



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects
Half Year Report
(due 31st October 2020)

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| Project reference | 26-022 |
| Project title | Uprating community forest management in Nepal: enhancing biodiversity and livelihoods |
| Country(ies)/territory(ies) | Nepal |
| Lead organisation | ForestAction Nepal |
| Partner(s) | Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (BRGE) Kathmandu Forestry College (KAFCOL) Federation of Community Forest User Groups (FECOFUN) Jhapa Division Forest Office Jhapa |
| Project leader | Naya Sharma Paudel, PhD |
| Report date and number (e.g. HYR3) | <i>HYR 2</i> |
| Project website/blog/social media | https://twitter.com/BiodiversityNep https://www.flickr.com/photos/184289092@N07/albums |

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 end September).

Project has made a considerable progress during the first half of the year 2. Most of the project activities were carried out by local field staffs. Project leader and project manager remotely supervised and monitored field activities as travel was difficult due to nationwide lockdown and travel restrictions. Activities that were planned during this period are covered in this report. Some activities which are either completed in year 1 or are planned for second half this year and year 3 are not covered in this report. Progress against each relevant activity is presented below.

Output 1: Forests are sustainably managed with greater diversity, enhanced structural complexity and improved productivity, and institutional capacity for biodiversity conservation enhanced

1.1 Organize planning workshops cum interaction program with local stakeholders at project site

- **Inception and interaction program:** an inception program was organised on July 16, 2020 at Durgabhitta community forest (CF) at Kachan Kawal Rural municipality. A total of 8 leaders from 7 CF User Groups (CFUGs) were present in the program. Last year's (year 1) activities were reviewed and discussion was held about year 2 activities. CFUG leaders suggested potential activities within the framework of the project (Y2_Doc-01). Similarly, informal contacts were continually made with other CFUGs regarding project implementation and activities.

1.5 Support CFUGs in plantation of bamboo culms and other fast growing native fodder species

- This year we have focussed on promotion and protection of Natural regeneration. However, we were successful in devising new strategy for plantation of 50/50 culms of bamboos and bananas inside core area (21 CFUGs) particularly for wildlife in collaboration with DFO, Jhapa. Majority of the CFUGs with core areas have already planted. We supported plantation of 550 seedlings in two CFs of Jalthal (Y2_Doc_2).

Majority of the investment were done in rescue operation. 11497 seedlings and 1260 saplings belonging to 58 different tree species from about 22 ha of forests were rescued or protected from smothered areas. Complete removal and uprooting of invasive species *Mikania micrantha* is practically impossible in monsoon season so we focussed on rescuing Saplings that would otherwise be inhibited by the invasive species (Y2-Doc_02). To facilitate the process we have produced a document as well in Nepali language (Y2_Doc_12).

We also supported a private nursery of native species (Y2_Doc_03).

We have developed and disseminated a short and easy to follow document on Natural regeneration promotion, *Mikania* management and forest restoration (Y2_Doc_12). Its in Nepali language and it highlights how can we achieve cost effective control restoration of degraded forest.

1.6 Work with CFUGs to revise and renew the forest operational plans considering key attributes of forest biodiversity

- Towards preparation community forest operation plans (CFOPs), the project has supported 6 CFUGs in preparation of their annual program (Y2_Doc_03) and the plans are made more specific on forest management with special focus on invasive species management which were not covered earlier. We have appraised creating short term employment for poor people in invasive species management and facilitated to keep it in annual program. We also organised OP practice training to CFUG leaders and members about forest management plans and biodiversity integration in them (Y2_Doc_04) and three more will be organised in later part of the year. Similarly, we are tracking CF on the phase of operational plan renewal with regular consultation and meetings to make them biodiversity friendly.

1.7 Conduct participatory biodiversity assessment of Jalthal forest bringing experts and local people together and maintain database, support KAFCOL master students in thesis on Jalthal biodiversity, management options and human nature interaction

- We are continuing regular bird surveys and started butterfly survey. The final report of the surveys will be attached in annual report of year 2. Some of the planned survey could not be completed due to travel difficulties. In the bird and butterfly survey, we are incorporating local youths and students. We walked on transect to count Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilus javanicus* in Jalthal area where we found 3 nesting sites and about 70 individuals were counted (Detail information in final report of year 2). The bird report has been updated incorporating recent sightings (Y2_Doc_5). Butterfly Survey is in progress.

Output 2 Mikania invasion substantially reduced and controlled, degraded forest areas and wetlands reclaimed and converted into productive systems through 'site management'.

- Project supported in restoration of a wetland invaded by invasive species Water hyacinth (*Eichornia crassipes*) in Paschim Durali Charksohe CF (Y2_Doc_06). We actively engaged CFUGs in natural restoration rescue in Mikania invaded areas and a formal consensus was reached between 6 CFUGs of Kachankawal rural municipality to rescue at least 1000 seedlings in their CF during monsoon (Y2_Doc_01). A campaign will be organised in the month of November.

2.4 Identify and promote technologies to use Mikania biomass (Support local farmers to make compost and bio-gas out of Mikania weeds)

- Compost production- Project has supported in establishing facilities for production of compost in Triveni CF and production will be started in drier season i. e Dec-Feb. We have working with Hariyali CF to start compost production and have completed a trial production. Now, we are trying to upscale production this year. The compost production will be using biomass of invasive weeds.

2.5 Undertake programs to restore wetlands in collaboration with local governments and CFUGs

- Project supported in restoration of a wetland invaded by invasive species Water hyacinth (*Eichornia crassipes*) in Paschim Durai Charksohe CF (Y2_Doc_06).

