

# Chapter Six: The Toledo Watershed Association and SAGE

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The survival of Toledo's globally significant environmental resources will greatly depend upon local institutions' collaborative capacity, rather than competitive instincts. (TWA 2002b)

## INTRODUCTION

The story of the Toledo Watershed Association (TWA) represents the continued development of the collaborative initiative born out of the Maya Mountain Marine Area Transect (MMMAT) concept. It highlights the tendency among organizations to work with other organizations like themselves rather than across sectoral boundaries; it also reveals the potential shortcomings of such an approach. By working predominantly with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and communities while involving Government and industry to only a limited extent, the TWA initiative may be more constrained for resources and less able to build broad support for initiatives.

The story of TWA also highlights the desire among NGOs to define and defend organizational turf. Organizations in Toledo exhibit reluctance to share information, ideas, and especially credit for projects given the funding that reputation draws. Finally, it demonstrates the power of models of success to motivate attempts at collaboration. Two types of organizational models underlie the TWA concept and are frequently referenced by participants in the initiative – the Sibun Watershed Association (SWA) and the Belize Alliance of Conservation NGOs (BACONGO).<sup>33</sup> While the story is complex, it reveals a great deal about organizational interests and inter-organizational dynamics in Toledo.

## BACKGROUND

As discussed earlier, the Site Conservation Plan (SCP) for the MMMAT was presented in a weekend workshop in Punta Gorda in January 2002 by the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment's (TIDE's) consultant responsible for the plan. Anselmo Castaneda of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridors Project also helped to facilitate the meeting. According to other organizational leaders in attendance, it had been anticipated that the meeting would include community leaders, such as alcaldes, but none were present (Caddy-Foster 2002). Instead, the group consisted largely of NGOs – including TIDE, the Toledo Association for Sustainable Tourism and Empowerment (TASTE), Belize Audubon Society (BAS), the Sarstoon-Temash Institute for Indigenous Management (SATIIM), and John Spang of Village Farm, as well as Government officials and representatives from a fishing cooperative.

The MMMAT SCP document was viewed with mixed feelings by meeting participants. While the SCP made a strong case for the region as an ecological entity, they felt, it was not based on community consultations and therefore did not adequately address central sociopolitical realities in the area. Secondly, because the analysis followed a threats-based framework, it presented human activities as threats, which was received negatively by organizations with a development focus. Finally, TIDE was put forward as the logical leader of the initiative, raising concern among other local NGOs who were already wary of TIDE's relative power in conservation and land management in Toledo. While several NGOs present at the SCP presentation made suggestions for additions, some participants felt that TIDE did not incorporate their ideas into subsequent drafts (B. Teul 2002). In sum, participants in the SCP meeting perceived that the document did not incorporate the interests of a spectrum of groups, nor did it address social issues. This perception contributed to a lack of ownership of the document among these groups.

Nonetheless, the argument made by the SCP for an integrated approach to conservation was compelling to several of the group leaders present at the meeting. A watershed vision emphasized the interconnections among organizations managing properties and reserves in the same region, and the value of unified efforts over piecemeal and often overlapping projects. While these groups suggested that significant consultation with communities and

fellow NGOs would be necessary to strengthen the document and to account for the realities of communities' needs for access to resources and interest in development opportunities, they also expressed guarded support for greater collaboration at the multi-watershed level as suggested in the SCP. The second day of the SCP presentation workshop was largely devoted, in fact, to working out potential mechanisms for more collaborative watershed management in the MMMAT (Esselman 2002).

### **The Sibun Watershed Association**

One significant contribution to thinking about watershed collaboration among the NGO leaders was a TIDE-organized presentation by Rigoberto Blanco of the Belmopan-based Sibun Watershed Association (SWA) (Esselman 2002; Genus 2002). SWA popularized the idea of watershed-based collaboration in Belize and serves as a model for collaboration initiatives in Toledo. SWA is recognized in Belize as an example of a successful grassroots, community-driven watershed organization that has yielded tangible improvements for communities and ecosystems through education and advocacy efforts. It is also respected for its public involvement strategies. Among other involvement mechanisms, SWA relies on a community-based board that meets monthly in each of the eleven key communities in the watershed on a rotating basis (Blanco 2002; Esselman 2002).

SWA's mission statement, as presented in its *Sibun River Watershed Atlas*, states:

[SWA is] a non-government community-based organization primarily committed to protecting the integrity of the Sibun River's natural ecosystems for the benefit of future generations, while recognizing the diverse interests of all of its inhabitants. (Boles 1999)

As noted, SWA is a "community-based organization," or a partnership among communities, rather than a partnership among organizations. Nonetheless, SWA also involves a broad spectrum of partners in collaborative management of the watershed. They successfully involve not only diverse communities, but also Government and industry partners. Through the efforts of SWA, citrus industry landowners in the region have increased stream-side buffers, communities have developed improved laundry facilities away from the river, a gravel-mining company has stopped washing gravel in-stream, and Government enforcement of environmental violations has increased with the help of SWA-trained community river

watchdogs. The effort began as an idea in 1993 with encouragement from the Belize Department of the Environment, and eventually SWA became a chartered organization in 1997 (Blanco 2002; Esselman 2002). A major flood provided additional impetus for forming the organization and raised community consciousness about the need for protecting the river (Blanco 2002).

