

Welcome to Turning Conscience Into Action, the Earth Charter podcast. Join Mirian Vilela, Earth Charter International Executive Director, in her fascinating conversations with great thinkers, scholars, and activists from around the world who are working in the fields of sustainability, ethics, education, and social transformation. Our purpose is to generate new insights on how to face current global challenges and inspire informed action.

For this podcast episode, we are sharing a conversation I had with Brendan Mackey, Professor at Griffith University in Australia.

Thank you very much for being here with us today in this podcast. We are so honored to have you here because you have been so much part of the drafting process of the Earth Charter back in the 90s, and you have been involved in this whole initiative since early 97. So I would like to start by asking you if you can share some thoughts on what was the aspiration in the year 2000 around the launch when the Earth Charter was launched. What was the aspiration of that movement and the document?

Yes, well, good morning, Mirian. At least it's good morning where I'm speaking to you from in Sydney, Australia. Yes, so what was the aspiration for the Earth Charter back in 2000? The hope was that it would become a leading document, declaration of ethical values and principles that could help guide the world community and nations and local communities. In the great transition towards a more just, sustainable and peaceful world, there was a goal set of getting it recognised in some formal way in the UN General Assembly. There was hope that doing so would then help propagate and lead to other more hard law initiatives, analogous to what happened with the Declaration, the Human Rights Declaration, which led to international law on human rights.

It was hoped that in addition to helping guide the policies and programs and actions of national governments and the international community, that would also provide ethical guidance for civil society and for businesses and corporations and such. And how much do you think the whole movement achieved some of these aspirations? Well, the document was recognised by two very important international organisations, one being UNESCO and the other being the OECN International Union for Conservation of Nature, which is a peak global body comprising government and non-government organisations.

So that in itself, I think, is a remarkable achievement we need to acknowledge. The Charter has not received formal recognition in the UN General Assembly. And there is a third very important, I would say, international body which has recognised the Earth Charter or at least acknowledged the Earth Charter. And that's the Catholic Church through the Vatican and Pope Francis' Encyclical. So we have three important global institutions. If you like the Vatican through Pope Francis, the OECN and UNESCO.

But it has not been formally recognised in the UN General Assembly and that's because that requires a national government to do so and that's not happened yet. So it's a mixed outcome at the international level. At a national level, in sub-national government level, there's quite a number of jurisdictions that have acknowledged the Earth Charter in one way or another. And the document has been endorsed by many, many organisations and individuals. But it's been a huge challenge, I think, for the Earth Charter to translate what

is a very rich document about ethical values and ethical principles and to translate that into a form or forms where people in different sectors struggling with real-world issues on the ground are able to make use of it.

So that remains the challenge, actually not just for the Earth Charter but for any set of ethical principles. We still face a great challenge in terms of translating our ethical values and principles into action and helping people understand what they do or fail to do, the policies they make, the programs they develop, the actions that they take, how these can be guided by ethical considerations.

But we could say that one challenge is first to frame that vision of ethical values and then to translate that or incorporate that into action.

Well, I think the way I would, one way of talking about it is a number of the listeners might be aware of Paul Raskin's Great Transition Initiative, which is envisaging different kinds of futures, scenarios for different kinds of future worlds and human societies. So in thinking about how we can address the problems of today, perhaps we need to be envisaging the future that we want, what does that look like and how can that be better than what it is today? What has to change in terms of our governance, in terms of our economy, in terms of our social relations, in terms of our laws, in terms of how we organise and govern our societies and our economies and our relationships with each other.

How does that have to change and how can it change? So, and that's very important that we do that. So in thinking about the future we want, people often think about goals. And I know we're going to talk about the sustainable development goals later on. But this is a key point about the relationship between the Earth Charter and not just the sustainable development goals, but any future goals, goals for a great transition, for a better world we want, is that we have to think about how we get there.

What, how do we transit from where we are to where we want to be? Because it's no good just thinking about the end point of the goals, because the end does not justify the means. I mean, everyone has heard that saying. And it's ethically very true. The means to the end we achieve has to be consistent with the means we employ to get there. Absolutely. Which is to say you can't achieve an ethical goal through unethical means. So, and this really is where the Earth Charter and the Earth Charter principles come into play.

Yes, the Earth Charter can help us envisage what a better world can look like. But I would argue equally importantly, its principles can very concretely guide the steps we take to get there.

And this is great. Absolutely. It's very important for us to remember that the way in which we achieve the goals are as important as the goal. Very likely said. Brendan, would you share with us what's the legitimacy? What's really the legitimacy of the Earth Charter?

