

Sharpening Environmental Policy: From the Lens of Non-Government Organization

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to scrutinize non-governmental organizations' perspectives on policy implementation, evaluate the participants' challenges, and emphasize the importance of environmental protection. Sustainable Development Goals 12 and 16 are highlighted in this study, wherein SDG 12 encourages the efficient use of resources. At the same time, SDG 16 ensures that these policies are supported by transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, making environmental policy more effective, fair, and enforceable. This study uses a qualitative approach and employs a descriptive research design. One-on-one, in-depth interviews were conducted with the seven chosen participants through phone calls and online platforms. The researchers provided informed consent to make this study transparent and accountable. The participants' responses were recorded with their permission and consent. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the gathered data and identify themes. This study highlighted the vital themes in each research question provided by the data analyst. Research question number 1 has six themes: Ineffective Implementation and Enforcement of Policies, Preference for Watershed Protection Policies, Financial Constraints as a Barrier to Implementation, Challenges in Policy Accessibility, Communication, and Awareness, Importance of Sufficient Staffing and Support, and Strengthening the Enforcement Mechanism. Research question 2 has identified five essential themes: Policy Enhancement, Monitoring and Updating, Inclusive Policymaking with Strong Enforcement, Effective Communication and Awareness Campaigns, Cultural Sensitivity and Indigenous Engagement, and Multi-Sector Collaboration and Partnerships. Lastly, the findings indicate how important it is for non-government organizations, governments, and other stakeholders to shape environmental policy collectively. This collaboration will be a strong foundation for promoting environmental policy protection advocacy.

Keywords: policy implementation, environmental protection, qualitative phenomenology, Davao City

SDG Integration: #12 Responsible Consumption and Production; #16 Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues have been a significant concern for centuries and decades, but many countries still struggle to address this. Some countries are collaborating to find a great solution, and because of this, many non-governmental organizations have emerged to help deal with the environmental problem. Access to policymakers has become a significant concern for non-government organizations due to the lack of connection to those in the position. Environmental policy is crucial for balancing conservation and development, impacting everyone from environmentalists to developers. However, the current ways of environmental policymaking are often criticized for being controlled mainly by the government and experts, leaving out the voices of local communities (Aryal, Laudari, Neupane, & Maraseni, 2021). Implementing policies sometimes becomes a personal interest, and only a few people will benefit from it, especially regarding natural resources; the opinion of the local communities is often set aside.

According to Pacheco's (2021) study on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and environmental governance, NGOs serve an essential role in the global advocacy process regarding sustainable development.

Greenpeace and the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), which work diligently to protect the Amazon Rainforest from industrial activity and deforestation, have greatly impacted Brazilian conservation efforts. In this case, in 2020 alone, Greenpeace detected and recorded over 15,000 cases of illegal deforestation in the area, putting more pressure on the Brazilian government to pass stricter environmental regulations (Pacheco, 2021). Similarly, the World Wildlife Fund has focused on promoting sustainable land use and biodiversity conservation. As part of their efforts, they collaborate with residents to promote sustainable agriculture techniques that lessen their environmental impact while improving the neighbors' lifestyles.

In the Philippines, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an important role in defining environmental discourse, notably by opposing waste-to-energy (WTE) incineration projects. Considering current environmental rules such as Republic Act 8749 and the Philippine Clean Air Act of 1999, which prohibit incineration of harmful pollutants, WTE plants' applications persist. Environmental organizations such as Greenpeace Philippines, the Mother Earth Foundation, and the EcoWaste Coalition highlight medical and environmental concerns linked with WTE incinerators. NGOs believe that WTE devices undermine sustainable waste management aims by encouraging trash creation rather than reducing it. This violates Republic Act 9003, the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, which stresses waste reduction, recycling, reuse, and composting. Furthermore, organizations such as the EcoWaste Coalition argue that redirecting expenditures to incineration undermines zero-waste projects and may contravene international accords like the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (GAIA, 2024).

Environmental difficulties in Davao City, including inadequate solid waste management and controversial waste-to-energy (WTE) incinerator ideas, have sparked increased concern among academic researchers, civil society groups, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A key concern is the ineffective implementation of the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act (RA 9003), particularly at the barangay level. Many municipalities continue to use obsolete waste disposal methods, resulting in inadequate segregation procedures, increasing trash buildup, and greater strain on the city's clean landfill. The waste facility in Barangay New Carmen and Tugbok District is reaching capacity, causing the local administration to propose a ₱5-billion WTE incineration project involving Japanese contractors and financial organizations. However, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) strongly oppose this proposal, claiming it weakens sustainable, community-based trash management alternatives (SunStar Davao, 2022).

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Davao City are actively battling environmental issues such as deforestation and pollution, which seriously harm the city's natural resources. Davao City has undergone fast urbanization, resulting in a reduction of green areas and rising pollution levels. According to statistics, Davao's forest cover is diminishing, with only roughly 32% of the region's land area still forested as of current data (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020). NGOs like Interface Development Interventions (IDIS) play an important role in resolving these concerns by campaigning for sustainable urban development and environmental protection. IDIS and kindred organizations are also involved in anti-pollution initiatives in local waterways, assisting in the monitoring and enforcing regulations that safeguard these essential ecosystems. Through their advocacy and mobilization initiatives, these NGOs help shape local environmental laws that balance the city's development with maintaining its natural environment. Their efforts are critical to ensuring that Davao City maintains a sustainable and comfortable environment for future generations (PNA, 2020).

