



BHUTAN
FOR LIFE

**Independent Evaluation of Environmental and Social Safeguards
Bhutan for Life Project**

FINAL REPORT

2024

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

The Bhutan for Life (BFL) project aims to protect 52% of Bhutan's land through its network of Protected Areas (PAs), supporting the country's commitment to remain carbon neutral under the Paris Agreement. This initiative is crucial to maintaining Bhutan's constitutional mandate of at least 60% forest cover for all times.

Over a 14-year period, BFL provides funding to enhance the management of protected areas, focusing on climate resilience and biodiversity conservation. The implementation of the BFL project activities is further divided into several components as follows:

1. **Component A (Mitigation)**: Focuses on increasing climate mitigation through improved forestry and land use practices, including monitoring forest cover changes and developing climate-resilient management strategies.
2. **Component B (Adaptation I)**: Implements adaptation measures in communities and ecosystems within and around PAs, using climate and natural resource data to enhance resilience and livelihoods.
3. **Component C (Adaptation II)**: Focuses on climate-smart conservation to sustain ecosystem services, addressing wildlife habitat protection and reducing human-wildlife conflicts amidst climate change.
4. **Component D (Protected Areas Management)**: Strengthens organizational and institutional capacities for effective PA management, ensuring well-trained staff, adequate funding, infrastructure, and management systems.
5. **Component E (BFL Program Management)**: Encompasses overall program management activities such as monitoring, reporting, evaluation, and policy support to ensure efficient implementation of the BFL initiative.

1.2 Purpose of Environmental and Social Safeguard Evaluation

The assignment aims to conduct unbiased assessments of how the project impacts both the environment and the community within Bhutan for Life's designated activity area. It ensures compliance with BFL's environmental and social management plans (ESMP), as well as other legal requirements in Bhutan. Furthermore, the study aims to pinpoint deficiencies and recommend opportunities for further enhancement, thereby safeguarding our natural heritage and promoting community well-being.

The 2023 ESS Evaluation is conducted by an independent consultant engaged by BFL-FS. The consultant conducted a literature review, carried out field observations in selected sites, and consulted with pertinent field officers to gather information and data. Furthermore, the consultant collaborated with BFL focal persons to administer a rapid survey for additional insights from the field.

1.3 ESS Report

The ESS evaluation report is structured into sections covering Planning, Implementation, Monitoring, and Reporting, with each section detailing observations, issues and challenges, and recommendations. Additionally, the report includes components on the Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) and Capacity Development for a more thorough analysis. The key findings and recommendations from the ESS evaluation are as follows:

1.3.1 Major findings

1. Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) for 2023 successfully developed and implemented in all project sites.
2. BFL focal and respective park management team have made significant impact in minimizing the adverse impact through education and awareness program on all aspects of BFL programs within project areas, therefore there is no report on GRM of any kind during the period.
3. High staff turnover within the Implementation Agencies impacted the implementation of project activities.
4. Monitoring of BFL activities at both the field and the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) level need to be strengthened.
5. ESMPs are developed or updated from previous years for activities that are found to have some risks and trigger safeguards standards. However, some activities do not pause any risks, therefore there are no ESMPs associated with these types of activities.

1.3.2 Recommendations

1. Capacity development in ESS management at various levels should be an ongoing process and should be budgeted for annually.
2. It is recommended for the BFL team to develop and adopt an M&E strategy for the monitoring of activities.
3. The ESS status reporting template requires inclusion of sections for elaborate information on the implementation status of ESS, impacts, and photographic evidence.
4. ESMPs of the project should be developed based on the scale of potential risks associated with activities.

1.3.3 Conclusion

Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) evaluation for BFL activities was successfully completed, with the evaluation covering 25 implementing agencies and 63 activities drawn from the Annual Workplan and Budget (AWPB 2023). The independent consultant visited three project sites selected based on the proximity and scale of potential impacts (Environmental and Social)

and consulted with 15 agencies and other BFL stakeholders such as PCU team and Park Management. The evaluation highlighted the project's strong commitment to sustainable development and conservation, aligning with Bhutan's "Gross National Happiness" goals. Effective ESS measures have minimized adverse environmental impacts and promoted community development and equitable benefit-sharing. Continuous monitoring, adaptive management, and capacity-building are essential for addressing challenges and ensuring the project's long-term success. Overall, Bhutan for Life exemplifies the integration of environmental conservation with socio-economic development, positively contributing to Bhutan's sustainable future.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

The Bhutan for Life (BFL) program aims to safeguard 52% of the Bhutan's landscape through its Protected Areas (PAs) network. This initiative is vital to Bhutan's commitment to remaining carbon neutral, as stated in its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement. It also supports Bhutan's constitutional mandate to keep at least 60% forest cover for all times to come.

BFL is a 14-year funding mechanism assisting the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) in enhancing the management of its protected areas for climate resilience. The project provides immediate benefits by reducing climate impact, adapting to climate change, and protecting biodiversity while the Royal Government of Bhutan gradually increases its own funding. It will achieve these goals through specific, strategic steps.

Component A: Mitigation: Increasing forestry and land use climate mitigation. This component focuses on monitoring systems that detect forest cover change and ecological responses of forests and other systems to impacts of climate change. The findings will be used to develop climate resilient forest management practices and restoration of the degraded lands to conserve and enhance carbon stock.

Component B: Adaptation I: Integrated adaptation in communities and ecosystems to improve natural resource management for livelihoods and climate resilience. This component focuses on harnessing climate, hydrological, and natural resources information to design and implement resilience and adaptation measures in Bhutan's protected areas (PAs). This component will work to benefit nature and the livelihood of the population living both inside and in the vicinity of the PAs.

