

Chapter Three: The Struggle for Land Tenure and Resource Control in Southern Belize

The Belizean test of multiculturalism lies squarely within the scope of state-local debates over natural resource conservation – Clark (2000b:28)

INTRODUCTION

The interplay of politics, community rights, and the control of territory and resources sets the stage for both opportunities and challenges to resource management in Southern Belize. While minority ethnic groups in Belize struggle for recognition at the national level, the Maya people of Toledo present the most outspoken and organized call for rights to natural resources. The 15,000 Mopan and Kekchi Maya form the largest demographic body in the region with 60 percent of the District's total population (Shal 2002a). The relationship of Maya communities to the land is embedded in their livelihood systems and culture. As the example of the Sarstoon-Temash Institute for Indigenous Management (SATIIM) will show, large Government land holdings such as National Parks and Forest Reserves coincide with communities having longstanding cultural and historic claims to the land but no legal title. Indeed, the presence of sizable populations without officially recognized land tenure is the most pressing social concern in the Toledo District. These issues are pervasive throughout Southern Belize and reappear in subsequent chapters of this report. They are important forces affecting the interest and ability of indigenous communities to collaborate with other groups in natural resource management efforts in Belize.

BACKGROUND

The ancient Maya lived in the 400,000 square kilometer area that is now southern Mexico, Guatemala, northern Honduras, El Salvador, and Belize. Maya civilization evolved in complexity from 1800 B.C. to attain its greatest cultural achievements between 250 A.D. and

1000 A.D. Due to uncertain causes, Maya society began to change rapidly by the middle of the 10th century A.D. The overall population shrank dramatically and numerous large settlements moved to other areas. At the time of European exploration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many Maya still occupied what eventually became Belize (Shoman 1994). The eventual arrival of European colonizers severely disrupted indigenous populations throughout the Caribbean coast and interior of Central America. The appropriation of territory and marginalization of indigenous populations continued through nineteenth and twentieth century transitions to national independence and into the present. The Maya, transformed by many challenges to their culture, currently live throughout parts of Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, and Belize.

Contentious debate surrounds the question of whether or not the Maya abandoned the southern region of Belize as a result of the conquest efforts of the Spanish colonizers prior to British settlement in the area now known as Belize. The issue of possible Maya abandonment has been a crucial point in determining the validity of claims to aboriginal rights over these lands. Regardless of the historical circumstances, the Kekchi Maya and the Mopan Maya are now firmly entrenched over a vast area of the Toledo District and the southern portion of the Stann Creek District. By the mid-1900s, the British colonial government established ten Maya Indian Reservations in the Toledo District in order to make land available for residential, farming and subsistence needs.

Currently, sixteen Maya communities, representing 51 percent of the Toledo Maya¹⁰ population, reside within reservations. At least twenty villages lay outside reservation boundaries (TMCC and TAA 1997). The 1992 Belize National Lands Act, which replaced the Crown Lands Act after national independence in 1981, does not recognize these reservations (GOB 2000c). According to Belize law, the Maya do not have legal rights even to the land within the reservations (TMCC and TAA 1997). The lack of legal land tenure is a factor in the marginalization of these communities.

Nearly all Maya oscillate between cash and subsistence economies (Wilk 1991); however, many productive activities are dependent on resources to which they have no Government-sanctioned rights. Lack of control over productive assets contributes to poverty among the

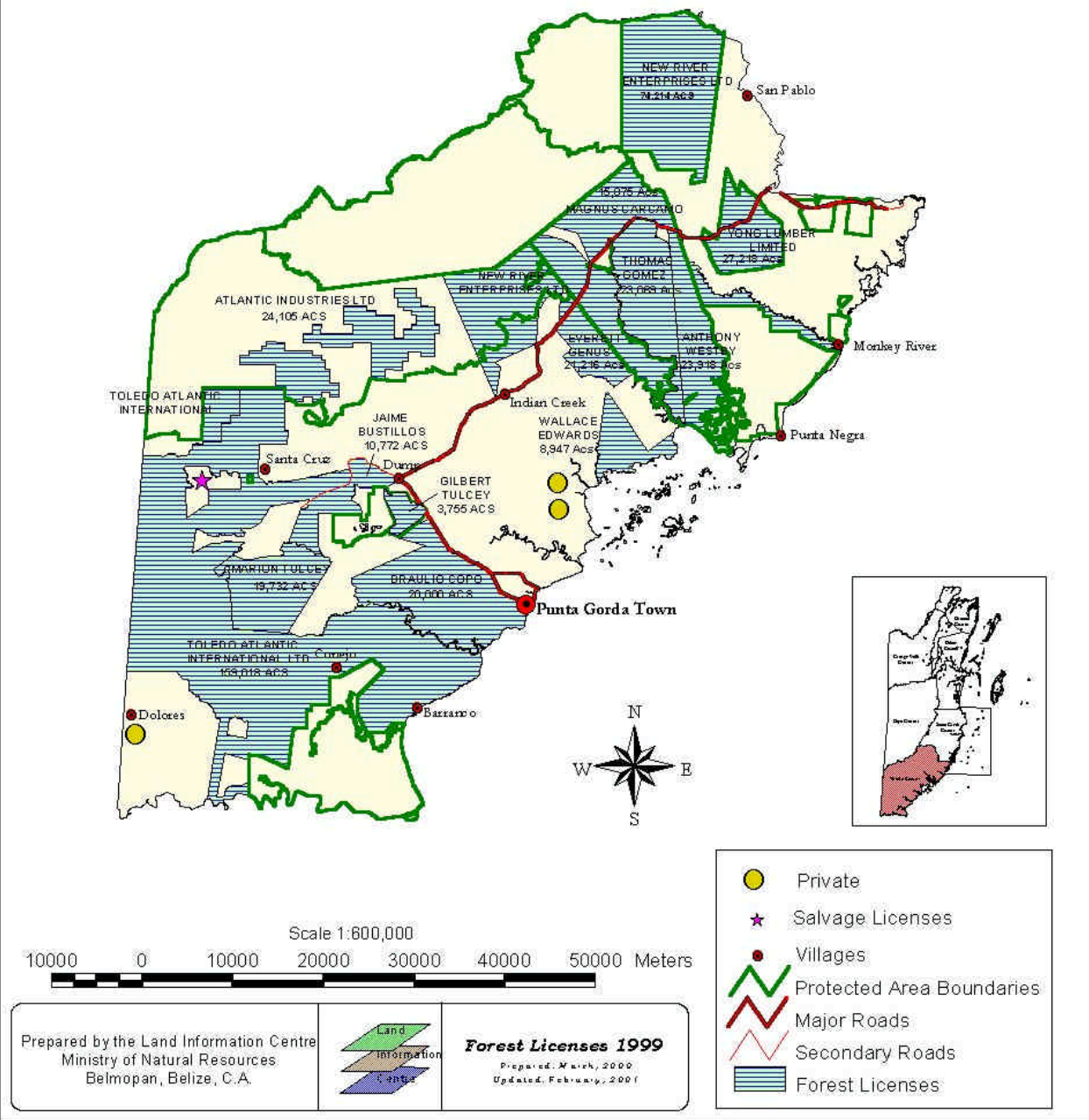
Toledo Maya. According to Government economic assessments, the Maya represent the poorest sector of the national population (GOB 1998). This is more pronounced among the Maya of the Toledo District with 65.8 percent labeled as “poor;” 30.4 percent of that category is also designated as “extremely poor,” existing on resources sufficient only for basic subsistence. Consequently, the incidence of poverty among the Maya is twice the national average (GOB 1998).

