

Culture and religion

Religion



MODULE 10: CULTURE& RELIGION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

INTRODUCTION Culture shapes the way we see the world. It therefore has the capacity to bring about the change of attitudes needed to ensure peace and sustainable development which, we know, form the only possible way forward for life on planet Earth. Today, that goal is still a long way off. A global crisis faces humanity at the dawn of the 21st century, marked by increasing poverty in our asymmetrical world, environmental degradation and short-sightedness in policy-making. Culture is a crucial key to solving this crisis.

Source: Preface, World Culture Report, UNESCO Publishing, Paris, 1999. Our cultural values, which often include particular religious beliefs, shape our way of living and acting in the world. Module 11 on Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainability explores the importance of indigenous values and spirituality in providing guidance for sustainable living. Such principles and values encourage a spirit of harmony between people, their natural environments and their spiritual identities. The principles for living sustainably that flow from these and other cultural and religious beliefs vary between groups and countries.

They have also changed over time as circumstances demand. Despite this diversity, many principles for living sustainably are shared, not only among indigenous peoples, but also between different religious traditions. This module explores the role of culture and religion in providing guidance on ways of living sustainably. It also provides activities which analyse the place of these themes in the school curriculum. **OBJECTIVES** • To develop an understanding of the relationship between culture, religion and sustainable

living; • To explore the principles for sustainable living encouraged in a chosen religion and in a case study from Nepal; To analyse the relevance and applicability of principles of sustainable living in the Nepal case study; and • To encourage reflection on the contribution of religious education in Education for Sustainable Development. ACTIVITIES 1. Defining religion and culture 2. Values and principles 3. A case study: Annapurna, Nepal 4. Culture and development 5. Reflection REFERENCES Bassett, L. (ed) (2000) *Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action*, UNEP. Gardner, G. (2002) *Invoking the Spirit: Religion and Spirituality in the Quest for a Sustainable World*, Worldwatch Paper No. 164, Worldwatch Institute. Robinson, M. and Picard, D. (2006) *Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development*, Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue, UNESCO. Schech, S. and Haggis, J. (2000) *Culture and development: a critical introduction*, Wiley-Blackwell. Throsby, D. (2008) *Culture in Sustainable Development: Insights for the future implementation of Article 13 (Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions)*, UNESCO. UNESCO (2000) *World Culture Report*, UNESCO Publishing, Paris. UNESCO (2009) *UNESCO World Report 2: Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*, UNESCO Publishing.

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This module was written for UNESCO by John Fien using materials and activities developed by Hilary Macleod and Hum Gurung in Teaching for a Sustainable World (UNESCO – UNEP International Environmental Education Programme). **ACTIVITY 1: DEFINING RELIGION AND CULTURE RELIGION, VALUES, CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT** The World Commission on Culture and Development defined culture as ‘ways of living together’ and argued that this made culture a core element of sustainable development.

Almost all of the grave threats confronting human and planetary survival originate in human actions. However, much narrow thinking on sustainable development has focused almost exclusively on the relationships of people to the natural environment– without considering the people-to-people relationships that lie at the core of a sustainable society. Fulfilling today’s human needs while preserving and protecting the natural environment for future generations requires equitable and harmonious interactions between individuals and communities.

Developing cultural values that support these people-to-people and people-to-nature values has traditionally been the role of religion in most societies. Religion is a major influence in the world today. It seems that people in all cultures have a set of beliefs that go beyond both the self and the natural world. We use these beliefs to help explain reasons for human existence and to guide personal relationships and behaviour. Part of the great diversity of

humankind is the many different religions and belief systems we have developed – Animism, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Taoism, and many more.

Religious beliefs have a strong influence on the culture of a community. Indeed, for many people around the world, religious beliefs are central to their culture and provide the moral codes by which they live. Even where people in the contemporary world believe that the traditional beliefs of their parents and societies are not so relevant to their everyday lives, underlying religious beliefs about human worth and how to relate to other people and the Earth are still important parts of their lives. HOW DOES CULTURE INFLUENCE OUR LIVES? Many definitions of culture refer to particular values and beliefs.

