

Organising to Influence the Global Politics of Climate Change

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Organising to Influence the Global Politics of Climate Change

ABSTRACT Many organisations have sought to influence the outcome of the international public policy process on climate change. This research compares two contrasting non-governmental network organisations that were particularly important and influential participants in the process of developing international public policy on climate change. These are Climate Action Network and Global Climate Coalition, both formed in 1989; the former by a range of international environmental organisations and the latter by US business organisations.

This research examines the emergence of both these organisations and the major role played by each of these organisations in forming broad competing international climate change policy coalitions including state and non-state actors. It concludes that they were both very strategic actors in an extremely complex policy process.

Keywords: sustainability, governance, NGOs, international ethics, cross-cultural environmentalism

INTRODUCTION

Both network Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Climate Action Network (CAN) and Global Climate Coalition (GCC) had their mission to influence national and international public policy on climate change. They were formed by a range of non-state actors to enhance their effectiveness in advocating preferred approaches in the national and international public policy process on climate change. The research is based on interviews conducted with people involved with both NGOs and with associated organisations starting in late 2005 and continuing to early 2008, as well as reviewing extensive documentation produced by each NGO and other published material.

In both cases, the network NGOs helped the people in their member organisations to share information, commission shared research, gain access to wider publics, access complementary resources, coordinate and strengthen lobbying and advocacy efforts, increase negotiating power, access a wider range of institutions and their decision makers and decision influencers. It can therefore be seen that there were benefits to the people and organisations involved in forming and developing both GCC and CAN.

It is in the area of networks, coalitions and movements that many problems relating to ontology, semantics and terminology arise, as the same terms are used in different ways by a variety of researchers. According to Keck & Sikkink (1998, p2) “a transnational advocacy network includes those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse and dense exchanges of information and services”. They see transnational advocacy networks as multiplying channels of access to the international system by building new links among actors in civil societies, business firms, states and international organisations within the international policy community. Such networks are most prevalent in issue areas characterised by high value content and informational uncertainty, such as climate change (Keck & Sikkink 1998). They view these networks, however, as formed by progressive, principled activists whereas in the case of the GCC, it was formed by oil, coal and car industry business interests, due to concern that measures might be taken in relation to climate change that “would harm fossil fuel use” (GCC Interviewee 1 2005).

The formation of both of the organisations therefore fits with the Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) hypothesis that people form networks when they believe that a network organisation and closer linkages will assist in what they and their organisations are trying to achieve it. CAN and GCC were, however, also both important actors involved in forming broader largely diametrically opposed international policy coalitions. These are broader than transnational advocacy coalitions and can include governments, government agencies, intergovernmental organisations, corporations as well as NGOs. The first part of this paper outlines why and how these network NGOs of CAN and GCC were formed. The second part outlines their membership and each was a key actor instrumental in building competing broader influential policy coalitions.

ORGANISATION ORIGINS AND INITIAL OBJECTIVES

In order to better understand their role of CAN and GCC within the competing international policy coalitions in the international environmental governance process on climate change, it is useful to initially review why and how CAN and GCC were formed and their initial objectives.

CAN

The German Marshall Fund “saw the opportunity in the late 1980s to foster European US cooperation on the emerging issue of climate change. In 1989, there was a 2 or 3 day meeting at a Church sponsored Conference Centre in Loccum, Germany” (Marshall Fund Interviewee 2005). This meeting was attended by a group of pioneering climate advocates who recognized the need for a coordinated international policy response to climate change and the need for an international coordinating organisation.

Cooperation between Environmental NGOs (ENGOS) was already in place at the Toronto Conference in 1988. On the opening day of the Toronto Conference, a group of ENGOS circulated a draft statement entitled, “Escaping the Heat Trap: An NGO Statement of Policies to Prevent Climate Change,” which highlighted the serious nature of the threat of climate change. The statement concluded, “Unilateral reductions of CO₂ emissions by the world’s leading economic powers and CO₂ producers should start now, reaching 20% by the year 2000” (Betsill 2000, p75).

