

# GLOBAL FORUM NGO TREATIES: LINKING JAPAN TO THE WORLD

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## Summary

Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) captured worldwide attention in 1992, Non-Governmental Organizations, or NGOs, have been influencing decisions and helping to set agendas that were once determined solely by governments. During the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, remarkable progress has been made in the way NGOs have gained authority, become activated and organized themselves.

Borne along this tide of change, Japanese NGOs also started to coordinate their activities, as they prepared to attend UNCED and also as they attempted to make more of an input into government policy. At the Global Forum of UNCED, they presented their messages to the world and submitted their citizens' report. They also participated in the NGO Treaty-writing process organized by the International NGO Forum.

For many Japanese NGOs, UNCED was a watershed event that boosted recognition of their role in Japan. Also it helped NGOs appreciate the importance of having a world vision, of sharing information with world NGOs, and of having an influence on public policy. The capability of the Japanese NGO community is still limited, however, and its relationship with the Japanese government is far from being an equal one.

The International NGO Forum has set as its agenda the following responsibilities: establishing a legal and financial framework for the world's NGOs, improving their expertise, and strengthening their advocacy. Japan's NGOs are prepared to meet these challenges, but in order to cope with them, they must strengthen their institutional capacity in terms of financial management and personnel. It is expected that the Japanese government will, in turn, develop the financial and institutional support mechanisms required to contribute to the sound development of Japanese NGOs.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. UNCED and the Global Forum**

In June 1992, the world's largest political summit was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Officially known as UNCED or Earth Summit, it brought together 118 heads of government and 178 diplomats. After two weeks of discussions on a large number of global issues, the government leaders at UNCED finally signed a package of agreements: namely a convention of biodiversity, a convention on climate changes, a statement on the forest principles, an agreement to work towards a convention of desertification, the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development, and Agenda 21.

UNCED drew world attention, not only because it involved a large number of officials, but also because of the large number of people who participated in the '92 Global Forum that paralleled the official conference. More than 25 000 people representing 9 000 organizations from 171 countries attended the Global Forum, which was organized by the Brazilian NGO Forum, the Center for Our Common Future, and the International Facilitating Committee (IFC). Various kinds of activities were took place at the Global Forum by 1 420 registered and non-registered NGOs. More than 300 Japanese participants from various NGOs were involved in the Global Forum in some way or the

other.

## 1.2. Conceptual Framework

This section will focus on the activities that took place at the Global Forum and compare the roles and influence of Japanese NGOs before and after UNCED. Since UNCED itself was not a mere event, but rather a process and a set of activities, the entire UNCED process is divided into three periods. First, in the pre-UNCED period (1990-1992) the way in which the national NGO network evolved is outlined in the countdown to UNCED. Second, it is described what happened and which NGOs did what during the Global Forum itself (June 1992) focusing on the various activities at the Japan People’s Center. Third, the post-UNCED period (1993-1997) is examined to identify the follow-up activities that took place in the five-year period before the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (Rio + 5) in 1997. This section also will assess the activities of Japanese NGOs during each of these periods and their relations with overseas NGOs and the Japanese government. And finally the challenges and opportunities that are currently confronting Japanese NGOs are identified.

## 1.3. A Brief Background of Japanese NGOs

In order to understand which Japanese NGOs did what at UNCED, it is necessary to get a better understanding of how NGOs have evolved in Japanese society. The evolution of NGOs is a relatively recent phenomenon in Japan compared with other developed countries. NGOs first emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, but they received increasing social recognition in the 1990s. According to the *Directory of Japanese Non-Governmental Organizations Concerned with International Cooperation 2000*, compiled by the Japanese NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC), there are 387 Japanese NGOs working in the field of development. Table 1 illustrates the number of NGOs established during each half-decade since before World War II. It shows that more than half of the NGOs were established after 1990. This is due to the increased recognition NGOs received in the early 1990s, when a number of world conferences were held, including UNCED.

