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# SILENT VICTIMS IN ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES: NATURE AS A DAMAGED LEGAL ENTITY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF VICTIMOLOGY

Dalia Kadry Ahmed Abdelaziz<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor of criminal law Prince Sultan University Saudi Arabia- Riyadh. Orcid ID:  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7616-5827>, [dkadry@psu.edu.sa](mailto:dkadry@psu.edu.sa)

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Corresponding Author: Dalia Kadry Ahmed Abdelaziz  
([dkadry@psu.edu.sa](mailto:dkadry@psu.edu.sa))

## ABSTRACT

*This study takes into consideration the silent victims of environmental crime in that nature is a legal, not passive victim, of suffering and can seek redress through the law. It is a comparative analysis of government rights through the lens of national law – New Zealand, India and various states across the United States – that have incorporated the rights of nature. The legal frameworks and practices in these jurisdictions represent pioneer cases of how such a legal framework can convey the intrinsic value of nature and allow legal proceedings and restorative measures for damages to the environment. Based on a review of relevant key legal principles, key cases and legislative features, this analysis demonstrates that as far as nature is a victim, the more society can strive for environmental justice here and now. Finally, this study invites an ideal development in victimology that integrates environmental questions and sustainable legal practice for more effective environmental trauma repair.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Legal Personhood of Nature, Green Victimology, Environmental Crimes, Ecocide, Environmental Justice.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of nature as a quiet victim to environmental crimes has had a conceptual shift and has shifted the law from the dominant paradigm that has been heavily human victim driven. Traditional laws, of course, don't really respond well enough to the deep harm done to ecosystems and to non-human life and animals. Thus, the key research question that can be asked is how to make nature a legal subject and in rights that nature could seek this or be subject to the law via justice and what mechanisms there exist within law and justice for recognition of this. In this research study examines various legal models (New Zealand and India) which allow for the legal personhood of nature and identify how this legal personhood could further the cause of environmental justice and save ecosystems. It also seeks to widen the idea of "victimhood" in victimology itself to encompass non-human actors in "green victimology," which integrates ecological values into legislation.

Most crucially, this research emphasizes the essential role played by international environmental treaties and financing mechanisms in advancing the realization of nature's legal rights, especially within developing economies. Global frameworks such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Paris Agreement, alongside financial instruments like the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), provide normative guidelines, technical assistance, and vital funding support (Mahmood & Irshad, 2026). Bridging significant institutional gaps remains a challenging yet necessary endeavor to achieve sustainable ecological governance at both national and international scales. This study investigates the legal underpinnings, case examples, and institutional as well as broader societal challenges at multiple levels—from national legislative harmonization to global treaty obligations—to develop recommendations aimed at enhancing legal protections against environmental and natural hazards.

This research treats nature legally as a group and identifies it as the victim of environmental crimes. It evaluates and compares laws, judicial outcomes and regimes in New Zealand, India, Colombia and Ecuador. Based upon an in-depth review of the relevant literature in the field of legal and victimology, the research is woven through diverse cases to demonstrate specific real world challenges and specific applications, and identifies various challenges facing nature and human societies during the discussion of the term 'green victimology,'

wherein different legal and institutional obstructions to nature's protection are studied in addition to the importance of international cooperation and sustainable financing, and provides a set of lessons relevant to both law reform and policy development.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The research uses a qualitative comparison to analyze the extent of legal recognition of nature's personhood in the jurisdictions studied. It seeks, finally, to examine whether and why specific laws acknowledge or discriminate against the status of nature as an entity in law, to explore factors that can either make or break recognition and the enforcement of such recognition, as well as the specific practical problems that are encountered as a means to achieving environmental justice in different legal systems. The research uses a 'green victimology' approach to broaden the traditional idea of victimization from human to ecological being.

