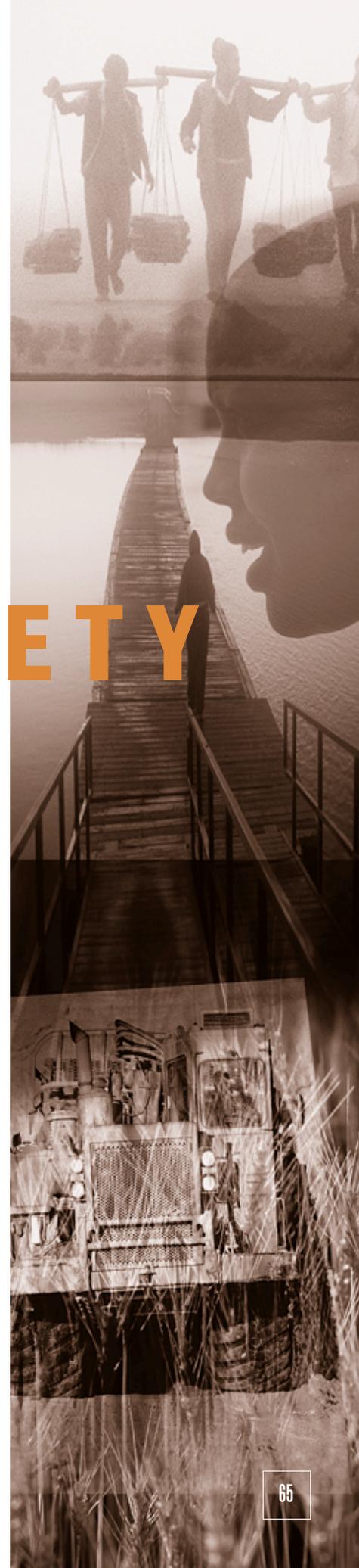


AWAKENING CIVIL SOCIETY

Governments and businesses no longer have a monopoly on environmental decision-making. A third force—civil society—is changing the power balance. Citizen groups of all sorts now routinely participate in decisions about the environment and development. The growing influence of these organizations is one of the most dynamic changes in environmental governance today, lending a stronger voice to the individuals, interest groups, and communities that must live with the consequences of environmental decisions.

What Can Civil Society Offer?

Civil society brings pressure to make environmental decisions more inclusive and representative. And it brings new creativity to environmental problem-solving. Citizen groups are capitalizing on expanding democratic liberties and press freedoms in many countries, as well as new and cheaper communications technologies. They have used these tools to shape public opinion, sway markets, mobilize political action, and provide services and information—in short, to insert themselves into the decision-making process (Anheier et al. 2001). This awakening of civil society is as important to the development of good governance as free markets are to boosting economic efficiency. Innovation and change are often the result when individuals come together in the self-motivated activity that a robust civil society fosters.



Examples of the growth of citizen power abound: A nationwide movement by traditional fishermen forced the Indian government to stop issuing licenses to environmentally destructive trawlers (Kothari 2000). Facing powerful financial interests, non-governmental organizations and social movements blocked or reformed plans to construct huge dams in Asia (Khagram 2000:87–88, 99). Labor unions played a critical role in bringing about democratic leadership in Poland, which ultimately expanded the opportunities for environmental activism there. Churches have helped biodiversity-friendly coffee growers in developing countries connect to Western consumer markets and earn a living through the Fair Trade and Equal Exchange movements. Environmental groups have purchased tracts of rain forests to keep development and destruction at bay.

The growing influence of civil society is one of the most dynamic changes in environmental governance today.



All these groups are part of *civil society*—a term that encompasses voluntary, citizen-based groups that are autonomous from government and business (Fowler 1997:8; Edwards and Gaventa 2001:2). Civil society includes non-governmental organizations, foundations, religious groups, consumer and shareholder groups, labor associations, sports or hobby clubs, and a variety of informal citizen groups established to address particular concerns. Independent press outlets (that is, media not controlled by the state), educational establishments, and independent political parties may also be included.

Civil society is marked by variety in its composition: Some groups are formally registered while many are informal. Some are membership-based, like unions, but many are smaller, self-contained organizations such as think-tanks, service groups, and science organizations. They operate at every scale: in the community, and at the national, regional, and international levels.

Civil society has a long history of involvement in environmental governance. Groups dedicated to nature conservation, such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK), or the Sierra Club (U.S.), have been active since the late

19th century. In fact, it was civil society groups that put environmental issues on the global agenda starting in the 1970s. Now, however, this sector is larger and more influential than ever before. This awakening of civil society is as important to the development of good governance as free markets are to boosting economic efficiency. Innovation and change are often the result when individuals come together in the self-motivated activity that a robust civil society fosters.

Of course, civil society is not always constructive and civic groups can engender contention as well as creativity and cooperation. More public participation can add inefficiencies and tensions to the decision-making process, and not all civic groups support a more “open” society or broader citizen participation. Many work for limited and parochial goals that can aggravate community divisions. But the achievements and potential of civil society outweigh its drawbacks. A

vibrant civil society provides a vital democratic counterweight to the profit-driven impulses of businesses and the bureaucratic responses of states.

Civil Society: Power in Numbers

Of all the various types of civil society groups, *nongovernmental organizations* (NGOs) are perhaps the most prominent new force for improving environmental decisions. Environmental NGOs range from grassroots groups with just a few members to global organizations like the 5 million-member World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) with offices in 48 countries (WWF 2003). Such groups serve as lobbyists, organizers, funders, researchers, networkers, and advocates, among other roles.

The number of environmental NGOs has grown significantly in the last few decades. This is part of a larger growth trend in NGOs in general, covering a wide range of sectors and issues. The precise numbers are difficult to ascertain because NGOs can be defined and counted in many ways. For example, some estimates include only officially registered groups. Others count the number of “nonprofit groups” or “private voluntary associations,” which may not include all

(continued on p. 68)

Box 4.1 Democracy and Civic Renaissance in Central and Eastern Europe

The global trend toward democracy has been a key contributor to the growth of civil society and the flowering of environmental activism worldwide. Democratic movements, which have taken root in an unprecedented number of countries since the 1990s, typically increase the ability of citizens to voice their concerns. Freedom to organize, access to information, and press freedoms have contributed to the effectiveness of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society groups.

Several Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries illustrate the connection between democratization and environmental activism. During the 1980s, Communist regimes tolerated environmental organizations that were perceived as apolitical. The Czechoslovak Union of Nature Conservationists, for example, had hundreds of branch offices (Tolles and Beckmann 2000:8). But with the collapse of Communism in 1989, some 180 new environmental groups were founded each year to address the problems of dying forests, air pollution, undrinkable water, and threatened biodiversity as well as to seize the opportunity to have a larger voice in public policy

(REC 1997:16; Salamon et al. 1999:18; Tolles and Beckmann 2000). The total number of environmental groups in 15 CEE countries jumped from about 800 in 1992 to 3,000 in 2001; some 46,000 people now volunteer in environmental efforts in those countries (Atkinson and Messing 2002:11).

Just as democratization allows environmental organizations to thrive, sometimes environmental movements open the door to wider democratic and civil rights. In Central and Eastern Europe, environmentalism acted as a vehicle for nationwide rallies and an outlet for popular dissatisfaction with the Communist government. The Danube Circle in Hungary, Ecolglasnost in Bulgaria, the Lithuanian Green Movement, and the Polish Ecology Club protested Communist regimes in the late 1980s (OECD 1999:82) and helped shape the first democratic governments. In Slovakia in 1998, environmental NGOs campaigned to boost voter turnout and helped sweep democratic forces into power, including several green parties. Today, Slovakian environmental NGOs continue to battle corruption, and work to support open and transparent decision-making (OECD 1999:81–82; Tolles and Beckmann 2000:39).

Environmental NGOs in the CEE Region

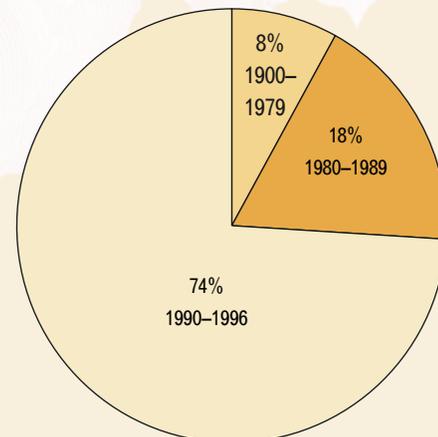
Two thirds of environmental NGOs in the region are located in Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic. Most NGOs are based in small towns and operate mainly at the local level. About 60 percent have less than 25 members.

Country	Number of Environmental NGOs
Albania	45
Bosnia and Herzegovina	38
Bulgaria	100
Croatia	187
Czech Republic	520
Estonia	35
Hungary	726
Latvia	60
Lithuania	81
Macedonia	73
Poland	600
Romania	210
Slovakia	141
Slovenia	114
Fed. Rep. of Yugoslavia	90
TOTAL	3,020

Source: REC 1997:13.

1990s: A Period of Environmental Activism

About one fourth of the environmental groups operating in the CEE region today were already active in the 1980s, but far more were formed in the early 1990s. Now, with funding decreasing since the early years of the transition to a market economy, growth in environmental NGOs has slowed.



When were environmental NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe officially registered?

Source: REC 1997:16.

NGOs—often just those working for charitable objectives. Whatever definition is used, it is clear that the NGO sector is now significant worldwide. Once clustered mainly in Western democracies, NGOs have shown particularly dramatic growth in Central and Eastern Europe (see Boxes 4.1 and 4.2) and parts of Asia (REC 1997:13, 16).

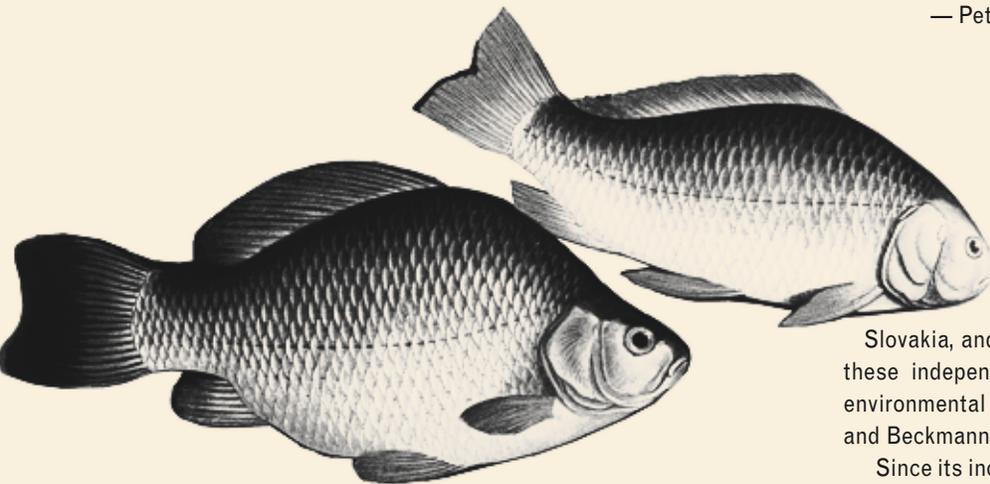
The NGO sector's expenditures and employment rates are other indicators of its reach. A 1995 survey found that the combined expenditures of the nonprofit sectors in 22 coun-

tries (excluding religious organizations) was \$1.1 trillion—some 4.6 percent of these countries' combined GDP. The same survey found that more than 26 million people are employed by, or volunteer for, nonprofits in Western Europe, the United States, Japan, and Australia combined (Salamon et al. 1999:9, 479). As impressive as these numbers are, they don't really capture the most influential features of NGOs: their contributions of new ideas and the "social energy" and "social capital" they mobilize for environmental preserva-

Box 4.2 Partnering for the Environment in Central Europe

"To learn fundraising is not so difficult, but to learn from others—to really listen and think about what others are saying—that's a real problem. This inability to exchange experience is the biggest limit to the development of Czech conservation NGOs."