The National Greening Program (NGP) was created by Executive Order No. 26 in 2011 under the administration of late President Benigno Aquino III; the NGP aims to address serious environmental issues such as deforestation, land degradation, and biodiversity loss while contributing to poverty alleviation and climate change mitigation. Through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) management, they plant billions of trees across millions of hectares of land. This is part of the government's strategy to promote environmental sustainability and restore the country's forest cover. According to Kleist, Herbrohn, Baynes, and Gregorio (2021), despite the National Greening Program's clear objective to enhance biodiversity, the Philippine government faces challenges implementing projects focusing on restoring biodiversity.

Moreover, Non-governmental organizations play a vital role in making an effective policy from which everyone can benefit. The National Greening Program is an excellent policy that addresses environmental issues. However, its implementation has faced several challenges, particularly due to a lack of consultation with NGOs and local communities, such as Indigenous Peoples (IPs) who reside in the impact areas. This lack of proper dialogue resulted in misaligned priorities and goals between the government and the communities directly affected by the policy.

The research gap in exploring environmental policy sharpening through NGOs in Davao City reveals several critical areas that need further investigation. Current studies predominantly focus on top-down approaches driven by government bodies, overlooking the specific role and impact of non-governmental organizations at the local level. Existing literature often neglects how interactions between NGOs and governmental bodies in Davao City influence effectiveness in policy development. While NGOs are known for mobilizing local support and raising awareness, detailed research on how such engagement translates into meaningful policy changes is lacking. Addressing these gaps will enhance understanding of NGO contributions to environmental policy, improve stakeholder collaboration, and foster more effective and sustainable environmental governance in Davao City.

The objectives of this research seek to look into the perspectives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) on implementing environmental policies, emphasizing how successful these policies have been in tackling environmental concerns. The research will also examine NGOs' suggestions to improve policy effectiveness, such as stricter enforcement and improved transparency. As a result, the study aims to answer the following questions: What are the views of NGOs on implementing environmental policies? What are the recommendations of NGOs to sharpen environmental policies?

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions and SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production are integral to sharpening environmental policies in Davao City, with NGOs playing a vital role in their implementation. Under SDG 16, peaceful and inclusive societies are essential for effective environmental policy. In Davao City, where issues like deforestation, pollution, and waste management are prevalent, NGOs mediate conflicts, foster community engagement, and promote collaboration, helping ensure societal stability for sustainable development. For SDG 12, NGOs advocate for sustainable resource use and waste reduction by promoting circular economy models, minimizing waste, and encouraging recycling. They campaign against harmful products like single-use plastics, lobby for sustainable supply chains, and educate communities to adopt eco-friendly consumption. In both SDGs, NGOs' grassroots initiatives, advocacy, and oversight play a critical role in shaping robust environmental policies that drive peace, justice, and responsible resource management in Davao City.

Furthermore, the significance of this study is to look into NGOs' contributions, opinions, and impact in influencing and strengthening environmental policies. This study is necessary for governments, non-governmental organizations, communities, citizens, academicians, and researchers. The present paper provides insight into NGOs' innovative ideas and on-the-ground experience, which can be considered to create more reachable, viable, and eco-conscious policies. It underlines the value of cooperation, enables governments to create a more influential partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and effectively manages environmental problems. The NGOs can use the results to identify the weaknesses and strengths of their advocacy work, thus having a broader impact on the policy processes. Societies are gaining extra representation by emphasizing the value of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in voicing local matters and enhancing policies that emphasize environmental conservation. The citizens will enjoy better policies that ensure sustainable growth, conservation of natural resources, and general improvement in the quality of the environment. This research will complement a growing body of literature at the intersection of the domain of public society with policymaking, as it will offer a fresh study of the subject through the perspective of a non-governmental organization (NGO). It will be the basis of further studies on innovative patterns of governance and collective efforts in the environment.

The phenomenon of environmental policy sharpening, as studied by a study based on NGOs in Davao City, is important as it unleashes localized knowledge on environmental issues, including deforestation and pollution. NGOs offer terrestrial insights and spur the participation of the communal physique, which improves the efficiency and tolerability of the policy. Their presence in awareness creation and building support among the population augments the endeavors undertaken by the government in fostering collaborative governance.

This study used the Institutional Theory. Struckell, Ojha, Patel, and Dhira (2022) clarified that the concept focuses on understanding the interplay of norms, values, and regulations affecting organizational behaviors and processes. Institutional conditions under which organizations exist comprise formal regulations, unofficial norms, and cultural interpretations held in common by the entire organization. Such establishments influence how corporations act, interact with other organizations, and seek to achieve their goals. Organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), must play by specific standards and rules to obtain legitimacy, resources, and influence in a specific industry. The theory can be applied in evaluating how NGOs respond to institutional constraints and how they can adhere to or not adhere to existing norms.

