

Alide Roerink

Anthropologist. Coordinator Earth Charter The Netherlands, convener Earth Charter Affiliate *Earth Charter Friends*. Co-founder *Worldconnectors* and *Global Goals Accelerator*. Earth Charter International Council member.

Contribution to the ECI dialogue Reflections on The Earth Charter in the Anthropocene.
Response to Brendan Mackey's essay "A Time of Hope".

2017

The Earth Charter

A Game Changing Ethical Guide

An ethic centred on Earth and the community of life

Earth Charter Commissioner Steven C. Rockefeller once shared a story I will never forget. It goes back to the last phase of the Earth Charter drafting process, early in the year 2000. Steven had asked a 17 year old to have a look at the Earth Charter draft document. He noticed that the girl cried while she was reading. When she returned the document to Steven, she said she had not expected adults to create such a hopeful text.

Indeed, the Earth Charter articulates the hope that we will have a future. A future secured by values and principles centred on "Earth, Our Home, which is alive with a unique community of life".

Children expect their elders to do what is best for them and for the world. Discovering the state of the world - infused with conflicts, injustice, incoherence, exclusion, avoidable diseases and ecological degradation - they lose faith. Then it is encouraging and heart-warming to learn that there is a common ground, a set of values and principles shared by people from a wide range of different faith traditions and aspirations around the world. An ethic centred on Earth and the community of life. Moreover, "an ethic rooted in a spirituality that makes us feel we are part of a greater whole that sustains the universe and each one of us."¹

Relevance beyond inspiration ...

In the opening essay for this series of reflections on the Earth Charter in the Anthropocene, Brendan Mackey states that "it is time we looked below the inspirational aspect of the Earth Charter and dived more deeply into the substance of its text, the meaning of each principle, and the challenges that arise when we endeavour to put them into practice."

To begin with, inspiration should not be underestimated. It is a driving force for change and intrinsic motivation to address tensions and resolve conflicts in the process of putting values and principles into action. The vision for a sustainable, just and peaceful future, as articulated in the Earth Charter document, inspired millions of individuals, countless dialogues, events and celebrations around the world. The Earth Charter brought meaning to people from all walks of life and ages.

¹ Earth Charter Commissioner Leonardo Boff in his Preface to Steven C. Rockefeller's essay on Democratic Equality, Economic Inequality and the Earth Charter, 2015.

Also below the inspirational relevance of the Earth Charter, there are multiple ways in which Earth Charter values and principles are being translated into concrete actions and transformative initiatives. In this essay, I will highlight some examples in the field of education, world citizenship and governance. I will also give some suggestions to take next steps and engage with partners and other initiatives. This is needed to - on the one hand - make more impact to address the pressing world problems we are faced with in this Anthropocene, such as climate change, economic and social inequality and exclusion. On the other hand to become more visible and provide positive perspectives.

.. in Education

Since the launch of the Earth Charter in June 2000, the international secretariat is playing an important role in the field of education, as a spider in the web. The Earth Charter values and principles were promoted to be applied in many ways. By developing education guide books, organising events, sharing stories and lessons learnt. Just have a look at the virtual library of the Earth Charter Education Centre and you will be surprised about the quality and quantity of the publications and materials in all languages and on all levels of education based on the Earth Charter.²

An effective strategy to integrate Earth Charter values and principles on the global level, was the UNESCO endorsement of the Earth Charter in 2003, and the decision by UNESCO to use the Earth Charter as the framework for the Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005 – 2015). Earth Charter ambassadors, affiliates, partners and UNESCO Chairs in other countries worked hard to make this happen and to play a continuing active role.

Other achievements are the realization of a green building, the *Earth Charter Education Centre*, and the appointment of Earth Charter executive director Mirian Vilela as the *UNESCO Chair on Education for Sustainable Development with the Earth Charter*³. With the development of Earth Charter masterclasses and courses, a growing circle of educators and school leaders are being engaged. Sam Crowell, Earth Charter International Faculty, developed an interesting vision called *Emerging Teaching*⁴, which is inspired by the Earth Charter and resonates with educators in many parts of the world.

It is impossible to highlight and respect all that is happening in the field of education with the Earth Charter. It is just a miracle to see how many committed people devote their time and lives on this, with very limited financial recourses. The transformation of education systems is not fuelled by budgets, but by the conviction that ethical awareness starts at childhood and continues with lifelong learning.

