

Floristic analysis and phytosociology in an area of Caatinga, Brazil

ABSTRACT- Studies on the composition and structure of vegetation can provide important information for decision-making and the application of forest-management techniques. The aim of this research was to analyse an area of Caatinga using vegetation characterisation and forest inventory in the Rocha Eterna Community, in the district of São João do Piauí, Brazil. Simple Random Sampling was used, installing 17 sampling units of 20 x 20 m. The phytosociological parameters of the horizontal and vertical structure, the floristic diversity of the species and the timber production in the area were evaluated. Fabaceae was the most representative family. The three most representative species in the area were *Senna acuruensis* (Benth.) H.S. Irwin & Barneby, *Sideroxylon obtusifolium* (Roem. & Schult.) T.D.Penn. and *Mimosa tenuiflora* (Willd.) Poir. The Shannon-Weaver diversity index (H') for the area was 1.74 nats.ind⁻¹. The estimated basal area for the area was 8.68 m².ha⁻¹. The estimated actual volume was 36.56 m³.ha⁻¹. Species diversity in the fragment under study was considered low.

Keywords: Floristic diversity. Vegetation structure. Survey of the Caatinga, Phytosociology

1. INTRODUCTION

Caatinga vegetation covers most of the area of semi-arid climate in the Northeast of Brazil (Giulietti et al., 2004). The vegetation is composed of herbaceous and woody

25 species, including cacti and bromeliads, with an emphasis on the xerophytic and
26 deciduous aspect, a typical characteristic of the species, which display great
27 heterogeneity in relation to their phyto-physiognomies and horizontal and vertical
28 structures (Prado, 2003).

29 The degradation of the Caatinga through anthropogenic action, deforestation and
30 the burning of forested areas for agricultural activities is increasingly compromising the
31 natural resources and sustainability of the biome. Further, there is little understanding of
32 the biome, especially of how to use the resources it offers, as there are particular aspects
33 of the Caatinga that must be considered if it is to regenerate and again be exploited
34 (Tabarelli et al., 2000; Vasconcelos et al., 2017).

35 Research into floristic and phytosociological composition in forests of the
36 Caatinga Biome is an important tool for detailing plant species diversity and verifying
37 how they are distributed in a given environment using structural analysis, which allows
38 an estimation of the distribution of individuals by species and consequently by family
39 (Souza, 2009).

40 Phytosociological studies also aid in forest management planning, environmental
41 impact studies and forest restoration and reclamation projects in degraded areas, and
42 may also indicate the potential use for a given species through information on richness
43 and abundance, volumetric potential and diameter-class distribution that will influence
44 its use, whether for wood, charcoal, cuttings or posts, among others (Santos et al.,
45 2017a).

46 Studies on the composition and structure of vegetation can provide basic
47 information for decision-making in the application of forest-management techniques
48 (conservation and maintenance), so that any intervention in the forest should be planned
49 and preceded by a detailed inventory, which would provide information such as

50 estimates of the floristic composition, and of the horizontal, vertical and parametric
51 structures (Souza, 2003).

52 It should be noted that forest inventories are still scarce in the southern region of
53 the State of Piauí, so that research which evaluates the conditions under which the
54 natural vegetation is found is extremely important. This study therefore aimed to
55 analyse an area of caatinga vegetation using vegetation characterisation and forest
56 inventory in the Rocha Eterna Community, in the district of São João do Piauí.

57

58 **2. MATERIAL AND METHOD**

59 **2.1 Study Area**

60 The **research** work was carried out with the support of the Non-Governmental
61 Organisation SOS Sertão in a fragment of Caatinga of approximately 200 ha in the
62 Rocha Eterna Community of the district of São João do Piauí, in the microregion of the
63 Upper Middle Canindé. **The area is located at 08°21'29 S latitude and 42°14'48" W**
64 **logitude**, and is about 482 km from the state capital, Teresina.

65 The city of São João do Piauí has an average altitude of 222 m above sea level,
66 with minimum temperatures of 22°C and maximum temperatures of 39°C, and a climate
67 that is considered semi-arid, hot and dry. The average annual rainfall is 500 mm, with
68 two periods a year: a rainy season lasting from 3 to 4 months and a dry season during
69 the remaining months (Aguiar; Gomes, 2004).

70 The soils of the region are shallow, considered young, sometimes stony, still
71 influenced by the underlying material, with a predominant vegetation of tree and shrub
72 Caatinga, where the soils are of sedimentary origin and extremely sandy (Aguiar;
73 Gomes, 2004; Nascimento et al., 2008).

