



Biocultural Heritage for Sustainable Development: Stakeholder Meeting

Centre for Mountain Dynamics, Kalimpong, 1st July 2019

Introduction and welcome (Nawraj Gurung): This project is coordinated by IIED (UK) working with Lok Chetna Manch and Centre for Mountain Dynamics in India. It involves 4 countries – India, China, Kenya and Peru, and builds on the SIFOR project (Smallholder Innovation for Resilience). In India the project is focusing on Lingsey and Lingseykha communities in Kalimpong District. The project takes a participatory approach, so we are engaging different stakeholders. We are seeking your feedback – the project is at the planning stage so we want all stakeholders to participate in the planning itself.

Participant Introductions:

- Nawraj Gurung, (BA project - Lok Chetna Manch / Centre for Mountain Dynamics)
- Nayan Pradhan (was working on SIFOR project), Centre for Mountain Dynamics)
- Dr Rajesh Joshi – GB Pant Institute for Himalayan Environment & Sustainable Development, Kalimpong (working on climate change)
- Ajay Rastogi, Lok Chetna Manch (BA project)
- Mr. Pawan Prasad, Range Officer Lava, Forest Department Govt. Of West Bengal
- General Secretary, Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association, Kalimpong
- Administration Officer, Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association
- Dr. Depak Sharma, Department for Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Science Govt. Of west Bengal
- Norden Pempa Hissey (Centre for Mountain Dynamics)
- Elen Lepcha, (BA project research assistant)
- Miss Mazumdar, Block Development Officer, Kalimpong II

- Krystyna Swiderska, International Institute for Environment & Development (IIED)

Biocultural Heritage for Sustainable Development project (Krystyna Swiderska, IIED)

This two-year project (2018-2020) is funded by the Sustainable Development Programme of the British Academy (Heritage theme). It aims to support the development/livelihoods of poor indigenous and tribal communities based on maintaining traditional knowledge, biodiversity and cultural heritage. It supports implementation of a number of international agreements that the Government of India is Party to: the Convention on Biological Diversity, FAO International Treaty on genetic resources, UNESCO conventions on intangible heritage and world heritage, and the Sustainable Development Goals. The main objectives of the project are:

1. To catalyse the establishment of collectively managed biocultural heritage territories for sustainable development.
2. To enhance understanding of the role of biocultural heritage in addressing the SDG challenges (especially SDG2, 'End Hunger') amongst policy makers, international agencies, researchers and practitioners, and promote more holistic and culture-centred policy and planning.

The project will conduct four case studies in areas with unique but threatened biocultural heritage, using an action-oriented, empowering and rigorous participatory methodology, working in 8 -10 villages/hamlets in each country/landscape. The results will be presented at the UN High Level Forum on SDGs; the Biodiversity Convention Conference of Parties in 2020; and a UNESCO world heritage meeting. The findings will also be shared internationally through case study publications, journal articles and a briefing paper for policy makers.

The key questions for this participatory action-research project are as follows (to be adapted to each local context):

1. Ethnicity: How are the communities connected to the landscape historically?
2. Worldviews and values: How do indigenous worldviews about wellbeing, cultural values and customary laws promote or hinder sustainable and equitable development? To what extent are these recognised/applied by different actors within communities?
3. Governance: What kind of traditional governance system exists? How can it be strengthened for sustainable management of the landscape?
4. Biocultural heritage: What the main elements of BCH and how are they interconnected?
5. Livelihoods: How can biocultural heritage be used to strengthen the local economy?
6. SDGs: How does biocultural agriculture contribute to SDG 2?

The project builds on previous research by IIED, CMD and LCM in the Eastern Himalayas:

'Protecting community rights over Traditional Knowledge' (2005-2009): this project was implemented in India with communities in Pudung and Sikkim in India. It developed the concept of 'biocultural heritage' as including the following interlinked and inter-dependent components: traditional knowledge, biodiversity, landscapes, cultural and spiritual values and customary laws. This concept was inspired by the Quechua holistic worldview (in Peru), and validated through research with 11 ethnic groups in 5 countries (including India).

The SIFOR project (2012-2017) conducted research in 5 communities in the Eastern Himalayas (Lepcha and Limbu) and generated evidence of the importance of traditional knowledge, crops and related innovations for food security and climate resilience. It has provided a rich data basis for establishing a biocultural heritage territory (BCHT) in Lingsey-Lingseykha.

The project also builds on the Potato Park BCHT in Peru which has been implemented for the past 20 years and has been very successful. This landscape (9000 ha) is managed collectively by 5 Quechua

communities in the Andes, who conserve c. 1400 varieties of potato (c.650 according to scientific classification), as well as Andean crops and wildlife. The park generates economic revenue from tourism and is now self-sustaining. It has built strong local capacity for agrobiodiversity management, based on TK and science.

