



## **WWF Nepal**

# **Strengthening communities livelihood and stewardship to conserve Otters in Karnali- Final Evaluation**

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### **BACKGROUND**

WWF Nepal works closely with Government of Nepal (GoN), civil society organizations (CSOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and local communities to achieve its mission of stopping the degradations of Nepal's natural environment, and to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature.

The Lower Karnali Watershed, spanning 747 km<sup>2</sup> within Nepal's Terai Arc Landscape, boasts remarkable aquatic biodiversity (Annex 4.1.1) and providing vital ecosystem services to local communities. Its diverse habitats, including rivers, riverine forests, floodplain grasslands, and oxbow lakes, support a plethora of species, including those listed on the IUCN Red List such as the Critically Endangered gharial crocodile, Vulnerable mugger crocodile, Endangered Gangetic River dolphin, and Vulnerable smooth-coated otter. Recognizing its importance, the Government of Nepal has designated the western channel of the Karnali River as an ecological corridor, while the eastern channel is encompassed within the buffer zone of Bardia National Park. Illegal and unsustainable fishing practices persist in the western channels of the Karnali River due to interconnected factors, including limited enforcement capacity for fisheries regulations and inadequate fisheries management procedures. Unregulated river aggregates extraction has rapidly increased in the western belt of the Karnali, with contractors neglecting environmental mitigation plans required by Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) reports. Weak compliance and monitoring mechanisms from local governments exacerbate the degradation of river systems and otter habitats, leading to the destruction of vegetation and fish spawning sites. This degradation has led to a decline in fish diversity and abundance, jeopardising the traditional livelihoods and food security of indigenous and marginalised Sonaha and Tharu communities. Otter species serve as ecological indicators of healthy aquatic ecosystems and are protected under Nepal's amended Aquatic Animal Protection Act 2002. However, declining fish diversity and abundance due to overfishing and habitat disturbance caused by intensive river aggregates threaten the health of the river ecosystem and declining smooth-coated otter populations. Insufficient research on their distribution further impedes the development of an effective national otter conservation strategy. Considering these challenges, this project aims to improve the livelihoods of marginalised river dependent communities, promote sustainable fishing practices, and enhance the capacity of government stakeholders and civil society organisations in the Lower Karnali Watershed. The project will also facilitate the formation and mobilisation of

community-based river stretch co management groups to monitor the river regularly to mitigate threats to fish and smooth-coated otters in the Lower Karnali Watershed.

Since April 2023, WWF Nepal in partnership with WWF UK has been implementing a three-year project ‘Strengthening communities’ livelihood and stewardship to conserve Otters in Karnali’ funded by the UK Government through the ‘Biodiversity Challenge Funds’. With the project, we are addressing these issues methodically and collectively to achieve the following Outcome:- Improved River management and enhanced wellbeing of 200 river dependent households through diversified livelihoods, result in increased fish abundance and otter occupancy in the Lower Karnali Watershed. The Project has three distinct yet correlated outputs- Output 1: River dependent communities and local governments demonstrate river stretch co-management covering at least 10 kms of the Karnali river and one fish sanctuary, enhancing sustainable fishing practices and inclusive decision-making processes; Output 2: By 2026, 200 Sonaha/Tharu households (at least 50% women as direct beneficiaries) living in and around the lower Karnali increase their annual income by 15% through market oriented vocational training to enhance their technical skills followed by material support for establishment of micro-enterprises; Output 3: By 2026, government officials (municipalities, division forest office, park authorities) have improved capacity to monitor and control river aggregates extraction and destructive fishing practices, in order to better protect fish spawning sites and otter habitats; and Output 4: By 2026, endorsed otter conservation action plan is adopted by all relevant stakeholders underpinned by robust scientific research and evidence-based approaches.

WWF Nepal collaborates with Nepal’s Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) and Department of Forests and Soil Conservation (DoFSC) under the Ministry of Forests and Environment (MoFE) in planning and executing project for ensuring full and comprehensive support for project from government. The project has been strongly collaborative, developed in response to local demand and implemented through partnerships with four project implementing partners: Sonaha Bikash Samaj (SBS), Dolphin Conservation Center (DCC), Freed Kamaiya Women Development Forum (FKWDF) and Small Mammals Conservation and Research Foundation (SMCRF). The project works closely with the municipalities in the project areas- Tikapur Municipality, Rajapur Municipality, Lamki Chuha Municipality, Janaki Rural Municipality and Geruwa Rural Municipality.

The project is running in its final year of implementation and will end in March 2026. Towards the end of the project, a final evaluation is to be carried out as provisioned in Project’s work plan. For this, WWF Nepal seeks to recruit the team of consultants to undertake the final evaluation of the project.

## **EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE**

The primary purpose of the evaluation is to support accountability by informing the end-of-programme reporting to the funding agency, UK Government, Biodiversity Challenge Funds. Furthermore, the evaluation should provide clear and relevant synthesis of learnings on what worked and what did not work, how, and why, regarding the programme’s strategies in improving River management and enhancing wellbeing of 200 river dependent households through

diversified livelihoods, for increasing fish abundance and otter occupancy in the Lower Karnali Watershed.

