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The potential contributions of an emerging model of polycentric forest governance to reduce deforestation and degradation in the Southwest Amazon

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An emerging model of polycentric forest governance in the Southwest Amazon is demonstrating how multi-level, multi-stakeholder initiatives can effectively address issues of deforestation and forest degradation. Extreme drought events, forest fire and illegal logging are an increasingly major threat to regional development in this frontier area of Brazil and Peru. In 2005 and 2010, extreme drought events in the region caused fires on approximately 900,000 ha in Acre – Brazil alone. Local governments are working together through a transnational, multi-stakeholder partnership to improve the adaptive capacity of their populations to these challenges, and Acre has led the process through its innovative System of Incentives for Ecosystem Services program (SISA in Portuguese).

The ISA-Carbono program, the carbon sequestration component of SISA, is considered to be one of the most advanced jurisdictional REDD+ programs in the world, and it was largely designed through a participatory process, in which the role of all sectors of society in reducing GHG emissions from deforestation and degradation was recognized. The program explicitly considers the role of multiple levels of governance through alignment with the national REDD+ program, inclusion of indigenous and smallholder communities, the private sector, and municipal governments in implementation and benefit-sharing structures, and most recently through engagement of Peruvian stakeholders. Participation in the Governors' Climate and Forests task force (GCF), capacity building workshops hosted by Acre, and a memorandum of understanding (MOU) focused on sustainable development signed by Acre and five regional governments of Peru have together created a new trans-national platform to strengthen territorial management and local adaptive capacity.

We evaluate the performance of SISA as a polycentric model of forest governance, and how its multi-stakeholder structure is contributing to reductions in deforestation in the region. Acre's partnership with the regional governments of the Peruvian Amazon serves as an example of trans-national partnership that can increase the effectiveness of SISA. While bottom-up, multi-stakeholder arrangements are widely perceived as contributing to global change solutions, we provide evidence for their positive performance in the Southwest Amazon.