Governance and Infrastructure in the Amazon – GIA Project

GIA PROJECT FINAL REPORT:

SYNTHESIS OF LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INFRASTRUCTURE GOVERNANCE

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This work reflects the contributions and mutual learning with all GIA students, post-docs, and regional partner organizations.

September 15, 2021

Realization:

TCD Tropical Conservation & Development Program

UF | Center for Latin American Studies
UNIVERSITY *of* FLORIDA

Support:

GORDON AND BETTY MOORE FOUNDATION

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GIA OVERVIEW

The Governance and Infrastructure in the Amazon project (GIA) led by the Tropical Conservation and Development Program at the University of Florida was established in the Fall of 2018 to create, strengthen, and implement a pan-Amazon Community of Practice and Learning (CoP-L). The GIA CoP-L provided a forum for social learning and analysis about the challenges and strategies for reducing threats to protected areas and other lands from poorly planned infrastructure projects.

GIA is a polycentric network of key stakeholders from grassroots organizations, academia, NGOs and government in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, and Peru. The network developed and adapted over the 3-year project. Activities in the first phase (building the network and learning about tools and strategies, 2019) included:

- Consultation and data gathering from leading NGOs in the 4 countries.
- Regional workshops in each country with a broader set of key actors including grassroots organizations, academia, and government.
- Analysis of 55 cases of organizational conservation strategies used by these actors.

Based on analysis of the 55 cases, GIA identified what seemed to be the most effective conservation strategies for improving infrastructure governance[1]. Informed by these results, GIA's second and third phases (2020-2021) conducted analysis and learning to deepen our understanding of the theory of change embodied in the project's conceptual framework. The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted planned travel and in-person events, but GIA partners adapted effectively. Using virtual tools and innovative approaches to research and partnership, we were able to hear and incorporate local voices, demands and realities:

- We convened regional and thematic working groups.
- GIA partners co-produced knowledge that contributes to regional governance and presents broader lessons about infrastructure governance strategies (see List of Products).
- We held a series of webinars and workshops to present, validate and expand these results (April and May 2021).[2]

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[1] https://giamazon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Tools-and-Strategies-Preliminary-Assessment.pdf
[2] Final workshop overview and key findings.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

GIA's conceptual framework begins with a representation of "business as usual" for infrastructure governance, driven by an "iron triangle" of commercial, financial, and governmental interests who effectively co-opt local and national constituencies and governance processes, interrupt community organization, limit consultation, and control information flows. The iron triangle is primarily composed of high scale actors (national and international) who control (drive) infrastructure planning and implementation, with socioecological impacts at local (as well as national and global) scales (Figure 1). In this scenario, socioenvironmental actors are relatively marginalized, and challenged to intervene in this infrastructure governance arena to address power imbalances (blue icon and dashed lines at bottom left of Figure 1).
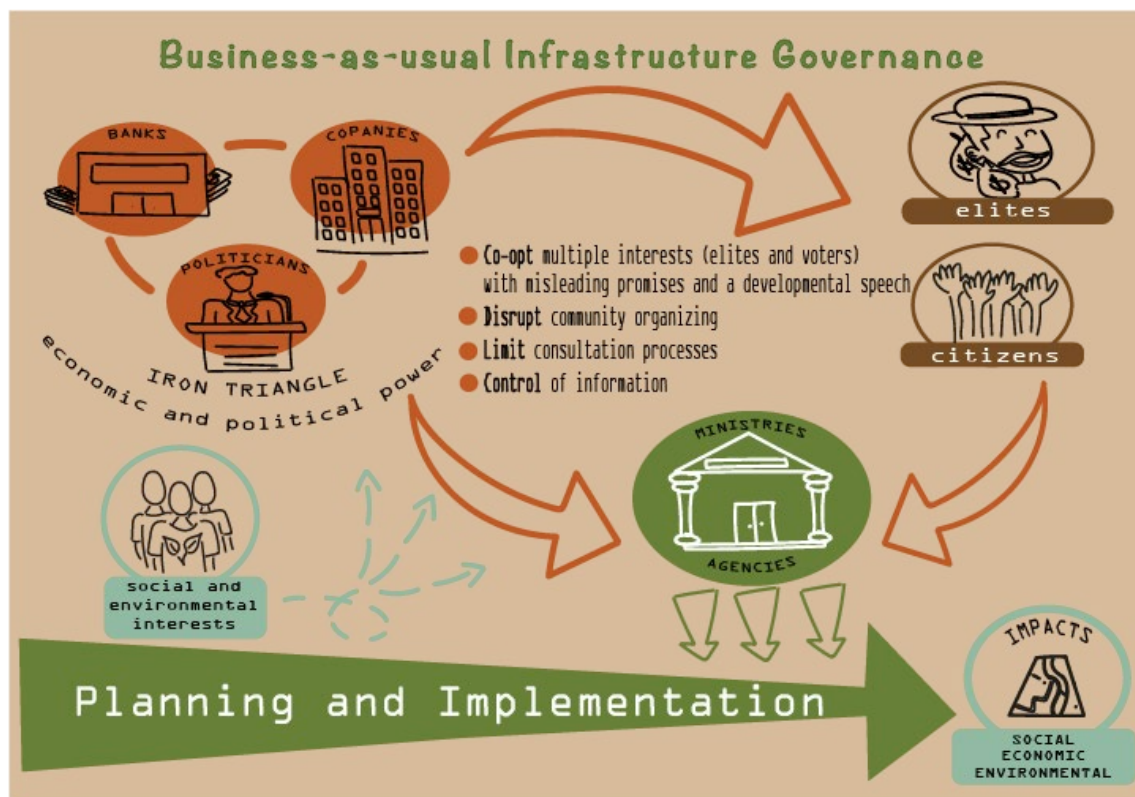