Many of the attendees of the Toronto Conference also attended the meeting in Loccum at which CAN was formed. At the meeting, it was decided to set up CAN as a network for NGOs who share a common concern for the problems of climate change and wish to cooperate in the development and implementation of short-term and long-term strategies to combat these problems. CAN was set up under the auspices of the Stockholm Environmental Institute. (CAN Interviewees).

The agreed CAN strategy coming out of the Loccum meeting was to influence governments and others to make changes to address climate change concerns. These NGO representatives saw themselves as working on behalf of the world and its people. Although all from NGOs, they represented a wide range of organisations, such as the “scientific and research” organizations like Woods Hole Research Institute and

the World Resources Institute. Many of the participants at Loccum had already been involved in the World Climate Programme and were working on the scientific assessment of climate change through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). There were also representatives of the big three “activist” ENGOs - Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and WWF. These traditionally focused upon bringing environmental issues into public awareness, but were developing their own research programs. These three are all based in Western Europe, but even in 1989 their global networks were involved in development issues as well as environmental issues. These large international ENGOs provide a contrast with other national and local ones (CAN Interviewees 2005-2006; Waddell 2003).

Once CAN was established under the auspices of the Stockholm Environmental Institute, it began to coordinate preferred policy positions and views on issues in the emerging international climate change policy regime. At this stage, “this was often achieved by getting the players from the NGOs to sit around a table” (CAN Interviewee 2 2006). CAN also provided a forum for the NGOs to discuss coordination of campaign strategies on particular issues, either nationally or internationally (CAN Interviewees). As email and electronic communication became more widely available, these discussions, activities and coordination would also take place electronically. Initial plans also included expanding the CAN network to include more NGOs from developing countries as “that was seen as important” (CAN Interviewee 2 2006).

GCC

GCC was also set up in 1989. One of the reasons given for its formation was that in 1988 there was a “very alarmist presentation by James Hansen of NASA to a Senate Committee that climate change was taking place” (GCC Interviewee 1 2005). GCC’s initial role was to monitor the position on behalf of its members - business organisations/associations from the fossil fuel industry initially, particularly the American Petroleum Institute (API) - as they were concerned that measures might be taken in relation to climate change that “would harm fossil fuel use” (GCC Interviewee 1 2005).

By June 1989, sixteen Washington business and trade associations formed the GCC, a group that hopes to be “the focal point for business participation in research and policy questions associated with global

climate change," according to GCC's first chairman Thomas Lambrix, director of government relations for Phillips Petroleum. The initial GCC members included major fossil fuel industry organisations (American Petroleum Institute, National Coal Association), major generators and industrial users of electricity (most generators in US use coal) and more general Business Interest NGOs (BINGOs) - US Chamber of Commerce, American Paper Institute and others (Industrial Energy Bulletin 1989). The GCC's three principles at that time were "that business is taking the climate change issue seriously; that good science must be the foundation for policy; and that because the issue is global - actions should be taken in a global context" (Industrial Energy Bulletin 1989).

GCC was opposed to "drastic and unilateral" remedies to mitigate global warming (Booth 1989). In March 1989, the US Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) had included a carbon tax among the policy initiatives needed to forestall global warming in an interim policy report to Congress (McInnes 1989).

"A senior GCC staff member, discussing motivations for the creation of the GCC, expressed the view that industry had "been caught napping" by the ozone issue, and that there was also considerable dissatisfaction with the Clean Air Act process. As he expressed it, "Boy, if we didn't like the Montreal Protocol, we knew we really wouldn't like climate change! This is the mother of all issues!" Although the GCC was constituted as a US-based organization and was focused on domestic lobbying, a number of US subsidiaries of European multinationals also joined, and the GCC quickly rose to be the most prominent voice of industry, both in the US and in the international negotiations." (Levy & Rothenberg 1999, p5)

GCC's initial plans were to focus on both research and economic analysis and to have studies completed in order to be ready to play roles in various international meetings on the climate change issue. These included the G7 Economic Summit (G7) in July 1989 in Paris, the climate-change summit President Bush (Senior) was planning for October 1989 and the 1990 meeting of the IPCC (Industrial Energy Bulletin 1989).

