The Journal of Development Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fjds20

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To cite this article: Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti, Anne M. Larson & Nicole Heise Vigil (2021): Understanding Difference to Build Bridges among Stakeholders: Perceptions of Participation in Four Multi-stakeholder Forums in the Peruvian Amazon, The Journal of Development Studies, DOI: 10.1080/00220388.2021.1945041

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2021.1945041

Published online: 01 Jul 2021.

The Journal of Development Studies, 2021
https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2021.1945041

Understanding Difference to Build Bridges among Stakeholders: Perceptions of Participation in Four Multi-stakeholder Forums in the Peruvian Amazon

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(Original version submitted August 2020; final version accepted June 2021)

ABSTRACT *As interest grows in supporting multi-stakeholder forums (MSFs) to address land-use and climate change, it is important to understand how these processes operate from the perspectives of their participants. The academic literature on their equity largely presents a dichotomy: participatory processes either allow for horizontal decision-making with more equitable and effective outcomes for local populations, or they mask technologies of governance that do not address – and may reinforce – structures of inequality. These two perspectives downplay the different, complex and sometimes nuanced perceptions and experiences of participation. In order to better understand these nuances, the authors applied Q-methodology to analyse and compare the perceptions of MSF participants and organisers in four forums in the Peruvian Amazon. The research finds that participants are often optimistic about the forums, but at the same time they are aware of risks; and that groups falling into both camps may be just as likely to fail to address inequality among participants but for different reasons. The results help identify points of convergence and divergence, and potential ways forward to help construct more equitable and effective MSFs.*

KEYWORDS: Conservation; Development; Q-methodology; Latin America

1. Introduction

Participatory processes are seen as central to conservation and development initiatives associated with land and forest use, more so given the climate emergency. Scholarly analyses on the equity of participatory processes tend to fall in one of two camps – an optimistic and a critical one – regarding the ability of such processes to address the inherent power inequalities among stakeholders. Regardless, the narrative of the transformational potential of participation for collaboration and problem-solving around land use remains powerful, as reflected in the current interest across sectors and levels in multi-stakeholder forums (MSFs). The proposed potential of MSFs to address power imbalances among stakeholders links to the idealised horizontality of democratic practice and the proposition that 'more' coordination may solve issues related to multi-level and multi-sector governance (Hemmati, 2002; see Larson & Lewis-Mendoza, 2012; Larson, Sarmiento Barletti, & Ravikumar, 2018 for critiques). Although a transition towards a substantive multi-stakeholder paradigm would be laudable, many past participatory initiatives have been criticised as 'box-ticking exercises' to satisfy legal or donor demands or have simply legitimated already-made decisions

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(Perrault, 2015). Current optimism reflects a lack of learning from the evidence of decades of participatory experiences (see Sarmiento Barletti, Larson, Hewlett, & Delgado, 2020).

This article follows publications by other scholars that identify multiple perspectives shaping participation (e.g. Maestre-Andrés, Calvet-Mir, & Apostolopoulou, 2018; Tuler & Webler, 2010; Wesselink, Paavola, Fritsch, & Renn, 2011). It questions the dichotomy presented in the literature approaching forums through the lens of equity. The dichotomy reflects a summary of more complex perspectives, translated through the researcher's own lens and made into analytical ideal types (Weber, 1952), yet has a limited contribution to lessons for MSFs. Instead, by recognising the inherent messiness of participatory processes and nuances in different participants' perceptions of equity (see Sterling et al., 2017), this article investigates the potential of MSFs to address the challenges of mainstream development and conservation initiatives (see Hickey & Mohan, 2005).

This article uses Q-methodology to analyse the perspectives held by the organisers and other participants in four MSFs in the Peruvian Amazon, bringing them into conversation with this literature. Q-methodology combines qualitative and quantitative research methods to compare the subjective perceptions held by research participants over a single issue (Stenner & Watts, 2012; Stephenson, 1953). The article synthesises participants' perceptions into four 'factors' representing different perspectives on MSFs. These groups represent commonalities across the different agendas, priorities, and topics addressed by MSFs. Results show that these forums are recognised not only as equitable spaces nor only as high-risk spaces that reinforce inequality; participants are often optimistic about them while being aware of their risks. However, groups falling into both theoretical camps may be as unlikely to address inequality among participants but for different reasons. Follow-up interviews reveal differences in proposed solutions, such as capacity development, and how these reflect different understandings of the problem. Furthermore, the article also seeks to understand the commonalities among stakeholder perceptions to build bridges towards more productive MSFs (see Lehrer & Sneegas, 2018). Analysis reveals commonalities (MSFs have opportunities and risks but have potential), compromise (MSFs could manage inequality), and conflict (MSFs can undermine the rights of Indigenous Peoples/Local Communities).

The two theoretical positions found in the literature on the equity of MSFs are set out below. This is followed by summaries of the four MSF case-studies, then an explanation of Q-methodology and data collection, and the results. The final sections present the discussion and conclusions.

2. The dominant dichotomies

The scholarly debate over equity in participatory processes in conservation and development is dominated by two positions. One argues for the potential of horizontal decision making with more equitable and effective outcomes for local populations (Bastos Lima, Visseren-Hamakers, Brana-Varela, & Gupta, 2017; Sayer, Sunderland, & Ghazoul, 2013). MSFs – as a method of practice – are celebrated for their potential to address problems associated with mainstream conservation and development. By bringing together different stakeholders to an issue, MSFs may address power inequalities among participants; lead to solutions for common problems that are more acceptable to local actors (and reflect their priorities) than top-down decision-making or bilateral negotiations; allow decision-makers and other participants to understand the perspectives of those most affected by land-use policy and decisions; and bring on board those who can affect the implementation and effectiveness of their outcomes (Buchy & Hoverman, 2000; Hemmati, 2002; Reed, 2008; Tippett, Handley, & Ravetz, 2007). The positive expectations for MSFs are varied and include the upholding of rights; participatory democracy; inter-sector coordination; and knowledge transfer (Backstrand, 2006; Chatre, 2008; Gambert, 2010; Selsky & Parker, 2005). This optimism is also reflected in policy and practice as donors and practitioners emphasise the importance of stakeholder participation in decision-making processes related to land use and land-use change. Local populations, especially indigenous organisations, also demand this access to participation (Zaremberg & Torres, 2018).

