



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

Half Year Report

Project reference	DAREX012
Project title	Scaling conservation of Himalayan plants and fungi through sustainable trade
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal
Lead Organisation	TRAFFIC
Partner(s)	TRAFFIC; ANSAB (Asia Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bioresources); FECOFUN (Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal); WWF India; University of Copenhagen; University of Oxford; Tribhuvan University; FairWild Foundation (FWF)
Project Leader	Anastasiya Timoshyna
Report date and number	HYR2 October 2025
Project website/blog/social media	Scaling conservation of Himalayan plants and fungi through sustainable trade

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed project implementation timetable.

Project implementation has progressed well. WWF India was formally contracted as a partner (August 2025), and the delayed activities are now underway. The project has continued to be managed day-to-day by Bryony Morgan (TRAFFIC), who visited partners in Kathmandu in June 2025 for coordination and planning purposes.

Implementation of activities in **Output 1 (Capacities and capabilities)** continued to be strong. In April 2025, ANSAB and FECOFUN held a three-day annual planning meeting in Surkhet (**Activity 1.1**; [REDACTED]). Y1 achievements were reviewed and thematic sessions on MEAL, communications, GESI, administration and finance held. Challenges discussed included the relatively low participation of women in some Y1 trainings, and the need for regular capacity enhancement of Local Resource Persons (LRPs). It was agreed to prioritize inclusion of women in upcoming community-level trainings, and to provide ongoing mentoring support to strengthen LRP performance. A detailed Y2 implementation plan was developed.

The first phase of **Activities 1.2, 1.3 and 1.5** was completed in Y1, although top-up training to field staff and LRPs (**1.3, 1.5**) was provided as part of other activities referenced below.

Roll-out of sustainable forest management trainings has begun to 350 Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) (**Activity 1.6**), which will ultimately encompass 20,000 harvesters. ANSAB developed a one-day curriculum and training programme ([REDACTED]). A one-day refresher training was held for nine forest officers and technicians (August 2025, also on Activity 1.9 subjects), to support LRPs in delivering the training. The roll-out has so far comprised 143 training events for 109 CFUGs: 4,287 people participated, 54% of which were female. This demonstrated that attempts to include more women are working, although ongoing effort is needed.

Preparation has begun for training of local enterprises on business skills (**Activity 1.9**). ANSAB designed a comprehensive four-day training curriculum and materials ([REDACTED]) and compiled an initial list of forest-based enterprises, using data from multiple sources. The list was refined based

on criteria such as business viability and scale, and as a result, 12–15 enterprises were selected from each of the 10 districts to participate.

ANSAB has communicated with the government authorities and prepared a preliminary list of participants for the trainings on international conventions, resource assessment, and sustainable trade issues in the next six months (**Activity 1.11**).

Good progress has also been made on activities in **Output 2** (Harvester livelihood benefits). The consultant team have completed their initial analysis of baseline data from the household survey, to be finalised in the next period (**Activity 2.1**). Initial findings indicate i) Medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) contribute approximately 30% of the total household cash income across 10 districts, with Bajhang, Dolpa, and Darchula showing the highest levels of dependence; (ii) Jatamansi is traded in the largest quantity, while Yarsagumba generates the highest value; and (iii) Over 90% of respondents reported a decline in the availability of wild MAPs. **Activity 2.2** is dependent on the Activity 3.1 outcomes (delayed, see below), and will shift to Y3/4.

ANSAB and FECOFUN have developed the documentation required for the harvester registration system (**Activity 2.4**). District FECOFUN teams will work with CFUGs to identify and register harvesters' details, as given in [REDACTED]. This process has now begun with 17 CFUGs in Dolpa and Jumla. Information will be compiled in a harvesters' database [REDACTED].

Technical and financial support was provided (**Activity 2.8**) to Himalayan Bio Trade Pvt. Ltd. (HBTL) to obtain FairWild certification of Spikenard oil, Kutki rhizome, and Seabuckthorn oil sourced from Humla and Jumla (certificate successfully issued in September 2025, [REDACTED]). Project also supported Annapurna Aroma Company Pvt. Ltd. to apply for FairWild certification of Spikenard, Valerian, and Juniper sourced from Humla, with audit scheduled for October 2025.

