

**CIVIL SOCIETY FOR ECOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SDGS:  
THE EXPERIENCE OF RUSSIA**

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**Abstract**

*The article is dedicated to volunteer environmental movements in Russia and governmental policy that are aimed at achieving Sustainable Development Goals. Russia belongs to the group of countries with low participation in civil society, but currently, the numbers of volunteers tends to rise. It could be influenced by governmental policy, which promotes volunteering. It is important to emphasize that the most popular type of volunteering in Russia is land improvement including participation in events, such as seedling cages or garbage collection, activities in protected areas, assistance in the performance of state functions (extinguishing forest fires as well as the work of public forest inspectors who appeared in 2018). 2017 was declared as the year of ecology and 2018 – as the year of volunteerism. Therefore, many activities were organized during these years. The tendencies of environmental volunteering and NGO activities in Russia are analyzed in the article with the focus on governmental support and regulations.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development, SDGs, civil society, CSOs, voluntarism, ecology, environmental movements

**1. INTRODUCTION**

On September 25 in 2015, UN member states adopted an Agenda for Sustainable Development for the period until 2030. The Agenda is a complex plan for wide scale transformations, including 17 interrelated and inseparable goals and 169 targets in the field of sustainable development. The targets are measured by 232 indicators. The Agenda was accepted in 193 countries, as it is universal and applies to all countries. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was designed in order to achieve the better life and the future for all people around the world. The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals requires the joint efforts of governments, business, civil society and all the population of the Earth.

All the goals cover 3 main dimensions of human life – social, economic and environmental development. The goals are connected to each other and for the some of them it is hard to say which dimension they relate to. This links are clearly seen from the table below.

**Table 1.** Social, economic and environmental dimensions of SDGs  
(Cutter, Osborn, Romano,& Ullah 2015)

The Goal	Social (%)	Environmental (%)	Economic (%)	Primary focus
Goal 1: No poverty	60	13	27	Social
Goal 2: Zero hunger	60	27	13	Social
Goal 3: Good health and well-being for people	96	4	0	Social
Goal 4: Quality education	81	5	14	Social
Goal 5: Gender equality	100	0	0	Social
Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation	44	44	11	Social/ Environmental
Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy	22	44	33	Environmental
Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth	37	10	53	Economic
Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	13	20	67	Economic

Goal 10: Reducing inequalities	67	0	33	Social
Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities	62	33	5	Social
Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production	21	58	21	Environmental
Goal 13: Climate action	56	44	0	Social
Goal 14: Life below water	5	67	29	Environmental
Goal 15: Life on land	22	67	11	Environmental
Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions	93	0	7	Social
<b>Total in SDGs</b>	<b>52,4</b>	<b>25,3</b>	<b>27,3</b>	

The environmental dimension is included in almost all the Goals, however, it is mostly related to 6 Goals:

- SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;
- SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable and sustainable and modern energy for all;
- SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production pattern;
- SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact;
- SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the ocean, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development;
- SDG 15: restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystem, sustainably manage forest, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

In addition, such Goals as SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved Nutrition and promote sustainable; SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; SDG 11: make cities and human settlement inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable Agriculture – also have direct or indirect effects on ecology and ecological Goals of SDGs.

## 2. CIVIL SOCIETY FOR SDGS REALIZATION

In Russia, there is a common view that the only actor, which is responsible for achieving SDGs, is a government. Of course, government plays a crucial role in this process as it regulates legislation, has enough resources for implementing programs and opportunities for influence on business and society. However, the SDGs is based on a complex, collective approach. Consequently, the one actor cannot be efficient. The full involvement of all the stakeholders: business, the general public and civil society organizations (SCOs) - is needed to achieve all the 17 SDGs.

Another common opinion is that the modern market economy does not provide environmental friendliness to goods and services. But it is important to notice that the market economy is based on a formed mechanism for satisfying the needs of the population. Therefore, the lack of such ecological friendliness is caused by the absence of such a request from the society. It is necessary to ensure the demand for “green” goods and services from consumers (including both the citizens and the government). Such demand cannot be formed immediately; it takes long time to change people’s way of consumption. However, and the experience of some developed countries confirms that can be reached.

