



Indian Ocean Cluster Information Note: Lessons from Madagascar and the Comoros

This Information Note presents an overview of the results of a Closed Project Evaluation conducted in Madagascar and Comoros in 2014 on 3 projects. Closed Project Evaluations allow independent experts the opportunity to undertake primary data collection in consultation with key project stakeholders, and collect and review important secondary data. This enables reviewers to undertake a robust assessment of project progress.

We present a number of key lessons of value to current and future Darwin projects, as well as conservation and development projects not funded under this scheme. Highlights include:

- The importance of collaborating with local partners during project design
- The benefits of defining a theory of change to ensure robust project design
- The advantages of adopting an adaptive management approach
- The need to ensure robust M&E systems are in place to effectively demonstrate project success
- The use of multiple knowledge sharing products to effectively disseminate key project findings

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)

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Credit: Madagasikara, nakajay

Introduction

In March 2015 the Darwin Initiative completed Closed Project Evaluations (CPEs) for a cluster of 3 Darwin-funded projects located in the Indian Ocean, 2 in Madagascar and 1 in Comoros.

Purpose of a Closed Project Evaluation

Closed Project Evaluations are used to look in-depth at a project to better understand the extent to which its outcomes and impact were achieved. It also provides us an opportunity to reflect on a project's wider contribution to the Darwin Initiative's objectives.

Selecting projects

There are 3 main criteria we use to select projects for a Closed Project Evaluation. These criteria include:

Geography: Selecting a cluster of projects offers good value for money and also highlights the cumulative effect of having multiple projects in one location.

Thematic focus: We regularly review the impact of the Darwin Initiative against themes identified as priority policy issues either for the UK government or the biodiversity and development agenda in general.

Institutional focus: Similar to geographic focus we may wish to look at what impact an institution has had on the objectives of the Darwin Initiative. This could be a type of institution e.g. research organisations, community-based organisations.

Methods of a Closed Project Evaluation

A CPE aims to review the outcomes of projects against their original logical frameworks, project reports and products, as well as their contribution to the overarching objectives of the Darwin Programme.

Methods regularly employed on Closed Project Evaluations include desk-based review of the documents supplied, interviews with project implementors, focus groups with beneficiaries, and field level verification of structures/organisations/ results of projects.

The Projects

Bushmeat in Madagascar

The first project, [Madagascar Bushmeat](#), was led by Bangor University supported by Madagasikara Voakajy, University of Antananarivo, MoEFT - Madagascar, Institut Pasteur, and CI Madagascar.

It aimed to improve knowledge of the drivers of illegal bushmeat hunting in Madagascar, in order to better target education and enforcement activities and achieve amendments to national legislation on bushmeat hunting.

The project focused on productive game species and sought to highlight the importance of well-managed native habitats in providing a sustainable source of meat. In doing so this project was able to demonstrate the suitability of a novel social research method, Randomised Repose Technique, in the context of illegal hunting. At the same time it has expanded the evidence base in relation to the extent and drivers of bushmeat hunting in Madagascar and enhanced conservation capacity.

Chameleon trade in Madagascar

The second Madagascar project, [Chameleons in Madagascar](#), was led by the University of Kent. This project addressed knowledge gaps relating to endemic Malagasy chameleon species. This Darwin project assessed trade demands on, and the extent of the illegal trade in, chameleon species whilst assisting the relevant authorities to regulate this trade. Alongside a species-based review, the project

commissioned a study to analyse the chameleon trade in South-East Asia.

The project was found to have had a positive impact, assessing all Malagasy chameleon species for the IUCN Red List. In addition the project achieved encouraging changes in national level CITES institutions, particularly in relation to methods for defining quotas.

Conservation Agriculture in Comoros

The final project, [Participatory Conservation for the Comoros Islands](#), focused on the protection of key endemic terrestrial biodiversity and forest habitats in the Comoros.

