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Energy Development and Environmental NGOs: The Asian Perspective

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Introduction

Since the early 1990s, the landscape of development and the environment has changed drastically. Environmental protection has come to be recognized as a principal area of focus for international environmental politics and policymaking. More than five years have passed since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was held in Rio in 1992. The question often arises: what has been achieved in the field of sustainable development since then? Despite an improved understanding of the scientific aspects of causes and impacts of environmental problems worldwide, the human dimension of environmental discourse is increasingly recognized as an important area for further investigation.² There is a need to better understand the human responses emerging from different sectors of society regarding critical environmental issues and policies.

We envision human response as a steering mechanism, shaping directions of development trajectories. Energy sector development is often identified as the focus of environmental action, because of the severe environmental impacts of energy exploration and utilization, driven by increasing demand for energy services. The conflict between energy production/use and the environment is seen as the main environmental issue attracting the attention of human society.

It is commonly recognized that environmental protection has been integrated into development processes through the involvement of four different types of social actors. They include governments, multilateral and bilateral aid agencies, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Their actions and interactions are the primary sources of societal response to critical development and environment issues.

Governments play a traditional role in shaping energy development and environmental protection through policy incentives and regulatory measures to generate environment-oriented action in society, or more often the vice versa, for example through supply-oriented energy production expansion. Governments often come to dominate development processes through a top-down approach, with command and control methods as a steering mechanism. This mechanism is often criticized as ineffective, and a barrier to greater energy efficiency and improved flexibility, because it tends to diminish the potential for citizen participation and discourages communities' self-involvement (Munasinghe, 1991, p.31).

² Examples include the Global Environmental Change Program in the UK, the Human Dimensions of Global Change Program in Canada, the Human Dimension of the Environmental Change Program in the European Community, and the Social Learning in the Management of Global Environmental Risks in the USA. The Battelle Institute and the US Department of Energy also supported a project entitled, "State of the Art Review of Social Science and Global Climate Change."

The development initiatives cultivated by **multilateral and bilateral aid agencies** are translated into development practice in developing countries. International aid agencies usually cooperate with governments and seldom consult directly with NGOs or engage them in dialogue. Many aid programs are oriented toward large-scale projects that are environmentally questionable. Although the environment is a relatively new item on the agendas of aid practice, it has seen a sharp rise in profile in recent years. The World Bank is a particular case in point (The World Bank, 1997a), although its response to environmental issues deserves further space for debate.

The private sector has traditionally been suspicious of environmental issues, because of their business orientation, which often disregards environmental externalities. The private sector is increasingly pushed by governmental regulations, and, to a lesser extent, by citizens' groups to react in environmentally benign directions. In general, environmental awareness is on the rise within the private sector, shaped both by internal awareness and by external pressures. One example is the increasing involvement in joint implementation (JI) projects from the private sector, which has encouraged interest from aid agencies (ECON, 1997).

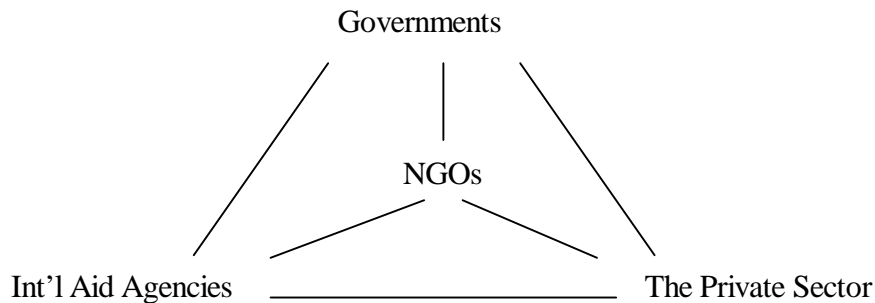
Most importantly, **NGOs**, as a social actor, have come to play an important role in linking development objectives with the environment, through interactions with the other social actors. NGOs have grown into an important social entity in what is called global civil society. NGOs have, sometimes with diverse orientations and objectives between developed and developing countries, functioned collectively as a catalytic force, or a mediator, bringing important environmental and development objectives to the attention of practitioners, i.e., those working in governments, international aid agencies and the private sector.

In the energy and environment sphere, NGOs have established different working relationships with other actors, as seen in **Figure 1**. Through formal and informal networks, NGOs come to shape the attitudes and operation of other social institutions.³ NGOs have developed particular modes of operation. They often act from below, with a bottom-up approach on issue-oriented activities. They seldom work on a single issue, but often take several issues at a time and tend to engage in these issues in an integrated approach to achieve greater effectiveness in action. For example, NGOs often lobby large energy development projects by pointing out potential consequences of such development: loss of biological diversity, resettlement of local residents, pollution problems, etc. Through such actions as advocating, opposing, negotiating, and consulting activities, NGOs have created an institutional framework for linking the general public from local

³ Institutions can be understood as sets of regulatory norms that give rise to patterns of action, concrete social structures or organizations. Institutions can be public or private in ownership, as long as they refer to a set of regulatory norms resulting in a whole structure of relations rather than just a single relationship. Institutions constitute the social infrastructure, which shapes the behavior of relevant actors in society and organizes the relationships among them. Institutions have an impact on the distribution of authority, and affect functions of social practice. They both establish individual and organizational centers of power and constrain the exercise of that power. For further definition of institutions, see Oran Young (1989, p.32).

communities with high-level decision-making bodies and other social institutions. NGOs realize their values and objectives through this process. Their influence on different issues can be observed in international environmental disputes, energy project development, global climate change, environmental impact assessment, etc. (Hurrell & Kingsbury, 1992, p.10).

Figure 1. Relationship of NGOs with Other Social Actors



Particularly in the last few years, NGOs have transformed themselves in scope and scale, creating a community. The characteristics, purposes, interests and means of their actions, or interaction, have all shifted from what we observed in the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, to better understand the present discourse of energy and environmental politics in relation to the function of NGOs, it is important to put these changes into perspective.

It is assumed that a global civil society has emerged, partly because of the influence of NGOs. This emerging global civil society provides a new framework for societal responses toward important issues affecting human activities and survival. The overall global institutions of governance are increasingly shaped by NGO activities. Therefore, there is a need to better understand the social phenomenon and the process of NGO involvement in international political systems. For our purpose of analysis, NGO participation in energy-related environmental activities is of a particular relevance.

