Conservation agreements

Helping protect Peru's Amazon forests and their residents

Regional Conservation Areas help protect Peru's Amazon forests, support sustainable local development and mitigate climate change. Managing them effectively requires coordination between public bodies, local organisations and other actors in the area.

Regional governments use conservation agreements as a participatory approach to achieve this. With support from the Swiss SECO-funded Subnational Public Finance Management programme, including training, technical assistance and clearer procedures, authorities are making these agreements more practical, measurable and aligned with conservation priorities.

Nine agreements have now been signed and four more are being developed. Together, they strengthen the protection of more than 5,300 hectares of Amazon forest. The experience provides a practical example of how participatory governance can strengthen environmental management at the subnational level and offers a model for other regions.

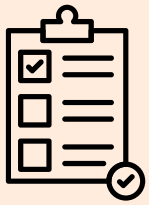


The aim of participatory conservation agreements: everyone gives the thumbs up. Source: Subnational PFM programme.



Targeted interventions

The programme identified and targeted issues including limited technical capacity, weak coordination between national and regional authorities and a lack of standard procedures.



Clear steps and measurable commitments

A clearer methodology introduced defined stages for designing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing agreements. This made the commitments easier to verify.



Nine new agreements

Programme support contributed to nine agreements in the region of San Martín, with four more in development. Before, only two such agreements existed nationwide.



Unlocking funding opportunities

Signing a conservation agreement can help local associations qualify for competitive funding, such as the *Entrepreneurs for Nature* fund, to support conservation commitments and sustainable economic activities.



Benefits for all

The agreements strengthen legal certainty for the sustainable use of natural resources, help local organisations access funding and support Peru's progress towards global conservation commitments.



A model for other regions and countries

San Martín's proposed Regional Directive on Conservation Agreements can help institutionalise the approach and support its use in other regions and countries.

The challenge: conserving forests through coordinated local action

Peru's forests under pressure

Tropical forests store vast amounts of carbon, regulate the climate, protect biodiversity and sustain millions of livelihoods. The Amazon is home to around 10 percent of all known species (Science Panel for the Amazon, 2021). Peru has a strategic role in its conservation: more than 72 million hectares of forest cover around 56 percent of the country (MINAM and DAR, 2021).

Yet these ecosystems face growing threats. Peru lost an average of 172,000 hectares of forest each year between 2010 and 2020 (FAO, 2021). Around 80 percent of this loss is linked to agricultural expansion, particularly farming and livestock production. Other drivers include illegal mining, illegal logging and illicit crops (Koelle and Garcia Soto, 2025).

Peru has established protected natural areas to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem services. Effective management of these areas protects strategic ecosystems, supports local livelihoods and advances national and international environmental commitments. These include Target 3 of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, known as the 30x30 target. This calls for at least 30 percent of the world's land and sea to be effectively conserved by 2030.



Cordillera Escalera Regional Conservation Area. Source: Subnational PFM programme.

Some protected areas are managed by the national government through the National Service for Natural Areas Protected by the State (SERNANP). Others are managed by regional governments and are known as Regional Conservation Areas. The Subnational PFM programme works with the latter. These areas cover 3.6 million hectares, or 2.8 percent of Peru's territory (SERNANP, 2025a).

Why conservation agreements are needed

One of the main management challenges is effective coordination between public bodies, local organisations and other actors in the area (SERNANP, 2025b).

To address this challenge, the Peruvian Government promotes participatory approaches to biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources (SERNANP, 2023). Conservation agreements are one such approach. Through these voluntary instruments, the authorities responsible for protected areas agree conservation commitments with communities, associations, businesses and other local actors.

However, regional governments face significant barriers when putting conservation agreements into practice.

- Institutional frameworks and procedures are often underdeveloped.
- Managers and technical teams may have limited knowledge of the mechanism.
- Coordination can also be difficult between SERNANP and the regional governments responsible for the conservation areas.

These gaps limit the agreements' potential and underline the need for stronger capacities, clearer procedures and better coordination.

The response: strengthening conservation agreements

The Subnational PFM programme developed a practical strategy to address these barriers. It focused on strengthening institutional capacity, improving coordination with SERNANP and establishing a more robust framework for participatory conservation.

The table below shows how the support responded to the main gaps identified.