Other meanings refer to the everyday life and behaviour of people that flow from these beliefs. Others are more general and refer to works of art. Culture is, therefore, an inextricable part of the complex notion of sustainability. It can be seen as an arbiter in the difficult trade-offs between conflicting ends with regard to development goals. As pointed out in the report of the World Commission on Culture and Development set up jointly by UNESCO and the United Nations, culture is not only the “servant of ends but (...) the social basis of the ends themselves”, a factor of development but also the “fountain of our progress and creativity”.

Source: UNESCO (1997) *Educating for a Sustainable Future: A Transdisciplinary Vision for Concerted Action*, paragraph 112. All these meanings or aspects of culture influence our worldviews and the ways in which we view our relationships with the Earth and each other. As a result, <https://assignbuster.com/culture-and-religion/>

these aspects of culture affect different meanings of what it might mean to live sustainably. Culture is an important concept in Education for Sustainable Development.

This is because the common cultural models in many societies often do not encourage sustainable development – and what is needed are new, or re-discovered, norms and values that can guide our actions towards sustainable ways of caring for other people and the natural world. Achieving sustainability ... will need to be motivated by a shift in values ... Without change of this kind, even the most enlightened legislation, the cleanest technology, the most sophisticated research will not succeed in steering society towards the long-term goal of sustainability.

Education in the broadest sense will by necessity play a pivotal role in bringing about the deep change required in both tangible and non-tangible ways. Source: UNESCO (1997) *Educating for a Sustainable Future: A Transdisciplinary Vision for Concerted Action*, paragraph 103. **ACTIVITY 2: VALUES AND PRINCIPLES** Despite the variety of religions and cultures around the world, all share common beliefs about the need to care for other people and the natural environment. Such beliefs are essential to a sustainable future.

The world's three major conservation groups – the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) – have identified a range of cross-cultural values that could underlie an 'ethic for sustainable living'. These values provide principles that can guide human relationships with each other (social equity, peace and democracy) and with nature (conservation and

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appropriate development), and include: | Social Justice Values: | Conservation Values: | | PEOPLE AND PEOPLE PEOPLE AND NATURE | | Meeting basic human needs | Respecting the interdependence of all things | | Ensuring intergenerational equity | Conserving biodiversity | | Respecting human rights | Living lightly on the Earth | | Practising democracy | Respecting interspecies equity | Identify the values or meanings underlying these principles.

These values are similar to the principles and ethics in the Earth Charter analysed in Module 2. These principles reflect values that are common in many religions and cultures. However, it is not the only possible one. For example, the people in The Monk's Story in Module 21 planned the development of their village in south-west Sri Lanka around six principles for living sustainably that are consistent with their Buddhist religion and their culture. These six principles are: • Harmony with nature • Variety and diversity • Quality of life • Small is beautiful • Self-reliance • Co-operation and peace

People of other cultures emphasise different principles. For example, the Garifuni people in Belize in Central America are guided by the following five principles for living sustainably: Unity All people are connected to the Earth in a common and interdependent whole. Reciprocity Every human being has a number of rights, but also mutual obligations and responsibilities. Co-operation Related to reciprocity, each individual has responsibilities for his/her brother or sister, just as each brother or sister has responsibilities for him/her. The importance of Mother Earth The land is sacred and can not be sold or bought.

Respect for others People should be tolerant of the views, aspirations, values and beliefs of others. This includes respect for the rights of all species and for the spirit of life.

RELIGION, CULTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY

It is not possible to provide information on the beliefs and practices of all the religions and cultures in the world and the ways in which they support principles of living sustainably. However, the Internet is a wonderful archive of this information. This activity invites you to search the Internet to find out about the link between a religion of your choice and living sustainably. Choose a religion that you would like to explore.

