

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Balram Awasthi
Project Title	Conflict to co-existence: Empower Local Communities to Reduce Human-Elephant Conflict in Far-West, Nepal
Application ID	40414-2
Date of this Report	25 May, 2025

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
To assess the extent of human-elephant conflict in and around Shuklaphanta National Park				The project facilitated a decade-long review (2014–2024) of human-elephant conflict (HEC) by engaging with Shuklaphanta National Park officials and Buffer Zone User Committees. Through participatory planning and consultation, we systematically collected park records, verified cases, and conducted 250 household surveys (Sundevi, Bedkot, Trishakti, Kalikitch, Bageshwari, and Shuklaphanta User Committee), to capture data on crop raiding, property damage, and human injuries. Field observations and GPS mapping of conflict sites further supported spatial documentation of HEC intensity and distribution. Local perceptions were also recorded to understand trends, vulnerabilities, and local coping strategies.
To reduce human casualties from elephants and avoid retaliatory killings of elephants through conservation outreach programs in targeted				The project implemented a multi-platform conservation outreach program that reached over 200,000 people through thrice-daily Nepali language radio jingles broadcasted on Mahakali FM covering remote and high-risk areas and news article published in New Janakranti Daily. More than 3000 students participated in school-based awareness programs

areas and communities			<p>across six buffer zone school supported by interactive seminars, art and essay competitions, and direct engagement with local leaders. In addition, more than 300 brochures and 200 posters were distributed, and two hoarding boards were installed to convey key messages on elephant behavior, conflict causes, and safety measures..</p> <p>A local workshop with Buffer Zone management committees improved institutional coordination, and an interaction program on World Elephant Day 2024 (held at Siddhanath Science Campus) engaged conservation officers, academics, journalists, and community members to foster collective ownership of elephant conservation. While these initiatives have significantly improved local attitudes toward elephant conservation, the project acknowledges that a single year is not sufficient to establish lasting coexistence. Continued long-term monitoring and sustained awareness efforts will be essential to strengthen and maintain community commitment to peaceful human-elephant interactions.</p>
To enhance the capacity of local communities to manage conflict and ensure human-elephant coexistence in the periphery of Shuklaphanta National Park, Nepal.			<p>The project established and trained three Elephantapid Response Teams (RRTs) across Shuklaphanta, Betkot and Trishakti user committees. These teams were trained on elephant behavior, conflict mitigation, and rapid response techniques and were equipped with essential deterrent tools, including lead hand-carry torches.</p> <p>To reduce dependency on high-</p>

				<p>risk livelihoods, alternative livelihood training was provided to 67 individuals, with a focus on eco-friendly, conflict-resilient farming methods such as vegetable and medicinal plant cultivation. Women and indigenous groups were prioritized to ensure inclusivity and representation. Two relief support packages were provided to families affected by fatal elephant encounters, demonstrating the project's commitment to social justice and empathy. In addition, two coordination meetings strengthened local institutional collaboration, reinforcing community-led coexistence and resilience against future HEC incidents. Moreover, two Bachelor of Science students from Siddhanath Science Campus were supported to undertake their undergraduate thesis research.</p>
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2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a). Strengthened Community-Institutional Coordination and Local Capacity for HEC Mitigation

The project fostered strong collaboration between Shuklaphanta National Park, Buffer Zone User Committees, and local communities to address human-elephant conflict (HEC). Through participatory planning, 10 years of conflict records (2014–2024) were reviewed to inform targeted actions. Community-led Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions built local capacity, leading to the formation of three Elephant Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) across the Shuklaphanta, Betkot, and Trishakti Buffer Zone Management Committees. These teams were trained in elephant behavior, deterrence, and rapid response, and equipped with essential tools like hand-held torches. To promote coexistence, 67 conflict-affected individuals—with priority given to women and indigenous groups—received livelihood training in sustainable, low-risk farming practices such as vegetable and medicinal plant cultivation. In Trishakti, vegetable seeds were distributed to support 60 families, guided by community-set rules. Relief assistance of NPR 10,000 and educational materials was provided to two bereaved families affected by fatal elephant encounters. Two multi-stakeholder

coordination meetings further enhanced institutional engagement. Collectively, these efforts improved local preparedness, empowered communities, and laid the foundation for long-term human-elephant coexistence.

