

Stepping off the small metal boat and onto the bank of a small river deep in the Amazon, I felt the earth and saw the trees that I had been learning about in digital articles, recordings of conference presentations, and international conservation websites from my quiet workspace in my home in Oakland, California, in the United States. In my head, I carried academic and development cosmovisions that interpret and oversimplify the Amazon territories through frameworks, carbon markets, policy analyses, and the like. These white, grey, black boxes were quickly crowded and pushed to the corners of my mind as I became more and more present in this place. I heard loud sounds of birds and insects in the trees and water rushing off in the distance. I felt thick, hot, humid air entering my lungs. I saw blue, yellow, black, green, white, and red butterflies drinking water from the mud at the river's edge, and dense trees and plants in every direction except for the small clearing made by the community for their wooden homes and the open space between them. An inviting hand reached out to help me out of the boat, and I looked up to see a big smile welcoming me to her community.

I traveled to the Amazon region as a second-year PhD student with funding from the Tinker Field Research Grant, hoping to learn from local perceptions of how international conservation advances and/or hinders territorial rights, self-determination, and ecological health. I came to listen. Through long conversations during walks, community gatherings, and boat rides, I learned about how things used to be, knowledges that were forever lost, and ideas for the future. During interviews with leaders and young university students, I learned about development pressures, climate stressors, and policy and finance opportunities that either threatened their communities or could be leveraged to advance their collective desires for their territorial futures.

Approximately two-thirds of Peru's land falls within the Amazon and is home to over a thousand Indigenous communities who have consistently worked to secure land rights within their territories over the past few decades. These communities have organized across ethnic identities and spatial geographies to form representative entities that can advocate for their territorial and human rights at scale. Namely, AIDSESP, ANECAP, and CONAP are three of the largest Indigenous organizations in Peru. It is fascinating to learn the myriad ways in which AIDSESP, ANECAP, and CONAP have creatively leveraged policies and finance mechanisms at the national and global scales to advance Indigenous rights and community well-being in Peru. Nearly a decade ago, these three organizations came together to form Grupo Peru, and just earlier this year, together with the Peruvian Ministry of Environment, they successfully co-opted a well-known international conservation finance mechanism, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), to create the first-of-its-kind Indigenous Jurisdictional REDD+.

When I learned about this effort, all of the academic papers and research I had done leading up to my visit flooded back into my mind. REDD+ is widely criticized in academia and has been the subject of numerous critical political ecology papers and discussions due to its unfair implementation, impacts on Indigenous land tenure, and its implications for epistemological justice. It is a payment-for-ecosystem-services mechanism that aims to compensate communities for storing carbon in their forests with funds that polluting nations pay to offset their

carbon emissions. In academic classrooms and discourse, REDD+ often times is painted as a failed approach to conservation; however, through listening to Indigenous community leaders and representatives, I learned that the communities had invested time and resources into understanding this mechanism and were organizing to use it to their advantage. After all, it represented an opportunity to move financial resources into their communities. The Indigenous Jurisdictional REDD+ aims to take control over the project design and management. This includes managing consultations with over 900 Indigenous communities, designing evaluation metrics, and shaping the scientific narrative.

As I had more conversations about the new Indigenous Jurisdictional REDD+, I started to draw connections between the academic cosmovisions I had adopted through desk research and the local territorial cosmovisions. My questions about this place shifted. Spending time in the Amazon with communities, birds, snakes, water, and plants, allowed me to develop a more complex understanding of the territory and local visions for the future. Rivers that I had seen on maps began to look like highways and roads used to connect communities, get kids to school, move forest products, access hospitals, and bring in tourists. The REDD+ approaches have flattened communities into scientific indicators and metrics for measuring carbon sequestration efficiently. Oversimplified indicators are dangerous because they direct financial resources toward in situ behaviors aimed at achieving them, but that may not be good for community or ecosystem well-being. For example, fencing off or land preservation models could lead to more forest cover; however, it might overlook forest or community health and could lead to food insecurity and loss of ecocultural knowledge. I started to see how the local economy, medicine, and culture could serve as the foundation for stronger programs that might yield better ecological and social outcomes. This Indigenous Jurisdictional REDD+ will hopefully represent a new generation of payments for ecosystem services approaches that can be built on local cosmovisions, and it will be important to follow as the broader community will have the opportunity to learn a lot from its implementation.