Two key factors have contributed to the Potato Park's success:

- *A community-led process* where communities pursue their own conservation and development objectives, and action-research focuses on traditional knowledge (TK) (as well as science) and uses indigenous research methods. This has been important to build local ownership and ensure sustainability beyond project support.
- *Using a holistic indigenous concept* that integrates environment and development to guide all activities: the Andean Ayllu concept where three 'communities' need to be in balance to achieve wellbeing: the community of the humans and domesticated plants and animals; the community of the wild plants and animals; and the community of the sacred and the ancestors. The BA project aims to explore Lepcha and Limbu worldviews to identify similar holistic development concepts that can guide the BCHT in Lingsey-Lingseykha.

Building on SIFOR findings and achievements (Ajay Rastogi, LCM)

The SIFOR project's objectives were to identify TK-based innovations that enhance food security in the face of climate change and strengthen traditional innovation systems and agrobiodiversity for climate resilience. The project involved 5 communities in Central Himalayas (district Almora) and 5 communities in Eastern Himalayas, including Lingsey and Lingseykha (L-L). SIFOR conducted an in-depth baseline study on trends in livelihoods, food security, crop diversity and climate change. It found that rainfall has become unpredictable and temperatures have increased, and there have been extreme events (eg. huge hailstones that broke roofs). At the same time, agrobiodiversity and TK are eroding. The project identified many innovations based on traditional and local knowledge of farmers, eg. an innovation in the timing of millet cultivation has been very useful for farmers; and the development of black rice bean through farmers' selection – this is important for market, as a staple crop and for the pride of the community. There is still living culture in the L-L area. Cultural ceremonies are quite integrated with biological areas.

SIFOR identified over 38 varieties of beans and lentils, and c. 60 different crop varieties in total. It conducted trials of upland and dryland paddy varieties, as these are much disappeared in the region. The project proposed the establishment of an FAO Globally Important Agriculture Heritage System (GIAHS) in Lingsey-Lingseykha duly endorsed by the West Bengal State Biodiversity Board. The Central Ministry of Agriculture has proposed this to the Ministry of External Affairs with a recommendation to propose it to the FAO. SIFOR organised a Mountain Policy workshop here at CMD in May 2017 which brought together high-level policy makers – many of them visited the proposed BCHT site.

Discussion:

Miss Mazumdar: I didn't know there was so much biodiversity in L-L – this was so enlightening.

Nawraj Gurung: we have selected 11 hamlets for the BCHT – 8 are dominated by Lepcha, 2 are Limbu and 1 with mixed communities of Lepcha and Limbu. In this project it is a process – a participatory approach for giving ownership to the community and for sustainability. We aim to support a community-led process so community organisations have to select community researchers for each hamlet and we want to use indigenous research approaches. The British Academy is just one agency supporting this process – all other agencies have some role to play in this process. The BCHT needs to follow certain rules and regulations so will have to engage all stakeholders to support it.

Krystyna: The BCHT model has to be adapted to the local context in India – in the Potato Park there was only one ethnic group but in Lingsey and Lingseykha there are many different ethnic groups. We had three meetings with the Lepcha and Limbu communities over the last 2 days. At the last meeting

both groups came together, and a Brahmin and a Sherpa also came. They felt that it is fine to focus on indigenous peoples in the first instance as they are the original inhabitants of the area, and that once the BCHT is established and is generating tourism revenue, the other groups will want to join and uphold the rules.

Miss Mazumdar (BDO): Traditional crops are being produced – where are they being sold?

Nawraj G.: In the local market – but most of the agriculture in the BCHT hamlets in Lingsey and Lingseykhais for subsistence.

Miss Mazumdar: The ultimate objective is to create livelihoods - the biodiversity park is a very good idea from the perspective of tourism. How to do the marketing?

Dr Sharma, Livestock Department: Animal husbandry and livestock are very important for organic fertiliser – but livestock is decreasing day by day in Lingsey and Lingseykha.

Krystyna S: It would be great to promote hardy traditional livestock breeds.

Dr Sharma: Jersey crossbreed cows support the best production in the area– they are best suited to the temperature and environment.

Miss Mazumdar: It is important to brand products for consumers – they are supporting the marketing through Bishwa Bangala brand a government sponsored venture.

Krystyna: BCHTs also focuses on improving nutrition, eg. in Peru they promoted sustainable use of wild plants rich in iron to help reduce childhood anaemia; as well as generating income from eco-tourism.

Ajay R: We tried to register black rice bean as a GI to enhance revenues for farmers; and also under the PPVFRAct – but it cannot be registered as rice bean is not a listed crop yet.

Miss Mazumdar: It is important to work with the Agriculture Department (they did not come today).

