



REVIEW ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism*

Environmental sustainability challenges in Saudi social institutions: Pragmatic analysis of problem, blame, and solution narratives

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ABSTRACT

Environmental sustainability enters public life through language that identifies what is wrong, indicates who is able or obliged to act, and makes some remedies appear more fitting than others. This article examines those pragmatic choices in a purposive corpus of sixteen English-language webpages and news items published between September 2024 and July 2026 by Saudi universities, municipal and environmental bodies, youth and family nonprofits, and organizations working in civic, conservation, and pilgrimage settings. “Social institutions” is used here in a bounded organizational sense: the sampled bodies structure education, volunteering, family socialization, community participation, and public ritual; they do not stand for Saudi society as a whole. A qualitative pragmatic discourse analysis considers speech acts, presupposition and implicature, modality, pronouns and deixis, agency, evaluation, mitigation, legitimation, and audience positioning. The texts consistently name pollution, waste, desertification, regulatory difficulty, and weak awareness as problems, yet they rarely accuse a specific wrongdoer. Culpability is softened into shared responsibility and prospective capability. Institutions promise, affirm, and report; citizens, students, families, volunteers, and small firms are invited or enabled to act. Solutions are correspondingly practical and coalition-friendly: awareness, volunteering, tree planting, cleanup, waste sorting, training, partnership, and monitored institutional integration. Differences among sectors are consequential. Universities favor pedagogic leadership, municipal bodies quantify participation and urban benefit, nonprofits foreground empowerment, and pilgrimage communication joins environmental conduct to place-specific collective care. A small set of negative cases—especially texts on environmental compliance, violations, and pollution—shows that stronger attribution remains possible. The dominant pattern nevertheless turns environmental conflict into an inclusive narrative of competence, contribution, and national alignment. That strategy protects institutional and audience face and may broaden participation, but it can also obscure asymmetries in environmental burden, regulatory power, and responsibility for harm.

KEYWORDS: environmental communication, institutional discourse, pragmatics, responsibility attribution, Saudi Arabia, social institutions, sustainability, volunteering

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1. Introduction

Environmental problems do not arrive in public discourse with their causes and remedies already attached. A polluted park can be described as the result of identifiable practices, as a condition requiring cleanup, as evidence of insufficient awareness, or as an occasion for civic participation. Desertification can be presented as a “natural threat,” a policy challenge, a consequence of land use, or a test of national stewardship. Each formulation establishes a different relation among the institution speaking, the audience addressed, the people or processes made responsible, and the action represented as appropriate. The practical work performed by such language is the subject of this article.

Saudi Arabia offers an unusually productive setting for that inquiry. Environmental goals now circulate through universities, municipalities, ministries, nonprofit associations, conservation bodies, and the organization of major public occasions. The language of sustainability is therefore no longer confined to environmental agencies or national strategy documents. It appears in student programs, family-development work, volunteer recruitment, small-business training, urban beautification, pilgrimage waste management, and accounts of community participation. This widening institutional field matters because sustainability acquires different social meanings when it is taught, invited, celebrated, regulated, or woven into public ritual.

Research has traced the growing prominence of sustainability in Saudi policy and media discourse. Alshuwaikhat and Mohammed (2017) identified substantial sustainability content in Vision 2030 while noting the need for deeper integration. Almaghlouth's (2022) corpus study found that Saudi online environmental discourse is strongly action-oriented and interdiscursive, joining national identity, development, and international sustainability vocabulary. Work on the circular economy and resource nexus likewise shows how environmental aims are aligned with institutional reform and economic transformation (Almulhim & Al-Saidi, 2023). These studies establish the importance of strategy, action, and national alignment. They leave room, however, for closer attention to the micro-pragmatic question: what are institutions doing when they describe an environmental challenge, and how do their linguistic choices distribute obligation, protect relationships, and prepare audiences to accept particular solutions?

That question requires more than counting recurrent topics. A statement that an initiative “aims to raise environmental awareness” does several things at once. It presupposes that awareness is not yet adequate; it avoids saying whose understanding is deficient; it commits the institution only to an aim rather than a guaranteed outcome; and it places the intended audience in the role of a learner. An invitation to “make an impact” assigns agency to the reader without accusing the reader of having caused the problem. An institutional declaration of “continued commitment” is a commissive act and a claim to moral standing. Numerical reports of volunteers, trees, hours, or kilograms of waste do not merely inform: they warrant effectiveness and make diffuse environmental work administratively visible.

The title retains the term *social institutions*, but with a narrower meaning than is sometimes implied by that phrase. The corpus does not consist only of ministries and government agencies, nor does it purport to cover family, religion, education, welfare, media, and civil society in equal depth. It samples organizations that mediate socialization and collective action across four fields: higher education; municipal and environmental volunteering; youth and family nonprofit activity; and civic-conservation or pilgrimage initiatives. In this organizational sense, institutions are durable arrangements that authorize roles, routines, and expectations (Scott, 2014). The object of analysis is their English-language public communication, not Saudi public opinion and not the full ecology of Arabic public debate.

The article also treats “blame” cautiously. Blame entails more than a grammatical subject or a reference to responsibility. It ordinarily combines causal attribution with adverse moral evaluation and some degree of accountability. Public institutions may avoid that combination even when they name causes or assign duties. The analysis therefore begins with an open question: do the texts blame identifiable actors, distribute responsibility, or replace retrospective culpability with prospective capacity? “Responsibility” is used in the article's subtitle and findings because it better describes the wider set of relations actually encountered in the corpus.

Three research questions guide the study:

1. How do sampled Saudi social institutions pragmatically construct environmental problems, causes, and consequences?

2. How do speech acts, agency, modality, evaluation, mitigation, pronouns, and presuppositions assign or soften blame and responsibility?
3. Which solution narratives are made legitimate, which audiences are positioned to act, and how do these patterns differ across institutional fields?

The contribution is empirical and conceptual. Empirically, the study provides a source-identified corpus and a transparent codebook for a set of institutional texts that is often discussed only at the level of national policy. Conceptually, it shows why problem, blame, and solution should not be treated as three boxes that public messages simply fill. In these texts, problem descriptions frequently anticipate remedies; invitations allocate responsibility without accusation; and institutional promises convert environmental authority into a relationship of guidance and partnership. Pragmatics makes those transitions visible.