Sweden is a good example of green-oriented government and law. In the sustainable development Index for 2018, Sweden took the first place, ahead of its neighbors and partners in the region - Denmark and Finland. (Sachs, Schmidt-Traub, Kroll, Lafortune & Fuller 2018). Leadership in this ranking reflects the long-term and complex work of Swedish society and government at all levels - from global to private. Sweden environmental policy started actively developing on the late 1990th. Sweden has national plans

and strategies to promote sustainable consumption and production. The biggest of them is Swedish system of environmental goals. This system contains principles, objectives, interim targets, strategies, and follow-up mechanisms, which together provide a solid ground for increased efficiency and improved prioritization in environmental policies. The strategy emphasis cooperation with other actors such as municipalities, the private sector and civil society organizations to ensure greater environmental, social and economic sustainability. The results of such policy are already noticeable. In the period from 2008 to 2014, the greenhouse gas emissions within the borders of Sweden dropped by 14 percent. The next plan is to completely eliminate the emission of greenhouse gases in the country by 2045. (Handlingsplan Agenda 2030 2018) An important element of the environmental policy in Sweden is the implementation of the concept of sustainable development in the education system of schools and universities. Another aspect of sustainability is waste recycling. The Swedish experience proves that a large part of the waste can be recycled and reused to produce energy, fuel, materials, etc. the Level of recycling of solid waste currently amounts to nearly 100 %. (Zero waste: how the problem of garbage is solved in Sweden 2017)

While in Europe and in the United States consumers are obliged to sort waste, and, for example, supermarkets limit the use of plastic bags, in Russia today there is no such practice. This means that for Russian population the degree of responsibility for their consumption models — in particular, for the method of waste disposal — is determined only by personal notions and the willingness to bear the additional costs associated with this. The absence of generally accepted norms and standards for responsible consumption at the level of private individuals makes it less important for Russian consumers to consider such aspects as, for example, the environmental friendliness of packaging of goods, the possibility of their processing and reuse, the presence of secondary raw materials in products, etc.

In such situation, it is very important to provide citizens with wide-scale informatization on ecological issues in order to make their outlook green-oriented. One of the most significant actor in this process is civil society.

In Agenda 2030 civil society is considered as one of the key means to implement the targets. The role of civil society is underlined in SDG documentation because it could be considered as a connecting link between the governments and general public. The civil society organizations (CSOs) are all organizations and associations that take an active part in the variety activities in the state and its' market; however do not belong to the state or the market. They represent the interests and needs of the citizens and communicate with authorities in order to realize these needs. Moreover, the main goal of any CSOs is quite simple – to improve the life quality of the people. In fact, the governments should also follow this goal. The activities of civil society influence positively the state and the market and promote such characteristics of good governance as transparency, effectiveness, openness, responsiveness and accountability. (Martinez-Soliman & Hendra (eds) 2014)

The effects of the civil society activities are seen at three levels: macro level (level of the whole society), meso level (level of organization or community), micro level (level of individuals). The levels are presented in the Figure 1.



Figure 1. Levels of CSOs impact (Mersiyanova (ed) 2018)

At the micro level, there are two recipients of profit from NGOs activities – a volunteer or a member of an organization and an actor whom\which the activities are addressed to.

As NGOs cannot exist in isolation, they are always associated with a community in which they work. By influencing the organization and individuals in the community, a volunteer thereby influences the community at the meso level.

The aggregate effect of NGOs activities at the micro influence positively the social, economic and environmental situation in a country or region.

### 3. THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN RUSSIA

There is no common approach to the estimation of the volunteers' number in Russia. Therefore, different statistical and research sources give contradictory data.

According to Federal State Statistics Service of Russian Federation, around 1,4 million people were involved in voluntary activities in 2016. Among them 303 thousands people were members of NGOs and 1,1 million participated in voluntary work on their own initiative. On average, Russians spend nine hours a month on volunteer work. (Labor and employment in Russia 2017)

Interesting fact is that, according to Russian Patriotic Center (RPC), in 2016 there were about 5.3 million volunteers in the country – it is almost four times more than according to Federal State Statistics Service (FSSS). Such differences could be explain by different approach to indicating volunteers. While FSSS counts only people who did any voluntary work only during one month before the survey, RPC consider as volunteers all the people who did it during the whole year before the survey.