Component C: Adaptation II: Climate-smart conservation to enhance provision of ecosystem services. This component focuses on harnessing climate, natural resource and biological information to design and implement ecosystem-based adaptation management of Bhutan's PAs. This component will work to secure wildlife, habitat, and reduce human wildlife conflict in the changing climate while ensuring the sustainable flow of ecosystem services.

Component D: Protected areas: Effective management of protected areas. This component focuses on strengthening the organizational, institutional and resource capacity for effective management of PAs. This is a crucial component, as the success of the initiative is dependent on fully equipped, well trained staff; full funding; essential infrastructure; and a well-organized system for managing the protected areas.

Component E: BFL program management: Management, monitoring, reporting & evaluation, policy support, contingencies This component groups all the management activities necessary for the effective implementation of BFL. As such, its purpose is to ensure the efficient implementation of the BFL program.

2.2 Purpose of the Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS) evaluation

The Environmental and Social Safeguard evaluation for 2023, conducted in 2024, aimed at conducting impartial assessments of how the project activities impact both the environment and the community within Bhutan for Life's designated project area. It is also to ensure compliance with the Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMP) and other legal requirements in Bhutan. Furthermore, the study aims to pinpoint deficiencies and recommend opportunities for further enhancement, thereby safeguarding our natural heritage and promoting community well-being.

2.3 Objective of the ESS evaluation

The following are the overall objective of the evaluation:

- To assess the effectiveness of the ESMP planning and Implementation by the IAs.
- To identify issues and gaps in the implementation of the ESMP procedures.
- To provide recommendations for enhancing the execution of ESMP activities.
- To evaluate the IAs' ability to implement and oversee the ESMP procedures.

2.4 Scope

This assignment will review and report on the project activities that are implemented from January to December 2023 only. The evaluation will focus on the effectiveness of Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) procedures in identifying and mitigating potential environmental and social impacts, assessing the adequacy of stakeholder consultation and engagement, and reviewing the monitoring and reporting mechanisms for Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS) activities.

2.5 Methodology

The method for evaluation of ESS is designed to effectively assess the effectiveness and adequacy of ESMPs in identifying and mitigating potential impacts of activities on the environment and local communities. The evaluation is conducted using various assessment tools to ensure thorough and accurate evaluation of the programs. The methodology includes the following:

- *Inception meeting with BFL-FS officials*

The inception meeting was conducted to finalize the methodology, deliverables of the evaluation, and on the field visit sites with the BFL-FS team.

- *Review of project documents*

Under the literature review component for the assessment, the following documents were reviewed:

- ESMP 2023 and 2022
- ESMF
- ESS compliance report for 2023,
- Independent Evaluation Report for 2022,
- ESS screening conducted in 2023,
- Annual work plan and budget for 2023,
- Public consultation reports for 2023,
- Training reports for 2023,
- Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Guidelines,
- WWF ESSF and SIPP manual
- The Grievance Redressal Mechanism for the Bhutan for Life Program.

- *Interview of key informants*

Three levels of key informant discussions initiated; First, to gather information on ESS management. The consultant met with Bhutan for Life Fund Secretariat (BFL-FS) and PCU officials both face to face and over telephone calls.

Second, to gather information on the field implementation of ESS activities in 2023, the consultant met BFL focal persons and Range officers during field visits and over telephone calls.

Third, to understand if any communities or institutions were affected by the BFL Activities and if any mitigation measures are implemented/taken during the period, the consultant contacted local people face to face and over telephone calls.

- *Field visits*

The following sites were visited to get firsthand field observation and to have face to face interaction with the BFL focal, site supervisors and construction workers:

- Construction site of Mendrelgang Range Office under BC3, Divisional Forest Office, Tsirang.
- Renovation of Rimchu Range Office under Jigme Dorji National Park
- Maintenance of Visiting Center and Cafeteria at the Royal Botanical Park, Lampelri (BC 2), Divisional Forest Office, Wangdue.

- *Survey*

A rapid survey was conducted with an objective of collecting additional information on the ESS implementation and to comprehend the overall status of ESS implementation in the field. The survey questions include the following aspects:

- ESS planning
- ESS implementation
- ESS monitoring
- ESS reporting
- ESS capacity of field officers
- GRM
- Benefits of ESS implementation

- *Data review and analysis*

The analysis of data collected for the evaluation was meticulously carried out to help identify key areas for improvement and provided actionable recommendations for enhancing implementation of environmental and social safeguard measures in future years of project implementation. The findings obtained from the data analyzed were compiled into the comprehensive evaluation report.

3. Evaluation of Environment and Social Safeguard Performance

3.1 Planning

The evaluation of ESS performance is based on the ESMP prepared by ESS focal person at Project coordination unit (PCU) in consultation with IAs. The preparation of the ESMP involves field officers identifying potential risk and appropriate mitigation measures for all BFL activities, which are then cross-checked and validated by the ESS focal person at the PCU and endorsed by the ESS specialist at WWF-US GCF AE. The approved ESMP is then shared with the project focal for implementation.

