A place at the table is not enough: Accountability for Indigenous Peoples and local communities in multi-stakeholder platforms

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ABSTRACT

Virtually all major efforts to address global problems regarding land and resource use call for a multi-stakeholder process. At the same time, there is growing interest in, and commitment to, inclusion of previously marginalized groups – e.g., Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), smallholders, and women in these groups – in decisions related to sustainable land and resource governance. Nevertheless, multi-stakeholder platforms and forums (MSFs) tend to be idealized as imagined spaces for collaboration among equals, despite ample prior research demonstrating that fostering equity in such "invited spaces" is no easy feat. This article draws on a comparative study of 11 subnational MSFs aimed at improving land and forest use practices in Brazil, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Peru. It analyzes data from interviews with more than 50 IPLC forum participants to understand their perspective on efforts to address equity in the MSFs in which they are participating, as well as their opinion of the potential of MSFs in comparison with other participants. The research sought to understand how MSFs can ensure voice and empowerment and address inequality, and thus be accountable to the needs and interests of IPLCs. The interviews show that IPLCs are overall optimistic, but the results also provide insights into accountability failures. The article argues that to bring about change – one that takes equality, empowerment and justice seriously – there needs to be greater strategic attention to how marginalized groups perceive their participation in multi-stakeholder processes. It builds on the lessons from the literature and the findings to propose specific ways that MSFs might foster the collective action or counter power that less powerful actors need to hold more powerful actors accountable.

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1. Introduction

The UN-REDD Program Assembly, the Climate Investment Platform, the Governors Climate and Forests Task Force, the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) Partnership, and the Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals are just a few examples of the many multi-stakeholder platforms now being promoted in virtually all global efforts promoting sustainable land- and resource-use practices. This abundance of support for dialogue is perhaps based on the popular yet flawed idea that "we are all in this together" – or at least, that we all occupy this unhealthy planet together – combined with the urgency to address the climate crisis. Nevertheless, not everyone is equally responsible for the crisis or impacted by its effects, nor do all actors have the same access to,

or voice at, the negotiating table (Heiman, 1996; Fraser, 2009; Myers et al., 2018).

Previous research on participatory development (Mansuri & Rao, 2013) and participatory conservation and development (Campbell & Vainio-Mattila, 2003) initiatives have already warned us about these limitations. Though there is broad agreement, at least in theory, that multi-stakeholder processes are preferable to top-down or unilateral decision-making, past evidence has demonstrated that they will not promote equity simply by bringing in more participants (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Cornwall 2003, 2008). Are the new platforms that promote sustainable land- and resource-use practices learning from the past, or repeating the same mistakes?

Multi-stakeholder forums (MSFs) focused on sustainable land use sometimes emphasize supporting communication across sectors (e.g. agriculture, environment, investment) (West and Fearnside, 2021), but there is growing recognition that landscape-level actors—including Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and smallholders—are integral to initiatives

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for change (Sayer et al., 2013). This recognition is important in forest landscapes of the Global South, where deforestation is a central problem, often in areas where many IPLCs live without secure land and resource rights (RRI, 2015). The expansion of participatory spaces for Indigenous Peoples is a marked shift away from historical exclusion and to some extent responds to international agreements (e.g., International Labour Organization Covenant 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) that call for free, prior and informed consent (FPIC; Schilling-Vacaflor & Flemmer, 2015). Though usually organized for consultation rather than consent, there is at least a tacit understanding that expanding decision-making and coordination spaces to include these actors has implications for equality and addressing the historical marginalization of IPLCs from political processes (Leifsen et al., 2017; Sarmiento Barletti & Seedhouse, 2019). For many donors and NGOs, fostering equality, empowerment, secure land rights and/or support for local livelihoods is a central goal of such processes (Fajardo et al., 2021).

Given this interest, it is important to understand how IPLC representatives experience participation in these spaces – a topic given surprisingly little attention despite some 40 years of research, theory and experience on participatory processes. Even rarer is comparative analysis of their experiences across multi-stakeholder processes. This article focuses on the perspectives of IPLC[1] participants in a study of 11 subnational multi-stakeholder forums in four countries aimed at addressing land use and land use change (LULUC) and improving land- and resource-use practices. In this article, MSFs are defined as a "purposefully organized interactive process that brings together a range of stakeholders to participate in dialogue and/or decision-making and/or implementation of actions seeking to address a problem they hold in common or to achieve a goal for their common benefit" (Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2020a: 2); "multi-stakeholder" was understood as including at least one government and one non-governmental actor (and at least one IPLC participant in the cases included here)[2]. Subnational arenas were specifically chosen because they are closer to the landscapes of targeted changes, as were forums that included, though were not necessarily organized by, government actors. MSFs with the presence of (subnational) government actors were selected to assure that the MSF was embedded (see Hewlett et al., 2021 on embeddedness) in, or at least linked to, official political processes and institutions, and due to the growing interest in so-called jurisdictional approaches (Boyd et al., 2018; Stickler et al., 2018; Libert-Amico and Larson, 2020). These MSFs are analytically important, as governments are responsible for upholding the rights of IPLCs.

This article focuses on questions about both the forums in which interviewees were involved and their general opinion of MSFs. The results show optimism as well as important arenas for concern. Previous evidence shows that inclusion in a participatory process may not be enough to guarantee voice (Arnstein, 1969), and even if it does, that "voice is not enough" (Fox, 2020). Minimally, then, how can MSFs ensure voice, and what else do IPLCs need to make an MSF worth their time and effort? How can these processes support rights and livelihoods and address inequality? Put simply, how can these processes be accountable to the needs and interests of IPLCs? Drawing from this experience and the literature, the analysis identifies ways forward. The article argues that

to bring about change that takes equality, empowerment and justice seriously, MSF organizers need to engage more strategically with IPLC participants to foster "counter power," and it suggests some specific ways to do so.

The following section presents the main conceptual background for this article. This is followed by a discussion of research methods, and the presentation of results from two sources of field data based on interviews with IPLC (and other) participants (including organizers) of MSFs. The discussion section analyzes the main findings, and the conclusion follows.

2. Participatory processes and accountability

There is ample research on participatory processes based on some 40-plus years of experience, as well as a notable evolution of perspectives and priorities over time. The literature engages with democracy (e.g., Ribot, 2004), pluralism (e.g., Wollenberg, Anderson, & Lopez, 2005), citizenship (e.g., Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000), decentralization (e.g., Larson & Soto, 2008), gender (e.g., Agarwal, 2001), development (e.g., Mansuri & Rao, 2013), and more.

It is important to revisit this research, given the recognition in global rights and environmental discourses of the importance of the participation of IPLC representatives, both men and women, in multi-stakeholder decision-making and coordination platforms (Bastos-Lima et al., 2017; Estrada-Carmona, et al., 2014). This interest is apparent in Sustainable Development Goals five and ten, which call for better integration of women and other marginalized groups, respectively. The participation of historically underrepresented groups in MSFs addressing land and resource use governance is part of these forums' appeal (Lyons et al., 2019) and is supported by environmental discourses highlighting the role of IPLCs as environmental stewards (Pinkerton, 2019).

There is little evidence that participatory processes alone can empower disempowered people (Cornwall, 2008). Ample past research has shown that the effective participation of marginalized groups in multi-stakeholder platforms and processes was uncommon in land and resource use decision-making and/or in the design of initiatives that might affect their rights, territories, lives, and livelihoods (Rockloff & Lockie, 2007; see Sarmiento Barletti & Larson 2019 for a recent review). This still held true a decade ago, despite progress on rights for Indigenous Peoples in international agreements such as ILO C169 and UNDRIP as well as demands from IPLC organizations and their allies (Espinoza Llanos & Feather, 2011). Deep histories of inequality and conflicts over resources and land mark many of the forest areas where IPLCs are invited to multi-stakeholder processes (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Rodriguez & Sarmiento Barletti, 2021) – places where there are few avenues for IPLCs to hold more powerful actors accountable.

The research analyzed in this article sought to contribute to this literature by understanding, through comparative analysis, whether this widespread call for multi-stakeholder processes and platforms demonstrated learning from past lessons on participatory processes, and, most importantly, to ask marginalized groups themselves what they have to say about equity in these MSFs.

The analysis thus focuses on a key subset of the participation literature on voice and accountability in MSFs. First, the MSFs studied here are "invited spaces." They are not grassroots driven or organized, but rather "those into which people (as users, citizens or beneficiaries) are invited to participate by various kinds of authorities, be they government, supranational agencies or non-governmental organizations" (Cornwall, 2002: 24; see also Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000). Research demonstrated that such spaces have great difficulties with regard to "equitable representation and voice" (Cornwall, 2004: 2).

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[1] The article uses IPLCs as a shorthand to refer to women and men from traditionally marginalized groups: Indigenous Peoples; members of other collective traditional communities and local forest cooperatives; and in some cases rural workers, villagers or small farmers.

[2] The complete study included 14 case studies. PPCDAM MSF (Brazil) was excluded from this analysis as this was a national MSF. The Regional Council on Climate Change (Indonesia) and INOBU-UNILEVER Palm Oil Initiative (Indonesia) MSFs were also excluded as no interviews were conducted with indigenous or local community participants.

Mansuri and Rao's review of large-scale, top-down "induced" local participation processes in the development arena found that "*absent some kind of affirmative action program*, groups that form under the aegis of interventions tend to systematically exclude disadvantaged and minority groups and women" (2013: 9, emphasis added). They conclude that project design and rules of implementation – institutions and mechanisms to assure local accountability – play a central role in determining whether community programs will reach the poor or be captured by more powerful actors. It is useful to consider what this might mean for MSFs, where poor and marginalized groups, and women in those groups, generally have even less representation or participation than in community programs. With regard to MSFs, they found that "deliberative forums are more effective where they are an integral part of the policy-making process and where higher-tier governments are committed to ensuring greater citizen participation" (2013: 277). Most projects, however, did not promote accountability, monitor progress effectively, or build a learning environment to adjust and improve the course of action (see also Fox, 2015).

Second, although such spaces may potentially become "conquered spaces" (Cornwall, 2004: 2), this is uncommon. Fox (2020) studied five top-down participatory development projects from the World Bank and found that a very small number enabled participation in a way that built countervailing power. Accountability depends on the exercise of countervailing power (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999), defined as "a variety of mechanisms that reduce, and perhaps even neutralize the power advantages of ordinarily powerful actors" (Fung & Wright, 2003: 260). Fox (2020) identified an important feature of the projects that were most successful in fostering counter power that is relevant to this study: support for scaled up social organizations (e.g., second level ethnic federations beyond the community level). Other important findings include the importance of collective land titling, the need to identify targeted political opportunities, and a common failure to support gender inclusion, transparency and accountability reforms or human rights protections.