2. Pragmatics, Responsibility, and Sustainability Communication

2.1 From frame functions to communicative action

Framing provides a useful starting scaffold. Entman (1993) distinguishes four functions through which communication selects and makes salient aspects of reality: defining a problem, diagnosing causes, evaluating them, and recommending treatment. These functions suit the present concern with problem, responsibility, and solution narratives. They also guard against calling any repeated word a frame. “Awareness” becomes part of a frame only when insufficient knowledge is treated as a problem, an audience is positioned as needing education, awareness-raising is valued, and training or campaigns are advanced as remedies. Methodological work on framing has repeatedly stressed the need for such explicit operationalization (Matthes & Kohring, 2008; Scheufele, 1999).

Framing alone does not fully describe what institutional utterances accomplish. Pragmatics shifts attention from semantic content to language in use: what an utterance counts as in context, which assumptions it carries, how strongly it commits a speaker, and what relationship it establishes with an addressee (Levinson, 1983). Searle’s (1976) taxonomy remains helpful for distinguishing assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Public webpages commonly mix them. A news item asserts that an event occurred and reports its results. A phrase such as “join us” directs readers toward participation. A claim of ongoing commitment binds the institution, at least publicly, to future conduct. Praise for volunteers expresses approval while also teaching the audience which conduct deserves recognition. Accreditation, awards, and official launches can have a declarative force because authorized bodies change the public status of programs or participants through naming.

Speech-act categories are not treated as fixed labels detached from context. The modal and grammatical form of an utterance shapes its force. “The ministry will continue” is a stronger commissive than “the initiative aims to.” “Volunteers can contribute” presents possibility; “volunteers should contribute” invokes obligation; “volunteer and make an impact” is a direct imperative softened by the promise of valued identity. Institutional messages often prefer *aims*, *seeks*, *supports*, *encourages*, and *contributes to*. These verbs are semantically positive and pragmatically cautious. They display purpose without guaranteeing results, keep coalition partners inside the story, and permit future-oriented claims that are difficult to falsify in the immediate text.

Presupposition and implicature add another layer. A campaign to “raise awareness” presupposes an awareness deficit, but it need not say who lacks knowledge or why. An initiative that “strengthens” participation treats participation as already present but insufficiently robust. A headline promising a “greener future” invites the inference that current arrangements are less sustainable, while avoiding an explicit diagnosis of failure. These forms are important in institutional discourse because they can introduce a problem as common ground rather than a contestable accusation. The audience is asked to proceed from the institution’s diagnosis without the interactional friction that a direct charge might create.

2.2 Agency, face, and the difference between blame and responsibility

Responsibility is distributed through grammar as well as explicit vocabulary. Active clauses can identify an institution that launched, organized, affirmed, or invited. Passive clauses, nominalizations, and abstract nouns can remove the actor from harmful processes: *pollution*, *waste*, *desertification*, *degradation*, and *violations* name

conditions or events without necessarily naming those who produced them. This is not evidence of evasion in every instance. Short public texts have informational limits, and some environmental processes have dispersed causes. Yet recurrent actor omission has a political effect: harm becomes a shared condition to be managed rather than an action for which a differentiated account is owed.

Blame raises a face problem. To blame an audience is to threaten its positive face—the wish to be regarded as responsible—and perhaps its negative face—the wish not to be coerced (Brown & Levinson, 1987). To accuse powerful organizations may threaten institutional relationships. Mitigation reduces those unwelcome effects by weakening the force, scope, or personal targeting of an utterance (Caffi, 1999; Fraser, 1980). The relevant devices in the corpus include impersonal problem nouns, inclusive pronouns, capability verbs, praise-before-invitation, and the substitution of future contribution for retrospective fault. Instead of “residents litter public spaces,” a message can celebrate volunteers who clean parks. Instead of “small firms fail to comply,” a program can acknowledge limited resources and offer knowledge, tools, and support. Both versions orient behavior, but only the former openly risks blame.

The distinction between retrospective and prospective responsibility is therefore central. Retrospective responsibility asks who caused harm, neglected a duty, or should answer for a past condition. Prospective responsibility asks who can now contribute, who is assigned a role, and who promises to maintain action. The sampled discourse strongly favors the second. Institutions assume the role of enabler, coordinator, teacher, and guarantor of continuity. Students, households, volunteers, pilgrims, and firms are constructed as capable participants. The environmental problem is still real, but responsibility is made forward-looking and relational. Evaluation and legitimation help stabilize that relation. Van Leeuwen (2007) identifies authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and narrative as recurrent bases of legitimation. The corpus draws on all four. Vision 2030, ministry partnership, accreditation, and official statistics authorize. “National duty,” “shared responsibility,” and care for natural resources moralize. Quality of life, reduced pollution, community benefit, and measurable reach rationalize. Narratives of progress—from awareness to action, and from action to a greener future—place programs within a larger story of transformation. Stance choices further calibrate certainty and alignment: boosters such as *fully*, *directly*, and *essential* close down alternatives, while *aims*, *seeks*, and *expected* preserve institutional caution (Hyland, 2005; Martin & White, 2005; White, 2003).

2.3 Environmental communication and the Saudi institutional setting

Environmental communication routinely has to connect large-scale processes with everyday relevance. Language, metaphor, and narrative affect whether climate and sustainability are understood as distant science, moral obligation, economic opportunity, collective risk, or practical choice (Carvalho, 2007; Nerlich et al., 2010; Nisbet, 2009). Research on collective responsibility shows that environmental discourse can build solidarity around shared action, but the same inclusiveness may blur unequal contributions to harm (Olausson, 2009). Online terms such as *carbon footprint* have similarly moved responsibility across economic, moral, and personal registers (Koteyko et al., 2010). These observations make agency and audience positioning especially important when institutions encourage behavior change.

Sustainability communication also moves between transmission and deliberation. Newig et al. (2013) distinguish communication that conveys approved sustainability goals from communication in which the meaning and priorities of sustainability are themselves discussed. The first is necessary for mobilization and program delivery. The second allows disagreement, trade-offs, and local knowledge to influence problem definition. Public-facing institutional texts are likely to lean toward transmission because they announce activities, recruit participants, or account for results. The analytical question is whether they nevertheless leave room for audiences to define problems rather than only accept roles.

