

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.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2023

Project reference	30 - 011
Project title	Living with large carnivores – Integrative coexistence through community empowerment
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	India & Nepal
Lead partner	North of England Zoological Society
Partner(s)	National Trust for Nature Conservation and Wildlife Trust of India
Project leader	<i>Dr Mayukh Chatterjee</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR-1 - 2023</i>
Project website/blog/social media	https://x.com/ScienceatCZ/status/1665759444666294274?s=20 https://x.com/ScienceatCZ/status/1665759545920978954?s=20

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).

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.

Besides the recruitment of required manpower, the first two quarters of the project were utilised in developing the methodology for collecting information on the various baselines for the project. This time was also taken to introduce and explain the project's objectives to the local communities through focussed group discussions and consultative meetings. It is important to note here that India and Nepal both experience torrential rainfalls in the monsoon season, typically between June to August. Keeping this in mind the second quarter was kept relatively devoid of field-based work and was reserved for planning and strategising related activities of the project. The project also brought on three advisors for specific aspects viz. mental health and wellbeing, working with media personnel, socioeconomic and demographic assessments, to support the core project team.

Activity 1.1, 2.1, & 3.1: During this period, the methodology and survey tool for baseline data collection for the indicators of the project was developed in close consultation with partners and the project advisors, over 10 hybrid meetings and an extended workshop (see annexed evidence file). Based on the drawn-out methodology and survey tool, the project team started door to door assessments covering all households (approximately 1200 households) in the six project villages in India and Nepal, aligning with outputs 1, 2 & 3. A survey monkey form was also designed to allow for easy data entry and compilation into a central database, which was monitored by the project leader and manager for errors and gaps. A total of 817 households in the three project villages in Chitwan National Park in Nepal were surveyed, while around 180 households were surveyed in Valmiki tiger reserve in India. Due to extended and heavy monsoon related flooding and road blockages (the risk has been included in the risk register), surveys were slightly delayed on the Indian side of the project, and surveys of remaining households will be completed by mid-November.

Activity 1.2: The project teams in India and Nepal held six consultative meetings and focused group discussions at two levels – with local administrative heads of the Eco Development Committees (EDC) of each project village in India, as well as the three Buffer Zone User Group Committees (BZUGC) for each of the three project villages in Nepal. The project's key objectives and the committees' role in the project was explained to the EDC and BZUGC members and their opinions and ideas were also sought during these meetings. Several other villagers also attended these meetings, and discussions were ensured to be open ended and interactive. The committees assured their assistance in delivering various project activities as well as in monitoring and evaluation.

Additionally, a consultative meeting to initiate the constitution of Primary Response Teams (PRTs), was also conducted with the local 16 community members of one village (*Devendrapur*) in Chitwan in Nepal. The villagers eagerly discussed and put forward their concerns and ideas, and a major suggestion put forward by some participants was taken onboard. As per this, it was decided to expand the scope (to include HWC management work) of an already established voluntary community based anti-poaching unit, as this would ensure they were being carried out by community volunteers who were already engaged in supporting wildlife conservation and had undergone basic training on patrolling, identifying wildlife presence, etc.

Activity 2.6: A separate methodological framework for the eye-cow initiative was also developed. This framework outlines how cattle will be sampled across project villages and how 'eye' and control (X) markings will be distributed across that sample. It also outlines the tools to be used for assessing relative impact of the markings across the sample over the project period. Sample impression pads for the 'eyes' and 'crosses' (1st control) were also manufactured (Please see annexed evidence file) using the guidelines provided by the Carnivore Research and Coexistence Group of Botswana (<https://carnivorecoexistence.info/african-carnivore-research-conservation-eye-cow-project-guideen/>), to be tested in December in select field sites in order to assess their efficacy and acceptability by local communities.

A draft guide has also been prepared to apprise field team members about the monitoring strategy and protocols as well as the self-reporting tools to be used for assessing effectiveness of the eyes vis-à-vis the controls.

Activity 3.2: On 15th September, a workshop was organised for establishing standardised community engagement processes and tools such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Dr Samir Sinha, WTI (Wildlife Trust of India) who has extensive experience in developing and using such tools and processes led this workshop which was attended by all team members of the project in India and Nepal as well as additional staff of the two partner organisations. The workshop aimed at establishing standard PRA processes for beneficiary engagement and empowerment in the six project villages, to allow for a more inclusive and participatory approach in carrying out the project activities. This would also allow in uniform assessment of the work throughout the project period.

Following the workshop, a standardised process framework was developed by both NTNC and WTI field teams. The NTNC field team then also planned to carry out a PRA workshop in the first week of October with members of the Buffer Zone User Group Committees (BZUGC) of one project village as per the process drawn out during the workshop. The outputs from this would be discussed between NTNC and WTI teams to ensure incorporation of any changes that may be required to the process.