Legitimacy can be assessed using a number of criteria. As I mentioned earlier, it's been formally endorsed and acknowledged by three very important and influential international institutions. It's also been formally endorsed by a large number of non-government

organisations. Not a few national and sub-national jurisdictions and by many, many individuals. So, it has some legitimacy in that regard. I think the process through which it was drafted gave it some legitimacy. As the listeners may know, one of the goals of the Earth Summit back in 1992 was an Earth Charter.

That didn't eventuate. Other important documents came out, including the Rio Declaration, which has ethical principles in it. If you think about the origins of the Earth Charter, it was an attempt by civil society to, if you like, bootstrap, if I can use that technical phrase, a People's Earth Charter that could then be taken back to the international community. And of course, what, as I mentioned before, the means we achieve in ends are important at the end. So, you know, a very genuine attempt was put in place to have a very rich, consultative process to draft the Earth Charter.

It was drafted over a very long period of time. There was a core drafting group, which was actually quite a large circle of people. There were consultations held in all the major regions of the world, including Latin America and Africa, so not just North America and not just Western Europe, but also Eastern Europe and other, as I said, every region of the world. And again, if you, the Earth Charter was trying to, I think I would describe it as taking a middle path in the drafting process. It was, it's starting point with those ethical values and principles that have already been agreed to and articulated in internationally negotiated treaties and declarations, such as those that came out of the Reoworth Summit, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the various summits on sustainability that occurred after that.

So the starting point was what the international community had already agreed to in principle as being new international norms, ethical norms and principles. So I think that is another aspect of its legitimacy, is that it's kind of one of its foundation stones is what the international community had already agreed to. Another of its foundation stones came from the consultation process with civil society, which as I said, I mean, no consultation process can be perfect, perfectly representative or it's always limited by time and resources.

But there was a real and genuine attempt to engage with civil society, a very diverse civil society, including in the developing world. And as I said, in Africa, the Middle East, India and Latin America and elsewhere. So I would argue that this is another aspect of its legitimacy is that there was a genuine dialogue with civil society. So if you had all of those, but ultimately, its legitimacy comes from it being its actual use and application. It's demonstrable utility to address the problems that we face.

In that case, you know, upon those foundation stones I've talked about, you know, its legitimacy is built brick by brick by those who make use of it. Good.

So it needs you. So we could say a number of its legitimacy comes from various angles. One is this number of important organizations and individuals that have endorsed it, but also how they how their shard is used. And also because of the kind of process it went through in its drafting. But one interesting thing that you said is how its legitimacy also comes because it builds on existing instruments already available in international law. So it's kind of in its entangled with a number of principles already available in international law.

Well, it built upon those principles and extended them through consultation with civil society. So this is an aspect of the earth charter drafting process, which I think is very interesting. For example, you know, one of the very well established legal principle now is the precautionary principle. So which goes very simple, you know, to put it in simple terms, you know, when knowledge is limited apply a precautionary approach.

And this comes to looking at, you know, the environmental impact of big development projects. We were where knowledge is limited about the precise risk involved to the environment from the development. So the precautionary principle says, well, we should be very careful and not proceed willy nilly until we've got, you know, more data that shows that it's safe to proceed to take a precautionary approach. And that's very well established in actually, you know, national stat, you know, in statutory law in, in, in many, many jurisdictions, you know, throughout the world.

So there's nothing controversial about having a principle that relates to the precautionary principle in an earth charter. But through the global consultation process, you know, there was a lot of dialogue around the limit or if you like, you know, how, how the precautionary approach should be applied and should be interpreted to get the best outcomes for, for, for people in nature. So if you read principle six in the earth charter says, prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.

We're going back, you know, it would make common sense to a lot of people, but we don't have a lot of laws that actually give the emphasis on preventing harm in the first place. And then when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach. So principle six A says take action to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm, even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or, or inconclusive. That is basically a pretty standard rendering of the precautionary principle that most lawyers were just simply not in agreement.

But, but through the civil society and consultations, an additional subprinciple was added, which is six B, which says place the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity will not cause significant harm and make the responsible parties liable for environmental harm. Now, that's a much stronger, that's a much stronger statement. Because placing the, so on who falls the burden of proof to argue that a proposed development activity will or will not cause significant harm. Often it's on the people who want to, who want to stop the proposed activity, right?

The burden of proof falls on them. This is suggesting that the burden of proof should fall on those who want to, who are the proponents of the activity. And that's, that's a very, very progressive, you know, addition to the, the precautionary principle. So I think this is one of the very interesting aspects of the earth charter that's, you know, it's not, it's a subtlety that isn't well appreciated is that its starting point were principles found in established principles in environmental law and international sustainability treaties and declarations, but they were enriched and made more progressive through the civil society dark and constant consultation.

