

Review Article

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Environmental Advocacy Groups' Impact and Strategies in Waste Management: Shaping Policies and Raising Awareness, with a Focus on Food Waste

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ABSTRACT

Waste management is an increasingly critical environmental issue, necessitating concerted efforts to address its impact on ecosystems and human well-being. Environmental advocacy groups play a pivotal role in driving sustainable waste management policies and raising awareness about pressing challenges, such as food waste. This review paper examines the influence and strategies of environmental advocacy groups in waste management, with a specific focus on their impact on policies and initiatives and their role in combatting food waste. The concept of environmental advocacy groups and their role in waste management were discussed. Through case studies and examples, an analysis was drawn on how these groups have successfully influenced waste management policies at various levels, ranging from local communities to international forums. Moreover, it explores the strategies employed by advocacy groups, including social media campaigns, public awareness initiatives, lobbying efforts, grassroots movements, and collaborations with diverse stakeholders. With a special emphasis on food waste, the review paper unveils the role of environmental advocacy groups in tackling critical issues. The paper discusses the far-reaching implications of food waste, encompassing economic losses, social disparities, and environmental degradation. Leveraging innovative strategies will be instrumental in driving positive change.

Keywords

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Introduction

Waste management is a critical global challenge with far-reaching environmental implications. The exponential growth of waste, coupled with its adverse effects on ecosystems and public health, underscores the urgency of sustainable waste

management practices. In this context, environmental advocacy groups have emerged as influential players, advocating for responsible waste management policies and fostering public awareness of waste-related issues. Environmental advocacy groups are non-profit organizations that champion environmental causes, seeking to safeguard the

planet's natural resources and mitigate the impacts of human activities. They play a crucial role in waste management by advocating for the adoption of circular economy principles, waste reduction strategies, recycling initiatives, and the establishment of effective waste disposal methods. These groups use research, public awareness campaigns, and advocacy efforts to influence policymakers and gather public support for waste management reforms.

Studies show that improper waste disposal leads to environmental degradation, soil and water contamination, air pollution, and increased greenhouse gas emissions (Cordano *et al.*, 2010).

Environmental advocacy groups play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges by driving policies that promote responsible waste management practices and support the transition to a more sustainable waste management paradigm (Sharmina and Ahmed, 2019). Their efforts have a significant impact on shaping waste management policies at various levels, from local communities to international platforms.

One of the critical waste management issues that environmental advocacy groups address is food waste. Studies highlight that food waste contributes to economic losses and increases social disparities, while also exerting a substantial environmental footprint (Quested *et al.*, 2013). Environmental advocacy groups are instrumental in raising awareness about the impact of food waste and advocating for measures to reduce it throughout the entire supply chain (Schmidt *et al.*, 2017). By employing effective strategies such as social media campaigns, public awareness initiatives, and collaborations with stakeholders, these groups have successfully brought food waste reduction to the forefront of public discourse.

Environmental Advocacy Groups

Environmental advocacy groups, also known as environmental NGOs (Non-Governmental

Organizations) or environmental nonprofits, are organizations committed to advocating for environmental protection, conservation, and sustainability.

These groups operate independently of governments and businesses, raise public awareness, and influence policy and decision-making processes related to environmental issues.

Environmental advocacy groups are diverse in nature, ranging from local community-based organizations to large international entities. Their objectives typically include:

Advocacy and Policy Influence

They strive to influence the development and implementation of environmental policies at various levels, from local ordinances to international agreements.

Education and Awareness

These groups play a vital role in educating the public about environmental issues, including waste management concerns. They organize workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns to empower individuals to adopt sustainable behaviours and reduce waste generation.

Conservation and Restoration

Environmental advocacy groups often actively participate in conservation efforts and habitat restoration projects. By protecting natural areas and biodiversity, they contribute to minimizing the environmental impact of waste disposal and other human activities.

Corporate Accountability

Many advocacy groups engage in corporate accountability campaigns, pressuring businesses to adopt environmentally responsible practices, including waste reduction, recycling, and responsible waste disposal.

Community Engagement

These groups work closely with local communities, empowering them to participate in waste management decisions and initiatives. They foster community-driven approaches to waste reduction and recycling.

Environmental advocacy groups are driven by a combination of factors that motivate their involvement in waste management issues such as environmental impact, public health concerns, sustainable development, environmental justice, etc. to maintain a balance between humans and the environment.

