

MUDDY WATERS  
CONSERVATION DISCOURSE & CO-MANAGEMENT IN BELIZE

MUDDY WATERS:  
CONSERVATION DISCOURSE AND THE POLITICS OF POWER IN  
MARINE PARK CO-MANAGEMENT IN BELIZE

By

TARA C. GOETZE, B.A., M.A.

A Thesis

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AUTHOR: Tara C. Goetze, B.A. (McGill University), M.A. (McMaster University)

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## **Abstract**

This research examines the complex local – national – global power dynamics that are a part of marine protected area (MPA) co-management in Belize, using Friends of Nature (FON) a local NGO that manages two MPAs along the southern coast, as an example. The first part of the thesis consists of a description and evaluation of marine conservation in Belize and the Friends of Nature experience thus far. The chapters document the system of MPA co-management in Belize, highlighting the distribution of power and authority between local, national and global stakeholders involved in the process. In reviewing FON's management activities and its interactions with the communities it represents, I suggest a new way of understanding the notion of 'local empowerment' as a component of co-management, lessons usefully shared, as well as areas for improvement. Part Two takes a more theoretically critical perspective on this experience, offering a different evaluation of the politics of marine conservation by exploring the issues surrounding co-management as a form of conservationist intervention. The chapters extend Part One's evaluation, but I shift the focus toward the discursive context in which co-management operates in one village, Placencia. The analysis presents the process as a contested conceptual project in which local fishers' and global conservation organizations' notions of conservation come into conflict. The matrix of connections between global and local actors indicates that though a powerful conceptual apparatus, conservation discourse is not necessarily dominant. In many ways, fishers actively contest it. In doing so, they engage these discursive constructions of ecological problems and solutions by participating in FON in a highly strategic manner. This ultimately results in a continuously shifting assortment of gains and deficits for all co-management participants, and highlights the limitation of positioning co-management as either 'empowering' or co-opting of local stakeholders.

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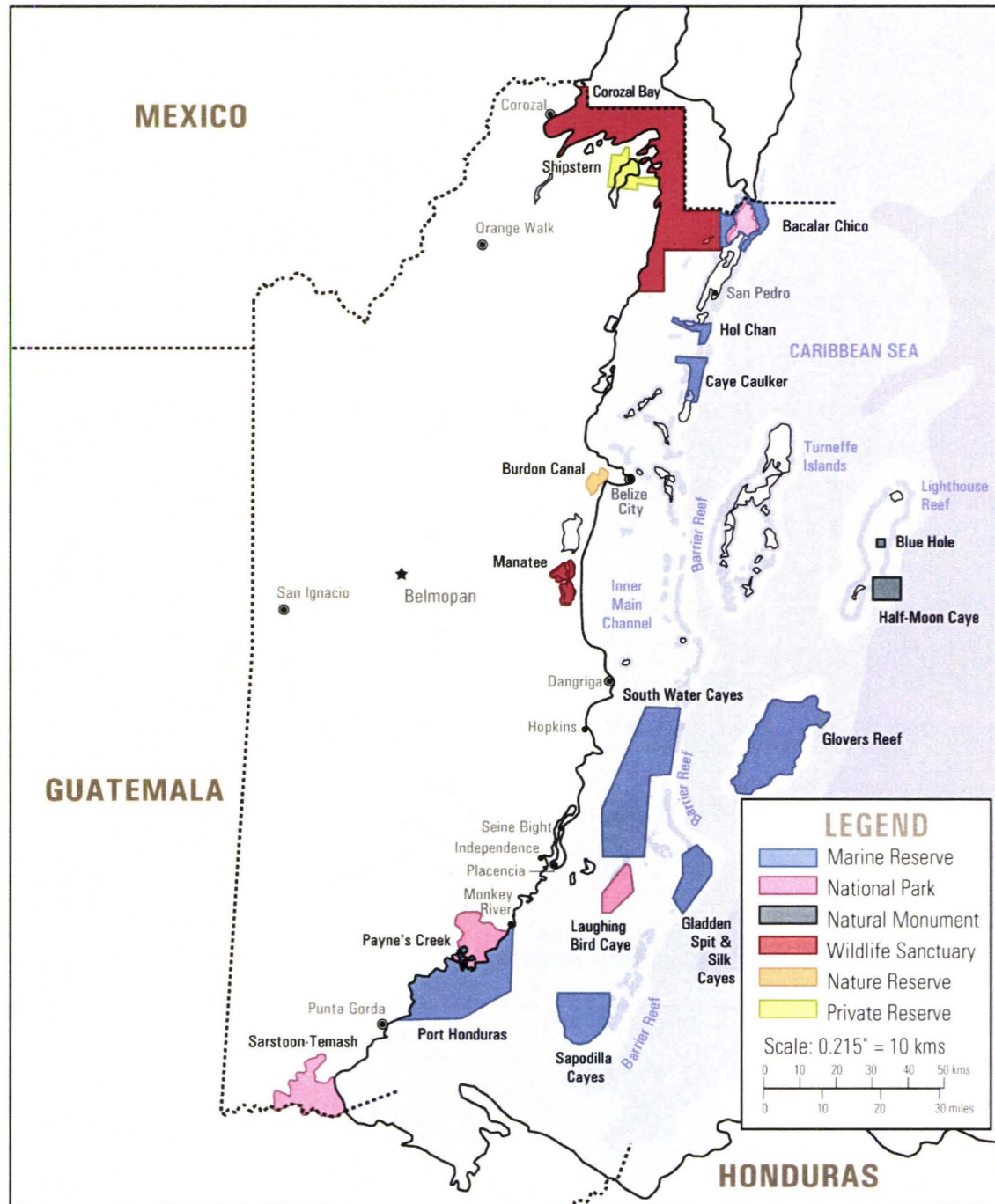
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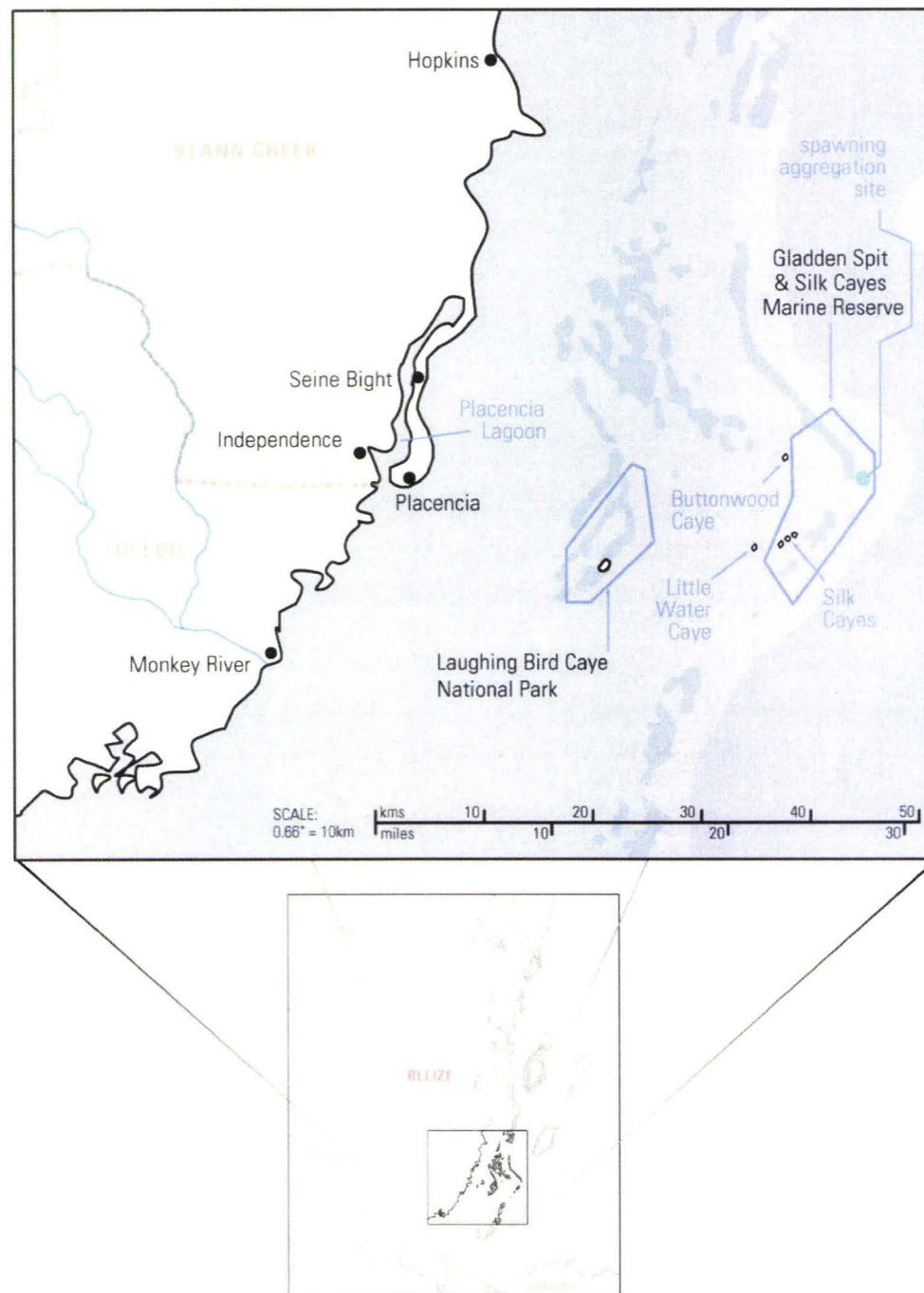


## Belize: Coastal and Off-Shore Marine Protected Areas





## Southern Belize: Friends of Nature Sites



## List of Acronyms

BAS	Belize Audubon Society
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCA	Caribbean Conservation Association
CI	Conservation International
CNGO	Conservation non-governmental organization
CZMAI	Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute
FAB	Fisheries Advisory Board
FAMRACC	Forest and Marine Reserve Association of Caye Caulker
FOLBC	Friends of Laughing Bird Caye
FON	Friends of Nature
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GSMR	Gladden Spit and Silk Cayes Marine Reserve
LBCNP	Laughing Bird Caye National Park
MPA	Marine protected area
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SPAG	Spawning aggregation
TASTE	Toledo Association for Sustainable Tourism and Empowerment
TEK	Traditional ecological knowledge
TIDE	Toledo Institute for Development and Environment
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WWF	World Wildlife Fund



## INTRODUCTION

The international development ‘industry’ has spent the early years of the twenty-first century recovering from the onslaught of criticism in the previous decade that characterized its interventions as failures and positioned it politically as an extension of discursively hegemonic Western constructions of the Under-developed Other (Ferguson 1990; Esteva 1992; Sachs 1992; Escobar 1995).<sup>1</sup> In the wake of the ‘demise’ of development a new community of ‘benign’ interventionist actors has emerged upon the global stage in the form of conservation-oriented non-governmental organizations (CNGOs). Growing concerns over the state of the Earth’s environment has spawned a global quest for ‘sustainability’ in which transnational conservation organizations are claiming a place as powerful global actors. Indeed, throughout the world, and with increasing prevalence, clashes between communities, industry, governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders over the use and management of natural resources are becoming a major concern politically, economically, and socially (Pinkerton 1989; Peet and Watts 1993; Mulrennan 1994; Smith and McCarter 1997; Stevens 1997a; Buckles 1999; Chapin 2004; Igoe 2004; Tsing 2005).

In the Latin America and Caribbean region, a growing number of people are relying on coastal resources for both subsistence and commercial purposes, while the burgeoning tourist industry continues to expand into coastal areas for the host of marine

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, single quotation marks are used to indicate problematized words and phrases. They appear only on the first usage of such terms in each chapter. Double quotation marks indicate direct citations from texts or interviews.

eco-tour and tropical get-away vacation opportunities they offer. The growing pressure on coastal areas is endangering the future sustainability of the very resources that local, national, and global stakeholders value. The current trend towards developing marine protected areas (MPAs) as a means to ensure the continuing viability of diminishing resources and over-taxed ecosystems, such as coral reefs, presents challenges in developing management models that promote participatory and cooperative relationships, whilst addressing often divergent local, national, and global economic development and conservation priorities.

In insular Caribbean states and coastal areas of Latin America, including Belize, where this research was done, coastal communities and governments alike regard these resources as crucial to current and future development initiatives. For example, the Government of Belize, several conservation and development-oriented organizations, and researchers have noted that there is a pressing need to identify means to: sustainably manage marine resources in a manner that promotes long-term cooperation among divergent groups of actors; provide opportunities for economic development locally and nationally; and ‘conserve’ those resources and protect their ecosystems’ future viability (Azueta 2000; CZMAI 2000; TASTE 2001; McField 2002; Palacio 2002; McConney, et al 2004). This necessarily involves considering multiple stakeholders’ perspectives on coastal and marine resource use, as well as incorporating their social, political and economic needs and interests in a management regime. In the past decade, the Government of Belize has developed a system of MPAs and subsequently pursued their co-management as the favoured avenue of action in meeting these objectives. As state

and local resources and capacities are limited, however, this has often involved turning to CNGOs as partners in MPA co-management.

My research explores the politics of marine conservation by examining these complex local – national – global dynamics that are a part of the practice of MPA co-management in Belize. In doing so, I use the term ‘politics’ in a broad sense to describe the processes, agencies, and interactions of multiple actors beyond, but including, the state system. I present my analysis in two parts, each with a distinct analytical focus that aims to provide readers with rather different perspectives on the practice of community-based marine conservation in Belize.

Part One consists of a description and evaluation of marine conservation in Belize and one local NGO’s experience with community-based management of MPAs. It is designed to provide practitioners and scholars alike with a pragmatic sense of the challenges and advantages that emerge from the Belizean experience with MPA management and of the particular local NGO model of co-management that I examined. This part of the thesis documents and assesses the system of MPA co-management in Belize, highlighting the distribution of control and authority between local, national and global stakeholders involved in the process. It also draws attention to the specifics of the local NGO’s management activities and its interactions with the communities it represents, and suggests an alternative understanding of ‘local empowerment’ as a component of co-management, one that differs from current discussions on the subject.

Part Two takes a more theoretically critical approach to the co-management experience, offering another perspective on the politics of marine conservation by taking

up the issue of transnational CNGO intervention in Belize. The chapters reflect an extension of Part One's evaluation, shifting the focus toward the discursive context in which co-management operates in the village of Placencia, and relating the process as a contested conceptual project in which local and global notions of conservation come into conflict. This part of the thesis assesses the co-management process in terms of conservation's discursive constructions as they are formulated and mobilized by CNGOs, forwarded via local NGO activities, and engaged by fishers in the village. The analysis focuses on the outcomes of this matrix of connection between global and local actors, which indicate that, while a powerful conceptual apparatus, conservation discourse is not necessarily dominant; rather, local fishers actively contest it, engaging it strategically via their involvement with the local NGO in a manner that ultimately results in a continuously shifting assortment of gains and deficits for all co-management participants.

Much like Ferguson's (1990) critique of development, I argue that conservation is a dominant conceptual apparatus that produces tangible effects through its discursive machinations. But I also expand beyond Ferguson's critique that focuses on the idea and institutional industry of development by analyzing the intricate discursive politics of ecological intervention from the perspective of its recipients, local peoples, as they interact with powerful local, national, and transnational actors in the process of marine conservation. I suggest that discussions of co-management's capacity to 'empower' local peoples through 'participation' must engage the notion of power as a complicated and messy process of negotiation, (re)prioritization, and deliberation. I endeavour to broaden the discussion and further extend the challenge to conservationists (Chapin 2004) to

ensure the privilege that informs their mission does not obscure the significance of other forms of knowledge, experience, and survival.

My desire to do research on co-management in Belize was influenced by my previous research with Aboriginal communities in Canada. My Master's degree research on the joint management agreement between Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations and the Province of British Columbia highlighted the political aspects of co-management. The co-management regime governing the resources of Clayoquot Sound, on the west coast of Vancouver Island, arose out of conflicts between indigenous users, environmentalists and state managers concerning access and use of resources. Now, Nuu-chah-nulth and other stakeholders cooperatively manage multiple contested resources on a comprehensive scale, including forests and fisheries (Goetze 1998).

The success of the Clayoquot model is linked to its capacity to share decision-making authority between Aboriginal co-managers and the provincial government. At the core of these conflicts were Nuu-chah-nulth demands for the recognition of their inherent rights to self-determination and self-governance, and for the settlement of their outstanding claims to traditional territories. For Nuu-chah-nulth, the ability to have control over the resources of these territories is directly linked to their ability to practice their inherent rights, to engage them in daily life (Goetze, in press). As such, co-management in this setting was primarily a political matter of negotiation related to rights claims that are themselves associated with demands for effective and enabling power-sharing in aboriginal – state relations.

It was also true in the case of Nuu-chah-nulth co-management that CNGOs, both local (Friends of Clayoquot Sound) and transnational (Greenpeace, Ecotrust, Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council), made claims to having a role in how the resources of the area were to be managed. The debate over how best to conserve the resources of Clayoquot Sound, and who had authority over the definition and direction of conservation strategies, was a significant element within the multi-stakeholder co-management process. Unfortunately, with my limited time in Clayoquot, I did not have an opportunity to further explore the rich dynamics of conservation politics within the context of the co-management process.

It was against this background of experience that I began my doctoral research. I went to Belize with a desire to understand how co-management works – or does not – in a different setting, how such joint governance institutions involving local peoples operate in the context of a developing area. As CNGOs are direct contributors to the operation of co-management in Belize, I would also have the opportunity to further explore the influence that CNGOs have on the practice(s) of resource management, as well as on the processes of partnership-building and power-sharing that are at the core of co-management.

Through an ever-amazing domino effect of contacts, I came to learn about Friends of Nature (FON), a small conservation NGO based in the coastal fishing village of Placencia in southern Belize. At the time, FON was in the process of negotiating its second co-management agreement with government partners, which would give it authority in the management over two local MPAs. FON was also participating in a

regional initiative that aimed to facilitate co-management of coastal resources in the Caribbean. The operation of the FON co-management model in Belize promised to provide a good example of the complexities that characterize the process of collaborative management of MPAs and the operation of conservation intervention in developing areas.

The rest of the introduction describes the context and execution of the research and places it in a theoretical framework within the broader literature that informs the main arguments in the chapters to follow.

## **Field Realities: The Evolution of Research Questions, Objectives, and Methods**

### *The Initial Research Plan*

In pursuing this research, I eventually became most interested in the issues surrounding the negotiation of competing local, national, and global conservation agendas in the co-management of MPAs in Belize. Upon learning about the details of the co-management agreements for Laughing Bird Caye National Park and Gladden Spit Marine Reserve (GSMR) in 2002, I decided to focus on exploring the operations of local NGO-directed co-management regimes. Other researchers had described a critical need for social science research on cooperative coastal resource management in southern Belize (Palacio 2001; TASTE 2001), and the FON co-management initiative provided an ideal context within which to undertake such work.

The road to this research orientation was not direct, however. Initially, my field research aimed to answer questions concerning the ways in which the relationships of different stakeholders developed over time, and the means to ameliorating community members' participation in the process of multistakeholder collaboration through

participatory processes which aimed to promote the empowerment of local resource users within FON's ongoing conservation efforts. Working closely with FON staff, my role was to be to both investigate as well as contribute to the process of developing FON's co-management system, focusing on capacity-building assistance with FON while facilitating a participatory approach they were interested in using. I was also to aid in the process of developing a new cooperative management paradigm by augmenting local users' participation in the management of contested resources. Given FON's stated interest in local empowerment, I wanted to observe the interaction of local community stakeholders with FON representatives in this process of negotiating interests in and claims to marine resources. The goals of this research were to identify key issues and actions to be taken in order to establish management strategies for the MPAs that effectively incorporate users' perspectives and promote their active participation in the co-management process.

As often happens, however, things did not work out in the field as planned in the research proposal. Upon arrival in the field, I did not receive the support I had been assured from FON, and local stakeholders were reluctant or disinterested in participating in yet another research project. As I quickly learned, participatory activities are not part of the cultural norm in the villages of the FON area. Travel between villages was difficult to arrange and very costly. These realities required a serious rethinking of my research orientation and activities.



### *The Research Plan Reconsidered*

My objectives thus shifted towards the consideration of the complex politics of MPA co-management, focusing on the interactions of local, national, and global stakeholders involved in the process. This assumed a consideration of the FON co-management experience not only in terms of the protection of the resource, but also for its effects on stakeholders' power relations, particularly among actors at different levels.

With this shift in objective, new questions emerged:

- How do local, national and global stakeholders envisage marine resources and MPAs, what are their interests in them and how do they recognize and negotiate these interests?
- What are the sources of each stakeholder's leverage and claims to legitimacy in the co-management process?
- How is authority exercised and shared among parties to the co-management agreements and what implications does this have for the nature of governance generally?
- In what ways is co-management viewed and/or mobilized as a means to local empowerment by different participants, and with what effects?
- What influence, in particular, do transnational CNGOs have over the co-management process, and is this changing?

My new research objectives reflected the concerns of these questions, and included: (1) understanding the operation of co-management in Belize, particularly regarding the conflicts and alliances that shape the exercise of power and authority among actors involved in designing and implementing the process in communities; (2) assessing FON's functioning within the village with the most active use of the MPAs' resources, Placencia, with a focus on the organization's orientation to notions of co-management's

utility in securing or augmenting local empowerment; and (3) exploring the role and influence of CNGOs as they involved members of local communities as key participants in the conservation projects they funded for area MPAs.

In sum, the broad intention of this research was to analyze the FON example in order to understand the complex outcomes of the local – national – global linkages that are inherent in implementing MPA co-management in Belize and elsewhere.

### *Methodology*

I began preparing for my research in southern Belize in the fall of 2001, doing archival research in various library collections to develop my knowledge of marine resource management issues in Belize, and forming contacts with stakeholders and NGOs involved in the co-management process there. In April 2002, I traveled to Placencia for ten days in order to attend a strategic planning workshop to which I had been invited by FON staff and Caribbean Conservation Association facilitators. While there, I met with FON staff to discuss the nature of my research activities, which would begin once I returned in June. In the field, my initial plan was to focus on participatory research methodology. One of the fundamental limitations of participatory methods, as I discovered, is that there must be ongoing local interest in and support of the research project in order for these methods to be mobilized. A pre-existing cultural context and mechanisms for community engagement and participation in local events is also useful, if not necessary. Though a key informant in FON initially assured me that such participation was feasible on my preliminary site visit in April, after the first month of research in June 2002, it became clear that both of these key conditions were lacking in

the area. Two months later, I returned to Placencia after returning home for health reasons. During this time, I had decided to resort to more ‘conventional’ research methods for the duration of the fieldwork focusing on individual interviews rather than group activities. From September 2002 to February 2003 and April to July 2003, I was based in Placencia, the village where the vast majority of active fishers and tour guides in the area covered by FON live and work, and where FON’s office is located.<sup>2</sup>

As it turned out, most people, particularly community members, were more amenable to a personalized one-on-one approach, due to their preference for less formalized settings and privacy. Locally, one of the best ways to both develop rapport and gain information about the co-management process was the use of informal interviewing, an activity which took place at village restaurants, bars, local docks, and community functions. After a time, some, though not many, fishers and fisher-tour guides were more comfortable with moving on to a more structured interview process. Informal interviews were conducted with over eighty members of the five communities, most in Placencia.

From Placencia, I traveled five times to Belize City and twice to Belmopan, the capital city, to interview government, CNGO, and multilateral donor representatives, each trip lasting between two to seven days. As in Placencia, informal interviews were effective as a means of introduction with these informants and as a prelude to the more formal interviews to follow.

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<sup>2</sup> I did travel twice to each of the other four villages represented in FON, though my visits were limited to one or two days.

In order to capture varying stakeholder views of the co-management process in a more in-depth manner, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews. Informal interviews were oriented not only towards building rapport and familiarizing people with my research interests, but also with establishing what issues were of importance as the subject of research from various stakeholder perspectives. The questions for semi-structured interviews were formulated from my notes of informal interviews. In total, I conducted fifty-four semi-structured interviews averaging forty-five to ninety minutes. Of these twenty-six were with people in Placencia: three with FON staff (out of ten); four with Board members (out of twelve); three with full-time fishers who did no guiding (out of eight); eleven with fishers who were also fishing guides (out of seventeen); two with dive guides (out of fourteen); and three with hotel owners (out of forty-three).<sup>4</sup> Another nine were with state authorities in the Fisheries Department (four), the Forestry Department (one), Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute (four), one with the head of the Belize Fishermen Cooperatives Association, and eight with representatives of transnational CNGOs and multilateral donors active in the FON co-management process (World Wildlife Fund, United Nations Development Program, Global Environment Facility, Meso-American Barrier Reef System, Protected Areas Conservation Trust, and

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<sup>4</sup> There were 126 licensed fishers in Placencia in 2000 (CZMAI 2001). In 2002, twenty-three were registered as full-time producers, while thirty-two were registered as part-time or non-producing members of the Placencia Cooperative (Placencia Producer's Cooperative Society 2002:4). Today, it is almost exclusively men who fish commercially, with an average of sixteen years of experience (Perez 2000). While some women used to fish commercially, currently most work in the tourism industry in Placencia, mostly as hotel, restaurant or shop owners. Some women in the village do fish recreationally for subsistence (on weekend boating trips, or off the beach or dock in the evenings), and there is one woman who, with her husband, fishes full-time. She was, however, uncomfortable discussing her experiences even in an informal setting. I experienced similar difficulties with FON staff, whose busy schedules and less than positive experiences with previous researchers made the interviewing process challenging.

Caribbean Conservation Association).<sup>4</sup> Finally, in the last month of my stay in Belize, I traveled south to Punta Gorda and north to Caye Caulker and Belize City to conduct eight semi-structured interviews with staff members of four other NGOs charged with co-managing MPAs: Toledo Association for Sustainable Tourism and Empowerment (TASTE) and the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) in Punta Gorda; the Forest and Marine Reserve Association of Caye Caulker (FAMRACC) in Caye Caulker; and Belize Audubon Society (BAS) in Belize City.

I also attempted to conduct structured interviews with informants with whom I had already spoken, in the form of a questionnaire. I soon discovered that scheduling was a significant problem, as was a rapid development of research burn-out, particularly among people in Placencia. Snowballing was the most effective technique for identifying local interviewees once a few had participated. Identifying government and state representatives was relatively easy, as their roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis MPA co-management are publicly demarcated.

Direct and participatory observation also played an important part in understanding the complexity of stakeholders' relationships, needs, and interests, and in the alliances and conflicts of relations between actors. I was able to attend five community consultations conducted by FON, three donor-led workshops, two government-sponsored symposia, and an international fisheries conference involving all stakeholders. Toward the end of my research, I was invited to accompany several

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<sup>4</sup> Though I made repeated attempts to secure a formal interview with The Nature Conservancy's field representative in Punta Gorda after our first informal discussion, he was consistently unavailable due to his busy schedule.

Placencian fishers to their camp on one of the cayes. I also participated in several other fishing and guiding trips and a few FON expeditions where visitors were given tours of the MPAs highlighting FON activities in the areas.

Having returned from the field, I was able to focus my attention on collecting documents produced by the most active CNGOs involved in FON co-management. While I had had the opportunity to acquire a small amount of CNGO-produced literature in Belize, much of it was outdated. To gather the most current information, I conducted three weeks of internet searches on their international activities, as well as their stated methods and approaches to conservation. Ultimately, these documents were to become the basis for a significant part of the discourse analysis featured in Part Two.

### **A Matter of Debate: Some Theoretical Issues**

My research on marine conservation in Belize contributes to ongoing debates and analyses that critically consider the evolving roles, responsibilities and impacts of NGOs vis-à-vis civil society (Falk 1995; Weiss and Gordenker 1996; Fisher 1997; Lipschutz and Fogel 2002). Several authors note the sizeable literature on the positive attributes of NGOs during the years of the dramatic global associational expansion (for an expansive list of such analyses, see Weiss and Gordenker 1996 and Fisher 1997). As institutions that focused largely on trying to ameliorate circumstances in developing areas, NGOs were posited as capable of alleviating poverty, engaging civil society both within and beyond the state, ‘empowering’ marginalized communities, and promoting a more democratic dialogue between communities, social movements and the state (see in particular Escobar 1995; Falk 1995; Weiss and Gordenker 1996; Fisher 1997; Kaldor

1999; Hurrell 2005). Yet, as Fisher argued in his critical review of research on NGOs, much of the literature is rife with idealized generalizations that obfuscate the complex politics of NGOs. There is, he asserted, a need to consider: (1) the discourses that shape NGO operations, and what they are imagined to be; (2) the impacts that relationships between such associations, the state and communities have had in particular local contexts; and (3) a vision of NGOs as dynamic actors operating within dynamic webs of association (1997:442). He further observed that anthropologists have made minimal contributions to these areas of investigation, adding, “there are relatively few detailed studies of what is happening in particular places or within specific organizations, few analyses of the impact of NGO practice on the relations of power among individuals, communities and the state, and little attention to the discourse within which NGOs are presented as the solution to problems” (1997:441).

Subsequent literature does directly take up the issue of NGO politics. Analysts question their accountability, legitimacy, and use of power (Edwards 1996; Sogge 1996; Nyamugasira 1998; Wapner 1998; Biekart 1999; Steans 2002; Woods 2002). Some cite their tendency to shift from movements to professionalized bureaucracies, and have remarked critically on the institutionalization of NGOs (Eder 1996; Davis 2001; Jamison 2001). Others touch on the fact that NGOs channel their entrenched political agendas and particular cultural values along with the ‘aid’ they provide their constituencies (Wapner 1998; Steans 2002, Hurrell 2005).

While NGOs are identified as sites of discursive production (Kardam 1991; Escobar 1995; Lister 2003), what is less discussed is the manner in which this in turn

establishes and perpetuates power relations among NGOs and between such associational institutions, the constituents they claim to represent, and state actors (Fairhead and Leach 2003). That some NGOs display a Foucauldian governmentality (1991) is just beginning to be explored in research (Lipschutz 2005)<sup>5</sup>.

The growing influence of transnational NGOs at the global level in recent years has sparked attention within the extensive body of work on global governance, particularly with regard to the emergence of private authority in the global sphere (Meidinger 2000; Hall and Biersteker 2002; Lipschutz and Fogel 2002; Held and McGrew 2002). In this regard, NGOs are typically considered members of the new global civil society that “address issues having to do with a global common good” (Lipschutz and Fogel 2002:136). Though the participation of non-state actors oriented toward social issues in international political processes is not, in fact, a new phenomenon, as Murphy (1994) aptly demonstrates in his historical review of global governance since the Industrial Revolution, theorists recognize the historically novel authority which NGOs are exercising across various governance functions that straddle global, national, and local contexts (Lipschutz and Mayer 1996; Smith, et al 1997; Wapner 1997; Korten 1998; Koenig-Archibugi 2002; Woods 2002). Several authors have noted, however, that the global governance frameworks to which they contribute are characterized by worrisome contradictions concerning basic democratic and representational values taken to be a part

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<sup>5</sup> While Luke does introduce the notion of “green governmentality”, his argument centres on the ways in which U.S. government institutions and their policies have abrogated environmentalists’ concerns “under the strategic ambit of state power” (1999:122). Agrawal’s argument concerning “environmentality” (2005:8) in India is similarly state-centered, while Ferguson’s (1990) seminal discursive analysis of a development project in Lesotho focuses on the discursive productions of state-sponsored transnational development agencies.



of good governance, especially in terms of legitimacy and accountability (Keohane 2002, Lipschutz 2002; Woods 1999, 2002). This caution extends to environmental NGOs, whose impact as powerful players in global affairs has attracted significant scholarly interest in the past decade (Princen and Finger 1994; Conca 1996; Wapner 1996; Young 1997; Liftin 1998; Bryner 2004).

Practitioners and theorists weigh the matter of transnational CNGOs' activities in the emerging critical literature on the practice of globally-oriented environmental protection and management. Among the most vocalized concerns is the prevalence of complaints concerning prohibitions against inhabitants entering protected areas and their exclusion from decisions about conservation projects operating in areas where they reside (Barrow and Fabricius 2002; Fairhead and Leach 2003; Adams 2004; Brockington 2004; Chapin 2004). In an overt critique that has fuelled a vigorous debate within the conservation community, Chapin suggests that the "string of failures" that resulted from past attempts to integrate peoples' development needs with biodiversity protection was due to the fact that such projects were "generally paternalistic, lacking in expertise, and... driven largely by the agendas of the conservationists" (2004:20). He thus challenges conservationists, including those working for the "biggest" CNGOs who are focusing on "science rather than social realities" (2004:18) with his assertion that "conservation cannot be effective unless the residents of the area to be conserved are thoroughly involved" (2004:29-30), echoing Dasmann's (1991) proclamation made over a decade earlier.

The contrasting positions among those involved in conservation initiatives often revolve around the protection of biodiversity within protected areas, and for good reason. Since parks were first established in the nineteenth century, in large part as a means to secure the sovereignty of the state over unsettled areas, the creation of protected areas has remained the “dominant ‘big idea’ of conservation throughout the twentieth century” (Adams 2004:4; see also Spence 1999). The current conflict over the use of protected areas concerns the capacity of such areas to perform their protectionist functions in the midst of ongoing human use. Against the trend of community-based management of protected areas, of which ‘sustainable’ use is a part via integrating conservation and development needs, proponents of ‘conservation as science’ suggest that “biological science should be the sole guiding principle for biodiversity conservation in protected natural areas” (Chapin 2004:26). The two sides, those who promote the inclusion of resource users for managerial as well as humanist reasons (Dasmann 1991; Stevens 1997b; Schwartzmann, et al 2000; Adams 2004; Chapin 2004; Forsyth 2004; Igoe 2004), and those who argue that people should not be a part of parks (Brandon, et al. 1998; Redford and Sanderson 2000; Terborgh 2000) occupy divergent positions regarding the politics of conservation. Thus, while the former tend to acknowledge the inherent political situatedness of conservation efforts, the latter tend to assert that the depoliticized ‘true’ essence of conservation lies in its mobilization of ‘sound science’ (Adams 2004; Chapin 2004).

Against ‘purists’ insistence of conservation’s political neutrality are a host of observations to the contrary. Wapner documents how CNGOs originally formed for

political reasons (1997, 1998), while Weiss and Gordonker point out how these groups “politicize the unpoliticized” (1996:19; see also Princen and Finger 1994). Fairhead and Leach contend that the politics of CNGOs may be found in the use of conservation science itself, pointing out how “the politics of their operation is conducted through the politics of science” (2003:28). Within this field of critique, the political implications of the global-local interstices that occur between transnational conservation actors and local peoples are also generating research interest (Nietschmann 1997; Brosius 2001; Dove 2003; Igoe 2004; Jasanoff and Martello 2004).

Like the critical deconstructions of the concept of development produced by anthropologists since the early nineties, one of the things that is needed now is to understand how the concept of conservation shapes assumptions, unequal power relations, and the interventions undertaken in its name. Insight concerning the extensive ramifications of global conservation initiatives and the local projects they produce could be enhanced by highlighting the connections between conservation discourse and institutional practice, linking the power of representation to processes of ecological and social construction. Such an analysis has been effective in revealing the politics and “anti-politics” of development (Ferguson 1990:21; see also Sachs 1992; Rahnema 1992; Escobar 1995; Manzo 1995; Porter 1995; Autumn 1996; Gardner and Lewis 1996; Gow 1996; Abram and Waldren 1998; Fagan 1999).

As Brosius (2003) succinctly observes, critics of environmental discourses in the past focused on three central areas. They have taken on the misrepresentative, idealized constructions of Western environmentalism (McCann 1997; Guthmann 1997),

emphasized the contestation of discourses produced by multiple actors (Schmink and Wood 1992; Smith and McCarter 1997; Fairhead and Leach 2003), and linked environmental discourses to transnationalism (Milton 1996).<sup>9</sup>

More recently, critics have come to rest an analytical gaze on understanding how these various aspects of discursive representation themselves interact within the profoundly dynamic context in which responsive local, national, and global agents produce and contest the basis of particular areas of debate (Brosius 2001, 2003; Dove 2003). Some scholars elucidate the ways in which powerful transnational CNGOs are “producing for a global audience universally acceptable facts, ideas and messages about phenomena such as ‘species protection’” (Martello and Jasanoff 2004:7). Others note the way in which these organizations use particular discourses to further their aims (Luke 1999; Poncelet 2001). Theorists have also pointed to the discursive production of the natural world by “discourse politics and coalitions within institutional contexts of decision, action and work” (Beck 1999:30; see also Hajer 1995 and Agrawal 2005).

What researchers have yet to explicitly consider are the ways in which globally-oriented conservationist discourse epistemologically (re)produces local environments and ecological ‘problems’, how such constructions are advanced within the context of specific CNGO-led projects, and how local peoples may strategically respond to this process.

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<sup>9</sup> There is also a substantial critical literature of environmental discourse from the field of linguistics and critical discourse analysis, which considers the communicative implications of such Greenspeak (Cantrill and Oravec 1996; Harre, et al. 1999; Fill and Muhlhauser 2001; Stamou and Paraskevopoulos 2004).

There is an immense body of knowledge on the ongoing creation and implementation of multi-stakeholder natural resource management strategies in developing areas which addresses the complexities of generating sustainable cooperative initiatives involving local and national actors (see especially Stevens 1997a; Buckles 1999; Christie, et al. 2000; Berkes, et al 2001; Orlove 2002; McConney, et al 2004). Yet, this research has not explicitly focused on the politics of transnational CNGO involvement in co-management despite their dominant role in the process in developing areas, whether it is referred to as co-management, participatory management, or community-based natural resource management. As has been noted for Belize, this is “an urgent topic that needs pressing study” (Palacio 2001:53). In this dissertation, I take up that challenge.

### **Organizing Principles and Chapter Summary**

This thesis aims to speak to a broad audience with diverse interests in exploring these dynamic local – national – global interactions that intersect in contemporary community-based marine conservation initiatives. As previously noted, its two parts forward different analytical perspectives on the co-management process in Belize.

Following a review of the context of research activities in Chapter One, Part One provides a pragmatic description and an evaluation of marine conservation efforts in Belize broadly and the FON co-management experience more specifically. The chapters draw attention to FON’s relations with local stakeholders and the distribution of authority among local, national, and global participants. Chapter Two traces the development of marine conservation in Belize, from the use and management of coastal resources to the

emergence of MPA co-management. It includes a summary of the major stakeholders' roles (government agencies, co-managing local NGOs, communities, and CNGOs) in the process. Chapter Three provides a detailed review of the FON experience beginning with a history of how FON co-management was initiated, and then noting stakeholder perceptions of FON. It includes an evaluation of the regime's successes and challenges, and suggests areas for improvement based on the stated experiences and perspectives of stakeholders. Chapter Four focuses on the critically important notion of partnership, and forwards an alternative perspective on the concept of local empowerment as an objective of co-management. Applying an evaluative approach to the broader issue of MPA co-management, it discusses other arrangements currently being implemented in Belize. It notes existing barriers to building more effective co-management in Belize, and presents a synopsis of critical lessons that are relevant to community-based MPA management beyond the Belizean experience. In particular, it emphasizes the challenge of creating conditions and implementing strategies that establish effective partnerships that enhance the authority of local stakeholders, and both recognize and augment local control of local resources.

Building on this evaluation of co-management, Part Two takes up a discursive analysis of the process as one of ecological intervention in which global and local visions of conservation meet and are negotiated.<sup>7</sup> Chapter Five begins by introducing readers to several of the central, but often anonymous, 'resource users' in Placencia Village, the

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<sup>7</sup> The discourse analysis presented in Part Two focuses on the productions of CNGOs and the responses to this by local fishers, for my interest was to understand these interactions as they occurred between globally-oriented conservation institutions and the local resource users that their initiatives target. As such, the discursive productions of FON are not a part of the present analysis.

fishers, many of whom are also tour guides. The objective of this chapter is to provide a sense of context within which the globally-directed conservation projects implemented by FON must operate. The preeminence of fishing as a cultural activity in Placencia reveals fishers' rich body of traditional knowledge about marine resources that they use to make decisions about resource use. It also underscores the challenge that the conservation initiatives face in seeking to re-direct fishers' efforts from harvesting to solely non-extractive tour guiding activities.

Chapter Six addresses the operation of conservation discourse. As Ferguson (1990) showed of development, this chapter argues that conservation, too, is a powerful discursively produced problematic that results in pragmatic outcomes when mobilized in local contexts. Through the analysis of various CNGO web-based documents, the chapter reveals how conservation 'thinking' functions as a process of ecological and social construction. It underscores the importance of recognizing the power of conservation discourse to (re)make and shape contexts of interaction and conditions of existence between humans and their environment.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter Seven applies this broad theoretical critique to ongoing CNGO efforts to conserve marine resources in Belize in which they pursue their objectives through partnering with co-managing NGOs such as FON. It demonstrates the interaction of community and global marine resource agendas using the example of how one CNGO has discursively constructed the globally significant local conservation 'problem' of

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<sup>5</sup> Following Ferguson (1990), many scholars have used a deconstructionist approach in their analyses of development, demonstrating its discursive constructions and power politics across a range of contexts (Esteva 1992, Sachs 1992; Escobar 1995, Munck 1999; Schuurman 2000).

overfishing in Placencia for which CNGO intervention is the ‘solution’. This, in turn, has resulted in outcomes unforeseen by those who planned the initiatives. Placencian fishers argue that the CNGO’s solution is detrimental to local needs and interests, both socially and ecologically. They actively challenge the interpretive prerogative that informs CNGO agendas, so a complex global-local discursive dialectic has emerged through which fishers’ resistance is expressed.

