

## Chapter Nine: Conclusions

---

Southern Belize, with its dense organizational landscape, rich cultural and ecological diversity, and shifting conservation and development priorities and strategies, provides a unique opportunity to explore factors that constrain and facilitate extant and emerging collaboration, as well as opportunities for new and innovative approaches to collaborative natural resource management. Examples of existing and emerging partnerships among NGOs, Government agencies, and local communities are described in the four case studies presented in this document.

Drawing from the case studies as well as the core issues affecting natural resource management in Belize (discussed in Chapters Two and Three), in this chapter we review our findings under three broad themes: 1) constraints and challenges to greater collaboration; 2) factors facilitating collaboration in Toledo; and 3) opportunities for expanding and improving collaborative management of natural resources. By distilling the salient points from our research and experiences in Belize, this section seeks to draw out insights and lessons that will assist a broad array of stakeholders engaged in or interested in greater collaboration in the Toledo District and beyond.

### CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES TO GREATER COLLABORATION

Emerging and extant collaborative initiatives in Southern Belize occur within a broader political, social, institutional, and economic context adding layers of complexity and challenge to collaboration. Drawing from the four case studies as well as from broader conservation and development issues in Belize, the following section examines factors that constrain or impede greater and more effective collaboration. Political constraints include the lack of enabling legislation; lack of implementation of legislation; lack of political will;

divestment of protected areas management responsibility; and the difficulty of integrating the local, district and central Government levels. Social and cultural constraints include the land tenure dispute; mistrust; cultural diversity; participation and representation; and lack of ownership of objectives and plans. Institutional level constraints include organizational norms and culture; lack of a champion; and lack of capacity. Finally, economic constraints include limited resources; national development priorities; and donor funding.

## **Political context**

### *Lack of enabling legislation*

Effective collaborative management of natural resources rests on sound legislation and policy that strengthens and supports long-term conservation planning. Belize lacks a comprehensive national conservation policy despite the percentage of land set aside for conservation purposes. For the most part; "...policy is expressed by individual ministers or departments, as specific statement and/or explicit legislation, to address statutory duties" (PFB 1996:29). The designation and de-reservation (i.e. removal from protected status) of protected areas (PAs) and Forest Reserves is highly politicized; sections can be de-reserved by Ministerial fiat in response to internal or external pressures. It is therefore clear that, despite the legal designation of PAs by various Acts (such as the National Parks System Act, the Forest Act, the Fisheries Act, and the Ancient Monuments and Antiquities Act), the current legal framework does not guarantee their long-term security. This insecure status is an impediment to conservation planning, because it creates a climate of uncertainty. Donor agencies and organizations may have little incentive to commit substantial resources or take part in a collaborative process when the long-term "protected" status of a protected area is in doubt. This uncertainty also has major ramifications for collaborative management of protected areas.

### *Lack of implementation of policy and legislation*

Where legislation and plans to protect cultural and ecological resources do exist, enforcement and implementation may be lacking. While the *de facto* management of most PAs is based on principles and practices specified in the *National Protected Areas Systems Plan for Belize*

(PFB 1996) this document has not been signed into law or endorsed by the Cabinet. Additionally, laws that protect “66-foot Reserves” along waterways, outlaw hunting and looting in PAs, and guide land use planning and management are rarely enforced and frequently ignored. Many PAs, therefore, are effectively “paper parks,” as evidenced by the hunting, logging, *milpa* farming, and looting of Maya archeological sites that continues to occur within protected area borders. Unregulated and illegal activities threaten the ecological and archeological resources of Southern Belize. Protected area management organizations would have little incentive to collaborate given this inconsistent implementation of protected area legislation.

### Political will

The largely “hands-off” approach taken by the Government of Belize (GOB) in the realm of natural resource management calls into question its commitment to greater cooperation and collaboration. Despite the expanse of Belize’s territory set aside for conservation, the small GOB budgetary allocations to natural resource management suggests this may not be an overriding priority. Furthermore, according to a Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) report *Community Involvement in Establishment, Planning, and Management of GEF Priority Protected Areas in the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System*: “None of the various laws that are relevant to the management of protected natural areas in Belize makes specific mention of public participation, collaborative management, or the creation and function of any type of advisory committees for protected natural areas” (Barborak et al., 2002:7). Greater Government involvement in natural resource management could bring legal authority, legitimacy, skills, and institutional-level authority “to the table.” As one non-governmental organization (NGO) representative stated: “In terms of management of a national park, they [Government] have weight, they could speak up, they can make things happen...” (Caddy-Foster 2002).

### Divestment of responsibility

In response to budgetary constraints, numerous development and conservation activities have been delegated to various NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs). Private NGOs such as Belize Audubon Society (BAS), Toledo Association for Sustainable Tourism and Empowerment (TASTE) and community-based organizations (CBOs)<sup>42</sup> such as Friend of Five Blues, manage Government PAs through co-management agreements. In the Belizean context, “co-management” refers to legally binding agreements between NGOs or CBOs and a government agency to share protected area management roles and responsibilities. However, given that the devolution of roles and responsibilities is not accompanied by necessary financial resources and institutional support, in this context it can be interpreted as divestment of responsibility rather than a true sharing of roles and responsibilities. This situation conflates the process of *democratic decentralization* with that of *privatization*.<sup>43</sup> Insufficient resources have been especially detrimental to CBOs that are signatories of co-management agreements.

### Integrating the local, district, and central levels

Natural resource decisions are unique with regards to questions of scale. Watersheds, rivers, and ecosystems cross geopolitical boundaries. Local forests and environs are part of larger ecosystems. Downstream users are affected by the actions and activities of upstream users. Integrated management decisions made at the watershed or landscape level require a combination of the local, district, and central level government. However, the majority of regulatory and planning decisions about the South are made 160 miles north of the District in the capital city of Belmopan while “no coordinating units are presently in place at the district level, despite district level officers and NGOs stressing the need to have such bodies to avoid disorganization” (GOB 2000c:171). The nascent Toledo Development Corporation (TDC) is an attempt to address the lack of coordination but its impact has not yet registered. An interviewee describes the political and geographic isolation of the South:

Look at Belize as a whole. The majority of the Cabinet is from the Belize District [the northern and western part of the country]. We only have two ministers from the South which is almost half the country. The power of the country is directed that way [meaning North]. (Anonymous 2002)

## **Social and cultural context**

### *Land tenure disputes*

A long-standing, unresolved conflict concerning legal title to traditional lands presents a substantial barrier to collaboration. Land security – and by default access to life-sustaining resources - is tenuous for many residents of the Toledo District. Indigenous people such as the Kekchi, Mopan, and Garifuna are disproportionately affected. Where PAs and Forest Reserves overlap contested land, collaboration has the potential to compromise rights and access to natural resources. Pending litigation over the status of Maya Reservation lands and logging concessions exacerbate tensions between Maya leadership and the Government of Belize.<sup>44</sup> Despite efforts to present a united front, local cultural organizations remain fragmented along ethnic, geographic, and political lines. Southern Belize lacks culturally appropriate, formalized alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for parties to resolve their differences.

