



Credit: Juan Pablo Moreiras/FFI

SUPPORTING CONSERVATION OF BELIZE'S MAYA GOLDEN LANDSCAPE A HALCYON LAND & SEA CASE STUDY

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) and Ya'axché Conservation Trust (Ya'axché) have been working together since 1998 to secure a vital wildlife corridor in Belize's Toledo district. Known as the Maya Golden Landscape, this corridor stretches from the Maya Mountains to the Caribbean Sea, and represents one of the last unbroken stretches of broadleaf forest in Central America. Beginning with the purchase of two vital parcels of land in the corridor, the initiative

went on to bring other key sites under conservation management, and engaged with communities in management of the wider landscape through a sustainable livelihoods programme. 2018 marks 20 years since the founding of Ya'axché, and we look back over the last two decades to share our achievements and lessons learnt, both from the project and the development of a long-term partnership.



Credit: Juan Pablo Moreiras/FFI

“Because of FFI’s initial purchase of Parcels 1 and 2 [of the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve], Ya’axché’s appointment as co- manager of Bladen and Maya Mountain North Forest Reserve, and integrated management of the Golden Stream Private Protected Lands, the Maya Golden Landscape is one of the few remaining areas in Belize where rivers still meet the sea unimpeded, providing an invaluable wildlife corridor. Specifically, much of the biodiversity in the Maya Golden Landscape has been preserved through FFI’s support of Ya’axché in developing effective Maya Golden Landscape programmes which help to control hunting, illegal extraction of forest products (timber, Xate, gold), slash and burn land clearance, and watershed destruction (dams)”.

From an independent review of FFI’s Halcyon Land & Sea and Halcyon Marine Initiatives for the Arcadia Fund, conducted by Michael P. Wells & Associates

BACKGROUND

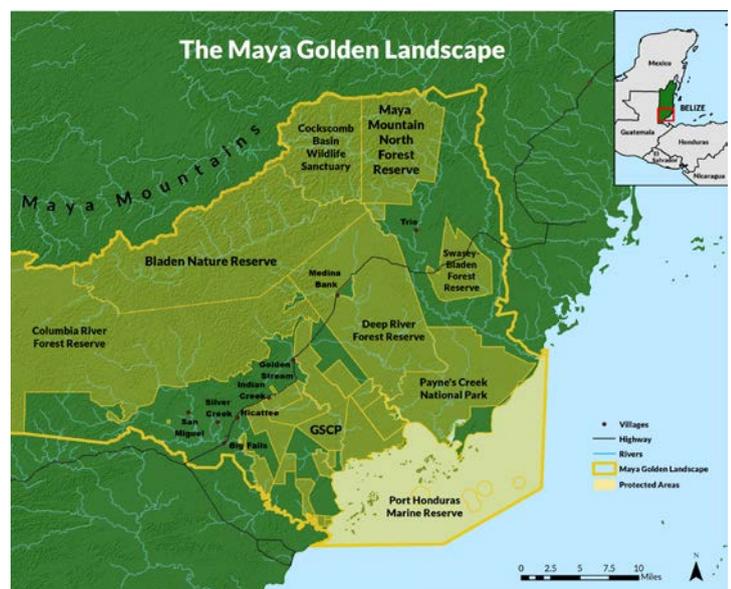
The Golden Stream watershed in Toledo district, southern Belize, forms one of Central America's last unbroken stretches of broadleaf forest. The forests extend all the way from the Maya Mountains in the west to the Caribbean Sea, forming a key link in the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor. The area is located within the Mesoamerican hotspot for species diversity, and hosts one of the world's richest assemblages of biodiversity. Amongst these are several globally threatened species, all five of Central America's cat species, and many other near-threatened species including Baird's tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*), Central American spider monkeys (*Ateles geoffroyi*), Yucatan howler monkey (*Alouatta pigra*), West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*), harpy eagle (*Harpia harpyja*) and Hicatee river turtle (*Deratemys mawii*). The forests also play a crucial role in watershed protection. They preserve the quality of the water draining onto the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef and provide water for local communities and large agricultural areas on the coastal plain.

By 1998, the Maya Mountains had already been severely deforested outside of Belize, particularly in eastern Guatemala, a trend that continues to this day. Remaining forests were threatened by commercial logging, clearing for agriculture and hunting. Forests within Belize, whilst relatively intact in the 1990s, faced a growing suite of pressures, with the area surrounding Golden Stream in particular recognised to be highly threatened. The paving of the Southern Highway through Toledo District had resulted in increasing demand for land in southern Belize, particularly for the citrus and shrimp industries. Critically, the location of the Southern Highway and associated forest degradation and clearance was set to sever one of the last remaining ecological corridors that connected the Maya Mountains to the Belizean coast. In addition to the threat of land clearance for commercial industries, timber extraction was increasing, targeting a number of valuable hardwood species, and also threatening the viability of remaining areas for supporting medium and large carnivores.