3.1.1 Observations:

- The BFL focal person in the PAs/BCs in collaboration with Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS) focal person at the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) identifies all activities requiring an ESMP and develops appropriate mitigation measures to be implemented in the field.
- The ESMP is a comprehensive document specifying a schedule of planned activities with their implementation timelines, budget, monitoring and reporting requirement, and mitigation measures to address potential environmental and social impacts. The ESMP 2023 has been prepared through extensive consultations with the communities and stakeholders, input from the domain experts, and field verifications. The ESMPs have been approved by WWF's Environmental and Social Safeguards specialist.
- Good understanding of ESS by the BFL focal persons ensures providing necessary information from the field during the planning phase. This has helped PCU in developing appropriate mitigation measures for each activity.
- 63 activities for the year 2023 required development of ESS mitigation measures, of which 19 activities fall within BCs, 30 within PAs and 14 activities outside of Protected Areas Network.

3.1.2 Issues and Challenges:

The ESMPs for 2023 were prepared in harmony with WWF's ESSF guidelines and implemented accordingly. However, there are a few concerns and challenges highlighted based on the findings from the field visits, surveys, and telephone conversations with the BFL focal persons and field officers.

- i. While efforts are being made to shorten the ESMP approval process, it is still taking considerable amount of time for final approval, resulting in delays in implementing activities.
- ii. Remoteness of some project sites and time constraint has resulted in delays in conducting community consultation, collecting field information, and progress monitoring for most of the IAs.
- iii. The ESS mitigation measures are more inclined towards addressing occupational health and safety (OHS), and not much attention is given to environmental issues and challenges.
- iv. According to a rapid survey conducted by consultant for this evaluation of the 29 respondents, only 10% expressed complete confidence in managing ESS activities, while 72% reported being somewhat confident in implementing the ESS activities due to limited capacity.

3.1.3 Recommendations

Based on the observation and challenges mentioned above the following are recommended:

- i. The BFL-FS should consider working with AE team to expedite the ESMP approval process to avoid unnecessary delays in implementing activities in the field.
- ii. It is recommended for ESS focal person/M&E team of the PCU to visit the major activities especially where infrastructure development is planned, before finalizing the ESMP to validate the mitigation measures.
- iii. The environmental component should be equally focused while developing ESS mitigation measures, especially for infrastructure development activities.
- iv. PCU in consultation with ESS Specialist could create a budget to support consultation and meeting related to ESS in the communities by IAs
- v. Community consultation is necessary for ESMP preparation, and the budget for this activity may be allocated and released as planned by the ESS focal persons of the IAs.

3.2 Implementation

The implementation of ESS is a critical process that ensures development activities are conducted in an environmentally sustainable and socially responsible manner.

3.2.1 Observations

- It is observed that all IAs have been diligent in implementing BFL activities in accordance with the ESMP, resulting in minimal to no adverse impacts on the environment and livelihoods of the communities.
- ESS evaluation report relies on quarterly ESS compliance reports submitted by the IAs. However, due to non-availability of substantive information in these reports, much of the necessary information was gathered through alternative methods.
- One incident of ineffective communication between PCU and implementing agency (OGOP) observed, and it is likely that this activity will not be implemented during this plan period.
- The effective implementation of ESS measures by the project team is benefiting both the local community and the environment at large. The field officers reported that ESMP is useful in effectively managing waste generation and improved Occupational Safety of the workers, thereby reducing negative impacts on overall well-being.

The detailed ESS implementation report by IAs is attached as **Annexure 4**.

3.2.2 Issues and Challenges:

- High turnover rate amongst the BFL Focal Person:** Recurrent change in focal persons either due to transfer or resignation have been impacting the timely implementation of the activities. The new ESS focal persons have reported having to rely on senior colleagues or management in the field to carry out their ESS activities. This is authenticated by the rapid survey conducted by the consultant, which reports that 38% of the focal person have less than one year of experience, about 10% have only one year of experience, and around 24% having more than two years of experience.
- Low level of awareness on ESS:**
 - **Contractors:** BFL construction works are awarded to either contractors or a community member who often lack awareness on the safety measures required for the project, thereby failing to incorporate necessary budget for safety gear such as gloves, helmets, boots, ear plugs, glasses and vest.
 - **Community Members:** Although community consultations are done in the process of ESMP formulation, the awareness level on ESS among the community is relatively low.

- iii. **Workers' reluctance to use safety gears:** One of the challenges is workers' preference/willingness to use safety gears (PPE) despite repeated request and awareness program. While interacting with the workers we learned that using PPEs is uncomfortable, therefore workers often neglect to abide by the workplace safety standards.
- iv. **Low prioritization of BFL program:** Allocating adequate time for BFL ESS activities is another challenge faced in the field, as all focal persons are full time employees of the Department of Forest and Park Services and having to fulfill their individual target planned with the department.

3.2.3 Recommendations:

The following recommendations are made based on field observations and findings. Although established ESS management procedures are in place, perhaps these recommendations would enhance the planning and implementation of ESS activities.

- i. Proper handover/takeover procedures must be established to ensure proper handing over of project status and document and onboarding of the new focal person. It is recommended to develop and use a standardized handover/takeover procedure. Furthermore, IAs shall share the copy of handover/takeover notes with the PCU.
- ii. PCU/ESS focal person should include additional section within the ESS reporting format to gather detailed information on how the mitigation measures are implemented and its benefits in terms of mitigating identified risks.
- iii. Monitoring, assessing and reporting on ESS activities is difficult particularly for those activities executed by different agencies such as Nubi Gewog in Trongsa for WCNP, and by various Divisional Forest Offices in the Dzongkhags for FRPMD. Therefore, the PCU should develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for ESS implementation, monitoring and assessment.
- iv. To ensure the successful execution of ESS activities, the PCU safeguard specialist should prioritize and initiate face to face meetings with BFL focal person and carryout a site visit, ideally at the outset of the activity. This will allow ESS focal to onboard concerned field officer about the ESS interventions. Subsequently, virtual discussions with the focal person in the field should be conducted by the ESS focal to address ongoing issues in a timely manner.
- v. Sensitize the contractors on the ESMP requirements including putting in place the necessary equipment and training for workers' safety.

