



## **Past, Present, and Future Conflicts and Protest: Roles of Local-to-Global-to-Planetary Citizenship**

Oluwadamilola Oke, Nabiha Qureshi, Jaella Wengel, Ana C. Velazquez

### Introduction

For the last five months, we have developed a research-driven curriculum based on sustainable practices in Bhopal, India. Primary and secondary research reveal how interconnected sustainability is with frameworks such as ecofeminism, just transitioning, and planetary citizenship. Our findings sought answers to the following questions: First, how can we leverage local contexts and identities in developing sustainability-driven curriculum? Second, how do intersections between ecofeminism, planetary citizenship, and self-worth manifest in discussing ‘a just transition’? Third, what does it mean to educate for sustainability in a postcolonial world? Fourth, how can people with different, often contrary, values become willing to cooperate?

### Foundational Research

#### Initial Research and Connections

One of the key frameworks we worked with was planetary citizenship. While state citizenship describes one individual’s political status within a given country, planetary citizenship describes our duty to protect the global climate. Engin Isin in their book “Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship” articulates citizenship as an act rather than a status, performed through claims instead of conferred by legal institutions. Planetary citizenship becomes especially significant in the Global South. These communities bear the brunt of climate change and biodiversity loss, yet are excluded from global conversations about environmental governance.

The crux of planetary citizenship lies with education, as information sharing is vital for any interconnected shift to occur. This interconnectedness is what connects education to planetary citizenship, as we learn more about personal ecological duty and communal support of the environment.

Ecofeminism shares a similar level of intersectionality by linking environmental sustainability with social justice, gender equity, and education. It critiques exploitative systems—patriarchal, colonial, and capitalistic—that take advantage of women and the environment. Additionally, ecofeminism emphasizes mutual care and cooperation for a future without extractive carbon-intensive economies.

These frameworks build upon the notion of justice in sustainability, otherwise called the just transition framework. Just transition insists that the shift to green economies must be fair, participatory, and inclusive. While often used in the context of energy or employment systems, we extend its logic into the realm of education and civic identity. A truly just transition cannot focus solely on decarbonization. It must also tackle structural inequalities shaping who has access to power, knowledge, and safety.

### *Setting: Bhopal, India*

Equally important to our secondary research was our time in Bhopal, India, where we taught at Mahashakti Seva Kendra (MSK). MSK is a nonprofit educating women between the ages of 18-34 on sustainability and computer skills, with the purpose of empowering them to thrive in a context that reduces the influence of men.

The legacy of the 1984 gas tragedy is still intensely felt in Bhopal. Traditional gender roles position women as the primary caregivers and managers of household resources, while placing them at the frontline of environmental harm. Additionally, many women suffer chronic health issues such as respiratory illnesses, reproductive complications, miscarriages, and gynecological disorders as a result of the gas leak. Their specific needs were largely overlooked in relief and rehabilitation efforts, reflecting broader gendered exclusions in disaster response and environmental governance.

## Findings

After months of research and discussions with educational experts concerning just transitioning, we traveled to Bhopal to teach our initial lesson plan. During our first day at MSK, we instructed each student to share with us what social topic they wanted to explore most. We expected to see answers about sustainability and just transitioning, but instead most students asked about the basics of gender studies. These inquiries shifted our lesson plans for the week. Our new plans focus on gender and justice then explore sustainability concepts.

For the final day, we made a new lesson plan focusing on mindfulness and confidence building. We walked them through breathing exercises and positive affirmations in both group and individual settings. Phrases we used included “you are brave,” “healing is meant for me,” and “I am loved.” Many girls noted they had never heard such affirming words spoken to them before. These affirmations practiced ecofeminist solidarity, transforming abstract ideas about collective liberation into lived experience fostering individual agency and healing.

## Mainstreaming Sustainability

The complex environmental challenges of our time demand innovative frameworks that inspire cooperation beyond boundaries. Environmental systems and their associated problems do not respect the arbitrary lines humans have drawn across the Earth. Yet, our ethical consciousness and political institutions struggle to address global ecological crises.

Moving beyond traditional environmental education, we embraced ecofeminist praxis to frame conservation as both personal healing and political resistance. We shared our own experiences of subjugation as women, highlighting how power is denied to women in the U.S. and India, though in different ways. Our workshop ultimately showed that sustainability education is most transformative when it addresses emotional realities and power dynamics, linking environmental care to women’s autonomy and justice.

Postcolonial ecofeminism, as explored in *Postcolonial Feminism: The Ecological Crisis and its Intersections with Colonialism and Women’s Oppression*, highlights how ecological destruction is entangled with colonial histories and the oppression of women. Colonial dispossession, patriarchal violence, and relentless ecocide are not unfortunate coincidences operating independently. Rather, they are intertwined mechanisms originating from the progressivist and productivist imperial paradigm. In response, traditional feminism must evolve beyond additive approaches that risk appeasement with offers of “a more just neoliberalism.”

We introduced our mindfulness lesson by connecting peace of mind to cleanliness outside. If there is pollution outside, it is difficult to focus and move forward with the day’s tasks. Similarly, if your mind is not clear and supported, it is difficult to do these very same tasks. We found that these affirmations increased the girls’ confidence and helped them better conceptualize lesser known effects of intensive pollution.