Within Saudi Arabia, national strategy supplies a powerful intertext. Vision 2030 functions not merely as background policy but as a recurrent warrant connecting local initiatives to an authorized future. Alshuwaikhat and Mohammed (2017) show that sustainability occupies a substantive place in the national vision, although implementation depends on institutional integration. In higher education, an integrated approach to campus sustainability joins environmental management with teaching, research, participation, and social responsibility (Alshuwaikhat & Abubakar, 2008). That combination is visible in university texts that present the campus as both an operational site and a pedagogic community.

Saudi online media have also been found to privilege a discourse of action over consequences and risk (Almaghlouth, 2022). The present corpus permits a closer view of how that action orientation is performed. A university can report action as leadership; a municipality can count action as volunteer participation; a youth association can frame action as empowerment; a family association can place action inside intergenerational socialization; and pilgrimage communication can connect action to the temporary, dense, and morally significant space of the holy sites. The same national vocabulary is thus reaccented by institutional role.

The wider Gulf context cautions against reading action language as sufficient evidence of transformation. Zaidan et al. (2019) describe persistent tensions among development, resource use, institutional capacity, and environmental vulnerability across the region. Circular-economy research in Saudi Arabia likewise notes progress in aligning resource agendas while identifying the continuing importance of coordination and implementation (Almulhim & Al-Saidi, 2023). Public discourse cannot resolve those material tensions. It can, however, show how organizations make them socially intelligible and how responsibility is publicly allocated when ambitious environmental commitments meet everyday practice.

3. Materials and Method

3.1 Corpus construction and scope

The corpus contains sixteen English-language public texts available on official Saudi institutional websites. Purposive sampling was used because the research question required comparable texts in which an organization explicitly described an environmental problem, assigned a role, or presented a response. Discovery began with official university, government, nonprofit, and Saudi Press Agency pages. A text was retained when it met four conditions: it was publicly accessible; the issuing organization had an identifiable social or civic role; environmental sustainability was central rather than incidental; and the page contained enough propositional material for pragmatic analysis. Navigation text, cookie notices, unrelated recommended stories, and duplicated boilerplate were excluded.

The sample spans four organizational fields. Six university texts cover institutional commitments, student activities, environmental weeks, volunteering, tree planting, cleanup, waste collection, and community partnerships. Four public-sector civic texts concern municipal volunteering, environmental recruitment, nationwide awareness, and vegetation protection. Four nonprofit texts come from Saudi Youth for Sustainability and Al-Mawaddah Family Development Association. Two official-news texts concern waste-sorting education during Hajj and student tree planting in a royal reserve. These last texts were included because pilgrimage and conservation organize distinctive forms of collective belonging and public conduct. Together, the fields justify the term *social institutions* more convincingly than a corpus made up only of ministries.

Table 1. Corpus profile

Dimension	Category	n
Institutional field	Higher education	6
Institutional field	Municipal and environmental civic bodies	4
Institutional field	Youth and family nonprofits	4
Institutional field	Civic-ritual and conservation news	2
Genre	News or official-news item	10
Genre	Standing, recruitment, inventory, or program page	6
Date status	Dated or visibly updated	12
Date status	No displayed date	4
Cleaned length	Short: under 200 words	10
Cleaned length	Medium: 200–399 words	6
Total	All English-language texts	16

Source: Author's source inventory in Appendix A. Length excludes navigation and repeated webpage boilerplate.

3.2 Analytical framework and codebook

The analysis combined deductive and inductive coding. The deductive scaffold came from frame functions

and pragmatics: problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, recommended treatment, speech act, presupposition, modality, agency, pronouns and deixis, stance, mitigation, legitimation, and audience role. Inductive notes captured recurring combinations not specified in advance, including quantified proof, “impact” slogans, pedagogic citizenship, and the conversion of culpability into capability.

Table 2. Pragmatic codebook

Dimension	Analytical question	Indicative evidence
Problem construction	What condition or deficit is made salient?	Problem nouns; change-of-state verbs; consequences; presupposed baselines
Cause and agency	Who or what is represented as producing the condition?	Active or passive clauses; named, generic, or omitted agents; nominalization
Blame and responsibility	Is past culpability, present duty, or future capacity assigned?	Adverse evaluation; accountability; duty; shared responsibility; capability
Speech act	What social action does the utterance perform?	Assertion; directive; commitment; praise; authorized declaration
Modality and stance	How certain, obligatory, or cautious is the claim?	Must, will, can, aims, seeks, expected; boosters and hedges
Audience position	Which identity and relationship are offered to the reader?	We, our, your; learner, volunteer, family, firm, pilgrim, steward
Legitimation	Why is the action presented as proper or credible?	Authority; moral duty; quality of life; Vision 2030; statistics; partnership
Solution narrative	Which remedy follows, and who is expected to enact it?	Awareness; training; cleanup; planting; sorting; compliance; integration
Negative case	What resists the dominant interpretation?	Explicit violations, illegality, regulation, enforcement, or named constraints

Source: Author’s analytical framework. Codes were applied to clauses and interpreted within each complete webpage text.

Coding proceeded in three passes. The first recorded the explicit problem terms, named actors, modal verbs, speech acts, solution verbs, evaluative expressions, and references to audiences in each text. The second compared how these elements clustered into problem–responsibility–solution narratives within each organizational field. The third revisited disconfirming passages and cases where explicit causation, compliance, violations, or enforcement complicated the dominant pattern. Memos distinguished a text’s claim from the analyst’s inference. For example, “raise awareness” was coded as an explicit purpose; the implied awareness deficit was coded as a presupposition. A named partner was coded as an explicit actor; the conclusion that partnership distributes ownership was treated as interpretation.

The study was conducted by one researcher. No intercoder reliability statistic is reported because no independent second coder was involved; inventing one would offer only false precision. Trustworthiness was pursued through an auditable source inventory, stable source IDs, a stated codebook, repeated coding at an interval, searches for negative cases, and limits on the level of inference. These practices follow the emphasis on transparent decision trails in qualitative analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). Short quoted phrases are used as linguistic evidence, while longer passages are paraphrased and tied to source IDs.

