

Influence of Civil Society through Grassroots Environmental Movement in Bangladesh

Labonno Saha^{1*}, Farhat Tasnim²

¹Institute of Bangladesh Studies, University of Rajshahi. Bangladesh.

²Department of Political Science, University of Rajshahi. Bangladesh.

*Corresponding Author Email: labonnosaha21@gmail.com

Abstract

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries due to climate change, its geographic location and socio-economic conditions. Civil society in Bangladesh has played a significant role in the environmental movement, driving both grassroots activism and influencing national policies related to environmental protection. The prime objective of this study is to explore the influence of civil society in the grassroots environmental movement, by examining the NGOs self-evaluation. The study employed a descriptive qualitative research approach to meet its objectives. Data was collected from 25 NGOs based on specific inclusion criteria. A semi-structured questionnaire is used to conduct interviews with selected respondents. NGOs overall influence is measured based on selected indicators, where five points Likert scale is used how much they are able to influence in grassroots environmental movement. Indicators like, Introduce environmental issues, youth leader creation, providing volunteers and trainers are scored high. On the other hand, political socialization, new organization creation, influence as pressure group are scored low based on NGOs self-evaluation. The study concluded by finding the obstacle of effective grassroots influence and making some proposals that CSOs, policymakers, and all stakeholders could consider while developing strategies for more influential civil society in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Civil Society, Grassroots Environmental Movement, Influence, NGOs.

Abstrak

Bangladesh adalah salah satu negara yang paling rentan terhadap perubahan iklim, lokasi geografisnya, dan kondisi sosial ekonominya. Masyarakat sipil di Bangladesh telah memainkan peran penting dalam gerakan lingkungan, mendorong aktivisme akar rumput dan memengaruhi kebijakan nasional yang terkait dengan perlindungan lingkungan. Tujuan utama dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi pengaruh masyarakat sipil dalam gerakan lingkungan akar rumput, dengan memeriksa evaluasi diri LSM. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kualitatif deskriptif untuk memenuhi tujuannya. Data dikumpulkan dari 25 LSM berdasarkan kriteria inklusi tertentu. Kuesioner semi-terstruktur digunakan untuk melakukan wawancara dengan responden terpilih. Pengaruh LSM secara keseluruhan diukur berdasarkan indikator terpilih, di mana skala Likert lima poin digunakan untuk mengetahui seberapa besar pengaruh mereka dalam gerakan lingkungan akar rumput. Indikator seperti, Memperkenalkan isu lingkungan, penciptaan pemimpin muda, menyediakan relawan dan pelatih mendapat skor tinggi. Di sisi lain, sosialisasi politik, pembentukan organisasi baru, pengaruh sebagai kelompok penekan mendapat skor rendah berdasarkan evaluasi diri LSM. Studi ini diakhiri dengan menemukan hambatan pengaruh akar rumput yang efektif dan mengajukan beberapa usulan yang dapat dipertimbangkan oleh LSM, pembuat kebijakan, dan semua pemangku kepentingan saat mengembangkan strategi untuk masyarakat sipil yang lebih berpengaruh di Bangladesh.

Kata kunci: Bangladesh, Masyarakat Sipil, Gerakan Lingkungan Akar Rumput, Pengaruh, LSM.

INTRODUCTION

There is a multiplicity of green political responses to the myriad of environmental problems around the globe (Doyle & McEachern, 2008). Concerns for ecological degradation have caught global attention since the 1960s and environmental social movements have emerged as a result (Leonard, 2008). Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable and disaster prone countries in the world preparing for the grove impact of climate change and global warming (Bangladesh Economic Review, 2017). Bangladesh is facing challenges such as rising sea levels, deforestation, water pollution, air pollution, climate change effects, and loss of biodiversity. Bangladesh has become a middle- income country in 2021, its percentage of people living in poverty is declined (18.7%)ⁱ, and primary education enrollment is increasing (97.76%)ⁱⁱ to ensure equitable and quality education (Bangladesh Economic Review, 2024). Despite this achievement the countries high rate of economic growth is hindered by climate change challenges, growing population, development interventions, gap in policy and regulations etc. (Aminuzzaman, 2020).

The environmental movement in Bangladesh has gained significant momentum over the past few decades due to the country's vulnerability to environmental degradation and its impact on the population, especially the poor and marginalized communities. Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as BRAC, the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), and the Center for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS) are actively working on environmental advocacy, awareness programs, and policy changes. These organizations often collaborate with international donors to fund projects and conduct research on sustainable practices. Besides these leading NGOs, a several number of grassroots NGOs are engaging themselves in environmental sustainability through environmental movement in Bangladesh. The main objective of this research is to evaluate the influences of NGOs by their grassroots environmental movement in Bangladesh.

The first part of the paper discuss about necessary key terms (Civil society, civil society organizations, environmental movement etc.), theoretical background of civil society, necessary theories, applied theory regarding this research, influence arena, and methodology of the research. The second part will provide result discussion, obstacle of civil society in grassroots influence, and the conclusion of the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Key Terms

Civil Society

Civil society constitutes the sphere of public activity that lies between the individual and the state and corporation (Barkdull & Dicke, 2023). It refers to the civic network of voluntary associations observed by Alexis De Tocqueville in 1831 in the United States, and the bonds that are crucial for citizens to deliberate and enact collective choice noted by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* (Harraka, 2002). Civil society is typically understood to encompass those associations that lie outside the state and the corporation (Diamond, 1997). Thus, the various arms of governments and for-profit enterprises are excluded. The civil societies can be understood as the intermediate sphere between the state and the market; i.e., the “social and political power of households, civil associations and social movements (Morrison & Lane, 2004). Civil society kept ideas of freedom alive through discussion groups, clandestine literature, oppositional trade unions, environmental groups, and other grassroots organizations. This

study focused civil society as an organized force promotes as a foundation for participatory democracy, inclusion of grassroots community, and participation of local environmental governance.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Civil society encompasses a vast array of organizations, formal and informal: These include productive and commercial associations and networks, religious, ethnic, communal, and other institutions and associations that defend collective rights, values, faiths, beliefs, and symbols; production and dissemination (whether for profit or not) of public knowledge, ideas, news, and information; trade unions, associations of veterans and pensioners, and professional groups; movements (for example, for environmental protection, land reform, consumer protection, and the rights of women, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, the disabled, and other victims of discrimination and abuse.