The consultant who led the creation of the second version of the SCP for the MMMAT, Peter Esselman, explicitly envisions, in the longer term, an organization modeled after SWA to manage the six-watershed corridor. Such an organization, like SWA, would involve a range of community leaders, industry representatives, and NGO partners. According to Esselman:

A positive example of community-based watershed organization, [SWA] has really been successful at drawing together communities and incorporating interests of communities in advocacy and outreach . . . I always use the SWA model. It's real. They have the citrus representation. They have 11 communities involved. Government support. They have the support of NGOs with cash as well as the University of Belize . . . They started by getting *Lighthawk* and flew community members around the watershed talking about upstream and downstream connectivity and how all communities are tied together by water. (2002)

In addition to using over-flights of the watershed to build a sense of place among participants, SWA conducts education in schools and facilitates youth participation in river-related environmental projects. A leading SWA education project is a “mobile classroom” that they take from community to community, predominantly for youth education. Furthermore, SWA produced a *Sibun River Watershed Atlas* with support from the Ministry of Education that explains, in an accessible style, the natural history of the Sibun Watershed and the threats to watershed health, as well as provides a history of the Watershed Association.

Though SWA has been successful in bringing together a broad spectrum of interested parties in the watershed and achieving positive results, the organization also faces resource constraints in terms of staff and finances. While they are a membership organization, they are predominantly grant-funded. Their capacity to conduct projects at any given time is therefore highly dependent on their success in gaining funding. SWA began with significant funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), but the grant eventually ended.

In 1998 and 1999, SWA was in “a slow period (Blanco 2002).” With reduced funding comes reduced ability to attract staff. Sergio Garcia, CEO of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Cooperatives, who is familiar with SWA comments, “I think that SWA, normally once they have money they flourish, but once they can’t access money they decline . . . When resources dry up, people find other jobs” (Garcia 2002). Maintaining funding may similarly prove to be a challenge for a watershed management organization in the Toledo District.

### **What’s in a name? MMMAT, MMMC, PHWA, TWA . . . ?!**

While the MMMAT, as it was first dubbed, or the Maya Mountain Marine Corridor, as it was subsequently marketed, have currency in the sense that organizations aside from TIDE and TNC attach a geographic area to the name, these particular names are still firmly identified with TIDE and TNC. According to Valentino Shal of the Toledo Maya Cultural Council (TMCC), the Maya groups objected to the name “Maya Mountain Marine Area Transect [because it] was a concept created on paper – TNC and TIDE did not consult locals in the development of this plan, so there is no ownership of this idea by the local people” (Shal 2002c).

The region is advertised by TNC, for example, in a manner that suggests that they, through TIDE, manage a regional initiative for the area. According to an NGO leader: “TNC promotes the MMMAT on their web site as if they were the manager of the whole thing” (Anonymous 2002). Leaders and staff of other organizations working in the transect express clear distaste for this presentation, as it appears to ignore their own important contributions to land protection and conservation development in the area and further supports their suspicion that TIDE desires to be *the* conservation organization in the district.

The subsequent evolution of the initiative to work collaboratively at a multi-watershed scale appears to be driven by the desire of the other NGOs to prevent its domination by TIDE. Instead of a collaborative process run by TIDE the other leaders pushed for a separate organization or working group to coordinate management. Nonetheless, early meetings were still called by TIDE and held at TIDE’s office, as TIDE had both the convening power to draw attendees and the space to accommodate a large group.

The naming of the new working group or organization became a major point of contention. On the one hand, TIDE and TNC had already been marketing the Maya Mountain Marine Corridor and so had a stake in keeping the title and the corresponding symbolic ownership of the concept. Maintaining such ownership would be key for both recognition and funding (Maheia 2002). TIDE's peer NGOs, on the other hand, sought to change the name in order to both broaden ownership and distance the group from TIDE and the predominantly ecological SCP.

Building off the idea of a watershed association, like the SWA in Central Belize, the country director of Fauna & Flora International (FFI), Emma Caddy-Foster, in consultation with others, suggested the name "Port Honduras Watershed Association." This name captured the reality that the six watersheds of the MMMAT flow into Port Honduras, a "bay" within the larger Gulf of Honduras. Caddy-Foster became a lead driver in the process (Esselman 2002), along with the TIDE consultant, Peter Esselman, and a few others (Caddy-Foster 2002). The NGO leaders met several times, with varying levels of participation, to work toward creating the Port Honduras Watershed Association.

Though the group continued to meet in the TIDE offices, TIDE representatives were often absent. The other NGO leaders grew increasingly impatient as TIDE staff continued to drag their heels. It ultimately became clear that TIDE was opposed to, or at least ambivalent about, the creation of this new organization (McGill 2002). A comment from Wil Maheia, TIDE's CEO, in fact, suggests his outright opposition to a new organization: "There are just too many associations in Punta Gorda. We don't need more" (Maheia 2003).