- vi. Initiate discussion with the Department of Forest and Park services to include the BFL activities as one of the major targets into their Individual Work Plan (IWP).

3.3 Monitoring ESS Implementation

Timely monitoring of ESS activities is crucial to prevent any potential negative impacts from activities on the environment and local communities. The monitoring is conducted at various stages of the implementation period. The BFL focal in the field holds primary responsibility in coordinating and monitoring of ESS activities in the field. Additionally, the ESS focal person at PCU provides essential support and guidance for field-level implementation of ESS activities.

3.3.1 Observations:

The ESMP document clearly outlines risks, mitigation measures, timeline, and responsible agency for carrying out ESS activities in the field, aligning with best practices and regulatory requirements.

The following are the specific observations made:

- i. ESMPs 2023 have indicated the need for BFL-FS to monitor every activity. However, as overall custodian of the program, the BFL-FS has delegated this role to PCU and PCU has a dedicated ESS focal person. Therefore, future ESMPs do not need to mention the role of BFL-FS in monitoring ESS implementation. However, BFL-FS shall continue to oversee ESS implementation as and when necessary.
- ii. Different IAs use different monitoring approaches and frequencies. Some focal persons follow structured schedules, such as beginning, mid and completion of the activity, whereas others combine ESS monitoring with other field programs. Occasionally, ESS monitoring is conducted by CFOs, Range officers and other officers. Therefore, there is a lack of standard monitoring and reporting system and information.
- iii. The frequency of ESS monitoring was found to be less. Most of ESS monitoring in the remote areas was conducted by the field officers and information with pictorial evidence was shared with the BFL focal.
- iv. In 2023, ESS focal person at PCU has not been able to conduct in person monitoring as she was on a sabbatical, however, she monitored the activities virtually through telephone calls, zoom meetings, and email correspondence.

- v. The field officers from range offices suggested that BFL focals in the divisional offices could visit the project sites during the project implementing, so that they could provide necessary support and guidance in ESS related activities.

3.3.2 Issues and Challenges:

The following are the issues and challenges:

- i. The PCU safeguard specialist and BFL focal officers should timely monitor ESS activities to offer support and make corrections promptly, preventing any adverse environmental and social impact of the project.
- ii. Remoteness and logistical constraints hinder regular on-site monitoring by BFL focal persons.
- iii. Timely guidance from the ESS focal in terms of implementing the ESMP activities due to vastness of the project area and time constraints.
- iv. Due to lack of M&E reporting framework, the consistency of information required to share is difficult.

3.3.3 Recommendations:

The following are the recommendations:

- i. The PCU safeguard specialist and BFL focals should conduct monitoring of ESS activities on time so that they could provide support and do corrections on time in order to avoid adverse impact of the project.
- ii. The M&E officer at PCU conducts project monitoring at least twice a year. Given that the ESS officer at the PCU cannot cover all sites for monitoring, the M&E officer or any other officer visiting field could assist by including some ESS monitoring sites in their regular monitoring schedule.
- iii. Online reporting platform for project activities maintained by PCU need to integrate ESS reporting so that the document can be found within one folder.
- iv. Observations on ESS mitigations by CFOs and BFL focal persons could be included in the ESS monitoring report and shared with all BFL focal. This practice would be beneficial and facilitate knowledge transfer among the focal points of all IAs.

- v. Having dedicated focal person to oversee the entire management of ESS implementation, including planning, field execution, monitoring, and reporting would result in greater impact, or mainstreaming BFL activities into their IWP needs to be considered to address the issue of prioritization.

3.4 Reporting ESS implementation

Reporting is essential for ESS programs as it provides critical information and field data. Reports should be succinct, containing key information that can be analyzed to identify gaps and provide feedback for subsequent interventions.

3.4.1 Observations:

To fulfill the disbursement condition, series of ESS monitoring and reporting is established. The focal with the field submits quarterly report to PCU, which is assessed, compiled, and shared with BFL-FS and AE for endorsement. Further, an independent evaluator is hired annually to assess ESS activities and its compliance, and a report is submitted to FS and AE for approval.

These are the following challenges and recommendations on the reporting of ESS activities:

3.4.2 Issues and Challenges:

- i. The ESS survey report shows that about 97% of the respondents stated that the reporting procedures is convenient. However, the current reporting template doesn't ask for detailed information on how the ESS mitigation plans are executed and how it has benefitted.
- ii. The report contains very little substantive information on the ESS implementation, its issues, and impacts. The ESS focal person at the PCU could encourage and facilitate improvements to enhance the quality of these reports, through field visit and requesting more information on the impact, issues and challenges encountered while implementing the ESMP.
- iii. Some activities have no mitigation measures to report. For example, enrichment plantation in RMNP, grassland management in PWP, and control of invasive species in JDNP, therefore it's difficult to assess.

3.4.3 Recommendations:

- i. The quarterly report on ESS activities should have adequate information which could be meaningfully used for planning and programming. However, the current template does not require detailed information on the ESS implementation process and its benefits. It is recommended to improve the template.

- ii. As commented by some of the IAs, reporting in excel sheet seems to be inconvenient especially when they have to post pictures. Therefore, using Google drive or exploring other project management systems for the quarterly reports is recommended
- iii. The focal persons suggested using a simple and user-friendly online reporting system to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of reporting.

