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EDITORIAL TEAM

Paula Diaz, Carly Jo Riggins, María Sosa Segnini and Mirian Vilela

AUTHORS IN THIS VOLUME

Emanuel Antunes, Luis Fernández Carril, Mahlet Girma, Catherine M. Nelson, Greshma Pious Raju, David Eduardo Velázquez Muñoz, and Paola Visconti Arizpe

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

María Sosa Segnini

COVER PHOTO

Alberto Agüero

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INTRODUCTION

In this seventh edition of the Earth Charter Magazine, we are honored to share six unique articles from educators, leaders and activists who are Turning Conscience into Action. With perspectives from Earth Charter Educators and Youth Leaders who have manifested the principles of The Charter in their own distinct ways, these stories highlight the importance of human connection in education for sustainability.

[Catherine M. Nelson](#), a retired elementary school teacher from the United States of America, used her perspective as an Earth Charter Educator to reflect on her many years of experience working with her students through relationships of care and respect.

[David Eduardo Velázquez Muñoz](#), shares the process of his university, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, embracing the Earth Charter and the Sustainable Development Goals while preparing the professors to bring sustainability to their teaching practice. He argues for the key role of institutions of higher education in providing a meaningful and transformative education. In this context, his university went through an evaluation process to identify blind spots, strengths and weaknesses in their existing curriculum, highlighting the need for continuous improvement and ongoing assessments when educating for sustainability.

[Paola Visconti Arizpe and Luis Fernández Carril](#), of Tecnológico de Monterrey of Mexico, reflect on the evolution of their university in infusing sustainability into their work and curriculum which led to the development of new guidelines for the institution's planning and management. Their experience acknowledges the multifaceted and multidimensional nature of education that incorporates sustainability as the center of the university activities instead of just in the periphery.

[Mahlet Girma](#), a workshop trainer and Earth Charter Young Leader, reflects on the challenges of effectively teaching and modeling ethical leadership in Ethiopia. Her reflections emphasize the importance of modeling the principles of The

Charter, especially in situations that are complicated by threats to professional or economic opportunities. Girma shares her experience using The Charter to develop ethical leadership training and practices that are attainable and sustainable.

[Greshma Pious Raju](#), an Earth Charter Young leader from Kerala, India, shares her experience in creating the Ecopeace Teen Cafe to connect teenagers across the world by providing a place for dialogue. Inspired by her internship with Earth Charter International, Greshma's programmes have shared the vision of The Charter with over 500 young people in 25 countries. Now inspired by the youth she has worked with through Ecopeace, she shares her plans to further spread the principles of The Charter through new initiatives that will inspire expanded practices of sustainable living.

[Emanuel Antunes](#) explores how the cultural expression of samba connects individuals to environmental concerns and social challenges of certain neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. His organization oversaw the development and implementation of a project to sensitize and engage young people from a Samba school with the Earth Charter and the vision of a more just and sustainable society. This article shows how the Earth Charter principles were manifested in the theme of a 2026 samba school carnival parade by children: Máscaras da Justiça (Masks of Justice).

The influence of the Earth Charter is undeniably intrinsic in each of these stories; providing a guide or a basis for classroom pedagogy, inspiration for new initiatives, or a model for change in local communities. We hope that you too will be inspired by the work of these leaders and institutions and may find new ways to share the vision of The Charter in diverse ways.

CARLY JO RIGGINS, MIRIAN VILELA &
MARIA SOSA SEGNINI
EDITORIAL TEAM





ALBERTO AGÜERO ESPINOZA CONSERVATION IS THE ONLY WAY

[@danta_adventures](#)

Alberto Agüero Espinoza, the photographer behind the images featured in this magazine, is from Turrialba. Since 2012 he has been an environmental and social activist, and he also works as a tour guide. Through his photographs, he seeks to convey the love, beauty, and nobility found in nature—its depth and its importance. Sadly, many of his images are the face of extinction. This is why, for him, conservation is the only way.





Photo Credit: Alberto Agüero



ECI Educator

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS



Catherine M. Nelson
[United States]

Catherine M. Nelson, M.Ed., has more than two decades of experience teaching in elementary classrooms across multiple grade levels, where daily practice shaped a steady, student-centered approach to teaching and learning. She is the author of the “Miss Nelson, Something’s in My Pants!” series and *Nature’s Way*, a collection of poetry and nature photography. Her work reflects the relationships, routines, and experiences that shape classroom life and extend into everyday living. She is an Earth Charter Educator and a retired elementary school teacher, USA.



Walking down the sidewalk at our elementary school, a voice called out, “Hi Miss Nelson!” I peered across the quad and saw a former student waving.

“Hi Jack!* How are you?”

“Nuthin,” he said.

I quickly responded, “No. I didn’t ask what you were doing. How are you?”

“Oh!” He replied more enthusiastically, “I’m good! My mom is good too!” He continued to call out as we moved down separate sidewalks to our destinations.

I could still picture Jack smiling. A simple shift in the question showed him someone was interested in him as a person, not in what he was or was not doing. Each year brought in new students and opportunities to learn together. Academic expectations guided the work, but building community within the classroom remained just as essential. It was a necessary, unspoken element. Values were not taught as a separate lesson; they were a part of how we worked, spoke, and learned together each day. Students communicated with each other in small groups. They saw kindness and caring emerge from community sharing, not by individual effort alone. Confidence grew as students supported one another.

Earth Charter principles of democracy, nonviolence, and peace flowed into daily classroom life as students took ownership of decisions during class activities. They learned the value of settling differences with words rather than physical confrontations. Quiet moments of reflection became part of the day.

Over time, it became clear that what was taking shape in the classroom was more than routines or shared experiences. It was an understanding of how to be with others. The Earth Charter speaks to respect, responsibility, and care for the community of life. The principles begin in simple, everyday moments.

This understanding extended beyond the classroom in meaningful ways. In one year while teaching third grade, students had pen pals in Zimbabwe. Two schools on different continents communicated through letters about family, favorite sports, and what they enjoyed in school. The class wanted to send a care package to their new friends in Zimbabwe. Parents joined the project, and we were able to send school supplies, coats, and sports equipment, especially soccer balls and air pumps to keep games going. Students’ delight in seeing photos of their pen pals with their gifts showed they recognized a broader sense of community and began caring about lives beyond their own experiences.

Looking back, the lesson was never only about writing letters or sending supplies. It was about helping students recognize connection. A name on a page became a real person. A classroom across the world became part of their thinking. The experience shifted something simple but important: an understanding that others mattered, even when they were not close by.

**Name changed to protect student privacy.*



Photo Credit: Catherine M. Nelson

Relationships in a classroom begin in small ways. A greeting. A question asked with intention. A moment of listening. Over time, those moments build trust and a sense of belonging. From there, students begin to look outward. They start to notice others, respond, and care.

The same understanding took shape not only across distance, but in everyday experiences close to home. Each year in fourth grade, students went on three or four field trips to Joshua Tree National Park. There, they explored the area's diverse ecosystems and were encouraged to ask open-ended questions based on their observations. This led to deeper thinking and discussion about their surroundings. Many had never been out to the park before. Often after a class trip, students told me they returned over the weekend to hike with their families. They wanted to share the experience with others.

Over several years in kindergarten, students' independence grew as routines and shared roles became part of the day.

Their naturally self-focused perspective began to broaden through class activities and the choices they made. Their confidence showed in moments like helping a classmate tie their shoes and managing group supplies. That same growth was reflected in their sense of wonder. Five-year-old enthusiasm was contagious as students marveled at caterpillars transforming into butterflies and being released around campus. The excitement continued when individual seeds were planted in covered trays, revealing dramatic growth over a single weekend. In these shared moments, students noticed not only the world around them, but their place within it.