The other side of the debate claims that mainstream participation does not address and may reinforce structures of inequality and the asymmetric power relations between MSF participants (Maestre-Andrés et al., 2018; Warner, 2006; see also Spash, 2001; Rauschmayer, Van den Hove, &

Koetz, 2009). Scholars consider that the agreements or outcomes reached at MSFs tend to rely on voluntary compliance and thus are unenforceable, which may create or exacerbate conflicts between participants (Mena & Palazzo, 2012). A critical awareness of power imbalances between participants is central to this side of the debate, in terms of access to economic and natural resources, technical knowledge, and to being invited to participate (Cornwall, 2003; Ravikumar, Larson, Myers, & Trench, 2018). Other analysts posit that these platforms are rarely or inconsistently monitored and require more nuanced and participatory developed monitoring methods (Kusters et al., 2018).

The dichotomy explained above is common in discussions over politically charged processes. Positions over participatory initiatives have taken on a political life as discourses, constructed by the perspectives held by implementers, participants, and analysts of such initiatives. Polarised views may derive from the histories of unequal interactions and access to land and resources experienced by the stakeholders in the areas where participatory initiatives are implemented. Polarised views also reflect the analytical priorities and methodological approaches of those who research the equality of participation. These analyses are commonly based on measurable differences in livelihoods or benefits (see Luttrell et al., 2013; Pham et al., 2013 on equity as benefit-sharing in REDD+); an etic analysis of the influence that disempowered participants had (or not) on the participatory process and its outcome (Barnaud & Van Paassen, 2013; Wallerstein & Duran, 2010); on what a well-functioning MSF could have achieved (Brouwer & Woodhill, 2015; Foley, Wiek, Kay, & Rushforth, 2017; Truex & Søreide, 2010); or on the perceptions of the actors involved in the process (Buckland-Merrett, Kilkenny, & Reed, 2017; Faysse, 2006; Okereke & Stacewicz, 2018). Although more analytically inclusive, the latter approach carries a methodological challenge in the systematic qualitative comparison of these perspectives. Publications that engage with participation by comparing case-studies are normally reviews of published material and thus consider data derived from different research methods and engagement, producing comparisons with little depth in knowledge (Ratner et al., forthcoming; Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2020 are exceptions).

Generally, these analytical approaches perceive scenarios where either all stakeholders benefit or the interests of some prevail over those of the rest. The former tends to come from analyses of cases aimed to learn lessons and expand on the theoretical potential for a well-functioning version of the same process. The latter tends to produce divisions between 'winners' (implementers or powerful actors with mainstream agendas) and 'losers' (local peoples or 'project beneficiaries') in processes that do little to address the status quo. Although this division reveals power inequalities between participants, it does not reflect the nuances within their experiences of and perspectives on participatory processes.

Considering these nuances is important and has been reflected in other literature by critical scholars of participation who recognised the need to understand different perspectives of actors in participatory processes, but who focus less on equity specifically. For example, in their work on stakeholder involvement in river basin planning in Scotland, Blackstock and Richards (2007, p. 487) found that participants 'bring their own particular perspectives, incorporating both knowledge and values, to the deliberation (. . .) [and] different levels of knowledge and understanding about different subjects.' Much of this work focuses on motives for participation. Wesselink et al. (2011) analysed the rationales for participation held by environmental professionals involved in the implementation of three European Union policy initiatives. They identified four different rationales[1] with an instrumental rationale dominating; other scholars, also in Europe, found similar results (Bickerstaff & Walker, 2001; Maestre-Andrés et al., 2018). Ideas of fairness or democratic rights were less relevant.

In what follows, we build on this approach to diverse perspectives but from an equity lens, to understand what people think MSFs can achieve. The MSFs engage with topics framed by histories of disparities in access to land and resource rights, conflicts, and powerful political and economic pressures driving unsustainable land use. They also include the participation of historically underrepresented groups. We seek to find common ground, potential compromise, and red lines between different positions held by MSF participants on the equity (potential and in practice) of their forums.

3. Case studies and methods

Four case-studies were selected after a scoping study of subnational MSFs in the Peruvian Amazon; all dealt with land use issues and had at least one government and one local actor (see Figure 1 and Table 1; see Sarmiento Barletti & Larson, 2019 for the full research methods).[2] Subnational MSFs were chosen for three reasons. First, international forums (e.g., Roundtables on Responsible Soy and Sustainable Palm Oil) have received the most attention. Second, subnational MSFs are closer to the locations and resources where stakeholders are involved in and affected by land-use change, planning, and management. Third, the analysis contributes to the growing interest in jurisdictional approaches to climate change (Boyd, Stickler, Duchelle, & Rodriguez-Ward, 2018; Stickler et al., 2018).

The cases are illustrative of the MSFs and the development and conservation priorities in the Peruvian Amazon. More than 60% of Peru's territory falls in this contested area where the rights and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) are at odds with the state's interest in natural resources. A contradiction of development and conservation policies makes Peru a stimulating setting for this analysis. Peru is one of the few countries with implemented prior consultation processes, based on the International Labour Organisation's Convention 169, which it regulated in 2011 (Sarmiento Barletti & Seedhouse, 2019). Furthermore, the government has signed international agreements towards 0% net emissions from land-use change and forestry by 2021, is undergoing a titling process in favour of indigenous Amazonian peoples and is developing a national strategy for the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Changes' Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) mechanism. Nevertheless, Peru's macroeconomic growth rests on the large-scale extraction of resources from the territories of indigenous Amazonian (hydrocarbons) and Andean (minerals) peoples. Currently, almost one-fifth of the Peruvian Amazon has been titled for indigenous communities; half of these territories fall inside extractive concessions (Sarmiento Barletti, 2016). Extractivism has been met with different degrees of social unrest, partly because IPLCs in Peru are rarely able to have their rights respected without striking or taking their demands to donors (Hughes, 2010).

To address these conflicts, Peru introduced laws over the past two decades to reform decision-making processes around land-use and resource governance and widen stakeholder participation. Notably, Article 11 in Peru's Environment Law (passed in 2005) calls for the 'articulation of policies, institutions, norms, procedures, tools, and information to promote the effective and integrated participation of private and public actors'. Similarly, its National Environmental Policy (passed in 2009) defines environmental governance as a process that must follow the principles of 'social inclusion and environmental justice', and the Forestry and Wildlife Law (passed in 2011) notes that forest governance must include the participation of public and private sector actors. These laws recognise that decision-making over forests and land-use management is carried out in a complex governance arena that is multi-actor, multi-sector, and multi-level. This includes national, regional and municipal government agencies, NGOs, international cooperation agencies, research institutions, IPLC organisations, and producer cooperatives.

