

Andes-Amazon Initiative Evaluation

Executive Summary

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This document provides an overview of the complete 2020-2021 Andes-Amazon Initiative evaluation, including the main evaluation report, and two complementary reports – the monitoring system assessment and the expert panel analysis.

Part 1: Structure and Frame of the Evaluation

The Andes-Amazon Initiative of the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation has awarded nearly \$520 million in grants since 2003, driven by a simple, far-reaching goal: To “conserve the ecological viability and aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity of the basin.” That goal, and the initial approach to reach it, were described in the first formal framing document, presented to the board in 2003. At that time, the staff estimated that 350 million hectares would need to be brought under effective management and protection.

Reaching the ultimate goal of a healthy functioning Amazon biome over the long term requires reckoning with both the conjunctural circumstances unique to each particular area and the structural forces that constantly undermine that territorial work. This evaluation explores how the initiative has addressed this fundamental challenge over time, with the goal of extracting lessons from the many ways in which the initiative’s approach has delivered tangible benefits to territorial conservation and management systems in the Amazon, while keeping an eye toward the broader structural challenges.

This evaluation differs from the previous external evaluations of the initiative in three meaningful ways.

- First, and most importantly, this evaluation was designed to extract lessons from the entire arc of the initiative, rather than assessing outcomes for a singular budget authorization period.
- Second, it took place entirely during the COVID-19 global pandemic, making field visits impossible, and sharing many of the challenges faced by the foundation and its grantees, as we all adapted to virtual work.
- Finally, the evaluation is complemented by two additional inputs: the monitoring systems assessment prepared by Foundations of Success, looking at the data and tools that staff uses for monitoring progress and adaptive management; and reflections from a small expert panel, comprised of experienced and respected individuals who added

diverse perspectives and opinions on the grantmaking, results, and overall context. The key findings of both of those efforts have been incorporated into the full evaluation report and are also described in this summary.

In simplest terms, this evaluation attempts to answer three overarching sets of questions:

- To what extent was the Andes-Amazon Initiative approach the right one to achieve the overall goal?
- How well did the Andes-Amazon Initiative execute that approach?
- What is the overall, durable impact of the Andes-Amazon Initiative over the lifetime of the initiative?

The evaluator carried out more than sixty key informant interviews; queried both historic and contemporary data from the grants database and the initiative monitoring system; carried out a grantee survey and analyzed previous Center for Effective Philanthropy Grantee Perception Reports; and reviewed the three previous evaluations. The evaluator also consulted the extensive literature and mapping and monitoring platforms that track Amazon protected areas, deforestation trends, threats, and scientific knowledge about the Amazon. That data, along with the inputs from the key informant interviews, monitoring systems assessment, and expert panel inputs are integrated throughout this report.

Part 2: Evaluation Summary Findings

Both the evaluation and the expert panel conclude that the initiative recognized and captured a unique opportunity with its protected areas approach. The expert panel puts it this way:

“These expansive forests—large enough to sustain ecological processes fundamental to the long-term health of complex tropical communities—are crucial both in ensuring the longevity of the basin’s ecosystems, and in acting as a source of plants and animals for degraded systems nearby. Healthy forests also are essential to the livelihoods and well-being of local human communities, and to the continued vibrancy of indigenous and riverine cultures. They provide critical water resources nationally, and influence climate globally. From the perspective of conservation, environmental, social and economic importance, a more appropriate focus for the grant making of the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation would be hard to envision.”

Over the past eighteen years, the initiative has maintained its commitment to its original overarching goal, while adapting to a volatile political and economic context, as well as internal changes in the Moore Foundation. Protected areas have remained at the center of the work, moving from an initial focus on quickly demarcating new areas to a more nuanced (and challenging) mix of creation and consolidation, putting more and more emphasis on durable

systems for long-term management of protected areas. The initiative made a significant, positive impact and approached its original goal, both in the amount of land protected, and the systems for making those protections meaningful and durable.

