Agroforestry as a pathway out of poverty

Agroforestry is providing income, better nutrition and traditional medicines that help millions of poor people around the world take a step out of poverty.

An aerial photo of farms with trees. Agroforestry is improving yields, boosting incomes, improving nutrition and providing traditional therapies for many poor households around the world. (Photo: World Agroforestry Centre).

Few poor households have any capital, except their land. Planting trees can provide an income, build up capital and be a first step on the pathway out of poverty. Growing trees works well with growing crops and raising livestock in poor, rural households. Trees improve soils, boost harvests and provide feed for the animals. Bigger harvests and healthier stock can lead to a surplus that can be traded. Many tree products – fruit, nuts, timber, fuel wood, leaves and bark – can be sold in local markets, nationally and even internationally.

Progressing out of poverty

Saka Abubacar, the secretary general of RIBA Rural Resource Centre in northwest Cameroon used to harvest one 50-kg bag of maize a year. Now he gets six bags from the same plot, thanks to increased soil fertility brought about by planting fertilizer trees. "My children have more to eat and I can pay their school fees in one go, rather than in instalments as I used to," he says, illustrating the impact that agroforestry training has had on his life.

Tree products improve nutrition

A varied diet helps combat malnutrition and builds up resistance to disease. Agroforestry research supports undernourished people in developing countries to identify and cultivate nutritious tree products for home use and for sale. Many native varieties have particularly wholesome fruits, nuts and leaves. Various local fruit species contain a range of essential vitamins and minerals that help sustain the health of millions of people in the developing world.
Agroforestry gardens diversify diets

In circumstances where getting just enough to eat is an everyday struggle, innovative agroforestry gardens are helping the women of Nyamakosi, about 200km northeast of Harare, Zimbabwe, to diversify diets and ensure that even the most vulnerable members of society get nutritious food. With support from the World Agroforestry Centre and partners, the group established a ‘nutritional garden’ with various kinds of vegetables, fruit trees and medicinals. Though grown primarily for household needs, by selling extra vegetables, the group is now able to look after their families, send children to school and buy groceries.

Fruit matters

It is estimated that almost 600,000 children in Africa die every year from preventable diseases, caused by vitamin A deficiency. Fruits are rich in vitamins, yet many on the continent cannot afford to buy them. The Agroforestry Food Security Programme in Malawi is helping to improve nutrition of over 1 million people by assisting farmers to grow and sell high-quality fruit, produced by agroforestry technologies developed by the World Agroforestry Centre and its partners.

Baobab leaves provide essential vitamins

In Mali, women’s groups are managing baobab trees and harvesting the leaves to make a tea that is rich in calcium, vitamins A and C, and protein. Baobab pulp has more than 10 times as much vitamin C as the same weight of orange pulp.

Medicinal trees grown on farm

Trees are a source of traditional medicines.Extracts of leaves, bark, berries and roots are vitally important for the health of poor people throughout the developing world. In Africa, more than four-fifths of the population depends on traditional medicines from trees, shrubs and herbs. While in Indonesia, traditional medicines help maintain the health and incomes of much of the rural population. Growing medicinal trees on farms can help meet the health care needs of local people, by providing a ready and reliable source.

Trees treating malaria

Over a thousand plant species have been identified by traditional healers as effective in the prevention or treatment of malarial symptoms. Traditionally harvested from the wild, many of these plants are now threatened by declining wild habitats and over-harvesting. There is great potential to cultivate species in farmland, raising incomes for farmers as well as providing a ready supply of medicines.

Capitalizing on demand for medicinal tree products

Drug and nutrition industries in the developed world rely on natural tree products for many of their manufactured goods. Growing valuable medicinal tree species on farms allows rural people to capitalize on this demand.

For more information visit www.worldagroforestry.org, and search keywords ‘Fruit or medicinal trees’