Project Evaluation Series
24/2025

Evaluation of the project "Building a Resilient Churia Region in Nepal"

Interim report
Project code: GCP/NEP/076/GCF

Annex 4. Methodological approach, limitations and ethical considerations

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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1. This annex provides information on the methodological approach employed for the interim evaluation of the project "Building a Resilient Churia Region in Nepal" (BRCRN) detailing each data collection method, limitations encountered during the evaluation process, and ethical considerations that guided the work.

Data collection methods

Qualitative data collection

2. *Document analysis:* The team reviewed the project design document, progress reports, and technical reports from all project components. This included Critical Ecosystem Restoration Plans and river system plans, training materials, implementation guidelines, assessment studies, field monitoring reports, and communications materials. The analysis also examined relevant policies, guidelines, and strategic documents from the Government of Nepal, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

3. *Key informant interviews (KIIs):* 22 KIIs were conducted to obtain in-depth information from stakeholders with different roles in the project. Interviews included representatives from the FAO country office (three interviews), BRCRN project team (three interviews), national and provincial government staff (13 interviews), local level Ward Chairs and stakeholders (seven interviews) and other relevant stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations and national networks (seven interviews). Special attention was given to stakeholders responsible for project execution, implementation, and coordination at all levels.

4. *Focus group discussions (FDGs):* 24 FGDs were conducted with an average of 18 participants per group. The evaluation team selected five riverine systems based on criteria set out in annex 3, from which data collection sites were chosen to ensure proportionate coverage of project activities. All participants were members of a community-based organization and actively involved in at least one project activity. Participation was voluntary. When groups were too large, FGDs were split, with gender-segregated groups created where possible. The overall gender composition reflected good balance, with female participation rates of 50 percent for Madhesh and Bagmati provinces and 33 percent for Koshi province (refer to Table 2). The FGDs explored several key areas: levels of awareness of climate change threats; future concerns and prevalent threats; observed changes in forest and river systems; migration patterns and their implications; perceptions of project intervention benefits;[1] sustainability prospects; gender and inclusion dynamics; and resilience factors.

5. *On-site observations*: Field visits examined nurseries, agroforestry plots, riverbank stabilization sites, and soil conservation structures. Observations assessed implementation quality, community adoption of climate-resilient practices, and visible ecological improvements.

6. *Meetings*: Two types of meetings complemented the data collection. Small group meetings (with an average of four participants) facilitated focused technical discussions with implementing partners and local authorities. Large group meetings (average 15–20 participants) enabled presentations of project activities and collaborative discussions, particularly with project staff and government officials.

[1] The nature of benefits and the sharing of benefits (equity and inclusion) have arisen consistently in multiple research papers on community forest user groups in Nepal. This is critically important to understand for potential for sustainability post-project. Evaluating Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs)' Performance in Managing Community Forests: A Case Study in Central Nepal, 2024. https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/16/11/4471

7. Table 1 presents the complete record of 34 stakeholder consultations conducted during the evaluation, including Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and group meetings.

Table 1. Overview of key informant interviews and meetings

N.	Stakeholder type / group	Location	N. of attendees	Consultation method
1	FAO Representative Nepal	Kathmandu	1	KII
2	BRCRN Project team	Kathmandu	6	Small group meeting
3	FAO CO and project team	Kathmandu	6	Small group meeting
4	IUCN GCF funded project team leader	Kathmandu	1	KII
5	AEPC GCF funded project Coordinator	Kathmandu	2	KII
6	FAO Country Office	Kathmandu	7	Small group meeting
7	BRCRN Project and Country Office Team	Kathmandu	12	Large group meeting
8	FAO TA specialists	Kathmandu	6	Small group meeting
9	MoFE Planning and Coordination Chief	Kathmandu	2	KII
10	PMU staff	Kathmandu	6	KII
11	FECOFUN	Kathmandu	2	KII
12	AFFON	Kathmandu	1	KII
13	NEFIN Representative	Kathmandu	1	KII
14	HIMAWANTI	Kathmandu	5	Small group meeting
15	President Chure	Kathmandu	4	Small group meeting
16	Project Team and PMU Theory of Change workshop	Kathmandu	25	Large group meeting
17	Ward Chairman	Madhesh	1	KII
18	DFO-SARLAHI Division	Madhesh	1	KII
19	Provincial Forest Secretory/Director	Madhesh	1	KII
20	Sub-divisional Forest Officer	Madhesh	1	KII
21	School Teacher	Madhesh	1	KII
22	Ward Chairman	Madhesh	1	KII
23	Ward Chairman	Bagmati	1	KII
24	Sub-Divisional Forest	Madhesh	4	Small group meeting
25	PPMU	Koshi	7	Small group meeting
26	Province Forest Secretary	Koshi	1	KII
27	Ward Chair	Koshi	1	KII
28	Chief, Divisional Forest Office	Koshi	1	KII
29	Ward Chair	Koshi	1	KII
30	Ward Chair	Koshi	1	KII
31	Ward Chair	Koshi	1	KII
32	Head PPMU Office, Itahari	Koshi	5	Small group meeting
33	Provincial Forest Director's Office	Koshi	1	KII
34	Provincial Secretary and PPMU	Koshi	7	Small group meeting

