



**MARINE
ENVIRONMENTAL
NGOS IN CHINA:
2017 DEVELOPMENT
REPORT**

AN INVESTIGATION OF CORE CAPACITIES

Heyi Insitute and
Shanghai Rendu Ocean NPO Development Center

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Contents

Preface	1
Section 1: Introduction	2
1. The development of the marine conservation sector	2
2. Current state of the marine conservation sector	3
3. Defining marine environmental NGOs	4
4. Research aims and core methodology	6
Section 2: Analysis of questionnaire data	8
1. Basic data	9
2. Fields and working methods	11
3. Professional capacities of marine environmental NGOs	13
4. Development of the sector and cooperation	21
Section 3: Case studies	24
1. Shanghai Rendu Ocean NPO Development Center	24
2. China Blue Sustainability Institute	27
3. Sanya Blue Ribbon Ocean Conservation Association	31
4. Shenzhen Blue Ocean Environmental Protection Association	34
5. Shenzhen Mangrove Wetland Conservation Foundation (MCF)	37
6. Shishi Xiangzhi Beautiful Coast Volunteer Association (BCVA)	41
7. Guangdong Wetland Conservation Association	44
Review of case studies:	46
Section 4: Findings and conclusions	48
1. Summary of findings	48
2. Conclusion: outlook for the sector	51
Appendix: List of 33 questionnaire respondents	53

Preface

This report has been produced jointly by the Heyi Institute and Shanghai Rendu Ocean NPO Development Center, with support from UNDP's Global Environmental Facility Small Grants Programme and XIN Partners, to examine the growth and professional development of NGOs working on marine conservation in China. We wish here to express our gratitude to our funders.

The last three decades have seen Chinese NGOs increase in number and start to specialize in different fields, each requiring its own professional capacities and working methods. Marine environmental NGOs, a subset of environmental NGOs, therefore face their own unique challenges. The current report builds on our 2015 report and the 2015 and 2016 directories to examine the following topic: what are the core professional capacities of Chinese marine environmental NGOs, and how have these capacities developed. Specifically, we will look at the working methods and professional capacities NGOs use to resolve problems and how well developed those capacities are. Here, "professional capacities" does not refer to organizational NGO capacities such as fundraising, internal organization or managing staff, but to the specific capacities needed in the marine conservation sector. This discussion will help organizations within the sector understand the methods and professional capacities needed to resolve issues; which in turn will help inform resource allocation, strategic choices, and cooperation and partnerships.

The report is divided into four sections:

- Section 1 is an introduction. This reviews prior work, describes the development and current state of the marine conservation sector, and covers key terms and methodology.
- Section 2 analyzes responses to a questionnaire, covering the topics of the report and interviews with NGOs. The 33 responses received describe the current circumstances of these NGOs, their working methods, development of their professional capacities and further needs, core capacities, observations about the sector, etc.
- Section 3 presents case studies: to fully investigate the topic of the report, we compiled and analyzed transcripts of interviews with seven organizations, identifying the professional capacities needed in their daily work.
- Section 4 sums up our key findings and recommendations.

We are grateful for your interest and look forward to further discussion.

Section 1: Introduction

1. The development of the marine conservation sector

The All-China Environmental Federation's *Development of China's Environmental Civil Society Organizations Blue Book* divides the development of environmental NGOs in China into three stages: emergence and rise from 1978 to 1994; growth from 1995 to 2002; and expansion and strengthening from 2003 onwards. Here we divide the development of the marine conservation sector into four stages.

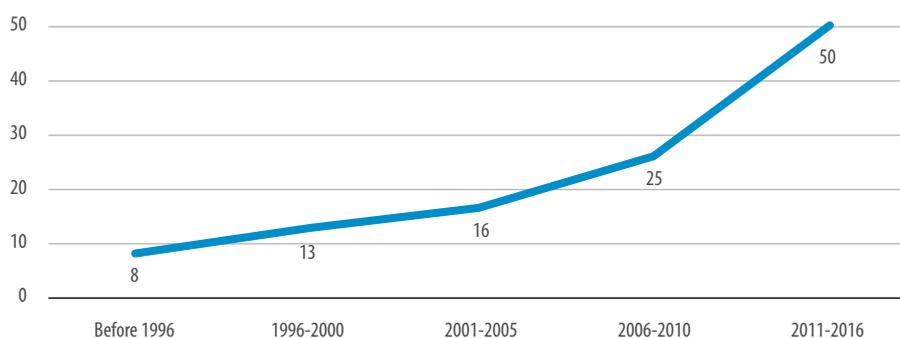
During the first stage, from 1979 to 1991, a few NGOs working on marine conservation were founded, but these saw little participation by civil society. In the second stage, from 1991 to 2000, isolated grassroots marine environmental NGOs started to appear. In the third stage, from 2000 to 2010, these groups grew stronger and this is when many of the organizations active today were founded. The fourth stage, from 2010 onwards, has seen organizations specialize in specific marine issues and become more professional. New organizations have often been founded in response to a specific issue, while existing groups have narrowed their focus.

Marine environmental NGOs were, when compared with environmental NGOs as a whole, by no means late starters. In 1979, at the start of reform and opening up, the China Seas Organization, a marine conservation body with civil society characteristics, was founded – although, due to the nature of the times, it retained strong links with officialdom. The Saunder's Gull Conservation Society of Panjin was founded in 1991 to protect the Saunder's gull, numbers of which were shrinking locally, and this is the earliest grassroots NGO we have been able to identify. It wasn't until two years later that Friends of Nature, usually regarded as emblematic of the development of environmental NGOs, was founded. Particularly impressive is that the Saunder's Gull Conservation Society of Panjin is today still active on the front lines of marine conservation. However, the decade following saw only the occasional founding of new organizations. These included the Huiwen Guannan Marine Resources Conservation Association (1998) and the Ocean Protection Commune (2000). From 2000 onward numbers steadily increased: the China Mangrove Conservation Network (2001), the Shenzhen Blue Ocean Conservation Association (2002), the Sanya Blue Ribbon Ocean Conservation Association and Shanghai Rendu Ocean NPO Development Center (both 2007) are all today important actors on the front lines of marine conservation. From 2010 organizations became more professional and specialized, with the appearance of some dedicated to resolving particular issues, such as the Dapeng New District Coral Conservation Volunteers' Association (2014) and the China Blue Sustainability Institute (2015). These organizations were characterized by professional expertise and technical capacities, allowing for more intensive participation and better outcomes.

2. Current state of the marine conservation sector

In June 2017 Rendu published its *2016 Directory of Chinese Marine Conservation Organizations*. This forms part of the initial research for this report and lists 191 organizations working in the sector, including 34 Chinese social organizations and 18 Chinese student societies working specifically on marine conservation; 8 Chinese foundations, 18 international NGOs, 63 Chinese social organizations and 16 Chinese student societies which do marine conservation-related work; 4 Chinese supporting social organizations; and 30 other groups. It should also be pointed out that information was missing on 47 organizations, 12 of which are Chinese marine conservation student societies and 10 Chinese social organizations doing marine conservation-related work. This report provides an overview of these organizations: when were they founded, where are they based and what their legal status is.

Year of foundation: Data for 112 Chinese marine conservation organizations has been plotted, with 18 international NGOs, 30 other related organizations, with 31 organizations for which data was missing being excluded.

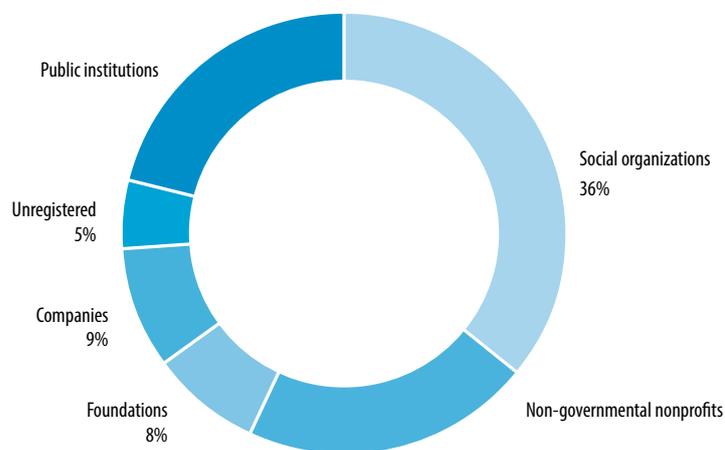


Year of foundation of Chinese marine conservation organizations

Geographical distribution: Data for 163 organizations is given, including 34 Chinese social organizations and 18 Chinese student societies working on marine conservation; 8 Chinese environmental foundations, 63 Chinese environmental social organizations and 16 Chinese student societies which do marine conservation-related work; 4 Chinese supporting organizations; and 20 other organizations.



Type of registration: data is provided for 114 organizations, with 18 international NGOs, 18 Chinese marine conservation student societies, 16 student societies doing marine conservation-related work, with 25 other organizations where registration data was missing being excluded.



3. Defining marine environmental NGOs

The subject of this report is “the marine environmental NGO”. However, we have not previously offered a very clear definition of this concept. In our 2015 report we defined it as “an environmental NGO doing work relevant to marine conservation issues,” which was an initial delimitation of scope but failed to consider the differences between groups. This report will therefore make that definition clearer.

A. LEGAL STATUS

In different contexts NGOs can be referred to as social organizations, NPOs, charities and the third sector. These terms generally refer to the same organizations, but with a slight difference in emphasis.

The Chinese government’s management framework allows NGOs to obtain legal status as social organizations, non-governmental nonprofits or foundations. There are also groups that are registered as businesses, or are not registered but carry out marine conservation work, and university student societies.

Social organizations: these have a longer history, having existed since the foundation of the People’s Republic of China. These are quasi-official, work under the direction of a governing body and are non-competitive. Some social organizations carry out certain governmental functions, are organized on civil service lines, and participate in the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. These are commonly referred to as people’s organizations. There are also social organizations which are run more closely along government lines, receive state funding and are not required to register with the civil affairs authorities.

In this report, the term NGOs excludes these quasi-governmental organizations. Other groups that are required to register under the Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations, even those having close links with officialdom, still campaign and communicate, cooperate closely with other NGOs, and play important roles in marine conservation, therefore making them essential subjects of study if we are to understand the marine conservation sector.

Non-governmental nonprofits: the most important form of NGO registration. Unlike social organizations, these are not restricted from competition. Since an August 2016 document on promoting the healthy development of NGOs, it is no longer necessary for environmental social organizations to have approval from an overseeing body before registration – a change which is bound to mean faster registration of marine environmental NGOs.

Foundations: the third form of social organization provided for in legislation. However, while there are foundations relevant to marine conservation, there are currently no foundations working solely on marine conservation issues. This form of registration will therefore not be discussed.

Organizations registered as businesses, or not registered: Of course, not all NGOs can win legal status, and due to difficulties registering, some NGOs have either not done so, or have opted to register as businesses instead. These are nominally businesses, but actually work in the public interest.

Student societies: student organizations founded and active on university campuses. These do not need to be registered and there is no shortage of student societies dedicated to marine conservation. However, as these lack institutional continuity and this report is focused on the core capacities of marine environmental NGOs, these groups will be excluded.

In general NGOs as referred to in this report are social organizations (excluding those which are quasi-governmental), non-governmental nonprofits and organizations which, despite being registered as businesses or not registered, engage in marine conservation work.

B. FIELDS IN WHICH MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS WORK

Having clarified what we mean by NGOs, we now look at what kind of work a NGO must do to be classed as a “marine environmental NGO”. In what fields are the subjects of our study active? There are two issues here.

First, what fields are considered part of marine conservation? Marine conservation issues are rarely restricted to the seas. This is clearest with pollution, ecosystem conservation and sustainable fishing – all marine conservation issues, which all in turn involve other areas. For example: Rendu aims to tackle marine litter – but 80% of marine litter comes from land-based sources, and so Rendu works on litter in rivers and even waste disposal in general. Do we include NGOs working on litter in rivers, other bodies of water and even on domestic waste? Further, do we regard groups which provide support and capacity-building to NGOs, and which have provided these services to marine environmental NGOs, as part of the sector?

Second, not every organization has a clear goal, or goals may not be limited to a single ecosystem. A group dedicated to raising environmental awareness and educating people about nature will necessarily cover the marine environment to some extent. What proportion of their activities should be relevant to marine conservation for them to be classed as a marine environmental NGO? This is not a minor issue: there are no small number of groups which carry out marine conservation work to one extent or another, but which do not class themselves as marine conservation groups. There are other marine conservation groups which have come to focus on this field only after a process of restructuring and trial and error. The boundaries of the sector are therefore fuzzy.

In the *Directory of Chinese Marine Conservation Organizations* we classed Chinese organizations as marine conservation organizations, marine conservation-related organizations or supporting organizations, then gathered information on such organizations as widely as possible. In this report we narrow our definition to study environmental organizations within China's borders, which specialize in or do marine conservation-related work. We will not examine overseas organizations, foundations or student societies.

4. Research aims and core methodology

The aim of this report is to understand the professional capacities used by marine environmental NGOs: the expertise, technology and resources applied to tackle marine conservation issues. "Professional capacities" excludes organizational NGO capacities – fundraising, communications, internal management – and stresses the methods, techniques and competencies used to resolve sector-specific issues. The focus of our study is to examine these professional capacities as used by marine environmental NGOs in their current work and the standards of those capacities. However we will also cover more organizational capacities and the outlook for the sector. We hope our work will give rise to further discussions on marine environmental NGOs, as well as to help organizations in the sector determine their strategies, gather resources and exercise greater influence.

Material for our research comes from three sources. First, previous work, primarily Rendu's 2015 and 2016 directories of marine environmental NGOs, which provide an understanding of the scope and characteristics of the sector. Second, case studies and interviews: we selected seven representative organizations working on different marine issues to interview, learning in depth about their areas of work, working methods, professional needs, the strengths and weaknesses of their teams, and their view of the sector. The information gathered has been compiled into case studies. Third, a questionnaire, intended to build on the interviews and provide a broader understanding. The questionnaire was designed with reference to interview transcripts, ensuring that it relates closely to the daily work of these groups. Questions cover the basic details of the organization, the field it works in, its professional capacities and an evaluation of these, plans for capacity-building, and observations of the sector. The questionnaire was sent to 81 groups: 28 marine conservation organizations and

53 marine conservation-related organizations. This distinction was drawn from Rendu's directory: marine conservation organizations are organizations with "marine" in their names which work only on marine issues; while marine conservation-related organizations also work on other issues besides marine conservation. For our analysis we decided to combine 15 marine conservation organizations and 18 marine conservation-related organizations, for reasons which will be explained in Section 2.

