

Field Visit Summary: Echeri Consultores, Mexico

Background

Echeri Consultores, a project highlighted by the Earth Charter Initiative (ECI) for the ESDInds field visits, is a non-profit CSO based in Michoacan, Mexico promoting environmental conservation through values education and the arts. Two Echeri programmes were selected for testing the indicators:

(a) A programme working with 9-13 year olds in 15 schools in the Purepecha indigenous communities. It includes arts workshops on environmental conservation and values; guided reflection on local ecosystems; and tree planting workshops, enabling the children to establish tree nurseries in the school grounds and conduct reforestation activities in the wider community.

(b) A multi-cultural group of around 19 youth aged 12-21, called Juatarhu ("Forest" in Purepecha), meeting every week. The activities of Jutarhu are similar to those of the schools programme, but with greater scope and depth, incorporating large reforestation campaigns and municipal arts festivals.

Aims of the Field Visit

The main aim of the visit was to test all 12 of the draft indicators for the value of Unity in Diversity, as well as 10 of the 79 draft indicators relating to Care and Respect for the Community of Life. In the context of this particular field visit, the name 'Collaboration in Diversity' was used instead of 'Unity in Diversity', in order to be consistent with the CSO's existing activities.

Another important objective was to create and test innovative assessment tools that were appropriate to the project context (children and youth, with varying levels of literacy, working through activities based on the arts and physical movement). Researchers worked closely with the project coordinator to design tools that were easy to use and appropriate for the target population.

Main Findings

This process validated all 12 draft indicators for the value of 'Unity in Diversity' as directly and significantly relevant to the work of the Juatarhu youth group. In addition, the team validated 10 of the 79 draft indicators for the value of 'Care and Respect for the Community of Life' as relevant for both Juatarhu and the schools programme. The wording of several indicators was modified, but the final versions of all of the tested indicators met the criteria of measurability, reliability and usability.

The youth participants from Juatarhu strongly confirmed the main hypothesis of the ESDInds project, namely that it is feasible and worthwhile to measure values. Referring to the visit in a presentation to an international gathering in April 2010, a member of Juatarhu explained that by making values 'visible', the research had made the group more united and strengthened, and had increased members' self-realization and self-esteem. Feedback from the project coordinator was also extremely positive.

Processes Utilized

The development of tailor-made tools was preceded by a long period of participant observation, in which the researchers gained an enhanced understanding of the CSO's current programs and the

local culture. A consultative process with project staff was then used to design appropriate tools, according to three criteria: (a) Methodological rigour, richness and reliability of results; (b) Adaptability to the target group (children and youth) and to the existing modes of activity of the CSO, based on arts and physical movement; (c) Ease of use and low resource demands, so that they can be replicated without external input.

Assessment Tools

Assessment Tool Used	Indicators Tested
Spatial/corporal survey	All Unity in Diversity indicators (Juarahu) CR_3072 (schools)
Focus group	All Unity in Diversity indicators (Juarahu)
Word elicitation – hand painting	CR_3072 (Juarahu)
Theatrical comprehension test	CR_3056 (Juarahu)
Key informant interview	U_H2 (Juarahu); CR_3048, 3058, 3059, 3060, 3063 (schools)
Indirect measures	CR_3039, 3056 (schools)

(a) Spatial survey: Each of the Unity in Diversity indicators was converted into a question with a three-point scale of responses (A lot – More or less – A little), represented by three different colours. A large spiral was formed with cloths of the three colours and after each question, the Juarahu youth were asked to stand on the colour best reflecting their response. In the schools programme, the playground was divided into three areas representing the scale points and the children were asked to move into one of them, according to their response.

(b) Focus group: Used as follow-up to spatial survey to explore differences and gain deeper insights.

(c) Word elicitation – hand painting circle: Each participant was asked to do a painting on their neighbour’s hand to represent their feelings at the end of a reforestation campaign, and then to describe their painting, while the researcher and coordinator recorded the emotional vocabulary used. Individual word lists were aggregated for a group perspective.



(d) Theatrical comprehension test: Theatre was used as a vehicle for a traditional comprehension test, role-playing either multiple choice answers, and letting the youth choose the one they felt was accurate, or role-playing a process with errors and asking them to spot them and explain why they were erroneous.

(e) Key informant interview: In-depth interviews with project coordinators were used to supplement the information obtained through other methods.

(f) Indirect measures: The team collected information on the state of the tree nurseries in participating schools, and numerical data on the survival of seedlings and trees.

Other Lessons Learned

Creativity and responsiveness to local culture: Locally meaningful symbols such as spirals and the use of coloured cloth, already incorporated into Echeri’s regular arts programs, were used to make the spatial survey more relevant to the young participants. Word elicitation, a research method often used in psychology, was enhanced by combining it with a hand-painting exercise.