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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Challenging state authority and hierarchical power: A case study of the engagement of Peru's Amazonian Indigenous Peoples' organizations in the governance of REDD+

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## Abstract

The reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD+) mechanism is a climate change mitigation policy tool widely used in tropical forested countries that faces institutional and governance challenges in its implementation. Peru provides a particularly rich case study to analyze the agency of Amazonian Indigenous Peoples' organizations (IPOs) in the development of a national REDD+ policy. We examine the multi-scalar interaction between the Peruvian State and IPOs in the governance of REDD+, identifying the role of Amazonian Indigenous groups in this process. Drawing on socio-ecological governance and political economy approaches, we analyze data collected through interviews and participant observation. The article provides a case study of how IPOs work within the evolving governance system of REDD+ in Peru—both in responding to opportunities and in shaping the emergent system. Furthermore, it reveals that IPOs' rights and equity frame—deployed through several multi-scalar strategies—has finally found a place in Peru's REDD+ governance. This has resulted in a more pluralistic mode of coordination between the State and IPOs and in the increase of the socio-political empowerment of Indigenous Peoples. Our analysis suggests that Peru's REDD+ policies could progress toward more equitable outcomes through a true operationalization of cohesiveness and inclusiveness that encourages a meaningful relationship building between the state and Indigenous Peoples.

## KEYWORDS

Amazon, climate mitigation, governance, Indigenous Peoples, multi-scalar strategies, REDD+

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Peru's forest represents the fourth largest area of tropical forest in the world. Amazonian Indigenous Peoples have occupied it for millennia and now represent 1.34% of Peru's total population, having rights over 11.8 million hectares (17% of Peru's tropical forest). Notwithstanding its relevance for people and climate, the tropical forest area in Peru continues to decline (FAO, 2017), intensifying rural poverty and impacting climate conditions (Finer et al., 2008). Hence, taking

action to ensure the permanence of the remaining natural forest in Peru is critical for tackling both rural poverty and climate change mitigation. Over the last decades, Peru's government has put in place a variety of forest governance instruments (Zimmerer, 2011). Since 2008, the global REDD+ mechanism (acronym for reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation, plus the conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks) has become a relevant mechanism in Peru's forest governance.

REDD+ is an economic type of forest conservation incentive—developed at the core of the United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—that targets forest-rich countries in the Global South. It is an example of a payment for ecosystem services (PES) scheme, a policy tool that has been increasingly used since the 1990s. REDD+ entails a transnational transaction between producers (e.g., Global South countries, communities) and buyers (e.g., State, private actors) of forest ecosystem services (Gallemore et al., 2015), which take shape through multilateral, bilateral or private agreements. REDD+ is considered a multi-level environmental governance project (Korhonen Kurki et al., 2017; Larson et al., 2018) involving a plurality of actors across scales, including among others governments, companies, individuals, communities, and NGOs. These actors represent and bring on board competing ideologies and values that span from more market-oriented approaches to the “buen vivir.” Furthermore, the operationalization of REDD+ requires a set of institutional changes and governance adjustments to enable the production, monitoring and transaction of the ecosystem services, namely carbon sequestration (Mbatu, 2016).

Both scholars and practitioners have emphasized the limits of REDD+ and risks that it could entail for Indigenous Peoples and local communities, for example, the emergence of new forms of exercising power/control over both the biophysics (forest) and the means of production of forest carbon (Mahanty et al., 2012), or by enhancing new forms of enclosure and pressures over the forest (Larson, 2011) and over Indigenous Peoples whose livelihood depends on access to the forest (see Appendix S3 section I). As for that, and as result of the claims and pressure exerted by Indigenous Peoples' Organizations (IPOs), UNFCCC approved a set of equity-related measures, known as REDD+ social safeguards in 2010 with the aim of preventing negative effects on local communities (McDermott et al., 2013).

In this research we verified that existing structural conditions and local actors play a key role in shaping the direction of how REDD+ is implemented and of the policies that accompany this implementation, which range from technical approaches to more socio- or community-centered ones (Brockhaus et al., 2014; Korhonen Kurki et al., 2017). Additionally, the compliance of safeguards also increases the pressure of defining “do no harm” preventive measures. As such, REDD+ may be understood as a political and social process embedded in larger socio-political and power relations (Mbatu, 2016). On the one hand, REDD+ policies foster new ways of networked relations and also create new spaces to rethink socio-nature interactions (Latta, 2013). On the other hand, there is evidence of the primacy of the procedural dimension in the application of equity measures—such as ensuring representation and participation—to the detriment of more politically contested aspects such as tenure (Myers et al., 2018). Addressing local people's needs in terms of land rights allocation continues to be problematic (Sunderlin et al., 2018). While some studies have investigated Indigenous Peoples' mobilization across scales in the climate negotiations (Claeys & Delgado Pugley, 2017; Lindroth & Sinevaara-Niskanen, 2013; Wallbott, 2014), little attention has been paid in the literature to the actual engagement, participation and role of Indigenous Peoples' organizations in the politics and policy-making

underlying the tailoring of REDD+ to different national contexts (see Aguilar-Støen, 2015 on Colombia and Costa Rica; Airey & Krause, 2017 on Guyana; Wallbott & Florian-rivero, 2018 on Costa Rica). Existing studies have revealed the absence of sufficient and appropriate participatory tools (Guyana), different levels and types of Indigenous engagement (Costa Rica, Colombia), and the risks associated to the failure of Indigenous engagement into the REDD+ agenda. This article aims to critically examine the engagement of Indigenous Peoples in the design and tailoring of REDD+ at the national scale. Peru is one of the countries that decided to implement the REDD+ agenda through a national based scheme that entailed several policy reforms and institutional adjustments at the central State level. This paper elucidates the role of Indigenous Peoples in defining and negotiating with the State the inclusion of a more profound equity-oriented understanding of REDD+ development. As such, this paper informs today's academic debates on the nature of the role of Indigenous Peoples in the conservation cum development agenda, bringing new insights into their strategies, narratives, and socio-political struggles.

While extended research on Peru's REDD+ covers the forest governance system (Kowler et al., 2016; Robiglio et al., 2014), only a few studies engage with the involvement of Indigenous Peoples and their organizations (Dupuits & Cronkleton, 2020; White, 2014). This paper examines, for the period 2008–2019, the multi-scalar socio-political dynamics and negotiations between the State and Indigenous Peoples' Organizations (IPOs) underlying the tailoring of REDD+ institutional framework. More specifically, this paper enriches REDD+ research on Peru by providing a more integrated understanding of the socio-political processes, struggles and governance challenges revolving around the State interplay with the national-wide Amazonian IPOs, namely AIDSEP (Inter-ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon), CONAP (Confederation of Amazonian Nationalities of Peru) and ONAMIAP (National Organization of Andean and Amazonian Indigenous Women). We highlight the dynamic character of Peruvian IPOs in the governance of REDD+ matters, especially when compared to their counterparts in other countries of the world; this is probably due to the various stakes arising from the large extension of tropical forests in the Peru—roughly 97% of the national territory.

For theoretical leverage, section two mobilizes the analytical lenses of three fields of study, namely socio-ecological governance, cultural political economy (CPE), and politics of scale. Together, these offer venues to re-politicize our understanding of economic incentives for nature conservation. Section 3 introduces the context in which REDD+ emerged in Peru and the empirical material collected in 2018 and 2019. Section 4 presents an analysis of the socio-political processes and struggles in the interplay between the State and national-wide Amazonian IPOs forging the governance of REDD+. Finally, the discussion and conclusion sections provide reflections on the role of IPOs in fostering more pluralistic forms of governance during the REDD+ design. We conclude that national-wide Amazonian IPOs have challenged the State's authority and the hierarchical power of the Peruvian REDD+ governance system by pursuing very clear

multi-scalar strategies—including political participation, confrontation, and multi-scalar alliances—infusing equity measures into the REDD+ policy design.

