



PATHWAYS TO A FUTURE THAT IS MORE SUSTAINABLE 2024: **Exploring the Value of The Earth Charter in Everyday Living**

Inquiry concept

The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental ethical principles and values for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century. However, some of its content is targeted at governments and it is not easy to see the relevance to the lives of ordinary people. It is our belief that most of the principles underlying the charter can be applied in the everyday lives of individuals and we are setting out to explore this proposition.

In a two step process, participants in the inquiry will consider the Earth Charter and use it as a reference to develop their own, personal statement of beliefs and values to underpin their own pathways to a future that is more sustainable than the one we are currently co-creating. We believe that a statement that is personal is more likely to be assimilated into everyday life than a high level charter. With reference to any aspect of their personal statement, participants will illustrate the application of their own beliefs and values as they journey along their chosen pathway to a more sustainable future.

Introduction

Lifelong learning is the integration of living and learning¹. For example, a person who is 50 year old has experienced over 18,000 days of learning in many different contexts and situations in their life. Seeing lifelong learning as the integration of learning from a multitude of daily experiences across and throughout a life, draws attention to the lifewide nature of living and learning which is the focus for our educational and self-educational work. It is in our day to day living that we can make a difference to the world of which we are a part and bring about transformations in ourself. In our day to day living most of our energy, effort and creativity are directed to fulfilling immediate goals and trying to live a good life but we have reached an important point in human history where we need also to think about and act for a more distant future. Science tells us that our resource intensive consumptive and wasteful habits and continuous economic growth, are causing us to exceed key planetary boundaries². Economic/ technological prosperity for some parts of the globe, has been achieved at the cost of destabilising climatic and ecological systems that enable all forms of life to flourish. As if this is not enough we have poverty, inequality and injustice, war and destruction in many parts of the world. Clearly, we need to change the way we live if we are to have a future and that involves changing the way we think about ourselves in relation to everything else including the future we will never experience ourselves. Our present is the future's past and by acting now we can help shape that future.

In 2021, Lifewide Education published a White Paper³ exploring the ways in which individuals' lifelong-lifewide learning might be connected to living for a more sustainable future. The ideas in this paper provided the basis for a contribution to the Handbook for Lifelong Learning⁴. Lifewide Education has given substance to this strategy by providing opportunities for open, collaborative inquiries to enable participants to explore how they might live and learn for a more sustainable future. The core idea is that each participant creates their own pathway, according to their interests, beliefs and circumstances, and then shares the results of their experiences as they try to implement their plan. In this way participants affirm, appreciate and inspire each other and learning as a collective is more than the sum of the individual parts.

Image credit

<https://sdgs.un.org/gsdrgsdrg2023>

In our first three collaborative inquiries we used the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁵ as the reference for creating our own pathways to a more sustainable future. The outcomes of these inquiries are curated in Lifewide Magazine.⁶⁻⁸ In our 2024 collaborative inquiry into living and learning for a sustainable future we will explore how The Earth Charter⁹



(reproduced in appendix 1), might be used to aid reflection and help participants create their own manifesto inspired by the principles and values contained in the Charter.

The Earth Charter

The Earth Charter is a *global initiative for sustainability*, promoting values like respect for nature, social and economic justice, ecological integrity and peace. It emphasises the interconnectedness of all life and encourages a sense of shared responsibility for the wellbeing of the planet¹⁰ It's a *declaration of fundamental ethical principles and values* for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century. It seeks to inspire in all people a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the

well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The Charter consists of sixteen principles that aim to guide individuals and organizations toward a sustainable and peaceful future. It addresses social, economic, and environmental issues and promotes a vision of a sustainable way of life.¹¹ Most recently the Charter is being envisaged as a blueprint for an ecological civilisation^{12,13} founded on the life-affirming principles that all life depends upon. The organisation that promotes the EC¹⁴ is organising a conference in April 2024 on the theme of *Reimagining Education for Ecological Civilisations*¹⁵ in which the EC will feature prominently. This timing means that it is an opportune moment for Lifewide Education to explore the potential of the Charter for supporting adult lifewide learning aimed at living for a more sustainable future.

Like the SDGs, the EC is targeted at self-governing communities, institutions and other organisations, states and international bodies. This makes it difficult for ordinary people to relate to at least some of the principles. Our collaborative inquiry involving people who are engaging with the challenge of living for a more sustainable future, will use the EC to inspire the production of personal 'Statements of Beliefs and Values' that could underpin an individual's journey towards a more sustainable future. Such a person-centred approach to might also reveal principles and values that have been omitted or marginalised in the Charter.

