THE POWER OF CONNECTIONS

Harvesting Lessons and Strengthening Coalitions for **Amazonian Conservation**

Executive Analysis

Sociobioeconomies and Conservation Finance in the Amazon

This publication serves as the Executive Analysis of Workshop 1, part of the project "The Power of Connections: Harvesting Lessons and Strengthening Coalitions for Amazonian Conservation."

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Organizers

UF Center for Latin American Studies, University of Florida

TCD Tropical Conservation & Development Program

IPE Instituto de Pesquisas Ecológicas

ESCAS

CIP Centro Internacional de la Papa

CGIAR

Collaborator

UF IFAS University of Florida

Partner

Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

Lessons for Effective Sociobioeconomy and Conservation Finance Initiatives

1. Trust & Long-Term Partnerships

Communities and external partners collaborated effectively through relationships built over time and through spaces that facilitated continuous dialogue and coordination.

2. Community Leadership & Inclusion

Youth, women, and Indigenous people were engaged through leadership, entrepreneurship, and cooperative governance, supporting sustained participation and autonomy.

3. Value Creation & Local Control

Production based on biodiversity and local knowledge generated economic and environmental benefits, with communities maintaining control over processing, marketing, and pricing, often through collective organization.

4. Financing & Institutional Strengthening

Philanthropic and structured financing aligned with project maturity and combined with technical assistance and capacity building, strengthened local decision-making, governance, and organizational resilience.

5. Knowledge, Technology & Innovation

Scientific and technical solutions adapted to local contexts improved productivity, while combining traditional knowledge with experimentation and practical technologies enabled innovation.

6. Territorial & Governance Conditions

Secure land tenure, functioning institutions, and aligned public policies provided stability and access to resources, programs, and markets, shaping the viability of community enterprises.

Introduction

Across the Amazon basin, a deep transformation is underway. Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) are leading multiple *sociobioeconomy* initiatives that are reshaping conservation and enhancing community well-being. These efforts harness innovative public-private partnerships and financial models designed to recognize the true value of Amazonian biological and cultural diversity. Yet, realizing the full promise of *sociobioeconomy* demands more than a vision. It requires strategic planning, bridges across diverse knowledge systems, and investment mechanisms that reach the communities doing the work.

Conservation finance is one such mechanism with the potential to catalyze inclusive, sustainable business models that reward people and nature across the Pan-Amazon. Despite persistent barriers, leaders and practitioners are advancing creative strategies that blend traditional knowledge with innovative investment solutions. Still, key questions remain: How do we ensure these market tools and market participation strengthen, rather than undermine, the region's human, ecological, and cultural capital? What does success actually look like on the ground? And how can lessons from one corner of the Amazon inform action across the entire basin?

To explore these questions, the "Sociobioeconomies and Conservation Finance in the Amazon" workshop brought together a diverse group of actors, representing different countries and conservation-practice sectors, across the Amazon. Seasoned practitioners, who have spent decades working in remote communities, met local entrepreneurs building businesses rooted in forest products, finance specialists aiming to channel capital toward conservation in the Amazon, as well as researchers, students, and other members of the organizing institutions. Everyone convened with a shared purpose: to exchange lessons, identify innovative pathways, strengthen networks, and ignite new coalitions capable of replicating solutions across the region.

Hosted by IPÊ in Nazaré Paulista, Brazil, from May 28–31, 2025, the event was organized by the Tropical Conservation and Development (TCD) Program at the University of Florida, in partnership with ESCAS/IPÊ, the International Potato Center (CIP/CGIAR), and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. It was the first in a series of five interconnected workshops designed to strengthen collaboration among scientists, practitioners, financiers, and community innovators working to transform the trajectory of Amazonian conservation.

This document distills the insights that emerged: new pathways for aligning sociobioeconomy and conservation finance, strategies for strengthening steward communities, and actionable lessons for replication throughout the Amazon.

Defining Terms and Claiming Meaning

The workshop's approach was deliberately collaborative. Participants jointly examined the complex and often contested concepts of *sociobioeconomy and conservation finance*, building shared understanding and pinpointing challenges that require collective action. While trying to converge on a characterization, participants noted that interpretations of these concepts varied across countries, communities, and lived experiences, reflecting how these concepts remain dynamic, evolving, and shaped by distinct worldviews and histories.

