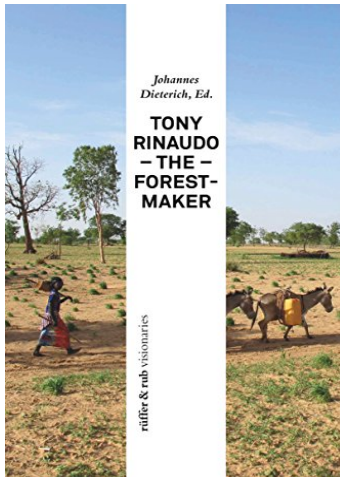


A review of the small compendium “*Tony Rinaudo – The Forest Maker* -” written by Johannes Dietrich & Günter Nooke

by Kris Schürch



Trees are Tony Rinaudo’s practical solution to countering desertification, famine and despair. In *Tony Rinaudo – The Forest Maker* –, he highlights that: *“It is essential to have trees in the landscape and fundamental for achieving food security and economic development. Through the selection and management of indigenous trees, soil fertility is improved, high temperatures and wind speeds are reduced, more moisture is retained and made available to plants, so effectively reducing the impact of drought, more fodder is produced and hence livestock production is increased.”*

Tony Rinaudo is an Australian agronomist who revolutionized reforestation in Africa. He spent nearly 2 decades managing an agricultural programme in **Niger**, deploying tree stumps and roots in one of the most inhospitable environments on Earth. His main agro-tools are his trusty, well-worn pocketknife and his inner-drive to conserve farming systems through **Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration** (FMNR) practices. In his biography, the authors Johannes Dietrich & Günter Nooke tell the story of a modest man, whose techniques represent the last hope for many farmers in Africa.

Climate change and land degradation are already threatening agricultural yields across vast swathes of the world. Particularly in the Sahel region, where people suffer from the worst ecological devastation. As a result, food security is reduced and poverty seems to be *“deeper rooted than the wild fig tree with its 120-metres deep shoots.”*

Poverty in the Sahel zone is a **major trigger for migration**, with a high number of people leaving the continent to seek better fortunes. It is also this poverty, which stimulates the recruitment of terror extremists. *“Both must be conquered.”* says Tony Rinaudo. His method: **spreading tree growth**.

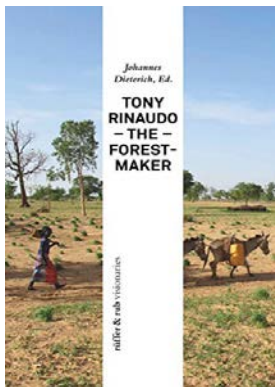
The authors initially recount Rinaudo’s seemingly endless challenges to inspire novel thinking and action for the restoration of trees in Humbo, **Ethiopia**, and in the Mardi region, in the south of Niger. One day, as Rinaudo stopped to let air pressure out of the tires, so as to move more easily through the loose sand, *“it was as if the scales fell from his eyes.”* As he bent down, the discovery of numerous green shoots sprouting all around him in the sand, which were previously assumed to be weeds, were in fact trees sprouting from their stumps. Upon close inspection, Rinaudo concludes that there is a vast network of roots spreading beneath the sand of the Sahel zone: **An underground forest**, Rinaudo’s key to success.

Rinaudo’s FMNR method promotes the **protection and care of tree shoots in degraded landscapes**, allowing the original tree population to regenerate and flourish again without engaging major financial costs. Willing smallholder farmers trying FMNR experienced improvements in harvest proceeds as soil fertility and moisture were retained. With increased

fodder and livestock production, **considerable increases in annual income** occurred as well. “Hunger is now consigned to our memories”, says Anato Katmar, one of the first few farmers, who were prepared to give Rinaudo’s ideas a concrete chance. Today, FMNR has successfully been applied to 24 African countries¹, with **seven million hectares of land restored in Niger alone**.

The exciting tales of Tony Rinaudo exemplify the importance of trees and the synergies inside forest ecosystems - not only in stimulating environmental growth, but also for social and economic development. Throughout the book, the authors facilitate their story-telling by executing well-timed metaphors and strikingly lush pictures. Although at points repetitive, the book is charming and inspirational. Tony Rinaudo’s modest nature is heart-warming and encourages the notion that big developmental changes occur in small steps, through local stakeholders.

Tony Rinaudo – The Forest Maker -, by Johannes Dietrich & Günter Nooke



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