Toledo is home to Belize's most marginalised and poorest rural communities, including the majority of the country's indigenous Maya population, a particularly disadvantaged group that is highly vulnerable to poverty. Maya have traditionally collected medicinal herbs, thatch and timber from the forests and fished the rivers, in addition to practising subsistence agriculture. In the late 1990s, Maya communities in Toledo District were fighting for indigenous land rights in the midst of the building of the Southern Highway, and in the face of the provision of a logging licence by the government to a non-Belizean

company, which was indiscriminately logging a forest that Mayan communities used for subsistence. In addition, there was concern over the sustainability of existing and/or traditional natural resource use practices adopted by rural Mayan communities in Toledo district for their livelihoods and well-being (slash-and-burn farming and the uncontrolled use of fire, excessive use of agrochemicals and the cultivation of riverbanks and steep slopes), and their impacts on biodiversity and watershed services.

In 1998, FFI was approached by a newly formed community-based organisation composed of a group of Mayan individuals (later to develop into Ya'axché Conservation Trust), for support with purchasing a parcel of land within the Golden Stream watershed that was up for sale. Without intervention, the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve (GSCP) was destined for conversion; a developer already owning extensive shrimp and citrus operations in the area had approached the landowner with an offer to purchase the land parcel. Two areas adjacent to the available land parcel were already being given conservation status: the Maya Mountains Forest Reserve and the Port Honduras Marine Reserve. Securing and protecting the land area between these two reserves would create a corridor of protected areas along the Golden Stream watershed, which would join the upper regions of the Maya Mountains to coastal waters in southern Belize.



Map showing the land parcels and protected areas making up the Maya Golden Landscape in Belize's Toledo district. FFI purchased the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve (GSCP) in 1998. Credit: Ya'axché Conservation Trust

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

In 1998, with support from Halcyon Land & Sea, FFI purchased an area of 3,866 ha surrounding the Golden Stream, with subsequent purchases in the period up to 2004 increasing this to 6,070 ha. Ownership of these lands was passed to Ya'axché Conservation Trust, with the aim to sustainably manage the forest corridor to promote biodiversity conservation and enhance sustainable development and livelihood opportunities among rural indigenous communities living in and around the Golden Stream watershed.

This strategic intervention has effectively protected the entire Golden Stream watershed – which is now conserved from the Maya Mountains down to the coast of Belize. Monitoring of satellite images showed no further conversion of forest to agricultural production within the GSCP between 2010 and 2012. This contrasted with high deforestation rates observed outside the GSCP on community lands and in state-managed protected areas over the same period. The community-based organisation developed into an NGO, Ya'axché Conservation Trust (Ya'axché), and took on full responsibility for management of the GSCP from 2002. Monitoring undertaken by Ya'axché in the GSCP demonstrates its continued biodiversity value, with at least 300 species of bird, 74 species of bats, 25 species of fish, 94 species of reptiles and 28 species of amphibians recorded to date. The GSCP also supports all five of Central America's big cat species, including jaguar (*Panthera onca*, Near Threatened).

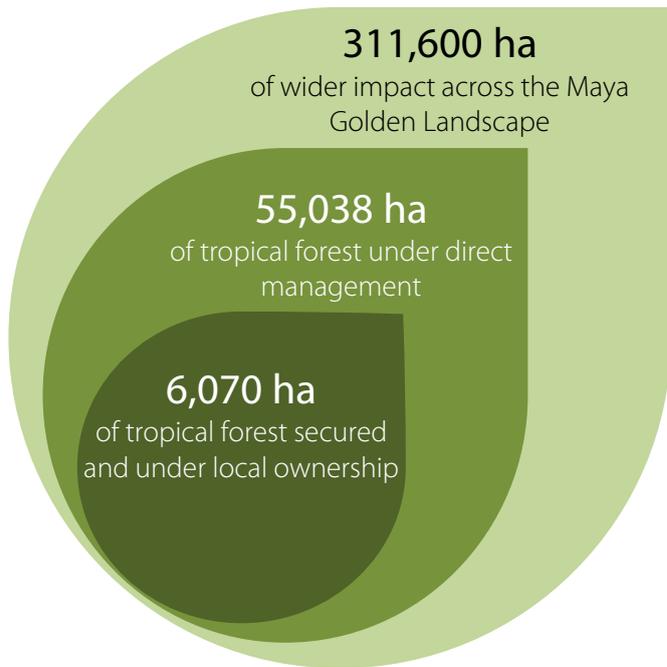
Ya'axché has grown into an effective grass-roots organisation, recognised nationally for its expertise on protected area and integrated landscape management. Ya'axché's reputation led to its appointment as co-manager of two state protected areas (Bladen Nature Reserve from 2008, and Maya Mountain North Forest Reserve from 2015). Key target species within these areas include Honduran rosewood (*Dalbergia stevensonii*, Endangered), a high-value timber species found predominantly in Belize and threatened by illegal logging. Ya'axché has brought these areas under increasingly effective management through a combination of regular patrols, biodiversity monitoring and research, outreach activities and strategic advocacy. Ya'axché's rangers are considered some of the best trained in the country, their experience and expertise underpinning the organisation's lead role in developing the National Ranger Training Academy.

