

## AGROECOLOGY WITHIN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IN MATO GROSSO DO SUL, BRAZIL

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### **Abstract**

*Indigenous people are the last guardians of an ancestral agricultural practice, called by some authors as etnoecology rather than agroecology. In order to strengthen their position in society is fundamental that public policies include them and answer to their main challenges. Assure the social role of land and water through agrarian reforms, land policies, and the guarantee of land rights of indigenous and native peoples and traditional communities.*

*Nevertheless, it should be recognized and valued their ancestral knowledge, traditions, local wisdom and cultural identities and included in different projects that address them.*

*This paper aims to highlight the agroecological practices within Terena indigenous community in Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil.*

**Key words:** agroecology, Terena indigenous community, Mato Grosso do Sul

### **INTRODUCTION**

The current Brazilian indigenous population, according to preliminary results of the Census carried out by IBGE in 2010, is 817,963 Indians (representing 305 different ethnic groups), 502,783 of whom live in rural areas and 315,180 live in Brazilian urban areas (IBGE, 2011). This census revealed that in all the states of the Federation, including the Federal District, there are indigenous populations. FUNAI also records 69 Indians groups uncontacted, and there are groups that are demanding recognition of their indigenous status by the federal Indian agency (Da Silva, 2006).

Under current legislation (CF / 88, Law 6001/73 - Indian Statute, Decree n.º1775 / 96), indigenous lands can be categorized as follows:

-Indigenous Lands Traditionally Occupied (Terras Indígenas Tradicionalmente Ocupadas): They are the indigenous lands mentioned in article no. 231/1988 Federal Constitution, concerning original right of indigenous peoples, whose demarcation process is governed by Decree No. 1775/96.

-Indigenous Reserves (Reservas Indígenas): They are lands donated by third parties, acquired or expropriated by the Union, which are given as permanent ownership of indigenous peoples.

-Dominion lands (Terras Dominais): Are property of indigenous communities, acquired under civil law jurisdiction.

-Interdicted (Interditadas): These are areas interdicted by FUNAI to protect the people and isolated indigenous groups (figure 1).

