

Agrodiversity: Learning from farmers across the world

Harold Brookfield, Helen Parsons, and Muriel Brookfield

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Through generations of innovation and experiment, smallholder farmers have nurtured a rich diversity of plants and animals, both wild and domesticated. Most academic literature emphasizes the accelerated loss of biodiversity, but this book describes how large numbers of smallholder farmers are conserving biodiversity in their farmland and surrounds. It is based on the fieldwork of the United Nations University Project on People, Land Management and Environmental Change (PLEC), which has observed how farmers use their knowledge and skills to manage diversity and also to manage their resources conservatively and profitably.

PLEC members, coordinators and advisers work out of over 60 institutions in Brazil, China, Ghana, Guinée, Jamaica, Kenya, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Thailand, Tanzania, Uganda, Britain, the United States, Japan and Australia. The work of these country groups is the main subject matter of this book. Because of the nature of its work PLEC has focused on particular small areas in each country, where scientists are able to develop close relations with the farmers, and to learn about their management methods and assist them in many technical ways. In these areas PLEC looks for exceptional or expert farmers who manage resources better than others. This book highlights their positive experiences in order to draw lessons in support of “agrodiversity” as a developmental approach to policies for reversing loss of biodiversity, controlling land degradation, and improving small farmers' livelihoods. Learning from farmers has been a valuable and important outcome of PLEC, and it has a great deal of potential application to other situations.

Harold Brookfield, formerly Principal Scientific Coordinator of PLEC, is now Senior Adviser. He is Professor-emeritus in the Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University. Helen Parsons, formerly Research Assistant to PLEC, is now joint editor (with Harold Brookfield) of the scientific-information listserv (PLECserv) and of PLEC News and Views. She is also a smallholder farmer. Muriel Brookfield was formerly the principal editor of PLEC News and Views. She is now engaged in ornithological and environmental research.

Contents

- Introduction
- The evolution of PLEC's work, 1992-2002

- How PLEC worked toward its objectives
- Brazil (Amazonia)
- Ghana
- Guinée
- Uganda
- Kenya
- Tanzania
- China
- Papua New Guinea
- Peru
- Mexico
- Jamaica
- Thailand
- Findings from the PLEC Project