

Integrating environmental action into the mandate and work of

Serve the City International (STCi)

"We have not inherited the earth from our fathers, but borrowed it from our children"

"We care for the environment because we care for people"

1. Purpose of this policy

Through an increasing number of National and Local Serve the City organizations, the global STC family has since 2015 mobilized thousands of volunteers for acts of care and compassion towards the most vulnerable in urban areas, reaching a total of more than one million people across the world in 2023 alone. With its focus on social concerns, actions addressing environmental issues and challenges were, with few exceptions, rather limited in the past. However, the increasing impact of environmental degradation and climate change, notably on the most vulnerable, propels STCi to put more emphasis on the environment. The purpose of this policy brief is to provide guidance and inspiration to all STC organizations on why and how environmental care and stewardship can be included in their daily operations, with the aim of strengthening STCi's mission, mandate, relevance, and impact.

2. The big picture: Think globally

Human flourishing and our environment are inseparably connected. Human existence depends on the availability of clean air, water, and biodiversity. Their degradation, compounded by the adverse effects of climate change, has a considerable detrimental effect on human physical and mental health and wellbeing. Its improvement, on a local and global scale, contributes to human survival and flourishing.

Over the past decades, the environmental conditions contributing to human wellbeing have significantly deteriorated across most parts of the world. We are witnessing declining air quality in ever growing cities, increasing amounts of plastic waste without sustainable disposal solutions, disturbed rainfall patterns destroying livelihoods and the destruction of tropical forests with multiple effects on biodiversity, climate and biodiversity.

3. A Call for Action

The above-mentioned challenges call for immediate action. The increasingly devastating effects of *today's* environmental degradation will inevitably be felt in the years and decades to come, and any further delay will put more human lives at risk. STCi recognizes that the marginalized are more vulnerable and less resilient to the degradation of the environment and the impact of climate change. Integrating environmental concerns into its activities, both in terms of mainstreaming environmental sustainability across all actions and in terms of implementing "green" actions, is therefore fully aligned with STCi's core values. STCi will continue to apply the organization's guiding principles of humility, respect, courage, hope, love, and compassion in its engagement with all its stakeholders, including "*beneficiaries*", volunteers, institutional actors, and donors.

3.1 Corporate practices: STCi's environmental footprint as an organization

The credibility of an organization caring for the environment is closely linked to how it mainstreams environmental care into its corporate practices. STCi will adopt policies and minimize its ecological footprint,



including in the areas of (i) waste management (reduce, reuse, recycle and minimize the use of plastic), (ii) resource use and the promotion of circular economy, (iii) travels (minimize fossil fuel travels), and to offset its carbon footprint. National and local STC organizations are also encouraged to adopt „green” policies, practices and implementation roadmaps, and to reduce their ecological footprint. STCi will identify tools that can help all STC organizations in this process.

3.2. Environmental actions in cities: Act locally (“green events”)

Mobilizing volunteers for environmental concerns can have a number of positive effects, for instance:

- (i) Supporting local green actions of likeminded partners and local authorities, for instance in greening or reforesting a neighborhood, creating a more plastic free neighborhood, removing waste from parks or supporting community gardens, have a direct positive impact on people’s living conditions.
- (ii) Environmental awareness and knowledge sharing could be included as part of each local green action carried out jointly by volunteers, “beneficiaries” and partners.
- (iii) Local green actions expand the reach of STCi, mobilize more volunteers, strengthen STCi’s role as important partner and bring its values closer to its partner organizations.
- (iv) Mainstreaming environmental sustainability across all activities of the global STC family will reduce the ecological footprint of the whole organization.

4. How to get started?

Environmental actions in our neighborhoods and cities need to translate the above-mentioned global challenges into local priorities based on local contexts and challenges. As a volunteer-mobilizing organization, all STC organizations should prioritize opportunities where local governmental or nongovernmental organizations are already active rather than trying to identify their own priorities.

A Local City STC organization interested in expanding its environmental profile could start by creating an environmental working group followed by a mapping exercise: What are the environmental concerns of the people, notably the most vulnerable? Who are the existing environmental actors in the neighborhood and what are they doing? What are the policies and actions of local governments? How do local authorities encourage environmental actions? Where possible, an STC organization can join existing (or help create) national or local “sustainability platforms” and offer partners to mobilize volunteers in support of their activities.

Following agreements with local partners (NGOs, local government), the Local City STC organization could include their environmental actions in their communication and volunteer mobilization activities in the same way as the more classical STC actions. This initial investment and effort will soon be compensated by the benefits of a greater engagement with the communities, more volunteers mobilized, more partner organizations, possibly more funds raised, and higher impact. As an example, litter picking projects have been successful in attracting more volunteers, raising the profile of a STC organization, and creating more partnerships.

To support the implementation of this policy, STCi will provide training and capacity building opportunities and tools to all STC organizations.

5. Partnerships

By its very nature, all STC organizations are embedded in multiple partnerships. STCi will endeavor to develop operational as well as strategic partnerships for environmental action at global level and encourages National



and Local City STC organizations to do the same at national and local levels. Environmental actions can also be an avenue to create or deepen partnerships with private sector actors that are interested in displaying their environmental friendliness as part of their corporate social responsibility. National and Local City STC organizations are also encouraged to exchange good practices and experiences among themselves.

Annex 1: Goals, indicators and reporting

As an initial step, it is suggested to keep the matrix simple. Over time and with increased environmental actions, a more complex matrix can be developed. While the matrix is binding for STCi, the application for national and local city STCs is suggested and depends on local contexts.

Areas	Indicators	Target	Timeline	Reporting on implementation
Guiding documents	<i>STCi</i> -Overall environmental policy -Implementation road map -Environment training program -Compilation of good practices -Reporting templates <i>Suggested for National and Local STC organizations:</i> -National and Local STC's environmental policy, goals/indicators, and implementation road map	Adopted Drafted and adopted Course developed Drafted and adopted Drafted and adopted Drafted, adopted	end-2023 S1/2024 S1/2024 S1/2024 S1/2024 During 2024 (suggested)	Quarterly starting 2024 Quarterly starting 2024 (suggested)
Institutional Partnerships	<i>STCi and National/Local STC organizations (suggested)</i> -Number of operational partners -Number of strategic partners -Number of signed MoUs	At least 1 At least 1 At least 1	End-2024 End-2024 End-2024	Quarterly, starting 2024
Resource stewardship	<i>STCi and National/Local STC organizations (suggested)</i> -Resource stewardship good practices compilation -Number of measures in place reducing ecological footprint	Drafted and adopted At least 5	Before mid-2024 End-2024	Quarterly starting S2/'24
Local actions/ "green events"	<i>Local City STC organizations (suggested)</i> -Number of local environmental actions carried out -Number of volunteers mobilized	Each local City STC can identify their own targets		Quarterly (suggested), to be agreed with Local City STCs

