
Between Co-Management and Responsibilisation: Comparative Perspectives from Two *Reservas Comunales* in the Peruvian Amazon

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Peru introduced co-managed *Reservas Comunales* (Communal Reserves) as an alternative to the ‘fortress conservation’ approach that characterises other protected areas where Indigenous Peoples tend to be excluded from both the physical space and managerial aspects of conservation regimes. Although these Reserves are lauded internationally as supporting Indigenous Peoples’ self-determination, this article examines the challenges that arise from the *cogestión* (co-management) regime for Indigenous organisations and communities. Focusing on the ‘responsibilisation’ relationships created in the co-management of two Communal Reserves, the article reflects on the different trajectories of this transfer of responsibilities, and the processes through which Indigenous co-management organisations are expected to adopt the government’s conservation goals.

Keywords: conservation, environmental governance, identity politics, neoliberal multiculturalism, responsibilisation.

The conservation of tropical forests is central to global environmental and sustainable development goals, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. With these goals in mind, protected areas have been established to preserve forests. Yet, their conservation potential remains threatened by demands for natural resources, while their local inhabitants remain largely excluded from related decision-making processes (Anaya and Espírito-Santo, 2018; Tauli-Corpus et al., 2020). This is a pressing issue as over half of tropical forests globally fall within claimed and recognised Indigenous territories (RRI, 2018).

The involvement of communities as co-managers of natural resources has been proposed as a solution to the power asymmetries and injustices inherent in mainstream conservation (Tauli-Corpus et al., 2020). Optimism is placed on co-management in scholarly, practice and policy circles (Carlsson and Berkes, 2005; Natcher, Davis and Hickey, 2005), including its potential role to advance Indigenous self-determination (Natcher, 2001; Natcher and Hickey, 2002). However, there is little reflection on the nature of Indigenous Peoples’ participation in these regimes, their understanding of co-management in different contexts and the challenges they face when navigating claims for self-determination.

This article provides such reflection based on our work with *Reservas Comunales* (Communal Reserves), protected areas managed by Peru’s *Servicio Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas por el Estado* (SERNANP, Protected Areas Service) and the Indigenous communities in its their buffer zones., who are represented by an *Ejecutor del Contrato de Administración* (ECA, ‘Executor of the

Administration Contract' of Administration). Peru's ten Communal Reserves follow the *cogestión* (co-management) regime approved in 2005 in collaboration with national Indigenous Amazonian organisations. *Cogestión* seeks to devolve resource management to Indigenous communities over parts of their ancestral territories, while enhancing conservation and livelihoods outcomes. These Reserves are among the mitigation actions in Peru's Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement and are presented as an example of regimes that align community objectives with those of the state (RRI, 2016; MINAM 2019).

We approach *cogestión* as framed by three governance processes that recognise Indigenous territories as part of public concern and interest: the extraction of natural resources from Indigenous territories, the introduction of initiatives to conserve the region's biodiversity and the implementation of climate change mitigation actions (Álvarez, 2012; Larsen, 2015; MINAM 2019). These processes have challenged the recognition and exercise of Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination, but have also created official and unofficial participatory governance spaces where Indigenous representatives are included (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson, 2020). In this context, *cogestión* can be understood as exemplary of 'neoliberal multiculturalism' (Hale, 2005) regimes that support the recognition of some cultural rights to resolve bottlenecks over mainstream economic agendas but exclude other more substantial rights demanded by Indigenous organisations (McNeish, 2008).

Cogestión is attractive to the government as it supports Peru's biodiversity and climate goals. However, it does not recognise full use rights for Indigenous Peoples over the resources in the forests and subsoil of Reserves, mirroring the regime for *Comunidades Nativas* (Native Communities, henceforth *Comunidades*), the titled collective territories for Indigenous Amazonian peoples in Peru (Monterroso et al., 2017). We engage with *cogestión* as a process of 'responsibilisation' through which there is a transfer of responsibilities to local people without a real transfer of power (Lemke, 2001; Erbaugh, 2019). As we explore below, Indigenous co-management organisations are expected to adopt the government's conservation goals and monitoring responsibilities, without the resources, capacities and power to fulfil them. Furthermore, Indigenous *cogestión* partners are expected to follow governance guidelines that may be at odds with Indigenous perspectives in *Comunidades* of what the government and Indigenous organisations should do. This is a departure from perspectives highlighting co-management's potential to support Indigenous self-determination.

The article examines two Communal Reserves in Peruvian Amazonia: *Reserva Comunal Amaraeri* (henceforth Amaraeri) and *Reserva Comunal Purús* (henceforth Purús) located in the regions of Madre de Dios and Ucayali, respectively. We approach them comparatively as both fall under the same legal framework and are located within the Purús-Manu Conservation Corridor. Yet they have followed different processes of responsibilisation. We understand these Reserves as part of physical landscapes but also of socio-cultural and political ones. Amaraeri and Purús cover areas that have been customarily used by local Indigenous Peoples, but also fall under other land and resource use regimes. Both have been envisioned by the government and conservation NGOs as buffer zones for neighbouring protected areas under stricter regimes.

Our analysis is based on data collected in interviews, informal conversations, workshops and document reviews during our work with Indigenous Peoples in both areas' buffer zones. One of the authors has worked with *Comunidades* adjacent to Purús since 2013 and the other with those in Amaraeri's buffer zone since 2017. Starting in 2018, we have also worked with the leaders of the *Asociación Nacional de Ejecutores de Contratos de Administración de la Amazonía Peruana* (ANECAP, National Association of Executors of Administration Contracts), which represents all ECAs, and SERNANP's Participatory Governance Unit to develop learning tools to support participatory governance in protected areas (SERNANP and CIFOR, 2020; Sarmiento Barletti, 2022; ANECAP, 2023). During tool development, we interviewed, had informal conversations and participated in workshops with leaders of ECAs and regional Indigenous organisations as well as SERNANP's officers in Communal Reserves. In our different interactions with Amaraeri and Purús, we have also reviewed official handbooks and documents related to the *cogestión* of both Reserves.

Below we start by contextualising *cogestión* within wider discussions on natural resource decentralisation, neoliberal multiculturalism and responsibilisation, followed by our two case studies. The discussion section synthesises some key trends before we draw the wider implications of our findings in the *conclusion*.