3.3 Interpreting blame

Blame was coded only when three features converged: an actor or actor class was linked to an undesirable state; the connection carried negative evaluation; and the text suggested accountability, correction, or sanction. Responsibility attribution was coded more broadly when a text assigned duty, capacity, or a future role. This rule prevents an imperative such as “join us” from being misreported as an accusation. It also allows the analysis to identify attenuated blame when, for example, environmental “violations” are named but violators remain generic, or when firms’ compliance difficulties are attributed partly to limited resources and regulatory complexity.

No claims are made about audience reception, authorial intention, or environmental outcomes. A

webpage can position readers as partners without proving that they feel included. A report of trees planted or waste collected can function rhetorically as evidence without establishing the long-term ecological effect of the activity. The study concerns public language and the social relations it makes available.

4. Results

4.1 Problems appear as conditions, deficits, and threats

The corpus names a recognizable set of environmental challenges: pollution, waste, desertification, degraded land, inadequate vegetation cover, pressure on natural resources, and uneven environmental awareness. Yet these problems are not constructed in a single way. Three pragmatic forms recur.

The first is the condition noun. University and public-sector texts refer to “pollution,” “desertification,” “environmental threats,” “degraded lands,” and “waste” as objects of action [EDU01, EDU02, CIV04]. Such nouns give the problem stability and seriousness; they can be listed beside programs, metrics, and goals. At the same time, they often suppress an agent. Pollution has “negative impacts,” but the polluter is not normally named. Desertification is called a natural threat in the King Saud University initiative [EDU02], a formulation that foregrounds hazard while backgrounding the mix of climatic and human processes through which land degradation develops. The pragmatic effect is not to deny causation but to make the condition broadly shareable. No audience has to accept personal fault before supporting the response.

The second form is the deficit. Environmental awareness must be “raised,” volunteer culture “strengthened,” vegetation cover “expanded,” compliance “enhanced,” and institutional efforts “integrated.” Change-of-state verbs presuppose an insufficient present without describing it as institutional failure. King Abdulaziz University’s Environment Week seeks a society “more aware of and responsible toward the environment” [EDU04]. The comparative *more* is diplomatically useful: it recognizes an existing moral baseline while establishing room for improvement. The Ministry of Municipalities and Housing similarly explains growing participation as evidence of increasing awareness and the normalization of volunteering [CIV01]. A potential criticism—citizens are not engaged enough—becomes a narrative of visible progress.

The third form is the bounded obstacle. The Saudi Youth for Sustainability page on small and medium-sized enterprises is the corpus’s most explicit diagnostic text. It names limited resources, complex regulatory frameworks, and lack of awareness and technical expertise as difficulties in environmental compliance [NGO03]. Here causation is distributed across organizational capacity and the regulatory environment. SMEs are neither excused nor accused. The choice of *face challenges* depicts them as actors confronting an externalized difficulty; the proposed partnership then offers knowledge, tools, and support. This problem statement is sharper than the awareness language elsewhere, but it still leads with constraint rather than misconduct.

Consequences are usually expressed through quality of life, public health, resource preservation, local climate, urban appearance, and future sustainability. These are high-consensus values. The KSU initiative links pollution to harmful effects and environmental action to improved quality of life, cooler local conditions, cleaner air, and protected resources [EDU02]. NCVC describes restoration, biodiversity, rangeland management, and action against illegal logging as parts of a flourishing and resilient vegetation cover [CIV04]. The Al-Mawaddah text makes the family the starting point for awareness and presents sustainable household habits as contributions to a sustainable society [NGO04]. Environmental harm is thus translated into consequences close to institutional missions: learning, community wellbeing, family formation, urban service, or landscape stewardship.

What remains comparatively rare is distributive diagnosis. The texts do not usually ask which communities are more exposed to pollution, which organizations generate the greatest share of waste, or who bears the costs of compliance. They speak to a national or community audience at a level where interests can be joined. That scale supports collective action, but it makes unequal environmental responsibility less available for discussion.

4.2 Institutional voice combines assertion, commitment, and authorized evaluation

Institutions occupy the most grammatically active position in the corpus. Universities “launch,” “host,” “form,” “monitor,” “integrate,” “emphasize,” and “reaffirm.” Ministries “reveal,” “explain,” “invite,” and “affirm.” Nonprofits “empower,” “connect,” “believe,” and “seek.” These verbs construct institutional competence in

three speech-act layers.

First, assertives establish a record. News texts report dates, partnerships, participant numbers, volunteer hours, trees planted, and kilograms of waste removed [EDU05, EDU06, CIV02, RIT02]. The detailed figures in the KAU closing-ceremony text—people reached, awareness hours, volunteers, waste collected, garments recycled, saplings planted, and online views—turn heterogeneous activities into comparable tokens of accomplishment [EDU05]. Quantification warrants the claim of impact. It also translates care into an administrative idiom: action becomes legible because it can be counted.

Second, commissives establish continuity. Institutions are “committed,” “fully committed,” “keen,” or engaged in “ongoing efforts” [EDU01, EDU02, EDU06, CIV02]. These expressions do more than describe an attitude. In a public context they bind institutional identity to future conduct. The strongest example is KSU’s claim that sustainability is integrated across operations and continuously monitored against national indicators [EDU01]. The text does not simply announce a one-off event; it presents a durable organizational self. The frequent adjective *ongoing* closes a possible gap between episodic campaigns and long-term responsibility, even though the webpage alone cannot demonstrate that continuity.

Third, authorized evaluation identifies commendable conduct. The texts praise leadership, pioneering roles, growing volunteer culture, community engagement, and national contribution. KSU describes environmental protection as “both a national duty and a shared responsibility” [EDU02]. The phrase is morally dense. *Duty* raises the force beyond preference; *shared* distributes it; *national* connects it to belonging. Yet no specific share is allocated. The formulation is inclusive precisely because it does not specify whether a university, regulator, business, or household carries more responsibility than another.

