

REPORT OF THE ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION “ORGANIZING GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNS TO OPPOSE PROJECTS THAT THREATEN BIRD HABITAT”

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THIS ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION was prompted by the need to campaign against an increasing number of building developments in our region that are having a serious effect on bird habitat. In some instances there is a threat to the survival of an endemic species such as the Grenada Dove (*Leptotila wellsi*; see www.grenadadovecampaign.com). Depending on the issue being opposed, some of the following ideas were considered useful in organizing and running a successful campaign.

The following steps should be taken for starting out the campaign: decide on an acronym (e.g. SOS ‘Save Open Spaces’); form a steering committee; decide on a campaign slogan; meet regularly as a committee; and plan a campaign strategy.

The following campaign publicity and methods should be taken: design a brand, create a website, newspapers (daily/weekly), magazines, TV documentaries, radio phone-in/talk shows, maintain regular email contact with supporters, campaign materials such as T-shirts and car stickers, and public service announcements.

Items useful for posting on the website include: the problem/concerns, goal—what should be done, developer’s plans, how to protest—points to include in letters and who to write to, examples of letters sent, organizations involved, upcoming events, merchandise available, how to make financial contributions, photos—before and after, on-line petition, photos, and call for help from volunteers.

Actions from individuals should include the following: letter writing to the Minister of the Environment, members of parliament, premier or prime minister, and editors of local or national newspapers; contact talk shows with informed views; file objections to planning applications (not a standardized letter); and sign on-line or written petitions (e.g., “Care 2 Make a Difference” at www.care2.com).

Actions from groups include: present petition to a government minister; hold community events at site, such as a picnic, family fun day, or concert; organize campaign competitions such as posters, poetry, or songs; peaceful demonstrations or protests; family walks (perhaps tied in with fundraising); keeping in the news through regular press releases or photos; field trips to the site; and pursuing legal issues.

Individuals or organizations who should be targeted include: government agencies and members of parliament, land developers, directors of proposed development (e.g., hotel board), investors (e.g., of the tourist development), all sections of the local community, and getting youth involved.

Individuals or organizations who should be worked with include: local non-government organizations (NGOs), international NGOs and other conservation organizations; scientists; the local community; service clubs; prior donors; and business or trade organizations.

Issues that should be confronted include: anticipate the arguments of opponents; ‘the development will provide jobs’—but at what cost?; short-term gain versus long-term benefit; will provide increased foreign earnings / government revenue; ‘boost to tourism’—but might there be an alternative such as eco-tourism?; is the disputed land protected?; is it privately or publicly held?; has a proper environmental impact assessment by independent, reputable scientists (or consulting firms) been carried out?; and beware of ‘greening’ arguments of opponents or developers.

A final question to consider: is it possible to undertake an economic valuation of the existing site?

Much can be achieved by organizing grass-roots campaigns. It is important to form a team and plan carefully. We hope that some of the ideas will be useful and result in a successful campaign.