- Identify three questions about the links between religion, religious beliefs, cultural values and ways of living sustainably that you would like to find out about this religion.
- Identify key words in your questions to use in an Internet search.
- Open an Internet search engine of your choice. Type the name of your religion plus (+) some of the key words from your questions in the 'SEARCH' space, e.g., "islam+ecology", or "christianity+social justice", or "hinduism+peace", or "buddhism+economics", etc. Then click 'SEARCH' and visit the listed sites. Continue this process until you are satisfied with the answers you have to your three questions.
- Keep these written answers beside you as they will be used in the next activity.

ACTIVITY 3: A CASE STUDY: ANNAPURNA, NEPAL

Begin by opening your learning journal for this activity.

THE ANNAPURNA CONSERVATION AREA PROJECT

This activity provides a case study of the influence of culture and religion in a successful sustainable development project, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) in Nepal.

Q1: Use the following three questions to guide your analysis of cultural and environmental issues in the Annapurna region of Nepal.

- What are the main cultural and environmental issues facing Nepal and the Annapurna region?

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What is the difference between the philosophy of the establishment of the Annapurna Conservation Area and other National Parks? • Why was the Annapurna region selected for the conservation programme known as ACAP? Q2: Use the following three questions to guide your analysis of the objectives and principles of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. • What is ACAP's relationship with tourism? • Why is the concept of 'lami' so important to ACAP? Why does Prince Gyandra Bir Bakran Shah say that conservation is for the people? Q3: Identify how the key activities conducted by the Annapurna Conservation Area Project contribute to a sustainable future in the region. • Resource conservation • Tourism management • Community development • Conservation education and extension INTERVIEWS WITH ACAP COMMUNITY LEADERS Read the transcripts of interviews with two community leaders in the Annapurna region. As you read the interviews make a note of the principles of sustainable living the two people describe.

This information will be used in the next part of this activity. • Min Bahadur Gurung, Chair of the ACAP Conservation and Development Committee • Om Bahadur Gurung, Buddhist monk from a village within the Annapurna Conservation Area Use your knowledge of this region, and ACAP principles and strategies to identify nine principles for sustainable living that are embedded in the religion and culture of the people of the Annapurna region. In the Internet search, in Activity 2, you investigated three questions about the relationship between beliefs and principles of sustainable living in a religion of your choice.

Use your knowledge of this religion and the Annapurna case study to examine how relevant the nine Annapurna principles for sustainable living

are to the religion you investigated in Activity 2. **ACTIVITY 4: CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT** Cultural diversity has emerged as a key concern at the turn of a new century. Some predict that globalisation and the liberalisation of the goods and services market will lead to cultural standardisation, reinforcing existing imbalances between cultures.

Others claim that the end of the bipolar world of the Cold War and the eclipse of political ideologies will result in new religious, cultural and even ethnic fault lines, precluding a possible 'clash of civilizations'. Scientists warn of the threats to the Earth's environment posed by human activity, drawing parallels between the erosion of biodiversity and the disappearance of traditional modes of life as a result of a scarcity of resources and the spread of modern lifestyles. Source: Introduction, UNESCO (2009) UNESCO World Report 2: Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue, UNESCO Publishing.

While cultural issues are gaining in public attention everywhere, they often have low priority in the development policies of many countries. Stressing the importance of considering culture in development projects, James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, stated: In this time of globalisation ... the poor are the most vulnerable to having their traditions, relationships, and knowledge and skills ignored and denigrated ... Their culture ... can be among their most potent assets, and among the most ignored and devastated by development programmes.

Source: Culture Counts, Conference on Financing, Resources and the Economics of Culture in Sustainable Development, Florence, Italy, 4-7 October, 1999. Culture is important in the processes of social and economic
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development. Socially, it provides for the continuity of ways of life that people in a region or country see as significant to personal and group identity. Economically, various forms of cultural expression such as music, dance, literature, sport and theatre provide employment as well as enjoyment for many people. These contribute increasingly large amounts of money to the economies of most countries every year.