Since the early 1990s, Asian developing countries have had particular influence in the global debate and action over development and the environment. This can be attributed to the rapid expansion of economic power in Asia, which consequently brings environment problems to the center of political and public attention. We have seen an increasing involvement of Asian NGOs in important environmental and development activities at the local, regional, national and international levels. This is a relatively new phenomenon in Asian developing countries. It is driven, on the one hand, by growing democratization of the political systems in the region. More freedom of political choice due to relaxation of regulations has empowered NGOs to grow as a source of social criticism against dominant societal actors. On the other hand, increasing economic integration and liberalization between countries and within the region has provided incentives for the development of

the NGO sector, with diversified sources of funding and opportunities for social intervention.

High rates of economic growth have increased environmental tensions in the region. It has led to a higher environmental consciousness of the general public, where environmental NGOs are rooted (Serrano, 1994). It can be argued that many environmental values and concepts are imported, or transferred, from the North, such as the initiatives to protect the global environment, as what is agreed upon in international conventions. It is clear that major actors from developed countries have shaped, to a large extent, the values of NGOs from developing countries through international development assistance projects. However, some NGOs in the South do impose different values regarding important energy and environmental disputes, such as on the reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions.

The development process in the energy sector is complex and includes many components. Energy production and consumption are two broad areas that divide interest between different types of NGOs. In energy production, it consists of, for example, the construction of new power plants, including fossil-fuel based electric power plants and hydroelectric dams, and non-conventional energy development, i.e., the development of new and renewable energy technologies such as solar panel and wind turbines. Energy conservation, lifestyle changes, sustainable use of biomass resources, etc., have become central concerns of many stakeholders interested in the process of development related to energy consumption.

There are considerable differences in NGOs' interest and involvement in energy development. As described later, different types of NGOs have different emphasis in their objectives and involvement in energy development. Their activities tend to focus on clusters of issue areas, such as large development projects, national or regional energy planning, renewable energy development, or conservation of energy resources. These diverging interests are due to a number of pre-conditions: local circumstances, in-house expertise in organizations, and potential benefits that may arise from particular activities. For some environment-oriented, or minded, NGOs, attention is focused on how to challenge environmentally-questionable development through protective activities. They tend to lobby large development projects, such as huge hydroelectric dams supported by multilateral aid agencies, claiming that they are safeguarding the local environment. The primary interest of some development-oriented NGOs, is to collaborate with aid agencies in internationally agreed upon projects for sustainable energy development that may benefit local people and communities.

This study aims to compare and analyze NGOs' activities in the energy sector in Asia. The main focus is on energy development with an environmental orientation, such as large hydropower development, energy efficiency improvements, and new and renewable energy development. The main objectives are:

- 1) to analyze the motivations, aims, characteristics, and means of operation of NGOs in their involvement in projects related to energy and environment;

- 2) to better understand the process of NGOs' involvement in decision-making, and the extent to which processes are affected by the nature of operation and why;
- 3) to review the relationships, and means of interaction, of NGOs with governmental agencies, international aid organizations, and the private sector;
- 4) to study the influence of international NGOs on local and regional NGOs, and the differences in their values and modes of operation; and
- 5) to describe the implications of NGO contributions to the emergence of global civil society from an Asian perspective.

1 Energy Development and Environmental NGOs in Asia

1.1 Background

For the last fifteen years (1980-95), economic development in Asia has been the most dynamic, compared with other regions in the world. In the 1980s, the East Asia and Pacific region had an average annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of 7.6 percent, and 10.3 percent in 1990-1995. In the same periods, South Asia had relatively low rates of growth at 5.7 percent and 4.6 percent, respectively. Compared with world-average growth rates of 3.1 and 2.0 percent in the same periods, Asia has performed well in catching up with economic indicators (The World Bank, 1997b, p.235).

Following the Japanese economic miracle in the 1960s and the 1970s, the four small tigers (Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong) — a group of newly industrialized countries and regions⁴ — drastically restructured their economies. They performed well in terms of GDP growth rates in the 1970s and 1980s. In the late 1970s till the early 1990s, China's emergence as a super economic power redefined the world political and economic order in many respects. In addition, countries in Southeast Asia — including Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam — have all shown faster economic development in the industrial and commercial sectors. Most of the other nations in Asia have also shown promising economic performance in the past decade. Although the financial turmoil in Asia in late 1997 led to critical views of the regional economy, one cannot completely rule out the possibility for future recovery. Structural change in government-NGO relationships is being debated as a key to realizing this proposition (Financial Times, December 30, 1997).

Not surprisingly, rapid economic growth in Asia has been achieved at a great expense to the environment (Clad and Siy, 1996, pp.52-58; ADB, 1990, pp.40-50). The stark contrast between Asia's fast economic development and rapidly deteriorating environment, particularly in urban-industrial environments, makes this region the foremost test for sustainable development. Energy plays a central role in this process. The conflict between energy sector development and associated environmental risks has led to concerns for ecological sustainability in the region. In many countries of Asia, energy development is characterized by expansion of fossil-fuel based power generation and the development of large-scale hydroelectric power plants.⁵ Industrialization and rapid urbanization have been the main driving forces fostering this development.⁶

⁴ Taiwan and Hong Kong are referred to as part of China.

⁵ One example is China's energy-sector development, which has shown continuous growth in energy supply through the construction of large coal-burning power plants and hydroelectric power stations, despite progress in energy conservation. See: Gan, 1998.

⁶ By 2025, the ADB estimates that Asia's urban population will more than double from 1.1 to 2.5 billion, as a result of population increase and rural migration, and will make up half the world's urban population. There will be some 20 megacities, each with more than 10 million people, and 10 of these will have populations of more than 20 million (Financial Times, September 19, 1997).

In rural areas, energy supply often does not meet demand. According to the World Bank, over 2 billion people in the world lack access to electricity and rely on biomass fuels as they have no better alternatives (The World Bank, 1996). The continuing conflict over the lack of fuelwood and commercial energy supply, i.e., electricity, has led to ecological imbalances in rural areas. With over 80 percent of rural energy consumption based on non-commercial biomass in most Asian developing countries, such as China, Indonesia and the Philippines (UNDP, 1997, p.196), the environment is bound to be affected. Burning biomass for cooking and space heating in rural areas has intensified in some regions, due to increasing population pressure (Brandon & Ramankutty, 1993, pp.21-32). This creates further conflicts over natural resources and energy use.

