

# A Comparative Look at NGO Influence in International Environmental Negotiations: Desertification and Climate Change

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## 1. The Need for a Systematic Approach to Studying NGO Influence

Recognizing the increasing importance of NGOs as global eyes and ears, researchers have devoted substantial efforts to understanding nonstate actor influence on the formulation of international environmental politics. Yet, most questions of how and under what conditions NGOs matter remain unanswered. Gathering evidence of NGO influence in a more systematic and consistent fashion would enable researchers to examine more thoroughly the plausibility that NGOs affect international environmental negotiations.

A review of the literature demonstrates large discrepancies between approaches and reveals such discrepancy in the types of evidence used to indicate NGO influence that very few conclusions can be drawn about the overall level of NGO influence. To address this lack of a systematic approach, we have developed an analytical framework for the study of NGO influence in international environmental negotiations (Betsill and Corell 2001, in this issue).

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the utility of that framework through analysis of two cases: the negotiations of the Desertification Convention and of the Kyoto Protocol to the Climate Change Convention. Using the methodological strategy we suggest, we illustrate how the framework strengthens findings of NGO influence in any given case, as well as allows for comparison between cases. This comparison helps identify explanatory factors that account for variation in NGO influence, ultimately contributing to a better understanding of the role NGOs play in international environmental policy-making in general.

This article first briefly introduces our framework. To test and demonstrate its utility, we proceed to apply the framework to the desertification and climate change negotiations. After comparing the outcomes, we finally initiate a discus-

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sion about explanatory factors that contribute to the variation of NGO influence in international environmental negotiations.

## 2. A Framework for Analyzing NGO Influence

An analysis of the current literature on NGOs calls for a need to gather and analyze evidence of NGO influence in a more systematic manner.<sup>1</sup> The framework we propose addresses three weaknesses in the literature on NGOs by: specifying which political arena the analysis pertains to; explicitly defining “influence” and specifying what types of evidence can help indicate influence; and exploring the causal mechanisms between NGO activity and influence. This framework relies on triangulation—the use of multiple data types, sources and methodologies.

Progress in our understanding of the conditions of NGO influence depends on a more careful consideration of what we mean by NGO influence and how influence might be identified. Lack of consistency in the types of evidence used to indicate NGO influence makes it difficult to determine whether NGOs were more or less influential in one case than another. In addition, there is a risk of over-determination as scholars look for any possible sign that NGOs made a difference while ignoring evidence suggesting that NGOs had little effect.

We argue that researchers need to clearly define what they mean by “influence.” The definition is closely related to the political arena, which is why we emphasize the need to specify which political arena the analysis of NGO influence pertains to. Consequently, our framework definition is guided by the conditions on the arena we have chosen to focus on—international environmental negotiations—where states have the decisionmaking power over both contents of decisions and over procedural issues. What governments need from NGOs in this arena is knowledge and thus the strategy NGOs rely on is the provision of information with the purpose of changing negotiators’ minds.<sup>2</sup> Thus, *influence can be said to have occurred “when one actor intentionally transmits information to another that alters the latter’s actions from what would have occurred without that information.”*<sup>3</sup> The two aspects of this notion of influence are, first, the intentional transmission of information and, second, alterations in behavior in response to that information.

Equipped with the tool of a definition, scholars can proceed to determine what types of evidence can be used to indicate NGO influence. We propose col-

1. For the purposes of this paper we use the term “NGOs” to refer to the wide range of organizations involved in international environmental negotiations. In our analysis, we discuss how the profile of organizations involved in a negotiation can impact NGO influence.
2. While states have military and political resources and the private sector has economic resources with which they can exert influence, the provision of knowledge and information is the key NGO resource for influence. We regard information as a set of data that have not been placed in a larger context. When information is placed within such a context—by relating it to previously gained knowledge—it becomes knowledge and can be used at a general level as the basis for assessments and action. Corell 1999a, 22.
3. Knocke 1990, 3.

lecting a combination of three types of evidence regarding NGO participation: *activity*, *access* to negotiations, and *resources*. This evidence relates to NGO participation in international environmental negotiations and addresses the first aspect of the influence definition, the intentional transmission of information. In addition, we argue that researchers need to determine whether those strategies had any effects, responding to the second aspect of the influence definition—whether negotiators altered their behavior in response to the information they received. Therefore, evidence regarding *goal attainment*—whether political outcomes reflect the objectives of NGOs—is needed to make a credible statement about whether NGOs were successful in their ambition to exert influence. We stress that it is important to examine the negotiation process as well as the outcome. Simply investigating whether the final agreement—the outcome—reflects NGO goals does not take into account the possibility that NGOs might have affected the negotiating process. For instance, placing issues on the negotiation agenda or creating specific jargon can shape the debate and ultimately affect how the issue is understood. Such influence can be reflected in the agreement text but is difficult to trace directly back to NGO goals unless events in the negotiation process are examined.

Finally, we call for the use of methodologies to analyze the evidence gathered that allow researchers to control for over-determination and to ensure better quality research results. While the evidence may suggest that NGOs were instrumental in influencing the final agreement text or the overall negotiating context, it is important to consider whether other actors with similar goals might have been responsible. We argue that scholars can strengthen claims of NGO influence through the use of process tracing and counterfactual analysis, both of which help researchers elaborate the causal mechanisms between NGO participation and influence.

Process tracing requires researchers to build a logical chain of evidence linking NGO participation in international environmental negotiations with the effects of that participation. Such a chain could for instance be to, first, demonstrate that NGOs engaged in intentional information transmission, second, consider whether negotiators received that information, and third, examine whether changes in actor behavior was consistent with the information provided.