### 2.1. Research Design

A qualitative comparative study is employed drawing on a review of laws, judicial decisions, and policy documents on the legal personhood of nature. Comparative perspectives drawn from multiple countries are included to analyze the legal regimes, and the cultural context in which environmental governance is embedded, with a view to the comparative analysis of legal frameworks and cultural contexts. By interweaving environmental law, victimology, and social justice, this framework links disparate aspects of criminal and environmental justice.

### 2.2. Case Selection

Cases were chosen deliberately to promote the development of legal personhood for natural beings and to gather sufficient evidence. Countries that were included were New Zealand (Whanganui River under the Te Awa Tupua Act 2017), India (Supreme Court rulings on the Ganga and Yamuna rivers), Colombia (e.g. Río Grande de Santander), Ecuador (the constitutional recognition of the rights of nature), and specific US states (Ohio and Pennsylvania) which granted rivers rights under the law. The cases contain a wide range of legal and cultural traditions, for which one can conduct a comparative in-depth exploration.

### 2.3. Data Sources

A number of primary sources of data included national laws, judicial decisions and government actions on environment conservation and the rights

of nature. A range of academic publications related to environmental law, green victimology and international treaties, like the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Paris Agreement, were also consulted to obtain an overview.

#### **2.4. Analytical Methods**

Through a scrutinizing analysis of legal and policy instruments, we explore how laws construct the subjecthood of nature and the rights and responsibilities that attend to it. Comparative jurisprudential analysis was used to assess the similarities and differences between jurisdictions in institutional positions and systems of enforcement. There also were identified gaps and practical challenges to implementation. Incorporating these findings with victimology theories reinforced the need for legal recognition in expanding acceptance of nature as a victim within justice systems.

#### **2.5. Ethical Considerations**

Given that this research is based on publicly accessible materials and literature, it is ethical. An emphasis was placed on appreciating indigenous sociocultural context and not over-representing. Since no human participants were involved, these consent and confidentiality issues were considered not applicable.

##### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. Variations in legal document availability and completeness across jurisdictions posed challenges for conducting a uniform analysis. Cultural and institutional differences limit generalizability of the findings. The purposive approach of the selection of a small number of pioneering cases could lead to sampling bias and bias would prevent the inclusion of the corresponding relevant contexts. The lack of empirical data and stakeholder interviews means practical on-the-ground challenges are not well documented. Furthermore, recent legislative policy shifts may have influenced the legality of the legal environment post-data capture. The interpretation of legal texts and cultural nuances may also be hampered by language and translation issues.

### **3. THE LEGAL PERSONHOOD OF NATURE: COMPARATIVE JURISPRUDENCE**

Recognizing nature legally, also known as legal personhood, is a breakthrough innovation in environmental law that alters classifications of life and can no longer be restricted to natural and juridical persons. Under the legal individualization of nature, rights and interests in nature can be

claimed to be protected in court, making ecosystems as individuals. This chapter discusses where humanity has found itself in trying to create, enact and effectuate such personhood in multiple countries, and where challenges have arisen

#### **3.1 Whanganui River Case: Legal Personhood In New Zealand**

New Zealand's Te Awa Tupua Act of 2017 is a pioneering legal model in New Zealand that recognizes the Whanganui River as a living legal person. The acknowledgment represents a way of life where Māori cosmology mixes indigenous spiritual and cultural ideals with the state's judicial system (O'Donnell & Talbot-Jones, 2018). It instituted appointed legal guardians, responsible to serve as the river's interests in court and to represent the local community through a local legal framework, so that the ongoing environmental governance was linked to the indigenous culture and the family. The case of Whanganui illustrates how legal personality can bind together cultural acknowledgement with environmental protection and protection of ecology, while providing indigenous rights and environmental restoration (Kramm, 2020).

