

Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Half Year Progress 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)

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IWT Challenge Fund Project Information

Project reference	IWT086	IWT086
Project title	Mainstreaming traditional hunting communities of western Nepal in tiger conservation	Mainstreaming traditional hunting communities of western Nepal in tiger conservation
Country/ies	NEPAL	NEPAL
Lead partner	National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC)	National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC)
Project partner(s)	Bardiya National Park, Banke National Park, Buffer Zone User Committees (BZUCs), Ujyalo Nepal and Tharu Women Upliftment Centre	Bardiya National Park, Banke National Park, Buffer Zone User Committees (BZUCs), Ujyalo Nepal and Tharu Women Upliftment Centre
IWTCF grant value	£346276	
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Reporting period (e.g. April 2021-Mar 2022) and number (e.g. Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	April 2021 – March 2022 and Annual Report 1 April 2022 – March 2023 Annual Report II	April 2023 – October 2023, Half Year progress report
Project Leader name	Dr. Naresh Subedi	Dr. Naresh Subedi
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.facebook.com/NTNCBARDIYA https://www.facebook.com/groups/301595715022472	https://www.facebook.com/NTNCBARDIYA https://www.facebook.com/groups/301595715022472
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1. Project summary

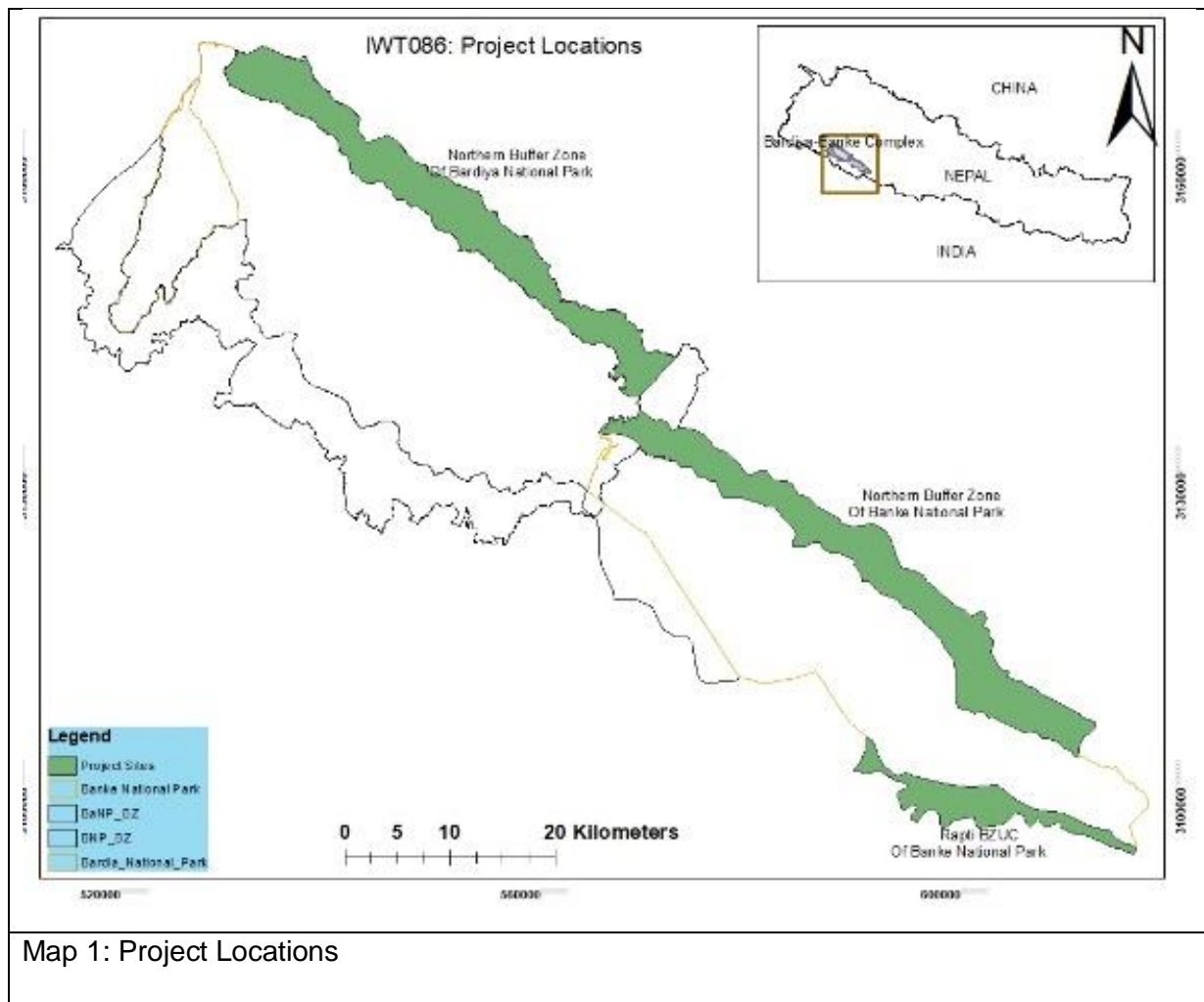
Bardiya-Banke complex representing Bardiya National Park and Banke National Park and their buffer zones in western Nepal provides a key habitat for tiger in Nepal. With current largest population of tiger, it also provides an extended habitat for tigers throughout the northern remote