## **Expanding beyond the MMMAT**

At one time, some members of the watershed association discussion group suggested expanding their watershed management effort south beyond the original six watersheds of the MMMAT to encompass the entire Gulf of Honduras watershed, including the parts in Guatemala and Honduras, as well as Belize (Caddy-Foster 2002). While other members wished to keep it to the original geographic scope, organizational realities forced a southward expansion, drawing in all of the Gulf of Honduras watershed area within Belize. The area of

coverage was thus not as large as the tri-national region pushed by Spang, but it went beyond the original MMMAT. The motivating organizational reality was funding (TWA 2002a).

Since TIDE had not delivered on start-up monies for registering the group and the other NGOs wished to move forward, a source of project funding was required. The Global Environmental Facility (GEF), administered by the United Nations Development Programme, offered an opportunity through its Small Grants Program (SGP). All key partner organizations in the incipient Port Honduras Watershed Association, however, had already received GEF/SGP Grants in 2002 and thus were ineligible to receive another. At this point, Caddy-Foster approached SATIIM, which seeks to protect the culture and livelihoods of communities bordering the Sarstoon-Temash National Park by involving them in the management and operations of the park. SATIIM had not yet applied for a grant with GEF and furthermore was interested in becoming involved more explicitly in watershed management activities while simultaneously expanding their sphere of influence northward. They thus agreed to submit the grant on behalf of the group (TWA 2002a).

### **Another name change**

Since the initiative would no longer be within the MMMAT/Port Honduras watershed only, a new name was felt to be needed. After some discussion, the group agreed to the name “Toledo Watershed Association” despite the slight northward extension of the area beyond the Toledo District and into the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary in the southern Stann Creek District. Another suggestion for a name change, presented at least half in jest, was TANGO, the Toledo Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, a Toledo District equivalent of the country-wide BACONGO, the Belize Alliance of Conservation NGOs. TANGO, in many respects, would be an appropriate name, as the association as established in the proposal would have resembled more closely an advocacy coalition than a broad, collaborative watershed management body.

Nonetheless, the name Toledo Watershed Association, more in line with the original SWA-like vision, was chosen and written into a proposal to GEF/SGP. Caddy-Foster presented the concept paper at the meeting of the partner NGOs. She expressed the evolution of the concept as follows:

The impetus to realize this institutional development coalesced at a workshop held by the TIDE in late January 2002 to discuss watershed management issues in the Port Honduras area. A review of the many actors, interests, conservation programmes and development initiatives present in the Port Honduras watershed by the participants revealed many complimentary and often overlapping activities and concerns. The participants therefore identified the need for a process to enable the different institutions active in watershed management to streamline the diverse initiatives, and ensure that shared goals could be more readily met through a pooling of resources and effort. (TWA 2002b)

The members would keep each other informed about approaching threats and current projects, and the group might come up with collective policy statements or documents. The threat of shrimp farms was raised as a possible first target for policy action, for example. The proposal also called for a staff person to manage the coalition and move projects forward. At the time the concept paper was written, membership included SATIIM, Ya'axche' Conservation Trust, TIDE, TASTE, Belize Foundation for Research and Environmental Education, and Village Farm. The concept paper left the door open for membership by "other interested *organizations*" (TWA 2002b, emphasis added).

### **Southern Alliance for Grassroots Empowerment**

The concept paper for TWA was submitted to the UNDP GEF/SGP, but not through SATIIM. Instead, the paper, with only a few small modifications, was presented under the banner of the Southern Alliance for Grassroots Empowerment (SAGE). According to the current proposal, TWA will not become an organization in its own right, but instead will become a commission within SAGE.

SAGE was formed in 1997 by a group of existing NGOs to address the negative impacts of the Southern Highway expansion. In the words of Pablo Mis (2002), "Empowering local leaders is the goal of SAGE and SAGE has made great achievements." Specifically, SAGE sought to ensure community representation in the Environmental and Social Technical Assistance Project (ESTAP), which had been set up as a condition of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) loan for the highway project to mitigate expected impacts and conflicts from the highway.

The IADB report suggested that the social and ecological ramifications of the highway would be severe and largely negative, especially for the Maya, whose land title is not secure. It was further understood that the highway would bisect the corridor connecting the Maya Mountains to the coast, while opening up land for increased land speculation and development, farming, ranching, logging, and mineral exploration. Each of these activities would impact both communities and the environment. SAGE was thus conceived by several existing NGOs, including both Maya and conservation NGOs, as an umbrella group to unite efforts of these groups to address these highway impacts and ensure community involvement in decision-making related to the expansion (P. Mis 2002).

Many of the founding members are involved in the Board, which includes:

- Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE)
- Kekchi Council of Belize (KCB)
- Toledo Maya Cultural Council (TMCC)
- National Garifuna Council (NGC)
- Toledo Alcaldes Association (TAA)
- Toledo Maya Women's Council (TMWC)
- Two other founding members, the Belize Audubon Society (BAS) and the Society for the Promotion of Education and Research (SPEAR), stepped down from the Board in 2001 but maintain an advisory relationship with SAGE.

The organization managing the Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve, TASTE, also recently became a member of SAGE. SAGE is thus an umbrella organization made up of local indigenous organizations and well-endowed national organizations, with one representative of each on the Board. Each group works on different issues and brings unique strengths to SAGE. For example, the TAA brings the ability to access communities through the member alcaldes (P. Mis 2002). SAGE has now officially registered as an association under Belizean law.

