

## **ECCAP WG2 Outline of report and call for contributions** *Ethical World Views of Nature*

### **Introduction**

This report will build on the work of ECCAP Working Group 1 and intends to give practical shape to its main proposition, which is the construction of a repository of ethical world views of nature. WG2 will describe various worldviews as they are and also explore their relevance to new challenges.

In summary, the ECCAP WG1 report (Rai, J. S., et al., 2010. *Universalism and Ethical Values for the Environment*. Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok) suggested that there may or may not be universal principles inherent in all the different worldviews. However it does not advance the cause of environmental sustainability if one perspective is pushed as a norm for the entire world, however rational or logical it may appear to be. The ethical principles in one part of the world may work for people of that region and inspire them as civil society to assert pressure upon their governments, international institutions and multinational corporations, for example, to take active steps to prevent further deterioration of environment. These set of ethical principles may also inspire many people to change their own personal habits to reduce damage to the nature as well as environment around us.

However, they may not inspire people all around the world as the relationship concepts with nature may be fundamentally different in some regions. Some may be deeply religious; some may attach considerable faith in revelations and others in intuition. Consequently WG1 suggested that a repository of worldviews be set up that will evolve as different set of ethical values from first principles widely held within the religion or culture of that region, people or civilization. Once a repository is developed, we may find that there may be similarities in all, there may only be similarities in some, or there may not be any similarities in the different perspectives or that the small number of similarities does not warrant a unitary ethical system for the whole world. With a repository, UNESCO and other organizations can promote wider participation in environmental issues from civil society of different background, cultures and regions.

WG2 does not intend to repeat the arguments in WG1 nor be a document on generic and general articles on why different world views should be respected. After an introductory chapter, all the chapters will be specifically about one community or country. Thus the mosaic of worldviews will be available to policy makers and all. The report will be a living project, which is expected to continue beyond the first edition (which will be published in 2012). In order to allow readers to follow the content of different articles clearly, authors are encouraged to follow guidelines below to shape entries to the repository. A general background that might be found useful is as follows.

### **There are 3 aspects to alternative world views.**

1. There are some indigenous groups or people who refuse to join the modern economic/technological world or the State system. These are mostly indigenous peoples who live in remote places, often protected by State non intervention and land reserved for them with restriction on anyone entering their regions. The ethical values that drive these groups are very interesting and do not necessary conform to universal ethics in UN documents. If these groups agree to share their sacred knowledge, their worldview could be documented.

2. There are many communities around the world that had strong and well developed theological, philosophical or general principles relating to nature, other species and people in general. These continue to influence their personal lives, are celebrated in annual festivals and inform their relations to the world in general. However because the State as an entity tends to adopt ‘international norms’ the otherwise very essential view of nature that could inspire greater protection for the environment are forced as religion into the private sphere. This can create apathy towards the environment in some cases or conflict in others where the belief systems of the people are over ridden by the State’s imperative to conform to and promote universal norms.

3. There were considerably different perspectives in many cultures about nature. However as the world has advanced rapidly and there has been a tendency towards universal norms, deeply held concepts have not been given the opportunity to evolve and adapt to new technological, economic and political advances. One of the main causes is that while the ritual, practices and cultural language is permitted in the form of festivals or in the private sphere, there is an overwhelming tendency to treat them as historic relics and idiosyncrasies. There may even be an embarrassment associated with them.

People are therefore neither informed or driven by their own cultural norms nor can empathize with international norms. International norms have generally been evolved from the cultural and philosophical developments within Western civilization. Consequently, civil society in the west can relate to international ethical documents but many other communities do not empathize with them. They have been uprooted from their traditions but not yet adopted Western culture as the foundation of their civilization. There is an ethical ghetto that many are in. They may sign up to and agree to internationally agreed principles but pursue their own interests without any sanction from their cultural and religious foundations to help them evaluate new developments.

The ECCAP WG2 exercise is therefore not merely to document historic sets of values, or the interesting ethical world views of consenting communities of indigenous peoples, or the rudimentary ideas within a religion. The second part of the entries will go beyond describing the ritual practices, a cultural beliefs, or religious principles, and explore these in the context of current issues. Practitioners need to be asked what if any relevance they have in the challenges facing the world. Where possible some leading proponents of a cultural principle need to be asked whether a set of ethical statements could be made for the people of that particular culture or religion. The examples given in WG2 will be useful to examine the essential proposition in WG1. The repository of worldviews will take time to be developed, and this will grow over time.

In case you find that there are not views according to the categories given in the framework within a worldview then simply state that under that heading, e.g. “No examples.” For instance where there are strong cosmocentric perspectives, anthropocentric perspectives may not need much comment. And if there are anthropocentric perspectives in practice but strong cultural biocentric yet undeveloped ideas, then this may need some comment.

**Please send contributions and/or outlines for contributions by 30 September 2011 to:**

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## **Framework: General Structure of Contributions**

The following aspects need to be considered in addressing for further discussion, and should follow a precise format for easy reference.