Ya'axché has always remained rooted in the communities from which it grew. The organisation has retained staff from communities in and around the Maya Golden Landscape in its ranger team and core staff, as well as having three community representatives on its board of directors. Ya'axché's agroforestry programme, part of an initiative to promote more sustainable land-use planning and practices in the region, is its most successful and enduring livelihoods initiative, and currently engages over 100 farming families across six communities. Organic cacao-based agroforestry remains the principal farming system promoted, along with organic vegetable production and bee-keeping. The programme is also helping farmers transition to more climate-smart and environmentally friendly farming practices that will not only help decrease deforestation but also support the livelihoods of the farmers in the Maya Golden Landscape. An additional component to Ya'axché's livelihoods and outreach programme has been its scholarship scheme, established in response to community requests to provide financial assistance to students to subsidise their high school costs, and in recognition of the importance of education in bringing about positive change and community empowerment.

The commitment and achievements of Ya'axché staff have been recognised nationally and internationally, with Ya'axché's former Executive Director, Lisel Alamilla, serving as Minister of Forestry, Fisheries & Sustainable Development from 2012 to 2015. Most recently, it is Ya'axché's current Executive Director, Christina Garcia, who is being recognised for her experience and expertise with her recent appointment to the board of directors for the Protected Areas Conservation Trust – soon to be the most powerful decision-making body on matters relating to protected areas in Belize.

Today, FFI holds a seat on Ya'axché's board of directors, and continues to provide technical inputs, capacity building and fundraising support through FFI's UK team, but at a significantly reduced level compared to earlier years. Ya'axché has a considerably diversified funding base that has enabled the further development of its strategic objectives through both the protected areas management and community outreach and livelihoods programmes.

OUR IMPACT: 20 YEARS OF CONSERVATION IN THE MAYA GOLDEN LANDSCAPE



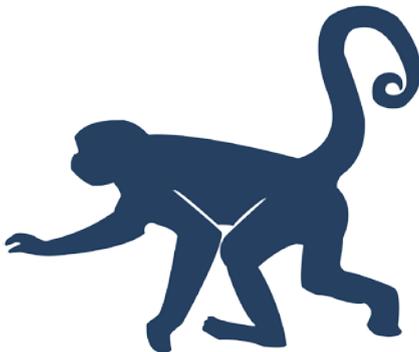
SITES UNDER MORE SECURE MANAGEMENT



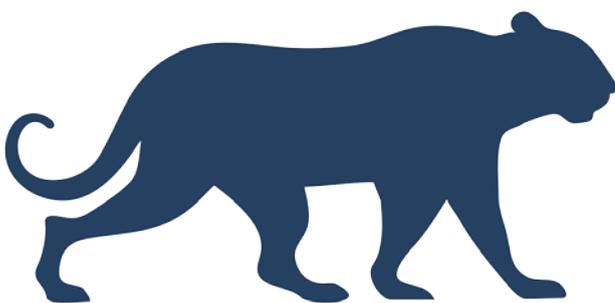
Since purchase of the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve: no conversion of forest to agricultural production, contrasting with high deforestation rates on surrounding lands

KEY SPECIES PROTECTED AND RECOVERING

2014: howler monkeys return to the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve, after an absence of 13 years following Hurricane Iris



2011: harpy eagles, thought to be extinct in Belize, discovered nesting in Bladen Nature Reserve



The Golden Stream Corridor Preserve continues to provide a refuge for all five of Central America's wild cat species, including jaguar



Since 2016: zero rosewood logging in Golden Stream Corridor Preserve & Maya Mountain North Forest Reserve

INCREASED CAPACITY OF A LOCAL INSTITUTION



2 conservation awards have put the remarkable work of Ya'axché and its talented staff in the international spotlight

Ya'axché has increased the proportion of its funds sourced independently of FFI year on year



2009



2012



2016

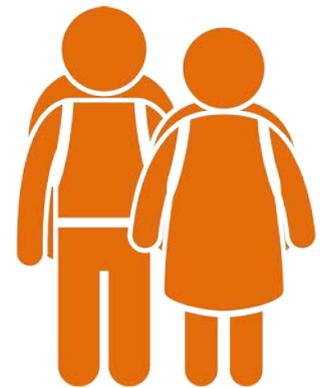
LOCAL COMMUNITIES ENGAGED AND SUPPORTED

OVER 100

farming families across six communities engaged in Ya'axché's agroforestry programme, generating income and supporting household nutrition.