Balancing energy development with environmental sustainability has become one of the greatest development challenges in Asia. There are many uncertainties. The reason is not only the complexity of energy-environmental issues, but also the interrelated co-effects of economic growth, population, poverty, and urbanization. The energy sector in Asia is typically owned and controlled by governments. The costs of environmental externalities are often excluded from economic cost-benefit analysis when development projects are decided by governmental agencies. Monopoly is a common characteristic of energy development and service sector operation. The recent trend of decentralization in the energy sector has legitimized private sector involvement in energy development (Munasinghe, M, 1991, p.31). With government support, and sometimes with help from international development assistance, public and private utilities are bound to defend their common interests in energy-sector expansion. For this to occur, great challenges in the form of environmental consequences of energy-sector development are foreseen. In this process, NGOs have come to defend their own interests, and those in society at large, as they believe their livelihood and wellbeing are affected, or harmed, by such development.

We have seen major changes in public debates over energy-environmental issues in the past two decades. With the increasing environmental imperative and evolving issue areas, public interest, mostly represented by NGOs, has evolved from focusing merely on local environmental problems in the early period to addressing regional and global issues in recent years. In the 1970s and 1980s, most of the environmental campaigns were focused on air and water pollution and the construction of large hydroelectric dam projects. From the late 1980s until the early 1990s, there was increasing attention on the problems of cross-boundary pollution, acid rain, global climate change, ozone depletion, sustainable use of biomass resources, development of renewable energy technologies, etc. The rise of global environmental problems in world politics in the 1990s created a unique opportunity for NGOs, enabling them to be integrated into the world political arena. Energy and the environment are the two areas in which NGOs have developed their competitive advantages.

1.2 The Evolution of Environmental NGOs

Asia's development has been characterized by the growing presence of the NGO community in political and social activities (Princen & Finger, 1994, pp.1-3). NGOs have evolved into a social critique in shaping political development processes. NGOs have also become a widely accessible provider of social service to millions of people in rural communities.⁷ It is generally agreed that NGOs have fostered great social changes through their activities, although their accountability and cost-effectiveness still deserve space for further debate (Edwards & Hulme, 1995, pp.6-14).

The development of environmental NGOs and their involvement in environmental activities must be interpreted from a historical perspective. It is part of the massive social movements that challenge the dominant structures and processes of the authoritarian regime, through which the political elite maximize their power and interest. The free associations of citizens in Asia have a long tradition, which can be traced back to the pre-colonial communal societies (Serrano, 1994, p.29).

Much of the growth of NGOs in Asia can be traced back into the post-World War II period of the late 1940s and 1950s. The independence movement gave rise to anti-colonization movements, through which civil society came to exercise its power and influence. During this process, local residents and communities developed their networks of contacts, and became independent from established fabrics of society, as traditionally dominated by super powers of western nations and national governments.

During the 1960s and 1970s, increased income in some Asian countries enabled the expansion of the middle class. This relatively well-educated and better informed social group tends to exercise their influence through participatory social involvement. They strive for more independent rights and freedom, and tend to challenge dominant social structures and practices. Many voluntary organizations were developed during this period with community-oriented social service as their primary objective.

Environmental NGOs emerged in the 1970s as part of the global environmental movement. They developed further in the 1980s, and expanded rapidly in the early 1990s (Thomas, 1992, pp.27-29). This phenomenon owes in part to the alarming environmental situation in Asia, following rapid economic development and the so-called modernization movements promoted by governments. Increasing industrialization has given rise to pollution problems that create environmental risks affecting human health. Many local

⁷ In South Asia, for example, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has more than 17,000 full-time staff, and works with over three million people in rural communities. It reaches nearly 60 percent of the country's 86,000 villages. India has more than 12,000 development NGOs. In Sri Lanka, the NGO named Sarvodaya works in 7,000 villages. Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) has more than 50,000 members (Edwards & Hulme, 1995, p.3). The total number of NGOs in Indonesia has reached more than 10,000 (*Financial Times*, December 30, 1997). The Philippines has some 18,000 NGOs (Princen & Finger, 1994, p.2). In China, NGOs have mushroomed over the past one and a half decades, although environmental NGOs are small in proportion to the rest (Wang, 1993).

residents were victims rather than beneficiaries of development.⁸ NGOs sometimes challenge dominant development activities when they see the risks of their interests being eroded and undermined by large-scale project development. The general trend is that environmental NGOs are becoming more complex, with a global orientation to their areas of involvement. Although local environmental issues still occupy much of their attention, they turn increasingly to global environmental affairs, such as climate change. Energy production and use are, of course, central concerns of their actions.

⁸ Resettlement of local people for hydroelectric dam construction is a well-known example. Large dam projects can result in millions of people being moved out of their homelands. In many instances, these people do not benefit from dam development.

2 NGOs as a Social Actor

The concept of "shaping of institutions" in energy development can be understood from three interrelated aspects: the role of experts and expertise, actors and their networks, and policy instruments. Experts and expertise refer to those professionals with specific knowledge/training or experience. Their knowledge capacity is used in public policy-making. Actors, broadly defined, include human and non-human actors. NGOs as a social group can be considered as an actor, although there are great differences in the orientations and characteristics of individual NGOs.

Networks play a critical role in facilitating communication and cooperation between organizations and individuals. Actors usually interact through a web of networks. Networking can be understood as an important means to promoting cooperation between institutions, and to keeping balance in power relationships. Through networking activities, institutions come to share specific knowledge or information, and establish consensus to reach specific objectives. The extent to which a network can function effectively depends on a number of variables: relationships between key actors involved, interests of individual actors, design of communication focal points, a common knowledge base, etc. Institutions operate by acting and reacting. Each institution has its own identity, which defines rules and principles. Institutional identity is established as a result of the social and cultural settings in which institutions are rooted. Transfer of knowledge in decision-making processes, patterns of policy change, strategy setting, technological innovation, etc., are largely determined by institutional identities.

2.1 Characteristics and Operation of NGOs

It is assumed that there are basically three types of NGOs involved in environmental disputes and related activities: 1) research-oriented NGOs; 2) lobbying NGOs; and 3) mediating NGOs. They have common characteristics functioning collectively as NGOs, but with different orientations, interests and development objectives.