Activity 3.3: The initiation of this activity has been delayed as the baseline survey initiation suffered a setback due to extended monsoons, because of which beneficiary groups could not be identified. Now that the baseline surveys are completed in Nepal and are near completion in India, this activity has picked up pace.

Our partners in India have identified an experienced consultant to carry out training workshops on manufacturing and repairing of fuel-efficient cook stoves for local women beneficiaries from the project villages. The first workshop has been scheduled for the last week of November, and currently materials and logistics are being sourced. WTI will partner with local potters, EDCs and women self-help groups to implement this activity.

The project partners in Nepal will be distributing prefabricated Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) cookstoves to identified beneficiaries under existing government subsidy schemes as there is already a good reach of this initiative in these regions. A relatively smaller group of these beneficiaries will be provided training on the repair and maintenance of these cookstoves, as LPG cookstoves require less maintenance.

Activity 4.1: The media report analyses has been delayed, as in the first quarter we were unable to collate information on existing print media dailies and their archival availability. This has however been completed in the second quarter and partners are recruiting part time consultants to carry out online searches of shortlisted print dailies (with accessible archives) over the next two quarters. A methodology for assessing and classifying media reports using specific key words is also being developed by the project team in consultation with the projects' media advisor.

Activity 4.2: Survey of relevant forest department staff at various levels to assess their knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions on human-wildlife conflicts in the region has been delayed. The survey tool has been developed, but due to limited capacity of in-field surveyors (since they are carrying out the baseline surveys) it has been planned now to be carried out after the community-based baseline information has been collected.

Activity 4.3: A master list of all print media houses and media professionals in the project area has been prepared with the help of project partners (please see annexed evidence file). These media houses and professionals have also been contacted to apprise them of this project and our intentions to work with them. Moving forward a short survey tool is being developed to assess the narrative on HWC from their perspective.

Activity 5.1: Two project advisors Dr. Andy Moss and Ms. Jennifer Mc Dermott were consulted to seek guidance towards developing the mental health and wellbeing assessment framework for local communities vis-a-vis their experience of negative interactions with wildlife. It was decided that a standardised framework be referred to and then modified to the local context. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) was selected owing to its wide application and rigorous validation in different languages across the world. This has also been validated in an Indian vernacular (*Hindi*) by

an accredited research institution in India. Consultations with the lead scientist who validated this scale were also carried out and their permission to use their validated scale in *Hindi* was obtained. Additional questions have now been developed to enhance this scale to incorporate the artefacts of human-wildlife conflict experiences, and the survey tool is currently under review by the advisors.

Assumptions Revisited

Output 2

1. Communities are willing to speak about livestock depredation freely before and after the project.

The baseline data suggests that community members have been freely speaking about livestock depredation and all aspects related to it even when they have not received any support from local authorities.

2. Compensation records from government bodies will be shared for data analysis of livestock depredation.

This assumption has been triggered as the government does not maintain this information in a standardised manner. We however have carried outdoor-to-door surveys in project villages, and thus have recorded more accurate estimates of livestock depredation over last three years.

3. Communities will want PPPs and will maintain them.

Well before the baseline data collection, local communities have been reaching out to the project teams to learn more about PPPs and seek support to build them. In addition to this, our previous experience through the Living with Tigers project shows that the uptake for PPPs in the project region in Nepal have percolated significantly beyond the immediate project beneficiaries, wherein people who could afford it adopted the practice even in neighbouring villages.

Output 3

1. Communities are willing to speak to the project team about forest-based resource collection and income from it openly.

The baseline data suggests that community members have been freely conveying to surveyors, their forest resource dependencies, earnings from them, and all other aspects related to it even when they have not received any support from local authorities.

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.

The project experienced some changes early in the first quarter wherein the Project Supervisor and in-country lead appointed by NTNC in Nepal changed. The Project implementation coordinator also had to be replaced by NTNC owing to personal reasons of the departing coordinator. By the end of the second quarter, all necessary survey consultants, village liaisons and field assistants were recruited by our partners in India and Nepal. Subsequent change requests were also submitted to NIRAS and in principal approval has now been received. As these changes were incorporated at an early stage, they do not have any long-term detrimental impacts on the project activities and outcomes.

Also, as mentioned before, while the project timeline consciously accounted for the monsoon season, we could not foresee the duration and intensity of the monsoons this year which were both extended and intensive (please see news links in annexed evidence file) disrupting physical modes of communication, and therefore delaying the initiation of field-based activities. This has however been managed very well by our partners in the field by ramping up field personnel to speed up work.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: No

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes (for manpower change only)

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes

Change request reference if known: N/A

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

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 2024)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

4c. 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.

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.

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, 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.

All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS 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. 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**