Foundation staff realized early on that bringing protected areas under management was only part of the solution and therefore shifted much of the effort into consolidation of protected areas, including working toward integrating them into regional planning, and nurturing protected areas systems with dedicated, sustainable sources of finance. Along the way, foundation funding helped develop sophisticated mapping and monitoring capacity and deepened the understanding of biodiversity in the basin and how different ecological systems interact. Grants built up a vibrant civil society ecosystem in Brazil, Peru, and Colombia (and to a lesser extent in Ecuador and Bolivia) at the same time as they strengthened national and subnational systems for environmental protection in the Amazon. Deforestation inside Moore-supported protected areas has remained consistently low, even as deforestation and land-use change has accelerated in recent years outside protected areas. Initiative staff have proved adept at defining, contracting for, and measuring outcomes in ways that both document progress, and inform adaptation.

But the structural forces that put the Amazon biome at risk in 2003 continue to loom over the region in ways that threaten the whole system, and the overarching initiative goal. Scientific experts now believe that we are rapidly approaching a [“tipping point”](#) or permanent shift in the hydrological cycle of the Amazon basin that would lead to a massive loss of forests, droughts in the Eastern Amazon, flooding in the west, and a conversion to primarily savanna ecosystems. Some parts of the south-east Amazon may have already shifted from a carbon sink to a carbon source, according to [recent research](#). The loss of the Amazon biome as a carbon sink would accelerate local and global climate changes and result in a cataclysmic loss of biological diversity.

This section distills the analysis of the five substantive chapters of the full evaluation into ten overall findings that present a synthesis of how the initiative met the challenge it set out for itself eighteen years ago, as well as the lessons it learned along the way.

1. The protected areas approach captured an opportunity, and the subsequent commitment to consolidation is yielding impacts consistent with the Moore Foundation Statement of Founders’ Intent.

The initiative designers presented a strong case in 2003 that the window for creating large, protected areas from existing public lands was open but closing rapidly. The initiative made an important contribution to capturing that opportunity, mobilizing political will and scientific knowledge to contribute to the creation and consolidation of protected areas. By and large, the protected areas strategy has succeeded in putting areas under protection that might have otherwise been turned over to agriculture or

extraction, or simply lost to small and large-scale land-use conversion. Evidence from past evaluations, data collected by grantees and numerous mapping, biodiversity inventory, and other studies support the assertion that the protected areas strategy reduced deforestation pressure and bought time for maintaining forest cover and protecting biodiversity inside all three categories of protected areas.

2. The Amazon biome remains at critical risk and could be lost—with catastrophic impacts on biodiversity, climate, and human wellbeing.

The initiative grantees made impressive gains in terms of both creating protected areas and moving them toward consolidation. However, those gains are at risk, and extreme risk in some cases. Staff have attempted to address some of the economic and political pressures that threaten the Amazon, but many of them lie outside the current scope of influence. Even in the case of relatively well consolidated protected areas, consolidation does not equal permanence. The movement to “green” on the protected-area consolidation scores does not mean those areas are “fixed” and the foundation can move on. This finding is well illustrated in the contrast between the protected area consolidation scores and the durability indicators from the mosaics analysis. With protected areas, the foundation can demonstrate clear influence on consolidation. With broader mosaics, the influence of the initiative is less easy to trace. The consolidation of the gains that the initiative helped to bring about will require ongoing monitoring, and ongoing adaptation of strategies to the evolving political, scientific and economic context. The Andes-Amazon Initiative 2017 reframe, including the new infrastructure strategy, a sub-strategy for Indigenous lands, and the freshwater sub-strategy all take important steps toward making the connection between structural problems and the territorial interventions where the initiative has made a measurable difference.

3. Durability requires both consistency and innovation.

After impressive early reductions, deforestation has been on the rise since 2012, especially in Brazil. The best science now warns ominously of an Amazon tipping point rapidly approaching (or already here). Therefore, even if everything were working perfectly in protected areas, it is not good enough to assume that gains to date will endure into the future. New energy and creativity are needed. The initiative adapted to this reality with new work on infrastructure, Indigenous lands, and a renewed commitment to hydrological health. These innovations show significant promise and report some initial positive impacts. The infrastructure strategy has been developed with theories of change that are well documented (see monitoring system assessment report) and designed to test assumptions for ongoing adaptive management. Support for collaborative science—such as the Science Panel on the Amazon—also holds promise for driving innovation in the Amazon. More of this creative energy and willingness to take risks will be needed to address the systemic threats to the Amazon.

