



LinKS' Project Strategy

LinKS' overall goal is to promote the importance of local knowledge for food security and sustainable biodiversity management on local, institutional and policy levels. Through their activities and responsibilities, men and women have developed different expertise and knowledge regarding their natural resources, i.e. plant and animal species and their utilization for food security. LinKS aims to strengthen stakeholders' (extension services, researchers and development workers) position as intermediaries between the grass root level, researchers and policy makers and focuses on the important linkages between local knowledge systems, gender and agro-biodiversity in order to achieve food security through **three key activities: training, research and communication**.

Despite an increased recognition at international level, for a long time the importance of local knowledge systems and gender in agriculture has been neglected in policies and development programmes related to agriculture and natural resources management. Modern research, science and national policies even further undermine the capacities of local farming communities to sustain and manage agro-biodiversity and secure food production. In this context, contributions that bring farmers' perspectives and their practice and knowledge of biodiversity management into focus are important for a constructive policy dialogue on sustainable management of natural resources.

LinKS aims to promote stakeholders' ability to exchange local and scientific knowledge and identify ways in which they complement each other, to jointly identify the needs and solutions to farmers' perceived problems and constraints. To strengthen researchers and extension workers' capacity of collaborating with farmers in the field, education and training curricula should reflect the importance of gender sensitive participatory approaches and the linkage between local knowledge, sustainable biodiversity management and food security. Policy makers often make decisions that directly and indirectly influence local people's access and control over resources, and thus their livelihoods. Through an improved understanding of the opportunities, constraints and needs of the rural communities, they will be able to develop, guide and support mainstreaming processes of gender issues¹ and LK to achieve poverty alleviation and food security. Although primarily targeting and working with above mentioned stakeholders, LinKS ultimately hopes to reach the *rural communities* and improve their livelihoods through improved food security. LinKS aims to increase local farmers' recognition of the value of their local knowledge and the contribution they can make towards rural development, sustainable management of agro-biodiversity and food security. Such an enhanced understanding will also improve the communication and working relationships between rural people, extensionists and researchers.

The LinKS' project strategy has two underlying approaches, *gender* and *participation*, emphasized in all the main LinKS' activities, as explained below:

¹ Gender mainstreaming has been defined by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Agreed Conclusions, 1997/2 of 18 July 1997, as "*a strategy for making women's, as well as men's, concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality*".

I Training activity

Training and capacity building is one of the key activities through which LinKS aims to create awareness, tools and methods, enhance capacity, change attitudes of development practitioners and researchers about the value and importance of local knowledge:

- To improve *communication and working relationships* between rural people, extensionists and researchers, and achieve food security;
- To enhance the awareness and understanding of researchers, extension workers and change agents from key partner organizations on *the importance of women and men farmers' knowledge* on agro-biodiversity management and the linkages between gender, local knowledge, agro-biodiversity and food security;
- To enhance researchers, extension workers and change agents' capacity to apply *gender-sensitive participatory approaches* in their work to increase visibility of men and women farmers' knowledge on sustainable agro-biodiversity management;
- To create awareness among policy makers and change agents about the value of men and women farmers' knowledge by providing mechanisms for *sharing information*, exchange of ideas and experiences, and fostering linkages between people and institutions at all levels; and,
- To enhance the awareness and understanding of partner university staff and students on the *importance of men and women farmers' knowledge* on agro-biodiversity management and the linkages between gender, local knowledge, agro-biodiversity and food security.

LinKS organizes two different courses. One course has a strong conceptual focus, looking at the linkages between gender, agricultural biodiversity and LK (2-5 days). This course is targeting policy makers, researchers and extension workers. The second course is tool-oriented, focusing on the application of participatory and gender sensitive approaches (1-2 weeks), usually targeting extension workers and researchers.

