

Government and Community Responses to Challenges in Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG-12) in the Philippines: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The study explored the responses of government institutions and community stakeholders to the challenges of implementing Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12) Responsible Consumption and Production in the Philippines. Using a qualitative narrative approach, the research examined how national policies, local initiatives, and collaborative practices shaped the country's progress toward sustainability. Findings revealed three major themes: policy implementation gaps, community empowerment, and collaborative sustainability. First, institutional weaknesses such as fragmented coordination, limited resources, and short-term political agendas hindered the translation of sustainability policies into effective programs. Second, communities responded to these gaps through self-initiated environmental efforts, including waste segregation, upcycling, and composting projects, which reflected empowerment and a shared sense of responsibility. Third, collaborative governance and policy innovation emerged as transformative pathways, where partnerships among local government units, non-government organizations, and private sectors fostered inclusive and adaptive sustainability models. The interplay between governance structures and grassroots participation highlighted that sustainable development could not be achieved by policy reform alone, but through collective ownership and long-term cooperation. The study concluded that strengthening participatory governance, institutional coherence, and innovation systems is essential for realizing SDG 12 in the Philippine context. By fostering collaboration between government and communities, sustainability initiatives can evolve from fragmented projects into integrated, equitable, and resilient systems of responsible consumption and production.

Keywords: Responsible Consumption and Production, Sustainable Development Goal 12, Collaborative Governance, Community Empowerment, Policy Implementation, Sustainability in the Philippines

Introduction

The Philippines had long faced increasing challenges in achieving sustainable patterns of consumption and production, as outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12). Responsible consumption and production referred to the efficient use of resources and energy, the reduction of waste, and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles (United Nations, 2020). The goal aimed to ensure that economic growth was decoupled from environmental degradation while improving resource efficiency and promoting sustainable infrastructure. In the Philippine context, rapid urbanization, population growth, and industrialization had

intensified the demand for natural resources and contributed to environmental pressures such as pollution, waste mismanagement, and unsustainable production practices (Asian Development Bank, 2021).

Government institutions in the Philippines had implemented various policies and programs to address these concerns. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) had spearheaded initiatives such as the *National Solid Waste Management Program* and *Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 (Republic Act No. 9003)*, which aimed to improve waste segregation, recycling, and community-based waste reduction (DENR, 2021). Moreover, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and other agencies had supported sustainable business practices through the promotion of eco-labeling, green industries, and circular economy approaches (DTI, 2022). Despite these efforts, challenges in enforcement, public compliance, and resource limitations persisted, which often hindered the full realization of SDG 12 (World Bank, 2022).

At the community level, responses to responsible consumption and production had varied depending on socio-economic contexts and local leadership. Many local government units (LGUs) and community-based organizations had initiated environmental programs such as community clean-ups, waste recovery centers, and plastic reduction campaigns (Local Government Academy, 2020). Grassroots organizations and non-governmental groups also played vital roles in promoting environmental education and awareness, particularly among youth and households (Greenpeace Philippines, 2021). However, behavioral change among consumers remained a major challenge due to limited awareness, economic constraints, and lack of access to sustainable products and services (UNDP Philippines, 2022).

Given these conditions, the study had explored how both government and community stakeholders responded to the challenges of implementing SDG 12 in the Philippines. It had sought to understand the policies, strategies, and practices employed at different governance levels, as well as the perceptions and participation of local communities in advancing responsible consumption and production. Through qualitative inquiry, the study had aimed to generate insights into how collective actions, policy coherence, and social engagement contributed to or hindered the country's progress toward sustainability. Ultimately, this study had provided a grounded understanding of the interplay between policy implementation and community behavior, offering implications for strengthening future sustainability efforts in the Philippines.

