



**BIODIVERSITY  
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



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

### **Half Year Report**

**Submission Deadline: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024**

**Submit to: [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com) including your project ref in the subject line.**

<b>Project reference</b>	<b>IWT 135</b>
<b>Project title</b>	Combating IWT: Strengthening Partnerships and Promoting Resiliency of Local Communities
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Nepal
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Zoological Society of London
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), South Asian Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN), Himalayan Nature (HN)
<b>Project leader</b>	Bishnu Prasad Thapaliya
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2024, HYR1
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	

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

This project works in the Tribeni, identified as a major illegal wildlife trade, spans multiple districts and provinces, with an open border to India complicating coordination efforts. Vulnerable local communities, especially those living in poverty and affected by human-wildlife conflict, are often exploited by organized criminal networks for poaching activities. The project aims to tackle these issues by engaging communities, law enforcement, and the judiciary to strengthen wildlife protection, enhance transboundary collaboration, and promote human-wildlife coexistence, while also addressing poverty and building community resilience. As the project started from 1 August 2024, this report includes progress report of two months (August and September 2024). In this two month, the project focused on creating an enabling environment for the smooth and effective project implementation by first understanding needs and requirements of Biodiversity Challenge Fund project's reporting (technical and financial), communications/branding, GESI, Safeguarding and M&E plan attending webinar on 21 August 2024. Along with this, the project team shared information about the project to partners and stakeholders, made formal agreements with implementing partner, developed the project team, oriented the project team on programmatic and financial compliance and started the baseline and other initial studies required to proceed with project implementation. The detail of which are as below:

**Project inception meetings:** To facilitate the implementation of the conservation project, ZSL Nepal is using two-tiered institutional setup, consisting of a Project Coordination Committee (PCC) at the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) level and a Project Management Unit (PMU) at the park level. These bodies provide coordination and support, with regular discussions on project progress and issues to ensure timely resolution. Project inception meetings are organised to engage government authorities and bring them on board with the project. On 30 August 2024, ZSL Nepal conducted a PCC meeting to share information about the project and to get their formal approval to start project implementation (*Annex 1.1*). Similarly, a PMU meeting was held on 18 Sep 2024 with authorities from Chitwan National Park (CNP) to share information about the project and formally start implementation at the buffer zone area of CNP (*Annex 1.2*). Additionally, meetings with local governments were held on 16 and 18 September 2024 (*Annex 1.3*), during which ZSL Nepal obtained consent from the respective local government (municipality) to proceed with activities in their areas (*Annex 1.4*). During this period, representatives from ZSL Nepal office and HN visited the project sites with the respective chairperson of Tribeni BZUC, Madhya Bindu BZUC, buffer zone community forest and community members. These visits

provided the project team with insights on target areas and potential beneficiaries, who will be surveyed to establish the baseline socio-economic status for the communities.

**Baseline studies:** The baseline studies, including hotspot mapping to identify potential intervention communities, assessing the socio-economic status of the project areas, and evaluating community members' capacity and knowledge on animal behaviour and avoidance strategies, have been initiated. These studies will guide the project team in shaping activities, such as developing more effective human behaviour change campaigns to achieve the desired outcomes. Following the selection of target areas, the project team will conduct a wellbeing ranking to identify the beneficiaries with whom the project will engage. Therefore, all related activities will take place in the second half of the year after the final baseline report is received and household selection is completed. In addition, significant progress has been made in drafting key strategic documents. The project has drafted a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework, which will guide the systematic tracking of progress, outcomes, and impacts. Similarly, the project is also working to develop Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) and Indigenous People Plan (IPP) that outlines the strategies for engaging marginalized groups, including women, indigenous populations of the community in a respectful and inclusive manner, ensuring their active involvement, safeguarding their rights and cultural heritage and benefit throughout the project lifecycle. These strategic documents lay the foundation for inclusive and accountable project implementation.

As the start of the project was delayed owing to a delay in the grant decision, with the grant agreement having only been formally signed between NIRAS and ZSL with effect from 1 August 2024, there hasn't been much progress in implementation between the start of the project and the end of September 2024. However, the preparatory activities undertaken by the project team will and has laid a solid foundation for the swift implementation of Year One activities. In addition, required human resources has also been recruited by both ZSL and partner. By completing the baseline studies and assessments, the team will have critical data and insights to inform decision-making, ensuring that interventions are targeted and relevant to the specific needs of the communities enabling the project to allocate resources more efficiently, avoid potential delays, and address challenges early on.

