

Forum: Second General Youth Assembly

Issue: Reexamining the role of NGOs while combating climate change

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Introduction

For countless decades, climate change has been one of the world's most constantly mentioned issues after the introduction of this concept in 1824. It can no longer be an unmeddled subject; it has now turned into a dire and imminent catastrophe as humanity has been living at the expense of the earth. Although this planet incrementally fell into this climate exigency, however, no significant action has been taken so far. Despite the concerns expressed by environmentalists and biologists saying that it is irreversible for the environment to reclaim the soundness of its past self due to the amount of loss it obtained, making efforts to mitigate the consequence of climate change is pivotal.

To achieve such goals, Non-Governmental Organizations' (NGOs) contribution has a seminal impact since they conduct awareness campaigns, workshops, seminars, and educational programs, exploring the less-known sides of climate change such as the rising sea levels, heatwaves and droughts, extreme weather events, and loss of biodiversity happening around the world. In fact, NGOs have been playing a significant role in the formation and implementation of global climate change policies.

A few years ago, the achievements made by NGOs were immersive with doubts as little progress had been made in combating climate change. The head of Civicus, a global association of civil society organizations, had expressed concern that NGOs are 'losing the war against climate change'. As NGOs have failed to seek for sufficient amount of long-term solutions and cooperate with more organizations and parties, the negative perspective was reasonable. From then on, NGOs have been gradually improving. For instance, the 196 parties at the UN Climate Change Conference adopted the Paris Agreement as the legal binding of international treaty on climate change in 2015. Its goal was to hold "the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C", and led countless NGOs and individuals to take climate actions.

As such, NGOs should play a consequential role in combating climate change, but the amount made right now is not enough. Actions should be taken now as they might be beyond humanity's control and lead to disastrous results if taken too late. On that note, it should be evident that this topic requires collaboration from all nations. It is

crucial for the countries to cooperate together and come up with realizable means to mitigate the effects of climate change as it is proven by the example of the Paris Agreement.

Definition of Key Terms

Climate change

Climate change is a long-term change in the average patterns of weather that define Earth’s climates. Changes observed in the climate since the mid-20th century are mostly driven by human activities, particularly such as fossil fuel burning, leading to more and more greenhouse gas emissions which increase heat-trapping greenhouse gas levels in Earth’s atmosphere, raising Earth’s average surface temperature. This trapping of the sun’s warmth is called the greenhouse effect.

Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)

NGO refers to a non-profit organization, group, or institution that operates independently from a government and has humanitarian or development objectives. Both NGOs and governments aim to achieve social or political goals, but this voluntary group of individuals (or organizations), is usually not affiliated with any government, that is formed to provide services or to advocate a public policy. The recorded amount of observer NGOs has been escalating ever since the COP(Conference of the Parties)1 was held in 1995 (Figure 1).