And it's reflected here in the earth charter, in this particular case in principle six of earth charter.

That's right. And I can give you, you know, some more examples of that too. Another principle that invoked a huge amount of dialogue and debate and discussion was principle 11, which reads, affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, healthcare and economic opportunity. Now, what was controversial about that principle was the terms gender equality versus gender equity.

And I wouldn't be revealing any secrets to say, you know, there was very, very rigorous debate about this at the consultations held in Africa. Absolutely. But there were equally strong views on this, on consultations in North America. So it was interesting. This was a principle where, and also the Middle East. In fact, everywhere, there was a lot of debate around this. And I'm probably over simplifying it, forgive me if I do, but it kind of fell along gender lines is that the males involved in the dialogue were very happy with the concept of gender equity, whereas the women were absolutely adamant that it had to be gender equality.

Right. And there was a discussion whether why should we add equality and should you just be gender equity? Yes. So what do you think is the difference that it makes?

Well, that's a very good question. And some people argued, you know, they're synonyms, you know, they're equivalent. But other people are equally argued that they're quite different. And equity, some people argued, means that things can be quite different and not equal. So when it comes to gender roles, you can have equity in gender roles. But that doesn't mean women can do everything men can do. If I can put it like that. Whereas, it means that women can do anything that a man can do.

Right. So this got down to some. And this is important because it touches upon cultural, it actually touched upon what for some communities and some societies and some countries are culturally based values. Right. So you remember that in some places people said that according to our culture, we are women and men. We don't want to be seen as equal or equality. So don't come with your westernized values to impose on us. So do you remember that and how, what's the kind of worldview that is behind that?

So the people involved in the discussions who were really adamant that it had to be gender equality were African women and Middle East women and Latin American women. And their argument was that, you know, culture, a society's culture is not frozen in time. Absolutely. Yes. But every generation needs to evaluate what's good about its culture, what should be kept and handed on to the next generation and what needs to be altered in light of gender or changing circumstances.

Absolutely. That's a very good point. So cultural values are not frozen over time and it can be reconsidered as our thinking evolves.

Yes. And so the, and so that wording of principle 11, affirmed gender equality and equity as prerequisites was to recognize that both equality and equity are important. So equity

has other meanings as well. But in this gender context, everyone will. The women who were advocating for equality also saw, you know, weren't against having equity because equity, you know, there are many issues for which equity is undeveloped.

Sure. Yes. So, you know, that's a, if you like, aspect of it. It's a good example of the kind of dialogue that went along with every principle.

Yes. Yeah. I remember that one too. So you got very engaged.

I remember it too because you might recall that the, remember there was the Rio plus 10 plus five, Rio plus five in Rio de Janeiro. Yes. That's right. I remember being sent with the draft of that principle to, there was, it was a women's group at that. And it was chaired by that wonderful. Bella Abzug.

And anyway, so I was. WIDU, women and development. That's right. WIDU chaired by Bella. So many people in WIDU helped to craft that principle, right? New feedback helping. That's right. I would ask to take the latest version of it to WIDU to get their feedback. Because it was all in this big hotel convention centre, right? And they had a room where they were meeting. And I knocked on the door and they said, come in. Or Bella Boonburt, come in and open the door and poke me head in.

And there was this table of WIDU women. And she said, yes, how can I help you? And I said, well, I've got a, you know, I'm here from the Earth, child of draft and team. And I've got a, the latest version of principle 11 for your review. And I started to talk and she said, what's your name? I said, Brendan, Brendan Mackey. She said, Brendan, you seem like a very nice young man. But were you mind just sitting down and listening for a while? Listen first. Listen first. I was a little, you know, appropriately admonished. I sat down and, you know, they, you know, they had this again, very, very focused discussion, very precise discussion, you know, it gave some very good feedback, which again was, you know, supported that this kind of, this kind of phrasing that we've got here.

That's wonderful. It's wonderful to hear this because you got involved in the whole drafting of the Earth Charter from a very early stage in early 97 and really took part in it from, was consistently taking part on it throughout until the year 2000 when the Earth Charter was launched. So anything that you remember from those days, so between 97 and the year 2000 that, in addition to these stories of drafting that you just shared that you remember because it stands out still today to you as a conversation that you really learned from it in the drafting of a specific principle. Would you share with us any other specific example that it helped you to amplify your thinking around any of these many ideas that are embedded here?