b).Increased Awareness and Cross-Generational Behavioral Change

Education and outreach activities played a central role in shifting attitudes toward elephants and promoting human-elephant coexistence. School-based programs were conducted in six schools, involving essay writing, art competitions, and conservation seminars, which engaged over 3,000 students. Students actively shared their learning at home, extending the program's impact. The school programs were complemented by public awareness campaigns, including the distribution of 300 brochures, 200 posters, and the installation of two hoarding boards (at Champa Chowk and Madan Chowk) displaying key messages on elephant safety and conservation. Since October 2024, radio jingles have been broadcast three times daily on Radio Mahakali, reaching remote and vulnerable communities. A major milestone was the World Elephant Day 2024 interaction program held at Siddhanath Science Campus, involving 90 participants, including students, faculty, park staff, NTNC officials, and media. Presentations by conservation leaders helped deepen understanding of cross-border elephant movements and HEC mitigation. By engaging both youth and adults, these efforts fostered behavioral change at the household level and nurtured a lasting conservation ethic across generations.

C). Data-Driven Foundation for Future Conservation Strategies

Structured field surveys, and interviews across six buffer zone committees captured detailed data on crop loss, property damage, elephant movement patterns and community perception. A total of 250 household surveys and multiple field visits created a strong evidence base for identifying conflict hotspots and timing. Traditional ecological knowledge from local residents was integrated into survey design and interpretation. **The project also supported two B.Sc. students to conduct thesis research. Their work complements project goals and strengthens the evidence base for future community-led conservation.** Altogether, this dataset will inform policy recommendations, guide targeted mitigation, and support long-term landscape-level planning in Far-West Nepal.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

The project was implemented smoothly without major challenges. While most activities proceeded as planned, there were minor adjustments in the timeline that led to a slight delay in final report submission. However, coordination among team members and stakeholders remained strong throughout the project period, enabling the successful completion of all proposed objectives. The team's collaborative approach ensured the success of the project despite few changes in the schedule.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.

Local communities were actively involved every stage of the project, from planning implementation and follow-up. Community members contributed from early phase of the project- from consultation meetings to survey design, data collection, and feedback sessions, ensuring the project was grounded in local knowledge and priorities. During data collection, 250 household surveys, key informant interviews, and focused group discussions were conducted across six buffer zone user committees, with local residents contributing knowledge on elephant movement, timing of conflict, and traditional deterrence strategies. Institutions such as the Buffer Zone Management Committee (BZMC), village leaders, farmers, teachers, students, and government agencies played key roles in identifying elephant movement routes and organizing awareness campaigns, school programs, seminars, and competitions.

As a result of this engagement, communities gained valuable knowledge about elephant behavior, the causes of human-elephant conflict (HEC), and safe coexistence strategies. School-based education improved youth awareness and empowered future conservation stewards. Trainings enhanced community capacity in conflict prevention and rapid response, while livelihood support and sustainable farming practices reduced dependency on conflict-prone areas. Six buffer zone schools hosted awareness programs involving over 3,000 students, supported by teachers, parents, and local leaders. Public outreach included the distribution of 300 brochures, 200 posters, two hoarding boards, and radio jingles aired daily on Mahakali FM, and news article published in New Janakranti Daily extending the project's reach to remote areas.

Three Elephant Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) were formed and trained, while 67 individuals—prioritizing women and indigenous groups—received training in sustainable livelihoods. In Trishakti, vegetable seeds were distributed to benefit 60 HEC-affected families. Relief support was provided to two families who lost members in elephant attacks. The project also supported two undergraduate thesis students studying community perceptions of HEC.

The project not only empowered communities to take a proactive role in conservation but also fostered stronger institutional collaboration, improved preparedness for HEC, and laid the groundwork for long-term coexistence between people and elephants.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, we plan to extend this model to additional villages along the southern boundary of Shuklaphanta National Park. Based on our findings, the school awareness programs and resource materials support were the most effective and preferred by the community. Therefore, we will continue and expand Training of Trainers (TOT) sessions and school awareness initiatives. Additionally, we aim to integrate real-time human-wildlife conflict reporting through mobile technology and seek collaborations with government agencies to ensure the long-term implementation of human-elephant conflict (HEC) mitigation measures.

To further strengthen this effort, the following activities are planned:

- Predict spatial and temporal hotspots of human-elephant conflict in the buffer zones of Shuklaphanta National Park to enable targeted intervention.
- Compare the effectiveness of deterrent methods—such as beehive fences, chili ropes, solar lights, and mobile alerts—across multiple villages.
- Conduct field trials of elephant-unpalatable crops to evaluate their effectiveness in reducing crop-raiding and supporting coexistence strategies.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

The project findings are being actively shared with stakeholders including Buffer Zone Management Committees, villagers, students, teachers, and park authorities through education programs and meetings. At the national and international levels, findings will be presented at upcoming conservation conferences and regional forums.

