



## SHORT COMMUNICATION: APPLICATION OF SITE-LEVEL ASSESSMENT OF GOVERNANCE AND EQUITY (SAGE) METHODOLOGY TO A CANDIDATE OECM: ANDAKÍ MUNICIPAL NATURAL PARK, CAQUETÁ, COLOMBIA.

Juliana Echeverri<sup>1</sup>, Alejandra Cely-Gómez<sup>2</sup>, Noelia Zafra-Calvo<sup>3</sup>, Junner González<sup>4</sup>, Clara Matallana-Tobón<sup>5</sup>, Marcela Santamaría<sup>2</sup> and Sandra Galán<sup>6</sup>

Corresponding author: juliana.echeverri@giz.de

<sup>1</sup>GIZ, Bogotá, Colombia

<sup>2</sup>Colombian Network of Civil Society Nature Reserves (Resnatur), Bogotá, Colombia

<sup>3</sup>Basque Centre for Climate Change (BC3), Leioa, Spain

<sup>4</sup>Fundación Tierra Viva, Bogotá, Colombia

<sup>5</sup>Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Research on Biological Resources, Bogotá, Colombia

<sup>6</sup>Fundación Natura Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia

### ABSTRACT

Governance is a fundamental aspect and precondition for conservation strategies, such as protected areas or OECMs. A methodology for Site-level Assessment of Governance and Equity (SAGE) has been proposed by IUCN to explore different aspects of governance, based on ten principles. This article describes the application of SAGE to a candidate OECM for what we believe is the first time: the Andakí Municipal Natural Park in the Amazon region of Colombia. The application of SAGE generated useful insights into different aspects of governance, including the importance of good communication and recognising and respecting the rights and responsibilities of different actors. Based on this experience, we believe that the SAGE methodology could be a useful tool not only to identify priorities for improving governance, but also to assess governance and equity in order to evaluate if an area meets the criteria for an OECM – that it is governed and managed to achieve sustained and effective contributions to in situ conservation of biodiversity, associated ecosystem functions and services, and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values.

**Key words:** governance, OECM, SAGE methodology, local government, conserved areas

This article describes the application of the Site-level Assessment of Governance and Equity (SAGE) methodology<sup>1</sup> to a candidate OECM (Other Effective Area-based Measure) for what we believe is the first time. The site is Andakí Municipal Natural Park (MNP) in the Amazon region of Colombia, which is a conservation area with shared governance between the local government and a non-governmental organisation, Fundación Tierra Viva.

Governance is a fundamental aspect and precondition for conservation strategies, such as protected areas or OECMs (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2014; Worboys et al., 2019; IUCN-WCPA Task Force on OECMs, 2019). Good governance is also crucial for effective and equitable conservation (Franks et al., 2018; IUCN-

WCPA, 2019; Booker & Franks, 2019). Governance analysis allows the identification of several essential aspects including the guarantee of legitimacy and voice, transparency and accountability, and capacity to respond adaptively to meet conservation objectives (Booker et al., 2019).

In order to explore these governance aspects in detail, the SAGE methodology involves the assessment and application of a set of ten governance principles which are grouped into three dimensions of equity (recognition, procedure and distribution) plus a fourth grouping (see Table 1).

The SAGE methodology is an eight-step process, divided into two phases, which are followed by a third phase on

**Table 1. Framework of equitable governance principles**

<b>Equity: Recognition:</b>	Recognition and respect for the rights of all relevant actors
	Recognition and respect of all relevant actors and their knowledge
	Full and effective participation of all relevant actors in decision making
<b>Equity: Procedure</b>	Transparency, information sharing and accountability for actions and inactions
	Access to justice, including effective dispute resolution processes
	Effective and fair law enforcement
<b>Equity: Distribution</b>	Effective measures to mitigate negative impacts on communities
	Benefits equitably shared among relevant actors
<b>Other</b>	Achievement of conservation and other objectives
	Effective coordination and collaboration between actors, sectors and levels

‘taking actions’ that seeks to expand the impact of the evaluation through strategies and activity-planning (Booker et al., 2019) (see Figure 1).

