

# Chapter 1 Values Education for SCP: From Knowledge to Action

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## **Abstract:**

There is often a poor correlation between a scientific or intellectual understanding of a problem or of risky behaviour, and changing behaviour to solve the problem. An emotional commitment is also necessary for action. Emotions can also override science, as when superstitious or irrational beliefs in unscientific knowledge can displace objective evidence and produce harmful behaviour. Education that harmonizes both scientific knowledge and a values-based emotional commitment seems to be necessary to move from an understanding of sustainable consumption and production requirements to actions that achieve sustainability. Empirical evidence in a variety of contexts shows that values education targeted at an individual's own belief system can reinforce scientific education on environment and sustainability. Examples will be cited from advanced studies programmes in sustainable development and environmental diplomacy in cross-cultural contexts. Tools such as values-based indicators have successfully measured these effects in pilot studies. Given the promising preliminary results, research is needed in a variety of social and cultural contexts to develop and validate combined scientific and values-based approaches to education for SCP, and to document if they result in lasting changes towards more sustainable behaviour in consumption and production.

## **1 Introduction**

Governments are relatively good at adopting declarations, action plans and even multilateral environmental agreements, but much less successful when it comes to implementation. The same is true at the individual level. There is often a poor correlation between a scientific or intellectual understanding of a problem or of risky behaviour, and changing behaviour to solve the problem. The inertia of habit and routine, often reinforced by cultural and commercial pressures and marketing, not to mention physical and psychological addiction, provide strong barriers to changes in lifestyle and consumption patterns. There may be a lack of awareness of the hidden drivers of behaviour. An emotional commitment rooted in ethical principles, moral values or some form of spirituality is also generally necessary for action.

Emotions can also override science, as when political opinions, religious beliefs, or superstitious or irrational beliefs in unscientific knowledge can displace objective evidence and produce denial or even environmentally-harmful behaviour. The health impacts of smoking, and climate change denial are obvious examples. Education that harmonizes both scientific knowledge and a values-based emotional commitment seems to be necessary to move from an understanding of sustainable consumption and production requirements to actions that contribute to sustainability (Dahl, 2008). This is a challenge that has particularly concerned the International Environment Forum (IEF), a Baha'i-inspired professional organization that has worked for 16 years to link values with scientific approaches to environment and sustainability, including through education. Much of this experience is documented through its annual conferences and on its web site (<http://iefworld.org>). The IEF is, for example, an active participant in the Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living (PERL, <http://www.perlprojects.org/>).

Each individual, depending on upbringing, education and life experience, operates on a spectrum from egotistical to altruistic, infantile to mature, base impulses to cooperative. In society, this is expressed as power-hungry, seeking status and social dominance, versus conscientious, egalitarian, communitarian (Shetty, 2009). The more mature attributes generally contribute to greater social good and higher levels of social integration, and usually result from some kind of moral education. Moral values state what is good and of primary importance to human civilization, often articulated as ideals. They define right from wrong. Ethical principles are the operational expression of moral values, and provide guidance to decision-making and action (Anello, 2008). Since sustainability is fundamentally an ethical concept of equity for this and future generations, it is logical that education for sustainable consumption and production be rooted in ethical considerations.

The potential in linking values and sustainability issues is also illustrated by the success of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) in inviting all the major religions to prepare long-term action plans on climate change and the environment, which were launched at a celebration at Windsor Castle with Prince Phillip and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in November 2009 (<http://iefworld.org/WindsorARC.html>). Many of the action plans included an educational component to change behaviour based on the spiritual principles and ethical values in each faith tradition (for example BIC, 2009). Faith-based organizations have also brought the dialogue on values and consumption to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (BIC, 2010).

While ethics and values were long absent in intergovernmental discourse on sustainable development, with only the briefest mention in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (UN, 2002, Annex, para. 6), the recent crises in the financial and economic system and the recognition of the need for indicators beyond GDP (Stieglitz et al., 2009) have brought considerations of human well-being and happiness into mainstream debate, with a UN General Assembly resolution (UN, 2011), the 2 April 2012 session on Gross National Happiness at the UN organized by the Government of Bhutan, and the launching of the first *World Happiness Report* (Helliwell et al., 2012). These significantly include concepts of spiritual well-being and ethical living as sources of happiness. This acceptance of the legitimacy of the topic should facilitate its inclusion in educational programmes on

sustainable consumption and production in countries where the dominant materialist paradigm has previously resisted such discussions.

Empirical evidence in a variety of contexts shows that values education relevant to an individual's own belief system can be integrated with scientific education on environment and sustainability and reinforce its impact. The following examples from the author's own experience show what is possible.

