

Exploring the Role and Impact of NGOs in Environmental Protection in the Global Context

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Abstract: The current global environment is facing greenhouse gases and various threats, which may seriously damage the ecological environment of the earth and threaten the future survival of humanity. With the increasing attention to environmental protection issues and their urgent need to be addressed by governments around the world. Macro level regulation and subjectivity are led by governments of various countries, while non-governmental organizations guide the public to enhance the breadth of citizen participation. NGOs refer to various voluntary groups, social organizations, and civil associations outside of government departments and non-profit enterprises (market sectors). NGO organizations have advocated extensively and promoted the implementation of diverse environmental protection policies by the government, providing supervision and regulation to government departments, and utilizing their high professionalism to assist in the formulation of government policies. NGOs are the most important third-party participants in promoting environmental protection knowledge to the public and providing channels for citizen participation. This article explores the identity and role that NGOs can play in environmental protection by conducting in-depth research and interpretation of the aforementioned functions.

1 INTRODUCTION

With the continuous development of the global economy and the continuous improvement of the global industrialization level, the increase of carbon emissions and other harmful environmental substances has become an issue that cannot be ignored. This trend has led to the frequent occurrence of extreme weather events and other climate disasters (Baldwin, J. W., Dessy, J. B., Vecchi, G. A., & Oppenheimer, M., 2019). According to predictions, without any intervention, global temperatures could rise by two degrees by the end of this century, leading to glacier melting and sea level rise at the poles, causing devastating impacts on the global ecosystem. Governments around the world have gradually recognized the impact of greenhouse gas emissions on the environment and the urgency of addressing them, and have taken active measures to respond, such as participating in and signing the Paris Climate Agreement to jointly face the current climate threat. In addition, environmental protection issues are becoming increasingly diverse, not limited to reducing pollution, but also covering multiple aspects such as ecosystem protection, restoration of the ecological

environment, and promotion of sustainable development.

In the process of formulating and implementing environmental protection policies, the government plays a core role as a macro entity, and the specific practice of environmental protection requires the public to cultivate and practice environmentally friendly habits in their daily lives. However, despite the increasing public attention to environmental protection, there is a lack of channels for acquiring relevant knowledge and effective ways to participate in environmental protection, resulting in insufficient popularity and public participation in environmental protection issues. In this context, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played an indispensable role as important third-party forces in environmental protection issues..

NGOs effectively promote the development of environmental protection by monitoring government actions, advocating and promoting among the public, providing professional guidance and services, and offering reliable sources of environmental protection knowledge and channels for the public. Based on this background, this article aims to explore in depth the specific role played by NGOs in the context of

increasing attention to global environmental protection issues. Through this study, the aim is to provide clear references for the wider participation of NGOs in environmental protection issues in the future and to help NGOs find their positioning and role in participating in similar issues more clearly. The research objective of this article is to explore and elaborate on the operational mechanisms of NGO organizations, analyze how these mechanisms can be effective in environmental protection issues, and look forward to the possible contributions of NGOs in the field of environmental protection in the future, to further promote the vigorous development of global environmental protection (Princen, T., Finger, M., & Finger, M., 1994).

2 DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF NGOS

2.1 Definition of NGO

"Non profit organizations "usually refer to various voluntary groups, social organizations, and civil associations outside of enterprises (market sectors) that are neither government departments nor profit-oriented. The collection of these organizations constitutes the 'non-profit sector', also known as the 'third sector', which, together with government and market sectors, forms the three pillars of modern society. Although some scholars believe that the scope covered by the "third sector" and the "non-profit sector" is not the same, these two concepts are often used interchangeably. Nowadays, the most widely accepted definition of non-profit organizations is the "Structure Operation Definition" recommended by the Johns Hopkins University Center for Comparative Research on Non-Profit Organizations, which holds that any organization that meets the five characteristics of organizational, civil, non-profit, autonomous, and voluntary can be considered a non-profit organization. The current definition of NGOs in the United States is somewhat confusing, and the public is not clear about the concepts and differences between NGOs and NPOs. However, they can still be distinguished by community and noncommunity, with NPOs providing services in the community and NGOs in others (Morris, 2000).