Contextualising Co-Management

Cogestión can be understood as a current expression of processes of administrative decentralisation (Rondinelli, 2005), and more specifically of decentralisation of the governance of forests and natural resources (see Larson and Soto, 2008 for a review). For its proponents, decentralisation can support more effective forest management by including the local people that steward and carry out their livelihoods from forests and resources. Despite variations in practices and definitions, decentralised, collaborative governance has been recognised as essential to sustainability goals (Agrawal and Chhatre, 2007; Hayes and Persha, 2010). Such governance is backed by local organisations and donor agencies as supportive of democratic ideals and the self-determination of local peoples (Conyers, 2003; Oyono, 2004). Co-management regimes may support the effective and equitable participation of local peoples in resource governance, reduce power asymmetries inherent to the relations between communities and the state in top-down governance regimes, address conflicts between different stakeholders to natural resources, and lead to more accountable and transparent resource governance (Castro and Nielsen, 2001; Natcher et al., 2005). This potential has made co-management regimes an appealing alternative to 'fortress conservation' schemes that have excluded Indigenous Peoples from protected areas (Tauli-Corpuz et al., 2020). However, analysts have also approached co-management as inherently conflictive as it increases government control over local peoples and resources, only devolves burdensome responsibilities, reinforces existing structures of exclusion and extends more power to local elites (Larson and Soto, 2008). Importantly, while co-management may extend access to political spaces to Indigenous representatives, this may not mean more access to natural resources for their communities (Larson and Lewis-Mendoza, 2012).

In Peruvian Amazonia, there is evidence that maintaining forested areas under community management reduces deforestation more than other regimes (Schleicher et al., 2017; Garnett et al., 2018). This contribution to climate change mitigation has been recognised in national policies, including Communal Reserves. This category of protected area allows for traditional subsistence economic activities by neighbouring communities and, with a resource management plan approved by the Reserve's authorities, also allows for the extraction of non-timber forest products with commercial purposes. SERNANP defines *cogestión* as a governance regime in which two or more actors negotiate, define and agree on a distribution of functions, rights and responsibilities over the management of a protected area and its natural resources (SERNANP and ANECAP, 2019). Communal Reserves are co-managed by SERNANP and an Executor of the Administration Contract (ECA); the latter is an organisation that represents the *Comunidades* in a Reserve's buffer zone, who are the ECA's *socias* (members/partners) and the Reserve's official beneficiaries. Every 3 years, these *Comunidades* elect representatives to their ECA's board.

Co-management's promise lies in the participation of communities. This should allow for the governance of a protected area to incorporate their priorities and perspectives into forest and resource management, advance their self-determination, and lead to more accountable and transparent governance (Natcher, 2001; Natcher et al., 2005). The rhetorical, political and technical transfer of management responsibilities is key to this governance relationship (Sahide and Giessen, 2015; Sahide et al., 2016). Yet, the context of a negotiated co-existence of extractive activity, conservation initiatives and climate mitigation interests that frames *cogestión* sets it within the recognition of Indigenous rights in regimes of 'neoliberal multiculturalism' (Hale, 2005). Although these regimes may promise improved interactions between the state and Indigenous Peoples, the latter's socio-cultural practices and political voices are only considered valid and legitimate if they operate within the limits of what the economic elites consider to be reasonable (Povinelli, 2002). As such, neoliberal multiculturalism defines 'which rights are legitimate, what forms of political action are appropriate and even arbitrating basic questions about the meaning of being Indigenous' (McNeish, 2008: 46).

In Peru, neoliberal multiculturalism is reflected in the government's support and recognition of some Indigenous rights (e.g., the Law of Prior Consultation and the expansion of *Comunidades*). Yet, other rights demanded by Indigenous organisations are refused, including full tenure and use rights over the resources in the forests and subsoil of their *Comunidades* (Schilling-Vacaflor and Flemmer, 2015). Resources in the subsoil of their traditional territories are central to Peru's macroeconomic agenda, as are forest areas granted as timber concessions, used for agroindustrial plantations or earmarked for

road development (Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2021). This context is reminiscent of Rivera Cusicanqui's '*indio permitido*' ('authorised Indian'; Hale, 2005), an analytical term that engages with how Latin American governments can be understood to have used multiculturalism and cultural rights to limit progress towards some of the key demands of Indigenous movements (e.g., full control over their territories and its resources). From this perspective, 'authorised Indians' in Peru are granted limited rights (e.g., *cogestión*) as long as they do not threaten the established order by demanding more control over their traditional territories.

We understand *cogestión* as a technology of governance that supports Peru's climate ambitions. Under *cogestión*, the state extends management rights to Indigenous Peoples over parts of their ancestral territories under a restrictive framework for conservation and resource use, rather than as extensions of their own titled territories. In a context in which resource extraction from the Andes (different minerals) and Amazonia (hydrocarbons, timber, and alluvial gold) hold economic and political importance (Merino, 2014; Schilling-Vacaflor and Flemmer, 2015), Indigenous rights and self-determination are only supported as long as they do not challenge extractive activity. As we examine below, *Comunidades* and their ECAs must take government goals as their own and carry out relevant tasks as subordinate agents in a decision-making hierarchy, without the resources, capacities and power needed to fulfil them. This is reminiscent of 'responsibilisation', a process through which government actors transfer responsibilities to local people without a real transfer of decision-making power, financial resources and access to technical capacities to succeed (Mustalahti et al., 2020). Through *cogestión*, the government makes Indigenous organisations responsible for the achievement of its conservation goals and climate targets in the Reserve's territory while pursuing extractive interests in the same broader landscape. In this process, ECAs frequently find themselves at odds with perspectives in *Comunidades* of what the government should do or how resources should be managed and used.

Two Communal Reserves in the Peruvian Amazon

Amarakaeri and Purús are part of the Purús-Manu Conservation Corridor, which includes three other natural protected areas and four reserves for isolated Indigenous Peoples (see Figure 1). Despite falling under the same legal framework and being located within the same corridor, both Reserves have undergone different processes of responsibilisation. We discuss each below, before moving on to a comparative analysis.

