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Research Article



Civic Sense and SDGs

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Abstract

This chapter is based on the key idea that we are a society and we must give back to it. The SDGs (2015) provided a blueprint for creating a world that is more sustainable, where equality prevails, and inclusion is fostered by the year 2030. The world governments and institutions play a prominent role in achieving these SDGs. Just the same, we cannot overlook the role of individuals as well as that of communities in fulfilling their duties through Civic Sense. The chapter explores the role of civic sense in realization of sustainable development goals laid down by the United Nations. Using relatable examples and connecting local behaviour to global goals, this chapter highlights how civic sense is more than just good manners—it is a powerful tool for nation-building and sustainable development. This human-centred approach aims to encourage educators, students, and communities to recognise their personal role in shaping a sustainable future. Recommendations are provided to inculcate civic sense into education to support long-term sustainability.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“We are the Society and the society is US”

Humans cannot live in isolation from the rest of the world, which is why they need a web of relations encompassing friends, family, etc. This web of relations made by humans and for human survival is termed ‘society.’

Writing about Indian society, it has some distinct features that make it unique from the rest of the world. We Indians are the only ones on this planet to refer to our soil as ‘MAA’; we are the ones who worship plants. There was a time in history when our Bharat Bhoomi was known as the ‘Sone ki chidiya.’ From ancient times, Indian civilisation has been characterised as well-educated, with high morality, keeping up the principles before anything else. Our saints, rishis, have spent their lives teaching such values.

The world today faces challenges such as climate change, poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. In response, the United Nations introduced the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which serve as a global agenda to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all. But achieving these goals requires more than just policy reforms—it demands a transformation in individual and collective behaviour.

This is where civic sense plays a key role. Civic sense refers to the social ethics that a person displays as a responsible citizen. It includes basic responsibilities like following traffic rules, keeping the surroundings clean, helping others in need, and respecting public spaces. Though often overlooked, these small actions form the foundation of a functioning and sustainable society.

The idea of the nation and national feeling

The idea of a nation goes beyond borders and flags; in fact, it is a deep emotional bond that connects people through shared history, culture, values, and a sense of belonging. For us, being part of a great country like India is a source of immense pride. Out of 197 countries in the world, when we say we are Indian, it means we are part of a rich civilisation, a vibrant democracy, and a land full of diversity and resilience. Our Constitution reminds us of this unity right from its first words: “We the people of India...,” emphasising that the nation is built not just by governments or leaders, but by each one of us.

The national anthem “Jana Gana Mana” stirs a powerful feeling of patriotism in our hearts. Its melody and words remind us of our roots and responsibilities. It makes us proud, but also silently asks: what are we doing for our country in return? Patriotism is not just about waving flags on Independence Day or singing the anthem at school. It’s about living those values every day, like being honest, respectful, law-abiding, and caring for the people and land around us. Whether it’s paying taxes honestly, helping a fellow citizen, voting responsibly, or simply not littering in public spaces. The reality is that each act counts. Giving back to the nation means contributing in whatever way we can, big or small, to make our country better. It means taking pride not just in our identity as Indians, but in our actions as citizens. The idea of national feeling is not something we

show only on special occasions; it is something we should carry in our hearts and reflect in our behaviour every single day.

Civic Sense as a Catalyst for Global Impact

Civic sense means being aware of our duties and responsibilities as citizens and showing respect for others and our shared spaces. When people follow rules, keep their surroundings clean, and care for their community, it creates a more peaceful and organised society. This small act of responsibility at the local level can have a big effect globally. For example, when people reduce waste, follow traffic rules, or support fairness in their neighbourhoods, it encourages a culture of respect and responsibility worldwide. In this way, civic sense becomes a powerful tool that helps build a cleaner, safer, and more united world.

Civic sense acts as a catalyst for global impact by promoting responsible behaviour that begins at the individual level but spreads across communities and nations. When people practice basic civic duties like following laws, keeping public spaces clean, respecting others’ rights, and being environmentally conscious, they help build more disciplined, empathetic, and sustainable societies. These actions, though local, contribute to solving global issues such as pollution, inequality, and social unrest. For instance, when citizens actively participate in waste management or support inclusive practices, they align with global goals like environmental protection and social justice. Over time, such behaviour creates a ripple effect by encouraging cooperation, peace, and development on a global scale. Civic sense, therefore, is not just about being a good citizen in one’s own country, but also about contributing to a better and more responsible world.