Sociobioeconomy was described as a set of practices grounded in local knowledge, collective organization, and the sustainable use of natural resources. Participants characterized it as an economic, social, and political model deeply connected to specific territorial and historical realities, while contrasting it with reductionist technical characterizations. The approach was also framed as a way of recognizing the value of traditional knowledge and longstanding practices that link environmental stewardship with care and community well-being.
Conservation finance was understood as an array of mechanisms intended to provide financial support for ecosystem conservation initiatives. Participants identified these as encompassing both reimbursable and non-reimbursable instruments—from impact investments to grants—that contribute to biodiversity protection, ecosystem restoration, and local livelihoods. They further emphasized the importance of ensuring that the implementation of these financial mechanisms respects local knowledge, reinforces community autonomy, and enables collaboration between traditional practices and newer technologies.

A recurring concern in the discussion was that these concepts could be diluted or redirected by stakeholders with differing agendas. Participants emphasized the need for a shared commitment to preserving the Amazon's social and biological diversity, while carefully evaluating economic models to be applied, to determine whether they truly value cultural and biological richness and account for the social and environmental impacts of large-scale production.

Initiatives Driving Change Across the Amazon

With shared definitions and principles in place, workshop participants presented initiatives from different parts of the Amazon that illustrate how sociobioeconomic approaches have taken shape in practice. Although contexts varied, the experiences revealed common processes and enabling conditions that support long-term, community-centered development and biodiversity conservation.

1. Trust & Long-Term Partnerships

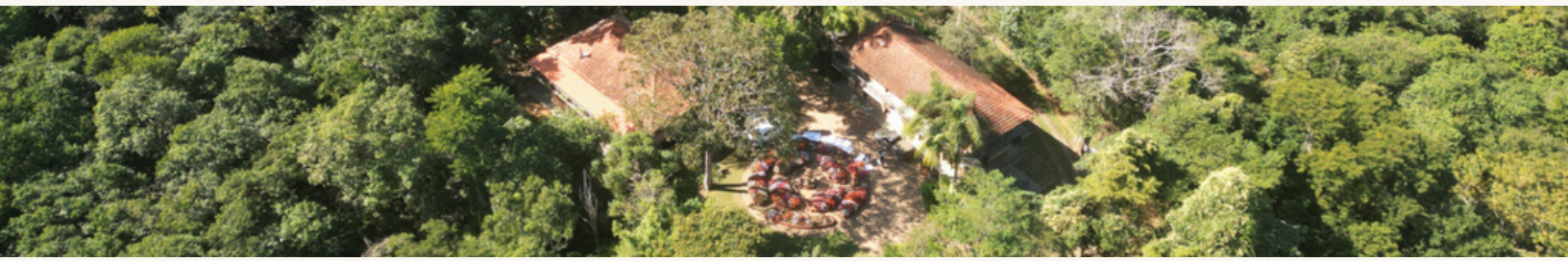
Many initiatives underscored that the starting point for effective work in the Amazon is the quality of relationships cultivated over time. Organizations with a long-standing presence in communities, for example, often serve as bridges between local actors, technical partners, and potential investors.

In Brazil, IPÊ's partnership with LinkedIn to support local entrepreneurs illustrates this dynamic. LinkedIn proposed an entrepreneurship project and contributed financial resources. IPÊ drew on its established relationships to identify community entrepreneurs within a protected area in the Amazon. Of 100 entrepreneurs identified, 11 received seed capital (US$3,000-US$5,000) and capacity-building sessions led by volunteer consultants covering business fundamentals, as well as technical visits and mentorship. According to IPÊ, the initiative's success rested on one essential asset: trust. Because IPÊ had built credibility over time, community members felt confident participating.

The small investments received by the community entrepreneurs, along with the continued support, generated positive returns in community autonomy, confidence, and local economic activity.

Collaboration spaces also contribute to building trust and connectivity, beyond individual projects. The Festival of Impact Investments and Sustainable Business in the Amazon (FIINSA), organized by IDESAM and ImpactHub, brings together entrepreneurs, community leaders, researchers, investors, and public-sector representatives. Through presentations, discussions, business rounds, and a matchmaking "BioHub," FIINSA fosters interactions that often lead to partnerships and shared strategies.

Across these examples, participants highlighted that trust, facilitation, and long-term engagement are not only relational assets but also practical conditions that allow projects to advance.



2. Broad Community Engagement and Leadership

Initiatives consistently emphasized the central role of women, youth, and local leaders in shaping and sustaining local sociobioeconomies, anchoring decision-making in local needs and renewing leadership across generations.

