

**ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY
IN THE CARIBBEAN:
THE CASE OF THE NARIVA SWAMP, TRINIDAD**

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ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY IN THE CARIBBEAN: THE CASE OF THE NARIVA SWAMP, TRINIDAD

Introduction

Balance between the need for sustained economic growth on one hand, and the need to protect the natural, physical and cultural environment on the other is particularly important in the island states of the Caribbean where there is a high level of direct economic dependence on natural resources. In countries across the region, the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources is currently one of the critical national development issues, particularly as competition for ever-diminishing resources is on the increase.

When large-scale commercial farmers from central Trinidad began illegally cultivating rice in the Nariva Swamp in 1986, the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago found themselves in a situation where a certain form of economic development was being pitted against the environment. Growing concern about the negative social and environmental effects of commercial rice farming and other illegal activities occurring in Nariva, prompted government resource managers, environmentalists and researchers to embark on what would become a ten-year campaign to oust the large-scale farmers and formalise arrangements for small-scale farming. The advocacy effort focussed on removing the squatters from the swamp and ceasing all illegal farming there until an environmental impact assessment (EIA) could be conducted and a management plan put in place.

This narrative account of the Nariva advocacy campaign examines the actors, the process, its outcome and impacts, and highlights those elements of the strategy that contributed to the effort's success in bringing about the cessation of farming in the swamp.

The Center for Democratic Education defines advocacy as a process “which organisations and individuals use to exert pressure for changes in a specific policy or behaviour of a government or institution” (Everts *et al.* 1996). It is a fundamental process in a democratic society as it allows groups and citizens to influence public institutions and policy.

The term ‘advocacy’ is used to describe a series of activities built around a theme or set of themes with the aim of effecting a specific change in action or policy. At the same time, advocacy processes can contribute to community development and empowerment. They can help build local capacity to articulate concerns and needs, assist in processes of group formation and community organisation, and build confidence at the local level. Advocacy processes can help broaden concerns and develop an understanding of issues and stakes, and can help popularise scientific and technical issues. Moreover, advocacy can be a useful tool in preparing stakeholders for participatory processes.

Even when advocacy efforts do not succeed in bringing about the desired policy change, the process itself may contribute to the strengthening of civil society, by building NGO and community capacity and raising the level of public awareness and debate (Miller 1994).

Environmental Advocacy in the Caribbean

While there is a long tradition of grassroots action and popular protest in the Caribbean against issues ranging from labour conditions to transportation to food shortages, mobilisation in defence of the environment is a relatively new phenomenon that can be traced back a mere ten to fifteen years. But two trends in the region suggest that over time it may become a more frequent occurrence. Given seemingly fewer options for economic development, some governments in the region appear to be overlooking environmental considerations when trying to maintain or increase levels of investment. At the same time, ordinary citizens are becoming increasingly aware of environmental concerns and of the need for civil society participation in all spheres of public life. Against this backdrop, it is likely that as more communities face threats to their physical, cultural and social environment as a result of massive developments, they will attempt to pressure governments and developers to take their concerns into account.

As the following three examples illustrate, it is difficult to talk about a sole ‘model’ of

environmental advocacy in the Caribbean. There are differences in processes of mobilisation, and in approaches and tactics that reflect national and local politics, culture and patterns of social organisation. In some cases, groups and organisations are formed specifically to address the issue, in other instances, established organisations take on the cause. Organisations sometimes act alone, seeking support and strategic alliances as necessary, while under some circumstances groups formally coalesce. The impetus for mobilisation can come from communities within or adjacent to the area in question, or the driving force can be external. Experience has shown, however, whatever the outcome, advocacy processes can have effects beyond the lobby issue: the process can prompt public debate on other related issues or catalyse processes of community development.

Jalousie, St. Lucia

In the late 1980s, a number of individuals within and outside of St. Lucia opposed plans for the construction of a hotel on the Jalousie Estate, at the foot of the country's most famous landmarks, the Pitons. With support from the Organisation of American States plans had been developed for the creation of a national park within the area, as part of an overall framework for the integrated development of the Soufriere region. In 1990, as it became clear that the Government was about to grant approval for the construction of the hotel, and as there were indications that other development proposals were being considered for the area, a small group of prominent St. Lucians stepped up the campaign against the Jalousie development. They organised public meetings and made public statements about the issue. The involvement of the author Derek Walcott in the campaign helped give it regional and international attention. Linkages were established with conservation organisations outside of the region to secure their support. The group, which later established itself as the St. Lucian Environment and Development Awareness Council, aimed most of its attacks on the government and failed to generate support from the local community, as the advocacy process was external to it. In the end, the Jalousie hotel was constructed, but the effort raised awareness of the importance of the Pitons, and helped create conditions where the sorts of proposals that were considered then would now be looked at differently (Renard personal communication).

Seatons, Antigua

In Antigua, residents of Seatons village came together in 1990 as the Concerned Citizens of Seatons expressly to protect local interests that were threatened by a proposed tourist development in the northeast of the island. Convinced of the greater effectiveness of numbers, they joined forces with a national non-governmental organisation (NGO), the Environmental Awareness Group, and two other community organisations, the Old Road and Bethesda/Christian Hill Community Groups. The Coalition sought to increase public awareness of the development and its potential impact on the community and the physical environment and to pressure the Cabinet to investigate and minimise the adverse effects of the construction of Coconut Hall and the overall development (Bunce and Derrick 1995). The Coalition's strategy centred around maximising the comparative advantage of each of the four organisations; staging public events; publicising the issue through the national and international media; directly lobbying the political directorate; and seeking legal recourse against the developers. The Coalition succeeded in drawing considerable public attention to Coconut Hall and delaying construction on the site---a situation that may have contributed in part to the eventual bankruptcy of the developers and the abandonment of the project (Bunce and Derrick 1995). This experience has prompted what appears to be a tradition of community organisation in Seatons, where in 1995 a new community group, the Seatons Development Organisation, was formed. The group, which has replaced the Concerned Citizens of Seatons, works in support of broad-based local interests (Derrick personal communication). The Environmental Awareness Group, another coalition member, has since used the lessons of the Coconut Hall experience in a struggle against a massive development on one of Antigua's offshore islands, Guiana Island.

Playa Ballena, Puerto Rico

A 1986 announcement by the Puerto Rican Government that it was about to facilitate the sale of private lands adjacent to Guanica Biosphere Reserve to French investors for a Club Med hotel prompted local public outcry. The development would have affected the integrity of the reserve and curtailed local access to the popular Ballena beach. The Comité Pro Rescate de Guanica went into action and between 1987 and 1993 the group--whose membership represents various sectors of the community--lobbied to prevent the sale of the lands. Building on the experience of an earlier struggle against a fertilizer plant in the area, the Comité was able to mobilise local and national support for Playa Ballena through a strategy that used the political system heavily. Public hearings were held before the House of Representatives and the Senate, debates were held in the town assembly, politicians and planners were taken on tours through the forest in Guanica, a local publication was used to expose corrupt politicians and others opposed to the cause, and a series of mass rallies and public demonstrations were orchestrated (Valdés-Pizzini personal communication). As a result of the strong opposition to the project, the French investors backed out and no other developers sought to take their place. In an unprecedented move, the land was eventually purchased by the Puerto Rican Conservation Trust and is now jointly managed by that organisation and the Department of Natural Resources. In addition to focussing attention on Playa Ballena and the Biosphere Reserve, the Guanica lobby provoked a national debate on beach access in Puerto Rico.

