

1. Title of the Practice

Caring for the Soil

2. Objectives of the Practice

The practice *Carers of the Soil* aims to inculcate environmental responsibility and sustainable living among students by promoting soil conservation, organic waste management, and eco-friendly practices. The primary objective is to sensitize students to the importance of soil as a life-supporting system and to encourage sustainable utilization of natural resources. Through hands-on activities such as composting, organic gardening, waste segregation, and environmental campaigns, the practice seeks to integrate ecological values with academic learning. It is grounded in the principles of sustainability, experiential learning, community engagement, and intergenerational equity, ensuring that students emerge as environmentally conscious citizens capable of contributing to local and global ecological well-being.

3. The Context

Rapid urbanization, changing lifestyles, and increasing consumerism have resulted in significant environmental challenges such as soil degradation, improper waste disposal, loss of green cover, and declining ecological awareness among youth. As a higher education institution located in Goa, Carmel College for Women recognized the need to address these concerns through structured, participatory initiatives. Students often lacked practical exposure to sustainable practices beyond theoretical classroom learning. Additionally, the campus generated considerable biodegradable and electronic waste, necessitating systematic management. There was also a need to strengthen community engagement in environmental conservation. Against this backdrop, *Carers of the Soil* was conceptualized as a holistic best practice to address soil health, waste management, biodiversity conservation, and water awareness by integrating curricular, co-curricular, and extension activities across departments and student bodies.

4. The Practice

Carers of the Soil is a multi-dimensional best practice that integrates academic learning with practical environmental stewardship. The Department of Botany plays a pivotal role by incorporating compost preparation into the B.Sc. Botany curriculum, enabling students to gain first-hand experience in managing organic waste through aerobic composting. Leaf composters and pit composting units are maintained on campus, and the compost produced is used to enrich the botanical and vegetable gardens.

The practice extends beyond the curriculum through workshops and certificate courses, such as the hands-on workshop on composting food and garden waste and the certificate course on Food Processing and Value Addition, where students learn to manage food waste efficiently. Students are further encouraged to replicate composting practices at home and in their communities, thereby acting as sustainability ambassadors.

Complementing soil care initiatives, the Environment Protection Club (EPC), NSS, NCC, and various departments organize activities such as the establishment of the *Green Thumb* vegetable garden, Van Mahotsav celebrations, Save Wetland campaigns, World Water Day observances, and regular e-waste collection drives in collaboration with government-authorized agencies.

These activities highlight the interconnection between healthy soil, water conservation, biodiversity, and responsible waste management.

The uniqueness of this practice lies in its integrated approach, combining curriculum-based learning, campus sustainability initiatives, and community outreach. Constraints included limited space for large-scale composting, the need for continuous monitoring, and sustaining student participation; however, collaborative efforts across departments helped overcome these challenges.

5. Evidence of Success

The success of *Carers of the Soil* is evident through measurable outcomes and qualitative impact. Over 600 kg of e-waste was responsibly collected and disposed of in March 2025, while bi-monthly drives ensured continuous awareness and participation. Composting initiatives resulted in the regular production of organic manure used for campus gardens, reducing dependency on chemical fertilizers. The *Green Thumb* vegetable garden successfully yielded its first harvest within two months, demonstrating the effectiveness of organic soil enrichment.

Large-scale participation was observed in activities such as Van Mahotsav, with around 250 volunteers, and World Water Day, which engaged over 100 students and faculty along with community stakeholders. Extension activities following composting workshops led students to educate multiple households on waste segregation and composting. Collectively, these results indicate enhanced environmental awareness, skill development, community engagement, and a visible shift towards sustainable campus practices.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

Key challenges included sustaining long-term student engagement, managing composting units during academic breaks, and ensuring proper segregation of waste. Space constraints and occasional lack of awareness among stakeholders initially posed difficulties. Resources required included composting bins, leaf composters, garden tools, saplings, protective gloves, awareness materials, and collaboration with external agencies such as government-authorized e-waste recyclers and forest departments. Faculty coordination, student volunteers, and institutional support were crucial human resources that ensured smooth implementation.

7. Notes (Optional)

The *Carers of the Soil* best practice is easily adaptable by other higher education institutions due to its low-cost, scalable, and participatory nature. Institutions are encouraged to integrate such practices into their curriculum, establish interdisciplinary committees, and collaborate with local bodies for greater impact. Regular monitoring, student ownership, and community linkage are key to sustainability. This practice also reinforces institutional values such as environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and experiential learning, aligning strongly with national priorities on sustainable development and higher education quality benchmarks.

