

THE ROLES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN MARINE CONSERVATION

by

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A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science
(Natural Resources and Environment)
at the University of Michigan
August 2013

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Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the individuals who agreed to be interviewed for this work. Thanks also to Julia Wondolleck and Steve Yaffee for their invaluable input and guidance, and to Rachel Kaplan for her generous mentorship.

Abstract

Non-governmental organization (NGO) engagement in marine conservation can be understood by analyzing the roles that such organizations play. Document and website analysis and semi-structured interviews were used to identify five NGO roles: advocate, expert, manager, watchdog and enabler. Semi-structured interviews were also used to explore the nuances of the enabler role, an approach that works with and through stakeholders to define and reach conservation goals.

Drivers of the enabler role were found to be organizational mission, conservation context, and funding needs. Benefits of the enabler role were better coordination and inclusivity, better long term conservation outcomes, targeting capacity and resource needs, better access to some contexts, and extended organizational capacity and resources. Challenges of the enabler role centered on resources needs, defining success and walking away, engaging with stakeholders, and tensions between roles. Facilitating factors included organizational trust, a commonly understood problem, and aligned interests. Strategies for enabling were cultivating trust, working collaboratively, clear communications, and shared responsibilities.

The typology and improved delineation of the enabler role presented here may aid NGOs in explicitly identifying the approach(es) necessary to achieve their goals. It may also help observers of the non-profit sector better frame discussion of how roles interact. It is hoped that the systems understanding cultivated here provides organizations, funders and scholars with a new lens into NGO engagement in marine conservation.

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Chapter 1. Introduction and Methods.

Introduction

Challenges, complexities and opportunities drive environmental non-governmental organization (NGO) involvement in marine conservation and management. NGOs working in the conservation domain recognize that the ocean plays a pivotal role in moderating climate and feeding burgeoning human populations and that marine systems are subject to drastic impacts from human activities. They further recognize that traditional top-down, governmental management of marine resources is complex and often problematic. Finally, NGOs see new opportunities for involvement as technological changes bring mixed-use issues, and tools like marine spatial planning, into the marine sphere.

Although NGO involvement in marine conservation and management efforts is common, a framework for categorizing NGO activities does not exist. A lack of systematic understanding of the activities and composition of the non-governmental sector has been identified as a significant gap in the literature on conservation, one that challenges any large-scale analysis of these organizations.¹⁰ Few attempts have been made to systematically categorize NGO roles into typologies or taxonomies.^{10, 40} One author describes interest group roles as educating and representing constituents, facilitating constituent participation, agenda setting, and program monitoring.⁶ One paper prescriptively delineates how conservation NGOs can engage with a subset of marine conservation activities, specifically marine spatial planning.¹² However, to date no studies exist that attempt to systematically categorize existing NGO roles or approaches to marine conservation. In Chapter 2, this study presents a typology of NGO

roles in marine conservation, attempting to answer the questions: How are environmental non-governmental organizations engaging in marine conservation and management? What roles do they play? The answers to these questions provide a framework for understanding the activities of the sector as a whole, as well as a context within which to understand individual NGO engagement. Delineating how NGOs engage is also the first step towards understanding results.

While existing studies of NGO activities provide some grounding for understanding the advocate, expert, manager and watchdog roles, only fragments of what has been here termed the enabler role appear in the literature. The enabler role focuses on empowering others to engage in marine conservation and management, and represents a departure from NGO roles as they are generally understood. Chapter 3 of this study attempts to address this lack by presenting a detailed description and analysis of the enabler role. It seeks to answer the questions: What drives NGO enabling of marine conservation? What are the benefits and challenges associated with enabling? What facilitates an NGO's enabling engagement? What strategies may an organization use to be more effective in this role? Chapter 3 fills a gap in current understanding by providing an in-depth exploration of one poorly understood way in which NGOs approach marine conservation and management.

Methods

The typology of roles outlined in Chapter 2 was initially generated from literature and website analysis. A matrix of NGOs involved in marine conservation, and the varied activities they undertake, was developed from a library of case studies and vignettes of marine ecosystem-based management.⁴⁵ This matrix was iteratively extended through

analysis of existing literature and NGO websites, with new organizations and activities added to the dataset as they were encountered. While the initial dataset was necessarily restricted to place-based management efforts, extension resulted in inclusion of non-place-specific approaches including large-scale market-based work, national level policy advocacy, and others. The final matrix included 163 organizations and 47 distinct activities. (See Appendices 1 and 2 for a list of organizations and activities). While the final dataset is clearly not exhaustive, sufficient repetition of activities was found with repeated sampling of additional organizations to indicate coverage of the suite of organizational activities. Clustering of NGO activities was undertaken to identify overarching roles that NGOs play in marine conservation.

The resulting preliminary typology was disseminated to experts in NGO engagement in marine conservation who have specific experience with the enabling role. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to ground-truth the preliminary typology of roles and gain a nuanced understanding of the enabler role. Thirteen individuals were interviewed representing twelve organizations. In order to gain as broad a sample as possible, subjects were chosen to represent a range of perspectives. Viewpoints targeted were implementers, coordinators, funders and observers of NGO engagement in marine conservation, in the US and abroad, across a variety of geographical scales.

Three respondents were conservation scientists with large, international conservation organizations. Of these three, one worked at the international level, and two at the regional (sub-national) level. Two respondents were fisheries scientists with small fisheries NGOs, both working at the regional level. Two respondents were organizational strategists, one working for a small conservation NGO at the national level, the other at

the international level for a large, international, multi-focus organization. One respondent was a facilitator with an NGO managing collaborative processes at the national level. One respondent was a coordinator with a national-level cross-sector coalition. Two respondents were representatives of charitable foundations, one funding primarily at the regional scale and the other at the international scale. The final two respondents were observers of on-the-ground NGO enabling of marine conservation and management, one of a large, international NGO and the other of a small, national NGO. (See Appendix 3 for a table of respondents).

Interviews were conducted between March 15 and May 28, 2013. Two interviews were conducted in person and the remaining 11 were conducted by phone; interviews lasted between 20 and 90 minutes. (See Appendix 4 for interview protocol).

Chapter 2. A Typology of NGO Roles.

Introduction

NGOs working to advance marine conservation and management goals engage in diverse activities. Imposing a structure on this fragmented and varied work enables a larger-scale understanding and analysis of NGO approaches. Furthermore, a broad conceptualization of the types of work in which NGOs engage is the first step towards understanding drivers of NGO approaches, as well as the outcomes of NGO engagement. Some of the roles outlined below will be relatively familiar. Nonetheless, the activities contributing to each role are outlined in some detail, grounding the typology in specific examples of NGO work.

Results

Five NGO roles in marine conservation were identified: advocate, enabler, expert, manager, and watchdog (Table 1). It is important to note that these categories refer to roles played by organizations and should not be understood as labels for organizations themselves. While some NGOs may favor certain types of approaches, and may even style themselves “advocacy” or “watchdog” organizations, most organizations engage in multiple roles, often simultaneously. This multi-role approach will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Table 1. Roles of NGOs in marine conservation.

| Role | Description | Sample activities |
|-----------------|--|--|
| <i>Advocate</i> | Drawing attention to or cultivating concern about marine issues; rallying support for a marine conservation agenda | Lobbying government and industry Participating in cross-sector collaborations as the voice of the environment Lawsuits Direct action Some education and outreach |
| <i>Expert</i> | Providing scientific input into marine conservation and management; increasing organizational knowledge | Original scientific research Development of scientific conservation tools Providing solicited process or science expertise |
| <i>Manager</i> | Directly implementing marine or coastal conservation; engaging in hands-on conservation activities | Land or easement purchases ¹ Management or co-management of protected areas Service provision Habitat restoration |
| <i>Watchdog</i> | Enforcing marine conservation agreements; preventing or stopping illegal activities, or activities seen as incompatible with a conservation agenda | Monitoring compliance and publicizing infractions Direct action, including direct interference with targeted activities Lawsuits |
| <i>Enabler</i> | Empowering others to manage or provide input into management of their own marine and coastal resources | Capacity building Funding provision Providing opportunities for stakeholder involvement in conservation activities Tool provision Process facilitation Network creation |

The advocate role

The advocate role consists of a cluster of activities that are widely recognized and accepted as falling within the NGO bailiwick. It is perhaps the most traditional and

¹ For a detailed look at how land trust strategies like these are applied to marine conservation see Portman, M. (2009). From Land to Sea: The Role of Land Trusts in Marine Protection. *Society & Natural Resources*, 22(1), pp. 12-26.

expected role an NGO can play. The advocate role has been described in detail in the literature on public interest groups,⁷ and authors who have broadly delineated types of NGO work generally agree on some kind of category that includes advocacy work.^{11, 40} Similarly, papers using survey methodology or case-based approaches to examine NGO engagement in conservation commonly identify clusters of activities or tactics that center around lobbying or other advocacy work.^{13, 35, 36}

Although the advocate role may be aimed at a variety of targets, it focuses on trying to bring behaviors and policies into alignment with the NGO's conservation and sustainability agenda. Tactics and activities of advocates include lobbying decision-makers, using media to influence public opinion, being the voice of the environment in cross-sector collaborative management processes, bringing lawsuits, and engaging in direct action, especially public protests or demonstrations. Advocacy is also inextricably intertwined with many NGO education and outreach efforts.

In the advocate role, NGOs directly lobby decision-makers in government and industry. For example, Ocean Conservancy representatives present Congressional testimony on the impacts of climate change on marine systems,⁷³ or testify before the National Commission on the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.⁷⁴ Petitions are organized and circulated, often via the organization's website and social media outlets, then delivered to policy-makers. Many organizations craft unsolicited site-specific recommendations or management plans, or propose protected areas; these proposals are then used as a benchmark for measuring, and influencing, government policy. The Ocean Conservancy has provided extensive recommendations for the Gulf of Mexico,⁷¹ while the Australian

Marine Conservation Society was actively proposing specific protections for the Coral Sea long before the Australian government addressed the issue.⁶⁵

NGOs practicing advocacy may use traditional media to connect with the public at large, thereby indirectly influencing decision-makers. The Australian Marine Conservation Society runs television ads in the Northern Territory to broaden public support for marine sanctuaries in Australian waters;⁶⁶ World Wildlife Fund (WWF) runs print ads in Europe to draw attention to the plight of the Bluefin tuna.⁴⁹ Social marketing may be used to similar ends. Indeed, in regions where access to traditional media is limited, social media may be relied upon to stimulate grassroots support for marine conservation. Rare Conservation and Blue Ventures are working together in Southwestern Madagascar to advocate for the reduction of destructive fishing techniques. Local Rare Conservation Fellows craft and disseminate culturally appropriate outreach materials including posters, songs, and community theater, even painting boat sails with conservation messages;⁵² this campaign supports and augments Blue Ventures' advocacy work, which educates stakeholders on the need for conservation practices through community meetings.³

NGOs that represent conservation interests in cross-sector management dialogues are often playing the advocate role. Place-based marine management efforts that have a collaborative component, or allow stakeholders an advisory role, commonly have at least one conservation NGO serving on an advisory committee or as part of a stakeholder group. The Nature Conservancy, for example, serves in this way in areas as diverse as the Pamlico/Albemarle Sound,³⁸ the Florida Keys,²¹ and the Gulf of Maine.³⁹ By filling these positions, NGOs ensure that their voices are heard and that their interests are represented

in management decisions – that marine conservation advocates are embedded in the process itself.

Lawsuits are another way in which NGOs play the advocate role. Lawsuits that challenge administrative decisions, like the Conservation Law Foundation's filings against the National Marine Fisheries Service's plan to open New England groundfish conservation areas,⁵⁴ are a tactic used to push policy and policy interpretation into alignment with a conservation or sustainability mindset. Furthermore, they are newsworthy, drawing attention to, and ideally attracting support for, marine conservation issues that might otherwise gain little attention from the public at large.

Like lawsuits, direct action can be a form of advocacy. Demonstrations and public protests, like those organized by Greenpeace outside International Whaling Commission meetings,⁶³ are a way of attracting media, public, and decision-maker attention. The message sent to decision-makers is both the existence of vociferous public support for the actions favored by the advocating NGO, and that the eyes of the world are on the process and outcomes of the meeting.

