



**BIODIVERSITY
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects **Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus**

Half Year Report

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 2-3 pages** in length.

If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2024

Please note all projects that were active before 1 October 2024 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

Submit to: BCF-Reports@niras.com including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	DAREX008
Project title	Championing change: Living in harmony with wildlife in lowland Nepal
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal
Lead Organisation	Zoological Society of London
Partner(s)	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), Environment and Rural Development Centre (ENRUDEC), National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), Ujjyalo Nepal (UN)
Project leader	Katherine Secoy
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	October 2024 HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	N/A

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end of September).

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your M&E systems (are your indicators still relevant, can you report against any Standard Indicators, do your assumptions still hold true?). The guidance can be found on the resources page of the relevant fund website.

In the past 6 months, project activities have focussed upon institutionalising Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC)-related information flow among the project's community champions, nodal persons within Buffer Zone Management Committees (BZMC), and National Park authorities, to facilitate faster and coordinated responses to HWC incidents. Efforts have also focussed upon exploring and piloting appropriate HWC insurance mechanisms, strengthening community banks and livelihood groups comprising of marginalised and vulnerable households (HH), and reducing HWC in vulnerable communities through the implementation of mesh-wire fences, bio-fences, predator proof corrals (PPCs), and early warning systems (EWS). In the following 6 months, the project's focus will broaden to building the capacity of park management in wildlife handling and rescue, habitat management activities in three national parks, and biological surveys of tigers and prey bases. The progress made so far is briefly described below.

Baseline survey

The baseline household survey, initiated in Y1 to provide baseline findings from which to assess and evaluate changes in HWC incident occurrence, community perceptions of HWC, and community wellbeing, was completed in Y2. Surveys were conducted across 52 settlements within 20 Buffer Zone Users Committees (BZUCs) around Banke National Park (BaNP), Bardia National Park (BNP), and Shuklaphanta National Park (ShNP), with 4,391 HH sampled for the human well-being index survey, and 904 HH included in the human wildlife coexistence survey (Knowledge, Attitude, and Perception – KAP survey), including 609 HH from BaNP, BNP, and ShNP and 295 HH from 26 settlements around Chitwan National Park, Parsa National Park, Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, and Dhansua District. Data analysis is nearing completion to establish baseline values for the relevant project indicators, and a full baseline survey report will be shared as part of the Y2 Annual Report.

Output 1: Foundations set for upscaling HWCx

Human-Wildlife Coexistence (HWCx) champions have been recruited and mobilised for HWC data collection across project sites, with the information feeding into BZMC and PA management bodies (Indicator 1.2). One incident in ShNP showed the linkages between HWCx champions and wildlife rescue response teams, which demonstrated the need for timely information sharing to elicit prompt responses from wildlife response teams and therefore reduce the risk further serious incidents (**Annex 1**). A total of 360 champions (including 154 females) were trained in identifying wildlife behaviour (Activity 1.4.1) and the deployment of GSM enabled cameras (Activity 1.5.1). So far in Y2, HWCx champions and ZSL staff have delivered HWCx-related awareness-raising activities to 3,357 individuals (including to 1,745 Brahm, Chettri and Thakuri people, and 1,612 people from groups defined as vulnerable and marginalised; 976 Janjati; 9 Madhesi; 625 Dalits 2 Others), with 1,892 of these participants female. These events included drill programmes (Activity 1.6.3; 9 events), community events (Activity 1.6.1; 43 events), and school events (Activity 1.6.2; 30 events), helping beneficiaries to learn better behavioural practices for living alongside wildlife and minimising harm. Two stakeholder meetings (one each in BNP and ShNP) were completed to identify effective HWC mitigation tools, including physical barriers (mesh-wire fencing, gabion wall fence; electric fence, and grain storage houses), biological measures (bio-fences, removal of problematic animal, and habitat management), economic measures (support for alternative cash crops, immediate or quick relief fund, and financial compensation for HWC-victim families), and awareness raising events (**Annex 2**). Likewise, a national level stakeholders' meeting was conducted in BNP to discuss various species-specific HWC mitigation measures in the presence of DNPWC officials. The information obtained from these stakeholder meetings will

inform the HWC mitigation measures best practices guideline (Activity 1.2.3 and 1.5.4) to be developed in Y2. Experts have also initiated studies to investigate appropriate HWC insurance mechanisms for agriculture and livestock damage in the project site, which will continue throughout Y2.

Output 2: Livelihood investments to break cycle of poverty

As a part of the project's livelihood interventions, five new livelihood groups (LGs) were formed (involving 672 HHs inc. 333 Janjatis and 84 Dalits; a sample LG registration certificate is included in **Annex 3**) and four existing LGs were strengthened (out of 52 community banks/LGs, Indicator 2.2). In this reporting period, through the formation and strengthening of LGs, 749 HH were reached (10% out of total target of 7,000 HHs; Indicator 2.2). Likewise, out of total target of 3,000 HH reached from improved agricultural practices (Indicator 2.2.1), 553 HH (18% of the total) were reached through vegetable farming training (277 HH, Activity 2.3.3), training on integrated pest management (IPM) (137 HH, Activity 2.3.6); and multiple-use water system training (139 HH, Activity 2.3.7). Similarly, out of the total target of 4,000 HHs (Indicator 2.2.2), 245 HHs (6% of the total target) were reached through stall feeding training (148 HHs, Activity 2.5.3) and commercial livestock rearing training (97 HH, Activity 2.5.4). Throughout the rest of Y2, skill-based training will be imparted to the HWCx champion members and the project's strengthened LGs, and additional agriculture and livestock related livelihood training will be conducted.

