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## **SOCIAL PREFERENCES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: DO THEY MATTER?**

Social preferences and attitudes significantly influence individuals' behaviours toward sustainable development, a concept defined by the Brundtland Commission [3] as meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. Social preferences involve considering others' welfare in decision-making, including altruism, fairness, and reciprocity [7; 8]. For example, altruistic individuals are more likely to engage in pro-environmental actions such as recycling and conserving energy because they value the well-being of others and future generations [15; 16]. Preferences for fairness can lead to support for policies that ensure equitable access to natural resources, while reciprocity encourages cooperative management of shared resources [14].

Social attitudes, defined as enduring evaluations, feelings, and tendencies toward socially significant objects or events [6], also play a crucial role in sustainable development. Attitudes toward environmental issues encompass cognitive beliefs, emotional connections, and behavioural intentions. Cognitive understanding of ecological problems, like climate change and biodiversity loss, shapes individuals' attitudes and can be enhanced through education and information campaigns [5]. Emotional attachments to nature motivate protective behaviours, as positive emotions toward the environment increase the likelihood of engaging in sustainable practices [11]. Additionally, the belief in one's ability to effect change, known as perceived behavioural control, influences the intention to perform sustainable behaviours [1]. Pro-environmental attitudes can enhance social preferences by leading

individuals to value long-term collective benefits over short-term personal gains [16]. Conversely, inherent social preferences like fairness can reinforce positive attitudes toward sustainability initiatives that promote equity [4]. Cultural norms and societal values mediate this relationship, as cultures emphasising collectivism may prioritise community well-being and environmental stewardship [10]. Social identity and group membership also affect attitudes and preferences, impacting participation in sustainable behaviours [17]. Understanding the relationship between social preferences and attitudes allows for better prediction and promotion of sustainable behaviours. Policies designed to align with individuals' preferences and attitudes can increase effectiveness. For instance, implementing incentives that appeal to social preferences, such as rewards for cooperative behaviour, can promote sustainability [18]. However, challenges like the attitude-behaviour gap must be addressed, where positive attitudes only sometimes translate into sustainable behaviours due to external constraints [12]. Additionally, the heterogeneity of preferences and attitudes necessitates tailored approaches, as one-size-fits-all policies may not be effective across different groups. The interplay between social preferences, social attitudes, and sustainable development is pivotal in understanding and enhancing citizen behaviour and the effectiveness of policies promoting growth. In decision-making processes, social preferences are individual [8]. Social attitudes, defined as enduring evaluations, feelings, and tendencies toward socially significant objects or events [6], shape individuals' perceptions of policies and willingness to engage in behaviours supporting development goals. Our examination reveals that social preferences and attitudes significantly influence citizen behaviour. Individuals guided by altruistic preferences are likelier to participate in community development projects and support social welfare programs [15]. Preferences for fairness can lead to more significant support for policies ensuring equitable resource distribution, which is crucial for addressing social inequalities. Reciprocity fosters cooperation, enabling collective action to manage shared resources and public goods [14]. These behaviours are essential for achieving sustainable development, as they facilitate the implementation of initiatives that require community engagement and collective effort.

Social attitudes toward sustainable development also play a critical role. For instance, when citizens hold favourable attitudes toward environmental protection, they are more likely to adopt sustainable practices, such as recycling and energy conservation [1; 11]. Similarly, positive attitudes toward education can lead to higher enrollment rates, contributing to

human capital development, which is essential for economic growth. Furthermore, social preferences and attitudes significantly shape perceptions and effectiveness of policies. Policies aligning with citizens' social preferences are more likely to gain acceptance and compliance [2]. When individuals perceive policies as fair and beneficial to the community, their support enhances their legitimacy and effectiveness. The cultural context is also crucial. Cultural norms and societal values influence social preferences and attitudes, affecting policies' perception and adoption [10].

The practical implications of these findings are significant for policy design and implementation. Incorporating social preferences and attitudes into policymaking can enhance the relevance and impact of development initiatives [19]. For example, behavioural insights, such as framing policies to align with existing social attitudes or employing nudges that appeal to social preferences, can encourage desired behaviours without coercion [18]. Engaging citizens in the policymaking process acknowledges their choices and attitudes, promoting empowerment and ownership that lead to more sustainable development outcomes [13]. However, challenges exist, such as the attitude-behaviour gap, where positive attitudes only sometimes translate into corresponding behaviours due to external constraints like economic barriers or lack of access to resources [12]. Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive strategies beyond influencing attitudes and preferences, including improving infrastructure and accessibility and providing incentives. In the context of sustainable development, **citizen behaviour** and **customer behaviour** reflect distinct but interconnected perspectives. Citizen behaviour emphasises the collective responsibility of individuals to contribute to societal well-being and sustainability goals. Customer behaviour, on the other hand, is typically guided by individual preferences and immediate personal benefits. Bridging the gap between citizen and customer behaviour is critical for sustainable development. Policies that resonate with social values and market incentives can increase citizen engagement and policy compliance, fostering cooperative behaviour essential for addressing global challenges like climate change. Tailoring policies based on cultural differences in attitudes and preferences is critical for long-term success in sustainability initiatives.

In conclusion, social preferences and attitudes are fundamental drivers of citizen behaviour and perceptions of policies, profoundly impacting development processes. Recognising and integrating these psychological factors into policy design and implementation can enhance the effectiveness of development initiatives.

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