Fox's (2015) research on social accountability provides additional insights for this analysis. He found that information (in our cases, learning by being at the table) is not enough to foster action. Rather, information has to be actionable; it has to be *safe* to take action; and it has to be credible that there will be a response. He also found that voice – from local communities alone – is not enough to challenge more powerful actors. The voices of the normally excluded have to be actively encouraged; interlocutors from within the state or other citizen's groups can help bridge power differences and allow marginal groups to build countervailing power (Fox, 2015). Fox makes a distinction between tactical (bounded, local, based on information and voice alone) and strategic approaches to accountability. This corresponds with findings from interviews with MSF organizers, who tended to see their forum as an event and a method, both as more tactical, but rarely as part of a broader strategy for change (Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2021). Strategic approaches embrace multiple tactics, enable collective action, coordinate citizen voice with government reforms that foster responsiveness, scale up and out, and are iterative and contested (Fox, 2015).

What lessons are relevant for the MSFs addressed in this article? They are deliberative spaces organized to achieve some kind of collective –action. They work towards common ground regarding land-use practices in a geographic space, rather than participatory budgeting or service provision, as in the cases above. But they are embedded in national political and economic realities and in global processes; the changes sought also involve policy reforms to re-align practices to something more sustainable and equitable. The article builds on these lessons to examine accountability in MSFs, to understand the kind of collective action or counter power needed to enable IPLC representatives to hold more powerful actors accountable.

3. Methods

This article focuses on 11 case studies – 2 each in Indonesia and Ethiopia, 3 in Brazil, and 4 in Peru – all part of a comparative study of subnational MSFs focusing on sustainable land and resource use. A short summary of each case is given in Table 1, but due to space limitations, only a small number of cases with illustrative details are explained more extensively, mostly in the discussion. The cases have been described extensively elsewhere; the purpose of this article is to explore common lessons across IPLC experiences.

The cases were selected after a national scoping study based on a variety of criteria: they focused on a specific subnational landscape; had at least one government and one non-governmental actor; were processes, not one-off events; and had been running for at least one year (MSFs that had ended were permitted as long as participants were still available to interview). Where possible, contrasting experiences were considered.

For data collection – in addition to national, subnational and forum-level data – research included specific interview protocols for key informants, forum organizers, participants, and non-participants (stakeholders to the issues addressed by the MSF but who had not participated for different reasons), as well as focus groups for Indigenous Peoples in some cases. On average, 40 people were interviewed in each site in each country's national language. The questionnaires had mostly open-ended questions, but included some closed questions followed by open questions to explain answers (see Sarmiento Barletti & Larson, 2019 for the research protocol). The questionnaires sought to understand the perspectives held by different actors on the issues addressed by each MSF, its process and outcomes, challenges, successes, and proposed alternatives. Q-methodology (explained below) was only used in interviews with MSF participants and organizers to understand their perceptions about the potential and challenges of MSFs.

In each forum, 20–25 participants were selected for interviews following a stakeholder mapping based on MSF documents, corroborated with MSF organizers and key context informants, and supplemented through snowball sampling. Participants were categorized by gender, sector (government, IPLC organization, NGO, academia, donor, or private sector), and level (local, subnational or national). The purposive sample aimed to assure that all of the main actor types in each forum were interviewed. In several forums there were only a small number of IPLC participants, and sometimes only 1 or 2.[3]

This article draws from 50 structured interviews with IPLC actors who were participants of the MSFs studied (see Table 2). The analysis focuses on two questions about inequality in and beyond the forum, and one question about the potential of MSFs to transform decision-making processes. We draw on both the quantitative questions and qualitative follow-up questions that explain their answers. The article also includes data from Q-methodology interviews held with 236 MSFs participants (including organizers) across actor types; 51 were IPLCs.[4]

Q-methodology interviewees sorted a set of cards with statements about MSFs on a predetermined grid according to their agreement/disagreement with each statement (from –4, more in

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[3] The small number of IPLCs in some forums poses problems for any kind of representative analysis, but in the authors' view, this is also indicative of the general problem being studied.

[4] Among IPLCs, 43 did both the participant interview and the Q methodology questions; 7 did the interview only and 5 did the Q methodology interviews only, as did 3 additional IPLCs who were organizers (all from Madre de Dios). Thus, a total of 58 distinct IPLC participants (including 3 organizers) were interviewed.

Table 1
Key characteristics of case studies.

Case	Context	Organizer	Purpose	Participants	Outcome	Distinguishing Features
Acre, Brazil Ecological Economic Zoning Commission (See Gonzales Tovar, 2020; Gonzales Tovar et al., 2021a, Gonzales Tovar et al., 2021b; Sarmiento Barletti & Heise, Forthcoming)	Acre's government was a key actor within a socio-environmental alliance supporting *florestania* ('forest-citizenship'). Acre was progressive in terms of its development policies and sought low-carbon alternatives that support the rights of Indigenous and local communities.	Acre state government	Collaboratively design a map for the sustainable management of Acre's territory. Through the map, and its design process, empower underrepresented groups and address past conflicts over land and resource access and use.	Government (national/ subnational); NGOs; agroindustry and farmers' groups; universities; Indigenous and local communities.	Completed map that was approved by Legislative Assembly.	Pro-Indigenous and environmentalist government was key to plan to empower IPs to participate effectively in the forum.
Mato Grosso, Brazil Social-Economic And Ecological Zoning Commission (See Gonzales Tovar, 2020; Gonzales Tovar et al., 2021a, Gonzales Tovar et al., 2021b; Sarmiento Barletti & Heise, Forthcoming)	Mato Grosso is Brazil's leading state in terms of agribusiness and deforestation, with a history of conflictive interactions between Indigenous and local communities and land holding and government sectors. The agro-industrial sector has great influence over the government, including participation in the state's Legislative Assembly.	Mato Grosso state government	Sustainably manage territory by designing a territorial map. Include different perspectives, to balance the economic, social and cultural uses of the territory.	Government (national/ subnational); NGOs; agroindustry and farmers' groups; universities.	Completed map but was yet to be approved by Legislative Assembly	Resilience and equity of MSF results affected by lack of measures to address IPLC representation in a jurisdiction with a history of marginalization of local actors.
Pará, Brazil Green Municipalities Program (See Londres et al., 2021)	In 2004, deforestation in the Amazon reached alarming levels, and Pará had the second worst deforestation rate in Brazil. Brazil's government introduced a deforestation 'blacklist' for the worst offending municipalities. Pará introduced the Program to address this context, led by an MSF. Furthermore, there are ongoing social conflicts related to resource and land tenure rights in the region, while production sectors continue to grow, local communities and Indigenous Peoples have organized to defend their rights and secure their livelihoods.	Pará state government	Reduce deforestation, improve rural environmental registry, decentralize enforcement mechanisms to the municipal level and engage municipalities in the Green Municipalities Program.	Government (subnational/ local); agroindustry and farmers' groups; NGOs.	Adherence of 124 of 144 municipalities to the program; five of seventeen blacklisted municipalities were expunged from the list.	MSF was successful in relating with municipalities and powerful actors but excluded IPLCs, which have already suffered from a history of rights violations and dispossession. The MSF avoided engaging issues framing historical inequalities by deploying a 'technical' solution for a problem that had a strong socio-political basis.
Oromia, Ethiopia Jamma-Urji Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (See Yami et al., 2021)	The Jamma and Urji mountains (in Oromia regional state) used to be covered with natural forest and managed by the state during the Derg regime. Following the regime's fall, there was no institution directly responsible for protecting the forest, which was cleared for firewood and charcoal by local agro-pastoralists groups, resulting in severe land degradation due to soil	Horn of Africa and Addis Ababa University	The MSF was created to organise collective action to rehabilitate degraded land, increase biodiversity and forest carbon stock, and work towards forest regeneration. The forum would also develop the capacities of local actors to design and implement sustainable land use practices. In the long run, it would enable a transformation of local people's livelihoods	Local communities; government (subnational/ local); NGOs.	Improved forest conservation and organization of through exclosures and Participatory Forest Management cooperatives; supported recognition of land use rights to cooperatives.	Project was seen as a conservation success yet it did not have mechanisms for the effective participation of women from local communities in cooperatives, despite their being key actors in forest use (e.g., collecting firewood). The project failed to balance the need of including government actors in an MSF with preventing them from controlling its process.

Table 1 (continued)

Case	Context	Organizer	Purpose	Participants	Outcome	Distinguishing Features
	erosion. In 2014, Horn of Africa and Addis Ababa University introduced the Jamma-Urji Farmers Managed Forestry Project to work with local communities to naturally regenerate an area, and work towards setting up a REDD+ initiative to create revenue for communities.		through carbon revenues and environmental benefits.			
Oromia, Ethiopia Share Bale Eco-Region (See Yami et al., 2021)	The SHARE-BER project was funded by the European Union to conserve biodiversity, ecosystems functions and services in the Bale Eco-Region, and improve local livelihoods by creating 'climate smart' families and communities. The project included interventions in technology, livelihoods, gender, and family planning. The interventions were developed through an MSF, which coordinated plans by community, government, and NGOs.	FARM Africa, SOS-Sahel, Frankfurt Zoological Society, and the International Water Management Institute.	Contribute to sustainable land use through an inclusive design and process that brings together stakeholders from different sectors to discuss common problems and find solutions that benefit them all.	Local communities; government (subnational/ local); NGOs.	Livelihood diversification and decreased deforestation and degradation through capacity development with local communities on sustainable land use.	MSF was seen as an environmental success, yet it did not include specific mechanisms to support the effective participation of women from local communities.
Jambi, Indonesia Adaptive Collaborative Management (Acm) Project (See Tamara et al., 2021)	In Jambi province, massive land clearing for timber extraction and forest conversion for agriculture have driven deforestation and forest degradation, as oil palm plantations expand. CIFOR established the ACM project in Bungo district to reduce deforestation and land degradation in the district's forest, where at that time illegal logging and timber concessions dominated extractive activities. An MSF was set up as part of an ACM project to bring together stakeholders to mobilize human resources and synergize actions.	Center for International Forestry Research, Jambi University and Gita Buana (local NGO)	Raise awareness about the negative impacts of conversion of the community's forest and loss of its natural resources; formulate a solution for customary forest management and conservation together with the local community; support secure forest tenure arrangements for communities.	Local community: university: NGO; local government.	Legal recognition of customary forests; capacity development for improved participation with local communities.	Organizers emphasized capacity development activities with local men and women to enable their equitable and effective participation. The MSF included an advocacy component to support customary forest and resource rights.
West Java, Indonesia Integrated Citarum Water Resources Management Investment Program (See Tamara et al., 2021)	The Citarum River is Indonesia's largest water reservoir. However, it is one of the most polluted in the world, contaminated with household, agricultural and industrial waste. This program was developed to increase water availability and	National government	Support sustainable watershed management through agroforestry. This MSF was established as part of a broader initiative that aimed to build connections between farmers and the subnational government at provincial and district	Government (national/ subnational); NGO; local communities; university.	Local communities transitioned to agroforestry.	MSF was successful in introducing agroforestry practices, yet there are questions about the initiative's resilience without donor funding. There were no mechanisms to enable the effective participation of women from local communities, and men

Table 1 (*continued*)

