

Darwin Initiative Main/Post/D+ Project
Half Year Report
(due 31 October 2017)

Project Ref No:	23-025
Project Title:	Reducing Environmental Degradation through Sustainable Fuel Interventions in Afghanistan
Country(ies)/Territory(ies)	Afghanistan
Lead Organisation	Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
Partner(s)	Conservation Action for Afghan Mountain Communities (COAM) UN Environment
Project Leader	Tony Miller
Report date and number (e.g., HYR3)	HYR2
Project website/ Twitter/ Blog/ Instagram etc	In development
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).

Report Period: 1 April 2017 – 30 September 2017 (6 months)

For Output 1 Biodiversity, the last six months have concentrated on the establishment of monitoring plots and the collection of biodiversity information related to fuel wood collection and the collection of baseline data on the composition of plant species and communities in three valleys in Bamyan Province.

For this purpose, three monitoring plots have been established in each of three valleys. The plots represent areas which were used for fuel wood collection in the past, present and potentially in the future as determined by the communities themselves. Establishment of the plots, mapping and development of the surveying protocols has been carried out at Bamyan University in collaboration with project partners, and regular monitoring has been undertaken by Bamyan University students under the direction of Prof Abdullah Nawrozi.

Monitoring has focused on those species collected for use as fuel wood, why those species are used and collected, and how often. This has resulted in informal identification of 27 different species used for fuel wood, and detailed information about those that are most favoured, those that are used because the favoured species are less common now than previously, those that have additional value, and how they are collected. For example, bota/buta is the most preferred species due to it being a hot and long lasting burner with little smoke but is not found as much now and not at all in some locations. Kharkoda and Khar are the most common species used, primarily as they are the most commonly found since buta is no longer commonly available. Each of these local names have variants that likely represent distinct species, detailed targeted

photographs of key characters as well as herbarium specimens are being collated to enable formal identification.

Differences in the species present and collected, and how they are collected, shows some variation between valleys and communities, and some variation among households in communities. Community level management – both in areas of collection and in community collections targeting specific households before winter – have been identified.

This has ensured that 27 students have received not only training in field survey techniques, but that these have been targeted to specific outcomes and have been subsequently practised and repeated in the field.

Future work will identify more specific information to be collected (for example targeting specific plant species characters to enable fast identification, establishing species for monitoring ecosystem status and any improvements noted), and comparisons among sites within and between valleys to determine the effects of fuel wood collection on biodiversity and potential recovery due to more sustainable and less frequent collection practices.

Capacity development is increasing, especially among students and also with government agencies who as well as conducting M&E activities are also accompanying COAM staff on interviews and field work. Further awareness raising activities are planned. Technicians are being trained in cook stove manufacture, installation and maintenance.

Detailed interviews on the collection of fuel wood, the different types of fuel sources, and the effort and expense required to collect them are ongoing. These also show variation among households, villages and valleys. Further, detailed self-rated health assessments have been trialled and are being rolled out to additional communities to encompass a wider range of household scenarios and genders. Expenditure on health care may require some revision to determine benefits, as most interviews have indicated that little or no expenditure on healthcare is made for routine coughs and respiratory issues for either adults or children during the winter except in very extreme cases. Initial surveys suggest that women consider their own health and that of their children to be particularly poor during the winter, with little opportunity for amelioration.

In terms of alternative fuel sources installed, the first positive comments regarding cook stoves have mostly been related to the improvements in indoor smoke against a background of poor self-rated health especially in the winter. This is because the cook stoves are used indoors for both cooking and heating during the winter, whereas heating is not required during the summer and cooking is often done out of doors.

Interviews have started to reveal a detailed picture of the daily lives of women in Bamyan. Assessments as to how these change – for better or worse – after alternative fuel installations – are currently under way and will be expanded.

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.

A change request was submitted just before the end of Year One of the project. This was due to agreement that additional funds could be requested in Year One to cover losses incurred due to exchange rate variation post-Brexit, with the understanding that this additional amount would be recouped later during the project. To make this adjustment, three months were removed from the end of the project meaning it will be complete by 31 March 2019. A reduction in the number of valleys involved in monitoring and assessments was also indicated. This change request was approved.

At this stage, it was communicated to us that it was disappointing that no attempt had been made to access additional funds. It was found to be very difficult to access funds to fulfil project requirements already initially funded but reduced due to exchange rate losses. However, we did in fact obtain funding to undertake related work in Tajikistan thus covering costs for UK partners, but then could not get visas for Afghan partners at that time due to Taliban activity in

border areas. We are in discussion with UN Environment about funding for this project and will report at end of year two.

While we have endeavoured to maintain regular communication with our Afghan partners, this has also been disrupted at times by inadequacies of the Afghan internet network which is routinely slow or non-existent. We do not believe, however, that this has had anything more than a minor effect on the outputs of the project, but has resulted in some delays in sharing information and images. As a result, the project website is not yet complete, but should be live before the end of 2017.

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	Yes

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g., 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. 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.

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

Not at this time.

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**