

The Earth Charter: a key document for advancing -the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

Introduction

This response offers comments on the *United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development Framework for the International Implementation Scheme* and recommends that the UNESCO Secretariat use the Earth Charter as an educational instrument and an ethical framework for the upcoming Decade. This document also highlights the Earth Charter's educational vision and its main planned activities with the goal of exploring how the Decade Implementation Scheme could benefit from a partnership with the Earth Charter Education Program.

Comments and Suggestions on Framework

1. The implementation framework needs to reflect the critical role of shared values and principles in promoting sustainable development. Note that the WSSD Plan of Implementation highlights the importance of *Ethics*. Sustainable development implies a normative view of the kind of world we wish to live in and bring to realization. From an educational perspective it is critical that the assumed norms – the shared values and principles underpinning sustainable development – are made explicit so that that can be examined, debated, tested and applied.
2. Thirty years of international dialogue – from Stockholm to Johannesburg – has produced an array of international declarations and plans of action that together help articulate the international community's understanding of and commitment to sustainable development. The unique contribution of the Earth Charter is to provide an integration of the values and principles contained in these documents, further refined by a decade long civil society global consultation process. The Earth Charter provides the ideal framework for making clear the ethical basis of sustainable development.
3. While sustainable development implies a shared aspirational world-view, the reality is that differences emerge in local interpretation, implementation priorities and approaches. An overarching ethical framework helps provide context for understanding the significance and meaning of the diverse ways in which communities respond to the challenges of sustainable development.
4. The implementation framework acknowledges the need for an “overall agreement on the concept of sustainable development”.¹ However, it does not clearly define how such an operational definition will be achieved. The Earth Charter can assist in this task as it has been crafted to make clear the major dimensions of sustainable development. Specifically, the Charter's 77 principles are structured around four main themes: protect and care for the community of life; ecological integrity; social and economic justice; democracy nonviolence and peace. The

¹United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) Framework for the International Implementation Scheme, Pg. 2, point 13. C/INF. 9

Earth Charter therefore provides an integrated definition of sustainable development, and its 77 principles constitute an explicit template for exploring in depth the meaning and implications of the sustainability agenda.

5. The UNESCO draft framework stresses the importance of a number of key themes in the planning of programmes and activities in support of the Decade². However, a missing element is how these various themes interconnect and are relate back to the concept of sustainable development. This relationship is clearly illustrated through the Earth Charter's structure and its presentation of a holistic, integrated vision of sustainable development. It is also significant to note that the Earth Charter responds to the key themes appearing in Education for All (EFA), the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) and the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs).
6. The implementation framework, while recognizing the need for "Reorienting existing education programmes"³ does not refer to a new pedagogy, which will be needed to reach the goals implied by the UNDESD. This will especially be relevant in 'Training' activities. Here, we would like to point to the 'Eco Pedagogy' movement of the Paulo Freire Institute as a guide, which was inspired by the principles of the Earth Charter.
7. The 'Decade's Partnership Approach'⁴ discusses the need to work individually as well as to have local, regional and national ESD task forces to advise, assist, mobilize, and share experiences. In response to this need, the Earth Charter Secretariat offers its network of partners to help furthering the goals of the UNDESD. Our partners have already been using the Earth Charter as an ethical and educational framework in their countries and bring a high level of understanding and competency in the area of sustainable development. By working with the Earth Charter Initiative, the Decade will be linking to a committed group of educational organizations with significant experience in education for sustainable development.
8. For the past decade the Earth Charter Initiative has been promoting the understanding of values and principles for sustainable development using the Earth Charter as an organizing framework. We would like to support the Decade's planning process and offer our participation in the 'Ad Hoc Working Group'.

² Pg. 2, point 19. C/INF. 9

³ Pg. 2, point 10. C/INF. 9

⁴ pg. 5-9, C/INF. 9

The Earth Charter and Education

Educational Vision

In 2001, an Earth Charter Education Advisory Committee, formed with the participation of an international group of educators, shared educational philosophies, defined the unique educational tasks for the Earth Charter, and identified opportunities for the educational use of the Earth Charter within existing and new educational programmes.

It was agreed that the Earth Charter is a unique educational instrument for reorienting education curricula to advance understanding of shared global problems and the need to act with an integrated vision for sustainable development. The Earth Charter can be used to achieve three key educational objectives: consciousness-raising about the challenges and opportunities of sustainable development; application of values and principles to local and global problems; and a call for action and collaboration amongst all sectors and actors. The Earth Charter's educational vision is broad, encompassing primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, professional development and community outreach.

Educational Uses

Throughout the world, an increasing number of educators are using the Earth Charter in their teaching and learning. These activities have arisen spontaneously and are the single most important testimony to the growing recognition of the Earth Charter as a valuable instrument for education towards sustainability. To capture these efforts, the Earth Charter Secretariat has developed an online teaching resource database as an initial attempt to bring together from around the world the experiences of educators using the Earth Charter and the kinds of materials being produced. These experiences reinforce the educational value of the Earth Charter and highlight the urgent need to provide both formal and non-formal educators with the resources necessary to comprehensively implement education for sustainable development.