Review of Related Literature and Studies

Policy Frameworks and Governmental Commitment to SDG 12

The Philippine government had actively aligned its national policies with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production. The Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023–2028 incorporated sustainable resource management and circular economy principles as part of the country's transition toward greener growth (National Economic and Development Authority [NEDA], 2023). In particular, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) had strengthened the implementation of Republic Act No. 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, emphasizing waste segregation, extended producer responsibility, and local government accountability (DENR, 2022). Furthermore, the enactment of Republic Act No. 11898, also known as the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Act of 2022, represented a significant step toward institutionalizing shared responsibility among manufacturers and importers in reducing plastic waste (Congress of the Philippines, 2022).

These legislative measures were complemented by the Philippine Action Plan for Sustainable Consumption and Production (PAP4SCP), which served as a national roadmap for promoting sustainable business models, green procurement, and eco-friendly lifestyles (DENR & UNDP Philippines, 2021). However, despite these efforts, gaps in coordination, limited funding, and weak monitoring mechanisms had constrained effective implementation (Asian

Development Bank [ADB], 2022). Studies had also indicated that local governments often lacked technical capacity and institutional support to translate national policies into actionable community programs (Santiago & Alampay, 2023). Thus, while the national framework was robust, the actual execution at the grassroots level remained uneven.

Community Engagement and Local Environmental Initiatives

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At the community level, local government units (LGUs), non-government organizations (NGOs), and civil society groups had played vital roles in advancing the principles of SDG 12. Community-based solid waste management programs, such as *Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs)* and zero-waste barangay initiatives, had been recognized as effective local responses to waste challenges (Solid Waste Management Association of the Philippines [SWAPP], 2021). In cities such as San Fernando, Pampanga and Quezon City, barangays had implemented extensive waste segregation campaigns and recycling incentives, leading to higher waste diversion rates (DENR, 2022). These programs illustrated that community mobilization and strong local leadership were key enablers of sustainable consumption practices.

However, not all communities had shown equal participation or success. In many rural areas, limited access to recycling facilities and insufficient environmental education hindered behavioral change among residents (Garcia & de Guzman, 2021). Moreover, socio-economic constraints forced many low-income households to prioritize affordability over sustainability, thus perpetuating the use of single-use plastics and unsustainable consumption patterns (UNDP Philippines, 2022). Community engagement, therefore, had to be context-sensitive—recognizing that environmental sustainability could only be achieved when aligned with social equity and livelihood considerations (Mendoza & Cruz, 2023).

Role of Education and Awareness in Promoting Sustainable Lifestyles

Education and awareness campaigns had emerged as essential components in achieving the goals of responsible consumption and production. The Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) had integrated sustainability themes into their curricula under the *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)* framework (DepEd, 2022). Higher education institutions in the Philippines had also adopted campus-wide sustainability initiatives, including green audits, paperless systems, and waste reduction programs (Lopez et al., 2021). Furthermore, environmental NGOs and youth organizations such as *Plastic-Free Pilipinas* and *Zero Waste Youth Movement* had mobilized thousands of volunteers through social media-driven campaigns (Greenpeace Philippines, 2021).

Nevertheless, researchers noted that public understanding of SDG 12 remained relatively low, particularly among marginalized communities (Perez & Soriano, 2022). Awareness efforts were often fragmented and project-based rather than institutionalized. For instance, while some localities implemented short-term environmental projects, these were not always sustained due to leadership turnover or limited funding. The challenge thus lay in developing long-term educational interventions that fostered intrinsic motivation and community ownership (Santos, 2023).

Challenges in Implementation and Policy Integration

Despite notable policy advances, the Philippines continued to face structural and practical barriers in achieving SDG 12 targets. Weak enforcement of environmental laws, insufficient inter-agency coordination, and limited access to green technologies were among the primary obstacles (ADB, 2022). The informal waste sector—composed of waste pickers and junkshop operators—remained largely unrecognized in formal policy frameworks, even though it played a crucial role in recycling and resource recovery (UN-Habitat Philippines, 2021). Moreover,



corruption, lack of transparency in procurement, and overlapping agency mandates further delayed the progress of sustainable consumption programs (Santiago & Alampay, 2023).