Counterfactual analysis considers whether the negotiations might have been different if NGOs had been absent. This is carried out through thought experiments as well as through asking participants in negotiating processes to carry out the same thought experiments. To avoid over-determination, it is important to include in that group—in addition to NGOs and government representatives directly concerned in the transmission and reception of information—observers who have little interest in overstating any actor group's influence.

This strategy makes possible a qualitative assessment of NGO influence in terms of high or low levels of influence, based on multiple data types, sources, and methodologies. The analytical framework is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Framework for Analyzing NGO Influence in International Environmental Negotiations. (Cells contain examples of questions researchers might ask.)

<b>Research Task: Gather Evidence of NGO Influence (2 dimensions)</b>		
Triangulation by:	<b>1) Intentional transmission of information</b>	<b>2) Behavior of other actors</b>
<b>Data Type</b>	<p><i>NGO participation</i></p> <p><i>Activities:</i> What did NGOs do to transmit information to decision makers?</p> <p><i>Access:</i> What opportunities did NGOs have to transmit information?</p> <p><i>Resources:</i> What sources of leverage did NGOs use to transmit information?</p>	<p><i>Goal attainment</i></p> <p><i>Outcome:</i> Does the final agreement contain text drafted by NGOs?</p> <p>Does the final agreement reflect NGO goals and principles?</p> <p><i>Process:</i> Did negotiators discuss issues proposed by NGOs (or cease to discuss issues opposed by NGOs)?</p> <p>Did NGOs coin terms that became part of the negotiating jargon?</p>
<b>Data Source</b>	<p><i>Primary texts</i> (e.g. draft decisions, country position statements, the final agreement, NGO lobbying materials)</p> <p><i>Secondary texts</i> (e.g. <i>ECO</i>, <i>Earth Negotiations Bulletin</i>, media reports, press releases)</p> <p><i>Interviews</i> (government delegates, observers and NGOs)</p> <p><i>Researcher observations</i> during the negotiations</p>	
<b>Research Task: Analyze Evidence of NGO Influence</b>		
<b>Methodology</b>	<p><i>Process Tracing</i></p> <p>What were the causal mechanisms linking NGO participation in international environmental negotiations with their influence?</p>	<p><i>Counterfactual Analysis</i></p> <p>What would have happened if NGOs had not participated in the negotiations?</p>

### 2.1. *Using the Framework*

In this article, we demonstrate the utility of the analytical framework by applying it to two cases. First, this illustrates how the framework can be used in empirical research and, second, shows how the framework provides a foundation for much-needed comparative research on the role of NGOs in international environmental negotiations. In our analysis, we simply evaluate NGO influence on the political process, not whether NGO influence ultimately leads to better environmental outcomes or better environmental problem solving. In addition, this research strategy is not a linear process. After analysis of a first round of gathered data, for instance, the scholar will likely have to collect additional data of different types to complement the first analysis.

In applying the framework to the cases, we begin—guided by the definition of “influence”—by developing a set of indicators to assess NGO influence on international environmental negotiations. If NGOs were influential in a negotiation, we would expect to observe NGOs: (1) being present at the negotiations; (2) providing written information supporting a particular position (such as newsletters, research reports or papers, or information leaflets) to relevant government ministries or to the negotiation sessions; (3) providing verbal information supporting a particular position (through statements, information meetings or seminars during negotiation sessions); and (4) providing specific advice to government delegations through direct interaction. We would further expect that NGOs would have had: (5) opportunity to define the environmental issue under negotiation; (6) opportunity to shape the negotiating agenda; and (7) ability to ensure that certain text supporting a particular position is incorporated in the Convention. These indicators relate to the types of evidence specified in the analytical framework regarding NGO participation (activities, access and resources) and NGO goal-attainment (both negotiation outcome and process).

Individually the indicators cannot point to specific levels of influence, but aggregated the indicators can indicate high, moderate or low levels of NGO influence. Indicators 1–4 address aspects of NGO participation, which is necessary but not sufficient evidence of NGO influence. NGOs cannot be said to have influenced a negotiation without having fulfilled at least some of the first four indicators. Indicators 5–7 relate to the observable effects of NGO participation and are ultimately the most significant factors in judging levels of NGO influence in any particular case. In instances of low influence, NGOs participate in negotiations but without effect. Moderate influence is when NGOs participate and have some success in shaping the negotiating process. The critical distinction between moderate and high levels of NGO influence relates to effects on the outcome of the negotiations. When NGO participation can be linked to specific effects in the agreement text, NGOs can be said to have exerted a high level of influence in a particular negotiation. Notably, this analysis cannot give any guidance as to the relative influence of NGOs compared to other actor groups.<sup>4</sup>

4. Arts 1998, 84–85.

Using those indicators we form a preliminary estimate of the level of NGO influence in the negotiations of the Desertification Convention and the Kyoto Protocol. Using process tracing and counterfactual analysis, we identify causal mechanisms linking NGOs to specific outcomes. This process, we hope to show, advances scholarly assessment of NGO influence in international environmental politics.

### 3. The Cases

This section briefly introduces the Desertification Convention and the Kyoto Protocol and provides background on their negotiation. The choice of cases is guided, first, by our intimate knowledge of them from earlier research and, second, by how well suited they are for this exercise.<sup>5</sup> They display a variation in results, which helps illustrate the utility of the framework—as well as its potential for useful application to other cases. Third, both negotiations occurred after the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which constituted a watershed in terms of NGO activity and involvement in international-level intergovernmental decisionmaking. Notably, the desertification case examines social and environmental NGOs (referred to as NGOs), while the climate change case examines environmental NGOs (ENGOs) only and excludes private sector NGOs.