Early experiences begin to shape how students interact with others. Respect for others is not taught through a single lesson, but through daily interactions. Responsibility grows when students see how their actions affect those around them. Care extends beyond the classroom when students understand they are part of something larger.

“Respect for others is not taught through a single lesson, but through daily interactions. Responsibility grows when students see how their actions affect those around them.”

Catherine M. Nelson



Not all experiences unfolded as smoothly. At times, a sense of community and positive relationships did not fully take hold for every student. In one year while teaching sixth grade, this became evident in a student whose choices and interactions were not aligned with classroom and school expectations. During my medical leave, the student was removed from school for the remainder of the year. When I returned, the class had already begun to process what had happened, and we moved forward together.

In the weeks that followed, the class continued to adjust. New friendships formed, routines steadied, and learning moved forward. The experience gave the class time for reflection on personal responsibility and on the needs of the whole group.

Building a caring community takes time and energy. When difficult decisions arise, responsibility extends beyond individual actions to include care, respect, and stability for the entire school community.

Thoughtful questions invite engagement. Connections across distances strengthen understanding and collaboration. As students learn to work within a group and adapt to one another, values take root through shared experiences and daily interactions.

Classroom experiences reflect the principles of the Earth Charter, with values demonstrated through practice rather than taught in isolation.

In time, early experiences begin to influence how students move through the world beyond the classroom. The language of respect, responsibility, and care becomes part of their everyday choices, whether on a playground, at home, or in the wider community. These are not grand gestures, but steady, thoughtful actions. In this way, the principles connected to the Earth Charter continue forward, carried quietly in how students learn to be with others and respond to the world.

My experience in education and with students continues to affirm the importance of relationships in student learning. Most students engage more fully when they know an adult cares. As the circle of care expands, students grow more confident and more willing to connect with the world around them.



Photo Credit: Catherine M. Nelson



Photo Credit: Alberto Agüero

 ECI Educator

THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF ACADEMIC TEACHING TO ADVANCE SUSTAINABILITY



David E. Velázquez M.
(México)

Doctor of Lifelong Education, master's in environmental education, Dental Surgeon, and holder of a Diploma in Education for Sustainability from the Earth Charter Center. He is a full-time professor at the Faculty of Dentistry of the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (UAEMéx). He is an educator and affiliated Earth Charter focal point in the State of Mexico. He is currently co-responsible for the ACT4SDGs project at UAEMéx.



Humanity is going through a decisive moment in its history. Faced with an unprecedented socio-environmental crisis—expressed in the deterioration of ecosystems, increasing inequalities, the fragmentation of the social fabric, and the loss of shared ethical references—a fundamental question emerges: are our educational institution's training professionals capable not only of adapting to the world as it is, but also of transforming it into one that is more just, sustainable, and peaceful?

Beyond the development of technical and disciplinary competencies, the current planetary context demands an education capable of cultivating [critical awareness](#), [ethical responsibility](#), and [active commitment to the community of life](#).

University education can no longer be limited to preparing professionals for labor markets; it must educate planetary citizens capable of understanding the interdependence among ecological, social, economic, and cultural systems, and acting accordingly [Clugston & Calder, 1999; Corcoran et al., 2005].

At UAEMéx, the commitment to the Earth Charter has gone beyond institutional endorsement and has become, for more than two decades, a living, dynamic, and continuously evolving university experience. Through curricular processes, environmental management projects, teacher training, student leadership, and international cooperation, the university has consolidated its own path toward the appropriation of Earth Charter principles,

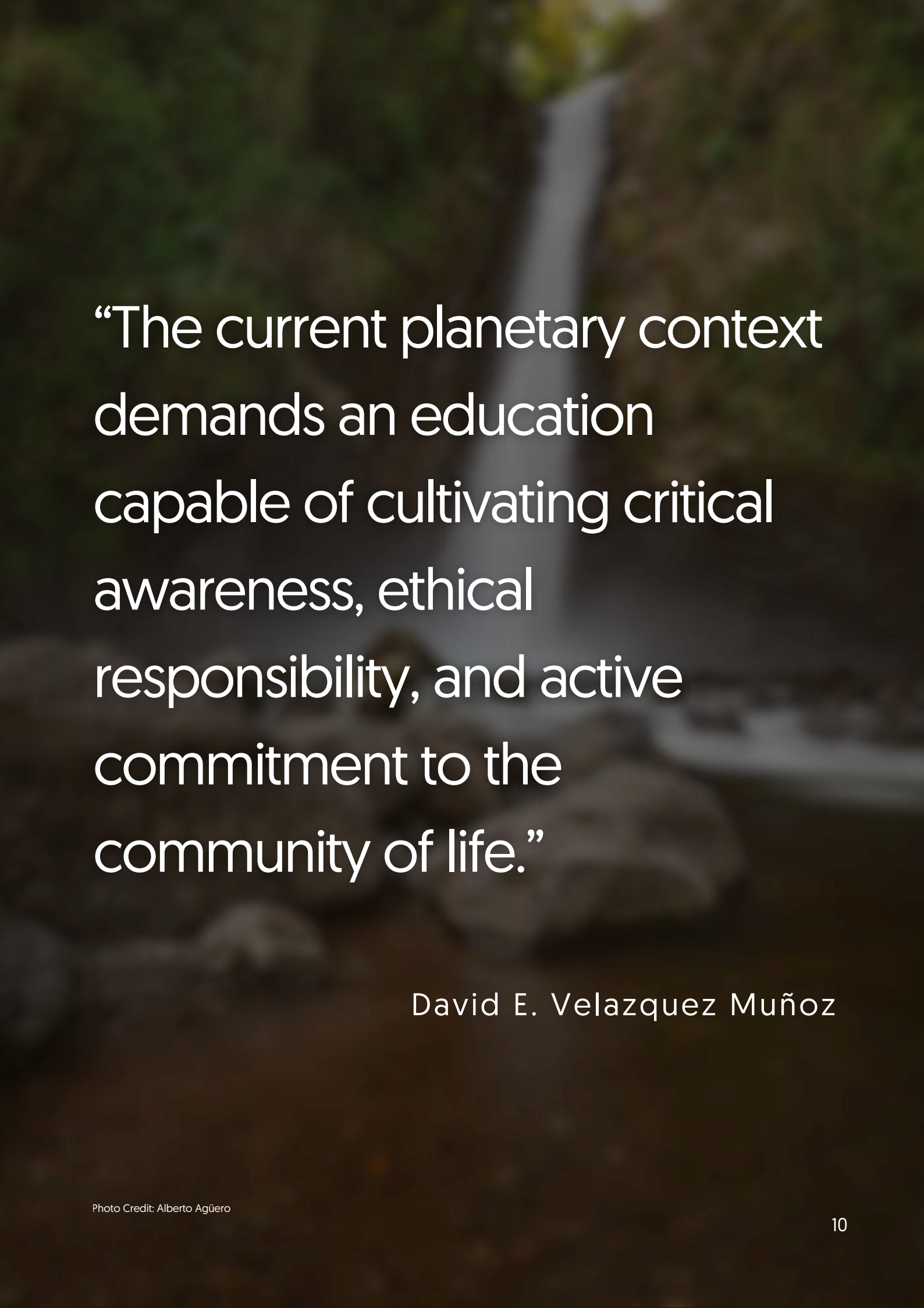
recently articulating them with the 2030 Agenda and new educational innovation methodologies.

This paper documents and analyzes this institutional experience, showing how a Latin American public university can become a laboratory for transformative sustainability education. More than merely presenting results, this article seeks to offer a critical reflection on the challenges, lessons learned, and possibilities that emerge when ethics, pedagogy, and collective action converge with the purpose of educating professionals capable of caring for, regenerating, and transforming the world they inhabit.