4. Strong and diverse constituencies for conservation are needed and have not been consolidated.

Good governance mechanisms are vital, with adequate civil society oversight and an engaged constituency that can hold governments to account when they backslide. The foundation, along with much of the conservation sector, has historically relied on the ability of a relatively small number of technically skilled professionals (both inside and outside government) both to oversee protected areas management and to position protected areas in national policy and political debates. This approach has not succeeded in building durable constituencies for a resilient, healthy Amazon that can stand up to economic and populist political pressures. The expert panel discusses the challenge of constituency building in detail and makes concrete recommendations that merit consideration.

5. Indigenous territories, governance, and rights require more focused attention.

Indigenous lands comprise 49% of the protected areas that the initiative is supporting and tracking in its target mosaics, covering much more land than strict protection areas (24%). This was recognized from the outset and many grantees worked to engage forest-dwelling people. The 2015 evaluation identified the weakness in protections for Indigenous lands as a major stumbling block to reaching initiative goals. The continued weakness in finance, governance, and legal protections for Indigenous lands is amply described in both the protected areas consolidation data and mosaic durability data. A new sub-strategy for Indigenous rights in Brazil – implemented through an initial set of grants in 2019 – takes up this challenge. In light of the political hostility facing Indigenous communities, most notably in Brazil, even well-entrenched land rights of Indigenous peoples are at risk. Institutional protections for land tenure and collective rights remain weak, even where those rights have legal standing. Existing vulnerabilities in Indigenous lands have been exacerbated by the pandemic, making this work all the more urgent.

6. The foundation has helped to mobilize additional and durable resources for conservation.

The initiative has made an important and durable contribution to conservation in the creation of long-term funding mechanisms for protected areas. The Amazon Region Protected Areas Program in Brazil is recognized by governments, funders, and NGOs as an important innovation that guarantees sustainable finance for some protected areas. Patrimonio Natural del Peru, and Herencia Colombia hold similar promise for increasing the durability of protected areas in those two countries. Other collaborations, such as the Wyss/Andes-Amazon Fund partnership, Legacy Landscapes fund, Climate and Land Use fund, and the Integrated Legacy of the Amazon Region project have also brought tens of millions in additional funding to protected areas in the Amazon. If the mechanisms prove resilient to changes in government and other pressures, they will

represent an enduring legacy of Moore Foundation grantmaking in the region. However, the ongoing success of these programs cannot be left to chance.

7. Donor coordination has made a difference, but more is needed.

The foundation remains a major player in grant funding for Amazon conservation, even as the overall pot of funds for conservation and avoided deforestation has grown significantly. Initiative staff are respected as leaders in the field. Building toward resilience requires a diversified approach that addresses the matrix of structural and conjunctural conditions needed for durable conservation. There is no doubt that the Moore Foundation can't do everything that is needed, but staff could do more to coordinate with others to make sure that gaps are filled and the synergies among activities achieve the "portfolio effect" — thereby increasing impact and reducing risk. By holding itself accountable to making a difference on the full scope of the challenge, whether in its own grantmaking, by deliberately coordinating with other donors to avoid gaps, or by seeking to influence and shape funding that could have a positive or negative impact on the Amazon (bilateral/multilateral donors and infrastructure funders).

8. Knowledge creation, monitoring and evaluation make the biggest impact when accompanied by pathways to communication and action.

Over the lifetime of the initiative, the foundation has made large investments in knowledge creation, monitoring, and evaluation. That work has greatly increased scientific understanding of the Amazon, but it would have a greater impact if accompanied by a clear communications strategy, including clearer narratives, and targets that directly address stakeholders. Additional investments in knowledge creation should contribute to the broader strategy of building stronger constituencies for conservation. Newer investments in knowledge creation (such as the recently released report from the Science Panel on the Amazon, "[The Amazon We Want](#)") link science to specific economic and policy opportunities, ultimately nurturing constituencies for a healthy Amazon in urban areas. The growing urbanization of the region cries out for a compelling narrative relating the health of the Amazon to human health, urban water systems, and sustainable economic opportunities. The expert panel takes up this issue in more detail in its recommendations for "shaping new narratives" for the Amazon.

9. Long-term gains require long-term commitments.

As the initiative has demonstrated over the past two decades, moving toward a healthy, sustainable, biologically diverse Amazon requires long-term investments. The notion of putting an end date on the initiative does hold some appeal. It can help drive the urgency of response. It can clarify what is possible over a specific time period. But it does not reflect the reality of the threat matrix for this critical ecosystem, which must be kept functioning for many reasons, not least among them the human rights and dignity of its residents, the Earth's climate, water for millions of people, and the biodiversity of the planet. The foundation's decision in 2013 to abandon the protected areas approach for the Amazon was not based on the best science or available data at

the time, and in retrospect does not seem consistent with Founders' Intent. It is encouraging that the foundation did re-commit to its core strategy, following an extensive consultation with a broad range of experts in 2015-16, but we may never know how severely the foundation undermined its own impact.