While education and outreach work defies simple categorization, much of what is traditionally termed education and outreach is in reality at least partly advocacy. For organizations motivated by a marine conservation agenda, formal marine science education programs also provide opportunities for indoctrination into a conservation mindset: "This is how our oceans work, and this is why it is important to protect them." The Marine Conservation Society presents its "Cool Seas Roadshow" at primary schools across the UK,⁶⁹ while the Algalita Marine Research Institute provides lesson plans and curricula on plastics in the ocean.⁵⁰ Similarly, many NGOs run experiential education

activities like naturalist-led walks (the Elkhorn Slough Foundation),⁶¹ whale watching tours (the American Cetacean Society)⁴⁸ and field trips and expeditions (the American Littoral Society).⁶⁴ Such activities present a combination of science education and a marine conservation agenda to students of all ages.

An interesting nuance of the advocate role occurs when organizations advocate for specific types of processes, for example a collaborative approach to marine resource management, rather than for specific outcomes. Such advocacy may also lead to enabling engagement, and is likely grounded in a belief that the advocated-for process is more likely to result in desired conservation outcomes. The theory of change motivating this type of work is discussed in Chapter 3.

As the above examples demonstrate, overlap exists between the advocate role and other NGO roles. This will be examined further at the conclusion of this chapter.

The expert role

In their role as experts, NGOs use science to inform and guide marine conservation policy and management. Although the expert role is overlooked by studies of the roles of the NGO sector in general, a subset of the existing literature on NGO involvement in conservation focuses on how these organizations undertake or apply science to conservation work. Original scientific research has been identified as a key role played by environmental NGOs.^{17, 26} While some studies question the value of NGO science to stakeholders motivated by interests distinct from those of conservation organizations,^{22, 26} it is evident from the literature that NGOs are playing a role in research and the dissemination of results.

NGOs playing the expert role engage in scientific research, both independently and at the behest of decision-makers. In the former case, while results may not be used externally, they may enhance in-house expertise, inform NGO priorities, or drive other organizational activities. When NGO science and process expertise is accepted, even sought after, by decision-makers, the expert role shapes external policies. This role also includes acting as a data clearinghouse and the development of scientific conservation tools.

Social, physical and natural science research fall into this category, whether published in peer-reviewed journals, NGO “white papers” or simply used to meet organizational needs. In Fiji, where a number of large NGOs work in tandem, research responsibilities were divided by discipline so that each organization had a clear bailiwick. WWF took responsibility for socio-economic research, Wildlife Conservation Society for natural science research, and Wetlands International for freshwater systems.²³ The expert role also motivates research expeditions, like the 2010 Cousteau Society expedition around the Mediterranean.⁵⁸

Research may be undertaken to meet organizational needs such as prioritizing sites or interventions (Conservation International’s development of the “seascape” model of marine conservation)⁵⁵ or developing a systems understanding of a targeted geography in order to inform future NGO priorities and strategy (the Nature Conservancy’s Northwest Atlantic Ecoregional Assessment).⁷⁰

When an NGO is seen as a legitimate source of scientific expertise by decision-makers who solicit the organization’s advice, activities that might otherwise be classed as advocacy are moved into the expert category by context. When organizations propose

Marine Protected Area sites at the request of decision-makers who intend to act on those recommendations, recognizing that the NGO possesses superior scientific knowledge and expertise (as was the case with WWF in Madagascar),³ they are acting as experts, although conservation advocacy may impact their recommendations. Overlap between the expert and advocate roles is discussed further at the end of this chapter. Organizations that are embedded in a local context and seen as legitimate scientific advisors by decision-makers, as is the case with Blue Ventures in Madagascar, are also acting in the expert role.³

Experts also organize and maintain scientific information. Organizations, like seaturtle.org, that serve primarily as data clearinghouses⁷⁸ can be seen as filling an expert role. Finally, conservation tools like the Nature Conservancy's payments for ecosystem services toolkits, or the Environmental Defense Fund's catch share design road map,⁶⁰ are developed by NGOs working as experts.

The manager role

NGOs acting as managers seek to directly implement conservation through hands-on management activities like reserve administration and habitat restoration. While management is identified as a distinct role by studies on terrestrial conservation,¹³ its application to marine conservation is more complex. Land trusts, for instance, have traditionally chosen management as their primary role; however, jurisdictional, geopolitical and geospatial boundaries of marine systems are often more complex and less well defined than their terrestrial counterparts. Studies of land trusts wishing to engage in marine conservation find that such organizations adapt traditional approaches like outright purchase of land or conservation easements.³⁴ Perhaps because such

traditional NGO resource management activities are difficult to apply to marine systems, little other discussion of this role exists in the literature on marine conservation.

However, existing case studies provide rich examples of NGOs engaging as managers,^{14, 25, 30, 41} sometimes actively comparing NGO management to government management.¹⁹

While some conservation NGOs working in marine systems, like the Elkhorn Slough Foundation, do purchase land and/or easements, this approach is rare and often focuses on management of localized terrestrial inputs into bounded systems.

Organizations engaging in marine conservation in the manager role may focus instead on administration or co-administration of reserves, service provision, or habitat restoration.

Some NGOs co-manage or administer government reserves, particularly in areas where government capacity for management is lacking. This is the case in Belize, where the Belize Audubon Society co-manages several national protected areas, including the Blue Hole Natural Monument and Half Moon Caye Natural Monument.⁵¹ Management activities in this case include administrative responsibilities: scheduling, logistics, staffing, budgeting, and visitor interactions like collecting fees and issuing permits, to name just a few. They may also include zoning or marine spatial planning.

Administration of conservation service programs is another way in which NGOs play a manager role. The Friends of Casco Bay, for example, provide a recreational small vessel sewage pump-out program, using Maine DEP-funded and maintained pump-out stations.⁵³ Similarly, the Washington SCUBA Alliance installs mooring buoys at popular dive sites in Puget Sound.⁷⁹

Habitat restoration is a common application of the management role. It is a particularly important activity for place- or region-based organizations. Much restoration

focuses on coastal lands and wetlands. The Elkhorn Slough Foundation constructed and maintains an underwater sill that helps reduce erosion;⁶² Save the Bay (San Francisco) replants native wetlands plants;⁷⁶ the Ocean Conservancy organizes and conducts beach clean ups.⁷² Other organizations focus solely on marine systems: the Coral Restoration Foundation, for example, replant nursery-grown staghorn and elkhorn corals on degraded Florida reefs.⁵⁷ Working as a manager may necessitate application of all the roles in the typology. This will be discussed further in the conclusion of this chapter.

The watchdog role

NGOs seeking to prevent or stop illegal activities, or activities seen as incompatible with conservation and/or sustainability goals, are acting as watchdogs. The watchdog role and its constituent activities are an accepted way in which NGOs engage.¹² One study identified “monitoring power,” or the ability to monitor both process and participants’ commitment to their rhetoric, as a one source of NGO power in global environmental standard setting.⁹ This is certainly a reference to the watchdog role, as are discussions of how NGOs influence markets through threatening to expose established brands’ unsavory environmental practices.³² Other authors, while not delineating watchdog as a distinct role, identify groups of NGO tactics including monitoring,³⁶ activism,¹³ and direct and legal action³⁵ that correspond at least in part to the watchdog role. Watchdog work also appears in a number of case-based studies of NGO involvement with specific issues or approaches.^{9, 33}

As watchdogs, NGOs engage in activities including monitoring compliance with existing laws or agreements, and whistleblowing or publicizing infractions. Direct action, especially direct interference with illegal activities or activities deemed unacceptable by

the watchdogging NGO, often falls under the watchdog role. Lawsuits in which an NGO uses existing law to challenge management decisions are also categorized as watchdogging.

Monitoring compliance with international agreements falls into this category. A suite of NGOs, including Greenpeace, have been instrumental in watchdogging both illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing in the oceans around Antarctica and government response to that issue.³³ Greenpeace also acts as a watchdog of NGO/industry partnerships like the Marine Stewardship Council, choosing to remain external to the process to maintain whistle-blowing ability.⁹ Sea Shepherd Conservation Society takes another approach to the watchdog role. Sea Shepherd's reliance on tactics that directly interfere with fishing vessels and marine mammal hunts (sometimes with, but more often without, government sanction) is another way in which the watchdog role plays out.⁷⁷

Lawsuits designed to force compliance with existing law are also considered a watchdog activity. Some NGOs specialize in this approach (NRDC and the Conservation Law Foundation, for example) while others use lawsuits as one tool in their toolkit. Varied uses and results of direct action and lawsuits illustrate overlap between the watchdog and advocate roles. This is discussed in more depth at the end of this chapter.

The enabler role

The enabler role is the least well defined and synthesized by the existing literature. As enablers, NGOs seek to increase the ability of others to conserve or sustainably manage their own resources, or to provide input into management of resources in which they have a stake. Salient studies of the NGO sector provide

incomplete glimpses of the enabler role. Descriptions like “service provider”¹¹ or “empowering local communities”⁴² capture some, but not all, of what NGOs do as enablers. Prescriptions for conservation NGO involvement identify providing funding,¹² facilitating collaborative processes,¹² and extending government capacity¹³ as appropriate roles, once again capturing some, but not all, of what the enabler role entails. And while a number of individual case studies provide examples and discussion of organizational approaches that can be termed enabling, none identify the overarching role as distinct from others that an NGO may play.^{1, 5, 16, 18, 29, 30}

Rather than trying to convince others that conservation is necessary or should be prioritized (advocate), providing expertise (expert), undertaking conservation themselves (manager) or trying to stop others’ objectionable practices (watchdog), NGOs in the enabler role strive to create the necessary preconditions and context to allow others to engage in marine conservation and management. Such efforts may be loosely grouped into two sub-roles: resource-enabling and relationship-enabling. Resource-enabling centers on activities that provide stakeholders with the skill sets, tools, and funds they need to institute or inform management. Activities falling into this category include building capacity, providing opportunities for hands-on involvement in management, dissemination of conservation tools, direct provision of funding, and sustainable development activities. Relationship-enabling consists of activities that create linkages between interested parties, including individuals, organizations, industries, agencies, and government decision-makers. Activities falling into the latter subcategory include process facilitation activities: facilitating stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes,

institution building, and facilitating or acting as the hub of collaborative management, as well as network creation.

Capacity building involves formal and informal training of local individuals in a variety of skills, including applying science to management decisions. This may include the establishment of protocols for collecting, synthesizing and applying data, as well as the use of industry best practices. In Madagascar, Blue Ventures trains local villagers in socio-economic and ecological monitoring protocols in order to create a local knowledge base and build support for conservation.³ On Tanzania's Mafia Island, WWF provides local fishers with training in by-catch reduction.²⁷ Local hiring practices are another way to build capacity: on Mafia Island a number of NGOs, including SeaSense and WWF, emphasize local hiring.²⁷ Local hiring spreads economic benefit to the local community, thereby addressing economic barriers to conservation, while also providing local residents with expertise and encouraging local buy-in.

Organizations enabling marine conservation may create opportunities and disseminate tools that allow motivated individuals to participate in marine conservation efforts. Local residents can volunteer to replant native species in coastal Louisiana under the auspices of the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana⁵⁹ or to monitor water quality with Save the Bay (Narragansett).⁷⁵ During the annual grey whale migration along the California coast, American Cetacean Society volunteers conduct a population census.⁴⁶ Tools for conservation may include sophisticated toolkits like those disseminated by The Nature Conservancy to help interested organizations understand and draft payment for ecosystem services agreements (Marine Conservation Agreements).⁶⁷ Other tools may be simpler: the Marine Conservation Society (UK) provides a downloadable toolkit for

individuals who are interested in creating local “ban the bag” initiatives to reduce local use of plastic bags.⁶⁸

Conservation and management require money, and NGOs working as enablers often provide or source funding for the efforts of other individuals or organizations. Blue Ventures sponsors university scholarships in marine science in Madagascar,³ the American Cetacean Society offers research grants,⁴⁷ and the Coral Reef Alliance provides funds to Caribbean and Pacific NGOs to help meet operational needs.⁵⁶ NGOs may help buy necessary equipment: in Indonesia, WildAid helped purchase a speedboat so that local rangers could monitor no-take zone compliance.⁸⁰ Finally, NGOs may act as a funding conduit. In the Gulf of California, WWF administers grants from foundations, routing monies to local NGOs as needed.²

NGOs also enable funding by undertaking sustainable development work. By enabling sustainable development, NGOs recognize that the degradation of marine and coastal ecosystems is often exacerbated by economic realities. Both local and international NGOs have taken this approach in their work at sites in Africa. On Mafia Island, Tanzania, local NGO SeaSense has helped fund construction of a school; they also offer direct payment for undisturbed turtle nests to discourage poaching of eggs.²⁷ WWF’s work at this site includes local training for alternative livelihoods, mitigating resource extraction pressures on marine ecosystems.²⁷ Blue Ventures has taken a similar approach in Madagascar, where they have encouraged development of ecotourism by training local guides, constructing a lodge, and organizing eco-tourist visits.³

NGOs may enable by facilitating decision-making processes, either formally or informally. Process facilitation may include facilitating stakeholder engagement in

decision-making and/or working at the hub of collaborative processes. In the Gulf of California, the Centro de Colaboración Cívica (CCC) works to organize, mediate and facilitate collaboration and consensus building among shrimp fishermen, conservationists, and government.² CCC works as a broker and arbiter, trying to avoid over-identification with a specific set of interests.