Humanity faces one of the most profound civilizational challenges in its history: to persist in patterns of production, consumption, and social organization characterized by individualism and ecological degradation, or to move toward a worldview grounded in care, interdependence, and shared responsibility with the community of life [Rockefeller, 2015; Earth Charter International, 2020].

Every person, within their sphere of action, has a mission to undertake in daily life, within the family, at work, and in all social interactions. This mission, of assumed responsibility, focuses on discerning with wisdom and understanding which thoughts and actions will lead us toward a better future for present and future generations.

Such responsibility varies according to each person's level of potential, capabilities, and influence. Therefore, it is



“The current planetary context demands an education capable of cultivating critical awareness, ethical responsibility, and active commitment to the community of life.”

David E. Velazquez Muñoz



Photo Credit: David E. Velazquez Muñoz

recognized that individuals with higher levels of education or who practice a profession possess greater tools, skills, and knowledge to design and implement new scenarios based on principles of sustainability and social, environmental, and economic justice.

Higher education institutions are strategic actors in catalyzing processes of cultural, ethical, and socio-environmental transformation, given their role in preparing professionals capable of responding to planetary challenges from a systemic and ethical perspective [Clugston & Calder, 1999; Corcoran et al., 2005].

Among Mexican public higher education institutions, UAEMéx represents a noteworthy example of assuming this responsibility toward society and the community of life. More than two decades ago, in 2004, it formally committed itself to the International Earth Charter Initiative. It was the first public higher education institution to endorse this commitment and one of the first worldwide.

Since then, university efforts to promote and apply education and ethics for sustainability have found fertile ground, particularly within eight academic units among the more than forty that comprise the institution's educational structure and outreach. Nevertheless, the challenge remains considerable, given that the student population across both the university's direct and affiliated educational systems exceeds 121,000 students.

Across several university departments, campuses and school of education, the Earth Charter has evolved beyond its use as an educational resource to become a foundational framework for environmental management projects, research initiatives, and cultural development programmes. In all cases, this universal declaration of principles and values for sustainability serves as a core reference text in courses such as Ethics of Trust, Environmental Culture, Ecology, Culture of Peace, among others.

At the Faculty of Dentistry, however, the Earth Charter was formally integrated



across two academic programmes: the Doctor of Dental Surgery programme and the Higher University Technician in Dental Prosthetics programme. The curricular mainstreaming of Earth Charter principles represents a strategy consistent with international recommendations on transformative education, as it facilitates the integration of ethical, socio-emotional, and ecological competencies into professional training (UNESCO, 2021; Earth Charter International, 2010). In addition, both degree programmes incorporated the course Environmental Education for Sustainability, whose curriculum is structured around all four pillars of the Earth Charter and their application to dental education.

The university's most significant engagement with the Earth Charter occurs through its extracurricular environmental management and education initiatives, implemented across all faculties (*departments) and upper-secondary schools under the umbrella of the Environmental Protection Programme. Education for sustainability finds particularly valuable opportunities within extracurricular programmes, which foster youth leadership, service-learning, and community engagement—elements widely recognized as essential components of Earth Charter pedagogy.

Through the coordinators of these programmes and their youth environmental brigades—such as the JADE Brigade at the Faculty of Dentistry and the Earth Charter Agents at the “Ángel María

Garibay Kintana” Preparatory School Campus—a wide range of educational activities are carried out, including environmental awareness campaigns, solid waste management initiatives, biodiversity conservation programmes, and reforestation projects. These activities are consistently accompanied by the dissemination and promotion of the principles embodied in the universal declaration for sustainability.

Through the work of these coordinators and their young environmental leaders, several highly significant achievements have been accomplished, including the adaptation of the Earth Charter into Braille; the complete translation of the document into three of the five Indigenous languages spoken in the State of Mexico; the creation of a university network of fair-trade markets grounded in ethical, social, and agroecological principles, involving local producers, artisans, and farmers who have become Earth Charter partners within the university; and, more recently, the establishment of the University Network of Agroecological School Gardens, with the participation of fifteen academic units.

Building upon this longstanding commitment to the Earth Charter, the UAEMéx, represented by the Center for Studies and Research on Sustainable Development (CEDeS) and the Faculty of Dentistry, was invited to participate as an associate institution in the Erasmus project Professionalization of Academic Teaching to Infuse SDGs in Latin American Universities, funded by the European Union.



This project highlights the strategic importance of high-quality teaching and undergraduate curriculum design in advancing the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into university courses. Its overarching objective is to enhance the quality of higher education (SDG 4) through the continuous professional development of academic staff and the creation of flexible, adaptable, and scalable innovations in teaching practices, as well as through curriculum review processes aimed at embedding the SDGs into academic programmes.

UAEMéx, together with the Michoacana University of San Nicolás de Hidalgo, are the only Mexican institutions participating in the consortium. The project also includes twelve universities from Germany, Cyprus, Greece, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Argentina.

The project began in 2024 and is currently in its final phase. For UAEMéx participants, this initiative is laying the foundation for a major reform of educational programmes

oriented toward sustainability and transformative education, while simultaneously fostering a collaborative network of environmental educators committed to the Earth Charter. Each stage of the project has become an important point of reference for faculty members and institutional decision-makers regarding the critical role of the professionalization of the practice of teaching for sustainability.

The first diagnostic phase consisted of a survey directed to university stakeholders—including administrators, faculty members, and students—combined with an interactive dialogue process based on the World Café methodology entitled “Tertulia por la Sustentabilidad” [“Sustainability Dialogue Gathering”]. Together, these activities generated a comprehensive assessment of the current state of education within the university.

Survey results revealed that the most traditional instructional approach—lecture-based teaching—continues to predominate among the academic staff surveyed. Newer pedagogical approaches



Photo Credit: David E. Velazquez Muñoz



that support the reorientation of university curricula toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remain significantly underutilized, particularly flipped classrooms, game-based learning, and community-based learning methodologies.

The “Tertulia por la Sustentabilidad” exercise brought together 30 participants, including faculty members, students, education specialists, and alumni. The most significant challenges were ensuring representation from the various institutional sectors, coordinating participation within a shared time and space, and creating the conditions necessary to foster a collaborative and constructive working environment.

Among the most encouraging outcomes of the process were the broad consensus regarding the need to strengthen the sense of community among all members of the institution, promote relationships grounded in empathy and mutual respect, create shared spaces for dialogue, coexistence, and well-being, and recognize the urgency of consolidating a worldview oriented toward harmony and care for the community of life.

The next phase of the project, entitled “Train the Trainers,” involved a workshop delivered by the project’s main coordinators from the Heidelberg University of Education, Germany, to fourteen university faculty members, after responding to an open call distributed to the entire UAEMéx academic community of approximately 7,200 faculty members.

These educators joined the initiative voluntarily and received training based on a framework of sustainability education competencies that had been developed by international experts during a previous phase of the project.

The participating faculty members represented different university campuses and academic disciplines. This diversity of professional backgrounds fostered a highly productive collaborative environment in which the CARE and DECORE+ methodologies—focused on pedagogical redesign and curriculum transformation for sustainability—were applied. As a result, fourteen undergraduate course syllabi were redesigned to incorporate student-centered content and learning activities, as well as active and transformative teaching methodologies grounded in the SDGs and the principles of the Earth Charter.

These fourteen faculty members subsequently assumed responsibility for coordinating the second phase of the capacity-building process, known as “Train the Champions.” The initial goal was to engage at least 125 faculty members and facilitate the redesign of 25 course syllabi. To support this objective, an Intensive Interinstitutional Diploma Programme for Faculty Professional Development was carefully designed to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into university curricula.

