

Belize Negotiating Influence: The Experience of Three Local NGOs in Marine Reserve Co-Management in Southern Belize

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Co-management has become an important tool in the management of Belize's natural resources, including the world's second largest barrier reef. There are many systems for co-management.

Delegated co-management, where local NGOs serve as the decision making authority and community representative, is the most popular form for marine reserves in Belize. The use of co-management offers a way to engage a diverse range of stakeholders in the decision making process. However, the success of marine reserve co-management is affected by a range of local, national and international factors. Through personal observations as a Peace Corps Volunteer working in southern Belize, interviews with key individuals involved in marine co-management and review of related literature, I explore how political and economic issues at the local, national and international level have influenced marine reserve co-management. Three Belizean nongovernmental organizations have signed co-management agreements with the Department of Fisheries for the management of marine reserves in southern Belize.

My research indicates that there are a number of factors which influence co-management in this situation. These include: the ability of local NGOs to effectively engage and represent local communities, the influence of partisan national politics, unaccountable power by government ministers, a growing national financial crisis, and increasing investment by international conservation and tourism development interests; all of which affect co-management of marine reserves. The success that local nongovernmental organizations have had implementing co-management is linked to their ability to balance these diverse pressures.