I guess, yeah, you know, there's a story around every principle. I think the principle 16 was very interesting too, promoter culture of tolerance, nonviolence and peace. And I think the person who I learnt most from around that and who I think had a very big influence on that was Kamala Chowdhury from India. Right, Kamala from India. She was so closely involved in the drafting of the whole Earth Charter but influenced a lot of this part, right? Yeah, that's right. Now also, sadly to cease, we lost a true sage and saint there.

So because that principle was originally focused around peace in the context, I guess, of war, peace as opposed to war.

So it addressed issues to do with demilitarisation and elimination of weapons and mass destruction and the peaceful use of outer space. It was, and preventing violent conflict between nations or like intra-country civil war and things like this. And she, what was very influential in her discussions with her about this and her input into this principle was that, you know, like, the lack of war between or within a country is not enough. That's just one manifestation of violence in our society. And really that we needed a principle that promoted nonviolence.

So if we were, if we had a principle on peace, which is really about, you know, not having, not using warfare to solve our international disputes or national disputes. That needed to be part of a broader shift based around recognition of the role of violence in our society generally, you know, including violence to women and violence to children. And that a lot of the violence also came about through cultural and racial intolerance. So that what we needed to be doing was promoting a culture of tolerance and a culture of nonviolence.

And this would lead, you know, to a culture of peace. So, you know, book ending those principles I read out before, which were more, if you like, conventional ones about demilitarization and peaceful resolution of national disputes and elimination of weapons of destruction. Book ending there was principle 16A. Encourage and support mutual understanding solidarity and cooperation among all peoples and within and among nations.

So that's about promoting a culture.

Very strong. This is very strong principle.

I mean, if you think about what's happening now around the world what's happening in the USA about what's happening in Brazil about about what's happening in the Philippines.

It's everything but more mutual understanding. If there's no mutual understanding, there's polarization in the black tract.

There's division not not solidarity and there's everyone for themselves not cooperation. And then you go to the end of 16 principle 16 you get 16F. And really I think this is, you know, very profound statement recognize the peace because everyone says we want peace. Well, Kamala pointed out that you don't just get peace. You know, peace is the product of having a culture that enables peace. So 16F ended up as recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, earth, and the larger whole of which we are all apart.

I mean, it's a huge concept when you think about it, but it's pointing at this connecting understanding that peace is the outcome of right relationships. And that's, and that's right relationships with with everything including oneself.

Very well put so this is really towards the end of the 16 principles of their show because it's really the result of if we kind of the path of all the other principles.

Absolutely. So all of those. And that's a good way of thinking about the other child that all the principles or 72 people 72. If, if, you know, given given effect in, in, in our lives and in society, you know, would lead to a culture of tolerance non violence and peace and and would lead to that wholeness created by, you know, right, right relationships. And a lot of charter really had a profound influence on on that principle and and and and I, you know, and through it the whole of the charter.

Absolutely wonderful. You are a scientist and you certainly offered the great inputs yourself to the whole drafting of each other. And especially to set to part two on ecological integrity and all the principles that are around it but would you would you share with us what is really the meaning of this notion what what what were the alternatives to call this this pillar to of the Earth Charter was was something else instead of ecological integrity and why the term ecological integrity is there. How was that articulated in the other. Why do you think is that is so important.

So, Well, first of all ecological integrity is a term that's recognized in international and in the academic literature. And it refers to, if you like the healthy functioning of of ecological systems of of ecosystems. You know, which can be whose, you know, whose health and healthy functioning can can be damaged by inappropriate human use, you know, directed indirect human impacts, whether direct impacts like over logging or direct impacts by pollution. All the way through to complete destruction by just eliminating, you know, removing the ecosystem and putting in place, you know, human managed system. Now we've done that.

So, so we wanted we wanted a framing for the environmental component of the earth charter. So, I should just step back and say, you know, one of the one of the aims of the earth charter as a ethic as a state of ethical values and principles was to try and bring together environmental concerns with social justice concerns, because you know, even even still today. So it's changed a lot. I think it's changed a lot. But certainly 20 years ago, you know, environmental environmental problems were not really understood as as social justice problems.

I think they are now and climate change which we can get on to talking about in a minute has really helped people understand that when you harm nature you harm you harm people. Ultimately. So we were wanting a framing for the environmental dimension that really recognize that earth is a planet full of life, which we refer to in the opening section. And there are life enabling and sustaining processes that we that we must protect. And since the earth charter, there's been a lot of, you know, advances in scientific thinking. And you might have heard of the concept of planetary boundaries.

