The Earth Charter for Sustainable Community
Development from a Buddhist Virtues’ Perspective

Environmental Preservation and Restoration

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8th United Nations Days of Vesak Celebrations
“Buddhist Virtues in Socio-Economic Development”
Bangkok, Thailand
May 11-15, 2011
Acknowledgements

For providing materials and information

- Mirian Vilela and Betty McDermott

- Marina Bakhnova Cary (deceased Easter Weekend, April, 2011)
  Earth Charter International Secretariat, San Jose, Costa Rica

- Dion Peoples

- Dany Gagnon

  Help with edits and focus
Epidemiology

The study of the distribution and determinants of disease in populations and its application to the control of health problems

→ Our focus in epidemiology is on community health; that is, on preventing disease, disability and premature death in communities
Contemporary global-scale issues with major human health implications

- Global geo-climatic system changes (e.g., global warming, sea level rise, ocean acidification); CO2 levels continue to rise
- Population growth with rapid urbanization and the development of mega-cities; Mass forced and voluntary migrations
- Expansion of consumption-intensive lifestyles (e.g., into China and India, each with 1B + populations)
- Increasing global and within-country disparities
- Fresh water declines everywhere
- Resurgence of old diseases and emergence of new (e.g., malaria and tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, SARS)
- Species extinctions
- The growth-bound paradigm is entrenched
Changing Landscapes

- Expanding reach …
- Accelerating rates …
- Changing habitats …

→ What is our role in adapting to these changes, both individually and collectively?
Virtues in the Professions

- **Humility** — Respect the input and opinions of others / Self-effacement
- **Fidelity** — Honour one’s commitments / Promote trust
- **Justice** — Act fairly
- **Patience** — Take time to hear others’ viewpoints
- **Industry** — Do your level best / Excel
- **Veracity** — Tell the truth / Be honest
- **Compassion** — Empathize
- **Integrity** — Demonstrate good moral character
- **Serve** — Protect the most vulnerable/ Serve the public interest
- **Prudence** — Err on the side of caution / Demonstrate good judgment
Moral integrity — People
Structural integrity — Buildings
Ecological integrity — Ecosystems
The past 25 years have seen an ~50% reduction in biodiversity as measured by INDEPENDENTLY-DERIVED indicators.

**INDEX OF BIOTIC INTEGRITY**: James Karr, University of Washington, from his study of streams

**MEASURE OF MEAN FUNCTIONAL INTEGRITY**: Orie Loucks, University of Miami, from his study of soils and forests

**WWF**: 16 markers

**ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT**: William Rees
Anthropocentrism and eco-/biocentrism

Reconnecting humans to their complete dependence on the ecosystems in which they live …
Prevention in focus –

for the support of *all* life and its inter-dependence
The Earth Charter

A soft law instrument … to save us from ourselves

Preamble

- Respect and care for the community of life
- Ecological integrity
- Social and economic justice
- Democracy, non-violence, and peace

The Way Forward

http://www.earthcharter.org/
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EARTH CHARTER</th>
<th>VIRTUES EMBRACED BY BUDDHISM</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>I. RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LIFE</strong></td>
<td>Ties in with Morality, Compassion, Generosity, Non-violence, Harmony, Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>I. ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY</strong></td>
<td>Ties in with Diligence, Renunciation, Responsibility, Simplicity, Harmony</td>
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<td><strong>II. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE</strong></td>
<td>Ties in with Generosity, Morality, Loving-Kindness, Compassion, Right Understanding, Harmony, Cooperation</td>
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<td><strong>III. DEMOCRACY, NON-VIOLENCE, AND PEACE</strong></td>
<td>Ties in with Transcendental Wisdom, Forbearance, Honesty, Truth, Non-violence</td>
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The Earth Charter ends with a statement of Universal Responsibility, where a Buddhist influence is clear:

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 ...
Decentralized Expansion strategy

"Decentralization for Scaling Up" is a strategy to enable the massive expansion of the initiative without having to grow the central administration, and to allow for a vast number of self-organizing efforts to multiply and grow.