Employment is also generated through the restoration and presentation of cultural heritage centres and sites – both for education and tourism. OUR CREATIVE DIVERSITY An independent World Commission on Culture and Development (WCCD) was established jointly by UNESCO and the United Nations in December 1992 to report on the interactions between culture and development. Chaired by Mr Javier Perez de Cuellar, Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1982 to 1991, the Commission, presented its report, Our Creative Diversity, in 1995.

Our Creative Diversity highlighted culture as the ‘ last frontier’ of development. Development not only involves improved access to goods and services, but also provides “ the opportunity for people to choose a full, satisfying, valuable and valued way of living together, thus encouraging the flourishing of human existence in all its forms and as a whole”. Read a summary of Our Creative Diversity. One of the recommendations of Our Creative Diversity to UNESCO was to publish regular reports on culture and development.

The first World Culture Report (1998) described culture as “ both the context for development as well as the missing factor in policies for development”. It also questioned many of the cultural assumptions in the development

models being used to guide economic, social, political and conservation policies worldwide . It asked the question, “ Can we say that the range of development models has progressively narrowed over time? ”, and concluded that:

- Western cultures have customarily been employed as the basis of thinking about development: “ Western culture has held an iron grip on development thinking and practice”. This model equates development with modernisation and modernisation with Westernisation, and this is a cause of great concern in many countries.
- Increasingly, it is being recognised that there are several alternative strategies of development.
- A paradox of globalisation is that local cultures are being stressed more than before, at least in ways that reflect local cultural interpretations of the diverse cultural and economic processes that are part of globalisation. While cultural pluralism is increasingly becoming a feature of most societies, people are turning more and more to culture as a means of self-definition and mobilisation.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY Cultural diversity is an important human right. It is a cornerstone of citizenship in any society. However, historical pressures and domestic political trends have limited the right to cultural autonomy and expression of some citizens. As a result, many minority peoples have been marginalised from the development processes in their own countries.

This is tragic both for the marginalised groups and for development trajectory of the wider society. As a result, the 1998 World Cultural Report stated that: ... considerable imagination is needed to build the participatory institutional spaces where diverse voices can express themselves, whether in the management of local environmental issues, the organization of local

urban life, or the operation of political institutions of functioning democracies. Source: World Culture Report, UNESCO Publishing, Paris, 1998. The same principle holds at the global scale.

More and more, countries (especially in the South) are arguing that societies differ in their particular paths of development; that each society has its own history, political and social structures and cultural values; that development policies should respond to the needs and requirements of each society; and therefore that what is appropriate to one society may not be appropriate to another. Just as no development strategy can be said to be culturally neutral, a culturally sensitive approach to development is the key to addressing the interlinked social, economic and environmental problems confronting the planet as a whole.

Cultural diversity — which emphasizes the dynamic interactions between cultures and sensitivity to cultural contexts — thus becomes a key lever for ensuring sustainable, holistic development strategies. Source: Chapter 7, UNESCO (2009) UNESCO World Report 2: Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue, UNESCO Publishing. This issue has been a major concern of the UNESCO African Itinerant College for Culture and Development (AICDD). AICDD is a regional coordinating body for discussion and debate on the cultural dimensions of development.

Research by AICDD indicates that development efforts in Africa have not yielded the expected results, and argues that there are three culturally-related reasons for this: • The unsuitability to the African context of development models and methods taken from industrial societies. • The institutional, geographic, social and cultural gap between people living and <https://assignbuster.com/culture-and-religion/>

working locally and government decision-makers and authorities. • A lack of the institutional knowledge and skills to plan development policies and projects that are consistent with the cultural context.