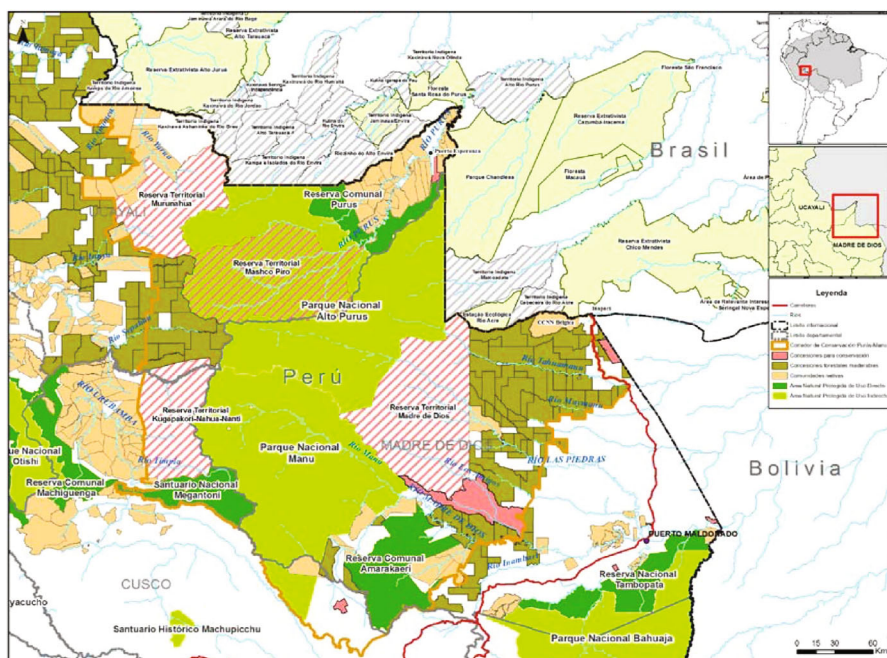
Amarakaeri Communal Reserve

Madre de Dios illustrates the negotiated co-existence of extractive and conservation interests in wider Peruvian Amazonia (Larsen, 2015). The region is in a socio-environmental crisis driven by alluvial gold mining, is targeted for the expansion of road infrastructure and contains areas earmarked for hydrocarbon concessions (Haselip and Martinez, 2011). Yet, just shy of half of Madre de Dios' territory falls within one of seven protected areas, including Amarakaeri.

The ten *Comunidades* in Amarakaeri's buffer zone are inhabited by three Indigenous Peoples: Harakbut (eight *Comunidades*), Matsigenka and Yine (one each). Although they are all represented by the Executor of the Administration Contract for Amarakaeri (ECA-Amarakaeri), leadership roles are dominated by Harakbut men. Harakbut people have the largest population in the area and consider the Reserve as part of their ancestral territory (Figure 2).

ECA-Amarakaeri's president explained that Harakbut people sought the legal recognition of their territories from the 1980s onwards in response to waves of migration from the Andes that created pressures over their territory. He recounted that many families leased parts of their land to migrants for alluvial gold mining to avoid conflicts and, in the process, had themselves learned to mine. Despite its environmental and social impact, mining became a key livelihood activity in parts of Amarakaeri's current buffer zone (Pinedo, 2017). Given the overlaps between *Comunidades*, mining, timber and hydrocarbon concessions, the *Federación Nativa del Río Madre de Dios y Afluentes* (FENAMAD, the Native Federation of the Madre de Dios River and its Affluents) – which represents the *Comunidades* of

Figure 1. The Purús-Manu Corridor

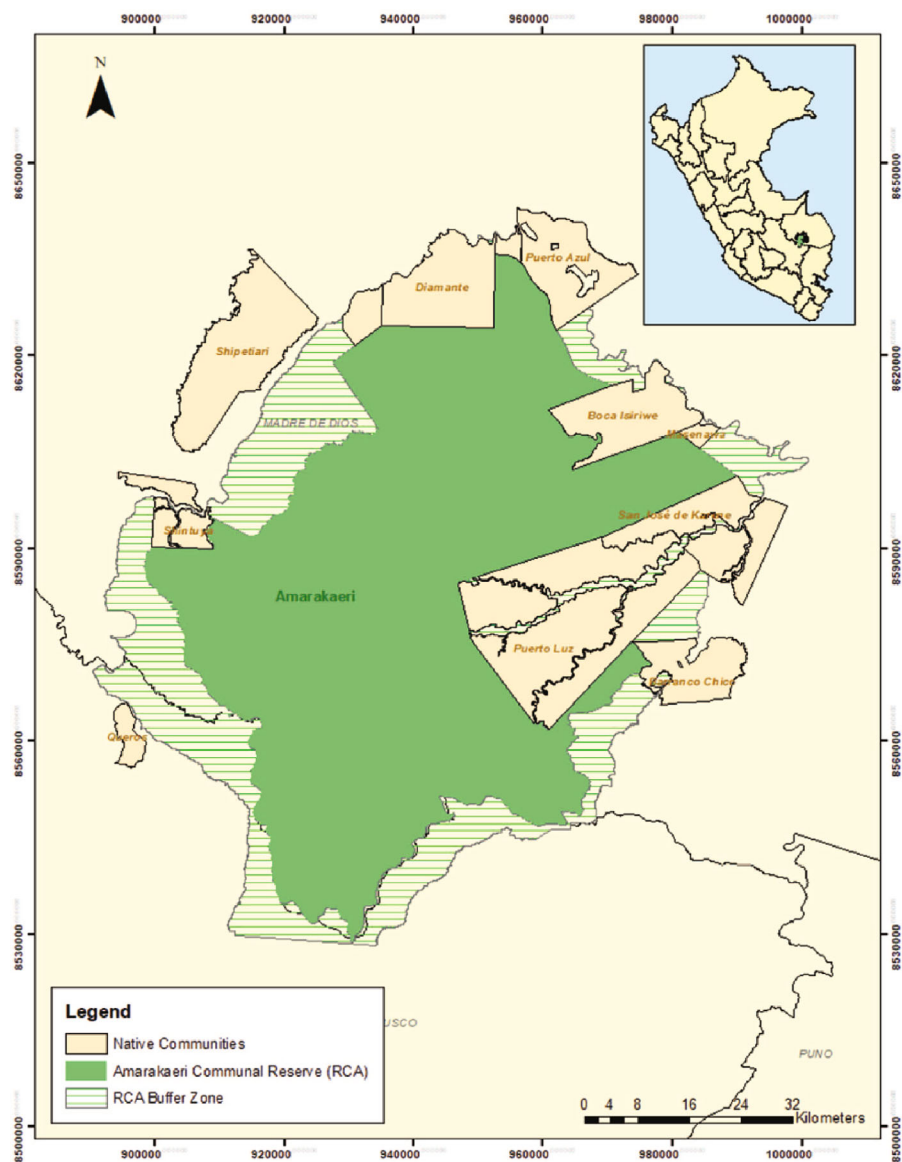


Source: https://wwflac.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/fact_sheet_consortio_purus_english.pdf

