



Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2014)

Project Ref No	21-002
Project Title	Building mycological capacity for sustainable resource management in Lao PDR
Country(ies)	Lao PDR
Lead Organisation	James Hutton Institute
Collaborator(s)	Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh
Project Leader	Dr Andy Taylor
Report date and number (eg HYR3)	October 2014, HYR1
Project website	In prep

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) 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 to end September).

Management: Taylor (AT) spent two weeks in Lao in April 2014. Several meetings were held with local partners to establish responsibilities and protocols. It was determined that the main route of development would be through the direct involvement of the Biotechnology and Ecology Institute (BEI). Other meetings were held with other potential contacts including Adam Starr, the new IUCN Country Manager, Lao PDR Country Program, who was very supportive of the project. A meeting was also held with Alex Needham at the British Embassy in Vientiane and AT was introduced to the British Ambassador. Alex was keen to support the project.

Outputs 1: Workshops

Setting up workshops logistics: Andy Taylor (AT) spent two weeks in Lao in April 2014. Re-establishing contacts with local partners, identifying potential workshop participants in various government organizations and the national university (NUoL). The visit by AT and Mark Newman (MN) planned for June to progress this further could not take place (see 2a below). A major focus of the visit in November 2014 for AT and NM will be to raise awareness and establish who will participate in the education workshops planned for 2015 and to identify potential candidates for the MSc scholarship to the UK starting late 2015.

Running workshops: The first workshop will take place in mid-November involving the European partners. Activities will focus on indicators for a number of outputs including - database development, laboratory development, gathering data on fungal poisonings.

Development of databases: During the November 2014 workshop, two of the European participants accompanied by local collectors will focus on curation of fungal material collected by Ole Pedersen of the Agro-Biodiversity Project (ABP). This will involve setting up a database of the material, identification and collation of photographic evidence and associated ecology.

Outputs 2: Laboratory and training manuals

Setting up the lab: Discussion with Dr Kosonh from BEI (Main Laotian Partner) during the April trip by AT, resulted in a suitable location being found in which to establish the proposed molecular fungal lab. This was a major step forward because up until this point it was not clear where this could be done. During the November visit, European partner Dr Manfred Binder, an expert in molecular analysis of fungi, will work closely with Dr Kosonh to determine how best the funds in the project for setting up a molecular lab can be utilized to improve the facilities

available for molecular biology. Dr Kosonh recently received international funding to establish a plant molecular lab to determine the occurrence of GMO crops in Lao. Dove-tailing the fungal lab with his lab will give considerable added value to what could be achieved in the current project if the lab was established in isolation.

Outputs 3: Report on fungal poisonings

Data gathering – During the Workshop in November AT and MN will meet with contacts provided by the British Embassy in the main hospital in Vientiane to establish how best to collect data on national statistics of fungi poisonings.

Outputs 4: Market fungi

A number of visits were made by AT to two local markets in the April 2014 visit. This coincided with the start of the rainy season and confirmed that the local markets are excellent sources of material for gathering collections from local areas for deposition in the proposed national collection. It is also clear that this will have to be carried out on a regular basis. With the cancellation of the June trip, no further data could be collected from the markets.

Outputs 5: Logging study (scheduled for 2015)

Outputs 6: Matsutake study (brought forward from 2nd year)

The study of Matsutake is a project case study that was scheduled for 2015. However, a number of opportunities arose in the April 2014 visit by AT which would have allowed rapid progress on this study in 2014. AT met with the Dean of the NUoL Science faculty, who has a particular interest in Matsutake. She confirmed that it is only in the last 10 years that locals have been collecting this fungus extensively for the export market to China and Japan. She also confirmed where harvesting was being carried out and that the locals were using harvesting techniques which are not sustainable. Discussions with Ole Pedersen (ABP) led to the planning of a field survey in June 2014 to gather information on the collecting and ecology of Matsutake. AT and MN were going to accompany Ole and ABP field agents to an area in Xiengkhouan Province where Matsutake is intensively collected. As indicated earlier this trip could not take place, but the survey was carried out by ABP and resulted in a report completed in September 2014. This forms an excellent basis on which to plan a more detailed study on the ecology and harvesting methods in 2015 in the same area.

2a. 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.

The most significant problem encountered in the last six months was the cancellation of the intended visit to Laos in June 2014. Due to unforeseen circumstances the planned trip to establish the logistics for the first workshop had to be cancelled. AT – was diagnosed with a suspected blood clot in his right leg, In addition, Mark Newman (MN) was called for jury duty in what became an extended court case. The major setback that this created was in the cessation of preparation for the education workshop planned for late 2014. Planned participation in field work with ABP to collect data on the Matsutake fungus was also cancelled.

The initial ideas to host a workshop in 2014 with 10-12 participants were therefore altered to create a more focused workshop with fewer participants and activities aimed at fulfilling other components of the project planned outputs.

The main financial impact to the budget of the cancelled trip was in the partial loss of costs for the flight tickets and in the saving of the subsistence costs. A cost of £2000 had also been allocated for workshops costs and it is likely that there will be an under spend on this with the reduced size of the planned workshop.

2b. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS: No

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance NA

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (eg more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully as it is unlikely that any requests to carry forward funds will be approved this year. 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 and would like to talk to someone about the options available this year, please indicate below when you think you might be in a position to do this and what the reasons might be:

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

There are no other issues at present.

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with LTS International through a Change Request.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk . The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 20-035 Darwin Half Year Report**