Research-oriented NGOs are those with informative and advisory characteristics. They are motivated by the value of their service realized through scientific knowledge development, consultation and policy advice. Many see their function as mediators, to inform and send important policy signals to policymakers and the general public. Their main interest is in academic research, in order to generate debate and knowledge within, and between, the scientific community, governments, and civil society. They intend to increase the scientific understanding of critical environmental risks of development. They aim to produce knowledge that can be used in societal contexts. Many research-oriented NGOs are think tanks with either public or private ownership. Their means of operation is through scientific publications, conferences/workshops, and media reporting. Traditionally, their roles are limited to being the agent that carries out projects designed by governments or international agencies. Increasingly, they become independent agents in decision-making processes with a more participatory perspective.

An important function of this type of NGO is to provide advisory services to governments with regard to the designing and assessment of policies, aiming at increasing energy efficiency and reducing costs for energy consumption. For example, the Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI) in India is an influential research institute in area of energy and the environment. It has played a critical role in informing the Indian government, and more broadly the international community, of the important environmental issues related to energy production and consumption. This type of NGO tends to act in a "soft" manner, often collaborating with their partners rather than resisting them.

Many of these types of NGOs grow out of governmental bodies. They prioritize research activities, instead of being action-oriented. The Beijing Energy Efficiency Center developed from the Energy Research Institute of the State Planning Commission. It maintains close ties with government agencies and operates within the framework of official contacts. Its objective is to facilitate the transfer and dissemination of environmentally-friendly energy technologies. This NGO could not have come into existence without the support of the Department of Energy in the United States. Thus, it functions as a consultant body to serve the government through project works brought up from foreign sources. In recent years, some technical assistance projects under the banner of capacity building, provided by international aid agencies, have helped the growth of such institutions. In turn, it has given rise to what may be called the scientification, or professionalization, of decision-making processes.

Lobbying NGOs are those with critical, sometimes radical, attitudes toward environmental-related development projects. They criticize important energy development activities that have high environmental risks and impact local communities and people. They focus on advocacy when they conduct lobbying activities against the policies of governments and international aid agencies.⁹ These types of NGOs often attempt to attract attention from mass media to inform the public and lobby governments. They also present themselves in international meetings to publicize their criticisms. The presence of the Green Peace movement in Asia is a clear example. In large energy development projects, such as hydroelectric dams, the role of lobbying NGOs cannot be under-estimated, as their criticisms sometimes lead to re-assessments of aid policies as shown in an Indian case below.

Rapid industrialization and urbanization drastically increase demands for commercial energy supply and services, especially for electricity. In response to demand from the industrial and commercial sectors, governments in Asia have targeted the development of coal- and oil-based power plants, hydroelectric power stations, and, to a lesser extent, nuclear power plants, as main objectives for national development. This is a clear case in China where the use of coal dominates energy supply and demand (Gan, 1998). Increasing awareness of potential environmental and social-ecological impacts of the construction of large hydroelectric dams has caused NGOs to respond strongly to the implementation of this type of energy development.

⁹ One example is the citizens' campaign against the construction of the Naerinchon Dam project in South Korea, which has been supported by the government. This campaign is led by the Citizen's Coalition for Economic Justice. Local residents have shaved their heads as a means of public protest (Han, 1997, pp.19-21).

Sometimes, resistance from affected local communities has made it difficult for governments to proceed with the operation of these projects. So it is international donors that support these projects. The most well-known cases of hydroelectric dam projects are the Narmada Dam project in India, and the Three Gorges Dam project in China, which have inspired strong public protest resulting in policy changes in governments and international aid agencies.

The Sardar Sarovar Dam and Power Project in western India, or what is known as the Narmada Dam project, is one of the energy projects that have sparked the most public debate and protest. The project was proposed by the Indian government and strongly backed by government energy development institutions. The World Bank was originally involved, providing credits for the project. Largely concerned about the displacement of local tribal groups because of the construction of the dam, NGO lobbying activities across nation-states drew large attention internationally. NGO groups, such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan, criticized the anticipated environmental impacts of the project, particularly impacts on the ecosystems upon which local people depended for their livelihood.

Different NGO groups participated in this process of public protest, including research institutions, national and international NGOs, indigenous groups, and the mass media. Demonstrations and publicity campaigns were held, putting pressure on the Bank, aimed at stopping Bank financing of the project. These protests generated concerns from politicians and executive directors of the Bank's member countries. Eventually, the Bank loan for this project was withdrawn at the request of the Indian government in 1993.¹⁰ The project is still supported by the government, but it has widespread implications in terms of impact. NGO protest on this project helped shape the World Bank's policy on the environment and human settlement. The Bank has now set up a policy to encourage NGO participation in resettlement plans. It also requires consultation with potentially-affected social groups and local NGOs in environmental assessments for large development projects (Malena, 1995, p.23)

The Yangtze River in China symbolizes life and death for Chinese people. Its waters nourish most of China's 1.2 billion people, and 70% of China's rice is grown in the Yangtze River Basin. After more than half a century of debate, in 1992 the Chinese government decided to build the world's largest hydroelectric dam at Three Gorges. The project is designed to generate about 18 billion kilowatts a year, which is enough to supply the power needs of 150 million people. The dam is expected to cost about US\$ 11 billion over an 18-year period. The main concern of opposition groups is that the dam will force the relocation of more than one million people. Most of these people are farmers living under poor conditions. Opponents say it would be cheaper and less risky to build smaller dams upstream of Three Gorges. They say China should rely on solar, wind and other alternative energy sources and improve the energy efficiency of its outdated factories. The Chinese government has decided to build up the dam with the ambition to solve the power-shortage problem, and intends to modernize the region with large plans for industrialization after the Dam is completed.

¹⁰ According to a news release from the Environmental Defense Fund entitled, "World Bank to Cancel Loan To Narmada Dam In India," March 30, 1993.

The project had sparked protest among NGOs, nationally and internationally. The International Rivers Network, Friends of the Earth, the Center for Marine Conservation, International Three Gorges Coalition, Probe International of Canada, WWF in Hong Kong and the Asian Pacific People's Network in Malaysia coordinated with several Chinese environmental groups to lobby the construction of the dam. Some criticisms and protest of the dam are from prominent scientists in China and abroad. Dai Qing, a leading Chinese journalist, was jailed for nearly a year after she published a book of essays criticizing the dam.

NGOs have lobbied the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which has been hired by China to help design the dam, to stay out of the project. They've pressured the World Bank, which has funded other large dams, not to fund this project. They lobbied at the International Tribunal in Amsterdam and won a symbolic victory, the court ruled the dam shouldn't be built until an environmental assessment is done and the people who would be moved are heard.

