

## 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: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023**

<b>Project reference</b>	<i>DARCC035</i>
<b>Project title</b>	Integrating local government and community conservation capacity of snow leopard
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Nepal
<b>Lead partner</b>	Snow Leopard Conservancy
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Mountain Spirit (MS)
<b>Project leader</b>	<i>Dr. Shailendra Thakali</i>
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	<i>April to September, 2023 HYR1</i>
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	

**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.

### **Progress Summary**

The project recruited three regular staff, a Project Coordinator, a Field Officer, and a Finance and Admin Associate, and identified 4 field associates to support project implementation as needed. Detailed work plans and budgets were developed and shared with Social Welfare Council (SWC) for approval as per Nepal government regulations.

The project area includes three Rural Municipality, one in Mustang and two in Manang. Working relationships with Narpa Bhumi, Ngisyang and Gharabdzong Rural Municipalities of Mustang and Manang districts were established. Project Principal Investigator and staff conducted 3 field visits, holding consultation meetings which had two objectives – familiarizing officials and local stakeholders on project activities, and soliciting local interests and priorities. 3 separate agreements were signed with the respective Rural Municipalities.

13 consultation meetings were held with a total 231 participants (See Annexes 1 and 2 for the Summary) Herders, herd owners, and farmers, Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) officials and Municipality officials were consulted. 26% of participants were women. The focus of workshops and meetings was developing livestock or farmer-based cooperatives to promote broader future livelihood and conservation-related activities. Sections below provide details of the project achievements.

## **1.0 Consultation Meetings**

### **1.1 Consultation Meeting in Phu**

Consultations in Phu village were held to discuss the status of livestock, the insurance and compensation policies, and explored local interest in the insurance scheme (Annex 1 July). Key findings are: there are 8 yak and 2 sheep/goat herds or goths (pastures or livestock pens in Phu and Kyang villages). Livestock depredation by snow leopards is common, and reported to be increasing annually. Yak calves (< 3 years) are particularly vulnerable to depredation. Yaks are kept in simple goths (pens) made of stones with no roofing and easily susceptible to snow leopard attack. Livestock is not insured, and most herders have no knowledge about insurance policies. Herders stated that compensation schemes for livestock depredated by snow leopards are ineffective and there has had been no reported compensation for livestock loss. Foxlight use was discussed (random blinking lights to protect livestock from snow leopards during the night). All herder participants had received foxlights but gave mixed feedback on their effectiveness. Based on feedback, an evaluation of foxlight effectiveness will be conducted. Most herd owners have not registered their livestock and do not understand the registration process or benefits from it. Following the consultations, interest in registering livestock was expressed, with financial and technical support from the project. Herders also requested a portable solar system to make nighttime livestock guarding more effective.

### **1.2 Consultation meeting with Ubi Jimbu (Himalayan Chives) Cultivation Committee**

A consultation was held with Narpa Bhumi RM officials and Ubi Jimbu Cultivation Committee members (Annex, July 2023). Jimbu (Himalayan Chives), one of the major cash crops is traditionally wild harvested from the high alpine pasture areas. This was the first time that cultivation of jimbu was tried, with one woman farmer stating harvested jimbu grown 3 times this year, making over 25,000 rupees (US\$ 200) this year, enough to cover incidental household expenses and plans to expand jimbu cultivation. Most farmers expressed confidence that jimbu can be successfully cultivated in their fields and has a high potential to supplement incomes. Scaling-up challenges remain. Ubi is within the prime habitat of wild ungulates such as blue sheep and it is also a livestock pasture when villages move from higher pasture areas to the village in winter. Protecting jimbu from blue sheep and livestock is a major challenge and farmers have been unable to transplant saplings grown in poly houses to their fields. Ubi is a large area and fencing would be very expensive. The irrigation system rehabilitated during previous project (Darwin #27-025) is also not sufficient to irrigate large areas. Scaling up jimbu cultivation was discussed with Rural Municipality (RM) officials and will focus on packaging, branding, + marketing jimbu this winter as a trial to test the market and explore impacts of potential value addition. (see Annexes 3 and 4 for photos) jimbu cultivation.

### **1.3 Consultation Meeting in Nar with Herders**

Consultations including 10 rural municipality (RM) members occurred in Nar village (Annex 1). The main findings are: Nar village has 15 yak and 13 goat/sheep goths (pastures or pens), with 1024 yaks and 480 goats/sheep, (including goths at Meta and Chyakhu). Nar community grazes their animals collectively but herds are kept separately in individually owned pens at night. Herds move to Chyap, Jhunam, and Meta during the winter. Depredation of yak calves is a major problem, and also of sheep and young calves during the days while they are free-ranging and at night. Most of the livestock owner participants received foxlights, saying that they were effective during the first year, but lost effectiveness as snow leopards become familiar with the foxlights. (Herders may not have been regularly moving foxlights, allowing snow leopards to become habituated). Nar herders have little knowledge on insurance policies. Some herders have joined the community-based insurance scheme introduced by Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) but lost interest as no compensation was received for livestock losses from snow leopards predation. Livestock in Nar is not registered with rural municipalities and there is no livestock-based group or cooperative. Participants expressed interest in registering livestock individually and in skill training to improve livestock-based products such as woolen items (carpet weaving) and hard cheese.

