Living With the Trees of Life: 2nd Edition
A Practical Guide to Rebooting the Planet through Tropical Agriculture and Putting Farmers First

Roger Leakey

Maximizing the returns from the restoration of natural, social and human capital

With our world torn by climate change, deforestation, land degradation, hunger, malnutrition, poverty, loss of wildlife habitat, zoonotic pandemics, illegal migration and social injustice, this book seeks to find a practical and pragmatic way forward. Based on the author’s extensive experience of tropical agriculture and forestry around the world, as well as his combination of practical and academic agricultural qualifications, the second edition of “Living with the Trees of Life” presents a unique and positive perspective on resolving these big global issues. It aims to identify principles, strategies, techniques, and skills to find a path through the maze of options for sustainable living in the tropics and subtropics. The book specifically draws heavily on a single case study which involved working to resolve the failure of tropical and subtropical agriculture to feed, sustain and support the needs of rural communities. To address the ‘big picture’ facing society, the work identified the traditionally important indigenous trees of tropical ecosystems – the trees of life – as a missing component of farming systems. These trees are keystones of the natural environment. Their products and critical ecological and social services have been overlooked by modern agriculture and should be recognized as the natural capital of the environment providing the very many day-to-day needs of local people. Many of today’s big problems can be traced back to the breakdown of the natural, social and human capital of farming systems. Hence, a focus on restoring the natural capital also has important benefits for the livelihoods of the rural population, as well as for the productivity of the agroecosystem. However, the real potential is to go much further and to build new natural capital in the form of new socially-modified tree crops producing a very wide range of food, medicinal and other non-food products for new local business enterprises. This then restores the degraded social and human capital and starts to create new physical and financial
capitals much needed for employment and economic development. There is, however, a missing 6th capital – the political and social will to change the way we manage our world by re-booting tropical agriculture and putting the needs of local people at the forefront farming systems.

Drawing on the technologies from across the spectrum of current conventional approaches to agricultural production, “Living with the Trees of Life“ seeks to promote the adoption of a new way ahead – described as Land Maxing – that also increases the returns on past investments in agriculture. The target readership of this book is a wide and diverse array of people engaged in advocating and/or adopting ways to address the issues affecting our divided and dysfunctional world, before it is too late.

Written in an accessible and engaging style, this book tells the story of how a new area of crop science has emerged across the tropics to create highly nutritious crops which can enhance food security and start to address the big issues facing humanity. Thus, this book is a vital read for academics, policy makers, and the environmentally and socially aware public alike.

Roger’s Living with the Trees of Life runs counter to conventional wisdom, and it is the inspiration that this young century needs to ensure that humanity fulfills its quest to reboot agriculture and rebuild natural resources to meet the needs of present and future generations.

Dr Dennis Garrity, Drylands Ambassador for the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, Senior Fellow at the World Resources Institute, and Distinguished Senior Research Fellow at World Agroforestry

There is now greater confidence and renewed optimism that we do have the knowledge to transform agriculture so that it not only feeds our growing population and provides improved livelihoods for farmers, but it also helps to address multiple global issues such as deforestation, land degradation, hunger, poverty, malnutrition, social injustice, illegal migration, climate change, loss of wildlife habitat, and zoonotic diseases. It may sound too good to be true, but Professor Leakey provides a very convincing and inspiring case.

Paul Harding, Chairman of Tropical Agriculture Association International, London, UK

For a world in crisis this book shows why transforming the food system is critical for the future of humanity and the planet. Using his own career as a narrative, Roger Leakey links deep knowledge, insights and wisdom to show how underutilized tree crops and agroforestry systems are an essential part of the transformation. Essential reading for researchers, students, and the concerned public.

Prof. Sayed Azam-Ali, CEO of Crops for the Future; Former Chair of the Association of International Research and Development Centres for Agriculture, Chair in Global Food Security at the University of Nottingham, UK and member United Nations High Level Panel of Experts in Food Security and Nutrition.