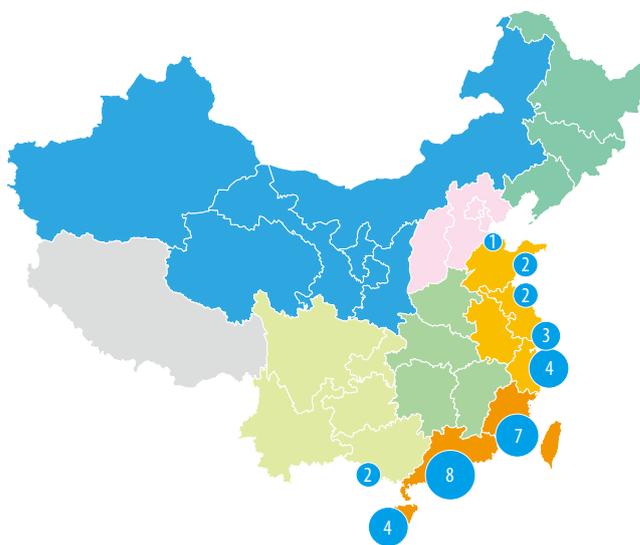
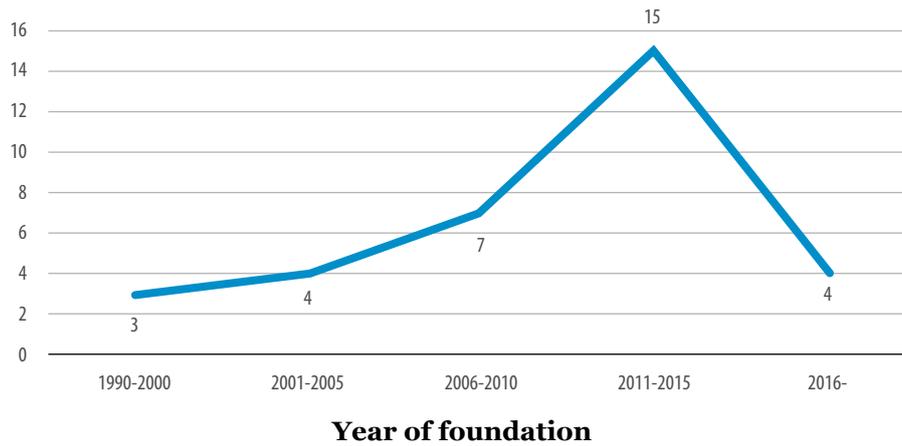
Finally, based on prior work, the interviews and case studies, and the questionnaire responses, in Section 4 we discuss our key findings and the outlook for the sector. We hope other organizations and employees will join our discussions.

Section 2: Analysis of questionnaire data

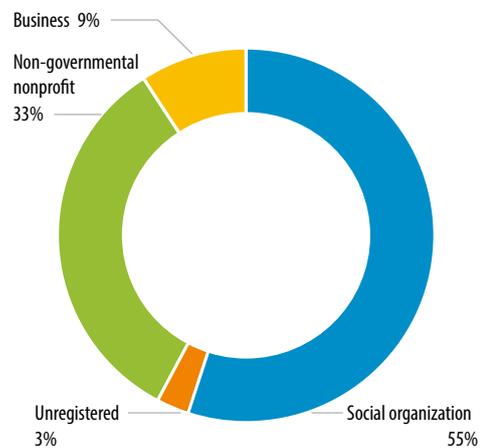
This section provides an analysis of responses to a questionnaire. As explained above, the questionnaire was designed with reference to interview transcripts, ensuring that it relates closely to the daily work of these groups. Questions cover the basic details of the organization, the field it works in, its professional capacities and an evaluation of these, plans for capacity-building, and observations of the sector. The questionnaire was sent to 81 groups: 28 marine conservation organizations and 53 marine conservation-related organizations. See Section 1 for an explanation of these categories.¹

Of the 28 marine conservation organizations, 4 had ceased operating and we were able to obtain completed questionnaires from 15 of the remaining 24. We received 18 completed questionnaires from the 51 marine conservation-related organizations. We decided to combine these two groups for analysis, for four reasons: First, the 18 marine conservation-related organizations which responded were those with a greater focus on marine conservation and so did not differ significantly from the other group. Second, the aim of our study is to understand the civil society forces at work in marine conservation, and so NGOs working on marine conservation should be included. Third, a significance analysis of the two sets of responses was carried out, but no significant differences were found. Fourth, we will be able to examine questions where some difference was found as they arise.

¹ This distinction was drawn from Rendu's directory: marine conservation organizations are organizations with "marine" in their names which work only on marine issues; while marine conservation-related organizations also work on other issues besides marine conservation.



Distribution across provinces



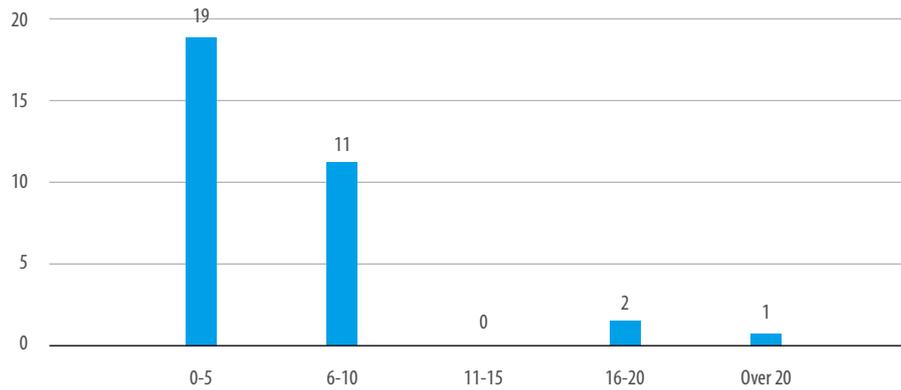
Type of registration

1. BASIC DATA

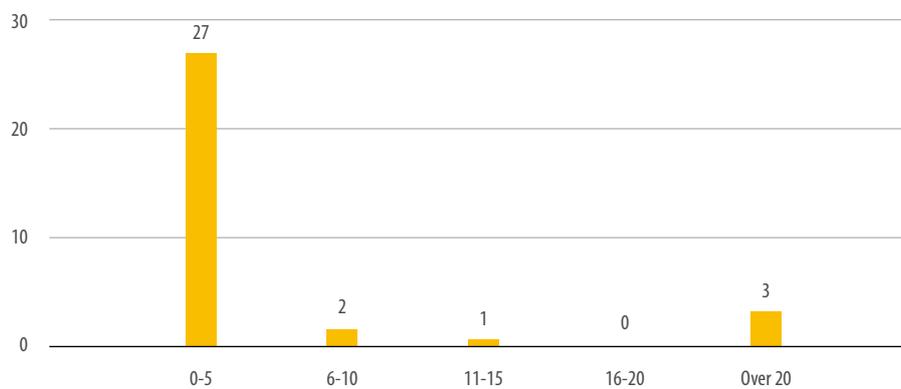
The 33 responses reflect how marine environmental NGOs have developed. A small number of these organizations appeared in the 1990s, mostly working on the protection of nature. From 2000 to 2010 there was a steady increase in numbers, with organizations dedicated to education or protection of coastlines appearing. **In the five years after 2010 there was more rapid growth, with the types of organization also diversifying.** How the sector will develop from 2016 onwards remains to be seen.

All organizations in the sample are found in coastal provinces, with significantly more in the south than the north.

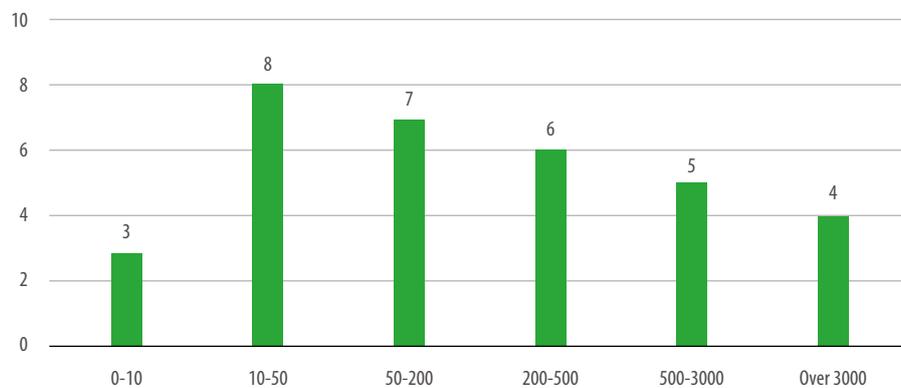
The majority of marine environmental NGOs are now registered. Almost 90% of the sample were registered as social organizations or non-governmental nonprofits, and 9% as businesses. Only 3% remain unregistered.



Numbers of full-time staff



Numbers of part-time staff



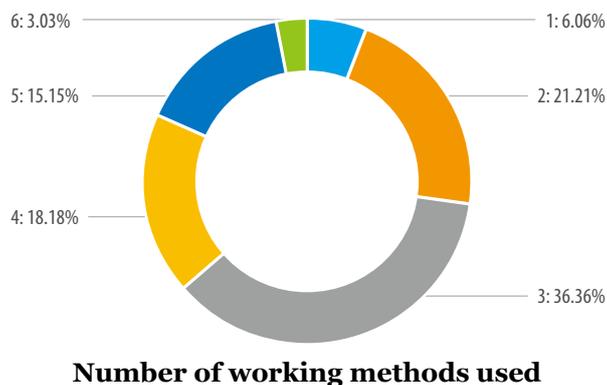
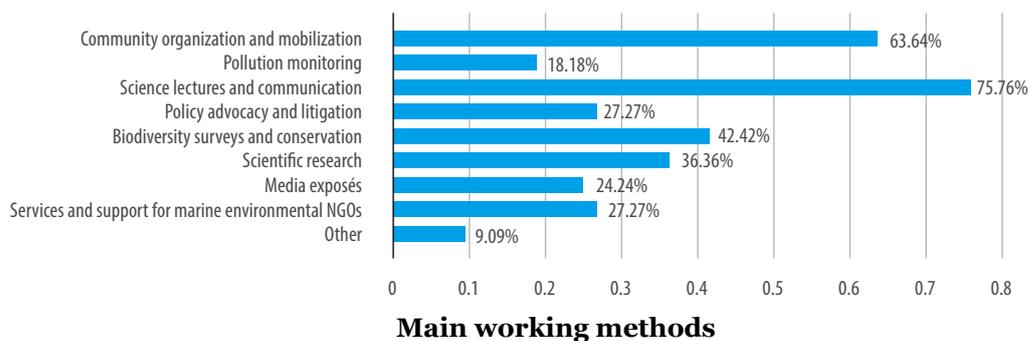
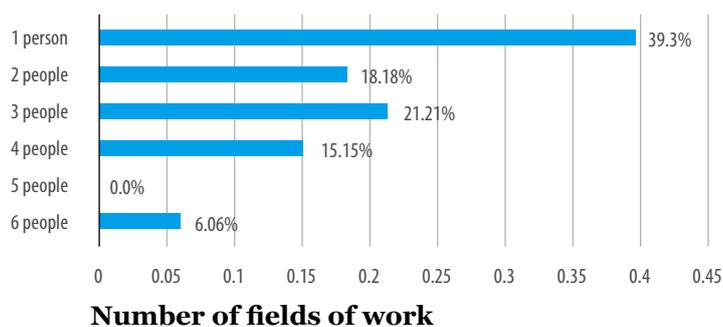
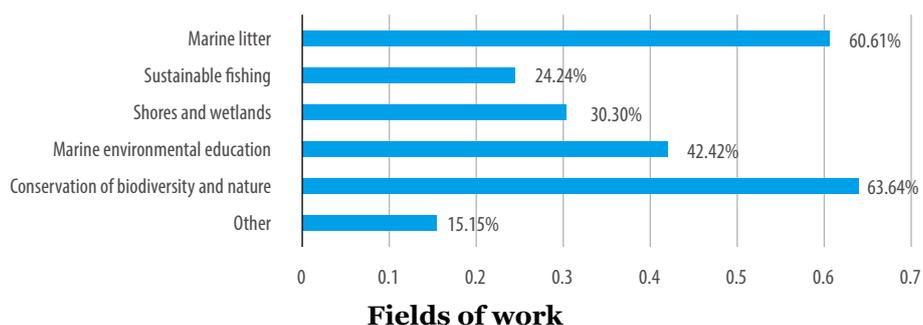
Numbers of volunteers

In terms of staff, organizations in the sample were generally found to have small full-time teams, very few part-time employees and varying sizes of volunteer groups.

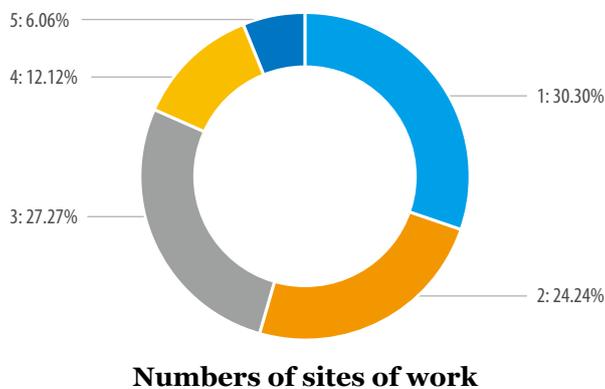
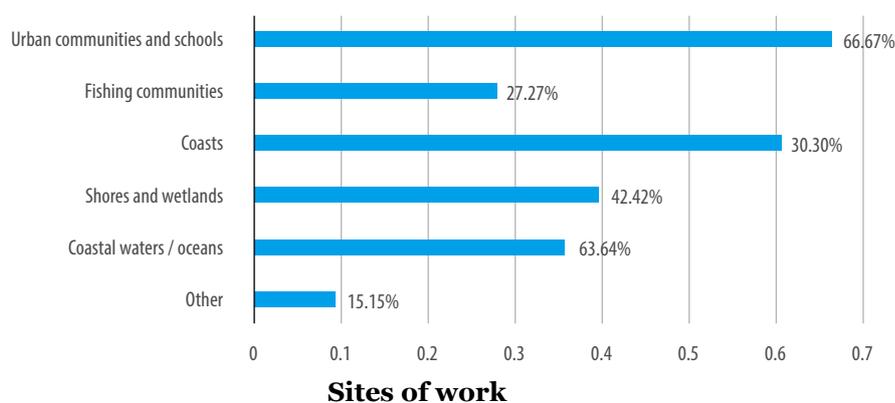
The majority had fewer than 10 full-time employees, with almost 60% having fewer than 5, and those with more than 15 full-time employees mostly being volunteer associations. All respondents had part-time employees, but in 90% of cases fewer than 5, with the exceptions mostly being volunteer associations. The majority of organizations had volunteers, but in varying numbers: 25% had 10-50 volunteers, around 20% had 50-200 or 200-500. The vast majority of organizations had more full-time than part-time employees.

2. FIELDS AND WORKING METHODS

The number of fields in which marine environmental NGOs work has gradually expanded since the 1990s, with over half now working on more than one issue. Over 60% of organizations work on marine litter and conservation of biodiversity. 40% work on marine environmental education, 30% on shores and wetlands, and 24% on sustainable fishing. Almost 40% work only on one topic, with another 40% working on two or three topics.