The diploma programme was delivered through a blended format that combined weekly face-to-face sessions with technology-mediated support. The programme benefited from the



Photo Credit: David E. Velazquez Muñoz

participation of nationally recognized experts as guest speakers, as well as faculty members who had completed the initial Train the Trainers workshop. The outcomes were highly encouraging. The programme was implemented across five university campuses: Health Sciences (55 faculty members), Upper Secondary Education (46), Santiago Tianguistenco (27), University City (25), and El Cerrillo (8). In total, 160 faculty members participated, resulting in the redesign of approximately 60 course syllabi.

An exploratory study conducted among participating faculty members revealed a high level of satisfaction with the professional development process. Participants reported having acquired competencies that would significantly enhance their teaching practice, including structured course planning based on the SDGs and the Earth Charter, the design of active, digital, and student-centered learning methodologies, the application of formative and reflective assessment strategies, and the development of leadership skills grounded in sustainability and ethical commitment.

For many participants, this professional development experience fundamentally reshaped their understanding of their role as educators. They anticipated a greater impact on their teaching practice through the application of the knowledge and skills acquired during the diploma programme, improving academic quality by selecting coherent and transformative content and methodologies. Particular emphasis was placed on experiential approaches that foster reflection, dialogue, and the collective construction of knowledge. Participants also highlighted the enhanced social relevance of their professional work, recognizing its potential to generate transformative change within and beyond the university context.

One of the most significant outcomes of the diploma programme was the recognition that the SDGs and the principles of the Earth Charter are already implicitly present in many academic programmes. However, the CARE and DECORE+ methodologies provide effective tools for making these connections explicit within curriculum design and instructional



practice. The experience also revealed the considerable potential of courses in the basic sciences, health sciences, and language studies to address sustainability in meaningful and innovative ways. Ultimately, one of the overarching conclusions of the initiative was the urgent need for educators to become transformative practitioners—moving beyond the classroom and collaboratively creating spaces that foster community-building and meaningful engagement with students.

The experience developed by UAEMéx over more than two decades confirms that university sustainability cannot be understood merely as a collection of environmental policies, isolated management actions, or fragmented curricular content. Rather, it constitutes a profound process of cultural, pedagogical, and ethical transformation that requires institutional vision, shared leadership, and an academic community willing to critically rethink its educational mission.

One of the main lessons learned is that educational transformation toward sustainability does not occur spontaneously, nor can it be achieved solely through institutional mandates. It requires ongoing processes of awareness-raising, dialogue, faculty development, and collective engagement. The findings emerging from the diagnostic and training phases of the project demonstrate that, even within universities characterized by a strong institutional commitment to sustainability, traditional pedagogical practices centered on lecture-based

instruction continue to prevail. This highlights the need to further strengthen faculty professional development and promote the adoption of active, participatory, and context-responsive teaching methodologies.

As an exercise in critical self-reflection, this experience also acknowledges several limitations. The results presented correspond primarily to an initial phase of curricular transformation and faculty professionalization. Consequently, it remains necessary to assess the long-term impact of these interventions on actual teaching practices, student learning outcomes, and the broader organizational culture of the university.

Ultimately, this experience reaffirms that education for sustainability entails far more than teaching just about the world. It involves cultivating individuals who are capable of caring for it, regenerating it, and living within it with responsibility, compassion, and a profound sense of belonging to a shared community of destiny.

Note

[1] Considering its whole university system, UAEMéx has approximately 100,000 students, about 7,000 professors and 191 educational programmes.



Photo Credit: David E. Velazquez Muñoz

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Photo Credit: Alberto Agüero

EDUCATING FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN TIMES OF CRISIS: LESSONS FROM THE TECNOLÓGICO DE MONTERREY EXPERIENCE



Paola Visconti Arizpe
[México]

Director of Sustainability and Social Impact, Tecnológico de Monterrey. She holds a Bachelor's degree in International Relations and a Master's degree in Applied Public Management, both from Tecnológico de Monterrey. Previously, she served as Liaison Manager at Ruta Azul, within the Directorate of Sustainable Development and Liaison of the Vice Presidency of Inclusion, Social Impact, and Sustainability at the same institution.



Luis Fernández Carril
[México]

Academic Manager for Sustainability and Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Ethics at Tecnológico de Monterrey, where he also holds a PhD in Philosophy of Science. He is a researcher in international climate policy at the Climate Change Research Program of the National Autonomous University of Mexico [UNAM], and serves as Technical Secretary of the Special Commission on Climate Change of the Senate of the Republic.



In a context marked by climate change, biodiversity loss, growing inequality, and profound technological and social transformations, higher education faces an unavoidable question: Are we preparing professionals for the world that is emerging, or for one that no longer exists?

For decades, universities have prioritized disciplinary specialization under the assumption of the relative stability of economic, social, and environmental systems. However, the contemporary planetary crisis challenges that premise. Today, it is no longer sufficient to educate technically competent professionals; society requires individuals capable of understanding complexity, navigating uncertainty, engaging in ethical deliberation, and acting in response to interconnected and evolving challenges. Sustainability has ceased to be a peripheral issue or a concern limited to specific professions and has become a cross-cutting dimension of virtually all professional practice.

Guided by this conviction, Tecnológico de Monterrey [1] has sought to build a comprehensive institutional approach to Education for Sustainable Development [ESD] through Ruta Azul (Blue Route), its institutional sustainability and climate change strategy. Rather than incorporating environmental content in an isolated manner, the institution has committed to transforming the educational experience through a transversal, systemic, and progressive approach. The Education pillar

of Ruta Azul is grounded in a clear mission: to develop leaders committed to shaping a sustainable future.

The Tec's experience has been driven by a simple yet profound question: [How can we ensure that all students, regardless of their academic discipline, graduate with the knowledge and competencies needed to address the climate crisis and broader sustainability challenges?](#)

[Ensuring High-Quality Climate Change Education for All Students](#)

One of the primary challenges facing higher education has been preventing climate change from remaining a topic reserved for environmental specialists or confined to elective courses. The climate crisis already affects healthcare systems, supply chains, cities, financial institutions, legal frameworks, cultural dynamics, and public policy decisions. Educating professionals without a sound and rigorous understanding of this phenomenon is equivalent to preparing specialists disconnected from one of the defining challenges of their time.

Reflecting on this reality, Tecnológico de Monterrey made a strategic institutional decision: no student should graduate without having had access to high-quality climate change education. To achieve this goal, each academic school identified a mandatory curricular unit in which Sustainable Development Goal 13, Climate Action, was integrated through the lens of Education for Sustainable Development [ESD].



Photo Credit: Mirian Vilela

This decision was grounded in the recognition of a fundamental principle: climate change is not a sector-specific issue but rather a reality that cuts across professions and fields of practice. Business professionals will face decisions related to decarbonization, climate risk management, and sustainable economic models; healthcare professionals will encounter differentiated impacts on public health; designers will need to consider resilience, sustainable materials, and environmental justice; and legal professionals will navigate regulatory frameworks, human rights issues, and socio-environmental conflicts. Accordingly, the objective was not to train climate specialists, but rather to prepare professionals capable of understanding and addressing the implications of sustainability within their own disciplinary and professional contexts.

However, the institutional experience quickly revealed an important limitation: while integrating sustainability-related content into curricula was necessary, it was not sufficient.

From Adding Content to Transforming Curriculum Design

One of Tecnológico de Monterrey's most significant lessons has been the recognition that education for sustainability cannot be reduced to the introduction of new curricular content or the inclusion of environmental modules within existing courses. Sustainability is not merely a topic to be taught; it represents a fundamentally different way of understanding problems, making decisions, and engaging in professional practice. From this perspective, the institution's efforts have extended beyond incorporating climate change content into pre-existing educational materials and have instead focused on embedding sustainability structurally within curriculum design itself.