Institutional self-praise is usually buffered by partnership. KAU works with a ministry branch, national centers, community units, environmental societies, and sponsors [EDU04, EDU05]. Qassim University presents fieldwork as an extension of its community role and a means of strengthening partnerships [EDU06]. The youth organization describes collaboration with environmental centers and national bodies [NGO02, NGO03]. Partnership spreads credit and reduces the appearance of unilateral authority. It also legitimizes action through association: expertise, government authorization, community service, and youth participation appear in one coalition.

4.3 Blame is attenuated into shared and prospective responsibility

Direct blame is exceptional. No sampled text accuses students, families, pilgrims, residents, or volunteers of environmental misconduct. Even when an audience’s behavior is clearly relevant, the grammar points forward. Three recurring strategies accomplish this attenuation.

The first replaces an offending actor with a valued role. Municipal messaging addresses “volunteers” and “individuals” who can improve neighborhoods, urban landscapes, and quality of life [CIV01, CIV02]. MEWA’s standing page tells readers to “take the initiative,” “leave your mark,” and “join us in building a greener future” [CIV03]. The reader is interpellated as a potential contributor, not a culprit. The imperative is direct, but its face threat is softened by benefit: participation develops skills, enlarges experience, joins a national team, and produces “tangible environmental impact.” A moral request becomes an opportunity for identity.

The second uses inclusive or possessive deixis. Slogans such as “Towards a Clean World,” “Your Impact Is Green,” “Our Environment is Our Treasure,” “Make an Impact With Us,” and “Your Volunteerism Builds Your Future” organize relations between speaker and audience [EDU02, EDU04, CIV01, CIV03, CIV04]. *Our* makes the environment a shared possession; *your* individualizes efficacy; *with us* keeps the institution present as guide and partner. None of these pronouns specifies causal responsibility. Their work is prospective: they create a public of co-owners whose next action matters.

The third converts culpability into capability. The SYS home page depicts young people as “changemakers” and “impact supporters” and promises resources, knowledge, and opportunities [NGO01]. The SME program recognizes compliance barriers and proposes empowerment [NGO03]. Al-Mawaddah presents the family as the foundation of environmental awareness and as a setting in which children learn to preserve resources [NGO04]. In each case, the audience’s possible contribution is emphasized more than its contribution to harm. The institution offers a path from identity to practice: young person to changemaker, family to educator, firm to compliant participant, resident to volunteer.

This pattern is not simply euphemism. Prospective responsibility can be pragmatically effective where the goal is recruitment. Blame might produce defensiveness, especially when causes are dispersed and participation is voluntary. The texts preserve audience face, lower the social cost of joining, and allow institutions with different mandates to cooperate. The cost is analytical vagueness. If everyone shares responsibility, differences in capacity, authority, and environmental footprint may disappear behind a morally attractive plural.

4.4 Solution narratives favor visible practice, learning, and partnership

Solutions are much more elaborated than causes. Nearly every text offers activities, procedures, partnerships, or measures, while only a few develop a causal account of environmental harm. This asymmetry supports earlier findings that Saudi environmental communication privileges action (Almaghlouth, 2022), but the present analysis identifies four distinct solution narratives.

The first is pedagogic. Awareness campaigns, lectures, exhibitions, webinars, posters, environmental passports, field visits, and training turn sustainability into something learned through participation [EDU03, EDU04, EDU05, NGO02]. Universities are especially prominent here. Their public voice combines expertise with student formation. Qassim University states that volunteering should help develop a generation conscious of environmental issues and capable of contributing to their resolution [EDU06]. The sequence is revealing: awareness precedes capability, which precedes action. Environmental citizenship is represented as an educational outcome.

The second is practical and restorative. Cleanup campaigns, tree planting, site maintenance, waste collection, recycling, and vegetation restoration provide tangible scenes of improvement [EDU02, EDU05, EDU06, CIV02, CIV04, RIT02]. These activities solve a communicative problem as well as an environmental one. They are photographable, countable, and locally intelligible. A planted sapling or a bag of collected waste offers evidence that an abstract commitment has entered the material world. Such acts also generate low-conflict participation: diverse audiences can support cleaner parks and more vegetation without agreeing on wider environmental policy.

The third is integrative. Texts repeatedly call for institutional integration, governed frameworks, partnerships, and coordinated pathways. KAU's Environment Week emphasizes the integration of institutional efforts [EDU04]; the municipal ministry describes structured volunteer pathways implemented through partnerships and governed for efficiency and sustainability [CIV01]; the SYS compliance proposal assembles regulatory, technical, and youth organizations around SME support [NGO03]. Integration functions as both diagnosis and remedy. Fragmentation is implied as a prior weakness, but no institution is blamed for it. Coordination itself becomes evidence of seriousness.

The fourth is procedural and place-specific. Eco-Hajj communication focuses on teaching pilgrims how to sort waste, while the reserve initiative recruits students into planting within a protected landscape [RIT01, RIT02]. These solutions are attached to particular times and places. Pilgrimage produces concentrated flows of people and materials; the message therefore presents sustainable behavior as part of orderly participation in a shared sacred setting. The reserve text links volunteering to custodianship of a named landscape. In both cases, the environmental audience is temporary but morally salient. The institution does not address an abstract consumer; it addresses a pilgrim or student whose presence carries situated obligations.

Across the four narratives, solutions are framed as cumulative rather than contentious. Training adds knowledge; volunteering adds hours; partnerships add capacity; campaigns add reach; planting adds vegetation. Verbs such as *support*, *enhance*, *contribute*, and *strengthen* depict compatible increments. The texts seldom describe a policy choice that creates losers, restricts a practice, or reallocates cost. Sustainability appears as coordinated addition and improvement.

4.5 Sectoral voices position audiences differently

The common national vocabulary should not obscure institutional differences. Universities speak as pedagogic leaders. Their favored audience is the student who becomes aware, responsible, and active through clubs, campaigns, lectures, and field practice. The university itself is both exemplar and educator. Even operational measures—waste collection, tree planting, sustainability committees—are narrated as opportunities for learning and community service [EDU01–EDU06]. This dual voice helps explain the recurrence of *role*, *awareness*,

generation, and leadership.

