Integrating Values of Sustainability into Education: the promise of the Earth Charter

The main purpose of the working session “Integrating values of sustainability into education” was to explore the role of values education in ESD efforts and the Earth Charter as an ethical framework and educational tool for the operationalization of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. It also intended to offer a space to exchange views and reflect the values and principles that should be integrated in educational practices.

Some of the questions raised in this working session were:

- How do we integrate values of sustainability into education, and what are these values?
- How can the Earth Charter be used to advance processes of ESD?

Interesting thoughts were generated and inputs to these were received such as: efforts to incorporate values of sustainability into education need to

- be contextualized. Much of it will depend on the cultural context and therefore we need to be sensitive to that.
- avoid indoctrination and use educational settings to generate an ethical reflection so that students will deeper their sense of responsible choice for decisions made
- consider the use of the Earth Charter as an instrument to stimulate such questions and understanding of sustainability concept as well as to stimulate a dialogue about the meaning and interpretation of the principles.

The number of participants that attended the activities of this session varied from 15 to 20 people, coming from universities, government departments, research institutes and a variety of non governmental organizations, representing 10 countries.

Activities on Saturday 24th November

The working session started on Saturday November 24th, with two presentations that reflected on the theoretical aspects and challenges of incorporating and making more explicit the values for sustainability in education systems.

The first speaker for this session was Edgar Gonzalez, Researcher at the Autonomous University of Monterrey, who is a key leader on the environmental education movement in Latin America and is part of UNESCO reference group for the DESD. The main message of his speech entitled “Education in values and Environmental Education” was to reflect on the inherent relation of values and education as part of human development projects. Incorporating values in educational processes is not about information transmission, Mr. Gonzales said, but on the reflection and formation of an ethical life, that would inform individuals about how to make proper, informed and responsible choices. In this sense, the Earth Charter is an important tool to invite people to reflect on people’s ethical decisions towards sustainability and move them to action towards change, as has the Inconvenient Truth film has done to make
people aware to make changes in their lifestyles. Edgar mentioned that in all occasions values are embedded in education explicitly or in a subtle way.

The second speaker was **Abelardo Brenes, Advisor to the Ministry of Education of Costa Rica and of the Earth Charter International** and former Professor at the University for Peace. His presentation started by proposing that this working session could suggest guidelines for the Decade. Mr. Abelardo mentioned that the Earth Charter is bringing forth two important ethical dimensions: Universal and Differentiated Responsibility, which are key for education for sustainability processes. The pedagogical principle for cultivating these principles can be found in Earth Charter principle 2, which promotes an ethic of care. He also mentioned the importance to cultivate virtues and altruistic motivations as part of the pedagogy of care.

As far as the role of the Earth Charter, **Mr. Brenes proposed that the Earth Charter can be used as the architecture to create a mega portal for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, taking as an example what [www.wiserearth.org](http://www.wiserearth.org) is doing.** He finished his presentation posing the question: what could be and should be our contribution to this major effort?

**Educational experiences using the Earth Charter**

After the first panel, three experiences of education for sustainability processes were presented, they exemplified how it is possible to incorporate and put into practice the Earth Charter principles.

The first experience, presented by **Usha Srinivasan**, was the experience of CLEAN India, an NGO based in New Delhi. CLEAN India has developed materials for teacher training programs, based on the Earth Charter. The program focuses on involving school children in activities such as developing green spaces, waste management and raising awareness about the environment management. Currently, they are working on teacher training programmes with 1700 schools in Delhi, in collaboration with Delhi Government. Usha shared with participants a teacher manual-guidebook that they have developed with the help of students.

Participants were impressed by all the activities that CLEAN India is developing, and suggested to expand beyond schools settings.