NGOs working as enablers may help formalize nascent conservation and management efforts through institution building. Blue Ventures provided assistance in structuring the governance institution of management areas in Madagascar.³ Finally, organizations may create communications networks between stakeholders. WWF creates formal stakeholder communication structures and organizes visioning workshops in Fiji,²³ working towards transparency and inclusivity to enable local ownership of outcomes.

The above examples illustrate how enabling often goes hand in hand with advocacy, especially in the overlap between capacity building and education and outreach. Overlap between roles is discussed below.

Discussion and conclusions

While the above typology provides a useful way to categorize and understand NGO approaches to marine conservation, it is necessarily broad-brush. Any given activity may not be restricted to a single role, moving from category to category as context changes. Individual roles may also overlap.

Although many activities can be clearly associated with a single role, others can be categorized differently according to context, or fall into multiple roles simultaneously. Creation of a conservation action plan, for example, is advocacy when done to pressure

decision-makers, expertise when done at the request of decision-makers, and management when the NGO in question has jurisdiction over the resource. Zoning and marine spatial planning follow the same pattern.

Overlap between roles occurs when a single activity meets multiple needs, or when activities work in combination. The advocate role is especially difficult to disaggregate since, to some extent, a conservation-centered mission drives all activities that a conservation NGO undertakes. An NGO bringing a lawsuit or engaging in direct action may be simultaneously watchdogging and advocating, both drawing attention to infractions as well as pushing a preferred response. Capacity building efforts focused on empowering stakeholder management of resources (enabling) may blend seamlessly with education and outreach (advocacy). Similarly, NGOs providing expertise may be influenced by their own advocacy agendas.

NGOs engaging as managers must generally play all the roles discussed in this typology.⁸² Hands-on management may necessitate a variety of activities, including but not limited to the following: education and outreach for local stakeholders; research on the managed system; boundary and rule enforcement; and organizing volunteer work days. Thus the management role often obliges adoption of the advocate, expert, watchdog and enabler roles as well.

Although overlap between roles exists, the emphasis of each role remains distinct. Advocates promote a marine conservation agenda. Experts provide objective information. Managers implement; watchdogs police; enablers empower. It is not surprising that organizations often do these things simultaneously. The ways in which these roles work

in synergy or challenge each other will be examined further in Chapter 4. Chapter 3 focuses on cultivating a more complete understanding of the enabler role.

Chapter 3. The Enabler Role.

Introduction

As enablers of marine conservation, NGOs seek to increase the ability of others to institute or inform sustainable and effective management of their marine and coastal resources. In contrast with other approaches, NGO enabling focuses on laying groundwork to allow interested parties to better engage in the management of resources in which they have a stake.

Enabling activities target a wide range of parties. The term “stakeholders” is used here to refer to any party whose participation and engagement in marine conservation and management is enabled or facilitated by NGO activities, including, but not limited to: other NGOs; government agencies at any level, including intergovernmental organizations; industry organizations or representatives of industry; individuals grouped around shared interests (artisanal fishers from a given region, for example); local communities; or individuals. For the purposes of this discussion, any party that is perceived to have a stake in marine conservation and management and whose involvement is enabled by NGO activities is a stakeholder.

Enabling activities range widely but share an emphasis on a “teach a man to fish” approach. They bring stakeholders together and give them the resources, tools, and relationships they need to engage in marine conservation and management. Activities and approaches that fall into the enabler category can be loosely grouped into two sub-roles: enabling resources (capacity building, providing funding or other physical resources, and sustainable development activities) and enabling relationships (facilitating stakeholder involvement, creating collaborative infrastructures and facilitating, or acting as the hub

of, networks of interests or multi-stakeholder collaborative processes). In practice these sub-roles are not often discrete. Many organizations enabling marine conservation engage in activities that fall into both categories.

It is important to underscore that the term enabler, in this context, refers to a role and should not be understood as a label for an organization itself. While some organizations may engage primarily as enablers, others use this approach as one of many. Organizations may play the enabler role while simultaneously acting as advocates, managers, experts, or even watchdogs within a single context; equally, an NGO may enable in one initiative and adopt other roles elsewhere.

A nuanced understanding of the enabler role includes NGO motivations or drivers, perceived benefits and challenges, factors that facilitate enabling engagement and strategies for success. This chapter supplements the typology presented in Chapter 2 by presenting a comprehensive picture of a role poorly described by the existing literature.

Drivers

Interviewees identified three drivers of the enabler role: organizational mission and culture; conservation context; and the need to secure funding. Interviewees from longer extant, multi-issue organizations saw enabling as consistent with their organizational mission. Some smaller organizations were founded as enablers, to address specific resource and/or relationship gaps. Context drives enabling engagement for multi-role organizations that prioritize specific geographies or issues for which they determine enabling activities to be the best approach. Context may also drive enabling engagement when building long-term on-the-ground relationships is seen as the most effective way to

access or target specific stakeholders. The need to secure funding was cited as a driver of enabling work in reference to both foundations and individual funders.

Organizational mission

Interviewees agreed that an enabling approach is consistent with their organizational mission and philosophy. For some longer established NGOs an enabling approach to conservation represents a natural evolution from a different initial primary approach.⁸³ An organization with its roots in land purchase, for example, has experience in building relationships across traditional boundaries applicable to enabling.

Respondents additionally point out that relatively moderate organizations are comfortable working within existing systems, meaning that an enabler approach may come

naturally.^{82, 83} Interviewees hypothesized that more extreme organizations are constrained by a history and culture of antagonism and are thus less comfortable in the enabler role.^{81,}

⁸⁵ For moderate multi-role organizations, activities like network creation, funding provision and capacity building are a way to augment and extend complementary efforts towards advocacy, education and/or resource management.^{81, 83, 92}

Other NGOs have their organizational genesis in an enabling mission. NGOs founded with funding earmarked to coordinate stakeholders, for example, fall into this second category:

For a large part I think our approach is defined by how our group was set up. To some degree it was a good-will development tool. To try to improve relationships and trust between fishermen and management and scientists.⁸⁶

Enabling work is thus at least in part such organizations' *raison d'être*; they were designed to meet a specific need for which activities like stakeholder coordination were the approach designated by founders.⁸⁴

Some organizations may enable marine conservation or management in pursuit of a larger mission that does not center on marine conservation *per se*. Just as “hybrid” organizations cross boundaries between conservation and development work,³¹ some NGOs working across the conservation/development divide may enable marine conservation. One NGO works to create consensus on the designation of marine reserves as part of a larger strategy to allow coastal communities to maintain sustainable artisanal fishing practices, thus enabling marine conservation in the interests of sustainable development and social justice.⁸⁷

Context

Conservation context, including the nature of the socio-political system, prior history and relationships, and social needs, may drive adoption of an enabling approach. For multi-role organizations, the decision to adopt an enabling approach is often driven by organizational goals and resulting needs. In a multi-step process, an organizational prioritization of issues and/or geographic regions leads to a strategic assessment of how best to gain access to prioritized contexts. Organizations are especially likely to use this approach when they engage across multiple issues or geographies, and enabling work is usually only one of a suite of approaches towards the prioritized goal.^{81, 83, 93} A decision to focus conservation efforts on Southeast Asia's Coral Triangle, for instance, leads an organization to work with a dispersed population, across geopolitical boundaries, and in the developing world. Large-scale conservation can only be achieved in such a context if

efforts are coordinated between governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders; local populations who rely on the ocean for subsistence can continue to meet their own needs; and sufficient buy-in exists among stakeholders to maximize compliance. An organization may choose to use a suite of approaches including enabling in working towards these ends. For further discussion of this strategic decision-making process see Chapter 4.

In certain contexts, options for engagement may be limited. For example, an organization's decision to engage with a given issue or geography may result in work where local communities have jurisdiction over their own coastal resources, as is the case in Fiji. In this case, enabling is simply a *realpolitik* response to the need to gain access to a dispersed, community-based, decision-making structure.^{81, 90} Tension between existing top-down coastal management initiatives, perceptions of past NGO involvement and disenchanted, disenfranchised users may also lead an NGO to see enabling work as the best way to gain access to a certain geography.⁹¹ NGOs are not always welcome players in the conservation contexts they prioritize, and building relationships and understanding and addressing local needs can help ease into a wider engagement. This issue is revisited in the discussion of the perceived benefits and challenges associated with the enabler role.

Funding

Funding needs also drive some NGOs to engage as enablers. Interviewees working for NGOs identify enabling work as attractive to foundations, individual donors, and members. Capacity building, for example, is seen as a way to extend the effectiveness of limited-term funding by leaving skills and motivation behind, even after

the funded engagement ceases. NGO representatives believe that this approach is appealing to donors:

Donors want to get the most out of their money. They don't want to see the money that they've spent completely unravel after that funding cycle. They're willing to invest in that.⁸²

In developed-world contexts, enabling work may help attract individual donations. Local stakeholders with an interest in local conservation outcomes respond positively to an organization that gives them opportunities to be involved in hands-on conservation of their own resources. Coordinating volunteer activities like beach cleanups, water quality monitoring, or eelgrass replanting may be an increasingly effective way to attract new members, and hence additional funding. Involving stakeholders directly in hands-on conservation appeals to people's desire to support causes they care about as well as their desire to be involved. It also reaches a population that is increasingly inured to standard requests for support:

The traditional model for the way that NGOs would get individual donations and membership funding was to say 'Great, give us some money at the start of the year, trust us to go away and do something good with that money and we'll send you a magazine once a quarter.' And then a year later you go back and say 'Can we have some more money please?'. That model is broken, really, times move on, people expect more. [Now] they want to be part of the work. I often describe it as you pay to join a conservation charity, you're really paying a ticket, the price of a ticket, to join the journey. And once you're on that journey you then expect to be involved in what's happening and to be given opportunities to engage in what the organization's doing, to feel part of the process, part of the success. That's the real demand, that's why people do it as much as for whatever the big goal is.⁹³

The funders interviewed stated categorically that their funding is issue-driven, motivated by strategic assessment of where work needs to be done and where funding can have the greatest effect, rather than consideration of specific NGO roles. However, they did recognize the value of working with stakeholders and understanding their needs.⁸⁸

In a lot of our work we talk about trying to align economic and social incentives with conservation outcomes. [...] That means we have to incorporate the resource users and their use patterns into the management decisions to create durable conservation outcomes.⁸⁹

Benefits

Interviewees identified seven benefits gained by an enabling approach to marine conservation: improved stakeholder coordination; increased inclusivity and stakeholder ownership; better and more durable conservation outcomes; ability to target capacity and resource needs; organizational access to otherwise inaccessible conservation contexts; and organizational access to extended capacity and a wider resource base. Improved coordination between stakeholders is a function of relationship-enabling, which creates communications platforms and brokers information between stakeholders. Increased inclusivity and stakeholder ownership are attributed to NGOs' ability to work across scales and use approaches that are beyond the traditional remit of government agencies. Perceived improvements in long-term conservation outcomes hinge on increased stakeholder ownership and the benefits that accrue to participating stakeholders. An ability to target capacity needs is especially important to NGOs working in the developing world, where biological diversity and richness are concentrated but conservation and management capacity often limited. Enabling may also target resource

needs, which were identified as a common choke point for marine conservation or management across a variety of contexts. Taking an enabling approach in contexts where stakeholders have jurisdiction over marine resources, or where resistance to NGO involvement is strong, was found to allow NGOs access where other approaches might fail. Finally, by empowering stakeholders NGOs were found to also extend their own capacity and access to resources. By enabling, organizations can draw upon more people, more diverse expertise, and share costs across networks of linked interests.

