

Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Evidence: Annual Report

To be completed with reference to the “Project Reporting Information Note”:
(<https://iwt.challengefund.org.uk/resources/information-notes/>)

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 20 pages** in length, excluding annexes)

Submission Deadline: 30th April 2025

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IWT Challenge Fund (IWTCF) Project Information

Project reference	IWTEV020
Project title	Combatting Illegal Fishing: Designing Evidence-based Interventions in Gulf of Honduras
Country/ies	Belize, Guatemala, Honduras
Lead Organisation	Wildlife Conservation Society
Project partner(s)	Centro de Estudios Marinos (CEM), APROSARSTUN
IWTCF grant value	\$99,889 GBP
Start/end dates of project	August 1 st 2024- February 28 th 2026
Reporting period (e.g. April 2024-Mar 2025) and number (e.g. Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	August 2024 -March 2025 Annual Report 1
Project Leader name	Nicole Auil Gomez
Project website/blog/social media	N/A
Report author(s) and date	Yamira Novelo, Nicole Auil Gomez, Kurt Duchez April 30 th 2025

1. Project summary

The Gulf of Honduras (GoH), shared by Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras, is a marine biodiversity hotspot within the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System. Despite the establishment of regional collaboration platforms such as the Trinational Alliance for the Conservation of the Gulf of Honduras (TRIGO) and efforts by individual governments to regulate fishing, transboundary illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing remains widespread. This undermines marine conservation, food security, and the livelihoods of over two million people who depend on healthy reef systems.

Led by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Mesoamerica Program, this project aims to understand and address the behavioral and socio-economic drivers of illegal marine wildlife trade in the GoH. Drawing on WCS's global experience in combatting wildlife trafficking (CWT) through crime science, behavior analysis, and evidence-based interventions, the project will generate essential data to inform sustainable, locally accepted, and regionally coordinated CWT strategies.

The project focuses on the illegal extraction, trade, and cross-border movement of ecologically and commercially important marine species, including Queen Conch (CITES-listed), Caribbean

Spiny Lobster, Nassau and Goliath groupers (IUCN Critically Endangered/Vulnerable), Mutton and Cubera snappers (IUCN Near Threatened/Vulnerable), and sharks (including newly listed CITES Appendix II species).

These species are heavily exploited, particularly during spawning aggregations, and are trafficked across porous maritime borders. Illegal activities are often driven by poverty, rising operational costs, and limited economic alternatives, with some fishers increasingly resorting to criminal acts such as piracy.

Traditional enforcement approaches in Belize and the GoH have not sufficiently addressed the root causes of illegal fishing. This project fills a significant evidence gap by shifting focus from punitive responses to understanding the behavioral pathways, motivations, and socio-economic pressures that lead individuals to participate in illegal fishing and trade.

Key research and evidence-gathering components include literature review and stakeholder interviews to assess the current state of IUU fishing and the illegal supply chain. Community surveys in 18 coastal communities across the three countries (see Figure 1) to identify capabilities, opportunities, and motivations behind illegal fishing behavior. Development of a “journey map” of illegal fishers to better understand decision-making pathways and enablers. A comprehensive Threat Assessment Report, incorporating feedback from 100 community members and 30 sector experts. National stakeholder workshops to co-design targeted, effective CWT interventions.

By addressing the drivers of illegal fishing and developing co-designed, behaviour-informed interventions, the project aims to: i) Reduce illegal take of priority marine species; ii) Enable recovery of overexploited populations; iii) Enhance enforcement effectiveness through community-informed approaches; and Foster long-term sustainability of livelihoods tied to marine resources.

Fishing communities in southern Belize, Guatemala’s Caribbean coast, and northwestern Honduras are disproportionately affected by illegal fishing and declining fish stocks. These communities often lack sustainable economic alternatives and face hardship due to decreased enforcement and criminal activity, including piracy.

The project involves these communities directly in the research process, ensuring their voices shape future interventions. We will co-develop strategies that align with local realities, promote inclusive, community-based conservation and support alternative or supplementary livelihood pathways and reduce poverty, contributing to improved food security and economic resilience. To reach these aims WCS has gained support from APROSARSTUN (Guatemala), Centro de Estudios Marinos (Honduras), TRIGOH members and local community organizations.

The WCS Belize Country Director and team is overseeing operations, with support from the Regional CWT Coordinator. Technical leads from Guatemala and Honduras will coordinate with country partners, while monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) will be guided by WCS’s Regional Marine Coordinator and Assistant Country Director. Community engagement and survey protocols will follow WCS global safeguards standards, led by the Director for Rights and Communities.

The project is implemented across the Gulf of Honduras, encompassing key marine and coastal regions in: Southern Belize, the Atlantic coast of Guatemala and Northwestern Honduras. These areas are identified as critical sites for illegal fishing activity, trafficking routes, and vulnerable marine ecosystems.



Figure 1: Project area and target communities in the Gulf of Honduras.

2. Project stakeholders/partners

WCS Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, are formal partners in this project with Centro de Estudios Marinos (CEM) and APROSARSTUN sub-contractors responsible for project implementations in Honduras and Guatemala, respectively. WCS Guatemala and Honduras provides technical support to the sub-contracting partners. In the first year (Y1 August 2024-March 2025) WCS country teams worked with sub-contractors in formulating agreements on the implementation of the community survey, development of additional stakeholder list for engagement with government and community entities. The finalization of contracts with CEM and APROSARSTUN was a key milestone in Year 1.

WCS Belize Project Co-Manager Yamira Novelo Fuentes took the opportunity to provide a presentation in Honduras to members of the Trination Alliance for the Conservation of the Gulf of Honduras (TRIGO), as well as fishers' associations from Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras. The presentation aimed to bring awareness of this award detailing the project scope, background and objectives for the Gulf of Honduras.

WCS Country teams also worked on compilation of literature to develop the literature review (Activity 1). The WCS teams also began drafting and designing standardized community survey instrument (Activity 1.3). The design effort is also to include sub-contracting partners CEM and APROSARSTUN as they are more familiar with the communities in their respective countries. This is to ensure survey design approach includes the experts from each country to properly reach the goals of obtaining the necessary information to develop the Threat Assessment.

The primary challenge faced was the withdrawal of previous partner Fundación Mundo Azul-Guatemala, which necessitated finding an alternative partner for the project implementation in Guatemala. Furthermore, WCS's rigorous administrative and legal process in developing contract agreements to ensure minimal to no fiduciary and delivery risk presented prolonged completion of contracts with CEB and APROSARSTUN.

While sub-contracts were being developed with partners WCS Belize began engagement with community partners in two of the eight target communities to discuss the project, and obtaining information on the issues the project seeks to address. This engagement was critical to deepen our understanding of illegal fishing from the perspective of the fisheries in GoH who have firsthand experience.

WCS engaged with the former Deputy High Nicole Davidson at the British High Commission in Belize as well as email communication to Mr. Eduardo Smith the Ambassador's Advisor of Guatemala and Honduras based in Guatemala City, introducing the project objectives and key deliverables before the start of the project. The BHC to Belize left in October, and a briefing is pending with Acting High Commissioner Christine Rowlands.

In the second year (Y2) of the project we will further our engagement process with the target communities, fishers' associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the Fisheries Department in all three countries. This is to ensure these stakeholders can provide their perspective, recommendations and suggestions for development of key deliverables of threat assessment, and strategy for the GoH to ensure a holistic approach is reached. We will also further our engagement with our formal sub-contracting partners, CEM and APROSARSTUN, to continue implementation of project activities specifically in the implementation of Activities from 1.2-1.6, and activities 2.1-2.3.

3. Project progress

3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

Output 1: Threat Assessment created to understand the nature and extent of illegal fishing in the GoH.

Activity 1.1: Conduct a literature review of academic publications, grey literature and reports on illegal fishing in the GoH.

Since the inception of the project in August 2024, WCS team has gathered various literature (Annex 4) available from public sources and through requests to the Government of Belize. The WCS and Guatemala teams have also provided literature from the perspective of the Guatemala and Honduras activity. The literature review is in progress to provide an understanding of information gaps that may exist see *Annex 4 Literature Review list* for a compilation of resources attained from the region to develop the Literature Review for Activity 1.1.

In recent meeting with fishers' associations in Belize, WCS Belize team understood there have been recent surveys within the last year covering some of the target communities in the GoH areas of Dangriga Town, Riversdale settlement and Hopkins Village. Therefore, we will begin to seek the reports of those surveys from the relevant non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to compile with the literature we have previously obtained and review. Additionally, the recent signing of agreement with sub-contracting partners in Guatemala and Honduras will provide more holistic information as they begin to implementation of these activities in their country with the partners.

The literature review remains ongoing and continues to inform the design of expert interviews and survey instruments as it will provide information in further developing questions for expert interviews and meetings to fill the gaps it identifies. Further development of the community survey with fishers in all three countries and ultimately contribute information to the Threat Assessment [IWTCF-D13] report.

Activity 1.2: Interview local experts (government, academia, NGOs and local communities) in Belize, Guatemala and Honduras who have knowledge and/ or experience on illegal fishing in the region.

The WCS country teams collaboratively developed a preliminary standardized questionnaire to ensure consistency across all three countries to ensure similar questions are being asked to the varying experts across all three countries. This will be validated and tested with the partner organizations before implementation, planned to start in May. Additionally, obtain approval through WCS International Review Board and in Belize WCS must attain approval from the Institute of Social and Cultural Research.

The WCS Belize team begun meetings with local experts from two of the Fisheries association (Riversdale Fishers Association, Hopkins Fishers Association) to gather knowledge, experience and highlighting challenges and gaps of illegal fishing in the GoH. Initial two meetings (*Annex 4 Hopkins: 10 males, 2 females; Riversdale: 4 males, 5 females*) with the fishers have been conducted in person at the associations' requests and included other fishers as they were comfortable discussing the issues of illegal fishing as a group. The WCS Belize team is organizing virtual meetings with additional experts from the NGO and civil society communities in Punta Gorda and Placencia and the remaining fishers' association in Dangriga, Placencia, and Seine Bight Village as requested in Year two (Y2).

The WCS Guatemala team has held meetings with fishers to gather knowledge and experience and highlight the challenges and gaps of illegal fishing in the GoH. Initial meetings in person have been held in the communities of Barra Sarstún (20 persons), San Juan (27 persons). The WCS Guatemala team, in collaboration with the local NGO APROSARSTUN will be organizing additional meetings with experts and other fishing communities as the project progresses.

WCS Honduras team met with the representatives from the Fisheries Department (DIGEPESCA) to present the project and provide an initial briefing on its objectives. An initial approach was made with Coral Reef Alliance, which has been active in the area of Puerto Cortes and Omoa conducting socio-economic assessments with local fishers.

This project activity is ongoing and contributing to the Threat Assessment [IWTCF-D13] report, Output 1.

Activity 1.3: Design and standardize community survey instrument across the GoH countries using WCS and FAO social safeguards.

A draft community survey instrument is in progress as WCS Country team (Belize, Guatemala and Honduras) has begun designing questions for the instrument. Several rounds of meetings to discuss the implementation of the survey has occurred with the team to identify the target audience, social safeguards and necessary training requirement for implementers. The recent signing of sub-contractors CEM and APROSARSTUN, will include contributions from the organizations to ensure the instrument is reflective of each country's perspective and dynamics with the target communities.

3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

Output 1: Threat Assessment created to understand the nature and extend of illegal fishing in the GoH.

Good progress has been made on this output since the inception of this project, which began 5 months into year one (Y1, August 2024). The which initial progress has been focused on Output 1 as its activity's completion are dependent in executing the activities of Output 2 and 3. Progress since project inception has been positive, though ongoing, particularly in building the foundations for Outputs 2 and 3, with effort on obtaining information on the issues via literature reviews, identifying external stakeholders in all three countries for obtaining information; but also, for participation in workshops to later develop the strategy. Lastly developing agreements (sub-contracts) with CEM and APROSARSTUN for the designing and implementation of the survey.

Initial progress on the agreement was a challenge as an alternative was necessary to replace the initial sub-contracting partner Fundacion Mundo Azul. Rigorous WCS sub-contracting process with partners were also lengthier than expected, therefore signing of Agreement for both organizations occurred in March 2025. While good progress has been made towards output 1. With the agreements now finalized, subsequent activities are expected to progress more efficiently. other dependent activities will now progress at a faster pace.

Output 2 and 3 were developed to begin in Year 2 (Y2), it is expected with the progress Output 1 now incorporating subcontractors the completion of Outputs 2-3 will progress on time as indicated in the updated log frame in Annex 2 provided in change request of December 2024.

3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

The project is ongoing and making steady progress towards enhancing the understanding of illegal fishing in the GoH. The goal is to design holistic interventions that reduce poverty and protect threatened target species, while informing future efforts to combat illegal fishing.

At the start of the project, most information about illegal fishing in the GoH was anecdotal. However, data collected during Activities 1.1 and 1.2 has confirmed that illegal fishing remains a persistent threat, with some documentation already present in the literature. Preliminary meetings with experts have also highlighted that enforcement remains a significant challenge, primarily due to limited human and financial resources to equip enforcement officers with proper boats, light and equipment for night patrols. Furthermore, there is emerging evidence that the networks and processes related to production and sale of marine products, legal and illegal, may have evolved from earlier understandings of fishing in Belize territorial water and illegal sale in Guatemala and Honduras. Emerging information gathered in meetings in activity 1.2 have indicated fishing products are being processed in Guatemala and resold in Belize.

In Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras, various NGOs have implemented different strategies to address these threats. Notably, they have introduced alternative and supplementary livelihood initiatives aimed at reducing dependence on illegal fishing across all three countries. The ongoing collection of data, along with the implementation of community surveys, will continue to deepen our understanding of both IUU fishing and the effectiveness of previous interventions to combat this issue. Continued stakeholder engagement will also support the development of evidence-based, community-informed strategies, increasing the likelihood of long-term success.

We are confident that we will achieve the outcome by the end of the project in understanding the threat and designing interventions [IWTCF-D26] to produce the finalized Threat Assessment [IWTCF-D13], CWT Strategy for GoH [IWTCF-B05], Policy Brief and Journal article [IWTCF-D11] by the end of year two (Y2).

3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

Assumption 1: Key stakeholders from Belize, Honduras and Guatemala will actively participate and collaborate throughout the project. Their input and expertise will be crucial in developing effective interventions.

Comments: The assumption of full stakeholder participation has not held entirely true. While many of the stakeholders identified and engaged with have actively contributed valuable information and expressed a willingness to continue participating in the project, there have been some challenges.

The WCS lost the Fundacion Mundo Azul (FMA) as a partner in the early stages of the project. This occurred despite prior discussions, agreements to participate, and FMA's initial commitment to support the implementation of activities under Outputs 1 and 2 as a subcontractor. FMA no longer wished to pursue the agreement.

Additionally, recent communications with certain fishers' associations in Belize suggest that some fishers may be experiencing "survey fatigue" due to previous projects. This could affect their willingness to participate in the community survey and potentially hinder collaboration on Outputs 2, which relies heavily on stakeholder input to develop effective, holistic interventions.

In response to these challenges. Firstly, WCS has identified an alternative partner in Guatemala—APROSARSTUN—to replace FMA and support the implementation of activities under Outputs 1 and 2. Secondly, WCS will engage with fishers to identify organizations that have previously conducted surveys in the area. The aim is to gather existing data to support Outputs 1 and 2 while minimizing the burden on communities. Continued communication and engagement with stakeholders will be prioritized to keep them informed, foster trust, and maintain their interest and participation throughout the project.

Assumption 2: Sufficient and accurate data on the nature and extent of illegal fishing in the GoH will be available.

Comment: The assessment of this assumption is pending completion of activities under Output 1.

Assumption 3: The governments of Belize, Honduras and Guatemala will actively support, participate in, and endorse the project.

Comment: This assumption is still valid as Belize, Honduras and Guatemala governments have supported the initial implementation and project thus far. There has been no opposition presented during any meetings. In Belize, a national election took place in March 2025. While the former government party remained in power, and the past Minister with responsibility of the fishing sector remains the same, we will update him and his new Chief Executive Officer of the project to learn how data may be useful for their efforts to develop a national enforcement plan.

Assumption 4: There is a recognition among stakeholders and governments that illegal fishing contributes to poverty in the GoH.

Comment: The assessment of this assumption is pending completion of activities under Output 1.

Assumption 5: The brief produced will be well received by policymakers and other stakeholders.

Comment: The assessment of this assumption is pending completion of activities under Output 3.

4. Thematic focus

This project focuses on two thematic areas of the IWT Challenge Fund which are 3: Strengthening law enforcement and 4: Developing sustainable livelihoods to benefit people affected by IWT.

Theme 3 – Strengthening Law Enforcement:

Through stakeholder consultations, literature reviews, and data collection under Activities 1.1 and 1.2, the project has identified ongoing gaps in enforcement capacity across the Gulf of Honduras region. Preliminary findings suggest that resource limitations and evolving illegal trade networks hinder the effectiveness of enforcement mechanisms. The project is contributing to this theme by mapping enforcement challenges and engaging enforcement agencies and local experts to understand needs and inform future, context-appropriate support to resource managers and communities. This evidence-based approach is laying the groundwork for future capacity-building and policy-relevant recommendations.

Theme 4 – Developing Sustainable Livelihoods:

The project has documented some previous and ongoing alternative livelihood initiatives led by NGOs across Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras. Building on this, it seeks to enhance these efforts by identifying what has worked, where gaps exist, and how community-led initiatives can be scaled or replicated. Through planned community surveys and continued engagement with fishers and local organizations, the project aims to identify specific alternatives that have been successful within the communities to reduce dependency on illegal fishing activities.

Evidence and Progress:

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Most stakeholders have remained highly engaged and continue to contribute valuable insights. Although one initial subcontractor (FMA) withdrew, a new partner (APOSARSTUN) has been onboard to maintain momentum.
- **Community Dynamics:** The project is responding to concerns such as “survey fatigue” by identifying existing data from prior surveys and maintaining transparent communication with communities to ensure their continued interest and participation.
- **Information Gathering:** Evidence from expert interviews and literature reviews confirms the persistence of illegal fishing pressures and the need for coordinated locally informed interventions.

Notable Achievements This Year:

- Successful identification and onboarding of APOSARSTUN as an alternative implementation partner.

- Successful partnership with CEM.
- Continued progress of foundational activities (1.1 and 1.2), which have significantly advanced the understanding of enforcement challenges and livelihood alternatives in the GoH.
- Strengthened relationships with stakeholders across all three countries, laying a solid foundation for the co-development of Outputs 2 and 3.

Overall, the project remains well-aligned with the IWT Challenge Fund's objectives and continues to contribute meaningfully to reducing illegal wildlife trade pressures through evidence-based, community-driven solutions.

5. Impact on species in focus

The project is focused on addressing threats to key marine species affected by illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the GoH, particularly those species experiencing population declines due to overexploitation. These include commercially and ecologically important species of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster (*Panulirus argus*), Queen conch (*Lobatus gigas*), Nassau Grouper (*Epinephelus striatus*), Cubera Snapper (*Lutjanus cyanopterus*), Sharks (*Requiem* family, *Sphyrnidae*, *Alopias superciliosus*) that are vulnerable to unsustainable harvesting practices. The long-term objective is to reduce pressure on these species through improved enforcement, increased understanding of illegal fishing dynamics and the promotion of sustainable livelihood alternatives.

The progress of the project with activities 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 is gathering and providing information towards the project goals and objectives by identifying the drivers of illegal fishing and mapping the specific threats to the target species. Preliminary indication sustains the assumption illegal fishing continues to pose significant risk to the species listed, exacerbated by enforcement limitations and socio-economic dependency on marine resources. These insights support the achievement of Output 1, which relates to the identification and documentation of threats to the focal species.

Engagement with stakeholders has provided further evidence that gaps in enforcement and the limited availability of sustainable economic alternatives are contributing factors to continued illegal harvesting. Preliminary results suggest that fishers are aware of the decline in key species but often lack the means or incentives to adopt alternative practices. This reinforces the need for targeted interventions under Outputs 2 and 3, which will progress in Year 2 and will aim to reduce direct pressure on these species.

Since the initial application, there have been minor adjustments to the project's implementation strategy, particularly following the withdrawal of FMA as an implementing partner. WCS has since onboarded APOSARSTUN to support delivery of activities under Outputs 1 and 2, ensuring continuity of effort. Additionally, the project team is placing greater emphasis on integrating existing datasets from prior surveys and conservation initiatives. This strategic shift enhances the project's ability to build on existing knowledge and deliver more targeted interventions without overburdening local communities.

Although it is still early to report direct ecological impacts or observable changes in species populations, the groundwork established through data collection, stakeholder engagement, and baseline assessments is critical for measuring future impact. As the project progresses, planned community surveys and continuous monitoring will generate more detailed evidence on changes in fishing behavior, community perceptions, and resource use patterns. These will inform the development of sustainable, community-led solutions aimed at protecting focal species and achieving broader conservation goals.

6. Project support for multidimensional poverty reduction

This project contributes to poverty reduction by generating knowledge and strengthening stakeholder engagement to reduce illegal fishing, which threatens both biodiversity and the livelihoods of coastal communities in Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras. The evidence being

generated will contribute to the global knowledge base on the intersection of biodiversity conservation, illegal wildlife trade (IWT), and poverty—supporting the design of scalable, community-driven solutions that can be adapted and replicated in other regions.

The primary beneficiaries of this project are small-scale fishers and coastal communities across the tri-national Gulf of Honduras (Belize, Guatemala and Honduras) region who are directly impacted by IWT—in this case, illegal fishing. These communities often rely heavily on marine resources for income, food security, and cultural identity. However, overexploitation and illegal activities have led to resource depletion, increasing vulnerability, economic instability, and competition among fishers. By addressing illegal fishing and its underlying drivers, the project contributes to safeguarding both livelihoods and long-term food security. The project has actively engaged with local communities, fishers’ associations, and NGOs to ensure that evidence collection and future intervention planning align with community priorities and lived realities. Early consultations have revealed key concerns such as “survey fatigue,” enforcement challenges, and limited access to sustainable livelihood alternatives—insights which are shaping how Outputs 2 and 3 are being designed.

Although the current phase of the project focuses on data collection and stakeholder engagement, its design lays the foundation for both direct and indirect poverty reduction impacts. In the short term, direct benefits include improved coordination with enforcement bodies and support for patrol operations-through support of other project funding, which enhance personal and livelihood security for law-abiding fishers and marine rangers. Long-term, the project is expected to generate indirect but lasting poverty reduction impacts by supporting the development of evidence-based, community-informed interventions. These may include alternative or supplementary livelihoods, which could increase household incomes and reduce dependence on illegal activities. Additionally, by promoting ecosystem recovery and improved governance of marine resources, the project will help restore the natural capital that communities depend on for their well-being.

In summary, while the current phase of the project is focused on research and engagement, it has already begun to contribute to poverty reduction through improved enforcement collaboration and targeted data collection. Its long-term impact will be realized through evidence-informed interventions that support more sustainable livelihoods, equitable resource access, and healthier marine ecosystems for some of the region’s most vulnerable populations.

7. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

GESI Scale	Description	Put X where you think your project is on the scale
Not yet sensitive	The GESI context may have been considered but the project isn’t quite meeting the requirements of a ‘sensitive’ approach	
Sensitive	The GESI context has been considered and project activities take this into account in their design and implementation. The project addresses basic needs and vulnerabilities of women and marginalised groups and the project will not contribute to or create further inequalities.	X
Empowering	The project has all the characteristics of a ‘sensitive’ approach whilst also increasing equal access to assets, resources and capabilities for women and marginalised groups	
Transformative	The project has all the characteristics of an ‘empowering’ approach whilst also addressing unequal power relationships and seeking institutional and societal change	

The project currently meets the criteria for a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Sensitive approach. It has incorporated GESI considerations in both the design and implementation stages to ensure activities are inclusive, do not exacerbate existing inequalities and address the basic needs of women and marginalized groups.

WCS prior experience in working in the target communities ensured from the onset of the project that the social and cultural dynamics influencing access to marine resources, the influence of local norms on gender roles, and the environmental vulnerabilities that disproportionately impact marginalized communities were considered. To ensure women's perspective are considered, engagement efforts have focused on recognizing their roles in fishing, processing, selling and managing household income from marine resources. Meeting and consultations are tailored to ensure participation of women and other underrepresented groups, with adjustments made to the timing, location and provision of meals to facilitate their involvement.

Challenges in engaging women specifically have been minimal as WCS over the years have been pivotal in recognizing women and their roles in the marine sector. Our familiarity with the communities, the women and women groups place an advantage in ensuring their active participation and input into this project. While the project currently meets the criteria for a sensitive approach, future activities—particularly those focused on livelihoods and governance—will create opportunities to adopt more empowering strategies. This includes identifying interventions that improve equitable access to income-generating opportunities and strengthening women's voices in marine resource decision-making.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

WCS and its partners are primarily using the project's logical framework (log frame) as the central tool for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL). This framework guides activity tracking, progress measurement, and adaptive planning. Due to a late project start—stemming from a delayed grant notification—WCS submitted a formal Financial Change Request and adjusted the log frame to reflect a three-month shift in project activities and spending. This revised log frame was developed in consultation with the project team to ensure it remained realistic and aligned with achievable outcomes. A detailed work plan was also created, mapping the timeline for each activity, including start and end dates, responsible staff, and consideration of key risks and assumptions that may affect delivery.

Monthly coordination meetings are held to review progress, address challenges, and plan next steps, while the lead project implementer provides regular updates to the Country Director to ensure high-level oversight. These structures support the effective implementation of three core activities under Output 1: the literature review (Activity 1.1), expert interviews (Activity 1.2), and development of a standardized community survey instrument (Activity 1.3). Progress includes an ongoing literature review led by WCS Belize, expert interviews conducted across all three countries, and the collaborative design of the community survey instrument with input from sub-contracted partners (CEM and APROSARSTUN). Gender and social inclusion are integrated throughout, and the MEL system remains adaptive, allowing for ongoing learning and timely adjustments to support the production of a robust and regionally informed Threat Assessment [IWTCF-D13]

The M&E framework ensures that the project remains grounded in evidence, supports stakeholder accountability, and contributes meaningfully to the development of the Threat Assessment report [IWTCF-D13]. As the project progresses into Year 2, monitoring will continue to document the implementation process, support learning across countries, and guide the integration of findings into policy and enforcement strategies for marine resource protection in the GoH.

9. Lessons learnt

Over the past year, the project has demonstrated both strong progress and valuable learning opportunities across administrative, management, technical, and M&E areas. A key strength has been the collaboration between WCS teams across Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras, as well as with local partners such as CEM and APROSARSTUN. This cross-country coordination, particularly in aligning expert interviews and designing the community survey instrument, has helped ensure that tools and approaches are contextually relevant and regionally consistent.

Monthly internal check-ins and regular updates between project leads and the Country Director have also supported proactive problem-solving and accountability.

However, the delayed project starts due to late grant notification in the fiscal year created initial challenges in planning and implementation. The need to adjust timelines and budgets reflected in the submission of a Financial Change Request and an updated log frame—highlighted the importance of flexible planning tools and early internal consultation. The creation of a detailed work plan, which included timelines, responsible leads, assumptions, and risks, proved crucial in realigning the team and restoring momentum.

If we were to start the project again, we would prioritize building out contingency plans earlier and formalizing risk management processes to prepare for potential delays. Identifying and securing early engagement with key stakeholders—such as fishers’ associations and government partners—would help reduce response times and increase ownership of the work from the outset.

For similar projects working on transboundary marine issues in the region, we recommend beginning stakeholder consultations and contracting processes as early as possible. It is also critical to invest in harmonizing tools across countries to streamline data collection and analysis, especially when dealing with multi-partner collaboration.

These lessons are actively informing our approach moving forward. We will continue to use the updated log frame and work plan as living tools for adaptive management and maintain monthly check-ins as a space for reflection and planning. We are currently planning to submit another formal Change Request for the replacement of Fundacion Mundo Azul to APROSARSTUN as we have finalized agreement with the organization in March of 2025. We will continue to monitor implementation closely and remain open to further adjustments if necessary. Building this learning into future phases of the project will strengthen coordination, improve responsiveness, and support the successful delivery of all project outcomes.

10. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

Not Applicable

11. Risk Management

Risk we have encountered in this year is sub-awardee Fundacion Mundo Azul no longer wishing to pursue the agreement due to their reluctance to provide administrative information for the sub-recipient risk assessment; this was highlighted in the Half Year Report (HY1). This necessitated identifying a suitable alternative sub-awardee APROSARSTUN’s late partnership delayed some progress in Guatemala. This was our most challenging issue this year as the activities progressed at a slower pace than expected.

WCS anticipates some additional Risk in Year 2 as recent Belize news reports indicate some discontent with fishers in coastal communities in Guatemala over the protection of a reef system in the GoH (Cayman Crown Reef) and Guatemala Authorities withholding support for the reef protection bill. Consequently, our team anticipates moderate risk in reduced fisherfolk participation in the project in Guatemala, which can affect the progress of the project implementation in survey and participation in stakeholder workshop. WCS Guatemala and Belize will continue discussion and collaboration with stakeholders in the area to further understand the issue, adapt and adjust as necessary to ensure project progress and concerns of all stakeholders are kept priority.

Additional risk in Belize indicates fishers stating, “survey fatigue”, the team is adjusting to fishers’ lack of participation in these communities by obtaining the survey reports from the relevant organizations for use in the threat assessment. WCS will continue to have open dialogue with the fishers’ associations on their suggestions and recommendations for an inclusive process.

Monitoring of these risk will continue and addressed as needed, any risk that may escalate further will be reported.

12. Scalability and durability

This project has established a strong foundation for both scalability and long-term durability in addressing illegal fishing across the GoH. Through close collaboration with stakeholders—such as fishers' associations, national fisheries departments, and local NGOs like APROSARSTUN and CEM—WCS has raised awareness of the project's goals and fostered ownership at the community and institutional levels. This has increased interest in adopting project tools, such as the community survey instrument and the Threat Assessment, for broader use across the region.

WCS supports the Belize Fisheries Department in their management of two key marine protected areas in the GoH, aiming to strengthen enforcement in protected areas in GoH areas in Belize. This aligns closely with national and regional efforts and increases the chances of long-term institutional support. In parallel, WCS is also implementing supplementary livelihood projects in select communities within the GoH area through other funding sources. The current project is being used to build a deeper understanding of fishers' motivations in Belize, Guatemala and Honduras, that can better link conservation goals with tangible economic benefits, which enhances both communities' buy-in and sustainability.

Evidence suggests that project activities are attractive to potential adopters due to their practical design, local relevance, and collaborative development. Ongoing engagement with government partners in Honduras and national agencies in Belize and Guatemala has helped align project outputs with existing and emerging policies. This connection to national enforcement and planning processes enhances the likelihood that results will be sustained and scaled.

Behavioral and social change is also beginning to emerge. Community meetings and interviews have increased understanding of the impacts of illegal fishing and the benefits of sustainable practices. These shifts in attitudes are an important step toward lasting stewardship and compliance.

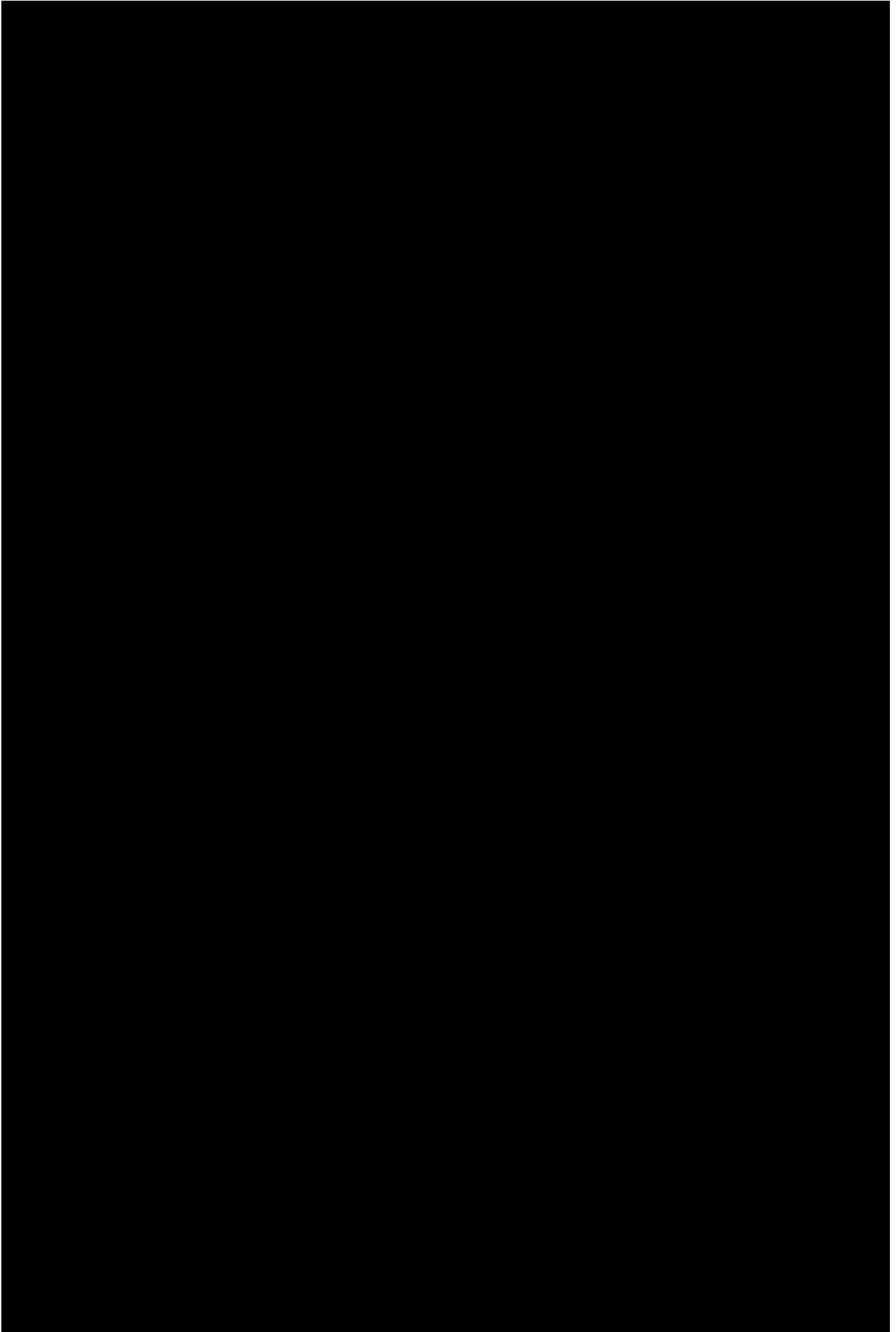
In line with the project's exit strategy, WCS is ensuring that tools and knowledge products are open-access and practically applicable. Capacity building with local partners, consistent stakeholder coordination, and integration into wider seascape initiatives all contribute to the project's durability. WCS remains open to adaptation as needed. Together, these efforts are helping to ensure that the project's impact extends beyond its formal end and contributes to a sustained legacy of marine resource protection in the GOH.

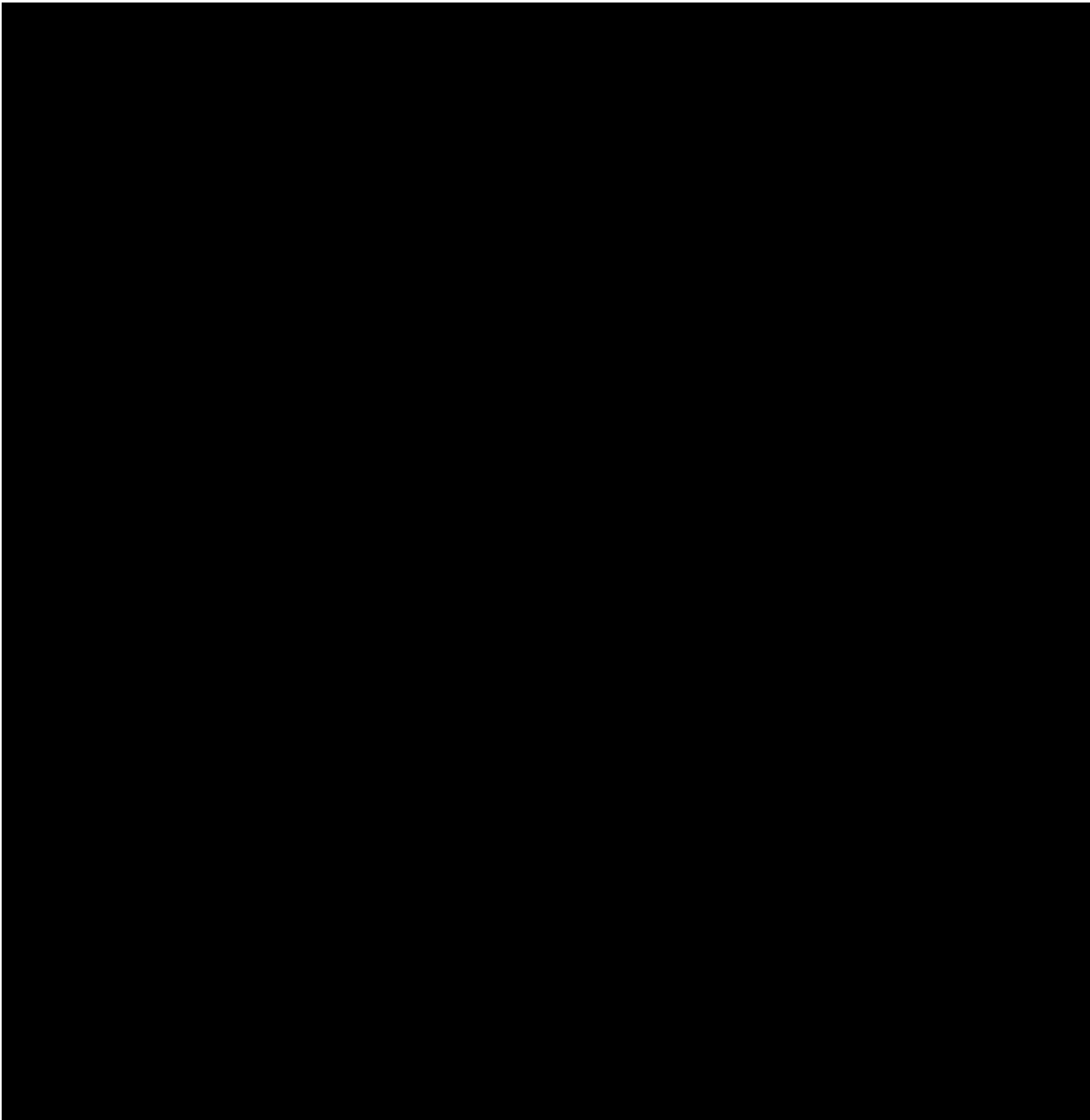
13. IWT Challenge Fund identity

The project is in its early stage and WCS has not publicised the IWT Challenge Fund to a wide audience. WCS has ensured during meetings and presentations to stakeholders to publicise the project grant is from the IWT Challenge Fund and displayed the project grant logo on each presentation. This took place in meetings in Belize and Honduras when meeting with organizations to ensure awareness among stakeholders and identity of the project, and at a regional Trinational Alliance of NGOs meeting in Guatemala.

In year two as the project progress and documents are created WCS will ensure to include IWT Challenge logos on documents, continue including and orally stating funding acquired from the IWT Challenge fund. All documents shared will also include recognizing the fund. As this project is gathering sensitive information photos of individuals participating in meeting will not be shared on our website or social media platform without organizations or individuals' consent. Preliminary meetings have gathered sensitive information related to illegal fishing activities; therefore, we have chosen to not share photos to protect the safety and confidentiality of the participants.

14. Safeguarding





15. Project expenditure

Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (April 2024-March 2025)

Project spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2024/25 Grant (£)	2024/25 Total actual IWTCF Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs (see below)				
Consultancy costs				

Overhead Costs				
Travel and subsistence				
Operating Costs				
Capital items (see below)				
Others (see below)				
TOTAL	£47,968.03	£47,968.03		

Table 2: Project mobilised or matched funding during the reporting period (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025)

	Secured to date	Expected by end of project	Sources
Matched funding leveraged by the partners to deliver the project (£)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total additional finance mobilised for new activities occurring outside of the project, building on evidence, best practices and the project (£)	N/A	N/A	N/A

16. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

NOT APPLICABLE

17. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements or progress of your project so far (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes.

Not Applicable due to sensitivity

File Type (Image / Video / Graphic)	File Name or File Location	Caption including description, country and credit	Social media accounts and websites to be tagged (leave blank if none)	Consent of subjects received (delete as necessary)
				Yes / No
				Yes / No
				Yes / No
				Yes / No
				Yes / No

Annex 1: Report of progress and achievements against Indicators of Success for Financial Year 2024-2025

Project summary	Progress and Achievements April 2024 - March 2025	Actions required/planned for next period
Outcome: Increased understanding of illegal fishing in the GoH is used to design holistic interventions to reduce poverty and protect threatened target species to inform future interventions to combat illegal fishing.		
Outcome indicator 0.1: 1 Threat assessment report that highlights the current state of illegal fishing in the GoH	Literature review / research, ongoing expert interviews and meetings, and development of draft survey instrument for communities in Activity 1.1-1.3.	<i>Completion of Activity 1.2-1.5 for the development of Threat assessment in Y2</i>
Outcome indicator 0.2: One CWT Strategy which highlights evidence-based strategies	Activities leading to this output will commence in Y2	Development of interventions for the CWT strategy in Y2
Outcome indicator 0.3: One Brief that provides evidence-based advice to decision-makers	Activities leading to this output will commence in Y2	Development of Policy brief and distribution to local and regional institutions in Y2
Output 1: Threat assessment created to understand the nature and extent of illegal fishing in the GoH		
Output indicator 1.1 At least 100 community members and 30 experts (government, NGO and academia) have been consulted and have contributed to the threat assessment by May 2025.	Expert Interviews and meetings have begun and is ongoing in Year 2 contributing to Activity 1.2	Continued interviews and meetings with experts to gather information in Y2 Implementation of Survey to communities in Y2
Output indicator 1.2 Implementation of community surveys across GoH 18 target coastal communities to gather drivers and motivation of communities' participation or non-participation in illegal fishing is completed by May 2025	Progress in development of Survey Instrument in Activity 1.3 is ongoing and will continue into Year 2	Finalization of survey instrument and implementation in Y2 to gather information on motivation and participation
Output indicator 1.3: One report on the current state of illegal fishing in Belizean waters is developed by October 2025. [IWTCF-D13]	Currently in the information gathering stage is on going as seen in Activity 1.1-1.5 to be continues in Y2	Completion of Activities 1.2-1.5 for the development of the Threat assessment in Y2
Output indicator 1.4 At least 10 experts are engaged through national workshops to access the project's research findings and to collectively design CWT interventions by October 2025. [IWTCF-B24]	Activities leading to this output will commence in Y2	Three national workshops will engage stakeholder to develop interventions based on the

		information analysed from survey and threat assessment.
Output indicator 1.5: One journal article on poacher motivations, methods, and networks in the GoH is submitted to an open access journal by February 2026. [IWTCF-D11]	Activities leading to this output will commence in Y2	Journal article will be developed from analysed survey, threat assessment.
Output 2. Evidence-based strategies to reduce illegal fishing in the GoH created and validated by Belizean, Honduran and Guatemalan governments.		
Output indicator 2.1. At least three evidence-based interventions are designed, all informed by the research results and expert input, by February 2026. [IWTCF-D26]	Activities leading to this output will commence in Y2	Finalized three interventions developed from stakeholder workshops
Output indicator 2.2. One strategy highlighting evidence-based CWT interventions/solutions is developed by February 2026.	Activities leading to this output will commence in Y2	Development of CWT strategy which highlights illegal fishing issues and the 3 interventions developed through stakeholder participation
Output 3. A brief created to influence policy changes to counter wildlife trafficking in the GoH		
Output indicator 3.1. One brief highlighting policy strengthening required to support CWT interventions in the GoH is produced by February 2026.	Activities leading to this output will commence in Y2	Create policy brief
Output indicator 3.2 At least five institutional stakeholders (per country) are engaged through stakeholder briefing events to discuss the policy brief by February 2026.	Activities leading to this output will commence in Y2	Share policy brief with institutions locally and regionally to spread awareness of the issues and results from the information gathered throughout the project.

Annex 2: Project's full current Indicators of Success Updated December 2024

	SMART Indicators	Means of Verification
Outcome: Increased understanding of illegal fishing in the GoH is used to design holistic interventions to reduce poverty and protect threatened target species to inform future interventions to combat illegal fishing.	Utilizing the research generated from this project, three key documents are created by the end of the project to inform evidence-based decision-making to address illegal fishing in the GoH: one threat assessment report that highlights the current state of illegal fishing in the GoH, one CWT strategy which highlights evidence-based strategies (crafted based on the results from the threat assessment and stakeholder input), and one brief that provides evidence-based advice to decision-makers.	Project documents: 1. Threat assessment report; 2. Counter Wildlife Trafficking Strategy; 3. Brief.
Output 1: Threat assessment created to understand the nature and extent of illegal fishing in the GoH.	<p>At least 100 community members and 30 experts (government, NGO and academia) have been consulted and have contributed to the threat assessment by May 2025.</p> <p>Implementation of community surveys across GoH 18 target coastal communities to gather drivers and motivation of communities' participation or non-participation in illegal fishing is completed by May 2025.</p> <p>One report on the current state of illegal fishing in Belizean waters is</p>	<p>Workshop/consultation agenda, copies of survey, participants lists (disaggregated by sex) and workshop report.</p> <p>Summary survey report from completed implementation within 18 coastal communities in GoH.</p> <p>Threat assessment report</p>

	<p>developed by October 2025. [IWTCF-D13]</p> <p>At least 10 experts are engaged through national workshops to access the project's research findings and to collectively design CWT interventions by October 2025. [IWTCF-B24]</p> <p>One journal article on poacher motivations, methods, and networks in the GoH is submitted to an open access journal by February 2026. [IWTCF-D11]</p>	<p>Workshop agenda, participant list (disaggregated by sex) and workshop report.</p> <p>Draft manuscript, submittal email, journal confirmation email</p>
<p>Output 2: Evidence-based strategies to reduce illegal fishing in the GoH created and validated by Belizean, Honduran and Guatemalan governments.</p>	<p>At least three evidence-based interventions are designed, all informed by the research results and expert input, by February 2026 [IWTCF-D26]</p> <p>One strategy highlighting evidence-based CWT interventions/solutions is developed by February 2026.</p>	<p>Copies of intervention design, results of surveys, CWT strategy</p>
<p>Output 3: A brief created to influence policy changes to counter wildlife trafficking in the GoH.</p>	<p>One brief highlighting policy strengthening required to support CWT interventions in the GoH is produced by February 2026. [IWTCF-B05]</p> <p>At least five institutional stakeholders (per country) are engaged through stakeholder briefing events to discuss the policy brief by February 2026. [IWTCFD21]</p>	<p>Copy of brief Event agenda, infographic and summary and participant list (disaggregated by sex)</p>
<p>Activities (each activity is numbered according to the Output that it will contribute towards, for example 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 are contributing to Output 1) 1.1 Conduct a literature review of academic publications, grey literature, and reports on illegal fishing in the GoH.</p>		

- 1.2 Interview local experts (government, academia, NGOs and local communities) in Belize, Guatemala and Honduras who have knowledge and/or experience on illegal fishing in the region.
- 1.3 Design and standardize community survey instrument across the GoH countries using WCS and FAO social safeguards.
- 1.4 Implement community survey across the GoH countries to collect data on illegal fishing motivation and drivers.
- 1.5 Analysis of data collected as well as available information (including literature) to produce threat assessment reports highlighting threats, patterns and trends in poacher behaviours, key actors, and motivations.
- 1.6 Organize and implement three national stakeholder workshops to discuss the research findings and develop evidence-based interventions/approach to address illegal fishing in the GoH.
- 1.7 Write and submit one journal article on illegal fishing to open access journal.
- 2.1 Consultation workshops with stakeholders to design evidence-based CWT intervention/ approach delivered.
- 2.2 Information gathered during consultation process analysed.
- 2.3 Evidence-based CWT intervention/approach strategy designed in consultation with stakeholders.
- 3.1 Produce and disseminate a brief that provides evidence-based advice to decision makers.

Annex 3 Standard Indicators

Table 1 Project Standard Indicators

Please see the Standard Indicator guidance for more information on how to report in this section, including appropriate disaggregation.

IWTCF Indicator number	Name of indicator	If this links directly to a project indicator(s), please note the indicator number here	Units	Disaggregation	Year 1 Total	Year 2 Total	Year 3 Total	Total to date	Total planned during the project
IWTCF-D13	Number of other publications produced- (Threat Assessment Report)	1.3	Number	Report Produced	-				1
IWTCF-B24	Number of government institutions/departments with enhanced awareness and understanding of biodiversity and associated poverty issues- (Expert Interviews and meetings.)	1.4	People. Government Institutions	Govt. Organization Type	3				10
IWTCF-D11	Number of unique papers submitted to peer reviewed journals-Journal	1.5	Number	New	-				1
IWTCF-D26	Number of new and enhanced tools/approaches developed for tackling IWT- (CWT Strategy with 3 interventions/solutions)	2.1	Number	Interventions design	-				3
IWTCF-B05	Number of best practice guides and knowledge products- (Policy Brief)	3.1	Number	Country, organization, gender	-				1
IWTCF-D21	Number of decision-makers attending briefing events-(National Stakeholder Workshop)	3.2	People	Country, organization, gender	-				15

Table 2 Publications

Title	Type (e.g. journals, best practice manual, blog post, online videos, podcasts, CDs)	Detail (authors, year)	Gender of Lead Author	Nationality of Lead Author	Publishers (name, city)	Available from (e.g. weblink or publisher if not available online)

Checklist for submission

	Check
Different reporting templates have different questions, and it is important you use the correct one. Have you checked you have used the correct template (checking fund, scheme, type of report (i.e. Annual or Final), and year) and deleted the blue guidance text before submission?	x
Is the report less than 10MB? If so, please email to BCF-Reports@niras.com putting the project number in the subject line.	x
Is your report more than 10MB? If so, please consider the best way to submit. One zipped file, or a download option is recommended. We can work with most online options and will be in touch if we have a problem accessing material. If unsure, please discuss with BCF-Reports@niras.com about the best way to deliver the report, putting the project number in the subject line.	N/A
Have you included means of verification? You should not submit every project document, but the main outputs and a selection of the others would strengthen the report.	x
If you are submitting photos for publicity purposes, do these meet the outlined requirements (see section 17)?	N/A
Have you involved your partners in preparation of the report and named the main contributors	x
Have you completed the Project Expenditure table fully?	x
Do not include claim forms or other communications with this report.	