

ROLE AND IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL NGO'S ON ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN INDIA

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Abstract

“Ten years ago there was little talk of civil society in the corridors of power, but now the walls reverberate with at least the rhetoric of partnership, participation, and the role of citizens’ groups in promoting sustainable development.”

Non-government organizations are prominent stakeholders in sustainability. There are more than 3 Million NGOs and voluntary organizations in India out of which large numbers of them are focused on Education and Environmental causes but very few are making significant impact. Challenges like Rapid Economic development, Population growth and Poor Management have added huge pressure on the Environment Sustainability. For a brighter and sustainable future, the thrust of this paper is how Environmental NGOs are playing a pivotal role addressing the environmental issues such as Climate Change, Energy, Waste Management, Pollution, Biodiversity and land use. The problem at hand is to study and investigate the Role of selected Environmental NGOs in Creating Awareness of the Public, Industry and Government on Environmental Issues, and to describe the ethical issues faced by NGOs. To safeguard the Environment, a proposed model is formulated to describe the working of NGOs. In the last few decades, the power of External Stakeholders, particularly NGOs has increased considerably. Generally, the NGOs and the Industry found themselves on opposite side of each other. The future of NGO will depend upon achieving a common goal by developing partnerships between Industry and Government for the Environmental Sustainability.

Keywords: Environmental sustainability, ENGO, Pollution, Climate change, Environment issues

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Introduction

NGOs are Non-Governmental Organizations are usually referred for organizations which are not part of government though could be funded by the government. The primary objective of these organizations is public service. As per one estimate, there are more than 3.3 million NGOs in India in 2009 (Shukla, 2010). In India, for an entity to become an NGO, it has to register either as a Trust, Society or a private limited nonprofit company, under section-25 Company of the Indian Companies Act, 1956.

Environmental NGOs typically take up causes related to the environment such Climate Change, Air Pollution, Deforestation, Ozone Layer Depletion, Waste Management, Biodiversity and Land Use, Energy, Conservation, Environmental degradation, Land Degradation Some of the Prominent examples of Environmental NGO working in India are Greenpeace India, Awaaz Foundation, Centre for Science and Environment, Goa Foundation, CERE India, Conserve, Foundation For Ecological Security, Exnora International, Goa Foundation, WWF India and Winrock International India.

India is the world's second most populated country in the world with a population of 1.21 Billion (2011), and is also of the fastest emerging economies of the world growing at 6.9 % GDP (estimated) for 2011-12. Large population base and high growth rate of the economy has created challenges and issue at the environmental front, particularly related to Air and water Pollution, deforestation and depletion of natural resources at fast pace. India has to take immediate action to slow and reverse the environment degradation. India has to work on Environmental sustainability. As per the World Commission on Environment and Development, sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (1987). Environmental Sustainability deals with maintenance or improvement to the quality of environment for long term. The article by Vadoan (2011) on the "Role of NGO's in Environmental Conservation and Development" highlighted the paradigm shift in the approaches and policies of the UN with regard to the Non-Governmental Organizations. There is a growing coordination between UN agencies and NGOs in all areas such as policy making, human rights, peace and disarmament, environmental Issues. It also discussed overall environmental activities carried out by International and National NGOs.

Research Methodology

Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically.

Nature of the Problem

It is absolutely essential that Environmental NGOs meet their set objectives of environmental sustainability. The impact of the ENGOs will depend upon their ability to mobilize resources, create partnerships with the Industry and Government, and on their ability to use media and tools such RTI and PIL to their advantage. So, keeping in view the importance of aforesaid subject, an attempt was made to understand the working of prominent ENGOs and propose a working model for ENGOs.

Objectives of the Problem:

This study highlights the role and impact of ENGOs on environmental sustainability, and makes recommendations and suggestions for improvements in their working. The study has been conducted to meet the following specific objectives:

- 1) To elucidate the proposed model for ENGO
- 2) To study the comparative impact of selected ENGO's
- 3) To sensitize on the ethical issues faced by ENGOs

Research Design:

A working exploratory model of ENGOs has been proposed whose implications will be discussed in future working series by developing an instrument to gather information. This model is purely qualitative and no quantitative aspect is under coverage.

Research Design	Proposed Model – Exploratory Comparative Analysis -Descriptive
Sources of data collection	Secondary – Articles , Internet Sites, Books

Scope of the study:

The scope of the present paper is confined to the above objectives and limited to secondary information of various ENGO's. The result of this study provides insights and information to on the emerging role of ENGOs, and the pitfalls to achieving those objectives.

