

The influence of NGO's on commitment to the environment and respect to nature, using the example of MRCI in Madagascar

Field Study Report by **Sandra Ellerkamp**, University of Twente

Background

Sandra was a volunteer with MRCI for 12 weeks in 2016 on the forest program. Whilst she was with us she asked volunteers when they arrive and leave to complete a questionnaire (Appendix I). This was a field report for a module in her degree from the University of Twente, below is a summary of her research and findings.

Problem Statement and Research Question

An important aspect for counteracting environmental destruction is commitment to the environment and respect to nature. Awareness of climate change and environmental consciousness go hand-in-hand with respect of nature. Before a conservation project starts, it is necessary to find people or organisations which show commitment to the environment. In Madagascar there are many Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) which work on conservation of the environment (Betsill & Corell, 2001). NGO's play an important role in conservation projects around the world, most prevalently in developing countries. One example of a NGO is Madagascar Research and Conservation Institute (MRCI). They not only have different conservation and community projects, they also conduct research. MRCI is located on Nosy Komba, Madagascar. As many as just under sixty volunteers live at the research camp on Nosy Komba at any given time. An example of one of their ongoing projects is forest conservation. Volunteers hike in the morning into the forest and collect data on reptiles, birds and lemurs in order to observe the population and examine possible changes. They also conduct regular hikes to pick up garbage and clean up the forest. Furthermore, they conduct workshops for local villages and learn about biodiversity on Nosy Komba in the afternoon and collect data for further research. The volunteers in the marine conservation project work on a similar basis, collecting data on the reef, running beach cleans and education programs. There are also construction and teaching projects. The camp where the volunteers stay during the project produces a small amount of waste. In addition, the people are asked to consume as little energy and water as possible. Bathrooms, main house and the huts where volunteers sleep are lighted with LED's, which are solar powered, because there is no electricity on the Island. As well as this, a generator runs a maximum of two hours a day.

According to Whitmarsh (2009) it is important to confront people with their energy consumption. Thereby people become more aware of their own energy use. The length of time an individual is confronted with

their level of energy expenditure for plays a role in their awareness. The most effective way to reduce energy consumption is to show possibilities of how energy use can be reduced. It is therefore important to make people aware of energy consumption. People feel more able to handle energy reduction when they see that changes they make do have an impact on energy consumption.

In conclusion, there are several research teams studying environmental destruction in Madagascar and the decrease in biodiversity. After analysing the influence of NGO's and the situation in the MRCI camp, the following research question is constructed:

Does the MRCI in Madagascar influence commitment to the environment and respect to nature?

This was tested using a set series of questions, see Appendix I.

Results

- The average score on **Commitment to the Environment and Respect to Nature** was 3.56 in the pre-test and **increased** to 3.6 in the post-test. This broke down to 3.5 for community volunteers and 3.6 for conservation volunteers.
- On average the score of **Intention to Conserve Water** was 3.68. This **increased** in the post-test to 3.76.
- The respondents scored in average 3.6 on the **Intention to Reduce Power in the Future**. In the post-test they also **increased** in score to 3.75.
- There was an **increase** of 0,1 between pre-test and post-test concerning to the **Intention to Reduce Waste** (3.78 and 3.83 respectively).
- In the pre-test as well as the post-test the group of **younger** volunteers (<30yrs) scored higher on **Commitment to the Environment and Respect to Nature** compared to the older group (>30yrs).
- **Female** respondents scored higher on **Commitment to the Environment** than the male respondents in the pre-test, as well as in the post-test.
- In both tests the respondents who chose '**Intention to Help**' as their reason for volunteering scored **lower** on **Commitment to the Environment** than any other group.

Conclusion

The main research question was: Does the MRCI in Madagascar influence the commitment to the environment and respect to nature? There was a significant effect on commitment to the environment and respect to nature found. The answer to the research question on the basis of the given results is therefore, that **the organization MRCI indeed influences commitment on environment**.

The results support the previously made expectations that were based on the theoretical framework. The respondents showed more commitment to the environment and respect to nature after living in the camp in comparison when they first arrived. The volunteers were living with nature. Their daily life was dependent on nature. They woke up when the day began and went to bed when it was dark. They personally experienced that something such as electricity or water, which are always accessible in First

World Countries, are not an endless resource. They were exposed to not only the fact that these things are not guaranteed everywhere, but they also experienced that it is possible to live with only small amounts of these things. Wasting electricity and water is not necessary for comfortable living conditions. Living with or next to nature resulted in an increase in commitment to the environment and respect to nature.

The Non-Governmental Organization, MRCI, is working on a sustainable environment in Madagascar. Volunteers are living in a camp which is eco-friendly. The camp wants to reduce water, energy and waste production. The volunteers are directly confronted and exposed with their consumption. The driving force of this behavior is that the volunteers have no other opportunities. There is a generator which runs only 2 hours a day and water production is dependent on rainfall. The volunteers know that they have to reduce their water consumption, because otherwise they will have no water for a period of time. The volunteers also see what happens with the waste. In Madagascar they usually burn the waste in open areas. The volunteers get more aware of their trash, they are exposed to the unsustainable waste dumping in their environment, and they try to reduce their own waste production. In order to achieve environmental sustainability it is not only necessary to treat environmental cases, it is also important to directly increase public awareness.

In conclusion, the results of the field study are useful in the view of dealing with grand challenges. Volunteers mostly come from developed countries, and as shown in the results, NGO's such as MRCI are able to influence their commitment to the environment. A change of attitude and behaviour is useful for future commitment to the environment. In order to create sustainable development it is important to have people who care about the environment and who see the problem. Furthermore, it is important to have new technologies which enhance sustainability. Young volunteers may choose to follow a career path based on environmental studies in the future. They have more opportunities to help create a sustainable environment than a poor farmer in Madagascar. Therefore, organizations such as MRCI in Madagascar can have a huge impact on the future regarding a sustainable environment.

Appendix I

Survey number:

What is your name?

What is your age?

Which project do you follow? Marine Forest Teaching Construction

What is your nationality?

How did you apply for the project? IVHQ MRCI The Leap

Intention to

Why did you decide for this project? help Gap year Study Other:

In the following you will be asked to write down to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree)

	1	2	3	4
I think that environmental destruction is a huge problem				
I feel a responsibility towards the environment				
I think that humans are severely impacting the planet				
Nature is strong enough to cope with the impact of agriculture and industry				
Environmental destruction is something that affecting or is going to affect me personally				
In Madagascar environmental destruction is a problem				
In the future I will donate/spend money in order to protect the environment				
I will spend time and energy to protect the environment				
Environmental conservation plays a role in my life				

I see myself as a person who respects nature				
Others see me as a person who respects nature				
I think that deforestation in order to cultivate crops is ok				
I should do more to protect the environment				
Others should do more to protect the environment				
My efforts to conserve the environment have no impact				
Volunteers at camp are asked to use as little water as possible				
This is acceptable				
When I am back at home I will reduce water consumption as well				
The MRCI camp makes use of solar power for light and there is a generator which runs 2 hours a day				
This is acceptable				
When I am back home I will reduce my energy consumption as well				
Volunteers at camp are asked to produce waste as little as possible				
This is acceptable				
When I am back home I will reduce my waste production as well				