In an effort to reduce poverty in the southern region, the GOB decided that “new and special approaches and measures must be taken to assist the south in catching up” (GOB 1998:1). The most prominent intervention has been the Southern Highway Rehabilitation Project, which traverses the entire southern region of Belize. With the advent of this improved major highway, Maya leaders expressed concerns in the early 1990s that the new road would further marginalize them from the general populace if particular economic and social conditions were not urgently addressed by the Government. Due to their insecure land tenure situation, a principal concern was that the improved highway would prompt a wave of land speculation.

Another series of events exacerbated Maya fears. In the past decade, the GOB granted at least seventeen concessions for logging on lands totaling 480,000 acres in Toledo (see Map 6, p.46). In 1997, the Government issued a permit to a foreign oil and gas exploration company to probe for oil reserves on almost 750,000 acres of land in the District (ILRC 1998). In response, the Maya began to advocate for recognition of their rights over lands and natural resources, citing their longstanding and historical occupation of the land as justification for their claims. The GOB balked at the Maya demands for land tenure and natural resource rights. Garnering support from national and international NGOs, research institutions, and attorneys, Toledo Maya leaders raised the ante and advocated their cause more vigorously at national and international levels.

On November 29, 1996, Maya organizations initiated an action in the Supreme Court of Belize that challenged the granting of logging concessions. In the lawsuit, the Maya asserted rights over lands and resources that are included in the concessions and sought to have these concessions enjoined and declared in violation of Maya rights (Anaya 1998).

Toledo District Forest Licenses 1999



Map 6: Toledo District Forest Licenses

The Maya leadership also filed a petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) on August 10, 1998, in an effort to compel the GOB to recognize indigenous land rights and to challenge the legality of logging and oil concessions in the Toledo District. The conflict remains unresolved despite the ratification of several tentative agreements concerning resource use and indigenous rights by Maya leaders and the GOB.

ROADS AND RESERVATIONS

Opposition to the Southern Highway Rehabilitation Project pressured its primary funder, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), to abide by the Bank's policy of not constructing roads in contested zones (Lockwood 1997). Responding to concerns that the improvement of the Southern Highway would create environmental degradation and exacerbate social and economic problems, particularly for the Toledo Maya, the IADB approved US\$2.6 million for the creation of an Environmental and Social Technical Assistance Project (ESTAP). The Project formulated a Regional Development Plan (RDP) for the South Stann Creek and Toledo Districts. For undisclosed reasons ESTAP dissolved in 1999 three years earlier than expected (TMCC 1999). Consequently, the Government created the Southern Region Development Corporation (SRDC) to fill the void left by ESTAP. After the Toledo District emerged as the focus area for the project, the SRDC transformed into another government-owned enterprise the Toledo Development Corporation (TDC).

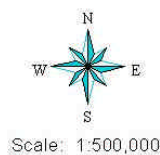
The TDC is charged with executing the original RDP. The Plan specifies a set of development programs to complement the improvement of the highway. It identifies particular steps to mitigate potential negative social, economic, and environmental impacts arising from the substantial civil works project (GOB 2000c). Through these projects, the Government expects TDC to become the aggregated voice of Toledo. This arrangement enables potential investors to interact with a singular, representative body. The Government envisions that the Plan along with the Southern Highway Rehabilitation Project will accelerate the pace of development in a region that has always been regarded as the most economically depressed in the country.

Toledo District Indian Reserves



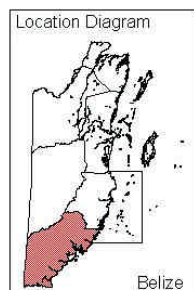
LEGEND

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|--|--------------------------|--|-----------------|
| | Indian Reserves | | Major Roads |
| | Rivers | | Secondary Roads |
| | Coast | | Major Tracks |
| | International Boundaries | | Minor Tracks |
| | District Boundaries | | Villages |



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Toledo

Prepared: November, 1999

Map 7: Toledo District Indian Reserves

Approximately one-third of the part of the Toledo District subject to the RDP is considered to be National Land, and is estimated to consist of 336,000 acres (GOB 2000c). National Land (including lease-land) is governed by the 1992 National Lands Act and is one of three designations that make up the Government's National Estate, which is administered by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRECI). Forest Reserves and National Parks comprise the remaining two categories. According to the Government, National Land constitutes public land "that is essentially a passive and un-managed resource" (GOB 2000c:91).

The Maya Reservations in the Toledo District represent the greatest exception to the conventional forms of land tenure in Belize. Approximately 70,000 acres of the Toledo District is officially classified as "Indian Reservation" (Emch 2003) (see Map 7, p.48). The reservations, first established by Britain under the Crown Lands Act, designated block possession of landholdings for the Kekchi and Mopan peoples of Southern Belize (Clark 2000b). The first reservation—a parcel of land measuring two square miles—was established in 1896 at San Antonio, Toledo District (GOB 2000c). Establishment ceased in 1962 with the extension of the Rio Blanco and Pueblo Viejo reservations. Despite the declaration of Indian Reservations, ownership of the land remains out of local control. "Reservation land is not owned communally by the Maya; the Government owns it. This system of tenure makes land ownership among the Maya on reservations impossible. Thus, national authorities have the power to eliminate Maya rights to this land" (Emch 2003:123, references omitted).

Maya organizations and the GOB fiercely dispute the legal status and function of Maya Reservations. The only statutory rules governing the reservations, adopted in 1924, have never been revised (GOB 2000c). The RDP states that the successor to the Crown Lands Act, the National Lands Act, "makes no mention of Indian Reservations as such, only referring to "reserves" which may or may not be applicable" (ESTAP 2000:127). Opposing this view, the Toledo Maya Cultural Council (TMCC), a NGO that represents the Mopan and Kekchi of the District, claims that these reservations continue to exist under the laws of Belize.

The reservations, however, only include roughly half of contemporary Maya villages that exist today (IACHR 2000). The RDP also states that according to regulations the occupation of reservation lands should be at the discretion of the Commissioner of Lands and Surveys of the Ministry of Natural Resources. At present, *de facto* authority over occupancy resides with the village alcaldes¹¹ (a traditional, community-elected leader) and Village Council Chairmen (GOB 2000c). The ten existing reservations now encompass sixteen communities with an approximate population of 6,500 Maya (IADB 2001). The IADB Land Management Program Project Report (2001) states:

There is negligible productive land available for expansion within the reservations and many additional Maya villages are now located outside the boundaries established under the Crown Lands Act. Based on recent estimates, Maya farmers occupy over 25,000 ha. of unleased national lands...

While independent opinions vary, there is consensus that the reservation system has deteriorated to the point where confidence in the system has been lost, owing in part to the absence of any official administrative structure. To date, there is no formal policy on tenure of reservation land.

At least twenty Maya villages reside outside reservation boundaries. This is not a recent or unexpected phenomenon. In the *Maya Atlas* (1997) the TMCC and the Toledo Alcaldes Association (TAA) declare:

The reserves were never physically demarcated nor defined in the country's constitution as the communal property of the Maya. The reservations constructed by the British to subjugate the Maya were not honored by the Maya. Many villages were constructed outside of the reservations without the government's approval, as the Maya regard all of these lands as their own, the home of their forefathers, who built magnificent temples to manifest their presence.