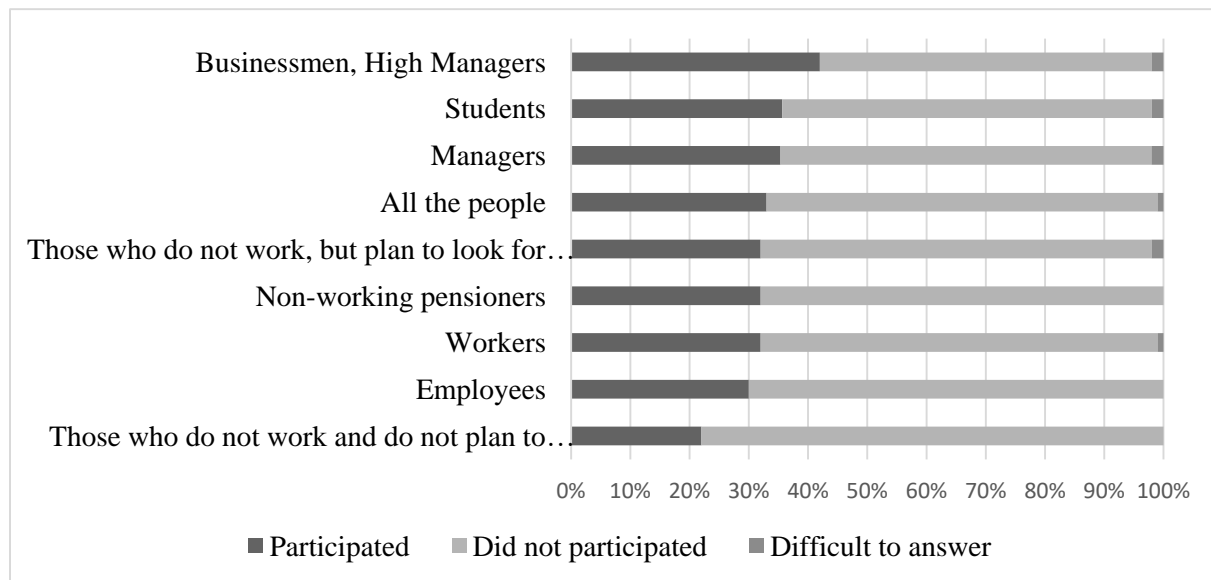
Residents of villages and cities volunteer equally, but as most of people in Russia live in cities, 75% of volunteers are residents of cities. As can be seen from the bar chart below, there is a gender disproportion among volunteers in Russia: most of volunteers are women, in cities this disproportion is more noticeable than in villages.



