

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2023

Project reference	29-018
Project title	Promotion of coexistence in human-elephant conflict (HEC) hotspots in Northeast India
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	India
Lead partner	British Asian Trust
Partner(s)	Aaranyak
Project leader	Belinda Stewart-Cox
Report date and number	HYR2 (Apr-Sept 2023)
Project website/blog/social media	www.britishasiantrust.org

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

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your M&E systems (are your indicators still relevant, can you report against any Standard Indicators, do your assumptions still hold true?). The guidance can be found on the resources page of the relevant fund website.

Output 1: Profiling the problem and building evidence

Monitoring of HEC in and around Project village: We continue to regularly monitor elephant movement, and HEC incidents that occur in and around the project villages. Most of the HEC reported was crop damage, but there were two deaths in Dibrugarh and West Garo Hills.

Output 2: Promoting security for people and elephants by raising awareness

Workshops for Village Champions: Two workshops were held to train the village champions in eastern Assam and West Garo Hills, Meghalaya in April and June respectively. A total of 32 people were trained (20 village champions and other villagers as well). During these training workshops, the village champions learned about elephant ecology, behaviour, effective HEC mitigation strategies and means, and how to communicate effectively with the people in villages to raise awareness. These village champions have been actively assisting the Aaranyak team in implementing and monitoring HEC mitigation, awareness generation. [DI-A05]

Gajah Kotha- an education campaign: Gajah Kotha translates to ‘Elephant Stories’, which is an education campaign for common people to raise awareness on elephant ecology and behaviour, HEC mitigation and means to promote coexistence. We have conducted 40 outreach events in project villages, reaching 1,986 people.

Workshop for Media Personnel: We conducted two workshops in Majuli and Tinsukia districts for 42 media personnel from nine media houses to highlight their role and potential to help reduce HEC, emphasising the importance of using the right kind of language/words to grab the attention of policymakers while also garnering conservation support from local communities.

Mass outreach through Radio: We participated in a live talk show via Radio where we interacted with the people in Assam as they posed questions related to HEC, its mitigation measures, conservation issues of elephants among others. The programme was aired live from Guwahati and Dibrugarh radio stations in Assam.

Output 3: Protecting livelihoods and assets

Rapid Response Units (RRU): Six Rapid Response Units (RRUs) with 215 RRU members were formed in eastern Assam's project villages (two in Jorhat district and one each in Sivasagar, Majuli, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia district in Eastern Assam) to facilitate the safe passage of elephants around villages, and act as early warning units by disseminating information about elephant movement in the vicinity through WhatsApp groups. There have been some coordination delays and general hesitation to form RRUs by some villagers. They are teething issues, and we will have the 20 RRUs by end-December.

Community-operated solar-powered electric fence as HEC mitigation tool: We conducted surveys to understand the feasibility of seasonal solar fences in 9 project villages of Assam and Meghalaya and conducted community consultations to discuss our model of fence installation. To build capacities of villagers on solar fence installation and maintenance (management), we conducted two trainings in Sadiya and Ujani Majuli in Assam. The 2-day training comprised of both theory and on field demonstration on installation of solar fence. A total of 116 community members were trained, which included members of solar fence management committee (formed by the local community), members of RRU, village leaders and wider community members. We developed a user manual on solar fence installation and maintenance in local Assamese language as well. The user manual in local Garo language is pending translation and will be ready in November. So far, we have installed 10.3 km seasonal solar-powered fences in Majuli. [DI-B09]

Output 4: Promoting supplementary livelihoods [DI-A04]

We conducted a willingness survey in the project villages to gain an understanding of the interest and preference of the beneficiaries' and their agreement to receive support. Based on the preference of the beneficiaries, we provided them with skill development training on weaving, fish farming, poultry, cultivation of winter vegetables, alternate crops and pottery to undertake the livelihood activities and supported them with required resources as well. To date, we have worked with individuals from 306 households to develop supplementary livelihoods, as outlined below:

Weaving: The 2-day training module provided hands-on training and trained 230 beneficiaries as well as 50 other village women from the project villages. 230 women received 5 kgs of cotton yarn each to kick-start their weaving merchandise.

Fish Farming: We organised capacity building trainings on fishery and aquaculture and renovated existing ponds in households, where needed. Thereafter, fingerlings of species that have high market value and commonly reared in Assam such as the common carp, grass carp etc. were provide. We have supported 16 beneficiaries with 98 kgs of fingerlings.

Poultry Farming: A veterinary doctor provided training to 60 villagers, who chose poultry farming, and informed them about the importance of regular vaccinations and veterinary care. A total of 600 chickens of "Kamrupa" breed from the Assam Agriculture University were provided to 60 beneficiaries along with vaccination to each chicken and essential veterinary care.

Output 5: Sharing knowledge and building capacity

World Environment Day: World Environment Day was celebrated in collaboration with the Forest Department and local communities around Dehing Patkai National Park in Dibrugarh district, and in Majuli, Jorhat and Sivasagar districts.

Rainforest Day: World Rainforest Day was observed with school students from two different schools in Jeypore area of the Dehing Patkai National Park (DPNP) in Dibrugarh district in collaboration with Forest Department, school management committees and Dehing-Patkai Suraksha Samiti. A total of 300 students and 20 teachers were reached during these events. The

DPNP is regarded as the “Amazon of the east”, because of its characteristics of tropical vegetation.

Elephant Day: We celebrated World Elephant Day with a range of activities in eastern Assam and Garo hills of Meghalaya. Aaranyak through its consistent effort was able to catalyse a collaboration between the Assam and Meghalaya Forest Departments and facilitate a joint event.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Overall, the project implementation has gone smoothly, and the project is on track. However, we have experienced an unexpected development. Owing to our efforts to raise awareness among the community to install temporary solar fences to mitigate HEC, the Forest Department has also approved a plan to install a 15kms permanent solar fence in Dibrugarh district that also covers our project villages. To avoid duplication of efforts, we are engaging with the Forest Department on how to best support their work and perhaps provide training for fence installation and management to ensure sustainability of that fence. We will submit a change request as soon as we chart out next steps.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

Change request reference if known:

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

Actual spend: ██████████

4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2024)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

4c. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

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

NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

N/A

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

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

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

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**