So planetary boundaries is a way of trying to come up very pragmatically with some indicators that represent thresholds we have to stay within in order to maintain the ecological integrity of the whole of the whole earth system. You know, earth is a earth as a whole. Because we're now we're now, you know, the human footprint is now so vast and so damaging that the ecological integrity, not just a local system ecosystems like the Amazon or Congo or coral reefs are threatened. And so the whole ecological integrity of the whole planet is. So that's, I guess, the logic behind using this term ecological integrity in the broader sense.



Yeah, wonderful.

Thank you so much. And it's good to hear this from you, particularly it's an image is a principle a whole notion of ecological integrity is still needs to be brought to the minds of people more and more, because I think there's a lot of lack of knowledge or consciousness in terms of what does it mean. And I think it's a nice to make it part of a bringing of children and young people and lawyers and business people. What does ecological integrity mean, what why that is important, and it's important not just for environmentalists, it's important for just life on earth.

Yeah, that's right. And again, we can get very calm. Well, we can think about it at the global level. So the planetary boundaries, planetary boundaries is a scientific concept. There's actually a set of measurable indicators about the planetary health that the health of the planet, the health of the planet's environment, and they've identified thresholds in each of these indicators that we need to stay behind below, in order to have a livable environment for all life. So that's at the planetary level at a local level again, you know, it's important to be able to give concrete examples of that. So if we take the case of, you know, what we call, you know, shallow fringing coral reefs, these are really important throughout the tropics in the developing world, like in the in the Pacific.

You know, it's about 70% of the protein that that that people eat consume in in Melanesia and Polynesia and Micronesia comes from the sea. And, and, and a lot of that is coming from the fringing coral reefs, the reefs that the coral reefs that fringe islands in the Pacific, and elsewhere in the tropics. And these coral reefs are as well as being important for food supply. They're very biodiverse and very productive. They're also very important, you know, for the local tourist industry, people like to come and look at them and recreating them. And they're very important for local custom and culture.

But they're quite fragile systems and their ecological integrity is easily damaged by pollution. Again, by overfishing and by physical damage. And they're also threatened by by global warming and marine heat waves. So, you know, when people ask me to say, well, practically, what does ecological integrity mean? They're the two examples I can give. I talk about the planetary boundaries idea. And then coral reefs is a very practical example of if we don't pay attention to the ecological integrity of an ecosystem like a coral reef, all the benefits we get from that system is lost, as well as intrinsic value of all the life that is dependent upon that system.

So do you think people should turn their their their vision to coral reefs because of the value it has to the well being of people or because they have their own value? What should be the approach here?

Well, I mean, it isn't either or. This is the thing about this is the thing about the earth charter that I was mentioning before. It's asking us to take a holistic, ethical perspective. And when we look at an ecosystem like a coral reef, it hasn't all all the life in it has its own intrinsic value, irrespective of its usefulness to people.

And that's that's the first principle of the earth charter. You know, respect earth and life in all its diversity one a recognize that all beings are interdependent in every form of life

has value, regardless of its worth to human beings. Right. So all the life that's dependent upon a healthy coral reef ecosystem, which comprises that ecosystem, you know, it has value regardless of whether we can make use of it or not. But at the same time, it's incredibly important to people for local communities.

It has customary value. You know, it's some tied to their culture and culture practices and their traditions. It's also materially important to them because it's a source of food and through tourism, eco tourism, it can be a source of some income as well. So it's not either or it's recognizing that all of these ways we understand and value ecosystem are important and really and really reinforce each other. And that's what the earth charter is asked Institute generally, you know, environmental protection, trying to maintain and restore ecological integrity and and benefits to people and human rights and justice.

We have to we have no choice but to do them together because if you think about, you know, we all, you know, we all live on earth and earth is our home is our collective home. So we have to look after the health of our planet because that you know, you can't you can't deliver social justice if you have a if you have an unhealthy planet and if you've degraded ecological integrity and it's not a good thing. We've overshoot the planetary boundaries. So it's not a matter of either or it's a matter of understanding again the relationships between ecological integrity and and social justice and human health and well being.

That's great. Now Brandon, the their shadow was launched in the year 2000. So many years have passed. What do you think is the relevance of their shadow to current times and how revision their shadow to be used now many years later.

Yeah, well, I think that we really, you know, must try and help people understand how the principles in the earth charter and the values articulated in the chart can help guide how we address the current challenges we face the problems people are facing on the ground and help guide us towards, you know, in this transition to improving our state of affairs. And, you know, we and I'll just give a few examples of what I know of this. So if we look at what's happening in many countries of the world and, you know, we see a rise of authoritarianism and and a decline of democratic processes.