Siwalik Hills (Thapa and Kelly 2016). Thus, the complex has potential to hold increasing tiger population and acts as climate refugia.

However, the complex is also identified as hotspot for illegal hunting and poaching. DNA-analysis of six cases of seizures in recent past revealed it originated from this complex (Karmacharya et al. 2018) During COVID-19 lockdown, a tiger was killed by poachers using hand-made snare (<https://kathmandupost.com/province-no-5/2020/9/26/tiger-carcass-found-inside-bardiya-national-park>). Two tiger skins were seized from BaNP periphery and twenty-seven tiger prey were also poached for bush meat (BaNP 2019) which may further be accelerated due to socio-economic difficulty created by COVID-19 pandemic. It is estimated that over 20,000 youths working abroad (Middle-East and India) have returned due to job loss in this complex and the unemployment situation may further fuel up poaching and hunting. Moreover, the recent release of jailed notorious poachers by the court has come as additional threat to tiger conservation in the complex (<https://www.nepalitimes.com/banner/lax-laws-make-nepal-haven-for-tiger-poachers/>). These recent seizures indicate re-emergence of poaching in the complex. If adequate measures are not taken to improve wildlife enforcement and local livelihood, the situation may further worsen and tiger conservation will be severely compromised. Therefore, this project has focused to strengthen efforts to offset the economic impacts of COVID-19 in these communities and engage them on wildlife conservation together with strengthening wildlife enforcement.

Because of the underlying poverty and geographical remoteness; hunting, which was primarily for the purpose of bush-meat in the past, is now commercialised owing to growing road networks and highway markets (Bhattarai et al. 2016). It is associated with prevalent poverty, inadequate presence park authorities and geographical remoteness (Bhattarai et al. 2016). The entire area is inhabited by the poor communities representing indigenous minorities, and have always been left behind by the mainstream of development. Specially, during this pandemic, these communities are bearing increased hardship to support their livelihood. Therefore, the project intends to provide alternative livelihood to the people whose livelihood is dependent on bush-meat, forest resources and are affected by the IWT.

In 2019 alone, 9 people lost their life from tiger attack in this complex (~10 human casualties per annum). Similarly, ~450 livestock get depredated by large carnivores annually and they hardly get compensation to these losses. In retaliation, the affected farmers sometimes kill tigers and other wildlife species through poisoning, snaring and gunshots (~2 tigers/leopard killing per annum). These wildlife parts are often smuggled into the black markets. Thus, this project has been focused to establish the measures to minimize human wildlife conflict and strengthen compensations mechanism, and decrease retaliatory killing of tiger and other wildlife significantly by obtaining support from the community peoples. Which also helps to check the entrance of illegal traders in the villages.