— Petr Dolejský, ČSOP, Bílé Karpaty, Czech Republic



Organizing citizens to take responsibility for the environment is difficult even when there's adequate funding, trained leaders, clearly understood environmental problems, and a public experienced in working together and with the government to propose alternative policies. Central European communities lacked these basic necessities and more in 1989 when Communist rule came to an end. A half-century of centralized decision-making had eroded the notion that one should or even could care for the land. People were unaccustomed to weighing other perspectives, forging compromises, and resolving conflicts. They didn't trust organizations or government, and they lacked a sense of community empowerment and initiative.

Three American foundations, however, recognized that helping to curb environmental deterioration was not only important in its own right, but could become a potent tool to foster democracy and build civil society. In 1991, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the German Marshall Fund, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund initiated the Environmental Part-

nership for Central Europe (EPCE)—a consortium of five national foundations operating in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and, since 2000, Romania. Led and staffed locally, these independent foundations stimulate community-based environmental action and participation in the region (Tolles and Beckmann 2000:5).

Since its inception, EPCE has invested over \$15.4 million to support more than 4,000 projects and to provide training, technical assistance, and study tours to 3,000 Central European organizations. Those organizations, in turn, have mobilized 30,000 volunteers, planted 175,000 trees, protected more than 150 endangered species of flora and fauna, and insulated approximately 1,000 homes, schools, and other buildings. The EPCE foundations are currently the most significant private source of funding for community-based environmental initiatives and advocacy projects in Central Europe (Růžička 2002). The EPCE is also the most important source of money in Central and Eastern Europe for advocacy projects.

The partnership has not only helped protect the environment, but has nurtured grassroots action:

- In the 1980s, Kosenka, an NGO in an eastern Moravian town, tried to preserve rare species of orchids in the White Carpathians region by organizing volunteers to mow fields. Now, with support from EPCE, Kosenka takes a more holistic approach to biodiversity protection: the group partners with farmers to improve pasture health and helps commu-

tion, anticorruption efforts, democratic participation, or a myriad other endeavors (Putnam 1993:167; Brown 2002; Paxton 2002).

Environmental NGOs and Citizen Action

Although global data on environmental NGOs is scarce, one estimate suggests that by 1990 there were more than 100,000 groups working on environmental protection worldwide—most of them founded in the previous decade (Runyon

and businesspeople develop and market traditional crafts and goods made from local produce, creating incentives to preserve the area's natural heritage (Tolles and Beckmann 2000:34).

- EPCE helped The Alliance of Greens in Hungary and MME (Birdlife Hungary) collaborate with other NGOs to establish a land trust—one of the first in Central and Eastern Europe—covering 500 ha of wooded steppe in the Bihar region. The first 28 nonprofit land trusts, totaling over 1,600 ha, have received official accreditation in the Czech Republic (Beckmann 2000:23).
- A group of environmental scientists from the Daphne Institute of Applied Ecology in Bratislava used EPCE support to engage local farmers and residents in restoring 130 ha of wetland habitats in the Morava-Danube floodplain in southwestern Slovakia (Tolles and Beckmann 2000:25).
- The Energy Conservation in Schools Program sponsored by EPCE involved over 9,700 schoolchildren and 1,800 teachers, parents, and other volunteers in local school energy conservation projects and educational activities. About 260 schools throughout Central Europe participated, with many receiving special grants to insulate windows, replace old lights and thermostats, and buy more efficient furnaces (Růžička 2002).
- The EPCE-funded Central European Greenways (CEG) project has involved hundreds of local communities, state and local representatives, businesses, and national government offices in creating a network of largely automobile-free recreational routes and trails. The 11 CEG routes total 3,000 km, and attract tourism and promote the region's natural and cultural heritage (Růžička 2002).

These and other initiatives supported by the partnership share a commitment to involve citizens in looking for and implementing sustainable land use practices and supporting public involvement in decision-making. In the context of post-Communist Central Europe, this is an approach that is nothing short of revolutionary.

1999:13). The increasing number of domestic and international environmental NGOs and the growing membership base of many groups (see Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1) is a response to the worldwide attention given to environmental problems since the 1970s, along with rising incomes, and several major political and sociological factors. One such factor is the demand for opportunities to participate. For example, the number of Asian environmental NGOs grew rapidly in the 1990s as industrialization, pollution, and attendant environ-

The Roots of Success

Initially—and importantly—the Western foundations committed multi-year support to EPCE to give the partnership time to train local personnel, create a cadre of independent leaders, and broaden its funding. Staffing and start-up efforts consumed the consortium's first year as the founding leaders of the EPCE organizations struggled to find staff capable of managing local grant-making programs, and community members experienced enough to serve on the Boards of Directors of the new foundations. Beyond financial support, the three Western foundations cooperated closely with the EPCE groups to discuss strategy and create links between the EPCE consortium and established NGOs in Western Europe and North America.

In reviewing its progress over the last decade, the EPCE consortium stresses one lesson above all: let local communities themselves decide on their conservation priorities, rather than having them imposed from the outside. Finding effective local leaders to spearhead projects is also essential for successful action. The EPCE foundation staff see their task as facilitating discussion, advising on local decisions, and offering technical support to create projects that address these community-identified priorities.

As EPCE works through its second decade, it faces the challenge of a society still trying to develop a sense of civic engagement, initiative, and self-responsibility. Other challenges loom as well, including the need to increase its fundraising capacity. The coalition is now moving toward greater autonomy from its Western founders, whose financial support will phase out by 2005 (Scsaurszki 2002). Fortunately, the consortium has already secured funding from some European foundations such as the Dutch Foundation DOEN, and the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt Foundation in Germany. Businesses and governments have agreed to help, too, including a unique arrangement in the Czech Republic, where the government has set up a special endowment fund for Czech foundations (Růžička 2002). Meanwhile, EPCE has become a model for the former Soviet Union and the Baltic states in how to engage civil society to meet local needs through care for the environment.



mental risks increased and as a new middle class expanded. With an educated and better informed public and visible evidence of environmental degradation, more people are joining organized environmental efforts (Gan 2000:112-113).

Increasing access to a variety of resources has also created conditions ripe for the growth of environmental groups:

- Volunteerism is growing. One recent survey found that worldwide the number of volunteers devoting time to environmental NGOs increased by 50 percent in less than 10 years (Pinter 2001:200);
- The Internet and cell phones are helping individuals and groups get, share, and act on information quickly; collaborate across borders; hold institutions accountable; monitor environmental changes; and circumvent government controls on information (see Box 4.3);
- Total development funds channeled through NGOs by governments and international donors is growing (Anheier et al. 2001:26), though it's not clear what portion is directed to environmental NGOs. In the 1970s and 1980s many donors began to see NGOs in Africa and Asia as more effective at running health and development programs than government bureaucracies (Baron 2002). Now, more than \$7 billion in private and government aid to developing countries flows through NGOs, compared to \$1 billion in 1970 (UNDP 2002:102). Many European governments channel 10-30 percent of their aid through NGOs (Pinter 2001:201-202);
- During the 1990s, Western and international donors prioritized aid for civil society and for groups working in areas such as good governance, the environment, human rights, and the media. The U.S. Agency for International Development increased its support for "civil society" from \$56 million to \$230 million between 1991 and 1999 (Carothers 1999:210; Pinter 2001:201).

At the same time, democratization has contributed to the renaissance of civil society in general and environmental

activism in particular (see Box 4.1), and globalization has broadened awareness of environmental problems that cross borders (Wapner 1997:75; Brown et al. 2000:4, 6; Florini 2000:224, 227-228).

Beyond Environmental NGOs

Many strands of civil society other than formal, registered environmental NGOs influence environmental management and decisions. In fact, many civil society groups are not formally constituted or legally registered—yet they play a strong community role. One study in South Africa found that 53 percent of civic associations there were not legally registered (Swilling and Russell 2002:20). The proportion may be even higher in other countries of sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South and Southeast Asia. In these areas, informal NGOs such as rural savings associations and farming cooperatives are often key players in local decisions.

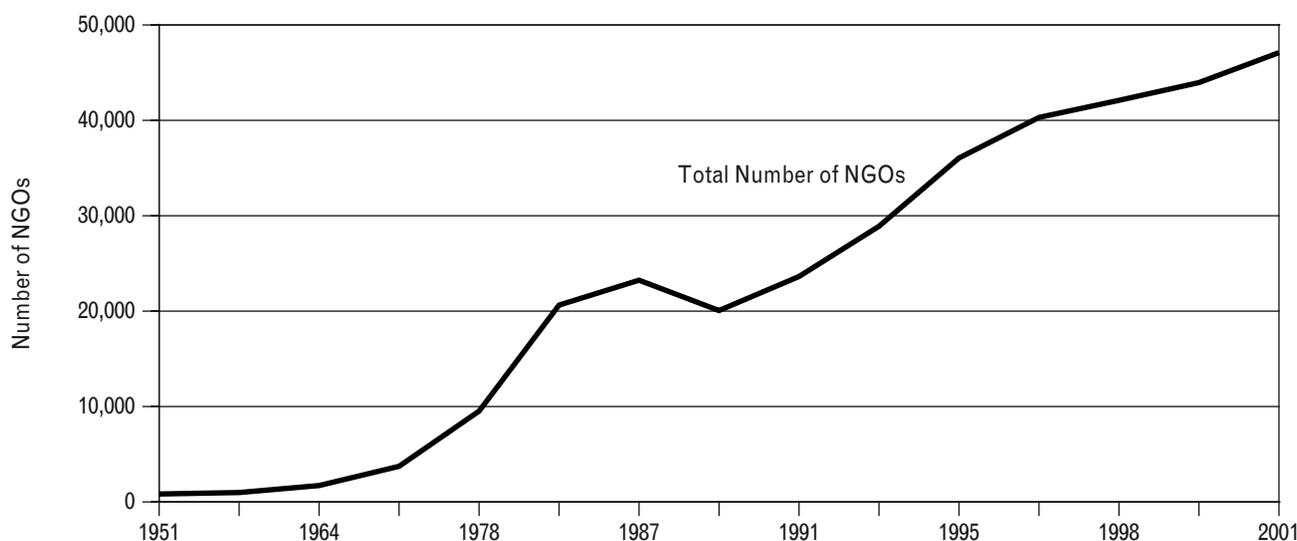
So-called "people's movements" are another influential element of informal civil activity. These movements may consist of hundreds of locally autonomous initiatives all focused on a common theme and using similar tactics. Examples include Kenya's Green Belt Movement in which citizens plant trees on public and private lands; the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement in Sri Lanka, which has organized more than 12,000 villages to produce small-scale improvement projects such as wells for drinking water and gardening; and the CHIPKO movement in India where villagers placed themselves between trees and the axes of timber harvesters (Salomon 1994:111).

