

Culture, Community, and Conservation: The Impact of Social Values on Environmental Stewardship

Dr. Ajeet Kumar Dixit¹ & Dr. Durga Prasad Pandey²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Karm Kshetra P.G. College Etawah U.P.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Maharaja Harishchandra P.G. College Moradabad U.P.

EMail- ajeetkd11@gmail.com & EMail- durgapandey.svg@gmail.com

Abstract

The present research paper examines the impact of socially developed beliefs and cultural values on the personal and group approaches to environmental conservation. It states that environmental behavior is not just a consequence of awareness, but it demonstrates highly embedded cultural inclinations and social standards. The research is based on the Value-Belief-Norm framework and considers the process of interaction between individual and social expectations to generate pro-environmental behaviour. The available evidence on the experience of various societies shows that the cultural systems with a collectivist orientation, where interdependence and shared responsibility are paramount, have a stronger moral commitment towards conservation than those with an individualistic orientation, where the interests of a person are often in the foreground in comparison to communal goals. The research also shows the importance of normative framework and peer processes in supporting sustainable practices, in which the ecological awareness can be transformed into routine with the help of shared standards. Besides that, the analysis assesses the role of media discourses in creating environmental meaning and interacting by creating culturally compelling discourses. Finally, the importance of the study of culture as a part of environmental policy-making and educational interventions is reinforced by the findings to respond to the needs of the conservation effort by addressing the values and beliefs held locally. Local values and beliefs can be promoted through ecological stewardship and collective strength by conservation strategies that are aligned with them. As a result, the authors draw a conclusion that sustainable futures realization does (and must) depend not only on technological progress but also on the development of culturally-based systems that support the positive ethical symbiosis between the human communities and the natural world.

Keywords: Environmental Conservation, Value-Belief-Norm Theory (VBN), Pro-environmental Behavior, Collectivism and Individualism, Ecological Awareness, Environmental Stewardship.

Introduction

When one considers the connections between social beliefs and environmental conservation, one realizes that cultural values are some of the core factors in shaping individual behaviors in terms of environmental protection. Social beliefs which entail collective attitude, rules and values, widespread in a community primarily, what people think are their environmental responsibilities and consequently, as they take action on such beliefs. It is especially important to understand how these social beliefs interact with the actions of individuals, especially when considering the modern-day environmental problems, such as climate change, biodiversity and pollution loss. These issues are pressing, and this fact makes the interaction between social values and individual behavior closer, as it is important that successful conservation is frequently based on community interaction and mutual activity. There could not be enough emphasis put on the role of cultural values in the models of individual response to environmental issues. Various cultures develop regimes of different values—occurring between individualism and collectivism and profitable ecological ethics—and these directly affect consciousness and environmental activism. An example is that when nature is held as being of inherent value within a culture, people can initiate conservation efforts (recycling, environmental policy promotion, etc.) more quickly than in cultures where nature is viewed primarily as a means to be used. In addition to this, informal rules of the community that serve as guidelines on how people conduct themselves may be used to promote or deter environmental activities. When a community takes sustainability as a shared value and feeds the practices that could enhance environmental management, it is highly likely that the individual in that community could also develop the same behavior.

The theory of the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) can be used to provide a helpful picture to examine how social beliefs can be converted into conservation actions. The theory, which was proposed by Paul Stern in 1999, asserts that individual values mediate beliefs regarding ecological crisis, and consequently, give rise to a given set of rules that will direct key actions in opposition to the environment. The theory states that as one has a great biospheric shade, which puts the welfare of the environment and living things first, then he/she is more likely to formulate ideologies pertaining to how serious the environmental problems are. This increased concern then develops the individual rules that reinforce the individual to act towards the conservation of the environment. This theoretical framework has been verified in recent studies, which demonstrate that the pro-environmental behavior of people is usually consistent with their values and beliefs that are mediated by social factors (Liobikienė and Poškus, 2019). The analysis of social beliefs in the VBN framework shows why people behave to conserve something. It also draws attention to the importance of social contexts in favoring or preventing these actions. It is through crushing how the collective cultural values and the community rules model the individual response to environmental crisis that we can be able to comprehend the conditions needed to encourage mass environmental action. The modern environment issues cannot be tackled by the efforts of an individual, but instead, a collective social movement towards sustainability is needed. The