1. Title of the Practice

Service Learning

2. Objectives of the Practice

The objective of this Service Learning practice is to integrate academic learning with structured community engagement to promote social responsibility, environmental sustainability, preventive healthcare awareness, and compassion among students. The practice seeks to sensitize students to real-life societal challenges through direct involvement in health camps, environmental drives, and social outreach programmes. It is grounded in experiential learning, value education, and civic engagement, enabling students to apply classroom knowledge to community needs. The practice also aims to inculcate empathy, teamwork, leadership skills, and ethical consciousness, thereby contributing to holistic student development and reinforcing the institution's commitment to inclusive and responsible higher education.

3. The Context

Institutions of higher education increasingly face the challenge of making learning socially relevant while responding to community needs. The surrounding communities near the institution include elderly populations, children in need of care, small vendors, and environmentally sensitive coastal areas. Issues such as lack of health awareness, plastic pollution, environmental degradation, and social isolation of vulnerable groups required focused intervention. At the same time, students needed opportunities beyond classrooms to develop empathy, civic responsibility, and practical understanding of societal issues. Service Learning was therefore conceptualized as a structured response to these challenges, using community-based activities as learning platforms. The presence of active NSS, NCC units, and committed academic departments provided a conducive environment for implementing sustained outreach programmes.

4. The Practice

Service Learning is implemented through a series of planned outreach and extension activities coordinated by academic departments, NSS, NCC, and institutional committees. Students actively participate in **health, environmental, and social welfare initiatives**, linking academic learning with community service.

Health-focused activities include **eye check-up camps, bone density detection camps, and organ donation awareness programmes**, organized in collaboration with healthcare professionals and agencies. These initiatives promote preventive healthcare, early diagnosis, and awareness among students, staff, and the local community.

Environmental responsibility is addressed through **paper bag making and distribution** at local markets and academic events like EXCAPO, encouraging alternatives to plastic and promoting reuse and recycling. **Beach clean-up drives**, conducted in collaboration with local Panchayats, engage students in coastal conservation while raising awareness about marine pollution.

Social outreach activities include **clothes donation drives** supporting women self-help groups for economic rehabilitation, and **visits to orphanages and old age homes**, where students

conduct cultural programmes, interactive games, and distribute essential items. These activities foster empathy, intergenerational bonding, and social sensitivity.

Mental health awareness is promoted through intercollegiate competitions and programmes organized by the Department of Psychology, encouraging dialogue on workplace mental health and emotional well-being.

The uniqueness of this practice lies in its **multi-dimensional approach**, combining health, environment, and social care within the Indian higher education framework. Constraints such as time management, logistics, and coordination were addressed through faculty mentoring, institutional support, and collaboration with external agencies.

5. Evidence of Success

The effectiveness of the Service Learning practice is evident through strong student participation, measurable community outreach, and positive stakeholder feedback. Health camps recorded substantial turnout, including **137 participants in the bone density detection camp**, indicating community trust and awareness. Environmental initiatives resulted in reduced plastic usage during events and increased awareness among local vendors and students. Beach clean-up activities led to visibly cleaner coastal stretches and enhanced environmental consciousness.

Social outreach programmes brought meaningful engagement with orphaned children and elderly residents, creating emotional connections and positive learning experiences for students. Reflection reports and faculty observations indicate improved empathy, leadership, teamwork, and communication skills among participants. Overall, the practice demonstrates successful integration of academic learning with community service, fulfilling institutional social responsibility objectives.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

Challenges included coordinating schedules across departments, managing logistics for off-campus activities, and ensuring sustained student participation alongside academic commitments. Weather conditions and transportation constraints occasionally affected outdoor programmes. Financial limitations required reliance on institutional support and collaborations.

Resources required included faculty coordinators, student volunteers, basic funding, healthcare professionals, materials for camps and donation drives, and partnerships with NGOs, Panchayats, and healthcare providers. Despite constraints, effective planning and stakeholder cooperation ensured smooth implementation.

7. Notes (Optional)

For effective adoption, institutions should embed Service Learning within their academic and extension frameworks and encourage interdisciplinary participation. Strong partnerships with local communities, healthcare agencies, and civic bodies are essential. Documentation, student reflection, and outcome assessment strengthen the practice and support quality assurance processes like NAAC. Institutional encouragement and recognition further enhance student motivation and long-term sustainability of Service Learning initiatives.