Finally, Chapter Eight both synthesizes and further extends the insights of the previous chapters’ discourse analysis, exploring the complex power dynamics of CNGO intervention via co-management. In particular, it shows how local resource users are constructed as ‘powerless’ within the empowerment discourse forwarded by institutions involved in co-management, and how fishers’ existing control over resources and activities is affected by their involvement in FON activities. In Placencia, FON’s implementation of CNGO-funded co-management simultaneously augments and constrains fishers’ control along with that of other actors involved. Being thus engaged in the co-management process, fishers interact strategically with FON in ways that address their multifaceted interests in local marine resources.

This thesis seeks to provide an alternative perspective on the development and implementation of conservation initiatives such as community-based natural resource management regimes. It also aims to contribute to the debate on the practice of conservation as “the term we use to describe the choices we make about the terms of engagement between people and other species” (Adams 2004:239). As this dissertation



hopes to make clear, these terms are actively contested, negotiated, and re-invented by a diverse spectrum of stakeholders whose agendas are complex and continually evolving.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **In the Field: The Context of Research Activities**

#### **A Bit About Belize and its MPAs**

Located on the west coast of Central America, Belize, formerly known as British Honduras, became a British colony in 1862 and gained independence in 1981. Compared to its immediate neighbours, Guatemala and Mexico, whose Latin characteristics evolved from a colonial experience dominated by the Spanish, the British legacy has contributed to Belize's distinctly Caribbean culture (Bolland 1977). Like Guyana, Belize is considered a part of the Caribbean community of states, for it shares many of the same socio-cultural characteristics of those countries.<sup>1</sup>

The population of Belize is composed of Creole, of African and European descent; Garifuna, of African and Carib ancestry; Mestizo, of Amerindian and European peoples; and Yucatec, Ketchi, and Mopan Maya. As in other Caribbean states, there is a noticeable ethnic divide in Belize, largely associated with skin colour, and tied closely to social status as a direct evolution from the colonial past (Bolland 1992). While it is slowly changing, the reality remains that key political and economic spheres of Belizean society are dominated by Creoles, with Mestizos a close second. Garifuna, Maya, and immigrant populations, mostly consisting of people from China and India, hold a decidedly less advantaged social status. There has recently been an increase in

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<sup>1</sup> As Grant (1976) asserts, the influence of a British colonial history is evident in Belize's political traditions, demographics, religion, language, and social organization.

immigration, so most villages are composed of relatively heterogeneous ethnic communities, though they are generally dominated by one particular ethnic group (CSO 2002).

Belize may be described as being politically stable, with long-standing democratic traditions, and regular elections that are avidly contested between two parties. Political authority is highly centralized, concentrated in the federal government, as Belize has a very small population, 250 000, relative to the physical size of the country (Shoman 1994). The vast majority of the population is rurally based, and sparsely dispersed beyond Belize City and Belmopan, the centres of government (CSO 2002). Belize is a country of one city, a few towns, and many villages spread over six Districts. Until recently, governance at the local, or village, level was not statutorily entrenched. Village Councils were recently legislatively endorsed as a form of municipal governance, but their institutional base is weak and there is little real devolution of authority. Very few Village Councils have pursued the opportunity to create formal by-laws. At the regional level, District Councils have been formed and the federal government recognizes the need to strengthen this form of regional governance as the population increases (Palacio 2001).

Economically, like many other developing countries, Belize is in transition, though poverty reduction remains a central short-term objective. In 2002, thirty-three percent of the population lived below the poverty line (GOB 2004) and, burdened with

debt, the government continues to rely on international aid for support.<sup>2</sup> The comparative lack of colonial infrastructural development that is easily observed in other former Caribbean colonies such as Jamaica, Barbados, and the Bahamas is attributed to the fact that the British viewed Belize more as a large logging camp than as a colony in which to invest for settlement; though some sugar cane was produced in the colony, Belize was primarily a source of lumber for the British (Bolland 1977; Shoman 1994). Heavy reliance on natural resources continued after independence. Belize's economy is based largely on commercial agriculture: bananas, citrus and some sugar cane. Forestry and fishing are also mainstays of the export economy, and shrimp aquaculture is becoming increasingly popular as a reliable form of production for the export market.

In recent years, however, the government has moved to shift the economy from commercial agriculture and harvesting of diminishing resources to tourism, a far more lucrative and, in the state's view, more 'sustainable' form of foreign exchange (Palacio 2002; Key 2002). As the home to the largest barrier reef in the northern hemisphere, vast tracts of rainforest, and among the most impressive Mayan ruins, Belize is well endowed to attract visitors for eco-tourism vacations that capitalize on the range of 'nature-based' activities offered in these areas. Belize has also grown in popularity as a cruise destination, with the number of visitors growing at a rapid rate annually (BTB 2001).

Belize's system of MPAs, which has been evolving since 1984, is a significant attractor for tourists seeking 'pristine' environments in which to vacation (ibid). The fact

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<sup>2</sup> In 2004, Belize's international debt stood at USD \$1.362 billion, while its GDP was estimated at \$1.778 billion. The government initiated expansionary fiscal policies in 1998, which led to steady GDP growth, averaging six percent since 1999 (<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bh.html>). Still, the sizable trade deficit and foreign debt continue to be major concerns (GOB 2004). Belize received \$22.2 million in international aid in 2002 ([http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/cty\\_cty\\_f\\_BL/html](http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/cty_cty_f_BL/html)).

that fisheries and other coastal resources in Belize are over-exploited soon led to the declaration of MPAs, originally designed to safeguard particular ecosystems and species, as fisheries “management tools” (Azueta 2000). Unfortunately, Belize does not possess the requisite financial and human resources to actively manage its seventeen coastal and off-shore MPAs, so many of them are parks in name only. In some cases, development has proceeded within MPAs unchecked, while access and activities are poorly regulated in many popularly visited areas (McField 2002). Moreover, there is widespread illegal poaching by Honduran night fishers as well as an influx of immigrants from Honduras and Guatemala, both of which are placing additional ecological pressures on marine resources (Palacio 2001; Pomeroy and Goetze 2003). As Young observes of Belize’s coastal and marine areas, “despite its enormous value to the overall economy of the country, this fragile ecosystem is rapidly being threatened from damage caused by over-exploitation of reef resources by fishing and tourism...the need to conserve and protect this valuable resource is of utmost urgency” (1999:2). The ecological degradation of marine and coastal resources has been accompanied by an increase in conflict between fishers, tour guides and operators, and residents (TASTE 2001). The need for effective coastal and MPA management that involves augmented levels of stakeholder participation is recognized both locally and nationally (CZMAI 2000; TASTE 2001; McField 2002; Ravndal 2002).

In keeping with this, some local communities in southern Belize have recently become involved in a regional coastal planning process led by the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute (CZMAI). The situation is compromised, however,

by a long-standing lack of central government support for increasing direct local community control over the management of natural resources, and the absence of coordination between state agencies charged with resource management responsibilities (Freestone 1995; Palacio 2001; Ravndal 2002). There is some indication that this is changing as decentralization becomes an attractive alternative for a government that “lacks the capacity to manage [natural resources] on its own” (TASTE 2001:8). Indeed, the policy response to this reality has been to focus on building partnerships with both local and transnational NGOs to share management responsibilities through the negotiation of co-management agreements that transfer both the human and financial costs of managing the MPAs to these organizations (Azueta 2000; CZMAI 2000).

The legislative framework for establishing co-management partnerships has existed since the early 1990s, and negotiating such agreements is a relatively straightforward process: a registered NGO makes a formal request, demonstrates its level of management capacity and financial support, and submits a management plan. Some negotiation may then ensue concerning the organization’s capacity and its proposed management plan. The terms of reference for co-management agreements in Belize are very simple, and once the statutory authority has approved the management plan, co-management may proceed. Having said that, there are interesting jurisdictional issues for a potential co-managing organization. The Forestry Department is responsible for the management of National Parks and Natural Monuments, which fall under its legal mandate, be they marine or terrestrial. Marine Reserves, the third type of MPA, are the responsibility of the Fisheries Department. While the Forestry Department has no formal

policy on the management of MPAs, the Fisheries Act allows that Department to “assign management responsibility to a qualified legal entity that is environmentally friendly and committed to sustainable responsible tourism” (Young 1999:3-4).

### **The Friends of Nature Story**

FON began in the late 1980s as Friends of Laughing Bird Caye (FOLBC), a coalition of local dive operators, tour guides and business people in Placencia, a fishing village on the southern coast of Stann Creek District. The group formed in response to the threat of private development on Laughing Bird Caye, a small island twenty kilometers off the coast of Placencia.<sup>7</sup> Eventually registering itself as an NGO, FOLBC started the process of urging the central government to protect Laughing Bird, which had been used historically as a fishing camp, a site of local recreation, and was increasingly important to area villagers as a destination for community-led tourism activities. The proposed foreign development would compromise all of these local activities. FOLBC sought the declaration of Laughing Bird Caye as a protected area, citing the need to protect the caye’s biodiversity and promote the sustainability of the various marine and terrestrial resources. Several meetings were held in area communities with interests in Laughing Bird Caye, with the aim of both informing people about FOLBC and threats to Laughing Bird, and gaining the support of community members for the Caye’s protection. In the early nineties, FOLBC circulated a petition to local communities in support of the protection of Laughing Bird. This, together with consistent lobbying of government

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<sup>7</sup> In the late 1980s, local dive guides noticed a survey post on Laughing Bird Caye. Further investigation on their part revealed that the caye was to be sold to a foreign developer.

agencies resulted in the declaration of Laughing Bird as a National Park in 1996. Securing management of the park required additional effort. In 2001, after securing funding from the local United Nations Development Program office, completing a series of community consultations led by the Forestry Department, and drafting a management plan, FOLBC signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Forestry to co-manage Laughing Bird Caye National Park.

At this time, there was also rising concern over the use of Gladden Spit, a promontory of the barrier reef forty-six kilometers east of Placencia, as a site for increasing dive tourism. Gladden Spit is one of the few areas in the world where whale sharks congregate on a regular basis, and may be viewed by divers and snorkelers with relative ease. The sharks arrive in the spring, attracted by the huge aggregations of fish that gather in the area annually to spawn. The whale sharks feed on the spawn, making their viewing a relatively predictable event. The area also attracts local fishers, who have historically used it as a primary fishing site for both subsistence and commercial purposes. In response, The Nature Conservancy, a U.S.-based conservation NGO, and FOLBC began a community consultation process for the protection and management of Gladden Spit.<sup>4</sup> In 1999, FOLBC began lobbying government in earnest for the declaration of the Gladden Spit area as a protected area. The area encompasses submerged reef and three tiny nearby islands that make up the Silk Cayes, and was

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<sup>4</sup> Safeguarding spawning aggregations from overfishing is a particular concern for The Nature Conservancy, as is the protection of whale sharks from any detrimental effects of high intensity viewing activities, particularly by divers. At the time FOLBC began urging the government to declare Gladden Spit a protected area, INC-sponsored biologists and Conservancy field staff were conducting research on whale sharks in Gladden, and had engaged in discussions regarding whale shark behaviour with local fishers and dive guides in Placencia.



declared a marine reserve a year later. In 2002, after undertaking several community consultations and drafting a management plan, FOLBC and the Fisheries Department signed a co-management agreement for Gladden Spit and Silk Cayes Marine Reserve (GSMR).<sup>5</sup>

Given its interests in protecting local marine resources, FOLBC merged with Friends of Placencia Lagoon, and changed its name to Friends of Nature (FON) in early 2002. An experienced Executive Director was hired, more stable funding was secured, and office support staff and rangers were hired to administer and manage the two MPAs.<sup>6</sup> A Board of Directors was created as the decision-making body to guide the strategic activities of FON staff. There are twelve Board members representing key local stakeholders: the villages of Placencia, Monkey River, Independence, Seine Bight and Hopkins; the Placencia Producers Cooperative; the local branch of the Belize Tourism Industry Association; Independence High School, the highest institution of learning in the area; the local Tour Guide Association, area youth, and local churches. Due to its well-developed level of organization, staff experience, and financial stability, FON is charged with the responsibility for implementing the plan it drafted and Fisheries approved for the daily management of the two MPAs. As such, it assumes control over designing new and implementing existing regulations on zoning and the behaviour of users under its co-management agreement with the government. FON is also authorized to patrol and

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<sup>5</sup> Though the MPA is formally named Gladden Spit and Silk Cayes Marine Reserve, it is shortened to the acronym GSMR by FON staff and Fisheries officials.

<sup>6</sup> Since 2002, FON has received funds from several transnational organizations, including the Oak Foundation, World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, UNDP – Global Environment Facility, and Conservation International. It has also received consistent support from the national Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute.

enforce those regulations within the MPA management zones. FON holds consultations in the five area villages in formulating its management plans, and whenever it considers deploying new management policies and strategies, though these have had variable success.<sup>7</sup> FON has also undertaken to provide environmental education about marine resources locally; an outreach and education coordinator was hired in 2002 to work in village schools, informational brochures about the MPAs are available, and FON has a regular column about its activities in the local newspaper.

Within Belize, FON may be described as unique in that it is one of the few ‘community-based’ or community-initiated NGOs because it originated from within local villages and because of the number of community consultations that it has organized in an effort to foster local stakeholders’ involvement.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Laughing Bird and Gladden Spit are the only actively managed MPAs in Belize that have been locally initiated with the support of community members.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Local Stakeholders**

As a community-initiated NGO, FON represents five local communities along the Placencia Peninsula with interests in and traditional, recreational and commercial uses of Laughing Bird Caye and Gladden Spit. The most northern of the villages, and the only

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the issues involved in the consultation process, see Chapter Three.

<sup>8</sup> Other NGOs, such as Belize Audubon Society, Programme for Belize, and Toledo Institute for Development and Environment, have lobbied for and manage MPAs. Though Belizean organizations, they were not instigated and established by the local communities whose marine resources they are charged with managing. Rather, these organizations were established largely under the impetus of transnational NGOs with conservation interests in Belize.

<sup>9</sup> While there are other examples of communities lobbying for the protection and management of a local marine area, for instance in Caye Caulker and Punta Gorda, FON is the only organization that has succeeded in gaining full management responsibility, and is consistently active in managing the MPAs for which it is responsible. For more on this, see Chapter Four.

one not located on the Placencia Peninsula, Hopkins has a sizeable population (1,027) consisting largely of Garifuna (Afro-Carib) peoples. Its economy is based on subsistence and commercial fishing with some tourism. Moving southward and onto the peninsula, Seine Bight is a smaller village (pop. 871), whose economic characteristics are very similar to those of Hopkins. It also has a significant Garifuna presence. Independence (also known as Mango Creek) is the largest village (pop. 2,929) and is locally considered “almost big enough to be a town”. It is here that area children go to high school, and it has the best infrastructure of the five villages. Its economy is based primarily on citrus and banana agriculture, with some commercial and subsistence fishing and a growing shrimp farming industry. Though the most popular tourist destination of the five, Placencia remains small (pop. 501). The road from the nearby airstrip into the village, which sits on the point of the peninsula, was paved only in 2003. Otherwise its infrastructure is second only to Independence. Its economy is based primarily on tourism with active subsistence and commercial fishing. By far the smallest village (pop. 170), Monkey River also has the poorest infrastructure of the five villages (e.g., one community phone, access by boat only). Being situated on the mainland, just south of Placencia, it is trying to capitalize more on tourism, building on the ever-increasing popularity of Placencia. Its economy is still based mostly on subsistence and commercial fishing.

Unlike Seine Bight and Hopkins to the north, Independence, Placencia, and Monkey River are numerically and politically dominated by Creoles. In all five villages there are growing numbers of Mayan and Honduran residents attracted to the burgeoning

tourism activities and the work opportunities they provide, a trend most evident in Placencia. All five villages have elected Village Councils, but only Placencia has drafted a set of by-laws, which await approval by the federal government in order to gain statutory authority. There are also two fishing cooperatives in the area. The Placencia Producers Cooperative Society has operated in the village since 1962. In 2000, the Northern Fishermen's Cooperative opened a small buying station in Independence, and it has successfully challenged the monopoly over harvest purchasing once enjoyed by the Placencia-based Cooperative; many fishers no longer bring their catch to Placencia Producers in order to avoid paying debts they owe there. Both represent fishers' interests locally as well as nationally. The Placencia Producers Cooperative is a member of the national-level Belize Fishermen Cooperative Association, which sits on the Fisheries Advisory Board together with other cooperatives, advising the government on a spectrum of issues related to the commercial fishery. Indeed, Belizean fishing cooperatives have been described as among the most powerful in the Caribbean (McConney, et al 2003a).<sup>10</sup>

With the exception of Independence, which is economically fuelled by commercial agriculture and aquaculture, FON villages' economies are based on fishing and tourism. Fishing is predominant in Hopkins and Seine Bight, and tourism is strongest in Placencia and Monkey River (Perez 2003). The two main user groups of marine resources in the area, then, are fishers and tour guides, and many people are involved in both types of activities throughout the year. Historically, fishing has been the full-time economic activity in the area and many villagers continue to fish for subsistence and

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<sup>10</sup> The role of fishing cooperatives in Belize is further discussed in Chapter Eight

commercial purposes on a regular basis, regardless of other forms of income (Palacio 2001). Since the 1980s, tourism has increased as a major economic sector in the villages, which has compensated in part for the declining fish stock (Key 2002). The norm is for villagers to balance both activities: the spawning aggregations occur in May and June, followed by the lobster season, which begins in mid-June. Lobster harvesting tapers off by the fall, at which point the tourist season (November to April) begins. Most fishers will move into tour guiding activities, such as snorkeling and sport fishing, for which only modest capital investment is required; they can use their own boats and clients generally bring their own equipment. Younger men are more likely to undertake the extensive training and more costly investment in equipment required to become a dive guide. For fishing guides, clients are typically acquired through word-of-mouth in the village, and most remain loyal to a particular guide once a relationship has been established, referring new clients to the guide based on their experience with him. Some fishing guides and many dive guides advertise their services in the local newspaper, on locally-run websites, or by posting flyers in area hotels and restaurants. All guides are required to take a course for a nominal fee offered by the local branch of the Belize Tourism Board in order to be licensed for service. Women tend to dominate work in the tourist service industry (hotels, restaurants, shops, laundry services). Families will typically convert part of their home into the shop or restaurant in order to reduce costs while facilitating childcare.<sup>11</sup> It must also be added that there are some fishers, estimated

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<sup>11</sup> The majority of hotels, restaurants, shops, and tour guiding businesses are small and owned by local families. There are also several larger resorts in the area, which offer accommodation, food, and recreation services in one location outside of villages. These are privately owned by foreign nationals, but are not part

by local people as approximately twelve across the five villages, who are not interested in tourism activities and continue to rely exclusively on fishing as a source of income. These fishers feel the impact of diminishing resources and management regulations affecting fishing activities more profoundly than do those fishers who also guide, or guides who occasionally fish commercially.

Conflict between local stakeholders is largely limited to three areas of disputes: between fishers over incursions into another's lobster traps; between local community members and resort owners who try to monopolize tourism business; and, more recently, between fishers and local and foreign dive operators in Gladden Spit, where whale shark diving takes place at the same time as fishing of the spring spawning aggregation. Fishers complain that the divers and snorkelers scare away the fish. Dive operators are concerned with the danger posed to their patrons by the presence of fishers' hooks in the water. Trap violation conflicts are typically resolved by the individuals involved, while the other conflicts are left unresolved. FON has attempted to mediate the latter conflicts with limited success. Another conflict exists over the presence of Honduran and Guatemalan fishers in the area, particularly around Gladden Spit, whose fishing, it is argued, compromises the catch of local fishers. While the government is aware of these illegal activities, the means to patrol the vast area of Belizean waters and enforce its fishing regulations is compromised by a lack of human and financial resources.<sup>12</sup>

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of transnational resort franchises. All tourism services are governed and facilitated by the Belize Tourism Board, which controls an impressive budget for marketing Belize as a holiday destination (BTB 2001)

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Seven for a fuller discussion of illegal fishing in the FON area.

Thus, in addition to the commercial fishers, dive operators, and fishing guides of the five villages, other local stakeholders are relevant to FON's co-management activities, in that they use the resources and can negatively or positively influence the resource base integrity of LBCNP and GSMR. These include:

- hotel owners
- tourists
- the Placencia Producers Cooperative
- local recreational users of the cayes
- local subsistence users of the marine resources
- inland citrus and banana plantations around Independence.

Non-local stakeholders involved in FON's MPA co-management process include:

- government agencies – Forestry Department, Fisheries Department
- quasi-governmental agencies – Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute
- donors – The Nature Conservancy, Oak Foundation, UNDP, Global Environment Facility, Conservation International, World Wildlife Fund
- inland shrimp farmers
- commercial fishers from Honduras and Guatemala

### **Laughing Bird Caye National Park**

When declared as a protected area under the National Park System Act in 1991 (SI 167/1991), LBCNP originally covered only the 1.4 acre caye.<sup>13</sup> In 1996, the park was extended to cover the coral faro and several patch reefs, which includes 4,077 hectares of marine area (SI 94/1996). In 1998, it was designated a UN World Heritage Site. The Park is managed under a co-management agreement signed in 2000 between the Forestry Department and FON. National Parks in Belize are established with the specific management objectives of habitat and species protection, research and education.

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<sup>13</sup> Protected areas in Belize are legally enshrined using federal legislation, referred to as 'statutory instruments'. Hence, LBCNP was originally protected under Statutory Instrument number 167 in 1991

preservation of natural and scenic features of national significance, and tourism and recreation. The Conservation Division of the Forestry Department exercises formal responsibility over National Parks, though the Division has no budget for the management of their marine parks.

In the past, fishers and families from Placencia, Monkey River, Independence, and Hopkins used Laughing Bird Caye for camping, recreation, and for the subsistence and commercial harvest of finfish, conch, and lobster. Over time, tourism activities gained popularity, while the level of commercial fishing began to wane in the 1980s as fish stocks declined. Since that time, the Laughing Bird has been an area of increasingly intense visitation, causing damage to vegetation. Improper anchoring of boats and the careless practices of snorkelers and divers has resulted in reef damage.

As a national park, LBCNP is a complete no-take Conservation Zone allowing only recreational and research activities. Until recently, illegal fishing continued in the Park. In 2000, FON's management plan divided the park into three zones designed to ensure that activity within the park is undertaken in a 'sustainable' manner. The Recreation Zone is located on the southern tip of the caye and is approximately 35,000 square feet in size. Located within this zone are a ranger station and visitor center, barbeque pits, and a palapa that provides a shaded area for several hammocks and picnic tables. The visitor center includes guest facilities, such as compost toilets, and operates on solar power. The Buffer Zone begins at the ranger station and ends at a no-entry sign that designates the boundary of the Preservation Zone. Located at the northern tip of the caye, it covers approximately 20,000 square foot area where no activities are permitted.



At the time of this research a Belizean, though not local, biologist and three rangers from the local area used the visitor centre building as a temporary ranger station. Patrols were carried out daily in the park, but rangers reported few incidents of non-compliance. The biologist had obtained baseline readings for most of the routine biological parameters of the marine resources in the park and had also prepared presentations and brochures for LBCNP.

### **Gladden Spit and Silk Cayes Marine Reserve**

Declared a protected area in May 2000 (SI 68/2000), GSMR covers 26,003 acres of marine environment. Also known as The Elbow, or Point-of-Reef in Kriol, the Reserve is located on the southernmost tip of the barrier reef just below the wave shadow of Glover's Atoll. From the coast at Placencia Village, it takes approximately forty-five minutes to reach Gladden Spit by boat. As part of its 2002 co-management agreement with the Fisheries Department, FON has responsibility for daily management activities in the Reserve.

Marine Reserves in Belize are established as part of the Fisheries Act for the management and preservation of all biological communities and species including commercial species and their habitats, research, visitation, and controlled extractive use within specified zones. Marine reserves may include terrestrial areas either as islands or adjacent mainland. All marine reserves are managed under the authority of the Fisheries Department.

Since the 1920s, fishers from Placencia, Seine Bight, Monkey River, Independence and Hopkins congregated at Gladden to harvest the annual winter and

spring spawning aggregations of reef fish. Today, fishers from the northern villages of Chunox, Copperbank, and Sarteneja, where local fishing grounds are now dormant, regularly harvest these areas as well. Foreign fishers from Honduras and Guatemala, who fish the aggregations at night using Global Positioning System technology (GPS) to locate the sites and underwater lights to attract fish to the surface, apply even more pressure to the area.

In response, several CNGOs have expressed concern regarding the possible depletion of Gladden's aggregations, arguing that overfishing is suspected to have eradicated several spawning aggregations in Belizean and other Caribbean waters. Furthermore, the correlation between the whale sharks' appearance and the presence of fish spawn has raised fears regarding the possible loss of whale shark tourism should the aggregations be depleted. These issues, as well as rising conflict between domestic and foreign fishers and between local fishers and dive guides, led FON to promote the establishment of marine reserve at Gladden Spit.

In 2003, FON drafted a management plan based on community consultations it held with stakeholders in the five villages it represents. FON held additional meetings with area fishermen and tour guides as well as state managers to develop a strategy for management in Gladden's spawning zone. The resultant plan includes designation of four multiple use zones that feature compromises allowing local stakeholders to continue to access resources in GSMR. The majority of the reserve will be a General Use Zone where fishing will be limited to handline and free-diving techniques. A small Conservation Zone encompasses Silk Cays and some adjacent reefs. Only non-extractive uses will be

allowed there and motorized recreational activities will be excluded. A Restoration Zone behind the reef covers a seagrass area that features a depleted conch ground. Fishing will be restricted here in order to promote restoration of the conch population. A Special Management Area includes the main spawning aggregation and whale shark area just outside the reef. There will be only limited access for fishers, divers and researchers in this area, requiring dive operators to coordinate their activities to maximize the numbers that can be accommodated. The number of tour boats and divers will be controlled, and guides will check in at a pontoon station moored just under the reef. FON is initiating a system of special site licensing for local tour guides, and implementing a fee for whale shark viewing to be paid by tourists wishing to enter the whale shark zone. It is still uncertain whether a system of 'traditional fishing' licenses for the spawning zone in the Reserve will be established, effectively restricting commercial fishing activities in the area.

During the time of my fieldwork, GSMR had a biologist from Belize City and three local area rangers. As a part of the management plan, daily patrols were carried out throughout the Reserve and rangers reported various incidents of non-compliance, and made a few arrests for violations by foreign fishers harvesting illegally in Belizean waters. The biologist prepared public presentations and brochures for the Reserve, and initiated an extensive monitoring program in which baseline data on assorted marine resources were obtained. Preliminary monitoring methods were developed for whale shark behavior and for spawning aggregations.

Having established the context within which FON co-management operates, the rest of the thesis takes up an evaluation of the process, considering both the anticipated and unforeseen outcomes of co-managing MPAs in Belize.

**PART ONE**

**The Nature of Partnership in Marine Co-Management in Belize**

The goal of the first part of the thesis is to provide practitioners and researchers involved in community-based management of protected areas with insights that have emerged from the Belizean experience with MPA co-management thus far. In doing so, Part One sets out a practically-oriented evaluation of how MPAs are currently managed in the country and, as such, presents the reader with much descriptive information paired with a pragmatic analysis. It highlights the difficulties, successes, and opportunities that Friends of Nature has encountered in developing and implementing its co-management agreements. Based on the rich experiences and judicious observations that informants shared with me in the interests of conveying these insights to others, I also present a series of recommendations and lessons generated from this aspect of the research.

For managers and policy makers, the practical lessons to be gleaned from the following chapters are relevant beyond Belize, and may provide options or solutions that usefully address or circumvent management challenges that they may encounter. Part One also sets the stage for the second half of the thesis, which undertakes a conceptually-based evaluation of FON co-management, examining the discursive politics and power dynamics of marine conservation in Belize.

In undertaking this evaluation, written material was limited either due to a lack of access to material, but more often because there has been little in the way of social science research on resource management undertaken in Belize. For this reason, the informal and semi-structured interviews I conducted with villagers, FON staff, CNGO and multilateral donor representatives, government officials, and other researchers proved invaluable in directing and informing the analysis. In addition to what was available from

archival information, this data enriched the discussion of the historical and current issues and strategies of marine resource and protected areas management in Chapter Two. Interview data is also featured prominently in Chapter Three, providing depth to the description of FON's co-management experience thus far, and informing the suggested areas of improvement I present at the end of the chapter. Chapter Four represents a synthesis of the remarkably consistent ideas and experiences shared during these many conversations. In it, I analyze the practice of co-management of MPAs in Belize and argue the need to create conditions for effective partnerships that enhance local stakeholders' authority.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Managing the Coast: Marine Conservation in Belize**

#### **Marine Resource Use in Belize**

The southern area of Belize, which includes the Stann Creek and Toledo Districts, is less heavily developed than northern areas, but the government views this status as temporary and sees the potential of the southern coastal region as somewhat of an economic ‘gateway’ (Palacio 2001). As previously noted, Belize relies on the marine and coastal resources of the Meso-American Barrier Reef System not only for subsistence and commercial fishing, but also as a major support for future economic development, particularly in terms of tourism. This is already evidenced in the popularity of Placencia, the fourth largest tourist destination in Belize; the vast majority of visitors to this area are primarily interested in diving and exploring the wide variety of offshore cays and reefs (Key 2002). In sum, the two main forms of marine resource use in Belize are fishing and tourism.

#### *Fisheries*

Commercial marine fisheries have been a mainstay of the Belizean economy for over thirty years, ranking third in terms of its importance to the national economy (MAFC 2002).<sup>1</sup> Commercial fishing has traditionally been based on the harvest of lobster and conch for export, but finfish and farmed shrimp are rapidly becoming lucrative

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<sup>1</sup> Fishing contributes significantly to employment (over 3,200 fishers), GDP (5.6% in 2000) and foreign exchange earnings generated by both open sea capture fisheries and terrestrially-based aquaculture (CSO 2000, MAFC 2002)



industries.<sup>2</sup> There were approximately 2100 licensed fishers in Belize in 2000, four hundred less than the previous year (CSO 2000). In Belize, a fishing license is required for both subsistence and commercial activities, but it is unclear how many licensed and unlicensed fishers harvest solely for subsistence purposes, and the rate at which they harvest. The vast majority of fishers use handline method of capture for harvesting finfish and free-dive for conch.<sup>3</sup> A mix of free diving and traps are used to catch lobster. The finfish fishery is used either for subsistence, or as an interim commercial activity during closed seasons for lobster and conch, primarily targeting local bi-annual spawning aggregations of valuable species from which large catches can typically be made over the course of a few weeks.

Approximately three hundred fishers were operating in the five FON communities at the time of this research. The area has the third largest concentration of fishing vessels in the country, and the majority are in Placencia, where fishing is particularly important (Perez 2000). Still, the number of fishers is relatively small in the south of the country, so many migrate from the north (largely from the towns of Sarteneja, Copper Bank, and Chunox) to fish in these waters (Palacio 2001). Private, large-scale shrimp farms operate in-land, though they are not owned or operated by area villagers. The local fishery is very dynamic and continues to recruit young people, although they arguably put more pressure on the fishery. Most of the local fishers with whom I spoke have secondary incomes in

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<sup>2</sup> In 1999, fisheries represented more than seventeen per cent of domestic exports (CSO 2000). Farmed shrimp is the largest contributor to fisheries based foreign exchange, followed by lobster and conch (MAFC 2002)

<sup>3</sup> The handline method uses various gauges of nylon fishing line to which a weighted sinker and hooks are attached. The line is baited, dropped overboard and, once fish have bitten, is hauled in by hand

the tourist industry from guiding activities, providing visitor accommodation, or engaging in construction work locally (see also Perez 2003).

In discussions with fishers in Placencia and other villages, most will admit that there are only a dozen or so focused commercial fishers, those who only fish for a living and do not partake in the tourism industry or other occupations during the closed season. Moreover, many revealed that the effort they put into fishing varies with their success in tourism endeavours. As a result, the degree of local pressure put on local marine resources is typically in flux from year to year.

### *Tourism*

Since its modest beginnings in the early eighties, tourism in Belize has become “one of the largest primary sources of foreign exchange” and is almost exclusively based on the country’s “unique environmental resources” (CSO 2000:35,70). Major attractions include recreational marine activities such as diving, snorkeling, kayaking, deep-sea and fly-fishing, and sailing. There is also growing interest in terrestrially-based activities such as viewing Mayan ruins, hiking, caving, river rafting, and viewing the extensive flora and fauna of the varied forest ecosystems that still cover much of Belize. Overall, the tourism industry in Belize is growing at an exponential rate. The number of tourists increased by over one-third from 1988 to 1999, and the total number of hotel rooms has more than tripled since 1980, the greatest growth occurring in coastal areas (ibid:70). In recent years, the country has become an increasingly popular port of call for large cruise ships, which dock in Belize City and afford passengers the opportunity to enjoy various coastal and in-land activities.

Listed as the fourth most popular tourism destination in the country (BTB 2003), the Placencia area is a relatively recent discovery for tourists. It was only in the mid-1990s that tourism grew into a major economic activity in the area (Palacio 2001; Key 2002). It is estimated that seventy-five percent of all visitors to the area visit Laughing Bird Caye National Park, which can be subject to over one hundred visitors a day during the high season (BTB 2003). Whale shark viewing in Gladden Spit Marine Reserve is growing in popularity, as are the deep-sea and fly-fishing services provided by local fishers. Visitors may also join tours offered by several local tour operators in Placencia to Cockscomb Reserve, an in-land protected area designated for the preservation of jaguars and their habitat. The Moorings and Tortola Marine Management, two international sailboat charter companies that provide catamarans for visitors to sail around the cayes, also recently began operating in Placencia. Areas of deep water also allow small cruise ships access to local reefs and cayes, and several have made Laughing Bird Caye a regular destination. Local residents and tour operators in Placencia expressed fear that the popularity of the northern destinations may lead to larger cruise ships entering the park area. Community members are strongly opposed to the idea, citing reports that foreign entrepreneurs are looking closely at this near-shore cruise ship access with a view to developing as yet undefined docking and transport facilities.

Housing development for visitor lodging, vacation homes and retirement is also increasing along the Placencia peninsula. A large residential retirement development near Seine Bight caused controversy over the carrying capacity of the small peninsula region. In the growing village of Placencia, recent government initiatives to provide space for

housing have led to filling lagoon areas. As the region becomes more of an internationally known tourist destination, relative property values have risen for the cayes as well as the mainland. Land is increasingly subject to spiraling “hope values” that may not reflect their true market value, yet often lead to “damaging improvements”, such as indiscriminate mangrove clearance, intended to push their value higher (CZMAI 2000:25).

#### *Condition of Marine and Coastal Resources*

The Belize reef ecosystem, like most others in the world, has been damaged by a variety of natural events and human activities. Belize has experienced significant hurricane activity in the past, and global climate change is believed to be responsible for the increase in several coral diseases and coral bleaching (Gibson, et al 1998). The low population density of Belize places only a modest pressure on the coastal zone through commercial and subsistence fishing, aquaculture, tourism, small-scale shipping and some recent oil exploration.<sup>4</sup> Independence increased the need to attain economic viability, however, and natural resources became a primary source of foreign exchange. As a result, resource-based industries are now the major threats to the country’s marine resources. Shrimp trawling has caused damage to the seabed, and foreign and domestic fishing activities have resulted in declining stocks, particularly of lobster and conch. Finfish are fished less intensively, and Belize is considered to have some of the healthiest reef fish stocks in the Caribbean (Heyman and Graham 2000). A study in 1990-91 concluded that

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<sup>4</sup> The term ‘artisanal’ describes both commercial and subsistence harvesting activities in Belize as the method of capture is unmechanized. In both cases, fishers haul in handlines manually.

finfish were only lightly to moderately exploited (Auil, et al. 1999). Rapid tourism development has resulted in visitors damaging reefs, seabed dredging and increased demands for waste disposal and sewage treatment. Deforestation causes soil erosion that translates into marine sedimentation of reefs, while agro-chemicals from nearby citrus and banana plantations run off into lagoons and sea areas (CSO 2000).

While it is still premature to quantify the impacts of tourism, anecdotal evidence from people in Placencia points to boat or diver-related reef damage, poor water quality, illegal camping, and litter as being the most urgent problems. Fishing is another main source of impact on nearby reef systems, as lobster and conch fishing are carried out in reef habitats. According to many area fishers, lobster are at least fully fished, if not overfished, while conch are clearly overfished, and have been for many years. Local fishers also noted that pressure on finfish increased in recent years, particularly after the significant reduction in tourism activity that resulted following the terrorist attacks in the United States in late 2001. Targeting spawning aggregations in Gladden Spit as lucrative harvesting grounds has been an issue of particular concern for CNGO biologists (Heyman 2001).<sup>5</sup>

### **Marine Protected Areas in Belize**

Home to the largest segment of the Meso-American Reef, Belize has an extensive and diverse coral reef ecosystem, with all the main reef types represented: fringing reefs,

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<sup>5</sup> Research undertaken by The Nature Conservancy suggests that spawning aggregations throughout Belize have been severely impacted by fishing to the point of causing the complete disappearance of some aggregations (Heyman 2001). The claim that the aggregations in the Placencia area are similarly threatened is disputed, however, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

barrier reef, offshore atolls, inshore patch reefs and faroes. There are also extensive related habitats such as mangroves and seagrass beds. The 260 kilometer Belizean barrier reef extends from the northern border with Mexico south to the Sapodilla Cays near the border with Guatemala. Because the country's reef habitats are of considerable economic importance, a series of marine and coastal protected areas have been established as central components of both biodiversity conservation and economic development.<sup>6</sup>

In Belize, protected areas are legally defined as "areas set aside for the preservation and protection of highly important natural and cultural features for the regulation of scientific, educational, and recreational use" (CSO 2000:83). Of the eight categories used to designate protected areas, the following have been the ones used to regulate activities in Belize's twelve off-shore MPAs thus far:

- **National Parks:** Areas reserved for the protection and the preservation of scenic values of natural significance for the benefit and enjoyment of the general public. These are zoned as non-extractive areas while allowing certain recreational activities to take place.
- **Natural Monuments:** Areas reserved for the protection and preservation of nationally significant natural features of special interest or unique characteristics to provide opportunities for interpretation, education, research and public appreciation. These are zoned as non-extractive areas, but allow certain recreational activities to take place.
- **Marine Reserves:** Areas reserved for protection, research, recreation, education, and controlled extraction in relation to marine and freshwater species and their habitats. These areas are zoned for multiple uses, including commercial, subsistence and sport fishing, diving and snorkeling, and stock preservation.

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<sup>6</sup> In addition to its expanding network of off-shore, multiple-use MPAs, Belize has five in-land coastal protected areas, which generally feature more restrictive zoning for their use

The Forestry Department of the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment, the Fisheries Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives, and the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute are the primary government agencies that are responsible for the creation and management of MPAs in Belize. MPAs have been declared on an *ad hoc* basis since the early 1980s, usually in response to requests from conservation NGOs for increased protection of threatened species or habitats. More recently, local communities have become involved in lobbying for protection of local marine resources through MPA designation, as was the case in the FON area. Due to the crisis-based motivation for declaring MPAs over the past two decades, limited progress has been made in developing comprehensive policy or effective coordination for the administration or management of MPAs in Belize.

Of the twelve MPAs, eight are designated Marine Reserves, administered by the Fisheries Department. There are also two Natural Monuments, two National Parks, and one Wildlife Sanctuary with significant marine habitat for which the Forestry Department has legal responsibility, but Fisheries administers many of these in practice.<sup>7</sup> Seven of these MPAs have been declared World Heritage Sites. In addition, there are seven Crown Reserves, which are essentially bird sanctuaries on small cays. About sixteen percent of Belize's marine territory (based on a three mile limit) lies within MPAs, with 1.3 percent of that area designated as no-take Conservation Zones (CZMAI 2000).

In a recent evaluation, Belize's MPA system was rated as "moderately satisfactory" in terms of management effectiveness (McField 2000:2). This indicates that

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<sup>7</sup> Bacalar Chico has both National Park and Marine Reserve designations. The division of MPA management responsibilities among government agencies is discussed further in Chapter Four.

there are minimal elements necessary for management, but there are also deficiencies that prevent effective management and reduce the probability that conservation objectives will be achieved. The evaluation noted that there was generally good community support for the MPAs, although a small but vocal group of fishermen openly stated their opposition to the MPAs. Management programs and planning are essential elements which were variously successful and in need of improvement (ibid). This evaluation continues to be relevant to current conditions of MPAs in Belize.

