

Information Note

Key Lessons from Annual and Final Reports in 2016/17

Beneficiary recording daily incident of crop raiding, Credit: D. Wright

Darwin project reporting

All projects funded under Darwin that are longer than one year must submit an Annual Report (AR) in the prescribed template. In addition, all projects must submit a Final Report (FR) within three months of closing. All Annual and Final reports are subject to a desk-based review by a biodiversity and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) expert. These specialists review the material submitted and either comment on progress made against the original application (AR), or review overall project impact (FR), as verified by the evidence submitted.

This Information Note synthesises key findings of a review of all the Annual and Final Report Reviews completed to August in financial year 2016/17. In total 46 Annual Report Reviews and 19 Final Report Reviews were completed over this period.

The Darwin Initiative supports developing countries to conserve biodiversity and reduce poverty. Funded by the UK Government, the Darwin Initiative provides grants for projects working in developing countries and UK Overseas Territories (OTs).

Projects support:

- the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS)
- the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)
- the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

 /DarwinInitiative

 @Darwin_Defra

 darwininitiativeuk.wordpress.com


Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs


Funded by
UK Government


DARWIN
INITIATIVE

darwininitiative.org.uk

Reporting on progress - Annual Reports

In 2016/17 a total of 46 Annual Report Reviews were completed. The majority of projects assessed were found to be likely to fully or largely achieve their intended Outcome, consolidating the positive trend from the 2015/16 reporting period. Below is a summary of key learning points from this review. LTS International, working with Defra and the Darwin Expert Committee, will now consider how to address these learning points and further improve the operation of the Darwin Initiative in future years.



Ethiopian farmer and daughter, Credit: Tree Aid

It is difficult for projects to achieve high scores for progress in years 1 and 2. It appears that Darwin reviewers are cautious; obtaining a top score is challenging. There are many projects that are talked about warmly but subsequently do not achieve the highest possible score. This is partly due to the complexity of these projects, often some aspects of a project are not achievable during the early stages of implementation. Consequently failure to obtain a top review score in years 1 and 2 does not necessarily equate to a lack of progress, and may result from a propensity for reviewers not to over-egg a project.

Projects that provide appropriate evidence with their reports score better. In recent years there has been a significant improvement in the provision of evidence in reporting. The vast majority of projects now provide relevant and robust evidence of progress with their annual reports. However in 2016/17 a small number of projects still failed to provide sufficient evidence – these projects rarely scored highly for progress. It is made clear to projects in the application, the report template and the New Projects workshop that they must submit evidence to support statements of progress. It is clear that some projects continue to require additional support in this area.

Adaptive management is evident in Darwin projects using Darwin mandated or their own institutional M&E frameworks to measure progress and make adjustments based on changing circumstances. These are often

the projects which reviewers find easiest to understand progress.

A number of projects have integrated **gender equality considerations explicitly into their project** such as tackling women's representation in governance, or access to resources, or ownership of assets. Other projects are using a no-harm approach – they have not necessarily sought to design a project that addresses disparities between the genders but have targets for equal representation of the sexes during delivery of the project e.g. training and recruitment.

A small number of projects have taken very limited steps to consider gender equality. It may be that these projects require additional support and/or guidance when dealing with gender in this context.

Alternative livelihood projects face common challenges. Almost a third of live projects are pursuing alternative livelihoods as a means of reducing pressure on natural resources. Several of these projects have experienced challenges in achieving the level of revenue originally predicted. Reasons vary but include:

- Lack of receptive market for products
- Production rates are below initial predictions
- Training has taken time so results not expected until the final year or beyond the project
- Value of products produced lower than expected
- Delays in undertaking work

For some projects this may just delay results seen until after the end of Darwin funding. For others care should be taken to address these challenges in order to secure alternative income and redirect efforts away from destructive practices.

There has been an **increase in projects involved in microfinance schemes** of some sort – VSLAs or similar. Most are showing positive increases in the number of members, number of transactions undertaken and value of savings achieved. Whilst some of these have not achieved the targets they have set themselves in terms of value of savings per household, this is a promising area of future learning.

Recommendation:

There are lessons to be learned here from projects that would merit a more in-depth study than feasible here. This could be an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning as well. For example is this experience similar for other development projects or are biodiversity-orientated alternative livelihoods schemes a special case?

Reporting on impact - Final Reports

In 2016/17 a total of 19 Final Report Reviews were completed. The majority of projects assessed either met or exceeded their predicted Outcome. Below is a summary of key learning points from this review. LTS International, working with Defra and the Darwin Expert Committee, will now consider how to address these learning points and further improve the operation of the Darwin Initiative in future years

Drivers of project success are not always clear.

Understanding why projects are successful is difficult since we ask few questions of projects about the intricacies of their management. Also projects may be concerned about providing details on what is not working so well, in case it has a negative impact on their support. However it would be helpful to better understand why some projects achieve so much whilst others struggle, to help refine the Darwin application processes (to encourage good design) or project monitoring processes (to push for better achieving projects). Adjustments to the Report templates are one option that could be explored. Peer-to-peer sharing to encourage learning amongst project staff is another positive avenue to explore.