Case	Context	Organizer	Purpose	Participants	Outcome	Distinguishing Features
	improve water resource management. Various MSFs were created at national and subnational levels, with different but complementary objectives for watershed restoration. The national level MSF focused on inter-ministerial coordination; the subnational MSFs coordinated and mobilised financial and political support for sustainable interventions with farmers.		levels, and to obtain political and financial support to ensure the sustainability of interventions at the Citarum River.			were targeted for capacity development and support towards agroforestry practices.
Loreto, Peru Commission for the Protection of Isolated Indigenous Peoples (See Sarmiento Barletti & Larson, 2020; Rodriguez & Sarmiento Barletti, 2021; Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2022; Sarmiento Barletti & Heise, Forthcoming)	Loreto includes the territory of isolated indigenous peoples officially recognised by the government. These groups are vulnerable as they lack immunity against common diseases. Their reliance on the forest for subsistence also makes them vulnerable to the impacts of extractive activities and infrastructure projects. Indigenous organisations and NGO allies have promoted the creation of Reserves for isolated peoples in Loreto since the 1990s, in areas that now overlap with communities, concessions, and roads.	Loreto's Office for Indigenous Affairs	Inform and articulate an inter-institutional response to the delay in the approval of reserves for isolated Indigenous Peoples.	Indigenous organizations; NGOs; government (national/ subnational).	Raise awareness on protection of the rights of isolated Indigenous Peoples.	The MSF had a strong capacity development component for subnational government actors given their lack of awareness regarding the rights of isolated Indigenous Peoples. The forum's potential impact was challenged, as participants did not hold a shared respect for recognised rights.
Madre De Dios, Peru Amarakaeri Communal Reserve Management Committee (See Sarmiento Barletti & Larson, 2020; Palacios Llaque & Sarmiento Barletti, 2021; Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2022; Sarmiento Barletti & Heise Forthcoming)	Madre de Dios is Peru's jurisdiction with the most protected areas, but also has a socio-environmental crisis due to alluvial gold mining. These practices are mostly carried out by non-indigenous migrants but are a growing livelihoods option in Indigenous communities. The subnational government supported mining, contravening national conservation policies and demands by Indigenous communities for the protection of their territories. The jurisdiction's Indigenous movement is strong and experienced.	Subnational office of Protected Areas Service (SERNANP)	Support Amarakaeri Communal Reserve's co-management between Indigenous organizations and the state and approve its master plan.	Government (national/ subnational); NGOs; private sector; Indigenous organizations; universities.	Approved master plan for the reserve.	MSF represents an achievement for IP representation and decision-making in a jurisdiction with a strong Indigenous movement. Achievement is supported by a transition in Peru's national government to co-managed protected areas.
San Martín, Peru Alto Mayo Protection Forest Management	San Martín is Peru's top jurisdiction in low carbon development.	Subnational office of Protected	Support Alto Mayo Protection Forest's co-management and	Government (national/ subnational),	Approved master plan for the protection forest.	The MSF's resilience is challenged by the exclusion from the

Table 1 (*continued*)

Case	Context	Organizer	Purpose	Participants	Outcome	Distinguishing Features
Committee (See Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2021; Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2022; Sarmiento Barletti & Heise Forthcoming)	The Alto Mayo Protection Forest is central to its agenda, as it is Peru's most successful REDD+ early initiative. The area, co-managed by the government and an INGO, has a conflictive relationship with family farmers living within it; they have not been able to engage Indigenous organizations in the MSF.	Areas Service (SERNANP)	approve its master plan.	NGOs; tourism organizations; universities.		forum of the local communities living within the Protected Forest; their activities were criminalized by the MSF's organizers. Although the MSF addressed the traditional territory of local IPs, there were no mechanisms to actively include them in relevant decision making.
Ucayali, Peru Platform for Community Forest Management (See Sarmiento Barletti & Larson, 2020; Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2022; Sarmiento Barletti & Heise Forthcoming)	Most of Ucayali's territory is forested land, and 13% of its population identifies as Indigenous. Ucayali is Peru's foremost logging region, with a history of informal extraction from Indigenous communities by private companies in unequal deals and reported related cases of corruption in the regional government. Ucayali signed pledges committing to support Peru's climate and reduced deforestation goals. The government created an MSF to support sustainable community forest management.	General Directorate of Forestry and Wildlife of the Ucayali Regional Government	Coordinate multiple stakeholders to promote sustainable and profitable forest management on the lands of Indigenous communities.	Government (national/subnational); NGOs; Indigenous organizations.	Worked towards developing the capacities of Indigenous representatives to engage with relevant laws; supported collaboration between different organizations.	MSF sought to develop IP capacities to follow technical approaches to forest management and abide by existing laws, instead of supporting new guidelines that were better tuned to Indigenous experiences. IP representatives seldomly participated despite being rights-holders and 'beneficiaries' of the issues addressed by the MSF.

Table 2
Number of research participants: Interviews and Q-method.

Country	Site	IPLC interview	Participants (Q-method)						
			IPLC	NGO	Government	Private Sector	Academia	Donor	Total
Brazil	Acre	6	4	1	12	4	1	0	22
	Mato Grosso	1	2	2	12	4	1	0	21
	Para	1	1	3	11	5	2	0	22
Ethiopia	Jamma-Urji	5	5	2	10	0	0	0	17
	SHARE-Bale	2	2	4	17	0	0	0	23
Indonesia	Jambi	12	12	5	10	0	7	0	34
	West Java	14	14	3	6	0	3	1	27
Peru	Loreto	2	0	2	16	0	0	0	18
	Madre de Dios	3	6	3	2	0	0	1	12
	San Martin	1	3	2	9	2	0	0	16
	Ucayali	3	2	6	14	0	0	2	24
TOTAL		**50**	**51**	**33**	**119**	**15**	**14**	**4**	**236**

disagreement, to +4 more in agreement). Responses for the 6 statements (out of a total of 42) that were most relevant to issues of equity and the participation of IPLC representatives (Table 3) were re-coded as "in agreement" (+1 to +4), "neutral" (0) and "in disagreement" (−1 to −4). Q-methodology responses reflect personal experience but are not specifically about the cases studied, thus reflecting more general opinions and aspirations. Below, the results

of interviews with IPLC participants are presented in comparison to those of the other participants.

4. Results: How did IPLC participants perceive their MSF?

The first two questions refer specifically to our interviewees' experience of power and inequality in the case studies, and the

Table 3
Selected Q-methodology statements.

Statement
1. In MSFs, all participants feel like equals with a real say in their futures.
2. MSFs can empower IPLC and/or previously marginalized groups (by e.g. gender, race, caste).
3. No matter how the MSF is designed, powerful actors always find a way to dominate the conversations held during it.
4. MSFs disempower IPLC by giving others with fewer rights over their ancestral territories equal participation in decision-making.
5. MSFs create opportunities for the less powerful to link with potential allies.
6. IPLC would be better off fighting for their interests through social action (collective action, their grassroots organizations) rather than through MSFs.

third is a more general question about the potential of MSFs to lead to more equitable decision-making.

4.1. Did the MSF attend to power differentials?

IPLC interviewees were asked *To what extent did/does the MSF address power differentials between its participants in the [land use and land-use change] context it sought to address*? (see Fig. 1). In four case studies (Ucayali, Jambi, SHARE-Bale and Acre), 50% or more of interviewees reported "to a great extent"; in two (Jamma Urji and SHARE-Bale) 50% or more responded "somewhat"; whereas "very little" or "not at all" dominated responses in Loreto and Pará, as well as in Madre de Dios and West Java among participants that answered the question.

The analysis of follow-up questions revealed four positions regarding the need for actions to address power inequalities and their outcomes: 1) such actions were unnecessary; 2) actions were taken and were positive; 3) actions were taken and were inadequate; and 4) no/minimal actions were taken, which had negative effects.[5]

Seven interviewees believed that there was no need for actions to address power inequalities; they were participants in Jambi (2/12), West Java (2/14), Loreto (1/2), and Ucayali (2/3). Five of them had said the MSF addressed power differentials to a great extent, and two said somewhat or not at all. Their explanations suggest that they believed participation was already equal. In Loreto, the forum addressed concerns regarding isolated Indigenous Peoples, a topic on which Indigenous organizations have more expertise than other forum members.

The largest portion of interviewees (12) thought that actions had been taken by the MSF and had positive effects. This group was strongly dominated by two forums, Jambi (7/12) and Acre (4/6); the other respondent was from SHARE-Bale. In Acre, interviewees said that all participants were equally heard, and that different groups were well represented. One interviewee highlighted the forum's "ethno-zoning" process, in which information was less technical and thus more accessible for Indigenous participants (see Gonzales Tovar et al., 2021). In Jambi, interviewees emphasized that the MSF had empowered women by developing their capacities to participate and including them in decision-making – from which they had previously been excluded. Two participants also explained that equitable participation had contributed to more equitable benefit sharing, and prevented local elites from controlling support for villages.

Nine interviewees in four MSFs – Acre (2/6), Jambi (1/12), West Java (1/14) and Jamma-Urji (5/5) – responded that actions were taken but were insufficient to address power differences. Most (7/9) said the MSF "somewhat" addressed power differentials between its participants; one interviewee (Jambi) considered this

