

KINASSEROM ISLAND (IBOL), CHAD



# FOREWORD

This book is a tribute to the strength and intelligence of the people of the Lake Chad Basin who, over centuries, have developed a wealth of local technologies enabling them to survive the harsh and uncertain conditions of the region. Most Lake Chad Basin people today engage in some mixture of agriculture, fisheries and pastoral activities. People in highly uncertain and marginal habitats clearly have a heightened awareness of the importance of biological diversity in their lives. A diversity of potential food sources, over a range of times and places, with different types and levels of demand on the environment minimizes the risk of a potentially deadly shortfall in food resources. Biodiversity, to the people living in this region, is not the mere subject of an academic debate with political overtones, it is the substance of survival.

Threats to biodiversity, and therefore to long-term well-being, have come in the form of population growth and economic pressures to move into possibly unsustainable production methods. The challenge now is to find original solutions that lead to better productivity, but not at the cost of biodiversity and long-term sustainability. The best solutions will derive from local creativity and engagement, and will maintain natural resources and ecosystem functions for future generations. To meet these challenges will require understanding existing social, economic and ecological systems, in order to find ways to help local populations to improve conditions without putting at risk the long-term stability and resilience of these systems.

Human well-being, poverty reduction, sustainable use of resources and the importance of biological diversity for food security was reconfirmed by the World Food Summit in 1996 (and again in 2002). These are not independent domains, but involve a high level of cross-cutting interrelationships and imply the need for regional political and scientific action. The Lake Chad Basin Commission must be assisted to help develop ecosystem management strategies based on up-to-date environmental science and economics, together with the knowledge and appreciation of the traditional practices of local peoples.

This publication has been prepared by FAO technical people from different Departments and Services, through the collaboration made possible by the Priority Area for Interdisciplinary Action on Biodiversity, and support received by the FAO/Netherlands Partnership Programme on Agrobiodiversity, for the participatory preparation and distribution of this book.

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