

Toward a Regenerative Future: Embedding Eco-Systemic Flourishing in Global Governance and Educational Frameworks

Executive Summary

This white paper proposes the adoption of the **Eco-Systemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework** as a global standard for measuring, nurturing, and sustaining human and planetary well-being. Rooted in a unitive narrative, relational ethics, developmental neuroscience, and systems thinking, the ESF Framework integrates ecological sustainability, social equity, and cultural regeneration. Drawing on the foundational ethics articulated in the 1993 Declaration *Towards a Global Ethic*,ⁱ leading neurobiological moral development theories and evidence-based educational practices, the ESF Framework is positioned to align and enhance global initiatives such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)ⁱⁱ, the Inner Development Goals (IDGs)ⁱⁱⁱ, the Earth Charter^{iv} and emerging frameworks such as the People's Pact for the Future^v and the Future Generations Index.^{vi}

Through its integrated matrix of seven human developmental levels and four systemic domains, the ESF model enables holistic assessment, regenerative policy design, and culturally responsive implementation strategies that nurture wellbeing across lifespans, ecosystems, and societies. It offers a dynamic platform for creating metrics, methodologies, and narratives that reflect the deep interdependence between people, place, and planet.

1. The Moral and Developmental Foundations of ESF

The ESF Framework is grounded in an ethical foundation that affirms the universality of shared human values. The 1993 Declaration **Towards a Global Ethic**, developed under the leadership of theologian Hans Küng and endorsed by the Parliament of the World's Religions, identifies four moral imperatives—nonviolence, justice, truthfulness, and gender equality—that are reflected across spiritual traditions worldwide. In 2018, a fifth directive was added: sustainability and care for the Earth, signalling a moral evolution aligned with planetary stewardship.

These values are mirrored in the **Earth Charter**, which calls for a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. The Earth Charter's holistic principles reinforce the ethical basis for ESF and provide a precedent for globally adopted ecological and moral commitments. They mirror Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical **Laudato Si'**^{vii} which called for a profound reorientation of human activity toward relationality, ecological stewardship, and regenerative living. This criticized the technocratic and consumerist paradigms that dominate modern societies, and emphasized instead the need for an '*Integral Ecology*' that recognizes the deep interdependence of humans, other species, and the Earth itself.

They also all reflect the values of **Traditional Knowledge Systems**, which have long emphasized the interconnectedness of life, reciprocity, and the sacredness of all beings. Indigenous principles—such as '*All my relations*' and '*Seventh Generation Thinking*' offer more than environmental insights; they offer relational cosmologies that restore balance between human communities and the more-than-human world. ESF honours this epistemological lineage by integrating relational, cyclical, and place-based wisdom into its structure and indicators. Together, these knowledge systems articulate the *why* and *how* of human morality: why shared values are essential for global flourishing, and how

relational, ecological, and developmental conditions enable their realization. The ESF Framework synthesizes these insights into a practical, systemic model for guiding human development within planetary limits.

2. Neurophilosophy and Human Flourishing

Ethics alone, however, are insufficient without understanding the developmental conditions under which values and worldviews emerge. **The Flourish Model** was developed to emphasize the importance of early human development to the formation of optimised worldviews and values, and leading researchers have confirmed the importance of early life environments in shaping ethical behavior. It has become increasingly clear that secure attachment, nature connection, and community embeddedness foster neurobiological conditions conducive to empathy, cooperation, and pro-social action, and this starts in babyhood.^{viii}

Neurophilosophy is a new interdisciplinary field that synthesizes neuroscience and philosophy to investigate the biological roots of thought, perception, consciousness, ethics, and identity. In the context of Eco-Systemic Flourishing, it offers profound insights into how human values, beliefs, and behaviours are shaped not only by cultural narratives and institutional systems but also by neurobiological development and ecological attunement. This emerging field shows that moral reasoning, empathy, and even spiritual awareness are not abstract faculties but embodied capacities—developed through neural pathways conditioned by early experiences, social environments, and interactions with the natural world.

In the context of the Eco-Systemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework, neurophilosophy provides a crucial foundation for understanding how human values, beliefs, and behaviours are not just taught or chosen, but *emerge from embodied neural development shaped by relational, ecological, and cultural environments*. It affirms that flourishing is not merely a matter of external conditions or policy—but is deeply entangled with brain architecture, neuroplasticity, and experiential learning.