had been done to a "great extent", and another (West Java) "did not know". Interviewees in Jamma-Urji argued that the actions taken were not adequate or sustainable. The participant from Jambi explained that actions were taken inside the MSF but that tensions arose in response to a company's proposal to work in the village. The interviewee from West Java pointed out that despite the MSF's efforts, farmers were still dependent on intermediaries to sell their products. The two interviewees in Acre said that inequalities remained in terms of access to technical knowledge or in the capacities of some participants to express themselves effectively.
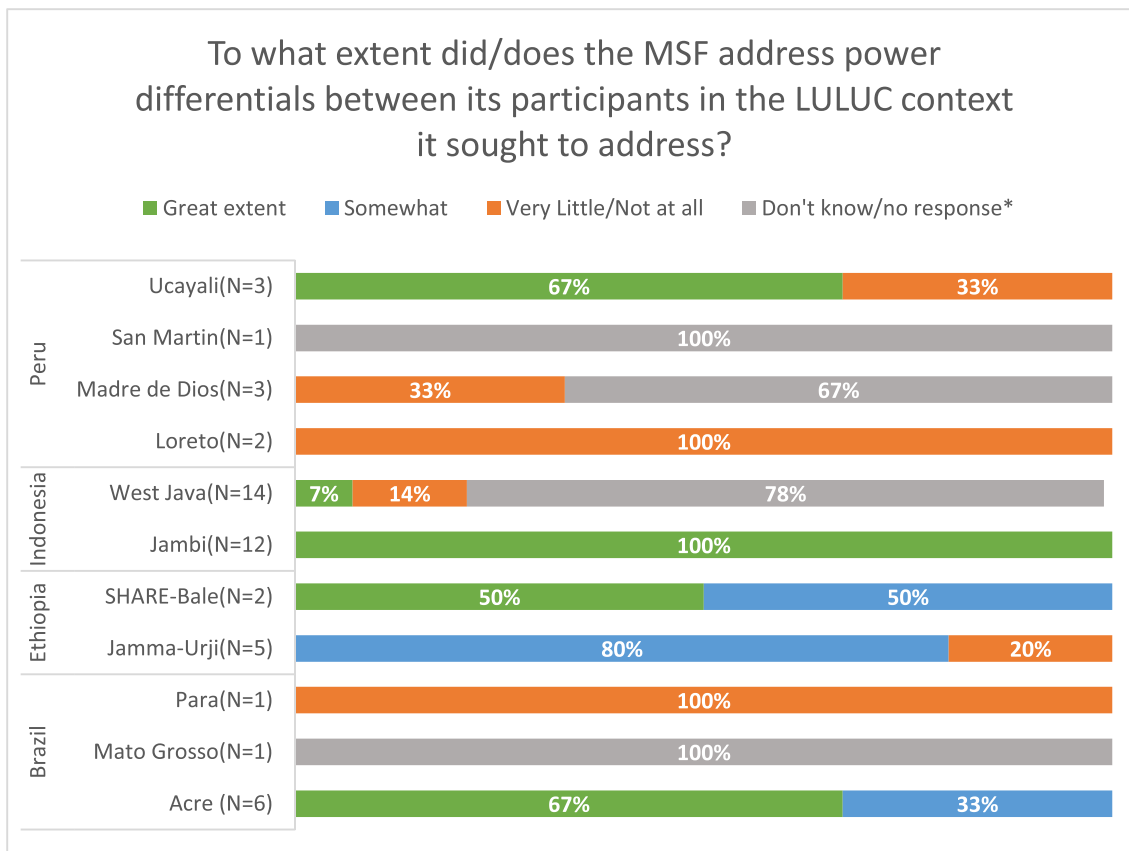
Finally, six respondents in five forums – Loreto (1/2), Madre de Dios (1/3), Pará (1/1), Ucayali (1/3), and West Java (2/14) – said that problematic power inequalities remained unaddressed. Interviewees reported that some participants' proposals were not implemented, that there was unequal access to decision-making, and that disparities in technical knowledge affected the ability of some to participate. In West Java, one interviewee said that the MSF lacked a "spirit of cooperation," and that attention should be given to "soft skills" supporting better organization and cooperation; the other said that the benefit-sharing mechanisms established to assure equality went unenforced.

On balance, of those who answered the question, 19 believed actions were unnecessary or were taken and were successful, and 15 believed there was no or inadequate action (see Fig. 2). Almost half of the former (9) were participants in Jambi, suggesting a successful forum in this regard. Conversely, in 8 MSFs at least one person was more critical, demonstrating some reason for concern. These results come with the caveat that many respondents (16/50) did not answer the question, and in some cases expressed difficulty in understanding the concept of power differentials.

4.2. Did the MSF level the playing field externally for IPLCs?

Interviewees were also asked *To what extent did/might the MSF have an impact in levelling the playing field more generally (e.g., outside the specific LULUC issue it addressed) in the region where it took place*? (see Fig. 3). Many interviewees believed that the MSF levelled the playing field outside the forum to a "great extent"; this perspective was dominated by participants in Jambi (10/12) and Acre (5/6), joined by participants from SHARE-Bale (1/2), Ucayali (1/3) and West Java (2/14).

Interviewees in Jambi and Acre – the two cases with the most positive responses to the previous question – had the most positive perceptions on this point as well. Almost all interviewees (11/12) in Jambi believed that the MSF had a positive effect, especially in terms of gender equality. As one female participant noted: "Women's participation used to be so unequal, not representative. Men ignored us in discussions, they said that we were useless. But [the MSF] motivated us." Another woman said: "We were taught how to organize a good meeting so that everyone had the opportunity to speak." Participants in Jambi also mentioned that other measures, such as inclusive invitations and capacity development, led to greater equality outside the MSF. Interviewees in Acre said that the MSF strengthened Indigenous rights and the Indigenous

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[5] A group of interviewees (16) reported they did not know or did not answer the question. In one case (Mato Grosso) the question was not asked. A large portion (9/16) were from West Java, where a large number of respondents, mostly women, felt uncomfortable replying, noting that they attended meetings but mostly sat at the back of the room, that "everyone participated," or that they did not know as they mostly helped their husbands in agricultural tasks.

*includes one site where the question was not asked (Mato Grosso)

Fig. 1. IPLC opinions on MSFs addressing power differentials (by forum).

movement more broadly, because it allowed Indigenous Peoples to engage with other actors in a completely new way. One interviewee commented, however, that this was not necessarily due to the MSF but to Acre's political context that was both pro-environment and pro-rights (see also Gonzalez Tovar et al., 2021).

At least one person in each of 6 forums – Jamma-Urji (5/5), West Java (2/14), Ucayali (1/3), SHARE-Bale (1/2), Loreto (1/2), and Madre de Dios (1/3) – said that the MSF had only "somewhat" levelled the field more generally. One person each from 7 forums – including the single interviewees from Mato Grosso and Pará – said the external effects were "very little" or "not at all".

In response to follow-up questions, all three IPLC interviewees in Ucayali thought that the MSF would have to do a lot to level the playing field, and that it ought to address more than just "forest issues" (such as land tenure rights). One pointed out that an MSF focusing on community forestry – in a context where many Indigenous communities engage with loggers and other private sector actors under unfair conditions – could do a lot to improve this precarious situation by supporting frank conversations with the private sector.

In Jamma-Urji, although all interviewees said the MSF had some effect on levelling the playing field, in follow-up interviews most (3/5) said that the efforts were inadequate, inconsistent or unsustainable. One participant said that the forum did not help marginalized groups to play a role in decision-making regarding the restoration initiative, as they had thought it would. In SHARE-Bale one participant noted that the MSF had developed community members' capacities, brought more economic opportu-

nities, and encouraged equal benefit-sharing; however, more was needed to ensure this would make a difference on the ground.

In West Java interviewees mentioned that the MSF encouraged women to get involved in agroforestry and in advancing land tenure recognition (however, see endnote 4), but noted that more government involvement was needed to ensure program sustainability. In Madre de Dios and Loreto interviewees generally felt that the MSF had not led to change. In Madre de Dios, this is because the MSF itself was the "change" – its creation was the achievement of the Indigenous movement's struggle for greater access to formal spaces for decision-making and coordination. In Loreto, one interviewee was optimistic about the MSF's future potential, due to its important role in informing the subnational government about issues related to isolated Indigenous Peoples and the international conventions and national laws protecting their rights. Finally, Mato Grosso (1/1) and Pará (1/1) interviewees said that their MSF did very little or nothing at all to level the playing field beyond the forum.

4.3. Do IPLC participants consider MSFs as transformative for equitable decision-making?

Interviewees were also asked: *MSFs have been proposed as a transformative solution for more equitable and effective decision-making processes. Based on your experience, do you agree?* Most respondents—all interviewees in 6 MSFs and the vast majority in a 7th—agreed to a "great extent" (see Fig. 4), despite sometimes having responded that they were unhappy with their MSFs. As expected, given their previous answers, this includes Jambi and
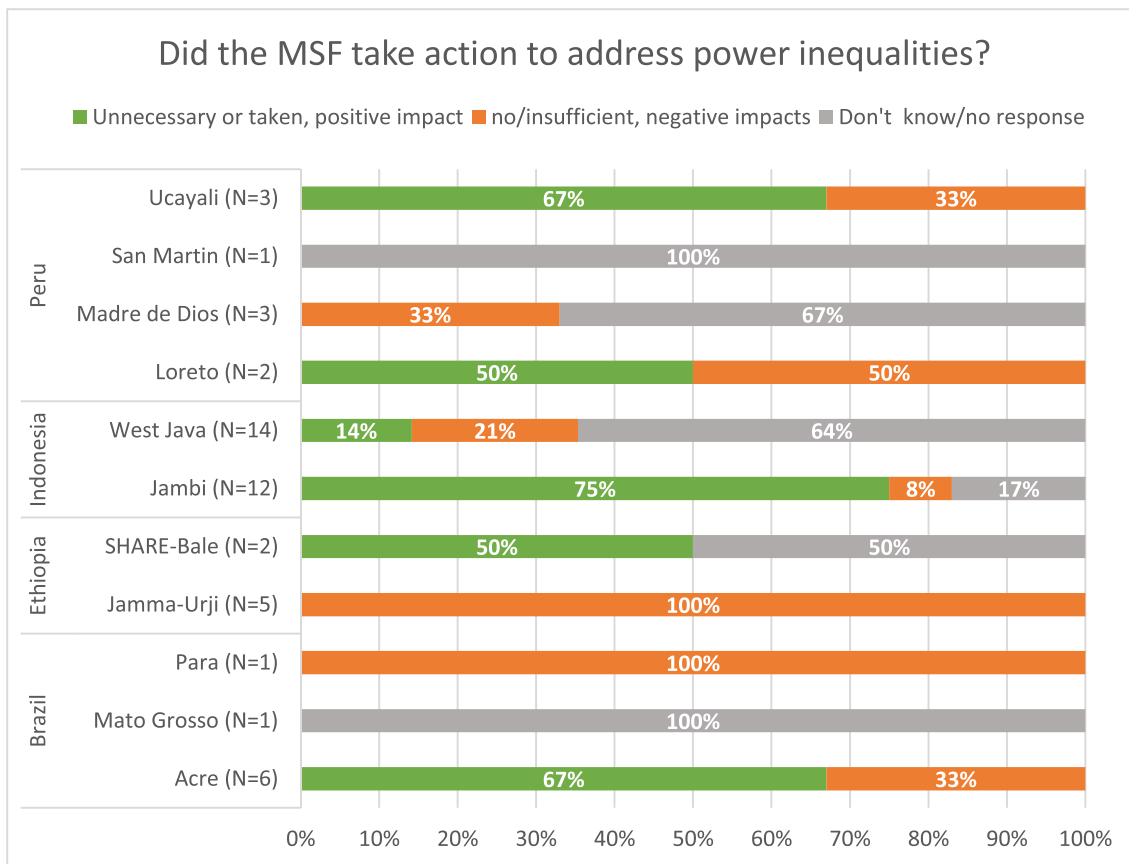
Fig. 2. IPLC perspectives on actions taken to address power differences (by forum).

Acre, as well as all the other case studies except Pará, Mato Grosso, and Madre de Dios (San Martín's only respondent did not answer the question).

From responses to the follow-up questions, it was clear that interviewees were optimistic about the potential of bringing different actors together in a dialogue for coordination and collaboration that would benefit IPLCs. One respondent from Acre said that this kind of dialogue – and joint decision-making – can benefit IPLCs if their representatives consult their communities and communicate their interests and opinions effectively. Interviewees from Jambi again emphasized the capacity development activities that were organized as part of the MSF and that empowered women to participate in local decision-making and in sustainable development practices. In West Java, interviewees referred to the benefits brought by the MSF's agroforestry program, and a few highlighted the opportunity for group learning and discussion. Respondents from Loreto and two from Ucayali highlighted the potential of bringing different actors to the table. In Ucayali, one referred to fostering collaboration for forest protection and the other to learning. Jamma-Urji interviewees agreed that MSFs are a good option for more equitable and effective planning but said these efforts needed to be sustained over time. In SHARE-Bale, both participants said MSFs were a good option for effective natural resource governance but did not comment further.

