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Food Security and Livelihood Achievement through Biodiversity Maintenance, Use, and Management — The Case of the Camëntsá Indigenous Community in the Sibundoy Valley (Colombia)

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Abstract

The Camëntsá indigenous agrarian systems approach is chiefly based on agroforestry systems, which implies two or three components: crops, trees or/and bushes, and animals. Under this productive scheme the Sibundoy Valley's biodiversity is preserved, used, managed, and improved. The biodiversity provides goods and environmental services necessary to meet the household and community demands, including income generation from the production surpluses sales. Among the prevalent goods, abound food, medicine, wood, and fuel. Services comprise biodiversity, pollination, carbon sequestration, nitrogen fixation, and beautiful landscapes.

One-hundred-twenty species were found in the indigenous agrarian systems – home gardens, silvopastoral systems, and monocultures – of the Sibundoy Valley and they have more than 20 different uses. Out of the total species, 40.8% are used as food, 25% as medicine, and 21.6% as live fence, with other uses including wood, handicrafts, fuel, aesthetics, construction material, herbs, and shade for crops. Species with one use are the most numerous (62%); species with more than one use comprise 30.8%.

The Camëntsá community, from ancient times until now, has been empowered by biodiversity to support their lives, uses, and customs. Exchanges of food, medicine, and trees, along with planting materials of different species and varieties, with Inga, and Amazon native peoples, is one of the causes that led to such a high level of biodiversity in such a particular place on the planet. Since pre-Columbian times, the indigenous communities have done the hard work of collecting planting materials, sowing them within the agrarian systems, choosing the best individuals to grow them, and finally adapting them to the local conditions. Thus far, biodiversity has allowed the communities to achieve food security and livelihoods.

Keywords: Home garden, income generation, Inga, pollination, wood