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Building a Resilient Churia Region in Nepal (BRCRN) Project



Introduction

The project “Building a Resilient Churia Region in Nepal (BRCRN)” is being funded by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) through a joint agreement between Food and Agriculture Organization the United Nations (FAO), and the Government of Nepal (GoN). The project started on May 12, 2020, and is being implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Forests and Environment (MoFE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization to build a resilient Churia Region in the eastern part of Nepal.

The FAO, as the nominated accredited entity and co-executing entity with the Ministry of Forests and Environment, was awarded the BRCRN project by the Green Climate Fund. The project aims to promote the widespread adoption of climate-resilient land-use practices, tackle deforestation and forest degradation challenges, better maintain the forest ecosystem in the Churia hills, and build resilience to climate-induced hazards. The Government of Nepal, through the Ministry of Forests and Environment, is implementing the project with the technical support from the FAO.

BRCRN focuses on 26 river systems located in the vulnerable Central and Eastern Churia Terai-Madhesh region of Nepal. The project area covers a total of 702,011 hectares, excluding settlements and waterbodies. Out of this area, around 390,000 hectares is cultivated land, followed by forests with 227,276 hectares, of which 50,000 hectares are considered degraded or marginal land. Over 35,000 hectares of open riverbeds are impacted by sedimentation and widening, leading to dramatic changes and loss of productive land.

To address these issues, BRCRN utilizes Climate Resilient Land Use Planning (CR-LUP) through map-based spatial planning methods. The project aims to engage a wider range of stakeholders and the local communities in intervention planning at the river system level. Local and provincial stakeholders lead the intervention planning process, using satellite imagery and GIS-based maps, and reviewing information on river system connectivity, hydrology, land degradation, drainage, climate, and disaster risk reduction (DRR) aspects. Field verifications are then conducted to demarcate and map out interventions that help restore ecosystems and build climate resilience in the Chure, Bhavar, and Tarai-Madhesh regions.

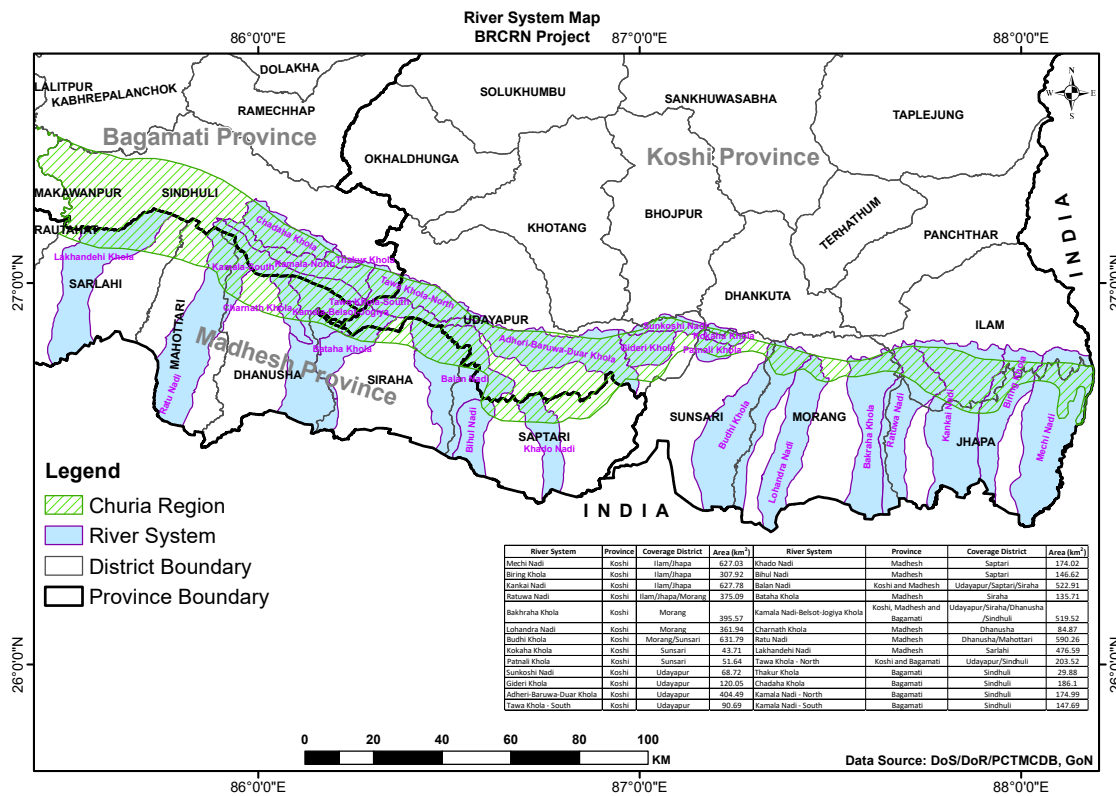


Photo 1: Map of 26 River Systems Covered by BCRN Project

Stakeholders Validates Critical Ecosystem Restoration Plan (CERP)

