**Book Review**

***Living with the Trees of Life – Towards the Transformation of Tropical Agriculture***

By Roger RB Leakey

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This is an inspiring book, a guiding star for the rebirth of tropical agriculture which puts the spotlight on the needs of poor farmers and the global environment. Professor Roger Leakey is a former Director of Research at the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF, 1993–1997). Currently he is Vice President of the International Society of Tropical Foresters and Vice Chairman of the International Tree Foundation. He is a well renowned tree biologist who has implemented and managed research projects in many corners of the world – usually in remote rural locations.

Professor Leakey is also an early supporter of *Forests, Trees and Livelihoods*. Always responding positively when asked to review a manuscript, he is still actively supporting the journal. We are very pleased to present his new book here. This is an important book for all our readers, a book in which Professor Leakey, among other things, recounts in accessible language his experience of the fascinating realities covered by the word ”agroforestry”, and especially his pioneering experience in developing a tree domestication program in partnership with local communities in the Tropics.

The first section of the book looks at the seriousness of the big global issues of environmental degradation, poverty, malnutrition and hunger that affect the lives of billions of people worldwide and describes how in agriculture land degradation leads to poverty; and poverty leads to land degradation. This downward spiral of environmental degradation and social deprivation makes it important to address socio-economic and environmental issues simultaneously. It then go on to explain how the cultivation of tropical trees within farming systems can address this spiral and have huge benefits to small-scale farmers living on the edge of the cash economy. Such beneficial effects of the integration of trees in farming systems are well known to our readers, as *Forests, Trees and Livelihoods* has published numerous articles on this topic. However, with regard to the wider implementation of agroforestry Professor Leakey says: “Sadly, despite over thirty years of research internationally, the important benefits derived from the cultivation of trees in different configurations in tropical farms and landscapes is poorly recognized by policy makers and development agencies”. He goes on to indicate that he can sympathise with this because although he has known about agroforestry for a long time, it was not until he was appointed to be the Director of Research at the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) in Nairobi that he really got an understanding of how it works. In that position one of his first tasks was to visit agroforestry projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America and to see examples for himself. After just a few months he was a total convert and in his book he tries to portray what he saw for those not lucky enough to go and see it for themselves.

The second section of the book is about how to harness the ecological power of trees and how to help local people to improve the quality of the wide range of tree products that originate from tropical moist forests and semi-arid woodlands. The process of domestication described by Professor Leakey, and to which he dedicated a substantial part of his scientific career, is done in partnership with local people. It is similar to that which has taken place in horticulture, but in agroforestry it is done through an empowering process which ensures that the communities are the beneficiaries of their own innovations. The range of potential innovations is enormous. He believes that few people realize the vast untapped wealth of the genetic variation that is present in trees and suggests that cultivars of a number of important tree species could be as diverse as the dog breeds developed from the wolf. This would create opportunities for a whole new range of modern industries. However, as Professor Leakey emphasises: “In developing these fledgling industries we must not remake the mistakes of the past. This time new industries must be developed in close and rewarding partnerships with local people”.

In the final section of his book, Professor Leakey mentions that numerous international reports have concluded that ‘business as usual is not an option for agriculture’. He goes on to ask, how can a new development paradigm for the world be created; one that this time recognizes the needs of the poor and vulnerable who have been marginalized by our current focus on Globalization? Professor Leakey recognises that this is indeed the knub of his book. In addition to having been fortunate enough to travel widely around the world and see for himself the positive and negative impacts of modern living, he has been involved in global studies of the future of agriculture. He says “What I have seen and heard has convinced me that most of our global woes, from climate change to abject rural poverty and food insecurity, can be relatively easily addressed by the widespread application of agroforestry, especially in the tropics. In contrast to the current polarised debate about whether agriculture should be driven by biotechnology or organic principles, I advocate a simple, highly adaptable three-step generic model of agroforestry that greatly boosts food production from the Green Revolution crops”. From this he concludes that “people should not see agroforestry as an alternative to current agricultural systems, but rather as a way to build on the great progress that has been made over the last 60 years – and as a way to correct some of the mistakes. In these terms, agroforestry is a way to increase the economic returns that come from the huge investment that has been made in crop and livestock breeding. In essence therefore, I see the way forward as a middle path involving new components from biotechnology and more rigorous attention to soil fertility management. In this way, agroforestry diversifies and intensifies a low-input production system with new crops that are beneficial ecologically, as well as economically. This also empowers local people to lift themselves out of poverty and creates new business and employment opportunities. The Convenient Truth (the title of the last chapter) behind all this is that we already know how to do it – indeed it has already been tested in the field and found to work. I leave you to read about the details!”

No wonder, reading this book is a must for students, teachers, researchers, policy-makers, and all those interested by the use, domestication and integration of trees in tropical agricultural systems for their beneficial effects on farmers’ livelihoods.

Hubert de Foresta