In Ecuador, TRIAS works with producer associations to identify barriers faced by women and young people, such as limited access to land, training, and financing, and supports them through leadership and entrepreneurship programs. Thus, youth groups now provide agricultural services such as phytosanitary control, while women's groups operate small food businesses serving local markets and visitors. TRIAS also strengthens governance within cooperatives, helping to improve negotiation capacity and price-setting practices.

Participants from Colombia noted that sociobioeconomic initiatives can create conditions that encourage rural youth to remain in their territories. Opportunities for decision-making and income generation were cited as important factors. As one participant said: "They want to remain in their traditional lands, but under new conditions."

In Manaus, Brazil, the Ateliê Derequine engages Indigenous women in the design and production of culturally inspired clothing, strengthening both income generation and cultural expression and affirmation. Educational efforts such as the Escola de Conhecimento Próprio within the urban indigenous community in Manaus, support Indigenous identity among children through art, body painting, and traditional livelihoods. Regional networks, including ANMIGA in Brazil, the National Indigenous Women's Gathering in Colombia, and Suriname's National Organization of Women, create and strengthen networks for collective learning and political participation.

3. Creation of Value through Biodiversity-Based Production

Several initiatives showed how biodiversity-based production, when organized around fair and transparent partnerships, can generate local income, support conservation, and reinforce community identity.

Coffee Agroforestry for Forest Restoration. In Brazil, IDESAM's Café Apuí Agroflorestal project uses coffee cultivation in agroforestry systems to restore degraded lands, integrating native and productive species. Over time, the initiative shifted from conventional production to organic and premium organic markets, supported by training, technical assistance, improved processing infrastructure, brand development, and certification.

Essential Oils and Collective Branding. The Inatú Amazônia collective brand, also supported by IDESAM, united dispersed communities within a protected area under a single identity to market essential oils (andiroba, copaíba, pracaxi). Standardized production practices, shared workspaces, and collective marketing have enabled producers to reach new buyers and negotiate better terms. This horizontal model, in which multiple actors share roles across production, processing, and marketing, proved more resilient and equitable than top-down structures, which are often dominated by a single actor.

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Value-Added Food Chains. In Peru, Despensa Amazónica developed a sustainable gastronomy line based on Amazonian ingredients, including pirarucu-based products such as burgers and nuggets. Investments in cold storage, processing, and transportation supported the chain from community sourcing to final branding. Because existing fisheries regulations in Peru recognized only sea fishing, the company advocated adjustments to the legal framework to include fish from Amazonian waters, demonstrating the need for dynamic interaction between public policy and productive innovation.

In Brazil, the ASPROC fishers' association formed various alliances to expand and professionalize pirarucu production beyond fresh fish by investing in processing, packaging, and freezing. When a processor, which operated a large freezing plant, faced a fine following a legal victory by ASPROC, the association negotiated compensation and terms for future collaboration. The processor then handled processing, packaging, and freezing, enabling ASPROC to access new markets.

The pirarucu is sourced from protected areas under a fisheries agreement, while the community monitors and protects the lakes that provide fish habitat, resulting in positive global and local environmental and economic benefits originating in a remote territory.

In Ecuador, the Kallari Association organized 10 communities and 55 cacao producers into a value chain that produces and markets 13 types of chocolate. Kallari also maintains a diverse agroforestry crop mix alongside cacao and owns its recipes, ensuring food security and resilience against market fluctuations and helping communities capture value throughout the production process.

These cases showcase communities that retained control and successfully captured value throughout the production chain. They also demonstrate that social capital rooted in organization, participation, and accountability can be the foundation for economic development.

4. Financing, Capacity Building, and Institutional Strengthening

Initiatives highlighted that durable sociobioeconomic enterprises require appropriate financing over time and strong local institutions capable of managing resources, risks, and relationships. Philanthropy was considered essential in early, high-risk stages, with projects gradually transitioning to more structured financing, such as reimbursable philanthropic capital or impact funds. As businesses mature, their absorptive capacity increases.

IDESAM's AMAZ accelerator, the largest impact venture builder in northern Brazil, uses a blended finance model that combines philanthropic, concessional, and commercial capital to support early-stage Amazonian enterprises. Philanthropy helps reduce risk in initial phases, while impact investment supports business growth once projects become more established.