135



students (64 girls and 71 boys) have been supported through Ya'axché's scholarship programme

"My view of the environment has changed a lot. At first, I did a lot of slash-and-burn. Thanks to the training I have received, I now know how to protect my forests as well as earn a living." Felipe Bah, cacao farmer.

LESSONS LEARNT

With nearly 20 years' engagement in conservation in southern Belize, FFI has a significant timescale from which to reflect on what it has learnt through its partnership with Ya'axché, and a programme of work that has seen the partnership go from the protection of a strategically situated private protected area to the integrated management of a considerably larger landscape. This section highlights some key lessons learnt from FFI's perspective. It is based on interviews with FFI staff – past and present – who have been engaged with the FFI-Ya'axché partnership and FFI's involvement in conservation in Belize since 1998.

THE FFI-YA'AXCHÉ PARTNERSHIP: A MODEL OF PARTNERSHIP FOR CONSERVATION

Maintaining an effective partnership is an ongoing process. Partnerships have to be allowed to develop and adapt over time. The FFI-Ya'axché partnership is a remarkable demonstration of the living, learning and growing nature of partnerships, and the evolution of a strong and highly effective relationship that has been built on and nurtured through mutual trust and respect. The partnership has evolved from extremely close collaboration, working together day-to-day on the ground, to a more strategic, high-level collaboration with technical, advisory and fundraising support provided remotely. Some of this transition has occurred organically, and some has required more active relationship management. For example, by the end of the first decade of partnership, during which FFI been closely involved in the organisational development of Ya'axché, as well as providing day-to-day operational advice and mentoring, both organisations recognised that Ya'axché had

established itself so effectively in southern Belize that there was a need to review the shape of the partnership. Maintaining such a close working relationship ran the risk of undermining Ya'axché's reputation as an independent organisation, as in Belize the two organisations had begun to be perceived as a single entity. A partnership review undertaken at the end of this first decade underpinned the development of a new kind of partnership, one that saw both organisations work to strengthen Ya'axché's independent profile and sustainability. FFI stepping back gave Ya'axché the opportunity to demonstrate and grow its capabilities in new ways, and the organisation has since gone from strength to strength. Experience of the FFI-Ya'axché partnership points to the value of undertaking periodic reviews for continued strong partner relationships.

Building strong organisations requires time and varied approaches. FFI believes that cultivating resilient conservation organisations in areas of high biodiversity is one of the most effective means of making a lasting contribution to conservation. Yet many organisations have a crisis in their first decade, some terminally. This may result from a funding shortfall, change in leadership or lack of focus. Many others simply need extra resources, expertise or objective external mentoring to help them realise their full potential. The evolution of the FFI-Ya'axché partnership encapsulates some of the many challenges faced by nascent organisations in the early phase of their development and highlights some of the varied ways in which FFI works to help build strong organisations that are able to realise their own conservation goals.

Credit: Chloe Wells/FFI





Credit: Chloe Wells/FFI

Persistence has been key. That FFI has remained committed to its partnership with Ya'axché over time and has been able to respond at times of crisis, and to step back when appropriate, has been one of several critical factors that have enabled Ya'axché to endure the rollercoaster of organisational development and to emerge from some of the more challenging points in its history as a stronger, more resilient and ambitious organisation. FFI's long-term approach in turn relies on a diverse and flexible funding base to give it the ability to provide strategic financial support and long-term mentoring as required.

Individuals matter. In the early days of the partnership there were numerous changes in key staff at FFI, resulting in a lack of continuity of leadership for FFI's work in Belize and its partnership with Ya'axché, with each new lead bringing very different ideas and approaches. Since 2006, FFI has been able to ensure that the partnership is overseen and managed by a named individual, underpinned by joint long-term strategic planning. Moreover, it has been the dedicated and passionate individuals that have worked for FFI and Ya'axché who have been the life force behind the partnership over the years, spurring it into new phases of development, upholding the principles upon which the partnership is based and fighting for the partnership and its shared objectives even in the most challenging times.

Resourcing the partnership has proved challenging. A key problem throughout the partnership has been limited resources for FFI to provide the desired level of support and commitment to Ya'axché. It has been particularly difficult to raise funds to cover the role that FFI plays in institutional strengthening of its partners, and yet this is where FFI staff have dedicated most time given its central role in delivering long-term biodiversity conservation outcomes. The challenge of raising donor funding for FFI's brand of long-term support to the partnership has at times resulted in a reliance on FFI's limited unrestricted funding base.