Civil society organization (CSO) includes advocacy groups, professional groups, non-government organizations (local, international, human rights), research institutions (think tank), trade unions and chamber of commerce, women groups, religion and region based organizations, cultural organizations, social movement groups including environmental movement etc. (Tasnim & Saha, 2020). CSOs firsthand knowledge of 'on the ground' issues, constraints, local challenges, and the actions needed to resolve them allow them to act and commit to addressing those challenges. Mostly, the understanding of the term civil society is confined to NGOs. NGOs, youth organizations and social welfare organizations which are working for the environmental issues such as environment protection, management, and development were considered as CSOs for this research.

Environmental Movement

According to popular usage, the word 'environmental movement' is broad and vague, encompassing loose networks of demonstrators, formally established groups, and opinion climates (Roots, 1997). The term 'environmental movement' in this study refers to any activity carried out by civil society that is concerned with preserving the environment, offering solutions to current environmental issues, or ensuring a sustainable environment.

Theoretical Background: Civil Society and Bangladesh

Fahimul Quadir examines the role of civil society in fostering liberal democracy and economic liberalization in Bangladesh (Quadir, 1999). The directives of the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) were the key catalysts for this liberalization, which was pursued to promote market mechanisms and macroeconomic stability (Quadir 1999). This economic development strategy weakens state roles while promoting new civil society movements, with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) serving as key development partners. The donor agencies' overarching goal is to free civil society from governmental control in order to promote liberal democracy and free markets. In this approach, international funders help to strengthen civil society networks, allowing liberal democracy to function properly by removing authoritarian governments. From a Gramscian perspective, civil society defines the relationship between liberal democracy and civil society, and consider civil society to have less potential (Quadir and Lele 2004). This viewpoint emphasizes a critical approach to directing the government system to promote local individuals' human rights, despite the fact that some prominent civil society organizations today support authoritarian governments for personal gain. Since Bangladesh's inception in 1971, considerable assistance dependency has created new civil society organizations that promote Western normative discourse while discriminating against the

local basis. The local institutional base is defined as rules, norms, customs, and beliefs (Wood 2014). This base's change is directed by a civil society that rejects traditional local culture in favor of corporate culture.

The history of civil society in Bangladesh needs us to distinguish between older and contemporary traditions of civil society, in the form of lengthier histories of social movements and the newer modern NGOs (Lewis, 2004). Many modern NGOs may remain connected to the government and other institutions through family ties, contracting agreements, and an often overlapping dependence on foreign donors (Lewis, 2011).

The NGO industry in Bangladesh is typically described as diversified. It includes both large and small groups that provide services as well as those that work on social mobilization, policy lobbying, or campaigning. While worldwide ties and relationships have always helped shape the NGO sector, more recent forms of globalization may have contributed to an intensification of local grassroots engagement (Lewis, 2015). This shift has empowered communities to advocate for their own needs and priorities, fostering a greater sense of ownership and accountability. As a result, local organizations are increasingly collaborating with international NGOs, creating a dynamic exchange of ideas and resources that enhances their overall effectiveness.

Environmental Movement and Bangladesh

Following the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, some significant Environmental NGOs (ENGOs) have been actively contributing to this through research, advocacy, and awareness based on the active support of donor agencies like the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In the case of environmental NGOs, a patriarchal development approach creates ecocracies, which Wolfgang Sachs (1993) defined as the politics of global natural resource management with a development approach.

D. A. Ahsan, T. A. Del Valls, and J. Blasco (2009) emphasize how NGOs may help address environmental degradation issues such as arsenic pollution, wetland loss, and biodiversity destruction. Population increase, poor governance, and the ability of government organizations like the Department of Environment (DoE) to safeguard Bangladesh's wetlands are some of the causes of these degradations, according to the authors. These degradations are strongly related to the dominant development approach, which raises human rights issues for Bangladesh's underprivileged.

Manual Castells adopts a positive approach when characterizing this public area as the hub for discussion, disagreement, and fresh concepts that facilitate contact between the government and civil society in order to transform local communities and advance social change. In order to address local environmental and human rights challenges, globalization works in this public sphere, creating new facets of international information networks, public diplomacy, and global governance (Castells, 2008).

The function of environmental civil society groups can be better understood using the postmodern theory of NGOs in addition to interest group theories. The decline of the nation-state's legitimacy as a unit of action and the concurrent rise of various acceptable local, regional, and international levels of political action are the main features of postmodern politics (Finger and Princen, 1994). The size, revenue, and activities of civil society organizations vary in Bangladesh. Compared to other groups, some are small and impoverished, while others are donor-funded and have more clout when it comes to lobbying the government and international organizations. The situation in Bangladesh cannot be adequately explained by a single model.

Although there are many civil society organizations in Bangladesh, pluralist competition that supports all groups is still lacking. However, via social and policy learning, grassroots environmental action

via environmental NGOs has brought about a form of societal change. Therefore, environmental civil society in Bangladesh cannot be adequately explained by either the pluralist or the postmodernist models. The patterns of environmental advocacy in Bangladesh are better explained by the corporatist model.

A system of interest representation known as corporatism involves the organization of constituent units into a small number of distinct, mandatory, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered, and functionally differentiated categories. The state recognizes or licenses these units and grants them a purposeful representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for adhering to specific restrictions on their choice of leaders and how they express their demands and support (Schmitter, 1979). The patterns of environmental advocacy in Bangladesh are better explained by the corporatist model.

