

## Partnerships between civil society and the private sector to protect sensitive regions

*Pierre Carret Grant Director - FRANCAIS CEPF*

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**The CEPF is a fund specialised in supporting partnerships between environmental protection associations and economic stakeholders. When civil society comprises a wide range of organisations - a diversity that helps our democratic machinery to function properly - it is easier for private stakeholders to work with some of them. These are win-win partnerships for private companies who are able to showcase their environmental credentials**

In 2015, Consortio Ambiental Dominicano, a non-profit made up of government and non-government organisations, created the Dominican Republic's first private reserve around a protected forest area where village communities get help to plant trees and grow cocoa and macadamia nuts. These high-quality products are then marketed to a North American network of chocolate makers in packaging that showcases the initiative and highlights the environmental value added by the partnership.

This pioneering model, underpinned by close cooperation between an environmental organisation and a network of private companies, shows what the relationship between the private sector and civil society could look like. However, it by no means exhausts all of the potential interactions between these two types of stakeholders — which can be harmonious but may also be conflictual.

Civil society is identified as a key stakeholder, alongside government organisations and the business community. In particular, it is recognised as playing a key role in driving socially and environmentally sustainable policies. It is therefore important that businesses understand the role that civil society organisations can play. There is genuine partnership potential between these two

different types of stakeholder, particularly in the area of environmental protection.

## **A WIDE VARIETY OF STAKEHOLDERS, WITH VASTLY DIFFERING POSITIONING STRATEGIES**

Civil society comprises a whole host of different structures, including non-profits committed to protecting the environment. Obviously, these organisations can support and influence economic stakeholders, but they can also oppose them and it is often from this standpoint that they are perceived by governments and economic stakeholders. Depending on their positioning strategy, we may classify environmental non- governmental organizations in different categories.

Naturalist associations, which are often the oldest such groups, initially had scientific objectives. These days, they are the main providers of data on biodiversity, whether for a given territory or for groups of species (birds, marine mammals, plants, etc.). NIMBY-type associations (i.e., “Not In My Backyard”) oppose projects that could damage the environment within their restricted living grounds. “Model-centric” organizations develop a more political vision as they attack economic models or advance alternatives. This opposition/proposition dynamic may be rooted locally or extend to global concerns such as plastics, deforestation, industrial farming, etc. They sometimes act as whistle-blowers or promote awareness of environmental causes. “Expert” organizations help shape debates around certain issues, seek out alternatives and solutions, and willingly help other stakeholders to boost their actions. Lastly, increasingly widespread “management”-type organizations seek to secure a more active role in preserving the natural environment and in actions, especially at local level and they currently manage numerous natural spaces.

Obviously, this oversimplified typology is porous. The role of certain organizations can vary and change over time as their internal dynamics and issues themselves change or as the environmental situation evolves within their own sphere of influence.

## **THE NEED FOR A STRONG AND DIVERSE CONSERVATION COMMUNITY**

Naturally, stakeholders from the private sector generally have a clear preference for “expert”- type organisations with whom it is easier to forge partnerships. Naturalist associations are also well regarded simply because of their capacity to provide the data needed for taking decisions. Obviously, those that pose as a force for opposition are less popular among private sector operators.

Nevertheless, all of these different types of organisations are essential for a vibrant civil society — and for effective governance of our societies in general. As with any ecosystem, relationships of interdependence between these organisations help the whole environment to function properly. The CEPF has worked in countries in which an environmental organization has had a virtual hegemony for historical reasons and this has led to numerous failures in the workings of conservation policies. Just like in the for-profit sector, while monopolies can create cosy situations, they can also stifle innovation, risk-taking and debate.

So it is important for the private sector to embrace the diverse range of civil society actors in spite of the frustration sometimes felt when confronted with opposition from some of these stakeholders.

And it is also important that this mutual understanding culminates in environmentally- friendly partnerships. This is exactly what the CEPF seeks to promote. Over the last 20 years, CEPF has partnered more than 2,350 local organisations across 98 countries and territories, and granted over USD 242 million worth of grants<sup>1</sup>. Approximately 3% of this investment (USD 6,7 million) has gone to cooperatives and micro-businesses. At the same time, CEPF has supported a large number of initiatives to strengthen effective collaboration between civil society and the private sector.

1 See CEPF impact report: [https://www.cepf.net/sites/default/files/cepf-2019-impact\\_report-single\\_page\\_view\\_0.pdf](https://www.cepf.net/sites/default/files/cepf-2019-impact_report-single_page_view_0.pdf)

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