To advance this objective, Tecnológico de Monterrey developed a Sustainable Development Guideline for course design. The primary purpose of this framework is to provide consistency in the way sustainability is addressed across schools



and academic disciplines. From the outset, the institution recognized an inherent tension: while some academic programs tend to approach sustainability through technical, operational, or techno-scientific perspectives, others emphasize ethical, social, cultural, or political dimensions. Rather than seeking to homogenize disciplinary approaches, the guideline aims to ensure that all students are exposed to a more holistic and integrated understanding of sustainable development, acknowledging its multidimensional complexity. This requires recognizing that sustainability challenges cannot be addressed solely through technological solutions or exclusively through ethical deliberation, but rather through educational experiences that integrate environmental, social, economic, cultural, and governance dimensions from complementary perspectives.

In addition to this guideline, the institution strengthened its transversal competencies by explicitly incorporating sustainability-related dimensions into their sub-competencies, learning elements, and

content. In particular, competencies such as [futures thinking](#), [ethics](#), and [innovation](#) are intended to enable students to [anticipate emerging scenarios](#), [envision inclusive and sustainable futures](#), [deliberate on complex dilemmas](#), [exercise responsible citizenship](#), and [design meaningful responses to social and environmental challenges](#).

This transformation is significant because it alters the underlying logic of education itself. Sustainability ceases to be treated as a supplementary topic and instead becomes part of the core capabilities that graduates are expected to develop. The goal has been to move sustainability from the curricular periphery to the center of the educational experience: not only learning about sustainability, but learning from and for sustainability.

This shift has also required acknowledging that Education for Sustainable Development demands something deeper than climate literacy alone. Educating for sustainability involves helping students understand [interdependencies](#), [think](#)



Photo Credit: Mirian Vilela



systemically, navigate uncertainty, recognize ethical tensions, imagine alternative futures, and act in response to complex challenges that do not have simple solutions.

An Ongoing Challenge: Preparing Faculty for Education for Sustainable Development

The curricular advances achieved to date, however, bring into focus one of the most significant challenges moving forward: faculty development.

Designing a curriculum guided by the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) does not automatically guarantee transformative learning experiences. A fundamental—and sometimes subtle—distinction remains between educating about sustainability and educating for sustainability. While the former may focus on transmitting knowledge about climate change, biodiversity, or the Sustainable Development Goals, the latter requires pedagogical approaches capable of fostering critical thinking, agency, ethical reflection, futures imagination, decision-making, and the capacity to act in response to complex and uncertain challenges.

In other words, a course may include sustainability-related content without necessarily developing the competencies required to address sustainability challenges in practice. An educational approach centered exclusively on content


risks producing students who are well-informed, yet not adequately prepared to confront the social, ethical, and professional dilemmas that characterize the contemporary planetary crisis.

For this reason, one of the most important lessons emerging from the Tec experience has been the recognition that curricular transformation must be accompanied by pedagogical transformation. Through “Ruta Azul,” the institution has promoted faculty development initiatives focused on Education for Sustainable Development, seeking to support educators in the transition toward more participatory, reflective, interdisciplinary, and action-oriented teaching approaches.

Nevertheless, the challenge remains open. How can faculty be prepared to integrate sustainability into disciplines that may appear distant from the subject? How can educational experiences be designed to move beyond awareness-raising and genuinely cultivate capacities for action? How can institutions assess whether students have not only learned about sustainability, but have also developed the competencies necessary to navigate and respond to uncertain futures?

Lessons for Other Universities

The experience of Tecnológico de Monterrey is not intended to be presented as a finished model, but rather as a process of institutional learning. Perhaps one of the most important lessons is that Education for Sustainable Development requires a comprehensive approach. Professional education is unlikely to be transformed through isolated courses, voluntary



“Curricular
transformation must be
accompanied by
pedagogical
transformation.”

Paola Visconti Arizpe
& Luis Fernández Carril



initiatives, or peripheral content. Institutional decisions, curricular changes, competency development, faculty support, and a shared vision regarding the purpose of education in the face of the planetary crisis are all required.

Another important lesson is that sustainability should not be understood exclusively as an environmental agenda. It is also about developing ethical, civic, professional, and human capacities to face a world characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and the need for transformation. This implies recognizing that contemporary challenges are not only ecological, but also social, technological, economic, and cultural, and that educating for sustainability requires preparing students to navigate tensions, make responsible decisions, and act in rapidly changing contexts.

In this context, an emerging challenge that is beginning to intersect Education for Sustainable Development is how to integrate artificial intelligence responsibly into higher education. Universities face the challenge of developing the capacities that enable students to understand, use, and critically leverage these tools, while also reflecting on their ethical, social, and environmental implications. Reconciling technological innovation with sustainability principles, critical thinking, and ethical use represents one of the most significant educational tensions moving forward. In the case of Tecnológico de Monterrey, this has already become an area of ongoing

work, aimed at exploring how to integrate artificial intelligence into education from a perspective that not only strengthens professional capacities, but also promotes the ethical, critical, and sustainable use of these technologies.

Ultimately, perhaps the most important question is not how to add sustainability to the curriculum, but what it means to educate professionals in a time of profound planetary, social, and technological transformations. For Tecnológico de Monterrey, Ruta Azul has represented an effort to answer that question through a clear conviction: educating leaders committed to shaping a sustainable future requires rethinking not only what we teach, but also how and why we educate.

Note:

[1] Tecnológico de Monterrey is one of Mexico's leading private universities, with more than 90,000 students and 11,261 faculty members. Its academic offerings include 43 undergraduate programs and 73 graduate programmes (11 doctoral programmes, 55 master's programmes, and 7 specialized programmes), delivered through a network of 22 campuses across 20 states in the country.



Photo Credit: Alberto Agüero

 **Earth Charter Young Leader**

WE TEACH VALUES, BUT NOT REALITY



Mahlet Girma
(Ethiopia)

Mahlet is a Consortium Program Manager and development professional focused on youth empowerment, gender equality, peacebuilding, and community engagement in Ethiopia. She founded Limitless Youth Training and Consultancy, where she facilitates leadership programs for young people, and has served as a Youth Leader with Earth Charter International. Passionate about Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and creating spaces for youth voices, she is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Social Work at Addis Ababa University, specializing in Community and Social Development.



Several months ago, after a youth leadership training I facilitated, a participant came up to me and said something that has stayed with me ever since:

“I understand what ethical leadership means. But I don’t think I can apply it in real life.”

It wasn’t confusion. It was honesty.

That moment forced me to reflect on something uncomfortable. I realized that what we often celebrate as success in youth-development spaces may be incomplete. We teach values. We inspire the youth. We create awareness. But we rarely prepare them for the reality of living out those values in environments that are complex, unequal, and sometimes unforgiving.

Around the same period, I completed a course with Earth Charter International. The course emphasized principles such as respect, justice, and responsibility as foundations for ethical living and leadership.

On paper, these values are clear. Even obvious. But sitting with that participant’s words, I found myself questioning something more uncomfortable: If we already know what is right, why does it feel so difficult to act on it?

Ethical leadership, as it is often taught, assumes that knowing what is right naturally leads to doing what is right. [But for many young people around the world, especially in developing contexts, where](#)

[opportunities are limited and systems are unequal, the real challenge is not understanding ethics, it is surviving while trying to practice it.](#)

In many youth-focused programmes, ethical leadership is introduced through concepts like integrity, accountability, respect, and responsibility. These values are explored through workshops, group activities, and reinforced through motivational narratives designed to inspire young people to become agents of change.

I have seen firsthand how powerful these spaces can be. Young people engage deeply, ask thoughtful and difficult questions, and leave with a new sense of purpose. They will be able to reflect honestly about the kind of leaders they want to become. For many of them, it is the first time they are invited to reflect on leadership in ethical terms.

But there is a pattern I have also observed. The learning often remains at the level of awareness. Participants leave knowing what ethical leadership should look like on paper, but without a clear sense of how to practice it when faced with real-world challenges.

