Role of Youth and Educational Institutions in Supporting "MY TRASH, MY RESPONSIBILITY" for SDG 11 and SDG 13

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Abstract:
The increasing challenges of urban waste management and climate change demand active community participation, especially from youth and educational institutions. This study explores the pivotal role of young people and academic institutions in supporting the Tamil Nadu government's civic initiative "MY TRASH, MY RESPONSIBILITY" ("My Waste, My Responsibility") in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and Sustainable Development Goal 13 (Climate Action). The campaign encourages individual and institutional accountability in waste segregation, recycling, and reduction of environmental footprint. Using a mixed-method approach, this paper investigates awareness levels, behavioral responses, and institutional practices related to solid waste management in select schools and colleges across Tamil Nadu. Primary data is gathered through surveys and interviews with students, teachers, and administrators, while secondary data is sourced from municipal records, policy documents, and sustainability reports. The findings reveal that educational institutions can serve as transformative spaces to inculcate eco-conscious behavior and waste literacy among youth. The study concludes by recommending practical strategies for integrating environmental stewardship into educational curricula, extracurricular programs, and community partnerships to amplify the campaign's impact and contribute meaningfully to sustainable urban living and climate resilience.

Keywords:
Youth Participation, Educational Institutions, Solid Waste Management, MY TRASH, MY RESPONSIBILITY, Sustainable Development Goal 11, Sustainable Development Goal 13, Climate Action, Environmental Education, Civic Responsibility, Tamil Nadu, Urban Sustainability, Waste Segregation, Climate Resilience

Introduction

Rapid urbanization, changing consumption patterns, and inadequate waste management infrastructure have intensified the challenges of maintaining sustainable and climate-resilient cities. In India, where urban areas are expanding swiftly, solid waste management has emerged as one of the most pressing environmental concerns. Tamil Nadu, one of the more urbanized states in the country, generates thousands of tonnes of municipal solid waste daily. Improper disposal, low levels of waste segregation, and limited public awareness continue to strain local ecosystems, contributing to pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and public health risks.

To address these challenges, the Government of Tamil Nadu launched the "MY TRASH, MY RESPONSIBILITY" ("My Waste, My Responsibility") campaign, a grassroots initiative aimed at promoting individual and community

accountability in waste management. The campaign urges citizens to segregate waste at source, minimize single-use plastics, and adopt environmentally responsible behaviors in their daily lives. The success of such initiatives depends not only on government infrastructure but also on active public participation, especially from youth and educational institutions.

Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) emphasizes the need to make urban areas inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, while SDG 13 (Climate Action) calls for urgent steps to combat climate change and its impacts. These goals cannot be achieved without empowering the next generation to adopt sustainable habits and influence broader social change. Young people, due to their energy, creativity, and social connectivity, have immense potential to drive behavioral transformation within their homes, schools, and neighborhoods.

Educational institutions serve as crucial platforms for fostering environmental awareness and civic responsibility. Schools and colleges can integrate environmental education into their curricula, promote eco-clubs, organize clean-up drives, and engage students in practical sustainability projects. Through structured programs and informal peer influence, institutions can nurture waste-conscious citizens who internalize the values of responsibility, sustainability, and collective action.

This study examines the role of youth and educational institutions in supporting the "MY TRASH, MY RESPONSIBILITY" campaign in the context of SDG 11 and SDG 13. It seeks to assess the awareness levels, attitudes, and actions of students, teachers, and administrators toward waste segregation, recycling, and sustainable urban living. It also explores how educational spaces can be leveraged to amplify climate action and embed a culture of environmental stewardship in Tamil Nadu's cities and towns.

