



## Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021)

<b>Project reference</b>	26-012
<b>Project title</b>	Ghodaghodi's Guardians: Communities Restoring a Ramsar Wetland at watershed scale
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Nepal
<b>Lead organisation</b>	Zoological Society of London
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Department of Forests and Soil Conservation (DoFSC), Ghodaghodi Municipality (GM), Comprehensive Ghodaghodi Lake and Tourism Development Board (CGLTDB) and Himalayan Nature (HN)
<b>Project leader</b>	<i>Dr. Hem Sagar Baral</i>
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	31 October 2021, (HYR3)
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/assets/uploads/Darwin-Newsletter-June-2021-A-Global-Restoration-FINAL.pdf">https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/assets/uploads/Darwin-Newsletter-June-2021-A-Global-Restoration-FINAL.pdf</a> <a href="https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/assets/uploads/Darwin-Newsletter-September-2021-Our-Changing-Climate-FINAL.pdf">https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/assets/uploads/Darwin-Newsletter-September-2021-Our-Changing-Climate-FINAL.pdf</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, implemented in Ghodaghodi Lake Area (GLA), aims to improve our understanding of the underlying threats to GLA, thus helping develop appropriate mitigation measures, ultimately contributing to the restoration of GLA's ecological integrity and increase the well-being of the local people through community-led natural capital-based sustainable management. To ensure the progress of the project throughout this reporting period, ZSL and CGLTDB continued their partnership while reaching out to concerned stakeholders and local communities during implementation. However, some of the activities were slightly delayed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as the Government of Nepal (GoN) imposed lockdown measures (travel restrictions and mass gatherings) to tackle the second wave of the pandemic (end of April until mid-July). After the ease in restrictions, most of the activities were implemented following safety protocols within this reporting period. The details of the project progress are outlined below.

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

Two interaction workshops were conducted for 60 FISH (Freshwater Information System for Households) representatives working as community focal points for sharing information on GLA's biodiversity, the watershed area, and its sustainable management to the established working group (**Act 1.5**). These workshops were geared towards re-orienting and sensitizing FISH members on the importance of GLA's ecological integrity, their roles and responsibilities as FISH members, and helping them enhance their skill and knowledge on communication, coordination and building relationships with community people. These representatives are working closely with CGLTDB and GM to encourage community people to actively participate in the GLA's

management, planning and sustainable development as well as GLA's restoration and wise use of natural resources.

Likewise, 10 awareness sessions in regulating grazing and controlled use of pesticides/fertilizers were completed for 422 upstream community members (286 females and 136 males) to promote the regulation of overgrazing, control excessive use of pesticides/fertilizers and mitigate human activities that negatively impact GLA's watershed and biodiversity (**Act 1.12**). They were briefed about the importance of forests and lakes on the sustenance of water sources, traditional culture as well as the negative impacts on GLA's ecosystem services due to over-grazing and overuse of pesticide and chemical fertilizer. Alternatives to open grazing and pesticides/fertilizer use were also discussed in these sessions. Similarly, no grazing areas have been agreed in Community Forests around GLA. Maps are being prepared and will be delivered in the next reporting period (**Act 1.12**).

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

ZSL's partner, CGLTDB facilitated four monthly meetings for each of the two women's groups during this reporting period to support them for their day-to-day cooperative operations (**Act 2.3**). The majority of the members from the women's groups participated in these meetings. During the meetings, CGLTDB staff presented information to the group members (existing and new members) about cooperative schemes, effective investment, fund mobilization and discussed the prevailing issues and challenges in their businesses. The support has resulted in improvements in saving habits – two cooperatives reported a combined saving since the initiation of the cooperatives, increasing confidence to grow small-scale businesses, and access to cooperative services to the deprived and indigenous groups. These meetings have further helped in promoting the importance of natural capital management.

The majority of the project beneficiaries are engaged in animal husbandry, aquaculture and a few of them run small businesses. Two market linkage workshops were conducted for 82 participants (74 female and 8 male) which encouraged participants to adopt a more sustainable livelihood utilising local markets to commercialize their products (**Act 2.8**). They were informed about government policies on agriculture and animal husbandry, subsidies, and incentives. They were provided with information on identification of market opportunities, assessment and demand trends and enabling them to grow their business. Furthermore, commercial schemes like improved breeding, feeds and nutrition, farm management, identification of beneficial and steady markets, production promotion etc. were taught and discussed during the workshop.