The advocacy process in Trinidad and Tobago that centred around the Nariva Swamp from 1986 - 1996 and continued while the outcome of an EIA was awaited, is part of this growing organisation of Caribbean people and groups in defence of their physical surroundings and socio-cultural milieu. Unless there is a change in how the region approaches foreign investment and economic development, it is likely that popular mobilisation for the environment will become even more commonplace.

Overview of Nariva

Nariva is Trinidad and Tobago's largest wetland (Trinidad and Tobago Government 1993). It is located on the east coast of the island of Trinidad. The area's biodiversity and importance as a habitat for several species make it a wetland of both national and international significance. The more than 6,000 hectares (15,000 acres) that make up Nariva combine four major wetland types (mangrove swamp forest, palm forest, swamp wood and freshwater marsh) to provide a habitat for many rare and endangered species of reptiles, mammals and birds. Some 60 percent of Trinidad's mammal species, including the manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) and the red howler (*Alouatta seniculus insularis*) and capuchin (*Cebus albifrons*) monkeys, are found there, as are 75 percent of the island's avian species. Additionally, the swamp supports 30 percent of Trinidad's reptiles and 28 percent of the island's amphibians (Nathai-Gyan 1996). Nariva is a refuge for

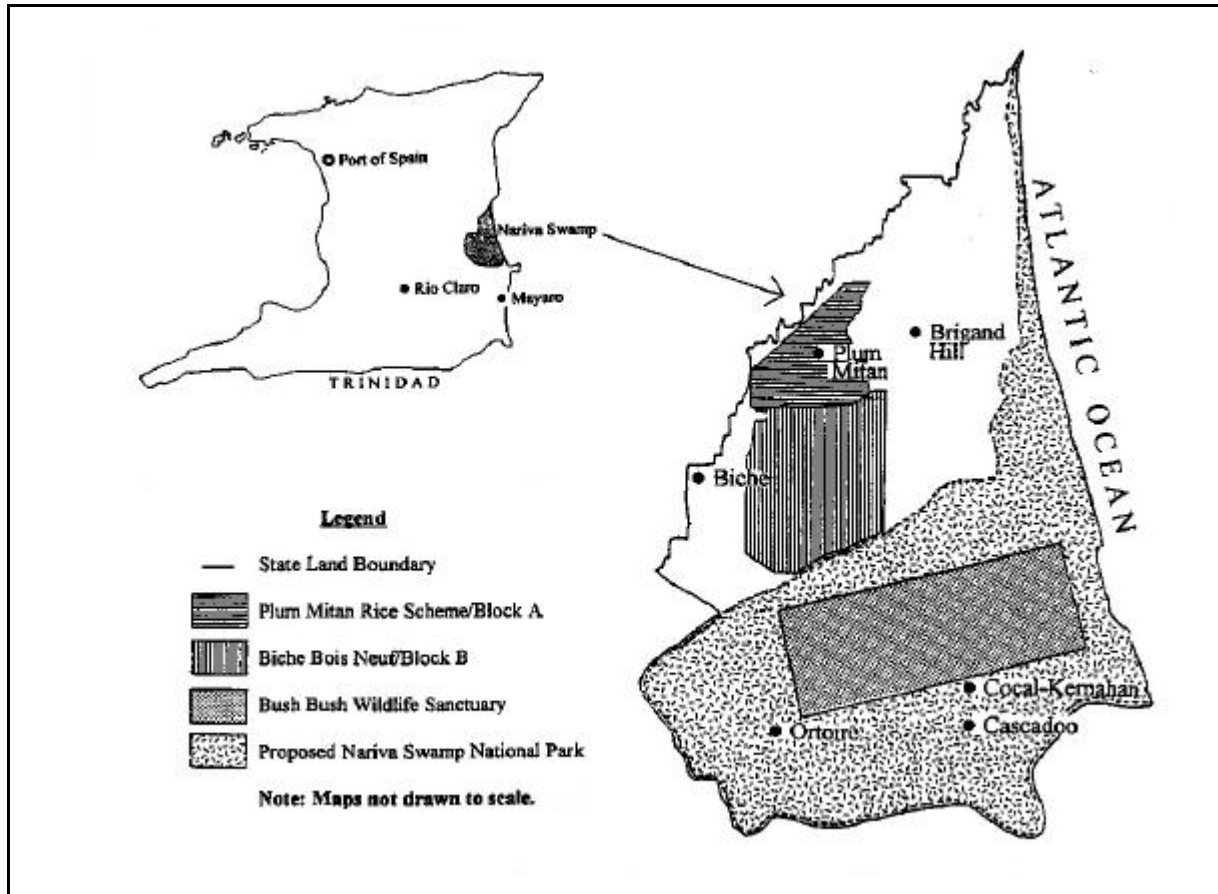
migratory waterfowl and a habitat for species of freshwater fish, such as the nationally popular catfish (*Hoplosternum littorale*), locally known as cascadura. Other species of commercial importance found in the swamp include the black conch (*Pomacea urseus*), mangrove oyster (*Crassostrea rhizophorae*) and various crabs (*Cardisoma guanhumi* and *Ucides cordatus*).

Nariva consists of two existing and one proposed administrative and management areas. It includes the Bush Bush Wildlife Sanctuary and Prohibited Area, the Nariva Mayaro Windbelt Forest Reserve and the proposed Nariva National Park. The Bush Bush Wildlife Sanctuary was created in 1968 under the *Conservation of Wildlife Act of 1958*. Hunting and the removal of plants are not allowed in the Sanctuary, which includes Bush Bush Island and Bois Neuf Forest and covers just under a quarter of the area of the swamp. Bush Bush was declared a Prohibited Area in 1989 under the *Forests Act of 1915*. Entry is by permit only and under restricted conditions. The Nariva Mayaro Windbelt Forest Reserve was declared in 1954 under the *Forests Act*. This designation governs the felling and removal of trees and forest products, and vests management responsibility for these activities in the Forestry Division. In 1993, the entire swamp, except for specially designated farming areas, was declared a Prohibited Area through the efforts of the Wildlife Section and the Pointe a Pierre Wild Fowl Trust. In 1980, the National Parks Section of the Forestry Division recommended that some 5,200 hectares (13,000 acres) of State lands and forest reserves be designated the Nariva National Park. In the absence of supporting legislation, the park has not yet been established.

Two areas within the swamp--blocks or sectors as they are alternatively known--have been demarcated for agricultural use. During the 1950s, the Plum Mitán Rice Scheme/Block A was established to provide small land holdings (2 - 5 hectares) for family farms under the *State Lands Act of 1969*. Although the Biche Bois Neuf sector/Block B has been demarcated, no official agricultural scheme was developed for the area. Block B abuts the Nariva Mayaro Windbelt Forest Reserve and the proposed national park and is in close proximity to the Wildlife Sanctuary.

There are five main human settlements in the vicinity of the swamp--Plum Mitán, Biche, Brigand Hill, Cocal-Kernahan and Cascadoo. A 1995 study of the swamp indicated that an estimated five thousand residents of these communities depended on the swamp to varying degrees, engaging in such activities as fishing, hunting and the small-scale cultivation of rice, watermelons, callaloo, cucumbers and tomatoes (Ramsar Convention Bureau 1996). Residents of the nearby villages of Rio Claro, Ortoire and Mayaro also use the swamp for hunting and fishing, though to a lesser extent than those of the previously mentioned settlements.

One community-based eco-tourism group from nearby Mayaro, South East Ecotours, leads guided trips up the Ortoire River and into parts of the swamp.