Increased coordination

Many respondents, especially those engaged in network creation, agree that without a coordinating force, the varied and conflicting interests affected by marine and coastal management decisions are unable to communicate, share interests, or find any common ground.^{84, 85}

One piece to be honest is to have a coordinating platform. Both building and brokering trust across different relationships and entities, and creating spaces and platforms for them to be able to work together.⁸⁸

Whether such work means being the hub of formal collaborations, or overseeing and facilitating communications across networks of linked interests, it creates conversations and pathways for information exchange while building communicative ties. Such coordination is seen to result in research, policy and other outcomes that bridge the needs of a wide range of players.^{86, 90, 91}

Increased ownership and inclusivity

By working in the spaces where government is absent, enabling NGOs are able to take up issues that would otherwise remain unaddressed and include players who might

otherwise remain excluded.⁸⁶ Government agencies are constrained by their own norms and history, as well as a legislative mandate. Such constraints may limit government to mostly predetermined, top-down approaches or responses to marine conservation and management issues.

Existing, top-down governance around marine conservation may disenfranchise some stakeholders, and some NGOs play an enabling role in order to bridge those divides. Where governance is top down, NGOs can bring together the governing and the governed, brokering information and understanding between them:

Through our work the foundation helps build bridges between the fishermen and other social and economic actors: local intermediaries, the local government, the national government, the EU authorities... it provides a way for them to communicate directly.⁸⁷

Bridging gaps between government and stakeholders may help decision-makers better understand stakeholders' viewpoints and benefit from their specialized knowledge, thus giving stakeholders a voice in decision-making processes.⁸⁶ It may also help stakeholders understand bigger-picture realities or trade-offs driving governance. Improved understanding may result in policies that better reflect stakeholders' needs and knowledge, as well as improved compliance from stakeholders who better understand existing policies.⁸⁴

Large-scale programs may not meet the needs of small, less well-organized stakeholders, and NGOs can address these gaps. One respondent used the example of Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) accreditation as illustration:

If you're a small-scale fisher in the local village, for example, you have no chance of being able to conform to MSC accreditation. And without that badge it becomes very difficult for you to prove that your produce is sustainably caught. If you can't prove that it's sustainably caught you can't sell it into the market as sustainable produce and benefit from the consumer-driven appetite for sustainable produce. You're stuck. What we're trying to do now is plug that gap, and provide platforms for local fishing communities, using our credibility as an NGO to support what they're doing. To give them the facility to market that product sustainably, to benefit from what they're doing at a level that is much lower than MSC. [...] That's one of the benefits of doing this work, that there is a level basically below which government doesn't go. People below that level can struggle.⁹³

Better and more durable outcomes

For some respondents, especially those building capacity in the developing world, the overarching benefit of enabling work is that it more effectively achieves conservation goals. Some organizations are motivated to enable marine conservation by a belief that involving stakeholders in managing their own resources results in better, more sustainable conservation outcomes than more top-down approaches. Activities like providing funding, disseminating tools, conducting professional trainings, and bridging gaps between interests and sectors aim to give stakeholders the ability to steward their own environments. This work is grounded in a particular theory of change:

It really goes back to the 'knowledge can eventually lead to behavior change' argument – an argument which we know is somewhat flawed. But it's underpinned by providing new perspectives for people. [So that they] understand what alternatives exist, that they wouldn't have perceived prior to the capacity building, prior to the engagement, prior to the development of tools. To help them work differently or see things differently.⁹²

The hope is that empowered stakeholders will recognize the value of conservation and sustainable management practices and internalize behaviors better aligned with a conservation or sustainability mindset.^{82, 86, 92}

That's where a lot of the issues lie, not with 'how do you do the population viability assessment?' but 'how do you work with people to get them to change their behaviors?'. [With this approach you have] people being more bought in and invested in the conservation of their own resources, rather than doing it because someone is telling them to.⁸¹

Interviewees see stakeholder ownership as a win-win situation. While this study does not focus directly on the stakeholder experience of NGO involvement, enabling NGOs perceive definite benefits for both individual and organizational stakeholders. Interviewees believe that stakeholders gain lasting relationships, increased access to resources, and an enhanced skill set. These benefits work in tandem to empower stakeholders to make or influence decisions, and result in policies that better meet both human and conservation needs.

A case study of NGO engagement in the Philippines found that new bridges to greater expertise and larger networks were a durable benefit for stakeholders.¹ Similarly, interviewees believe that enabled stakeholders gain lasting connections to other stakeholders, decision-makers, and larger networks. These connections create a community of colleagues who can provide additional expertise, an extended skill set, and help spread costs across multiple parties.^{82, 87} Such connections may also serve to reduce conflict, thereby rendering pressing, but previously intractable, issues more amenable to resolution.⁸⁸ Connections to legislators and administrators allow stakeholders a voice in ongoing law-making, rule-making and management; stakeholders who have gained

salient tools, knowledge and vocabulary are better placed to make use of that voice.^{82, 89}

Ideally, in an upward cycle of improved management, stakeholders empowered by an enabling NGO see outcomes that meet their needs better than other alternatives or previous measures. Interviewees believe that these positive outcomes increase stakeholder buy-in and encourage stakeholders to maintain their new relationships and skills, thereby reinforcing the long-term sustainability of outcomes.

Targeting capacity and resource needs

By acting as enablers, NGOs can target conservation contexts that are natural resource rich but where conservation and management capacity is lacking. Both scientific resource management, and engagement with a larger community who ground their work in a Western scientific paradigm, are enabled when capacity needs are targeted.⁸²

A colleague talks about initially a lot of people not even being able to interpret a slope on a graph... It makes it very difficult to interpret data and make decisions if you're not even able to interpret what's being said. [...] Several NGOs have specifically hired expat scientists to build up science capacity in terms of thinking through: What are the sorts of questions you would want to ask? How would you go about answering them? All the way to management, and analysis, and even presenting.⁸¹

NGOs also target gaps in resource availability by directly funding stakeholder groups, processes or sustainable development work. Examples of the two former include paying rangers to enforce no-take zones,⁹⁰ or funding large, multi-stakeholder processes to designate marine protected areas.⁸⁶ Organizations may also engage in sustainable development activities, such as facilitating access to markets for sustainably managed fisheries' produce,^{87, 93} or developing alternative, non-extractive livelihoods in fishing communities.⁹⁰ Sustainable development activities are seen to provide stakeholders with

ongoing funding that does not rely on external agencies while simultaneously reducing pressure, particularly extractive pressure, on marine resources.

Gaining access to specific contexts

Some conservation contexts demand an enabling approach because of jurisdictional realities or opposition to NGO involvement. In these cases, an NGO that works with local interests and meets local needs may gain access where otherwise none would be possible. Working in South Pacific communities where individual or community reef ownership is the norm, for example, calls for building relationships in order to access fragmented decision-makers.

Contexts in which stakeholders resist NGO involvement may also beg for an enabling approach. Resistance may stem from past NGO engagement; disillusioned local stakeholders may fear that any NGO involvement will only result in further disappointment.⁹¹ Resistance may also arise where conservation NGOs are seen as intrinsically antagonistic to a community or entire sector's economic interests. Fisheries work, for example, is seen as especially prone to this issue.⁸⁷ (For further discussion of this issue, see the section on challenges). In these situations, connecting with suspicious stakeholders, building trust over time, and working to coordinate stakeholder involvement in conservation and management – enabling stakeholder engagement – may be the foot in the door that allows an NGO any access at all.

Extended capacity and access to resources

One appeal of an enabling approach is that it allows organizations to access additional capacity and resources. By engaging in capacity building or providing local stakeholders opportunities for involvement in hands-on conservation and management,

NGOs may be able to recruit members and/or utilize the time and skills of interested external individuals to accomplish their own goals. By providing stakeholders with the tools, skills, and resources for conservation, an enabling NGO “creates an army of people who can do things, who feel motivated by the sorts of goals that we set. Who can almost be self-sufficient.”⁹³ Direct engagement with stakeholders may also give NGOs access to stakeholder expertise, including local or traditional ecological knowledge.⁸⁶

Like stakeholders, NGOs may benefit from connections to networks they help create or facilitate in the course of their enabling work. Some benefits are similar: such networks allow for coordination of effort, thereby increasing effectiveness and sharing resource burdens across multiple parties.^{88, 92} Building such relationships may also provide NGOs with additional leverage in moving a conservation or management process forward. One NGO, faced with recalcitrant managers dragging their feet in implementing marine conservation agreements, used the relationships built through their work at the hub of a collaborative process. By leveraging connections to both high government officials and local communities, the NGO was able to bring pressure to bear from both above and below, motivating managers to begin implementation.⁹¹

Challenges

Interviewees identified four types of widely encountered challenges: resource challenges; challenges around measures of success and exit strategies; challenges around working with stakeholders; and challenges around working in multiple roles. Resource challenges were found for both large and small NGOs engaged in both resource and relationship focused work. Challenges around measures of success were also found across types of enabling engagement; challenges around exit strategies, or how an

organization determines that it has accomplished its goals and may disengage, were particular to large organizations that engage across multiple contexts. Enabling engagement necessitates working with stakeholders, and multiple challenges around working with stakeholders were also identified. Challenges around working in multiple roles will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

It is important to note that while all of these challenges are applicable to NGOs in their role as enablers they are not all exclusive to that role. Although the challenges discussed below were raised by interviewees in discussion of the enabler role, many of these issues could be identified in reference to NGO work in other roles or across roles. While the focus of this study precludes a full understanding of challenges that NGOs encounter when they play roles other than enabler, some discussion of how these challenges may uniquely confront organizations working as enablers is included below.

Resource challenges

Limited time and capacity

Interviewees generally agree that lack of organizational resources is a hindrance to their efforts. Resource constraints are undoubtedly a common challenge across sectors, and are likely particularly challenging for non-profits. For example, a review of NGO involvement in aquaculture identifies constrained organizational capacity and time as a significant challenge.⁸

On-the-ground enabling of site-specific marine conservation may necessitate investment of organizational time and human resources. Negotiating unfamiliar cultures, connecting with stakeholders and decision-makers, building trust, and establishing

working relationships all require dedication of significant organizational resources, but must be accomplished before any progress can be made on conservation goals.⁹¹

All organizations are to one degree or another faced with resource limitations and the need to prioritize. Some NGOs with very broad missions or rapid programmatic turnover may encounter self-inflicted limits to their effectiveness as enablers, as resources are stretched across types of engagement or rapidly shifted from program to program.^{89, 92} Equally, organizations focusing their time and energy on enabling work may sacrifice different, equally valuable types of engagement. Competition between various enabling activities for staff time and attention may also occur, with one respondent identifying the opportunity costs of an organizational dedication to capacity building:

It definitely constrained my ability to sit down with government partners, deal with external collaborators, publish reports and papers that would have been really nice to publish... I just didn't have time for those things.⁸²

Indeed, hands-on capacity building is seen to be especially time consuming. The sheer time commitment necessary may prevent organizations already working at capacity from actively pursuing this role:

It takes a lot of time, it takes a lot of patience [...] Sitting down at the table with people who don't have the skills you have, and giving them those skills. [...] Convincing managers that don't have this as part of their schedules to add it is a really hard sell. Not because they don't want to do it but because their schedules are already packed.⁸²

Long-term engagement, short-term funding

The duration of engagement required to enable marine conservation also complicates acquiring funding. Interviewees recognize that the relatively short duration of funding cycles mean they need to be constantly selling their projects and initiatives to funders, and that the need to respond to short-term funding cycles may limit their ability to engage in regular long-term work.⁹³ Continuing NGO commitment to ongoing work in a single location may be less appealing to funders: “It’s not the new sexy thing anymore, even if that’s what you still need, the boring old enforcement training or whatever.”⁸¹ Previous studies have identified tensions between projects undertaken on flexible time scales with ill-defined stopping-points, and funders’ needs for discrete, measurable outcomes.^{5, 20} Interviewees agree: “The problem of course is that funders don’t want to support projects that just go on indefinitely with no end in sight. And you can’t really blame them.”⁸⁶ This incompatibility between funding cycles and on-the-ground needs is exacerbated by challenges around measuring success that are discussed in more detail below.

