

Understanding the Impacts of COVID-19 on the Sustainability Actions of Environmental Non-
Governmental Organizations (ENGOS) in Canada

by

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Abstract

Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS) in Canada have been working for decades to protect the environment and biodiversity, while encouraging sustainability. The purpose of this research was to understand how ENGOS in Canada have changed their sustainability actions since COVID-19 and the implications of these changes. My findings show that these organizations are contributing to issues related to climate change, ecosystem restoration, endangered species, environmental pollution, laws and policies, natural resources, and other relevant issues while maintaining communication with the public, Indigenous communities, and other environmental groups.

The data also shows that their activities were disrupted by COVID-19 and it caused many temporary and permanent changes to the activities and operation of these organizations. The results of my study reveal that the pandemic impacted their use of technology and virtual tools, their outdoor and in-person activities, operational processes, economic conditions, external communications, and interpersonal relationships within organizations. There was also a loss of momentum on issues and their attention towards sustainability was affected. The study reveals in conclusion that while some of these changes affected all areas of their activities, others had impacts on specific activities. The results further indicate increased use of virtual tools facilitating more engagement and connections; opportunities for remote work providing flexibility and better work-life balance; diversification of funding sources and approaches; and an increased priority in action-oriented work on affordability and justice issues following the pandemic.

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Chapter 1. Introduction and context

1.1 Background

Since the 1970s, the environment has become an issue of major public concern (McCormick, 2023). Non-government organizations (NGOs) have been acknowledged by the United Nations as remarkable contributors to environmental protection. The report of the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, *Our Common Future*, advised governments ‘to recognise and extend NGOs’ right to know, and to have access to information on the environment and natural resources; their right to be consulted and to participate in decision making on activities likely to have a significant effect on the environment; and their right to legal remedies and redress when their health or environment may be seriously affected’ (WCED, 1987). More importantly, the vigorous preparatory activities of the Environmental Non-Government (ENGO) sector prior to and throughout the Rio de Janeiro Conference (the Earth Summit) in 1992 demonstrated that ENGOs had acquired noteworthy skills in scientific and technological sectors, policy making, policy amendment and policy implementation, which immensely facilitated their conventional lobbying activities, activism and ideological awareness building (Yearley, 1996).

From the beginning of the 21st century, ENGOs have undertaken many roles related to environmental protection. They have done extensive research on various environmental issues; lobbied different levels of governments; exerted pressure on corporations and international organizations; collected and spent funds for the implementation of practical management systems; and built consciousness towards positive environmental outcomes. Many international ENGOs were created to address diverse emerging international issues. International ENGOs helped to unite the national lobbies with the same interest to influence other governments and the public, so that they could draw attention to major environmental problems (McCormick, 2023).

Some of the methods and strategies that ENGOs employ include: working alongside elected leaders, bureaucrats and corporate officials; raising and utilizing funds; campaigning and arranging public protests; promoting environmental preservation through media; litigating and regulating the implementation of environmental law; taking part in information exchange; conducting research; obtaining and maintaining property; and creating opportunities for local communities to engage in environmental protection (McCormick, 2023). In the last thirty years, the community of ENGOs has evolved and has been exerting a powerful influence on national

governments and international organizations. They have also been contributing to negotiations on international agreement regarding the environment (McCormick, 2023).

Particularly for the ENGOs, activism of late has consisted of generating and promoting divestment plans and certification projects as well as exerting influence on international negotiations (Ayling & Gunningham, 2017; Betsill & Corell, 2001). Activism is implemented in both domestic and international arenas when ENGOs are not in agreement with government decisions. Organizations within transnational advocacy networks take part in more pivotal activist strategies. Also, they lobby national governments on domestic and international levels to promote the organizations' objectives in governmental negotiations (Rietig, 2016). Key requirements for exercising influence on any government are access to government officials on the domestic or international arena, resources, and taking part in activities such as, associating with negotiators, providing suggestions, and communicating requirements (Gulbrandsen & Andresen, 2004). A phenomenon of note in the literature was the emergence of groups that were promoting sustainable development or sustainability. The sustainability or sustainable development lobby focuses on maintaining resources for extended usage of future generations (McCormick, 2023).

It is suggested in the literature that NGOs have been affected both negatively and positively by COVID-19 in terms of the activities outlined above (e.g., Asogwa et al., 2023). The virus was detected for the first time in Wuhan, China, and on 30th January 2020, the WHO (World Health Organization) then declared this disease as a pandemic. A global lockdown was implemented with stern rules to prevent the disease from spreading (Pal et al. 2021). COVID-19 directly influenced commercial production and manufacturing activities, and the post-COVID economic and societal situation was significantly different from the pre-COVID period due to the lockdown policies (Bashir, Ma, & Shahzad, 2020).

The dominant negative impacts of COVID-19 are reduced health-seeking behaviours, less project implementation, raised expenses and waste products resulting from masks and PPE, adapting to virtual meetings, a decline in level of competence, and staff exhaustion (Asogwa et al., 2023). However, there have also been some positive impacts of COVID-19. Those include increased productivity through digital innovations, creative mediation through development of networks, exercising resilience and fast adaptation due to the pandemic, and efficient management of the accessible resources (Asogwa et al., 2023). There has been some research on the influence

of COVID-19 on ENGO organizational operation. The literature suggests that virtual meetings helped with wide-ranging participation, which allowed more conversation and development of new acquaintances (Widing & Ahmed, 2021). This development may in the future be favorable for ENGOs, as connections with various parties can contribute to expressing the views and opinions in discussions on important issues and final decision making (Nasiritousi, 2019). Therefore, this can be argued as a positive impact of COVID-19 which could strengthen ENGOs' advocacy strategies (Widing & Ahmed, 2021). The results from research into the pandemic also show that ENGOs have changed their activities based on the lockdown restrictions. ENGOs were forced by the pandemic to modify their outside advocacy strategies as their opportunities for physical presence and activism were restricted. Though there was some success with virtual demonstrations, they were not quite as successful as the physical demonstrations in terms of making an impact (Widing & Ahmed, 2021). Although there has been some research on the effects of COVID-19 on NGOs and ENGOs, there are opportunities to investigate the changes in sustainability actions of ENGOs in Canada during and since COVID-19.

1.2 Research purpose

The purpose of this research was to understand how ENGOs in Canada have adapted and changed their sustainability actions since COVID-19 and the implications of these changes.

1.3 Research objectives

The research objectives for this research project were to:

- 1) Review the sustainability actions of ENGOs in Canada before COVID-19;
- 2) Determine whether and how ENGOs in Canada have changed their sustainability actions in the face of and since COVID-19;
- 3) Consider the implications of such changes for further sustainability through the actions of ENGOs.

1.4 Research methods

The research followed a qualitative, case study research design. For collecting data, I used document review and semi-structured interviews. I reviewed ENGO websites, academic journals,

ENGO reports, and academic textbooks associated with the topic. This enabled me to collect data for objective 1, provided some insight for objective 2, and helped me to design my interview schedule. I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews to acquire data for objectives 2 and 3. I mostly created open-ended questions along with some closed-ended questions for the interview. I interviewed 19 ENGO officials who are associated with creating, or changing, and implementing sustainability policies and organizing actions. I conducted the interviews in a thorough and detailed manner for maximum understanding and used NVivo software during data analysis, as outlined in Chapter 3.

1.5 Contribution to knowledge

The thesis summarizes the ways in which ENGOs are supporting the environment and the associated wildlife while ensuring sustainability. It also provides knowledge on how COVID-19 has impacted the actions of the ENGO sector in Canada, and there are possibilities that other nonprofits might have been affected in a similar way. Moreover, the thesis suggests some strategies for ENGOs to follow in case of a similar emergency, e.g., economic instability or political disputes. All ENGOs, charities, and nonprofits can benefit by following these strategies to tackle a challenging situation.

1.6 Organization of the thesis

The thesis consists of six chapters. Following this introduction, the second chapter consists of a review of the literature which delves into the history of ENGOs in Canada, their sustainability actions, the effects of COVID-19 on their operations, and recent changes in their sustainability actions after COVID-19. The third chapter provides detail on the research design along with the data collection methods and data analysis process. The fourth chapter includes the activities that the case study ENGOs are engaged in. In the fifth chapter, I discussed the changes that occurred in ENGO actions during and after COVID-19. Chapter six draws conclusion related to the objectives of the thesis and includes a set of potential strategies for ENGOs to follow in case of another emergency similar to COVID-19.

Chapter 2. Considering sustainability policies and actions of ENGOs

This chapter provides insight into the establishment of environmental policies and activities of ENGOs for ensuring sustainability, the strategies employed by ENGOs for upholding sustainability, the overall impacts of COVID-19, and the impacts of the pandemic on the environmental sector.

2.1 Brief history of sustainability-oriented policies

The impact and number of ENGOs and non-state actors associated with environmental protection has risen noticeably (Betsill & Corell, 2007; Biermann & Pattberg, 2012). Early ENGOs carried out the important task of pushing political parties, national, and transnational decision makers to focus on environmental issues (Blasiak et al., 2017; Cadman et al., 2020; Princen & Finger, 1996). In the mid-1960s and early 1970s, the environmental movement grew in North America and Western Europe. The movement was a necessary reaction to the evidence of the environmental effects of commercial developments worldwide - air, soil, and water pollution because of agricultural and industrial substances, and the devastation of wildlife habitats for capitalist projects. ENGOs had called the attention of the public to the serious damage of the environment caused by industrial and agricultural wastes, hydroelectric dams, and coal-powered electric engines and these actions successfully swayed public opinion on major environmental issues (Yap, 1990). By the 1990s, academics and experts were encouraging the ENGOs to play a more prominent role in the political arena by directly taking part in discussions and decision-making (Cliche, 1996; Princen & Finger, 1996). The responsibilities of ENGOs were expanding, as they started to view themselves as external advocates for the environment and agents for small communities and regions (Cooper & Fritz, 1992).

Conservation-oriented organizations were operating in Canada before the 1970s. Ducks Unlimited Canada was established in 1938 to protect waterbirds through conservation measures in their habitat. The Nature Conservancy of Canada was established in 1962 with a goal to conserve certain geographic areas of ecological importance. Their very first project was a wetland area named Cavan Swamp and Bog. The area was in Ontario, and it was home to twenty-two species of orchids. By the 1970s, other environmental groups joined the Canadian list of ENGOs, including the Canadian Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club of Canada, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, World Wildlife Fund, and Pollution Probe. Greenpeace was also founded

in the early 1970s. It was formed in Vancouver to protest against nuclear testing in the Aleutian Islands and became very active with environmental concerns shortly after. It organized its antiwhaling activism in April 1975, which strengthened its position against harmful business initiatives and to raise awareness about activities that were destroying the environment (Doern et al., 2015; Weyler, 2004).

NGOs monitored how the environmental policies were being implemented in Canada and continued to influence the governments through various media. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, government and industries considered NGOs as unorthodox groups whose opinion only needed to be heard when there was sufficient support from the public. Through the efforts of NGO activism, air emission control legislation was created which resulted in cleaner air. A regulation of pesticides used in agriculture was also implemented. During that time, environmental impact assessment processes were introduced that presented an opportunity for the public to express their concern towards any development project (Yap, 1990). From the late 1990s to the mid 2020s, a broad range of organizations associated with pollution, conservation, and animal welfare materialized in the US and some other Western countries (Longhofer et al., 2016). These included citizens groups that vigorously opposed industrial developments in their surroundings, known as “NIMBYs”, which stands for Not in My Back Yard. The movements disrupted planned and questionable residential development projects, local industrial sites and necessary commodities of urban life in the 20s (Fischel, 2001).

For the past five decades, NGOs have carried out the important responsibility of environmental protection. Studies that evaluated funding for environmental issues indicated that funding was higher for environmental organizations after the early 1990s, though the numbers would fluctuate from year to year (Corrigall-Brown & Ho, 2019). Their responsibilities have increased their influence for policy development and created connections between politicians and the public. These NGOs have influenced the political system from outside. As ENGOS are independent from government, the public views the groups as trustworthy and genuine, which has provided them with more control over important negotiations (Princen & Finger, 1996).

The increasing scientific solidarity on possible global harms of the domestic activities has caused rapid internationalization of many northern NGOs. Friends of the Earth International, Probe International, the Environmental Defense Fund, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the

European Environmental Bureau and many other ENGOs have influenced agreements on the international level, with intergovernmental organizations voicing their opinions with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the World-watch Institute, and the World Resources Institute (Yap, 1990). As Canada's environmental policies have been modified to address the increasing international and local policy challenges, the role of ENGOs has also changed. While some of the ENGOs did not involve themselves in decision-making processes, others increasingly engaged in policy-making processes for the environment (Cooper & Fritz, 1992).

2.2 Sustainability policies and actions of ENGOs

ENGOs are worried about the environmental pollution that is being caused by human interventions and are concerned about the ability of the environment to maintain the balance between human disturbances and environmental wellbeing. For these groups, the meaning of sustainability is effectively using the natural resources to fulfill human requirements while taking the environmental constraints into consideration. The biggest challenge of sustainable development is attaining healthy balance between the rate of consumption and population, along with ensuring environmental welfare. ENGOs have been working towards achieving sustainable development by addressing their areas of concern in environment, technology, research, and development (Yap, 1990).

ENGOs are now working in different levels and using different political strategies to achieve their goals. ENGOs employ, exchange, and transfer scientific knowledge and they are included in a broad collaborative set of state and non-state bodies that are more interested in an environmental governance system that is based on consensus (Evans & Wellstead, 2017). A cooperative relationship between governments and ENGOs depends mostly on the government showing interest. If the political leaders are not in agreement with the ENGO objectives, then ENGOs will keep their distance from the government and will continue to influence through education and activism (Laverdière, 2014). ENGOs employ mainly four strategies for their operations - hard advocacy; soft advocacy; building connections and effective administration; and collecting insights (Cadman et al., 2020).

Hard advocacy includes activities addressed to the public where ENGOs lobby for policy decisions and intend to put pressure on political parties. Some examples of hard advocacy include media interviews; petitions; press releases; campaigns; promoting through social medias; policy briefs to political leaders; speaking as representatives at government meetings; and searching for accessible legal support. Advocacy to government refers to, letters, dialogue, media releases, petitions and presentations at meetings, which are directed towards ministers or government leaders. Maintaining connection with both leaders and bureaucrats is necessary as advice and communication moves between both of these parties, and the message should be consistent throughout this process. Advocacy and education must rely on information that is empirical and has been peer-reviewed. Not only scientific information, but also economic knowledge can be useful in advocacy (MacKinnon et al., 2016).

Soft advocacy includes activities those are not addressed directly to the public and attempts to reach a shared consensus, such as negotiation and building relationships. Government and stakeholders are likely to reach out for advice and assistance from an ENGO if it has an established reputation, making this an essential part of their soft advocacy strategies. ENGOs maintain connection between government and proponents and communicate scientific knowledge from researchers to the decision makers. Their flexibility allows them to adapt their strategies to advanced practices and policies. Thus, ENGOs are playing an important role in environmental conservation (Cadman et al., 2020).

For collecting insights, ENGOs regularly seek expert opinion on their issues from academia, industries and government to assess them and to find appropriate solutions to environmental problems. Many times, these assessments are carried out in collaboration with other environmental groups to formulate multiple suggestions. ENGOs often arrange public polling on their websites based on their issues and the results are later shared with other groups, along with being utilized in activities related to hard and soft advocacy. ENGOs and governments organize meetings to share information on various issues with each other and other stakeholders, and also to facilitate the work of both parties. Along with gathering and sharing insights, administration is also a major part of ENGO operations as it includes management and planning of programs. Strategic planning and ensuring funding for the activities of these groups are also a part of effective administration (Cadman et al., 2020).

2.2.1 ENGO strategies for sustainability actions

The larger part of ENGOs' work can be marked as advocacy, which is 66% and it involves both hard advocacy and soft advocacy (Cadman et al., 2020). These two forms of advocacy are regarded by ENGOs as instruments that can be implemented strategically depending on the situation, with a goal of maximizing their influence in decision-making process. Campaigns and other hard advocacy activities are employed to raise public support on various issues, such as issues related to conservation with the goal of putting pressure on government. Public campaigns are very powerful as they raise awareness and strengthen support. But when these types of campaigns happen too often, the public can lose interest in the issue (Cadman et al., 2020). Apart from sharing knowledge, ENGOs engage in conversation and negotiations with stakeholders and government to find solution to environmental issues. The activities that the ENGOs engage in to build relationships are – collaboration with stakeholders or government departments; serving in advisory committees; informal communication meetings; and direct involvement with ministers (Cadman et al., 2020).

Among the strategies ENGOs utilize to create an influence on regulators, issue framing seems to be the most promising in directing the views of the public and getting the necessary response from the government. Issue framing refers to the process by which we develop a concept regarding a particular issue or reorganize the thought process related to the issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The use of frames for any particular issue can be very powerful if it is used in a logical sense. A great example of issue framing is the activities of ENGOs to advocate for a clean environment for the sake of ecosystems and wildlife. In the 1990s, coming up with the new frame of the significance of a clean environment for the wellbeing of people was very helpful in advocating for the environment. Relevant scientific data also supported the new frame and it seemed logical (MacKinnon et al., 2016).

ENGOs have employed various strategies to draw the attention of the public and governments to environmental issues over the years, most recently to climate change. They have criticized industries and governments through pointed activism and led boycotts of commercial products from industries that did not live up to the modern standard of corporate responsibilities. They utilized mass media, especially the modern forms of media that rapidly developed with the

help of internet, to pressurize governments, guide the views of the public and direct the corporations into adopting more sustainable practices. (MacKinnon et al., 2016).

2.2.2 Sustainability actions of international and domestic ENGOs

International ENGOs also presented various ways to advocate for policies alongside national ENGOs. The IIED, the Worldwatch Institute, the IUCN, and the World Resources Institute aim for policy amendments by consulting with intergovernmental organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Community, and also with national organizations such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). They convey their messages to the public through publications and conferences based on the findings of empirical research. Some ENGOs such as, the Environmental Defense Fund, Friends of the Earth, the European Environmental Bureau, Pollution Probe, Probe International, the Natural Resources Defense Council prefer to exert pressure on the industries and the government mostly through media. Another ENGO, Greenpeace is known to take immediate actions on environmental issues (Yap, 1990).

Domestic ENGOs have a very important role to play in preserving biodiversity and maintaining livelihoods. These organizations can gather resources, change public views, and take opportunity of political openings to introduce policies and lawsuits to the government. In most cases, international ENGOs formed much earlier than domestic ENGOs in developing countries (Longhofer & Schofer, 2010), and they play major roles in sharing knowledge and gathering resources to tackle climate change according to the Kyoto Protocol. The rapid growth in the number of international and domestic ENGOs over last few decades caused massive reorganization of the global system. Academics and policymakers have become optimistic hoping that the ENGOs will pave the way to resolve all the issues related to the environment, democracy, and development (Reimann, 2005).

Even at the international level, academics have entrusted domestic ENGOs with a leading role. They present them as underlying pillars for transnational collaboration, which eventually facilitates national policy reforms (Tarrow & McAdam, 2005; Wapner, 1996). Alliances between domestic and international ENGOs can also facilitate policy change. International

ENGOS can enhance the opportunities of domestic ENGOS in political structure and increase the effectiveness of activism strategies (Tsutsui, 2006). Collaboration between domestic and international ENGOS may be difficult in political situations where local actors are not included in policy processes. Boli & Thomas's (1999) work conveys that international organizations represent global culture. The world has gained a new cultural identity and international organizations are working as a mechanism that is paving the way to a greater social change (Frank, 1997). International ENGOS may have impacts but those are ingrained in extensive processes of institutional reformation (Hironaka, 2014). For the past 20 years, the international environmental community has moved its attention towards domestic organizations, providing them with authority and resources (Schofer & Longhofer, 2011). ENGOS have thus become the bearer of hope of a better world and are being preferred by development banks and donors (Longhofer et al., 2016; Tsutsui, 2006).

2.2.3 Leadership in ENGOS

Leadership is one of the most important factors that determine how ENGOS can contribute to environmental policies. It refers to the leader of ENGOS such as, CEO, CFO, executive director and or president. A leader's characteristics and behaviour control the atmosphere of an organization and influences most matters in actions outside the organization. Qualities that make a leader powerful within an organization also assists them in the outside world. Leaders must protect the organization from possible harms and take appropriate actions when lobbying for policy changes. This issue can present itself as a problem when an advocacy position threatens the funds or cause distance with external partners. A leader must make decisions in such a way that the activities meet the goal of the organization while ensuring the support from donors and external partners. A leader has the responsibility of planning, sharing information, reporting progress, anticipating the future, gaining financial support, unleashing intellectual capacity, delegating, tracking, and supporting the team's moral spirit. It is very important that an ENGO leader employs various leadership strategies and styles to adapt to institutional and political changes. They can use directive strategies or participative strategies according to the situation.

Strong mutual connection based on trust and transparency is required in these types of leadership. Particularly when dealing with advocacy matters on environmental issues, leaders

must be flexible regarding their leadership and take steps based on the level of urgency. A very important quality of a leader is the ability to discover and engage with people with similar values. ENGOs greatly benefit from having staff with various backgrounds, viewpoints, and expertise. An ideal mix of professionals, new graduates, volunteers, work placements and summer students is efficient for ENGO operations as it provides insights on latest findings, and creates a new perspective that potentially leads to innovative ideas (Bass, 1996).

2.2.4 Adoption of digital technology in ENGOs

Digital technology has become essential for ENGOs that want to impact sustainability policies. It helps to increase the flow of knowledge from organizations to politicians and this aspect has been a major factor for the work of most ENGOs in a broad range of policy domains working with sustainability (Betsill & Corell, 2007; Corell & Betsill, 2017). ENGOs have been involving in practices that appear as challenges to traditional governance structures by utilizing digital technologies. ENGOs have been quite early in adopting new digital technologies (Horton, 2004; Thaler et al., 2012). Digital technology refers to social media that are operated through the internet and includes technologies based on codes (Horst & Miller, 2012; Joyce, 2010). These technologies often have various uses and are not limited to any structural or ideological bindings and therefore can be very useful for environmental activism (Mulvihill, 2009). Digital technologies have supported environmental advocacy by expanding ENGOs' scope and by increasing the speed of communication with fellow environmentalists. These advancements have diminished the distance between environmental communities through social media, communication applications and websites. While this improvement is a positive development for environmental groups, it is also unfortunate that these messages are reaching out to the audience that is already seeking environmental initiatives. Moreover, in this neoliberal world, social media platforms are dominated by messages from modern corporate society, and the algorithm also supports mainstream media companies because of greater online engagement (Jacqmarcq, 2021).

ENGOs have utilized these technologies in many ways including engaging in dialogue with policymakers on matters concerning environmental policies in the form of e-protests or online petitions, and influencing the policy process by developing the support of stakeholders (Christensen, 2013; Lim & Tang, 2008; Snajdr, 2012). The development of new information and

communications technologies has changed the flow of information among ENGOs, politicians, and the public, introducing a new way of governance where knowledge is a major source. Social media have become beneficial to the public in maintaining the information flow to government by making them active contributors in policy processes. The public can now express their views on issues using social media. The public can also participate in adaptive governance along with government officials. Based on existing practices (Horton, 2004; Schäfer, 2012; Stein, 2009), there are five ways that ENGOs have employed digital tools in order to impact environmental policies; they include media attention, information broadcast, direct communication, appeal to action, and reinforcement. It is suggested that newer digital technologies will be integrated more in governance processes and within the broad range of ENGOs (Nulman & Özkula, 2016).

