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This workbook was introduced during a workshop at the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Environmental Education Congress, held in Turino, Italy in October 2005. During this workshop many people contributed to the development of this edition. Their stories have been incorporated into the text, and their suggestions helped shape our revisions. We are grateful for the energy, enthusiasm, and thoughtful comments from this international group of environmental educators.

# foreword

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## Environmental Education, Ethics and Action, Getting Started

**'T**o think is easy. To act is difficult. To act as one thinks is the most difficult of all.' These words by the German poet Goethe encapsulate the essence of the branch of philosophy known as ethics. Ethics lies at the heart of all human endeavour, from the foundations of human civilisation and the great religions, to the day-to-day decisions we all make in the course of our lives.

Environmental decision making by governments, businesses and individuals cannot be separated from ethics. For example, consider the issue of climate change. Decisions that we make today—at the policy level and as individual consumers of energy and natural resources—will affect all of humankind for generations to come. As pressures upon the Earth's natural systems increase, more and more people, young and old alike, are realizing that environmental issues concern everyone and that they cannot be resolved by technical means only. They understand that environmental management also rests on questions of ethics.

At UNEP we receive many visitors, from schoolchildren to politicians, diplomats and government leaders. The most interesting questions they ask are often related to ethics—issues to do with poverty and environment, climate change and the Kyoto Protocol, unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, indigenous peoples and biodiversity, the link between environment and cultural and spiritual values, etc. Through these visitors, and people I meet around the world, I have learned that ethics needs to be incorporated into environmental awareness raising and into mainstream education.

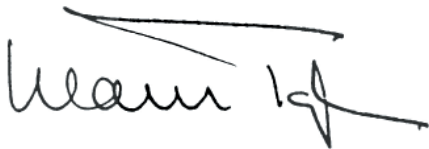
The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005–2014 emphasizes the need not only to inform and educate people so they can make the right decisions, but to ensure that such education is propelled by an underlying ethical reasoning. It is therefore a pleasure to introduce *Environmental Education, Ethics and Action: A Workbook to Get Started*. This book will help educators to incorporate the challenging, complex, yet vital world of ethics into teaching and learning.

The object of *Environmental Education, Ethics and Action: A Workbook to Get Started* is to link ethics to everyday activities. It takes ethics out of philosophy departments and puts it squarely onto the streets, into the villages, towns and cities, and connects ethics to all life on Earth. The book's primary audience is teacher trainers, college instructors, university professors and others responsible for professional development in education. It is also aimed at environmental educators who want to take their teaching more deeply into the questions that lie at the heart of sustainable living.

The activities featured in this publication have been developed and tested over many years. The authors have used them in undergraduate and graduate courses and in workshops in many parts of the world. Most recently a draft of this book was introduced during a workshop at the Third World

Environmental Education Congress in Torino, Italy, 7–10 October 2005, where the participants were encouraged to provide feedback based on their practical experience. Their thoughts and comments have been incorporated in this publication.

In the end, however, this book is just a beginning. No book can cover all ethical possibilities, nor can one set of authors speak for everyone. It is a starting point that invites people from all over the world to seek examples in their own communities, and from different cultural perspectives. The nineteenth century biologist and social philosopher Herbert Spencer once wrote: 'The great aim of education is not knowledge but action.' We encourage readers to continue the work begun here. Write stories, devise activities and keep us informed about your innovations. It is through the simple perspectives of local environmental values that we can hope to inspire differentiated yet unified action to conserve the global environment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Klaus Toepfer', with a long horizontal line above it.

**Klaus Toepfer**  
**Executive Director**  
**United Nations Environment Programme**



# introduction



## Why this book?

It is timely. Global efforts to save the planet often remind us of our need for ethics. Many environmental conventions and treaties have come up in recent years to ring the ethics bell even louder. People around the world want better relationships between themselves, within communities, between communities, and between nations. And they know that this includes relationships between humans and the more-than-human world, or, for others, between humans and the rest of Creation<sup>1</sup>. In using the term 'more-than-human world' we suggest that exploring new relationships with Earth not only benefits human beings and their needs (although we recognise how important these are), but also the needs and well-being of forests, fields, rivers, animals, creatures in the sea, and the atmosphere.

This book recognises that ethics is about relationships between individual and group interests—human or otherwise—around some idea about the common good. People know that we need to pay more attention to these relationships; there are signs everywhere. Newspapers run columns on 'everyday' ethics. Some days it seems that the word 'ethics' is never far from the lips of concerned people everywhere. Perhaps this is because people around the world are realising that globalisation is essentially about an economically driven vision for the world and that an approach which over-emphasises economics is failing humanity<sup>2</sup>. So far, globalisation has not helped very much in a resolution of many of the World's most pressing problems. As Nelson Mandela said, 'Massive poverty and obscene inequality are such terrible scourges of our times'<sup>3</sup>.

Many of the world's social and environmental problems are not resolved because ethics questions are not asked. Ethics, with all the challenges that go with this idea, can initiate discussions about living well, about justice, equity, and common interests. This Workbook provides some beginnings for these discussions—openings, starting points, challenges, and even hope.

