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The Earth Charter as a Tool for Strengthening the Capacities of Young People as Agents of Change



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For the last 15 years, we have joined efforts as two members of the Earth Charter International Young Leaders Network (Melchor Ernesto Muñoz Dzib and Yaneri Rosario García Pool) and a member of the Earth Charter Network in Mexico (María Guillermina Pech Pech) to promote the Earth Charter's (EC) ethical framework in Quintana Roo, Mexico. Our aim has been to engage and sensitize young people of all educational levels and generate a positive learning impact in them. In 2020, with the appearance of COVID-19 and the "new normal", new challenges arose that allowed new connections and collaboration to promote the Earth Charter. This essay shares the journey of our work in engaging youth and its generational impact, as well as our actions and achievements in the effort of promoting the EC's values and principles for the creation of a just, sustainable, and peaceful civilization.

In this journey, we have had the support of several secondary and higher education institutions such as: The University of the Caribbean (Universidad del Caribe), Polytechnic University of Quintana Roo (Universidad Politécnica de Quintana Roo), Mayan Intercultural University of Quintana (Universidad Intercultural Maya de Quintana Roo) and the Campus One High School (Colegio de Bachilleres Plantel Uno), as well as a large number of committed people, in the pursuit of "buen vivir" or "good living", as an alternative for development.



Background

Throughout our learning process at different educational levels and within the family and social nucleus, we acquire and strengthen our knowledge, skills and abilities to enable us to face current challenges. The global youth movement is a testament to the power and impact of young people's actions and proposals to address global problems and purposefully support their communities.

In 2008 in Cancún, we developed a movement called Environmental Voices. This group, initially made up of graduates from the University of the Caribbean, positioned itself within the university, inviting students to participate in pro-environmental actions. Environmental Voices was a group whose objective was to change attitudes towards the environment. At the beginning, the group comprised of young people from Cancún and professionals in Sustainable Tourism and Hotel Management. As the years passed, young people from other backgrounds were included. Environmental Voices was based out of the University of the Caribbean, an institution that has included sustainability as a guiding pillar since its founding. Since its inception, Environmental Voices has developed various non-formal environmental education projects. In 2008, we managed to download resources from the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT, by its acronym in Spanish) and held the first Environmental Culture Week at the University of the Caribbean. This event continues to be held

annually, now under the leadership of the Sustainability Committee. This event is a space that has allowed us to glimpse the importance of environmental issues, environmental education and sustainability in the training of young people as agents of change.

Environmental Voices managed to remain active as a group for 10 years at the University of the Caribbean due to its horizontal structure among peers. Before graduating, students shared their knowledge and created a new structure that would give continuity to the established themes and new ideas according to the context. Its essence lies in the visibility, trust, and certainty of the work of youth, and the generation of a collaborative network with local, state and regional actors. In addition to the great promotional work that the student members of Voices did, who motivated other young people to join this movement.

During its tenure at the University of the Caribbean, Environmental Voices created a space for interaction, cooperation, and reflection for young people at the University of the Caribbean. In later years, due to the presence that gave rise to grouping within public spaces and academics, students from other universities mobilized to form new work groups in their educational institutions. This allowed various universities to give importance to the participation of young people in the decisions made in their



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educational institutions. It should be noted that this youth organization was a platform that allowed youth to influence other spaces in the public sector, such as advisory councils for sustainable development and the beginning of youth meetings against climate change in the south-southeast region. The SEMARNAT Advisory Councils², young people who at the time represented their sector in each federal entity, were the ones who joined together to hold the Climate Change Meetings and from the south-southeast region they have coincided and participated from their social and business organizations, and volunteering in various strategies to date.

In 2008, a sustainability policy emerged from the Rector's Office of the University of the Caribbean, which resulted in the Environmental Committee being formalized and the commitment to adhere to the Earth Charter reaffirmed. The Earth Charter has been an instrument that has been used for training workshops and in videos that have been made in English and Spanish as a dissemination mechanism.

Additionally, its thematic content is considered in the Diploma in Environmental Education, and it is immersed in the curriculum from the subject of the training workshop in social and environmental responsibility.

With the recognition of the Earth Charter as an educational instrument, we implemented courses, workshops, and activities for the adoption of the pillars and principles of the EC and their relationship in the resolution of socio-environmental problems. For this purpose, it was supported by dynamic activities accompanied by messages of reflection and case solutions. Integration, responsibility, participation, and decision-making activities were carried out with the purpose of discussing the ideas of individual participation and responsibility, and the responsibility of young university students and how they influence society.

We also collaborated with the Cozumel Quintana Roo City Council to establish Cozumel as a sustainable destination. The "Workshop on Internalization of Principles



and Values for Sustainable Development: The Earth Charter” was held and representatives of civil society organizations that work within the island, as well as representatives of the different government institutions of the same municipality attended.

Later in 2012, with the creation of the University of the Caribbean’s Environmental Plan, a shared effort began where Environmental Voices joined the institutional strategies. It is worth highlighting the support of the then head of the Department of Sustainable Tourism and Hotel Management, Dr. Ana Pricila Sosa Ferreira, since she was the one who brought trust and certainty to the group by incorporating it in environmental actions within the campus.

