

Almanac of the **Future**

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational experience No. 4



**Producing
with the forest**

PRODUCING WITH THE FOREST



Chestnut tree in amazonian tropical forest

The management of land plots with agroforestry systems demands conviction and a continuous careful work. The situation in which the pioneer producers of agroforestry Amazonian systems currently live shows that they live well, producing with the forest and without the need to continue deforesting and burning the vegetation. But these cases, characterized by a clear vision of sustainable management and coexistence, are still the minority before the majorities, with short-term logics.

Life in and with the forest

Manuel Tananta lives with his wife Matilde Muñoz and his family in a community named after its foundation date: October 26, in the rural outskirts of Riberalta municipality, in the middle of the Bolivian Amazon. He arrived to the area 28 years ago, and founded the community among other 8 families. Now more than 60 families live in the sector. An area of 50 hectares corresponds to each family, and, a couple of years ago, families received titles to their land; because they are communal titles, the land cannot be sold but only returned to the community. As a young man, Manuel worked in the collection of rubber, an important extractive activity in the Amazon that

was later replaced by the chestnut harvest. Not all families were as familiar with the Amazon forest as Manuel at the time of their settlement. There are also families that migrated from the “Altiplano” (high plain territories) to the Amazon, used to another type of agriculture. “The first few years,” Manuel recalls, “have not been easy since clearing the forest is a very hard job and the yield of rice, corn, banana and cassava crops goes down from the third year onwards” The families had to clear an area of forest up to one hectare every third year, in order to guarantee their subsistence and sell the few surpluses.



Land clearing in the Amazon: knock down vegetation with machete and ax and then burn it



Manuel Tananta shows his agroforestry parcel.

Planting/sowing forest

More than 15 years ago, Manuel began to plant nativefruit trees such as cupuazú, chestnut, tamarind and cocoa, among others in his land. The formation of agroforestry plots is slow. During the first years, the trees are in full development without giving any fruits but it is still necessary to make up to three land cleanings per year, besides pruning and controlling diseases. Manuel was convinced from the beginning and persisted in these cultural tasks and said that "most families could not stand it", abandoning their agroforestry plots, again dedicating themselves to traditional

agriculture. For several years, Manuel and his family have lived on the production of the six agroforestry plots that Manuel attends with the help of his son Ariel. In the nature, there is an average of only up to two chestnut trees per hectare. Manuel Tananta, thanks to his agroforestry management, now manages 400 chestnut trees since the trees, planted more than ten years ago, already bear fruit. "The chestnut trees planted are my insurance for the rest of my days," says Manuel while explaining what is in his agroforestry plots.

Market acces

Forest management with agroforestry systems is economically profitable, as well as environmentally and socially friendly; as long as there is a market for the products. Chestnut is one of the pillars of the Amazon regional economy, but for the processing of cupuazú and other native palm fruits such as asai and majo, there was at first no market or infrastructure for its processing. The NGO IPHAE, a partner of Misereor, advising agroforestry producers such as Manuel Tananta in the rural and indigenous communities of Vaca Diez province and in the department of Pando, proposed in 2003 the idea of forming the APPAA (Association of Agroforestry Producers in the Amazon) that agglutinates the agroforestry pioneers of the province. A second association APAE (Association of Organic Agroforestry Producers) was formed shortly after by the Pando producers. The two organizations, supported by IPHAE, created the Madre Tierra Amazonia Process and Marketing Company S.R.L. The company, based in Riberalta processes several fruits of agroforestry systems (asai, majo, tamarind) but mainly cupuazú, which reaches a volume of up to 10 tons of raw material per harvest, dispatching the refrigerated pulp for juice to the local markets in Riberalta, (Guayaramerin, Trinidad) and the country's largest cities (La Paz, Santa Cruz, Cochabamba).



Testimonies from Manuel Tananta

“Since my youth, I have been acquiring affection for nature, this helped me to have chestnut plantations of productive age today. What I have planned and planted more than two decades ago is becoming true; it is my future assured”
Manuel is convinced that all trees play an important role: “for example, Kudzu and Patujú maintain moisture in the soil; palm trees aside from keeping moisture attract birds”

“There must be consensus in the family when starting an agroforestry project; as the production is in the long term, the possible divergence between husband and wife causes a mismanagement of the system and abandonment of the same”.

“My happiness is to live with the family in the countryside (husband, wife, sons and daughters), without looking for TV, cell phone or a luxury motorcycle”.



At a meeting of the producer associations and the marketing company, the producers make it clear that thanks to its further processing and marketing, the Cupuazú fruit is next to the chestnut the most important source of income. Christian Noco belongs to the association APPAA and has managed to live exclusively from agroforestry. Saúl Garcia is currently president of APAE, "Even when I started with agroforestry, I did not cut or burnt the forest, instead I open paths to plant the trees". The participants in the meeting agree that the agroforestry is profitable but at the same time absorbs a lot of time and labor. Many of the farmers in Amazonia would like to live by their agroforestry, but there are only a few who could ultimately abandon the short-sighted economic view and abandon traditional land-clearing agriculture.

The working proposal developed by IPHAE, in many cases together with the affiliate marketing company "Madre Tierra Amazonia", is based in using the value of the natural products these rural communities produce. The producer associations receive technical advice in their lands and are supported in the further processing and marketing. The experience of IPHAE and "Madre Tierra Amazonia" SRL these years, of creating access to markets for sustainable products, has shown that the great challenge in the Amazon region to access appropriate markets and thus generating occupation and income for organized producers is both, the lack of trained human resources as well as the promotion of sustainable Amazon products.

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Telefono: 591 (3) 852-3269
 Email: madre tierra amazonia

Challenges. The group of producers, consultants and marketers are unanimous about the challenges of the future:

- Mechanization of work (cleaning of plots), achieving in three working days what currently takes up to ten days; there are first public initiatives of promotion in this direction.
- The Agroforestry Systems have not yet achieved social recognition since it is something new.
- Very few young people prefer to continue the agroforestry management of their parents, and the others migrate to the city; life in rural communities could become more attractive if electricity and comfort were available.
- The state prioritizes extractivism and short-termed logics and visions; the agroforestry approach still does not achieve a more marked incidence in the imaginary of the public entities.
- The dimension of agroforestry land that can be cultivated by a producer family is small and it is necessary to increase the yield per tree by techniques such as natural fertilization, pruning, etc; in the case of the Cupuazú a tree produces an average of 10 kg of fruit. In Brazil, these average can reach up to 40kg.



Flower of a Cupuazu tree

Messages to the future

- The Amazon forest, not being perceived as an obstacle, constitutes the basis of sustenance and development.
- The use of family agroforestry systems is compatible with the Amazonian ecosystem without generating environmental or social externalities.
- The vision for a holistic development is decisive, replacing short-termism with “living well in harmony with Mother Earth” in the Amazon.

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Cupuazú fruits.

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Author: Jorge Krekeler, jorge.krekeler@scbbs.net

Consultant Misereor as AGEH specialist

Translation: Samuel Suárez

Layout: Diana Patricia Montealegre

Images: Jorge Krekeler

Contact to the story of succes:

Fortunato Angola email: iphae_riberalta@yahoo.com

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