4. Grievance Redressal Mechanism

BFL activities are primarily carried out in communities, making it essential to consider the social well-being of the local population. A systematic Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) ensures that the grievances of local communities are addressed in a timely, transparent, and fair manner, thereby promoting public trust, while shouldering social responsibility.

4.1 Observations:

- The GRM disclosure is done through the websites of BFL-FS, WWF-US Office, Department of Forest & Park Services and Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources.
- There were no instances of GRM-related issues reported during the reporting period (2023). One of the reasons could be that most of the BFL activities are implemented within PAs and BCs which falls outside of settlements and are relatively smaller size activities.
- The GRM brochure, containing information about the GRM process and contact details, has been distributed to gewog centers, community groups, and individuals at project sites.
- The majority of BFL and GRM focal persons have participated in GRM training facilitated by BFL-FS and PCU. GRM process is an established practice, and the reporting of GRM is an integral part of BFL project activities.

4.2 Recommendations:

- Despite efforts by the BFL focal persons in the IA to raise awareness about grievance reporting within the communities, there is still a need to initiate awareness on GRM among the community members. Consequently, it is necessary for the BFL focal at IA to allocate a budget and consistently conduct sensitization activities.
- To enhance awareness among the local population, it would be more effective to create a video, documentary, or animated video that explains the processes of Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM). Such visual mediums have the potential to effectively convey information and engage the audience, making them more accessible and engaging for the local community.

5. Capacity development

ESS is an important component in planning and implementation for the BFL activities as this ensures activities are sustainable and socially responsible. These safeguards planning and implementation processes will ensure development of adequate and appropriate mitigation measures to curb negative impacts on the environment and communities, promoting long-term benefits and reducing risks. Therefore, the people engaging in BFL activities must be made aware of the regulation both local and International, on the safeguards and should be able to identify, analyze and initiate appropriate measures as needed.

As ESS is a relatively new subject among the Bhutanese, there is a recognized need for a comprehensive capability development program targeting all stakeholders, including the PCU, BFL focal persons, Range office staff, and even contractors. Specifically, to oversee ESS implementation and guide its execution in the field, the PCU safeguard specialist should have the capability to guide other team members. Additionally, it would be advantageous if other PCU members also get capacitated in ESS monitoring.

With the frequent changes in BFL focal person, it's necessary to develop strategies to establish a knowledge transfer mechanism within the organization to ensure that knowledge and skills are effectively retained, it will be advisable to develop a resource guide for future reference. Management should also consider allocating a dedicated budget for different stages of ESMP activities, including planning, preparation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Thereby, the IAs can effectively manage and execute ESMP initiatives while ensuring the continuous presence of skilled personnel implementing the activities.

6. General observations from the field visits

The following are the observations made from the field visits

- i. Construction of staff quarters adjoining the office may allow staff to attend office activities conveniently at any point in time. However, it is professionally not advisable to house staff with their families adjacent to the office for various safety reasons. (example: Mendrelgang Range Office).
- ii. The independent evaluation of ESS 2023, was carried out over 30 days, with 14 billable days, which is why the consultant has not been able to visit most of the project sites. Nonetheless, the consultant gathered adequate information through phone calls with the project focal persons. The allocation of more time for future evaluation would enhance the accuracy of the evaluation report through more face-to-face discussion and field visits.
- iii. Rainwater harvesting is an effective way to manage water resources. The area where the Range office in Mendrelgang is located faces water issues, especially concerning drinking water. Given the large roof area, rainwater harvesting could be an innovative solution to address this problem. Implementing this practice would also serve as a positive example of water resource management for the local communities.

7. Conclusion

The evaluation of the Environmental and Social Safeguards of BFL Activities for the year 2023 was conducted successfully despite the short period of time allocated for this purpose. A total of 25 Implementing Agencies (8 BCs, 10 PA and 7 others) with 63 different activities were evaluated. The independent consultant visited 3 project sites in JDNP, BC 3 & RBP and consulted 15 different agencies and BFL stakeholders including BFL-FS, PCU, CFOs and BFL focal persons.

The evaluation of the ESS measures for the BFL project reveals a commendable commitment to sustainable development and conservation in Bhutan. The project's emphasis on preserving biodiversity, protecting ecosystems, and promoting sustainable livelihoods aligns well with the long-term national goal of “Gross National Happiness”. The implementation of robust environmental and social safeguard measures has ensured minimal adverse impacts on the natural landscape and fostered community development with equitable benefit-sharing. However, continuous monitoring, adaptive management, and enhanced capacity-building are crucial to addressing emerging challenges and ensuring the long-term success of the initiative. Overall, the Bhutan for Life project serves as a model for integrating environmental conservation with socio-economic development, contributing positively to Bhutan's sustainable future.