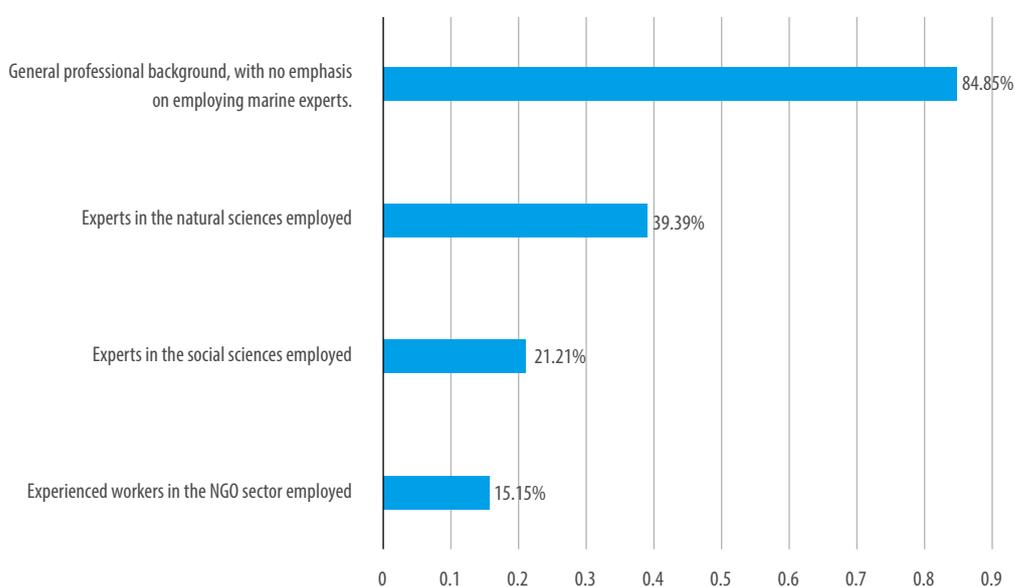
Understanding how marine environmental NGOs work is crucial for the allocation of resources, capacity-building, cooperation between organizations, and understanding the outlook for the future. Marine environmental NGOs have also been expanding the ways in which they work, with the vast majority now working in a variety of ways. Community organization, and scientific lectures and communication are by far the most popular approaches, with 60% of organizations using these. Closely following are biodiversity surveys (40%) and scientific research (35%). Pollution monitoring, policy advocacy, media exposés, and services and support for marine environmental NGOs are equally popular, at 20% to 30% each. In general methods which involve conflict (with businesses or government) are less used. The vast majority of organizations use between two and four of these methods.



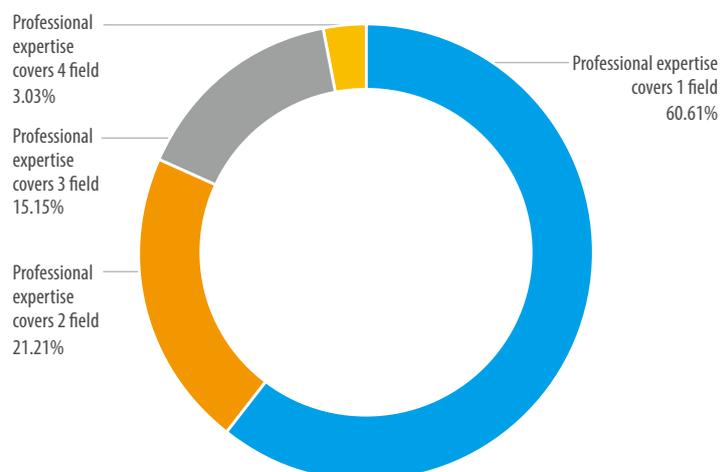
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3. PROFESSIONAL CAPACITIES OF MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS

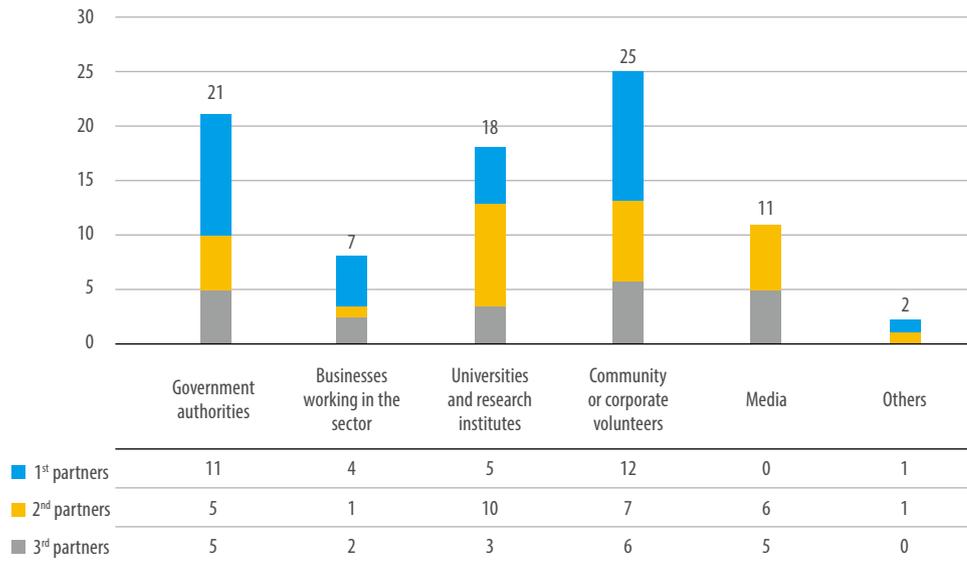
The professional expertise of full-time staff is a key part of an NGO's professional capacities and can reflect the fields in which it works and the direction in which it is developing. In our sample some organizations did employ professionals, but most did not. Almost 40% of marine environmental NGOs employed experts in the natural sciences, and 20% experts in the social sciences, while 15% had employees with experience in the NGO sector. Over 60% of organizations had only one type of employee, and of these 16 organizations, 15 had no specialized full-time staff. These were volunteer associations or educational organizations. Staff at almost 40% of organizations had a range of backgrounds.



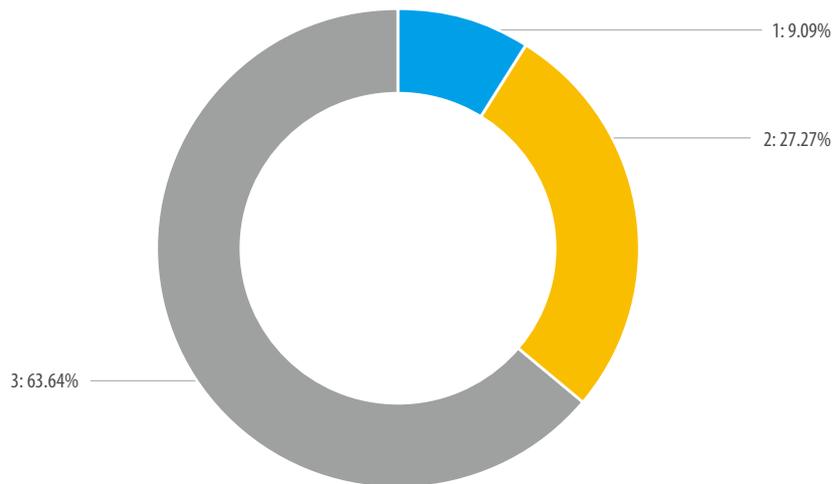
Professional expertise of full-time staff



Diversity of background of full-time staff

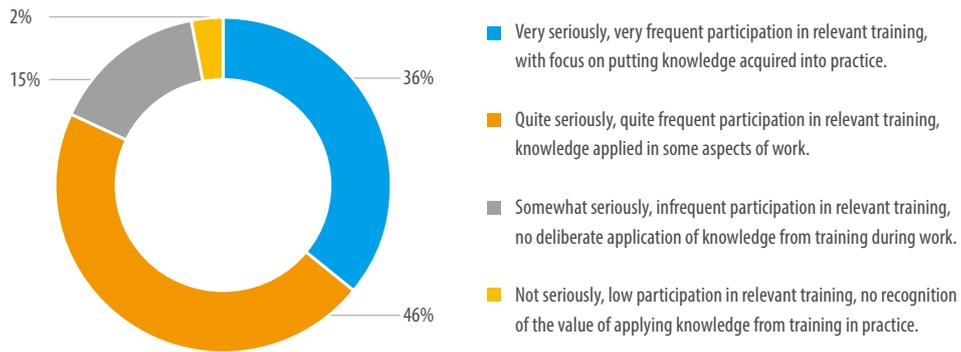


Main partners



Numbers of types of partner

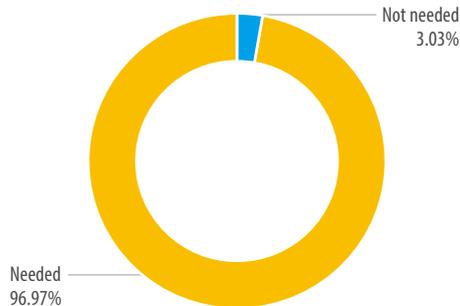
Partners are another indicator of the capacities of marine environmental NGOs. These organizations have limited power and need to mobilize other forces through cooperation. The partners, and the order of importance of these partners, reflect the space in which the NGO works. Our survey found diverse partnerships, with government and volunteers particularly important. Overall, partnerships with community and corporate volunteers, government authorities, and universities and research institutes were most common. More than half of organizations working with government said these were their most important partnerships; as did half of those working with community or corporate volunteers. Universities and research institutes were mostly listed as second in importance. Over 60% of organizations had at least three main partners.



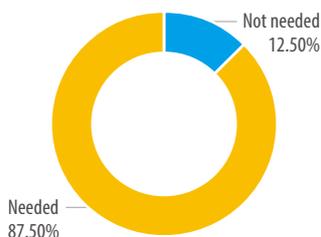
Degree to which "NGO management capacity-building" is taken seriously

There are now many training networks and courses helping NGOs build NGO management skills in China, to boost organizational capacities such as fundraising, communication and internal management. How seriously these courses are taken indicates the characteristics of the sector and how it has developed. The majority of respondents took this process seriously, with 36% saying it was taken very seriously, with frequent attendance on training courses and application of that knowledge. Close to 20% said it was only taken somewhat or not seriously, with little training attended and the knowledge acquired not applied, with the organizations making these responses working on education, volunteering and biodiversity, rather than being clustered in any one field.

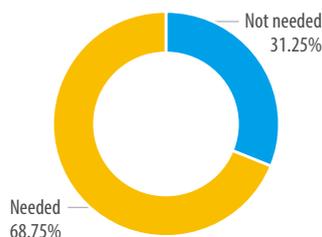
To display how marine environmental NGOs solve problems during their work, we asked them to choose the mix of capacities they required and rate their mastery of these capacities from weak to strong on a five-point scale. The capacities to be chosen were drawn from the interviews. See below for analysis:



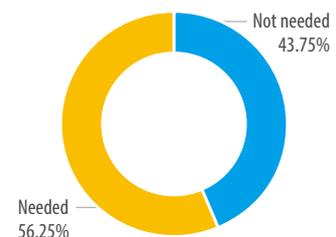
Relevant professional expertise and capacities



Professional expertise and capacities for conserving ocean and wetland biodiversity

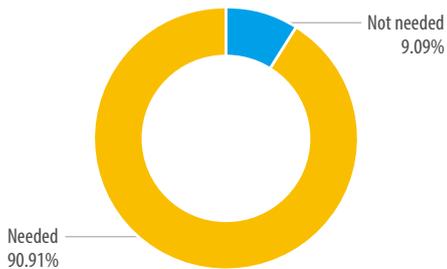


Professional expertise and capacities in waste sorting and disposal

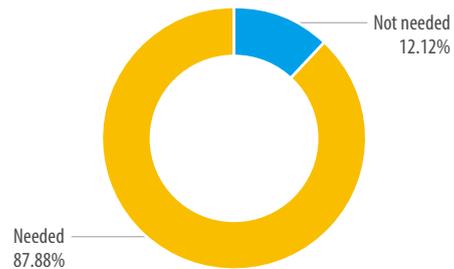


Professional expertise and capacities in fishing and aquaculture

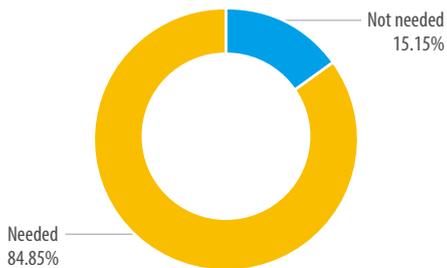
“Relevant professional expertise and capacities” was most commonly required, by 96.97% of respondents. This huge demand contrasts sharply with the fact that most organizations have not hired professional staff. More specifically, expertise and capacities in marine and wetland biodiversity was most needed, followed by waste sorting and disposal, and then fishing and aquaculture. Organizations reported roughly equal abilities on these three aspects, mostly either “average” or “quite strong.”



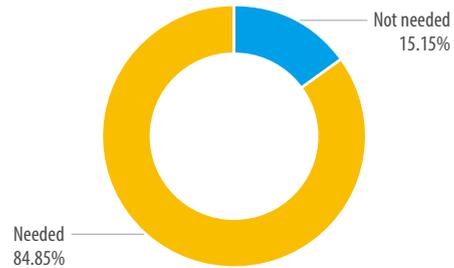
Monitoring and data analysis



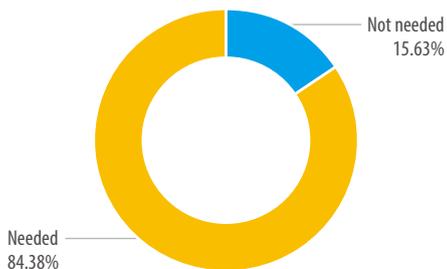
Winning support and cooperation from other marine conservation organizations



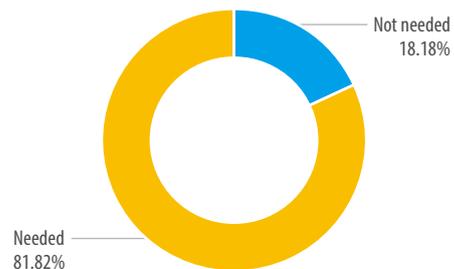
Research and action on policy and legal advocacy



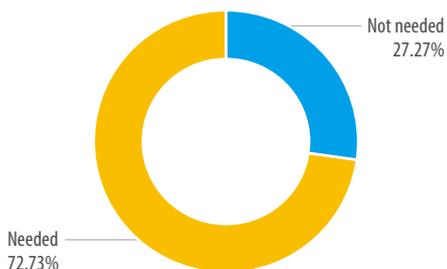
Use of the media



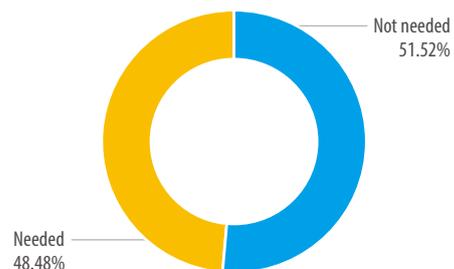
Research and action on policy and legal advocacy