The Amazon Investor Coalition provides initial investments up to R$500,000 with mentoring and network access. ASPROC, supported by the U.S. Forest Service, used directed funding to improve marketing strategies and compete with illegal pirarucu markets, showing how targeted financial support can help level the playing field for legal, sustainable enterprises.

Capacity building was cited as a central element of durable economic development. TRIAS's long-term support for cacao cooperatives, focusing on negotiation skills, certification, risk analysis, and pricing tools, helped 70-80% of these businesses break even after a few years. IPÊ's partnership with LinkedIn combined seed capital with training and mentorship to help new entrepreneurs operate independently. These systems not only improved profitability but also strengthened internal governance and transparency, showing that technical assistance, ongoing training, and mentoring are essential components of institutional strengthening.

5. Connecting Knowledge and Technology

A recurring challenge identified is the gap between available scientific or technical solutions and their adaptation to local contexts. Several experiences showed how bridging this gap can support innovations that foment local participation in- and control over production systems, also improving working conditions.

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In another case, technology from the Manaus Industrial Hub was adapted so that a community could package essential oils using only a small rail track. This simple adaptation was sufficient to support a machine used for packaging essential oils, increase productivity, and improve product presentation.

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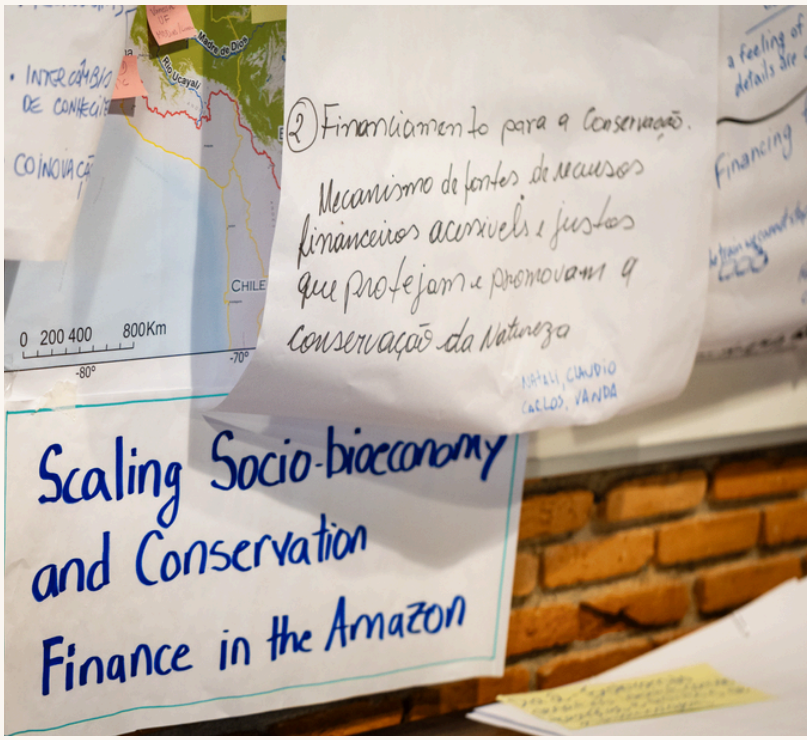
6. Territorial Conditions and Governance

Sociobioeconomic initiatives also depend on structural conditions related to land rights, local institutions, and public policy. Participants noted that secure tenure, predictable governance, and coordination across agencies create the environment for activities to develop and consolidate.