**2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

N/A

**3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with NIRAS:	√ Yes
Formal Change Request submitted:	√ Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	√ Yes
Change Request reference if known: <b>CR24-042</b>	

**4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)**

**Actual spend:**

**4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2025)?**

Yes ☐ No ☒ Estimated underspend:

**4c. If you expect and underspend, then you should consider your project budget needs carefully.** 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 re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes to your project if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.**

**NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.**

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

N/A

**6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report.** Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.

**Comment (i):** It is noted there is a discrepancy between the cover letter and log frame regarding the number of households the planned livelihood interventions will benefit: the cover letter indicates 450 household beneficiaries, and the log frame only highlights 270 households. Please clarify.

**Response (i):** The cover letter includes all the beneficiaries of the project including HHs we provide with direct livelihoods support including training and access to established seed fund (270HHs) (indicator) and HWC mitigation (indicator) instruments (180 HHs). In the log frame we have only included the number of HHs we are striving to increase their income through direct alternative livelihoods scheme such as community banking, capacity building trainings. Adhering to the new standard indicators (Outcome 0.5, Output 4.1) the log frame only includes beneficiaries who are envisioned to increase their income through the interventions made by the project whereas the cover letter covered the entire beneficiaries of the project hence the discrepancy in the number of beneficiaries in the log frame and the cover letter.

**Comment (ii):** The application notes the provision of training to households to provide knowledge and skills for alternative livelihoods, further clarification is required regarding the level of certainty of obtaining those new livelihoods.

**Response (ii):** ZSL Nepal has extensive experience in providing alternative livelihood skills to communities and has continuously adapted and refined its approach to align with the local context, resulting in successful outcomes across multiple projects. A key strength of these initiatives is the participatory approach employed in all activities. Additionally, the alternative livelihood efforts are supported by a community banking scheme, with the community bank's constitution ensuring that loans taken by beneficiaries are invested in the specific livelihood schemes for which they have been trained. Selection of livelihood intervention is based on community people interest that is locally viable. Further, their livelihood options will be tied with the business plan that will be regularly tracked by the social mobilizer and project officers residing in the community.

**Comment (iii):** It is noted there are only a few staff members dedicated to the project full time. Clarify if this level of resourcing is sufficient to deliver all the proposed activities given the ambition of the application.

**Response (iii):** ZSL Nepal is experienced (IWT099) in delivering work of a similar size and scope and we are confident that the resourcing is sufficient to deliver the project goals. The budget contains allocation for a full-time ZSL HWC Officer and a full-time ZSL Programme Associate. These roles will be supported by the ZSL Nepal office and from the ZSL UK office. In addition to this, Himalayan Nature (implementing partner) has a full-time project officer dedicated to the project, as well as a full-time social mobiliser stationed at the project site.

The project is supported by an ZSL Nepal's existing field office in Parsa National Park with regular backstopping from the Kathmandu central office including support from HR department, Program Manager as well as program management team and ZSL UK and builds on existing relationships with DNPWC, SAWEN and BZMCs.

**Comment (iv):** The log frame should be strengthened:

- the Outcome indicators need further strengthening, none of the listed indicators are really an indicator of "reduced IWT";
- under Output 1 consider an alternative indicator to demonstrate "strengthened capacities", please note the provision of training (i.e. indicator 1.1) does not necessarily mean an increase in capability.
- similarly, an increase in monitoring does not indicate an increase in interagency cooperation, you should seek to revise indicator 2.1 to a more appropriate indicator.

**Response:** To strengthen the outcome indicator, IWTCF-B05 has been introduced as a new indicator, and IWTCF-B16 has been revised to IWTCF-B07 to align with the new IWT standard indicators, highlighting the reduction in illegal wildlife trade (IWT).

Output indicator 1.1 has been updated from IWTCF-B01 to the IWT standard indicator IWTCF-D01. Additionally, IWTCF-D02 has been added to reinforce the output, demonstrating enhanced capacity.

Output indicator 2.1 has been revised to IWTCF-B01, and IWTCF-D10 has been introduced as a new indicator to showcase the effectiveness of increased collaboration. Furthermore, Output indicator 2.3 has been updated from IWTCF-D27 to IWTCF-D08.

## Checklist for submission

<b>For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you <b>responded to any additional feedback</b> (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)?	√
If not already submitted, have you attached your <b>risk register</b> ?	√
<b>For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you responded to <b>feedback from your latest Annual Report Review</b> ?	
<b>For All Projects</b>	
Include your <b>project reference</b> in the subject line of submission email.	√
Submit to <a href="mailto:BCFs-Report@niras.com">BCFs-Report@niras.com</a> .	√
Have you reported against the most <b>up to date information for your project</b> ?	√
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	√