MAYA ADVOCACY

Thirty-six Maya villages located throughout the Toledo District lay within or in close proximity to the lands on which the GOB has granted logging concessions. These concessions include forests around villages that are used by Maya for religious purposes as well as for farming, hunting, and gathering. According to Valentino Shal (2002a) President of the TMCC, the paving of the Southern Highway and the planned construction of a new

highway to Guatemala “will provide easier access to outsiders to claim land in the area” and is thus “an additional concern to the security of the land presently under Maya occupation.” Anaya, an attorney with the Indian Law Resource Center, states that, from the standpoint of the Maya, “the issue is not simply one of environmental degradation; *it is more fundamentally one of ownership and control over the lands and resources at stake*” (1998; emphasis added). The current core interests and concerns of the Maya organizations confirm this assertion.

Five major NGOs claim to represent the Maya of the Toledo District. The Toledo Maya Cultural Council (TMCC), the Kekchi Council of Belize (KCB), the Toledo Maya Women’s Council (TMWC), and the Toledo Alcaldes Association (TAA) initially arose to address social and economic needs, cultural and gender concerns, and the lack of political representation. The rising importance of land availability and tenure necessitated the incorporation of an overtly political slant to the missions of these organizations. The politicization of land in Southern Belize prompted these Maya organizations to form the Maya Leaders’ Alliance (MLA) in 1999. The following analysis discusses the interests of each of these organizations.

Toledo Maya Cultural Council

In 1982, a group of Mopan and Kekchi Toledo alcaldes established the TMCC as a response to the Government’s appropriation and distribution of land without consultation of Maya communities. The men also feared what they perceived as the GOB’s actions to erode the traditional alcalde system of governance in favor of the newer nationally-endorsed governance system of village councils (TMCC and TAA 1997). The leaders intended the TMCC to act as a representative body for cooperation among the Toledo Maya in order to promote unity and mutual understanding and to search for solutions to shared economic, social and educational problems. As conflict over land escalated, the TMCC grew increasingly concerned about the precarious land tenure situation of Maya communities. Response to this concern evolved into a primary objective of the TMCC: to ensure that the Maya continue to live in what they consider to be their ancestral territory (TMCC and TAA 1997). Since Mopan Maya and Kekchi Maya face similar threats, six representatives from

each group have been elected to the TMCC Executive Committee. As the Kekchi population is nearly double the Mopan population, this arrangement has altered power relations between the two groups.

Kekchi Council of Belize

Despite the efforts of pan-Maya organizations, long-standing tensions between Mopan and Kekchi people led to the existence of single-ethnicity advocacy groups. The KCB formed as a splinter organization of the TMCC (Wainwright 1998). After a series of community consultations, the KCB was incorporated in 1992 by a group of Kekchi leaders who felt it imperative for a legally established representative body to address the concerns of the Kekchi community in the Toledo District. The Council is a non-profit, non-religious, and non-partisan association that collaborates with governmental and non-governmental organizations to improve the living conditions of the Kekchi people by conducting leadership skills training, engaging in economic development projects, and documenting indigenous knowledge. The KCB's mission is to promote the enhancement and preservation of the Kekchi language and culture and to promote interracial and interethnic harmony in Belize and elsewhere (MLA 2003). According to KCB President Gregorio Ch'oc, the Council's primary interests include protecting and preserving all ancient and contemporary indigenous heritage including folkways, territory, monuments, and antiquities. In addition, the KCB attempts to make certain that development projects "are to a large extent practical and reflect the needs and priorities of the Maya communities" (Ch'oc 2002). Ever inclusive, the KCB programmatic portfolio now covers a broad range of aspects, including political and watershed management issues.

Toledo Maya Women's Council

Attention to interethnic divisions among the Toledo Maya contributes to the masking of other important community issues (Wainwright 1998). To respond to gender concerns, in particular, village-level women's groups formed the TMWC in 1997. Pulcheria Teul provided the impetus to organize the Council, prompted by her election to the Belize National Indigenous Council in the same year. The TMWC may be the most broad-based of all Maya organizations; its annual meetings host two representatives from every women's

group in Maya villages throughout Toledo. TMWC serves as a support organization for these groups. Based on anticipated social changes in the District and the realization that women will not be able to “move ahead” without training, it seeks to address gender issues and economic well-being through leadership training, marketing, communication, and administrative and business management skills (P. Teul 2002). The TMWC is also linked to direct advocacy through the mediation of domestic violence cases. Limited funding and staffing (Teul is the only full-time, volunteer staff member) force the TMWC to maintain the delicate balance between its own institutional strengthening and the facilitation of projects. The Council expands its capacity and impact by working closely with the Southern Alliance for Grassroots Empowerment and (SAGE) training with the Community-initiated, Agricultural and Rural Development project (CARD). Through these endeavors as well as its focus on women’s livelihood concerns, the TMWC affects the issues of land rights and resource control in Southern Belize. The inclusion of the TMWC in the MLA is imperative for the full representation of community concerns given strong cultural barriers to women’s advocacy and a distinct, gendered division of labor in many Maya communities.

Toledo Alcaldes Association

In 1992, the same year that the KCB emerged from the TMCC, the alcaldes from thirty-six Maya communities gathered to create the TAA. Incorporated into the GOB in 1994, the Association serves as the legal representative of Maya communities (TMCC and TAA 1997). The fact that each village contributes one elected alcalde means that the Association consists of a Kekchi majority. The TAA strives to preserve the traditional leadership structure and strengthen the role of alcaldes in community decision-making. These goals entail educating both its constituency and the national Government about the function and significance of the alcalde system. The TAA faces difficulty in realizing its objective because it must contend with other Maya organizations for legitimacy in representing indigenous concerns.

Maya Leader's Alliance

The shared goal of securing land claims forced Maya organizations to recognize the fragmentation of Maya leadership and take action to alter this reality. The TAA, TMCC, KCB, and TMWC assembled the MLA in 1999. Commonly dubbed “Maya Government,” the Alliance formed for multiple reasons including the monitoring of development projects and the promotion of languages, traditions, knowledge, and skills that comprise Maya cultural heritage. More importantly, however, the Alliance sprang from the need for Maya leadership to collectively negotiate with the GOB for recognition of ancestral resource rights in Southern Belize. Continuing where the comprehensive documentation initiative of the *Maya Atlas*¹² left off, the MLA recently began implementation of the Maya Co-Management Project. In collaboration with the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC)¹³ and the Canadian International Development Agency, the project seeks to examine Maya land use and occupancy in Southern Belize in order to develop a land management system that asserts indigenous control and ownership of ancestral lands and resources. Geographer Joel Wainwright explains that projects like this encourage a more-unified Maya voice; “[B]ecause the case for land claims rests on indigenous rights—which are equated with being Maya—and not Mopan or Kekchi identities *per se*, in most public discourses leaders stress Maya identity, or claim to speak on behalf of ‘the Maya people’” (1998:38).