## 2 | ANALYTICAL LENS TO EXAMINE THE SOCIO-POLITICAL INTERACTION IN THE GOVERNANCE OF REDD+

The governance of REDD+ is an example of how the confluence of multiple actors and institutions across scales challenges the traditional top-down forest agenda in the tropical forested countries. In this context, Indigenous Peoples are recognized as critical actors for multiple reasons, among them the evidence of their effectiveness in controlling deforestation (Nelson & Chomitz, 2011). Literature on Indigenous governance has incorporated key concepts related to Indigenous self-determination, nationhood, and inherent rights (von der Porten et al., 2015). In this article, our perspective is strongly grounded in Amazonian experiences, with concepts relating to Indigenous rights.

To examine the socio-political relations between the State and Indigenous Peoples in the REDD+ development, we develop an understanding of governance that not only incorporates institutional design but also aspects of culture, power, agency, and scale. Furthermore, we bring CPE to strengthen our analysis on the connections between global discourses and local practices and politics of scale for unfolding indigenous agency.

### 2.1 | Conceptualizing governance and its dimensions

Some understandings of governance tend to neglect the societal dimension of nature (Nieto-Romero et al., 2019), which concerns power relations over natural resources (including their symbolic meanings) and between social groups concerned by these resources, as well as the connections of these relations with globalized dynamics (Hecht, 2014). Governance is indeed embedded in politics and takes shape through socio-political processes, including issues of participation, access and distribution of land, resources, and benefits that result of their use, among other institutional governance arrangements and power dynamics (Orach & Schlüter, 2016). These are permeated by political struggles resulting from conflicting ontologies and contradictory socio-institutional processes. Furthermore, Parra et al. (2019)'s understanding of governance calls for a more profound and socio-spatially situated analysis, highlighting that “(socio-ecological) governance systems have a history and geography, they are spatially situated, culturally molded, and embedded in social structures fragmented along various conflict lines” (p. 150). This understanding provides an integrative view of the multiple dimensions, interactions and outcomes for the analysis of the socio-political interactions in the governance of REDD+, allowing a better comprehension of the role of Indigenous Peoples in this process. Relevant governance dimensions

include, among others, culture, agency, discourses, institutional and governance arrangements, and power dynamics.

Culture acknowledges the existence of socio-cultural diversity, plurality in nature-culture relations, of different visions and value systems, and its dynamic (Parra & Moulaert, 2011). Agency, on the other hand, entails people's rationalities, motivations, knowledge and collective strategies (Whaley, 2018). For this article, Indigenous identity is understood as a result of political and cultural dynamics in a specific historical juncture (Li, 2000). Concerning Indigenous agency in the conservation agenda, we look at their struggles against global framings using specific strategies and performing expected roles, for example, using discourses on Indigenous rights (Lindroth, 2014), environmental justice (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014) and “buen vivir” (Pretty, 2011; Sieder & Barrera, 2017); lobbying global and national policy making (Wallbott, 2014), and performing expected roles attributed by United Nations narrative concerning being landholders, stakeholders and environmental stewards (Lindroth, 2014).

Discourses can be considered an example of structural and historical forces (Jessop & Oosterlynck, 2008), and institutional and governance arrangements concern the practice of the discourses that take shape, for instance, through policy development and setting up coordination mechanisms. CPE provides a framework to better understand the socio-political relations taking place in governance processes by conceptualizing the interplay between discourses and practices. Discourses are materialized through mechanisms of variation, selection, retention, and consolidation. This implies that discourses can emerge intentionally or unintentionally, can privilege selective responses, can retain these selective responses through their realization, and finally, can institutionalize them in social relations through certain manifestations and strategies (Jessop & Oosterlynck, 2008, p. 1160). Applying this concept to the case of REDD+, we observed that, recently, discourses on climate change mitigation such as REDD+ have emerged in the field of land use and forest management, being framed to reflect particular angles, values and choices (Sapiains et al., 2021). Ascribed to the so-called reformist lenses in environmental governance (Dryzek, 2013), REDD+ privileges and retains a problem-solving narrative linked to the failure of markets and the weakness of governments and institutions, while emphasizing cost-effective, technical solutions linked to institutional changes. As such, framings on technocratic pragmatism (Dryzek, 2013) linked to carbon-centered REDD+ (e.g., land use change monitoring system, among others) (Turnhout et al., 2017) and democratic pragmatism (Dryzek, 2013) linked to participative and collaborative processes (Hall, 2012) have found in REDD+ a fertile ground from whence to expand. In contrast, more critical voices linked to equity and justice principles still found hard to have a place in the REDD+ practice (Chomba et al., 2016) although the United Nations' social safeguards were approved in 2010. CPE enables a critical view of how multiple and contrasting REDD+ narratives shape ideas, institutions and governance arrangements; allows seeing how tensions and convergences emerge in the process of tailoring REDD+; and brings to light the opportunities and challenges for IPOs' political agenda.



Within this context, a relational understanding of power and power relations comprise an embodied, situated effect of a multiplicity of interactions among humans and between human and non-human elements (Ahlborg & Nightingale, 2018; Allen, 2011). Politics of scale provides a framework to better understand the distribution of power by treating scale within governance systems as political, whereby actors struggle to consolidate or strengthen their own position by pursuing multi-scalar strategies (Hüesker & Moss, 2015). Scale jumping, as an example of multi-scalar strategies, interprets the way in which actors hinder, build and alter scales and levels to serve their interests and political aspirations (Lebel et al., 2005) and to develop and mobilize a plethora of struggles for control and empowerment (Newstead et al., 2005 in Blakey, 2020). We build on previous works that see conservation practice as a site of struggles for accessing and controlling resources (Sundberg, 2006), such as the case of REDD+ (Mbatu, 2016). For Indigenous Peoples, political priorities in REDD+ have concerned guaranteeing meaningful indigenous participation in decision-making instances, ensuring collective tenure and guaranteeing a fair, just distribution of REDD+ benefits.

In sum, the proposed analytical lenses provide the necessary tools to explore the ways in which relations of authority and power are constituted and reshaped; allowing a more robust and nuanced understanding of culture, politics, and scale. A socio-ecological governance lens allows for an understanding of the socio-political relations and outcomes in the REDD+ governance; CPE allows unraveling discourses and its practices; and politics of scale lens allows reflecting on the socio-political process and struggles. The conceptual graph (Figure 1) shows the interactions in the REDD+ governance that are shaped by the interconnected and mutually influenced governance dimensions. For instance, actors' agency is shaped by socio-cultural diversity and different visions and value systems across scales, while power relations are embedded in political economies and nature-culture relationships. It also shows the type of information to be collected and analyzed for each category of analysis (see Appendix S1).

