

Sustainable Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction



The rapidly changing economic, social, and environmental context in the region requires innovative and sustainable adaptation strategies and methods to ensure a secure and improved lifestyle for the mountain people of the region and their downstream beneficiaries.

The Sustainable Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction (SLPR) programme provides the innovative livelihood options needed to enhance socioeconomic sustainability and ensure that livelihood and poverty reduction issues are systematically integrated into ICIMOD's activities.

ICIMOD monitors and analyses the poverty situation and its main drivers. It helps to develop policy-relevant information with a special emphasis on high value products and value chains, innovative livelihood options, and economic analysis.

ICIMOD promotes resilience to help alleviate poverty by providing sustainable livelihood options. Innovative rural income generation strategies aim to alleviate the effects of socioeconomic and environmental change.

The main achievements in the SLPR programme in 2008 include

- Demonstration through action research in Nepal and India that the income of poor growers and collectors of *Cinnamomum tamala* leaves (bay leaves or tejpat) could be increased substantially through a few focused interventions based on a value chain analysis
- Increased awareness and integration of gender issues in mountain development among partners and



The SLPR programme works in two action areas and divisions:

- High Value Products and Value Chains
- Innovative Livelihood Options
- Economic Analysis Division
- Gender and Governance Division

ICIMOD through the findings from extensive and interlinked gender assessment studies

- Wider impact of ICIMOD's experiences in promotion of high value mountain products through the start of a scaling up project for increased employment and income generation for the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.

Partners' voices: "Farmers learned new methods and ... technologies..."

ICIMOD started working with community forest user groups and poor households collecting bay leaves in February 2008. The initial achievements of the action research are described below.

Mr. Bharat Bahadur Thapa is the Chairperson of the Udayapur District Branch of the Federation of Community Forest User Groups (FECOFUN). He describes the results of FECOFUN's collaboration with ICIMOD.

"With the training through ICIMOD, farmers learned new methods to collect bay leaf and a new technology for producing oil. ICIMOD also brought downstream linkages to add valuation at different links in the chain. As a result, collectors have been able to make more profit."

Partners' voices: "Many stakeholders are working together for the same output.."

Mr Mahendra S Kunwar is the Secretary of the Himalayan Action Research Centre (HARC), based in Dehra Dun, Uttaranchal, India. The centre is an NGO working to promote NTFPs and sustainable livelihoods in the local area. It is involved in the action research project to improve the value chain for bay leaves.



"We at HARC are always into action, but in this project, for the first time we are doing action research, which we find more productive and rewarding. As well, this is the first time that so many stakeholders are working together for the same output – the state government departments, CBOs (community-based organisations), the private sector, NGOs, and ICIMOD. This is a new mode of working and everyone is in a win-win situation. It is good for everybody. For the first time, the state government is promoting public private partnership in an NTFP project and they see the potential to replicate it all over the state."

Honeybees: Much more than honey

ICIMOD's honeybee programme has enabled farmers in remote areas to start using beekeeping and honey hunting as way of gaining cash income.

Training, hives, and new technology provided through ICIMOD's honeybee programme have enabled local farmers in remote areas of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan to shift from collecting indigenous honey for their own use to managing hives and producing honey to sell for money. Many beekeepers in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, for example in Himachal Pradesh, India, are also renting their honeybee colonies to apple farmers for managed pollination. Studies carried out by ICIMOD have shown that honeybee pollination enhanced seed production and quality of seed in various fruit and vegetable crops. The collapse of pollinator populations could decrease crop production by 50%.

These achievements by the programme managed to attract the interest of the BBC for production of a documentary about Himalayan cliff bees and the importance of honeybees for pollination and livelihoods. As a result, tourists are coming to watch the wild bees and farmers are also seeing the potential for ecotourism.

An evaluation of the honeybee programme recommended that it invest in value chain development, honey trade policy, quality standards, residue monitoring, and development of national monitoring plans for each RMC. Based on the evaluation, ICIMOD launched a new cycle of the honeybee project. ICIMOD will now facilitate RMCs and partners to develop quality standards, and policy instruments, and to scale up existing successful activities and develop pro poor value chains for honeybee products and services.

On a broader scale, the impact of the project is that now, smaller NGOs are implementing honeybee projects on their own with thematic support from ICIMOD to build the capacity of instructors. The honeybee and pollination training materials have also been translated into regional languages.