Consequently, there are increasing challenges to the dominant western approach to economic development and modernisation – not only from the South but in the North as well. The demonstrations each year in major cities every time meetings are held by the World Trade Organisation and other international political and financial institutions (that are perceived as promoting a uniform model of development) are evidence of this. Finding space for these alternative models of development will not be an easy task – this is the downside of globalisation and the domination of the world economic system by major transnational corporations.

As a result, discussions about culture and development tend to be framed in terms of several key issues that relate to the social, economic, political and conservation dimensions of sustainable development, including: • Culture and economic development • Cultural diversity, conflict and pluralism • Cultural rights and indigenous peoples • Globalisation and cultural diversity • Culture and sustainability • Culture and poverty • Culture and democracy • The economics of cultural heritage • Culture, freedom and independence • Heritage conservation and values • Global creativity and the arts. Indicators of culture and development. Research these issues in the UNESCO World Report 2: Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue. **ACTIVITY 5: REFLECTION** Begin by opening your learning journal for this activity. Completing the module: Look back through the activities and tasks to check that you have done them all and to change any that you think you can

improve now that you have come to the end of the module. Q4: How important is religious education to the curriculum in your school? Q5: To what extent are students encouraged to relate religious education lessons to principles for living sustainably?

Q6: Are there ways in which the Annapurna case study could be integrated into religious education lessons or other subjects in your school curriculum?

Definitions of Religion A religion is a set of spiritual beliefs about two key aspects of life: concern with the ultimate meaning of human existence; and an identification with a supernatural power beyond the limits of the human and natural worlds. The many different religions have different beliefs about these two aspects of life. However, religions generally have the following characteristics in common:

- A belief in supernatural beings, or gods;
- A code of morality believed to be sanctioned by the gods;
- Ceremonial and ritual acts which focus on sacred objects and symbols;
- Communication, notably through prayer, with the supernatural;
- Particular religious feelings, such as a sense of mystery, awe, adoration and reverence, that tend to be aroused in the presence of sacred objects or symbols, and during ceremonies and rituals associated with the supernatural;
- A particular world view, or a general understanding of the world and the individual's place in the universe, that shapes the religion's overall organisation and style of life;

A social group expressing the above features with and to which the individual identifies and contributes. Source: Adapted from Bell, R. and Hall, R. (1991) *Impacts: Contemporary Issues and Global Problems*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane. The Annapurna Region of Nepal Nepal The Kingdom of Nepal, with an area of 147, 181km² , is a land of ecological contrasts. Within

a short p of 200km, the altitude varies from less than 100m to 8850m. This is Sagarmatha (Mt Everest), the highest peak in the world. The tropical monsoon forests, temperate evergreen forests and arid steppes of the Tibetan plateau are a result of these changes.

For centuries the landscape has also been carved by large numbers of Indo-Aryan and Mongoloid people representing more than 45 ethnic and tribal groups. This peaceful land of unexcelled beauty and cultural heritage, generally known as 'Shangri-La', is also one of the least developed countries in the world. More than 90% of the population are subsistence farmers and more than 40% live below the poverty line. These people depend on depleted forests for fuel, fodder and timber. Currently more than 87% of the entire country's energy requirement comes from fuelwood.

The dependence on firewood as a source of energy in rural areas is more than 93%. Forests are being destroyed at a rate of nearly 3% annually. This loss of forests, combined with overgrazing by livestock and cultivation of crops on marginal land, has triggered processes of soil erosion and landslides during the monsoon season. Annapurna Ecological and cultural issues in the Annapurna Region are not too different from those in other Himalayan regions – except that they are greater in magnitude. Within a short distance of about 120km, the altitude varies from less than 100m to 8091m at Annapurna 1, the eighth highest peak in the world.

Due to its geographic features and terrain, it provides many micro-climates supporting sub-tropical lowlands and forests in the plains and the valleys, lush rhododendron and temperate evergreen forests in the South of the Annapurna, and alpine steppe and arid environments to the North of the

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Annapurna region. This area contains over 100 species of orchids and many of Nepal's 700 medicinal plants. The region also serves as excellent habitats for rare and endangered species such as the snow-leopard, the musk deer and the blue sheep. It is also the habitat of five of the six species of pheasants found in Nepal.

The Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) encircles the major peaks of the Annapurna Himal with an area of 2600km². Catchments of three major river systems are roughly bordered by the major trekking route. It is also home to over 40, 000 people of different ethnic and tribal backgrounds with various religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Bon Po, Shamanism and Animism represented. Gurung, Magar, Thakali and Manangi are the dominant groups. Generally, these people are subsistence farmers who depend on the forests for fuel, fodder and timber.

The Annapurna Conservation Area The Annapurna region is by far the most popular trekking destination in Nepal attracting over 60% of the total overseas trekkers in Nepal. The natural environment, resources and cultural integrity of this region are deteriorating due to over-grazing, intensive agriculture, poverty and a high population growth rate, and the influx of this large number of trekkers. Rational forest management for a sustainable yield of timber is not common. These factors mean that the cultural and natural environments of the region are in jeopardy.

In view of this environmental deterioration in one of the most spectacular regions of Nepal, His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev of Nepal issued directives in the Spring of 1985 to investigate the possibility of giving protected status to the Annapurna region. The directive required a

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management plan that would help to strike a balance between the basic needs of the local inhabitants, tourism development and nature conservation. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) began in 1986 to address the problem of maintaining a crucial link between economic development and environmental conservation.

It recognises that protection of critical habitats and maintenance of species diversity cannot be achieved without improving the economic conditions of poor villagers who inhabit the mountains. Unlike national parks and wildlife reserves, it regards humans, and not any particular species of wild animals or plants, as the focal point of every conservation effort. Source: Adapted from Gurung, C. P. (1990) People's participation in conservation: Annapurna Conservation Area Project, Proceedings of the International Conference on Tropical Biodiversity, Kuala Lumpur, pp. 74-85. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project

Background What is conservation – if not for the people? It must be viewed only as a means, the end being the improvement of the quality of our very existence. His Royal Highness Prince Gyanendra Bir Bikran Shah, Chair of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) operates under the guidance of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, Nepal's leading non-profit, non-governmental environmental organisation. It is self-funded by entry user fees but receives additional support from the Worldwide Fund for Nature (USA) and the German Alpine Club.

The project was set up in 1986 and has undertaken an innovative and successful approach to natural resource and tourism management in the <https://assignbuster.com/culture-and-religion/>

Annapurna region. ACAP practices a multiple land use method of resource management, combining environmental protection with sustainable community development and tourism management. Income from tourism is used to integrate traditional subsistence activities into the framework of resource management and to develop small-scale conservation and alternative energy projects in order to raise the living standards of the local people.

ACAP has a grassroots philosophy and approach that involves local communities in all aspects of the conservation and development process. ACAP's role is that of 'lami', or 'matchmaker', between local communities and sources of appropriate skills, knowledge and technical and financial assistance which enables these communities to improve the quality of their lives. Recognising that the breakdown of social structures contributes to environmental degradation, ACAP also strives to strengthen the cultural integrity of the area. At the heart of ACAP's program is conservation education.

ACAP believes that without increasing the level of awareness of both villagers and visitors, lasting environmental protection and cultural diversity cannot be achieved. Objectives The objectives of the project are to conserve both natural and cultural resources for the benefit of the local people of both present and future generations by implementing rational management policies and programs. ACAP's long term objective is to benefit the 40, 000 inhabitants living in the 2600km² Annapurna Conservation Area by providing a viable means to help them maintain control over their environment. Principles ACAP bases its activities on three principles:

People's participation In order to have long lasting efforts in conservation in the Annapurna region, it was recognised that the interests of the local people and their needs must be considered first. Unless these people really felt that the fruits of conservation could be harvested by themselves and that the resources belonged to them, the support of the local people could not be obtained. Thus, the project considers the local people as the main beneficiaries and includes them in the planning, decision-making and implementing processes, and delegates more responsibilities for the management of the conservation area to them.