FIGURE 1 – CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF BUSINESS-AS-USUAL INFRASTRUCTURE GOVERNANCE, EMPHASIZING THE POWER IMBALANCE BETWEEN INFRASTRUCTURE PROPONENTS AND SOCIOENVIRONMENTAL INTERESTS.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT INFRASTRUCTURE GOVERNANCE STRATEGIES

The GIA preliminary assessment identified *partnership, knowledge creation and sharing,* and *communications* as essential elements of a Theory of Change for infrastructure governance (Figure 2). Further, GIA explored how to implement these strategies in an integrated, effective manner. GIA's final workshop validated the overall approach and produced recommendations and guidelines for how to implement it (see Sabo et al. article forthcoming and below).
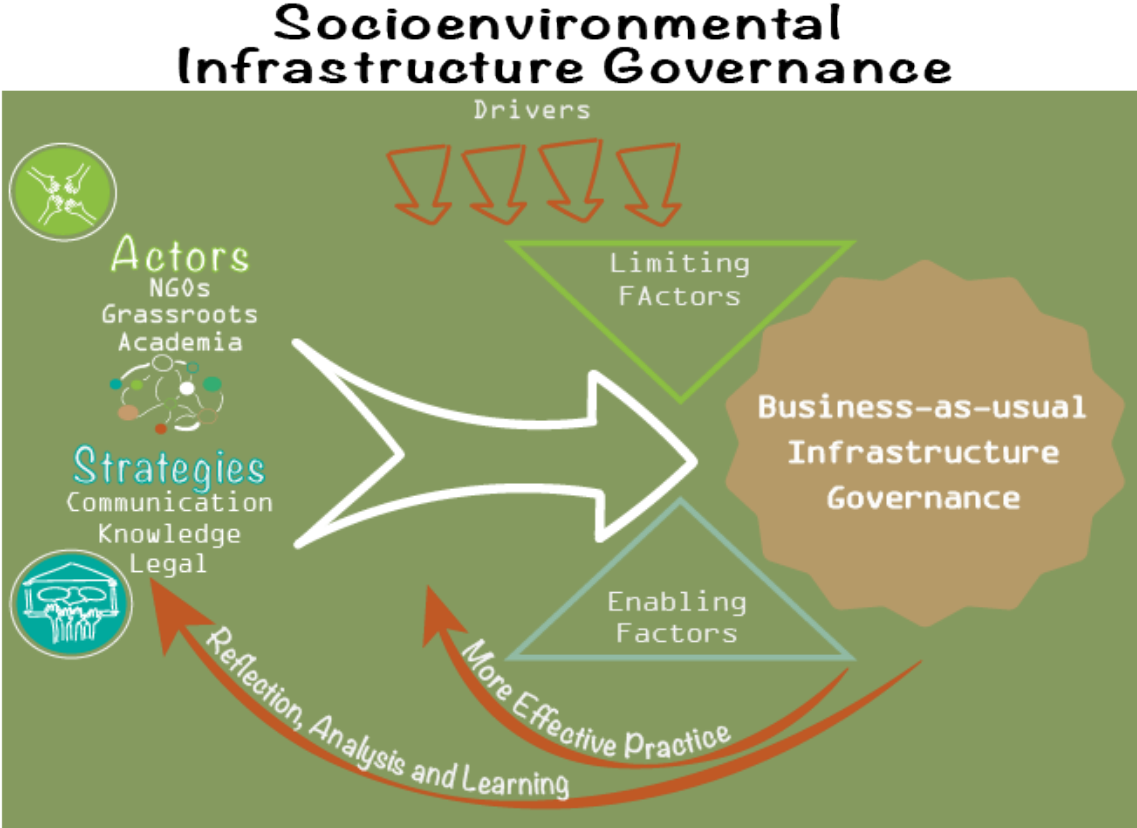