2.2 Characteristics of NGOs

NGO organizations have five common characteristics, the first of which is organizational

nature. Organizational structure is reflected in having clear internal rules and regulations, responsible persons, and continuous activity arrangements. Those collections that lack formal structure and are only composed of temporary groups do not meet the standards of non-profit organizations. Nonprofit organizations should have a legal identity registered under national laws to have contractual rights and hold their managers accountable for the organization's commitments. The second point is folk nature. Nonprofit organizations are not part of the government, nor are they led by a board of directors led by government officials. However, this does not prevent non-profit organizations from receiving government funding support. The third point is nonprofit distribution. Nonprofit organizations do not accumulate profits for their owners. Nonprofit organizations can make profits, but the proceeds must continue to be used for the organization's mission, rather than being distributed among its members (originally the founders of the organization). The fourth point is autonomy. Nonprofit organizations have control over their activities, and their internal management procedures are independent of external intervention, ensuring the independence and autonomy of organizational decision-making. The fifth point is voluntariness (Morris, 2000). There is a significant degree of voluntary participation in both actual activities and organizational management. Especially the formation of a board of directors composed of volunteers and the widespread use of volunteer workers (Salamon, L. M., Sokolowski, S. W., & List, R., 2004).

3 THE SPECIFIC ROLE OF NGOS IN GLOBAL DECARBONIZATION

3.1 Advocacy and Policy Promotion

Against the backdrop of global environmental protection and other issues being increasingly valued by governments around the world, environmental NGOs have played a key role in promoting the formulation and implementation of relevant policies. Taking the introduction of policies as an example, environmental NGOs not only promote the introduction of policies but also affect their implementation. During the project, environmental NGOs will continuously advocate and promote the concept and knowledge of green environmental protection, such as a simple and moderate lifestyle

and green travel habits. While improving the ecological environment through this advocacy role, it is also possible to influence the local people's concepts and enhance their green awareness through this project. This will enable them to have a stronger sense of being citizens and participating in environmental protection as individuals, and thus pay more attention to the corresponding environmental policies established by local governments. They can also participate in dialogue and communication with the government, forming exchanges and cooperation among the public, NGO organizations, and government, and better promoting environmental protection and future development. For example, the "Air Conditioning Temperature Adjustment and Energy Conservation Action" in 2006 was advocated and guided by NGOs, which had a great impact across the country, making citizens aware of the importance of environmental protection and participating in it (Yao,2020). At the same time, there are a large number of professionals with professional knowledge in NGO organizations. When the government formulates corresponding policies, they will extensively communicate and exchange ideas with NGO organizations to ensure the effectiveness and implement ability of policies in various aspects to achieve the expected results. At the same time, NGO organizations pay more attention to environmental issues in society, widely voice their opinions, and communicate with government agencies to put forward their own opinions on environmental problems and promote the government to introduce corresponding policies, thereby achieving the effect of protecting the environment.

3.2 Public Education and Awareness Enhancement

With the continuous development of the economy, environmental issues are gradually being taken seriously by governments around the world. At the same time, the public's understanding of environmental issues and awareness of environmental protection have gradually become the most important components of future environmental governance. NGOs are the grassroots channels for promoting public issues, complementing government propaganda and policies, and jointly building the overall framework of public environmental knowledge. NGOs influence and guide public opinion through daily methods such as preaching, organizing related activities, and utilizing online media, enabling the public to acquire more knowledge about environmental protection and participate more

closely in environmental protection issues. In recent years, NGOs have successfully participated in a variety of environmental protection issues as non-governmental organizations, such as writing articles and participating in the issue of "green peacock protection" as a media, which has aroused widespread public recognition and promoted people's discussion and participation in the issue on the Internet, prompted the news media to pay attention to the situation and report on it, and finally got the understanding of relevant parts and conducted official governance on this phenomenon (Mei,2021). In addition, on the issue of decarbonization and emission reduction, NGOs such as the Energy Foundation and the China Environmental Protection Federation are gradually promoting public participation and awareness on this issue, using NGO education to spread and influence, allowing more people to participate in carbon reduction and emission reduction.