Thus, various management committees (forest management committee, kerosene depot management committee, healthcentre management committee), selected and nominated by the local people, are formed in order to manage the various ACAP activities. Most of the community development projects undertaken by ACAP are carried out with 50% local contribution either in cash or kind. Thus, the project is administered by only a few staff, most of them hired locally. Catalytic role His Majesty's Government of Nepal and various other national and international agencies have implemented a number of development and conservation projects in the region.

It is not the aim of ACAP to duplicate or take over these projects but to work with them in order to improve the quality of life of the people. ACAP uses grassroots methods to help the villagers maintain control over their local resources as well as help them to identify their immediate needs and priorities. As a result, ACAP considers itself a 'lami' (matchmaker) that will bring together resources from outside in order to meet the needs of the local

people. Sustainability One of the most important characteristics of the project is sustainability.

Many of the foreign aided development projects in developing countries fail because they do not have any provision for sustaining them once the donor agency leaves. These projects once completed can neither be maintained and managed by the local people nor by the government – creating a great loss of time, energy and resources. ACAP has to be financially self-reliant once the funding from WWF-USA and other donor agencies is exhausted. Hence, an entry user's fee of about US\$7 is levied on all the international trekkers visiting the Annapurna region.

His Majesty's Government of Nepal allows ACAP to collect the fee and deposit it in its own account. Thus, there will not be any financial burden, either to King Mahendra Trust and His Majesty's Government or to the local people once funding from the donors is terminated. A similar approach is also maintained among community development projects where the local people are either trained or provisions made for the projects to continue. As an example, a community health centre in Ghandruk was founded by a ? 300, 000 Endowment Fund to which ? 100, 000 (US\$3500) and ? 00, 000 (US\$7000) were contributed by the local people. Source: His Royal Highness Prince Gyanendra Bir Bikran Shah, Chair of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation. An interview with Min Bahadur Gurung Respected local elder from Ghandruk and Chairman of the region's Conservation and Development Committee Interviewer You have been involved for many years in the indigenous management of your region's forests and other natural resources. Has culture or religion influenced your management of these

areas? Min Bahadur Gurung Of course. In our village we practice Hinduism, Buddhism and Animism.

Our ancestors or forefathers managed their forest resources by themselves without the help of outsiders. They set aside a forest area for fuelwood and harvested it on a rotational basis. Interviewer Would you think there is a negative impact on the forest when you harvest for fuelwood? Min Bahadur Gurung When you harvest the selected old trees of a particular area, and for a certain period of time, there will be no adverse impact on the environment. Our traditional rotational system makes the forest harvesting sustainable in the long run. We also feel very familiar with our forest.

We know what species of trees to harvest, when, where and for how long. Interviewer It seems that you and your people have a close relationship with the natural environment. How do you link culture, religion and environment? Min Bahadur Gurung Our culture and religion provide education for nature conservation. In every village we have a forest sanctuary where we worship our forest god. The forest is prohibited from any use and is thus a home for many birds, deer, insects and other living forms. We believe that if we cut such sacred forest we will be sick.

The forest's resources, especially traditional medicinal plants, are also important. We use them to treat many common diseases. Our sacred forests are set aside above our village. We feel safe from landslides and our water source is kept in good condition. It also keeps our village green thus providing a high aesthetic value. Our forests shape our lifestyles and behaviours. Interviewer The way you protect your forest has high ecological

value. Would you believe this system to be sustainable? Min Bahadur Gurung
The way we protect and conserve our forest is for our benefit.

We harvest the fruits of our conservation efforts. Since our forefathers, we have followed this culture and religion. Thus, sustainable management and use of the forest resources is our way of life. We are not relying on outsiders to manage our forest and wildlife and our conservation practices don't rely on money for its success. Everyone in the village looks after their forest. Our communal management system is working. Our children are also growing into this system, so I hope they learn the way we are managing our resources.