Despite the pressure from NGOs, the Chinese government decided to approve the project with full government support. The Chinese government muffled criticisms and unleashed pro-dam propaganda. According to Haipei Xue of the Three Gorges Coalition, "This issue enjoys less freedom than any political issue in China." In 1992, two-thirds of the 2,633-member Chinese People's Congress voted to build the dam, only 12 votes more than the minimum required. This is amongst the lowest support ever given to a government-backed project. The dam is now under construction, fully financed by the governmental. However, international aid agencies, such as the World Bank and ADB, have stayed away from financing the project, mostly for fear of criticism from NGOs (*China News Digest-Global*, October 11, 1992).

By contrast, the Xiaolangdi Dam at the Yellow River, China's second largest dam project, is well under construction. When completed in four years, the US\$ 4 billion dam is expected to contain the type of "catastrophic" floods that have killed hundreds of thousands of locals over the past 2,500 years. The Xiaolangdi Dam project has "proceeded without the controversies" (*Greenwire*, July 8, 1996). Many NGOs were preoccupied by the Three Gorges Dam and paid inadequate attention to the Xiaolangdi Dam project. The World Bank has offered a loan of \$430 million to the project, which is by far the largest loan provided to the Chinese government (*People's Daily*, October 29, 1997, p.1). These two cases illustrate differences in terms of the effect of NGOs in domestic and international energy/environmental politics.

Mediating NGOs are those providing network services. They are usually competent in establishing networks, domestically and internationally. They are skilled in making contacts and establishing relationships. Their main interest lies in making connections and providing information on important issues to concerned interest groups and individuals. Networks play a critical role in facilitating communication and co-operation between organizations. Actors usually interact through a web of networks, formally and informally. Networking can be understood as an important means for promoting co-operation between institutions, and keeping balance in power relationships. Through networking activities, institutions come to share specific knowledge or information, and establish consensus to reach specific

objectives. The extent to which a network can function effectively depends on a number of variables: relationships between key actors involved, the political interests of individual actors, design of communication focal points, and a common knowledge base. The ability to build up a reliable and effective network is a decisive factor for cost-effective management of international aid. So is the case of the cost-effective operation of NGOs. Establishing a network of organizations is key in implementing environmental agreements, as in other development projects and programs.

In the 1990s it has become evident that the emerging information society has provided opportunities to empower people at different levels of society. The increasing accessibility of information through internet services has provided a powerful means of communication for common people and social groups. This technological development has broken down the information monopoly traditionally maintained by governmental institutions. It also enables more democratic use and transfer of information across national boundaries. It is clear that NGOs in the 1990s are much better informed than those in the 1980s and before. Use of electronic mail has enabled more networking and collaborating activities. As a result, many NGOs increasingly operate on a global scale, rather than being restricted to a regional and local presence.

One example is the operation of the Professional Association for China's Environment (PACE). This NGO was established in 1996 with all the members working on energy and environmental related areas. PACE has expanded rapidly since 1997, and has now involved more than three hundred members in China and all over the world. One of the main means of its operation is through e-mail communication, for sharing information and networking activities. Energy and the environment are the main focus of debate in this network of professionals. PACE's work has facilitated contacts between the US and the Chinese governments on issues related to energy and the environment.

Networking is one of the cultural characteristics of Asia. Asian societies are traditionally community based and integrative in common values. Asians highly value family ties and tend to be involved in collective community activities. This tradition is the basis for NGO growth, as many NGOs are community based and deeply rooted in societal networks at the local level, particularly at the village level. This is a cultural dimension that may help us to understand the important function of networking in NGO development in Asia.

One example is the Third World Network based in Malaysia. This NGO has functioned as a network organization by providing information to concerned NGOs. Their means of operation is through seminars and publications. This organization has been influential through its publication of the monthly journal *Third World Resurgence*. The staff members of this organization have been actively involved in the consultation to the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and in post-Rio campaigns for sustainable development in UN system organizations (Gan, 1993b). These NGOs function differently in their activities than the other two types of NGOs. Therefore, they impose different impacts on social institutions and actors involved in environmental activities.

It must be mentioned that there is an overlapping relationship amongst these three types of NGOs. Although TERI is basically a research NGO, it is also involved in networking activities. It acts as the secretariat for the Asian Energy Institute (AEI), a network organization with 13 member institutes across Asia. AEI's work involves sustainable development and use of energy resources. Its objectives are to promote information exchange, facilitate sharing and dissemination of knowledge, to undertake research and training activities that are of common interest to its members, and to analyze global energy developments and their implications. Third World Network is also active in lobbying international aid agencies, such as the World Bank and ADB, for their environmentally questionable projects.

In some circumstances, NGOs aim to circumvent the function of the state through direct interactions with other social actors. This is often the case when the state cannot effectively fulfill its mandates, as in the case of the inability of states to satisfactorily address public interests, which differ from those of states. In addition, some tasks that may be attributed to the state in one country do not form part of the governmental sphere of competence in another country, due to differing political, social, cultural and institutional conditions. However, these conditions may change over time, partly because of NGO influence in the process of policymaking and implementation.

While NGOs vary greatly in size, interest, and objectives, most share the common goals of helping people and benefiting society. Most NGOs work on a wide-range of activities from energy conservation and environmental protection to poverty reduction and political advocacy. Few NGOs work on single issues. They often combine different issues in their mandate. NGOs at the local level provide services that include community organizations, healthcare, education, alternative energy development, small-scale financial assistance, and environmental protection, to name just a few.

NGOs also help improve people's lives through training activities and other livelihood support programs. NGOs prepare and implement development projects and work to strengthen local institutional capacity and promote community self-reliance. NGOs' funding comes from different sources: private donations, membership fees, government subsidies, international aid, and a variety of other sources.

Governments are often criticized for their lack of accountability in dealing with programs for local energy development that sometimes benefit the rich instead of the poor. Their means of governance are questioned by most NGOs as having a top-down approach with inadequate consultation with the local people concerned. Meanwhile, the strategy of NGOs offers an alternative approach with a bottom-up orientation. They provide services to local communities with flexible organizational structures and more democratic processes. Their objectives are to oppose dominant players and institutions with the intention of empowering the poor.