Most of activities in **Output 3** (Sustainable forest management) have progressed well, but some are delayed from the original timetable. Resource assessment is one of the flagship activities of the project. The resource inventory methodology (**Activity 3.1**) was drafted by ANSAB with support from Nepal's Forest Research and Training Centre (FRTC). Following two rounds of national expert review, a final draft guideline was prepared [REDACTED] and shared with international reviewers for feedback. Simultaneously, a team from ANSAB, FRTC, and the DFO-Jumla conducted a pilot assessment in Jumla in July-August 2025. Encompassing feedback, a working version of the methodology was prepared as the field inventory protocol. The final toolkit will be published later in Y2 and will continuously evolve.

To deliver the resource inventory (**Activity 3.2**) the Global Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies (GIIS) was engaged to prepare species distribution modelling maps, and National Statistics Office (NSO) for sample design. Nepal was divided into nine strata encompassing the distribution of the 10 targeted species: based on geography (East, Central, and West) and elevation zones (temperate (2,000–3,000 m), sub-alpine (3,000–4,000 m), and alpine (4,000–5,000 m)). A total of 1,171 sample plots were systematically laid out within these nine strata, with adjustments made for isolated and inaccessible plots. Software was developed for the entry of inventory data.

Permissions to conduct the inventory were received from Ministry of Forests and Environment, Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Provincial Forest Ministries (n=6), Division Forest offices of respective districts (n=7) and from Protected areas including national parks (n=3), conservation areas (n=3) and hunting reserves (n=1). 19 field teams were recruited to conduct the resource inventory and were trained through a two-day session in August 2025 on species identification, equipment handling, data collection and entry.

Fieldwork took place in September and October 2025. ANSAB's team provided 24-hour guidance, through a control centre in Kathmandu. Unfortunately, the fieldwork was disrupted by security concerns following the protests that took place in Kathmandu in September 2025, and safety and access issues resulting from a particularly heavy monsoon season. However, by the end of September 2025, a total of 238 plots were surveyed, mainly on high-altitude areas – the most challenging sites. Limited fieldwork will carry on in October 2025; however, the remaining resource inventory activities and budget need to be shifted to Y3.

Premature and overharvesting are among the major sustainability concerns for Himalayan MAPs. ANSAB held a series of meetings with Nepal's Department of Plant Resources (DPR) to plan collaborative research on sustainable harvesting practices, regeneration management, and domestication of Himalayan MAPs with high conservation and economic value (**Activity 3.4**). Collaboration targeted to 5 key species will include research in the framework of a DPR officer's

PhD degree at Tribhuvan University's Central Department of Botany. ANSAB and DPR will conclude a formal collaboration agreement, after which the DPR will submit a detailed research proposal, and ANSAB will establish permanent research plots.

Dialogues on issues affecting mountain forest communities (**Activity 3.6**) have been initiated during the "*Citizens and Science Conference for National Learning-Sharing and Building Partnerships for Snow Leopard Ecosystem Conservation and the Wellbeing of Mountain Communities*" organised by WWF Nepal in Kathmandu in June 2025. ANSAB presented their experience with NTFPs and introduced DAREX012. The event was attended by ~100 participants. Future collaborations were identified to enhance a coordinated response to mountain ecosystem conservation and the wellbeing of communities.

ANSAB provided technical support to DPR in the update of a non-detriment finding (NDF) report on *Nardostachys jatamansi* (**Activity 3.11**), submitted to the CITES Secretariat (August 2025, [REDACTED]). A further revision of the NDF is planned based on the results of the resource inventory.

Activities in **Output 4** (Sustainable value chains) have progressed well. The main delays are to the activities in India; however, inception and planning activities are now taking place. The project team have drafted the influence plan for the project, identifying stakeholders, methods of engagement, and communication tools needed.

Work has continued to undertake and publish trade analyses for NTFPs traded from Nepal to major consumer markets (**Activity 4.2**). The University of Copenhagen (UoC) is developing a book-length overview and synthesis of the state of trade and conservation of Nepalese MAPs. Two manuscripts are under development: on the volumes and values of trade in Nepal at the national level, and on assessing the sustainability of trade for high-altitude species. Two PhD projects (UoC and University of Tribhuvan) are also contributing to Activity 4.2.