These openings towards participation, coupled with donor expectations and the need for technical input from civil society experts due to a lack of government capacities (e.g., the Ministry of Environment's REDD+ safeguards technical workgroup), generated expectations for participation in related spaces organised by both governmental and non-governmental actors. Yet, the inclusion of more stakeholders does not mean that their perspectives and priorities are taken seriously, nor that these processes remain unaffected by unequal power relations among actors (Larson & Lewis-Mendoza, 2012). The MSFs summarised below are examples of trends in participatory processes in Peru.

3.1. PIACI roundtable

Set up by Loreto's regional government, the Roundtable for Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact includes nineteen organisations: nine regional government offices (ranging from Indigenous

Figure 1. Peruvian regions where the four case study MSFs are located.

Table 1. Summary of MSF case studies

MSF	Jurisdiction	Type[a]	Participating actors
Roundtable for Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact (PIACI Roundtable)	Loreto	Knowledge sharing	• Government (National, Regional and Local) • Indigenous Organisation (National, Regional) • NGO (National)
Management Committee for the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve (Amarakaeri MC)	Madre de Dios	Decision-making; Knowledge sharing	• Government (National, Regional and Local) • Indigenous Organisation (Regional) • NGO (National, International)
Management Committee for the Alto Mayo Protected Forest (Alto Mayo MC)	San Martin	Decision-making; Knowledge sharing	• Government (National, Regional and Local) • Indigenous Organisation (Regional, Local) • NGO (National, International)
Regional Platform for Community Forest Management (Ucayali CFM)	Ucayali	Knowledge sharing	• Government (Regional) • Indigenous Organisation (Regional) • NGO (National, International) • Donor organisation

[a]MSFs have been classified following the typology previously set out by the authors (Sarmiento Barletti & Larson, 2020).

Affairs to Health); the national Ministry of Culture; five provincial municipalities; two NGOs; and regional and national organisations representing indigenous Amazonian peoples. This MSF is mainly for knowledge sharing as it brings together stakeholders to support the implementation of five Indigenous Reserves for isolated indigenous peoples in Loreto. The reserves were requested by indigenous organisations between 1993 and 2007 in areas now overlapped by conflicting land-use regimes such as indigenous communities, forestry concessions, hydrocarbon concessions, and planned roads.

3.2. Amarakaeri MC

The Amarakaeri Communal Reserve is co-managed by Peru's Protected Areas Service (SERNANP) and Executor of the Contract of Administration-Amarakaeri (ECA-Amarakaeri), an organisation that represents the 10 indigenous communities in the Reserve's buffer zone. Mandated by law, the Amarakaeri Management Committee supports SERNANP and ECA-Amarakaeri's co-management. Participation in the MSF is voluntary; it includes indigenous organisations, SERNANP, and national NGOs. Apart from knowledge sharing, the MSF's main outcome has been approving the Reserve's 2016–2020 Master Plan and discussing the implementation of Indigenous Amazonian REDD+.

3.3. Alto Mayo MC

The Alto Mayo Protected Forest is co-managed by SERNANP and Conservation International; Alto Mayo MC, also mandated by law, supports the co-management of the Protected Forest. Participants include different sectors and levels of government, IPLC organisations, NGOs, universities, and tourism organisations. Apart from knowledge sharing, the MSF has promoted agreements with migrant communities concerning a conflict that arose from their challenges to the land-use restrictions set within the Protected Forest. Conservation agreements were implemented with some communities, but others feared eviction and demanded their legal recognition as indigenous communities.

3.4. Ucayali CFM

Ucayali's Community Forest Management MSF was organised to coordinate and promote sustainable forest management in Ucayali's indigenous communities. Peru's greatest source of timber, Ucayali has a tradition of informal extraction from indigenous communities by private companies in unequal deals. This knowledge-sharing platform was attended by representatives of the regional and national governments, NGOs, an international cooperation agency, and an indigenous organisation. Capacity development workshops were held with some indigenous communities to promote sustainable forest management and relevant legal regulations.

3.5. Methods

Q-methodology is a quantitative and qualitative research method used to understand the perspectives held by a group of people regarding a topic and identify subgroups with similar perceptions. It was used to examine how MSF participants across the four case-studies perceived participatory processes. The use of Q-methodology is growing in conservation science (Cotton, 2015; Cotton & Devine-Wright, 2011; Gram-Hanssen, 2019; Price, Saunders, Hinchliffe, & McDonald, 2017), yet it is a novel approach to understand MSFs. Research participants were selected after stakeholders were mapped for each case-study, validated with MSF organisers and key context informants for each, and supplemented through snowball sampling. Research participants were representative of the different actor types in each MSF (see Table 2).

Each participant was first interviewed on their experience of the MSF (data not analysed here), followed by the application of Q-methodology. These data collection activities were conducted at the office of the organisations that each participant represented at the MSF, and in Spanish – the native language of all interviewers and most interviewees.

The application of Q-methodology involves the sorting of a Q-set by research participants. A Q-set is composed of statements that represent different views about a topic – in this case, MSFs. These statements are written as affirmations for research participants to rank based on whether they agree or disagree with them. The Q-set for this study was designed based on the lessons from a Realist Synthesis Review of the scholarly literature on MSFs (Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2020) and scoping field research. The list of statements (in English) was developed, refined and peer-reviewed by a group of specialists on participation and land-use issues. The final set of 42 statements was translated into Spanish by the authors and tested with participants of MSFs in Peru that were not in the research sample to check for interpretation issues, after which it was refined for its application. Although all participants were fully fluent in Spanish, facilitators interpreted any statements that were unclear for research participants.

