

CSR in Environmental Protection and Human Development: Two Different but Complementary Objectives.

Twenty miles off the North coast of Honduras are a group of islets and keys known as Cayos Cochinos (Hog Keys). Though small and geographically unprotected from the storms coming through the Caribbean Sea, the keys are an important economic hub for three Garifuna artisanal fishing communities. The Garifuna, descendants of survivors of a wrecked slave ship and local Arawak Indians, have been designated by the United Nations as a World Heritage Culture and maintain a distinct identity which can be seen in the language, traditions, and livelihood of the people. Unfortunately, they are also a population struggling with all of the challenges of extreme poverty such as access to healthcare and education, as well as, the complexities of being a racial minority. The Garifuna communities in Cayos Cochinos are

actually based in the coastal villages of Nueva Armenia, Sambo Creek and Rio Esteban and have permanent fishing villages on the Keys in Chahuahuate, Bolaños and East End respectively. There, they fish the waters as their forefathers have done for generations.

Cayos Cochinos

Between 1998 and 2002 the Inter-American Foundation committed US\$303,000 to the Cayos Cochinos Foundation. Counterpart funding from a variety of sources, including Honduran businesses and the Avina Foundation total US\$660,700 for this particular program.

*The scope of the Cayos Cochinos Foundation's activities goes beyond IAF funded projects.

Beginning in the early 1990's, there has been significant interest in the Keys from an environmental standpoint. Both the Honduran private sector and the Honduran government are interested in the Keys' endangered species as well as the surrounding coral reefs that exhibit some of the best biodiversity in Central America. In 1992, the Smithsonian Institute completed a study that found threats to the local environment to include: storms, commercial fishing operations, the demands of indigenous fishing, wildlife collectors and sporadic tourist activity. The study concluded that a proactive management plan restricting human activity would eventually repair the damage. The study did not contemplate, however, a specific strategy for limiting local human activity or more importantly, the needs of the Garifuna. At about the same time, the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil was generating new interest in public and private sector involvement in environmental conservation and restoration.

Corporate Involvement.

Both national and international private sector interest in the area converged in 1992 to create a strategy of collective action for the long-term environmental sustainability of Cayos Cochinos. In order to manage the Keys and its surrounding areas, the Cayos Cochinos Foundation was established. The organization is capitalized jointly by

members of the private sector including multinational businesses and institutions such as Texaco and the Avina Foundation, as well as, a dozen representatives of national Honduran businesses. Before the Foundation could begin its activities, it had to be given jurisdiction over the area. Several corporate representatives spearheaded political support by lobbying the Honduran government to create laws designating Cayos Cochinos as a national park. This was first mandated by presidential decree, and will soon become law.

Why did corporations in Honduras, a country with little CSR culture, commit to such a long-term, complicated undertaking? Despite little tradition of CSR, the concept of corporations coming together to lobby government and create a Foundation is recognized as an extremely innovative endeavor in Honduras. Additionally, the international attention and support that Cayos Cochinos has received from the Inter-American Foundation (IAF), Avina Foundation, and World Wildlife Fund, as well as the Honduran National government, created a level of prestige in being associated with the project. Finally, members of the Foundation's Board all have an individual interest and dedication to the preservation of the environment which resulted in the Foundation becoming fully operational within a very short timeframe.

The Project and Results.

Today, the Cayos Cochinos Foundation represents a model of companies bringing together resources, community input, political will, and scientific study. Getting to this point, however, was not without challenges. As it was originally conceived, the Foundation solely dedicated itself to the scientific study and environmental preservation of the area.

The Foundation's initial position, as suggested by the Smithsonian study, was to restrict human activity in an effort to preserve the bio-diversity in the Keys. This resulted in friction with the local communities who subsist on fishing. It quickly became evident that without the support of the people who lived on the Keys, the program could not succeed. By focusing only on the scientific aspects of the Keys, the Foundation separated the mutually dependent activities of the community and the health of the ecosystem. The Foundation later learned that the socio-economic position of the Garifuna is critical to the success of managing the reserve and that local buy-in was at risk if the community was not involved in the Foundation's planning process.

The Foundation's philosophy today reflects the intrinsic role of community in its projects. Through its partnership with the IAF, the Foundation learned a valuable tool in managing community development programs: participation. This fundamental transition is exemplified in several of the programs managed by the Foundation.

Consider one of the Foundation's early ventures: the construction of a scientific research and observation station on Cayo Menor. The facility runs on solar energy and has lodging facilities, a computer center, and a marine laboratory. Initially only Foundation staff, several scientists, and a few members of the Honduran Navy lodged here to patrol the waters of Cayos Cochinos and ensure compliance with fishing controls. Today the environmental management of Cayos Cochinos is integrated with community

participation. Several of the Garifuna fishermen are employed as park rangers and reside at the station along with Foundation and naval staff. Their job is to monitor activities in the protected zones, educate people about policies protecting the Keys, and lend their unique expertise of the area to assist in the management of the reserve.

Educational programs that take advantage of the extraordinary natural setting are jointly developed and taught by the Foundation and Garifuna educators to local school children. One such program is the involvement of the students in raising and eventually releasing endangered species of sea turtles. Other initiatives include capacity building exercises such as micro-enterprise development, exchange visits with artisanal fishermen in other countries, and a successful grassroots lobbying effort with the national government.

The Role of the IAF.

On the surface, IAF funds were used to support activities that addressed community needs and priorities, supplemental to the Foundation's environmental objectives. Potable water, radio communications, and health/first aid projects were carried out. The IAF's most valuable contribution, however, was to work with the Foundation on building the communities' capacity to manage, design, and implement its own projects. In the case of Cayos Cochinos, this was one factor that encouraged projects that develop human capacity in addition to basic infrastructure needs.

Lessons Learned:

- Corporations that wish to support community development often find themselves acting in concert with other international and national donor organizations all pursuing development from many angles. This can be a double-edged sword if project goals and coordination are not managed well;
- CSR programs that deal with community development must be prepared to commit for the long term. Having institutions with personnel dedicated to the program is key for stability...both from the company's perspective and the community's;
- Communities are complex systems. CSR programs must be clearly articulated to local communities and a mechanism for feedback from all involved partners must be set in place.

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