**Figure 2.** Volunteers by gender and place of residence, thousand people on average per month (Mersiyanova 2017)

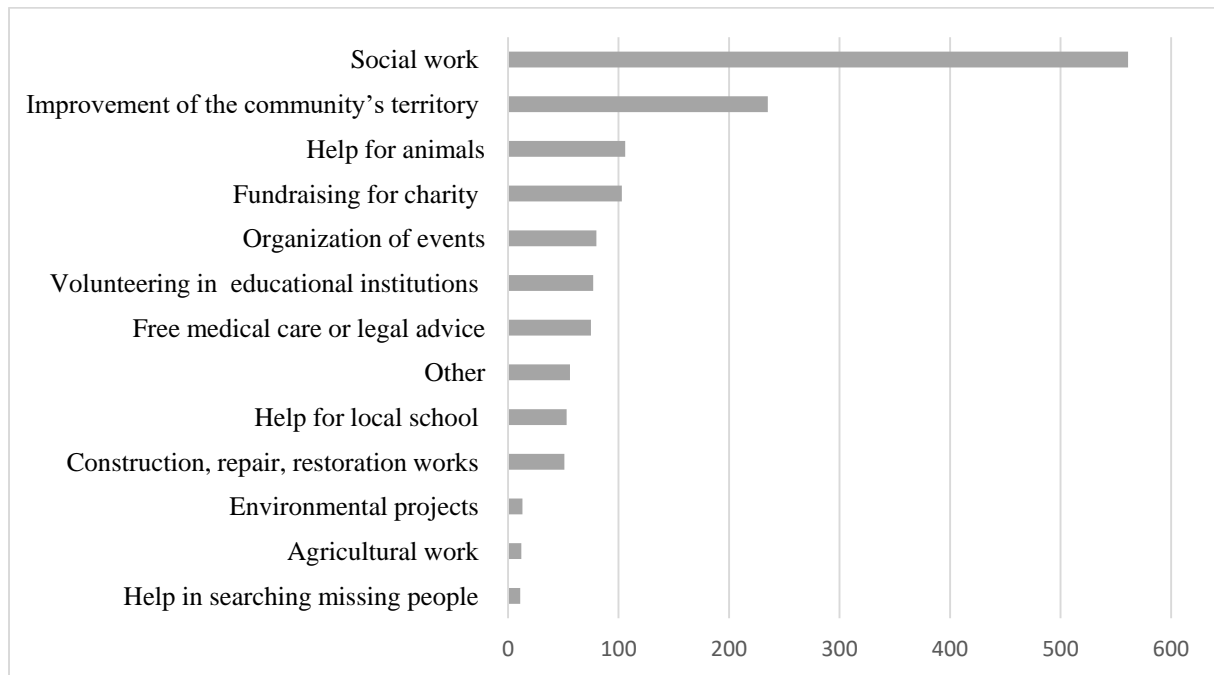
The research on Russian civil society by National Research University “Higher School of Economics” in 2018 showed that the majority of Russian citizens (89%) appreciate the voluntary work and believe that volunteers contribute to solving the social problems.

Figure 3 shows that around 33% of Russians had voluntary experience over the past year. In addition, volunteers differ in their occupation status. Businessmen and high managers (42%), students (36%) and managers (35%) are the most active groups in voluntary work. The least active are people who do not have a job and do not plan to look for it (22%).



**Figure 3.** Participation in voluntary activities by occupation status (%) (Mersiyanova (ed) 2017)

As can be seen from Figure 4, only 13 thousands people participate in environmental projects (clearing forests, fields and rivers planting trees). Such activities as improvement and cleaning of the community’s territory (235 thousands people) and help for animals (106 thousands people) are also connected with ecology. Therefore, around 25% of all voluntary activities in Russia are environmental.



**Figure 4.** Number of volunteers in Russia by activities' areas (thousands people)  
(Labor and employment in Russia 2017)

The Plan of activities for volunteering development was created by Russian Parliament in 2017. Within this Plan priority areas of volunteering for Russia are medical and social services, cultural, environmental volunteering, protection from emergency situations, pro bono volunteering. Moreover, 2018 was declared as the year of volunteerism in Russia. Many activities were conducted in order to develop volunteerism in Russia.

#### 4. CSOS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIONS IN RUSSIA

Environmental volunteering in Russia might be divided into three categories:

- public events, such as seedling cages or garbage collection;
- voluntary activities in forests and protected areas;
- environmental education.

##### 4.1 Public events

The most common public events are events aimed at improvement and cleaning of the community's territory. For example, collecting and sorting garbage, cleaning a territory, etc.

The biggest action of garbage collection is an event called "Let's do it!". This is an international activity that is famous in the world under the name "World cleanup day!". (About World Cleanup Day 2019) In 2018 this event united around 230 thousand people in 67 regions of Russia. Action "Let's do it!" has been organized in Russia since 2010 attracting more and more people every year. The volunteers were responsible for all the steps of event's organization from promotion to search for partners and investors.

Another big event related to garbage collection is "Clean games". "Clean games" are team competitions for the collection and sorting of garbage, which are held in contaminated areas. In the form of funny, active game people clan the territory, get useful experience and knowledge in sorting of garbage, become more responsible and green-oriented. During one game, 100-200 people collect 2-6 tons of garbage, half of which is recycled. The first game was organized in 2014 in Saint-Petersburg. Since that, 414 games

were held in 208 cities of Russia. They united 31995 people who collected 637.2 tons of garbage. (About Clean Days in Russia 2019)

One of the oldest movement against garbage in modern Russia is “Musora. Bol’she. Net” (which means “There is no garbage anymore”). The movement was found in 2004. “Musora. Bol’she. Net” is a network of 50 initiative groups in the cities of Russia and of Commonwealth of Independent States. The movement regularly holds environmental events in companies and in open spaces like exhibitions, fairs and festivals. (About Musora.Bol’she.Net Project 2019)

Usually volunteers who collect garbage also separate it. Simultaneously, there are several movements aimed at separating garbage. Among them are the project "Separated collection", as well as the Russian campaigns of GREENPEACE "For a separate collection”.