CONVOLUTED INTERESTS AND COMPETING CLAIMS

A façade of unified parties and convergent interests hides the fissures in relations within and between indigenous groups and the GOB. The creation of an enabling environment for economic growth and development continues to be the main thrust of the GOB’s strategy to address social problems and reduce the impact of poverty in Southern Belize (GOB 1998). In the National Poverty Elimination Strategy and Action Plan 1998–2003, the GOB outlines its priorities as employment/livelihoods (including access to land), health, education, the strengthening of civil society institutions, and the support of “decision-making processes based on partnerships between central Government, NGOs and local organizations such as Town Boards, Village Councils and other social groups” (GOB 1998:8).

At first glance, the GOB's plans for the southern region appear to be laudable and similar to the interests of the Maya organizations. After all, the Maya are also seeking to improve their living conditions and access to land. But skepticism about governmental intervention abounds in Southern Belize. According to Gregorio Ch'oc, President of the KCB:

[The GOB continues] to mortgage the future of Belize on development that is ill-conceived. The environment is paying a high price. Over the last 30 years, about 60 million dollars have been spent in the Toledo District. You can go down here and see what has happened and ask what the hell has happened to the money. (2002b)

The Maya claim

Maya and GOB positions diverge on the issue of legitimacy in access to land. Based on the research of US anthropologists like Richard Wilk and Grant Jones, Maya representatives have submitted reports to substantiate their claim that the contemporary Toledo Maya are the descendants of Maya subgroups that inhabited the territory at least since European exploration in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Anaya 1998). Government attorney Jose Cardona of the MNRECI has disputed these accounts with counterclaims portraying the Toledo Maya as immigrant groups with no ancestral linkages to the territory that predate British settlement (Anaya 1998). Put simply, the GOB sees itself as the rightful owner of all national land, including the Maya Reservations, in the southern region. Such a perspective relegates the Toledo Maya as squatters on Government property. Studies challenge this perspective by suggesting that the Maya Reservations actually formalized block land ownership for the Kekchi and the Mopan. Control over these designated zones of traditional forest use granted communities legal recourse in village/state conflicts over the management of these areas (Clark 2000b). To further complicate the matter, Maya advocacy organizations have demanded more than mere title to reservation land; they have pressed for a "Maya Homeland." According to Wainwright (1998), the TMCC has issued three distinct positions on behalf of the Maya claim since 1995:

1. The creation of a separate Maya state within Belize, including the creation of a Maya flag, and other tropes of Maya nationalism.

2. The creation of a Maya Homeland, which would seek to secure agricultural land-rights within the framework of a broadly Maya governance system, without abandoning their privileges as Belizean nationals.
3. The creation of a Maya Lands Administration Program (MALAP), which would advocate the creation of a new Maya Council that would have authority over all Maya villages and common lands (plus Reservation lands which are not claimed by any village) in Toledo. This proposal emphasizes that the MALAP-run area would not be autonomous from the Belizean nation in any sense, although land use decisions would be the purview of the Maya Council.

The *Maya Atlas*, however, states that the creation of a Homeland under the status of a “Freehold Title” is the ultimate goal of the Maya (TMCC and TAA 1997). According to the TMCC and the TAA, the goal is to gain “legal security for our ancestral land; we want to establish a homeland that will also be an environmentally protected area under the management of the Maya” (TMCC and TAA 1997:1).

According to Valentino Shal, the director of the TMCC, the GOB has never taken a concerted effort “to take a good look at the [Maya] land tenure issues” (2002). In fact, to date, the GOB has approached the Maya land tenure issue from the 1992 National Lands Act framework for land allocation. As previously indicated, “national lands” encompass all public lands (other than Forest Reserves and National Parks). From the Government’s perspective, since the Act does not recognize the Maya Reservations, these lands are officially viewed as public lands. The Act states, “The Minister [of Natural Resources] may grant leases of national lands on such terms and conditions as he thinks fit and may likewise renew leases on such terms and for such periods as to him may seem proper” (GOB 2000a:9).

Leasing parcels of contested land is a long-standing Government initiative that exposes divisions within Maya communities. Government discussion on the privatization of reservations began in the 1940s (Emch 2003). Active de-reservation continued through the 1980s. This caused residents of reservations to find alternative ways to secure land.

Wilk (1991) explains that many farmers started to plant cacao in reserves in order to develop land rights. The threat of de-reservation even led to the formation of new organizations. “In 1985, a group of farmers from 10 villages formed a group called the Toledo Cocoa Growers Association (TCGA). Their main goal is to establish cacao on leasehold land and eventually gain title to that land” (Emch 2003:124).

In 1998, the IADB allocated funds to ESTAP for the purpose of resolving land issues in Toledo. ESTAP learned that many Maya communities favor private land leases rather than communal lands (Van Ausdal 2001). Since the 1980s, communal lands have become increasingly privatized through local land tenure rules. This process intensified under the 1992 National Lands Act. The appeal of leases results from many villagers’ desire to access credit, to retain land claims during village absences, and to protect their farms through buffer zones. The leases create tensions in the Maya communities between those that favor privatization and those that prefer the traditional communal system.

The realization of Maya discord on the issue reveals a fundamental deviation from positions posited by Maya organizations. Although initially disputed by the TMCC, the Council did eventually acknowledge the shift within their constituency (Van Ausdal 2001). This contradicts the claim made in the *Maya Atlas* that “The Homeland proposal has the support of all the villages in the Toledo District” (TMCC and TAA 1997:8). Such contradictions bring into question Maya organizations’ pronouncements of unanimous grassroots support for their struggle to achieve recognition of indigenous land and resource rights. Furthermore, the division strikes at the relationship between Maya organizations and communities. A senior official of a Maya organization notes:

[There is a] lack of coordination between communities and [Maya] NGOs. Leaders make the decisions, without getting appropriate input from the alcaldes and communities. This includes the... TMCC. These NGOs make decisions that won’t suit the whole district... [The Maya] NGOs in Punta Gorda¹⁴ don’t know what’s happening in the villages. They don’t live there, and don’t know the problems and needs of the community. (Anonymous 2002)

The fear of setting precedents for indigenous rights is one reason for the GOB's reluctance to concede to Maya demands for legal dominion. Due to the nation's ethnic diversity, granting privileges to one group may trigger others groups such as Garifuna, East Indian, and Yucatec Maya to press for control of national lands. In contrast, Toledo Maya organizations believe that their case is unique and warrants special consideration. This disagreement raises the issue of divergent assumptions and understandings regarding the control of land in Toledo. Contrary to the GOB's view of land tenure, the issue for Maya advocates is not congruous with the acquisition of "property." Gregorio Ch'oc clarifies: "This isn't about a possession of resources; this is about a basic right. It isn't about 'taking' land but about land that is already being used" (Ch'oc 2002a).

The Government's stake

Although the Toledo District has been the most economically depressed region of the country, the area is abundant in natural capital including timber and mineral deposits (GEF 2000a). Consequently, exploitation of those resources plays a key role in the GOB's national economic development and poverty elimination strategies. These resource rich areas, however, straddle the land over which the Toledo Maya assert aboriginal rights. In their petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (see below), the TMCC claims "that the State has violated the Rights of the Toledo Maya indigenous communities in relation to their lands *and natural resources*" (IACHR 2000; emphasis added). Thus, the conflict goes beyond mere control or possession of territory; control over resources such as timber, petroleum deposits, and biodiversity is also at stake. It has therefore behooved the GOB to ignore Maya claims and to continue perceiving itself as the rightful owner of national land in the Toledo District. Cardona, representing the GOB's position, asserts that at one time "most of southern Belize was privately owned lands but through escheatment, lapse in leases, and acquisition of land in lieu of taxes, most of the Toledo District is now National Lands" (in Anaya 1998). As previously mentioned, the GOB effectively and conveniently considers the Toledo Maya as trespassers on Government property. The following discussion outlines some of the major economic and development interests that the GOB has at stake in Southern Belize.