Improving internal communications within FFI and Ya'axché, as well as between the two organisations, has proven essential in maintaining a strong and functional relationship that is relevant, appropriately resourced – addressing current and future needs. As with all organisations there have been periods when the level of consultation and communication within and between the organisations has fallen short of expectations. This has been particularly apparent in the process of proposal development. Resultant project funding, though well intentioned on all sides, has in some cases put pressure on staff to deliver activities that were not fully aligned with current and future plans.

To address this issue at FFI, arrangements were put in place to have a more coordinated approach to supporting Ya'axché with funding proposals. Ya'axché also made considerable progress in strengthening internal coordination and communication, for example through greater integration of the financial management and development functions within the organisation. Both partners committed to maintaining frequent remote communications, and increased exchange visits between Belize and the UK. These visits have fostered broader interaction between FFI and Ya'axché staff, a greater understanding of the work and needs on the ground, and the capacity of both organisations to provide support.

Accurately attributing work has always been a key part of building and maintaining a partner relationship. However, it can be challenging to represent the respective contributions of either partner, particularly when reporting on outputs and outcomes at an institutional level, and the important distinction between attribution and contribution can easily become blurred. The same applies when working with communities and other stakeholders.

Institutional capacity building is vital. Efforts to strengthen Ya'axché's institutional capacity gained momentum in 2006 through the development of the organisation's first strategic plan. However, it wasn't until 2008, ten years after our initial engagement, that FFI began placing far more emphasis on institutional capacity building, strategic planning and financial sustainability rather than fundraising for activities alone (reflecting a step change in the relationship with Ya'axché as it became more independent). This highlights an important lesson for FFI at the time: that establishing a programme of institutional capacity development is at least as important as (and arguably more so than) supporting field activities and raising funds for them. FFI has since recognised and placed a strong emphasis on the importance of institutional capacity building and providing support to partners with organisational processes such as strategic planning, financial management and planning, as well as mentoring and supporting professional development of partner staff.

Working with an NGO that has its own strong identity, and a somewhat different mission from FFI, is a real strength of the partnership. Ya'axché is managing a far greater area today than was envisaged at the outset of the project, has contributed to building conservation capacity nationally and has proven its ability to support conservation objectives beyond the areas it manages. Ya'axché has gained a lot of legitimacy locally, and with the government, and has worked hard to expand its network across the region. If Ya'axché had been more dependent on and subordinate to FFI and FFI's mission, it would not be the strong and independent partner it is today. Having independent identities further ensures that the partner organisations are not jeopardised when one organisation adopts a stance the other cannot. For example, as a Belizean organisation Ya'axché was able to take an activist role against a government decision

relating to a hydropower development in Bladen Nature Reserve. This is something FFI could not have done. Similarly, the moratorium and CITES listing of rosewood exemplified what can be achieved by a local NGO with links to on-the-ground conservation, scientific credentials and good working relations with government.

Just as FFI worked to build Ya'axché's organisational and individual staff capacity, today Ya'axché is supporting a number of community groups to build their own organisational and technical capacity, undertaking joint fundraising and supporting their efforts to secure funds independently. The partnership model and capacity building process have come full circle, and the fact that Ya'axché is playing such an important role in southern Belize is testament to the maturity of the organisation and to its history of partnership with FFI.

SECURING LAND FOR CONSERVATION THROUGH LAND PURCHASE

Pre-conditions for making land purchase for conservation effective. The GSCP was one of FFI's first land purchases, and provided valuable lessons for FFI in regard to land purchase arrangements in different countries. Whilst land purchase for protecting highly threatened areas can be contentious and isn't always the right approach, there are cases when it can be the best route to achieving long-term conservation impact. The land purchase conducted through our partnership with Ya'axché was a positive example of this. In this situation land tenure was clear, the drive came from Ya'axché as a locally-based organisation and was supported by some local leaders, and there was an urgency to secure the already privately owned parcel before its almost inevitable purchase (and subsequent clearance) by developers.

Photo credit: Juan Pablo Moreiras/FFI



In addition, Ya'axché had a solid understanding of the socio-ecological context and was ready to take on the ownership and management of the land at the earliest opportunity. These conditions are not always present, and it is important to fully consider the risks associated with land purchase, and to recognise that in some cases it may not be the best approach. For example where multi-layered land tenure and resource use rights are complex and/or unclear, or where the concept of ownership is very different to that in western culture and legislation. Even in the case of GSCP some aspects of land use arrangements were not fully appreciated at the outset and, as the landowners, Ya'axché has encountered resistance over the years. FFI therefore recommends that alternative tenure and management arrangements for the area of interest should always be fully considered before opting for land purchase. In cases where land purchase is determined to be an appropriate conservation strategy after all other options have been evaluated, FFI's experience in Belize highlights the value of understanding the socio-ecological context, transferring ownership to local management at the earliest opportunity and of developing a realistic and context-appropriate strategy for engaging local communities from the outset.