Comparison of Organisation Origins and Initial Objectives

Both also quickly became involved in coordinating activities and lobbying efforts at the major international climate change meetings (CAN Interviewees 2005-2006; GCC Interviewees 2005-6). Only not-for-profit organisations and governments are allowed to have delegates at the official international meetings of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC 2007). As GCC was a registered NGO with the UNFCCC, many executives from its member corporations registered as delegates under GCC for the official meetings. This included 63 GCC delegates and 6 delegates from its close ally, the Climate Council, at the 1997 UNFCCC Conference of the Parties where the Kyoto Protocol was negotiated (UNFCCC 1997).

Although the GCC had more of a US focus, it is clear from its initial plans in terms of seeking reports for the G7 Summit and the IPCC meeting in 1990, that it was working internationally as well as domestically. GCC from its initial formation began making media statements as the GCC. There were clearly advantages to its members as the statements, which often were sceptical of the climate science, were seen to come from a more neutral or even concerned organisation than if they came from the American Petroleum Institute, the National Coal Association or the Edison Electric Institute (association of electric utilities – using mainly coal fired power generation) – three focal BINGOs in the GCC.

CAN's initial objective was more focussed on working behind the scenes, sharing research and information, helping the activist groups understand the science, coordinating policy positions and helping the CAN member NGOs to work together to promote these policy positions at a national and international level and at international official meetings. The CAN individual members were responsible for generating and responding to media coverage in their respective regional, national or international media as part of normal day-to-day activities, it was usually only at the international meetings that media messages were coordinated and issued under CAN. This was sometimes complemented by the major CAN ENGO members (Greenpeace, WWF, FoE) also issuing their own statements, however, in a coordinated way.

CAN's membership was diverse in types of environmental and scientific NGOs and included international and national organisations. GCC's membership was more homogeneous; most of its members were US

business associations representing particular industries (coal, petroleum) or business interests more generally (eg US Chamber of Commerce). In 1989, it also had 18 corporations that were direct members, both US corporations such as Exxon, Mobil, General Motors, Ford and Chrysler and European corporations, such as Shell and BP, though the latter were mainly involved via their US subsidiaries (GCC Interviewee). Both CAN and GCC would also often coordinate lobbying and other advocacy activities with non-members in order to form a broader policy coalition on particular issues as they emerged in the international climate change governance processes (CAN and GCC Interviewees).

MEMBERSHIP OF THE NETWORK NGOS – CAN & GCC

In the initial years, more organisations joined each of these Network NGOs. Having a broader membership has benefits in terms of more organisations with resources to advocate for each organisation's preferred position in the international public policy process on climate change. It may, however, increase the difficulties in getting an agreement to a preferred position by the Network NGO members on particular issues. BP (1996) and Shell (1997) both resigned from the GCC as they disagreed with its campaign against the Kyoto Protocol. The difficulties of gaining agreement to a preferred position may be exacerbated by having members from a wide variety of countries, cultures and backgrounds, as was the case for CAN. It represented a widely distributed and particularly diverse community of practice (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002).

CAN

CAN initially had only one regional (multi-country) node – Climate Action Network Europe, which received initial support from the European Union and it operated alongside Global CAN with a shared coordinator. There were two national nodes, US Climate Action Network (USCAN) and Climate Action Network UK, both regional nodes and Global CAN gained good support among the European and US Environmental NGOs (CAN Interviewees 2005-2006; Waddell 2003).

