

Darwin Initiative Capability & Capacity: Final Report

To be completed with reference to the “Project Reporting Information Note”:
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It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 20 pages** in length, excluding annexes.

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Darwin Initiative Project Information

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Project title	Integrating local government and community conservation capacity for snow leopards
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Project partner(s)	Mountain Spirit (MS)
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Project Leader’s name	Dr Shailendra Thakali
Project website/blog/social media	www.snowleopardconservancy.org
Report author(s) and date	Dr Shailendra Thakali and Brian Peniston, June 29, 2025

1 Project Summary

Snow leopards, listed as Endangered in Nepal and Vulnerable globally, continue to face persistent threats from retaliatory killings following livestock predation. While actual losses are relatively low (1–3% of total livestock), incidents involving multiple kills—often due to poorly built corrals—can trigger severe backlash from affected communities. Compensation mechanisms remain slow, inadequate, and bureaucratically burdensome, while preventive measures such as predator-proof corrals are costly and difficult to scale in remote areas.

Effective conservation requires a holistic, joined-up and integrated approach that includes improved livestock protection, enhanced wild prey populations, diversified income opportunities such as ecotourism, and strong community engagement. Yet efforts remain fragmented, overly centralized, and insufficiently scaled—despite Nepal’s transition to a federal system with three tiers of government. Some success has been seen in Lower Mustang and Manang, where herder networks, farmer-led cooperatives, compensation schemes, and conservation enterprises have begun to take root. However, geographically remote villages like Nar and Phu continue to fall behind.

This project made significant progress in establishing a coordinated snow leopard conservation mechanism across the rural municipalities of Gharapjhong, Narpa Bhumi, and Ngisyang within

Nepal's Annapurna Conservation Area. Although a formal centralized institutional body was not created, a functional mechanism emerged through aligned municipal policies, registered herder groups, cooperatives, and community-based enterprises.

At the policy level, several municipalities adopted snow leopard imagery in their official symbols, signalling shared political commitment. Cooperatives played a central role in channelling conservation funding, thereby enhancing transparency and inter-municipal accountability. Conservation goals were closely linked to enterprise development. In Gharapjhong, over 540 women in the Vongmor Cooperative launched branded local products promoting snow leopard conservation. In Narpa Bhumi, abandoned farmland was revitalized through the cultivation of Himalayan chives (jimbu), improving local livelihoods and reducing pressure on fragile alpine habitats.

Ecotourism was another key focus, including the launch of Nepal's first "Snow Leopard Trails." Youth were trained in guiding, hospitality, and wildlife tracking, contributing to local employment. Non-timber forest products (NTFPs)—such as wild mushrooms and wool-based crafts—were identified for enterprise development, although logistical and regulatory hurdles persist.

To mitigate livestock depredation, herder groups were equipped with predator-proof corrals, solar-powered lights, and improved enclosures—significantly improving livestock safety. Mobile veterinary clinics and pilot livestock insurance schemes provided preventive care to over 2,300 animals. Despite low insurance uptake—due to delays in claims processing and limited access—these initiatives laid critical groundwork for more robust risk management in the future.

Gender and youth inclusion were integral to the project's success. Women played leading roles in key cooperatives and herder groups, while young people acquired skills and employment through conservation-linked enterprises. The project successfully reached over 1,094 individuals through various programs—62% of whom were women—and delivered direct benefits to 769 households across three municipalities.

Although not formalized under a single institution, the conservation mechanism functions effectively through community networks and aligned local government strategies. Encouragingly, this model has already been replicated in Mugu District, near Rara National Park. Originally designed as a one-year initiative with potential for extension, the project ended early due to the closure of USAID funding.

While collaboration within individual local governments improved significantly, intergovernmental coordination remained limited. Contributing factors included geographic isolation, the lack of dedicated intergovernmental conservation focused fund transfer systems, the absence of simplified compensation mechanisms for losses caused by snow leopards and other predators, and the lack of a higher-level, locally represented institutional body to oversee conservation across municipal boundaries.

2 Project Partnerships

Partnerships were established with Gharapjhong Rural Municipality in Mustang, and Manang Ngisyang and Narpa Bhumi Rural Municipalities in Manang, along with cooperatives, herder groups, and local-level institutions formed under the Annapurna Conservation Area. The project was approved by the Social Welfare Council in accordance with Nepal's NGO laws. All three municipalities also approved the project and signed memorandums of understanding.

The project maintained coordination with the Ministry of Forests and Environment, Gandaki Province, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, and the Annapurna

Conservation Area (ACA) managed by the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC). Coordination also extended to district-based line agencies such as Veterinary Hospitals and Livestock Service Centers, private sector partners such as insurance companies, and international and national organizations including International Veterinary Outreach (IVO) and Animal Nepal (AN).

These partnerships focused on establishing forums and networks for multi-stakeholder engagement to promote collaborative efforts for snow leopard conservation within designated habitats. All partners were involved in various aspects of activity planning and project implementation.

3 Project Achievements

3.1 Output 1: Three rural municipalities collaborate to market snow leopard-linked products and services (e.g., tourism), thereby promoting snow leopard conservation.

This project was implemented across three rural municipalities in Manang and Mustang districts, each situated in separate valleys within the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA)—Nepal's largest protected area. Though independently governed, these municipalities share ecological and administrative linkages due to their location within the ACA.

Nepal's 2015 Constitution promotes federal, provincial, and local coordination; however, practical collaboration is still limited. To address this, the project promoted snow leopard conservation as a shared ecological and economic concern to strengthen inter-municipal cooperation. As a flagship species, the snow leopard offers both conservation value and branding potential for tourism and local enterprise.

Manang and Mustang, part of the globally renowned Annapurna Circuit, are major trekking destinations, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors annually. These areas are also biodiversity hotspots, especially for endangered species like the snow leopard.

However, snow leopards pose risks to herders by preying on livestock—especially goats and young yaks—causing substantial losses and discouraging conservation efforts. In response, the project collaborated with municipalities to implement four major initiatives, with registered cooperatives and groups receiving municipal funding. This has increased local ownership and accountability for conservation-linked enterprises.

Key Project Achievements

Jimbu Cultivation and Value Addition: The project successfully revitalized commercial jimbu (Himalayan chives) cultivation in Phu village, a biodiversity-rich area and habitat for snow leopards. Initially involving 45 households (70% women), the initiative now supports 30 households engaged in cultivating jimbu on fallow land. The 7-member Upi Jimbu Cultivation Group was re-established to coordinate production, branding, and marketing.

With project support, the group designed packaging and collected 25 kg of dried jimbu to test result of value addition. Exposure visits to Kathmandu allowed members to participate in cleaning, weighing, and packaging activities and to meet 10 potential vendors. While vendors praised Phu jimbu for its superior aroma and agreed to retail it at NPR 450 per 50 kg (four times the village rate), their reluctance to offer upfront payments discouraged continued value addition. Nevertheless, the effort demonstrated the commercial potential of branded jimbu to generate alternative income and help offset snow leopard-related livestock losses.

Using Snow Leopards as a Brand for Local Products: In Mustang, the project partnered with the Vongmore Small Farmers Agriculture Cooperative—the largest in the district with 540

women members and NPR 10 million in working capital—to brand and market local products using snow leopard imagery.

Five business plans were developed—one for the cooperative and four for member-run enterprises. The project contributed [REDACTED] supplemented by [REDACTED] from the cooperative, to create branded packaging materials. Products now carry the snow leopard image and the slogan, “Small Farmers for Snow Leopard – Committed to Quality, Pure, and Organic Local Products.” Although MoU finalization was delayed, limiting full assessment of outcomes, the initiative successfully mobilized women and helped foster a shared identity linking conservation with economic opportunity.

Ecotourism Experience and Service Development: To enhance eco-tourism in Thini village, the project mapped three themed trekking trails—Thakali Heritage Trail, Nilgiri Round Trail, and the Snow Leopard Trail, which leads to Tilicho via prime snow leopard habitat. The installation of 27 QR-coded storyboards along these trails is planned to educate visitors about local culture, wildlife, and snow leopard conservation. Additionally, a five-day snow leopard tracking and guiding training was conducted for 15 participants (including two women). Three local youths (one female) completed professional guide certifications, and a local mule transporter expanded services to include guiding. These activities have helped diversify tourism offerings, raise conservation awareness, and create new livelihood opportunities.

Hotel and Lodge Management Training: Recognizing demand for skilled labor in tourism and hospitality, the project partnered with National Academy of Tourism and Hotel Management (NATHAM) to deliver two 15-day hotel and lodge management training sessions in Kathmandu for 40 participants (18 women) from all three municipalities. The course included practical training in baking, barista skills, and housekeeping. As a result, five participants launched bakery and café businesses, while one ward chair from Braga now successfully runs a lodge and café, attributing improved service quality to the training.