Given this purpose, the primary objective of the assignment is to ascertain the results achieved by the programme over the project duration vis-à-vis the set targets as outlined in result framework. The evaluation should aim to assess to what extent the project interventions were effective in delivering the anticipated results. Secondly, the evaluation will also assess the impacts - the broader, often long-term, effects of the programme on the target groups and beyond. Thirdly, the evaluation should assess the likelihood of the project's results being sustained and assess whether the available resources were used efficiently for delivery of project outputs. Further, the evaluation team will conduct an in-depth assessment of gender equality and social inclusion, especially of Sonaha communities and women in governance and benefit sharing mechanism.

In addition, the team will explore opportunities, incorporate learnings from the existing project to recommend strategies and action points to scale up/out the project either in same area or in larger area or in completely new area. The outcomes are expected to contribute to building a solid foundation for the design and preparation of the next phase of the project.

## **EVALUATION GUIDING QUESTIONS**

The evaluation is expected to be carried out based on the guiding questions listed below, but it should not be limited to them.

### **Effectiveness**

- How effectively were planned results delivered/progressed at the level of output and the outcome (with reference to each of the specific output and outcome indicators for the project)?
  - Effectiveness of engaging Sonaha/Tharu fishing communities in co-design and implementation of inclusive and sustainable river management interventions.
  - Effectiveness of capacity building, technical support and financial access interventions for market-based enterprises including on-farm and off-farm activities targeted towards sustainably diversification of local livelihoods.
  - How effective were the capacity building interventions in improving the capacity of government officials to monitor and regulate over-extraction of river aggregates and tackle illegal and destructive fishing.
  - Progress towards securing government agreement to an inclusive, otter conservation plan in order to secure future resource allocation.
- What possible reasons or factors may have influenced the outcome results? i.e. to what extent did this project contribute to the outcome results and were there other factors potentially influencing these results too.
- How effectively was adaptive management pursued by project partners to ensure effective delivery of outputs/outcomes?
- Were there any unintended results (positive or negative).

## Impacts

To what extent has the project progressed towards and or contributing to impact<sup>1</sup> and long-term changes as expected? Refer to contributions the project made to impact on both biodiversity conservation and on human development and wellbeing (poverty reduction).

- Active and continuous engagement of indigenous women and men in co-management of river stretches to further enhance community stewardship of river resources.
- Livelihood diversification of Sonaha and Tharu communities to reduce their dependence on river resources, and diversify and enhance their incomes, enhancing their wellbeing.
- Scaling up the community-based river management to safeguard ecological integrity of freshwater biodiversity in the Lower Karnali Watershed for securing and increasing smooth coated otter populations, as well as supporting conservation of Dolphin, Gharial, Mugger and fish.
- While assessing the impacts, the evaluation should also examine whether and how the project contributed to reducing gender inequality and enhancing social inclusion targeting Sonaha and Tharu communities considering the scope of the project?
- What synergies among existing projects and stakeholders were made within consortium partners to improve and strengthen the results delivered?
- The evaluation will also assess and document in case of any unintended positive or negative impacts of the project.

## Sustainability

- What results are likely to be sustained post-project? What legacy will be left?
- What results will require some support (financial, technical, or other) to be sustained post-project?
- What is the level of ownership and commitment among the key stakeholders to continue and sustain the results?
- Assess whether the sustainability aspects of the short term and long-term results were sufficiently considered while designing the project?
- Assess whether the sustainability components were implemented as per the plan? Were any other steps taken to promote the durability of desired outputs, outcomes and impacts and ensure the project has a sustained legacy?

## Efficiency

- Did the project use the available resources in delivering outputs ensure QQT (Quantity, Quality and Timeliness)? Has the project delivered value for money in that costs are reasonable given the outputs and outcomes generated?
- Did the project leverage any collaborative efforts made with other projects/stakeholders while delivering the outputs? Was the project good value for money (in line with the definition provided in Annex B of the Finance Guidance of the Darwin Initiative)?

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<sup>1</sup> **Impact statement:** The ecological integrity of the Lower Karnali Watershed is safeguarded to sustain freshwater biodiversity, smooth coated otter populations and improve the resilience of local livelihoods.

## **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion**

- How well the project analyzed the intersectional social identities of gender, caste, class, ethnicity, religion, geography, age and (dis)ability and related discriminations while designing and implementing project activities in the ground.
- How inclusive the community river stretch management groups (CRSMGs) are in terms of ensuring equitable membership and women's representation and meaningful participation in executive committees.
- Did the project prioritize women and other excluded groups' while selecting beneficiaries of livelihood interventions and other economic opportunities?
- What measures were implemented to strengthen the meaningful participation of women and marginalized communities?
- Were there any barriers to participation being identified and addressed?
- Are there lessons learned on gender equality and social inclusion?
- Did the project face any resistance or opposition from community members or stakeholders regarding gender equality initiatives?