Another critical issue was the imbalance between production and consumption priorities. Industries continued to generate significant environmental footprints due to unsustainable production systems, while consumers had limited access to sustainable alternatives (World Bank, 2023). Although the circular economy concept was gaining traction, implementation was still in its infancy and heavily concentrated in urban centers (Ramos & Bautista, 2022). This urban bias had marginalized rural communities that lacked technological and infrastructural support for sustainable production.

Emerging Practices and Pathways Toward Sustainability

Despite these challenges, several innovative practices had emerged that illustrated the country's growing commitment to sustainable consumption and production. The private sector had increasingly embraced corporate sustainability and environmental responsibility through initiatives such as the *Philippine Business for the Environment (PBE)* network and the *Green Jobs Act of 2016* implementation roadmap (Department of Labor and Employment [DOLE], 2022). Many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) had also shifted toward eco-packaging, upcycling, and green marketing as part of their post-pandemic recovery strategies (Bautista, 2021).

Digital platforms had further enabled sustainable innovation by connecting eco-conscious producers and consumers through online marketplaces (Cruz & Morales, 2023). These new models illustrated the potential of technology and entrepreneurship in transforming consumption patterns. At the policy level, continued partnerships between government, academia, and civil society were recognized as essential for achieving SDG 12 (NEDA, 2023). A systems-based approach—one that integrated economic, social, and environmental dimensions—was increasingly viewed as the most effective path toward long-term sustainability (UNDP Philippines, 2022).

Synthesis. The literature collectively underscored that while the Philippines had established a solid policy foundation for SDG 12, translating these commitments into tangible outcomes required stronger community participation, institutional coordination, and sustained behavioral change. Government initiatives provided the structural framework, but community responses determined their real-world success. Education, inclusive governance, and innovation emerged as recurring themes that linked policy to practice. Overall, the synergy between government frameworks and grassroots action was identified as the critical determinant of progress toward responsible consumption and production.

Framework of the Study

Theoretical Framework

This study had been guided by two key theoretical perspectives: the Sustainable Development Theory and the Collaborative Governance Theory. These theories provided the foundation for understanding how the Philippine government and local communities responded to the challenges of implementing Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12) on responsible consumption and production.

The Sustainable Development Theory (Brundtland Commission, 1987) emphasized the balance among economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity to ensure that current needs were met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. This theory had been widely applied to environmental policy and governance, highlighting the interdependence between consumption patterns, production systems, and ecological preservation (United Nations, 2020). In the context of this study, the theory explained how government and

community efforts aimed to create sustainable lifestyles, reduce waste, and promote resource efficiency. It also framed the analysis of how local actions aligned with the national and global sustainability agenda.

Complementing this was the Collaborative Governance Theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008), which posited that complex societal issues, such as environmental degradation and unsustainable consumption, could only be effectively addressed through the collective participation of multiple stakeholders—government agencies, civil society, private sectors, and local communities. The theory underscored the importance of shared decision-making, mutual accountability, and networked partnerships in achieving sustainability outcomes. Within this framework, the study examined how cooperation, dialogue, and joint action between government institutions and community actors shaped responses to SDG 12 challenges. It also guided the analysis of barriers such as weak coordination, limited resources, and inconsistent policy implementation.

Together, these theories had provided a strong conceptual foundation for interpreting how the Philippine government and communities interacted, negotiated, and collaborated in addressing environmental sustainability issues under SDG 12. The Sustainable Development Theory clarified the “why” of sustainability goals, while the Collaborative Governance Theory illuminated the “how” of stakeholder engagement and policy execution.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Grounded in these theories, the conceptual framework of the study illustrated the dynamic relationship between **government responses, community participation, implementation challenges, and sustainability outcomes**. Government responses referred to the national and local policies, programs, and enforcement mechanisms initiated to promote sustainable consumption and production. Community responses encompassed the participation, awareness, and local initiatives undertaken to complement government efforts. Between these two levels lay a set of implementation challenges, including policy fragmentation, resource constraints, and behavioral barriers, which influenced the overall effectiveness of SDG 12 initiatives.