Participants were asked to divide 42 cards, each with a statement, into three piles – agree, disagree and neutral – before sorting them onto the Q-grid in terms of how strongly they agreed (+4) or disagreed (−4) with each statement (see Figure 2). Given the Q-grid's forced distribution, the method leads participants to reveal and prioritise their personal subjectivity. Sorting was followed by an

Table 2. Research participants

		# of research participants	% of sample
MSF	Ucayali CFM	24	34%
	PIACI Roundtable	18	26%
	Amarakaeri MC	12	17%
	Alto Mayo MC	16	23%
SECTOR	Government	41	59%
	NGOs	16	23%
	IPLCs	11	16%
	Private Sector	2	3%

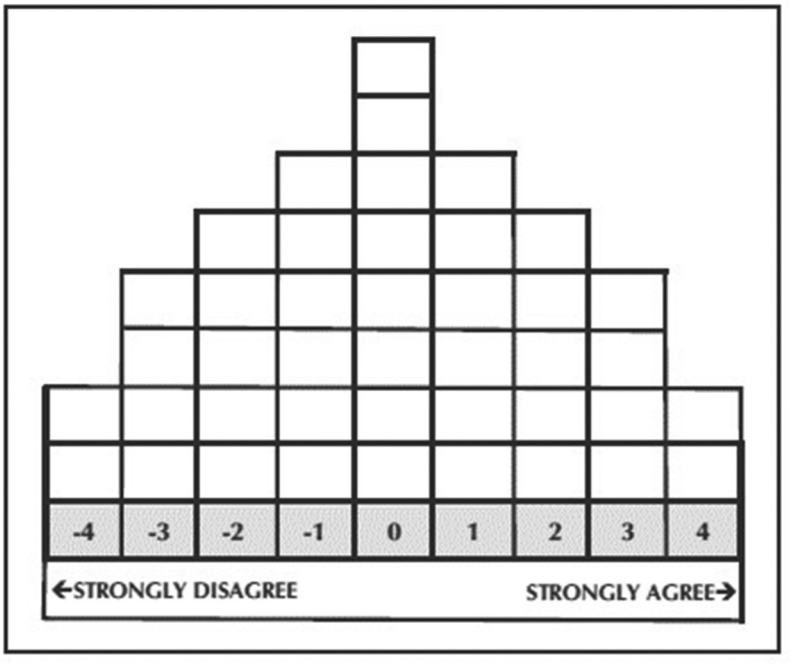

Figure 2. Q-methodology grid.

interview to understand why interviewees ranked the statements the way they did. The data from follow-up interviews was also used to contextualise this sorting as some participants may have sorted the statements as a statement of fact rather than opinion. For example, some participants disagreed with the statement 'Effective MSFs have those driving deforestation and forest degradation at the table' because those actors tend to be missing in MSFs and not because they did not think that their presence was important. All Q-sorts were photographed and systematised in spreadsheets; interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English.

All 70 Q-sorts were entered into KenQ Analysis, a web-based platform for factor analysis. Eight factors were initially extracted from the correlation matrix and reduced to four after applying the Kaiser–Guttman criterion and the Scree Test, also considering the explained variance and number of participants significantly loaded in each group. Following factor extraction, varimax rotation and auto-flagging were used to find the best factor solution. Different numbers of factors were considered and rejected based on explained variances below the recommended minimum for Q-methodology or for not complying with the parameters for the composite reliability of factors (e.g., the number of significantly loaded participants to each factor).

The four resulting groups fulfilled all expected parameters – they were each loaded with at least 5% of participants, had a composite reliability of more than 0.9, and a cumulative explained variance of more than 40%. No co-founded cases were found and 24 participants were excluded for not being significantly loaded onto any group. In Q-methodology, a participant's 'loading' can be interpreted as the correlation between their individual Q-sort and the factor's composite Q-sort. We followed the common practice that participants 'who do not load significantly on any factor have points of view that are "idiosyncratic" and cannot be included under any theme depicted in the Q factor analysis results' (Stenner & Watts, 2012). Although we would have preferred to exclude less participants, this ratio still complies with the acceptable range provided by specialist publications (see Stenner & Watts, 2012).[3]

KenQ Analysis produced a composite Q-sort for each factor, representing an 'ideal' viewpoint held by the participants grouped in the factor. The composite Q-sorts for the four factors were used to produce narrative descriptions of the viewpoint expressed by each factor. Q-methodology interviews were only carried out with MSF organisers and/or participants; the sample does not include past participants or those who were not invited or were invited but chose not to attend. Although non-participant stakeholders were interviewed as part of the wider research project, this article does not include that data. Thus, results are biased towards those most likely to see MSFs favourably, given that they were choosing to attend.

4. Results: four viewpoints on MSFs

Forty-six participants were significantly loaded – had a similar perspective – to the Q-sorts produced for one of the four factors that emerged from the analysis: 15 in F1, 13 in F2, 3 in F3, and 15 in F4 (see Table 3). As for variances in the Q-sorts, F1 accounts for 14%, F2 for 13%, F3 for 5%, and F4 for 12%. While 44% explained variance is within reason, it is on the lower end of the scale and thus perceptions may be more nuanced than what these four factors captured.

Factor groups have a majority of government participants, which is unsurprising as they made up just over half of interviewees (52%) and most case-studies were organised or co-organised by government actors (see Table 4). This majority is greatest in F3 (100%) and F4 (60%). NGO participants represented 26% of the sample, mostly grouped in F4 (33%) and F1 (27%). Participants representing IPLC organisations made 20 per cent of the sample and were mostly in F2 (31%) and F1 (27%). Finally, only 2% of the sample (one actor in F1) belonged to the private sector, given their scant participation in the MSFs under study. F1 mostly included participants in Alto Mayo MC, F3 in PIACI Roundtable, F4 in Ucayali CFM, and F2 in Amarakaeri MC and Ucayali CFM. In terms of gender composition, 33% of the participants under F4 were women as were 31% in F2 and 13% in F1. All in F3 were men.

Table 3. Factor extraction

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
No. of defining variables	15	13	3	15
Avg. Rel. Coef.	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
Composite reliability	0.984	0.981	0.923	0.984
S.E. of factor Z-scores	0.126	0.138	0.277	0.126

Table 4. Key characteristics of participants per factor group

		Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3		Factor 4		Total	
		15		13		3		15		46	
Number of participants		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
MSF	Ucayali CFM	4	27%	5	38%	0	0%	11	73%	20	43%
	PIACI Roundtable	2	13%	2	15%	3	100%	1	7%	8	17%
	Amarakaeri MC	3	20%	4	31%	0	0%	1	7%	8	17%
	Alto Mayo MC	6	40%	2	15%	0	0%	2	13%	10	22%
Actor type	Government	6	40%	6	46%	3	100%	9	60%	24	52%
	NGO	4	26.7%	3	23%	0	0%	5	33%	12	26%
	IPLC	4	26.7%	4	31%	0	0%	1	7%	9	20%
	Private Sector	1	6.7%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%

The four ways of perceiving MSFs are discussed below (see Table 5), with references to statements and rankings (see Table 6) – e.g. (S1/+4) – and contextualised with data from follow-up interviews.