If land is purchased there must be a long-term commitment to, and financing strategy for, the ongoing management of the area. Whilst having funding dedicated to land acquisition alone is very helpful, and in the case of Ya'axché was pivotal, there is a risk around sustainability and responsibility of conservation management in the long term. It is imperative that this is factored in when making decisions around land purchases. Experience shows that ongoing management costs, land taxes, and the operational costs of the management agency are often under-budgeted, putting considerable strain on the organisation responsible for managing the area.

Often land purchases come up as now or never opportunities; over time FFI has learnt the consequences of engagement and the need for careful and comprehensive consideration of potential risks and the length of commitment required. Budgets need to be comprehensive and realistic, and must be revisited, with financing strategies adapted accordingly. Through experiences such as the Golden Stream purchase, FFI has learnt to be more aware of the challenges of bringing in site maintenance funds for the long term, and of having in place a long-term (20+ years) yet flexible plan. Over time we have seen land purchase donors come to recognise the reality of this, and in some cases they have proved willing to fund the sustainability of the site's operations, and to cover the fixed costs of ongoing management.

WORKING WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Investing in building relationships with local communities has been vital. Ya'axché places a very strong emphasis on community outreach work – beginning from its origins as a community-based organisation. This is fundamental to the way it works has become increasingly so. It has earned community support over a long period of time, navigating through periods of discontent and conflict with particular individuals or communities, maintaining consistent engagement and delivering tangible benefits. This has been pivotal in Ya'axché getting where it is today. The importance of establishing and maintaining strong stakeholder relations, and navigating the inevitable ups and downs in those relationships, is paramount in delivering conservation outcomes in many of the contexts in which we work. FFI has an important role to play in supporting its partners to develop and maintain those relationships – for example through building partner capacity in participatory processes and conflict resolution.

Partnerships and projects must be locally relevant.

Ya'axché's original name - Golden Stream Corridor Preserve NGO - was inappropriate. The name focused on the protection of the newly established preserve but had little resonance with the Mayan communities living in and around the GSCP, and further risked alienating the communities with whom the project intended to work closely. The change in brand to Ya'axché Conservation Trust was highly significant in this regard. Ya'axché is the Mopan Maya name for Ceiba petandra, a sacred tree of Maya, which linked ixbalba (the underworld) to the heavens and thus has symbolic significance to the Mayan communities. After Hurricane Iris hit in 2001 the huge ceiba trees were the only trees left standing, thanks to their deep roots and strong trunks, making them highly visible landmarks in southern Belize, and a powerful symbol for the organisation. The adoption of the ceiba as the logo for the NGO was based on direct consultation with local Mayan community members — and the logo itself based on the traditional Mayan glyph for the tree. Improving understanding of what Mayan communities living around the GSCP wanted and cared about in the project, and how they would use the area to benefit local sustainable agriculture, was a pivotal part of the process. Ya'axché's decision several years later to refer to the organisation as Ya'axché rather than YCT further served to strengthen the emphasis on the organisation's relevance to the communities in and around the GSCP and wider Maya Golden Landscape. The research that informed this rebranding contributed to wider thinking in FFI, and was summarised in a paper on the importance of locally relevant flagships in conservation ([Bowen-Jones & Entwistle, 2002](#)).



Credit: Evan Bowen-Jones/FFI

Sometimes apparent setbacks open up new opportunities. In 2001, the category four Hurricane Iris flattened a large proportion of the forest in and around the GSCP, and subsequent fires caused further deforestation. The impact of the hurricane forced FFI and Ya'axché to re-think their strategy in the Golden Stream watershed. Reduced standing forest and therefore forest cover in the GSCP jeopardised the original project aim of maintaining a corridor of high-quality forest habitat, but this prompted FFI and Ya'axché to think more about the wider landscape and the importance of shifting to a broader landscape approach to achieve conservation objectives in southern Belize. There was also an urgent need to provide assistance to the indigenous Mayan communities in Toledo whose livelihoods had been almost or completely destroyed by the impacts of the hurricane. It was in the aftermath of Hurricane Iris that Ya'axché's community outreach and livelihoods programme was established, initially through supporting communities to rebuild their livelihoods and encouraging sustainable forest management practices, such as agroforestry, that would promote active reforestation of the area, more sustainable use of resources, and the realisation of multiple forest values. Today, Ya'axché's livelihoods programme and in particular its agroforestry initiative is one of the longest-running and successful parts of the project.