Resources under pressure

The challenge in Nariva is the increasingly common one of reconciling human needs with the imperatives of natural resource conservation. In recent years, Nariva's resources have come under growing pressure from human activity, particularly fishing, farming, and hunting. The area's water-based ecosystem is very complex and sensitive to change. The high biodiversity there is thought to be due to the fluctuation of water levels and there is likely a close link between the biology of all natural plant and animal species occurring in Nariva and the seasonal cycles of flooding and drying in the swamp (Bacon 1996). The hydrologic cycle in the swamp basin supports the sustainable agricultural use of certain areas. Activities that alter the area's hydrology, such as drainage, can significantly affect the area's ecology and devastate the agriculture.

Destruction of habitat: Legal farming began in Nariva with the establishment of the Plum Mitan Rice Scheme in the 1950s. By the late 1980s, however, farming in the swamp had begun to expand rapidly, with most of the new cultivation taking place in areas prohibited from human activity. Between 1984 and 1993, the large-scale commercial cultivation of rice and the subsistence farming of fruits, vegetables and rice took place in Nariva. Although growing rice on a large scale was the more controversial of the two types of farming, the unauthorized felling of trees and clearing of land within the Wildlife Sanctuary for the shifting cultivation of crops such as watermelon, peppers, tomatoes, and squash, as well as the illegal cultivation of marijuana, also contributed to habitat degradation and loss in the swamp. The sale of timber for the production of matches during the early 1980s was also controversial and of concern to environmentalists.

Over-harvesting and endangerment of species: The hunting of game species such as agouti (*Dasyprocta leporina*) and wild hog (*Tayassu tajacu*), and the over-fishing of commercial species such as cascadura, conch and crabs have combined with habitat destruction to reduce the numbers of these animals in the swamp. The pet trade has also had deleterious effects on certain species in the swamp. For example, the Moriche Oriole (*Icterus chrysiocephalus*), which is sought after nationally and internationally for its song, is now endangered, as is the ocelot (*Felis pardalis*). The Blue and Yellow Macaw (*Ara ararauna*), which is indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago and was formerly found in great numbers in the palm swamp forest, has been extirpated because of the pet trade and the reduction of its habitat. The Red-bellied Macaw (*Ara manilata*) is facing a similar threat due to habitat destruction as well. Other species in the swamp, such as the Red Brocket Deer (*Mazama americana*) and the West Indian Manatee, have become endangered as a consequence of hunting and habitat alteration.

Insecurity of land tenure: A major concern of Nariva residents is insecure land tenure, a problem in the established communities and in Block A. In 1995, for example, only seven of the 75 families occupying land in Block A had legal tenure. Though legal, the tenancy of these seven families was precarious, as their leases were short-term (month to month). Several of the Block A farmers had been trying to regularise their status in Nariva for as long as ten years (Ramsar Convention Bureau 1996). Lack of tenure had been identified as "... one of the main hindrances to agricultural development and financial stability in the area" (Kacal and Homer 1996) and as a factor that contributed to the economic insecurity that changed the way in which residents used and had an impact on the swamp (Ramsar Convention Bureau 1996).

The need for management

The degradation of Nariva's resources had affected those who depend on it to earn a living; in many instances incomes had decreased, and economic insecurity had increased (Gaskin and Shephard 1996, Homer 1996, Sankar 1993). This influenced how people related to the swamp and affected harvesting and hunting practices. Some cascadura fishers, for example, engaged in the illegal practice of damming water channels to increase their catches. These fishers, who had

been affected by the changed water cycles due to drainage for commercial farming upstream, in turn affected other fishers downstream. In other areas of the swamp, notably around Biche, marijuana cultivation had increased as an alternative to legal crops.

Nariva's problems did not begin with the expansion of rice cultivation. Even before this occurred, the swamp was being affected by hunting, cattle rearing and unauthorised cultivation. However, large-scale rice cultivation exacerbated pre-existing problems and added new ones. It also drew widespread attention to myriad issues beyond environmental degradation, including land tenure, resource access, legislative and policy shortcomings and the need for managed use.

Mobilising to Protect Nariva: The Advocacy Effort

The expansion of rice farming in the swamp

Large-scale commercial rice farming began in the Nariva Swamp in 1986 when a farmer from central Trinidad established a holding there (Sankar 1993). This farmer acquired approximately 49 acres (20 ha) in early 1987 and more than 120 hectares (296 acres) by 1992 (Trinidad and Tobago Government 1993). Between 1989 and 1992, a second farmer cleared more than 100 hectares (247 acres), some of which extended into the proposed National Park and the Bush Bush Wildlife Sanctuary. By July 1993, there were five large holdings in the swamp. According to the Wildlife Section, these farmers together with the traditional small rice farmers were responsible for altering close to two-thirds of the Nariva Wetland. A 1996 survey by the Lands and Surveys Division identified some 945 hectares (2,334 acres) in the swamp that were being cultivated by eight farmers and by July of that year, thirteen large farmers were illegally occupying land in the swamp (Bank and General Workers Union 1996).

In addition to felling trees and clearing land in the Sanctuary, the commercial farmers created and altered water channels in Nariva to facilitate year-round cultivation and transportation. For example, a drain was cut from Plum Mitán to the Nariva River to transport rice out of the swamp to the Manzanilla Road. Farming in other areas of the swamp was affected by the changed water cycles and levels, which along with the use of pesticides and other chemical inputs, affected fresh-water fish populations. Additionally, the destruction of the nursery grounds of various marine species posed a threat to Trinidad's east coast fisheries.

In the mid-1980s, the conditions for rice cultivation in Trinidad and Tobago were generally favourable. Farmers enjoyed subsidies ranging from 54 (TT) cents per pound (US \$0.09) for Grade A rice to 4 (TT) cents (US \$0.006) for Grade D produce until 1986, when the National Flour Mills (NFM) was given exclusive control over supplying rice to the domestic market. The NFM introduced a fixed buying rate of 89 (TT) cents per pound (US \$0.17), regardless of quality, and guaranteed prompt payment to farmers. This system remained in place until 1994

when a new pricing scale, based on grades, was introduced. The 1986 rate, however, prompted a sharp increase in rice cultivation in Trinidad. Between 1985 and 1986, the number of rice farmers increased from 300 to 5,000 (Sankar 1993) with output growing from 1.5 million kilos in 1985 to 21.25 million kilos in 1992 (Pearl and Dean 1994). This expansion in production occurred primarily in Nariva and the Caroni rice lands. Prior to 1986, no large-scale rice cultivation took place in Nariva, and the farmers there were residents of the surrounding communities.

Conflict over Nariva's resources

The expansion of rice cultivation increased ecological disruptions in the swamp, which in turn sparked conflict over the use of Nariva's resources. Four sets of controversies in Nariva that existed over the period covered by the advocacy effort have been identified (Mahy 1997), two of which played prominent roles in the process.

The main controversy, which in fact gave rise to the advocacy campaign and continued throughout the effort, was that between commercial and conservation interests. The farmers' reckless destruction of the swamp through the clearing of land, alteration of water channels and the use of pesticides along with their flagrant violation of the law raised the ire of those groups with a stated interest in Nariva's proper management and conservation, namely the Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division and various non-governmental conservation interests. For their part, the farmers felt that the conservation interests were hampering their efforts to contribute to Trinidad and Tobago's food security (Sankar 1993), and that their right to be in the swamp was based on Government indications during the mid to late 1980s that Block B would be developed for farming (Akaloo personal communication).

