

## Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

*Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this. Confidential information is marked in blue.*

**Submission Deadline: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2022**

<b>Project reference</b>	29-018
<b>Project title</b>	Promotion of coexistence in human-elephant conflict hotspots in Northeast India
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	India
<b>Lead partner</b>	British Asian Trust
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Aaranyak
<b>Project leader</b>	Belinda Stewart-Cox
<b>Report date and number</b>	HYR1 (Jun-Sept 2022)
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="http://www.britishasiantrust.org">www.britishasiantrust.org</a>

### **1. Outline progress in last 6 months (April-Sept) against agreed project implementation timetable.**

Reporting Period: June- September (The project started in June 2022)

#### **Output 1: Profiling the problem and building evidence**

June: The project team, comprising British Asian Trust (BAT) and Aaranyak, visited villages in the eastern Assam districts for a recce. The team also met with senior forest officials for the target region (Assam/Meghalaya) to brief them on the project and gather contextual information to inform village selection and around Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC) incident hotspots.

Based on these consultations, target villages were shortlisted. Villages were selected based on the following four pre-set criteria: (i) a revenue village close to elephant habitat, elephant corridor and protected areas; (ii) frequent/high intensity HEC incidents including crop and property damage, human injuries and deaths, and retaliatory elephant killings in the last five years; (iii) low economic background (have financial/emotional difficulty in recovering the losses) of the HEC affected people; (iv) people supportive towards conservation efforts to safeguard biodiversity.

Based on these criteria, a matrix was prepared for village selection. Secondary information from Forest Department, local villagers and published news was collected to rank the shortlisted villages. Thereafter, an on-ground verification was conducted for the final selection of villages.

July: We initiated the process of recruiting project personnel (project officers, project assistants), setting up the field office and collecting secondary information on HEC status. In addition, preparations were made for the first inception workshop in eastern Assam.

August: The project's first inception workshop was conducted on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2022 in Dibrugarh, Assam and attended by ~50 people, including officials from the Forest Department and Agriculture Department, local NGOs, University faculty and students, local conservationists, and local communities. During the workshop, we introduced the project, and held an open discussion to understand the current HEC status in the region, the measures local communities adopt to cope with the conflict scenario and identify the gap areas. This helped finalise the 16 target villages for implementation in the districts of Majuli, Jorhat,

Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia of eastern Assam. We also completed the recruitment of key project personnel during August.

September: The Meghalaya inception workshop was conducted on 22 September 2022 at the Government Circuit House in Tura in West Garo Hills and attended by 50+ people, including the Deputy Commissioner, senior officials from Forest Department, Police Department and representatives from various Government Departments, local communities, NGOs, and conservationists. All the attendees gave support for the project to carry-out activities in West Garo Hills to promote human-elephant coexistence. The four villages in West Garo Hills were selected using the same matrix and information from Meghalaya Forest Department.

With reference to the Implementation Timetable, we had to complete Activities 1.1, 1.2., and 1.3 and we have done so as per schedule or before schedule even.

#### **Output 2: Promoting security for people and elephants by raising awareness**

September: The team conducted a mobilisation meeting in each of the 20 selected villages of eastern Assam districts (n=16) and West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya (n=4) to explain the project and gain 'buy-in'. This was followed by a Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) in all the villages. 360 community members (M:65.5%; F:34.5%) were consulted as part of the RRAs. The Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) for the selected villages is ongoing, along with the monitoring of elephant movements in project sites. (RRA reports for each village are available on request)

We could not complete the workshop with experts to develop communication materials for creating awareness (Activity 2.2) due to delays suffered for the floods. This workshop is now scheduled for Q3. This delay will not impact the project and in fact will result in a better workshop as we can utilize the findings from the RRAs and PRAs to enrich the discussions.

#### **Output 3: Protecting livelihoods and assets**

September: As outlined above, community dialogues and RRA's have been carried out in each of the 20 villages, completing Activity 3.1 ahead of schedule. During the RRA, project teams undertook thorough discussions with community members to understand the practices adopted by local communities to mitigate HEC incidents. Most of the people surveyed in the selected villages mentioned that they practice crop guarding system. The project has also distributed 90 torchlights to the local communities and frontline forest staff to manage HEC.

#### **Output 4: Promoting supplementary livelihoods:**

September: According to the Implementation Timetable, the activities are not due till Q4. However, our RRA surveys have shown that in nine project villages, the local community has abandoned cultivation in 910 acres of agricultural land due to regular crop damage by elephants. With mostly smallholder farmers, this has a significant impact on the livelihoods of the region. We are currently gathering more data through our PRA exercise to understand and identify the measures that will work best to promote supplementary livelihoods in these areas.

#### **Output 5: Sharing knowledge and building capacity:**

The activities under this Output are scheduled after Q3 of Year 1. However, we are in the process of reviewing the existing IEC (Information Education Communication) materials to identify the gap areas and develop effective IEC materials. The ongoing PRAs and elephant movement data monitoring will also provide additional information that will help in developing the IECs.

**2. Detail notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt in last 6months. Explain what impact these may have and whether changes will affect the budget or timetable of project activities.**

Overall, the project implementation has gone smoothly and the project is on track. However, we did experience two minor challenges/unexpected developments. The first was the slight delay in conducting project activities because of the flooding in Assam and the involvement of relevant government officials in flood relief work. This has had minimal impact on the project timeline overall, beyond moving some activities from Q2 to Q3. The project will be on track, even a little ahead of schedule, by the end of Q3.

The second unexpected development has been a big win for the project, but also required a change to the planned implementation of the project. The project has gained major buy-in from the Meghalaya Government, which is a big win as the government is an important stakeholder in conservation and livelihoods projects in India. However, in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya, we had planned to work in two districts (West Garo and North Garo), but following the strong recommendations from Senior Forest Officials and the District Commissioner, we have submitted a change request to the Darwin Initiative to concentrate in West Garo Hills district only. This will reduce the number of districts the project will cover from 7 to 6, but not impact the outputs and outcomes of the project in any other way.

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

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS:	No
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance	No
Change request reference if known:	TBC

**4a. 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: £

**4b. 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 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 if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.**

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

Due to the flooding in Assam, some activities had to be postponed and will now be carried out in Q3. This has meant an underspend in Q2, but these funds will be spent in Q3 instead. This is explained and reflected in our Q3 Claim Form for the project.

**If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response 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 NIRAS-LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com). The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**