

IMPACT OF NATIONAL SERVICE SCHEME ACTIVITIES ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

The National Service Scheme (NSS) plays a vital role in engaging youth in community service and nation-building. NSS-led programs such as tree plantation drives, cleanliness and waste-management campaigns, health and literacy activities, and awareness sessions on water conservation etc. directly support United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to the environment, education, health, and inclusive communities. This paper examines how NSS activities contribute to sustainable development by promoting environmental protection. This research based on primary data, reports of Ashoka International Centre for Educational Studies and Research (AICESR) and existing studies.

Key words- NSS activities, environmental protection, sustainable development

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Introduction:

The National Service Scheme (NSS) is a flagship youth-volunteer program of the Government of India, launched in 1969 under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. It aims at developing the personality and character of students through community service, with the motto 'Not Me, But You'. The program started during the Mahatma Gandhi's centenary year as it was Gandhi who inspired the Indian youth to participate in the movement for Indian independence and the social uplift of the downtrodden masses of our nation.

In recent decades, NSS has been increasingly aligned with the broader goals of sustainable development, especially in the areas of environment, education, health, and community empowerment. Sustainable development refers to development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations. Youth participation is crucial in achieving sustainability goals. This paper analyzes how NSS activities contribute to sustainable development by integrating environmental conservation for the academic year 2024 to 2026

Objective of the Research:

To study the activities conducted by Ashoka International Centre for Educational Studies and Research (AICESR) under the National Service Scheme (NSS) for promoting sustainable development.

Research Methodology:

The study adopts qualitative & descriptive research as it aims to systematically describe and analyze the activities conducted for sustainable development.

NSS and Sustainable Development: Conceptual Link:

NSS activities are broadly classified into regular and special camps, with themes such as cleanliness, health, tree plantation, literacy, and rural development. Many of these activities directly support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action)

List of specific NSS activities conducted by Ashoka International Centre for Educational Studies and Research (AICESR) that promote sustainability:

1. Tree plantation drives

- Under the campaign “Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam”, NSS volunteers of Ashoka International Centre for Educational Studies and Research, in collaboration with Samsonite South Asia Pvt. Ltd., carried out a tree plantation drive on 11th July 2024 at Sawargaon, Taluka and District Nashik. More than 160 saplings were planted, including species such as Karanj, Savar, Kanchan, Kashid, and Chinch. This initiative contributes to maintaining ecological balance and enhancing biodiversity.
- A similar activity was conducted on 12th July 2025 at Shirsate, Taluka and District Nashik, where 27 NSS volunteers actively participated and planted around 1200 saplings. This large-scale plantation drive significantly contributed to increasing green cover and promoting environmental awareness.
- On the auspicious occasion of Founder’s Day, celebrating the 76th birthday of Dr. Ashok Katariya, a special tree plantation programme was organized at Mhasurli Village, Taluka and District Nashik on 23rd August 2025. This activity aimed at enhancing afforestation and spreading awareness about the importance of environmental conservation. As a mark of gratitude towards the Chairman, NSS volunteers of the second year planted 76 saplings of Neem and Cashew at Shweta Farm on the occasion of his 76th birthday. The active involvement of students in this activity helped them understand the importance of environmental conservation and their role in sustainable development.
- During the NSS Special Camp held on 11th January 2026, NSS volunteers of Ashoka International Centre for Educational Studies and Research organized a tree plantation activity in the adopted village Moha, District Nashik. The programme was conducted in the presence of the village Sarpanch, local members, and the administrator of Ashoka Education Foundation. A total of 30 indigenous saplings were planted in the premises of the Sarpanch office and nearby hill areas. This initiative contributed to enhancing local green cover and promoting environmental awareness among the villagers, thereby supporting sustainable development at the grassroots level.

Cleanliness Drives (Swachh Bharat Abhiyan / Clean-A-Thon):

Cleanliness drives organized under the National Service Scheme (NSS) play a significant role in promoting environmental hygiene, public health, and sustainable living practices.