The Critical Ecosystem Restoration Plans (CERPs) for 26 river systems of the Churia region have been validated by stakeholders. The development process involved extensive exercises such as identifying problems and solutions at the river system level (upstream, midstream, and downstream), verification of CERPs through 11 expert planning workshops, and validation of CERPs at the provincial level viz. in Madhesh Province covering eight river systems, Bagmati Province covering five river systems, and Koshi Province covering 13 river systems. The project engaged a total of 2,848 participants, of which 1,189 were women, in 133 events. Government officials including representatives from Division Forest Offices, Provincial Forest Directorates, Provincial Agriculture Ministries, Agriculture Knowledge Center, Soil Conservation and Watershed Management Offices, local governments, experts, academia, scholars, forests related Ministries and indigenous people’s organizations participated in the verification and validation process of CERPs. Broad participation and collaboration in the planning and implementation of this project with the experts and stakeholders ensured the wider acceptance and ownership in the process of furthering CERPs.

Following the provincial-level verification and validation processes, the project organized a national-level validation workshop. Experts and stakeholders amidst a national-level workshop organized in Kathmandu on February 10th, 2023, validated CERPs under the BCRN project. The National Project Director of BCRN, Dr. Rajendra KC chaired the

event while the Chief Guest of the program was the Secretary of MoFE, Dr. Rewati Raman Paudel. Other special guests included the FAO Nepal Country Representative, Mr. Ken Shimizu, Ms. Bharati Pathak, President of Federation of community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) and Honorable Member of Bagmati province legislative assembly, and Dr. Kiran Paudyal of President Chure-Tarai Madhesh Conservation Development Board (PCTMCDB). A representative from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development was also among the special guests.

During the workshop, Mr. Sushil Bhandari, Project Coordinator of Provincial Project Management Unit (PPMU) in Koshi Province, delivered the welcome remarks. Dr. Rajendra KC, National Project Director of the BCRN Project, introduced the project, its operation modalities, progress, and achievements. Dr. KC emphasized the project’s value in addressing climate change through adaptation and mitigation strategies and promoting resilience building in the Churia region landscape. He also highlighted the importance of collaborating with PCTMCDB and other like-minded organizations in the region to create greater connection and synergies at the Churia landscape level.

Arun Poudyal, Spatial Analysis and GIS Specialist from the BCRN Project, presented the CERP development processes. The presentation highlighted the consultation at the river system level to identify problems and local-level solutions in all 26 river systems, expert analysis workshops in all

11 districts, and provincial validation workshops in three provinces. Abdul Ansari, Climate Change and Land-use Planning specialist from the BCRN project, presented the consolidated comments and suggestions received during provincial level CERP validation. Mr. Ansari suggested possible solutions and mentioned that they incorporated all comments and inputs from experts in provincial validation workshops into the final draft of CERPs.

The presentations were followed by an open discussion where representatives from various government entities, experts, civil society leaders, and academicians made suggestions to make the project more need-based, meeting the needs of local people in these 26 river systems.



Photo 2: Participants of the National Level CERP Validation Workshop held in Lalitpur

Officials Emphasized Leveraging the Indigenous Knowledge and Their Meaningful Participation

The project organized a national level sharing workshop on “Disseminating Lessons Learned through Strengthening Institutional Capacity Building of Indigenous People Organizations” in Kathmandu. The workshop aimed at training indigenous peoples’ organization (IPOs) focused on raising awareness about climate change and its adverse impacts and contribution of indigenous peoples in sustainable natural resource management. The workshop was a follow-up event to the previous trainings and the participants shared the consolidated lessons, explicitly emphasizing the vital role of indigenous people in sustainable natural resource management.