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Quantitative data collection

8. The following table presents the sample breakdown by riverine system.

Table 2. Sample breakdown per riverine system

Riverine system	Total number of Municipalities	Municipalities sampled	Total number of project-supported community-based organizations	Community-based organizations sampled	Total number of households	Households sampled
Kamala South	2	2	68	5	7 174	120
Ratuwa Nadi	6	6	38	10	35 090	210
Andheri Baruwa Duar	4	3	104	8	34 495	150
Bataha Khola	3	2	16	8	24 980	150
Ratu	6	3	24	19	97 270	390
Totals	**19**	**16**	**97**	**50**	**199 009**	**1 020**

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

9. Data collection was carried out by a local service provider in December 2024, through the use of structured questionnaires administered face-to-face via interviews and capturing GPS locations and using the KOBO Toolbox. The survey instrument maintained the core areas of inquiry from the baseline household survey while adding targeted questions to address previously under-emphasized aspects of project implementation. Before fieldwork, questionnaires were pre-tested, and enumerators received two days of training. Data collection was monitored by the evaluation team both on-site and remotely to ensure quality and consistency. Interviews were conducted with individuals aged 18 and above, ensuring gender balance between male and female respondents.

Evaluation limitations and risk management

10. The evaluation faced several methodological limitations. First, the baseline household survey had constraints that affected the evaluation: it sampled 1 400 households spread thinly across all 26 riverine systems without weighing for population size or planned activities. Questions focused mainly on climate-resilient agriculture practices with limited coverage of afforestation and resilience infrastructure. The interim evaluation adapted the question for its household survey from the baseline survey questionnaire in selected areas to gain midterm perspectives on progress. Limited baseline data and insufficient information on pre-project conditions posed challenges in assessing impact and making comparisons to the initial situation. Data gaps on specific indicators, target groups, and financial flows further hindered the analysis for the comparison between baseline and interim situations.

11. Many interventions were at early implementation stages, leading to low expectations of unlikeliness to observe significant change. Afforestation and forest restoration activities are long-term processes where results emerge slowly. The interim evaluation therefore presents an incomplete picture of progress in areas requiring longer timeframes to observe reliable change, such as forest cover, density, and erosion protection.

12. Exceptionally heavy rainfall affected Nepal in September 2024, one month before the data collection. However, this event presented an opportunity for the evaluation, as it provided the first

major monsoon test for the project's resilience infrastructure interventions, allowing Churia residents in affected areas to assess their effectiveness against a real climate shock.

13. The geographic spread of the five target riverine systems presented access challenges and time constraints for the data collection, resulting in some planned interviews not being conducted.

14. On managing potential bias, the risk was the evaluation being biased towards the views of FAO country office and the project team. The independent consultants led the data collection process and documented their findings and analysis on a Sharepoint platform. In order to establish clarity and shared purpose and ownership, several engagements took place with Ministry of Environment and Forests staff assigned to the project. This was repeated at Provincial level with PPMU teams. Staff from two other GCF-funded programmes were interviewed by the evaluation team to get an "outside perspective" from agencies familiar with GCF projects. At field level, efforts were made to avoid risks of the evaluation team data collection being oriented to sites where progress was better. The five riverine system areas were selected by the evaluation team and a schedule of visits was requested based on intervention types in those areas (community site selection was altered to some extent by practical issues, time available and travel challenges). In both Madhesh and Koshi sites, opportunities were taken for brief unscheduled site observations and speaking with communities and Ward Chairs in the vicinity.

15. To address these limitations and risks, the evaluation team implemented a comprehensive risk management plan. This included verifying and validating data through cross-checking from multiple sources and conducting field visits. The team conducted additional data collection to fill gaps and used alternative data sources where necessary. The inception report identified potential risks to the evaluation process, including data quality issues, stakeholder bias, resource constraints, and time limitations. Throughout the evaluation, the team maintained open communication with stakeholders about potential risks, mitigation strategies, and any changes to the evaluation plan.

Ethical considerations

16. The evaluation adhered to strict ethical standards throughout the process. The team ensured informed consent from all participants in data collection activities, respecting their rights and privacy by reading a statement at the beginning of meetings and having participants sign consent forms. Confidentiality and anonymity were safeguarded during data collection and analysis, with personal information protected and not disclosed without consent. The evaluation respected the cultural norms and practices of local communities, considering their beliefs, values, and traditions while avoiding potentially harmful or offensive activities. The process also emphasized equity and inclusivity by incorporating diverse perspectives, particularly from women and marginalized groups, avoiding discriminatory practices and promoting inclusivity in all aspects of data collection and analysis.

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