10. The COVID-10 pandemic has taken a grave toll—and may create opportunities.

Despite the many challenges they faced, many Moore grantees have continued to carry out significant work over the past 15 months. In general, groups who were closer to the field were the quickest to react, adapt, and innovate. Despite heroic efforts from grantees, the foundation must recognize the reality that COVID not only knocked out 2020, but much of 2021 for work that required engagement with government and planning agencies, or field work in certain areas. Vaccines remain slow to roll out. Indigenous communities and other local or isolated communities are both at risk from the pandemic and under increasing attack as emboldened land grabbers move in. The existing threats to durable conservation have accelerated with lack of government authority and presence in the countryside. As recovery efforts ramp up, political pressure to show short-term progress could accelerate the risks of bad infrastructure projects, weakening environmental and social protections that have taken years to put in place. On the other hand, the expected influx of new funds should create opportunities to shape policies and even re-think economic recovery from a bio-economy or conservation perspective. The foundation and its grantees are well-placed to capture those opportunities from a technical perspective. Seizing the political moment will require agility, flexibility, and openness to bold ideas.

Part 3: Expert Panel Process and Key Findings

“Based on their knowledge of the region, the expert panel considers that not only has AAI grant making contributed directly to the effective management of a significant fraction of the protected areas in the Amazon, but the protected areas which have received AAI investment are part of a portfolio that effectively retains areas of high biodiversity and ecological integrity. In addition, as reported by some members of the expert panel, the consolidation standards adopted by AAI have been widely emulated and thus extensively influenced other protected areas in the region.”

The expert panel participated in the evaluation in three important ways.

- First, convened early in the evaluation process, providing the evaluator with lists of additional experts, and a more detailed list of key questions that the panel believed needed to be addressed. Those questions shaped the structure of both the grantee survey and the key informant interviews.
- Second, the expert panel reviewed the draft full evaluation and provided comments.
- Finally, the expert panel presented its own report.

That report concurs with the full evaluation report on many key issues, including the importance of initiative grantmaking to creating, managing, and consolidating protected areas in the Amazon, as well as its important contributions to protected areas systems and catalytic investments in conservation finance. The expert panel report also highlights many of the same challenges that were discussed in the full evaluation report, taking a careful look at the political and economic power dynamics that put the Amazon and its Indigenous and forest-dwelling peoples at extreme risk. The expert panel highlighted the challenge of building political will and coalitions for conservation in the region, affirming the efforts of the infrastructure strategy to identify and strengthen such coalitions and break down false narratives that pit conservation against prosperity.

The expert panel wrestled with the challenge of situating the good work of the foundation and its grantees in an extremely challenging reality of the Amazon today, noting that “the overall goal of retaining overall forest cover across the Amazon basin remains elusive, and deforestation rates in the Amazon have been increasing since 2012, and at alarming rates in the last two years.”

The expert panel therefore turned its attention to the question of what the Moore Foundation might do to achieve its overarching goal of a functioning Amazon. The panel recommended:

- a. Continuing to strengthen protected areas in the Amazon, especially focusing on mechanisms to sustain financing for administration, management, and enforcement.
- b. A stronger focus on the consolidation of areas managed by Indigenous people and local communities, both inside and outside of formally declared protected areas.
- c. Explicit institution and coalition-building strategies, focusing especially on those that support Indigenous and community-based management of Amazonian forests, to complement those at national and regional levels.
- d. A strategy to build “conservation narratives,” making the case for the value of standing forests, recognizing the ecological and social value of Indigenous territories and communities, and for developing a more sustainable approach to managing resource extraction and infrastructure development in the basin.
- e. More engagement with influencing national policy on conservation and development in general, building on the foundation’s existing influence around protected areas policy and practice.

In the context of several of its recommendations, the expert panel urged the foundation to consider the positive synergies that might be realized between conservation work and efforts

to limit the impacts of climate change—noting both the climate risk to conservation and the potential opportunities for collaborations on those issues.