The environment movement was hatched in the decennial of 1980 in Bangladesh (Rayhan, 2017; Islam, 2018). This got momentum in the decade of 1990. Many environment pioneers were united under the organization Paribesh Rakkha Shopoth (PRS). Bangladeshi expatriates have also banded together to save the environment. They established the Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN) in 1998. On the initiative of the PRS, BEN, and other environmental organizations, an international conference on the environment of Bangladesh (ICBEN) was held in January 2000. The aim of this conference was to unite all the environmental working organizations. The Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA) and Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (BELA) are the two prominent organizations that are working for the betterment of the environmental standards. Civil society groups, including NGOs, community-based organizations, and environmental activists, have been instrumental in raising awareness about environmental degradation at the local level. For example, organizations like the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) and the Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (CSRL) work to inform the public about issues like deforestation, water pollution, and climate change. See table 1.

Table 1. Civil Society and Their Influence through Grassroots Environmental Movement

Major CSOs	Influence Issues	Function By CSOs
Civil society groups, including NGOs, community-based organizations, and environmental activists, the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) and the Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (CSRL)	Local Environmental Awareness	Work to inform the public about issues like deforestation, water pollution, and climate change.
National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas and Mineral Resources, Power and Ports	Grassroots Mobilization	The movement to save the Sundarbans
Oxfam Bangladesh and BRAC	Advocacy for Climate Justice:	Advocating for climate-resilient infrastructure and sustainable development practices.
Uttaran, BRAC	Disaster Relief and Preparedness	Particularly in the aftermath of flooding, cyclones, and other natural disasters exacerbated by climate change. Preparedness, response, and recovery have helped vulnerable communities adapt to changing environmental conditions.

Centre for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS)	Scientific Research and Data Collection	Conduct environmental research and provide data on climate change, natural resource management, and land use, which helps shape public discourse on environmental issues.
NGOs and community groups	Educational Campaigns	Campaigns on topics like deforestation, water pollution, waste management, and renewable energy. These campaigns are critical in changing public attitudes toward environmental responsibility.
Uttaran, Unnayan Prochesta, SUS, BRAC	Promoting Sustainable Practices	NGOs and environmental groups have supported projects related to renewable energy, organic farming, and sustainable agriculture to reduce the country's environmental footprint.
Uttaran, Unnayan Prochesta, Satkhira Unnayan Sangstha (SUS) etc.	Green Economy Initiatives	The use of eco-friendly technologies, green business practices, and the development of sustainable industries
BELA, BRAC, BAPA, BEN, Varendra Youth Forum	Global Environmental Networks	Participating in global conferences like the United Nations Climate Change Conferences (COP) and through networks such as World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Friends of the Earth, Shape international environmental policy and secure aid for environmental and climate adaptation programs.

Source: By the Researchers (Based on previous literature and surveyed NGOs)

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. A qualitative descriptive approach was chosen because it allows an in-depth exploration of the present status of civil society influence through environmental movement in enhancing grassroots environmental sustainability in Bangladesh. 25 civil society organizations (Environmental NGOs) have been purposively selected for in-depth questionnaire survey.

NGOs were purposively selectedⁱⁱⁱ on the basis of their environmental initiatives and activities from three regions (Dhaka, Rajshahi, Khulna) in Bangladesh.^{iv} In Khulna division, 9 NGOs (among 89 NGOs) were purposefully selected among the lists that are working on environmental issues (www.khulna.gov.bd, 2024). From the Rajshahi, 10 NGOs (among 92) were also purposefully selected for the survey (www.ngosrajshahi.com, 2024). As Khulna division is a coastal region, NGOs have been selected to understand what kind of work the NGOs are doing at the grassroots level to deal with the effects of climate change, salinity, cyclone, flood etc. And Rajshahi also has been selected to see how it deals with environmental issues in a dry climate, extreme hit wave, and drought. Rest of NGOs has been selected from Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh with the objective to contribute to the delivery of the SDGs and to enhance the accountability in its implementation processes (www.bdplatform). Data were collected from face to face interviews using semi-structured questionnaires.

A combination of primary and secondary sources has been used to get the data. By reading pertinent research articles secondary data have been gathered. The responsible officer and executive are the respondents to the questionnaire survey, we employed both closed- and open ended questionnaires.

Data from the questionnaire survey were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentage were provided by SPSS. A five-point LIKERT SCALE^v has obtained data about the attitudes and experiences of the respondents. Along with questionnaire data comparing qualitative interview data from the responsible key informant interview (KII). 5 KII have been conducted upon responsible officials and key informants. Among them, two were leaders of the environmental movement; two were environmental CSOs (ECSOs) heads, and one policymaker. These qualitative interviews were taken to validate NGOs self-evaluation.

Table 2. KII Categories and Figures

SL No	Character of Respondents	Institutions	Number of Respondents
KII-1	Government Organization	Environmental policy makers (Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change)	01
KII-2	ECSO	BELA Relevant Dealing Person	01
KII-3	NGO(Organizations working with environment)	Barshik	01
KII-4	Environment movement leaders	Surjokiran Social-welfare Association	01
KII-5	Environment movement leaders	Youth Action For Social Change	01
Total			05

Table 2 insights gained from the KII provided a deeper understanding of the NGOs' methodologies and challenges, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis. This triangulation of data sources enhances the reliability of the findings and supports informed decision-making for future initiatives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As an actor of civil society, NGOs has a broad influence at the grassroots level in Bangladesh. Microcredit activities and improvements in community well-being are used to assess civil society's influence. Furthermore, NGOs cover donor agencies' environmental agendas as well as, on occasion, the government's agenda. So, through their environmental activities, there were some influences at the grassroots level.

While the support of governmental and international financial institutions gives the impetus for globalization from above, civil society organizations drive it from below (Khondker, 2001). Studies on foreign country also showed that, civil society has an influence from bottom to national level policy decisions. Eric Amna stated that, in the Nordic countries, CSOs have historically been vital to nation and state-building processes, organized democratically from the grassroots to the level of national umbrella

organizations, and viewed as part of a system that created and transmitted 'the will of the people' to national decision makers (Amna, 2006).

When asked about the impacts of their environmental movement, the questionnaire's respondents identified a variety of areas of influence. Their response addressed the influence area, as seen in the table 3.