The assessment phase (phase 2 of the methodology) is carried out using a multiple-choice questionnaire with questions about governance structure, procedure and outcomes for each of the ten principles. This set of questions is adapted as necessary to each site’s context and answered in a participatory way with different stakeholders and rightsholders (step 2.2) before they come together in a synthesis workshop (step 2.3). Subsequently, with the answers to the questionnaire and the discussions in the synthesis workshop, an analysis of the data is carried out (step 2.4.). This provides pertinent information to actors in the area with which they can take decisions and plan actions to improve the governance of the site (phase 3: taking action).

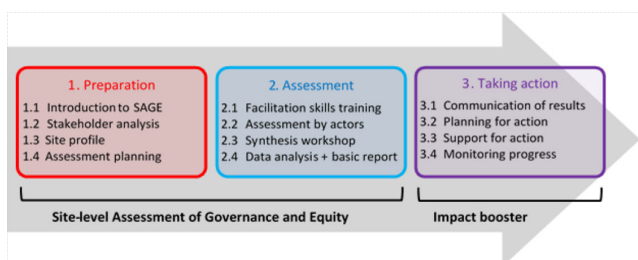
In 2019, as part of a project on the application of OECM criteria to the Colombian context, the Andakí MNP and another 26 areas were assessed as potential OECMs using the IUCN Guidelines (IUCN-WCPA Task Force on OECMs, 2019). The results showed that in many cases there are governance aspects that could be enhanced in order for the areas to demonstrate that they had

achieved a sustained and effective contribution to *in situ* conservation of biodiversity as required to be recognised and reported as an OECM.

Andakí MNP was considered as a potential OECM because in Colombia local governments are not able to declare or manage protected areas. However, more than 140 local governments carry out ecological heritage conservation actions to guarantee the supply of ecosystem services as part of their territories’ sustainable development (GIZ, 2019), and one type of local government action has been the creation and management of municipal conservation areas. Although these areas are not recognised in the National System of Protected Areas of Colombia (GIZ, 2019), they have a strong social function and in some cases are incorporated into land-use planning processes. These, then, are potential candidates for recognition as OECMs.

The Andakí MNP is in the municipality of Belén de los Andaquíes in the Colombian Amazon region, which has been conserving strategic areas for over 20 years in order to maintain their biodiversity. This conservation process actively involves local actors and has included the creation of nine municipal natural parks, including the Andakí MNP (Fundación Tierra Viva, 2013). The Andakí MNP covers an area of 26.7 km<sup>2</sup> and was recognised by the local government based on its biodiversity, its ecosystem services and its important contributions to municipal development, as well as its role in maintaining sites of historical and cultural significance.

Due to the health emergency caused by SARS-CoV-2, the SAGE methodology was adapted to be applied not



**Figure 1. Phases of SAGE methodology**

only in the field but also remotely. For the preparation phase, a virtual training (step 1.1) on how to apply SAGE was developed by the EUROCLIMA+ Project and IIED with different Colombian institutions<sup>2</sup>, together with SAGE developers, conservation practitioners and public institutions in Bolivia and Honduras<sup>3</sup>. The following steps were implemented through virtual meetings between the project team and on-site facilitators. As a result, the stakeholder and rightsholder groups (Indigenous peoples, rural communities, local and regional government, NGOs, academics and National Natural Parks of Colombia) were identified and participated in the assessment. The governance principles and related questions to be included in the assessment questionnaire were prioritised based on the content of the questions and their relevance to the context of the site, in line with the SAGE guidance, and adapted with input from on-site facilitators. As a result, eight principles were prioritised with a total of 17 questions. For the second phase, the assessments by each group of actors (step 2.2) were made through on-site and virtual assessment meetings with the support of local facilitators and the project team (Figure 2). Figure 3 shows the results of the evaluation by each group, with the mean scores for the eight governance and equity principles.