Other Potential Enterprising Opportunities: To expand income-generating opportunities, the project conducted an assessment of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). The survey identified **63 potentially marketable species**, including **60 types of mushrooms**, 15 of which are edible. This led to plans for value-addition training on existing NTFPs such as mushrooms and exploration of new livelihood options.

A community agriculture cooperative in Syang village—whose members include goat and yak herders—was recognized as a promising channel for product diversification. Community members in Syang and Nar expressed strong interest in wool products, such as carpets and blankets. This enterprise, however, could not be started due to funding and skill constraints, and lack of local commitments.

Yak cheese production in Braga emerged as another promising snow leopard-linked product potential. Although the local market for yak wool is niche due to fiber coarseness, the feasibility of wool-based income was recognized by residents of Syang and Nar and will be pursued further.

Reflections, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

While Output 1 achieved several foundational milestones—particularly in linking biodiversity conservation with local economic development—the project also faced a number of significant challenges that limited the full realization of its intended outcomes. The following reflections summarize these obstacles and the key lessons derived from the implementation process.

One of the major challenges was related to market linkage. The reluctance of Kathmandu-based vendors to provide upfront payments for *jimbu* significantly discouraged local farmers from engaging in value-added processing. This weakened their confidence in the emerging market

model and disrupted the continuity of the initiative. Additionally, the persistent trend of out-migration from rural areas, particularly among youth, further reduced participation in agriculture-based livelihood activities. This trend created labor shortages and threatened the long-term sustainability of community-based enterprises.

Administrative delays also posed a challenge. The finalization of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with a key institutional partner—the Vongmore Small Farmers Cooperative—took longer than anticipated. This affected the timely rollout of branding-related activities and hindered early evaluation of their market impact. Moreover, inadequate infrastructure, especially along the Tilicho trail, limited the potential of eco-tourism initiatives designed to promote conservation through tourism. Poor trail conditions affected both tourist access and the viability of conservation-linked tourism services.

Despite these challenges, several important lessons emerged. Firstly, the project underscored the importance of market readiness. Branding and enterprise development efforts are unlikely to succeed unless supported by reliable payment systems and robust supply chains. In this context, it became evident that market systems must be in place before introducing product branding at scale.

Secondly, strong institutional partnerships are crucial for the sustainability of conservation-linked enterprises. The involvement of capable, community-rooted cooperatives—such as the Vongmore Small Farmers Cooperative—proved instrumental in strengthening enterprise development, scaling activities, and building long-term accountability within the system.

A third key insight was the value of gender inclusion. The active participation and leadership of women throughout the project enhanced local ownership and added depth to implementation efforts. Women-led cooperatives played an especially vital role in shaping community responses and ensuring inclusive participation.

The project also demonstrated the effectiveness of short, practical, and locally tailored training programs. These hands-on sessions significantly boosted community skills and enabled quick livelihood outcomes. Participants showed increased engagement and a stronger sense of agency when training was adapted to local needs and realities.

Lastly, the project confirmed that aligning conservation with local economic development is not only possible but can also be mutually reinforcing. Through snow leopard-branded products and conservation-friendly tourism, the project showed that ecological goals can coexist with community incentives—provided market conditions are fair and accessible to producers.

In summary, Output 1 laid the foundation for integrating conservation and economic development in a mutually supportive framework. It introduced innovative, community-based models that empowered local cooperatives—particularly those led by women—and piloted nature-linked enterprises that hold long-term promise. Although challenges around market access, infrastructure, and coordination delayed some outcomes, the project made meaningful strides in promoting inter-municipal cooperation, enhancing local ownership, and demonstrating the viability of snow leopard-friendly livelihoods. These lessons provide a valuable roadmap for future conservation and development programming in high-altitude mountain landscapes.

3.2 Output 2: A New Cooperative of Livestock Owners Operates Across Three Municipalities

A baseline survey conducted in Year 1 found that, apart from Gharapjhong Rural Municipality (RM), the other two municipalities—Narpa Bhumi and Ngisyang—had no cooperatives involving livestock owners. Even in Gharapjhong, the 10 registered cooperatives represented a

mix of occupational groups, including farmers, herders, off-farm entrepreneurs, women, and Dalits, rather than exclusively serving herders.

Several livestock groups were identified in Gharapjhong and Ngisyang, although most had been formed primarily to access municipal subsidies or support from donor-funded projects. Narpa Bhumi RM had no such groups. In addition, institutional structures such as the Conservation Area Management Committees (CAMCs)—present in all three RMs—and the Snow Leopard Conservation Committees (SLCCs)—operating in Ngisyang and Narpa Bhumi—were in place but awaiting restructuring under the amended Conservation Area Regulation, which was pending approval as of 2024.

Key Project Achievements

Although no livestock cooperative previously operated across all three municipalities, the project successfully formed herder groups in each RM and laid the foundation for a future inter-municipal livestock cooperative.

Gharapjhong Rural Municipality: Gharapjhong RM now hosts six herder groups involving 45 households. An additional five households continue to herd livestock independently. Of the total 50 herder households, 39 rear goats and 11 rear yaks or chauris.

These groups, however, showed limited interest in forming a broader network or cooperative. This reluctance is primarily due to the small number of herders in each village and a preference for working in smaller, independent groups. This structure is believed to provide better access to municipal subsidies and services. On average, Gharapjhong RM provides NPR 600,000 annually, allocated on a rotational basis to up to three groups, for infrastructure development such as goth (pen) improvement and water supply systems.

A higher-level yak herder committee—Himalayan Chauri Palan Tatha Sanrakchyan Samiti, Mustang—was formed under a past ADB-funded project. While it includes members from various yak herder groups, herders in Gharapjhong report that it primarily serves herders from a different RM in the south and shows limited relevance to their needs. As a result, Gharapjhong herders have little interest in engaging with this committee, and attempts by the project to initiate collaboration were unsuccessful.

Of the 10 registered cooperatives in Gharapjhong, only three are currently active. Based on an assessment conducted by a cooperative consultant, the Vongmore Small Farmers Cooperative was selected as a project partner. This women-led cooperative was chosen for its strong community reach and full female membership. The project supported Vongmore through training, business planning, exchange visits, and promotion of the “Snow Leopard Mark”, a branding initiative for conservation-linked local products. Additionally, the cooperative launched a Rs. 1 lakh enterprise insurance scheme for its members, although uptake has so far been limited.

Narpa Bhumi Rural Municipality: Before the project, Narpa Bhumi RM had no herder groups, cooperatives, or informal networks. In consultation with the RM and local herders, the project facilitated the formation of four new herder groups—two each for goat and yak herders. These were later consolidated into two informal networks in Nar and Phu villages.

All groups were formally registered under the Agriculture and Livestock Farmers Cooperative Act, with legal and technical guidance provided by the project. Currently, 35 households participate as active group members using these platforms to organize and engage in collective herding activities.

Ngisyang Rural Municipality (Manang): Several yak and goat herder groups were established in Ngisyang RM during the ADB-funded Himali project. However, most of these dissolved after

external support ended. As of now, one yak herder group and one goat herder group remain active. The goat group is managed as a collective enterprise by 11 Dalit members.

Local interest in livestock rearing has declined due to the increasing dominance of tourism-based livelihoods. Community members also cited rising predation by snow leopards as a major deterrent, with depredation incidents reportedly increasing each year.

Repeated attempts to form herder groups in Manang village were unsuccessful due to a lack of interest. However, in Braga village, six households came together to form a new yak herder group. Although these efforts mark a starting point, the absence of broader community engagement prevented the establishment of a formal network in Ngisyang.

To support and sustain emerging herder groups, the project introduced several key interventions aimed at reducing livestock losses and improving herder livelihoods:

Predator-Safe Herding Measures: The project provided Fox Lights (79 units) and solar lighting for mobile and torch charging (20 units) —critical for night-time herding in high-altitude areas. It also supported the reinforcement of goths (pens) by securing doors, windows, and roof openings to prevent predator entry (6) and introduced portable goths made of gabionwire, iron bars and stone walls (10 units) and gabion wire fence (1) and corrugated iron sheets, and gabion wire for roofing goth (1).

Livestock Insurance Awareness and Subsidy: Herders were educated on available government livestock insurance and wildlife compensation schemes. The project subsidized 50% of the required 20% premium contribution. The government provides an 80% subsidy for livestock valued below NPR 5 million. Details will be presented next output.

One Health–One Welfare (OHOW) Program: In partnership with the Manang District Veterinary Hospital and Livestock Service Center, the project organized preventive livestock health clinics. The initiative aimed to improve veterinary services, animal welfare, zoonotic disease prevention, and reduce human-wildlife conflict.

An 8-day OHOW training and conservation workshop was held in Manang from September 22–29, 2023, with support from Snow Leopard Conservancy (SLC), International Veterinary Outreach, Mountain Spirit, Animal Nepal, and NTNC/Annapurna Conservation Area. Fifteen junior veterinary technicians and assistants (including four women), accounting 100% of in-service JT/JTAs, and two CAMC representatives received training in predator-safe herding.