### *Mistrust*

Mistrust between NGOs and Government, and people and NGOs – stemming from long-standing conflicts, failed development projects, and negative perceptions – has the potential to limit communication and understanding. As mentioned in the SAGE/TWA case, NGO–Government relations appear to be marked by mistrust. An NGO official describes this perception: “The Government of Belize 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). Despite numerous projects and the investment of millions of development dollars down south, the quality of life for many rural inhabitants remains the same. Poorly implemented and managed NGO projects have led some community members to believe NGOs are “just like the Government.” Conservation organizations are seen to “lock away resources” while the private sector “only cares about money.” According to ESTAP’s *Regional Development Plan*: “the absence of proper guidelines and legislation to regulate (and regularize) their [organizations working in the south] activity has meant that many NGOs and CBOs still operate in a climate of suspicion” (GOB 2000c:183).

### Cultural diversity

Cultural diversity adds another layer of complexity to collaboration in Southern Belize. The population of Southern Belize “reflects the country’s greatest ethnic diversity” which includes Kekchi and Mopan Maya, Mestizo, Garifuna, Creole and East Indian people: characterized by variations in language, lifestyles, and governance structures (GOB 2000c:19). While all groups are ultimately concerned about the future of Toledo’s natural resources, they differ in how they value them as well as their proposed strategies to protect and manage them. Conservation organizations might define “over-hunting” or “sustainable use” in a way that differs from other groups’ understanding of the issues. Cultural diversity also implies differences in the understandings of relationship between people and nature. For many indigenous people rivers, forests, and wildlife provide the foundation of their livelihood and in many cases, their identity. Collaboration and joint decision making amidst such rich cultural diversity needs to accommodate differing values and traditions.

### Representation and participation

Decision making authority in the region is largely in the hands of international, national, and regional organizations and “experts” while communities and other local actors affected by those decisions are largely shut out of decision making processes. Rural farmers, women and indigenous communities exhibit different levels of organization, education, and ability to participate in decision making processes. From a single protected area to the six-watershed conservation unit – the Maya Mountain Marine Corridor (MMMC) – many individuals expressed the need to involve a broader array of interests and organizations in conservation planning and projects. As one interviewee framed it: “A collaborative body should have a variety of interests... an integrated approach must be wide enough to meet all the interests, both community and individual interests” (Anonymous 2002).

Despite various attempts by NGOs such as Ya’axche’ Conservation Trust, the Sarstoon-Temash Institute for Indigenous Management, and the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment to integrate communities into conservation and sustainable livelihood initiatives, various interviewees questioned their success. Marginalized groups such as indigenous people and women were frequently cited as being excluded from decision making

fora. Traditional roles for women can limit educational opportunities and access to communication channels placing them at a disadvantage to be heard. Successful collaboration will depend on the ability of leading organizations to include a broader spectrum of participants and their interests, skills, and experience.

### *Lack of ownership of objectives and plans*

Early involvement in defining the problem and participation in the process is key to fostering a sense of ownership. Recognition of TIDE and The Nature Conservancy (TNC)'s "Ridges to Reef" conservation unit (dubbed the MMMC in Toledo) has been problematic since the outset caused by failure to consult adequately with stakeholders and organizations within the region during the formulation of the Site Conservation Plan.<sup>45</sup> Villagers in the Golden Stream watershed, who feel they were only marginally consulted during the initial stages of the planning process, do not necessarily recognize the legitimacy of the Golden Stream Conservation Corridor. As one Maya villager commented, "They tried to get people involved and the people really want to have their input taken but as time goes by they quit taking the input of the people . . . They don't ask the people" (Anonymous 2002).

Projects and initiatives that fail to adequately engage communities and local organizations with site-specific knowledge frequently result in a lack of acceptance and understandably, create resistance during the implementation phase. Toledo is littered with the remains of unsuccessful development projects driven in part by "...a tendency for the project ideas to be conceived outside of Toledo with project implementers that are hardly in tune with or connected to the unique dynamics of the area. They [individuals and implementers] tend to work in the district with an agenda already externally packaged for how things should be done" (Enriquez 2002).

## **Institutional context**

### *Organizational norms and culture*

Where interests overlap, organizational norms and culture may impede collaboration across institutional boundaries. While groups of environmental organizations have embraced landscape scale or eco-regional conservation planning, contiguous parcels and PAs remain

divided along organizational rather than ecological lines. Jurisdiction over PAs is divided between local, regional, and international NGOs, the private sector and the GOB. Management of Government PAs falls under the umbrella of three Government departments each located within a separate Ministry. The need for cross-sectoral coordination at the Government level has already been recognized for the coastal zone, leading to the creation of the interdepartmental Coastal Zone Management Authority (CZMA) however, this arrangement only addresses the coastal/marine component of the protected area system.

Southern Belize's dense organizational landscape creates challenges for organizational collaboration. All the case studies introduced in the previous chapter, cite turf as a constraining factor. Collaboration can offset the expansion or maintenance of organizational turf, power, and interests. The following quote by a NGO representative refers to organizational territory as "fiefdoms":

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 TIDE territory. TIDE goes up to Monkey River, and then you are into maybe the Friends of Nature area. (McGill 2002)

Government agencies, NGOs, and private sector organizations adhere to formal goals for conservation and development which sometimes conflict. Some organizations practice a more "science driven approach," others, a more "people driven" approach. Interests might revolve around management or protection of a protected area like the Bladen Nature Reserve, a watershed like the Golden Stream, or multiple watersheds like the MMMC. The challenge will be to reconcile diverse goals and agendas within a regional strategy for Toledo. Jerry Enriquez suggested: "Organizations should collaborate their strategic visions and plans, and should decide together how their goals fit with each other" (2002).

NGOs in Toledo wield varying levels of power – from large well-funded international NGOs like TNC to small single-staffed organizations like the Toledo Maya Women's Council. Power imbalances can produce fears when entering into a collaborative process: *Who will dominate the process? Who will control the agenda?*

### Lack of a local champion

Experience with collaborative management of natural resources shows that “[s]uccessful collaborative efforts usually have one or two individuals who have a ‘we’re in this together’ stance that sharply contrasts with previous adversarial interactions” (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2001). While various individuals and organizations have expressed interest in a regional approach to conservation in Southern Belize, integrated conservation initiatives such as the MMMC and Toledo Watershed Association (TWA) remain in the concept or planning stage. The MMMC concept continues to face challenges as a multi-stakeholder forum to promote collaboration. Participants in TWA, now the purview of the Southern Alliance for Grassroots Empowerment, continue to debate its organizational direction and mandate: *How will industry and communities be included? Will the organization form along the lines of the Sibun Watershed Association (SWA) or shift towards a single sector model? Will SAGE take an advocacy role or develop into a multi-stakeholder forum?* A truly collaborative effort will require a dedicated leader willing to merge existing synergies and champion the move towards a new inclusive organizational model built on trust and joint decision making.