Madre de Dios region – proposed the creation of Amaraeri in the 1990s to support the protection of Harakbut territories by including local *Comunidades* in its management (Álvarez et al., 2008). When Amaraeri was created in 2002, SERNANP imposed a ‘conservationist governmentality’ (Palacios Llaque and Sarmiento Barletti, 2021) through which it restricted *Comunidades*’ access to the Reserve. During interviews, local Indigenous leaders argued that the Special Regime for the Administration of Communal Reserves (approved in 2005) did not consider the ways in which Indigenous Peoples engaged with their territories and resources. Interviewees noted that *Comunidades* rejected the new regime as it restricted their access to Amaraeri for hunting and for livelihood practices including timber extraction and alluvial gold mining. These restrictions led to conflict in 2006 when the government shifted to an ‘extractive governmentality’ (Palacios Llaque and Sarmiento Barletti, 2021) and granted Hunt Oil an exploration concession that overlapped most of Amaraeri and its buffer zone. *Comunidades* were banned from using Amaraeri for livelihood practices they had been carrying out before the Reserve’s establishment, while hydrocarbon companies did not follow the same restrictions (Álvarez et al., 2008). Hunt Oil divided the Indigenous movement by strategically supporting some *Comunidades* with money and projects (Pinedo, 2017).

SERNANP and ECA-Amaraeri’s first draft of the Master Plan for the 2007–2009 period banned hydrocarbon activities from the headwaters of the Madre de Dios River inside the Reserve. However, their next draft argued that hydrocarbon exploration and extraction activities did not threaten the Reserve, that large-scale resource extraction and conservation could co-exist in Amaraeri, and that extraction could fund its management (Pinedo, 2017). That draft kept the access and resource use restrictions on *Comunidades*. FENAMAD organised protests in response, and its leaders demanded changes in the leadership of both ECA-Amaraeri and SERNANP’s Amaraeri office. Interviews with FENAMAD leaders noted that despite their protests, and SERNANP’s failure to carry out a consultation process with the *Comunidades* in Amaraeri’s buffer zone, the first Master Plan (2008–2012) was approved. In response, FENAMAD formed a new ECA-Amaraeri that opposed Hunt Oil’s activities. Meanwhile, SERNANP continued to work with the initial ECA.

Figure 2. The Amarakaeri Communal Reserves and the *Comunidades* in its buffer zone



Source: Palacios Llaque and Sarmiento Barletti, 2021

The conflict transformed in 2011, when a new board was elected for ECA-Amarakaeri and the head of SERNANP’s Amarakaeri’s office was replaced. The latter introduced a strategy to develop the capacities of ECA-Amarakaeri leaders to participate in the Reserve’s management. Interviewees noted that FENAMAD received this transition positively and agreed to collaborate with SERNANP. This new strategy is the starting point for the *cogestión* implemented, with different degrees of success, in Communal Reserves. ECA-Amarakaeri interviewees described *cogestión* as based on intercultural negotiation and collaborative decision-making between SERNANP and ECAs. SERNANP actors noted that this approach was also informed by a transformation towards participatory governance within SERNANP (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson, 2020). FENAMAD’s leaders, however, argued that *cogestión*

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was the result of their long-term work in support of Harakbut people's self-determination rather than of government priorities. A FENAMAD leader noted that: '[*Cogestión*] wasn't the work of [Madre de Dios'] government or NGOs. We, Indigenous organisations, changed the conversation about conservation in Communal Reserves. We influenced the creation of *cogestión* more than the government and the NGOs'. For the Indigenous leaders and NGO allies that we interviewed, Amarakaeri's national and global recognition are a consequence of Indigenous People's role in *cogestión*.

Cogestión, however, has brought about challenges. The main one is related to what ECA-Amarakaeri interviewees described as 'insufficient' public funds destined for Amarakaeri; these funds are managed by SERNANP's office. In general, SERNANP's budget is insufficient for the adequate management of all protected areas in Peru. Most areas are partially funded by multilateral or donor organisations or through NGO projects. This is a trend in Peru where, despite commendable climate ambitions, the environmental sector is underfunded. Although we cannot expand on these resource flows here, we consider the interests linked to these flows as an important part of the framing of conservation and climate change mitigation interests in Peru. Interviewees noted that most of ECA-Amarakaeri's salary expenses were covered by NGOs, who hold projects funded by international organisations to support Amarakaeri or participatory conservation efforts with joint biodiversity and livelihood goals more generally. Some monitoring activities are also funded by collaboration agreements with NGOs, including capacity development on monitoring methods and the purchase of drones.

Interviews with leaders from Indigenous organisations noted that the resource use restrictions placed on *Comunidades* have led many of them to join the government's Conditional Transfer Mechanisms programme, a conditional payment for ecosystem services programme managed by the *Programa Nacional de Conservación de Bosques* (PNCB, National Program for Forest Conservation). We have participated in information workshops organised by SERNANP and ECA-Amarakaeri for communities in Amarakaeri's buffer zone where they described the programme in positive terms, highlighting its potential to support the Reserve's conservation and livelihoods objectives. However, one of the requisites to participate in the programme is that money transfers are spent in community development projects and not divided as family income (Kowler et al., 2020). This is noteworthy as livelihood activities linked to deforestation tend to be carried out to supplement family incomes (Sarmiento Bartlett et al., 2021). As such, the burden of conservation in Amarakaeri and its buffer zone is placed on *Comunidades*, who are also responsible for finding livelihoods that are sustainable by government standards and must pursue community development projects that are pre-approved by government actors.

While our interlocutors from FENAMAD and other Indigenous organisations saw *cogestión* as a political achievement, ECA-Amarakaeri and SERNANP officials described ECAs as 'technical organisations' with 'no political motivations'. As an ECA-Amarakaeri leader noted, this follows a transition in Indigenous organisations' strategies from 'protest to proposals, and from proposals to action'. He explained that Indigenous organisations now sought to actively participate in policy and governance processes and engage government actors at different levels to advance their organisations' proposals rather than prioritise protests. Interviews with SERNANP staff revealed clear connections between the emphasis on technical practice and conservation in terms of maintaining tree coverage in Amarakaeri. This is reminiscent of the discussion in conservation and development regarding the application of technical solutions to the symptoms of structural issues (e.g., Ferguson, 1990; Tauli-Corpuz et al., 2020).