Output 3: HWC mitigation investments for communities and BZUCs

Based on the knowledge generated in Y1 (Activity 3.1 and participatory HWC hotspot mapping, **Annex 4**), mitigation measures were implemented to reduce wildlife-induced damages and fatalities in the target settlements. By this reporting period, 1082 meters of mesh-wire fence, 81 community solar lights; eight EWS's, 46 PPCs and 3,480m of bio-fence have been installed, while 2500 wild-fruits in Buffer Zone Community Forests and alternative cash crops acting as deterrents to wildlife (ginger and turmeric in 2 ha agricultural land) have been planted, benefiting 2,215 HHs out of the intended target of 5,000 HH (Indicator 3.3). A particular focus of the project's HWC mitigation efforts is to promote bio-fencing as a nature-based solution to effectively reduce HWC, which will also provide resources for the community in future years.

Output 4: Mitigation of effects of linear infrastructure and habitat fragmentation on wildlife.

Stakeholder consultation workshops were completed in ShNP, where government officials from various departments (protected areas, roads, irrigation, and electricity) discussed the impact of linear infrastructure on biodiversity, and possible mitigation measures. During the workshop, a committee was formed to institute a co-design model to monitor the effectiveness of existing mitigation measures in the Mahakali – III Irrigation Canal and document best practice designs for wildlife-friendly linear infrastructure in future, by monitoring and assessing construction works as per designs and existing policies (**Annex 5**). A preliminary assessment on the use of crossings by wildlife was carried out in all seven overpasses built in the Mahakali – III irrigation canal via camera trapping exercises, which showed that crossings are used by wildlife including elephants (**Annex 6**, summary report). Based on the findings, an intensive methodology to assess the effectiveness of wildlife crossings over the irrigation canal and to identify potential measures for strengthening existing crossings on the Mahakali – III and Mahakali – II irrigation canals in ShNP is under development. A seven-day intensive training was completed for wildlife veterinary officials, wildlife technicians, and park front-line staff (game-scouts) on appropriate species-specific handling and care (38 individuals trained, including 5 females). To strengthen the post-rescue capacity of national park authorities, one new tiger holding enclosure in ShNP is under construction and an existing holding enclosure will be strengthened/repaired in BNP and BaNP. Jointly with park authorities, the behaviour of conflict tigers in enclosures has monitored throughout Y2 by CCTV cameras installed in YR1, and activity to be guided by ZSL's expert veterinarians. At present, there are five tigers in enclosures in BNP.

Output 5: Investment in PA habitat quality benefit wildlife.

A total of 109 frontline staff were trained in the use of conservation technologies (Activity 5.3.4); and 132 frontline PA staff have been trained to improve understanding of wildlife behaviours and signs (Activity 5.3.5). A tractor purchased in YR1 has been used for forest road maintenance in Y2 and will be used for grassland management later in Y2. Vehicles provided to BNP and ShNP in YR1 have been used for surveillance and monitoring activities inside the parks. Activities related to habitat management (grassland and waterholes) will commence in November as per the wildlife habitat management guideline of DNPWC.

Monitoring

Field monitoring by Programme Coordination Committee (PCC) members under the leadership of Deputy Director General of the DNPWC was carried out between 11 – 14 May 2024. During the monitoring visit, the monitoring team visited activities in BaNP, BNP, and ShNP. The major observation of the PCC related to how best to maintain the sustainability mobilisation of community banks after project end, and it was suggested to devise plans for facilitating the long-term sustainability of community banks. Three Project Management Unit meetings (one at each park) were also conducted to share the YR2 activity workplans, and park wardens led the monitoring of field activities implemented within each protected area.

Based on the achievement so far, the indicators and targets envisioned under output 1 to 5 seemed to be relevant and achievable. Assumptions mentioned in the log-frame still hold true. Further assessments on this will be made throughout Y2, and updates will be provided in the Y2 annual report.

Environmental and Social Safeguarding

Community level meetings were organized to sensitize the local community members and the indigenous people regarding the aspects of social and the environment safeguarding in the project activities and the existing grievance redress mechanism for the project. Altogether seven community level orientation meetings were conducted from 21st to 23rd July 2024 in Banke, Bardia and Shuklaphanta National Parks, where a total of 126 community representatives (inc. 110 females) participated.

Additional partner staff from ENRUDEC, NTNC and Ujjyalo Nepal completed environmental and social safeguarding meetings in July 2024, where environmental and social safeguarding at the community level was discussed. One finding from this meeting concerned the decreasing use of the grievance dropboxes as grievance redressal mechanisms, so ZSL and partner staff will discuss possible solutions for this.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The major challenge the project encountered during this reporting period was the frequent transfer of PA managers. However, regular communication and update sharing between ZSL, implementing partners and park authorities, and regular PMU meetings held throughout Y2, helped to foster common understanding among park management leadership on the objectives of the project, who in turn facilitated the implementation of the planned project activities.

3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with NIRAS:	No
Formal Change Request submitted:	No
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	No

Change Request reference if known: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

<p>4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)</p> <p>Actual spend:</p>	
<p>4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2025):</p> <p>Yes</p>	
<p>4c. If you expect and underspend, then you should consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.</p> <p>If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes to your project if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.</p> <p>NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.</p>	
<p>5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?</p>	
<p>No significant issues were identified at the time of reporting period.</p>	
<p>6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report. If your project was subject to an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment, please use this space to comment on any changes to international human rights risks, and to address any additional mitigations outlined in your offer letters. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.</p>	
<p>The comments raised in YR1 narrative report will be incorporated in YR2 narrative report as requested, which related to the exclusion of certain community members within the target communities, and the sources of the project's match funding.</p>	

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to any additional feedback (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	
For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	

Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	