### Capacity

While collaboration presents opportunities for a broader spectrum of stakeholders to participate in decisions about and the implementation of conservation and development initiatives in Toledo, it does not guarantee that all have the capacity to do so. Indigenous organizations, local elites, industry representatives, and NGOs exhibit different levels of organization, financial resources, and influence at the local and regional level. Capacity building and education will be necessary to enable effective problem-solving and implementation.

### Inadequate communication and information sharing

Natural resource managers in Southern Belize are faced with the growing need to share information, expertise, and data in order to understand let alone manage large scale ecosystems such as the Golden Stream Corridor and the MMMC. Despite the proliferation of civil society organizations there has been limited coordination and dialogue between them.

Conservation planning and development activities in Southern Belize are characterized by inadequate communication and feedback mechanisms. Given the already limited available information (ecological, demographic, and topographic) on and about Southern Belize, shared information and expertise is crucial. Fragmentation makes communication, collaboration, and streamlining of management activities across the landscape difficult. NGOs may be reluctant to share ideas and information with each other if this sharing correlates to recognition and access to funding sources. As stated by the FFI Programme Director: “[NGOs] are not honest with one another. Ideas are sources for funding, so people aren’t always willing to share” (Caddy-Foster 2002).

As demonstrated by the establishment of SATIIM and the Port Honduras Marine Reserve (PHMR), the breakdown in communication between Government, and NGOs and communities led to misunderstanding and uncertainty. Local communities living in and around the Sarstoon and Temash Rivers did not learn about the existence of the Sarstoon-Temash National Park until three years after its establishment (Caddy et al., 2000). At a meeting in Hopkins village, fishermen expressed concern about being denied access to resources in the PHMR stemming from lack of information about “no-take” versus “multiple-use” zones. Experience with communities led a Government official to conclude: “We have had some bad experiences in the past from not communicating. It is simple. You need to talk with these people” (Anonymous 2002).

## **Economic context**

### *Resource limitations*

Involvement in collaborative processes requires significant human and financial resources: for example, travel costs to attend meetings, technical expertise, and time. When asked about challenges to greater collaboration, various NGO representatives mentioned a lack of time and money. Additionally, organizations participating in a collaborative arrangement vary in size, types of expertise, and access to resources. For example, grassroots organizations like the Kekchi Council of Belize and the Toledo Maya Cultural Council operate with fewer staff members and on a much smaller budget than TIDE and TNC.

If collaborative partners feel that costs are not distributed proportionally, it can be a source of friction and frustrate attempts to work together over the long term. This was the case with Bladen Consortium where participants disagreed as to whether or not participants were sharing work and costs related to the function of the Consortium.

### National development priorities

In an effort to close the gap between Southern Belize and the more developed Northern Districts, the GOB has instituted new approaches to accelerate the pace of development in a region that has always been regarded as the most economically depressed in the country (GOB 1998). In the mid-1990s, the GOB granted at least seventeen logging concessions on lands totaling 480,000 acres in the Toledo District (see Map 6, p.46). In 1997, the Government granted a permit to a foreign oil and gas exploration company to explore for oil reserves on almost 750,000 acres of land in the Toledo District (TMCC 1998). Current and new development initiatives can conflict with parallel efforts to expand the protected area system in the south. One individual stated: “I think protected area management and sustainable development initiatives are not an integral part of the development philosophy of the country even though it’s rhetorically said so” (Anonymous 2002). Another concern is how large-scale economic development initiatives will integrate the needs, skills, and capabilities of local communities so that they can capture the benefits of local development efforts.

### Donor funding

The Toledo District has captured the attention of a large contingency of donor agencies, natural resource managers, and INGOs. While this thickening of civil society provides new opportunities for partnerships between Government agencies, international donors, NGOs and CBOs, even locally based “...grassroots groups and NGOs may also not be accountable to or representative of local people.... [They] are constituted to represent the interests of their members or donors” (Ribot 2002).

Given the proliferation of INGOs working under the rubric of sustainable development and the environment, INGOs provide an attractive funding mechanism for under-resourced Government agencies, NGOs, and CBOs. INGOs and international donor organizations have been forthcoming with technical and financial support for under-resourced Government agencies and NGOs in Toledo. TNC partners with TIDE, FFI partners with YCT, EcoLogic Enterprise Ventures (EEV) supports Belize Lodge & Excursions (BLE), and the EcoLogic Fund supports SATIIM. Maya organizations receive external assistance from the Canadian International Development Agency, the Indian Law Resource Center, and the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, among others.

Funding sources influence conservation strategies and allegiances. Tight relationships between donor agencies and NGOs have led to skepticism about who sets the agenda. One must consider: *Who sets the agenda? Who benefits from NGO participation and partnerships?* Chief Forest Officer Sabido (2002) commented:

While a lot of the NGOs are locally based down there, there is also a very strong undercurrent of policies and objectives that follow the agendas set by the external NGOs or organizations that assist the local NGOs. This is very clear when you look at, say, the approach of TIDE versus the approach of YCT, for example. It's two different types of approaches and outlooks.

### **Concluding remarks**

While the challenges mentioned in this section cast shadows on collaborative resource management in Toledo, organizations with similar concerns and interests continue to seek out innovative ways to work together. It is important to note that what can be a constraint in one context or for one group may act as an opportunity or enabling factor under different circumstances. The following section describes the forces that facilitate collaboration in Toledo.

## FORCES FACILITATING COLLABORATION IN TOLEDO

Despite the many challenges and obstacles to collaborative management of natural resources in Toledo identified in the preceding section, collaborative management is already taking place in the district at a number of geographic scales. Scales of collaboration include: 1) individual protected areas, such as the Bladen Nature Reserve; 2) single watersheds, like the Golden Stream Corridor; and 3) multiple watersheds, namely the Maya Mountain Marine Corridor (MMMC) and now all Toledo watersheds that flow into the Gulf of Honduras, as coordinated through the Southern Alliance for Grassroots Empowerment (SAGE).

Each case study on collaboration in Toledo reveals that context, specific organizational dynamics, and history all influence the outcomes of these efforts. Nonetheless, the cases share many common traits. The cases, framed by an understanding of core issues in the district, suggest that when individuals and organizations have joined together to collectively manage protected areas in Toledo, they have done so for several major reasons: a shared sense of place; common perceptions of threats; legitimate conveners; a perceived need to act collectively; tight social and professional networks; specific shared interests; committed individuals; and governmental support.

### **Shared sense of place**

Research on collaborative efforts in areas outside of Belize suggest that a shared sense of place among people in a region helps to foster a cooperative atmosphere that sets the stage for joint management. As articulated by the literature, “sense of place” refers to the subtleties in the relationship of local groups with a particular locale and its resources. An understanding of a “place” is not merely the conceptualization of a specific area as a distinct geographic unit in which a “shared sense of place” is agreement about the boundaries and contents of the unit in question. This interpretation is inadequate to capture the many different ways people identify, create meaning, and interact with their surroundings and each other.

A sense of place is shaped by collective action. The phrase connotes a bond with and care for a particular geographic area, based on the histories, experiences, practices, and cultures that hold a connection to the location.