Pulcheria Teul and Pablo Mis ran SAGE's day to day operations until Mis' recent departure from SAGE. They are both Maya and are key players in several other organizations in Toledo. Teul assists with the operation of TMWC and Pablo Mis led efforts to expand community co-management in Aguacaliente Wildlife Sanctuary through the Aguacaliente Management Team. Pulcheria Teul is intimately tied into the fabric of civil society in Toledo through personal and professional relationships. In addition to formal ties through the board and cross-membership in the organizations noted above, SAGE is connected to Ya'axche' Conservation Trust (YCT) through Pulcheria Teul, whose husband Bartolo Teul is the head of YCT. Furthermore, Pulcheria Teul is connected to TASTE, Toledo branch of the Belize Civil Society Movement, and SATIIM through working relationships and friendships.

As the highway has neared completion and having secured community representation in ESTAP (now the Toledo Development Corporation), SAGE moved on to other related issues. SAGE's main focus is now on illegal logging. They seek to: 1) reduce and prevent illegal logging and corresponding degradation of environment; 2) involve the local community in monitoring to promote jobs, local control/involvement, and capacity building/training; and 3) ensure that local communities are able to enjoy benefits of forest resources.

These goals were particularly important to them given the large number of logging concessions granted to logging companies in the South through the late 1990s and the extremely limited ability of the Forest Department to ensure compliance with the requirements of the concessions. With no fuel, few staff, and not even a functioning vehicle, the Forest Department was (and is) almost totally unable to enforce restrictions, especially against highly armed illegal loggers. Abuses are thus rampant. When Hurricane Iris struck, it leveled Toledo's forests, curtailing logging as so little timber was left standing. Salvage operations were undertaken; however, the same extraction activities caused substantial damage (P. Teul 2002; P. Mis 2002). A large new salvage logging concession was recently granted to the company ECOFOR<sup>34</sup>, much of it in the headwaters of Golden Stream, as well as beyond, without public involvement. This concession prompted SAGE to seek a Memorandum of Understanding with the Forest Department that would formalize SAGE's role in public involvement and ensure adequate community consultation prior to the granting of new concessions. Such an MOU has been drafted but has not yet been signed.

Prior to TWA's incorporation into SAGE, the Project Team heard the suggestion from several interviewees that SAGE should take the lead on regional watershed management. For one, it was felt, they already had strong ties with key rural communities and a stock of community trust. Secondly, they have both funding and human capacity as well as experience in training and working with rural people. Third, observers felt that a totally new organization, such as TWA, would simply be one organization too many for Toledo. Finally, watershed management was seen to fit neatly with SAGE's existing focus on illegal logging (Genus 2002; P. Teul 2002). While SAGE's director feared possible conflict with TIDE were SAGE to take on the watershed management role (P. Teul 2002), TIDE's operations manager and executive director both actively supported SAGE's leadership in the initiative (Genus 2002; Maheia 2002). The following quotes suggest opposition to a new organization and support for SAGE.

### **NGO staff believe SAGE should lead watershed management efforts**

- SAGE has now taken up the functions that would have been TWA's. This is good for SAGE, and will strengthen it as an alliance. (Maheia 2002)
- SAGE does have a whole Southern Belize remit and is running the forest monitoring program right now. There is no reason why SAGE should not take [watershed management] on. We don't need another bloody NGO. (McGill 2002)
- We need to be careful about developing a new project or forming a new association, which doesn't really make sense anymore, as all of these groups are already involved in the management of these areas, so all we need is collaboration. (P. Teul 2002)
- SAGE will have a component that is dedicated to watershed, hence the watershed stuff will be handled by SAGE. That way we will not create another association for Toledo, and Lord knows we do not need another. But this should make SAGE stronger. (Maheia 2003)
- SAGE has potential and would gladly take it on. We would need more staff people if there were funding and also include other organizations. (P. Teul 2002)
- When they called the meeting to form the watershed association, I suggested that SAGE play that role. We do not need another association. (Maheia 2003)

## ANALYSIS

This section of the case study presents constraints on collaboration and opportunities for increased interaction among individuals, agencies, and other organizations in the region. Dimensions of the current debate among NGOs on how a watershed management body should be structured are then examined.

### **Challenges for collaboration**

Interviewees identified dozens of constraints that they felt might limit watershed-based collaboration in the Toledo District. The following challenges were cited most frequently and forcefully.

#### Community issues

**Limited community capacity and interest.** As noted earlier, NGO leaders in Southern Belize suggest that community capacity in the region is much less than in the Sibun watershed, limiting potential for leadership from the grassroots and demanding more of existing NGOs with greater knowledge and skills to manage the process (P. Teul 2002). Another limiting factor, suggested by Rigoberto Blanco of SWA, is that in the MMMAT area few settlements lie directly along watercourses. In his experience, it is these communities that are most responsive and involved as they most clearly recognize their connection to the water bodies (Blanco 2002). However, starting out with a few small projects with one community along each major river, he suggests, could represent a good starting point, to build upon small successes.