These values are not the problem. Frameworks like the Earth Charter clearly articulate them. The challenge lies in translating them into action within environments that do not always support them.



Photo Credit: Mahlet Girma

In contexts like Ethiopia, where I work closely with young people, ethical decision-making is rarely straightforward.

A young professional might witness unfair treatment at work but stay quiet because speaking up could cost them their job. A student may go along with things they know are wrong because saying no could leave them isolated at school. A young woman might notice gender discrimination affecting her or a friend yet feel unable to challenge it because of cultural expectations or fear of backlash.

In these situations, [ethical leadership is not simply about choosing right over wrong. It is about navigating power, risk, and consequence.](#)


Economic realities also make these dilemmas even more complicated. When opportunities are limited, refusing to engage in unethical practices can mean losing access to income, networks, career growth or stability. For many young people, the question becomes not “What is right?” but “What can I afford to do?”

These are not abstract dilemmas. They are daily negotiations young people go through.

While these pressures take different forms across contexts, the tension between ethics and survival is not unique to developing countries.

In more developed settings, young people face different but equally complex pressures. A young employee in a corporate environment may feel unable to question unethical decisions due to fear of losing career opportunities. Social media culture can encourage performative activism, where appearing ethical is rewarded more than acting ethically. In academic spaces, competition can push students toward dishonest practices despite knowing the consequences.

Across contexts, the pattern is similar, [systems do not always reward ethical behavior consistently.](#) In some cases, they actively discourage it. The difference lies in the form these pressures take, not in their existence.



“Ethical leadership is not simply about choosing right over wrong. It is about navigating power, risk, and consequence.”

Mahlet Girma



This is where the gap in ethical leadership education becomes clear.

We say we are preparing young people to recognize ethical dilemmas, but not to navigate them. We emphasize values, but we rarely address the tension between those values and real-life constraints.

As a result, many young people are left to figure it out on their own. Some adapt by compromising. Others withdraw. A few persist, often at a personal cost.

This gap is not a failure of youth. It is a limitation of how we design and deliver ethical leadership education.

Part of the problem lies in how success is measured. Many programmes measure impact through participation, engagement, or short-term feedback. While these indicators are useful, they do not capture whether or not ethical behavior is sustained over time.

There is also a tendency to simplify ethical leadership into ideal scenarios. Difficult conversations about trade-offs, fear, and

failure are often avoided, perhaps because they are uncomfortable or harder to facilitate.

In addition, many leadership frameworks are applied universally, without enough adaptation to local realities. What ethical leadership looks like in one context may not translate directly to another, even when the values themselves are shared.

If we are serious about developing ethical leaders, we need to shift our approach.

First, we must acknowledge complexity. [Ethical leadership is not about perfect decisions, but about navigating imperfect situations.](#) Training should include realistic scenarios that reflect the environments young people actually operate in, including situations where there are no easy answers.

Second, we need to equip young people with practical skills. This includes how to communicate concerns, negotiate difficult situations, assess risks, and build alliances. Ethics should be practiced, not just discussed.



Photo Credit: Mahlet Girma



Third, long-term support matters. Ethical leadership develops over time, through experience and reflection. Mentorship, follow-up engagement, and peer networks can provide the support young people need as they face real challenges.

Finally, we must create space for honesty. Young people should be able to talk about moments when they struggled to act ethically, without fear of judgment. These conversations are essential for growth.

Conclusion

The principles emphasized by the Earth Charter call for respect, justice, and responsibility. But these are not just ideals to be taught. They are commitments that must be practiced in environments that often make them difficult to uphold.

If we continue to focus only on teaching values, we risk preparing young people for an ideal world that does not exist. To truly support them, we must also prepare them for the world as it is: complex, constrained, and full of difficult choices.

Bridging the gap between knowing and doing is not simple. It requires rethinking how we design programmes, how we measure impact, and how honestly, we engage with reality.

But it is necessary. [Because ethical leadership is not defined by what we know, it is defined by what we are able and willing to do when it matters most.](#)



Photo Credit: Mahlet Girma



Photo Credit: Alberto Agüero

 **Earth Charter Young Leader**

ECOPEACE TEEN CAFE: A LIVING EXPRESSION OF THE EARTH CHARTER



Greshma Pious Raju
(India)

Greshma is a climate and peace educator with experience in interfaith dialogue and environmental peacebuilding. She is the founder of Ecopeace Teen Cafe, an online education programme for teenagers that emphasises community care, environmental protection, social justice, and nonviolent communication. She also serves as a Global Council Trustee of the United Religions Initiative and as an Earth Charter Young Leader. Driven by a belief in the power of small acts of love and compassion, Greshma is dedicated to fostering positive change within the global community.



Faith, Dialogue, and Climate Action

My life-changing journey began in Kerala, the lush southern state of India known for its greenery, rivers, and backwaters, and I unexpectedly found deeper meaning in the forests of Costa Rica. In 2018, I moved to the University for Peace to pursue a masters degree in International Peace Studies. As part of my education, I completed an internship with Earth Charter International, an experience that profoundly transformed my understanding of peace, sustainability, and human relationships with nature.

During my time there, I was deeply inspired by how the Earth Charter was used in Sierra Leone as a tool for dialogue and reconciliation. [I realized that sustainability was not only about protecting the environment; it was also about healing relationships, restoring dignity, and creating cultures of peace.](#)

Every day, I travelled from Ciudad Colón to El Rodeo, surrounded by forests, flowers, birds, and the quiet rhythms of nature. Those journeys brought me an inner sense of peace. They also brought back memories of Kerala and made me reflect on how nature itself can become a symbol of compassion, coexistence, and responsibility. Slowly, a vision emerged within me: to use dialogue and environmental consciousness together as tools for peacebuilding.



Photo Credit: Greshma Pious Raju



Bringing it to a bigger context of my life, I grew up reading news about conflicts across South Asia, and even today Asia remains a region deeply affected by tensions and divisions. Much of the news, films, and public narratives I encountered created negative impressions about people from neighboring countries. I grew up receiving the message that people from certain countries were “bad,” even though I had never personally met anyone from those places. These narratives quietly shaped my perception of the world.

However, my experience at the University for Peace campus and my time in Costa Rica transformed that understanding. Through conversations, friendships, and shared experiences with people from different cultures and nations, I began to realize the profound power of human connection. While in Costa Rica, I met someone from one of those countries for the first time, and very quickly I understood that they were a human being just like me; human carrying dreams, fears, kindness, and love, just as I did. That simple yet powerful human connection profoundly changed my perception and worldview.

After graduation, I returned to India determined to work with young people and help “bring back the green” into their minds and communities. I began conducting sustainability workshops in schools and community spaces. However, I was shocked to realize that many children did not see climate change as an urgent crisis. Environmental destruction had become normalized. This realization pushed me to think more deeply about

how meaningful climate and peace education could be created for young people.

Then the world suddenly changed.

COVID-19 and a New Reality

As I was planning future initiatives, the COVID-19 pandemic brought humanity to a standstill. Schools closed, communities became isolated, and uncertainty filled everyday life. Like millions of others, I also experienced personal loss during that period. Yet amid the grief and silence, I found myself thinking constantly about teenagers who were disconnected from schools, friendships, and safe spaces while also witnessing growing climate disasters around them.

I began asking myself, “Could online spaces become places of healing, hope, and transformation?” From this inner question, Ecopeace Teen Café was born in 2021.

As the Earth Charter states in its preamble, “We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature”. The soul of Ecopeace Teen Cafe lies in its way of connecting humans and nature.



Photo Credit: Greshma Pious Raju

Ecopeace Teen Cafe is deeply inspired by the four pillars of the Earth Charter:

1. Respect and Care for the Community of Life
2. Ecological Integrity
3. Social and Economic Justice
4. Democracy, Nonviolence and Peace

The online café dialogues were designed as brave and compassionate spaces where teenagers could openly share their fears, dreams, struggles, and hopes without judgment. At the same time, they learned the equally important skill of listening actively, with respect, and compassion.

