



National Workshop on Community Seed Bank

June 2012, Pokhara

NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON COMMUNITY SEED BANKS

14-15 June 2012, Pokhara, Nepal

Workshop Summary Report



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Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD)

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Introduction

A community seed bank is an example of a local institution dedicated to the management of plant genetic resources of importance to farming communities. The first community seed bank (labeled as such) emerged in the middle of the 1980s in a number of countries around the world. Different forms of community seed banking practices are being promoted by different actors both within and between different countries. Some community seed banks are highly specialized in terms of the collection, regeneration, distribution and maintenance of local crop diversity and documentation of associated information and traditional knowledge, while others are engaged in production and marketing of seeds of improved varieties. In Nepal, since 1996, different organizations have been implementing and supporting community seed banks in a variety of ways and in different regions of the country. Currently, there are more than 100 self-proclaimed community seed banks in Nepal. This is most likely the highest number of any country in the world.

A first national workshop on community seed banks was organized by Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD) from 14 to 15 June 2012, with the aim to bring community seed bank practitioners together to develop a common understanding on the concept (and practices), elaborate a typology in the Nepalese context, and identify future activities. Other specific objectives were: to



A community seed bank, Jogimara, Dhading.
Photo: Mahesh Shrestha/LI-BIRD

review the working modalities of community seed banks in Nepal, to explore *ex situ* and *in situ* links and related policy issues, to identify challenges and opportunities of community seed banks, and to promote future collaboration and networking among relevant organizations in Nepal.

The workshop brought together around 40 participants from farming community, NGO/INGO, high level government officials and scientists from the national genebank, LI-BIRD, USC Canada Asia, Oxfam and Bioversity International. In the workshop, community seed bank practitioners shared their experiences and lessons learned. This report summarizes the main issues discussed. Workshop organizers are planning a workshop proceeding publication that will include several of the detailed presentations made during the workshop.



Partners and participants¹

Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD) organized the workshop with financial support from Bioversity International, USC Canada Asia and Oxfam Nepal. LI-BIRD also contributed financially from Community-based Bioversity Management South Asia programme and Neglected and Underutilized Species Phase III projects supported by The Development Fund, Norway and IFAD respectively.

About forty people working on community seed banks, with experiences ranging from over one and half decades to a few years, representing farming communities, government agencies, NGO/INGOs, the Nepal Agricultural Research Council (NARC) and Bioversity International participated in the workshop. Among them were farmers, researchers, community seed bank practitioners, extension workers and national policy makers. In addition, there were scientists and policy experts from Bioversity International, LI-BIRD and USC Canada Asia. From the Government of Nepal, the Chief of National Agriculture Genetic Resources, the Chief of the Outreach Research Division, NARC the Director of the Crop Development Directorate from the Department of Agriculture and the Chief of the District Agriculture Development Offices of Kaski and Dadeldhura were present.

¹ See the list of participants in Annex 1.



Joint inauguration of the community seed banks workshop.
Photo: Sachesh Silwal/LI-BIRD

Organization of the workshop programme²

The two-day workshop was divided into five sessions. The first session offered a global overview and conceptual understanding of community seed banks. The objective of this session was to share the historical processes, key concepts and typologies of community seed banks at the global level. There were three presentations in this session. The first by Ronnie Vernoooy from Bioversity International was a global review of community seed banks. The other two papers were presented by Bhuwon Sthapit from Bioversity International and Pratap Shrestha from USC Canada Asia. These two conceptual papers were focused on community seed banks in the Nepalese context.

² See the workshop program in Annex 2.



In the second session, national experiences on community seed banks were shared by LI-BIRD, Oxfam, Crop Development Directorate, and Parivartan Nepal, representing the main organizations that put community seed banks in motion in the country.