Only three interviewees (out of 50) said MSFs were "somewhat" transformative – one each in Madre de Dios (1/3), Pará (1/1), and West Java (1/14). In Madre de Dios, the interviewee said that although Indigenous communities are involved in the MSF and empowered by their participation, the forum should be more aware of the needs of the communities represented at the forum,

including for funds to travel to urban areas to participate in the meetings. In Pará, the interviewee warned that the political interests represented in the MSF meant that powerful actors could use it as a political tool to dominate the forum to maintain the status quo. Finally, the interviewee in West Java criticized the MSF for unequal benefit sharing in favor of wealthier farmers.

Only four people were highly skeptical – three stating "very little" (Madre de Dios 2/3 and West Java 1/14) and one "not at all" (Mato Grosso 1/1). In general, respondents related their answers to their perception of a lack of positive results. In Madre de Dios, where Indigenous Peoples are very much "equal players" in the forum, both interviewees suggested that one Indigenous group dominated over others. This is related to the history of inter-ethnic Indigenous politics in the area and the different ethnic composition of the Indigenous organizations that take turns holding the presidency of the MSF; in addition, one group dominated the executive committee of the organization co-managing the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve. In Mato Grosso, the respondent perceived the MSF as a space for discussion and not one that would lead to a concrete outcome representing the perspectives of all participants.

Interviewees were then asked, *Can you think of a better solution for the problem the MSF sought to address*? Most responded by commenting on how they believed MSFs could be improved, such as holding more frequent meetings, involving more actors, monitoring the MSF's results, and increasing funds for MSF activities. In West Java, for example, some participants suggested involving the whole community and finding context-appropriate ways to foster collective work and enforce agreements. Those that mentioned alternatives included holding separate consultations for
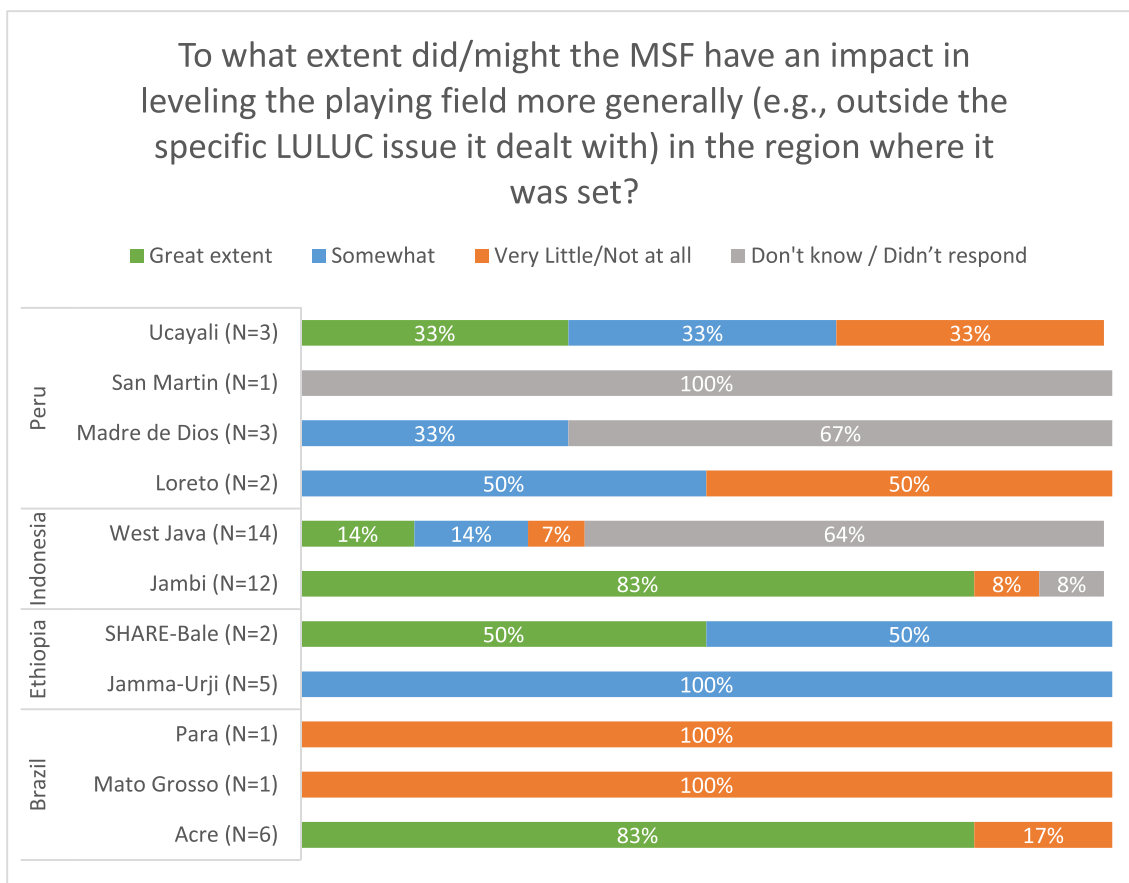
Fig. 3. IPLC opinions on the MSF's impacts on power beyond the forum (by forum).

IPLCs (Mato Grosso), community-led conservation activities (Jambi), and the creation of an Indigenous Nation (Madre de Dios).[6] Other interviewees noted the power of social mobilization. In Acre an interviewee mentioned that '[social] movements are more important [than MSFs]: they make things happen.'

5. Results: How do participants perceive voice and potential in MSFs more generally?

The results below are based on Q-methodology interviews that were implemented with MSF participants[7] and organizers (three of which were IPLCs, all in Madre de Dios[8]). This section compares IPLC and non-IPLC participants' responses regarding the potential of MSFs to provide voice, empowerment and opportunity for change. Although the questions refer to the potential and limitations of MSFs in general, the results also reflect insights into their specific forums. We briefly compare results between IPLCs and other forum participants (using simple averages but also noting averages by forum[9]),

mention notable group differences between types of participants, and summarize key differences by forum, with special emphasis on IPLC responses (see the Annexes for detailed results tables).

5.1. Participants feel like equals

Respondents were asked to consider the statement *In MSFs, all participants feel like equals with a real say in their futures.* Of the IPLCs interviewed, 61% agreed, which is only slightly lower than the average of all the other interviewees (64%) (Fig. 5). Overall, donors, academics, and NGO representatives were on average more positive than government, IPLC and private sector participants (Annex 1.1). When the results are averaged by forum, the IPLC average drops almost 10 points (52%) while the average for other participants rises slightly (68%), revealing a 16% difference between the two (Annex 1.2).[10]

Notably, IPLCs in Pará and Ucayali were the least optimistic (none agreed), while those in Acre and San Martín were the most optimistic (100% agreed). Only half of the respondents in Jambi agreed with this statement, somewhat surprisingly given their otherwise apparently positive experiences. In Madre de Dios, the three IPLC organizers were not among the interviewees who agreed that participants feel like equals (Annex 1.2).

5.2. Empowering marginalized groups

Respondents were asked to consider if *MSFs can empower IPLCs and/or previously marginalized groups (by e.g., gender, race, caste)* – 65% of IPLCs agreed compared to 74% of non-IPLC participants

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[6] The first Arakmbut Nation government was elected in early 2021.

[7] None of the IPLC respondents from Loreto were able to participate in Q-methodology interviews.

[8] Although IPLCs rotate into official positions, in comparison to Peru's protected areas service, they do not have any real power. Hence they are treated here as participants, and their responses are equally mixed.

[9] The results presented in the graphs are simple averages across all IPLCs and all other participants. To see how this would affect the results, we also compared the averages across forums to account for some large differences in numbers of actors between forums. In almost all cases, this made the differences larger between IPLCs and others, rather than smaller. Hence for simplicity of presentation we have focused on the simple averages in the text and figures – the more conservative results – and placed the detailed graphs in the annexes. We also mention important differences in the text.

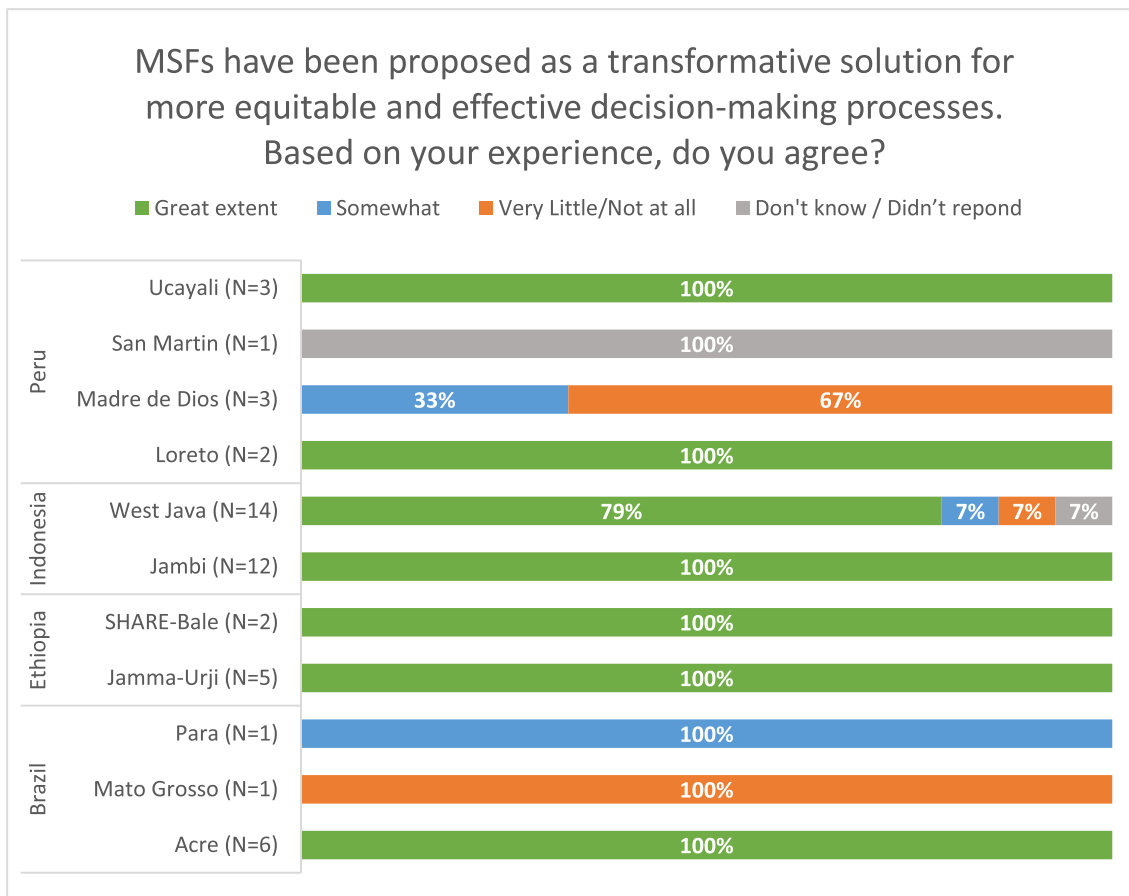[10] There is also a drop in Academics' agreement from 71% to 47%.

