Land Management Strategies and Fuelwood Collection in the Indigenous Ngäbe Village of Hato Horcón, La Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé, Panamá

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Fuelwood is a basic necessity used to sustain the lives of people throughout the developing world. Each day within the village of Hato Horcón subsistence farmers use their local knowledge and best judgment to locate fuelwood sources. The eventual development of local knowledge and the understanding of the surrounding environment allow these farmers to locate good places to find fuelwood and to identify species preferred for use as fuelwood.

Over time, the population of Hato Horcón has increased and agricultural land use has intensified. The combination of both factors has affected the supply of fuelwood throughout the village. Trees once used as public sources of fuelwood have been claimed through usufruct land tenure, and public fuelwood collection areas known through local knowledge have been converted to agricultural land. The current conditions have caused farmers to adapt to and create new methods of how to locate and collect fuelwood through land management strategies.

The purpose of this study was to analyze a set of variables to investigate the process a farmer goes through in locating a fuelwood site and how this process relates to land management strategies. The study found that the farmers of Hato Horcón prefer the use of large trees in areas of high basal area, which tend to be river basins, with a dominant vegetation of mixed and agroforestry species. They have adapted to the changing environment and population through the use of agroforestry and large-tree systems on their farmland.