Use of the media



Child psychology, pedagogy and course development



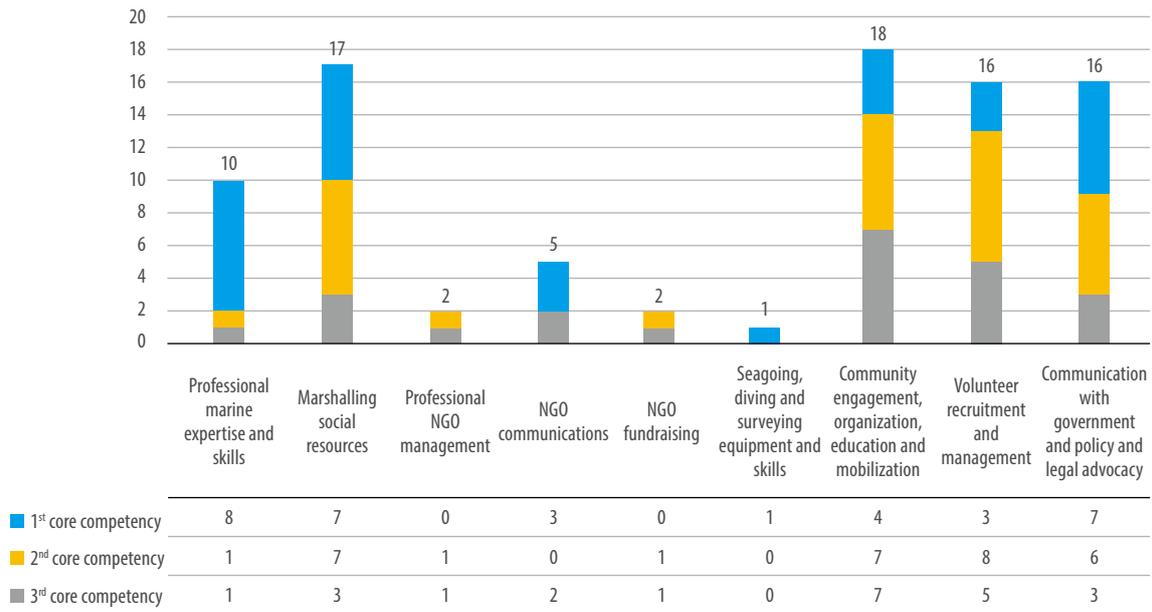
Diving and seagoing

After “professional marine conservation expertise and skills”, 90% of the 33 organizations reported a need for data monitoring and analysis skills, with current capacities being relatively low – on average below “average” (3), but with 11 selecting quite strong or strong. Similarly, almost 90% reported a need to win support and cooperation from other marine conservation organizations, with average self-reported abilities below average, some choosing very weak, and 8 quite strong or strong.

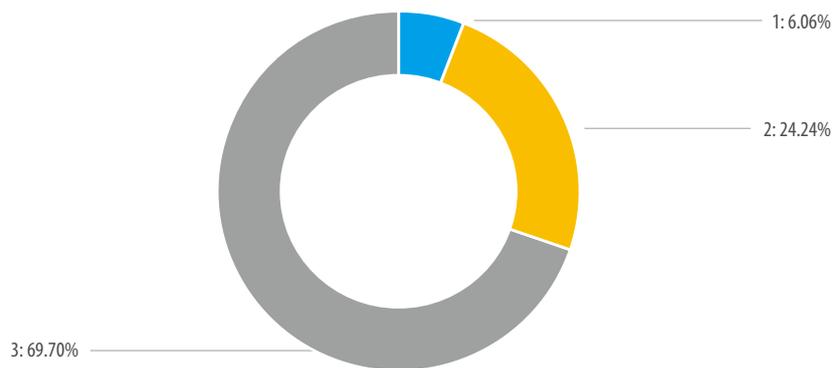
The number of organizations reporting a need for skills for research and action on policy and legal advocacy, public / community mobilization, use of the media, and independent research were similar: 85%, 85%, 84% and 82% respectively. Reported capacities in public and community mobilization were highest, 3.39 on average, only 2 organizations opting for lower than average and 10 choosing quite strong or strong. Reported skills in “use of the media” were also higher, but more widely distributed: 6 chose weak or quite weak and 11 quite strong or strong. Skills in independent research were a little lower, at an average of 3.02, and widely distributed: 13 organizations reported weak skills, 9 strong skills. Of these four skillsets, capacities for research and action on policy and legal advocacy were reported to be lowest, an average of 2.89, with 9 organizations weak or quite weak.

Less commonly needed was child psychology, pedagogy and course development skills; and diving and seagoing skills – chosen by 73% and 49% of respondents. Average reported skills for the first of these was 3.06, with 8 selecting quite strong or strong. Reported diving and seagoing skills were lowest of all, an average of 2.38, with 12 organizations reporting weak skills and 7 strong skills.

Overall, marine environmental NGOs need a combination of different professional capacities. The demand for professional expertise and capacities relevant to marine conservation is greatest, and for diving and swimming lowest. Marine environmental NGOs tend to report average skills across the sets examined, with some reporting stronger or excellent skills. Public and community mobilization skills were higher than others, while organizations that reported a need for professional expertise and capacities relevant to marine conservation also reported better skills in this field. Policy and legal advocacy skills and data monitoring skills were reported to be lower, with diving and swimming lowest of all.



Core competencies



Diversity of core competencies

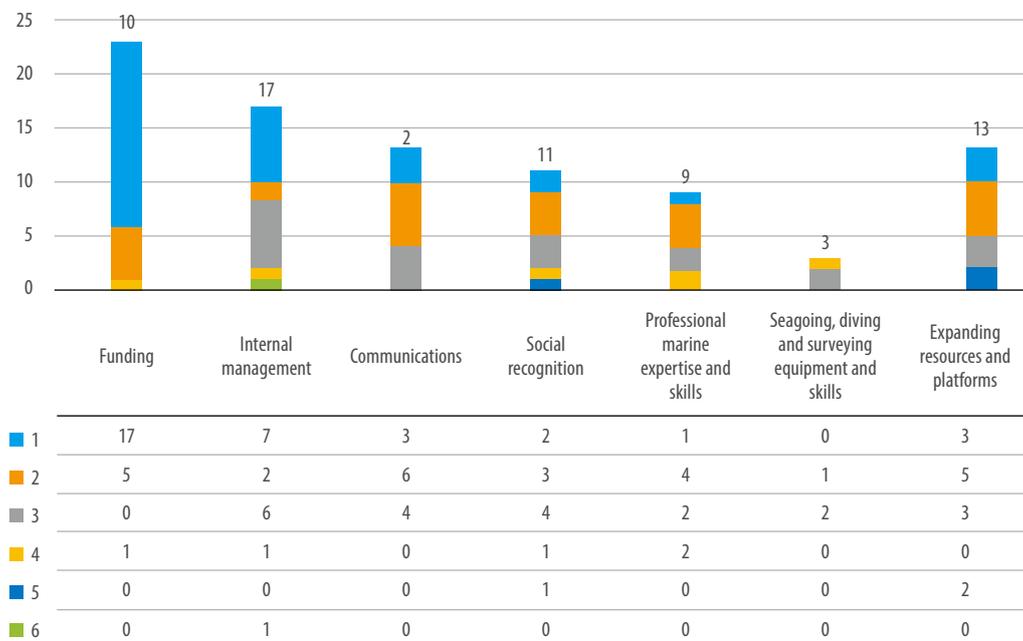
The previous question explored the professional capacities organizations use to tackle marine issues. “Core competencies”, meanwhile, is more comprehensive and includes both professional and organizational capacities. These are both crucial for the organization. Understanding core competencies helps understand the organization’s strategic orientation and advantages.

The four most popular choices – marshalling social resources; community engagement, organization, education and mobilization; recruiting and managing volunteers; and communication with government and policy and legal advocacy – were selected equally often. Communication with government and policy and legal advocacy was mostly ranked first or second in importance, indicating its importance for the overall development of the organization. Community engagement, organization, education and mobilization was ranked second or third, so of less strategic importance.

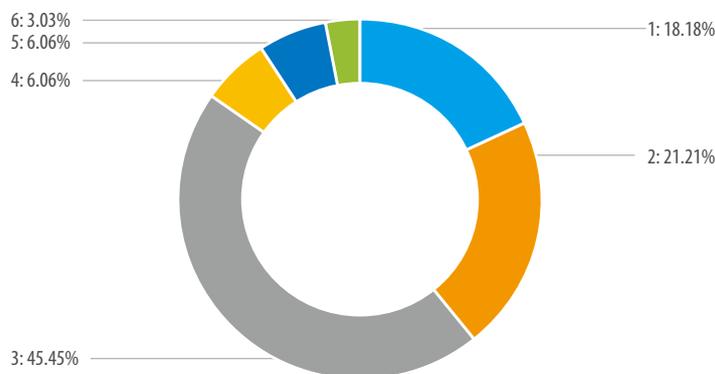
It is worth noting that only 10 organizations chose professional marine expertise and skills as a core competency, but that 8 gave it top ranking – indicating some organizations place

great emphasis on highly professional participation in marine governance as part of their development and strategic orientation.

In most cases organizations claimed a range of core competencies, with almost 70% listing three. Only 6% of organizations listed a single core competency.



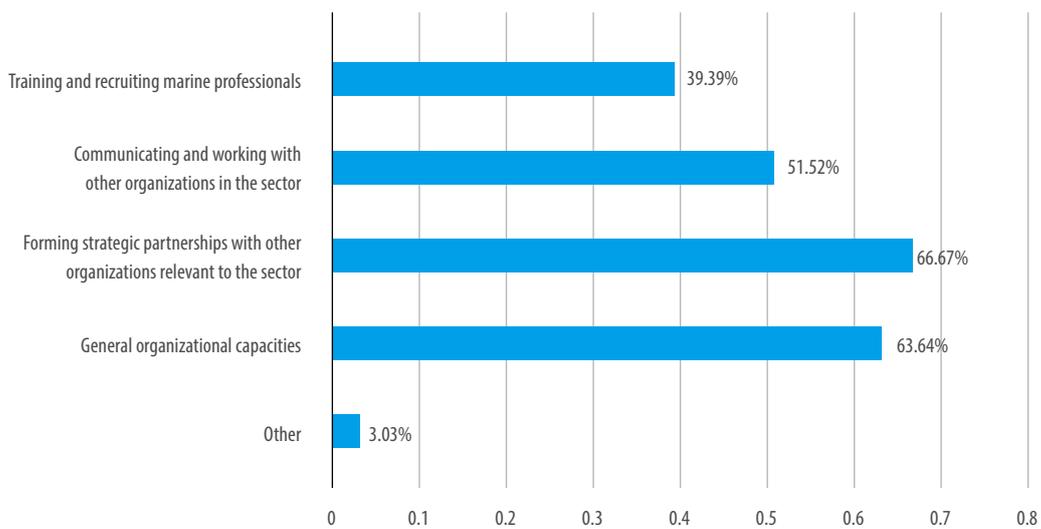
Core competencies



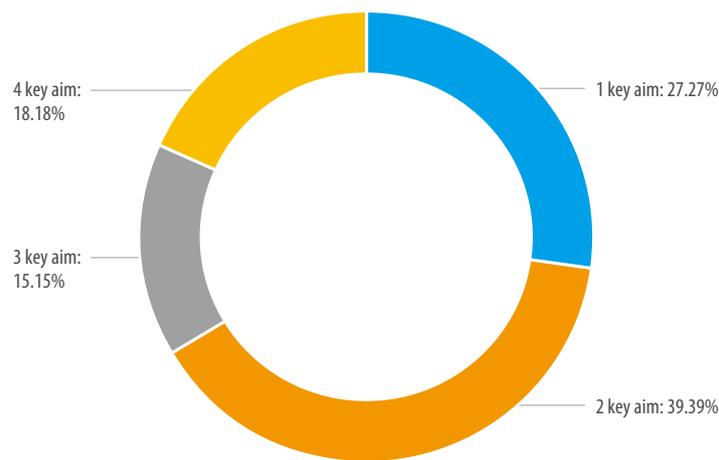
Diversity of core competencies

Understanding the challenges organizations face aids understanding of bottlenecks in development of the sector and informs future capacity-building efforts. The biggest challenges faced by respondents were not professional capacities related to the marine sector, but rather basic issues around sustaining and running the organization. The most common challenge was fundraising, with the vast majority listing this as their top challenge. Next came internal management, then expanding platforms for cooperation within the sector, then communications. Professional marine expertise and skills is not, during the current stage, a major challenge. Meanwhile, the organizations are facing diverse challenges, with almost 70% listing two or three major challenges.

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Objectives for future strategic capacity-building



Number of aims for future capacity-building

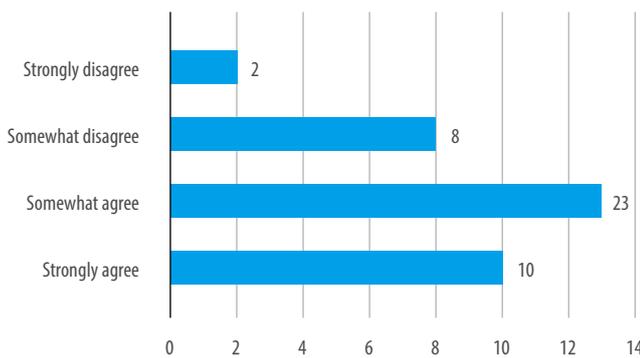
Aims for future development help understand current capacity shortfalls and future direction. Most respondents had a number of different aims, with 70% listing between two and four.

The two most common aims for future development were forming strategic partnerships with other organizations relevant to the sector (67%) and basic organizational capacities (64%). Half of organizations planned to strengthen communicating and working with other organizations in the sector, while only 40% listed training and recruiting professionals on marine issues.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECTOR AND COOPERATION

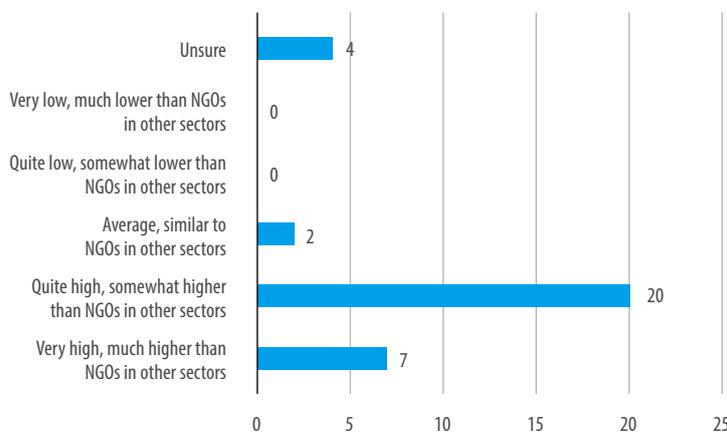
The following four questions look at marine environmental NGOs' understanding of their own environment, which is of value for analysis of the unique characteristics of marine conservation issues and planning for overall strategic capacities. Overall, the organizations see the issues they work on as quite costly and technically demanding; of less public interest than other environmental issues such as air and water pollution; but benefiting from an established legal environment.