There are some drawbacks to the adoption of digital technologies and social media as well. With in-person campaigns and mainstream media involvement, the organizations cannot manage enough time and effort for training and practising newer technologies (Snajdr, 2012). Moreover, the involvement of digital technology can vary with the geographic location and the level of campaigns. In some countries, lack of necessary resources and expertise can negatively impact the implementation of these technologies. Also, confidential information from organizations are being leaked regularly through the advancement of technologies (Nulman & Özkula, 2016). The campaigns from opponent groups, unsupportive media framing and lack of interest in public towards environmental matters are also some of the less positive impacts of the modern technologies on ENGOs (Cox & Schwarze, 2022)

2.2.5 The role of ENGOs in green collaborations

The industrial sector is going through global, social and legal pressures to act in a sustainable way. More people are acknowledging that ENGOs can help the industries by initiating environmental programs through green alliances, which refers to collaborative partnerships between businesses and ENGOs that work towards mutually beneficial environmental targets (Stafford & Hartman, 1996). ENGOs can be helpful for enviro-entrepreneurial plans in two ways. First, ENGOs can supply the industries with scientific, environmental and legal expertise (Milne et al., 1996). Second, ENGOs can support and facilitate corporate connections with other stakeholders, who may support any particular business (Polonsky, 1996). Many stakeholders,

consumers and the media may skeptically view many businesses as deceitful. But as ENGOs have strong connections with these actors, they can help the businesses acquire a clean reputation. (Stafford et al., 2000). ENGOs use social justice accounts, especially regarding the harms imposed on Indigenous communities, to lobby against capitalist frames employed by governments to justify extraction of natural resources. ENGO advocacy through media goes beyond regulatory initiatives to figure out advanced solutions to climate change and environmental justice issues, which is growing in ENGO discussions. This consists of green jobs and calls for fair transitions. ENGOs often state that solutions to environmental issues must promote Indigenous authority and decolonization and lobby Indigenous leadership in environmental matters (Graham & Robinson, 2024).

Under green capitalism, some Canadian ENGOs have converted their focus from community-oriented environmental advocacy that challenged the government's initiative of appointing environment officials as consultants in big ENGOs (Desfor & Keil, 2004; Hajer, 1995; Paehlke, 2000). This green capitalist group understands the political consequences of working against government and influential stakeholders and suggests working with them by implementing digital solutions for environmental issues that will also benefit bureaucrats. Also, environmentalism in the form of consultation is more agreeable to urban planners, real estate investors and municipal leaders who are opting for development and financial growth (Kipfer & Keil, 2000). Many ENGOs have changed their approach beyond just the traditional discussions about conservation of nature in their mandates and strategies. According to the new understanding, environmental change included acknowledging different social boundaries that many marginalized communities face such as, challenges of poverty, language barriers and time, that may appear as a barrier to sustainability (Teelucksingh et al., 2016).

Corporate sustainability programs (CSPs) are becoming more popular and gaining significance in developed nations worldwide. ENGOs, public views, and the initial development of regulatory guidelines have projected the need of CSPs, which generate positive opinion on corporate responsibility (Audsley et al., 2010; Kourula & Halme, 2008). The goals of CSPs include disclosing corporate plans through collaborating with ENGOs, exercising corporate sustainability practices, and reporting progress on sustainability programs. A strong legal standing of

stakeholders is highly valued in corporate sustainability, and it helps to obtain the endorsement of ENGOs (Crespy & Miller, 2011). Environmental groups express their opinions on corporate sustainability in various ways, from praising sustainable practices to requesting legal actions for offenders. Joint statements circulated by corporations and organizations are especially compelling in conveying messages on sustainability, as ENGOs have the reputation of holding public trust and authority on environmental matters (Kourula & Halme, 2008). The ideal example of collaboration between an organization and a corporation is a durable partnership consisting of one from each group. Such cooperations provide collective, mutual benefits for both parties. The corporations provide funds and resources for ENGOs to organize advocacy activities on their issues and ENGOs provide support and consultation for the corporations to improve their attempts to achieve sustainability. The support for environmental actions can elevate the sustainability efforts led by the ENGO and creates new values connected to the business interests of the corporation (Dahan et al., 2010; Lee, 2019).

ENGOs have been known for uncovering greenwashing plans of many businesses, and because of that, relationships between ENGOs and businesses have always been antagonistic since they were first established (Arts, 2002; Delmas & Burbano, 2011). The title of “environmental police” was given to ENGOs by the second wave of environmental activism. During the 1960s and 1970s, ENGO played a significant role in establishing, changing, and sometimes abolishing regulations. ENGOs have a broad range of coping techniques to resolve their fundamental dissimilarities with the corporations. Many ENGOs attempted to deal with the differences by encouraging the corporate world to gradually adopt many sustainable practices. Some other ENGOs opt for direct conversation that puts pressure on the corporations in the form of public protests (Lee, 2019).

2.2.6 Sustainability actions of ENGOs in Canada

Environmental degradation has increased in Canada in the same way it has in most other developed industrialized countries since 1960s (Parson, 2000). Canada did not have an environment department within government until 1971. After its establishment and gradual improvements, the department started playing an important role in environmental governance. It carried out national and international responsibilities in the UNCED Rio Summit in 1992 and also in the Canada-US Great Lakes agreements and negotiations. But the department was rather slow

in establishing biodiversity policies and regulations. In the initial years, Environment Canada worked only around the Clean Air Act, the Fisheries Act, the Environment Act, and the Canada Water Act. But now the department operates around about twenty statutes, including the Species at Risk Act, and the Federal Sustainable Development Act (Doern et al., 2015).

The discussion in previous sections depicts how ENGOs work towards sustainability policies and action worldwide, and Canadian ENGOs mostly employ similar strategies to implement their sustainability goals. Most of the times, environmental groups possess capacity for helping the government to set agendas. ENGOs are playing a significant role in policy conception, implementation, and amendment in Canada (Doern et al., 2015). ENGOs that are unsatisfied with policies and practices of the domestic government often present their issues in international forums and to governments of other countries. They also consult with the markets of Canadian products so that those parties can exert pressure on the Canadian government and corporations, most notably in the forest and mining sectors. However, sectors like mining, forestry, organic agriculture, chemicals, and fisheries, have all been greatly enhanced through the work of environmental groups in the past as their strategies resulted in various positive outcomes, including environmental improvements (Doern et al., 2015). ENGOs continue to influence these sectors, pushing industry to reach their sustainability goals.

ENGOs in Canada have also employed legal mechanisms to exert pressure on the government for policy changes (Taylor & Pinkus, 2013). There has been a long history of court challenges around the implementation of federal impact assessment that continues to this day (Hazell, 1999). Howlett (2007) discusses how NGOs can be very effective in policy creation, especially in the initial stage of policy development. They can help to successfully influence the public in favor of a new environmental legislation as well. Evans & Sapeha (2015) assessed the collaboration between provincial governments and ENGOs in Canada during policy formulation and found that a great deal of cooperation exists between these two parties. An increasing amount of collaborations among ENGOs and government has been found in Ontario as the province has become more neo-liberalized over the last 20 years (Davidson & De Loë, 2016; Logan & Wekerle, 2008; Macaraig, 2011; Sandberg & Wekerle, 2010). ENGOs are contributing on a large scale in the sector of species conservation in Canada, for example, Amos et al. (2001) and Elgie (2009)

discussed the role that Canadian ENGOs played in establishing the federal Species at Risk Act. Environmental groups are also carrying out vital roles in raising awareness and educating the public (Cox, 2013). ENGOs are actively using newer tools, such as social media, and older instruments, including workshops and pamphlets, to reach the public. ENGOs in Canada are continuing to work, maintaining communication with government agencies, stakeholders, and other environmental groups (Olive & Penton, 2018).

2.3 Changes after COVID-19

Based on the information from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 was initially identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and is believed to have originated from wild animals sold at the market. Due to the effects of COVID-19, the existing environmental issues have become more severe and apparent. The pandemic has presented itself as the biggest crisis since the World War II, which caused massive human suffering all over the world (Muhammad et al., 2020). All personal and industrial activities came to a halt as the offices, school and factories were closed due to the temporary lockdown (Wilder-Smith & Freedman, 2020). Many academics reported some positive impacts of the pandemic on the environment, such as reduced noise, cleaner air, and a decline in greenhouse gas emissions, as the lockdown resulted in a decline in anthropogenic and industrial activities (Dutheil et al., 2020; Le Quéré et al., 2020; Wilder-Smith & Freedman, 2020; Zambrano-Monserrate et al., 2020). One of the most intriguing changes due to the lockdown was the reduction in CO₂ production which mostly resulted from travel restrictions. The lockdown caused almost 96% of international flights to be cancelled and it had dropped the rate of international flights to the lowest in 75 years (Wallace, 2020). Also, the decline of toxic emissions from industries and city traffics resulted in reduced rate of NO₂, SO₂, and PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ emissions (Bates et al., 2020; Mousazadeh et al., 2021; Nilashi et al., 2019; Prakash et al., 2021; Querol et al., 2021).

There have been some studies that highlighted the shift towards remote or hybrid work causing a reduction in commute trips and changes in the modes of transportation (Matson et al., 2023). The reduced number of commute trips mean reduced traffic and air pollution as the transportation sector is a major cause of air pollution in urban environment (Hidalgo-Triana et al., 2023; Hunter, 2019). Reduced physical commutes created new working habits that have the

potential to positively impact the environment if they are adopted for a long term (Crowley et al., 2021). Previous research has indicated that working remotely from a home-office delivers more productivity, maintains work-life balance, and contributes to reduced transport flow in the streets (Hunter, 2019; OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19), 2020).

Although there had been some visibly apparent temporary positive impacts of the lockdown, not all impacts of the lockdown were positive and helpful for the environment. Some impacts of the pandemic presented themselves to be very dangerous for the environment (Cho et al., 2022). A notable environmental concern regarding COVID-19 was the increase and treatment of medical waste. As the increased use of masks, PPE, and other medical supplies had become necessary during the peak time of the pandemic, hospitals have been estimated to produce six times more waste compared to regular times. But the amount of waste is not the only concern, as the nature of waste also seems to be alarming. A plastic industry boom has been observed during the pandemic with demand for safety materials such as masks, tests, and gloves. Most of these are single-use products that have greatly increased the global amount of plastic waste. These plastic wastes are not biodegradable and will mostly end up in the oceans or the landfills, adding to the existing waste (Mukhopadhyay, 2020). These non-biodegradable wastes will result in a wide range of environmental problems, including deforestation, water and air pollution, and soil erosion (Mourad, 2016; Schanes et al., 2018).

Lockdown and reduced activity have caused serious impacts on employment (Galanti et al., 2021), commerce, industry, and tourism through disastrous effects on worldwide economy (Bashir, Ma, Komal, et al., 2020; Cheval et al., 2020; Nilashi et al., 2020). The pandemic has caused serious impacts on the manufacturing and industrial sectors (Muhammad et al., 2020). Demands for oil reduced dramatically worldwide and oil prices fell rapidly as the factories and transport system had been halted for lockdown (Muhammad et al., 2020; Zambrano-Monserrate et al., 2020). Global energy demand had reduced by 3.8% in the first few months of 2020, with most of the decline detected in March (Barreiro-Gen et al., 2020; IEA, 2020). COVID-19 had a devastating effect on human health and economy worldwide, but it is understandable that it also led to some positive changes because of limited anthropogenic activities (Dutheil et al., 2020; Muhammad et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2020).

2.4 Changes in environmental organizations after COVID-19

Organizations are an essential part of modern human societies (Haller, 2017). Organizations such as, ENGOs, can be disturbed by conditions that operate beyond their areas (Jones, 2013), and, in exceptional cases, occurrences such as the COVID-19 pandemic can affect ENGOs in unpredictable ways (Magalhães & Sanchez, 2010). Organizations are linked with larger systems and the balance of social, environmental and economic sectors can be affected by these disturbances (Porter et al., 1975; Stacey, 2007; Wong & Avery, 2009). Organizations have been contributing in guiding society to a direction that is more sustainable (Dururu et al., 2015; Haller, 2017; Holliday et al., 2002; Lyth et al., 2017). Amidst any crisis, the priority of any organization is to take care of the staff and to stay active. But environmental concerns always seem to suffer in terms of prioritisation, regardless of the country, organization type, organization size, and the age of the organization. Smith (1999) suggested that organizations need to take advantage of emergency situations and turn them into opportunities to contribute more to sustainability (Arevalo & Aravind, 2010; Giannarakis & Theotokas, 2011; Souto, 2009). It will ensure that their sustainability actions taken during the previous years are not wasted (Barreiro-Gen et al., 2020).

The data indicates that some organizations have achieved improved results under COVID-19 restrictions. A crisis can have a dual effect on the economic condition of organizations. Some organizations may never make a comeback after a crisis and others may come back with a more solid footing. Most organizations had assumed that the lockdown would be for short time and decided not to make any major changes in their operations while waiting for the situation to be normal again. But in reality, there had been many changes in the ways organizations operated and how they worked with other parties. Reduced income, increased cost of health and changing accommodations have affected the overall condition of the society and also, the willingness to support NGOs and ENGOs (Giovanis & Ozdamar, 2022). But not all were affected similarly by the pandemic. According to research, people may become more willing to support others at the time of crisis (Vieira et al., 2020). Other studies indicate that donors opted to support people from their own locality during COVID-19. Donations to NGOs, including ENGOs from national and international sources, were reduced by half during the pandemic (Grimalda et al., 2021). McCambridge & Dietz (2020) analysed the impacts of the Great Recession in 2008 on NGO activities and found that smaller non-profit organizations never fully recovered from the loss and

the larger organizations gained a better position after recession. They also studied closure rates during the recession and the result indicated that closure rates were highest for public, religious, international, societal benefit and membership organizations, and the lowest closure rates were for humanitarian and environmental organizations and charities (Waniak-Michalak et al., 2022).

Many NGOs were compelled to adjust their operations based on the pandemic situations. The economic crisis caused reductions to the number of projects where the organizations and local government had collaborated. Organizations had to bring about some modifications in their activity models to maintain their activities and funding. This created an opportunity to study how digital tools could be utilized in an organization. Virtual meetings could accommodate more participants than a physical one and it facilitated more interactions and connections. ENGOS could still collaborate with each other despite the restrictions resulting from using virtual tools. This enabled the organizations to work cooperatively and to develop new programs. This approach helped them generate many innovative ideas and those opened new doors for increased partnerships (Widing & Ahmed, 2021). Sadly, many NGOs were not able to make the adjustments as their employees and beneficiaries could not work or communicate remotely (Waniak-Michalak et al., 2022).

A study that was aiming to garner learnings from COVID-19 for immediate climate action in Canada found that the pandemic demonstrated that the public can be accepting towards direct government intervention, though there were some dissatisfactions towards misdirected and unproductive preventative approaches. These lessons from the pandemic can be utilized to understand the part social supports can play in instances like the climate crisis. When participants were prompted to imagine how a climate crisis would look on a similar level to COVID-19, their responses highlighted the necessity of reinforcing the social safety net over individual and industry profits. It was evident from the responses from participants that they valued social supports in the context of climate crisis based on their experiences of COVID-19 (Sterling, 2023).

The data further suggested that the shift from physical to virtual required ENGOS to reform their advocacy strategies. The findings indicated that ENGOS changed their advocacy strategies according to the social restrictions. Important international conferences and negotiations

were still held during COVID-19 with the help of digital platforms, but the meetings concerning important agreements were postponed as physical presence was necessary for them. Some ENGOs could carry on with their activities during COVID-19 but others needed to postpone activities. For example, the activities for conservation efforts needed to be postponed because they required physical presence. These types of activities were suspended due to safety concerns during the pandemic. But the operations that did not require physical presence and could be done virtually were continued, such as educational efforts. It can be argued that most of the ENGOs' operations were hampered due to the pandemic because the majority of their operations were physical. The results also indicated that ENGOs changed some of their goals for 2020 due to lack of funding. However, they continued to lobby for the environmental issues through activities that needed fewer resources (Widing & Ahmed, 2021).

2.5 Changes in environmental organizations after COVID-19 in Canada

There has been some research on the impacts of COVID-19 on the activities of non-profit and environmental organizations in Canada. The literature has provided some very insightful data on the impacts of the pandemic on this sector. The literature suggests that the pandemic accelerated digital innovation and, that technologies have become more advanced during this time (Mikołajczak et al., 2022). As well, it has been noted that ENGOs have invested resources and time to identify, understand, and experiment with new digital tools and technologies (Case & Eady, 2022). Akingbola et al., (2021) further noted that it was a challenge for most non-profits due to lack of resources and training. The results of some recent research show greater interest in use of IT tools and online communications in nonprofit organizations, especially for modern data management systems, IT security, and remote access to files and office equipment (Mikołajczak et al., 2022). They understood that amidst the lockdown, people were gravitating towards social media and increasing activities in social media will contribute to advocacy. The organizations took this opportunity of the pause in face-to-face activities to rebuild their internet presence (Case & Eady, 2022).

The literature also suggests that street-level activities reduced during the pandemic. Organizations had to find ways to improvise their efforts to cope with social distancing protocols, limited resources, changes in demands and the changed political context that emerged as the result

of the pandemic. The literature also indicated that in the case of water advocacy, organizations took immediate precautions which included canceling or postponing their events, laying of staff, and pausing for a period of reflecting and regrouping as they waited to understand the implications of the pandemic on their organizations and programs. The organizations that were impacted most were those who focused on building relationships through in-person activities, such as youth adventures and overnight camping, which have no appropriate online alternative (Case & Eady, 2022).

It is further noted that most organizations faced reduced revenues, disturbances in organizational strategies, and troubled workforces as the result of COVID-19 (Case & Eady, 2022). The research shows that many grassroot organizations have changed their approaches to continue with their activities and to put pressure on government officials on different issues (Hibbett, 2020; Pleyers, 2020). A survey on international activists showed that 81% of the respondents adopted new tactics that enabled them to continue towards their campaign goals (Pinckney & Rivers, 2020). The data from literature suggests that the disruptions created by the pandemic have created conditions for experimenting, innovation, developing new capabilities, and exploring new strategies (Case & Eady, 2022).

The data from literature also suggests that the pandemic forced a record number of employees from nonprofits to work remotely. Though there were opportunities for these organizations to benefit from flexible work schedules and attract employees who prefer to have work-life balance, the benefits came with the need to adopt improved human resources practices to address issues related to remote work, e.g., mental health concerns, reduced team dynamic, and legal considerations between clients and employees (Akingbola, 2020). Some of the organizations also experienced reduced hours at work (Olawoye-Mann, 2021).

The new strategic visions have also been helpful for the groups to follow changing needs of different stakeholders, identifying new sources for funding, connecting with other organizations, and building relationships with public and communities (Rottkamp, 2021). The pandemic has not only been a challenge for them, it was also an opportunity to invest in future collaborations, financial strength, and team stability. The pandemic inspired them to become more

agile and innovative, and encouraged them to evaluate their procedures and functioning in a new light (Case & Eady, 2022). Though the situation created by the pandemic was negative, it brought some positive aspects for these organizations and increased their flexibility (Chikwanda, 2020).

The literature further revealed that many nonprofits depended on temporary government programs such as the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, which was an economic response plan for COVID-19 that covered 75% of an employee's wages so employers could avoid layoffs and create new jobs (Olawoye-Mann, 2021). The literature review also revealed that most ENGOs had to cancel their fundraising events (Mikołajczak et al., 2022), which resulted in the reduced revenue and disturbances in cash flow (Stewart et al., 2021). The data from literature also suggests that the organizations faced reduced government revenues during the pandemic (Johnson et al., 2021; Mikołajczak et al., 2022).

Many organizations changed their strategies for fundraising as they could not raise enough funds during the pandemic. They implemented digital tools and diversified their approach to raise more donations. Some of them asked for support from their partners and focused on applying for more grants (Mikołajczak et al., 2022). The non-profits were required to increase their virtual advertising to maintain their existing donors and to get attention of new donors. It was necessary to make their online presence more visible through web engagements and easy web searches (Olawoye-Mann, 2021). The data from literature also revealed that one of the organizations had a diverse and crowd-funded donation base and goal-driven approach to organizing which provided them with flexibility for planning and activities. (Case & Eady, 2022).

A surprising observation of note is that, the data from literature suggests that some large foundations and corporations increased their support for organizations during COVID-19 (Finchum-Mason et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2021), and individual donations increased in some cases (Johnson et al., 2021; Li & Feng, 2021). The data from the literature review also indicated that though there were fears around reduced revenue, that did not occur in all cases. A survey on Canadian environmental groups in 2021 revealed that the financial impact was more modest than expected. The reason behind this can be the influences of environmental movement's support and

the organizations' efforts to remain active and visible in the early days of COVID-19 (Case & Eady, 2022).

The literature on the matter of changing relationships during COVID-19 indicated that from working in-person to working from home can change how people think about their work (Hoff, 2021; Kuenzi et al., 2022). The literature also indicated that changes in organizations can affect how the workers relate to their organizations (Ashforth, 2020; Hennekam et al., 2021; Ranganathan, 2021). The organizations showed remarkable resilience during the pandemic and the key contributing factor for that resilience was the quality of relationships within and outside the organizations. It is important to build strong, open and spontaneous internal relationships to connect with each other personally, to blur differences in ranks and to create a work culture based in mutual trust and support (Case & Eady, 2022).

2.6 Summary

As my review suggests, ENGOs have contributed towards environmental protection and sustainability for decades. They have been taking part in policy formation, implementation, and amendments with governments and have also been advocating for many environmental issues with support from the public. This has been occurring in Canada and beyond. Provincial and International ENGOs are working with national ENGOs to tackle transnational issues, such as climate change. ENGOs have also adopted modern digital technologies to improve their efforts towards achieving a more sustainable society. These digital interventions have provided them with more connections and creative developments. ENGOs are also paying attention to the quality of leadership and employees they are investing in and are increasingly involved in collaborations with corporate entities. These types of connections are beneficial for both parties as they provide resources for the ENGOs and expert consultation for corporations. ENGOs in Canada have been very active in ensuring environmental protection at the international, national, and regional levels. They have been really focusing on engaging in processes for improving environmental policies and helping local governments to collaborate with the national government. They are also lobbying for the development of different environmental sectors.

But the arrival of COVID-19 got in the way of ENGO operations. COVID-19 has not only hampered human health, environment, and the economy, but also the sustainability actions of ENGOs in Canada. COVID-19 has impacted the progress that ENGOs have been making towards establishing a more sustainable society. The degree of this impact remains largely unknown, except for a few studies such as the one in Sweden, noted above, that indicated through the shift from physical to virtual activities, ENGOs were making more connections, which led to better ideas in some cases. But the results of this work also suggest that virtual advocacy strategies and demonstrations were not as successful as physical ones. It is clear that many sustainability actions had to be paused to take care of the damages caused by COVID-19 and to ensure the safety of ENGO employees and volunteers. What is not clear is whether these have been re-started, and what has happened to any momentum built. There is opportunity to study how the ENGOs in Canada have adapted their sustainability actions after COVID-19 to keep progressing towards a more sustainable society.

Chapter 3. Research design and methods

This chapter discusses the research approach and design that I have worked with for this research project. As such, it includes data collection methods, data analysis, ensuring validity, ethics, and the dissemination of findings.

3.1 Perspective and approach

Through this research I attempted to understand the effects of COVID-19 on the sustainability actions of ENGOs in Canada. I used a qualitative approach, as most environmental issues require human responses and my work deals with issues best approached through talking to people. In this case, I tried to obtain people's perspectives on the impact of COVID-19 on their work, which clearly fits a qualitative approach. Also, this approach allowed my data analysis to proceed inductively, constructing from particulars to themes, while I attempted to make interpretations from the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I analyzed the data by organising them into themes and interpreted the findings of the research based on my own understanding, which is a characteristic of qualitative research.

I approached my research from a transformative perspective since it focuses on the requirements of groups and individuals in our society that are marginalized or deprived of their rights. Linkages have been found on marginalization and environmental degradation in multiple research projects in the field of political ecology since the 1990s, which was based on issues such as soil management, deforestation and desertification. In recent years, the literature on this subject has further showed how this narrative surrounding environmental degradation is being used as a weapon to gain power over natural resources, which further marginalizes groups that are already struggling (Benjaminsen, 2015). Environment has been perceived for a long time as something that is ever present, provides basics and necessities for life and takes the waste materials we discard, but people have not particularly thought about the way humans value it (Leimgruber, 2018). Thus, the whole idea of environment and environmental advocacy can be seen as disregarded and marginalized. In that sense, people that work for the environment, ENGOs in this case, are part of the marginalized group. COVID-19 brought massive changes in society worldwide and studying such changes in society and understanding those changes is also the essences of a transformative perspective.

COVID-19 has also changed the way ENGOS have operated in the years prior to the pandemic, and they had to transform practices in some way after the COVID-19 to adjust to the effects. My research aimed at understanding the change or transformation within ENGOS, that COVID-19 brought about. By following the transformative worldview, theoretical perspectives can be linked with philosophical assumptions that enable the researcher to build an overall understanding of the subject being studied, the group of people to be researched, and the modifications that are required. Outcomes of these studies generally consist of an action plan that may change the lifestyle of the participants, the institutions where they work, and the researcher's surroundings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3.2 Research design: case study

The research design that was adopted for this research project was case study. Research design is the linkage that connects the scientific data to a study's research questions and to its findings (Yin, 2009). Another way of defining research design is as a "blueprint" for research. It means that research design defines the questions that will be studied, the data that will be required to collect, the methods which will be employed to collect the data, and the way in which data will be analyzed (Philliber, Schwab, & Samsloss, 1980). The main objective of a research design is planning the study in a way that the evidence leads to the answers to initial research questions (Yin, 2009).