This perspective has profound implications for global governance, education, and wellbeing strategies. It highlights that:

- **Ethical worldviews** are neurologically embodied and must be nurtured through nested environments of safety, care, empathy, and meaningful connection.
- **Belief systems** are not static but are dynamically formed and re-formed through social interaction and cultural feedback loops.
- **Behaviours** rooted in compassion, cooperation, and ecological stewardship can be cultivated when the nervous system is supported by prosocial, nurturing contexts.

Neurophilosophy thus reinforces the importance of ESF's emphasis on early development, relational environments, and value-driven education. It challenges reductionist views of human nature and instead supports a **holistic paradigm of flourishing**—one where inner transformation and systemic change are co-evolving aspects of the same regenerative journey. In alignment with Indigenous principles^{ix}, it promotes a sacred science of interconnectedness, where the nervous system is understood as responsive not just to other humans, but to all sentient beings and natural forces. This view aligns with neurobiological research demonstrating that awe, reverence, and ecological empathy can stimulate cooperative and compassionate behaviours through vagal tone^x and right-hemispheric activation^{xi}. By embedding these insights into ESF's structural logic, we ground the vision

of flourishing not merely in ideological ideals but in a biologically and existentially coherent map of human potential.

3. Core Architecture of the ESF Framework

The ESF Framework is built around a multidimensional matrix that interweaves human developmental psychology with socio-ecological systems thinking.

It includes:

- **Four Systemic Domains:**
 - **Natural Environment (NE):** Ecosystem integrity, biodiversity, and climate resilience
 - **Circular and Regenerative Economy (CRE):** Inclusive, sustainable, and regenerative economic systems
 - **Cultural Values and Identity (CVI):** Social cohesion, narrative diversity, and intercultural respect
 - **Human Capacities and Potential (HCP):** Holistic development of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects
- **Seven Levels of Human Development:**
 - **Security** – Physical and emotional safety
 - **Relationship** – Connection, belonging, and love
 - **Independence** – Autonomy, agency and access
 - **Engagement** – Meaningful involvement and learning
 - **Fulfilment** – Joy, self-expression, and spiritual meaning
 - **Contribution** – Civic participation and shared responsibility
 - **Growth** – Lifelong learning, legacy, and intergenerational equity
- **Integrated Assessment Tools (under development)**
 - The **Integrated Wellbeing Evaluation Form** will encourage institutions to measure systemic wellbeing.
 - The **Community Evaluation Guide** will empower local stakeholders to assess collective progress.
 - The **Ecosystemic Flourishing Indicators** will link subjective wellbeing with ecological, cultural, and economic outcomes, supporting both qualitative and quantitative assessment.

This architecture supports policy development, educational reform, and community regeneration by providing tools for integrated diagnostics, planning, and impact measurement.

4. Strategic UN Alignment Opportunities

The ESF Framework aligns with and strengthens key global agendas, offering systems coherence and value integration:

- **Unitive Narrative Integration:** Central to the ESF framework is the promotion of a unitive narrative—a story of humanity rooted in interdependence, shared destiny, and kinship with all life. This narrative transcends geopolitical, cultural, and economic divisions by inviting a collective reimagining of progress not as domination, but as mutual thriving. A unitive narrative underpins global ethics and regenerative governance, cultivating empathy across boundaries and reweaving a sense of global citizenship grounded in ecological humility and intergenerational care.
 - **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Integration:** ESF cross-maps indicators across all 17 SDGs, enabling relational tracking and coherence between goals. For example, SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 13 (Climate Action) are inherently interconnected through ESF's developmental and ecological lenses.
 - **Inner Development Goals (IDGs):** ESF amplifies the IDGs by embedding moral development, emotional intelligence, and relational awareness in both individual and collective flourishing.
 - **Future Generations Index:** ESF provides metrics and narratives that support long-term stewardship, integrating legacy-building and intergenerational justice as core policy goals.
 - **Global Digital Compact:** ESF offers a robust conceptual framework for the ethical design of digital wellbeing platforms and planetary dashboards, integrating nature-based metrics, community resilience data, and child/youth-centred indicators.
 - **Earth Charter:** The ESF Framework aligns with the Earth Charter's ethical pillars of ecological integrity, social and economic justice, democracy, nonviolence, and peace. It operationalizes these principles through its indicators and developmental domains, translating the Earth Charter's vision into actionable community, educational, and governance strategies.
 - **People's Pact for the Future:** As part of the global consultation process accompanying the United Nations Pact for the Future, the People's Pact calls for participatory, justice-based frameworks that embed ecological wisdom, intergenerational solidarity, and community leadership. ESF aligns with this vision by offering a tangible model that operationalizes these demands through cross-sectoral systems change.
 - **Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home:** Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* calls for an "integral ecology" that recognizes the profound interconnectedness between humans, society, and the natural world. The ESF Framework embodies this vision by embedding ecological stewardship, relational responsibility, and spiritual flourishing at its core. It operationalizes *Laudato Si'*'s ethical imperative to care for our common home through its dynamic, nested model of flourishing that integrates human, community, and planetary well-being.
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5. Proposed Implementation Pathways