A second conflict between commercial and subsistence interests helped strengthen the Nariva lobby as it was part of the justification used to oust the large farmers. The commercial farmers caused social and economic disruptions in the communities surrounding Nariva. The ecological impacts of their activities in the swamp affected the ability of the traditional farmers and fishers to earn their livelihoods. Fishers noted a decrease in their catches, and farmers were subjected to changes in their water supply. At the same time, some large growers forced subsistence farmers to quit land they had been occupying in Blocks A and B for years, albeit also on an illegal basis. On occasion they used threats while at other times, ironically, they sought legal recourse. In one such example, a commercial farmer allegedly filed an injunction against a small farmer in 1996 restraining him from entering land on which he had been squatting, on the basis that the small-scale farmer was blocking river channels and diverting water (Homer 1996).

A third set of tensions emerged between subsistence and conservation interests as the lobby developed. The small-scale farmers found themselves caught in the dragnet to end large-scale commercial rice cultivation. The issue, perforce, was eventually framed in terms of ceasing all

illegal activity in the swamp, regardless of scale of effort. Consequently, those subsistence farmers who made a living cultivating crops in Block B, or who were without legal tenure in Block A, were faced with a loss of income due to efforts to cease illegal farming. Furthermore, some of the small-scale farmers felt that the urban-based environmental interests were more concerned with flora and fauna than with human beings. It appears too that a minority of small-scale farmers resented the efforts of the environmentalists to get the commercial farmers out of the swamp as they benefited from the use of heavy equipment for preparing their fields and from jobs created by the commercial activity (Lal personal communication, Charles 1996).

The fourth conflict was a relatively minor one between subsistence fishers and farmers that had little bearing on the unfolding of the advocacy effort. A 1996 study of the potential for collaborative natural resource management in Nariva identified what could be considered a minimal conflict between farmers and fishers centred around land and water use by farmers, and the fishers' perception of encroachment by the farmers (Mahy 1997).

Initial lobbying: The Forestry Division takes action

In the mid-1980s, confronted with the increased pace of destruction in Nariva, the Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division began to wage a deliberate campaign within the government to cease illegal activities in the swamp. The Forestry Division was then part of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (MALMR). Its aim is to manage the forest resources of Trinidad and Tobago on a sustainable basis providing valuable raw materials and services. The Division is structured into conservancies, six of which are in Trinidad and the seventh in Tobago. It also includes the Forest Resources Inventory and Management Section, National Parks, Watershed Management, and the Wildlife Section. The goal of the Wildlife Section is to conserve wildlife in Trinidad and Tobago with special emphasis on species management, habitat protection and provision of technical advice and services. Enforcement, research activities and administrative services are the major responsibilities undertaken by the Wildlife Section.

Between 1984 and 1996, the Forestry Division, mainly through the Wildlife Section, devoted financial and human resources to sustaining the Nariva lobby within the MALMR (Dardaine personal communication). But the process was impeded by changes in political administrations in Trinidad and Tobago: the issue spanned three successive governments and the Wildlife Section was faced with the recurrent task of briefing Ministers and Permanent Secretaries about Nariva and familiarising them with the Wildlife Section's position on the illegal occupation of swamp lands. And although there were funds earmarked for the Wildlife Section's work in Nariva, they were inadequate.

Legal recourse

From as early as 1987 the Wildlife Section had begun to view squatting and deforestation in Nariva with grave concern (James *in litt.* 28.4.92). In that year, for the first time ever, the Wildlife Section sought legal recourse for the removal of a squatter from the Wildlife Sanctuary. However, the case languished in the judicial system for years. Between 1987 and 1993, the case was adjourned by the Rio Claro Magistrate's Court more than ten times and was not settled until September 1997. The Wildlife Section's attempts to initiate squatter evictions in 1987 were poorly timed. The climate for such action became unfavourable in 1986 after the Ministry of Housing, under the newly elected National Alliance for Reconstruction Government, decided to place a moratorium on squatter eviction¹.

The Forestry Division's ability to bring about the evictions was complicated by the multiple legislative bases of the swamp: The prosecution of squatters falls under the purview of the Lands and Surveys Division (also a part of the MALMR) as squatting is a violation of the *State Lands Act*, and not the *Forests Act*, which the Forestry Division is responsible for enforcing. Another factor that further hampered the Division's efforts was uncertainty about the boundaries of the management areas within the swamp (Forester III - South East Conservancy, *in litt.* 25.9.92). The boundary lines of the wildlife sanctuary, windbelt reserve and proposed national park did not appear on survey maps until May 1993. This made it difficult for the authorities to determine when charges should be limited to the violation of the *State Lands Act* (illegal occupation of Block B) or should include offences punishable under the *Forests Act* (the felling of trees and the removal of forest products from a Prohibited Area). The rate of prosecutions in Nariva proceeded at an exceedingly slow pace, in spite of the Conservator of Forests attempts (in his capacities as head of the Forestry Division and chair of the Wildlife Conservation Committee, WLCC) to enlist support from the MALMR and the Environmental Management Authority to expedite the process (Wildlife Conservation Committee 1996).

National and international linkages for support

In addition to raising the issue at the ministerial level through the Forestry Division and seeking legal recourse, the Wildlife Section sought support for its stand on Nariva from the WLCC and endorsement through international channels. In March 1993, a WLCC sub-committee on Nariva was formed at the suggestion of the Minister of Agriculture to help publicise the problems facing Nariva (Wildlife Conservation Committee 1993). The subcommittee included NGO members who, in the words of the Wildlife Section, were "... considered to be extremely necessary since ... public-sector regulations prevent public servants from liaising directly with the media, especially on issues that are likely to be controversial" (Trinidad and

¹ According to Pantin and Mohammed (1994), "...squatting is a way of life in Trinidad and Tobago..." and in certain communities there is an expectation that as families expand, they can simply appropriate more land to meet their needs. As a result of lobbying by environmentalists and international agencies, the State has had to become more diligent in controlling squatting.

The Convention on Wetlands, commonly known as the Ramsar Convention, was adopted in Ramsar, Iran in 1971, and came into force in 1975. The Treaty promotes the conservation of wetlands through their 'wise use.' Wise use is defined as sustainable utilisation for the benefit of mankind in a way compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem. Contracting Parties must designate at least one site that meets the Ramsar criteria for inclusion on the List of Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar List) and ensure the maintenance of the character of each Ramsar site. Additionally, Contracting Parties are required to include wetland conservation within their national land use planning, establish nature reserves on wetlands and promote training in wetland research, management and wardening, and consult with other Parties about the implementation of the Convention, especially with regard to transfrontier wetlands, shared water systems, shared species and development projects affecting wetlands. The Conference of the Contracting Parties meets every three years to approve resolutions, recommendations and technical guidelines to further the application of the Convention.

The Ramsar Bureau, as the secretariat is known, is hosted by the World Conservation Union, IUCN, in Gland Switzerland. The Convention works closely with other environment-related Conventions and institutions. A Memorandum of Cooperation has been signed between the Ramsar Bureau and the Convention on Biodiversity.

To date, four Caribbean countries are Ramsar Contracting Parties, namely: Trinidad and Tobago, the Bahamas, Jamaica and Belize. There are also Ramsar sites in the following territories: Aruba, Bonaire, British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, Cayman Islands, Guadeloupe, and French Guyana.

Ramsar Convention Bureau

Tobago Government 1993). The Minister of Agriculture formally asked local NGOs, through the Council of Presidents of the Environment (COPE), to help bring public attention to the issue in 1993. Between 1986 and 1996, Nariva was a recurrent agenda item at WLCC meetings, and much of the strategising and planning about how to keep moving the issue forward was done in this forum.