Case study research design is generally found in disciplines of social science and practicing professions. Case study is a research design that inquires about a present-day situation (the "case") in detail and in contemporary context (Yin, 2009). In this instance, the case was the changes in actions of the ENGOS after COVID-19. Case studies allow a researcher to delve thoroughly into a "case" and uphold a modern and holistic perspective, such as studying small-scale group behavior, organizational and management procedures, and international relations. As well, if the research is asking "how" and "why" questions, it is well suited to a case study. This is because these questions help to track down changes in operational processes over the years, rather than finding out just frequencies (Yin, 2009).

With this in mind, I realized that a case study design will let me dive deep into the workings of ENGOS so that I can identify how and why they have changed after COVID-19 in terms of sustainability actions. My research also represented a contemporary phenomenon with

real-world context which is a perfect setting for a case study. I am certain that, by adopting case study as my research design, I was able to attain my research objectives and reached to accurate findings.

3.2.1 Case study selection

The focus of my research was ENGOs, of which there are many across the country. I intended to select participants from different provincial and national ENGOs in Canada. I applied the following criteria when selecting ENGO's from which I solicited participants.

- The ENGO has to have been active prior to COVID-19
- The ENGO must have an active online web presence
- The ENGO must have documented sustainability actions
- The ENGO must have at least one staff person

3.3 Data collection methods

For this project, I decided to use document review and semi-structured interviews as data collection methods. I understood that these methods would allow me to obtain maximum insight regarding my research topic and would be more manageable. The document review allowed me to dive into the sustainability activities of these ENGOs, and to consider any prominent changes in their focus after COVID-19. Semi-structured interviews with ENGO officials allowed me to attain a practical understanding of the changes that happened in the sustainability actions of ENGOs that revealed themselves through the document review.

3.3.1 Document review

Document review is a data collection method that is used to obtain relevant information from published literature. A researcher gathers various written materials and reviews them to reveal needed information (Mwita, 2022). Document reviews may be done with public documents such as minutes of meetings, books, and newspapers, as well as private documents, including journals and letters. (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The main documents I reviewed were ENGO reports of their activities available on public websites. For example, the Canadian Wildlife Federation (Canadian Wildlife Federation: Your Connection with Wildlife) has tabs and reports related to key actions they are working on such as 'Coasts and Oceans' and 'Endangered Species'.

At first, I made a list of all the ENGOs I wanted to include in my study by browsing the web and studying their activities. I was able to find their mission, mandates, and programs through their websites. Some websites included annual reports and policies. Almost all websites included published blogs, press releases, important news, newsletters, and success stories. I retrieved data from websites on the issues they were focusing on and the actions the organizations were taking to address those issues. The data from the websites supported me in completing my first research objective, which was to understand ENGO activities. I also reviewed relevant literature and textbooks to study the actions of ENGOs, and I collected data from those sources. I combined all the data in chapter 4, and it provided me with a summary of what these organizations had been doing before the pandemic.

I also found some data on the changes after COVID-19 from the annual reports of the ENGOs, but the insight was very limited. I found some data from the news articles on their websites which depicted how the pandemic changed some of the actions of these groups and what responses they received from the public. The literature also provided important data on the impact of the pandemic on the nonprofit sector, which includes ENGOs and other environmental groups and charities. There has been some research on the impacts of COVID-19 on NGOs and nonprofits in other countries. The data from those papers provided interesting and meaningful insights on the effects of the pandemic on the policies, operations, and activities of these groups. I tried to incorporate all the data I could find into this paper.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interview

An interview is a tool that is used to collect data through the use of words between a researcher and a participant. Interviews can be done in-person or through the use of digital devices such as telephones and computers (Mwita, 2022). I had developed a semi-structured interview guide because this approach allowed me maximum flexibility, while also having a structure organized around a set of predetermined questions. This approach also allowed me to ask follow-up questions related to the response given (Mwita, 2022).

My interview guide consisted of open-ended questions which allowed the participant to elaborate on any answer if they wanted to. There was opportunity to ask further questions when I was not clear on any topic. I also asked a few closed-ended questions at the beginning of the interview to gain some perspective about the interviewee and the organization. In designing the

questions, I depended on the reading that I had done, as reflected in the literature review, as well as readings on interview design. I also tailored the interview schedule based on what I learned about an individual ENGO through my document search.

I had planned to interview approximately 15-20 people in total from selected ENGOs, and I wanted to include organizations from all over Canada, both regional and national. I made a list of potential participants from the selected ENGOs that I wanted to approach. With the help of the websites, I was able to find the staff directory of the ENGOs, and I selected the people I would approach for an interview. I was mostly interested in interviewing directors or staff in managerial positions because they would have more understanding of the changes that occurred because of the pandemic. After making the list, I forwarded it to my supervisor and received some recommendations, which I added to my list. I approached the interviewees through their emails and was able to receive a positive response from nineteen prospective participants. Of the nineteen participants, eleven were from provincial or regional organizations while eight were ENGOs which operate on a national level (some of these ENGOs also work internationally). Eight of the ENGOs in my study have their head offices in Ontario, particularly in Toronto and Ottawa. Two of the organizations have their offices in Manitoba, one in Saskatchewan, two in Alberta, three in British Columbia and one in New Brunswick. Two of the ENGOs also have offices in foreign countries and two organizations on my list operate without a physical office. Another organization on my list has offices in all the provinces. The smaller regional organizations tended to have less than 10 staff, but the larger organizations had 20 or more staff. I was satisfied with the ENGOs I could include in my study, as they were diverse in terms of location and operation. I did not mention the name of these ENGOs in my study to protect the privacy of my participants.

After getting the approval from the participants, I sent them the consent form to sign and return back to me. I also sent them the interview information package to provide them with necessary information about the study and the interview schedule. They were asked to provide a convenient date and time for the interview. After receiving the signed consent form and finalizing the date and time, I sent them a secure Zoom link through email. Though the participants were given options for meeting in-person or online, all the participants chose to meet online through Zoom for the interview. Even though few of the participants were based in Winnipeg, they

preferred to use the online option for the interview session. The duration of the interviews ranged between 30 and 45 minutes.

I recorded all my interviews through Zoom so that the recordings could assist me while transcribing the interviews. I also turned on the option for transcription for every interview on Zoom. Though the transcription from Zoom was helpful, there were many errors in the transcripts. As a result, I had to go over the transcripts and correct them with the help of the recordings.

3.4 Data analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research proceeds along with other parts of qualitative study, such as the data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I started to look for potential codes while working on document review and conducting interviews. Coding is the procedure of organizing data by selecting a group of texts and writing a word representing a particular category in the margins (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Coding allows the researcher to generate themes for the description of the settings for data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). After completing all the interviews, I transcribed the interviews and moved on to the coding part.

Today's qualitative software programs have grown to be very popular among researchers, and they help researchers to organize, sort, and search for data in text or image databases (Guest et al., 2011). I used the NVivo software to organize my data into codes and themes. This software helps a researcher with sorting, managing, and analyzing the gathered data. It also enables the researcher to store and arrange various kinds of primary and secondary data, such as articles and interviews. In NVivo, coding is done by nodes that function as containers, that hold data of the same theme and becomes the primary categories of findings. I uploaded all the transcripts and the data from literature and document review to NVivo and organized the data into distinct themes.

As the approach for this study was qualitative, the results of this study were depicted in chapters 4 and 5 using the terms 'few', 'many', or 'most'. The term 'few' refers to 30-40% participants supporting a point. 'Many' refers to 50-70% of participants agreeing on or supporting a statement. And 'most' refers to more than 80% of the participants expressing the same opinion. These terms represent the level of support for each theme.

It is also important to mention that my worldview and environmentalist mindset had some influence on the approach, data analysis process, and interpretation of the data. Apart of being a student studying management of natural resources, I have been involved with volunteer movements that worked for protection of nature and strived to uphold the principles of sustainability. As I acknowledge my bias towards environmental protection and sustainability, I have been mindful of the effects of the bias on my findings and have tried to present my findings in a fair manner.

3.5 Ensuring validity

Researchers need to reveal how they will prove their data to be authentic and findings to be accurate (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Qualitative validity refers to the process where the researcher checks the accuracy of the findings by using particular processes (Gibbs, 2007). The integrity and application of research methods implemented for a study and the level of accuracy in which the findings reflect the data can be referred as validity (Pyo et al., 2023). Internal validity in qualitative research projects is shown by the triangulation of results from different resources, and I used triangulation in order to increase the internal validity of my findings. I tried to compare the findings from literature and document review and the interviews to find similarities between two sources. I also conducted member checking by sending the transcribed interview to participants so that they can review it and verify that it precisely expresses their opinions. This process of verification allows participants to add to their previous answers and refine their responses. I believe that by carrying out triangulation and member checking, I have ensured the validity of my findings. Moreover, my advisor and committee members had multiple opportunities to read my research and provided feedback on my data. The peer scrutiny in this case further supports the validity of my research.

3.6 Ethics

This research project went through ethics review at the University of Manitoba prior to interviewing the participants. The participation was voluntary and fully confidential. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research project prior to interviews and were requested to contribute. All the participants were requested to fill out a consent form and sign it. The form explained the basic purpose and objectives of the study. It also indicated that the participants understood the study, agreed to take part in it, agreed that their interview be recorded,

and agreed for their responses to be included in the thesis and other publications as anonymous quotes. The participant had the right to decline to respond to any question and to withdraw from the interview completely, which none of my participants opted for. To maintain maximum confidentiality, the digital consent forms are being kept securely on OneDrive. Also, the data from the interviews and the forms will be disposed of after five years and the transcripts and recordings of the interviews will be securely stored on OneDrive.

3.7 Dissemination

The results of this study have been included in this thesis. Pending the approval of the thesis, I will send a summary of all the major research findings to all the participants and ENGOs. I intend to publish the findings from this research project in a reputable academic journal and present my findings at a conference such as Canadian Environmental Studies Association.

Chapter 4. Activities of the case study ENGOs

4.1 Introduction

The data from the websites of the ENGOs, the literature, and interviews indicated that these organizations engage in various activities that ensure environmental protection, restoration of ecosystems, and sustainability. The actions related to these are mostly associated with the environmental, social, and political dynamics of our surroundings. The groups are also increasingly pursuing issues related to justice, because they view this as an integral part of sustainability.

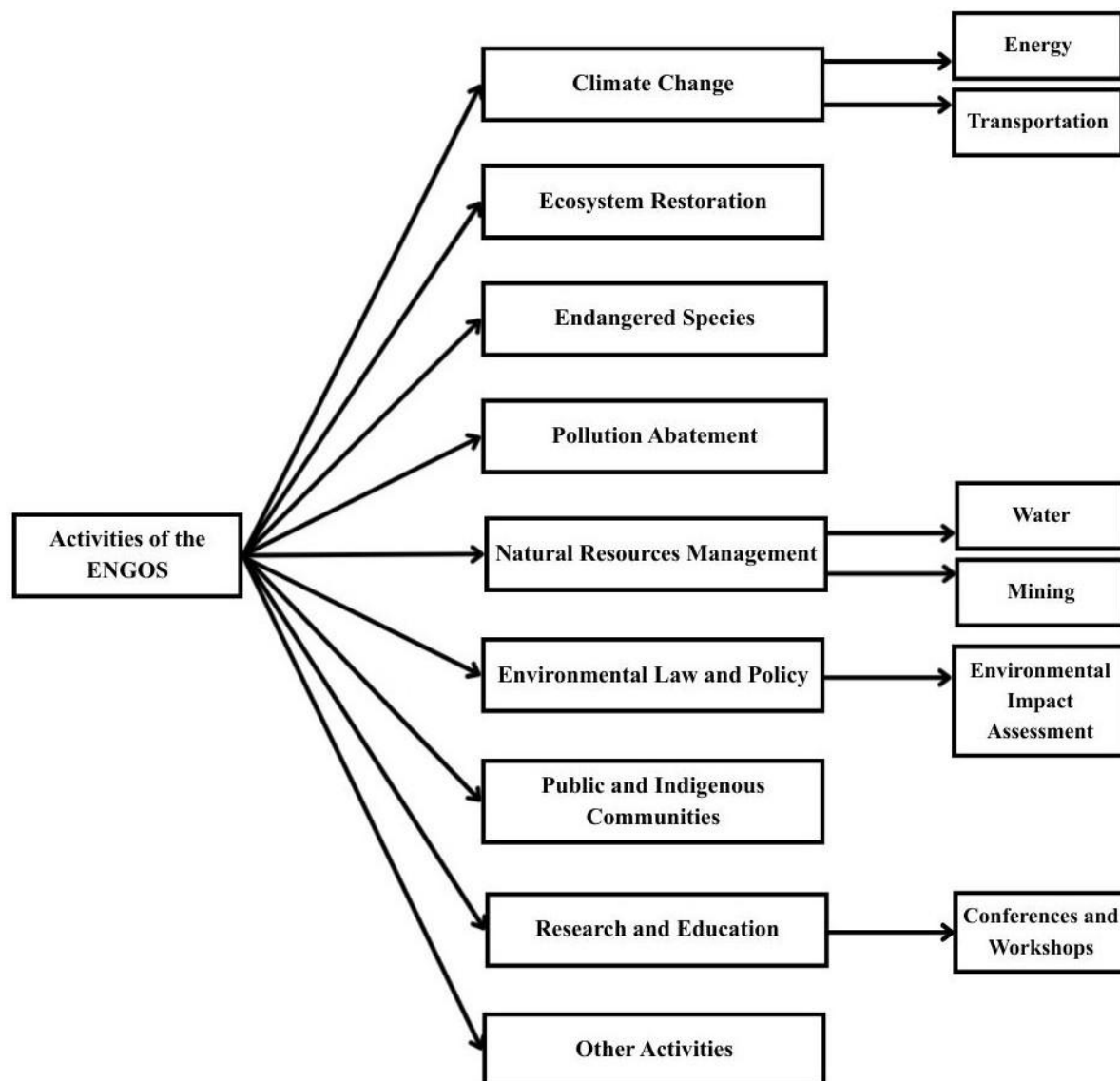


Figure 4.1: Activities of the ENGOs in Canada

ENGOS regularly reveal their activities through their websites in the form of blogs, reports, press releases, newsletters, news articles, and pictures. According to the document review, most of the organizations are working with issues related to water, climate change, energy, conservation, biodiversity and education. Some of the ENGOS are also working on issues related to environmental pollution, natural resources management, transportation, green communities and youth. A few organizations are addressing specialized issues related to mining, impact assessment, environmental laws, gender equality and economy. The most significant issues that are being addressed through actions of these organizations are displayed in Figure 4.1 and detailed in the sections that follow. The activities are ordered according to the saturation of data for the areas of activities, as it demonstrates which activities the ENGOS mostly engage in.

The data show that most of the organizations depend on different advocacy strategies while working on the issues displayed in Figure 4.1. The strategies that the ENGOS utilize include running campaigns, doing research, forwarding policy briefs to politicians, arranging protests, taking part in environmental planning and assessment, policy development and amendment, creating relationships with partners etc. Some ENGOS create opportunities for the public to act on their issues through their websites and citizen science projects. They also arrange different events and volunteer opportunities for public and Indigenous communities. Fellow environmentalists can become supporters and members of these organizations. They can also donate to the ENGOS in different ways, such as giving lands, financial aid and symbolic adoptions. A few organizations reward their supporters with awards, scholarships and bursaries.

4.2 Activities related to climate change

The data indicated that climate change is one of the leading issues that the ENGOS are working on with key actions noted in Table 4.2. All of the organizations involved have activities

Table 4.2: Actions for climate change

Actions on climate change	Adaptation and mitigation Climate resilience and risk management Reducing greenhouse gas emissions Educating and building awareness Raising awareness about renewable energy Encouraging energy efficiency Encouraging active transportation
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that are designed to address this urgent issue and many of them have integrated advocacy for climate change in their mandates. The organizations are mainly focusing on the adaptation and mitigation aspects of climate change. These efforts being undertaken in relation to climate risk management and adaptation are helping decision-makers formulate policies for ensuring sustainability over the long term (e.g., IISD, 2025). Some of the primary activities in relation to climate change include, educating and building awareness of climate change in the public at both the individual and community levels, and working to expand their network to involve other people who are working towards mitigating the impacts of climate change (e.g., Climate Change Connection, 2014).

These groups are partnering with companies from other countries to establish ways to adjust to a changing climate and they are using their knowledge and expertise to establish actions that help reduce the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (IISD, 2025). The organizations are bringing in nature-based solutions to prevent the release of greenhouse gases in the environment caused by the destruction of forests and coastal ecosystems. They are restoring areas such as forests, peatlands and marine coastal areas that aid carbon capture and storage, and building models for regional water management to protect communities from recurring floods as the result of climate change (e.g., WWF, 2025). They are also focusing on conserving large ecological areas because it gives species more space to move to when there are fires or other changes due to climate change in their habitat. These larger areas show more resilience than fragmented areas (e.g., Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, 2025).

By bringing together local and scientific knowledge and by developing strategies, tools, and policies, these groups are trying to respond to the impacts of climate change on environment, cultures, livelihoods, and economies (IISD, 2025). The data also revealed that the activities of these ENGOs are working to build climate resilience. For example, the Nature Conservancy Canada (2025) is identifying ways to conserve and restore nature to help cool air during heatwaves, ensure natural corridors, and protect areas for wildlife species. Some groups are helping to restore degraded lands and shorelines to address the impacts of changing climates and to create the environment in which wildlife can thrive (e.g., WWF, 2025).

Some of these groups are also associated with international programs, such as The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Global Network, which partners with the most vulnerable

countries and is trying to increase the resiliency of communities, ecosystems, and economies to the impacts of climate change. Some local organizations are trying to identify gaps in climate resiliency knowledge, developing plans for meaningful climate adaptation in neighborhoods, and exploring projects that are significant for each community's needs. They are partnering with neighborhood corporations in the cities and implementing climate-adaptive solutions within these neighborhoods to make them greener. The groups are regularly conducting surveys and research on climate resilience and adaptation on a community level and sharing the results by publishing reports (e.g., Manitoba Eco-Network, 2025). The organizations are offering nature-based solutions to businesses to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and providing expertise to Indigenous-led mitigation initiatives (Ducks Unlimited Canada, 2025).

Some groups are pursuing legal avenues to help address major challenges and create opportunities for solutions regarding climate change. The groups recognize the political nature of climate adaptation and support workshops where the public can evaluate risks and express their opinions on adaptation policies. Through such workshops, some groups are helping to create a legislative framework for Canada that will assist them in protecting the environment and acting on climate change. This ensures the accountability of politicians and industry proponents (e.g., West Coast Environmental Law, 2025).

The data also showed that the groups are introducing the public to the latest science to increase their understanding of climate change and to gain their support for influencing government to implement solutions for climate change (e.g., Conservation Council of New Brunswick, 2025). Some groups are researching to find best solutions and practices for fighting extreme heat and water scarcity by using comprehensive data and conducting adaptation mapping. They are organizing training programs to build climate resilience in rural and remote communities, and these programs provide the communities with skills and tools for developing climate adaptation strategies. This work is supplemented through offering resources related to climate change on their websites and creating additional websites. For example, the website for Fraser Basin Council (2025) includes news, events and tools to support work on reducing the emission of greenhouse gases, and they also include case studies, reports, policies, guides, and plans to tackle climate change. ENGOs also organize activities related to energy and transportation that contribute to reducing the impacts of climate change.

4.2.1 Energy

Energy transition is established in the data as a significant issue many of these ENGOs have been working on. They have been working to find ways to move away from fossil fuel-based energy, transitioning to other more sustainable sources of energy, such as hydro, solar power, wind, and biomass. The organizations are trying to introduce and create awareness about these clean energy alternatives to the public, such as using natural gas for heating residential buildings in dense urban areas and also in resource-based industrial structures (e.g., Pollution Probe, 2025). Some groups are raising awareness about government's dependency on oil and gas, and advocating to stop subsidizing the industries and to put a limit on pollution to reduce the impacts of climate change (e.g., Environmental Defence, 2025). Some organizations have projects that aim to collaboratively create frameworks for innovative alternatives for energy in Canada to accelerate the transition to an energy system with lower carbon emissions (e.g., Pollution Probe, 2025). Some are also advocating that energy transition will help to stop the growth in toxic tailings that are causing contaminations of rivers, groundwater, forests, air, and wildlife species (Environmental Defence, 2025).

Some groups are also working with Indigenous communities on energy efficiency and providing training and mentorship to advance skills in this field and delivering introductory workshops about energy efficiency solutions and practices. They are also supporting remote communities in energy planning and decarbonizing energy systems (e.g, Fraser Basin Council, 2025). Some organizations are working with clean energy regulations which are based on flexible mechanisms and allow each province to adopt systems that work to their advantage. They are working with electricity system operators and utility groups to generate and supply new sources of electricity (Pembina Institute, 2025).

My data further indicated that many organizations are helping other nonprofit groups and charities in energy conservation measures which will help to decrease their environmental footprint while lowering their operational costs. They are using methods that include carbon capture and storage to reduce energy consumption and emissions in buildings. As residential buildings are a major source of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada, these organizations are working to provide homeowners services to increase energy efficiency in their homes. These services help the homeowners better understand the concept of energy efficiency and create a

housing market that values energy efficiency in their homes. Some have also studied ways to address the urgent need to retrofit existing buildings to reach desired outcomes of reduced emissions (Pembina Institute, 2025).

4.2.2 Transportation planning

Transportation is an issue that ENGOs are increasingly working on as the groups are advocating for reduced reliance on vehicles that run on fossil fuel and encouraging people to switch to electric vehicles or transportation modes that require less usage of energy, e.g., cycling and using public transport. ENGOs working on this issue are conducting surveys with owners of electrical vehicles in Canada to understand their experience of vehicle charging and to identify pros and cons of public charging infrastructure (e.g., Pollution Probe, 2025). They are working with the results of such surveys to push authorities to make improvements in their charging infrastructure to encourage more people to switch to electric vehicles. The groups are continuing to support wider understanding of electric vehicles and charging system, and they are collaborating with different groups on barriers to the adoption of such vehicles (e.g., Fraser Basin Council, 2025).

The data also shows that a few organizations are helping to transition school buses from diesel-fuel to electric through collaboration with government. They are also creating opportunities to engage municipal government and their partners to formulate solutions through external and internal resources, and create discussion on zero emission vehicles (Pollution Probe, 2025). These groups also encourage youth to become active transporters in cities, by walking, cycling, and using scooters and skateboards. EcoSuperior (2025) notes that these programs help youth to enjoy the physical, mental, and emotional benefits of moving actively.

4.3 Ecosystem restoration

The data indicates that many of these organizations are working to conserve biodiversity through the actions noted on Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Actions for ecosystem restoration

Actions on ecosystem restoration	Acquiring ecologically significant areas Increasing landscape resiliency Protesting city expansion Incorporating traditional practices Supporting municipal and local efforts Wildfire management
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The groups are acquiring ecologically significant areas and partnering with communities to protect them. This restoration is being done in various ways, for example, planting native trees, conducting prescribed burns, turning agricultural lands to wetlands or grasslands, reintroducing species, removing invasive species, removing dams, cleaning up trash along shorelines, and rehabilitating degraded shorelines (Nature Conservancy Canada, 2025). The groups involved in this are paying increased attention to conserving grasslands, which are endangered and very important ecosystems on the Canadian prairies. Some groups are also working to protect the boreal forests, one of the largest ecosystems in the world, by partnering up with Indigenous communities and incorporating traditional ways of caring for the lands (e.g., Canadian Wildlife Federation, 2025).

Some ENGOs are protesting against cities expanding in green spaces and advocating to protect the established greenbelts (e.g., Environmental Defence, 2025). The organizations are also providing services such as wetland restoration, mapping and assessment, habitat management consultations, watershed management, water replenishment, development and planning for green urban infrastructure, stormwater treatment etc. for conserving ecologically important lands and waterbodies (e.g., Ducks Unlimited Canada, 2025). They are supporting the public to change the ways of forest management, stop damaging rivers and lakes, and diversify forest-based industries. (e.g., Conservation Council of New Brunswick, 2025).

