



Deutscher Tropentag, October 11-13, 2005, Hohenheim

“The Global Food & Product Chain—
Dynamics, Innovations, Conflicts, Strategies”

Forest Extraction and Product Marketing of Selected Dweller Systems in Várzea and Terra Firme Locations of Pará State, Brazil

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Abstract

Estimates on the number of people involved in forest extraction in the Amazon region range from about 1 million to over 500 million. The ambiguity on the definition of forest extraction can explain much of this discrepancy. Studies that bring together the productive activities of forest dwellers and uses of the respective products are still rare. In the context of a Farming Systems Analysis an exploratory study was undertaken focusing on the contribution of forest extraction to the livelihood of dweller households in selected locations at the lower Amazon river. The objective of the study was to contrast practices and output of dweller households in the Várzea and Terra Firme regions. The study sites were identified basing on criteria like accessibility, ongoing extraction of forest products, and ecosystem. A total of 60 households, among them 12 in Itacoã (Terra Firme) and 48 in Monte Tabor, Nova Santa Cruz, Manoel Carneiro (Várzea) had been selected for primary data collection.

Results prove common and also differing characteristics of the study sites. Similarities across the study areas are the household orientation towards sustenance, small-scale production, absence of land titles, and exploitation of forests as an open access resource. Both the production for home consumption and commercialisation contribute to this effect. Particularities of the studied Terra Firme location are shifting cultivation combined with charcoal production for sale, individual household arrangements, and access to the Belém regional market place. The Várzea communities under study are characterised by limited agricultural activities due to seasonal inundation, inefficient home gardening, timber and palm heart extraction in Várzea and adjoining Terra Firme areas as the main cash-generating activities, local sawmilling for value addition, dependency on middlemen for marketing due to the location far from Breves and so Belém market places and communal household arrangement. Despite the more variable production system in the studied Terra Firme location the mean income per person is distinctly higher in the Várzea communes due to timber extraction. Forest related recommendations put emphasis on land titling, participatory assessment and management of the resources referring to the productive capacity.

Keywords: Adding value, commercialisation, forest extraction, home consumption