3.3 Supervision and Evaluation

The government, as the main body of policymaking and promulgation, is responsible for guiding and implementing corresponding environmental policies. However, without suitable carriers to assist in implementing these policies and supervising their implementation, the feasibility of many policies may not be outstanding. Environmental NGOs, as third-party entities, have great advantages in embedding themselves in this environmental governance system. Firstly, NGOs are independent and autonomous systems with non-profit characteristics. This characteristic and advantage of the system enable NGOs to greatly reduce their desires and needs for interests in participating in environmental governance issues and focus more on public interests. Secondly, members of environmental NGOs generally have higher levels of professionalism, and their expertise and legal literacy in the field of environmental governance enable them to participate in environmental governance issues with greater specialization and legal literacy. At the same time, NGOs have a broader mass base and strong social mobilization capabilities. Under various conditions, NGO organizations are the most suitable third-party entities with non-profit, non-governmental, public welfare, and professional characteristics to evaluate and supervise policies issued by the government, make their judgments on the current situation, provide their opinions on policies that have not been implemented or have been implemented, and

supervise the implementation status (Yang, Zhu, 2021).

4 THE CURRENT SITUATION AND CHALLENGES OF NGOS IN PARTICIPATING IN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

4.1 Current Status of Climate Change Issues

The current state of climate change is mainly manifested by sustained global temperature rise, rising sea levels, increasing extreme weather events, and ecosystem destruction. In recent years, China has gained a clearer understanding of the severity of climate change and has taken a series of measures to address the negative impacts it brings. On July 4, 2024, China released the "Blue Book on Climate Change in China (2024)", which reflects the global and Chinese climate change situation, pointing out that China is a sensitive and significantly affected area of global climate change, with a warming rate higher than the global level during the same period. At the same time, China's annual average temperature has also reached a new high. To alleviate such problems, China had already set the goals of "dual carbon" as early as 2020, namely "peak carbon emissions by 2030" and "carbon neutrality" by 2060. Under the green, environmentally friendly, and low-carbon lifestyle advocated by these goals, China will accelerate the pace of reducing carbon emissions, guide green technology innovation, and vigorously develop renewable energy.

4.2 Current Status and Remaining Issues of NGO Organizations' Participation in Climate Change Work

4.2.1 Current Situation

In recent years, the participation of Chinese NGOs in addressing climate change has been increasing, and their involvement in projects has become more diverse. They have not only made outstanding contributions to helping the government manage public affairs but also provided personalized and diversified services that the government cannot achieve (Jiang, Huang, Gao, 2022). In the "Research Report on Multi-Issue Public Welfare Organizations'

Response to Climate Change" by the United Green Foundation, it can be seen that although there are many public welfare organizations, due to the serious climate problems currently faced, most of them take climate action spontaneously or consciously. 93.9% of the core business of the organizations is related to climate change, as shown in Figure 1. In addition, NGO organizations have extensive communication and exchanges with relevant government departments, actively participating in the formulation and revision of climate policies, promoting the government to introduce more effective policies to address climate change, and actively responding to and participating in the promotion and publicity of the dual carbon policy. At the same time, these organizations have also been heavily involved in educational activities and publicity work, giving the public a stronger sense of crisis regarding climate change issues. At the local level, NGOs have implemented a series of climate adaptation and emission reduction measures, such as afforestation, promoting green emission reduction, and promoting renewable energy. These projects not only effectively improve the ecological environment, but also bring practical benefits to the local area. Finally, Chinese NGOs are also exchanging experiences and sharing technologies with organizations in other countries and regions, working together at a global level to address the important issue of climate change.