## **METHODOLOGY**

For this assignment, the evaluation team will conduct a desk review of available project documents including project proposal, periodic progress reports, work plans and database and any other relevant documents for the purpose of this evaluation.

Similarly, the team will conduct a field visit to the project site (Kailali and Bardia) and conduct focus-group discussions with key beneficiaries and key stakeholders of the project including CRSMG members, livelihood beneficiaries, local government, officials from Divisional Forest Offices and National Park Authority. Consultation and interaction with key officials of project partners including WWF Nepal project team will be done.

The evaluation is expected to adhere to OECD DAC quality standards.

## **DELIVERABLES AND TIMELINE**

The evaluation will include the following deliverables:

- Inception report (including presentation)
  - Methodology and tools for data collection
- Implementation including fieldwork
- Preparation of draft evaluation report and submission.
  - Presentation of results to relevant stakeholders.
  - Good quality relevant photographs (the photos taken as part of this consultancy will be **copyrighted to WWF Nepal**)
- Finalization of evaluation report following review of draft report.
  - The final report should have a separate chapter to present recommended strategies and action points to scale up/out the project.

The timeline below provides key dates and timeframes for the evaluation activities and deliverables. A detailed workplan will be part of the inception report.

Task/output	Dates or deadlines
Contracting	2 <sup>nd</sup> week of January 2026
Inception report	2 <sup>nd</sup> week of January 2026
Finalization of Evaluation tools and processes	3 <sup>rd</sup> week of January 2026
Fieldwork and post-fieldwork briefing	4 <sup>th</sup> week-Jan to 2 <sup>nd</sup> week of Feb 2026
Draft evaluation report and presentation	4 <sup>th</sup> week of February 2026
Final evaluation report	15 March 2026

## PROFILE OF EVALUATOR(S)

The evaluation team will be composed of two members: one Team leader ideally has expertise in freshwater biodiversity conservation along with the livelihood/GESI expert. The consultants shall have prior experience in evaluating similar projects. Experience with DEFRA financed projects will be an added value. The evaluators selected should not have participated in the project preparation and/or implementation and should not have conflict of interest with project related activities. The evaluators should possess the following characteristics:

- Demonstrated experience in designing and conducting evaluations similar to the one being commissioned
  - Freshwater biodiversity conservation in case of Team Lead.
- Technical knowledge of, and familiarity with, relevant evaluation methodologies.
- Relevant educational background, qualification, and experience in evaluation and research and experience with both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies required. Experience in sample and survey design.
- Demonstrated ability to generate high quality, concise and readable products on time and in line with expected deliverables.

## REPORTING AND COORDINATION

The consultant/team will report to the MEL team, work closely with the technical team and local implementing partners.

## PROPOSAL SUBMISSION DETAILS

Interested VAT registered firms in Nepal are requested to submit technical and financial proposals providing a detailed breakdown of total budget in Nepali rupees, electronically to- **proposalsubmission@wwfnepal.org**.

Please mention “**Proposal- Otter Final Evaluation**” as an email subject and submit the proposal by **5 p.m. Nepal Standard Time, 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026**.

The proposal must include the following:

- Signed cover letter specifying the value of the proposal
- Technical proposal (7-10 pages)
- CV of expert/s
- Organization profile with experience (Not exceeding 2 pages)
- Financial proposal (see annex 1 for template)
- Organization registration and renewal certificates
- VAT registration certificate
- Latest tax clearance and audit report

## **MODE OF PAYMENT**

The payment will be made based on the existing norms of WWF Nepal. Fund disbursement will be done in two steps. Other expenses (field costs including travel and accommodation and expenses associated with workshops and consultations) except the consultancy fee will be provided as advance upon the signing of the contract. The second and final installment will be released after the final acceptance of the report by WWF.

**ANNEX 1: BUDGET TEMPLATE**

S.N.	Description	Unit	Qty.	Rate	Amount (NPR)
<b>1</b>	<b>Fee (1.1+....VAT)</b>				<b>XXXX</b>
1.1	Team Lead-Name	Days			XXXX
1.2	Livelihood/GESI expert	Days			
	VAT 13% on Fee				XXXX
<b>2</b>	<b>Other Expense (2.1+2.2+VAT)</b>				<b>XXXXX</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>Field Expenses</b>				<b>XXXXX</b>
2.1.1	Transportation				XXXX
2.1.2	Food & Accommodation				XXXX
2.1.3	Airfare....				
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Other Costs</b>				<b>XXXXX</b>
2.2.1	Communication	Lumpsum			XXXX
2.2.2	Consultation Meetings (Tea and Snacks)	No			XXXX
2.2.3	Stationaries	Lumpsum			XXXX
	VAT 13% on Other Expense				XXXX
	<b>GRAND TOTAL (1+2)</b>				<b>XXXX</b>

*\*Note: please add/edit rows as required*