Municipal and environmental bodies speak as organizers of scalable participation. Their texts emphasize pathways, registration, coverage, categories of volunteering, national platforms, urban quality of life, and large participation totals [CIV01–CIV04]. The citizen is positioned as a service partner whose contribution can improve streets, parks, neighborhoods, vegetation, and municipal performance. The invitation is more procedural than the university appeal: register, browse, choose, volunteer. Numbers then return as proof that participation has become a culture.

Youth and family nonprofits speak through empowerment and social multiplication. SYS promises connection, resources, knowledge, opportunity, collaboration, education, and innovation [NGO01]. Its SME pages treat knowledge gaps as remediable through support rather than enforcement alone [NGO02, NGO03]. Al-Mawaddah moves environmental socialization into the household. The family teaches children, normalizes habits, and represents society in international dialogue [NGO04]. Here the target is not merely an individual behavior; it is the reproduction of environmental values across generations.

Pilgrimage and conservation texts speak through situated stewardship. The relevant “we” is formed by temporary proximity to a holy site or protected reserve. Waste sorting and planting are modest acts, but their setting enlarges their symbolic weight. The solution narrative ties environmental order to respect for place, coordinated presence, and the public meaning of collective conduct [RIT01, RIT02].

These differences show that audience categories are not interchangeable. “Public awareness” may sound generic, yet the pragmatic addressee is variously a learner, volunteer, resident, young leader, parent, firm, pilgrim, or custodian. Each identity brings a different entitlement and obligation. Institutional discourse succeeds when the proposed action fits that role; it becomes thin when “society” is invoked without specifying how people can act.

4.6 Negative cases: compliance, violations, and harder edges of responsibility

Three clusters complicate the dominant account of softened, shared responsibility. First, the SYS SME text names regulatory complexity and environmental compliance directly [NGO03]. *Compliance* presupposes a rule and the possibility of nonconformity. The text remains supportive, but the normative standard is firmer than in volunteer appeals. SMEs are expected to integrate sustainable practice, even if they require assistance.

Second, NCVC refers to violations affecting natural ecosystems and to illegal logging [CIV04]. These phrases contain explicit negative evaluation and point toward accountable conduct. Yet the actor remains generic. The page authorizes protection and enforcement without staging a public accusation. This is attenuated blame: wrongdoing is lexically visible, but wrongdoers are not socially specified.

Third, the KSU and KAU texts include pollution, waste removal, and large quantities of discarded material [EDU02, EDU05]. The material record implies prior harmful behavior. A beach cleanup of 1,500 kilograms and the collection of electronic waste make waste generation difficult to ignore. Still, the narrative center is the volunteer achievement. Past harm supplies the occasion; virtuous action receives the subject position. These cases matter because they show that the absence of direct blame is not caused by an inability to name harmful practices. The texts can invoke law, compliance, violations, pollution, and waste. They generally choose to subordinate those harder terms to narratives of support, restoration, and participation. The pattern is therefore pragmatic, not merely lexical.

4.7 A problem–responsibility–solution matrix

The findings can be summarized as five recurrent narratives. They are not mutually exclusive frames; most texts combine at least two.

Table 3. Problem–responsibility–solution narratives

Narrative	Problem form	Responsibility position	Preferred solution	Receding issue
Condition to stewardship	Pollution, waste, degraded land, desertification	A broad public shares care; harmful agents recede	Cleanup, planting, restoration, protection	Differentiated causation

Narrative	Problem form	Responsibility position	Preferred solution	Receding issue
Deficit to participation	Awareness or volunteer culture is insufficient	Audience is a capable learner or volunteer	Campaigns, lectures, invitations, field activity	Why the deficit arose
Obstacle to empowerment	Limited resources, complex rules, missing expertise	Firms retain duties but receive support	Training, tools, collaboration, compliance	Sanctions and uneven firm capacity
Fragmentation to partnership	Efforts are dispersed or not yet integrated	Institutions coordinate and share credit	Governed pathways, networks, joint programs	Institutional conflict
Place to custodianship	Waste or ecological pressure in a valued setting	Pilgrim or student assumes a situated role	Sorting, planting, respectful conduct	Wider systems of consumption

The matrix clarifies the article's central empirical claim. The sampled texts do not suppress environmental problems, but they typically detach the problem from a sharply blamed actor and reconnect it to a capable audience. Responsibility moves from backward-looking accusation to forward-looking role assignment. The solution then confirms the new identity: the aware student volunteers, the enabled firm complies, the responsible family teaches, the engaged resident improves the city, and the pilgrim sorts waste. Institutional voice holds these transitions together by asserting results, committing to continuity, authorizing values, and offering routes to participation.

5. Discussion

5.1 The pragmatic conversion of blame into capability

The most important finding is not simply that blame is rare. It is that the discourse has a recurrent mechanism for doing without blame. Environmental harm is first nominalized as a condition or softened into a deficit; the audience is then addressed through a valued social identity; finally, a feasible contribution is attached to that identity. This sequence converts culpability into capability.

The conversion helps institutions solve a practical communication problem. Environmental action often requires cooperation from audiences that no single organization can command. Universities need students and partners; municipalities need residents and volunteers; nonprofits need members, families, and firms; Hajj organizers need temporary compliance from vast numbers of visitors. Direct accusation could narrow the coalition. Mitigated responsibility allows participation without an admission of fault. Caffi's (1999) account of mitigation is useful here: weakening the unwelcome effects of an utterance can preserve cooperation while leaving its practical direction intact.

The result also extends framing analysis. Entman's (1993) causal and moral functions do not always appear as explicit propositions. In this corpus they are often pragmatically redistributed. A presupposition carries the diagnosis; an inclusive pronoun carries the moral relation; an imperative or capability verb carries treatment. The frame is completed across speech acts rather than stated in a single sentence. Close attention to force, presupposition, and face therefore prevents an analyst from mistaking the absence of accusation for the absence of responsibility.

5.2 Inclusion, legitimacy, and the limits of shared responsibility

Shared responsibility has genuine strengths. It can connect environmental conduct to belonging without shaming audiences. It recognizes that sustainability depends on coordinated institutions and ordinary practice. It gives social organizations a vocabulary for acting within their mandates: teaching, volunteering, family development, community service, or pilgrimage management. It also provides moral continuity between local projects and Vision 2030. Authorization, moral evaluation, and rationalization converge: national goals validate the initiative, duty gives it ethical weight, and quality of life explains its benefit (Van Leeuwen, 2007).