2.8 Prepare publish and disseminate factsheets of Jalthal Biodiversity (Status, threats, values and conservation)

- Our staffs have written a blog about Jalthal forest which was published in ForestAction website (www.forestaction.org/blogs). We also prepared a calendar demonstrating biodiversity of Jalthal forest (Y2_Doc-07) and distributed it in project site.
- A manuscript from our staff on short note incorporating new altitudinal record of Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdonii* from Jalthal is in review in a national newsletter.

Output 3 Biodiversity conservation and values are appreciated and integrated into community forestry policy and planning process; communication materials highlighting biodiversity conservation prepared and disseminated for diverse stakeholders

3.1 Develop a manual on integrating overall biodiversity conservation in CF planning and process, include national expert while preparing the manual

- We are lagging behind with this activity. Reviews of community forest operation plan has been completed so we will be able to complete it by end of this year.

3.2 Provide training to CFOP practitioners on values of biodiversity and ways of integrating it into CFOPs

- A training for CFUG leaders have been organised in which a total of 24 people participated (Y2Doc-04)

3.5 Publish a peer reviewed article based on review of CFOPs to highlight gaps and opportunities of biodiversity conservation in CFs.

- We have completed review of 50 CFOPs and building on the review a MS will be prepared.

3.6 Write and publish three popular articles on leading national dailies

- Two popular articles; one about promotion of Natural regeneration in forest restoration has been published in Nepal's first newspaper and another about newly reported invasive species have been published in a leading national daily (Y2-Doc-08, 09, 10)

3.7 Prepare, produce and disseminate a video (documentary) to conceptualise, highlight and operationalise overall biodiversity conservation in community forests.

- Progress has been slow with this now the camera persons will be able to travel to field after

vacation in October. We expect to complete it in time.

Output 4 Forest based micro enterprises including ecotourism facilities established and operationalized for enhancement of local livelihoods

4.3 Identify disadvantaged women and support them in enterprise development in agroforestry, ecotourism including fisheries

- We have supported poor and disadvantaged group of people including women in income generating activities. So far three groups from 3 CFUGs have started fisheries engaging 32 households as direct beneficiaries (Y2_Doc_06). The benefit of the intervention will be known soon.

4.4 Designate biodiversity demonstration block, prepare and provide necessary information for visitors

- We have identified potential locations and will be done in second half of this year.

4.6 Provide skill development training to local people by including women and disadvantaged group of people, promote traditional skills related to bamboo and rattans, support making crafts, utensils and souvenirs out of bamboo and rattans

- Will be organised in second half of the year.

4.7 Support women groups by providing seed fund and technical support to start agroforestry including prioritised non –timber forest products (NTFPs) in designated areas of CF and in private lands

- We have supported poor and disadvantaged group of people including women in income generating activities. So far three groups from 3 different CFUGs have started fisheries (Y2_Doc_06).
- We are working in agroforestry part and possibilities. With discussions, we have kept agroforestry models in annual plan of Diyalo CFUG whereby we will be working with livestock farmers for fodder grass production in open areas inside forest whereby seedlings of tree species will be tended. We have supported fodder tree seedling production in private nurseries (Y2_Doc_03).

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.

- According to the plan most of the activities are making a satisfactory progress. However, developing a manual for biodiversity integration in community forest has been slower than we expected. We will meet this target by end of this year. Some activities are affected by COVID-19 which are in 2b.
- Government of Nepal imposed a nationwide ban on sale of Timber in community forests in June 2020. Some of the activities required some financial contribution from CFUGs. That has affected some of our activities to some extent but the effect to overall project was too small.
- Local political tensions between political parties (of which we are not part of) have some impacts in our activities. Due to this our effort to make local government's role visible in forest and environment related activities is slower.

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.

Covid has impacted our project in following three ways:

- Increased threat to biodiversity: Following the lockdown since third week of March 2020, cases of illegal hunting and tree felling was observed and the trend was nationwide. Cases of poaching were reported even in strictly protected national parks. Our site was not an exception. Local unemployed youths were engaged in hunting. Surveillance of forest department was weaker and the opportunity was used by poachers.
- Our activities were impacted by COVID-19: Project team in Kathmandu could not travel to the field during the nationwide lockdown. Similarly, RBGE researchers could not make their planned travel to Nepal. This has hampered planned field activities specially those which were seasonal in Nature. For example, several trees blossom in March-May period, we could not make specimen collection. For trees to blossom we need to wait one more year. This has impacts on some communication materials which are project milestones for eg. Biodiversity register, profile of Jalthal forest etc. Similarly, our plans to produce documentary is also lagging behind. In summary, some type of activities which are dependent on Kathmandu or RBGE team are affected while local activities including community engagements are coordinated and operated by field team are making satisfactory progress.

Mitigation to Covid-19 impacts:

- Going local: Inspire of pandemics we made a satisfactory progress in field activities. We had a benefit of having office at project site and local staff. Being local, helped us carry out most of the activities. We think being local in terms of operating office and staffs has provided opportunity to us carryout field activities even during the pandemics.
- SSS strategy: For our field activities we adopted SSS (small, scattered and several) strategies against single and big event. For example, one big event which was supposed to be organised in a single location was splited into four small events and were organised at convenient location of participants. This allowed us to conduct activities while following covid-19 safety guidelines of local personalities.
- ForestAction Nepal itself also developed a safety protocol for field activities (Y2Doc-..).
- We did remote supervision to our field staffs through telephone, zoom meeting, skype and messenger. Same method was used to discuss with partners.

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: over £

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 Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

- We expect some under spending in this year but the amount of underspent will depend on RBGE's travel to Nepal. We are discussing about change request with RBGE researchers. We may request for change soon before the end of December.
- We do not have specific referee comments to be addressed in this report. Nevertheless, reviewers' comments are considered in our activities and 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 Darwin-Projects@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: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**