The research project conducted by TRAFFIC and China Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine (CATCM) into the Chinese Market has delivered a draft report. The findings were reviewed in an expert meeting in September 2025, with a panel from China Wildlife Conservation Association, the Office of the Endangered Species Scientific Commission of China (CITES Scientific Authority), Institute of Medicinal Plant Development, Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, and China Chamber of Commerce ([REDACTED]). The report provides survey results from the main TCM markets in China and online trade monitoring and makes a series of recommendations. The final report will be released in Chinese in late 2025 and translated into English to guide the value chain mapping between Nepal and China.

Finally, research into value chains is also in development for India, with a research plan being elaborated and ToR for a consultancy drafted. Next planned engagement will be through the project stakeholder meeting and launch event (Delhi, January 2026).

Under **Activity 4.4**, the project team from University of Oxford and Greenhood Nepal continued to map out an extended Bayesian Belief Network (BBN) model for the trader and demand side, using literature and own knowledge. Drawing from trader and collector interviews in Y1, a list of more than 40 factors that impact the demand for medicinal plants have been identified. A draft BBN model has been produced that is now being tested and refined with stakeholders.

Under **Activity 4.9**, the project supported the president of Nepal Herbs and Herbal Products Association (NEHHPA) to connect with stakeholders in China, linking them with TRAFFIC China and CATCM during a visit to Beijing. In September 2025, further connections between Nepal and China were made through the first *Hong Kong International Traditional Chinese Medicine Expo* hosted by the Bauhinia Group, and the parallel "*Medicinal Resources Sustainability · Open Collaboration · Innovation*" Forum, co-hosted by the University of Hong Kong, CATCM, and TRAFFIC. The latter convened over 100 experts, industry leaders, and policymakers from mainland China, Hong Kong SAR, Vietnam, Nepal, and Malaysia, and included a range of expert speakers as well as a roundtable facilitated on sustainable sourcing issues. ANSAB presented on '*Sustainable Management of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants and Community Development in the Himalayas*' ([REDACTED]), sharing information on Nepali MAPs exported to China, and issues and challenges faced. A dedicated exhibition booth co-organized by TRAFFIC and CATCM showcased collaborative initiatives aimed at promoting the legal and sustainable sourcing of medicinal materials, including DAREX012.

An ongoing programme of meeting facilitation between prospective buyers and Nepali producers is underway (**Activity 4.10**). In April 2025, FWF exhibited at the annual *In-cosmetics* global trade

show in Amsterdam, which attracts over 1,000 representatives from the cosmetics and fragrance industry. FairWild provided stand space for Nepali exporter HBTL and facilitated meetings with buyers. FWF has provided facilitation support to a connection between Annapurna and a major American buyer, which began at the 2024 IFEAT trade show and has since developed into a potential new trading relationship. In anticipation of agreeing Annapurna as a supplier, representatives of the buyer planned to attend the supplier's certification audit, planned for mid-October. Due to the political unrest in Nepal, the visit has been postponed, but their desire to source FairWild-certified products from Annapurna remains. The participation at the 2025 IFEAT in September 2025 provided an opportunity to reinforce this relationship. Productive discussions were held with another Nepali operator interested in the FairWild certification.

To support engagement with the natural products industry, FWF produced a publication, available online and shared at industry events, aimed at sourcing managers introducing five of the project's key target species (■■■■).

The project has kept up a strong programme of communications (**Activity 4.11**), including publishing articles in the [Darwin Initiative newsletter](#), social media posts with news from the project (e.g. [here](#)), and industry-targeted communications (■■■■). A connection is developing with the CITES Secretariat in advance of World Wildlife Day (March 2026); a project photograph was used in the event press release, which will focus on sustainable MAPs trade.

Activities in **Output 5** are largely on track, with some delays in India. TRAFFIC has begun the policy framework assessment to identify trade and management barriers and opportunities (**Activity 5.1**). Progress towards establishment of a regional cross-agency multi-stakeholder forum (**Activity 5.3**) took a major step forward with the project's support to the "*International Workshop on Sustainable Utilization and Management of CITES-listed Medicinal and Aromatic Plants of the Himalayas*", jointly organized by Chongqing University, the Endangered Species Scientific Commission of the People's Republic of China (China's CITES Scientific Authority), and TRAFFIC in August 2025. The workshop brought together over 50 experts and scholars from 10 countries to exchange ideas and discuss strategies for conservation and sustainable use of Himalayan MAPs (including a range of project presentations, ■■■■). The workshop Summary and Recommendations (■■■■) call for continued regional coordination and action on Himalayan MAPs. The project plans to convene the next multi-stakeholder forum in Kathmandu in 2026.

