

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Anuradhi Dulangi Jayasinghe
Project Title	Mainstreaming Human-wildlife coexistence in conservation science, policy and practice.
Application ID	43247-1
Date of this Report	24 th June 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
<p>To study the barriers to coexist with elephants in Walsapugala village in Southern Sri Lanka through an ethnographic study through participant observations and focus group discussions.</p>			Fully achieved	<p>In the original proposal, two ethnographic studies were suggested in two study sites in two different provinces (Southern and North Central provinces) in Sri Lanka over a span of four months. However, project activities were carried out only in the Walsapugala village in the Hambantota District in the Southern province for the same time period due to following reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Based on the initial discussions with key informants from selected civil society organisations in Sri Lanka, the anticipated study sites in the North Central province are subject to flooding from the northeast monsoon rains. Hence, staying there for an extended period of time for an ethnographic study has some risks and barriers to the continuity of the study. 2. Due to the financial crisis that the country was facing, confining the

				<p>locations into one site helped to stay within the budgets proposed. (This was mainly due to increasing prices of domestic travelling).</p> <p>3. Spending an extended time (four months) in one study site was understood to be helpful in conducting a successful ethnographic study as it provides adequate time to study and understand the social contexts of farmer communities interacting with elephants.</p> <p>Before commencing the ethnographic study, head of the research and the program manager of the Law and Society Trust, Colombo Sri Lanka, were first interviewed to understand the context in the Walsapugala village and to create connections with other stakeholders who were working in the study area. As a results, program manager of the organisation called MONLAR Sri Lanka were interviewed and identified key informants from the village. The ethnographic study was consisted of three main methods (key stakeholders were farmers): focus group discussions (FGDs), transect walks and participant</p>
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				<p>observations. Eight FGDs were conducted with 113 farmers. Each FGD was followed by a transect walk along the farmland and houses, especially those that are being damaged by elephants. The community members (3-4 per FGD) who participated in the FGDs guided these transect walks. However, transect walks were also took place separately to the FGDs.</p> <p>Although the original plan was to conduct interviews with national park authorities and local government authorities, due to the prevailed political situation (presidential and the parliament elections) acted as barriers to obtain the approvals. However, in-depth interviews were conducted with four Mahaweli Development Authority that purview the Agricultural activities and parts of compensation programs in the village. These interviews were quite helpful to understand the governance perception of the barriers mentioned by the farmers to coexist with elephants.</p> <p>The barriers identified in the research were already communicated with the IUCN</p>
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				<p>HWC to coexistence task force that reviews the IUCN Green List standards, during its monthly meetings. Also, I have already started putting them in a manuscript as a gap analysis of the IUCN Green List standards and developing scripts to share them in the IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC) to be held in Abu Dhabi in October 2025.</p>
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2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a) Understanding the nuances of social contexts of vulnerable farmer communities to coexist with elephants:

The barriers of those farmer communities to coexist with elephants are multifaceted, and interpreting them in a confined framework of values, norms, and knowledge is challenging because there are intricacies in those social contexts. However, the focus group discussions and participant observations conducted during the ethnographic study yielded nuances of the social contexts of these farmers and their strategies to coexist with elephants. Hence, this data reflects a broad range of farmer perspectives, which in turn helps identify recurring themes, relationships, and gaps in the human-wildlife coexistence landscape.

b) Understanding the barriers of the farmer communities to coexist with elephants:

Those farmer communities' knowledge of the elephants' behaviour and how to act accordingly during crop raiding, like conflict situations, is interestingly high. For instance, they have years of observed elephant behaviours and are now sensitive to them. Accordingly, farmers are careful not to point the torches directly at the eyes of elephants since they aggravate elephants, unlike in the past. Moreover, farmers' knowledge about constructing effective elephant fences is also surprisingly high. However, according to the farmers' perspectives, the support received from the responsible authorities to practice successful strategies to coexist with elephants is considerably low.

c) Disseminating the ground-level realities of farmer-elephant coexistence from Sri Lanka in global conservation dialogues.

Amidst the rising intensity of conflicts with elephants, especially in terms of crop-raiding events and escalating vulnerabilities of the communities with poor or non-functioning compensation mechanisms, those farmers are still concerned about the well-being of the elephants and voice/act for the habitat needs of the elephants.

This research aided in disseminating the values embedded within these vulnerable communities that must be factored into conservation planning, with international conservation conferences like the ICCB (International Congress of Conservation Biology), June 2025, in Brisbane, Australia.

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

1. During the first few weeks of the ethnographic study, gathering farmers for FGDs was difficult for many reasons. For instance, since the discussions were planned in the mornings, many farmers (both men and women) had spent their nights chasing away elephants from their cropping fields or spent the nights in tree huts built in their farmlands. To overcome this, the discussions were arranged later in the day, allowing those discussants to rest in the morning.
2. The discussions took place in selected houses in the village, and in some areas, reaching those houses was the biggest challenge due to damaged roads. This was tackled by hiring landmasters to travel on poorly constructed or damaged roads.
3. There were some heated and aggressive behaviours of the farmers during the initial stages of the FGDs as they had no one visited the village from the government to listen to their problems. So, I had to repeatedly mention, regardless of the participant information sheets and introductions shared before the discussions about my studentship in an Australian university, that I am not representing the Sri Lankan government or its officials.

