Contribution of wild plants to human well-being in Apurimac, Peru: An ecosystem service perspective

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T15 Contribution of ecosystems services to well-being of rural poor in Latin America

Contribution of wild plants to human well-being in Apurimac, Peru: An ecosystem service perspective

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Research efforts are unevenly distributed between categories of ecosystem services, with regulating services receiving more interest from scientists than provisioning and cultural services. Whereas food provision is the most commonly studied provisioning services, products collected from ecosystems for medicinal and aromatic purposes are overlooked. Ethnopharmacologists have studied the contribution of wild plants to human well-being, but there have been few attempts to relate this contribution to the concept of ecosystem services. Existing studies highlighted the fact that the poorest populations are the most dependent on biological products for their two contributions to human health (medicine) and livelihoods (incomes through medicinal product trade). In developing countries, the cost and the accessibility of formal health care systems explains the use of alternative medicine and medicinal plants even though it has been observed that people may also prefer traditional medicine for cultural, religious or spiritual reasons. Plant collector are often rural dwellers that are economically marginalized, such as landless people or women. Using semi-structured interviews and participative workshops, we identified the most used wild medicinal plants in two watersheds of Apurimac region, Peru. We analyzed their distribution and harvesting patterns (maps of ecosystem service supply or use) and we described their uses and contributions to different component of well-being. Results showed that most people collected wild plants for medicinal purposes and that more than 80% of interviewees had a strong to medium economic dependence to plant harvesting. These elements offer interesting insight for local decision-makers since a restriction or control of harvest could deeply affect livelihoods with high economic dependence. Small-scale cultivation and the diffusion of sustainable harvesting practices could be considered as alternative strategies for wild plant conservation.

Keywords: Medicinal plants; Livelihoods; Peru