During the workshop, the presenters shared lessons learned and recommendations gathered from similar events held at 11 BCRN Project districts and three provinces involving IPOs and representatives from 113 municipalities. The workshops held at district and provincial levels focused on gathering recommendations from the participants regarding how BCRN can bring greater impact, what the government and BCRN project need to do, and how indigenous peoples can contribute to the optimum

achievement of the project’s objectives. The best practices, lessons learned, and challenges collected during the district and provincial events focused on inclusive and rights-based approach in project implementation. The presenters shared consolidated lessons, challenges, and recommendations with high-level officials at the national level. The presentation also highlighted best practices, including implementing Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework (IPPF) and free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) procedures for indigenous people after their enhanced understanding of these following the series of capacity strengthening trainings conducted.

FAO Nepal Country Representative, Mr. Ken Shimizu, congratulated the Government of Nepal on successfully organizing the workshop. He expressed his gratitude to the leadership of the Government of Nepal and MoFE for leading the implementation of this flagship project. He also committed to offering technical assistance from FAO to make the project successful. The Chair of PCTMDB appreciated the project model of extended partnership with like-minded entities. MoFE Secretary, Dr. Rewati Raman Paudel, emphasized the need for livelihood diversification to support the people. Wrapping up the program, the National Program Director expressed his commitment to include the important suggestions and recommendations in CERP.



Photo 3: Dr. Rajendra KC, NPD, BCRN Project Addressing the Participants

Ms. Reshma Majhi, a training facilitator for the IPOs, made a presentation on “Orientation and Capacity Building of IPOs” and Mr. Dhana Bahadur Gurung presented on “Recommendations, Learning, and Sharing from Provincial Workshops”. Additionally, Mr. Tunga Rai, Climate Change Partnership Program, Director, (NEFIN), presented on “Relevance and Importance of Partnership between BCRN and Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN)”.

The national level workshop was chaired by Dr. Rajendra KC, NPD of BCRN and the Chief Guest was Secretary of MoFE, Dr. Rewati Raman Paudel. Other participants included high-level officials from Ministry of Forests and

Environment, PCTMCDB, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM), NEFIN, FECOFUN, Association of Collaborative Forest Users, Nepal (ACOFUN) and Himawanti Nepal. In his speech, Chief Guest Dr. Paudel emphasized the need to address the concerns raised by indigenous communities for swift project implementation. In his concluding remarks, Dr. Rajendra KC urged all stakeholders to ensure the meaningful engagement of indigenous communities and expressed his commitment to offer policy level support for conducting activities that safeguard the livelihoods and environment of targeted communities.

Sharing the Lessons Learned Paves the Way to Mainstream IPOs in Project Implementation

NEFIN, under the Building a Resilient Churia Region in Nepal (BRCRN) project, organized provincial-level lesson sharing sessions in Hetauda, Nepal, on March 3, 2023. During the sharing session, participants shared the lessons learned from the institutional capacity building of IPOs conducted in three provinces, eleven districts, and 113 local levels from December 2021 to February 2023. The event discussed best practices, lessons learned, and challenges. The shared best practices include that indigenous peoples are now comfortable administering Indigenous Peoples Plan (IPP) and FPIC procedures and building consensus during the consultations of IPP and CERP making procedures. DFOs/SFDOs emphasized that challenges include unmanaged settlements as an impediment and urged NEFIN to manage them. Another lesson shared was that traditional production of IPs at the household level should be promoted and marketed.

Bagmati Provincial Secretary Mr. Yajna Nath Dahal attended the event as the chief guest. During his speech, the Secretary expressed his commitment to cooperate with the BRCRN project by supporting from the Provincial Forest Ministry, including DFOs and SFDOs, to monitor and coordinate through PPCC. Other attendees, including Krishna Prasad Neupane, DFO Sindhuli, Ram Balak Yadav, BRCRN PPMU Coordinator Bagmati, Bala Ram Kandel, National Project Manager, BRCRN FAO-TA, and Vimal Magar, Secretary of the NEFIN, also made remarks to continue the best practices, fine-tune project implementation based on lessons learned and recommendations, and mitigate challenges.

Narrowing the Gaps between Right Holders and Duty Bearers

NEFIN conducted one-day capacity-building interaction workshops from 17-26 January 2023 in 10 venues across Koshi Province, Madhesh Province, and Bagmati Province. The workshops aimed at building the capacity of government officials from 113 project Palikas to create an enabling environment for indigenous people in local-level planning and resource mobilization and sensitize duty bearers and right holders to ensure indigenous peoples' rights. The workshops trained officials, including Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Planning Officers, Social Development Officers, Administrative Officers, Women and Children Cell Officers, Engineers, and Disaster Focal Persons, to enhance their institutional capacity to engage with the IPOs in the local-level planning processes, provide support to IPOs, and build close relationships between right holders and duty bearers. Among the 280 trained officials, 105 were women.