Objective I – To elucidate the proposed working model of Environmental NGO

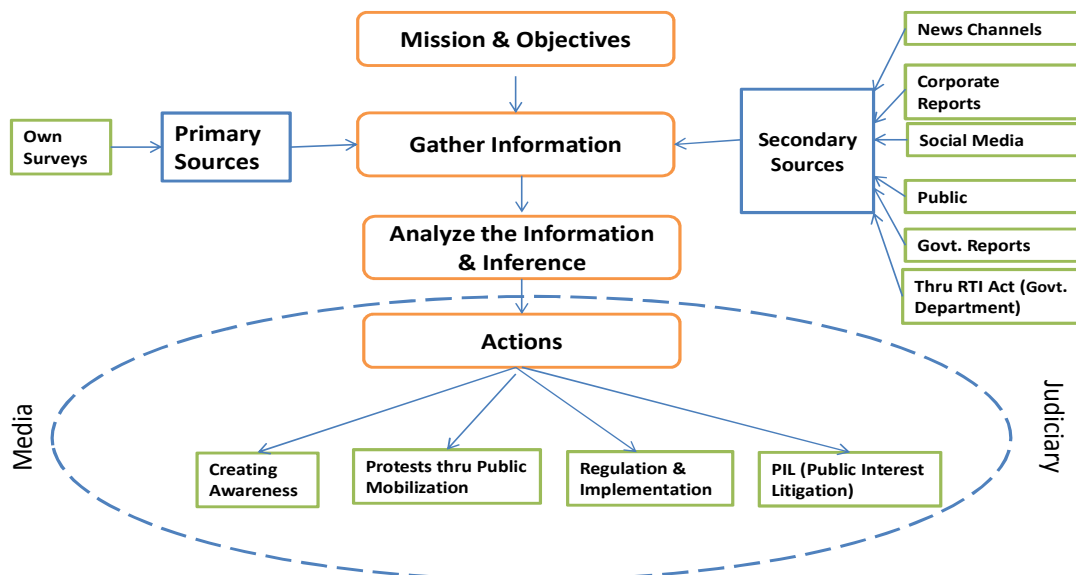
The role of Environmental NGOs as a major stakeholder in Environmental Causes has increased both in dimension and stature over last decades. Most of the Environment NGO started as small organizations focused on one or few of following causes– Education & Training, Environment research, Environment Monitoring, Air or Water Pollution, Land degradation, Waste Management, Toxic & Chemical Waste, Saving Wild life and Eco Sensitive Zones. But over the period, some of these organizations have transformed themselves into highly professional and respectful organizations. For Instance, a prominent India NGO, Centre for Science and Environment started in 1980 as an organization focused on creating Public awareness on Science , technology , Environment and development. But over the past 30 years, its grown into highly organized and professional organization focused on Pollution Monitoring, Developed a Knowledge Portal – a comprehensive website & series of publication on Environment Issues, created innovative mechanisms such as Green Rating points for the Industry, and turned into knowledge based environment activism. Many ENGOs have started collaboration with Government and Industry to create a sustainable structure for future growth. These organizations provide consultancy to industrial houses and



corporates, and are actively engaged at various levels with the government on developing Environment friendly and sustainable development policies. Some of the companies are collaborating with NGOs to implement their Corporate Social Responsibilities. With the power of media and Judicial Activism, Environmental NGOs are able perform functions better, which may not have been possible otherwise. The enhanced roles played by ENGOs come with lot of responsibilities and challenges which they need to bear in mind.

Proposed Working Model of ENGO:-

Based on the study of several Environmental NGOs operating in India, there is work flow that is followed by most of the successful ENGOs. Most of the ENGOs have a mission and set of Environmental objectives they want to achieve. To fight for a cause, it's too important to gather the relevant information relevant to the problem as facts are important to make the strong case. The Environmental NGOs rely on Secondary and Primary sources to gather information about the issue at hand. This could in the form of Government Reports prepared by Ministry of Environment and Forest, Centre & State Pollution Boards, or through attending conferences and seminars organized at National & International level. The media, particularly Electronic and Newspaper bring forth burning environmental issues which can be taken by the certain Environmental NGOs to pursue. The ENGO collect Primary data as well. They collect primary data through filling Questionnaires, actively interacting with Environmental stakeholder such as local population, Industry, Government agencies, Publics, and other. Also, increasingly, environmental NGOs are using RTI to extract data related to Government Rules and Regulation on Environment Laws, information related to implementation of the projects, Government Outlays and others relevant information. The data gathering stage is followed by analyzing the information and drawing inferences from the same. Based on the inferences and analysis, ENGOs take certain action which could range from certain awareness in the general public about Environmental Issues to taking Legal action against the Offender or PIL to mitigate the Environmental Risk.