Adaptive management in this case meant FFI and Ya'axché were able to have a more wide-reaching impact in the region, in spite of the setbacks caused by Hurricane Iris. At

the same time, Ya'axché's effective management of the GSCP for conservation supported its recovery post-hurricane. The return of howler monkeys to the GSCP in 2014 for the first time since Hurricane Iris was an encouraging indicator of forest recovery and habitat quality within the GSCP.

Importantly, the decision to promote an integrated and more holistic approach to landscape planning and management has enabled the partnership, through the work of Ya'axché, to effect change in support of biodiversity conservation across a much larger area. Ya'axché has become one of FFI's strongest partners in addressing the dual objectives of sustainable development and biodiversity conservation. The experience in Belize and learning generated through Ya'axché's integrated landscape management approach has informed FFI's work more broadly, and the development of landscape-level approaches across its portfolio. For example, FFI has been taking an integrated landscape approach to manage the impacts of the oil & gas sector in the La Guajera region of Colombia: working with the Indigenous Waiu People, the oil and gas company and other key stakeholders has resulted in an inclusive and consensus-driven suite of options for livelihoods development and biodiversity conservation.

FUNDING AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Forward and succession planning needs to be

accounted for alongside implementation. Following the closure of a large multilateral-funded project in 2010, Ya'axché found itself with inadequate funds to maintain the scale and scope of its operations. The multilateral grant, by its very nature, absorbed all the time of the team employed on the project for implementation, with the focus being on delivery of project objectives rather than sustainability and the ongoing legacy of the project. Budgeting failed to tangibly build in the real staff time required for developing sustainability. This reflects restrictions on the grant itself, but also points to the need to identify and secure the right type of co-financing for large grants such as this. With staff dedicated to the management and implementation of the multilateral project, attention was diverted from active fundraising.

The dependencies created through implementation of such a large and highly prescriptive grant also made succession planning difficult for FFI and Ya'axché, particularly in terms of how Ya'axché would cope, evolve and prioritise following the end of such a sizeable project grant. The administrative demands of the multilateral grant were also not well suited to NGO execution. Nevertheless, for Ya'axché, experience gained in managing such a large project and effectively navigating turbulent times post-project closure has made it a stronger, more experienced and resilient organisation with demonstrated tenacity and capability that earned it the management of the state-owned Bladen Nature Reserve. Ya'axché is also now better able to deal with challenges that come its way and the organisation has actively worked to avoid a repeat of the post-multilateral grant scenario.

Sustainable financing of an organisation ideally needs to be separate from social development and conservation objectives.

Important lessons have been learnt through the trialling of various business ventures and collaboration with business experts. Building on the recommendations of past reviews and with experience gained through working with other enterprises and consultancies, Ya'axché has developed a separate business arm to establish sustainable financing enterprises. The Ya'axché Institute for Conservation and Education (YICE) was legally incorporated in 2014 to function as an umbrella for Ya'axché's business ventures, which currently include an ecotourism initiative, formalising tree nursery sales, capacity building sessions, and consultancies. The need to separate the social development objectives that underpin Ya'axché's Community Outreach and Livelihoods programme from the organisation's own financial sustainability goals has been recognised and is being clearly addressed in the development of YICE.

Enterprise development requires business expertise and sufficient resourcing.

FFI and Ya'axché historically attempted to develop community livelihood and sustainable financing enterprises as an offshoot to their core business of conservation and without the necessary level of business expertise and resourcing required. Limited resources (financial and technical) for marketing and distribution have further constrained potential for some enterprises, especially organic produce, woodwork production and early tourism ventures. External factors, including Toledo's geographical remoteness and social isolation, poor market access and small local outlets for production, and inadequate social and physical infrastructure, have also limited progress of many community-based ventures that have been initiated over the years.

Credit: Juan Pablo Moreiras/FFI





Credit: Juan Pablo Moreiras/FFI

Learning from this, **Ya'axché has increasingly incorporated expert involvement and sought strategic alliances and partnerships to underpin more sustainable enterprise development.** Recent feasibility studies for business development have involved rigorous market research, expert analysis, partnership development, and investment in appropriate low-cost marketing (e.g. through social media and Ya'axché's website) — a significant improvement on the early days of under-resourced enterprise development. The landscape in which Ya'axché operates has also changed considerably over the last decade. For example, the emergence of more competition for existing products (e.g. new buyers for

Toledo cacao), strategic sectoral development (e.g. for cacao) driven by the government of Belize, gradual increase in commercialisation of the district, improvements in infrastructure and communications, and planned new sectoral developments (e.g. cruise ship tourism). These may prove advantageous for the development and potential success of YICE and for future investigations into the viability of payment for environmental service schemes, although steps need to be taken to ensure that such developments do not have a negative impact on the biodiversity of the area.

