

## Act locally for collective gains: Nepal's experience in community-based biodiversity management

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A Chinese proverb states, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." This saying elucidates that for development projects to be successful, planning and implementation should be done by the people, for the people, and in the place where people reside. Community mobilization and ownership are now considered the stronghold of development initiatives. These include efforts to conserve local genetic diversity. Zooming in on Kachorwa village in Bara district southern part of Nepal, experiences and modest achievements of their community-based biodiversity management (CBM) illustrate the value of collective and local efforts in preserving biodiversity and enhancing the lives of marginal farmers.

The project "Strengthening the Scientific Basis of Agrobiodiversity Conservation On-farm," focused on identifying and testing various on-farm conservation approaches and methodologies of local crop varieties. Kachorwa village was among the sites which had shown good project results on *in situ* conservation.

Farmers in Kachorwa grow crops both for household consumption and selling. The village is characterized by sub-tropical agro-ecology with high production potential. Farmers have vast exposure to technological interventions and easy access to agricultural inputs including modern seed varieties. These, however, cause immense impact and pressure on farmers growing traditional crops and varieties. Additionally, there

had been an observed dearth of rice varieties with the drastic decline from 33 in 1998 to 12 in 2003 and with areas under rice landraces rapidly decreasing; hence, the realization of the need and importance of on-farm conservation.

### Community Seed Bank – an effective approach to agricultural biodiversity conservation

In 2003, a community-based organization named Agriculture Development and Conservation Society (ADCS) was established. First in the list of ADCS' pioneering activities was the establishment of a Community Seed Bank (CSB) for maintaining local rice varieties that exist in the village and those which can no longer be found in their vicinity. With no structure to speak of, an ADCS member willingly offered his house as the temporary CSB. With a grant of US\$ 1000 from Bioversity and contribution, in kind, from its members and the village development committee, the group was able to erect a one-story CSB building.

Recognizing the importance of their work, ADCS received more support from the South Asia Network for Food Ecology and Culture (SANFEC) and the UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme to strengthen the CSB. To date, CSB has collected and preserved over 100 local crop varieties which would have been lost in the absence of this conservation approach.

### Breaking new grounds: ADCS does Participatory Plant Breeding

ADCS prides itself for successfully breeding a local rice variety Kachorwa 4, which was developed from the local variety Dhudhisaro. Kachorwa 4 is a product of the Participatory Plant Breeding (PPB) approach aimed to develop new rice varieties adapted to local climate. ADCS also maintains diversity blocks of rice landraces according to domain to ensure the regeneration and steady production of seeds for distribution.

### Self-financing through Community-based biodiversity management fund

The project developed and tested the concept of CBM fund to strike a balance between activities to conserve local crop varieties and improvement of people's livelihood. Nearly one million Nepalese Rupees was raised. Every year, more than 100 members take out a loan from the CBM fund to invest in various business ventures. Members with loan are also duty-bound to regenerate and multiply local rice varieties from packets of seeds that they are obliged to avail from CSB.

### Empowering women and farmer groups

Few years after, ADCS became a nodal local institution in the village. Many farmers, especially women, showed interest in joining existing groups while others are encouraged to form new groups. In both cases, the commitment to conserve local crop races and to carry out income generating programs has remained.

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To boost the women’s knowledge and confidence, women groups in Kachorwa were taken on field visits to project sites with model farms to enhance interaction and farmer-to-farmer learning.

**Teaching others to fish: Scaling-up and Scaling- out**

ADCS’ work spans nine years and has yielded good results. Kachorwa village has become a resource site for effective CBM practices and model in initiating a platform for social learning and community development. LI-BIRD has replicated the approach and established 15 CSBs in Nepal. The national government and other NGOs have likewise taken this approach in other regions of the country. The good practices in CBM fund mobilization have also been replicated in villages not only in Nepal but Sri Lanka and other developing countries.



Member farmers of the Agriculture Development and Conservation Society (ADCS), Bara in front of their community seed bank.  
Photo: Sajal Sthapit, LI-BIRD

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## LI-BIRDko Chautari heralds agrobiodiversity conservation

felt value in addressing concerns about biodiversity conservation, NRM, climate change and the like. It has given farmers leverage in accessing needed information, knowledge, technical, institutional and policy support. It has helped in narrowing the gap between marginal communities, researchers and policy-makers, thus, aiding in consensus building on development agenda and issues of common interest.

For all these good intentions and practices, LKC now requires critical review and some new mechanisms to scale-up efforts to the national and international levels. Meanwhile, LKC, for its noble works, continue to make waves.

“ To date, LKC goes on air every Friday from 7:15 to 7:30 pm simultaneously in 14 different radio stations all over Nepal. ”