knowledge of interdependencies among cultural orientations, community expectations and individual behavior can be a fundamental foundation of the establishment of effective strategies that enhance both awareness and engagement in the conservation efforts to enhance the overall resiliency of environmental systems. Cultural values play a pivotal role in determining the attitudes of individuals on environmental conservation, as well as, a framework, on which individuals interpret and respond to environmental problems.

There is a growing body of literature that cultural settings are instrumental in mobilizing the community norms and the impact of practical action taken to conserve the environment. In that regard, to consider, Chwialkowska et al. (2020), exhibit that common cultural beliefs may facilitate strong pro-environmental behavior. They are able to bring into the limelight the complexity of the association between societal values and sustainability efforts. As it is presented in their article, it is more likely in the cultures with a high level of collectivism that people will be involved in the environmentally friendly practices. Collectivist societies focus a lot on the welfare of the groups thus resulting in social responsibility towards environmental management, which means that, community involvement in conservation activities increases. This especially becomes apparent among the communities whose ecological knowledge is traditional and whose customs and local practices direct to the sustainable use of natural resources. As an example, the native cultures that focus on peace with nature tends to incorporate practices that do not only preserve biodiversity but can enhance the local ecosystems, since they are framed by their culture. On the other hand, individualist cultures may pose challenges to successful conservation of the environment. Individual prosperity and independence tend to be appreciated against community accountability in these settings and hence the poor environmental conditions. Based on their findings, it is possible to state that people living in individualist societies may resort to environmental activities primarily through the prism of personal costs analysis, which may subjugate collective conservation campaigns. The individualism values may also reduce the social pressure to engage in environmental programs since personal interests may overrule the environmental duties of the community.

The connection between culture and environmental behavior can be further complicated by social norms that can result due to the strong cultural values rooted in an organization. Environmental normative beliefs have the power to encourage or deter permanency in behavior of a community. Indicatively, where pro-environmental behavior are linked to the endorsement of prestige or social, people tend to engage in practices, regarding consideration, resource conservation and environmental advocacy by the virtue that they have been asked to participate. Conversely, communities in which destructive environmental behaviours are not criticized socially - or in which sustainability is not deemed viable or beneficial—might face considerable problems with the adoption of sound conservation practices as Sawitri, D. R. et al (2015) convince. Moreover, due to cultural differences, there might be diverse perceptions of threats to the environment. Chwialkowska et al. (2020) note that people of a culture that has a high sense of connection to

nature would be more likely to view the worsening of the environment differently than those who view nature as a domesticated or overexploited resource. This image difference can simply affect the intention of a person to take action in conserving the environment. As an illustration, the community that practices a cultural account that focuses on property stewardship would be more willing to support the policies that conserve natural habitats and enhance biodiversity. Ultimately, a cross of cultural values, community norm and personal action reveals a complicated dynamic that enhances/distracts conservation initiatives in different societies.

