

**THE BURITI AGRO EXTRACTIVISM: AN ALTERNATIVE FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON REGION**

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ABSTRACT

The Brazilian Amazon Forest is internationally renowned by its biodiversity and importance for the population, mainly for those people who live in the most remote rural communities. In these cases, survival is almost always guaranteed due to fishing, the açaí fruit, the flour and other products originated from the vegetal extractivism, such as for example, the buriti (*Mauritia flexuosa*). Therefore, one intends to contribute to the discussion of the sustainable development of the traditional rural communities, whether or not isolated ones, who work with the extraction of the 'palmácea'. By doing bibliographical and document research, one could see that the extraction activity has been suffering with the advance of the economic interests, agricultural conflicts, lack of crop management, added to the lack of information. However, the support to the extraction activity becomes essential and initiatives for the certification of vegetal products obtained from the forest are alternatives that need to be increased.

Key Words: *Isolated Communities, Sustainability, Extractivism, Mauritia Flexuosa, Amazon Region.*

Introduction

The agro-extractivism represents a traditional and complementary activity for the many generations of the Amazon families. In this case, one generates two types of benefits, the monetary one (income) and non monetary (self-sufficiency). The latter is as important as the first one, obtained by means of the sale of some products (profit made from the activity). Non monetary income can be understood as the work performed that generates a product that is not exchanged into currency, being its destination for the sufficiency of the workers themselves. According to Pelinski et al. (2006), this way, the production intended for self-consumption becomes an income, mainly because the expenses with food maintenance and health are decreased, thus ensuring quality of living and the food safety itself.

The importance of the buriti agro extraction activity, as well as of other species that occur and are associated to it, has been threatened for quite a long time. As from the 1980's, with the opening of the highways that crisscross the entire forest, economic activities, such as agriculture and livestock, became the major negative agents. Those invade the areas where the species are located, directly interfering in the quantity of populations and in the natural balance ratio, compromising the survival and dissemination of individuals. Carvalho (1991) states that many of the changes caused by human action may be irreversible, mainly due to the low capacity for recovery of the typical locations, such as the rural settlements. Traditionally, the rural economy that should not be mixed up with the agricultural economy, was based in the vegetal extractivism or in mining. The first one is practiced in different levels. One can still find the humble and archaic extractivist worker and the 'caboclo' that removes parts of the plants which are still not fully grown. But one also finds the coexistence of the big ones, the miners, the cattle farmers, the lumber companies, including the foreign ones, that destroy the forests, as well as the fishing boats that decimate the schools of fish (CASTRO, 2007).

Based on the aforementioned, the purpose of this present work is to contribute for the discussion of the sustainable development of the Amazon rural communities, whether or not isolated, who work with agro-extractivism of the 'palmacea' species, such as, for example, the buriti.

Literature Review

The Brazilian Amazon Region, due to the big flow of people, mainly in the latest years, the relation between man and the land, was transformed from a harmonious status to a scenario of concern. Castro (2007), in his work "Amazônia: Soberania e Desenvolvimento Sustentável" describes that the livestock production, exercised in an extensive manner, sustains an apparent modernization which is revealed in the land concentration in the form of land-grabbing. No being able to rationally explore his lot, the country man, sells and migrates to the city or he will demand for new pieces of land. Also concerned with the sustainable issue of the Amazon, a study made by the United Nations Program for the Environment (PNUMA), Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (OTCA) in collaboration with the Research Center of the Universidad del Pacifico (CIUP) demonstrates that the economic growth, at the expense of the environment, has been considerably affecting the environmental scenario.

The use of fire is a common artifice among the cattle farmers who, by using a quick form, try to convey the idea of a used land, an argument that ensures the future legal property. In this one, in its turn, new social relations begin to exist, in which the extractivist country man, who was stuck by mercantile and semi feudal links, is suddenly transformed into a follow-the-crop worker or substituted by him in relations that many times remind us of slavery. A good part of the land tension in the region and the fight for conservation – in extractivist reserves, Indian lands and other types of conservation units – is related to this type of occupancy and of land grabbing, as Castro (2007) reports.

In the recent years, the social, economic and environmental situation in the region poses big challenges, which indicate the need for a joint action between the Government, the Society and the Local Non-Governmental Organizations. The possible actions constitute an effort to promote and to strengthen the sustainable development of the region. The agro-extractivism is presented as an alternative which has been the target of several studies, jointly with other activities that support the local population, such as the fishing crop. Clüsener-Godt and Sachs (1994) emphasize that the development of extractivism alone does not present a big relevance and, therefore, the economic, social and environmental feasibility becomes compromised.

An important element in the development context are the Extractivist Reserves (RESEX`s). The 1st Article of Decree Law nr. 98.897, as of January 30, 1990, by the Presidency of the Republic, through the Sub-Head for Legal Matters of the Civil House, provides the concept of the term as follows: The Extractivist Reserves are territorial spaces intended for the self-sustainable exploration and the conservation of the renewable natural resources per extractivist population and belong to the categories of the Sustainable Use Conservation Units, which, in turn, are defined as areas where it is possible to harmonize the conservation of nature with the sustainable use of a portion of its natural resources. These units also integrate the Environmental Protection Area; the Area of Relevant Ecological Interest; the National Forest; the Fauna Reserve; the Sustainable Development Reserve; and the Private Reserve of the Natural Heritage.