The second case was presented by **Shafia Sucar**, she is a professor of University of Guanajuato, and coordinator of Complexus (a network of Universities in her country) Mexico. She shared the experience developed by students and professors of this university in creating a network of Earth Charter promoters. These promoters use the Earth Charter as pedagogical tool to discuss and raise awareness on global and local issues in different workshops across Guanajuato and other Mexican States. Their intention was to first engage the students, so they could develop a workshop “for students, by students”. These workshops are fully run by a group of students in the - University of Guanajuato to the student community of their university and other universities in the country. Given the successful experience they have established a network of youth groups in Mexico that are using the Earth Charter as a vision for a sustainable world.
Peter Blaze Corcoran, Professor at the Florida Gulf Coast University briefly mentioned the activities that his university is undertaking to put the Earth Charter principles into action at different levels of the university life. In addition, he expressed to the participants his reflections about the urgent need to foster universities sense of responsibility towards society to bring the needed solutions that will enable societies to achieve sustainability. Universities have important resources and a privileged position in society, and therefore, they can take a lead role. Mr. Corcoran mentioned that “culture is the only foundation upon which one can build any development model sustainably”, in this sense, it is important to bring cultural changes, especially in the university system, to reward those who do applied research to bring the needed solutions to sustainability.

The discussion on this presentation revolved around how to make possible these changes. Mr. Corcoran mentioned that students can foster these cultural changes, demanding a more active role of the university in addressing local and global issues.

He specifically shared a couple of whys in which they are using the Earth Charter as a framework to stimulate dialogue and understanding about sustainability issues. First they have a course on environment literacy that used the Earth Charter as the basis and second they have developed a project to stimulate sustainable and humane patterns of production and consumption through the choices we make regarding the food we eat.

The last activity of the day was an interactive activity. Participants played a game called ‘Earth Charter Workmat’. This game helped participants to get a more in depth understanding about the Earth Charter principles, talk about their different perception about these and related to something that is happening in reality that are implementing each of these principles.

The main recommendation that came up from this day was: We should use the Earth Charter as framework for monitoring and evaluating DESD

Activities on Sunday 25th November

The day started with the presentation of the EC Assess Tool. This tool is comprised by a set of qualitative indicators, based on the Earth Charter principles, that is useful to assess the level of interest and actions of individuals, organizations or initiatives regarding the principles of sustainability contained in the Earth Charter.

As an exercise, the participants used this tool to assess the DESD. The objective was to make participants acquainted with this tool, experience it and discuss their opinion about its usefulness. The participants found this tool to be very relevant for educational purposes, but they found that it is important to be very clear when defining the subject of assessment. They found that DESD was not a very appropriate subject because it is a broad and multidimensional initiative that can be seen from many perspectives, but above all because all participants had different levels of information regarding what were happening in the DESD. In any case this was an example of how to use this tool that was thought to be useful for instance to be used with students in a classroom to evaluate their class, school or community.

Panel Discussion: Relating the Earth Charter to topical issues and initiatives
The following activity of this day was a panel that presented several papers related to topical issues and initiatives on values and education.

The panel started with a summary of the previous day discussions and presentations, focusing on the role of the Earth Charter as binding framework for change.

The first presentation of this panel was entitled “The Earth Charter and Humane Sustainable Living”, by Rick Clugston, Vice President of Humane Society of United States and Peter Blaze Corcoran.

Mr. Clugston discussed about how agribusiness is operating in the US, and around the world, and the challenges these are posing for the sustainability model. He presented some basic food consumption and production trends, decreasing nutrient density and food habits, which are affecting people’s health and also deteriorating the environment. In this context, he mentioned that the EC principles 2 to 4, and principles 12 and 13, can give guidelines to deal with the problems we face with agribusiness and unsustainable lifestyles.

Mr. Corcoran reflected on how the analysis of the challenges posed by food systems can help to promote awareness in education experiences. Reflection on food habits can be very powerful to bring cultural changes in students. He mentioned that in his university, they use food as an entry point to create awareness, and use the Earth Charter as a framework to analyze sustainable lifestyles.