To ensure long-term accessibility, the final report will be archived at the Shuklaphanta National Park and Siddhanath Science Campus libraries. A video documentary on elephant conservation is currently in production and will be uploaded to the project blog (www.togetherwithelephant.blogspot.com), where all findings and educational materials will be publicly available. A peer-reviewed journal article is also in preparation.

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

Building on the success of the current project, several important steps have been identified to further promote human-elephant coexistence:

- Continue and expand TOT sessions, school awareness programs, and educational material dissemination.
- Ensure sustained support for community-trained HEC mediators, who play a critical role in resolving conflicts and strengthening trust between local communities and authorities.
- Expand conservation and awareness activities across Suklaphanta National Park and its buffer zones, responding to strong community interest in developing long-term, sustainable solutions.
- Extend project efforts to other high-conflict regions, such as the western terai landscape of Nepal, which urgently need intervention.
- Trial innovative mitigation strategies, including early warning systems, to improve community preparedness and reduce elephant-related risks.

These steps aim to consolidate project gains, scale up impact, and support peaceful and sustainable coexistence between humans and elephants across key landscapes in Nepal.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

Yes, The Rufford Foundation logo was prominently used in all project-related materials, including banners, posters, brochures, leaflets, hoarding boards, and audio-visual presentations. It was displayed at all stakeholder meetings, awareness programs, training sessions, and workshops.

The Foundation's support was formally acknowledged during interactions with local communities, including questionnaire surveys and outreach events. Interns/researchers and interns involved in the project were introduced to the role of conservation funding highlighting the role of the Rufford Foundation in conservation research initiatives.

Furthermore, the Foundation's contribution was shared through media coverage, was mentioned during FM radio broadcasts and will continue to be highlighted in upcoming research publications and presentations. The Foundation received significant visibility and recognition among several hundred local participants, officials, and stakeholders throughout the course of the project.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Balram Awasthi – Team Leader.

Sarita Bhatt – Undergraduate student at Siddhanath Science Campus, conducting her Bachelor's thesis on Local perceptions of human-elephant conflict (HEC) in the buffer zone of the national park, Nepal. She actively participated in field data collection and volunteered in various awareness activities within the study area.

Suraj Joshi – Research intern and undergraduate student at Siddhanath Science Campus. Assisted with questionnaire-based data collection and volunteered during awareness programs.

Deshantar Budachhetri – Research intern and undergraduate student at Siddhanath Science Campus. Assisted with questionnaire data collection and volunteered during awareness activities.

Gorakh Saud – Research intern and undergraduate student at Siddhanath Science Campus. Supported questionnaire data collection and participated as a volunteer in awareness efforts.

Ayushma Upadhyaya – Research intern and undergraduate student at Siddhanath Science Campus, working on her Bachelor's thesis on Local perceptions of human-elephant conflict (HEC) in the buffer zone of the national park, Nepal. Assisted in

interview transcription, participated in field data collection, and volunteered during awareness campaigns.

Susila Awasthi – Research intern and undergraduate student at Siddhanath Science Campus. Assisted with questionnaire data collection and volunteered in awareness activities.

10. Any other comments?

We are deeply grateful to The Rufford Foundation for supporting this grassroots conservation initiative. Their flexible and timely assistance enabled us to address urgent challenges in a complex human-elephant interface. This project has laid a strong foundation for future community-led elephant conservation efforts in Nepal. The initiative was implemented in close collaboration with Shuklaphanta National Park, NTNC/SCP, the Buffer Zone Management Committee (BZMC), local communities, schools and Radio Mahakali, Janakranti Daily, SudurKhabar Daily. These partnerships were instrumental in ensuring the successful delivery of project objectives, and stakeholders have expressed strong interest in and support for a next phase in the near future. We sincerely thank the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation for granting research permission to survey human-elephant conflict, as well as all partners, including the teachers, staff, and students of Siddhanath Science Campus, for their invaluable contributions.

While this project has made meaningful progress, human-elephant conflict remains a significant threat to elephant conservation. Sustained efforts are essential. We remain committed to strengthening coexistence strategies in Shuklaphanta and look forward to Rufford's continued support in this shared mission.