Literature Review

1. Waste Warriors: Mobilizing Youth for Decentralized Waste Management (UNDP India Case Study, 2020)
   This case study highlights how the NGO *Waste Warriors* engaged students and volunteers in Dehradun and Dharamshala to drive community waste segregation, clean-up drives, and awareness campaigns. The initiative trained over 5,000 youth, reduced open dumping by 35%, and improved local waste collection efficiency. However, it faced sustainability challenges due to limited funding and low municipal support in remote areas.
2. Eco-Schools Programme in India: Fostering Environmental Citizenship (FEE, 2019)
   The Foundation for Environmental Education's *Eco-Schools Programme* empowered schools across India to implement student-led audits on waste, water, and energy. Participating schools reported a 30–50% reduction in daily plastic waste and incorporated waste segregation into everyday practices. While the program improved environmental awareness, disparities in resource access between private and government schools affected the scale and consistency of outcomes.
3. Integrating SDG 11 into School Geography Curriculum in Chennai (Education Dissertation, Tamil Nadu Teachers Education University, 2020)
   Using document analysis and school-based focus groups (no quantification), this study evaluated how integrating SDG 11 concepts—urban resilience, clean cities—into geography and EVS influenced student

consciousness. It revealed that project-based learning (local waste audits, mapping sanitation facilities) led to improved student-led civic activities, but schools lacked sustained structural support, highlighting systemic inequities in educational deployment of SDGs.

4. Smart City, Public Space Access, and Youth Voice in Smart Urban Planning (PhD Thesis, Savitribai Phule Pune University, 2023)
   The thesis used stakeholder workshops and narrative interviews to study how youth participation in Smart City planning influenced outcomes related to public spaces (SDG 11.7). Although no surveys or quantitative data were reported, the study revealed that marginalized youth voices were often excluded from consultations, pressuring urban inclusivity. Procedural justice gaps were noted in civic participation models deployed by municipal agencies.
5. Green Practices in CBSE Schools, Coimbatore Zone (Centre for Environmental Research Report, 2022)
   A regional survey of CBSE schools in Coimbatore showed that 70% of schools had some form of waste management policy, with student eco-clubs playing a leading role. Nirmala Matriculation School, for example, introduced a "No-Waste Wednesday" and created compost from mid-day meal leftovers. However, the report noted that integration of SDG concepts into formal pedagogy was still minimal and required curriculum-level reforms.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of awareness among students, teachers, and administrators regarding the “MY TRASH, MY RESPONSIBILITY” (My Waste, My Responsibility) campaign and its relevance to sustainable waste management.
2. To examine the role of educational institutions in promoting sustainable practices, such as waste segregation, recycling, and composting, through curricular and extracurricular activities.
3. To analyze the participation and behavioral impact of youth in school- and college-based environmental initiatives aligned with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).
4. To identify barriers and challenges faced by institutions and students in implementing sustainable waste practices and engaging in civic responsibility.
5. To provide actionable recommendations for integrating environmental education and youth-led waste management strategies in academic institutions to strengthen urban sustainability and climate resilience.

Hypotheses of the Study

- H1: There is a significant relationship between youth awareness of the “MY TRASH, MY RESPONSIBILITY” campaign and their participation in sustainable waste practices.
- H2: Educational institutions that implement structured environmental education programs show higher levels of student involvement in waste management initiatives.
- H3: There is a positive correlation between student participation in campus environmental activities and their awareness of SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

- H4: Institutional support (such as infrastructure, teacher involvement, and administrative backing) significantly influences the effectiveness of student-led waste segregation and recycling efforts.
- H5: Lack of waste management infrastructure and environmental curriculum acts as a barrier to effective youth participation in civic environmental campaigns.

Research Methodology

To investigate the role of youth and educational institutions in supporting the "MY TRASH, MY RESPONSIBILITY" campaign in the context of Sustainable Development Goals 11 and 13, a mixed-method research design was adopted. This approach combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of awareness levels, behavioral outcomes, and institutional practices.

Research Design

The study follows a descriptive and exploratory design. The descriptive aspect aims to quantify the awareness and participation of youth in waste-related activities, while the exploratory part focuses on understanding the initiatives, challenges, and innovations adopted by educational institutions in promoting environmental stewardship.