The speakers recommended proposing that this Conference reminds participants to the importance of the Earth Charter as a framework for the Decade. The EC has a broad vision that can well serve educational processes. Reflection about our food system and health could be used as a central entry point for stimulating change and experiencing the relationships of the dimensions of sustainability.

The next presentation addressed the contribution of a faith organization – Bahai Faith, to the evolution of ESD. This paper was presented by Dimity Podger, PhD Candidate of Graduate School of the Environment, at Macquarie University, Sydney Australia.

The main focus of Mrs. Podger research is to look at the interactions of sustainability, education and spirituality. She mentioned that although there are an increasing number of efforts to bring faith organizations to dialogue about what are values for sustainable development, the Earth Charter seems to be one of the few that really engage faith organizations to act in these topics.

Mrs. Podger got involved with the US Bahai organization given their active role in international processes from Rio to Johannesburg Summit, she developed several seminars and collected information about the perspectives of this faith organization on sustainability and how their perspective is helping the education processes they are engaging.

She reaffirmed what Abelardo Brenes said in the previous day that it would be good if the Conference promotes or recommends the need for a pedagogy of care – which would integrate in a more holistic framework for sustainable development and include development of an identity for sustainability using the Earth Charter.
She recommended to integrate spiritual and values education more explicitly into all forms of learning, and actively develop identity and consciousness for sustainability.

Mrs. Gayle Seddon presented the paper “A changing climate calls for a changing consciousness”. She is from Australia and is also part of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University. Her presentation focused on the role of meditation to promote change of consciousness which can enable people to better explore the links of how to get to the root causes of the problems. Think Clean, Think Green is the slogan that Brahma Kumaris use to encourage people to be aware of what they think, and to have positive thinking that will enable the conditions for changing to a peaceful and sustainable world.

The next presentation was entitled Practical Environmental Ethics and ESD. The speaker was David Kronlind Professor of Uppsala University, Department of Curriculum Studies. In their presentation, they raised the concern about the importance to have an ethical framework for the global and local implementation of DESD, because education is not a values-free activity. Values are important for every decision and choice we make, Mr. Kronlind said, therefore is important to question what values should be integrated to education. There are different ethical perspectives with which people frame their actions, the speakers argued that the one that apply to ESD is sustainability ethics. This concept is normatively neutral, meaning that not only humans have intrinsic value.

The speaker also argued that teachers cannot teach the values to students, but teachers have to be confident that students will come up with those values that will lead to sustainability, through practice and ethical reflection. As a final remark, the speaker urged participants to not get trapped into a conceptual discussion about environmental education and ESD, but get more engaged in action – that would lead to the creation of knowledge.

The following speaker was Seung hwan Lee, Assistant Secretary General of UNESCO – Korea. His presentation was entitled “Challenges for ESD – Lessons from EIU (Education in Understanding)”. Mr. Lee gave background information and analysis about EIU initiative, which was in place during the 1960’s. In his opinion, “ESD is a new version of EIU”, therefore, he urged the participants to take into account the implementation of EIU as lessons learned to make the DESD implementation more successful.

The main problem that EIU faced was its politicization during the 1970’s, UK and US withdraw of EIU implementation affected this initiative. Also, Mr. Lee considers having a very broad and unclear identity were other factors that affected this initiative. In this sense, Mr. Lee warned that it is important to be aware of politicization for ESD regarding the clashing of interests of rich and poor groups and nations. Also, to consider the dilemmas about universal values and cultural pluralism regarding unsustainable patterns of production and current life styles. For ESD implementation, he said, it is important to respect others, to cooperate, put theory into practice and take into account that ‘here and now’ is more important than the future.
Some participants reacted to Mr. Lee’s presentation, asking if educational processes and initiatives, such as ESD, are in capacity to bring the desire changes. Mr. Lee mentioned that it is important to consider what the purpose of education is. If the aim is directed to economic gain or competition, we cannot achieve the changes. But if the aim is to understand others, there is a possibility for success.

