

# **The Role of NGOs in Environmental Management of the Coastal Zone in Korea**

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The Korean peninsula, with three sides surrounded by seas, is a land of beautiful landscapes and high productivity. The three coastlines of Korea, of the East Sea, Yellow Sea and South Sea, have very distinctive coastal characteristics, such as wetlands, islets, and white sandy beaches.

Unfortunately, the destruction of the coastlines by the inflow of polluted fluids and garbage from the land, frequent oil spills, massive reclamation projects, and land development for industrialization has resulted in severe environmental pollution. The severity of marine environmental contamination has reached the point where people have started paying attention to the problem, however, the research activities conducted mainly by the government and scholars continue. The sad part of this is that integrated information and data about Korean marine life and pollution has not been collected and controlled scientifically. Furthermore, environmental NGOs' activities in conservation of the coastal zone is concentrated on the Anti-Saemangeum reclamation project.

As one of the five largest tidal flats in the world, preservation of the Saemangeum area has become a concern that extends beyond the borders of Korea. The area is located along the western shore of the Korean peninsula in the North Cholla Province. It is the main source of livelihood for most of the surrounding fishing communities. This wildlife habitat supports 158 species of fish, or 76.9 percent of all fish species in the West Sea, according to Lee Chungryul, biology professor at Kunsan University. It also serves as a major stopover for the more than 20,000 birds that journey from East Asia to Australia annually. For four years, environmental advocates, representatives from major religious groups, and various concerned civic groups throughout Korea have been aggressively demanding that the proposed development of the Saemangeum area be abandoned. 'Civil committee for Cancellation of Saemangeum Reclamation Project,' with over 100 NGO members, has been actively conducting a range of activities including opinion polling, regular discussions and meetings, leading protests, meeting with key government officials, water sampling, and educating the community on the importance of tidal flats. These kinds of activities will continue until the Korean government stops the Saemangeum reclamation project.

In order to preserve the marine environment, GKU believes that collective research about the marine pollution has to precede and should be conducted by both government and civil organizations. In 2000, GKU started a marine pollution monitoring program through civilian participation. We collected data for sea contamination and marine ecosystems based on nationwide coastal line surveys with the ministry of marine and fishery.

Our sea is an asset belonging to present and future generations. They deserve to be conserved and passed on to future generations. This is why environmental education of future generations of the 21st century is so important. In August 2001 GKU held marine schools for youth. They traveled from the East Sea to the

Yellow Sea along the coastline and produced shoreline green maps and reported ocean waste pollution.

The special characteristic of marine pollution is that it does not stay in one area, but tends to spread to other areas through currents. So international cooperation between affected countries is really important and needed. We believe that the experience of marine conservation and wise use around the world will help Koreans find a way of building sustainable marine management.