The research also utilizes the Environmental Justice Theory. As Ottinger (2024) asserts, this theory concerns the uneven sharing of environmental threats and the advantages they bring, especially the adverse effects on marginalized and vulnerable groups. This concept asserts that environmental degradation bears inordinate burdens on communities of color and low-income dwellers. This comprises access to pollution and toxic waste, and narrow access to clean air, water, and green space. Advocacy, activism, and policy reform are frequently utilized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to alleviate disproportionately high environmental burdens that marginalized populations bear. The article applied this theory to understand how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Davao promote fairer environmental laws and strive to lessen the disparate environmental threats that different individual societies face.

Finally, our academic research applies the Social Movement Theory. Wang, Whitson, King, and Ramirez (2023) defined social movements as a group of persons who share some common goals and collaborate to have long-term interactions with the elites, enemies, and authorities. The themes of mobilization of resources, alliances, and definition of goals, as well as the exploitation of opportunities within political systems to pursue their causes, are the agenda of interest in this environment. The key concepts in social movement theory include political opportunity structures, resource mobilization, and action in collectives. This theory will constructively examine how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work within the frame of environmental policy. The Social Movement Theory, in turn, allows the research to consider the way that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) choose to conceptualize environmental issues in order to make them appealing to people, how they employ the opportunities of political development in lobbying governmental policies, or how they utilize different types of demonstrations and advocacy (like petitions, rallies, and campaigns) to appeal to the decision-making processes by government.

METHOD

Design and Procedure

This qualitative research explores how Davao City non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocate to sharpen environmental policies. The study relies on in-depth interviews with key participants, thematic data analysis, and careful ethical considerations to ensure the integrity of the research process. Through this methodology, the study aims to provide actionable recommendations for improving NGO policy influence.

The research employs a qualitative design, ideal for investigating the complex and context-specific processes involved in environmental policy advocacy (Al Habsi, 2024). In particular, in-depth interviews uncover NGOs' lived experiences, strategies, and challenges. This design allows for a deeper understanding of the advocacy landscape in Davao City by focusing on the participants' insights rather than relying on predetermined assumptions (Bhangu, Provost & Caduff, 2023). Given the limited research on how NGOs in Davao City

specifically address environmental policy challenges, the study follows an exploratory approach. The flexibility of qualitative research provides an opportunity to uncover novel insights that may not emerge through quantitative methods (Taherdoost, 2022). Furthermore, the qualitative approach enables the researcher to adapt to new findings throughout the research process, allowing for a richer exploration of the participants' experiences and strategies (Tracy, 2020).

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach implies systematic identification, analysis, and reporting of the patterns observed in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Its interventions included the researcher reviewing the interview transcripts and creating the initial codes. The codes reflected repeated ideas, approaches, and issues that the participants discussed. After the coding, the researcher categorized the emerging codes into possible themes, which were checked and refined. Thematic analysis resulted in a more orderly and still flexible data processing method. It helped the researcher figure out not only shared notes but also specific insightful observations that might not have necessarily been envisioned during the conception of the study (Tracy, 2020). The data identified several significant themes: Barriers to Effective Advocacy, Successful Advocacy Strategies, and Perceptions of Environmental Policies. Under Barriers to Effective Advocacy, Barriers brought up by participants included the inability to access policymakers, lack of adequate finance, and bureaucratic red tape. Some NGOs in Successful Advocacy Strategies stressed the need to develop coalitions, mobilize their community, and present scientific facts accompanying their statements. In terms of perceptions of environmental policies, although particular participants claimed that the policies have improved, they also displayed a weakness, mainly in local enforcement and implementation of the policy. These themes have been traced back to the research questions through thematic analysis, creating a well-rounded picture of the NGO advocacy work and the general state of environmental policy in Davao City.

The study paid close attention to ethical considerations. All participants had provided informed consent before they were interviewed. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research, their part in the study, and their rights, including the right to withdraw consent to participate at any time with no repercussions. This made their involvement in the study completely voluntary and informed (Mirza, Bellalem & Mirza, 2023). The ethics of the study also emphasized confidentiality. All personal details of the participants were anonymized to keep their identities confidential in the final report. We have asked the participants to conceal their actual names by using pseudonyms and anonymized data about their organizations to keep the contributions confidential (Bhangu, Provost, & Caduff, 2023). Also, audio recordings and transcripts were stored safely to guard against data security and privacy breaches. The research ensured that the study followed ethical considerations regarding studying human participants (Al Habsi, 2024). This means that the rights, privacy, and well-being of the participants involved in the research were respected during the different stages of the research process (Al Habsi, 2024).

Participants

The study selected seven participants from various NGOs in Davao City. Purposive sampling was used to select these participants because it guarantees that the individuals included in the study have pertinent knowledge and experience (Taherdoost, 2022). The selection criteria were based on personnel concerned with environmental advocacy and individuals aware of policy-making practices at both local and national levels. The NGOs promoted by the participants are multifarious in size, scope, and advocacy interests. Some of the organizations are at a national or international level, and others are grassroots-based. This heterogeneity offers a wide view of how various organizations conduct environmental policy advocacy (Tracy, 2020). There also exist differences in the roles of the participants as some are involved in policy formulation, others in focus and campaigns, and others in mobilization at the community level. This diversity of experience will enable the study to get a holistic picture of the interaction of the NGO sector with environmental policy. Before the commencement of the interviews, the study participants were informed about the intention of the research, the questions to be asked, and that their participation would be voluntary. The participants were informed of their right to leave at any point during the study, so their participation was entirely voluntary (Mirza, Bellalem & Mirza, 2023).