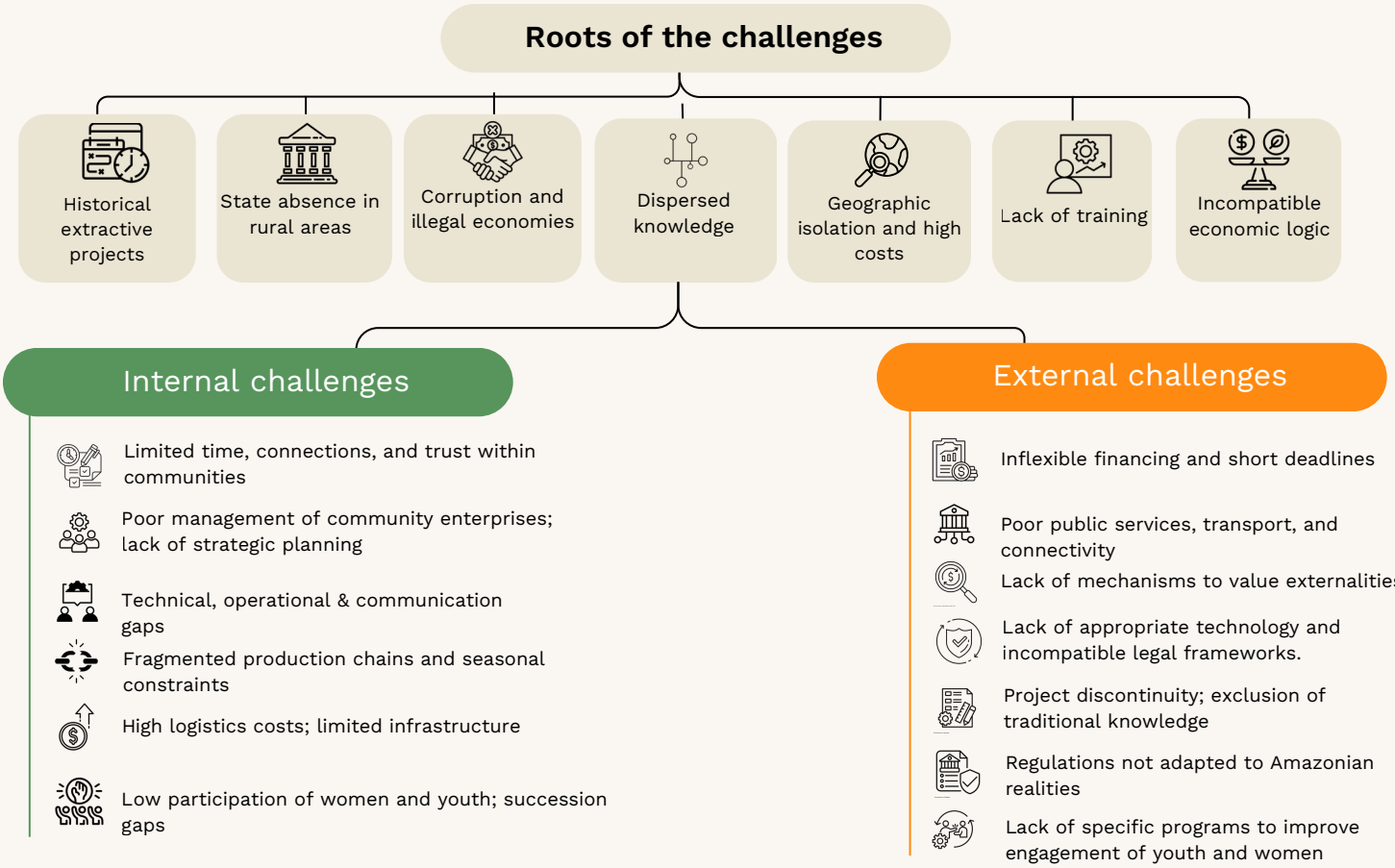
These conditions shape how communities access credit, engage with government programs, and navigate regulations on resource use and commercialization. Where frameworks function well, communities are better able to formalize enterprises, meet standards, and benefit from technical assistance, rural credit, and procurement programs. Participants stressed that implementation gaps —especially in remote areas—often limit the reach of these instruments, even when policies exist on paper. Strengthening local institutions to bridge these gaps is therefore as important as the financial resources themselves. Despite wide variation across the Amazon, governance conditions consistently influence the viability of community enterprises and the autonomy of local organizations in managing productive activities and territorial development.

Challenges of Sociobioeconomies

Workshop participants highlighted both internal challenges (within communities and organizations) and external challenges (structural and institutional) that limit the development of sociobioeconomies in the Amazon. They also pointed to deeper historical roots that shape these barriers. The figure below presents the main collective reflections.



Internal and External Challenges of the Sociobioeconomy



Collective Insights for Moving Forward

Participants envisioned a sociobioeconomy grounded in community autonomy, long-term capacity, and genuine partnership rather than short-term, beneficiary-style interventions. Communities seek to be decision-makers and co-authors of their own development, with investments focused on strengthening local institutions, administrations, and political articulation so that organizations can manage processes independently after external projects end.

Consistent, long-term investment in capacity was seen as essential. This includes building skills in management, accounting, negotiation, political advocacy, and risk management, as well as deepening understanding of value chains and territorial markets. Capacity building must reach community researchers, youth, and women, recognizing them as central actors who generate and interpret knowledge, lead enterprises, and sustain social cohesion.

