

Governance Mechanisms and Collective Action for Sustainable Forest Management: Social and Ecological Dimensions of Small Coffee Producer Groups in the Peruvian Amazon Basin

Kowler, Laura F.¹

¹University of Florida, School of Natural Resources & Environment, Gainesville, FL USA

A poor understanding of the dynamic institutional arrangements of local forest user groups has impeded practical community-based conservation efforts that have increasingly promoted the collective natural resource management of local forest user groups in the tropics. This study proposes a relationship between the social dynamics and governance mechanisms of these groups and their collective dedication to sustainable forest management. The study compares levels of group cohesion and group identity of eight small coffee producer groups belonging to two large producer organizations in the Altomayo Region of the Peruvian Amazon Basin. These organizations are differentiated by their governance systems classified as both *top-down* and *bottom-up*, respectively.

The study population of 140 coffee farmers participated in semi-structured questionnaires, 45 of which were selected to participate in an interview and farm visit over the course of a 3 month period. An exploration of leadership, rules and norms, rule enforcement, decision-making regarding goals for sustainable agro-forestry practices, and ecological indicators were used to determine the level of collective dedication for sustainable forest management of the respective groups.

I propose that the collective dedication of groups toward sustainable forest management maintains a positive relationship with the level of group cohesion and group identity. This relationship is more likely in self-reliant local forest user groups which control their own resources. Community-based conservation efforts must consider the diverse social institutions influencing the collective capacity of forest user groups to gain access and control over their own resources in order to realize the potential for sustainable forest management.

Keywords: Collective action, community-based conservation, sustainability, sustainable forest management, agro-forestry practices, conservation, development, group cohesion, group identity, decision-making, goal-setting, rule enforcement, small coffee producer groups, Peruvian Amazon Basin

Contact Information: Laura F. Kowler, School of Natural Resources & Environment, University of Florida, PO Box 110300, Gainesville, FL 32611 USA; Phone: 352-392-2201 Ext. 304; Fax: 352-392-8196; Email: lkowler@ufl.edu