The final synthesis workshop was attended by two representatives of each of the four groups that

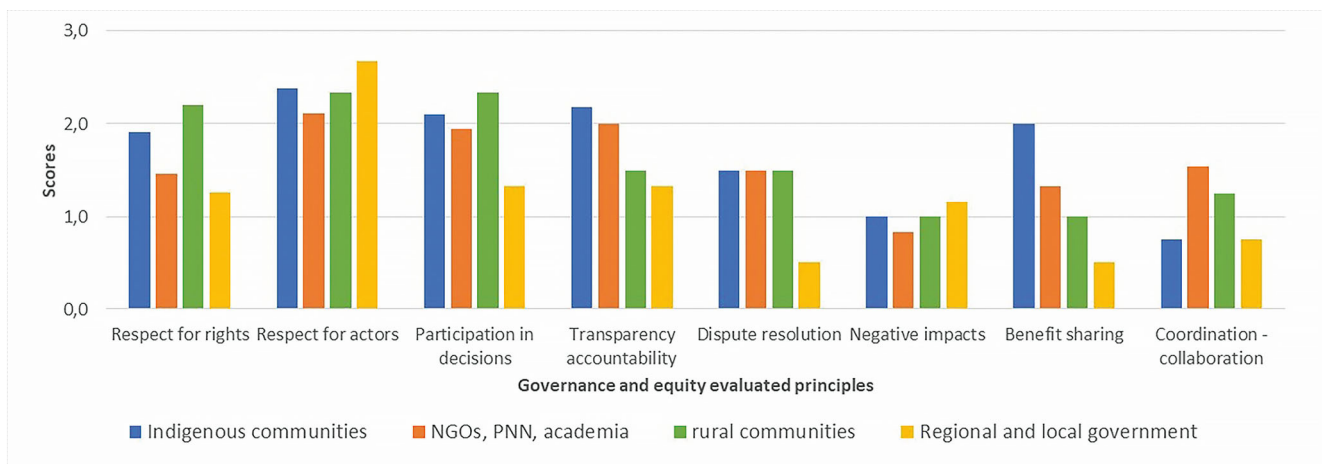
participated in the assessment. During the workshops the results were shown and discussed, giving an opportunity for the participants to recognise each other's perspectives and needs.

The results of applying the SAGE methodology showed a high level of consensus between actors regarding the possibility of improvement on all evaluated governance principles, especially on dispute resolution, negative impacts and coordination-collaboration. The highest scored principle was 'respect for actors' which indicates that there was a high level of recognition and respect for the rightsholders and decision-makers involved in the governance and management of the Andakí MNP. This also implies that there was a strong sense of ownership of the conservation process and a high level of recognition of the legitimacy of the area. No striking differences between groups were evident. One important finding was related to principle 4 (on transparency, information sharing and accountability for actions and inactions), where there was a need to clarify actors' responsibilities and communication channels for conflict resolution.

The group approach allowed for substantial interaction between different organisations and groups of actors, which contributed to a good understanding of the issues and encouraged the input of all participants. The methodology also allowed different actors to articulate



Figure 2. SAGE assessment workshop



**Figure 3. Mean scores for eight governance principles for each workshop group**

their different ways of perceiving the territory (such as traditional, indigenous management or academic) in formulating their insights for a single purpose: to improve site governance and equity.

All stakeholders were willing to participate in future decision-making processes, conflict resolution and communication strategies, and the actions identified to improve governance will be considered for the Andakí MNP Management Plan update. The final phase of the methodology also generated insights on the role of Andakí MNP in terms of biodiversity conservation beyond its boundaries at a regional scale, involving connectivity with the Alto Fragua Indi Wasi National Natural Park (762.70 km<sup>2</sup>), and on possibilities for the coordination of conservation processes with actors from other areas and municipalities.

Overall, the methodology helped to generate relevant information about governance and management in relation to the OECM criteria at different levels. At the local level, as described above, it allowed the actors to identify the governance aspects that most need to be strengthened and to plan actions for better governance. Thus, applying SAGE in the Colombian context gave an opportunity to complement and strengthen existing governance arrangements for a candidate OECM and to plan for the implementation of management tools. At the national level, application of SAGE showed that many of the municipal conservation areas assessed fulfil most of the characteristics and criteria for OECM identification, although in some of them, governance arrangements and biodiversity monitoring need to be improved. This provides specific information that will help meet the national reporting requirements for OECMs and in turn will help the country to achieve its international obligations as a Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The main practical lessons learned from applying the SAGE methodology were related to the essential role of local facilitators, the importance of verifying the ten governance principles, the process of prioritising questions for the site, and adapting the language (making it accessible to local facilitators and participants). A central aspect is the participation of all stakeholder groups throughout the whole assessment phase. Furthermore, although the methodology establishes that the principles and questions must be selected prior to the evaluation phase, we suggest reviewing them and making adjustments to the questionnaire with the facilitators on site. This ensures that prioritisation is aligned with local needs and interests.