Funding-driven opportunism

Several interviewees agreed that funding availability, or lack thereof, drives opportunism in where or how organizations engage. This challenge likely applies across the non-profit sector. In discussing enabling marine conservation and management, interviewees say that constrained funding may prevent an organization from engaging in a region that has been identified as a priority,⁸¹ impact which issues are emphasized in a given proposal,⁸² or simply determine what work gets done:⁹³

If it's something that you and I are both really concerned with, but we don't have a hope in hell of getting funding for it... Well, then it gets dropped by the wayside pretty quickly.⁸⁶

This challenge echoes criticisms of NGO engagement in conservation in the developing world. Large NGOs in particular are accused of being overly driven by the priorities of their funders, often at the expense of local stakeholders.^{5, 15}

Structural inefficiencies

Tiered funding structures, in which large NGOs channel funds to smaller organizations or individuals, introduce certain inefficiencies into resource-enabling. Foundations may prefer to fund large, international “household name” NGOs due to the credibility that those organizational brands enjoy. When these organizations act as middlemen, passing funding on to smaller, local NGOs working on the ground, administrative costs are increased. Less money reaches the targeted organization or initiative than would through a more direct approach.⁹¹

Lack of needed expertise

Reaching across traditional stakeholder boundaries necessitates that organizational staff have a wide range of skills across multiple disciplines. Such cross-sector expertise may still be lacking in the marine conservation and management sphere. Smaller organizations rely on single individuals to work across these boundaries, with varying degrees of success.⁸⁶ Larger organizations may have to hire, or train existing staff, in order to effectively enable cooperation across sectors. This challenge is evident in market-based work:

There are still very few folks with any business background working in the seafood and marine space. You've certainly got

some of the social sciences, but I liken it to a soccer game. We have mostly policy and scientists, two disciplines on the field, and that's still too narrow given the breadth of the issue. So I'd say there's more evolution to be seen, particularly in regards to the types of disciplines and talent needed to either bring in to the space or bridge as partners.⁸⁸

Defining success and walking away

Identifying metrics of success

While defining and measuring success may be difficult for NGOs across roles, respondents felt that it was particularly problematic for NGOs working as enablers:

It's very hard, not just for us but I think for all enablers. Because you're two steps removed down the theory of change. Really you're about priming the pump, you're about creating the enabling conditions, you're about empowerment so that people can be more effective and make the right choices. This is the hardest thing to measure.⁹²

In the best-case scenario, organizations define success proactively and track specific metrics to measure their progress. Even when this is case, however, success is defined according to organizational and/or funder goals which may or may not include objective measures of ecological or socio-economic improvement. Furthermore, success thus defined is often not comparable across programs or initiatives.⁸²

Tensions may exist between organizational and funder metrics of success. Organizations that enable collaborative fisheries management, for example, may measure their own success by metrics of representativeness and transparency, while the proposals that garner funding for those processes center on concrete outcomes like number of hectares protected, number of participating fishing boats, etc.⁸⁷ Enabling NGOs may find

themselves pulled in different directions by their dedication to a specific process, the outcomes of which are inherently uncertain, and the concrete goals of their funders.

Planning exit strategies

Linked to metrics of success is the issue of organizational exit strategies.

Interviewees from NGOs local to and/or embedded in the conservation context were less likely to identify this challenge than those from large NGOs working across a variety of contexts. Interviewees from large NGOs recognized that an organizational focus on multiple issues and geographies necessitates program turnover:

You can't do everything forever. You can't start an initiative and then do that for the rest of your life. Other things come up, you reprioritize, there are other things that you need to focus on. Building in an exit strategy when you've engaged in something, [...] that's how you get other projects. You train other people, you get other people set up with funding and their own skill sets so they can take things on, and we can start working on the next big challenge.⁸³

For respondents who agreed on the desirability of exit strategy formulation, difficulties around defining and measuring success make proactive exit planning difficult.^{81, 82, 83} As discussed above, this issue complicates efforts to source long-term, ongoing funding. Proposed metrics of enabling success, like how smoothly power is transferred to stakeholders and before-and-after efficiency of spending,⁸² can only be measured after organizational disengagement. This information is of little use in determining a stopping point for an initiative that is still underway. Determining when a project is ripe for turnover – that is, when sufficient success in building partner capacity exists to allow the enabling NGO to walk away without sacrificing current or future gains – is often done on a case-by-case basis, according to poorly specified variables.^{81, 83}

Engaging with stakeholders

Challenges around working with stakeholders appear to be intrinsic to an enabling approach. An NGO that enables commits to working with stakeholders, usually over the long term, and is thus dependent on the relationships that it builds. Challenges to building and maintaining relationships exist across roles, but are especially demanding when an organization's approach is predicated on those relationships.

Distrust and resistance

Especially in the beginning phases of a new initiative, NGO representatives engaging in capacity building or stakeholder engagement and coordination may face stakeholder pushback. NGOs playing an enabling role often engage with communities with the intention of enfranchising or supporting stakeholders, but because they belong to a sector that is perceived as historically antagonistic to certain stakeholders' interests, some groups may resist their involvement. This is especially true for NGOs working with fisheries:^{86, 87}

I think that there's great suspicion on both sides. Fishing communities, the fishing industry, is very fearful, very apprehensive of NGOs... I think the fishing industry feels that they have been maligned and misunderstood and victimized by NGOs. And on the other side I think NGOs probably think that the fishing industry, or a section of the fishing industry, is on a suicide mission. If they keep going the way that they're going there's going to be nothing left for their kids. Very polarized. [When] you go into a local fishing community as an NGO representative you have that baggage you have to overcome.⁹³

Such resistance acts as a drag and increases the amount of time and money that already stretched thin NGOs must invest.

Stakeholder distrust may also arise during the course of an initiative, particularly one that involves facilitating collaborative work. Organizations working at the center of collaborative processes may face criticism from alienated stakeholders who question the legitimacy and inclusiveness of the process:

There's often the perception – primarily from the folks who decide that they don't want to cooperate, that they don't want to play along – that there's some sort of favoritism, that there are individuals or parties who are on the inside and others who are on the outside. Some groups would initially refuse to be involved, or would make themselves so difficult that arguably you couldn't involve them, but would then cry foul saying 'We've been excluded.'⁸⁶

Again, this echoes existing literature critical of NGO engagement in conservation in the developing world, which faults NGO-based collaborative efforts for failing to adequately include the traditionally disenfranchised.¹⁵

Conflicting NGO and stakeholder expectations

Mismatch between the expectations and goals of various marine conservation players was a recurrent theme raised by interviewees. Indeed, a previous study of coastal management in Papua New Guinea identified conflicting funder, NGO and stakeholder expectations as a significant challenge.⁵

Stakeholder expectations and desires may exceed what enabling organizations can provide. Limited NGO mandates, especially in resource- and capacity-constrained contexts, may be challenged by local stakeholders concerned about issues beyond the enabling NGO's remit.⁸⁷ Efforts centered on building capacity for administration and enforcement of marine reserves encounter local complaints of illegal logging, for example.⁸² An organization tempted to extend its mandate beyond its capabilities may

find itself subject to resentment: “I think the biggest way you can get yourself in trouble is to say you’re working on something you can’t, and to promise something that you can’t deliver.”⁸²

Conflicting NGO and stakeholder interests

Stakeholders and NGO priorities may conflict in a number of ways. Stakeholders may be drawn to the attention and prestige of participating in a formal collaborative process yet lack genuine buy-in, making it difficult to reach consensual solutions.⁹¹ In less formal collaborations, partners may be reluctant to participate unless their own needs are met:

Academics, in general their interest is limited by the perceived potential for those projects to support graduate students and publish papers. Managers, their interest is tempered by how much time is this going to take... does it fit with my annual plan, do I have the staff to dedicate to this, can I really do this? They’re strapped for time and resources. And then fishermen are concerned about, what’s in it for them? Are they going to be compensated for their time, for the gear they use, for the risk?⁸⁶

NGOs may encounter challenges when working with stakeholders whose interests are not grounded in a Western scientific paradigm. One NGO shared an understanding of the goals of no-take zones with enabled Fijian fishing communities: both parties agreed that increased fish populations were desirable. But a lack of consensus on why population increase was beneficial underlay a series of challenges. The NGO’s conservation ethic contrasted with the stakeholders’ interest in simply catching more fish. With insufficient grounding in systems thinking (i.e. how conservation facilitated increased catch over the long term), villagers exposed to rebounding populations in successful no-take zones pushed to be able to open and fish those areas immediately.⁹⁰

Devolving conservation processes to stakeholder groups may result in decisions or outcomes that are poorly aligned with the enabling NGO's science-based preferences. A case study of terrestrial NGO-mediated conservation in Mexico found that science-driven prescriptions were in conflict with local concerns.²² Similarly, when NGOs enable local management of marine resources, their own science-based priorities may take something of a back seat.^{81, 82} When increased catch is of primary concern to fishing populations, fuel provided to patrol fisheries closures may be redirected to power trips to fishing grounds that are further afield.⁹⁰

Existing socio-economic and cultural divides

Working in contexts with deeply etched cultural and socio-economic divides challenges NGOs attempting to bridge gaps between stakeholder groups. In Mexico, deep-seated class lines between educated, urban NGO representatives and the rural fishers with whom they needed to engage created challenges for NGO involvement in marine conservation in the Yucatán.⁹¹ In Indonesia, systematic prejudice against Western Papuans created difficulties for the transfer of conservation initiatives to local populations.⁸² Enabling often requires working within existing systems, and such systems may impose barriers to an NGO agenda that includes inclusivity and/or collaboration.

Stakeholder turnover

Individual turnover in mobile societies was identified as a challenge to NGOs working to build human capacity on the ground. Training a manager may not accomplish hoped-for ends if that manager marries and/or decides to relocate shortly after training is complete.^{82, 90} Societies that rely on a network of knowledge, rather than individual expertise, may not see value in training and maintaining a single consistent contact

person.⁹⁰ Local stakeholders in whom an enabling organization has invested may simply decide that the work is not for them:

People will start the program thinking that it might be what they want to do, but they've not grown up with people around them doing it enough to know what it really entails. Of course some people will get started and discover they don't like it, and that's normal, but you just have to accept a fair amount of loss in that way, and it ends up being very time-consuming and expensive.⁸²

This attrition can be especially costly when the investment in capacity building is heavily concentrated on a small group of promising individuals to whom educational funding or other long-term support is provided. In one such instance, opportunity costs were high: “They invested fairly heavily in half a dozen or so people, but maybe only one or two stuck around in conservation [...] because often the business world can pay more.”⁸¹

Conflicts between enabling and other roles

Some studies have found that NGOs working across traditional sector boundaries may be co-opted by other interests, primarily industry and government, thereby compromising their ability to meet their own stated goals.^{15, 20, 37} While interviewees did not explicitly recognize this issue, some did note incompatibility between organizational missions to advocate for, implement, or watchdog conservation and an approach that focuses on empowering stakeholders to drive their own processes. This topic will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Facilitating factors and strategies

Interviewees identified several facilitating factors and strategies that contribute to successful enabling. These contributions are discussed individually below, but generally revolve around building trust, shared problem identification, shared interests, inclusivity,

communications, and resource sharing. As such, the facilitating factors and strategies discussed here closely parallel the findings of collaborative process scholarship. This overlap will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

Facilitating factors

Interviewees identified three factors that facilitate NGO enabling of marine conservation and management: organizational trust; a commonly perceived problem; and aligned interests. A preexisting perception among stakeholders that the enabling organization is trustworthy and has relevant expertise is seen to facilitate enabling across conservation contexts. Visible, easily identified problems that directly impact stakeholder quality of life were found to be particularly powerful in motivating stakeholder acceptance of NGO involvement. Aligned interests around conservation and management were found to facilitate NGO engagement across sector divides.

Organizational trust

Interviewees from large NGOs working across varied contexts emphasize that a widely recognized and respected brand opens doors and facilitates access.⁹² Previous studies of NGO power in international standard setting have identified the power of organizational branding and a public perception of trustworthiness as an organization's "symbolic power".⁹ Respondents from "household name" NGOs agree that the right name carries weight:

When we're involved, people know that it's a good initiative. We have a lot of thought and a lot of science behind the decisions that we make. [...] Our partners and other stakeholders know that about us. That's a common theme that we see coming through in our communications and the studies that we've done of our brand."⁸³

Interviewees from both large and small organizations agree that positive public perception and organizational trust grease the skids of enabling engagement. In smaller conservation niches, for example enabling near-shore resource management by a coastal village, organizations with a history of local engagement may be known and trusted quantities despite lacking widespread brand recognition. Stakeholder perception of organizational trustworthiness opens doors, minimizes resistance, and allows entrée into targeted conservation contexts that might otherwise remain inaccessible.^{84, 90, 93}

Cultivating trust where it does not already exist is discussed below, in the section on strategies.