4.1. MSFs promote an equal playing field between participants

F1 represents the most optimistic perspective of MSFs – the 'idealists'. For this viewpoint, forums work towards the common good (S2/+4), bring different actors together (S27/+2; S22/+3), and make them feel like equals (S23/+4). MSFs guarantee effective collaboration (S42/-3) in processes and outcomes that will not be controlled by powerful actors (S38/-1; S35/-4; S33/-2), leading to agreements that will be implemented (S34/-4; 5/-3). Other options (e.g. better law enforcement or separate consultations) are not more effective (S15/0; S16/-1; S29/-3; S19/0). Given this optimism, there is not much concern for flexibility (S1/0) or having an unbiased facilitator (S8/+1). This viewpoint upholds cooperation (e.g. S22/+3; S24/+3; S28/0) without considering the quality or challenges of participation once everyone is brought together. As one participant (government) noted, 'we're all completely involved, together, around a theme that will lead to a solution [that] will have a positive impact in the future [and] the next generations'. The idea of collaborating for the common good could be why this viewpoint proposes a 'technical approach' that avoids conflict by staying away from addressing political issues (S3/+2). Although IPLC's capacities must be developed to understand this approach (S7/+3), IPLCs are not disadvantaged (S30/+2; S37/-1; S40/-1) and gain more from MSFs than from social action (S17/-2) or secure land tenure (S18/-1). 'Idealists' support capacity development for IPLCs but fail to address inequalities substantively or to see that simply inviting people to the table is not enough. This reinforces the argument of theoretical sceptics about the limited equitable participation in these processes.

Most 'idealists' were in Alto Mayo MC. Despite being formed to support the management of a protected area with indigenous communities within and adjacent to its buffer zone, it does not include many indigenous participants. Other interviews carried out as part of the wider research project with IPLC representatives, revealed that they knew little about the forum and rarely participated. The lack of knowledge may be related to the overlap between the MSF and the projects that Conservation International carries out with local indigenous communities. The NGO argues that community involvement in its projects is proof of the MSF's ability to develop local capacities and through that address power relations. However, neither the communities nor the organisations that represent them recognised themselves as active MSF participants. Importantly, there is a REDD+ project in the protected area, which IPLC representatives reported to know little about in focus groups that were carried out as part of the wider project.

Table 5. MSF perspectives by factor/type and main characteristics

Factor/Type	Perspective	Characteristics of majority of participants
1/Idealists	MSFs promote an equal playing field between participants	• Mixed • Most in Alto Mayo MC
2/Negotiators	MSFs build trust by offering a space for dialogue and lead to consensus outcomes	• Indigenous organisations • Most in Amarakaeri MC and Ucayali CFM
3/Sceptics	MSFs are successful when they include rights protections	• Government • All in PIACI Roundtable
4/Pragmatists	MSFs are effective when underrepresented actors have their capacities developed	• Government • Most in Ucayali CFM

Table 6. Q-sort values per statement

No.	Statement	Factor 1	2	3	4
1	Successful MSFs adapt to the circumstances as needed, rather than sticking to their original objectives.	0	0	0	1
2	Successful MSFs make decisions based on the common good.	4	4	−2	4
3	Successful MSFs take 'the politics' out of LULUC issues by making them technical.	2	−1	1	1
4	Effective MSFs have those driving deforestation and degradation at the table.	0	1	−4	0
5	An MSF is a waste of time if its outcome is not mandatory for all relevant actors.	−3	0	−3	−1
6	There should be a minimum quota for IPLC and/or women representatives.	1	2	4	1
7	Successful MSFs include capacity-building elements for IPLCs to participate effectively.	3	2	−1	4
8	Successful MSFs have an unbiased facilitator.	1	2	0	2
9	An MSF's objective should be set by the convenor before including other participants.	−2	−3	−2	−1
10	If participants are too transparent with information, maps and legal documents, others may use that to further their own agendas.	1	1	2	1
11	Participants must be ready to compromise some of their beliefs to reach an agreement.	2	3	4	3
12	In case agreement cannot be reached, the government must decide.	−2	−3	1	2
13	MSFs are often a waste of time because some participants use them to make unrelated claims.	−3	−2	0	−2
14	It is more important for an MSF to be effective than to include the participation of all stakeholders related to an issue.	1	−2	1	−2
15	Government regulations on the private sector would be more effective than an MSF.	0	−2	−1	−1
16	Enforcing the law is a better option than an MSF.	−1	−1	−3	0
17	IPLCs would be better off fighting for their interests through social action (collective action, their grassroots organisations) rather than through MSFs.	−2	1	0	−3
18	Securing land tenure rights for IPLCs is a better solution than an MSF.	−1	0	−3	0
19	Decision-making would be fairer if the government consulted each stakeholder group separately.	0	3	3	−2
20	MSFs are only effective when all participants have proven technical knowledge on an issue.	0	−4	3	2
21	For an outcome to be fair, only those actors holding rights over the area in question should take part in decision-making.	1	−1	−1	−3
22	MSFs help solve problems because they bring together government actors (e.g. development and environment planners) that would normally not work together.	3	3	1	3
23	In MSFs, all participants feel like equals with a real say in their futures.	4	0	−2	0
24	MSFs build bridges that are likely to lead to future positive outcomes (even if not right now).	2	4	1	2
25	MSFs improve information sharing and transparency.	3	1	0	2
26	In MSFs, the final decisions are in hands of legitimate actors.	3	1	−4	3
27	MSFs make people be more reasonable with their demands.	2	1	2	1
28	Participants in an MSF feel like they 'own' the outcome, and so are more likely to implement it.	0	0	−2	0
29	Making laws simpler to comply with is a better solution than an MSF.	−3	0	−1	0
30	MSFs create opportunities for the less powerful to link with potential allies.	2	2	−1	3
31	MSFs can empower IPLCs and/or previously marginalised groups (by e.g. gender, race, caste).	0	3	0	−2
32	Corporate social responsibility projects lead to better relations between the private sector and IPLCs than MSFs.	0	−2	2	0
33	No matter what the MSF decides, powerful actors (companies, government) will keep deforesting.	−2	−1	3	0
34	It doesn't matter what the MSF decides because it will never be implemented.	−4	−4	−3	−3
35	MSFs are just a way to create the appearance that participants are equals, which makes things worse for the less powerful.	−4	−2	0	−4
36	Because MSFs only address immediate problems, rather than their underlying causes, their outcomes will never change the status quo.	−1	−3	1	−1
37	No matter how the MSF is designed, IPLC representatives will lack the confidence to voice their interests.	−1	−1	−1	−3