2. Project partnerships

To implement the project, NTNC has been coordinated with two governmental organizations; Bardiya National Park and Banke National Park and two Non-Governmental local organizations: Ujjalo Nepal and Tharu Womens Upliftment Center. Partnership among the organizations have been established to work for human-wildlife coexistence, wildlife research, community mobilizations and engagement for wildlife conservation since the initiation of this project in Bardiya-Banke Complex. Partnership among the local organizations has enabled smooth implement of the project activities. Inception workshop and coordination meeting with partner organization and communities was organized during project initiation, and regular meetings have been organized alongside regular communication among the local organizations for project planning, monitoring, evaluation and decision making. Bardiya and Banke National Parks have their checkpoint in the respective sites near to project locations that has served as access point for field visits for monitoring of project activities. Though the project sites have some geographically remote areas, the project has received help of local communities, community schools, local cooperatives, traditional women groups, and particularly the Buffer zone user committee (BZUC) to implement the project. BZUC has provided direct help to collect the socio-economic data of community members residing close to the forest area, including beneficiary identification for particular activities, monitoring and regularly updating the field work progress. A full documentation of the socio-economic survey was produced and reported in the project's first year reporting. Community Based Anti-Poaching Unit (CBAPU) of respective project sites were involved to conduct household survey and led the illegal wildlife trade control awareness sessions to keep safe community people from the aggressive wildlife and raise awareness about the importance of wildlife conservation.

3. Project progress

In this half year of the project, promotional activities for homestays promotion has been completed. One unit of interaction workshop and exposure visit has been completed with local and national journalist. Similarly, information board has been installed to disseminate information of the Churiya homestay. With an objective to reduce conflict in the northern belt, 15 improved predator proof corral houses have been supported in Rapti BZUC, while the remaining 17 is under construction and will be completed in the next reporting period. Additionally, nine women's cooperatives are selected for additional support to innovative livelihood activities. Altogether four units of IWT awareness campaign has been organised in local communities. Five school are selected for further continuation of school level awareness activity in the next reporting period.

3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

Outputs 1: Increased community stewardship in conservation through diversified alternative livelihood opportunities;

Homestay management support:

A total of 34 Churiya homestay have been supported from this project in first two years. Homestay management support in this year has focused on the promotion of previous year supported homestay including the landscape of Churiya homestay surrounding. Establishment of Churiya Homestay board and broadcasting about the Churiya homestay from the different media sources has been conducted during this reporting periods. Exposure visit to the national and local level journalist in Churiya homestay was accomplished to disseminate information of Churiya homestay. Homestay boards have also been installed for individual homestays for their identification. Similarly, two homestay information hoarding boards were placed in the strategic locations of Chepang and Harre settlements along the Kohalpur-Surket highway which are entry points to the Churiya homestay sites. Two additional existing homestays will be supported in next period.



Photo: Churiya homestay promotion hoarding board in Chepang, Babai

Former hunters now active in wildlife conservation

Back in time, the villagers had to either go to India for work or kill animals for livelihood. But things have changed now.

□ DIPENDRA BADUWAL & MANOJ PAUDEL
RAJKANDA (SURKHET), DEC 9

These days, Rana Bahadur Budha, a resident of Rajkanda village in Surkhet, is busy looking after his domesticated animals and working on farm lands. Rana Bahadur's farm lands, green with wheat and gram, adjoin the forests of Bardiya National Park (BNP). Rana Bahadur, together with his wife Dhansara, tends to 28 goats, a lactating buffalo and a pair of oxen in the shed. The Budha couple remain busy from dawn to dusk for agricultural work. On the side, they also run a homestay.

Things, however, weren't always so settled. Rana Bahadur, who is in his early 50s, has a dark past: He was once a notorious hunter who used to kill wild animals in the park mainly for meat. He is now an exemplary farmer, home stay promoter and a conservationist.

Back in time, local production through traditional farming was not enough for the livelihood and there were not any alternatives to generate income in the village, Rana Bahadur said. "Either the villagers had to go to India for work or they had to kill animals, dry their meat and sell it," the former hunter recalls. By his own admission, Rana Bahadur hunted dozens of animals, mainly the deer species, for about 10 years between 2000 to 2010.