#### 3.1. *The Desertification Convention*

The decision to negotiate a convention on desertification, or dryland degradation, was made after considerable political maneuvering in the final hours of UNCED, during negotiations of Chapter 12 of Agenda 21 on drought and desertification. The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Desertification (INCD) was established to develop a convention and this body met 12 times between 1993 and 1997. In June 1994, at INCD-5, the *United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification* (UNCCD) was completed. It came into force in December 1996 and the first Conference of the Parties (COP-1) was held in 1997. COPs have been held annually until 2001. As of 29 August 2001, the UNCCD had 176 Parties.

Regarded as the first sustainable development treaty, the UNCCD combines addressing the environmental problem of soil degradation with consideration of economic and social development needs. The Convention defines desertification as “land degradation in arid, semi-arid, dry sub-humid areas re-

5. Each of us have carried out extensive research on the respective cases by studying documentation, attending negotiations, and conducting interviews. Corell attended all Desertification Convention negotiating sessions from 1993 to 1997 and Betsill attended one session of the Kyoto Protocol negotiations in 1997. We collected information by interviewing officials of the negotiations, government delegates, members of the Secretariats, representatives of various UN bodies, NGOs and other observers. We also collected observations in “Author’s notes.” For detailed discussions of the cases, see Corell 1999a; and Betsill 2000.

sulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities” (UN 1994, Article 1, paragraph a). The 40-article main text is supplemented by five regional implementation Annexes for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Northern Mediterranean, and Central and Eastern Europe. The greater size and detail of the African Annex illustrates the emphasis placed on that region.

To fulfill the Convention’s objective of combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought, Parties commit to undertaking concrete national commitments for practical action, particularly at the local level, specifically by developing National Action Programmes (NAPs) to Combat Desertification. Cooperation across national borders is to be coordinated in Sub-Regional and Regional Action Programmes (SRAPs and RAPs). The Convention offers recommendations for dryland management to governments of affected countries and to donors by providing a framework for cooperation—informally referred to as the “bottom-up approach”—between local land users, NGOs, governments, international organizations, funding agencies, and northern donor countries. Only affected developing country Parties are eligible for assistance under the Convention.

### 3.2. *The Kyoto Protocol*

The Kyoto Protocol to the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) was agreed upon in Kyoto, Japan in December 1997. The Protocol responded to concerns that the commitments contained in the 1992 UNFCCC (which required industrialized countries to stabilize their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 1990 levels by 2000) were insufficient to meet its long-term objective of stabilizing atmospheric concentrations of GHGs. At the first Conference of the Parties (COP-1) in March 1995, delegates adopted the “Berlin Mandate,” which required parties to negotiate a protocol by 1997 containing quantified emissions reduction and limitation objectives.

The Ad Hoc Group on the Berlin Mandate (AGBM) met nine times between August 1995 and December 1997. Protocol negotiations also took place at COP-2 (Geneva) and COP-3 (Kyoto). Debate focused on whether all countries (industrialized and developing) ought to be obligated to limit their GHG emissions and the extent to which those emissions should be limited. The Kyoto Protocol requires industrialized states to reduce their aggregate GHG emissions 5% below 1990 levels in the period 2008–2012. In subsequent meetings, Parties have tried to work out the rules for how industrialized states can achieve that goal. The Protocol has not yet entered into force; it must be ratified by 55 Parties, incorporating Parties responsible for at least 55% of total industrialized country GHG emissions. As of 28 September 2001, 84 Parties had signed the Protocol and 40 Parties had ratified. At COP-6 part 2 (Bonn) in July 2001, Parties adopted the “Bonn Agreement,” a package of decisions aimed to allow the Protocol to enter into force without the USA before the World Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2002.

## 4. Applying the Framework

In this section, we apply the analytical framework to assess NGO influence in the UNCCD and Kyoto Protocol negotiations. We examine the evidence on NGO participation and goal attainment, compare the evidence to the indicators developed above, trace the causal mechanisms of NGO influence, and finally summarize the conclusions. It is important to note that the essential first step of separately analyzing the two cases has been excluded here. We present the analysis of the cases in parallel to tie them directly to the theoretical framework and to allow for a swifter transition to the comparative conclusions.

### 4.1. Evidence on NGO Participation

From INCD-1 to COP-1 (1993-97), a total of 187 environmental and social NGOs actively participated in the UNCCD process.<sup>6</sup> The majority of the NGOs could be classified as representing grassroots' interests. There was always a core group of about 40 organizations active at the meetings and 30 organizations participated in five or more of the 12 meetings.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, more than 40 organizations sent representatives to at least two of the AGBM sessions and at each session there was an average of 100 representatives of environmental NGOs. In the UNCCD negotiations, Africa was by far the most represented geographic region: almost one-half (91 NGOs) of the total participating NGOs and just over one-third (11 NGOs) of the organizations that attended most frequently were based in Africa. In contrast, the environmental community participating in the Kyoto Protocol negotiations was dominated by northern NGOs; only one-fourth of the ENGOS came from the South and these organizations typically sent only one or two representatives compared to the much larger northern groups.

*4.1.1. Activities.* NGOs undertook numerous activities throughout the UNCCD and Kyoto Protocol negotiations. At INCD meetings, the NGOs coordinated their activities, usually met twice daily during the sessions, lobbied delegates, and held seminars. At the AGBM meetings, ENGOS coordinated their activities under the umbrella of the Climate Action Network (CAN).<sup>8</sup> They too met daily, lobbied delegates and held seminars. In both cases, NGOs created their own working groups focusing on issues they felt were particularly important. In the UNCCD negotiations, these included: institutions; regional instruments for Africa and South America; capacity building, education and public awareness;

6. For each case, these numbers are based on the authors' calculations from lists of participants issued at the meetings. The number of accredited NGOs is often higher and there is usually a discrepancy between that number and the actual number attending. For instance, a total of 360 NGOs had been accredited by COP-1 of the UNCCD, but only 187 had attended one or more meetings. See Corell et al. 1997, 2.