Identified problem	Programme response
Limited awareness of conservation agreements among managers and technical teams	Training and technical assistance on designing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing conservation agreements
Weak coordination between SERNANP and regional governments	A clear roadmap and technical support throughout the preparation, signature and review of agreements, in coordination with SERNANP
Weak institutional frameworks and procedures	Support to develop a regional directive that standardises procedures and strengthens legal certainty

Gaps in implementing conservation agreements and corresponding programme support. Source: Subnational PFM programme.

The programme's technical assistance introduced a more rigorous method for managing conservation agreements.

- **Clear stages for better monitoring**: In line with SERNANP guidance, the new agreements set out clear stages for design, implementation, monitoring, review and feedback. This makes it easier to verify commitments and assess whether activities are reducing threats such as deforestation and contributing to ecosystem conservation.
- **Defined areas**: Each agreement also defines a precisely georeferenced area and aligns its commitments with the conservation objectives in the relevant area's Master Plan.[1]
- **Stronger capacity**: The programme also strengthened the capacity of conservation area managers, local associations and other actors through specialised workshops, coordination meetings and ongoing technical support. This helped participants understand the mechanism, improved coordination between regional governments and SERNANP, and supported the consistent application of national standards.

From individual agreements to a regional directive

The programme provided support throughout the process, from identifying potential signatories to preparing workplans and monitoring arrangements.

In San Martín, it also helped develop a proposed Regional Directive on Conservation Agreements in coordination with SERNANP. The directive is intended to standardise procedures for designing, implementing, monitoring and overseeing agreements. It should help institutionalise the approach, sustain it over time and provide a model for other regions.

Results: stronger agreements and wider benefits



Conservation agreement between the Association Mel de Montaña and San Martín's Regional Environmental Authority. Source: Subnational PFM programme.

More agreements in place

Before the Subnational PFM programme became involved, only two conservation agreements were in force across Peru's Regional Conservation Areas, both in Loreto.

With programme support, nine agreements have been signed in

1 Under Peruvian law, the Master Plan is the highest-level strategic planning document for managing a protected natural area. It sets out the area's zoning, strategies, policies, objectives and management programmes, as well as mechanisms for coordination and participation with actors in the area and its buffer zone. It must be developed through a participatory process and reviewed periodically (Article 37 of Supreme Decree No. 038-2001-AG, approving the Regulations of the Protected Natural Areas Act).

two conservation areas in San Martín and four more are being developed. This represents a significant expansion in the use of this participatory management tool.



Meeting between representatives of the Federation of Native Communities of the Ampiyacu (FECONA), the Subnational PFM programme and the Swiss Economic Cooperation. Source: Subnational PFM programme.

Stronger local stewardship

The signed agreements are strengthening surveillance, control and ecosystem conservation. Participating associations have become strategic partners for conservation area managers. They help monitor the territory and prevent illegal activities and other threats to natural resources.

The agreements also provide greater legal certainty for the sustainable use of resources. This strengthens the operational capacity of local organisations and supports the long-term viability of their economic activities.

New access to funding

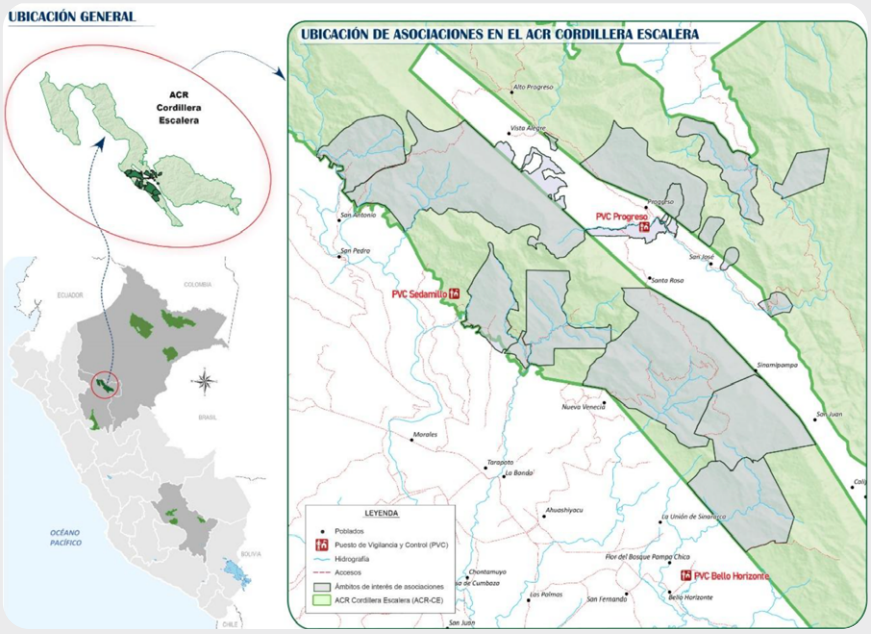
Conservation agreements can also help local associations, communities and businesses access funding for the sustainable use of natural resources.

