

## GUEST EDITORIAL

### NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS—A MISNOMER?

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In the past, it was common practice for hunter-gatherers to collect tree and other products from forests and woodlands. These common-property resources were nutritious and often also important as medicinal products, as well as being useful for wood products for crafts, construction and for tools. As such they were rightly called non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

These days, I think we need to recognise that NTFP is sometimes a misnomer as much of the forest has gone or has been severely degraded by logging and shifting cultivations. As a consequence, many of the species which used to provide NTFPs are now more commonly found in farm land. Indeed, many of the traditionally important and useful tree species are now found in places far removed from forest—sometimes even outside the area of their natural distribution. The distribution of these species is now a consequence of anthropogenic activity and they have become components of the agricultural landscape. For example, marula (*Sclerocarya birrea*) trees in southern Africa are typically scattered trees in farmers' fields. Likewise in the humid belt of west and central Africa, safou (*Dacryodes edulis*) is often grown as shade tree in cocoa farms. Safou is thought to have a small natural range in south-west Cameroon (Vivien & Faure 1985), but is now common throughout southern Cameroon and in large areas of central Africa. In Asia and Latin America there are similar examples such as damar (*Shorea javanica*) which is cultivated in complex agroforests in Indonesia, longan (*Dimocarpus longan*) in Vietnam and peach palm (*Bactris gasipaes*) in Brazil and Costa Rica.

The importance of indigenous fruit and nut tree species as the source of both nutrition and income to rural households was recognised in the early 1990s (Leakey & Newton 1994). As a result, a programme of tree domestication was initiated (Leakey & Simons 1998). This has grown to become an international initiative now entering its third decade (Leakey et al. 2005).

This initiative was focused on the promotion of indigenous trees for the production of marketable and domestically important products to improve the livelihoods of poor smallholder farmers in the tropics and subtropics. The approach employed was to develop horticultural cultivars by vegetative propagation of elite trees selected for a range of different attributes, thus, meeting the needs of different market opportunities. Additionally, the approach involved the active engagement of local communities in participatory domestication (Tchoundjeu et al. 2006, 2010, Asaah et al. 2011), as this was seen as a way to empower the villagers, and to ensure that the social and economic benefits flow to the communities involved (Lombard & Leakey 2010). To recognise these new crops the term agroforestry tree products (AFTPs) was proposed (Simons & Leakey 2004) to distinguish them from NTFPs or non-wood forest product (NWFPs). As such, we can consider these species to be a new generation of agricultural crops.

The importance of these new tree crops is not well recognised yet by agricultural scientists and policy-makers who are more focused on the small number of herbaceous plants, often highly domesticated by the Green Revolution. However, I believe that in the future they will play an important role in the fight against poverty, malnutrition, hunger and environmental degradation, making tropical agriculture much more sustainable and productive (Leakey 2010). In this respect, the domestication of agroforestry trees can be seen as a new second wave of crop domestication (Leakey 2012a, b), which is aimed at improving the livelihoods of poor, smallholder farmers in the tropics and tropical nations rather than contributing to the further enrichment of the economies of developed countries.

In conclusion, I accept that the terms NTFP and NWFP are still highly appropriate for common property resources being collected from forests and woodlands. However, I think

we now need to be aware that many of these products come from farms. Therefore, I believe that in these circumstances these important tree products need to be recognised as AFTPs—products from new crops with a vital role to play in the development of many tropical and subtropical countries. This recognition is needed if the statistics of trade and consumption are to influence policy-makers and donors of the social, economic and environmental values of more diversified forms of agriculture based on perennial tree crops (Simons & Leakey 2004).

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