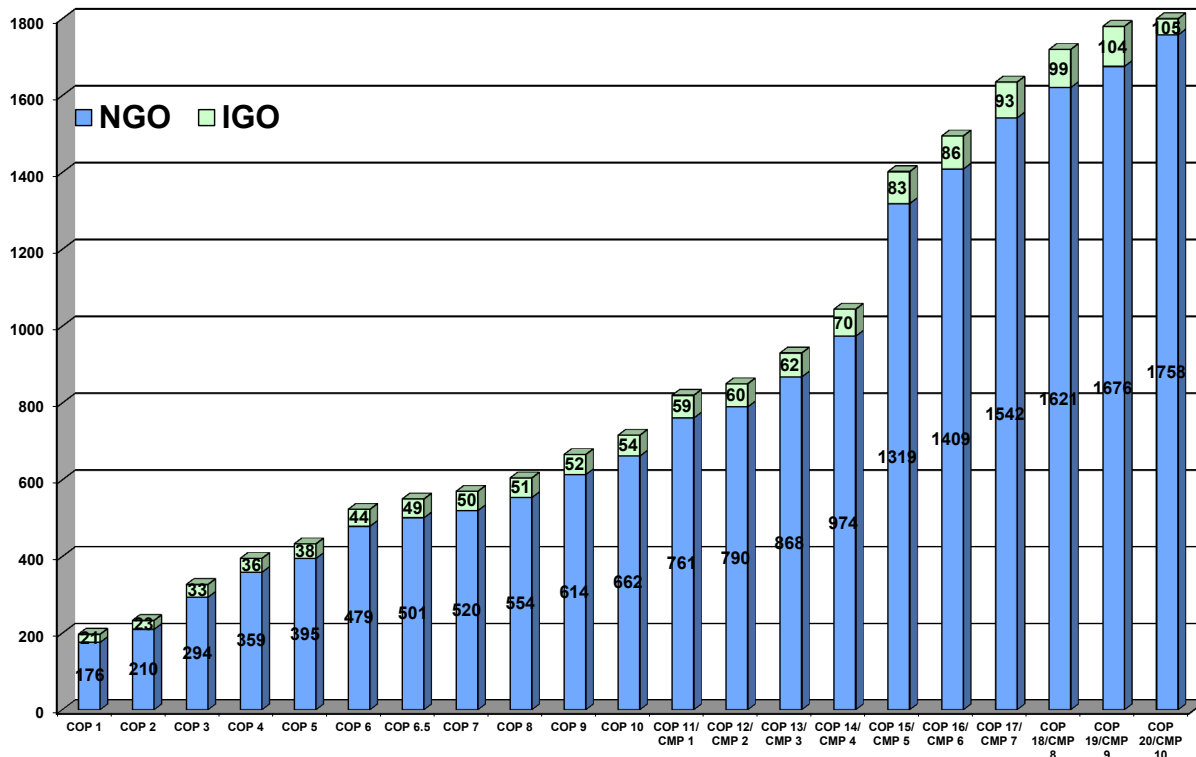


Figure 1: Cumulative Admissions of Observer Organizations to the UNFCCC

Greenhouse gases

Greenhouse gases, any atmospheric gas that has the ability to absorb infrared radiation, thereby contributing to the greenhouse effect, have a profound effect on climate change as they are directly relevant to the prevention of radiation from bouncing back out from the Earth's surface. Greenhouse gases include many different types, having carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide as the most common ones. As the amount of these gases increases to an excessive extent, climate science has already posited that when tipping points are exceeded, it will lead to significant irreversible changes.

Climate adaptation

Climate adaptation refers to the action of adaptation to climate consequences beyond trying to stop or slow the pace of global warming. This is important as climate change is caused by the effect of crucial resources to humans such as coal or gas and therefore it is impossible to not use those substances at all. As a result, the adaptation to the changing environment is necessary.

Climate mitigation

Climate mitigation is the action of cutting the root cause of climate change: for example, there is reducing the flow of heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Climate adaptation and climate mitigation should be taking place at the same time as climate mitigation pursues the reduction of the seriousness of the initial problem while climate adaptation prepares for the unavoidable effects of climate change.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

CSO stands for Civil Society Organization, which is a non-state, not-for-profit, voluntary organization formed by people that is not relevant to either the state or the market. They can include community-based organizations as well as NGOs. As they monitor government policies and actions and hold government accountable, engage in advocacy, and also offer policies for government, they are considered an important source of information for both citizens and governments.

Background Information

To underline once again, the roles of NGOs on the subject of combating climate change should be reassessed due to the unsuccessfulness and nominality of their previous efforts to alleviate this crisis. While the attempts weren't always successful, it cannot be denied that NGOs have been engaging when it comes to combating climate change. The Second General Assembly ought to sagaciously approach this problem by reviewing NGO engagement in climate change, analyzing the challenges faced by NGOs, and seeking for the relevant frameworks and agreements that can guide NGOs' further engagement in climate action.