Pro-environmental culture values are imperative in ensuring that the community commitment and movement towards sustainability works out better. It also highlights the need to modify conservation policies by fitting it to fit different cultural frameworks in order to achieve maximum effectiveness. It points out the crucial nature of culturally informed approaches in the expanded environmental discourse. Community norms form important determinants of behavior of individuals especially in regard to environmental sustainability. Farrow et al. (2017) glossary the role of social norms as the guidelines that are exchanged on how one should act in a particular community in shaping conservation practices related to the environment. These norms can be effective inspirers of people. They are able to pressurize them to conform their behavior on the vision of the community in terms of environmental management. When they see what other members of the community do that sustain the environment, they tend to embrace such a behavior that leads to a collective action to carry out conservation behaviors. Effects of peers and social strengthening are the mechanisms through which community standards use their influence. People have the tendency to blend in with their peers and when pro-environmental behaviour is prevalent and celebrated within the society, there is an increased chance that people will emulate it. As a case in point, the campaigns about recycling or lesser use of plastic in the community can foster a sense of obliged compliance and hence more people will be attracted to the community campaigns. Farrow et al. (2017) underline that with perceived engagement of other people into conservation practices; the cue to pursue the given behavior grows stronger, making the culture of sustainability even more powerful.

The example of empirical cases that can demonstrate the effectiveness of community standards is the movement of transitional cities, which originates in the United Kingdom and is aimed at empowering the local communities so that they could carry out sustainable practices. The concept of transitional cities provides a common ground of action and the community members in the city come together to carry out different projects that include community gardens to renewable energies. These initiatives demonstrate how common standards can motivate substantial behavior change by fostering the sense of community identity through the lens of sustainability. The Totness transitional city has a community-oriented sustainability plan that has been implemented in a case and incorporated considerable investments in the local food systems and resource conservation educational programs. As a result, a community of individual actors has not only moved towards sustainable practices but also spread them as a social

convention in the broader community. Moreover, the analysis of the carbon reduction programs in the neighborhoods of the United States proves the usefulness of the community standards in designating behavior. According to the research, when the households are made aware of the efforts and the conservation of the energy of their neighbors, they are more disposed to align the energy consumption diagrams with the average standards set by the community. Indicatively, the achievement of some community organizations such as Eco-teams in the United Kingdom gave the participants comparative remarks regarding energy use in the contrast to fellow participants. Not only was this feedback encouraging the adherence to the energy saving behavior, but the concept of the responsibility of neighbors was also preferred, leading to a worldwide decrease in household energy usage.

Moreover, peer pressure is evident in the social media campaigns that exploit the social conventions by manipulating the environmental behavior through community norms. On purpose, these examples can be the difficulties and movements that make people realize the need to share their conservation steps, like the Free July campaign, that misuses a community structure and tries to make people have a collective identity as people concerned with the environment. The participants who share their online activities create visibility and act as informal reinforcement processes, therefore influencing others in the community to follow suit and to play a part in the process of a larger cultural change in the direction that will see the conservation of the environment. That is, according to the analysis of community norms, they are mighty to influence the individual conduct to the environmental sustainability. Guiding people in accordance with the expectations on the way acceptable behavior is and encouraging influence of peers, the communities can successfully result in a collective action in their conservation efforts, which will contribute to making the actual environmental changes. The case studies used in this discussion point to the persuasive interplay of community norms in the behavior of the individual, which can go further to bring collective efforts to enhance the effectiveness of a practice in environmental conservation. A variety of works represent the way social values have a moderating effect on the ecological management practices, not only on the individual behavior but also on the biggest projects of the community. To give a detailed examination of this dynamic, Ives and Kendal (2014) point to the pivotal importance of the social values in the management of natural resources. They say that when communities integrate and prioritize their values like sustainability, management and respect to biodiversity, it becomes translated into practical acts that will in effect enhance the practice of the conservation work to the environment. To this end, the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and management system founded on the community can be considered as a way of illustrating the potential of pursuing conservation with the help of cultural values. Conservation strategies are usually more effective in those regions where there is a high cultural connection of the local communities to their natural environments, such as those that are using the indigenous people in North America and also the Aboriginals in Australia. The association among community identity and culture and

environment enhance conservation behaviours that are consistent with values. The cases study highlights this by showing how the initiatives spearheaded by the natives have reinstated the native ecosystems, and at the same time preserved the cultural heritage (Berkes, 2009). Besides, the connection between the social norms and the political process cannot be overlooked regarding conservation. These policies which appeal to the values which are dominant in a given society stand more chances of achieving acceptance and compliance thereby resulting in successful approaches to environmental protection. As an example, the community forests management model (CFM) in Nepal where the local communities were granted authority in the management of the forest resources is an illustration of how the incorporation of the rules of the community in the political framework could lead to the positive outcomes. Local knowledge recognition and belief in community property have helped to decrease the rate of deforestation and enhance the biodiversity in the managed zones (Shrestha et al., 2018).