For ECA-Amarakaeri leaders, their role as a technical organization explained two key exclusions from *cogestión* at the time of research: Indigenous women and Andean local communities. When asked about the lack of women in ECA-Amarakaeri's board, its leaders described a dearth in local Indigenous women with university degrees, which they explained was a necessary capacity to participate in *cogestión*. In our experience, the male dominance in ECA-Amarakaeri stems from the fact that its members are elected by *Comunidad* leaders, who are almost exclusively men. This male dominance extends to national mixed-gender Indigenous organisations. National organisations have more gender parity in their leadership, but women tend to occupy positions with less decision-making power. Our research on the participation of Indigenous women in the governance of *Comunidades* in Amarakaeri's buffer zone revealed exclusions from leadership positions and even from participation in

Comunidad-level meetings (CIFOR and ONAMIAP, 2020). A female leader at FENAMAD illustrated this during an interview when she noted that most of the men in ECA-Amarakaeri had completed degrees in education or tourism studies rather than degrees related to conservation or management. For her, this was a continuation of the wider exclusion suffered by Indigenous women from the leadership and management of their *Comunidades*. Another female leader at FENAMAD and others from a national organisation noted that this means that *cogestión* focuses on male priorities and resource management practices (CIFOR and ONAMIAP, 2020).

Cogestión also excludes the Andean migrants that live and work in Amarakaeri's buffer zone. These groups are only engaged by ECA-Amarakaeri and SERNANP when there are conflicts over land and resource use with *Comunidades*, or when the Reserve's conservation goals are threatened by alluvial gold mining. Those engagements tend to be attempts to expel migrants from the areas where they have settled or bring the police to seize or destroy their tools. Andean migrants are also excluded from Amarakaeri's *Comité de Gestión* (management committee), which is a legally required, open, participatory space for civil society actors to inform how protected areas are managed (Palacios Llaque and Sarmiento Barletti, 2021). Given Indigenous leaders' portrayal of Andean migrants as driving deforestation and lacking respect for forests and capacities for conservation, their exclusion could be understood as both cultural and technical.

Amarakaeri is an example of what *cogestión* can look like in contexts with strong Indigenous political movements with the capacities to successfully engage government agencies, and where there has been support for the most part from the *Comunidades* that make up the ECA. However, the contextual characteristics that have led to Amarakaeri's global recognition are not present in the context and relationships that frame the *cogestión* of Purús.

Purús Communal Reserve

Like Madre de Dios, Ucayali is also a patchwork of often overlapping extractive and conservation interests. Almost one quarter of Ucayali's territory is covered by seven national protected areas, including Purús. Purús' buffer zone covers all of Purús Province, including 26 *Comunidades* from 8 different Indigenous Peoples (Amawaka, Asháninka, Chaninahua, Cashinahua, Madija, Mastanawa, Sharanahua and Yine) as well as Puerto Esperanza (the province's capital), and 2 settler villages. The 26 *Comunidades* are represented politically by the *Federación de Comunidades Nativas del Alto Purús* (FECONAPU, Federation of Native Communities of the Upper Purús River) and by ECOPURUS in the co-management of the Reserve. All the Indigenous Peoples of the province consider Purús to be part of their ancestral territory, except for Asháninka who are recent migrants.

Comunidades upriver from Puerto Esperanza predominantly belong to Cashinahua and Sharanahua peoples and have easier access to the Reserve due to their location. These two Peoples have the largest populations locally and have, on average, higher levels of formal education, familiarity with state bureaucracies and fluency in Spanish than their Indigenous neighbours. For these reasons, they have achieved a dominant position in local politics, including Indigenous organisations, and command most government jobs held by Indigenous persons in the province. This asymmetry is a source of tension and conflicts regarding the management of Purús as well as other local affairs and has resulted in most development and aid programs focusing on upriver *Comunidades*.

Purús Province has not experienced intense widespread extractive interventions since the rubber boom due to its remote location and to the lack of roads and waterways connecting it with the rest of Peru. The main economic activities in the province are subsistence agriculture, fishing and hunting. Commercial timber extraction is minimal and limited almost exclusively to mahogany. The high cost of air freight renders the logging of other timber species unprofitable. The need to export all local products by air contributes to preventing the development of illicit activities widespread in other parts of Peruvian Amazonia like alluvial mining, illegal logging and cocaine production. On the other hand, this exclusively aerial link with the rest of Peru results in extremely high prices for industrially manufactured goods flown into the province. Since the establishment of the Reserve, there has been a conscious impulse to develop low carbon development projects centred on the sustainable extraction and management of forest products such as river turtle eggs, copaiba oil, açai berries and mahogany

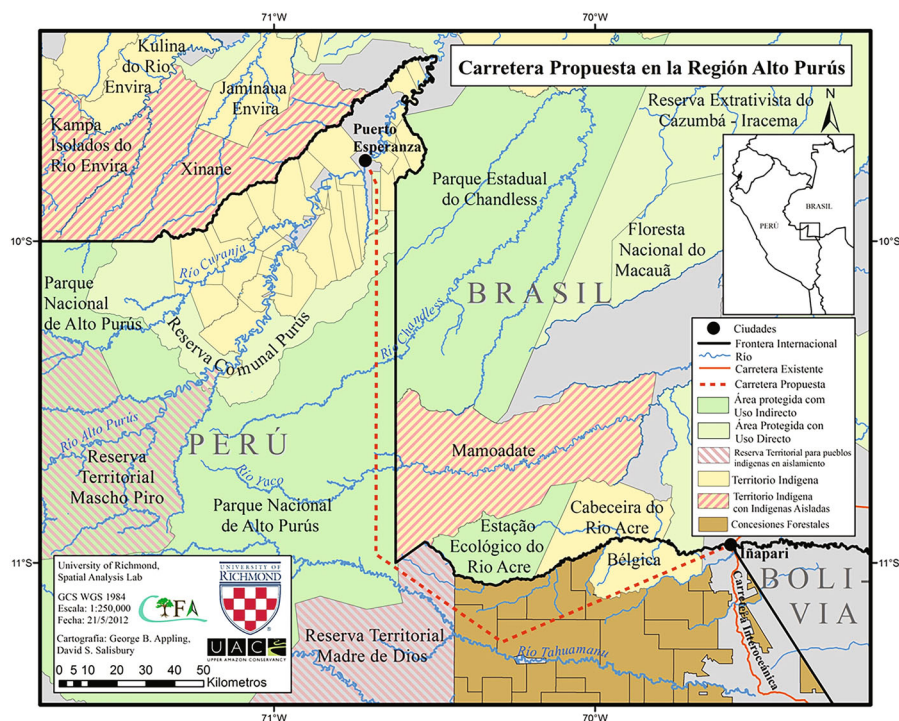
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seeds. These initiatives are promoted in the 11 *Comunidades* that receive direct conditional cash transfers from the PNCB as desirable investments that meet the conditions set by the programme to use the cash transfers. However, their economic impact is still limited.