II Research activity

LinKS' three major issues, **gender**, **local knowledge** and **agro-biodiversity**, are explored through research to develop a better understanding of how the issues are linked with each other, especially in relation to household food security. LinKS seeks to highlight the dynamics of agro-biodiversity management in the context of food security, especially the rapid loss of agro-biodiversity, and the different roles and responsibilities of rural men and women in the use and management of agro-biodiversity. LinKS' research methodology is gender sensitive, interdisciplinary, participation oriented and a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The project supports short and medium term research activities in:

- Local seed management;
- Local practices management of animal genetic resources;
- Local knowledge systems; and,
- HIV/AIDS.

The main characteristics of LinKS research activities are:

- LinKS collaborates closely with national research institutions;
- Rural communities are active partners in the research process; and,
- The research activity must lead to tangible benefits for the rural population after the activity is finalized.

Research should not simply exploit the local knowledge of the farmers, but start a communication and exchange process between farmers and researchers, extension workers and other stakeholders. Researchers and field staff must respect local culture and the customary rights of local communities, as well as relevant laws and regulations within the host countries. National and international obligations according to the Convention of Biological Diversity, and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources, and recommendations in the FAO Code

of Conduct on Genetic Resources Collection and Transfer, must be known and when relevant, be observed by the project.

III Communication activity

In order to promote the importance of LK for food security and sustainable development, communication is important to support a process to highlight, share and document rural men and women's knowledge and skills with regard to farming and sustainable management of biodiversity. Communication will contribute towards:

- raising awareness on the importance and linkage between local knowledge and sustainable biodiversity management through sharing information and experiences from the field;
- increasing men's and women's recognition of the value of their own local knowledge systems to strengthen their position as local food providers and managers of agro-biodiversity;
- the facilitation of an active involvement of and collaboration between different stakeholders; farmers, extension workers, researchers, development workers, consumers, local authorities and policy makers;
- developing and enhancing researchers', extension workers' and development workers' capacity to apply gender sensitive participatory approaches recognising and understanding the link between local knowledge, sustainable biodiversity management and food security; and,
- creating a network of stakeholders interested in the issues of local knowledge, biodiversity and gender.

The actual media of communication will depend on the target group, the community and available access to media sources.

Gender approach

LinKS seeks to raise awareness and mainstream gender² in policy and advocacy activities. Gender and gender analysis is an underlying principle in all research activities. *Gender analysis* is a systematic way of looking at the different impacts of development on women and men. The term *gender* refers to the social roles and relations between women and men in a given culture or location and stresses the importance of:

- gender-based differences in rural communities;
- the value of men and women's knowledge, skills and practices; and,
- supporting equitable agricultural policies to provide incentives for the sustainable use of genetic resources, especially through in-situ conservation.

LinKS aims to strengthen capacity in the application of gender-sensitive participatory approaches for research and community development initiatives, as well as to raise awareness and mainstream gender in policy and advocacy activities.

Participation approach

Active participation is necessary to allow for a more equitable development process. LinKS seeks to support, build on, and strengthen what rural people already know, have and do, in order to improve their livelihoods. This can only be achieved when rural people and stakeholders are actively working together and all parties involved are open to a continuous learning process, based on critical reflection and action. Disadvantaged stakeholders, mainly local people, need to be empowered to increase their level of knowledge, influence and control over their own livelihoods, including development initiatives affecting them. It is a process of equitable and active involvement of all stakeholders in the formulation, planning,

² *Gender mainstreaming* is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. (As defined by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Agreed Conclusions, 1997/2 of July 1997)

implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development activities. Participation for LinKS means:

- Supporting institutions and organizations to apply gender-sensitive participatory approaches in their research and extension activities;
- Involving local communities and strengthening their capacity to identify, analyze and communicate their perceived opportunities, needs and constraints to development workers, extension officers and policy makers; and,
- Creating a forum for learning, networking and sharing of information and knowledge systems through active participation of all stakeholders involved, including policy makers, development and extension workers, researchers and the rural communities.