Individual behaviors that are directed towards conservation are also great in modeling by social norms. The studies conducted in the area demonstrate that the more people perceive the environmental activity like recycling or using organic products, like socially accepted behaviors or regulation acts, the more people become inclined to the practice of them (Cialdini et al., 2006). Such an influential concept as the social standard plays a central role in developing the programs which should be used to alter the attitudes of the community with regard to sustainability. It is with such social marketing campaigns exploiting such rules that the ecological behaviors have risen at significant levels of examination of the advantage of harmonizing the political strategies and conservation with the convictions of the community. The confluence of the social values and environmental policy can also be explained in terms of participatory governance. The development of initiatives that encourage the members' dedication to the decision making processes that link the environmental management is the realization of the role of the social beliefs importance. Communities tend to exhibit higher dedication in the implementation of the policies that they helped in the formulation of their cultural ideals. As an illustration, municipal processes of participatory budgeting in cities, where people allocate some of their local budgets to ecological initiatives, show how communities can be made to guide conservation practices through shared values (Pratt, 2016). In general, adherence to social ideas to the actions of the community proves that significant advantages can be brought to the environmental protection. The presence of the close relationship between cultural beliefs and the establishment of effective conservation policies, as well as the intrinsic association of cultural values, rules of the community and personal actions, the influential works in the given field seem to indicate that a collaborative approach to the environmental management may ensure better ecological outcomes. Studies have established that social beliefs play a great role in causing the individual motivation towards practicing consecrated beliefs. In this instance, Gifford and Nilsson (2014) formulate that individual and social issues play important functions in explaining pro-environmental behaviors model. Their photograph implicates that the individual actions are not necessarily directed by

environmental issues awareness or knowledge, but rather by dwelling upon the norms and values that characterize their community. Personality reaction to social beliefs may be demonstrated through the numerous practical activities which will be striving towards environmental preservation. These activities are held to the taking of sustainable consumption patterns, like, buying of eco-friendly products, engaging in local cleaning activities, and encouraging political reforms in the local politics. The community's rules can in most instances play a role of reinforcing the sustainability measures, which in turn forms a feedback loop that will lure on the continuation of further pro-environmental behavior. To take just one example, the recycling, composting and energy reduction rates tend to be greater in regions with high environmental cultures as the people are driven by the shared sustainability culture. The impact of cultural values on environmental behavior cannot be underrated in this queue. People have higher chances to participate in co-operative conservation in those societies where ethics of community liability is predominant. Search by Stern et al. (1999) expounds the manner of how values, e.g. altruism and collective well-being, can compel people to behave in a manner that priority is given to environment protection. Quite on the contrary, pro-environmental behaviors might not be so strong in such culture as emphasis is placed on individual benefits as opposed to shared goals during environmental preservation. The creation of awareness and education comes out as the determinant in bridging the disparity between what social beliefs and important actions. Educational programs are vital in the process of setting patterns on environmental ethics and enhancing a better learning of the ecological problems. Indicatively, the targeted educational campaigns that will underscore the effects of unsustainable practices and advocate benefits of conservation can be adopted to influence individuals to conform their behaviors to social congruencies as far as environmental management is concerned. According to Han et al. (2008), the enhancement of the environmental knowledge of an individual is usually related to the increased commitment of the individual towards the pro-environmental behaviors, which indicates that educational interventions can be successfully used to utilize the social beliefs to facilitate action. Moreover, the community-based participatory research has proved the efficiency of the educational programs in place in raising the level of awareness and environmental action. By modifying the educational materials to capture the culture of the community and the regulations, these programs can appeal to people on another level making them interested in adopting sustainable practices that might otherwise be deemed as too abstract or too unrelated. The interplay between knowledge and social thinking can also bring up the prospect of awareness programs that can bring in the powerful leaders of the community together or can use social marketing policy to shift perceptions and make a difference. Finally, personal behavior as an environmental protection is closely connected with the social ideologies, cultural values and rules in the community. Awareness, education and expectations of society convergence is not just the model but the key to pro-environmental behaviours and, therefore, the promotion of conservation culture should be provided through a complex approach taking into account not only the personal