**Insecure land title.** Land title is not secure for local communities, including Garifuna and Creole people, but most seriously for Maya communities. A lack of secure title and the likelihood of future exploitation of community land by outside companies limits incentives for land stewardship. As Caddy-Foster noted,

A community might be concerned about the state of their forest, but there is some company coming in that the Government is going to let clearcut the whole area pay them a pittance and that is the only option they have, then they will try to get a job with the company. There is no legal mechanism by which communities, as opposed to individuals, can obtain security over their lands. (2002)

### Resource constraints

The few trained natural resource management and development professionals in Toledo are pressed for time and so find it difficult to participate in meetings. Instead, they feel they need to focus on their own projects. They are thus not as interested in broader scale collaboration, except to the extent that it relates to their own piece of land. Ken Karas of Belize Lodge & Excursions, for example wants to focus on the Golden Stream corridor and Jake Marlin is most interested in the Bladen Nature Reserve and the management of the Bladen Consortium: “The [Bladen] Consortium would play whatever role it needs in the MMMAT plan in order to protect Bladen” (Marlin 2002). The following quotes from land managers further express the challenge of limited time against the demands of collaboration.

The main problem they are facing is the inability of different organizations to come together and work. Everybody has their own thing to do and not much time to work together. When someone tries to call a meeting, no one has time for it. (B. Teul 2002)

We cannot be attending all these meetings because we have lots to do. (Maheia 2003)

### Organizational barriers

**Lack of accountability.** Several interviewees highlight the problem of accountability. While funders may suggest that they favor collaboration among local organizations, if they do not monitor and evaluate outcomes of the collaborative projects they support, less pressure will be placed on NGOs to actually follow through with project plans. A lack of monitoring may in fact encourage non-action, as noted by Emma Caddy-Foster of FFI:

People get money and they don't implement it the way they said they were going to do it . . . Nobody gets back on them and no one makes sure that it is actually done right . . . Recommendations don't mean anything unless there is punishment or withdrawal of funding . . . It is a problem of accountability that is lacking across the board . . . The only people that have any power to change any of this probably aren't even in Belize, the people with money that give money to NGOs and to the Government, that say 'account for this.' (2002)

It may also be difficult for communities and Government to hold NGOs accountable, especially since NGO funding often comes from sources outside the country or region. John McGill, himself an NGO staff member, underscores the danger that these organizations may pose: "NGOs may be a move against democracy, as NGOs are not really accountable" (McGill 2002).

**Lack of strategic plans among local organizations.** Lack of strategic plans among local organizations allows manipulation by outside funders. Pablo Mis of SAGE and Aguacaliente argued that, "Funders don't understand the reality down here. We need to be clear about our needs. What they want to fund may not be what we need most" (P. Mis 2002).

#### *Conflict and competition among groups*

Information equals funding for many NGOs. While information sharing may ultimately result in an "expanded pie" of funding for the region if it facilitates collaboration and interests new donors, when it comes to dividing up the existing funding pool, NGOs are reluctant to share ideas with one another. Bartolo Teul of YCT, for example, believes that cross-sector projects could attract new funding, but he worries that the reluctance among organizations to share information could prevent the success of such efforts (B. Teul 2002). Teul explained that, "Collaboration is weak at present among Toledo NGOs. They are not honest with one another. Ideas are sources for funding, so people don't want to share" (2002). He later expanded this explanation:

In Belizean culture we tend to want to do things by ourselves so if it succeeds it is us that gets the good name. We don't want to share that recognition with others . . . NGOs will lose their fame if they start working with or through others. (2002)

### Power and politics

The NGOs in Toledo hold varying levels of power, both in comparison to one another and in comparison to the international NGOs (INGOs) with whom they partner. While greater collaboration among local NGOs could strengthen their collective bargaining power in relation to the INGOs, larger, more powerful local NGOs may be able to capture the funding and recognition of collaborative efforts more easily than smaller organizations. This imbalance leads to fears about collaborating. TIDE, for example, is the most powerful board member of SAGE. This could be a key reason for TIDE's active support for SAGE as the leader of the watershed management initiative. Will they try to dominate the process? SAGE's leader suggests diplomatically that, "Working with organizations bigger than you can pose a threat and we have to be very careful" (P. Teul 2002).

### Differing conservation paradigms

Unlike TNC's "science-driven" conservation approach, the other NGOs claim to take a more "people-centered" approach. The TNC consultant on the MMMAT SCP argues that a more people-centered approach is important in the Belizean context.