The online platform ([recyclemap.ru](http://recyclemap.ru)) is created by GREENPEACE in order to inform Russian citizens about all the points where they can leave the sorted garbage. Such map is available for 30 Russian cities. (Greenpeace released a recycle map in a new format 2016)

Another popular activity in Russia is tree planting. Annually around 15 million trees are planted in Russia. Usually, non-governmental organizations in cooperation with state forestry services, which provide volunteers with necessary equipment and seedlings, are involved in tree planting. Often such activities are sponsored by large companies such as Russian Railways, RUSAL, SIBUR, etc. Moreover, tree planting is a common activity for corporate volunteering. (Paramonova 2018)

In the Russian GREENPEACE, forest restoration is a separate program under the title “Revive our forest”. Activities include working with children in schools.

#### *4.2 Voluntary activities in forests and protected areas*

Almost all reserves and national parks in Russia organize volunteer programs. According to the Ministry of Natural Resources, in 2018 about 2,000 actions were held in the protected areas, which unites more than 50,000 volunteers.

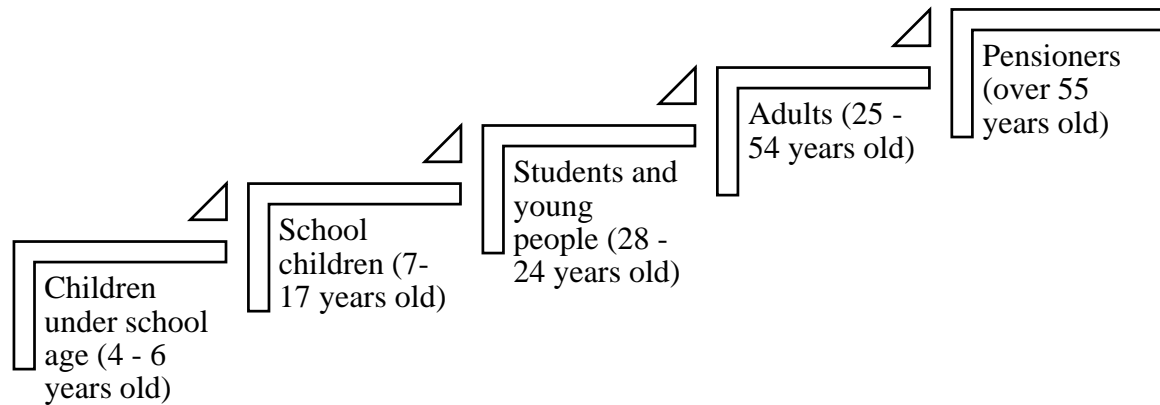
The largest project was the creation of ecological routes and eco-trails within the framework of the All-Russian project “Green route”. The competition “Green route” offers participants to pass and evaluate the state of ecological paths, develop tourist programs, form proposals for promoting and developing ecological paths. To take part in the competition a team of 7 to 15 people should be formed. Each team should include volunteers, local historians or historians, tourism instructors and photographers. (All-Russian competition "Green route" 2018)

In 2018, the Eco Center “Zapovedniki” and the Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia launched the project “Ecodemia”. From June to September camps for "green" volunteers were organized in the 12 national parks. The aims of the camps are assistance to protected natural territories in improvement, reforestation, firefighting, promotion of a culture of responsible ecological tourism in protected areas and support for eco-volunteer initiatives Around 450 people took part in eco camps during the summer 2018. (All-Russian Volunteer Camp Ecodemy 2019)

