**Let the locals lead: Empowering poor to manage tropical fruit tree diversity and adversity[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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**Abstract**

On-farm conservation efforts are sustainable only when local efforts are embedded within a wider context of government policies and programs on national and local level. A considerable gaps in knowledge exist how to consolidate local and individual efforts on the ground to the local and wider context of supportive policies and institutions. Roles of farmers as user, conserver, innovator and promoter are considered important for supporting evolutionary breeding and on-farm management of tropical fruit tree diversity. We tried to i) assess whether empowering community and local institutions helps to realise the dual goals of on-farm conservation and development (i.e. improving farmer livelihoods and income); ii) discuss key principles and practices that empower community and local institutions and iii) identify key indicators of efforts by empowered community and local institutions. We analysed experiences of a long term on-farm project, “Conservation and sustainable use of wild and tropical fruit tree diversity in India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand”. We found that community empowerment is the key driver to achieving both conservation and development. We have shown that this can be achieved by the process of community-based biodiversity management (CBM) approach -a set of principles and practices-by which communities enhance knowledge of local inter- and intraspecific diversity and improve traditional practices through continued engagement in platforms of social learning managed by leadership of community organizations. These platforms could use a set of good practices, tools and methods that engage both men and women, poor and rich in collective planning and learning and practicing. Here we illustrate some of those good practices of CBM approach that are essential for empowering communities, promote *in situ* - *ex situ* linkage and managing adversity by mobilizing available genetic resources and participatory fruit tree improvement (though simple selection and propagation). We put forward CBM as a key strategy to promote community resilience contributing to the conservation of plant genetic resources in general and tropical fruit genetic resources in particular.

**Key words:** On-farm conservation, tropical fruit tree biodiversity, empowerment, development, community biodiversity management, good practice

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