Fig. 4. IPLC opinions on MSFs as a transformative solution (by forum).
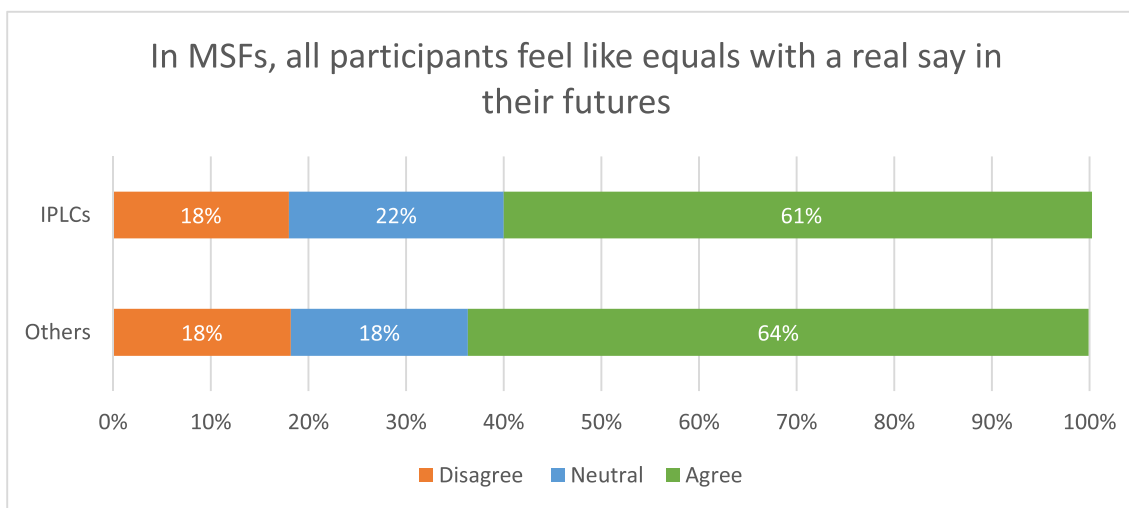

Fig. 5. Comparison of results between actors: participants feel like equals.

(Fig. 6). Averages were particularly high among academia (85%) and NGO (93%) participants (Annex 2.1). Only the private sector had a lower percentage (60%) than IPLCs. Averages by forum do not meaningfully change the results.

Perhaps surprisingly, all IPLC interviewees in Pará and Mato Grosso were positive despite their experiences. In all Brazilian cases, as well as Madre de Dios and Jambi, more than 75% of IPLC respondents agreed (Annex 2.2). The lowest agreement among

IPLCs was in San Martín (33%) and Jamma-Urji (40%), where government actors were the other group with lowest agreement (44% in San Martín and 40% in Jamma-Urji). Notably, San Martín had the highest results in the previous question, which suggests that "feeling like equals" and empowerment were not understood as being equivalent.

The results are also interesting in comparison to the earlier question about MSFs as a transformative solution (Fig. 4), where
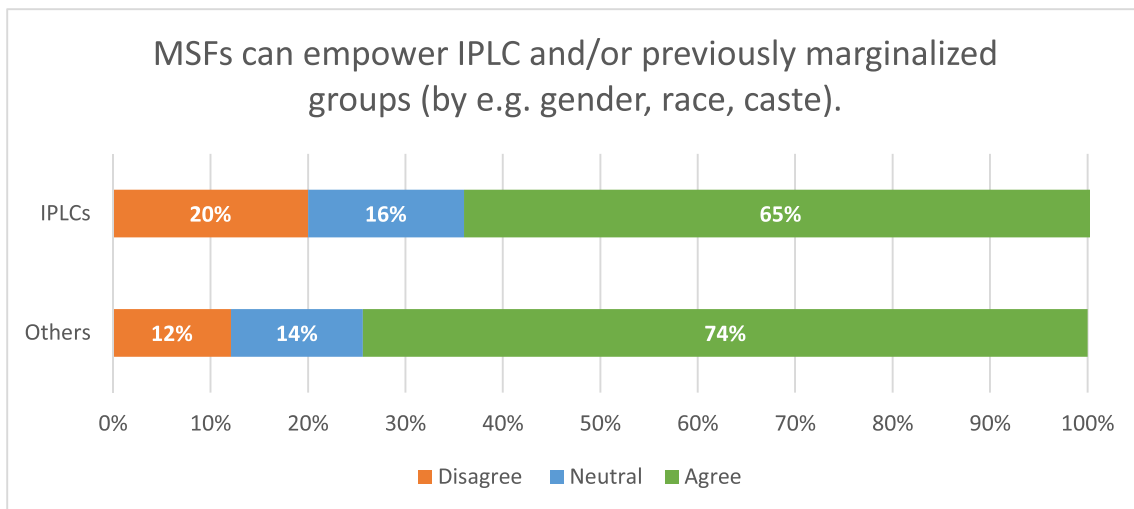
Fig. 6. Comparison of results between actors: Empowering marginalized groups.

there were overwhelmingly positive responses from IPLCs. Here, Pará and Mato Grosso were the only ones with 100% agreement on the potential of MSFs to empower marginalized groups, when for the previous question all respondents in six *other* MSFs had agreed on their potential as a transformative solution. We return to these points in the discussion.

5.3. Powerful actors dominating

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement *No matter how the MSF is designed, powerful actors always find a way to dominate the conversation held during it*. Most respondents disagreed (57%). On average, however, IPLCs were more likely to agree (29%) compared to 21% of respondents from all the other participant groups (Fig. 7); the average by forum increases the difference to more than 15 percentage points (Annex 3.1). Among other actors, only academics (29%, through both averaging methods) are close to the opinion of IPLCs (Annex 3.2).

The single respondent from Pará agreed with this question, as did one of the two from Mato Grosso; a majority agreed in San Martín (2/3). Though no IPLCs agreed in several cases, it is interesting to note that some people agreed even in Jambi and Acre, where IPLCs had positive perspectives on most other questions.

5.4. IPLC ancestral territories

Respondents were asked if they agreed with the statement *MSFs disempower IPLCs by giving others, with fewer rights over their ancestral territories, equal participation in decision-making*. Only 20% of IPLC respondents agreed compared to 15% of the other participants (Fig. 8). Responses from donors, the private sector, and government, overall, are similar to IPLCs (Annex 4.1). Once again, the difference between these respondent groups increases substantially, to 15%, when the average is calculated across the forums: agreement from IPLCs rises to 30%, and the level of agreement is only similar among private sector actors (Annex 4.2).

These results are strongly site-specific, reflecting local context regarding land rights. The concern was greatest from IPLCs in Pará (1/1) and San Martín (3/3), followed by Ucayali (1/2) (Annex 4.2). In Pará, for example, some interviewees specifically reported that the process supported by the MSF usurped Indigenous and traditional lands (Londres et al., 2021). In San Martín, there are conflicts over Indigenous territories with migrant farmers;

furthermore, the MSF had been organized to support a protected area, with an economically successful REDD+ project co-managed by an international NGO and Peru's national protected areas service, which is adjacent to or overlapping some of the Indigenous communities in the area. Conversely, none of the six IPLC participants in Madre de Dios agreed with the statement, as the MSF, as noted previously, was organized to support the co-management of a protected area by an Indigenous organization with Peru's protected areas service, and the MSF's presidency was held by a local Indigenous organization (Palacios Llaque & Sarmiento Barletti, 2021).

5.5. Opportunities to link with allies

Respondents were asked if they agreed with the statement *MSFs create opportunities for the less powerful to link with potential allies*. There is a substantial difference between IPLCs and the other actors – the largest of all the questions so far. IPLCs are by far the least optimistic of all the groups, with only 51% in agreement and the highest percent in disagreement (22%). This compares to 71% in agreement and only 12% in disagreement among other actors (Fig. 9). The differences decrease slightly when the averages are taken by forum but there is still a 15% gap between IPLCs' agreement and everyone's else; the smallest gap between IPLCs and any other actor group is 10% (Annex 5.1, 5.2).

Among the case study sites, less than half of IPLCs agree in Jamma-Urji (1/5), San Martín (1/3) and West Java (6/14) (Annex 5.2). Only in West Java did almost all other actor groups (government, NGO, and donor) also give consistently low ratings – even more critical than IPLCs. Interestingly, in the most problematic sites for IPLC participation (Mato Grosso and Pará), all IPLC respondents agreed on this point, suggesting that even in these challenging cases they either found allies or saw the potential in doing so. The highest level of agreement was in Acre (3/4) and Madre de Dios (4/6); both MSFs were organized in a context of multi-stakeholder cooperation and provided mechanisms for more equitable participation of IPLCs. In Acre this included capacity development on technical issues and parallel coordination processes for IPLCs alone; in Madre de Dios, the MSF was organized around issues where IPLCs had formal decision-making responsibilities in a co-management partnership with a government agency.
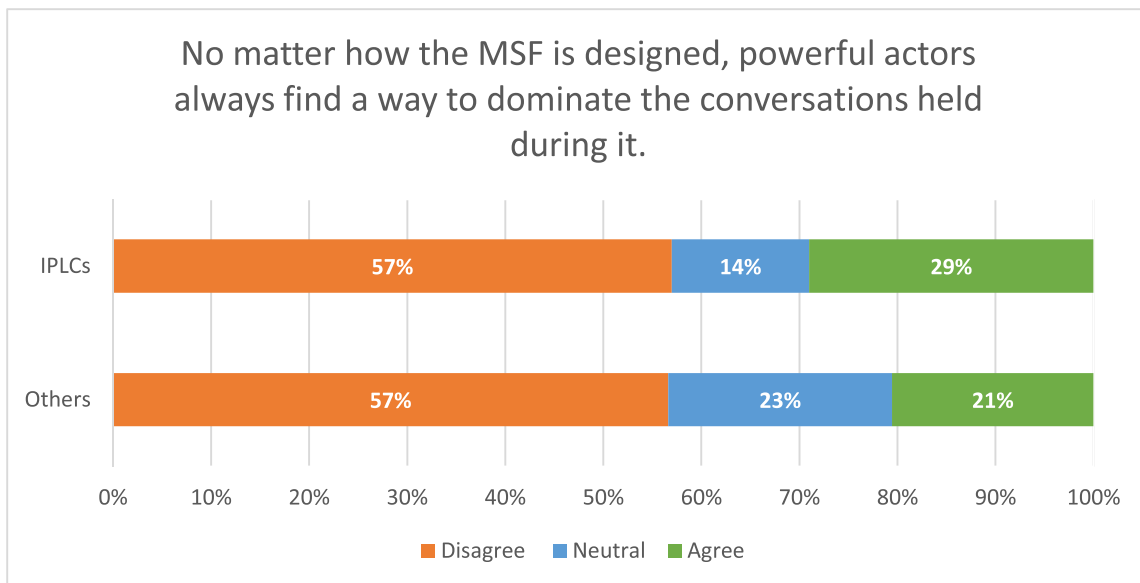
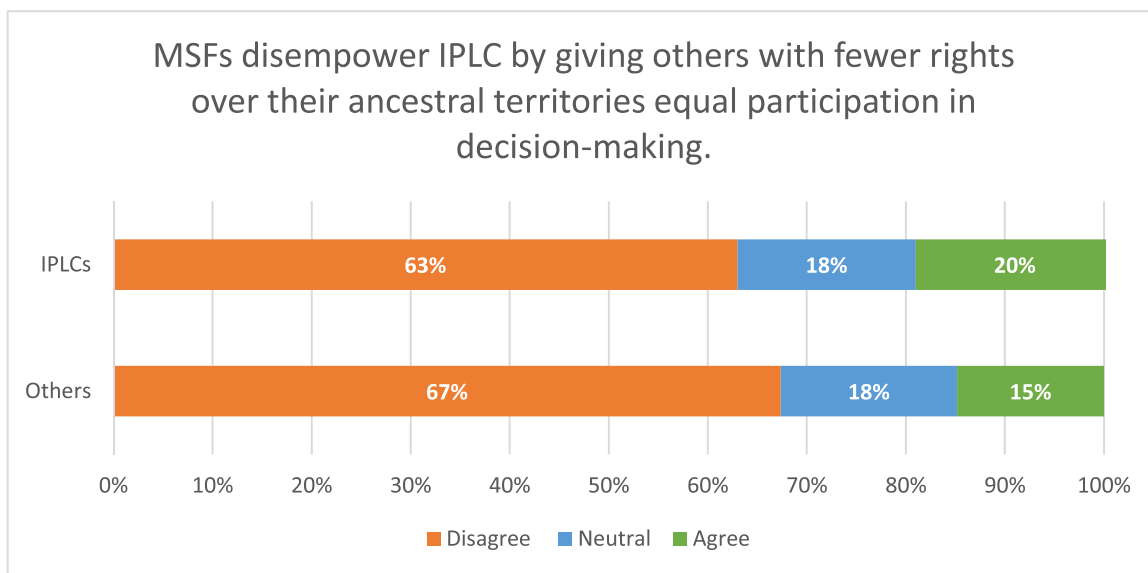**Fig. 7.** Comparison of results between actors: Powerful actors dominating.