Rana Bahadur then owned a musket bought by his father, who passed down hunting skills to his son. "Most of the villagers used to hunt for a living back then," Rana Bahadur said. "They used to go to the park forests, kill wild boars, barking deer and Sambar deer. They were oblivious to the conservation of wild animals," he said.

The locals had it easy back then, poaching wildlife without any hurdle, as there were security lapses in the national park forests near Rajkanda as the park headquarters was quite far and there were no any security posts in the areas. The hunting continued unabated during the decade-long armed insurgency (1996-2006).

Soon afterwards, things took a turn. With an objective of making local people active in conservation, the govern-



(Left) Rana Bahadur Budha pictured in front of the homestay he runs with his wife, Dhansara. Dhansara cooking food for the guests at their home stay.



POST PHOTO: MANOJ PAUDEL

ment on December 16, 2010 declared Rajkanda and other settlements adjoining the park in Surkhet a buffer zone. Four consumers' committees were formed in the Rajkanda area to enhance people's participation in conservation.

And around that time, Rana Bahadur was arrested on hunting charges. The park arrested him on a poaching charge but it didn't have any evidence, he said. His sister Chandra was the treasurer of Taranga-Siddachul Buffer Zone Consumers' Committee and he was released on a bail of Rs10,000, he said.

Rana Bahadur's sister Chandra had already started working for wildlife conservation. The consumers' committee had warned him that it would not take any responsibility if he got arrested again.

"Then I changed my mind," Rana Bahadur said. "I handed over my musket to my sister and expressed my commitment to conserving wildlife." But there were repercussions to hanging up his hat. "The villagers who were dependent on hunting were angry with me. They even threatened

to kill me," he said. "But they were also ready to submit weapons after they knew about the importance of wildlife conservation and legal action for poaching the wild animals."

The local people, according to Rana Bahadur, gradually gave up hunting and engaged themselves in conservation. "Eleven muskets were submitted to the consumers' committees in Rajkanda, Gainekanda, Bunggad, Siddagaira and Gurase areas," he said. "Nobody is involved in hunting in the area nowadays. All the villagers have been working to control poaching wild animals and smuggling of timber."

According to Ashok Ram, chief conservation officer at the Bardiya National Park, a total of 241 weapons had been submitted during the time from the settlements lying in the north of the national park. He said that the local people in the buffer zones played very important roles for the conservation of wildlife and forests.

The poaching of wildlife and smuggling of timber in the northern part of the park are almost nil. And the

number of wild animals is on the rise. But for farmers, that has posed another set of difficulties. When the villagers used to hunt the animals, the wild animals hardly entered the settlements. But these days, deer and wild boars, among other animals, routinely enter the settlements.

"We can harvest about half of the crops while the wild animals eat or damage the other half," said Dal Bahadur Oli, a local of Telpanigaun in Barahatal-1. "Tigers and leopards kill domesticated animals quite frequently and the livelihood of the locals has taken a hit. The authorities concerned should also work to lift the living standard of the local people."

Based on the damage caused by wildlife, the park provides relief to the farmers. But it is not easy for the residents of remote Telpani village. "It takes almost a day to go to the ward office to make a recommendation letter for the compensation. One generally spends Rs8,000 to get the compensation of Rs4,000," Oli said.

Telpani is around 20 kilometres from Birendranagar, the district headquarters of Surkhet, and the village is

yet to be connected with road networks.

Chandra Budha, now the chairperson of Taranga-Siddachuli Buffer Zone Consumers' Committee, has been active in wildlife conservation since 2007. She is satisfied with the conservation efforts of the consumers' committee, local and the park administration.

However, she complains that the national park doesn't pay much attention to lift the livelihood of the local people despite their active roles in conservation. "The national park assured to launch various income generating projects in the areas but to no avail. The locals are frustrated and angry," said Chandra.

Ram, the conservation officer, obliquely admits about the failure of launching effective income generative programmes in the buffer zone areas. "It is also the responsibility of the national park to uplift the living standard of the people who contribute to conservation," he said. "The national park, local unit and the local people should work together for the development of the areas."