The same strategy has limits. "Shared" can imply equality where responsibility is unequal. Students, households, small firms, municipalities, and large organizations do not possess the same authority, resources, or environmental footprint. An inclusive *we* may conceal who sets rules and who must adapt to them. Action-centered messages can also make visible, countable remedies—planting, cleanup, volunteer hours—more salient than less photogenic issues such as procurement, enforcement, maintenance, emissions, land-use trade-offs, or

the distribution of environmental burdens.

This tension resembles a wider problem in environmental communication. Collective frames can mobilize a common public, yet they may detach solidarity from differentiated accountability (Olausson, 2009). The answer is not to replace every invitation with blame. It is to combine prospective participation with clearer role differentiation. A message can welcome volunteers while separately identifying institutional duties, regulated actors, and enforcement mechanisms. It can celebrate cleanup while explaining how waste will be prevented. It can invite families to conserve resources without implying that household conduct alone is responsible for structural environmental pressure.

5.3 Social institutions as translators of national sustainability

The sectoral differences show how national sustainability is translated into social practice. Universities turn it into formation: an environmentally conscious generation is produced through learning and service. Municipal bodies turn it into organized participation: residents enter governed pathways that promise visible urban benefit. Youth nonprofits turn it into agency and networks; family organizations turn it into intergenerational habit; pilgrimage and reserve initiatives turn it into respect for place.

This translation is more than repetition of national policy. Each institution selects the part of sustainability that fits its authority and audience. The process helps explain why the same verbs recur with different pragmatic consequences. *Empower* is credible in a youth organization because members are offered resources and opportunity. *Commit* carries particular weight from a university describing operations and monitoring. *Register* suits a ministry-linked platform. *Teach* and *adopt habits* fit the family association's account of socialization. Institutional role shapes the felicity of the speech act.

The pattern also gives substance to Newig et al.'s (2013) distinction between transmitting and discussing sustainability. The corpus is rich in communication *of* sustainability: it explains goals, recruits participants, and reports achievement. It contains much less communication *about* sustainability in the deliberative sense. Audiences are invited to act inside established problem definitions. They are rarely invited to dispute priorities, report competing needs, or propose alternative diagnoses. Even "co-created solutions" in the municipal volunteerism text are situated within a designed program [CIV01]. This is understandable in short institutional genres, but it narrows the public role from co-definition to implementation.

5.4 Implications for research and practice

For research, the findings argue for a pragmatic account of institutional sustainability discourse that works below the level of theme and above the level of isolated grammar. The unit of interest is the communicative move: a problem is presupposed, a role is offered, commitment is calibrated, and a remedy is legitimized. Comparative studies could test whether the capability pattern appears in Arabic versions, corporate sustainability reports, local media, or public comments, and whether more contentious genres produce stronger blame. Audience research is also needed. The present analysis can identify an invitation; it cannot show whether readers experience it as empowering, moralizing, or routine publicity.

For practice, three refinements would preserve the inclusive strengths of the discourse while improving accountability. First, institutions can distinguish responsibilities explicitly: what the organization will do, what regulated bodies must do, and what voluntary participants can do. Second, achievement reporting can connect outputs to environmental reasoning. Volunteer hours and trees planted are persuasive, but readers also need to know how activities address a diagnosed problem and how results will be maintained. Third, invitations can include channels through which participants report local problems or shape future priorities. That move would bring communication about sustainability closer to communication of it.

5.5 Limitations

The study's claims are deliberately bounded. Sixteen short English-language texts cannot represent the full range of Saudi social institutions or the Arabic public sphere. Official and organizational webpages are curated genres that favor coherence, positive evaluation, and reportable activity. The study does not include corporate actors, independent journalism, sermons, school curricula, local Arabic campaigns, or audience responses. Standing pages may change after retrieval, and several do not display publication dates. The corpus is uneven across

fields, with more university texts than pilgrimage texts. A single researcher conducted the coding, so the analysis relies on transparency and negative-case checking rather than independent agreement. Finally, reported outputs were analyzed as rhetorical evidence, not audited as environmental outcomes.

These limits do not make the corpus trivial. They specify what the article can answer: how a set of identifiable institutions publicly organizes environmental problems, responsibilities, and remedies in English. A larger bilingual and longitudinal archive could examine whether the present pattern changes when environmental regulation becomes more salient, when campaigns move from launch to evaluation, or when audiences respond in interactive settings.

6. Conclusion

Saudi social institutions in the sampled corpus speak about environmental sustainability through an idiom of constructive action. Pollution, waste, desertification, degraded land, compliance barriers, and weak awareness are named, but a sharply blamed actor is usually absent. Institutional discourse instead allocates prospective responsibility. Organizations commit, coordinate, teach, and report. Students, volunteers, families, firms, residents, and pilgrims are invited to become capable contributors.

That allocation is achieved pragmatically. Nominalization makes environmental harm a shared condition. Comparative and change-of-state verbs presuppose room for improvement without declaring failure. Inclusive pronouns create common ownership; second-person address personalizes efficacy. Modals and purpose verbs calibrate commitment. Partnerships authorize action, while statistics and visible outputs warrant achievement. The resulting solution narratives favor awareness, volunteering, practical restoration, training, procedural participation, and institutional integration.

The discourse is neither empty optimism nor a comprehensive account of responsibility. Its coalition-friendly language can widen participation and protect face, especially where institutions depend on voluntary cooperation. It can also blur asymmetries in power, resources, and contribution to environmental harm. The practical challenge is therefore not to choose between blame and encouragement. It is to retain an inviting public language while specifying differentiated duties, structural causes, and mechanisms of accountability. The article's broader claim is that social institutions do not merely relay national sustainability goals. They translate those goals into recognizable roles: learner, volunteer, parent, young leader, compliant firm, pilgrim, and steward of place. Environmental sustainability becomes socially actionable when institutions make such roles credible. It becomes publicly accountable when they also make clear who has the authority and obligation to change the conditions that volunteers and families alone cannot repair.