74 The terrain in the region shows a flattened surface with areas of depression in
 75 which temporary lagoons form, surfaces of low plates, flat relief with smoothly
 76 undulating areas and altitudes varying between 150 and 300 metres, undulating surfaces
 77 and moving relief, corresponding to slopes with the residual extensions of plates,
 78 gradients and steep slopes, with valleys, elevations and tabular summit surfaces of flat
 79 relief (Aguiar and Gomes, 2004).

80 2.2 Data collection and processing

81 For the survey, an area of approximately 200 ha of native forest was selected,
 82 where 17 plots of 20 x 20 m (400 m²) were randomly allocated, resulting in an
 83 inventory area of 6,800 m².

84 Inside the 17 plots, measurements were taken of the tree and shrub forest species
 85 having a circumference at breast height (CBH) equal to or greater than 10 cm, where
 86 they were identified *in loco* by means of their dendrological aspects; when possible,
 87 botanical material was collected for later identification and/or confirmation of the
 88 scientific names by consulting the literature. The APG II system (2003) was used to
 89 classify the plants up to species level.

90 After acquiring the data, the phytosociological parameters of the horizontal and
 91 vertical structure of the sampled species were evaluated (Felfili and Rezende, 2003)
 92 together with the floristic diversity, using the Shannon-Weaver Index (H'), the Simpson
 93 Dominance Index (C) and the Pielou Evenness Index (J'), as per Table 1.

94

95 **Table 1.** Shannon-Weaver diversity index (H'), Simpson dominance index (C) and
 96 Pielou evenness index (J').

Index	Designation	Formula
Diversity	Shannon-Weaver (H')	$H' = \sum_{i=1}^s \left(\frac{n_j}{N} \cdot \ln \frac{N}{n_j} \right)$

Dominance	Simpson (C')	$c' = \sum_{i=1}^s \frac{(n_j \cdot (n_j - 1))}{N \cdot (N - 1)}$
Evenness	Pielou (J')	$J' = \frac{H'}{H'_{max}}$

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Where: S = total number of sampled species; N = total number of sampled individuals; ni = number of sampled individuals of the ith species; Ln = neperian logarithm; Hmax = Ln (S) = total number of sampled species.

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102

To calculate the volume, the DBH at 1.30 m including bark of adult trees measured in the sampling units was considered, applying the following formulae:

103

$$VCc/c = (\pi * (DBH^2) * Ht)/40000$$

104

(Equation 1)

105

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107

108

where: VCc/c = cylindrical volume of the tree with bark; π = "pi" (3.1416...); DBH² = diameter at breast height, squared (in centimetres); Ht = total height of the tree (in metres); 40.000 = quadratic conversion factor from centimetres to metres (from the DBH);

109

$$VA = VCC * ff$$

110

(Equation 2)

111

112

where: VA = actual volume (in cubic meters - m³); ff = form factor (0.9 dimensionless) (ZAKIA *et al.*, 1988).

113

To estimate the stacked volumes, the following formula was applied:

114

$$VS = VR * fe$$

(Equation

115

3)

116

117

where: VS = stacked volume (in steres); VA = actual volume (cubic metres); fe = stacking factor (3.41 adimensional) (ZAKIA *et al.*, 1988).

118 To describe the community structure, the following phytosociological parameters
119 were estimated: absolute density (DA), relative density (DR), absolute frequency (FA),
120 relative frequency (FR), absolute dominance (DoA), relative dominance (DoR),
121 importance value index (IVI) and coverage value index (CVI).

122 Processing or computation of the field data was carried out using an Excel 2010
123 spreadsheet and the MATA NATIVA v3.01 software, used in floristic and
124 phytosociological analysis.

125

126 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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128 In the survey, 792 individuals were sampled, belonging to 6 families, 17 species
129 and 15 genera. Of these species, two were identified by their common name only.
130 Family Fabaceae was the most representative in number of species, together with
131 Euphorbiaceae; only one species was registered for each of the remaining families, as
132 shown in Table 2.

