

Preface

Deborah Eade

This *Development in Practice Reader* is based on an issue of *Development in Practice* commissioned and guest-edited by Steven Franzel, Peter Cooper, and Glenn Denning, all current or former¹ senior staff at the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF), which forms part of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).² The volume comprises papers from their ICRAF colleagues around the globe, from the remote north-western region of India, to the Yucatán Peninsula on Mexico's Caribbean coast, from the hillsides of Uganda to the Peruvian Amazon.

Despite the somewhat more 'technical' or specialised focus than normally characterises titles in the *Readers* series, the authors not only convey their own passionate commitment to the small and often marginal farmers with whom they work, but also bring a depth of insight into wider debates that is fully grounded in their experience. Issues such as the relationship between theory and practice, the proper role of research in development, constraints on 'scaling up' (or, as one contributor calls it, 'scaling out'), local successes, the nature of human motivation for risk-taking and learning, and the ways in which individuals and communities respond to technical innovation, are all critically explored here. The value of learner-centred approaches is shown to be far greater than can be measured through the transfer of formal knowledge, and has as much to do with 'what works' as it does with any ideological principle. Participation and collaboration, for instance, may be good things in themselves or as a means to various ends, but the transaction costs of these approaches make it necessary not merely to invoke or romanticise such ideals, but also to demonstrate the tangible 'value-added' they bring to improving the situation of people living on the margins of the global economy. The conventional information- or technology-transfer model, based on 'simplifying the complex, separating the connected, and standardising

the diverse', is shown to be misguided and wasteful. Contributors constantly stress the importance of exploring and experimenting with a range of possible agroforestry techniques and approaches to monitoring and evaluation, in conjunction with the farming communities who will adopt or reject these methods over time: however precarious their livelihoods, small and subsistence farmers are not interested in quick, but short-lived, fixes and indeed may well have a longer-term perspective than do people who can 'afford' to mortgage their futures. Again and again, the emphasis is on the importance of patience, and of tempering a commitment to social change with a willingness to be in it for 'the long haul'. Development agencies, which are accustomed to setting their own agendas and to re-fashioning them at will, would do well to heed what these highly experienced practitioners have to say.

Notes

- 1 Since the guest-edited issue was initially commissioned, Peter Cooper has left ICRAF and joined the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) at its head office in Ottawa.
- 2 ICRAF is based in Kenya. Other members of the CGIAR include CIAT (Colombia), CIMMYT (Mexico), CIP (Peru), ICARDA (Syria), ICRISAT (India), IFPRI (USA), IITA (Nigeria), ILCA (Ethiopia), and IRRI (Philippines). Further details are available in the resources section at the end of this book.