Some competitive funds now require applicants to have signed, or committed to sign, a conservation agreement. One example is the Entrepreneurs for Nature fund managed by Peru's Fund for the Promotion of Protected Natural Areas (PROFONANPE).

The Takiwasi Association and the Mel de Montaña Association, which participated in the programme-supported process, have both secured funding. This will help them meet their conservation commitments while creating opportunities for sustainable local economic development.

Case study: Cordillera Escalera Regional Conservation Area, San Martín

Cordillera Escalera is one of nine Regional Conservation Areas supported by the Subnational PFM programme across Cusco, Loreto and San Martín. It covers 149,870 hectares. Of this area, 1,059 hectares, or 0.71 percent, are classified for tourism and recreation (San Martín Regional Government, 2018). These zones contain 10 natural sites of high biodiversity, landscape and tourism value, as shown in the map on the following page.



Map of the Cordillera Escalera Regional Conservation Area. Source: Subnational PFM programme.

The San Martín Regional Environmental Authority had signed agreements with 17 tourism and research associations to support activities in these zones. However, the agreements were not fully aligned with SERNANP guidance on preparation and follow-up. Their commitments were also weakly linked to the strategic objectives in the area's Master Plan. This limited the associations' contribution to reducing threats and conserving ecosystems.

The Subnational PFM programme responded in two ways.

- First, working with SERNANP, it provided workshops on participatory management and conservation agreements. These strengthened the technical capacity of both the Cordillera Escalera management team and the tourism and research associations operating in the area.
- Second, it provided ongoing support during the design and implementation of the new agreements. This included precisely georeferencing the areas covered and ensuring that commitments were aligned with the objectives of the Master Plan.

As a result, the San Martín Regional Environmental Authority signed eight conservation agreements with tourism and research associations active in the Cordillera Escalera Regional Conservation Area and is preparing to sign three more.[2] Together, the agreements cover approximately 5,300 hectares. Commitments include surveillance, ecosystem restoration, sustainable economic activities and awareness-raising in areas of high biological and landscape value.

2 One agreement has also been signed, and another is being developed, with associations in the Bosques de Shunté y Mishollo Regional Conservation Area, also in San Martín.

Lessons for successful conservation agreements

The experience offers five practical lessons for expanding and sustaining conservation agreements in other regions and contexts.

1. **Build trust**. Trust between conservation area managers and local organisations is essential. Existing cooperative relationships make dialogue easier, reduce coordination barriers and create a stronger foundation for long-term commitments.

2. **Coordinate across stakeholders and government levels**. Coordination between national authorities, regional governments and local actors improves the quality of agreements. Combining national standards, technical expertise and local knowledge produces stronger agreements that are better aligned with conservation objectives.

3. **Support the entire process**. Ongoing technical support turns general guidance into practical, verifiable agreements. Support at each stage helps resolve difficulties, build institutional capacity and maintain quality standards.

4. **Define areas and commitments**. Georeferenced areas and measurable commitments strengthen legal certainty and territorial management. They make agreements easier to monitor, improve surveillance and reduce risks linked to the use of natural resources.

5. **Plan for limited capacity**. Limited staff capacity and heavy workloads can slow progress. Clear roadmaps, standardised procedures and well-defined coordination mechanisms make it easier to organise work and sustain implementation, even when operational capacity is constrained.

Expanding participatory management

This experience shows that conservation agreements can strengthen participatory management when institutions have the necessary capacity, procedures and coordination mechanisms. Tools such as San Martín's proposed Regional Directive on Conservation Agreements can embed the approach in regional systems and support its long-term sustainability.

The methods developed through the programme also provide a practical model that other regional governments can adapt to protect strategic ecosystems and support sustainable local development.

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