The project adopted a participatory approach to improve agricultural practices and local institutional development. It introduced conservation agriculture methods to enable sustainable agricultural intensification, developed appropriate local institutions for improved natural resource management, and used high resolution satellite imagery to map the islands' forests, the first ever such maps of the three Comoros Islands. The Comoros-specific approach adopted by the project has resulted in better conservation outcomes and improved agricultural yields. Whilst the initial project design may have been over ambitious, the establishment of a new Comorian NGO (Dahari) as a result of this project, and the additional funds leveraged off the back of their Darwin grant, has helped enhance conservation capacity on the island archipelago.



Key Lessons for the Darwin Community

A participatory approach at design stage helps

It is best if a participatory planning process with project partners begins during project design. This was a key feature of both the Madagascar Bushmeat and Chameleons in Madagascar projects, which held multi-stakeholder discussions with project partners during the design phase. Such collaboration early in the project cycle is surprisingly uncommon, yet it has real benefits in facilitating a diversity of opinions and contributions. Furthermore it allows networks, expertise, local knowledge and logistics to be fed into the project at an early stage, ultimately improving project design and positively impacting upon project implementation.

Importance of close collaboration with local project partners

The CPE highlighted the benefits of collaboration with project partners early in the project cycle. The review identified the benefits of taking the time, in conjunction with project partners, to revisit and revise (as necessary) project assumptions, indicators and outputs, during the early stages of fieldwork. Doing so helps to ensure that project design reflects on the ground realities, and further, ensures that adequate M&E systems and appropriate milestones are in place.



Importance of a Theory of Change to eventual success

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A Theory of Change (ToC) helps to articulate the risks and assumptions underpinning a project's design. It considers the complexity of the relationships between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes. Drawing up a ToC in advance of a logframe, during project design, enables stakeholders to identify and emphasise the links between their outputs and outcomes. As well as this, the process highlights the key assumptions upon which project success depends and draws attention to the associated risks which may hinder the project.

Linking outputs to outcomes

In the case of the Comoros Project, for example, the CPE identified a number of limitations in project design that impaired the project's ability to achieve its aims. The findings of the review were that the original project design had overly-ambitious targets, resulting from several assumptions implicit in its logframe. This was particularly true of the project's initial assumptions that local institutions would be willing to engage with the project, and that the expansion of smallholder farming was the key driver of deforestation in the

area. At the same time the project's logframe was found to have only tenuous links between outputs and outcomes, and between outcomes and impacts, resulting in a lack of cohesion within the project.

When a theory of change can help

Conducting a ToC exercise would have helped the project to identify and overcome some of these difficulties. A ToC would have enabled assumptions to be more clearly considered during project design. In turn, this would have improved understanding of underlying risks, enabling interventions to be better targeted from the start. At the same time, a consideration of the project's wider ToC would have provided a stronger evidence base from which to develop and refine more realistic impact level objectives. Similar issues relating to the links between outputs and outcomes and logframe complexity stemming from the absence of a theory of change, were found for the Bushmeat project.



The benefits of adopting an adaptive management approach

Closely linked to the idea of engaging with project partners and key local stakeholders early in the design phase, is the adoption of an adaptive management approach which also allows the project design to evolve in the face of previously unforeseen challenges and obstacles.

The Comoros Project struggled with a number of issues stemming from the absence of a ToC. One consequence of this was the misplaced assumption that a participatory approach within an integrated landscape plan, would be the most effective means of improving agricultural practices, increasing household incomes and enhancing conservation efforts.

Applying adaptive management to overcome challenges

The Comoros project was able to overcome this challenge particularly effectively by enabling a Comoros-specific approach to promoting improved agricultural and livestock practices to be developed and refined. Adaptive management is an ongoing process which has seen new knowledge fed back to influence project activities. In this case, the adoption of an adaptive management approach based on effective monitoring, evaluation and learning, has enabled the project to successfully achieve its goals, even in a context of uncertainty and imperfect knowledge. Key to this success has been the free and ongoing process of knowledge sharing between partners. The focus on building internal capacity to monitor progress and evaluate outcomes of actions and activities, has also been important.

