

Environmental NGO Failures: Aspects Of Accountability and Community



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Abstract:

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have and will continue to play a major role in global sustainable development. The recent increase of the size and scope of environmental NGOs has led to critiques of their relationships with corporate donors whose business practices misrepresent the mission of the NGO. The concern is that the monetary donations from these corporations cause environmental NGOs to implement programs that are more beneficial to the corporations than the affected communities. In the end, corporate donors have more influence than the targeted community. *How can NGOs balance their conflicting donors and improve their effectiveness?* The Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala was used to demonstrate this common problem with international environmental NGOs and provide possible solutions. The aim of NGOs in this area is to promote sustainable forestry practices at different scales. An analysis is made of the programs implemented by the Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, CARE, Forest Stewardship Council, and Rainforest Alliance, with a focus on community involvement and accountability. *In order for an NGO to be effective it must prove it is more accountable to the local community by facilitating community involvement to in their programs and requiring external assessment of their donors.*

Methods:

Comparative Analysis of NGOs:

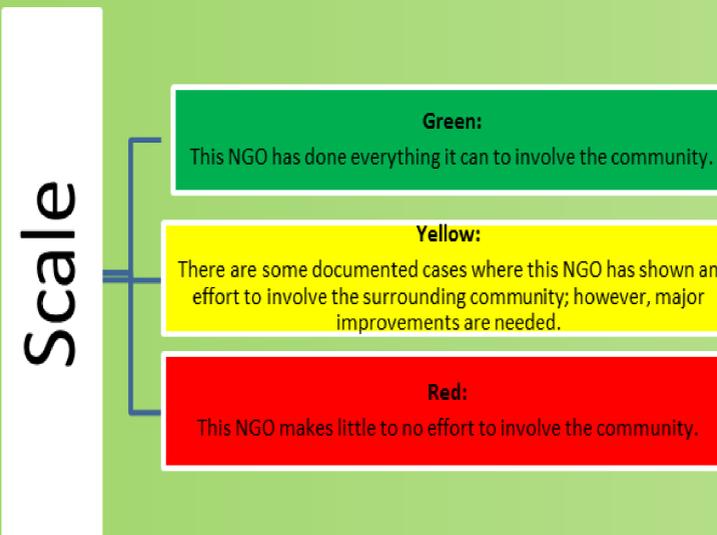
A critical analysis of 4 NGOs was done with a focus on their corporate donors and the programs they implemented in the MBR. A review of alternative ways to keep NGOs accountable to the community was done that focused on Intermediary NGOs and Grass-roots Organizations.

Case Studies:

Case Studies focused on the Guatemalan Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR), which is located in the Northern department of Petén. It was created in 1990, with the intent to identify ways in which people and nature can co-exist for the benefit of both. Many NGOs have implemented programs in the MBR, the four case studies were chosen because they are well-known environmental NGOs that are based in the United States.

Interview:

In order to have an in-depth understanding of the community problems in the MBR I interviewed Juanita Sundberg, a professor at the University of British Columbia who wrote her PhD. dissertation on NGOs working in the MBR and has visited the area three times.



NGO	Community Involvement	Accountability
Nature Conservancy	RED	RED
Conservation International	YELLOW	RED
Rainforest Alliance	YELLOW	RED
CARE	YELLOW	RED

This chart was created in order to show the results from the NGO case studies in the reserve. Accountability was given RED for all four because none of them use assess their accountability externally. Community Involvement was assessed based. In order for NGOs to receive a GREEN on the assessment scale they must:

- Provide guidelines to corporate donors that limits their decision making power.
- Work together with grass-roots organizations and intermediary NGOs in the surrounding community.
- NGO field workers must incorporate self-assessment workshops for staff reflection on accountability and research the community perception of the NGOs programs.

Analysis:

The four NGO case studies incorporated different projects. This table demonstrates the individual projects of the four NGOs working in the MBR:

NGO	Programs Implemented in the MBR
Conservation International	Debt-for-Nature-Swap Grupo Promotor ProPetén – Eco Escuela
Nature Conservancy	Debt-for-Nature Swap Purchase Land for Conservation
Rainforest Alliance	Smart Wood TREES
CARE	Mi Bosque

Each NGO receives donations from corporations that are known for unsustainable practices. These corporations include: McDonalds, Starbucks, Exxon Mobil, BP, Monsanto, IKEA, Coca-Cola, and more. These partnerships have a potentially negative affect on the NGO programs that are implemented in these Guatemalan communities located in the MBR. This problem is found in many developing countries and a solution must be found to protect these poor communities.

Conclusion:

Examination of NGO practices in the MBR suggests that significant reform is need to ensure community involvement and accountability. There are existing external organizations that assess NGOs. NGOs must publish the results of these assessments on their websites in order to ensure that their primary concern remains the needs of the communities they aim to help. In recognition of this need, this project will include an assessment tool for this purpose.

Recommendations:

- NGOs working in developing countries should take extra steps to encourage community involvement in their project.
- NGOs should provide concrete evidence of community involvement, such as documentation of community-NGO meetings and interviews.
- NGOs should invite external programs to assess their accountability.
- NGOs should post the results of external assessments on their websites for the public along with a plan to remedy areas of concern.
- NGOs should provide their field workers with extensive knowledge about the culture of their area of work.