Table 3. Some areas at the grassroots level where NGOs have influences by their environmental activities

Responses from Interview	from	Grassroots Influence Issues
NGOs (As an representation of civil society)	an	provide information and advice in various environmental issues to people, environmental preservation and conscious raising at grassroots, communication with local government, influence on local environmental issue, influence at local government, advocacy for climate fund for marginal people, providing memorandum at divisional commissioner (DC) office, training to face disaster, technology and financial support, family waste management, food, living standard development, natural resource management, arranged peoples participation awareness meeting, increasing adaption capability youth consciousness, , raising public awareness, pond and river digging, preservation of rain water at the salinity affected areas, biodiversity protection on Sundarbans, water resource conservation, environment protection awareness program disaster risk reduction through community radio, awareness raising, providing finance or loan on proper sanitation system, drinking water, healthy sanitation, disaster risk adaption and reduction, awareness creating to use coal against wood on brick making

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Furthermore, to access their influence at the grassroots level of Bangladesh, selected indicator and NGO self-evaluations are analyzed here. These evaluations provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of various programs and initiatives, highlighting both successes and areas for improvement. By examining these indicators, we can better understand how NGOs are shaping community development and engaging local populations.

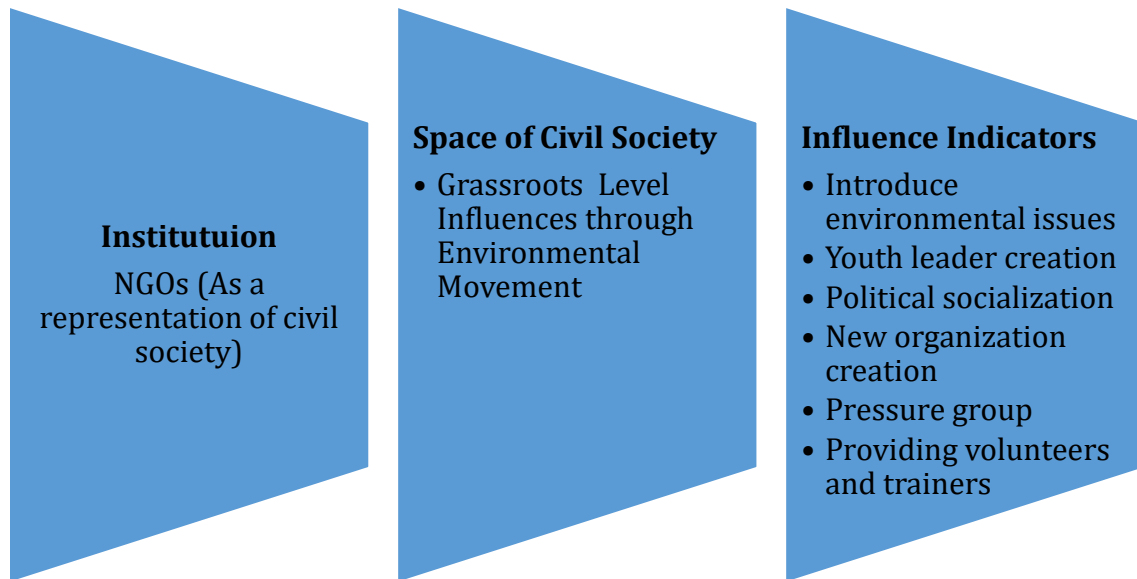


Figure 1. Grassroots Level Influence Analysis Framework (Developed by the Researchers)

Figure 1 show the grassroots level, the influence of civil society is analyzed through some grassroots mobilization, which includes introducing environmental issues, youth leader creation, political socialization, new organization creation, acting as a pressure group, and providing volunteers and trainers. These efforts not only empower local communities to address their specific challenges but also foster a sense of collective responsibility and engagement among citizens. Ultimately, this grassroots mobilization plays a crucial role in shaping policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of the community. The influence of civil society upon environmental issues in Bangladesh can be understood in the following ways:

Introduce Environmental Issues

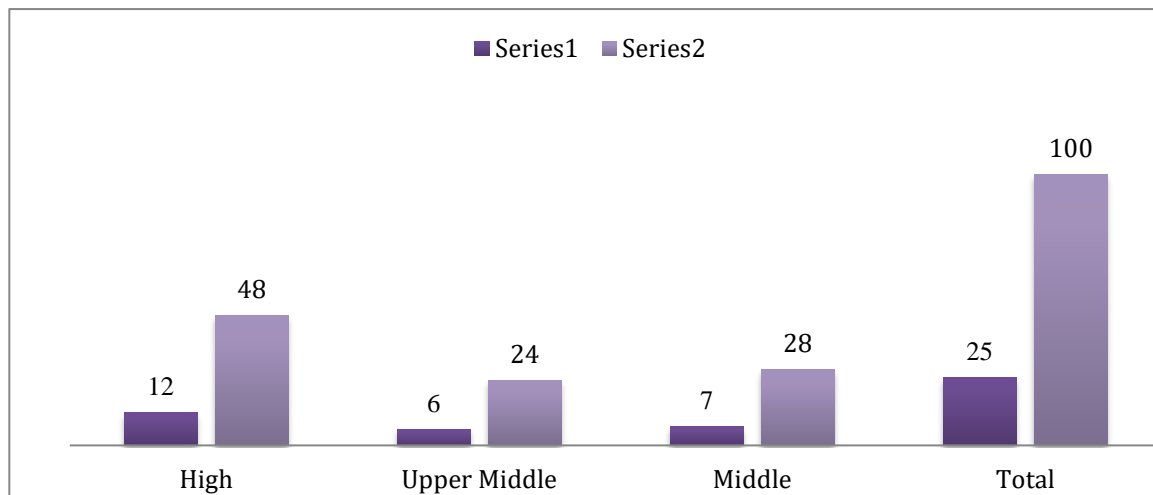


Figure 2. Influence on Introducing Environmental Issues.