तेल न पानी दुःखको खानी

लेकाडमा एक प्याकेट गुनकै ४० रुपैयाँ, तीन सय रुपैयाँ लिटर तेल



स्वास्थ्यचीकीमा सामान्य सिटामोलबाहेक केही पाईदैन, बिरामीलाई होकोमा बोकेर अस्पताल पुन्नाउनुपर्ने बाध्यता हटोको छैन

सुदीपक बज्रवाल र जसोती धीरेन कृष्णः

बोकेर र बाँकेको पानी कति। भुँगे भुम्बाको पानीसम्म बाँकेका निक्काको घण्टा जस्य। उपचारको सुविधाको निक्काको घण्टा जस्य।

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आमा, मनका बच्चा अन्ततः तनो पेठ हुने र रगत बने समझा भएकी बुढीका पानीको बर्ष विचरता बढी भयो। 'बाँके उपचार गरे पनि निक्को हुँदैन', बुढीलाई भिन्न गाउँको बाँकेको उपचारको निक्काको घण्टा जस्य।

विद्युत्को बोकेर विचरतामा पुग्दाको निक्काको घण्टा जस्य। उपचारको सुविधाको निक्काको घण्टा जस्य।

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सुदीपक बज्रवाल गाउँपालिका विना पाइनेकाडबाट विरामी बोकेर अस्पताल जाँदै, पानी कसको अस्पताल जाँदै, पानी कसको अस्पताल जाँदै, पानी कसको अस्पताल जाँदै।

Photo: News about Northern buffer zone was published in Nepali Journal

Interaction workshop with Journalist

To promote northern buffer zone in the Churiya range and connect tourism activities with Bardiya National Park and Churiya homestay, an interaction program with the local and national level journalist was organized in Bardiya National Park on the occasion of International Tiger Day 2023. A total of 28 journalist, (Male: 23 and Female: 5), representing national and local media actively participated in the interaction workshop for northern Churiya homestay promotion.



Photo: Interaction workshop in Bardiya National Park with journalist to promote tourism in Northern Buffer zone

Table 1: List of journalists participate in interaction workshop

SN	Name	Media affiliation	Address
1	Yadab Acharya	Annapurna Post	Bardiya
2	Murali Godiya	Sagarmatha TV	Bardiya
3	Gandip Lata Kayastha	Kothiyaghat Rastriya Saptahik Rajapur	Bardiya
4	Kamal Panthi	Kantipur	Bardiya
5	Rejina Malla	Kantipur	Banke
6	Rita Shaha	Sanchari Samuha Sadasya	Bardiya
7	Joty Kumar Panthi	Himalaya TV	Bardiya
8	Menaka Chaudhay	RSS	Bardiya
9	Min Prasad Adhikary	Radio Sathi FM Rajapur	Bardiya
10	Dil Prakash Gautam	Nepal Television	Banke
11	Yagya Prasad Sapkota	Nayapatrika	Bardiya
12	Prakash Paudel	Krishnashar Online	Bardiya
13	Prakash Neupane	News 24 TV	Bardiya
14	Radheshyam Bishwokarma	AP one TV	Bardiya
15	Bishnu Prasad Adhikari	Sodhpatra Dainik	Bardiya
16	Ram Bahadur Thapa	Radio Tiger	Bardiya
17	Saughat Shrestha	Radio Sambad FM	Bardiya

SN	Name	Media affiliation	Address
18	Rishi Wagle Gopal	Galaxy 4 K	Bardiya
19	Keshab Koirala	Image TV	Bardiya
20	Puskar Kafle	Geruwa Update	Bardiya
21	Durga Acharya	AV news TV	Bardiya
22	Santhosh Paudel	Geruwa Karnali Post	Bardiya
23	Hari Gurung	Prime TV	Bardiya
24	Manoranjan Sharma	Karobar Dainik	Butwal
25	Dipedra Baduwal	Kantipur, Lumbini	Butwal
26	Rabinda Gupta	Prime TV	Butwal
27	Sanjaya Kumar Acharya	Radio Nepal	Butwal
28	Anjana Tharu	Radio Tiger	Bardiya

Improved livestock corral support:

Out of the targeted 260 households, 320 households have been supported with improved livestock corral as of the last two reporting period. Project is planning to support 32 households in Year 3, while in this reporting period project has supported 15 predator-proof corrals and remaining 17 will be supporting to next reporting period for the communities of northern buffer zone; Chepang BZUC of Bardiya National Park and Rapti BZUC of Banke National Park.