In 2000, the Fisheries Department drafted a new policy for MPAs in which they declared a network of strategic Marine Reserves, administratively divided into several coastal zones (Azqueta 2000).<sup>8</sup> According to the Department, increasing levels of resource exploitation, which demand greater efforts to maintain a sustainable fishery, motivated the move towards the new system. The plan eliminated management and advisory committees for each reserve and instead created one management team advisory board for each of three marine zones. The new policy also introduced the idea of charging visitors entrance fees as a means of financing the reserve system. The proposed fee would encompass all Marine Reserves in a zone, so that tourists could enjoy several attractions for one ticket price. The Fisheries Department was to determine the relative roles of government and other agencies and any effects this may have on the co-management arrangements they have with local NGOs. Interestingly, the draft policy conflicts with existing notions for promoting coastal zone management endorsed by the Coastal Zone

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<sup>8</sup> At the time of this research, the policy was still in draft format



Management Authority and Institute (CZMAI 2000), highlighting the jurisdictional conflict that is a key difficulty in administering MPAs in Belize.

### **Coastal Zone Management in Belize**

MPAs are among the most important elements of coastal conservation in Belize. According to the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute, Belize's network of MPAs "has traditionally formed the backbone of the integrated coastal zone management programme in Belize" (2000:30). Still, integrating and coordinating this program has proved somewhat of a struggle.

There are several legislative instruments that relate to conservation activities in the coastal zone of Belize. Of primary significance is the Coastal Zone Management Act passed in 1998. The Act was inspired by recommendations that emerged from a UNDP-GEF funded project on Sustainable Development and Management of Biologically Diverse Coastal Resources in Belize (project BZE/92/G31). In his review of the project Freestone (1995) noted the need to create a coordinating agency to take on responsibility for the complex task of coastal zone management. He also recommended drafting coastal zone legislation that would address the jurisdictional confusion promulgated by existing laws giving multiple line ministries legal mandates related to aspects of coastal management, mandates which often conflict.

In response, the Act created the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute. This new institution emerged from the Coastal Zone Management Technical Committee of the Fisheries Department, and was designed to oversee and coordinate all activities in the country's coastal zone and develop an integrated coastal area

management plan (CZMAI 2000). In addition, the Authority is empowered to draft coastal zone policy, commission research, appoint committees, and advise the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Cooperatives on issues related to the coastal zone. The Institute is the technical branch of the Authority, designed to promote and conduct research on the state of the country's coastal zone (ibid). As it stands, the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute is an excellent source of information on Belize's coastal zone and acts to facilitate MPA co-management by providing some funding for NGO management activities.

In terms of achieving its mission of improving coastal zone management in Belize, however, the Authority is severely limited. CZMAI staff noted during interviews that, as opposed to being the overarching regulatory body with sole jurisdiction over coastal issues as was recommended, the Authority is an advisory body with neither *de jure* nor *de facto* authority over the management of Belize's coastal resources; it has no statutory authority to draft legally binding regulations, and government agencies are not required to vet their activities through the Authority. It is nearly impossible, then, for the organization to have any direct impact on coastal zone management as it has no control over government decisions affecting the coast.

Other key legislation relating to coastal resource management in Belize includes the Fisheries Act, the National Parks Act, and the Forestry Act, all of which contain provisions for the declaration (and de-declaration) of protected areas in the coastal zone.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the Departments of Fisheries and Forestry, departments in the Ministry of

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<sup>4</sup>The legislation used by both the Forestry and Fisheries Department to create MPAs includes a final clause stipulating that any area may be "de-reserved...at the discretion of the Minister" (McField 2000:8)

Natural Resources, Environment, Commerce and Industry, and the Ministry of Economic Development, Investment, Tourism and Culture are involved in permitting activities affecting the coastal zone such as housing and infrastructure development, mining exploration, dredging, aquaculture, and tour guide licensing. Each regulatory agency involved in these activities has their own regulations and policies that overlap and conflict with existing legislation for the conservation of the country's coastal resources. Many informants involved in MPA management insisted that the success of coastal management in Belize requires the introduction of comprehensive and legally mandated policies and regulations that place authority over access to and use of the various resources of the coastal zone in a single agency, the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute.

At present, the situation suggests that protection of the coastal environment is incidental in the mix of politics that allows for the creation of an Authority with no legal authority to make decisions concerning the management of the coastal zone for which it was designed to be responsible. As long as government agencies such as the Fisheries Department continue to cling to their individual domains of authority for fear of losing what control they have to a collaborative effort, Belize will be severely limited in its ability to sustainably manage the coastal zone on which it so heavily relies for its own economic development.

### **Co-Management of MPAs in Belize**

Co-management in Belize informally debuted in 1984, when the Belize Audubon Society began pressuring the government to actively manage Half-Moon Caye, a small

island and marine area with unique biodiversity features that had been declared a protected area in 1982. Society staff were primarily concerned with the protection of the endangered Red-Footed Booby Bird, which nested on the island. As the government had neither the human nor financial resources to undertake the management of the area necessary for the protection of this species, it delegated management responsibilities for the area to the Society, which had both the expertise and the funds required for the task.

This subsequently set the stage for the manner in which protected areas are declared and co-management partnerships are instigated in Belize today. Parks and reserves are declared as protected due to the defined ecological threats, such as declining stocks, illegal harvesting, or unchecked development. The identification of environmental problems is generally initiated by communities or local NGOs, or transnational CNGOs arguing that more active management of the area is the solution. As government line ministries could not, and still cannot, provide an elevated level of on-site management, co-management became the most effective alternative solution. So, while the actual or perceived threats to biodiversity, and their implications for national and or local interests, may be cited as the primary motivators for protected status declaration, the need to shift the costs of this protection to other institutions underscored the process of establishing co-management of MPAs in Belize.

Co-management of marine resources takes place only in protected areas; in order to secure co-management, interested organizations must first have the area of concern

officially declared.<sup>10</sup> Organizations or communities desiring co-management of a local protected area must also be legally registered as an NGO in order to qualify as potential partners in a formal co-management agreement. The process of then negotiating co-management is relatively straightforward. The NGO approaches the relevant line ministry: Forestry for terrestrial areas, including off-shore cays, and Fisheries for marine areas. A management plan must be formulated, a minimal level of institutional capacity must be demonstrated by the NGO, and community consultations concerning proposed management strategies and activities should be undertaken, though there are no guidelines stipulating how such meetings are to take place or what they are to achieve in terms of local support. Once the management plan is approved, a Memorandum of Understanding is signed, and the responsibility for daily management activities is delegated to the NGO (Pomeroy and Goetze 2003).

Overall, four models of protected areas co-management may be identified as currently operating in Belize:

- 1) Government – NGO co-management of public protected areas;
- 2) Government – NGO co-management of public protected areas where community-based organizations (CBOs) actively participate in management via the NGO;
- 3) Government – CBO co-management of public protected areas;<sup>11</sup> and

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the relationship between the Fisheries Advisory Board and the Fisheries Department has also been described as a form of co-management operating in Belize (McConney, et al 2003a). The Fisheries Advisory Board was formed in 1965. Its members include representatives from local and national cooperatives, government, industry, and fishers who are not affiliated with cooperatives. The Board meets monthly to consider and make recommendations on a spectrum of fisheries issues.

<sup>11</sup> Communities represented by the CBO in this model generally live adjacent or close to the boundaries of a terrestrial or marine reserve and have ongoing needs and interests related to the area. As recently evaluated by Ravindal (2002), such government – CBO co-management was assessed as being unfeasible due to a fundamental lack of resources and management capacity (i.e., for enforcement, infrastructure, managerial skills and technical expertise) among CBOs in Belize.

- 4) Government – landowner co-management of private protected areas or reserves (ibid).<sup>12</sup>

All co-management of MPAs in Belize falls into the first category, where government agencies retain the statutory authority over resources and maintain their position as the ultimate body responsible for resource management.<sup>13</sup> Thus far, the Fisheries and Forestry Departments have signed co-management agreements for six MPAs with five NGOs: Belize Audubon Society, Friends of Nature, the Toledo Association for Sustainable Tourism and Empowerment, the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment, and the Forest and Marine Reserve Association of Caye Caulker. These co-management agreements vest certain management and fundraising responsibilities for their respective MPA(s) with the NGO. An executive committee, usually a Board of Directors, interacts with NGO staff in determining management strategies and other NGO activities. Boards may review and comment on an NGO's proposed management plan for an MPA, as well as projects involving training community members in 'alternative', usually non-extractive, economic activities. Directors are also involved in approving the organizations' financial dispensations. Most NGOs conduct community consultations in order to solicit users' views on management plans and other issues, though there is no explicit legal requirement to do so, nor any guidelines by which to formulate such events. For government, this form of co-management allows nationally important areas to be

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<sup>12</sup> Co-managing partners who privately own the areas under protection are also registered NGOs, such as Programme for Belize, a Belizean organization that owns and itself manages the expansive Rio Bravo Conservation Area in accordance with government regulations for park and wildlife management.

<sup>13</sup> The exceptions may be found for Belize's in-land coastal protected areas, a mix of freshwater marine and terrestrial ecosystems. For instance, Shipstern Nature Reserve, located in the Corozal District of northern Belize, is a private reserve owned by Swiss-based International Tropical Conservation Foundation and managed by the Belize Audubon Society.

managed in the absence of state resources to do so. For communities, this is meant to increase their involvement in the management of the local resources upon which they rely for subsistence and income generation.

In practice, MPA co-management operates somewhat differently from this seemingly simple model of delegating responsibility from the federal to the local level. First, there are no clear policies, formal regulations or informal guidelines governing the co-management process in Belize. There is no considered model of co-management informing the negotiation, formulation and implementation of agreements. Rather, co-management has evolved on an entirely *ad hoc* basis. The Terms of Reference that constitute the agreements may be described as broad and vague, failing to clearly define the 'joint management' roles and responsibilities of each partner, timeframes for approval, mechanisms for conflict resolution, and the methods and extent of local user participation in decision-making.

Second, there is a significant difference in the degree of delegated responsibility NGO partners may acquire, depending on their level of capacity to take on management activities. According to officials in the Department of Fisheries, where local NGO administrative training, office infrastructure, and management skills are low, government agencies retain authority over daily management. In these cases, NGO staff focus their efforts on acquiring funding for training, capital costs, and other conservation projects, for government cannot provide them with the expertise they require in order to achieve the state-defined level of capacity. Where the NGO's ability is deemed high, local

partners execute most, if not all, day-to-day resource management activities, as well as local projects aimed to enhance local economic opportunities vis-à-vis the protected area.

Staff of co-managing NGO repeatedly complained that the government, on the other hand, often fails to maintain the few responsibilities it does retain in both situations. Unreasonable delays in management plan approval, failure to provide enforcement support to NGOs with lower levels of management capacity, and threats of de-designating existing protected areas, are some of the challenges which co-managing NGOs must face in dealing with their state partners. In short, government agencies download the costs and implementation of management whilst retaining, and sporadically exercising, their legal mandates over the country's natural resources.<sup>11</sup> Ravndal, in an evaluative report on co-management in Belize, highlighted the chronic lack of federal support: "Governmental responsibilities related to co-management (i.e., enforcement, assistance in provision of infrastructure, and shared responsibilities in the joint management of the protected area) mostly go undone" (2002:43).

Third, it is only in some cases that local NGOs' governing Boards are composed of representatives from area resource users, in an attempt to enhance local participation in the co-management process, as representatives at the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute explained. In addition, staff members of several co-managing NGOs noted that, though community consultations take place, even without clear guidelines for doing so, attendance tends to be chronically low. This means that there is a

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<sup>11</sup> It quickly became clear in interviews with staff of co-managing NGOs that of their experiences working with both the Forestry and Fisheries Departments, local co-managers experienced many more difficulties in dealings with the latter, particularly in terms of unreasonable delays in the approval process, and other types of what were typically described as "power plays"



rather broad spectrum of rates of community participation in the decision-making and management processes in MPA co-management across the five NGOs involved.

Finally, regardless of the state's legislative monopoly over natural resources, the fact is that marine conservation in Belize is largely promoted, instigated, and funded by transnational donor agencies and CNGOs.<sup>15</sup> While both are key sources of financial support of MPA co-management, the latter is also the primary source of the 'technical support' that many co-managing NGOs need to implement their new management responsibilities. Without the involvement of these organizations and their field staff, the implementation of co-management in Belize would not be realized. As a result, they enjoy a significant degree of influence over the process. Co-managing NGO staff routinely comment on the manner in which CNGOs' particular conservation agendas dictate the management objectives and activities of local recipient organizations.<sup>16</sup>

Establishing co-management of MPAs in Belize has proven an innovative approach for addressing several of the limitations of state-centred management of coastal resources. Having emerged in such an improvised manner, many have concluded that it is now time for the MPA co-management system to be re-examined and re-organized in a holistic manner from legislation through policy to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The fact that internal project reports (Castaneda and Tortell 1997) and UNDP consultant evaluations (Ravndal 2000) suggest similar considerations begs the question of what barriers might exist to facilitate such progress towards more effective community-

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<sup>15</sup> This point was raised by numerous informants, including government officials, Coastal Zone representatives, co-managing NGO staff, and CNGO field workers.

<sup>16</sup> Part Two of the dissertation takes up the issue of the influence CNGOs have in the process of MPA co-management in Belize, using the Friends of Nature experience as an example.

based coastal resource management in Belize. Following an evaluation of the FON experience, Chapter Four explores some of these issues in greater detail.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **A Community Experience: Friends of Nature Co-Management**

#### **The Development of FON Co-Management**

As an example of one of the four models of co-management that operate in Belize, FON is engaged as an NGO in the co-management of public MPAs with the government. This is a delegated type of co-management where management responsibility, though not final authority, is granted to local institutions. In return, FON informs the relevant government departments of its management plans and activities. The agencies review, and may either change or endorse, decisions made by FON. As noted previously, though Friends of Laughing Bird Caye first proposed a co-management partnership with government for management of Laughing Bird Caye National Park in 1999, it was not until 2001 that such an agreement was finalized. Renaming itself to reflect its growing interests, Friends of Nature then negotiated with the Fisheries Department to additionally co-manage Gladden Spit. This occurred as part of a United Nations Development Program-Global Environment Facility-funded initiative by the Fisheries Department and the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute to actively pursue co-management of existing MPAs in Belize.

Since it began as a community-based organization primarily interested in protecting Laughing Bird Caye from development, the members of FON had few of the technical or administrative skills necessary for managing these MPAs. Staff members

explained that, as an organization, it needed to ‘build capacity’ in order to take on the responsibilities involved in co-managing the MPAs, and its members took several steps in pursuing that end. The organization entered into a partnership with the Coastal and Marine Management Program of the Caribbean Conservation Association (CCA) to assist with organizational capacity-building and the implementation of the co-management process. The CCA facilitators involved in this project pointed out that the partnership also aimed to expand and finalize the 1994 Draft Management Plan for Laughing Bird Caye National Park developed in pursuit of protected status. They noted that the Draft focused largely on ecological and economic factors and so, with assistance from CCA, it was modified to include various social perspectives of central importance to “building effective long-term community-based MPA management”. One outcome of this collaboration was the creation of a comprehensive five-year strategic plan for FON to help it orient itself towards its desired objectives, to assist in planning its activities, and to facilitate the acquisition of funding from donors. The Oak Foundation of Washington, D.C. funded the project as a part of their Coastal Resources Co-Management Project (CORECOMP).

In another part of this project, FON participated in various training workshops. In 2001, it was part of a CORECOMP-funded workshop on co-management in order to “better inform and prepare itself for co-management”: the workshop included donors and government partners and was facilitated by members of the Coastal and Marine Management Program (TASTE 2001). Over the next two years, FON participated in two

additional Caribbean Conservation Association training workshops on strategic planning and developing MPA management plans.

In mid-2003, as I was completing my fieldwork, FON was focused on completing the management plan for Gladden Spit Marine Reserve, a process that had become complicated by controversy among fishers and guides over activities to be permitted in the MPA. Most fishers with whom I spoke in Placencia and other villages expressed concern over the FON suggestion that harvesting the area's spawning aggregations would be limited to "traditional fishers", or those dozen fishers they identified as relying solely on fishing for their livelihoods. A new FON-led licensing system was proposed that met significant resistance from community members. Those who operated as both tour guides and fishers were equally upset at the prospect of losing the capacity to earn money by fishing the aggregations should the tourist season prove slow and their income insufficient. Other community members expressed a similar concern, as the aggregations have always been available to be fished should an inflow of cash become necessary.<sup>1</sup> The fact is, many argued, that regardless of any other full-time occupation, most people in the area fish regularly for food and to supplement their incomes.

The draft GSMR management plan also led to conflict with tour guides operating out of the Placencia area, specifically those who lead diving and snorkeling trips out to Gladden Spit during the spring spawning aggregations for whale shark viewing. In recent years, increasingly dangerous levels of boat traffic, diver/fisher proximity, and higher numbers of visitors in the water led many people to the conclusion that activity in the

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<sup>1</sup> Many people used the example of a family member in need of costly medical attention

area needed to be regulated. While local tour guides were worried over client safety with so many boats in a small area while there are divers in the water, CNGOs led by The Nature Conservancy suggested that the growing presence of divers was proving detrimental to the whale sharks.<sup>2</sup> In response, FON divided the area into fishing and viewing zones, set limits for the size and number of boats and divers, introduced the idea of user fees, and suggested a lottery system for controlling access to the area. During whale shark season, names would be drawn at random and assigned to specific time slots. At FON's community consultations organized to discuss the matter, many guides complained that charging user fees would discourage tourists from undertaking the already costly trip to view the sharks. The greater problem, however, was their sense that the lottery system would prove unfair in that, with limited time slots (two hours per boat), guests may not see any whale sharks at all. At the end of my fieldwork, FON was still negotiating with fishers and guides over access and use of GSMR.

Overall, in a relatively short period of time, the loosely organized grassroots organization with concerns over one particular issue has evolved into a well-trained, active, co-managing NGO. FON is making significant effort to effectively manage the MPAs and address area communities' needs and interests. It does, however, face a number of challenges as the implementation process proceeds.

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the debate over the use of Gladden Spit's spawning aggregations, see Chapter Seven

### **FON Successes and Challenges Locally**

Since expanding its interests to include co-management of a second MPA in 2002, FON has achieved a significant amount of progress in developing itself as a managing institution. It has a functioning Board of Directors composed of local stakeholder representatives, an Executive Director, and several staff to implement the management plans it has in place for both MPAs. It acquired an office and the equipment critical for carrying out several management activities, and it has begun enforcement patrols in both MPAs. Though still relatively unstable, moderate financing has been secured for the immediate future.

FON co-management has proven beneficial on several fronts. In addition to working with the Caribbean Conservation Association to develop capacity and its management plans, FON is engaged in various projects funded by The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, and Conservation International that have provided a variety of managerial and community benefits:

- Completing baseline assessments of the marine ecology in both MPAs.
- Purchasing or constructing various forms of management and administrative infrastructure (e.g., ranger stations).
- Providing alternative livelihoods training for local stakeholders.
- Providing management training for staff.
- Leading educational exchanges for fishers to other MPAs outside Belize.
- Purchasing Little Water Caye, a site for the GSMR ranger station.
- Purchasing Buttonwood Caye, a traditional campground and landing site for fishers harvesting at Gladden Spit.

- Assisting in research on the spawning aggregations at Gladden Spit.
- Conducting socio-economic assessments of villages it represents.

In addition, FON has negotiated conflicts among local stakeholders, albeit to varying degrees of success. For instance, while staff managed to quell rising tensions between fishers and guides over the use of the spring spawning aggregations in which each was perceived as compromising the other's interests, the general question of how the area will be accessed remained, as noted above, unresolved. Staff and Board members point to the use of community consultations along with the local composition of the Board of Directors as evidence of FON's commitment to integrating local interests into the management of local resources. Both local and non-local informants suggested that these efforts provide a promising foundation for building greater community participation in FON's activities, but that they need some modification in order to increase their efficacy.

Co-management arrangements in Belize have not been designed primarily as community-based systems with the attendant participatory decision-making structures and processes (Pomeroy and Goetze 2003). It is, therefore, not unusual that FON's co-management structure and activities do not yet involve broad-based community participation. Thus far, the primary means of achieving community members' participation in determinative management decision-making has involved appointing a representative to the Board from a stakeholder group FON staff has identified. In interviews, villagers observed that these appointments proceeded regardless of whether that individual in fact represents the many interests of that community, or indeed,



communicates the direction of FON decisions and activities to its community constituents. Furthermore, while FON staff and the Board of Directors make key decisions, Board meetings are not open to the public, nor are their minutes publicly available. Apart from representation via the Village Council Chair on the Board, no institutional or processual mechanisms are in place to involve local stakeholders directly in the primary decision-making process, for instance in developing management plans for the MPAs.<sup>3</sup> Rather, community members said, they are asked for their opinions after FON has formulated regulations for the MPAs.

Realistically, then, the five communities impacted by FON's actions have very little determinative impact on the MPA management design and decisions that affect the local resources they depend upon for their personal and economic survival. Stakeholders tend to be 'consulted' after major decisions are made and management plans are drafted, and as interviews revealed, many fishers and guides are unclear how the views they forward at these meetings are integrated into subsequent FON planning. There is a pressing need for FON and government to develop mechanisms to more directly and actively involve community members in decision-making. Regular community information sessions in all villages, a community liaison program and officer, use of participatory techniques for establishing local people's needs and interests, would all serve to integrate those who use the resources more fully and actively into the management process.

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<sup>3</sup> Village Councils perform municipal level governance activities in Belize, and are empowered to enact local by-laws. The Chair of the Village Council, then, is essentially the village mayor.

Unfortunately, the co-management agreements between FON and the Forestry and Fisheries Departments give FON responsibility and authority for the daily management of the MPAs, but they currently do not include any indicators of success, a matter that will need to be rectified in order to evaluate the efficacy of managing the resources and mobilizing community support for the organization. The lack of evaluative criteria in the management plans means that it is difficult for either of the co-managing partners to note and publicly share achievements and, conversely, to identify areas for improvement.

Finally, there is the chronic challenge of community ignorance. When asked what the term co-management meant to them, the vast majority of active fishers and guides with whom I spoke admitted that they had limited knowledge concerning FON's mandate and the process of co-management. It was also surprising to learn that, though they are the people most actively using marine resources, fishers and guides tend to be uncertain about their role in FON co-management. Those in Placencia, where the FON office is located, did understand that FON has management responsibility for the MPAs, but in general, they readily confessed their poor understanding of FON and its function. In fact, they suggested that the majority of time, they do not know what FON is doing. Several fishers suggested the need for a public awareness program to educate community members on FON's role in managing the MPAs. Such statements suggest that among the difficulties with which FON has found itself burdened, improving its position in the minds of its constituents may prove to be the most taxing should FON wish to continue to promote itself as a community-oriented organization. Having said that, it is unrealistic to

strive for unanimous support of FON and its activities or to expect that providing people with greater education about FON will eliminate community criticism toward the organization. As with all communities, the villages represented by FON are fractured by various competing interests, interpersonal conflicts, and shifting agendas, which means that people may at once criticize the organization on the one hand, while finding it to be a useful partner on the other, as I show in Chapter Eight.

### **Local Perceptions of Friends of Nature**

As became evident through both formal and informal interviewing of fishers and tour guides, as well as other community members in Placencia, there is a general perception that FON is a quasi-governmental organization whose intentions and motivations are unclear vis-à-vis local interests. A view popularly held by fishers in many villages is that the declaration of “so many” MPAs is the result of a conspiracy between the decision makers and some wealthy Belizeans and their foreign conservationist cohorts to favour tour guiding to the detriment of livelihoods based on extractive fishing. Many fishers feel that FON is either a part of this conspiracy or that FON’s role in relation to it is passively complicit at best. There is a sense that the benefits of the two MPAs in the area are designed to meet the needs of those with conservationist agendas, and that donors are biased against commercial extractive activities.

Discussions with other people in FON communities revealed a similar sense that FON does not effectively represent or consider their interests. This suggests that many stakeholders do not have a sense of themselves as active participants in the co-management process and, more to the point, that they have little control over FON

activities that affect their interests, be they economic or ecological. Fishers and guides, as well as one FON staff member, all pointed to a low level of public trust in the capacity and intention of FON to consider local needs in the management of the two MPAs. Taken together, their comments suggest broadly held local concerns with matters of representation, participation, and transparency that underscore a troubling lack of confidence in FON.

In part, such perceptions may be attributed to a poorly designed and executed consultation process between the co-managing partners and the five communities involved, as noted above (see also Brown 2000). For instance, during one round of consultations that I attended concerning proposed management strategies and regulations for Gladden Spit, FON staff first informed attendees of the regulations contained in the management plan before soliciting any objections. When issues were raised, they were typically over contentious proposals such as licensing fishers to use the area, and limiting the size and number of guide boats allowed in the area. The FON staff response, dominated by the executive director, amounted to a brief attempt to address concerns, followed by a cessation of the discussion, noting that views were being recorded and would be addressed later by FON staff in the management plan document. Subsequent comments made by those who attended the consultation implied that this meeting, as others they had attended before, left people feeling that the decisions had already been made for them, and that they had little say in what FON would ultimately do concerning the MPAs. This suggests that the consultation process needs to be reconsidered in terms of its purpose, methodology, and the skills of those facilitating the meetings.

At the same time, skepticism of governmental activities is a common theme in conversations with Belizeans as well as in local and national media. The fact that FON is in a management partnership with government agencies and is mandated by these departments to create and enforce regulations for local MPAs implies to many villagers, including fishers and guides, that FON is simply an extension of those government bodies. This assumption is reinforced when they witness the purchase of costly equipment for the organization. Villagers pointed in particular to the purchase of new vehicles, computers, and boats for staff use. In the small FON communities, the acquisition of such material wealth is immediately noticeable and causes people to consider what benefits, material or otherwise, they themselves may, or ought to, accrue from the organization. It would seem that a lack of information on the necessity and use of such equipment combined with the sense that the MPA regulations that FON is introducing reflects an elitism and government mentality, has left many of FON's constituents feeling excluded from the co-management process.

It must also be considered, however, that the suspicious views that routinely emerged in discussions with local fishers and guides are part of a larger political process that takes place at the village level between families, groups of friends, and individuals based on past experiences and present interests. This politics of opinion is influenced by ethnicity, wealth, occupation, and past interactions as well as a host of other conditions that affect local interpersonal and group relations. FON staff, Board members, CNGOs and government representatives, and researchers are part of this dynamic. In this local socio-political landscape, alliances are continually reformulated. This is not meant to call

the veracity of peoples' statements into question, but to provide a context for understanding stakeholder views that may, at times, appear contradictory.

### **Areas for Improvement**

Over the past decade, FON evolved from a grassroots organization of villagers concerned about the use of local marine resources to a legally recognized NGO mandated to provide a range of functions for MPA management. In doing so, FON has shown itself to be a flexible organization in making repeated efforts to adapt to the changing management needs of the MPAs and the interests of community members. As an institution, FON is in a process of growing and maturing, and continues to seek ways to improve the functions and services that it provides its constituents as a part of the co-management process.

The areas of improvement I identify below emerged from the many discussions I had with research participants during my time in Belize. They integrate the observations, suggestions, and concerns as voiced by local fishers, guides, and other community members, as well as government agency representatives, transnational CNGO field workers, and international and regional donor representatives.

- Community Public Relations
  - Develop mechanisms that provide for increased institutional transparency and accountability for FON management activities by establishing clearly open lines of access and communication between FON and community members.
  - Undertake staff training in facilitation, dispute resolution and participatory research techniques to build a more effective and productive community consultation process.

- Stakeholder Representation
  - Implement mechanisms that promote and facilitate local user participation in FON management activities, and revisit the existing format of community consultations.
  - Ensure the effective representation of and reporting to local stakeholders is taking place via training of Board of Directors members.
  - Undertake a comprehensive stakeholder analysis for FON villages to ensure that the spectrum of community interests is included in FON activities.
  
- Management Activities
  - Develop a consistent system of communication with communities that promotes understanding of the co-management process and FON interests, roles and responsibilities in MPA management.
  - Develop a mechanism to involve area fishers, guides, and divers in the research process for generating baseline data on the reef. This would include documenting the rich body of local ecological knowledge as well as employing these community members, on a rotating basis, in data gathering activities.
  - Strengthen self-financing mechanisms to reduce dependency on donor funds and direct staff energies to management responsibilities.
  - Develop mechanisms for participatory evaluation of FON and its activities involving stakeholders from area villages.

As previously discussed, in 2002 FON developed an organizational strategic plan with assistance from the Caribbean Conservation Association. The aim of this process was to identify and clarify the overall mission and more specific goals FON wished to take on as a co-managing NGO. The plan, finalized the spring of 2003, includes several objectives and actions that would address many of the issues identified above.

Successfully implementing that plan, however, is directly dependent on government and CNGOs involved in the MPA co-management process themselves addressing some of the challenges that FON and other local NGOs face in co-managing MPAs in Belize. For instance, it is critical in the long term that government departments resolve the chronic jurisdictional conflicts that result in delays and confusion in implementing many of FON's planned management activities. The federal government should also develop legislation that clarifies the roles, responsibilities, and expected outcomes for its local NGO partners in formal co-management agreements.<sup>4</sup> CNGOs, while providing critical assistance, should take steps that augment their own awareness of local communities' needs and interests, and formulate strategies that more effectively accommodate them. A common theme in many discussions with local users in FON villages was the ways in which CNGO representatives consistently fail to understand the interests and needs of local users and, in turn, either knowingly or unknowingly impose their programmatic agendas and environmental interests in local contexts. The challenges that FON faces in the years ahead are not unique to the organization, and are discussed in the broader national context and in greater detail in the following chapter.

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Four for a further analysis of co-management partnerships in Belize



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Building Partnerships: Evaluating MPA Co-Management in Belize**

#### **Other MPA Co-Management Regimes in Belize**

At the time of my research in 2003, there were three other NGOs in addition to FON that were involved in co-managing MPAs: Belize Audubon Society; Toledo Institute for Development and Environment; and Toledo Association for Sustainable Tourism and Empowerment.<sup>1</sup> As described further below, these NGOs each have varying levels of power and authority delegated for MPA management in their agreements commensurate with their level of institutional capacity to “manage natural resources, conduct research and provide funding for the management” (Azueta 200:16) of MPAs as evaluated by the relevant government agencies.

As the organization with the longest history of activity in Belize and the most experience with conservation and co-management, Belize Audubon Society (BAS) has a high degree of management capacity and, therefore, delegated authority.<sup>2</sup> It has an office in Belize City, over forty trained and experienced staff, a functioning Board of Directors, stable financing from bilateral donor agencies, CNGOs, and its own twelve hundred supporting members. It is well-equipped, having invested in ranger stations, boats, and educational brochures for its MPAs. It currently is responsible for the daily management

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<sup>1</sup> Though the Forest and Marine Reserve Association of Caye Caulker had a co-management agreement with the Fisheries Department, it was in suspension due to a lack of management activities undertaken by the organization.

<sup>2</sup> The Belize Audubon Society was formed in 1969 as a foreign chapter of the Florida Audubon Society. In 1973 it became an independent organization, the first, and for many years, the only Belizean environmental organization in the country.

activities and several research projects in two MPAs, Blue Hole Natural Monument and Half Moon Caye Natural Monument, both of which are World Heritage Sites. This includes the authority to enforce regulations in the protected areas. It also runs Advocacy and Education programs throughout the country and undertakes various research projects in its protected areas. BAS staff realize that, unlike other co-managing NGOs in Belize, it did not emerge out of community concern for the protection of local resources. As one staff member observed, BAS was practicing a “top-down management style” that often ostracized people living near or in the protected areas. Having recognized this, the organization is now making a significant effort to improve its engagement of communities in the protected areas it manages. In recent years it has dedicated its attention to modifying its approach to co-management in terms of developing mechanisms for more effective community participation, though it is currently focusing these efforts in two of its six terrestrial protected areas.<sup>3</sup>

Though relatively young compared to BAS, the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) quickly developed an advanced level of capacity. It has an office in Punta Gorda town, twenty well-trained staff members, a functioning Board of Directors, stable financing from CNGOs and its own eco-tourism business, and the requisite equipment, such as patrol boats. It currently has co-management agreements for two MPAs in southern Belize: Port Honduras Marine Reserve, and Payne’s Creek

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<sup>3</sup> In April 2000, the Society won a grant from the European Union in support of a four-year project entitled “The Development of Two Wildlife Sanctuaries as Centres for Co-management of Protected Areas in Belize”. Thus far, the project has developed a management structure incorporating nearby communities at an advisory level through the establishment of local and regional advisory committees at both pilot sites. According to staff, communities are now actively participating in the development of new five-year management plans for both protected areas. The management plans were due to be completed by December 2004.

National Park. In both, TIDE has full authority over management activities and actively patrols the areas to enforce the regulations stipulated in their respective management plans. The NGO also focuses much of its activity on promoting 'alternative livelihoods' for people in local communities in the interest of developing 'sustainable' economic endeavours in the area. TIDE categorizes itself as a community-based organization because it places priority on engaging area communities in its activities.<sup>4</sup> According to a TIDE staff member, a "grassroots approach" is also assured through the presence on its Board of Directors of local residents who are meant to represent the spectrum of community interests. Since TIDE's acquisition of Payne's Creek, however, this assertion has been challenged.<sup>5</sup>

Also located in Punta Gorda town, the Toledo Association for Sustainable Tourism and Empowerment (TASTE) is the most recent NGO to negotiate a co-management agreement with the government. As it evolved from its original status as a tourism-oriented community volunteer organization only recently, TASTE has a relatively low level of capacity, so the management and enforcement of the MPA, the Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve, remains the responsibility of the Fisheries Department. In recent years, TASTE has partnered with a regional NGO, the Caribbean Conservation

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<sup>4</sup> TIDE was initiated by a combination of community level and CNGO concerns regarding the negative environmental effects of activities such as manatee poaching, illegal fishing and various forms of unsustainable development in the Toledo area. In 1997, TIDE emerged out of the Belize Centre for Environmental Studies, which was a large and well-established NGO. It also received, and continues to receive, substantial economic and technical assistance and direction from The Nature Conservancy.

The declaration of Payne's Creek as a National Park was, in fact, lobbied for by the residents of Monkey River and, unlike Port Honduras, it is not located near Punta Gorda town. According to some in Monkey River, which is located directly adjacent to the Park, people in the village would prefer to themselves manage the Park in partnership with the government. Several people suggested that TIDE does not represent their interests and that the organization "stole" the Park from the people of Monkey River, who were deemed by the government to be lacking the capacity to manage the area.

Association, and has participated in several of their workshops on co-management, strategic planning, education and outreach, and creating management plans for MPAs. TASTE has subsequently developed a strategic plan, and a management plan for Sapodilla Cayes is underway. It now also has an office, boat and several staff members, who successfully initiated a community education project, which aimed to build the organization's capacity to raise awareness, understanding and concern about threats to Belize's barrier reef and the Sapodilla Cayes in particular.<sup>6</sup> In 2004, it won a sizeable grant for a coral reef conservation project. TASTE's activities thus far have been supported by funds from multilateral donor agencies, such as the United Nations Development Program, and the national Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute. TASTE has conducted several community consultations in coastal communities to establish peoples' level of awareness concerning the MPA and their interests in relation to it.<sup>7</sup>

As is the case with Friends of Nature, in these other MPA co-management arrangements there is a similar stakeholder perception that the NGOs managing the MPAs often do not represent, consider or protect the interests of local users. Echoing the sentiments of fishers in FON villages, interviews with NGOs' staff and other researchers working in Belize revealed that fishers in other areas of Belize feel that with every new MPA, the available area of sea to which they have commercial access diminishes.

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<sup>6</sup> The project was designed to give primary and secondary school students in the Toledo District an opportunity to better understand the value of marine resources and the ecological processes that maintain them.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, TASTE consultations revealed that community members had little knowledge of either the location or the importance of the Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve. In addition, the majority of young people from the area have not had the opportunity to visit nor enjoy the Reserve, due to the expense of traveling to the area, some seventy-five kilometres offshore.

Furthermore, many fishers believe that “scientific experts” and MPA managers leading the co-management process are profoundly biased against commercial fishing as a livelihood for local community members. There is a sense that those fishers who “convert” to full-time tour guiding are being drawn into an elitist conservationist agenda forwarded by CNGO field staff and co-managing NGOs alike. Another central concern voiced by many fishers is that they feel they were not adequately consulted before the MPAs were declared. Some asserted that they regularly experienced discriminatory practices, even harassment, in their activities around MPAs, particularly by enforcement staff. Finally, there is a common degree of ignorance among local fishers in terms of their knowledge of MPA regulations, definitions of co-management, and the role of the managing NGO.<sup>5</sup> In general, informants attribute these perceptions and experiences to the lack of an effective standardized process of consultation between government, NGOs and local stakeholders (see also Brown 2000).

In his research on community-based coastal resource management, Palacio (2001) found the issue of MPAs to be more controversial in communities where fishing brought in a substantial part of the household income. This makes sense: in villages where income is primarily derived or is substantially supplemented by tourism, no-take zones do not affect local livelihoods as dramatically. MPAs consequently tend to be held in a more favourable light by local stakeholders in these areas, though this is not always the case.

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<sup>5</sup> This is not especially surprising given that Belizean fishers are often unfamiliar with longstanding Fisheries regulations governing commercial and subsistence activities. Heyman and Graham report that among fishers in the Port Honduras Marine Reserve area co-managed by IIDE, only half could accurately identify the legal season and size for harvesting lobster, while a slightly larger percentage knew about the legal usage of nets. Interestingly, only half suggested that they would cooperate with authorities in combating illegal fishing, though this is certainly a chief complaint among fishers throughout the south (2000:11)

As a result, those fishers who earn the majority of their income from tour guiding (i.e., diving, snorkeling, sport fishing, kayaking) often have a more favourable perception of MPAs, and tend to have a greater understanding of their regulations and zoning restrictions.

The practice of negotiating co-management of MPAs in Belize continues to progress and expand. National agencies expound the virtues of securing “a higher level of involvement by the stakeholders and local communities” for they recognize that such engagement “is essential for the long-term success of MPAs” (CZMAI 2000:34). Yet if government agencies are to persist in actively seeking agreements with local NGOs “that have wide representation of user groups” (Azueta 2000:16), the objectives, structures and processes of co-management arrangements that promote the constructive participation of stakeholders must be integrated in order to establish such partnerships.

### **Barriers to Building Effective Co-Management Partnerships**

Though the basic claim that partnerships are essential to building effective co-management exists in Belize, informants’ comments pointed to a variety of issues that represent significant hurdles to developing an effective system of MPA co-management in the country. The obstacles listed below operate at the national and local levels, and must be addressed by the respective co-managing partners to which they apply.

- *Lack of national policy*

A serious barrier to successful co-management of MPAs in Belize has been a lack of systematic national policy governing these areas. As noted earlier, since the declaration

of the first MPA in 1984, the regulation of local processes and agency activities as they affect MPAs, whether under active management or not, has been rather disordered. Indeed, several informants characterized it as “chaotic”. There has been no overarching national policy to coordinate the laws and regulations affecting MPAs in Belize, and no policy concerning the negotiation and implementation of co-management in MPAs. While there is an organization in place that could easily take on the creation and implementation of such a national policy, the likelihood that the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute will be allowed to do so has been challenged by the Fisheries Department. In the summer of 2000, the Department released a draft policy aimed to introduce a sense of collective vision among the agencies involved in MPA management. Besides the fact that Fisheries defines the utility of MPAs in radically different terms from other agencies, the policy positions Fisheries as the coordinating body, a role for which it neither has the expertise nor the resources.”

- *Lack of coordinating national authority*

Lack of coordination is a problem among government agencies and between local NGOs, their donors and those agencies. There is redundancy in funding of projects and research undertaken together with a low level of sharing information and experience. Much of the work is being conducted on what people described as a “piecemeal basis” due to the absence of a comprehensive, integrated strategy for research and management in MPAs.

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In the draft policy, the Fisheries Department defines the primary goal of MPAs as “maintaining a sustainable fishery in Belize” (Azueta 2000:5). The Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute sees MPAs as critical to a broader strategy for integrated coastal zone management that “seeks to attain the optimum sustainable use of coastal natural resources, maintenance of biodiversity and conservation of critical habitats” (CZMAI 2000:1).

and an identified agency to oversee such activities. There are also a number of legislative issues that create conflict and confusion in the management of a national system of MPAs in Belize. First, the division of responsibilities between the Fisheries and Forestry Departments. Secondly, there are several departments, particularly permitting agencies, that have the legal authority to grant permits within MPAs for activities that do not necessarily comply with MPA regulations. For instance, the Geology Department may grant a dredging permit to a developer on a caye. This caye may be within or near an MPA where such activities are restricted, yet there is no legislation stating that any and all activities taking place within MPAs must be vetted through a particular agency. As a result, departments are acting on their legal mandates regardless of their effect on MPAs. Third, this situation has inspired the desire within the Coastal Zone Management Authority for legislative authority to govern all activities in MPAs, to make management decisions, oversee enforcement, grant permits, etc. Authority staff suggested that the broad vision and conservation focus of the organization make it the ideal agency to oversee the management of Belize's MPAs. Fisheries, they argue, has too narrow a vision that focuses on stock capture and economic gain in managing its reserves, so its exclusive authority over the majority of MPAs in Belize means that broader ecological issues may not be considered in its management strategies and decisions.

