Project Update: May 2020

Background

Human-elephant conflict (HEC), especially elephant attacks on humans, has become one of the major challenges for elephant conservation. In most of the cases, elephants attack people (with 67% of attacks ending with death of the victim, Acharya et al. 2016) when people try to chase elephants feeding on their crops or raiding their stored grain. People sometimes approach too close to such elephants or provoke elephants to become angry. Such elephants attack humans causing injury or death. The project aims to reduce such human casualties from elephants to a minimum through awareness programmes in targeted areas and communities and enhance the capacity of local communities to manage conflict and ensure the human-elephant coexistence in periphery of the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve in eastern Terai of Nepal. The project contributes to creating coexistence between humans and elephants to ensure the long-term survival of elephants in the highly fragmented and human-dominated landscapes like eastern Terai and Siwaliks of Nepal. The project started in October 2019. Some activities proposed in the project have been completed while others are in progress. This report provides the update on the implementation status of the various activities of the project.

Activities and progress

B.1. Plan vs progress

SN	Activity	Progress/achievements	Remarks
1	Develop HECx training manual and toolkit	HECx training manual (100 copies), poster (1500) and brochure (1500) are printed and ready for	Due to high demand of manual we printed more copies than proposed (15)
2	TOT on human-elephant coexistence (HECx)	Planned for ~25 persons. TOT will be conducted after the countrywide lockdown due to COVID-19 is lifted.	The TOT was planned for the starting of March 2020. However, due to government restrictions on gatherings of over 10 people as part of social distancing to prevent COVID-19 infections, I had to postpone the TOT. I am in regular communications with local BZUCs and the reserve authority. Will conduct the TOT once the situation is favourable in the project area.
3	HECx training for locals	Will be conducted consequently after the TOT.	10 units (2 TOT participants conduct 1 unit of HECx) with ~50 local community members

4	Assess the nature and extent of the elephant damage	Fieldwork completed; data analysis is ongoing	Two university students hired, and they conducted 494 questionnaires with the locals with in-person-interview under my supervision.
5	Radio program	Two radio jingles (one in Nepali and other in Maithili) is prepared and regularly aired from three FM stations	
6	Brochure and poster publication	With small modification on the previous content, 1000 copies of the poster and 2000 copies of the brochure are published	

B.2. Activities conducted and achievements

B.2.1. Field visit and reconnaissance
Field site (Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve) was visited in November 2019 for reconnaissance survey. With the consultation of park authorities, forest officials and buffer zone leaders, most affected areas from elephant conflict in the periphery of the Koshi Tappu have been identified. They suggested to conduct the TOT and HECx training during February/March 2020when people are relatively free from their agricultural activities.

B.2.2. Questionnaire survey
As proposed in the project I selected two master's students from Nepalese universities in consultation with the professors to conduct the questionnaire survey in the buffer zone of Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve. The survey is intended to quantify the loss caused by elephants. The selected students were Ms. Ambika Tiwari and Mr. Pawan Rai from Zoology (Central Department of Zoology, Tribhuvan University) and Environmental Sciences (Golden Gate College, Tribhuvan University) faculties, respectively. A set of questionnaires was designed, and the survey protocol was finalised in consultation with their supervisors from universities. Questionnaires were filled with the in-person interview with the respondents. One of the students (Ms. Tiwari) carried out survey in the eastern buffer zone and the other student (Mr. Rai) conducted in the western buffer zone. I supervised the survey. They were well trained prior to carrying out questionnaires survey. In total, 494 questionnaires were conducted which help us to understand the nature and extent of human-elephant conflict in the periphery of the Koshi. Data entry and analysis is ongoing.

B.2.3. HECx training manual
The HECx training manual previous developed by the Zoo Outreach Organization (India) has been adapted to Nepalese context. One hundred copies of the updated manual have been printed.

Figure 1. One of the students conducting interview with the local respondent and filling out the questionnaire related to Human-elephant conflict in the project area.

B.2.4. HECx TOT and HECx training for locals

The TOT was planned for March 2020. However, due to government restrictions on gatherings of over 10 people as part of social distancing to prevent COVID-19 infections, I had to postpone the TOT. I am in regular communications with local BZUCs and the reserve authority. I will conduct the TOT once the situation is favourable in the project area. The HECx training for locals will be conducted subsequently after the TOT.

B.2.5. Radio Jingles

Radio jingles related to human-elephant co-existence were produced in both Nepali and Maithili (ethnic) languages and are being broadcasted from three different FM stations (Saptakoshi FM, Itahari, Sunsari; Radio Sathi, Kakadvitta, Jhapa; and Radio Jaymadhesh, Saptari) since November 2019. The radio jingles are also uploaded in my blog (Jungalihatti.blogspot.com).

B.2.6. Brochure and Poster

Brochures (2000 copies) and posters (1000 copies) from my previous projects were reproduced with small modifications. These posters and brochures will be distributed to the participants of TOT and HECx training.

Figure 2. Project leader with the recently developed HECx training manual.

Way forward

I planned to complete the project activities before April 2020 but due to the difficult situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, I could not complete all the activities within the timeframe. I will conduct the remaining activities (especially the TOT and the HECx trainings) immediately after the situation comes normal in the project area.

Figure 3. New Brochure produced from this project.

Figure 4. New poster printed from this project.