In several of the case studies in Belize, a shared sense of place played a central role in motivating collaboration. “Place” figured prominently in the formation of the Bladen Management Consortium, for example. Several key members of the Consortium cared deeply about the Bladen Nature Reserve, not only because of its biological significance, but also because of its personal and symbolic importance to them. A passion for the Reserve helped Consortium participants to maintain energy for the planning process through years of meetings, discussions, and delays. A National Geographic movie and articles about the Bladen Nature Reserve, as well as fly-overs of the Reserve organized by the Consortium, helped to build understanding of and connection to Bladen beyond the immediate Consortium members. This outside support for the Reserve from both Belizean and non-Belizean funders and decision-makers has further strengthened the Consortium.

Significantly, Bladen’s many distinct characteristics, including incredible biodiversity, rich archeological resources, and dramatic topography give the reserve even greater mystique and elevate its perceived importance at a national and global level. Furthermore, the Bladen Nature Reserve is a named and defined geographical unit with a recognized administrative boundary under a single legal jurisdiction, which reinforces its status as a place in the minds of managers and supporters. In contrast, building a shared sense of place among potential collaborators proved more challenging in other cases described in this document, especially when the area in question is defined by ecological rather than political boundaries. Nonetheless, it appears that efforts to foster a sense of place have been successful in promoting collaboration. The Sibun Watershed, for instance, was not originally understood as a tangible place by inhabitants of the watershed or related decision makers. Giving meaning to the idea of the “Sibun Watershed” required a multi-year education and outreach effort, including the creation of a watershed atlas and, as with the Bladen, over-flights of the area, in this case with community members. These efforts created popular recognition of the watershed as a “place” and culminated in the creation of the Sibun Watershed Association.

The Maya Mountain Marine Corridor (MMMC) is also coming to be understood as a distinct unit, though its acceptance may not be as widespread as that of the Sibun Watershed. Fewer years of effort have been invested in popularizing the notion of the MMMC, with less community outreach undertaken. While community members may not conceptualize the MMMC as a region, though, some NGO leaders certainly do, with the Site Conservation Plan providing additional support to the idea and the value of a unified vision of the region. According to Jake Marlin of BFREE, “I’m not sure what the Maya Mountain Marine Corridor is, except a concept. It’s not recognized by the Government, but *if we talk about it, it’s real*” (Marlin 2002, emphasis added). Marlin’s statement supports the idea that places may be defined and imbued with meaning through discourse.

In the cases of the Sibun Watershed and the MMMC, the growing currency of the concept of watersheds helps to support understanding of watersheds as tangible geographic units. By helping to define watersheds, watershed education may build a case for watersheds as places, thus facilitating more successful collaborative watershed management.

Finally, the Toledo Watershed Association, now under SAGE, benefits in terms of popular understanding from the already well-established and well-understood political boundary of the district. While a few of the watersheds in the district included under the umbrella of the association extend beyond the district boundaries, most fall within. Thus, TWA overlays a political concept—the district—and an ecological concept—the watershed. In this case, the boundaries established by these concepts may fit closely enough to strengthen rather than confuse the geographic definition of the management area among potential collaborators.

### **Common perceptions of threats**

Chief among reasons for the individuals and organizations in the Belize case studies to join together to manage resources across boundaries was the common perception of threats to those resources. This finding is consistent with case studies throughout the world; a sense of crisis or compelling need can be one of the most powerful factors supporting collaboration. In the case of TWA/SAGE, commonly perceived threats driving the formation of the consortium were the Southern Highway Rehabilitation Project, the Pan-American Highway, and their associated environmental and social impacts. The highway and land development

tied to the highway have already begun to cause increased habitat fragmentation, threatening the viability of the region for supporting key species of wildlife. Participants recognized that collectively they might better be able to address the threat of the highway and target conservation efforts to support viable ecosystems. Similarly, but on a smaller scale, the key land managers in the Golden Stream Corridor began working together when they recognized threats to the viability of the corridor and perceived that joint action would better address these threats than individual action alone.

The Government's surreptitious formation of the Sarstoon-Temash National Park raised alarm bells among communities who depend on areas of the park for sustenance and claimed rights to the land that was designated as park. The threat was powerful enough to help differing ethnic communities, who had often been at odds, to agree to jointly manage the park through a new organization, namely SATIIM. SATIIM provides a framework for local participation and control of resources through which to counter the threat of outside domination. In the case of TASTE, threats to the Sapodilla Cayes included lack of management and overuse. Degradation of the resource prompted Government agencies and NGOs to act to protect the cayes through the establishment, ultimately, of TASTE, based on a model of co-management with corresponding capacity building.

Resource threats were also motivating factors in the formation of the Bladen Management Consortium. Looting, poaching, and illegal logging, among other threats to the Bladen Nature Reserve, prompted Jake Marlin and Rafael Manzanero to invite interested parties to discuss the future of the reserve. Several participants in the original discussion group ultimately created the Consortium to enable formalized joint management of the reserve. New and re-emerging threats, such as fire and the pine bark beetle epidemic, also helped to reinvigorate the Consortium when it was flagging.

Importantly, in many cases the communities surrounding protected areas did not necessarily share NGO perceptions of "threats." Often, as with Bladen, they seemed to view NGO intervention as at least as great a threat to their immediate livelihood as the broader, and to them less salient, regional issues affecting the district. NGOs like YCT that are active in educating local communities about these regional issues may be helping to bridge the NGO-

community perception gap, so that community members see conservation efforts as more consistent with their own self-interest. In turn, a better understanding of community interests and community perceptions of “threats” may also help NGOs to frame and implement programs in ways that are more consistent with community needs and thus more successful.

### **Legitimate conveners**

In the case of the Bladen Consortium, Manzanero’s legitimacy as an official in the Forest Department, which has official jurisdiction over the Reserve, strengthened his hand in convening a broad spectrum of key stakeholders. “Legitimacy of the convener” was also important in the MMMC and TWA/SAGE case studies. In these cases, TIDE sent invitations to potential participants and hosted meetings at their offices. As the oldest and most well-funded local conservation NGO in Toledo, TIDE had a strong position with which to assemble key stakeholders. The presence of Government officials at the early MMMC meetings also encouraged broader participation.