- NSS volunteers of Ashoka International Centre for Educational Studies and Research actively celebrated NSS Day on 18th September 2024 by organizing a “Clean-A-Thon” under the theme “Swachhta Hi

Seva”. This activity was conducted in collaboration with the Nashik Municipal Corporation at Godaghat, Panchvati. During the drive, volunteers took a cleanliness pledge and engaged in cleaning the riverside area. They collected garbage and plastic waste and spread awareness among the public with the message of “Clean City – Green City.” This initiative contributed to improving sanitation and environmental awareness in the community.

- Similarly, on the occasion of NSS Day on 24th September 2025, another cleanliness drive was conducted under the theme “Swachhta Hi Seva – Garbage Free India”. This programme was also organized in collaboration with the Nashik Municipal Corporation at Phule Market and Gadge Maharaj Pool, Panchvati. NSS volunteers actively participated by taking a pledge for cleanliness and carrying out cleaning activities in public spaces, including riverside areas. They collected plastic and other waste materials, thereby promoting responsible waste management and community participation in maintaining cleanliness.

Water Conservation Activity:

Water conservation is a crucial component of sustainable development, and NSS volunteers actively participate in activities that promote the efficient use and management of water resources. During the NSS Special Camp organized by the National Service Scheme (NSS) unit of Ashoka International Centre for Educational Studies and Research, a significant water conservation activity was carried out in the adopted village Moha, District Nashik. On the second day of the camp, students were guided by Mr. Shimpi on the concept and construction of Continuous Contour Trenches (CCT), highlighting their importance in water conservation and soil management. Following the guidance session, NSS volunteers actively engaged in fieldwork on Kandoba Hill, where they constructed a total of 22 Continuous Contour Trenches. These trenches play a vital role in reducing surface runoff, preventing soil erosion, and enhancing groundwater recharge. The activity provided hands-on experience to students and deepened their understanding of sustainable environmental practices.

This initiative not only contributed to water conservation at the local level but also created awareness among students and villagers about the importance of preserving natural resources. It reflects the commitment of NSS volunteers towards environmental sustainability and community development.

Shramadan Activity:

Shramadan (voluntary physical labour) is an important component of NSS activities that promotes community participation, dignity of labour, and environmental cleanliness. During the seven-day NSS Special Camp, NSS volunteers of Ashoka International Centre for Educational Studies and Research actively participated in daily village cleanliness activities as part of Shramadan in the adopted village. Volunteers undertook cleaning of key public areas such as the Sarpanch office premises, village roads, temple surroundings, and the Zilla Parishad (ZP) school premises.

This regular engagement not only improved sanitation and hygiene in the village but also instilled a sense of responsibility, teamwork, and respect for community service among the volunteers. The activity contributed to creating a cleaner and healthier environment and encouraged local residents to maintain cleanliness practices.

Participation in Oxygen Rally:

Participation in environmental advocacy programmes is an important dimension of NSS activities that promotes awareness and collective action for environmental protection. NSS volunteers of Ashoka International Centre for Educational Studies and Research actively participated in an “Oxygen Rally” organized on 21st April 2026 in Nashik. The rally aimed to protect the oldest indigenous trees of the city, which were at risk due to large-scale infrastructure development in preparation for the Kumbh Mela.

Environmentalists, tree lovers, concerned citizens, and NSS volunteers came together to raise awareness about the importance of preserving urban green cover. During the rally, participants submitted a formal memorandum to the Nashik Municipal Corporation, urging authorities to take necessary steps to conserve trees and adopt sustainable development practices.

This activity highlights the role of NSS volunteers in environmental advocacy, civic engagement, and promoting responsible urban development.

Conclusion :

Overall, NSS activities at AICESR have a positive and far-reaching impact on environmental protection. They not only improve the physical environment through plantation and cleanliness drives but also foster environmental awareness, responsible behaviour, and community participation. These efforts contribute significantly to achieving sustainable development at the local as well as global level.

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