It is also apparent in the data that many of the groups are also advocating for laws that support management based on the different ecosystems, Indigenous rights, and meaningful public participation. Nature Canada (2025) for example, is focusing on supporting projects in municipalities that are increasing their protected areas, helping them to explore challenges for municipal-level conservation and formulating best practices to support municipalities in conservation effort. Many groups also engage in public planning and consultation processes, and forward letters and policy briefs to government, and meet politicians and bureaucrats around park development (e.g., Bow Valley Naturalists, 2020). The data also shows that some ENGOs are focused on working to improve laws and policies for forestry at all levels of the government, and they are advocating for improved management to ensure habitat protection for all species (e.g., Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, 2025).

The groups are working with Indigenous communities, activists and all levels of government to create new protected areas, including provincial parks, sanctuaries, reserves etc. (Wilderness Committee Manitoba, 2025). The data also pointed to the fact that some organizations are helping to create gardens in urban spaces to increase the greenery inside their cities and to restore the connection people have with nature. These gardens also use organic gardening techniques, maintain pesticide-free approaches to horticulture and demonstrate landscaping using native plant species (e.g., EcoSuperior, 2025). These ENGOs provide practical, scientific, and sustainable landscape solutions for improved water quality and land management in urban and remote areas all over Canada (e.g., Ducks Unlimited Canada, 2025). These groups are also looking for ways to increase landscape resiliency to help ensure that the conditions exist for landscapes to be resilient not only ecologically, but also culturally and socially.

Some of these groups are bringing people together to engage in wildfire protection and to protect important ecological areas and communities in them. These gatherings support communication among organizations that provide different services related to wildfire prevention and risk reduction. With the increase in the volume of wildfire in recent years, these coordinated gatherings have become essential to tackle this issue and ENGOs are organizing roundtables in remote communities to create strategies to overcome it (e.g., Fraser Basin Council, 2025).

4.4 Endangered species

Most of the ENGOs are working to protect endangered species from going extinct and they have a variety of conservation programs for different species depending on the area, depicted in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Actions for endangered species

Actions on endangered species	Stewardship, monitoring and research on species-at-risk Establishing protected areas Restoring natural corridors Co-management with Indigenous groups Consultation services Using technology in conservation
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For example, the Canadian Wildlife Federation, (2025) conducts stewardship, monitoring, and research for the recovery of North Atlantic right whales. Along with that, their programs aim to rescue marine and freshwater animals, like salmon, American eels, and freshwater turtles, and

conduct research and outreach for these species. Other organizations are also trying to protect endangered pollinators such as the Monarch butterfly and other insects by carrying out research and community science projects in collaboration with academic, municipal, corporate, and government partners. They are also taking initiatives to protect Arctic species, including polar bear, barren-ground caribou, walrus, narwal, bowhead whale and beluga whale (e.g., WWF, 2025).

Many organizations are providing consultation services on habitat management and impact mitigation, measuring habitat areas and disturbances, and quantifying the harmful impacts on biodiversity and endangered species of certain activities. These organizations are saving wildlife habitats by supporting landowners who are committed to protect their lands and encouraging them to adopt sustainable practices in agriculture and resource management. They are also working on removing invasive species from ecosystems and researching the effects of habitat and biodiversity loss (e.g. Ducks Unlimited Canada, 2025).

In protecting birds, some ENGOs are arranging different programs for the communities to engage in bird-friendly practices that are beneficial for the whole environment. The ENGOs have different campaigns to support wildlife, such as, building bird-friendly cities, stopping environmental racism, ending extinction, keeping wild species wild, defending oceans, and working for nature-based climate solutions (e.g., Nature Canada, 2025). They are also looking for public support in their attempts to introduce approaches to manage threats to biodiversity, such as, habitat loss, pollution, and overfishing to improve different legal mechanisms. These can include legislations and policy related to fisheries, forests, and species at risk etc. (e.g., West Coast Environmental Law, 2025).

The data also revealed that most ENGOs are working with First Nations communities by conducting research on keystone species such as sturgeon and bison. Many are also identifying areas with high biodiversity to improve stewardship in those regions. They have, for example, projects that work to track the health of biodiversity by obtaining and measuring a wide range of information about nature and implementing conservation efforts based on science. They are working to track diseases through scientific monitoring programs and developing treatments to fight these diseases (e.g., Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, 2025). Some are also acting to maintain and restore natural corridors for movement of different species in major ecological areas

so that the animals can safely reach to their desired destinations while migration (e.g., Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, 2025).

These organizations are serving on forums that support wildlife stewardship and habitat conservation in coordination with Indigenous governments. The objectives of these forums are to facilitate long-term co-management of wildlife and their habitats that are acknowledged and approved by Indigenous communities. Involved organizations also have programs to provide opportunities to environmental groups and Indigenous communities, and these programs primarily support new and collaborative Indigenous-led species recovery options rooted in traditional Indigenous knowledge and scientific information (e.g., Fraser Basin Council, 2025).

Moreover, the data suggested that most of the groups are working to safeguard people and nature at the same time. They understand that addressing just nature or people will not be effective to protect biodiversity. They have also established that any approach needs to be adapted to address cumulative impacts of climate change, pollution, habitat loss, invasive species, over exploitation, and the harmful impacts of industries. Some are also developing and using conservation drones, remote sensing technologies, machine-learning technologies, artificial intelligence-based tools, and camera traps for implementing their conservation efforts (e.g., WWF, 2025).

4.5 Pollution abatement

Organizing protests about various forms of pollution has been a part of the activities many ENGOs engage in through actions such as those noted in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Actions for pollution abatement

Actions on pollution abatement	Stopping plastic pollution and microplastic exposure Advocating for reusable materials Protesting industrial pollution Stopping the usage of harmful chemicals and toxins
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Some are, for example, working to stop plastic pollution while advocating for better recycling systems (e.g., Environmental Defence, 2025). One group is using innovative technology to detect, capture and remove plastic and other waste materials from the Great Lakes. They are trying to identify the sources that are introducing litter in waterways through collaboration, outreach and

education, and seeking support from government, industries, and the public to reduce such pollution (e.g., Pollution Probe, 2025). There are also ENGOs working with Indigenous communities to assess the health of species in relation to their exposure to microplastics, and also pollution from heavy metal in watersheds from nearby mines (e.g., Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, 2025).

Some ENGOs are providing opportunities to the public to learn how plastic can be beneficial when used, treated, and discarded in a responsible way and about the measures being taken to tackle plastic pollution (Pollution Probe, 2025). Some ENGOs are trying to empower youth to take action on plastic pollution in water through educational sessions, field trips, workshops and mentorship, and by sharing knowledge, skills, and networking information with them (e.g., Pollution Probe, 2025).

To reduce dependency on plastics, some ENGOs are advocating for increased use of reusable materials and are always spreading awareness about the harmful impacts of single-use plastic products. Some of the more local organizations (e.g., Resource Conservation Manitoba) are also encouraging people to compost their perishable wastes to make fertilizers for their gardens, which in turn reduces pollution and production of harmful greenhouse gases. These groups often organize clean-up events to keep communities and coasts clean from waste and litter, with the help of volunteers (e.g., EcoSuperior, 2025).

The data also suggests that ENGOs are working to stop the usage of harmful chemicals and toxins through advocacy. Some are demanding a ban on Canada's forever chemicals (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) and advocating for government to strengthen their laws around toxins (e.g., Environmental Defence, 2025). The groups are also raising awareness on the contamination of pharmaceuticals in Canadian lakes, which have adverse impacts on aquatic ecosystems and human health (e.g., Pollution Probe, 2025). These organizations are also always advocating for government to pass laws controlling pesticides and working with the public to limit their usage on their lawns, etc. They have created publications and other resources to educate people on regulations around pesticides use and have organized events with farm workers, labor groups and government to discuss the protection of farm workers who use pesticides (e.g., West Coast Environmental Law, 2025).

The groups are engaging in projects that seek an understanding of how industrial sites are affecting the neighborhoods and how people can utilize the law to get justice from the problems of living near contaminated industrial sites. Their reports illustrate that there are components missing from our legal framework and outline what is necessary to ensure access to environmental justice (e.g., Manitoba Eco-Network, 2025).

4.6 Natural resources management

As advocates for nature and sustainability, many of these ENGOs are working to ensure the proper management of resource extraction activities which are displayed in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Actions for natural resources management

Actions on natural resources management	Reviewing the management of resource extraction Establishing regulations with policymakers Preventing pipelines and tanker projects Offering sustainable solutions to industries Developing methods for freshwater management Developing relationships with coastal communities Rehabilitating orphaned mines Supporting movements against harmful mining practices
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According to websites and participants they are conducting a considerable amount of research on issues such as water, responsible mining practices, and forest management, as well as advocating for sustainable agriculture. These groups are working with policymakers to establish regulations to ensure sustainable development and responsible management in all resource sectors.

The data further revealed that the groups are working to change patterns of land and resource management by addressing the causes of unsustainable resource extraction and achieving legal protection for the environment. The groups are also raising their voices against large oil companies and encouraging their local governments to launch lawsuits and demand payment to communities for climate impact compensation. They believe and advocate that climate polluters should be held accountable for their actions and prevent them from making profits when the public faces the impacts of climate change through floods, wildfires and heat waves. They are also working to prevent the expansion of the oil sands by lobbying for no new pipelines and tanker projects in order to protect the watersheds, nearby ecosystems, and local communities. For achieving this, they are supporting clients in different strategic areas, including law reform,

litigation, community engagement, and application of Indigenous law (e.g., West Coast Environmental Law, 2025).

The data also reveals that some organizations are working to improve the operations of oil and gas sectors. They are supporting the oil and gas industries by offering practical, evidence-based solutions that will lead to emission reduction from the industries, which will support Canada's climate goals. The groups are tracking the progress of oil and gas companies in decarbonizing their operations and encouraging them to provide details of their project decisions (e.g., Pembina Institute, 2025). The groups are promoting policy frameworks that encourage proper private-sector investments to support sustainable agriculture and the food sector. For example, International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD) (2025) advocates for the negotiation of multilateral trade rules for equal and sustainable international trade in food and agricultural products.

4.6.1 Water issues

Data indicated that among all natural resources, water has always been an important area for advocacy because of the abundance of lakes and rivers in Canada. Many ENGOs are working on water issues such as fighting the causes of algae blooms and improving lake health for people and wildlife. Some groups are also protesting against the construction of barriers in rivers, including dams, culverts, levees and road crossings, and they are working to mediate their impacts on water systems and wildlife (e.g., Canadian Wildlife Federation, 2025). The findings also suggest that the groups are developing methods of managing freshwater by creating a scientific understanding of freshwater in their science facilities and are also suggesting policy recommendations. They are conducting economic analysis and hydrologic assessments for the governments to compare options before making a management decision. Additionally, they are supporting the management of watersheds across countries and bringing different stakeholders into the decision-making process (e.g., IISD, 2025).

Moreover, some groups are working to ensure that legal tools are being utilized to protect sensitive coastal areas of the sea and maintain healthy marine wildlife. These ENGOs also advocate for coastal strategies; West Coast Environmental Law (2025) for example, has been successful in developing a coastal marine strategy. These groups are also suggesting ways to decrease the negative effects that ship traffic has on marine populations, especially whales and

seals (e.g., Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, 2025). Some groups have also established strong relationships with local fishermen's associations, government departments, and coastal communities to address threats of pollution and other changes in marine habitats. They are also looking to find solutions through pollution control and rigorous research on emissions reductions.

A few ENGOs are also working to reduce flood risk and to ensure healthy watershed and sustainability around water. The groups are supporting floodplain mapping for areas that are prone to flood hazards, and they are managing the mapping process in collaboration with government. These organizations are also supporting the creation of flood management strategies to increase flood resilience in communities (e.g., Fraser Basin Council, 2025).

4.6.2 Mining and mineral extraction and processing

Mining is another issue that many of the environmental groups I reviewed are acting on because of the harmful impacts mining practices can have on the environment. These organizations often work in collaboration with communities who are dealing with mining operations that are affecting their surroundings. They are also working on the legacy of closed mines to find ways in which orphan mines can be rehabilitated. They provide technical information about mining practices that are impacting communities and provide strategic support to those affected by mining to remedy problems. They also organize and run campaigns on issues around mining, conflicts and, support movements that are rising against the impacts of mining. Organizations such as Mining Watch Canada (2025) are working to see policies put in place to stop mining corporations from taking advantage of poor regulations.

The data also suggests that some local organizations work to educate people on mining for the nuclear industry and some protest all nuclear developments. They are also supporting people affected by the uranium mining, working to prevent further development of this kind of project, expressing solidarity with other parties opposing these developments and advocate for the responsible deposit of uranium mine tailings (e.g., ICUCEC, 2025). The Wildlife Conservation Society Canada (2025) has created a website with relevant information about land claims.

4.7 Environmental law and policy

As noted in sections above, many ENGOs are trying to find ways to utilize laws to protect the environment while also advocating for effective environmental policies. Their efforts are displayed in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Actions for environmental law and policy

Actions on environmental law and policy	Increasing knowledge of environmental law Providing recommendations for law reform Promoting and formalizing Indigenous law Providing legal support and advice on EIA Ensuring public participation Including scientific perspectives in EIA Improving EIA procedure and implementation
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The organizations are always engaging in policy work that looks to hold government and businesses accountable and to educate the public. They are regularly communicating information to other activists, lawyers, students, and the public on environmental law and how the law can be effectively used. As the use of legal tools tends to be very complex for the public, groups are working to increase the public understanding of legal processes and increase their engagement in legal procedures and law reform. They also create reports and documents that give an overview of relevant environmental laws in Canada and provide recommendations to strengthen the environmental governance framework, support more meaningful public participation, and build better relationships with environmental groups. For example, Manitoba Eco-Network (2025) had a series aimed at helping the public to understand the law related to environmental impact assessment (EIA) and how they can participate in such processes.

Some of these groups have projects based on promoting Indigenous laws and, communities participating in these projects can receive free legal services. They also provide learning and research opportunities for members. Legally trained staff from ENGOs work with Indigenous nations to summarize legal principles related to land and resources based on the stories and knowledge of elders, develop written law and policies and draw up agreements formed by their laws and community dialogue (e.g., West Coast Environmental Law, 2025). The work is aimed at strengthening the community-based capacity to practice Indigenous law and Indigenous legal orders and better understand how they should be implemented.

4.7.1 Environmental impact assessment

Some organizations are working on improving EIA to help ensure environmental protection and the sustainability of any project. The organizations involved in these procedures understand the importance of law and policies related to EIA, noting that these legal tools can support proper planning and decision-making related to development and resource extraction. These groups take part in law and policy reform at federal and provincial levels and serve on multi-interest committees for different government departments tasked with EIA responsibilities. In addition, they provide legal support and advice to Indigenous groups on the matters of EIA and support individual or community groups who are engaging in EIA processes (e.g., West Coast Environmental Law, 2025).

One focus area for these groups is the EIA of mining projects, since these are often inadequate with insufficient public participation and questionable scientific evidence. Mining Watch Canada (2025) noted that environmental planning through EIA creates a path to sustainable development and the ENGOs are trying to ensure that mining sector is included in that. These ENGOs are working to improve the procedure and implementation of EIA, especially to address cumulative effects from projects. They are supporting the public by reviewing project-level impact assessments and in permitting process and by providing technical support in restoring mining projects (e.g., Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, 2025).

4.8 Public and Indigenous communities

The data suggests that the groups are partnering with public and Indigenous communities to deliver environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits through their programs, as depicted through Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Actions for public and Indigenous communities

Actions for public and Indigenous communities	Providing expertise and resources Maintaining diverse alliances Supporting reconciliation with Indigenous groups Ensuring mutual benefits for wildlife and people
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The ENGOs are providing a versatile range of expertise and tools while working with people from all sectors, different levels of the government, First Nations, industries, and other NGOs (Nature

Conservancy Canada, 2025). There are many in-person events, protests, campaigns, and workshops where people can join to advocate for various issues. Some organizations are offering programs that provide wilderness journeys that lead the participants to meaningful, community service opportunities. The groups are also making virtual applications so that people can connect easily with them and join in their activities in nature. The ENGOs also honor individuals who show great passion and determination towards conservation and advocacy through awards (e.g., Canadian Wildlife Federation, 2025).

The data also reveals that the organizations are working to maintain diverse alliances, which are based on transparency, gender equality, and social inclusion. The solutions that are established from these initiatives are permanent because they are built on quality and developed from the bottom up. These ENGOs are always engaging with the public on their issues, empowering communities, and evaluating progress towards sustainability through global community platforms (e.g., IISD, 2025).

The data further revealed that these organizations understand the importance of Indigenous law as they acknowledge the relationship people have with nature (West Coast Environmental Law, 2025). The organizations are focusing on reconciliation by supporting conservation led by Indigenous communities and partnering with them by conducting research and conservation of wildlife, lands, and waters (Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, 2025). The ENGOs are increasingly playing a role in educating the public on the ways they can become better advocates of reconciliation with Indigenous people and build strong relationships. The groups are always eager to share their success stories on Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborations on their projects, and how these projects, can advance reconciliation and sustainability (Fraser Basin Council, 2025).

The organizations engage the communities to create solutions for environmental issues and support residents and decision makers in key planning decisions. They partner with tourism industries to limit their impacts on wildlife habitats and collaborate with Indigenous communities to implement solution that promote mutual benefits of people and nature (Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, 2025). The ENGOs are paying more attention to issues related to gender equality, inclusivity and diversity in recent years. Some organizations are including policies related to these on their website.

4.9 Research and education

Most of the ENGOs I reviewed engage in research and educational activities to develop strategies for addressing the issues they are working on and to raise awareness about potential solutions as outlined in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Actions for research and education

Actions on research and education	Arranging educational events Supporting citizen science projects Undertaking scientific research Sharing expertise and increasing capacity Discussing contemporary research Improving connection and collaboration
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Often educational programs are focused on building knowledge about natural ecosystems and ways they can be protected. Data suggested that frequent contact with nature provides a reminder that conservation of nature is necessary for our survival, and so they arrange educational events with guest speakers, support citizen science projects, and publish newsletters with informative articles, research and current issues (e.g., Bow Valley Naturalists, 2020). Many groups focus in conducting experiential education sessions as they provide opportunities to gain knowledge and apply that knowledge in a practical setting and space to reflect on new experiences (e.g., Canadian Wildlife Federation, 2025)

Some organizations undertake or commission scientific studies to research various conservation issues to improve their ability to address the necessity of sustainability. These groups are working closely with academics, charity foundations, governments and corporate partners to, for example, study the benefits of ecological areas in Canada. The research findings lead to conservation programs that are sustainable and nature friendly, such as retiring unproductive agricultural lands and introducing foraging programs. Ducks Unlimited Canada (2025) indicates that such programs help convert idle agricultural lands into grassland and restore habitats to balance the loss of wetlands and aquatic habitats.

Some groups directly partner with Indigenous communities to conduct scientific research that support the conservation goals of the ENGOs (Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, 2025). Some groups have programs that are designed to help children connect with nature by providing them with opportunities to learn, explore, and play in nature. With support from teachers

and volunteers, they can integrate outdoor learning into these programs to create environmentalists for the future (e.g., Conservation Council of New Brunswick, 2025).

4.9.1 Conferences and workshops

The data revealed that ENGOs are continuously organizing and participating in workshops and conferences on environmental issues. These activities contribute to their efforts to research and spread awareness on environmental matters. The data suggested that these events are excellent opportunities to share expertise, develop strategies for mutual goals and build capacity (Nature Conservancy Canada, 2025). The data further indicated that these events provide a platform for experts to discuss innovative and practical solutions for pollution and sustainability issues. Pollution Probe (2025) noted that conferences on energy transition present contemporary research and key innovations for achieving net zero by 2050. Mining Watch Canada (2025) noted that international conference on mining supports more than 80 countries in moving forward with their sustainable development goals through appropriate policies and regulations.

The gatherings hosted by these organizations are important for connection, learning, and collaboration among environmental groups on issues such as climate change, biodiversity protection, policies that encourage more sustainable resources management, etc. These gatherings bring people together from nonprofits, governments, industries, academia, and different communities, who are all passionate about the environment and sustainability (Alberta Ecotrust Foundation, 2025).

4.10 Other activities

The activities of the ENGOs studied are not limited to the fields discussed above. Their scope is so vast that it is difficult to summarize them in a few categories. Some of the other actions that some ENGOs engage in are displayed in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10: Actions for other issues

Other actions	Creating greener communities in urban areas Supporting local businesses to adopt low-carbon setting Ensuring support for workers during transitioning to net zero economy Promoting sustainable growth in human resource management Promoting sustainable seafood and aquaculture Promoting sustainable food systems
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	Promoting sustainable development goals Implementing conservation grant programs Protecting environmental rights
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Alongside the sectors discussed above, they are focusing on creating greener communities and are working to identify implementation pathways, support collaborations on best practices on interdisciplinary levels and also work with policymakers (e.g., West Coast Environmental Law, 2025). The organizations are working to help local businesses to transition to a low-carbon setting which is cost-effective and a practical approach to help people take steps to reduce the impacts of climate change and increase resilience (Alberta Ecotrust Foundation, 2025).

The data also indicated that ENGOS aimed to ensure that workers of all levels are supported in course of transitioning to net zero economy, and the workers in the energy sector can have stable jobs and proper access to training. They are consulting with labor unions, academics, and other stakeholders on how Canada can prepare for clean economy jobs and how workers can benefit from the transition to a net zero economy. The research of these groups shows that the principles of net zero economy should be based on inclusivity. ENGOS are advocating for policies that support a clean economy that benefits everyone. According to them, it is important to put workers and communities at the center of net zero economy. They feel that a broad and holistic approach is needed for engaging workers and communities in the transition to net zero and that solution-based policies can bring workers to the table in new net zero economy (Pembina Institute, 2025).

Some organizations are working with coastal communities that have always cared for the waters and are adopting practices for sustainable ecosystems that will guarantee sufficient seafood for future generations. They are working with seafood manufacturers to develop best policies and educating them on best standards (Ocean Wise, 2025). A few of the organizations are working to bring food security for local communities in collaboration with regional organizations. ENGOS are also engaging in research and facilitating projects on farming and food systems for land and sea, and through locally produced food and resilient businesses, they are supporting the local food economy (Ecotrust Canada, 2025).

4.11 Barriers to the actions of ENGOs

While all the groups are working to implement actions related to their issues and ensuring the presence of sustainability in our everyday lives, in doing so they confront several barriers. The main barriers confronted by my participants are outlined in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11: The barriers encountered by ENGOs in Canada

Field of barriers	Examples of barriers
Lack of public support	Inadequate facilities to encourage behavior changes in public Public being unmotivated Public participation not inclusive
Lack of cooperation and political will from government	Regular changes in political parties in power Lack of political will to value environment Prioritization of short-term economic projects Lengthy implementation processes Environmental issues politicized
Industry lobbying	Influential industries have greater access to lobby governments Industry campaigns creating confusion in public Vested interest of decision-makers Inadequate consultation with First Nations
Insufficient capacity	Lack of necessary resources Insufficient number of volunteers Overburdened staff in remote areas
Insufficient funding and investment	Projects do not match funding timescale Increased costs of management
Issue comprehension	Difficulty for public to grasp some issues Inability to realize environmental changes Lack of general awareness

4.11.1 Lack of public support

One of the major barriers identified by most of the organizations is the need for greater public support. The groups work continuously to encourage people to practice more sustainable behaviors, but this can be quite difficult. For example, a respondent indicated that they are trying to encourage people to adopt walking, cycling, taking public transit, carpooling, and other environmental behaviors to reduce automobile use and the associated impacts of climate change. But it is difficult to get people out of their car-centric ideas because the transit system in their city is often not efficient enough to get around town and bike infrastructure needs a lot of improvement.

Changing people's mindset is also difficult because it is a bit challenging to figure out how to make people realize that all the aspects of the environment have value and incorporating that into everything one chooses to do. Often it takes incentive to encourage people to make changes in their home energy systems, such as efficient windows and better insulation that are better for the environment. There are rebate programs in many regions but often these are difficult to access and require the work to be done and paid for before rebates are given. It was noted that without the rebate programs, people must be highly motivated to do these sorts of renovations just because they are good for the environment. Protecting the environment does not seem to be enough of a motivator for people to make behavioral changes. As noted above, ENGOs depend on public participation and support for policy advocacy with government bodies. Government also needs to have good programs for people to participate in. It was noted by participants that participation is often wanting and certainly not inclusive enough or the public involvement is not of good quality that allows the environmental groups to engage in a way that they would like to.