CONCLUSION

Looking back over the last 20 years, FFI and Ya'axché have much to celebrate, and to build on. Ya'axché has emerged from the highs and the lows of organisational development as a robust organisation with effective governance and systems established, a recognised national authority on protected areas management, and with an integrated landscape management programme that maintains connectivity across over 300,000ha of vital wildlife corridor habitat in the Maya Golden Landscape. FFI has applied the many lessons learnt through this collaboration across its

own programmes, and is set to support and guide Ya'axché through the next stage of its organisational development. As both the FFI-Ya'axché partnership and the Golden Stream project move into new phases, face new challenges and identify novel opportunities, one element that will remain constant is the spirit of collaboration and mutual respect that has characterised and driven this unique partnership since its inception.

FAUNA & FLORA INTERNATIONAL

FFI protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and take account of human needs. Operating in more than 40 countries worldwide, FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's longest established international wildlife conservation body and a registered charity.

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YA'AXCHÉ CONSERVATION TRUST

Ya'axché Conservation Trust (Ya'axché) is a Belizean organisation which aims to maintain healthy forests, rivers and reefs for the benefit of all through protected area management, advocacy, and working hand in hand with communities to develop capacity for the wise use of land and natural resources in and around the Maya Golden Landscape in Toledo. Ya'axché's vision is for harmony between nature and human development for the benefit of both.

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HALCYON LAND & SEA

Halcyon Land & Sea is a fund established in 1998 by Dr Lisbet Rausing to find innovative and entrepreneurial ways to secure threatened habitats. Through Halcyon Land & Sea, FFI secures areas of critical biodiversity through a number of diverse approaches, developed to fit the needs of individual sites and projects. These include site purchase or lease, developing local land stewardship or site management agreements, and putting in place conservation management where this has been absent or weak. We always work in partnership with local conservation agencies and local communities.

Halcyon Land & Sea is supported by Arcadia (a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin) and Hugh Sloane.

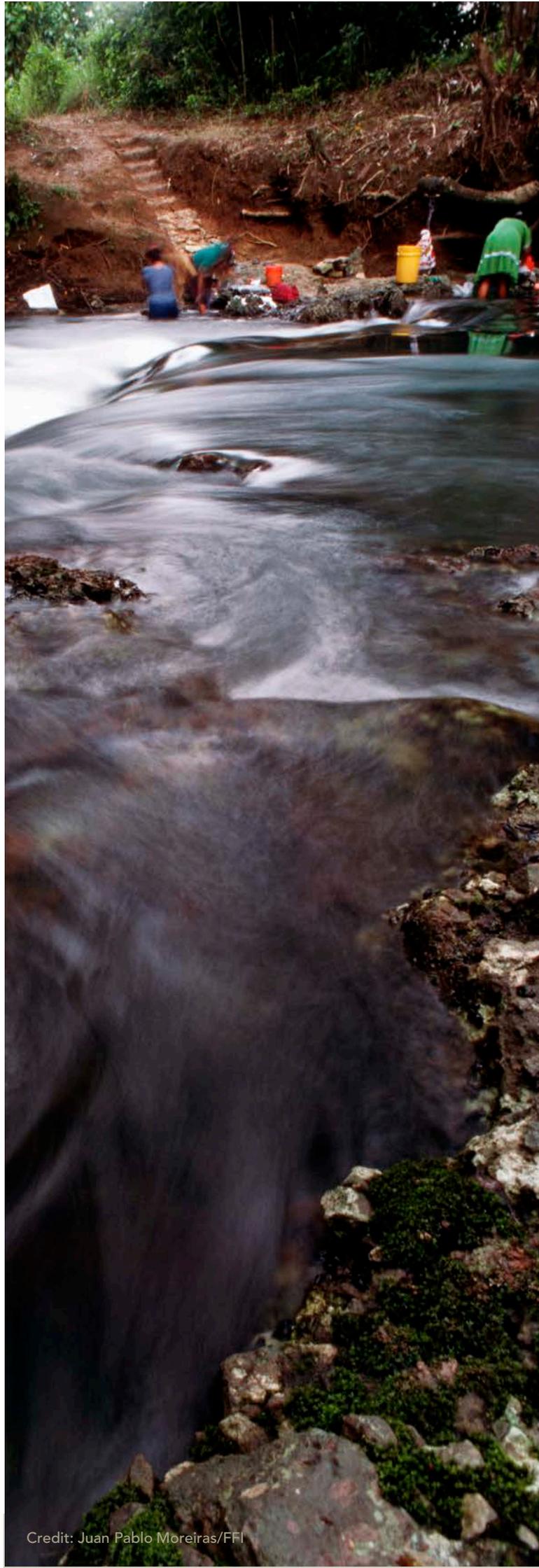
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HOW TO CITE THIS CASE STUDY

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JUNE 2018



Credit: Juan Pablo Moreiras/FFI