

EDITORIAL

An opinion about the situation of native species plants

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The profit of native species plants in general and ornamental plants (as cactus and orchids) and/or medicinal plants, in particular, can be approached from different points of view that, far from being antagonistic, are perfectly complementary. Considering that a significant number of these species are not cultivated, and that their exploitation is based on an extractive unsustainable regime, it can be assumed that due to this situation many of these species are in serious extinction risk. The case of some species of orchids (belonging to *Cattleya* genre, for example), numerous cactus, succulent species and several aromatic and medicinal plants (i.e.: *Minthostachys mollis* and *Hedeoma multiflorum*, among others), is paradigmatic.

The described scenario affects transversally all kind of proposals that can be presented in function of the development and the sustainable use of this germplasm, since any activity proposed will depend on the availability of these plant materials. The situation indicates that public policies should be prioritized and implemented, first and foremost, to promote strategies to recover and safeguard the germplasm previously mentioned.

Taking these into account, two parallel lines of work should be developed. The first alternative that arises is to regulate collectors' activities, not only by giving the system a chance to recover, but also with the sowing of the respective habitats with different genotypes of selected material multiplied *ex situ* and letting them evolve and cross freely with the original plants remnants, in protected "sanctuaries". At the same time, given that species extraction is a cultural

problem that makes any change difficult (after all, we are still hunter-collectors) extensive work should be done to encourage proper harvesting practices. It would also be necessary to have the appropriate legal support (always within the framework of the Biodiversity Convention) in order to be able to count with the tools to prevent and where necessary, punish the erroneous extractive practices.

The second line of work, judicious and complementary to the first one, in my opinion, is based on offering the industry demanding these species, the possibility of counting with improved plant materials in terms of quality and productivity. This process of domestication and selection, which has already been put into practice with some of these species, could be accelerated by the application of appropriate biotechnological tools such as tissue culture and molecular markers. In this context, biotechnology offers alternatives of simple development and relative low costs, both in time and economic resources.

The objective will be fulfilled when large areas of natural habitats are recovered and collectors are trained in the application of good practices of extraction in harmony with the environment and human resources formed in the conservation and development of this germplasm. It should be emphasized that for the achievement of the proposed objectives, the collaboration of the whole society, becoming aware of the importance of these genetic resources and, as previously mentioned, the support of the State that provides the legal framework and counts with the public policy-making power.

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