## **2 Advanced studies and distance learning on sustainable development**

For a decade the University of Geneva has offered a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Sustainable Development targeted at mid-career professionals, with the IEF as one of the co-sponsors (<http://www.unige.ch/ecohum/formcont/Certificat20112012.html>). The early courses included a few presentations on values and ethics, but the response was so positive that a whole module was developed on the social and cultural dimensions of sustainability. The content includes a lecture on the ethical dimensions from the dean of the Faculty of Theology; cross-cultural and developing country perspectives; multi-dimensional visions of well-being; the relationships of sustainability to poverty, social inequality and social policy; changing behaviour and lifestyles; and an exercise preparing, for example, a charter of environmental rights. While it is difficult to sort out all the contributors to behavioural change from a course of this type, many participants reported reorienting both their careers and personal lifestyles towards more sustainability. One participant even sold his SUV part way through the course and bought a bicycle to replace it.

The IEF has also developed and co-sponsored for several years a 14-week on-line course on sustainable development and the prosperity of humankind through the Wilmette Institute, a distance learning programme in the United States, relating sustainability themes to ethical and spiritual values. It includes modules on the concept of sustainable development; economic development, poverty and wealth; social crises and solutions; environmental challenges; future perspectives; and education for sustainable development through individual and community action. Many of the participants report on the course forums that they have changed their lifestyle and organized actions for sustainability in their local communities. The IEF also makes available on its web site a 9-module interfaith course on the scientific and spiritual dimensions of climate change, for use by groups in their local communities (<http://iefworld.org/ssdcc0.html>).

## **3 Environmental diplomacy**

The UNEP/University of Geneva/Graduate Institute Certificate of Advanced Studies in Environmental Diplomacy was offered in Geneva for four years from 2006-2009, with three months of distance learning preceding an intensive 14-day residential course in Geneva and preparation of a 20-page thesis to earn a certificate worth 25 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits. The course targeted mid-career professionals from foreign affairs and environment ministries, diplomatic missions and NGOs working at the international level. The ten modules varied from year to year but included sustainable development; environmental law and policy; environmental governance; environmental security; sectoral

topics like climate change, energy, biodiversity, water, trade, chemicals and wastes; negotiating techniques; and ethics, religion and science for environmental diplomacy.

This latter module coordinated by the author explored both the participants own values relevant to environment and sustainability, and the values expressed by science and the major religious traditions, with examples from the Bahá'í International Community and one other faith tradition each year. Participants started by envisioning their own ideal of the society they would like to live in a few decades from now, considered personal ethical dilemmas, explored the positions and values of various civil society organizations as the conscience of humanity, heard presentations from theologians and other experts on ethics, considered environmental rights and obligations, and role-played different positions in negotiations, to understand how values influence the positions that governments and diplomats take in environmental debates. The importance of trust in the successful outcome of negotiations was particularly emphasized. For example, a Franciscan monk taking the course was the most effective negotiator in one exercise because everyone trusted someone who had taken a vow of poverty.

Participants put their learning to good use after the course, becoming ambassador, vice-chair of the Commission on Sustainable Development, even Minister for the Environment. A number changed career orientation towards something more in keeping with their values (i.e. from international finance to social enterprise). One diplomat, who had never related Islamic education to his work, prepared a thesis proposing an Islamic convention on the environment to demonstrate that environmental protection was rooted in Quranic principles. Course evaluations showed that the values dimension was highly appreciated as a fundamental part of the course.

#### **4 Values-based indicators**

A two-year European Union Framework 7 research project (2009-2011) has developed values-based indicators of education for sustainable development (<http://www.esdinds.eu/>, Podger et al., 2010; Harder et al. in press; other papers in preparation). The project initially focused on values such as justice, trust/trustworthiness, integrity, empowerment, unity in diversity, and respect for the environment, and developed a range of 166 indicators for behaviours and feelings related to these values. As it advanced, it became apparent that each group and organization had its own vocabulary and conception of its fundamental values, which the project helped to crystallize, and that the indicators were more universal than the vocabulary in capturing behaviours reflecting those values. Drawing inspiration from the indicators list, each project selected and adapted its own indicators that reflected its own values in practice. The use of the indicators made these values more visible and led to a conscious effort to implement them more effectively.