Part 4: Monitoring System Assessment Key Findings

The monitoring system assessment comprised the first step in the evaluation. Its goal was to assess the degree to which current monitoring, evaluation and learning content and systems provide the information needed to monitor and assess the effectiveness of initiative strategies. The affirmation from the monitoring system assessment of the overall integrity of the initiative monitoring systems was a critical input to the overall evaluation, because the evaluator relied on those systems for key data points on and analysis of protected areas consolidation, threats, and the durability of the protected areas mosaics.

“Overall, the assessment team found that the AAI monitoring evaluation and learning system provides the AAI team with valuable data about both the accomplishments of investments and the context within which AAI is operating. In the face of significant complexity at multiple levels - ecological, socio-cultural, economic, and programmatic - AAI has established clear desired outcomes and developed two focused strategies and a theory of change that provide a powerful and yet relatively simple framework to guide its investments across the basin. In short, the assessment team is not aware of any other program-level initiative operating at a comparable geographic scale with all of the monitoring, evaluation and learning elements that AAI has put in place.”

The monitoring system assessment describes significant strengths in the monitoring system, noting that both the complexities of the Amazon and the diversity of grantmaking present unique challenges for adaptive management. For purposes of the evaluation, the monitoring system assessment found

“an extensive amount of data going back to 2013 will support an evaluation of the cumulative impacts of Moore investments over time. For the drivers [infrastructure] strategy, indicators are clearly tied to a solid theory of change and will provide useful information about the contributions of initial, pilot investments.”

The monitoring system assessment concluded that the initiative has a “**clear ultimate outcome** – and clear, measurable outcomes at the strategy and sub-strategy levels.” In validating the data for use in the overall evaluation, the assessment affirmed that the initiative strategy documents, measurement, evaluation, and learning plan, Miradi files, the monitoring data, and the internal strategic review documents “all reflect a **strong situation analysis** and a process of continuous reflection on the situation in the Amazon, as it changes.” The monitoring system assessment further noted that “**reporting in Power BI is very valuable** and makes an enormous

amount of data in the shared Microsoft Excel online database accessible in a digestible form and enables the team to start with high-level summaries and then dig into the details and do more seamless queries.” The monitoring system assessment also found that the use of these tools improved in recent years and that the initiative team is actively using and continuously improving their monitoring system.

The monitoring system assessment also identified opportunities for improvement that might be implemented in a new or refreshed initiative. In particular, it suggested that staff continue to “organize measurement, evaluation, and learning content in a way that illustrates the complex relationships among outcomes, objectives, indicators, assumptions and management questions.” The assessment also recommended the use of a single system to manage the core elements of the various theories of change and management plans. It affirmed the importance of qualitative indicators for measuring complex and long-term changes and suggested that those indicators could yield better information if staff is provided “more comprehensive guidance (with examples) on how to apply qualitative rating criteria” and that staff be encouraged to document the rationale for each rating so that progress can be reviewed more comprehensively over time.

Finally, the monitoring system assessment recommended that the initiative staff take a more deliberate approach to defining how information gathered from the monitoring system will be used in decision making, including how and when evaluation will take place.

A final note on measurement: The expert panel also weighed in on the question of measurement and metrics echoing the monitoring system assessment recommendation for a more deliberate approach to assessing cause and effect on different interventions and encouraging a coordinated theory of change that takes into consideration “the many ancillary impacts of protected areas consolidation, such as institution-building; improved regulations and management; local livelihoods, and strengthened conservation constituencies.”

Conclusion

The Andes-Amazon Initiative has adapted over time to address some of the contextual factors that limit the durability of the outcomes it has pursued, including important breakthroughs in sustainable finance, strengthened protected areas systems, and the consolidation of protected areas themselves. Nevertheless, the future of the Amazon remains uncertain. Choices made over the next decade will determine whether the Amazon biome as we currently know it will endure into the future. The foundation has made an important contribution. It has seeded and supported technical capacity. It has brought millions of acres into protected status and embraced the hard work of keeping them that way. It has bought critical time for hundreds of

forest communities and countless species, despite growing pressures on the biome. Along the way, it has learned pivotal lessons about the power and limitation of site-based work, particularly in the face of powerful political and economic interests. Those lessons should inform a bold and creative path forward. There is still a great deal more to be done and the foundation still has the potential to make a real and enduring difference.