### 3 | CASE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 | The Peruvian Amazon: A socio-ecological history of natural resource exploitation, cultural assimilation, and social discontent

Peru's tropical forest covers 53.9% of the total territory and is among the most mega-diverse areas in the world (See Figure 2). However, Peru's dominant economic rationale of colonizing the Amazon has encouraged decades of measures to incentivize agricultural expansion and resource exploitation—notably through oil, natural gas, and mining—and encouraged outmigration (Lust, 2016), putting Peru among the top 15 countries that suffered the greatest loss of primary forest between 1990 and 2015 (Morales-Hidalgo et al., 2015). The growth of public revenues coming from extractivist investment—which contributed to Peru's successful macroeconomic performance

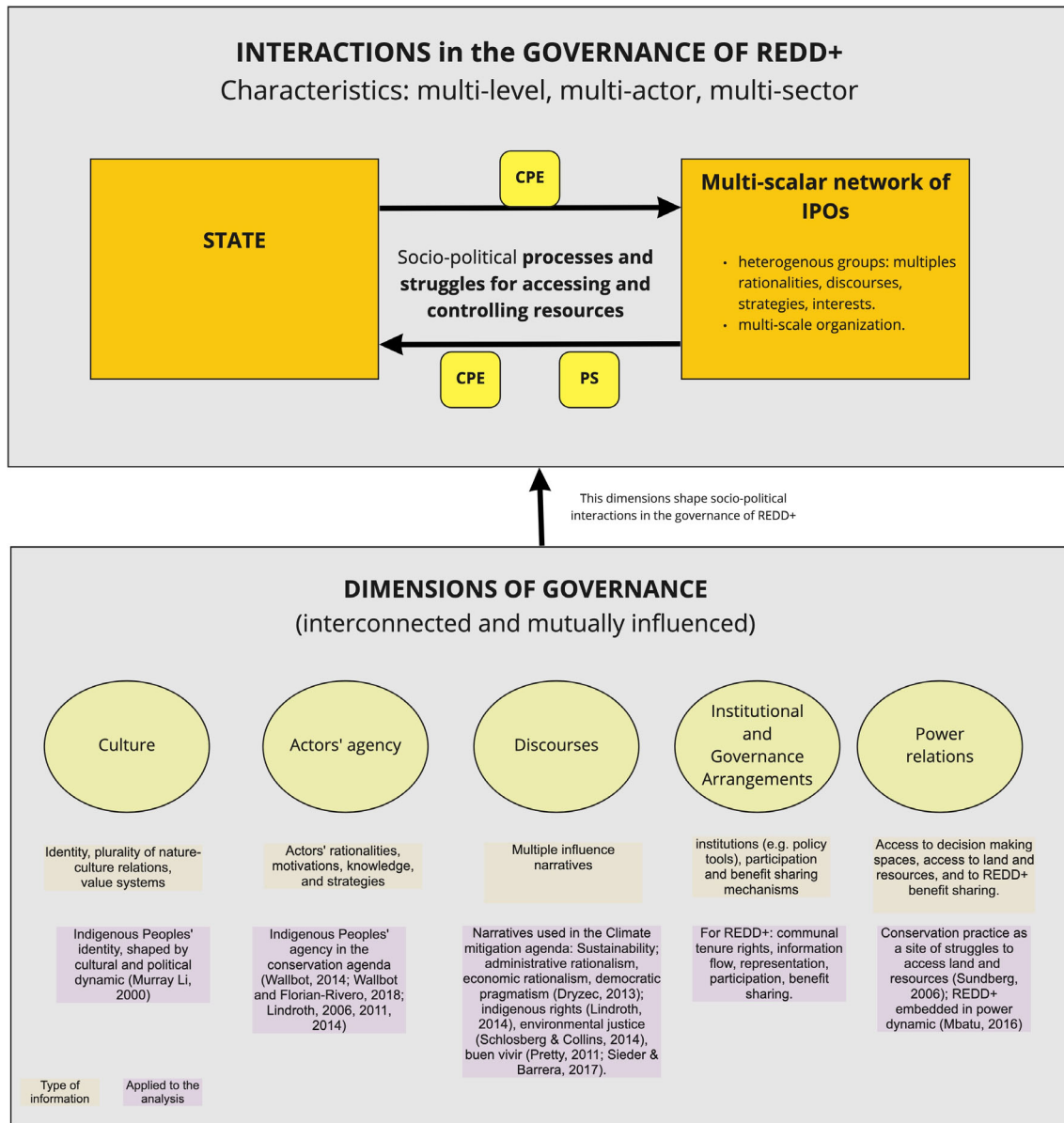
during the last 20 years—has come together with social discontent (Merino, 2015), notably due to its close link with processes of land and resource dispossession (Bebbington et al., 2008) that have led to higher levels of inequality within the country (INEI, 2018).

The Peruvian Amazon is home to 44 Indigenous ethnic groups (INEI, 2018), known as Amazonian Indigenous Peoples, “Indigenous Peoples of the lowlands,” or Amazonian Indians (Maybury-Lewis, 1999). They have coexisted for centuries, with different histories of connections, encounters, internal dynamics, and conflicts. They have a long history of marginalization that started in the colonial period and was aggravated after independence through processes of dispossession of land and resources, and of assimilation by religious missions and incoming migration flows. The religious missions were key to build indigenous leadership that led to the formation of local IPOs in the 1970s, which rapidly scaled up to establish the first national-based Amazonian IPO in 1980, the Inter-ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon (AIDESEP, in Spanish). The goal of these multi-scalar networks of IPOs is to defend their self-preservation against pressure exerted by migration, extractivist industries and the proliferation of infrastructure (Greene, 2007). Although sharing the common goal of protecting the indigenous lands and rights, there is a heterogeneity of interests and strategies within the IPOs and their networks mainly concerning their multiple approaches in their relationship with the State and the market economy. The latter has led to internal divisions and to the creation of new national groups, as is the case of the Confederation of Amazonian Nationalities of Peru (CONAP, in Spanish) born in 1991. The formation of new IPOs has been also driven by thematic agendas. For instance, with the emergence of women's organizations and the attention given to the role of women in the climate and REDD+ agendas, new national women's organizations emerged within the spectrum of IPOs. That is the case of the National Organization of Andean and Amazonian Indigenous Women (ONAMIAP, in Spanish) created in 2009, which represents the women's voices of Amazon and Andean (Appendix S2). In general, the three national-based IPOs have been involved in the national REDD+ design and have brought critical issues to the table, such as the way REDD+ private initiatives have taken place without State's control of related risks to local communities (Che-Piu & Menton, 2013).

#### 3.2 | The set-up of REDD+ in Peru: A socio-political process for building an efficiency-focused REDD+ governance system

In 2008, Peru's new Ministry of Environment (MINAM) committed to preserving 54 million forested hectares by fostering a mix of policy instruments, including REDD+. Since then, under MINAM's leadership as the national entity for coordinating REDD+, Peru has taken part in multiple multilateral REDD+ funding initiatives including: the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) in 2008, the Forest Investment Program (FIP) in 2010, the United Nations' REDD+ program (UN-REDD+) in 2012, and has signed bilateral agreements with major

## Analytical framework for analysing the socio-political processes and struggles in the REDD+ governance, and the role of IPOs in challenging State's power and authority