The workshop sessions were focused on raising awareness about climate change and its adverse impacts and the contribution of indigenous peoples to sustainable natural resource management. After the workshop, IPOs are expected to engage in constructive dialogue with the local governments for their rights, including for FPIC. Additionally, IPOs would be able to utilize the grievance redress mechanism at the local level, and municipalities would be able to incorporate IPOs' concerns in the local level planning and resource leveraging for sustainability. The key expected output of the workshop was to narrow down the gaps between the right holders and the duty bearers. This training also built an enabling environment for IPOs to negotiate their rights to protect their customary practices and preserve indigenous knowledge and skills.



PPPU Coordinator Under Secretary Mr. Sushil Bhandari addressing in Dharan, Koshi Province



Municipal Representatives in Capacity Building at Gaighat, Udayapur, Koshi Province

Capacity Strengthening of IPOs Empowers Them to Engage in Constructive Dialogue with Government Agencies

NEFIN conducted three-day trainings from January to November 2022 to build the capacity and raise awareness of IPOs in the BRCRN project areas. The trainings were held in 11 project districts and three provinces, namely Koshi Province 1, Madhesh Province, and Bagmati Province, covering the districts of Ilam, Jhapa, Udayapur, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sarlahi, and Sindhuli. The objective of the training was to increase awareness about climate change and its adverse impacts and the contribution of indigenous peoples in sustainable natural resource management.

The training also emphasized that participants should provide recommendations regarding how BRCRN could bring greater impact; what the government and BRCRN should do, and how indigenous peoples can contribute to the optimum achievement of the project's objectives. A total of 278 participants, including 134 women and 144 men, attended the training from 26 river systems located in 11 districts. The expected outcomes of the training were that IPOs could engage in constructive dialogue with government agencies at all levels on their rights, including FPIC, that IPOs could utilize grievance redress mechanisms at the federal, provincial, and local level, and that municipalities could incorporate IPOs' concerns in the local level planning and leverage resources for sustainability.



Photo 5: Participants of Capacity Building Training for IPOs at Dharan, Koshi Province



Photo 6: Gender Mainstreaming Workshop Inauguration Ceremony in Siraha District Attended by Mr. Bishal Ghimire, Provincial Forestry Secretary.

Capacity Building on Gender Mainstreaming Sets Momentum for Gender Inclusivity in Local Planning

The project organized capacity building workshops at national and provincial levels to mainstream gender into project implementation for project staff, government officials, and stakeholders. The officials from the ministries, departments, division forest office, BRCRN project, and civil society organizations (CSOs) who contribute directly to project implementation and monitoring activities participated in the sessions. A total of 83 participants, including 22 women, benefited from the capacity building sessions. This activity enhanced the participants' knowledge to readjust the gender action plan and created a common understanding of the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment in the BRCRN project.



Photo 7: Participant Sharing Her Experiences during the Training in Siraha

Women’s Empowerment and Leadership Development Promote Gender Equality in Sustainable Management of Natural Resources

During the last months of 2022, the project conducted capacity building for CBOs on women’s empowerment and leadership in sustainable management of natural resources. The project selected women executive members and committee members from CBOs to participate in the training. A total of 520 women, including executives and selected general members from 26 river systems, were trained in empowerment and leadership development. The training also identified 3-5 community champions from each river system to advocate for gender roles in sustainable management of natural resources.

Ensuring Social Inclusion & Safeguard through Environment and Social Management Plan (ESMP)

BRCRN is collaborating with two different service providers, SEEPORT and Youth Alliance for Environment (YAE), to develop ESMP for different river systems. The ESMP also includes Indigenous Peoples Plan (IPP) and Social Inclusion Management (SIMP), dedicated to Indigenous Peoples and marginalized communities, respectively. The drafting process for ESMP involved orientation, field assessment complying with the inception report, field level activities, and validation of reports. Key Informants Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were held in different settlements and river system level consultation workshops during the last week of December 2022 to February 2023. The respective collaborator’s draft reports will be reviewed and validated at the provincial and national level. Once the ESMP-IPP and SIMP are endorsed, they will be implemented in line with the CERP. The contract is expected to be completed by June 2023.