In imagining this project, we had a common vision—to improve our teaching, and to encourage students and teachers to consider ethics everyday. As environmental educators, we all share a deep concern for the human and the more-than-human world. And, we are interested in how we humans can live in different ways—ways that are not destructive to other humans, and to the more-than-human world. This book is written for teacher trainers, college instructors, university professors, and other professionals with responsibilities for professional development in education. It is also aimed at those passionate environmental educators who seek ways to take their teaching more deeply into questions at the heart of unsustainable patterns of living. We have found that there is often very little 'practical' material available for teachers and teacher educators to 'get started' with ethics as an everyday activity. Hence this book.

The book is inviting, practical and creative. It encourages educators to examine stories that shape the world—stories found in newspapers, on television, on the streets, in the fields and forests. We encourage educators and learners to look at things people do, in their daily lives, and in citizen actions. Mostly, we encourage educators

and learners to tell stories — stories that are ethically inspiring, and stories that work.

While we want this book to be inviting, we have not shied away from harsh and difficult realities. Power, injustice, exploitation, greed, and degradation are some of the themes running through our stories. We encourage readers to make the invisible values that shape our societies more visible<sup>4</sup>. And we encourage readers to re-imagine the world in creative ways, to find alternatives, to seek answers, and to take action.

Indian activist and writer Arundhati Roy, in her book, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*<sup>5</sup>, reminds us that there is beauty yet in this brutal, damaged world of ours, and she encourages us to seek out the beauty, to nurture it and to love it. Her words encourage us to think about the future as open, and we recognise that there are ‘all manner of unimagined possibilities surround us’<sup>6</sup>. We think that an exploration of ethics is an important way to create an open, imaginative, just, and beautiful future.

Christina Boelcke  
Director, Division of Policy Development and Law  
UNEP.

## Ethics and the environmental educator

Exercising our ethical abilities is part of being human. It is an ability that should be built into our lives such that it becomes ‘simply normal behaviour’. Ethics should not be an exotic activity performed by heroes, saints, and experts that reside elsewhere—it is a matter for everyone. It is the stuff of everyday activity.

There are many who recognise the importance of ethics, but we are still a long way from making

ethics an everyday activity. In spite of growing interest, ethics circles the perimeter of mainstream education. As long as this remains the case, the implicit message delivered to students, parents, teachers, schools, and citizens is that ethical practice isn’t particularly important.

In this book we explore creative ways of working with ethics in education. But first, we must clarify what we mean by ethics. It’s a tricky word that can take many meanings. For us, ethics is a *process of inquiry* and *critical thinking*; it is **not** about ‘preaching’, ‘indoctrinating’, or ‘inducting’ learners into ‘rules of behaviour’ or ‘codes of conduct’.

One way to start this process is to ask philosophical questions: What is a good way to live? Or, what is a good way to live in a given context? What are good relations between people and societies? What about good relationships between people and animals, species, ecosystems, or the more-than-human world?

Some think of ethics as relationships that include action, reflection, and doing. We are drawn to First Nations<sup>7</sup> colleagues, and in particular Louise Profeit-Leblanc who asks ‘What makes us noble?’ She adds that ethics ‘has to do with upright living and making moral decisions based on this goal of being noble in our everyday activities’<sup>8</sup>. We can also ask: how does ethics inform everyday activities, and conversely, how do everyday activities inform ethics?

Seen this way, ethics is an open-ended process with the potential to expose new challenges and generate new possibilities. It is a process of making choices that enable better ways of seeing and doing things. This doesn’t mean that decisions and actions are never taken—we do act. It does mean, however, that ethical positions are open for discussion, re-examination, and revision.

In this book we provide starting points, ideas, and activities to get you started. We invite you to explore ethics in the everyday, and to discover the excitement and joy of doing ethics.

## Some thoughts on how to use this book

To 'get started' with an exploration of ethics, we offer five topics, and five potential ways to get started:

- **Being critical** — here we encourage you to 'look beneath the surface';
- **Self-validating reduction** — this is an examination of what happens when the potential of people, communities, places, or landscapes is reduced in damaging ways;
- **Complex questions and ethical quandaries** — in this section we reflect on what happens when complex ethical questions are not easy to address;
- **Ethics in action** — this section explores ethics as everyday activities; and,
- **Re-imagining possibilities** — here we encourage you to think 'outside the box', and creatively re-imagine the future with new possibilities.

Topics include background notes, stories, and

We encourage you to browse through the topics and find a place that feels comfortable to begin. Try a few activities. When you feel comfortable with these, try a few more and explore other topics and other stories. The stories we include are drawn from the experiences of people around the world.

As you get started, remember that there are many different ways to teach ethics. This book introduces activities such as analysing images in popular media, group discussion about complex issues, contemplating local and international scenarios, reflecting upon daily actions, and creatively imagining new possibilities. But remember, teaching about ethics isn't a value neutral activity. You will choose activities and teaching strategies just as we have done in writing this book, and no one can cover all ethical possibilities. You may develop some new activities that reflect your own interests and your approach to teaching. While teaching ethics is not value neutral, it is not about imposing ideologies or seeking consensus either. Our challenge is to encourage processes of thoughtful deliberation and creative actions.

Finally, teaching about ethics isn't for someone else. It is for everybody. How we approach the world, how we come to know it, and how we make meaning of our experiences are all shaped by our values, even if we don't notice this on a day-to-day basis. These values are sometimes called

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