

IDRC in Nepal

IDRC's 34 years of support for research in Nepal has contributed to the preservation of agricultural biodiversity, increased farmers' food security, and identified possible avenues for the rehabilitation of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. Centre-supported research has also led to better meat-processing practices in Kathmandu and the adoption of an information technology policy.

Nepal ranks among the lowest Asian countries on the human and income poverty index published by the United Nations Development Programme. Work carried out by IDRC's research partners aims to reduce this poverty by involving the poorest and most marginalized members of society in the search for solutions. Although political instability and armed conflict have slowed the country's development significantly over the past decade, this may change as the Government of Nepal and the (Maoist) Communist Party signed a peace agreement in November 2006.

Nepal is essentially a rural economy: three-quarters of the population depends on subsistence farming. IDRC is supporting Nepal's participation in international research activities to strengthen farmers' ability to conserve the genetic diversity of traditional crops. An early outcome of this work was the official release in July 2006 of an improved version of a traditional rice variety, developed collaboratively by farmers

and researchers and worth a 25 percent premium because of its soft texture and unique aroma and flavour.

IDRC is also supporting research to improve community forestry. Nepal has received international praise for its 20 years of progressive forest management. Making communities responsible for the management of nearby wooded areas has increased forest cover and rehabilitated ecosystems. But the Nepalese government, academics, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) realize that the poorest community members still need greater access to forest resources. IDRC's research partners are tackling this issue.

For the past 17 years, IDRC has supported the work of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, based in Nepal. Research, now also supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, seeks to determine the causes of advanced degradation in the world's highest mountain system, the Hindu Kush-Himalayas, and contribute to their rehabilitation while improving rural livelihoods. Research and tests with farmers have demonstrated that producing off-season vegetables and high-yielding crops, such as cardamom, ginger, and tea, as well as fish farming are sustainable and profitable activities. Researchers and farmers are also testing ways to rehabilitate common lands and are collecting hydrological and meteorological data across watersheds in China, Nepal, and Pakistan.

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The urban environment and its effects on health are the focus of eight years of IDRC support in Kathmandu. The National Zoonoses and Food Hygiene Research Centre is collaborating with local authorities and community members to identify and reduce food-and water-borne diseases that spread from animals to humans. Data generated by earlier research led the city to adopt an *Animal Slaughtering and Meat Inspection Act*, and community groups have developed measures to meet the new regulation. Researchers are now consolidating these achievements.

IDRC also supports a network of researchers in five South Asian countries, who are evaluating the economic dimension of environmental issues, as well as a study of women's rights under national immigration legislation in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal as it evolves to combat the trafficking of women.

Past IDRC support led to the creation of a program in Asia to analyze the impact on households of macroeconomic policies, such as trade liberalization or cuts in social spending. In Nepal, the National Labour Academy collaborated with the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation, a Canadian NGO, on an innovative pilot of a community-based poverty-monitoring system. Nepal's government used the results in designing its five-year development plan. During the third phase of support from 2002 to 2005, however, political unrest in the country hampered implementation and research activities came to a halt.

Nepal's political instability has also hindered implementation of the country's information technology (IT) policy, which IDRC helped to develop by supporting the preparation of six background papers and consultations with the private sector, academics, and civil society. The Nepalese Parliament adopted the policy in October 2000, but implementation has been limited to some capacity building and the establishment of an IT park in Kathmandu. Nevertheless, the policy remains an important first step

for the government and the IT sector, and it is the first time a policy has been developed using a participatory process.

Agriculture was an IDRC priority in Nepal throughout the 1980s. In one instance, researchers helped Nepal's Ministry of Food and Agriculture set up a program to increase productivity of neglected cereal crops, such as finger millet, barley, buckwheat, and amaranthus. During the 1970s, IDRC's support to organize and disseminate documentation on rural development and agriculture led to the establishment of a specialized library, the National Agricultural Documentation Centre.

Since 1972, IDRC has allocated CA\$25 million to 110 projects in Nepal. Some of these activities were regional in scope. The Centre is currently supporting 10 projects, worth just over CA\$5 million.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

On-farm Conservation of Agricultural Biodiversity

In Nepal, as in the rest of South Asia, many farmers rely on crop diversity for food security, particularly in marginalized areas. They plant several varieties of a crop, such as rice, to ensure that, if conditions are harsh, at least some strains will survive. Farmers maintain their seed banks through exchanges with other farmers. To enhance the ability of farmers to perform their important conservation role, researchers and policymakers need to understand when, where, and how on-farm conservation is successful.

The International Plant Genetic Resources Institute is coordinating an international research effort to strengthen the scientific basis, institutional linkages, and policies that support the role of farmers in the conservation and use of crop genetic diversity. IDRC is supporting Nepal's participation in this project, which also involves Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Hungary, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, Turkey, and Vietnam.

For the two Nepalese collaborators — the National Agricultural Research Council and the Local Initiatives for Biodiversity Research and Development — adding value to these crop varieties is key. For example, farmers and researchers developed an improved version of the traditional rice variety, *Jethobudho*, which has recently been approved by the national seed board of Nepal. Research also aims to develop the market for traditional crops and strengthen local seed exchange systems and social networks.