The observed creation trend of the RESEX`s in recent years, has been supporting the process of the regional development, as they serve as the base for the maintenance of biodiversity; labor and income generation for the country side populations; and implementation of studies and partnerships that enable a control of the access to the resources by their users, by means of a rational exploration. Some of the biggest RESEX`s of the Amazon Region are highlighted such as the Chico Mendes and Alto Juruá, both located in the State of Acre; Tapajós-Arapiuns, in Pará; and Rio Cajarí, in Amapá; among others.

In 2009, to acknowledge the social, economic and environmental grandiosity that the agro-Extractivist activity represents, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock e Supply (MAPA) and the Ministry of the Environment (MMA) signed the Joint Normative Instruction 17 of 2009, which defined the technical norms to obtain the organic product certification which is originated from the sustainable extractivism. The document presents an important step forward to obtain the organic certification, and also for valuation the agro-Extractivist forest products, by adding value to the raw material. Those norms are exclusively applied to non-lumber products of vegetal or fungal origin, which have as an objective its identification as an organic product. This same legal text also defines non lumber products and also all the biological material, except the logs of wood and sawn timber by products, plates, panels, and wood pulp, which can be extracted from natural or modified ecosystems and used for domestic or commercial use, or which contain a specific social, religious or cultural significance, such as roots, barks, bush ropes, leaves, flowers, fruit, seeds, exudates and fibers.

As another measure to foster agro-extractivism, the Brazilian Government through the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (MDA) also keeps the National Program for the Strengthening of the Family Agriculture (PRONAF) and annually provides several specific credit lines to fulfill each type of public to which is directed. The idea is to finance individual and collective projects that may generate income to the family agricultural workers and those settled by the land reform, with the purpose of promoting the sustainable development of the communities in the rural area. The program has the lowest interest rates of the rural financing, and also the lowest default rates among the credit systems of the Country. Currently, the Program provides several credit modalities, such as Costing; Investment; Agro-Industry; Agroecology; Eco; Forest; Semi-arid; Woman; Youngster; Costing and Commercialization of Family Agro Industries; Part quota; Rural micro credit and More food.

Another program executed by the federal government that deserves to be highlighted is the Food Acquisition Program (PAA), one more market opportunity for the products of family agricultural people. It was created in 2003 with the purpose of ensuring the access of food to populations who were under a condition of food and nutritional insecurity. It also aims at contributing to form strategic inventories and to allow the family agricultural workers to store their products so that they may be commercialized at fair prices, in addition to promoting social inclusion in the field. The program acquires the goods from the agricultural workers and every year it receives the adhesion from new participants.

Research Methodology

This study is based on bibliographical, explanatory, explanation and document research about the extractivism and its productive arrangements and governmental programs for the region. The first one is made up by, mainly, the consultation of scientific articles, books and several types of media. The sources used for the research consist of the consultation of bibliographical data from the IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), MDA (The Ministry of the Agricultural Development), MMA (The Ministry of the Environment), MAPA (the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply) and PRONAF (National Program for the Strengthening of Family Agriculture), among others. Those were used for the collection of historic data, quantitatives and statistics and other information which are necessary for the performance of the scientific research. The focus of the work is the extractivism and its importance in the Amazon region.

Research Results

One of the most important studies that have already been performed at the national level about the extractivism of buriti was performed by Afonso (2008) who searched to understand all the productive chain of the species. The researcher was able to map the fibers and other products such as the pulp and oil. The biggest producers of pulp of the buriti were the states of Piauí and Maranhão (Northeast), and Pará and Tocantins (North). About the oil, Piauí, Pará and Amazonas are the major ones (Northeast).

The Atlas of the State of Acre (2008) shows that the biggest part of the area of the Conservation Units allows the implementation of the sustainable use projects, and only the existence of partnership being necessary. With the purpose of preserving the forest and valuing the families of the workers that depend on the vegetal extraction, some governments of the States of the Federation that make up the Amazon have been developing important actions. Such actions are the result of own initiatives or even a continuity of the policies in the federal scope.

In 2003, the Secretariats of the Environment and Sustainable Development (SDS) and Rural Production (Sepror) of the Amazonas Government created the free green zone Program in an attempt to reemerge the productive chains which were in decay in the interior of the state. The investment provided employment and income in a direct and indirect way for several families covered by the program. A partnership between the Sustainable Development Agency (ADS), an agency linked to the SDS and the program executor agent, and the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM) materialized the creation of three micro plants, going from only one in 2002 to four units. The partnership benefited about 680 families during the harvest period. In 2005, the performance of some organizations and agencies linked to the Government of Amazonas, managed to obtain the “green seal”, by means of the FSC certification (from English it means Council of Forest Management) for the management of the buriti oil, granted to the Santo Antônio do Abonari Community, the first one in the country with this acknowledgement for the work of oil management, according to an article published in 2005, at the Amazonia Portal. With the seal, the community that previously provided the raw material in the natural form only, will now conduct all phases of the processing to obtain oil, adding value to the raw material.