Pilot projects demonstrated the effectiveness of these indicators with indigenous school children in Mexico, former child soldiers in Sierra Leone, a youth theatre group in Germany, a university programme on sustainable development, and Moslem women in inner-city London, among others. For example, an Earth Charter project with a local NGO, Echeri Consultores, working with 9-13-year-old children in schools in the Purepecha indigenous communities in Mexico to encourage reforestation, selected the values “collaboration in

diversity”, and “care and respect for the community of life”, and chose 22 indicators such as “we feel girls are valued”, “different points of view are listened to”, “emotional connection to community of life”, and quality of tree planting. Indicators were assessed with spatial/corporal methods, hand painting and word elicitation, focus groups, theatrical comprehension, and key informants ([http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sdecu/research/esdinds/resources/fieldvisitsummary\\_echeri.html](http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sdecu/research/esdinds/resources/fieldvisitsummary_echeri.html)). Rather than just measuring the number of trees planted and the number of children involved, they now measure empowerment, gender equality, equality of indigenous members, and their emotional connection to nature. The donor was so pleased that it extended their funding.

Another case study at the university level was with the cross-faculty Environmental Institutional Programme of Guanajuato University (PIMAUG), also in Mexico. The University already had good environmental measures, but the deeper dimension of the Earth Charter vision of transforming values into action, and the degree to which those values were present and transformative, was not known. The indicators articulated deeply held aspirations and priorities which had not previously received systematic attention. The process of reflection and selection of the indicators, even before measurement, had a significant cultural impact on the PIMAUG unit and enthused participants, producing transformational learning.

The project changed the culture of PIMAUG. The Earth Charter workshop leaders reported a greater sense of effectiveness as a result of a clearer and more precise focus on values in their workshop delivery. The personal impact of the indicators affected how a manager dealt with conflict, and generated a much more participatory approach in her work with volunteers. The unit had a greater unity of vision, and participants in the focus group discussions reported having reconnected or been re-inspired in their work. Integrating the indicators into regular evaluation increased group insight into their own application of values and led to understanding success in terms of values in a practical way. ([http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sdecu/research/esdinds/resources/fieldvisitsummary\\_guanajuato.html](http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sdecu/research/esdinds/resources/fieldvisitsummary_guanajuato.html))

Another pilot project was organized through the Principles and Values Department of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), which has initiated and conducted a worldwide programme called “Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change” (YABC). YABC seeks to empower youth to take up a leadership role in positively influencing mindsets, attitudes and behaviours in their local communities towards a culture of peace, respect for diversity, equality and social inclusion. As part of this programme, the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society has established an agricultural project composed of four teams of 30 members each. It brings together members of different tribes and chiefdoms - even those who fought on opposite sides during the civil war, which ended ten years ago. These youth live and work together on agricultural sites and participate in YABC workshops relating to non-discrimination and respect for diversity, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion, gender, and building a culture of non-violence and peace ([http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sdecu/research/esdinds/resources/fieldvisitsummary\\_redcross.html](http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sdecu/research/esdinds/resources/fieldvisitsummary_redcross.html)). The use of the indicators in this setting was so successful that they are being used throughout the YABC programme.

This approach to measuring values is now being extended into the business community, the health system, and hopefully for use in formal education. By providing a tool that can be

used to measure and evaluate values-based education, it can encourage the more systematic use of values-based approaches in projects for sustainable consumption and production. It could also be adapted as a self-assessment tool for individual motivation (Dahl, 2012).

## **5 Future research**

The rising consciousness of the importance of a values component in both education for sustainable consumption and indicators of sustainability requires that this work be put on a more rigorous footing. Tools can now be developed to make it possible to assess the educational methods most effective in imparting sustainability values at different age levels and in various target groups. Networks like PERL could be used to exchange information and to accelerate the replication of best practices. The dynamic of combining both scientific information and values should be explored further to ensure that it empowers individuals to investigate and adopt their own sustainability values without imposing any particular cultural framework, ideology, political or religious perspective.

It seems logical that one outcome of sustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles should be an increase in human well-being and happiness. The methodologies for assessing happiness have been most developed in Bhutan, which acknowledges the uniqueness of its cultural situation and the need to adapt its model for export. There are some concerns that the recent *World Happiness Report* (Helliwell et al., 2012) may unconsciously reflect a Western bias in the definitions of happiness behind the surveys on which it was based. There is an obvious need to research the many possible definitions of human happiness and well-being around the world, and to search for measures that are culturally neutral, or at least adapted to reflect cultural diversity. In the absence of such research, comparisons between country may be problematic.

The values-based indicators have been pilot tested in a variety of cultural and institutional contexts and have seemed reasonably robust, but the sample size is still very small. The approach needs to be extended more widely and the results shared to build a more solid base of experience in their use.

## **6 Conclusion**

Given the promising preliminary results, research is needed in a variety of social and cultural contexts to develop and validate combined scientific and values-based approaches to education for sustainable consumption and production, and to document if they result in lasting changes towards more sustainable behaviour.

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