

**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	30-005
Project title	Protection to Community Engagement: Managing Nepal's youngest transborder National Park
Country	Nepal
Lead Organisation	Zoological Society of London
Partner(s)	Environment and Rural Development Centre (ENRUDEC), National Trust for Nature Conservation Nepal (NTNC), Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC, Government of Nepal) and Banke National Park
Project leader	Dr Bhagawan Raj Dahal
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR2, 31 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).

Output 1: Livelihoods of 155 households in the project sites are improved (directly) through providing access to income strengthening opportunities, underpinned by support for mainstreaming nature-based tourism and strengthening of operation plans for buffer zone forests.

Following the community bank operation training at Ryang (N=36; 89% women, 92% indigenous and marginalized people) (*Annex 1.1*) and two trainings on book-keeping and accounting training organized for the members of two established women led community banks (*Annex 1.2*), seed fund of NPR 661440/£13890 was channelized to Fulbari Jibikoparjan Upasamiti (In English: Fulbari Livelihoods Subcommittee) at Hattidamar BZUC, Ryang (*Annex 1.3, 1.3.1*). Periodic meetings were carried with executives (81% women, 41% indigenous and marginalized group) of these groups to provide onsite coaching on the operation of community banks, good governance and channelization of fund to its member (*Annex 1.4*). As a result, 25 members (Milijuli Alternative Livelihood Group (ALG) in Rapti BZUC (n=18) and n=7, Fulbari ALG at Hattidamar Ghuyiyabari BZUC) accessed the soft loan from these two community banks totalling to NPR 774,000/£4,552) (*Annex 1.5*). Of these, 84 % are women and 68 % belong to indigenous and marginalized members. Including the members from Hattidamar Ghuyiyabari BZUC who accessed the soft loan, total of 47 members were trained on 7-day long business plan training (N=47; 85% women, 89% indigenous and marginalized members) assisting them to plan their business to the profitable and sustainable way (*Annex 1.6.1, 1.6.2*).

¹ £1= NPR 170

Further, recognizing thematic gaps such as tiger conservation measures and human wildlife mitigation actions in the operation plan of BZUC, one meeting in each of the two BZUC i.e., Rapti and Hattidamar Ghuiyabari BZUC were held. As a result, both the BZUC will now allocate resources to mitigate and respond HWC from their own source in the revised operational plan (*Annex 1.7*). Likewise in response to aiding the vulnerable members with especial focus to HWC victims, the project is working to establish education fund at School Management level. Various meetings have been carried out as a result guideline to mobilize the fund has been drafted and is under review (*Annex 1.8*). While practicing the promotion of agroforestry in the project site, 2900 fodder and fruits seedlings have been distributed to 118 HHs, of which 48 % belong to indigenous and marginalized group (*Annex 1.9.1, 1.9.2*).

Output 2: Improved management of grasslands and wetlands, and control of forest fires in priority areas within the core of the park, underpinned by strengthened understanding of the habitat requirements of key species (sambar deer, spotted deer) results in an increase in tiger prey species density.

In response to strengthening the BaNP's capacity in wildlife monitoring, three sets of GPS was handed over to the BaNP (*Annex 2.1*). Equipped with GPS units, BaNP can now collect more precise location data, monitor species distribution, and manage habitat use information critical for both biodiversity conservation and protection efforts. Since, habitat management requires frequent and timely intervention, tractor fitted with a front-end loader for habitat management was handed over to Banke National Park in the presence of Dr. Sindhu Dhungana, Director General of the DNPWC (*Annex 2.2*). This support has equipped BaNP with the required equipment to perform habitat management interventions, providing suitable habitat for the wildlife all-round the year. A fire risk mapping has been prepared in first year, and study on tiger presence in association with fire intensity is being analysed. A final report will be completed by the end of the year. Activities related to habitat management (grassland and waterholes) will commence in November as per the wildlife habitat management guideline of DNPWC.

Output 3: Reduced impact of human-wildlife conflict (HWC) in the project sites (total 1112 HHs/5170 people) through investments in livestock and crop safeguarding, underpinned by improved measures for the safety of people.

The project is continuously striving to reduce HWC in the project site. For this, total of 95 predator proof corals (PPC) were supported (47 PPC: Rapti BZUC and 48 PPC: Hattidamar Ghuiyabari BZUC) (*Annex 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.2a*). Among the household supported 38 % belonged to women and 65% belonged to indigenous and marginalized community). Similarly, 450 meter of mesh wire fencing has been erected around the community of Hattidamar Ghuiyabari BZUC at Bataule with the purpose of curbing the trespassing of the wildlife into the six-hectare agricultural field benefitting 23 households (*Annex 3.2.1, 3.2.2*). Whereas contract has been made with Rapti BZUC for construction of 1000-meter mesh wire fencing (*Annex 3.2.3*).

