



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2020)

Project reference	26-012
Project title	Ghodaghodi's Guardians: Communities Restoring a Ramsar Wetland at watershed scale
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal
Lead organisation	Zoological Society of London
Partner(s)	Department of Forests and Soil Conservation (DoFSC), Ghodaghodi Municipality (GM), Comprehensive Ghodaghodi Lake and Tourism Development Board (CGLTDB) and Himalayan Nature (HN)
Project leader	<i>Dr. Hem Sagar Baral</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)	31 October 2020, HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	N/A

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

This project is being implemented in Ghodaghodi Lake Area (GLA), one of the Ramsar sites located in the south-western lowland of Nepal. The project aims to restore the ecological integrity of the lake and surrounding forest habitats and corridor through the active participation of local communities. Like in the previous year, ZSL has maintained strong coordination with the project partners (GM, CGLTDB, DoFSC, HN) and local communities of GLA to ensure the success of the project. During this reporting period, some of the activities planned were not completed due to the nationwide lockdown imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19, resulting in strict government restrictions on travel, workshops, and community gatherings starting from the end of March until July. However, after the lockdown in the project site eased up, almost seventy five percent of the planned activities were implemented following all the health and safety protocols in place. The details of the project progress are outlined output wise below:

Output 1: Natural capital of GLA governed equitably through CGLTDB, and established governance mechanism

During this reporting period, a refresher training was conducted for the previously recruited 40 FISH (Freshwater Information System for Households) representatives working as community focal points for sharing information on GLA's biodiversity, the watershed and its sustainable management to the established working group (Act 1.5). They were oriented and sensitized on their roles and responsibilities to conserve GLA's ecological integrity, enabling these voluntary representatives to act as a bridge between community people and the working group, providing crucial information regarding lake conservation, sustainable development and community well-being. A training on sustainable fishing practices was conducted for 31 local fishermen (18 females and 13 males) selected from vulnerable and fish-dependent communities, mostly the indigenous Tharus (Act 1.9). The training covered appropriate techniques, timing (season) and location for fishing to reduce the impact of overfishing on GLA. They were taught how to use the appropriate mesh size, the proper gear for fishing, the appropriate size of fish catch, time and

season of harvesting fish, malpractice, and restricted fishing locations in GLA to conserve lake biodiversity. Also, under this output two workshops on regulating grazing and pesticide/fertilizer application in GLA (Act 1.12) were completed for 62 participants (24 females and 38 males), representing members from 11 Community Forest User Groups. The workshop consisted of group discussions and interactions, covering the importance of forests and lake for sustainable conservation, traditional culture, water sources, and the negative impacts on ecosystem services due to over-grazing and overuse of pesticide and chemical fertilizer. The participants developed a common understanding in controlling overgrazing in their respective forests and increased use of organic manure in fields. For this, a 7-membered monitoring task force comprised of the representatives of community forests was formed to inform community people about the impact of overgrazing and the overuse of chemical fertilizers in GLA watershed area. They will further encourage community people to increase the use of alternatives to chemical fertilizers, like organic manure, and to use bio-pesticides in fields rather than the chemical fertilizers and pesticides that have a negative impact on the soil and watershed area. The monitoring team is responsible for reporting to CGLTDB and GM. Rules, regulations and proposed no-take zone areas in GLA has been drafted and will be finalised through community workshops in the delineation of no take zone (Act 1.11), planned in the next reporting period.

Output 2: Access to sustainable natural capital-based livelihood secured for the most vulnerable, marginalized fresh water dependent communities within GLA

A two-day training was provided to 26 members of the Gurans Women Group (Act 2.3). The training, entitled "Revolving Fund Mobilization and Management Training", was aimed at strengthening women's capacity in group management, saving and credit schemes, the record-keeping of saving and credit funds, potential income generation activities, and sensitizing them on fund mobilization guidelines and implementation policy. Another planned training under this output will be conducted in the next quarter. Monthly meetings of each women's group (Gurans and Fulwari Saving and Credit Groups) were carried out (Act 2.4) to review income status, progress on the business ventures of those members who received soft loans, loan facilities to new members and the payback period. The seed fund support has resulted in improvements in saving habits, increasing confidence to grow small-scale businesses, and access to cooperative services to deprived and indigenous groups. The progress of the women's groups who received soft loans will be presented in next reporting period.

