

## **Funding, green washing and fabricated success stories (Non-academic version)**

The failures of conservation can in part be attributed to the current system of funding which is capitalistic and neoliberal in its nature. Big NGO's (BINGOs) control and manipulate the majority of funds through political and bureaucratic means, supported by corporations with greenwashing and nepotism. Small or grassroots NGOs are often left to squabble for small handouts from the BINGOS creating a competitive, hostile environment. More often NGOs rely on the public for direct funding and so they must constantly produce and share success stories to compete with the simplistic and unrealistic stories presented by BINGOs which appeal to western ideologies.

Mainstream conservation institutions are increasingly modelling themselves on, and indeed directly reliant upon, commercial businesses. Being part of the dominant economic establishment positions these NGOs as conflicted in their ability (and desire) to take effective action against the root cause of environmental degradation which unarguably stems from uncontrolled capitalist exploitation, accompanied by corruption, broken nation states and a burgeoning world leadership crisis. These large NGOs cannot challenge these overarching systems of oppression because they have become part of them. By ignoring the "bigger picture" and the real cause of the problems that they claim to be concerned with tackling and offering superficial, insincere solutions, the big NGOs cause severe damage to our world in that they control the vast majority of resources and funding to ostensibly support conservation efforts, but fail to use it where it is most needed and thus fail to create any meaningful change or positive results.

Funding systems in conservation favour BINGOs while excluding small NGOs. Matching grants and reimbursement grants are examples of funding that require the applicant NGO have large capital to even apply. Matching grants oblige an NGO to provide a certain proportion of the total grant amount and will not be awarded unless that amount is raised. In the case of grants that are substantial, small NGOs have virtually no chance of raising the "matched" amount therefore making this type of grant inaccessible. Reimbursement grants pay back expenses an NGO has already incurred, making them available to organizations that have expendable resources, as is generally not the case with grassroots NGOs. This type of grant also offers the possibility of doubling grant money if an NGO were to say, raise funds by direct funding (funds raised by the public) for a project and then have that project reimbursed. Regulation of these large grants is sporadic at best and there is very little accountability to put the money directly into the conservation work it is meant for. Greenwashing by large corporations exacerbates this situation. Ethically corrupt corporations such as oil companies can "save face" by donating to environmental protection projects but obviously do not enforce what that money is used for and what results is an inefficient use of funds. Therefore, greenwashing "washes" both funder and funded.

The funding options most often left to small NGOs are receiving run-off, small grants distributed by BINGOs and direct funding. This leads to a highly competitive atmosphere between small NGOs which can manifest into NGOs taking credit for others' work, stealing joint funding or pitting local communities against each other (to gain popularity). This hostile environment is obviously disadvantageous to the cooperation of small NGOs. Raising funds through direct funding means appealing to the public and is done through social media or crowd-funding campaigns. Again, this is highly competitive in nature and unfortunately, success is only achieved by promoting simplistic narratives and offering the donor goods or services in return for their donation.

Donor agencies and NGOs are pressured to pretend that the money they grant will quickly and efficiently fight poverty and species loss. Projects of high economic investment are often of very short term and are non-continuous after grant money is finished. Therefore, simplistic narratives used to attract funding from the public do not give an accurate portrayal of conservation and are therefore detrimental to the movement. There is very little supervision and on the ground validation of NGOs' grant money application, in case of violations of human rights, misuse of grant money. These allow the fabrication of success stories, a dangerous misrepresentation to the public of what, or in many cases what isn't, happening on the ground.

Often the focus is on cute or attractive animals being rescued from horrific conditions to live out a life of contentment in a bright, spacious enclosure. This story becomes a familiar anthropocentric tale of the human saviour with disregard to the fact that a life of improved captivity is a glorified and inaccurate "success" story for that individual animal. More importantly, it ignores the frustratingly bureaucratic work of changing and ensuring the enforcement of policies which is the true driving force of conservation. Unsurprisingly BINGOs have mastered the art of playing into pre-existing cultural biases of white, western cultures and have the financial means to produce high quality videos and promotional material as well as products which are hugely successful in our capitalist societies.

- Reclaim Conservation will have an honest, transparent funding system which will require donors to follow to our policies and will communicate the realities of conservation work with the public.
- Reclaim Conservation will avoid reliance on funds as much as possible, and not compromising to obtain them.
- There will be complete transparency of any funding that is applied for – all applications will be published on the web.
- Reclaim Conservation will promote international system of supervision and regulation of NGOs groundwork to ensure that funding money is used accordingly funding agreements, with full respect to nature and human rights.
- There will be strict requirements and policies for donors to adhere to, no greenwashing.

- Reclaim Conservation will inform the public about the reality of conservation work and expose the corruption.
- Information produced and defused by Reclaim Conservation will be presented concisely and with the belief that the public is deserving of access to the truth about complex concepts and not just simplistic narratives used to incite donations.

## Bibliography

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Büscher, B. and Dressler, W. (2007), 'Linking neoprotectionism and environmental governance: On the rapidly increasing tensions between actors in the environment-development nexus', *Conservation and Society*, 5 (4), 586.

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## Questions

**In general, does the text gives a good overview of the relations between funding and the efficiency of conservation, or do you think there are better ways to tackle this issue?**

**Does this need more background info?**

**Is it easy and interesting to read? Does the English needs editing? Can you suggest edits?**

**Are parts of the text irrelevant, repetitive, or should be rephrased or deleted?**

**Are there any relevant issues that are not covered by this text? Would you be able to add them or just list them to be added by us?**

**Can you suggest a person or an institution that might have the right experience and perspective to rewrite this text? Are you happy to forward this text to them?**

**Do you know of any academic work related to the subject that can be added to this text?**

**This is the non-academic version of this issue. Are you interested in writing the academic version?**

**Any other comment?**