133

134 **Table 2.** List of identified species found in the sampling plots in the Rocha Eterna

135 **Community, Brazil.**

Family/Species	Common Name	Habit
Annonaceae		
<i>Annona leptopetala</i> (R.E.Fr.) H.Rainer	Bananinha	Arboreal
Bignoniaceae		
<i>Jacaranda jasminoides</i> (Thunb.) Sandwith	Chifre de carneiro	Arboreal
Combretaceae		
<i>Terminalia fagifolia</i> Mart.	Chapada	Arboreal
Euphorbiaceae		
<i>Croton blanchetianus</i> Baill.	Marmeleiro	Arboreal

<i>Manihot glaziovii</i> Müll.Arg.	Maniçoba	Arboreal
Fabaceae		
<i>Machaerium acutifolium</i> Vogel	Violete	Arboreal
<i>Poincianella pyramidalis</i> (Tul.) L.P.Queiroz	Catingueira	Arboreal
<i>Bauhinia cheilantha</i> (Bong.) Steud.	Mororó	Arboreal
<i>Pityrocarpa moniliformis</i> (Benth.) Luckow & R.W.Jobson	Catandúva	Arboreal
<i>Senna acuruensis</i> (Benth.) H.S.Irwin & Barneby	Canela de Velho	Arboreal
<i>Machaerium</i> Pers.	Jacarandá de Sangue	Arboreal
<i>Mimosa tenuiflora</i> (Willd.) Poir.	Jurema preta	Arboreal
<i>Piptadenia stipulacea</i> (Benth.) Ducke.	Jurema Branca	Arboreal
<i>Dimorphandra mollis</i> Benth	Folha Miúda	Arboreal
Sapotaceae		
<i>Sideroxylon obtusifolium</i> (Roem. & Schult.) T.D.Penn.	Espinheiro	Arboreal
Undetermined		
Undetermined 1	Birro	Arboreal
Undetermined 2	Violete Preto	Arboreal

136

137 It should be pointed out that in other surveys already carried out in the Caatinga
 138 region, the families Fabaceae and Euphorbiaceae are commonly recorded as having the
 139 largest number of species. (Calixto Júnior and Drumond, 2014; Dias et al., 2014; Leite
 140 et al., 2015; Santos et al., 2017b).

141 Family Fabaceae presented 9 species, these with around 8 genera; the genus
 142 *Machaerium* was repeated and represented by two species; the genus has around 140
 143 species, among which, *Jacaranda* stands out with numerous variations.

144 It is common in floristic and phytosociological surveys for the most representative
145 species to be Fabaceae and Euphorbiaceae, considered as one of the most numerous
146 families among plants groups.

147 Vasconcelos et al. (2017) showed similar results for the number of species of
148 family Euphorbiaceae in studies carried out in the district of São Francisco, Piauí;
149 however, being an ecotone of the Cerrado and Caatinga biomes, this was an area with a
150 higher floristic diversity index as well as having a greater number of species and
151 individuals per unit area (absolute density).

152 In a survey carried out in an area of Caatinga in the State of Paraíba, Oliveira et al.
153 (2009) found that the families Fabaceae and Euphorbiaceae excelled in the number of
154 species and also had a large total number of individuals. Rodal (2002), found that the
155 families Fabaceae and Euphorbiaceae were the most representative in phytosociological
156 studies of the woody component in an area of Caatinga in the district of São Raimundo
157 Nonato, Piauí.

158 The aim of this study was to register species of the tree and shrub stratum,
159 however, the only component found was arboreal, although some shrub species were
160 seen outside the plots. What demonstrates the development of species in the area is their
161 being better established in the forest; management should be seen as a positive way of
162 maintaining biodiversity, compared to intense extraction of the vegetation.

163 The most abundant species in the inventoried region were *Senna acuruensis* (339),
164 *Sideroxylon obtusifolium* (178) and *Mimosa tenuiflora* (Willd.) Poir. (130) (Table 3).

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Table 3. List of inventoried species, in the Rocha Eterna Community, in the district of São João do Piauí. .

