

The Women Role in the Agroenvirnmental Activities of Amazon Agroforestry Systems

Watanabe, M.A.1 & Abreu, L.S.2

Abstract

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 agroforestral environment in relation to food security, family income, to social stability, and recuperation and conservation of biodiversity. A sample of 50 women belonging to small farms of the Associação de Produtores Alternativos (APA) from Ouro Preto do Oeste, Rondônia, Brazil, was taken for the study. APA small farmers are mostly descendants from Brazilian Southeast States migrants, and took to Rondônia the healthy habits of vegetable and fruit consumption. In contact with traditional communities like the rubber tappers and riverine people, they learned how to cultivate Amazonian native plants like vegetables, fruits, and medicinal plants. The rubber tappers' women know about 150 species of Amazonian plants. The migrant farmers in contact with the traditional communities are learning the cultivation of native plants and native animals like Amazonian fish and honeybees. Traditionally, in Brazilian rural zone the women and the children constitute non-paid labor, and due to this labor it was possible the implantation of perennial cultures in Rondônia, in the beginning of its occupation. In Ouro Preto do Oeste, the women play important roles in the conduction of agroforestry systems, as farm labor (78.0%), participating in decision-making, such as what plants to cultivate (18.0%), the destination of the harvest (32.0%) what animals to raise (14.0%), and which destination for animal production (34.0%). As traditionally happens in other Brazilian rural zone, the APA's women are unpaid labor, together with their children in spite of their active contribution for farm income generation. This work is undervalued, poorly recognized, and has low social visibility. Nevertheless, they get some monetary income, with occasional commercialization of on-farm processed products such as cheese, pickles, jellies, and fruit liqueurs. Three distinct roles can be played by the APA's women. (1) Within the family, she is the spouse, the mother of the farmer's children and a working partner; (2) For the farm economic management, the woman contributes for the selection of varieties to be planted and animals that are economically the most interesting to raised. The same can be applied for the destination of harvest and animal products. (3). The women's contribution to the agroforestry activities are the conservation and recuperation of biodiversity, the conservation of ecological equilibrium, conservation, perpetuation, and dissemination of the forest traditional knowledge, and local germplasm (creole seeds). Given the low fecundity among the APA's women (2.14 children/woman), and since 14.3% of the couples are childless, the importance of women for making farm activities viable is essential, provided that only 4.0% of the families can afford to hire labor from outside the farm.

¹ Embrapa Meio Ambiente, Caixa Postal 69, 13820-000 Jaguariúna, SP, Brazil, e-mail Watanabe@cnpma.embrapa.br

² Ibid., e-mail lucimar@cnpma.embrapa.br

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