## Developing a Framework

Rather than treating our frameworks as abstract ideals, we tested them on the field, examining how lived experiences and local context organically shaped the outcome in real time. Instead of presenting ourselves as experts, we engaged in co-creation, dialogue, and reflection.

Planetary citizenship was not taught as a concept, but experienced as a process. Our activities focused on value exploration allowed them to see their experiences as both valid and essential. Leadership became visible when participants began suggesting community-facing sustainability actions, such as waste reduction strategies or social messaging. For many, it was the first time an educational space positioned them as protagonists in their own learning.

Emerging from this synthesis is a vision of planetary feminism connecting social reproduction with ecological regeneration. With this planetary perspective, feminism can contribute to a fundamentally decolonial project by way of creating more just and sustainable ways of living. What remains is the challenge to develop concrete strategies for transformative and cooperative engagement in local-global environmental struggles.

Our model affirms that emotional and political agency are interwoven, and sustainability education must address social and environmental restoration. In Bhopal, where historical harm intersects with gendered vulnerability, this approach offers an actionable justice-driven pedagogy for transformative learning.

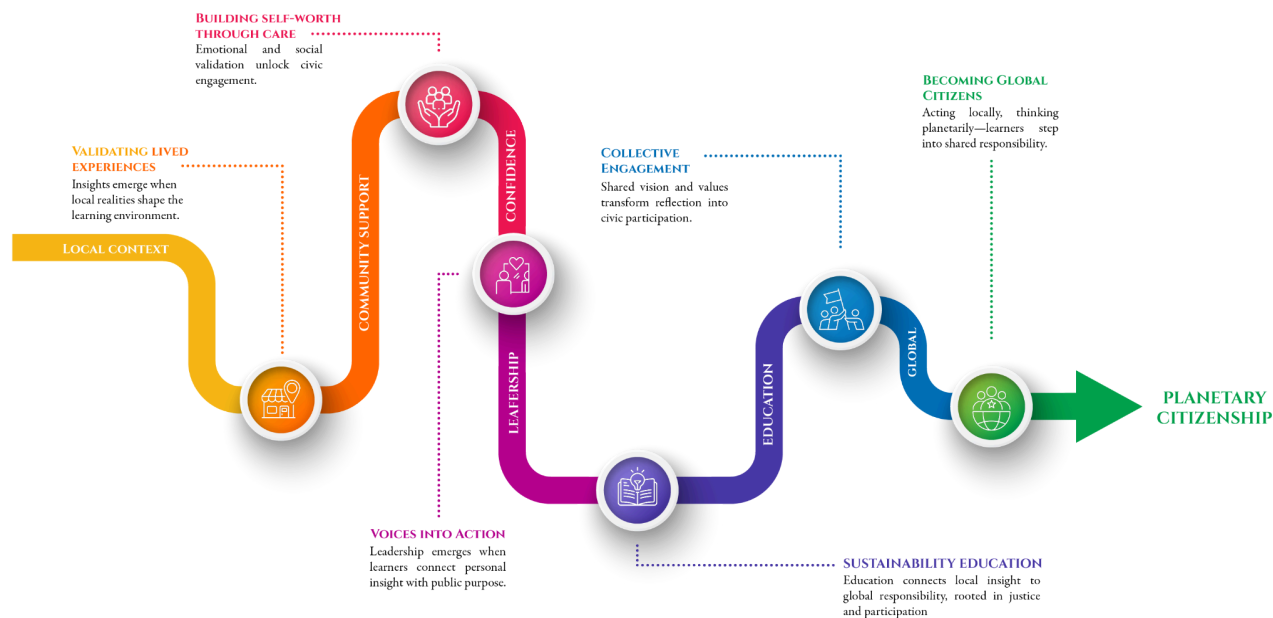


Figure 1. Pathways to Planetary Citizenship.

## Conclusion

As environmental crises of our time deepen, the urgency for solutions that transcend disciplinary and geographical borders becomes more apparent. Through our collaboration with MSK in Bhopal, we witnessed firsthand how questions of sustainability cannot be divorced from the social and emotional realities of those most affected.

Integrating planetary citizenship, ecofeminism, and just transition principles proved to be not only a robust theoretical approach, but also a transformative one when embedded within educational practice. The women we worked with were not passive recipients of knowledge, but active participants in shaping the curriculum.

Our framework recognized that sustainability is never neutral. It is shaped by histories of harm, systems of exclusion, and the resilient practices of those long left at the margins. Grounded in care, solidarity, and co-creation, our work addresses both the planetary scale of crisis and the intimate scale of daily life. It does not offer a fixed model, but an invitation to imagine sustainability differently.

## *References*

Isin, E. F. (2002). *Being political: Genealogies of citizenship*. University of Minnesota Press.

*UNFCCC 2023 Highlights*. Unfccc.int. (2023). <https://unfccc.int/about-us/2023-highlights>

*Postcolonial Ecofeminism: The Ecological Crisis and Its Intersections with Colonialism and Women's Oppression in Vandana Shiva, Arundhati Roy, and Amitav Ghosh* (Master's thesis, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, 2018),  
<https://unitesi.unive.it/retrieve/0f269fd8-04e3-4320-b32a-ef40b92b1f34/846320-1223979.pdf>.