### **1. Summary**

### **2. What is the broader framework that influences ethics among the people?**

For example you may discuss questions such as:

- **Dharma:** It is a generic word for Indian traditions, philosophies and ways of life. They tend to be holistic and can mean anything from the nature of a substance, a life form to the place of human within the entire cosmos and even scientific rules.
- **Religion:** Mostly revelations and mostly Abrahamic.
- **Evolved traditions:** traditions that may or may not have any religious or theoretical explanation, for instance many indigenous practices.
- **Secular theories:** most of the ideas inherent within international conventions. Utilitarian, altruistic, instrumentalist etc.
- **Democracy:** whether democratic consensus determines a worldview or policy, irrespective of its benefits or threats to environment.

### **3. What is the broader outlook of the environmental concepts within the tradition?**

*Is it one of the ones listed below or a combination of them, or others? (refer to WG1 for details and please list all the following, and write “No examples” if you have no examples for that outlook; and you can cross reference if you cannot separate the examples for multiple categories, e.g. “Integrated under section 3.4.”)*

#### **3.1. Anthropocentrism**

#### **3.2. Biocentrism**

#### **3.3. Ecocentrism**

#### **3.4. Cosmocentrism**

#### **3.5. Others (Specify)**

**4. What are the human –environment relationships? Are they:** (refer to WG1 for details and please list all the following, and write “No examples” if you have no examples for that outlook)

#### **4.1. Symbiotic**

#### **4.2. Integrationist**

#### **4.3. Apocalyptic**

#### **4.4. Managerial**

#### **4.5. Apathetic**

#### **4.6. Animistic**

#### **4.7. Others**

### **5. Conclusions**

### **6. References**

## **Examples of applications of world views to modern technology/globalization**

Is the world view compatible with modern technological advances? Does it already have some position and ethical guidance on human relation to technological advances? Are there principles that can be developed? Do main practitioners or proponents of the worldview think about modern advances and their impact on resources, human relations, society and other species? For instance increasing dependence on technological mobility (cars, planes, etc) or transplant surgery and possibilities of cloning? Increased age expectancy, larger populations in cities, reduced agricultural land, impact on climate change with energy emissions and consumption? Impact of globalisation on smaller communities, on traditional ethical values, on interaction with larger world? And whether there already are ideas of interacting and coping with globalization trends. These are issues that could be evoked according to the current living situation of each group.

## **Conclusions**

The conclusions should indicate whether the worldview is a living set of concepts, whether a set of values can be developed from it, whether it is largely reflected in the current conventions, whether a distinct document for that particular worldview would benefit greater compliance to goals to achieve better sustainable environment. Conclusions could suggest whether more work is needed and whether communities can be encouraged to develop perspectives that can stand on their own and help the larger population in that community to take ownership of environmental concerns through the prism of their worldview.

## **Additional suggestions**

In the paper the following also need to be given some consideration, and how they are expressed in their cultures, including.

*Equity, participation, precautionary principle, vulnerability, sustainability, peace, human rights.*

The following leading questions could also be addressed in the discussion.

Human beings and evolution.

*What is the status of the human in the complexities of evolution? Is it as the ultimate perfection of divine creation, a sudden and independent emergence upon earth, a gradual evolution through species or another theory/hypothesis/revelation?*

Human beings and other life forms.

*What is the status of the human to other life forms? Is it master of all other species, simply another species in the scheme of life, the only species with a conscience, or simply another transient species in evolution?*

Human relations to environment, guardian, symbiotic, custodian?

*What forms the basis of human relation to the environment? For instance is it one of a guardian, a custodian, a symbiotic dependence, a dependent on the earth and environment, a species for which all has been created, a species with a right to exploit all that exists for its own advantage, an instrumentalist relation or a species without any significance in the many life forms. Or is it cosmological, biocentric, ecocentric, anthropocentric or another one.*

Interaction with environment.

*Is the interaction of the human to the environment one of fear, love, awe or without any emotion.*

**Is earth living?**

*Are the earth and the environment a living 'entity' with a conscious ability to protect itself against human led destruction or is the earth an inert entity without an ability to survive destruction?*

**Doomsday, living and punishing earth theory.**

*Is there a language of doomsday (end of world, scorch earth theory) or a theory of for instance that earth will punish humans, or a rationalist argument such as the environment will become unsustainable and therefore humans will die of needs, scarcity etc have a place in the tradition?*

**Ritual, practices, worship etc of environment.**

*Are there any practical rituals, practices or forms of worship within the tradition that inspire the follower to build a deeper relationship with the environment, for instance Bishnoi or animal worship?*

**End of world theory.**

*What does the tradition say about end of world? Will life form somewhere else in the cosmos, get reborn on earth, or will a doomsday scenario be the end of the human species altogether?*

**How can tradition inspire more responsibility towards environment?**

*In the current concern about the environment such as desertification, fuel scarcity, pollution etc, how can the tradition inspire its adherents to become more responsible with the environment?*

**Human reason.**

*What importance does the tradition have on human reason? Does insight have significance? Or are similarities or differences with Western environmental theories? Does the tradition simply endorse conventional Western position or does it offer a radically different approach to environmental issues?*

## **Reference style**

Please follow UNESCO Bangkok style guide, using reference citations for published material, and automatic footnotes for websites and newspaper comments, and explanatory comments.