The workshop included three days of classroom learning and five days of free animal health clinics held in Koto, Chame, Pisang, Bhraka, and Manang. In total, 248 animals (including mules, horses, cows, goats, dogs, and cats) were treated, and 49 owners were educated on animal welfare practices.

Outreach in Baragung Muktichhetra RM: Preventive animal health care clinics were held in Khinga, Ghyakar, and Jharkot, where 2,100 goats from 69 households were treated for internal parasites using Ivermectin.

Post-training evaluations showed that 87% of participants reported improved understanding of animal welfare, while 75% felt more confident in delivering livestock health services. Many noted increased motivation to support both herding livelihoods and snow leopard conservation.

Reflections, Challenges, and Lessons Learned Output 2

Over the past two years, the project made notable progress under Output 2 by successfully establishing herder groups across all three target municipalities—Gharapjhong, Narpa Bhum, and Ngisyang. These groups provided an essential foundation for community engagement, local knowledge sharing, and initial steps toward collective livestock management. However, the

project's broader objective—to establish a fully functioning cooperative of livestock owners operating across all three municipalities—was only partially realized.

Several factors contributed to this outcome. A key lesson learned is that a two-year implementation period is insufficient to institutionalize new cooperative structures in areas where the concept of collective organization remains unfamiliar or poorly understood. In many communities, herders expressed a preference for working independently, citing greater flexibility and more direct access to local government subsidies. This independent approach, while understandable, hindered the development of formal, inter-municipal structures.

In addition, herding as a livelihood is undergoing a broader decline across the region. Out-migration—particularly among younger generations—has reduced the labor base available for livestock-related work. At the same time, economic opportunities driven by tourism are shifting community focus away from traditional herding. Compounding this shift are increasing incidents of livestock depredation by snow leopards and limited access to government compensation schemes, which, although well-intentioned, are often perceived as bureaucratic and ineffective in practice.

The project also observed a pattern in which many previously formed groups—often established during earlier donor-supported interventions—have since become inactive or dissolved. In several cases, these groups were formed primarily to access subsidies, lacking a sustainable organizational foundation. This presents a significant risk for the groups and networks established during the current project: without long-term support and institutional embedding, they too may become defunct over time.

To address this risk, the project took deliberate steps to promote sustainability by supporting the formal registration of newly formed herder groups under the Rural Municipality (RM) Cooperative Act. This strategy aimed to serve two main objectives. First, embedding groups within a legal and institutional framework was intended to reduce the likelihood of them dissolving once external project support ended. Second, formal registration was designed to strengthen accountability among rural municipalities, encouraging them to assume a more active and sustained role in supporting these groups through policy, technical assistance, and financial inputs.

While Output 2 fell short of fully establishing a cross-municipality cooperative, the progress made has laid essential groundwork. The project demonstrated that with targeted support, it is possible to mobilize herders, build early-stage group structures, and initiate legal formalization processes. However, the findings clearly point to the need for longer timelines, continuous engagement, and strong local governance support to achieve lasting institutional outcomes in pastoral systems that are increasingly under economic and ecological pressure.

This experience reinforces the importance of context-sensitive approaches—particularly in landscapes where traditional livelihoods are shifting rapidly. It also underscores the value of legal recognition and government accountability mechanisms in sustaining the momentum of community-based organizations beyond the life of a project.

3.3 Output 3: Common approach, standards and mechanism to compensate herders for livestock depredation events is formed and operate across sub-national boundaries.

The project undertook three major initiatives to achieve Output 3. First, a desktop review was conducted to understand the national and sub-national context and to inform the development of a common approach, standards, and mechanisms to compensate herders for livestock depredation events. Second, the project assessed local interests and existing practices related to

wildlife damage relief and insurance schemes by supporting affected herders in preparing compensation documents and facilitating livestock insurance with a 50% subsidy on the premium, as provided under current policy. Third, the project presented its findings to help define a common approach, standards, and mechanisms for compensating herders for livestock depredation.

Key Project Achievements

Desk top policy review of national and sub-national governance context: A desktop review and key informant interviews indicate that Nepal's 2015 Constitution provides for intergovernmental fiscal transfers designed to bridge the gap between functional responsibilities and revenue-generation capacities. Under these provisions, sub-national governments receive four types of grants from the federal government: fiscal equalization, conditional, special, and matching grants.

Sub-national governments have full autonomy over fiscal equalization grants, while the others come with spending conditions. For instance, conditional grants are earmarked for specific sectors, and special grants are intended for improvements in areas such as health, education, water supply, and infrastructure.

Two key pieces of legislation—the National Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission Act (2017) and the Intergovernmental Fiscal Arrangement Act (2017)—govern the distribution of grants and revenue sharing. Currently, the federal government retains 70% of national revenues, with the remaining 30% shared equally between provincial and local governments. Provinces are also mandated to allocate 9% of their funds to local governments through fiscal transfers.

In the past two fiscal years, conditional grants have accounted for nearly 60% of total fiscal transfers, while special and matching grants made up less than 7%. Despite guiding principles that recommend increasing fiscal equalization grants and reducing conditional ones, the current trend has moved in the opposite direction.

Several funds relevant to wildlife depredation—such as those for wildlife damage relief and subsidies for agricultural and livestock insurance—are still centrally managed by the federal government. Field-level agencies, such as national parks and forest offices, handle the processing of claims, but final approval and fund disbursement remain centralized. Similarly, while the government appoints district-level insurance agencies and sets targets, decisions on claim settlements are controlled exclusively by their Kathmandu-based headquarters. Rural municipalities have minimal involvement beyond issuing recommendation letters.

Additionally, there are unresolved issues around revenue sharing in the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA). The National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) manages ACA revenues from tourism fees and permit royalties. However, the Gandaki Province and local municipalities have raised concerns about the absence of a fair benefit-sharing mechanism. Although a proposal exists, it has not been approved, and current discussions are limited to revenue distribution—not resource allocation or governance roles for effective ACA management.

These structural limitations have constrained sub-national governments' capacity to collaborate with conservation agencies and implement meaningful mitigation measures. As a result, pressing challenges such as livestock depredation and associated economic losses remain inadequately addressed.

Field Test of Wildlife Damage and Relief and Livestock Insurance Directives: Nepal has two key policy instruments offering partial protection and compensation for wildlife-induced losses, including those from snow leopards:

1. Wildlife Damage and Relief Directive

Wildlife Damage and Relief Directives provides financial relief for injuries, fatalities, and property, crop, or livestock damage caused by wildlife. Under the Relief Directives compensation is available without the need for pre-registration. Under this schemes, victims receive up-to Rs. 10,000 for a goat, and Rs. 60,000 for a yak killed by snow leopards and other wild predators, including wolves. Herders who experienced mass goat killings in Phu (2021) and Mustang (2023) have not received damage and relief compensation, although the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) and the respective Rural Municipalities provided some relief support—covering approximately 20% of the total losses.

2. Agriculture, Bird-Livestock, and Herb Insurance Directive

The Agriculture, Bird-Livestock, and Herb Insurance Directive provides broad protection against losses from both natural disasters and wildlife depredation. Under this scheme, livestock must be insured for owners to be eligible for compensation. The government subsidizes up to 80% of the insurance premium and appoints specific providers in each district.

According to the directive, the premium is set at 5% of the livestock's market value, and compensation can be as high as 90% of the animal's value. However, in practice, insurance companies have often used the expected compensation amount as a base to calculate premiums and determine payouts—leading to inconsistencies.

Despite the substantial subsidy, livestock insurance uptake remains very low in both Manang and Mustang districts, with fewer than 3% of animals insured. Herders typically only purchase insurance when required for accessing bank loans or participating in livestock-related development projects.

One key factor limiting participation is the discrepancy in how livestock losses are reported and perceived. Herders often overestimate losses, while conservation professionals may underestimate them. Research indicates that herders, on average, lose about 11% of their livestock to predators. However, data from the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) shows that the most significant losses usually occur during rare but severe mass-killing events by snow leopards. Aside from these events, average annual depredation has been recorded at 50–70 incidents in Mustang and 65–110 in Manang over the past decade.

This gap between field observations and official records creates uncertainty about the true scale of wildlife-related losses, fostering mistrust in the insurance system and limiting participation.

A 2023 project assessment in Nar and Phu villages found no livestock were insured before project intervention. After 9–10 months of outreach, 34 herders insured 34 yaks and 80 goats. While no yaks were lost, four insured goats were presumed killed by snow leopards. However, compensation claims could not be submitted due to a lack of evidence, such as recovered carcasses.

