

Awakening Eco-Entrepreneurs: Sustainability Awareness and Norm Activation in Shaping Entrepreneurial Intention Among Business Students in Ghana

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Abstract

Youth unemployment in Sub-Saharan Africa positions entrepreneurship as a policy lever under Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), whose Target 8.3 calls for policies supporting entrepreneurship and job creation, interlocking with SDG 4.7's mandate to embed sustainability values in education. Grounded in the Norm Activation Model, this study examines how sustainability awareness shapes entrepreneurial intention among Ghanaian university students, directly and indirectly through a sequential moral pathway of awareness of consequences, ascription of responsibility, and personal norms, while testing the moderating roles of altruism and denial of responsibility. Data from 507 undergraduate business students were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling. Environmental awareness showed no significant direct effect on entrepreneurial intention, whereas social awareness significantly and positively predicted it. Both environmental and social awareness significantly predicted awareness of consequences, which strongly predicted ascription of responsibility, which predicted personal norms, which significantly predicted entrepreneurial intention. Altruism negatively moderated the ascription of responsibility-personal norms relationship but did not moderate the personal norms-entrepreneurial intention link, while denial of responsibility negatively moderated the awareness of consequences-ascription of responsibility relationship. These findings show that sustainability awareness must be internalized into personal moral obligation through sequential norm activation before it drives entrepreneurial intention, with social awareness emerging as the more potent direct driver, an insight actionable for SDG 8-aligned curricula. By demonstrating that moral internalization, not awareness alone, catalyzes venture-creation intentions, this offers universities and policymakers an evidence-based entry point to advance decent work and economic growth through youth-led sustainable enterprise.

Keywords: environmental awareness; social awareness; sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship; SDG 8; value-creation intentions