motivation but also the structure of the broader society. It is a more and more important research topic to comprehend how the media can engage its members in practical and active measures to save nature, by promoting an environmental ethic based on the common values. According to Huang (2016), the media narratives are basic elements to construct and organize the idea of environment issues in the eyes of the populace and behaviors towards them. Media representations can either foster awareness and mobilization toward conservation activities or cause people to become apathetic and non-actionable because of the framework through which they perceive their environmental reality.

The framing methods by which the media presents the issue of environmental conservation has often encouraged people to understand and prioritize ecological issues differently. Indicatively, the defining an environmental crisis as acute and urgent can create the impression of crisis, which is emergency-inducing to people and the community. On the other hand, illustrating environmental degradation as distant or abstract problem can give rise to disengagement. According to Huang (2016), these types of narratives are not neutral; they are based on social beliefs, cultural values, and norms existing in a particular community. Without exception, the expression of nature, such as the diversity among the cultures, differs considerably, so as to impact the manner in which the person connects with the conservation efforts. In cultures in which nature is held as godly, media with greater focus on spiritual links can lead to increased individual dedication to environmental responsibility. Besides, media discourses can be influential to the level of collective activity. The social milieu created when conservation is made a hero by mediated framing of community values can generate more people willing to engage in the sustainable practices. The advertising campaigns emphasizing recycling or conservation are usually popular when they are incorporated into the discourses that are anticipated to prefigure civic pride and duty. As Huang (2016) remarks, depictions of effective community projects or active people might have a domino effect by inspiring others to do similar activities. This type of mass movement is often critical to its implementation of changes in policies and pushing environmental concerns to the higher ranks of the agenda. On the contrary, negative media discourses may augment social cynicism. In situations where the main discourse on environmental issues is that of sensationalism, which is, stressing on dire consequences without providing realistic remedies, people may feel ecological anxiety, the notion of powerlessness in response to environmental degradation. According to Huang (2016), persistent exposure to pessimistic environmental predictions, the lack of constructive stories and effective plans, may cause the disillusionment with the participatory activities because of hopelessness. Furthermore, the stories of the media can also react with the cultural values, either supporting or damaging collective environmental action. In societies that value the common good, stories that emphasize the communal conservation would fuel the involvement in group projects. Stories about personal responsibility and self-efficacy might be better received in individualist cultures, however. It follows that it is necessary to comprehend the role of different cultural frameworks in interacting

