

## **Project Update: November 2021**

We started field work later than the original plan. COVID-19 and related restrictions such as travel bans, social distancing and lockdown, prevented us undertaking our field work. Once the first wave of COVID-19 in Nepal was over, we prepared for the field work. However, the second wave of COVID-19 and second lockdown again (in April 2021) compelled us to put off our field work.

The necessary research permit from the Nepalese department of national park and wildlife conservation and respective national park offices (Bardia and Langtang national park) has been secured. The survey instrument has been approved by the human research ethics committee of the university.

**Progress:** Finally, field work has been completed in Bardia National Park (buffer zone). A total of 480 questionnaires have been conducted in Bardia National Park buffer zone. Three different clusters representing varying degrees of nature-based tourism activities, proximity to the park headquarters, and proximity to the highway and level of development were chosen for the survey. We aimed to address the diversity of the socio-economic and human dimension of conservation in Bardia National Park and Buffer Zone. Three users' committees, Thakurdwara, Baghkhori and Haiharpur, were surveyed which also represent three different local municipalities and two districts. While the first two users' committees were situated in Bardia (Terai/lowland) district, Hariharpur lay in Surkhet (mountain) district. These three regions have varied characteristics such as proximity to park headquarters, level of tourism development and the geographical landscape. By covering the distinct regions of the buffer zone in our survey, the findings can be extrapolated to conclude the overall status of the national park. Data entry from this work has started.

We have also started field work in Langtang National Park and Buffer Zone and the first leg of the field work in Langtang national park has been completed. To date 145 surveys have been completed. This work was carried out in the Rasuwa district which is where the park headquarters lies. The second leg of field work in Langtang National Park is to start by the start of next week. Sindhupalchowk district will be covered in the next phase. In Langtang National Park too, three different areas have been chosen to address the complexities of the park management. These regions were chosen based on the overall status of tourism, proximity to the park headquarters and different district and varying socioeconomic situations. At least another 220 surveys will be carried out in the coming phase of this work.

**Challenges:** Due to the COVID19 pandemic, some of the project objectives required changes to overall fit to the research and PhD work. For example, the collapse of the tourism industry and absence of visitors in the national park meant it was not possible to measure and quantify the negative environmental impacts (energy demand in the form of firewood consumption) and the waste generation problems in the study parks. Similarly, we were not able to explore the willingness to pay (WTP) for entrance/ visitor fees as there were no tourism activities in the park. Our original aim to compare and contrast the WTP with previous studies in two different time periods could not be fulfilled. This has hindered us to compare and analyse the temporal stability and reliability of willingness to pay studies to determine park entry fee.

**Adaptation to the changing scenario due to COVID-19 (Plan B):** Although some of the research objectives needed to be replaced by other feasible objectives, the overall quality of the work and research objectives within the frame of PhD was not comprised. The environmental impact of the nature-based tourism activities has been replaced by the global level review of socio-economic impact of nature-based tourism in protected areas. This objective has been complete and now submitted for publication. This is under peer review process.

Another objective on WTP has been replaced by the perceived benefit and cost of nature-based tourism to local people in the national park and buffer zone. Although these original two objectives could not be met this time due to the situation beyond our control, I hope to address this in the future once the pandemic is over and daily life returns to normal.

**Next stage:** In the next stage, we will work on data entry and complete the remaining field work in Langtang National Park. Once the data entry is completed, we will focus on data cleaning. Data analysis will be done by January 2022. As this project is also a part of PhD research programme, all of the remaining writing tasks will be carried out within the timeframe of higher degree by research.



Respondents replying to the survey team in Bardia National Park. ©I. Acharya.





Farmland damaged by park wildlife in Bardia National Park. © I. Acharya.



Fishing in a canal in buffer zone of Bardia National Park. © I. Acharya.





Livestock depends on grazing land inside Langtang National Park. © I. Acharya.



Chhorten in a village inside Langtang national park showing nature-culture relation. © I. Acharya.





High mountain village such as this in Langtang national park is lacking tourist due to COVID-19 which once relied on nature-based tourism industry. © Kamal Thapa.