

Chapter 65

Discourse Analysis of Indigenous Women's Construct on Biodiversity and Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

Managing and understanding the environment and its issues is not limited to one environmental discourse but to numerous discourses. It is created through histories which result in contradictions as narratives may oppose each other. This opposition is considered an important aspect of discourse. This article explores how biodiversity and sustainable development were discursively constructed by indigenous women living in an agricultural society with distinct cultural practices closely linked to rice farming and examined the outcomes arising from their construction of biodiversity and sustainable development. Seven women farmers were interviewed and conversations were transcribed, coded and analyzed through discourse analysis using Maarten Hajer's conceptual tool. Five major discourses emerged from this study: conserving biodiversity through the notion of contrasting views on farming responsibilities, conserving biodiversity through a sense of community, sustainability of government initiatives, negotiating cultural heritage and economic benefits, and articulating sustainable development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Biodiversity's rapid loss is one of the most critical and crucial environmental problems faced by our society. Research studies in the past two decades have established people's growing dependence on biodiversity. This dependence heightened with economic growth especially among underprivileged citizens and in developing countries (Dobson, 1992; Guo, Zhang, Li, 2010; Yang et al., 2016; Yang, Dietz, Liu, & Liu 2016).

Biodiversity is a major theme among environmental discourses and discussions on sustainable development. In the last two decades, there have been worldwide efforts toward biodiversity conservation. During the 1992 United Nations Convention on Biodiversity in Rio de Janeiro, biodiversity was defined as "the variability among living organisms from all sources" which includes "terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems" (United Nations, 1992). This event led to Agenda 21's development where Chapter 15 also highlighted biodiversity conservation (Division of Sustainable Development, n.d.). In 2000, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment enabled the evaluation of ecosystem change's effect on human well-being. Two years later, the World Summit on Sustainable Development pushed to improve all life on earth by decreasing biodiversity loss and reducing the incidence of poverty by 2010 known as the International Year of Biodiversity.

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2011-2020 as the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity to advocate for harmonious relationship with the environment and mainstream biodiversity across all levels. These efforts culminated in 2015 with the countries' agreement on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the sustainable development goals. Goal 15 of the agenda is to "protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss" (UN, n.d.). Sustainable development encompasses economic, social, and environmental sustainability and sustained provision of material benefits (United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Its discourse sees various environmental issues as one global question of generating sustainable growth for the world (Gustafsson, 2013) and expresses the importance of cooperation among agencies, communities, and countries (Waters, 2008).

The most predominant environmental discourse is nature functioning as a resource to be exploited and refined for social and economic development. This view encompasses the discourse of sustainable development. It also supports the idea of science and technology managing environmental issues and creating social and economic growth (Gustafsson, 2013). It stemmed from the increased awareness on the link between environmental and socio-economic issues with poverty, health, and inequality (Hopwood et al., 2005).

Environmental discourses in the late 20th century contributed to biodiversity's conceptualization (Gustafsson, 2013). While most studies about biodiversity highlight the number of species in an area, focusing on this aspect limits biodiversity into something easy to understand and measure (Thompson & Starzomski, 2007). Another way of understanding biodiversity is through a discursive approach which views conservation as something that happens in and through text.

The discursive approach sees biodiversity as a product of histories rather than something to be scrutinized by science. It shows the interconnection between nature and society with diverse global contexts such as culture, science, and economy (Escobar, 1998). A gendered view of separated sustainability also exists which sees the home, habitat, and workplace as three separate domains with three separate

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