FIGURE 2 – GIA THEORY OF CHANGE FOR SOCIOENVIRONMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE GOVERNANCE. ACTORS AND THEIR STRATEGIES CAN INFLUENCE INFRASTRUCTURE GOVERNANCE, WITHIN A CONTEXT OF DRIVERS AND ENABLING/LIMITING CONDITIONS. BOTTOM ARROWS REPRESENT GIA LEARNING AND IMPROVED PRACTICE.

- KEY ACTORS: The GIA preliminary assessment of 55 cases of strategies for infrastructure governance[3] highlighted the role of grassroots organizations, which are responsible for 50% of the most effective strategies while being involved in only 18% of the total cases. These organizations have many effective partnerships with NGOs. Historically, partnerships between grassroots organizations and academia have been less frequent and less responsive to community needs, but GIA has demonstrated how knowledge co-generation can effectively support and empower communities. Therefore, a major component of the GIA theory of change is **effective collaboration among these actors**, and we present findings and recommendations on how this collaboration can be most effective (see Sabo et al. article forthcoming, and products on intercultural collaboration).

- KEY STRATEGIES: From both the preliminary assessment and subsequent work, we demonstrate that **knowledge and communications** are key aspects of any effective infrastructure governance strategy. **Knowledge** is the basis of understanding infrastructure impacts and developing a positive and proactive agenda for infrastructure and development that meets local needs; knowledge forms the basis for all actors to determine their positions and interests with regards to infrastructure and governance more broadly. **Communications** is essential both internally and externally: to build shared understanding and mobilize local actors within grassroots organizations, to engage with other constituencies who may share similar interests and values, and to influence decision-making as part of political negotiations.

Along with the factors and strategies that are necessary for successful infrastructure governance, GIA also identified two key limiting factors (Figure 2): **power relationships** in the governance arena are inherently unfavorable; and the **local/regional scale on which GIA's theory of change focuses may be insufficient** to address large-scale drivers. These limiting factors must be addressed in future work, as described below.

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[3] https://giamazon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Tools-and-Strategies-Preliminary-Assessment.pdf

OPPORTUNITIES FOR APPLICATION OF GIA LESSONS FOR LONG-TERM IMPACT

GIA's analysis and results address the two pathways of our theory of change for effective infrastructure governance: 1) an engaged network of academic, NGO, and grassroots partners; and 2) co-production of relevant knowledge that is then used to influence ongoing government processes through communications, mobilization and political negotiation. We highlight below key lessons and recommendations that emerged from GIA for each pathway:

Lessons and recommendations for intersectoral collaboration

While NGO-grassroots collaboration is a longstanding partnership, GIA incorporated into our community of practice academic partners from regional universities, who could scale-up impact in terms of knowledge generation. Importantly, GIA participants have advanced in defining how such partnerships can be most effective for infrastructure governance:

- *community engagement from definition of research topics to data gathering and analysis;*
- *recognition and respect for grassroots ontologies, epistemologies, timing, and knowledge;*
- *community autonomy and co-ownership of research products.*

This approach is challenging for universities, but GIA's experience integrating UF graduate students who have deep local knowledge and connections with motivated students and faculty at Amazon universities has shown the way forward.