In Manang and Braga villages, insurance had previously been used to access subsidized loans through the Himali Project. However, it was later abandoned due to failed claims and growing distrust in providers. Despite renewed efforts, most herders remained reluctant. Nonetheless, eight herders in Braga insured 139 yaks and 160 goats. While no goat losses were reported, three yaks were lost; two claims were approved, and one remains pending. A recent policy change now requires full vaccination for eligibility, creating additional hurdles—especially where certain vaccines are unavailable locally.

In Garapjhung, a similar pattern emerged. One yak herder who had previously benefited from subsidized loans discontinued insurance after the project ended. With renewed project support,

insurance was secured for 84 yaks and 307 goats. Two insured yaks were later killed by snow leopards—one claim was approved, and one is pending.

The project also helped 10 herders submit claims for goat losses through the damage relief mechanism. None of the claims were successful. Officials cited a four-year backlog and a lack of recent fund disbursements. The current claims process is highly centralized: field offices verify incidents but lack authority to make final decisions or release funds. This has eroded public trust and strained relationships between communities and conservation staff.

Despite isolated successes, most herders remain disengaged from both insurance and wildlife damage relief programs. Several persistent challenges contribute to this, including frequent changes in government policy regarding premium subsidies, which create confusion; limited access to insurance providers in remote areas; slow and non-transparent claims processes; and a shortage of government staff to verify depredation incidents on-site—often compounded by their reluctance to travel to remote loss locations. These systemic issues have significantly eroded public confidence and diminished community interest in livestock insurance and compensation schemes. As a result, many legitimate claims go unprocessed or are rejected due to insufficient verification. Furthermore, a growing backlog in wildlife damage and relief claim processing has deepened mistrust in both the damage relief and livestock insurance systems.

Regional Workshop on Policy Dialogue: To disseminate project findings and promote policy dialogue, a high-level regional workshop was convened on 24 March 2025 in Pokhara. The event was co-hosted by the Provincial Ministry of Forest and Environment and the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, and chaired by the Secretary of Forest and Environment. A total of 31 participants—including three women—attended, representing a diverse range of stakeholders from government agencies, conservation organizations, rural municipalities, and herder communities affected by livestock depredation.

Two invited experts provided key insights. A retired government secretary shared reflections on the policy intentions behind the Wildlife Damage and Relief Directive and associated insurance schemes. He noted significant implementation challenges, particularly the centralized structure of these programs and the exclusion of local governments from meaningful roles in administration and decision-making.

A biodiversity expert, who had recently completed a study on livestock insurance in Nepal's lowland regions, discussed barriers to scaling up insurance. He observed that many insurance companies only offer agricultural and livestock products to fulfill regulatory obligations rather than as a viable business model. Common issues include the lack of risk mitigation strategies, low premium rates, and limited community participation—factors that contribute to the financial unsustainability of these schemes.

The project's Principal Investigator presented an overview of the three primary mechanisms currently available to address wildlife-related losses:

1. **Community-Based Insurance Schemes** – Typically established and funded by NGOs, these are easy to implement but provide only minimal compensation—often less than 10% of actual market value.
2. **Wildlife Damage and Relief Directive** – Although revised multiple times, the directive is hampered by low public awareness, centralized control, limited involvement of local governments, and delays in claim processing.
3. **Commercial Insurance Schemes** – Awareness of these schemes remains low, and trust in insurance providers is weak. Frequent changes in subsidy policy and the absence of provincial or local government roles in implementation further hinder their effectiveness.

The regional policy workshop facilitated a lively and substantive dialogue among key stakeholders on the persistent bottlenecks and challenges related to adapting, scaling, and managing wildlife damage relief and livestock insurance schemes. Drawing on the project's experience, participants examined how these issues have collectively undermined community confidence and hindered the broader adoption of available relief mechanisms. A central recommendation that emerged was the need to decentralize both insurance and compensation systems by empowering local governments to play a more active role in managing and processing claims. Such decentralization would enable faster response times and strengthen accountability at the community level.

The workshop also called for a simplified and streamlined claims process, along with timely disbursement of compensation funds. Participants recommended that conservation agencies be required to insure livestock located within protected areas, ensuring that vulnerable herders are not left unprotected.

Additionally, it was proposed that dedicated staff be appointed at the field level to manage and monitor claims, thereby relieving pressure on central agencies and ensuring more consistent service delivery. Ensuring adequate and timely budget allocations for both compensation and insurance payouts was highlighted as essential for building long-term trust in the system.

Finally, stakeholders stressed the importance of educating herders and local actors about the benefits of insurance, the correct procedures for filing claims, and compliance requirements—critical steps to increase participation and reduce confusion.

A proceedings document summarizing the workshop's outcomes is currently being finalized and will be submitted to the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation and the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives. These insights are expected to inform future policy reforms and contribute to the development of more responsive, community-oriented mechanisms for addressing the economic impacts of human-wildlife conflict in Nepal.

3.4 Outcome: Mechanism for Coordinated Snow Leopard Conservation Across Three Subnational Boundaries

The project made substantial progress toward establishing and operationalizing a mechanism for coordinated snow leopard conservation across subnational boundaries, particularly within the three rural municipalities of Gharapjhong, Narpa Bhumi, and Ngisyang, spanning two districts in Nepal's Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA). Through integrated interventions at policy, community, and individual levels, the project aligned biodiversity conservation with local development goals while laying the groundwork for long-term cross-boundary collaboration. The project successfully reached over 1,094 individuals through various programs—62% of whom were women—and delivered direct benefits to 769 households across three municipalities (see annex 7).

At the policy level, all three municipalities incorporated the snow leopard as both a conservation symbol and a unifying identity marker. Narpa Bhumi and Gharapjhong Rural Municipalities notably adopted official logos featuring snow leopard imagery, signaling shared political commitment to conservation. Although a centralized coordinating body was not established—due largely to governance limitations within the ACA and the logistical challenges of inter-valley collaboration—legally registered herder groups and cooperative-based coordination structures functioned as practical entry points for joint planning and action. The project further institutionalized conservation-enterprise linkages by directing municipal funds through cooperatives, fostering inter-municipal accountability and aligning incentives around shared ecological and economic objectives.

At the community level, the project demonstrated a functional model of conservation-compatible enterprise development that strengthened cooperation among municipalities. In Gharapjhong RM, the Vongmore Small Farmers Cooperative—comprising over 540 women—developed five business plans and launched branded products using snow leopard imagery. Their slogan, “Small Farmers for Snow Leopard – Committed to Quality, Pure, and Organic Local Products,” tied biodiversity to local livelihoods and established a common narrative around snow leopard conservation that extended across municipal borders.

In Narpa Bhumi RM, abandoned farmland in Phu was revitalized through the reintroduction of jimbu (Himalayan chives) cultivation. This intervention addressed economic losses caused by snow leopard predation and blue sheep crop damage. With jimbu now harvested four times a year in plastic tunnels by 30 households—70% of them women-led—income stability improved, and reliance on wild harvesting from sensitive snow leopard habitats was reduced. The success of this initiative highlighted the viability of conservation-based enterprise models, even in high-conflict areas.

Complementing these agricultural efforts, the project supported the creation of Nepal’s first interpreted “Snow Leopard Trails,” mapped across three routes and featuring QR-coded storyboards. These educational trails linked conservation messaging with ecotourism development. Youth were trained in hospitality, guiding, and snow leopard tracking, leading to the establishment of new tourism services such as guesthouses and the “Snow Leopard Experience” lodge in Upper Manang. Similarly, 63 marketable non-timber forest products (NTFPs) were identified across the region, with early community interest shown in wild mushroom collection and wool-based enterprises. However, bureaucratic challenges around transporting wild-harvested NTFPs and market access limitations remain significant barriers to scale.

Recognizing livestock depredation as a shared cross-boundary challenge, the project advanced a multi-pronged livestock management mechanism. Herder groups were formed and legally registered in each municipality—six in Gharapjhong, four (later consolidated into two networks) in Narpa Bhumi, and two in Ngisyang. Although cultural preferences for autonomy prevented full cooperative integration, these groups established an initial structure for cross-boundary coordination. Conservation-compatible herding practices were introduced across all municipalities, including the distribution of Fox Lights, portable solar light, and predator-proof portable pens, alongside reinforcement of livestock enclosures. These measures significantly enhanced herding safety and demonstrated a replicable model for human-wildlife conflict mitigation.

Livestock insurance and veterinary support further strengthened risk management. A total of 815 livestock were insured, and claims were processed for 10 snow leopard-related losses. In parallel, the project’s One Health–One Welfare initiative provided preventive veterinary care to over 2,300 animals through mobile clinics, deepening the link between animal health and conservation outcomes. Despite low insurance uptake due to systemic challenges—such as subsidy inconsistencies, agency unavailability, and slow claims processing—the project established a viable framework for future coordination.

