

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Chungla Sherpa
Project Title	Assessing a Multidisciplinary Framework for Human-Snow Leopard Coexistence in the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area of Nepal's Eastern Himalaya
Application ID	41175-1
Date of this Report	October 2024

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
Capacity Building and Empowering Communities leader and promotion of Nature based tourism, promotion of livelihood diversification that have minimum impacts on local environment and improve tolerance towards snow leopard			✓	The project successfully achieved this objectives of raising awareness about snow leopard conservation through interactive sessions and discussions on ecology, conflict mitigation, and promotion of nature based tourism. Pre- and post-workshop assessments demonstrated effective knowledge transfer and behavior change, supported by a well feedback and interests on turning their responsible business and engagement activities that deepened participant commitment to conservation of local environment including snow leopard habitat.
Sensitizing local stakeholders (schools/youth women group) on snow leopard conservation through knowledge product.			✓	Promotional and Advocacy Initiatives, including campaigns targeting youth and children, using posters, leaflets, booklets, quiz and drawing competition for student were carried out.
Promotional and advocacy activities			✓	KCAP officials, rangers, and game scouts, Snow leopard conservation committee and were also involved in some activities, some findings were shared with the global community through a Story Map. https://storymaps.com/profile/CSherpa

2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a). Increased awareness, enhanced stewardship on the role of community led ecotourism in conservation

Community's growing enthusiasm for ecotourism, recognizing it as both a path to conservation and a sustainable livelihood. Participants are now envisioning eco-friendly tourism options, such as homestays, guided nature tours, and sustainable crafts, which not only offer alternative income sources but also protect snow leopard habitats. This collective vision sees their village evolving into a unique conservation and tourism destination, where economic resilience and environmental stewardship coexist. This foundational step towards community led ecotourism sets a course for a balanced relationship with nature, fostering economic growth while preserving the pristine Himalayan landscape and its wildlife.

b). Indigenous communities are willing to raise their voice on mountain issues and conservation

The project has successfully fostered a sense of empowerment among indigenous communities, encouraging them to actively engage in discussions about mountain issues and conservation efforts. Through targeted outreach and education, community members have become more informed about the challenges facing snow leopards and their habitats, particularly in the face of climate change.

c). Nurturing future conservation leaders, empowering students for snow leopard conservation

The project has successfully engaged local schools to educate students about the ecological significance of snow leopards. Through interactive workshops, students gained first-hand experience of their habitats and learned about the importance of biodiversity conservation. This initiative empowered them to become ambassadors for snow leopard protection, sharing their knowledge with family and community members. As a result, the project fostered a sense of stewardship among young learners, cultivating the next generation of conservation leaders committed to protecting the environment and advocating for sustainable practices in their homes, communities.

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

During the project, several unforeseen difficulties arose, primarily concerning participant engagement and logistical challenges. Initially, we faced resistance especially from yak headers and farmers. Many were unfamiliar with participating in such activities, as they had never engaged in similar discussions before. Additionally, the isolated nature of their living in remote location led to concerns that discussions would be conducted in a language they did not fully understand. To address these issues, we made significant adjustments to our approach. We began conducting discussions in the local language, which greatly increased participants' concentration and interest in the subject matter. Furthermore, we communicated project materials in local dialects and incorporated culturally relevant examples, which helped to establish rapport and foster a more inclusive environment.

Another challenge we encountered was related to weather conditions, which impacted travel to the remote areas. To mitigate this, we implemented contingency planning, allowing us to adjust schedules and ensure that we could still meet our objectives despite the weather-related delays. By actively listening to participants' concerns and adapting our strategies, we were able to enhance engagement and ensure the success of the project.

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

Local communities are integral to snow leopard conservation and eco-friendly tourism, making them a core focus of the project. Through various training sessions and workshops, we have equipped community members with knowledge of sustainable tourism practices, enabling them to generate income through eco-lodges and guided tours while also preserving their cultural heritage. The project emphasizes the critical role of snow leopards in maintaining ecological balance and addresses various threats, such as habitat loss and human wildlife conflict. By empowering communities with knowledge and awareness, we have fostered a sense of stewardship, encouraging them to actively participate in conservation efforts. This involvement has led to improved livelihoods and a collective commitment to protecting natural resources, ultimately benefiting both the local economy and the conservation of snow leopards. The project has created a sustainable model where communities can thrive while ensuring the preservation of their environment and the iconic snow leopards that inhabit it.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, I definitely plan to continue this work. I recently applied for a PhD under the Gustavo Fonseca scholarship, and my initial Expression of Interest (EOI) has been accepted. The insights gained from this project have been instrumental in enhancing my understanding of the complex human environment interactions in the region and in developing my future study proposal and research plan. One significant gap I identified during the project is the disparity between scientific findings and the issues and knowledge of local communities.

It is essential to view local changes through a scientific lens to effectively bridge the gap between scientific discoveries and the lived experiences and observations of local people, as well as the status of species and ecosystems. This underscores the urgent need for adaptive and multidimensional conservation strategies. As Himalayan mountain communities face increasing vulnerability due to climate change, developing sustainable conservation approaches that balance the needs of both people and wildlife including snow leopards becomes crucial. I am hopeful that I will receive this PhD opportunity, which will enable me to expand this work further. My goal is to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic, cultural, and ecological factors influencing human-snow leopard interactions in the eastern highlands of Nepal. This region has seen limited research but is ecologically sensitive and critical for conservation efforts.