Fig. 8. Comparison of results between actors: IPLC ancestral territories.

5.6. Social action as a better option

Respondents were asked if they agreed that *IPLCs would be better off fighting for their interests through social action (collective action, their grassroots organizations) rather than through MSFs*. Again, there were large differences between IPLCs and other actors. Whereas only 15% of other participants agreed, over twice that many IPLCs (33%) did; more than half (54%) of other actors disagreed compared to 43% of IPLCs (Fig. 10). Actors from NGOs (21% in agreement) are the closest to IPLCs (Annex 6.1). When considering averages by forum, the difference between respondents agreeing climbs to 28%, as 36% of IPLCs agreed and only 8% of other actors agreed (Annex 6.2).

Agreement from IPLCs represents more than half of respondents in Madre de Dios (83%) and Jamma-Urji (60%), and half in SHARE-Bale, Acre and Mato Grosso (Annex 6.2). That Madre de Dios interviewees were so positive about the possibilities of MSFs in the pre-

vious statements yet also in favor of social action is based in a history of an organized Indigenous movement in the jurisdiction, which has achieved its main victories in terms of rights recognition – including their central role in the MSF studied and the protected area it supports – through social action (Murtagh, 2019). Madre de Dios and Loreto are examples of how participation in MSFs is only one of a series of different strategies in IPLC political representation (Rodriguez & Sarmiento Barletti, 2021).

6. Discussion

Despite some large gaps between IPLCs and other participants, the results suggest that many IPLCs participating in MSFs are reasonably optimistic about their potential, whether or not they are participating in forums they consider problematic or inadequate. Given what we know about the forums from the broader analysis,
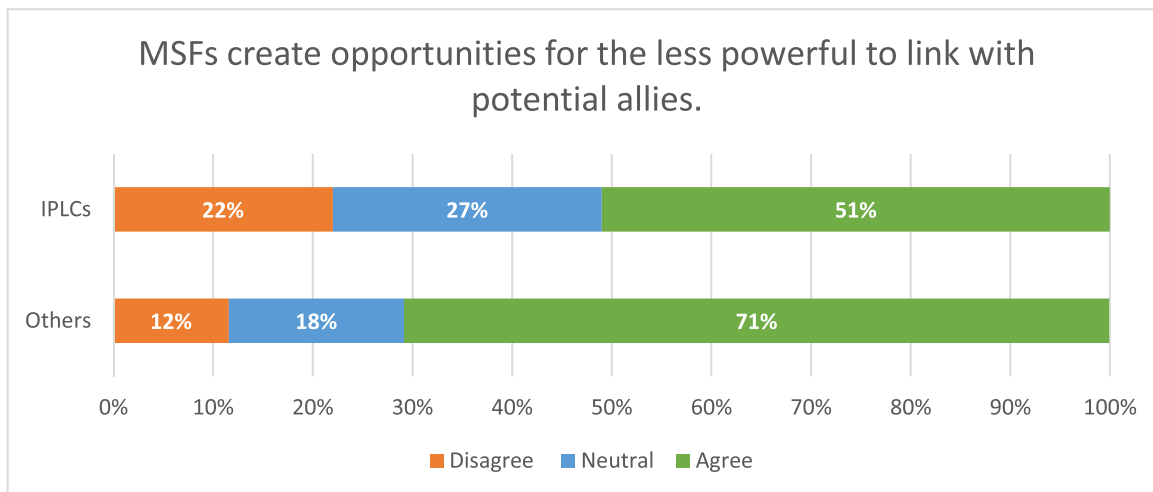
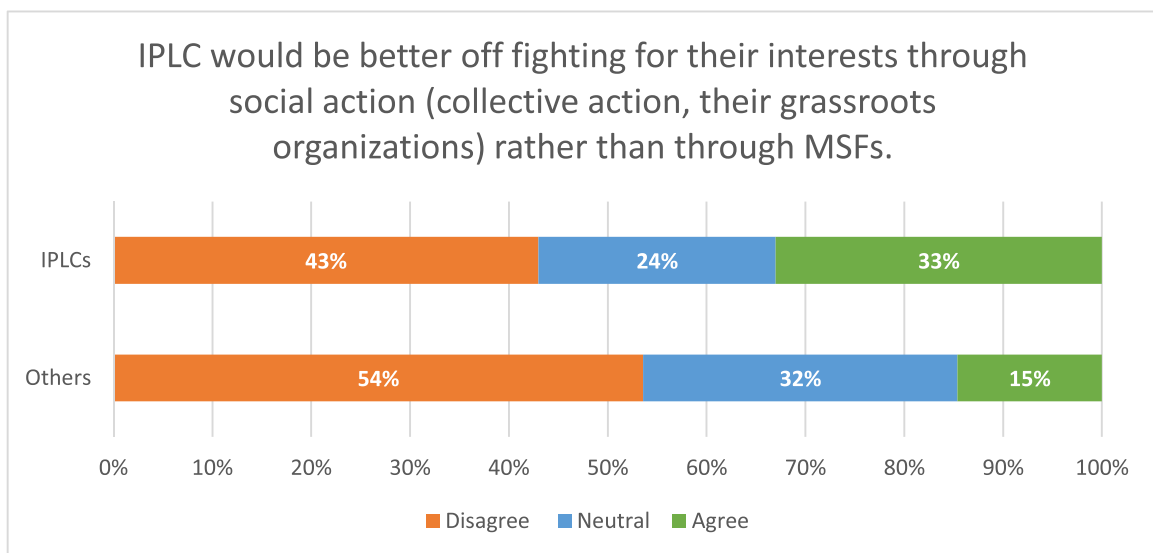**Fig. 9.** Comparison of results between actors: Opportunities to link with allies.

Fig. 10. Comparison of results between actors: Social action as a better option.

these results were somewhat surprising. However, it is important to remember that these interviews took place with IPLCs participating in MSFs, not those who were never invited or who chose not to attend,[11] hence this sample is biased toward those favoring participation.

Additionally, there are several warning signs and lessons to consider, given the growing interest in expanding participation to IPLCs. First, there are mixed results and critical perspectives across most of the forums, which suggest considerable room for improvement. Second, despite overall optimism, IPLCs are substantially more skeptical than other actors about the potential of MSFs to assure voice, empower IPLCs, prevent powerful actors from domi-

nating and avoid placing ancestral land rights at risk. Third, the responses about allies and collective action as an alternative provide significant insight into issues of voice, accountability and countervailing power, based on the literature. This discussion explores these points in turn and closes with a reflection on lessons for invited spaces.

6.1. Addressing inequality: What makes for a "good" forum?

Two questions focused on whether the MSFs addressed power differences and whether they had an impact on the playing field beyond the forum. In most forums, responses were often qualified ("somewhat") and/or varied among the people interviewed. In every forum (where the question was answered) except one, at least one person stated that that nothing or too little was done to address inequality in the forum (Fig. 2).

Additionally, at least one person in 7 MSFs stated the forum had very little or no impact on levelling the wider playing field (Fig. 3). Results have also shown that two forums stand out as exceptionally positive (Acre and Jambi) and two as particularly problematic (Mato Grosso and Pará). Considering the responses presented here,

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[11] Although we have data from a set (33) of non-participant IPLCs, their comments regarding non-participation most often related to not being invited and/or being unaware of the forum. Only six of them (18%) referred to "mistrust" or "not being heard" when asked what affects a stakeholder's ability or desire to participate. Given the difficulties of locating an adequate pool of non-participants in general, and non-participant IPLCs specifically, this should certainly not be considered definitive. For example, San Martín's organizers noted during a results dissemination workshop that the IPLCs located in the vicinity of the protected area that their MSF supported mistrusted their work; they attributed this to their own ineffective communication.

we can synthesize the main factors that promote equity from the perspective of IPLCs. The MSFs in Jambi and Acre were very different, but both included important measures to address inequalities and ensure participation. Jambi's MSF was aimed at protecting a community forest and centered on knowledge sharing and capacity development. It was based on the "bottom-up" adaptive collaborative management (ACM) method (Colfer, 2005) for which building trust among participants was an important part of the process. Since Jambi's MSF closure over a decade ago, progress has continued, with later projects supporting the securing of community land rights (Tamara et al., 2021). As noted in the results, almost all interviewees were positive about the support for women's equality and participation.