For future work, GIA participants recognize the need to strategically expand their influence to other stakeholders at multiple scales in Figure 1; these may include churches, legislatures, government agencies, the private sector and investors.[4] Critically, this engagement can leverage knowledge products already produced but not widely accessible, and expand the use of communication strategies for political impact on aspects related to infrastructure governance and beyond (e.g., access to education and health). Incorporation of artistic expression for both internal and external communications is a specific approach that GIA participants have highlighted and demonstrated and should be expanded in future work.

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[4] GIA opened a dialogue between government and grassroots organizations in the Colombia CoP-L about participation in regional planning; grassroots partners in the Upper Madera CoP-L have begun an outreach campaign to share GIA products with incoming municipal and departmental governments.

The learning and reflection engendered by GIA's Community of Practice and Learning catalyzed new and innovative partnerships among organizations; we learned to engage with each type of organization -- grassroots organizations, regional universities, NGOs (and to some extent government) – based on their interests, capacities, and agendas. Expanding this intersectoral collaboration can reach broader audiences, with new and innovative mechanisms for communication and awareness raising to improve effective governance and achieve desirable outcomes.

Lessons and recommendations for advancing governance strategies

Partnerships, knowledge, and communication strategies can be deployed within specific arenas to influence governance. In our preliminary assessment, we identified two strategies that were widely utilized in cases of effective governance: **legal/judicial approaches** and **policy advocacy.** The GIA legal/judicial working group from Rondônia and southern Amazonas has done preliminary work such as compiling and documenting legal tools; this needs to be continued and expanded to provide information and build capacity that partner grassroots organizations can incorporate into their infrastructure governance strategies. Specifically, protocols for free, prior, and informed consent, as developed with two communities in the Upper Madera mosaic through GIA, can be expanded to promote more effective infrastructure governance.

GIA's communication assessment was a first approach to better understand communication strategies that can influence political advocacy. However, policy drivers often come from a higher scale than the regional and local partnerships and strategies that were GIA's focus. For future work, it is important to consider opportunities for synergies across scale, i.e. continued GIA work with grassroots organizations, NGOs and academia at local and regional scale, that complements policy advocacy and transparency efforts performed by national and international NGOs in the region. The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation's Amazon-Andes Initiative Drivers Strategy supports a network of NGOs and universities that are leaders in this field and potential collaborators for cross-scale strategies.

THE GIA NETWORK AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

In its final configuration, the GIA network integrated 3 regional/thematic CoP-Ls (Communities of Practice and Learning) and one pan-Amazon thematic CoP-L on Communication Strategies. The figure below shows the configuration of key partners from grassroots organizations, NGOs and regional universities in 4 Amazonian countries with whom we are currently working to jointly design an agenda and fundraising strategies to sustain our future collaborative work. Ongoing next steps center on the incorporation of knowledge and products that have been co-generated by GIA partners into their mobilization and political negotiation strategies. This includes:

- *strategic communication with government and other powerful stakeholders on infrastructure impacts and an alternative development agenda in the Upper Madera mosaic;*
- *designing a pedagogical strategy to use co-generated knowledge for community mobilization and formation of a next generation of leaders in Colombia; and*
- *application of legal-juridical methodologies with communities impacted by dams, roads, and mining in Rondônia and southern Amazonas.*