**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, all activities were implemented during the last two years. In this reporting period, GM supported CGLTDB by promoting sustainable tourism within GLA by convening workshops with provincial ministries, developing foot-trails, check dams (complementary to ZSL activities), and promotion of homestays. Also, a participatory tourism plan is ready (**Act 3.4**), and GM is reviewing the final document.

**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**

GM is currently reviewing a watershed management plan for GLA (**Act 4.3-Ongoing**). The plan will be endorsed by GM by the end of this project.

Three awareness raising drop-in sessions were conducted in the month of August 2021 for 99 people (46 female and 53 male) from three upstream settlement communities (Maghi, Gaidakhera, Lathuwa) in the GLA to discuss and consult on the watershed management plan (**Act 4.5**). The importance of the watershed area and its conservation issues were shared and discussed, and participants also helped to identify problems and threats to water resources, helping guide the development of a participatory framework to address these issues in the GLA watershed management plan. Participants from these settlements were positive in the

sustainable use of water resources. Also, around 100 leaflets highlighting the need for, and importance of, watershed management were distributed in this workshop.

Similarly, the project facilitated building support for designating GLA a Bird Sanctuary (**Act 4.8-Ongoing**). GM, the local government body, has already 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. CGLTDB and GM have conducted one municipal assembly, one board and one provincial level meeting to discuss with provincial government and other stakeholders to declare the area as Nepal's first Bird Sanctuary and provincial government has remained positive and express their willingness to support this initiative. GLA will be declared as Bird Sanctuary by the end of this project.

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

During this reporting period, a three-day training course on indicator species and biodiversity monitoring was conducted (**Act 5.4**) for 34 people (19 Female and 15 Male) from Pahalmanpur Forest Division, FISH and some citizen scientists. They were both theoretically and practically trained in biodiversity monitoring including indicator species monitoring. Camera trapping techniques, fish monitoring, vegetation survey, bird survey and mammalian survey techniques were demonstrated during the training. The training also included building capacity of the citizen scientists to enable monitoring of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) locally.

Similarly, for seasonal observations, a fish survey and wild rice survey was carried out (**Act 5.5 & 5.6**) as a part of the natural capital assessment. The survey has recorded 32 species of fish from 8 orders, 16 families and 24 genera. Likewise, the current study identified 8.6 hectares of area covered with wild rice (*Oryza rufipogon*) within GLA. The larger patches of wild rice have been observed mostly towards the northern boundary of Ghodaghodi Lake. During this reporting period the survey has only partially been completed; the rest of the annual assessment 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.**

No notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt have been encountered over the last six months. The only delays were due to COVID-19 which have been detailed out in Section 2b.

**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.**

After the ease in COVID-19 restrictions, the implementation was sped up and most of the activities were completed during this reporting period. Twelve activities were planned for this reporting period, and only one activity has been shifted to the next quarter (**Act 2.5**) and two activities have been partially completed (**Act 5.5 and 5.6**) due to the effect from COVID-19. To compensate for lack of physical meetings, virtual meetings were organized with project partners to effectively implement the project. In consultation with project partners and beneficiaries at site, some strategic approaches were adapted to minimize the impact of pandemic to the project.

- Widespread temporary and permanent loss of livelihoods due to COVID-19 has affected communities within our intervention sites, and this has resulted in increased interest and expectations of our current livelihood interventions from other families living in the same area. Therefore, it has been realised that the livelihood interventions need to be increased to cover a larger number of households. ZSL is facilitating GM, who are working with the local communities to support them with other alternative opportunities.
- With the ease in restrictions, the planned activities were sped up ensuring the health and safety of project staff, project beneficiaries and local community people as advised by WHO, Nepal government, local government and ZSL.
- Although the timetable for activities (Act 2.5, 5.5 and 5.6) will be shifted, these will not impact the budget. Aforementioned activities are also scheduled for the next reporting period and as such deliverables will not be impacted.

**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](mailto: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**