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Environmental issues are perceived and communicated quite differently in different parts of the world (Burns and LeMoyné, 2001). The activities of constituents of environmental movements vary with

their size and geographical breadth, among other considerations. Generally, large Asia-Pacific developing country ECSOs approach environmental issues from the perspective of poverty reduction and therefore place human concerns at the center of their strategies (FAO). NGOs are focused on environmental issues such as awareness-raising, resource development and recording, the introduction of alternative livelihoods, coordination and assistance for various government departments, attention to habitat management and restoration, and so on. Grassroots level NGOs work on various issues of environment. NGOs introduce to the grassroots community about environmental issues safety, protection and management.

From figure 2, it can be asserted that most of the NGOs are intensively able to influence for introducing environmental issues at the grassroots level (48%). 24% NGOs influence level is upper middle and 28% NGOs evaluate themselves in middle position. The rights of indigenous peoples, community forestry, forest conservation, wildlife protection, river and watershed conservation, timber production, eco-labeling and certification, environmental pollution, and environmental aspects of international trade are just a few of the many issues that environmental movements are concerned about on a global scale (FAO).

The activities of constituents of environmental movements vary with their size and geographical breadth, among other considerations. Generally, large Asia-Pacific developing country Environmental CSOs approach environmental issues from the perspective of poverty reduction and therefore place human concerns at the center of their strategies. Like globally, as a developing country, Bangladeshi NGOs also have a better influence in introducing environmental issues at the grassroots community.

In this indicator a youth movement leader told,

“Grassroots communities often do not know what is wrong, where to get help, what will help, what kind of help they can expect regarding their surroundings. In this context local NGOs are helping individuals by empowering them: by helping them to get to know what they are entitled to expect about sound environment. We are presenting the environmental issues influenced by the entire system and identifying sources for remedies.” (KII-5)

But the opinion of the policymaker differs from the youth NGO leader. She claimed that,

“At the marginal level, civil society works on environmental issues, but it is pollution-centric. If civil society does not act according to the donor’s agenda, then it will work on the environmental issues that will increase the eligibility of civil society.” (KII-1)

This statement highlights the tension between civil society’s focus on pollution-related issues and the influence of donor priorities. The youth NGO leader suggests that without aligning with these agendas, civil society may struggle to effectively address broader environmental concerns.

Youth Leader Creation

NGOs addressing the relationship between human being and environment on education and training of technical and field staff and community leaders on environmental protection, conservation, rehabilitation processes, and technologies. It is expected that due to their greater capacity for situational adaptation and creativity, the younger generation is better positioned to act as a catalyst for environmental movements. Engaging youth in a meaningful way that can increase their understanding of what impact them and build the capacity of youth to play an effective role in future development processes (World Bank, 2007). So, this research also tried to find the position of environmental NGOs in influence regarding youth leader incensement.

Table 4. Influence on Creating Youth Leader

Scale of Measurement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	9	36
Upper Middle	6	24
Middle	8	32
Lower Middle	1	4
Low	1	4
Total	25	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

From table 4 the survey it has been found that 36% NGOs rated their influence level is high, where 24% scored upper middle and 32% in middle position. The rest are rating low (4% lower middle, 4% low, Table 4). This result helped to understand that, through environmental movement NGOs, they have a significant influence on the creation of young leaders. Chowdhury et. al. (2014) claimed that Bangladesh still has a poor participation of youth regarding environmental awareness. But after one decade from their result, the youth engagement is increased notably. Numerous youth environmental NGOs have grown also.

A responsible officer of Environmental NGO stated that,

“To increase youth leader they communicate with the youth organizations, partnering with them to promote their engagement in environmental movement, increase member by contacting youth to youth, involving youth in advisory groups or forming youth advisory groups, dialoguing with youth which create a space in the agenda where youth can speak to the leaders, local government officer, and policy makers, and building the capacity of youth through training programs based on environmental issues.” (KII-3)

In another interview with youth organization head, he talked about the importance of youth leaders to foster environmental movement. He said,

“Youth have a special talent for invention and the development of new forms of action and activism and can generate more effective responses to environmental issues. They are able to adapt new technology regarding environmental impact assessment and easily spread the information on social networking sites. At the same time, by working as a volunteer in the environmental movement, the qualities of leadership within the youth developed. Which creates opportunities for establishing more new organizations and creating leadership in politics in the future.” (KII-4)

So, it may be asserted that the pivotal role of youth organization heads in the environmental movement cannot be overstated, as they embody a dynamic fusion of creativity and activism that is essential for addressing today’s ecological challenges. With their innate ability to innovate and inspire, young leaders are not only capable of crafting effective responses to environmental issues but also adept at harnessing cutting-edge technology to enhance impact assessments. Moreover, their fluency in social media serves as a powerful tool for disseminating vital information and mobilizing peers, amplifying awareness and action on a global scale.

Political Socialization of Grassroots Community

Only the mass public can generate the political pressure and power necessary to bring about reform (Diamond, 1997). Promoting community engagement in agenda-setting and public decision-making gives everyone a political platform to voice their demands and objectives related to the environment. The Sundarbans^{vi} and the Rampal Anti-Power-Plant Movement serves as a social movement that opposes issues such as the coal industry, deforestation in the name of development, and the nation's defective

energy policies. It also assists in determining the reason behind the severe future dispossession of local people by their government (Huq, 2020). The anti Rampal Power Plant movement became a global social and environmental movement, which embodies the 'environmentalism of the poor' (Islam & Al-amin, 2019). Grassroots environmental activism may be an effective way to make the community politically socialized.

Table 5. Political Socialization

Scale of Measurement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	3	12
Upper Middle	5	20
Middle	13	52
Lower Middle	1	4
Low	3	12
Total	25	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 5 is obvious that the question in influencing political socialization only 12% NGOs rated high. 52% NGOs keep themselves in middle position. Additionally, Warleigh (2001) discovered that NGOs and civil society were unable to encourage their followers' political socialization. The framework of EU policy-making and the role of NGOs in political socialization served as the foundation for his research. In the case of Bangladesh, more than two decades later, the NGOs influence on political socialization is still insignificant. This suggests that despite the passage of time and the potential for NGOs to impact political engagement and awareness, their role in shaping the political attitudes and behaviors of the Bangladeshi populace remains limited. Factors such as governmental resistance, societal norms, or lack of resources may contribute to this ongoing ineffectiveness.

