



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

Half Year Report

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, Sonaha Bikas Samaj (SBS), Freed Kamaiya Women Development Forum (FKWDF), Dolphin Conservation Centre (DCC), Small Mammal Conservation and Research Foundation (SMCRF)
Project Leader	Nicola Loweth (WWF-UK); Rajesh Sada (WWF Nepal)
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 October 2025, HYR3
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.

On 6 June 2025, Tikapur Municipality convened a group interaction session aimed at advancing the institutional mechanism for river stretch co-management. The session focused on the registration process and finalisation of the statute for the Milan Community River Stretch Management Group (CRSMG). The event was facilitated by officials from the Municipality's Local Disaster and Environment Office and financially supported by Tikapur Municipality.

In parallel, significant legislative progress was achieved with the endorsement of the Aquatic Animal Bill by Rajapur Municipality and Geruwa Rural Municipality on 22 and 24 June 2025, respectively. This endorsement provides a robust legal foundation for community-led river management, promoting sustainable fish harvesting, enhancing local revenue generation, and curbing illegal activities (Activity 1.2).

To mitigate illegal and destructive fishing practices along the Karnali River, CRSMGs were mobilised to monitor designated river stretches ranging from 1 to 2.5 kilometres in close coordination with local governments, Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs), and law enforcement agencies. During the reporting period, CRSMGs documented a total of 119 incidents of illegal fishing. Additionally, all CRSMG members received accidental health

insurance coverage in accordance with government standards to ensure their safety and motivation during field operations (Activity 1.6).

World Otter Day was commemorated on 28 May 2025 in Rajapur-1, Bardiya to promote sustainable fishing practices and otter conservation. The event engaged 72 participants (Male: 40, Female: 32), including community members, youth, local stakeholders, and government representatives. Activities included a conservation rally and an awareness session highlighting the ecological significance of otters as indicators of healthy river ecosystems. The event concluded with a collective conservation pledge to safeguard aquatic biodiversity and foster harmonious coexistence with nature.

Further outreach was conducted by Otter Champions (OCs), who organised 30 awareness programmes across schools, CFUGs, and community centres, reaching a total of 979 individuals (Male: 206, Female: 773). To reinforce public messaging, two hoarding boards were installed at strategic locations, emphasizing the importance of otters, threats to their habitats, and the necessity of protecting their prey base (Activity 1.7).

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 primarily focused on providing refresher training for previous livelihood beneficiaries to strengthen their technical skills and enhance income generation.

A two-day refresher training on goat rearing was conducted with 27 participants (Female–25, Male–2), focusing on business planning, breed selection, shed management, nutrition, health, vaccination, and insurance. Similarly, a two-day pig farming refresher training was held in Rajapur, Bardiya from 8–9 June 2025 with 21 participants (Female–19, Male–2), covering topics on shed construction, pig breeds, reproduction, piglet care, feeding practices, marketing, and disease prevention. A two-day refresher training on fish farming was also organized in Rajapur, Bardiya, with 15 participants (Female–8, Male–7) from four fish farming groups, covering fish species selection, disease management, preparation of low-cost feed using local materials, and marketing, along with hands-on practical exercises. Likewise, a two-day refresher training on vegetable farming was organized for 19 beneficiaries (Female-15, Male-4) focusing on climate change impacts on farming, seed selection, organic fertilizer preparation, off-season farming, gourd farming techniques, pest and disease management, and market coordination to enhance productivity and profitability (Activity 2.2).

To enhance off-farm livelihood skills, a two-day orientation on fresh house (butchery) management was conducted for 8 new beneficiaries (Female–5, Male–3). The training focused on slaughterhouse hygiene, record-keeping, market management, and included practical sessions on butchery (Activity 2.3). Participants also received input support such as a deep freezers, weighing machines, and raw materials for constructing fresh houses to enable them to start their businesses immediately. Within one month of completing the training, four beneficiaries had already established their fresh house enterprises (Activity 2.4).

A fifteen-day long advance grass-based handicraft making training was also conducted in Rajapur, Bardiya for 10 previous beneficiaries, focusing on producing modern handicraft products such as baskets, wall hangings, and dining sets using *Saccharum* species with dyeing and finishing techniques. Similarly, a fifteen-day follow-up car driving training was organized (1–15 August 2025) for 6 male beneficiaries, of whom three successfully obtained driving licenses (Activity 2.3). Similarly, 23 kg of wire mesh (Gabion net) was provided to 10 beneficiaries for duck rearing to protect ducklings from predators. In addition, 20 vegetable farmers were supported with green mesh nets and weighing machines to protect crops and improve market transactions,

while one beneficiary in a drought-prone area was provided irrigation support (pump set and pipe) to improve water access for vegetable farming (Activity 2.4).

