He, Yifan; University of Michigan and Conservation International
yifanhe@umich.edu
Authors: Arun Agrawal, Juan Pablo Badiviezo, Vicente Candaguira, Ivette Perfecto
Title: How Should an Indigenous Community in Eastern Bolivia Defend Their Land and Forests under Increasing Economic and Political Pressures? – A Sustainability Case Study

Many indigenous groups in Latin America depend on forests for livelihood. Due to an increasing global demand for agricultural commodities, their forests are under threat from the expansion of mechanized agriculture and cattle ranches. While maintaining a pro-indigenous and pro-nature image, the government of Evo Morales in Bolivia encourages mechanized agriculture and extractivism instead of supporting the forest management of indigenous groups in the eastern lowlands. Developed under the Michigan Sustainability Case (www.teachmsc.org) initiative, this case study examines how the conflictive state policies affect forest management and land use in the indigenous territory of Guarayos. We conduct semi-structured interviews with 25 community, business, and government stakeholders to understand the social-ecological system (SES) surrounding forested land in Guarayos. We also examine the patterns of land cover change and identify potential mismatch between designated and actual land use through spatial analysis. We find that deforestation rate has been accelerating in Guarayos for the past 20 years, with commodity production accounting for over 75% of deforestation. Areas formally owned by the Guarayos indigenous have the lowest deforestation rate from 2000-2017 as compared to other land titles. However, the Bolivian state weakens the Guarayos indigenous people’s governance capacity through failure of forest law enforcement, prioritization of agricultural activities, and support for land titling of external entities. We present the findings through a case narrative surrounding a decision maker – the indigenous president of Guarayos. This case study demonstrates that Guarayos indigenous people have great potential for sustainable forest management, but face multiple stress posted by state policies that conflict their interests.