The study had conceptualized that effective alignment between government actions and community engagement would lead to more sustainable outcomes—such as waste reduction, responsible consumption habits, and improved resource efficiency. Conversely, the absence of collaboration or the persistence of systemic challenges could hinder progress toward the fulfillment of SDG 12 targets. The conceptual framework therefore served as both a guide for data collection and an interpretive lens for understanding how various actors contributed to or constrained the country’s sustainability goals.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY



Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework illustrates the dynamic process linking government and community efforts toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 12. It begins with government responses, which include the formulation of policies, programs, and legislation, as well as interagency coordination to promote responsible consumption and production. These efforts encounter implementation challenges such as institutional gaps, limited resources, low public awareness, and behavioral barriers that hinder effective policy execution. In response, community initiatives emerge through grassroots participation, awareness campaigns, and local innovations to complement and reinforce government actions. Together, these interactions lead to sustainable outcomes such as waste reduction, responsible consumption, the promotion of a circular economy, and the improvement of overall environmental health in the Philippines.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to examine how both government institutions and local communities contributed to the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12) in the Philippines. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Analyze the policy implementation gaps and institutional constraints that affected the effectiveness of government programs promoting responsible consumption and production.
2. Explore how community engagement, empowerment, and shared responsibility emerged as adaptive responses to institutional shortcomings in sustainability implementation.
3. Investigate the forms and impacts of collaborative sustainability initiatives that bridged government, community, and private sector efforts toward achieving SDG 12.
4. Evaluate how these interconnected dynamics policy gaps, community empowerment, and collaboration collectively shaped the outcomes of sustainability practices in the Philippine context.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design using narrative analysis to explore the lived experiences of government officials, community leaders, and sustainability advocates in addressing the challenges of implementing Sustainable Development Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) in the Philippines. Narrative inquiry was chosen for its capacity to capture how individuals construct meaning from experiences and social realities related to sustainability and governance (Riessman, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2021). A purposive sampling technique was used to select eight informants—three local government officials, three community

leaders, and two sustainability advocates—who were directly engaged in sustainability programs and projects promoting responsible consumption and production. Data were gathered through life story interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations, supported by documentary reviews of policy papers, government reports, and environmental audit documents to ensure triangulation and credibility of findings. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw were strictly observed throughout the research process.

Data were analyzed using Riessman's (2008) interpretive narrative framework, examining each narrative in terms of plot, characters, temporality, turning points, and resolutions to uncover meaning and structure. To strengthen interpretation, Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic analysis was integrated in an iterative process to identify patterns across narratives. This analytical approach revealed themes related to policy coherence, governance challenges, institutional collaboration, community adaptation, and sustainability outcomes. Through this process, the narratives were situated within the broader context of Philippine governance and community participation, showing how both sectors responded to and navigated sustainability challenges under SDG 12. The findings illuminated how personal and institutional stories of action, resilience, and innovation contribute to advancing responsible consumption and production, providing grounded insights for enhancing policy implementation, community empowerment, and sustainable development practices in the Philippines.

Findings and Discussion

Thematic Narrative 1: Policy Implementation Gaps and Institutional Constraints

Participants consistently highlighted the gap between the ideals of SDG 12 and the realities of its implementation in the Philippines. Government officials and community leaders narrated how resource limitations, bureaucratic red tape, and weak coordination among agencies have slowed the translation of sustainability policies into actionable programs. Several informants described instances where projects promoting waste segregation, recycling, and sustainable production were “well-drafted on paper but poorly executed,” illustrating a pattern of fragmentation between planning and operationalization. Local officials admitted that overlapping mandates and inadequate technical support from national agencies often resulted in delayed or redundant projects. Meanwhile, community leaders noted that sustainability programs were sometimes short-lived due to insufficient funding and lack of long-term planning. These recurring patterns of administrative fragmentation and limited institutional capacity align with the Implementation Theory of Policy (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Sabatier & Weible, 2014), which asserts that policy failures often stem from complex, multi-level coordination challenges. Likewise, Governance Network Theory (Rhodes, 2017) helps explain how the absence of coherent collaboration among actors weakens collective efforts in achieving sustainability goals.