(*continued*)

Table 6. (*Continued*)

No.	Statement	Factor 1	2	3	4
38	No matter how the is MSF designed, powerful actors always find a way to dominate the conversations held during it.	−1	0	0	−2
39	MSFs do not work because they are usually rushed.	−2	−1	3	−1
40	MSFs disempower IPLCs by giving others with fewer rights over their ancestral territories equal participation in decision-making.	−1	0	2	−4
41	For an outcome to be fair, every participant must be speaking on behalf of an interest group that selected him/her to represent them.	1	2	2	1
42	MSFs create an artificial context of collaboration and equity that won't persist after it ends	−3	−3	−2	−1

4.2. MSFs build trust by offering a space for dialogue and lead to consensus outcomes

F2 represents a perspective of MSFs as spaces for dialogue and consensus – the 'negotiators'. Like the 'idealists', this perspective supported the optimistic theoretical position but was more critical and had more of a strategy for success. The perspective with the most IPLCs, it holds that although things might not be easy, dialogue builds trust and the process is worth it. For this viewpoint, MSFs build an effective collaborative environment (S42/-3) by bringing actors together (S22/+3) to negotiate and compromise (S11/+3). They build bridges towards common good outcomes (S2/+4; S24/+4) that will be implemented (S34/-2) and change the status quo (S33/1; 36/-3). When an MSF does not reach an agreement, decision-making power should not be passed on to the government (S12/-3). Although MSFs do not reproduce inequalities (S38/-1; S35/-2; S40/0), equality was not taken for granted as actors may not feel like equals (S23/0) and IPLCs may be unable to voice their demands (S37/-1). Thus, MSFs must address inequality pro-actively through separate consultation processes (S19/+3), quotas for underrepresented groups (S6/+2), and an unbiased facilitator (S8/+2). Social action may be a way for IPLCs to pursue their interests (S17/+1), but MSFs can still empower IPLCs (S31/+3) and create opportunities for them to link with allies (S30/+2).

Most 'negotiators' were in Amarakaeri MC and Ucayali CFM – MSFs intrinsically related to indigenous territories and wellbeing agendas. For one participant (government), MSFs led to a better understanding of the challenges faced by IPLCs: 'The connection is not only at the level of our organisations. Now, after speaking with [indigenous leaders], I understand their problems better, I feel for them'. 'Negotiators' considered that people without technical capacities should still participate in an MSF – even if it deals with technical issues – because that requirement would exclude many (S3/-1; S20/-4). Developing the capacities of IPLCs – understood as the capacity to participate effectively – can improve an MSF's effectiveness (S7/+2). As a participant (NGO) noted, indigenous representatives may not have technical forest management knowledge but bring their expertise and knowledge to an MSF. Furthermore, all participants should jointly set the MSF's objective (S9/-3) and know its function and limits or else, as another participant (NGO) noted, '[participants] don't feel identified [with the MSF] or understand why it was created'. When done well, 'You end up with an outcome that belongs to everyone (…) based on common interests, one that unites rather than divides'.

4.3. MSFs are successful when they include rights protections

F3 reflects the concerns of the more critical theorists. It represents a viewpoint that MSFs may succeed if they include rights protections – the 'sceptics'. MSFs may only create the appearance of equality (S35/0) as participants do not feel like equals (S23/-2), do not improve transparency and information sharing (S10/+2; S25/0) and – as they only address immediate problems and are rushed – do not challenge the status quo (S33/+3; S36/+1; S39/+3). The fact that participants need to compromise some of their beliefs to reach an agreement (S11/+4) is not positive for underrepresented

actors given that powerful actors may dominate (S38/0), as is that the final decisions are not in the hands of legitimate actors (S26/-4)[4] and that decisions are not based on the common good (S2/-2). Furthermore, MSFs follow methods that can disempower IPLCs (S20/+3; S40/+2) and may not allow them to link with allies (S30/-1). Presumably, this is why separate consultations are preferred (S19/+3). Despite this critical view, MSFs are not entirely negative as they make people more reasonable with their demands (S27/+2) and build bridges between participants (S24/+1). MSFs do not assure equality on their own but need to include procedures for widened stakeholder inclusion, including setting quotas for underrepresented groups (S6/+4).

All 'sceptics' participated in Loreto's PIACI Roundtable and worked in its government. This is interesting as the authors expected the largest sceptics to be IPLCs due to their history of interactions with the state. In interviews, 'sceptics' noted their support for IPLC rights and recognised that, in their experience, MSFs present capacity, logistical and financial challenges for indigenous participants: 'Sometimes they call for a meeting days in advance but some communities may take as much as 15 or 10 days to get to the city'. 'Sceptics' did not fully reject MSFs and see potential in them that is unfulfilled because of the challenges to effective IPLC participation.

4.4. MSFs are effective when underrepresented actors have their capacities developed

F4 represents the viewpoint that MSFs can reach outcomes for the common good if they include capacity development for the participants that require it – the 'pragmatists'. MSFs solve problems by bringing government actors together (S22/+3) to build bridges that are likely to lead to positive outcomes (S24/+2). These outcomes are based on the common good and decided by legitimate actors (S2/+4; S26/+3), even if they may not all be relevant rights-holders (S21/-3; S40/-4). Collaborations are not artificial (S42/-1) as MSFs improve information sharing and transparency (S25/+2), treat participants equally (S35/-4) and powerful actors do not dominate conversations (S38/-2). This perspective supports capacity development; not to address inequality – IPLC can already voice their interests (S37/-3) – but to develop the capacities of underrepresented groups to 'participate effectively' in the MSF (S7/+4) based on their technical knowledge over the issues being discussed (S20/+2).

