

Good morning and welcome to Planet Life, where today we're discussing NGOs or Non-Governmental Organizations as many charities are described these days. It's obvious that governments and commercial companies need to be audited, that is checked by external organizations to ensure that their finances are in order. But have you considered that NGOs also need to be audited to ensure that they're being run efficiently? We have to remember that they're also human organizations – so we need to check against laziness, inefficiency and even corruption – as we do with any other organization. That's why an organization called 'Elephant Family' has decided to audit the efforts of NGOs to preserve the Asian elephant. Let's hear what our environmental correspondent has to say about Elephant Family's work. Sally ...

Thanks Cameron. Yes, well, we all know about the problems of wild African elephants, but Asia has its wild elephants, too. However, unlike their African cousins, they mostly hide in forests, which is why so few people seem worried about what happens to them. Yet despite this, 21 NGOs in ten countries claim to be trying to preserve Asian elephants.

That seems a lot!

Yes, though only \$4m a year is actually spent doing the work. I'm sure you'd agree though that \$4m is still an amount of money worth auditing.

It certainly is!

Well, Elephant Family's audit report makes interesting reading. Firstly, they found that the best projects were run by local organizations rather than international ones.

Why's that? Because focal enthusiasts are highly motivated?

That's right, Cameron. And the second interesting finding is that the larger NGOs aren't always effective. In fact, as the report itself puts it "Competition for funds and publicity among the larger NGOs results in a divided movement that is not making the best use of its resources". What's more, the report says that funds get moved from conservation to institutional survival and self interest, resulting in a lack of transparency. In other words, money's sometimes spent on supporting the NGOs rather than preserving the animals they're intended to protect!

Surely that means that NGOS seriously need to re-evaluate the way they operate.

Yes, and that more questions may be asked in future about where funding is going. But it also means that some people may be unwilling to donate money to wildlife charities ...