Around the world, there is a big difference in the level of attention for the Earth Charter in education. Even in The Netherlands, where the Earth Charter was launched and a national Earth Charter network with members active in the field of education, it is rare for students to learn about the Earth Charter in school. In Mexico, this is quite the opposite. When my daughter as part of her studies International Relations, started a Master's program at UNAM in Mexico city a few years ago, she was surprised that the Earth Charter was discussed in the very first lecture she attended. She soon found out that this was not a coincidence. The Ministries of Education and Environment endorsed the Earth Charter and are committed to

² <http://earthcharter.org/virtual-library/>

³ <http://earthcharter.org/learn/earth-charter-center-education-sustainable-development/>

⁴ <https://www.amazon.com/Emergent-Teaching-Creativity-Significance-Transformation/dp/1475802552>

integrate the Earth Charter in education at all levels. A strong Earth Charter network with chapters in all regions is in place in Mexico and local governments are engaged⁵.

I would like to suggest to Earth Charter Affiliates to assess what the level of attention for the Earth Charter in education is in your country. To reach out to students or student boards and initiatives and cooperate with them on the way the Earth Charter can play a visible role in their context. To look for inspiring examples of how the Earth Charter is integrated in schools. To come up with ideas, for example to introduce the celebration of International Earth Charter Day (29 June), to play the Earth Charter Game⁶, or to organise an Earth Charter essay contest. Earth Charter International will publish the stories on the website.

... in World Citizenship

In the field of world citizenship, the Earth Charter forms the bases for several new projects and programs. First of all, there is the Earth Charter International Youth Leadership program⁷. Coordinated by the Earth Charter Youth Project staff member, young people from all parts of the world are engaged and educated on ethics and sustainable development and to take leadership roles in their societies. A concrete example of youth leadership, inspired by both the Earth Charter and the SDGs, is the creation of the latest online application called MAPTING⁸. MAPTING enables users to share positive actions to achieve the goals of the Earth Charter and SDGs on the world map. It is created by the Earth Charter Youth coordinator in cooperation with young people working with Earth Charter partner SGI in Japan. I invite you to download MAPTING and start using it. You can search for positive actions structured according to the 17 SDGs, or by country. You can encourage positive actions by 'liking' them. You can make connections directly and see how to cooperate. If we manage to make MAPTING go viral, all SDG supporters will naturally find the Earth Charter.

A focus on compassion, one important Earth Charter value, proves to be another successful approach to make a difference in people's daily lives. Given one wish and the TED prize in 2008, Karen Armstrong, a respected scholar, was able to kick off the process to create the Charter for Compassion. This new Charter was successfully crafted by a group of leading inspirational thinkers from the three Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam and based on the fundamental principles of universal justice and respect. In November 2009, the Charter for Compassion⁹ was born. It grew from contributions from more than 150,000 people from 180 countries, and was crafted into a succinct, 312-word pledge that allows room for all faiths by a panel of leading religious scholars. More than 107,000 people have pledged to uphold it. Cooperation between the Earth Charter initiative and the Charter for Compassion was established in the early stages of the Charter for Compassion. The Earth Charter is listed on the website as 'Environmental Partner' and the Earth Charter document can also be found there¹⁰. Interestingly, the Earth Charter Initiative and the Charter for Compassion Initiative both brought forward a city programme: The Compassionate City and Earth Charter Cities¹¹. Another commonality is that both closely cooperate with faith communities. Here is an opportunity to renew the partnership, join forces and strengthen each other to enhance compassionate actions.

⁵ <http://earthcharter.org/countries/mexico/>

⁶ <http://earthcharter.org/news-post/earth-charter-game-education-strategy-for-sustainability/>

⁷ <http://earthcharter.org/youth/>

⁸ <http://www.mapting.org/>

⁹ <https://charterforcompassion.org/>

¹⁰ <https://charterforcompassion.org/350-org/earth-charter>

¹¹ <http://earthchartercities.org/>

An example of an initiative inspired by the Earth Charter, which engages businesses and actors in the financial sector, is *The True Price movement*¹². It started by young members of the Worldconnectors Round Table in The Netherlands, with the idea to implement Earth Charter principle 7.d.: “Internalize the full environmental and social costs of goods and services in the selling price, and enable consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards.” The true price is being calculated and published for products such as potatoes and other food items, but also more abstract things such as landscapes. The True Price movement has developed in the past few years into an independent social enterprise and works to create an economy that creates value for all. One of the first companies that integrate the true price in their business model is EOSTA, a trading company in organic fruit and vegetables and Earth Charter endorser¹³.