The final session of day one was on linking community seed banks with the national genebank. The presenter was the chief of the national genebank, Madan Bhatta. The first session of the second day was allocated to representatives from farming communities who are operating community seed banks to share their experiences. There were three presentations from community seed banks of Bara, Lalitpur and Sindhupalchok districts followed by personal stories and reflections of three farmers from Dang, Sindhuli and Dadeldhura.

The rest of the workshop was dedicated to group work on four themes and specific tasks were given to each group separately. Group work themes were; i) development of a common definition of community seed banks, identifying and defining typologies and terminologies, ii) identification of emerging issues and challenges and suggesting possible ways to address those issues and challenges, iii) identification of policy gaps and a mechanism to develop linkages between community seed banks and the national genebank, and iv) identification of technical and management related problems and possible options to address those problems, including a mechanism for sustaining community seed banks when there

is no support from external agencies. The outputs of the group discussion have been presented in the group work and recommendations section of this report.

Presentation highlights

- The concept of the community seed bank evolved in the 1980s and now more than 40 countries from around the world have implemented different forms of community seed banks.
- Despite its significant contribution to food and agriculture, until now, in most cases, this approach is being supported and promoted by aid agencies and civil society organizations. Formal recognition of community



Bhuwon Sthapit from Bioversity International giving his presentation on concept of community seed banks.

Photo: Ronnie Vernooy/Bioversity International



seed banks at national and international levels is largely missing. It is striking that the FAO's 2nd State of the World Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (2010) makes no mention of community seed banks.

- Community seed banks fulfill several functions but the major focus has been on the conservation of local varieties, restoration of 'lost' varieties, crop and variety management in response to crisis/disaster, improvement of availability and accessibility, offering seeds at low costs or according to traditional system, sharing knowledge and expertise, helping poor/marginalized/women farmers and seed multiplication of participatory plant breeding varieties.
- In Nepal, the concept was first introduced in the late 1990s by USC Canada Asia in the central hills. In 2003, with some new innovations, LI-BIRD started community seed banks in the central terai area and from there has promoted community seed banks in 15 localities from the terai to the high hill areas. The Government of Nepal developed guidelines and piloted its 'own' community seed banks in 5 cases and planning to scale up in other 12 districts. Oxfam Nepal has supported the establishment of more than 90 community seed banks in 2 western hill districts namely Dolakha and Dadeldhura in the last few years. The main goal of the community seed banks, supported by LI-BIRD and USC Canada Asia, is to promote plant genetic resources conservation whilst the goal of government and Oxfam promoted community

seed banks are to increase production through increased seed replacement rates and increase availability of farmer preferred varieties. In practice, many of the community seed banks combine two or more objectives in a diversity of operations.

- The importance of linkages between community seed banks and the national genebank has been realized, but a clear mechanism for cooperation has yet to be developed.
- Despite many challenges, farming communities are managing community seed banks with minimal external support. On the other hand, farmers have realized the urgent need for policy and legislations to create a more enabling environment and for deploying efforts to strengthen community seed banks and guarantee their sustainability.



Workshop participants.

Photo: Pitambar Shrestha/LI-BIRD



Group work and recommendations

- **Definition/conceptual clarity**

Group 1 came up with basic elements for a working definition of community seed banks; conservation of plant genetic resources, community ownership/control of plant genetic resources, community governed and managed, recognition (legal and/or community-based), quality seeds based on agreed standard, seed production and distribution, providing platform for other community actions, are the basic elements for a definition.

Community seed banks aim to promote the conservation and sustainable use of both local and improved varieties for food security and to improve the livelihoods of



Group work session.

Photo: Ronnie Vernooy/Bioversity International

farmers. The group also agreed that the term ‘community seed bank’ should not be used if there is no plant genetic resources conservation activity.