In support of this new strategy, a set of Action Guidelines for Decentralized Expansion of the Earth Charter Initiative was developed. The Action Guidelines are a resource designed to help people conduct Earth Charter related activities in ways that are in harmony with the values and principles of the Earth Charter. The purpose of the Action Guidelines is also to ensure a certain measure of consistency in how decentralized actions are carried out on behalf of the Earth Charter. Following these guidelines, any person, organization, or community can make use of the Earth Charter and put it to work in appropriate ways corresponding to their capacities and opportunities. The twelve points of the Action Guidelines can be found in the Earth Charter website.

Areas of work

ECI and its partner organizations are especially active in the following six areas of work which were chosen because they provide significant opportunities for using the Earth Charter strategically to advance the transition to sustainable ways of living:

Education Given the importance of education to the Initiative’s mission, the Earth Charter Center for Education for Sustainable Development at the University of Peace has been created as well as an education task force. Its purpose is to promote the use of the Earth Charter in schools, colleges, universities, and non-formal education programmes throughout the world and to contribute to education for a sustainable way of life.

Businesses The Earth Charter is increasingly considered by business actors as a useful tool to inspire and support internal sustainability initiatives. ECI encourages companies to adopt the highest possible standards of ethical performance and use the Earth Charter as a guiding framework.

The Media Efforts are being made to influence key people in the field of media organizations (TV, print media, advertising and entertainment), including entrepreneurs, corporate executives, journalists, advertising agencies creative directors, screenwriters, TV producers and news editors that shape the content of the media. The intention is to have the Earth Charter utilized as an instrument to sensitize the public on the vision of sustainability.

Religion The Earth Charter has been formally endorsed or publicly supported by many religious organizations, representing most major faiths and traditions. Leaders and scholars from many traditions also participated in the drafting process of the Earth Charter. There is a continuous effort to reach out to religious communities and interfaith groups and further engage them with the global challenges of our time.

The United Nations, Law and Ethics ECI works with partner initiatives to promote the use of the Earth Charter Principles in framing international conventions, codes of ethics, legislation, and standards of organizational practice and reporting.

Youth There are Earth Charter youth groups around the world using the Earth Charter in creative ways. The purpose of this focus area is to further engage, expand, and empower the Earth Charter Youth Initiative (ECYI) network.
The General Conference, considering that:

... 

– The international community has the Earth Charter as an instrument, which contains fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society;

– The Earth Charter sets forth an integrated approach to address the inter-related problems that the world community faces;

...
UNESCO is a Task Manager in the United Nations system of Chapters 15 (Science) and 36 (Education) of Agenda 21, 32 C/73–p. 16, and resolves to:

1. **Recognize the Earth Charter as an important ethical framework for sustainable development, and acknowledge its ethical principles, its objectives and its contents, as an expression that coincides with the vision that UNESCO has ...**;

2. **Affirm our intention, as Member States, to utilize the Earth Charter as an educational instrument**;

3. **Invite the UNESCO General Conference to analyse with the UNESCO Director-General how to reinforce, in a practical way, the vision and principles of the Earth Charter in UNESCO programmes**.
Buddhist Engagement in the Earth Charter

- Steven Rockefeller
- The process adopted for its creation
- Soka Gakkai International
- World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002
- UNESCO (2003), IUCN (2005), others
- Appeal now to enlightened self-interest regardless of whether one’s home is in a country that embraces communitarian, egalitarian or libertarian values
The Earth Charter and Economic Well-being

True meaning of “economic well-being”
- Reclaim it to mean the well-being of the “household” (not the “global economy”) putting the economy above all else
- Move away from GDP/GNP as the single-most important measure of “economic/social well-being” (incapable of measuring that which provides meaning in life, including happiness and enlightenment)
Conclusions

- Happiness and enlightenment are Buddhist concepts in community development as included in the Earth Charter
- Buddhist virtues are needed in our pain-stricken world – we speak about equality, but instead we see callous indifference to widening disparities and suffering
- We need collectively to transcend our old paradigms
END