Do you agree that the policy and legal environment for marine issues is complete, with clear rules, distinct rights and responsibilities, and orderly management?



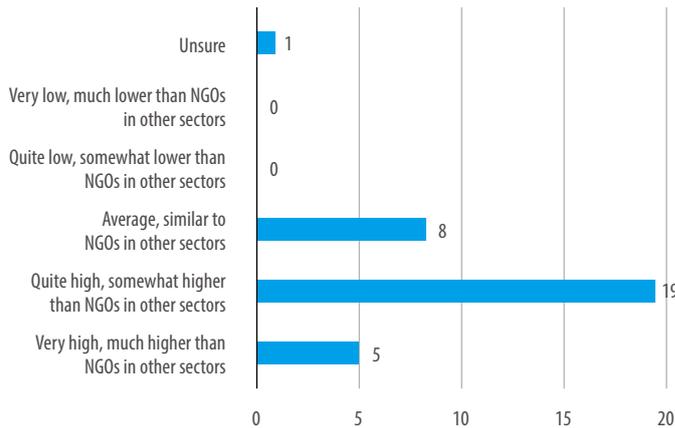
The majority of marine environmental NGOs are optimistic about their policy and legal environment, with 23 of the 33 respondents somewhat or strongly agreeing that “the policy and legal environment for marine issues is complete, with clear rules, distinct rights and responsibilities, and orderly management.”

Marine environmental NGOs' views on their policy and legal environment



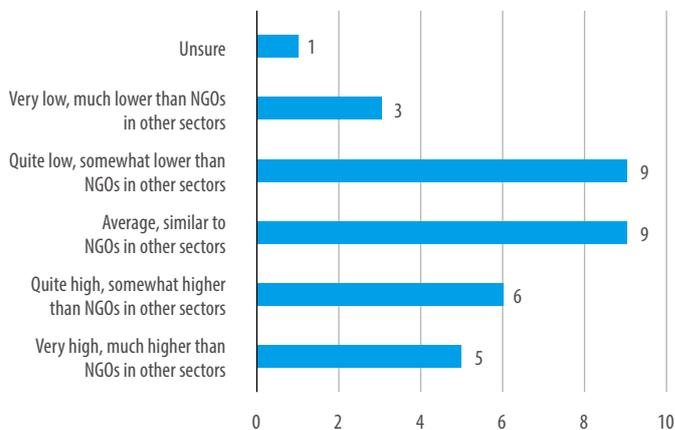
The majority of organizations think operating costs (personnel, funding) in the sector are on the high side, with 27 respondents describing these as somewhat or much higher than for organizations in other sectors. Four organizations were unsure, but none said costs were lower than in other sectors.

How do marine environmental NGOs regard operating costs (personnel, funding, etc.) in the sector?



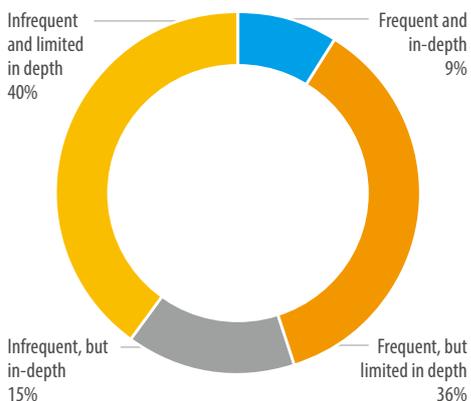
Views are similar on the requirements for professional expertise and technical skills: 24 respondents say these are somewhat or much higher than in other sectors, and none feel these are lower.

View of marine environmental NGOs on requirements for professional expertise and technical skills.



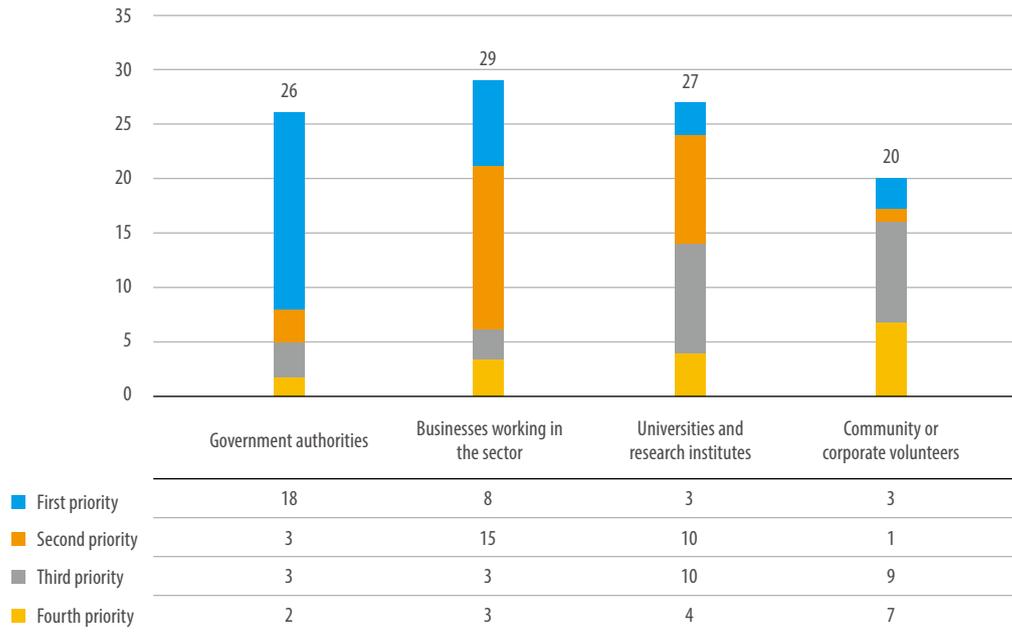
Most organizations are pessimistic about levels of public interest, with 21 saying public interest in the sector is average, quite low or very low compared to other sectors. Only 11 organizations had a more optimistic view.

How much public attention do marine environmental NGOs think marine issues get?

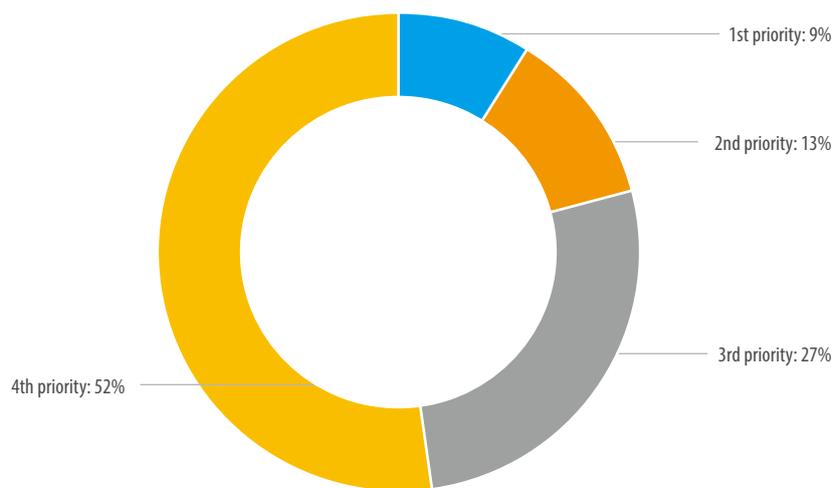


Degree of cooperation by marine environmental NGOs within the sector

Overall, cooperation by marine environmental NGOs within the sector is limited. 40% reported that cooperation was infrequent and limited in depth, 36% reported cooperation was frequent but limited in depth. 15% had infrequent but in-depth cooperation, and less than 10% reported cooperation that was both frequent and in-depth. Marine conservation has many subsectors where there are possibilities for joint action, so the low levels of cooperation reported may be a topic worth further exploration. Meanwhile, over half of organizations planned to improve cooperation in the future – but it remains to be seen if this will bring about actual change.



Priorities of marine NGOs for an online portal for the sector



Number of priorities

An online portal for the sector would help with closer cooperation, the full use of resources, and joint planning for the future. Currently there is no fully-formed portal for marine environmental NGOs, with existing NGO discussion forums being used instead. The functions organizations most want to see on a platform are sharing of professional expertise and sharing of resources and information, but the other two options were also popular. It is worth noting that most organizations listed working with other marine environmental NGOs to raise public awareness of marine issues as their first priority, with in-depth planning for joint action tending to come third or fourth. This may reflect the needs of the organizations at the current stage. Organizations have a range of priorities, with over half choosing all four options.

Section 3: Case studies

1. SHANGHAI RENDU OCEAN NPO DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Founded: 2007

Staff: 10

Fields of work: Marine litter, environmental education, network building

Vision: To make the oceans clean again and restore better relations between humanity and the oceans

Mission: Organize and support beach-cleanups; promote tackling of marine litter and reduce litter reaching the sea

• Key projects and working methods

Rendu's main projects include:

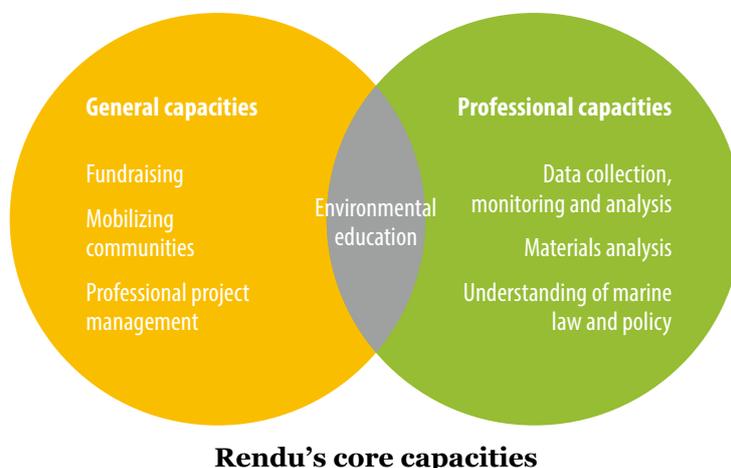


Over time Rendu has gradually developed and clarified its aims. In 2008 it was praised for its work as China coordinator for the International Coastal Cleanup by the initiator of the event, US NGO Ocean Conservancy, and in 2009 by the Ministry of Environmental Protection. This shows Rendu was by that time a part of international networks. Rendu continued to improve its beach cleanups run in cooperation with business, improve the quality of its services, and establish lasting links with a number of firms. This meant regular funding for the organization. As of the end of 2016 Rendu had organized 113 beach cleanups attended by 6,737

volunteers, removing 14.3 metric tons of litter, and started to become the most professional NGO working on marine litter. From 2007 Rendu started to also collect data on marine litter and carry out research. In 2016 Rendu and its partners won an award for protection of water environments for its work on the China Coastal Litter Cleanup and Monitoring Project, with experts praising the technical level of its work on marine litter.

• **Core capacities**

Rendu has needed to tackle a number of marine environmental issues in pursuit of its aims, involving various challenges. Rendu’s partners indicated that the below capacities are of particular importance to its operations, achievements and future development. These can be classed as organizational capacities, which environmental NGOs in all sectors will possess; and professional capacities specific to marine environmental NGOs.



Rendu regards organizational capacities as very important, as shortcomings here will affect the quality of the organization’s work. Of these, Rendu pays particular attention to:

First, fundraising. This is not the most important of an NGO’s capacities, but it does have the most direct impact and the largest short-term impact. Funding can, for environmental NGOs, provide leverage. Thanks to long-term cooperation with a number of businesses, Rendu now has a stable income, but it still needs to do more to mobilize social resources.

Second, community mobilization and volunteer management. Many of Rendu’s projects involve volunteer participation, with consequent demands on the organization’s capacities. Rendu does not yet have adequate experience in maintaining volunteer enthusiasm over the long term in order to ensure service quality, or in communicating environmental and civic ideals to volunteers, and a systematic plan to improve this is needed.

Third, professional project management. Rendu has developed through trial and error and many of its projects have been set up according to immediate demands, rather than in line with the theory and practice of NGO project management. Looking over existing projects, Rendu sees it would be hugely beneficial to apply professional project management tools,

particularly in the initial planning, coordination, setting of expectations and running of the project; and that the organization should work on these capacities.

When it comes to **professional capacities**, Rendu believes that professional expertise on marine issues is crucial. In 2014 Rendu identified scientific research as one of its core competencies. In 2015 and 2016 Rendu created two research positions, employing two researchers – one in the sciences and one in the social sciences. The science researcher had a basic understanding of marine issues and the ability to **gather, monitor and analyze data**, ensuring the quality and accuracy of Rendu's litter monitoring reports. Analyzing marine litter also involves expertise in **materials analysis**, so Rendu works with research institutes and universities which carry out those tests in support of its own research. Its social science researcher **studies laws and policies relevant to marine issues**, analyzes the policy environment and the power and responsibilities of different departments, and plans for the organization's future, providing Rendu with a better understanding of how it can develop. **Education on the marine environment** is also very important, and this overlaps somewhat with organizational capacities. For Rendu this combines with scientific research: research provides the material for educational activities; education maximizes the value of the research. Rendu believes it urgently needs to be better able to develop and deliver educational courses, requiring much improved capacities in this area. Rendu is therefore considering creating a specific educational post.

For Rendu both organizational and professional capacities are important. Professional capacities are crucial for the organization's key activities and product quality – but these are more easily developed, by hiring the right staff and acquiring the necessary expertise and skills. It is harder to develop the more organizational capacities, which impact on its overall effectiveness and the speed with which it can develop professional capacities. These are a prerequisite for raising professional capacities.

• **Observations of the sector**

From Rendu's point of view, there are certain unique characteristics of marine environmental NGOs compared to those of NGOs in other sectors, mostly reflecting the sector's challenges. First, organizations in other sectors tend to work on land and can travel easily. Those working on marine issues might need support from boats or divers. That is expensive, and explains why costs are higher in this sector. Second, technological requirements are higher when working on marine issues: for example, specialized equipment is necessary for surveys of marine life. Simple enthusiasm is not enough. Third, marine issues can overlap with political and sovereignty issues – although this is not currently a major obstacle to NGO activities.

There is currently no association for marine environmental NGOs. There are some key organizations, but overall the sector is only loosely connected. Rendu and its partners have worked to set up learning networks and alliances, to share and increase expertise, but this by no means represents an industry association. Cooperation varies across sub sectors: it is more common on marine litter issues, while less so on environmental education.