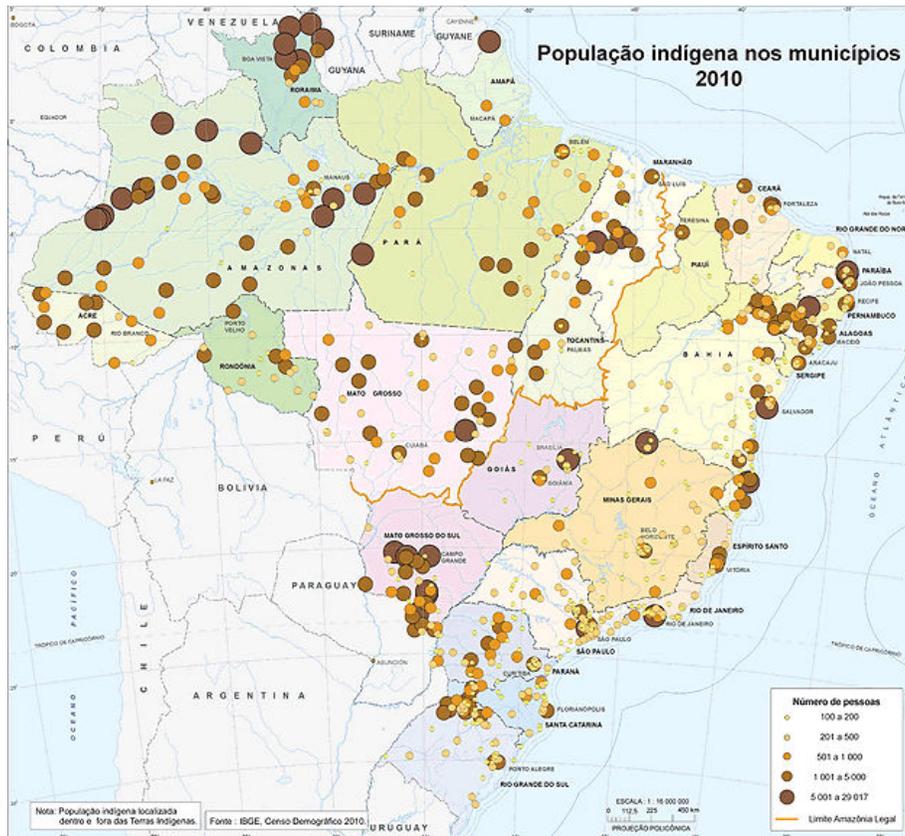


Fig. 1. Indigenous in Brazilian municipalities, 2010 (IBGE, 2010)

With the end of dictatorship in 1985, subsequent governments have strengthened the rights of indigenous people. About 13% of Brazil has been recognized as indigenous territory. Yet farmers continue to expand their land holdings. According to the National Institute for Colonisation and Agrarian Reform, the 74 largest farms in Mato Grosso do Sul cover 2.4m hectares of land, while all the indigenous areas together, where 77,000 Indians live, add up to only a third of that area. Reason why there are still conflicts between indigenous groups and large landowners.

In Mato Grosso do Sul, according to FUNAI (2009), there are 65 indigenous lands covering 829230 hectares, representing only 2.3 % of the whole state surface.

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

Studies concerning indigenous communities are always controversial. In order to approach indigenous community, it's extremely important to deconstruct Western research practices (the methodologies, the theories and the writing styles). The unknown indigenous universe requires reconsideration of the researcher assumptions, motivations and values. Similar to the thesis *Orientalism* (1978) of Edward Said in which he points on the inaccurate cultural representations of the Middle East by westerner researchers, current empiric research on the agroecological practice within indigenous communities in Mato Grosso do Sul consider the limitations of understanding the complexity around the topic.

The first interaction with the indigenous community was with Terena community from Aldeia Ipegue during a trip organized by UCDB Campo Grande in the second week of March 2016. During this interaction I had different discussions with community members and leaders, being extremely helpful for the analysis. In which consist the agroecology practice, during my research I had the chance to meet a representative of the indigenous community (Fineida Aquino, from Aldeia Panambizinho, Dourados region) during the *Secunda Conferência Estadual de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural (ATER)* promoted by the Ministry of Agrarian Development (Ministério de Desenvolvimento Agrário) and the State Government through *Agência de Desenvolvimento Agrário e Extensão Rural (AGRAER)*.

Furthermore, short interviews/discussions were realized with indigenous farmers that are present in the Indigenous Market in Campo Grande.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

A long journey with some local indigenous people in Fazenda Cristalina, north-west from Aquidauna to Agua Branca, enabled me to investigate the land use and, in particular, the Terena indigenous management of the land. The Terena indigenous people conduct agriculture mainly on home gardens, close to the houses, but often a few kilometers away. In their gardens, indigenous cultivate a wide range of plant species.

Those plant species include nutritional ones but also medicinal and ritual. The gardens look like an anarchic agricultural place, where plants are cultivated randomly, according to their main needs. The main cultivated plants are mandioca (cassava), peppers, pumpkins and beans. Close to the garden they have raise swine and chickens (figure 2).



Fig. 2. Terena indigenous garden (Photograph by author, 2016)

The Terena indigenous installed on the indigenous land of Taunay/Ipegue were always living on the land that they call it Pokoó and which currently this territory is known as fazendas Ouro Preto and Cristalina. When asked about agricultural practice, they mentioned that before the land was covered with forest and the indigenous used small surface for agriculture like nowadays, just the forest is missing being replaced with pasture needed for the cattle rising. When discussing with them they mentioned that in the diet of Terena indigenous honey is very important and due to the agrotóxicos used in agriculture there are less and less bee keepers within the community. Mandioca dominates this agricultural stage because it is the primary staple crop for most indigenous peoples.