The Peruvian government declared the headwaters of the Purús River *Zona Reservada Alto Purús* (ZRAP) in 2000. *Zona Reservada* is a transitional protected area category that is given its definite status after biological studies and consultation processes with local communities. The original categorisation plan for the ZRAP only included the creation of the *Parque Nacional Alto Purús* (henceforth, the *Parque*). *Parque Nacional* (National Park) is the strictest conservation regime in the Peruvian protected areas system; the only human activities allowed in Parks are scientific research and tourism in designated areas. In 2004, the ZRAP was divided into two areas under different conservation regimes: the *Parque* and the Reserve. Purús' creation was a demand from Indigenous organisations who saw access to an area they consider to be part of their ancestral territory, and its resources, threatened by the *Parque's* creation (Figure 3).

According to the official narrative, the protected areas were created and categorised following consultations with local *Comunidades* and non-Indigenous residents, as well as with local and regional government offices and civil society organisations. These consultations were funded by a World Bank grant aimed at promoting Indigenous participation in the management of protected areas across the country. However, as Peru had not passed its Law of Prior Consultation at the time, the consultation to categorise the ZRAP followed World Bank guidelines and was implemented by NGO actors and SERNANP's predecessor. An Indigenous leader who served in both FECONAPU and ECOPURUS stated at an interview that initially *Comunidades* were not properly consulted and did not understand what was at stake during the workshops that led to the ZRAP's creation. In contrast, he noted that the categorisation process that followed and resulted in the creation of the *Parque* and Purús was better, as it was done over a longer period, employed Indigenous facilitators and used Indigenous languages

Figure 3. The Purús Communal Reserves and the *Comunidades* in its buffer zone



Source: <https://blog.richmond.edu/dsalisbury/maps/>

whenever possible. He observed that at that point *Comunidades* knew more about protected areas and the challenges of living next to one. This leader's relatively positive recollection contrasts with those from interviewees in *Comunidades*, where we were told many people did not understand what was at stake. A village leader stated during an interview that 'we didn't know about protected areas, we thought we were just attending a workshop like many others'. He noted that if he signed anything it was only what he thought was 'an attendance sheet', not any document that could be understood as consent to the restrictions of protected areas.

Although FECONAPU supported the creation of Purús, the initiative to pursue a protected status for the area came from NGOs rather than from the *Comunidades*. During the consultation processes, FECONAPU served as an intermediary between the *Comunidades* and the NGOs and government agencies that promoted the ZRAP's creation. In 2006, 2 years after the creation of Purús, ECOPURUS was established as its ECA. Since then, many of ECOPURUS's leaders have held positions in FECONAPU and vice versa; they noted in interviews that they considered both organisations as inextricably linked. From their perspective, ECOPURUS is an offshoot of FECONAPU and therefore subordinate to it. However, in formal settings, representatives of both organisations affirmed that although they should work in a coordinated manner, the organisations are autonomous entities with different roles towards *Comunidades*. Interviewed leaders stated that FECONAPU, like other Indigenous federations, is a political organisation, represents *Comunidades*, deals with issues connected with Indigenous rights and works to promote development in *Comunidades*. Meanwhile interviewed leaders saw ECOPURUS as a technical organisation that represents *Comunidades* in the *cogestión* of Purús and oversees projects related to natural resource use and management. Although discursively the organisations hold different yet complementary roles, this complementarity is often questioned in private. Interviewees that held positions at FECONAPU considered that ECOPURUS should be subordinated to their organisation's political principles and priorities.

Through their involvement in the creation and management of the Reserve, FECONAPU and ECOPURUS emerged as the area's main local supporters and the main local partners of NGOs. From interviews with SERNANP officials, we learned that donors have supported and channelled their projects through ECOPURUS, which they perceive as more competent in managing funds and implementing work plans. The same interviewees noted that ECOPURUS's relative success was an unspoken source of tension between the province's Indigenous organisations. Furthermore, during our interviews, *Comunidad* leaders perceived these transfers of funds from NGOs and donor agencies as evidence of FECONAPU and ECOPURUS leaders being more interested in the agendas of NGOs than those of their *Comunidades*. This idea underpins a local narrative that although NGOs use the images and names of Indigenous Peoples and their territories to obtain funding, little of it reaches *Comunidades*. *Comunidad* leaders argued in interviews that funding should be managed by them as they are the forest stewards and are impacted by the restrictions set by protected areas.

These perspectives partly reflect the differing levels of knowledge about the rules regulating access to Purús and its natural resources. Many of the Indigenous leaders who are more familiar with state bureaucracies in general and SERNANP in particular understood when and what kind of bureaucratic processes and permits were needed for activities inside Purús. However, most Indigenous persons in the region that we interviewed or had informal conversations with did not understand such processes and permits and experienced the presence of control posts and park rangers as an entry prohibition. As a result, many in *Comunidades* saw the creation of Purús as an appropriation by the state of a territory that they used to use freely. Initially, SERNANP and NGOs posed that the inhabitants of *Comunidades* should not access the protected areas for resource extraction as they already had large titled territories (in relation to their populations) with healthy forests and abundant fauna. Although SERNANP and the NGOs have come to understand that Purús covers an area traditionally used by Indigenous Peoples, most of the foreign funded interventions in *Comunidades* are aimed at developing capacities and/or setting up livelihood projects rather than on building consensus on how *Comunidades* could take advantage of the opportunities afforded by Purús. These issues connected with access to the Reserve are identifiable in discourses in *Comunidades* regarding SERNANP's stinginess as its local employees are perceived as hoarding a large territory for no good reason, preventing others from benefiting from it.