Materials and Instruments

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to collect data. The semi-structured design introduced flexibility, but participants could talk about their experiences in detail, and the researcher was free to dig deeper into some regions of interest (Braun Clarke, 2023). This technique is especially effective in qualitative studies because it allows a researcher to look at anticipated and surprising themes during an interview (Al Habsi, 2024). The interviews consisted of 20-30 minutes and were held in a way that did not impose on the participants. Online interviews were conducted on a platform that was convenient and available to the participants. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim with permission from the interviewee. The open-ended questions in the interview guide aimed to cover a breadth of questions, such as the specific environmental issues that their NGO is working on, what methods they use in their policy change advocacy, the barriers that they have in their interactions with policymakers, and other stakeholders, how they felt about the current policy in the city of Davao when it comes to the environment and what they can improve, the success stories and lessons that they had concerning their past advocacy, and so on. Field notes were produced with the interview data to ensure the recording of the researcher's reactions and observations, as well as non-describable interpretations that could provide depth to the verbal response given by the participants (Tracy, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis, presentation, interpretation, and recommendation of the findings from the data gathered, resulting in this study. Data on the selected participants, identified based on their profound expertise in environmental policymaking, were obtained over one and a half months. The researchers conducted their analysis in places in Davao City where NGO officials were assigned, and the participants were interviewed online. In these in-depth interviews, participants sincerely shared their experiences and primary knowledge about strengthening the environmental policy within the city.

The in-depth interviews took place between March 11 and April 16, 2025, specifically with non-governmental organizations in Davao City. Before the interviews started, participants were kindly requested to provide self-introductions, disclosing their names and current places of residence. Throughout this process, it was observed that each respondent possessed a different perspective on the environmental policies in Davao City. The demographic composition of the participants included three females and four males, spanning ages from 35 to 60 years old.

Profile of the Participants

Participant 1, or "Vertido," has worked in an NGO for almost six years; he has much experience as part of a Non-Government Organization.

Participant 2 preferred to be called "John." He worked in a non-governmental organization for ten years; he handled youth who focused on environmental advocacy.

Participant 3, or "Lemuel," is an urban planner who has worked under IDIS organizations for more than five years, and he is one of those behind the planning of local ordinances concerning the environment.

Participant 4, or "Nene," has worked as a field officer in the Josefa Segovia Foundation for more than five years.

Participant 5, or "Jimbea," was a culture-based conservation manager at the Philippine Eagle Foundation for almost eight years of service.

Participant 6, or "Joes," was the Executive Director of the Jose Segovia Foundation; they provided support in agriculture and environmental advocacy for more than a decade.

Participant 7, or "June," was a part-time news anchor and worked at the Jose Segovia Foundation for five years.

To safeguard the participants' identities, pseudonyms are used instead of real names. Vertigo preferred to be referred to as "Participant 1." John was referred to as "Participant 2." Lemuel was named "Participant 3." Nene was "Participant 4." Jimbea was "Participant 5." Joe was Participant 6." June was "Participant 7."

As the interview continued, the researchers discussed the purpose of the study, presented the informed consent document, and indicated the specific rights afforded to the participants during the interview process.

In addressing the pressing environmental concerns of Davao City, a thorough investigation was conducted, focusing on the vital role of non-governmental organizations in combating the pressing environmental issues. According to the findings of Azis (2022), NGOs play an important role in environmental advocacy as well as service delivery. In the middle of watershed degradation, widespread deforestation, and the crucial need for green spaces, the discussion highlights the important expertise of each NGO in providing a practical solution that could also benefit the citizens of this city.

The researcher's methodology aimed to capture an in-depth comprehension of the point of view of non-governmental organizations in shaping environmental policy. By asking about personal experiences and narratives, the study desired to reveal their challenges in lobbying for the policies, implementation, and their struggle to collaborate with the Local government unit (LGU)

The research explores the complexities non-governmental organizations face, promotes inclusivity in drafting the policy, provides valuable knowledge and expertise to improve policies, and strengthens the collaboration between NGOs and LGUs.

Views on the implementation of environmental policies in Davao City

Non-governmental organizations are actively participating in the promotion of environmental preservation. These NGOs have operated for almost a decade or more. Because of that, they already have many observations about the environmental policies the local government is implementing. They held different perspectives on these policies, which are based on their experience as part of the NGOs. They highlighted how this policy affected the daily lives of the citizens.

On a global scale, various organizations promote conservation and try to influence policy-making in response to the urgent need to address environmental problems. The perception shared by the participants centered primarily on six existing themes. The six themes are different views on implementing policies in Davao City.

Ineffective Implementation and Enforcement of Policies. It has come to the attention of non-governmental organizations that many laws related to the environment have been passed. Unfortunately, the enforcement is not strong enough, resulting in the policy's unsuccessful implementation. According to Al-Sartawi (2022), insufficient penalties and punishment, and the lack of apparent authority directly responsible for enforcement are the key factors affecting the enforcement of the current regulations. Environmental policies will only become effective when supported by the government, which has the police power to implement laws, establish clear guidelines, impose sanctions for violations, and monitor mechanisms to ensure the policies are well implemented. The study participants believe there is enough policy, but it lacks enforcement.