Photo: Predator coral house at Rapti

Support for women's cooperatives for innovative livelihood activity:

To promote alternative livelihood strategies of community women and motivate them in wildlife conservation, 16 women's cooperative groups were formed by year 2, and this totals to 988 members who will have access to soft loans. Seed money was provided to seven women's group/cooperatives in year 1 and 2. As per the regular meeting records and seed money request decision made by the cooperative members meeting, allocated seed money has been deposited in the bank account of the women cooperatives. Similarly, cooperatives are providing documentation about how they are going to mobilize seed money among their cooperative members. Seed money support can help them to access low interest loans to start small local business.

Out of the 16 women comparatives, remaining nine cooperatives will be will be provided with seed money in year 3.

Outputs 2: Awareness of community towards IWT increased and hunting/poaching decreased

Awareness among the community members about the importance of wildlife conservation and negative impacts of illegal wildlife trade (IWT) have been widespread during the first year of the project. Community people who were involved in the hunting/poaching are now started to talk about conservation.

Community trainings on IWT

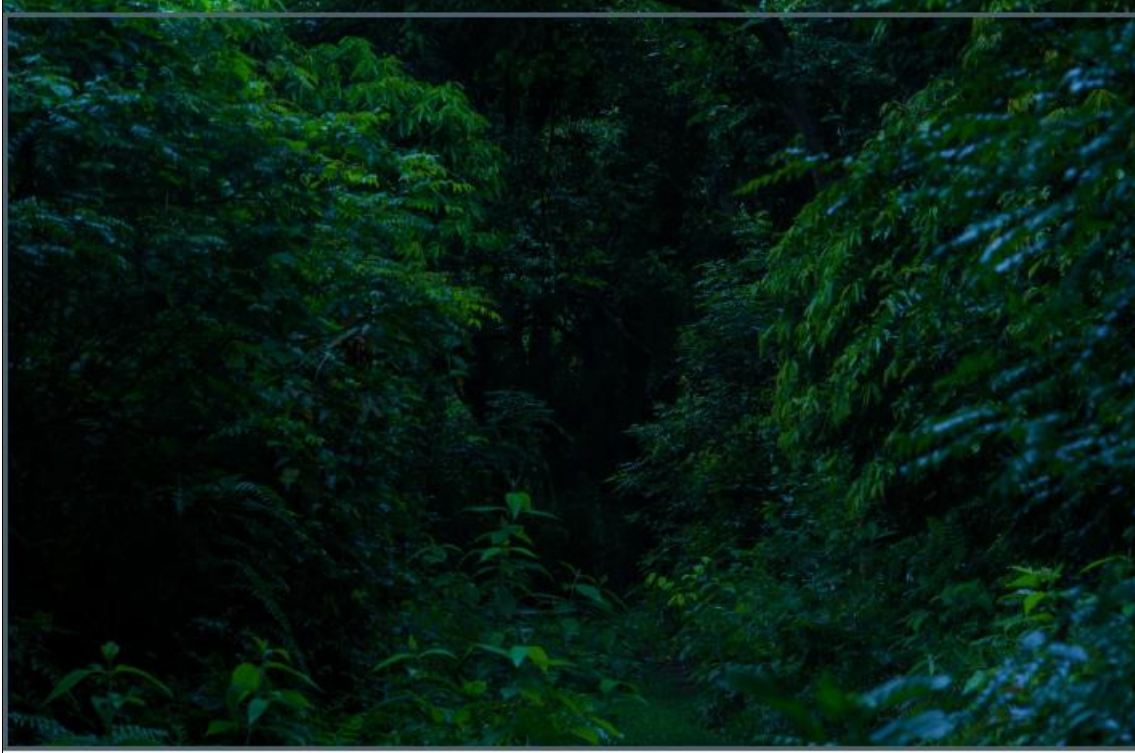
To establish human wildlife coexistence by discouraging traditional hunting behaviour, site-level anti-poaching training has been supported to the buffer zone community members and front-line staff working in the northern buffer zone. By end of year 2, 188 community awareness trainings were completed reaching 5,319 community members. In this reporting period, four additional community training was organized by the trained CBAPU members in Hariharpur sites. A total of 11 CBAPU youths were involved in the program for the four different sites of Hariharpur.

