

The Belgrade Charter

A Global Framework for Environmental Education

Adopted unanimously at the close of the 10-day workshop at Belgrade was a statement, subject to modification by subsequent regional meetings, of the framework and guiding principles for global environmental education, which became known as the Belgrade Charter.

It follows:

Environmental Situation

Our generation has witnessed unprecedented economic growth and technological progress which, while bringing benefits to many people, have also caused severe social and environmental consequences. Inequality between the poor and the rich among nations and within nations is growing; and there is evidence of increasing deterioration of the physical environment in some forms on a world-wide scale. This condition, although primarily caused by a relatively small number of nations, affects all of humanity.

The recent United Nations Declaration for a New International Economic Order calls for a new concept of development – one which takes into account the satisfaction of the needs and wants of every citizen of the earth, of the pluralism of societies and of the balance and harmony between humanity and the environment. What is being called for is the eradication of the basic causes of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, pollution, exploitation and domination. The previous pattern of dealing with these crucial problems on a fragmentary basis is no longer workable.

It is absolutely vital that the world's citizens insist upon measures that will support the kind of economic growth which will not have harmful repercussions on people; that will not in any way diminish their environment and their living conditions. It is necessary to find ways to ensure that no nation should grow or develop at the expense of another nation and that the consumption of no individual should be increased at the expense of other individuals. The resources of the world should be developed in ways which will benefit all of humanity and provide the potential for raising the quality of life for everyone.

We need nothing short of a new global ethic – an ethic which espouses attitudes and behaviour for individuals and societies which are consonant with humanity's place within the biosphere; which recognizes and sensitively responds to the complex and ever-changing relationships between humanity and nature and between people. Significant changes must occur in all of the world's nations to assure the kind of rational development which will be guided by this new global ideal – changes which will be directed towards an equitable distribution of the world's resources and more fairly satisfy the needs of all peoples. This kind of development will also require the maximum reduction in harmful effects on the environment, the utilization of waste materials for productive purposes, and the design of technologies which will enable such objectives to be achieved. Above all, it will demand the assurance of perpetual peace through coexistence and cooperation among nations with different social systems. Substantial resources for reallocation to meet human needs can be gained through restricting military budgets and reducing competition in the manufacture of arms. Disarmament should be the ultimate goal.

These new approaches to the development and improvement of the environment call for a reordering of national and regional priorities. Those policies aimed at maximizing economic output without regard to its consequences on society and on the resources available for improving the quality of life must be questioned. Before this changing of priorities can be achieved, millions of individuals will themselves need to adjust their own priorities and assume a personal and individualized global ethic – and reflect in all of their behaviour a commitment to the improvement of the quality of the environment and of life for the world's people.

The reform of educational processes and systems is central to the building of this new development ethic and world economic order. Governments and policy makers can order changes, and new development approaches can begin to improve the world's condition – but all of these are no more than short-term solutions, unless the youth of the world receives a new kind of education. This will require new and productive relationships between students and teachers, between schools and communities, and between the education system and society at large.

Recommendation 96 of the Stockholm conference on the Human Environment called for the development of environmental education as one of the most critical elements of an all-out attack on the world's environmental crisis. This new environmental education must be broad based and strongly related to the basic principles outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the New International Economic Order.

It is within this context that the foundations must be laid for a world-wide environmental education programme that will make it possible to develop new knowledge and skills, values and attitudes, in a drive towards a better quality of environment and, indeed, towards a higher quality of life for present and future generations living within that environment.

Environmental Goal

The goal of environmental action is:

To improve all ecological relationships, including the relationship of humanity with nature and people with each other.

There are, thus, two preliminary objectives :

1. For each nation, according to its culture, to clarify for itself the meaning of such basic concepts as “quality of life” and “human happiness” in the context of the total environment, with an extension of the clarification and appreciation to other cultures, beyond one's own national boundaries.
2. To identify which actions will ensure the preservation and improvement of humanity's potentials and develop social and individual well-being in harmony with the biophysical and man-made environment.

Environmental Education Goal

The goal of environmental education is:

To develop a world population that is aware of, and concerned about, the environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations and commitment to work individually and collectively toward solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones.

Environmental Education Objectives

The objectives of environmental education are:

1. Awareness: to help individuals and social groups acquire an awareness of and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems.
2. Knowledge: to help individuals and social groups acquire basic understanding of the total environment, its associated problems and humanity's critically responsible presence and role in it.
3. Attitude: to help individuals and social groups acquire social values, strong feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively participating in its protection and improvement.
4. Skills: to help individuals and social groups acquire the skills for solving environmental problems.
5. Evaluation ability: to help individuals and social groups evaluate environmental measures and education programmes in terms of ecological, political, economic, social, esthetic and educational factors.
6. Participation: to help individuals and social groups develop a sense of responsibility and urgency regarding environmental problems to ensure appropriate action to solve those problems.

Audiences

The principal audience of environmental education is the general public. Within this global frame, the major categories are:

1. The formal education sector: including pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education students as well as teachers and environmental professionals in training and retraining;
2. The non-formal education sector: including youth and adults, individually or collectively from all segments of the population, such as the family, workers, managers and decision makers, in environmental as well as non-environmental fields.

Guiding Principles of Environmental Education Programmes

The guiding principles of environmental education are:

1. Environmental education should consider the environment in its totality – natural and man-made, ecological, political, economic, technological, social, legislative, cultural and esthetic.
2. Environmental education should be a continuous life-long process, both in-school and out-of-school.
3. Environmental education should be interdisciplinary in its approach.
4. Environmental education should emphasise active participation in preventing and solving environmental problems.
5. Environmental education should examine major environmental issues from a world point of view, while paying due regard to regional differences.
6. Environmental education should focus on current and future environmental situations.
7. Environmental education should examine all development and growth from an environmental perspective.
8. Environmental education should promote the value and necessity of local, national and international cooperation in the solution of environmental problems.