

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

Half Year Report

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

Project reference	29-011
Project title	Terai Arc: Community stewardship to secure wildlife corridors and livelihoods
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal
Lead Organisation	Zoological Society of London
Partner(s)	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), Parsa National Park (PNP) and Mithila Wildlife Trust (MWT)
Project leader	<i>Ms. Monica Wrobel/Mr. Bishnu Prasad Thapaliya</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR3, 31st October 2024</i>
Project website/blog/social media	

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).

The project operates in the northern buffer zone of Parsa National Park (PNP) and aims to secure connectivity between the protected areas and northern Shivalik hills using a corridor of community-managed forests. It addresses human-wildlife conflict, promotes diversified livelihoods, and enhances agroforestry. The gender distribution across the activities carried out during this period captured 55% representation of women and 75.5% representation from community people belonging to indigenous and marginalized group reflecting the organization's dedication to empowering underrepresented groups. This half year progress report, covering period of April to September 2024, outlines solid progress across all project outputs.

Output 1 Joint participatory management framework for North-East Parsa community-forest corridor is established.

The plantation program was implemented in four strategically chosen locations within the Northern Buffer Zone Corridor of Parsa National Park. These sites were selected to restore the degraded forest corridor, which connects Parsa National Park with the Northern Siwaliks and Eastern Terai Forest. A total of 10,300 native seedlings and saplings were planted, aiming to reestablish the forest corridor, promoting safe wildlife movement, enhancing biodiversity, and improving ecosystem services. The initiative successfully restored 26 hectares of degraded forest, focusing on enhancing corridor functionality by establishing connectivity that support sustainable forest management.

In addition to the plantation program, significant progress has been made in developing the Dhole Conservation Action Plan. Several consultation field visits were conducted at various stages to gather valuable information and feedback, helping to refine and strengthen the action plan. The plan has now reached an advanced stage and is ready to be submitted to the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) for final review and ZSL aims to secure its approval by the next quarter.

Output 2 Reduced short-term costs from HWC, and long-term plan to manage future HWC pressures in corridors, enable communities to receive net benefits from their community-forest corridor.

With an objective to strengthen the existing capacity as "Human-Wildlife Co-existence Champions" (HWCx) on managing human-wildlife conflict and mitigating it at the community level, 47 HWCx (M:38, F:9, indigenous people 81%) were trained on wildlife conservation and HWC during this quarter.

Similarly, ZSL have drafted a manuscript, which compiles key findings on the frequency, causes, and impacts of HWC within the PNP, as well as the responses of affected communities and the wildlife involved. The manuscript highlights crucial lessons learned from these years of monitoring and management efforts, contributing to the broader understanding of HWC in protected areas. The manuscript will be submitted for peer-reviewed journal publication, aiming to share these valuable insights with the scientific community and inform future conservation strategies.

Output 3 Diversified livelihoods for the most marginalized community members provide a direct revenue stream from the protected area, ensuring that precarious households equitably benefit from the corridor and are not forced into the overuse of natural resources.

On 16 June 2024 and 16 September 2024, a three-day training on off farm vegetable farming was provided to the member of Janahit women's Income generation sub-committee (JWIGC) at Manahari-1, Goganpani, Lokhit BZUC and Makhamali Women Income generation sub-committee (MWIGC) of Manahari BZUC). These two events of the trainings benefited 58 individuals (including M:12, F:46, 81% from indigenous and marginalized group. The pre-test and post-test conducted at both the events increased the participants knowledge by 38% and 89% respectively on integrated pest management (IPM) strategies and disease prevention methods tailored for off-season crops, knowledge in crop selection, cultivation techniques, and management practices specific to off-seasonal conditions.

A total of NPR 24,00,000 (equivalent to £114,117) has been mobilized in this reporting period (Surakhsya Women Income generation sub-committee (SWIGC): NPR 665,000 (£3,911), JWIGC: NPR: 820,000 (£4,823) and MWIGC: NPR 915,000 (£5,382) benefitting 51 additional members all belonging to women, 84% indigenous and marginalized group. As the project nears its phase-out, the project team has prioritized capacity building to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of cooperative management among the community members. This targeted approach allowed for the tailoring of content to address the challenges and opportunities faced by the executive members of the cooperatives. In total, 33 executive members from the MWIGC and JWIGC participated in the cooperative education and institutional strengthening training (M:10, F:23, 79% indigenous and marginalized group).

Two hospitality training events were conducted to 24 community members of Manahari BZUC (9), Lokhit BZUC (5) and Amleshwor BZUC (10). Out of which, 11 participants were female and 66% belonging to indigenous and marginalized group. Among these, training at Amleshwor BZUC benefitted the members of the homestay that is established by the project during Year 2. Both the event observed 48% increase in the knowledge after analysing pre and post-test responses of the participants. In addition to the hospitality trainings, tourism promotion workshop was also held during this reporting period engaging 67 stakeholders around the PNP to unite key stakeholders, fostering collaboration between stakeholders to propel tourism thus creating a premier tourist destination.

The visitor information centre was established and equipped with information on Elephant at Hattisar in Amlekhgunj in PNP. This centre is thoughtfully equipped with comprehensive information about elephants, providing visitors with valuable insights into their biology, behaviour, and conservation needs. The visitors who visit the Elephant captivity centre will have the unique opportunity to deepen their understanding of these majestic creatures fostering a connection between the public and wildlife, while promoting responsible tourism and conservation efforts within the park.

Output 4 Enhanced agroforestry practices adopted throughout the community-forest corridor, laying foundations for long-term forestry revenues and sustainable corridor connectivity across Parsa National Park.

Two agroforestry training took place during this reporting benefiting 81 participants from Manahari and Lokhit BZUC (M:34, F: 47, 73% indigenous and marginalized group). Following the training, 900 fruit saplings (Mango, Lemon, Jack fruit) were also distributed.

Safeguard

As a part of the project, a series of training programs focusing on Environmental and Social Safeguarding were conducted in the three buffer zones of Parsa National Park reinforcing the Darwin Initiative safeguarding principles. The orientation programs equipped the local stakeholders and community members with the knowledge required to ensure that conservation and other social activities are conducted in a manner that respects the environment and the social context of the communities. Total of 80 participants (M: 37, F:43, 73% indigenous and marginalized group) were sensitized on the occasion.

Monitoring

A PMU was conducted in first quarter of this year i.e., 12 April 2024 to ensure the continued support and cooperation from park authorities for Year three of the project as well. The meeting discussed on the planned activities for Year three and agreed on the workplan for the implementation.

¹ £1: NPR 170

During this reporting time, monitoring of the field activities funded by Darwin Initiative was conducted by Social Welfare Council (SWC), a government institution for managing NGOs/INGOs in Nepal with an objective to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the project activities, identify areas of improvement, and provide recommendations for future enhancements. The monitoring visit involved a comprehensive review of project documentation, on-site observations, and interactions with project staff, beneficiaries, and stakeholders. Likewise, The Program Coordination Committee (PCC), headed by the Deputy Director General (DDG) of the Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), conducted a joint monitoring and field visit of ZSL Nepal's project in Parsa National Park (PNP) and the buffer zone communities on May 17-18, 2024. The joint monitoring team also visited buffer zone communities to assess project progress, engage with beneficiaries, identify challenges, and understand local needs for future program design.

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.

N/A

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 2024 – 30 September 2024)

Actual spend:

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)?

Yes No Estimated underspend:

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

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

Due to the limited number of operational plans scheduled for renewal this year and PNP's own available resources, it was suggested that our support for BZCF operational plan preparation should be redirected to other activities. This adjustment would impact our Year 3 target of preparing or revising five BZCF management plans. As a result, the project is considering revising the activity and reallocating efforts to similar initiatives that would still contribute to achieving the project outcomes. If necessary, a change request may be submitted by December 2024.

6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report.

N/A

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.	n/a
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	yes
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.	n/a
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	yes
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?	n/a
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	