I've clearly recognized that TNC's methodology and the focus on biodiversity, while it is appropriate for the socio-political sphere of the States, is not really appropriate for down here. A lot of targets that are biological should really be social and economic indicators. I don't mean to suggest that the methodology is invalid, rather that it is not yet fully compatible for a developing world context and thus needs modification to include more social and economic considerations. (Esselman 2002)

The grant proposal for TWA also suggests the need for a more "balanced" paradigm:

The citizens of Toledo struggle daily with the highest poverty figures, lowest employment and poorest social services in the country. Faced with these great life challenges, conservation has little use in their vocabularies. To be successful, conservation efforts will therefore have to become equated in community perspectives with qualitative livelihood improvements, for without local support, watershed management regimes will never prove effective or sustainable. (TWA 2002b)

The groups most tied to traditional, mostly Maya, communities are even more "people-centered." John McGill, a consultant to SATIIM, and Valentino Shal of TMCC expressed the differences in focus:

I can endorse the SATIIM philosophy – using the park to attract new funding for development in surrounding communities – not the TNC [planning and methodology], where development is only done for protecting the park, whereas SATIIM does the opposite. (McGill 2002)

One thing that stands out in my mind is that reserves are designed in a way that doesn't take into account the people that are in the area . . . It is important to preserve the environment, but people are part of ecosystems. (Shal 2002c)

### Other challenges

- **Lack of shared ownership** for the MMMAT Site Conservation Plan. The feeling that this is a TIDE plan is pervasive, as discussed in Chapter Five. Without broad buy-in, success may be limited.
- **Disincentives.** Legal frameworks do not support conservation. Tax disincentives, like the land speculation tax, lack of land trust laws, lax enforcement of land use laws, and limited ownership title security all inhibit conservation.

There is no incentive for any conservation to take place. There's no tax incentives. There are no incentives to do anything sustainable . . . Except the Queen's law not to cut anything within 60 feet of the river, anything goes. (Marlin 2002)

The laws in Belize are designed to exploit, not conserve. (B. Teul 2002)

- **Need for funding.** Funding is needed for SAGE to coordinate partners, both to cover meeting expenses and to cover the cost of staff time: “First we need to support someone to be a full-time advocate for this group” (Esselman 2002).
- **Politicization of natural resource management issues.** Several party politicians have used natural resource issues as a basis for gaining support for either the UDP or PUP. Due to strong divisions in communities, information is often not shared among residents of opposing parties (B. Teul 2002; P. Teul 2002).

- **Turf.** The intensity of territoriality is evidenced by the following quote from SATIIM’s consultant, John McGill:

With the coastal zone, we were careful about not moving into TIDE or TASTE territory. The coastal zone is demarcated into little fiefdoms. We extended our influence up to the mouth of the Moho River, thinking that north of there is approaching into TIDE territory. TIDE goes up to Monkey River, and then you are into maybe the Friends of Nature area. (2002)

## **Opportunities and facilitating factors**

While the challenges to collaboration are many, the interviewees also suggested a number of opportunities that could promote collaboration.

### *Potential for joint gains*

**Complementary strengths and geographic coverage.** While the desire to “divide up Toledo” among NGOs is viewed by some as a constraint to collaboration, it is viewed by others as an opportunity. It was in fact the sense among NGOs that they were often “tripping over each other” that led to planning for joint watershed management in the first place (TWA 2002b). By focusing on specific geographic areas or leveraging the unique skills and strengths of particular organizations, a collaborative management body might be able to produce the most results with limited resources.

Division along lines of expertise is also an option. SAGE itself is recognized as a leader in community involvement. Other organizations are more connected to outside agencies or donors. Alan Genus, Operations Manager of TIDE suggests the following arrangement:

TIDE’s role would be monitoring. Golden Stream [YCT] is grassroots. They have an office and do development activities, so they could do outreach . . . [Also] different organizations have different relationships with funders. They could bring these to the table. (2002)

The idea of organizing a collaborative body along lines of complementary strengths illustrates the notion of organizational niche arrangements (Brechin 1997). According to this argument, organizations should join forces and each do what they do best in concert with one

another to maximize effectiveness in conservation and development. With respect to SAGE/TWA, it appears that the participating NGOs plan to do just that.

### Interest in moving forward

Interviewees presented mixed views about the possibilities for collaboration, but a majority of NGO players, at least, felt that it could happen. Further, they suggested that moving forward was necessary, despite the obstacles. They felt that once the process began to show success, that momentum would build.

I don't know what is going to happen, but I know that it is a good thing to do.  
(Caddy-Foster 2002)

There's more of a critical mass, more permanent people. There is more of a chance it will come to fruition . . . I have a feeling that this is going to happen.  
(Esselman 2002)

### Other opportunities

- **New draft of Site Conservation Plan.** TIDE is currently working on a fourth draft of the SCP that would include more of a socioeconomic focus (Esselman 2002). This process presents a new opportunity to involve communities and fellow NGOs, as well as other participants, to promote broader buy-in.
- **The recent salvage logging concession to ECOFOR** in the middle of the MMMC heightens the perceived need for a coordinated response to logging.
- **Ties between local NGOs and large international NGOs** suggest access to substantial funding.
- **Greater emphasis among funders on trans-boundary collaboration** for conservation could tie in well with the Gulf of Honduras initiative, if SAGE/TWA efforts can be thematically connected with the broader transnational efforts (Blanco 2002).

- **International recognition for Toledo's biodiversity** and increasing exposure of Toledo to the rest of world suggest the possibility of new funding opportunities.
- **A new natural resource management (NRM) program at the University of Belize** is currently in its third year, training future natural resource managers (P. Teul 2002), and the University of Belize has recently opened a Toledo campus. Perhaps some graduates of the NRM program can be encouraged to participate in conservation in Toledo.