7. Interview, INCD Chairman, 20 February 1998. See also Corell 1999b.

8. CAN was formed in 1989 for ENGOS interested in the problem of climate change and today has more than 280 members. Additional information is available at <http://www.climatenetwork.org>.

financial resources and mechanisms; and science and technology.<sup>9</sup> In the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, these included emissions trading, sinks,<sup>10</sup> and compliance and review. In the case of the UNCCD negotiations, this coordination enabled NGOs to make statements on behalf of all attending NGOs. NGO statements were often reproduced in the newsletter *ECO*, which was produced by NGOs at both sets of negotiations. *ECO* is a major NGO lobbying device, where NGOs publish their statements, editorials, short case studies and other comments. As the two negotiation processes evolved, NGOs gained the confidence of numerous government delegates and had the opportunity to meet formally and informally with delegations, allowing them to provide specific input on certain aspects of the negotiations. In the UNCCD case, NGOs were successful at persuading government delegations themselves to propose ideas that originated with the NGOs.

NGOs were also active in between negotiating sessions. In the UNCCD case, NGOs usually held coordination meetings before and after the INCD sessions. In some instances, the NGOs held international or regional conferences in preparation for INCEDs. Such conferences at times resulted in statements or reports, including drafting proposals, subsequently presented to the negotiations. Also during the UNCCD process, NGOs created *Le Réseau d'ONG sur la Désertification et la Sécheresse* (RIOD)—a world-wide network for cooperation between NGOs involved in the implementation of the Convention. RIOD was established in June 1994, when the Convention text was agreed upon, and it has since gained recognition as an NGO focal point. The UNCCD Secretariat and governments use RIOD to channel information to all NGOs interested in the UNCCD. In between AGBM meetings, some CAN members met regularly with other members in their respective regions to devise strategies for lobbying particular governments.

4.1.2. *Access.* NGOs participating in the UNCCD process were given considerable access to negotiations. In contrast, ENGOs had limited access to the Kyoto Protocol negotiations. In the UNCCD case, NGOs benefited from the precedent set at UNCED giving NGOs a greater role. The resolution—authored by the developing countries—that established a negotiating committee for the elaboration of a desertification convention invited all NGOs and especially encouraged NGOs “from developing countries to contribute constructively to the success of the negotiating process.”<sup>11</sup> The NGOs participated in all meetings except those behind closed doors. The NGOs were also supported from the beginning of the negotiations by the INCD Chairman—who met with them once or twice per session for briefings—the UNCCD Secretariat and many government delegations. In the words of one NGO: “Our success is not only a result of our hard

9. Interview, NGO representative 2, 27 October 1994; Author's notes 19 November 1995; and Walubengo 1994, 3–4.

10. Sinks are “physical and biological processes . . . which remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.” UNEP and WMO no date.

11. UNGA 1992, paragraph 19.

work, it is also a result of cooperation with our allies in the Secretariat, some northern governments and a few southern governments."<sup>12</sup>

During the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, at least one CAN representative delivered a formal statement during each of the AGBM and COP meetings. However, NGOs could not circulate on the floor during plenary sessions, and by the end of the process, delegates met primarily in closed-door sessions from which NGOs were excluded. Environmentalists became adept at using more indirect strategies for following the negotiations and promoting their positions. They developed and used informal relationships with government delegates, lurked in corridors hoping to corner delegates and even searched trashcans and copiers in hopes of retrieving draft documents.<sup>13</sup> ENGOs and delegates also communicated via cell phones; on several occasions, delegates reportedly called ENGO representatives to get their opinion on a proposal being discussed in a closed-door session, which enabled ENGOs to contribute to debates while not physically in the room.<sup>14</sup>

*4.1.3. Resources.* In both the UNCCD and Kyoto Protocol negotiations, technical knowledge was NGOs' most valuable resource. In the eyes of desertification negotiators, NGOs possessed key know-how essential for effective treaty implementation and were referred to as "partners in development." In addition, the NGOs represented what the Convention refers to as "local/traditional knowledge," a type of knowledge recognized as an important complement to scientific knowledge for addressing dryland degradation.<sup>15</sup> During the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, ENGOs had specialized knowledge on issues such as sinks and emissions trading that delegates required to help them choose among policy options. It is important to note, however, that ENGOs did not have a monopoly on this type of knowledge.

ENGOs' link to public opinion was another valuable source of leverage during the Kyoto Protocol negotiations. Particularly among industrialized countries, ENGOs were seen as the people's voice and shapers of public views about climate change and the appropriateness of governments' responses. Thus governments paid attention to how they were portrayed by ENGOs.

In each case, NGOs were somewhat limited in their financial resources. In the case of the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, this presented a particular challenge for the southern groups.<sup>16</sup> The INCD Secretariat and individual countries provided funding for NGO participation as well as pre- and post-INCD meetings. This allowed NGOs to meet before and after sessions to coordinate their efforts. The climate change Secretariat also provided some funds (raised from individ-

12. Interview, NGO representative 2, 27 January 1994.

13. Interviews: ENGO 4, 26 October 1998; ENGO 8, 17 February 1999; and ENGO 9, 18 February 1999.

14. Interviews: ENGO 3, 8 December 1997; ENGO 7, 16 February 1999; ENGO 9, 18 February 1999; and Delegate 4, 22 February 1999.

15. Corell 1999a.

16. E-mail correspondence, ENGO 11, 3 March 1999.

ual countries) for NGO participation, but the funds were often insufficient and CAN regularly made appeals to delegates for more funding.