Creating a Personal Statement of Beliefs & Values

Our 2024 collaborative inquiry takes as its starting point, the idea that the EC provides a valuable aid to self-reflection and self-education for anyone who is interested in living for a more sustainable future. It encourages individuals to consider their own beliefs and values, their responsibilities and duties as a human being, and some of the things they do or have done (past and present) that are consistent or perhaps inconsistent with the Charter. In doing so, an individual could create their own version of the charter in the form of a *personal statement of beliefs and values* that engages with those aspects of the EC that have meaning and relevance to them in their own contexts and circumstances. It may also include things that are not included in the Charter but which are important to the individual.

We believe that the process of creating a Statement of Beliefs and Values (SBV) provides an opportunity for continuing self-education. Creating a personal statement draws attention to aspects of the charter that an individual can act upon, and are probably already acting upon. It raises awareness of other things they might do to contribute to a more just, sustainable and peaceful society. In this way it becomes their personal call to action in small and more significant ways.

Lifewide Collaborative Inquiry May 2024 to October 2024

We are proposing a process lasting 6 months. During the inquiry participants will:

- 1) Consider The Earth Charter as an ethical framework for our own lives and living for a sustainable future in which all life can flourish.
- 2) Begin the process of creating a Personal Statement of Beliefs and Values that underpin an individual's commitment to living for a more sustainable future and more just and peaceful society in which all life can flourish.
- 3) Use their evolving statement to inspire action and design a pathway to a more just, sustainable, and peaceful society (including family, community, organisation or beyond). Pathways might build on an existing pathway or initiate a new pathway. They might be focused on a single aspect of the personal statement or contain a range of diverse actions that connect to different aspects of the statement. The intention is to encourage imaginative and creative use.
- 4) Towards the end of our inquiry we will reflect on and evaluate the effects of our actions on the world, other people and ourselves. We will have new understanding about The Earth Charter and those aspects of it that have greater or lesser relevance to the participants involved in the inquiry. We will have new understanding of the different ways in which the EC might be interpreted at the level of an individual's life and we will have new understanding of ourselves and the value to us of creating and working with a personal statement of beliefs and values..

An outline of the process of collaborative inquiry is shown below

Launch Zoom Meeting 1 Late April – Introduction to the Earth Charter (appendix 1) and the action-learning process.

STAGE 1 (first month)

Participants consider the Earth Charter as an ethical framework for building a more sustainable future and just and peaceful civilisation and using those principles and values that are relevant to them and their lives, they create their own *statement of beliefs and values (SBV)*. The outcome of this process will be a range of perspectives on the value of the Earth Charter as a guide to living a life for a more sustainable future, and a collection of personal statements derived from the Charter. These are living documents that will be revised in the light of experience as the inquiry progresses.

STAGE 2 (months 2-6)

Using their SBV as a prompt, participants choose and design their own pathway to a more sustainable future which could build on an existing pathway or begin an entirely new pathway.

There will be a Zoom *get together* at the end of each month (June – October) to share perspectives, experiences, progress, setbacks and unanticipated events. The facilitators will record the meetings and curate learning that emerges.

STAGE 3

At the end of the process participants will have the opportunity to record and share their overall experience in a format yet to be decided, it could take the form of a digital story, an article for Lifewide Magazine or perhaps a chapter for an e-book. Through our collective efforts, we aim to develop a better understanding of how the Earth Charter can be used by ordinary people to contribute to the goal of building a more just, sustainable and peaceful society, as a stepping stone to a more sustainable future. The process will also enable us to gain insights on the value of creating a personal statement of beliefs and values to help us demonstrate our commitment to contributing to a flourishing future.

