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“Resilience of agricultural systems against crises”

Food from the Forest – An Alternative to Agriculture in Crisis?

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Abstract

Since “Kyoto” there is an increased awareness on international level to enhance forest conservation. Nevertheless, positive results have been poor, and deforestation in the tropics, as in Central America, is an ongoing problem. At the same time, small scale agriculture in Honduras is in crisis under the effects of climate changes, putting in risk the family production and local food source. Some rural women in the Biosphere Reserve Rio Platano took therefore a decision backward – they are harvesting food from a native forest, following the tradition of the ancient Maya culture: They are using the nut of the tree *Brosimum alicastrum* (Swartz), in preparing beverages and pastries. The nut is nearly fat free, but a good source of carbohydrates, sugars (malt), protein, potassium and calcium, and the essential amino-acid tryptophan, which is poor in the typical tropical diet, and needed to produce melatonin and serotonin in the human organism. As the women are consuming the nut and making some money while selling it, the natural forest got some additional value and the local people are committed to its protection. On the other hand, *B. alicastrum* seems to be a key species of the tropical rainforest ecosystem, being the base of the alimentation pyramid for jungle wildlife. In this study, there is made a first afford in quantifying the potential production of *B. alicastrum* of 100 ha natural humid rainforest and the percentage being consumed by wildlife, which have to be considered in a sustainable management. It also shows the potential of *B. alicastrum* to better the economics of rural women in Honduras and might help to end up with the old dilemma of food production, deforestation and climate change: not agriculture versus forest, but food from the forest!

Keywords: Food security, indigenous knowledge, non-timber product, rural women economy