At the formation meeting in Loccum, a steering committee was formed to broaden the network to include representatives from the developing countries. Many of these countries faced significant threats from

Climate Change including Bangladesh and many of the small island states. There were two main parts to this strategy. (CAN Interviewees 2005-2006; Waddell 2003)

Firstly, appropriate representatives of NGOs from developing countries were identified and invited to one of the many international governmental meetings that were being held on climate change in 1990 and 1991. Possible invitees from these NGOs were identified using the expanded network of contacts of the steering committee and these potential CAN participants were funded to attend the international conference to see if there was a mutual interest in further working together (CAN Interviewees 2005-2006; Waddell 2003). By September 1990, CAN was speaking to the media on behalf of thirteen environmental groups from North America, Europe and Africa (Agence Europe 1990).

At the Second World Climate Conference in Geneva in 1990, the NGOs could see clear evidence of the benefits of working cooperatively. The CAN NGOs from the majority world and minority world formed the view that by working together they were much more effective than either group acting alone.

Following on from this, the NGOs could see the benefits of continuing to cooperate on the continuing climate change negotiations through CAN (CAN Interviewees 2005-2006; Rahman & Roncerel 1994).

The second part of the strategy therefore involved regional organising, creating multi-national regional nodes like the European node of CAN.

By 1993, the Climate Action Network was organized into seven regional networks, coordinated by several informal information nodes managed by existing NGOs. Regional CAN groups include Climate Network Africa, Climate Network-Europe, CAN Latin America, CAN North America, CAN South Asia, CAN Southeast Asia and CAN UK (Sanhueza 1993). There were no formal application procedures to join CAN at this stage and the process was more a networking process where like-minded organisations were invited to join the relevant regional CAN network (CAN Interviewees 2005-2006).

CAN's overall goal was to promote government and individual action to limit human-induced climate change to ecologically sustainable levels. In pursuit of this goal, its objectives in 1993 were "to coordinate information exchange on international, regional and national climate policies and issues, both between CAN groups and other interested institutions; to formulate policy options and position papers on climate-

related issues; and to undertake further collaborative action to promote effective non-governmental organization involvement in efforts to avert the threat of global warming” (Rahman, Robins & Roncerel 1993). By the time of the first COP in Berlin in 1995, there were 150 Environmental NGOs involved with CAN and representatives of many of these gathered to set “Goals for Berlin” on March 27th 1995, the day before the COP officially commenced (Global Warming Network Online Today 1995).

The Japanese Government’s invitation to host COP3 in Kyoto in 1997 resulted in increased focus on the climate change issue among the emerging Japanese NGOs and efforts to foster this by CAN. As a result of this the Kiko Forum was set up in December 1996 as an umbrella organisation for Japanese NGOs participating in COP3 (Reimann 2001). The Kiko Forum evolved into the Kiko Network, with over 170 organisational members, it is one of the best organised national nodes within CAN (Waddell 2003).

China, with its hostility to NGOs, Russia and other countries which were part of the former Soviet Union remained countries where there was limited success in expanding the CAN Network. CANCEE (Central and Eastern Europe) was established in 1994 (CANCEE) but has been one of the more problematic regional nodes. In 2006, at the Solta Seminar on Climate Change participants from ENGOs in Central and Eastern Europe stressed their willingness to work together and thus revive the CANCEE network again, despite the fact that there were at the time no funds for the CANCEE network and no coordinator (CANCEE 2006).