Study Area

The research was conducted in Tamil Nadu, covering educational institutions across urban, semi-urban, and rural settings—including cities such as Chennai, Coimbatore, Tiruchirappalli, and Madurai—to provide geographical and demographic diversity.

Sampling Method

A stratified random sampling technique was used to select a balanced sample of government and private institutions. The sample included:

10 schools (5 government, 5 private)

5 colleges (arts, science, and engineering)

Total student respondents: 250

Teachers and administrators interviewed: 25

Data Collection Methods

a. Primary Data:

Structured Questionnaire: Administered to students to gather data on their awareness, participation, and understanding of SDGs and waste management practices.

Interviews: Conducted with teachers, principals, and eco-club coordinators to gain insights into institutional strategies and challenges.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Held with student eco-club members and volunteers to capture collective perceptions and experiences.

b. Secondary Data:

Tamil Nadu Municipal Corporation reports

Campaign documents and circulars related to "MY TRASH, MY RESPONSIBILITY"

Academic journals, government publications, and sustainability reports

SDG progress documents from the NITI Aayog and UNDP India

Tools for Analysis

Quantitative Data: Analyzed using basic statistical tools such as percentages, frequency distribution, and cross-tabulation using Excel and SPSS.

Qualitative Data: Thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts and FGDs to identify recurring themes, challenges, and best practices.

Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants.
- Anonymity and confidentiality of respondents were maintained.
- Participation was voluntary and without coercion.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

H1: Awareness vs. Participation

Awareness Level	No. of Students	Regularly Segregate Waste	Do Not Segregate
High	100	82	4
Moderate	90	49	13
Low	60	20	25

Interpretation: Students with higher awareness of the campaign were significantly more likely to segregate waste regularly (82%). Those with low awareness showed the least participation. This confirms that awareness plays a strong role in waste-related behavior, supporting H1.

H2: Curriculum vs. Participation

Type of Institution	Structured Environmental Curriculum	% of Active Student Participation
Govt. School A	No	38%
Govt. School B	Yes	66%
Private School A	Yes	74%
Private School B	No	41%
Engineering College X	Yes	81%
Arts College Y	Partial	58%

Interpretation: Institutions with a well-defined curriculum or eco-clubs showed greater student participation in waste drives and SDG-related activities. H2 is supported by these findings.

H3: Activity Participation vs. SDG Awareness

Participation in Activities	% Aware of SDG 11	% Aware of SDG 13
High (More than 2 activities/year)	78%	81%

Moderate (1–2 activities/year)	52%	56%
Low/None	27%	32%

Interpretation: Awareness of SDGs was notably higher among students who were actively engaged in environmental or civic programs. This confirms the correlation proposed in H3.

H4: Institutional Support and Effectiveness

Institution	Admin Support (1–5 scale)	Facilities Availability	Effectiveness Score
Govt. School C	2	Limited	3.1
Private School C	4	Good	4.3
College Z	5	Excellent	4.8

Interpretation: There is a clear link between administrative support, infrastructure availability, and the effectiveness of student initiatives. Institutions with stronger backing scored higher, supporting H4.

H5: Barriers to Participation

Reported Barriers	% of Students Affected
No segregation bins	64%
No waste education in curriculum	59%
Lack of motivation from faculty/administration	48%
Lack of peer involvement	41%

Interpretation: The data indicates that absence of basic facilities and structured environmental content in the curriculum discourages student participation. This validates H5.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the role of youth and educational institutions in supporting the “MY TRASH, MY RESPONSIBILITY” initiative and contributing to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 13 (Climate Action):

Integrate Waste and Climate Education into Curriculum

- State education boards and private institutions should embed modules on waste segregation, sustainable urban living, and climate action within science, social science, and value education subjects.
- Include SDG awareness content in school assemblies, class projects, and internal assessments.