Each session became more than a conversation. It became a place of learning, sharing and caring. Over the years, Ecopeace Teen Café has engaged more than 500 young people from 25 countries across four continents. To ensure meaningful participation and deep connection, each dialogue session was intentionally designed for around 30 participants. Since its founding, the initiative has conducted more than 200

online dialogue sessions, creating consistent spaces for intercultural learning, emotional support, leadership development, and climate engagement among young people worldwide.

Teenagers connected with peers from different countries, cultures, and backgrounds. They learned to understand the “unknown,” listen to the “unheard,” and recognise the “unseen.” These exchanges encouraged empathy, courage, and creativity. Through the process, young people developed skills in communication, transformational leadership, relationship building, and collaborative action.

One of the strongest values of the Earth Charter is inclusivity, and Ecopeace Teen Café sought to embody that principle through language diversity. Programmes and dialogues were conducted in English, Spanish, French, and Malayalam, allowing young people to express themselves in the language closest to their hearts. This linguistic inclusiveness created a deeper emotional connection and participation.

“I realized that sustainability was not only about protecting the environment; it was also about healing relationships, restoring dignity, and creating cultures of peace.”

Greshma Pious Raju



But Ecopeace Teen Café was never intended to remain only a space for dialogue. It was designed to inspire local action. Participants were encouraged to take small but meaningful steps within their own communities. Sometimes, the transformation began with a simple family conversation. Sometimes it started through a nature walk, a local cleanup effort, or creating a new youth initiative. Many participants went on to launch their own community projects, including young leaders such as Nelly from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Victor from Nigeria. Others adopted more mindful, sustainable, and peaceful ways of living.

These experiences continually reminded me that teenagers possess extraordinary power to create change. I began my own interfaith peacebuilding journey in 2009 as a teenager, and I still remember the curiosity and hope I carried during that time. Working alongside young people through Ecopeace Teen Café brought back that same belief: young people can transform families, neighbourhoods, and

communities simply through conversations, empathy, and small actions.

As a Catholic, I draw deep inspiration from Saint Francis of Assisi and his love for all creation. Today, that same spirit continues through *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis, as well as initiatives such as Al-Mizan within Muslim communities. Across religions and spiritual traditions, there are growing efforts to protect nature and respond to climate change.

What moves me most is the deep interconnectedness between these teachings and the values of the Earth Charter. All of them emphasise dignity, compassion, responsibility, interdependence, and care for the Earth. Through my work, I seek to create brave interfaith spaces where these common values can unite people beyond differences.

When I began this journey during a time of global hopelessness, I carried uncertainty within myself. Today, although darkness



Photo Credit: Greshma Pious Raju



and crises still surround our world, I stand with greater hope and optimism. I have learned that **small actions often speak louder than despair.**

Inspired by the energy and resilience of young people, I am now launching a new movement called Green Collective. This initiative will create more in-person dialogue and placemaking spaces where young people can gather, collaborate, participate in climate action, and contribute to rural livelihood projects that strengthen peace and community resilience. It is rooted deeply in Principle 16 of the Earth Charter: building cultures of peace, nonviolence, and respect for life.

Alongside this, Ecopeace will also launch the Ecopeace Faith Café as a tribute to the Jubilee of Saint Francis of Assisi. The initiative will engage religious leaders and faith communities in my hometown to adopt green protocols within their religious spaces and ensure that places of worship become cleaner, greener, and more environmentally responsible. The hope is that these practices will extend beyond religious institutions and inspire sustainable living within homes and communities as well.

All these efforts are inspired and sustained by a document created more than two decades ago — The Earth Charter, a document that still lives in countless hearts and continues to flow like a river across communities, cultures, and generations.



Photo Credit: Alberto Agüero



Photo Credit: Bárbara Cardoso

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE EARTH CHARTER AT THE 2026 CARNIVAL OF FILHOS DA ÁGUIA DA PORTELA: AN EXPERIENCE OF THE ECOLOGY OF SAMBA



Emanuel Antunes
(Brazil)

Master's degree in History from the Federal Fluminense University (UFF), PhD candidate in Social History at PPGH (UFF). He conducts research on the history of Liberation Theology and its correlation with social movements. He is a member of Alternativa Terrazul, as well as the Harmony Department of the Portela Samba School and the same department in Filhos da Águia da Portela. He coordinated the project "Hope in a Better World" with the children and youth community of Portela, and taught courses on the History of Portela, the history of Brazil, the biography of the composer Monarco, and the social history of labor in Carnival during 2024 and 2026.



In the context of post-abolition of slavery in Brazil, when the State constructed a process of denied citizenship, the Black population developed various mechanisms of existential order — samba is one of them. Born from the persistent sociability of freed groups and their descendants, samba was created as a political, economic, religious, and cultural element, and precisely because it carries all these dimensions, it became intrinsic to the daily life of the communities that occupied the tenements and suburbs of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. By the 1930s, samba had already emerged as one of the main instruments for sharing Black Brazilian consciousness. It was in the space of samba that men and women, directly affected by Brazilian apartheid, scientific eugenics, and the positivist thinking of the ongoing Republic, created discourses filled with ancestral references, established historical consciousness in defiance of academic historical science, and planted the flag of religiosity rooted in the diaspora and centuries of captivity. It was through samba that Black Brazilians chronicled daily life — labor relations, social inequalities — and amid all of this, led the ecological discourse of the suburbs.

Due to the large urban reforms of the first half of last century, the poor population was expelled from the center of the republican capital. The space we always refer to as the suburb was constituted during this period of changes in the city's landscape. These spatial transformations were accompanied by the poets of the asphalt, the hillside, and the dirt roads of

neighborhoods such as Madureira, Oswaldo Cruz, and Engenho de Dentro, among others. In 1930s, Paulo da Portela wrote about the environmental transformations of Rio de Janeiro in "Linda Guanabara." In that same generation, numerous sambas addressed the relationship between the individual and the environment, projecting the landscape imaginary of these samba composers and revealing their precise ecological consciousness.

Samba is, in its essence, collective, chronicling, existential, and an instrument for intervening in reality. Observing all these characteristics, and understanding the tradition established between samba and the relationship of people with nature and climate change, we developed a project that directly addressed questions of race and class, placing ecology at the center of debate. At the end of 2024, we developed the project "Hope in a Better World: Youth of the Rio Suburbs in the Fight Against Environmental Racism." The project was an initiative of Alternativa Terrazul, in partnership with Filhos da Águia da Portela and the Oficina Paulo da Portela, with support from the Fundo Casa Socioambiental. The central idea was to develop socio-environmental awareness-raising work, guided by the principles of the Earth Charter and the Sustainable Development Goals. The primary element of this project was samba itself. The venue: the Portela Samba School, in the neighborhood of Oswaldo Cruz, in the greater Madureira area. [Madureira is a neighborhood in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil]

“Samba is, in its essence,
collective, chronicling,
existential, and an
instrument for intervening in
reality.”

Emanuel Antunes



Photo Credit: Bárbara Cardoso

Samba Schools were created in the 1930s as institutions of cultural and political resistance. They grew over the years, and by the 1950s were the main expressions of samba music genre in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The Portela samba school was a pioneer in developing the parades that, step by step, occupied the center of the nation's capital [in those days it was Rio de Janeiro]. True to its tradition of innovation, the Portela community established the Filhos da Águia Mirim Samba School in the early 2000s [a samba school dedicated to children and adolescents].