4.11.2 Lack of cooperation and political will from government

Respondents noted that they regularly feel the presence of political sway on their projects. The political parties are always changing, and political priorities change with them as well. There is also general lack of political and social will to value different ecosystems and social components. There is a prioritization of fewer short-term economic development and profit, rather than more community-oriented and long-term planning around sustainability. The organizations that work with law reform need willing governments to adopt their recommendations and they need the public to demonstrate to decision makers that the recommendations are a priority. Too often governments are out of power before such changes can be made. These groups take on projects that align with the commitments of the current government, but the implementation takes a long time and that time can be interrupted by political cycles and funding.

There are also so many economic issues for Canadians that it is hard to get government officials' attention about the need for strong environmental laws. The data indicated that many times the ENGO staff are involved in collaborative processes and have meetings with government officials and representatives from Indigenous nations. Yet decisions are not made at those tables - they are made somewhere else and often behind closed doors. It was also noted that environmental

issues often get politicized by politicians, industries, and the media, as can be seen around climate change. It is often difficult for the public to get information from which to understand the issue at hand. Social media has not helped this situation. There are also challenges with getting government to actually apply and enforce their own environmental laws and regulations. It was noted that in many cases, the government plays a non-responsive role.

Also, while provincial governments are aware that Greenhouse Gases should be reduced and biodiversity loss needs to be halted, some of them want to delay actions for as long as possible, especially in the face of economic challenges. Post COVID-19 there were pushes to stimulate the economy and ease off on environmental regulations when it comes to resource extraction in particular. This has only worsened since I did my research, with the tariff situation between Canada and United States. Politically, environmental issues just do not seem to be part of the discussion. The push for critical mineral mines through expedited approval process also changes the ENGOs' ability to participate meaningfully in decision making. This creates a challenge for ensuring sustainability of these projects.

4.11.3 Industry lobbying

There are industries who oppose the initiatives that ENGOs are working towards according to the participants. The people from these industries with economic power influence decisions through government lobbying. The oil and gas, mining, and nuclear industries carry significant influence with government and are the most active lobbyists. This often leaves the public confused enough to not think that this is a serious problem and they are resistant to take action on it, or to only understand the jobs versus environment argument.

My data also indicates that there are challenges with industries causing harm and not fully mitigating the negative environmental impacts. The orphaned and abandoned oil wells and mines across Canada are but one example. Decision-makers sometimes have vested interests and strong connections with people from these industries. Industries opposed to ENGO actions are always influencing the government on issues such as the extraction of critical minerals, oil and gas, and establishing the urgency to develop critical minerals and build pipelines as quickly as possible. Industries also claim that the government is slow in approving projects, but the primary

problem is finding the money needed to initiate some of their projects. The proponents are often not ready to move forward with these projects as quickly as they would like and blame red tape.

It was also suggested by participants that there is always continued tension between resource extraction-centered land use and the conservation of land for wildlife habitat and ecological integrity. This is a long-standing debate in Canada, made more difficult when the economy is doing poorly. Dissent over consultation with Indigenous people is also an issue for industries. Communities are now challenging industries that are just moving in to develop resources without proper consultation.

4.11.4 Insufficient capacity

Many of the organizations also feel they lack capacity in terms of funds, staff, and other resources to effectively work on all the issues they have committed to. Most organizations rely on volunteers for many activities and having enough people willing to commit their time to take on the activities is a challenge. It is also a challenge to build up the skill, knowledge, and overall capacity of the public. Also, the ENGOs work with communities of all sizes, and some are in remote, rural areas with very few staff. They can become oversubscribed and it gets difficult to engage project volunteers to do in-depth work and collaborations with the limited time they have. There are also challenges to working remotely because conservation projects should be place-based, and the staff should have the opportunity to work on sites.

4.11.5 Insufficient funding and investments

ENGOs often face challenges around having sustained funding and investments in their projects. Projects undertaken do not at times match the timescales of the funding and sometimes sudden issues emerge. A lot of community-based work sometimes requires multiple years to do effectively but the funding will often come in much shorter increments. This is a challenge that makes it hard to sustain activities for a longer period. If there is discontinuity of implementation, projects are badly affected.

For organizations working on land conservation, financial capacity is always an issue as the cost of acquiring land is ever increasing. Purchasing the land becomes difficult when the

organizations are funded by individual donors. There are also costs associated with maintenance of these sites. These organizations gather their funds through grants, individual donations, and crowdsourcing. But doing this year after year can get really tiring for these organizations, especially if the organizations are small with few staff. Not all organizations have charitable status and they are not able to write a tax receipt if they accept donations from the community, making it less attractive for some people to donate to them.

4.11.6 Issue comprehension

The data suggests that understanding issues concerning the environment can be difficult. For example, people do not experience the impacts of an unhealthy climate in a straightforward way. The loss of grassland can be a challenging issue to communicate to urban audiences. Recent polling shows that people do not know what grasslands are and if they get to know that the grasslands are the most at risk terrestrial ecosystem on the planet, it is hard for people to understand what that means. When informed, they realize that something should be done to restore this. Most Canadians think that these issues are somewhere else, not in the Canadian prairies. This is a major barrier of awareness, and another barrier is that the impacts are not direct and immediate.

4.12 Summary

My document, literature review, and interviews revealed that ENGOs in Canada engage in a wide range of activities directed by their values and mandates, and they are ensuring sustainability in the environmental sphere. Figure 4.1 and tables throughout this chapter detail many actions, activities, and policies of these organizations in Canada aimed at protecting the environment and biodiversity and achieving sustainability more broadly. It was not surprising that a strong focus of the actions of these groups was aimed at climate change and our collective energy footprint. Climate change is one of the most crucial issues at present and can be linked to most of the other issues that these groups are working with.

Another observation of note was the implementation and usage of law and policy instruments in different sectors. It was suggested in the data that there are opportunities to seek justice for environmental issues and ENGOs are increasingly utilizing these opportunities for most of the issues discussed above. The public is also being encouraged to engage in legal procedures

to avail their rights regarding environmental protection and sustainability. It was noted from the data that the groups are working with the public and Indigenous communities regarding most of their issues. By engaging community members in their activities, they are gathering more support for their campaigns, which is helping them to raise these issues with the decision makers.

Some of the data from the results also support the literature discussed in chapter 2 regarding activities of the ENGOs. For example, Cadman et al. (2020) indicated that the ENGOs engage in conversation and negotiation with stakeholders and government on environmental issues which is supported by the actions of groups such as the IISD and the Pembina Institute as they are implementing these actions for issues related to water and transportation. The actions of the Conservation Council of New Brunswick and the Wildlife Conservation Society Canada to influence the government and public towards adopting more sustainable practices are also aligned with the insights provided by MacKinnon et al. (2016) about utilizing some hard advocacy strategies, such as, petitions, press releases, campaigns, policy briefs to political leaders etc. for influencing the public. Moreover, the ENGO's role in policy conception, implementation and amendment in Canada (Doern et al., 2015) is supported by the actions of groups such as the Manitoba Eco-Network and West Coast Environmental Law on issues including EIA and pollution control.

Along with the activities of these groups, it is important to consider the barriers they are facing. An interesting observation from the data is that many of the barriers the participants noted have stemmed from economic constraints. For example, the barriers related to increased costs, prioritizing short-term economic projects, continuous economic stress, and environment not being a top priority are linked to the challenging economic situations observed at present.

Chapter 5. Changes in ENGO activities after COVID-19

5.1 Introduction

Based on the document review and interviews, changes have been identified in sustainability actions of ENGOs in Canada at the time of COVID-19 and in subsequent years. The major areas for changes or themes are displayed in Figure 5.1 below and detailed in the sections that follow. Relevant quotes from participants about these changes noted during the interviews are provided below and the participants are referred to by random letters assigned to each participant (participant A, B, M), to protect their privacy.



Figure 5.1: The changes in ENGOs after COVID-19

The changes have been ordered based on the responses from the participants and on the volume of data for a theme collected during the interviews.

5.2 Increased use of technology and virtual tools

One of the most common impacts of COVID-19 that participants noted was that they increased their use of virtual tools for communication. For example, participant K mentioned that,

I think a lot more of our work is online than it was before. So internally, we have way more online meetings. And within broader coalitions, we do a lot more virtual like, my work involves working with a lot of people outside my organization and we do a lot of that work now online where we might have met for coffee or met in person for strategy sessions.

Some of my participants noted that when the pandemic started, most ENGOs were not equipped with tools to connect with others remotely and did not have much experience with online operations. But they adapted as most turned to online communication strategies like webinars, online presentations and social media engagement to connect with their audience. My data indicated that some ENGOs used to organize webinars from time to time prior to COVID-19, but the pandemic improved their abilities in this area. On this subject, respondent B mentioned, “We certainly did develop a whole kind of infrastructure to support remote engagement. We started to have more webinars. And normally we have more of them but got better at how they were formatted.”

Many participants also noted that they started to communicate with their donors and supporters virtually through Zoom, Teams, Skype, and other digital communication platforms. Participants indicated that these platforms were affordable and quite easy to use for online interactions. For example, participant D shared “We adapted by using technology, like Zoom. It was a low-cost platform that was very flexible. So, we moved a lot of our programming into that fashion. So that was an adaptation.” The data suggests that the flexibility from online operations was really helpful for the staff.

My data also shows that the number and frequency of their meetings also increased significantly as they could be held online. Participant H shared, “We just meet more now. We used to meet infrequently because you met in person and now everybody meets more often but through

the computer screen instead.”. It was also noted that online meetings saved a lot of time and increased efficiency for the ENGO staff. After some years, the staff now have both options for meeting. They can meet in-person or online depending on the circumstances. Participant R shared on that subject, “If we’re meeting even with somebody across town, sometimes it will be a virtual meeting and sometimes we will meet face to face at either location. And that’s all just based on timing and people’s calendars and availability.” Because of online meetings, it did not matter where the participant was located, and it allowed the ENGOs to have a more national approach by reaching across the region. The respondents indicated that some international conferences that used to be held in-person every year also switched to online mode.

Respondents also noted that their groups were able to welcome board members from different provinces and countries during the pandemic. Before COVID-19, they would only appoint board members from the nearby provinces, but with the adoption of virtual communication technologies, they could bring in board members from different places, significantly broadening their scope. A respondent noted that it was not considered proper to reach out through a call before the pandemic and in-person meetings were more formalized. But now one can reach out to someone through a call on Zoom or Teams for important discussions and that is accepted by everyone after COVID-19, making it easier for people to maintain contacts and relationships.

Some organizations already engaged in the practice of using Zoom prior to the pandemic, which was beneficial for them as they were up to speed, and they were able to help other ENGOs through the expertise they had gained. They also shared their credentials with other organizations so they could use their Zoom account at the beginning of the pandemic. Data indicated that though these groups were familiar with Zoom, its use was still transformative in terms of being able to pivot to work virtually. Participant M mentioned that,

We actually had been using Zoom and encouraging others to use Zoom prior to COVID. At least a year, maybe two years before COVID, we had a Zoom account, and we were trying to use it in order to be able to reach remote communities.

Some respondents also indicated that they increased their focus towards social media. For example, participant D shared, “We got to grow our social media output. We had a social media person working for us. So, we went on to different platforms.” Many ENGOs started to engage

with the public through websites by uploading more content, so even though people were not able to attend in-person activities, they were still able to access the content. ENGOs were also able to upload media from online events on their website for people to follow. Data show that during the pandemic, the public was uploading relevant articles, updates and news regarding COVID-19. These provided some guidelines to the public about how to cope with being indoors or how to engage with nature for better mental health.

The data also indicated that an ENGO opted to make a shift towards more remote digital data collection and during COVID they experimented more with remote sensing applications and are continuing to collect data digitally. Participant L shared their experience on this matter, “During COVID, we had been thinking about making a shift to more remote and digital data collection. And we've kept going with that.” The data showed that the integration of technology and virtual tools in ENGO activities has been taken positively by the respondents.

My data also reveal that virtual communication came with some disadvantages. For example, one participant mentioned that as the pandemic took hold, there were back-to-back online meetings, causing the employees to get burned out. It was noted that in the case of in-person meetings, employees would have the time to decompress between events, but there was very little time between Zoom meetings. Some participants noted that they started to develop coping mechanisms for the excessive number of online meetings, such as taking more breaks during the day between virtual meetings. On this note Participant K shared,

And there was a period of time in which I was really struggling to manage the number of meetings because they just take more energy out of me to be talking to people than sitting on my computer. So, I had a kind of adjustment period when I realized that I needed to be building breaks into my day in between all of the virtual stuff.

Another respondent indicated that without much technical capacity within the organization, they faced some difficulties at the beginning switching to virtual operations. Participant N shared,

We don't have a lot of technical expertise in our group, so it was a bit of a challenge to switch to that medium. In terms of putting our programs online, we do not think about it anymore these days but for a little group like ours that was the initial challenge to figure out how to make that work.

Others had to rely on the goodwill of organizations outside of the ENGO world like municipalities to provide internet capacity, which created a few challenges. The data indicated that it was a struggle to organize online or hybrid events and the local municipality was doing nothing to increase the capacity. Participant R mentioned that the pandemic negatively impacted their experiential activities as engaging online was not the same as engaging in hands-on projects.

Almost all participants indicated that due to improvement of technology and virtual operations, the participation and connections have increased during the pandemic for the ENGOs. A respondent indicated that, in the early days of the pandemic, they were quite surprised by the number of people joining in their community workshops and there was an increased interest in those virtual programs for a year. Participant A shared on this subject, “We definitely did some webinars during the pandemic where we had a lot of people participate. There was a real hunger for the content that we put out there and difficult for people to get it.” Figure 5.2 below shows how improved use of virtual tools and technology facilitated increased connections and participation in ENGOs during the pandemic.

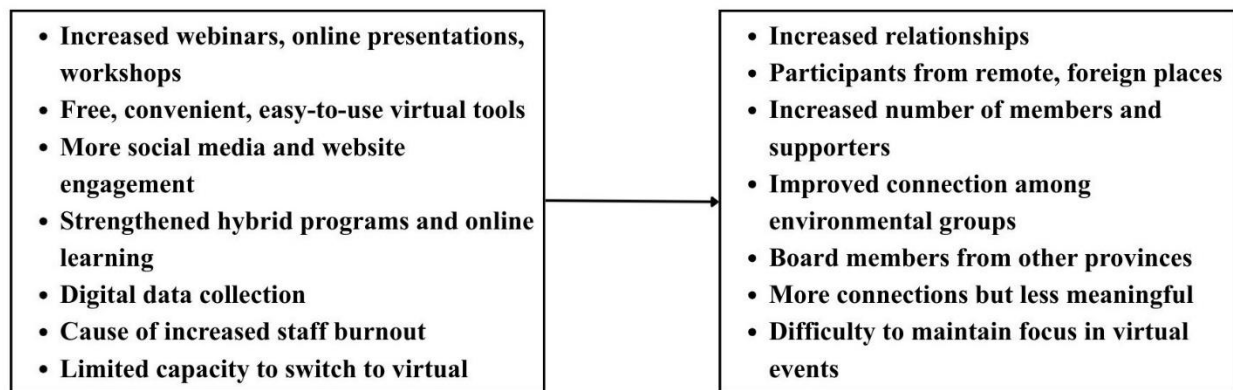


Figure 5.2: Changes related to increased use of technology and virtual tools

The data also revealed that, as people got more comfortable interacting online, they were building new relationships. There were more opportunities for public engagement, and these opportunities were coming much quicker and spreading further because of the adoption of digital tools. Participant J shared about increased connectivity and opportunities,

World Oceans Day one year, another NGO asked me to sit in on a webinar they were holding for youth. And from that webinar, I've spoken to a few classes. A professional at

one of the schools reached out to me because she saw me on the recording of the webinar and asked for us to come to their school.

Respondents also indicated that some of the groups arranged events where they showed documentary films and later would have a panel discussion on it. Those events would attract audiences from all over the world regardless of their time zones. Some people were participating from very remote areas, who would never have been able to join if the event was not virtual. A participant shared that they would get 30-40 participants for these events in-person. But since they started to do this online, they are getting four, five, or even six hundred people participating. Participant W shared on this subject, “Audience exposure has been a real benefit to partners. So, if we were working with a First Nations which has an Indigenous-led program and if they were able to elevate their storytelling, elevate their communications to that audience level, that is a pretty big value that we can bring to partners.” A key aspect noted was that the groups did not have to force the idea of online learning on people, nor did they have to familiarize them with going online - the pandemic introduced this mode of communication.

Participants indicated that people were signing up as members of their organization as the number of followers increased. It was also noted that even if all followers did not sign up as members, an increase in the number of followers meant connections were growing. Participant N shared on this matter,

We have found that, we’re probably over 600 or so total followers, members plus people who just follow but don’t necessarily sign on as a member, both of those numbers have increased. And that’s probably because of COVID. It’s not because of anything that we’ve done or any change in our operational outlook.

A layer of complexity related to the finding above is that some participants noted that while they may have more connections now, the connections are not that strong and meaningful. They may have more weaker relationships with external partners and fewer strong relationships. The relationships that were built based on online connections only are weaker than the ones made through in-person interactions. Participant T shared the following, “I would agree with the first part that you can get wider engagement just because it’s very low barrier to hop into a virtual meeting or virtual engagement. I would disagree with the second, because I don’t think that’s real relationship development.” When attending online meetings people like to jump on important

topics after a few minutes of initial greetings. But when they meet in person for a meeting, they have different conversations which lead to deeper and more personal relationships.

Respondents also indicated that people have difficulty focusing during virtual events. Participant C shared that they have attended government meetings during the pandemic and in these three-days long meetings, scientists were reviewing the best available science to answer questions posed by the management. These meetings were mostly virtual during COVID-19 and the quality and engagement of the full group in these had declined massively. The organizations also did some project planning with local partners during the pandemic, and they realized that it was harder for the partners to feel engaged and feel the shared ownership of a project if they have been engaged virtually in a meeting just for an hour or stayed checked out in a three-day meeting.

5.3 Impacts on outdoor and in-person activities

All respondents indicated that the outdoor activities that they engaged in were put on hold at the time of lockdown and for most of the pandemic. They indicated that prior to the pandemic they arranged many community events, workshops, seminars, presentations, meetings, and other types of activities, but that these all stopped due to COVID-19. Participant D noted, “We never did anything in person anymore during COVID, during the first part of it. So having those personal meetings with decision makers and having events with the public just didn't happen anymore.”

A participant shared that they used to hold a series of evening educational programs which supported advocacy and had been an activity of the ENGO since it began but that they were not able to do this anymore. The pandemic challenged this core outreach activity of the organization, and they switched to online presentations. They also noted that the pandemic restricted their ability to build communities for environmental advocacy and have constructive discussions with them. Another participant pointed out that they had a network of groups that would gather annually to lobby the federal government on various environmental issues but that did not happen during the pandemic. They had to pause organizing this gathering for a few years because doing these kinds of lobbying online was not as effective as in-person.

Respondents indicated that they could not do the restoration projects they had been doing in remote Indigenous communities anymore during the pandemic because the community members did not want people coming into the community from outside. Also, participants noted that they were trying to find ways to support communities during the pandemic while distancing themselves and there were some serious challenges. For example, participant P shared, “Some of the renewable energy projects that we had in remote communities, they involved people needing to travel in some cases. So, we had to hold back on that until it was safer and we were able to do that house-to-house engagement.” These disturbances eventually also affected the research programs of some of my participant ENGOS, in part by not being able to travel for hands-on monitoring and sampling.

Participants noted that during lockdown everyone was somewhat confined within their homes with limited things to do. They felt that as a result people were feeling distant from nature and they wanted some opportunities to be outdoors, which increased connections with nature. They were relying on nature to refresh their minds during the difficult time. Participant O shared, “Everybody sort of really turned inward. But I think the importance of natural spaces sort of remained and was highlighted as part of an opportunity for people when they couldn't gather indoors, they were able to get outside.”

Participant B works in an ENGOS that specializes in ecosystem restoration, and they indicated that they were receiving more requests to access their lands during COVID-19. As a result, they enhanced their capacity to support the public to get out and experience nature. In a sense, people became more aware about the importance of nature and connecting with our surroundings because of COVID-19. An organization shared through their website that people found this connection with nature to be vital to remain positive and find hope in the depressing circumstances of the pandemic. This awareness grew hope in the environmental community that the crisis would result in broader recognition of our dependency on nature and the importance of protecting it. Organizations focused on using people's renewed interest in nature to advocate for more protection and conservation. People could also see that pollution reduced for a short period of time during the pandemic and it spiked their awareness about its impact on us all and on wildlife. The data also revealed that people became more aware of the lack of opportunities to access natural

environments. Respondents had feedback from members that there were not enough hiking trails, bicycle trails or other facilities for people to use.

The data has also pointed out some long-term impacts of the pause in outdoor activities. Some ENGOs were not able to arrange any in-person events or youth gatherings and as a result indicated that they lost the personal connection aspect with their supporters. The participants noted that people were not interested in gathering in large groups during the pandemic as they had become used to staying at home. Participant N shared, “It took a while once we started in-person events and gatherings. Participation was slow to come back and it's hard to say whether it has come back fully or not.” They shared their perception of loss of physical connection caused by the pandemic and its effect on outdoor activities. According to them, this was the time when people became wary of each other because they did not want to get infected and have still retained that suspicion consciously or subconsciously. It was also noted that even when the restrictions of COVID-19 were lifted, there was some degree of concern among people about keeping safe.

Due to the restrictions around in-person activities, the data show that some ENGOs created new practices to carry out their activities. One respondent pointed out that they had created new policies to follow in their research sites during COVID-19 and made those policies mandatory for all staff. This included more emphasis on digital data collection. When the other groups saw that the ENGO was continuing to collect data during the pandemic while maintaining safety, they reached out to the organization, and thus the strategies were able to be shared with other groups.

Not surprisingly, the data indicated that the impacts on outdoor and in-person activities had negative implications for their ongoing projects. Figure 5.3 below depicts how the changes in the outdoor and in-person activities during COVID-19 eventually affected their ongoing projects.

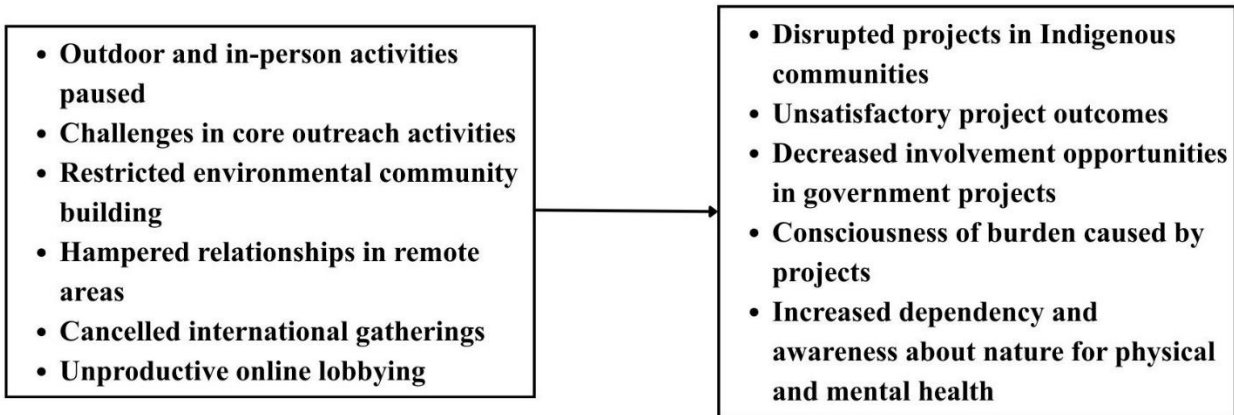


Figure 5.3: Changes related to the impacts on outdoor and in-person activities

Participants noted that it was harder to get projects going because of the uncertain situations surrounding COVID-19. For example, many organizations had projects that involved taking groups of volunteers out into the field and engaging them in conservation or restoration activities, but these sorts of hands-on activities had to be put on hold. Since these activities were not possible during the pandemic, one organization opted to use drones for providing visual experiences. Participant B shared on this topic,

Having the ability to provide drone videos, which is something we started to use much more regularly because it at least provided a visual experience. But as far as effectiveness, a visual experience alone sitting in your living room, watching the computer screen compared to actually being out in nature, maybe 10% as effective as far as making an impression.