Successful initiatives such as the ones presented have been raising the interest and attracting small companies to the country side of the state of Amazonas, which is already exporting not only the buriti oil but others such as andiroba, uricuri, virola, babaçu, murumuru, copaíba, among others. The families envision in those opportunities the chance to settle in the rural zone by means of a more dignified work and that provides a better quality of living, also contributing to the forest conservation.

Another perspective for income and development creation is the destination of some vegetal oils for the production of biodiesel (less pollutant) which have already been tested. In 2007, ADS mediated the sale of 20 tons of vegetal oils, and benefited 120 families of three associations. The ADS also formalized a covenant with the Health National Foundation – FUNASA – for studies using the andiroba oil, to prevent malaria and dengue (break bone fever), tropical diseases that are the cause of death of hundreds of people every year. In this regard, other partnerships could emerge to investigate the buriti oil by the traditional peoples as a medicine, mainly for the cure of prostate cancer, and may give a new push to its extractivism.

Recently, the Ministry of the Environment, approved of the creation of the Brazilian Forest Services (SFB) as per Law nr. 11.284/06. The new agency has the mission to conciliate the use and conservation of forests, valuing them to the benefit of the present and future

generations, by means of the management of public forests, of the construction of knowledge, development of capabilities and supply of specialized services. The SFB has supported sustainability projects in almost all the Brazilian states and has been a fundamental partner in the development of a sustainable forest economy, with social inclusion. In Amapá, the SFB and the State Institute of Forests (IEF) set a partnership to strengthen the management of the Public Forests of the State.

In Pará, the Forest Development Institute of the Pará State (Ideflor) elected as one of the priorities to be worked on from 2011 to 2014, the forest extractivism with a focus on the traditional populations. The actions propose plans that will ordinate the use and good use of the forest areas and legal reserve under the domain of the traditional populations and the family agriculture. On the other hand, there is opposed thinking that compare the extractivism as an impoverishing factor, as in the case of Pará, in an article published by the Liberal TV. The INMETRO, jointly with the government of Pará, will certify the products that use the raw material from the Amazon Region. The certification will be a guarantee for the consumers who use the Amazon raw materials in their transformation phases, whether in the manufacturing of phytopharmaceuticals, jewelry, sustainable packages, goods and bio cosmetics.

Discussion

The programs developed and implemented by the Federal and State Governments have brought positive results related to preventing the rural exodus in the region, providing conditions to create income to their inhabitants, developing conditions to use the local raw materials in order to improve their quality of life. Some research actions elect the vegetal extractivism as a factor of promotion of the sustainable development of the forest and of families which depend on it. On the other hand, there are other lines of thoughts that question the real contribution of extractivism. The fact is that some communities, such as the Indian community have made their living from extractivism and fishing long before the discovery of Brazil. The issue only became a problem when the white and the capitalists arrived in the region. At this time, in the XXI century, one can not stop observing that those problems have accumulated in such a way that the local inhabitants can no longer by themselves face them, because the rivers are being polluted and there is not sufficient fish for everyone. The forest is being put down and with that the changes in the existing eco systems already affect its survival. For this reason the governments need to interfere and, jointly with the local community, search for sustainable solutions so that they may continue to live in that region.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The social economic situation being experienced by a big part of the Amazon rural population, mainly those ones that live in more remote communities, makes the families to explore the forest resources, most of the times, with no information about the suitable environmental management. These families end up becoming hostages of the most diverse economic interests, of those ones that see in the forest a source of wealth and explore it at any cost. The creation of Extractivist Reserves (RESEX`s) represents an important measure to

preserve the natural biodiversity and serve as a base for studies and sources of survival, for those families engaged in sustainability projects which are developed in these areas. Initiatives such as obtaining seals, that certify the origin of the product, need support and must be multiplied, mainly in more remote locations in the Brazilian Amazon Region. The valuation of the agricultural extractivist activity is another form to settle the workforce in the field, providing a more dignified quality of life to the rural workers and minimizing the social problems in the urban centers.

It can be understood that the buriti agricultural extractivist activity, as well as of other palm trees and fruits have a historic relevance for the Amazon Region and it has the potential for multiple uses. The continuity of the research and of political actions represents, therefore, a necessity so that the rural communities of the Amazon region may continue to live in the same location in a better citizenship style and dignified manner. The fruit and the palms that are located in the Amazon region keep the countryman and serve as food, an instrument and means to create income and work, so that he may improve his quality of living and it also sustains the entire biodiversity which exists in its surroundings. This is by itself, already sustainable; we humans, that regard ourselves as civilized, have to learn to move around the natural wealth of the Amazon Region with respect, ethics and humbleness, because they already existed long time before we arrived and they must prevail rather than us.

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