Through the Mirim School, hundreds of children can learn the fundamentals of samba, develop artistic skills, and strengthen social bonds. Every year, the Mirim Schools parade at the Marquês de Sapucaí [the main and iconic place of the samba schools' parade], following the standards of the Special Group Parades in Rio de Janeiro. These institutions hold an immense potential to intervene in the reality of children and young people. We are talking about institutions that,

embedded in a context of socioeconomic inequality, spearhead social projects to change the reality of many of those who live there. They develop, in a critical and direct way, reflections on the structures of oppression and the possible futures for these young people.

When we established the partnership with Filhos da Águia, we found fertile ground for the principles of the Earth Charter. We held weekly meetings where, through Portela's century-old songbook, we discussed concepts such as "Common Home," "Integral Ecology," "Culture of Peace," "Racial Equality," and historical elements that shape the development of children and youth — in this learning cycle, they were the main actors. Their daily trajectories and experiences emerged as central points of discussion. In 2025, the Mirim School paraded with the theme "When I Think of the Future, I Don't Forget My Past," a reference to a samba by Paulinho da Viola [a famous samba musician and composer]. That year, the school's honorees were Marisa Monte and



Paulinho da Viola, both members of the Portela community and well-known singers in the country. Through our work with the children, we developed the concept for the percussion section, which was renamed "Love for Nature" in the parade. In 1975, Paulinho da Viola composed this entirely ecological samba, reflecting on the growing pollution that plagued Rio de Janeiro, in contrast with green spaces and nature, which — resiliently — endured amid the chaos of capitalist progress.

This section was one of the initial outcomes of the debates generated while developing the project. During this period, we carried out intensive memory-based work. Every meeting was permeated by a process of deconstructing urban spaces, showing children and young people that the development of the suburb was the result of a political and economic process. As we deconstructed the historical perception regarding the greater Madureira, we clarified the deep connection between the communities of this territory and the preservation and valorization of nature. With the Earth

Charter as our guiding thread, we navigated three hundred years of Brazilian slavery, liberation struggles, trajectories of resistance, the birth of samba as the direct existential expression of freed communities, the long post-abolition period, the emergence of samba schools, and the 20th century's intensification of socioeconomic injustices. This teaching-learning journey, drawing on Freirean pedagogy, strengthened the community's environmental consciousness. The children and young people identified, through the memory, identity, and ancestral knowledge permeated by daily life, the ecological and samba culture roots of their community.

After the conclusion of the 2025 cycle, Filhos da Águia da Portela chose its theme for the 2026 carnival: Máscaras da Justiça (Masks of Justice). The theme (which is the plot of the song and what is illustrated through the images, cloths and parade floats) was based on a Letter sent by the Earth to children and young people. Throughout the parade, the Earth would speak to the children about the challenges



Photo Credit: Bárbara Cardoso



of the present and the future, about climate change, and about the measures necessary to establish dignity, ensure existence, and equality. The launch of the 2026 theme took place at the main green space in the Rio suburbs: Parque Mestre Monarco in Madureira. The children planted a native Brazilian tree and celebrated the Earth Charter as one of the key documents underpinning the theme to be developed for the 2026 carnival.

From the choice of this theme for this samba school, a year dedicated to the principles of the Earth Charter began. The children had access to the adapted version of the Earth Charter for Children, published by Alternativa Terrazul and distributed during activities held at the Samba School's rehearsal hall. As every year, the parade samba that would be sung on the main Avenue was developed by the youth. Written, composed, and sung by them, the samba music about the theme "Masks of Justice - Máscaras da Justiça" can be heard on all digital platforms and conveys, in the form of poetry and with youthful spirit, the guidelines of the Earth Charter and the Sustainable Development Goals, directly linked to ancestral heritage and inherited knowledge.

As for the visual dimension, the school paraded at the Sapucaí in February 2026 with all its sections portraying this Letter sent by the Earth to its children: the Filhos da Águia. In this context, the young people carried the ancestral message, and also held the possibility of shaping the future.

The potential of this theme, the work carried out over years, the existential power of singing, dancing, and coloring the avenue with ecology and samba, produced an unforgettable parade. Moving from the history of Madureira's establishment to the effects of unchecked exploitation of man by man, and the environmental degradation caused by the consumerist greed of capitalist society, the parade prompted reflection among the audience and established, in a lasting way, an internal community debate about the challenges of promoting sustainable development. A carnival that brought Filhos da Águia da Portela even closer to an ecological vision. Today we envision a Mirim School entirely oriented toward ecology, embracing samba and the defense of life on the planet as intrinsic elements.

Find the lyrics below (both in Portuguese and the English translation)

Find the music in Spotify [here](#).



Photo Credit: Bárbara Cardoso



Samba de enredo - Filhos da Águia
Máscaras de Justiça
Authors: JUAN REIS and ARTHUR SANTOS

De letras do vento, escrevo esta carta
Com tintas da chuva
O meu desabafo, grito entalado
Que ninguém escuta
Diz que me ama
Mas joga o lixo que corre no mar
Desmata meu solo a mil gerações
E cobre esse céu, com ar de fumaça
Mas posso acreditar
Que dias melhores, enfim chegarão
Nas mãos das crianças
É perseverança
Saber respeitar

Cuidar é plantar amor
Ouvir a floresta, refloresce a vida
Colher e regar
Fazer nossa parte
Lutar pelo mundo, é arte

E a resposta é recebida
Vem do coração das guardiãs do amanhã
Que transformaram em alegria, em fantasia
O meu clamor
Hoje, desfila a coragem com a consciência
Pois cada sorriso é ser resistência
E a justiça se encontra no tambor
"Insisto, sigo e sou!"
Hoje, a esperança
Se veste com as cores da grande mudança
Feito Luz de Vera"
Assino embaixo, Mãe Terra

É hora de voar, por nossa casa azul
Da Filhos da Águia, o grito ecoou

Pra não se esquecer, manter na memória

Que nosso futuro começa agora

From the wind's letters, I write this letter
With the inks of the rain
My outburst, a stifled cry
That no one hears
They say they love me
But throws the trash that runs into the sea
Deforests my soil for a thousand generations
And covers this sky with air of smoke
But I can believe
That better days will finally arrive
In the hands of children
It is perseverance
Knowing how to respect

Caring is planting love
Listening to the forest, life re-flourishes
Harvesting and watering
Doing our part
Fighting for the world is art

And the answer is received
It comes from the hearts of the guardians of
tomorrow
Who transformed My cry
into joy, into fantasy
Today, courage parades with consciousness
For every smile is resistance
And justice is found in the drum "I insist, I
continue, and I am!"

Today, hope
Dresses itself in the colors of great change
Like Vera's Light"
I sign below, Mother Earth

It's time to fly, for our blue home
**From the Children of the Eagle, the cry
echoed**

So as not to forget, keep in memory

That our future begins now



Photo Credit: Bárbara Cardoso

Note: Between 2024 and 2026, Alternativa Terrazul carried out a socio-environmental awareness campaign and promoted the Earth Charter with Filhos da Águia da Portela, a children's samba school in Rio de Janeiro. As a result of the year-long project, Hope for a Better World: Youth from Rio's Suburbs in the Fight Against Environmental Racism, the school chose the Earth Charter and the Sustainable Development Goals as the foundation for its 2026 Carnival theme. Under the theme Masks of Justice, participants connected ancestral knowledge and samba traditions with the Earth Charter's core principles. In February 2026, around one thousand children and young people sang, danced, and performed in costumes that conveyed these values, sharing messages of socio-environmental justice and ecological integrity with their community and the wider public.



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CONSCIENCE INTO
ACTION**

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About the Earth Charter:

Crafted by visionaries over twenty years ago, the Earth Charter is a document with sixteen principles, organized under four pillars, that seek to **turn conscience into action.**

It seeks to inspire in all people a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the whole human family, the greater community of life, and future generations. It is a vision of hope and a call to action.

www.earthcharter.org





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