### **Perceived need to act collectively**

Even if many organizations perceive common threats, they are unlikely to work together unless joint action helps them to achieve organizational goals, and unless they believe that coordinated planning will better achieve management objectives than individual action alone. Building on a sense of place and the perception of growing pressures on resources, organizations and individuals in Toledo have built bridges when they have seen the value of collective action. In some cases the motivation to work together was based on a growing recognition of the interconnectedness of properties and protected areas. In the Golden Stream Corridor, for example, Ken Karas understood that neighboring parcels impact each other and that the coordinated management of these parcels together is key to the long-term viability of each. In other cases, organizations joined forces because they realized, “We can’t do it alone.” This perspective was certainly true of Bladen, where no one agency or NGO could muster the necessary resources to manage the valuable but inaccessible area by itself. SAGE/TWA arose based on the recognition among various groups of their overlapping jurisdictions and complementary strengths, as illustrated by the following quote from a TWA concept paper:

A review of the many actors, interests, conservation programmes and development initiatives present in the Port Honduras watershed by the participants revealed *many complementary 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, emphasis added)

TIDE's operations manager, Alan Genus, agrees:

The impetus to realize this institutional development coalesced at a workshop held by the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) in late January 2002 to discuss watershed management issues in the Port Honduras area. Collaboration with organizations of Toledo to recognize their strengths so as to better manage the Toledo watersheds is also needed. Recognizing strengths and divisions of responsibility will have the different organizations working more productively in watershed management. Outreach and education, capacity building at the community level, funding and fundraising are some of the areas that organizations can work individually or in collaboration. TIDE, SAGE, and YCT have begun working in these areas. (Genus 2002)

Finally, organizations understand that joint action brings new opportunities for funding. Maheia and Caddy-Foster both suggest that collaboration not only *is* effective but also that it *looks* good to potential funders. Funders may perceive that, as argued in the previous quotes, well-fashioned collaborative initiatives leverage the skills and capacity of participating organizations. Furthermore, in a climate of otherwise shrinking support from foundations and multi-lateral donors, innovative collaborative initiatives such as TWA/SAGE raise the profile of the Toledo District and suggest that Toledo organizations are working together, ensuring maximum return on donor investment. Maintaining interest in and funding for collaboration will require that the organizations involved in these efforts continue to demonstrate that the benefits of collective action outweigh the costs over time.

### **Tight social and professional networks**

Toledo is a small district with about 35,000 residents. Punta Gorda, the regional center of governance and NGO activity, is even smaller, with just a few dozen resident leaders and decision makers in the fields of conservation and development who interact frequently both professionally and socially. Regular interaction and relationships form a firm foundation on

which to build collaborative management bodies. Beyond Punta Gorda, frequent interaction often takes place in Belmopan, and so includes national conservation leaders who also play a role in Toledo. Furthermore, formal umbrella organizations and existing partnerships are already in place among many of these same groups. Cross-membership on boards of directors of conservation and other civil society organizations creates a high level of social capital and integration, through personal networks and improved information flows. Existing relationships have enabled collaborative arrangements to date and promise to allow increased interaction in the future. Since individuals have worked together through umbrella organizations such as SAGE, and on smaller scales, like at the level of the Golden Stream Corridor, they may be better able to work together at the scale of the district. Finally, tight networks may serve as an enforcement mechanism to limit free-riding on collaborative initiatives. In a tightly integrated environment, group sanctions against individuals and organizations that do not do their fair share of work may be sufficiently powerful to enforce meaningful involvement.

### **Specific shared interests**

Beyond broader shared concerns about resource degradation, organizations have also engaged in collaboration in the Toledo District in order to meet more specific organizational interests. Organizations have been most effective in joining forces when they understand their own goals and interests and can articulate how these interests overlap with those of other organizations. TIDE and BLE, for example, are both able to help the other to meet its interests through cooperative arrangements. TIDE's mission includes the protection of marine and terrestrial resources and BLE depends on a high quality natural environment for the best possible experiences for its eco-tourism customers. By paying a user fee for access to TIDE-managed preserves, BLE helps ensure that habitat is protected and TIDE is better able to finance patrols and management. BLE also volunteers its rangers for joint patrols with TIDE to further strengthen protection. Similarly, they assist with patrols of Bladen Nature Reserve, helping to protect the headwaters of the Golden Stream Corridor.

## **Committed individuals**

Behind each of the collaborative processes highlighted in the case studies stand committed individuals. They move planning and management forward and overcome challenges with their energy and skill. They care about and wish to protect resources in the district and to practice a more people-centered approach to conservation. They recognize that many opportunities are best pursued in constructive partnerships with other organizations. These individuals are key drivers of collaboration in the Toledo District.

## **Governmental support**

Finally, governmental support for co-management agreements has created new and expanding niches for NGO involvement in protected areas management. This support is based in large part on the lack of Government resources to address land and watershed management issues in the district and the emergence of NGOs to fill the void. The Bladen Management Consortium was a response to insufficient management capacity of Government for the Bladen Nature Reserve nurtured by Government agency staff members along with NGO counterparts, though it awaits official co-management status. TIDE rose in the district through management of the Port Honduras Marine Reserve under agreement with GOB. Finally, TASTE has grown with support from the Department of Fisheries. Government support for co-management, especially through the instrument of MOUs, has created space for NGO growth and expanding collaborative management in Toledo.

## **Existing facilitating factors are also opportunities**

The factors facilitating collaboration at present also suggest opportunities for increasing and improving collaboration in the district in the future. The additional opportunities discussed in the following section, therefore, build upon the supporting factors identified above.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPANDING AND IMPROVING COLLABORATION IN TOLEDO

As discussed in the previous section, forces that facilitate collaboration in Southern Belize (such as a shared sense of place and tight social networks) provide a rich foundation for expanding and improving collaboration in Toledo. Likewise, landscape scale conservation initiatives, innovative funding mechanisms, and a change in the status quo, among other factors, provide incentives and opportunities for greater collaboration. Drawing on lessons learned from the preceding two sections, but also looking beyond the case studies themselves, this section focuses on future opportunities, or “windows of opportunity,” for improved collaboration. Opportunities are grouped thematically under ecological, economic, political, organizational, and social and cultural context.

### **Ecological context**

#### *Emerging support for landscape-level ecosystem management*

Landscape-scale conservation efforts in Southern Belize follow a distinct trend towards a more holistic approach to natural resource management.<sup>46</sup> This shift in conservation strategies coincides with a shift in conservation planning and funding practiced by several major international NGOs (INGOs) and multi-lateral funding agencies over the past decade. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) now focuses its conservation efforts on 200 marine and terrestrial ecoregions.<sup>47</sup> The global efforts of The Nature Conservancy (TNC),<sup>48</sup> and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF)<sup>49</sup> and its implementing agencies follow a similar vein. TNC launched a landscape-level Marine Initiative “to link land and sea conservation in an effort to protect the rich array of plant and animal life and safeguard the tremendous benefits the oceans provide” (TNC 2003a). In Belize, TNC focuses its conservation initiatives across two biological regions – the MMMC and the Mesoamerican Reef System – in a “Ridges to Reef” approach, where the million-acre landscape of protected areas (the MMMC) links the crest of the Maya Mountains to the Belize Barrier Reef.

The GEF also invests in regional conservation initiatives, with a particular emphasis on the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System (MBRS) and the Mesoamerican Biological Corridors Project (MBC).<sup>50</sup> The MBRS spans the entire connected barrier reef systems of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras. GEF allocated US\$11 million toward a US\$24 million five-year project entitled *The Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System*.<sup>51</sup> The WWF, Oak Foundation, University of Miami and the Governments of Canada, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico have committed the remaining project funds over the five-year period (2002-2006).

These regional projects indicate rapid transformation of the funding environment. It has become increasingly challenging for protected area management agencies to secure financial support from INGOs and multi-laterals for conservation projects that focus on individual species and habitats. Protected area managers therefore need to think beyond their individual subregions and develop plans and projects at the landscape scale. As indicated elsewhere in this report, occurrences at one property impact adjacent properties, given the interchange among terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. This contiguity provides opportunities and incentives for land managers and policy makers to join forces to secure financial support to improve management of the protected areas of the Toledo District at the landscape and trans-boundary scales.

