



Laudato Si' and Beyond: An Interfaith Exploration of Integral Ecology and its Implications for Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16)

Kemigisha Susan

Theology Department, School of Social and Human Studies,
Atlantic International University, Pioneer Plaza,
900 Fort Street Mall 905, Honolulu, HI 96813, USA

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research explores the concept of integral ecology, as outlined in Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, and its implications for peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16). The study examines two case studies, the Green Belt Movement in Kenya and the Jesuit-run Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat in Rome, to demonstrate the practical applications of integral ecology in promoting sustainable development and social justice. The research integrates insights from various scholarly voices and explores the diversity of interpretations within different Christian denominations. The study finds that Integral ecology provides a holistic approach to understanding the relationships between human dignity, environmental sustainability, and social justice. The case studies highlight the importance of community-led initiatives, environmental justice, and advocacy and community engagement in promoting sustainable development and social justice. The research contributes to the growing body of research on integral ecology and its implications for sustainable development and social justice, providing valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars seeking to promote peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16).

Keywords: Integral Ecology, Sustainable Development, Environmental Justice, Catholic Social Teaching, Interfaith Dialogue.

INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND

The intricate relationship between human dignity, environmental sustainability, and social justice has become increasingly prominent in the 21st century. The degradation of the natural world, climate change, and social inequality have underscored the need for a holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of human and environmental well-being (Francis, 2015; Berry, 1999; McFague, 2008). This realization has given rise to the concept of integral ecology, which seeks to promote a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between human dignity, environmental sustainability, and social justice.

Integral ecology is rooted in the Catholic social teaching tradition, which emphasizes the importance of caring for creation and promoting human dignity (Francis, 2015). This tradition is based on the biblical concept of creation, which recognizes the intrinsic value of the natural world and the responsibility of humans to care for it (Genesis 1:26-28). The Catholic Church has consistently emphasized the importance of environmental stewardship and social justice,

as seen in the encyclicals of Pope Paul VI (*Populorum Progressio*, 1967), Pope John Paul II (*Centesimus Annus*, 1991), and Pope Benedict XVI (*Caritas in Veritate*, 2009).

The practical applications of integral ecology can be seen in various initiatives around the world, such as the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, which has empowered local communities to take charge of their environment and promote sustainable livelihoods (Maathai, 2003). Similarly, the Jesuit-run Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat in Rome has been instrumental in promoting integral ecology and advocating for environmental justice globally (Northcott, 2013).

Scholars from various disciplines have contributed to the development of integral ecology, including theologians, philosophers, and environmental scientists (e.g., DeWitt, 1998; Cizik, 2009; Beisner, 2011). This study seeks to build on this existing research by exploring the implications of integral ecology for peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, provide a framework for promoting sustainable development and social justice globally (United Nations, 2015). SDG 16, in particular, focuses on promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions, which is critical for achieving the other SDGs. Integral ecology offers a valuable framework for promoting SDG 16, as it recognizes the interconnectedness of human dignity, environmental sustainability, and social justice. Aim of this study includes exploration of integral ecology and its implications for sustainable development as well as social justice. Purpose of this study is to provide valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars seeking to promote peace, justice, and strong institutions, particularly in relation to SDG 16.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The degradation of the natural world, climate change, and social inequality have underscored the need for a holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of human and environmental well-being. Despite growing recognition of the importance of environmental sustainability and social justice, the relationship between these concepts and peace, justice, and strong institutions remains underexplored.

The lack of a nuanced understanding of the relationships between human dignity, environmental sustainability, and social justice hinders the development of effective strategies for promoting sustainable development and social justice. Furthermore, the failure to recognize the intrinsic value of the natural world and the responsibility of humans to care for it perpetuates environmental degradation and social inequality.

The practical applications of integral ecology, which seeks to promote a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between human dignity, environmental sustainability, and social justice, remain largely unexamined. As a result, policymakers, practitioners, and scholars lack valuable insights into the implications of integral ecology for promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions, particularly in relation to SDG 16.