- **Practical challenges**

Group 2 identified gaps and challenges of community seed banks and suggested ways to address them. They are lack of policy, lack of common understanding of community seed banks, low coverage, more resources demanding, a need for greater capacity building effort, purity maintenance of seed, replacement of local varieties by hybrids and modern varieties, declining interest from farmers, limited scientific knowledge, focus may get diluted when combining plant genetic resources conservation and seed production of modern varieties. This group suggested to address the gaps by strengthening local institutions, improving information systems, mainstreaming community seed banks into the national system, formation of policy and legal mechanisms, establishing a seed revolving fund, linking with market and private agencies, developing a mechanism for providing subsidies and registration of community seed banks in the government system.

- **Linking community seed banks with the national genebank**

The task of group 3 was to identify policy gaps and develop a possible mechanism to link community seed banks with the national genebank. Major policy gaps are



limited focus on plant genetic resources conservation in general, a gap in linking existing community seed banks with the government seed production programme, no national level database on community seed banks, lack of information and material sharing among different agencies, community seed banks are not recognized by national policies (draft access to and benefit sharing bill, agrobiodiversity policy 2007, draft plant variety protection and farmers rights act, agriculture development policies, seed policy and seed acts), no policy on linking community seed banks with the national genebank, lack of policies in defining and regulating community seed banks. The team suggested a revision of existing national policies and legislations to include community seed banks in draft bills, development of a comprehensive policy guidelines for community seed banks operations, a survey (review) of community seed banks and their modality across the country to develop an inventory of community seed banks in the country, and defined roles and responsibilities of the national genebank and other stakeholders for linking the various actors.

Group 3 also identified some activities for immediate action. It was proposed that the national genebank should develop a simple but concise plant genetic resource characterization form to be used by community seed banks, as well as a standard material transfer agreement (SMTA), prior informed consent (PIC), mutually agreed terms (MAT) system for safety duplication of community

seed banks materials; prepare a certificate for community seed banks to recognize farmer's contributions to the national genebank collection; develop and make available technical/procedural guidelines for seed acquisition; develop a format and guidelines for seed delivery on request for community seed banks within the country; and provide technical support and training to community seed banks by 2012. For community seed banks, it was proposed that they collect seeds from local areas with standard information (passport data); update passport data of community seed banks collections; and support joint explorations for germplasm collection. The tasks suggested for facilitating organizations that provide support to establish community seed banks include



Madan Bhatta from national genebank giving his presentation on linking national genebank and community seed banks.
Photo: Sachesh Silwal/LI-BIRD



providing financial and technical support to community seed banks, working jointly with the national genebank and community seed banks in developing the guidelines and regulations proposed, supporting to develop an inventory and passport data generation, facilitation of seed acquisition and delivery to the national seed repository for safety back-up, and involvement in joint explorations for germplasm collection.

- **Management of community seed banks**

The fourth group was represented by farmers and they discussed problems and challenges faced by farmer groups, as well as suggestions to improve the management of community seed banks. They emphasized



Community seed bank, Kachorwa, Bara.
Photo: LI-BIRD Photo Bank

the existence of a policy challenge in the sense of lack of support and clear rules and regulations. Other problems identified, were: the lack of enough financial resources, less interest of farmers in local varieties, problems in marketing seeds, lack of physical infrastructure, lack of technical knowledge in managing seeds and regeneration of collected seeds. Their suggestions to overcome the issues were a supportive policy and if necessary, legal act on community seed banks; that the District Agriculture Development Office, Village Development Committee and District Development Committee should include community seed banks in their regular annual plans: that subsidies being provided by government programme should not be limited only to government supported community seed banks; development of rules to register the best local varieties; subsidies related to seed equipment; provision of incentives to custodian farmers and inclusion of the topic of agro- biodiversity in the school curriculum.

Lessons learned

- **Learning from cases**

Workshop participants learned from each others' presentations and the discussions about the concept, typologies, status and implementation modalities of community seed banks, in Nepal to a large extent and around the globe to some extent. There is no single type of community seed bank, but a number of core elements can be identified.