#### 4.2. Evidence on NGO Goal Attainment

The environmental and social NGO positions during the Desertification Convention negotiations can be summarized into three points. The agreement should: (1) encourage the use of a participatory bottom-up approach in its implementation; (2) reflect the social and economic consequences of land degradation for populations in affected areas; and (3) provide “new and additional resources” for dryland management projects in affected developing countries. ENGOs had four main objectives during the Kyoto Protocol negotiations. They argued the Protocol should (1) require industrialized countries to reduce their GHG emissions 20% below 1990 levels by 2005; (2) include strong review and compliance mechanisms; (3) not allow industrialized Parties to meet their commitments through emissions trading; and (4) not allow Parties to get credit for emissions absorbed by sinks (ECO Team 1997c).

*4.2.1. Effects on Negotiation Outcome.* NGOs participating in the UNCCD process were more successful in influencing the final text than were ENGOs participating in the Kyoto Protocol negotiations. The UNCCD reflects the bottom-up approach and contains language on the social and economic consequences. By encouraging and convincing delegates to include and retain many formulations, NGOs were able to ensure the incorporation of numerous references to NGOs, popular participation, the importance of local/traditional knowledge and other NGO proposals in the Convention text. Notable is the language on the importance of local participation and NGO involvement in the implementation of the Convention, specifically in the NAPs to combat desertification in Article 10, paragraph 2(f).<sup>17</sup> One government delegate said that this is “the only Convention where the NGOs are in the provisions to be involved in the implementation of the Convention. This is the first time in any international legal instrument.”<sup>18</sup> Another example is the UNCCD recommendation in Article 21, paragraph 1(d) of the establishment of national desertification funds, a proposal that originated with the NGOs.<sup>19</sup>

It is debatable, however, whether there are any new resources devoted to dryland management activities after the implementation of the Convention. The mandate of the UNCCD financial mechanism—the Global Mechanism—is not to collect new resources for combating desertification but rather to channel and mobilize existing resources towards dryland degradation efforts.

In contrast, the Kyoto Protocol text does not clearly reflect the ENGO goals. While industrialized countries committed to reducing GHG emissions,

17. UN 1994.

18. Interview, Delegate 33, 10 October 1997.

19. Interviews: NGO representative 6, 6 October 1997(A); NGO representative 7, 6 October 1997(A); Bernstein et al. 1994, 1; and ECO Team 1994a and 1994b.

the commitments were not as stringent as NGOs had hoped. Many delegates questioned the political and economic feasibility of a 20% reduction target and thus never seriously considered the ENGO proposal. The Protocol does not contain compliance and review mechanisms. Article 17 permits Parties to achieve commitments through emissions trading and Article 3 makes allowances for Parties to receive credits for emissions absorbed by sinks.<sup>20</sup>

*4.2.2. Effects on Negotiation Process.* In both cases, NGOs influenced the negotiating process in ways that cannot readily be observed in the treaty texts. During the UNCCD process, NGOs established the international network of NGOs on desertification (RIOD) and prompted the ground-breaking decision to devote Plenary meetings at COPs to government-NGO dialogue, where NGOs get the chance to address government representatives from the podium. NGOs also contributed to shaping the negotiating agenda towards emphasis on the participatory bottom-up approach to implementation of the Convention, as well as by proposing and pushing for the establishment of desertification funds.

In the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, ENGOs shaped debate over emissions trading by coining the term “hot air,” referring to the ability of a country whose emissions are already below its legally binding limit to trade the difference. The term hot air has since become a part of the jargon and continues to be a central part of discussions on emissions trading. Similarly, ENGOs catalyzed debate on the inclusion of sinks in the Kyoto Protocol. CAN members were concerned about the lack of methodologies for calculating removals of GHGs by sinks.<sup>21</sup> Although the Protocol does permit countries to get credit for emissions absorbed by sinks, delegates were unable to agree on how these levels would be calculated. Technical decisions about how sinks would be treated were left for future negotiations.

### *4.3. Indicators of NGO Influence*

Comparing the evidence to our indicators, our preliminary assessment is that NGOs exerted significant influence over the UNCCD process, while ENGOs only had moderate influence in the Kyoto Protocol negotiations (see Table 2). In the UNCCD case, NGOs fulfilled almost all of the indicators. They provided written and verbal information to the negotiation sessions and to some government ministries, and provided specific advice to and interacted with government delegations while present at the meetings. They had no opportunity, however, to define the environmental issue under negotiation. Delegates decided to retain the language on the extent, impacts and definition of desertification that had already been determined in the negotiations of Chapter 12 of Agenda 21—with virtually non-existent NGO participation as very few were present. But NGOs did contribute to shaping the negotiating agenda by insisting on the necessity of a bot-

20. UN 1997.

21. ECO Team 1997b.

**Table 2.**

A Comarative Look at NGO Influence in the UNCCD and Kyoto Protocol Cases

Influence indicator	UNCCD	Kyoto Protocol
Presence at negotiations	yes	yes
Provision of written information	yes	yes
Provision of verbal information	yes	yes
Provision of advice through direct interaction	yes	limited
Opportunity to define the issue	no	no
Opportunity to shape the agenda	yes	yes
Ability to incorporate text in the agreement	yes	no
<b>Level of influence</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

tom-up approach to tackling dryland degradation. And finally, they had an important impact by ensuring that certain text was incorporated in the Convention.