Annexure 1: List of documents reviewed

Sl. No	Document	Source
1	ESMP 2023 (Jan 2023 – June 2024)	PCU
2	ESMP Executive Summary	PCU
3	ESMP compliance monitoring sheet	PCU
4	Year 5 and year 6 activity list	PCU
5	Independent Evaluation of Environment and Social Safeguards 2023	BFL website
6	WWF ESSF and SIPP	WWF website
7	Public consultation report	PCU
8	Training report	PCU

Annexure 2: List of field visits made

Date	Site	Remarks
11 May 2024	Range Office Construction, Mendrelgang, Tsirang Territorial Division	Nearing completion
12 May 2024	Park Range office renovation, Rimchu, Punakha under JDNP	Completed and handed over
13 May 2024	Renovation of Environmental Education Center, Royal Botanical Park, Lampelri, BC 2	Completed and handed over

Annexure 3: List of PA/BC/Others consulted

Sl. No	Official	Agency
1	Executive Director, Program and Finance Managers, Communication officer	BFL-FS
2	Project Coordinator, M&E Officer, Finance Officer, ESS focal, Gender focal	PCU
3	CFO and BFL focal	BC3
4	BFL focal	JDNP
5	BFL focal	BC4
6	CFO and BFL focal	JKSNR
7	BFL focal	BC7
8	CFO and BFL focal	RMNP
9	BFL focal	WCNP
10	BFL focal	JWS
11	BFL focal	FRPMD
12	BFL focal	NPPC
13	BFL focal	OGOP
14	BFL focal	SWS
15	Principal	Mendrelgang Primary School

Annexure 4: Status of ESS Implementation in 2023 by Implementing Agencies

Implementing Agencies	Activity	ESS mitigation measures	Status of ESS implementation	Issues faced during implementation	ESS implementation evidences
BC1 Paro	Blacktopping of the office parking lot	Beautification around the blacktop area, advised to use ear plug and timing for work from 7am to 7 pm	Complied	No issues	Office compound blacktopped to prevent from muddy and dust during winter and summer
	Construction of water tank stand	Proper dumping of waste generated from construction	Complied	No issues	Safe and clean drinking water supply to the staffs
BC2 Wangdi Phodrang/ Sarpang	Maintenance/improvement of access road from Peljorling to Chuba	work was done during the day so that the activities won't disturb the local	Complied	No issues	Construction not operated after 7 pm, noisy vehicles not operated
		spraying of water to reduce dust emissions, vehicle emissions tested as required by the law, protective mask to be worn by workers	Complied	No issues	Water was sprayed when dust was produced during the work
		Waste was collected and put in waste bins during and after construction	Complied	No issues	Waste bin located near construction site
		workers were equipped with safety gears as required	Complied	No issues	Safety gears provided
		Waste was collected and put in waste bins during and after construction, safety of locals ensured	Complied	No issues	No hazardous waste was generated nor the work affected streams and rivers
	Development of parking and access road in the newly constructed campsite	as the work was minimal, the noise pollution is also very minimal and the campsite being located away from the community. Work was done during the day to reduce noise disturbance	Complied	No issues	Construction not operated after 7 pm, noisy vehicles not operated
		the construction waste was disposed in designated waste bins	Complied	No issues	Waste bin located near construction site
		No soil erosion, landslides or flooding as the work was on a very small scale	Complied	No issues	Surface alignment maintained; eco-friendly materials used

		provided with safety gears	Complied	No issues	Safety gears provided	
	Construction of kitchen site and terracing of land for tent pitching inside the campsite	less waste generation and the little amount of waste generated were disposed in designated waste bin	Complied	No issues	Waste bin near site	
		it was done during pre-monsoon season to minimize the slope disturbance, avoiding steep areas	Complied	No issues	Slope stability maintained,	
		workers were provided with safety gears	Complied	No issues	Safety gears provided	
		Expansion and Maintenance of wildlife rescue shelter	Work was done during the day to avoid disturbance to the nearby communities	Complied	No issues	Construction not operated after 7 pm, noisy vehicles not operated
	Expansion and Maintenance of wildlife rescue shelter	waste generated were disposed in the designated waste bin	Complied	No issues	Waste bin near site	
		workers were provided with safety gears	Complied	No issues	Safety gears provided	
		Maintenance of office	workers were provided with safety gears	Complied	No issues	Safety gears provided
	Maintenance of office	waste generated were disposed in the designated waste bin	Complied	No issues	Waste bin near site	
		Work was done during the day to avoid disturbance to the nearby communities	Complied	No issues	Construction not operated after 7 pm, noisy vehicles not operated	
		BC3 Tsirang	Construction of Mendrelgang Range Office	Reduction of noise using different means Maintained minimum noise pollution	Complied	No issues
	BC3 Tsirang	Construction of Mendrelgang Range Office	Reduction of waste generation using different means	Complied	No issues	
			Workers' health and safety	Complied	No issues	Workers' use of OHS items
			Construction of ponds and enclosure	Minimize waste generation	Complied	No issues
	BC4 Zhemgang	Construction of Kitchen at	Workers' health and safety	Complied	No issues	Workers' use of OHS items
			Restoration of grassland at Pirchen		Complied	No issues
	BC4 Zhemgang	Construction of Kitchen at		Complied	No issues	

	Zarkabla Ecotourism campsite				
	Construction of toilet and maintenance of homestay at Buli	Occupational Health and Safety of the workers was ensured	Complied	No issues	Complied
BC5 Pema Gatshel/ Samdrup Jongkhar	Construction of retaining wall near Division Office approach road	Timely monitoring on permissible working hours (7 am-7 pm) especially during office working days (Monday to Friday). The vehicles that are likely to produce excess noise were not permitted to operate.	Complied	Nil	Monitoring report
		I) Temporary waste bins installed at the working site for dumping different types of waste. II) Periodic monitoring conducted and instructions provided to workers to refrain burning of construction waste and dumping of waste in non-designated places such as private land and along the road sides. III) The excavated soil waste was reused for backfilling the wall.	Complied	Nil	Field validation; No waste observed within the construction site. All excavated materials are seen reused as backfill for the constructed wall.
		Ensured required OHS facilities being provided to workers. The workers were pre-informed to report CFO, ADM or the BFL focal, in case they face any issues and discrepancy in due course of their work operation but no issues and grievances reported as of now.	Complied	Nil	No contravention report received from the workers
	Construction of Electric fence at Choegar Dhuedhuel Phodrang	The Gewog Agriculture extension agent shall arrange to collect the obsolete/damaged	Complied	Nil	No e-Waste generated so far