Some of the well known working groups of environmental advocacies are as follows:

Green peace

Known for its global activism, Greenpeace campaigns for environmental causes, including waste management. They advocate for the reduction of single-use plastics and promote circular economy principles.

World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

WWF engages in waste reduction initiatives, particularly in marine conservation, by addressing plastic pollution and promoting responsible waste management practices.

Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

NRDC advocates for sustainable waste management policies and works towards reducing food waste and single-use plastics.

The Ocean Cleanup

Focused on ocean pollution, The Ocean Cleanup develops innovative technologies to remove plastic waste from the oceans.

Waste Aid

This organization addresses waste management challenges in low-income countries, promoting sustainable waste management practices and recycling initiatives.

Influence on Waste Management Policies

Local Level

At the local level, advocacy groups often collaborate with community members, local governments, and businesses to advocate for waste reduction and recycling programs. They organize public outreach campaigns, conduct awareness programs, and collaborate with stakeholders to develop and implement waste management initiatives tailored to the specific needs of the community.

Regional Level

Those operating at the regional level focus on influencing waste management policies within a particular geographic area or administrative region. They may collaborate with regional authorities and other stakeholders to push for regional waste management strategies, recycling mandates, and policies to reduce waste generation.

National Level

On a national scale, advocacy groups engage in lobbying efforts, public campaigns, and policy research to influence waste management legislation and regulations. They work with policymakers, legislators, and government agencies to promote comprehensive waste management laws, extended producer responsibility programs, and initiatives to address specific waste streams.

International Level

They contribute to shaping international agreements on waste reduction, recycling targets, and actions to combat pollution. Through international

collaboration, these groups have led to the development of agreements such as the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal.

Case Studies of Successful Advocacy Group Impact

The Zero Waste Scotland Initiative

Zero Waste Scotland is an environmental advocacy group that worked closely with the Scottish Government to achieve ambitious waste reduction goals. Through collaborative efforts, the group influenced the development of Scotland's Zero Waste Plan, leading to substantial reductions in landfill waste and increased recycling rates.

Plastic Bag Bans and Reductions

Several advocacy groups, such as Surfrider Foundation and Greenpeace, played key roles in advocating for plastic bag bans and reduction policies at the local, state, and national levels in various countries. Their efforts led to the implementation of successful policies to limit single-use plastic bags, reducing plastic waste and its environmental impact.

Strategies Employed by Environmental Advocacy Groups

Environmental advocacy groups employ a variety of strategies to raise awareness about waste management issues and drive policy changes. These strategies encompass a range of tactics, including public outreach, legislative advocacy, grassroots movements, and partnerships with diverse stakeholders.

Utilizing social media platforms, advocacy groups can reach a vast audience and engage individuals in waste management discussions. They share informative content, infographics, and videos to raise awareness about the environmental impact of

waste and encourage sustainable practices. They also organize public campaigns and events to attract attention to waste management issues. Activities such as beach cleanups, plastic-free challenges, and zero-waste workshops create opportunities for direct engagement with the public and media coverage.

Building grassroots movements empowers local communities to advocate for change. Advocacy groups support community organizing efforts, enabling citizens to influence waste management policies at the local level through petitions, letter campaigns, and public demonstrations. They often form partnerships with other organizations, governments, businesses, and community groups.

Collaborative efforts enable them to amplify their messages, leverage resources, and drive collective action toward more sustainable waste management practices. Advocacy groups also conduct educational programs in schools, universities, and community centers to raise awareness among students, educators, and the general public.

Successful Approaches and Factors Contributing to Their Effectiveness

Successful approaches involve engaging local communities in waste management initiatives. Empowering individuals to participate in decision-making processes creates a sense of ownership and commitment to sustainable waste practices.

Apart from that they back their campaigns and policy recommendations with scientific evidence and data, enhancing the credibility and persuasiveness of their messages.

Advocacy groups use consistent messaging across various platforms, reinforcing key waste management messages and creating a cohesive brand that resonates with the public. They employ creative and engaging content, such as impactful visuals and compelling stories, to capture the attention of the audience and facilitate knowledge retention.

Role of Environmental Advocacy Groups in Addressing Food Waste

Environmental advocacy groups play a vital role in addressing the issue of food waste. They work towards reducing food waste throughout the entire supply chain, from production and distribution to consumption and disposal. Food waste incurs significant economic costs. A report by the World Resources Institute (WRI) estimated that the economic value of food wasted globally in 2019 was approximately USD 1.2 trillion (Kummu *et al.*, 2020). This waste not only represents a loss of valuable resources but also affects food security and economic stability in many regions. Food waste exacerbates food insecurity and hunger.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), roughly one-third of the food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted globally, while millions of people suffer from malnutrition (FAO, 2021).