... in Governance

The Earth Charter proves to be relevant in the context of global governance. Its position as a ‘People’s document’ and a soft law instrument, is a strength in certain aspects. At the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “Inspiration for Global Governance”¹⁴ was published, in which the authors (Earth Charter Commissioner Ruud Lubbers, Tineke Lambooy and Willem van Genugten) highlight how both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Earth Charter (2000) constitute an important basis for modern global governance. The first document marks the beginning of the human rights tradition; the second builds further on these values, and also includes more modern aspirations. It highlights the interconnectedness of all living beings and our duty to protect the Earth’s vitality, diversity and beauty¹⁵. At the eve of the celebration of 70 years UDHR, there is an opportunity for the Earth Charter to play a central role, both as movement and as document, to take the next step towards Earth Trusteeship. See the contribution by Klaus Bosselmann in the UN dialogue on Harmony with Nature.¹⁶

Against the background of the Earth Charter as a soft law document, the Earth Charter was successfully used to resolve a diplomatic conflict¹⁷. The conflict involved textile workers in India and Dutch businesses, and when it escalated it also affected the relationships between India and The Netherlands on the highest levels. Earth Charter friends from both sides were invited to mediate. Measures were taken and in the follow-up an ombudsperson was appointed with the Earth Charter as his guide.

The Earth Charter inspired the intergovernmental negotiation process on the *Post 2015 Development Agenda*. This resulted in the adoption by the UN of *Agenda 2030 – Transforming Our World*, including the 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development (in short: SDGs)¹⁸. Compared to earlier UN agenda’s, Agenda 2030 represents a big step forward, because it integrates the development agenda (as successor of the Millennium Development Goals), the human rights agenda and peace movement, the agenda of the women’s empowerment movement and the environmental or broader the sustainability movement.

¹² <http://trueprice.org/nl/>

¹³ <http://www.eosta.com/en/content/true-cost-food-now-stores-all-over-europe>

¹⁴ <http://earthcharter.org/invent/images/uploads/Flyer%20IfGG%200225.pdf>

¹⁵ [Inspiration for global governance the universal declaration of human rights and the earth charter](http://inspiration-for-global-governance-the-universal-declaration-of-human-rights-and-the-earth-charter)

¹⁶ <http://harmonywithnatureun.org/content/documents/presentations/Klaus.Bosselmann.Presentation.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/article-g-star-artikel-lambooy.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

A fruitful approach, in my opinion, to ensure that the SDGs will be implemented in a qualitative and ethical way, is to use the Earth Charter document as the ethical foundation to achieve the SDGs. The Earth Charter initiative can play an important role as people's movement to raise awareness about the SDGs and accelerate the implementation. MAPTING is a good example of this integration of both the Earth Charter values and principles and the SDGs. Another initiative, which should be taken forward in my opinion, is the Earth Report. A first Earth Report on SDG 5 - gender equality - was coordinated by CEE in India. The situation on Earth with regard to gender equality and empowerment of women and girls was highlighted from the ethical Earth Charter lens. Hopefully, this pilot edition will be followed up by a series of Earth Reports. This will require an investment in time and expertise by Earth Charter International and partner CEE. It is key that a quickly growing crowd of people, who is engaged with the SDGs, also learns about the added value of the Earth Charter.

Another example of an integrated approach of both the Earth Charter and the SDGs is *Global Goals Accelerator*¹⁹. Ten priorities were identified in a series of dialogues co-facilitated by Earth Charter The Netherlands, as an input to the national SDG strategy and to generate systemic change²⁰. One of the priorities is the establishment of an Ombudsperson for Future Generations.

Various countries have already successfully established institutions that offer protection to the rights of future generations. In Brazil, Chile, Finland, Germany and Israel, parliamentary commissions for sustainable development and/or environmental issues are already established, mandated with the responsibility to defend the interests of future generations. Although these initiatives should be encouraged, analysis of the World Future Council shows that because of a lack of independency, institutionalisation and a restricted mandate, the impact of these initiatives is only limited when it comes to the rights of future generations. Wales goes one step further with the introduction of a Commissioner for a Sustainable Future. Parliamentary Commissioners for the environment are also established in Canada and New Zealand. In comparison with the earlier mentioned parliamentary commissions, the Commissioners are given a broader mandate. The most effective instrument for protecting the rights of future generations seems to be the establishment of an Ombudsperson for Future Generations²¹, in which Hungary sets a good example. The Hungarian Ombudsperson acts according to the following description: *"to make human responsibility felt in all the fields of state and civil life, with respect to the conservation of natural values entrusted to us, for the sake of protecting the next generations."*

