

Other Configurative Reviews (e.g. evidence maps or scoping reviews)

Title

Conceptualizations of "Rights of Nature" and "Right to a Healthy Environment" in the Literature: A Protocol for Qualitative Synthesis

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Keywords

nature rights; right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; ecocentrism; gender, social equity and poverty

Background

Gender and social inequalities and poverty (manifested as inequitable access and control over resources and distribution of risks) are interlinked within socio-ecological systems and the crossing of planetary boundaries [1]. Safeguarding the environment and human rights therefore requires special consideration for those who rely the most on the environment for their survival. The 2022 UN adoption of the universal "human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment" is a milestone in preventing, redressing and mitigating socio-environmental injustices [2]. "Rights of Nature" is a parallel concept as it similarly recognizes the intricate relationship between humans and nature. It is oriented to both environmental protection and human wellbeing [3]. Yet recognition of the rights of nature has been piecemeal, despite being an ancient Indigenous concept. Moreover, there is little insight in research and policy regarding potential synergies or tensions between these two, as concepts and as paths away from the current planetary and human crisis trajectories. A lack of critical reflection on the conceptualisations of the two terms may hinder the successful implementation of both the Rights of Nature and the Right to a Healthy Environment, thus limiting societies' potential to change trajectories. This review will contribute to addressing these gaps by collating and synthesising the range of definitions and conceptualisations of the terms "Rights of Nature" and "Right to a Healthy Environment" found in academic and grey literature and their (expected) outcomes for both humans and non-humans. By critically exploring variations and commonalities among these definitions and conceptualizations, the review will provide valuable insights for research and policymakers in designing and implementing effective rights-based approaches. This includes providing grounds to understand when the application of rights approaches is pursuing (or not) the same or similar goals (e.g. improved quality of life and environment).

Theory of change or causal model

NA, not relevant for this type of review

Stakeholder engagement

This review project is part of a larger initiative where stakeholder mapping will be conducted. We will use the resultant stakeholder map to select representatives of academia and policy actors from intergovernmental organisations (such as the UN) to show our preliminary research findings and discuss the clarity, comprehensiveness, and relevance of findings for decision-making. In June 2023, the review team had conversations to define the scope of this review with the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment 2018-2021, David R. Boyd.

Objectives and review question

Primary Review Question: 1. How are the 'Rights of Nature' and 'Right to a Healthy Environment' defined and conceptualised in academic and grey literature? Secondary Review Questions: 2. What are the key elements associated with the concepts of 'Rights of Nature' and 'Right to a Healthy Environment' as described in the literature? 3. Are there any variations or different interpretations of the 'Rights of Nature' and 'Right to a Healthy Environment' across different disciplines and regions? 4. What are the main convergences and divergences between the 'Rights of Nature' and 'Right to a Healthy Environment'?

Definitions of the question components

Settings: Literature that explicitly discusses or defines the concept of "Rights of Nature" and "Right to a Healthy Environment" Phenomena of interest: "Rights of Nature" and "Right to a Healthy Environment" and their definitions and conceptualizations, including specific examples and applications. Study Type: All types of reports, policy briefs, conference papers, PhD dissertations and journal articles (including reviews, commentaries, theoretical papers, and empirical qualitative and quantitative research).

Search strategy

Our search will be conducted across 2 bibliographic sources, a search engine and a set of specialist websites. Additionally, bibliographies of relevant reviews identified during the search will be examined for relevant literature. See below and Supplementary material (sheet 3) for a detailed search strategy.

Bibliographic databases

We will search Web of Science Core Collections (WoSCC) and Scopus (both accessed via Stockholm University library). Search string for WoSCC: TS= ("right* for nature" OR "nature right*" OR "right* of nature" OR "right* to the healthy environment" OR "right* to a healthy environment" OR "right* to a good and healthy environment" OR "environmental human right*" OR "Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment") Search strings were developed iteratively in a series of trials to increase the sensitivity and comprehensiveness of the searches (see Supplementary material (sheet 2) for details).

Web-based search engines

Google Scholar will be searched for relevant titles with a simplified search string (see Supplementary material (sheet 3)). We will retrieve the first 1000 search results using Publish or Perish software [4].

Organisational websites

We will search for relevant literature in organisational websites to capture grey literature The list of relevant websites (see Supplementary material (sheet 4)) was compiled with inputs from rights and gender experts on the review team and it includes intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, research institutes specializing in human rights (including Indigenous rights) and rights of nature. These organisations have a wide geographical spread. Each website will be hand-searched for relevant publications with simplified search terms in English.