- *Conflict of interest at the national level*

It is clear, then, that the two lead agencies in the management of MPAs in Belize, Coastal Zone and Fisheries, are caught in a conflict of agendas and vision. Coastal Zone favours a broad, ecosystem-based, conservation oriented management system, while Fisheries'



vision focuses on extraction and the material value of MPAs. This affects the management strategies that are proposed and engaged by each agency. This results in each pursuing activities that conflict with the other's interests, and that sometimes compromise the needs of local stakeholders. Furthermore, the process of meeting community needs is defined differently by each organization: while Coastal Zone focuses on community engagement, alternative livelihoods, and sustainable development, Fisheries is concerned with protecting the existing economic incomes of fishers in communities, through sound management of MPA resources. This conservation versus extraction duality of agendas creates tension between the two agencies and their personnel and makes cooperative activity difficult, to say the least.

- *Lack of national capacity and jurisdictional clarity*

As a senior government representative involved in MPA management said, "The fact is, neither Fisheries nor Coastal Zone have the level of funding necessary to securely and comprehensively manage Belize's MPAs." Nor are there enough Belizeans qualified to take on the jobs associated with running a national system of MPAs. The Fisheries Department faces serious challenges in enforcing regulations within its MPAs in terms of capacity and funding. Enforcement of MPAs is a costly affair, and the need for watercraft, fuel, trained personnel, infrastructure for ranger stations and funds for salaries is one that is not easily met within the limited budget of the Fisheries Department.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the Forestry Department has no budget at all for enforcement in its MPAs.

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<sup>11</sup> In the fiscal year 2000-01, the Fisheries Department received a BZD \$550,000 (USD \$275,000) budget to manage eight marine reserves (Azuela 2000)

and relies on Fisheries to undertake these activities in their stead. Not only does this place additional financial burden upon Fisheries and its staff, it also further muddies the jurisdictional boundaries between Fisheries and Forestry in the practice of managing MPAs in Belize. Therefore, while the legislation gives Forestry *de jure* authority over some MPAs, financial reality has created a situation in which Fisheries practices *de facto* authority over all MPAs in Belize.

- *Lack of financial and human resources for local NGOs*

For co-managing NGOs, a sizeable impediment exists to their ability to remain financially solvent in order to carry out their delegated management responsibilities. While doing so does involve undertaking certain projects, such as baseline ecosystem and stock evaluations, it also includes basic overhead and capital costs, such as staff salaries, ranger stations, boats and fuel for patrolling. Unfortunately, most funding from national and transnational donors and CNGOs is project oriented, so NGO staff spend an inordinate amount of time and energy trying to acquire stable funding for the basic daily operations of the organization. In a small country such as Belize, in which education is a costly undertaking for most of the population and many who are educated leave the country for lucrative opportunities elsewhere, there is also a shortage of trained people to fill positions required for effective MPA management. Qualified biologists, outreach coordinators, educators, social scientists, park rangers, executive managers, and administrative assistants are not keen on taking the low-paying positions in MPAs, which are often situated in remote areas of the country, and may not provide even the most basic infrastructure such as toilets and showers.

- *Lack of community interest and engagement*

A common problem for many co-managing NGOs is the chronic lack of interest that community members show in their activities, which some informants suggested might be linked to the plethora of failed development projects sponsored by NGOs in the past. This has resulted in low community expectations of such organizations and their initiatives. A lack of information on the purpose and interests of these organizations in the communities they represent exacerbate the situation. Yet communication with community members can be a challenge for NGOs as their offices are often at a distance from the villages they represent, and the cost of frequent visits is untenable. For this reason, attempts to establish regular community visits for engaging communities via NGO reporting and consultation have been rare and typically fail. In only one case is there a clearly defined community liaison policy and staff position within the co-managing NGO.

- *Lack of direct community representation and participation*

Direct representation and participation for communities involved in the MPA co-management problem is very rare in Belize. Local stakeholders are not involved in the design, implementation or evaluation of management plans. They have little influence on the projects that are selected by NGOs that often take place in their communities and often on their behalf. There is little direct community involvement in the decision-making process as this takes place in the office setting or at closed board meetings, which stakeholders cannot attend. There are few community-based mechanisms (such as community advisory boards) in which stakeholders can themselves discuss and forward

their interests to the NGO, and communication with the NGO staff is difficult at a distance while consultations or meetings are typically scheduled at the NGOs' convenience. Several informants asserted that community representatives selected to sit on Boards of Directors are in fact not being representative of their constituents.

- *Lack of NGO transparency and accountability*

In their relations with communities, co-managing NGOs have encountered problems with conveying transparency to communities for a number of reasons. Many NGOs do not have clear policies on the decision-making process that they can share with communities to illustrate how decisions are made by staff regarding such things as the creation of regulations, subjects of consultations, and the selection of community-oriented projects. Moreover, meetings of NGO Boards are poorly reported to communities. Many informants felt resentful that their interests were being discussed "behind closed doors". Others expressed their suspicion over the distribution of funds, knowing the potential for corruption from past experiences. This speaks to the lack of accountability that local stakeholders often associate with co-managing NGOs in Belize: communities have poor access to information and outcomes of the decision-making process, and there are no mechanisms for community-based monitoring and evaluation of the ongoing co-management process.

- *Domination of CNGO agendas*

Several informants argued that CNGOs and other donors tend to exhibit neocolonial attitudes in their relations with local NGOs and community members by imposing their

notions of conservation and community development at the expense of local visions of these activities. Co-managing NGOs find themselves having to modify their needs in order to acquire the funding that donors stipulate that they will provide for resource management. As several staff from local NGOs noted, there have been times when the personal conservation interests and relationships of local donor representatives determine funding priorities and recipients. They also argued that donors design programs for skills training in management and alternative livelihoods without local input or consideration for cultural context. Some observed that evaluations conducted for funded projects are typically undertaken internally and exclude local views and experiences. Others pointed out that decisions regarding funding are, at times, based on hastily conducted site visits that do not adequately illustrate the needs of the communities, in which donor staff do not have an opportunity to engage local users. Finally, many NGO staff voiced their concern that much of the research conducted in MPAs is dictated by CNGOs' interests and undertaken by CNGO field staff and foreign academic researchers associated with the organization who may not share local interests or understand local needs.

- *Personality politics*

According to many people with whom I spoke, clashes of personality or personal issues between and among managers, donors, government representatives, and local stakeholders cause significant problems in the co-management process. The consequence of such differences, they observed, is a lack of regional and national cooperation among co-managing NGOs, so valuable experiences are not being shared between those organizations with years of experience and NGOs new to the process of MPA

management. They also result in entrenched conflicts between government agencies attempting to facilitate the process, while creating barriers to effective communication between NGOs and community stakeholders. This carries over into staff conflicts within NGOs, which can be worsened by a top-down management style in which personal agendas dominate the activities of the NGO, staff communication breaks down, favouritism surfaces, and decision-making takes place, as one informant put it, “behind closed doors” in the Executive Director’s office. Ultimately, this detracts from the overall task of achieving both the ecological and social goals of the co-management agreement.

Describing the issues listed above as barriers is meant to suggest that while they may currently impede progress towards successful MPA co-management, it is also possible to address the problems they present. At the time of this research, steps were being taken to find creative solutions by developing new policies, re-negotiating roles and responsibilities, and seeking out long-term stable funding options for co-managing institutions. These barriers are not necessarily unique to the Belizean experience, and co-managers elsewhere in the Caribbean and beyond would benefit from considering the presence of such challenges in their own contexts.

### **Lessons Shared: The Need to Create Conditions and Strategies for Partnerships**

The Belizean experience with MPA co-management provides a number of useful insights into the opportunities and challenges that will face governments, NGOs, and local stakeholders in establishing effective community-based natural resource

management arrangements, whether legally defined as co-management or engaged as more informal collaborative approaches.

Since co-management generally emerges from people arguing the real or perceived mismanagement of resource(s), arrangements usually aim to address not only the biological requirements of contested resources, but also the socio-cultural and economic needs and demands of local users.<sup>11</sup> Co-management regimes incorporate several core principles in order to meet these objectives. Thus, in theory, implementing co-management results in more effective management of contested resources by: building cooperation between multiple stakeholders in the management process; facilitating stakeholder dialogue; promoting the integration and convergence of stakeholders' interests; and sharing decision-making power between the state and local users through the devolution of authority (Goetze 1998). In practice, however, the structure and operation of co-management arrangements vary widely, and questions remain as to how co-management regimes can realistically 'empower' local users within their frameworks.

Many researchers and practitioners would argue that an effective co-management system is one that 'shares power' with local stakeholders in a manner that allows them to exercise a determinative measure of control over the use and management of local resources (Osherenko 1988; Kearney 1989; Pinkerton 1989a; Berkes, et al 1991; Weimer

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<sup>11</sup> Swerdlager (1992) identifies six elements usually included in formal co-management agreements: collectively formulated *decisions*, which make clear the meaning of terms used, *principles* that guide all concepts, plans and actions of the managing institution; clearly articulated *objectives* with measurable results that clarify the aims of the agreement, a sense of the agreement's *scope* concerning signatories, geographical area, and management issues; a description of *management structures*, outlining the power relations between stakeholders and the authority, responsibilities, and duties of the management body; and a section on *implementation* that sets out the conditions for meeting the objectives and responsibilities of the management body.

1991; Mulrennan 1994; Usher 1994; Ivanitz 1996; RCAP 1996; Berkes, et al 2001; McConney, et al 2004). This perspective on co-management can appear limited, however, for it may not fully incorporate the ways that local people already practise a measure of control over their use of resources, or exercise their power as resource users in other ways.<sup>12</sup>

With this in mind, I suggest engaging co-management as a system of management *partnership* between government agencies and local stakeholders that shares determinative decision-making authority with community resource users by establishing relationships that involve a real measure of user-directed governance at the local level. Ultimately, in order for co-management to be considered effective, it must allow local stakeholders to meet their needs and protect their interests vis-à-vis the contested resource(s), while not compromising the level of control they already enjoy. How that authority is created or recognized becomes the key issue.

Determinative decision-making authority is best understood to mean the capacity of local voices to be acknowledged, heard, and demonstrably integrated into the entire management process: planning, design, implementation and evaluation (Kearney 1989; Berkes, et al 1991; Goetze in press). Thus, a central objective of building co-management is to have local stakeholders integrated in the process in three key ways. First, their expertise as influential partners to resource management is actively recruited. Secondly, they have the means to express their needs and interests in management

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<sup>12</sup> During several interviews, Belizean state officials and fishers made reference to the fact that fishers exercise an impressive degree of political power vis-a vis the central government through a well-developed system of local and national cooperatives and the Fisheries Advisory Board (see also Palacio 2001; McConney, et al 2003a). I discuss this further in Chapter Eight.



planning, decisions, and activities. Third, they have the means to witness and partake in the active engagement of these needs and interests in the execution of management plans

Local stakeholders in the FON area repeatedly stressed that, beyond the creation of “rules” regulating access to the MPAs, they were unclear on the role of FON and the co-management process. With the exception of the few highly-active commercial fishers, with whom staff developed relationships and approached individually regarding possible restrictions on harvesting in MPAs, fishers and guides often noted that though they may have the opportunity to express their concerns at consultations, they typically did not see that their participation “made any difference” in the subsequent management activities of FON. Many Placencian fishers complained during interviews that their value as knowledgeable and experienced seamen appeared to be of little interest to biologists, researchers and managers in creating regulations for the MPAs. According to staff at Belize Audubon Society with whom I spoke, stakeholders from other communities where NGO-led co-management was taking place expressed similar complaints concerning local peoples’ sense of alienation from the NGO decision-making process. Indeed, some informants were candid in their concern that past participatory strategies used by the Society had failed to engage local stakeholders effectively.

There are important contextual conditions that need to be met in order to establish co-management that effectively partners multiple stakeholders while ‘sustainably’ managing contested resources. These include: developing clear legislation and policies concerning the goals, activities and outputs of co-management that are coordinated between government agencies, partner NGOs and donors (with local stakeholders’ input);

stipulating in the legislation the terms and conditions of local participation governing co-management agreements and institutions; creating a legally empowered central authority composed of stakeholder representatives at the national level to regulate the development, implementation, and evaluation of co-management activities and organizations; and establishing comprehensive training programs designed to work in partnership with the expertise of donors and those with experience in co-management from elsewhere in order to build the capacity of co-managers to mobilize such systems of shared governance (Buckles 1999; Christie 2000; Berkes, et al 2001; Pomeroy and Goetze 2003; Goetze 2004; McConney, et al 2004). Beyond these specific conditions, and equally important, are an overall vision and strategy.

In Belize, it is not unusual to find that community members simply do not know or understand the role of the co-managing organization vis-à-vis local MPAs. This is due in part to the challenge of distance and transportation, time constraints, or lack of interest that results in typically low user attendance at NGO public meetings. Such challenges of access and interest are not unique to Belize or to co-management scenarios. While users may recognize MPA boundaries and understand the rules and regulations regarding use, they are unclear on the role of the local organization charged with the authority to manage the resources of MPAs and regulate the activities of users (Himes 2005). This is particularly true where there is co-management, a term that is often poorly understood by users, and one that often does not actively integrate the expertise of these people in the decision-making, planning and implementation process. This is further complicated in contexts like Belize where the co-managing organization has yet to develop its capacity

to take on all management responsibilities, leaving government departments like Fisheries in a more dominant role in the co-management process, which can confuse users, who are unsure of where the authority over various activities lies. As such, information dissemination and active recruitment of stakeholders as resource experts must be undertaken as a priority action for local organizations involved in implementing MPA co-management in collaboration with community user groups.

The necessity for collaborative community-oriented education programs (i.e., delivered by both scientists and user groups) is related to the chronic crisis of confidence evident in stakeholders' perceptions of these organizations. As noted above, commonly held opinions of co-managing NGOs in Belize include viewing the organization as simply "another rule-maker", an institutional arm of government with little interest in local needs and a dismissive attitude towards users' knowledge, interests, and experience. The danger is that NGOs may be seen by community members in any or all of the following ways: an elite and exclusive circle oriented towards amassing personal wealth in the face of local poverty; as more concerned with externally defined conservationist agendas than the interests of local commercial and subsistence users; or as yet another interventionist project that will invariably fail, leaving community members with little to show for the time they invested as part of their involvement.

This is a central lesson to heed in developing effective co-management of MPAs: the importance of broadly building local stakeholders' confidence should not be underestimated. It is widely agreed in Belize that securing the active support of the people that access MPAs is essential to successful management of these areas (Azuela

2000, CZMAI 2000; Palacio 2002). Yet, actually investing the requisite time and energy in developing relations with the communities they represent is rarely taken on as a priority by managing organizations. It is undeniable that the process will likely prove time consuming and costly in terms of the need for repeated travel to various communities in order to undertake the multiple meetings, consultations, and informal visits that are critical to gaining the trust of a broad base of users and fostering local understanding and support of management activities beyond a few high-impact users.

It is, however, critical that co-managing NGOs place significant emphasis on building public confidence in their activities by developing positive, mutually engaging relations with these communities, including those which are located at a distance from the NGO's office. Developing a public education and awareness program in coordination with stakeholder representatives is a useful first step towards developing a dialogue-based relationship that will educate both communities and managers about MPA management issues. Put bluntly, building confidence between managing institutions and local users costs, but failed projects, poor management, and conflict with community stakeholders cost more.

Another critical lesson to be learned from the experience of implementing MPA co-management in Belize is the need for institutional mechanisms that provide clear demonstrations of transparency and accountability to community members. This is necessary at both the national and local levels of the management process, and is specifically related to the need for transparency in decision-making and financial accountability. These conditions are intrinsically related to the process of fostering

confidence among a broad base of local users. This process is here referred to as *inclusive partnership*.<sup>11</sup> The necessity of promoting partnership-as-transparent participation is of central importance to building effective cooperation between managers and users. This approach seeks a balance of stakeholders' voices and interests in the formulation and implementation of MPA management strategies. It provides local participants with the ability to see the connections between their needs and visions and the management objectives of the implementing organization. It also clearly presents the manner in which funds are dispensed in the name of managing and 'protecting' local resources. Such collaboration and accountability will be 'empowering' for local actors, such as fishers and tour guides, insofar as it acknowledges and mobilizes their significant control over the welfare of the resource(s) as primary users. In some cases, it may augment the leverage of users who traditionally have experienced low levels of direct influence in governance decisions that affect their lives.

On the other hand, this may appear 'disempowering' for managers who are accustomed to an exclusive, hierarchical monopoly of decision-making authority. Rather than naively seeking to create absolute equals out of the actors involved in collaborative resource governance, this approach recognizes that differences in power exist, and aims to mediate particular imbalances as they relate to stakeholders' competing agendas in the highly politicized arena of resource management by building new, mutually beneficial relationships. The process of 'sharing power' in NGO-directed co-management, then,

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<sup>11</sup> This understanding of partnership differs from other views that assume that 'partnership' is synonymous with 'equality of power' and therefore contest the plausibility of 'true' partnership taking place between governing institutions and their local constituents (see Goetze 1998)

takes place via the creation of inclusive partnerships based on the explicit recognition and engagement of existing forms of local knowledge and control, maximal transparency in decision-making, and accountability of financial dispensation. The challenge is to envision and strategize to create conditions for effective partnerships that broadly enhance local authority over resources within joint decision-making structures.

These lessons represent a summary of various experiences with MPA co-management in Belize. In many ways, these observations are relevant beyond the Belizean context, and a central objective here was to present managers of MPAs and actors involved in resource co-management elsewhere with a sense of the Belizean experience from which they may glean new strategies or solutions to challenges that they may find themselves faced with presently or in the future.

**PART TWO**

**(Re)Constructing Conservation in Placencia Village**

As Part One illustrated, in practice, co-management of marine resources in Belize functions largely through transnational CNGO support. CNGOs provide the vast majority of funding and managerial experience for co-management in Belize. Without such external support the management strategies that are a key component of these agreements could be neither developed nor implemented. CNGOs, however, are only one of the four key actors involved in the co-management of MPAs in Belize, the others being local communities, local co-managing NGOs, and state management agencies. Each group is characterized by a distinct set of needs and values, and their respective agendas interact in ways that produce both opportunities and challenges in terms of effectively co-managing MPAs. During my time in Placencia, it became clear that these agendas coalesce in a particular socio-cultural space occupied by the five communities that FON represents. It is in these localities that people must adapt to changes that accompany the declaration of MPAs and the subsequent creation of a local co-managing institution. The first half of the thesis focused more directly on the relationship between community members, the state, and FON. The second half further explores one community's experience of co-management by discussing the roles and interactions between CNGOs and the local resources users whose activities are directly affected by CNGO-funded FON projects.

The chapters that follow expand the understanding of FON co-management developed in Part One by shifting the evaluative gaze to focus on the discursive context with which community-based management of natural resources plays out in the implementation of such projects locally. Together, the chapters reveal the messiness of



the conservation process as it is directed toward and engaged by a key group of community 'participants', the fishers, in one village, Placencia. Taking inspiration from Ferguson's (1990) discursive analysis of development's planned social interventions, Part Two considers how conservation, like development, is mobilized as both an idea and an activity, a discourse and an intervention that shape and implement practices that produce significant social impacts in peoples' daily lives.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Fishers' Lives, Fishers Experiences**

*Elvis Leslie, Jr. is a young man who learned how to fish from his father, who is one of only a handful of fishers who do not supplement their income with tourism activities. Elvis Jr. himself is involved in dive guiding and is learning how to fly-fish in the interest of taking tourists out on day trips, a lucrative activity in Placencia. He is adamant that, though he is actively pursuing "what they call alternative economic activities", he is deeply attached to fishing as both a subsistence and commercial activity: "I support conservation, catch and release fishing, diving, and tour guiding. But I will never stop fishing Gladden Spit."*

#### **Introduction**

It is statements such as this one that I recorded in my fieldnotes in late 2003 that piqued my curiosity about the implications such views hold for the task of conserving marine resources and for MPA co-management in the FON area. According to many of the fishers and guides who spoke with me, both young and old, tour guiding is a more profitable livelihood than fishing, and it is also much easier work. Why, then, the repeated assertions like Elvis', that guiding would never fully replace fishing as an economic activity? And in what ways does such behaviour impact the conservation strategies that FON is attempting to implement and transnational donors support?

As described in Part One, FON was originally formed, and has since evolved, on the basis of local concern for protecting the local marine environment. Part of this strategy aims to promote the 'sustainable use' of marine resources through the reduction of fishing efforts in local waters. FON also places a strong emphasis on being community-

based, and recognizes the importance of meeting community needs. It prides itself on making great efforts to secure a high level of community representation via participation of local stakeholders on its Board of Directors and at community consultations.

FON staff and Board members expressed concern that management activities not disadvantage community members as a part of co-managing the two MPAs. This means that there is a desire to see that local users reap economic benefits from environmental protection. This aim is broadly supported by FON donors such as the national Coastal Zone Management Institute and Authority, the UNDP, The Nature Conservancy and World Wildlife Fund, and it manifests itself primarily through training programs for ‘alternative livelihoods’ directed at fishers in the FON area. Such projects aim, in large part, to transfer tour guiding skills, and in some cases, equipment, to fishers. This is hoped to reduce overfishing, identified in CNGO-sponsored research as one of the key threats to resources in the area (Heyman, et al 2001).<sup>1</sup> As fishing has been problematized as an activity that is not entirely compatible with some of the key conservation objectives of the MPAs, it is useful, if not crucial, to gain a sense of its role in the lives of the people FON represents and whose activities they are seeking to reorient.

Since Placencia has historically always been a fishing village and because it has by far the largest group of fishers actively accessing the resources of the MPAs out of FON’s five constituent villages (Perez 2000), this chapter focuses on the practice of fishing in this village. It reviews the history of fishing in Placencia, as well as current fishing practices in the village. The stories and views of four fishers from the village

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<sup>1</sup> CNGOs identification of overfishing as a threat to the marine environment in the FON area is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

provide an opportunity for understanding some of the lived experiences of fishers themselves, shedding light on the reasons why fishing is unlikely to be replaced by tour guiding activities. Hearing about fishing from their perspectives, it becomes clear that there is a *culture* of fishing, a culture that is reproduced by its practice. Being such a significant cultural activity, fishing informs the ontological framework of both full-time and occasional fishers in Placencia.

The objective here is to provide a sense of the relationship between fishers and the marine environment in Placencia. Understanding this reality is key, for it shapes the local context within which globally-oriented conservation interventions take place, where local and global agendas meet and, as the following chapters show, how they are negotiated.

### **“For as Long as I Remember”: A Brief History of Fishing in Placencia**

When people in Belize speak of Placencia, they often refer to it as a “traditional fishing village”. Indeed, Placencia’s “predominantly maritime orientation” (Palacio 2001:36) has existed for as long as villagers can remember, beginning with a focus on subsistence and trade to local markets, moving to a strong commercial export fishery, and eventually evolving into a mix of recreational and extractive fishing activities.

In Placencia, fishing for both subsistence and cash income has a long history. It dates back to the nineteenth century, generations before the development of the modernized commercial export fishery that now serves as a key element of Belize’s economy. Economic activities in the village included fishing, raising pigs, producing coconut oil, along with performing wage labour in sawmills and logging camps, often away from the village. In the late nineteenth century, both local and more distant logging camps and

agricultural plantations in Belize were “ready markets for fresh and corned fish” (ibid:37). Placencia was ideally located to supply a number of these and as a result, “its fishers with their families became early suppliers” (ibid:37). Fishers also traded fish for agricultural products with farmers in other area villages.

Originally, fishing was done using sailboats and small dug-out “dories”, a small surplus of fish beyond the subsistence needs of the community was produced for trade or sale outside the village. In those days, fishers went out on sailboats that carried small twelve or thirteen-foot dories with paddles for each of the six or seven crewmembers onboard. As described by some of the older fishers in Placencia, who themselves worked in sailboats when they began commercial fishing, these boats would average a week at sea. The crew set out early in the morning, anchored at “a good location”, and the crew would paddle out in their dories away from the main boat and dive all day from the dory. Around three in the afternoon they would return to the boat with their catch to clean it and then each one would weigh their individual catch, which the captain would record in a book. Every day the crew’s catch was weighed and recorded. When the boat came in to shore, each member’s catch was tallied and the captain paid himself a “boat share” for the use of his equipment. Crewmembers then also had to pay for the food, fuel and ice they took out at the Cooperative. The remainder of the money was theirs to keep.

In the early 1950s, the demand for shark meat in Guatemala, and the lucrative income it generated, sparked local fishers to focus part of their efforts on catching a species that was not locally popular; landing and processing sharks for their meat and oil was done

exclusively for foreign consumption.<sup>2</sup> Fishers also modified their boats, building bigger sailboats to take their catch to Guatemala. Later in the decade, the introduction of fiberglass boats, outboard motors and, into the 1960s, the consistent availability of ice along with the creation of fishing cooperatives revolutionized local fishing methods and the sale of local marine products. Many men no longer had to leave the village for several days at a time, living on the sailboat and working for its captain. With the advent of the Placencia Producer's Cooperative in 1962, fishers had access to loans with which they could purchase their own boats and motors, typically a twenty-three foot skiff with a forty horsepower motor. A "good producer" could pay off the cost of his boat in two or three years. Use of ice, together with the Cooperative's storage facilities meant that the demand for marine resources and local fishers' capacity to supply fish and profit from their production increased significantly. Furthermore, a new demand for lobster from the emerging middle class of post-war America created a new market for local marine products, shifting the focus of species capture.

In the late 1980s, tourism began to emerge as a dominant economic activity, and has, after less than two decades, supplanted commercial fishing as the most lucrative economic interaction with the marine environment. In terms of tourist activities, diving, snorkeling, and even fly-fishing to a certain extent, are the preferred domains of younger men in the village. Older men tend to engage in tourism activities that allow them to continue in a lifestyle that most closely resembles that of a full-time, or "traditional", fisher. As such they act mostly as deep-sea sport fishing guides and or conduct river

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<sup>2</sup> Palacio notes that shark meat bleached with salt in the sun fetched twenty-five cents per half kilogram, "the highest price paid for fish at that time" (2001:38).

tours, an activity that capitalizes on their knowledge of the local marine environment, and for which very little additional investment is required. Moreover, because the tourism season is from November to April, these guides can still capitalize on the lobster season, with the most important and productive months being from June until October. If business is slow in May and early June, they additionally have the option and opportunity to fish for snapper, which spawns at Gladden Spit at that time. In this sense, the tools and methods of production, and indeed, the lifestyle parameters, do not alter significantly between commercial fishing and tour guiding for these men.

### **Knowing the Sea: Current Fishing Practices in Placencia**

The primary target of the commercial export fishery in Placencia continues to be lobster, which is the most valuable marine product for fishermen to harvest.<sup>4</sup> Most fishers free-dive for lobster. This involves the use of a mask and a pole with a sharp hook on the end, used to pull the lobster out from under coral, which is their preferred habitat. While there are no explicit divisions of marine tenure among Placencia fishers, and fishers will often harvest scale fish in areas that are common knowledge, the pursuit of lobster operates under the rule of secrecy and the quality of a fisher's knowledge of the best lobstering "spots". Diving, however, is becoming more difficult as competition over the stock increases and men have to dive deeper for their catch.

This has led to the development of alternative harvesting methods and technologies, the most popular of which is the use of "shades", planks of corrugated tin or concrete that

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<sup>4</sup> On average, cooperatives in Belize pay six times more for lobster than for lintish, and over three times more for conch (Heyman and Graham 2000:17-18).

mimic the shelter of coral formations that lobster prefer. Shades can be placed in shallower waters, facilitating the process of diving. Other fishers use lobster traps, which are much easier to use, in terms of the effort required to harvest one's catch. Being obviously visible, though, traps do not meet the standard conditions of secrecy, and are easily transgressed by other fishers. The use of traps has also increased the incidence of conflict among fishers. Indeed, this is cited as a reason for some fishers avoiding the use of traps. Others note the incompatibility of the technology of both shades and traps with the geography of the marine environment around Placencia: "You can only set traps and use shades in certain areas cause of rocks, the rocky bottom here...and the water is deeper here... Here we have more rocks on the bottom and less grasses, and the banks here are too small to set traps."

Lobster is by far the marine resource most commonly targeted for extraction in the Placencia area, due in large part to its market value; and fishing for lobster is a relatively easy way to make "good money". Because it is also based on skill, in terms of a fisher's knowledge of good lobstering "spots", there is a competitive element to lobstering that may contribute to a fisher's social status among his peers and in the village: landing a significant catch of lobster during the season implies not only the degree of effort invested by a fisherman, but his superior knowledge of the sea. Diving for conch that hide among sea grass in flat, sandy areas is the next most commercially valuable species. Increasing scarcity, however, means that fishers have to dive in increasingly deep water. Many fishers suggest that the effort required to catch "a decent amount" of conch outweighs the income it may generate.



Last, in terms of market value are finfish, such as grouper and snapper. These are harvested primarily during the times at which they spawn at Gladden Spit, over the full moons from November to January (primarily grouper) and from April to June (primarily snapper).<sup>4</sup> Fish are caught using the local handline method: two or three hooks and a lead sinker are attached to nylon fishing line, baited with sardines or conch, and lowered into the sea, using an extended finger to maintain a “feel on the line”. A slight tug on the line indicates biting fish, and the hook is set with a quick tug, followed by the effort of hauling the fish into the boat. Many fishers wrap rubber inner tubes around their hands along the creases of their fingers to protect them from the weight of the fish on the line. Towards late afternoon, fishers return to their camp at Buttonwood Caye, a landing site much closer to Gladden Spit than Placencia. Here fish are cleaned and stored on ice. During the two weeks that fishers are “out on the reef”, the catch will be run into Placencia every few days by a member of the group, and fresh ice and other supplies will be brought back. While significantly less valuable than lobstering, harvesting scale fish at the SPAGs is the only available extractive activity outside the lobster season, which opens on June 15 and runs until February 14. Fishing the SPAGs allows fishermen to catch a significant amount of fish in a short space of time. As many villagers and fishers noted, it is the main means of survival for fishermen who are not involved in the tourist industry.

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<sup>4</sup> Of the sixteen spawning aggregation sites identified in Belize, all are considered “multi-species” sites, which may be dominated by one species, such as Nassau grouper, but several other species also spawn there at the same time (Heyman and Requena 2002:3). At Gladden Spit, researchers sighted up to eighteen different species of reef fish, including jacks, groupers, and snappers (ibid:19).

### **Fishers and Tourism: Stories, Experiences, Knowledge**

The fishers whose views are expressed below have all been fishing since they were children, the youngest for over two decades, and have been harvesting commercially since their teens. Eventually, they became involved in tourism as guides, but continued to fish despite the increased income derived from their tourism activities. The stories they tell are featured here with the aim of sharing their experiences and thoughts as fishers with established histories in tourism. The objective is not to suggest that this is ‘what fishers think’ generally in Placencia. Rather, it is more to give a sense of depth to the people who are commonly referred to in the literature and, indeed, in this dissertation, in the very general and abstract terms of ‘fishers’, ‘resource users’, or ‘local stakeholders’. The people conservation interventions typically aim to direct into purely non-extractive livelihoods. The ideas they share help to shed some light on the significance of fishing in Placencia as more than an economic pursuit, but as a lifeway that persists in the face of growing tourism opportunities.

#### *Villa Godfrey*

Now retired from producing for the Cooperative full-time, Villa Godfrey has been fishing for “forty or forty-five years, since I was a kid”. Most days he can be found chatting with friends and family outside the Cooperative or in the tour guide shop run by one of his sons, which is next door. Villa moved to Placencia, his family’s home, when he was twenty-one. His father was the lighthouse keeper and he used to go out to visit him every year for holidays. It was during those times that he learned to fish: “I

practiced...how to dive and how to fish. My father fished and he taught me while he was the lighthouse keeper". It is a way of life that he has passed on to his own children:

All of my kids fish. Six boys, all of them are into the tourist business. But they all fish. Everybody goes to fish when the tourists are not here. They do guiding, and fly fishing. They learned how right out on the caye here. I used to teach them. I had a sailboat. And I used to take them out and teach them.

In earlier times, Villa occasionally took tourists out to fish to supplement his income.

As most other fishers in Placencia, Villa has his own boat, but sometimes goes out in his friends' boats. Like others, too, he mostly fishes for lobster and conch in and around the cayes and on the banks inside the barrier reef. For grouper and snapper, he goes to Gladden Spit, outside the reef. He stays for several days, spending the nights camping on Buttonwood Caye with other fishers:

When I go to fish, there are three of us. My friend and Sonny and me, and sometimes his brother, sometimes we go out. Then we take ice with us in a big box, and then spend about three or four days fishing. Then we come in and sell it to the Co-op, and then we go back out again. We have been fishing together for a long time. Most guys fish with friends; they don't like to go by themselves.

I inquired further as to how he and his friends remember the best fishing locations:

We usually know. We know the spot where the fish they come up. Then we go there and fish.

*How do you know?*

(Laughs) Just, everybody knows.

*So people tell each other?*

Yeah. And they mark the spot by the cayes and so. And the mountains and so. We have our spots. But everybody goes there. It's not a secret. For lobster and conch it's different. Everybody have their own spot and they don't tell anybody.. I've got my rocks that I go to, I put my rocks there and the lobster go there. There are many spots to get lobster and conch.

He points out that much of this he learned from his father. He further explains that fishers know that the fish in the SPAGs at Gladden Spit lay their eggs on the full moon, “so you usually go either two days before the full of the moon or two days after the full of the moon, then they begin to bite”. He says that fish always spawn at “the point of the reef” because “the temperature is good...[and] where the current is moving, that’s where they choose”. Once out at the SPAGs, another method is used to find out if the fish are willing to take the bait: “We use glasses to spy them”. Fishers use diving masks and look overboard, and if they see that the fish are up off the bottom, going in circles, they will not bite; “but when they go down to the bottom and change their colours, then you know they’re going to bite”. For fish inside the reef, fishers work with the tide. When the tide is high they will bite, but not when the tide is low.

Villa then emphasizes how important it is to know “how to treat the sea” as well as how to harvest it. He offers the example of ensuring that empty conch shells are not discarded in the shallow waters of the banks, for it will discourage living conch from the area. He then adds, “lobster the same thing, you can’t clean them in the sea. But you can clean fish in the water.”

While talking to Villa, he often comes back to his concerns about the state of the fish stock in the waters he has fished for so long: “In the time that I have been fishing, fish are getting scarcer and scarcer. Everything. Conch and lobster too. I think that it’s overfishing. And we have a closed season, but people, from Honduras, come over and still fish it. They’re getting scarcer and scarcer”. In concluding he says that he supports the practice of conservation, and thinks that LBCNP has been good for regenerating the

fish stock in that area: “Right now they’re doing a good job, because there’s a lot of fish now around [Laughing Bird] caye. A lot of fish. You see them when people go there with the tourists. It’s useful”. Villa says he understands that MPAs are, in large part, there to protect the fish, lobster and conch around the cayes, and he has no problem with tourists using Laughing Bird Caye. He thinks this is a good thing for local employment. The problem he sees with MPAs is that “well, you can’t fish the area, you know? You have to go hunt the next area, which is hard”. Laughing Bird was a popular place to fish and camp, and now they have to go to fish at other cayes further out from the village.

#### *Egbert Cabral*

Egbert, or “Pow”, Cabral has been fishing for over twenty-five years. He learned how to fish from his father when he was nine years old, and began fishing as his work when he was eleven. At first he worked on a sailboat, and at seventeen he bought his first motorized boat with his own money. Pow entered the tourism business about fifteen years ago as a captain on a boat that operated between Belize and Guatemala. Now a deep-sea fishing guide, he lists the benefits of tourism being the amount of money he earns and the ease with which he earns it: “you work half as much for the same money”. He says there is less pressure as a tour guide and it protects the environment, through practicing catch and release fishing.

Since he has stopped fishing as his main form of income, Pow considers himself a full-time tour guide. Still, in the off-season he will dive for lobster because he enjoys it and it is a good way to supplement his income. He works with a friend, setting shades and then diving to get the lobster hiding under them. He says that each fisherman has one

or more rocks, “a special rock or spot” that they go to for lobstering. Some of the locations he uses were “laid down” by his father, but most of them he found and marked himself.

In recent years, Pow has noticed changes in the fish stock, largely with lobster and conch, noting that there are “less in all of them. You used to just pick them up. Now you have to work like a son-of-a-bitch to get something out there!” He believes that this change is due to more people harvesting these stocks as well as damage to the reef, which means less available habitat. He, like other fishers, says that putting conch shells back in the water discourages other conch from coming to that area, a practice undertaken largely by non-local fishers. He says that conch is overfished, and not sufficiently protected: “During the closed season, conch is still harvested by Honduran and Guatemalan fishers who come during the day and at night”.

Pow has no problem with the MPAs that have been declared in the area. He believes that Laughing Bird Caye was declared a protected area because there was a desire to develop it to attract tourism. He says that Laughing Bird used to be a good fishing ground, but he thinks that it is good for the community now, too. He is, however, against “taking any more of the reef”:

Half of the reef is already protected, and because it’s not fair... Protecting Gladden [Spit] is right down my alley. It’s doing a good thing for me as a tour guide. You close it to fishing and there’d be almost nothing left for the poor class of fishermen. Local fishermen are against closing Gladden because it’s the heart and soul of fishing down here.

*Elton Eiley*

Elton "Cagey" Eiley started fishing when he was a young boy. His uncle used to take him out fishing regularly, and after school and on weekends he and his school friends would fish in little dugout dories around the island near shore, catching lobster. They would then sell it for school money. Cagey began commercial fishing when he was sixteen (he is now forty-three). He was a member of a crew on a sailboat owned by another fisher, the captain. Since there was no tourism in the village at that time, during the lobster season the crew would stay on shore for only two or three days, then go out again.

Now Cagey has his own boat, and he currently uses it mostly for tour guiding, which he started doing about twenty years ago, giving river, snorkeling, and deep sea fishing tours. His main tour is the river tour in Monkey River, but his favourite tour involves fishing:

I take tourists trolling and bottom fishing out on the reef, near the drop off. I have regulars who return to go fishing with me... I like it cause there's a lot of excitement in it, you know. Especially if it goes out and you know you've hooked up on a big fish. It's a lot of excitement. It's nice, you know? That's what I like.

He continues to fish for lobster and snapper when the tourism season is slow. While he used to fish with a partner, now he prefers to fish on his own. To catch lobster, he uses shades made from corrugated tin that he puts in areas with grassy bottoms in about forty feet of water. He explains, "I don't want to put it in shallower water because then other guys might steal your catch under your shade". Using only a mask and fins he routinely dives to sixty feet to get his catch. He says that in the days he worked the sailboats they used to catch lobster in four or five feet of water, "but the product are getting scarce

now!” He describes how this has created greater competition for lobster, telling how he has had to confront other fishers because it was clear that they were diving his shades. “Since there is no coral in the area... You start off with a strong warning, and tell him that the next time it will be very serious so it’s best to stay out of my area”.

Cagey laments that fishing is getting more difficult “because now you have all these fishermen come from up north, from Belize City, Caye Caulker, San Pedro, Sarteneja they come and clean out the reef... There are so many more fishermen now than before”. He notes that “guys from Honduras and Guatemala” also come over to fish for “whatever they find” then they take it back to their own countries, so both the local fishers and the Cooperative suffer these losses. He says they do not respect the closed season: “And that’s the time when you should patrol, when the season is off so that they could protect all the lobster from going out of the country.”

#### *Anthony Eiley*

Tony Eiley has been involved in tourism “off and on since 1962”. He said he got into it after Hurricane Hattie hit Belize in 1961, “when there wasn’t much to do” in the Placencia area. At that time, a friend in the village introduced him to a man who brought houseboats from Cuba and bought property in the Placencia area. He says his story is not uncommon: “a lot of the older guys in the village have been working in tourism since the late 50s and early 60s”. He himself does mostly fishing and snorkeling trips. When asked what he enjoys about being a tour guide, he says, “I know that there is much to be made from tourism”. He comments that the work is easier than fishing full-time. He later adds: “I work for the money right now, to be honest with you,” though he insists that he also



enjoys meeting and befriending the different people who go on his trips. Tony noticed a decline in the fish stock in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He attributes this largely to Guatemalans and Hondurans “poaching lobster and conch”. As a result, he says, interest in tourism has expanded in the village: “It’s hard to make a living from fishing right now. Tourism is part of people diversifying and the money is much easier.”

Despite his success in tourism, Tony still engages in commercial fishing. What fish he catches he mostly sells on his own, while the lobster and conch he sells to the coop. For the most part he uses traps to catch lobster. He currently has a few traps and says he intends to get more for the upcoming season, because the tourism season is almost over. He says he only dives for lobster at the beginning of the season when they are abundant and in more shallow water, “like thirty feet or so”. He shares his scale fish catch with mostly family, a tradition that started with his father, and noted that he shared his catch with the whole village after Hurricane Iris devastated Placencia in late 2001. He prefers to go lobster fishing alone “because I don’t want people to know my spots”, the places where the “good rocks” are located. As he explains it, all the fishers have what they call their “secret spots” for diving. With traps, however, each person has a clear area where they have set their traps, so there is little need, or capacity, for secrecy.

Tony believes that declaring Laughing Bird Caye a protected area was a good thing:

Now that part for conservation, that is ok, because Laughing Bird Caye is really beautiful. For tourism, it is ideal... The life is going to come back to the area, and the conch and fish are going to move out of that area. And there’s lots for people to see.