ENGOS participating in the AGBM process had a strong presence throughout the negotiations and provided a great deal of written and verbal information to negotiators. Their ability to interact directly with delegates was somewhat compromised, although in the words of one ENGO representative, the problem of access was "not insurmountable."<sup>22</sup> Throughout the negotiations, ENGOS defined the problem of climate change as an environmental crisis requiring immediate action. However, this sense of urgency was not reflected in statements made by negotiators or in the final text. Environmental NGOs had some success in shaping the negotiating agenda by catalyzing debate on emissions trading and sinks, but they failed to get delegates to discuss compliance and review mechanisms. In the end, environmental NGOs were unable to ensure that their position was reflected in the final Protocol text.

#### 4.4. *Tracing Causal Mechanisms*

In our framework we emphasize the importance of checking initial findings of levels of NGO influence for over-determination. However, additional process tracing and counterfactual analyses in both cases confirmed the conclusions drawn in Table 2.

4.4.1. *Process Tracing.* Scrutinizing the causal mechanisms linking NGO participation in the UNCCD process with outcomes, it is clear that NGOs had direct impacts on the Convention text. In addition, the majority of the informants

22. Interview, ENGO 4, 24 October 1998.

(negotiation participants and observers) thought that NGOs, given their observer status in the negotiations, had had considerable influence over the outcome. One Secretariat staff member stated that the NGOs “definitely had influence.”<sup>23</sup> Another staff member said the “negotiations were a breakthrough for the NGOs, who made sure they were part of every part of the process, and the INCD was open—as much as possible—for the NGOs.”<sup>24</sup> Government delegates also viewed the NGO input positively, even as early as INCD-1. One delegate noted that the NGOs were “doing an important job” and another was “curious about what the NGOs will bring into the process. They seem to have gotten over the fuss that they usually have.”<sup>25</sup>

Participants and observers of the Kyoto Protocol negotiations widely acknowledge that ENGOs were responsible for introducing the term hot air and calling attention to a potential loophole in emissions trading.<sup>26</sup> In addition, CAN’s criticism reportedly influenced France’s position on sinks. Dominique Voynet, French Minister for Territorial Planning and the Environment, acknowledged that ENGOs, acting as “the voice and conscience of the people,” had prompted her country to oppose the inclusion of sinks language in the Protocol.<sup>27</sup> One delegate noted that ENGOs managed to raise so much distrust about sinks that some delegations refused to even talk about them.<sup>28</sup>

*4.4.2. Counterfactual Analysis.* Without the NGOs, the Desertification Convention would not be the instrument it is. The centrality of the bottom-up approach for the implementation of the Convention might have been lost from the text without the constant pressure from NGOs to give it an important role. Moreover, had the NGOs not been present in the negotiations, the Convention may not have had financial mechanisms such as national desertification funds or emphasized NGO and local community participation in its implementation.

In the absence of ENGOs, the Kyoto Protocol might have been even weaker. Several participants suggested that American environmentalists were instrumental in convincing Vice President Al Gore to attend the Kyoto conference and instruct the US delegation to be more flexible, a key turning point in the negotiations.<sup>29</sup> Gore’s speech included a last-minute addition stating, “I am instructing our delegation right now to show increased negotiating flexibility if a comprehensive plan can be put in place . . .”<sup>30</sup> High-level representatives of two US organizations reportedly conveyed this message to the Vice President in a

23. Interview, Secretariat staff 6, 27 May 1998.

24. Interview, Secretariat staff 3, 27 May 1998.

25. Interviews: Delegate 12, 3 June 1993; and Delegate 17, 3 June 1993.

26. Bettelli et al 1997, 15; Interviews: Business NGO 2, 16 February 1999; Delegate 2, 1 September 1998; and Delegate 5, 2 February 1999.

27. Quoted in ECO Team 1997a.

28. Interview, Delegate 4, 22 February 1999.

29. Interviews: ENGO 7, 16 February 1999; Delegate 1, 9 December 1997; and Delegate 5, 22 February 1999.

30. Gore 1997.

phone conversation during Gore's trip from the Osaka airport to the Kyoto convention hall.<sup>31</sup> It was only after Gore's speech that the US agreed to include emissions reduction (rather than stabilization) targets in the Protocol. Once the US conceded to reduction targets, other countries were more willing to give in on the issues of sinks and emissions trading. Without ENGO pressure, the EU might not have held out for reduction targets.<sup>32</sup> EU Environment Commissioner Ritt Bjerregaard noted, "We are fortunate to have a lot of activist NGOs to push nations along."<sup>33</sup>

#### *4.5. Assessing Levels of NGO Influence: Conclusions From the Case Analysis*

To summarize, we conclude that NGOs had a high level of influence in the Desertification Convention negotiations but only moderate influence in the Kyoto Protocol negotiations. In the UNCCD case NGOs were able to exert significant influence because of three factors: the link between the bottom-up approach and NGO participation in the implementation of the Convention; their homogenous composition and interests; and the fact that NGO participation was encouraged by negotiators.<sup>34</sup> In the Kyoto Protocol case, the highly technical nature of the negotiations created a demand for specialized knowledge on issues such as sinks and emissions trading, knowledge that the NGOs had developed. They were also able to increase their leverage by working together through CAN and providing a single environmental voice. However, their ability to influence the outcome of the negotiations was constrained by the fact that most delegates were focused on the economic implications of controlling GHG emissions and that the negotiating environment was not overly supportive of NGO participation.

It is interesting to note that, in each case, the ability of NGOs to exert influence was linked with their ability to speak with one voice. NGOs at the desertification negotiations coordinated themselves and presented unanimous statements without major disputes or opponents hampering their work. This coordination was facilitated by the fact that the participating NGOs, although initially lacking in international experience, were a relatively homogenous group with the shared goal of improving the conditions of people living in arid areas. Similarly, CAN members worked very hard to present a single environmental position during the Kyoto Protocol negotiations.

