

Trees for Life Journal: A Bridge Between Science and Traditional Knowledge

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All societies create their own ivory towers—their bastions of learning. It is imperative to enable a few people to study, explore and contemplate what is good for the whole community. Common people put in extra labor and toil to create the necessary surplus of wealth to maintain such monuments of knowledge and wisdom. They also honor the people who climb to those heights.

Those who work in these higher institutions gain an element of inner satisfaction. They are aware of the great potential for good that could be achieved from their lives' work. Such knowledge could put an end to poverty, hunger, disease, war and all ills known to humanity. The promise is limitless.

Need for more channels of communication

Yet, the same awareness also creates a sense of frustration, for it seems to take a very long time for their gained insights to be translated into action. Poverty, hunger, disease, war and pestilence continue regardless of their studies.

The Rector of the National Agriculture University in Nicaragua, Francisco Telemaco Talavera Siles, once told me, "We have all the necessary knowledge to improve the lives of the farmers in our country. But we do not have the means to take this knowledge to the farmers."

The head of a horticulture university in India said to me, "I have the information, but no buyers." An extension officer in Guatemala similarly complained, "I wait, but they do not come."

On the other hand, people whose lives could be improved by the research findings are not even

aware such a wealth of information exists in their midst. The magnificent centers of learning that they help maintain are all but invisible to them—as if they existed in a different universe.

"We need to hear from the people," one scientist told me. "That would help us adjust and fine tune our research."

Almost anyone with experience would agree that many more channels of communication are needed to increase the exchange between academics and lay people. Such an exchange can facilitate a higher quality of research, as well as a speedier and more effective translation of their efforts into practical actions.

Using technology to create a link

The Trees for Life Journal is an effort to establish one such additional link.

This journal is an attempt to bring the traditional knowledge of beneficial plants and trees to the attention of academicians and, in turn, deliver their insights to the people who need them.

Our ambition is limited to facilitating and fostering scientific studies of traditional wisdom of plants and trees. There is a great wealth of information ready to serve future generations.

The Trees for Life Journal is being launched in response to the growing need for practical studies at the grassroots level to complement, support, nurture, and validate highly controlled, double-blind, peer-reviewed academic studies.

Such a bold attempt on our part is possible only because of the recent progress in electronic media. The ease and speed of this technology transcends the barriers

of cost, space and time. Thanks to the worldwide web, it is now possible to scale the walls that have long divided those who know and those who need the knowledge.

Acting as a bridge to serve

Regardless of these advantages, it would still be a daunting task if Trees for Life had not acquired the art and science of being a bridge.

Trees for Life has always been a bridge—between East and West, between the rich and the poor, between know-how and those who toil. Within this wide and ever-growing circle of friends, there is ample knowledge about plants and trees. Realizing the value of electronic media, we have also gone out to acquire that know-how. We combine these valuable assets to serve.

In the Turkish language, the word for "bridge" means literally "to give." A bridge allows others to pass over it without asking anything for itself. In the same spirit, we at Trees for Life are creating this Journal with one sole purpose: to serve. And, if you will permit me a personal discretion, "to serve" is also our sole prayer.

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