

Preface

The conversation that ultimately led to this volume began with a 2003 workshop on ecological anthropology at the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF) in Nairobi, Kenya, which subsequently grew into discussions between the co-editors, and then led to invitations to a broader range of contributors. The one-day workshop highlighted theoretical advances from ecological anthropology and related disciplines that would be useful to the agricultural development and natural resource management (NRM) community in expanding the range and quality of research-for-development in the social and environmental sciences. Presentations covered several theoretical sub-fields in the social sciences (critical theory, ethnoecology, historical ecology, political ecology) and a wide range of methodological approaches aimed at expanding the repertoire of methods used to understand human–environmental interactions. An important cross-cutting theme was the need to move beyond a purely biophysical consideration of natural resource problems to encompass broader and often unacknowledged socio-cultural, political, and knowledge-based dimensions of development.

The bulk of the participants – biophysical researchers and development practitioners coming from a strong problem-solving orientation – felt some discomfort with the social scientific emphasis on “critique”. Highlighting negative consequences of development practice – whether resulting from the failure to recognize the gender consequences of technological change, the micro-political implications of tree planting, or how we as scientists wield our knowledge – did little to make participants feel empowered by socially-informed approaches to agricultural research and development. Dr. Luis Navarro, long-time colleague and supporter working out of the International Development Research Centre’s (IDRC) Nairobi office, thus concluded with a challenge to workshop organizers and the discipline more broadly: to move beyond “critique” to “application” by following up critical analyses of current approaches with concrete recommendations for research and practice.

The current volume finds its roots in these earlier debates and represents an effort to meet this challenge by clearly demonstrating the need to move beyond the conventional (biophysical) treatment of agriculture and natural resource management. Its contributors propose concrete recommendations for how researchers and practitioners can become more responsible in their interactions with local communities and the natural world. It also represents the efforts of the “next generation”

of socio-cultural scientists who are working (or have worked) in the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) system and who are interested in making a critical yet practically useful contribution to applied social science and biophysical sciences in the context of development. Hence, although the volume has roots in the 2003 Nairobi workshop, it brings together the work of many scholars who were not present at that gathering, who have been inspired by, reflected upon, and responded to some of the issues and challenges it raised.

Having travelled such a long way from its roots, the volume therefore also reflects the collaborative efforts, support, and learning of many people and institutions. The editors in particular want to acknowledge the institutional and intellectual support of their current and previous institutions for this project: the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) and the African Highlands Initiative (AHI), the Tropical Soil Biology and Fertility Institute (TSBF-CIAT) and the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies at the University of the Western Cape, the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Out of the Box Research and Action, the School of Global Studies and Department of Anthropology at the University of Sussex, and the School of International Development and Global Studies (SIDGS) at the University of Ottawa. Besides the impetus for this volume provided by the late Luis Navarro and the workshop organizers (Diane Russell, Peter Brosius, and Laura German), it is also worth acknowledging the role of key senior scientists within the CGIAR system in supporting critical thought and reflection on interdisciplinary research and practice: Joachim Voss, Sam Fujisaka, and the late Ann Stroud, to name only a few. The volume has also been enriched substantially by the dedication and rigour of our literally global network of anonymous reviewers, and by the patience and encouragement of our editors at Springer (Takeesha Moerland-Torpey, Marlies Vlot and Fritz Schmuhl). Finally, editors and authors alike would acknowledge that such a volume would not be possible without the friends, partners, and families who have sustained us through the long journey to this volume's completion.

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