#### **3.2. The Identification Of The Natural Entities In India, Based On The Ganga And Yamuna Rivers.**

In India, the Supreme Court granted living entity status to the Ganga and Yamuna rivers and in Indian law, there is a need to protect them as living entities by constitutional safeguards protecting their sanctity and health (Cribb et al., 2022; O'Donnell et al., 2020). These judicial pronouncements reflect a judicial readiness to innovate environmental jurisprudence, but the operationalization of such judicial pronouncements is impeded in practice. Challenges include balancing the pressures of industrial development with environmental sustainability and environmental limitations, and limits on pollution control mechanisms (Jolly & Menon, 2021). The Indian government's establishment of specific conservation authorities exemplified policy reactions to the rulings, although successful implementation is a subject to ongoing scrutiny.

#### **3.3. Comparative Observations: Institutional Frameworks And Community Involvement.**

New Zealand and Indian experiences show some key lessons that shape the effectiveness of nature's legal personhood. While the successful practices of New Zealand were attributed to strong institutional systems and effective engagement of Māori people,

guaranteeing responsible stewardship and embedding cultural knowledge in governance (O'Donnell & Talbot-Jones, 2018). Despite this, India's continued challenges to enforcement demonstrate weaknesses in institutional capacity and societal engagement and necessitate better legal infrastructures together with more participatory processes (Jolly & Menon, 2021).

### **3.4. Internationally, Global Trends In The Recognition Of Nature's Rights**

Outside those jurisdictions, different countries have adopted the rights-of-nature discourse as a global trend toward ecocentric governance. For example, Colombia's Constitutional Court recognized the Atrato River as a rights-bearing legal entity which highlighted intersecting environmental and social imperatives to maintain its ecological integrity (Álvarez-Marín et al., 2021). Ecuador's 2008 constitution further institutionalized nature's rights, building on indigenous beliefs like Pachamama (Kauffman & Martin, 2018). Within the United States, There are states such as Ohio and Pennsylvania, which have introduced legal rights for rivers such as the Cuyahoga and Delaware, indicating increasing innovations in subnational environmental governance (White, 2018).

### **3.5. -Case Example - Río Grande De Santander: Colombia**

A classic example for a part of Latin America is the identification of the Río Grande de Santander in Colombia as an individual as recognized by the Constitutional Court; a ground-breaking decision in this area which has important implications for the environment, and as a matter of Environmental jurisprudence (Álvarez-Marín, Zamorín, & Arevalo-Marín, 2021). This ruling placed the burden on the state, and several parties, to preserve the integrity of the river. Yet the case is emblematic of the tangled relationships among judicial decisions, popular attitudes, and bottom-up activism amidst rival economic motives. Implementation problems may include, inter-agency coordination, reconciling of developmental pressures and a sense of community participation. This case study also sheds important light on the practical limitations and scalability of legal personhood initiatives, particularly in the context of developing countries.

## **4. GREEN VICTIMOLOGY: CONSTRUCTING ITS CONCEPT OF VICTIMIZATION**

Green victimology refers to a relatively new field

of empirical research that challenges traditional anthropocentric victim paradigms by considering non-human entities impacted by environmental crimes as legitimate victims (White, 2018). This is a conceptual shift that highlights the complex interdependence of human societies and ecosystems that expands the paradigm of victimhood to incorporate ecological victimization.

### **4.1. Defining Green Victimology**

Green victimology affirms that both people and the environment experience suffering from environmental degradation and that such suffering requires recognition and recourse (Hall, 2017). In stark difference to classical victimology, which focuses on human experience, green victimology embraces an environmental perspective that emphasizes the innate intrinsic significance of the natural world (Hall, 2013; Toole et al., 2025). This transition also leads to legal innovations, as courts and legislatures now take actions for harm inflicted on ecosystems and species.

### **4.2. Ecocide Within Green Victimology**

Ecocide—the large-scale destruction of ecosystems—constitutes a pivotal area within green victimology. Advocacy for its recognition as an international crime under the Rome Statute has gained momentum, supported by expert panels proposing amendments to international law (Killean & Newton, 2024; Pazvantoglu, 2025). Such formal codification could establish accountability mechanisms commensurate with the gravity of environmental destruction, exemplified by debates on corporate responsibility for Amazonian deforestation (Legge & Brooman, 2020). As ecological crises intensify globally, codifying ecocide becomes an urgent legal imperative (Peacock, 2021).