The findings emphasize that institutional constraints are not merely technical or financial but structural, embedded in the governance culture itself. Participants' narratives reveal that sustainability programs often depend on short-term political priorities rather than long-term ecological goals, leading to fluctuating commitment and inconsistent enforcement. The lack of continuity across political transitions further hampers progress, resulting in projects being “restarted from scratch” after leadership changes. This dynamic demonstrates that achieving responsible consumption and production requires not just good policy design but institutional continuity, stable coordination mechanisms, and political will. By exposing how governance inefficiencies obstruct SDG 12 implementation, these narratives call attention to the need for a sustained and integrated governance framework that bridges national strategies with local realities.



Fig. 2 Narrative Tree on Policy Implementation Gaps and Community Engagement

Figure 2 presents the narrative tree illustrating the connection between policy implementation gaps and community engagement in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 12. The analysis reveals that institutional weaknesses such as fragmented coordination, inadequate funding, and inconsistent enforcement hinder the effectiveness of government programs promoting responsible consumption and production. These deficiencies, however, have prompted active community responses, where local groups, non-government organizations, and barangay initiatives fill policy voids through awareness drives, waste segregation efforts, and grassroots innovations. The interaction between these two dimensions underscores that sustainability outcomes emerge not solely from formal government actions but from the synergy between institutional reforms and empowered civic participation. Strengthening communication channels, resource sharing, and participatory governance mechanisms is therefore essential to bridge policy–practice gaps and sustain progress toward SDG 12 targets in the Philippines.

Thematic Narrative 2: Community Engagement, Empowerment, and Shared Responsibility

A second dominant theme emerged around the proactive role of communities in addressing sustainability challenges despite institutional shortcomings. Participants shared how local organizations, cooperatives, and informal groups mobilized waste collection drives, community gardens, and upcycling initiatives to supplement limited government programs. One community leader described how “we started our own composting program because the city collection system was unreliable,” illustrating a sense of ownership and innovation among citizens. These grassroots efforts were driven by a shared belief that sustainable practices must begin at the local level, even without full government support. This aligns with Participatory Governance Theory (Fung, 2015; Gaventa, 2006), which highlights how citizen involvement strengthens accountability and enhances policy outcomes through collective action. Furthermore, Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000) provides a lens for understanding how communities transform from passive beneficiaries to active agents of change through environmental education, resource sharing, and cooperative labor.

The participants’ narratives also revealed that collaboration between government and communities, when present, yielded more sustainable results. Barangay-led waste management programs and livelihood projects on sustainable crafts demonstrated the potential of co-production of sustainability when both sectors worked in synergy. However, respondents emphasized that community participation was often limited to consultation rather than genuine decision-making, leading to a perception of tokenism. Still, in many cases, communities responded with self-reliance and mutual support systems, framing sustainability not merely as a policy obligation but as a moral and civic responsibility. These accounts resonate with Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000), which underscores that networks of trust and cooperation foster resilience and long-term sustainability. Ultimately, the convergence of citizen empowerment and participatory governance in these narratives shows that sustainable

consumption and production in the Philippines can only be realized through shared accountability where both government and communities act as equal partners in stewardship of the environment and the nation's resources.

Thematic Narrative 3: Toward Collaborative Sustainability and Policy Innovation

The third major theme centers on the emergence of collaborative governance and policy innovation as critical responses to the challenges in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 12 in the Philippines. Informants from both government and community sectors narrated how partnerships across local government units, non-government organizations, and private enterprises have started to address long-standing sustainability barriers through collective problem-solving. One sustainability advocate shared that “true progress began when the barangay worked with the youth, schools, and waste traders—everyone had a role.” This collective approach marked a shift from fragmented and top-down initiatives toward inclusive, multi-stakeholder participation. Respondents cited successful examples such as inter-barangay recycling networks, green livelihood programs supported by local businesses, and community-based environmental monitoring groups. These innovations illustrate that collaboration not only mobilizes resources but also builds accountability and shared ownership over sustainability outcomes. The narratives reflect the principles of Collaborative Governance Theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015), which emphasizes that sustainable policy outcomes arise when diverse actors build trust, share power, and engage in deliberative dialogue.