To strengthen business development and market linkages, a three-day Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) training was conducted in Rajapur, Bardiya for 23 participants (Female–14, Male–9), covering entrepreneurship, marketing, financial management, and business plan preparation. Furthermore, five interaction meetings were organized with 121 earlier livelihood beneficiaries (Female–97, Male–24) representing different sectors such as vegetable, fish, pig, goat, and duck farming, handicrafts, and snack enterprises. These meetings facilitated experience sharing, problem-solving, and discussions on enterprise registration, record-keeping, and access to seed capital through cooperatives. Similarly, a handicraft collection center was established at Rajapur-3, Bardiya, to promote product visibility and serve as a sales outlet. This center is managed by a trained beneficiary who also sales products through social media platforms (Activity 2.7).

To improve financial access for enterprise growth, the project provided additional seed capital of NPR [REDACTED] (approx. [REDACTED]) to Shree Sharad Sana Kisan Agricultural Cooperative Society Ltd., Rajapur-1, Daulatpur, Bardiya. This support complemented the previously mobilized NPR [REDACTED] (approximately [REDACTED]) to meet the growing loan demand among cooperative members. In addition, six financial literacy campaigns were conducted and reached 143 CRSMGs members (Female–127, Male–16) to enhance financial decision-making, promote savings, and provide information on cooperative loan and share membership procedures (Activity 2.8).

During the reporting period, 41 beneficiaries accessed cooperative loans amounting to £ [REDACTED] (NPR [REDACTED]) to establish or expand their enterprises. Micro-enterprises initiated in the first year—such as vegetable farming, tea shops, handicraft production, pig and goat farming, hair cutting, duck rearing, and betel leaf cultivation—have demonstrated resilience and sustainability, collectively generating an income of £ [REDACTED] (NPR [REDACTED]) during this period (On-farm: [REDACTED]; Off-farm: £ [REDACTED]).

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 organized for 27 governmental officials (Male-25, Female-2) in Tikapur, Kailali on 15th August, 2025 to enhance the knowledge of the government officials regarding otters and their prey base conservation, as well as issues such as destructive fishing practices. Similarly, a training workshop specifically focussing on Aquatic Animal Protection Act and National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act and local Aquatic Animal and Biodiversity Conservation Act (Activity 3.3) was convened for 22 officials (Male-19, Female-3) from law enforcement agencies, specifically the Nepal Police and Armed Police Force, in Tikapur, Kailali on 16th August, 2025. The workshop addressed a critical gap in awareness among law enforcement agencies regarding existing legal frameworks for aquatic animal protection, which has been identified as a major barrier to effective enforcement. The workshop also covered important environmental topics, including Initial Environmental Examination (IEE), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and Environment Management Plans. These topics were contextualized to address illegal sand and gravel extraction in the Kamali River, to promote sustainable fishing practices that support the conservation of fish species that are crucial for maintaining the prey base for otters. On average, 35% and 33% increment in knowledge was observed among government officials and LEAs respectively, based on pre and post-tests.

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

The first draft of the Otter Conservation Action Plan was discussed on July 16, 2025, with eight researchers from the Himalayan Otter Network (HON), IUCN SSC Otter Specialist Group. Based on their inputs, the draft was revised and resubmitted to DNPWC on August 5, 2025 and later

reviewed by senior conservation officers and experts whose feedback was also incorporated in the updated version.	
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.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The construction of a bridge in the Sankatti area, connecting Tikapur and Geruwa Municipalities, has disrupted water flow and sedimentation downstream, potentially affecting fish diversity and otter occupancy in the peripheral area. Policy-level decision-making was hindered by disruptions from local protests and radical movements, including the Gen Z protests, resulting in the reluctance of municipal and ward representatives to make public appearances. Escalating political unrest in recent months may hinder mass gatherings and social events. The cancellation of scheduled municipal executive meetings in Janaki Rural Municipality, Tikapur and Lamki Chuha Municipalities resulted in the inability to endorse the river aggregate extraction protocol. 	
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
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes/ No
Change Request reference if known:	
4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025) Actual spend: XXXXXXXXXX	
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 2026)? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Estimated underspend: £0	
4c. If you expect an 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, and not later than 31st December. 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 BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures?	
No	

6. Project risk management

6a. If your project has an Overseas Security and Justice assessment, please provide an update on any related risks, and any special conditions in your award paperwork if relevant for your project.

Not Applicable

7. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent Annual Report. As a reminder, all projects that were scored as 'Not Yet Sensitive' in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment of their latest Annual Report should demonstrate how they are meeting the minimum GESI-Sensitive standard.

Checklist for submission

Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, and annexe other requested materials as appropriate.	Yes, but in Section 7
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	Yes
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	
Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com	
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	