Scientific Name	N	DA	DR(%)	FA	FR(%)	DoA	DoR	CVI (%)	IVI (%)
<i>Senna acuruensis</i> (Benth.) H.S.Irwin & Barneby	339	498.529	42.8	100	14.78	10.228	80.08	61.44	45.89
<i>Sideroxylon obtusifolium</i> (Roem. & Schult.) T.D.Penn.	178	261.765	22.47	88.24	13.04	0.562	4.40	13.44	13.30
<i>Mimosa tenuiflora</i> (Willd.) Poir.	130	191.176	16.41	94.12	13.91	0.425	3.32	9.87	11.22
<i>Pityrocarpa moniliformis</i> (Benth.)	31	45.288	3.92	94.12	13.90	0.163	1.28	2.60	6.39
<i>Bauhinia cheilantha</i> (Bong.) Steud.	15	22.059	1.89	52.94	7.83	0.029	0.22	1.06	3.31
<i>Croton blanchetianus</i> Baill.	31	45.588	3.91	35.29	5.22	0.065	0.51	2.21	3.21
<i>Terminalia fagifolia</i> Mart.	7	10.294	0.88	23.53	3.48	0.574	4.5	2.69	2.95
<i>Manihot glaziovii</i> Müll.Arg.	13	19.118	1.64	35.29	5.22	0.105	0.82	1.23	2.56
Undetermined 2	11	16.176	1.39	35.29	5.22	0.104	0.82	1.10	2.47
<i>Dimorphandra mollis</i> Benth.	9	13.235	1.14	29.41	4.35	0.062	0.48	0.81	1.99
<i>Jacaranda jasminoides</i> (Thunb.) Sandwith	4	5.882	0.51	23.53	3.48	0.087	0.68	0.59	1.55
Undetermined 1	7	10.294	0.88	17.65	2.61	0.149	1.17	1.03	1.55
<i>Machaerium acutifolium</i> Vogel	6	8.824	0.76	11.76	1.74	0.093	0.73	0.74	1.07
<i>Piptadenia stipulacea</i> (Benth.) Ducke	3	4.412	0.38	17.65	2.61	0.005	0.04	0.21	1.01
<i>Annona leptopetala</i> (R.E.Fr.) H.Rainer	5	7.353	0.63	5.88	0.87	0.025	0.2	0.41	0.57
<i>Poincianella pyramidalis</i> (Tul.) L.P.Queiroz	1	1.471	0.13	5.88	0.87	0.06	0.47	0.30	0.49
<i>Machaerium</i> Pers.	2	2.941	0.25	5.88	0.87	0.038	0.3	0.27	0.47
Total	792	1164.706	100	676.47	100	12.772	100	100	100

169 The values are in descending order of IVI. Where N = number of individuals, FA = Absolute Frequency (%),
170 FR = Relative Frequency (%), DA = Absolute Density (ind.ha-1), DR = Relative Density (%), DoA= Absolute
171 Dominance (m2.ha-1), DoR= Relative Dominance (%), IVI = Importance Value Index (%), CVI

172

173 For the importance value index (IVI), which estimates the ecological importance
174 of a given species in the community, and comprises the sum of each value of the
175 relative parameters, the species *Senna acuruensis* had the highest value, of 45.89%,
176 followed by *Sideroxylon obtusifolium* with 13.30%, *Mimosa tenuiflora* with 11.22% and
177 *Pityrocarpa moniliformis* with 6.39%.

178 The species *Senna acuruensis*, *Sideroxylon obtusifolium* and *Mimosa tenuiflora*
179 also presented the highest values for coverage in the area; the species are important, as
180 together they account for 84.75% of the individuals sampled in the area.

181 Due to species distribution, these values are related, with *Senna acuruensis* and
182 *Mimosa tenuiflora* present in all the inventoried plots, and *Sideroxylon obtusifolium*
183 occurring in nearly all the plots. The species *Croton blanchetianus* Baill., although
184 presenting considerable values for density, was not among the five species with the
185 greatest IVI, since it did not stand out as to frequency. All the parameters can be seen in
186 table 3.

187 The Shannon-Weaver diversity index (H') for the area was $1.74 \text{ nats.ind}^{-1}$, the
188 Simpson Dominance index (C) was 0.74 and the Pielou Evenness index (J') was 0.60.

189 The Simpson Dominance Index (C) seen in this study also presented lower results
190 than in other studies in the area of Caatinga, such as that of Sousa, et al. (2017) of 0.88
191 in Bom Jesus, Piauí, and 0.93 seen by Vasconcelos et al. (2017) in São Francisco do
192 Piauí. The Shannon index (H'), $1.74 \text{ nats.ind}^{-1}$, was lower than those found in other
193 studies in the Caatinga, such as Rodal et al. (1998), Rodal et al. (2006) and Ferras et al.
194 (2006).

195 This value is considered low, a fact related to the climate conditions and
196 associated with the types of soils predominant in these regions (Trovão, 2004). When
197 evaluating the values of these two indices, it is correct to say that the study area has less
198 diversity when compared to other areas located in the same region.

199 However, the study area presented greater diversity when compared to Caatinga
200 vegetation in other regions; as for example, an area studied by Holanda et al. (2015) in
201 Cajaseirinhas, Paraíba, where the vegetation structure in remnants of caatinga with a
202 history of disturbance showed a value of $1.5 \text{ nats.ind}^{-1}$.

203 The value for the Pielou Evenness Index (J') found in this study ($J = 0.60$) was
204 similar to that found by Pereira Júnior et al. (2012) of $J = 0.63$. These values for species
205 distribution are considered low when compared to other areas of Caatinga; in Monteiro,

206 Paraíba, a greater value, corresponding to $J = 0.73$ was found by Pegado et al. (2006),
207 indicating the more even distribution of plant species throughout the area.