Land as a political tool

Land and development rights are routinely used by officials in Government to reward partisan supporters and punish opponents (Duffy 2000). This abuse is so ingrained into the Belizean political culture that it occurs blatantly and without recourse. As a consequence land allocation, tenure, use, and management often have damaging social, economic and environmental consequences. As a political tool, land-related decisions can further short-term objectives, giving little consideration to long-term benefits for the people or the natural resource base. The People's United Party, now in its second five-year term, had been committed by its 1998 Manifesto to de-politicize land, but no significant progress was made towards achieving this goal. This situation continues despite a loan from the IADB in 2001 to implement a Land Management Program intended "to improve the enabling environment for private and public sector development through enhanced land security, effective land markets, and the promotion of a coherent land policy framework contributing to sustainable development and efficient use of land resources" (IADB 2001:1). Furthermore, at least up to 2001, there has been little effort on the part of the Government to consult with civil society on land issues (BAS 2002b).

Timber resources

Southern Belize contains the bulk of the nation's timber resources. Its seven forest reserves contain extensive stands of valuable timber species such as pine, mahogany, teak and gmelina. Harvests on Government lands dominate routine timber production in Toledo. Until Hurricane Iris in 2001, total hardwood extraction intensified under the perception that the Toledo District continues to harbor a large supply of natural timber resources (ESTAP 2000). At least seventeen licenses totaling about 480,000 acres have been issued for logging in the southern region (ILRC 1998) (see Map 6, p.46). This figure does not include numerous small-scale timber leases. The southern logging industry is one of the largest direct and indirect employers. Maya villagers, residing near the various logging operations, comprise the industry's primary labor force (GOB 2000c). While wage labor provides some financial benefits, the GOB has rarely consulted Maya communities before granting licenses in their area.

Despite this practice, the Chief Forest Officer Oswaldo Sabido recently began to work with the Southern Alliance for Grassroots Empowerment (SAGE)¹⁵ to develop a mechanism for community consultation before issuing licenses. This significant sign of progress reveals collaboration between local advocacy NGOs as well as the public servant legally responsible for upholding forest laws and recommending timber licenses to the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment. This combined effort originated from direct community input in a 1998 Logging Review Committee. A Maya representative on the Committee recommended that communities should be consulted before issuing permits. In addition, he suggested that Maya leaders should monitor logging concessions in the absence of a functioning mechanism to do so. According to Chief Forest Officer Sabido:

[In] dialogue with and discussion on this with SAGE, it was decided that they would assist us by being the facilitator for community consultation with prospective licensees before the licenses are issued. And that is working reasonably well. It still has some glitches, moving a little slowly, but on a whole it's taking us where we want to go. A lot of people who are used to decision-making are used to doing things on the "fast-track." In Toledo especially when dealing with communities you need to take things one step at a time. (2002)

Oil reserves

In December 1997, the MNRECI granted an oil exploration license to a US/Guatemalan oil company, Compania Petrolera del Atlantico (Wainwright 1998; GEF 2000a). The license covers 749,222 acres of land in the lowland Toledo District (IACHR 2000). The prospects for oil extraction are realistic. Within the region, both Guatemala and Mexico produce substantial quantities of oil on geological formations similar to those found in the karstic hills of Southern Belize. Industry practice and laws in Belize dictate that a contract for petroleum operations guarantees oil extraction rights. These rights may last up to 25 years if commercially viable oil deposits are located. The TMCC claims that in granting the oil exploration license the GOB "placed a substantial portion of Maya traditional territory in a potential position of long term oil development and production activities without consulting the Maya people" (IACHR 2000).

Shrimp farming

Leasing land in Southern Belize for aquaculture also generates revenue for the GOB and frustration for indigenous communities. The industry is expanding at an astounding rate of over 160 percent per annum in Belize (Myvett and Quintana 2002). Written into the 2003 People's United Party Manifesto, the Government recognizes the US\$25 million industry as an increasingly valuable sector for the nation, "We will: Facilitate the establishment of 4,000 new acres of shrimp farms, and expand the tilapia farms for small farmers" (PUP 2003). Aquaculture in Belize is based almost entirely on the production and export of Pacific White Shrimp. In addition to rural employment production and processing, the industry provides infrastructure development with roads and electrification and jobs through ancillary services such as freight haulage and customs brokerage.

Factors that have contributed to the rapid expansion of shrimp farming in Belize and the southern region in particular include the availability of suitable land, the existence of a trainable work force, and expanding public infrastructure and support services. Currently there are eleven farms, mostly concentrated on the coastal pine ridge soils in the South Stann Creek area (Myvett and Quintana 2002). National proposals for new shrimp farms specify coastal areas of the Toledo District. Accompanying the expansion of the industry has been the issue of land speculation. Since 1995, the Department of the Environment of the MNRECI has raised concerns regarding the unchecked leasing of national lands (and the de-reservation of forest reserves), often to accommodate scantily outlined proposals (BAS 2002b).

TOWARDS A RESOLUTION

Politics as usual

Formal and informal attempts to resolve the land dispute have taken place at grassroots and international levels. The TMCC claims that "the Maya people have consistently attempted to have the government address and resolve their concerns, administratively and judicially from 1995 to [October 2000] but to no avail" (IACHR 2000). Consequently, Maya organizations

resorted to legal action. In 1996, Maya organizations brought a case to the Supreme Court of Belize to assert their rights over lands and resources included in logging concessions. Although a brief procedural hearing was held before Chief Justice Meerabux in 1997, further hearings were adjourned indefinitely at the request of the Attorney General's office (IACHR 2000).

Simultaneously, grassroots actions targeted the land issue at the community level. Between 1995 and 1997, the TMCC and the TAA joined forces to undertake an extensive Maya Mapping Project. With support from the Indian Law Resource Center (ILRC), the University of California-Berkeley, and the MacArthur Foundation, the TMCC and TAA produced the *Maya Atlas* (1997). The Atlas depicts the dynamic interactions among various Maya communities and their complex relationship with their environment. In doing so, it determines the boundaries of a "Maya Homeland" by illustrating the extent of traditional land use and occupancy. At its release in Belmopan in October 1997, Maya activist Diego Bol introduced the publication proclaiming, "The Maya Atlas... is our tool to show our existence, a weapon to press for our legal right to a piece of the jewel, our desire to be active participants in the sustainable use of our resources..." (in Wainwright 1998:61). One of the Atlas' maps, immediately published in major Belizean newspapers, revealed seventeen logging contracts in the Toledo District. The GOB responded, according to Wainwright, "with its most explicit and honest policy statement concerning the conflict: the Maya have no land rights" (1998:64-5).