A notable strength of the mechanism was its deliberate emphasis on gender inclusion and youth engagement. Women assumed leadership roles across enterprises and herder groups, particularly within the Vongmore Cooperative and jimbu cultivation initiative. Their involvement in decision-making processes added depth and legitimacy to local conservation governance. Meanwhile, tourism and service training offered youth alternatives to outmigration and disengagement, embedding conservation values in the next generation and diversifying local economies.

While the mechanism is not yet formalized under a single institutional umbrella, it is functionally operational through a network of aligned municipal strategies, community-led groups, cooperative enterprises, and shared conservation messaging. Nonetheless, sustaining and scaling this model will require overcoming persistent challenges: the absence of a formal coordinating institution within ACA's governance framework, geographic isolation and communication difficulties across valleys, regulatory hurdles for NTFP transport, and gaps in technical capacity and long-term funding.

In conclusion, the project successfully established and operationalized a functioning, community-driven mechanism for snow leopard conservation across three subnational boundaries. By anchoring conservation in economic opportunity, fostering inclusive governance, and promoting inter-municipal collaboration, the initiative laid a durable foundation for landscape-level conservation. While further institutional consolidation and policy support are needed, the progress achieved offers a promising model for cross-boundary ecological stewardship in the Himalayas.

3.5 Monitoring of assumptions

Project monitoring duties were the primary responsibility of the Nepali partner organization, Mountain Spirit. A Change Request was submitted in January 2024 to simplify and strengthen the logframe indicators and means of verification, and revisions resubmitted in March 2024 responding to suggested changes. The change request was approved, based on reviewer's inputs and email correspondence with BCF Reports (Eilidh Young email, April 26, 2024).

As stated in the original proposal, monitoring is based on progress against the stated indicators of success. A concise reporting on progress on each indicator and means of verification is presented in Section Annex 1, the logframe.

4 Contribution to Darwin Initiative Programme Objectives

4.1 Project support to the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements

The project remains fully aligned with the Government of Nepal's signed Conventions, Treaties, and Agreements. Since the project's inception, the Government has updated its Snow Leopard Conservation Action Plan (2024–2030), committing 35% of its resources to mitigating human–snow leopard conflicts through community engagement (Summary, page 8). This commitment aligns closely with the project's goals and objectives. Government officials, senior NGO representatives, and community members actively participated in the project's closing workshop, facilitating timely discussions on the advantages and challenges of various insurance and compensation schemes addressing livestock depredation by snow leopards—an issue of national significance.

4.2 Project support to biodiversity conservation and multidimensional poverty reduction

The project contributed to learning on poverty reduction in mountain communities. Phase one's snow leopard trails experience evolved into a small private enterprise run by a local wildlife photographer. A Community Non-Timber and Agricultural Products Cooperative now supports approximately 540 members and promotes conservation through snow leopard branding. The Himalayan Chives (jimbu) initiative has moderately increased cultivation and reduced wild harvesting, though collective marketing has stalled as farmers continue to prefer traditional buyers. The project underestimated the reliance on established market practices and found that new models must match or exceed existing profits to gain traction. In Phu village, jimbu revenues remain far below those from yarsa gumpa (caterpillar fungus), limiting broader economic impact.

However, the newly developed snow leopard trail above Thini, featuring QR storyboard interpretation, shows strong potential to attract more visitors to this off-route village. This could stimulate a range of local enterprises—guiding, trekking, porter and jeep services, lodges, homestays, bakeries, and cafés—creating meaningful opportunities for poverty reduction in the near future.

4.3 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

GESI Scale	Description	Put X where you think your project is on the scale
Not yet sensitive	The GESI context may have been considered but the project isn't quite meeting the requirements of a 'sensitive' approach	
Sensitive	The GESI context has been considered and project activities take this into account in their design and implementation. The project addresses basic needs and vulnerabilities of women and marginalised groups and the project will not contribute to or create further inequalities.	X
Empowering	The project has all the characteristics of a 'sensitive' approach whilst also increasing equal access to assets, resources and capabilities for women and marginalised groups	X
Transformative	The project has all the characteristics of an 'empowering' approach whilst also addressing unequal power relationships and seeking institutional and societal change	X

The project has integrated Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) considerations into both its design and implementation. Activities have particularly focused on empowering women through enterprise development.

In these communities, women typically do not spend extended periods in the high pastures managing livestock, but they frequently visit for short durations. In most villages, women are primarily responsible for tourism-related functions, especially hotel management. In Himalayan mountain communities, women often play a significant role in household and local decision-making, as many men are away in the high pastures, engaged in trade, or working in Kathmandu.

A notable example from Phu village highlights this dynamic: 29 men were incarcerated for 4 to 9 years due to alleged involvement in the killing of yarsa gumba poachers. During their absence, women assumed major economic and household responsibilities.

One key lesson learned is that scheduling meetings in the evenings after dinner increases women's participation. Additionally, seeking input from each individual directly often encourages more women to contribute and share their perspectives. These observations align closely with the initial project assessments.

4.4 Transfer of knowledge

The Project Coordinator participated in two international conferences on snow leopards—one organized by the Government of Nepal and the National Trust for Nature Conservation, and the other at the ICCB in Australia. He used these opportunities to share the project's work and key findings, and

also presented a poster on the project at the ICCB conference. An article for publication in a journal is also being planned.

The project team was additionally involved in the design and implementation of a similar initiative in Mugu, within the buffer zone of Rara National Park. This initiative was funded by the Jal Jangal Project. Mountain Spirit had hoped to extend the project to cover a larger area; however, this was not possible as the funding—provided by USAID—ceased following the termination of the grant.

4.5 Capacity building

No formal training was provided to staff; however, the Principal Investigator (PI) and (C-PI) mentored and coached the Project Coordinator, Field Monitoring Officer, Admin/Finance Associate, and field mobilizers on project planning, activity and output reporting, financial management, and community engagement. They also provided on-the-job training opportunities to support staff development and staff were involved in training programs as participants and assistance.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

Project monitoring was primarily carried out by the Nepali partner organization, Mountain Spirit. In January 2024, a Change Request was submitted to strengthen the logframe indicators and means of verification. Revised indicators were resubmitted in March 2024, incorporating reviewer feedback, and the request was approved (BCF Reports, Eilidh Young email, April 26, 2024).

As outlined in the original proposal, monitoring was based on progress against the project's defined success indicators. A summary of progress against each indicator, along with verification methods, is provided in Annex 1 (logframe).

6. Lessons Learnt

Over the past two years, several important lessons have shaped the evolution of the project:

- **Community Variation Affects Implementation**

Significant differences exist between communities and Rural Municipalities due to varying levels of market access, governance experience, and historical relationships with authorities. In particular, Nar and Phu exhibit greater distrust of external actors and slower adaptation due to their remoteness and past experiences with incarceration.

- **Institutional Readiness and Legal Frameworks Matter**

Only one of the three Rural Municipalities had Cooperative Acts in place. The others declined to formalize cooperatives, prompting a shift to supporting informal Groups/User Groups. This revealed a clear gap between training offered and local institutional readiness.

- **Devolution Is Slower Than Expected**

The project overestimated the speed and depth of power transfer from federal to local levels. Resistance from various governance bodies, combined with inconsistent federal revenue flows, has slowed progress nationwide—hindering local authority in biodiversity management.

- **Collaboration Requires Time and Tangible Incentives**

In remote pastoral communities, collaboration is often resisted unless immediate financial benefits are visible. Efforts to foster cooperation require longer timelines, persistent engagement, and culturally sensitive strategies—especially where individualism is valued over collective action.

- **Cooperative Models Need Time to Take Root**

The two-year project timeframe proved insufficient to institutionalize cooperative models in

areas unfamiliar with collective organization. Many herders preferred working independently, viewing it as more flexible and directly beneficial.

- **Early Mobilization Is Possible with Support**

Despite challenges, the project successfully mobilized herders and initiated early-stage group structures. However, long-term success depends on sustained local governance support, longer implementation horizons, and legally recognized frameworks.

- **Local Contexts Require Adaptive Approaches**

The rapid transformation of traditional livelihoods necessitates flexible, context-specific strategies. Legal recognition and government accountability are critical for sustaining community-based initiatives after external support ends.

- **Data Gaps Undermine Trust in Insurance Systems**

A consistent discrepancy exists between herder-reported livestock losses and official estimates. This mismatch undermines trust in compensation mechanisms and limits participation in insurance schemes, highlighting the need for more accurate and trusted monitoring systems.

7. Actions Taken in response to Annual Report Reviewers

There were limited comments in Annual Report #1, and no changes were requested at that time. However, a revision to make the indicators SMARTer and to strengthen the means of verification was proposed and approved through a change request in April 2024. All revisions were made in close consultation with the implementing partners.

8. Risk Management

The Risk Registry was updated on October 31, 2023. There were no significant changes, and the registry closely reflected the original proposal's list of identified risks. The risk of lower-than-expected female participation was confirmed during Year 2 implementation, despite concerted efforts by project partners. Delivery chain risks and challenges with cooperative action also proved substantial.

