

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	30-018
Project title	Reviving Trans-Himalayan Rangelands: A community-led vision for people and nature
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	India
Lead partner	WWF-UK
Partner(s)	WWF-India & Center for Pastoralism (CfP)
Project leader	Nicola Loweth
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 October 2023 HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	

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: Shared, community-led vision developed for Changthang and Mago-Chu Rangelands

Activity 1.1 We designed and piloted a Traditional Ecological Knowledge and resource use questionnaire with key informants from four villages in Chushul, Korzok, Chumur and Hanle (Changthang). The questionnaire was finalised after incorporating the feedback from the community representatives and will be used to target key informants of two different age groups (50-70) and (30-40), to document the traditional knowledge as well as the changes in the rangeland so far. With the help of local institutions and young volunteers from Changthang 6-7 key informants from every village of Changthang have been identified.

To also help understand the present socio-political dynamics of the villages and its historical context at our project sites in Mago-Chu Valley, thirteen semi-structured in-depth interviews and ten informal consultations were conducted in nine villages. Key-informants were selected on the basis of the information and knowledge they possessed on the community dynamics and their age-old traditional information including key village leaderships i.e. Gaon Burahs (GBs) of Thembang, Lish and Socktsen villages.

Several nuances of socio-political and cultural differences emerged and were documented. Insights gained so far indicate that in the Mago-Chu valley we will have to approach the

community visioning in a strategic and stepwise manner given the socio-political complexities; primarily multiple layers of governance and high concentration of power in the hands of a few. We are developing the community engagement strategy by clustering the villages into three categories; first category includes seven villages that fall under the community conserved areas, second category covers 3 villages that have the highest population of the nomadic brokpa community, and third category covers 5 villages which have had minimum historical engagement with NGOs.

Furthermore, Information on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) was collected from nine villages of Mago Chu to understand the sustainable use of pastures practised traditionally with the help of semi-structured open-ended interviews.

Activity 1.2. The pilot testing of the community vision framework was conducted at Hanle (Changthang) with 33 community members, which established a platform to include community suggestions and ideas into the visioning framework developed. Based on the community feedback on making the visioning process simpler and engaging, a visual tool was used at every visioning exercise. The visual tool captures the religious, cultural and ecological essence of the Changthang Landscape.

To date four visioning exercises have been completed covering three villages and one hamlet involving 44 women and 97 men. Key preliminary insights include (a) diminished interest in pastoralism among the younger generation (b) shift from a pastoral economy towards emerging opportunities such as casual labour jobs offered by the Border Roads Organization (BRO) (c) perceived pasture destruction by marmots and kiangs (d) an aspiration for improved quality of life with an emphasis on infrastructural development (e) restriction from Indian Army to access the traditional pasture routes (f) lack of market access and not getting deserving price for their product like pashmina, wool and other dairy product (g) increase in the number of wild carnivores and stray dogs leading to increased livestock depredation (h) influx of mass tourism resulting in disturbance to wildlife and littering. The community members had the following additional suggestions/insights to offer- (a) robust fencing to reserve the pastures for lean winter period and predator-proofing of corrals (b) counselling for the youth of Changthang to be aware of the importance of nomadism and rangelands (c) improved market access and value addition to pastoral products (d) monthly cleanliness drive.

Furthermore, to support the development of multi-stakeholder rangeland co-management plans, an in-depth study was conducted to (a) Examine Changpa women's perspective and visions of rangelands and to understand their role in rangeland management. Their knowledge of the management of pastures, livestock, and wild plants can be valuable for creating a management plan and (b) Examine how gendered perspective can be considered in conservation programming- A gendered perspective is essential to make a conservation and management strategy more sensitive, inclusive, and just towards the under-representation within a marginalised group. A final report has been prepared and is available.

Based on the insights gained from developing community-led visions in Changthang, a revised strategy for replicating this approach in Mago-Chu is under development. Following initial consultations, the villages of Mago, Thingbu and Luguthang have been identified for intense engagement for the rangeland visioning exercise, where the nomadic brokpa population is high.

Activity 1.3 To socialise the project with key stakeholders a project launch/inception event was held in September in the presence of the Secretary for Animal Husbandry, Union Territory of Ladakh, different Councillors, the Gobas (traditional village heads) & sarpanches (elected village representatives) from diverse villages in the Changthang region, representatives of local institutions, civil society members and local NGO's. The response was remarkably encouraging, as community representatives warmly embraced the concepts, efforts, and concerns concerning rangelands and pastoralism. The Gobas and councillors specifically lauded the idea of a long term vision for the Changthang landscape and assured their participation and support. Socialisation of the project with key local stakeholders in Mago-Chu will take place in Q3 and Q4 through engagements and workshops.