Frustrated by the Government's legal firewall, the TMCC elevated their claim to the international realm. In 1998, attorneys from the ILRC presented a petition to the Organization of American States' (OAS) Inter-American Commission on Human Rights against the State of Belize "for alleged violation of Articles of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man" (IACHR 2000). This petition prompted the GOB to respond to the Maya claims for the first time since the Belize Supreme Court hearings were adjourned. On November 18, 1998, the GOB and the TMCC made independent requests to the IACHR for a negotiation process that conforms to "friendly settlement procedures" (IACHR 2000).

The following two years witnessed fluctuating strife between the parties despite attempts at mediation. The TMCC expressed its exasperation with the GOB's failure "to engage in a meaningful dialogue" and to establish conditions "believed to be necessary in order for the friendly settlement talks to proceed in a fruitful manner" (IACHR 2000). After the TMCC attempted to withdraw from the negotiation procedures in 1999, the GOB finally replied to questions posed by the Maya organization (IACHR 2000):

Will the Government of Belize immediately alter its course of action in regard to development activities on Maya traditional lands?

Does the Government of Belize recognize that the Maya have rights to lands and natural resources in Southern Belize based on their traditional use and occupancy of those lands?

The Government's response sounded promising:

The Government is prepared to commit to negotiating with the TMCC immediate interim measures and change the terms under which the Government permits activities

The Government of Belize is entirely open to recognizing Maya traditional land resource tenure patterns

The response encouraged the TMCC by indicating that the Government was willing to discuss "immediate measures" and alter activities. However, the GOB avoided comment on defining the basis for indigenous rights. This evasion precipitated diplomatic backsliding. Through 2000, the Government failed to engage in negotiations with the TMCC and neglected to respond to IACHR communications.

In October 2000, the Commission reached a final decision and declared the validity of the TMCC's petition. As a member of the OAS, the GOB took the IACHR's decision seriously. Only days after the IACHR's decision, the Government and Maya leaders signed a historic and unprecedented agreement called "Ten Points of Agreement between the Government of Belize and the Maya Peoples of Southern Belize" (GOB 2000b). The Agreement was signed by the Prime Minister of Belize and by the Chairpersons of the TMCC, the TAA, the KCB, the TMWC, and the Toledo District Village Councils Association.

While the Agreement primarily focused on forging a partnership between GOB and the Maya leaders to design and implement development programs to benefit the Maya communities, the Government made what appeared to be an extraordinary concession by recognizing that “Maya People have rights to lands and resources in southern Belize based on their long-standing use and occupancy” (GOB 2000). However, as the statements below indicate, it is clear that the Government and the Maya leaders have different interpretations of indigenous rights. Gregorio Ch'oc, President of the Kekchi Council of Belize, remarked:

It's the government's recognition that the Maya people have a right to the land and resources in southern Belize, particularly around their communities and the immediate environment. The larger framework [of the Agreement] will determine how we proceed *to provide titles or ownership of these lands and resources to the communities and how they will benefit, not only economically, but spiritually, socially, culturally, from the resources*. Maya people are pretty much a forest dependent people and as such their livelihood depends on it. It is important that we safe guard this. (News 5 Online 2000; emphasis added)

Said Musa, Prime Minister of Belize, elaborated on the Government's perspective:

[This Agreement] is setting out a framework for us to work together to ensure that we have meaningful development here in Toledo that will benefit the people. [The Agreement] will ensure that the people who want the titles to their lands, their leases, who for years have been waiting for this, we will try and speed up that process now, so they can get their leases and their titles. Those who want to retain communal lands around their villages; we will respect that as well. There is enough land to satisfy both demands if you like, but it has to be done in an organized fashion and we have to make sure there is an equitable distribution of this land. ... The concept of just having a whole section of Belize put aside and just say that this is a Maya homeland is not what this document is about. We do not subscribe to that and this is where we had to sit down and discuss this with the Maya leaders, that we felt you cannot balkanize, you cannot separate any part of Belize, because Belize belongs to all the Belizean people and any Belizean is entitled to come and live here in Toledo, whether it be Creole, Garifuna, Mestizo. Similarly, any Maya is entitled to live in any part of Belize. (News 5 Online 2000)

The Maya clearly interpret the Agreement as the GOB's recognition of Maya aboriginal land rights and acceptance of the Maya homeland, at least in concept. The Maya expectation, therefore, is for the GOB to provide land titles and ownership to the Maya within the framework of their Maya Homeland proposal. The GOB clearly disregards the Homeland

concept, but recognizes the need to grant the Maya individual land leases and titles within the framework of the National Lands Act. The Prime Minister referred to respecting “those who want to retain communal lands around their villages.” Given the Prime Minister’s pronouncement regarding the “Maya homeland”, his reference to “communal land” can be interpreted as GOB’s acceptance of the traditional Maya occupation (without title) of land. This is effectively GOB’s concession to tolerate Maya “squatting” on Government lands, but cannot be construed as recognition of Maya aboriginal land rights. In the Agreement, the Maya leaders agreed that the Toledo Development Corporation will be the main agency for the implementation of the Regional Development Plan which was developed by ESTAP. Essentially, the Maya leadership endorsed the development plan for the South Stann Creek and Toledo Districts and, by so doing, made the most extraordinary concession of the two parties to the Agreement.

The GOB and the Maya leadership made a significant step forward by agreeing to cooperate with each other to implement development programs for the Maya communities. However, in regards to the Maya claims of indigenous land and resource rights, the GOB maintained the status quo and made little progress. Government and Maya leaders were expected to develop administrative measures and target dates for the implementation of the program within four months after signing the Agreement. To the consternation of Maya communities, these obligations remain unfulfilled. At present, energy and effort to resolve issues of land tenure and resource rights have dwindled.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The prospects for a negotiated settlement in the Mayas’ favor are fraught with difficulty. Notwithstanding international indigenous rights agreements, the power of the State decides whether or not it will accede to the Maya demand for recognition of their rights to land and resources. The financially burdened GOB has much at stake – control over land, timber resources, mineral resources, and the economic benefits that these derive. Maya communities face far greater risks; resource management decisions jeopardize their livelihoods, communities, identities, and self-determination.

Similar to other cases of indigenous land claims, the Toledo Maya do not hold sufficient power in the political realm to move the Government toward a framework of negotiation based on an understanding of indigenous people and their relationship to ancestral lands and resources. The Maya, therefore, attempt to use the sphere of international law and the legal process to shift the balance of power in their favor.

Land and resource management promises to remain a contested process with a diverse and divided rural population. The future of communal lands faces pressure from people who desire individual land leases. As ESTAP (GOB 2000c) and Van Ausdal (2001) revealed, many Maya communities favor private leases rather than communal holdings. While possibly a device of Government co-optation, the appeal of individual title derives from the current situation of land tenure insecurity. Understandably, people seek to establish stable livelihoods and communities. Legalized individual leases, however, already clash with collective land holdings in villages. These conflicts lead to rifts between Maya leaders as to who best represents community voices. While the leaders of NGOs are elected through their own members, alcaldes and village council chairmen are elected by entire villages. Questions of authority, legitimacy, and accountability drive the tense relation between Maya organizations. One alcalde shared his discontent, “The KCB and TMCC don’t represent the people. The TAA and the Village Council Associations do represent the people’s views” (Anonymous 2002). The GOB ensures the escalation of conflict with its current focus on restructuring the Lands Department, creating a Land Distribution Authority, and expediting the process of granting individual titles under the National Lands Act (PUP 2003).