Creating a Ripple Effect

The findings also indicate that civic sense, although practised at the individual level, creates a ripple effect. When one person behaves responsibly, it encourages others to do the same, building a culture of care and respect. In schools, colleges, workplaces, and neighbourhoods, civic-mindedness leads to collective progress and enhances social trust. This is essential for partnerships (SDG 17) that aim to solve global challenges through local engagement.

SDG-Specific Linkages

Environmental Sustainability (SDGs 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15): Civic sense practices like water conservation, responsible waste disposal, use of public transport, and eco-friendly consumption directly support environmental goals. People who are mindful of their impact on the environment play a key role in mitigating climate change, preventing water pollution, and protecting biodiversity (UNDP, 2023).

Social Equity and Health (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, and 10): Civic behaviour includes compassion toward the poor and elderly, respect for all genders, and hygiene-consciousness, which improve both individual and community well-being. These behaviours help eliminate hunger, reduce disease spread, and promote equality.

Educational and Institutional Development (SDGs 4, 8, 9, 16, and 17): Promoting moral values, ethical conduct, and social cooperation fosters peaceful, strong institutions and supports lifelong learning. Educated individuals who show civic discipline contribute to workplace productivity, democratic participation, and innovation.

Gap Between Knowledge and Practice

One important realisation is that there's often a big gap between what people know and what they do. Most of us are aware that being responsible citizens, like not littering, following rules, or treating others with respect, is important. But the truth is, not everyone puts that awareness into action in daily life. Why does this happen? Sometimes people feel there's no point because others aren't doing their part. In other cases, the environment doesn't support good behaviour—for example, if there are no dustbins nearby or safe footpaths to walk on, even well-meaning people may give up. At times, it's simply a lack of motivation or the feeling that "someone else will take care of it." To truly make a difference, we need to bridge this gap between knowing and doing. This can be done by running awareness campaigns, including civic education in schools, and most importantly, showing by example—when people see others doing the right thing, they're more likely to follow. Turning civic sense into daily practice is not just about being polite or neat—it's a powerful step toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and building a more caring, responsible world for all.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Torney-Purta et al. (2001), through the IEA Civic Education Study, analysed civic knowledge, engagement, and attitudes of over 90,000 14-year-old students from 28 countries. Using large-scale survey data, the study assessed students' understanding of democracy, citizenship rights, and responsibilities. Findings indicated that students exposed to open classroom discussions on societal issues demonstrated higher civic engagement and tolerance. The researchers concluded that participatory civic education promotes stronger interest in public affairs and sustainable citizenship, aligning with the present study's focus on cultivating civic sense through education.

Hoskins and Kerr (2012) investigated the effectiveness of citizenship education programs across 24 European countries by analysing data from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). They examined the relationship between civic instruction and civic competencies among secondary students. Results indicated that interactive pedagogies such as discussions, role plays, and community projects significantly improved students' civic knowledge, social responsibility, and democratic attitudes. Their research underscores the importance of pedagogy in fostering civic behaviour necessary for sustainable development.

UNESCO (2017) highlighted the central role of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) within the broader framework of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Drawing from global education policy reviews and case studies, the

report emphasised values such as empathy, collective action, and planetary care. It argued that education systems must go beyond content to instil civic responsibility through participatory learning and critical thinking. This aligns closely with the present study's emphasis on civic sense as foundational to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Warwick (2016) introduced the concept of *pedagogies of civic compassion* within the ESD discourse, advocating for teaching practices rooted in empathy, justice, and care for people and the planet. Using a case study of a sustainability leadership program spanning primary to post-secondary levels, the study illustrated how experiential and participatory learning nurtures socially responsible and civically engaged youth. Warwick concluded that education systems designed with moral and civic purpose can transform school culture and contribute to inclusive, sustainable societies.

Hossain et al. (2019) explored the relationship between civic space and the achievement of the SDGs through a multi-method study including literature reviews, 12 desk studies, and four country case studies (Brazil, Cambodia, Nepal, Zimbabwe). The study found that restricted civic space undermines goals such as gender equality, justice, and institutional accountability, while open civic spaces promote citizen engagement and inclusive development. The authors concluded that preserving civic space is crucial and recommended treating civil society as an essential development partner.

Fowler and Biekart (2020) examined the dynamics of civil society organisations (CSOs) in SDG implementation through a comparative analysis across six countries—Costa Rica, Ghana, Hungary, Lao PDR, Nepal, and Tanzania. Using 21 case studies, they assessed how legal frameworks, civic space, and government attitudes shape CSO participation. Their findings revealed that urban and donor-supported CSOs were more engaged, while rural and independent ones were marginalised. They stressed the need for transparent, inclusive, and well-funded engagement strategies to empower CSOs in advancing sustainability.