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

The project was mainly conducted with the involvement of the communities, who played various roles during the field activities. I stayed with one of the families in the village throughout the research period. The eight focus group discussions were conducted with 10-15 farmers (a mix of males and females) for each, which included activities like transect walks to witness farmlands and houses damaged by elephants as well as landmarks with popular elephant activities (such as elephant gatherings and corridors). The lunches provided for during the FGDs were mainly provided by selected farmer families. During participant observation events, especially during activities like maintaining electric fences and also after each FGD, the farmers were encouraged to get together and produce small write-ups describing the nature of the prevailing elephant conflicts and the suggested solutions as they saw. Those write-ups could then be submitted to wildlife authorities and attached to media publications through the local news reporters of the area.

Since these farmers have long been neglected for their vulnerabilities to elephant conflicts, they were so desperate to talk about those conflicts and their aspirations

to see elephants also living peacefully in designated reserved areas. After almost all the FGDs, the participants shared the fact that they felt relieved as they had an opportunity to share the stories about the struggles, strategies to overcome them and some memories of elephant conflicts and coexistence events.

No research assistants were recruited officially; rather, two research assistants were incorporated in the study on a casual basis, mainly to help with recording and transcribing the discussions. These RAs were involved in the study after discussing with the head of research of the Law and Society Trust. Further, they have used my laptops for the tasks assigned under my supervision.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes.

Since Sri Lanka is an island and this study took place in only one village with a historically increasing number of conflicts, first, the findings must be shared with researchers and responsible authorities who are working within this same landscape across the country. With the appointment of the new government in Sri Lanka, the newly appointed ministries must also be informed about the findings of this research to inform any upcoming conservation policies.

To assist with informing the new ministries in an effective manner, I have already started communicating with other Environmental NGOs in the country, where we could do a collective information sharing session rather than just sharing written reports. However, I am currently in the process of summarising the findings in Sinhalese to share with the new ministries as an entry point to a long-term information-sharing session.

My aim is to start the next phase of this project by organising a national human-elephant conflict coexistence forum with the help of NGOs and leading government university lecturers who are working in this landscape. This would first inform the government of the information we have about the barriers and solutions already identified nationwide. Second, while understanding the policy, the outcomes of the forum will lead to implementing solutions to address human-elephant conflicts in the country. Moreover, as a member of one of the task forces under the IUCN, I plan to invite collaborations within Asia into this national forum.

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

The study results will be shared in four international conferences/congress platforms through oral presentations.

I first shared the study results on the 18th of June 2025 at the International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB 2025) in Australia.

The second results-sharing event will happen from 1st to 4th September 2025 at the International Wildlife Congress in Norway.

Thirdly, the results will be shared at the Pathways conference in the USA on the 8th of September 2025.

Fourth, the results will be shared at the 17th Biennial Conference of Science & Management to be held at Northern Arizona University on the 10th of September 2025.

(All these conferences are confirmed and registered for oral presentations).

The first manuscript from the study is under review in the Ambio journal (Manuscript number: AMBI-D-25-00626).

The second manuscript is completed in writing and is waiting for the supervisor's comments before submitting to a journal

The rest of the publications are still at the writing stage.

The findings of this research have already been shared with the IUCN HWC to the coexistence task force that reviews the IUCN Green List Standards. Further, together with these task force members, I will be sharing the study findings in a side event at the IUCN World Conservation Congress to be held at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre from 9th to 15th October 2025. The congress participation and registration are already confirmed.

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

I am drafting a newspaper article to be published in Sri Lanka's Sinhalese language as a public awareness article, as well as a policy recommendation article on the key findings and recommendations.

Given the complexity of the issue of human-elephant conflicts, it is essential that research on this landscape prioritises qualitative research to understand the intricacies of the barriers to coexist with elephants. As an important next step towards mainstreaming coexistence with elephants and understanding a way forward, a national conference to be conducted in Sri Lanka that collects and presents various research conducted on this issue would be crucial. This is mainly because Sri Lanka is a very small island nation, and thus, coexisting with these endangered giants is no doubt the only way forward. It can't be achieved when conservationists, ecologists, policymakers and many other relevant stakeholders are working in individual silos. Further, there will be no one and only solution, so to identify a series of solutions and pathways towards coexistence, it is a must that different stakeholders come together.

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, I have done an oral presentation at the ICCB 2025 in Brisbane, Australia. I have shown the Rufford Foundation logo in my slides, and I acknowledged verbally the funding support from the Rufford Foundation.

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

Anuradhi Dulangi Jayasinghe: Main Researcher

I am the main researcher, and as a Sri Lankan born and raised researcher, I conducted an ethnographic study in the local languages.

Associate Professor Leah Burns

Associate Professor Duan Biggs

Associate Professor Johanna Nalau

They are my PhD supervisors, who revised my project proposal and were my advisors throughout the project.

Dr Sakuntala Kadirgamar (Law & Society Trust)

Dr Sakuntala is the one who assisted me in identifying key informants at the initial stage of the ethnographic study. Following her, Mr Sandun Thudugala and Mr Vidura Munasingha from the Law & Society Trust and Mr Sajeewa Chamikara from MONLAR Sri Lanka have also been involved in initial key informant meetings.

10. Any other comments?

The study was a success and provided lots of insights into moving forward to mitigate human-elephant conflicts towards coexistence. The highlight is that the findings of the research study will inform future conservation planning about the importance of the social context of communities interacting with wildlife.