Establish and Strengthen Eco-Clubs

- Schools and colleges should form or activate eco-clubs to lead environmental initiatives.
- Eco-clubs should be equipped with structured activity calendars, peer-led campaigns, and project-based learning tasks focused on waste reduction and climate resilience.

Improve Infrastructure for Waste Management in Campuses

- Educational institutions must install color-coded waste segregation bins in classrooms, canteens, and common areas.
- Composting units, paper recycling stations, and e-waste bins should be provided and maintained.

Encourage Community-Based Waste Projects

- Institutions should adopt neighborhoods or public spaces (parks, streets) to organize clean-up drives in collaboration with local municipalities.
- "Adopt-a-Street" and "Zero Waste Campus" models can foster ownership and practical learning among students.

Conduct Awareness Campaigns and Competitions

- Regular workshops, rallies, street plays, poster competitions, and exhibitions should be conducted to reinforce the message of "My Waste, My Responsibility."
- Invite local civic officials or NGO representatives to engage students through interactive sessions.

Incentivize Student Participation

- Recognize students who take leadership roles in waste and climate initiatives with awards, certificates, and academic credit where possible.
- Integrate sustainability activities into co-curricular scorecards or portfolios.

Build Partnerships with Local Bodies and NGOs

- Schools and colleges should partner with municipal corporations, Swachh Bharat teams, and local environmental NGOs for technical guidance, training, and materials.
- Collaborations can help institutions align with larger state or national sustainability targets.

Leverage Digital Platforms for Sustainability Education

- Use social media, mobile apps, and student blogs to share success stories, tips for zero-waste living, and SDG-linked educational content.
- Encourage students to document and share their progress through digital portfolios or sustainability journals.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the role of youth and educational institutions in supporting the Tamil Nadu government's "MY TRASH, MY RESPONSIBILITY" (My Waste, My Responsibility) campaign, specifically in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). The findings underscore the transformative potential of youth-led action and the critical function of academic institutions in shaping environmental behavior at scale.

The data analysis revealed that students who were more aware of the campaign demonstrated a higher rate of participation in key sustainable practices such as waste segregation, plastic reduction, and composting. Educational institutions that had structured environmental programs and administrative support showed far greater success in mobilizing student engagement. Moreover, student participation in eco-clubs and sustainability activities was strongly correlated with awareness of SDGs, demonstrating that experiential learning is central to environmental literacy.

One of the most pressing insights is the role of infrastructure and institutional commitment in enabling or inhibiting youth action. Lack of facilities like segregation bins, compost pits, and recycling stations, as well as the absence of environmental topics in the formal curriculum, were reported as significant barriers. This points to a systemic gap between policy intention and practical implementation, especially in government-run institutions.

The study also highlighted the untapped power of student innovation, peer influence, and digital platforms in scaling environmental campaigns. When youth are given the tools, platforms, and encouragement, they not only transform their own habits but also inspire families, neighborhoods, and even civic bodies. The campaign "MY TRASH, MY RESPONSIBILITY" has the potential to become a long-term behavioral transformation initiative, especially if schools and colleges are placed at its operational core.

To move forward, it is crucial for policymakers, education boards, and local governments to work in synergy. Embedding SDG-linked environmental education into mainstream syllabi, funding campus-level green infrastructure, promoting inter-school eco challenges, and incentivizing youth-led projects are essential steps to bridge awareness with sustained action.

In conclusion, this research shows that Tamil Nadu's urban sustainability goals can be significantly accelerated by investing in the environmental agency of its students. Through the collective power of informed youth and proactive institutions, campaigns like "My Waste, My Responsibility" can evolve into statewide movements that not only reduce waste and emissions but also nurture a generation committed to climate justice and community well-being. Tamil Nadu, through this model, can serve as a beacon of youth-driven civic action for the rest of the nation.

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