After a two-year internal lobby by the Wildlife Section, with support from the Pointe a Pierre Wildfowl Trust, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago became a Contracting Party to the Convention on Wetlands in December 1992, and Nariva was designated for the List of Wetlands of International Importance². The Convention entered into force in April 1993. At that time Trinidad bore the distinction of being the only Caribbean Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention and Nariva was the only Caribbean wetland

on the Ramsar list. The swamp's rich biodiversity and its value as a habitat for many species of plants and animals were among the factors that combined to make Nariva eligible for inclusion on the List of Wetlands of International Importance. Due to the rapid ecological changes

² The Wildlife Section first began enquiries about Trinidad and Tobago's accession to the Ramsar Convention in the early 1980s. In late 1987, the issue was revived by the Field Naturalists Club. In 1990, the Wildlife Section began pushing for Government accession in earnest, and their efforts were supported by the Pointe a Pierre Wildfowl Trust and Pearl and Dean (advertising agency) lobby.

occurring in Nariva (primarily a result of large-scale rice farming) the Government of Trinidad and Tobago requested the inclusion of Nariva on the 'Montreux Record' in June 1993 at the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The Montreux Record is a list of those Ramsar sites "...where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring or are likely to occur primarily as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference" (Ramsar Convention Bureau 1996). The Head of the Trinidad and Tobago delegation at the 5th Conference of the Parties (COP5) made a strong plea for international action on Nariva. Some members of the delegation, which included a representative of the Pointe a Pierre Wildfowl Trust, made themselves available for informal discussions on the issue during COP5 (James personal communication)

The Government's decisions to become a Ramsar Contracting Party and to list Nariva on the Montreux Record were significant in that they brought an international element to the Nariva struggle. As a Contracting Party, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is required to promote wetland conservation and to formulate and implement planning for the 'wise' or sustainable use of wetlands. Wildlife Section officials felt that their case within the Government of Trinidad and Tobago was strengthened by the Ramsar Convention: if the political directorate would not listen to their technocrats, perhaps they would live up to the obligations of an international agreement. Indeed, in 1994, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, at the recommendation of the Wildlife Section, invited the Ramsar Bureau to conduct a review of activities occurring in the swamp and make recommendations. This Monitoring Procedure took place in April 1995 and comprised a site visit by a three-member Ramsar team³. The team's recommendations addressed social, ecological and management issues, and included the temporary cessation of farming in Block B until an EIA could be conducted. Recommendations for formalising this process were made by the Wildlife Section in 1993, through the establishment of a National Wetlands Committee, comprising broad-based national membership (James personal communication).

Government action: Part one

By 1993, the Wildlife Section felt the situation in Nariva had reached a crisis. Early in that year, Forestry Division officials and environmentalists noted with alarm the growing threat of salt water intrusion due to the channel to the Manzanilla Road. This prompted immediate action and a special meeting between the Minister of Agriculture and the WLCC was convened. As follow-up the head of the Wildlife Section invited the Minister to visit the Plum Mitan area of the swamp to assess the impact of the illegal activities that were occurring there. A number of

³ The Monitoring Procedure (now known as the Management Guidance Procedure) is a "... mechanism operated by the Ramsar Bureau, at the invitation of the Contracting Party, to address issues at sites included in the Montreux Record and make recommendations for steps to remove the site from the Record..." (Ramsar Convention Bureau 1996).

other individuals were invited to participate in this field evaluation, including Ms. Molly Gaskin of the Pointe a Pierre Wildfowl Trust, who from that moment on would prove to be the most vocal and consistent public advocate for the removal of the squatters and the conduct of an EIA.

The field evaluation of 22 March 1993 was a turning point in the Nariva advocacy process. As a result of this visit, the Minister declared all of Nariva Swamp, except the specially designated farming blocks, a Prohibited Area. The Wildlife Section has considered this decision one of the “most significant conservation decisions ever taken in Trinidad and Tobago” (Trinidad and Tobago Government 1993). After this visit, the NGO community, notably the Pointe a Pierre Wildfowl Trust, embarked on an intensive five -year crusade to end illegal farming in Nariva, thus transforming the advocacy effort from an internal Wildlife Section crusade into a public issue.

The Government’s stated commitment to protect Nariva and the renewed drive to evict squatters from the swamp in the aftermath of the Minister’s visit were met with resistance by the large farmers. As part of the backlash against this effort, one commercial farming couple brought a constitutional motion against the Attorney General and the Minister of Agriculture on the grounds that their constitutional rights had been violated by the Government’s decision to prohibit them from cultivating rice in the swamp. The couple claimed that they began farming in the swamp in 1986 after the Government indicated its intention to permit farming in Block B and that the former Minister of Agriculture promised that if they applied, they would be granted leases to farm there (Joseph 1993). The couple further claimed that they entered into a contract with the National Flour Mills for the sale of their Nariva-grown rice. The couple secured commercial loans as well as a loan through the State-owned Agricultural Development Bank for the purchase of heavy equipment (Joseph 1993), a move that could have been interpreted as tacit Government approval. In July 1993, the Courts dismissed the motion and upheld the Minister’s decision. Nariva’s advocates, both inside and outside the Government, interpreted the ruling as a victory for the environment. The case helped publicise the issue, and the ruling helped garner additional popular support for the Nariva lobby.

Despite the Government’s indication that it was keen to resolve the problems in Nariva, action continued to be slow. In 1995 alone, more than 160 quit notices were served (Nathai-Gyan 1996), but the squatters remained in place. In a 15 July 1994 meeting held by the Minister of Agriculture to address Nariva, a number of significant decisions were taken. These included decisions to: prepare a management plan for Nariva; remove squatters from the Protected Area (though not squatters in Blocks A and B in the first instance); regularise the tenancy of qualified persons in Block A; undertake an EIA of the potential for farming in Block B; and undertake infrastructural development works in Nariva (Ganteaume-Farrell 1996). These decisions became the blueprint for Government action on Nariva between 1994 and 1996, with

most concrete activity (eviction of squatters, construction of pumps in Block A, conduct of EIA) taking place between late 1996 and mid 1997.

The campaign goes public

Immediately following the Wildlife Section-sponsored visit to the swamp, Ms. Gaskin and the Pointe a Pierre Wildfowl Trust launched into a media campaign to build popular support for halting the destruction of Nariva. Since 1966, the Pointe a Pierre Wildfowl Trust has been working to conserve Trinidad's wetlands and wetland fauna. In 1977, the Trust expanded its programme to include environmental education, advocacy and lobbying. It also conducts research on wetland habitats and ecosystems, and breeds endangered wetland avian species for reintroduction into the wild.

Ms. Gaskin, in her individual capacity and as head of the Pointe a Pierre Wildfowl Trust, helped ensure that Nariva remained in the public fore by issuing frequent statements to the press between 1993 and 1996. During this period, several articles and letters to the editor about Nariva appeared in the national press. As interest in the issue would appear to wane, Ms. Gaskin would raise it through an article, commentary or press release. Additionally, she issued statements about relevant actions that she and other interested parties were taking, in order to keep the media informed of development in the Nariva case. Her own writing ensured that Nariva remained on the media agenda, and her articles often sparked reports by journalists or letters to the editor from environmentalists and other concerned citizens.

