

## 15 Site description for Begnas, Nepal

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### 15.1 Context

The village of Begnas is comprised of a mixture of different ethnic communities. There is also a considerably greater number of community cooperatives and institutions in place in the Begnas site, compared with the other two study sites in Nepal, namely Bara and Bardiya. This degree of social organization distinguishes Begnas from these other two sites. Also, mean annual precipitation is relatively high and temperature ranges allow for three crops per year. Agricultural land is classified according to the availability of irrigation, being either seasonal to all year round or not present at all. Land with access to irrigation grows predominantly rice, cultivated in the summer season. Maize, finger millet, taro, vegetables and fruits are planted in the non-irrigated fields. The majority of households are involved in farming activities ranging from cereal crop production and/or horticulture to livestock rearing.

### 15.2 Institutional and project setting

The lead organization for the study sites in Nepal is LI-BIRD. In Begnas site, the study focuses on two projects, which will both have been concluded by the end of 2011. A more detailed outline of each project is provided below.

The first is Promoting Innovative Mechanisms for Implementing Farmers' Rights through Fair Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit Sharing Regime In Nepal (ABS). Implementation of the project commenced in 2007. The main objectives are: assessing the appropriateness of policy and legal instruments to implement farmers' rights relevant to the access to genetic resources and benefit sharing, and to the conservation and utilization of genetic resources; strengthening multi-stakeholder arrangements for effective implementation; identifying and supporting institutional arrangements appropriate to farming communities' rights and sustainable management of their genetic resources; supporting innovative practices serving implementation of farmers' rights and other project mechanisms; and conserving biodiversity for livelihood security. The donor is the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in partnership with South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environments (SAWTEE). Collaborators include: Bioversity International; the Nepalese Ministries of Agriculture and Cooperatives, and Forest and Soil Conservation; Nepal Agricultural Research Council; and district development committees, farming communities and community institutions within the project sites.

The second project; Community Based Biodiversity Management (CBM) in Nepal, is supported by The Development Fund, Norway, in partnership with: Department of Agriculture, Nepal; Bioversity International; the Nepalese Ministries of Agriculture and Cooperatives, and Forest and Soil Conservation; Nepal Agricultural Research Council; and district development committees, farming communities and community institutions within the project sites. Implementation began in 2008 with the main objective to enable farming communities to assess, conserve, utilize and secure access to and control over their genetic resources through local capacity building and by influencing favourable policy changes.

### 15.3 Key project activities

Key activities in the above-mentioned ABS and CBM in Nepal projects are, for the former, advocacy for policy and practice, assessment, capacity development, awareness raising and inspiring innovation practices aligned with *in-situ* conservation of plant genetic resources, value addition and participatory plant breeding and variety selection. Activities of the latter include capacity building, influencing policy changes, documenting genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, empowering communities to develop and implement CBM plans, and exploring opportunities for conservation through the utilization of local genetic resources. Both project approaches involve similar approaches to conservation and empowering communities to conserve and sustainably manage genetic resources. These are enumerated in the *CBM practices* section below.

### 15.4 Social and institutional organization

As mentioned previously, the Begnas site can be distinguished from the other two Nepalese study sites by its relatively developed social organization. Initially, farmers' groups were set up by CARE Nepal, an International NGO, but several years later, LI-BIRD is working within the community on agrobiodiversity management. A number of these initial farmers' groups that were formed by CARE went on to form the Biodiversity Conservation Movement (BCM), which acts as a leading community-based organization for the resource collection activities of the community. As a component of the BCM, the Pratigya Cooperative has been involved in the collection and selling of local agri-products, from 1998 to date. This cooperative mobilizes other farmers' groups to produce local food items. Cooperative members also work as mediators in the collection and selling of those products. Another cooperative is the Rupa Lake Rehabilitation and Fishery Cooperative, which manages wetland biodiversity around Rupa Lake and its watershed. The Jaivik Shrot Sanrachan Abhiyan (Biodiversity Conservation Movement) is another community-based organization, which mobilizes a CBM fund for income generation and conservation activities. The PPB farmers' group in Begnas is responsible for the establishment and management of mother trials, participatory varietal selection (PVS) and the segregation of materials of *in situ* PPB products. Biodiversity Conservation and Development Committees (BCDCs) were formed at the village level, which are also responsible for the conservation and management of genetic resources and the mobilization of community contributions to the CBM fund.

The initial farmers' cooperatives formed with the objective to document the available genetic resources in a community biodiversity register. Later, they and their successor organizations initiated several awareness-raising activities to sensitize the community towards vanishing local genetic resources. In this regard, the community developed a wide range of methods and tools to raise awareness. The formation of the PPB Group is one such method and one crucial for the conservation of indigenous landraces.

### 15.5 Plant genetic resources

Rice is the main food crop grown across the study site and it is cultivated in all categories of land: swampy, irrigated or partially irrigated, rainfed and high land. Finger millet is the second most important hill crop, after maize, and it is grown under marginal conditions. The local genetic resources base in the site includes 68 rice, 24 finger millet, 13 sponge gourd, 24 taro and 15 cucumber local varieties. The site is rich in fruits, vegetables, grain legumes, forests (including non-timber forest products), fodder species and wetland species diversity.

## 15.6 CBM practices

This list serves to enumerate all the different activities taking place in the Begnas site which pertain to community-based conservation and sustainable utilization of agrobiodiversity.

1. Generating awareness and an understanding of local diversity:
  - documenting genetic resources in the community biodiversity register;
  - identifying rare, endangered and valuable resources through four-cell analysis (de Boef & Thijssen, 2007);
  - raising awareness on diminishing local genetic resources through biodiversity fairs, food fairs, rural theatre, poetry, song, painting competitions, farmers' workshops, rural radio shows, and travelling seminars.
2. Establishing community institutions, developing their capacities and consolidating CBM in their working modalities:
  - NGO and community involvement in the formation of several cooperatives operating at different scales with different roles and responsibilities related to CBM;
  - coordination and linkage between community organizations regarding various CBM activities;
  - defining institutional norms and responsibilities of community cooperatives;
  - internalizing CBM in the community action plan;
  - building capacity through various needs-based trainings, diversity blocks, diversity kits, village workshops, subcommittee formation, and community group working platforms;
  - capacity development aimed at improving the efficiency, self-confidence and social mobilization of local institutions.
3. Developing conservation practices (including entrepreneurship and marketing of agrobiodiversity), monitoring and evaluating practices, promoting social learning and scaling-up:
  - reviewing and monitoring CBM progress in the forum of monthly meetings and annual general assembly's;
  - mobilizing community contributions to the CBM fund;
  - financing income-generating ventures, especially for those farmers who are resource-poor, using the CBM fund;
  - establishment and maintenance of the community seed bank;
  - encouraging social learning through this site's recognition as a CBM resource centre, hosting site visits from outside communities and institutions and participating in several governmental and non-governmental trainings programmes;
  - promoting participatory approaches to plant breeding and variety selection;
  - developing diversified options for conservation strategies.