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

As a researcher and professional in the fields of forestry, wildlife, and natural resources, I recognize the importance of sharing knowledge. I aim to engage the scientific community by preparing data for publication in national and international journals. For the general audience, I am creating story maps that illustrate the activities conducted during my fieldwork, incorporating photos and videos to make the content engaging and relatable. These visual narratives will help convey the significance of the research and its implications for local communities and conservation efforts.

Furthermore, I plan to conduct more in-depth analyses and publish findings in high-impact journals in the near future. This will be accomplished through collaborations with other researchers and organizations working in similar fields, utilizing long-term data to strengthen our collective understanding of these critical issues. As a representative of women from indigenous communities in the Himalayas, I wish to ensure that this knowledge reaches diverse audiences. To achieve this, I plan to employ various methods and mediums. In the future, one of my primary strategies will be to develop booklets in local languages, Nepali, and English. This will make the information more accessible to community members who may not speak English. Additionally, I will continue to explore other avenues for sharing knowledge and engaging with diverse audiences.

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

Looking ahead, the next steps are crucial, especially given the limited research conducted in this ecologically sensitive region. My deep connection to the area and background as a native provide a unique advantage in bridging scientific inquiry with local knowledge, enhancing both the relevance and impact of the findings. A key focus for future work should be exploring the multidisciplinary connections between ecological and social dimensions under changing climatic conditions. This approach aims not only to protect endangered species, such as the snow leopard, but also to preserve the rich, interconnected ecosystems that provide essential ecosystem goods and services to the both upstream and downstream of the region. By fostering an understanding of sustainable coexistence, the work can help build local communities tolerance toward snow leopards and create conservation pathways that support both human and wildlife needs. In addition, future projects should incorporate predictive models that factor in altitude, vegetation, prey availability, and climate change. These models will be invaluable for conservation planning, allowing stakeholders to anticipate habitat shifts, identify critical conflict zones, and integrate this information into local development planning. I aim to undertake these activities as part of my PhD research, using a proactive approach to inform targeted interventions that effectively mitigate human-snow leopard conflicts. Ultimately, the project's future steps will create sustainable, science-backed pathways to conservation that not only protect biodiversity but also strengthen local resilience to climate impacts and support regional development.

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, we prominently used Rufford logo on all knowledge products and materials developed during the project, which received enthusiastic responses from the local communities. Some community members expressed appreciation, noting how meaningful it was for them to see the tiger an icon of the low land Nepal species featured so prominently. One local person joked with a big laugh, "If we in the Himalayas can help grow the snow leopard population, maybe someday organization will start using the snow leopard in their logos instead of the tiger!"

We also received positive feedback from international trekkers, including from England who remarked on how rewarding it was to see his country's organization supporting reaching such remote highland for conservation. He congratulated our team on the dedication required to make an impact in these distant areas. Hearing first-hand how our efforts are appreciated by both locals and visitors reinforces the importance of this project and strengthens our commitment to conserving the region's unique biodiversity.

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

Chungla Sherpa - Project Lead / Field Planning / Field Visit / Trainer

As the project lead, Chungla was responsible for overseeing all aspects of the project, from initial planning to execution. Her roles included field planning, coordinating field visits, and conducting training sessions for both team members and local communities.

Manju K.C. - Field Visit, Data Collection, Survey, and Capacity-Building Assistant

Manju played a key role in field visits and was responsible for data collection and conducting surveys. She also assisted in capacity-building activities, helping to engage and train local participants.

Deepa Gurung - Field Enumerator and Assistant

Deepa served as a field enumerator, conducting surveys and gathering essential data in the field. She provided general assistance to the team, ensuring efficient and accurate data collection.

Nupu Tshiring Sherpa - Field Logistics and Local Guide

Nupu managed the logistics in the field and acted as the local guide, facilitating travel and navigation through the region. His deep local knowledge was instrumental in coordinating field activities and assisting team members.

Dawa Sherpa - Porter and Cook

Dawa served as both porter and cook, handling the team's supplies and preparing meals during field visits. His support ensured the team's well-being and provided essential logistics throughout the project.

Tshiring Sherpa - Porter

Tshiring assisted in transporting equipment and supplies as a porter, enabling the team to reach remote field sites/village with the necessary materials.

10. Any other comments?

The heavy rain, snowfall, and challenging travel conditions in the high Himalayas impacted parts of our planned schedule and extended the number of days required in the field. Additionally, the region's unique local climate and limited infrastructure posed challenges to our pre-planned activities. However, with the project lead being from the area, her strong local connections greatly facilitated our work. We are deeply grateful to the local community for their exceptional support and responsiveness despite their own busy schedules. We also extend our sincere thanks to Rufford for their financial support, which enabled the successful completion of this project. We look forward to continued support for future phases as we work to further explore the region's complex human-environment interactions.