'Pragmatists' have the largest group of government participants and are mostly from the government-led Ucayali CFM. Although they emphasise that MSFs are for the 'common good', Ucayali CFM has failed to effectively include IPLCs despite being organised for community forestry. Some subtleties are subject to interpretation, but follow-up interviews with 'pragmatists' described MSFs as mainly existing to serve their organiser's purpose where expediency is preferred over equality and government actors with decision-making power are the key legitimate actors; when agreements are not reached, the government should decide (S12/+2). For one participant (government) 'Representative actors [with decision-making power] must go to the meetings. It is more likely that agreements will be implemented that way'. In a sense, this group is the reason why the 'sceptics' are sceptical. Follow-up interviews with 'pragmatists' posed that capacity development is important to address different levels of technical capacities and to empower indigenous actors to participate effectively. Ucayali CFM aimed mainly at implementing government policy which, for 'pragmatists', can only be achieved if indigenous peoples have the 'right information' to implement appropriate forest management. Another participant (government) explained: 'An important part of [the forum's] design is that it should include capacity development so that everyone will participate and reach good outcomes'. 'Pragmatists' understand the 'common good' as the government's work aimed at all citizens; if this contradicts the priorities or demands of indigenous organisations, it will, nonetheless, have a positive impact on those communities in the future.

5. Learning from similarities and differences

The results revealed nuanced perspectives among MSF participants, enriching the theoretical debates. Two viewpoints came closest to the 'idealised' theoretical positions: 'idealists' to those who believe

MSFs are horizontal spaces supporting equality, while 'sceptics' to those who argue that they do not change the structures of inequality. 'Negotiators' appeared to be more realistic MSF supporters, also supporting the more favourable theoretical camp. 'Pragmatists' reinforced the critical argument because they are interested in facilitating the implementation of their goal, not discussing it. 'Idealists' and 'pragmatists' may be as likely to fail to address inequality among participants but for different reasons; the former posed that bringing people to the table is enough and for the latter it is not a priority. Both viewpoints trusted existing institutions and had a shallow understanding of power imbalances. It may be that even 'sceptics' see potential in MSFs because Q-methodology interviews were not carried out with people who reject MSFs entirely; there is, therefore, a bias towards those who are more optimistic about MSFs overall.

Given the centrality of collaboration to discourses about the transformative change needed to address the climate crisis (see Atmadja et al., forthcoming), finding common ground (similarities), potential compromise (bridgeable differences) and conflict (unsurmountable differences) may produce more useful lessons for MSFs than the theoretical dichotomy in the literature that analyses them through an equity lens. Factor correlations illustrate how similar or different the viewpoints represented by each factor are to each other. 'Idealists' (F1), 'negotiators' (F2), and 'pragmatists' (F4) represented similar perspectives; the greatest correlation is between 'idealists' and 'pragmatists'. 'Sceptics' (F3) had the lowest correlation to the rest and lowest to 'pragmatists'. To distil more comprehensive lessons, what follows reviews statements rankings to tease out similarities (all viewpoints agreed/disagreed), potential compromise (at least two factors agreed or disagreed, and the rest were neutral), and where there is conflict (a combination of agreement and disagreement).

5.1. Common ground: MSFs have opportunities and risks but have much potential

Despite differences, all viewpoints agreed that MSFs are not an artificial context of collaboration (S42), bring government actors together that normally do not collaborate (S22), lead to implementable agreements (S34), and build bridges (S24) as they make people more reasonable (S27) and compromise some of their beliefs (S11). Yet there was a shared perception that stakeholders must act carefully in MSFs as sharing information with other participants could affect their interests (S10). This could be about trust, related to the different interests and priorities held by the sectors participating in an MSF, the history of interactions between them, and the unequal power relations that grant them different kinds of access to land, resources, and influence over decision-making. Thus, there are some risks associated with MSFs. That is perhaps why they all agree on minimum quotas for underrepresented groups (S6) and that they will be confident to speak out for themselves (S37). Thus, participants agree that MSFs are not perfect, but they are worth it with some effort towards inclusion and equality.

5.2. Compromise: MSFs could manage inequality

That even 'sceptics' see potential in MSFs foreshadows possible compromise between how to manage some aspects of power inequalities in an MSF. Considering the characteristics of each viewpoint, compromise rests on how well an MSF can include actions towards a more equitable process. For example, there is a potential compromise if efforts are made to address inequality, as all but the sceptics agreed that MSFs treated participants equally ('sceptics' were neutral). Capacity development may be an important tool for compromise towards MSFs that are perceived as more equitable by participants. Understanding different approaches to capacity may lead to a middle ground.

For 'optimists' capacity development was important for an MSF's effectiveness, which may be one of the reasons why the viewpoint does not see forums as disempowering IPLCs. For 'sceptics', quotas are more important than capacity development at an MSF, but this does not mean that capacity development

is unimportant. An interviewee noted that IPLC participants 'should have a technical advisory team or be trained before meetings', and thus not necessarily at the MSF, 'about the issues that will be discussed'. 'Sceptics'' interest in managing power relations could be addressed by including capacity development for non-IPLC actors to understand IPLC's traditional ecological knowledge, governance structures, and priorities. For 'negotiators' and 'pragmatists' something has to be done to improve the participation of marginalised actors. Both groups note the importance of capacity development for underrepresented actors, but this means different things which could be understood as a distinction between 'soft' and 'hard' capacities. 'Pragmatists' want all participants to have the relevant technical know-how ('hard' capacities) to implement their solution. 'Negotiators' support a scenario where indigenous representatives have developed their 'soft' capacities (e.g. participation, rights, legal procedures) for a more effective forum; but they do not see the need for all participants to have proven technical capacities (e.g. forest and resource management) or formal technical training.

Although this requires further analysis, these varied interpretations of required capacities reveal the relevance of power in defining capacities, who should hold them, and what they allow them to do (Agrawal, 1998; Fernando, 2003). A middle ground, or at least clearer ground, would involve developing a comprehensive capacity development plan that elucidates these different views and seeks to make everyone's participation more effective. This would empower all participants to understand each other's positions on different issues, how different actors (and cultures) can contribute to reaching the MSF's outcome, and identify the need for 'technical' experts or the use of simpler concepts to democratise knowledge and capacities. This would, however, still only improve things to a point as the more structural inequalities and rights issues may prove too challenging for MSFs to address.