Overview of NGO Engagement in Climate Change

NGOs are currently involved in diverse and active climate change mitigation and adaptation programs. Organizations are cooperating with NGOs to address the crisis, working by multi-faceted means.

Funding Opportunities

NGOs have access to various funding sources to support their climate-relevant works. First of all, the LIFE Programme, the EU's flagship initiative for funding environmental and climate actions, offers profound opportunities. In 2024, it has deployed €571 million in total for a variety of projects, including €61.98 million only for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Also, it provides €14 million for specific operating grant agreements for NGOs.

Collaboration and Partnerships

NGOs are increasingly collaborating with regional governments and other stakeholders. In February 2024, representatives of NGOs and local governments gathered in Liège, France to discuss the future of the European Green Deal. The Liège Declaration was signed by 70 organizations and networks, calling on the EU to up climate adaptation efforts.

Advocacy and Policy Influence

NGOs play a consequential role in advocating for stronger climate policies and actions as they actively engage in international climate negotiations and bolster more ambitious targets and commitments. NGOs also focus on raising public awareness through online platforms such as CARE Climate Justice Center (<https://careclimatechange.org/>) or Climate Action Network International (<https://climatenetwork.org/>).

Challenges Faced by NGOs

Despite the engagements they have been involved in, NGOs encounter several common challenges that can undermine the effectiveness of their efforts. These challenges include funding and resource mobilization and operational challenges.

Funding and Resource Mobilization

As stated above, an NGO would have the opportunity to get funded if it falls under the conditions provided by funding systems and applies to those available. However, many NGOs heavily rely on donations and grants currently, which are often competitive and subject to fluctuating trends in philanthropy. Consequently, this makes it difficult for the NGOs to secure stabilized funding for long-term projects. The importance of funding can be shown with the World Resource Institute (WRI), which is funded by the MacArthur Foundation and conducts researches and expands its influence without facing funding issues.

Operational Challenges

Climate change isn't an issue that can be easily forboded, hence it is demanding to make predictions and prepare for possible damages the change would make. This uncertainty complicates project designs and implementations. Furthermore, the majority of the plans conducted by NGOs have relatively short durations, which may not be sufficient to achieve significant changes or goals that lead to long-term good.

Even if a project is followed up with a post-project design, it is often underfunded due to inadequate resources, leading to challenges in maintaining and rectifying successful projects. Especially, this is important for LEDCs compared to MEDCs, as their ability to respond to the aftermath of climate change is limited to a small extent as they may lack adequate resources and technology. Therefore, continuous support and resources are necessary to guarantee long-term sustainability.

Major Parties and Organizations Involved

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

The UNFCCC hosts international meetings where NGOs are engaged as observers. NGOs can participate in and influence the negotiation process through lobbying, reporting and analyzing the progress in the negotiations, and acting as watchdogs for their organizations. It acts as a bridge between NGOs and governments, which leads to easier integration and reflection of NGOs' perspectives.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

The IPCC was established by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in 1988. It provides climate-scientific assessments that involve NGOs in the review processes. As the IPCC informs international climate policies and makes sure that the shared information is accessible and inclusive of voices from diverse perspectives, NGOs can use its reports to advocate for more effective climate actions. The organization has been publishing comprehensive scientific assessment reports every five to seven years, and is currently in its seventh assessment phase.

World Resources Institute (WRI)

WRI is a global research NGO that focuses on six critical goals: climate, energy, food, forests, water, and cities and transport. As the organization is established with funding from the MacArthur Foundation, it doesn't face financial hardships. Plus, it is active in over 50 countries including but not limited to Brazil, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, the Netherlands, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Its partnership with NGOs helps in shaping effective policies and facilitating the sharing of knowledge between NGOs and governments.

World Bank

The World Bank is a major funder of climate investments in developing countries, setting a finance target of 35% for FY (financial year) 21-25. It provides financial and technical assistance for climate change mitigation and adaptation projects. As NGOs lack that support, the World Bank cooperates with them for the implementation of projects and the development of policies.

