

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2009)

Project Ref. No.	17/011
Project Title	A participatory conservation programme for the Comoro Islands
Country(ies)	Comoro Islands (Western Indian Ocean)
UK Organisation	Bristol Conservation and Science Foundation
Collaborator(s)	Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, University of East Anglia, Government of the University of the Comoros, University of the Comoros
Project Leader	Neil Maddison
Report date	13 November 2009
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 1
Project website	Not yet available

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

The project was launched on Saturday 25 April, with an official opening ceremony attended by government, partners, national press and villagers from the zone of intervention. Subsequently three articles about the project were published in the national press and reports went out on the local television and radio.

A start-up evaluation was conducted 28 April – 12 May by Dr Oliver Springate-Baginski of the University of East Anglia following the pilot phase of 1.5 years (report sent to Darwin). This led to a revised, more streamlined project intervention strategy in the villages, which has been tested over the last six months in four villages on Anjouan before enlargement in November. The evaluation mission also developed proposals for a social monitoring and evaluation system for the project, which is currently being put into practice in the four villages. A team of six village facilitators and two agricultural technicians has been trained in this new strategy, and good progress has been made on the ground. Two villages are now following a pathway towards protection of water catchment areas (and thus forest and biodiversity), which includes creation of water management committees, reforestation (started already in one village), and elaboration of management rules and sanctions for different forest zones. A third village is just starting on this pathway. Individuals within each of the four villages are also working to reduce fertility problems through group reflexion and learning, farmer-farmer exchange visits, and a package of technical support including reforestation. Lastly, the project is supporting groups to develop alternative revenue streams, notably through market gardening (testing the first organic methods for the Comoros) and poultry farming (developing a model based on local entrants).

Training in biodiversity surveying has been underway since September for a team of three local technicians supported by the Biodiversity Manager, who has been hired on the project following a detailed recruitment process. The Biodiversity Manager has extensive experience working in Madagascar in similar ecological and cultural situations and has been working closely with project partners on the development of a sampling design for the next two years, which has been pilot tested in a couple of key locations. The wet season surveys started as planned in October. This team is now also developing plans for GIS-based mapping of land-use in partnership with the GIS department of the Comoros government.

Dr Andrew Terry of Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust and Neil Maddison (Project Leader) conducted an appraisal and planning mission for the development of a strong local conservation NGO 21-28 April (please see report previously submitted to Darwin). This recommended the creation of a new NGO, for which a workshop is being planned in January 2010.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments 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.

Creation of the biodiversity monitoring team was delayed by 4 months due to a delay in signing a co-funding agreement through the UNDP from the Comoros Programme of Work on Protected Areas, and due to difficulty in recruiting a Biodiversity Officer. However, first surveying has commenced on time in October so no further difficulties are expected.

The NGO appraisal mission concluded that it would not be appropriate to base capacity building on the main Darwin Initiative partner, Action Comores. This was due to strong concerns about the motivation of key members, an assessment that the institutional structure was not appropriate to achieving long-term benefits, and differing ambitions and skill sets between the Action Comores members and the staff managing the community engagement elements of the project, who were identified originally as providing the basis for the NGO. A request has been submitted to Darwin to change the local host country partner as a result of this, and for the focus of the capacity building elements within the project to be on the establishment of a new NGO. This process is planned to start in January 2010. Although this change has delayed branding and training activities, we believe that these actions will enhance the institutional achievements originally planned for Action Comores by the end of project. Mohamed Moutui, the local project coordinator, has also left the project due to concerns about his political activities, with a locally recruited replacement appointed at the start of November.

The French Development Agency (FDA) co-funding has been delayed, with last checks now underway in Paris and financing expected to be available January 2010. Due to this delay and the more streamlined project strategy developed following the evaluation, it was felt a better use of resources was to invest in expanding the intervention on Anjouan in this first Darwin year, rather than starting on Mohéli in October. Mohéli salaries for 2009/10 have thus been transferred to Anjouan. Concerns still remain about the feasibility of starting in Mohéli at the beginning of Darwin year 2. However, the FDA funding will run for three years from January, and the amount has been increased from £480,000 to £820,000 to include financing the whole team for 8 months after the end of Darwin Initiative funding. This potentially gives room for the same progress to be achieved on Mohéli within this project with a later start date. Further planning will be undertaken before year 2, and Darwin contacted if changes are thought necessary.

Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement? Yes

Discussed with LTS: NGO change + Mohéli budget change from 10/09

Formal change request submitted: For both NGO Change and Mohéli budget change 11/09

Received confirmation of change acceptance: From LTS yes, awaiting Darwin confirmation

3. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures? No