

## Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

*Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.*

**Submission Deadline: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023**

<b>Project reference</b>	<b>DARNV020</b>
<b>Project title</b>	<b>Upscaling innovative ‘planting-baskets’ to restore landscape diversity, enhancing climate-resilient livelihoods</b>
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Belize
<b>Lead partner</b>	University of Edinburgh
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Belize Botanical Gardens,
<b>Project leader</b>	Neil Stuart
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	<i>HYR1</i>
<b>Project website/ blog/ social media</b>	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-funds-darwin-initiative-innovation-project-in-belize">https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-funds-darwin-initiative-innovation-project-in-belize</a> <a href="https://fb.watch/nWjUP9Fcot/">https://fb.watch/nWjUP9Fcot/</a> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/ukinbelize/videos/658172843131023/">https://www.facebook.com/ukinbelize/videos/658172843131023/</a>

**Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).**

Overall, the project has made a good start, with 8 of the 10 activities planned for the first half-year successfully underway or completed. Section 2 below explains how one activity (1.1) has been rescheduled into year 2 and how horticultural training (2.3) will begin as soon as all participants have been selected.

Additionally, we have also undertaken various networking and media activities designed to raise awareness of the project both in-country and internationally. A highlight among these was a launch event on 2<sup>nd</sup> August attended by the British High Commissioner to Belize HE Nicole Davison and Deputy HC Kate Reynolds, <https://fb.watch/nWjUP9Fcot/> Press releases about the project have appeared in various local media, as well as a featured World News Story on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk), and have been widely shared on Facebook and other social media.

All our project assumptions still hold true, our indicators still remain relevant, and we are currently discussing as a team the core and optional indicators to be used for ongoing M&E, and for annual reporting.

Progress towards the outputs is summarised overleaf in a description of activities (numbering is taken from the logframe and project’s implementation timetable):

- (1.2) BBG have consulted with potential beneficiaries in the Cayo District of Belize including
- ~20 smallholder farmers interested in adapting their agriculture to be more climate-resilient;
  - ~10 representatives from NGOs, government ministries involved in implementing policy on forest restoration and restorative agriculture;
  - ~10 landless families showing commitment to maintaining a backyard garden
  - ~10 representatives of universities and technical colleges with educational programmes in sustainable agriculture, agroforestry and biodiversity.

(1.3) RBGE have worked with BBG to produce a conservation assessment by Aug 2023 of ~200 local food plant, fruit, palm and tree species for biodiversity, food security and livelihood benefits. The resulting live document is here <https://edin.ac/3QiqDzj> and is being used to prioritise species for the growing trials described in (2.2).

(1.4) An expansion of the plant nursery and potting facilities at BBG was completed by August 2023. Photographs will be included in the annual report as evidence of its completion.

(2.1) 15 students from Galen University and Mopan Technical College were recruited as seed collectors and trained to begin seed collection in June 2023. A record of names is available from Dr Denaie Swasey [REDACTED]

(2.2) Experimental trials have begun at BBG on a first set of ~ 15 native plant, palm and other tree species, assessing their ease of propagation, survival and drought resistance. A logbook details numbers of seedlings planted by species, and survival rates are being recorded. Sample pages can be viewed on request; data will be transferred to a spreadsheet and maintained at BBG on secure storage.

(3.1) Design and landscaping of a new 'Agroforest Garden' has begun at BBG, with the initial planting to be completed by April 2024. Photographs will be included in the annual report to evidence completion.

(4.1) IIED have developed a survey tool to enable BBG to gather information about the current range of crops grown, and estimate the interest to increase growing of a wider range of especially native and endangered 'baskets' of trees, palms and plants. The questions are based on adaptations of the SHARP questionnaire survey developed by FAO (<https://www.fao.org/inaction/sharp/resources/publications/en/>) with additions from 'Diversification for climate resilience' <https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2021-10/20311IIED.pdf>

BBG and Mopan Tech College have piloted and refined the instrument, and are now utilising it to interview ~ 20 local smallholder farmers and growers to understand their present growing systems, range of crops grown, barriers to diversification and any possible livelihood benefits these growers perceive may result from adopting more native plants and restorative agricultural practices. The survey Instrument is documented here: <https://edin.ac/45PwvpH>

(5.2) BBG have reached agreement with a private company to film up to 14 new episodes of 'The Garden Show', with one episode that will exclusively showcase the Gardens to Grow scheme, and one dedicated to promoting the native plants being grown by the project's participating farmers. These two episodes will be specific project outputs, fully funded by and acknowledging this Darwin Project; other episodes will also be filmed in the Garden and will take advantage of facilities that have been improved by the project (e.g. at the Visitor Centre).. Many of the episodes will encourage the growing of native species, and use of the organic methods being promoted to farmers by this project.

Distribution will be firstly via the National Channel TV station, and possibly further channels depending on costs of distribution. Transmission schedules once confirmed, will serve as evidence, together with clips from the two 'Darwin Project' episodes, which will be made available on Youtube and social media.

**2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

Although some year 1 activities were delayed, those not requiring significant operating costs (e.g. seed collecting, planting, potting, conservation assessments, designing of stakeholder survey, consultations with stakeholders), still began promptly in Q1. The only year 1 activity that has been rescheduled into next FY is one field visit by RBGE botanist Zoe Goodwin, who having just returned from a period of maternity leave in October, has asked to reschedule her planned taxonomic training to May 2024. She is able to undertake all her other contributions (activity 1.3) for this year online. This has been accommodated within the budget by rebalancing how the taxonomic work is undertaken across years 1 and 2.

The only activity yet to start is the bespoke horticultural training (2.3). Training could not be offered until all participants in both the smallholder farm and Gardens to Grow schemes were identified. One thing we have learned is that most of the smallholder farmers live several miles from their farms and some farms are not accessible by road, which will make monitoring visits and delivering plants to some farms difficult. Although all the farmers recruited will receive training, BBG have decided to focus the delivery of plants to more accessible farms, and to those participants showing most motivation to apply the training, who are thought most likely to continue to record their growing of plants throughout the full duration of the project.

Through frequent online and also in-person meetings to review progress with partners on all activities, and by careful financial monitoring, we have expended 50% of the budget by the half year end. We will continue this monitoring to ensure we maximise value for money and avoid underspending by 31 March 2024.

We are already developing synergies between this relatively small Innovation project, and other larger, longer-term projects in Belize, to maximise the impact of this project, find opportunities for co-operation and promote adoption and wider dissemination of the innovative methods it is trialling for native plant propagation. As an example, we recently collaborated with a UK-funded Leverhulme Trust Project, studying adaptation to climate change in Belize, by co-hosting an event at BBG with them, attended by the farmers participating in this project. Over the coming months, we will seek greater co-operation with the DEFRA Biodiverse Landscapes Fund (BLF) project, through a joint meeting with the lead implementing partner, WCS-Belize. We have already identified a number of possible synergies with the BLF project, since several of our project stakeholders and beneficiaries, including Friends for Conservation & Development, Belize Maya Forest, and the Government of Belize Forest Department, are also partners in the BLF project that will run in Belize, as well as in Guatemala and Honduras over the next 7 years.

**3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with NIRAS: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

**4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)**

Actual spend: £ [REDACTED]

**4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2024)?**

Yes  No  Estimated underspend: £

**4c. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully.** Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.**

**NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.**

**5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

**All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com). The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**