GCC

GCC’s focus was on the US and it did not seek to expand its network beyond US-based Business Interest NGOs (BINGOs) and US and multinational corporations (GCC Interviewees 2005-6). By January 1992, it had expanded its membership from 46 business organisations as members (both associations and corporations) and at that time appointed John Shlaes as Executive Director. John Shlaes, was previously director of government relations at Edison Electric Institute (EEI), the association of investor-owned electric utilities. EEI was a founding member of the GCC (PR Newswire 1992). Shlaes was to play a major role in lobbying for the GCC position at both the US Government level and in the context of the international negotiations on climate change. According to Jeremy Leggett (2001), he was a man who

knew about influencing governments. Along with Don Pearlman of the Climate Council (a key GCC ally), Shlaes became very visible in the international negotiations that, during 1992, were focused on concluding the final negotiations of the text of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Michael E. Baroody, Senior Vice President of the National Association of Manufacturers, was elected interim Chairman of the GCC Board at the beginning of 1992. Other GCC Board members, at that time, included representatives of 12 business/industry associations (American Iron and Steel Institute, American Mining Congress, American Petroleum Institute, American Iron and Steel Institute, Association of International Automobile Manufacturers, Chemical Manufacturers Association, ELCON (an association of large industrial consumers of electricity), Edison Electric Institute, Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association of the US, National Coal Association, Process Gas Consumers Group - an association of industrial users of natural gas, U.S. Chamber of Commerce). Other GCC board members represented 7 Corporations from the Oil, Natural Gas and Chemical Industry (ARCO, Amoco, Dow-Hydrocarbons & Resources, DuPont, Enron, Phillips Petroleum and Texaco) and 5 Electricity Generating Corporations (American Electric Power Service Corporation, Illinois Power, Southern Company, Ohio Edison and Union Electric) (PR Newswire 1992). Most of the electricity generators in the US at that time used coal and this has continued through to 2008.

It can be seen from this analysis that representatives of the fossil fuel industries and the large electricity generators and users were well represented on the GCC Board. Business/industry associations from these sectors were also well represented along with some other major business/industry associations.

On his appointment, Shlaes described the GCC as “actively involved in the global climate change debate because of our concern over the enormous impact which improper resolution of this issue may have on our customers, the nation's economy and the ability of the U.S. to compete in international markets” (PR Newswire 1992).

Comparison of Initial Expansion

As discussed in relation to the initial formation of the GCC, many US business interests were dissatisfied with the international agreement to phase out CFCs under the Montreal Protocol and saw climate change as an even bigger potential threat to US business interests (Levy & Rothenberg 1999). Building a wider and more diverse coalition of business associations both increased the resources available for coordinated lobbying and other advocacy. It also increased the legitimacy of the organisation as it could claim to speak for a wider spectrum of US businesses.

By 1990, GCC's ally in the international negotiating arena was already established, it was the Climate Council headed by Don Pearlman. He was a partner in the Washington law and lobbying firm, Patton, Boggs and Blow and a former under-secretary in the Department of the Interior in the Reagan administration. The law firm had a reputation as "super-lobbyists" and kept the funders of the Climate Council secret (Leggett 2001).

The expansion of the CAN network is more complex as it already was an international Network NGO. Its further expansion was international, with a particular focus on broadening involvement by NGOs from the majority world. CAN also established regional (across a number of countries) and national nodes (although each most of these outside CAN Europe and US CAN had very limited resources), which helped to share expertise and information and co-ordinate advocacy activities.

Among the benefits of expanding the CAN network to include developing country NGOs was that these NGOs could access the expertise on climate change that had been built up by the major ENGOs and Research Institutes. The inclusion in CAN of NGOs from a wider range of countries, gave more opportunity to affect the international processes as almost the government of almost every country is represented and as a signatory to the UNFCCC has an equal 'official' status at the negotiations. Through the broadened NGO network, CAN sought to influence the position of a wide range of official national delegations to take a more progressive stance on international climate change policy. This therefore gave CAN the opportunity to broaden the reach and effectiveness of its international policy coalition.

Conclusion

Both CAN and GCC successfully formed Network NGOs, which acted to enhance the influence of their member organisations in the development of national and international policy of climate change. Both grew rapidly and were valued by their participant organisations. Their importance lies in the key role they both played in coordinating broader transnational advocacy networks and facilitating even broader policy coalitions with the international climate change policy development process. They were both sophisticated and strategic actors with an extremely complex policy process.

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