Risk 4—related to federal resistance to devolving power—was realized, as federal authorities reduced the revenues allocated to Rural Municipalities, as anticipated. Marketing risk also materialized: chive production remained limited to one Rural Municipality, which hindered efforts at consolidation and collective marketing. Other Rural Municipalities produced or collected insufficient quantities, and harvesters continued to sell through traditional middlemen rather than adopting a consolidated marketing platform. As anticipated in the original risk registry, this risk proved particularly difficult to overcome.

9. Sustainability and legacy

Despite securing all project approvals, formalizing partnerships with Rural Municipalities, establishing cooperative relations, conducting multiple trainings, and improving inter-municipal communication, the project did not achieve its goal of establishing sustainable local collaboration mechanisms to the extent envisioned. Although the Cooperative and the Chives Enterprise have been established, they are not functioning across municipal boundaries.

The insurance scheme trials yielded valuable learning, even though they were not deemed successful by herders or insurance agents, as detailed earlier in the report. Conversely, the snow leopard trail enterprise has been well received and, although still in its early stages, shows potential for sustainability.

The improved portable corral design has also been a technical success. However, no corrals have yet been disassembled or relocated due to their weight (approximately 400 kg). Notably, no improved corrals have been breached by snow leopards so far, though this may be due to the unpredictable nature of predator attacks rather than definitive evidence of design superiority.

The project's work in evaluating compensation mechanisms—along with the sharing of findings in a national/regional workshop and a national newspaper article—has sparked broader discussion on this topic. This outcome is a net positive and represents a valuable contribution. However, follow-up will be essential in future projects to build on the lessons learned and growing interest. Given the systemic and institutional complexities, achieving durable results in this area will require a long-term effort.

10. Darwin Initiative Identity

Darwin Initiative logos and acknowledgment have been used consistently across all written materials, signage, training sessions, and workshops, and were also referenced in a national newspaper article. Additionally, Snow Leopard Conservancy has prominently featured the Darwin Initiative in its newsletters, annual reports, social media content, and board meetings.

The Conservancy has requested the project team to prepare a comprehensive analysis and history of the Darwin-supported project for inclusion in the Fall 2025 newsletter, which is currently in progress. Mountain Spirit has also credited the Darwin Initiative in multiple social media posts and communications.

11. Additional Risk Management

No new risks were identified or encountered during the reporting period. One unanticipated development was a resurgence of support for the monarchy and isolated instances of political and civil unrest in certain parts of the country. However, no such disturbances occurred in any of the project's working areas.

12. Safeguarding

13. Finance and administration

a. Project expenditure

Project spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2024/25 Grant (£)	2024/25 Total actual Darwin Initiative Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs (see below)				
Consultancy costs				
Overhead Costs				
Travel and subsistence				
Operating Costs				
Capital items (see below)				
Others (see below)				
TOTAL	89,840	90170.03		

Staff employed (Name and position)	Cost (£)
	Cost (£)
Staff in Nepal, Mountain Spirit	
Brian Peniston, Snow Leopard Conservancy, (SLC) Co-PI	
Dr Rodney Jackson, SLC President and Founder	
Ashleigh Lutz Nelson, SLC Executive Director	
Accounting Staff, SLC	
TOTAL	

Capital items – description	Capital items – cost (£)
Printer for Mountain Spirit	
TOTAL	

Other items – description	Other items – cost (£)
None	0
	0
	0
TOTAL	0

b. Additional funds or in-kind contributions secured

Matched funding leveraged by the partners to deliver the project	Total (£)
Ashleigh Lutz Nelson SLC Exec Director, One Health salary	
Brian Peniston, Co PI matching salary funds	
Rodney Jackson, SLC President matching salary	
Thakali + Niraj salary for Mustang Corral and Community work	
TEKA Samuha Nepal/Adil Adhikari, Conservation Education	
TOTAL	

Total additional finance mobilised for new activities occurring outside of the project, building on evidence, best practices and the project	Total (£)
TOTAL	

c. Value for Money

Snow Leopard Conservancy and our partner, Mountain Spirit, successfully delivered strong value for money throughout the project. The majority of salary costs were allocated to Nepal-based staff, including the Project PI. All consultants engaged were Nepal-based experts, several of whom were retired senior officials from the Government of Nepal. Their involvement provided valuable insights, particularly in negotiations with government offices on compensation-related issues. International travel costs were kept to a minimum.

The cost of each improved corral was approximately GBP 1,070, significantly lower than comparative costs in nearby areas—approximately GBP 10,680 in the WWF Dolpo project and GBP 16,800 in the SLC Dolpo project. (While not exact comparisons, as the Dolpo corrals accommodate more livestock, the difference still highlights cost-efficiency.)

Workshop venues were chosen to provide high-quality facilities at lower-cost locations. Field travel was planned strategically to achieve multiple objectives per trip, maximizing efficiency and minimizing both travel and per diem expenses. All international communication was conducted via free internet-based services such as WhatsApp.

Capital equipment expenses were kept minimal and limited to essential office equipment that improved operational efficiency. Additionally, matching funds from the Snow Leopard Conservancy enabled complementary activities in Mustang District, extending the project's reach and impact by involving more participants across a broader geographic area.

Matching One Health funding, particularly in Year 1, further enhanced community benefits by offering veterinary services and training that were not part of the original Darwin project design. These efforts contributed to building trust and goodwill with communities—an outcome that is highly valuable, even if difficult to quantify.

14. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

15. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements of your project (300-400 words maximum).

This section may be used for publicity purposes

File Type (Image / Video / Graphic)	File Name or File Location	Caption, country and credit	Online accounts to be tagged (leave blank if none)	Consent of subjects received (delete as necessary)
				Yes / No
				Yes / No
				Yes / No
				Yes / No
				Yes / No

Annex 1 Report of progress and achievements against final project indicators of success for the life of the project

Annex 1 Report of progress and achievements against final project indicators of success for the life of the project

Project summary	Progress and Achievements
<p>Impact</p> <p>Mechanisms for coordinated snow leopard conservation across sub national boundaries in Central Nepal established and operational</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most project outputs were achieved, with many original targets exceeded. The project's design aimed to deliver interconnected, multidisciplinary outcomes, which made reporting on individual components somewhat repetitive and challenging to separate. Progress toward the defined outcomes was mixed and only partially realized. In retrospect, the project was overly optimistic about the speed at which authority and resources would be devolved from the Federal Government and ACA to local government bodies. Although some advances were made, many achievements remain ongoing and aspirational. Additionally, the project underestimated the reluctance of remote mountain communities to adopt new marketing and trading innovations, as well as the enduring influence of traditional trading relationships.
<p>O.1 Two or more Fora (e.g., networks, user groups or businesses) that support snow leopard conservation activities are formed and operating in at least two rural municipalities by end of project.</p> <p>Training provided to three livestock herders or user groups by end of year 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Himalayan Chives (Jimbu) Enterprise: The enterprise was successfully established and formally registered. However, villagers did not support collective marketing of jimbu, preferring to continue selling through traditional middlemen. Eco-tourism Development: Forty participants were trained in small hotel and lodge management to support the expansion of eco-tourism. The Snow Leopard Trails have been successfully mapped, and approximately 80% of the QR-coded storyboards have been completed. Additionally, 15 potential local guides received training in snow leopard tracking and guiding services, with one individual formally trained in porter guiding and two in general guiding services. Installation of 27 QR storyboards along three designated trails is nearing completion. Promotion and marketing of the trails will be undertaken with support from the Welling Zoo grant. Inter-Municipality Coordination: Following seven training workshops involving over 200 participants, plans to establish a formal multi-jurisdictional networking mechanism were ultimately discontinued due to limited local commitment. However, the initiative did lead to improved communication and coordination between Rural Municipalities and herder groups. In parallel, the engagement of the Vongmor Small Farmers Agricultural Cooperative—comprising 540 female members from villages across Garapjhong—has shown promising potential. The cooperative, along with interest from other enterprises, could serve as an important platform or informal network to support snow leopard conservation efforts in Mustang.