The last presentation of the day was given by Shreya Jani, she is a young professional that works at the Young Ecologist Initiative in New Delhi. This initiative is part of Navdanya, organization led by the renowned author and activist Vandana Shiva.

Ms. Jani presentation, entitled “Values Education to generate behavioral changes for building an Earth Democracy”, focused on how her initiative and experience of using the Earth Charter and Educating Cities framework to assess the city where they are located, and to sensitize and engage local youth in reorienting their lifestyle as well as to become active change agents. In her perspective, promoting reflection about one’s actions and values is a key aspect to bring together education and sustainability. Regarding the practical work that this initiative is doing, they are trying to promote participation of the youth by empowering them with different tools.

She recommended us to think about the need to cultivate the power of youth to catalyze processes of change.

The experiences shared in this part of the working session testify how useful the Earth Charter has been as a common framework to stimulate diverse processes of ethical inquiry, dialogue and informed action.

Activities on Monday November 26th

For this day, there were two sessions, the first one was the presentation of three papers, the second one was the Earth Charter as a vision for the future workshop.

The first presentation was carried out by professors David Kronlind and Leif Ostman, from Uppsala University, Sweden. This presentation was a follow-up of their previous talk. They presented a model that can be used in classrooms to incorporate values and avoid indoctrination. This model consists in engaging students in an exercise of ethical reflection by encouraging students to analyze their actions, moral reactions (which brings their feelings about certain situations they encounter), and the behavioral norms that exist in their contexts. This would help them consider how to react in a given situation. So the students can identify their values, using reason and feelings.

One participant asked how to identify the fine line that divides indoctrination to sharing values. The presenters mentioned that when people force their values on others, indoctrination happens. But, this can be avoided if there are conditions that enable people to reflect and dialogue about their values and ways to behave.

The second presentation was carried out by one teacher and four students from several schools of Delhi. They shared how they have implemented a policy guideline set by Delhi government to all schools that urged them to become zero-waste schools. They
implemented the green – red and blue system. Using containers of these colors, they are separating biodegradable, paper and non-biodegradable waste. They used the Earth Charter as an ethical framework to create awareness in the students about the importance of promoting waste management. They faced one problem, what to do with the non-biodegradable waste? They decided that they also wanted to contribute not only to a cleaner environment but, as Earth Charter principles urge, also to promote social and economic justice. So, they found a street kid – Abdul - that used to collect trash from the streets to sell without the possibility to attend school. The school got organized to collect school trash and give Abdul and his family the non-biodegradable waste. This enabled him to attend school and gave his family a source of income. For this school, the most important lesson of this experience is to be always open to find creative ways to put the principles of sustainability into practice.

The teacher closed her presentation with a call for all organizations to adopt an underprivileged family to ensure that the kids would go to school rather than be trash collectors on streets.

The last paper presentation was carried out by Jayantee Naugah, Senior Advisor Ministry of Environment on Education Matters of Mauritius. She shared the environmental and social problems that are facing especially with the challenges that climate change is posing to Pacific Island States such as Mauritius. The speaker shared about the experience that the Ministry is doing to introduce environmental education in the school curricula. She shared several tools they are using to sensitize students to be aware about how to adapt to climate change.

The last activity of this Working Session was a workshop – Earth Charter as a vision for the future. This workshop was conducted by Oscar Motomura, CEO of Amana-Key (Brazil) and Mirian Vilela, Director of Earth Charter Center of Education for Sustainable Development.

This activity offered a space for the participants to get a more in-depth understanding about the spirit of the Earth Charter values, the need to be sensitive to different contexts when sharing the Earth Charter vision, and how to approach questions about the validity of universal or shared values versus the need to respect cultural diversity.

This workshop ended at 7pm on Monday.

**Tuesday, 27 November**

A small group of participants that were engaged in this working session from the beginning met the whole of the afternoon to talk about the outcomes of this working session and the draft the recommendations. This dialogue went from 2:30 till 6:30 pm.