

OTHER INTERNATIONAL NGOs

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Summary

International environmental NGOs differ widely in their aims and consequently in the work which they undertake. Most contribute to environmental education by providing information to the public and encouraging debate about environmental issues. The activities of these NGOs include campaigning on international as well as national environmental issues, and longer-term projects concerning sustainable development.

This article describes three examples of different types of international NGOs. Greenpeace is an NGO organizing high profile campaigns to inform and educate the public. WaterAid provides water and sanitation aid to developing countries with an emphasis on local education and training and capacity building. Worldwatch provides information to educate the public and policy makers.

1. Introduction

International environmental NGOs differ widely in their aims and consequently in the work which they undertake. Most of these NGOs contribute to environmental education especially by providing information to the public and encouraging debate about environmental issues. Some NGOs such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth are especially concerned with campaigning on international as well as national issues. Friends of the Earth(FOE) operates as an international network of environmental groups

around the world and it is represented in 68 countries. Some NGOs such as Oxfam and WWF are involved in longer-term projects concerning sustainable development and conservation. In addition some NGOs such as Oxfam and WaterAid provide aid to poorer countries. Some NGO activities are directed at marketing the products from sustainable agriculture in poorer countries (eg Fair Trade products).

Three examples of different types of international NGOs are described *viz*:

- Greenpeace as an example of an NGO organizing high profile campaigns to inform and educate the public;
- WaterAid as an example of an NGO providing water and sanitation aid to developing countries with an emphasis on local education and training and capacity building;
- Worldwatch as an example of an NGO providing information to educate the public and policy makers.

2. Greenpeace

Greenpeace dates from 1971 when a small group of protestors set sail from Vancouver in Canada to a US underground nuclear testing site at Amchitka. This small island off the west coast of Alaska was the last refuge for 3000 endangered sea otters and the home of bald eagles, peregrine falcons and other wildlife. The old fishing boat carrying the protestors was intercepted but the action generated great public interest. Although the test went ahead, later that year nuclear testing on Amchitka ceased and the island was declared a bird sanctuary.

Now Greenpeace has 2.8 million supporters worldwide with national and regional offices in 41 countries, and with its headquarters in Amsterdam. Greenpeace describes itself as “an independent campaigning organization that uses non-violent, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems and force solutions for a green and peaceful future”. The goal is therefore “to ensure the ability of the Earth to nurture life in all its diversity”.

Greenpeace has campaigned on a wide range of issues including:

- Climate change;
- Destruction of tropical forests;
- Pollution of seas and oceans;
- Whaling;
- Genetically modified foods;
- Nuclear power and weapons;
- Toxic chemicals.

Most of these campaigns have relied on widespread publicity and many have been successful, at least in part. In 1992, for example, France cancelled its nuclear tests at Moruroa Atoll when the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior entered the test zone. In 2002 Rainbow Warrior was active in the Irish Sea to protest at the return of a shipment of nuclear fuel from Japan to England. Also in 2002, Greenpeace helped defeat a move by Japan and some other nations to reintroduce commercial whaling through the

International Whaling Commission. This would have endangered the protected status given to whales under the 1982 Commercial whaling ban.

Greenpeace has frequently targeted specific organizations, companies and governments for policies or actions considered to be detrimental to the environment or non-sustainable. Even large multinational companies have sometimes been forced to make changes. Shell intended to dispose of its Brent Spar oil platform at sea. A campaign led by Greenpeace focused on the amounts of toxic wastes left on the platform. In 1998 following increasing public concern, Shell was forced to abandon its plan for sea-disposal and bring the Brent Spar platform back to land for dismantling and recycling.

Another campaign against Shell concerned its activities in Nigeria. In the early 1990's the activities of Shell and other oil companies in Ogoniland led to widespread environmental devastation. Protests from the native Ogoni people were violently put down by the Nigerian government. Over 1000 Ogoni people were killed and many of their leaders were executed including Ken Sao-Wiwa. Greenpeace helped to publicize these events in the developed countries leading stakeholders in Shell to question the company's involvement in such events.

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WaterAid (1996). *Community Participation*. WaterAid, London. [One of a series of pamphlets issued by WaterAid describing the organization and its activities.]

Worldwatch Institute (2002). *State of the World 2002*. Worldwatch Institute. Earthscan, London. [The State of the World series is published each year. Each publication is a widely researched and authoritative report on the world's progress towards a sustainable society.]

Websites:

www.greenpeace.org (The web site contains comprehensive information about the organization and its activities.)

www.wateraid.org.uk (The web site contains comprehensive information about the organization and its activities.)

www.worldwatch.org (The web site contains comprehensive information about the organization and its activities.)

Biographical Sketch

Professor David Cawsey has an honors degree in Geology and a doctorate in Civil Engineering. He is a Chartered Geologist and a Fellow of the Geological Society of London. His wide experience includes working for central and local governments, higher education, and industry in engineering geology and subsequently in environmental engineering and management. He is the author of more than 50 publications in these fields. Other professional activities have included leading successful international environmental and training programs, and acting as external examiner and adviser for degree programs and doctorates. He now combines some university teaching with consultancy and professional activities.

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