Another important trend is the increasing diversity of civic activism on environmental issues. Though their objectives are not strictly "environmental," groups that focus on poverty alleviation, human rights, rural development projects, indigenous and women's rights, and world peace are increasingly collaborating with environmental groups to influence decision-making. The recent World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg drew a wide mix of issue-oriented NGOs. In contrast, the NGOs that attended the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 were predominantly environmental NGOs.

A variety of causes are bringing these diverse groups together. The effects of globalization on jobs, health, and the environment is one very visible issue uniting human rights groups, trade unions, and environmental groups (Boyle and Anderson 1996:2-3; Zarsky 2002:1-2). The environmental justice movement has also linked environmental and human rights communities with religious organizations.

Further alliances are forged as environmental organizations recognize that promoting civil rights can help to achieve their goals. For example, the right to freely associate and the right to a free press were both integral to the success of the environmental movement in the 1970s. In turn, many human rights organizations have come to see access to a

Figure 4.1 Growth of International Nongovernmental Organizations



Source: UIA 1999, 2001:1519 as reported by EarthTrends.

decent environment—clean air, water, and a minimum standard of health—as a basic human right.

A Multitude of Roles

Civil society groups play a multitude of roles that affect the environment directly or bear on environmental decisions:

Snapshots of NGO Sector Growth

- The United States has 1–2 million NGOs, 70 percent of which are less than 30 years old.
- 60,000 NGOs were created in France in 1990 alone, compared to 10,000–15,000 in the entire decade of the 1960s. Associations in Germany have grown at a comparably high rate.
- New Zealand's civic sector includes at least 36,000 incorporated groups, with perhaps 20 new groups formed each week.
- Hungary boasted 13,000 associations two years after the end of Communism, at least half of them formed in the preceding two years.
- By the mid-1990s, about 1 million NGOs were operating in India, 210,000 in Brazil, 96,000 in the Philippines, 27,000 in Chile, 20,000 in Egypt, and 11,000 in Thailand.

Sources: Salamon 1994:111; Salamon and Anheier 1996:5; Robinson 1997:100; Runyon 1999:14; Silk 1999:16; Independent Sector 2001:3; UNDP 2002:5.

Implementing Programs and Providing Services

In many budget-strapped nations, NGOs are the institutions most capable of implementing environment and development programs. For example, some 1,500 neighborhood associations, called “Civic Exnoras,” backstop the impoverished municipal government of the Indian city of Chennai by managing the primary waste collection for almost half a million people (Anand 2000:34–35). In Bangladesh the Rural Advancement Committee’s 17,000-member staff works with more than three million people in rural communities. Its services reach nearly 60 percent of the country’s 86,000 villages, and it has established some 35,000 schools (Weiss and Gordenker 1996:30; Gan 2000:126). Some NGOs help run ecotourism projects or help maintain parks and protected areas. The Belize Audubon Society manages 7 protected areas totaling approximately 150,000 acres for the Belize government (BAS 2003).

Educating and Informing

NGOs, informal grassroots groups, and academic institutions are all resources that help people, businesses, and governments make more informed environmental decisions. The information can be aimed at changing governance at the village level or the global level. For example, the Indian NGO Beej Bachao Andolan helped village farmers revert to using traditional seeds and agricultural practices that benefit biodiversity, while the U.S.-based Business for Social Responsibility provides tools, training, and advice to help companies incorporate responsible practices in their strategies and operations. Information dissemination can be geared toward crafting sound policy, rallying opposition to environmentally harmful projects or policies, increasing transparency in

Table 4.1 The Trend to Join: Variety and Growth of Selected NGO Membership Organizations

Organization	Mission	Date Founded	Current Membership	Recent Growth
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK)	Creates and manages nature reserves and develops environmental policy alternatives.	1889	1 million individuals	25% (1990–2002)
Sierra Club (U.S.)	Pursues environmental activism and policy development, and promotes outdoor recreation.	1892	738,000 individuals	102% (1985–2003)
New Zealand Ecological Society	Promotes the study of ecology and the application of ecological knowledge in planning and management of the environment.	1952	600 individuals	33% (1985–2002)
Singapore Nature Society	Promotes the study, conservation, and enjoyment of the natural heritage in Singapore, Malaysia, and the surrounding region.	1954	2,200 individuals	182% (1983–2002)
World Wide Fund for Nature	Works to conserve nature and ecological processes worldwide through field projects, policy development, and research.	1961	4.5 million individuals	80% (1987–2002)
Hungarian Ornithological and Nature Conservation Society (MME-BirdLife Hungary)	Works to protect wild birds and their habitats through monitoring, nature conservation, and education.	1974	6,941 individuals	75% (1985–2002)
Grameen Bank	Provides credit to low-income individuals to promote economic and rural development.	1976	2.3 million individuals	1,279% (1985–2002)
Sanasa - Sri Lanka Thrift and Credit Cooperative Societies	Provides credit and promotes rural development.	1981	850,000 individuals	264% (1984–2001)
Environmental Law Foundation (UK)	Provides communities and individuals with information and advice on how the law can help resolve environmental problems.	1992	476 individuals	98% (1995–2002)
Korean Federation for Environmental Movement	Promotes environmental protection, peace keeping, and human rights.	1993	87,000 individuals	74% (1998–2002)
EarthAction	Mobilizes people around the world through a global action alert network to press for stronger measures to solve global problems.	1992	2,150 NGOs	329% (1992–2002)
Asia Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists	Promotes honest and accurate reporting of environmental and development issues.	1988	46 organizations	318% (1988–2002)
Union de Grupos Ambientalistas (Union of Environmental Groups) (Mexico)	Promotes the conservation, rehabilitation, and improvement of the environment through awareness-raising and education.	1993	75 organizations	257% (1993–2003)
Forest Stewardship Council	Defines and promotes sound forest management and certification of forest products through a coordinated network of NGOs and community and trade groups.	1993	561 organizations and individuals	737% (1995–2002)



decision-making, or alerting citizens to threats to their health.

Governments often turn to NGOs for environmental data and analysis. In many cases, local NGOs have specialized knowledge of an area and the environmental threats it faces, but they can be important partners in larger-scale analyses as well. The UN Environment Programme's *Global Environment Outlook* (GEO), and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) are examples of collaborative processes among NGOs, national governments, and international organizations to integrate local and regional data into a larger-scale assessment of environmental trends (Gemmill and Bamidele-Izu 2002:87).

Promoting Participation and Increasing Equity

NGOs can open doors to broader citizen participation in environmental decisions at all levels. Some NGOs focus on creating a climate conducive to participation. Many groups organize citizens for public hearings on environmental issues, or encourage their participation in Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs). NGOs alert the public to opportunities for formal consultations with governments or international institutions on policies in agriculture, land use, or other sectors. They may help citizens prepare for these meetings, help

them articulate and advocate their views in writing, or even transport them to capital cities to lobby government representatives directly. In these ways, they bring grassroots voices directly to the ears of decision-makers.

Civil society groups also create channels for participation by people typically excluded from decision-making. For example, women's participation in microcredit cooperatives provides them with greater control over their livelihoods. Likewise, agricultural cooperatives in Latin America and Africa can give poor farmers a stronger voice in rural development plans that dictate farming techniques, agricultural policies, and pesticide use. In male-dominated societies, participation in civic groups can help women assume greater leadership roles (see Figure 4.2). For example, in Japan, where the business and government sectors are dominated by men, about 38 percent of nonprofit organizations are founded or headed by women (Kuroda 1998:9).

Watchdogs for Accountability

A vibrant civil society increases the demand for transparency and accountability of decision-makers in both government and business. Citizen groups and NGOs press for government reform and work to expose corruption. The NGO Transparency International taps a worldwide network to collect data on corruption and spotlight the most egregious examples. TRAFFIC—a partnership between the World Wide Fund for Nature and the World Conservation Union (IUCN)—aims to reduce illegal trade in endangered species by tracking and highlighting goods traded under the CITES treaty—the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Other NGOs shame corporations into better behavior by documenting and publicizing their behavior. Global Witness, a London-based NGO, has played a central role in exposing corrupt practices in the oil industry in Angola and pressing transnational oil companies to adopt accounting practices to combat this corruption (Global Witness 2002:1–4). (See also Chapter 6.)

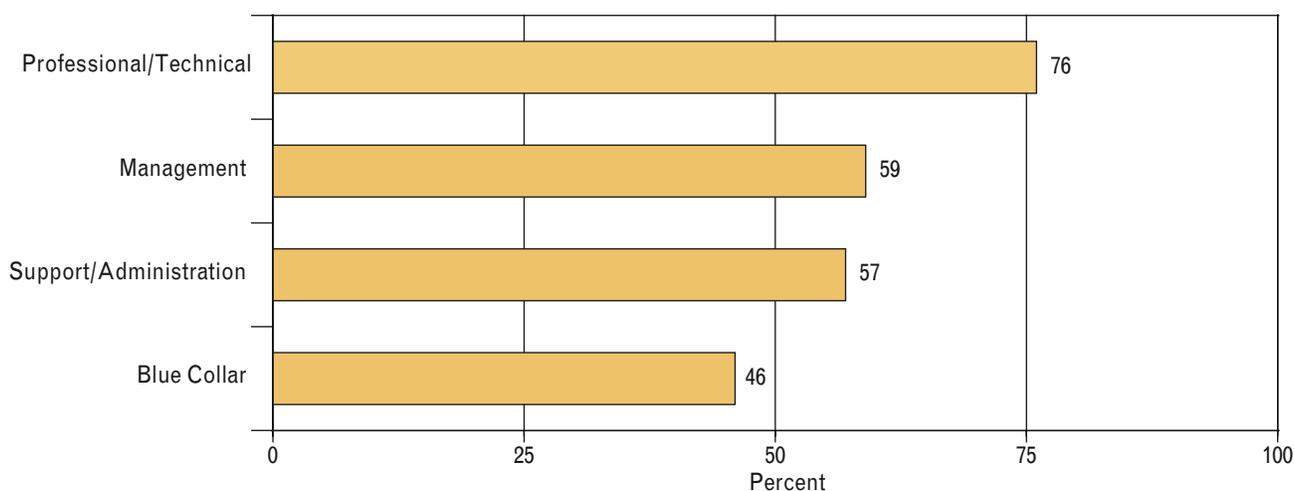
NGOs also enforce accountability at the local level. Between 1997 and 2000, a community-based monitoring project by an Indonesian NGO, Yayasan Duta Awan, uncovered problems with a multi-million dollar World Bank and Indonesian government project called “Integrated Swamps Development.” The NGO exposed violations of the World Bank's policy on pest management, and documented farmers' increased dependence on chemical pesticides, the lack of information about the health effects of pesticides, and the exclusion of women from agricultural training. Their findings led to revisions in the project as well as efforts to implement recommendations from local farmers that the NGO had recorded as part of its monitoring work (PANNA 2001).