Commonly perceived problem

A common perception of a conservation problem is another variable that paves the way for NGO involvement, especially for organizations working with stakeholders in individual communities. Gaining access to a coastal community to deal with marine debris issues is relatively simple when community members wake daily to beaches covered in litter.⁸³ Likewise, subsistence fishers who witness and share stories of declining catches over time may welcome NGO involvement in fisheries management:

The village elders would tell stories of plentiful fish, healthy reef systems. And now you could see algae covering the reefs, big plumes of algae. I remember sitting with one of the middle-aged fishermen and he said ‘Even when I was a kid there were so many more fish.’ [They’re able to see] that the resources need better management, because you’ve got multiple generations there together sharing these stories that just don’t match up.⁹⁰

Alignment of interests

NGOs building networks across sectors find that increasing industry awareness of sustainability issues opens new doors to enabling engagement. Renewable energy, aquaculture and fisheries are examples of industries in which a new recognition of the alignment of conservation and long-term industry interests are driving opportunities for new relationships:

In the fisheries space, where some groups are actually concerned about reliability of supply, and are now understanding that, actually, conservation goals are aligned with their business goals, I think we're starting to see a different role for industry. [...] There's a way to engage with that industry that there hasn't been in the past.⁸⁹

Strategies

In some initiatives, the above facilitating factors may be either entirely lacking or insufficient to meet the full suite of encountered challenges. Interviewees identify five groups of strategies that organizations use to ease enabling engagement: cultivating trust; collaborative problem definition; working across boundaries; establishing clear communications; and sharing responsibilities. Stakeholder trust may be cultivated in both place-based and non-place-based contexts through connecting with existing leadership or established networks. Organizations working on the ground also build trust by maintaining a long-term local presence and hiring locally. Collaborative problem definition is seen as a way to gain access and ensure inclusivity; the latter goal also motivates work bridging existing divides between stakeholders or sectors. Clear internal and external communication ensures a shared an understanding of the goals, means, and

limits of NGO engagement. Sharing responsibility is found to address resource and capacity issues, especially for small NGOs.

Cultivating trust

Interviewees, especially those engaging in community-based work, agree that stakeholder trust must be cultivated and nurtured in order to effectively enable marine conservation and management. Building trust involves establishing connections with respected local players and maintaining relationships, and NGO presence, over relatively long time scales.

Models of how to involve local communities in marine conservation emphasize the central role of key community members acting as liaisons.¹⁸ Likewise, studies of co-management of marine fisheries have found that the involvement of at least one committed, respected local leader was essential to success.²⁴ Respondents also recognized connecting to local leaders as a valuable strategy in organizational efforts to work with local communities.^{86, 90, 91} They look for someone who is:

Oftentimes quite a charismatic individual in the community, somebody to whom other people listen. [This is a] place where you can have a disproportionate influence. They may already be thinking what you're thinking, and if not, get them on your side. Recruit them as ambassadors for what you're trying to achieve. That's a good way to do it.⁹³

Organizations may choose to connect with existing networks for similar reasons. In Fiji, Peace Corps volunteers are generally seen as valuable resources and welcomed into host communities; one NGO utilizes these connections by working closely with Peace Corps volunteers posted to the islands, even presenting at Peace Corps training sessions.⁹⁰ Working with local leaders or existing networks addresses resource challenges

by decreasing the amount of time needed to gain access to the community. It also extends organizational capacity by recruiting outsiders to aid NGO work. In general, connecting with known players, be they respected leaders or existing networks, allows the organizations to borrow legitimacy from those who already enjoy the confidence of target stakeholders, thus side-stepping or mitigating distrust or resistance to NGO involvement.⁸⁷

Maintaining a local office, particularly one that hires local staff, is another way to establish a long-term presence in a community, thereby building trust over time. In a study comparing NGO- and government-led conservation in Nepal, stakeholder perceptions of the NGO as more trustworthy were attributed at least in part to local hiring and a more visible local NGO presence.⁴ Organizations working to enable marine conservation also recognize the value of long-term on-the-ground engagement. Large NGOs that maintain offices across multiple geographies agree that an organizational model that embeds in them local contexts helps them to gain access to stakeholders and work with local and regional partners.^{81, 83} This is particularly true when those offices are staffed primarily by locals, who can bridge organizational priorities, cultural context, and local networks, and help tap into local expertise.^{82, 90}

Collaborative problem identification

Some NGOs gain access and target their work through collaboratively defining conservation problems with stakeholders. Many issues are less clear and tractable than the examples provided in the discussion of commonly perceived problems above, and many respondents point to reaching agreement with stakeholders on the nature of the problem as key to working as enablers. Collaborative problem identification may in this

case mean simply consulting with stakeholders, particularly those subject to, but disenfranchised from, management decisions, and brokering their responses back to management agencies or comparing them with existing data.⁸⁷ The enabling NGO may not be successful in altering management priorities, but they do create new communications channels between the managers and the managed:

The first thing I ask them is ‘What is important to you?’ [...] And then I usually tell them that I would love to look at ways of reducing fuel consumption, or whatever, but the funders are interested in the priorities that Fish and Wildlife are developing and this is the list that they have. So I say ‘Of these, what’s most compatible with your own interests, and your own expertise, and the equipment and gear that you have at your disposal?’ But I always take the fishermen’s ideas and bring them back to Fish and Wildlife and say ‘You know, the fishermen are really interested in Project X, and it may not be a high priority... but is there a way we could include that with one of these other projects?’⁸⁶

Alternatively, collaborative problem identification may involve working with stakeholders who have some level of jurisdiction over the resources in question, and may have more tangible results in management decisions. In either case, cultivating shared understanding of conservation problems helps to enfranchise stakeholders and create buy-in that otherwise might be lacking. Organizations who value their own expertise over the direct experience of local stakeholders may find themselves stymied from the outset:

There have been cases I’ve heard of where scientists have arrived, say in a town hall for a meeting with a local community saying ‘Look, we’ve come up with the perfect solution to your problem!’ And [the community] answer[s]: ‘What problem?’⁹³

Working across boundaries

A willingness and ability to reach across traditional boundaries may increase the effectiveness of enabling. In the above example of rigid class distinctions challenging marine conservation in the Yucatán, individual NGO representatives willing to transcend those divides through liaising with local leaders, putting in face time with stakeholders, and modifying communication styles were better able to connect with local fishers.⁹¹ Reaching out to a variety of stakeholder subgroups may help an organization be certain that their understanding of the issues is clear and complete.⁸⁶ Finally, actively seeking to work across sectors and with non-traditional partners, especially those often seen as antagonistic to conservation interests, allows some NGOs to connect with wider audiences while addressing concerns about stakeholder exclusion.⁸³

Structured approaches and clear communication

Structuring of approaches and clear internal and external communication may help NGOs prevent or navigate challenges associated with enabling work. Internally, establishing and communicating explicit organizational goals and priorities helps organizations structure the use of limited funding.⁸² Articulating clear project goals may also help to prevent organizational overreach.⁸² Designating and communicating clear metrics of success help organizations monitor and adapt long-term enabling initiatives,⁸⁷ as do time-lining and tracking performance indicators.⁹³ Communicating structured thinking to funders may help soothe donors' concerns over the somewhat fuzzy outcomes of enabler work.⁸⁸

Clear, structured communication with stakeholders is also strategically advantageous. Transparency, through sharing metrics of success, information gathered,

and progress-to-date, may increase stakeholder buy-in.⁸⁷ Clarifying and recording agreed-upon administrative structures and explicit goals allows organizations to address stakeholder pressure to extend their involvement. Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) that precisely delineate the limits of NGO responsibility are very valuable:

When we came up against illegal logging issues, we had to say very clearly ‘This is not in our MOU to deal with this, we’re trying to do the best we can, we’re making introductions and trying to generate funding, but until we get more funding, until our MOU is able to cover this, we can’t do it.’ And people would understand that.⁸²

Rigorous process documentation also helps organizations protect themselves from accusations of favoritism or stakeholder exclusion:

At least when those issues arise you can say ‘Well, I’m sorry you feel that way. But as you can see here by virtue of our notes from six months ago, we reached out to you and we very much wanted you to be involved. If you’d like to be involved now, of course we’d like to bring you in.’⁸⁶

Sharing responsibility

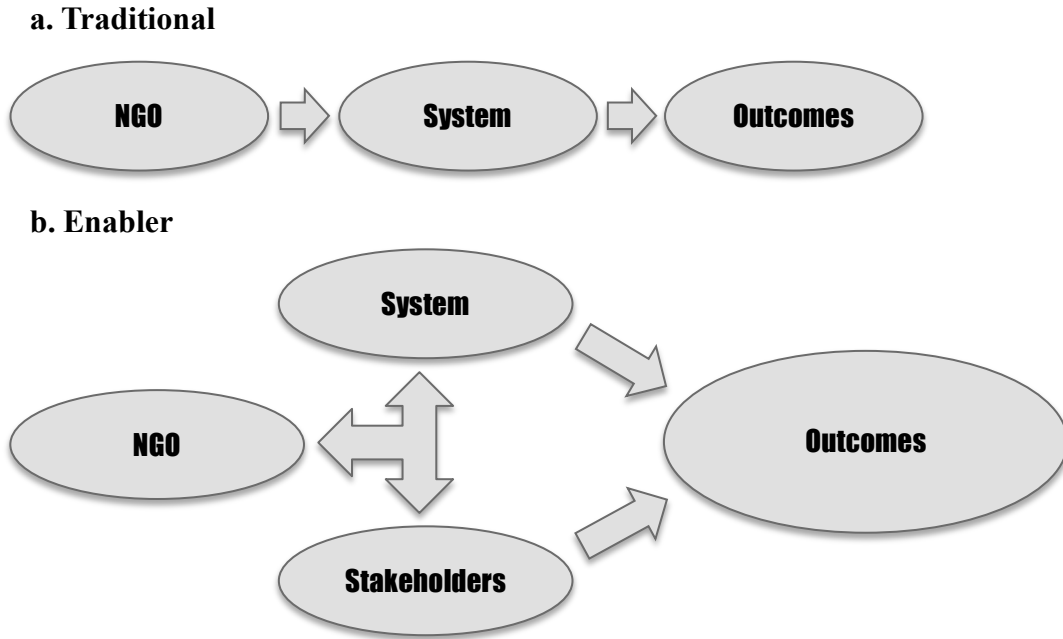
Sharing responsibility for management and funding with stakeholders helps NGOs, especially smaller organizations, address capacity and resource challenges while still maintaining engagement. Decentralizing initiative management by devolving it in part to stakeholders is one way in which NGOs address capacity challenges. Maintaining centralized control of diverse and far-flung efforts stretches organizational capacity, and limits what a small staff can accomplish.⁹³ Allowing stakeholders to take responsibility for managing their own initiatives, while maintaining contact with a local point person, frees staff to attend to other work.

Sharing responsibility for securing funding is useful when resource constraints are the limiting factor. Faced with stakeholder needs that exceeded their initial mandate, one NGO working with artisanal fishers in Chile expressed their willingness to work in the extended issue area once stakeholders had secured their own funding.⁸⁷ Like decentralizing management, this strategy allows the organization to remain engaged with stakeholders and continue to work towards common goals while addressing concerns about organizational resources and capacity.

Discussion and conclusions

The enabler role represents a departure from traditional NGO roles that attempt to reach preferred outcomes by influencing governance system directly (Figure 1a). As enablers, NGOs strive to reach outcomes by working through marine conservation and management stakeholders. This approach builds bridges between stakeholders and the system, allowing for improved communications and outcomes that may better meet stakeholder needs. It also encourages and enables stakeholders to work on outcomes directly, to the extent possible within a given context. It further allows for feedback between governance systems, enabled stakeholders and NGOs that informs priorities on all sides. This distinction is illustrated in Figure 1b.

Figure 1.



The enabler role may thus represent a maturation of NGO approaches to conservation, one that is grounded in a belief that stakeholders are key to creating sustainable outcomes. Straight advocacy or other traditional NGO approaches may result in policy outcomes that meet organizational priorities. However, these policies may fall apart in the face of implementation challenges that arise from stakeholder disinterest or resistance. By taking the needs of diverse users into account, NGOs enabling marine conservation expect to create durable, substantive change that is owned by those most vested in the resource.