The idea for an Ombudspersons for Future Generations is directly inspired by the Earth Charter document: "It is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations." Also: "Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world." Principle 4 calls upon everyone to "Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations". And to "recognize that the freedom of action of each generation is qualified by the needs of future generations", and "to transmit to future generations values, traditions, and institutions that support the long-term flourishing of Earth's human and ecological communities. " In the first ethical pillar of the Earth Charter - Ecological Integrity - the notion of intergenerational solidarity is translated more concretely in principle 6.c.: "Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance and global consequences of human activities".

¹⁹ <http://www.globalgoalsaccelerator.nl/>

²⁰ https://issuu.com/violainehacker/docs/bb_14_bien_commun_charte_social

²¹ Also called a Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations.

The Earth Charter initiative could join forces with the World Future Council²² and help initiate Ombudspersons for Future Generations all over the world. It will directly contribute to the implementation of SDG 16 on inclusive institutions, justice and peace.

Updating the Earth Charter

I agree with Brendan that the Earth Charter vision remains as valid as when it was created, its articulation is inspirational and its principles enduring. And that there is no need to change the Earth Charter text. I also feel the sense of urgency to generate more impact with the Earth Charter, especially in the light of climate change, which has escalated, and problems caused by large-scale industrialization, technological innovation and polarization.

Brendan proposes to update the Earth Charter by publishing Addenda. This is in line with a decision from the Earth Charter Commission, which carried the responsibility for the integrity of the document. 10 years after the launch of the Earth Charter, the Commission and members of the Council gathered in the Peace Palace in The Hague to review the text. The conclusion in 2010 was not to change the text. Although the plan was seek ways to review the Earth Charter regularly. This could lead to either a complete new document or new initiative under another name. Alternatively, in case a major need emerged, a process could be initiated to draft addenda to the Earth Charter on specific issues.

I personally welcome new documents on the relevance of the Earth Charter in the light of topical developments. This is in fact what the Earth Charter Council did some years ago when statements were issued on the Earth Charter and 'responsible reproduction' and on the Earth Charter and climate change. More recently, Steven C. Rockefeller's essay on Democratic Equality, Economic Inequality and the Earth Charter (2015) can be considered as a topical reflection of the Earth Charter on a specific issue.

This is also, what we had in mind in The Netherlands when we started the *Worldconnectors Round Table for People and the Planet*. We engaged prominent people from different sectors and generations to look at topical issues from the perspective of the Earth Charter and come up with statements and inclusive and alternative solutions on issues such as migration, the connection of civilizations, food security, gender and diversity and climate change. This way, the Earth Charter proved to be relevant to new audiences which otherwise would not have been reached.

However, let us not limit updating the Earth Charter to a particular form. Updates can include creative expressions and all kinds of actions. The Earth Charter can be raised in interviews, dialogues or in process of building new partnerships. A very powerful example of a creative form is the one page map of the Earth Charter linked to new concepts, crafted by Fritjof Capra. Or the inclusion of the Earth Charter in his inspiring online Capra Course. The Earth Charter will remain relevant as long as it is brought to the attention of all those concerned with the critical issues of our time by those inspired by the way in which the Earth Charter frames humanity challenges and aspirations.

Assess to accelerate

In a few years, the Earth Charter initiative will celebrate its 20th anniversary. A good moment to reflect and look forward. A challenge will be to assess the impact of 20 years Earth Charter, while strengthening the Earth Charter movement at the same time. The Earth Charter movement developed into a widespread network with a minimum of central

²² <https://www.worldconnectors.nl/en/themes/future-generations/>

coordination. Partly as consequence of a strategy of decentralized empowerment, partly due to a lack of capacity. Assessment can bring knowledge about success factors, achievements and weaknesses. It can also provide the basis for a new phase of the Earth Charter initiative with an engaging and unifying strategy. In which potentially every individual, family, organization, and community has a vital role to play. With the Earth Charter to accelerate the ethical implementation of the SDG's. And the Earth Charter International secretariat in an energizing and catalysing role. As a learning lab and reference point for community engagement and campaigns.

Let us assess to be able to accelerate towards 2030. So that we can look back at that moment in time, and realize that the last sentence of the Earth Charter had come true: "Let our time be remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life (Earth Charter Way Forward)."