Working with the Private Sector

Rather than play an adversarial role, civil society can sometimes join with businesses in cooperative ventures. Together

Figure 4.2 Percentage of Full-time Positions Held by Women in South African Nonprofit Organizations

Women wield significant authority in South Africa's nonprofit organizations, dominating the ranks of professionals, managers, and support staff.



Source: Swilling and Russell 2002:25.

they can make decisions to protect the environment without significant government involvement. For example, the World Resources Institute is collaborating with leading businesses to build a market among corporations for “green power”—power generated from renewable sources. Since January 2001, member companies of WRI’s Green Power Market Development Group have purchased over 50 megawatts of green power at over 200 U.S. facilities (Hanson 2003).

Conservation groups have also gained experience in brokering deals with financial lenders, paper mills, and other forest product companies to save land, and sometimes jobs. In 2002, the Nature Conservancy, a United States NGO, assumed \$50 million in loans made to financially struggling Great Northern Paper. In return, the company turned over 200,000 acres of land in the state of Maine for conservation, recreation, and sustainable timber harvesting (Jiang 2002:B2).

Joining in Global Environmental Governance

In the 1990s, more than ever before, NGOs began to work on environmental issues beyond their own nation’s borders. The number of international NGOs focusing on the environment grew almost 20 percent—from 979 in 1990 to 1,170 in 2000 (Anheier et al. 2001:300) and the number of all international NGOs more than doubled (see Figure 4.1) (UIA 2000; 2001:1519). Even countries typically considered withdrawn from international engagement, including Iran, Iraq, and Kuwait, have strong public participation in NGOs. Currently, individuals from high-income countries tend to dominate the membership and activities of international groups. However,

there has been dramatic growth in the number of international NGOs operating in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, and the trend is toward greater parity in the participation of residents from all over the world (Boli and Thomas 1999:57, 77; Anheier et al. 2001:287–288).

One key to civil society’s increased role in global governance is that these groups have forced international and regional governing bodies to officially acknowledge their presence and input. Some governments have actually made space for NGOs at the decision-making table by including NGO representatives in their official delegations. NGOs have successfully sought accreditation at international summits and other high-level meetings where they could lobby government delegates, organize briefings, officially address the governments, and submit official statements, commentaries, or research findings as guidance to delegates.

The 1992 Rio Earth Summit, in particular, provided a boost to NGO efforts to participate more broadly in international governance. Agenda 21—the blueprint for sustainable development that emerged from the Rio Summit—affirmed that the United Nations should expand the involvement of civil society groups in its decisions (Gemmill and Bamidele-Izu 2002:81–82). The response to this call has been impressive. While only 41 NGOs had “consultative” status with the UN system in 1948, almost 3,000 were accredited to participate in the 2002 Johannesburg Summit (see Figure 4.3) (Willets 2002). (Consultative status affords at least some opportunity to propose agenda items, and to designate representatives to attend meetings of the UN Economic and Social Council and its subgroups.)

By 1990, more than 100,000 NGOs were helping to protect the environment worldwide—most of them founded in the previous decade.

Civil society groups have also sought to have greater input into the work of multilateral banks such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). These efforts have expanded opportunities for citizen participation in decisions about project financing for roads, dams, health-care, and agricultural development. Today, about half of all World Bank projects involve the input or direct involvement of NGOs, compared to only 6 percent 30 years ago (World Bank 1996; 1997:2). In December 2000, the World Bank's NGO-Bank Committee agreed to create a new Bank-Civil Society Global Forum to provide more opportunities for dialogue between the Bank and a cross-section of civil society organizations. In creating the Forum, the World Bank acknowledged that these groups have become "critical allies in designing innovative operations, implementing solutions, and monitoring results" of the Bank's work (World Bank 2001:105).

Civil Society Is Not Perfect

Civil society organizations don't always contribute to good environmental decisions. These groups are not immune from problems of legitimacy, transparency, and accountability—the same issues that NGOs often raise about governments and corporations. Nor are they universally effective, open to new ideas, or eager to collaborate with others. These weaknesses can leave civil society groups open to attack by government bureaucrats, politicians, and the media, and can damage their credibility in the eyes of many donors (Sinclair 2002).

Who Do NGOs Represent?

NGOs may claim to represent the "public interest" or "common good" and are often credited with some moral authority (Risse 2000:186). Yet, because of their diverse motivations and sources of funding, civil society groups aren't always legitimate or credible spokespersons for the broad public interest they claim to represent. Sometimes the public is appropriately skeptical of NGOs that are too closely identified with special economic or political interests. Indeed, NGOs don't always successfully maintain their independence and ability to speak freely when working with or accepting funding from corporate or government sponsors, or wealthy private benefactors. For example, an NGO called the Greening Earth Society—heavily sponsored by the United States coal industry—argues that global warming is good because it will enhance vegetation growth (World Watch 1999:2). The self-described grassroots organization People for the West! (now People for the USA) advocates broader access to land for mining, but it too is largely supported by mining companies.

(continued on p. 78)

NGO Coalitions: Networks of Influence

International coalitions of NGOs have widened their influence to the global stage. The number of international NGO networks has reached 20,000 according to the UN Development Programme (UNDP 2002:102). When they work best, transboundary NGO coalitions can help to transcend issues of national sovereignty, reconcile North-South differences, and bring the attention of a world audience to important regional or local issues. In some instances, these coalitions have achieved successes that many policy experts would have deemed impossible:

- The International Campaign to Ban Landmines, a coalition of 1,400 NGOs from 90 countries, convinced 146 countries to sign a treaty to ban landmines at a time when private companies and government agencies in 52 countries were manufacturing antipersonnel mines and 2.5 million new landmines were being laid each year. Since the 1997 signing of the treaty, more than 30 million stockpiled mines have been destroyed (Mekata 2000:145; UNDP 2002:103; Wixley 2002).
- A civil society coalition spanning more than 60 countries organized the "Jubilee 2000" campaign that alerted millions to the staggering debt of the poorest countries and caused G7 leaders to cancel more than \$110 billion in foreign debt. The coalition included labor unions, physicians, religious organizations, environmental groups, food aid organizations, and peace and justice groups, and even enlisted the aid of rock star Bono as a spokesperson (Florini 2000:228; UNDP 2002:103–104; Jubilee 2000 2003).
- Networks of NGOs from the West and from developing countries have successfully slowed or halted the building of large hydroelectric dams in India, Thailand, Malaysia, and other countries. These cross-border coalitions also influenced the World Bank's decision to give greater weight to the potential environmental and social impacts of a dam when making decisions on financing such projects (Khagram 2000).

Box 4.3 New Communication Tools for Environmental Empowerment

An international diffusion of affordable information technologies—Internet, mobile phones, pagers, faxes, e-mail, and mapping programs (Global Information Systems or “GIS”)—is giving civil society organizations new ways to participate in environmental governance. In just the last decade, these new technologies have helped to alter the balance of power among governments, corporations, and civil society groups (Keohane and Nye 2001:22). The news media, for example, have actively embraced the on-line world, with about 40 percent of daily newspapers worldwide now offering their content on-line as well as in print (Norris 2001:180). Political parties have also used the Internet to spread their messages abroad, with “Green” parties especially quick to do so. As of 2000, 71 percent of Green parties had an on-line presence (Norris 2001:157–158).

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have become particularly adept at using new technologies like the Internet and GIS. In fact, they have often proven to be quicker and better at exploiting these technologies than governments and businesses (Naughton 2001:147; Norris 2001:171). In a typical week, Greenpeace International’s website gets 58,000 visitors (Norris 2001:187); the site provides information about issues ranging from whaling, to nuclear arms, to illegal logging. With a click of the mouse, the Sierra Club lets a visitor to its website e-mail letters to his or her political representatives expressing opinions on a variety of environmental topics. At NGO-sponsored “Village Information Shops,” rural residents in India can use e-mail, Internet, phone, and CD-ROMs to learn about credit, seed prices and availability, transportation options, pest control and a number of other agricultural practices—information that benefits resource management decisions (Pigato 2001:31–32).

The advent of video cameras and growth in television ownership makes it easier to dramatize the scale and human impacts of environmental damage. In Honduras, an organization of small-scale fishermen sent a videotape to the Honduran Congress depicting the illegal destruction of mangroves by politically powerful commercial farmers, and protesting the loss of their livelihoods and habitat (UNDP 2001:32).

Activist groups have demonstrated that they can use Internet-based campaigns to quickly link people worldwide. In 1997–98, an Internet-based coalition of environmental NGOs, consumer groups, religious and human rights organizations, and trade unions from 67 countries came together to defeat the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI)—an agreement that multinationals and the industrialized countries strongly supported. Many NGOs opposed the secrecy of the MAI negotiations process and the agreement’s lack of environmental safeguards, among other shortcomings (Bray 1998). The NGOs used websites, e-mails, and “listservs” (electronic mailing lists) to quickly share strategies and detailed analy-