### **SAGE/TWA: Debates and dimensions**

SAGE/TWA is still taking shape and several issues remain in flux. Key interviewees discussed a range of questions related to watershed management through the SAGE/TWA amalgam. While they agreed on a number of points, such as the need for information sharing, they disagreed about how these inter-organizational relationships should be structured. The central questions framing their debates are described below.

#### *Should SAGE/TWA act as a pressure group or a multi-stakeholder collaborative?*

Given that a watershed model along the lines of SWA inspired initial discussions about collaboration in the Toledo district, the shift toward a single-sector model is significant. Peter Esselman, who had been a key driver in the discussion about a watershed association, suggested that while narrowing the field may be better than nothing, broad collaboration is needed in the long run. Upon learning that TWA was to be founded only by NGOs and modeled after BACONGO, not SWA, Esselman commented:

That will be a point of conflict, a point of debate. I don't agree with that. She [Caddy-Foster] voiced it to me as not wanting to have a huge organization, but as a conversation between the players. If we can't muster the energy to make it happen as a multi-stakeholder approach at the transect level, then I think it's good to have us come together once a month and share. That's something that hasn't happened and needs to happen. That's if we are pulling back . . . [But] the future is not as an NGO forum. (2002)

A key concern about starting as an NGO-only forum is that it may limit future participation by non-NGOs. For example, Esselman (2002) asked, “How willing would [Sorenson] be to participate in a heavily NGO-laden organization?”

*How should communities be involved?*

The NGO leaders developing plans for the TWA debated how to involve local communities in the organization and in watershed management efforts. The discussion revolved around the following questions. While the framing of the questions may change with TWA falling under SAGE, the core issues remain.

- Should communities be directly represented in TWA or should they be involved through their representatives in TWA member organizations?
- What sort of training is necessary to ensure meaningful community participation?
- How does past experience with conservation projects influence community attitudes?
- What issues might a collaborative body face in terms of representation from communities?
- What are the best methods for reaching community members?

Emma Caddy-Foster of FFI favored indirect involvement of communities, largely because she wished to avoid raising false expectations among community members. She argued that: 1) communities in the South had already been thoroughly surveyed, 2) they were tired of plans being made with no follow-through, 3) they would like to see even small tangible results, and 4) their interests were sufficiently represented through the potential association’s member NGOs which were already working in communities and often included community members on their boards (Caddy-Foster 2002). This sentiment was captured in the grant proposal to GEF:

The [watershed association], itself a purely institutional-member body, will therefore be ensured a high level of stakeholder participation by virtue of the broad interest groups their respective member groups provide them access to. (TWA 2002b)

John Spang, on the other hand, felt that more direct community involvement was necessary, and unsuccessfully pushed for representation of local people through the Toledo Alcaldes Association, but without success (TWA 2002a). According to Alan Genus of TIDE, the rationale for NGO leadership in watershed management is that the communities lack capacity: “With SWA, the communities took the lead. Here the organizations are taking the lead. Here the capacity is different. People are more set-back and don’t have the capacity” (2002).

The following comments illustrate perspectives of several additional interviewees on community involvement. Statements are grouped by category of concern.

## **Beliefs about Community Involvement**

### **Success hinges on community involvement and education**

The indigenous people must be viewed as key players. Effective collaboration is not possible without them. (B. Teul 2002)

Education to communities is key to everything here. They need to understand the whole purpose of why we are trying to protect this area. (P. Teul 2002)

### **Broader representation would enhance credibility**

I feel like we would have a more substantive organization if we focused on the community level and not the NGO level. (Esselman 2002)

It is important to have not only leaders, but also other people from the community present at meetings. (B. Teul 2002)

In order to involve women it is necessary to work with the TMWC or to invite women directly to meetings, as alcaldes and other men will often not announce that a meeting is taking place to women in the village. (B. Teul 2002)

### **Past history poses barriers to involvement and trust**

People in the communities are tired of being censused. They see someone with a clipboard and they run the other way. (Caddy-Foster 2002)

Communities don't want to listen anymore. [NGOs] talk about doing innovative things, but don't do anything. Conservation groups only like to talk about conservation, but communities [see their problems as] more pressing than the environment. (Saqui 2002)

### **Ensuring contact between representatives and constituents is a challenge**

[Representatives] are supposed to be reporting back to their communities anything that they get involved in and they don't always do that. Communities within themselves have their own internal dynamics, whereby you could have somebody go to a meeting, hear about something and not go back and tell anybody. (Caddy-Foster 2002)

YCT attempts to contact the community through radio shows, newsletters, and a booth at community events. (B. Teul 2002)

### **Training for community members is essential and requires compensation**

For communities to participate meaningfully in the conservation concept there has to be aggressive training for community members, for example PACT's leadership skills training . . . I hear at meetings that Mayans think that [training] is a waste of time: 'While you're training, our people are starving. Training will not help us put food on the table.' . . . When we think about designing training, we need to start thinking about offering a stipend to participants (including transportation). (B. Teul 2002)

### What role should Government play?

To date, Government has played only a limited role in the discussions surrounding watershed management in Toledo. NGO leaders appear to be of two minds about Government involvement. Some feel that their current lack of involvement confers freedom, while others believe that their absence represents a missed opportunity. Government may be faced with declining resources, but they could bring legal authority, skills, and institutional-level influence, as well as possible money to the table. Similarly, Government has mixed feelings about NGOs. The limits faced by governmental agencies create a void that NGOs are called to fill, but NGO leaders feel that Government may still have important roles to play, as revealed in the following quotes.