2. CHINA BLUE SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE

Founded: 2015

Staff: 10

Fields of work: Sustainable use of fisheries; protection of the oceans and coastal belt

Vision: For China to have healthy rivers, lakes and seas, and stable fishing communities; and for balanced economic, social and environmental development of the oceans

Mission: Using multidisciplinary scientific research and innovation to balance economic, social and environmental goals; to promote responsible aquaculture and sustainable fishing; to spur healthy development of China's marine product market; and to encourage fishermen and businesses to explore and implement environmentally-friendly models of development

• Key projects and working methods

China Blue's main projects include:

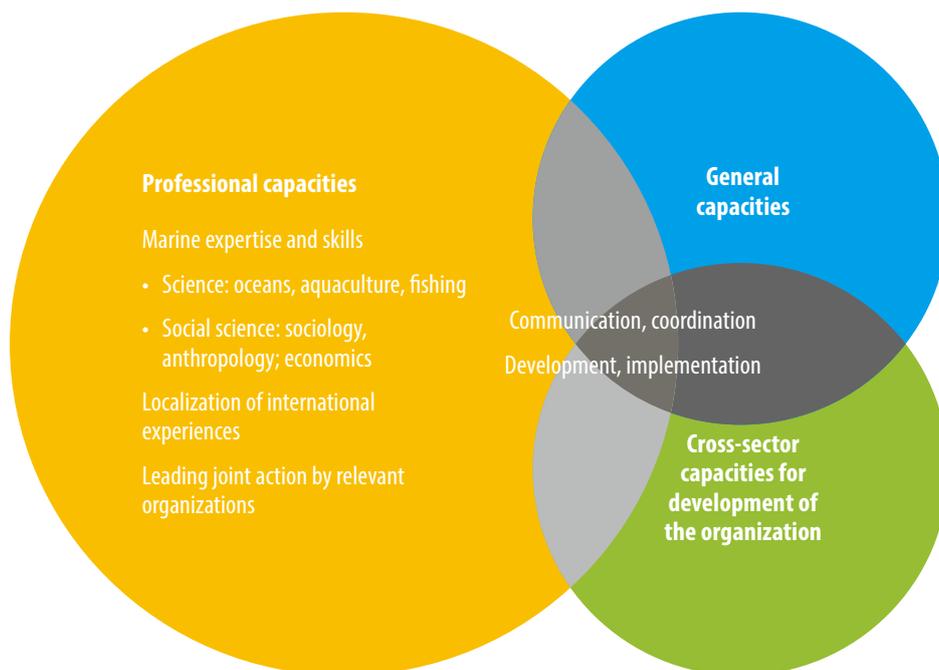


China Blue is a Chinese nonprofit focusing on sustainable fishing and the protection of the oceans and coastal belt. Its staff are highly experienced and as a result its activities provide a model for the sector. China Blue, being critical of the existing international system for evaluating marine products, worked with national industry associations to produce a new system for evaluating sustainability of marine products which was suitable for Chinese markets, and used its IT team to develop iFish, a marine product sustainability database used by customers

including Disney and Chinese retail chains. These are precedent-setting achievements for the sector: the approach was hugely innovative, close attention was paid to China’s particular needs, and the project outcomes are of huge significance for the sustainable development of China’s fishing industry. In its work on supply chains, it has recognized that the sector is not centralized and opts to work with stakeholders within the industry to bring about change. For example, it carried out a number of studies of tilapia farming before producing the 2015 2016 Hainan Tilapia Farming Sustainable Development Report, while working with regional industry bodies, local government, industry associations, international groups, domestic and international buyers, and retailers to explore more sustainable approaches and boost coordination and organization within the industry. China Blue’s guidance and support has enabled the Hainan Tilapia Association to work with local and national experts, representatives from suppliers of juvenile fish and fodder and the processing and fish-farming industry, to produce regulations for the use of control technologies in tilapia farming in Hainan. In 2016 China Blue aided the industry in setting up 40 demonstrations of monitoring and control of water quality in fish-farming ponds. China Blue has made a name for itself in China’s fishing industry and works closely with both the authorities and research institutes to promote the sustainable development of China’s fishing industry.

• **Core capacities**

China Blue faces a number of challenges in its work on issues including sustainable fishing and environmental pollution, which require certain capacities. In an analysis of its core capacities, China Blue greatly stressed its **professional capacities**, but also mentioned some **organizational and cross-sector capacities**.



China Blue’s core capacities

As one of the few professional NGOs in the sector, China Blue places great importance on its **professional capacities**.

First, its greatest core capacity is its deep understanding and wide-ranging expertise in the field. The technical barriers in the marine and fishing sectors are high, with many issues requiring scientific investigation and understanding – increasing the demands on those active in the sector. China Blue’s team (full-time, part-time and volunteer) are highly experienced and come from diverse professional backgrounds. Staff have backgrounds in **aquaculture, fishing, communications technology, IT and conservation**, ensuring accuracy and reliability in the organization’s research, investigation and evaluation system design. But China Blue does not think the development of the sector is restricted to changes in science and manufacturing – there are also management issues. It therefore has staff with **backgrounds in sociology and economics**, helping the organization participate in industry reform and work with various stakeholders. All of China Blue’s current projects include an element of policy analysis and it is considering creating a policy analyst position. The multidisciplinary team helps fulfill its aim of using “multidisciplinary scientific research and innovation.”

Second, another core capacity essential for solving sustainable development issues in China’s marine products sector is **an understanding of China’s circumstances**. Tools for evaluating the sustainability of marine products already existed internationally, but were not suited to China, as they did not match up with the structure of the industry and the market in China. China Blue places great emphasis on local solutions and, after ample research, it selectively adopted international experiences and came up with a solution tailored to China. This was crucial to effectively resolving the issue.

Third comes **leading joint action by relevant organizations**. China Blue already has close links with regional and national industry associations, the Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences and Hainan University. This helps resolve issues in at least two ways: China Blue can obtain information, resources and legitimacy via these partners, making its work easier. Also, for China Blue, working jointly with these organizations also unobtrusively influences them. Bringing the principle of sustainability into government bodies, industry associations and research institutes will be of huge significance for the sustainable development of the fishing industry.

When it comes to organizational capacities, China Blue is already competent at fundraising, communications and internal management, skills that have benefited from the origins, approach and experience of the organization. China Blue also pointed out that it needed to work with various actors on issues affecting their economic interests, meaning **communication and coordination skills** are always in need of improvement. China Blue also hopes to expand its capacities and attend training designed to boost its development and implementation skills.

• **Observations of the sector**

China Blue sees certain technical barriers to entry to the sector. For example, in sustainable fishing strict scientific backing is required for monitoring and market proposals. Professional

expertise and skills are key to resolving issues. Also, NGOs in the sector are facing shortages of personnel, with fresh graduates straight from school unable to carry out the work. China Blue has put a training plan in place to resolve this. This is aimed at its own volunteers and interns, to allow these students to take part in project management, understand the sector and acquire expertise in different fields. It uses online and offline discussions, brainstorming sessions and debates to improve reasoning, analysis and problem-solving skills, building up a pool of staff for marine NGOs.

Overall, China Blue acknowledges that China is not a seafaring culture, but thinks the public is starting to take the oceans more seriously. NGOs working on marine issues were founded later than those addressing air and water issues, but there is now an awareness of the need for an alliance within the sector – a valuable idea worth pursuing.

China Blue also sees itself as having a responsibility to create a community of marine NGOs. This would provide a platform for cooperation and sharing of resources and information, and a foundation for future development of the sector. For example, China Blue was a joint host of the first China Ocean NGO Forum, which saw 30 grassroots organizations funded to attend, meet others in the sector and receive training. At the second forum, this year, the hosts arranged for meetings between Chinese and overseas foundations, so Chinese foundations could learn more about needs in the marine sector and talk with overseas counterparts. This creates resources for the entire sector.

3. SANYA BLUE RIBBON OCEAN CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

Founded: 2007

Staff: 8

Fields of work: public mobilization; conservation; community building; marine litter

Vision: Build a global ocean conservation alliance

Mission: Bring together all forces to protect our beautiful oceans

• Key projects and working methods

Blue Ribbon's main projects include:



Blue Ribbon's core capacities

- **Main working methods and core competencies**

Using a membership organization to integrate resources. Blue Ribbon is an association of organizations. On founding in 2007 members were mostly Sanya hotels and travel agencies with an interest in the oceans. Ten years later the association has 34 members across 18 Chinese cities, and 22 donor members, including businesses, universities, the media, state institutions and other NGOs. Besides providing funding for Blue Ribbon's activities, these provide ample social capital, enabling the organization to identify partners in various fields when carrying out projects. **"Finding the right person to do the right thing"** enables the few members of staff at Blue Ribbon's office to mobilize thousands of volunteers and win attention from both government and the media. As it says, Blue Ribbon integrates various resources to protect the oceans.

Using service centers to build a huge volunteer team. Volunteer numbers are key to successful projects, and there is no question that Blue Ribbon leads the marine environmental sector in this. Blue Ribbon establishes volunteer service centers in universities, businesses and even within the government and military. Its number of volunteer service centers in universities – 29 – is particularly impressive. These provide a constant supply of volunteers, giving the organization an advantage in running volunteer-intensive projects such as beach cleanups and environmental education. The volunteer service centers have already spread beyond Hainan, to coastal cities and provinces such as Shandong, Shanghai and Zhejiang, increasing the influence of the organization. This means activities are carried out under the Blue Ribbon banner nationwide, creating scale and branding.

Maintaining a public relations network. Like many NGOs, early on Blue Ribbon relied on the resources and abilities of managers and key staff when handling public relations. As the organization developed, Blue Ribbon's projects brought about better public relations by themselves. Many of these projects are large and have wide-ranging impact. Added to this they benefit the public; and companies, the media and even academic bodies volunteer their cooperation – which in turn improves the impact of the projects, to even greater public relations benefit. Blue Ribbon's activities have also earned support and cooperation from government bodies and the organization has good links to the State Oceanic Administration, the provincial fisheries authorities and the Youth League.

- **Development and challenges**

Better project management: As an association, Blue Ribbon's strengths lie in leveraging social capital, but it lacks experience in actual project management. The success of its university volunteer program means it has been able to employ a number of graduates who are already familiar with its work, creating a steady injection of new vitality, but also has meant a younger workforce with little life or project management experience. As the organization's work has expanded, partners, including large foundations and the United Nations, have required better project management processes, and this is currently a key challenge for the organization's development.

Stronger professional expertise in marine conservation. Blue Ribbon is not a marine environmental think tank and does not require full-time staff to have professional backgrounds in environmental protection, the oceans or biology. Rather, **it relies on support from member organizations, partners and consultants.** But external support cannot meet all its needs, and this lack of expertise manifests itself during project implementation in two ways: First, a lack of mastery of scientific detail, especially obvious during publicity or education. Second, it is difficult to assess the qualifications of potential partners or consultants, which affects project outcomes. To tackle this, Blue Ribbon considered matching up employees with work that reflected their interests, having specific employees responsible for certain fields and so increase the build-up of expertise. But staff turnover has meant this has not been very effective.

Areas of work too varied. Unlike organizations which focus on specific matters, Blue Ribbon's projects are wide-ranging, and include conservation, community building and marine litter. This obviously reflects the organization's broad participation in the sector, but also prevents in-depth involvement in any one matter. Core staff frequently find it necessary to get up to speed on new areas, only for a project to end. While this might not be a complete waste, it does reduce project effectiveness. But Blue Ribbon is aware that its value is not in how much expertise or work it contributes to one specific issue, but in integrating social resources. How to balance these two needs will continue to be an issue for Blue Ribbon in the near future.

4. SHENZHEN BLUE OCEAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ASSOCIATION

Founded: 2002

Staff: 4

Fields of work: Marine litter, conservation, environmental education

Vision: To protect rare and endangered marine life and to contribute to the sustainable development of China's coastal and marine biological resources

Mission: Bring the awareness and ideals of marine environmental protection to all parts of Chinese society; promote management, research and prevention of pollution of coastal ecosystems in Shenzhen, Guangdong and even nationwide; promote civil society efforts to protect the marine environment; contribute to the protection of rare and endangered marine life and the sustainable development of China's coastal and marine biological resources

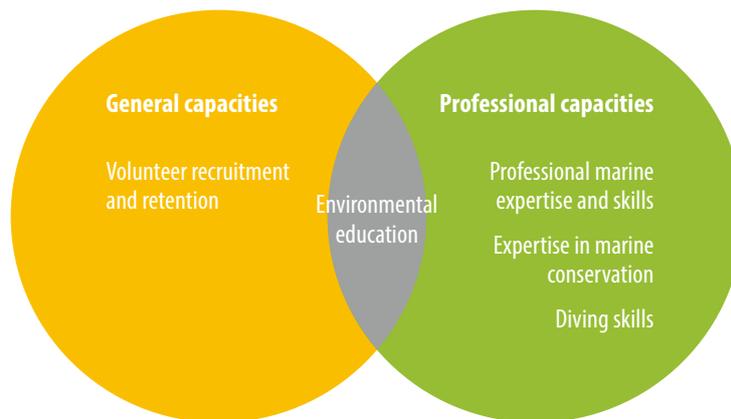
• Key projects and working methods

Blue Ocean's main projects include:



• Core capacities

Blue Ocean was founded in 2002 and officially registered in 2005, but had no full time staff until 2015. In the ten years since it was founded it has relied on volunteers, meaning the organization is very experienced in volunteer recruitment and retention. The organization was originally founded by divers with a passion for the ocean and, having accumulated experience through years of work in marine environmental protection, Blue Ocean's unique strengths are expertise in the marine environment and diving skills.



Blue Ocean's core capacities

Volunteer recruitment and retention: When Blue Ocean was founded, its main aim was to clean up the oceans and it held frequent and large-scale beach cleanups, with many volunteers participating. This meant publicity and a positive public response. During major events such as Oceans Day and International Beach Cleanup Day, Blue Ocean can mobilize thousands of volunteers to clean up dozens of beaches.

Blue Ocean has been able to keep such a large force of volunteers by regular maintenance, with hours contributed by volunteers recorded and the provision of courses on marine environmental protection and first aid. This increases volunteers' sense of belonging. Also, volunteers are used to recruit more volunteers and lead volunteer teams, which also increases participation. Currently Blue Ocean has only four or five full and part-time staff, who are unable to manage the volunteers alone – so interest groups in schools and other organizations are used to arrange participation. Blue Ocean works through those organizers, who in turn bring more volunteers who join the ranks of those working in marine environmental protection.

Professional marine expertise and skills: Blue Ocean has been operating for over a decade and has accumulated rich professional expertise and skills. For example, Blue Ocean is one of very few Chinese organizations able to carry out seabed cleanups and monitoring. This is thanks to its background in the diving community and cooperation with diving groups. Blue Ocean also uses volunteers with a good understanding of marine issues to carry out marine environmental education activities.

- **Development and challenges**

Activities need to be more in-depth and focused on impact on individuals. Blue Ocean organizes large scale events with many participants. But in interviews Blue Ocean mentioned it hoped to carry out more in-depth activities with more impact on individuals, to change

volunteers' behavior to be more environmentally-friendly in the future. To this end Blue Ocean is working to strengthen follow-up activities and using questionnaires to evaluate the degree of behavior change. It seems the ocean cleanups and educational work are having some effect, as Shenzhen's "beach litter and seabed litter has seen some reduction."

Improve organizational capacity-building: Despite already operating for ten years, it was only in 2015 that Blue Ocean employed its first full-time staff member and currently it only has four full-time employees. Employing full-time staff was transformational for the group, as it could then organize events and run projects. But there is a huge need for better organizational capacities such as project management, communications and fundraising.