### **4.3. Rehabilitation And Mediation: Other Solutions.**

Conventional legal systems may insufficiently encompass diffuse environmental harms targeting human and non-human victims (Hall, 2017). Restorative justice and mediation provide alternate perspectives that underscore the need to heal harm and reestablish relationships, instead of just punishment. These approaches encourage dialogue between affected communities, individuals and representatives of natural entities and develop collaborative responses that respect the dignity of all victims (Hall, 2017). Indigenous land dispute mediations that combine environmental restoration with coexistence agreements are examples of

effective application. The concept of restorative justice can work through embedding that in environmental law that makes for more equitable, sustainable outcomes that empower marginalized groups and protect ecosystems (Hall, 2016).

## **5.THE DIFFICULTIES OF PROTECTING VICTIMS IN ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES**

The emergence of Green Victimology, this issue is compounded by the realities of current legal frameworks, public opinion, and overlapping ideas about intersectional victimhood. Incorporating these intertwined issues, this section argues that the solution involves holistic reforms to guarantee fair and equitable treatment of people and nonhuman victims amid escalating ecological degradation.

### ***5.1. Legal And Institutional Challenges In Addressing Environmental Crimes And Ensuring Victim Justice***

These are also linked to the legal framework limitations and institutional constraints. One of the first and foremost obstacles is that there is a need to reform the existing legal provisions to combat the specific attributes of environmental victimization. Conventional criminal justice systems, built upon the concept of direct and discrete harms, face difficulties when addressing environmental crimes, such as pollution and habitat destruction, when causation is multi-actor and over time (Hall 2013, 2016). For instance, the prosecution of serious industrial pollution cases demands evidence establishing more intricate chains of cause and effect that overwhelm standard legal procedures. In addition, institutional obstacles impede strong reactions. Power imbalances in regulatory environments (especially where corporate interests contribute to environmental policies) marginalize many vulnerable populations (Saad-Diniz & Gianecchini, 2021). A significant example was Brazil's rollbacks of the protection enjoyed by the Amazon rainforest, which resulted in environmental damage being aggravated and the indigenous people being disproportionately affected (Barreto & Souza, 2020). The situation in question illustrates how institutional failures are magnifying injustices on the part of environmental victims. Victim protection and effective justice require reform in institutional settings that close the gap between unequal justice and legal remedy.

### ***5.2. Stigma And Social Conceptions Toward Environmental Victimization***

All of this can be understood beyond the institutional challenges highlighted above; society's

beliefs also play an important role in the way environmental survivors are identified and supported. While discussions about environmental justice have been on the rise, many victims—especially those victimized by slow-onset harm (e.g. groundwater pollution)—are not recognized as victims (White, 2018). Many environmental problems are sidelined out of economic interests. Also, marginalized communities are generally distrustful of legal systems. Indeed, studies on Indigenous peoples impacted by contamination in Canada have shown that widespread skepticism reveals how historical neglect and systemic discrimination lead to reluctance to engage with formal legal channels (see Fisher et al., 2017), and therefore reluctance to utilize legal avenues. Such disempowerment produces a loop in which victims withdraw and the demands for justice weaken in a feedback loop.

### ***5.3. Intersectional And Complex, Environmental Victimized***

Intersectionality also extends our conception of victimhood, whereby categories of social status (i.e., race, class, gender, geography etc.) in the community are interconnected and interact to exacerbate prejudice and disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1989). Using this framework, the environmental effects of the injustices which disproportionately affect already marginalized communities can be seen with what one might call an institutional view of justice. In the US, low income and racial/ethnic minorities are disproportionately exposed to unsafe pollution dumping sites (e.g. "Cancer Alley" along the Mississippi River) (Bullard, 2001). The understanding of these layered vulnerabilities necessitates victimology conceptual models that engage in different experience categories. Wolf (2011) argues that legal changes need to be inclusive in addressing that intersecting identities are determinative of what victims want and what is provided for victims. This calls for vigilant, social understanding of, and sensitivity to environmental victimhood.