Participants also underscored that innovation in sustainability policy often emerged from necessity and experimentation. Due to limited funding and institutional constraints, local actors adapted and improvised by repurposing available materials, integrating indigenous practices, and developing circular economy models suited to their contexts. For example, one barangay established a waste-to-craft initiative that transformed plastic waste into marketable goods, combining environmental protection with livelihood generation. These initiatives embody Adaptive Governance Theory (Folke et al., 2005; Chaffin et al., 2014), which explains how flexibility, learning, and local innovation strengthen community resilience in the face of policy and environmental uncertainty. Narratives from community members further revealed that these small-scale innovations often influenced local ordinances or inspired neighboring communities to adopt similar models. Such ripple effects highlight the transformative potential of collaboration when governance institutions view communities not as recipients but as co-designers of sustainability solutions. Ultimately, this thematic narrative demonstrates that the path toward achieving SDG 12 in the Philippines lies in fostering continuous dialogue, mutual trust, and innovation across institutional and social boundaries bridging governance structures with citizen creativity and moral commitment to sustainability.

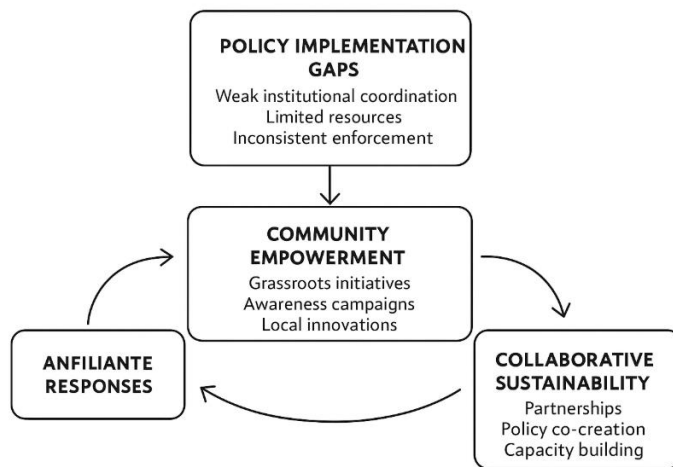


Figure 3. Cluster Map of Collaborative Sustainability Responses

Figure 3 illustrates the interconnections among the three major thematic narratives—policy implementation gaps, community empowerment, and collaborative sustainability. The map shows how weak institutional coordination and limited policy execution (Thematic Narrative 1) prompted strong grassroots responses and civic empowerment (Thematic Narrative 2), which in turn evolved into collaborative partnerships and innovative sustainability models (Thematic Narrative 3). This interconnected framework demonstrates that achieving SDG 12 requires a cyclical process of governance reform, community engagement, and adaptive collaboration—each reinforcing the other toward a more inclusive and effective sustainability agenda in the Philippines.

Conclusion And Implications

The findings of the study revealed that the successful implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 12 in the Philippines depended on the dynamic interplay between institutional governance and community participation. While persistent policy implementation gaps such as weak coordination, limited resources, and short-term political priorities had hindered government-led sustainability efforts, empowered communities had emerged as catalysts of change through grassroots innovations, cooperative initiatives, and adaptive practices. These community-driven actions not only compensated for administrative shortcomings but also fostered collaboration among local government units, civil society, and private sectors, leading to the co-creation of more inclusive and context-responsive sustainability models. The implications of these findings underscored the need for stronger policy coherence, participatory governance mechanisms, and institutional continuity to sustain progress toward SDG 12. By embedding collaboration, flexibility, and mutual accountability into the policy process, the Philippines could transform fragmented efforts into an integrated sustainability framework that empowered citizens as equal partners in promoting responsible consumption, production, and environmental stewardship.

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