And this is happening in some of our in some of the largest countries of the world. It's it's happening in the USA. It's happening in Brazil is happening in India, happening in the Philippines, Turkey. As we go around the world, we we see a rise of authoritarianism and an apparent decline. Well, interestingly, you know, in many countries, democratic processes have led to the election of authoritarian leaders who are who are reinforcing that kind of top down our authoritarian approach. And, you know, we're also seeing a rise in dissent in response to that and and and and, you know, people, you know, people demanding more or accountability and more inclusion.

Well, the earth charter, you know, speaks to this directly. I mean, if we look at section four on democracy, non violence and peace and and principle 13, which has strengthened democratic institutions at all levels and provide transparency and accountability and governance includes participation and decision. And so we're also making an access to

justice. And let's look at 13 C, which is a very interesting one, protect the rights to freedom of opinions, expression, peaceful assembly, association and dissent.

And I think principle, you know, principle 13 people could reflect upon very helpfully in terms of the current situations we face, including the principle 13 C. The other point I'd like to make and that this might be a good time to shift to talking about climate change, because climate change is also one of the one of the biggest challenges. One of the challenges.

Major challenges for all of us independently of where we are in the world. And but you're much of your work in the past many years as being around climate change. Absolutely. What do you think are the dilemmas, the ethical dilemmas around the issue of addressing climate change?

Yeah, just before I get the climate change, just to finish on, you know, where what we were discussing. So one of the big challenges we face is about the loss of biodiversity. Actually, a lot of scientists now are talking about biological annihilation. We are just destroying ecosystems and eliminating species to such an extent at such a rate that, you know, the prospects for going forward are very grim.

Well, you know, Earth Charter has a whole section that we were just discussing, section to ecological integrity, which directly addresses that problem. The problem we were just talking about was the rise of authoritarianism and the kind of democratic processes and the rights of people to advocate for what they believe in. Well, again, we have a whole section, you know, section through on social economic justice, which people can draw upon in that. Coming to climate change, this is the third great challenge that another great challenge that we face wherever we are, wherever we live.

You know, until recently, the general view was that, and this is still true, the people who are and will suffer most from the impacts of climate change, human force climate change, are those who have been least responsible for it. And that's because most of the problem comes from burning fossil fuel and to date it's the wealthy countries who have been largely responsible, mainly responsible for those greenhouse gas emissions. And also, if you look at the impacts on future generations, obviously, young people and those yet to be born, you know, will bear the brunt of those impacts and they've not shared responsibility for causing them either.

That has changed. I mean, that still remains, but on top of that now, developed countries, those countries that have been responsible for the emissions are also now feeling the full force of climate change. You would have all had the news coverage about the megafires we had in eastern and southern Australia earlier this year, where we had about six or seven million hectares of forest burn. Our capital cities engulfed in smoke for three or four months and great harm done to humans and nature and property.

So climate change is not just something which impacts upon the developing world, it also impacts upon people in developed countries and the impacts are already and will increasingly become so great that they overwhelm our adaptive capacities. If you look at

the earth charter, it doesn't actually mention climate change and, you know, that just shows you where the global dialogue was that in the 1990s.

But we had a frame with someone could argue is that a problem or it's not a problem that their shutter doesn't clearly address climate changes, the wording of it, but it addresses it from another angle.

I think it is problematic and it would be better if we had put it in and we actually are a member of the discussion around it, you know, in the late 1990s. And it just shows you, as I said, the earth charter was trying to take this middle road of building upon what the international community had agreed to and adding to that the progressive. You know, thinking of civil society. That's one that's my interpretation of what the process, but you know, we did have you in framework convention on 1992.

So, you know, on reflection with the benefit of high side, we should mention it or it should have been mentioned.

Probably in the global situation. But that is not to undermine in any way the relevance of the earth charter to addressing the climate change problem now. So we've got to the climate change problem kind of devolves into two dimensions. One is what all this two aspects to it. One is what we call the mitigation problem, which is we have to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. And there's two main sources, burning fossil fuel, coal, oil and gas for energy. We need to stop doing that and replace that with clean energy sources like solar and wind and other sources.

And also the emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. So it's a huge challenge and we have to do that, you know, to avoid to avoid breaking some of the worst. Well, to avoid to avoid if you like runaway climate change. The scientific view and the international consensus is we should limit global warming to well below two degrees above pre-industrial levels. And that's and a business as usual emission. We're going to cross that threshold in about 30 years time by 2050. So it's a very short time horizon to make this transition to a what we call a net zero emission economy.

