

**A Framework for
Assessing the Effectiveness of
Environmental Nongovernmental Organizations.**

By

Vanessa M. McMahon

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

International affairs face a challenging puzzle. Traditional notions of state sovereignty are eroding. The conventional assumption that states are the primary (perhaps only) actors in world politics is challenged by the pervasive operation and importance of sub-state actors. Firms, multinational corporations, interest groups, and various other non-governmental organizations are clearly important; they influence states directly by lobbying for their cause but they also coordinate action and pressure internationally through influencing norms of acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

One type of nongovernmental organization—the environmental interest group—plays an increasingly prominent and important role in representing environmental interests. Environmental nongovernmental organizations (ENGOS) play a central role in most environmental issues and are in some cases by far the most important actors in defining and framing political action. These observations about the importance of ENGOS have been made by academics and practitioners alike. The exact role of ENGOS and other interest groups in the policy process is an open issue. Different countries have adopted alternative approaches towards the participation of special interests. This study acknowledges that interest groups are playing increasingly influential roles in intergovernmental politics and assumes that they are legitimate actors that play important roles in defining and framing political action.¹

Given the importance attributed to them it is surprising to find that there are few analytical or theoretical studies about ENGOS. Those that do exist provide anecdotal evidence but have not systematically described how and why ENGOS are influential nor identified the opportunities and constraints that shape their behavior. A lack of scholarly work on ENGOS is perhaps due to their sheer numbers, their diversity, the daunting range of issues they pursue, and the many strategies and tactics they use which makes any sort of systematic study difficult to undertake. This is further compounded by the difficulty of assessing their influence as it is difficult to compare an ENGO-

influenced outcome with what the outcome might have otherwise been. Additionally, they have been understudied and their power underestimated because scholars typically focus on the state and the way that power and influence flows through state actors.

This analysis is based on extensive interviews with ENGO representatives and other experts.² This paper is an early contribution toward understanding how ENGOs operate—how they choose the issues they pursue and the strategies they use—and in doing so, whether they are utilizing their resources optimally. In addition to interviews, the analysis of the case study presented in section III was based on observations at various international environmental negotiations (especially those in preparation for UNCED).

This study

Because of the important roles that ENGOs play, it is important for practitioners and scholars of international environmental politics to be able to assess the conditions and constraints under which ENGOs wield effective influence. The aim of this study is to allow such assessments of effectiveness. This goal is achieved in three parts.

Part 1: Framework for Analysis

The first part develops a system of categorization of the many characteristics of ENGOs. Such a system provides a crucial foundation for systematic study of the conditions, constraints, and effectiveness of ENGOs. There is daunting breadth in the ideology, funding sources, issues, strategies and tactics that characterize ENGOs. The purpose of the categorization is to provide a coherent manner of describing the issues that ENGOs pursue and activities (strategies and tactics) they employ.

The categorization developed here shows that funding sources dictate many ENGO issues and activities. It reveals that ENGOs are not as independent as they may initially appear—like most organizations they answer to their constituencies. For example, some ENGOs are broad-based with large