<p>Outcome indicator 0.2,</p> <p>Herders supported to insure their livestock and process their livestock depredation claim for livestock loss compensation.</p> <p>Two User groups involved in insurance schemes and compensation process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A total of 55 herders insured 804 livestock across two Rural Municipalities following a multi-jurisdictional workshop. Although the activity was implemented, the outcome was not sustained. Community support for the insurance schemes was limited, and insurance companies were reluctant to engage due to the high costs of travel and personnel in remote mountain areas. A detailed analysis of these challenges was published in a national newspaper. • Wildlife damage and relief and insurance schemes were also evaluated and found to have several critical weaknesses. Community members viewed them as overly complex, time-consuming, heavily reliant on verification procedures, and offering compensation below the market value of lost livestock. In response, a policy dialogue workshop titled <i>"Moving Towards Fairer Compensation"</i> was convened. The workshop identified key barriers and policy constraints, and a set of proposed remedies has been submitted for government consideration.
<p>Output 1: Three rural municipalities collaborate and market snow leopard-linked products and services (e.g., chives, tourism) promoting snow leopard conservation.</p>	
<p>1.1: A User group formed and operating that promotes the snow leopard as a brand for local products is established and supported. ****</p> <p>A marketing brand in support of snow leopard conservation registered, and the experience shared with cooperatives/groups to establish subnational marketing network for local products.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Himalayan Chives (Jimbu) Committee in Phu Village, comprising 30 members, was legally recognized. Jimbu was marketed under a snow leopard conservation branding initiative. However, after two years of trial efforts, villagers expressed a preference for continuing to sell their products through traditional middlemen rather than adopting a collective sales approach. • A four-day cooperative strengthening training was successfully conducted for Garapjhong and Narpa Bhumi Rural municipalities with 27 community members participating. In addition, an agreement was signed with the Vongmor Small Farmers Agricultural Cooperative, which includes 540 female members. The project and the cooperative jointly contributed matching funds to establish a dedicated fund aimed at supporting the packaging, branding, and marketing of local products that promote snow leopard conservation.
<p>1.2: User Groups consolidate production, marketing, branding, processing, and sales of snow leopard-linked products and services.</p> <p>A business, marketing and branding plan produced and tested by end of year one.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing materials and information for Himalayan chives (jimbu) were designed and adapted for use by other cooperatives in the project area. Similarly, a market assessment on jimbu pricing and marketing was conducted in Kathmandu, including a comprehensive market competition analysis. (See Annex 7). • A snow leopard branding logo was developed specifically for the Vongmor Small Farmers Cooperative. Marketing analysis indicates the potential to increase income from value-added jimbu sales by up to four times. Tracking income changes among Vongmor Cooperative members following the introduction of branding could provide valuable insights for future initiatives.
<p>1.3: ****/User groups across three</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six business plans were developed for the Phu chive cultivation group and five for the Vongmor Small Farmers Cooperative.

rural communities increase incomes from snow leopard linked enterprises	<p>Additionally, 15 local youth were trained in snow leopard tracking and guiding services, one in porter guide training, two in general guiding, and 40 in lodge and hotel management—including bakery and barista skills. (see Annex 10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three cooperative formation trainings were conducted across three rural municipalities, with a total of 49 participants (20 males and 29 females). • Livestock-based enterprises were identified, and a feasibility study was conducted in Year 1. However, these enterprises were not implemented. The identified products showed limited revenue potential, primarily due to low production volumes, limited market demand, and strong competition—particularly in terms of quality. For example, cashmere, which commands higher prices, is not produced in the area. Locally produced blankets and fabrics were found to be too coarse to compete effectively, even in Kathmandu markets.
1.4: All three rural municipalities incrementally increase their annual contributions from federal general development funds to support coordinated snow leopard conservation activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergovernmental fund transfers have stalled in recent years due to consistent underspending by provincial and local governments, as well as their limited capacity to generate matching revenues. This remains a broader national issue beyond the scope of the project. The Federal Government’s interest in supporting projects in remote areas often correlates with the size of external funding, which raises sustainability concerns. The ability—or inability—of government bodies to allocate resources for program-related expenses can either enable or hinder their participation.
Output 2: New cooperative of livestock owners operating across three rural municipalities.	
2.1 Minimum of 30% of livestock herders and livestock owners are trained in improved veterinary and livestock welfare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eight-day One Health One Welfare training was completed for 15 JT/JTAs and 2 ACA officials. This represents 100% of the JT/JTAs working across four rural municipalities in Manang, as well as personnel from the Veterinarian Hospital and Livestock Service Center—significantly exceeding the original target of training 30%. Additionally, 49 animal guardians received training. • Five livestock camps were conducted in Manang (Chame, Pisang, Humde, Manang, Bhraka), with over 40 households participating and more than 3,500 livestock vaccinated. This surpassed the target of 37 herders and 700 livestock vaccinated. Notably, three trained JTAs remain very active, regularly visiting remote communities.
2.2 Three Livestock User groups established, or municipalities are supported for the formation of user groups by end of year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eight livestock training sessions on safeguarding mechanisms and current practices were conducted across three Gaun Palikas. Six livestock groups were trained, formed, and strengthened across rural municipality boundaries. While Narpa Bhumi actively supported the formation of herder groups and networks, interest from two other municipalities in establishing similar herder networks was limited.
2.3 Two study tours involving livestock cooperatives/groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A SWOT analysis involving livestock cooperatives and groups was completed across three municipalities. Based on the findings, tailored support programs were designed and implemented. Efforts focused on strengthening the Vongmor

completed during Year 1 and 2 of the project.	<p>Cooperative in Garapjhong Rural Municipality through training and the development of five business plans. In two other municipalities, the project worked to raise awareness and encourage cooperative formation by supporting the development of a local cooperative act. However, these efforts did not yield tangible results.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A four-day combined study tour on the operations of livestock and agricultural product cooperatives was conducted with 25 participants, including 12 women.
2.4 Peer-to-peer knowledge sharing networks established between herders in three rural municipalities (*Non-Darwin funding sources)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No peer-reviewed journal articles have been published to date. However, one national newspaper article on snow leopard compensation issues was published (see Annex and Box 3.1 for details). The Project Management Team has been invited to contribute a chapter to an upcoming book on alpine conservation and management. The chapter, led by Snow Leopard Conservancy (SLC), will focus on lessons learned from community-based snow leopard conservation. The book is currently in production, with completion expected by September 2025 (post-Darwin project funding). Preparation of a journal article is also underway, and the contributions of the Darwin Initiative will be duly acknowledged. • The Project Coordinator participated in one national and one international conference on snow leopard and biodiversity conservation—held in Nepal and Australia, respectively—using both events as platforms for peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. In addition, three multilingual information boards promoting snow leopard trail education and conservation were produced and installed (see photo, Annex).
2.5 Herder workshops for sharing herder-snow leopard interface and challenges associated with it conducted at provincial and national levels, and results shared.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eleven herder workshops were conducted, engaging 200 participants and identifying common challenges as well as preferred design features for improved livestock corrals. As a result, 12 predator-proof corrals were constructed, including one specifically for a Dalit community—Nepal’s most marginalized and historically disadvantaged caste group. These corrals were designed to be mobile and adaptable for seasonal migrations between pastures. However, due to the weight of the galvanized iron (GI) poles—approximately 400 kg per unit—none have been relocated as of this writing. • In addition, 8 existing corrals were upgraded, benefiting a total of 156 herding households. One solar-fenced corral in Mustang was also improved, though it has experienced recurring technical issues due to frequent short circuits in the electric current. • The original target was five workshops and 50 beneficiaries, indicating that the project significantly exceeded its outreach goals.
Output 3: Common approach, standards and mechanism to compensate herders for livestock depredation events is formed and operates across sub-national boundaries.	
3.1: Recommendations made to simplify existing compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A workshop proceeding is currently in progress, incorporating feedback from participants of the regional workshop held on 24

guidelines to speed up compensation process.	March in Pokhara. This report will present a concise analysis of policy barriers and gaps, along with practical recommendations to improve both wildlife damage relief directives and the Agriculture, Birds and Livestock, and Herb Insurance policies.
3.2: 50% of herders demonstrate improved understanding of livestock insurance and compensation policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the first year, 55 herders participated in cooperative training sessions. A two-year trial of the livestock insurance claims process was completed. A total of 804 livestock were enrolled in insurance schemes that operated for one year. During this period, eight insured animals were killed. Of the resulting claims, three were approved, two are pending, and four could not be filed due to lack of evidence (carcasses were not found). Additionally, ten claims were filed for non-insured livestock killed by snow leopards, but the victims have not received any compensation to date. Analysis revealed limited interest from both the community and insurance companies in the livestock insurance schemes. Community members viewed the schemes as: a) overly complex with delayed payouts, b) requiring unrealistic verification, and c) offering compensation below the fair market value of lost livestock.