with media consideration in order to anticipate the effectiveness of conservation communication. Social beliefs with respect to environmental conservation can be applied to the ways of formulating effective communication strategies. An approach based on strategic composition, the consideration of local cultural parameters, and involving communities in the process is likely to develop a commitment to environmental governance. The engagement in this environment between the media, the values and normative behaviour has significant consequences on the prospects of environmental conservation and it would therefore be important to have reflexive media as the agents that trigger collective action to take place. The complexity between social beliefs, cultural values, community norms and behaviours of individuals makes a landmark step towards the comprehension of conservation activities. This study points out that the general disposition of people towards their environment is largely shaped by shared mentalities propagated in their cultures. Differences in cultural values in the context of different societies create dissimilar attitudes toward the management of the environment; by way of illustration, collectivism cultures tend to lead to a stronger feeling of responsibility towards communal resources, consequently encouraging sustainable practices in a more aggressive manner than individualistic societies, where the benefit of the collective can be obscured by the interests of particular groups (Manfredo et al., 2017). Culture and Cultural values Community norms play roles in manifestations of the culture. They set the criteria on which behaviours of the individuals are measured. The standards according to which pro-environmental behaviours are taken into account can create a social environment where green behaviours are encouraged, but are not only promoted, but also expected. An example of this is a campaign that can pick up in areas where environmentally conscious communities live and which socially support environmental stewardship. Based on the peer influence and the wish to abide by the communal standards, people in such environments tend to embrace more ecological friendly practices. The social learning consequence when followers seek other people to acquire the proper behaviour becomes significant in the process of matching personal activity to the norms of the society (Han, 2021). Moreover, even natural practices that benefit the environment conservation process are usually filled with values based on social assumptions. When people internalize the belief that to respect nature is right, they have a higher chance of adopting behaviours of minimizing the use of single-use plastics, limiting the consumption of water, and joining local Clean-up activities. The positive individual behaviours that have been generated through the positive influences of the social beliefs are shown by this feedback cycle to be not only generated by the social beliefs but also strengthen the beliefs that already exist in the broader society. This makes the environmental management a collective identity, which brings about more of an integration of the behavioural commitments of people within their cultural milieu.

The importance of developing the social support beliefs cannot be questioned. Within the current environment of increasing environmental crises, the introduction of culturally appealing values

the emphasis of which rests on sustainability is the most important. Interventions that seek to trigger individual conservation behaviours should be able to consider the complex cultural conditions and neighborhood dynamics. Some of the programs that are effective in incorporating the local values, such as the culturally sensitive environmental education or community-based conservation projects, could leverage individuals' internal motivations hence earning them a more sustainable future. Further on, the subsequent research must be focused on the elaboration of the strategies that would utilize the social values to improve the environmental management. Through the study of how the various cultures perceive and value the value of nature, scholars can find the ways through which more inclusive and effective conservation programs can be created. The exploration of these strategies expands our understanding of nexus of the social beliefs and individual behaviors. Also, it helps communities to develop resilience practices towards the environmental degradation. Long term dedication at different points of view, especially in terms of an interdisciplinary integrated endeavor, will be crucial to the development of this body of research and the global culture of sustainability. It is important to note the efforts of well-known researchers (e.g., Manfredo et al., 2017, and Han 2021) to recognize the valuable information that could be incorporated in future studies to make sure that human reaction towards environmental issues would be efficient, fair and interculturally acceptable.

Conclusion

The importance of developing the social support beliefs cannot be questioned. Within the current environment of increasing environmental crises, the introduction of culturally appealing values the emphasis of which rests on sustainability is the most important. Interventions that seek to trigger individual conservation behaviours should be able to consider the complex cultural conditions and neighborhood dynamics. Some of the programs that are effective in incorporating the local values, such as the culturally sensitive environmental education or community-based conservation projects, could leverage individuals' internal motivations hence earning them a more sustainable future. Further on, the subsequent research must be focused on the elaboration of the strategies that would utilize the social values to improve the environmental management. Through the study of how the various cultures perceive and value the value of nature, scholars can find the ways through which more inclusive and effective conservation programs can be created. The exploration of these strategies expands our understanding of nexus of the social beliefs and individual behaviors. Also, it helps communities to develop resilience practices towards the environmental degradation. Long term dedication at different points of view, especially in terms of an interdisciplinary integrated endeavor, will be crucial to the development of this body of research and the global culture of sustainability. It is important to note the efforts of well-known researchers (e.g., Manfredo et al., 2017, and Han 2021) to recognize the valuable information that could be incorporated in future studies to make sure that human reaction towards environmental issues would be efficient, fair and interculturally acceptable.

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