

EDITORIAL

The papers presented in this edition of the *Forests, Trees and Livelihoods* journal are each a synthesis of two or more papers presented at the 3rd International Workshop on *Dacryodes edulis* and other Non-conventional Oil Producing Species. The Workshop was held in Yaoundé, Cameroon from 3-5 October, 2000, and was attended by 88 delegates from seven African and three European countries. Organised by the ASANET (African Safou Network) Committee, the Workshop was funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in recognition of the substantial body of new data emerging from two research projects (R7190 and R7187) on indigenous fruit trees supported by DFID's Forestry Research Programme. The full proceedings (Kengue *et al.* 2002) include papers on other novel oil-producing tree species. The papers in this issue deal with all aspects of *D. edulis*, from its propagation and management to processing and marketing, to provide an integrated picture of its development potential and the key constraints still to be resolved.

Despite two previous workshops, *D. edulis* (Safou or the African Plum/African Pear) is not well known outside West and Central Africa. Virtually ignored by formal research until the early 1990s, this medium-sized forest tree with edible and extremely nutritious fruits has made the shift from the forest to the farm. It is found as a frequent and regular constituent of homegardens and cocoa/coffee agroforests over a wide area of humid West and Central Africa, especially to the East of Nigeria, spanning Cameroon, Gabon, Congo Brazzaville, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and even beyond. Its precise area of origin is unclear, however, and needs to be critically determined using molecular techniques. What is not in doubt is that, although 'wild' in the sense of not having been subject to a formal improvement programme, the tree has been the focus of farmer-initiated domestication, and is now extensively cultivated by small-scale, low-income farmers. In addition to being widely marketed at a local scale, the fruits, which are extremely variable in shape, size and colour, are traded between neighbouring countries, with Cameroon being the main exporting country. A small quantity of fruits is also exported to Europe and America for expatriate African consumers. This regional trade has been monitored and quantified over recent years and is growing substantially. In addition to being almost a staple food during the fruiting season, the fruit has potential to be an oil crop.

With the creation of the Tree Domestication Programme at ICRAF (International Centre for Research in Agroforestry) in 1994, a major initiative was started to determine which of the many indigenous tree species around the tropics of importance to local communities would be the top priority for domestication by agroforestry. This process started in West and Central Africa, and *D. edulis* came a strong second, after *Irvingia gabonensis*. Much of the

subsequent work to promote and domesticate this species is summarised in this issue of FTL in order to bring both the species and the range of domestication activities to a much wider audience. The focus of this issue on a single species is justified on the basis that *D. edulis* is emerging as a forest tree which, as reported in this issue, is having substantial impacts on the livelihoods of subsistence and small-scale cash crop farmers in West and Central Africa, through its integration into small-scale farming systems. It is hoped that other species will follow this same route into farming systems, and that none of them will be diverted into large-scale monocultures. As long as the fruits supply a relatively small and localised niche market the risk of monoculture is not too high. However, policy-makers must recognise the potential for oil production to further improve the income of small-scale farmers, and consider providing appropriate regulation (should an industry emerge) as well as a coordinated programme of extension to improve the benefits obtained by farmers within the current market environment.

Kathrin Schreckenber, Roger Leakey and Joseph Kengue

Kengue J., Kapseu C. and Kayem G.J. (eds.) 2002. *3ème séminaire international sur la valorisation du Safoutier et autres oléagineux non-conventionnels Yaoundé, Cameroun, 3-5 octobre 2000*. Presses Universitaires d'Afrique, Yaounde. 638p.

This is the first special issue produced during my stint as Editor. I congratulate Kathrin, Roger and Joseph on the results of their work that has produced this succinct summary of the current state of knowledge of *Dacryodes edulis*. Even in this age of electronic communication, keeping contact with the authors of the combined papers has been difficult and at times frustrating. Most of my contacts have been with Kate Schreckenber and I acknowledge with great pleasure her work in presenting these papers to me. I sincerely hope and believe that this publication will be well used.

At the same time I wish to apologise to authors the publication of whose papers has been postponed until the next number, and assure them that the delay will be kept as short as possible.

Michael S. Philip