Comprehensiveness of the search

During the scoping phase, search results were screened against 16 benchmark articles relevant to the review (Supplementary material (sheet 1)). In cases where relevant articles from the benchmark list were not found with the search strategy, the search strings were examined to identify why articles were missed and were amended accordingly. This process was iterative. The final search string captures all articles from the benchmark list.

Search update

Search update will not be conducted.

Screening strategy

The screening methodology will involve a two-step process, including the screening of titles and abstracts followed by a full-text assessment. After title and abstract screening, full texts of records with relevant abstracts will be retrieved. We will be tracking records that cannot be located or accessed (reporting these in the final review). Retrieved records will be screened at the full text, with each record being assessed by one experienced reviewer. The final report will include a list of articles excluded at the title and abstract, and at the full text, with reasons for exclusion.

Eligibility criteria

Settings: Literature that explicitly uses the concept of "Rights of Nature" and "Right to a Healthy Environment" Phenomena of interest: "Rights of Nature" and "Right to a Healthy Environment" and their definitions and conceptualizations, including specific examples and applications. Study Type: All types of journal articles, including reviews, commentaries, theoretical papers, and empirical qualitative and quantitative research. Reports, policy briefs, conference papers, and Ph.D. dissertations will be included. Declarations, statements, resolutions, news articles, book reviews and blog articles will not be considered. Time limitation: No restrictions on the publication date. Language: English language publications only.

Consistency checking

Before commencing screening, consistency checking will be performed on a subset of records at both title and abstract and full-text levels. Specifically, up to 100 titles and abstracts and 20 full-text records will be independently screened by all reviewers. The results of the consistency checking will then be compared among reviewers and all disagreements will be discussed in detail. Where the level of agreement among reviewers is low (below 80%), further consistency checking will be performed on an additional set of articles. This will be repeated until the agreement level reaches at least 80%.

Reporting screening outcomes

Screening outcomes will be reported using the ROSES flow diagram. The final report will also include a list of eligible articles and a list of excluded full-text articles with reasons for exclusion.

Study validity assessment

A critical appraisal of study validity will not be conducted as this review focuses on the qualitative synthesis of definitions and conceptualizations rather than the evaluation of study design or outcomes.

Consistency checking

NA, see above

Data coding strategy

Apart from bibliographic information (author(s), journal, year of publication, publication type), we

will code the following (meta)data: • Study context (including research field and study location) • Events or policy processes surrounding or motivating the publication (where relevant) • The target audience of the publication (where relevant) • Definitions of rights (both explicit and implicit) • Dimensions or elements of the definitions • Theoretical approaches, conceptual frameworks or narratives used in definitions • Mention of international policy commitments in relation to the definitions (e.g. SDG) • ge-se-p domains referred to in definitions • Intended outcomes and aspirations • Any other observations connected to definitions and included studies

Meta-data to be coded

See above

Consistency checking

Consistency checks will be performed on a subset of 5 full texts, before commencing data coding, to ensure the reliability of the coding process.

Type of mapping

NA

Narrative synthesis methods

The review will employ narrative synthesis methods and show descriptive statistics, tables, and figures that summarize the evidence base. Definitions and conceptualisations found in the literature will be synthesised using a thematic synthesis approach [5,6] and via a three-stage process: 1) line-by-line coding, where themes are identified from definitions (within and across the included papers) 2) consolidation and clustering of themes, grouping similarities (and differences) into hierarchical codes 3) exploring how groups of themes relate to one another, what are the variations and commonalities In the first stage, quotes with definitions and conceptualisations from the included studies will be coded inductively. We will also code information related to conceptual/theoretical background, potential outcomes of rights, and others (see Data coding strategy). In the second stage, a hierarchical structure will be created by grouping the codes based on similarities. In this process, we will explore and comment on variations and commonalities between different (groups of) rights definitions. We will analyse what dimensions and expected outcomes different (groups of) definitions include and to what extent they consolidate around the same themes.

Knowledge gap identification strategy

NA

Demonstrating procedural independence

The review team will ensure that reviewers who have authored articles to be considered within the review have no role in decisions regarding the inclusion or data coding of their own work.

Competing interests

The review authors declare no financial or non-financial competing interests that could influence the objectivity or impartiality of the review process or findings.

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Author's contributions

BM designed the methodology and drafted the first version of the protocol, all authors revised and approved the final version of the protocol.

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NA

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