	Monastery agriculture land under Norbugang gewog	materials from the construction site and surrender to NPPC/DRE but as of now no e-wastes were generated.			
		I) Frequent monitoring carried out after the installation to observe any wild animals being trapped or injured. II) Created public awareness and proper signages were also installed for safety of local commuters.	Complied	Nil	1 No. Signboard installed to create awareness to the local commuters
BC6 Tashigang	Sanitary landfill extension at Mukazor under Wamrong Dungkhag	Installation of HDPE and sheet to prevent leaching	Complied	Cost escalated, not being able to cover about num0.060m	eco-friendly sanitary landfill extended as per NEC recommendation
		Aesthetic plantation around landfill (bioengineering plantation, bamboo planted around landfill)	Complied	No excavation without FC, fine imposed as per FNRR 2017	successful plantation around the landfill
	Major maintenance of Thrimshing beat office	Construction waste managed with wastebin and compound fencing. waste bin installed and managed and emptied every Friday	Complied	need landfill to dump waste from kangpara and Thrimshing dungkhag	compound fencing with footpath and waste bin
	Maintenance of Check post and Beat Office	Contract was awarded to the local community contractor	Complied	No issues	
		Labourer camps set up away from water sources	Complied	No issues	
		Waste generated during maintenance work was disposed. Ensured construction materials were cleaned and disposed	Complied	No issues	
		Safety measures were taken care. Wearing of helmet and safety gum boots	Complied	No issues	
BC7		Engage local labour-Contract was awarded	Complied	No issues	

Mongar	Maintenance of Check post and Beat Office	to the local community contractor			
		Maintain clean water source-Labourer camps set up away from water sources	Complied	No issues	
		Waste generated during maintenance work was disposed of in proper place. Ensured construction materials were cleaned and disposed.	Complied	No issues	
		Workers' safety-Safety measures were taken care of. Wearing of helmet and safety gumboots	Complied	No issues	
BC8 Bumthang	Restoration of lowland grasslands at Jongthang		Complied	No issues	
BWS	Maintenance of buildings (Develop balcony and footsteps for BWS guest house)	Installation of waste bins, used safety mask and gloves and safe disposal of unusable rotten wood/timber debris.	Complied	No issues	Completion report, handing taking note and structure in placed
JDNP	Control of invasive species	Manual removal of three invasive species (name them)	Invasive plants are removed manually by uprooting. This is as per the protocol developed by National Biodiversity Center	No issues	Report
		Waste generation	Waste is collected and dispose in the Gewog waste disposal site	No issues	Report
		Workers' health and safety	Ensured workers wear mask, hand gloves and safety boot	No issues	Report
	Ruecheynna Park Range office maintenance	Waste generation	Complied	No issues	Report
		Workers' health and safety	Complied	No issues	Report
JKNR	Improvement of Alpine	Waste generation by workers	Complied	No issues	Report

	meadows at Chala, Lolithang & Nubtshonapatra	Workers' health and safety due to high altitude	Complied	No issues	Report
	Construction of two reservoir tanks in Thangdokha village, Gakiling	Waste generation by workers	Complied	No issues	Report
		Workers' health and safety during construction	Complied	No issues	Report
	Bio-engineering (Plantation, check dam) in Thangdokha village, Gakiling	Waste generation by workers	Complied	No issues	Report
		Workers' health and safety	Complied	No issues	Report
SWS	Restoration of the alpine and lowland meadows at Merak and Sakten	Proper disposal of weeds to control invasive species, use of biological control measures, workers health and safety	All complied	No issues	Report
	Implementation of Shetmay watershed management bioengineering work	Generation of waste during implementation and workers health and safety measures in place	All complied	No issues	Report
	Restoration of natural saltlick at Merak	Ensure no use of artificial salt and workers health and safety	All complied	No issues	Report
	Maintenance of Joenkhar Range office	1. Installation of waste bins. 2. Workers used safety mask and gloves. 3. Safe disposal of unusable rotten wood/timber debris.	All complied	No issues	Range office building and handing-taking report
PNP	Bamboo plantation along flashflood prone	Risk of introducing invasive plants: Preliminary species assessment was done before plantation was carried out. Only native species of bamboo and fast growing species with deep root systems were planted. Timely monitoring of the plantation site by the Phawan Range Office.	Successfully completed plantation and ESS complied	No issues	Since the area is very steep and prone to monsoon flash flood, the success of the plantation is always at risk of flash flood. Completion report