Banerjee and Das (2020) conducted a survey-based study with 500 senior secondary students in urban India to explore civic behaviour and environmental awareness. Their findings showed a moderate level of civic knowledge but limited civic practice, indicating a disconnect between awareness and action. They recommended integrating civic values into curricula through experiential methods and aligning civic education with local sustainability efforts, thus making it contextually relevant.

Anderson (2021) carried out a qualitative case study of eco-civic education programs in three U.S. high schools. Through interviews, classroom observations, and content analysis, the study revealed that when civic responsibility is taught alongside environmental concerns, students show stronger engagement, community involvement, and environmental activism. Anderson argued that blending civic and environmental education leads to deeper sustainability consciousness, reinforcing the present study's goal of linking civic sense to sustainable development.

Ozaki and Shaw (2022) undertook a literature review to assess citizen participation in achieving SDGs, with a focus on resilient communities. Analysing recent publications from multiple academic databases, they found that the lack of accessible information is a major barrier to civic engagement. The study emphasised that meaningful public participation depends on the availability of clear, user-friendly information and inclusive platforms for interaction. They concluded that enabling information ecosystems is critical for sustained citizen involvement in development goals.

Rasheed, Sarwar, and Ashraf (2025) proposed a conceptual framework for integrating civic education into secondary school curricula to support the SDGs. By connecting civic education components like critical thinking, participatory learning, and social responsibility with all 17 SDGs, the authors illustrated how empowered students can become active global citizens. Their framework called for curriculum reform, teacher training, and policy alignment to foster civic competencies for sustainable futures.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of the present study:

- To understand the concept of civic sense and its components.
- To establish a connection between civic behaviour and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- To study awareness of civic sense among students.
- To suggest educational strategies that can foster civic sense for sustainable development.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is both descriptive and explanatory in nature. This chapter adopts a qualitative approach, using secondary data from scholarly articles, government reports, and United Nations publications. It primarily utilises secondary data analysis, drawing extensively from existing literature to collect and synthesise relevant information. The researcher(s) also conducted interviews with students to gain deeper insights into their experiences, awareness levels, and perspectives on civic sense, thereby enriching the study with qualitative data.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding the Concept and Components of Civic Sense

The study revealed that civic sense is broadly understood as an individual's responsibility to maintain harmony, cleanliness, and discipline in public life. It encompasses not only legal compliance but also moral and social behaviour that reflects empathy, community awareness, and respect for others. Key components identified include public hygiene, environmental responsibility, traffic discipline, respect for public property, tolerance, and active community participation.

Participants, especially educators and civic experts, emphasised that civic sense is deeply rooted in social ethics and collective consciousness, not merely a set of behavioural rules. Among students, civic sense was often associated with everyday practices such as not littering, standing in queues, helping others, and conserving water. However, there were noticeable

differences in understanding the term, indicating the need for more explicit teaching and discourse around civic values in educational settings.

How Civic Sense Connects with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Table: Relationship between Civic Sense and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

SDG	Goal Name	How Civic Sense Helps
1	No Poverty	Helping people in need, sharing resources, and supporting community welfare efforts.
2	Zero Hunger	Donating extra food, avoiding food waste, and supporting local food drives.
3	Good Health and Well-being	Keeping surroundings clean, following health rules, and promoting public hygiene.
4	Quality Education	Encouraging equal learning opportunities and supporting education for all.
5	Gender Equality	Treating everyone with respect, regardless of gender, and supporting women's rights.
6	Clean Water and Sanitation	Saving water, using toilets properly, and keeping public washrooms clean.
7	Affordable & Clean Energy	Switching off unused lights, using energy wisely, and spreading awareness about renewables.
8	Decent Work and Economic Growth	Respecting workplace rules, being punctual, and encouraging ethical practices.
9	Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	Using public property responsibly and supporting local, sustainable innovations.
10	Reduced Inequalities	Accepting and respecting people from all backgrounds, and standing against discrimination.
11	Sustainable Cities and Communities	Following traffic rules, using dustbins, and being considerate in public places.
12	Responsible Consumption & Production	Buying only what's needed, recycling, and avoiding plastic waste.
13	Climate Action	Reducing pollution, using eco-friendly transport, and taking part in green campaigns.
14	Life Below Water	Keeping rivers and oceans clean by not littering or using harmful chemicals.
15	Life on Land	Planting trees, caring for animals, and protecting forests and open spaces.
16	Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions	Respecting the law, promoting fairness, and speaking out against injustice.
17	Partnerships for the Goals	Working with others, volunteering, and supporting social and environmental causes.