“Naay policy pero walay ngipon. Dili lang kulang, kundili walay enforcement, kay kung kulang lang, naay enforcement unta pero wala man gyud.” (There is a policy, but it lacks enforcement. Not only is it lacking, but there is also no enforcement. As if it is not enough, there should be enforcement, but there is not). – Participant 1

Participants 4 and 5 emphasized that Davao City has a lot of environmental policies but lacks implementation.

“Of course, dili magkulang ang Davao City sa mga polisiya, pero ang views nato is giunsa ba siya pag-implement. Same na siya sa concept nga daghang balaod nga nakatutok bahin sa pagprotekta sa kinaiyahan, pero giunsa ba nato pag-implement.” (Davao City has sufficient policies, but our concerns are with how the City implements them. It’s the same concept that there are many laws focused on protecting the environment, but how do we implement them). – Participant 4

“Naa tay daghan nga mga environmental policies in Davao City are very nice. Ang concern lang gyud nato is daghan tang gi-lobby nga mga proposed environmental laws, but very few sa mga lawmakers are responding to those proposed environmental laws.” (Davao City has several commendable environmental policies. Our primary concern is that we lobby a lot for environmental laws, but few lawmakers are responding to them.) – Participant 5

This shows the importance of implementing and enforcing the policy once the legislative body passes it. In response to urgent environmental concerns, non-governmental organizations emphasize the importance of fully implementing this policy at the grassroots level. This will also put more pressure on the government to maximize the enforcement level of the policy it will implement. In connection with institutional theory, the effectiveness of environmental policy depends not only on the existence of law but also on how these rules are integrated into institutional frameworks such as the legal system and government agencies.

Preference for Watershed Protection Policies. Davao City has identified eight watersheds from different rainforests and mountain ranges. This indicates how rich their biodiversity is and provides class-A drinking water to the people in rural and urban areas. As stated by Makanda, Nzama, and Kanyerere, the protection of water resources is a key factor in sustainable water supply management for human well-being and for the ecological ecosystem to prosper. However, in recent years, watersheds faced challenges such as water availability and water quality deterioration despite having policies and regulations. The study participants shared their preference for and importance of watershed protection policies.

“Very specific ko aning Panigan-Tamugan watershed nga protected area nga declared biodiversity area that is supposed to have no human activities allowed diha. That it should remain as a forest para dili mabulabog ang biodiversity, dili madaut ang mga kakahuyan, ug ang mga native species nga pila na ka tuig naa diha.” (I am particularly concerned about the Panigan-Tamugan watershed; it is protected and a declared biodiversity area, where human activities are prohibited. This ensures that the forest remains intact, preserving the biodiversity, trees, and native species that have been present for years. – Participant 1

Participant 4 also stated,

“Kanang ongoing nga pakigbugno diha sa konseho sa siyudad, kana gyung pagprotekta sa water source nato diri sa ancestral domain.” (This ongoing debate in the local legislature is over the protection of our water source in the ancestral domain). – Participant 4

The personal preference of the participants in this study is not just a mere bias, but it highlights how important the protection of watersheds is. The participant also emphasized the important role of our rainforests and mountain ranges as they not only act as a natural filter and manage water resources but also help mitigate the impact of climate change. By integrating environmental justice theory, they should prioritize the protection of watersheds in a way that benefits impoverished communities, which often suffer from water pollution, lack quality water access, and are prone to flooding.

Financial Constraints as a Barrier to Implementation. Most NGOs belong to nonprofit organizations that have limited access to funds and resources; they commonly depend on donations and international support. The reality of environmental policymakers is that more problems need more attention than money and political will to solve. Furthermore, international societies could double the resources committed to environmental protection but still fail to address the issue (Fiorino, 2023). The participants in this study emphasized the importance of the financial aspect.

“Walay kwarta, walay implementation.” (No funding, no implementation). – Participant 1

Participants 4 and 6 stated how important the budget is in implementation.

“Another thing is kadtong budget sa government nga ihatag para didto mao nay importante.” (Another thing is the budget allocated by the government for that; that is what is important). – Participant 4

“Kinahanglan siya og budget because you have to educate the people.” (It needs to have a budget because you have to educate the people). – Participant 6

Because of the lack of financial support from the government, it is impossible to implement the policy. Non-government organization can play their role through information and education campaigns (IEC). Educating from the grassroots level helps citizens interpret laws easily. Social Movement theory highlights the importance of mobilizing resources such as funds, public support, and political influence to pressure the government to prioritize environmental concerns.

Challenges in Policy Accessibility, Communication, and Awareness. Many environmental laws have used complicated terminology, which causes ordinary citizens to be confused and misinterpret the policy; this will lead to the small participation of citizens in policymaking. To address this issue, the study of Lin and Kant (2021) suggests that the government has used social media to gain public opinion and disseminate information. Additionally, for those who cannot participate via the traditional approach, social media enhances social inclusion by engaging more participants online. Through this initiative, the policy became accessible and comprehensive to everyone. The participants suggested that the ordinance should be comprehensive and inclusive.