Food waste also contributes to significant environmental impacts. Decomposing food in landfills generates methane, a potent greenhouse gas. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that food waste accounts for about 8% of global anthropogenic methane emissions (IPCC, 2019). Additionally, the resources used to produce the wasted food, such as water, energy, and land, are also wasted.

Initiatives Led by Advocacy Groups

Feeding America's "Food Recovery and Distribution" Initiative

Feeding America, a network of food banks in the United States, collaborates with farms, retailers, and food manufacturers to rescue surplus food that would otherwise go to waste. Through this initiative, the organization redistributes the recovered food to those in need, thereby reducing food waste and supporting food-insecure communities (Feeding America, n.d.).

Love Food Hate Waste Campaign (United Kingdom)

Led by WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme), this campaign raises awareness about food waste in the UK and provides practical tips to reduce waste at the household level. As a result of the campaign, WRAP reported a 27% reduction in avoidable food waste per capita in the UK between 2007 and 2018 (WRAP, 2019).

Food Sharing Initiatives (Global)

Various food-sharing initiatives, such as Foodsharing.de in Germany and OLIO in the UK, connect individuals and businesses with surplus food to those who can use it. These apps and platforms facilitate the redistribution of surplus food, diverting it from becoming waste and promoting community engagement (Foodsharing.de, n.d.; OLIO, n.d.).

Challenges Faced by Advocacy Groups

Many environmental advocacy groups face financial constraints that limit their capacity to conduct extensive research, run awareness campaigns, and expand their initiatives.

Collaborating with diverse stakeholders may lead to conflicting interests, especially when advocacy goals clash with business interests or government policies. Advocacy groups may encounter resistance from industries or sectors that perceive waste management policies as burdensome or potentially detrimental to their operations.

Adequate data and research on waste generation, disposal, and recycling are essential to inform effective advocacy campaigns and policy recommendations. Limited data availability can hinder evidence-based advocacy efforts. Apart from these one of the major challenges is that advocacy groups must continuously engage and educate the public to garner support for their initiatives.

Impact and Future Perspectives

Environmental advocacy groups are likely to focus more on promoting the adoption of circular economy principles in waste management. This approach emphasizes reducing waste generation, reusing materials, and promoting recycling and upcycling, aiming for a more sustainable and resource-efficient waste management system.

As technology advances, advocacy groups may increasingly leverage digital tools and data analytics to drive their waste management initiatives. Innovative technologies can aid in tracking waste flows, identifying areas for improvement, and engaging the public more effectively.

Future trends may see increased collaboration between advocacy groups across borders to address waste management challenges collectively and influence international policies on waste reduction and recycling. Given the close link between waste management and climate change, advocacy groups may integrate waste management issues into climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies to enhance their impact on both fronts.

This review paper highlights the pivotal role of environmental advocacy groups in waste management and sustainability efforts.

Through their persistent efforts in lobbying, public campaigns, and partnerships, they have successfully influenced the adoption of sustainable waste management practices and shed light on the economic, social, and environmental implications of food waste and plastic pollution.

Environmental advocacy groups' collaborative efforts with governments, businesses, NGOs, educational institutions, and community organizations have been essential in advancing waste management initiatives more comprehensively. By working together, stakeholders can address waste management challenges effectively and foster a culture of sustainability.

Nevertheless, advocacy groups do face several challenges in their mission. Funding limitations, conflicting interests, and resistance from certain sectors have posed obstacles to their advocacy efforts. Addressing these challenges will require innovative approaches, strategic partnerships, and continuous engagement with the public and policymakers. Their persistent advocacy efforts have led to policy changes, behavioral shifts, and positive environmental outcomes in the realm of waste management.

Looking to the future, environmental advocacy groups are likely to focus on circular economy advocacy, tech-driven strategies, sustainable consumption promotion, international collaboration, and integrating waste management into climate change initiatives. Future studies could evaluate the effectiveness of waste management policies influenced by advocacy groups, conduct socioeconomic analyses to understand broader implications, explore practical implementation of circular economy principles, investigate digital solutions and data analytics, and address the needs of marginalized communities to promote equity and social justice in waste reduction efforts. By continuing to collaborate, innovate, and engage diverse stakeholders, environmental advocacy groups can pave the way for a more sustainable and waste-resilient future.

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