Additionally, the arrival of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) was a blessing for us. Interviewer How is ACAP working in the village? Min Bahadur Gurung We support ACAP's integrated conservation and development program through people's participation. It has helped us to strengthen our traditional institution with the formation of the Conservation and Development Committees. ACAP emphasises traditional resource management practices. This has allowed us to continue our traditional systems of fuelwood collection and rotational grazing in our alpine pastures. ACAP didn't drive the local people from the villages.

Other protected areas such as national parks in the Himalayas have excluded local people totally which has created conflict between parks and people. ACAP has also enabled us to implement small-scale community development projects such as drinking water supply, medical facilities, irrigation, bridges and trail construction and repair. Additionally, we also now have a forest nursery. Interviewer What do you think about sustainable living

and how do you inter-relate your development works? Min Bahadur Gurung
We believe development should not be an agent for destruction to our environment.

It rather should aim to meet the basic needs of the people, for example provide food, cotton and shelter. Most importantly, we are protecting our environment. If you have fresh air to breathe, fresh food to eat and a safe shelter in which to sleep, then you live in a sustaining society. Our lifestyles will be more sustainable if we learn to live in harmony with our environment. If we neglect the environment that is sustaining our lifestyle, then we will be destroying our future. An interview with Om Bahadur Gurung Buddhist Monk and Lama (Priest) from the Village of Ghandruk, Nepal Interviewer

As a Buddhist monk, how does religion play a part in your daily life? Om Bahadur Gurung Culture and religion are an important part of all of our lives. We have been practising them since our childhoods. Our parents have taught us the good things and to follow the Ramro Bato (Good Path). I have inherited my culture and religion from my father. I have learnt compassion, happiness and to value the good things in my life. Thus, we respect our culture and religion. Interviewer It sounds like following the Ramro Bato has taught you a great deal of good things in your life. Could you please elaborate a bit more?

Om Bahadur Gurung Well, in our society, people do all sorts of things, both good and bad. I learnt that if you do a bad thing, you will have to face disastrous consequences, 'pap', after your death. Cleanliness is important in our religion. Our three hundred years old monastery is in the forest, away from the dirty village. We respect the forest because it is the home of our
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god. We protect the forest and tell other villagers to do so. The forest provides valuable medicinal herbs which are important in our lives. Our mantra (prayers) and traditional medicinal herbs save the lives of our people when they are sick.

We tell people not to cut down trees and not to kill animals. Interviewer Oh! Why do you tell this message to others? Om Bahadur Gurung The answer is simple. Do you kill your children? No, you do not. You love your children, don't you? All creatures have life and they are born freely on the planet Earth. I believe they have the right to survive. As a human being, we should take care of all the living creatures and live in harmony with their environment without oppressing them. Interviewer It sounds good. How does your culture and religion reflect the notion of sustainable living?

Om Bahadur Gurung All living creatures live and die. As for human beings, we believe they do not die, but change their spirit and form another life. We Lamas perform ' arghau', for example, within 49 days of a person's death because that spirit will be in a hard life. We pray to our god to send them into heaven and to change their life into another living creature. That is our interpretation of sustainable living. Life is a cycle. If we don't do our ' karma', the cycle will be broken. Interviewer Finally, do you have any message to educators? Om Bahadur Gurung

I have learnt many lessons from my Guru (mentor) over the years. To prove my worthiness as a Lama, I spent three years, three months and three days in a hostile place to learn the ways of the Buddhist culture and religion. When I went to the city to observe other monasteries and meet other monks, I learnt that I still have to learn more. I hope educators have more access to <https://assignbuster.com/culture-and-religion/>

learn about our culture and religion. From my experience, I would say that the Buddhist philosophy of culture and religion provides the wisdom to protect our environment and sustain our lifestyles.