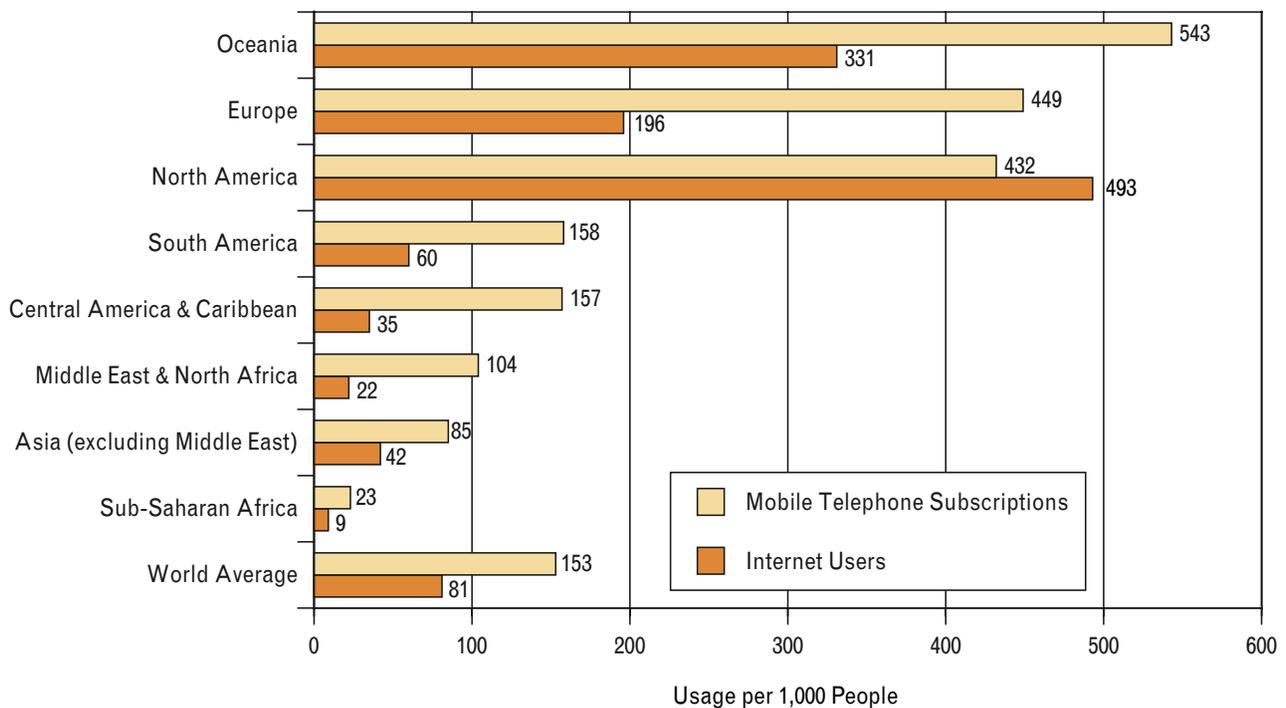


Access to Information by the Poor in Nepal

Sources of Information and Communication (based on surveys)	Percentage of Rural Poor	Percentage of Urban Poor
Radio	71	71
Newspapers	24	43
TV	2	57
Telephone	1	13
Computer	1	4
Fax	0	0
Friends	83	73
Family	81	83
Political Leaders	78	12
Local Leader	70	19
Schools	21	16

Source: Pigato 2001:29–30.

Mobile Phone and Internet Use, 2001



Source: ITU 2002 as reported by EarthTrends.

ses of draft MAI texts, mobilize citizens to contact decision-makers, and coordinate activists around the world. The Internet-based campaign enabled NGOs to shape the public debate, influence domestic media coverage in some countries, and made it harder for OECD officials to dismiss NGO positions as “fringe” (Smith and Smythe 2000).

Of course, the diffusion rate of new communication technologies varies by country and region (see Figure). The current “digital divide” means that only 6.7 percent of the world’s population uses the World Wide Web, with the majority of users clustered in developed nations and urban areas (Freedom House 2001:1). But this number can be deceiving when judging the significance of Internet technology for environmental empowerment. In fact, there is evidence that NGOs may have a much higher level of Internet access than the general public, even in the developing world. A representative sample of 468 groups drawn from the Yearbook of International Organizations found that about one fourth can be reached through their own website (Norris 2001:189). Many

more undoubtedly have access to the Web and can spread the advantages of connectivity to their membership (Sinclair 2002).

Nonetheless, differences in access do have real implications for how the Internet is used by civil society. In North America and Europe, thousands of “connected” people with e-mail accounts can be quickly rallied to action or protest through e-mail alerts and discussion boards. Those same people can use the Web to share information on-line and access environmental data. By comparison, in poor countries, the power of the Internet may be more indirect. An NGO may indeed have access to environmental information and may be able to collaborate with other groups in far-flung places on-line. But the majority of citizens will be far more likely to rely on other technologies as their day-to-day information source. Surveys of communities in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have found that most people still rely on family, friends, and local leaders, or on the more basic technologies of radio, television, and newspapers (Pigato 2001:ii, 13). (See Table.)



It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly who a particular civil society group represents, and how effective they are as advocates for their constituents (Brown and Kalegaonkar 2002:25). Domestic and even international civil society groups may claim to represent local people—such as low-income families or indigenous groups—but may fail to consult them, or represent only one faction’s interests.

This problem of representation extends to international NGO networks. In the past, large, wealthy Northern NGOs dominated such networks, calling into question how well they could reflect the priorities of the South. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, environmental and human rights groups joined in a battle against the oil company Conoco’s plans to drill in the rain forests of Ecuador. United States and European NGOs were active and influential actors in this campaign, but typically had little contact with the local indigenous group—the Huaorani people—on whose territory the drilling was to occur. As a consequence, they often failed to take Huaorani interests adequately into account when they settled on action strategies or negotiating tactics (Jordan and van Tuijl 2000:2061).

The dominance of Northern NGOs has historically been projected into official circles as well. More than 85 percent of NGOs with consultative status in the ECOSOC are from the North (Edwards and Gaventa 2001:9). Similarly, of the 738 NGOs accredited to the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) 1999 ministerial conference in Seattle, Washington, 87 percent hailed from industrialized countries (UNDP 2002:8). This problem seems to be diminishing as NGOs in the developing world grow in number and capacity (Florini 2000; Anheier et al. 2001:111). The majority of the NGOs who participated in negotiations on the Convention to Combat Desertification in the early 1990s were from the South (UNCCD 2003) and thousands of southern NGOs attended the WSSD conference in 2002.

Some NGOs lack both legitimacy and a real constituency. In some places, they have proliferated less out of community need than to take advantage of available donor funding, tax breaks, and employment opportunities. Such groups may not be serious about achieving a social mission or the public good. In fact, they may simply wish to compete with for-profit businesses (Brown et al. 2000:12; Anheier et al. 2001:198). The result can be duplication of programs and wasted effort.

Are They Reliable? Accountable?

Civil society groups are not always honest brokers. NGOs vying for media attention and donor funding may sometimes use tactics and information that is more alarmist than realistic. Greenpeace, for example, lost credibility in 1995 when it had to admit the inaccuracy of some of its claims about Royal Dutch Shell and its planned disposal of the Brent Spar offshore drilling rig in the North Atlantic (Keohane and Nye 2001:225). Greenpeace had greatly overestimated the amount of waste oil remaining on the rig. On the other hand, many NGOs realize that they risk discrediting themselves when they skew findings or supply inaccurate research, and therefore strive to make their information reliable and their biases clear (Diamond 1994:10).

Transparency and accountability may also be problems. Some civil society groups may not be vigorous in disclosing their sources of funding, or how they choose their projects and spend their budgets. They may not communicate regularly with their constituents or donors through newsletters, year-end reports, or other methods, and thus remain aloof from those they claim to serve. For example, a recent study of NGOs in Kenya found that it was impossible to trace the funding sources and expenditures of most NGOs, and often difficult to obtain information on their activities (Kunguru et al. 2002). Indeed, worldwide, many groups do not have any formal accountability mechanisms such as elections, auditors, or oversight committees. Often this is simply due to their small size, limited budget, and lack of capacity. But some do engage in corrupt practices, misallocating funds under the guise of community service.

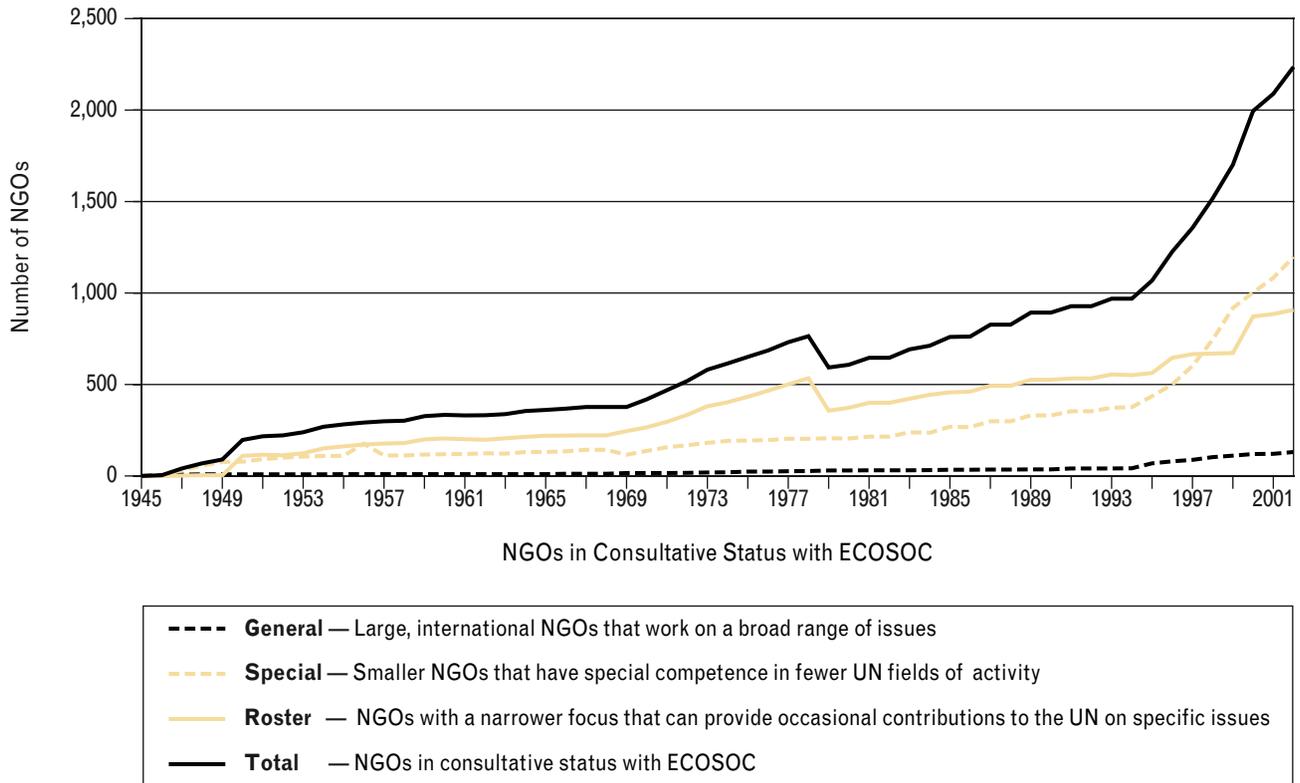
Donors, members, and collaborating partners can help hold civil society groups accountable for their actions and the accuracy of their research by serving on boards of directors, demanding progress reports, and participating in internal strategy sessions. Funders hold a powerful tool for accountability through their capacity to remove financial support. Still, it can be difficult, if not impossible, for funders and constituents to know how decisions are made and moneys spent in the many remote venues where NGOs may work, or to determine whether the work accomplished was effective and appropriate.

Contention and Discord

NGOs don’t always agree on how to tackle environmental problems. Southern environmental NGOs may have more pragmatic interests in environmental conservation than their Northern counterparts. Or, NGOs from both hemispheres may agree there’s a problem, such as climate change, but not on the solution. Sometimes NGOs define their issues or goals very narrowly, or are blind to the possibilities of mutual gain from working with others. An NGO road-building program in the Dominican Republic, for example, helped some villagers get to the market, but also created erosion problems for neighboring villages not involved in the program (Brown and Kalegaonkar 2002:235–236).