Term	Number	Term	Number
Before WWII	2	Early 1980s	46
After WWII-1950s	4	late 1980s	86
Early 1960s	3	1990-1993	143
Late 1960s	4	1994	47
Early 1970s	11		
Late 1970s	22	Total	368

Table 1. Number of NGOs Established in Each Half Decade

It is very important to define the term “non-governmental organization” when discussing the subject of NGOs in Japan, since it refers to a diverse range of organizations including foundations, associations and organizations created by individuals, by corporations, by groups of corporations, and by the government. The

term “NGO” in this section refers to independent and private institutions involved in fulfilling an international agenda.

Until 1997, there had been no legal framework that supported NGO activities in Japan. Most of citizen-initiated organizations had been informal and unregistered as legal entities, but when the Specially Designated Non-profit Activities Law was enacted in 1997, it gave NGOs juridical status for the first time. The bill, however, had a fundamental flaw: it did not provide NGOs with the privilege of having access to tax-deductible contributions. Prior to UNCED, the number of NGOs had been growing in Japan, but they were small and fragile and had limited budgets. They also suffered from a lack of professional staff and a stable financial base. Consequently, their preparations for UNCED consisted mainly of creating national NGO networks to coordinate their various activities and disseminate information.

## **2. The Pre-UNCED Period (1990-1992)**

### **2.1. The “UNCED Process” in Japan**

In the run-up to UNCED, the Preparatory Committees (PrepCom) organized by the UNCED Secretariat met four times between 1990-92. These PrepCom meetings were very important since they discussed drafts of the agreements to be voted on at UNCED. More than 150 national delegations and specialists gathered at these PrepCom meetings. The secretariat encouraged NGOs to participate in this two-year negotiation process, because they believed that broad-based participation at grassroots level was vital if various agreements were to be effective. International NGOs, such as the World Conservation Union (IUCN), Greenpeace and WWF (World Wildlife Federation), had been involved in this process from the beginning.

In Japan, however, UNCED did not receive wide public attention in the early 1990s. Japanese NGOs were not organized well enough to send their representatives to these preparatory meetings, and so it was not until the third PrepCom meeting that representatives of Japanese NGOs were able to participate in the UNCED process. This was partly because NGO activities at that time were based around individual organizations and most of NGOs did not have established networks with overseas NGOs. Consequently, they did not receive much information on UNCED. Furthermore, the NGOs did not have any established ties with the Japanese government, the bureaucrats made no attempt to hear the voices of NGOs, and neither did they allow any NGO representatives to be part of the government delegation.

### **2.2. Networking among Japanese NGOs**

#### **2.2.1. The Establishment of the People’s Forum for UNCED**

On May 5, 1991, more than 50 representatives of NGOs and 200 citizens gathered at Meiji University, Tokyo where it was decided to establish a people’s forum for UNCED. The ’92 NGO FORUM, JAPAN (hereafter the Japan Forum) commenced activities on May 25, and its office was established in June. Four NGOs: the National Citizens Movement Center, the Tokyo Consumers Organization Liaison Center, JVC (Japan

International Volunteer Center) and CASA (Citizens' Alliance for Saving the Atmosphere and the Earth), served as its provisional communication centers.

The foundation of the Japan Forum can be traced back to the International Citizens Conference held at Hosei University, Tokyo, in September 1989 when about 1 500 people gathered together to discuss Japan's role in global environmental issues. This conference also aimed at questioning the Japanese government's attitude towards NGOs, since the government had not allowed NGOs to participate in the Tokyo Conference for Global Environmental Conservation co-sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). On the agenda for those gathered at the NGO conference was the issue of how to arrange diverse ideas into constructive opinions and proposals to be presented at UNCED. Their success depended particularly on their ability to effectively link two types of Japanese NGOs: international NGOs that were interested in global environmental issues happening outside of Japan; and local NGOs that worked on domestic environmental issues including pollution and its related disease.

The Japan Forum was established with three objectives in mind. The first was to stimulate the exchange of experiences and information among NGOs concerned with global environmental issues. The second was to formulate constructive proposals and papers on policies and actions for sustaining the global environment, and the third was to encourage its members to participate in and make proposals to UNCED.