A major barrier to sustainable trade from Nepal to China is the lack of Pest Risk Assessments (PRAs) for key MAPs. In consultation with Nepal's National Plant Protection Organization, ANSAB has begun the process to develop PRAs for prioritized species (**Activity 5.6**). A recruitment process is underway for an expert team to conduct pest surveys, which will be done during the post-harvest season (Y2) and growing season (Y3) for five target species.

The project is supporting the government of Nepal to participate in CITES processes (**Activity 5.11**). Financial support enabled two government officials – the Director General of DPR (Nepal's Scientific Authority for CITES-Flora) and Deputy Director General of Department of Forests and Soil Conservation (Nepal's Management Authority for CITES-Flora) – to participate in the Chongqing international workshop. Both officials gave presentations during the workshop. TRAFFIC is preparing for engagement at the CITES CoP20 and secured a side-event on sustainable trade in MAPs, to be co-delivered with Nepal and UK CITES authorities.

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 most notable issue in the past six months has been the government instability in Nepal. Student protests in Kathmandu in September 2025 were violently contained, with loss of life. The resulting unrest which broke out across Nepal led to the resignation of the prime minister. An interim prime minister is now in place, and an election is scheduled for March 2026.

Disruption due to the security situation combined with a particularly heavy monsoon season directly impacted the fieldwork for the resource inventory, the majority of which was expected to be completed in the 2025 field season. Survey progress was significantly delayed, and a change request will be submitted to shift budget to Y3 as a result. There is a narrow fieldwork window, as it must be conducted when plants are sufficiently mature, but before harvest starts.

The uncertainty over the political situation has also impacted other planned project activities. For example, the *Kathmandu Sustainability Forum* was originally planned for June 2026, but has now been postponed to a probable date in November 2026, to ensure it is not too close to elections. Industry engagement activities in Y1 Q4 have also been impacted; adaptations may include bringing Nepali stakeholders to the stakeholder meeting in India in January 2026, rather than bringing Indian stakeholders to Nepal as was originally planned for Y2.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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: N/A

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)

Actual spend:

[REDACTED]

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 2026)?

Yes

Estimated underspend:

[REDACTED]

4c. If you expect an underspend, then you should consider your project budget needs carefully.

A Financial Change Request is being developed.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

Not applicable.

6. Project risk management

6a. If your project has an Overseas Security and Justice assessment, please provide an update on any related risks, and any special conditions in your award paperwork if relevant for your project.

Not applicable. A copy of the latest project risk register has been submitted.

[REDACTED]

7. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent Annual Report. As a reminder, all projects that were scored as 'Not Yet Sensitive' in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment of their latest Annual Report should demonstrate how they are meeting the minimum GESI-Sensitive standard.

The Y1 annual report review provided valuable feedback, the majority of which will be responded to in the Y2 annual report. We were asked to provide an update on roll-out of training on Safeguarding and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH), which should reach 100% of staff. At the time of reporting, we have made good progress towards this figure, with 95% of staff trained (70 of 74 staff) – an increase from 71% (50 of 70 people) reported in April 2025. In fact, the progress is more extensive than it would appear, as the main gap in coverage is the WWF India staff who were not included in the previous figures. In addition to expanding the number of staff trained, the depth of training has increased. Most staff have now completed the Safeguarding Essentials training course recommended by NIRAS (n=50), with bespoke trainings conducted in Nepali for FECOFUN staff (n=15) and selected ANSAB staff (n=2) where it was felt this would be more effective.

Safeguarding training will continue in Y2, and field implementation of the safeguarding protocols is also taking place. Safeguarding is being covered as part of the roll-out of the trainings to CFUGs, and a dedicated training for the network of LRPs is also planned.

Checklist for submission

Have you responded to **feedback from your latest Annual Report Review**? You should respond in section 6, and annexe other requested materials as appropriate.

Have you reported against the most **up to date information for your project**?

Have you **clearly highlighted any confidential information** within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?

Include your **project reference** in the subject line of submission email.

Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com

Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.