

EARTH CHARTER EQUALS HAPPINESS IN YOUR TOWN

What is the Earth Charter

The Earth Charter (EC), an international people's Declaration of Interdependence, is an expression of hope and a call to form a global partnership at a critical juncture in our planet's history. It is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st century. The EC was first attempted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 but when nation states signed a "declaration of Rio", non-governmental representatives wrote the EC. The EC languished until 1994 when Maurice Strong, the former secretary general of the Earth Summit and chairman of the Earth Council, and Mikhail Gorbachev, president of Green Cross International, launched a grassroots drafting process of the Charter with financial support from the Dutch government. Steven Rockefeller chaired of the International Drafting Committee. The EC builds on 50 United Nations declarations including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights plus over 200 NGO agreements, perspectives from contemporary science, theology, cosmology and 50 years of environmental ethics, An Earth Charter Commission was formed in 1997 to oversee the project, and an Earth Charter Secretariat was established at the Earth Council in Costa Rica. After a worldwide grassroots drafting process the Earth Charter was launched at the Hague Peace Palace in The Netherlands in June 2000. The Earth Charter has been endorsed by over 2600 organizations representing 8 million people.¹

Uniqueness of the Earth Charter

The Earth Charter is unique for two reasons.

Reason #1: The Earth Charter came out of an unprecedented, open, grassroots drafting process that eventually involved thousands of people in 77 countries over the course of ten years. People from all regions, cultures and sectors of society participated. They met in village squares, open fields and meeting spaces to weave their dreams for a more just, sustainable and peaceful world into the Earth Charter. People listened deeply with their hearts open to reach agreement while not contaminating the beautiful vision of the Earth Charter. In South Africa, Black men and women found agreement on gender equality and access; the Arctic hunting cultures had their beliefs and concerns heard about their relationship to the animals; and villagers leading bleak lives in the Ukraine found hope in the fact that people around the globe wanted the same world they did.

Reason #2: In addition to the unprecedented grassroots drafting process, it is the Earth Charter's core value of the interdependence of all life that makes it so unique. It is the first international document that recognizes that human beings are an integral part of the web of life--not dominant over it. The worldview of individualism that exists primarily in Western cultures and has been the foundation for the development of the United States is a mixed blessing. It may produce stunning entrepreneurship and accomplishments, but it has led to a prevailing culture of self-interest and disconnection that leaves people yearning for a meaningful connection to others and to a higher purpose. The Earth Charter fulfills this yearning with a call to make respecting and nourishing the connectedness of all people and all life on this planet a top priority in policies and practices in all aspects of community.

¹ They include US Conference of Mayors, International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, International Baccalaureate Organization, International Council for Science, World Federation of Engineering Organizations, Sierra Club International, and Parliament of World Religions.

www.earthcharter.org

Earth Charter Equals Happiness

Science is discovering that happiness is linked to the two values that are fundamental to the Earth Charter—connectedness and community. Alan N. Schore of the University of City of Los Angeles School of Medicine presents a large body of interdisciplinary data underscoring infant attachment and says: “The idea is that we are born to form attachments, that our brains are physically wired to develop in tandem with another’s, through emotional communication beginning before words are spoken.” Hungarian-born psychologist Mihaly Csikszentimihaly observes that: “The most fundamental finding from the science of happiness is that almost every person feels happier when they’re with other people”. Happiness as well as productivity at work is even dependent on relationships. The Gallup Organization has surveyed 5.4 million employees in 474 organizations in different countries. Gallup researcher Donald Clifton points out “a strong positive response to the statement, “I have a best friend at work, indicates a high level of belonging and is correlated with profitability and connection with customers.” The importance of relationships and a sense of belonging are also borne out in the World Values Surveys on 45 societies done in the 1980’s and again in the 1990’s that found there is a values shift taking place away from “reindustrialization and rearmament to a *sense of belonging*, quality of life and freedom of expression.”²

The evidence that relationship, connectedness and community are key to happiness is known from personal experience as well as scientific studies and worldwide surveys. The Earth Charter gives us a way to apply this data to increase the happiness and wellbeing of people and communities.

Earth Charter Community Indicators Project (ECCIP)

The Office for Earth Charter USA Communities Initiatives is using the Earth Charter as a framework to develop a template for Earth Charter Community Indicators that is unique in its emphasis on connectedness and community. There are many remarkable and comprehensive community indicator projects around the world and the work of these cities will inform the Earth Charter Community Indicator project in areas like ecological integrity, human rights, participatory democracy, safety and security.

What makes ECCIP unique is that it will also develop measures guided by the Earth Charter’s emphasis on community and connectedness.. Other indicator programs do not generally measure these critical qualities based on the *personal experiences of people living in neighborhoods* (people-centered measures). Instead, they use markers like membership in neighborhood associations.

The ECCIP will use the results of a landmark study on 343 neighborhoods³ done by Harvard School of Public Health over a ten-year period, which quantified “a sense of community” and demonstrated its powerful effect on the development of children and youth. The study’s surprising results showed that regardless of poverty level or ethnic make-up, children and adolescents living in neighborhoods higher in collective efficacy were less involved in crime, performed better in school and had less obesity and asthma. Collective efficacy is different from the traditional concepts of social capital, social ties or networks. Collective efficacy is a measure of social connectedness, social trust, shared norms and reciprocity. In neighborhoods where collective efficacy was higher, neighbors were willing to intervene on behalf of the common good. For instance, if a child was found out of school drawing graffiti, a neighbor would intervene and ask, “Why aren’t you in school today?” and take action to make that happen.

² Inglehart, R. *Culture Shift: In Advanced Industrial Society*; 1990; *The New Political Culture* 1998 edited by Clark, T.N. & Martinot V.H.; .

³ *Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods*; Harvard School of Public Health; PI Elton Earls, M.D., 2000

As a result children and adolescents benefited from the connectedness of the neighborhood, and giving them a sense of being important, nurtured and responsible for their actions. These are key ingredients in producing happy, healthy children as reported by the Commission on Children At Risk, written by 33 children's doctors, research scientists and mental health professionals and sponsored by Dartmouth Medical School, YMCA of USA and Institute for American Values in New York. Their report, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities* recommends building communities that are based on policies that flow out of the Earth Charter's principles and values. They recommend building communities that are "philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all persons and to the principle of love of neighbor", "reflect and transmit a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person" treat children as ends in themselves" and are "warm and nurturing". Kathy Kline, M.D., Principal Investigator for the Commission is collaborating with ECCIP and is leading the effort to develop child-centered indicators.

ECCIP will engage over 20,000 citizens in Tampa, Florida in the first phase of the project establishing a broad set of quality of life and sustainability themes for the indicators. In-depth community forums and focus groups will narrow the themes down to detailed descriptions that will be incorporated into the final survey items. Holton and Kline will integrate their work on connectedness to develop person and child-centered survey items for the scientific random sampling of the community, which is the final development stage of the indicators. Their involvement and expertise assures that connectedness will emerge as a critical indicator to be measured and monitored.

The Harvard study and the report from the Commission on Children at Risk ground the Earth Charter Community Indicators Project in measuring relationships among adults, children and youth, which are fundamental to happiness and wellbeing. Behavioral scientists know that what you measure is what changes over time because that is where attention is focused. It makes sense then to measure that which is desired in a community. The Earth Charter as the vision and ethical framework for the development of community indicators assures that connectedness—the bottom line for happiness—will be measured and then grown in a community.