References

- 1 Carlsen, A. (2014) Lifelong Learning UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning Technical Note. Available at:
<https://uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/keydocuments/LifelongLearning/en/UNESCOTechNotesLLL.pdf>
- 2 Rockström, J. & Gaffney, O (2021) Breaking Boundaries: The Science of Our Planet. DK
- 3 Jackson, N. J. (2021) Enriching and Vivifying the Concept of Lifelong Learning through Lifewide Learning and Ecologies for Learning & Practice Lifewide Education White Paper Available at:
<https://www.lifewideeducation.uk/white-paper.html>
- 4 Jackson, N.J. (2022) Steps To An Ecology of Lifelong-Lifewide Learning for Sustainable, Regenerative Futures In K. Evans, Lee, W.O. Markowitsch, J. & Zukas M. (Eds) Third International Handbook of Lifelong Learning Springer Available at
https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-030-67930-9_15-1
- 5 UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1. (2015) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Available at:
https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf
- 6 Lifewide Learning for Sustainable Regenerative Futures Lifewide Magazine #25 (January 2022)) Available at: <https://www.lifewideeducation.uk/magazine.html>

- 7 Action, Learning and Creativity for Healthy, Sustainable, Regenerative Futures and Wellbeing
Lifewide Magazine #26 (September 2022) Available at:
<https://www.lifewideeducation.uk/magazine.html>
- 8 Helping Nature, Environment and Sustainability through Lifewide Action and Learning. Lifewide
Magazine #27(October 2023) Available at:<https://www.lifewideeducation.uk/magazine.html>
- 9 The Earth Charter <https://earthcharter.org/read-the-earth-charter/>
- 10 CHATgpt 3.5 14/02/24
- 11 CHATgpt 4.0 14/02/24
- 12 Lent, J. (2021). What Does An Ecological Civilization Look Like? YES Magazine Spring 2021
Available at: <https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/ecological-civilization/2021/02/16/what-does-ecological-civilization-look-like>
- 13 Lent, J. (2024) The Eco-Civilization Framework <https://www.greattransition.org/gti-forum/global-movement-whats-next-lent>
- 14 The Earth Charter organisation <https://earthcharter.org/events/eci-conference-2024/>
- 15 Earth Charter Conference Reimagining Education for Ecological Civilisations
<https://earthcharter.org/events/eci-conference-2024/>

APPENDIX 1 EARTH CHARTER

PREAMBLE

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

Earth, Our Home

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

The Global Situation

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The

foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous—but not inevitable.

The Challenges Ahead

The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.

Universal Responsibility

To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. 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.

We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed.

THE EARTH CHARTER PRINCIPLES

I. RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LIFE

1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.

a. Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.

b. Affirm faith in the inherent dignity of all human beings and in the intellectual, artistic, ethical, and spiritual potential of humanity.

2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.

a. Accept that with the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of people.

b. Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.

3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.

a. Ensure that communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide everyone an opportunity to realize his or her full potential.

b. Promote social and economic justice, enabling all to achieve a secure and meaningful livelihood that is ecologically responsible.

4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

a. Recognize that the freedom of action of each generation is qualified by the needs of future generations.

b. Transmit to future generations values, traditions, and institutions that support the long-term flourishing of Earth's human and ecological communities. In order to fulfill these four broad commitments, it is necessary to:

II . ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.

a. Adopt at all levels sustainable development plans and regulations that make environmental conservation and rehabilitation integral to all development initiatives.

b. Establish and safeguard viable nature and biosphere reserves, including wild lands and marine areas, to protect Earth's life support systems, maintain biodiversity, and preserve our natural heritage.

c. Promote the recovery of endangered species and ecosystems.

d. Control and eradicate non-native or genetically modified organisms harmful to native species and the environment, and prevent introduction of such harmful organisms.

e. Manage the use of renewable resources such as water, soil, forest products, and marine life in ways that do not exceed rates of regeneration and that protect the health of ecosystems.

f. Manage the extraction and use of non-renewable resources such as minerals and fossil fuels in ways that minimize depletion and cause no serious environmental damage.

6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.

a. Take action to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or inconclusive.

b. 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.

c. Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.

d. Prevent pollution of any part of the environment and allow no build-up of radioactive, toxic, or other hazardous substances.

e. Avoid military activities damaging to the environment.

7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.

a. Reduce, reuse, and recycle the materials used in production and consumption systems, and ensure that residual waste can be assimilated by ecological systems.

b. Act with restraint and efficiency when using energy, and rely increasingly on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.

c. Promote the development, adoption, and equitable transfer of environmentally sound technologies.

d. Internalize the full environmental and social costs of goods and services in the selling price, and enable consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards.

e. Ensure universal access to health care that fosters reproductive health and responsible reproduction.

f. Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.