“If the ordinance is clear and comprehensive, dali lang siya i- implement.” (If it is straightforward and comprehensive, it will be easily implemented). – Participant 2

Participants 3 and 4 also stated,

“Ang pagka-comprehensive sa ordinance, pagka-straight to the point, and clear sa pag-structure sa ordinance.” (Being comprehensive of the ordinance, straightforward, and structured). – Participant 3

“Kinahanglan nga masabtan gyud siya sa ordinary citizen.” (It should be understandable by the ordinary citizen). – Participant 4

Everyone must have equal access to the policy. In the context of Social Movement Theory, the policy should be more inclusive to ensure that all sectors from different societies, including the marginalized, can participate and benefit from the policy. When the policy is clear and straightforward, people will understand their rights and the importance of following this rule, especially in environmental protection.

Importance of Sufficient staffing and support. Non-Government Organizations play a vital role in providing workforce, from lobbying the policy to researching the ground. According to Bey (2022), Non-governmental organizations emerge as imperative actors in connection to their interest in supporting the dissemination of environmental policies. Consequently, NGOs need resources, and it is imperative that they effectively use those resources to achieve the desired environmental policy influence.

“Dapat naay tawo nga mag trabaho ana.” (There should be people working on it). – Participant 5

Participants 6 and 7 emphasized the importance of individuals implementing the policy.

“Magkuha og personnel nga mag-implement gyud sa konkreto nga program.” (They should get personnel to implement the concrete program). – Participant 6

“If you want it to be successful, not on an occasional basis, then put personnel in place to implement the policy.” (If you want it to be successful, not just occasionally, put personnel in place to implement the policy). – Participant 7

The government, non-government organizations, and other stakeholders shall collaborate to provide enough manpower to enhance the monitoring mechanism before implementing the policy. In relevance to the Social Movement Theory, individuals with the same interests shall work together. Within this framework, they can focus more on the mobilization of resources and recognize the imperative of interest. This theory will serve as an encouragement for these different actors to advocate public awareness.

Strengthen Enforcement Mechanisms. Many environmental crimes are often not prioritized by the criminal justice system or the public, even though they pose a serious threat to society and, worse, can cause deaths. Instead of being treated as a serious crime, most environmental violators, especially those committed by big companies, usually handle the situation through small fines rather than strict legal punishment (Nurse, 2022). This is alarming since our environment will be exploited and destroyed. The participants in this study give their insight into how enforcement mechanisms become stronger.

“Buhatan nato og ngipon ang mga polisiya.” (Let us put strict implementation on our laws). – Participant 4

Also, Participant 7 expressed,

“Kung walay brave action ang city ug ang mga nabutang sa program, dili siya magmalampuson.” (Without brave action from the government and those involved in the program, it will not be successful). –Participant 7

The participants suggest that the government should exercise their power to penalize those who violate our environmental policy. Social Movement Theory emphasizes the importance of collective action, in which non-governmental organizations will handle the information and education campaigns (IEC). At the same time, the government will provide legal and financial assistance. Through this initiative, we can strengthen the enforcement approach.

Recommendations to sharpen environmental policies in Davao City

Considering the environmental policies in Davao City, non-governmental organizations shared their insights and recommendations on how to sharpen the city's environmental policies. Their insights focused on five (5) key themes. The themes were Policy Enhancement, Monitoring and Updating, Inclusive Policy-Making with Strong Enforcement, Effective Communication and Awareness Campaigns, Cultural Sensitivity and Indigenous Engagement, and Multi-Sector Collaboration and Partnerships.

Policy Enhancement, Monitoring, and Updating. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are crucial in improving the efficiency of environmental programs, guaranteeing that efforts adapt to evolving ecological circumstances and the needs of communities. According to the Institutional Theory, institutions change due to constant adaptation to internal and external forces, such as changes in public expectations, technological advances, and sociopolitical dynamics. This aligns with the views of participants 2 and 6 when they pointed out that policies must be updated and monitored.

“Katong mga existing policies kinahanglan lang i-improve gamay, or naay ammdments.” (Those existing policies need to be updated, or there may be amendments). – Participant 2

Participant 6 also stated,

“I-update sad nila ug i-evaluate ang mga policies.” (They should update and evaluate the policies). – Participant 6

According to Kumar, Maring, Gaurav, and Ahamed (2023), using a comprehensive approach to monitoring and evaluation that integrates real-time tracking with results assessment enhances evidence-based decision-making, promotes transparency, and facilitates continuous policy improvements. This dual structure enables environmental laws and regulations to evolve, fostering sustainability and efficiency.

Inclusive Policy-Making with Strong Enforcement. Effective environmental governance primarily depends on the concepts of inclusion and enforcement used to achieve sustainable outcomes. Inclusive policy-making, along with transparent and accessible enforcement approaches, may enable communities to safeguard their environment more efficiently. This aligns with the views of participants 3, 4, and 5.

“Our ordinances should be coming from the people and not from the politician’s personal preference, so this is an output, a collaborative output coming from different sectors, different positions, or from various organizations and representations.” – Participant 3

Participants 4 and 5 emphasized the necessity of consulting and involving indigenous communities in policy-making related to our environment.

