

Summary of dialogue event: Building bridges for the conservation of forests and well-being of communities in San Martín, Peru

Moyobamba, Peru - March 9 & 10, 2017



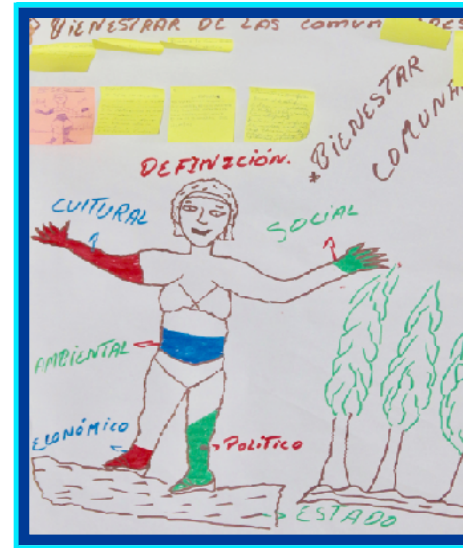
On March 9-10, 70 conservation leaders from communities, NGOs, cooperatives, universities, and the regional government of San Martín met in Moyobamba, Peru to discuss key challenges and possible solutions to obtain better results for conservation initiatives and the well-being of communities in the San Martín Region. This summary outlines the diverse experiences and ideas shared during presentations and small dialogue groups focused on 4 main themes:

1. **STRENGTHENING ENGAGEMENT:** How to broaden participation and foster trust among actors?
2. **UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATIONS:** What is the best way to motivate people for conservation?
3. **IMPROVING MONITORING:** How should conservation projects be monitored and evaluated?
4. **BALANCING POWER:** How to give communities and conservation more political power?



Key challenges and ideas discussed:

- 1. Definitions of conservation and well-being are diverse:** Some people view conservation as protection, others as finding a balance between sustainable management and production. Similarly, although many projects only pursue economic components of well-being, many additional aspects of well-being emerged as important in discussions, including quality of water, diet, healthcare, education, community culture, social relations, political processes, and the environment. It is important to consider how the way in which conservation and well-being are defined can influence aims and results of conservation initiatives.
- 2. Debate exists over how to motivate conservation:** People protect the environment for diverse motives. For example, some people are motivated to conserve forests and biodiversity as an end in itself (intrinsic motivation), while others think material benefits play an important role in generating interest (extrinsic motivation). Extrinsic motivations were seen by some as potentially more risky, while intrinsic motivations were seen as more long-term. It is important to develop projects which create synergies rather than conflicts between multiple motivations for conservation.
- 3. Increased income does not automatically result in more conservation:** Many projects aim to develop productive activities to promote conservation; however, a recent investigation in San Martín found that higher income is actually linked to more recent and planned deforestation. Another investigation demonstrated that the total amount spent on protected areas and conservation concessions is poorly linked to conservation results. It is important to better understand how to generate and distribute benefits in ways which help develop intrinsic motivations and strengthen local governance for conservation.
- 4. Conservation models should be long-term and involve shared benefits:** Participants mentioned that projects often have poor continuity over time or involve the capture of project benefits by a relatively small portion of the community; this can create discontent and disillusionment. Obtaining sources of sustainable finance and investing it in creating long-term social and environmental benefits is crucial for both local acceptance and conservation outcomes.
- 5. Conservation leadership depends on long-term dialogue and capacities:** Participants mentioned that their initial motivations for taking action for conservation emerged from community discussions, by being inspired by others to take on leadership roles, and by obtaining the knowledge and capacities necessary to lead activities. People also identified important knowledge gaps limiting their effectiveness, such as best technical practices to support management decisions, as well as improved social skills to encourage broader participation and manage conflicts.



- 6. Young people and women should participate more in conservation initiatives:** Participants identified the problem that many conservation initiatives work primarily with men and that it is therefore important to find better ways of engaging young people and women. To achieve this, it is necessary to better understand the barriers which limit the participation of women, such as domestic responsibilities and expectations. In addition, conservation projects should become more involved with parent-led local organizations, such as parent associations for schools and women's clubs.
- 7. Improved law enforcement and management of social conflicts is important:** It is critical to develop approaches to better manage social conflicts related to conservation. The participation of local leaders and governance structures, such as Rondas Campesinas and local authorities can provide a more secure environment in which people can undertake conservation activities. Participants also identified the need for more state support in managing deforestation in their conservation areas and resulting conflicts. Effective facilitation techniques could help bring together diverse perspectives.
- 8. Strengthened legal frameworks are needed to support voluntary conservation:** Some participants indicated that the inflexibility of state laws impeded conservation efforts. At the same time, they felt they did not have sufficient legal support to overcome the complex bureaucratic processes. For example, some community groups struggle with perceived legitimacy of their conservation area due to the often delayed process of receiving legal authority to manage the area. In addition, non-state conservation actors often cannot access public funds despite providing public benefits.
- 9. Power imbalances in resource use decisions should be explicitly recognised and addressed:** Certain factors give some actors more power than others to influence decisions related to conservation and development, such as access to sustainable financing, experience and political connections. This tends to put some local actors at a disadvantage compared to other more influential actors, such as well-connected NGOs and individuals. To address these power imbalances, it is important to explicitly recognise why some interests are prioritised over others and help communities access sustainable financing, resource management knowledge, and connections to influential people and networks.
- 10. Stronger networks among local conservation actors could foster more influence and power:** Weak coordination between local actors and institutions was identified as a critical barrier. Poor collaboration hinders the ability to develop the political pressure necessary to pursue common agendas. When conservation actors exchange ideas, knowledge and provide mutual support, they can develop their capacity and power to influence political decisions related to conservation and development. There is a need for more local and regional management committees to facilitate better communication and coordination between different actors with different strengths and roles.



- 11. More participatory conservation models can foster improved trust with local communities:** The weak involvement of local communities in defining specific conservation project aims and the poor transparency in how funds are spent was identified as a key barrier to promoting improved trust among actors, broader participation and ultimately conservation effectiveness. For example, community members often felt that only a minor percentage of funds actually arrived to their communities. The requirement of actors to demonstrate evidence of “success” via photos and signatures also generates mistrust. It is necessary that donors allow for more flexible design processes and alternative ways of showing progress.
- 12. More direct links are needed between donors and community initiatives:** Given problems with a large portion of funds spent on administrative costs, poor project continuity, and conflicting aims between conservation and development efforts, there is a need to find more direct and sustainable funding for community initiatives. However, this requires that donors can trust communities’ to manage funds properly, and thus relies on the improved capacity of communities to receive and manage funds for collective benefit and develop reliable evaluation and reporting systems.
- 13. Community monitoring committees could improve transparency:** Communities could take a more active role in tracking how the well-being of their community and surrounding forests is changing over time, and the role of people and organizations in generating changes. The vision outlined by participants involved developing the capacity of locally elected community monitoring committees responsible for holding meetings with community members to understand issues with how decisions are made and their social and environmental effects. Regular public reporting of results and discussion via public assemblies could help improve transparency and accountability of the work of different actors.
- 14. Efforts to monitor project impacts should incorporate qualitative information:** It is important to listen to diverse local perspectives about how community well-being and motivations and capacities to conserve forests are changing in order to better understand the long-term implications of projects, as well as the complex heterogeneity of local impacts. Currently, project success is often only measured and reported via quantitative indicators (e.g. number of trees planted, number of hectares conserved, amount of income generated).



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