New Organization Creation

In many cases, civil society has been essential in planning demonstrations, neighborhood cleanups, and educational initiatives that emphasize environmental preservation and sustainability. As an example, there has been a lot of grassroots action in the fight to protect the Sundarbans, the biggest mangrove forest in the world, from industrial threats. Another mass movement was saving the Ratargul Swamp forest.^{vii} Along with other bodies of civil intellectuals and civil alliance groups, since 2012, the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas and Mineral Resources, Power, and Ports of Bangladesh^{viii} (hereafter 'National Committee') has been engaged in the Sundarban-Rampal Anti Power-Plant Movement's protest and campaign countering this India-Bangladesh joint-venture coal-based power plant to be located near the forest, the Sundarbans (Huq, 2020). NGOs can easily reach the poor and obtained participation of the intended beneficiaries.

Table 6. New Organization Creation

Scale of Measurement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	6	24
Upper Middle	5	20
Middle	11	44
Lower Middle	1	4
Low	2	8
Total	25	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 6 shows that 24% NGOs claim that they have high influence on creation new organization in the perspective on environmental movement. 20% NGOs rated their position in upper middle position, 44% respondent in middle position and the rest was scored in insignificant influences position. Coalition with other environmental civil society organizations newly formed NGOs influences and engages in grassroots environmental movements in Bangladesh.

The interview with the responsible officer of BELA, he said that,

“BELA with NGOs working on environmental rights forms strategy alliance and works to influence. Creating new organizations and forums with the same kind of NGOs can collectively influence the government as a pressure group. Water Rights Forum (WRF)^{ix} is an example of this collective action.” (KII-2)

Another organization is mentionable from the survey, which is the Varendra Youth Forum.^x It organizes the ‘Rajshahi Youth Climate Summit’ that presents various environmental discriminations and challenges through the cooperation of other youth organizations. The surveyed respondent mentions that,

“The youth of Bangladesh are working to build a society free of discrimination. We want to establish climate management and fairness free of discrimination. The Bangladesh tree protection movement, the save the river movement, and the drought of the Varendra region are focusing areas to influence the concerned authority. The Rajshahi Youth Climate Summit stands as a beacon of hope and action, addressing the pressing issues of environmental discrimination and the multifaceted challenges it brings. By forging alliances with various youth organizations, the summit amplifies its impact and fosters a united front committed to advocating for a society devoid of discrimination.”

Central to its mission is the pursuit of climate management that emphasizes fairness, ensuring that every voice is heard in the fight against ecological degradation. With a focus on critical areas such as tree protection, river conservation, and combating drought in the Varendra region, the summit raises awareness and actively promotes sustainable practices that are essential for nurturing our planet’s future. Through these efforts, participants embody a vision of resilience and equality, demonstrating that collective youth action can drive meaningful change in our environment and society.

Influence as a Pressure Group

A pressure group is an organization which seeks as one of its functions to influence the formation and implementation of public policy (Grant, 2000). As an actor of civil society, it was expected that NGOs are able to exert influence as pressure group through environmental movement.

Table 7. Pressure Group

Scale of Measurement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	2	8
Upper Middle	4	16
Middle	10	40
Lower Middle	4	16
Low	5	20
Total	25	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

In this question NGOs influence in high level is very poor according to their evaluation. Only 8% NGOs act as high influential pressure group in environmental movement. 16% NGOs rating their position in upper middle, 40% in middle, 16% in lower middle, and 20% in low which helps to explained that as

pressure group (Table 7). NGOs influence is comparatively poor in grassroots level and overall environmental movement in Bangladesh. This distribution of NGO influence indicates that while a small percentage hold significant power, the majority operates at a lower capacity, limiting their effectiveness in driving grassroots change. Consequently, this weakens the overall impact of the environmental movement in Bangladesh.

Providing Volunteers and Trainers

NGOs participation ensures a greater plurality of voices and points of view; and NGOs, being a different type of actor than states, can accomplish things that states cannot. NGOs cover a wide range of grassroots people through their organizational project implementation. They arrange several training programs to meet natural disaster response and to challenge environmental degradation. Besides, they arranges seminar, workshop with the help of donor agency. These activities provide a number of volunteers and trainers in environmental issues response.

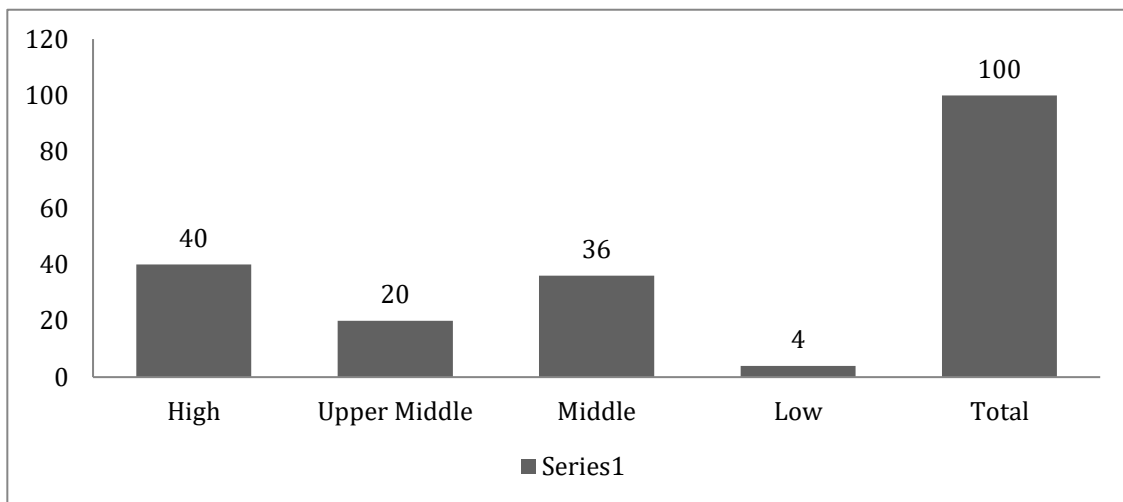


Figure 3. Influence on Providing Volunteers and Trainers

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

According to figure 3, 40% NGOs have highly influence on providing volunteers and trainers in tackle environmental movement. 20% in upper middle influence, 40% in middle, and only 4% scoring low influential position. This result help to assume that, NGOs have a significant influence on providing volunteers and trainers in response to meet natural disaster and environmental conservation. Especially youth NGOs are very much active about current environmental threats and degradation both home and abroad.