Participant D pointed out that their organization was planning on investigating issues related to climate resilience and adaptation and had arranged some consultation sessions with other ENGOs in the community. The pandemic got in the way and so they switched to a webinar series. The project was not as successful as they hoped for because they could not complete it the way they wanted. Participant M also noted that they had taken on an extensive project on climate resilience and that project required wide community engagement and participation; “We actually had a series planned, a series of community engagement sessions. We had finished our first one. We had planned at least three or four to deal with the key topics.” The respondent shared that they switched to Zoom meetings with subject experts instead of in-person sessions, but this really changed the nature of public involvement the organization wanted.

The data also indicated that activism related to government policy and programs was impacted. During the pandemic, government staff were facing functionality challenges like the rest of the world and many government projects were put on hold or were moving very slowly on their end. This impacted the extent to which ENGOs could engage on these projects, and such activism was the core work of some groups. Along this same theme, participants noted projects that were hampered or cancelled during the pandemic because the government agency running the program could not hold in-person meetings with members of the affected communities. In some cases, it seemed to some respondents that COVID-19 was being used as an excuse not to proceed with a program or policy. Also, a respondent working on issues related to the mining industry indicated that the mining communities received varied responses from the government and industries during the pandemic. The industries were pushing for extractions even during the lockdowns and communities had to resort to protests for production to be stopped. Mining communities in Canada had to ask government agencies to stop permitting processes and sending notices to review sites.

The data reveals that the volume of projects also changed for some groups. Participant O indicated that they used to take on many ecological restorations projects at a time and were not paying attention to their capacity. But COVID-19 changed their outlook on this issue, and they narrowed their focus regarding how many projects to take on at a time. The participant expressed on this subject, “It used to be that we would take on a lot of projects all at once and of quite a variety of sort of ecosystems or sometimes we would dive into heritage. And so, we've really narrowed our focus to the ecological properties as well as being really mindful of our capacity, what we can take on.”

Data suggests that the impact assessment processes for different projects were also affected by the pandemic. Participant E indicated that before COVID-19, many public meetings as well as hearings were held for the impact assessment of various projects which involved local people and experts to talk and testify about the impact of any projects. After the pandemic, the number of those meetings and hearings declined. Another participant indicated that one of the impact assessment hearings that was to be held was cancelled because the proponent was not able to do all the necessary studies because of the pandemic and the facility was shut down. According to the data, COVID-19 started on the second year of implementation of the Federal Impact

Assessment Act, and organizations were trying to understand how the Act was being implemented. When COVID hit, all proponents requested pauses to the impact assessment because they could not have people working on the ground and in communities.

The data revealed that some ENGOs conducted research during the pandemic related to changes in the environment as a result of the pandemic. One of the respondents pointed out that they supported a project on Greenhouse Gas impact assessment of remote work. The project attempted to understand the changes in the environment and carbon emissions when most people were working from home. The result showed that the changes in carbon emissions were not that dramatic. An interesting observation from that study was that people were starting to embrace remote work when the study was being conducted but they also noticed that the workforce not coming downtown was affecting the vitality of the city and economic activities. The data also revealed that many of the organizations conducted surveys during the pandemic to engage their supporters. For example, one organization conducted an energy survey related to climate adaptation and the recommendations from that survey were shared through their website.

The data also revealed a project that involved a group of 21 international conservation and sustainable development organizations that gathered with a response to the pandemic. Data from a participant organization noted that they were one of the leading groups that were calling the provinces to respond to pandemic in ways that would build a greener economy and keep everyone safe from future climate-related disasters. They also interviewed people affected by floods and wildfires, asking them how the pandemic may affect their ability to prepare for future emergencies.

After the pandemic, the organizations have returned to in-person activities and have still retained the option for virtual as they have already developed tools for engaging virtually and want to utilize them. A participant also noted that they are better equipped to engage during the winter months because they have the tools and are better at navigating them. Participants also noted that the work which was relevant before the pandemic was no longer relevant for the present world. This resulted in the cancelling of some of the projects during the pandemic and development of new projects in their place. Some ENGOs noted that they diversified their programs to

accommodate this situation. They tried to include projects and themes that the stakeholders and the local groups wanted to see in the community.

5.4 Operational changes

All of the participants indicated that the organizations went through a lot of operational changes during COVID-19. The data suggests that some of those changes were temporary and those are no longer applicable, but some of the changes ended up becoming permanent. At the time of pandemic, there were general rules of operation related to wearing masks and gloves, maintaining social distancing and abiding by the protocols related to COVID-19 and there were rules regarding people with various symptoms not coming to the office. The offices put up posters and signs regarding the regulations and policies.

The most common operational change mentioned by all participants was switching to remote operations instead of in-person. The data suggests that all employees of the ENGOs were working from home for a period during the pandemic. The organizations tried to make sure that their staff had everything they needed to be successful in working remotely. My data suggests that the staff were more productive when they were working from home compared to working at the office. But it was noted that the additional productivity was partial because they were not interacting with their colleagues in-person and they were missing the connection. One of the respondents noted that the facilitation of remote work allowed them to be nimble and adaptive around their activities and they could engage when needed, without spending so much time on the road, which was a positive aspect of switching to remote work.

Some respondents indicated that before the pandemic, their organizations practiced hybrid work, but the pandemic forced them to go fully remote. Even after the pandemic has been under control for a few years, most organizations indicated they have variable office hours. Some ENGOs have remained fully remote until now, some have given their employees the freedom to choose where they prefer to work, some have made rules for employees to work a few days at the office in a week, and some have gone back to their in-person operations. Like others, Participant L shared about their changed practices, “We don't require people to be in the office. While we have these offices, people aren't required to report to them or work for them. So, working from home is

still somewhat normalized.” Participant T shared that they did a survey among the staff and the result indicated that the staff preferred to work from home. The respondent indicated that this is a challenge for the organization because the office space remains unutilized. They shared on this subject, “I think this is a function of COVID, for sure, because I think that it gave people the permission to work from home, and I think people really like it just because of the flexibility it gives you”.

One respondent also noted that the team structures that had formed were impacted because of working from home. But the respondent revealed that they do not wish to compel the staff to come back to the office full time because employee happiness is important for their organization. But the organizations are also facing challenges managing the two ways of working because they are still using virtual tools for communication and administration, but at the same time, it is also important to attend in-person gatherings.

In general, all the organizations have increased their flexibility around working days and hours since the pandemic. A respondent indicated that their organization has formally reduced necessary working hours in a week for all the staff. Another respondent noted that they relied on the staff to carry the workload but now expectations have changed around gaining a work-life balance. Participant J noted that the pandemic created consciousness to not overburden the staff and avoid burnout. The data suggests that during the pandemic there was recognition that overwork should not be idolized. There used to be an idea that overwork and burnout demonstrated a commitment to one’s work, but those ideas changed during COVID-19.

The respondents also noted that most of the ENGOs are now hiring people regardless of their location, sometimes from other provinces and sometimes even internationally. Participant L shared on this topic, “We began hiring people outside of these cities and also around the world. And probably about a third of the staff do not work in a city with an office.” Some participants indicated that the number of employees in their organizations increased in a significant way during and after the pandemic. Some of the organizations hired staff for communications, which was not a part of their operation before COVID-19. As Participant J notes,

For the first at least five or six years I was with the organization, we didn't have any communication staff. Now none of us can imagine not having a comms team. And it went from one person, now we're at a minimum of two or three since the pandemic.

Some participants also revealed that their organizations went through major administrative changes during the pandemic. In this regard, a respondent revealed that just after the pandemic, their organization switched to a co-leadership model and two of their staff now share a leadership position. They noted that in this way both leaders can work on different projects and lead the organization at the same time. They also formally transitioned to a four-day work week after COVID-19. The participant thinks that these changes would not have happened if not for the pandemic. The data also reveals that there have been some staff changeover during the pandemic. Some of those were caused by mental health struggles and addiction issues during that difficult time.

A big operational change for most of the organizations was towards modern Information Technology (IT) systems and digital administration. Participant S shared their experience,

We've gone a lot more virtual; we're now hybrid organization and all our processes are online. Our IT systems are all modernized and online using the usual, a lot more video conferencing stuff, almost all of our administration is now done virtually, like payment processing.

The respondents believed that they would have made their way in this direction eventually, but COVID just accelerated the process.

The organizations studied all made changes in their operational policies during COVID-19 to respond to the critical situation, with some being in place only temporarily. Not surprisingly, respondents indicated that they implemented policies to deal specifically with COVID-19. Figure 5.4 indicates how the changes related to the operations during COVID-19 resulted in changes in their policies.

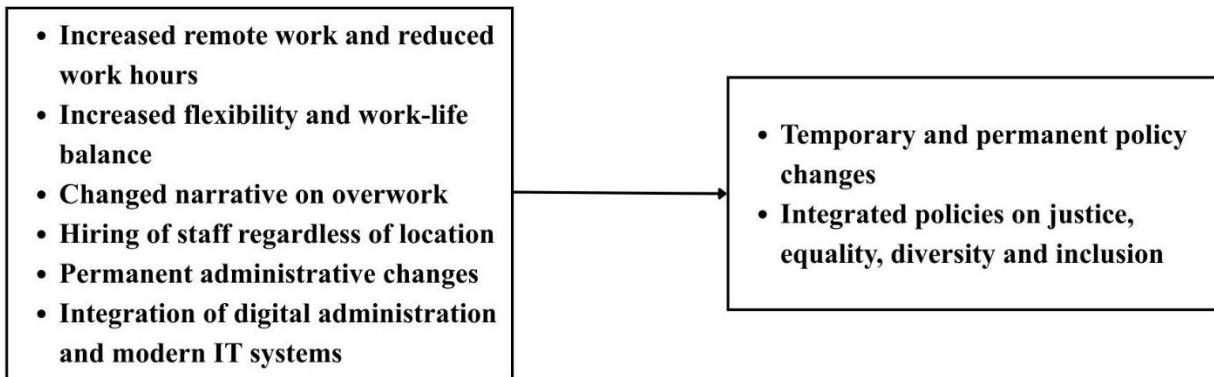


Figure 5.4: Changes related to operation

For example, they made new policies about when people would travel and what they should do before and after any trip. The policies also considered aspects such as, wearing masks, taking COVID tests, submitting proof of vaccination, and other related issues. A respondent indicated that they made policies for COVID-19 until 2024 to deal with the complications of it and would update their policies every year according to the circumstances. The primary focus of these policies was to safeguard the health of the employees and their families, partners, and the community at large.

A few participants indicated that they have been engaging in developing policies related to environmental and social justice in the past, but some social movements emerged during COVID-19 and that increased the awareness of these social justice issues among staff. The ENGOS started to address more issues related to justice, equality, diversity, and inclusion, and some included these concepts in their mandate. Participant K indicated in this matter, “We had been doing it before, but it made it into our strategic plan; environmental justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion, one of our North Stars. So, it's much more formalized into the work that we do.”

5.5 Impacts of changed economy

Most of the organizations interviewed noted impacts related to the economic changes that occurred during COVID-19. Some ENGOS suffered because of the changed economy and had to endure challenging situations during the pandemic. Other groups did not face many difficult situations; in fact, the donations for their organization increased during COVID-19.

Most respondents indicated that there was initial worry that it would be difficult to meet their fundraising goals because everyone was worried about the economy and was less inclined to give due to uncertainties. In the words of Participant A, “There was a lot of uncertainty about our ability to raise money going into the pandemic. Although that didn’t end up being a real concern for us.” Most participants experienced challenges due to the recession caused by the pandemic. While switching to virtual operations helped organizations in minimizing costs amidst affordability concerns, few struggled with staff salary and materials cost due to the inflation. Some of my participants shared that their employees received wage benefits during the pandemic and it supported them in tackling the economic crisis. One ENGO used to send snail mails to supporters for outreach and depended on monthly donations for fundraising. They had anticipated that their revenue would decrease because of the economics around COVID-19 as they could not send out those mails.

Some of the respondents noted that they faced a reduction in donations during the pandemic. They did not receive the large funding amounts that they relied on because some of the funders shifted the way they processed grant applications. As these organizations rely heavily on the philanthropic interests of Canadians, COVID-19 had a negative impact on these groups in the forms of doubt and uncertainty. They were required to diversify their sources and apply for those funds. Participant R noted, “We were able to research different pots of money and be successful in those applicants. I think it helped us branch out of our comfort zone a little bit and for the better for sure.”

The data also revealed that at the beginning of the pandemic the organizations dialed back some of their fundraising activities because of the uncertainties and the reluctance of people to donate. The organizations aimed for more personal donations in the following years. Those that do not rely on fundraising events were affected less because they did not need to cancel their events during COVID-19. They could continue with fundraising with the understanding that there was a reduction in giving capacity because of the downturn in economy.

Participant B also pointed out that fundraising also relies on building impactful relationships and they could not build relationships for two and a half years because of COVID-

19. They shared on this subject, “So for a couple of years, we didn’t get to have people out showing them the work that we do, showing them rare and endangered habitats and places in Manitoba, talking to them about why grassland birds are leading declines of all species in North America.” The pandemic had inhibited their ability to properly introduce the activities to new supporters and donors.

Participants noted that the need for economic recovery was used by provincial governments to take measures that amended or rolled back some key environmental laws. The impacts of pandemic manifested through a rapid drop in energy prices in provinces that produce oil and this severely affected their economies. The Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador addressed the prime minister for action as the province was unable to secure funds for operation. The government of Alberta announced relief for mining and energy industries and the Saskatchewan government implemented relief funds for the oil and gas industries in the province. In March 2020, the Alberta government declared 1.5 billion dollars worth of investment for the Keystone XL pipeline project. This investment delayed the payment to support funding and employment opportunities in forestry industries. Later that year in April, the federal government announced funding of 1.7 billion dollars for environmental conservation in Alberta, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan along with 750 million dollars of repayable loan program for reduction of greenhouse gases from oil and gas industries. (Gosselin et al., 2020). These were some significant impacts of the economic changes on the actions of environmental groups caused by the pandemic.

Some of the respondents indicated that they received financial support from the government and charities during the pandemic. In the case of a few ENGOs, they did not receive some large fundings during the pandemic. For these organizations, especially in the early years of COVID-19, the fundings remained heavily restricted. Because of increased competition, ENGOs are now required to be more strategic about applying for a grant and choosing partners. A respondent also indicated that donations from individual donors are a small part of their budget and they rely on grants from funding organizations and provincial governments. During COVID-19 one of the funding organizations supported the ENGO through a special fund.

ENGOS employed different strategies to tackle the economic challenges during the pandemic. Participant L noted that they had saved some reserve money to sustain the staff in case of an emergency. They felt fortunate to have this financial cushion and one of the first things the ENGO did in the beginning of the pandemic was assure the staff that everything was alright. They shared on this matter, “We quickly got the message out to our staff that everybody's job was safe, that COVID was not going to cost anyone their jobs.” So, they were able to pay their employees during the pandemic through that fund. That had been an impact on the organizations in the sense that they were investing in their employees.

The most surprising result was that about half of the respondents indicated that their donations did not reduce because of the pandemic. In fact, a few of them mentioned that the donations increased during the pandemic. Some ENGOS saw a small decline in 2020 but in the following years they were successful in raising funds. They shared that their funders were understanding around reorganization of the activities and were considerate enough to roll the fundings over to the following year. Participant W shared their experience,

Our organization doesn't receive much government funding; we are based on foundations and individual donors. There was concern that there would be an impact because of the COVID-19 pandemic on fundraising. In the end, we actually raised more. I think that's sort of unexpected.

Another respondent noted that their annual budget has been increasing after the pandemic and they have been growing with it. Some respondents also indicated that because of the funding support, the organizations were able to keep up their activities by shifting their model according to the situation and the initial fear around the economy had not realized. A respondent noted that low interest rates during the pandemic became a major enabler for the environmental sector. The low interest rates increased support for renewable projects in the economy, for example projects related to energy transition or technologies. That resulted in a lot of investments in those sectors during the pandemic, but as the interest rates rose very quickly after the pandemic to slow inflation, that also had a major effect on those projects. The data also suggests that online giving has become more popular and important over the years.

Another impact of the changed economy that was faced by almost all the participants was the necessity to take affordability into consideration during COVID-19. The actions groups wanted to engage in were important but the economic situation of the world at the time had been more critical. Figure 5.5 below shows how the impacts of changed economy resulted in consideration of affordability crisis for the ENGOs.

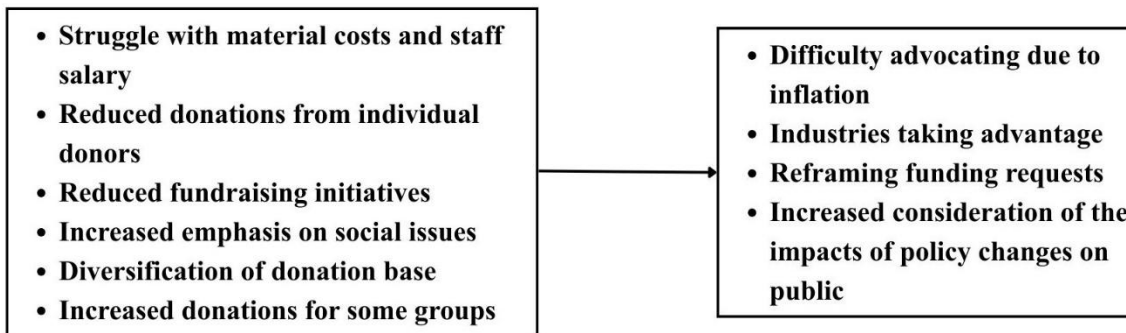


Figure 5.5: Changes related to impacts of changed economy

Most of the organizations indicated that they had to step back a bit and slowed their activities for some time because it was hard to take action on certain issues when people were struggling financially. This forced them to contemplate on how to advocate on certain issues without offending anyone. The participants also revealed that there have been several surveys during COVID-19 done by some organizations and through these surveys they were trying to understand and respond to the needs of the communities at that time.

A lot of the activities of ENGOs rely on public support in communicating the need for better environmental policies to political leaders. In the words of Participant K, “We’re trying to get governments to enact stronger environmental laws, we need voters to be communicating to political candidates and their members of parliament, their elected leaders”. That became a lot harder when people grew concerned about the economy during the pandemic. Also, typical polluting industries such as oil and gas used these fiscal concerns to promote the idea that new projects were needed in the face of the affordability crisis. There was a feeling among participants that some industries were using these concerns as a tool for the deterioration of environmental laws. They also felt that some politicians were also supporting the industries because they always want to prove that they are trying to make people’s lives more affordable.

The data also indicates that some organizations had to change their messaging and reframe their asks to donors and funders. People were going through different circumstances, and some had been laid off, so the organizations had to be careful how to ask for funding when people were going through such difficult situations. Participant O notes,

You want to be mindful of your fundraising asks in terms of risk when they're already dealing with something that is so difficult, right? And so, our framing was more around how being in nature was helpful for your health and for your mental health. So, we definitely did shift in that regard.

The respondents indicated that they have become more careful about how different policies were affecting people with different economic conditions differently. The pandemic really affected lower income people in many cases more than people with higher income. Participant D shared on this topic, “We live in a western rich country, and we sometimes don't really think much about the poorer or lower income people in our society. I think from a philosophical policy perspective, that was something that probably changed within our organization.” The impact of policy changes on these different groups of people was not noticeable before the pandemic, but COVID-19 showed how some policy changes can impact some people and not work in their favor.

Some organizations indicated that they did not feel the need to consider affordability issues during COVID-19. According to these participants, environmental issues will always be important and just because COVID-19 happened, it did not reduce the importance of environmental advocacy. These organizations operate by approaching the public and engaging them in environmental activities. They did not shy away from doing this during the pandemic.

5.6 External communications

ENGOS depend a lot on their relationship with the public and government in order to advocate, work on various issues, and obtain fiscal support. Figure 5.6 below shows how these two types of external communications have changed for the ENGOS after the pandemic.

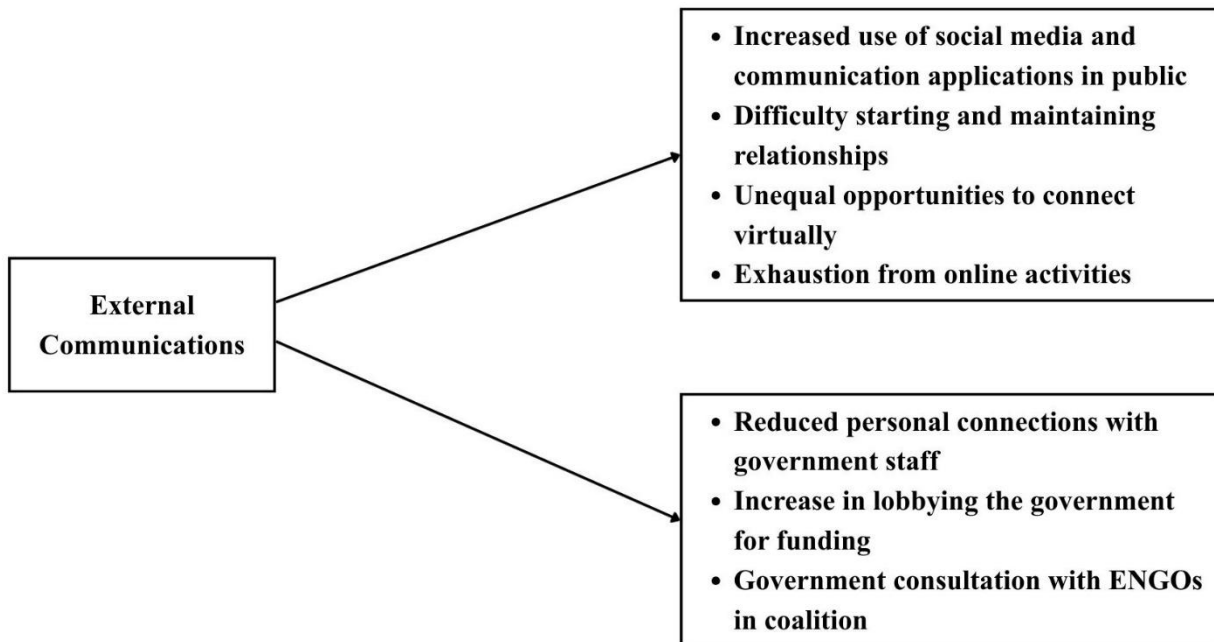


Figure 5.6: Changes related to external communications

The data indicates that, before the pandemic, most of the activities, such as general meetings, reports to communities and events with the public were in-person for these groups. With the beginning of COVID-19, there was much less communication with the public but as everyone adapted to digital communication tools, there were increased opportunities for the public to participate. The data also suggests that the groups started using communication apps to circulate updates and digital newsletters by email to the public. The respondents also indicated that they opted to facilitate engaging activities for the public through different virtual software.

The data suggests as well that a big barrier was that not all people had the same opportunity to connect virtually because they did not have the technology. Participant M noted that they had some projects in northern remote First Nations that completely disappeared after COVID-19 because their internet connection was so poor that they could not adjust to Zoom meetings. The respondent shared on that, “Their bandwidth wasn't good enough to have Zoom meetings, so we couldn't even replace the in-person communication with Zoom relationships with remote First Nation communities, they virtually stopped.” In many cases, feedback from the Indigenous communities were lacking during COVID-19 because of the lack of facilities. These issues related to duty to consult were brought up by the Indigenous communities after the COVID period in the

court and the court agreed with them. Additionally, the respondents indicated that people from all age groups were not comfortable with technical tools necessary for remote communications. Younger people were more successful in adapting to these technologies and were able to switch quickly to remote, but the older generation faced some difficulties in this regard.

The participants also indicated that they had to consider the greater sensitivity that was caused by COVID-19. People were watching their close ones get sick and suffer. As most Indigenous communities are tightly bound, these sufferings were especially affecting the communities. They were struggling with increased mental health issues at that time. Organizations wanted to give space to these communities and were more sensitive with their approaches. When the communities were working on a project, they were given more time as everyone was going through a tough situation. Participant P shared on this subject, “Folks were undergoing lockdowns. I think, we were a lot more sensitive in our outreach, we wanted to give folks more space. Knowing that everyone's kind of going through these pretty tough times and we wanted to be considerate of that.”