Before the park came along, it was mostly used for conch fishing. He describes how it used to be a popularly fished conch bed, that it was not fished much for scale fish or

lobster “because there are too many large rocks around for that”. He suggests that “there weren’t really any objections” to closing the Laughing Bird area from village fishers because more lucrative lobster were not easily harvested there. He adds, however, that he feels closing more fishing grounds in other MPAs would be putting too much pressure on fishers:

People have kids to send to school, they have to mind their children. And fishermen aren’t farmers, they’re fishermen. And they’ll die a fisherman. You know the tourist season helps a little bit by not being out there everyday catching fish or whatever. But what happens when the tourist season closes? You gotta find a way to make a living! I mean, we live along the coast, we don’t live back in the wilderness there where they do farming. We live along the coast, and you’re not gonna get anybody to go back there to do farming. That’s not gonna work.

### **Lifeways of the Sea: The Culture of Fishing in Placencia**

What became clear in my conversations with these fishers and others was that their knowledge of the sea is profound and, as is made clear in their thoughts presented above, their understanding of the term ‘fisherman’ goes beyond that of an economic activity. As many of them noted, fishing is hard work, harder than giving tours. In fact, for many fishers in Placencia, tourism is the preferred economic activity. From an economic perspective, fishing could be described as a way of assuring a level of income security in times when tourism is less profitable. Yet, even when fishers describe themselves as being retired, their fishing activities do not stop. Together with the insights shared by other fishers, the importance of fishing as a significant *cultural* component in addition to its economic role began to emerge.

Being one of the oldest fishing villages in Belize, the practice and knowledge of harvesting the resources of the sea is omnipresent in daily life in Placencia. The

Cooperative is not only a key economic institution; it is also one of the main social hubs in the village. Older men who no longer fish regularly gather outside the “Co-op” every morning to socialize and observe the goings-on in the main dock area. People routinely gather around the main dock while a fisher is cleaning, and often distributing, his catch. One of the most anticipated events in the village is the annual Lobster Fest fishing competition, where knowledge and skills are applied in pursuing the reward of catching the largest fish, among several other categories of prizes. In this sense, Placencia is representative of Palacio’s statement concerning the significance of fishing in the South:

The culture of artisanal fishing prevails throughout Southern Belize. To the fishers, the handline, cast net, the outboard motor with its quirks, the license they have to pay to the government, the behaviour of fish at the drops, dealing with their customers, and contending with the new focus on marine protected areas - all of these are a matter of day to day life (2001:25).

As the dominant activity of daily life over generations, fishing informs and influences the social fabric of the village, and as such represents a significant cultural framework for people and events. This is the context within which conservation projects operate.

The stories told above reflect the fact that men are the principle commercial and subsistence fishers in Placencia. In practice, however, fishing is an activity done by all members of the community, including women and children. About ten women in the village fish off the point regularly. Indeed, they “love to fish,” according to Tony Ealey. Rosenda Leslie, along with her husband, Lennox and his four brothers, fishes commercially full-time. While she is now the only woman who fishes full-time, she tells of half a dozen or more women who did so in the past. One of these women, Celia, who

is now in her seventies, notes that it was “not so unusual” for women to fish, and they were respected and valued as “good fishers” in the village.

Similar to the patterns of their fathers, mothers, and grandparents, village children, albeit mostly boys, continue to learn to fish at a young age. Children will typically accompany fishers on short trips out to the cayes to fish. As Villa Godfrey noted earlier, this is how his sons learned to fish, and his sons are now seen taking their own sons out on their boats when they are not guiding clients. Children can often be seen fishing off docks with both their parents or unaccompanied, the latter being more common as they grow older. Sighting an old dory in the lagoon filled with boys diving into the water or using handlines is not unusual.

Placencia is a village whose predominantly Creole inhabitants originate from a few families. The extensive intermarriage of these families has produced complex kinship ties within the community. Fishing serves to maintain these kinship relations through various means. Part of a fishers’ catch is routinely distributed to nuclear and extended family members, and often to close friends. As Villa Godfrey explains, “sometimes you give your friend a bara, or so, you know, a barracuda. You might also give them grouper or snapper. You mostly give it to your family, like my daughter, or so”. Similarly, the transference of knowledge of the sea from parents and grandparents to children, something that is done via both men and women, is an important activity between family members. Laurence Leslie described how he learned about several of his secret lobstering spots from his father, and he would only share these with his son, as a way of “passing down the information for the means to a livelihood”. The seasonal camping on



Buttonwood Caye during the spawning aggregation harvesting is a predictable and highly anticipated annual gathering of fishers, some of whose families accompany them for these weeks. Indeed, the extensive family network of the Leslie family, the six brothers of which are known as among the best fishers in the area, occupy a large portion of the caye in the spring when snappers spawn. It is not only the full-time fishers who harvest the SPAGs and camp on Buttonwood; fishers who work as tour guides also set out to Gladden, usually for a shorter period of time, staying only a night or two, then returning with their catch to the village.

Fishing also serves to strengthen and maintain other social relations. As told in the stories above, men often go handline fishing, and occasionally fishing for lobster and conch, with a particular partner or two. These partners are often long-standing friends or family members. The women who regularly fish from the beach typically are in a group of three or more and include both friends and family spanning three generations. Going “out to the cayes” to handline fish with friends is a popular recreational activity that brings together nuclear and extended families, long-standing and more recent friends, visitors and villagers.

As people often told me, fishing is as much a social activity as it is a way of making money or getting food. It also plays a part in defining one’s social identity in the village. In many ways, fishing determines a man’s status in the community and his relation to others: who is a “good” fisher, who is a “traditional” fisher, who is a “good producer” are all descriptors that are used to define part of the space a person occupies within the social fabric of the village. As one fisher stated, “I know my place in the food chain”. As a full-

time tour guide, he says he is now viewed by those who continue to fish commercially as “having made my money”, as having no need to fish. In order to credibly attend a meeting of village fishers, he would need an invitation: “So, I’m out of the loop in many ways”. In this sense, there is an internal hierarchy of status, rights, and influence among area fishers that is related not only to ability but also to effort, production, and necessity.

Those who fish when tourism is slow may be “good” fishers, and they are considered “real” fishers, but they are ranked lower in terms of the legitimacy of their claims concerning fishing. Interestingly, fishers from Northern Belize who also fish in the waters around Placencia, are described as “farmers in boats”. “They are not men of the sea,” according to Lennox Leslie. As such, they are without the requisite knowledge, experience and, in turn, right to harvest in the area.

Fishers in Placencia clearly hold a sense of ownership, or stewardship, over the local marine environment. Because it is the source of their livelihoods, the means by which they feed their families, send their kids to school, pay for medicine, the sea and its resources are critical elements of survival. There is a sense of who should and should not be allowed to fish in what they commonly refer to as “our area”. Given this perspective, local fishers view fishers from “the North” with resentment. They resent the presence of northern fishers in what they call “our area” to fish because they have fished out their own grounds, and they are upset that “Northerners” do not understand how to care for the sea, so they engage in damaging fishing practices. Furthermore, local fishers are angered by the fact that this, together with the sophisticated equipment they use and their growing numbers, are endangering the livelihoods of local fishermen.



While they begrudge other Belizean fishers they are contemptuous of those from Honduras and Guatemala whom they see using illegal gear and fishing at night, activities that they view as “stealing” from local fishers. Laurence Leslie argues that there is a need to protect “our fishing areas to keep out the foreigners,” which includes Belizeans from the North, “or they will come in before the season opens to get the conch before you can”. He describes how these “foreign” fishers work one area several days in a row, which locals “would never do”.

We let an area rest before we go back to it again. We rotate diving areas for lobster. Both the Sartenega guys and the Hondurans work in the same areas for days on end, clearing out an area before they move on. It’s something that they’ve done from the beginning and has never been good for the fishery... They are farmers that come out on the sea and they break the coral and such. And this has a lot to do with the life of the lobster. They throw conch shells back into the sea on the banks and this is not a good thing. In my experience I’ve seen areas where shells were thrown in ten years back and still no conch have returned to the area. It’s ok to throw them into the deep areas of the sea, but not on the banks.

He says that this shows that these “foreign” fishers do not know about the sea, that they do not come from a fishing background, where their “forefathers were fishermen”. Villa Godfrey agrees: “The people from up north throw the conch shells back on the banks. Some of them are farmers and they don’t know about the sea, they don’t know. But we’re raised up on the sea, so we know”. Tony Eiley sums this perspective up in his assertion that “you cannot take a fisherman and put him to do farming. You cannot take a farmer out to do fishing.” Other fishers in the village shared these sentiments and hold a similarly critical posture towards non-local fishers, suggesting that village fishers share a conceptual hierarchy of rights to access and harvest the waters in the Placencia region.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that, in Placencia, fishing is not just an economic income *activity* that people *do*; rather, they *are* fishers. Even the men who are full-time tour guides describe themselves first as “fishermen”. Fishing is not merely work that is done as a job; it is work that is a *livelihood*, part of a lifestyle people in the village continue to actively choose, one that incorporates and sustains and mobilizes a rich body of knowledge and networks of reciprocal familial and non-familial relationships. In short, it is a *way of being*, a way of living in the world.

The Placencian fishers I spoke to are aware of the benefits they accrue from their marine activities, and are supportive, demanding even, of improved management of marine resources. They say that this should not come, however, without reference to their own needs, uses, interests, and knowledge in relation to coastal areas. Being acknowledged and involved in the management of the areas on which they depend for their livelihoods is a central concern. A key addition, and the point that this chapter seeks to highlight, is that understanding and respecting the connection of fishing to individual and collective cultural identity is critical when addressing resource issues that involve shifts in people’s harvesting activities.

As will be seen more clearly in the following chapters, the experience of these fishers and others illustrates that many conservation organizations have yet to recognize this reality. The programmatic initiatives that transnational CNGOs formulate within their organizations and the interventions they identify as solutions to resource threats in the



MPAs reflect this failure. As such, they have met with resistance, and are unlikely to meet the conservation expectations of the fishers or the objectives for the MPAs.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **Conservation Thinking: The Conceptual Framework of Planned Ecological Interventions**

*World Wildlife Fund Saving the Last Great Wild Places: Conservation begins with saving real places - the forests and deserts, rivers and wetlands, mangroves and coral reefs that make up the web of life. But the quickening destruction of habitats and the limited resources available for their protection require establishing clear priorities among places the world must work to save. To guide this undertaking, WWF scientists developed a roadmap known as the Global 200, a scientific ranking of more than 200 critical terrestrial, freshwater, and marine habitats - areas that we must protect if we are to preserve the web of life. (<http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildplaces/index.cfm>)*

*We [at The Nature Conservancy] have developed a strategic, science-based planning process, called Conservation by Design, which helps us identify the highest-priority places – landscapes and seascapes that, if conserved, promise to ensure biodiversity over the long term. In other words, Conservation by Design allows us to achieve meaningful, lasting conservation results. Worldwide, there will be thousands of these precious places. Taken together, they form something extraordinary: a vision of conservation success and a roadmap for getting there – the Conservation Blueprint. Simply put, by protecting and managing these Last Great Places over the long term, we can secure the future of the natural world. (<http://nature.org/aboutus/howwework>)*

*Conservation International believes that the Earth's natural heritage must be maintained if future generations are to thrive spiritually, culturally and economically ... CI applies innovations in science, economics, policy and community participation to protect the Earth's richest regions of plant and animal diversity in the hotspots, major tropical wilderness areas and key marine ecosystems. (<http://www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/about>)*

#### **Introduction**

The involvement of U.S.-based transnational CNGOs among the key actors in the co-management of MPAs in Belize prompts important questions about the agendas, understandings, and responsibilities that these organizations bring to the process of

managing natural resources in mostly foreign countries. What ideas about natural resources inform such projects of interventionist conservation? What is the conceptual ‘thinking’ behind the initiatives that are designed and the objectives that they aspire to fulfill? What are the assumptions upon which this framework rests? What are the implications of introducing these concepts and agendas into diverse local settings? Such questions are pressing because CNGOs are often the initiators of protected areas declarations throughout the developing world, and receive a significant portion of the financial support for these projects from development agencies.<sup>1</sup> The obvious and growing link between conservation and development activities mirrors the similar ways in which organizations formulate and justify their projects: both are in the business of benign intervention.

Addressing questions concerning the process by which CNGOs imagine and implement their programs drew my attention to the ways in which conservation ‘problems’ were defined, and how that, in turn, informed the ‘solutions’ that were identified. This process of conservation’s discursive construction echoes Ferguson’s perspective on development as an unquestioned “central organizing concept” (1990:xiii). Development interventions proceeded for decades as a seemingly natural activity without concern for the assumptions at its normative core. Development was conceptually taken for granted, one of modernity’s grand narratives, as Lyotard (1986) termed the similarly

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, when it began in 1990, fully half of The Nature Conservancy’s *Parks in Peril* program was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Development agencies have also themselves promoted the creation of protected areas as part of regional development projects. For instance, in 1983, USAID funded the establishment of Yanachaga-Chemillen National Park in Peru (Brandon, et al 1998).



accepted conceptions of science. Very much as Lyotard engaged science, the critiques of development that followed Ferguson's analysis in the 1990s revealed how development served to justify its own existence, purpose, and activities through the epistemological production and reproduction of its object, an 'underdeveloped world' (Esteva 1992; Sachs 1992; Escobar 1995; Fagan 1999).

The purpose of this chapter is to call the accepted dominant conceptual framework of conservation to a similar challenge, using similar methodology: discourse analysis. Much like established anthropological critiques of development, this analysis is less concerned with defining what conservation *is*, and more interested with revealing what it *does*: what assumptions underlie the concept, how the concept interacts with institutional planning and action, and what results from the exchange in communities.

Certainly, the idea of conservation has been critically engaged in the literature. Critiques have taken up the concept's historical roots in empirical, and later state, expansion (Griffiths and Robin 1997; Spence 1999), its Westernized construction of nature (Cronon 1996a; Whiston Sprin 1996), and its coupling of science and morality (Hays 1969; Worster 1994). What is less clear is the mechanism by which conservation discourse functions to justify and legitimate the international interventions of powerful CNGOs. Areas in the developing world are increasingly the target of CNGOs' global campaigns and, as Ferguson noted of development, conservation projects have worrisome outcomes, particularly in relation to the status of local resource users within the problematic.

My analysis here considers the qualities of conservation discourse as an accepted globalized conceptual framework with which local peoples, such as fishers in Placencia, must deal when conservation measures, like MPAs, are introduced into their lives. The question of how fishers *receive* and *engage* this framework when conservation initiatives such as MPA zoning and use regulations are implemented is taken up in the next chapter.

### **The Power of Language: Intervention and the Process of Discursive Construction**

Using discourse analysis to mount the challenge to conservation takes its inspiration from two sources. Methodologically, this approach deploys Foucault's (1971, 1973, 1979, 1991) systematic consideration of how language operates to assert power by acting as the means to the construction and reconstruction of knowledge and social experience. While rhetoric may obfuscate issues, as Foucault revealed, discourse has tangible effects in reality, for it is a structured practice.

Secondly, the analysis emerged out of deconstructionist critiques of development that pay homage to Foucault's project in focusing on the central role language plays in entrenching and perpetuating the hegemonic productions that emerge from the epistemological constructions of bureaucrats, consultants, and other actors informing and formulating development's social interventions. Two seminal works directed this critical lens at the constructions and outcomes of the idea and practice of development: Ferguson's *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development,' Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (1990), and Escobar's *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (1995). Both works link discursive creations to non-discursive effects, and in exposing the discourse-practice connection, they reveal the

determinative linkage between institutions' epistemological production and social realities in communities.

Ferguson applies his deconstruction of development to an aid project in Lesotho. He begins by suggesting that development acts as a dominant concept, a "central, unquestioned value" that establishes an "interpretive grid" through which development discourse is organized (1990:xiii). His aim is to understand and illustrate what development does, in terms of the real social effects of the ideas generated by development agencies and 'experts'.

In doing so, Ferguson argues that development institutions such as the World Bank and the Canadian International Development Agency generate discourse, and that this discourse objectifies a 'less developed other' through building a particular structure of knowledge around them, which then informs, organizes and justifies subsequent interventions (reference!). In the case of Lesotho, discursively constructed as a Less Developed Country with problems the transnational agencies were well equipped to solve, the failure of the Thaba-Tseka Development Project to meet planned objectives did not stop it from being renewed, nor did it mean the absence of achievement. Rather, the project's unintended consequences are of greatest interest: discourses informed the project's design; the project justified agency intervention; its failure meant there was still a need for a revised project; and it simultaneously expanded and entrenched bureaucratic state power while depoliticizing the economic, political, and social contexts within which the complex causes of 'underdevelopment' are manifest. Development is reduced to process that addresses a series of technical problems. As "the anti-politics machine",



development discourse denies the politics of intervention, of the state, and of poverty, as well as the politics of bureaucratic expansion (ibid:254). Ultimately, Ferguson argues, these “instrument effects” represent “a particular kind of exercise of power” by both opening up areas to bureaucratic control and through the indirect discursive control of defining the problem and its solution (ibid:274).

Based on research in Columbia, Escobar’s critique of development in many ways echoes Ferguson’s analysis. For Escobar, underdevelopment is a category created by developers that informed the structuring of problems and identities for which development is the solution, a solution that serves Western interests, facilitates the exercise of power, and perpetuates Western domination. Development discourse, he argues, has been “the central and most ubiquitous operator of the politics of representation and identity in much of Asia, Africa, and Latin America” for over five decades (1995:214). In controlling the definition of particular peoples’ problems to suit and justify Western intervention, development discourse operates as politically informed epistemological production that effectively creates and controls the people of a constructed Third World. Escobar’s critical gaze is differently focused from Ferguson’s, however. He speaks of the discursive construction of an entire geographic region and its effects on both the practices of institutions and on the people who encounter them, suggesting that institutions’ representations attempt to control peoples’ identities as well as the material conditions in which they live. Escobar emphasizes the agency of recipients who, rather than passively incorporating received constructions, actively resist the dichotomization of their identity as “traditional” to the West’s “modern”, so that

development is also a forum of “cultural contestation” (1995:15). Development, therefore, is a cultural project as well as a political process.

These analyses proved critical to providing a more sophisticated perspective on development processes and outcomes, moving beyond the issue of ideology and away from denouncing the specific structures and failures of development projects. Indeed, Ferguson explicitly resists labeling development as being either ‘true’ or ‘false’ and, by association then, ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (1990:xv).<sup>2</sup> Introducing an anthropological perspective to discourse analysis revealed how development discourse is structured by particular socio-cultural and institutional contexts. Both works shifted the anthropological critique of development toward an uncovering and understanding of the issues of external control, postcolonial imperialism, and unequal power relations that formed the basis of the development encounter. By incorporating existing social theory into ethnographic analysis of development contexts and connecting prevailing development discourse to institutional practice, Ferguson and Escobar moved the debate concerning development towards a consideration of the ways in which epistemological construction of the Un(der)developed Other structures the social reality of these encounters.

Taken together, these arguments provide an intriguing perspective on the power of discourse as manifest in the process of planned intervention. To summarize: The process of discursive construction is an exercise in power on several levels. It is an interpretive procedure that controls the identification and definition of first, the problem and second,

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<sup>2</sup> Ideology had been the locus of much of the critique of development since the 1970s, and was particularly favoured by Latin American dependency theorists (see Peet and Watts 1993; Gardner and Lewis 1996 for discussions).



its solution. It is powerful in that it controls the way a situation is understood; it is the manufacture of an epistemological monopoly of a particular aspect of social reality. This begets a specifically objectified target for intervention that justifies a specific type of intervention that requires a specifically qualified intervener. In delivering the solution, the *effects* of this conceptual production take shape in ways obscured by the framework and unpredicted by some of its agents. The question of whether these outcomes are good or bad is less relevant than whether they are useful or not. This depends on one's position in the process as either intervener, government, or recipient, as well as on both the stated purpose of the project and the implicit objective of the intervention. The matter of success is secondary to the continued attempt to assure the achievement of the objective, which is discursively controlled by the interveners themselves. The image that emerges is that of an efficient discursive feedback loop which assures the perpetual need for new forms of intervention. In the following analysis of the discourse and practices of transnational conservation interventions, I focus on applying Ferguson's analysis in which he highlights the connections between development's discursive construction and the design and implementation of institutional programs by development agencies.

### **Intervention at Work: The Conservation Industry**

As is the case with development, conservation's interventions are formulated and forwarded by an institutional industry; thousands of small local, national, and regional NGOs, several sizeable transnational NGOs, various bilateral and multilateral donors, and myriad consultants, are all busily planning, funding, implementing, and evaluating conservation efforts around the world (Princen and Finger 1994; Conca 1996; Wapner

1996; Young 1997; Liftin 1998; Bryner 2004). A broad range of research illustrates how NGOs, as members of a new global civil society, have come to wield a significant degree of leverage as local, national, regional, and global level actors, and transnational CNGOs are among the most influential (Falk 1995; Weiss and Gordenker 1996; Fisher 1997; Meidinger 2000; Lipschutz and Fogel 2002; Hall and Biersteker 2002; Held and McGrew 2002; Chapin 2004). The expanding role of NGOs in general complements the growing presence of CNGOs. The structures and operations of these increasingly ubiquitous ‘non-governmental’ bureaucracies and their capacity to influence power relations via transnational intervention warrants close attention, much like that previously directed toward bilateral and multilateral development agencies (Edwards 1996; Sogge 1996; Nyamugasira 1998; Wapner 1998; Biekart 1999; Steans 2002; Woods 2002).

Unlike the development industry, CNGOs are not beholden to the economic status of a state in mobilizing their eco-interventions; they flourish in countries considered wealthy as much as in ones that are seen as poor. In fact, CNGOs often designed their early initiatives for implementation in countries in North America and Europe. Among the most active global conservation institutions, World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International, and The Nature Conservancy were all founded in industrialized states, and are presently headquartered, managed, and largely dependent on financing mechanisms in developed countries, from which they launch their respective interventions (Chapin 2004).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The ‘worldwide’ offices of The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International and World Wildlife Fund U.S. are all located in the Washington, D.C. area. The headquarters for World Wildlife Fund International is located in Gland, Switzerland.



Claiming to be “the largest privately financed international conservation organization in the world,” World Wildlife Fund (WWF) was founded in Switzerland in 1961, for the purpose of coordinating the programs of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature ([www.worldwildlife.org/about/history.cfm](http://www.worldwildlife.org/about/history.cfm)). From a small organization, WWF International grew to include a global network of regional offices in over one hundred countries. The organization pioneered “the two most important financial mechanisms in conservation today:” debt-for-nature swaps (1987 with Ecuador) and conservation trust funds (1991 in Bhutan) (<http://www.worldwildlife.org/about/history.cfm>).<sup>4</sup> According to WWF, these two financing strategies have netted more than USD \$1 billion for conservation globally, \$200 million of which was leveraged by WWF itself. WWF also raises funds through various “market transformation initiatives” that encourage industry “to create market incentives for responsibly managed resources,” such as certification for forest and marine products ([www.worldwildlife.org/conservationfinance/](http://www.worldwildlife.org/conservationfinance/)).

The American branch is now operated independently from WWF International, and itself funds and runs projects in dozens of countries around the world, partnering with numerous governments in developing areas, as well as the World Bank, in its global

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<sup>4</sup> Trusts are financial assets managed by an independent board of directors or trustees. By law, they are restricted to use for a particular purpose, and must remain apart from other financial sources. They may take a variety of institutional forms, such as non-profit corporations or private foundations, depending on the legal system under which they are established ([www.worldwildlife.org/conservationfinance/trustfunds.cfm](http://www.worldwildlife.org/conservationfinance/trustfunds.cfm)). Since WWF made its initial investment of USD \$1 million in 1991, the trust in Bhutan has grown to over \$35 million. The fund is being used to “train Bhutanese scientists and park guards, develop alternative livelihoods, and protect and replant forests” ([www.worldwildlife.org/about/history.cfm](http://www.worldwildlife.org/about/history.cfm)).

operations. (<http://www.worldwildlife.org/about/history.cfm>).<sup>5</sup> According to its 2004 Annual Report, WWF U.S. controlled USD \$169 million in net assets, of which over eighty per cent was spent on conservation programs (WWF 2004:37). The organization boasts over one million members who provide a significant percentage of WWF's funding, over half of the nearly \$56 million contributed in 2004, which also included sizable donations from foundations, and far less substantial contributions from corporations (WWF 2004:37).<sup>6</sup> A Board of Directors is responsible for WWF's policies and programs and provides advice to staff on both policy and operational issues. The Board includes a range of members from scholars, lawyers and activists to executives of several private corporations, who are elected for three-year terms. Directors are meant to reflect "a broad range of scientific and other expertise" and have "a strong and demonstrated commitment of nature conservation," in addition to observing and annually signing WWF's conflict of interest policy ([www.worldwildlife.org/about/boardlist.cfm](http://www.worldwildlife.org/about/boardlist.cfm)).

Conservation International (CI) was established in 1987 when, due to internal conflict, most of the staff of TNC's international program left to form their own organization. In 1989, a group of WWF staff joined the organization, which then quickly grew as the result of a well-developed fundraising approach (Chapin 2004:18). CI operates primarily in developing areas, running projects in forty-four countries in Asia,

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<sup>5</sup> Because WWF U.S. is more actively engaged in marine conservation in Belize, it is the subject of this chapter's analysis. WWF is used here to refer to the U.S. branch of the organization unless otherwise stipulated.

<sup>6</sup> Member donations totaled USD \$29 million in 2004. Other contributions included \$15.2 million from "major donors", \$9 million from foundations, and 2.7 million from corporations, including 326 companies that matched the contributions of WWF members and other donors (WWF 2004:37, 65). The organization also received income from other sources, including \$8.7 million from WWF Network organizations, \$27 million from government grants and contracts (WWF 2004:37).



Africa, Latin America and the Pacific (<http://www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/regions>). In 2004, CI's operating revenue totaled USD \$92.2 million, fifty-one per cent of which came from foundations, with twenty-four percent coming from governments, NGOs and multilateral donors, and sixteen per cent from individuals (Conservation International 2004:23).<sup>7</sup> The organization spent eighty-five per cent of its revenue on global conservation projects, almost one quarter through its Conservation Funding Division, which finances conservation initiatives by NGOs, communities, and the private sector (Conservation International 2004:22). The Division includes three mechanism for financing projects: the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund; the Global Conservation Fund; and Verde Ventures.<sup>8</sup> All are underwritten by CI, which controls over \$194 million in net assets, and are supported by a spectrum of partners including the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility, government-sponsored development agencies in industrialized states, private foundations, and several international finance corporations (Conservation International 2004:19, 22).<sup>9</sup>

Much like WWF, CI is managed by a Board of Directors, which includes private individuals, academics, and corporate executives, but the majority of CI's Board is

<sup>7</sup> The rest of its revenue came from corporations (eight percent), and investments (one per cent) (Conservation International 2004:23). In neither its annual report nor on its website does CI provide information on the number of members supporting the organization.

<sup>8</sup> The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund provides funding and technical assistance to civil society groups such as NGOs and community groups that are working "to help safeguard Earth's biodiversity hotspots" ([http://www.cepf.net/xp/cepf/about\\_cepf/index.xml](http://www.cepf.net/xp/cepf/about_cepf/index.xml)). The Global Conservation fund finances "the creation, expansion and long-term management of protected areas in the world's biodiversity hotspots" (<http://www.conservation.org/xp/gcf/about/>). Verde Ventures provides financial support to conservation-oriented small businesses in 'priority areas' in which CI works (<http://www.conservation.org/xp/verdeventures/>).

<sup>9</sup> Established in 1991, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) is an independent financial organization that provides grants to developing countries for projects that benefit the global environment and promote sustainable livelihoods in local communities. Over thirty countries fund the Facility, whose projects are implemented by three agencies: the UN Environment Programme, the UN Development programme and the World Bank ([http://www.gefweb.org/What\\_is\\_the\\_GEF/what\\_is\\_the\\_gef.html](http://www.gefweb.org/What_is_the_GEF/what_is_the_gef.html)).

composed of the latter. This is suggestive of CI's approach to pursuing its global conservation initiatives through "strategic partnerships": "forging partnerships with leaders in government, business and communities is essential to accomplishing our goals, and we continue to mobilize key partners to pursue our conservation objectives" (<http://www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/strategies/partnerships/>).

One of the key ways CI pursues these partnerships is through The Center for Environmental Leadership in Business. CI and the Ford Motor Company established the Centre to engage the international private sector in designing solutions to critical global environmental problems to which industry contributes. The Centre works globally and locally with thirty-four corporate partners, including McDonald's, Shell, Weyerhaeuser, and BP, to mitigate industries' "ecological footprints", formulate corporate conservation policies, and invest in conservation programs (<http://www.celb.org/xp/CELB/strategies/>).<sup>10</sup> According to the Centre's website, such partnerships are "essential to ensure that conservation solutions are viable and replicable and have buy-in at both business unit and corporate levels" (<http://www.celb.org/xp/CELB/about/>).

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) began in the U.S. as the Ecologists Union, a small group of scientists advocating for the preservation of natural areas in 1946. Changing its name to The Nature Conservancy in 1950, the organization focused on acquiring conservation easements, by which lands remain privately owned but are managed by TNC. The Conservancy soon grew to include offices across the U.S. and launched its

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<sup>10</sup> For example, CI launched a turtle conservation project in Cambodia funded by the BP Conservation Programme (BPCP), a partnership of CI, Fauna and Flora International, BirdLife International, the Wildlife Conservation Society and BP, a British petroleum company (<http://www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/partners/>).



international program in Latin America in 1980. In the 1990s, the organization expanded significantly, taking its activities beyond the Western hemisphere and into South America (<http://www.nature.org/aboutus/history>). A twenty-one member Board of Directors governs TNC, nearly half of which are scholars and “conservationists” with the rest being corporate executives, and all board members are limited to nine-year terms (<http://nature.org/aboutus/leadership/>). The Board “holds ultimate legal and fiduciary responsibility for Conservancy operations,” and makes final decisions concerning both conservation and strategic matters, including policy, marketing, conservation practices, and fundraising (*ibid*), though many daily management responsibilities are delegated to its fifty chapter boards across the U.S., comprised of over 1500 trustees (<http://nature.org/aboutus/leadership/art15473.html>).<sup>11</sup>

Currently, TNC operates in twenty-eight countries, has close to one million members, and controls assets in excess of three billion U.S. dollars (TNC 2004:2,16). In 2004, TNC received USD \$ 356 million in contributions from various donors, sixty-four per cent of which came from individual members, while another twenty-two per cent was received from private foundations, and corporations’ donations amounted to six per cent (TNC 2004:16).<sup>12</sup> In addition to philanthropic support, TNC’s corporate ‘partners’ also provide

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<sup>11</sup> Since 2003, TNC has been restructuring its governance mechanisms and policies in order to strengthen its organizational oversight. On the recommendation of an independent advisory panel, The Conservancy developed “a new management and Board structure that enhances the Board’s ability to carefully and thoroughly assess and manage organizational and reputational risks” (<http://nature.org/aboutus/leadership/art15473.html>). Some of the changes included reducing the number of Board members by half (from forty one to twenty-one), holding Board meeting four instead of three times per year, and creating a new trustee council to “bridge the span between central and local operations with new written standards and comprehensive operating principles” (*ibid*).

<sup>12</sup> The remaining eight per cent was generated by other sources of income, such as investments (TNC 2004:16).

cause-related marketing (Nature Valley, Bank of America), take conservation action to mitigate their impact on the environment (The Home Depot, Cinergy), sponsor events (Merrill Lynch, Georgia-Pacific), and donate lands (3M, BP) (<http://nature.org/joinanddonate/corporatepartnerships/about/>). The Conservancy actively pursues debt-for-nature swaps and conservation trust funds to finance their global conservation efforts. It has also launched programs that extract payment for the use of ecosystems services, such as watersheds, and charge fees for resource extraction.<sup>13</sup> Finally, TNC pursues aggressive public finance campaigns, which have generated more than USD \$24 billion for the organization since 1995 (<http://nature.org/aboutus/howwework/conservationmethods/conservationfunding/>).

TNC divides its approach to conservation according to whether lands are privately or publicly held. Private lands conservation is “an innovative tactic that leverages the increasing interest of the private sector to take part in conservation” by which TNC “works with landowners, communities, cooperatives and businesses to establish local groups that can protect land” (<http://nature.org/aboutus/howwework/conservationmethods/privatelands/>). In fact, The Conservancy pursues land acquisition as the principal strategy for its conservation efforts in the U.S.<sup>14</sup> Conservation easements, by which legal restrictions are placed on the use of resources on private lands, are either donated or sold to TNC and serve to limit or prevent development in these areas. The

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<sup>13</sup> In Ecuador, fees from resource extraction have contributed to a USD \$16 million trust fund to support conservation efforts in the country (<http://nature.org/aboutus/howwework/conservationmethods/conservationfunding/>).

<sup>14</sup> TNC has assisted in the acquisition of approximately fifteen million acres of land as a part of its private lands conservation program in the U.S. (<http://nature.org/aboutus/howwework/conservationmethods/privatelands/>).



Conservancy also pursues “conservation buyers projects”, where it first “identifies and purchases target properties within priority conservation areas” and then “widely and publicly markets the property, seeking a buyer committed to protecting the property's important natural values and willing to ensure the land's long-term conservation by placing a conservation easement on the land” (ibid).

In its international work, TNC tends to forgo acquiring land itself, and instead “works with local communities and national governments to encourage the protection of ecologically-sensitive land.” (ibid). The Private Lands Program seeks to develop private lands conservation tools such as easements, private reserves, and land trusts in countries overseas.

For public lands in the U.S., The Conservancy focuses on advocating “conservation-friendly public policies”, working with public land management agencies on conservation planning and the development of threat abatement programs, and assisting these agencies by purchasing or exchanging “key properties” through its land acquisition programs (<http://nature.org/aboutus/howwework/conservationmethods/publicpolicies/>). With funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Parks in Peril program is designed “to support local groups and government agencies” conserve publicly held lands outside the United States (ibid).

As Ferguson observed of development, so too, does the conservation ‘industry’ include an “identical [set of] institutions and... a common pool of ‘experts’” (1990:8), which function in a similar manner in pursuing the ‘business’ of conservation. The rest of the chapter undertakes an analysis of how the institutions of the conservation industry

share “a common discourse and the same way of defining ‘problems’, and a common stock of expertise” (ibid).

### **Expert Definitions: The Construction of Conservation Discourse**

Ferguson and Escobar both pointed to particular processes that necessarily take place as part of planned social interventions that “attempt to engineer an economic transformation” (Ferguson 1990:20-21). The practice of discursive construction they describe and the effects this has in the execution of projects on the ground is not unique to development work. It is evident, too, in the design and implementation of conservation initiatives that pursue a course of engineering socio-ecological reform.

As with development-oriented interventions, the conservation industry’s ecologically-oriented interventions produce and deploy a powerful discursive lens resulting in worrisome outcomes often unforeseen by the intervening agencies’ planners and unacknowledged by governments. Like development, the concept of conservation “presupposes a central, unquestioned value with respect to which the different legitimate positions may be arrayed, and in terms of which different world views can be articulated” (ibid:xiii). Conservation too may be considered “a dominant problematic or interpretive grid” through which we view and understand the world. In the development problematic, “it appears self-evident that debtor Third World nation-states and starving peasants share a common ‘problem’, that both lack a single ‘thing’: ‘development’” (ibid:xiv). In the conservation problematic, it appears self-evident that everyone shares the same problem of endangered species, declining resources, and ‘disappearing’ ecosystems and that the

solution for everyone is conservation. The discourse defines problems in a *particular* way so that they can be solved by a *particular* form of conservation.

Conservation, as development before it, has become an unquestionable global need, subject to many variable and contested visions, some of which challenge where and how much conservation is required; but the central concept, the value and idea of conservation, though challenged, through repeatedly redefined, has remained dominant.

Though both development and conservation have produced prolific industries, the purpose of aid differs. In large part, the conservation industry directs its economic and technical benevolence towards ‘nature’ first, and to the people who interact with it secondarily. Nature and people are separated, an ontological paradox for many people living in areas targeted for conservation intervention. While development efforts aim first to improve peoples’ lives, the *first* objective of conservation is to protect wildlife and ecosystems, largely from human ‘abuses’. And therein lies the crux of the problem, as defined in conservation discourse.

The primacy of the needs of nature and its causal relationship to human behaviour, the problem for which conservation is the solution is clearly evident in the narratives presented on the websites of what are commonly referred to as The Big Three CNGOs. While it may be argued that websites are generated primarily for the purpose of public consumption, and the discourse found on them functions as an exercise in public relations aimed at enhancing public support and donations, the reality may be more complex. The statements made on CNGO websites, though they are not documents produced for internal use in these institutions, are *produced by* these institutions, and I found that they



were related to both the frameworks used and programs implemented in communities such as Placencia. The websites themselves made explicit connections between the organizational goals, values, and priorities and the specific programs they initiated, including those at local sites like Placencia (see examples in the remainder of this chapter the beginning of the next chapter). I also found, as the following chapters of this thesis show, that the conservation discourse I identify from web texts does coincide with CNGOs' practice as they formulate policies, design projects and execute them in Placencia, the MPAs, and other villages nearby. Thus, in this instance the analyses of these web-based discourse was very productive.

The mission statements posted on each of these CNGOs' sites are ideally suited for use as a discursive point of departure, as they are typically composed by senior management and are central in defining an organization's orientation, forwarding the purpose, values, and objectives upon which it frames its actions (O'Hallaron and O'Hallaron 2000):

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive (<http://www.nature.org>).

World Wildlife Fund's mission is the conservation of nature. Using the best available scientific knowledge and advancing that knowledge where we can, we work to preserve the diversity and abundance of life on Earth and the health of ecological systems (<http://www.worldwildlife.org/about/index.cfm>).

Conservation International's mission is to conserve the Earth's living natural heritage, our global biodiversity, and to demonstrate that human societies are able to live harmoniously with nature (<http://www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/about>).

What is immediately obvious from these statements is the implication that humans are not currently living in ‘harmony’ with nature. That quality of human interaction with the natural environment is clearly problematic is further reinforced in CNGO descriptions of the state of the natural world. The World Wildlife Fund’s (WWF) *Living Planet Report 2004* documents how “humanity’s Ecological Footprint [has grown] to exceed the earth’s biological carrying capacity by twenty per cent... we no longer live within the sustainable limits of the planet” (Loh and Wackernagle 2004:1). The Conservation International (CI) website speaks of areas that are under pressure from “encroaching human populations” (<http://www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/strategies/>), while The Nature Conservancy’s (TNC) site notes how “human activity has changed the diversity of life on Earth... These changes include biodiversity loss that harms the natural systems, known as ecosystems, which sustain all life on the planet” (<http://nature.org/pressroom/press/press1933.html>).

A key element in justifying the non-negotiable *need* for conservation intervention is the discursive construction of nature as humanity’s victim. CNGOs’ websites present not only the organization’s mission statement as noted above, but each site is also populated throughout by various narratives that point out the ways in which nature is being threatened by human activities; animals, oceans, and forests are commonly described as being “endangered”, in “peril”, and in “crisis”.<sup>15</sup> There are, however, still parts of nature that have “escaped” the ravages of humanity, described as the “last remaining” and

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<sup>15</sup> In some sections of this chapter, text in quotes appears that is not followed by references. In these cases, double quotation marks are used to refer to terms used commonly on multiple pages throughout each of the CNGOs’ websites (<http://www.worldwildlife.org/>; <http://www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/>; <http://www.nature.org/>).



“untouched” species and ecosystems that are “rare” for their being “intact” or “pristine”. They are held as being valuable in part because of their “beauty” and “majestic” qualities, but more so for the “richness” of the biodiversity that they “harbour”. For these reasons, “protection” is not only imperative, but also carries an element of urgency: oceans and reefs must be “rescued” and the “last wild places” need to be “saved”.

Such claims to urgency are justified and rendered undeniable in two ways. First, the assertions are based on “sound science”, which forms the basis of all conservation work. The texts on the sites are consistent in describing how through “careful analysis” using the “most up-to-date” scientific “technology” and “expertise”, the effects of peoples’ interactions with nature are quantified and evaluated. Referencing and integrating the epistemological power of scientific discourse (Foucault 1971, 1973) to the definition of the problem is the dominant source of legitimacy for conservation’s global rescue mission. It also suggests that there is a ‘proper’ way to understand nature, reflecting the dominant Western modernist paradigm in which generating ‘accurate’ knowledge concerning the world is posited as the sole domain of scientists (see Fischer 2000). Fishers and hunters may have some useful information, lay knowledge that is complementary to scientific investigations, but only scientists have the expertise required to diagnose and define the problem and, as is described below, the solution.

Secondly, the web texts make a connection between the scientifically proven phenomenon of natural degradation and human survival. According to the scientific “experts”, if the “pattern of destruction” is not halted and reversed, our very survival is at stake. In these narratives, conservation is an exclusive empirically-supported mission

informed by a moral imperative: the need to “save” the earth and its resources not only for themselves but for ourselves, and *from* ourselves, for the sake of “future generations”. These particular discourses of science and survival are mutually reinforcing referents for the legitimacy of conservation’s project.