Further, to mitigate forest dependency and human-wildlife conflict, while also promoting the economic advancement of the community, total of 2900 seedlings of various native fodder species was distributed to 99 HHs (52 % indigenous and marginalized group) (*Annex 3.3*). To mitigate human-wildlife conflict and prevent wildlife from encroaching on the farmlands of the community, specifically in the Rapti, Dhakeri and Hattidamar Ghuiyabari BZUC areas, total of 1869 seedling non-palatable crops like lemon, and Sichuan pepper were distributed to 118 HHs (48 % indigenous and marginalized group) (*Annex 3.4*).

Output 4: Relationships between the park management and local people is improved through meaningful outreach programmes, underpinned by increased participation of two focal communities in conservation dialogues, and evidenced by community participation in intelligence gathering and community-based anti-poaching patrols.

Various stakeholders and community engagement events were carried out during this reporting period to increase the awareness among them to engage them in the sustainable biodiversity conservation efforts. On World Environment Day, discussion was held among the park authority, community based anti-poaching unit (CBPAU), Buffer Zone User Committee (BZUC) and other conservation partner organizations (*Annex 4.1.1*). Similarly on the occasion of Global Tiger Day, discussion program for ecotourism promotion was held among the Park authority, Hoteliers, Nature guide, BZUC, CBAPU and other stakeholders with active participation of 71 individuals (*Annex 4.1.2*). Taking human behaviour change as one of the best ways to mitigate HWC in the project community, 224 school going children (Male: 108; Female:116) were sensitized on Human wildlife coexistence (HWCx) (*Annex 4.1.3*). Similarly, total of 122 behavioural change events were conducted in 9 BZUCs, reaching 1,991 local people, including 1,390 males and 601 females, to motivate them towards human-wildlife coexistence (*Annex 4.1.4*).

For the effective mobilization of CBAPU in monitoring of illegal activities within buffer zone, through community patrolling, the project facilitated to support the two established CBAPU in the project site (*Annex 4.1.5*). The project also held the regular meeting with CBAPU to get informed about their activities and provide direction on monitoring illegal activities (*Annex 4.1.6*). 24 members from the various six buffer zone community forest user group (BZCF) of Rapti BZUC were trained on community forest management. The

event focused on imparting knowledge on fire suppression techniques and working mechanism of fire-fighting tools, silvicultural operation techniques for the sustainable management and utilization of its resources (*Annex 4.1.7*).

Moreover, in an effort to promoting tourism in BaNP, the documentary prepared during Year 1 has been broadcasted in the national TV channel, Avenues Khabar, at the time of drafting this report <https://youtu.be/DK6BgJZM5As> . As of 29 October 2024, 102 views have been reported.

Baseline:

The baseline household survey, initiated in Year One, was completed during this reporting period. This provides the project with baseline values for the socio-economic conditions of the project community, essential for evaluating the impact of interventions by project completion. The survey encompassed a census of 155 households targeted by the project (74 from Hattidamar-Ghuiyabari BZUC and 81 from Rapti BZUC), with 75% representing indigenous and marginalized community members. Additionally, site-specific baselines were established (*Full baseline report available upon request*) to assess the project’s impact at each location, enabling the team to evaluate how effectively site-specific issues were addressed (*Annex 4.2*). With this M&E plan within the M&E framework has also been updated accordingly.

Safeguard:

A day session on grievance mechanism with the members of Milijuli ALG at Rapti BZUC was carried out among the 19 members (73% women, 79% indigenous and marginalized group). The meeting informed the participants about the grievance mechanism, process of lodging the grievance, the redressal mechanism and their role in grievance redressal (*Annex 5.1*).

Monitoring:

Over the six month of period (April-September 2024), the project has worked towards enhancing the visibility of the project achievement at various level. The team shared its progress with Rapti Sonari Rural Municipality of Banke district and Kalimati Rural Municipality of Salyan district showcasing the transparency and accountability towards local government (*Annex 6.1.1, 6.1.2, 6.1.3, 6.1.4*). Two Project Management Unit (PMU) were held (*Annex 6.1.5, 6.1.6*) to inform align the project activities, receive consent from the park authority to execute the planned activities and implement the decision made by the Project Coordination Committee (PCC).

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 remoteness of the project site, Hattidamar-Ghuiyabari, presented significant logistical challenges that impacted the timely completion of planned activities till September 2024. This area, with limited infrastructure and challenging terrain and further exacerbated by the monsoon posed a challenge in transporting materials, mobilizing field teams, and coordinating with local stakeholders contributing to delays in project implementation.

Moreover, a late agreement between ZSL (Zoological Society of London) and ENRUDEC (Environment and Rural Development Center) further compounded the delay. The delay in formalizing this partnership meant that some activities scheduled for Year 2, Quarter 1 (Y2Q1), could not proceed as initially planned. Without a signed agreement in place, critical steps like fund disbursement, resource allocation, and mobilization of on-ground support were held up, creating a lag in the implementation timeline.

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

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

N/A

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

. This confidence is grounded in the fact that the bulk of our high-budget activities, including the Habitat management, Level 2 certification training, fencing, exposure visits are all slated for execution in the third and fourth quarters. The preparatory work of these activity has been already started.

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

Submitted separately in a word document format with this Half yearly report named as ***“30-005_Response to Reviewer Feedback_ZSL Nepal”***.

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.	YES
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.	YES
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.	