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“Prosperity and Poverty in a Globalised World—
Challenges for Agricultural Research”

Medicinal Natural and Agricultural Ecosystems Exploitation in Latin America

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Abstract

As science and culture go global, accompanying a global economy, tensions ravage small communities nearly everywhere for basic needs such as food, shelter and health are frequently not met and prosperity is unevenly distributed. The paper addresses one of those basic human needs and rights — health — focusing alternative medicinal practises and predominantly medicinal herbs production, trade and consumption in Latin America, seen as a fair usage of local plant resources by local actors, under ancestral Indian healing traditions aimed at lower income urban households. Research undertaken in four cities, different in size (2 up to 17 millions) and location (North and South America) has shown there are market niches for alternative medicinal trade, income generation at small scale being a fact, and medicinal agricultural ecosystems being sustainable either in rural, periurban, even urban environments. The herbs, fruits, roots, etc. traded and consumed in urban markets come from diverse locations ranging from rainforests to mountainous milieus: 1. Lower and upper Amazonia (Brazil and Peru); 2. Plateaus and Andean high plateaus (Peru and Chile); Forested volcano slopes (Mexico, Peru and Chile); 3. Peri-urban valleys (Chile) and season flooded planes (Brazil). Some plant species are wild and collected under demand, but most of them are grown in peri-urban and rural areas, using less than one-hectare plots and no chemicals at all. Medicinal herbs trade field researched in Lima (Peru), Santiago (Chile), Belen (Brazil) and Mexico City (Mexico), depicts a sustainable use of local and national natural and agricultural resources, whereas targeting lower income populations, contributing to decrease health risks and therefore addressing the issue of poverty in a globalised world.

Keywords: Medicinal plants, Latin America, ecosystems