5. SHENZHEN MANGROVE WETLAND CONSERVATION FOUNDATION (MCF)

Founded: 2012

Staff: Almost 30 full-time employees

Fields of work: Protection of mangrove forests and other coastal wetlands

Vision: Using the Shenzhen spirit to restore beauty to the coasts

Mission: Using education, public participation, scientific research, environmental protection and the maintenance and restoration of mangrove forests to protect these resources and biodiversity, and promote protection of coastal wetlands

• Key projects and working methods

MCF works on public participation in environmental protection. Its main projects include:



Public Education: Public education is key to a participatory model of environmental protection. First, China's coastal wetlands are in highly populated developed areas, where environmental protection is weak. There has been little effort made or funding provided for environmental protection. Second, Shenzhen is highly urbanized and developed, and residents are aware of the possibilities of participation. MCF must use this as its driving force, using communications and education to involve everyone in wetlands conservation. Public education is therefore core to this approach.

Active conservation and management of coastal wetlands: MCF has actively studied the Mai Po wetlands in Hong Kong, which are managed by the WWF on behalf of the Hong

Kong government. Wetlands conservation is tougher than forest conservation – wetlands are constantly being degraded and it is impossible to fence them off. Active management is therefore needed to boost existing wetland ecologies. This will also bring more public participation. For example, the repurposing of fish-farming ponds will, as far as possible, involve those living around the wetlands.

Scientific research and monitoring: This is the foundation of both conservation and education work. The participatory model of conservation focuses on science, and in particular research carried out in cooperation with institutions and experts studying wetlands. Monitoring work is carried out mainly by staff and volunteers, and this is a long-term project with data recorded weekly. Monitoring of migratory birds is done twice weekly, of non-migratory birds weekly.

Cooperation with Hong Kong, Macau and internationally. MCF is based in Shenzhen and is exploring a model of wetland conservation. Previously it has worked most often with Hong Kong, bringing the experiences of the Mai Po wetlands to Shenzhen and adjusting them as necessary. That cooperation is now extending overseas: a strategic partnership has been signed with the ASEAN-China Center on joint conservation work in the One Belt, One Road region. In 2016 MCF and the ASEAN-China Center held two forums on coastal wetlands: one on technology for restoring wetlands and the second an ecological city forum.

The foundation also funds the popularization of participatory models of conservation. This may develop in different directions according to different local needs, but the key theme of involving everyone in protection of the wetlands does not change.

- **Typical projects:**

No. 4 Fish pond repurposing: Many migratory birds stop in Shenzhen Bay during their journeys. In 2016 MCF proposed a repurposing of the No. 4 fish pond to provide better habitats for migratory birds. The foundation took a team to Hong Kong to study the details of management at Mai Po wetlands, with experts from Mai Po also visiting Shenzhen to examine the fish pond and make suggestions on how it could be used. Topographical maps were drawn up as part of a work proposal, with the fish ponds to be transformed into a wide expanse of water and low-lying islands, designed to meet the needs of various species of migratory birds. The proposal could not be implemented immediately – first, experts examined and made changes to the plans. The public also had to be mobilized, with foundation staff reaching out to local communities to explain the project. With the help of building management companies and resident committees the foundation was able to make contact with property owners and explain the work was to provide habitats for migratory birds. Next, due to the location, approval had to be obtained from the border defense authorities. Only then could the work start. Monitoring records from before and after the changes show a significant effect: in April this year 6,000 black-faced spoonbills were seen at one time, more than ever before.

Wetlands conservation requires a comprehensive approach which can be implemented and applied elsewhere. The foundation viewed this project as a way of spreading its ideals and working methods, showing other wetlands conservation organizations what can be done.

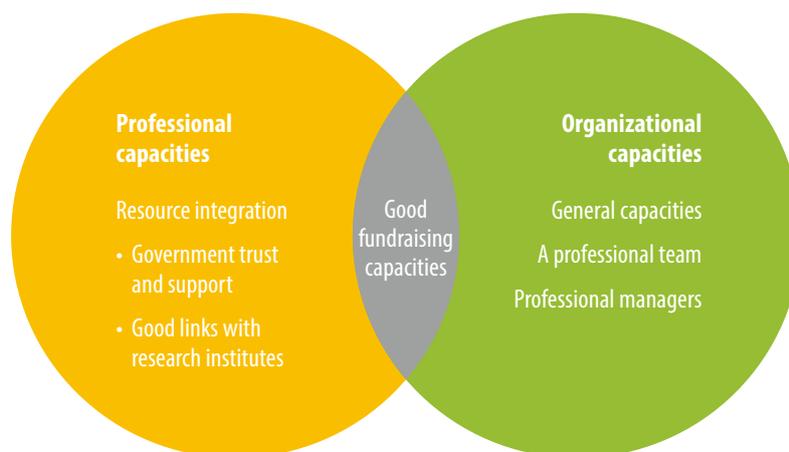
• **Core capacities: resource integration and professionalism**

Advantages

Resource integration: Winning government trust is crucial. The government manages all of China’s coastal wetlands, so cooperation here is very important, and the organization’s conservation and education work is a supplement to the government’s work. With government support the foundation was able to bring in more social resources and do more to protect mangrove forests and coastal wetlands. The board, supervisors and key staff are also strategic thinkers, all entrepreneurs and professionals. That strategic approach has been very important for the foundation’s development.

A strong professional team. The secretary-general handles project and staff management. The education director is an expert in environmental education. The members of the strategic development committee are all domestic or international leaders in wetlands research. Financial managers have a professional background, with the financial director having worked for a Big 4 firm.

For MCF, this professionalism is key to solving problems, and it will continue to build on this. It also needs to learn more about wetlands conservation and management of nature reserves. Processes and standardization are also key to solving problems: having accumulated years of experience, the foundation’s aim for this year is to put those processes in place.



Blue Ocean’s core capacities

- **Challenges faced:**

Developing staff is an issue. The foundation needs to manage six environmental education centers, meaning work is busy, with frequent overtime at weekends, leading to loss of staff. Overtime and salaries are the main reasons for staff leaving. There is a lot of physical work, but few male staff, and the foundation is caught in a cycle of recruitment and training.

The foundation would like to develop **small public donations** as a key form of funding. It would like to have a stable group of long-term donors, and maintaining those donors is key. It currently solicits monthly donations through the Weixin app and may work more on this in the future.

- **Observations of the sector**

MCF thinks success of cooperation and alliances within the sector will depend on whether or not the organizations involved benefit, and an effective platform for sharing and learning will be crucial. Good cooperation and dialogue should leave participants feeling they have benefited, whether through useful discussions, planning or organizing events. On this platform, everyone would be both participant and audience.

6. SHISHI XIANGZHI BEAUTIFUL COAST VOLUNTEER ASSOCIATION (BCVA)

Founded: 2015

Team size: about 200

Fields of work: marine litter, environmental education, social mobilization

Vision: Clean up the beaches and protect the environment

• Key projects and working methods

BCVA's main projects include:



BCVA originated with beach cleanups organized by two locally well-known elderly people. The township of Xiangzhi is located where a river empties into Fuzhou bay, in the north-east of the city of Shishi. It is surrounded on three sides by the sea, has 13.5 kilometers of coastline and is a key fishing port. Locals still believe the sea can absorb any amount of pollution and domestic, construction and fishing vessel waste accumulates on the beaches, along with waste that has flowed downstream or drifted in from the oceans, turning the beaches into garbage dumps. The accumulated waste stinks and it is often necessary to hold your nose while walking on the beach. The determination of those two elderly people, however, has showed locals how effective beach cleanups can be. BCVA was officially founded on 11 September 2015, with the two founders using their local networks to attract almost 200 volunteers. The association's aim is simple: **keep the beaches clean**. Its work has, over these two years, had considerable impact, with many local companies participating in order to fulfil CSR aims and earn good publicity. BCVA also has good links with the government, which provides funding. Thanks to BCVA's work, locals no longer dump waste on the beaches and construction companies put barriers in place on their sites to prevent waste contaminating the beaches. This alone has cut off two of the major sources of beach litter.

• Core capacities

BCVA is a special case where it is not possible to identify any capacities specific to marine NGOs. But as a grassroots marine NGO mobilizing public volunteers, it is worth looking at

the group's organizational capacities. BCVA itself says **the most important of its skills is recruiting and managing volunteers, environmental education and fundraising.** The organization does not have much need for specialized expertise or skills.



BCVA's core capacities

BCVA regards all three of those capacities as equally important. BCVA's biggest advantage in **recruiting and managing volunteers** is that they recruit locally, with the organization's managers having plenty of local expertise and influence. BCVA is also aware that as volunteer numbers increase, some will become less enthusiastic. They therefore have reward mechanisms, such as making particularly active volunteers team leaders. Those more enthusiastic members are also the first to receive government-purchased insurance. BCVA also believes it needs to treat these volunteers with generosity and acceptance, and when necessary provide guidance. Most are not familiar with environmental ideals and it will take time to change their views.

Next, **marine education.** BCVA thinks the problem of waste on the beaches has become so serious due to the locals' lack of environmental awareness. Increasing expertise in the marine environment and encouraging conservation of the environment and an appreciation of nature is an important way of protecting the environment.

Finally, **fundraising** is not the most important skill, but it is essential. As a grassroots NGO, BCVA needs funding to enrich its methods of education, hold events to increase its influence and treat volunteers better.

• Observations of the sector:

BCVA is different to other NGOs in the sector – rather than saying it is less professional, it could be said that it is closer to China's grassroots traditional society. The association was founded by members of the public and is a very local organization. First, the waste on the

beaches was affecting the lives of locals, and there was a real need for beach cleanups. Second, due to a lack of professional expertise, BCVA did not record the amount or type of waste collected and picked up, everything from litter, stones, bricks and seaweed. Third, Xiangzhi is not a modern place and retains many characteristics of village society. BCVA's two founders have many local connections, and this is a key reason for the group's success. President Cai is head of the Xiangzhi Winter Swimming Club, while Deputy President Chen, head of the local Tai Chi association and a fitness trainer, is active in various local dancing, educational and sports groups, and is also a retired deputy school head with good links to the local education bureau. His background in education also gives him strengths when educating the public. BCVA also actively seeks out opportunities to cooperate with government and businesses, and has won much assistance doing so.

BCVA is now a member of Fujian's first provincial association of marine charities, the Fujian Marine Ecology and Civilization Promotion Association. President Cai acts as executive director of the association, while Deputy President Chen is a director. The two were also among the first members of the Fujian Coast and Beaches Protection Alliance, led by the provincial oceans bureau, with the head of the resources and environmental protection office of the bureau acting as the alliance's head. BCVA has close links with other marine NGOs, but does not cooperate with them. Currently BCVA would like to learn from other organizations and to see NGOs along the coast offering mutual support. BCVA only works with neighboring townships, where it wants to mobilize volunteers to keep the beaches clean.

7. GUANGDONG WETLAND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

Founded: 2014

Staff: 10 – 2 full-time and 8 part-time

Fields of work: protection of coastal wetlands; environmental education

Vision: “Understand, research, protect and use the wetlands”

• Key projects and working methods

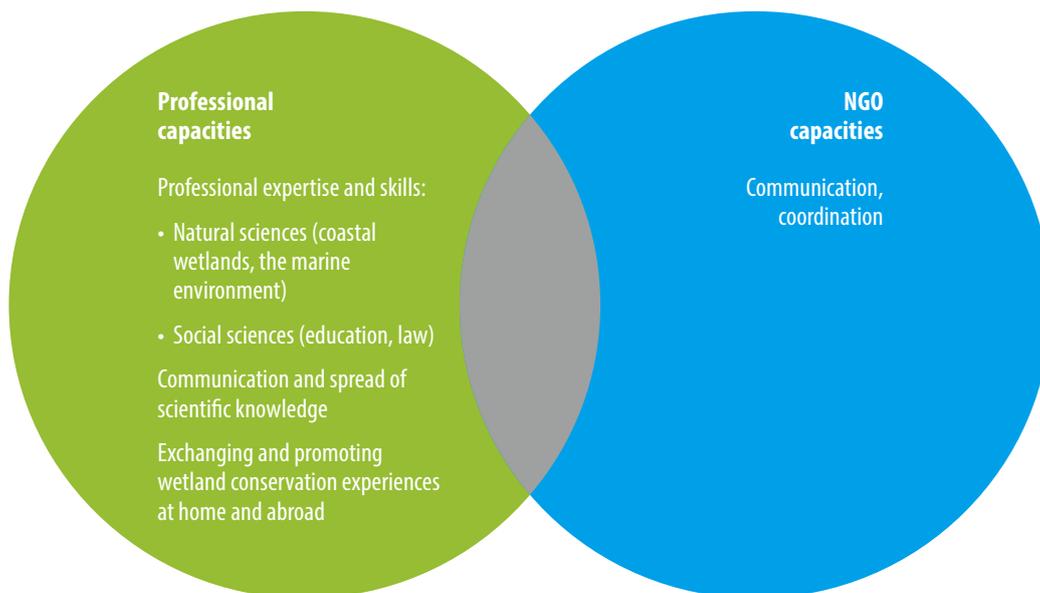
GWCA’s core projects include:



GWCA is a local nonprofit focused on education about Guangdong’s coastal wetlands. There is no shortage of organizations working on marine environmental education, and environmental education in general. But unlike most, GWCA has a new approach: working in partnership with the educational authorities, it facilitates the inclusion of environmental knowledge in textbooks to be used in the classroom and uses extracurricular activities to reach middle and elementary schools. Work on textbooks and readers is currently underway. To help with this work the organization draws upon an expert committee made up of researchers studying the coastal wetlands, the marine environment and freshwater wetlands, to provide professional guidance and information.

• Core capacities

GWCA aims to protect Guangdong’s coastal wetlands. To achieve this it is actively improving its methods and capacities. Alongside some organizational and cross disciplinary skills, GWCA ranks its **professional and regional nature** as important.



GWCA's Core capacities

The organization's professional capacities have become better defined as it has grown. Initially it focused on developing and retaining expertise on the wetlands, organizing a team of experts on the local marine environment and wetland conservation to carry out investigations and research with staff and other wetland activists, and transmitting that information to the public through educational activities. Over time this was narrowed down to focus on the coastal wetlands of Guangdong and building links with wetlands experts from Singapore, Taiwan, Macau and Shenzhen. After an analysis of the state of environmental education in southern China, GWCA decided to do what other organizations did not, and work on course design and textbook writing. Currently the organization has staff with backgrounds in education and communication, who help the experts make scientific expertise more accessible and understandable to middle and elementary school students. Therefore, GWCA's three major professional capacities are **the acquisition and retention of expertise in wetland sciences and education, the popularization and transmission of scientific expertise, and the acquisition and integration of international wetlands conservation experience.**

Alongside this, the most important organizational capacities for GWCA are communication and coordination – when producing textbooks and readers, the organization needs effective communication and coordination with the education authorities.

Acquiring these professional and organizational capacities is significant to GWCA for two reasons. First, it reflects the organization's unique positioning: combining wetlands expertise with education and links with the education authorities to bring environmental education into the classroom is what differentiates GWCA from other organizations. Second, open communication and interaction is of long-lasting significance for improving the organization's capacities and branding.