Nawraj G: Most of the Agriculture officials are away to Pokhara, Nepal in connection with an exposure and training visit at the moment. However, we shall brief them on the discussions held in the workshop upon their return.

Norden: If the government can give land for grazing cattle the communities can increase cattle production.

Yusuf S: Is the project moving away from climate change? A lot of experiments are going on at farm level – I think the climate change aspect is also part of the project. It would be good if we can enhance local varieties of cattle also. I am worried that government will bring hybrid varieties which will lead to further loss of resilient local varieties which are important for climate adaptation.

Krystyna: The SIFOR project focused on resilience to climate change – this project is focusing more on the cultural and governance side to help establish a BCHT. But a key aim of BCHTs is to conserve agrobiodiversity which is important to enhance resilience to climate change as diverse systems are more resilient to shocks, and to provide options for adaptation. BCHTs also enable continued evolution and co-evolution of genetic resources for adaptation.

Dr Joshi: For sustainability the social side (eg. loss of traditional practices) and climate change are important factors to consider. We are working in a Lepcha Community Conserved Area in Sikkim – have learnt that many traditional practices are being affected by socio-economic changes and by climate change. So if we are trying to sustain the TK of communities, we also need to address these aspects.

Krystyna: Participatory Plant Breeding provides a way to address climate change problems affecting agriculture – linking TK and science. Farmer Field Schools are also important to help farmers address climate related problems (eg. increased pests) by learning from one another.

Ajay: Participatory Variety Selection is also useful – Dr. Joshi provided climate change information and helped with statistical analysis of dryland paddy trials in SIFOR project.

Pawn P: Everyone is talking about biodiversity, and the main biodiversity lies in Reserve Forests which the Government controls. The Forest Department still finds considerable cardamom cultivation inside

the forests that have been acquired for expansion of the existing Neora Valley National Park. There are also cattle grazing activities which is not allowed. The Forest Department is asking the people to discontinue cardamom cultivation in the reserve forests. They are giving the 2-3 years of time in the light of the fact that people have made considerable investment in cardamom. There are a lot of medicinal plants in our area.

Nayan P: In our experience with SIFOR there are also animal conflicts – monkeys, wild boar etc - is there any policy to prevent this animal conflict?

Norden: We need to plant native trees to keep the monkey population down.

Pawan P: Yes we are planting native trees now. People are encroaching on forests and wildlife, but forests and wildlife were there first. I belong to Corporation side of the department and the concerned issue is for the consideration of the Wildlife. I will convey it to the concerned colleague who are dealing with wildlife issues. Local people lack knowledge.

Dr. D Sharma - In my experience, the monkey problem can be dealt with very easily – can vasectomise monkeys and use various sounds to make monkeys go away.

Nawraj - Can also plant fruit trees inside the forest.

Pawan P: But monkeys now want to eat cooked foods like chips, people feed them.

Krystyna: I spoke to Dawa Lepcha's mother in Lingsey yesterday and she said that monkeys have destroyed her whole maize crop this year – she is a subsistence farmer so this is a big problem for her. She says there are so many more monkeys this year, she thinks they have been brought from the city.

Pawan P: I will convey the message to my colleagues in the Wildlife Department.

Krystyna: Indigenous peoples have a lot of knowledge and cultural values that support biodiversity conservation. The recent IPBES report (Inter-Governmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) found that there is a global crisis of biodiversity loss, and that indigenous peoples are the best guardians of biodiversity, which has been better maintained on their land (agricultural and forest land) than on any other land. Indigenous peoples have a lot of knowledge about medicinal plant uses.

Pawan P: Yes we go to indigenous peoples to get knowledge about medicinal plant uses.

Nawraj: I would like to set up a small advisory committee for the BCHT area so that any intervention is more supportive. The Addl. District Magistrate (Dev) is also very supportive of this initiative.

Film on Biocultural Heritage Territories

Participants viewed a 6-minute film about Biocultural Heritage Territories – including the proposed 'Bean Park' BCHT in Lingsey-Lingseykha, see: <https://biocultural.iied.org/new-photofilm-profiles-biocultural-heritage-territories> 'Bean Park' is the initial name proposed but the name is being reconsidered as beans are not indigenous to India.

Concluding remarks

Miss Mazumdar: This meeting has been very enriching for me – thank-you for inviting me. It is very good to see Lingsey-Lingseykha taken into this project. It is a very biodiversity-rich area – I didn't know. It is great if the indigenous people can keep the traditional crops through their own means – to do that, we will do whatever we can to support. Tourists already flock to this region but not to that part. We have to work on the branding and marketing because these traditional crops have some qualities that other crops don't have. I feel that the financial side is very important to keep the younger generation in the community. So keeping that in view we hope to support the process through the local government.

Nawraj Gurung: Thanks to all participants, it has been very useful. I will be in touch with you to establish an Advisory Committee.