Within the conservation problematic, the problem is nature’s need of salvation from the irrational behaviour of humanity. The systematically designed intervention of CNGOs is the solution. More to the point, conservation *science* as mobilized by CNGOs is the means by which global biodiversity will be protected from the pattern of human destruction. Once identified as the ‘enemy’ to the natural world that is posited as its victim, humanity’s entitlement to interact with nature comes into question, and it becomes the task of conservation’s experts, scientists, to define the acceptable parameters of the human relationship with the natural world.<sup>16</sup>

This is not to suggest that human need does not factor into conservation agendas. For instance, WWF and CI draw a connection between poverty and biodiversity degradation, noting their concern for “poverty alleviation” as an important component of successful conservation in the world’s ecological “hotspots” ([http://www.conservation.org/xp/CABS/research/human\\_dimensions/welfare\\_poverty.xml](http://www.conservation.org/xp/CABS/research/human_dimensions/welfare_poverty.xml); <http://worldwildlife.org/cci/agriculture.cfm>). The protection of biodiversity is, therefore, also imagined as a means to reduce poverty, for only through conserving resources through their sustainable

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<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, the on-going debates regarding what kind of use of ecological resources is acceptable, over whether people should be allowed to access and use resources, even sustainably, in areas which are considered either in crisis or exceptionally valuable to global survival, most of which hold the status of protected areas or parks (Dasmann 1991; Stevens 1997b; Brandon et al 1998; Redford and Sanderson 2000; Terborgh 2000; Schwartzmann, et al 2000; Adams 2004; Chapin 2004; Forsyth 2004; Igoe 2004).



use can they be available for the use of future generations. Again, however, conservation is positioned as the solution to the problem of human poverty, which not only endangers humans, but nature itself. This all makes good sense, and conceptually is not necessarily itself problematic; there are enough examples of species loss to reinforce the need for moderate human use of natural resources.

What is striking is the process by which CNGOs are controlling the process of defining the solution to the problem of poverty as being biodiversity conservation, as once economic development was its solution, and still continues to be, though now under the guise of ‘sustainable development’. In the rise of sustainable development, the conservation of ecosystems has become embedded as a necessary component of poverty alleviation. Some CNGOs, such as WWF International, have fully embraced this amalgamation, launching programs specifically designed to alleviate poverty and promote sustainable development ([http://www.panda.org/about\\_wwf/what\\_we\\_do/policy/macro\\_economics](http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/what_we_do/policy/macro_economics)). For neither development nor conservation, however, is the solution to poverty related to a need for some countries to consume much less of the earth’s limited ecological resources. It is rarely linked to the culture of consumption and material acquisition that fuels the unequal distribution of *global* resources. More to the point, suggestions that citizens of wealthy countries ought to consume less as a means to relieving pressure on resources are not likely to inspire donations, placate corporate partners, or increase membership among the general public in developed areas.

Imagined as in localized struggles with humanity, nature is thus discursively re-configured into “ecoregions”, identified as critical areas for conservation due to their



remaining ecological integrity, measured by the richness of their biodiversity. In turn, these ecoregions become the “targets” of CNGOs’ efforts. Taken together, these provide the “roadmap” that guide the process of “saving the earth”.

In formulating these solutions, scientific methods have been integrated into a systematic framework, lending further legitimacy to the claims that the actions identified are the correct ones for addressing global ecological issues. WWF developed the Conservation Science Program (CSP) in 1990 to “provid[e] scientific expertise to WWF field programs in the design and implementation of conservation projects” (<http://worldwildlife.org/science>). Indeed, CSP forms the basis for WWF’s approach to doing its conservation ‘work’: “CSP has been central in developing many of the core components of WWF’s conservation approach, including the Global 200 and Ecoregion Conservation. And CSP is actively pursuing the next generation of innovations designed to keep WWF in the forefront of science-based conservation” (ibid.). Since 1996, TNC has used “a systematic, science-based approach to identifying sites for protection called Conservation by Design, our framework for achieving mission success” (<http://nature.org/tncscience>). Using “ecoregional assessments”, Conservation by Design provides a “well-tested, science-based process for developing and evaluating the effectiveness of conservation strategies that achieve tangible results” (<http://nature.org/aboutus/howwework/cbd/science/html>). As a result, “decisions at the Conservancy are based on rigorous conservation science, the product of a highly respected scientific staff consisting of experts in their respective fields” (ibid). Reflecting the fact that “the fundamental building block of CI’s conservation efforts is science”, in

1998, CI launched its Center for Applied Biodiversity Science (CABS) “to strengthen CI's research capabilities in order to accurately identify and quickly respond to emerging biological diversity threats” ([http://www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/programs/CABS/research\\_science.xml](http://www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/programs/CABS/research_science.xml)). As the “center of scientific and technical resources within CI,” CABS informs conservation program development by “drawing on a diverse array of in-house and outside experts” (ibid). The need for legitimacy is linked to CNGOs’ desire to demonstrate that the changes that their ‘missions’ advocate are necessary, useful, and justified.

The dominance of science as an integral component of conservation discourse not only lends the culturally-embedded legitimacy attached to science in Western societies to the definition of ecological problems and solutions; it also controls the definition of *who* has the authority to participate in the interpretive process and *how*. While CNGO scientists may use the knowledge of indigenous and non-indigenous fishers, hunters, and farmers, it is in a manner *complementary* to scientific knowledge. Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) tells scientists where and when to conduct their investigations, even providing information previously unknown to them. It is then proven valuable in being validated by further scientific research that demonstrates its accuracy and veracity. For the purposes of conservation design, TEK does not bear sufficient validity.

The conservation ‘apparatus’, to borrow a Foucauldian phrase, operates thus: the problem of the human (aggressor) / nature (victim) relationship is scientifically defined, and is institutionally translated into critical global conservation issues and priorities (biodiversity loss, global warming). Scientific expertise and methods are secondarily

applied in defining the solution, the means to saving nature through intervention is formulated into topical conservation programs (marine, forests, wildlife, climate change). Conservation projects use sound science to design ‘actions’ that aim to mitigate and control the problematic human-nature relationship. Within programmatic areas, generalized entities like ecoregions are designated based on their biodiversity characteristics, and in these areas specific targets are identified. These target areas receive the protection that programs are designed to deliver through various intervention mechanisms that, among other techniques, aim to: restrict access (protected areas designation and management); redirect use (alternative income-generating activities); and re-orient governance (policy-oriented advocacy, co-management partnerships with governments and/or local stakeholders). Our global ‘human’ problem thus becomes the particular problem of anonymous and remote ‘others’.

The unspoken consequence is to legitimate and enhance the intervention of CNGOs to initiate, manage, and benefit from the process. It also focuses greater attention on isolated areas not currently used by industrial resource users rather than on reducing their current destructive practices and modifying consumers’ demands for their end products. Furthermore, it may develop the knowledge base and infrastructure necessary to make those areas more easily utilizable in the future by ‘non-consumptive’ users from industrialized states, such as transnational ecotourism operators, while enhancing the capacity of the state to govern via the new infrastructures, or by developing its use of natural resources.



It is within this discursive context, which epistemologically produces nature as both separate from and threatened by people, that CNGOs formulate and outline their global conservation priorities, and subsequently plan eco-social interventions.

### **The Ocean's End: The Production of the Global Marine Crisis**

Like other countries with significant coastal areas within their borders, Belize has attracted the attention of the several transnational CNGOs, whose global marine programs identify marine ecosystems as among the most threatened, yet most biologically significant areas in the world. In particular, coral reefs and the species they support are commonly identified as being “at risk”, and have been designated as “critical” targets for conservation interventions as part of CNGO marine conservation programs. As the second largest barrier reef in the world, the extensive Meso-American Reef (MAR) has become an increasingly popular area of focus for conservation interventions in the past decade. Since Belize's territorial waters encapsulate the vast majority of the MAR, the number of conservation initiatives that aim to protect the country's marine resources has steadily increased as CNGO concern for reef habitat has escalated in the past decade.

WWF and TNC have taken a particularly active interest in protecting Belize's marine environment, launching interventions that focus primarily on establishing MPAs and promoting sustainable economic activities. For this reason, it is their respective descriptions of the context for such interventions in Belize that are featured below. It should be noted, though, that these two examples are closely related to the discursive constructions of other CNGOs operating interventions elsewhere.

On the WWF website under the category “Wild Places”, the heading, “Global Challenges” and the subheading, “Ocean Rescue” one finds the following assessment:

Life on Earth depends on healthy oceans - from coral reef communities teeming with life to mangrove swamps that provide a home for thousands of species. Our planet's oceans are in trouble and the plant and animal life they sustain are being threatened.

WWF calls its marine initiative Ocean Rescue. As the global leader in safeguarding these marine ecosystems, WWF aims to achieve a bold goal in the next 10 years: the creation of stable marine networks that encompass 100 marine protected areas worldwide. At the same time, we will continue our landmark efforts to end destructive fishing practices, stop illegal trade in marine wildlife, and reduce pollution on land and sea. WWF's marine conservation experts work in more than 40 countries, conducting research, initiating dialogue with decision-makers and fishing industry leaders, and advocating solutions -- all in an effort to champion the conservation of the marine environment and fishing communities around the world.

In order to achieve conservation results, WWF employs innovative strategies, like using market incentives to promote responsible fishing, and works with governments and other conservation partners to advance policies that will sustain the vital and diverse wildlife and habitats that constitute the ocean's web of life. WWF is crafting solutions for fishermen, coastal communities and the tourism industry that make economic sense while saving vulnerable species and their habitats.

Saving a living planet demands that we accept the real peril facing our oceans and act accordingly to reverse their decline and return them to good health. The Ocean Rescue team, with your help, can guarantee a more secure future for our world's oceans, their inhabitants and the people who depend on them (<http://www.worldwildlife.org/oceans>).

On the TNC website, the “Global Marine Initiative” page first makes the reader aware of the value of oceans before listing the threats that endanger them, and the action that TNC is taking to ameliorate the situation:



**The Role of Oceans:** The Earth's oceans are home to the bulk of the planet's biodiversity. The wealth of life underwater is evident in the fact that there can be as many varieties of fish in two acres of coral reef in Southeast Asia as there are species of birds in all of North America.

The marine environment's benefits to society greatly exceed their direct uses. In addition to providing the fish and seafood that millions of people depend on for food, they are the source of antiviral medicines like those derived from marine sponges, and products used to fight cancer or in bone grafts. Mangroves shield coastlines from storms; seagrass beds filter pollutants from water and protect against erosion and flooding; reefs and kelp forests act as natural breakwaters for coastlines; and all three serve as nurseries for fish and shellfish.

**Our Threatened Oceans:** Demand for basics such as housing, food and income is damaging ecosystems and depleting marine resources. Around the world, unsustainable fishing practices, including the poisoning and dynamiting of coral reefs, trawling sensitive areas, and the loss of critical nursery areas are exacerbating the problem. The overharvest and loss of critical populations such as oysters in the Chesapeake Bay not only cause direct losses to fishermen, but may prevent remaining populations from delivering key ecological functions like filtering water, causing further degradation of the entire system.

Equally damaging are the effects of pollution resulting from land-based activities such as dredging, paving, mineral extraction, deforestation and unsustainable agriculture. The Gulf of Mexico's "dead zone" is the result of excess fertilizers applied to farm fields in the Midwest. These pollutants flow through the Mississippi watershed and dump into the Gulf, setting off algal blooms which deplete oxygen levels, killing fish, shrimp, crabs and other sea life.

On a global scale, the wide-reaching impact of climate change is also taking a toll on the oceans. Coral reefs have already experienced the devastating effects of warmer water, which causes corals to bleach and can eventually kill them. Forecasts of more frequent warming events and a burgeoning coastal population that depends on coral resources bring urgency to the issue of protecting these fragile habitats and the broader marine environment.

Although once considered a limitless and inexhaustible resource, the oceans of the world are increasingly in jeopardy. The cycle of influence between land and sea is delicate, and human activities are taking a heavy toll on the health of all ocean systems, from marshes and mangroves to reefs and the deepest reaches.

The Nature Conservancy's Global Marine Initiative develops innovative strategies in an effort to protect the rich array of plant and animal life and safeguard the tremendous benefits the oceans provide. This global initiative

complements the over one hundred marine projects that the Conservancy has at sites around the world (<http://nature.org/initiatives/marine>).

Each organization then goes on to describe how this problematic state of the world's oceans is affecting coral reefs and, among others, cites the Meso-American Reef as an area of particular concern. On the right of WWF's "Ocean Rescue" page, one sees that among the "Related Wild Places" is the "Mesoamerican Reef". Navigating to this page leads one to this description:

The largest coral reef system in the Atlantic and the second largest coral reef in the world, the Mesoamerican reef system extends nearly 700 miles from the northern tip of the Yucatan peninsula to the Bay Islands off the coast of Honduras. This jewel of the Caribbean is unique in the Western Hemisphere not only for its size, but also because of its array of reef types, luxuriance of corals, and nearly pristine condition. It hosts more than 65 species of stony coral and more than 500 species of fish, including the mammoth whale shark, the largest fish in the world. Compared with many other parts of the Caribbean, this ecoregion is in fairly good condition.

The Mesoamerican Reef (MAR) is part of a larger interconnected system of currents and habitats that stretch throughout the Caribbean basin and beyond. The reef system is one of the region's greatest natural assets. Its massive structure provides an important defense against storms and coastal erosion, while the living reef and associated ecosystems support recreation and commercial fishing.

But the region is under constant danger from unsustainable fishing practices, global warming and pollution, which is why WWF has placed such a high priority on protecting all the Mesoamerican Reef has to offer. For the past two decades, World Wildlife Fund has been on the ground and in the waters of the Mesoamerican Reef ecoregion to ensure this Caribbean treasure is preserved for future generations (<http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildplaces/mr/index.cfm>).

To learn more about the activities WWF is pursuing in protecting such a valuable natural asset, the "Featured Projects" tells how WWF is working with governments in Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras "to establish marine reserves and wildlife refuges, protect coral reefs, educate the public, and train communities and scientists how to better manage



protected areas and preserve coral reef systems” (<http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildplaces/mr/projects.cfm>). Similar descriptors are featured on the TNC’s Meso-American Reef page:

The Meso-American reef stretches over 400-miles from north to south and contains some of the most extensive and well-developed coral formations in the world, supporting an amazing diversity of marine life. More than 500 species of fish have been recorded along the reef, many of which support the livelihoods of small-scale commercial fishermen residing along the coast.

Despite the well-recognized value of coral reefs, they are facing unprecedented levels of destruction from a range of activities including habitat destruction, water quality degradation, overfishing, temperature-related coral bleaching and associated diseases, possibly linked to climate change. Experts predict that by the year 2050, 70% of reefs will be lost from the world forever – coastal communities that depend on these reefs and associated habitats for their livelihood will be particularly hard hit (<http://www.nature.org/wherewework/centralamerica/belize/work/art8602.html>).

One of the four strategies TNC employs in their Global Marine Initiative is “Transforming Coral Reef Conservation”, which is a “worldwide program to transform the way marine protected areas (MPAs) are established, designed, managed and financed for the benefit of coral reefs, and for the people who depend upon them” (<http://nature.org/initiatives/marine/strategies/art12286.html>). The Meso-American Reef is one of three sites at which TNC is implementing this program by “identifying what it takes to make reefs resilient in the face of growing local and global stresses” (ibid). The Meso-American Reef Project page describes what “Conservation Action” is being made in the area:

The Nature Conservancy and its partners have identified the MAR as a high priority for establishing a regional network of mutually replenishing marine protected areas (MPAs). Resilient networks such as this one form the centerpiece of the global Transforming Coral Reef Conservation (TCRC) program.



The Nature Conservancy will work closely with a wide range of local, national, and regional partners to carry out a comprehensive set of activities to establish a resilient MPA network in the MAR. Key actions include: developing a marine ecoregional plan; identifying spawning aggregation sites and areas resistant to coral bleaching; preparing initial management plans at strategic sites such as the Gladden Spit and Port Honduras; developing and implementing programs to build awareness and financial support; helping create a monitoring program that provides feedback for adaptive management of the network; building capacity within local partner organizations and facilitating exchanges between and among MPA networks...

... The MAR project provides an excellent early opportunity to apply the concepts of bleaching resistance, protection of spawning aggregations, connectivity, and sustainability to a large-scale, multinational network of MPAs. Working with partners in these protected areas will guide implementation of future resilient MPA networks around the world by facilitating the exchange of information and building capacity (<http://nature.org/initiatives/marine/work/mar.html>).

Thus, environmental problems are constructed first globally, then locally, following a general conceptual hierarchy of issues, strategies, actions and results. Global ecological problems are translated into solutions via strategic conservation actions in local settings around the world. The process of problem identification, solution design and action implementation begins anew for each location, but it is expected to fit a pre-existing framework. Indeed, it must make such a fit, for it is a product of that framework. It is against this discursive production of the need to save ocean ecosystems, in which coral reefs and MAR in particular are under threat, that Belize is constructed in terms of its ecological value in relation to these imperatives.

### **Getting Local: Constructing Conservation ‘Targets’ in Belize**

Following this, and referencing these global requirements for marine conservation measures to be deployed, TNC and WWF then identified a series of localized

conservation “targets” in Belize that respond to specific ecological problems. Referencing the strategic framework previously developed within the organization for promoting global salvation, interventions are planned and implemented as solutions in various local contexts in Belize identified as particularly critical to the global conservation mission. These actions aim to achieve demonstrable/quantifiable “conservation results”.

Under “Conservation Results” featured on WWF’s page dedicated to describing the wonders of and threats to the global marine environment, we learn how “WWF Helps Belize Protect Marine Habitats”:

As a result of hard work and lobbying efforts by a WWF coalition that includes seven local and international NGOs, eleven new Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) were established in November 2002, promising to protect critical habitat and restore depleted wildlife populations. Although each of the sites is only about 2 square miles in size, their ecological importance in maintaining healthy fisheries greatly increases their conservation benefit. These MPAs will help protect spawning aggregations, and many other species of grouper, snapper and other reef fish. This comes less than 15 years after WWF Central America worked with Belize to create its first marine reserve...

... WWF is active in important, behind the scenes activities as well, raising public awareness and convincing fishermen and policy makers that creating no-take zones provide greater benefits than the lost fishing income -- resulting in wider acceptance for the concept and larger no-take zones within marine protected areas. Additionally, in Belize WWF teaches biologists coral reef identification and monitoring methods in order to provide them the training and experience required to safeguard coral reefs.

To strengthen community-based management, WWF supports other environmental organizations--such as Friends of Nature in Belize--and organizes community exchange programs where participants learn about park management and fisheries regulations, and how to develop tourism regulations for whale shark protection. (<http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildplaces/mr/results/habitats.cfm>)



The central proponent of the creation of these new MPAs, designed to protect spawning aggregations (SPAGs) along the barrier reef in Belize, was TNC. On their website (<http://nature.org/magazine/spring2003/features/#>), TNC has identified the “urgent need to save” the world’s SPAGs, described as “one of the secrets of the sea—the mysterious places where teeming masses of fish gather to mate at the same time each year”. As with other forms of environmental degradation, human behaviour is cited as the chief threat to the future survival of SPAGs: “For decades, commercial fishers have exploited known spawning aggregation sites, and overfishing has taxed their ecosystems to the breaking point. In the Caribbean Sea, the Nassau grouper has been one of the hardest-hit species”. Such behaviour appears understandable, given that fishers did not have the expertise to understand the ramifications of their actions: “To people who depend on the sea for their food and income, these predictable mating dances... seem like vast cornucopias of limitless fish—but their abundance is an illusion”. In defense of this threat, “the good news is that research by The Nature Conservancy is offering solutions to this problem”. TNC has taken on the task of protecting SPAGs by alleviating the assumed ‘ignorance’ of fishers through public education and diverting human income needs to more ‘acceptable’ non-extractive activities. These are key components of the Marine Initiative, through which TNC “is working with government, non-government and fishing industry partners to manage and protect spawning aggregation sites within Marine Protected Areas”. The ultimate goal of these interventions is “to protect marine biodiversity and benefit local and regional tourism and fishing economies”.

Being home to so many SPAGs, Belize has been identified as an important target for conservation efforts. Its ecological value, along with the threats to it and TNC's financial commitment to safeguarding it, are highlighted in the description of TNC's Belize Program:

Belize encompasses lush tropical rain forests, coastal mangrove forests, offshore cays and the Meso-American Reef — the second largest barrier reef system in the world. The unspoiled rainforests and savannas of Belize are well known homes to jaguars and four other large cat species, both spider and howler monkeys, tapirs, peccaries and nearly 350 species of birds...

... The major threats to the environment in Belize are deforestation, water pollution from sewage, agricultural runoff, solid waste disposal and intensive fishing.

The Nature Conservancy, in partnership with the U.S. government and the government of Belize, orchestrated a landmark debt-for-nature swap in August 2001. This historic deal forgives approximately half of Belize's debt to the United States in exchange for protecting 23,000 acres of tropical rainforest, supporting local environmental organizations and investing in Belize's protected areas (<http://nature.org/wherewework/centralamerica/belize/>).<sup>17</sup>

In addition to investing substantial funds at the national level, the "Conservation Action" page describes activities being undertaken at local sites as a part of the Belize Program, all of them involving MPA designation and management, as well as alternative livelihoods training for fishers:

Off the coast of Belize, The Nature Conservancy is working with the government of Belize and local organizations to identify, protect and manage thirteen spawning aggregation sites of endangered reef fish. Recognizing that many fishermen are economically dependent on fishing aggregation sites, like the Gladden Spit Marine Reserve, we are working with local partners to develop alternative sources of income for affected communities.

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<sup>17</sup> As part of the deal, TNC provided USD \$800,000 of its own funds to the U.S. government to help finance the swap.



The Nature Conservancy's Belize program is also working with local partners to protect the coastal forests, rivers and coral cays in the in the Port Honduras Marine Reserve, the marine component of the Maya Mountain Marine Corridor. Port Honduras was recently designated a marine reserve by the government of Belize, which chose the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) to manage the reserve (<http://nature.org/initiatives/marine/work/mar.html>).

TNC's activities in this first intervention, the protection of SPAGs, have focused special attention on Gladden Spit, due largely to the fact that the SPAGs at Gladden predictably attract whale sharks. Predictable gatherings of whale sharks are rare and the species itself has been given a "conservation status" of "vulnerable" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (<http://nature.org/magazine/spring2003/html>).<sup>18</sup> This has brought the organization, its programs, and the power of its discursive constructions into the lives of fishers and guides in Placencia, the ramifications of which are further explored in the next chapter.

### **Humans Versus Nature: Considering Conservation's Effect**

The effects of conservation discourse relate directly to the way in which it positions people in relation to the category of nature that it constructs. First, in defining the problem, it creates a competitive human-nature duality that sees people as a burden on the natural world. While rhetorically promoting the notion of mutual interdependence, the human relationship to the environment is defined by essentialized categories of 'destroyers' and 'rescuers'. The solution lies in controlling peoples' (destroyers) interactions with nature by the creation of protected areas and strict management

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<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere in the world, such as Asia, fishers have been known to catch whale sharks for sale. In India, the practice continues, while in the Maldives and the Philippines, it has been banned (<http://nature.org/magazine/spring2003/html>).

regulations that are based on the premise that nature is best shielded by eliminating human presence where possible. Such measures play out contemporary Western ideas about the ‘wilderness’ of the natural world as distinct from ‘civilization’ of the human world (Cronon 1996b; Spence 1999). Such assumptions underlie the notion of creating parks as places that are free of the human presence that sullies the ‘pristine’ quality of these areas (Stevens 1997b; Adams 2004). The concept of nature as humanity’s victim, leaves little political space within which people may be understood to be victims of state corruption and neglect, or of the insatiable resource demands of societies beyond their borders. Such scenarios do not lend themselves to the technical solutions that conservation science can provide. Therefore, the discourse not only constructs its objects, problems and solutions, it depoliticizes them.

The path to salvation through protection is epistemologically bounded, dictated by particular people who, based on the practice of sound science, delineate the *correct* way to interact with the natural world. The human-nature relationship thus constructed as the proprietary domain of CNGOs and their scientists, whose specialist knowledge is a precondition for defining the acceptable parameters and conditions of the human-nature connect as mediated by CNGO texts such as those on their websites. A distinction is created between tourists who are the acceptable human presence built into the imaginary of parks and many protected areas, and local resource users who, because of their unacceptable damaging behaviour, are constructed as threats. CNGOs then attempt to

render their presence acceptable by training them to engage in “sustainable use activities”, largely as tour guides.<sup>19</sup>

Another effect is that, while interventions are executed in “partnership” with other actors – governments, industry, local users – such partnerships are also discursively delimited. CNGOs provide support through lending “financial and technical assistance” to these “stakeholders” who are recognized as important components of the solution, for their participation is necessary to achieving “mission success”. Only state governments have the authority to legislate natural resources regulations, or grant legal mandates to non-state regulatory bodies (e.g., small NGOs, or CNGOs themselves as managing authorities for a protected area). Community members’ compliance with these regulations is also important. These ‘partners’, however, are often causally linked to the problem, therefore hardly in a position to define solutions. They are discursively positioned as being epistemologically, technologically, and morally unqualified to participate in the interpretive process.

Conservation initiatives provide a huge source of aid in many developing areas, but the reality is that *people* are not the primary target of conservation’s benevolent gaze. Aid is first aimed at saving nature by reorienting peoples’ relationship to the natural world according to Western conceptions. Particularly in areas where people maintain a subsistence dependency on their local environments, the ‘pristine-ness’ values that inform conservation actions often conflict with communities’ lifeways. This can lead to the creation of projects that are unlikely to generate local support, not just because they

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<sup>19</sup> There are also areas where the situation is defined as so dire that no human presence, save for that of conservation scientists, is acceptable.



threaten local livelihoods, but also because the vision of the human-nature relationship upon which they rest is often contrary to local cultures and identities. As Chapter Seven illustrates, such conservation solutions tend to alienate the support of users whose compliance is critical to the success of the ‘rescue mission’.

### **Conclusion**

Applying an analytical approach that employs discursive deconstruction exposes the situated perspectives, assumptions, dominant interpretive power, and socio-ecological constructions that form the conceptual core of conservation as an idea. This, in turn, clarifies how these discursive productions influence intervention strategies and institutional arrangements CNGOs mobilize to advance their agendas. Conservation discourse not only justifies the existence of CNGOs but also makes their global interventions both necessary and *legitimate* in contexts otherwise considered the exclusive domain of sovereign states: the control of natural resources. The basis of CNGOs’ claims to authority over natural resources is both moral and normative, reflected in discourses of global survival and sound science.

The point here was not to evaluate whether CNGOs and their projects are ‘good’ or ‘bad’, nor to determine if they are necessary. In pursuing this analysis, I am not denying that environmental degradation and overexploitation occur and need action. Nor do I suggest that the restriction of excessive resource use and ecologically damaging patterns of activity should not be advocated. I do, however, question the global forming of depoliticized ecological problems, the process by which the answers are formulated, and the programs that are executed as solutions.



I show below how (1) the discursive context and framing in which interventions are planned and justified as an integral component of the conservation mission, and (2) the implications this has for recipients on the ground. Conservation discourse represents a powerful lens through which the world is (re)constructed according to a particular type of epistemological production that is rooted in the modernist narrative of science that not only separates humans from nature, but casts them as enemies of nature to be controlled. A particular type of knowledge, conservation science, is posited as a countermeasure to destructive human behaviour, and conservation scientists are positioned as the experts on appropriate human interaction with the natural world.

Using Ferguson's strategy, this analysis critically engaged conservation using a "decentered" perspective to examine the discursive processes and planned interventions of conservation organizations (1990:18); CNGOs and conservation projects are not identified as the singular locations of power, but rather as the progenitors of a powerful conceptual process. While they are certainly powerful actors, this does not necessarily translate into control over either the process or the outcomes of discursive construction as they are mobilized in local communities. Seeing how conservation discourse 'works' in Belize generally is complemented by a consideration of the unplanned outcomes of eco-interventions. This is taken up in the next chapter, which explores the operation, local engagement and effects of a particular conservation roadmap being implemented as part of FON's co-management mandate.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **The Global-Local Conservation Debate in Placencia**

*[Conservancy scientists'] research and the efforts of The Nature Conservancy and other groups prompted the Belizean Minister of Fisheries Dan Silva in November 2002 to protect 11 spawning aggregation sites and prohibit fishing of Nassau grouper during their spawning season. Fishers throughout Belize support the minister's bold action (<http://nature.org/magazine/spring2003/features/>).*

#### **Introduction**

The presence of multi-species fish and whale shark aggregations were among the central reasons why, under CNGO prompting, FON lobbied the government of Belize to declare Gladden Spit a protected area. Unlike Laughing Bird Caye, which as a National Park is a strictly no-take MPA, Gladden was granted Marine Reserve status, and thus has multiple use zones. In large part this was due to the fact that GSMR is a much more actively accessed fishing area than Laughing Bird ever was. As the local co-managing partner for GSMR, FON has legal jurisdiction to create regulations governing access to those fishing grounds. During my time in Placencia, the GSMR management plan was being developed by FON staff, with a great deal of 'technical assistance' from CNGO 'experts', and presented to community members in a public consultation process. The process produced controversy over proposed use and access regulations in the MPA. Placencian fishers understood that FON was attempting to restrict their harvests of the snapper spawning aggregations (SPAGs) based largely on the findings of CNGO – funded researchers. They were also aware that these research findings ultimately would

lead to the total closure of winter grouper SPAGs in Belize. They agreed to this “bold action” in large part because the springtime snapper SPAGs hold much greater commercial value and because they were cognizant of and concerned with the rapid decline in grouper populations.

In the previous chapter, Escobar and Ferguson’s arguments concerning the operation and effects of development discourse provided a useful analytical approach to deconstructing the globalized conservation problematic. In particular, Ferguson’s “decentered perspective” was useful in illustrating how, by using particular epistemological and moral discourses to define global environmental ‘problems’ and ‘solutions’, the conservation problematic asserts its “subjectless” discursive power over the human-nature relationship (1990:18).<sup>1</sup> Implementing planned interventions in pursuing its global mission of ecological salvation introduces this interpretive lens into local contexts where it produces tangible, and often unintended, outcomes. In his analysis, Ferguson also shows how discursive constructions produce Foucauldian “instrument effects” in the ways they structure social reality of those on the receiving end of planned interventions by simultaneously expanding state power and reducing the politics of intervention to technical issues easily solved by the interveners (ibid:19).

This chapter applies and extends Ferguson’s critical perspective of a particular development project to the co-management experience in Placencia. It first demonstrates how the conceptual constructs of conservation discourse create a local conservation

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<sup>1</sup> As Foucault (1979) demonstrated in his analysis of prison systems, planned interventions may manifest powerful outcomes that are neither intended nor located in a particular subject, yet are effective despite their actor-less nature. In fact, he suggests that this form of control is more powerful for its being subjectless.

problem of global significance for which CNGO intervention is the solution. Before considering the tangible instrument effects of this process as they are experienced by community members, the analysis first expands on Ferguson's approach by illustrating how CNGOs' powerful discursive productions are challenged by the 'local users' whose reality CNGOs seek to (re)structure through planned eco-interventions. Fishers' statements suggest that they have their own ideas about conservation and how to protect local resources, and actively engage CNGOs' interpretive imperatives in forwarding them.<sup>2</sup> This process of dynamic discursive debate serves to highlight how conservation discourse operates dialectically in Placencia. It also points to several unforeseen outcomes of CNGO strategies for 'protecting' Gladden's spawning aggregations that are detrimental to both global and local actors' interests.

### **Saving the SPAGs: Conservancy Discourse Targets Gladden Spit**

One of the most active and visible CNGOs in Belize, and in Placencia, INC has come to champion the cause of protecting the country's spawning aggregations and, in Gladden Spit, the whale sharks that these phenomena attract. On its website, it makes a clear case for concern regarding the state of the world's SPAGs. In addition to establishing the "critical" need to "rescue" the world's coral reefs, including the Meso-

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<sup>2</sup> The point of this chapter is not to assert that the views forwarded here are representative of what fishers think in Placencia as a homogenous category. As elsewhere, fishers in Placencia are a highly diverse group of people who defy generalizations (see Himes 2005). Nor is it to evaluate who may be 'right' or 'wrong' concerning the problem at Gladden. I highlight here the way in which these 'local users' have responded to INC's interpretive construction of the situation in GSMR. The featured excerpts are from recorded interviews and came in response to questions about their level of harvesting activity at Gladden, how they felt about its declaration as an MPA, and about the proposed closure of the SPAGs.

American Reef that runs along Belize's coast, the TNC website explains how the threats to the area's SPAGs must be addressed through conservation measures:

Why Spawning Aggregation Sites Need Protection: Aggregating fish are vital links in a delicate marine food chain. Many aggregating fish species reproduce only at spawning aggregation sites. Since ocean currents link aggregation sites together, each site's survival is connected to the others. Unsustainable fishing practices like catching spawning fish in large volumes and catching females with unreleased eggs in their bellies have depleted several sites in the Caribbean already. If we conserve and properly manage spawning aggregation sites before overfishing occurs, they may recover (<http://nature.org/magazine/spring2003/features/>).

Being able to identify overfishing as the central activity that is endangering Belize's SPAGs was the result of Conservancy "experts" applying "sound science":

... [A] Conservancy marine scientist... has been studying Belize's reefs for five years and has identified 13 spawning sites that need protection. Using satellite imagery, [he and] a Conservancy remote sensing expert, are amongst the first to accurately predict when and where spawning aggregations will occur. He currently runs workshops for local fishers and managers to help them maintain sustainable fishing practices in Belize and throughout the Meso-American Reef (ibid).<sup>3</sup>

Building on the discursive construction of Belize's SPAGs as a "precious ecological asset", and therefore in "urgent need of protection", TNC has "selected" Gladden Spit as an ecological locale exhibiting a specific conservation problem:

Why the Conservancy selected this site: The Gladden Spit Marine Reserve harbors an intact spawning aggregation site for at least 25 species of reef fish, resulting in a continuous replenishment of the region's fisheries. The government of Belize chose Nature Conservancy partner, Friends of Nature (FON), to manage Gladden Spit.

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<sup>3</sup> TNC's scientist may have been among the first *biologists* to accurately predict the timing and location of SPAGs, but Placencian fishers told me that they have known this for at least three generations. In fact, much of his capacity to identify area SPAGs (and the association of whale sharks with them) was the result of fishers sharing their knowledge with him, a collaboration he acknowledges (Heyman et al 2001; Heyman and Raquetna 2002)

Threats: The integrity of the Gladden Spit Marine Reserve is threatened by unsustainable fishing practices, such as the use of gill nets, and anchor damage to reefs. Overfishing has reduced critical fish species to dangerously low population levels, threatening their long-term existence in Gladden Spit and throughout the Meso-American Reef. (<http://nature.org/wherewework/centralamerica/belize/work/art8862.html>)

At one site in Belize, the disappearance of the SPAG is directly attributed to local fishing efforts (Heyman and Raquena 2002:19). Gladden Spit's SPAGs are not just important to maintaining fish populations. According to researchers, "Gladden Spit harbors vulnerable aggregations of whale sharks... as well as dolphins and a great number of predatory sharks. The area is a marine oasis, and should be protected" (Heyman, et al 2001:281). In one of its membership publications, *Global Currents*, an article makes it clear why TNC has chosen "this globally important area" for conservation action: "As a result of the rapid decline in snapper and groupers, and the commensurate threat to whale sharks, spawning aggregations and tourism management at Gladden Spit have become a conservation priority for the Conservancy" (TNC 2000:4). TNC claims that the conservation problem of declining fish in the SPAGs at Gladden Spit is caused by irresponsible human behaviour, overfishing.

The solution to this problem is interventionist conservation. Threats to SPAGs can be eliminated by implementing well-planned science-based "conservation actions": TNC's strategies focus on conservation-oriented "sustainable" economic activities for fishers, stipulating a more ecologically acceptable human-nature interaction in Gladden:

What The Conservancy Is Doing: Recognizing that many local fishermen are economically dependent on fishing the aggregation sites, the Conservancy and Friends of Nature are introducing alternative-income opportunities for the community: so far, 21 fishermen have been trained and certified as dive and sport

fishing guides. They now have the opportunity to earn more from the spawning sites as guides than they can garner from fishing, and have become willing advocates for spawning-aggregation protection.

Large concentrations of whale sharks, which come to feed on the fresh eggs and spawn, also visit the area several months of the year. The presence of the whale sharks is dependent on the health of the fish aggregations. With well-planned management efforts, the site can be an ecotourism destination for sports fishing and diving. Along with Friends of Nature, The Conservancy conducts intensive scientific research in the Gladden Spit Marine Reserve in order to maintain the continued health of these dramatic whale shark and fish aggregations (ibid).

Interviews with fishers in Placencia suggest that they have been advocating for the protection of area SPAGs for many years prior to TNC's 'discovery' of Gladden's "dramatic" aggregations. Since they are identified as part of the problem and are targeted by CNGOs as needing to shift their activities and reorient their livelihoods, it is useful to understand the issue from the perspective of fishers themselves. Though they share a mutual concern for the future integrity of the SPAGs, fishers' discourse constructs a different vision of conservation priorities in GSMR.

### **Fishers' Definition of Gladden's Conservation 'Problem'**

During both formal and informal interviews with Placencian fishers who actively harvest the SPAGs at Gladden, an alternate construction of the ecological problem became apparent.<sup>4</sup> Generally, these fishers agreed that there are fewer fish at the SPAGs

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<sup>4</sup> During my time in Placencia, I was able to conduct recorded interviews with eight users of Gladden's SPAGs, including three of the locally estimated "about a dozen" fishers in FON communities whom other fishers I spoke with identified as its current "regular users". These men fish the SPAGs as a primary source of income, particularly in the spring. I also had informal conversations with several others, including many who fish the SPAGs more sporadically. I was able to attend several FON consultations at which the fishers who consistently harvest the SPAGs at Gladden expressed their thoughts on the matter. Of the men who did grant recorded interviews, four were 'regular users' (one is retired but used to fish full-time). Four others engage in tour guiding, while still fishing at Gladden with varying levels of regularity. One of these men agreed to do a semi-structured interview, but preferred to remain anonymous. He also did not wish to be recorded or have his views on the co-management process publicly documented.



than in the past. The matter of contention is conservation scientists' assertions that the causal link is overfishing. More specifically, informants contested claims that *local* fishing efforts contribute to the degradation of the aggregations.

Head of the Placencia Producers Cooperative, the representative for area fishers on FON's Board, and a full-time fisher for over four decades, Carlton Young, Sr. touched on several points that Placencian fishers routinely made during interviews. When asked to describe the state of fish stocks in the area, he replied:

Well, the fish stock has changed. But what caused it, I'm not so sure. I'm not a scientist. But scientists will tell you things that are not the truth, either. They will tell you, like they are saying that it's handline, that it's overfished, and that's causing the depletion. I don't buy that. And a lot of fishermen will tell you that they don't believe that either. Because catching a fish with a handline, that fish has to be hungry to take that line. You can't force him to bite! So how can you overfish that area with handline? There were times when at Glover's, you know the guys would go out and say, well I can't remember – Brian went out one December and he told his mom, "Don't prepare a Christmas dinner for me because I won't be back for Christmas". And he showed up here on Christmas Day. He said, "The groupers were out there by the thousands! And when you lower your line with the live bait they just open up and the bait goes right down. They don't take it. And those groupers will move, and they didn't bite. So...but that's what some of the scientists are saying, that we're depleting the stock by taking out fish with a hand-line. Now I agree: net fishing and trap fishing you probably would do more damage. The most damage done to these areas is by those types of fishing. Now I'm strictly against that, and this is what the government has put in place, too. That nowhere in any spawning area no traps would be set, no nets would be used.

Like Mr. Young, it was not unusual to hear fishers questioning the validity of the "scientific findings" upon which these claims are made, and arguing that there is no evidence that handline fishing is affecting the SPAGs. Very often it would be prefaced in terms of the length of time fishers have been harvesting, what they had observed in that time, and the knowledge of the marine environment they had acquired, and subsequently

shared with researchers. Like Villa Godfrey who asserted, “There are too many people going to fish there. Too much fishermen [*sic*].” Fishers did overwhelmingly identify overfishing as a significant part of the problem at Gladden, though not necessarily the only one as CNGO researchers primarily suggest.

Several fishers shared concerns about the effects of land-based pollution during informal conversations. Asked to speak at a presentation at the 2002 Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute conference, Mr. Young also suggested that it was important to establish what other factors, such as pollution from nearby fruit plantations, are affecting SPAGs, and wondered why this had not yet been the subject of scientists’ research.<sup>7</sup> Others pointed to the effect of increasing numbers of tourists diving the SPAGs to view whale sharks, that their physical presence and copious use of sunscreen disrupts the integrity of the SPAGs as much as extractive activities.

Also agreeing with TNC suggestions that use of illegal gear was endangering SPAGs, fishers noted that it was not local practice to use such equipment to fish at Gladden. During his talk at the conference, Mr. Young emphasized that local fishers did not use illegal gear such as traps, nets, or spears at the Gladden SPAGs, that they used only the hand-line method of capture. Tony Eiley also noted that suggestions that local fishers use illegal gear are misplaced:

The Guatemalans do mostly gillnetting, which kills the sea, just like they did in the south there... They have miles of net, and they are out there right now and

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<sup>7</sup>As noted earlier, just across the lagoon from Placencia are several sizeable citrus and banana plantations. Several fishers mentioned their concerns over the effect of pesticide and herbicide runoff on the health of local marine life. Some were similarly worried about nearby Big Creek, one of the larger shipping ports in Belize through which a variety of hazardous materials are transported.

you can find them setting their nets... They're looking for sharks, but they catch everything in their nets and what they don't use they just leave to spoil.