While a fractured Maya leadership impedes the prospect of instigating changes in Toledo-wide land policies, international networking with indigenous advocates helps to establish a legal basis for the recognition of Maya Reservations. Although these areas are not recognized by the National Lands Act of 1992, pre and post-colonial governments never dissolved their integrity. It is important to remember, however, that these areas, drawn up by the British between 1896 and 1962, represent a small portion of places in which the Toledo Maya historically and currently live. Reservation lands, in turn, serve as a formal tool for communities to assert more inclusive resource rights.

Apart from the acknowledgement of indigenous rights, crucial decisions of how rights are implemented in land management still lies in the hands of the GOB. The negotiation of their interpretation will continue into the future.

The articulation of indigenous control over land and natural resources highlights the claims and interests of communities, NGOs, and government. Oftentimes, these groups compete with each other. On one hand, the GOB seems unwilling to concede authority over valuable resources. It grants land titles, distributes concessions, sponsors development projects, and disregards reservations without consulting the people who live in the immediate area. When concerns are raised, the GOB must be forced into negotiations. On the other hand, the history of Government interaction with the Toledo Maya shows prospects for reconciliation. The State realizes that it must contend with its marginalized but vocal indigenous citizenry. The GOB now recognizes aboriginal rights, traditional land use patterns, and ancestral occupancy. It shows flexibility in its willingness to sponsor community consultations for development projects and timber concessions. In addition, the Government permits the practice of community co-management on national lands. The formation of one particular NGO, the Sarstoon-Temash Institute for Indigenous Management, exposes the conflict between Government and communities concerning national lands, reservations, and resource rights. It also suggests the tremendous potential for innovative management strategies and new State-community relationships.

SARSTOON-TEMASH INSTITUTE FOR INDIGENOUS MANAGEMENT

Issues of politics, ethnicity, and the control of natural resources interface with protected area management in the case of the Sarstoon-Temash Institute for Indigenous Management (SATIIM). The organization attempts to reinforce the culture and livelihoods of six communities surrounding the Sarstoon-Temash National Park by incorporating them into its management. SATIIM emerged in direct response to the surreptitious creation of the Sarstoon-Temash National Park. In 1994, the GOB established the Park without consulting

communities in the area. This action provided the impetus for community organizing and advocacy.¹⁶ Furthermore, it led to new relationships, greater livelihood security, and enhanced conservation management.

Sarstoon-Temash National Park

The 41,898 acre Sarstoon-Temash National Park (STNP) consists of a large complex of rivers, estuaries, wetlands, and rainforests. Enclosed by the Sarstoon and Temash Rivers, the wet forest and wetland ecosystems provide habitat for many rare and unrecorded plant and animal species that exist nowhere else in Belize (see Map 8). It is the second largest and one of the least accessible National Parks in the country. Affirmed in the National Anthem of Belize,¹⁷ the nation holds an affinity to an area few will venture to see:

*...Our fathers, the Baymen, valiant and bold
Drove back the invader; this heritage hold
From proud Rio Hondo to old Sarstoon,
Through coral isle, over blue lagoon...*

Such romanticization, combined with geopolitical and economic aspirations of the GOB, led to the Park's creation in 1994. The Government's financial need to exchange conservation measures for foreign aid conveniently fit with its desire to secure the southern border with Guatemala. In addition to the area's natural bounty, multiple reasons provided the momentum for establishing the Park (Caddy et al. 2000; Lumb 1998).



Map 8: Sarstoon-Temash National Park

In the formation of the STNP, the MNRECI neglected to take account of the 750 Maya and Garifuna citizens that lived near the Park's perimeter and that depended on resources encompassed by the new boundaries. The Kekchi villages of Crique Sarco, Sunday Wood, Conejo, and Midway fell within two miles of the Park. Barranco, a Garifuna community, was situated on the coast just northeast of the park. A small settlement, known as Temash Bar, was also encircled by the Park. In addition, the Park partially covered the Graham Creek Maya Reservation (see Map 7, p.47). The lack of any permanent governmental presence or demarcation of boundaries meant that residents were unaware of its creation.

In 1996, three years after the Government declared the protected area, the local communities gradually learned of the Park's existence through media and governmental sources (Caddy et al. 2000). The appropriation of ancestral land and livelihood base infuriated the communities who subsequently attempted to have the park dismantled. In 1997, however, community representatives invited members of governmental and non-governmental organizations to a meeting in Barranco to discuss available options. Nearly 72 participants attended the Sarstoon-Temash National Park Stakeholders Workshop including leaders from each of the affected villages, and members of the following organizations: KCB, TAA, the National Garifuna Council (NGC), the Belize Center of Environmental Studies, Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT), the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), Inuit Circumpolar Conference, Coastal Zone Management Authority, Belize National Association of Tour Guides, The Nature Conservancy, Indigenous Mapping Project, and the Forest Department (Lumb 1998). At the meeting, community representatives recognized that seeking co-management of the park could formalize their precarious land tenure situation. By the end of the workshop, a steering committee was formed to begin the difficult task of securing co-management. After the EcoLogic Development Fund (EDF)¹⁸, ESTAP, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Rome provided financial assistance and capacity training, the Steering Committee registered with the Government as SATIIM in 1999.

SATIIM's area of operation extends along the coast from the Sarstoon River in the south to the Moho River in the north (see Map 8, p.68). Currently SATIIM works with the 550 Kekchi and 200 Garifuna residents in the original villages around the Park (Caddy et al.

2000; Eltringham 2001). In addition, SATIIM is incorporating the new Kekchi village of Graham Creek that recently developed on the boundary of the park and the border with Guatemala. Led by Gregorio Ch'oc, also the President of the KCB, the Executive Board of SATIIM consists of representatives from each village as well as members of KCB, TAA, NGC, PACT, and the Forest Department.

Indigenous management

Protected area management takes unconventional meaning under the purview of SATIIM. Beyond the management of natural resources, the organization emphasizes the documentation and use of traditional knowledge systems related to the surrounding environment. This approach inserts an explicitly strong cultural component into the practice of protected area management and connotes the significance of the relationship between the communities and their environment. SATIIM strives to simultaneously meet economic, cultural, and ecological goals. Economic goals include maintaining control of land and resources at the local level, creating employment, and building local capacity through training. Cultural goals involve demonstrating the value of indigenous knowledge and bridging the divide between Maya and Garifuna communities. Ecological goals consist of managing the park through a blend of Western and traditional environmental knowledge. Ch'oc elaborates on the importance of bridging competing knowledges to provide long-term security:

It has to be through adapting local knowledge and processes in a way that allows [indigenous people] to bridge their local knowledge and subsistence tradition into that of the market-based economy and contemporary knowledge of natural resource management systems for effective ... management. (2002b)

SATIIM also advocates for complete self-governance for Maya communities although the earlier secessionist calls for a Maya Homeland have been dropped. The organization aims to strengthen traditional governance structures within villages. Even without a formal co-management agreement, alcaldes act as guards by enforcing Park rules and monitoring activities. Ch'oc compares the situation of the Maya and management of the National Park with other indigenous struggles for land rights:

Several co-management agreements have been signed between indigenous people and states. Most have recognized indigenous people's rights. But in Belize it has always been like if I give [the Mayas] their rights, others will demand theirs. This is nonsense. It has absolutely no basis for granting rights of people. Human Rights are not negotiated. (2002b)