Output 2: Multi-stakeholder co-management of rangelands, based on the community-led visions

Activity 2.9 A preliminary analysis focusing on changes in the Changthang rangelands, by examining greening and browning patterns in the past 20 years has been completed using Landsat and Sentinel Imagery. Preliminary results show significant browning (decline in vegetation) at certain sites within Changthang. A further in depth analysis will be conducted in the next two quarters.

Activity 2.10. A detailed study plan on wild carnivore occupancy has been established for both regions, focusing on Snow Leopards and Himalayan Wolves, and a population assessment of their primary prey. Data collection for Changthang will take place between October and December 2023 and April-July 2024 for Mago-Chu valley. In the Mago-Chu valley, six local citizen scientists (all youth aged between 18 to 30 years) have been recruited and trained in ecological surveys focusing on snow leopard and wild ungulate population assessments to support this data collection process.

Output 3: Enhanced tolerance of community towards wildlife

Activity 3.1 Discussions have started on using WWF's wellbeing tool to conduct assessments of community tolerance towards wildlife. The tool will be rolled out across both regions in the next reporting period.

Activity 3.2 Baselines assessments on the nature and extent of human-wildlife conflict have been conducted in Changthang and Mago-Chu valley. In Changthang, 120 herders across 6 hamlets: Bug, Khaldo, Punguk, Rongo, Samad, and Shado were interviewed. A total of 1,073 livestock loss cases were recorded. Wolves were the primary animals in conflict, causing 208 of the loss cases, while snow leopards accounted for only 20. Livestock depredation was highest in winter with 112 cases, followed by spring with 58 cases. In Mago-Chu valley, the assessment was completed in 15 project villages, covering 12 village leaders and 33 brokpas (nomadic herders). Asiatic wild dogs emerged as the top predator of livestock followed by snow leopards and Asiatic black bears. More livestock died due to disease followed by wild carnivore predation and natural causes such as extreme winters or heavy snowfall.

Activity 3.3 A total of 59 devices were deployed at three project sites in Changthang (Hanley: 12 Fox Lights + 11 Flashlights, Rongo: 8 Fox Lights; and Tsokar: 14 Fox Lights + 14 Flashlights) to reduce livestock losses using project match funding. The next phase, which involves evaluating the effectiveness of these measures, will be crucial in refining the approach and ensuring that livestock losses are minimised.

Output 4: Changpa and Brokpa pastoral households have diversified and augmented income from 'rangelands-friendly' products and micro-enterprises

Activity 4.1 Background discussions (on training modules, raw-materials supply chain and logistics) with our local partner, Looms of Ladakh (a women-based cooperative) regarding the training of women from Changthang in skill-sets related to Pashmina and wool based handloom/handicrafts products have been held. A plan has been formulated for engagement with the women from 6 villages including Khaldo, Pungukk, Shado-Bug, Hanle TR, Tsokar and Rongo (Changthang). Discussions were also held around setting up a formal network of village-level women-based self-help groups which in future could be converted into a women-led micro-enterprise. Local points of contact for the women groups in different villages shall be explored in the coming months so that women groups could be formalised for establishing a value-chain. In Mago-Chu valley, a six-monthly plan towards research, craft documentation and product diversification has been developed among the brokpa women of selected project villages in collaboration with Its-All-Folk, a project partner. The livelihood activities will primarily focus with the brokpa families of Mago, Thingbu, Luguthang, and with a proposed training and

production hub at Nyukmadung village. This livelihood activity plan will be finalised and implemented with Its-All-Folk during the next reporting period.

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.

In Changthang, Ladakh, there is an ongoing government effort to review and adjust the boundaries of protected areas. The purpose of this exercise is to exclude areas that are anticipated to experience significant development. While the specific information regarding these changes has not been made public, we are in the process of assessing the potential effects on our project and determining the necessary adaptations.

Furthermore, considering the input and feedback gathered during the project's inception meeting, as well as the expected consequences of the altered protected area status, we intend to initiate a change request process. This request will outline the modifications we are considering making.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: Yes/No

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No

Change request reference if known:

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 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?

Although expenditure to date is lower than foreseen (% of the Year 1 budget has been spent by the end of September), the project team is confident that they will spend a significant proportion of the planned Year 1 budget in the second half of the year. The period October to March is an intense period of field implementation. Project partners are anticipating a potential underspend of £ for Year 1 at the current time. We will be reviewing the Year 1 budget with partners to make appropriate changes and consider alternatives. We will shortly be submitting a Change Request Form as we would like to request changes between budget lines within the Year 1 budget as well as notify Niras of some staff changes.

As a new project this year, we also attach the following documents to this report:

1. Logframe - which maps indicators against BCF standard indicators.
2. Risk Register
3. Response to the feedback letter received at contracting.

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**