

Charlie Tuesday pm

Report for Symposium 2: Domestication of Agroforestry Tree Crops

Chaired by Roger Leakey, the symposium featured three presentations touching on various aspects of tree domestication in West and Central Africa, Latin America and Southern Africa. One of the key messages was that tree domestication can significantly increase the incomes of smallholder farmers and rural dwellers. It can also provide considerable environmental benefits.

Zac Tchoundjeu of the World Agroforestry Centre discussed the impact of participatory tree domestication on farmers' livelihoods in West and Central Africa. This vast region is a hot spot for both biodiversity and poverty. A survey conducted in the early 1990s found that the species most valued by farmers were indigenous fruit trees such as African plum and bush mango. These are among the species that have been the subject to a programme of participatory domestication, which involves communities in the selection and propagation of indigenous fruit trees. Using vegetative propagation, researchers and farmers have developed cultivars which fruit early and provide large, sweet fruit.

Farmers involved in tree domestication report significant increases in income. This has enables them to buy medicines, send their children to school, restore dilapidated houses, buy fertilizers and much else. There are significant environmental benefits too. Domestication has encouraged farmers to protect the forests, which are now an important source of the raw germplasm needed to develop new cultivars.

The second presentation, from Jonathan Cornelius of James Cook University, Australia, described four projects which encourage smallholder production of agroforestry germplasm - in other words seeds and plants - in Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico and Peru. He began by stressing that the success of tree-planting programmes depends on a chain of different activities. One weak link can undermine the whole enterprise, and one of the most important links is the availability of good germplasm.

Besides increasing the income of the farmers involved, these projects have had other benefits. For example, they have increased the availability of good germplasm, and helped farmers to retain control of distribution. Cornelius stressed that it is important to work with seed sources that are already available and to choose the right species. Wherever possible, it makes sense to add value by producing and selling seedlings, as well as seeds.

The final presentation described the work of Phytotrade Africa, a trade association which supports and promotes the sustainable trade in various wild plants. One of Phytotrade's main objectives, explained Cyril Lombard, is to help poor people generate a supplementary income. The key areas of support include supply chain development, market development, institutional development and research and development. Although Phytotrade has focused on supporting the harvesting of wild material, it recognises that some industrial partners want 'the security' of cultivated suppliers. This will be achieved through participatory, pro-poor domestication programmes.

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