In June 1993, as part of activities in recognition of World Environment Day, the Wildfowl Trust and other environmental NGOs staged a rally and march in the capital, Port of Spain, to help bring popular attention to the destruction of Nariva. The event was a success and more than one hundred people came out to show support for the swamp. In 1994, Pearl and Dean Caribbean Ltd. produced the documentary video *Nariva Must Not Die*. The video was broadcast on national television and was later selected for screening at the Third International Film Festival (1995) in London. The video was an effective tool for communicating the environmental lobby's concerns about Nariva. The video's title was one of the slogans of the Nariva campaign and was used by government and NGO officials alike.

The Wildfowl Trust combined its media work with attempts to lobby the political directorate directly through personal access and through committees. Ms. Gaskin, for example, capitalised on her personal influence and standing in the community to directly approach politicians and government officials (Shephard personal communication). Ms. Gaskin's effort in the swamp did not go unrecognised. In 1994, the Wildfowl Trust was awarded the Hummingbird Gold Medal in recognition of the organisation's work in public awareness and environmental education. In 1995, Ms. Gaskin received the medal in her individual capacity. In 1996, she was selected by a panel of judges from among 26 nominees submitted by individuals and women's groups for the Guardian Woman of Trinidad and Tobago Award (Bridgemohan 1996). But Ms.

Gaskin's participation was not without its costs. She and members of the staff of the Wildfowl Trust received repeated anonymous threats by phone, and she was subjected to various forms of harassment, including the theft and destruction of her car (Chouti 1996).

The final thrust

When additional squatters began moving into the swamp in 1996, the Trust decided to increase the intensity of the campaign and the recently elected United National Congress (UNC) Government became a victim of the very demands it made while in opposition for the regularisation of the Nariva squatters and the resolution of the conflicts there (Alleng personal communication). In June of that year, a petition on Nariva was circulated throughout the country by the Trust. In a tremendous display of public support, twelve thousand individuals signed it within a three-week period. The petition called for, among other things, the removal of the squatters from the swamp, the timely hearing of cases involving quit notices served to the large-scale farmers, removal of the rice subsidy for large farmers across the country and the implementation of a series of recommendations made by the National Wetlands Committee. The petition and a letter signed by Ms. Gaskin, representatives of the Nariva communities, the Field Naturalists Club, COPE and the Bank and General Workers Union were presented to the Minister of Agriculture on 1 July 1996. The Wildfowl Trust invited the media to cover the presentation of the signatures to the Minister and a copy of the letter was subsequently published in the local press (Gaskin *et al.* 1996). The Minister rebuffed the approach, but instead of weakening Ms. Gaskin's position, this reaction generated more media coverage. But the message did not go unheeded; in the face of mounting local and international pressure, the Government was obliged to take action. Within days of the presentation of the petition, what would turn out to be the final and definitive Government push to remove the squatters was set in motion.

Around this time the Toco Foundation became actively involved in the advocacy process. The Toco Foundation is a community organisation in north-east Trinidad, founded in 1991. Its mission is to raise environmental consciousness in the communities in which it works, and to provide opportunities for sustainable income generation.

In late 1995, the head of the Foundation at the time, Mr. Michael Als, began to work behind the scenes with the Wildfowl Trust, bringing his experience as an activist to the process. In mid-1996, Mr. Als and the Foundation took on a public role in the campaign and began appearing alongside Wildfowl Trust staff at public events and assisting with community organisation in Nariva.

On 8 July 1996, the Bank and General Workers Union attempted to mediate between the Wildfowl Trust and the rice farmers. The meeting, which was chaired by the President of the Bank and General Workers Union, brought representatives of the Wildfowl Trust, the Hunters

Association, the Wildlife Section and the Toco Foundation together with the President of the Trinidad All-Island Rice Growers Association (herself one of the Nariva farmers) and nine other commercial farmers. Mr. Als was instrumental in organising this attempt at conflict resolution. Among the outcomes of the meeting were agreements to: immediately halt the felling of trees and the general destruction of the swamp; restrict farming activities to Block B; phase out the use of heavy equipment; and restrict the number of farmers in the swamp to thirteen (Bank and General Workers Union 1996; Lal 1996). The agreements were, however, non-binding and subsequently broke down. That the Ministry of Agriculture was not represented by a senior staffer suggests little importance was attached to this process by the Ministry and the Forestry Division. This was the only instance during the life of the controversy when an attempt was made to resolve the problem through mediation.

Government action: Part two

In early July 1996, the Attorney General⁴ announced that the rice farmers must be removed as they were “ . . . contraven[ing] the law and the law must be enforced” (Danny 1996). On 23 August the Attorney General’s department served the farmers quit notices. They were given five days to harvest their crops and leave the swamp (The Trinidad Express 1996a). After an appeal, the farmers were granted an extension until 31 October. A second extension was requested but denied. The Government indicated that it would attempt to relocate the farmers once it identified suitable lands and that it would conduct an EIA to determine the feasibility of rice cultivation in the swamp (The Trinidad Express 1996b).

On 1 November 1996, the Ministers of Agriculture and Labour, accompanied by members of the press, Ms. Gaskin and other Wildfowl Trust staff, went into the swamp to see if the 31 October quit deadline had been met. It had not. Instead, the party was met by a group of angry farmers, some of whom proceeded to verbally and physically abuse Ms. Gaskin. The media were on hand to cover the affair and the assault on Ms. Gaskin was soon widely known. The incident helped to further turn public opinion against the farmers. A new deadline for the farmers’ evacuation of the swamp was set for 5 November and extended until 6 November, as the earlier deadline was compromised because of lack of effective communication (Pickford-Gordon 1996).

In the last public activity of the advocacy campaign, Ms. Gaskin and a group of individuals, including Mr. Als, staged a silent protest outside the Parliament building on the 6 November deadline during a regular sitting of the Senate (Douglas 1996). The silent protest was in

⁴ In one of the great ironies of the Nariva situation, the lawyer who represented the couple that brought the constitutional motion against the State in 1993 (see page 13) became the Attorney General who, in 1996, was responsible for overseeing the removal of the squatters from the swamp.

reaction to the treatment of Ms. Gaskin at the hands of the rice farmers and was designed to call additional attention to the evacuation deadline.

In the immediate aftermath of the squatters' removal from the swamp, the Government began putting measures in place for an environmental impact assessment of the extent and conditions under which farming could occur in Block B. The eight-month study began in April 1997. Although the farmers had stopped cultivating rice in the swamp, up to the time when the EIA began some farmers continued to maintain a presence there, retaining all their heavy farm machinery and buildings on "their" farm lands.

The Advocacy Effort in Nariva: Process and Outcomes

Process

The Wildlife Section as advocate

There were two parallel processes in the Nariva advocacy effort: an internal lobby of the Government by the Wildlife Section, and a public lobby spearheaded by the Pointe à Pierre Wildfowl Trust. The former is often overlooked when the advocacy process in Nariva is considered, although it is perhaps one of the more noteworthy aspects of that campaign. Advocacy campaigns generally start with civil society actors (Vernon personal communication). The issue is identified by an NGO or citizens' interest group, and a strategy to address it is developed and implemented. A key element of the strategy is the formation of an advocacy network and the identification of potential allies and targets in other organisations, including the Government. The Nariva lobby, in contrast, was initiated by a government department which developed an internal strategy to deal with the issue. When normal procedures and channels failed to resolve the problem, the department resorted to extraordinary measures, forging strategic alliances with NGOs and the media with the objective of bringing public pressure to bear on government policy and practice.

The Forestry Division attempted to fight the Nariva battle on legal grounds in order to oust the farmers (Cross personal communication), but the bureaucracy and backlog in the Trinidadian judicial system, together with political ambivalence towards squatting, rendered this approach almost ineffectual. Had this been the sole prong of the Division's strategy, it is likely that illegal rice cultivation would have continued beyond November 1996.

