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## Natural Resource Use and Living Standard Generation by Indigenous Communities in Comparison to Immigrant Settlements — The Case of Bananal Island, Tocantins, Brazil

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### Abstract

Brazil is home to 218 different indigenous nations with a total population of 350.000 people, of whom 60 % live in the Amazonian area. These ethnic groups are of pre-Columbian origin or ascendance and show cultural characteristics that distinguish them from other parts of the national society. Nowadays, their traditional dwelling areas in tropical rainforests are under increasing pressure from the use of the natural resources by various actors with conflicting interests. Indigenous groups depend on the use of natural resources not only with regard to basic food supply but also on the social and cultural level, where the respect towards forest entities has a spiritual dimension. The contact with non-indigenous settlers, who move into areas that were exclusively inhabited by Indians before, brings changes that may even end up in an irreversible acculturation. The resulting recognition of the value of natural resources for the immigrants frequently by indigenous communities and individuals frequently starts an unfair trade with forest goods. Simultaneously, spiritual respect declines as the interest in profit from this trade increases. The evolution of this process may transform indigenous communities into peripheral smallholders due to the overuse of natural resources and engender impoverishment of their societies.

Holistic analyses of indigenous households and farming systems of immigrants are required to understand the dynamics of this process and to identify agreeable solutions for the involved actors. The application of a respective approach on the Bananal Island in the western part of Brazils Tocantins yielded indications on the differences in objectives, perception of value of different forest goods and living standard between the indigenous population in recently recognized indigenous territories and settlers who were transferred out of these territories into adjacent areas.

**Keywords:** Farming system, forest goods, indigenous, living standard, smallholders