### ***5.4. Legal And Social Challenges In Environmental Victim Protection***

Legal and social inequalities present formidable challenges to the effective protection of nature as a victim of environmental crime. Many environmental harms hit marginalized communities the hardest. In the United States, poor and African American individuals who live in the "Cancer Alley" corridor along the Mississippi River, for example, are exposed to a higher degree of pollution and health hazards

(Bullard, 2001; White, 2018). Likewise, in the Brazilian Amazon, a reversal of environmental protections has led to mass deforestation and displacement of Indigenous peoples by the government, underscoring the systemic institutional failures which have been intensified by economic interests (Barreto & Souza, 2020). Environmental damage is often diffuse and cumulative, as in polluted groundwater and loss of habitat, and yet still insufficiently recognized legally and socially (Hall, 2013; Hall, 2016). On top of this, victims themselves remain deeply distrustful of legal institutions as a result of historical marginalization, that will delay or reject effective justice (Fisher et al., 2017). Mitigation of these entwined legal and societal challenges requires systemic reforms to build the social justice foundation, empower local communities – especially Indigenous peoples – as well as introduce inclusive participatory enforcement mechanisms (Wolf, 2011). Without such recognition and reforms, the legal rights of nature will be in danger of becoming symbolic, when in fact, they remain operational or transformative.

### **5.5. Institutional, International, And Financial Challenges In Advancing Nature's Rights**

Developing countries have significant institutional obstacles to achieving and enforcing nature's legal rights. These challenges are related to weak institutional capacity, financial instability and political uncertainty, and inconsistent economic interests which have always played a strong role in blocking the implementation of new legislation into meaningful environmental protection (Bond & Cipler, 2013; Barreto & Souza, 2020). International treaties (such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, CBD and the Paris Agreement) are critical and provide for the essential normative direction and promote a global collaboration necessary to entrench the rights of nature in national frameworks (United Nations Development Programme, 2021). Supplementary financial instruments, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), can be critical to the transfer of resources and provide technical advice for capacity building and sustainable governance, especially in low-resource settings (Global Environment Facility, 2020; Green Climate Fund, 2023). Still, in practice, obstacles remain political instability, bureaucratic incompetence, opacity and accountability problems abound. Emerging financing mechanisms (e.g. green bonds, impact investing and performance-based financing) have potential to allow linking financial returns to verified

environmental impact, and by extending stakeholder participation to the public and private sectors (OECD, 2019; Nakhoda & Norman, 2014). Achieving these persistent challenges calls for focused multi-sectoral action by the state, civil society, Indigenous and private sector to have transparent and fair distribution of resources, reinforced by enhanced governance frameworks. Promoting and maintaining the legal right of nature ultimately depend on the unison of institutional reform, compliance with international agreements, capacity building and creative, sustainable finance. This cohesive approach is key to protecting ecosystems and advancing environmental justice globally.

## **6. PUTTING IT TOGETHER: RECOMMENDATIONS, POLICY ON HOW TO CREATE BETTER ENVIRONMENTAL VICTIMOLOGY THROUGH A POLICY APPROACH**

To move environmental victimology further, the application of such insights demands linking theory to practical policies that favor both human and ecological victims. The following suggestions indicate a framework in which all four perspectives provide new prospects for law, institutional, technology, and society and with that the need for change at all levels that acknowledge the complex nature of these are available.