Figure 4.3 More NGOs Can Participate in UN Meetings

Catalyzed by the impressive NGO presence at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, NGO mobilization gained speed in other conferences in the following decade, including the Vienna Human Rights Summit (1993), the Cairo Population Summit (1994), the Beijing Women's Summit (1995), the Istanbul Summit on Human Settlement (1996), and the Johannesburg Summit (2002).



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs NGO Section, as reported by Willetts 2002.

Often NGOs simply have conflicting objectives and opinions. When the United States company Scott Paper proposed to develop a tree farm and pulp mill in southeastern Indonesia in 1988, a coalition of local NGOs eventually accepted the proposal, working with the company to reduce the project's environmental costs and increase its local employment benefits. However, some international-level NGOs campaigned to block the plantation altogether in the belief that large-scale forest development of any sort was unjustifiable (Jordan and van Tuijl 2000:2059-2060).

Some contention among civil society groups isn't bad. The contribution of civil society to good environmental governance is strengthened by a diversity of ideas, debate, and criticism. But discord and conflicting positions can mean lost opportunities to advance forward-looking policies and achieve environmental progress. A fragmented environmental NGO community is often an ineffective community, but united and coordinated, civic groups can articulate and pursue more influential strategies (Brown and Kalegaonkar 2002:236). In global and national politics, one of the major

constraints to NGOs exercising political influence is disunity at the bargaining table (Vanasselt 2002:157).

Empowered or Marginalized?

The capacity of civil society groups to organize and influence environmental outcomes varies widely by country and region. In some countries, NGOs are an accepted and empowered presence. They boast memberships and budgets in the millions and have ready access to the best and most up-to-date information technology. In other countries, government control remains very strong and civil organizations are weak.

Political and social contexts are important determinants of the power balance between governments and civic groups. For example, the United States has a long tradition of privately funded and managed public interest groups with a variety of mandates working on a wide range of issues. But in East and Southeast Asia, the centralized state typically has limited the scope for NGO participation in decisions about social issues and public policy. Nonprofit groups are met with suspicion about their motives and intentions, and government

bureaucrats are reluctant to proactively work with NGOs (Baron 2002).

Governments may welcome NGOs that focus on social services, the delivery of aid programs, or those that don't threaten state authority, but they show hostility to advocacy groups that might challenge government policy (World Bank and ICNL 1997:3, 5, 9). For example, when the Tanzanian NGO known as Lawyers' Environmental Action Team exposed irregularities in connection with a cyanide-leach gold mine near Lake Victoria, the government issued warrants for the arrest of the NGO's leaders on sedition charges (Lissu 2002).

Some governments deny civic associations significant autonomy from the state. India restricts the amount of funds that domestic NGOs can receive from foreign donors. By keeping NGOs reliant on the state for financing, operation, and legal standing, civic groups are constrained as a force for independent information and oversight (Petkova et al. 2002:116). Egypt and Indonesia both have a history of authoritarian systems in which the government typically creates, organizes, licenses, and funds interest groups (Diamond 1994:13). China and other countries also have "government-sponsored" NGOs. While these "semi-public" or "semi-official" environ-

mental groups may not be independent, they can still be effective, given their high-level connections. At the same time, such organizations are not likely to rally any large-scale activity against the state or business sector, and the scope of their work may be limited (Ho 2001:911, 915-916).

In general, governments generally have moved away from outright hostility toward environmental activism or civic organization. Still, they routinely use a variety of rules and regulations that hinder the sector's development and discourage the work of environmental advocates. In parts of Africa, the Middle East, China, and other countries, authoritarian governments severely curtail civil society's activities and influence (Mathews 1997:53). Some limit freedom of speech or the right to associate, effectively making it impossible to form a voluntary group (see Figure 4.4) (Anheier et al. 2001:263-266). NGOs in Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Pakistan, and India have battled to stop governments from rolling back the legal space in which civil society operates (see Box 4.4).

Governments can also hinder the work of NGOs through the laws that regulate these organizations and determine their access to funds (World Bank and ICNL 1997:9). But tax laws can also help NGOs. The United States and Europe pro-

Box 4.4 In a Clear Voice: Press and Internet Freedoms

Press Freedom Is Growing

Freedom of the press and the Internet are important determinants of civil society's ability to influence environmental decisions and encourage broader public participation. For one, the news media are frequently the fundamental source of environmental information in a community. Greater media freedom often translates into more accurate and complete reporting and more reliable information.

In general, a free press is one of the most effective ways to expose environmental problems linked to government policy. It helps environmental groups and other nongovernmental organizations make their case to the public, and strengthens their oversight of government and corporate actions. For example, in 2000, NGOs from around the world focused media attention on a major cyanide spill from a Romanian mine into the Tisza River and the Danube. This media exposure brought public scrutiny to Romania's lax mine oversight and emergency planning, and led to government collaboration with NGOs in a new program to address environmental safety and risk issues (REC 2001:3-4, 13-15).

An active and free press can contribute to more fundamental social changes as well, and can help to limit government abuses, be they environmental or social. For example, in 2000, independent journalists publicized government corruption and human rights abuses in Peru and Yugoslavia, helping to bring down those government regimes. (Freedom House 2001:5).

The good news is that, in general, press freedoms are growing worldwide. According to Freedom House's annual survey of press freedom in 186 countries, the number of nations in 2001 with substantial freedom of the press rose to its highest level in a decade. The survey rated the press in 75 countries as "free," 50 countries as "partly free," and in 61 countries, national restrictions on journalists and publications meant the press was "not free" (Sussman and Karlekar 2002:5).

The overall upswing in the number of countries with a free press is impressive given the increased attention to state security after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States. However, the new focus on security has not been entirely benign. In the United States, the Freedom House survey found that media access had declined somewhat in response to the "war on terrorism." In other countries, progress in granting press freedoms continued—for example, Chile repealed a controversial section of its State Security Law that criminalized anyone who "insulted" a state official. However, in many countries, strict libel laws and overzealous state security laws greatly impede media reporting on official corruption or malfeasance (Sussman and Karlekar 2002:7, 50).

In terms of the quality and extent of media coverage of environmental issues, trends are mixed. Environmental journalism in Asia now benefits from several umbrella organizations that provide services to journalists, including the Asia Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists and the Environ-

vide favorable tax treatment, making financial contributions to NGOs tax-deductible and thereby encouraging donations. East Asian countries, on the other hand, typically limit tax deductibility on donations to NGOs or other nonprofit organizations (Baron 2002).

Registration laws vary, too. China's 1998 registration regulations for social organizations require an NGO to have a sponsoring institution, fewer than 50 members, and a minimum level of financial resources. They also disallow the existence of two organizations in the same field or sector, in the same jurisdiction. Those organizations that choose to avoid these restrictions and remain unregistered are unable to enter into contractual relations, such as obtaining telephone lines or leasing office space. Nor can they offer personnel benefits like pensions and medical insurance, or have their own bank account, making it harder to attract staff and funding (Ho 2001:903–905). In contrast, Japan eased financial requirements for the registration of NGOs in 1998 (Florini 2000:219).

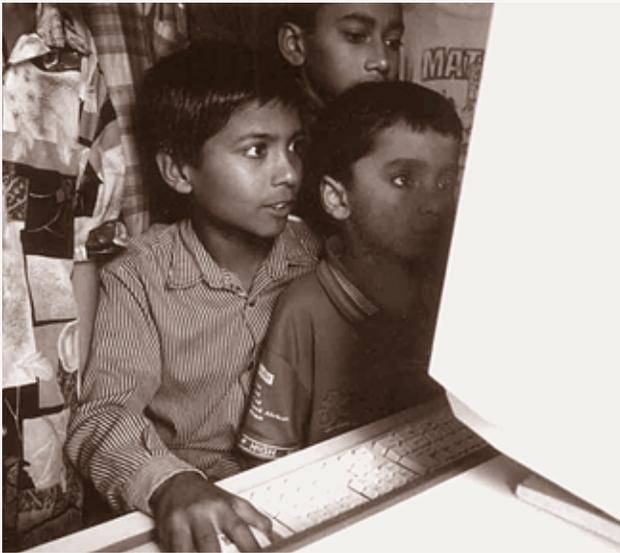
Another controlling mechanism is government-imposed limits on a civic organization's existence. In Rwanda, an NGO can exist for no longer than three years and, in Kenya, an NGO must re-register and pay a fee every five years (World

Bank and ICNL 1997:39). Sometimes, in the purported interest of accountability, governments exercise burdensome oversight on NGO activities. Viet Nam and Thailand require nonprofit organizations to file minutes of annual meetings. Japan and Korea require filed statements of proposed activities and budgets for the following year. Indonesia requires nonprofits to obtain government consent prior to receiving funds from abroad (Silk 1999:32, 37). Worldwide, many countries—particularly the countries of the South—lack an adequate framework of laws and regulations that would enable, rather than restrict, the operation of NGOs.

Building the Capacity of Civil Society

Nurturing New NGOs

Many NGOs working on environmental issues today were born of the democratic revolution and the economic changes of the past two decades. The challenge today is to support these new organizations as they develop the skills to become effective, well-managed, and self-sufficient (see Box 4.5). This includes learning how to partner with other institutions (including government), how to fund-raise, how to engage



mental Communication Asia network (ADB 2001:36). This is significant because environmental stories in the news media have been a key factor in the growth of the environmental movement in the Asia and Pacific region (ADB 2001:36). In the Central and Eastern European countries, some newspapers and television programs have established regular reporting on the environment. But, in most countries, newspapers and other media tend to cover the environment only occasionally, focusing mainly on accidents and controversy rather than on substantive environmental issues or the policies required to address them (SustainAbility et al. 2002:8–14).

Internet Freedom Is Mixed

Though relatively new, the Internet is already a significant element in expanding environmental democracy and empowering NGOs. But, like the media, Internet users can be subject to government constraints on who they can contact, what websites they can visit, and what information they can pass on.

Results from one of the first international assessments of Internet freedom show that while government restrictions on Internet access or content are uncommon, Internet freedoms are by no means universal. Of 131 countries examined, 58 provide liberal access to the web and generally do not control the content of material available on-line. Another 55 countries have moderate restrictions on web access and content. Eighteen countries, including China and Russia, significantly restrict Internet freedoms. In these countries, the state may provide the Internet service directly or intervene in commercial Internet service. Citizens may be fined, harassed, or imprisoned for messages deemed seditious or expressing dissent from government policies (Freedom House 2001:1).

Surprisingly, the results show that a high or moderate level of Internet freedom can often be found in nations where press freedom is low. In Oman, for example, there are many press restrictions, but Internet users are subjected to few. In 12 other nations with low press freedom, the government applies only moderate restrictions to the Internet. In these countries, the Internet may prove a critical tool for the effectiveness of civil society groups, and a major source of access to environmental information (Freedom House 2001:1–4).

the media, how to deliver services efficiently, and how to communicate results.

