Title
How gender caste intersectionality drives the involvement of communities in rural development projects in central India

Background
There are wide arrays of projects in the development sector that aim to promote sustainable agriculture and improve farmer livelihoods. The interventions developed through these projects usually target economic or agronomic parameters such as crop yield, soil fertility or market access. It is assumed that the developed interventions will benefit the whole rural community. However, who benefits from such projects is often mediated by complex cultural and power relations that occur within the local context. In rural India such power relations are further strengthened due to the caste system. In India there is a strong reassertion of gender and cultural norms in the agriculture system where men are associated with technology or farming and women with home and food. This leads to advisory services, policy makers and even farming families themselves to associate farming to be a 'male' activity; resulting in decision making power or participation in farmer networks to be male dominant. Caste systems too can have a regulating effect on the women’s role in agricultural activities, further exacerbating the decision making and participation divide. There is a need to understand how gender and caste interact to influence representation of different actors in a community. Using such information in execution of development projects could play a crucial role in narrowing the power relations.

FiBL’s SysCom India project of has been running in the rural belt of Madhya Pradesh state in central India since 2007. This project aims to improve organic cotton production in the region and undertakes a wholistic approach focusing on different social and ecological aspects of cotton production. The master thesis will aim to understand the role that gender and caste intersectionality can play in involvement of different rural actors in the project.

The thesis will be conducted in collaboration with the Transdisciplinarity Lab of ETH Zurich and the Department of International Cooperation of FiBL.

Methods
Literature review; semi-structured interviews; focus-groups; possibly surveys

Contact
Akanksha Singh, akanksha.singh@fibl.org, +41 62 865 04 81

Expected start
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Field work
October – December