- **Conceptual clarity among workshop participants**
Different organizations have different understandings of community seed banks and are using the term in their own way. The workshop developed a generic definition of community seed banks and concluded that plant genetic resources conservation is a central function of community seed banks. Farmers groups that deal in essence mostly with the production of seeds of improved varieties could best be labeled as a seed enterprise.

- **Identification of gaps both in policies and practices**

Based on more than 15 years of experience in the country, several gaps and challenges were identified covering organizational, technical, and policy/legal aspects. This kind of analysis gives clear direction to community seed banks actors about where their efforts are needed. In particular, policy gaps and linkages between community seed banks and the national genebank were well discussed. A suggestion was made to start working on a 'national genebanking system' that would combine *in-situ* and *ex-situ* conservation and serve local and national needs and interests. This suggestion was well received by the participants.

- **Short term action plan developed for linking community seed banks with the national genebank**

Community seed banks and the national genebank can play complementary roles in managing plant genetic resources, but until now very little interaction has taken place. This workshop has done something concrete to work on this issue. The chief of the national genebank readily agreed to take some concrete steps, such as the development of contractual arrangements (SMTA/PIC/MAT) and a guide for collecting passport data in community seed banks by 2012.



Bhagawan Pokharel, a farmer sharing outputs of group work.
Photo: Sachesh Silwal/LI-BIRD



- **Initiation of a platform for collective action**
Different NGOs and the government are working on community seed banks but they had never met to exchange experiences and develop a common agenda. This workshop brought many of the key actors together to discuss issues of common interest. The Crop Development Directorate of the Department of Agriculture wishes to work together with NGOs and, vice versa, NGOs aim to collaborate with the government and the national genebank. It is the beginning of a shared undertaking towards the strengthening of community seed banks in Nepal.

The road ahead

- **Proceeding publication**
Given the richness of experiences and lessons learned that have global relevance, it has been proposed to work on a workshop proceeding publication (in English). The proceeding would be structured according to the workshop programme and presentations. LI-BIRD will take the lead in the workshop proceeding publication.
- **Global proposal**
Several important issues have emerged from the workshop on which different partners can work together. Bioversity International and LI-BIRD will work together to develop a global proposal and other partners will be invited at an appropriate stage.

- **National and international links**
The workshop generated some concrete ideas to start linking community seed banks to the national genebank, and, potentially, through the national genebank to the international genebank system. The organizers of the workshop agreed to work together to move the policy/legal agenda in support of community seed banks forward. A concrete first step is the collaboration between the community seed banks and the national genebank towards the development of a national genebanking system for Nepal.



Visit of Ronnie Vernooy from Bioversity International to the community seed bank of Jogimara, Dhading.
Photo: Deepa Gurung/LI-BIRD



Evaluation of the workshop

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to provide feedback in two ways; the positive aspects of the workshop and suggestions for the organizer. Most of the workshop participants clearly expressed that the workshop was well organized with good structure and time management and conducive environment was created for learning, sharing and discussions. Many of them also mentioned that the workshop was inclusive and represented multi-sectoral stakeholders and the forum given to farmers was well appreciated, while the Academia was conspicuous in their absence. They found the content very relevant and the workshop created a platform for a common understanding of community seed banks and further action plans.



Participants evaluating the workshop.
Photo: Pratima Rana/LI-BIRD

In terms of suggestions, they pointed out that more participation of farmers especially women and representation from local government, Ministry of Agriculture Development and other practitioners of community seed banks would have made it better. Similarly, they have suggested to organize such workshop on a regular basis to bring experiences together. As most of the power point presentations were in English, farmers have suggested to address language barrier by having bi-lingual presentations and distribution of handouts. They also have suggested to do prompt follow up of the actions identified at the workshop.