Financing models need to be more flexible, realistic, and phased. Participants stressed the importance of blended approaches that combine grants, repayable funds, loans, impact investment, and partnerships with financial institutions, evolving with the maturity of each initiative and recognizing the true costs of conservation and organizational development. Longer timeframes, adequate overhead, and hybrid arrangements --such as collective funds and models that pair local implementation with external financial management-- were considered key to reducing dependency and transaction costs while promoting autonomy. The insurance sector could also help mitigate perceived risks and attract new investors to a high-potential but uncertain context.

Integrating environmental value into economic systems was viewed as non-negotiable. Water, biodiversity, and ecosystem services must be recognized in policy, regulation, and markets so that forest-based economies are not structurally disadvantaged relative to subsidized extractive industries. This implies regulatory reform, fiscal incentives, and targeted programs for sociobioeconomy sectors, as well as pricing that reflects the ecosystem services embedded in products and the often-hidden costs of conservation.

Companies were identified as potential strategic allies, not just buyers. As mentors, co-designers, and connectors, they can help shape value chains, open markets, and support innovation through advisory networks and informal exchanges. For this to work, territories must be prepared rather than reactive: communities need governance systems, infrastructure, and operational readiness in place when companies and investors seek sustainable solutions.

Coordinated, long-term planning is necessary to avoid the "cemeteries of projects" left by fragmented, short-term interventions. Infrastructure gaps (in transportation, logistics, digital connectivity, and locally appropriate or adapted technology) remain major bottlenecks that isolate producers and raise costs. Addressing these constraints with coordinated investment in logistics, digital infrastructure, and technologies, coupled with education and entrepreneurship pathways, would also make residing in their Amazon homes a viable and attractive choice for youth.

In terms of knowledge systems and science, participants called for transdisciplinary and ethical research and education that bridges technical, traditional, and experiential knowledge. Preserving local knowledge, including that of Indigenous and traditional peoples, entails recognizing and collaborating with them in their roles of analysts, with their knowledge systems treated as legitimate scientific frameworks. Collaboration among researchers, practitioners, and communities should generate applied learning and shared strategies, with science acting as a partner in transformation rather than a distant observer.

Institutionalization and appropriate evaluation frameworks were highlighted as critical next steps. Many Indigenous and community enterprises are informal and excluded from formal finance. Tailored technical assistance and accountants who understand small, non-capitalized ventures can help overcome this barrier. Success should be measured not only in income or production volumes but also in the resilience of local organizations, the continuity of their actions, and their ability to evolve beyond project cycles. Flexible indicators aligned with territorial realities, stable funding for monitoring, and ethical, patient financing were also seen as essential to sustaining meaningful change.

The resulting vision is of an economy rooted in the Amazonian forest and waters, where the value of standing ecosystems underpins financial instruments, value is added locally, and prosperity is redefined around social, ecological, and cultural integrity.

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For more information on the workshop agenda, participants, and discussions, please review the detailed report at: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18614370

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About the project 'The Power of Connections'

"The Power of Connections" Project is led by the Tropical Conservation and Development (TCD) Program within the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida (UF), in partnership with the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. "Learning Lessons and Strengthening Coalitions for Amazonian Conservation" is at the heart of this project, which seeks to connect people and collaboratively develop pathways for lasting Pan-Amazonian conservation. This project is funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation through Grant GBMF13270.

About TCD

The mission of the Tropical Conservation and Development (TCD) Program is to connect theory and practice to promote biodiversity conservation, sustainable resource use, and human well-being in the tropics and beyond. TCD is a research and training program of the Center for Latin American Studies, with 10 core faculty and approximately 100 affiliate faculty across the University of Florida campus. TCD has a long history of collaborating with partner organizations in the Amazon and supporting networks of conservation professionals dedicated to sustainable development.

About the Moore Foundation

The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation promotes scientific discovery, environmental conservation, and the unique character of the San Francisco Bay Area. Since 2001, the Moore Foundation's Andes-Amazon Initiative has helped conserve more than 400 million hectares of the Amazon. By 2031, the initiative aims to bring 70 percent of the Amazon biome (forest cover) and the freshwater ecosystems that support it under effective management and conservation.

Organizers

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SCHOOL OF FOREST, FISHERIES, AND GEOMATICS SCIENCES

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