

Darwin Initiative Main/Post/D+ Project Half Year Report (due 31 October 2016)

Project Ref No	21012
Project Title	Enhancing rural livelihoods and biodiversity conservation through responsible tourism, Myanmar
Country(ies)/Territory(ies)	Myanmar
Lead Organisation	Harrison Institute
Partner(s)	Myanmar Bird and Nature Society, Grow Back for Posterity, and University of Mandalay
Project Leader	Dr Paul Bates
Report date and number (e.g., HYR3)	25 October, 2016 – HYR3
Project website/ Twitter/ Blog/ Instagram etc	http://www.destination-ayeyarwady.com/
Funder (DFID/Defra)	DFID

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).

The following progress has been achieved (April-September, 2016).

Outputs 1.1a and 1.1b:

Activity: There was no direct activity relating to outputs 1.1a, 1.1b or 1.1c during this reporting period.

Output 1.2a:

Activity: Extensive preparatory work has been undertaken to develop two workshops on environmental safeguards, one at Hsithe village and one at Myitkangyi. The target audience is the adults and children of the two villages. To ensure take-up of the important messages about environmental safeguards, the workshops have been tailored specifically to the needs of the audience. They include talks, songs, interactive plays, and a colouring competition for the children built around the concept of waste management, pollution, and electro-fishing.

Objective: To develop environmental guidelines (especially relating to waste management, pollution and fishing practices) at the new destinations on the Upper Ayeyarwady.

Organised and led by: This preparatory work has been led by Beatrix Lanzinger of the Harrison Institute, with constant support from U Hpone Thant from UMTA (Union of Myanmar Tourism Association), Ma Hnin Witt Yee of GeoDiscover and various other colleagues in Myanmar, including cartoonists and musical and acting specialists.

Outputs: Greater awareness amongst villagers of the importance of environmental management.

Follow-up: The workshops are planned to take place in November, 2016 and the impact will be monitored subsequently.

Output 1.3a:

Activity: Much discussion took place concerning the development of an effective and meaningful environmental monitoring and data-logging system.

Objective: The aim is to develop a simple citizen science project. Tourists will monitor sightings of Irrawaddy dolphins, birds, other wildlife and also report on good and bad environmental

practices on the Ayeyarwady River.

Organised and led by: Discussions were led by the Harrison Institute with local CSO partner Myanmar Bird and Nature Society and with international colleagues working on similar projects elsewhere in the tropics.

Background: Ideally, it would be best to implement a geo-referenced logging system linked directly to smart phones. However, Myanmar has its own distinctive Myanmar mobile network that is not accessible to most international visitors, without purchasing a new SIM card and which has a limited coverage in rural areas. Therefore, since the vast majority of tourists cannot use their smart phones in Myanmar, a monitoring system built on this system seems unlikely to be effective.

Outputs: Therefore, following advice, we have opted initially for a simple reporting system based on printed and laminated identification cards (<http://www.destination-ayeyarwady.com/wildlife>). Reporting can undertaken by (1) writing directly on to photocopied sheets, which are handed over to the boat captain and then onwards to local CSO project personnel for subsequent transfer to Facebook, or (2) can be directly submitted to Facebook by the tourist/observer.

Follow-up: We will assess this monitoring system to determine take-up by tourists, especially the number and quality of the reports submitted.

Output 2.1b

Activity: Establishing strategic partnerships with business, village communities and local CSOs.

Objective: To develop long term, sustainable partnerships between the village communities of the two new destinations (Hsithe and Myitkangyi) and business partners in the responsible tourism sector. The same to be supported by the conservation sector CSOs.

Organised and led by: Paul Bates/Beatrix Lanzinger, Harrison Institute in conjunction with Ma Hnin Witt Yee of GeoDiscovery, U Hpone Thant of UMTA (Union of Myanmar Tourism Association) and Dr Thein Aung (Myanmar Bird and Nature Society [MBNS]).

Supported by: Darwin Initiative (financial) and GeoDiscovery, UMTA and MBNS (logistics and participatory support).

Outputs: A series of meetings in Yangon and extensive email correspondence led to inspection visits by tour operators to the new destinations, for example see the published report by Tour Mandalay <http://www.tourmandalay.travel/myanmar-in-focus-irrawaddy-community-conversation-project/>. The destinations are now included in Lonely Planet <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/myanmar-burma/mandalay/activities/day-trip-to-hsithe-village-from-mandalay-with-lunch/a/pa-act/v-39259P3/357092> and Tripadvisor <https://www.tripadvisor.com/AttractionProductDetail?product=39259P3&d=1010602&aidSuffix=xsell&partner=Viator>.