A number of common challenges were identified that may restrict the achievement of project Outcomes. These include:

- Weak or missing baselines or the provision of insufficient evidence, making an evaluation of project achievement difficult
- Project Outcomes that are heavily reliant on outside processes e.g. government policies, that are beyond the control of the project
- Changing circumstances resulting in a change in approach that is not updated in the project logframe
- Project Outcomes that are not expected to be achieved within the Darwin project timeframe

Insufficient evidence makes reviewing difficult.

A minority of projects continue to submit insufficient evidence with their Final Report to support their statements of progress or impact. Feedback on the need to ensure that future reporting includes robust evidence of progress, is provided to project leaders in Annual Reports. This finding suggests that the weakest projects may need additional support in these areas.

The importance of appropriate Outcome indicators.

Most Darwin projects set clear and achievable Outcomes and associated indicators. Where inappropriate Outcome indicators are set, projects struggle to achieve their aims. Weak or missing baselines, and a failure to

undertake the necessary monitoring in the final year to be able to demonstrate change, can contribute to this. In the few instances where this is the case, additional support may be necessary for applicants to ensure they understand how indicators should be chosen, monitored and reported on.

Understanding impact on gender is difficult at present.

With some minor adjustments, the Final Report template would be better able to capture projects' engagement with gender equality. From what has been reported to date, projects could do more to clearly set out their engagement with gender issues and effect on gender equality. These projects were designed and funded before consideration of gender issues became a requirement, and this is clearly an area in which current projects may benefit from additional support.

Darwin projects are ambitious, addressing complex issues in fragile environments. **The facility to request an extension is commonly taken and is valued by projects.** It is also relatively common for projects to make requests to change parts of their approach. Change requests are a cornerstone of an adaptive management approach; if change requests were not approved more projects would struggle to fulfil their potential. Ambition aside, project staff need to be realistic at the design phase to avoid too much re-design once funding has been received. Effective management strategies are rarely talked about by successful projects and yet ineffective management is very clear in failing projects. With minor edits, FRR forms could do more to capture success drivers for effective management.



Making fishing nets in Myanmar (Burma), Credit: Paul Bates

Key opportunities and suggested response

Key opportunity	Suggested response	Sources of further information
Increasing the number of projects achieving high scores for progress in ARRs 1 and 2	Ensuring that logframe indicators include clear interim targets will help to demonstrate progress is on track e.g. By end year 3, at least 30 investigations into traders of CITES listed shark and rays species have been undertaken by the marine wildlife conservation unit (baseline = 2, targets = 5 by end year 1, 15 by end year 2).	Examples of strong indicators can be found in the Logframe Information Note .
Further improving the quality of evidence provided by projects	Ensure sufficient evidence of achievement is included in annual and final reports. Ideally this should be contained in clearly labelled annexes, cross referenced at the relevant places in the main body of the report.	The recently updated briefing paper ' Writing an Annual Report ' and slides from the 2017 New Project Webinar.
Adaptive management to increase project success	Regularly revisit your project M&E plan and logframe to ensure they remain relevant. If they are not, contact LTS to discuss updating them through the change request process.	Further information on change requests and M&E planning can be found in the proceedings and presentations from the 2017 new project webinar and workshop.
Greater consideration of gender equality	Where possible, disaggregate logframe indicators by gender. Explore the extensive body of literature on gender issues in conservation available online such as on GEF and WWF websites.	Refer to Section 4.2 of the application guidance . Extensive resources are available online and a Darwin Information Note will be published over the coming year.
Improved attainment in alternative livelihood projects	Ensure that the project team includes expertise in the development of income generating activities, marketing, and business development. This can help ensure common challenges do not arise, and may help to address them where they do.	A summary of key considerations for livelihoods projects is included in the Poverty Information Note
Updated report formats to highlight learning	Annual and final project reports offer a useful opportunity to capture learning from project implementation. Project leaders are encourage to emphasise lessons, positive and negative, in their reporting.	The recently updated briefing paper ' Writing an Annual Report '.
Project Outcomes that better reflect the realities of implementation	Darwin projects are encouraged to employ an adaptive management approach. For the majority of projects it is clear whether or not they are likely to achieve their Outcome well in advance of project end. If it appears likely that the original stated Outcome is no longer appropriate, projects are encouraged to submit a change request to reformulate their Outcome to better fit on the ground realities.	Discuss with LTS International. Change request forms are available here .
More robust Outcome indicators	Poorly quality Outcome indicators is a challenge common to many projects. Issues are usually flagged to projects through application feedback and through Annual report reviews. Where Outcome indicators have been flagged as weak or inappropriate it is important to ensure these issues are addressed as early as possible in discussion with the project team and wider partners.	Discuss with LTS International. Guidance on these issues is also available in the ' M&E and the Darwin Initiative ' and ' Logical Frameworks ' Information Notes.