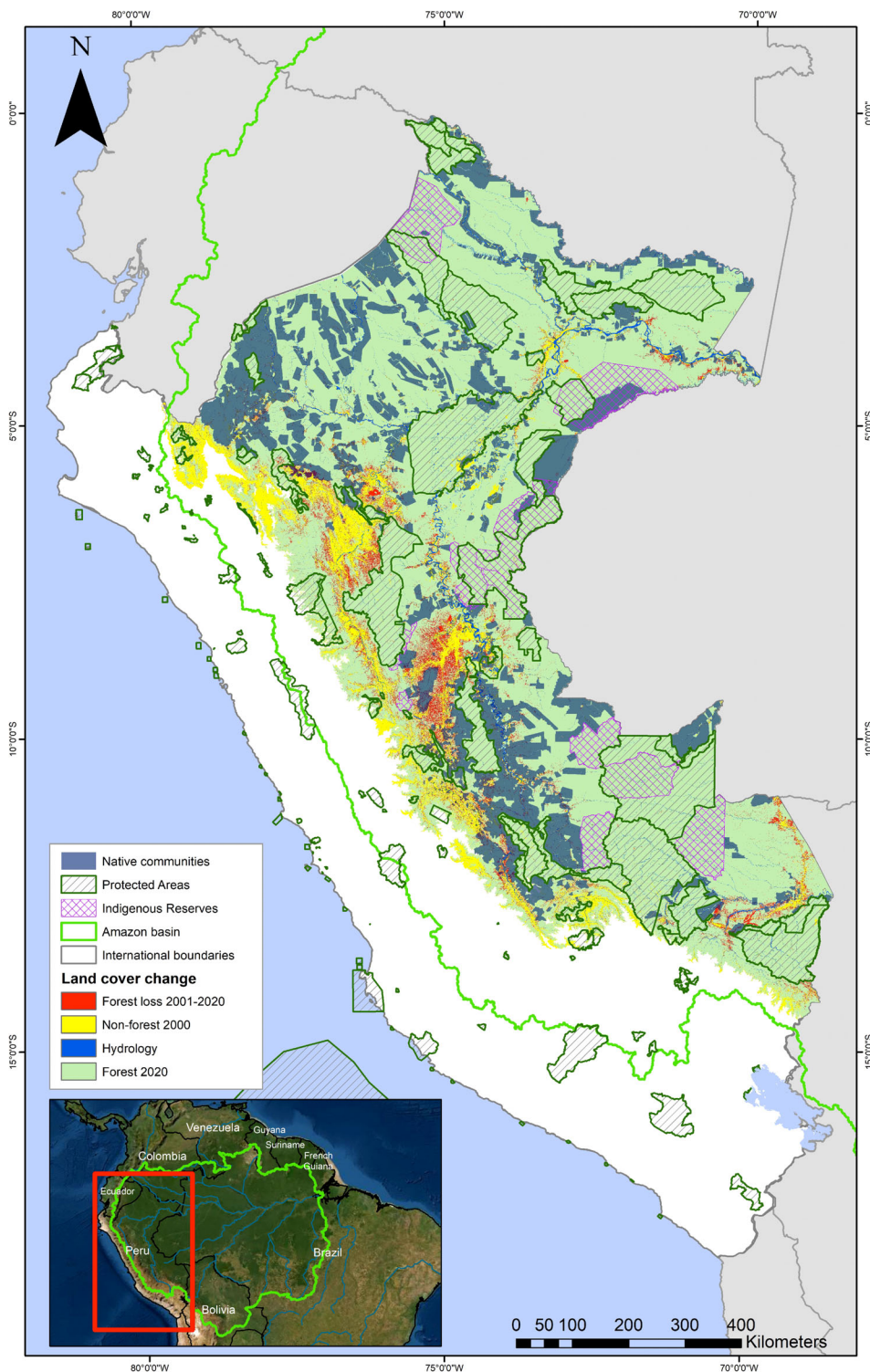


**FIGURE 1** Analytical framework. Source: Own elaboration.

REDD+ donor countries including Germany in 2010 and Norway in 2016 (see Figure 3). By 2019, financial flows in Peru associated to REDD+ were around US\$ 0.52 billion, including both already executed funds and committed funds for 2030 (MINAM, 2019).

The injection of resources provided the means to implement the so-called REDD+ readiness phase—the first of three phases in the process of tailoring REDD+ as defined by United Nations, by which countries may define and implement a set of institutional arrangements in order to run the REDD+ mechanism, meaning being able to produce, count, monitor and exchange the Forest Carbon Unit

(UNFCCC, Article 73 Cancun Agreement, 2010, p. 11). A focus on efficiency privileged rulemaking, knowledge production and the development of a mix of policy tools for land use (see Figure 3). First, the rulemaking implied developing the legal framework for REDD+, which materialized in the 2011 Forest law, the 2015 Forest Regulations, the 2014 Ecosystem services law and regulation and the 2015 REDD+ strategy—known as the National Forest and Climate Change strategy (ENBCC, in Spanish), among other policy documents. Second, knowledge production has privileged setting up the deforestation baseline and reference level, and the development of the forest monitoring



**FIGURE 2** Peru's Amazon basin, showing forest lost from 2001 to 2020 (including territories of native communities, Indigenous reserves and protected areas). Source: Ministry of Environment (MINAM Peru), 2021; Ministry of Culture (MINCUL Peru), 2021a,b; National Service of Protected Areas (SERNANP Peru), 2021. Dataset on Peru's native communities, Indigenous reserves, protected areas and forest loss.

platforms, for example, “Modulo de Monitoreo del Patrimonio Forestal” (MMPF-SNIFFS), and the “Modulo de Monitoreo de Conservacion de Bosques” (MMCB-GEOBOSQUES). Third, the REDD+ strategy emphasized three types of policies as classified by Borner and Vosti (2013). First, disincentives policies: enforcing forestry zoning and planning and monitoring and strengthening the protected area system and law enforcement to control illegal activities. Second, enabling conditions policies: fostering individual and collective tenure rights and land-use

rights allocation, for example, forest concessions, smart agriculture. Third, incentives policies: fostering PES-like initiatives such as REDD+ and the cash-payment program for indigenous communities (MINAM, 2015). While privileging an intervention and investment in forest planning, monitoring and enforcement, less progress was observed in the design of the national Safeguards Information System (SIS). Although the multiple efforts for drafting ideas for the design of the national SIS—for example, regional proposals from the San Martin

and Madre de Dios REDD+ roundtables on social safeguards indicators—, only a road map for the SIS design was agreed upon in 2019 (see Figure 3). As expressed by an Indigenous organization, this is mainly due to its political implications—as it required an alignment among multiple sectors—and the lack of understanding of its functioning.

It seems that the lack of progress on SIS is also due to a political decision ... So much information has been produced on how to move on SIS (assessments, ...) that political will is not the only reason for not progressing. I think there is also a lack of understanding of how a safeguards system may work .... It seems that developing a SIS is a complex item within the agenda. (October 2018, Informant n. 28)

However, the readiness phase also came attached to the compliance with social and environmental regulations proposed by each of the international donors (White, 2014), which included safeguarding Indigenous Peoples' rights to participation and tenure—for instance, as found in the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank performance standards. As such, the process of tailoring REDD+ to a national context has represented an opportunity to address the historically neglected institutional challenges concerning Indigenous rights to public participation (Larson et al., 2012), the enforcement of collective tenure rights (Monterroso et al., 2016) and the role of Indigenous People in forest governance (Pacheco et al., 2016).

### 3.3 | Methodology

This study used a case study approach to capture the complexities in the interactions between the State and IPOs during the process of tailoring REDD+ at the national scale during the period 2008–2019. Methods for data gathering included desk research and collection of secondary sources material, face-to-face semi-structured interviews and participant observation (See Appendix S3). For data analysis, we conducted a qualitative content analysis, stakeholder mapping (see Appendix S4) and spatio-temporal analysis of the REDD+ development (see Figure 3). Data collection, carried out between 2018 and 2019, mobilized the concepts and collected the type of information needed per category of analysis (See Appendix S3).

Secondary sources included all relevant (historical and recent) official State documents, publications and reports, as well as civil society's documentation and Indigenous organizations' documentation, including official statements, position papers, and press material relating to Peru's forest sector and Indigenous Peoples' engagement.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 male and 18 female informants. Eligibility criteria for selecting the participants was identified a priori and was guided by their relevance to the research question. We selected a purposive sample based on three criteria: (i) individuals having first-hand knowledge of and experience in the national REDD+ design and/or in the Indigenous engagement

in this process. As for this group, we identified current or former State officials and Indigenous leaders who experienced the process of the national REDD+ design as well as NGO representatives and donors who closely participate/monitor the process; (ii) a variety of types of organizations being represented; this included representatives and/or members of national and international NGOs, Indigenous organizations, public agencies and ministries, international REDD+ donors and a journalist specialized in the subject; (iii) an approximately equal number of men and women. Specifically for informants from IPOs (08 in total), we aimed to collect the views of both Indigenous leaders and their technical advisors. Additionally, two regions in which REDD+ local design was discussed (Madre de Dios and San Martin) were selected: two Indigenous actors were interviewed (one per region) to better explore the information flow within the multi-scalar network of IPOs.