Timeline of Events

Year	Description of event
1972	Stockholm Conference, the first major international environmental conference where NGOs began to play a key role, was held.
1988	The IPCC was established by the UN to assess climate science and policy.
1992	The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro led to the creation of the UNFCCC, with crucial NGO participations and advocacy.
2007	The IPCC was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about human-caused climate change, with support from NGOs.
2015	The Paris Agreement was adopted at COP21, with NGOs playing a significant role in advocating for firm targets and buttressing the agreement's ratification.
2019	The NGO involved in Greta Thunberg's school strike for climate, which inspired a global movement, organizing strikes and advocating for climate action.
2020	The COP26 conference focused on strengthening climate commitments and mobilizing finance for climate action, highlighting the importance of NGOs' active participation and advocacy for bold outcomes.
2022	The climate action summit by the UN Secretary-General stressed accelerating climate action and increasing the climate finances. It called upon NGOs to advocate for increased ambition and effective solutions.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

UNFCCC

In 1995, the UNFCCC held the first Conference of the Parties in Berlin, establishing the UNFCCC's initial framework and mechanisms. Ever since, it has been hosting this annual negotiation, which is essential for shaping global climate action and coming up with feasible designs. It has been adopting important protocols such as the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, the Bali Action Plan in 2007, the Paris Agreement in 2015, and the Glasgow Climate Pact in 2021. Overall, the COPs have been beneficial in shaping the frame for climate policies and drawing the public's attention to the topic. These conferences have supported shedding light on the climate issue, demonstrating the gravity of collective ideas ultimately leading to action and setting future goals.

IPCC

Having been founded in 1988 with the purpose of assessing climate science and policies, the IPCC's mission is to provide an objective, scientific view of climate change and its impacts based on the latest research and

evidence. The first Assessment Report established in 1990 was a foundational document that emphasized the role of human activities in climate change and called for global action to mitigate the issue. Since then, it has long established Assessment Reports every once in a few years. Being acknowledged for its effectiveness in dealing with climate change mitigation, the Fourth Assessment Report was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007. Also, it takes part in scientific outreach and policy support. Analyzing the current climate research data and deciphering it into relatively easily-accessible information for the policymakers, the IPCC works as a bridge to fill in the gap between science and policy. It also held expert meetings and workshops to aim for interactions and knowledge-sharing among scientists, policymakers, and stakeholders, thereby securing the policymakers are aware of the latest outcome of scientific research.

Possible Solutions

The current support and resources provided to NGOs may not be sufficient, therefore leading to the ineffectiveness of the policies or project designs produced. As a result, a new, better way of facilitating NGOs is needed, aided by reinforcement of the partnerships between NGOs and governments or policymakers. Also, the general public should be able to know whether the organization they are likely to support is trustworthy and transparent. The nations should come up with solutions such as but not limited to:

1. Strengthening partnerships between NGOs and stakeholders

One of the biggest challenges the NGOs face when planning for long-term projects and polishing them is having lose partnerships with relevant stakeholders and institutions. This action can be implemented by the local and international authorities; an example means to conduct this is to hold an annual international conference between the NGOs and local authorities. Moreover, this approach can result in cooperation between NGOs and other sectors, facilitating collaborative research and resource sharing.

2. Enhancing the transparency and accountability of NGOs

NGOs should always be righteous and accountable to the public. This method can be applied using ways such as but not limited to creating a website reporting the current events NGOs are involved in, using the funds supported by the government and public. The recordings should not be the responsibility of the NGOs themselves but rather a professional individual who has sufficient knowledge on the topic of climate change. The UN might have to foster some experts who are suitable and willing to support this process.

3. Increasing support for NGOs financially and intellectually

According to Gret, the funding for NGOs is currently considered poor. Nations can invest in NGOs and encourage their people to join. They can also share their discoveries of climate change if their own research has shown a fresh result in international meetings with NGOs. However, this might cause fiscal loss for the government, therefore leading to a decrease in those who desire to help.

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