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Given the demands from their grassroots and the funding available to them, ECOPURUS invests most of its energy facilitating development projects in its *Comunidades*. Most projects are connected to the use of natural resources within the *Comunidades* neighbouring Purús rather than resources located inside the Reserve. These projects seek to provide families with income from the management of fish populations in oxbow lakes, the extraction of copaiba (*copaifera langsdorffii*) oil, the management of river turtle nests to sell and export hatchlings, and the transformation of açai berries into marketable products. Like in Amarakaeri, 11 of the 26 *Comunidades* in Purús' buffer zone have joined the Conditional Direct Transfers mechanism. Another important way in which *Comunidades* are included in Purús' *cogestión* is through the constitution of *Comités de Vigilancia Comunal* (Communal Monitoring Committees). These groups of volunteer park rangers receive support from SERNANP – mostly, foodstuffs and petrol – to patrol the access points to the protected areas within their communal territories. In interviews, these roles were understood as desirable given potential future paid contracts as official park rangers.

As in Amarakaeri, women and non-Indigenous inhabitants of Purús' buffer zone are largely excluded from *cogestión*. The participation of women in ECOPURUS has thus far been limited to the office of secretary. Like their peers at ECA-Amarakaeri, the leaders of ECOPURUS link the absence of women in positions of leadership in their organisation to a scarcity of Indigenous females with educational credentials that would make them suitable for such positions. In addition, they explained that women did not run for such offices because 'shame prevented them from doing so'. As previously explained, this power imbalance is not exclusive of ECAs but also takes place at the *Comunidad* level and in national Indigenous organisations. While acknowledging that many Indigenous women preferred to not get involved in organisations like the ECA for various reasons, a female leader at ECOPURUS rejected the idea that Indigenous women were not capable of leadership roles. She pointed to her own educational and work trajectory and those of other Indigenous women who, like her, had obtained their secondary school degrees and worked at public institutions in the province. She concluded her comment comparing her experiences to those of her male colleagues, saying that it was time for Indigenous organisations to be headed by women and simultaneously expressing doubt at the possibility of achieving this goal, due to the unwillingness of many of their constituents to elect female leaders.

While ECOPURUS is an exclusively Indigenous organisation, Purús' management committee includes non-Indigenous individuals and organisations. Nevertheless, most non-Indigenous residents of the Province that we talked with understood the Reserve to be a protected area created for the exclusive benefit of Indigenous People. In addition to the limitations to the extraction of forest resources, non-Indigenous locals see the creation of Purús and the *Parque* as the main obstacle to the province's development. The construction of a road linking their province with Peru's national motorway system is a long-held desire of most non-Indigenous locals who see this infrastructure project as the panacea for all the province's ills. In this sense, they do not only feel excluded from the management and benefits afforded by the protected areas, but they also feel affected by their presence as the motorway project is now illegal as it would have to cross the *Parque*.

A significant challenge to the *cogestión* of Purús is the lack of culturally appropriate information about the topic available to *Comunidades* in their own languages. Even *Comunidad* leaders who have previously occupied leadership positions on the boards of ECOPURUS and FECONAPU often have trouble understanding and explaining the meanings of terms like *cogestión* and *gobernanza* (governance). This was evidenced in a reaction of one of such leaders to a publication on Purús' Facebook page in March 2023. The publication consisted of a text and four pictures. Purús was sharing news of a recent workshop in which the ECA and SERNANP co-managers of three Reserves gathered to 'generate a space of knowledge and reflection to improve knowledge about the idea of *cogestión* and sustainability'. In his public comment to the Facebook post, the *Comunidad* leader and former ECA board member wrote 'we need you to replicate the workshop (here) because in our *Comunidad* we still do not know the meaning of governance or *cogestión*'.

Purús makes evident some of the issues that can limit the success of *cogestión*. First, its introduction is closer to government and NGO agendas than those of *Comunidades* and their organisations. Second, grassroots organisations are challenged by capacity gaps to engage with government agents and to represent a diverse constituency. And third, *cogestión* is framed by gaps between local political and

ecological knowledge and practices, and those of environmentalist bureaucracies. In the next section, we compare Amarakaeri and Purús to distil lessons about *cogestión* as co-management.

***Cogestión*: Transformation or Responsibilisation?**

The development of the *cogestión* relationship between ECAs and SERNANP in Communal Reserves in Peru has catalysed a positive yet limited transformation in the participation of Indigenous Peoples in the management of protected areas in their ancestral territories. The most obvious positive aspect is the formal inclusion of Indigenous Peoples as co-management partners, and that parts of their ancestral territories have been protected from further invasions or from the roll out of large-scale extractive projects. The *cogestión* model itself – particularly through Amarakaeri's success – has been recognised globally and a former President of ECA-Amarakaeri was the first Indigenous person to be appointed to SERNANP's Board of Directors as evidence of that success. Despite this progress, we found challenges to the equitable participation of ECAs and the *Comunidades* they represent in *cogestión* that raise questions to whether Communal Reserves can be understood as a transformative policy shift or as an example of a 'green' form of responsabilisation. We synthesise these issues below.

First, although Amarakaeri and Purús have followed different historical processes and have unique characteristics given their geographical locations and socio-political contexts, they have faced similar challenges throughout their existence. Important tensions arise from the difference in how *Comunidades* and their representative organisations perceive their participation in the formation of each Reserve. For Amarakaeri, *Comunidades* see themselves as having been central to the Reserve's creation and to the *cogestión* model. Given the infrastructure and geographical connections to the rest of Peru, *Comunidades* in Amarakaeri had felt the pressures of outside interests and saw the potential of the Reserve to defend their territory. Amarakaeri is widely considered as the most successful example of a co-managed area in Peru and globally, a view that is based on the perception of the participation of local Indigenous Peoples in the area's management and on the Reserve's support for the needs of local *Comunidades*. In Purús, the proposal for a Reserve did not come from *Comunidades* although they were involved in the initial phases of its formation. There is a general feeling among our interviewees that they were not consulted effectively and were drawn into agreements over the area without fully understanding the implications. Purús has been understood as more of an outside imposition, preventing *Comunidades* from using and developing parts of their traditional territory according to their priorities. This has promoted the view that the Reserve responds to the government's desire to increase its control over the province, rather than work with local people.

Second, tensions have arisen from diverging ideas of how the relationship between *Comunidades* and the government should play out. These tensions are manifested in the negotiation of the relationship of responsibility that has been established between the government, via SERNANP, and the *Comunidades* in the Reserves' buffer zones, via their ECAs. SERNANP officials often express that in an ideal situation their office would be reduced to a minimum to allow ECAs and *Comunidades* to fully manage natural resources and forest conservation. In contrast, *Comunidades* expect SERNANP to bring resources into the area and strengthen their presence as local representatives of two sets of powerful outsiders: government and NGOs. Still, the independence of ECAs depends on whether they can secure funding for their work and to expand it. ECAs lack control over the funds that SERNANP offices receive from Peru's annual budget, which are never enough to do much else than cover wages and some monitoring exercises. Since the beginning, NGOs have funded much of the work of ECAs through donor projects, which may challenge the *cogestión* model across time unless other more permanent sources of funding are secured.