A recent analysis of civil society in 22 countries emphasized the need for capacity building in most of them (Salamon et al. 1999). But capacity building itself requires financial resources, and many civic groups struggle to secure even a shoestring budget. In fact, finding funding is the root problem plaguing new NGOs, and many older ones as well. The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) reported in 1997 that almost half the NGOs in that region were operating with budgets of under \$1,000 a year, and three quarters reported their financial situation as either unstable or poor (REC 1997:8). With an increase in the size of the environmental sector and a decline in international funding to Central Europe since 1996, NGOs there now rely on even fewer resources.

Funding problems are compounded by the fact that most of the money from external donors goes to groups that focus on national and international issues, rather than to those working on local problems (OECD 1999:85). Meanwhile, few donors are willing to commit their support for longer than a few years despite the fact that NGOs—particularly new ones—require long-term funding to effectively address most social or environmental issues. Donor initiatives to establish longer-term relationships with NGOs are thus one way to deal with the problem of financial insecurity. Donor support can

also include direct capacity building. For example, a donor agency might host an internship where NGO personnel can undertake research and training or produce a handbook or other field materials for use in their home country.

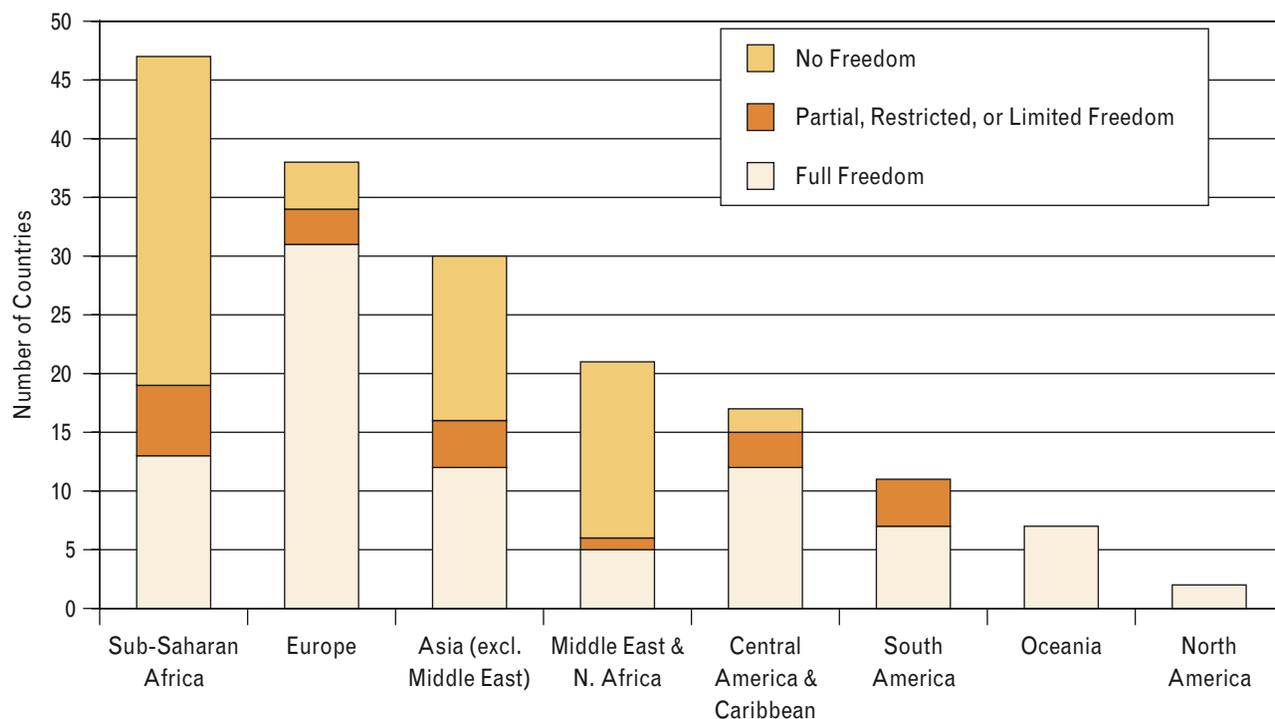
Government Action

Governments can facilitate civic action on environmental issues by improving the legal and regulatory frameworks that enable NGOs to grow and mature. Several nations in the Asia-Pacific region are making efforts in this area. For example, changes made to Thailand's constitution in 1997 guarantee freedom of association and specifically grant the freedom to assemble in the form of NGOs. In the Philippines, the government has enacted generous tax deductions for charitable contributions by individuals and corporations (Silk 1999:7, 12-16). However, progress needs to spread to other regions. This includes greater attention to press and Internet freedoms, which are vital to civic debate and the ability of civil society groups to communicate with and organize their constituents. Governments can also be proactive in seeking civic input in developing policies and pursuing projects with significant environmental impacts.

Developing Local Support

Support from external donors such as bilateral aid agencies or development banks often helps new civil society groups to

Figure 4.4 Freedom of Expression and Association, 1999



Source: U.S. State Department, as reported by Anheier et al. 2001: 263-266.

A vibrant civil society increases the demand for transparency and accountability of decision-makers in both government and business.

get off the ground and older groups to undertake special projects or build capacity for effective action. But in order to survive and thrive, civil society groups must eventually enlist local support and involvement. They must establish roots in their communities, engaging local interest and acceptance and securing financial support.

Establishing those local roots can be challenging. In many countries limited public understanding of the legitimacy of civil society organizations makes it difficult for new groups to stimulate indigenous support and participation (Brown and Kalegaonkar 2002:233). NGOs and other groups may be unaccustomed to reaching out to the public and other stakeholders, as an assessment of Russian NGOs found (see Box 4.6). Similarly, an examination of the sustainability of Latin

donors. Unless local charitable support expands, these groups are left vulnerable to impoverishment as a growing number vie for a finite or shrinking pool of international support (Atkinson and Messing 2002:13). In five Latin American countries, researchers found a similar need to encourage the growth of local charitable foundations to enable further expansion of the nonprofit sector (Salamon et al. 1999:35).

Transparency and Accountability

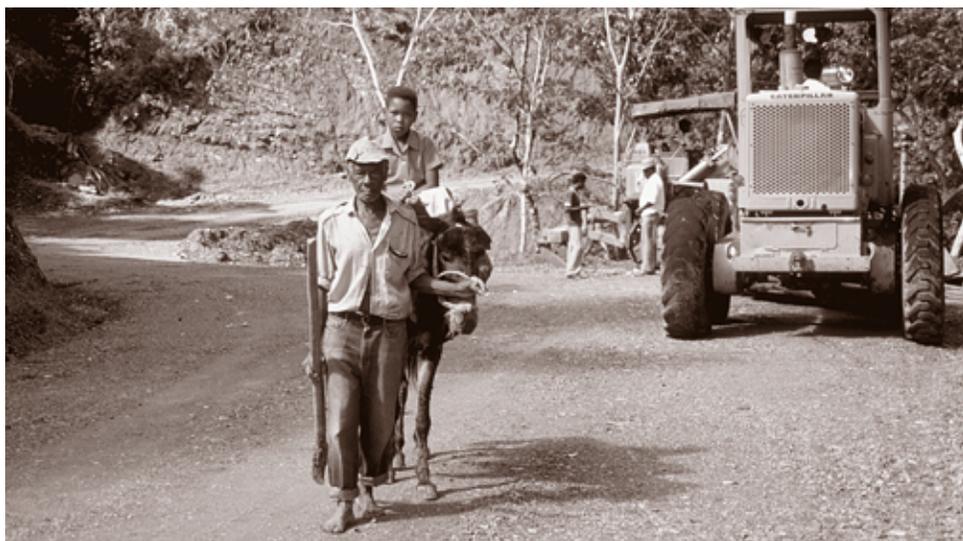
One step toward overcoming doubts about civil society's legitimacy and effectiveness is for environmental NGOs and other civic groups to measure their own impact in clear and simple terms. More in-depth and transparent self-evaluation and peer evaluation can help defray questions of accountability or responsiveness to their primary constituencies. Similarly, transparency and openness in the areas of funding and work agendas can allay concerns that NGOs are merely agents of foreign interests.

There are fledgling efforts to make NGOs more transparent and to assess their effectiveness. These include scorecards that survey the performance and ethics of nonprofit organizations. *Worth Magazine*, for example, provides an annual list of the 100 best United States charities in several fields,

including the environment, based on criteria such as return on investment and effectiveness.

Many efforts to improve accountability and transparency come from within the NGO community. Donors and some large conservation groups, such as the World Wide Fund for Nature, and the Nature Conservancy, are trying to develop accounting standards to audit the effectiveness of environmental projects (Christensen 2002:D2). InterAction, a membership association of United States NGOs engaged in international humanitarian efforts, requires its members to comply with set standards in such areas as governance, finance, communication with the U.S. public, and management practices. InterAction also promotes standard-setting

(continued on p. 86)



American NGOs concluded that NGOs can't expect to gain acceptance, legitimacy, and support by leading projects in isolation. They must learn to work effectively in a support role by coordinating community activities, forging alliances, and integrating themselves into the social fabric of the community (Valderrama 1999).

Building a broad base of indigenous financial support is a particular challenge in countries where there is no history of private philanthropy or nonprofit organizations, or where per capita income is very low. Yet, access to diversified sources of funding—local, international, and self-generated income from fees—is a key to NGO sustainability and autonomy. Analysis of environmental NGO financing in Central Europe shows an overwhelming dependence on foreign

Box 4.5 African NGOs: A Kaleidoscope of Efforts

Africa's nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) mirror the wide variations in governance among the countries of the continent. Here, the best and the worst examples of NGOs can be found. Throughout much of Africa, strong NGOs have been on the frontline of the battle for civic freedom and better environmental governance, while in other parts of the region they are weak, insecure, and vulnerable to repression.

Yet, even in places where formal government structures are in disarray, such as in parts of the Great Lakes region, or Somalia, community organizations and NGOs have managed to address social and environmental concerns—against great odds. During the Rwanda genocide crisis in 1994, for example, local organizations worked in the communities that hosted refugee camps, helping people find alternative energy sources in order to reduce the destruction of local forests for fuelwood.

Similarly, in war-torn Somalia, local groups have been working with UN agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to help build a culture of reconciliation and peace, and a foundation for economic growth. In the oasis of Iskushuban in the Somali desert, local groups using seed funding from UNDP have formed a water-users committee to rebuild irrigation channels, established a microcredit plan to finance new village enterprises, started a demonstration farm to spread organic farming techniques, and constructed retaining walls to pre-

vent erosion of the steep valley terrain. These locally led initiatives have become a model for civic action in other villages in the Iskushuban district.

Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, and Zimbabwe are home to large numbers of NGOs, and many have played a critical role in advancing policy reform at the national level. In Zimbabwe, civil society found its voice during the years when the capital city Harare was the center of resistance to the apartheid regime in South Africa, and continues to address Zimbabwe's current civil troubles. Over the past decade, NGOs in Ghana and Kenya have defended the public's right of association in the face of government attempts to legislate a limit to this basic freedom. In Kenya in particular, NGOs such as the Mazingira Institute, Kenya Human Rights Commission, and the Green Belt Movement, in partnership with churches and other groups, have helped catalyze constitutional reform. Civil society also played a central role in the dramatic changes in South Africa's political system in the last two decades—a story that has somewhat overshadowed the important influence of NGOs as drivers of change elsewhere on the continent.

Much of the story of NGOs in Africa revolves around the relationship between civil society and government. Governments tend to look favorably on NGOs that provide services such as healthcare, education, or other activities that the state would ordinarily perform. On the other hand, politically active NGOs may provoke government ire. With the slow growth of democratic governance across the continent, civil society organizations are often seen as the only acceptable and effective vehicle to work for change in society. Consequently, many African governments have viewed NGOs with suspicion, if not outright contempt. But NGOs do not always work in opposition to the state. Since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, many African NGOs have worked to strengthen their governments' positions in international policy forums. And in





some countries, such as Senegal and Uganda, serious efforts have been made to bring civil society more meaningfully into the national policy-formulation arena.

Nonetheless, there remain many weaknesses in Africa's NGO sector. Despite the strength of ZERO in Zimbabwe, ENDA in Senegal, Friends of the Earth Ghana, Environmental Justice Networking Forum in South Africa, and Zambia Wildlife Society, to name a few, the vast majority of NGOs face critical financial constraints and capacity gaps. African NGOs argue that the high level of poverty makes it difficult to raise local funds, so they rely on international donors. Yet, charitable giving is not alien to most African cultures, and the difficulty of soliciting local funds is often simply due to a lack of fundraising skills, or the absence of strong support among local constituents.

What often *is* alien to Africans is the social concept of the nongovernmental association as it has developed in European cultures—a variety of citizens from different walks of life and often different communities, coming together to address a



specific set of social issues. Instead, many African NGOs reflect a narrower social base. Some have arisen from the activity of urban elites, along the lines of the European NGO model. Many others were created at the request of financial donors to carry out projects at the community level. Often, these NGOs have bypassed and alienated traditional social norms, which are community-focused and governed by traditional leadership structures, such as local chiefs. This cultural mismatch is one reason that NGOs in Africa are frequently accused by governments, as well as by some donor agencies, of lacking the capacity or mandate to succeed in their mission. Other shortcomings include corruption, tribalism, and the “Big Man syndrome”—where most decision-making power is vested in one individual or leader. These problems can become obstacles to fostering democratic norms, transparency, and accountability among the continent's civil society groups.

Although these concerns are real, they are often overblown by critics. This focus frequently leads to unfair or inappropriate treatment of NGOs by African governments, while a great deal of effective work by civil society organizations goes unrecognized. The many success stories among NGOs in Africa indicate that creative and culturally sensitive approaches to capacity development—such as fostering mechanisms for accountability, or nurturing democratic and effective leadership—have strong potential to broaden the response of civil society groups to Africa's environment and development needs.

Contributed by Robert Sinclair, capacity development consultant, Nairobi, Kenya.

Kenya's Healthy Civil Society

Number of voluntary nonprofit organizations in Kenya, 2002 (including informal organizations) (Hakkarainen et al. 2002)	150,000
Number of government-registered NGOs in Kenya, 2003 (Sinclair 2003)	2,511
Percentage of Kenyan hospitals run by NGOs, 1999 (Government of Kenya Ministry of Health 2001:63)	50.2%
Percentage of Kenyan health clinics and medical centers run by NGOs, 1999 (Government of Kenya Ministry of Health 2001:63)	87.1%
Percentage of Kenyan nursing and maternity homes run by NGOs, 1999 (Government of Kenya Ministry of Health 2001:63)	100%



Civil society groups create channels for participation by people typically excluded from decision-making.

processes for comparable groups in Canada, Japan, Asia, and Central and Eastern Europe (InterAction 2003).

At the same time, One World Trust, a London-based charity, is designing indicators to measure the accountability and transparency of a range of global institutions, including international NGOs. Using these indicators, an organization might measure how accessible its meetings and formal decision-making processes are to members, or the independence and transparency of its evaluation process. Or it might measure whether the group has adequate stakeholder representation from the North and the South (Kovach et al. 2003). Although many of these efforts focus on international NGOs or take place in developed countries, they provide approaches that might be adapted and used elsewhere.

Specialized Support Organizations

Some NGOs have taken it as their mission to help other civil society groups become more effective. These “support organizations” provide a variety of services. Some provide research and training to NGOs or increase the public’s awareness of their contributions. Others build alliances or bridge the differences among government, business, and civil society groups. The work of these support organizations has catalyzed fundamental changes and maturation throughout the sector. Some notable successes include:

- The Society for Participatory Research in Asia fostered the development of regional and international networks to promote capacity building and training for grassroots organizations. The Delhi-based organization responded to the demand for its services by developing a network of regional support organizations throughout India. It also forged alliances with organizations throughout South Asia that provide training, information, and other resources to strengthen NGOs and help women and disadvantaged populations participate in local and national governance (Brown and Kalegaonkar 2002:240).
- The Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), organized by business leaders, provides financial support to NGOs working on rural development and encourages learning from past initiatives to improve effectiveness. On a larger scale, PBSP has also generated awareness that improving relations between NGOs and businesses is critical to improving funding (Brown and Kalegaonkar 2002:241).
- The Council of National Indigenous Associations of Ecuador (CONAIE) shares information among members and represents them in negotiations with govern-

Box 4.6 Russia's NGOs: Learning to Engage

To successfully advance their interests, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) need to build relationships and be connected—to the public, to government officials, to the business community, and to each other. Yet, engaging the public and other stakeholders is easier said than done. Engagement is especially difficult in countries where civic groups are a relatively new force and there is general public distrust of such institutions and of government bodies.

Russia typifies this situation. Russian NGOs who work on environmental issues have traditionally been distant from the public and the communities in which they work. The leaders and members of these NGOs are often scientists, technical experts, and other professionals who tend to value their links to the scientific community, but who may not be inclined to consult “ordinary citizens.” Indeed, a 1999 survey of Russian environmental NGOs found that 70 percent of these groups routinely consult with scientists to advance their work, while only 30 percent routinely seek involvement from the public (see Table) (Wernstedt 2002a:31).

The survey also found that most environmental NGOs don't work with other Russian or international NGOs on a regular basis. They consult even less frequently with anyone in local government. Weakest of all is their relationship with the private sector. Ninety-two percent of NGOs surveyed reported working with business or industry only “occasionally” or “never” (see Table). The absence of close working relations with these groups means that Russian environmental NGOs often lack an effective entry point to decision-making (Wernstedt 2002a:19, 31)

The problem of civic disengagement goes beyond the NGO community. Many Russian citizens do not actively seek to participate in environmental NGOs or in the political process. This is not due to any legal constraint on public participation. Russians have a constitutional and statutory right to participate in public decision-making and to give their input on environmental matters (Wernstedt 2002b:25). Yet, a recent poll

indicates that only 5 percent of Russians currently participate in public organizations and nearly 75 percent say they have no interest in doing so (Wernstedt 2002b:24).

These results point to the difficulty of building coalitions for action around environmental problems in Russia today. But it may not always be so. Surveys show that the public is concerned about the role of the environment in health issues. Nearly 60 percent of 3,300 Russians surveyed in 2000 reported that they believed the environment caused or contributed to chronic illnesses in their family (Wernstedt 2002a:3-4). If it can be tapped, this concern may offer a viable path to public engagement. At the same time, Russian NGOs are clearly starting to understand the need to involve the public in their work. More than 40 percent of environmental NGOs now rank “increased public involvement” as a top priority for improving environmental policies (Wernstedt 2002a:29).

A Reluctance to Engage?

Percentage of Russian environmental NGOs surveyed who work with:

	Always	Usually	Occasionally or Never
Scientists	70	22	8
Other Russian NGOs	42	23	35
Educators	40	28	32
International NGOs	38	19	43
Local Public	30	30	41
Local Elected Officials	15	42	43
Local Government	15	41	45
Institutions			
Business/Industry	0	8	92

Source: Wernstedt 2002a:31

ments and international agencies when indigenous rights and resources are threatened. The CONAIE federation not only successfully revised a proposed law that jeopardized indigenous land-holdings, but also set the stage for a larger role for indigenous actors in future policy-making (Brown and Kalegaonkar 2002:243, 247-248).

These “support organizations” face their own survival challenges. They must create a constituency for their services—yet civil society actors are often unaware of their

own shortcomings or reluctant to acknowledge their weaknesses (Brown and Kalegaonkar 2002:250, 254).

Coalitions and Alliances

Forming coalitions of environmental NGOs and other civil society groups can be a highly effective way to channel their energy and magnify their effectiveness. By adopting a common stance on key issues of national or international importance and by learning to work together, civil society groups can often achieve synergies that lead to more significant outcomes. They can convene diverse constituencies that sway



policy-makers far more easily than single groups. Influential coalitions include:

- The Danish 92 Group, which coordinated the work of Danish environment and development organizations in preparation for the 1992 Rio Summit and the 2002 Johannesburg Summit. Twenty domestic NGOs participate in the Group.
- The Norwegian Forum for Environment and Development, a network of 60 groups that develops common positions on issues such as global access to safe drinking water, and sustainable agriculture, and mobilizes participation and action on Agenda 21 efforts in Norway. For example, the Forum called for debt cancellation for developing countries, and for a larger portion of development assistance to be channeled to water projects (FwF 2002).
- The Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO) brings together some 2,500 NGOs and cooperatives from the Philippines to discuss issues facing the sector, promote professionalism, and build member consensus on development, NGO, and community issues.

One example of a particularly large and effective international coalition is ECO-FORUM—an alliance of more than 200 environmental organizations from all over Europe. The coalition enjoyed full negotiating powers in the drafting of the Aarhus Convention from 1996 to 1998. This was the first time that NGOs could sit with equal status alongside governments to draft an international treaty. Now that the Aarhus Convention has entered into force, ECO-FORUM remains involved in the implementation process and contributes to decisions on how to interpret and refine the treaty. For example, ECO-FORUM has been active in negotiations on a new treaty that will require signatories to compile annual inventories of pollutants from industrial sources (called Pollutant Release and Transfer Registries, or PRTRs). (See Chapter 6.)

Ultimately, effective participation of civil society groups in environmental governance won't come from simply having larger coalitions or more environmental groups. A greater voice in government and corporate environmental decisions will come as much from the *quality* of civil society efforts as from the *quantity* of people participating or projects undertaken.

The legitimacy of environmental groups—old and new—will depend on their ability to develop sophisticated strategies, to offer substantive knowledge and organization skills, to better measure their own performance, and to better forge connections with each other and with other stakeholders.