#### *Designation of biological corridors*

The designation of biological corridors, and the multi-lateral funding allocated for its implementation, provide tremendous encouragement and incentives for protected area management agencies and other land managers to collaborate in the assessments of needs and development of projects to conserve and manage protected areas along ecological rather than political boundaries. The GEF allocated another US\$11 million toward a US\$24 million project titled Establishment of a Programme for the Consolidation of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor.<sup>52</sup> The MBC is a regional initiative that covers the entire Central American isthmus and is an attempt by the region's countries to develop a series of interconnected protected area systems from Panama to the southern states of Mexico.

According to the GEF, this project “builds upon all regional and in-country initiatives to collaboratively form conservation and sustainable use programmes and harmonization of regional policies” (2000b:252). All Ministers of Environment of Central America, including Belize, signed on to the project. As a result, several corridor initiatives have started to develop in Belize. For example, the Golden Stream Corridor (GSC) initiative, also referred to as the “Southeastern Biological Corridor,” is being marketed as an essential component of the MBC.

## **Economic context**

### *Funding structures and financing mechanisms*

While funding for conservation initiatives seems to be taking more of a regional and landscape-level focus, other innovative financing mechanisms have been developed that may support more collaborative approaches to country-level and unit-level projects. The Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT)<sup>53</sup> is the only in-country trust fund dedicated to supporting the management and development of protected areas in Belize. PACT has become increasingly wary about funding protected areas projects in the absence of a national policy and plan for the Belize protected area system. The need for such a policy and plan creates an opportunity for PACT to collaborate with protected area management organizations and other stakeholders to conduct a multi-disciplinary project that will seek to formulate a comprehensive National Protected Areas System Plan and Policy for Belize. Future PACT grants could then be strategically invested in collaborative projects that fit within the priority areas of this national plan. According to PACT’s Executive Director, PACT could support collaborative initiatives in the Toledo District:

“We could support [collaborative initiatives] and we would want to see something like that happen. ...we would want [protected area management organizations] to get together because it is in our interest. Once you get people together and get a focus, it makes what we do a lot more clear. And it makes it so when we go to [Southern Belize]...” (Woods 2002).

The debt-for-nature swap initiative is another innovative way of securing and providing much-needed funding to support existing terrestrial and marine conservation projects. One of the five core parcels of the Golden Stream Corridor (Block 127, now owned by TIDE) was protected via the first debt-for-nature swap in Belize.<sup>54</sup> As part of the agreement, the GOB will issue US\$7.2 million in local currency obligations payable to three NGOs – TIDE, Programme for Belize, and BAS – and PACT over a 26-year period for the management of protected areas. On October 16, 2001, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Coral Reef and Coastal Marine Conservation Act to initiate a debt-for-nature swap with developing countries to protect coral reefs. This may represent another opportunity to secure funding for the Belize Barrier Reef System, within which the Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve is located (Oceans Daily 2001).

Another opportunity worth noting is the involvement of INGOs in the acquisition, via outright purchase, of strategically located forest blocks. Without these land acquisitions, these forested land areas would have been at risk of conversion into farmland or shrimp farms. TNC has purchased several such blocks in the Toledo District, and has transferred title of these blocks to TIDE. Similarly, Fauna & Flora International (FFI) purchased the area now known as the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve (GSCP), which is now owned and managed by YCT and is an integral part of the Golden Stream Corridor. There may be other such forest blocks, or even cayes within existing marine reserves, that have not yet been acquired but are essential for the consolidation of fledgling corridor systems. These gaps in protection therefore create an opportunity for protected area management organizations to work together to attract and secure the necessary funding from INGOs, such as TNC and FFI, to acquire these at-risk areas.<sup>55</sup>

### *Tourism and social entrepreneurship*

Expanding ecotourism in protected areas could be a boon both to NGOs and local communities. If practiced responsibly, ecotourism could form the foundation of increased collaboration between NGOs and communities. Tourism may present the best opportunity for generating revenue to support management of protected areas across watersheds and landscapes. TIDE, for example, is well-positioned to capitalize on this opportunity, given its

ownership and protection of several private properties in Toledo, its management of Port Honduras Marine Reserve and its involvement at Payne's Creek National Park. TIDE has started a tourism enterprise, called TIDE Tours, which employs mostly local people as field naturalists and fly-fishing guides. TIDE Tours provides tours of the marine protected areas as well as kayak and boat rentals.

As discussed elsewhere in this report, BLE recognizes the potential for what it calls "trans-habitat" tourism. BLE's property, much of which has been set aside as the Boden Creek Ecological Reserve, is an integral part of the Golden Stream Corridor, and is therefore connected to a wide swath of protected forest land, including YCT's GSCP and TIDE's Block 127. This contiguity has favored BLE greatly, as it has been able to market and promote its tourism business as "a multifaceted eco-enterprise company located in an environmentally sensitive and biologically rich area [that] provides a select offering of ecotourism excursions within the Boden Creek Ecological Reserve (BCER), Golden Stream Conservation Corridor (GSCC), Port Honduras Marine Zone, Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve, [and] the surrounding Toledo District" (BLE 2003d).

The proximity of BLE's and TIDE's properties and the complementary endeavors of the two companies, suggest that TIDE and BLE could work together in developing and making full use of the tourism product which their areas represent. BLE could contract out boat rentals to TIDE Tours, thereby lessening their management costs, and provide a marine ecotourism experience from their lodges or jungle camps, while at the same time direct much-needed revenue to TIDE for its conservation programs.

Cultural-based tourism is another area that has great promise, and one in which Maya communities have shown interest. Maya communities may have the best opportunity to participate in this type of tourism, not only as employees but as tourism operators themselves. In an effort to attract cruise ship passengers to the Toledo District, the GOB has announced plans for the development of a "tourism village" and marine terminal at the southern end of Punta Gorda in an area of land previously occupied by the Voice of America Radio Relay Station. Cruise ship tourism has often been referred to as "9 to 5 tourism" because of its reliance on one-day trips to sites at the various tourist destinations.

Given that over the long-term this type of tourism tends to negatively impact local cultures and natural attractions due to the associated onslaught of visitors, it must be practiced responsibly. A tourism-focused outcome that showcases Maya contemporary life and archaeology could be developed with Maya communities in control of these operations. Such a product should only be developed if the Maya community leaders are in support and involved in the development of the product. The Maya-led Toledo Ecotourism Association (TEA) set a precedent by establishing a “Village Guesthouse and Eco-trail Program” in villages throughout the Maya Mountain foothills.<sup>56</sup> Either something similar or an expanded TEA could be developed in the villages within the MMMC, with the full support of the GOB through the Belize Tourism Board.