Once it became apparent to Forestry Division officials that relying on the judicial system alone would not get the squatters out of the swamp in a timely manner, it sought ways of bringing public and international pressure to bear on the Government, notably through the NGOs, the Ramsar Convention and its Monitoring Procedure and other international organisations such as the World Conservation Union--IUCN (Pirrot *in litt.* 8.7.93).

The situation in Nariva illustrates that government is not monolithic, the interests of one arm may conflict or compete with those of another, but the outcome shows that despite this dissonance, in some instances consistent and widespread pressure can effect change.

The Wildfowl Trust as advocate

The lobby by the Pointe à Pierre Wildfowl Trust more closely resembles an archetypal advocacy process, with a main civil society actor, and the use of mass media campaigns, personal lobbying and public and publicised events. However, the style was not typical of that used in other parts of the world, where direct advocacy and lobbying is often combined with such tools as consumer boycotts, mass rallies, vigils, civil disobedience, media campaigns and letter-writing campaigns. Instead, this approach relied principally on the direct advocacy and lobbying of participants and media campaigns. The media campaigns were such that they evoked spontaneous responses from the public instead of soliciting organised actions.

The Nariva advocacy effort was an urban undertaking, with Port of Spain-based environmentalists articulating the agenda and the Port of Spain-based media, notably the press and television, serving as the primary public forum. The campaign issues were narrowly defined and there was limited local involvement in the establishment of the agenda or its articulation. One of the striking things about the campaign is that during the four years of the public phase, it continued to be dominated by outsiders and no prominent local spokesperson emerged from the Nariva communities.

Outcomes

Though protracted, the Nariva lobby succeeded in bringing about the eviction of the rice farmers and a government decision to conduct an environmental impact assessment of the feasibility of rice-farming in the swamp. But the outcomes of the advocacy process are not limited to these; the effort has had an impact on public policy, community organisation, NGO capacity and public awareness in Trinidad and Tobago.

Policy

The first significant policy decision that resulted from the Nariva lobby was the 1989 decision to declare the Bush Bush Wildlife Sanctuary a Prohibited Area, in a move to control human activity in the area and provide an additional legal basis for the prosecution of squatters. The 1993 decision to declare all of Nariva a Prohibited Area extended legal protection to the entire wetland. This helped the advocacy processes as it strengthened the legal basis for evicting squatters from those sections that fell within the proposed national park, but outside the Wildlife Sanctuary. Previously, these areas enjoyed no special protective status. The issue also forced the Government in 1993 to conduct a comprehensive survey of Nariva and define the boundaries of the various management areas on its maps.

The Wildlife Section's decision to push for Nariva's inclusion on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance was, in part, motivated by its desire to stop the destruction of the swamp. The motives for placing Nariva on the Montreux Record and requesting the Monitoring Procedure relate to this objective even more directly. Trinidad and Tobago's accession to the Ramsar Convention has changed wetland policy in that country. Indeed, the island now has a comprehensive policy for managing its wetlands where previously various government agencies were left to sort out their jurisdiction over and actions in wetlands as best they could.

Nariva forced the Government to address the issue of land tenure. After years of inaction, the process of regularising qualified farmers within Block A is underway, with surveys now being conducted in the swamp. In 1996, a bill to regularise squatters was proposed and national consultations on a bill -- the Planning and Development of Land Act, 1997-- to provide for the orderly and progressive development of land, including human settlement, are underway. There has, however, been little progress made on the 1996 Squatters Bill since its initial proposal.

Over the course of the advocacy process, a significant policy shift took place within the Forestry Division. A greater number of officials began to recognise the inadequacies of the 'top-down' approach to forest management and accept the need for some form of participatory management, which was already being practiced by the Wildlife and National Parks Sections in other parts of Trinidad. In March 1997, the Forestry Division hired for the first time residents of Plum Mitán, Cocal and Kernahan to help gather data in Nariva and monitor activities in the swamp. It should be noted, however, that this shift with respect to Nariva has taken place within a wider context of acceptance of participatory management approaches within the Forestry Division. This, in turn, has occurred in a regional and international environment where such approaches are now considered legitimate.

Nariva exposed some of the inconsistencies between government policy and practice, as well as among the policies of different agencies. Technocrats in the Forestry Division found themselves in conflict with politicians in the MALMR as social and ecological imperatives were being pitted against political interests. The measures put in place to stimulate rice production provide one such example. Government incentives were not limited to rice subsidies and favourable market prices. The State-owned Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) provided low-interest loans to farmers on the basis of National Flour Mills registration numbers, but in very few cases did the ADB verify the legal status of the land on which the rice was grown (Lans 1996), as is required by proper procedure. Some of the illegal large farmers were, therefore, able to access credit through government channels. Similarly, the State-owned NFM continued to purchase rice grown in Nariva, with no regard for the fact that the crop was being cultivated on illegally appropriated land. Had the State wanted to oust the large farmers earlier, surely an effective way of applying pressure would have been to refuse to buy their produce and deny them credit.

Community organisation

The urban nature of the Nariva advocacy effort notwithstanding, national awareness of the issues helped catalyse a certain level of organisation in the communities around Nariva. One group whose genesis can be traced directly to the controversy is the Nariva Conservation Foundation (NCF). The NCF was formed in September 1996 to protect the wetland and the residents' livelihoods (The Trinidad Express 1996c). The group used the Toco Foundation as an organisational model (Als personal communication) and was formed with assistance from that organisation, Ms. Gaskin and the Forestry Division's game warden for the area. Another group that was formed in 1996 with assistance from Ms. Gaskin and the Wildfowl Trust was Women on 'D' Rise in Plum Mitán. This self-help group was formed to address the economic situation of women in Plum Mitán and not conservation issues, however. Other organisations, such as the Farmers Association in Plum Mitán, the Kernahan Village Council, the Biche Young Achievers and South East Ecotours, were formed between 1993 and 1996. This suggests that the national focus on Nariva and the presence of outsiders (journalists, researchers and government officials) in what had previously been a largely neglected area may have provided a certain impetus for local organisation.

However, the Nariva advocacy process could have been used to stimulate more community organisation and to foster local development, had the debate been framed in broader terms and the struggle waged through different channels. The focus of the effort was to get the large farmers out and to stop illegal activities; so although the process brought several community development issues to light, it did not address them in any comprehensive way. This stemmed from how the issues were framed and who framed them. The experience of the Society for the Promotion of Education and Research (SPEAR) in Belize suggests that when there is a strong feeling of connection between the advocacy issue and the community's every day needs, and when participatory techniques are used, communities, regardless of levels of (formal) community education, can play a role in an advocacy campaign, from naming the problem, to being a part of the advocacy activities (Vernon personal communication). The strong alliance between the illegal cultivators and various politicians coloured the process, rendering community empowerment work very slow and difficult and sometimes even dangerous. At the same time, the rate of destruction in the swamp dictated urgent action.

NGO capacity

Over the course of the advocacy process, environmental NGOs in Trinidad learned how to organise as a lobby to influence the State (Als personal communication). The increased intensity of the campaign during 1996, for example, suggests that there was a new level of organisation and sophistication in the effort. Through its work between 1993 and 1996, the Wildfowl Trust developed its capacity to network and form alliances with other groups (Shepherd personal communication), forming broader linkages with other NGOs, government agencies, international organisations and the mass media.