DS' Working Model of a Typical Environmental NGO

The actions of ENGOs include Education and Training to stakeholders, Environmental Monitoring, resorting to protests (Chipko Movement), Physical Effort (Cleaning River Ganges), or mobilizing support for Environmental Causes, or litigation against Polluters or PIL against unfavorable laws and regulation.

Use of PIL and RTI – Tools used by ENGO

PIL – Public Interest Litigation is considered one of the potent tools, increasingly used by the ENGO to enforce Environmental Laws, or bring about changes or modification in Laws concerned with the Environmental Issues. PIL in the Indian context means any litigation which is used for the protection of public interest. The rise of public interest litigation has to do with increased judicial activism in last few decades. PIL will not be able to provide satisfactory or the best solution in all the cases. Sometimes, the PIL route can slow the process of resolution of the problem. Though , courts welcome genuine litigation but there are several cases of frivolous litigation put up in the court to meet self-interests, or settle personal score. PIL has become a preferred weapon of choice in the fight for environmental sustainability. For instance, a filing of PIL by Tapas NGO in Delhi High Court led to the ban of Plastic ban in the Delhi from January 2009. The positive impact was the emergence of biodegradable and Jute bags which helped in bring desired green change in Delhi. The NGO made a huge effort to sensitize the general public about use of plastic bags. They put 20000 poster and organized protests at JantarMantar to mobilize public for banning of plastic bags(Joy, 2011).

RTI – Right to Information Act 2005 (RTI) provides power in the hands of the ordinary citizens and NGOs to extract Information from a “Public Authority” (Government Departments).This acts empowers the ENGOs to seek relevant information such as Information on Laws and Government Regulations, actions taken by the Government bodies with regards to Environment aspect and others. This helps the ENGOs create awareness in the general public or society at large about the rights, and if there is any violation of law by individuals or corporations, this tool can be used as evidence of wrong doing. For Instance, In June 2010, an NGO run by Rohit Prajapati filed an RTI application with Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA) on their emergency chemical disaster Management plan. This was very important as there are number of chemical plants and factories situated in Gujarat, and a chemical disaster can turn very deadly as in the case of Bhopal Gas Tragedy where more than 30000 people lost their life. Through this process of RTI, it came to the knowledge of Public that there is no plan in place to tackle these disasters.

Government and ENGO collaboration

One of the important stakeholder in Environment Issue is the Government – whether Central or state governments. ENGOs need to work in collaboration with concerned departments such as Ministry of Environment and Forests, Central and State Pollution Boards and others. ENGO should collaborate to help greater transparency and accountability, to act as pressure groups for enforcement of relevant laws, to work for providing solutions for Environment sustainability, to help in Participation of general public in government programs, to help provide technical and other assistance, and to act as watch dog to ensure things are being implemented in kind and spirit. Both Government and ENGO should join hands for create safe and green future for the country. For Instance, In May 1992, MoEF have constituted a NGO cell to strengthen existing and new NGOs. The cell also acts a single window counter for all NGO related activities being carried out at different division of the Ministry. The West Bengal Pollution control Board has empanelled 223 NGOs for promoting environmental cause in state of Bengal. Also, the state government rope in NGOs for providing consultation on environment awareness programs.

Industry and NGO Collaboration

Industries and corporations play an important role in the growth and development of any country. But, Industrial houses, Construction and Infrastructure companies, and those involved in Mining, Chemicals and Fertilizers, Paper and Pulp, Leather, Steel and Cement, have caused huge negative environmental impact. Un-relented construction and Mining in Eco-Sensitive areas, water and air pollution, deforestation, and toxic wastes have added burden on the environment sustainability. There are number of Government laws and regulation in place such as ,The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, The Ozone Depleting Substance (Regulation & Control) Rules, 2000, Hazardous Waste (Management & Handling) Rules, 1989, Biomedical Waste (Management & Handling) Rules 1998, The Mines (Amendment) Bill, 2011, The Indian Fisheries Act, 1897 , The Water (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act, 1974,The Air (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act, 1981,The Indian Forest Act, 1927,Forest Conservation Act 1980 with amendments made in 1988 etc. But despite these, the rules are flouted by the Factories and corporations for short term gains. For this very reason, apart from that action taken by the government and Courts (Sue Moto) to enforce these laws, the Role of ENGO is very critical.