The members of the Japan Forum included both individuals and organizations involved in environmental issues either domestically or internationally. In order to administer the Forum, a managing board was set up involving the member organizations listed in Table 2. Four representatives of the Japan Forum were the major driving force behind Japanese civic groups' networking efforts towards UNCED.

Architects for Peace and Environment  
Citizen's Alliance for Saving the Atmosphere and the Earth (CASA)  
Environmental Council for Kasumigaura  
Forum for Air Pollution Trials  
Friend of the Earth, Japan  
Greenpeace, Japan  
Globe, Japan  
Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union  
Japan Environment Council  
Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC)  
Japan International Volunteer Center (JVC)  
Japan Youth Council  
Japan Nature Conservation Society  
Japan Toropical Forest Action Network (JATAN)  
Kyoto Consumers Association, Tokyo Consumers Association  
National Committee of Consumers' Organization  
National Conservation League for Urban Landscape  
National Center for People's Movement  
Pacific Asia Resource Center (PARC)

Research Institute of Consumers' Co-operative Union  
Society for Entropy  
Tropical Forest Conservation Organization  
Union of Patients Caused by Pollution  
WWF-Japan

Table 2. NGOs on the Managing Board of the Japan Forum

Before UNCED, the Japan Forum set up more than ten working groups based on different areas of concern. These included pollution in Japan, Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) programme, tropical forests, biodiversity, waste disposal and toxic waste, the exportation of pollution, global warming, energy, sustainable development, food and agriculture, and marine resources. Each working group started discussions and made out a draft of their section of the forum's policy proposal to be presented at UNCED.

After seven months of discussions, the policy proposal was completed in January and published in May 1992 as a document entitled: "I have the Earth in Mind, The Earth has Me in Hand" along with a summary version in English (See "The People's Voice of Japan"). The Japan Forum had thus acted as a liaison for various conservationist groups in Japan, which were keen to have their voices heard in Brazil.

### **2.2.2. Activities and Events leading up to UNCED**

At the same time as the Japan Forum was being formed, various NGOs began their own discussions leading up to UNCED. For example, JANIC held an international forum, "Environment and Development", in September and International NGO symposium was held in Tokyo in October. The students' group, A SEED Japan, was formed in October and started activities in collaboration with the Japan Forum. The Japan Environmental Council also held its Asian Environmental Conference in Bangkok.

At the international level, 27 Japanese NGO staff members attended the Global NGO Conference hosted by the French government in Paris in December 1991. More than 800 NGO participants from all over the world gathered in Paris for this conference and prepared for UNCED by endorsing NGO position paper called "Agenda Ya Wananchi (Roots for Our Future)." Representatives from CASA commented on global climate changes at the workshop, and distributed several published statements at the conference. These included "To Save Only One Earth" by CASA, "Pollution Has Not Ended" by the Pollution Victims Association, "Towards Constructing a Sustainable Development System" by the Japanese Scientists Association, and "The Prevention of Environmental Pollution from Toxic Chemicals" by a working group of the Japan Forum.

In accordance with Secretary-General Maurice Strong's idea of involving millions of people in the UNCED process, the UNCED secretariat made an effort to help NGOs from all over the world come to the PrepCom meetings and lobby government delegates. Since the UNCED secretariat encouraged NGO participation into the UNCED process, about 1 000 NGOs were accredited by the final PrepCom meeting in March 1992. However, no Japanese NGOs participated in either the first or second

PrepCom meetings. This caused consternation among the world's NGOs and they specifically asked the Japanese NGOs to attend all further PrepCom meetings. The Japanese NGOs stayed away from the first and second PrepCom meetings mainly because they had not been informed that NGOs could be accredited to UNCED, even if they did not have consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This information was very important, because representatives of accredited NGOs were allowed to attend all formal sessions of the PrepCom meetings and to make oral and written statements.