Participant observation included the first and second authors' participation as observers in internal gatherings of IPOs, in public meetings held by the State and the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and in the Mesa REDD+ meetings. Due to the mobility of the identified key informants, interviews and participant observation took place in different locations including Lima, two Amazonian regions (San Martin and Loreto) and Madrid at the occasion of the 25th Conference of Parties (COP25) of the UNFCCC.

## 4 | THE GOVERNANCE OF REDD+: A SOCIO-POLITICAL SPACE FOR INDIGENOUS STRUGGLES

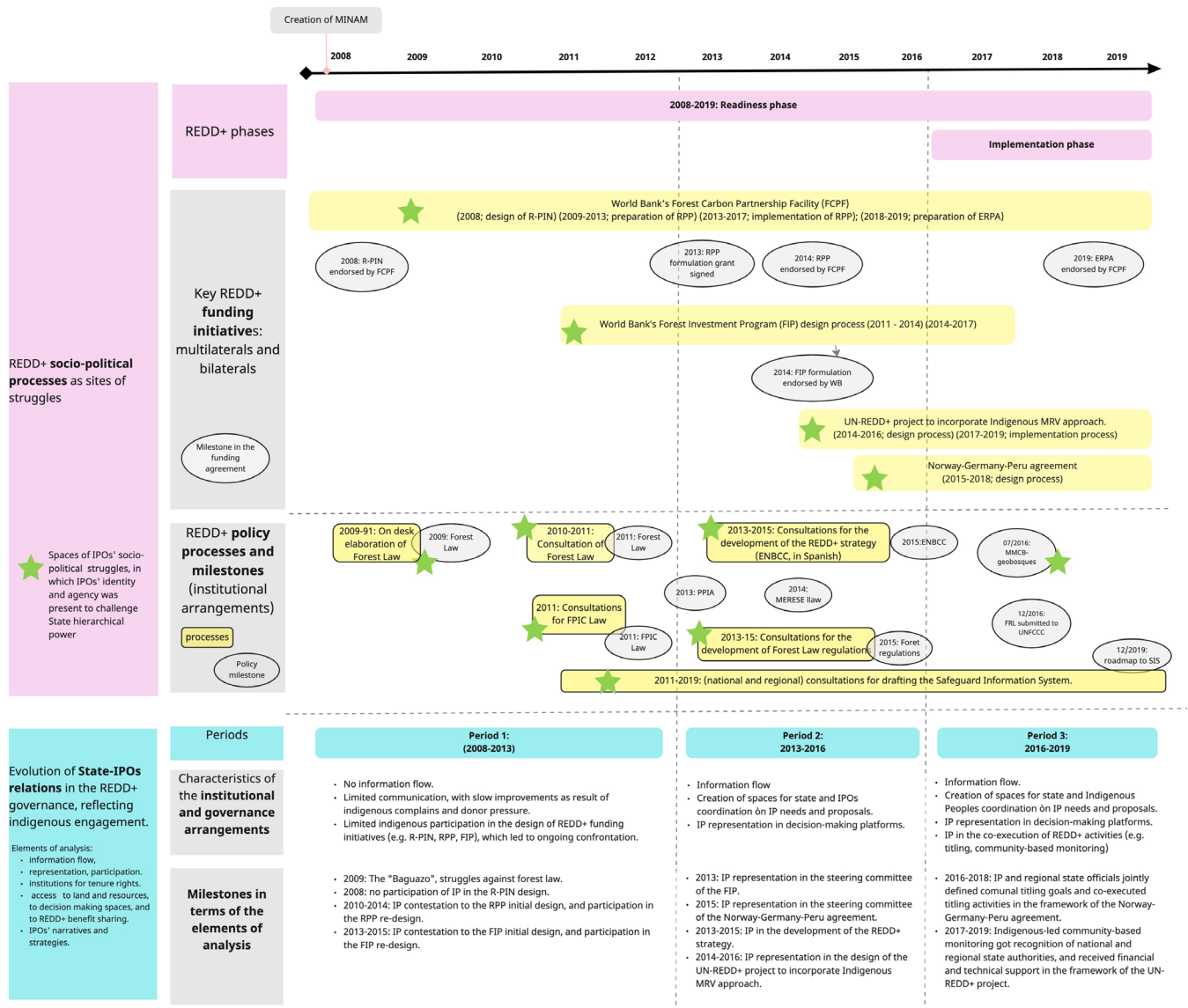
The socio-political dynamics that have shaped the design of Peru's REDD+ governance system cannot be disentangled from a set of narratives—reflecting the different understandings of values, practices, and knowledge that have been mobilized and retained throughout its materialization into institutional mechanisms and governance arrangements. This section shows how MINAM's efficiency-focus understanding and narrative of REDD+ has collided with Indigenous Peoples' rights-frame, creating tensions and making the REDD+ readiness process a site of political contestation.

### 4.1 | Multiple ontologies, narratives, and interests in the design of REDD+

Peru's REDD+ readiness process brought multiple views across scales of government and governance to frame and tackle deforestation problems (see Appendix S4), which shaped the development of the REDD+ institutional framework. MINAM sustained a technical-focus narrative by privileging rulemaking and knowledge production in terms of forest planning, monitoring and enforcement.<sup>1</sup> Together with MINAM, actors linked to conservation matters had a leadership role in the design and implementation of solutions to tackle deforestation, including: international agencies, the nationally driven “Mesa REDD+” (REDD+ Roundtable) and IPOs (Che-Piu & Menton, 2013).



## A historical chronology of REDD+ governance and of the evolution of Amazonian IPOs' engagement



**FIGURE 3** A chronology of REDD+ governance and of the evolution of Amazonian IPOs' engagement. Source: Own elaboration.

International agencies included the REDD+ donor community and environmental NGOs. Through the multilateral and bilateral agreements to run REDD+ readiness—meaning the FCPF, FIP, Norway-Peru-Germany agreement—the donor community has greatly influenced Peru' REDD+ agenda through political and economic power, knowledge production and technology transfer capacity (Robiglio et al., 2014; White, 2014). They have also conditioned MINAM to hold a participative/inclusive process in the design and implementation of the multilateral and bilateral agreements. In fact, as expressed by interviewees, these planning processes have represented socio-political spaces of negotiations between the State and IPOs, in which different ontologies, interests, and particular strategies came together.

I have seen an effective indigenous advocacy during the process of policy development for REDD+ e.g. National REDD+ strategy, the four regulations of the Forest Law. The policy making processes allows consultation with multiple actors, including Indigenous groups, and have become the space for Indigenous negotiation with State. It is the space where Indigenous groups bring their own political ideas and put pressure to tailor the policy documents to fit their interests. (December 2019, Informant n. 2)

Environmental NGOs have mostly supported the dominant central-State efficiency-focus narrative on REDD+ (Di Gregorio et al., 2013)

and provided the means (expertise, knowledge, technology, and resources) to favor REDD+ development. The (national and regional) REDD+ roundtables—composed of a large variety of stakeholders including government, civil society organizations, international and national NGOs, private companies and research institutions with interests in REDD+ at different scales—also played a critical role in legitimizing the REDD+ technical-focus process.