The data also revealed that though virtual tools were helpful to connect with the public at the time of the pandemic and also after that, the organizations are also facing some challenges with the public. Now that a few years have passed since the pandemic, the public is getting tired of online events, and it's been harder for the groups to get participants for virtual events. For about a year now, the first inclination for any public event is arranging it in-person rather than online. Participant T shared on this subject, “I think our push has been that yes, we can do virtual when appropriate, but it's not the same. It's not as impactful. There's a lot of difference between who just signs up because they think they're going to get a recording versus who's going to participate.”

The respondents indicated that they are also trying to get back to in-person activities for public engagement as these are easier to run and more successful than those held online. They run activities such as games and group work for community engagements and these activities are effective when done in-person. The groups can also discuss complicated matters with the public in person. Participant S indicated on this matter, “I think for the public, it's not their job to participate and their job to be involved, they're definitely going to be more inclined to be engaged

and learn when it's in person, when the person is in front of you compared to virtual.” Respondents also indicated that they try to avoid hybrid gatherings with the public because those are very challenging to arrange.

Communication with government was also a common theme in the data as it suggests that before the pandemic, most meetings with the government were in-person. During COVID-19, government agencies started investing in new communication technology and operating remotely. One impact noted was that organizations could contact and meet with government agencies more regularly as communication went online. Participants noted that before the pandemic, if ENGOS were doing outreach to government officials in Ottawa, they really had to go there in person, but that is no longer necessary. As Participant T shared, “I think the government’s kind of the same as everyone else. Everyone’s first inclination now, if you book a meeting, is going to be virtual.”

The data also suggests that, for some organizations, communications with governments have remained consistent and steady before and after COVID-19. Some ENGOS have always been working remotely with the government because of geographic locations. Those relationships have stayed consistent through the pandemic as the parties were able to maintain communication. The results also show that a lot of communications with the government is written.

The data also pointed to some negative sides of having meetings online. The Participants noted that before the pandemic, it had been an effective strategy to have personal contact with government officials to maintain good relations. But the pandemic took that opportunity away. Participant K noted that, “I find that even though we’re no longer in COVID, I still live in Ottawa, but most of my meetings with officials are virtual, even though I could just walk to their office or grab a coffee with them.” But there have been some exceptions related to that. A participant noted that, after the pandemic, staff from offices in remote locations are meeting with government officials in-person if they visit the region for work or there have been any changes in political parties. The data suggested that some offices may get more visits from government officials based on areas of interest.

The data also suggests that the way government approached people has changed because they are working remotely. A major change that occurred after the pandemic is decision makers from government are meeting with policy advocates in coalitions with other groups. Instead of meeting with one ENGO at a time, government officials are meeting a group of ENGOS together. This has increased the cooperative mentality among the environmental groups as they are able to advocate for urgent issues as a team.

5.7 Relationships among colleagues

One of the common impacts noted during the interviews was how the pandemic has changed the relationships among colleagues at the ENGOS. Almost all participants agreed that the work-from-home model has changed the way the staff interact with each other and that it altered their interpersonal relationships. The data pointed to the fact that the staff had to work harder to stay connected to each other because they were not meeting at the office and were not interacting with each other. The data also revealed that some smaller organizations had few staff members and though they had been fairly cohesive, that cohesion was challenged through working from home.

Participants indicated that even after the pandemic, people have more flexibility around their work and that the realigning of relationships at work has been challenging. It was noted that people do not see their colleagues as often, as they may go to office on different days. That had an impact on the social cohesion of a work unit. After the pandemic, people are getting to know each other again, but they may only interact in-person one or two days a week. In the words of participant B,

They haven't quite figured out exactly, what that relationship is going to look like and how do you maintain the positive things that come from everybody being fully in the office. I don't think as an organization, even as a working society, we've figured that out quite yet.

The data also suggested that the commitment of people towards their organizations has lowered because the staff do not know each other as well as they did before the pandemic. Participants indicated that it was difficult for the staff to reframe their relationship with their workplace and peers. Even a few years after the pandemic, it was noted that this has remained a struggle.

The respondents indicated that though staff were satisfied with working from home, they were unable to develop interpersonal relationships. Participant T shared on this subject, “Even though people are extremely happy because they work from home, you don’t get that interpersonal relational development. I think what’s fundamental to that is also our ability to be creative in our work.” Participant T also suggested that newer employees did not receive the advantages of relational development as the other staff who had the opportunities to go for coffees, joining events and to just enjoy the company of each other. The lack of connection has led to challenges related to the reluctance to return for working in-person and in relational developments. Respondents also indicated that the team-building approach of the organizations was hampered and that affected their work because people work better when they know and trust their fellow colleagues.

Furthermore, the data suggests that there was a lot of tension that emerged in the organizations around conversations on different social issues and the stress that people were bringing in from their outside lives. COVID-19 was a very stressful time. Different social movements that happened at the time created a lot of tension within the organizations and that resulted in more time and energy being wasted in conversations concerning these subjects, such as – transgender issues and the Black Lives Matter movement. Participant K suggested, “I think the pandemic created a lot of mental health strain, put a lot of mental health strain on people. And that mental health strain affected people’s internal staff interactions and we still haven’t recovered from that. We still haven’t healed all of those frictions.” The data revealed that people have become sensitive about some of these issues and that created a gap among their peers. Some have become less tolerant of different viewpoints and started assuming that they are not being trusted or supported by their colleagues. That gave rise to passive-aggressive behavior and tension among colleagues. Some respondents indicated that this had a very negative impact on the productivity and mental health of the staff.

The data shows that all organizations tried to retain connections among colleagues through some approaches. In one case, respondent K revealed that, at the time of COVID-19, ENGOs arranged daily or weekly check-ins for the staff to catch up with each other as a team. They would come together and share anecdotes with the group to lighten the mood. They would

ask questions unrelated to work to refresh their minds and to get them loosened up before jumping into any agenda.

The data also indicates that the groups are trying to work through these changes in relationships among colleagues. Participant S shared, “You think five years in, we would have a better sense of how to do the balance properly. But we're still kind of struggling with how we make sure that everyone kind of keeps in touch, knows what the other people are doing in a virtual environment.” The participant noted that project teams are doing alright because they have regular meetings and gatherings but for the organizations as whole, more effort is needed to make sure that everyone knows what other teams are doing. Another respondent indicated that they were trying to bring back the connection the staff used to have with each other in spite of working from home. Their organization arranged quarterly in-person leadership meetings where they work for two days for relational development and to encourage creative thinking. The respondent also noted that they organize two week-long team retreats annually which provide opportunities for planning, learning and team building.

The data also shows that most organizations are trying to mitigate the gap created by COVID-19 by getting the staff to come to office a few days a week. A participant indicated that the staff at the office try to coordinate the days they go to the office now to meet each other and also frequently make plans to get together outside of the office in order to maintain a healthy relationship.

5.8 Increased consciousness about sustainability

Sustainability is at the forefront of priorities for basically all the ENGOs in my study. Almost all the issues they work on contribute to a more sustainable world. My respondents indicated that the pandemic helped increase their consciousness towards sustainability. One outcome noted was that the staff of these organizations have become cautious about their carbon footprint through travel and energy consumption. Meeting in-person certainly has its value but bringing people from all over the country results in more carbon emissions. This has resulted in reflection on the potential of both virtual and in-person meetings, and the staff are often choosing online meetings for efficiency. This in turn is minimizing the amount of greenhouse gases in the

environment. Not all ENGOs are following this rule but some of the ENGOs who are working from home five days a week or at least a few days a week expressed this consciousness around sustainability.

Respondents noted that they are always working to incorporate sustainability in everyday lives, but COVID-19 made it difficult in some ways. For example, during the pandemic the practice of people using single use masks and plastic gloves was not in harmony with the principles of sustainability. These behaviors made the organizations more conscious about practicing sustainability through their activities, for example, arranging more outdoor activities and pivoting to online learning. Participant R that, “Maybe it was the kick we needed to make those things happen and not focus on what might happen if we don't do it.”

The data also suggests that the pandemic has increased consciousness around the impacts of environmental issues on human health. Participant E noted, “I think prior to COVID we didn't think too much about the impacts of climate change on human health or the impacts of having animals in these open-air markets and the possibility of spread of disease.” Organizations changed how they used to think about sustainability and incorporated more human health considerations.

Participants indicated that they changed their approach towards inclusion and diversity. Participant H shared, “I saw a huge change in social awareness and polarization and some people becoming much more concerned about society and community and some people becoming much less concerned.” The organizations are keeping these things in mind when they are planning their activities. These issues are increasing awareness about social and environmental justice for the ENGOs. The organizations are trying to integrate social justice principles and equity into their work with their staff and when they are designing law reform proposals. They are trying to include more communities with their work so that they have a diverse set of opinions on their policy advocacy approaches and can represent interests of people from all parts of the society, instead of just the dominant actors.

The ENGOs are trying to weave the principles of diversity, equity, justice and inclusion in their environmental work. Participant K shared on this subject, “I think that there was a bit of a social movement that occurred in not just Canada, but all around the world. Greater attention in the public discourse about the need for environmental justice, for social justice, then in our work.” The respondents also indicated that they are asking questions related to justice in the earlier part of their projects. They realized the need to engage people early in the processes to address the issues concerning justice.

The data also suggests that some ENGOs are supporting more Indigenous communities now after the pandemic. They are paying more attention to the relationships they have with the communities and are sometimes expressing allied statements with them. Participant J shared on this matter, “We started looking a little closer, putting out allied statements when Indigenous nations were calling for an inquiry into systemic racism, we put out statements on that and engage on that, and we'll speak to that sometimes.” The organizations are looking at how different environmental policies are affecting these communities and how can these policies be improved to serve the First Nations. Participant J shared ,their views,

I would say that some of the social movements that came about in the time of COVID-19, I think those influenced us in a good way. I do think we have a long way to go and it's a question of accountability for ourselves and being held accountable by others. But I hope we've created more room for that accountability.

They are trying to work with diverse communities now because unless they do, they will never get to the roots of real issues. A participant suggests that part of environmental work is justice work and they did not want to separate them. They also noted that environmental policies have not always been created to cater to the needs of everyone. The groups are now trying to take diverse opinions into consideration.

5.9 Impacts on momentum

Respondents noted that they could not continue with their regular activities during COVID-19, and their momentum had been affected. Not all the organizations felt they lost momentum, but some certainly did. Most slowed down their work during the first few months of the pandemic but were able to adapt over time. This of course depended on the sorts of activities

these groups were engaged in, as some had to stop their key work that involved others being in close contact (e.g., research, gatherings) for some time.

Respondents also indicated that the environment was one of the top priorities for the public in polling before the pandemic. During the pandemic, issues such as housing, affordability, and health rose to the top, with less attention on the environment. The issues people were facing persisted even after the pandemic and are still relevant because of continued inflation. Participant A noted,

Before the pandemic, climate change was routinely one of the top three concerns that Canadians have and now it's no longer in the top three. It's maybe in the top five, maybe in the top ten, depending on the poll. Because other issues have surfaced that are directly related to the pandemic.

Respondents also felt that regulations regarding vaccines and the command-and-control style of the authorities made people wary of government intervention. Participant A added on this topic,

The pandemic gave rise to issues which are still dominating the conversation, and I think it did push Canada and other jurisdictions as well further towards a rejection of government-imposed mandates and a more command-and-control style of government where people kind of wanted government out of their lives.

This had a negative effect on the ENGO activities and in turn, on momentum because ENGOS often lobby for law and regulations to enact for environmental policies. Participants noted that there were many issues that were gaining importance and support among the public and politicians before the pandemic but that progress on these issues was heavily impacted by COVID-19.

Another issue of importance to some groups was plastic pollution and a lot of momentum had been built on addressing this issue. Before the pandemic, a nationwide plastic ban was being drafted and people were being discouraged from using all single-use plastics, but the ban was halted during COVID-19. Participant R, whose group was working on this issue shared on this matter, “We lost a lot of momentum because of the fear of people getting sick and people not understanding that in fact using reusables wasn’t going to necessarily give you COVID-19 but I would say that momentum definitely had been strong and we lost a lot of it.” They are trying to

rebuild the momentum after the pandemic because it is a critical issue for the whole world and the organizations are committed to keep advocating against plastic pollution.

The data also suggests that the pandemic changed the framing around ENGO activities which also affected momentum. For example, before the pandemic the focus was on transitioning to an economy free of fossil fuels. When the pandemic happened and everything stopped for a while, emissions were reduced. Then the narrative became how everything can be built back better. Participant L shared on this issue, “When the world shut down in March 2020, economic activity dropped significantly. Greenhouse gas emissions dropped by about 5%. And then a lot of things were sort of changing. And the narrative became how do we build back better?” During this time, the activities of the organizations stayed the same, but the overarching frame changed to how can we build back better from transitioning to an economy free from fossil fuels. At present, people are talking about economic sovereignty from the United States, which is changing the framing again. Participant L shared further on this matter, “And COVID definitely changed the framing around some of these issues, but probably only temporarily. It changes to something new all the time. When there's a recession, it's often about how can we have economic stimulus that incentivises clean energy”.

Some participants indicated that some organizations work with government agencies and their momentum on issues often depends on the speed of government procedures. During COVID-19, these groups slowed down because the government agencies were progressing things slowly; Participant N shared on this subject, “The government agencies that we work with in our advocacy themselves slowed down during COVID and have gathered a little bit more momentum since then”. Since the pandemic, government agencies have picked up new projects and ENGOS are working with them on those projects, meaning the momentum has picked up again for some. A few of the respondents indicated that in the cases of their grassroots organization, they did not feel the change of momentum because people were reminded of the importance of nature during the pandemic.

5.10 Differing effects on larger versus smaller ENGOS

One of the major things that was evident from the data was that COVID-19 affected organizations differently depending on their size. Large-scale organizations were impacted less in some cases, whereas smaller, grassroots or regional organizations were affected more. Participant N shared on this issue,

You really have to focus on what you do, and it has to resonate with the public. We're a small organization. There are large organizations, and they've been around for a long time, and they get a lot of public support. And they have lots of people working for them, and they have lots of people who donate. So, for smaller regional groups, you've got to find your niche.

The data suggested that large, national organizations had more resources and funds they could draw on, unlike smaller groups. Many of the larger ENGOS did not have to cancel projects because of lack of funding. Some projects were paused for a while because of lockdown, but they continued after COVID-19. Participants from smaller groups indicated that they did not have the back-up funds to continue projects after lockdown and government funders did not allow them to carry funds forwards to the next fiscal year. The data also suggested that when COVID-19 first hit, the larger ENGOS suffered less with switching to virtual operations because they had resources and expertise to change how they ran their organizations and most, in fact, already had IT experts within the organization. They also had the capacity to buy the equipment and subscriptions for virtual operations and could hire staff to maintain communications. Smaller organizations did not have these luxuries, as Participant N notes on this matter,

When you bring in bigger organizations they probably had better access to expertise to deal with that technical side of online communications. In a small organization like us, we had to figure it out from the seat of our pants, and we don't have a big budget to pay an IT person to come in and sort it all out for us or buy the quality equipment needed.

The data also revealed that almost all the ENGOS have physical office spaces for their operations and the larger ENGOS in some cases have offices in different cities. Smaller groups reported that they had minimal office space and a few operate without any office. Participant N shared on the subject,

For a small grassroots organization to be able to go to a community center that has all the technical capability, it's just not there. In my community, there's just not that awareness,

the awareness in the community. It has large, well-funded facilities and they charge lots of money for that and a grassroots group struggles to get access.

5.11 Summary

In the sections above, I have established how the pandemic affected the actions of the ENGOs, as highlighted in the various figures throughout the chapter. The data indicated that the greater impacts of COVID-19 relate to the adoption of technology, operational changes, relationship among colleagues, and impacts on momentum as they affected the overall activities of the ENGOs. In Figure 5.11 I established some of the key relationships between changes in ENGO activities after COVID-19 and their actions.

For example, it is clear from the data that the increased adoption of technology and virtual tools affected all their actions to some extent because everything switched to online during the pandemic and good portion of their activities remained online after the pandemic. But the most significant impacts were revealed in relation to activities with the public, Indigenous communities and government, such as, law and policy amendment, advocacy on key issues and data collection for research purposes.

The changes in outdoor and in-person activities of the groups primarily affected the approaches to advocacy for climate change, endangered species, pollution abatement, and management of natural resources, as the groups could not arrange activities outdoors. The changes also affected the actions necessary for ecosystem restoration as those mostly involve hands-on work and require taking volunteers to locations in nature. The activities required for proper implementation of environmental law and policies were also delayed, such as the court hearings related to environmental impact assessment cases and the implementation of new policies. These changes also disrupted the practice of building community with the public as there was no opportunity to engage face to face. Changed relationships among colleagues in the organizations affected all activities of these ENGOs as changes related to daily activities, team structures, and staff interactions had impacts on all areas of their work.

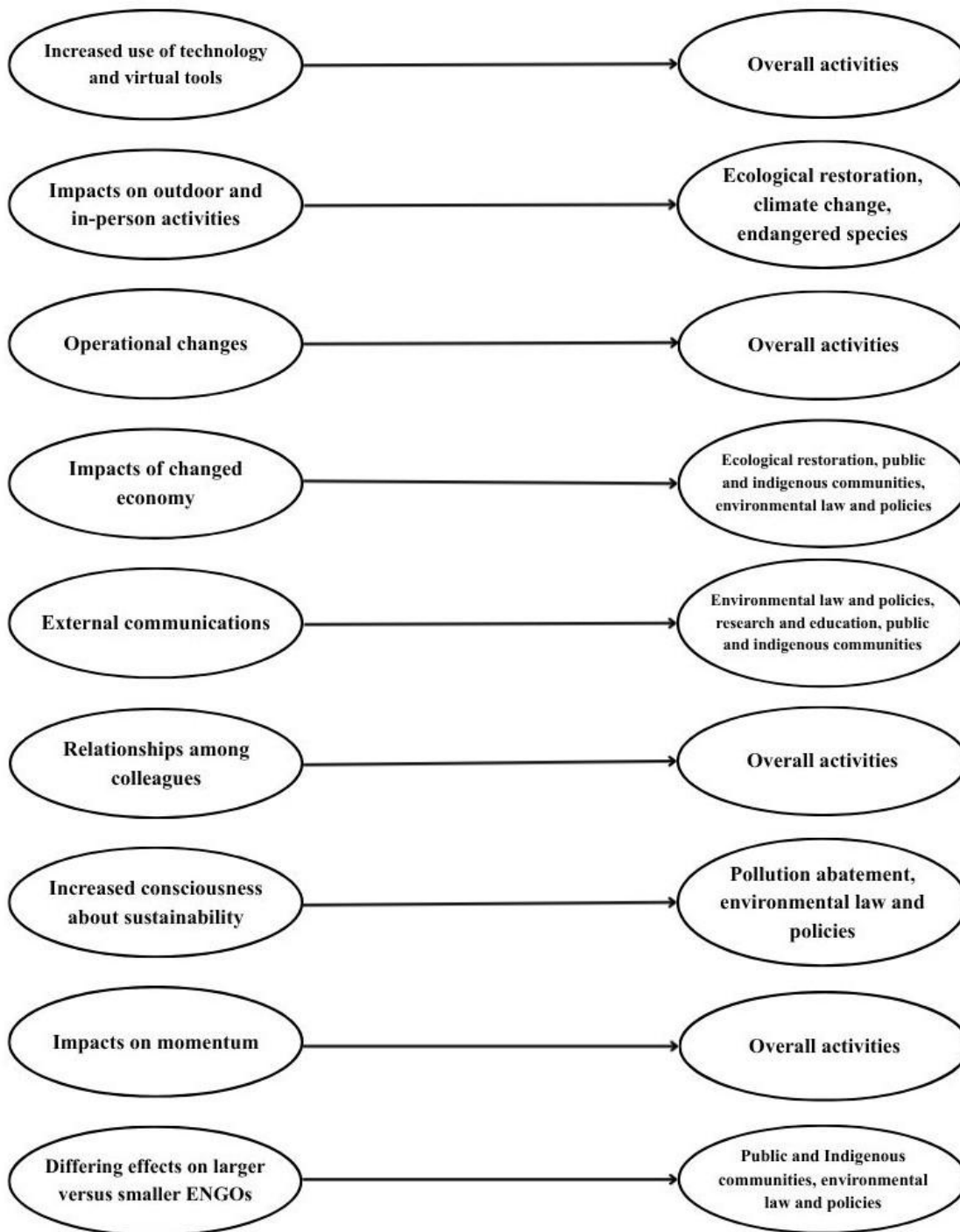


Figure 5.11: The implications of changes in NGOs after COVID-19 on their activities

The impacts of the changed economy also affected most of NGOs' actions, especially affected NGOs working on ecosystem restoration. As the groups are often required to

acquire the lands they want to restore, the increased cost became a barrier for these groups. Also, the changed economy disrupted their work with the public and Indigenous communities due to the affordability crisis during and after the pandemic. The data also indicated that the changes related to external communications with public and government has primarily affected the actions concerning activism for environmental law, policy, and research. It is essential for the groups to consult with government and the public to lobby for better laws and policies, and the pandemic made those communications quite difficult. Moreover, the use of the affordability crisis by industries as a tool to advocate for more industrial projects was a great challenge standing in the way of environmental policies. Also, reduced communication and interaction with public and Indigenous communities in remote locations affected the research projects of some groups.

Increased consciousness about sustainability was an important area of change for the ENGOs as it affected many areas of their actions. The increased efforts for ensuring sustainability such as reduced travel, contributed to their efforts for reducing the impacts of climate change and controlling pollutions. These changes also encouraged them to advocate for better policies and laws that reflect the principles of sustainability. The changes for sustainability further prompted them to pay attention to the public with different incomes and assess the impacts of different policies on them. Changes in momentum were also linked to all areas of activities because negative impacts on momentum affected all of their activities.

In terms of the strategies the ENGOs employ to advocate their issues, some of those strategies were impacted by the changes that occurred during the pandemic. Increased use of technology and virtual tools changed the way the organizations arranged their events and workshops, and introduced new methods of educating, conducting surveys and running research projects. The changes in the outdoor and in-person activities of the ENGOs impacted the way they were arranging protests and building awareness on their issues, along with changing their approach for different projects and restoration activities.

The impacts of the changed economy affected the ENGOs' ability to receive public support in favour of their issues. Moreover, the changes in their relationship with the government and public affected the partnerships and collaborations the organizations had with other groups and

organizations. There were also changes in the ways they would lobby to politicians for their issues. The changes in the relationships paired with the changed economy became a barrier in their way of advocating for better environmental laws and policies during and after the pandemic.

Chapter 6. Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to understand any changes in the actions of Canadian ENGOs during COVID-19 and the implications of those changes. The objectives set included: 1) To review the sustainability actions of ENGOs in Canada before COVID-19, 2) To determine whether and how the ENGOs in Canada have changed their sustainability actions in the face of and since COVID-19; and, 3) To consider the implications of such changes for further sustainability through the actions of ENGOs. To approach these objectives, I reviewed relevant literature and documents, and conducted semi-structured interviews to collect necessary data. I was able to interview 19 participants from 19 different ENGOs across Canada and recorded their experiences. I then conducted qualitative thematic data analysis to summarize my results. In this chapter, I draw some key conclusions to this study as they relate my objectives and the results obtained.

6.2 Activities of ENGOs in Canada

To understand what these groups had been doing before and since the pandemic, I collected data through literature and document review and semi-structured interviews. Chapter 4 outlines the results in this regard and these are summarized for the reader in the tables throughout the chapter. The data I collected depicted that these environmental groups are moving forward with actions in the areas such as climate change, ecological restoration, protecting endangered species, pollution abatement, natural resources management, environmental law and policies, research, and education. I found that these actions are not only contributing to the protection and conservation of the environment but also ensuring the presence of sustainability in every sector.

Most of the ENGOs are engaging in activism on their key issues to influence people and governments and are creating opportunities for the public and Indigenous communities to join in their activities. For example, many of the groups are educating and building awareness about climate change on individual, public and community levels. Moreover, some groups are advocating for stronger laws to protect endangered species and running campaigns to safeguard wildlife from the impacts of industries. Activism efforts similar to these are influencing public and government perspectives around supporting initiatives and policies that ensure environmental

protection and sustainability. The data also suggest that the efforts of these groups towards restoring ecologically significant areas are contributing to solving other issues too. There have been increased approaches towards reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and a shift towards renewable energy sources as it contributes to the improvement of most environmental issues. The activities of ENGOs are also promoting the integration of environmental laws and traditional Indigenous laws in their campaigns.