In the fifth edition of the meeting, the objective was to build a space that promotes the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and practices to strengthen the capacities of young people on climate change issues, including: adaptation and mitigation actions to climate change, environmental education for the establishment of local projects, the challenges of young people in the face of climate change, as well as the construction of sustainable citizenship. The event took place from the 20 to 22 November 2015, at the University of the Caribbean in the city of Cancún, Quintana Roo. This meeting and the other projects that Environmental Voices envisaged from different perspectives, the organizational capacity, the power of coming together to solve

problems, promoting participatory structures—all elements that added up so that each of the members of Environmental Voices could be inspired and chart his or her own path.

In 2020, the Diploma in Environmental Education began, the objective of which is the impact of theoretical and methodological elements in programmes from the private social, academic and government initiative for the development of applicable educational projects. Within the curricular map of the diploma, the Earth Charter is addressed as an element that allows influencing values, knowledge and the transformation of society. It should be noted that the Mexican Earth Charter Network has also been a reference framework at the national level that encourages environmental promoters in the construction of a society committed to change towards a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world.

The work of youth and their consistency during these years is thanks to the generation of alliances, the credibility of the youth and the strengthening of civil society, guaranteeing sustainability from the local level, being aware of the environmental complexity and the importance of environmental education as a piece for transformation from a critical perspective in educational practices. The Earth Charter represents for youth a strategy that acts from the local level and will have its manifesto through generations. This is how it is possible to transcend and shape new strategic lines of



social impact. Motivating and accompanying young leaders entails acting through critical and systematic thinking so that achievements are timely in environmental solutions, as well as lines of action continue to promote youth. One of the success stories has been through the company Componentes Verdes (Green Components) that has trained young people from public and private higher education using the Earth Charter, as part of the results of the workshops following their participation in the Earth Charter International online course, “Leadership, Sustainability and Ethics.” This course reinforces the work of Earth Charter Young Leaders (ECYL) inside and outside the state of Quintana Roo to be proactive environmental promoters.

Currently, Earth Charter Young Leaders have been recognized in the state of Quintana Roo as important actors within the governance and public decision-making processes. This invites us to reflect on the role we have as a society regarding the recognition of the territory to achieve more just, sustainable, and peaceful societies from comprehensive thinking where the principles and values promoted by the Earth Charter are reflected in the strategies young people propose within social, economic, political, cultural and environmental environments.

During 2020, there was a virtual interaction with the Earth Charter International Young Leaders, actively participating in the virtual meetings scheduled for the Young Leaders Network of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The virtual meetings have made it clear that it is necessary to take action through the alliances promoted by the Earth Charter in its Pillar 4 and Principle 13, established in the subprinciple: b) Support local, regional and global civil society, and promote the meaningful participation of all interested individuals and organizations in decision making.

The ECYLs as environmental promoters of the Earth Charter build trajectories aimed at intervening in public policies focused from a local, state and national environment. It should be noted that ECYLs contribute from various angles such as companies, universities, civil and government associations, contributing to a shared responsibility where the sum and alliance can have more solid results.

During 2023, the XVII Legislature of the Free and Sovereign State of Quintana Roo and the Earth Charter formed an alliance for the adoption of the principles and values of the Earth Charter.



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In conclusion, the training and participation of youth show great potential to involve others in joining to support the principles and values of the Earth Charter and to continue promoting the Earth Charter through courses, workshops, seminars, congresses, forums and environmental talks. This could be a turning point in the lives of many young people to raise awareness about the civilizational crisis that humanity faces.

Spaces led by young people for young people allow them to take ownership of their environment, where they consider mechanisms to take actions that allow them to act in society and achieve important transformations. Due to their interest and concern for the various situations that occur today, they seek to create effective actions that promote a fair society at economic levels, rational with its immediate environmental resources and peaceful where social coexistence is harmonious and free of violence.

Quintana Roo, being a multicultural state, has allowed young people to create safe and comfortable spaces to exercise their

voices and work in the community. These spaces promote respect and the creation of comprehensive strategies with the vision of everyone who participates. Young people continue to acquire knowledge, tools and skills for the future and maintain momentum for several generations. Upon reaching the stage of adulthood, they promote a shared vision with other young people to instill in them the importance of their participation in public decisions, as well as maintaining intergenerational dialogue due to the changing context of today's society and its ways of life.

Youth under an environmental eco-literacy approach reach maturity according to the experience-learning process; however, they will not reach their greatest achievement until they manage to encourage other young people to continue with the legacy of being a young leader. Young people have provided a framework of intergenerational collaboration for various social groups, making visible the importance of caring for the community and the environment in



which we find ourselves, as well as maintaining a shared vision regarding those that concern us as a social group.

Young people have shown they have the power to transform their reality, of which they are protagonists and, by being aware of environmental complexity, they can have a proactive impact. Youth are a window where it is possible to introduce and open spaces for the reflection of knowledge. Through their perspective they can motivate and create proposals that work towards sustainability. That is why encouraging youth in areas of environmental education will help solve the challenges that humanity faces in the 21st century.