Among the Amazonian IPO networks, the heterogeneity of political views, interests, and strategies influenced the relationship with the State. On the one hand, AIDSEP and ONAMIAP firmly opposed REDD+ private initiatives and the use of carbon market mechanisms to solve deforestation problems, arguing for major structural changes in the current forest system. On the other hand, CONAP barely expressed criticism at the idea of REDD+, rather aiming at building bridges with the State and the international community.<sup>2</sup> Beyond these political differences, both AIDSEP and CONAP strategically joined up in their efforts to challenge State authority and call donors' attention to bringing Indigenous Peoples' agenda into the REDD+ design.<sup>3</sup> Within each of the IPO networks, there were also heterogeneous voices. Some local voices see REDD+ as an opportunity to improve livelihoods, while others see it as a growing risk for enhancing new pressures over their territories.<sup>4</sup>

## 4.2 | The evolution of Indigenous engagement in the REDD+ design: Putting participation, tenure, and benefit sharing at the centre

The design of REDD+ funding initiatives, policy processes and expected outcomes involved moments of political confrontation (see Figure 3), which represented milestones in the shift toward a more inclusive process in the REDD+ design. In these moments, Indigenous voices claimed for meaningful participation in decision making spaces, for the recognition of collective tenure rights and for a fair distribution of REDD+ benefits.

We distinguished three periods in the evolution of Indigenous engagement in the making of REDD+ (see Figure 3). The first period (2008–2013) is characterized by an intense confrontation between the State and IPOs as MINAM failed to properly engage Indigenous voices and incorporate their concerns. During the first years there was no clear definition of who the relevant stakeholders were and their scope of participation in decision-making processes; furthermore, there was no honest discussion on collective tenure rights among State actors' narratives and practice (Di Gregorio et al., 2013). For instance, Peru's concept note for the readiness plan (R-PIN) in 2008 did not foresee the participation of IPOs or other non-governmental actors (Che-Piu & Menton, 2013). Furthermore, the preliminary drafts of the RPP and FIP were not discussed with IPOs before submitting them to the FCPF and FIP committees respectively. This situation created social discontent among civil society organizations, mainly IPOs. Confrontation was thus the primary mode of interaction between IPOs and MINAM during the first stages of designing REDD+. Distrust of the State remained although practical efforts

were made to create more opportunities for Indigenous—State discussions.<sup>5</sup>

The second period (2013–2016) is characterized by intense dialog and coordination between MINAM and IPOs regarding: the re-design of REDD+ funding initiatives (RPP, FIP); the design of new funding initiatives (UN-REDD+, Norway-Germany-Peru agreement); and consultations for the development of REDD+ policy outcomes (2015's REDD+ strategy, 2015's Forest Law regulations). This was the result of Indigenous public complaints and the pressure from donors to ensure a participative process. As of 2011, the REDD+ political landscape changed: the MINAM started organizing public information meetings and technical and policy discussions (Robiglio et al., 2014). Later, in 2013, new ways of coordinating with IPOs were developed as part of MINAM's 2013 Plan for Stakeholder Participation and Engagement (PPIA) (MINAM, 2019). The plan entailed reconfiguring relations among sectors and levels of government and between the State and society. Specifically for Indigenous Peoples, it included: (i) tackling unequal information flows (providing resources in expertise, infrastructure and training to Indigenous Peoples); (ii) fostering spaces for open dialog, negotiations and technical debates between State officials and IPOs—wherein representation from subnational or local indigenous organizations was present; (iii) inviting Indigenous representatives to specific State-led REDD+ governance platforms such as the Executive Committees of the two major REDD+ donors, Peru's FIP and the Norway-Peru-Germany agreement.

The third period (2016–2019) involved extensive coordination across scales to implement the agreements concerning communal titling and community-based monitoring systems. As regional governments (GOREs) have the competences for issuing communal titling, collaboration across governmental entities and with IPOs took place. For example, local working groups for communal titling (*Grupo de trabajo regional para la titulación de comunidades nativas*, in Spanish) were set up in the framework of the Norway-Germany-Peru agreement, whereby IPOs and State officials jointly defined and co-executed communal titling goals.<sup>6</sup> Another example is the strengthening of community-based monitoring systems (*Sistema de monitoreo communal indígena*, in Spanish) through granting a State recognition and providing them the financial and technical means (e.g., contemporary equipment such as drones) for monitoring land-use change in community forests.<sup>7</sup>

Previous studies and results from interviews point to changes in the socio-spatial configurations of REDD+ that have allowed new spaces of pluralistic governance (Dunlop & Corbera, 2016; Dupuits & Cronkleton, 2020). The emergence of these new spaces of engagement represent one of the main arenas of change in Peru's forest sector as part of the process of tailoring REDD+ to the national context (Dunlop & Corbera, 2016); these have served as arenas for discussion on institutional aspects of the REDD+ design as well as for confrontation over different ontologies and interests concerning socio-nature relations. Specifically concerning Indigenous Peoples, REDD+ has created a new socio-political space for State-Indigenous negotiations—one that has been highly influenced by the need to comply with donors' social safeguards. In these spaces, some elements of

Indigenous Peoples' political aspirations have been heard, informed, retained and incorporated in REDD+ projects and policies (e.g., in FCPF planning documents, the ENBCC and the bilateral agreements with Germany and Norway). For instance, both communal titling and Indigenous political participation became a priority for the REDD+ national agenda. However, other more contentious topics have been left behind, including REDD+'s governance structure, its financial mechanisms and the benefit distribution scheme. Key characteristics of these new moments of negotiation encompassed: (i) the confrontation between different ontologies on socio-nature relations, which generated a dynamic of constant conflict, with alternating moments of confrontation and collaboration; (ii) the presence of technical and political discussions on institutional and governance aspects, in which top senior State public officials (e.g., the Minister) set up a face-to-face dialog with Indigenous Peoples' representatives; (iii) an effort to address critical issues of Indigenous interests, including meaningful participation, collective tenure rights and distribution of benefits; (iv) the empowerment and enhanced capacities of the network of IPOs through their inclusion and participation in multi-scalar deliberative processes and access to key information and institutional resources.

### 4.3 | Indigenous Peoples' scale jumping strategy

IPOs' reaction, mostly influenced by AIDESEP, relied on the use of scale-jumping processes, by which IPOs made use of spatial scales to advance their strategy agenda and gain power (Appendix S4). For instance, IPOs bypassed national government boundaries to directly connect with the REDD+ donor community, and /or bypassed national levels of governance to connect directly with the international forest community, including with environmental and human rights NGOs, scientists, and broader Indigenous networks such as COICA and the Indigenous Caucus. To do so, AIDESEP, CONAP, and ONAMIAP made use of a contesting narrative that was mobilized across scales by using a set of mechanisms that we examine below.

The development of a contesting narrative aimed at framing particular claims to infuse Indigenous rationalities into the REDD+ design. These claims—present at the subnational and national Indigenous REDD+ roundtables—concerned communal titling, meaningful Indigenous participation, and access to benefit from REDD+. AIDESEP's "Amazonian Indigenous REDD+" (REDD+ Indígena Amazonico—RIA, in Spanish) is an example of this framing. Supported by studies in Peru that reported a reduction of forest clearing tied to collective titling (Blackman et al., 2017), RIA brought collective tenure and access to decision-making platforms as a major condition for any negotiation or discussion on REDD+. As stated by an NGO representative,

AIDESEP has placed the idea that to be successful in REDD+, communal titling should be a condition for achieving conservation (August 2019, Informant n. 15)

Furthermore, RIA brought attention to Indigenous territorial plans (Planes de Vida, in Spanish) as a holistic tool for governing and empowering Indigenous territories. By doing so, AIDESEP reframed specific issues that tend to be institutionalized and imagined as local—such as collective tenure rights, Indigenous territorial plans and livelihoods strategies—and presented them in their global dimension as interdependent elements with local and global consequences. The RIA narrative also framed critiques over the existing economic rationale and socio-political structures that perpetuate global inequalities and environmental problems. Finally, the Indigenous narrative addresses ethical issues by demanding re-scaling responsibilities at different scales of governance. In the words of an NGO representative,

The Amazonian Indigenous REDD+ narrative addresses three levels of governance: at an international level, by 'conditioning' developed countries to reduce their emissions when establishing agreements on forest conservation with the Peruvian government; at national level, by urging the Peruvian State to take action to control mega-drivers of deforestation; and at local level, by encouraging a holistic approach for managing Indigenous territories. RIA called for the ethical. (August 2019, Informant n. 12)

IPO networks mobilize their voices at different spatial scales by using a repertoire of tools including confrontation, building multi-scalar alliances and political participation in deliberative processes.