To validate the self-evaluation, an interview was taken with a prominent environmental CSO official. He said,

“BELA offers a regular training program on environmental issues and laws. Over the last 23 years, more than 400 government officials, 850 local government officials, 1000 judicial officers, 1000 NGO activists and civil society members, 150 journalists, 120 police officers, and 500 school and college teachers have been trained.” (KII-2)^{xi}

Detailed discussion with him helps to understand that, this comprehensive program has not only increased awareness about environmental protection but has also fostered collaboration among various

sectors to address pressing ecological challenges. Participants have reported a significant enhancement in their ability to implement and enforce environmental regulations effectively.

So, it can be anticipated that civil society in Bangladesh has a better influence at grassroots community mobilization and fostering a democratic engagement in environmental movement. Additionally, some respondent argued that, the influence of external factors and economic pressures may overshadow local initiatives, complicating the pursuit of genuine democratic engagement in environmental issues.

Discussion

The civil society grassroots influence in Bangladesh play a crucial role in shaping and influencing the broader dynamics of the environmental movement. Their impact reflects the intersection of socio-political, economic, and ecological conditions in the country. Grassroots organizations work closely with local communities to raise awareness about environmental issues, including deforestation, river pollution, and climate change. Their activism reflects the broader struggles of marginalized groups; especially those affected by environmental degradation, such as farmers, fisher. Grassroots initiatives, such as community-based adaptation projects, reflect the need for resilience-building and policy influence at the national and international levels. Their struggles to advocate for environmental justice mirror the broader governance issues in Bangladesh, such as corruption and weak environmental regulation. Many grassroots organizations collaborate with international NGOs and global climate networks, reflecting the transnational nature of environmental activism

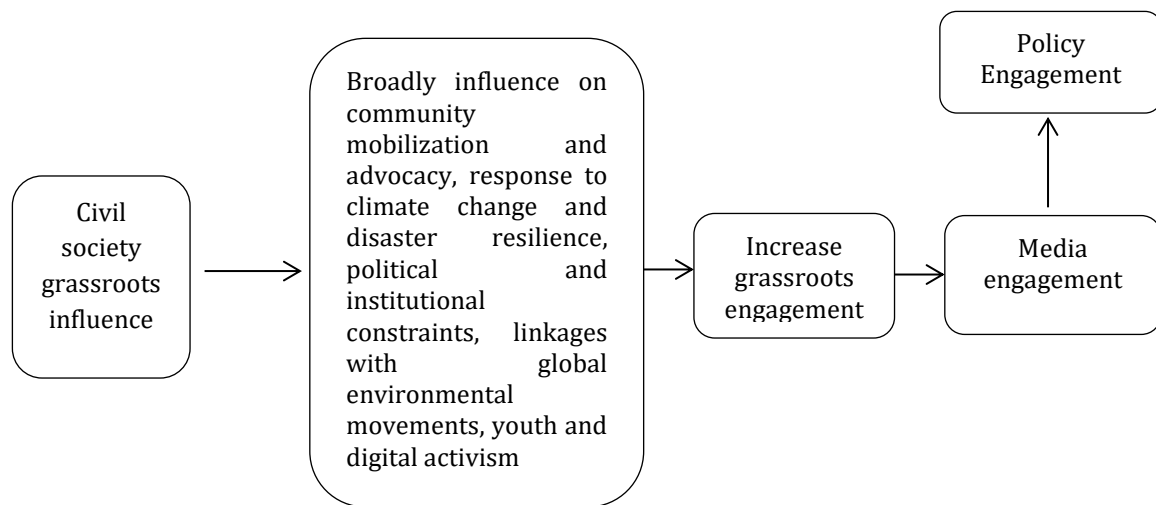


Figure 4. Overall mapping of the Research

Source: Developed by the researcher

Figure 4 show The dynamic interplay between Bangladesh's economic growth and the pressing need for sustainability underscores a transformative era shaped by youth-led movements. These passionate advocates are not only championing climate action and conservation but are also harnessing digital platforms to amplify their voices, fostering greater civic engagement and heightening environmental awareness among the population. The grassroots initiatives they spearhead play a pivotal role in influencing socio-political dynamics, creating a ripple effect that challenges traditional economic paradigms while promoting sustainable practices. As these movements continue to evolve, they are poised

to significantly shape the future trajectory of Bangladesh's environmental landscape, ensuring that economic progress does not come at the expense of ecological integrity. Thus, the convergence of youthful activism, digital innovation, and grassroots mobilization stands as a testament to the nation's commitment to forging a sustainable path forward in an era marked by both opportunity and challenge.

Grassroots Challenges and Future Directions

While civil society plays a significant role in socioeconomic development in Bangladesh, it falls short in attaining democracy, policy reform, or accountability. Environmental NGOs are also very active at the grassroots level for soft development, such planting trees, making sure the water is pure, and raising awareness of environmental issues, but they have less success when it comes to campaigning at the upper level of government decision-making. Notwithstanding the fact that civil society has significantly aided Bangladesh's environmental movement, the following are the main issues raised by the NGOs surveyed.

Environmental advocacy is often hindered by political and economic wills, especially in a country where industrialization and urbanization are rapidly growing. The government's efforts to increase control over NGO operations, especially their access to foreign money, are the most obvious indication of tensions between the state and NGOs (White, 1999). The influence of corporate interests can undermine environmental laws.