Two community-managed fishponds (Tendi pond with 2 ha. and Parsehni pond with 0.75 ha.) have been supported (Act 2.6) to promote sustainable aquaculture during this reporting period. Altogether 65 members from Tharu indigenous community are collectively managing these two ponds. NRs. seed fund was provided to the group to operate these fishponds. The operations of these fishponds are guided by the bylaws prepared with support from CGLTDB and GM. Twenty-nine (19 females and 10 males) out of these 65 members were trained for sustainable aquaculture (Act 2.7). They were trained on native species aqua-culture and productivity-raising techniques to restore the population of native fish, snails and water chestnuts. Furthermore, they were also informed on policy and legal provisions for aquaculture in Nepal. This was followed by a workshop to facilitate the market access of cooperative members via linking with local/national markets and government commercial schemes (Act 2.8) in which 27 cooperative members (16 females and 11 males) of fishponds took part. In this workshop, better opportunities for high-value fish market were discussed. The commercial schemes provided by the Government of Nepal to the farmers were described in detail during the workshop. Through the provided seed fund support, six species of native fish (nearly 131,340 juvenile/fingerlings and matured fish weighing 150 kg in total) were released into these fishponds in the month of August.

Two planned natural capital cooperative exposure visits for 80 households (40 per quarter) to promote the natural capital cooperative concept (Act 2.5) were delayed due to the global pandemic and government restrictions on travel and gatherings. This is planned for the next reporting period.

Output 3: Growing tourism industry in GLA is increasingly sustainable, with wider community benefits, based on tourism master plan that provides a model for other tourist destinations

Under this output, a participatory tourism master plan has been drafted and reviewed (Act 3.2) and the workshops are planned for the next quarter to obtain additional inputs from community

people and stakeholders, prior to finalising the document. The development of sustainable tourism infrastructure in GLA, (Act 3.3) including foot trails and an information centre, was also delayed due to the pandemic. This will be completed before the end of the next reporting period.

Output 4: A robust protection framework is implemented, by designating GLA as Nepal's first Bird Sanctuary, and building on the existing Basanta Protected Forest designation in the upper watershed, to address upstream threats

A watershed management plan for GLA (Act 4.3) was drafted in the previous year and the revision of this plan is in progress. With field visits, ground truthing and community workshops, the watershed management plan for GLA will be completed within the next reporting period.

During this reporting period, the project facilitated on building support for designating GLA a Bird Sanctuary (Act 4.8-Ongoing). GM, the local government body, has now integrated this initiative in the Comprehensive Master Plan of GLA which shows their determination in protecting the GLA through the designation of the area as a Bird Sanctuary.

Output 5: Data and experience from GLA, with its natural capital and socio-economic monitoring, inform evidence-based conservation interventions, management plans and policy

Under this output, to organize the annual training of all monitoring personnel on indicator species monitoring and camera trapping (Act 5. 4), training module was designed, and 24 participants were selected from GLA communities and DoFSC. The training will be completed in the next reporting period.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for Covid-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Project partners including GM, DoFSC, local communities and other project stakeholders have remained supportive, which has been instrumental in delivering the project activities. However, a heavy monsoon this year, along with the Covid-19 outbreak, has slightly delayed a few of the project activities. The support received from GM, CGLTDB and HN and their stewardship and capacity understanding the project remains crucial during this reporting period and are very well coordinated for the second year. We have already built very good cooperation with GM and all stakeholders, which has brought the positive change in conserving GLA and community wellbeing. Such positive feedback and support from all the stakeholders are important for bringing the desired changes during the project timeframe and for longer-term sustainability.

2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of Covid-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Despite the travel restrictions and restriction on mass gatherings by Government of Nepal due to the pandemic since March, 75% of the planned project activities have been completed within the reporting period, with the exception of the activities that require travel and large gatherings. The remaining 25% of the activities have been adjusted in next six month's planning and will be completed, provided government continue to ease the travel restriction. During this reporting period, we have reviewed and discussed the project activities with project partners and beneficiaries both virtually and in-person (maintaining physical distance). After consultation, we followed some strategic approaches to adapt to the impact from the pandemic.

- From the very beginning, we reviewed the project activities of year two and looked at how we could fit the activities in the given time frame with regards to the changed context. Compared to year one, fewer activities were planned for the first half of this year without compromising the project objective.
- We increased the role of the project partners and received support from GM, the local government authority as all partners are based on site and familiar with the context and the communities which has eased the implementation of the project activities. While we have been working with these communities for 18 months, the enhanced capacity of the partners, communities and local government resulted from the structure set in the first year facilitate the smooth operation of the project. Hence, the minimal support through virtual meetings and guidance by the ZSL staff have been instrumental for the implementation of the project.
- All remaining activities are now planned for next two quarters and, considering the recent easing of government restrictions, the activities planned this year are achievable and the timetable, budget and the outcome of the project will not be affected so far. The project will ensure following proper health and safety measures advised by WHO, the Nepal government and ZSL while working with the communities.
- Pandemic induced widespread loss of livelihood options has resulted increased interest and expectations from our current livelihood interventions to additional families living in the same area. Hence, it has been realized that the livelihood interventions should increase its scope to diversify the current livelihood activities and coverage to mainstream additional HHs for conservation of GLA.

2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS: No

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

None to report.

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**