

English Summary

A Study on the Role of Environmental NGOs in the Environmental Impact Assessment System

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (Environmental NGOs) within Japan's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) system, focusing particularly on their participation in the decision-making process as an essential element of sustainable development.

Chapter 1 reviews the development of Japan's environmental legislation during the 1990s and highlights the increasing emphasis placed on public participation. The Environmental Impact Assessment Act enacted in 1997 significantly expanded assessment items, introduced earlier stages of environmental consideration, and promoted greater public access to environmental information. These institutional changes created new opportunities and responsibilities for Environmental NGOs to participate in environmental decision-making.

Despite the recognized importance of Environmental NGOs, previous studies had provided very limited empirical evidence regarding how these organizations actually contribute to the EIA process. Therefore, this research adopted a case-study approach to investigate the practical roles of Environmental NGOs and to identify the conditions necessary for them to contribute effectively.

Chapter 2 defines the concept of Environmental NGOs and examines their organizational characteristics in Japan. In this study, Environmental NGOs are defined as non-governmental and non-profit citizen organizations dedicated to environmental conservation regardless of their legal status. The analysis revealed that Japanese Environmental NGOs actively engage in environmental protection, public education, scientific investigation, and research. However, many organizations remain relatively small in terms of both organizational capacity and financial resources. Consequently, this research focused primarily on local Environmental NGOs possessing extensive knowledge of the environmental conditions within the project area.

Chapter 3 analyzes public participation procedures within Japan's EIA system and proposes three primary roles of Environmental NGOs:

Monitor— monitoring whether environmental information provided by project proponents accurately investigates, predicts, and evaluates local environmental conditions;

Information Provider— supplying locally accumulated environmental knowledge to project proponents and government authorities; and

Public Advocate– influencing public opinion and encouraging decision-makers to incorporate adequate environmental considerations when deficiencies exist within the assessment process.

Because many Environmental NGOs operate with limited resources, the study also hypothesized that cooperation and networking among NGOs would be essential for effective participation.

Chapter 4 presents the Eastern Coastal Development Project at the Awase Tidal Flats in Okinawa as the first case study. Through interviews with project proponents, government officials, and Environmental NGO representatives, together with chronological analysis of project documents, the study examined interactions among stakeholders.

The findings indicate that Environmental NGOs became involved too late in the assessment process to fully perform the three proposed roles. In particular, opportunities to provide local environmental information through formal EIA procedures were limited. Although NGOs attempted to provide environmental information through alternative channels, information submitted outside the official EIA framework received little consideration from project proponents. The study also identified insufficient information disclosure by project developers and emphasized the necessity of early networking among Environmental NGOs.

Chapter 5 analyzes the Fujimae Tidal Flat Landfill Project in Nagoya, where Environmental NGOs successfully fulfilled their expected roles.

Unlike the Awase case, local and regional Environmental NGOs participated from the earliest planning stages. Their scientific investigations and environmental information, submitted through the formal EIA process, ultimately contributed to the suspension of the proposed development project. The study concludes that several factors were critical to this success:

long-term accumulation of reliable local environmental information;

effective use of formal EIA procedures for information submission;

strong collaborative networks among Environmental NGOs established during the early planning stages; and institutional support through transparent information disclosure and well-developed public participation procedures provided by the Nagoya municipal government.

Finally, Chapter 6 integrates the findings of the study and presents the overall conclusions together with recommendations for future research.

The study concludes that Environmental NGOs should not be viewed merely as opposition groups but as essential stakeholders contributing to environmental governance. Early public participation, transparent information disclosure, and collaborative networks among Environmental NGOs significantly improve the quality of environmental decision-making and enhance the effectiveness

of Environmental Impact Assessment systems.