5.3. Conflict: MSFs can be detrimental to the rights of IPLCs

To different degrees, 'idealists', 'negotiators', and 'pragmatists' represent positive perceptions of MSFs as spaces that promote inclusiveness and equality – or do not see this as aconcern; – 'sceptics' are more concerned that MSFs may disempower IPLCs. This is a more critical awareness of how power relations – and how MSFs manage them (or not) – can disempower IPLC rights and political agendas. Considering the four viewpoints discussed in this article, there is an important conflict in terms of finding compromise regarding how MSFs should deal with the recognised rights of IPLCs, especially in cases where other actors that are not rights-holders are included in the conversation. 'Sceptics' are the only ones to see MSFs as spaces that do not make IPLCs feel like equals (S23) and can disempower IPLCs by allowing other non-legitimate actors (S26) to discuss and decide over issues where IPLC's rights may be involved (S40). 'Sceptics' were also the only ones who did not perceive that MSFs made decisions for the common good (S2) and posed that they only addressed immediate problems (S36) rather than the structures of inequality. All viewpoints agreed on the need for quotas (S6), all but 'pragmatists' believed that separate consultations with the government were fairer than MSFs (S19), and only 'negotiators' posed that MSFs empower IPLCs (S35). Considering the wider research carried out around these case-studies as part of the broader project, it seems that for 'sceptics' the rights of underrepresented peoples are not negotiable (see Rodriguez & Sarmiento Barletti, 2021 on PIACI Roundtable).

6. Conclusion

What new or different understanding does this research provide about MSFs and how to improve them? The article's analytical approach is innovative because little research on equity in MSFs systematically examines the points of view of participants within these processes, and even less do so comparatively across processes (exceptions include Ratner et al., forthcoming; Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2020; Warner, 2006). In general, connecting practice to the literature reinforces the concerns raised about MSFs. Although on the surface only one group (the 'sceptics') presented a critical view

similar to the sceptics in the literature, the three others reinforce the concerns raised by analysts of participatory processes. 'Pragmatists' reflected those who might be tempted to box-tick rather than foster engaged and meaningful participation, with no real interest in challenging power relations. 'Idealists', while being strong supporters of equal participation for marginalised actors, failed to understand that inviting them to the table is insufficient to address inequality. Only the 'negotiators' appeared to both support the ideas of pluralism, participatory democracy, and challenging inequalities and to understand what is needed to do so.

The results also suggest that, to some extent, all groups believed in and are optimistic about what can be achieved through MSFs. Their participants were wary of some risks but were nonetheless positive about their potential role in finding new solutions to the challenge to sustainable land use and land-use change. In Peru, and perhaps more broadly, this optimism may be because any participatory process is better than the alternative and to how things were before. This does not mean this is sufficient.

Simplifying the range of opinions held by participants to MSFs into two positions – for and against – is analytically unhelpful and does not contribute to building lessons towards designing more effective and equitable participatory processes. It is unhelpful to consider actors as being solely pro- or anti-MSF. In general, this article has shown that MSFs are seen by their participants as having potential as the most helpful way to bring actors together and as necessary for more successful processes towards sustainability.

Importantly, results showed that geography shapes perspectives; this has been noted in other applications of Q-methodology (Nost, Robertson, & Lave, 2019; Ormerod, 2017; see Hirsch & Baxter, 2009 on the influence of space in how environmental issues are perceived). The most straightforward explanation is that subjectivities are 'informed by shared practice and everyday lived experience and is therefore geographically and historically specific' (Ormerod, 2017, p. 77). However, given that the relationship between people and space is dynamic, fluid and mutually constitutive (Latour, B, 2005; Lefebvre, 1991), further research would have to explore how MSFs form and are informed by the political, social, economic, and environmental contexts – including the development and political priorities that drive unsustainable land and resource use – where they are organised. Importantly, this includes an awareness of the different histories of how underrepresented groups have been able to access political participation and enjoy their recognised rights. This research would allow for a more nuanced understanding of why most participants had positive expectations of MSFs and – perhaps most importantly – why those who might lose out engage in MSFs if they see them as risky or not addressing inequality. To different degrees, the four viewpoints claim that MSFs can work and that to some extent IPLCs in Peru are stepping up to the spaces made available to them. This reflects the history of a lack of spaces of coordination and consultation in Peru, especially concerning land-use and forest governance. Hence, MSFs have likely led to expectations and optimism for what they might be able to do, and a substantial improvement over the lack of such options in the past.

MSFs are here to stay, but much can be done to improve them. It is perhaps clearest in the realisation that not all capacity building is the same, nor is it proposed or implemented for the same reasons. This is notable, as work by the authors found that the lesson for more equitable participatory initiatives is not about designing projects that better fit local contexts but, rather, about how better to engage with the different stakeholders in these processes (Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2020). Understanding commonalities, as well as these nuances of difference in experiences and perceptions, is an important step towards identifying ways forward in supporting more equitable and effective MSFs.

Notes

1. The four are: instrumental (e.g. more legitimate decisions and better outcomes), substantive (e.g. better information to improve the quality of decisions), normative (e.g. counter the power of interest and allow all stakeholders to have influence), and legalistic (e.g. meeting formal requirements).
2. The data presented here is part of a four-country study of MSFs. This article focuses only on the Peru data.

3. Most of the MSF participants that were not significantly loaded and thus were excluded from factor analyses had, overall, positive perspective of MSFs. Despite this positive tendency, their sorting of three statements revealed a critical perspective and awareness of other ways of action. Firstly, 11/24 agreed that 'Decision-making would be fairer if the government consulted each stakeholder group separately'. Secondly, 14/24 agreed that 'If participants are too transparent with information, maps and legal documents, others may use that to further their own agendas'. Finally, 8/24 considered that 'An MSF is a waste of time if its outcome is not mandatory for all relevant actors.'
4. Distinguishing statement ranked positively by the other factors.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their help in improving our article. We also thank Natalia Cisneros, Diego Palacios and Alejandra Huaman for their research assistance in the application of Q-methodology interviews. Funding support for this study was provided by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation; the European Commission; the International Climate Initiative of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety; and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development. This work was undertaken as part of the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets (PIM), led by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and the CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA), led by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). The opinions expressed here are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of IFPRI, CIFOR, CGIAR or the donors. The data on which this article is based is available in CIFOR's repository upon request.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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