This is not to suggest that there was never disagreement among the NGOs. For example, during the climate change negotiations, there were serious debates during CAN meetings between ENGOs advocating market mechanisms as a solution to mitigating climate change and those who viewed the market as part of the problem. There were also tensions between northern and southern ENGOs

31. Author's notes, 8 December 1997; and Interview, Scientist 1, 28 July 1998.

32. Bettelli et al. 1997, 15.

33. Author's notes, 9 December 1997.

34. Corell 1999b.

over the role of developing countries. In both cases, however, NGOs successfully managed these conflicts and did not jeopardize their united front.

This examination of the UNCCD and the Kyoto Protocol cases illustrates how the framework helps achieve systematic analysis of NGO influence in international environmental negotiations. The analysis demonstrates that yes, NGOs do exert influence in this political arena. In particular, it highlights the framework's utility for detection of NGO influence: had we only looked at the outcome of the negotiations, we would not have detected any influence in the climate change case. The systematic approach achieved through the use of the framework has also made the analyses comparable, and illuminates *variation* in NGO influence across cases. The framework thus serves as a foundation for a discussion of the factors that explain variation in NGO influence in international environmental negotiations. What influences NGO influence?

## 5. NGO Influence Variation in International Environmental Negotiations: Explanatory Factors

Further theoretical development requires moving beyond the question of *whether* NGOs influence international environmental negotiations to a focus on *the conditions* under which they matter. This would help determine which cases and under which conditions NGOs may be politically effective through influence on the negotiations. Based on the desertification and climate cases examined above, this section identifies five factors that may enhance or constrain NGOs' ability to exert influence in international environmental negotiations: (1) the nature, (2) history, and (3) framing of the issue under negotiation; (4) the political opportunity structure; and (5) the NGO profile.<sup>35</sup>

### 5.1. Nature of the Issue

One area for future research is whether the nature of the issue affects the ability of NGOs to influence international environmental negotiations. Desertification and climate change, like other global environmental problems, differ in ways that may have shaped the ability of NGOs to exert leverage in the negotiations. While both are highly complex, desertification is much more tangible and the proposed solutions much less technical than is the case with climate change. Affected populations suffered daily from dryland degradation, whereas few could claim to be directly affected by climate change. Dryland degradation was considered as a socio-economic problem with mainly non-technical solutions within the political sphere—such as participation in decisionmaking by politically marginalized populations. Desertification NGOs, most of whom were grassroots and community-based organizations, successfully portrayed themselves as part of that solution. In contrast, climate change was increasingly

35. See also Arts 1998, 89–92.

viewed as an economic issue requiring highly technical solutions, such as new energy technology. ENGOs were thus less central to solving the problem.

### 5.2. *History of the Issue*

It may also be the case that differences in how global environmental problems emerge on the international agenda have implications for NGO influence. The desertification negotiations were mainly politically driven—with a strong push during the UNCED process from developing countries wanting an environmental treaty of concern for the South. The Kyoto Protocol negotiations had both political and scientific motivations.

Desertification NGOs with environmental and social concerns had a role to play in the politically driven process, and were regarded as partners in the implementation of an agreement. Influence by southern grassroots NGOs was also considered important in a process focused on a problem with a developing country profile. Analyses of the failed 1977 Plan of Action to Combat Desertification, which had promoted top-down development projects, had concluded that a participatory bottom-up approach was essential for project success. NGOs were regarded as the link between the international and local levels—as actors who could encourage local population involvement in the development of local and national implementation policies.

In some respects the Kyoto Protocol negotiations were motivated by EU and developing country wishes to avenge their defeat in the UNFCCC negotiations and push the U.S. to accept binding targets and timetables for reducing GHG emissions. This prompted an important alliance between ENGOs and the Europeans. Science was also a key driver in the negotiations. In 1990, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that stabilizing atmospheric GHG concentrations would require an immediate 60% reduction in global emissions. At the same time, however, the early stages of the negotiations were marked by considerable debate over the role of humans in causing climate change. ENGOs often found their hands tied by the lack of scientific evidence supporting their positions. ENGOs regularly attributed extreme weather events to global warming while scientists refused to view any single event as evidence of climate change.

### 5.3. *Framing of the Issue*

The way issues are framed may also affect the NGOs' ability to influence. A "frame" is an "interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action within one's present or past environment."<sup>36</sup> Frames shape international environmental negotiations by creating a demand

36. Snow and Benford 1992, 136.

for particular types of information, thereby privileging certain actors and limiting which proposals delegates consider seriously. De-certification was primarily viewed through a sustainable development frame while climate change was intimately linked to fundamental economic concerns.

In the UNCCD negotiations, there was general agreement that for efforts to have any effect the problem had to be tackled by those immediately affected, and the NGOs were seen as representing them. Negotiators supported this bottom-up approach by listening to NGOs with experience-based knowledge from dryland areas and by including NGO positions in the Convention text. Not to have done so would have been politically unfeasible.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, the linkage between climate change and economics limited NGO impact. Decisions about limiting GHG emissions have implications for energy prices and industrial production, issues as the heart of industrialized economies. Negotiators were often more concerned about the short-term costs of controlling emissions than the long-term costs of not acting. ENGOs provided economic information to negotiators suggesting that industrialized countries could reduce their GHG emissions at minimal cost.<sup>38</sup> However, there were an equal number of studies that indicated further international regulations would result in economic ruin.

#### 5.4. Political Opportunity Structure

International environmental negotiations take place in a particular institutional context. Institutions, which are patterns of rules and practices governing the relations between actors, can influence the types of political opportunities that various actors have at their disposal. There are no set rules governing NGO participation in international negotiations. The tendency has been for the international organizations responsible for a particular negotiation to establish rules on an *ad hoc* basis and there is a great deal of variation among international bodies.<sup>39</sup> These differences likely affect the ability of NGOs to influence international environmental negotiations.