Cross-scalar confrontation took place through traditional resistance strategies used by grassroots organizations. First, public protests were held in different locations across scales, for example, by joining the "No rights, No REDD+" global campaign in 2010. Second, there was direct confrontation with the Peruvian State during donor meetings, through public speeches, political statements, direct lobbying with donors, and so forth. One example of this was the process of designing Peru's REDD+ readiness package in 2008–2011, which led to a revised version that incorporated Indigenous and civil society concerns. Another example was the design of Peru's Forest Investment Program between 2013 and 2015. After 2 years of intense negotiations, AIDESEP and CONAP were able to deepen the analysis of the drivers of deforestation, to allocate funding for communal titling and to ensure Indigenous representation in the Steering Committee of Peru's Forest Investment Program (Robiglio et al., 2014; White, 2014). Third, official Indigenous position statements were made and disseminated, such as the Amazonian Indigenous REDD+ position paper (see Appendix S3). Fourth, critical reports on REDD+ development and on deforestation drivers were co-produced and disseminated with researchers and NGOs (see Appendix S3). Fifth, international complaint mechanisms were used to scale up concerns about State-led projects, warning of potential risks over customary lands and resources, pushing the State for further revisions and inclusion of Indigenous voice.

Building multi-scalar alliances has been critical to broadening IPOs' scope of influence and to strengthen their position in the

national, pan-Amazonian and global REDD+ debate. Building alliances became an objective, strategy, and process within Indigenous advocacy practices.<sup>8</sup> They built alliances with national and international actors, joined coalitions with environmental NGOs (see Appendix S4) and shifted to engaging with these entities (in a more balanced manner) not as beneficiaries but as active partners.

Amazonian IPOs have rarely participated in broader civil society groups, for example, national and regional REDD+ roundtables. Instead, they have created their own multi-level institutional space known as the national and regional “Indigenous REDD+ roundtables.” These roundtables represented the space to bring Indigenous socio-cultural diversity existing at multiple scales and to balance power within the multi-scalar network of IPOs. They serve as spaces for sharing information, coordinating, self-reflecting on the risks and opportunities of REDD+, resolving differences and frictions concerning REDD+ risks and benefits and developing the strategy development toward the recognition of Indigenous rights within the REDD+ framework (Kowler et al., 2016). At the same time, they have been active in the multi-scalar political arena through joining diverse platforms and decision-making processes that allowed them meaningful interaction, placed their aspirations on agendas at different political spheres and infused national REDD+ policies and plans with their socio-political priorities. Furthermore, Peruvian IPOs have access to the international networks and fora where REDD+ is discussed, usually through their regional counterparts. Through their participation in international networks, IPOs access relevant information that allows them to build and constantly nurture their narrative. At the same time, as indicated by Wallbott (2014), they also intentionally mobilize, build bridges, and construct their power in relation to their international and national peers and in interaction with governments. Because of their active and widely recognized role in contesting global narratives in international fora, Amazonian IPOs were encouraged—as mentioned above—to engage more boldly on a national level in spaces of dialog, negotiations, and technical debates.

Notwithstanding, although IPOs have been productive in infusing an “alternative” narrative into the policy design and process, for example, putting collective tenure rights as a priority, the concrete environmental intervention—both geographically and ecologically—has not been operationalized due to major structural forces (e.g., dominant inertia).

## 5 | DISCUSSION: REDD+ AS A SPACE TO CHALLENGE THE STATE'S AUTHORITY AND HIERARCHICAL POWER

This paper analyses the actual engagement of Amazonian IPOs in Peru's REDD+ design. It shows how Indigenous Peoples' agency—together with other underlying factors—has played a role in bringing a more socially sensitive approach to the negotiations, governance, and progressive implementation of REDD+ in Peru.

### 5.1 | Indigenous agency in the REDD+ making

The development of the REDD+ framework at a national level, being embedded in global climate governance, has required its design to meet a set of specific conditions—being multi-level, multi-actor, multi-theme, and infused with global discourses linked to rights and equity. These particular conditions have created a new and unprecedented setting for socio-political struggles that allowed for the emergence of more socially embedded narratives and practices in the REDD+ governance in Peru. In particular, this study supports evidence from previous studies portraying conservation spaces as arenas of socio-political struggle for the access and control of resources (Sundberg, 2006). From this perspective, we argue that REDD+ can be understood as a social and political process that is embedded in power relations (Mbatu, 2016). Our findings show that Peru's REDD+ socio-political process, embedded in a larger global context, has entailed at least the following three aspects.

First, the instrumentalization of REDD+ to progress on institutional agendas. Our findings show how distinct but not divergent interests among IPOs have been strategically accommodated. Notwithstanding their initial critiques to the mechanism, REDD+ has represented a tool for socio-political contestation and political struggles—providing a setting to reconceptualize their demands, infusing political and cultural elements to materialize their historical rights to land and resources, and thereby potentially improve the Indigenous-State dynamic in broader processes of environmental governance. These findings represent novel contributions to ongoing debates on how environmental regulation represent a site of struggle over contested resources (Bryant & Bailey, 1997; Sundberg, 2006).

Second, the perception of an increased Indigenous agency. Building on White (2014) who claimed that IPOs were able to gain political power during the REDD+ process, our research shows IPOs' ability and political capacity to confront forest policies that threaten Indigenous Peoples and their territories, being able for instance to block State-led processes. They have done so by performing expected roles and by using specific strategies that privilege and retain global narratives aligned with their political ideas and by mobilizing these narratives through scale jumping strategies. For instance, the Indigenous' rights discourse (Lindroth, 2014) demands the recognition of Indigenous status (tradition, culture, cosmovision, self-development, autonomy, Indigenous ontology) and Indigenous access to land, resources, and environmental services. The environmental justice discourse (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014) highlights the unequal disproportion of environmental impacts on Indigenous communities and their vulnerability. Discourses on “buen vivir” (Pretty, 2011) emphasize Indigenous Peoples' cultural understanding of socio-nature relations as an alternative to Western views on exploitative approaches to nature. Finally, the discourse on democratic pragmatism (Dryzek, 2013) gives Indigenous organizations a role in the conservation and development agenda (Wallbott, 2014). These findings contribute to ongoing debates on Indigenous Peoples' struggles to global framings on conservation and development agendas (Wallbott, 2014), and provide a more nuanced perspective of the socio-political process of tailoring



REDD+ in a Latin American country. This situation has resulted in a major perception of an empowered group able to challenge hierarchical structures and normative discourses and to mobilize counterproposals across scales. In terms of this, we can say that IPOs upraised their agency in the national and international fora.