Enabling and collaboration

Significant overlap exists between the findings of collaborative process scholarship and the nuances of the enabler role explored here.^{43, 44} This is especially true of factors contributing to success. Variables found to contribute to success in enabling marine conservation include pre-existing or cultivated trust, shared problem

identification, shared interests, inclusivity of efforts, structured and clear communications, and responsibility sharing. Existing literature identifies factors contributing to the success of collaborative processes that include, but are not limited to: fostering trust, shared perceptions and ownership of the problem, shared or compatible interests, inclusivity and representativeness of process, maintaining and institutionalizing communication, enabling interactions between diverse groups, and resource mobilization.⁴⁴

Enabling and collaborative approaches share an emphasis on working with stakeholders. NGOs enabling relationships may initiate or facilitate formal collaborative processes. They may broker collaborative process results to decision-makers, or work informally to build networks or smooth cooperation and information transfer. The overlap in facilitating factors and strategies outlined above is most pronounced where mitigated challenges center on stakeholder engagement. Shared strategies also occur around shared needs for resources to support an organization as it engages in intensive, long-term work.

NGOs enabling marine conservation and management also provide resources to stakeholders. Interviewees did not discuss challenges or strategies around resource-enabling. While a larger interview sample would help to understand existing challenges more fully, resource support may be generally welcome to stakeholders, and therefore encounter fewer challenges.

Measuring outcomes

Challenges around measuring success and formulating exit strategies were widely acknowledged by respondents. Two issues exist here: initiative turnover and long-term outcomes.

In order for an organization to disengage from an existing initiative without jeopardizing present or future gains, “ripeness for turnover” criteria should be established. Making such criteria explicit will help NGOs better plan for disengagement and result in smoother transitions away from organizational control. It will also help organizations secure funding by providing donors with a clear roadmap of limited-term engagement. While ripeness for turnover is context-specific,⁸³ there are certain shared preconditions that need to be in place before an organization disengages. These may include government or leadership support; appropriate legislation; long-term funding mechanisms; sufficient extra-organizational expertise; and an extra-organizational commitment to staying the conservation or management course. The latter variable is especially challenging to measure. Further research is needed to establish specific metrics.

For some, enabling is predicated on a belief that this approach results in better, more durable conservation outcomes. Tracking long-term outcomes of enabling work would help determine whether this belief is grounded in reality. Does providing stakeholders with money, skills, tools and relationships, and embedding them in marine conservation and management processes, actually lead to improved ecological results? The answer to this question is beyond the scope of this study, but future research in this area would help organizations direct limited resources based on known correlations to

outcomes. It would further help organizations adapt existing approaches to be more effective.

Conclusion

This chapter outlines the drivers, benefits, challenges, facilitating factors and strategies of the enabler role. By examining how organizations enable parties with a stake in marine and coastal resources to understand, engage in and inform management of those resources, the chapter paints a detailed picture of a previously poorly synthesized way NGOs work towards conservation goals. Chapter 4 discusses strategic considerations in role adoption and synergies and tensions between roles.

Chapter 4. Discussion and conclusions.

NGO engagement in marine conservation can be understood by analyzing the roles that such organizations play. NGOs engage as advocates to rally support for a marine conservation agenda. They engage as experts to provide scientific input into marine conservation and management, and as managers to directly implement marine or coastal conservation. NGOs engage as watchdogs to prevent or stop illegal activities, or activities seen to be incompatible with a conservation agenda. Finally, NGOs engage as enablers to empower stakeholders with resources, skills, and connections so that those stakeholders may participate in management of marine and coastal resources. Enablers take a “teach a man to fish” approach and undertake activities including capacity building, resource provision and network creation. The enabler role is the least well delineated in the existing literature.

NGOs are motivated to engage as enablers by their organizational mission, the conservation context, and the need to secure funding, as well as certain perceived benefits gained by this approach. Identified benefits of the enabler role include better coordination and inclusivity, better long-term conservation outcomes, an ability to target capacity and resource needs, better access to some contexts, and extended organizational capacity and resource base.

The enabler role meets with certain challenges in application. Challenges encountered by enablers can be grouped into challenges around resources, defining success and walking away, engaging with stakeholders, and tensions between roles. Some facilitating factors and NGO strategies contribute to successful enabling engagement. Facilitating factors include organizational trust, a commonly understood problem, and

alignment of interests between disparate groups. Strategies can be grouped into cultivating trust, working collaboratively, clear communications, and sharing responsibility.

The typology presented in Chapter 2, and the improved delineation of the enabler role presented in Chapter 3, may work with existing organizational decision-making processes to aid NGOs in explicitly identifying the approaches necessary to achieve their goals. It may also help observers of the non-profit sector better frame discussion of how roles interact, including how some organizational roles empower or create tension with others. It is hoped that the systems understanding cultivated here provides organizations, funders and scholars with a new lens into NGO engagement in marine conservation.

Roles in application

Choosing a role

Organizations choose how to engage with prioritized issues in the larger context in which behavior change must occur. While the drivers of NGO engagement discussed in Chapter 3 were raised by interviewees discussing the enabler role, they also provide a starting point for understanding how NGOs choose which role(s) to play overall.

Situations that call for an organization to decide how to engage provoke consideration of the same variables that motivate the choice of an enabling role: organizational mission, culture, and history; the context of conservation work; and the need to secure funding.

Strategic decision-making processes may drive how organizations choose a role or roles. Strategic decision-making processes are driven not only by the variables outlined above but also by iterative feedback from previous experience of all the roles discussed here. Strategic decision-making in turn drives organizational issue

prioritization, as well as choices about how to approach new or adapt existing engagement. As one respondent commented:

We go in and we decide what's the problem, and what's the perceived solution. We were concerned with overfishing [...] and we did an analysis of all the various tools from market-based work to rights-based management, and we decided that the most promising way to get fisheries reform was going to be to test the idea of putting rights-based frameworks in place. Then we laid out a plan that had a set of strategies and activities. That included multiple roles you describe here.⁸⁹

Another respondent laid out his organization's approach to grounding their approach in a holistic understanding of context:

It starts with science, always, and from the scientific breakdown you then work up a policy base. [...] It has to be rock solid, we spend the most time thinking through that, making sure that our scientific rationale is firm and our policy base is firm. [...] At that point I sit down with the team and do what I call issue mapping. Which is to write down everything that has a bearing on that goal, and then connect it up. So in the end it looks like a massive spider web, not organized in any particular way, just everything down in front of us so we can see who the decision-makers are, for example. Who are the primary audience, the people we have to influence to get the decisions-makers to do what we want them to do? The secondary audience, the ones who have to influence the primary audience? Legislation that might be relevant, key people who might be influential, government scientists, for example, or particularly influential business leaders. It could be anything. And then we start to look for pinch point, places where we can exert a disproportionate impact. [...] Through that you come up with a series of actions to take, and then you timeline those, plan out how you're actually going to do it, cost it, resource it, and then do it.⁹³

Strategic decision-making helps organizations decide what activities to engage in, and hence what role to play. It may also help frame organizational thinking about how roles empower each other and work in tandem towards a given goal.

Synergies between roles

When desired outcomes are clear, and context is understood, multiple NGO roles can be applied simultaneously to gain traction on a prioritized issue. This multi-pronged approach may be a powerful way to meet organizational goals; equally, failure to recognize the need for work on multiple fronts may hinder organizational efforts.

Advocate-Expert-Enabler

Synergies between the advocate, expert and enabler roles may help organizations working to create essential change in how populations, especially resource users, interact with marine environments. As advocates, organizations try to instill stakeholders and/or decision-makers with the will to conserve or manage sustainably. As experts, NGOs identify conservation needs, and engage in conservation science. As enablers, NGOs provide skills training and tools, fill resource needs, and make connections in order to lay the groundwork for conservation. Applied simultaneously, the advocate, expert and enabler roles may thus work in tandem to foster the will, knowledge and ability necessary for stakeholders to engage in marine conservation and management. In Madagascar, for example, Blue Ventures engages in activities including education and outreach and advocacy for formal Marine Protected Area designation; ecological and socio-economic monitoring; and capacity building, sustainable development, and institution building.³ One organization thus works on multiple fronts to create political will, collect and disseminate data, provide stakeholders with skills training, and source the funding needed for conservation.

In similar cases, application of one role without sufficient attention to others may result in NGO efforts that fail to achieve their preferred outcomes. In Fiji, extensive

scientific research representing a significant investment of NGO time and money produced results found to be of limited use to users with jurisdiction over the resource.²⁶ Providing data to stakeholders who are operating from a different set of concerns, or who are simply ill-equipped to make use of findings, may be indicative of an organizational failure to recognize the need to balance the expert, enabler and advocate roles. By soliciting and applying local concerns to help formulate research questions, providing skills training, and instituting additional education and outreach efforts, an NGO can support its expert-centered mission and help ensure that outcomes reflect the science.

Advocate-Watchdog-Enabler

An organization that enables marine conservation either by embedding itself in a community, or by coordinating interactions between stakeholders and decision-makers, builds relationships and gains the trust of many parties. These relationships and resulting goodwill may provide an organization with additional access and opportunities for advocacy. They may also allow the NGO to better watchdog by helping it to stay informed of, and have the means to address, implementation challenges.

Advocates strive to ensure that NGO priorities influence policy, while watchdogs strive to ensure that those policies continue to reflect organizational priorities through implementation. Enabling empowers advocacy through feedback between NGOs, stakeholders, and decision-makers which alters the priorities of all three sets of parties, as is illustrated in Figure 1b. By identifying and incorporating the needs of stakeholders into their own advocacy work, NGOs may expect better support from stakeholder groups. Stakeholder support may in turn strengthen the NGO's voice in the policy or management process. Finally, NGOs who have built trust and garnered goodwill through

their enabling efforts may find additional opportunities to forward their own agendas with stakeholders.

Similarly, an NGO that connects to stakeholders through enabling work may be empowered by those connections to address implementation challenges. When an NGO enabling community-based marine conservation in Mexico leveraged connections to government officials and local communities to overcome foot-dragging by resource managers,⁹¹ it provided a concrete demonstration of how enabling can empower the watchdog role.

The advocate, watchdog and enabler roles may work in tandem to inform NGO priorities and build NGO access to players and process, resulting in improved organizational ability to gain preferred outcomes.

Organizational generalists

When organizations generalize their approaches, they make use of an increasingly wide variety of roles.

[One change] we're seeing is that organizations feel like they need to have multiple sets of competencies, so that things are now becoming one-stop shops. Especially the bigger groups. As opposed to saying: 'Here's my competitive advantage, you should come to me when you need this.' [It used to be that] you went to a Greenpeace for campaigning, when you wanted a hard-hitting campaign using a whole range of tactics. Or you went to a TNC to play more the manager/expert role. But now everybody's got a communication shop, everybody's got a campaign shop, and everybody has litigation. There's been a lot of trying to pull the full skill set into a given organization. It's got its pros and cons. Not everybody can be good at everything.⁸⁹

Organizations may generalize as they strive to remain relevant or in response to funding needs. Organizational generalization may also be driven by recognition of the

ways in which roles empower each other. Roles empower each other not only through the specific dynamics described above, but also by providing organizations with the opportunity to mix “hard” and “soft” approaches.

Categorizing roles as hard or soft presents difficulties as each role covers a spectrum of practice. We may conceive of the enabler role, in particular, as soft, as an enabling NGO works in cooperation with existing systems. The watchdog role can be seen as hard, with watchdogging NGOs often setting themselves up in opposition to existing systems. But other roles are more difficult to categorize. Soft advocates may work from within to gently guide policy, while hard experts may use their expertise to vociferously critique existing management.

By employing multiple roles and a varied spectrum of practice, organizations have a wider range of approaches to a prioritized issue or a given context, and may be better able to exploit synergies between roles. Generalizing their approaches may give organizations control over both the “stick” (the threat of public censure via watchdog, hard advocacy or hard expert work) and the “carrot” (providing knowledge, funding and tools via soft expert or enabling work).

Tensions between roles

While various roles may work in synergy, they may also pull an organization in conflicting directions. Advocacy may conflict with enabling and expert work: organizations that set themselves up as neutral arbiters, or objective scientists, may encounter limits to their ability to fill those roles while also pushing for preferred outcomes.

There are a number of ways in which advocacy may conflict with enabling. Enablers, especially those at the center of stakeholder networks, may need to temper their conservation agenda in order to facilitate a process driven by multiple conflicting interests,^{86,91} making them less effective advocates. Alternatively, enabling efforts may come to be seen as manipulative and insincere by stakeholders if advocacy for NGO priorities outweighs consideration of stakeholder needs. As discussed earlier, empowering stakeholders to make their own choices may result in outcomes that do not match NGO preferences, making a successful enabling engagement a failure from the perspective of an advocate.