Enabling CBOs by Capacity Building on Risk Assessment and Management

The project is currently conducting capacity-building trainings for Community Based Organizations (CBOs). The aim is to strengthen the institutional capacity of the CBOs on FAO and GCF environmental and social safeguards frameworks, national and sub-national environmental and social (E & S) policies, social and environmental risk assessments, and management procedures for inclusive planning and sustainability. The training will enable the CBOs to develop environmental and social risk assessment and management plans in their annual planning activities. To accomplish this, Rupantaran Nepal has been mobilized for the assignment, and they have completed 30 training

sessions in several river systems. The training was designed based on the KII undertaken, and they have developed a systematic training framework to guide the event. Additionally, the service provider is producing training materials, including video documentaries and flip charts, to facilitate the understanding of CBO members. We expect to complete the task by May 2023.



Activity Highlights

The project completed a baseline survey in 2022, which captured the baseline value of impact, outcome, and output indicators at the river system and project level, enabling BRCRN to assign baseline value of CERP result indicators at the river system level. These baseline values will allow BRCRN to track progress at the river system and project level for further reporting and planning directed towards its results. The project sampled a total of 1,560 households to collect information about resilience capacity, knowledge, and practice of climate change adaptation in agriculture. Under this baseline survey, the project carried out intensive forest inventory using MoFE guidelines in 1,384 sample plots, comprising 992 plots in the forest area and 392 plots in other wooded land. Similarly, for the inventory of sedimentation, the project measured 59 samples from 59 gullies, comprising at least two samples from each river system.

To raise awareness of climate resilient sustainable management of natural resources through local schools, media, and intra-regional exchange, the project celebrated World Environment Day on 05 June. A short mobile video competition among secondary and higher secondary students from 18 participating schools was organized. The project identified three winners as youth champions who will be involved in promoting gender equality in sustainable management of natural resources in three provinces.

Similarly, to mark Chure Conservation Day on 16 June, the project organized an essay competition in Madhesh Province, which was participated by 62 university students. The project also supported a Chure Conservation talk program organized by Provincial Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Forest on 18 June 2022 in collaboration with MoITE, PCTMCDB, Save the Children, Mithila Wildlife Trust, and other local organizations. Hon. Minister, Industry, Tourism and Forest Ministry of Madhesh Province, PCTMCDB Chairperson and former board members, senior government officers, local leaders, and other key stakeholders participated in the talk program.

The project celebrated 16 days of activism against gender-based violence from 25 November to 10 December 2022.

The project organized a specific event in its community training program in Mirchaiya, Siraha district, on 8 November, 2022. The project provided an orientation about gender discrimination and gender-based violence and asked participants to draw their life journeys. Women participants reflected on their life stories and shared how gender inequality and violence affected their leadership role and performance. The participants identified the phases where they suffered gender-based discrimination and violence, their struggle, and its effect on their leadership in sustainable management of nature resource.

The project conducted a five-day provincial Training of Trainers (ToT) on Ecosystem Mapping and Land Monitoring using Geospatial Tools in Itahari, Koshi Province, from 17-22 October 2022. The training was designed to assist and empower provincial level government representatives to use spatial tools to improve governance institutions' performance in Climate Resilient Land Use Planning and improve skills and confidence in geospatial data and tools. The pre- and post-test results of the ToT showed an overall increase in participant knowledge level from 2 (basic) to 3 (moderate) in the Likert rank of 1-5. Due to the technical nature of the content, the participants requested follow-up refresher training. Hence, refresher training is planned for the coming years. Similarly, provincial level ToT is planned for Madhesh and Bagmati Province in 2023.



Photo 8: Beneficiaries of Churia Region Sharing Their Concerns

Beneficiaries Reached in 2022

In 2022, the project outreach to beneficiaries amounted to 4,321 (1,729 female) total; including 3,415 (1,485 female) CBOs members with 286 (8%) Dalits which is most disadvantage communities and 1372 (40%) Janajatis / indigenous peoples. The project engagement with youth population was around 53% (1,825 out of 3,425), who were from the CBOs. Similarly, the total government beneficiaries who participated in different events of the project were 513 (33 female), while 393 (211 female) represented from other stakeholder categories (such as FECOFUN, ACOFUN, HIMAWANTI, NEFIN etc.) as given below:

Beneficiaries Reached in 2022 (Gender wise)

	CBO Members/Users	Government Staffs	Other Stakeholders	Total
Male	1930	480	182	2592
Female	1485	33	211	1729
Total	3415	513	393	4321

Caste and ethnicity of CBO members

S. N	Caste/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
1	Dalits	286	8%
2	Indigenous nationalities	1372	40%
3	Brahmin/Chhetri	1086	32%
4	Madhesi	643	19%
5	Muslim	28	1%
	Total	3415	100%



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