Third, the reshuffling of new geographies of power in the national climate agenda, in which Indigenous Peoples' voices gain significant influence. The contesting dynamic in the process of tailoring REDD+ to the national context illustrates how the geographies of power of environmental governance concerning relations of authority and power have been constituted and reshaped, as expressed in the words of an IPOs representative "the interactions between the State and IPOs have definitely changed toward a more symmetric relation, especially at the national scale and where it is possible to exercise local control" (August 2019, Informant n. 11). We observe that throughout the process of REDD+ design, the authority of the State has been challenged. A concrete example is the development of specific platforms for Indigenous participation, which has led to improved transparency, coordination and Indigenous political participation. Simultaneously, we observe a major mobilization of Indigenous political interests into Peru's forest governance, with the support of influential global discourses and actors. This mobilization has brought to the REDD+ design not only topics of participation and representation, similarly to what we see addressed in other countries (Myers et al., 2018), but also other contentious topics concerning access to land (e.g., collective tenure), to decision making spaces and to the distribution of benefits. As such, IPOs have been motivated to engage in participatory processes despite maintaining their skepticism on the overall REDD+ tool and conservation objectives. The combination of these two simultaneous effects has allowed challenging the hierarchical nature of traditional State structures, allowing a redefinition of socio-political boundaries toward a more pluralistic form of coordination—particularly in the interaction of the State and Indigenous Peoples. These findings represent a novel contribution to ongoing debates on the role of Indigenous Peoples as environmental stewards in environmental governance (UNFCCC), showing their strategic leadership rather than seeing them as objects of power (Lindroth, 2014).

## 5.2 | The underlying factors enabling a better negotiation arena for Indigenous empowerment

Contextual factors have played a key role in shaping the direction of national REDD+ policies (Brockhaus et al., 2014; Korhonen Kurki et al., 2017). In our case study, the observed changes in the political REDD+ landscape might have not only been a result of Indigenous struggles. The concurrence of multiple factors has leveraged attention on social sustainability, equity aspects and Indigenous rights. The first factor concerns the wide recognition of Indigenous People as relevant players in forest governance. The second factor refers to the increased socio-political discontent with State policy measures that address Indigenous lands and rights, and have ended up in violence, for example, the Baguazo. For instance, the increased focus on setting the conditions for the implementation of REDD+ demonstrative

projects placed risks on indigenous lands and intensified conflictive relations between the State and Amazonian IPOs. MINAM's failure to regulate private carbon investors that have made use of unfair contracts to the detriment of Amazonian IPOs since 2008 has caused the deepening of tensions (De Jong & Del Castillo, 2014). The third factor entails the pressure on the compliance of social and environmental regulations/standards coming from international donors (White, 2014) reacting to the growing discontent of both IPOs and members of the national REDD+ roundtable (Che-Piu & Menton, 2013). On one hand, the need for social compliance helped to put pressure on the State; on the other, harmonizing all donors' safeguards system (e.g., World Bank's FIP and FCPP) was a challenge. Finally, changes in MINAM's leadership brought to the table State officials with a higher level of empathy toward the needs and socio-political claims of Indigenous Peoples, as stated in the following quote of a journalist "... it was M. Pulgar-Vidal (the Minister of Environment) who taught us to look at native communities with different lenses ... as an organized social group" (December 2019, Informant n. 2).

Having a broader understanding of the multiple institutional, governance and agent-based elements and their interplay in REDD+ governance allows for a more nuanced and better understanding of today's debates on Indigenous Peoples' struggles to global framings on conservation and development. That being said, REDD+ may be understood as a political and technical process embedded in power relations (Mbatu, 2016), in which multiple understandings of socio-nature interactions have collided (coming from donors, Indigenous Peoples, State actors), making it possible to address procedural aspects such as participation and conflicting topics such as collective tenure rights.

## 6 | CONCLUSIONS

Relations between the State and Amazonian Indigenous Peoples have involved a long history of marginalization, dispossession, and assimilation of Indigenous Peoples. These have followed colonial patterns of domination, leading to an increase in socio-environmental conflicts in the last 20 years. Specifically, in this article we show how REDD+ constitutes a new battlefield within this history of conflicts, in which Indigenous political ontologies and interests (e.g., legitimate rights for self-determination) have found space to challenge the State's authority and hierarchical power in Peru's REDD+ governance system. The latter supports preliminary ideas on the pragmatism showed by some IPOs concerning REDD+ development, who see its implementation as an opportunity to advance their agenda on land titling and autonomy (Aguilar-Støen, 2017, p. 105). These IPOs have done so by putting forward, in a sustained manner, specific discourses and actions anchored in the values of equity, human rights and other social sustainability matters, as shown in the framing of RIA and in the strategic mobilization of their goals at multiple spatial scales.

Furthermore, we also show that regardless of working in a context dominated by colonial rationality and a government-supported efficiency-oriented REDD+ narrative, IPOs have not only adapted but

also succeeded in shaping Peru's REDD+ governance system, bringing more politically contested aspects to the fore such as collective tenure rights. These findings contrast with similar analyses in other Amazonian countries such as Guyana, whereby the participation of Amerindian communities in the 6 years of low carbon development strategy was found limited or nonexistent (Airey & Krause, 2017). Different to other REDD+ countries where participation was also present in the design of REDD+ (such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia or Vietnam), in the case of Peru voices demanding collective tenure rights were much more present, visible and listened to in policy-making. This is due to Peruvian IPOs' socio-political agency as well as a conjuncture of events and a particular context that created a favorable setting, for example, visible social protests (e.g., Baguazo), constitutional rules, donor pressure and State leadership. These findings contribute to ongoing debates on "re-centring the political" as a serious attempt to tackle environmental issues (Swyngedouw, 2013) such as deforestation, and are also consistent with previous works reporting that REDD+ outcomes are context-dependent (Brockhaus et al., 2014; Korhonen Kurki et al., 2017). As observed in the case of Peru, tackling deforestation requires not only embracing institutional changes but also fully endorsing a sincere political commitment to reconfigure the socio-ecological and political landscape. Furthermore, the operationalization of any institutional tool will fail if it is not properly politically endorsed and if it does not form part of a mix of measures aiming to balance power relations among sectors, actors, and scales of governance.

Based on these findings, this research found that REDD+ has recast the role of IPOs by recognizing their potential to shape global-local relations through their capacity to elevate specific local voices and practices associated to socio-nature relations. By doing this, IPOs in Peru were able to infuse a more equity-focus to the REDD+ design. Consistent with previous observations on Indigenous Peoples' mobilization across scales in climate negotiations (Wallbott, 2014), our findings—also manifested in interviewees' perception—broadly support the recognition of IPOs as relevant actors in the REDD+ governance. This claim contests previous studies that argue for the minor role or presence of non-State actors in the process of tailoring REDD+ to national contexts (Huynh & Keenan, 2017).


Our analysis suggests that Peru's REDD+ policies could progress toward more equitable outcomes not only by enhancing participation and by addressing collective tenure rights, but also through a true operationalization of cohesiveness and inclusiveness that encourages a meaningful, caring, and mutually respectful relationship between the State and Indigenous Peoples, from which the different involved parties can learn from each other and build together a system of governance with human dignity and respect for nature as its compass. This societal effort is an important precondition to address in a serious manner those structural factors constraining policy implementation (see von der Porten et al., 2015) and perpetuating unsustainable, extractivist nature-culture relationships.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Interview No. 14, 16, 21, 22.
- <sup>2</sup> Interview No. 10.
- <sup>3</sup> Interviews No. 2, 5, 7, 12, 16.
- <sup>4</sup> Interviews No. 1,2,3, 8, 10, 26, 30, 31.
- <sup>5</sup> Interviews No. 1,2,3, 8, 10, 28, 30.
- <sup>6</sup> Interviews No 1, 8, 9, 10, 12.
- <sup>7</sup> Interviews No. 1, 8, 22, 26.
- <sup>8</sup> Interviews No. 7, 8, 12, 16.

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