

THE WOMEN ROLE IN THE AGROENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES OF AMAZON AGROFOREST SYSTEMS

Watanabe, M. A. ¹, Abreu, L. S. de ²

Key words: Woman, Ouro Preto do Oeste, small farming, fecundity, decision making.

Abstract – This paper presents the results of a research on the way which shows the role of the farmer women to contribute to overcome the life hindrances in the Amazonian agroforest environment, for food safety and familiar income. The sample was the women of the Associação de Produtores Alternativos - APA, Ouro Preto do Oeste, Rondônia, Brazil. Questionnaires were applied to 50 women of this community, in 2004/2005, with additional interviews in 2006, taking into account their role in the farms, and their several invisible activities. The role of APA's women was compared to that of other Amazonian women, like rubber tappers and riverine people. The APA's women perform tasks as field manpower - 78.0% of them, making decisions about what to plant - 18.0%, harvest destination - 32.0%, which animals to raise -14.0% and animal products destination -34.0%. Traditionally, in rural zone, the women with their children play a role as non-paid manpower, getting some monetary income with occasional commercialization of on-farm processed products as cheese, pickles, jellies and fruit liqueurs. They are responsible for the cultures practiced around the house. All these Amazonian women edaphoclimatic conditions, greatly contributing to the biodiversity, conservation, and to ecological, social and economic stability. are guardians, perpetuators and disseminators of a rich germplasm adapted to local

Introduction

This paper aims to present the results of a research about the way by which the female farmers contribute to overcome the life hindrances in the Amazon agroforest environment in relation to food security, familiar income, to social stability and recuperation and conservation of biodiversity.

¹ Embrapa Meio Ambiente, Caixa Postal 69, 13820-000, Jaguariúna, SP, Brazil – E-mail: watamabe@cmpma.embrapa.br

² As above

A sample of 50 women belonging to small farms of the *Associação de Produtores Alternativos (APA) de Ouro Preto do Oeste, Rondônia, Brazil*. In Rondônia the pioneer development poles were implanted, having as aim to revert the extreme environmental degradation and to promote the adoption of sustainable production systems like the *agroforest systems*. The production unities were occupied by Southeastern families who brought to the Amazon healthy habits of eating vegetable and fruit (citrus, cashew, mango, papaya, avocado). In contact with traditional Amazon communities like the rubber tappers and riverine people, they learned to utilize forest products and to cultivate native fruits, thus performing germplasm exchange. The rubber tapper women know about 150 species of native forest plants whose utilization are: food items, medicines, seasoning, animal food, firewood, construction material, basketry, besides the medicinal herbs brought from the Northeast by their ancestors.

These families cultivate 14 banana varieties, 7 of rice, 9 of beans, and 5 of sugar cane. The women became guardians, perpetuators and disseminators of these traditional knowledges, many of them acquired from the Indians (Kainer & Duryea, 1992).

Traditionally in rural zone, the women and the children constitute non-paid manpower, and due to this manpower it was possible the implantation of perennial cultures in Rondônia in the beginning of its occupation (Silva, 1984). The women as manpower were particularly important in Ouro Preto do Oeste because of low number of children in the families (2,14 children/woman) (IBGE, 2000) and the high cost of manpower hired from outside the farm (Silva, 1984).

Material and methods

This research was carried out from the exploitation of a wide data base about social, economic and agroforest diversities of Proambiente Pole, in Ouro Preto do Oeste, Rondônia, collecting for this analysis the genera question. It was intended to understand how the female farmers of APA contribute for familiar reproduction, how they perform several roles as field manpower, their role as family's income producers with the commercialization of home made products such as jellies, liqueurs, pickles and cheeses, and their contribution to food safety.

The APA's women role was compared with that of the riverine and rubber tapper women.

50 small farmers of APA were interviewed in 2004/2005, which data was complemented with further data collected in April and November 2006. The results were tabulated by Excel program and statistical procedures were applied.

Results and discussion

In Ouro Preto do Oeste, the women play important roles in the conduction of agroforestral systems, as farm manpower (78.0% of them), they participate in decision making like what cultures to plant (18.0%), which destination of the harvest (32.0%), what animals to raise (14.0%) and which destination of animal production (34.0%). It is worthwhile to observe that these decisions are always taken with the man and/or children, almost never by the woman alone; then, most of the decisions continue to be taken by the man.

As traditionally happens in rural zone, the APA's women are non-paid manpower, together with their children in spite of their active contribution for the farm income generation (Silva, 1984; Browder, 1994). This women work, as happens in other Brazilian regions, is undervalued, poorly recognized, with low social visibility. Nevertheless, they get some monetary income with occasional commercialization of on-farm processed products as cheese, pickles, jellies and several fruit liqueurs.

Three distinct roles can be played by the women from Ouro Preto do Oeste: 1. Within the family, the woman is spouse, farmer's children mother and working partner. 2. For the farm economic management, the woman contributes for the selection of cultures to be planted and animals to be raised economically most interesting. The same can be applied for the destination of harvests and animal products. 3. The women contribution in the agroforest activities are the conservation and recuperation of biodiversity, the conservation of ecological equilibrium, conservation, perpetuation and dissemination of forest traditional knowledge, and local germplasm (creole seeds), reducing the risks of genetic erosion.

The women living in Ouro Preto do Oeste are migrants from Southeast region and in contact with local communities (riverine people and rubber tappers) are people who are incorporating the traditional knowledge about forest products kept by these elderly established Amazonian communities (Teixeira, 1996).

The low fecundity among the women from Ouro Preto do Oeste (2,14 children/women) (IBGE, 2000) and since 14,3% of the couples are childless, the women importance for the viabilization of farm activities is essential. Only 4.0% of the families are hiring manpower from outside the farm, then most of the farms depend upon the familiar manpower.

Conclusions

The women in the Amazon, the rubber tappers, riverine women or agricultural worker, are contributing to the conservation of biodiversity, to environmental equilibrium, to the sustainability of agroforest systems. All of them present high sensibility to environmental questions. They are all guardians, perpetuators and disseminators of traditions, local culture, feeding habits, knowledge about native plant and their utilization, of creole germplasm of their respective communities.

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