The system of training public environmental inspectors was established in Russia in 2018. The main function of the public environmental inspector is to assist the state supervision bodies in environmental protection activities on a voluntary and free of charge basis. The function of inspectors is the protection of forests, the control of illegal landfills and the pollution of environment. During 2018, about a thousand people were trained to be public inspectors. More than 200 people confirmed their knowledge during the preliminary testing and will be accredited as an environmental public inspector. Become a public environmental inspector 2017)

#### *4.3 Environmental education*

Environmental education is the dissemination of ecological knowledge, information on the state of the environment, on the use of natural resources in order to form an ecological culture, to foster respect for nature. Environmental education should cover all the categories of population (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Target audience for environmental education  
(The concept of continuous environmental education in St. Petersburg 2015)

There are different approaches of disseminating ecological information for different age groups. For example, kids under the school age can get information through gaming activities, cartoons and short videos, interactive performances. Older children might be interested in search, research and creative activities. Students and young people are main participants of ecological events, projects and voluntary organizations. Adults might learn and include ecological principals in their work. (The concept of continuous environmental education in St. Petersburg 2015)

This sphere of volunteering includes high cooperation with local authorities, governmental organizations and educational institutions.

One of the successful organizations that organize wide range of eco-educational events is Environmental Volunteer Center that was created in 2015 in St. Petersburg at the initiative of the Committee for Nature Management, Environmental Protection and Ensuring Ecological Safety. The main objectives of the Center are to promote communication, cooperation and the development of voluntary environmental projects, movements and organizations of St. Petersburg. The center is an intermediary between non-profit organizations, social movements and public authorities.

Volunteers and environmental activists can attend the Center's training activities and participate in internships and environmental education trainings, such as "the Red Wolf Eating Trash" training project, the School for Marketing Environmental Projects, the Volunteer School and others. The center regularly conducts environmental education games for schoolchildren and students, including hosting foreign groups. (Environmental Volunteer Center 2016)

As part of the environmental volunteer center work since October 2015, the following activities were organized and conducted:

- over 70 events (meetings, seminars, round tables - organized by non-commercial public organizations of St. Petersburg),
- support and printing of more than 21 series of various environmental education materials (leaflets, posters, booklets, etc.) were carried out - the circulation was more than 7,000 copies,
- 25 agreements with public organizations and associations,
- 6 organizations interact with the Center without agreements,
- 100 volunteers of coordinators were trained in the Center.

Among the biggest actions related to ecological education in 2018 were the All-Russian Ecological Action "Volunteers can do everything" and the inter-regional project "Letters to animals".



The action “Volunteers can do everything” is held in several areas, including: a drawing contest, children's environmental forums, a competition of projects aimed at creating ecological paths, helping people with disabilities and large families, art and music, and other projects. (All-Russian environmental campaign "Volunteers can do everything", dedicated to the Year of the volunteer 2018)

In the framework of the “Letters to animals” project, children correspond with animals, including rare and endangered species; as a result, children receive a response in the form of a letter from the animal’s face. The “Letters to animals” project is a game, at the same time it explains to children quite complex concepts in an accessible form. (Interregional environmental education project "Letters to animals" 2017)

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Civil society is considered as an independent and important actor in the process of Sustainable Development Goals’ realization. The role of civil society for SDGs in Russia is significant because the governmental regulations and low in this field (especially in environmental aspects of SDGs) is not developed enough. Moreover, Russian society is not well informed about ecology and SDGs. Civil society organizations take responsibility for providing people with necessary information and with opportunity to do real actions.

Russian government supports volunteering by providing non-governmental organizations with funds and organizing different events and programs. The number of volunteers is increasing, however, it is hard to estimate how many people are involved in voluntary activities as different statistical organizations use different methods and present absolutely different results. The universe method should be chosen and all-Russian research on the state of civil society should be conducted in order to have an understanding of the real situation.

In Russia there are many voluntary activities aimed at the realization of environmental dimension of SDGs. Most of them are related to organizing public events, activities in forests and protected areas, assistance in the performance of state functions, environmental education. Nevertheless, their impact is not that high as it could be with better infrastructure (garbage collection points, recycling points, green manufactories, etc.) and regulations of production and consumption (restrictions on the production and sale of plastics, encouragement for green purchases, etc.). Therefore, the government and business should get involved in SD more actively.

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