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**Living with the Trees of Life: Towards the transformation of tropical agriculture**

Roger Leakey, 2012

*CABI, Wallingford, Oxfordshire*

*ISBN 9781780640983 (PBK)*

*200 pages, £27.50*

This is Roger Leakey’s first-hand account of how agroforestry has the potential to redress many of the wrongs that have been inflicted on smallholder farmers in developing countries. The goal is to restore their food sovereignty and security and to bring them into the global market on their own terms. Thirty years of experience are packed into the story and there are accounts of an array of soil and water conservation possibilities for trees from alley cropping to improved fallows to hillside contour barriers, fertilizer trees

and much more.

The *Trees of Life* of the title are indigenous species producing multiple useful products which poor smallholder farmers can incorporate into their multifunctional agroforestry systems. One example is *Garcinia kola* which provides, *inter alia*: bactericidal twigs to be used as toothbrushes; nuts to cure bronchial infections; fruit flesh used as a purgative; bark for leather tanning; gum to cure gonorrhoea;

latex for cuts and wounds; and sap for skin diseases and parasites.

Trees on farms not only provide fuel, wood, food, medicines and timber, but they also provide environmental services such as shade, wind protection, erosion control and soil fertility maintenance. For these reasons, the book explores the ways and means of selecting the best (‘plus’) trees and the

methods of vegetative propagation and multiplication. It is the ability to propagate ‘plus’ trees vegetatively that is the key to enriching agroforestry systems and opening up opportunities for generating income

from village-level tree nurseries. The book goes to great lengths to give case studies and to discuss the need for good marketing strategies for tree products which safeguard the interests of smallholder farmers, who need to be protected against biopiracy and its subsequent unfair competition. It would, for example, be grossly unfair for a company to recognize the potential in a particular agroforestry product and then to develop monocultural plantations in a location with a similar climate, but no law would prevent it at the moment. Fortunately, ethical approaches are being seen as good business by some multinational companies; the case of Brazilian-built Mercedes cars is one positive example which shows how the production of materials for incorporation into cars through small-scale agroforestry is feasible and profitable for all.

There are now 1.2 billion smallholder farmers incorporating agroforestry in their production systems and, by doing so, are increasing the number of trees in the environment with all the attendant benefits that this implies. If, as seems likely, agroforestry can contribute to the necessary goal of doubling food output for the planet’s predicted population increase, using far less water, less land, less energy and less fertilizer, then this richly informative and thought-provoking book points the way.

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