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Declarations

Data availability: The article analyses public institutional webpages. The source register and representative Romanized excerpts are included. A reusable corpus should be archived only after checking institutional copyright, webpage changes, and journal data-sharing requirements.

Ethics: The corpus contains no private or personal data. Institutional texts are quoted briefly for scholarly analysis.

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Appendix A. Corpus Inventory

EDU01. King Saud University, Sustainability. “Home Page | Sustainability.” Updated 14 July 2026. Standing institutional page; higher education/environment; English; medium length. Included because it states the university’s environmental commitments, monitoring, policy alignment, and audience scope. <https://sustainability.ksu.edu.sa/en>

EDU02. King Saud University News. “Environmental Initiative to Promote Awareness and Volunteerism.” 28 October 2025. News release; higher education/community volunteering; English; medium length. Included for its explicit problem terms, shared-responsibility formula, restoration activities, and institutional commitment. <https://news.ksu.edu.sa/en/node/145585>

EDU03. King Saud University Sustainability. “Our Students.” Updated 14 July 2026. Activity inventory; higher education/student socialization; English; short length. Included because its list of lectures, visits, planting, clubs, and awareness events constructs the student as an environmental learner and volunteer. <https://sustainability.ksu.edu.sa/en/node/2969>

EDU04. King Abdulaziz University. “King Abdulaziz University Launches Environment Week under Your Impact Is Green Initiative.” 4 May 2026. News release; higher education/community engagement; English; medium length. Included for second-person impact language, institutional integration, audience differentiation, and behavioral reinforcement. <https://kau.edu.sa/en/news-details/king-abdulaziz-university-launches-environment-week-under-your-impact-is-green-initiative>

EDU05. King Abdulaziz University. “King Abdulaziz University Concludes Final Ceremony for the ‘Sustainable Healthy Environment’ and ‘Gheras & Shade’ Initiatives.” 14 October 2025. News release; higher education/volunteering; English; medium length. Included for quantified proof, waste and restoration metrics, partnership, and retrospective accomplishment claims. <https://www.kau.edu.sa/en/news-details/king-abdulaziz-university-concludes-final-ceremony-for-the-sustainable-healthy-environment-and-gheras-shade-initiatives>

EDU06. Qassim University. “The University’s Sustainable Development Center Participates in Developing ‘Shuaib Al-Tarfiya.’” 15 April 2026; updated 19 April 2026. News release; higher education/ecological volunteering; English; short length. Included for its explicit sequence from awareness to volunteer culture, social responsibility, field practice, partnership, and institutional role. <https://www.qu.edu.sa/en/news/70619/>

CIV01. Ministry of Municipalities and Housing. “MOMAH Launches the ‘Your Volunteerism Builds Your Future’ Initiative to Promote Community Participation.” 1 September 2025. News release; municipal/community volunteering; English; medium length. Included for its direct invitation, structured volunteer pathways, quality-of-life rationale, and account of volunteerism as normalized practice. <https://momah.gov.sa/en/node/15201>

CIV02. Ministry of Municipalities and Housing. “More than 300,000 Male and Female Volunteers Will Participate in Municipal and Housing Initiatives during 2025.” 8 June 2026. News release; municipal/community volunteering; English; short length. Included for its quantitative legitimation, environmental and urban solution categories, and national-participation narrative. <https://momah.gov.sa/en/node/16273>

CIV03. Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture. “Volunteering Opportunities.” Updated 25 June 2026. Recruitment page; environmental volunteering; English; short length. Included for imperatives, second-person address, benefit framing, and the procedural sequence from registration to action. <https://www.mewa.gov.sa/en/Ministry/AboutMinistry/Employment/Volunteeropportunities/Pages/default.aspx>

CIV04. National Center for Vegetation Cover Development and Combating Desertification. “NCVC Participates in Environment Week Through Nationwide Environmental Campaigns and Community Engagement Activities.” 20 April 2025. News release; conservation/community engagement; English; short length. Included for awareness, restoration, biodiversity, illegal logging, violations, and resilient-vegetation language. <https://ncvc.gov.sa/en/MediaCenter/news/Pages/NCVC-in-Environment-Week.aspx>

NGO01. Saudi Youth for Sustainability. “Saudi Youth for Sustainability.” *n.d.* Organizational landing page; youth/nonprofit; English; short length. Included for changemaker identity, empowerment, collaboration, and the balance among economy, community, and environment. <https://sys.org.sa/en>

NGO02. Saudi Youth for Sustainability. “Igniting Green Webinar Series.” *n.d.* Program page; youth/nonprofit and SME education; English; short length. Included for its awareness-and-compliance pairing and its partnership-based account of environmental change. <https://sys.org.sa/en/blogs-listing/17>

NGO03. Saudi Youth for Sustainability. “Enhancing Environmental Compliance and Sustainability for SMEs

in Saudi Arabia.” *n.d.* Program proposal page; youth/nonprofit and business compliance; English; short length. Included as a negative case because it names resource limits, regulatory complexity, awareness gaps, and technical expertise as specific barriers. <https://sys.org.sa/en/blogs-listing/18>

NGO04. Al-Mawaddah Family Development Association. “To Enhance the Role of the Family in Protecting the Environment, Al-Mawaddah Is Approved as an Observer Member at the COP16 Conference in Riyadh.” *n.d.* News release; family/nonprofit; English; medium length. Included because it constructs the family as an environmental socialization institution and links household habits to public representation. <https://almawaddah.org.sa/en/news/343>

RIT01. Saudi Press Agency. “Makkah Municipality Launches Eco-Hajj Initiative with Waste Sorting Education for Pilgrims.” 11 June 2025. Official news report; pilgrimage/municipal environment; English; short length. Included for its place-specific audience, procedural waste education, and construction of sustainable pilgrimage conduct. <https://spa.gov.sa/en/N2338287>

RIT02. Saudi Press Agency. “Volunteering Students Plant 1,600 Seedlings in King Abdulaziz Royal Reserve.” 18 September 2024. Official news report; conservation/student volunteering; English; short length. Included for its combination of student identity, quantified restoration, protected-place stewardship, and volunteer action. <https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/N2173284>