(Project # 101433; Strengthening the Scientific Basis of In Situ Conservation of Agricultural Biodiversity (Nepal); Duration: 2002–2006; IDRC contact: Oliver Puginier; IDRC allocation: CA\$463 300; Research partner: Devra Jarvis, International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (now Bioversity International); Via dei Tre Denari 472/a, 00057 Maccarese, Rome, Italy; Tel.: 39-06-61181; Email: d.jarvis@cgiar.org; Website: bioversity-europe@cgiar.org)

One Step Further in Community Forestry

The majority of Nepalese people depend on forests for fuel, food, and feed for livestock. To preserve this resource, government policy over the past 25 years has fostered the creation of more than 10 000 formal, community-based user groups that manage local forests. Although this system has slowed deforestation, researchers and activists have identified a number of issues that impede further development. These include the need to improve the livelihoods of the poorest and most marginalized people by increasing their participation in forestry management and governance.

With IDRC support, researchers at the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), based in Indonesia, have teamed up with the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation and two NGOs: ForestAction and New Era. They are exploring the viability of CIFOR's flexible approach to community forestry called "adaptive collaborative management" or forestry management for social change.

(Project # 102046; Community Forestry (Nepal); Duration: 2004–2007; IDRC allocation: CA\$450 000; IDRC contact: Oliver Puginier; Research partner: Cynthia McDougall, CIFOR; PO Box 6596, JKPWB, Jakarta 10065, Indonesia; Tel.: 62-251-622-622; Email: c.mcdougall@cgiar.org)

The Economics of Environmental Problems and Solutions

Environmental problems and economic development are intimately related. Researchers from six South Asian countries are exploring these links through the South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics (SANDEE), based in Nepal.

IDRC and other donors support SANDEE's efforts to nurture the development of an indigenous knowledge base on the links between growth, poverty, and the environment. The network holds meetings and training workshops, publishes an array of documents relevant to policy-makers, and administers a small-grants competition. Recent competition winners in Nepal are studying the links between pesticide use, human health, and household productivity, and the costs of indoor air pollution. Past SANDEE-supported research in Nepal has found that poorer households and female-headed households were benefiting less than others from community forestry.

(Project # 102580; South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics (SANDEE); Duration: 2004–2007; IDRC allocation CA\$604 500; IDRC contact: David Glover; Research partners: Priya Shyamsundar, International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, PO Box 8975, EPC: 1056, Kathmandu, Nepal; Tel.: 977-1-552-8761/81; Fax: 977-1-553-6786; Email: priyas@sandeeonline.org; Website: www.sandeeonline.org)

Better Practices for Urban Public Health

Rapid and uncontrolled urbanization is a major cause of poverty in Kathmandu: 70 percent of the city's population earn less than \$1 a day. Food- and water-borne illnesses are important problems in this multi-ethnic city where discrimination on the basis of caste, although it is outlawed, still divides society.

The first phase of this IDRC-supported project concentrated on two city wards where 60 percent of the city's meat is slaughtered and sold. The National Zoonoses and Food Hygiene

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Research Centre (NZFHRC) led a team of researchers who found that more than 50 per cent of the waste generated lay unattended on street corners and in open spaces. The slaughtering of water buffaloes took place in the open air, with intestinal contents and waste meat routinely dumped into the river. These findings led to improvements in garbage pick-up, new regulations for meat processing, and community-led action, such as composting animal waste.

In the second phase of IDRC support, the NZFHRC is collaborating with local and national authorities and the Sociology Department of Tribhuvan University to consolidate these initial results. Research is targeting marginalized groups who did not participate in the first phase, such as unorganized wage labourers and low-caste women sweepers.

(Project # 101277; Urban Ecosystem Health in Kathmandu (Nepal) – Phase II; Duration: 2003–2006; IDRC allocation CA\$335 900; IDRC contact: Andrés Sanchez-Bain; Research partner: Durga D. Joshi, NZFHRC, PO Box 1885, Tahachal, Kathmandu, Nepal; Tel.: 977-1-270667; Email: ddjoshi@healthnet.org.np)

The Rights of Women Migrants

In recent years, a flurry of national acts and regional and international protocols and conventions have been established in South Asia to combat the trafficking of women. These legal instruments often view female migrants solely through the lens of victimization, equating female migration with trafficking. Various governments have also adopted anti-immigrant

measures. Nepal and Bangladesh, for example, have imposed departure restrictions on women under 35 years of age. Increased entry restrictions lead to more clandestine migration, putting women in an increasingly vulnerable position.

The Centre for Feminist Legal Research in New Delhi is evaluating the legal regulation of cross-border movements, female migration, and women's rights in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal and will suggest measures to enhance the rights of women migrants. The goal is to contribute to the development of policies that recognize women as economic actors capable of making decisions for themselves.

(Project # 103498: Cross-Border Movements, Female Migration, and Human Rights: A Post-colonial Evaluation; Duration: 2006–2008; IDRC allocation: CA\$136 000; IDRC contact: Navsharan Singh; Research partner: Ratna Kapur, Centre for Feminist Legal Research, B-12 Maharani Bagh, New Delhi, India, 110 065; Tel.: 91-11-2683-0636; Email: ratna_kapur@msn.com; Website: www.cflr.org)

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