### **6.1. Reform The Law To Acknowledge The Rights Of Nature**

Holistic legislative reorganization should recognize the inherent rights of nature, within national and international jurisprudences. Countries such as New Zealand and India have shown that the legal personhood of natural entities supports the practice of effective representation with respect to courts and also for the improvement or control of the environment (Barrett et al., 2020; Jolly & Menon, 2021). Legislation may require the rights of nature to be clearly incorporated, together with clear definitions of ecocide, to impose punishment for large-scale environmental degradation (Rodgers, 2017; Ruru, 2018). For example, Ecuador's constitutionalizing of Pachamama's rights represents a solid legal foundation from which citizens can stand up for nature in the public interest and has resulted in judicial interventions which have prevented the environmental destruction of schemes (Kauffman & Martin, 2018). It should be noted there are also restorative justice frameworks (which focus more on restoring and healing harm to the

environment and less on punishing) which also support sustainable environmental reformation, as was demonstrated by some of Australia's restorative environmental programs (Schimmöller, 2020). But legal reforms must be kept in perspective as political resistance persists and many times only the need be met with sustained lobbying and money to make possible a meaningful law implementation.

### ***6.2. Empowering Communities In Institutional Processes To Move Towards Environmental Justice***

Real environmental justice demands collaboration between the institutional apparatus and community level strengths. Specialized environmental courts or tribunals like India's National Green Tribunal (NGT) have demonstrated how a well-coordinated focus, combining expertise and resources, helps in achieving efficient judicial outcomes in very technical environmental matters (Gupta & Singh, 2017). Just as significant is empowerment of the affected communities through legal education and support. Legal training programs, pro bono legal clinics and collaborative schemes between environmental lawyers and non-profit organizations provide them with essential information that can empower and assist disadvantaged communities to gain their rights and seek compensation (Bond & Scott, 2019). Participatory action research (PAR) methods add to this empowerment by allowing communities to document environmental harms and provide factual data to substantiate legal claims (UNDP, 2018). However, the significant obstacles are institutional—including limited access to judicial systems in many areas, and lack of resources to bring them up to standard. Strengthening the underlying structures of institutions, along with community-based capacity building, is therefore essential. Governments at all levels must bring laws, regulations, funders and participatory platforms in line with the required model of public governance that sustains environmental justice (Sarabdeen, 2024; Arnold, 2022).

### ***6.3. Public Awareness, Education Initiatives, And Technological Integration***

Public awareness and technical integration are also encouraged. To create a sense of concern for the environment in society, the public will need to understand the link between human and environmental health. Ground-level campaigns, such as those led by the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, have successfully integrated data and human stories that catalyze local community

activism around the world (GAIA, 2020).

Additionally, the adoption of high-tech systems such as artificial intelligence (Hansen et al., 2013), remote sensing (Hansen et al., 2013), location tracking, and geographic information systems (GIS) (Petel, 2024) may significantly assist environmental monitoring, data gathering, and law enforcement. Such technologies enhance transparency and enable more rapid detection of environmental harms. They also promote greater accountability and efficiency in regulatory agencies and strengthen the effectiveness of policy by allowing community participation in identifying and reporting environmental damage.

Recognition that the socio-political context influencing these initiatives is complex requires strong political will, funding commitment, and multidisciplinary cooperation. International cooperation is a crucial tool to exchange best practices, harmonize legal standards, and develop and further global cooperation for the protection of environmental victims (Green Climate Fund, 2023; OECD, 2019).

## **7. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS FOR FUTURE ENVIRONMENTAL VICTIMOLOGY WORK**

As the field of environmental victimology matures, it is very pertinent to develop future research strategies to enhance our understanding of and offer greater protection to human and non-human victims. Solutions to complex environmental issues, however, need integrative work and rely on interdisciplinary, cutting-edge technologies and culturally sensitive perspectives. The remaining subsections discuss the remaining subsections on the implications of future studies in three distinct topics: interdisciplinary work, use of contemporary technologies, and the acceptance of global and intercultural aspects for victimology frameworks to be more flexible and helpful. These interdisciplinary, technological, multi-cultural approaches need to be complemented by the active participation of researchers with relevant policymakers, community and civil society, to drive scientific knowledge to concrete environmental protections and justice.