Acre's MSF was part of a mandated process to develop a land-use plan for the entire state. Participants said that in the MSF all were equally heard, there was good representation of different groups, and one of the interviewees highlighted an "ethno-zoning" process that was set up separately in response to Indigenous Peoples' concerns. Meetings were sometimes held in rural areas closer to communities rather than always requiring their representatives to travel to Acre's capital (Gonzales Tovar, 2020); this is the only case in the sample that did this. In addition, the forum was developed in a context in which the state government already worked well with IPLCs, was politically committed to inclusion and took significant efforts to support it. Acre's government – part of Brazil's left-wing Workers Party – advocated for the rights of Indigenous and traditional peoples and promoted a forest-based sustainable development, which they called *florestania* – forest citizenship (Gonzales Tovar et al., 2021b).

These two cases suggest the importance of adaptive, long-term approaches, trust-building processes, capacity development, decentralized meetings, and separate meeting spaces. It is important to note that these measures were considered to be effective by IPLC participants.

In contrast, Mato Grosso and Pará MSFs were viewed far more critically. In both forums, organizers were less interested in building trust or addressing IPLC interests or rights. Interestingly, the forum in Mato Grosso was the same government-mandated land-use planning process that was carried out in Acre, nonetheless with opposite results in terms of equity and IPLC satisfaction. This points to the influence of the political context on the results (Gonzales Tovar et al., 2021b). Mato Grosso is a highly unequal region, where the agro-industrial alliance was strong enough to delay approval of the zoning map the MSF had been organized to produce, and where, according to interviews, local activists were threatened. One participant even referred to the process as "a Machiavellian action of the state government" (Gonzales Tovar et al., 2021a). Gonzales Tovar et al. (2021a) reported that "the representative of traditional populations perceived that the main structural issues (e.g., 'invisibilization' of traditional communities) were not being discussed in the ZEE commission because that would expose various ('under the carpet') problems, such as wealth concentration and illegal land grabbing."

The second most critically perceived MSF was in Pará. The Green Municipalities Program focused on the commercial and private landowners who were the primary drivers of deforestation and supported their claims to land and land use practices. The MSF excluded IPLCs and their priorities, thus avoiding discussions on the land demands of Indigenous and traditional communities. Though the program received accolades nationally and internationally and has been lauded as a model for the implementation of jurisdictional approaches (see Brandão et al., 2020), case study research found that "interviewees described this as 'greenwashing', depicting the program as a 'wolf in a green sheepskin'" (Londres et al., 2021). Three grassroots movement representatives – representing Indigenous Peoples, *quilombos* (Afro-Brazilian communities) and family farmers – claimed that they had not been invited to participate and that the forum had not, by any means, represented their interests or considered their agendas (Londres et al., 2021). One interviewee referred to "constant threats of expulsion and murder" against IPLCs (Londres et al., 2021), a suggestion that the condition for safe action (Fox, 2015) is violated. Finally, it is noteworthy that both problematic cases are in Brazil, which, among other things, had the third highest number of assassinations of environmental defenders in the world in 2020 (Global Global Witness, 2020).

6.2. Understanding voice, empowerment and transformation

The Q-methodology statements about feeling like equals, empowerment, powerful actors dominating and giving participation to those who do not have land rights are all related to voice, as is the interview question about the potential of MSFs to transform decision-making. IPLC responses generally reflected optimism about MSFs, but they were not as positive as the other forum participants, with gaps of about 15% across most of the questions (and 9% on empowerment).

What is also notable about these responses is that they are not consistent. For example, San Martín respondents were the most positive (3/3) about "feeling like equals with a real say in their futures", yet the most pessimistic about MSFs as a way to empower IPLCs and other marginalized groups. They were also more likely than IPLCs in almost any other forum to agree that powerful actors always manage to dominate, probably because San Martín was dominated by an international NGO and Peru's protected areas service, which co-managed the protected area and the REDD+ project and its profits. Also, all IPLCs interviewed in six forums believed in the transformative potential of MSFs to foster more effective and equitable decision-making; however, only in two forums (and none of the previously mentioned six) did all interviewees agree with MSFs' potential to empower marginalized groups.

Although some variation may be related to the different formulation of the questions, it is more likely that respondents find meaningful differences between feeling like equals at an MSF, experiencing MSFs as tools for empowerment, and believing in their transformative potential. Being at the table and "feeling like equals" may be an assertion of equality, not a statement about treatment within an MSF. Thus, feeling equal and being empowered by the MSF are not the same thing, just as empowerment and seeing the potential for "transformation" are not the same thing. Even in Jambi and Acre, where, overall, respondents were very positive about equality, some people agreed that powerful actors "always dominate". These results also suggest there may not only be mixed results but also contradictory results (see Fox, 2020), as well as contradictory feelings about the potential of MSFs to bring about transformative change. Finally, it reminds us that, as with other groups, individuals who are Indigenous can have very different experiences and opinions, which are commonly homogenised in discussions regarding IPLC participation.

6.3. Allies, collective action and countervailing power

We return now to the central questions raised in the introductory sections of this article: how can MSFs be accountable to the needs and interests of IPLCs and women in these groups? What kind of collective action or counterpower is needed?

The most concerning results are those related to the two statements associated with MSFs as a place to connect with potential allies, and with collective action as an alternative to MSFs. These two questions represented the largest differences between IPLC responses and all other participants. With regard to finding allies, the gap was 15 to 20 percentage points depending on the method,

with only 51% of IPLCs across sites agreeing. On the one hand, all three interviewees from Pará and Mato Grosso agreed, despite their difficult forums. On the other hand, there was some disagreement from every other forum, even Acre and Jambi, with most coming from the two sites in Ethiopia, one in Peru and one in Indonesia (0–43%). The difference between IPLC responses and others in the same forums also suggests that although these other participants see themselves or others at the forum as IPLC allies, IPLCs themselves are less convinced. IPLCs with less access to social or political networks are more likely to see MSFs as a place to build alliances, whereas other IPLCs find their allies elsewhere.

Perhaps the most striking result of this study pertains to the future of MSFs as a strategy for change and whether collective action outside the forum may be a better option. IPLCs again are far more likely to agree with the latter than the other actor groups: one third think social action is a better option, and less than half (43%) disagree with the statement. How IPLCs and other actors responded to this question was influenced by their view of "social action" – whether it is seen as a "last resort", "desperate" or disruptive, or whether it is a smart way of organizing to improve negotiating power through collective agency. The most positive agreement on collective action (83%) is in Madre de Dios, the region in our sample that likely has the strongest Indigenous movements (Murtagh, 2019). In fact, the movement had been central to the achievement of the co-management regime that was supported by the MSF, and the MSF itself was presided by an Indigenous organization. Although IPLC participants' assessment of the MSF leans critical, the Q statements are more positive. Madre de Dios is the clearest example of the use of an MSF as part of a longer-term strategy of representation. Indigenous organizations work with the government when it serves them, and protest when it does not. The MSF is thus part of their accountability strategy, but it is not its only element (Palacios Llaque & Sarmiento Barletti, 2021).

The findings suggest important lessons for MSFs. As explained previously, for IPLCs and women, *finding allies* – based on the need for interlocutors to help bridge unequal power relations (Fox, 2015) – is an essential building block for accountability, as is *collective action*. If MSFs are based on an idealized discourse about coming together to find common ground, how is it that many IPLCs do not see them as a place to find allies and consider collective action *outside* the forum as a better option? And what should MSFs do differently?

6.4. Lessons for invited spaces

MSFs are based on ideas (or ideals) of pluralism, yet participatory platforms are not necessarily part of representative democratic processes, or the normal ways in which accountability works in a democracy. Interviews with MSF organizers in this sample found that at least one interviewee in all but one forum recognized power inequalities between their participants as obstacles to their MSFs' work, yet organizers generally failed to consider specific measures to address them (Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2021).[12] Rather, proponents tend to idealize their forums as imagined spaces for collaboration, or even collective action.

Despite more than 40 years of research on participation, the cases analyzed here suggest that lessons about invited spaces have not been learned. Few of the MSFs studied undertake specific measures to ensure IPLC voice or empowerment. Clearly, simply bringing people to the table is not the collective action for counter power that IPLC or other marginalized groups need.

If IPLCs are to remain at the table – and more importantly if we want to bring about real change – the results of this study suggest that much more is still needed to support accountability. What would that look like? More strategic thinking about MSFs is needed, with more attention to what it means for marginalized groups to have a place at the table. Why are they being invited to the table exactly? How does their participation in an MSF fit into a well-developed theory of change that includes levelling the playing field for their participation? How can accountability structures be built into the MSFs, and specifically what is needed for these processes to be accountable to the needs and interests of IPLCs?

Jambi and Acre suggest some possible ways forward. In Jambi, the forum was launched from an action research approach strategically designed to support bottom-up decisions and capacities, with high priority placed on trust building. It is notable that in Jambi there was a *higher number* of IPLCs, and there were targeted strategies for empowering IPLC women. In most of the forums studied, IPLCs and IPLC women especially were a small portion of the people at the table. And although building strong allies could conceivably help resolve limited direct representation, more thought needs to be put into assuring that IPLCs see alliance building as an option and into facilitating such alliances.

In Acre the forum was a part of a broad political strategy. Representation was important, as the people at the table were key social movement representatives. Acre also took the forums out to the field where they could engage more people directly in remote areas. In a sense, Acre supported the development of a *separate space for collective action* among IPLC representatives and their constituents, just as Jambi created that separate space for women.

In sum, MSF organizers who are committed to equity, voice and empowerment of marginalized groups in and beyond their forums need to *create the conditions to foster counter power*. IPLCs and women need to have their own spaces to learn, debate and organize in relation to the MSF. There needs to be more than just one or two representatives from underrepresented groups – enough to form a constituency – and they should be embedded in structures of representation of those groups. They also need the conditions to build strategic alliances with other forum members. MSF organizers should engage strategically with these groups and discuss how to facilitate such accountability mechanisms, rather than sweeping differences under the rug. And they should approach this facilitation with an openness to listen, reflect, learn and adapt over time (see Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2020b; Evans et al., 2021 for tools).

7. Conclusions

In general, the results of this study – the perceptions of IPLCs about MSFs – are more positive than expected, given our broader understanding of MSFs. This suggests that IPLCs are (mostly) getting something out of multi-stakeholder forums; for those who choose to participate, participating is apparently better than not participating.

Nevertheless, the results also suggest that, despite ample research and experience, problems persist regarding representation, voice and influence of marginalized groups in these invited spaces. This may be why more than half of IPLCs participating in MSFs hold out for the idea that something besides the forum – such as their own collective organizations – may be a better option.

But MSF organizers can take specific, concrete actions: assuring a critical mass of representatives of marginalized groups; fostering spaces for self-organizing as well as alliance building with other MSF participants; and working openly and strategically with the

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[12] It is noteworthy that in cases like Madre de Dios, where indigenous peoples had control over the MSF, there were exclusions of other historically underrepresented actors, such as the local communities of wildcat gold miners that were important to the future sustainability of the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve.

representatives of IPLCs to support the construction of counter power. If we want to capture the potential of these platforms, building on what appears to be common and substantial optimism, purposive action should be taken to foster the conquering of invited spaces.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Anne M. Larson: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti:** Conceptualization, Methodology. **Nicole Heise Vigil:** Formal analysis, Data curation, Visualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.105907.

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