Table: Participates in Community awareness Program

Settlement	Male	Female	Total
Talpani	11	6	17
Gainekanda	8	4	12
Betani	12	5	17
Magaha	9	7	16
	40	22	62

School programs on tiger conservation

To strengthen the school level awareness program in all the schools of northern buffer zone, a training manual was prepared in the first year. As of year 2, 92 awareness classes were conducted in local schools reaching 3,021 (M: 1,652; F: 1,439). No awareness activities were conducted in this reporting period. To further increase tiger conservation awareness, this activity will be conducted in five schools of BZUC of Bardiya National Park buffer zone in the next reporting period



विद्यालयस्तर वन्यजन्तु संरक्षण जागरूकता निर्देशिका

प्रकाशक

राष्ट्रीय प्रकृति संरक्षण कोष

बर्दिया संरक्षण कार्यक्रम

बेतहनी, बर्दिया

4. Output 3: Enhanced Capacity of frontline park staff to handle IWT

4.1 3.4. Wildlife Crime Control Bureaus (WCCB) meetings

A total of three WCCB meeting has been accomplished during this reporting period to strengthen the anti-poaching operation capacity of district level anti-poaching team. WCCB meeting in Surkhet (1), Mugu (1) and Bardiya (1) event has targeted the major possible wildlife threats sites.



Photo: WCCB Meeting in Banke District

Table: WCCB meeting supports in different sites

Date	Sites	Male	Female	Total
6/9/2080	Banke	57	3	60
6/12/2080	Rara Mugu	26	2	28
7/23/2080	Bardiya	48	2	50

4.2 3.5. Organize regional workshop on IWT/Project learning

Project learning regional workshop preliminary preparation is under progress and will be organized in next reporting period.

4.3 Progress towards project Outputs

Increased community stewardship in conservation through diversified alternative livelihood opportunities

Homestay management support:

A total of 34 new Churiya homestays have been supported from this project in first two years. In addition, 14 existing homestays located in the southern buffer zone of Bardia and Banke districts were also supported to bridge tourism with the northern Churiya homestays. In this reporting period, project focused on the promotion activities of the homestays to increase national and international visitors in the area. Workshops with local and national journalist helped to increase media coverage of the homestays and provide highlights on the communities' involvement in conservation. Homestay information boards have also installed at strategic location to disseminate information of Churiya homestay. In the next reporting period, 2 more homestays in the southern buffer zone will be supported for their upgrading.

Support for predator-proof corral house:

A total of 320 households have been supported with predator-proof corrals as of the last reporting period, while in this reporting period, additional 15 household were support in predator proof coral. Livestock depredation cases in the beneficiary communities are in decline as reported by the BZUC.

Support to women cooperatives:

A total of 16 women cooperative with a total of 988 women members of the marginalised poor community were established and seven of these cooperatives were provided with seed money to provide alternative livelihood opportunities for the women. The cooperatives with seed money have started seed money mobilizations among their cooperatives members in minimum interest rate. In the next reporting period, remaining nine cooperatives were support with seed money.

Awareness of community towards IWT increased and hunting/poaching decreased

Altogether additional 62 people living around the poaching hotspots were now familiar to the legal aspects of tiger and prey base poaching and legal aspects of illegal wildlife trade on this reporting period.

School programs:

A training material manual was developed in the first year. A total of 3,021 school students have been reached through the awareness classes by end of year 2. No school awareness classes were conducted in this period. In the next reporting period, we will spread conservation message to strengthen conservation education in five school of BZUC of Bardiya National Park buffer zone.

Wildlife Crime Control Bureaus (WCCB) meetings:

3 units of WCCB meeting were conducted at Bardiya National Park, Banke National Park and Rara National Park. Officials of district forest office, security personals were made aware about the human wildlife conflict and illegal wildlife trade.