• **Observations of the sector**

GWCA regards marine NGOs, and in particular those working on wetlands, as having certain professional and technical requirements. Protection of wetlands is a varied task, requiring knowledge of aquatic vegetation, wildlife, and how to deal with pollution of freshwater and oceans. But the government does not yet have an overall approach to wetlands management – for example, its mangrove forest project was overseen by the forestry authorities, as it looked like a forestry project, but the shallows and wildlife are actually managed by the marine authorities. Pollution from land sources, such as effluent outlets or leaks, is the responsibility of the environmental bureau. Over 10 different authorities can be involved at times, and coordinating these can be difficult. It is therefore sometimes very difficult to know with which department an issue should be raised. This means the organization needs a full understanding of relevant law and policy and the ability to communicate and coordinate with those authorities to ultimately reach a solution.

Also, professional expertise and skills are particularly important for marine NGOs carrying out environmental educational activities. Popularizing basic information about the protection of the marine environment and the issues and pressures faced by the oceans and wetlands is crucial. This means the organization must itself have a structured knowledge base, but this is something that many NGOs, including GWCA, do not yet have.

GWCA said it was very keen to see a study and resource sharing platform for marine NGOs. First, NGOs could develop and share resources, providing a basis for further development of the sector. Second, it would make it easier for NGOs to learn about the strategies and changes at other organizations, and as necessary adjust in response to prevent overlap or competition, ensuring that marine NGOs complemented each other, and creating a comprehensive and complete NGO ecosystem.

REVIEW OF CASE STUDIES:

Research for this report includes both interviews and questionnaires. In-depth interviews were carried out with the seven organizations covered above to acquire first-hand material on the sector. Below we present an initial analysis of these organizations.

Main characteristics of the organizations interviewed:

1. In terms of the scope of their work, marine environmental NGOs can be divided into two categories. One is those that focus on a specific issue, such as marine litter, sustainable fishing or mangrove forests. The other includes those focused on environmental education but not specific issues, such as BCVA, which mobilizes community volunteers; GWCA, which works on environmental and scientific education; and Blue Ribbon, which mobilizes university volunteers.
2. The marine environmental sector requires a high degree of professional expertise, and there are technical barriers that do not exist in other sectors. Monitoring sustainable fishing requires solid scientific backing; and monitoring and recording marine litter requires

particular skills. These skills require professional staff and expertise – raising both barriers to entry and costs.

3. While marine environmental NGOs have strong professional capacities, internal development and management capacities need to be stronger. This report focuses on both professional and organizational capacities, with professional capacities referring to those marine environmental NGOs use to resolve sector-specific issues. Organizational capacities are more broadly necessary for organizational development and include fundraising, communications and staff management skills. Each organization interviewed had one or more area of professional strength: an ability to mobilize others or a reserve of professional expertise. But internal capacity-building needs to be improved, as a standardized management system will improve the stability and long-term development of the organization. The key to internal management is the management of people – and each organization is working towards having a stable staff and volunteer team.

4. Sectoral support networks for marine environmental NGOs remain undeveloped. Some organizations have realized the importance of a sectoral alliance and are promoting the building of such an alliance and communication networks, as their circumstances allow. The sector does have some learning networks and action partnerships which have carried out initial sharing of information and discussions, but there is a lack of stable and routine mechanisms. Overall, marine environmental NGOs are developing in isolation, with only occasional cooperation with other groups in the sector, mainly focused on specific events. There are no stable and permanent mechanisms for cooperation within the sector or any generally accepted norms.

Section 4: Findings and conclusions

1. Summary of findings

This report explores the sector-specific professional capacities of marine environmental NGOs – that is, the core professional capacities these organizations use in tackling marine environmental protection issues. This is contrasted with organizational capacities – fundraising, internal management, communications, etc. We hope to show to some extent trends in capacities within the sector and its current state of development, in order to prompt discussion on resource allocation and strategic decisions. The following is a summary of our main findings:

a. The main challenge remains in building organizational capacities, rather than professional capacities. To an extent this is due to the stage of development of the sector.

The vast majority of organizations in our sample are officially registered and have a small full-time staff. Meanwhile, most are somewhat or extremely focused on building NGO management capacities (fundraising, internal structures, communication, etc.). We could describe most organizations in the sector as working towards more standardized management systems.

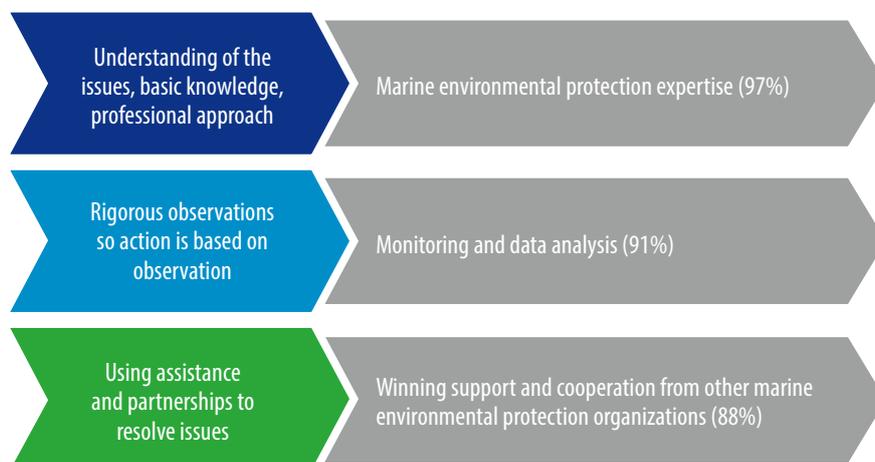
Meanwhile, questions on core capacities, challenges and development plans highlighted weaknesses in organizational capacities. The most common challenges reported were, in order: fundraising, internal management, and (in joint 3rd) communications and development of resource-sharing platforms. 64% of organizations reported a desire to strengthen organizational capacities in future capacity-building. In core competencies, NGO management skills, fundraising and communications were ranked second, third and fourth from bottom. In interviews, organizations including Blue Ribbon and Rendu mentioned that professional project management capacities were, to varying degrees, hampering organizational development and the expansion of cooperation.

This to an extent reflects the fact that the organizations' organizational capacities remain weak. Their professional capacities allow marine environmental NGOs to efficiently and professionally tackle issues, create branding and develop resources – but organizational capacities are a prerequisite for the effective use of those more specific capacities. There is a consensus within the sector on the need for more organizational capacity-building.

b. Professionalism is taking shape in the sector, but this process is in its early stages and partial. This is shown in topic development, working methods and skill sets.

i. Fields worked on are becoming more specialized. Respondents' work is not limited to the volunteer and community activities of earlier days, but becoming more diverse, including environmental protection, protection of coastal wetlands and sustainable fishing – all more technical and specific fields.

- ii. Working methods are becoming more professional. The main approach for marine environmental NGOs is still community mobilization and education. But newer and more demanding methods are also appearing, such as surveys of biodiversity (used by 43% of organizations), independent research (36%) and policy advocacy and litigation (28%). This allows organizations to have a deeper impact and respond more effectively to issues. In one case study China Blue carried out its own research and developed a system for evaluating marine products – work noted by government, businesses and research organizations, with the NGO’s stance on marine environmental protection converted to a project outcome applied in the field. Or with Rendu’s work on ocean litter, where statistical analysis is used to produce rigorous reports, used in turn to provide a compelling description of the litter issue and hold stakeholders to account.
- iii. Staff teams are gradually becoming more professional. As shown in Section 2 on the professional background of staff members, most organizations still do not place much emphasis on having a staff with professional experience in the marine environmental protection sector. Almost 40% of organizations have not employed scientific staff to provide expertise in marine environmental protection, fisheries, conservation, or statistics and monitoring. 20% employ staff with social science backgrounds to help the organization understand issues such as policy environments and community development. Some organizations covered in our case studies, such as Rendu, China Blue and MCF, place great emphasis on bringing experts and experienced professionals onto their teams to boost core competencies. Youth programs in the sector also emphasize the study of such expertise. This to an extent reflects how seriously organizations are taking the specialized nature of their fields of work.
- iv. Core capacities are starting to reflect fields worked on. Organizations already know that specific skills are necessary to resolve issues. When reporting skills that they needed, organizations most commonly chose expertise in marine environmental protection, monitoring and data analysis skills, and the ability to win support and cooperation from other relevant organizations.



Setting competence in professional capacities aside, the organizations' reported requirements for particular practical skills reflect the importance of each. When self-rating on certain capacities, organizations were most confident in their public and community mobilization skills, with other capacities ranked about the average mark (a score of 3 out of 5). Diving and seagoing skills were ranked lowest, close to "somewhat weak." Scores varied across organizations, with some ranking their skills as "very strong" or "somewhat strong", and others as "very weak". There are some very professional organizations in the sector, as shown in their core capacities. Specifically 10 organizations chose "marine environmental protection expertise and skills", with 8 ranking this as their most important capacity.

- v. Cooperation mechanisms are taking shape, helping resolve marine environmental protection issues. Organizations surveyed commonly had a range of partners, with many having close links with government, volunteers and research institutions. As shown in the case studies, these strategic partnerships provide the organizations with legitimacy, expertise, funding and information, and increase its ability to have an impact.
- vi. Clear consensus on the nature of the sector. In both the questionnaire and the case studies, organizations had a similar view of the sector. Most agreed technical barriers and costs were higher than in other sectors, with less attention from the public but a reasonably complete legal environment.

The above analysis shows that marine environmental NGOs are gradually displaying professionalism in terms of capacities, background and methods, with fields of work becoming more diverse. But overall this is limited and only a minority of organizations gave themselves outstanding ratings; nor did a majority stress professionalism in staff and working methods. Also, although organizations all had some sector-specific expertise, overall this was low, as shown in average scores.

c. Commonalities and intersections with other environmental sectors

Although there are particular characteristics to the resource demands, technical barriers and topics of marine environmental NGOs, there are also similarities with organizations working in other sectors. For example many organizations, including China Blue and Blue Ocean, place great emphasis on community building, while organizations such as Rendu stress education. As with NGOs in other sectors, those covered in the case studies pointed out that their impacts were mainly realized by mobilizing resources and bringing various parts of society together to resolve marine issues.

In a sense this reflects the limited professionalism of marine environmental NGOs and the lack of obvious characteristics of the sector. For example, the majority do not currently have seagoing or diving expertise, and so operate on land, as organizations in other sectors do. This is also inevitable, and indicates the overlap and scope for cooperation between different sectors, especially on including community building and education in projects.

d. Cooperation within the sector is very limited

Recent years have seen major improvements in communication and cooperation between marine environmental NGOs in comparison to the previous decade or two. Good examples are the joint activities for World Environment Day and International Coast Cleanup Day, or networks for sharing information and expertise such as the China Ocean NGO Forum and the Capacity Development and Network Building for Marine Environmental Protection NGOs in China project. This is of course a step forward for the sector. But there is still a lack of depth to these efforts. As analysis of the statistics in Section 2 show, 76% of respondents feel cooperation is not in-depth enough, and 24% feel it is somewhat in-depth. Meanwhile we found that the majority (56%) of organizations saw more public attention as the most important outcome of cooperation, with the sharing and acquisition of expertise second (52%). Sharing of resources and planning for joint activities were listed lower, mostly in third or fourth place.

It is worth noting that 52% of organizations plan to cooperate with other organizations in the sector in the future. Bridging the gap between reality and these plans will require consideration of issues including the nature of the problem, smooth flow of resources and platforms for cooperation.

e. Use of the Internet and dataflows to expand impact

This was particularly apparent during the case studies. For example, Rendu uses swipe cards to manage beach cleanup volunteers and tracks data on waste collected. China Blue's iFish application provides an easy-to-use online resource to provide consumers with information on ocean conservation. Many organizations use social media to increase their impact. The innovative use of IT resources may aid the development of marine environmental NGOs.

2. Conclusion: outlook for the sector

The above analysis addresses the topic of this report: the professional capacities of marine environmental NGOs, and the development of these capacities. Overall, there is a degree of professionalism in the sector, with organizations consciously boosting their expertise, using professional methods to gather and analyze data, and working with government, businesses, communities and the public to resolve issues. Some organizations have outstanding levels of professional capacities, but this is nowhere near the norm and there are large differences across organizations.

Based on this research into development of the sector, some suggestions can be made.

First, the report shows that while some organizations and support systems put particular emphasis on professional capacities, more organizational capacities remain weak and also need to be strengthened.

Second, as analysis in this section shows, professional capacities are concentrated in research, data collection and cooperation with government, research bodies and communities. More

antagonistic approaches – filing complaints, media exposés and pursuing accountability – are used less often. Meanwhile, most marine environmental protection organizations are active on the coasts, rarely heading to sea. This indicates these organizations have developed a somewhat narrow range of capacities – possibly due to limiting factors, such as the maturity of the organization, costs and resources. It is worth considering if the resource and capacity support is in place for a wider range of activities.

Third, as mentioned in the above analysis, cooperation between marine environmental NGOs is extremely limited and shallow in scope. This is understandable, as the sector is relatively new and there is less in the way of accumulated resources and platforms for cooperation. But given the high technical requirements and costs, and the low level of public interest, a well-developed platform for the sector could provide expertise and resource sharing, opportunities for cooperation, and increase public interest. Our research found that the organizations are aware of this, which will be beneficial for development of that platform. But how that should be done, and how organizations working on different issues could be brought together to learn and cooperate, needs further consideration.

Appendix: List of 33 respondents

Sanya Blue Ribbon Ocean Conservation Association
Ningde Marine Environmental Volunteers Association
Free Sea Cucumber Nursery
Zhuhai Marine Resources Protection and Development Association
Greenovation:Hub
Fujian Environmental Defense
Guan Ai Nature
Guangzhou Huangpu Green World Conservation Center
Lianyungang Clean Coasts Volunteer Center
ChinaBlue Sustainability Institute
Guangdong Wetland Conservation Association
Shenzhen Aixin Tree Ecological Volunteers Association
Wenling Youth Volunteers Association
Shenzhen Blue Ocean Environmental Protection Association
Wenling Chaoyang Volunteer Center
Fujian Birdwatching Society
Ningbo Beilunshidong Environmental Water Conservation Volunteers
Hainan Helecrab Conservation Center
Fujian Green Technology and Culture Promotion Association
Weifang Binhai Volunteer Center
Ziranmeng Shanghai Educational Technology, Ltd
Tianjin Ecocity Friend of Green Association
Shenzhen Dapeng New District Coral Conservation Volunteer Association
Zhejiang Green Technology and Culture Promotion Association
Xiamen Baby Gull Environmental Education Center
Guangzhou Haizhu EcoCanton Environmental Protection Center
Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China
Beihai Citizen Volunteer Association
Hainan Marine Environmental Protection Association
Beihai Mangroves Care and Development Research
Putian Green Shoots Coastal Wetlands Institute
Shanghai Rendu Ocean NPO Development Center
Shishi Xiangzhi Beautiful Coast Volunteer Association