Environmental culture as a new sustainable livelihoods framework's capital

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Short notes:

Livelihood (sinh kế) is indeed so fascinating that I have spent a great deal of time on learning and working. My first work on this topic began many years ago, in the summer of 2004, when I and two classmates, Mai and Phạm, collaborated on a student-level research project on the role of gender in household livelihood at Truong Son commune, Luong Son district, Hoa Binh province. That is also the first time I've learned a sustainable livelihoods framework (SLF) that includes five pillars: natural capital, physical capital, financial capital, human capital, and social capital (DFID, 1999).

Over the past 17 years, I have participated in numerous livelihood research projects in provinces spanning from Ha Tay to Dien Bien, Son La, Bac Kan, Quang Ninh, and Thua Thien Hue and so on. In all of these projects, I have used the SLF as a theoretical framework for building model and/or livelihood analysis as default.

Interestingly, until when I have diligently worked and strictly applied the 3DMS system (Khuc, 2021d; Napier, N. K., & Vuong, 2013; Q. H. Vuong & Napier, 2014, 2015), I found that although the sustainable livelihoods framework aforementioned has many advantages (applications), it is flawed in that SLF does not consider environmental culture as a livelihood capital. For example, when I visited some villages in Son La and Bac Kan province over ten years ago (Meyfroidt, 2013), I noticed that there is a strong environmental culture that exists. To be specific, the locals are there very aware of the importance of forests (community forests) to their livelihoods. They formed groups to take turns patrolling to prevent illegal forest exploitation from people inside and outside the village. As a result, community forests are well protected and green, and locals sustainably exploit them for timber, water, and a variety of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). This example proves (confirms) that environmental culture has a significant effect on people's and communities' livelihoods but it has been overlooked in many studies .

Here, I propose and advocate environmental culture (văn hóa môi trường) (Khuc, 2021b, 2021a; Q.-H. Vuong, 2021; Q. Vuong, 2020; Q. H. Vuong, 2021; Q. H. Vuong et al., 2021) as a livelihood capital in a new sustainable livelihoods framework (Figure 1).

Figure 1. A new sustainable livelihood framework updates environmental culture

Environmental cultural capital mentioned here is the attitude, awareness, knowledge about the environment and the actions (skills), even initiatives to protect and contribute to the environment improvement (Khuc, 2021c; Van Khuc et al., 2021). Environmental culture embody the beautiful living and actions that people need, should have, and must-have in the current environment of pollution and depletion. On the one side, I believe that environmental culture are the new motive of mankind to address environmental issues (climate change); on the other side, they are the ultimate goal for people to strive for in this century and later on.

Environmental culture capital not only reflects humankind's the highest level of beauty (mỹ cảm hướng thượng) but also plays a critical role in orienting livelihood activities associated with environmental protection. Moreover, environmental culture capital is considered a new metric for evaluating people's livelihood more comprehensively.

In short, it's time to regard and update environmental culture as a new sustainable livelihoods framework's capital. In the context of a polluted and depleted environment, the new sustainable livelihoods framework would assist us in shaping and promoting activities to protect (improve) environment in order to make a better place for nature and children.

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