The Earth Charter and the Decade

In order to reach its dispersed global audience, the Secretariat, which works with a network of 53 Earth Charter National Committees (See Appendix A for more details on Organization Structure), has prioritized strategies that benefit from a multiplier effect and has dedicated its energies to forming a global partnership in order to further the goals of the Initiative.

The Partnership: 'Educating for Sustainable Living with the Earth Charter'

The Earth Charter International Secretariat is focused on facilitating the implementation of the Type II partnership titled, 'Educating for Sustainable Living with the Earth Charter' which was launched at the Johannesburg Summit. (See appendix B for Partner Overview). The main goal of this partnership is to ensure that the concept and principles of sustainable development are incorporated into educational systems as well as local community programmes. In many ways, this partnership can be seen as a laying the groundwork for the Decade. UNESCO, along with governments of Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, and Niger, and thirteen NGOs are partner organizations.

Response to Decade Framework for the International Implementation Scheme

The partnership's Plan of Action, focuses on two of the four major thrusts of education for sustainable development, as identified in the UNESCO's framework implementation scheme.⁵ (See Appendix C for Summary of Planned Activities)

Conclusion

The Earth Charter reflects a broad convergence of values and principles for sustainability and therefore represents a critical ethical framework for the Decade. Not surprisingly, it addresses all the key themes critical for planning programmes and activities in support of the Decade identified by UNESCO's Implementation Scheme Framework⁶. (See Appendix D for a chart on the dimensions of the Earth Charter)

UNESCO already recognizes the Earth Charter as a useful educational tool in its "Teaching and Learning for Sustainable Living" material. The Earth Charter is listed on UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development website under 'International Framework', and it can in effect serve as such. Within this context, groups and organizations working towards the Decade should not hesitate to refer back to the Charter as they seek to define what it means to educate for sustainability. We look forward to being associated with the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and helping to advance its vital mission.

⁵ pg. 2, 32 C/INF.0

⁶ United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) Framework for the International Implementation Scheme, pg. 3 #19.

Appendix A: The Earth Charter Initiative's Organization Structure

The International Secretariat for the Earth Charter Initiative is based on the campus of the University for Peace in San José, Costa Rica. The Secretariat, which includes an executive director, two staff people, and volunteers, provides support for the Commission and Steering Committee, coordinates major programs and works with a global network of 53 Earth Charter National Committees and coordinators, and a number of partner organizations.

The Earth Charter Commission was established in early 1997 to oversee the consultation and Drafting process of the Earth Charter and to approve a final version of the Charter. Oversight of the operations and programs of the Earth Charter Initiative is the responsibility of the Earth Charter Steering Committee, which is chaired by members of the Commission.

The Secretariat, Earth Charter National Committees, and committed organizations work together to disseminate and promote the Earth Charter at the national level. Diverse groups at the local level organize a wide variety of Earth Charter activities independently.

Appendix B: Type II Partner List



Appendix C: Summary of Planned Activities

Reorienting Existing Education Programs

Activity	Output
1. Develop the philosophy and suggested pedagogies for teaching the principles of sustainable development using the Earth Charter.	A document presenting the value of the Earth Charter in education and how it could be used in primary, secondary and tertiary education.
2. Develop new curricula and learning materials that integrate the principles of sustainable development and peace building.	Tested curriculum materials at each educational level.
3. Develop teacher education/professional development materials necessary for educators and administrators to use the learning materials of the Earth Charter Education Program	- Sustainable Development learning targets at each level. - A CD-Rom and an educators' manual
4. Offer technical assistance for using the curriculum materials and the Earth Charter in educational settings.	Schools and universities benefiting from guidance and technical assistance as needed to implement the project.
5. Document experiences into case studies that can be utilized by other educational institutions.	A compilation and summary of examples available to others.

The Plan also includes the following activities that are targeted primarily at adult community members not enrolled in the formal education system.

Developing Public Understanding and Awareness of Sustainability

Activity	Output
1. Develop an introductory workshop toolkit providing guidelines for introducing and guiding discussion about the application of Earth Charter's values and principles in local and global contexts.	A workshop targeted at adult community members that introduces the concepts of sustainable development and the Earth Charter.
2. Collaboratively design an adult-education workshop that aims to build capacity for ethical decision-making for sustainability using the Earth Charter.	A workshop that helps participants define ethics and values and explore how to integrate common ethical values in decision-making towards sustainable development.
3. Train a group of trainers to run the workshop and to adapt the materials to their own local cultural context. Support the trainers in running the workshops.	Trained trainers in all partner countries. 10 workshops held at the community level.
4. Produce and publish case studies to illustrate the use and impact for local actors using the EC at the community level.	Pamphlet of 10 case studies demonstrating the use of the Earth Charter in local community education programmes. The pamphlet will be for practioners.

5. Develop a documentary video capturing the best stories of how these educational materials have been impacting in people lives around the world

A high-profile video that would be launched at a public event. This will communicate to the wider global educational community the results of this partnership.

Appendix D: Development Dimensions in the Earth Charter