## **Political and policy context**

### *Existing governmental and quasi-governmental initiatives*

Community development projects have created new opportunities for grassroots and community participation in collaborative arrangements. Although much development and other project funding have been invested in Toledo over the past fifteen years, many interviewees felt that there is very little to show for it. Recently, however, there has been an evolution in the types of community development programs that have been implemented in the district. The projects of “the old days” were rarely, if at all, developed and implemented with input from the local people. Recent projects and enterprises – such as the Community-initiated Agriculture and Resource Development project (CARD) and the Toledo Development Corporation (TDC) – demonstrate greater involvement of local people, although additional improvements could further strengthen these programs.

TDC, a quasi-governmental organization, works with the Ministry of Economic Development to oversee the planning and implementation of economic development programs for the Toledo District. TDC’s Board is comprised of nine members – three appointed (the two Toledo area representatives and one representing the town council) and six elected community members (representing various zones in Southern Belize).

The Board was structured to enhance the capabilities of the community representatives, and to delay decision-making in order to give communities more time to engage in their traditional yet time-consuming decision-making processes. Under this structure, the community representatives present issues and concerns at Board meetings, are given time to carry the matter to their communities and engage in community consultation, and then bring back to the table community feedback on the issue in question. A high Government official sees this as “Government ...bending over backwards to get local representation [on board] this time around” (Anonymous 2002).

Other projects that are currently underway can potentially create the enabling environment to improve the capability of communities to participate in conservation and development programs for Toledo. CARD’s mandate is to accelerate rural development in Southern Belize by building capacity, providing credit, and improving marketing and infrastructure for communities.<sup>57</sup> In 2001, with funding from the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the Government of Belize commenced the implementation of 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. These governmental and quasi-governmental initiatives thereby create an opportunity for an even greater level of integration of community needs and aspirations into conservation and development programs for Toledo.

#### *Increasing national and international recognition*

Association with one or more protected areas via co-management agreements give NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) a higher degree of credibility, and therefore make them more marketable to funding agencies. The bulk of Belize’s public protected areas are located within the Toledo District. GOB has signed agreements (or is negotiating agreements) with NGOs and CBOs – such as TIDE, TASTE, SATIIM, and the Rio Blanco Mayan Association – for the management of several protected areas.

Many of Belize's national parks and marine reserves were declared after extensive lobbying on the part of NGOs and CBOs. Given GOB's resource constraints, the onus is now on the NGOs and CBOs to step in to manage or assist in the management of these protected areas.

External funding can be accessed to support protected areas management, again creating another incentive for protected area management organizations to work together in the development of project workplans and strategies. The Belize Barrier Reef System has been recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. This reef system furthermore comprises about three-quarters of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System. This international and regional recognition has been highly marketed by NGOs and INGOs resulting in the securing of significant multi-year funding from INGOs and multi-laterals.

#### *Trans-boundary concerns*

A tri-national focus on the sustainable management of marine and coastal resources of the Gulf of Honduras raises the stakes for collaboration at the Toledo District level. The Toledo District shares the waters of the Gulf of Honduras with Guatemala and Honduras. Due to resource limitations, Belizean enforcement agencies have been unable to patrol this vast expanse of sea in order to deter over-fishing and illegal fishing by Guatemalan and Honduran nationals. Illicit activities are likely to increase given that the Atlantic Coast of Guatemala alone has 130,000 inhabitants and 5,000 coastal fishers compared to the 4,500 coastal inhabitants and 125 fishers of Southern Belize. This pressure on the fishery resources has opened a tremendous window of opportunity for regional cooperation. The Gulf region has been getting increased attention from INGOs and multi-lateral organizations, such as TNC, GEF and the IADB. The latter institution (IADB) funded a regional project to develop mechanisms of cooperation among the three Gulf countries (TIDE 2000:54). Several conservation NGOs working in the Gulf of Honduras watershed banded together in 1996 to form the Tri-National Alliance for the Gulf of Honduras (TRIGOH), which serves as the coordinating body for the IADB-funded project. TRIGOH's mission is "to preserve the biological diversity of the Gulf of Honduras and improve the quality of life of the local communities" (TIDE 2003a). The umbrella organization has a Secretariat that rotates among member organizations in the three countries. The Belize members of TRIGOH include TIDE,

the Toledo District chapter of BTIA, the Toledo District chapter of the National Garifuna Council, Friends of Nature, and TASTE. TIDE holds the Secretariat for 2002–2003. Improved working relationships among the Belize TRIGOH members will facilitate more effective regional cooperation. The Toledo NGOs therefore have a real incentive to improve multi-NGO collaboration.

## **Institutional context**

### *Partnership agreements*

Cognizant of the plethora of pressures faced by Belizean conservation NGOs, but also due in part to its global organizational restructuring, TNC has started to establish a permanent role for itself in Belize in partnership with local NGOs. At the same time that TNC has been setting up its Belize country office, complete with expatriate technical staff, it has offered to enter into Conservation Partnership Agreements (CPAs) with four protected areas management organizations – Programme for Belize, BAS, TIDE, and Friends of Nature – which manage a combined total of 14 protected areas across the length and breadth of Belize. Through the CPAs, TNC is seeking to establish “channels of communication that permit the creation and exchange of information as well as scientific, technical, financial, and institutional collaboration in the area of biodiversity conservation” (TNC 2002b). Specifically, TNC proposes to work with these NGOs in the following areas – institutional development, ecotourism and enterprise development, fundraising, protected areas planning and management, land purchases, and stewardship of properties. Other INGOs – such as Conservation International, WWF, and the Wildlife Conservation Society – either have official representatives in Belize or are in the process of setting up country offices themselves.

Some Belizean NGO officials worry about potential competition for project funding that may arise between INGOs and local NGOs. However, the presence of these INGOs may be a blessing in disguise for the local NGOs. While the local NGOs are usually strapped for funds, the INGOs have contacts beyond Belize as well as technical expertise that may be accessed for joint conservation initiatives as we saw in the examples of TNC’s efforts with the debt-for-nature swap and FFI’s and TNC’s actions to secure funds for land acquisition.

### Local conservation capacity

INGOs now recognize that if they want their conservation investments to be effective in Belize, they must form partnerships with local NGOs and align themselves with local conservation objectives. While the local NGOs have been heavily dependent on their working relationships with INGOs in order to secure funding, the situation is starting to change. The numerous conservation programs that have been set up over the years in Southern Belize have created a myriad of new career opportunities for Belizean nationals who otherwise would have had to migrate to Belize City or Belmopan in search of gainful employment. These budding professionals have benefited from on-the-job training as well as from intensive training programs, and are now a force to be reckoned with, as individuals, as staff members of local NGOs, and as NGO representatives on national and regional alliances and networks. TNC's efforts to sign CPAs with Belizean NGOs speak to the rise in local conservation capacity.

### Emerging educational opportunities

During the last decade, most Belizean natural resource management and tourism professionals had to pursue their formal studies in foreign countries, particularly in the United States, Great Britain, Mexico and the Caribbean. Even now, Belizean conservation practitioners have to study abroad in order to advance their education beyond an Associate's degree, which is the highest degree conferred by the University of Belize. Courses offered at the university's Toledo Campus include: People and Parks, Hospitality and Tourism, Coastal Zone Management, and Protected Areas. As this project has shown, a critical need exists in Southern Belize to develop leadership capacity and to conduct training in areas such as conflict management and dispute resolution. The University of Belize could jump to the challenge by developing expanded and advanced educational programs in partnership with national and international natural resource management organizations and educational institutions.