There is growing realization among the corporations and ENGOs to work together for meet the larger objective of creating Environment friendly and sustainable products in the

Market. There are growing number of companies in India who are engaging in a strategic dialogue with ENGOs on matters of Product development, processes, project management, promotion and recyclability. There is also growing partnership between Corporate and ENGOs on the matter of Corporate Social Responsibility. To ENGOs acts an arm for the business to achieve their corporate social responsibility. For Instance, to address the community waste, PepsiCo has partnered by NGO Exnora to create replicable model across the cities such as Chennai, Panipat, Cuddalore and others to address the community waste.

Role of Media

After Liberalization and advent of Internet Media, the role played by news channel in English and vernacular language can't be overestimated. They are constantly bombarding the audience with 24*7 news. As per an estimate there were more than 800 satellite channels and out of which more than 80 are news channel. India also boasts of the biggest newspaper market in the world. India media particularly the electronic media is considered to be very aggressive and proactive. The corporate, Industrialists and Government at large doesn't want get into controversies and create a Media Crisis.

ENGOs act as feeder for news to these every hungry news channels. They are acting in collaboration with the media to bring the environmental issues to the forefront. The issues environmental degradation, climate change, dumping of toxic waste, Land degradation and environmental impact due to excessive mining, construction projects in eco-sensitive zones, air and water pollution by chemical and heavy industries grab instant headlines in the newspapers and electronic media. For Instance, in the recent case of Lavasa Corporation involved in creating the so called "India's First Planned Hill City". Due to violation of Environment laws by Lavasa, there has been growing pressure created by NGOs on the Government and law enforcing agencies to act against Lavasa so that it meets the environmental norms. This has been the Headline news in both Electronic and Newspapers. In another instance, in 2003, the Centre for Science and Environment – a prominent Environmental NGO created uproar by publishing findings that the beverage produced by Coke and Pepsi contains high percentage of pesticide residue which is harmful to health and is not fit of human consumption. This story grabbed headlines in all major newspaper and TV channels, created a PR nightmare for coke and Pepsi.

Objective 2 - Comparative study of 10 prominent ENGOs working in India.

Name	Focus	Activities /Impact
Greenpeace India	Climate Change, Toxic Waste, Nuclear Safety, Overfishing Protection, Environment degradation	Pushed the Indian Govt. for Unlimited Liability of Supplier which led to increase in Liability of Suppliers from 5 Billion. To 15Billion in the Nuclear Liability Bill; In 2008, Greenpeace organized the meeting of major electronic manufacture on e-waste which leads to the ball rolling for a formal law governing e-waste; Exposed presence & sale of Genetically Engineered food in the country leading to investigation by Director general of Foreign Trade.
CERE India	Environment Education, Awareness and Advocacy	CERE is commissioned by organizations such as Tata power, TCS, Hindustan Lever, IndusInd Bank map carbon footprint & help cap carbon emissions. Conducted lectures & workshops in many orgs such as ISB, Oberoi Hotel, DanikJagran, Aga Khan Society (http://www.cere-india.org/carbon-map--cap-initiative.html)
EXNORA International	Preserving Nature, Presenting Environment degradation, Waste Mgmt.	Formed Community Based Organization across India. There are 5000 civic exnoras in India targeting 30000 streets and settlements to clean the streets and environment (http://www.exnora.org/aboutus.php)
AWAAZ foundation	Air Pollution, Toxic Heavy Metal, Protection of Tress, Noise Pollution	Compelled Policy change in State of Maharashtra regarding sand mining. Sensitive areas , Facilitated Infrastructure using alt. technology use of natural & recycled sand (http://www.awaaz.org/Awaaz_Foundation/About_Awaaz_Foundation.html)
Foundation for Ecological Security	Conserve Ecologically sensitive area, Land & water resources	Work with 2208 villages' institution across 27 districts across 6 states in protecting 1, 30,000 hectare of revenue wasteland, degraded grazing lands forest lands. (http://fes.org.in/)
Goa Foundation	Environment Education, Solid Waste Management, Statutory Responsibility	Filed 80 PILs in High Court and Supreme Court On Environmental reports, Launched a periodical Curry & Rice updating citizens' environment Report ; Instrumental In removing Plastic litter from Goan Environment; Part of Goa State coastal Zone Mgmt. Authority and Supreme Court monitoring committee on Hazardous wastes
CSE India	Environment Awareness, Propose Sustainable Solution, Climate Change, Air Pollution, Water Management, Education & Training, Food Safety & Toxins, Climate Change	In 2003, brought forth the issue of higher pesticide residue content In soft drink by cola giants Pepsi & Coke and also in Bottled water. This led to government forming joint parliament committee on health and safety; Engaged with Bureau of Indian Standards to put in place a methodology for testing Pesticides. Involved in providing Green Rating award to Industries on the basis of their environmental performance. Successful Green Awards.
WWF India	Conservation, Wasteful Consumption of resource, Minimizing Water Pollution, Reduction of Toxic waste & Mgmt. of Toxic Waste	Working actively to conserve critical regions such as Bharatpur, Sunderbans, Tiger reserves; Established Centre for Environment Law (CEL) -involved in policy analysis, campaigning, legal Intervention in Environmental Laws
CONSERVE India	Waste Management, Up cycling	Trained hundreds of people in Delhi's disadvantage to clear streets of Plastic and bad waste. This is up cycling to create designer handbags, wallets , shoes and belts for high fashion
Winrock International India	Natural resource Management, Energy and Environment, Climate change	Become member on Expert committee on Clean development Mechanism, constituted by Ministry of New & Renewable Energy, GoI. Involved in CDM Project Facilitation & capacity Building, Involved in facilitation numerous projects such as 10.2 MW wind farm project under CDM with UNFCCC, Involved in Integrated Rain water harvesting in Almora District. Created "The Nilgiri declaration on Hill Water resource Management.

