



**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	30-017
Project title	Strengthening communities livelihood and stewardship to conserve Otters in Karnali
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal
Lead Organisation	WWF -UK
Partner(s)	WWF- Nepal; SMCRF, SBS, DCC and FKWD
Project leader	Nicola Loweth (WWF-UK); Rajesh Sada (WWF Nepal)
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 October 2024, HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	Project webpage

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).

Output 1: By 2026, river dependent communities and local governments demonstrate river stretch co-management covering at least 10 kms of the Karnali river and one fish sanctuary, enhancing sustainable fishing practices and inclusive decision making processes

A two-day training workshop on sustainable fishing and river monitoring (Activity 1.3) was held on June 10-11, 2024, in Rajapur-3, Bardiya. A total of 44 (17 males and 27 females) members from the Community River Stretch Management Groups (CRSMGs) attended. The training focussed on the use of traditional fishing gears and techniques, highlighting the fish sustainability, understanding breeding seasons, and the importance of adhering to appropriate fishing timings to minimise environmental impact. As a result, participants' knowledge increased by around 20%.

During this reporting period, 15 CRSMGs conducted 180 river monitoring patrols (Activity 1.6) along the Karnali River, recording 536 instances of illegal and unsustainable fishing practices (207 cases involving gill nets, 327 cases of mosquito nets and 2 cases of river diversion).

In order to raise awareness (Activity 1.7) about otter conservation and habitat protection, World Otter Day was celebrated on 29th May 2024 at Tikapur-5, Kailali with 75 participants (53 males

and females). Similarly, World Rivers Day was celebrated by organising an Inter School Art Competition on 22nd September 2024.

Furthermore, to promote community led awareness campaigns (Activity 1.7), 44 Otter Champions (16 males and 28 females) from 15 CRSMGs received refresher training on Otter conservation and sustainable fishing on 25th and 26th September, 2024. Additionally, two more community-based awareness campaigns were held, engaging 115 participants (30 males and 85 females) leading to a 35% increase in participants' knowledge. Hoarding boards were also installed (Activity 1.7) in Rajapur Municipality and Geruwa Rural Municipality, Bardiya district. Finally, leadership training (Activity 1.10) was provided to six CRSMGs, aiming to strengthen leadership skills, improve decision-making abilities, and promote sustainable fishing practices. This led to a 48% increase in participants' knowledge.

Output 2. By 2026, 200 Sonaha/Tharu households (at least 50% women as direct beneficiaries) living in and around the lower Karnali increase their annual income by 15% through market oriented vocational training to enhance their technical skills followed by material support for establishment of micro-enterprises.

During this reporting period, the project conducted a series of both, on-farm (Activity 2.2) and off-farm (Activity 2.3) training activities to diversify livelihood options and promote entrepreneurship among beneficiaries. These trainings aimed to enhance technical skill while integrating traditional farming knowledge. The project provided training on pig rearing for 17 beneficiaries (3 males and 14 females), goat rearing for 30 beneficiaries (24 males and 6 females), a refresher course on vegetable farming for 17 beneficiaries (3 males and 14 females) and integrated pest management training for 31 participants to promote pesticide-free vegetables. The training focussed on using locally available materials to minimise costs, marketing techniques for profit maximisation, and risk management strategies related to enterprise establishment. Additionally, a 6-month tailoring course (Activity 2.3) was launched for 15 female beneficiaries aiming to equip them with tailoring skills, fabric knowledge and familiarity with available machinery.

In addition, a 3-year business plan development workshop for cooperatives (Activity 2.8) was held, benefitting 21 participants (6 males and 15 females). This business plan will help cooperatives to operate successfully and achieve sustainable growth. A 5-day financial literacy campaign (Activity 2.8) was also conducted to enhance the understanding and knowledge of board members and staff.

Three beneficiary groups, each consisting of seven members, were supported with irrigation systems for fishponds (Activity 2.4), each pond measuring 7,284 square feet. A total of 1,200 fingerlings and necessary feed (pellets) were provided to each group to ensure successful fish cultivation. Additionally, 17 beneficiaries received support for vegetable farming (Activity 2.4) including plastic tunnels, mulching plastic, spray tanks, and seeds for both seasonal and off-season vegetables. This initiative aims to enhance food security and promote sustainable livelihoods through diversified agricultural practices.