Acknowledgements

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Annex 1: List of participants

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Workshop organizing committee

1. Pitambar Shrestha, Coordinator
2. Rachana Devkota, Member
3. Sajal Sthapit, Member
4. Pashupati Chaudhary, PhD, Member
5. Ram Bahadur Rana, PhD, Member



Annex 2: Workshop programme

National Workshop on Community Seed Banks
14-15 June 2012, Pokhara, Nepal

Date and Time	Activity	Responsible
DAY I: 14 June 2012, Thursday		
7.30-8.30	Breakfast	All
8:30-9:00	Registration	Pratima Rana/Indra Paudel
9:00-9:15	Welcome/opening remarks	Shreeram P. Neopane, PhD, LI-BIRD
	Inauguration of workshop	-
9:15-9:30	Introduction	All
Session I: Global Overview and Conceptual Understanding of Community Seed Banks Chair: Devra Jarvis, PhD, Bioversity International		
9:30-10:15	Global review of community seed banks	Ronnie Vernooy, PhD, Bioversity International
10:15-10:30	Tea/Coffee break	All
10:30-11:00	Emerging theory, practice, typology and rationale of CSB in Nepal	Bhuwon Sthapit, PhD, Bioversity International
11:00-11:30	Community seed banks: concept, practices and challenges	Pratap Shrestha, PhD, USC Canada Asia
11:30-11:50	Discussion	All
11:50-12:00	Closing of session I	Chair
Session II: National Experiences on Community Seed Banks Chair: Pratap Shrestha, PhD, USC Canada Asia		
12:00-12:30	Community seed banks for saving seeds and securing livelihoods: experience of LI-BIRD	Pitambar Shrestha, LI-BIRD
12:30-13:00	Agro-biodiversity resource center: a cooperative managed community seed bank of Ranibas, Sindhuli.	Dinesh Shrestha, Parivartan Nepal
13:00-13:15	Discussion	All



13:15-14:15	Lunch Break	
14:15-14:45	Policies and procedure of implementing community seed banks in Nepal	Suroj Pokhrel, Crop Development Directorate
14:45-15:15	Oxfam's experiences on community seed banks: a community-led seed management for local seed security	Mahendra Mahato, Oxfam, Kathmandu
15:15-15:35	Discussion	All
15:35-15:45	Closing of session II	Chair
15:45-16:00	Tea/coffee break	All
Session III: Linking In-situ and Ex-situ Chair: Suroj Pokhrel, PhD, Crop Development Directorate		
16:00-16:30	Linking community seed banks with national genebank and multilateral system	Madan Bhatta, NAGRC
16:30-16:45	Discussion	All
16:45-17:00	Closing of session III	Chair

DAY II: 15 June 2012, Friday

Date and Time	Activity	Responsible
7.30-8:30	Breakfast	All
Session IV: Voice of Community Chair: Madan Bhatta, National Agriculture Genetic Resources Centre		
8:30-8:50	Experience of Agriculture Development and Conservation Society in managing community seed bank	Ram Ekwal Yadav, ADCS, Kachorwa, Bara
8:50-9:10	Experience of Dalchoki Community Development Committee	Krishna Prasad Sanjel, Dalchoki community seed bank, Lalitpur
9:10-9:30	Experience of Sindhu Community Seed Bank	D.B. Bhandari, Sindhupalchok community seed bank, Sindhupalchok
9:30-10:00	Discussion	All



10:00-10:15	Tea/Coffee break	All
10:15-10:45	Synthesis presentation	Pashupati Chaudhary, PhD, LI-BIRD
10:45-11:00	Closing of session IV	Chair
11:00-13:00	Group work	All
13:00-14:00	Lunch Break	
14:00-15:15	Group work presentation and discussion	All
15:15-15:30	Feedback collection on overall workshop organization and management	All
15:30-15:45	Tea/Coffee break	
Closing Session		
Chair: Shreeram P. Neopane, PhD, LI-BIRD		
15:45-16:15	Few words -Farmer -CDD, DoA -NAGRC -Oxfam -USC Canada Asia -Biodiversity International	
16:15-16:30	Vote of thanks and closing remarks	Chair
18:30	Reception dinner	All



धानी घान
आतः पाकेधनी

For further information



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