Survival strategies that involve wild species in Northern Guerrero, Mexico: A proposal for enhancing a safety net system.

INTRODUCTION

"Silvestrear" is a practice where wild species are used within a cyclic gathering, processing and consumption system, including in some cases their commercialization. This system has been developed through several generations in the Alto Balsas, Southern Mexico. Based in tropical deciduous forest, the practice of "silvestrear" complements the resources obtained through the rainy season agriculture. The peasants of this region belong to the Nahua ethnic group, and have an annual average income of 820 US$ per family.

RESULTS

A complex array of factors, including public policies and also climatic changes observed by peasants, exert undesirable effects on agriculture and overload the "safety net" as a whole, threatening the ancient system of "silvestrear".

DISCUSSION

Local NTFPs are symbols of Mexico's deeply-rooted traditions. However, its revalorization, as the revalorization of their users themselves, appears to be contrary to the modernization and cultural standardization paradigm that presides many government policies. The massive exodus of young people from the indigenous communities has resulted in labor shortages and in the monetization of the rural economy through the presence of "migrodollars". This, added to the increasing rural poverty and the absence of governmental policies designed to support the subsistence agriculture, leads to the extinction of the gatherer-peasant figure and to a gradual degradation of its social organization, compromising the reproductive capacities of the indigenous peasant communities.

An essential fact related to the safety net dynamics is that indigenous peoples, familiar with their own environment, generate local knowledge and resources that constitute a unique form of wealth. Thus, the process of massive displacement of the communities is a threat to the heritage of humanity. The enhancement of the local activities oriented to generate added value from NTFPs, should be one of the main governmental and non-governmental activities aimed to avoid the massive displacement of indigenous communities.

As a result of the case study and its local discussion, we propose an Ethnodelopment Project focused on: a) medicinal plants; b) handcrafts (Bursera aloexylon) for its essential oil (perfumery, aromatherapy) and woodcarvings (handcrafts); c) pochote (Ceiba pentandra) for its tender seeds (food), fiber (as kapok) and bark (handcrafts), and d) Agave cupreata distilled liquor (mezcal). Local involvement in reforestation, and restriction of shepherding, are underlined, even if the first one is not a traditional concept and practice in the zone.