This study addresses this problem by exploring the concept of integral ecology, its implications for peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16), and its practical applications in promoting sustainable development and social justice.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

1. Explore integral ecology's implications for peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16).
2. Examine practical applications of integral ecology in sustainable development and social justice.
3. Identify common themes and lessons learned from case studies.

Goals

1. Contribute to research on integral ecology and sustainable development.
2. Provide insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars on SDG 16.
3. Promote nuanced understanding of relationships between human dignity, environmental sustainability, and social justice.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, which involved a comprehensive review of existing literature on integral ecology, sustainable development, and social justice. The study also included two case studies, which were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis approach.

Literature Review

The literature review involved a comprehensive search of academic databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Web of Science. The search terms used included "integral ecology," "sustainable development," "social justice," "Laudato Si'," and "SDG 16." The literature review focused on scholarly articles, books, and book chapters published in English between 2015 and 2022.

Case Studies

The two case studies selected for this research were:

1. The Green Belt Movement in Kenya, founded by Wangari Maathai, which has empowered local communities to take charge of their environment and promote sustainable livelihoods.
2. The Jesuit-run Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat in Rome, which has been instrumental in promoting integral ecology and advocating for environmental justice globally.

Data Collection

Data collection involved a comprehensive review of existing literature on the two case studies, including academic articles, books, and book chapters. Additionally, primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with key informants from the two case studies.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved a qualitative content analysis approach, which involved coding and categorizing the data into themes and sub-themes. The data was analyzed using NVivo software.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with the principles of ethical research, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. The research protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Atlantic International University.

Materials

- Academic databases (Google Scholar, JSTOR, Web of Science)
- Literature on integral ecology, sustainable development, and social justice
- Case study reports and documents
- In-depth interview transcripts
- NVivo software
- Methods:
- Literature review
- Case study analysis
- In-depth interviews
- Qualitative content analysis
- NVivo software analysis

By detailing the materials and methods used in this research, this study aims to ensure reproducibility and transparency, and to contribute to the growing body of research on integral ecology and sustainable development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of integral ecology, which recognizes the interconnectedness of human dignity, environmental sustainability, and social justice. Integral ecology is rooted in the Catholic social teaching tradition, which emphasizes the importance of caring for creation and promoting human dignity (Francis, 2015). This framework is also informed by the concept of sustainable development, which seeks to balance economic, social, and environmental considerations (United Nations, 2015).

Integral Ecology

Integral ecology is a holistic approach that recognizes the intrinsic value of the natural world and the responsibility of humans to care for it (Francis, 2015). This approach seeks to promote a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between human dignity, environmental sustainability, and social justice. Integral ecology is rooted in the biblical concept of creation, which recognizes the intrinsic value of the natural world and the responsibility of humans to care for it (Genesis 1:26-28).

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a concept that seeks to balance economic, social, and environmental considerations (United Nations, 2015). This concept recognizes that economic development, social justice, and environmental sustainability are interconnected and interdependent. Sustainable development is a key principle of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were adopted by the United Nations in 2015.

Catholic Social Teaching Tradition

The Catholic social teaching tradition emphasizes the importance of caring for creation and promoting human dignity (Francis, 2015). This tradition is rooted in the biblical concept of creation and recognizes the intrinsic value of the natural world and the responsibility of humans to care for it. The Catholic social teaching tradition also emphasizes the importance of social justice and the need to promote the common good.

Existing Literature

The existing literature on integral ecology, sustainable development, and social justice is extensive and diverse. Here are some key studies and findings:

Integral Ecology

- Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) is a key text on integral ecology and its implications for sustainable development and social justice.
- The work of Thomas Berry (1999) and Sallie McFague (2008) has been influential in shaping the concept of integral ecology.
- Studies by DeWitt (1998), Cizik (2009), and Beisner (2011) have explored the implications of integral ecology for environmental sustainability and social justice.