Annex 2: Project's full original log frame as presented in the application form (unless changes have been agreed)

****metric of these indicators may be revised based on inputs from participatory village meetings and more detailed data collection. If there are even minor changes, they will be communicated and negotiated with NIRAS through emails and the regular Change Request Process.****

Outcome	SMART Indicator	Means of Verification
Mechanisms for coordinated snow leopard conservation across sub-national boundaries in Central Nepal established and operational	<p>O.1 Two or more Fora (e.g., networks, user groups or businesses) that support snow leopard conservation activities are formed and operating in at least two rural municipalities by end of project.</p> <p>Training provided to three livestock herders or user groups by end of year 2</p>	<p>O.1.1: One or more value-chain user group networks registered and operating within 2 years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> User group meeting minutes List of user group members Terms of reference for user group Local Government authority records
		<p>O.1.2: Training results from three Livestock-owner and herder user groups registered* or existing groups supported by end of year 2.</p>

	<p>O.2: Herders supported to insure their livestock and process their livestock depredation claim process for the livestock loss compensation. Two.</p> <p>User groups involved in insurance schemes and compensation process</p>	<p>O.2.1: Number of herders receiving insurance claims for depredation loss increased. * (Changed Numbers of insurance claims will depend on the number of depredation incidents within the project period)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document current compensation process and implementation challenges. • Identify institutional conflicts between National Parks and Annapurra Conservation Area authorities. • Based on study findings suggest proposed improvements to compensation empowering local authorities • Number of community members enrolled in insurance scheme <p>02.2: Number of herders compensated for their livestock loss, if any. (See * Comment above. Compensation only occurs following depredation events)</p> <p>02.2 Number of registered and operating livestock user groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half year and annual user group meeting minutes with key decisions noted • Number of registered participants/members at meetings
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Output 1: Three rural municipalities collaborate and market snow leopard-linked products and services (e.g., chives, tourism) promoting snow leopard conservation.	<p>1.1: A A User group formed and operating that promotes the snow leopard as a brand for local products is established and supported. ****</p> <p>A marketing brand in support of snow leopard conservation registered, and the experience shared with cooperatives/groups to establish subnational marketing network for local products.</p>	<p>1.1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User group created and operating. • Marketing plan developed and implemented. • Informal meeting/s held and shared marketing experience with neighbouring communities. • Marketing and branding materials produced. • Volume of products sold and gross revenues generated
	<p>1.2: User Groups consolidate production, marketing, branding, processing, and sales of snow leopard-linked products and services.</p> <p>A business, marketing and branding plan produced and tested by end of year one.</p>	<p>1.2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Plan produced in year 1 • Marketing and branding materials designed, printed and in use in year 1 • Revenues generated by branded products sold by end year 2 • Number of herders getting revenues from branded goods sold by end year 2
	<p>1.3: ****User groups across three rural communities increase incomes from snow leopard linked enterprises</p>	<p>1.3.1 For plant-based enterprises: # of KGs produced and sold by end of project.</p> <hr/> <p>1.3.2 For livestock enterprises: sales of livestock products (quantity and revenues generated by end of year 2)</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.3.3 For service enterprises: increase in tourist visitors and revenues by end of year 2.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of households/herders receiving some financial benefits from user group sponsored activities by end of project.
	1.4: All three rural municipalities incrementally increase their annual contributions from federal general development funds to support coordinated snow leopard conservation activities. *****	1.4: All three rural municipalities coordinate on snow leopard conservation activities and contribute according to their priorities. (Measured against baselines collected in Q1 Year 1)
Output 2: New cooperative of livestock owners operating across three rural municipalities.	2.1: Minimum of 30% of livestock herders and livestock owners are trained in improved veterinary and livestock welfare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1.1: Training materials produced. Number of veterinary technicians trained by end of year 2 Pre- Post Training assessment of new skills learned by participating herders by end of Y 2. <hr/> 2.1.2 Number of livestock treated and vaccinated by end of Y2 * 2.1.3 Number of predator deterrent devices distributed and effectiveness assessed (fox lights) by end of Y2 2.1.4 Number of livestock sheds (corrals) improved to reduce depredation by end of Y2.
	2.2: Three Livestock User groups established or municipalities are supported for the formation of user	2.2: Registration documents by end of y2. Meeting minutes noting numbers of participants annually

	groups by end of year 1	
	2.3: Two study tours involving livestock cooperatives/groups completed during Year 1 and 2 of the project.	2.3: Study tour reports on completion of study tours
	2.4: Peer-to-peer knowledge sharing networks established between herders in three rural municipalities (*Non-Darwin funding sources)	2.4.1: Ideas from at least one owner/herder group are documented and replicated by another group by end of year 2.
		2.4.2: Appropriate, peer reviewed paper detailing knowledge sharing experience prepared for on-line distribution and submitted to Snow Leopard Network.
		2.4.3 Innovative herder performance awards granted by end of year two.
	2.5: Herder workshops for sharing herder-snow leopard interface and challenges associated with it conducted at provincial and national levels, and results shared.	2.5: One Provincial and one National level workshop conducted at end of project. <i>*These workshops will also be combined with those listed in Indicator 3.3</i>
Output 3: Common approach, standards and mechanism to compensate herders for livestock depredation events is formed and operates across sub-national boundaries.	3.1: Recommendations made to simplify existing compensation guidelines to speed up compensation process.	3.1.1: Report analysing current livestock insurance and compensation policies produced with recommendations for improvements by end of year 2 \

	3.2: 50% of herders demonstrate improved understanding of livestock insurance and compensation policies.	3.2: Pre and post workshop evaluations of herders understanding of insurance and compensation processes following workshops.
<p>Activities (each activity is numbered according to the Output that it will contribute towards, for example 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 are contributing to Output</p> <p>1.1 Desk and key informant review of Fiscal Transfer Process under evolving Constitution reviewed and “Best Practices” for conservation funding allocation options and fund transfer mechanisms produced</p> <p>1.1 Key informant interviews to identify current marketing structures identified and strengths & weaknesses identified recognized.</p> <p>1.2 Study tour to successful community cooperatives involved in agriculture and livestock based enterprises conducted, and lessons learned and adapted for use</p> <p>1.3 Subnational marketing cooperative capacity established, legally registered and operating</p> <p>1.4 Capacity for consolidation, processing, branding and marketing of snow leopard linked products are operating using chives cultivation as a model, but adapted for other sites as products come online</p> <p>1.5 Revenues generated and benefits shared across Rural Municipality boundaries and among community members</p> <p>1.6</p> <p>1.7 If appropriate, results shared in peer reviewed on-line publication like OnePlus</p> <p>2.1 Livestock owners common priorities and challenges identified and prioritized</p> <p>2.2 Key informant interviews conducted with livestock owners and herders</p>		

2.3 Livestock cooperative legally established, registered and capacity to operate in place

2.4 Shared challenges identified and prioritized, and pilot activities initiated across three municipalities.

***Note: ***Approaches likely to differ based on locally identified priorities designed to tackle specific constraints, risks and opportunities. Anticipated priorities based on past experience are Livestock Health product marketing and rangeland restoration (Nar and Phu), Cultural Conservation (Manang) and Corral Improvements (Jomsom)

2.5 if appropriate, result consolidated and shared in online peer reviewed journal like OnePlus.

3.1 Desk review and key informant interviews on existing compensation mechanisms

3.2 Three municipality (subnational) workshop to identify areas to improve compensation mechanisms, new structure proposed and implemented

3.3 Results from new compensation schemes are analysed and recommended improvements implemented based of field experiences

Please describe up to 6 key assumptions that, if held true, will enable you to deliver your Outputs and Outcome.

- *Communities and local governments recognize value of networking
- *Municipalities (mayors and staff) provide financing (as in the chives/jimbu project) and endorse collaborative efforts across administrative boundaries
- *Marketing cooperatives achieve cross-boundary collaboration and marketing agreements
- *Municipalities receive sufficient funding from the Central and Provincial governments for supporting conservation projects with communities or cooperatives going forward.
- *Outside political pressures do not adversely dictate or impact how funds are utilized
- *Pandemics or natural calamities are short-lived and do not adversely impact the local economy, enterprise operations or product marketing and sales

Annex 3 Standard Indicators

Table 1 Project Standard Indicators

DI Indicator number	Name of indicator	Units	Disaggregation	Year 1 Total	Year 2 Total	Year 3 Total	Total achieved	Total planned
DI-A 11	Number of sustainable livelihood enterprises that are profitable (at least one year after establishment)	Enterprises	Not applicable	0	2	N/A	2	3
DI-A12	Annual Turnover of established sustainable enterprises in the projects final year	Enterprises	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	***	*** Enterprise only established in year 2

Table 2 Publications

Title	Type (e.g. journals, manual, CDs)	Detail (authors, year)	Gender of Lead Author	Nationality of Lead Author	Publishers (name, city)	Available from (e.g. weblink or publisher if not available online)
Ghosts of the Himalayas	Bi Weekly Newspaper	Sonia Awale, January 27, 2025	Female	Nepali	Nepali Times Newspaper	https://nepalitimes.com/here-now/ghosts-of-the-himalaya
***In preparation	Book Chapter	Peniston, Jackson and Thakali	All Males	2 US and 1 Nepali	Oxford university Press	***In preparation
***Various internal manuals and project reports	***Grey literature, internal project documents	NTFP manual Mushroom inventory manual Fiscal Transfer review	Male and female staff	Nepali	Internal project documents	***In Nepali language, available on request