Most significantly, there is a scaling up as RMCs start to use their own funds for honeybee programmes. The Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN), a lead development actor in Afghanistan, requested strategic input for their national beekeeping strategy and is now investing to scale up beekeeping in Northern Afghanistan. The Pakistan government has

realised that investments to increase bee colonies from 400,000 to 1.7 million can increase production of oil seed crops to produce an additional US \$600 million worth of edible oil per year. This would decrease Pakistan's import of edible oil commodities by 60% each year and promote food security. With this in view, a scaling up project has been developed and is in the process of approval.



Pro-poor value chains in India and Nepal

– Improved livelihoods for bay leaf collectors

The income of poor producers and collectors of *Cinnamomum tamala* (bay leaves) has trebled by building their capacity and linking them to markets.

The initial results of an ICIMOD action research project show that empowering poor collectors with improved capacities and market information and access improves their bargaining power and ultimately, their food security. The results show a way for development stakeholders and governments to help poor mountain people that could be replicated and scaled up for wider benefits. Interventions at various levels provide support services, such as finance, technology, and policy coordination to assist poor mountain households in remote regions to engage more successfully and equitably in the growing bay leaf product markets.

The ICIMOD action research project promotes specific interventions for mountain producers to participate more equitably in value chains. The project also promotes cross-border learning and sharing of good practices between value chain practitioners in India and Nepal. In collaboration with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the project targets 250 households in selected areas of Udaipur district, Eastern Nepal, and Chamoli district of Uttarakhand state, India. The project is implemented locally by the Himalayan Action Research Centre in India and the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN) in Nepal.



Following a participatory approach, the project assisted collectors/producers to form groups and federated institutions for production and marketing of bay leaves. Market information gathered through surveys was shared with the groups. The project organised training programmes on group building, bay leaf cultivation and management, and enterprise development. It also identified options for marketing and facilitated linkages and contract negotiations with local buyers and exporters. The contracts obliged the buyers to provide training on collection, grading, sorting, and packaging leaves for added value. For technical support, the project mobilised line agencies, organisations dealing in non-timber forest products, and donor supported programmes on livelihood improvement.

It worked closely with the State Forest Department in Uttarakhand India for policy coordination and institutional support.

The project emphasised sustainable harvesting of leaves by counting the bay leaf trees and promoting provisions for a 50% harvest in state owned forests in India. Farmers in Nepal adopted improved harvesting techniques and avoided multiple harvests of trees in a season. The project also promoted plantations for environmental conservation and increased production. As a result, the collectors in India received INR 25/kg for 10 tonnes of leaves – a doubling of the 2003 prices when bay leaves were last harvested from the area. The bay leaf producers in Nepal tripled their price from NRs 3-7 per/kg to NRs 16 per/kg for 100 tonnes of 'A' grade leaves with the contract. The income from bay leaves averaged NRs 5,000 per household. This addition to the average annual cash income of NRs 15-20,000 (approx. 170-250 US\$) per household contributes substantially to increased food security and improved livelihood options.

Increased awareness and participation in local governance

Mountain women and men in four countries are now successfully advocating for their rights following an ICIMOD capacity-building project.

Newly elected representative on a local government council in the Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh, Sujata Dewan, says: "I received sensitisation training in gender, and basic entrepreneurship and leadership skills development from 2001-2005 from ICIMOD."

As a result of awareness raising through ICIMOD's 'Regional Programme for Capacity Building of Community Based Organisations in Advocacy Strategies in the Himalayas', some women working with civil society organisations are now able to claim rights from women's suffrage to maternity leave. Others are now running for public office in their villages.

The project aimed to build and strengthen the capacity of selected community-based organisations to advocate for the rights of mountain people for addressing social, economic and gender issues in the Himalayas. Up to 2008, it worked with over 40 partners from four countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan) in informal or formal networks, which created opportunities for many other institutions to benefit from capacity building activities.

During 2008, over 230 people participated in the training sessions supported by the project and more than 5,000 citizens built their capacity in advocacy through short courses organised by partner organisations at local level.

"First, we helped them come out of their traditional roles; second, we built their confidence in themselves through livelihood projects; third, we organised them to form associations and networks; fourth, we established the rights of women in different dimensions including policy dialogue among women of the network and with policy makers," says Tuku Talukdar of Green Hill, an NGO in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Sujata now advocates what she has learned during meetings to women and community members. She has accepted the community's challenge to represent them in public office at the village level.