NGOs have contributed to social and economic development in developing countries. They often enjoy comparative advantages over government and private sector institutions, because of their closer contacts with local people. NGOs can deliver services to hard-to-reach

communities in a more cost-effective manner than those provided by governments.¹¹ Much of the success of NGOs comes from dynamic leadership and committed staff members. NGOs usually tend to be flexible and innovative. They are less affected by bureaucratic constraints, because of their built-in structures of governance, which are often decentralized.

NGOs have limitations. Many Asian NGOs are small both in size and scope of operation. As most of them are rooted in local activities, lack of access to resources and information is common. Their impact is sometimes limited. NGOs can suffer from financial and technical constraints. Some of them depend on foreign donations and lack long-term financial security. Attracting funding is one reason for them to engage in international activities. Given the current economic difficulties in many Asian countries, the long-term survival of Asian NGOs is questionable.

Accountability and performance are interrelated issues. Many smaller NGOs are loosely structured and have limited accountability. Management and planning in these NGOs may be weak, or too flexible (Edwards and Hulme, 1995). Many aid agencies are skeptical of the accountability of local NGOs, because of the problem of measuring their performance. It has been increasingly realized that lobbying is not enough to generate pro-active action for sustainable development. Therefore, more cooperation in project activities is needed at the local level. To achieve this objective, establishing criteria for measuring performance is crucial to fostering support for local NGOs.

¹¹ The issue of cost-effectiveness in NGOs' operation is very much debated amongst researchers. See: Edwards and Hulme, 1994.

3 Relationship between Asian NGOs and international NGOs

There is a changing perspective with regard to relationships between NGOs in Asia and those from other regions of the world. On the one hand, Asian NGOs are rapidly expanding their areas of activities across national boundaries, and responding to issues with international orientations. They present themselves in international gatherings and conferences (Princen and Finger, 1994, pp.4-5). They often act as advocates of international protest against dominant institutions. In this process, key persons play a central role. For example, the prominent environmental activist Vandana Shiva from India is recognized internationally as a leading spoke-woman on the behavior of the type of radical environmental NGOs from Asia. Her speeches and writings are influential in shaping international environmental politics. Her arguments often come to attack the policies of dominant international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Shiva, 1991, pp.58-60). Khor Kok Peng from Malaysia is another example. He has written many articles on international relations on the environment. He acts as an advocate for Third World countries, opposing unsustainable aid activities and policies.

NGOs in Asia are paving the way into arenas traditionally occupied by NGOs from industrialized countries. Protest against international aid agencies is one area that attracts a lot of attention. There are differences in performance amongst Asian NGOs from industrialized countries, particularly Japan, and those from developing countries. Many Southeast Asian NGOs are more actively involved in international environmental disputes than those from Japan. For example, many local residents have viewed global climate change as a relatively remote issue compared to others that immediately affect their health and livelihood, such as air and water pollution.

However, many NGOs in Asia have become involved in one way or another in climate change related activities, such as the GEF. Global climate change has come to shape the interest from both the North and the South. It has helped to improve the relationship between NGOs from different backgrounds and with different motivations. Similar development is also seen in the issues of deforestation, conservation of biological diversity, and ozone-layer protection. This has become a common phenomenon in international relations. To a large extent, NGOs in developing countries have taken over some of the power space from international NGOs. NGOs from the South have redefined their strategies to share common interests with their counterparts from the North. By doing so, they have established themselves in world political forums.

On the other hand, international NGOs have become more engaged in Asia than ever before. This is mostly because of Asia's growing importance in the world economy, politics and the environment. Many NGOs in the North are increasingly seeking partners from the South for collaborative activities, *i.e.*, research, campaigning and networking. This trend can be understood as an interdependent relationship, driven by demand for closer collaboration to link the local with the global, and the vice versa. Large international NGOs, such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Nature Conservancy and Greenpeace International, have all established close contacts and collaborating relationships with local NGOs in Asia. For

example, WWF has been rapidly expanding its activities in China since the early 1980s. It has been mostly dealing with the government, but with increasing involvement of local NGOs, such as the research community and conservation groups. Interests from both sides encourage this increasing collaboration. The Chinese are interested in exchange of information, expertise, and most importantly, financial resources. WWF is interested in gaining access to local people and resources, and the prospect of expanding its activities in China. It is interesting to note that WWF has increased its role in sustainable energy development in China. The same is also happening in Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Since the early 1990s, we have seen an increasing development of relationships between Asian NGOs and those from industrialized countries, particularly those NGOs with international orientations. In 1991, about 50 NGOs from Asia, North America and Europe worked together in a campaign to protest the establishment of the GEF and the operation of the multilateral aid agencies for their environmentally destructive activities in developing countries. This campaign was led by Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth Malaysia), and, not surprisingly, it adopted a similar strategy to that used by Friends of the Earth International. In many respects, the operation of the GEF has provided an opportunity for many NGOs, including Asian NGOs, to be engaged in activities that shape the global environmental agenda. This is evident from the NGO consultation meetings prior to the GEF meetings. These consultations have affected the formulation of GEF policy and strategies (Gan, 1993a, p.208). Another example is seen from the UNCED process, through which NGOs from the South and the North strengthened their relationships.

One could argue that there might be diminishing support or collaboration from Northern NGOs to governments in developing countries. The main cause of this shift may be attributed to closer contacts between Southern and Northern NGOs. Although WWF is committed to working with governments for its country programs, increasing emphasis is being put on support to non-governmental conservation institutions. WWF Nepal assists a number of agencies in a variety of ways. Support includes funding staff training, purchasing field equipment, upgrading office facilities, and participating in national and international seminars and events.

Following the democracy movement in 1990, hundreds of local NGOs are now registered in Nepal. Many of them function as pressure groups, catalysts, and educational forums, while others implement conservation and development projects. Many of these NGOs are committed to environmental conservation. WWF is helping through its project "Support for Local NGOs." Recipients of WWF grants include the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC), Environmental Camps for Conservation Awareness (ECCA), Kathmandu Environment Education Project (KEEP), Nepal Forum for Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ), Himal Associates, Nepal Botanical Society, and Women in Environment. Supporting grassroots NGOs with practical and original ideas promotes conservation as part of the daily life and actions of Nepal's people. WWF is also developing a network of NGOs to ensure that all conservation initiatives are well coordinated.