The data also provided insight on the barriers that the groups encounter while working on their initiatives. It was interesting to note that many of the barriers were tied to the economic capacity of the ENGOs and how addressing this capacity may in turn lead to solutions for some of these barriers. The data on barriers indicated that while it is important to move forward with necessary actions for environmental protection, it is also vital to understand the barriers and look for solutions to address them.

6.3 Changes in ENGO actions during COVID-19

The participants provided insights regarding the many changes that occurred in their organization's activities and operations during the pandemic. Many of the findings from my study support the literature on the actions of environmental groups and non-profit organizations in Canada in response to the pandemic as discussed in chapter 2. The literature from Case & Eady (2022) and Mikołajczak et al. (2022), for example, indicated the increased use of technologies and digital innovation, and ENGOs investing resources to understand new digital tools. These findings were supported by the data from my participants. Widing & Ahmed (2021) suggested a switch from physical to virtual operations and found that virtual tools were contributing to increased interactions and connections, which also aligned with my data.

Case and Eady (2022) noted a trend in relation to environmental groups taking the opportunity of the pause in physical activities to rebuild their internet presence, which also stood out in my data as respondents noted an increased focus on social media and website engagement. The challenges that occurred due to lack of resources and expertise in the field of technology noted in a few of my interviews supported the findings of Akingbola et al. (2021). The data further indicated that even though the pandemic is over, the ENGOs still mostly depend on virtual tools

for maintaining communication. Given that the public has become very comfortable with these virtual tools, it can be predicted that more approaches for engaging the public, increasing connections, and building relationships will be implemented by the ENGOs.

The data from participants on restricted outdoor and in-person activities, disturbances for the ongoing projects, and adaptative measures taken by groups supported the literature that suggested that outdoor activities were reduced during the pandemic, many events had to be cancelled, and that groups had to change their organizational strategies (Case & Eady, 2022; Pinckney & Rivers, 2020). Hibbett (2020) and Pleyers (2020) noted that the environmental sector was resilient through the lockdown as organizations changed their approaches in order to continue with their activities as far as possible. This was supported by the data from the respondents around their continued activism, adoption of many operational changes, implementation of many strategies to restore the relationships among the staff, and increased efforts to practice and ensure sustainability.

Olawoye-Mann (2021) indicated that organizations adopted some short-term policies to comply with the regulations of COVID-19. This aligned with my data as my participants noted that the ENGOs implemented temporary policies regarding safety in the office environment, personal hygiene, remote work, reduced working hours, leave for sickness, and travel during the pandemic. The data from the respondents regarding staff working from home, found that this practice resulted in gains of flexibility and a better work-life balance. This supports the data from literature that suggests that the pandemic forced employees from non-profit organizations to work remotely, bringing the benefits of a flexible work schedule and a work-life balance (Chikwanda, 2020). The data further suggested that relationships among colleagues have suffered because of remote work and differences of perspective on social issues during COVID-19. The organizations are trying to bring people back to work and also creating opportunities to interact online to mitigate the social gap.

The data from the literature on the impacts of the changed economy was also supported by the data from my interviews. The literature suggested that many non-profits depended on the temporary government subsidy programs for staff salary (Olawoye-Mann, 2021) which was

also noted by some of my participants. Mikołajczak et al., (2022), Stewart et al. (2021), and Giovanis and Ozdamar (2022) indicated that the organizations had to dial back on some of their fundraising activities, resulting in reduced revenue and donations, which was also noted by the data from my respondents. My data also indicated that they were unable to secure some larger funds from the government during the pandemic and it supports the data from the literature that the organizations faced reduced government revenues during COVID-19 (Johnson et al., 2021; Mikołajczak et al., 2022).

Like Mikołajczak et al., (2022), I also found that organizations changed their strategies for fundraising as they could not raise enough funds during the pandemic along with implementing digital tools and diversifying their approach to raise more donations. Vieira et al. (2020) suggested that people may become more willing to support social causes at a time of crisis, which was supported by the respondents as many indicated that government and donors focused more on social issues instead of environment issues during and after the pandemic. Also, McCambridge & Dietz (2020) indicated the impacts of the Great Recession on NGO activities and that smaller non-profit organizations have never fully recovered from the loss while larger organizations gained a better position (Case & Eady, 2022), as my participants also noted. My data indicated that some of the smaller organizations faced many difficulties during the pandemic and are still trying to navigate through their issues. Larger organizations did not face the same degree of reduced funding and resources, and most reported they have been thriving since the pandemic.

The negative consequences of the pandemic regarding the increase in plastic pollution and the impacts of that on reduced sustainability noted in the literature (Cho et al., 2022; Mukhopadhyay, 2020) was also supported by my participants. Some expressed concern about the increased use of single-use materials during COVID-19 and the impacts of those on the environment, and this action contradicted their ideologies surrounding sustainability. Moreover, the data from the participants suggested that the increased emphasis on issues related to justice, inclusion, diversity, and equality has advanced the practice of sustainability in these groups and some of these ideologies have taken place in their policies. It can be expected that the organizations will address more issues related to this area of sustainability in the near future.

6.4 Implications of changes in ENGO activities

Not surprisingly given the diversity of groups I worked with, my results show that the implications of the changes brought by COVID-19 were varied. Some of these changes affected the overall functioning of the groups through operational changes, changes in relationships among colleagues, and changes in momentum. Other changes impacted specific areas of activities, such as changes in communication with public and government affected activities related to policy advocacy of these environmental groups. Some of the changes resulted in positive outcomes for the organizations while others were negative. One positive impact felt by all groups was the further adoption of digital technologies and virtual tools that resulted in an increase in their connections and overall participation, well beyond what many thought was possible. There were also costs associated with this as noted in the results, but most felt the overall impacts could be described as positive. Some of the operational changes implemented were also found to be beneficial across all groups and for the long run as they provided new organizational flexibility and a better work-life balance for the staff. These changes also inspired a change of narrative regarding overworking and created greater awareness about overburdening staff.

Another positive aspect that was noted across the groups was an increased consciousness about sustainability among staff members of each organization. Direct experience by spending more time out in nature as well as information shared widely on the effects of lower emissions had a notable impact on the public's awareness about greenhouse gas emissions and protecting the environment from additional harm, according to the groups. Another interesting outcome that may be related to this was the increased focus on issues related to environmental and social justice, diversity, inclusivity, and equality, which were recognized as important contributors to a more sustainable society. This was new for some groups and increased in importance for others.

Unfortunately, not all of the changes caused by COVID-19 had a positive influence. Perhaps one of the most important impacts seen across groups was the negative impact of not being able to gather. This had a considerable effect not just on the programming of the groups with their members but also on their activism. Online protests just did not have the same effect on those that the groups were trying to influence. The in-person campaigns of these groups aimed at sharing

knowledge and collecting donations were stopped. The pandemic also affected the ability of groups to complete the projects they had taken on, especially those projects that were occurring in remote areas. Another negative impact of note for some of these groups was reduced donations as they were unable to continue with their activities and operational processes because of financial restraints. On a positive note, the organizations were able to diversify their donation base due to the economic challenges faced during COVID-19. As a result, they can now approach more sources for necessary funding for their activities compared to before, instead of depending on some limited sources.

Another negative impact of the pandemic was the changed and declining relationships among the staff as it disrupted the overall harmony of these organizations and hampered team-building efforts. The data suggests that the staff in leadership positions are trying to reduce the gap by bringing people back into the office and encouraging them to interact more online.

The necessity of considering affordability issues at present is another negative aspect for the organizations which was not as apparent before the pandemic. The environment has consistently been one of the top priorities for the public, but since the pandemic and with the rise of affordability issues, the environment has fallen down the priority list, as indicated by the participants. This is a major challenge for the environmental groups as they can no longer rely on the support from the public to advocate their issues to the decision makers. It can be predicted that with the rising inflation, the economic condition in Canada will deteriorate by the day and it is getting difficult at the same time for the environmental groups to move forward with their issues. Though the future may hold a difficult reality, it is also important for the groups to understand that environment will always be important despite the economic issues, and they should not back off from their initiatives. Climate change is ever present, pollutions is still on the rise, and wildlife is still struggling. It will always be reasonable and fair for the environmental groups to advocate for their issues.

6.5 Potential strategies for future interruptions

One of the intentions of this research was to identify from the data any potential strategies for ENGOs to follow if they are confronted with an interruption like COVID-19. In fact,

a couple of respondents suggested of their own accord that this should be an important outcome of the research. These interruptions may not be another pandemic; they could also be caused by economic stress or extreme political situations. The strategies identified below are based on the document review and interviews.

6.5.1 Training in virtual operations for staff

ENGOS should provide detailed training for their staff on virtual communication technologies and applications. The organizations that had previous experience with using a variety of virtual tools for communication and operations did not face as many difficulties when they had to switch to online communication. Especially for smaller organizations, it took a lot of time and effort to adapt to virtual or remote systems of working and it was noted that these systems change often requiring on-going training.

6.5.2 Invest in modern equipment and services

It was noted that many ENGOS needed to invest in more modern equipment and diversify their subscriptions to online services. As most ENGOS are practicing online operations and many of the staff are working from home, it is important to have advanced equipment at both the office and home. The equipment will assist with the training of staff and will help online operations to run smoothly. Also, there are many services available online for better communication and operation that can be subscribed to. Software such as Zoom and Teams has helped a lot during the pandemic and through these the ENGOS were able to maintain communication with their staff and partners.

6.5.3 Focus on building strong relationships

While the data show that online communication has made it really easy to make new connections with other organizations and partners, it was also revealed that these relationships are shallow and, in some cases, do not last. COVID-19 made people realize the importance of deep in-person relationships with others that can be maintained through online communication, but personal communication is also needed

6.5.4 Support communities in remote locations

Public and remote communities faced challenges with communication during COVID-19 because they did not have resources and tools for connection. They did not have proper internet connections, equipment, and financial stability to support the tools needed, making it difficult to connect with environmental groups. It would be helpful if ENGOs could help the public and communities build the necessary resources so that they can continue working together regardless of the circumstances. Through their collaboration with government, ENGOs often have greater experience with funding programs and documentation needed to get funds, experience that could be invaluable to rural and remote communities.

6.5.5 Compile lessons and share

All the ENGOs implemented different strategies to cope with the pandemic and have learned a lot as a result. Compiling lessons learned could be invaluable to other groups and organizations if they face a similar situation. The literature review also revealed that nonprofit organizations in Canada should document their experience and survival strategies through the pandemic (Olawoye-Mann, 2021)

6.5.6 Daily check-ins to boost morale

When ENGO staff first started working from home, it was a very stressful time for everyone. Some ENGOs practiced regular check-ins with the staff at the start of the day. Interview participants indicated that this really helped them to loosen up and aided their mental health. Any organization that still has people working from home needs to consider adopting the practice of daily check-in to boost the morale of their team members.

6.5.7 Formulate temporary policies

Some of the ENGOs made new policies during COVID-19 to address the need for leaves due to sickness and to maintain protocols surrounding the pandemic. Those policies proved to be an efficient way to deal with the exceptional situation. Some ENGOs in the study increased flexibility around required work hours during the pandemic and that has proven to be beneficial for the organizations. By working from home, the staff could find a better work-life balance and complete

tasks in their own time. It can be a useful strategy to make policies and protocols that fit the circumstances instead of sticking to the old ones.

6.5.8 Diversify funding sources

Some of the ENGOs faced funding constraints for projects because they were relying on government grants and individual donations for their funds. The organizations that had diverse sources of funding and were reaching out to more funders for donations did not feel the reduction in funding as profoundly. It is important for ENGOs to not rely on any specific source for funding and diversify their options for donations. It should be an important strategy for them to start reaching more possible funders if they have not started yet.

6.5.9 Partner with other ENGOs

Another strategy that was noted was partnering with other environmental groups so that they can leverage each other's work. The organizations practicing this often work on similar issues and may have experience with some components that can guide other groups. It can be also beneficial for the national ENGOs to partner with local non-government organizations because those groups usually have great relationships with local communities.

6.5.10 Switch between in-person and virtual

As the ENGOs now have gained greater expertise in online operations, they have the option to utilize online and in-person operations according to their needs. For some projects, online communications would be more efficient and suitable. For those with hands-on activities, an in-person setting would be more appropriate. It is not necessary to stick to one mode of operation. It can be a strategy for ENGOs to embrace this adaptability gained from COVID-19 and to go with an online or in-person setting based on project requirements.

6.5.11 Create a backup fund for emergencies

A few of the organizations noted that they had arranged backup funds for emergencies. Those funds supported the ENGOs and the staff during the beginning of COVID-19 when activities were slow. These organizations did not need to lay off any staff or deal with an acute lack of resources. Investing in a rainy-day fund can be a useful strategy for organizations.

6.5.12 Internal and external relationships

The internal relationships within an organization and the external relationships they have with partners, the public, and governments, are critical to the survival of ENGOs. The data from literature suggests that the organizations should focus more on the internal and external members of the organization, identify organizational capabilities to cope with difficult situations and place more emphasis on transparency and accountability (Sayarifard et al., 2022).

6.5.13 Always be prepared for action

COVID-19 caused affordability issues for the public and communities, which resulted in a pause in initiatives for some ENGOs. Some other ENGOs did not slow their pace during the pandemic and kept advocating for their issues, because environmental issues will always be important. The continued actions put these ENGOs in the spotlight and thus boosted their reputation. Trying to remain action-oriented is the key while also maintaining safety.

6.6 Future research

As I was searching for literature on the activities of the ENGOs in Canada, the literature and documents were found to be insufficient on this subject. I was able to find some data regarding ENGO activities in other countries, but the literature seemed lacking in the context of Canada. There is clearly an opportunity to study environmental groups in Canada and compare the activities of larger organizations with the smaller, local ones.

My research will contribute to the literature on the impacts of COVID-19 on the environmental sector. There was some literature on the impacts of the pandemic on the non-profit sector and non-governmental organizations, but there was very little literature on the impacts of the pandemic on the environmental sector, especially in Canada. There are opportunities to study the impacts of the pandemic on the environmental groups of Canada and other countries. This is also a suitable time to assess the impacts of an unstable economy on non-profits, NGOs and environmental groups in Canada.

6.7 Concluding comments

ENGOS strive to achieve more sustainable societies through their activities. COVID-19 has not been the first obstacle on their path, and it will not be the last. With the economic instability and the political unrest that Canada is presently going through, along with the desire to build new national projects, there will be new obstacles in the way of environmental activism and efforts to achieve sustainability. Moreover, profit-based industries are always trying their best to influence the government and public for support to implement and expand their projects.

Though the impacts of the pandemic were overwhelming and difficult to navigate at the beginning, the groups I worked with quickly adjusted with the changed circumstance by making some temporary and permanent changes. Though some groups are still struggling with some operational issues, their commitment towards environmental protection and sustainability has been consistent. The potential strategies that were developed through this study will provide the organizations with a guideline for improved operations and support them in case of any future disturbances.

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Appendix A

Interview Schedule

Introduction

- 1) What is your position in this organization (asked if not already known)?
- 2) How long have you worked in this organization?
- 3) Were you working here before COVID-19 or did you join during the pandemic?

Action Areas

- 4) What are the main areas of concern that your organization has been working on for ensuring sustainability? (This question will be modified to reflect the information I find on the ENGO websites. So, for example, if I found that climate action was a main issue for an ENGO, I would confirm this and ask if there were other actions.)
- 5) Can you identify for me some of the barriers that you have encountered in trying to take action on the issues you are working on?

Understanding Changes in ENGO Policies and Actions after COVID-19

- 6) Did the focus or direction of your organization change during COVID-19? If so, has this continued?
- 7) Did any of the ways you approach sustainability actions/policies change after COVID-19 for your ENGO? Have these lasted?
- 8) What were the actions (strategies) of your organization that were implemented before COVID-19 that were modified during the pandemic? If so, have these changes remained?
- 9) Did the way you approached the public and/or government change during the pandemic? Have these changes remained? I was also wondering if during the pandemic, decisions were made not to pursue issues with government or the public because of concern about the perception it might leave when there were so many issues people were contending with?
- 10) Did COVID-19 get in the way of projects that were working towards prior to COVID-19? Have these remained stalled?
- 11) A significant impact of COVID-19 was related to the economy. How has this impact of the pandemic affected your work?

12) Did your organization experience operational changes during the pandemic? Have these remained?

13) The readings I have done suggest that a positive impact of COVID-19 for ENGOs was that virtual meetings allowed wider participation and resulted in the development of new relationships. What are your thoughts about this?

14) In what ways did COVID-19 affect the momentum you had built on the issues you were working on? Has such momentum been rebuilt?

15) Have you identified any particular strategies for coping with a similar interruption in the normal course of work of your organization for the future?

16) How would you describe the overall impact of COVID-19 on the actions of your organization?

Conclusion

17) Is there anything you would like to add to your responses about the impact of the pandemic on your activities?

Appendix B

Participant Informed Consent Form

Research Project Title: *Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on the sustainability policies and actions of ENGOs in Canada.*

Student Principal Investigator: Disha Gomes, Master's Student,
Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba, 220 Sinnott Building,
70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2M6.
Email: gomesd1@myumanitoba.ca

Research Supervisor: Dr. John Sinclair, Director and Professor,
Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba, 220 Sinnott Building,
70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2M6.
Email: john.sinclair@umanitoba.ca
Phone: 204-474-8374

Conflict of Interest and Undue Influence:

Disha Gomes does not have any conflicts of interest in this study.

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, feel free to ask any of the people named above. Please take the time to read this document and any accompanying information carefully. It is very important that you understand:

- **what is being asked of you,**
- **what the risks and benefits of participation are,**
- **how the information you provide will be used and stored.**

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this research is to understand how Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOs) have changed their sustainability policies and actions after COVID-19 in Canada and the implications of these changes. My aim is to understand the strategies that ENGOs are applying to continue their sustainability actions and how they had to change or adapt during the pandemic to keep their sustainability efforts in motion.

Study Procedures:

You are being requested to participate in one in-person or online interview that will take approximately 1 hour to complete. The interview will take place using UM ZOOM or an in-person location of your choice (e.g. your office, any secure public place). The interviewer will provide you with an information package ahead of the interview that contains background information and

the interview schedule. You will be asked about your organization's sustainability policies and actions before and after COVID-19 and your opinion on the changes. The interview will be recorded with a voice recorder. After the interview is completed, a transcript of the interview will be created.

An electronic copy of your interview transcript will be sent to you to review and communicate any required changes. The transcript will be sent 1-2 weeks after the initial interview, and you will be provided 2 weeks to review the transcript. If the P.I. does not receive any correction from you within the given time, it will be assumed that you are satisfied with the transcript.

Study Risks:

This research presents minimal potential risk to participants, meaning that the risks are no greater than what you might encounter in your daily life. Participants will not be asked to share any information or opinions that they feel could put them at risk. In addition, participant identities will not be shared publicly in any way.

Study Benefits:

While there will be no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, understanding the effects of COVID-19 on ENGO policies and actions in Canada will help ENGOs to evaluate how they had to change or adapt their strategies to cope with the pandemic. They can also use the results of the study as a guideline to follow if any crisis situation arises in the future to make immediate changes in their sustainability policies and actions. The potential benefits of this research on ENGOs will indirectly benefit all the employees. Also, the participants will get an opportunity to express their opinions on how their organization has changed after the pandemic in terms of sustainability actions and evaluate those changes. This research will also help build the growing body of literature on changes in sustainability policies and actions of ENGOs due to COVID-19.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for this study.

Use and Storage of Information:

All the information you provide as a participant in this study is confidential which means we, as the research team must keep it safe. We will do our best, however, it is not possible to guarantee absolute confidentiality. We will only share your personal information if required through court order or law.

The information collected through your interview will be kept confidential. Interview transcripts will be coded and will not contain any personal identifiers. Only the P.I. and Supervisor will have access to directly identifiable information.

If UM Zoom is used for the interviews, please be aware that the P.I. cannot guarantee complete privacy of the data collected. The meeting link will be sent through the P.I.'s secured university

email account. The meeting will require a password to join in. To help maintain confidentiality, the following steps can be taken during the interview:

- You can use a nickname or initials on Zoom instead of your full name
- You can keep your camera off, if you wish
- We recommend you join the meeting in a private location where you will not be disturbed or overheard

Your information will be stored on a secure platform approved by the University of Manitoba. We will have a file that links your name and contact information to your research information using a code. We will keep the file with your name, contact information, and code separate from the research information you share with us. When we share the results of this study, we will combine everybody's responses. This means no one will see your answers, name, or contact information.

All virtual data from the study will be stored in UM Overdrive and UM SharePoint, as both of these are protected by password. All hard copy documents will be stored in a locked office at the Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba. Recordings from the interviews will be destroyed as soon as the interview transcripts are generated. The transcripts and consent forms will be kept till August 2027, as the data will facilitate the P.I. in the dissemination of the research findings (e.g., academic publication, conference presentation).

Dissemination

The data from this interview will be included in the thesis that is required for master's degree fulfillment of the P.I. (Disha Gomes). Direct quotations from the interview will be included in the thesis, but the participants will be referred to by general descriptors, likely by a number. The P.I. intends to publish the findings of the study in a reputed journal and present the study in a relevant conference. A summary of the findings will be shared with all the participants and ENGOs after completion of the study.

Withdrawing:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. If you request to withdraw, all the data you have contributed to the study will be deleted, including recordings, transcripts, consent forms and email communications.

To withdraw, please email the P.I. (gomesd1@myumanitoba.ca) by the end of April 2025. After this date, you may still withdraw, but anonymized data may not be able to be deleted, since your individual contribution will not be identifiable.

Questions or Concerns

Designated University of Manitoba personnel (and/or Funder) may check that this study is being done safely and properly. To do this, they may visit the study site or review the research records. We will tell you if someone outside the research team will be there while you are participating. If this makes you uncomfortable, please tell a member of the research team, who will ask the personnel to return at another time.

This study has been reviewed and approved by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. However, this does not mean that participation is risk-free. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Human Research Ethics at humanethics@umanitoba.ca or (204) 474-7122.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study, you may contact any members of the research team listed on the first page or the Office of Human Research Ethics.

Consent

By signing this document, I agree that:

- I have read the above information or had it read to me.
- I have had the opportunity to ask and have answered all of my questions.
- I understand what is being asked of me.
- I will be taking part in a research study.
- I may freely stop or leave the research study activities at any time.
- My information may be shared outside the University of Manitoba.
- I do not waive my legal rights by participating in the study.

Notice Regarding Collection, Use, and Disclosure of Personal Information

Your personal information is being collected under the authority of The University of Manitoba Act. The University of Manitoba is committed to preserving your right to privacy. The

information you provide will be used by the University to support our research. Your personal information will not be used or disclosed for other purposes, unless permitted by The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act or The Personal Health Information Act. If you have any questions about the collection of personal information: Ph: 204-474-9462 or Email: fippa@umanitoba.ca

I agree to participate in this study.	☐ YES ☐ NO
---------------------------------------	--

Name of Participant: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Summary of Results:

The P.I. will develop a summary of research findings for participants upon completion of the study. Please indicate below if you would like to receive a copy. You can expect the summary by July 2025.

☐ I would like a copy of the plain language summary, to be sent to the following email address:

_____ or mailing address:

☐ I do not want a copy of the plain language summary.

Appendix C

Recruitment script for individual interview

Subject: Request to participate in a graduate research project regarding the effect of COVID-19 on the actions of Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations

Hello [Name],

My name is Disha Gomes and I am a master's student at the Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba. I am contacting you today regarding my master's research titled: "Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on the sustainability policies and actions of ENGOs in Canada". I am conducting this project under the supervision of Dr. John Sinclair. I am certain that with your experience in working with sustainability policies and actions (e.g., climate change, waste management, ecosystem restoration, sustainable energy etc.) before and after COVID-19, you could bring a lot of knowledge and insight to my research, through which I hope to develop policies and actions for future pandemics or major disruptions. If you agree to participate in my study, participation will include an interview in-person or via Zoom on a date and time that is suitable for you. The interview will take no more than an hour, and the questions will be related to changes in sustainability policies and actions after COVID-19 in your ENGO. You are in no obligation to take part in this research; however, I will be grateful if you decide to participate. If you would like to set up an interview or have any questions regarding the research, please feel free to reach me by email. The research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry Campus.

Best regards,

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