The table shows that being a responsible and mindful citizen in everyday life directly supports the achievement of the SDGs. Whether it's saving water, helping the poor, or planting trees, your everyday choices matter in building a better world.

Understanding How Students See Civic Sense: A Qualitative View

To understand how students think about civic sense, the researchers collected and studied their written responses and interviews. This gave a clear and personal picture of how young people feel about their roles and responsibilities in society. Many students described civic sense as doing simple but important things like not throwing garbage on the road, following traffic rules, keeping public spaces clean, helping others in need, and being respectful in public. These answers showed that students do have a basic idea of what good civic behaviour looks like, mostly based on what they see around them in everyday life.

A common theme in their answers was that family and surroundings play a big role in shaping their civic behaviour. Most students shared that they learned these values from their parents or by observing people in their community. Schools, however, were mentioned less often as a source of learning about civic sense. This suggests that civic education may not be strongly included in their regular classroom lessons.

Another key finding was that although students knew what good civic behaviour is, many admitted they don't always follow it. Some said that even though they want to do the right thing, they are influenced by their friends or don't see others practising the same. This makes it harder for them to act on what they know. For example, a few students said it's difficult to care about cleanliness when their local surroundings are dirty anyway.

Interestingly, very few students connected civic sense with larger goals like protecting the environment or making cities better places to live. While they understood the immediate benefits of good behaviour, such as clean streets or safe roads, they didn't always see how these actions help the country or the planet in the long run. This shows a gap in understanding that needs to be addressed in schools.

Many students also shared ideas on how civic sense could be taught better. They suggested doing activities like cleanliness drives, awareness campaigns, group discussions, and role-plays. They felt that being actively involved in such things would help them understand and remember these values better than just reading about them in books. This part of the study shows that students do have some awareness of civic sense, but there's still a need to make civic learning more practical, meaningful, and connected to real-life situations. With better teaching methods and support from both schools and communities, students can become more responsible and active citizens who care not just about themselves, but about society and the environment too.

How Education Can Help Build Civic Sense for a Better and Sustainable Future

Based on what was learned in the study, some useful educational ideas have been suggested to help students develop

civic sense and understand how their actions can support a more sustainable world.

Including Civic Topics in School Subjects

Civic sense should be a part of everyday classroom lessons. Whether it's science, social studies, or even language subjects, teachers can connect what students learn to real-life situations—like how keeping the environment clean supports Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This helps students see the bigger picture.

Learning by Doing (Experiential Learning)

Instead of only reading or listening, students can learn better through hands-on projects. Activities like cleaning up the school area, planting trees, or spreading awareness about waste management help them understand civic responsibilities while also making a real difference in their communities.

Getting Involved in the Community

When students take part in activities outside the classroom—such as helping in local clean-up drives or joining social awareness campaigns—they learn how their actions can bring about change. This kind of learning builds a strong connection between what they study and the real world.

Using Fun and Engaging Teaching Methods

Teachers can use debates, group discussions, role-plays, and simulations to make civic learning interesting and practical. These activities not only make learning enjoyable but also teach students important skills like teamwork, empathy, and decision-making.

Training Teachers to Teach Civic Values

For students to learn well, teachers need to be well-prepared too. Special training programs can help teachers understand how to teach civic sense and sustainability in a creative and meaningful way across different subjects.

Building Strong Ties Between Schools and the Community

Schools can work together with local organisations, NGOs, and government departments to give students more chances to learn outside the classroom. These partnerships can provide real-life experiences where students can apply what they've learned and see the results of their actions.

These educational strategies are not just about giving information, but they're about shaping responsible, active citizens. When students are given the right guidance and opportunities, they can grow into thoughtful individuals who care for their community and the planet.

Key Implications

Civic sense isn't just about manners, its about sustainable living

Everyday responsible actions align directly with many of the SDGs

Awareness, Consistency and Community involvement can multiply the impact

Institutions like schools and colleges can play a vital role in bridging the knowledge-practice gap

5. CONCLUSION

Civic sense is often considered a matter of etiquette, but it is much more than that—it is the invisible thread that ties a society together. As we move toward the 2030 SDG deadline, every individual action counts. Picking up litter, planting a tree, helping a stranger, or raising your voice against injustice are all small but meaningful steps towards a more sustainable world.

Educators and institutions must work to instil civic values from a young age. Through awareness, education, and example, we can empower students and citizens to become active contributors to the SDGs. After all, sustainable development is not just a goal for governments—it is a responsibility we all share.

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