“Ang mga polisiya nga related sa atong mga kinaiyahan, kinahanglan i-involve gyud nato ang mga indigenous people.” (When it comes to environmental policies, we need to include the indigenous people). – Participant 4

Participant 5 mentioned,

“It should be a participatory and consultative process by the environmentalist, especially indigenous communities.” - Participant 5

The manual, a collaborative initiative of legal professionals, environmental scientists, local government officials, and community organizations, establishes a systematic approach for discovering, documenting, and redressing environmental violators. Sitchon (2024) says that the program simplifies complicated environmental laws into easy-to-follow steps for three areas—land (green), coastal (blue), and pollution (brown)—making it easier for local communities to see and take part in the enforcement process.

“Ang pagpakusog sa implementation gyud kay even naay balaod diha og walay mopatuman sa balaod, wala lang gihapon.” (Strengthening implementation is important because, even if a law exist, and no one will enforce it, nothing will happen). – Participant 2

Participant 5 mentioned putting people in charge of implementing the policy.

“Naa gyuy mga tawo nga ibutang diha to implement.” (There should be personnel in place to implement the policy). – Participant 5

Participant 6 emphasized that the policy must be enforced strictly.

“Strict enforcement sa tanan nga gipanghimo nila nga balaod. Dili lang simple enforcement but strict enforcement.” (Strict enforcement of all laws made. Not just simple enforcement, but strict enforcement). – Participant 6

Additionally, Participant 7 stated that,

“Assign monitoring personnel or a task force. Dili lang ta mag sige og task force on traffic, but also task force on environmental issues.” (Assign monitoring personnel or a task force, not just a task force focused on traffic, but also a task force dedicated to environmental issues). – Participant 7

The statements from our participants emphasized the essential function of community involvement in guaranteeing compliance, accountability, and long-term effectiveness of environmental regulations through the establishment of localized enforcement processes. According to the Social Movement Theory, community participation and collective action are essential in forming and creating environmental governance. The Indigenous people should have a voice in decisions affecting their domain and way of life, and inclusive consultation should guide environmental activities. The government should recognize the role and experiences of the IPs, as they are the ones who know their environment best. Thus, policies and programs shall be consulted with them so they can be most effective.

Effective Communication and Awareness Campaigns. Most participants agreed that spreading awareness of the existence of environmental policy helps sharpen the policy's implementation. According to Environmental Justice Theory, Communication is more than just dissemination; it is a right that allows community members to actively form laws that impact their environment, livelihood, and health. Without effective communication, laws will become obsolete, and spreading awareness will be impossible. According to Carbonell-Alcocer, Romero-Luis, and Gertrudix (2025), in the study that analyzes the perceptions of communication processes of the stakeholders of a circular economy, communication plays a fundamental role in fostering cooperation between all actors involved in the transition to a circular economy. Moreover, Karunarathne (2023) adds that utilizing multiple communication channels and involving community members in the policy development process are key elements of successful communication efforts.

“Communicate the ordinance to the indigenous people. Implement it in the barangay level and even in the school level.” – Participant 7

Participant 5 also stated,

“There should be an information and education campaign.” – Participant 5

This suggests that the policy can be enhanced if properly communicated and effectively collaborated at the grassroots level, especially at the barangays and school levels, to encourage community involvement and understanding.

Cultural Sensitivity and Indigenous Engagement. One of the most notable considerations in developing environmental policies is cultural sensitivity and Indigenous engagement. The former refers to the respect that must be given to cultural beliefs when considering environmental protection. The latter encourages inclusivity in the creation of policy. According to Environmental Justice Theory, the voice and opinion of the indigenous people must be respected, heard, and consulted. They must be included in developing and implementing environmental policies, especially those policies that impact their ancestral domains. According to Herse, Lyver, Scott, McIntosh, Coats, Gormley, and Tylianakis (2020), coordination with the indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLC) can help in the protection of biodiversity and the environment because many of them have detailed knowledge of local biodiversity ecosystems and can provide the crucial workforce needed to manage biodiversity. Similarly, according to Zbona and Morales Garro (2024), it is important to consider the engagement of indigenous people in pushing projects for the environment. It is unethical and may result in costly delays, reputational damage, and, in many cases, litigation.

“Ensure each ordinance is as participatory as possible. And through their committee hearings, kinahanglan nga wide gyud ang perspectives of the sectors who will be participating the committee hearings, dili lang kadtong mga nagduso sa ordinance ang ilang i-konsulta.” (Ensure each ordinance is as participatory as possible. Moreover, through their committee hearings, we need a broad perspective of the sectors participating in committee hearings, not just those who pushed for the ordinance. – Participant 3

Participant 5 asserted that indigenous people understand their forests more and are the most effective stewards.

“As I said kaganina, they know their forest, their environment well, ilabi na atong mga indigenous people who have been stewards of the community sa forest areas nila. So, they know it, and they know it well. So, their

role is, since naa sila dinha, and they are the stewards, they are the best forest guards.” (As I said earlier, they know their forest and environment well, especially indigenous people who have been stewards of the community in the forest areas. So, they know it, and they know it well. So, their role is, since they are there and they are the stewards, they are the best forest guards.” – Participant 5

This suggests that policies should be based on the perspectives of experts and different sectors, considering the expertise that Indigenous people can offer since they know more about the culture and the environment of the protected environment.

