



**BIODIVERSITY
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



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

Half Year Report

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 2-3 pages** in length.

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.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2024

Please note all projects that were active before 1 October 2024 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

Submit to: BCF-Reports@niras.com including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	29-018
Project title	Promotion of coexistence in human-elephant conflict hotspots in Northeast India
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	India
Lead Organisation	British Asian Trust
Partner(s)	Aaranyak
Project leader	Belinda Stewart-Cox
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	1 April 2024 - 30 September 2024 HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	N/A uses British Asian Trust and Aaranyak socials

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).

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your M&E systems (are your indicators still relevant, can you report against any Standard Indicators, do your assumptions still hold true?). The guidance can be found on the resources page of the relevant fund website.

Output 1: Profiling the problem and building evidence

Monitoring of HEC in and around Project village: We continue to regularly monitor elephant movement and human-elephant conflict (HEC) incidents that occur in and around the project villages through active participation of the project team members, village champions (VCs) and Rapid Response Units (RRUs). In the last 6 months, we recorded 13 incidents of crop damage from eastern Assam, and 10 incidents of property damage from both Assam and Meghalaya project villages (Details in Annexure 1). Three human deaths (non-residents of project villages) were also recorded around project villages of West Garo Hills in Meghalaya during the reporting period.

Data analysis and report writing: The project team has analysed the data collected in the last 2 years and shared the findings with concerned stakeholders. A total of 20 village meetings were organised in eastern Assam and Meghalaya to update the stakeholders regarding various activities performed. The information is available on request.

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

Developing IEC materials: During this reporting period, an audio-visual form of the existing IEC material of “Gajah Katha” Phase I was made and launched on World Elephant Day on 12th August.

Moreover, a handbook was published in local Assamese language on human-elephant conflict mitigation tools of community managed solar-powered electric fences. This book was launched by Ms. Nandita Garlosa, Honourable Cabinet Minister for Power, Sports & Youth Welfare, Co-operation and ITFC (Archaeology) Department, Government of Assam, at an event held in Guwahati, Assam. Conduct awareness: We conducted a total of 10 “Gajah Katha” events, our signature outreach campaign. The Information Education Communications (IEC) materials of the second phase of Gajah Katha, which focussed on effective mitigation measures to reduce human-elephant conflict were used. Moreover, we conducted seven outreach events where we used both IEC materials from Gajah Katha phase I (about elephant ecology) and II to generate awareness. Through these 17 outreach events we reached out to around 553 people, of which 274 were males and 279 were females. In addition to *Gajah Katha*, we conducted several other outreach programmes targeting students, youths, farmers, and women to generate awareness. We conducted a total of 75 such events, reaching out to around 3499 people, of which 882 were males and 972 were females, in addition to 1645 students. On World Elephant Day, which is globally observed on 12th August, we conducted multiple events at Namoni Gazera village in Majuli district including wildlife quiz competition, creating elephant sculptures from colourful clay, nature games, and exhibitions of the handloom products of our beneficiaries. Officials from Majuli Forest Division, President and Secretary of TMPK Gazera Ancholik, member of Zila Parishad, and Gram Pradhan of Gazera attended the event.

Output 3: Protecting livelihoods and assets

Training to RRUs: Based on the training provided by our team, the RRUs have continued collecting information on elephants’ presence in their vicinity and sharing the alerts in “WhatsApp groups” (DI-A04). Given the effective HEC-alert managed by the RRUs and their implications in sending early warnings, the other villages besides, the project villages have adopted a similar model (DI-A05). Currently, the RRUs are active in 58 villages (including the 20 project villages) with around 389 active members. During the reporting period, 68 alert messages were sent out in 10 RRU groups across project villages of eastern Assam and Meghalaya (Details in Annexure 2).

Solar fence and Biofence installation

A total of 3.36 km of seasonal solar fence was installed in Sadiya (Tinsukia). While in Jorhat and Sivasagar districts, the project team along with the local community members is currently installing around 38 and 39 km of seasonal fence respectively. The solar fences are installed before the paddy harvesting season which begins in November.

We planned to provide 21 km of biofence (7 km in each row, with three rows is place) using Assam Lemon. During this reporting period, we planted around 3 km of biofence but lost most of the saplings to the flood. In Sadiya, we planted 1 km of biofence, and lost around 0.5 km to flood, which will be replaced with 800 lemon saplings. In Sivasagar, we lost the biofence to flood, and plan to provide additional 4800 saplings for biofence. Similarly, another 2 km of biofence was lost to flood in Majuli. Additionally, 2400 saplings will be supported for replanting.

Effectiveness of the solar fences: The project team has established a system to regularly monitor the solar fences and check whether the fence has been working effectively in all locations. In the project village of Sadiya, elephants broke the fence during the month of April 2024 which was repaired instantly.

Output 4: Promoting supplementary livelihoods

Supplementing Livelihood- In the last six months, we have supported 145 beneficiary households from 20 project villages (DI-B10). These households were selected based on preset criteria (details provided during year 1 annual report). Each beneficiary household is monitored regularly to ensure that they continue their efforts after receiving the training and earn additional income. Moreover, the beneficiaries already supported are monitored at regular intervals.

Output 5: Sharing knowledge and building capacity

Joint village meeting to share findings- In the last six months, we conducted 20 village meetings to discuss the project initiative and progress and receive feedback/input from the beneficiaries and other villagers. During one such village meetings, the villagers highlighted the need and use of vermicompost for better cultivated produce. Taking cognisance of this, we organised a capacity building training on vermicompost production.

In addition to this, the team made efforts to reach out to the people from the flood-affected project villages in eastern Assam and provided them with immediate relief materials such as mosquito nets/repellent, disinfectant, sanitary pads, tarpaulins, medication kits and few cooking utensils.

Prepare reports/journal articles: The team presented about the work during an International conference on human elephant conflict management held on 12th August, organised by Karnataka Forest Department.

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.

During June-July 2024, 10 project villages in eastern Assam districts of Tinsukia, Sivasagar and Jorhat were affected by severe annual floods. The flood significantly affected the project activities for around two months in these villages. Besides, the livelihood support extended in form of lemon and chilli cultivation were all damaged.

To support the flood affected community, we provided them with essentials sanitation and protective gear such as mosquito nets, tarpaulin sheets, sanitary pads, disinfectants, utensils, first-aid kits etc. through the project.

However, one of the significant observations post the flooding was how the crop fields remained with silt cover, making them uncultivable for the next few years, adding to food insecurities.

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:	No (agreed via email)
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes (via email)

Change Request reference if known: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

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?

No

6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report. If your project was subject to an Overseas

Security and Justice Assistance assessment, please use this space to comment on any changes to international human rights risks, and to address any additional mitigations outlined in your offer letters. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1st April 2024)

Have you **responded to any additional feedback** (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.

If not already submitted, have you attached your **risk register**?

Y

For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1st April 2024)

Have you responded to **feedback from your latest Annual Report Review**? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.

For All Projects

Include your **project reference** in the subject line of submission email.

Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com.

Have you **clearly highlighted any confidential information** within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?

Have you reported against the most **up to date information for your project**?

Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.