There is also increasing cooperation amongst NGOs in Asia developing countries. NGOs see the advantage of building up coalitions to strengthen their positions in international

environmental movements. This is particularly seen in Southeast Asia where networks of NGOs are blooming. NGOs come to define common interest areas for collective actions. They build up their collective alliance by holding large regional meetings and conferences. Examples include the “Southeast Asia Regional Consultation on a People’s Agenda for Environmentally Sustainable Development: Toward UNCED and Beyond,” held in Los Banos, Laguna, the Philippines in December 1991, and the “People’s Participation in Environmentally Sustainable Development,” held in Puncak Pass, Indonesia in March 1990 (WWF, 1993, p.49).

4 Interrelationships between NGOs and Other Social Actors

The following sections review the interrelationships between NGOs and other societal institutions, *i.e.*, governments, international aid agencies, and the private sector. It points out the interdependent relationship of these actors in society, particularly in the Asian context.

4.1 Governments

In the analysis of external forces that are important in shaping the environmental discourse, we distinguish two interrelated social institutions: governments and NGOs. **Table 1.** indicates the main characteristics of these two institutions interacting in energy and environmental discourse. It is the interaction, or tensions, between these actors that functions as means to retaining inter-agency relationships and promoting cooperation. Formulated policies are thus the results of conflict resolution, as means of harmonizing the development process and achieving perceived objectives. In this regard, adjusting sectoral policies can be viewed as an instrument for accomplishing commitments, and for resolving conflicts among involved groups of actors.

The relationship between government and NGOs has gone through major changes in recent years. Concerns regarding environmentally-sustainable development have brought governments and NGOs together. The social and environmental accountability of development is often claimed by NGOs to be central to their agenda. Their attitudes toward governments differ from country to country. In some countries in Asia, NGOs have been dependent on government subsidies for their activities. For example, many NGOs in China are usually semi-public in order to assure their legitimate rights. The Chinese NGOs that attended the UNCED were selected and sent by the government as part of the official delegation. This relationship is currently changing, due to economic liberalization and decentralization of the political system, and diminishing government support. New types of NGOs are emerging in response to environmental challenges. They tend to distance themselves from government control, and try to work on less sensitive issues to challenge governmental legitimacy.

Table 1. Characteristics of NGOs and Government Institutions

	NGOs	Government Organizations
Characteristics	Social Critique	Bureaucratic
Main Interests	Defending Local Interests Engaging in Int'l Politics	Control of Resources Retention of Power
Priorities	Poverty Reduction Natural Resource & Environmental Protection	National Economic Development National Security
Instruments	Lobbying Public Debate Media Reporting	Negotiation Financial Control Political Pressure

In recent years, many governments in Asia have come to rely more on NGO collaboration for projects implemented at the local level. Governments increasingly see NGOs' connections with local communities as an important factor for ensuring the cost-effective implementation of projects.

4. 2 International Aid Agencies

In the context of energy development in Asia, the influence of environmentally concerned NGOs is crucial, as they affect the discourse on environmental protection and sustainable development in multilateral and bilateral aid agencies, and the United Nations system organizations. The relationship between NGOs and the international aid community has undergone drastic changes in recent years. Most aid agencies, such as the World Bank, have set up particular policies to deal with NGO matters (Malena, 1995). Mostly because of the increasing pressure and criticism of NGOs with regard to aid policies and practice, improving relationships with NGOs has become a priority of aid policies. NGOs have also realized the need to cooperate more with international aid agencies. They sometime take pro-active responses to requests from the aid community. The Small Grants Programme under the Global Environment Facility (GEF) is an example. Many NGOs have found it useful to be involved in this framework of activities, although grants for each project are small with a maximum of US\$ 50,000 (Gan, 1993b). It is clear that these types of incentives can help to establish a framework for more active involvement of NGOs, which also strengthens their capacity to operate.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) claimed to have established closer ties with NGOs. Areas of cooperation include information sharing, practical assistance in developing and implementing programs and projects, and, where possible, co-financing projects with national governments. Other development agencies also benefit from such cooperation with NGOs. The ADB claims that participation in Bank activities helps NGOs expand their operations, in areas

such as project preparation and implementation, community organization and social mobilization. Cooperation with NGOs benefits the poor and disadvantaged and helps support broad social concerns and environmental and natural resource protection and management. Some specific advantages of working with NGOs are, as stated by the ADB:

1) NGOs, with direct knowledge of local communities, can share expertise with the Bank and Governments in identifying, preparing, monitoring and evaluating development policies, programs and projects. NGOs can enhance public awareness of development. The ability of NGOs to gather and share information is particularly useful in identifying and avoiding potential problems.

2) NGOs help the Bank and Governments prepare and implement specific programs and projects. This input is increasingly important as development efforts specifically include emphasis on poverty reduction and enhancing the role of women in development, and focus on concerns such as human resources development and environmental protection. For the Bank, NGO input is important in addressing specific concerns such as involuntary resettlement, protection of indigenous people, participation in development planning by beneficiaries and affected persons, and benefit monitoring and evaluation.

3) NGOs can provide co-financing in the Bank's loan and technical assistance activities, either by financing selected activities, or by providing resources, such as consulting services, staff assistance or facilities and equipment.¹²

Providing assistance to NGOs has become a policy priority in the ADB. This is a shift, although still small, from its previous policies that put heavy emphasis on governments. In 1994, ADB approved regional technical assistance to strengthen the capacity of women's NGOs across the region. Some 180 NGOs in seven countries received support in developing systems for planning, monitoring and evaluating projects, so that more effective and efficient programs could be established. Staff training was conducted for capacity building, to enable NGOs to manage their organizations and programs more efficiently. NGOs covered under the project were linked in national and regional networks. The project provided NGOs with access to resources, and helped them achieve more influence in decision making and gain greater acceptance as equal partners in development.

Institutional strengthening of NGOs in Bangladesh is an example. In 1992, technical assistance was undertaken to deepen the understanding of NGOs' operation. Enhancing Government-NGO cooperation was an important aspect of this project. In 1994, follow-up technical assistance was undertaken to develop a framework that would help involve NGOs directly in ADB and other donor-agency supported projects. The objective is to strengthen the development of NGOs to make their operations more effective. This project includes support for the Government's NGO Affairs Bureau and the creation of a consultative Government-NGO body.

¹² For more information about the ADB's policy on NGOs, please search the homepage of the ADB from the Internet.

