

Palms deserve a big hand

An ITTO project proposes mechanisms for the sustainable utilization of palm trees in a conservation area in Bolivia and Peru

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PALM TREES play a very important ecological role in South American forests: their fruits and seeds are eaten by many wild animals and their stems form part of the habitat of birds such as macaws and other parrots, some of which are endangered. Palms are also important to many people, who use them, sometimes unsustainably, for the production of food, clothing and health products and in cultural rituals and construction.

ITTO PROJECT PD 17/00 REV. 3 (E): *Conservation and development in the natural areas of Tambopata (Peru)-Madidi (Bolivia)* is financed by ITTO and implemented by Conservation International in cooperation with the National Institute for Natural Resources (*Instituto Nacional de Recursos Naturales*—INRENA) of Peru and the National Service for Protected Areas (*Servicio de Areas Protegidas*—SERNAP) of Bolivia. Its objective is to improve conservation outcomes in Peru's National Tambopata Reserve Area (*Reserva Nacional Tambopata*—RNT) and Bolivia's Madidi National Park and Integrated Management Area (*Parque Nacional y Area de Manejo Integrado Madidi*—PNANMIM).

The project has developed recommendations for mechanisms that will help bring about the sustainable management of two palms: *Geonoma deversa* (palmiche) and *Oenocarpus bataua* (majo). The aim is to help improve the living standards of local communities through the processing and use of the two palms while also contributing to conservation objectives in the conservation area.

Promising products

A huge range of products is obtained from palm trees—including oils, flours, extracts, juices and building

materials—but only some are marketable. In order to identify these products, general data were obtained under the project about current markets and extraction and/or harvesting practices and the sourcing of raw materials and processed products.

Information was gathered mainly through interviews. In Bolivia, this led to the recovery of traditional knowledge from the Tacana and Leco communities about palm-tree harvesting. In Peru, the project worked with local communities through directed interviews after selecting the relevant data required and then establishing interview



Mauritia palm at Cocococha, Tambopata, Peru: another of the suite of palm species present in the Tambopata/Madidi area. Photo: © Haroldo Castro/Conservation International

structures. In both cases the project sought to obtain qualitative and quantitative information about the supply of and demand for raw materials and products. The project then selected *pañó de crisneja*, a material made from palmiche leaf used for roof-building, and the oil and sap obtained from majo as the products to be developed by RNT and PNANMIM, respectively.

Harvesting proposals

A management plan was developed to maintain vigorous palmiche populations, which included: an inventory of the resources available; a land-use planning proposal for the production area and management options based on the zoning of the RNT; a management, regeneration and/or propagation methodology; a felling cycle; optimal average harvesting rates and intensity; the requirements to be met for harvestable species; and a harvesting, haulage and packing, transport and storage system. The plan also identified possible research and training issues, a model system for monitoring and evaluating the management of the species and for assessing the implications of its utilization, and the social organizational structures required for its sustainable management.

In addition, the project analysed the *paños de crisnejas* production chain and its trade patterns and proposed improvements.

A management and sustainable utilization plan is being developed for majo oil and sap based on the identification of biological, social and economic criteria for the sustainability of the resource and on the improvement and implementation of management and processing techniques. Inventories have been carried out to identify high-density areas, and potential markets for these products have been researched. Moreover, the project has cooperated with the Pharmaceutical Biochemical Research Institute of the Higher University of San Andres (*Instituto de Investigación Fármaco Bioquímico de la Universidad Mayor de San Andrés*) to conduct a bromatological analysis of fruits that has generated detailed information on the characteristics of selected products and their value as foods.

Sustainability of the proposal

The plans will be implemented through the various legal mechanisms and requirements applied by both INRENA and SERNAP in cooperation with local communities. The information on which the plans are based has been obtained from the users themselves, and no one is better placed to decide on the most appropriate activities to be undertaken.

In addition, production projects will be developed to capitalize on the experience gained, thus improving the competitiveness of existing production chains by strengthening local organizations and ensuring greater social and environmental benefits. In relation to the



Peace park: the Tambopata-Madidi transboundary conservation area is fostering cooperation between Bolivia and Peru with the assistance of an ITTO project. Photo: Rod Mast/Conservation International

production of *paños de crisnejas*, a strategic goal is to implement actions aimed at improving gender equity in communities and ensure the social cohesion of the families involved in the production process.

The project will thus contribute to the sustainability of resource utilization and ensure that palm trees continue to provide benefits into the future.

Translated from the Spanish by Claudia Adán.