Objective III - Ethical Issues plaguing ENGOs:

NGOs are playing a formidable role in the current Indian Scenario. Environment NGOs have emerged as one of the strongest external pressure groups in bring about the changes in Environmental laws and regulations as well as enforcement of environment rules and regulation. But every day, there are reports emerging that everything is not right with the working of these ENGOs. There is still lot of opaqueness in the funding and activities of some NGOs. In India, NGOs do have a favorable image up till now. Indian Society and Indian media have positive view about the role of NGOs. But, that view is slowly but surely taking a beating due to unscrupulous and unethical activities by some NGOs. Even in some part of media and government, NGOs are considered a growing menace which powers and activities need to be curtailed.

Some ENGOs are accused of taking up only those causes which give them publicity rather than taking up issue which are important. For Instance, very few ENGOs are really concerned with cleaning of River such as Ganga or Yamuna, or actively engaged in Educating the rural population in Indoor pollution which kills lakhs of people every year in India. Most NGOs want to target MNCs and large corporations because that give them easy publicity, and media is quick to take up these confrontational issues. For Instance, the issue of pesticide residue in soft drink bottles was blown out of proportion, and media was quick to take up that issue. Though, inherently the major issue should have been the polluted ground water which everybody was drinking. Therefore, the pesticide residue was also in drinking water and milk but MNCs were taken to task and not the Municipal Corporation or government at large who needs to ensure clean drinking water for its citizens.

In the recent case of Nuclear Plant at Koodankulum (Tamil Naidu), few NGOs are accused of using foreign funds to create a campaign of fear among the local population about nuclear threat. Even in the recent Interview to a Journal, our PM said “There are NGOs often funded from US and the Scandinavian countries, which are not fully appreciative of the development challenges that our country faces”. According to an estimate, there are projects worth Rs 300 Billion stuck in the key infrastructure areas such as Power and Mining because of minor objections and roadblocks created through PIL, protests etc. by Environmental NGOs (Chawla, 2012).

Some of the NGOs are also funded by corporate houses that are using them as a platform to secure favorable deals or use a weapon to target their competitors and adversaries. For instance, in judgment of Kalyaneshwari Vs Union of India, a writ petition was filed seeking closure for an asbestos unit in Gujarat on the record that it is harmful to

humans. The courts subsequently found that the petition was filed not for any concern for human health but under the garb of public safety, the real interest was to push for substitute of asbestos. The plea was eventually rejected and court ordered a fine of Rs 100,000 on the litigant. In another case, a local NGO in Delhi was condemned by the court for filing frivolous litigation and misusing RTI, and was fined Rs. 75000 for targeting the MCD officials. The use of unethical practices by a growing number of NGOs is a worrying trend, and needs to be checked (Nair, 2012).

Conclusion:

The Environmental NGOs have emerged as strong and potent group for advocating Environmental Issues. The proposed model highlights the important elements such as RTI, PIL, media, collaboration with government and Industry which if used potently will help the NGO to effectively meet its Environmental objectives.

The study of selected Environmental NGOs bring forth the constructive role played by them through affecting policy change in government, collaborating with Corporations on carbon emissions, mobilizing villagers in protecting forest and revenue wasteland, creating awareness on water and Air pollution, and bringing the important environmental issues to the forefront.

The misuse of RTI and PIL by some NGOs is creating bad publicity, and needs to be curtailed. The courts and government have to a strong view on the frivolous litigations and stop its misuse. There is also a growing distrust deficit amongst NGOs, Industry, Government and Public due to lack of transparency and accountably in the working of ENGOs. So, it's important that NGOs should self-regulate and acts as responsible organizations.

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