At the same time, we have to deal with the impacts and the consequences of a rapidly changing climate, particularly in the climate. And also, particularly, including the increase in the frequency and the intensity of extreme weather events, extreme climate events, like wildfires, like tropical cyclones, like droughts, like floods, like heat waves on land and in the ocean and marine environment. And that's that's an adaptation. That's what we call adaptation. How can we change what we do to deal with these terrible impacts of a rapidly changing climate?

So our success or failure to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions determine how bad the climate impacts are and our capacity to adapt to them or not. How much harm we can we can moderate. So how do we do that? How do we take the actions that are needed? I mean, if you like, we can talk about the climate action in terms of mitigation adaptation. Well, we talked before about how the importance of the means being consistent with the end. So it's all very well having an ethical end or goal in mind. But the means to achieving it have to be consistent with that ethical end.

They have to be ethical too. So this is where the climate, this is where the earth charter comes in. Because in taking climate action, we have to be we have to be sure that that climate action is ethical. And what does that mean in the context of a charter? It means it's just. It means it's equitable. It means it's it's it protects and doesn't undermine ecological integrity. It means that the climate action we take respects and cares with the community in life. It means that the climate action we take promotes and does not undermine social and economic justice.

And it means that the climate action we take to achieve our mitigation and adapt and adapt, you know, promotes democracy non-violent. It doesn't undermine violence and peace. It doesn't undermine democracy. It doesn't promote violence. So the earth charter principles are really important to climate change in terms of making sure that the actions we take to make sure that climate, our climate actions are ethical. And in solving the climate change problem, we don't make other problems worse and create new problems.

That's good. So that's how you think the earth charter can be helpful in addressing the challenges of climate change itself to look at the path to get there. That's right. And to make sure that's an ethical path that that.

You know, that promotes the strength and does it undermine ecological integrity that promotes does not undermine social and economic justice. You know, we can mitigate greenhouse gases in a way which is really inequitable, which is makes it harder for poor people, for example. We can, we can all the actions, all the climate actions we take, we need, we need to be thinking about how that affects ecological integrity and how that, what that means for social and economic justice. And to make sure that the instruments and means we employed to achieve those climate actions are democratically based and and and not and helping to promote a culture of democracy, non violence and peace.

As distinct from taking a, you know, authoritarian approach and and one that ends up destroying further destroying our ecosystems and bias.

Okay, so in the year 2015, the United Nations launched the sustainable development goals as the G's. And so I'm very impressed with the communication campaign that went around the SDG's and comparison to many other instruments the UN generated. Because I think UN really made a special effort around the SDG's to make non state actors embrace it and feel part of the whole process and therefore private sector in Jules universities, people everywhere have really taken seriously the SDG's and really don't see it only as as an agenda that belongs to the UN, which is quite good.

I would like to ask you if you could share with us some thoughts on on on the SDG's and and how do you think of or see the relationship between the SDG's and their shutter at the complimentary in which way or or the SDG's has anything that is not fitting to their shutter or vice versa. Would you share some of your thoughts on that SDG's and their shutter.

Yeah, I'll, you know, I agree with you the sustainable development goals has, you know, it's a wonderful initiative. And I also agree that it's been a really, really good, you know, I would call it engagement campaign on their part and and and their communication and outreach, you know, really has been exceptionally effective in in helping people in helping

people understand what the sustainable development goals are trying to achieve and in showing how they're relevant to people's lives. And of course they've also done a good job in trying to unpack each goal in terms of targets and indicators that can be measured and reported on to track progress towards achieving those goals.

And it's also very useful to have a framework which is which is which can be applied to all countries, whatever their economic status. And every country, you know, has agreed to and and and provides regular assessments reports provides a nice consistent framework for seeing how sustainable development is progressing and all these different dimensions. So yeah, it's much better than having a single index like GDP or some simple accounting term and and to unpack it in ways that is directly relevant to people's lives.

So there's a lot there's a lot that's good about the sustainable development goals themselves, the process through which they'll negotiate and and the how they've been how they've been used. And and of course, I guess many people would argue that the sustainable development goals themselves are ethical goals. The goals that the ethical I mean ethics in a general sense is about the right or wrong in terms of how we're treating others and and the impacts and consequences of what we do or don't do at others.

And generally it's about promoting the good life for people and and and each of those goals each of those 17 goals is an articulation of what we believe constitutes good life. Having said that, they again they and they can't do this and they don't profess to this. So so what what do the sustainable development goals not do? Well, they don't you know, they don't identify the pathways by which the goals will be achieved. The means to achieve them. They provide goals targets that are milestones along the journey to those goals indicators that can be measured that you can report on progress to those milestones.