The Government of Belize (GOB) is notoriously ambivalent about NGOs. They see NGOs as interfering, [but some agencies] are happy to offload responsibilities on them . . . If the government is going to rely on NGOs, they have to inject transparency. (McGill 2002)

Government can be stronger, I suppose . . . In terms of management of a national park, they have weight, they could speak up, they can make things happen. (Caddy-Foster 2002)

Government needs to commit themselves to put people that can make decisions in these meetings they have with NGOs. And NGOs need to block the cloud of suspicion against Government and recognize that government has huge resources that can be tapped into. Instead of working on separate projects hampered by resource constraints, NGOs and Government should pool resources and work on joint projects . . . In the enforcement area, government has to play a key role. Government needs to recognize NGO capacities and the fact that NGOs are not trying to work against them. Both are supposedly working for the development of the communities. (Garbutt 2002)

We haven't had any problems with Government. Since they have no funds they say, 'Go to it'! (Caddy-Foster 2002)

### How should industry be involved?

Agriculture is a leading industry in Southern Belize. As the Southern Highway nears completion, enhancing transportation and access to markets and labor in Toledo, agriculture will expand rapidly. Agricultural sectors include citrus, bananas, forest products, and rice, along with a smaller acreage in crops like habanero and mangos, and subsistence swidden corn production. Aquaculture, especially shrimp farms, is also expanding throughout Belize

and is viewed as a threat in the South. Finally, cacao, and organic cacao in particular, is increasingly grown in Toledo, mostly in connection with conservation development projects. Bananas and citrus in particular are grown at massive plantation scales and conventional processes demand significant inputs of fertilizer and pesticides. These inputs and associated land use practices present challenges to the maintenance of ground and surface water quality in the region. As the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary director noted,

[Citrus and banana plantations] cut all the way down to the river. They also aerial spray and pollute community water. They don't listen because they are too powerful and always busy. (Saqui 2002)

Improvements in large landowner practices could thus yield substantial water quality benefits. Finally, according to locals, the foreign laborers associated with large plantations engage in harmful fishing and land use practices. As major landowners with serious impacts on water quality, the agricultural industry is thus a key player in the region.

Among the most powerful of these players is Soren Sorenson, with thousands of acres in a variety of agricultural and timber lands held through several sub-companies. While some NGO representatives distrust Sorenson, others feel that it would be impossible to do successful watershed management without his participation. A few even feel that his company could be a positive force in a watershed management body. In fact, a member of Sorenson's team even suggested the idea of creating such an organization: "Christian Beck . . . the environmental conscience of [Sorenson's] company . . . has approached Jake [Marlin] about forming a watershed association" (Esselman 2002). Although, Beck's "environmental conscience" is separate from his role with Sorenson's company, this enthusiasm from Beck has led Marlin to form a positive impression of Sorenson and his company and interest in collaborating with them. As Marlin suggests:

They're the biggest landowners in this part of the country and we have to work with them . . . Yeah, Sorenson represents a company. The company is very large, world-wide. They have vast amounts in capital and investment. That company is a potential philanthropist, and people in his company are conservationists, and are trying to push some positive things, like Christian Beck. He's a dynamic individual. He manages the company's logging operations. He's also managed their farming. He's Sorenson's right-hand man. He's implemented composting of all the banana waste and he's pushing the watershed idea. He wants to do major riverine reforestation. I think Sorenson, everyone has negative things to say about him, but I feel differently . . . (2002)

### What will collaboration look like?

Will collaborative watershed management require weekly meetings among all representatives? Monthly gatherings of a core working group? Annual weekend workshops and planning sessions? These issues remain to be resolved. TIDE's SCP consultant suggests an informal, social approach:

Even just to have a huge party. Advertise free beer to get people to come and then educate them in the process. That's a joke, but the message is that people love to party. Bring these stakeholders together in a relaxed atmosphere. We need to start slow and recognize that it takes years to build substantive partnerships between stakeholder groups that for most hours of the week are not thinking about participating in an organization like this, but are willing to give one day a year to go to a watershed-wide conference and listen to presentations about different issues and be educated about things that interest them. (Esselman 2002)

## CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the case revealed many challenges and opportunities for collaboration among participants in SAGE/TWA, as described in the previous section. In addition, the case offers a number of lessons for collaboration more generally. The case suggests the following:

- When conservation efforts are relevant and responsive to community needs they are more likely to engage community interest and support.
- Early, meaningful community consultation is critical in planning efforts if broad support is necessary for success.

- Models of success inspire efforts to collaborate, which is especially evident with SWA and BACONGO's influence on the development of TWA.
- Strategic planning both at the protected area level and at the regional level may be necessary to prevent external domination of local NGOs by foreign NGOs.
- An opportunity exists for Government agencies and NGOs to work together to ensure accountability and transparency for both and to complement each other's efforts.

