



Nepal

The Business Case for Biodiversity Conservation

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Bhishma Subedi, Executive Director, Asia Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bioresources, Nepal

A new approach to community forest management and resilient livelihoods

With a combination of funds from Global Development Network (GDN) and other development partners, Asia Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bioresources (ANSAB) set up a pilot project in the districts of Dolakha and Sindhupalchok, in Nepal, which turned out to be the first of many projects to come. Implementation followed a step-by-step approach. Firstly, ANSAB supported selected communities in obtaining forest tenure and land use rights from the government, and to organize themselves into Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs). Once established, the CFUGs co-designed a forest management plan for developing social enterprises producing non-timber forest products such as medicinal and aromatic liquids, and solid biofuels. Eventually, locals took over full ownership and management of the businesses, with ANSAB providing technical advice and financial support.

Since the award, the approach has proved successful in a number of projects in other districts and with different types of forest products. Most notably, this included a four-year €2 million project funded by the European Union. An important new dimension within this project was the strengthening of ‘lead firms’ at the national level to trade with and provide technological support to local

Dr. Bhishma P. Subedi is Executive Director of the Asia Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bioresources (ANSAB) in Nepal. In 2008, ANSAB won the second prize in the Most Innovative Development Project (MIDP) competition, for their approach to biodiversity conservation through community-based enterprises. GDN recognized the potential of their approach to forest management – an innovative social development approach that offers a practical solution to forest degradation in Nepal. Aligning conservation objectives with economic incentives, ANSAB has managed to safeguard the sustainable use of forests through local ownership and income generation.



enterprises, and to sell their products on domestic and international markets. These were conceptualized and established by ANSAB while developing the marketing system for community-produced products. To explore additional incentives for sustainable forest management, ANSAB developed a partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC); this collaboration led to the development of a forest certification standard, used to verify the impact on ecosystem services.

Proof of Concept

The ANSAB approach has had a significant impact and has provided clear evidence (from project data) that conservation can be profitable. In total, the projects strengthened 1,298 economic entities that engaged 84,553 participants in Nepal, generating over \$8.31 million in financial benefits in 2016. Locally, project evaluations showed that communities' incomes have grown. In less than 10 years, the projects have managed to set up an independently functioning production and trade system benefiting rural communities, urban entrepreneurs and local ecosystems. A lively trade in bio-briquettes and charred pallets now exists between several CFUGs and markets in Katmandu, and essential oils from aromatic plants and other natural products are procured by

international enterprises for use in high-end industrial products, such as personal care and aroma therapy products, and perfumes.

Forests have greatly benefited as well. Heightened awareness of the value of forests has resulted in a decline in forest degradation and deforestation in project areas. The organization's impact tracking system shows that its enterprise-oriented programs have brought 127,000 hectares of forest and meadow areas under the improved management of 663 CFUGs.

Bhishma Subedi, Executive Director, expects positive impacts to continue in the coming years; all the 'lead firms' have developed a long-term vision to continue their business, with action plans for the next five years.

Sustained efforts

Today, ANSAB is widely recognized for its expertise in community-based sustainable forest management including use and marketing of forest products, especially non-timber forest products, both at the national and international level. The organization is consulted by groups from around the globe and has several demonstration sites which are regularly visited by international experts. ANSAB has assisted in designing projects in other countries, such as Bhutan, Laos, South Africa and India. Following the GDN



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Bhishma Subedi, Executive Director, Asia Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bioresources, Nepal

award, ANSAB has gone on to win awards from other organizations; one of their CFUGs was selected as the finalist for the Equator Prize in 2017. Subedi himself became the first ‘Champion of the Asia Pacific Forests’, an FAO award that recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions to forest management in the region. “This was a surprise and a great honor for me”, explains Subedi.

ANSAB can claim several policy successes within Nepal, having worked together on several occasions with the Ministries of Agriculture, and Forests and Soil Conservation to include incentives for grassroot action in their development plans. Their approach to community sub-groups, for example, has been adopted

by the government, making it easier for communities to organize themselves in forest management bodies and benefit from the sustainable use of forests. In addition, ANSAB has taken on a facilitating role, connecting government officials, communities, scientists and private sector organizations. As Subedi explains: “A lot of stakeholders come to us since we are a neutral third party. We bring them all together and present the issues and evidence-based facts to generate an effective policy forming process.”

Recognition

Subedi says that above all, the GDN funding provided an invaluable recognition of ANSAB’s approach and

gave them the confidence to continue in their line of work – enabling people to take ownership of their own challenges: “We focus on those people that show the ability to change and help them to solve their own problems so that they can help others in their turn. It is hard to realize that you yourself are part of the problem, but once a person takes on this responsibility, we have seen it helps them to grow and not only become their own driver out of poverty, but contribute to sustainable development, balancing overall environmental, social and economic concerns.”

By supporting ANSAB, GDN has helped to promote community self-governance and the sustainable use of natural resources as a solution to environmental degradation and marginalization of communities. ANSAB has lived up to the potential recognized by GDN – successfully developing an approach that benefits the poor in developing and transition countries.

This is one of nine stories produced in partnership with Aidenvironment to document the outcomes of GDN's awards and medals program, generously supported by the Government of Japan, the World Bank for implementation and a host of donors over the years for the medals.

About the Global Development Awards Competition

The Global Development Awards Competition is an award scheme that identifies talent, supports the career advancement of researchers in developing countries, and funds innovative social development projects, implemented by NGOs, to benefit marginalized groups in the developing world. Since its inception in 2001, the competition has supported more than 340 individuals, research organizations and NGOs with roughly US\$3.8 million worth of awards, placing it as one of the most important global competitions targeting development and research. It currently has three categories of awards: Japanese Award for Outstanding Research on Development (ORD), Japanese Award for Most Innovative Development Project (MIDP), and Japan Social Development Fund Award (JSDF). The Medals for Research on Development (MRD), funded every year by a

Award

Japanese Award for Most Innovative Development Project, 2008

Sources

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Interviewees

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Images

From first to last:

A Wintegreen distillation unit in Dolakha, Nepal, ANSAB.

Women harvesting Wintergreen leaves from FSC-certified forest for selling to the distillation unit in Dolakha, ANSAB.

Representational photo, Pexels.

Representational photo, Pixabay.

different pool of donors, were discontinued in 2015. Over the years, the competition has built a community of excellence among researchers and development practitioners. The Global Development Awards Competition receives annual funding from the Ministry of Finance, Government of Japan. The World Bank manages the trust fund that makes these activities possible.

About GDN

The Global Development Network (GDN) is a public international organization that supports high quality, policy-oriented, social science research in developing and transition countries, to promote better lives. It supports researchers with financial resources, global networking, access to information, training, peer review and mentoring. GDN acts on the premise that better research leads to more informed policies and better, more inclusive development. Through its global platform, GDN connects social science researchers with policymakers and development stakeholders across the world. Founded in 1999, GDN is currently headquartered in New Delhi.

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