He says this includes a lot of good fish like kingfish, snapper, and barracuda: "They don't care, they just throw the other fish away. And there's nothing being done about it. That's bad."

Together with their doubts concerning the focus and findings of scientific research, local fishers' experiences with CNGO scientists undertaking research on Belize's SPAGs have served to reinforce their suspicions regarding the intentions behind such research. Laurence Leslie relies solely on fishing for his income.<sup>6</sup> He describes an encounter he had with two biologists, one an employee of a large CNGO, interviewing fishers concerning their harvesting activities in the Gladden SPAGs:

They said they weren't going to harm us. He said that handline had no effect on it and such thing. But it turned around after they got down into it. Then they changed it. Then they said that they don't see many fish out there and such things. He said he didn't see where they spawn, but I understand he did and he kept it from us. Because they spawn out there. I can't understand how he doesn't see it... I can't understand. So he must be trying to do some trick to get his job done!

His brother, Lennox, also a "hard-core" fisher, had a similar experience with the same researcher:

That guy used us, the interviews, against us. So that's a very difficult thing for anybody to see because then you're kind of scared. To me, that's the way I feel.

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<sup>6</sup> Laurence Leslie and his brother, Lennox, are known in and around Placencia as members of the small group of full-time fishers who do not themselves participate in tourism. They are two of five brothers in the Leslie family who are locally renowned for their skill as fishers. Laurence's wife runs a small laundry service, which services both locals and visitors, but Laurence, like his brother Lennox, generates his income from full-time fishing activities exclusively. Both men, their brothers, and their families make the annual trip out to the traditional camping grounds at Buttonwood Caye, near Gladden Spit, to harvest the spawning aggregations. As a result, the Leslie brothers have been recruited as informants for a host of scientific and social research concerning fishing in the area.

Cause you know, you get scared before, you don't want it to happen again. Not scared, but, I mean, what would I say ... make us a liar. That's why he's not in the village too often... So instead of just sitting down and talking to him, you gotta be very, very careful of what you say... But this guy... he's the one. He pretended that he was honest at the first, and after that, he came back with something against us... We don't want to be in that shoe anymore."

Challenging TNC's science-based vision of the problem at Gladden reflects a skepticism regarding the epistemological basis for the identification of overfishing as the only conservation concern. Fishers further doubt conservationists' claims that local efforts contribute to overfishing. This represents a commonly held position in Placencia that the problem of overfishing at Gladden is due to the presence and methods of non-local fishers conducting illegal activities.

During interviews, fishers regularly pointed out that the number of local fishers regularly harvesting at Gladden had dropped substantially, while the number of boats coming from other areas had increased. Tony Eley made this point early in his interview, noting that "now there are only maybe about twenty hard-core fishers in the village, where there used to be up to two hundred in the eighties... it's getting less and less because of tourism and because of the depletion of fish." On the other hand he points to the influx of other fishers into the area:

Everybody from the north of the country is coming down in this area. It's happening right now. You go there right now, and you can see that. They come down in this area, and crowd this area, and won't take a year before everything is gone completely. Then what? And that would be the end of it.

Laurence Leslie forwarded the same scenario, estimating that "only twenty fish with handlines in the village," but the presence of "foreigners" fishing at Gladden had grown in the past decade.

As illustrated in Chapter Five, fishers in Placencia have strong feelings about “Northerners” fishing in local waters, but hold an even greater disdain for the Honduran and Guatemalan fishers who are doing so illegally. Fishers estimate that there are three or four times as many illegal boats as Belizean boats at times. Worse still, they say, is that they fish the SPAGs at night because snappers are night fish and they bite more readily at night. Illegal fishers use GPS systems to locate the fishing grounds in the dark, and also use lights to attract the fish to their lines and nets. At dawn they pull anchor and return to Honduras. Though they are aware that their catch would be better if they fished at night, Placencian fishers do not, as a rule, do so. Many say that their boats are too small to risk being outside the barrier reef at night. More commonly they laughed and said, “God made night to sleep.” As Carlton Young, Sr. argued, “these guys who do the illegal fishing they don’t have any respect for conservation. They have no respect for the sizes. They take anything... they take a *hell* of a lot of scale fish out of this country”.

Laurence Leslie agreed with this assessment, and he shook his head as he said, “the Hondurans are hurting us.” He has seen up to thirteen boats coming in at dusk as he and his brothers are leaving the SPAGs to go back to camp at nearby Buttonwood Caye. He said they told the authorities about them. Officials brought the offenders in to shore, but soon released them, and they continued to poach. Such stories were told time and again, pointing to fishers’ shared frustration with the lack of effective enforcement by the Fisheries Department. The trouble begins with a lack of patrols at the SPAGs. Elton Eiley said that patrols by Fisheries officials tend to focus more on controlling local fishers during the lobster season:

Whenever the lobster season's about to open. That's the time when they come around to hassle you. Cause most of the fishermen, most of them – like the lobster season opens on the fifteenth – some of them go out from about the, I would say from about the second, you know. But then they go out, dive the lobster and stash them away, you know? Stash them away, so that when you come in you could, you know – cause if you don't do that, it's difficult. If you wait until the season opens, you go out there, you don't got much to get! Cause that first block is the most! But everybody knows you're not supposed to fish until the season opens. But some fishermen take the chance, and go out. And that's the time when the boats they come out around that time, the Fisheries boats, to hassle people. And, to me I think that's wrong. Cause then the lobster that you catch gonna come into the country anyhow. It's not going out, you know? It's coming into the cooperative to make benefits for everybody. Cause then they got all their taxes, the government have all their taxes to get out of it, all of that. All the revenue they get, you know? So, I don't think, to me, I think that's not right at all.

Lennox Leslie described the same scenario, adding:

To me, it's not good because they should have been out there a little more regular. At least their presence would be better. It would keep things down to normal... but sometimes when the [lobster] season is all coming on, like about to open, that's the time you see them. And when it's closing, that's the time you see them. They keep to standing around. You know, they just relax... A lot of things they've got to be more fixed. Cause definitely you can't just leave the industry to go down just like that because you need protection.

Like others, both men said that the Department does not focus much of its efforts on reducing illegal fishing.<sup>7</sup> Yet even when illegal fishers are caught, the measures enacted by state officials do not act as effective deterrents. Mr. Young gave this example:

I can recall they catch one with like seventy-five undersized conch. They took him to P[unta] G[orda], they charged him, put him in jail for a week. When he came out, they gave him back his boat and the following week he was right there, they catch him again! So that is to give you an idea of what's going on! They don't have nowhere else to fish but in Belize waters. And if you don't stop them, they will never stop.

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<sup>7</sup> Part of the explanation for this is that illegal fishers typically have larger boats with more powerful engines and can outrun Fisheries' patrol boats. Moreover, these poachers are often armed, a situation that the Department's staff are not eager to face.

He later recalled a similar scenario in which he was involved in capturing five boats for illegal fishing at Gladden. He describes the position of the officials who released the boats back to the poachers:

And they were saying, “We don’t want a quarrel with our neighbours,” and you know, Yeah, so you don’t want a quarrel, so you let them take out all the fish out of the waters and then we won’t have anything to feed our people here. I couldn’t understand that. And this has been happening before that. Because they say they do patrols, the guys from Fisheries they catch them, they bring them in...and they charge them two hundred dollars and give them back their boat, put them in jail for a week. And the same guys they come right back!

Tony Eiley, too, told how fishers “see them every day when you’re out there. You see the Honduramians but you never see a patrol boat. Never.” He continued, giving one reason why Fisheries’ patrols, when they do occur, are not effective:

I mean nobody comes to check nothing. You don’t see anybody. That’s the hurtful part... Fisheries, that’s their job... If they do come they don’t do anything, they just come for a joy ride. They don’t have the right people in the right places. They have people come from the bush to work the sea... They don’t use the people who have the knowledge of the waters. Regardless of if that person doesn’t have any education at all, they can close their eyes and go through that reef. Those are the people you want as captains on board of those boats. You don’t want nobody from a university to come and captain a boat in the waters that they can’t even pass. Because Belize waters, it’s not easy to navigate around this area. They never have the right people to do the right job. It’s so political. It was always like that from the beginning. Never had the right people from upstairs. ...It’s all political. This Minister puts his cousin up there, and his cousin doesn’t know crap about the ocean... They catch the Honduramians, they say they don’t want to spoil diplomatic relationship, and they give the guys back their boat and then charge them two hundred dollars and send them back! ...That is not right. That is not right and that’s not fair, and these are the things that are causing the fishing to go down.

From the perspective of fishers in Placencia the cause of the problem of overfishing is the lack of patrols by the Fisheries Department, and the lack of enforcement when violators



are caught. This, in turn, is related to political issues between governments. In the discourse of local fishers, overfishing is attributed mainly to state politics.

Fishers present an alternate interpretive lens to TNC's discursive framing of the conservation problem at Gladden Spit, referencing a different epistemological framework. They cite other factors that pose potential threats to Gladden's SPAGs, clarifying the fact that they do not use illegal gear, and identifying non-local and illegal fishing together with the lack of enforcement of existing fisheries regulations as the central causes of the problem at Gladden. In constructing this definition, fishers reference their own expertise regarding marine resources, knowledge that emerges from their daily lives in which fishing is the dominant form of interaction with the environment. This intimate and extensive interaction is the basis of a rich understanding of the marine environment with which fishers engage CNGO biologists' findings and proclamations. As fishers themselves note, the legitimacy of their ecological knowledge is tied to the successful practice of fishing. Fishers consistently expressed pride in the level of expertise they, or someone else, possessed in terms of "knowing the sea". This is not empty pride, for their personal status and their family's survival are directly related to their skill as fishers. The accuracy of their knowledge is tangibly legitimized, displayed in their ability to consistently produce as harvesters. It is in this epistemological context that fishers challenge the legitimacy of scientists' claims concerning local ecological problems, as well as their ability to provide useful solutions.

### **(Re)Defining the Solution for Gladden Spit Marine Reserve**

For fishers, TNC's preferred solution that would restrict all fishing in GSMR and promote alternative livelihoods in tourism appears ill-directed. Given that Placencian fishers define the central cause of the problem at Gladden as related not to local behaviour, but to threats posed by people from outside the area, they identify strategies that focus efforts on mitigating these external factors as a means to protecting the SPAGs.

Expressing the strategy most commonly forwarded by fishers in Placencia, Carleton Young, Sr. asserted, "Most fishermen, or every fisherman will tell you that if we can curb this illegal fishing, our stock will be there." Villa Godfrey provided a succinct, and oft-repeated phrase in response to the question of how best to implement the solution of eliminating illegal fishing: "They could be patrolling." "They" was identified most often as the Fisheries Department and FON. Fishers' statements concerning the need for increased patrols were often associated with their sense that the primary obligation of management authorities is to enforce federal fishing regulations in defending national resources from foreign incursions. As Tony Eley said:

Well, you have to have somebody protecting it! You can't just mark out an area and say it's a protected area and have nobody out there protecting it... But that entails proper patrols, strong fines if you're caught in the area fishing, and stuff like that.

With fervour similar to other fishers, Tony pointed out some of the problems associated with promoting tourism as the alternative to extractive fishing:

Tourists don't just come to this country to see. They come to eat seafood. And whenever they can't find any seafood, they're going to places where they can find seafood. So, they gotta pay very good attention to what is going to happen here. It's not just 'I don't care about you guys, it's off and you cannot fish in that area' That's not gonna work. That's one part of it. Number two. How are they gonna

stop the Hondurians from coming across here and fishing? Because that's the area they fish. From the Gladden Spit, all the way down...and they come at night. How are they gonna do that, what's gonna happen there? That was always my question: you stop us from doing it, who owns it, but yet the Hondurians and the Guatemalans can come and do that. So I would really like to know what's gonna happen there. That's my whole interest in the whole thing right there. They're stopping us from doing it, to make a living. But the Hondurians can come and do that."

As many fishers shared their frustration with the government's lack of enforcement, it became clear that, for them, curbing illegal fishing is critical to justifying the creation of marine reserves that restrict Belizean fishers with the aim of replenishing fish stocks. They argue that redirecting local harvesting activities into tourism does nothing to stop foreign overfishing.

In the absence of effective enforcement, they say, the only purpose conservation in GSMR serves is to attract and increase tourism, which they see as being neither environmentally benign nor as economically sustainable as TNC suggests. Fishers noted that tourism activities are not necessarily ecologically 'friendly', citing impacts such as the introduction of chemicals from sunblock into the water and the illegal practice of not releasing sport fish once captured. Though the income it generates can be more lucrative than extractive fishing, it is seasonal and may not sustain a family for the entire year<sup>7</sup>

TNC's suggestion that tour guiding will compensate for the closure of Gladden's fishing grounds was consistently challenged. Elton Erley described the reaction to the closing of grouper SPAGs and researchers' suggestions that closure of the snapper SPAGs would also be necessary for conservation purposes:

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<sup>7</sup> People in Placencia typically identified the tourist season as beginning in November, after American Thanksgiving (third Thursday of the month), and waning in April.

A lot of [the fishermen] are talking about it. ...It's going to be hard for them to survive after they close down all those places! It's going to be very hard on them. Cause they've been fishing all the days of their lives until this organization come in here and they start tightening up on these things. It's going to be really hard on them.

Tony Eiley reiterated this sentiment when he summarized fishers' comments after one of the consultations on proposed FON management strategies that limit fishing access to Gladden Spit:

The hard-core fishermen don't want it because that's where they've been fishing all their lives and then if that happens there is no place else to go... And as I say the older fishermen who depend on the Gladden Spit area all their lives, that's all they know. That's all they depend on because they know when the fish come there and when they leave, and they have nowhere else to go. So that's gonna be pretty hard. ...Because if I depend on going to Gladden Spit for my livelihood, to feed my children, to send my children to school, and you come and tell me that 'Tomorrow you cannot go there anymore. For the rest of your life, you cannot fish in there,' I mean, that's a problem. That's like bullying. That's a problem and that's not going to work.

When I asked him if fishers would be comfortable doing tourism instead of fishing, he responded, "Well, some are. But what happens when the tourist season is closed? That's the time when the fishermen go back to fishing."

As for the fishers who are entirely dependent on commercial fishing for their income,

Lennox shared his perspective on the effect of closing the snapper SPAGs:

...then we say, well, they're gonna close that area, and that's the biggest part of our livelihood of fishing. Handline fishing, anyway, you know? That's about the biggest worry for me because then how are we gonna do after the [lobster] season is closed? You know we'll have to find a way to do something to keep bills going down, and kids to school and all that. Cause like I said before, everybody depends on fishing here. It's a fishing village! ... as we say, that's our livelihood. What else are we gonna do if they shut that down? I don't wanna say what they're gonna do, but that's a different part (laughs). Well, that's a different area. You gotta think on that before you do things. But definitely, if I have to survive, I'll survive.

His brother, Laurence, shared the same concerns:

How can we survive? Especially now that things are getting tougher with the lobster, we're depending on the next four months to go fish. If we can't do that, what will you do? What can we do, the fishermen? We have more guides than tourists (laughs). No, that won't work.

Carlton Young, Sr. asserted that closure would present a challenging scenario for fishers in Placencia, even for those who partake in tourism activities, which are scarce during the snapper spawning season:

The lobster season is closed and that's the only other type of fishing in this area that you can make a little money until the lobster season reopens. If you take that away from them, what will they do? ... You can't take all the livelihood away from the people just like that.

He suggested that CNGOs promoting SPAG closure at Gladden must consider other income alternatives for fishers with no interest in tour guiding: "You can take it away from them, but then you will – or whosoever – will have to find a way of living for them. Probably pay them to go and catch fish and tag and release, or something like that."

Hard-core fishers such as Lennox and Laurence Leslie agreed that CNGOs need to share more of the cost of their conservation strategies, and take greater responsibility for replacing the income lost to fishers as a result of these activities.

Laurence acknowledges that creating a no-take park around Laughing Bird Caye has caused fish populations to increase in the area, and believes that restricting fishing in Gladden would likely have the same effect. But he also noted that the MPA at Laughing Bird did not benefit full-time fishers, just those who are also tour guides, an occupation he and his brother do not enjoy:

These [conservation] things could help. But if you want to do something, and change it out there or close it, you have to find alternative things to do, than only

depend on fishing. Try to get something else done that you could survive from. But you can't just chop it off and leave it there. It'd be tough, real tough. I wouldn't like it. Nobody else would.. That's what my brother told one of those same scientists out there. You could find some money for us during each month of the closed season if you close it (laughs). That's no more than fair. Find something else to do to keep you going they say. Well, alright, this is a solution to the problem, too if they shut it down.

This perspective is shared by other fishers who are engaged in tour guiding, but understand that it is not suited to everyone, a fact they say does not enter into TNC's ecotourism-based solution to protecting the SPAGs. In those cases, Elton Eley contends, CNGOs should be providing fishers with income opportunities other than tourism: "The way I see it, if those organizations were providing jobs for those other guys that are making their *living* off of fishing it wouldn't be too bad." Tony Eley also took issue with the manner in which conservation strategies were planned without carefully considering how best to support fishers' needs and personal occupational preferences:

... they have to do more. More if they're going to stop the fishermen from fishing at Gladden which has been a fishing ground since before my dad was born...people have been fishing there for so long and it's the only fishing ground in this area. And if they're gonna lock that off, they gotta come up with something for the fishermen to do. And they have to take up responsibility of patrolling to help the fishermen...

*You say they'd have to give the fishermen something else to do. What would that be?*

Compensation, some way or another. Maybe give some help out with other things like lobster traps and whatever the fishermen need. Each fisherman does something different. Whatever that person does, to help them with that. Because there's no other place. As I said the fishing is going rapidly in this country and right now there are so many reserves here and there and it's coming to like one small area...

From fishers' perspective, CNGOs interested in safeguarding Gladden's SPAGs and 'helping' local people should be directing their efforts primarily at the reduction and

eventual elimination of illegal fishing. They point to the fact that they have already agreed to stop fishing the area's grouper aggregations and argue that closure of the snapper aggregations would impose an economic strain for which tourism income could not compensate.

Fishers' discourse represents TNC's conservation actions as strategies that will not effectively protect the marine resources they have identified as being under threat. Rather, promoting total closure paired with tour guide training misunderstands the extent to which people in Placencia depend on the area, their economic as well as social relationship with fishing at Gladden Spit. It fails to compensate them for losses, or provide secure livelihoods. It also denies the political realities of overfishing in the GSMR area by not dealing with the issue of foreign fishing and internal migrant fishing motivated by poverty and need, nor the lack of state enforcement of existing regulations. As such, TNC's solution can neither safeguard the SPAGs nor the people who depend on them.

As with their (re)definition of the conservation problem at Gladden, in countering TNC's interpretive prerogative, Placencian fishers' discourse constructs the solution at Gladden quite differently. Whereas TNC asserts the need to ensure species survival as a powerful legitimizing referent for their proposal of a permanent ban on fishing in GSMR, fishers forward the need to assure the survival of both the fish and their families as the legitimate basis for their rejection of this solution.



## **Intervention Outcomes**

TNC's planned conservation intervention at Gladden Spit has sparked a discursive debate between global and local actors. According to TNC, the key problem, the human activity that is endangering SPAGs at Gladden Spit the most, is (over)fishing. It further stipulates the solutions best suited to this scenario. First, access to the site is best restricted to ecotourism uses. Secondly, fishers' interaction with the local marine environment must be redirected from extractive resource harvests to non-extractive tour guiding activities. Finally, conservation science must be applied in order to safeguard the integrity and assure the survival of the marine life in the area. TNC appears to avoid the issue of non-local fishers activities. Why this is so is unclear, but as fishers asserted above, it may be related to the wider politics of long-standing tensions in Belize's relations with its southern neighbours.

Placencian fishers most commonly asserted that TNC's assessment of the problem with the SPAGs at Gladden does not accurately represent the situation, and implicates local fishers as part of a problem they do not believe themselves to be a part of. Pointing to their decades of experience and observation concerning the practice of fishing and the behaviour of fish in the area, they generally made four points in this regard: (1) the stocks are declining at Gladden's SPAGs; (2) overfishing is contributing to this decline, though it may not be the only factor; (3) overfishing of the SPAGs has not been definitively linked to local harvests, which have declined significantly, and cannot be solely attributed to local fishing practices, which use relatively low-impact methods; and (4) overfishing is caused by non-local fishers whose numbers and methods are destructive. Their comments

suggest that the conservation strategies mobilized as the means to mitigating an ill-defined conservation problem are misdirected, ineffective, and compromise the survival of local people as well as the aggregations, assuredly an unintended outcome on TNC's part.

TNC's pursuit of alternative livelihood training that focuses on ecotourism activities as sustainable alternatives to extractive fishing activities is a solution that is likely to increase competition among users, possibly creating conflict and increasing pressure on Gladden's resources. The alternative livelihoods project is creating more tour guides in Placencia when there are already many guides without enough business to survive on alone. Many guides already routinely supplement their income with commercial fishing.

Part of the issue is simple economics in that the number of tourists visiting the Placencia area dictates demand for tour guides. Already fishers suggest that there are more tour guides than the demand warrants. Hurricane Iris destroyed much of the infrastructure that supported tourism in Placencia. There has been no market study undertaken to evaluate if the village economy could handle more tour guides. TNC has not produced a comprehensive plan for the costs of investment in not only establishing, but then also building and maintaining a tour guiding business. Often a loan is required, or capital is acquired through commercial fishing. If there is not enough guiding business, then increased fishing effort is the most viable means to ensure payment of a loan and other living expenses.

No evaluation was undertaken to establish if training more tour guides would actually reduce fishing efforts at the SPAGs.” Many of the hard-core fishers who use Gladden the most intensively are not interested in becoming tour guides. Others who use the area are already tour guiding but fish at Gladden in the spring for a variety of reasons: to supplement their income when there are few tourists; to maintain relationships, social status, or long-standing traditions; and for personal enjoyment.

Moreover, if or when the number of tourists traveling to Placencia increases and provides the income for more trained tour guides, this may exceed the carrying capacity of the protected areas, compromising the conservation objectives that motivated their training to begin with. At a community consultation on GSMR’s management plan, TNC researchers suggested that even eco-tourism activities must be limited “in such a fragile area”. FON’s management plan for GSMR restricts the number and size of boats, and the number of divers in the water with whale sharks, already limiting the potential for this significant tourist attraction to generate income for local guides trained as part of the aforementioned TNC-funded dive master training project.

For both economic and cultural reasons, turning Placencia fishers into tour guides is unlikely to stop them from fishing for either subsistence or commercial purposes. In fact, reducing local fishing pressure is unlikely to halt the decline of the stock, particularly given fishers’ observations that local harvesting is already waning. Gladden’s stock decline has yet to be scientifically or otherwise causally connected to local fishing

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike fish in the SPAGs, TNC has not identified lobster and conch as being in need of protection, despite an increasing rate of harvest that is demonstrably depleting stocks of these marine resources (Pomeroy and Goetze 2003).

practices alone, though TNC was sponsoring research on the matter prior to a major change in research personnel in 2004 (Heyman, et al 2001). Indeed, it has not been definitively attributed to overfishing by any user group. The unknown factor of land-based pollution is a potential contributor in the minds of fishers, and research that explores its impact on SPAGs is important, too.<sup>10</sup>

In this scenario, local fishers appear as anonymous ‘resource users’ being ‘participated’ in conservation projects that are based on abstracted constructions of global *ecological* problems. The resulting planned interventions target human behaviour in a manner that affects people’s *social* realities. Problems and solutions are defined (a) without taking into account the wider political environment; (b) away from local settings, needs, agendas; (c) in the absence of local expertise regarding the target environment; (d) without relevant social or economic studies; and (e) without a sufficient understanding of local people’s ontological relationship to the resources to be conserved. Despite this, TNC has led efforts to protect SPAGs in Gladden. It has generated planned interventions and offered them in the form of ‘technical assistance’ to FON staff who are preparing a management plan for GSMR, the funding for which will come primarily from CNGOs.

The conservation vision for Belize that redefines SPAGs from fishing grounds to protected areas and aims to turn local fishers into tour guides has had several additional unintended outcomes. In Placencia, the closure of the winter grouper aggregations, and the increasing possibility of a similar ban on the spring snapper SPAGs, is affecting the social reality of ‘recipients’ in ways very similar to development’s depoliticizing

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<sup>10</sup> For fishers, such research is crucial to gaining the support of fishers in reducing their harvesting activities in these areas.

“instrument effects” as Ferguson identified (1990:255). On the one hand, it further extends the power of the state in fishers’ lives by creating a bureaucracy, albeit a local NGO, that has a growing capacity to dictate where and how local people may pursue their traditional livelihoods. This affects the cultural traditions, social obligations, and survival needs associated with fishing SPAGs in Placencia. Second, it denies the politics of state corruption, inter-state relations, and the unequal distribution of material wealth that are inherently related to ecological degradation locally, nationally, and globally. In identifying particular threats and not others, the problem of SPAG degradation becomes a technical issue best solved by CNGOs applying their technical expertise through scientific research and training programs that modify local human interactions with the threatened eco-target. This occurs without critically examining or disrupting a problematic wider political and economic context.

This approach, in turn, presents a serious challenge to ensuring the mutually desired protection of the SPAGs at Gladden Spit. It serves to alienate fishers, whose voluntary compliance with MPA regulations that restrict their activities is critical to successful conservation efforts. As it stands, many fishers in Placencia feel disconnected from CNGOs, do not trust them, and are reluctant to actively participate in conservation actions that they feel disregard their needs. This is so despite their statements suggesting that they would cooperate with conservation programs that did not seriously disadvantage them. Fishers’ skepticism compromises FON’s efforts to effectively co-manage GSMR in accordance with donor agendas while meeting its stated objective respecting the needs of the communities it represents. As much previous research has shown, conflict among

stakeholders is a serious impediment to establishing effective resource management that is both ecologically and socially responsive (Osherenko 1988; Pinkerton 1989a; Berkes, et al 1991; Goetze 1998; Buckles 1999).

## **Conclusion**

The interpretive conflict between TNC and Placencian fishers concerning Gladden's conservation problem and its solution exemplifies a locally-driven discursive challenge to the dominant conservation problematic. By countering TNC's construction of the conservation problem and solution at Gladden's SPAGs, Placencian fishers are engaging the external production of a 'global' conservation problem, and re-framing it through a local interpretive lens that takes TNC's discursive constructions and evaluates their veracity on different epistemological terms. Rather than passively incorporating these productions, resource users in Placencia are asserting their own relationship with 'nature' and forwarding an alternate interpretive vision of the problem and its solution that favours local agendas and interests.

The debate points to a discursive struggle over the future of Gladden Spit. Both actors legitimate their respective interpretations of the situation at Gladden by referring to their own interests and a pressing need to ensure mutually contested visions of survival. This reflects a more fundamental dispute over who has the 'right', the legitimate capacity, to define the relationship between humans and nature in GSMR. It also underscores the tension between global and local knowledge, needs, interests and agendas in terms of

which will dictate the direction of conservation in the area.<sup>11</sup> These competing discourses suggest a need to consider what fishers are being asked to give up in the name of conservation at Gladden. That there may be social and cultural significance attached to fishers' chosen lifeways, and political contexts of action and constraint, appear to bear limited consideration within interventions that seek to alter them in the pursuit of a vision of conservation that is framed from the beginning in global terms

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<sup>11</sup> At the time of this research, the matter of fishing access to GSMR was still an unresolved issue

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **Conservation, Co-Management and the Evolution of Local Power Relations**

*“Fishers recognize the need to work cooperatively with other stakeholders and the need to engage in co-management.” Vincent Gillette – Director, Belizean Fishermen’s Cooperative Association*

*“The concept of co-management has always existed in communities here, especially among fishermen.” Lindsay Garbutt – Executive Director, Friends of Nature*

*“But if it wasn’t co-management it would have been management by Fisheries... They are what you call the legislative body, they make the laws and they pass them. Whether you like it or not, that’s the law.” Brian Young – Chair, Friends of Nature*

#### **Introduction**

On many CNGO websites, a key element of executing conservation action lies in building local ‘partnerships’. In Belize, as elsewhere, co-management is an increasingly popular means by which CNGOs pair with governments, local NGOs, and ‘resource users’, such as fishers. Through co-management arrangements, small local NGOs gain state-sanctioned legal authority to undertake daily management responsibilities for particular mutually identified resources (e.g., species, habitats, protected areas). A major component of these NGOs’ mandates is the development and implementation of management plans, a process facilitated by the ‘technical assistance’ and financial support of myriad CNGOs. Partnered with CNGOs, who act as donors and advisors in planning and implementing MPA management strategies, local NGOs become a key institutional means through which the globalized conservation problematic operates at the

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<sup>1</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of co-management theory and its practice in Belize, see Chapter Four



local level. Scientifically defined ecological ‘problems’ are typically ‘solved’ in part, via local projects that are implemented through local co-managing partners like FON. As such, these ‘community-based’ institutions provide the means to deliver CNGOs’ powerful discursive constructions that beget tangible outcomes affecting the lives of people in ‘local partner’ communities. In addition, Chapter Seven revealed how conservation-driven co-management has the capacity to expand the managerial power of the state, while introducing the discursive power of the global framework described in Chapter Six to area villages through the CNGO staff working on conservation projects with local NGOs. Fishers’ own counter-discourses showed that CNGO visions do not go uncontested.

Like other joint management institutions, FON is inevitably positioned at the nexus of powerful global, national, and local actors. In general, local co-managing NGOs are faced with the task of deploying resource governance responsibilities in a manner consistent with the need to address various conservation problems. The management initiatives that are developed as part of this process should ideally engender the voluntary compliance of local users, for they wield the power to disobey management regulations, which can be costly, and sometimes fatal, to conservation efforts (Chernier, et al 1999; Oviedo 1999; Berkes, et al 2001).

In negotiating these agendas in order to establish cooperative management, it would be natural to assume, as much criticism does, that local interests become lost under the regulatory and epistemological imperatives of national and global actors. Some researchers have pointed to the ways in which some co-management regimes act as a

means to local peoples' co-optation (Kearney 1989; Nadasdy 1999; Neumann 2001; McConney, et al 2004). On the other hand, among the most common benefits cited is the opportunity for local 'empowerment' that co-management presents, largely through community members' 'participation' in management decisions (Osherenko 1988; Pinkerton 1989a; Weiner 1991; Usher 1994; Hoekema 1995; Stevens 1997a; Goetze 1998; Weitzner and Borrás 1999; Talaue-McManus 1999; Berkes, et al 2001; McConney, et al 2003b). While these perspectives usefully highlight the emerging debate concerning the advantages and constraints of co-management, they both mobilize a shared discourse on empowerment that makes a common assumption: that there is a lack of power on the part of local users.<sup>2</sup>

Several interesting questions emerge from this scenario. How do local resource users' perceptions and practices relate to the constructed need for their empowerment? How do fishers' and CNGOs' differing visions of MPA management get put into practice? Are fishers simply ignored? What effect does CNGO-assisted co-management have upon fishers' understandings, interests, and resource activities? If the meeting of global and local agendas results in a contentious power struggle, what role does co-management play in promoting or mitigating the conflict?

This chapter extends the analysis of the conservation problematic by showing how ideas of participation and empowerment are part of the discursive framework of conservation, as they are of development (see Rahema 1992; Rowlands 1995; Michener 1998; Mohan and Stokke 2000), and examining the power relations that coalesce and

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'power' in this context is used to refer to the capacity of people(s) to make or share in decisions on matters that affect their interests (Dahl 1982, Olsen 1993)

shift as a part of FON's implementation of management strategies in the MPAs.' In doing so, it synthesizes the insights of the previous chapters and extends Ferguson's critique of development by analyzing the complex global-local power dynamics of CNGO intervention via co-management. It explores the construction of a discourse of local empowerment and the ways in which FON's implementation of CNGO-sponsored MPA management strategies affects fishers' control over resource activities. I argue that rather than simply 'empowering' fishers, the process both expands and constrains fishers' options along with that of other actors involved. As 'participants' in co-management, fishers' engage in a well-established practice of considered decision-making that strategically increases or diminishes the control of these local users according to shifting needs and interests. This implies that understandings of community-based conservation initiatives such as co-management must consider the process of discursive construction, and the negotiation, (re)prioritization, and deliberation of interests, all of which are bound up in how community members 'participate' in joint management institutions.

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Critics argue that the ways in which participation is deployed within development projects may perpetuate or obscure unequal power relations between communities and external actors or within communities themselves (Rahnema 1992, Menike 1993; Rowlands 1995; Michener 1998; Mohan and Stokke 2000). participation in this context is co-opted by development agencies, which use the term to import their own ideas and then attribute them to the community, in turn legitimizing external intervention, limiting local protest, and contributing to the expansion of agencies' control. Far from empowerment, the result is the incorporation of community members into the powerful development apparatus (Rahnema 1992, Lane 1995; Gardner and Lewis 1996). Moreover, the meaning of empowerment is externally pre-defined, so participation takes place on terms as understood by outsiders and is not really open to local views, consequently, it has a disempowering effect by masking or validating outsiders' predetermined decisions concerning the means and goals of development interventions (Rahnema 1991, 1992, Menike 1993, Gardner and Lewis 1996).

### **FON Co-Management, ‘Participation’, and Discourses of Local ‘Empowerment’**

For the government of Belize, co-management has less to do with promoting participation that ‘empowers’ local users by giving them a determinative role in resource management decisions, and more with capitalizing on the economic input from CNGO donors in managing valuable national resources (Azqueta 2000; McConney, et al 2003b). For their part, CNGOs working in Belize broadly endorse the participation of resource users as a part of the process of building partnerships with local people in order to secure their support for conservation projects. The website for Conservation International asserts that, “conservation cannot succeed without the support of local people” (<http://www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/strategies/>), and The Nature Conservancy site page titled, “Our Partners” contends that “effective conservation cannot be achieved unless the people who live and rely on those lands are an integral part of the conservation process” (<http://www.nature.org/partners/partnership/art14301.html>). For World Wildlife Fund, community participation is a critical factor necessary to assuring project success ([http://worldwildlife.org/bsp/publications/africa\\_biome/participation.pdf](http://worldwildlife.org/bsp/publications/africa_biome/participation.pdf)). As has been observed elsewhere, such partnering is typically encouraged by CNGOs as a way to better advance their global strategies and implement local conservation activities (Dasmann 1991; Schwartzmann et al. 2000; Brockington 2002; Adams 2004; Forsyth 2004). For both the state and these transnational CNGOs, the central purpose of community members’ participation is to meet the goal of effective resource management for either economic or ecological purposes. Empowering local users is a distant second, if mentioned at all.

Nevertheless, the empowerment capacity of participatory resource management regimes has been actively promoted in Belize by some transnational organizations targeting the small NGOs involved in MPA co-management. In a 2001 workshop on co-management held in Belize, a programme officer for a U.S.-based NGO spoke on the importance of co-management. Among four key elements, she noted that, through participation, successful co-management builds community capacity to “practice good, long-term decision-making” that, in turn, results in “community empowerment” (TASTE 2001:26). A Caribbean Conservation Association report on its Coastal Co-Management Guidelines Project asserts that, “to act as incentives, benefits of co-management must outweigh costs” and it lists “increases empowerment” as one of these benefits (McConney et al 2003b:18).<sup>1</sup> The report defines empowerment as “having the power and responsibility to do something; the ability of a person or a group of people to control or to have an input into decisions that affect their livelihoods” (McConney et al 2003b:52). It connects this decision-making control to “the extent to which stakeholders, other than the government authority, have power to make decisions on their own” (McConney et al 2003b:26-7). Achieving local empowerment through co-management is also defined in economic as well as legal terms. In its *Good Practice Guide*, the Centre for Development Studies (2000), which supported the Guidelines project, links successful co-management to the process of poverty eradication and alleviation through community empowerment.

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<sup>1</sup> This project (2001-2003) was undertaken by the Caribbean Conservation Association, the University of the West Indies, Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies, and Marine Resources Assessment Group Ltd. It was funded by the UK Department for International Development. The aim of the project was “to ensure that integrated coastal management in the Caribbean is done in a way that involves and benefits those who depend on the resources of coastal areas, especially where there is poverty. The purpose was to understand the conditions required for establishing and sustaining successful co-management of coastal resources in the Caribbean” (McConney et al 2003b:4)

which is associated with giving the poor an opportunity to be participate in resource management. With the best of intentions, the terms by which a homogenous process of empowerment takes place is defined by institutions external to the diverse communities living in the different areas in which conservation via co-management will take place, a process that has been similarly observed within 'participatory' development processes (see Rahnema 1991, 1992; Menike 1993; Gardner and Lewis 1996).

Ideas about empowering community members through their participation in co-management are not just expressed by transnational organizations. According to FON staff and Board members I interviewed, the goal of local empowerment through co-management is highly valued by FON, who note this position is implicit in its motto: "Protecting our natural resources through developing our human resources." The organization prides itself, and is hailed by others, as being "truly community-based", being locally representative, and making consistent use of participatory methods such as community consultations to integrate community interests into its work.<sup>7</sup>

FON's interest in promoting empowerment in the communities it represents was clear at the Caribbean Coastal Co-Management Guidelines Project Workshop in May 2003 in Belize City. Discussing the FON case study, the issue of local empowerment was raised as a key part of the co-management process.<sup>8</sup> A general presentation on co-management

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<sup>7</sup> Several informants (government representatives, FON staff and Board members, other co-managing NGO staff) commented on the "truly community-based" nature of FON as an organization that grew out of community member efforts and continued to actively engage in village consultations were commonplace during interviews with staff members of several CNGOs and coastal managers in Belize.

<sup>8</sup> FON was one of four case studies featured as part of the project, which was being used to evaluate the diversity of co-management options that may be used under the varying conditions throughout the Caribbean region. Project staff also supported the implementation of these co-management 'pilot projects' through training workshops.

noted that among the “forces driving co-management” in the Caribbean was the “empowerment of civil society in governance” (CCA UWF/MRAG 2003:42). Another presentation evaluating the status of FON co-management suggested that among the ‘priority actions’ for FON to create the conditions for successful co-management was “the increased empowerment of stakeholders” (ibid:37).

The idea of how to “empower the community” was enthusiastically debated at length by facilitators, FON staff, and FON Board members. It was agreed that the path to such empowerment was through participation, which involved access to management decision-making, involvement in management activities, and active representation within a co-management regime. FON staff agreed with one workshop facilitator that there was a need for “a trickle down of government decision-making power to [community] stakeholders”.

Furthermore, as the session progressed, the unspoken understanding framing the discussion suggested that resource users in the FON areas had limited power themselves prior to co-management: workshop participants unanimously agreed that one of the central benefits of co-management was that it could empower community stakeholders such as fishers.

The concomitant notion that co-management can function to fill this vacuum discursively constructs local stakeholders such as fishers as generally ‘powerless’ and posits co-management as the ‘solution’ to this ‘problem’. The discussion did not reference fishers’ expressions of feeling powerless in relation to a particular issue, but instead suggested this was a general state of being that needed to be actively changed.

In the discourse on empowerment, conceptually, power is being discussed as a thing that people either have or do not have. In doing so, the discourse creates an opportunity in which these institutions become the means to ‘empower the powerless’. Good intentions aside, this discursive framework misrepresents the situation, and has unforeseen effects. As my interviews with fishers revealed, co-management relates to a pre-existent context of power *relations*, a dynamic, complex, fluid process in which actors assert and constantly (re)negotiate competing and complementary sets of interests which reflect a diverse variety of needs.

The rest of this chapter examines the historical and more recent ways in which these resource users asserted control prior to FON, and how they have accessed new forms of leverage through co-management. It suggests that one outcome unforeseen by either progenitors or critics of empowerment discourse is the manner in which fishers feel their existing level of influence is changed, simultaneously increased *and* compromised, through their participation in FON co-management.

### **Power Players: Fishers and Their Influence**

Prior to the negotiation of FON’s co-management agreements, fishers were developing and forwarding their control as active decision-makers in accessing the resources upon which their incomes rely, largely through a system of nationally-linked local cooperatives. Palacio describes how the local fishing cooperative has long acted as a mechanism for asserting fishers’ interests: “In the South, only the Placencia Producers Cooperative Society Ltd, provides organizational support to community members going back for forty years.” (2001:46). Many fishers noted how historically, the Placencia



Cooperative allowed fishers to gain control over the marketing of locally harvested marine products. Since its inception in 1962, the member-run Cooperative has provided a variety of services to fishers, facilitating the purchase of equipment that they could not otherwise afford, providing additional income through profit-sharing and presenting their interests nationally. Key identifies the creation of the Placencia Cooperative as a significant element of fishers' "political activity" that meant they "were now able to take complete control of fishing in the village...with the industry in the fishermen's hands, they were able to fight against quotas and extend seasonal limits for the high valued items" (Key 2002:9). Indeed, the cooperative system in Belize affords significant political leverage for fishers at the national level as well:

The Belize Fishermen's Cooperatives emerged in the 1960s, some two decades before Belize achieved political independence, as a mass movement that had wrestled lobster processing and exporting rights from foreign monopolists, accused of exploiting the local producers through exploitative producer prices... Its umbrella organization, the Belize Fishermen Cooperative Association (BFCA) formed by representatives of the member organizations since 1970, uses the defense of this privilege-turned right of monopoly over the processing and exporting of lobsters, and later on, of conch, as a rallying point for unity against any imagined or real threat from both internal and external sources... The organizational strength of the movement is primarily dependent on the defense of this monopolistic right: their economic strength is derived from the lucrative trade in lobster and conch products. This significantly enhances their independence and reduces their dependence on government largesse. The BFCA operates from a position of both political and economic strength, and has been successful in warding off any attempts to deprive the members of their hard won rights... Through the BFCA, the member cooperatives have the ability of bargaining for concessions from governments, and are able to influence decision-making through dialogue, lobbying, negotiations and effective use of their membership on the National Fisheries Advisory Board (Brown 2004:1).

