

## The Ninth Revolution: transforming food systems for good

Sayed Nader Azam-Ali, 2021

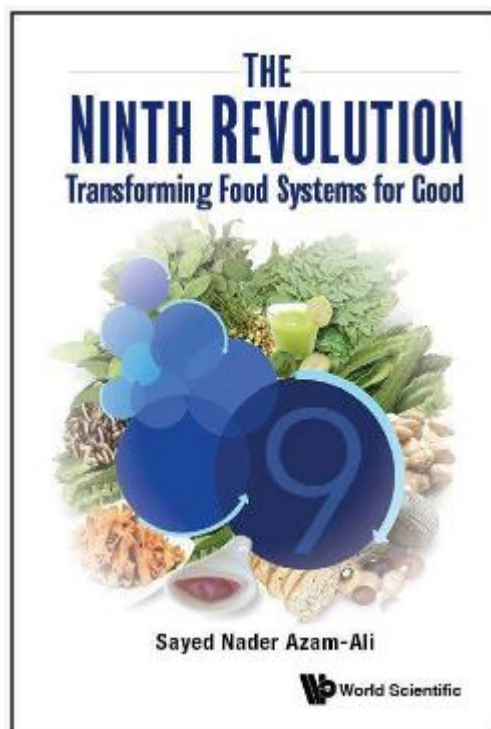
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This book is highly pertinent in our mixed-up, divided and dysfunctional world, where agriculture seems to be both the culprit and the potential saviour of billions of resource-poor people facing increasingly harsh and degraded environments. Sayed Azam-Ali takes the reader through several thousand years of human and agricultural development, explaining the history and pointing out the merits and flaws of different efforts to feed a growing human population. Uniquely, he examines in detail the role of research and education, and the growth and decline of different establishments and initiatives.



The crux of this book – ‘the need of the moment’ – focusses on the critical role of agrobiodiversity. It recognises that the current tendency to focus on only 30 out of 30 000 edible plant species ignores many wonderful and locally popular foods that are also crucial Incentives for food system reforms for healthy and productive farming systems. Sayed sees the recognition of the benefits of agrobiodiversity in multi-species mixtures as a ‘light bulb moment’. Indeed, he himself has been a pioneer in developing what he calls ‘Plan B’: the diversification of farming systems with ‘neglected and underutilised species’ as new mainstream crops. This accords with the recognition that, despite views to the contrary, multi-cropping is beneficial to total production. In this connection, Sayed quotes Wendell Berry, who wrote that a “mix of 80% perennial species and 20% herbaceous” best captures the numerous ecological benefits derived from perennials. The role of agrobiodiversity underpins the much-needed transformation of food systems despite the fact that this wisdom runs counter to the popular ‘yield for profit paradigm’ expressed as ‘calories for cash’.

This enlightening book is full of important messages for students and professionals in agricultural and related land-use disciplines. One of these that rings very true is that “electric light did not come from the continuous improvement of candles”. This accords with Norman Borlaug’s statement in 1970 about the Green Revolution, saying that it will be “a temporary

success in man's war against hunger and deprivation"; a breathing space in the struggle to feed humanity. Sayed goes on to compare the similarity between the current need for more sustainable approaches to agriculture and the sinking of the Titanic. This analogy fits well since the Titanic disaster occurred despite numerous warnings of trouble ahead and, of course, there have been many unheeded warnings that 'business as usual' in agriculture will exacerbate ongoing hunger and bring forward looming planetary disaster.

The book ends with nine critical calls for collective action. These include capturing better evidence for the benefits of agricultural diversification; the greater involvement of local communities in decision-making; agroecological support for climate change resilience; improvement of genetic resources in a wider array of crop plants for ecological and dietary diversity; and a global action plan. I heartily agree and have followed the same philosophy.

I wholeheartedly recommend this book to all who are keen to see the end of hunger, malnutrition, social injustice, poverty, further loss of wildlife habitats and the reversal of global warming.

**Roger RB Leakey**

(TAAI Member)