It comprises important nutritional, agroecological, gastronomic, and cultural values at the indigenous level. The indigenous agroecology is based on an embedded ancestral ecological knowledge, coevolving with indigenous cultural forms. The indigenous agroecological practice contributes fundamentally to the food security and the primary health care system of them. Nevertheless, it provides a variety of ecological and social services, whilst integrating ecological concerns (Gari, 2001). Itinerant farming, hunting, fishing, and fruit gathering are the main productive activities. Without understanding the indigenous culture is almost impossible to improve their condition. One of the main characteristic of the



According to the datas of INCRA in Dourados there are 87 families granted with land in the Aldeia Panambizinho and 109 families that practice family agriculture and there are quilombo remnants (Maciel, 2012). In the first case, Guarani Kaiowá indigenous are occupying 1273 hectares, which represent 14/family, much lower than the average of family farmer at the state and municipal level.

In Campo Grande, since 2000 a special market for indigenous community Praça dos Povos Indigenas was created. Terena Indians, are coloring with their presence an area with a long tradition close to the Praça do Mercado Municipal. They are selling mainly: mandioca, corn, cabbage, green beans, pepper, mixirica, guavira and pequi. Is an atypical market, the whole family is staying there selling or arranging things or even cooking. Women's are in charge with the selling activity, men's are sitting very close and debate different topics around the tereré. The cohesiveness of the indigenous group can be deducted from this ritual of drinking tereré, a habit that is rooted in the indigenous culture and that serve also as a social function in uniting members of the community. During the interview carried on, I was invited to take part in their ritual of drinking tereré. Is not so common to invite non-group members to take part in the drinking tereré process.

Entering in a free conversation, opened the door for different information's. Among the indigenous there are no social classes. The land, for example, belongs to the whole community. The labor within the indigenous community involve all members, tasks being assigned according on gender and age. Women are responsible for food, children raising, crafts, harvesting and planting. Mens are in charge with the heavier work: hunting, fishing, war and tree cutting. Historically, women's played a key role in food production within indigenous culture. It is not surprising to see in the indigenous market around 50 indigenous women from different communities and ethnic groups mainly from aldeias from Aquidauana, Anastacio and Miranda in the Pantanal, that are selling different agricultural products. One of the older women, mention that is not new their presence in the market, it was very common in the past to see indigenous who was selling fruits and herbs in Mercadão. According to the interview carried with the French agronomist borned in Morocco and established in Campo Grande Le Bourlegat, in the municipal market herbs were sold mainly by Japanese or descendants of Japanese immigrants and indigenous. Indigenous recognize that some of their products are appreciated and they have loyal consumers, who returns frequently to buy products such as handicrafts, flowers, honey, fruits, palm hearts, green beans, pequi and mandioca. One of the seller mentioned that her weekly presence in the market allowed her to grow and offer education to all her six children's and

is the main revenue that improved their livelihood. Indigenous crafts are as well an important revenue source and is one of the main brand of the Terena culture, a skill which is transmitted within female members of the community from mother to daughter. Their products being one of the most common souvenir in Campo Grande (figure 4).



Fig. 4. Indigenous market Campo Grande (Photograph by author, 2016)

## CONCLUSIONS

Agroecology within indigenous communities is glorified in the literature but in reality is characterized by a mosaic of practices with different degrees of achievements. Agroecological among indigenous community is rather an intercultural relationship with strong ethnographic characteristics (Fehlauer et al., 2014). Their special relation with the nature, allows practice that are claimed in the modern agroecology theories. For indigenous people land and in general nature, has a sacred quality.

When it comes to efficiency they are lacking knowledge, it is mostly a subsistence agriculture which doesn't include ideas of growth, overproduction. Agroecological projects implanted within the indigenous doesn't have always the expected outcome, especially when assistance is not delivered. Their knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation. Therefore, memory is the most important intellectual resource among indigenous cultures.

Despite of all those idyllic factors, the historical changes occurred on their territory changed them, being marginalized and excluded now they become one of the main vulnerable group being exposed to various conflicts.

In Mato Grosso do Sul there are more than 70000 indigenous that belong to the large indigenous groups of Kaiowá and Guarani, Terena and Kadiwéu. In the last decade they become more active fighting for their rights and implicitly for an improved quality of life.

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