8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.

a. Support international scientific and technical cooperation on sustainability, with special attention to the needs of developing nations.

b. Recognize and preserve the traditional knowledge and spiritual wisdom in all cultures that contribute to environmental protection and human well-being.

c. Ensure that information of vital importance to human health and environmental protection, including genetic information, remains available in the public domain.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.

a. Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.

b. Empower every human being with the education and resources to secure a sustainable livelihood, and provide social security and safety nets for those who are unable to support themselves.

c. Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and enable them to develop their capacities and to pursue their aspirations.

10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.

a. Promote the equitable distribution of wealth within nations and among nations.

b. Enhance the intellectual, financial, technical, and social resources of developing nations, and relieve them of onerous international debt.

c. Ensure that all trade supports sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and progressive labor standards. d. Require multinational corporations and international financial organizations to act transparently in the public good, and hold them accountable for the consequences of their activities.

11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.

a. Secure the human rights of women and girls and end all violence against them.

- b. Promote the active participation of women in all aspects of economic, political, civil, social, and cultural life as full and equal partners, decision makers, leaders, and beneficiaries.
- c. Strengthen families and ensure the safety and loving nurture of all family members.

12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.

- a. Eliminate discrimination in all its forms, such as that based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, language, and national, ethnic or social origin.
- b. Affirm the right of indigenous peoples to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and to their related practice of sustainable livelihoods.
- c. Honor and support the young people of our communities, enabling them to fulfill their essential role in creating sustainable societies.
- d. Protect and restore outstanding places of cultural and spiritual significance.

IV. DEMOCRACY, NONVIOLENCE AND PEACE

13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.

- a. Uphold the right of everyone to receive clear and timely information on environmental matters and all development plans and activities which are likely to affect them or in which they have an interest.
- b. Support local, regional and global civil society, and promote the meaningful participation of all interested individuals and organizations in decision making.
- c. Protect the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly, association, and dissent.
- d. Institute effective and efficient access to administrative and independent judicial procedures, including remedies and redress for environmental harm and the threat of such harm.
- e. Eliminate corruption in all public and private institutions.
- f. Strengthen local communities, enabling them to care for their environments, and assign environmental responsibilities to the levels of government where they can be carried out most effectively.

14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.

- a. Provide all, especially children and youth, with educational opportunities that empower them to contribute actively to sustainable development.
- b. Promote the contribution of the arts and humanities as well as the sciences in sustainability education.
- c. Enhance the role of the mass media in raising awareness of ecological and social challenges.
- d. Recognize the importance of moral and spiritual education for sustainable living.

15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.

- a. Prevent cruelty to animals kept in human societies and protect them from suffering.
- b. Protect wild animals from methods of hunting, trapping, and fishing that cause extreme, prolonged, or avoidable suffering.
- c. Avoid or eliminate to the full extent possible the taking or destruction of non-targeted species.

16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace

- a. Encourage and support mutual understanding, solidarity, and cooperation among all peoples and within and among nations.
- b. Implement comprehensive strategies to prevent violent conflict and use collaborative problem solving to manage and resolve environmental conflicts and other disputes.
- c. Demilitarize national security systems to the level of a non-provocative defense posture, and convert military resources to peaceful purposes, including ecological restoration.
- d. Eliminate nuclear, biological, and toxic weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.
- e. Ensure that the use of orbital and outer space supports environmental protection and peace.
- f. 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 all are a part.

THE WAY FORWARD

As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. Such renewal is the promise of these Earth Charter principles. To fulfill this promise, we must commit ourselves to adopt and promote the values and objectives of the Charter. This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. We must imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally. Our cultural diversity is a precious heritage and different cultures will find their own distinctive ways to realize the vision. We must deepen and expand the global dialogue that generated the Earth Charter, for we have much to learn from the ongoing collaborative search for truth and wisdom. Life often involves tensions between important values. This can mean difficult choices. However, we must find ways to harmonize diversity with unity, the exercise of freedom with the common good, short-term objectives with long-term goals. Every individual, family, organization, and community has a vital role to play. The arts, sciences, religions, educational institutions, media, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and governments are all called to offer creative leadership. The partnership of government, civil society, and business is essential for effective governance. In order to build a sustainable global community, the nations of the world must renew their commitment to the United Nations, fulfill their obligations under existing international agreements, and support the implementation of Earth Charter principles with an international legally binding instrument on environment and development. Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.