### ***7.1. Interdisciplinary Approaches***

Evolving environmental victimology requires the fusion of biology, sociology, law, and environmental science. Such group research into the community impacts of environmental degradation, like the psychological distress of deforestation experienced by the Amazonian tribes, provides important perspectives on how environmental victims live (de Carvalho et al., 2019). However, combining those

viewpoints from cognitive science insights can also be useful to illuminate how attitudes towards victimization are formed and develop in cultural settings, and contribute to strategic communication and advocacy (Barsalou, 2010). Additionally, a combination of methodologies, qualitative and quantitative, including the analysis of quantitative data, conducting ethnography, and community participation can offer a more holistic view of environmental victimization.

### **7.2. Technological Integration**

New technologies—AI and remote sensing—are transforming the detection of and documentation of environmental crimes. For example, satellite imagery analyzed through machine learning can be leveraged for near-real time deforestation and habitat loss monitoring, improving legal accountability and facilitating timely measures (Hansen et al., 2013). And virtual and augmented reality technologies are being applied to the public to make people feel how to emotionally respond to the harms of the environment, to create empathy and to mobilize for action (Picozza, 2016). This technological toolkit can support not just increased data collection, but democratizing access to information and empowering affected communities.

### **7.3. Global Perspectives And Cross-Cultural Studies**

Environmental concerns cut through countries and across the world, so it behooves us to investigate cultural differences in the experience and reaction of environmental victimization. Indigenous governance systems in the Pacific Northwest are an example of community-based models of ecosystem-based victim support that integrate traditional knowledge with legal frameworks (Turner et al., 2013). By combining culture with victimology, cultural diversity enriches victimology in the sense that diverse values or indigenous justice systems can be included in crime frameworks which are context sensitive and more universally applicable (Figdor, 2012). Future research should prioritize participatory research styles with indigenous voices and marginalized communities at the center to produce maximum impact.

As one of the advances on these interdisciplinary, technological and multicultural fronts, researchers will need to work in close partnership with policy makers, indigenous peoples and civil society bodies. Such cooperation is necessary to transform scientific studies into effective laws that promote green conservation and justice for all victims.

## **8. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ACTIVISM IN ENVIRONMENTAL VICTIMOLOGY**

A key means of improving environmental victimology is vigorous community involvement and grassroots action. Such bottom-up struggles not only shine light on the environmental injustices that are inflicted on communities, but they also force change in policymaking, legal recognition and support for environmental victims. Expanding on activism from below, this section examines how community involvement contributes to environmental justice via their three components, namely: grassroots initiatives, legal redress through initiatives, and environmental education as means to building resilient communities.

### **8.1. Grassroots Movements And Environmental Advocacy**

Grassroots movements play a pivotal role in highlighting environmental injustices, especially those affecting marginalized communities. Notable examples include global youth-led initiatives such as *Fridays for Future* and activist groups like *Extinction Rebellion*, which have mobilized millions worldwide to demand stronger climate policies and environmental protections (Loh & Tironi, 2020; Extinction Rebellion, 2019).

These movements employ a range of tactics—from peaceful protests and social media campaigns to community organizing—that build sustained public and political pressure for change. Indigenous-led campaigns, exemplified by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline, have also garnered international attention, emphasizing the intersection of environmental and Indigenous rights (Whyte, 2017).

Despite facing challenges such as political resistance, limited resources, and media misrepresentation, these grassroots efforts continue to be vital catalysts for policy reform and legal recognition of environmental victims. Digital platforms further amplify marginalized voices, fostering global solidarity and coordinated action.

### **8.3. Building Resilient Communities Through Environmental Justice Education**

Community development is essential for maintaining and nurturing and growing these community-based initiatives which education is vital. Educating in the long run is crucial for establishing a culture of environmental stewardship and justice. Incorporating environmental

victimology into the academic programs at schools and colleges also serves to educate those concerned about the interrelatedness of ecological and human health (Okereke et al., 2020). Courses that stress environmentally friendly practices and activism can prepare the next generation to confront the environment in a meaningful way. Facilitate shared understanding of environmental injustices through dialogue and joint work community, workshops, and public dialogue. Engaging with local experts, activists, and educators in these sectors provides them with deeper value and helps strengthen these spaces as centers for empowerment and action (Taylor, 2014). For instance, the UK's Youth for Climate Justice partnership combines educational programming with local activism to guide informed outreach and advocacy to young people (Youth for Climate Justice, 2022). By leveraging digital technologies and online learning platforms, environmental education has been expanded into greater reach and reach education through cooperation with resources. However, access needs to be overcome, and educational initiatives need cultural diversity to create inclusive and effective learning experiences.