Multi-Sector Collaboration and Partnerships. Involve the joint efforts of various sectors such as government, private organizations, civil society, and academia to address complex issues like environmental protection. According to Valbuena-Hernandez and Ortiz-de-Mandojana (2022), a greater diversity of social sectors and longer-duration partnerships are linked to improved corporate sustainability performance. Similarly, Pathak, Shrestha, Pradhan, Guragai, Baksi, Azizi, and Shrestha (2022), multi-stakeholder collaboration is significant in addressing complex environmental challenges because of their shared understanding and capability to agree on a solution.

“Our ordinances should be coming from the people and not from the politician’s personal preference, so this is an output, a collaborative output coming from different sectors, different positions, or from various organizations and representations.” – Participant 3

Participant 2 also stated,

“Dapat ipa-revisit ang enforcement and mag-invite og mga experts.” (The enforcement needs to be revisited, and they should invite actual experts). – Participant 2

Ordinances must reflect the collective voice of the people, not just the agenda of politicians, and should result from collaboration among various sectors and organizations. According to Institutional Theory, effective enforcement requires involving true experts to ensure implementation is informed, credible, and sustainable.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion

This section covers the researchers' implications and conclusions. The use of a qualitative approach has been considered relevant in this study because it primarily focuses on the policies, especially in strengthening environmental policies, challenges of non-government organizations, and effective implementation mechanisms.

This study's primary objective is to understand non-government organizations' views on the policies related to protecting the environment in Davao City. This reveals the challenges faced by non-government organizations and the implementation of environmental policies. The researchers used online platforms and phone calls to gather information from seven (7) participants, utilizing a qualitative phenomenological study. This method discovers the insight of non-government organizations towards the condition of the current environmental policies.

The findings of this study reveal several correspondences among non-government organizations regarding the implementation of environmental policies. The first set of themes highlighted the challenges faced by NGOs. Lack of government support is often viewed as the key factor that led to the unsuccessful implementation of the policy due to weak enforcement. Funding is also crucial to properly implement laws at the grassroots level and mobilize sufficient personnel to monitor and evaluate the policy after implementation. Coordination is also identified as one of the challenges, emphasizing the need for enhanced collective action of non-government organizations, governments, communities, and other stakeholders responsible for environmental

protection and advocacy. The policy should also be accessible through an information and education campaign (IEC). It will help ordinary citizens comprehend the policy context and reduce confusion about the terminology used.

The second set of themes underscores the valuable insights of the participants that are vital to sharpening environmental policy. Collaboration is the top tier for effectively implementing the policy; the government can support NGOs through financial aspects and legal assistance, while other actors can contribute by providing reliable data. This will also promote inclusivity and ensure every citizen can participate in policymaking. This collective action can strengthen the enforcement mechanism and increase policy effectiveness.

Lastly, the participants also recognize the vast contribution of Indigenous people in protecting the environment, particularly in the upland area where they served as the natural protectors of the watersheds, rainforests, and rich biodiversity by only using their traditional knowledge and methods. It is crucial to strengthen policy implementation by executing the existing ordinance and imposing penalties for those who violate it. Moreover, building partnerships with international, national, and local community-based groups and inviting other agencies to contribute ideas and increase the sourcing of funds can further facilitate the strengthening and implementation of environmental policies.

Implication

This paper assesses the challenges and experiences of non-government organizations in enhancing environmental policies. This section also discusses the imperative of this research to the community and how the conclusion affects different factors. Seven (7) selected participants who work in non-government organizations were evaluated in shaping environmental policy by the researchers of this study.

The findings of this study reveal the importance of collective action, inclusivity, and a legally supported approach to strengthening the enforcement of environmental policies. Policymakers should consider the insights of different actors, especially in marginalized sectors. Non-government organizations and local government units can work together to create a more inclusive policy that everyone can benefit from. In this study, the researcher asserts that the government should be the one who leads the evaluation and strengthening of our policy since they have enough resources and power. On the other hand, non-government organizations can provide data and expertise that can help to improve our policy. Additionally, NGOs do not possess the police power to implement such policies; they can only lobby different councilors, and after that, it is in their hands whether to support the proposed policy or not.

The weak implementation of policy and overlooked environmental concerns are the central ideas of this study; this paper also provides a necessary recommendation for policymakers and other stakeholders. In connection with this, the researchers argue the importance of applying these ideas for the effectiveness and improvement of policy implementation. Sharpening environmental policy is important, according to the findings of this study. Policymakers should hear the voices of their communities and conduct a wide consultation before implementing the policy to identify their needs.

The outcome of this study paves the way for policymakers, government officials, non-government organizations, communities, and future researchers to scrutinize different points of view before drafting and implementing policies. It highlights the importance of collective action with the government and non-government organizations in planning their project. It also allows people to see the importance of active policymaking participation. Additionally, it outlines how local government officials adopt the solution essential for sharpening environmental policy. Therefore, non-government organizations see the importance of collaborating to create a policy that addresses the issues. Furthermore, this study will guide future researchers, particularly those focusing on policymaking, to thoroughly investigate the benefits and drawbacks of the policy.

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