Public awareness

Perhaps one of the best indicators of the impact of the lobby on the national consciousness is the fact that over time, Nariva became a prism through which other issues, such as illegal timber harvesting, the poaching of turtle eggs, the illegal sale of birds and squatting on hillsides, were addressed and examined publicly. While it is difficult to accurately assess the extent to which the Nariva process contributed to an overall increase in the level of awareness of environmental, notably wetland, issues among the general Trinidad and Tobago public, it is safe to assume that there has been an effect. For four years, the public was bombarded with media reports of Nariva's destruction and its potential and actual consequences on Trinidad and Tobago's patrimony. A sampling of letters to the editors of Trinidad and Tobago's major newspapers over the period suggests that the Nariva conservation position enjoyed considerably more popular support than that of rice cultivation and that this support came from a cross-section of the population.

The Nariva Advocacy Campaign Strategy

A number of elements combined to contribute to the campaign's success. While some were due to externalities, such as the political situation in Trinidad and Tobago, others resulted from the strategy employed by the principals in the effort.

Alliance building

The formation of alliances was critical to the advocacy process in Nariva. Collaboration within and between government and NGOs was effective for defining problems and possible solutions. As the Nariva campaign demonstrated, alliance-building can engender popular support and facilitate access to essential information. Three levels of partnership were forged in the Nariva campaign: between the Wildlife Section and the Wildfowl Trust; between those two players and the media; and among NGOs.

Credibility and legitimacy

An examination of the Nariva advocacy effort must consider the role and function of personal credibility and organisational legitimacy. Personal influence and social standing were exploited to advance the cause. Ms. Gaskin was the charismatic individual who kept the advocacy process alive and the "face" of the effort. Prior to the Nariva affair, she was a known public figure and she was able to capitalise on this during the advocacy process. Her own personal standing within Trinidadian society helped her gain access to the mass media, politicians and policy-makers. National and international recognition of Ms. Gaskin's work also helped give it credibility and further publicise the issue.

At the organisational level, the Wildfowl Trust enjoyed a certain level of legitimacy in its own right. Besides the fact that it had the backing of its 2,000 members, its twenty-one year history of involvement with wildfowl and wetland protection in Trinidad made it a credible, if not obvious, advocate for Nariva. Another legitimising organisation was the Toco Foundation, which is known for its focus on community development issues, and its use of this particular lens when considering the environment. The non-partisan commitment of staff of the Wildlife and National Parks Sections of the Forestry Division to the sustainable management of the country's resources and their willingness to share information and adopt a low profile while supporting the process, served to facilitate the participation of these NGOs in the advocacy process.

International support

External agencies and international conventions were used to support national actions and positions. Officials of both the Wildlife Section and the Wildfowl Trust admit that they viewed the support from the Ramsar Bureau as a way to bolster their position within Trinidad, because it accorded Nariva a sense of importance beyond Trinidad's borders. (Nathai-Gyan personal communication, Shephard personal communication). Besides Ramsar, two other international agencies, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and Greenpeace, supported the local lobby. In the aftermath of the attack on Ms. Gaskin in the swamp, for example, Greenpeace issued a public statement in her support (Newsday 1996). In addition, international awards won by Ms. Gaskin in 1994 and 1996 and the screening of the video *Nariva Must Not Die* at London's Third International Film Festival helped influence local public perception of the importance of the issue⁵.

Framing the issue

An interesting element of the Nariva strategy is how the issues were framed. The large-scale rice farmers were the primary target of the campaign, although the objective of the effort was to change the Government's policy and practice with regards to the swamp. The fact that the primary focus was on the rice farmers and their activities and not on the Government allowed the State to relatively easily adopt the popular position on the squatter issue in public, when it finally decided to take action.

Information and communication

The role that information and education can play in building popular support for a cause is another of Nariva's lessons. The use of existing communication channels, including the mass media as well as personal and institutional contacts, is essential to the advocacy process. Information can lead to increased awareness and understanding, and ultimately to action and change. Prior to the public phase of the Nariva campaign there was very little popular support

⁵ In 1994, Ms. Gaskin was named to the UNEP Global 5000 Roll of Honour, and in 1996, she was one of 25 women honoured by UNEP for their work on the environment on the occasion of the organisation's twenty-fifth anniversary.

for the Wildlife Section's efforts, as the issues remained largely unknown beyond the narrow conservation/naturalist sector. Once Nariva became a 'national' issue, framed in terms of patrimony and national safety and well being, members of the public began to rally behind the issue⁶. Increased public understanding of the importance of Nariva and how its deterioration and destruction could affect the country as a whole, led to public pressure for a resolution to the crisis. This public pressure was one of the factors that led to government action in 1996.

The Medium: The Trinidadian mass media was the conduit for much of the public advocacy. Without the collaboration of the media, the issue may have remained the concern of the MALMR and selected environmentalists and researchers. The willingness of the media to make Nariva news over the long term and their appreciation of the significance of the unfolding situation helped keep it alive as part of the national debate, rather than as a localised issue. Indeed, the rice farmers claim that their attempts to use the media to their advantage proved unsuccessful and that the media were biased against them in their treatment of Nariva (Akaloo personal communication). The Wildfowl Trust and Ms. Gaskin were particularly astute in using the media to their advantage. Although the Wildlife Section did not have the same level of flexibility as Ms. Gaskin to generate newspaper articles and newsworthy events, it also proactively helped stimulate coverage by providing information to the press and passing along story ideas to sympathetic journalists (Nathai-Gyan personal communication, Cross personal communication). None of this activity was clandestine, as the information channelled to the media was readily available to the public.

The Message: The issues were presented in the media in a simplistic moral formula of "good" versus "evil". Messages that deal with moral choices can be effective in the advocacy process. The interests of "small farmers and fishers who have lived and worked in the area for generations" were pitted against those of "a handful of big, illegal land grabbers, people not even from the area, who have moved in and grabbed as much land as they could take . . ." (Gaskin 1996). In addition, this message was consistent throughout the media campaign. Several articles reiterating these points were written by Ms. Gaskin and other members of the NGO lobby between 1993 and 1996. The success of the Nariva advocacy strategy indicates that messages that are clear, relevant and consistent are critical to the advocacy process.

⁶ "Nariva is unique and supports *our* (author's emphasis) wildlife, *our* Manatee found nowhere else in the Caribbean, *our* red-bellied macaw..." "...the Nariva-Mayaro Windbelt Reserve protects *us* from hurricanes..." (Gaskin 1996).

Conclusion

The ten-year advocacy effort in Nariva was ultimately a successful one, demonstrating clearly what is possible from a sustained and collaborative effort between government agencies and NGOs in dealing with common conservation problems. The experience goes further to show that advocacy is not limited to NGOs, but that government agencies can have a role in the process: the Wildlife Section was not simply an ally of the NGOs; it played a catalytic role at the start of the process and remained an actor throughout. The strategic alliances formed by the various stakeholders and their use of existing channels of communication and information flows proved to be critical in building a sound case and strong public support for the cessation of illegal rice farming in Nariva. In bringing this campaign to a positive conclusion, the various participants have shown that within Trinidad and Tobago, and the Caribbean by extension, there is scope for policy-influencing by civil society actors and for constructive government and NGO collaboration in environmental protection.

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Caribbean Natural Resources Institute

The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) is a regional non-governmental organisation concerned with issues of conservation, environment, and sustainable development in the insular Caribbean.

CANARI's mission is to create avenues for the equitable participation and effective collaboration of Caribbean communities and institutions in managing the use of natural resources critical to development.

The Institute has specific interest and extensive experience in the identification and promotion of participatory and collaborative approaches to natural resource management.

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