From the NGO perspective, establishing organizational entities to deal with international aid agencies is also prioritized. The NGO Working Group on the ADB is a task force established during the 1992 NGO Campaign at the 25th ADB Board of Governors' Meeting. The Working Group is composed of four organizations, representing regional and national constituencies. The mandates of this institute are: 1) to develop closer working ties with Asian NGOs and other public interest groups and to stimulate public awareness and action on issues related to the ADB; 2) to develop a cohesive framework and strategy for campaigns on the ADB; 3) to sharpen public debate and understanding of the basic issues on ADB's development model and strategies. Activities include the following: facilitating information flow, informing interest groups of the status of access to information, advocacy with the ADB, facilitating dialogues between stakeholders, and monitoring agreements between the ADB and Asian NGOs and other public interest groups.

4.3 ADB and the Philippine Energy Sector Development

In the past decade, energy accounted for 25 to 30 percent of the ADB's lending portfolios in the Philippines. ADB assistance in the energy sector has focused mainly on developing power generation facilities, rural electrification, and rehabilitation and maintenance of existing power plants. The Bank's major loans were primarily devoted to the construction of new power plants, reinforcing the government's thrust to expand generation to meet the country's energy needs.

In recent years, the ADB has been supportive of the Philippine Government's initiatives to diversify the energy mix and to reduce dependence on imports by utilizing indigenous energy sources. However, this has been limited to the extension of loans for geothermal and hydroelectric power plants. These types of projects have met strong protest from local communities and NGOs, citing serious social and environmental impacts.

Because of the social protest, the ADB admitted that it has given little attention to alternative energy development, such as end-use energy conservation and efficiency improvement. The Meralco Distribution Project approved in 1992 thus presents a major development in the Bank's energy loans to the Philippines, as it seeks to address electricity shortages in the country by looking at efficiency improvements, conservation measures and demand-side management. The project was conducted during 1993-1996 with US\$ 230 million from the ADB, the remaining US\$ 92 million being met through a co-financing arrangement with local resources. With the Meralco Distribution Project as a major initiative, the ADB has started to implement a comprehensive energy lending strategy for the Philippines, with capital investments for both private and government agencies that would focus on efficiency, conservation and the development of renewable energy systems.

4.4 The Private Sector

The private sector's relationship with NGOs has been little studied thus far. This is a complicated topic, because it deals with diverse sectoral interests and, sometimes, conflicting organizational objectives. Due to the business interests of private sector involvement in development projects, many industrial enterprises find it difficult to agree with NGOs, especially on environmental aspects of development projects. Meanwhile, the private sector has been criticized by NGOs for being responsible for severe environmental damage in development projects. Compared with international aid agencies, the industrial sector has made limited efforts to improve its relationship with NGOs. Little efforts have been made to create better conditions for improving relationships between these two actors. Therefore, drastic changes need to be undertaken to improve the environmental performance of industrial projects.

Because of rapid industrialization in Asia, many NGOs have found it difficult to campaign effectively against major development projects funded by large international corporations, which are perceived as having led to environmental damage. The ineffectiveness of NGOs in dealing with the private sector reflects the issue of legitimacy. NGOs feel incapable of pushing the business community toward reacting drastically on the environment. To promote better environmental accountability of the private sector, government regulations and pressure may prove more cost-effective, if combined with NGO campaigns and support. International aid agencies may also contribute to better communication between NGOs and the private sector through supportive policies and concrete measures such as establishing conditions for contract and bidding agreements.

5 Conclusions

In summary, Asian NGOs play an important role in international and national energy and environmental activities. Their increasing presence in the world political arena has helped, in one way or another, reshape agendas of governments and international aid agencies. They have also facilitated the establishment of critical links between local communities and institutions of governments and aid agencies. They have come to define new areas of interest and develop catalysts for action. Governments and aid agencies have benefited from interactions with the NGO community, but have also been puzzled about how to deal with them in proper and cost-effective ways. What we see in this interrelationship is a complex and dynamic process.

NGO movements on energy and the environment cannot be considered in isolation. They are conducted in a dynamic, rather than static, process. They change their perspectives, according to international and local circumstances. Their engagement in sustainable energy and environment activities has helped establish new and critical links among societal institutions. They base their strategy for survival on linking local and global perspectives. NGOs have managed to create a niche within societal contexts, establishing themselves as both a social critique and a service provider, in order to deal with governments and international aid agencies. Over the past one and a half decades, NGOs in Asia have learned how to cope with changes in international environmental arenas. Their establishment in world politics, through participation in sustainable energy and environmental activities, reflects a trend of transition in international relations that will profoundly impact human society in the 21st century.

NGO movements as a particular social phenomenon can be characterized as having been developed from below. NGOs have managed to establish themselves as social agents with critical linkages to those at the bottom in society. They have developed a public space that is not, and cannot be, filled by other societal institutions: governments, international aid agencies, and the private sector. NGO movements are deeply rooted in societal contexts. NGO activities reflect the needs of those from the lowest levels of the human society. This is in contrast to many institutions generated by governments from above. The development and growth of NGOs as a social entity has proved to be crucial to the wellbeing of human society. The influence of NGOs across national boundaries can be seen as part of the globalization process. It will have far-reaching effects on public policy and sustainable energy development in Asia.

NGOs represent the future engine of world development. The conflict between energy development and the environment is far from over. The internal logic of NGOs' development is self-evident. From the Asian perspective, several characteristics can be generalized from the current development: first, NGOs will continue to create new social linkages, or webs of contacts, throughout human society. They will help establish and improve relationships between the general public and other social institutions: governments, international agencies, and the business community. Second, the diversification and outgrowth of NGOs will continue to increase with greater speed and scope. This will be especially seen in energy and environmental fields, because of the imperative of environmental deterioration and its impact on human prospects for survival.

One important question that needs further analysis is how to improve the accountability of NGOs with regard to their performance in projects. We need to develop workable methodologies and criteria for evaluating NGO performance. This is critical in getting NGOs involved more in sustainable energy and environmental activities. The increasing involvement of NGOs in environmental activities provides good opportunities for the UN and the international development assistance community. Through increasing engagement of NGOs in design, consultation, operation and evaluation of projects, these institutions will be able to act as agents to empower the people in the lower levels of human society. With more incentives to support the NGO sector, greater social equilibrium could be achieved. It can be assumed that NGOs might assume many of the conventional mandates that are usually performed by specialized UN agencies and governments. What represents the so-called global civil society is the inclusion of people's voices and needs. NGOs have come into being through this social process.

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