During the last six months, a total of 49 beneficiaries who received both on and off-farm training have begun generating income from their newly acquired skills. Additionally, 20 beneficiaries secured loans totaling USD 5265 (NRs. 695000) to establish enterprises. Six more women from target villages have also started earning income generation by learning grass-based handicraft making from project supported, trained beneficiaries. Micro-enterprises established in the first year of the project, such as vegetable farming, tea shops, handicrafts making, duck rearing, and betel leaf cultivation have shown resilience and continue to generate revenue from USD 1189 to USD 4957.

Output 3. By 2026, government officials (municipalities, division forest office, park authorities) have improved capacity to monitor and control river aggregates extraction and destructive fishing practices, in order to better protect fish spawning sites and otter habitats

A capacity-building workshop on otter and prey base conservation (Activity 3.1) was held in Tikapur on 27th September 2024 for 27 governmental officials (20 male and 7 females). The workshop aimed to enhance their knowledge on otter and prey base conservation, as well as issues such as destructive fishing practices.

Similarly, on June 15,2024, a training workshop (Activity 3.3) focussed on on the Aquatic Animal Protection Act and the National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act was convened for 32 officials (25 males and 7 females) from law enforcement agencies, including the Nepal Police and Armed Police Force, also in Tikapur. A key challenge identified was the lack of awareness among law enforcement agencies regarding prevailing laws and regulations on aquatic animal protection, hindering conservation efforts for aquatic biodiversity.

The workshop also covered important environmental topics, such as Initial Environmental Examination (IEE), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and Environment Management Plans. These topics were linked to addressing illegal sand and gravel mining in the Karnali River, as well as promoting sustainable fishing practices and conserving fish species that are crucial for maintaining the otter prey base for otters. Pre and post-test evaluations showed an average knowledge increase of 32% among government officials and 35% among law enforcement agencies.

Output 4. By 2026, endorsed otter conservation action plan is adopted by all relevant stakeholders underpinned by robust scientific research and evidence-based approaches

Between April - Sept 2024, six community consultations were held with 203 participants (131 males, and 72 females) to prepare the Otter Conservation Action Plan (Activity 4.6). These consultations took place in various locations, including Majhgaun- Kanchanpur, Arnahawa-Kailali, Thakurdwara- Bardia, Kapilvastu, Kasara- Chitwan and Kusaha- Sunsari. The meetings spanned from Shuklaphanta National Park in the far-western Nepal to Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve in eastern Nepal.

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.

- Illegal fishing practices, particularly night-time electrocution (which occurs outside of the CRSMGs' monitoring hours) have been reported. This could impact the project's goal of increasing fish diversity and abundance.
- On the 13th September 2024, heavy rainfall in far-western Nepal caused flooding that swept away a large number of fish from one of the project-supported fishponds, resulting in significant losses. This may affect the beneficiaries' income generation potential.

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/ No

Formal Change Request submitted:

Yes/ No

None in FY 2024/25

Received confirmation of change acceptance:

Yes/ No

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 ☒

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?

The agreement with the project implementing partners was delayed due to the annual government endorsement cycle. Similar to last year, the period November to March is an intense period of field implementation, following the monsoon and a period of festivals in Nepal. We will be reviewing the Year 2 budget with our partners to make appropriate changes and consider alternatives. A Change Request Form will be submitted shortly to request changes between budget lines within the Year 2.

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.

Comment 1: Concerns were raised by some community members leading to reluctance to participate in project activities. While it is understood that the project organised focus group discussions and monthly awareness raising events in response, the outcome of these measures has not been reported. Please clarify.

Response: *Focus group discussions, awareness campaigns, regular monthly meetings with CRSMGs, have been organised by the project partners to raise awareness and foster stewardship among community members. This has resulted in formation and registration of 15 CRSMGs including regular monitoring of their respective river stretches and organisation of the community led awareness raising activities.*

Comment 2: Two camera traps installed for otter occupancy monitoring were stolen during the reporting period. In mitigation, the project has collaborated with village chiefs and local law enforcement agencies. However, it is unclear what measures have been taken by these stakeholders in response. Please clarify.

Response: *The village chief raised the issue of the stolen cameras during their village meetings, emphasising the importance of retrieving data for otter conservation. Community members were also encouraged to report any suspicious activity or information regarding the theft, however, no information has been provided so far.*

Comment 3: It is unclear if the project is recognized as a distinct project with a clear identity or does it form part of a larger program. Please clarify.

Response: Yes, the project has been recognized as a distinct project due to its specific focus on river-dependent communities, river stretch co-management and the conservation of and their prey base conservation. However, it significantly contributes to the government's Terai Arc Landscape Strategy and Action Plan (2015-2025), and WWF Nepal's strategic plan (2022-2026).

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.	n/a
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	n/a
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.	yes
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	yes
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 ?	yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	yes