Brown contends that the cooperative system in Belize is an example of power-sharing between local and national actors in which local actors are able to effectively assert their

interests vis-à-vis those of the state: “This is a classic case of a dynamic partnership between a resource appropriation organization and government functionaries in management relationships, in which the scale of strength and influence seems to weigh in favour of the former” (ibid:2). He is not alone in his observation of the considerable leverage of Belize’s fishing cooperatives. In their study of the Fisheries Advisory Board (FAB), McConney, Mahon, and Pomeroy describe the Board as “a powerful force in fisheries development since its establishment along with the Fisheries Department in 1965” and note that “fisheries cooperatives exercise considerable power in and through the FAB” (2003a:6). During their research, they observed, “fishing cooperatives had easy access to Ministers,” and representatives of the Belize Fishermen Cooperatives Association (BFCA) were noted several times as having meetings with the Minister directly in order to press their perspective on issues currently before the FAB. (ibid:51). This prompted them to conclude, “the power exerted by fishing industry stakeholders and the types of decisions that the body has taken causes [the Fisheries Advisory Board] to exhibit characteristics of collaborative management on particular issues” (ibid:56).

Perhaps because of their experience with cooperatives, fishers in Placencia expressed a well-developed sense of control in relation to management activities in the MPAs, most commonly referring to an understanding between FON staff and fishers that decisions regarding regulations restricting fishers’ access depend on fishers’ approval if they are to be successfully implemented. This perspective is echoed in the statements made by two well-respected fishers in the village. At a fisheries conference in 2002, Carleton Young, Sr., FON’s Board representative for fishers, asserted, “FON doesn’t make the rules for

Gladden Spit Marine Reserve, the fishermen do. I am on the Board of Directors, and I represent the fishermen there. So, FON is working *with* the fishermen. We work *together* in the management of Gladden.” During an interview, he noted that he had been involved with FON since the time Laughing Bird Caye was being forwarded for park status. He said he had to “voice his opinion” at that time because a six-mile radius was originally proposed: “And I tell them, ‘Hell no, man!’ When I knew about that was when it had already become law... I said, ‘That cannot work, that’s too much. You’re taking *all* the conch ground from the fishermen, that thing will have to reduce’. And we got to reduce it to one mile.” Lennox Leslie described fishers’ relationship with FON: “They don’t hide nothing from us. Cause they gotta get our views to make them do something, right? They don’t do it to fit their own time, their own rules. They can make rules, but they contact the fishermen *before* they make the rules. If it is ok for them to do it or not.” He later added, “It’s because we’re like, as we call it, the designated fishermen to an area. So anything they want to find out, they come to us. You know, like we have five brothers among us and uncles and cousins...we are the ones they come look for to get a little feedback from.” Voicing a sentiment often forwarded during informal discussions with other fishers, he commented, “Because fishermen, you get them against you, and that’s it.”

Together with an awareness of the leverage they hold, which is based in part on the well-established power of the cooperatives, and in part on the need for their compliance with resource regulations, fishers also told of experiences in which they did feel a sense of powerlessness. For the most part, fishers expressed a sense of being helpless in two

key areas directly affecting their needs and interests. First, the CNGO-sponsored closure of the area's winter grouper spawning aggregations, and the ongoing efforts of CNGO researchers to extend the closure to the spring snapper aggregations, critical fishing grounds for fishers during the waning of the lobster and tourist season. Laurence Leslie told how "the others who were out there experimenting because they wanted us to come to a full closure... They tricked us (laughs), all of us. What they told us, right, was that they didn't think to harm us... And then the thing was turning around the *other* way, to close it. Recommendations were going in, you know, and it was hurtful to us." Secondly, fishers suggested that they felt powerless when faced with the government's lack of enforcement, allowing illegal fishing to continue, endangering the fish stocks that Belizean fishers depend upon for their livelihoods. When asked what they did when they saw boats fishing illegally, Villa Godfrey, as most others, pointed out that there was nothing they could do but report it to authorities:

Nothing. You can't do nothing. Sometimes you tell them, but they don't listen to you... Sometimes they hide out and then come out and fish at night. They have bigger engines, so they can run...and they clean the fish right on the banks, so you get a lot of sharks, then the sharks take the fish from you. They've been coming from long time, many years ago. Since I know myself, they've been coming across. Well, they still come, but the government now tries to catch them. But it's hard, you know?

In their experience, those with the authority to act against poaching do not use it effectively. Carlton Young, Sr. conveyed this feeling well, exclaiming "You know it's hard for you to go out there and to see somebody taking maybe lobster during the closed season, and you can't do anything about it!" As noted in the last chapter, he also noted the use of ineffective deterrents when offenders are caught:

And we were a voice of discontent about these people fishing out there and they had asked that if we could try and help the government to do something. Brian got some police and they camp at my island and before daylight they went down by Silk Caye and went outside the reef and wait on them. And they saw them coming. Like at four o'clock in the morning and they just start chasing them. They catch the first one and took away his tank. And they catch the other one and took away the tank...three of them got away. But they brought in five and to our surprise, the government gave them back their boats! You know, so you put your life on the line to try to protect the area and they turn around and give it back to the people!

In light of such events, Tony Eiley suggested, “Well, that Belizean style, ‘We’re gonna do this, and we’re gonna do this,’ and that’s it and you can’t do shit about it. And then next thing you know, you got everybody upset...they shove it down your throat, and that is not fair. That’s the nature of this country that’s how they do things here.” This dynamic needs to be challenged, he argued: “Nobody comes to talk to us about it. This poor reef has been hammered. It’s time for somebody to do something. That’s why I say Friends of Nature has to do something.” Interestingly, other fishers also pointed to FON as the means to mitigating contexts in which they felt their ability to meet their central needs was challenged by forces beyond their control.

In sum, rather than being devoid of power as empowerment discourse suggests, in their own discourse, Placencian fishers situate themselves as being influential vis-à-vis some actors, and less so in other relations. As such, they feel they are least effective when dealing with problems that are the responsibility of national and transnational actors. In these scenarios, fishers suggested that FON was proving a useful partner.

### **Of Giving and Taking: FON and Fishers' Interests**

Though fishers did not express a generalized sense of being powerless as implied by an empowerment discourse that constructs them as such, they did note that they benefit from the *new forms* of control that FON's co-management arrangements have introduced for managing protected areas. The idea that their control was enhanced through FON was suggested by several fishers during interviews. Most often this shift was observed in relation to illegal fishing and the restriction of fishing in the Gladden Spit area, matters of key concern but over which they themselves have little influence. Having defined the problem differently than CNGOs, their solution differs accordingly: in these areas in which they have less leverage, participating in FON co-management provides the means to augment fishers' control.

Though Villa Godfrey had never heard of the term co-management, he knows that FON works along with government, and he thinks this is good. "because government is, they're the sole people that make the law, you see? You have to work with them". He believes that it is beneficial that government is working with FON. When asked why he thought this, he said that FON "get to us, they get to we, and then they go to government and tell government what they hear from us. So, the three of us are involved, you see? The government, the people and everything." He thinks this is a better system for the fishers than before FON when they had only the Cooperative or their local elected representative to deal with issues related to protected areas and other specific issues affecting local fishing activities. With FON, he said, "we tell them what we want and then they tell government... The area representative is good, too, but we don't see him

often cause they have a lot of other villages to take care of, too”. Carlton Young, Sr. also suggested that FON co-management has been a useful development for area fishers: “It is because you have a *voice* in what will be done in *that* [protected] area, instead of the government coming and telling you, ‘Well, you should do *this*, and you should do *that* and shouldn’t do *this*.’ you know? *We live here*. We are in an out of that area *every* day, so we know what should be done there. So that’s why I think it will work.”

Laurence Leslie acknowledges the fact that FON is better situated to assert fishers’ interests in certain cases: “They have more power to do certain things for us. Because out here was to be closed, too, I understand. But they can’t close it because it was controlled out here by Friends. So, I’m glad for that because it was destined to be closed.” His brother, Lennox also called attention to the fact that the government has not closed Gladden’s spring aggregations as proposed by The Nature Conservancy, and used this an example of how FON has proved a powerful ally to fishers in this regard:

They don’t want to be putting away. They say that they are there to help the fisherman and that’s what they’re trying to do. Actually I give them a big applause because they fight for us to hold that place still open. As I said the guy at first wanted to close it down. But they are the ones who really fight to keep it open. And they’re going to manage it, that’s why they fight. And they pulled through with it. You know it’s very good that you can have some fishing there.

As a FON Board of Directors member representing fishers, Carlton Young, Sr. explained FON’s position on the proposal to permanently ban fishing in GSMR:

The Nature Conservancy wanted to close it entirely! No fishing at all. But we [on the FON Board] are saying ‘No, we cannot just take it away from the fishermen’. Eventually if the population starts dwindling, it might come to that. But we say, ‘You cannot do that right now’. Then what will the fishermen who depend on that for their livelihood, what will they do? ... But like I say if the stock is depleting, then we will have to let the fishermen know that this is the case and we will try to

find some other way of livelihood for you... But you can't do it just like that, say 'You fished there last year and this year you can't fish.' No."

Being both an active fisher and a member lends Mr. Young a unique perspective concerning the implications of FON co-management for fishers:

This co-management it helps us have a voice in what is going on in the reserve, you know? And I don't think we'll have a problem with it because [FON Chair] Brian [Young] was a fisherman, [FON Executive Director] Lindsay [Garbutt] was a fisherman, I am a fisherman, and we are on the Board. So, we will do everything possible to, you know – although we are thinking about – we know it's a reserve, and we know what can happen, and we will have to take a little away from the fishermen, but we are not intending to take that much. If we take, we're going to give back something. And I think most of the fishermen understand that. That it's not like what it was ten, fifteen years ago. So there has to be some kind of restriction. Like probably take away some of your, your – I wouldn't say your rights, but take away a little bit of production away from you because you will be limited to maybe catching so much fish, or you will be limited to only a few – which we are thinking about – maybe ten or twelve boats to fish in the area for this coming season, and things like that. But they are not up in arms about it because they know that something has to happen."

Not only do they know that "something" must happen, the "hard-core" fishers who most heavily depend on the SPAGs are actively defining what that should be through FON. At an FON consultation in Placencia on the management plan for GSMR, the matter of how to control fishing of the spring aggregations so as to minimize its impact on them was discussed at length. Restrictions such as limiting fishing to the dozen hard-core fishers were suggested. Then, these fishers themselves proposed a compromise that saw them offering a significant concession. As Mr. Young describes:

Like when they were talking about this groups and the limiting of the fishing boats, one fisherman came right up and said, 'Well you know what? We are giving up the full moon in the month of June for fishing'. And they weren't thinking about that. He said, 'We are saying that we are not going to fish on the full moon in June'. So, that's a contribution from the fishermen, and we weren't thinking about that. They said, 'We will not catch any grouper and we will give up the full moon in June'.



Offering to give up fishing the winter aggregations and one of three months in which they traditionally fish those in the spring reflects a well-established approach to navigating the power relations of which fishers have long been a part. It demonstrated fishers' strategy for negotiating the powerful interests of CNGOs in an attempt to maintain their access to the highly valued fishing grounds at Gladden.

Mr. Young then went on to describe how FON has used its access to substantial capital in making an effort to "give back" to fishers. He uses the example of compensating them for the loss of their camping grounds at Silk Cayes when Gladden Spit was declared a protected area:

Well, for one like I mentioned, the Buttonwood Caye. They gave that back to the, you know, they bought it and gave it to the fishermen... I guess that in any other area that we see it possible that we can give back something to the community or to the fishermen, it will be done. And I think this is one of the things why I say that most of the fishermen are not too up in arms against the things that are done.

He later added:

Here in Placencia, we can see the benefit that we will get from this reserve. As a matter of fact, Friends of Nature is working for the fishermen, because they are getting a caye for the fishermen. That island would have been taken away, and then they would have nowhere to camp. And that's a traditional camping ground for the fishermen all through the year. They use that island to camp, to fish in the Gladden Spit reserve and do lobster fishing and things. They would have had nowhere to go. So, I think that's a feather in the cap for Friends of Nature.

Like Lennox Leslie, fishers tended to agree with Mr. Young's assessment of FON's efforts in this regard:

Friends of Nature what they've done for us is very good. Try to seek for the fishermen. Cause an example that happened lately, I didn't know about it but a couple of days ago I just got the word about it that they buy Buttonwood Caye, the caye where we go and stay, that they've had that held down for a while. You know they try to buy that, finish that, so they can get a place where the fishermen can go.

When asked how he and other fishers felt about no longer being able to camp at the Silk Cayes, now protected as part of GSMR, he answered:

Well, you don't, you really don't press. It's something you're used to and suddenly it stops. Cause if Friends of Nature didn't do that, and they sell it out, I don't want to say the word but, to foreigners, you probably have a little spot there, you know, free no more again. So now you can go to Buttonwood and sit there and do whatever you want and just follow the rules they say and that's that. You have that caye to go and relax.

Again, as Lennox's words suggest, fishers realize that the new leverage they gain through FON may necessarily involve restricting the exercise of their existing control in terms of the decisions they make as harvesters. Discursively they position their partnership with FON as one in which, as in their relations with state management agencies, there are trade-offs. Moving beyond the matter of empowerment, in fishers' discourse, 'participating' in FON co-management results in both gains and losses of control. While Gladden remains open to fishing the spring spawning aggregations, the winter SPAGs have been given up. With the loss of the tiny Silk Cayes as a camping ground near Gladden, fishers gained permanent access to the larger Buttonwood Caye nearby, long used for the same purpose.

The process of strategically conceding a measure of control in one area in order to augment it in another also takes place in relation to FON's enforcement activities that aim to reduce illegal fishing in and around its MPAs. Many fishers pointed to the increased presence of FON rangers as a significant deterrent to illegal activities continuing in the

area. Carlton Young, Sr. said that FON co-management has been a good thing for fishers because of the regularity of patrols that it has undertaken:<sup>7</sup>

It kind of takes some of the weight off the fishermen knowing that we have people doing patrolling in the area. That we know for sure now that they will be scared to come back. As a matter of fact they have recently apprehended one of these same fishing boats from Honduras... They won't ease them now, because they know now that the fishermen will get on the radio or write them up in the newspapers so they won't do that anymore.<sup>8</sup>

Oftentimes they were quick to add that this includes any illegal activities in which local area fishers may choose to engage. As Villa Godfrey said, "Well, they bring people too in if they catch you doing illegal things out there. They bring you in there." Lennox Leslie told how FON has "the power to do their own stuff out there... Like they've got the power to do things out there, to patrol, and if [a local fisher] see them in the area [he's] definitely not going to do the things [he] shouldn't do. So their presence is still better than nothing at all." He contends that the benefit of the increased presence of patrols, though imposing a new level of restriction on fishers' own decision-making behaviour, will ultimately wield results that are of greater value to him as a fisher:

[FON's] getting bigger and bigger. Cause they have rangers that say you can't go there and take out what you're not supposed to take. Well, it happens all over the world, but sometimes it difficult because some people wait until the people leave from there, take out their lobster, and go again. But now they're policing the area so you can't do nothing like that again. So everything's coming back in a big abundance.

Over time and through more discussion with fishers, it became clear that they understood and carefully considered the concessions that were involved if FON is to effectively

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<sup>7</sup> Prior to FON launching its own efforts, patrols by the Fisheries Department were sporadic, which contributed in large part to their ineffectiveness (see Chapter Seven).

<sup>8</sup> In observing that "they won't ease them now", Mr. Young is suggesting that, once apprehended, illegal fishers will no longer be shown the leniency they experienced in the past.

reduce foreign poaching of “their” fishing grounds. Laurence Leslie explained fishers’ reactions to FON’s proposal for better dealing with the matter of illegal fishing by establishing regulations banning night fishing. In support of this, he told how “the fishermen have said we would give up night time so they could go out and patrol and arrest anybody fishing in the water at night”. Though fishing at night was never a common event in Placencia, fishers know that it is a good time to fish the aggregations at Gladden because the fish bite more at night, so it was an option that was occasionally capitalized upon in times of need. He then mentioned one FON ranger in particular, who he thinks is performing his duties well, and added with a laugh, “so, I’m relying on him to do his job”.

Fishers’ discourse constructs the process of participating in FON co-management in a manner that highlights both the opportunities and restrictions that FON’s conservation activities may present fishers within the scope of existing power relations and agendas. It suggests both that they are aware of their positioning within this power dynamic, which is strongly influenced by sponsoring CNGOs, and that they operate within it accordingly in ways that assert their needs, knowledge, and interests while recognizing the necessity of restrictions. Instead of defining their engagement with the co-management process as the solution to the problem of their powerlessness, fishers’ discourse frames their partnership with FON as one that can both bring and take away as it relates to their control as local resource users.

### **The Power Dynamics of Co-Management: Fishers, FON, and Conservation Intervention**

In light of fishers' statements regarding their interaction with FON, it is useful to re-visit claims that co-management can empower local users involved in community-based natural resources management. Is empowerment perceived as a benefit brought by outside CNGOs, or by FON? Does it merely or predominantly advance CNGO or government intervention in Placencia? The perspectives offered by fishers indicate that what FON actually 'does' to or for fishers is more complex than these questions imply. Fishers' discourse underscores the fact that empowerment does not singularly come from above. It requires that the analysis move past the 'who empowers or co-opts' view of participations' power-sharing function to see how co-management engages and transforms the power dynamics in which fishers are involved. This approach would focus on the ways in which co-management impacts the power relations among local, national and global actors, exploring the shifts that transpire as a result.

Like many local-level resource management institutions, FON is the locus of multiple assertions of control. The key actors and their predominant expressions of power as they relate to the operation of FON co-management are: the state (legal power), CNGO donors (economic power), local users (power of non-compliance), and FON (regulatory power). Empowering fishers in this co-management scenario would involve maintaining, as well as enhancing, their existing ability to assert their interests and authority in relation to the state, and also in relation to CNGOs, either of whom may retract the leverage they share with FON (legal authority to manage, economic support for activities) at any time. As per the terms of reference of FON's co-management agreements, the Minister may de-declare

an area protected at any time. Similarly, donors may simply refuse to grant funding for project applications. Fishers, likewise, may choose not to comply with management regulations. Even with regular patrols, the area is of sufficient size and the fishers possess sufficient knowledge and skill to pursue harvesting activities within the protected areas in a manner that would significantly compromise conservation efforts. All are constrained from doing so, however, by the very nature of their interest in FON; each relies on FON as the means to furthering their respective agendas and obligations with regard to the marine resources and their socio-political goals.

Though the state has the ultimate statutory authority to designate and revoke protected area status, it *needs* FON in order to secure CNGO funding through which the country's MPAs are actually managed. For Belize, protected areas are critical to the government's vision of shifting the national economy from agriculture to tourism, specifically the eco-tourism activities that capitalizes on Belize's 'pristine' ecology. In addition, Belize's government is bound to promoting the protection of its natural resources by virtue of a debt-for-nature swap it negotiated with the U.S. government<sup>9</sup>

Correspondingly, CNGOs *need* in-country partners with regulatory powers in order to mobilize their global environmental vision. Like many aid organizations, the general preference is to transfer skills and financial support to community organizations rather

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<sup>9</sup> As indicated above, in 2001, The Nature Conservancy organized a debt-for-nature swap in which the U.S. government forgave nearly half of Belize's debt to the United States. In exchange, the government of Belize agreed to protect a designated area of rainforest, support community environmental organizations and invest in a national protected areas system. Contributions from both TNC and the U.S. Government allowed the forgiveness of USD \$1.4 million Belize owed to the U.S. For its part, the Government of Belize allotted BZD \$7.2 million to be distributed to various Belizean co-managing NGOs, including Toledo Institute for Development and Environment, Programme for Belize, and Belize Audubon Society. The Protected Areas Conservation Trust, a Belizean foundation established as an endowment fund to manage the country's protected areas, also received part of these monies.

than governments. In this way, CNGOs *need* FON to gain access to the management of ecological areas that have been identified as in need of protection for the sake of the global good. Such involvement is critical in demonstrating to their members and supporters that they are legitimately carrying out their stated agendas: they are working with local partners to implement sound conservation actions and, as such, are meeting their conservation objectives successfully.

Like the state and CNGOs, fishers would like a healthy marine environment, for it provides the ecological foundation for sufficient species abundance that is necessary for them to retain their livelihoods and provide for their families. It is also the basis for the continuation of a lifestyle that allows them to be “on the sea”. Beyond being the lifestyle of preference for them, it is the means to fulfilling various social obligations and practicing certain cultural traditions that are directly linked to particular marine activities.<sup>10</sup>

As the local co-managing institution, FON must negotiate the agendas and pressures of all these actors in developing a management regime for the MPAs. Being the site of such interdependent and dynamic power relationships FON’s role may be described as that of a *filter effect*: the organization must negotiate local, state and global actors’ competing areas of influence in mobilizing its overarching vision of conserving resources for the benefit of local communities. Implementing various MPA management strategies as the new local management authority thus results in the process of either limiting or extending the control and interests of these actors.

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<sup>10</sup> The socio-cultural significance of fishing in Placencia is discussed in further detail in Chapter Five

FON is therefore a catalyst in the extension of the regulatory power of the state and the discursive control of CNGOs into the daily lives of fishers. In doing so, co-management has constrained fishers' influence. With government approval of its management plan, FON can enact regulations to create use zones, issue licenses, and establish user fees, all of which place new restrictions on fishers. CNGOs have capitalized on this local authority by citing scientific research findings that necessitate conservation strategies restricting fishers' access to marine areas and funding training programs promoting 'sustainable' marine activities. The institutionalization of a local management regime with a central conservation objective has resulted in the creation of boundaries that define no-take marine areas, along with more patrols. This means local fishers have less choice in where they may harvest and are more likely to be caught if they themselves are fishing illegally. Fishers' commonly voiced their sense of being "kept out" of MPAs that were areas they were once at liberty to use as they desired.

Fishers expressed a sense of FON's economic and regulatory capacity in referring to FON as "the company". Fishers noted that they could plainly "see the money" coming into FON (new trucks, new boats, new staff, etc.) and they were very wary of "what is being done" with that money. They were concerned that the benefits of the organization and of the conservation measures it implements be extended to them. The level of suspicion that fishers feel towards FON is reflective of their experience with interventionist institutions and their representatives such as Fisheries officers, CNGO field staff, and university researchers who all suggest their activities are for the benefit of



fishers, though in reality fishers have often suffered as a result of these ‘cooperative’ relationships.

FON staff and Board of Directors members are aware of the need to show users, particularly fishers, the benefits they can derive from the MPAs and FON’s management of these areas. As a locally-initiated institution, FON has its own relationship with the people it represents. As its motto suggests, its interest in protecting local resources is connected to a sense of protecting the needs of the community members it represents. Consisting solely of representatives of local stakeholders, including current and former fishers, the composition of FON’s Board at the very least acts to restrain the top-down imposition of generalized departmental policies and CNGOs’ conservation strategies that may be in direct contradiction to local interests. Its actions in relation to establishing regulations for GSMR thus far have taken the stated objections and needs of fishers as determinative directives, while clearly stipulating the need to restrict their harvesting activities as part of the MPA management process.

As fishers’ statements suggested, co-management has provided the means to addressing two key areas in which they felt they lacked control: the TNC-initiated closure of fishing grounds at Gladden and illegal fishing by non-locals in the area. At the same time, fishers have made and accepted significant concessions limiting their use of marine resources in the reserve because it strategically supported their primary objective of retaining harvesting access to the spring spawning aggregations.

Fishers also pointed to the ways in which FON allows for the extension of their influence and their continued control in changing circumstances. Fishers have direct

access to the 'authority' managing the resources upon which they depend, and to whom they can make their demands personally. They may capitalize on the moral suasion of FON's claim to being locally representative and responsive. For additional leverage, fishers' have the benefit of sharing with some FON staff and Board members a lifestyle, location, and an understanding of the value of the resource to them and their families. Thus, fishers assert that FON also augments their sense of determinative leverage by allowing them more immediate influence over the creation of legally-binding regulations governing local waters and resources through a local institution whose stated agenda includes protecting the interests of area fishers. Giving fishers increased access and authority over the decision-making process by which regulations are formulated allows them a greater degree of control over the direction of local resource governance.

Not only are fishers cognizant of this dialectical process in which their leverage is expanded and restrained, they actively engage it, strategically participating in FON activities based on their understanding of the potential benefits and drawbacks. The fact that fishers' discourse constructs FON as a means of resisting the imposition of CNGO and government agendas, while simultaneously sacrificing some of their interests and voicing suspicions, makes sense. This seeming contradiction is intelligible in light of their statements that indicate that FON has been slotted into the existing socio-political context in which fishers exercise their political leverage.

Like membership in the local and national cooperatives, participating in the local co-management institution's activities is the means to particular ends. Fishers see FON as a form of state and CNGO sponsored intervention, one that forwards certain of their

interests while restricting others. Seen from this perspective, fishers can appreciate and support FON for the way it has functioned to reduce illegal fishing and halt the closure of Gladden's fishing grounds while still criticizing the organization for not displaying sufficient transparency and poor communication with community members. As events occur and circumstances shift, fishers' stated views and interactions with MPA co-management vary accordingly.

While fishers are cognizant of the control CNGOs and governments exercise through FON, they do not simply view FON as under the control of these institutions. Understanding the need to relate to government and CNGOs, fishers see FON as a means of contesting or negotiating these external forms of control, while asserting and even enhancing their own. Fishers can partner with FON and usefully participate in its activities because they see themselves as empowered in the first instance.

## **Conclusion**

As became clear in Chapter Seven, fishers have developed and asserted their own discursive vision regarding marine conservation in the areas they harvest. In and of itself, this does not protect fishers from being co-opted by the expansion of state and CNGO control that FON inadvertently yet necessarily facilitates. It demonstrates one of the means by which fishers mobilize their ideas and needs within the conservation power dynamic. Another way emerges from fishers' alternative discursive framing of their position within the power relations between local, national, and global co-management stakeholders in which fishers are conscious of the influence they assert, and the ways in which participation limits and augments their leverage. This framework functions in

opposition to CNGOs' and FON's empowerment discourse which produces the problem of fishers' universal powerlessness which is to be solved by institutional actions. It also reflects fishers' awareness of the choices they are faced with as partners in the co-management conservation process, and that these are strategic decisions they must make by considering the relation of their own concepts to the respective agendas of other powerful actors.

Prior to the introduction of conservation-oriented co-management, fishers' control over local resources was being challenged by the state's imposition of new regulations regarding harvesting activities, by developing tourism, and by the increasing intrusion of outside fishers. In the period before the MPAs were declared and FON had local resource management responsibilities over them, fishers largely exercised their influence, and attempted to control the impact of these intrusions, through the system of local and national cooperatives in Belize.

With the creation of two new protected areas and the subsequent formation of FON as a local managing institution, the dynamics of resource use in Placencia shifted. On the one hand, the influence of state and CNGO agendas has become a more immediate, daily experience for fishers in Placencia, and it has further limited fishers' access to those local resources now encompassed within protected areas. Yet, fishers have also capitalized on the presence of FON to resist some restrictive CNGO initiatives, to lobby for enforcement against illegal fishing, and to ensure that state and CNGO-encouraged tourism is not pursued as a substitute for their extractive livelihood activities. Thus, co-management has contributed to processes that have reduced fishers' control of resources

and activities, while also producing some of their most effective responses to these processes, thereby expanding local actors' influence against efforts that would have otherwise further restricted it.

As previously noted in Chapter Four, much of the literature on co-management suggests that power-sharing is a core issue: much of the debate and research centres around the devolution of managerial responsibility to the local level via collaborative multistakeholder institutions and processes. These discussions typically highlight the ecological and political benefits and possibilities associated with such partnerships. Despite this, researchers often express the concern that power, understood as decision-making authority, is not being effectively shared with local co-managers and suggest ways in which it could be augmented (Kearney 1989; Berkes, et al 1991; Ivanitz 1996). On the other hand, others argue that participating in co-management institutions has a co-opting effect at the local level, constraining local control more than it facilitates it (Nadasdy 1999; Neumann 2001).

Fishers' experiences with FON challenge these analytical positions, suggesting that co-management's power-sharing function is a complex process of discourse, negotiation, contradiction, and transformation. As a site of conservation intervention, FON is the nexus at which the ideas and agendas of local, national, and global actors are forwarded and come into competition. As a result, FON co-management is a continually shifting, multivalent area of contested interests and understandings, a site of domination and resistance, a means to limit and augment local control. In sum, it is a process of continuous strategizing in which participating actors' influence is constantly negotiated

or challenged, allowing it to expand and contract across various issues and events. In the process, the discursive framing of partnership, participation, and empowerment itself shifts, as each group of actors forwards their own views and recognizes or contests others' across various contexts. This results in diverse consequences for local users' control over the use of and access to local resources.

## CONCLUSION

### **Considering Conservation's Future**

Chief among the interests that directed my research in Belize was my desire to understand the intricacies of planning and implementing co-management as a form of state-local power-sharing in a developing area context. Using FON as a case study, the evaluation of MPA co-management in Belize presented in Part One focused on the pragmatics of this issue. There I contribute to the growing literature on the operation of community-based natural resource management around the world (Feit 1989; Pinkerton 1989a; Mulrennan 1994; Usher 1994; Stevens 1997a; Buckles 1999; Christie, et al 2000; Berkes, et al 2001; Palacio 2001; McConney, et al 2004). The chapters highlighted difficulties and opportunities of MPA co-management, particularly noting the lack of economic and human resources and the drive for states to pursue economic development agendas as key factors affecting the co-management process. As a result, transnational donors have come to play a significant role in the operation of MPA co-management in Belize, as in parks management in other developing areas (Breton 2000; Berkes, et al 2001; Fairhead and Leach 2003; Adams 2004; Igoe 2004).

Part One also reflected on the dilemma of engaging community members as active participants and the challenge of building effective partnerships that enhance local authority, issues that are at the core to building effective co-management across a variety of contexts. Establishing local-level 'power-sharing' is often cited as a core element of *effective* co-management (Kearney 1989; Berkes, et al 1991; Ivanitz 1996; Goetze 1998)

Yet, such assertions may not reflect the ways in which local people, as is the case with Placencian fishers, have an established degree of control over their resource activities, and already exercise their power as users in various ways. I suggest that *partnership-as-transparent-participation*, an inclusive management partnership between government and communities, balances stakeholders' voices and interests in the design and execution of joint management strategies. In this scenario, 'sharing power' takes place not through formal devolution, but through the development relationships and processes that explicitly acknowledge and mobilize *existing forms of local knowledge and control*, facilitate transparency in decision-making, and promote accountability in financial management. Such partnerships establish a real measure of user-directed governance at the local level, and allow local participants to clearly draw the connections between their interests and ongoing management activities.

Part Two expanded upon the understanding of co-management generated in the first part, considering the power relations at play between CNGOs and the local resource users involved in the projects they design, fund, and implement as part of the co-management process. It offered another perspective on the politics of marine conservation by undertaking a second assessment of co-management centering on a Foucauldian discursive analysis of the experience of community-based natural resource management in Placencia. Exploring the effects of CNGOs' discursive constructions on the lived realities of local users was at the core of Part Two's evaluation. Together, the chapters produced several insights that speak to continuing debates on the practice and objectives of conservation (Brandon, et al 1998; Terborgh 2000; Adams 2004; Brockington 2004;



Chapin 2004; Igoe 2004), demonstrating the need and means for applying analyses of discursive and conceptual apparatuses to the practice of conservation. These are key to understanding how transnational CNGOs, governments, local NGOs, and community members interact, and reveal the conflicts and negotiations by which relations of power develop and are transformed.

First, conservation, like development, is a powerful, unquestioned and increasingly globalized conceptual apparatus that emerges from, and itself (re)produces, a complex discourse. This discourse is actively used to affirm some underlying assumptions that are embedded in culturally particular normative values while rendering others 'invisible'. It is powerful in that it legitimates operating on a global scale and generates significant financial and moral support for its definitions of 'problems' and its remedial activities, forwarded as missions of socio-ecological salvation. This leverage and globality is linked to conservation's embrace of 'sound science' as its basis, further entrenching the legitimacy of its agendas and activities in the epistemological prerogative of the scientific paradigm and the necessity of long-term human survival, while depoliticizing these processes. Much like development, conservation's discursive constructions naturalize delocalized social and natural landscapes, scientifically-based technical 'solutions', and depoliticized environmental crises. It is very much different from development discourse in that, while development's planned social interventions primarily target aid at improving peoples' lives, conservation's planned ecological interventions are first directed toward aiding a specifically constructed natural world in which people themselves are typically the problem to be solved.

Secondly, conservation discourse explains and promotes intervention, particularly by transnational CNGOs. The chapters explored how several CNGOs defined ecological problems that they are uniquely qualified to solve through their intervention. The operation of conservation's discursive machinations is evident in the process of conceptual and epistemological construction in which CNGOs identify particular global, regional, and local problems and develop their solutions. This justifies intervention and, in turn, legitimizes CNGOs' authority to undertake various 'actions' that often impose new forms of resource governance. The implementation of CNGOs' discursively constructed conservation solutions via planned interventions produce tangible outcomes across a spectrum of peoples' lived realities.

Third, the discursive productions of CNGOs display a tendency to simplify the complexities of fishers' realities to a uni-dimensional representation of anonymous resource users. At best this amounts to a homogenized category of fishers, which similarly generalizes their motivations for fishing as 'poverty', or others similarly economically-based and ill-informed. Applied to the practice of fishing in Placencia, the effect is clear: it (over)simplifies the rich local socio-cultural context within which marine resource activities occur, and discursively (re)constructs culturally embedded lifeways in the process of defining conservation problems. The problem is defined thus, marine resources are being overexploited by 'poor' fishers and, therefore, are in need of protection from such reckless human behaviour. Fishers in Placencia have a particular relationship to the resources identified as in need of protecting. The personally and socially intimate relationship with the marine environment that informs a *culture* of

fishing in Placencia presents a challenge to conservation efforts, for it defies the discursive reductionism informing CNGO interventions. Since the discourse both misconstrues and ill-constructs the problem, it is misguided in the construction of its solution. These conservation projects are unlikely to be successful in terms of promoting 'alternative livelihoods' for local fishers as the solution to the problem.

Fourth, community-based conservation interventions involve a complex and unpredictable series of power relations. On the one hand, the discourse is oriented around an unequal power dynamic in which one group of people seeks to define the economic opportunities of others, with the ultimate goal of transforming local peoples' behaviour. As generalized objects of CNGO representation, local resource users in Placencia need to be transformed from 'threatening' fishers who overharvest into 'safe' tour guides whose activities are inherently 'sustainable'. This is pursued in the absence of social research and economic data on the long-term potential for tourism in the area. Here, the process of deconstruction drew attention to the very real effects of conservation discourse, including a lack of circumspection concerning the dynamic and often tenuous nature of peoples' daily material needs in developing areas. In Placencia, national and global processes as well as local cultural prerogatives and economic realities influence peoples' use of natural resources.

At the same time, fishers' statements demonstrated that conservation discourses, while powerful, are neither automatically dominant, nor oppressive. Rather, they are engaged locally, both resisted and embraced based on distinctive and shifting visions within communities. The analysis extends aspects of Ferguson's (1990) work by applying

it to conservation, and by examining recipients' responses to a dominant conceptual framework as it operates in communities, in this case, a conservation framework. Local peoples have their own, often alternative, visions, practices and meanings associated with their social and ecological surroundings. These localized discourses and counter-discourses reveal the misperceptions and misunderstandings that globalized conservation discourses manifest when they are forwarded in community-based conservation projects. This is evident in the effects that the creation of new regulatory mechanisms and institutions at the local level (e.g., MPAs, 'community-based' NGOs, co-management arrangements) have had on community, state, and global actors' relations in Placencia. Rather than resulting in a singular dominance-resistance dynamic, a more complex power matrix emerged, a process of simultaneous expansion and restriction over time and context.

Finally, this research illustrates how co-management is both a local goal and structure of intervention that is neither a straightforward form of 'empowerment', nor of co-optation as some research seems to suggest. (Osherenko 1988; Kearney 1989; Berkes, et al 1991; Usher 1994; Hoekema 1995; Ivanitz 1996; RCAP 1996; Nadasdy 1999; Neumann 2001; McConney, et al 2004). Co-management frameworks may be used to forward empowerment discourses that construct local resource users as being homogenously 'powerless'. In turn, co-management institutions are positioned as the means to empower the powerless by way of community members' 'participation' in collaborative activities. In these conceptualizations, power is a thing that actors either gain or lose. Instead, this research shows how co-management functions within an

existing set of dynamic and fluid power *relations* in which multiple interests and ideas are continually forwarded and contested. The power-sharing that takes place via participation in FON co-management is a complex (re)negotiation of the means by which states and CNGOs intervene in the control and use of local or national resources. The result is that fishers' influence is both increased *and* compromised via participation in co-management. Though their statements that suggest both their support and rejection of FON may appear contradictory, fishers' interaction with the institutions involved in co-management is the result of careful deliberation, as may be the case elsewhere. Where it occurs through local institutions that, like FON, are structurally positioned so that they do aim to be responsive to local resource users, the outcomes of co-management 'partnerships' can be complex mixes of gains and concessions that can clearly serve the survival of local control and ways of living.

In looking ahead to the future of conservation, this research emphasizes the need to understand the complex operation of conservation as a discursively directed process of intervention; it is a global(izing) cultural and political project as much as an ecological one. Such a perspective signals some compelling implications such local-global interstices hold for understanding globalization processes, and speaks to the emerging interest in the political implications of the relationships between transnational environmental organizations and local peoples (Nietschmann 1997; Brosius 2001, Dove 2003; Jasanoff and Martello 2004). The case of FON co-management suggests that local level recipients of CNGO projects are not inevitably helpless in the face of powerful global forces. In some cases, local peoples' autonomy may be enhanced through such

interventions and the creation of local NGOs in response to extra-local initiatives. While in some cases, transnational CNGOs initiate the process, in many others, communities may have their demands for augmented protection and control over local resources advanced through partnering with local, national, and global actors.

Though not all conservation projects involve local stakeholders as key components, the imperative of 'protecting nature' through human behaviour modification broadly targets people as the locus of change. The ways in which the values inherent in global conservation discourse and its practical engagement come into conflict with dissimilar, diverse local lifeways and understandings of both nature and the human-nature relationship warrant close attention.

There is, therefore, a need to personalize and socialize conservation's problematic, to address it from the perspective of those whose lives are being affected, objectified and reduced to a singular technical issue by global institutions pursuing a solution to their problem. How is their local reality communicated in a less essentialized fashion? How are these stories told? How may conservation's monologue on environmental protection and global survival be transformed into a dialogue that reflects and engages the realities of the *people* who are part of the natural world in targeted localities?

Within the conservation problematic, environmental degradation is a matter of global concern and humanity's survival, yet paradoxically, peoples' daily survival needs are often thrown into shadow. The problem is so constructed that, though the fact that many people's basic needs are not being met locally is acknowledged, this tends to be obscured by the urgency and globality of conservation's gaze. Failure to carefully consider the

human costs of ecological interventions suggests that the financial and technical aid of conservation interventions is not primarily designed to improve peoples' lives. The objective of ecological intervention appears thus: to get people out of the way of conservation. This further implies that despite their claims, conceptually and institutionally the conservation industry is yet to effectively link environmental protection with social justice.

The case study presented here highlights a broadly neglected prerequisite to conserving natural resources: acknowledging and integrating the varied localized cultural contexts within which these efforts take place. In particular, it is crucial for conservation practices to respect and reflect local peoples' relationship(s) to the resources targeted for protection when designing both community-based conservation projects and the more global programmatic initiatives that inform them. This is important beyond the managerial benefits to using an approach more likely to promote successful conservation in terms of gaining people's compliance with regulatory mechanisms. The FON case suggests that there is a pressing need to ensure that ecologically-oriented interventions are socially just beyond canonical claims to 'saving the world' by saving its resources. This is particularly critical in the case of developing areas and indigenous territories.

Much of the current thinking about conservation conveys a message of sacrifice that suggests what must be given up in order to protect what remains. Let us consider carefully, though, the assumptions informing the discourse that legitimizes these requests. Let us ponder *who* is being asked to make *what* sacrifices, and by whom, in the pursuit of humanity's survival.

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