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**To Plant or Not to Plant? - Cultural Reasons and Barriers for  
Adoptive Transplantation of Wild Fruit Trees in West Africa**

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**Abstract**

Climate change, population growth, deforestation, monocultures and overharvesting threaten local ecosystems in West Africa. The availability of wild plants that have traditionally been collected from these ecosystems is decreasing. Local farmers need to decide which wild plant species they may want to start cultivating in their fields and agroforestry systems. This process is called ‘adoptive transplantation’. A regional ethnobotanical study on the traditional use and management of baobab (*Adansonia digitata* L.) and tamarind (*Tamarindus indica* L.) trees was undertaken to highlight the cultural context of adoptive transplantation. This research aims to identify the farmers’ perspectives and motives that lead to or prevent the adoptive transplantation of these two species. 220 individual interviews were conducted with 11 ethnic groups in Benin, Mali and Senegal covering 4 agroecological zones. Methods include structured questionnaires, group discussions and participatory mappings. Local cultural belief systems are key elements in the farmers’ decision-making processes. Reasons that motivate or prevent the farmer from planting trees can be the presence of spirits that are believed to live in trees, the view that trees are ‘planted by god’, and gender-related tree uses. These emic and traditional perspectives mostly concern indigenous trees and only partly relate to non-indigenous trees. This regional study highlights that it is not a lack of knowledge on planting techniques, but underlying cultural reasons that prevent the farmers from planting indigenous fruit trees. Local belief systems need to be considered by development agencies and forestry institutions intending to establish sustainable reforestation and in-situ conservation programs. Innovative concepts need to be elaborated together with the local population. Conservation strategies need to work with or even ‘work around’ local belief systems that are hindering the adoption of unsustainably used wild trees.

**Keywords:** *Adansonia digitata*, agroforestry, Belief systems, Benin, Conservation, Domestication, Mali, Senegal, *Tamarindus indica*