#### **1.4 Consultation Meeting with Herd Owners/Herders in Manang**

Consultation occurred in Manang (Annex 1). Discussions focused on experience with livestock insurance, and herders who had insured their livestock some years before shared their unsatisfactory experiences. The Siddhartha Insurance Pvt. Ltd. Is an authorised insurance provider for Manang, with an agent based in nearby Chame. Herd owners with past livestock insurance stated that there were delays in processing insurance applications and claims and no one received money from the insurance company for the loss of their livestock despite following the approved procedures. Until the insurance agent is changed or the company establishes its branch office in Manang, herders expressed no interest in insuring their livestock. The meeting also found one owner had registered his herd as a farm with the Rural Municipality and received a government grant to build a predator deterrent coral. Manang's only microfinance institution (Manang Trust) is not well known by locals and there are no cooperatives. However, rural municipality officials expressed interest to establish cooperatives and explore ways to strengthen local livelihoods with project support.

#### **1.5 Consultation Meeting at the Bhraka Village**

Consultations occurred in Braga village and 1 ACA official participated (Annex 1). Key findings were: Braga has 4 goat/sheep goths and 4 yak goths. Most goth owners/herders have received foxlights, stating that they were only effective during the first two years. They continue to use foxlights and also requested the project to provide more, if possible. Braga has only one registered goth - 'Taanke Sheep Goat Rearing Centre' but little information was available.

#### **2.0 Consultation Workshops and Meetings on Cooperatives**

A Cooperative Expert was hired who assessed the current status of cooperatives and levels of local interest, and is responsible for designing and developing follow-up program activities to form and strengthen cooperative systems, particularly to improve herder well-being and use cooperatives to support local livelihood improvement initiatives.

#### **2.1 Consultation Workshop in Thini Village**

A workshop was held in Thini, (Annex 2, Sept. 2023), focused on the status of existing cooperatives (or formal/informal livestock groups that can be upgraded) or linked to sub-national cooperatives operating. Key findings include: There is only one Community Livestock Group, registered in 2020. Two more Livestock Groups were formed but they are not yet registered. Sessions were conducted exploring the advantages of upgrading existing Community Livestock Groups into multipurpose cooperative forums, with follow up training will be conducted as per local demand. Participants highlighted challenges to protect their herds from the snow leopard depredation. Most local goths have poor lighting and lack secure windows and doors. Herders also highlighted poor pasture quality and insufficient feed, particularly during winter. Participants thought cooperatives could help expand access to government and INGO/NGO support to address many challenges. They also highlighted lack of livestock health and noted that veterinary service is insufficient, suggesting this as an area of future cooperative focus. Livestock owners/herders of Thini are aware of livestock insurance and compensation policies but have little trust, based on past experiences. Some herders insured their herds but discontinued after receiving no compensation. They agreed that working as a cooperative group may help them pressure insurance companies and ACA to provide better service and more timely processing of claims. They also requested training to preparing insurance claims and document proper evidence of depredation to strengthen their claims. These findings will guide ongoing project activities.

#### **2.2 Consultation workshop in Syang Village**

Fifteen livestock owners/herders participated in the workshop (Annex 2). Key findings include: There is one Community Livestock Group, registered in 2021. There are 2 yak herds, with one registered with the municipality. The other yak herd is also planning to register. There is also one 'Community Agriculture Cooperative' and most goat and yak owners are affiliated with this cooperative. They had more experience with insurance schemes but are also unsatisfied with a low rate of claims success. They stated that Prabhu Insurance, (the government-authorised

insurance company for Mustang), is not helpful. Workshop participants asked for skill training to improve the quality of woolen products to get better market access and price.

### **Consultation Meeting with Municipality Officials**

Garabdzong Rural Municipality (RM) officials were briefed on project objectives and planned activities (Annex 2), and support the project and snow leopard conservation, requesting close collaboration to avoid duplication. The meeting distributed 20 foxlights and rolled out the livestock insurance policy. Officials agree that livestock depredation is a major problem associated with snow leopard conservation, and reducing depredation rates is a priority. This RM has a Cooperative Act and Regulation, and 10 cooperatives have been registered but they are inactive. They requested cooperative training and networking support to better promote livelihoods programs and snow leopard conservation.

### **2.4 Consultation workshop in Jomsom**

Consultation in Jomsom occurred (Annex 2). Most herders have joined cooperatives as members. They also have received foxlights (for 2 yak and 4 goat herds). The Cooperative Consultant explained the pros and cons of cooperatives + groups and how they may promote farmer/herder well-being, rights and livelihoods, and help herders access better support from the government. A representative from Prabhu Bank attended the workshop and explained the livestock insurance scheme and its benefits. Key findings: Herders from Jomsom shared similar types of problems as shared by other communities. One of the major problems with insurance schemes is documenting evidence. The difficulty of finding carcasses and veterinarian technicians for field verification of depredation was highlighted, making the claim process for insurance difficult. Despite challenges, herders of Jomsom showed interest to insure their livestock with the project support on a trail basis.