Sustainable Development

- The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework for promoting sustainable development and social justice globally (United Nations, 2015).
- Studies by the World Bank (2019) and the International Monetary Fund (2020) have explored the economic and social implications of sustainable development.
- Research by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2018) has highlighted the importance of sustainable development in addressing climate change.

Social Justice

- The work of liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez (1973) and Leonardo Boff (1987) has emphasized the importance of social justice in promoting human dignity and environmental sustainability.
- Studies by the World Council of Churches (2014) and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2011) have explored the implications of social justice for sustainable development and environmental sustainability.

The theoretical framework of integral ecology provides a holistic approach to understanding the relationships between human dignity, environmental sustainability, and social justice. The existing literature on integral ecology, sustainable development, and social justice highlights the importance of promoting sustainable development and social justice in addressing the complex challenges facing the world today. This study aims to contribute to this body of research by exploring the implications of integral ecology for peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16).

Case Studies

Case Study 1: The Green Belt Movement in Kenya

The Green Belt Movement, founded by Wangari Maathai, is a community-led initiative that empowers local communities to take charge of their environment and promote sustainable

livelihoods. Recent philosophers, such as Michael Northcott (2013), have highlighted the significance of the Green Belt Movement in promoting environmental justice and sustainability.

Case Study 2: The Jesuit-run Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat in Rome

The Jesuit-run Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat is a global advocacy organization that promotes integral ecology and environmental justice. Philosophers, such as Pope Francis (2015), have emphasized the importance of advocacy and community engagement in promoting sustainable development and social justice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Objective 1: Explore Integral Ecology's Implications for Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16)*

The analysis of the literature and case studies revealed that integral ecology has significant implications for promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions. The concept of integral ecology emphasizes the interconnectedness of human dignity, environmental sustainability, and social justice, which are all critical components of SDG 16. The case studies demonstrated that community-led initiatives, such as the Green Belt Movement, can promote environmental justice and sustainability, while also empowering local communities to take charge of their environment. Similarly, the Jesuit-run Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat's advocacy efforts highlighted the importance of promoting integral ecology and environmental justice globally.

Objective 2: Examine Practical Applications of Integral Ecology in Sustainable Development and Social Justice*

The case studies revealed several practical applications of integral ecology in promoting sustainable development and social justice. For example, the Green Belt Movement's community-led initiatives demonstrated the importance of empowering local communities to take charge of their environment and promote sustainable livelihoods. The Jesuit-run Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat's advocacy efforts highlighted the importance of promoting integral ecology and environmental justice globally. The analysis also revealed that integral ecology can be applied in various contexts, including education, advocacy, and community development.

Objective 3: Identify Common Themes and Lessons Learned from Case Studies*

The analysis of the case studies revealed several common themes and lessons learned. These include:

1. Community-led initiatives: Both case studies highlighted the importance of community-led initiatives in promoting sustainable development and social justice.
2. Environmental justice: Both case studies emphasized the need for environmental justice and the recognition of the intrinsic value of non-human life.
3. Advocacy and community engagement: Both case studies demonstrated the importance of advocacy and community engagement in promoting sustainable development and social justice.

Discussion

The findings of this study have significant implications for promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16). The concept of integral ecology provides a holistic approach to

understanding the relationships between human dignity, environmental sustainability, and social justice.

The practical applications of integral ecology, as demonstrated in the case studies, highlight the importance of community-led initiatives, environmental justice, and advocacy and community engagement in promoting sustainable development and social justice.

The common themes and lessons learned from the case studies emphasize the need for a holistic approach to promoting sustainable development and social justice. The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of research on integral ecology and its implications for sustainable development and social justice.

The study's findings also have implications for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars seeking to promote peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16). The study highlights the importance of integrating integral ecology into development policies and programs, and of promoting community-led initiatives and advocacy efforts to support sustainable development and social justice.

Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for research, policy, and practice:

1. Integrating integral ecology into development policies and programs: Policymakers and practitioners should integrate integral ecology into development policies and programs to promote sustainable development and social justice.
2. Promoting community-led initiatives: Community-led initiatives, such as the Green Belt Movement, should be promoted and supported to empower local communities to take charge of their environment and promote sustainable livelihoods.
3. Advocacy and community engagement: Advocacy and community engagement efforts, such as those undertaken by the Jesuit-run Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat, should be promoted and supported to raise awareness about the importance of integral ecology and environmental justice.
4. Further research: Further research is needed to explore the implications of integral ecology for sustainable development and social justice in different contexts and regions.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the concept of integral ecology and its implications for peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16). The research has demonstrated that integral ecology provides a holistic approach to understanding the relationships between human dignity, environmental sustainability, and social justice.

The practical applications of integral ecology, as demonstrated in the case studies, highlight the importance of community-led initiatives, environmental justice, and advocacy and community engagement in promoting sustainable development and social justice.

The study's findings have significant implications for research, policy, and practice. Policymakers and practitioners should integrate integral ecology into development policies and programs to promote sustainable development and social justice.

Community-led initiatives, such as the Green Belt Movement, should be promoted and supported to empower local communities to take charge of their environment and promote sustainable livelihoods. Advocacy and community engagement efforts, such as those undertaken by the Jesuit-run Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat, should be promoted and supported to raise awareness about the importance of integral ecology and environmental justice.

The study's findings also contribute to the growing body of research on integral ecology and its implications for sustainable development and social justice. The research highlights the importance of promoting sustainable development and social justice in addressing the complex challenges facing the world today. Further research is needed to explore the implications of integral ecology for sustainable development and social justice in different contexts and regions.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated the significance of integral ecology in promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16).

The research highlights the importance of integrating integral ecology into development policies and programs, promoting community-led initiatives, and supporting advocacy and community engagement efforts. As the world continues to grapple with complex challenges, the principles of integral ecology offer a valuable framework for promoting sustainable development and social justice.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Explore the implications of integral ecology for sustainable development and social justice in different contexts and regions.
2. Investigate the role of faith-based organizations in promoting integral ecology and environmental justice.
3. Examine the potential of integral ecology to inform policy and practice in areas such as climate change, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable agriculture.
4. Develop case studies of community-led initiatives that demonstrate the practical applications of integral ecology in promoting sustainable development and social justice.

By exploring these research questions, future studies can build on the findings of this research and contribute to a deeper understanding of the implications of integral ecology for sustainable development and social justice.

References

Beisner, E. C. (2011). What is the most important environmental problem? In J. Coffey & R. Cudney (Eds.), *Environmental Stewardship* (pp. 19-34). Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Berry, T. (1999). *The great work: Our way into the future*. New York, NY: Bell Tower.

Boff, L. (1987). *Passion of Christ, passion of the world: The facts, their interpretation, and their meaning yesterday and today*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Cizik, R. (2009). The role of faith in environmental sustainability. In R. Gottlieb (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of religion and ecology* (pp. 571-586). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

DeWitt, C. B. (1998). *Caring for creation: Responsible stewardship of God's handiwork*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Francis. (2015). *Laudato Si': On care for our common home*. Vatican City: Vatican Press.

Gutiérrez, G. (1973). *A theology of liberation: History, politics, and salvation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2018). *Global warming of 1.5°C*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

International Monetary Fund. (2020). *Fiscal policies for Paris climate strategies – from principle to practice*. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund.

Maathai, W. (2003). *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the approach and the experience*. New York, NY: Lantern Books.

McFague, S. (2008). *A new climate for theology: God, the world, and global warming*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Northcott, M. S. (2013). *A political theology of climate change*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Paul VI. (1967). *Populorum progressio*. Vatican City: Vatican Press.

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. (2011). *Towards reforming the international financial and monetary systems in the context of a global public authority*. Vatican City: Vatican Press.

United Nations. (2015). *Sustainable development goals*. New York, NY: United Nations.

World Bank. (2019). *Global economic prospects: Heightened tensions, subdued investment*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

World Council of Churches. (2014). *The economy of life: An urgent call for action*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches.