



Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Half Year Report (due 31st October 2020)

Project reference	IWT041
Project title	Strengthening community anti-poaching and ecotourism in the Western Terai Complex
Country(ies)	Nepal
Lead organisation	Zoological Society of London
Partners(s)	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) and Himalayan Nature (HN)
Project leader	Dr. Hem Sagar Baral
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 October 2020, (HYR4)
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.zsl.org/conservation/regions/asia/strengthening-community-anti-poaching-and-ecotourism-in-the-western-terai

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

The project is being implemented in the Western Terai Complex (WTC) of Nepal, containing three protected areas – Banke, Bardia and Shuklaphanta National Parks (NP). The WTC is a vital landscape and serves to connect healthy populations of important wildlife across Nepal and India. The project aims to tackle the Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) through enhancing conservation technology to improve the efficiency of the efforts of law enforcement agencies, and empower communities living in the buffer zone of the NPs of the WTC through alternative livelihoods and capacity enhancement to mobilise the local communities for better conservation outcomes. The project has been progressing well, completing all activities inside the core area of NPs and most of the activities in the buffer zone for this reporting period, despite the Covid-19 pandemic. During this reporting period, the project progress was reviewed on the site level and central level with all project partners participating.

Output 1: Effective and efficient rapid response network utilising the latest technology and tools to combat wildlife crime.

During this reporting period, two refresher trainings were organized for 20 frontline staff of the two NPs (Bardia and Shuklaphanta NP) of WTC to strengthen the deployment of GSM-enabled surveillance cameras for controlling IWT. Furthermore, ZSL technical experts provided on-site training on the operation and deployment of surveillance cameras regularly, as per the request of the NPs. Protected area (PA) staff in all three project sites have at most times deployed at least 10 surveillance cameras in areas vulnerable to intruders (Act 1.8). Rapid Response Teams (RRT) led by the NP staff responded to 275 threats in the project sites from the information received from different sources, including GSM-enabled surveillance cameras, CCTV cameras, informant groups and reports from community-based anti-poaching groups (Act 1.8). Of which, 90% of the threats were responded to by the RRT. Of the 90% (247) of

threats responded to, nearly 80% resulted in successful apprehension, among which, more than 80% of the cases were related to illegal resource extraction. Nearly, 13% of cases were related to illegal timber smuggling and poaching. The responses have resulted in 106 arrests and the seizure of 12 trophies (including a red panda skin, wild boar meat, Chital meat and skin). Based on this, NPs have registered 34 cases of which 15 were finalized for this reporting period. The RRT responded to the threats within 30 minutes, on average, and reached the location within an hour (based on distance and topography). The CCTV cameras are operational along the highway of Banke NP and regularly monitor illegal activities and speeding vehicles (Act 1.9). The NPs, including RRT, also responded to another 65 road accidents during the reporting period and 110 animals (monkey, wild boar, monitor lizard, Chital, leopard, snakes, etc) were also rescued.

During this reporting period, GSM-enabled surveillance cameras sent email alerts of 2,564 images including images of intruders (29%), authorised personnel (9%), wild animals (3%), vehicles (3%), and false triggers (56%). Out of total intruder images from 241 events, 5% were images of a person with fuelwood, 7% were images of a person with fodder, 2% were images of a person with an axe/gun, 47% unknown and 39% classified as 'other'. A staff member of each NP (head of RRT and antipoaching unit) is responsible for responding to the image alerts as per the agreed mechanism in the first year of the project. More than 70% of the events alerted via email were responded to with a success rate of 75% from the RRT or the deployed team from the nearest guard post. Out of the successfully responses, 90% were minor and dealt with via a verbal warning, 5% with written warnings and nominal fines, and 5% led to arrests. Regular formal and informal meetings were conducted with park authorities to review the status of Rapid Response Command Centre (RRCC), also called the Joint Operation Cell (JOC), with regards to the enhanced efficiency of rapid response including surveillance cameras in the park (Act 1.14). ZSL handed over 20 surveillance cameras to Banke NP to increase the ownership of camera deployment and camera coverage.

The three NPs have been regularly conducting anti-poaching operations including regular patrols from 60 joint posts of the Nepali Army and NPs, sweeping operations (more than 10 days long), and long/medium range patrols to improve law enforcement. During this reporting period, the project supported three sweeping operations and long-range patrols in the WTC (Act 1.12). The sweeping operations covered nearly 100 km² in the eastern sector of Shuklaphanta NP, 50 km² in Banke NP and 100 km² in Bardia NP. The sweeping operations detected 219 signs of illegal activities, including fuelwood collection (46), illegal grazing (35), illegal intrusion/human footprint (99), timber collection (18), wildlife poaching (11), encroachment (3), and others. Furthermore, it contributed to the arrest of 50 people who were fined and released. The operations also collected information on wild animals' presence.

The project has supported the review of the IWT information gathering and storing of the NPs. A report was prepared consulting with the NPs of the project sites highlighting the need of software to improve the IWT data base management capacity of park authority (Act 1.13).

Output 2: 12 (4 per site) 10-man Community Based Anti- Poaching Units (CBAPUs) effectively collecting and disseminating anti-poaching intelligence, using the SMART approach.

The project has regularly provided support to monitor the CBAPUs established in the project sites. During this reporting period, 13 workshops were organized for 552 local youths (353 males and 199 females) to review the status and activities of established CBAPUs in the project sites (Act 2.10). Furthermore, the project has supported five stakeholders' workshops to mobilise the local youth to curb the IWT in the project sites where 124 youths (56 Male and 68 Female) of Banke NP participated. During the workshops, four CBAPUs were also renewed as sub-committee of buffer zone user committee (BZUC) of Banke NP.

An interaction workshop between the CBAPUs and Bardia NP was supported through the project to review the existing status of IWT in the buffer zone of Bardia NP during this Covid-19 pandemic (Act 2.5). The workshop outlined the importance of CBAPU mobilization to control the escalating illegal activities in the buffer zone of NP due to the impact of the pandemic. The

travel restriction due to pandemic has limited the livelihood opportunities for poorer households which has meant higher degree of involvement in illegal resource extraction from the NP.

The project has regularly supported the existing and newly renewed CBAPUs in the project sites to aid the control of IWT. To motivate the local youth who are participating voluntarily, the project has supported for regular communication for the coordinators of 14 CBAPU sub-committee, logistics support for monitoring, sports materials, and dress (T-shirt) (Act 2.9). The project has supported joint patrol including CBAPUs and park authority in the project sites which have covered 1756.93 km distance along the buffer zone with 50 patrols. During this, the CBAPUs removed four snares that were set up to trap deer and two persons involved in the killing of spotted deer were also arrested with the information received from the CBAPU.

Output 3: Improved intelligence gathering and sharing and collaboration between relevant Nepal agencies (e.g. DNPWC, BZMC, Nepal Army, Nepal Police, Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB)) and enhanced transboundary intelligence collaboration.

Regular meetings were held among the relevant authorities including NP, protection units (Nepali Army), CBAPUs, and buffer zone people to share the information on IWT (Act 3.7; contd.). The intelligence was also shared through WCCB to control the IWT in the WTC where ZSL representatives also shared the knowledge and expertise, mostly on technological use for IWT control.

The project supported six site-level workshops for 170 local youths (55F and 115M) in vulnerable areas of WTC to maintain the systematic collection and reporting of information for use by RRT (Act 3.10). "The workshop was fruitful to strengthen the capacity of CBAPU members and it is necessary as knowledge of this kind can contribute to safeguard the iconic biodiversity of WTC", said the chairperson of CBAPU-Network, Bardia Mr. Hemanta Acharya.

As reported in the last annual report, the plan for PA authorities and related stakeholders of WTC to visit the protected areas of India, including Corbett Tiger Reserve has been postponed due to the pandemic induced travel restrictions. The transboundary workshop/meeting for intelligence-sharing between the two countries has also been postponed due to the pandemic (Act 3.8). If the travel restrictions and global crisis due to Covid-19 continue for few more months, we might need to review the proposed activity.

Output 4: Cooperative community ecotourism ventures successfully operating in the WTC supported by an endowment fund established to make soft loans to ecotourism enterprise.

The proposed activity of cross fertilization trip to Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) for local community members to observe successful ecotourism operations and replicate them in their own ecotourism activities has been postponed due to the pandemic induced travel restrictions. Originally the visit was planned for Corbett Tiger Reserve, but it has since been agreed with the LTS to change it to ACA during the second year (Act 4.3).

During this reporting period, the project has supported endowment fund of NPR to the already established homestays to promote and strengthen their capacity (Act 4.4). The project had supported the establishment of three homestays in WTC including Krishnasar Community Homestay of Shuklaphanta BZ, Chyamma Homestay of Banke BZ and Gobrella Community Homestay of Bardia BZ through the endowment fund, hospitality training, and orientation. Two homestays except Gobrella had started to provide services to customers and generated over NPR in six months period, until the pandemic started which has hit hard the tourism industries of Nepal since March 2020. Once the negative impacts of the global pandemic have reduced, the homestays will continue to get the benefits which will enhance the opportunity of local communities to diversify livelihood options. Furthermore, an agreement has been made to provide endowment fund in the next quarter to support the Nature Guide Association of Bardia NP to promote alternative livelihood activities as nature guides whose livelihood is dependent on tourism are the hardest hit due to the pandemic.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for Covid-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

We have continued to maintain the coordination and strong relationships among the project partners and beneficiaries for the successful implementation of the project. Most of the planned activities for this reporting period were accomplished except activities that needed travel and mass gatherings. As illegal resource extraction is escalating, project-supported surveillance cameras have been instrumental in controlling illegal activities in the NP and its buffer zone. The park authorities have acknowledged this and are requesting further assistance to expand the existing surveillance network. During consultations (virtual and in-person while maintaining physical distance) with project stakeholders, including NPs, buffer zone communities, and project partners, awareness-raising for ecotourism promotion and wildlife conservation to the wider audience were requested.

2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of Covid-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Despite the travel restrictions by Government of Nepal due to the pandemic since March, most of the planned project activities have been completed, with the exception of the activities that require travel and large gatherings. During this reporting period, we have reviewed and discussed the project activities with project partners and beneficiaries both virtually and in-person (maintaining physical distance). After consultation, we realized that the following project activities might be delayed or need to be amended.

- The plan for PA authorities and related stakeholders of WTC to visit the protected areas of India, including Corbett Tiger Reserve (Act 3.8) has been delayed due to the pandemic-related travel restrictions. If the travel restrictions and global crisis due to Covid-19 continues for a few more months, we might need to review and redesign the planned activity.
- The visit to Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) for community members (previously planned as a visit to Corbett Tiger Reserve) (Act 4.3) had to be postponed due to travel restrictions. Project partner NTNC has advised that CBAPU mobilisation would be an appropriate replacement activity that would help to motivate local young people to engage with IWT control.

If travel restrictions persist for another few months, the proposed activities of travel and transboundary cooperation needs to be amended. The planned activities might be changed to activities aimed at strengthening law enforcement inside the core area, or to activities promoting CBAPU mobilisation in order to motivate local young people to engage in IWT control.

Pandemic induced widespread loss of livelihood options has resulted increased interest and expectations from our current livelihood interventions to additional families living in the same area. Hence, we extent our on-site support by liaising with related stakeholders, including NPs, BZUCs, veterinary centre, and agriculture service centre to access the benefit for Covid-19 impacted HHs. Furthermore, it has been realized that the livelihood interventions should increase its scope to diversify the current livelihood activities and coverage to mainstream additional HHs for conservation.

2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS:	No
Formal change request submitted:	No
Received confirmation of change acceptance	No

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget, so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to IWT Challenge Fund management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

None to report

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to IWT-Fund@ltsi.co.uk. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: IWT001 Half Year Report.**