### **2.5 Consultation workshop in Nar**

A workshop in Nar village occurred (Annex 2), discussing terms and conditions for forming cooperatives (or groups where the formation of a cooperative is not possible). Key findings: Unfortunately Nar does not have a Cooperative Act and Regulation Act in place, a necessary first step to developing local cooperatives. Other points discussed were the relationship between three pillars - the government, individuals, and cooperatives, and the advantages of forming community-based groups vs., individual enterprises, for livestock businesses. Required steps to register livestock groups were discussed and how to form future cooperatives. The insurance agent who joined the workshop explained livestock insurance policies and benefits. Following this, participants voluntarily formed a Goat and Sheep Community Group, and Yak Community Group, providing a mechanism to work with groups for future programs and strengthening these groups to form cooperatives if there is sufficient local interest. Narpabhumi RM has also agreed to register these groups and develop a Cooperative Act and Regulations.

### **2.6 Consultation Workshop in Manang**

A workshop was held in Manang (Annex 2). Key findings: Manang has 11 yak and 5 goat goths. Herders use 5 pasture areas (Ghyangyang, Yak kharka, Manang, Pripche, and Ledar) on rotation for grazing. Herder owners have registered their goth with rural municipalities individually. After explaining the importance of cooperatives and groups and the steps to achieve them, participants requested training from the project on group and cooperative formation. Participants agreed to form an ad hoc group – one is Yak Herder Group (9 members), and another one as the Goat Herder Group (5 members). The insurance representative discussed the livestock insurance policy and steps to insure livestock. Participants, however, showed little interest based on unsuccessful past experience with insurance claims.

### **2.7 Consultation workshop in Braga**

A workshop was held in Braga (Annex 2). Key findings: There were more female participants when compared to other workshops, 7 out of 11 participants. Interest in group formation and forming cooperatives was shown, once the cooperative act and regulation are approved by the municipality. Participants voluntarily formed 1 informal group with 4 members. Braga village has 4 yak and 4 goat goths. Like the Manang community, they also use rotational grazing and move their herds around 5 high pasture areas (Chraka, Sabche, Icelake, Phriee, and Tangia).

### 3.0 Other Activities

#### 3.1 Project Management

Mr. Purna Man Shrestha - Program Coordinator (MA, Zoology). Ms. Bijaya Thakali (BA, Sociology) - Field Monitoring Officer, and Ms. Gyanu Thapa Chhetri (BA, Accounting) - Admin and Finance Associate using Mountain Spirit's open and transparent recruitment process. 4 local persons, 1 in Mustang and 3 in Manang were identified to who will support project activities on an as needed basis. Agreements between Mountain Spirit and Narpa Bhumi, Ngisyang Rural and Gharabdzong Rural Municipalities were signed. Project documents were submitted to the Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation, (Aug 2023), and Social Welfare Council ( Aug 2023) for approval.

#### 3.2 Braga Goth Visit

The Program Coordinator and Field Monitoring Officer visited a field site above Braga village to gain first-hand insights on local ghot construction. Goths were simple stone walls with tarpaulin or plastic sheet roofing. Herders have no guard dogs and use a small room built next to the goth for the shelter, which are easily attacked by snow leopards. Based on observations and discussion with herders, four types of predator-proof goths for future consultations were designed (see Annexes 5 and 6 for photos and drawing). The project plans to construction at least 3 improved goths by end of 2023.

#### 3.3 NTFP and Mushroom Survey

Research grants were provided to two master-level students to undertake surveys of NTFP with a focus on edible mushrooms, and the goth condition in Narpabhumi Rural Municipality. The survey identified 61 species of Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) and 61 species of mushrooms. 15 species of mushrooms are edible and the people of this municipality have been collecting and selling them for supplementary income. Some species of NTFPs have also been used. Yasagumpa (caterpillar fungus), for example, has become the main source of local income for almost two decades. Almost all households in this area are involved in yarsagumpa collection during the season. They have no problem selling them. Yarsagumpa traders come to their village and buy them. Some traders even provide money in advance to secure the purchase of yarsagumba. The report will be used to develop appropriate skill training to add value to NTFPs and mushrooms.

Research grantees visited 8 sites to assess the condition of goths, and met with 33 herders. Figure 4 shows the goth used for keeping yak calves. This survey focused on documenting herding practices, the status of livestock predation by wild animals including snow leopards during the past five years, knowledge and information on livestock insurance, compensation relief of livestock killed by wild animals, and current practices of mitigation measures.

**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.**

Approvals from DNPWC and SWC are taking longer than expected. This means the project is focused more on consultations, meetings, planning, and rapport-building activities this quarter. Based on field inputs, the project team will revisit and possibly revise the outcomes, outputs and activities/indicators through a formal change request process.

**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: A change request may be submitted in Q3.	

**4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)**  
**Actual spend:** £ [REDACTED]

**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?**

No

**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](mailto: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**