Many civil society organizations operate with limited financial resources, making it difficult to scale their initiatives. They are often dependent on international funding, which can sometimes limit their influence on local policy (Holloway: 1993, Stiles: 2002, Quadir: 2003). The pressure of donors and the domestic government, all shape the scope and character of NGOs activities in Bangladesh (Zohir, 2004). Respondent also claimed these challenges during survey. Although civil society has made significant strides, engaging the general public in environmental issues remains an ongoing challenge. People of grassroots community still struggle with the immediate pressures of poverty and may not prioritize environmental concerns.

Civil society to become more effective and influential in environmental movement, here are some key suggestions:

- I. Promote greater public engagement in decision-making, particularly in local government.
- II. Develop awareness initiatives to promote a more engaged populace by raising awareness of environmental rights and responsibilities.
- III. Civil society organizations (CSOs) should collaborate more effectively with each other, as well as with the government, private sector, and international organizations. Building networks across sectors can amplify their influence and outcomes.
- IV. Focus on advocating for transparent, accountable, and inclusive policies that promote democratic environmental governance and human rights.
- V. Empower marginalized communities through legal and policy reforms that address inequalities in areas such as gender, labor, and environmental justice.
- VI. Invest in building the digital and internet based platform of CSOs, including skills in management, advocacy, and project implementation. This will increase their long-term effectiveness and sustainability.
- VII. Provide training in digital tools and technologies to help organizations better reach and mobilize citizens. Develop apps or platforms for better communication and coordination among civil society actors and the general public.

- VIII. Engage the younger generation by providing platforms for youth to participate in civil society activities, creating opportunities for leadership development and social change.
- IX. Organize youth-led campaigns around social justice, environmental sustainability, and human rights to encourage long-term engagement.
- X. Engage in environmental protection efforts, advocating for policies that address climate change and promote sustainability in local communities.

By focusing on these areas, Bangladeshi civil society can increase its influence in advocating for environmental movement, ensuring more sustainable and environmental governance.

CONCLUSION

Civil society in Bangladesh has been a significant driver in the environmental movement, influencing policies, fostering local activism, and advocating for a more sustainable and climate-resilient future. Through legal, advocacy, and educational efforts, civil society groups continue to raise awareness and push for changes that can help protect Bangladesh's fragile ecosystems in the face of climate change. From the result it can be stated that NGOs influence in political socialization (12%), new organization creation (24%), and pressure groups (8%) is rated high. This rating indicates a less influential role of NGOs in grassroots environmental activism. On the other hand, influence in introducing environmental issues (48%), youth leader creation (36%), and providing volunteers and trainers (40%) scored high. This high rating indicates NGOs environmental activism and acceptance at the grassroots level of Bangladesh. Though all the indicators separately refer to the influence of civil society at the grassroots level.

The multifaceted impact of NGOs in Bangladesh underscores their vital role in shaping grassroots environmental activism. While their capacity to create pressure groups remains limited, they excel in raising awareness and introducing critical environmental issues, accounting for 48% of their impact. Furthermore, the cultivation of youth leaders at a notable rate of 36% highlights their commitment to fostering the next generation of environmental advocates. Coupled with a robust provision of volunteers and trainers—40%—NGOs are not just participants but pivotal players in enhancing civil society's effectiveness at the grassroots level. The synthesis of these efforts reveals a dynamic landscape where NGOs serve as catalysts for change, empowering communities to address environmental challenges and fostering a culture of activism that promises hope for a sustainable future.

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Endnotes

- ⁱ This information was collect according to 'Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2022' which is quoted from Bangladesh Economuc Review 2024. p.187.
- ⁱⁱ Ministry of Primary and Mass Education , Bangladesh Economic Review, 2024. Chapter 12, Human Resource Development. p. 173.
- ⁱⁱⁱ NGOs were selected purposively because there are no rational lists or number of Environmental Civil Society Organizations or NGOs to the Government or any private source. So, the author focused three division based on three criteria for the selection of NGOs.
- ^{iv} Dhaka as the capital area, Khulna as the coastal region, and Varendra region are facing more environmental disasters. These three regions have been selected for the purpose of seeing how the NGOs' are working with the environment.

- ^v Likert scale can provide a clear way to measure the intensity or agreement/disagreement level with certain statements, thus helping researchers capture a range of perspectives. Accordingly Likert Scale has been used to measure influence attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of respondents towards environmental movement in Bangladesh.
- ^{vi} The Sundarbans were designated as a Bangladeshi world heritage site by UNESCO in 1997. Combining the Bengali words "sundar" (beautiful) and "bans" (forests), the term Sundarbans refers to the stunning forests that are found in the delta region of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna river basins, which span parts of Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. The largest coastal mangrove forest in the world is found in the Sundarbans, which span over 10,000 square kilometers, with roughly 6,000 of that area located in Bangladesh. Details at, Zohora, F.T., 2011, Non-timber forest products and livelihoods in the Sundarbans. In: J. Fox, M.G. Mustafa, S.A. Quazi, W.B. Miles, E.J. Cunningham, and M. Chassels Eds Rural Livelihoods and Protected Landscapes: Co-management in the Wetlands and Forests of Bangladesh (Dhaka: USAID), pp. 99–117.
- ^{vii} One of the world's twenty-two freshwater swamp forests is the Ratargul Swamp Forest in Bangladesh's Sylhet District.
- ^{viii} The full name is the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas and Mineral Resources, Power and Ports or the National Committee Bangladesh (NCBD). It is an official committee and the only indispensable platform for organizing the Sundarbans-Rampal Anti Power-Plant Movement consists of progressive left-oriented parties along with representatives of civil intellectual bodies like environmentalists, educators, researchers, writers, journalists, lawyers, artists, and public intellectual activists, etc. The committee mainly operates continuous activism in the capital Dhaka as that considers the city as their central platform. Besides, they have few branches and regional representative committees to execute activism in other parts of Bangladesh, including adjacent areas to the southern zone; consisting the Sundarbans.
- ^{ix} Water Rights Forum (WRF) is a platform of seven rights based organization including ARLD, Nijera Kori, BNPS, Nagorik Uddyog, BELA, Incidin Bangladesh, and CCDB. ARLD is the secretariat of the forum.
- ^x A coordinated initiative of youth for the development of the Varendra region. This is an integrated new organization with 46 youth organizations.