Only CASA, which was established in Osaka in 1988, sent a representative to the third PrepCom meeting, however one participant from the Japanese NGO community was not enough to cover all the working group meetings and plenary sessions. The CASA representative, moreover, felt acutely aware that compared with the Third World Network in Malaysia, the organization powers of the Japanese NGOs were very weak indeed. When the third PrepCom meeting was held in Geneva in 1991, only ten months before UNCED was to begin, CASA, the Japan Forum, Rissho Koseikai, Soka Gakkai International, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and OISCA were each accredited into the preparatory process. These representatives from Japanese NGOs attended that PrepCom meeting in an attempt to establish networks with other NGOs. This time the number of representatives increased, but it was not yet enough to follow every agenda discussed.

After returning from Geneva, the NGO staff members felt strongly that Japanese NGOs needed to link with overseas NGOs in order to share Japan's problems and to empower Japanese NGOs in the international arena. They were very much interested in linking with Asian NGOs in the lead-up to UNCED. Hence, Japanese NGOs such as Pacific Asia Resource Center (PARC), JVC, the Japan Tropical Action Network (JATAN), Friends of the Earth-Japan and the Japan Forum sent representatives to the Peoples' Forum organized by the Thai NGOs that was held concurrently with the IMF/World Bank Assembly in Bangkok in October 1991. Also, in December the Japan Environmental Council held its Asian Environment Conference in Bangkok in collaboration with a Thai university, to which they invited environmental scholars from Asian countries.

In early May 1992, only a month before UNCED, the Japan Forum organized the "Global Environment and Asian NGO Forum" in an effort to capture wide public attention and raise people's awareness of issues such as the depletion of the tropical rain forests through the felling of timber; shrimp farming; and industrial pollution in Southeast Asian countries. As part of being involved in these activities, each working group of the Japan Forum drafted its own policy proposal.

### **2.3. Relationships with the Government**

In spite of the fact that there had been growing recognition within Japan of the role of the NGOs, the attitude of Japanese government officials remained very curt, which no doubt reflects the heavy reliance on bureaucratic leadership in Japanese society.

Consequently, from the early stage of the UNCED process, relationships between the Japanese NGOs and the government were not well coordinated. Noboru Takeshita, the

then Prime Minister, proposed 1989 as a “Year of Environmental Diplomacy” in Japan and expressed the government’s will to contribute to international environmental negotiations. Then in September 1989, the Takeshita government, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme, organized the Tokyo Conference on the Global Environment and Human Response towards Sustainable Development. The Japanese government neither allowed the participation of any Japanese NGOs at the conference, nor the conference was open to the public. Hence, Japanese NGOs and citizens’ groups were excluded from the process of environmental diplomacy.

To cope with this situation, prior to the Tokyo Conference, a coalition of environmental, indigenous and consumer groups in Japan organized a three-day international people’s forum in Tokyo at which they questioned Japan’s role in global environmental issues. Some prominent overseas NGO staff members were invited to speak at this forum, and the Citizen’s Council on Waste, Friends of the Earth-Japan, Greenpeace Japan, JATAN, JVC, and the Society for Studies on Entropy were also actively involved.

Even though the UNCED secretariat suggested that national governments involve independent sectors of society in the preparation process, the Japanese government was not interested in consulting with citizens’ groups, once again reflecting the long-held dominance of bureaucracy in Japanese society. Nevertheless, the Japan Forum lobbied government officials to set up a public dialogue concerning the national report on environment and development what was to be submitted to the secretariat prior to UNCED. And so in July 1991, the Japan Forum were able to begin exchanging their ideas about the national report with staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Environment Agency. The Japan Forum suggested they set up an open forum to allow civic groups and government ministries to exchange opinions, and to raise public awareness of global environmental issues. On April 12 and 13, 1992, in response to a request by Maurice Strong, Secretary General of UNCED, the Takeshita government hosted an “Eminent Persons Meeting on “Financing the Global Environment and Development”. The Japan Forum reciprocated by holding a *Bonjin* (Ordinary People’s) Meeting in Tokyo, with the aim of raising funds for attending UNCED. At the *Bonjin* Meeting, grass-roots groups criticized the Eminent Person’s Meeting, using the slogan, “Money can’t Save the Earth”. They claimed that top-down, undemocratic decision-making mechanisms and institutions benefit neither the people nor the environment.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

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