In fact, SATIIM draws on precedents from First Nations' agreements with the Canadian Government to pattern their own request for co-management. The organization's guiding vision is to formalize the relationship between communities dependent on Park resources and the Government. Securing a co-management agreement with the GOB, however, proves to be a difficult task. To a large extent, this difficulty is due to the different conceptions each holds regarding "appropriate" management. In contrast to the Government's technocratic perspective, SATIIM understands local resource control as the key to sustainability:

People need to be told that the way they manage has had a positive impact on their resources. What I hear especially from Belmopan or the environmental elites is that every activity that rural or indigenous people engage in is bad, bad and bad. These people (indigenous and rural) are persons with practical real world environmental knowledge and those people are dying out. The world community is starting to understand that it is the local knowledge that has allowed local people to have green space around their communities. This must be the cornerstone of any successful management program unless it is the intention to build a "Berlin Wall" around these areas. (Ch'oc 2002b)

Toward collaboration

The interethnic composition of SATIIM from its inception distinguishes it as a unique resource management organization. Caddy et al. (2000) explain that SATIIM's formative workshop, held in English, Spanish, Kekchi, and Garifuna, was the first time different ethnic groups collaborated to decide how to jointly manage a protected area. SATIIM continues to bridge historical cultural divides by uniting the Garifuna of Barranco, and the surrounding Kekchi communities. This merger carries implications for the incorporation of gender concerns in management and project decisions. Pronounced differences exist between Garifuna and Maya women concerning expectations and expressions of public involvement. While Garifuna women take an active and vocal role in the participatory activities of SATIIM, Maya women in the area have been less inclined to attend general meetings and express their concerns (Lumb 2002). These differences require SATIIM to implement

different strategies for the incorporation of all community issues. Nevertheless, specific cultural norms among the Garifuna and Kekchi may be changing as SATIIM enters its sixth year.

Legitimate community participation in the planning and implementation of all conservation and development initiatives remains an elusive goal for SATIIM. The goal of genuine participation dovetails with the objectives of larger projects assisting SATIIM. Imperiled resources in the region, SATIIM's innovative management strategy, and hard work by the organization's leaders and consultants determined SATIIM's selection for a medium-sized project sponsored by the GEF. The Community-Managed Sarstoon-Temash Conservation Project (COMSTEC) aims to "reduce land degradation and conserve globally significant biodiversity resources in the Sarstoon Temash National Park" (GEF 2000a:18). The project supports co-management and complements the rural development activities of the Government's CARD project (described elsewhere in this report).

Regardless of its public image as a community-based organization, SATIIM receives criticism from its constituents (Caddy et al., 2000). The situation relates to the general claim that the leaders of Maya organizations based out of Punta Gorda are not in touch with village life. In addition to lingering resentment over the establishment of the STNP, the lack of tangible benefits from income-generation projects breeds skepticism among communities. These tensions may be reduced in the future as communities reap the eventual harvests of projects like organic cacao production and shifting agriculture replacement, both facilitated by EcoLogic Development Fund.

SATIIM also contributes to larger resource management initiatives in the Toledo District and Central America. The organization is an active member in the Toledo Watershed Association (TWA), an evolving District-wide federation of conservation and land management actors now under the auspices of the Southern Alliance for Grassroots Empowerment (See Chapter Six). In fact, SATIIM was encouraged to apply for GEF Small Grant Programme funds in order to support the emergent TWA. Additionally, the STNP falls within priority areas established under international conservation programs (GEF 2000a).

Complementing corridor projects in northern Belize, the Park forms a component of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor conservation and land use management initiative in Southern Belize. The Park also forms part of the coastal component of the Sarstoon-Temash/Sarstún marine complex, a key bi-national section of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System (WB 2001). Inclusion in prominent and collaborative programs like these generates greater legitimacy for SATIIM and, hence, advances its ultimate goal of securing community control over Maya and Garifuna land, heritage, and futures.

SATIIM exemplifies the promise and peril of collaboration. The organization itself arose from the shared concerns of six villages. Representatives joined forces with experienced NGOs and Government liaisons in Toledo attempting to resolve the dilemma of a National Park. Instead of dismantling the Park, they have used it as a vehicle to assert their own desires. SATIIM has worked with larger projects and international NGOs to locate funding and build its own capacity. Additionally, through the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, SATIIM learned from the experiences of successful indigenous groups with similar priorities and problems. Now SATIIM continues to form a co-management agreement with the GOB in order to secure its position in the national sphere. Each of these partnerships, apprenticeships, and friendships expand and improve its impact within its jurisdiction and far beyond. The move toward greater fulfillment and complexity through collaboration has not been easy. The remote communities SATIIM claims to represent continue to question motives, actions, and leadership of the organization. Their justifiable skepticism stems from a history of malevolent interaction with more powerful outsiders. State, NGO, and business actors have all attempted to impose self-serving schemes on the communities around the STNP. In terms of traditional rights, self-determination, and co-management, SATIIM itself has maintained an unstable relationship with the GOB. SATIIM's co-management agreement with the Government remains to be signed.

CONCLUSION

In the south of Belize, rural communities have always utilized resources from their surrounding landscape and waters. The rigid demarcation of territory and the establishment

of exclusive protected areas and concessions do not correspond to the practice of everyday life for most inhabitants of Toledo. Based on current and historic use and occupation, international indigenous treaties, and the legal underpinnings of the Maya Reservation system, the Maya make a strong claim over lands and resources in Southern Belize.

Attention to politics, ethnicity, and control over natural resources reveal the patterns and idiosyncrasies in negotiations between indigenous people and the GOB for the establishment of land tenure and livelihood security. The conflict encompasses the entire population of Southern Belize. Ch'oc explains, "[R]epresentation of Toledo does not rest on the shoulders of the Mayan people but all the people of Toledo. Land tenure is not just a Mayan problem though it tends to be viewed as such" (2002b).

Ironically, the international border dispute with Guatemala forces the GOB to recognize and rely on Maya communities in Belize. The participation of Maya translators and negotiators serving on Government commissions help to establish legitimacy for settlements of indigenous groups (Shal 2002b). These occurrences confirm the fluctuating tendencies of Government to use the existence of southern settlements as a basis for defense of national sovereignty. "The very people that have not been allowed on their own lands are now the same ones that the Government is counting on to protect its territory in Southern Belize," proclaims Ch'oc (2002b). Communities play the literal and figurative roles of border guard since the use of lands by villages throughout the region is a factor in securing the demarcation of boundaries.

SATIIM provides an example where indigenous management in Southern Belize corresponds with some of needs of the Government. Similarly, the rights and concerns of indigenous people directly relate to the control of land and management of natural resources. SATIIM presents a unique case in Belize in which the goals of strengthening of indigenous culture, livelihoods, and land tenure are attained directly through the protection of natural resources. In this process, SATIIM must work across ethnic, class, professional, organizational, regional, and national boundaries. This effort is making progress toward improving the organization, assisting communities around the National Park, reconciling tensions between ethnic groups, and expanding SATIIM's impact far outside of the Sarstoon-Temash area. The

benefits of networking with diverse people and organizations are crucial for the nation of Belize, proposes a high-ranking Maya leader, “Each different group must be asked to come together on their own terms. This strengthens the unity of the country. This is collaboration on a whole other scale” (Anonymous 2002).

