Partners

The project partners from grassroots to policy level carry out most of the field level activities and are a mix of government agencies, academic organisations and non-government organisations. The main partners are: North-Eastern Community Based Resource Management Project (NERCMP), Nagaland Empowerment of People through Economic Development (NEPED), Kanchendzonga Conservation Committee (KCC), Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), World Conservation Union Bangladesh (IUCN-B), Himalayan Grassroot Women's Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAWANTI), National Biodiversity Centre of Bhutan (NBC), and Mizoram University (MZU).

Expected long-term outcomes

- Raised awareness about access and benefit sharing (ABS) at the community level – so that communities realise the value of their assets and can benefit from them; and at the policy level – so that policy makers are able to prepare appropriate policies and legislation to use ABS for national and community benefit
- A regional strategy for ABS in the Eastern Himalayas so that countries can benefit from the common genetic resources without conflict
- Empowerment of grassroots women by promoting and enabling their full participation in the ABS process
- ICIMOD serving as a clearing house for documentation and exchange of knowledge on ABS in the Eastern Himalayan region
- Documentation and analysis of successes and failures of ABS implementation in the region providing a basis for learning

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Photos: insect, aquatic and plant genetic resources, repositories of indigenous knowledge and traditional skills – K.P. Oli
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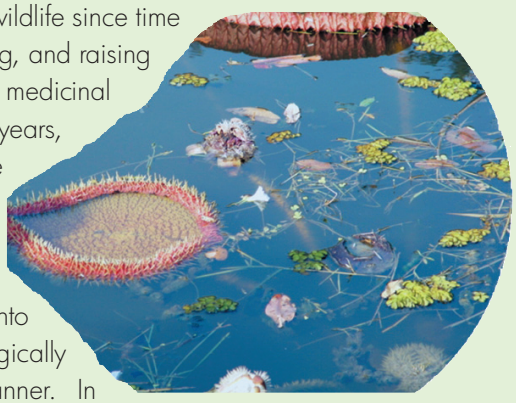
Regional Programme on Access and Benefit Sharing

from Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge in the Eastern Himalayas

ABS
Access and Benefit Sharing
for
- sustainable use of biological resources
- equitable sharing of benefits
- regulated access to biological resources

Genetic Resources and Indigenous Knowledge



Communities have used local plants and wildlife since time immemorial – collecting, selecting, growing, and raising varieties of food crops, livestock, and medicinal plants for their livelihoods. In recent years, awareness has been growing of the value of these genetic resources and the traditional knowledge associated with them. However, the challenge is to convert these resources and knowledge into modern economic wealth in an ecologically sustainable and socially equitable manner. In former times, access to genetic resources and the associated traditional knowledge was considered to be freely available to all. Resources were often taken from communities and exploited by external agencies and individuals who monopolised the benefits.

Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) Regimes

The **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** came into force in 1993 and has three objectives: conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of biological diversity, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from utilisation of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge. National governments became the legal owners of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, and countries started to develop policies and legal instruments to protect, promote, and manage them. The CBD is the most important international legal instrument governing **Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS)** for genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, further supported by the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture which came into force in 2004. Article 15 of the CBD provides the framework for national governments to implement ABS mechanisms that regulate and protect knowledge and genetic resources, and facilitate access in such a way that fair and equitable sharing of benefits is ensured. The main components of ABS agreements are prior informed consent (PIC), mutually agreed terms (MAT), traditional knowledge (TK), and fair and equitable benefit.

The **Eastern Himalayas** are one of the 34 global 'biodiversity hot-spots' and a treasure house of genetic resources and traditional knowledge. These rich resources provide the basis for the livelihood security of mountain communities. The countries of this region are at different stages in implementing the CBD and developing ABS regimes. India has enacted a 'Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Act' in 2001, and a Biodiversity Act in 2002, accompanied by Biodiversity Regulations in 2004. State biodiversity boards are being established and state biodiversity regulations promulgated. Bhutan enacted a Biodiversity Act in 2003 and is in the process of developing the regulations. Nepal and Bangladesh have prepared draft bills on 'Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit Sharing' and 'Biodiversity and Community Knowledge Protection', respectively.

The ICIMOD Access and Benefit Sharing Project

ICIMOD is helping to facilitate the process of developing and implementing equitable ABS regimes in the region through the project 'Access and Benefits Sharing (ABS) from Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge in the Eastern Himalayan Countries (Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Bhutan)', supported by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ). The **main goals** are

- to contribute to an increased understanding of the 'Access and Benefit Sharing' approach to exploiting genetic resources and associated knowledge among the wider community in the region, and
- to foster participation of indigenous and local people, especially women, in ABS activities.

Activities focus on awareness raising using a broad range of different media and pathways, and promotion of dissemination through workshops at different levels, and national and state level consultations between relevant government and non-government organisations. Targeted local activities are carried out at selected field sites chosen because they are rich in biodiversity, inhabited largely by indigenous and local communities with traditional lifestyles, and are a repository of traditional knowledge. The three-year project started implementation in June 2005.