



SDG 18: ACTIVE EMPATHY FOR LIFE

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"The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would be enough to solve most of the world's problems." Gandhi

Active Empathy for Life

When I was 4 years old, I moved with my mother and brothers to my grandparents' house. Next to the house, separated by a large wall and accessible by a gate, was an old orchard that became a refuge for me and my handicapped older brother. A magical place to my eyes and heart, full of trees, hiding places, bugs, and greenery, that raised me to be free and explore, giving me security and unconditional love. There I met nature, and developed a bond with her, with Mother Earth. She taught me that there is not only what you see, but also what you feel. That what we do to others, we do to ourselves. I learned to love her and take care of her. Later, those lessons allowed me to understand that our purpose as a human species is to build a better world and we will achieve it when our decisions and actions have a positive impact on our well-being, other people and nature.

From then on, I looked for that "something", which is felt and cannot be seen. That intangible thing that is the fiber of our "humanity" and it seems that we are losing, and with it, our ability to redirect our way of life for the common good. Along with a group of entrepreneurs we started with the word "empathy" which is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as: "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another". "Another" is understood by the majority as a person and we felt that it was important to include the natural world in that term and thus we arrived at "Empathy for Life". We also consider that "understanding" is not enough, we need to "do", and thus we arrive at "Active Empathy for Life" understood as "the ability to prioritize the common good through daily actions that generate well-being in oneself, other people and Mother Earth". In this definition, "oneself" includes body, mind, and spirit; "Other people" include family, those whom we know and those whom we do not see, including our ancestors and the unborn; Mother Earth includes plants, animals, air, water, soil, and ecosystems. This definition has been constructed considering the worldview of indigenous peoples and western urban culture.

The next question was what do we do to develop "active empathy for life" in the population? I had the answer since my childhood: facilitating that new generations grow up in regular and positive contact with nature so that they can enjoy and love her. More than 25 years working on it taught me two additional and essential lessons for the above to take effect: we must consider nature as a subject and not as an object, and children as agents of change and not as "incomplete adults" unable to contribute to society. Currently, there are multiple investigations that show how regular contact with nature contributes significantly to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional development of children and behaviors that take care of the environment, (Cohen and Horm, 1993; Wilson, 1993; Sobel, 1990; Sobel, 1996; Kellert and Kahn, 2002; Chawla and Derr, 2012).

Active Empathy for Life and the Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, the member countries of the United Nations approved the 2030 Agenda as a roadmap to face the growing problems that plague our planet and move towards a more inclusive, peaceful, prosperous, and environmentally sustainable world. The 2030 Agenda has 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that include: no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships for the goals. These in turn have 169 targets to be achieved by the year 2030, that is, in 10 years, the time we have according to science to react, turn from an unsustainable world, and move towards a sustainable one. It is evident that it will not be easy to achieve it since many deny it and others consider it impossible. For this reason, we consider that one more SDG is needed, one that contains the spiritual dimension of the human being, the sense of oneness and interdependence with our surroundings, and inspires us to modifying our conduct and practices in favor of a better world. This SDG is "Active Empathy for Life", a goal that is rooted in the 17 UN SDGs and



that will contribute to have a holistic approach towards them, sustaining and catalyzing their achievements. This is how "SDG 18" was born, as an unofficial sustainable development goal promoted by people, groups, and organizations from civil society.

SDG 18: Active Empathy for Life

In 2019, in Peru, the Association for Children and their Environment (ANIA) and 30 other associations and organizations, the majority led by young entrepreneurs, adopted Active Empathy for Life (AEL) as SDG 18. We were convinced that to solve global problems and move towards sustainable development it is essential that new generations grow up with AEL, and that for this to happen we need Mother Earth as an ally. Who better than life herself to teach us to love and care for her.

The SDG 18 targets are:

- Target 18.1 Promote Active Empathy for Life in the world.
- Target 18.2 Value nature as a subject of rights, as Mother Earth, and the ancestral wisdom that cares for her.
- Target 18.3 Value and empower the new generations as agents of change for sustainable development.
- Target 18.4 Promote the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (UN).

To help achieve these goals, we created the website: www.ods18.com. Through it, people of all ages, associations and organizations are invited to actively participate in promoting SDG18. On the website there is a section for "children" and another for "young people and adults" with commitments to assume voluntarily. In the children's section there is a message that Mother Earth gives them, for which Jane Goodall and Gisele Bündchen have collaborated with their voices in English and Portuguese, respectively. It is intended that children take ownership of SDG18 and in doing so put into practice actions that contribute to the 17 UN SDGs.

Associations and organizations are invited to participate by assuming three commitments:

- ✓ Practice the principles and values that are the essence of Active Empathy for Life: generate health and well-being in people and Mother Earth with affection, equity, peace, coherence, and transparency.
- ✓ Through its website or social networks, make visible the UN SDGs to which it contributes and SDG 18.
- ✓ Share on their social networks the actions they carry out to promote Active Empathy for Life.

In this section there is a letter that you download, subscribe, and send to formalize the commitment. The SDG 18 logo can be downloaded in all sections for consistent use.

Vision 2030

Active Empathy for Life is an ability valued and adopted by society on a global level. Nature is recognized as a subject of rights, as Mother earth, and children as agents of change. The new generations grow up in regular and positive contact with nature and take part in actions that develop an emotional bond with her and other people. Schools of early education, primary, secondary, and superior education incorporate Mother Earth as a teacher. They institutionalize *Nature's classroom* as part of its infrastructure. This "classroom" is used as a space for emotional containment, a pedagogical resource across all curricular areas. It is an ally in the development of values and attitudes in favor of life and sense of purpose in students. Schools adopt an evaluation system that goes beyond the knowledge acquired and values and records its use for generating well-being for oneself, other people, and nature. Those who practice Active Empathy for Life are valued in society and are prioritized in public and private positions linked to the well-being of people and the care of the environment. SDG 18 is recognized as a catalyst for the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals and an initiative that inspires and empowers people to adopt healthy, sustainable, and resilient lifestyles that contribute to the common good.



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Joaquin Leguia Orezzoli has a Bachelor in Natural Sciences from Cornell University and a Master of Environmental Management from Yale University. He is founder and director of the Asociación para la Niñez y su Ambiente - ANIA, www.aniaorg.pe and creator of the character Ania, the methodology "Children's Land", Carbon for Education, Bonus for Environmental Services in Values and Education and promoter of SDG 18: Active Empathy for Life. Joaquín is a Fellow of the world network of social entrepreneurs of Ashoka and has received various recognitions such as being named Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum (2007), the recognition by the Ministry of the Environment of Peru for his contribution to the natural heritage of Peru (2009), the Miguel Grau award in values (2018 - Peru), and a Diploma of Honor from the Congress of the Republic for contributing to Peruvian society (2018 - Peru).

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