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“World Food System —
A Contribution from Europe”

Traditional Medicinal Knowledge in Costa Rica

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Abstract

Over one decade the Portuguese Tropical Research Institute has worked on the issue of natural resources preservation and traditional medicinal knowledge compilation in Latin American metropolitan areas; so far we have researched six countries: Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru, Cuba and Costa Rica. Costa Rican rainforests are among the richest world's tropical forests. Some recorded species are common to the Amazon rainforest as field research has proved, though. The tropical forest serves as a storehouse for medicines collected by traditional healers and herb traders that provide a diversity of species highly appreciated by the less wealthy urban residents and plant therapy believers. San Jose, Costa Rica's capital city is no exception, as observed, for Costa Ricans use a wide range of barks, roots and herbs to mitigate pains and treat traditional illnesses. During the year 2009 we have obtained a sample of forty-three interviews to three categories of informants within San Jose: Thirty urban gardeners from Mexico, Sabana and Fatima neighbourhoods; twelve medicinal species traders from several local markets; and one officially recognised plant therapist. Together with the plant species farmed, sold or recommended by suppliers, users and healers for all sorts of diseases we have systematically collected the domestic and ancestral prescriptions so as to make traditional medicinal knowledge available for a wider public. Our objective for compiling the vernacular names and the taxonomists' identification of flora together with their therapeutic uses is to provide a comparative guide of non-conventional medicines focusing Latin America. Hope is to contribute for sustainable use of medicinal resources and supply poverty alleviation formulas.

Keywords: Costa Rica, medicinal Natural Resources