## **Social and cultural context**

### *Integrated conservation and development*

While tourism creates job opportunities and other associated economic benefits for surrounding and neighboring communities, private companies and investors are frequently better positioned to capture the benefits of nature and cultural tourism than rural communities. Conservation initiatives and protected areas that integrate local needs and skills as well as provide tangible long-term benefits to surrounding communities are more likely to foster enthusiasm and support. YCT and FFI have been at the forefront in the creation of innovative alternatives by boldly experimenting with managed natural resources extraction and value-added processing at the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve (GSCP). YCT is currently implementing two projects that seek to address Maya livelihoods. The first project trains community members from Medina Bank, Golden Stream, Indian Creek, and Tambran to make basic furniture and to appreciate the value of timber. Community members are also taught to properly carry out low impact timber extraction with chainsaws. All the timber extraction (only salvage logging is done) is taking place within GSCP lands (YCT's property). YCT's premise is that "if people learn the basics of furniture-making, how to add value to the wood, how to extract timber more sustainably, and how to make an income at the same time, this will add tremendous value to the timber, and therefore to the forest" (B. Teul 2003).

YCT is also assisting in the establishment of ten one-acre gardens in the buffer zone communities to promote and demonstrate backyard gardening at these communities. Vegetables will be planted both for subsistence and for sale. Support will be included to secure a local market for the surplus produce. A training coordinator, funded by YCT, comes in two times per week to train the participants in vegetable farming techniques and practices.

With support from Counterpart International and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, YCT will also develop shade-grown, organic cacao in the four villages. The cacao project is being conducted in partnership with the Toledo Cacao Growers Association, which provides a secure market for the cacao produced via the project. SATIIM is also working on a similar cacao project at Maya and Garifuna villages near the Sarstoon-Temash National Park.

Given the existence of a secure market, these cacao projects could be promoted and expanded throughout the Toledo District as a means of providing economic benefits to the communities.

The Forest Department envisions the promotion of what its Chief Forest Officer calls “community forestry.” Following the massive impacts from Hurricane Iris in 2001, community members are directly involved in salvaging timber in order to rebuild their homes. Salvage logging is therefore a main source of income for communities at present, and the main source of direct monetary benefit from the forest. If conducted in an ecologically sound manner, limited salvage logging represents an opportunity to get the communities involved in forest management via a system of community forestry. This system would include “the whole gamut of protected areas management to extraction of timber or non-timber forest products” (Sabido 2002). Reforestation, plantation development, and sustainable timber extraction could play a key role in being an economic prime mover for other activities, such as ecotourism. By being involved in community forestry, communities would realize the importance of the forest resource. Due to its constrained human and financial resources, the GOB may not be able to take the lead in such a development. It may again fall on the NGOs to take the lead.

Communities could also benefit through sustainable fisheries management. The marine reserves of the MMMC – Port Honduras and the Sapodilla Cayes – are in effect multiple-use protected areas that are set up to allow for sustainable extraction of the fishery resource. The fishers of the Toledo District – most of whom reside in the coastal communities of Barranco, Punta Gorda, Punta Negra and Monkey River – could work closely along with marine reserve managers to conserve the resources of these protected areas. For example, fishers and NGO staff could engage in joint patrols to deter poaching by fishers from across the border. TIDE has already approached a local fishers cooperative – Rio Grande Cooperative – and offered to organize a fisheries management field seminar in Maine, USA, for four Rio Grande executive officers. Such initiatives indicate that there is a good chance to expand working relationships between resource users and managers.

### *Galvanizing enthusiasm for collaboration (superordinate goals)*

The future of conservation in Southern Belize will to a great extent be influenced by the way in which the pressing development issues are addressed. As discussed previously, these issues include the pending completion of the Southern Highway, the plans for a Belize connection to the Pan-American Highway, the rapid proliferation and expansion of shrimp and tilapia farms, and the seemingly intractable Maya land claim. These issues affect the entire organizational landscape of Toledo and create opportunities to explore alternative ways of resolving disputes.

### *The power of existing relationships*

It can safely be said that, when compared to just a few years ago, there is an increased awareness in Southern Belize about the benefits of collaboration. As previously noted, the Maya NGOs have organized themselves into an umbrella organization – the Maya Leaders Alliance – as an effort to pool their resources in order to have greater influence and political power. The Maya have made some significant achievements, having signed a milestone agreement – the Ten Points of Agreement – with the Government of Belize to work together “to achieve an expeditious and amicable settlement of [land tenure] issues in a way that is mutually satisfactory to both parties” (GOB 2000b). Just last year, several protected area management organizations and land owners decided to form an association in an effort to effect a multi-agency approach to addressing watershed issues in Toledo. The functions of this association – the Toledo Watershed Association – were recently absorbed by the Southern Alliance for Grassroots Empowerment, an even broader alliance of local and national NGOs and CBOs. This interest in multi-organizational communication and collaboration has extended beyond Belize’s boundaries, as can be seen with the existence of TRIGOH. Several Toledo-based NGOs are members of this regional body. Some of these same Toledo-based NGOs are founding members of a new coalition – the Association of Protected Areas Management Organizations – which seeks to provide a national forum for discussion and prioritization of protected area management issues, and to create a networked voice for protected area managers.

These existing and burgeoning relationships provide evidence that there is an increased recognition about the value of expanded and improved collaboration among organizations. Although it is mostly NGO-led at present, a distinct trend toward multi-stakeholder working arrangements has been initiated. The challenge now will be to expand these existing relationships so as to include the needs, concerns and proposals of local communities, indigenous groups, industry, and Government.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Toledo is no longer “the forgotten district” of Belize. The social and ecological fabrics of the District—its communities and its ecosystems—are changing rapidly in the face of new development pressures led by the impending completion of the Southern Highway Rehabilitation Project. The perception that these changes threaten not only to alter, but to unravel these fabrics has galvanized local and international action in the Toledo, including the formation of new governmental projects and NGOs and greater attention from existing funders and organizations. Against a backdrop of decreasing Government resources, the role of the non-profit and private sectors may be more important than ever.

The Project Team’s case study research and interviews reveal that interested individuals and organizations, from both within and outside Toledo, increasingly recognize that managing change in the District so as to protect its unique cultural and ecological resources will require a coordinated response to planning across sectors. Government agencies; community leaders; local, regional, and international non-governmental organizations; funding organizations; and private sector representatives will all need to play a role in shaping and implementing a shared vision for Toledo’s future. To the extent that individuals and organizations hold competing visions and represent potentially opposing interests, mechanisms for resolving and managing conflict in Toledo will be required. Collaboration is one promising approach to conflict management. Groups with an interest in conservation and development in Toledo are already joining together to facilitate more integrated management of natural resources.

The challenge and the potential to build on existing collaborative efforts lie with these groups. Ultimately, more integrated natural resource management for conservation and development may serve to benefit *all* of Toledo's residents.