Although provisions were made for NGOs to provide limited input into the Kyoto Protocol negotiations—such as through formal interventions—this was by no means a supportive negotiating environment. NGOs were denied access to the floor during plenary debates and by the end of the negotiating process most negotiations took place in closed-door meetings. This limited the political opportunities for ENGOs to voice their concerns and clearly privileged government actors. In contrast, the supportive environment in the UNCCD negotiations helped the NGOs achieve considerable influence. Desertification NGOs had open access to negotiating documents and were permitted to make

37. Corell 1999a.

38. WRI 1997; and WWF 1997.

39. ICTSD 1999.

oral interventions and distribute statements on more or less the same basis as states. The NGOs were supported from the beginning of the desertification negotiations by the INCD Chairman and the Secretariat channeled financial resources provided by governments to NGOs, allowing them to meet separately from negotiating sessions and coordinate their efforts.

### 5.5. *NGO Profile*

In explaining variation in NGO influence, it may also be important to consider the profile of NGOs participating in the negotiations. The UN uses the category of NGOs as a “catch-all” and a large number of organizations, associations and institutes with remarkably divergent interests and motives are brought together in one category. This can make it difficult for NGOs to coordinate their lobbying strategies and may introduce competition among NGOs with vastly different objectives. The NGOs participating in the desertification negotiations were much more homogeneous than the NGOs participating in the climate change negotiations. NGOs involved in the UNCCD process benefited from the fact that there were no private sector NGOs represented at the negotiations whereas ENGOs in the Kyoto Protocol negotiations constantly had to counter arguments made by the fossil-fuel industry who strongly opposed international regulation on GHG emissions.

The desertification NGOs were mostly activist social and environmental NGOs, with only a few participating scientists. The composition of the NGO group was rather unique because of its lack of large northern NGOs and private sector representatives, which enabled environmental and development NGOs to coordinate their work and significantly impact the outcome of the negotiations. The resulting relative homogeneity helped NGOs speak and act as a cohesive group—as one actor—making it easy for negotiators to consider and act upon NGO positions. During the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, ENGOs had to compete with private sector NGOs for delegates’ attention. In addition, some delegates questioned the credibility of the environmental position because it was heavily dominated by northern NGOs. While these factors did not prevent ENGOs from having some influence on the negotiations, they did create a more challenging negotiating environment for NGOs participating in the Kyoto Protocol negotiations than in the UNCCD negotiation.

### 5.6. *Factors Explaining Variation in NGO Influence: Summary*

This section concludes our brief discussion of the conditions under which NGOs may have influence in international environmental negotiations. Based on an examination of the desertification and climate change cases, we have suggested that five factors can either enhance or constrain the NGOs’ ability to exert influence. The nature, history, and framing of the issue under negotiation are all important, as well as the political opportunity structure and the NGO

**Table 3.**

A Comparison of the Explanatory Factors for Variation in NGO Influence

Factor	UNCCD	Kyoto Protocol
Nature of the Issue	Tangible Highly practical solutions	Intangible Highly technical solutions
History of the Issue	Politically driven	Politically and scientifically driven
Framing of the Issue	Sustainable development (focus on affected populations' ability to support themselves, effects for nations needing incomes from agricultural production)	Economic issue (concern for short-term costs of controlling GHG emissions)
Political Opportunity Structure	Highly inclusive and supportive of NGOs	Restrictive for NGOs
NGO Profile	Developing country (Africa) dominance Absence of northern or business NGOs	Northern NGO dominance Competition between environmental NGOs and private sector NGOs

profile. Variation on these factors between the two cases is summarized in Table 3.

In addition to listing the factors, the table demonstrates the significant differences between the two negotiations, both in terms of the issue under negotiation and the practical conditions that prevailed during the actual negotiations. This is a first endeavor to initiate a more wide-ranging discussion of why NGO influence varies. Examination of other cases may add factors to our list.

## 6. Conclusion

In this article, we have examined the political effectiveness of NGOs in international environmental negotiations by analyzing their influence. We have applied an analytical framework developed elsewhere (Betsill and Corell 2001, in this issue) to analyze NGO influence in two sets of international environmental negotiations: the 1994 Desertification Convention and the 1997 Kyoto Protocol to the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Our framework is a complementary approach that combines examination of NGO participation (activity, access and resources) with goal attainment. It provides a richer picture of NGO

influence by focusing on knowledge and information as the resource with which NGOs exert influence, looking both at the intentional transmission of information as well as its effects on other actors. By applying to both cases the same systematic approach to gathering evidence of NGO influence proposed by our framework, we demonstrate that it is possible to make qualitative judgments about levels of NGO influence and that systematic analysis subsequently allows for making credible comparisons between the two cases. Such comparison is otherwise difficult to make in an NGO literature lacking common methodological approaches.

In addition to complementing current literature on NGO influence, we also initiate a discussion about why there is variation in NGO influence. Comparison across cases allows identification of factors that may explain variation in NGO influence in different negotiating situations. We suggest that how an environmental issue is addressed and negotiated at the international level varies depending on the *nature*, *history* and *framing* of the issue. The political *opportunity structure* and the *NGO profile* also affect NGO influence. Differences in these explanatory factors may have implications for NGO impact on international environmental negotiations.

It is our hope that this discussion inspires additional comparative research on the role of NGOs in international environmental negotiations. What we provide here should be viewed as hypotheses for testing on other cases. For example, the findings of this study could be complemented by examinations of other types of NGOs, notably from the private sector, as well as of other environmental issues. Testing and fine-tuning our framework would provide considerable additional insight regarding NGO influence in global environmental decision-making.

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