4.2.2 Difficulties

Although the current process of NGOs participating in climate change work is gradually improving, there are still some practical problems. As mentioned earlier, the diversity of practices involved in climate change work is increasing, but there is also a certain degree of imbalance. Some of the responses are towards a direction where there are few public welfare organizations involved.

In addition, NGOs' participation in climate change work faces serious limitations in fundraising or funding itself. In the research report of the United Green Foundation, it is stated that the fundraising channels and scale of public welfare organizations are very limited. One-third of organizations have not yet started climate-specific funding. Among the institutions that have already raised funds, 1/4 of the organizations have an annual climate funding amount of less than 50000 yuan. Most organizations indicate that the main difficulty is financial instability. However, some public welfare organizations that have already taken climate action are facing difficulties in finding effective ways to integrate and

deepen their work topics with climate issues. This is also considered by most organizations as the most serious problem in their subsequent development and participation in climate change issues. At the same time, research on grassroots NGOs further reveals that in addition to funding shortages, the lack of power resources is another major challenge faced by some NGOs when participating in social governance issues. For some NGOs, they rely on government authorization to conduct environmental research, evidence collection, and other aspects of governance information collection. However, many NGOs that attempt to move towards and participate in environmental governance, although having higher autonomy and flexibility compared to some NGOs that rely on government resources, still find it difficult to participate in the supervision process of environmental governance in the context of a lack of power resources, resulting in almost no supervisory power (Li, Wang, Hu, 2023).

At the same time, China's participation in environmental protection issues is just beginning. Even though the country has invested a lot of energy in the field of environmental protection, there are still shortcomings in the support and coordination of some policies. Some policies are unclear and deviate from actual implementation, which limits the participation and work efficiency of NGOs. From the perspective of the public, environmental issues have become increasingly prominent in recent years, but overall citizens' attention and participation in climate change are still low. Differences in overall willingness and understanding also pose problems and challenges for local NGOs in the promotion process (Liu, 2019).

5 CONCLUSION

In the previous discussion, it can be seen that NGOs play a crucial role as the most important third-party entity in environmental protection issues. In communication with the government, environmental NGOs can provide more favorable media for the government's policy formulation. They can participate in the formulation of government policies through their professional advantages, and then use a third-party perspective to evaluate the effectiveness of policy implementation and analyze and judge the problems encountered during implementation to promote subsequent improvement and development.

This article holds a more positive attitude towards the future development of environmental NGOs, and believes that NGO organizations will have more influence among the public to promote global

environmental protection. Non governmental organizations (NGOs) are highly influential and the primary channel for citizens to participate in environmental protection issues. In the promotion of environmental protection issues, NGOs will extensively publicize and educate on current environmental problems, promoting public understanding of the environmental challenges faced by the environment. Simultaneously providing a channel for citizens to participate in environmental protection issues, thereby making the future field of environmental protection more accessible to the public.

However, NGOs focused on environmental protection still face many challenges at present. For example, some NGOs face great difficulties in funding and fundraising, which makes it difficult for some NGOs to perform their functions and play their due roles. In addition, some NGOs have difficulty implementing their role in monitoring and evaluating the government due to the lack of corresponding government-level connections, resulting in insufficient participation in public affairs. Although environmental protection issues are receiving increasing attention and importance from the public, the overall level of attention is still relatively low compared to some popular topics. Therefore, the level of attention from the public may also be a problem for NGOs in their future development.

The current global environmental protection industry is flourishing, and the work of environmental protection is arduous and the road ahead is long. In the future work process, more problems and challenges will inevitably be encountered. Faced with these challenges, NGOs in various countries are seeking new solutions, including strengthening cooperation with government departments and enterprises, seeking more international aid and resource support, and enhancing public participation through innovative ways. Through continuous efforts, NGOs hope to more effectively address climate change in the future and contribute more to global sustainable development.

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