## 9. CONCLUSION

This research emphasizes the urgent need to expand justice to incorporate ecological persons as victims as well as human beings, and to frame nature as a "silent victim" with inalienable rights and appropriate legal protections. Based on a literature review of existing legal concepts alongside bottom-up activism and interdisciplinary practice from areas including but not limited to New Zealand, India, Colombia, and the United States, the study highlights how realizing the legal personhood of nature is associated with the empowerment of ecosystems with appointed representatives engaging in judicial practices, as well as the reconfiguration of environmental governance paradigms. In addition, grassroots movements have been crucial in raising awareness about environmental injustice and encouraging law change from ground up, demonstrating the critical role that community activism and legal empowerment, to which community-based movements that can be seen to add to justice toward environmental concerns can play at the grassroots level and further develop policy and advocacy for ecological policies in their most formed. And ecological science/social theory/law integration together with social theory/law facilitates innovation that is necessary to make it sustainably-and ethically minded and just.

Despite this, current legal frameworks have been found to be inadequate for the complex and cumulative harms to the ecosystems and a lot of times too limited to adequately address what is at play; it is necessary to look past just to change the mindset so that our perception of what is true of the whole natural world to consider nature's innate value. Crucially, the success of these developments will ultimately rely not only on strong national legal reforms but also on the compatibility and coherence with global environmental legal frameworks and agreements. Conventions like the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Paris Agreement and financing mechanisms like the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility, provide valuable normative guidance, financial resources, and technical assistance, especially for countries in the developing world, that have been left without the institutional structure to deal with them due to trade barriers. This multi-tiered cooperation strengthens states' ability to integrate nature rights in policymaking and enforcement by transcending national boundaries along with cross-border cooperation. Moreover, sustainable funding is still a key for the sustainability of nature's legal rights. Finding various and lasting sources of funding – whether through public or state governments, international organizations, private collaborations, or transformative tools such as green bonds and impact investing – and translating its legals into true environmental benefits is essential. Multi-sectoral partnerships that draw from the public purse, civil society and indigenous peoples, as well as venture capital investors, drive transparency, equity, and resilience in funding efforts. It is suggested that future studies must focus on making comparative assessments of current legal models – identifying the most effective ones to close the enforcement gap. Unpacking the ways in which grassroots activism can positively shape the legal agenda in different parts of the world will uncover ways to better connect local efforts to macro-level policy approaches. They must draw from interdisciplinary research with environmental ethics and sociology, psychology, and technology to deepen our understanding of human-ecological links and understandings of victimization. Utilizing disruptive technologies, including AI, remote sensing and GIS, promise to increase both environmental monitoring, monitoring up front for harm events, and legal liability. An expanded environmental victimology that allows for global or cross-cultural understanding expands the theorization of environmental victimology to a much broader theoretical and

practical scope by considering different ways of seeing the world and concepts of justice, while supporting cultures that are more sensitive and context specific. It also known through education and awareness programs that schools create communities and future generations that they are not isolated from the pursuit of environmental preservation, good and effective. Finally, developing environmental victimology is essential to confront the growing environmental degradation and climate challenges in

the 21st century. Valuing nature's rights, promoting powerful community activism, promoting interdisciplinary cooperation, adopting new technologies, obtaining finance in a sustainable manner, and enhancing international cooperation all contribute toward an environment sustainable future, that will benefit ecosystems and human societies for decades to come thanks to integrated, effective environmental regimes and management.

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