- **Policy Toolkit for Member States:** Development of an ESF-aligned policy toolkit to support national and local governments in adopting integrated wellbeing metrics. This includes policy alignment templates, participatory evaluation methods, and guidance for cross-sectoral collaboration.
- **Pilot Programs and Global Networks:** Launch pilot programs in cities and communities aligned with the Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo), UNESCO Learning Cities, and UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities. These pilots will test the ESF framework in school curricula, community planning, and local governance.
- **Education Transformation:** Embed ESF in formal and informal education systems, emphasizing:
 - Place-based and nature-integrated learning
 - Spiritual, ethical, and contemplative pedagogy
 - Interdisciplinary and project-based regenerative learning
- **Knowledge Partnerships:** Collaborate with the OECD Better Life Index, the World Happiness Report, the Inner Development Goals initiative, and Future Generations Commissions to harmonize ESF data with global wellbeing metrics.

6. Why ESF Now?

The 21st century faces a confluence of existential risks: ecological overshoot, biodiversity loss, social inequality, democratic erosion, and a global crisis of meaning. At the heart of this polycrisis is a fractured worldview that separates humans from nature and one another.^{xii}

The ESF Framework responds with a paradigm of relational Interbeing. It integrates:

- **Scientific insights** (systems theory, planetary boundaries, developmental neuroscience)
- **Spiritual wisdom** (indigenous cosmologies, contemplative traditions, deep ecology)
- **Educational innovation** (regenerative, trauma-informed, place-based learning)

In doing so, it presents a compelling vision for leadership that centres compassion, ecological stewardship, and co-evolutionary development. ESF is not a replacement but a synthesis and elevation of existing efforts, offering a unifying compass for policy, pedagogy, and practice.

Conclusion

The ESF Framework represents a watershed moment in the evolution of wellbeing governance. As the United Nations advances its *Pact for the Future*, it must adopt frameworks that transcend fragmented metrics and embrace the full spectrum of human and planetary thriving.

ESF is such a framework: grounded in moral clarity, developmentally informed, ecologically embedded, and globally adaptable. It provides the architecture and tools needed to shift from extractive systems to regenerative societies—where people, place, and planet flourish together.

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- ⁱ **Parliament of the World's Religions.** (1993). *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*. Retrieved from <https://parliamentofreligions.org>
- ⁱⁱ **United Nations General Assembly.** (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, 42809, 1-13
- ⁱⁱⁱ **IDG Foundation (2024).** Inner Development Goals. Transformational Skills for Sustainable Development. Stockholm: IDG Foundation.
- ^{iv} **Earth Charter Initiative.** (2000). *The Earth Charter*. Retrieved from
- ^v **United Nations.** (2023). *Pact for the Future: Zero Draft*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org>
- ^{vi} **UNESCO.** (2021). *Futures of Education: Learning to Become*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org>
- ^{vii} **Francis.** (2015) *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- ^{viii} **Narvaez, D.** (2014). *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality: Evolution, Culture, and Wisdom*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- ^{ix} **Jacobs, D. T., Cajete, G., Cajete, G., Lee, J.** (2010). *Critical Neurophilosophy and Indigenous Wisdom*. Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- ^x **Porges, S. W. (2011).** *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- ^{xi} **McGilchrist, I. (2009).** *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*. New Haven: Yale University Press.