Robust M&E systems are vital to track, measure and demonstrate success

All projects funded by the Darwin Initiative are expected to have robust and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems. As a minimum, projects submit reports every six months and Annual Reports which are subject to an independent, desk-based review. Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation systems is a vital step in enabling projects to track, measure and demonstrate their performance, success and impacts, in a form that can be independently evaluated and verified. This information is valuable to a range of stakeholders including funders keen to ensure value for money is achieved, project participants who need to ensure that their project remains on track, and the wider public whose buy-in can help facilitate project success.

M&E can help manage expectations

The case of the Bushmeat project provides a useful illustration. The project's logframe had 8 outputs which, with the time and budget constraints in which Darwin projects operate, can be unmanageable. This may have set unrealistic expectations amongst stakeholders about what the project would achieve.

This project also included a number of indicators that were not SMART, that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. Consequently, the project initially struggled to monitor and measure performance effectively and so could not provide evidence for its progress.

Reducing complexity to help track progress

Currently it is recommended that projects include no more than 5 outputs in their logframe. In fact large (£1million+) DFID programmes are encouraged to have no more than 4 outputs. In terms of indicators, advice on ensuring that the indicators you choose are SMART, appropriate, and will enable you to demonstrate the impacts of your project, is available on the Darwin website. It is important that projects spend time with their partners defining their M&E systems during project design and that these M&E systems should be developed and amended, where appropriate, to reflect ongoing learning as the project evolves. Doing so will enable projects to present evidence of their impacts whilst measuring their progress against key milestones.



Different knowledge products for different audiences

Publicising what your project has achieved is a key element for Darwin projects. Outputs can take many different forms: from the more traditional, such as peer reviewed publications, to the more contemporary, such as blog posts and tweets. This range of very different but equally valid tools can be used to convey distinct types of information to diverse audiences. What is important is that the most appropriate methods are used to reach each distinct stakeholder group. Given the vast range of potential options available, it is also vital that projects develop and implement an overarching communications strategy. This will help to ensure that messages are targeted to the right audiences, and will prevent communications activities from becoming ad hoc and ineffective.

Raising awareness through multiple outlets

The Bushmeat Project in Madagascar provides a useful example of this. This project effectively provided an evidence base for the extent and drivers of bushmeat hunting in Madagascar, whilst also raising the profile of the issue at national and international levels. The project used a range of communications tools including peer reviewed publications, and stories

featured in national and international media outlets. This multi-pronged approach to communications has effectively raised the profile of bushmeat hunting both within Madagascar and beyond.

Translating science

At the international level, the project's peer reviewed publications have stimulated a wider discussion on emerging infectious diseases. This has resulted in growing interest in the topic amongst research groups in Oxford and Australia who are working to build upon the research. These publications have also helped to garner interest from international news media outlets including the BBC News, the New York Times and the Daily Mail, enabling the project to reach an international non-specialist audience. At the national and local level, the project has further demonstrated the value of communicating results in a 'non-scientific' way. For example, a press release issued by the project based on a scientific publication, led to attention in the local press and subsequent televised debates on the preservation of endangered species versus consumptive use, organised by a USAID-funded programme that has taken forward the findings of the Bushmeat Project.



Conclusions

Although based on the CPEs of just 3 projects the recommendations outlined in this information note are broadly applicable to all Darwin-funded projects. Regardless of their technical or geographical focus all projects would benefit from:

- exploring their Theory of Change during project design,
- collaborating closely with local stakeholders,
- remaining open to change as the project progresses, and
- ensuring that robust monitoring and evaluation and communications frameworks are in place.

More information about all of these topics is available on the [Darwin Website](#) and a number of these issues will be dealt with in more detail in forthcoming information notes.

The UK Government's Darwin Initiative aims to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of resources around the world including the UK's Overseas Territories. Since 1992, the Darwin Initiative has committed over £113million to over 943 projects in 159 countries.

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For more information on the Darwin Initiative see <http://darwininitiative.org.uk>

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