



## Darwin Initiative Main/Post/D+ Project Half Year Report

**Project reference:** 25-030

**Project title:** Biodiversity Conservation and Community Development in Al-Makhrour Valley in Bethlehem, Palestine.

**Country(ies)/territory(ies):** Palestine

**Lead organisation:** Bethlehem University - Palestine Institute of Biodiversity and Sustainability/Palestine Museum of Natural History (BU-PIBS/PMNH).

**Partner(s):** Institute for Community Partnership (ICP).; Pioneer Consultancy Centre for Sustainable Development (PCC); Byspokes Sustainable Community Development.

**Project leader:** Professor Mazin Qumsiyeh

**Report date and number (e.g., HYR3):** 31-10-2018 Number: HYR1

**Project website/blog/social media etc.:** [palestinenature.org/conservation](http://palestinenature.org/conservation)

### 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 project started on September 1, 2018. Therefore, only works for the month of September 2018 will be included in this report as it covers the reporting period from April 1, 2018 until September 30, 2018. Most of the works conducted during September focused on preparations. Only one activity in the **logical framework** was due during this reporting period, the activity was analysing literature reviews for national and global relevant research documents. This activity included a desk study and collection of data of relevance to the project and its outputs. The main indicator from the log frame other than hiring and getting organized was: 1.1 Analyse literature for national and global relevant research documents. For this we did a comprehensive desktop study gathering all relevant resources including a literature review was done (part of it also done in October). Please use the follo

The purpose of the desk study is to evaluate existing literature and other resources available in this area covering all aspects of the forthcoming work. The three main aspects covered via studying resources and literature review included: a) biodiversity, b) anthropological issues including agriculture, and c) ecotourism. Understanding the landscape and what was studied before us is critical in developing our methodologies to do our own surveys. As can be seen from the link above, the desktop study reveals areas well studied and others in need of further study. Also the Desktop study showed us the map of the world heritage site that includes Wadi Al-Makhrour but also Wadi Al-Aion between Husan and Battir which we thus decided to include (instead of Cremisan) based on the revised understanding of the area from both the Desktop study and initial exploratory field work (see section 3.10). Thus Husan is included in one of the villages instead of Al-Khader.

The other preparation works focused on the following issues:

#### 1- Recruitment of the project manager and project leader.

**1.1 Project Leader:** Prof. Qumsiyeh serves as overall project leader and was contracted as such starting 1 Sept. 2018 (project start date) and ending 31 March 2019. The contract will be renewed on yearly basis, according to the availability of funds received from the Darwin Initiative. He started to allocate >20% of his work for this project as per project plan. Project leader job description is posted here and his signed contract is here:

**1.2 Project Manager:** The process for hiring the project manager started by announcing a

vacancy on the Palestinian most accessible website in Palestine for job vacancies as well as in local newspaper. The announcement was published on August 29, 2018 and the deadline for applying was on September 7, 2018. See project manager vacancy announcement posted on jobs.ps: Please click hyperlink below to find a summary of the selection process.

Documents related to the selected Project Manager are available here including his

1.3 Under the contribution of the PIBS/PMNH for the project, the project management assigned a **team of researchers** from PMNH staff to provide support to the project. The team consists of: Elias Handal (50%), Mohammad Najajreh (50%). In addition, Mohammad Abu Sarhan, Reena Saed, and Aysha Al-Wahsh will provide support when requested by the project management based on the needs during the implementation of the project.

## **2- Conducting preparation meetings with the project Partners, Staff, and key stakeholders:**

**2.1 Partners:** PMNH conducted a series of individual and group meetings with PCC, ICP and the grant control office at Bethlehem University. The meetings focused on planning and preparation for the progress of the project.

**2.2 Staff:** PMNH held meetings concerning the preparation of action plans as well as allocation of tasks among the project team.

**2.3 Stakeholders:** The Project Management met with the Environment Quality Authority (EQA), and the ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) on September 13, 2018 to discuss the management and conservation plan that the ministry has prepared for the area classified by UNESCO as world heritage site (WHS). The targeted area of PMNH's Al-Makhrour project (funded by Darwin Initiative) intersects with the WHS. During the meeting it was also discussed establishing a Steering Committee for the PMNH Al-Makhrour project. Following this initial meeting, another meeting was conducted at MoTA on September 25, with broader participation from PA's ministries, village councils and municipalities (including targeted communities of PMNH's Al-Makhrour project), and other actors who implement projects in the area. At this meeting, PMNH Al-Makhrour project management presented the project, and facilitated discussions focused on incorporating the project into the management plan and the other PA institutions plans relevant to the project. (Please see annex 1 that contains some pictures from the meeting).

**3- Conducting exploratory field trips to the project site:** During the month of September, the project team conducted field trips to Al-Makhrour valley. The purpose of the visits was to prepare the plans for the implementation of the project (please see section 3.10 of the Desk study for the details)

**4- Expenditures:** During this reporting period, the only expenditure was the salaries for the project leader and the project manager for the month of September 2018. So, the expenses till 30/09/2018 . Please click on the below hyperlink to find the expenses sheet till 30/09/2018, as well as the expenditures supporting documents.

### **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 main challenge faced during this reporting period concerns the development and signing agreement with one of the project partners, specifically, the agreement with PCC. Basically, the challenge arose because PCC is a private consulting firm and when the proposal was written, we had not anticipated the complexity of reconciling Bethlehem University (BU) accounting systems with a private consulting firm. PCC and BU finance office tried to figure out alternative ways to resolve this issue, but PCC could not fulfil the BU accounting system requirements. The work to resolve this challenge continued to the next reporting period. In the end, a change request form was submitted to Darwin Initiation in October aiming at reallocating the agriculture

tasks from PCC to BU with their associated budgets.

This action ensure that BU will execute those parts of the project relating to agriculture in-house at the University, including BU's Institute of Community Partnership (ICP) which is already a partner of this project. PCC will work on short-term service agreements for two periods to only focus on the plant biodiversity inventory works and to prepare the Biodiversity management plan. The logic behind this is that short-term service agreements are less complicated financially. Thus the line item for SALARY for Roubina Ghattas, director of PCC would now change to consultancy contracts (both for Roubina and for other consultancy work to help in the agricultural areas). While the agriculture part of the work and its related budgets such as salary for Mohammad Abu Amrieh of PCC would then be managed by the project leader/BU and be done per BU internal procedures and Darwin policies.

Budget-wise, funds that were to be allocated to the partner PCC (including overhead) would now be spent directly by BU per procedures including making short term consultancy for Mrs. Roubina Ghattas/PCC. We will try our best to ensure that these changes do not affect the timely implementation of project plan/log-frame.

**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/No

Formal change request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No (Not yet, this is happened in the next reporting period)

**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 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?**

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. Additionally, if you were funded under R24 and asked to provide further information by your first half year report, please attach your response as a separate 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](mailto: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**