Follow-up: Following the annual rains (May to October) and the annual extensive flooding (July to September), the destinations will be officially opened to tour operators in November, 2016 (Hsithe on 1 November) and (Mytikangyi on 30 November). This launch will coincide with the start of the high season, which runs from November to March.

Output 2.3a and b

Activity: The project website, <http://www.destination-ayeyarwady.com/> is published and is being constantly updated. On the homepage it includes links to some of our partners in the tourism sector. There are also links to our Myanmar CSO project partners: Grow Back for Posterity - <http://www.growbackposterity.com/> and Myanmar Bird and Nature Society - <http://www.myanmarbirdnaturesociety.com/>, whose websites were also developed as part of this Darwin project.

Objective: The website is to (1) provide information about the objectives and activities of the project; (2) highlight the key actors who are implementing the project and also the Darwin Initiative sponsorship (3) provide high quality information and photographs to tour operators in the sustainable/ecotourism/nature tourism/soft adventure tourism sector and (4) provide important information (ie about pre-booking and terms and conditions) to independent travellers who may wish to visit the destinations.

Follow-up: The website is updated on a regular basis with new and relevant information.

Output 3.1a

Activity: Since the target number of 18 ecotourist guides has already been trained, no further training is planned.

Follow-up: However, it is planned to publish names, CVs, and contact details of the 18 ecotourist guides on a new website, which is currently being developed by the Harrison Institute in conjunction with the Myanmar Tourism Federation (<https://www.facebook.com/myanmartourismfederation.org/>) (see details in 3.1b below). The new website will be hosted at www.myanmar-ecotourism.org.

Output 3.1b

Background: Poor internet access has prevented the online training of two students in 'Sustainable Tourism Management'. Subsequently two students were selected for training in sustainable tourism at Mandalay College, Mandalay; the students to be sponsored by our project. However, in the run up to the general election of 8 November, 2015, the Myanmar government banned all international NGOs from signing MoUs with Myanmar HEIs. Without an MoU it is not possible to sponsor the students. So following exploratory discussions with the Myanmar Tourism Federation (MTF) it was determined that the greatest good could be achieved if resources should be used to develop a website for Myanmar ecotourism (www.myanmar-ecotourism.org).

Objective: The aim of this website is to promote sustainable, nature-based tourism that gives an economic value to conserving Myanmar's natural heritage.

Follow-up: Detailed discussions have now taken place about the content, hosting and design of the website with both MTF and the professional web designers MMNet.

2a. 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.

The most notable problem has been the 20% reduction in our in-country budget, owing to a change in the GBP/US\$ rate following the Brexit referendum. It should also be noted that since the original proposal was submitted in December 2013, the exchange rate has fallen from \$1.63-£1.00 to \$1.21-£1.00. This represents a 25.8% reduction in in-country budget (to cover all work in Myanmar and all salaries paid in Myanmar).

This has implications for the project in its final year, restricting its activities and limiting scope for important value-added additional activities such as the promoting of the destinations through a launch to tour operators in the sustainable sector, the government and media.

Lessons learnt – some issues cannot be planned for but require adaptation of the project to a new reality.

Other problems include – heavier flooding than normal during the monsoon season at our two destinations (especially July-August). This required additional expenditure on repairing and protecting the visitor centre in preparation for visitors in November, 2016. Lessons learnt - flexibility and adapting to new situations is very important.

Ongoing problems with one of our project partners, Grow Back for Posterity. We have now replaced this organisation in many areas of the project with some excellent and highly responsive support from in-country operator GeoDiscovery and with an independent Myanmar specialist in tourism based in Mandalay. This is a very positive outcome. Lessons learnt – as above, flexibility and adapting to new situations is very important.

A large number of local Myanmar holidays is causing problems since they restrict activities owing to shops being closed and individuals being unavailable. This is a particular problem when working on our destinations since when we commit time to working at these destinations we need to achieve much to ensure that the project runs to schedule.

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:	Yes
Formal change request submitted:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance	Partial response

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

No

3b. 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 rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary.

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

I think the Darwin Initiative needs to offer some urgent general advice and guidance about how projects are expected to operate in an environment where the GBP has seen such a significant reduction in value. This change in the exchange rate cannot be ignored and unless projects have between 20 and 25% overspend built into their budget, cannot be planned for.

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 e.g., Subject: 22-035 Darwin Half Year Report**