



Tropentag, October 9-11, 2007, Witzenhausen

“Utilisation of diversity in land use systems:
Sustainable and organic approaches to meet human needs”

Ethnobotanical Survey of Medicinal Plant Species Used by Traditional Midwives in Cotacachi, Imbabura Province, Ecuador

SUSY ALEJANDRA PINOS BARRETO¹, RAINER SCHULTZE-KRAFT¹, VOLKER HOFFMANN²

¹*University of Hohenheim, Institute for Crop Production and Agroecology in the Tropics and Subtropics, Germany*

²*University of Hohenheim, Institute for Social Sciences in Agriculture, Germany*

Abstract

This study was conducted in Cotacachi, Ecuador. The aim was to establish a relation between the conservation of some wild plant species and traditional healing practices of Cotacachi midwives, as well as the impacts of that relation on the rural development strategy of Union of Farmers' and Indigenous Peoples' Organisations from Cotacachi (UNORCAC).

Cultural and biological diversity are seen as two sides of the same coin, thus, with the actual cultural and environmental changes both are being lost. Women play a key role in the conservation of wild species that are of high importance to the poor since they are a source of food, energy, fibers, feed and medicine. Such species require little inputs and they scope with the multi-task duties of women and their responsibility for the sustainable livelihood of the family.

Midwife members of a group called “Jambi Mascaric” were interviewed, in order to gather information related to the plant species that they use. Based on those interviews traditional healing practices, diseases and other special conditions influenced by the Andean cosmovision were identified. Follow-up interviews allowed gaining an insight about the local classification system of plant and animal species.

There is a direct relation between traditional healing practices of midwives in Cotacachi and the conservation of some wild plant species. Because of this, midwives of Cotacachi play a key role in the preservation of local knowledge and biodiversity in the study region. Their role is also necessary to achieve the goal of UNORCAC members: “development with identity”.

Further studies are recommended related to population density and distribution of wild species. It is also recommended to increase the sample size and include midwives from other areas. Based on that cultivation of the most threatened species could be attempted.

The study concludes that in today's global economy, indigenous people are vulnerable to rapid economic and cultural change and a better understanding of their traditional ways, including traditional uses of plants, could point to strategies to diminish the negative impacts of that change.

Keywords: Biodiversity, traditional knowledge, midwives, traditional healing practices, wild species

Contact Address: Susy Alejandra Pinos Barreto, University of Hohenheim, Institute for Crop Production and Agroecology in the Tropics and Subtropics
private address: 0904376 Guayaquil, Ecuador, e-mail: susypinos@hotmail.com