GIA 's pan-Amazon network provides a space for dialogue among grassroots protagonists of infrastructure governance, strengthens the use of strategic communications, and replicates and expands effective practices across regions.
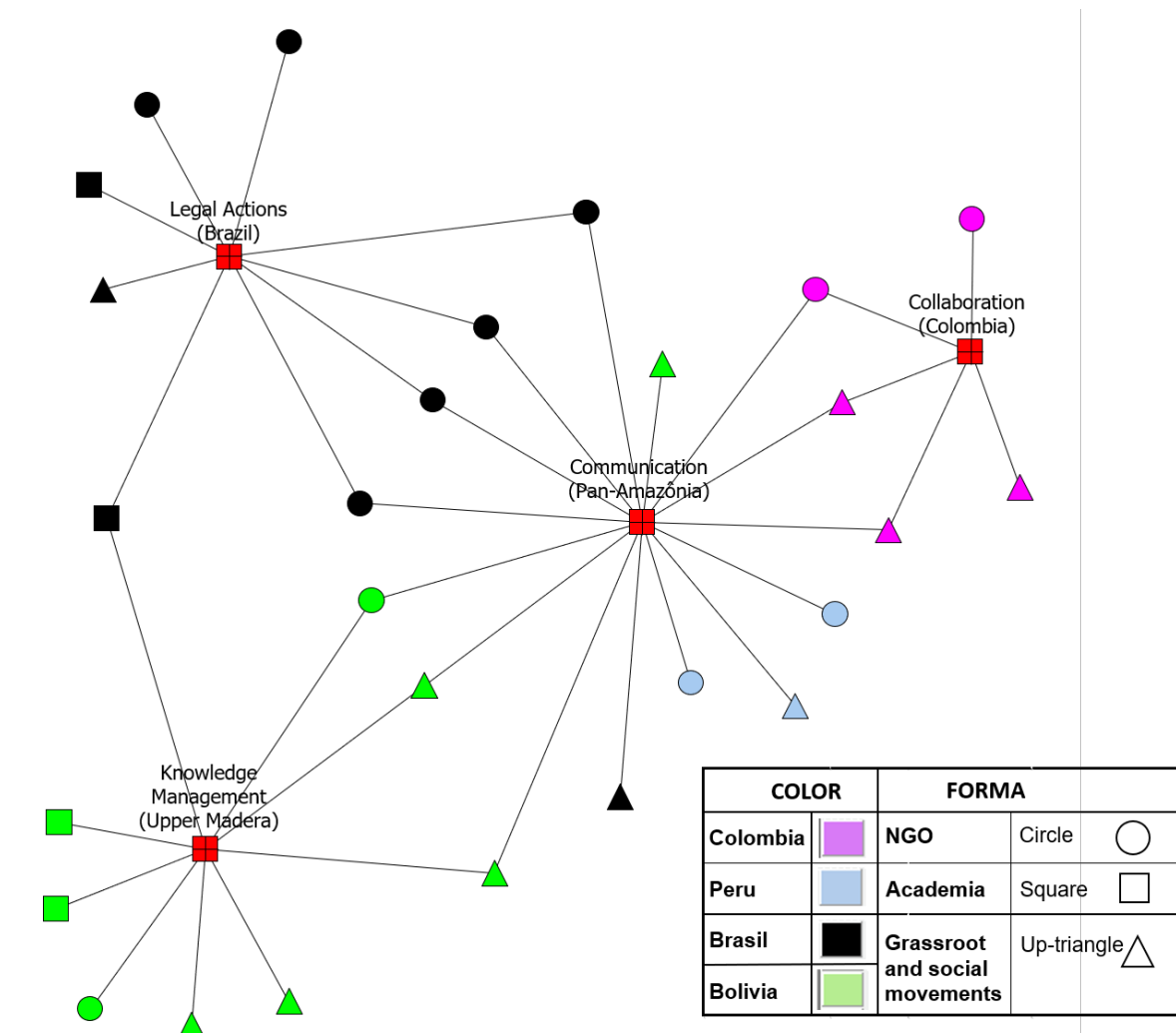
FIGURE 3 – KEY GIA PARTNERS FROM GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS, NGOS AND REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMPOSED OF REGIONAL AND THEMATIC SUB-NETWORKS.

In addition to the continuity of GIA, UF sees opportunities to scale up to a broader environmental justice and capacity-building agenda by linking to other regions with grassroots networks with which UF is already collaborating, such as the Gran Chaco, rural Ecuador, MAP, the southern cone of Latin America, and southern Africa. While UF/TCD has a long history of bridging teaching, research, and practice in partnership with conservation and development practitioners, GIA has had the resources, flexibility and focus to demonstrate a more complete "proof of concept" that combines partnerships, knowledge co-generation, and specific conservation strategies to improve effectiveness of infrastructure governance. This model features academic participation in tandem with other stakeholders and can be replicated in other regions. UF/TCD thus stands to make a unique contribution to global challenges of conservation and development, environmental justice, the climate crisis, the knowledge-application recommendations of the Science Panel for the Amazon, and all 17 UN SDGs.