Third, the government's agenda of responsabilisation operates at two levels: ECAs and *Comunidades*. Although in practice they represent the same universe of *Comunidades*, ECAs are separated from the work carried out by Indigenous organisations like FENAMAD and FECONAPU, as the latter are understood as having political responsibilities. To be allowed to participate in *cogestión*, Indigenous leaders in ECAs – as 'green' *indios permitidos* – have adapted their political agendas, transforming them into technical goals that support the government's environmental agendas. This reveals the challenges to Indigenous Peoples' self-determination brought about by *cogestión*. By bringing ECAs into

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its apparatus, the government has created a technology of governance that makes Indigenous Peoples responsible for the pursuit of environmental roles as part of Peru's wider environmental policy efforts, in detriment of the use that *Comunidades* may want to give to the land and resources inside Communal Reserves.

Fourth, ECA leaders hold a challenging position as brokers, having to simultaneously respond to the often-diverging agendas and demands of their own kinship networks, *Comunidades*, SERNANP, NGOs and donors. This is a pressing issue for ECAs that are explicitly tasked with the duty of representing *Comunidades'* interests. The composition of both ECA's boards reflects asymmetries across *Comunidades* as locally dominant ethnicities impose their leaders and agendas. This frequently results in an unequal distribution of the benefits obtained through the participation of the ECA in *cogestión* with leadership roles in Amaraakeri dominated by Harakbut men while ECOPURUS has a preponderance of Cashinahua and Sharanahua men among its leadership. This exclusion reflects the gender balance across staff in SERNANP's Amaraakeri's office. Meanwhile, the exclusion of Indigenous women and of non-Indigenous communities from the co-management of Amaraakeri and Purús leaves out a large part of the population living in the area surrounding the Reserves, men and women who carry out land and resource use and management activities that can impact the areas' goals positively and/or negatively. The exclusion of non-Indigenous communities is also short-sighted as formal interactions through the Reserve's management committees may be a tool for conflict transformation between *Comunidades* and their non-Indigenous neighbours.

Finally, the representativeness of ECAs is challenged by their conceptualisation as 'technical entities' where technical skills and knowledge are privileged. This is another outcome of how *cogestión* is understood by our ECA interlocutors, with technical knowledge assumed to be foreign knowledge associated with formal education and opposed to the political representation work carried out by organisations like FENAMAD or FECONAPU. The naturalisation of the technical as the desirable way to manage Reserves justifies the exclusion of local knowledge specialists, including women, under an apparently 'neutral' practice. This results in the privileging of people with higher education degrees to occupy leadership positions, particularly men who already wield more power. Those who have more formal education have often spent significant time away from their *Comunidades* throughout their lives, and are less well versed in local knowledge repertoires. While the election of representatives with these characteristics eases communication between Indigenous leaderships, SERNANP and NGOs, it does so at the expense of local knowledge and associated practices. These different perspectives are also embodied as ECA officials adopt versions of the uniforms worn by SERNANP staff. In Amaraakeri, the adoption of the dress gives them the legitimacy of technical knowledge and state authority in the eyes of *Comunidades*; the same legitimacy in terms of 'local' knowledge is granted by the traditional dress they wear in activities with foreign audiences (Palacios Llaque and Sarmiento Barletti, 2021).

Conclusion

Overall, despite their potential importance, it is still unclear whether co-management is best understood as promoting Indigenous Peoples' self-determination or as a 'green' technology of environmental governance that extends the status quo. In this article, we have reflected on the nature of the participation of Indigenous organisations and communities in *cogestión*, the co-management regime for Communal Reserves in the Peruvian Amazon. We have explored how the same co-management regime is experienced differently, both conceptually and as relationships, in different contexts. We have also examined the challenges faced by Indigenous organisations when they try to access the self-determination promised by co-management. These challenges stem from how *cogestión* has been implemented in the Peruvian Amazon and linked to the negotiated co-existence of extractive, conservation and climate change interests in the region. We have shown how the co-existence of these interests has only allowed for a limited extension of rights in an unequal relationship between *Comunidades* (represented by their ECAs) and the Peruvian government (represented by SERNANP).

The limitations of co-management are illustrated in at least two aspects of the power imbalance at the core of the relationship between the *cogestión* partners. First, although *cogestión* is a response to

critiques of mainstream conservation and undoubtedly represent progress, ultimate control of Reserves remains with the state. This control is emphasised by how most funding for such regimes comes through the state and is supplemented through NGO projects to which ECAs and *Comunidades* remain bound. To participate in *cogestión*, *Comunidades* must organise themselves following Peruvian laws and to support government policies, which may be at odds with local priorities. Second, *cogestión* is understood as a technical process with regulations that differ from local models of resource use, disregard local knowledge, exclude Indigenous women and Andean settlers with relevant environmental knowledge, and/or fail to address issues that are inherently political.

The responsabilisation relationship in Reserves is tied to how *cogestión* is understood and implemented by the *cogestión* partners. For SERNANP, it leads to a future where ECAs will manage and guard the Reserves in support of the government's conservation goals. This wish to transfer responsibilities to *Comunidades* is already evident in the design of the National Programme for Forest Conservation. However, Indigenous Peoples hope for *cogestión* to expand their relationship with the government and for it to become a channel for resources and projects into the area, strengthening government commitment with the ECAs and the *Comunidades* they represent.

The asymmetric incorporation of Indigenous leaderships into supposedly horizontal governance arrangements like *cogestión* raises an important question regarding co-management approaches like Communal Reserves. That is, do they advance Indigenous self-determination? Or are they a technology of environmental governance that creates 'green' *indios permitidos* to domesticate Indigenous movements by incorporating them to the state apparatus and making them support exogenous policy goals? It will be important to continue examining *cogestión* as it continues to mature to continue to understand its possibilities and limitations. Meanwhile, we remain cautious about how *cogestión* can support Indigenous self-determination and the sustainability of any progress. The pursuit of self-determination is challenged by the current arrangement in which ECAs are limited to being technical organisations working to support Peruvian environmental policies while dependent on NGO and donor funding to function.

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