208 The vegetation had a mean height of 4 m for the 792 individuals inventoried,
209 reflecting well the characteristics of the vegetation for height and population density.

210 Distribution of the basal area and of the estimated actual volume by diameter class
211 shows that the highest values were found for a diameter class of between 6.5 and 11.5
212 cm, followed by the class between 1.5 and 6.5 cm (Table 4).

213

Table 4. Distribution of Basal Area (BA), Actual Volume (VA) and Stacked Volume (VS) for diameter class, on the Rocha Eterna property, Brazil.

Class	N	BA (m ² .ha ⁻¹ .)	Act. Vol (m ³ .ha ⁻¹ .)	Stacked Vol (st.ha ⁻¹)
1.5 6.5	436	0.682	2.4405	11.92
6.5 11.5	169	0.951	3.5398	17.28
11.5 16.5	71	1.055	4.186	20.44
16.5 21.5	48	1.338	5.4146	26.44
21.5 26.5	27	1.214	5.0391	24.60
26.5 31.5	20	1.317	5.9434	29.02
31.5 36.5	16	1.424	6.5183	31.82
36.5 41.5	3	0.336	1.4607	7.13
41.5 46.5	1	0.139	1.0001	4.88
46.5 51.5	0	0	0	0.00
51.5 56.5	1	0.228	1.0259	5.01
Total	792	8.684	36.568	178.54

214

215 The three species of greatest abundance in the vegetation represent 84.75% of the
216 sampled population. It was found that the basal area in this region was very low, this is

217 related to the high importance value index found in the primary-stage species. It may

218 also be related to disturbances in the area (the history of land use), which may have

219 influenced vegetation dynamics. The sampling error was found to be 17.46%, which

220 was acceptable and gave satisfactory results.

221 Considering the sum of the basal area of the individuals per hectare, the value
222 found in this study was greater than ($7.6 \text{ m}^2 \cdot \text{ha}^{-1}$), that found by Santos et al. (2017b),
223 ($7.6 \text{ m}^2 \cdot \text{ha}^{-1}$), who evaluated the woody component of a fragment of Caatinga located in
224 another area in the district of Upanema, in the State of Rio Grande do Norte. Amorim et
225 al. (2005) evaluated the structure of tree and shrub vegetation in an area of Caatinga in
226 the district of Serra Negra do Norte, also in the state of Rio Grande do Norte, in the
227 microregion of Western Seridó, where a lower value ($6.1 \text{ m}^2 \cdot \text{ha}^{-1}$) was also found.

228 This difference can be explained by the fact that these areas are located in a
229 different region of the Caatinga, in another State, and also because in both the above
230 studies the basal area was calculated from data obtained from the woody stratum (trees
231 + shrubs), whereas in the present study, only tree-like individuals were considered (see
232 Table 2).

233 The Actual Volume in the area was greater than that reported by Santos et al.
234 (2017b), who found a value of $30.03 \text{ m}^3 \cdot \text{ha}^{-1}$ in the town of Desterro, in the district of
235 Teixeira, Paraíba, and lower than those found by Leite et al. (2015), of $40.40 \text{ m}^3 \cdot \text{ha}^{-1}$
236 also in the district of Teixeira, Paraíba, in the microregion of Serra do Teixeira.
237 However, this value was greater than the values found by Xavier et al. (2005) when
238 assessing the timber potential of the microregions of Sousa and Itaporanga, and who
239 calculated a volume of $17 \text{ m}^3 \cdot \text{ha}^{-1}$ and $20.51 \text{ m}^3 \cdot \text{ha}^{-1}$ respectively. It would seem that the
240 habit of the components under study contributed to this significant difference between

241 the areas, in addition to environmental factors, that have a different effect in each
242 locality.

243 **4. CONCLUSION**

244 Family Fabaceae had the largest number of individuals. The diversity found in the
245 area was considered low, also displaying little uniformity in the distribution of
246 vegetation when compared to other studies in areas of Caatinga in the State of Piauí,
247 highlighting the regional variations, especially in population density.

248 The place where the Caatinga vegetation is found has an effect on the diversity
249 indices.

250 The inclusion of only tree species in the study increased the values for basal area
251 and volume compared to other areas of Caatinga, where these values were calculated
252 from the complete woody stratum (shrub and tree).

253 The species that stood out for IVI in the fragment under study were *Senna*
254 *acuruensis*, *Sideroxylon obtusifolium*, *Mimosa tenuiflora*, *Pityrocarpa moniliformis* and
255 *Bauhinia cheilantha*.

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