		Occupational health and safety of the workers: No health hazard issues occurred during execution of the plantation. Workers were provided with safety gears to prevent uncertain casualties.	Successfully completed plantation and ESS complied	No issues	
JWS	Restoration of lowland grasslands at Nunai	<p>Ensure that no damage is caused to local vegetation - major trees or plants that are supposed to be cut shall be clearly marked, and only marked trees will be cut;</p> <p>Only native species will be planted</p> <p>No trees should be removed unnecessarily</p> <p>Burning of trees and other plants should be avoided and if not necessary, burning should be carried out in a controlled manner avoiding dry and windy times of the day.</p> <p>Control burning to be carried out by making fire line.</p> <p>Avoid work when the herd is in the habitat site.</p> <p>Avoid using heavy machinery.</p> <p>Avoid soil excavation and noise disturbance to minimize impact on natural habitats.</p>	All ESS requirements are fulfilled	Risk of encountering elephant and Gaurs by workers due to the remoteness of the place. However, no incident happened.	Improved grassland
RMNP	Management or restoration of lowland grassland	All the invasive bushes & shrubs were cleared manually by labourers, let dry for	Successful completed and ESS complied	Difficult in getting labourers at government wage rate	Managed grasslands at the sites

		around a week, collected together (many smaller groups) and burned in order to avoid spread of fire into the nearby forest or for the safety of workers. Strict monitoring of fire was also done while burning.			
		No new grass species were planted except few transplantations of existing species grass shoot from locality to enrich area and to avoid introducing invasive species	Successful completed and ESS complied	Grasses easily getting overgrown/dominated by other invasive species	Managed grasslands at the sites
		Workers were deployed with proper safety gears and as per the OHS regulations	Successful completed and ESS complied	Nil	Managed grasslands at the sites
	Enrichment plantation in 3 Community Forest (name 3 CFs)	site clearance was carried out before plantation and barbed wire fencing after plantation	Plantation completed and ESS complied	Nil	Plantation survival at the respective sites
	Enrichment plantation	site clearance was carried out before plantation and barbed wire fencing after plantation	Plantation completed and ESS complied	Nil	Plantation survival at the respective sites
		Site clearance was carried out manually before plantation and barbed wire fencing after plantation	Successful completed and ESS complied	No issues	Plantation survival at the site
PWS	Grassland management	Introduction of native grass plantation	Successfully raised in Nursery for planting	No issues	Grassland Nursery
		Unnecessary grassland fires avoided, grassland made into compartments and fenced.	Completed and ESS complied	No issues	Images of grassland compartments
WCNP	Mangdephu to Dhur Tshachhu trail development	This activity is currently being implemented due to change in the design of bridges.	All ESS requirements are monitored	No issue so far	NA

JSWNP	Improvement of Alpine Meadows	Ensure proper sanitation of the working area through appropriate disposal of the debris generated from the pruning activity. Additionally, the debris were burnt in appropriate space ensuring minimal impact to the environment.	Complied	No issues	Pictures
		Dumping waste shall be prohibited on fragile slopes, forests, and other sensitive areas.	Complied	No issues	Site visit
		Collection, transportation and final disposal of all waste will be undertaken regularly.	Complied	No issues	Site visit
		Follow the workers' health and safety guidelines as attached to the ESMP. completed the activity with no incidences of injury to the workers.	Complied	No issues	Pictures
		Ensure that the activity is carried out by trained forestry personnel. The activity was conducted by forestry technicians and power chain operators.	Complied	No issues	Pictures
		Ensure safety gears and first aid kits for the workers. Rubber boots and hand gloves were provided to the workers. Additionally, helmets and safety goggles were provided to the power chain operators.	Complied	No issues	Pictures
NCHM	Construction of Flood Warning and Cryosphere Research	Only the contract is awarded. The construction is yet to start along with ESMP mitigation	NA	NA	

	Facility at Lunana	measures. (may be completed??)			
NPPC	Installation of portable electric fencing in Samdrupjongkhar and Lhuntse	Generation of e-waste	Compiled	No issues	Handed over extension officers
		Minor disturbance to soil – digging of holes			
		Worker’s health and safety			
		Implementation of mitigation measures (bioacoustics technology)			
PMO	Installation of electric vehicle charging station at Sephu and Sengor	Generation n of construction wastes and general wastes	Compiled	No issues	Report with pictures
		Dust/waste generation			
		Noise pollution			
		Workers’ health and safety			
		Risk of causing inconvenience to the highway users			
		Risk of damaging the road			
FRPMD	Establishment of cane and bamboo enterprise at Banjar village under Tsamang Gewog	Pre and post construction waste generation	Compiled	No issues	Report with pictures
		Dust generation			
		Noise pollution			
		Workers’ health and safety			
	Creation of 51.97 hectares of new plantations in Samdrup Jongkhar, Sarpang, Tsirang and Tashigang	Waste generation of waste from the poly pot used for seedling			
		Risk of introducing invasive species			
		Workers’ health and safety			
	Creation of 36.23 hectares of new enrichment plantation in Pema Gatshel, Zhemgang and Thimphu	Waste generation of waste from the poly pot used for seedling			
		Risk of introducing invasive species			
		Workers’ health and safety			
NCD	Installation of Protected Area Boundary	Minor disturbance to the soil through digging of holes (wastes particularly	Compiled	No issues	Report with pictures

	Information Pillars	unwanted soils and unearthed materials)			
		Workers' health and safety			
	Construction of animal enclosures and a staff quarter at the Rescue Centre at Chamina.	Generation n of construction waste			
		Dust and noise pollution			
		Workers' health and safety			
OGOP	Production of highland honey	Occupational health and safety of the bee handlers	Compiled	No issues	Report with pictures
Royal Botanical Park	Campsite Development	Waste generation during the construction	Compiled	No issues	Report with pictures
		Workers' health and safety			

Annexure 5: Pictorial evidences



Evidences of use of OHS both indoor and outdoor



Renovation work is well executed at Rimchu Range office



Well done flooring work by local contractor



Good quality of ceiling and lighting work at Royal Botanical Park, Lampelri



Well maintained EE center and campus at Lampelri



Construction site well covered to avoid disturbance to the Primary School