When policies and management decisions align with organizational preferences, there may be no tension between enabling and advocacy. However, uncomfortable dissonance between roles, with repercussions for both organizations and stakeholders, may result when enabling outcomes do not align with NGO objectives.

Similarly, tensions exist between the advocate and expert roles. The appropriate role of science and scientists in policy formulation has long been discussed in the literature. Some scientists fear that individual or organizational policy preferences or agendas may affect the objectivity of expert recommendations.²⁸ Others postulate that NGO science is no more agenda-driven than academic or industry science.¹⁷ Interviewees were also sensitive to this tension:

For years, scientists were told pretty sternly that they should not be advocates in any capacity, in any sense. And I think still there's some real concern about that. What happens to our ability to be effective if we are also advocating for a particular stance or position or policy or what have you?⁸⁶

While some NGO science undoubtedly meets the highest standards of rigor and objectivity, concerns about bias are legitimate. Biased studies provide misinformation at best, and at worst may result in poor management decisions and disenchanted decision-makers who no longer know whom to trust. The effects of advocacy agendas on the expert role are undoubtedly context and organization specific, and beg to be better understood.

Future work

This study opens many opportunities for future work. Interviews were limited to a small sample of 13 respondents; additional interviews would better inform both the typology and the understanding of the enabler role. The bias inherent in grounding a study primarily in English language websites should be addressed by applying the typology to additional non-English language NGOs, as well as to the many small organizations that do not maintain a web presence. Although interviews resulted in general agreement that the typology was complete and appropriate, larger and broader individual and organizational samples would reinforce the results gained here.

Valuable insight could be gained by correlating the above typology of roles with organizational variables, including budget, geographical scale of operations, organizational model, and mission, in order to determine what kinds of organizations play which roles. A more complete understanding of the sector's involvement in marine conservation could be gained from matching a typology of organizations with the above roles typology.

While this study does improve understanding of how NGOs enable marine conservation, it is largely centered in the organizational experience of the enabling role.

Future work should focus on the experience of those who are being enabled. Do advantages perceived to accrue to stakeholders from enabling engagement in fact do so? Is enabling useful to stakeholders?

Finally, the above typology and role description both beg the question of outcomes. Given that NGOs engage in marine conservation in these ways, what can we say about the results of that engagement? A study correlating role(s), conservation context and conservation outcomes would add a valuable layer of understanding to this first step. Similarly, the perception that enabling marine conservation leads to better, more sustainable conservation outcomes is ripe for exploration. Do perceived improvement in outcomes gained via the enabling role actually exist? While this study represents a first step towards delineating how NGOs engage in marine conservation, further research is needed to complete the picture.

Appendix 1. Organizations included in data matrix.

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Algalita Marine Research Institute | Connecticut Fund for the Environment (Save the Sound) | Greenpeace |
| America's WETLAND Foundation | Conservation International | Grey Seal Conservation Society |
| American Cetacean Society | Conservation Law Foundation | Gulf of Mexico Alliance |
| American Littoral Society | Consortium for Ocean Leadership | Environmental Education Network |
| Association of National Estuary Programs | Coral Reef Alliance | Gulf of Mexico Foundation |
| Australian Conservation Foundation | Coral Restoration Foundation | Humane Society International |
| Australian Marine Conservation Society | Core Sound Waterfowl Wetland Museum | Huntsman Marine Science Center |
| Belize Audubon Society | Cousteau Society | ICS Committee on Oceanic Research |
| Blue Ocean Institute | Danish Society for Nature Conservation | Iemanya Oceanic |
| Blue Ventures | Earthwatch Institute | International Fund for Animal Welfare |
| Bluepeace | Ecology Action Center | International Seafood Sustainability Foundation |
| Cairns and Far North Environment Center | Ecotrust | International Seakeepers Society |
| Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society | Elkhorn Slough Foundation | International Union for the Conservation of Nature |
| Casco Bay Estuary Partnership | Environmental Defense Center | Living Oceans |
| CEDENMA coalition | Escape Cord | Living Oceans Society |
| Centro de Colaboracion Civica | Europarc Deutschland | LMMA Network |
| Centro Intercultural de Estudios de Desiertos y Oceanos | Evergreen Islands | Maine Coast Heritage Trust |
| Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental | Frenchman Bay Conservancy | Marine Animal Response Society |
| Charles Darwin Foundation | Friends and Volunteers of Refuges - Florida Keys | Marine Conservation Institute |
| Chatham House | Friends of Casco Bay | Marine Conservation Society (UK) |
| Chesapeake Bay Foundation | Friends of Nature | Marine Interest Groups of SLO County |
| Citizens for a Healthy Bay | Friends of Taunton Bay | Marine Resources Council of East Florida |
| Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana | Friends of the Bay | Marine Stewardship Council |
| Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation | Friends of the Earth | MarineBio Conservation Society |
| Coastal Coalition | Friends of the San Juans Frontier | Monterey Bay Aquarium |
| Coastal Ecosystem Learning Centers | Gaia Foundation | National Audubon Society |
| COMPASS | Galapagos Conservancy | National Estuary Research Reserve Association |
| Comunidad y Bioversidad | Galliano Island Conservancy | |
| | Galveston Bay Foundation | |
| | Georgia Strait Alliance | |
| | Global Coral Reef Alliance | |
| | Global Ocean | |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| National Fish and Wildlife Foundation | Penobscot East Resource Center | SharkSavers |
| National Parks Association of Queensland | People for Puget Sound | Shore Stewards |
| National Wildlife Federation | Pew Environment Group | Sierra Club |
| Natural Resources Defense Council | PISCO | SLOSEA |
| Nature Conservancy | Plant-a-Fish | SouthEast Aquatic Resources Partnership |
| NatureServe | POORT | St. Andrews Bay Resource Management Association |
| New Venture Fund | Project AWARE | Surfrider |
| Noroeste Sustentable | Pronatura | Sustainable Conservation |
| North Carolina Coastal Federation | Queensland Conservation Council | Tampa Bay Watch |
| North Queensland Conservation Council | REEF | Taunton River Watershed Alliance |
| Northwest Straits Foundation | Reef and Rainforest Research Centre | Tillamook Estuaries Partnership |
| Ocean Alliance | ReefDoctor | Tokitae Foundation |
| Ocean Conservancy | Reefkeeper International | TurtleTrax |
| Ocean Foundation | Resource Legacy Fund | Underwater Clubs of British Columbia |
| Ocean Futures Society | Restore America's Estuaries | Waddenvereniging |
| Ocean Reef Conservation Association | Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation | Washington SCUBA Alliance |
| Oceana | Save Our Seas Foundation | Weeks Bay Foundation |
| Oceanic Society | Save the Bay (Narragansett) | Wetlands International |
| Oceans Blue Foundation | Save the Bay (San Francisco) | Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society |
| Palau Conservation Society | Scenic Galveston | WildAid |
| Palau International Coral Reef Center | Sea Shepard Conservation Society | Wildcoast |
| Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation | SeaCoast Science Center | Wildlife Conservation Society |
| Partnership for the Sounds | Seal Conservation Society | Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland |
| | SEAlliance/ Mission Blue | World Resources Institute |
| | Seas at Risk | World Wildlife Fund |
| | SeaSense | |
| | SeaTurtle.org | |
| | Seaweb | |

Appendix 2. Activities included in data matrix

| | |
|---|---|
| Advisory expertise | Grant administration/funding liaison |
| Application of legal tools | Habitat/environmental restoration |
| Bridging divides between stakeholders | Identification/proposal of protected areas |
| Collaborative process facilitation | Industry whistleblowing |
| Community event organization | Land purchase/easements |
| Conference organization | Lobbying industry |
| Conservation action plan creation | Lobbying intergovernmental organizations |
| Conservation education and outreach | Lobbying the executive |
| Creation of conservation toolkits | Lobbying the legislative |
| Creation of/training for non-extractive livelihoods | Local technical training |
| Cultivating local conservation leadership | News/area information clearinghouse |
| Development/promotion of ecotourism | Program evaluation |
| Direct action | Providing volunteer opportunities |
| Direct payments to local stakeholders | Providing conservation toolkits |
| Experiential education | Providing environmental services |
| Facilitating implementation of community based management | Providing consumer information |
| Fisheries products certification | Public advocacy |
| Funding academic research | Reserve administration or co-administration |
| Funding development projects | Scientific research |
| Funding local businesses, individuals or initiatives | Serving on advisory boards |
| Funding governmental initiatives or organizations | Sourcing funds |
| Funding other NGOs | Spatial analysis/MSP |
| Funding/organizing expeditions | Synthesis of existing data/data clearinghouse |
| | Technical/administrative assistance |

Appendix 3. Sources.

| <i>NGO</i> | Identifier | Description |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <i>A</i> | Conservation Scientist 1 | Conservation scientist coordinating international marine and coastal research and capacity building for a large, international NGO |
| <i>B</i> | Conservation Scientist 2 | Conservation scientist who built capacity for coastal management on the ground for a large, international NGO |
| <i>C</i> | Conservation Scientist 3 | Conservation scientist coordinating regional research and partnering for a large, international NGO |
| <i>D</i> | Fisheries Scientist 1 | Fisheries scientist building collaborative networks for a small, state-level fisheries NGO |
| <i>E</i> | Fisheries Scientist 2 | Fisheries scientist building enabling sustainable fisheries management for a small, national fisheries NGO |
| <i>F</i> | Strategist 1 | Marine conservation strategist for a large, international education and outreach NGO |
| <i>G</i> | Strategist 2 | Campaign strategist for a small, national marine conservation NGO |
| <i>H</i> | Facilitator 1 | Facilitator specializing in marine issues for a collaborative process NGO |
| <i>I</i> | Coordinator 1 | Coordinator and administrator for a small, national marine conservation NGO |
| <i>J</i> | Funding Representative 1 | Specialist in marine fisheries for a charitable foundation |
| <i>K</i> | Funding Representative 2 | Specialist in domestic marine conservation for a charitable foundation |
| <i>A₁</i> | Observer 1 | Observer and partner of a large, international NGO's engagement in on-the-ground marine conservation |
| <i>L</i> | Observer 2 | Observer and researcher of a small, domestic NGO's engagement in on-the-ground marine conservation and network creation |

Appendix 4. Organizational interview protocol.

Typology:

1. I generated the typology I sent you from a survey of 65 case studies and vignettes of marine ecosystem-based management, as well as website and literature review. Did you have a chance to look it over? What is your reaction to it? Is there anything you would **add or change**?

NGO roles in marine conservation:

2. How does your organization **choose what role to play** when pursuing marine conservation objectives? What factors do you consider?

3. Has your approach to marine conservation **changed over time**?

4. Is your organization's, or NGOs' in general, involvement in marine conservation on the rise? Why?

Enabler role:

5. I'd like to drill down a little into what I've termed the "enabler" role, which seems especially interesting. When organizations commit to "enabling" – capacity building, network creation and sustainable development activities, for example – **what gaps are they filling**? Why do such gaps exist?

6. Do you see more of this kind of work in the marine sphere than in terrestrial conservation? Why might that be? **What's different about marine conservation**?

7. Do you see an increase in capacity building and similar activities **through time**? Is this a bigger part of your portfolio than it used to be?

8. Are there certain types of initiatives or locations in which this type of work is your **go-to strategy**?

9. How does capacity building align with or challenge your **organization's mission**?

10. Are there unique **advantages** to playing a role that focuses on indirectly accomplishing conservation goals through empowering others or filling the gaps identified earlier?

11. What matters most to your **ability to be effective**?

12. What **challenges** arise? Are there unique disadvantages to working this way?

13. Does playing this role **constrain your organization** from pursuing other strategies in a given initiative? What about in general?
14. How do you **decide when** to take this approach? What factors influence your choice to pursue an enabling strategy?
15. How do you **contact and build relationships** with communities, organizations or governments in order to engage in capacity building?
16. What does the **process** look like then? How does “enabling marine conservation” work in practice? Does the process change between contexts?
17. How do people, organizations and institutions **react** to an NGO that pursues an enabler role? What kinds of expectations do they have? Do reactions change between contexts?
18. How do you **measure success** when engaging in what seems to be “behind the scenes” capacity building or sustainable development work? How do you know when to stop? What happens then?
19. How do **funders** react to the enabler role? How do their expectations affect your work?

Finishing Up

19. Is there anything else you’d like to add?
20. What other organizations do you know of that are doing this kind of work? Is there **anyone else** you would suggest that I talk to?

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