But you know they don't they don't provide guidance on on what you do or how you implement what you do what the transition is what are the actions you take to do. And again, I think that's where the climate where the earth charter principles come in and the earth charter principles again can be thought of as a even even in a very simple sense as a checklist of things you need to be thinking about when taking actions to make progress towards achieving those goals. The so that's the first point. A second point is all those goals are actually like they're presented as a list, mainly for simplicity state but they're deeply interconnected.

Because you can do one thing.

You know, for example, you can provide clean sanitation and water, which is goal six in ways that undermine ecological integrity of life on land.

So, I'll give you an example of that you could provide a sanitation system for a for a local village on a Pacific Island, which contaminates the groundwater and produces pollution, which destroys the fringe and coral reef. So when thinking about goal six, how you achieve goal six for a local community, you also need to be thinking about the impact of that on the ecological integrity, which affects goal five. So I think the earth charter can do two things. It can it can help guide. How we the actions we take to achieve each goal, make sure they're ethical, and also they can provide, you know, a framework for thinking about

how the actions we take on one goal will impact the better or worse on the actions we take on another.

So it provides a framework to help us think about how to achieve the goals. And the interactions between the goals.

Because we don't want to because the goals are interdependent.

So are there's charter principles. They're both interdependence. So do you think they can be used together or they are complementary? Well, I see them as being. They are. Yes, they're definitely complimentary. They're not. They're not. They are different instruments, different mechanisms. One is setting these ethical goals. Yes, the geo ethical goals and in and targets and indicators for tracking progress towards them. The earth charter is talking about how we achieve those goals.

It's talking about the ethics of the actions we take to achieve those goals.

As I said before, the means and the ends have to be consistent. SDG are ethical goals, but they need to be achieved by ethical ends. And we need to be very, you know, we need to pay attention to the interactions between these goals. You know, in eliminating poverty and achieving zero hunger, we want to do that in ways which are ethical and which according to the earth charter, right? You know, means thinking about issues of social economic justice, social economic justice, social economic justice, social economic justice, social economic justice, social economic justice, social economic justice.

It means thinking about issues of so called social economic justice, democracy, non violence and peace, ecological integrity and respect to keep the community alive. And to think about how what we do to achieve one goal is impacting upon all the other SDG goals. It's wonderful. Brendan, we are coming to an end of our conversation today. Would you share with us any example of how have you used the earth charter in your work or in your life over these past years?

Well, yes, I can give you a very concrete example. We have a note, you know, I work at a university in South East Queensland called Griffith University. And we've just initiated a new program at the university that I'm director of called the Climate Action Beacon. And it has three key themes. One is understanding what motivates people to take climate action. The second is how we can make these transitions in different sectors to a net zero emission and climate resilient future. And the third theme is called climate justice.

Now, I think if I had not encountered the earth charter, you know, as a scientist, I would have established a climate action beacon at a university that was very much focused on the physical side of things, the technical side of things. On the ecology, on urban planning, on infrastructure planning. You know, I would have focused on climate change aspects that were more of a kind of technical or conventional ecological and even economic kind of aspect. But through, you know, working with the charter and understanding the earth charter, you know, I've understood the need to address a societal problem like climate change in a very holistic way.

And hence the need to look at this, these relationships to take a relationship perspective between society and the natural environment between people and the greater community of life, between people in wealthy countries like mine and developing countries between current and future generations. So, you know, understanding the earth charter, drawing upon the earth charter, you know, the climate action beacon has a much more holistic framing than what it would have had without it.

Yeah, this is wonderful. Okay. Let me see. Another question here to finish.

What would be, how would you envision the earth charter being spread or used in the coming years, like the future towards the earth charter movement? Well, I think the key is to help people connect the earth charter with and the principles in it to the societal problems that people are facing today. And we've talked about them. We've talked about climate change. We've talked about biodiversity extinction crisis. We've talked about the loss, degradation of planetary boundaries and ecological integrity. We've talked about the rise of authoritarianism and the decline of democratic processes.

I think if we can help show people how these principles can be translated into guiding actions to help bring about a transition to a more just, sustainable, peaceful world, then the earth charter will be seen to be of value and people will, more people, you know, word will spread about it through its use, through its good use. So that to me is the key is making this connection between what is very rich and somewhat argue complex document to these really key societal struggles that people are facing with today as we speak. I think that's the key to the future of the earth charter.

Oh, this is wonderful. Well, Brandon, thank you so much. It has been such a pleasure to talk with you today and we feel honored that you come to our podcast and share with us your knowledge and the experience in this field. Thank you.

It's pleasure to talk.