In summary, the SAGE methodology did not require substantial modifications to its phases or steps in order to be applied to the Andakí Municipal Natural Park; it was successfully implemented as proposed in the international guidance. It quickly generated useful ideas for different aspects of governance, including good communication and recognising and respecting the rights and responsibilities of different actors. The process allowed weaknesses in the governance and management of the area to be identified and it made visible the need to strengthen coordination and information-sharing between the different actors. The process was also of great value in itself in working to strengthen shared governance and creating a space for future collaboration between the different actors involved.

Regarding the OECM criteria, the SAGE methodology could be a useful tool to assess governance and equity, helping to evaluate if the area meets the criteria of being governed and managed to achieve a sustained and



Bromelia Andakí Trail , Andakí Municipal Natural Park © José Alirio González Peréz

effective contribution to in situ conservation of biodiversity, associated ecosystem functions and services, and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values. The evaluation could highlight important aspects that need to be enhanced in the future to maintain these conditions in the long term. We suggest that the methodology should be tested in other potential and candidate OECMs in order to gain more insights into how it will help governments and other actors to apply the OECM criteria.

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup><https://www.iied.org/site-level-assessment-governance-equity-sage>

<sup>2</sup>Representatives of national and local governmental institutions and non-governmental institutions: Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, Alexander von Humboldt Institute, Fundación Tierra Viva, Embera Katio Indigenous group, Fundación Natura, Resnatur and Local Protected Areas Project.

<sup>3</sup>Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Poppoli from Honduras and Asociación Boliviana para la Investigación y Conservación de Ecosistemas Andino-Amazónicos from Bolivia.

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## RESUMEN

La gobernanza es un aspecto fundamental y una condición previa para las estrategias de conservación, tales como las áreas protegidas o las OMEC (otras medidas efectivas de conservación basadas en áreas). La UICN ha propuesto una Evaluación de gobernanza y equidad a nivel de sitio (SAGE, por sus siglas en inglés) para explorar diferentes aspectos de la gobernanza, centrada en diez principios. Este artículo describe la aplicación de SAGE a un área con posibilidades de inclusión como OMEC: el Parque Natural Municipal Andakí en la región amazónica de Colombia. La aplicación de SAGE produjo reflexiones de gran utilidad sobre diferentes aspectos de la gobernanza, incluyendo la importancia de una buena comunicación y el reconocimiento y respeto de los derechos y responsabilidades de los diferentes actores. Con base en esta experiencia, creemos que la metodología SAGE podría ser una herramienta útil no solo para identificar prioridades para mejorar la gobernanza, sino también para evaluar la gobernanza y la equidad con el fin de determinar si un área reúne los criterios de OMEC –que se gobierna y gestiona con miras a lograr contribuciones sostenidas y efectivas para la conservación in situ de la biodiversidad, las funciones y servicios de los ecosistemas asociados, y los valores culturales, espirituales, socioeconómicos y otros valores localmente pertinentes.

## RÉSUMÉ

La gouvernance est un aspect fondamental et une condition préalable aux stratégies de conservation, appliquée par les aires protégées ou les AMCE. Une méthodologie d'évaluation de la gouvernance et de l'équité au niveau sur le terrain (SAGE) a été proposée par l'UICN pour explorer différents aspects de la gouvernance, sur la base de dix principes. Cet article décrit l'application de SAGE pour la première fois, à notre connaissance, à un candidat AMCE : le Parc Naturel Municipal d'Andakí dans la région amazonienne de la Colombie. L'application de SAGE a fourni des indications utiles sur différents aspects de la gouvernance, y compris l'importance d'une bonne communication, de la reconnaissance et du respect des droits et des responsabilités parmi les différents acteurs. Sur la base de cette expérience, nous pensons que la méthodologie SAGE pourrait être un outil utile non seulement pour identifier les priorités pour améliorer la gouvernance, mais aussi pour examiner la gouvernance et l'équité afin d'évaluer si une zone répond aux critères d'une AMCE – à savoir qu'elle soit régie et gérée de manière à apporter des contributions durables et efficaces à la conservation de la biodiversité in situ, des fonctions et des services écosystémiques associés, ainsi que des principes culturels, spirituels, socio-économiques et autres valeurs pertinentes à l'échelle locale.