



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2021)

Project reference	DIR25S2\100072 No: 26-004
Project title	Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Sierra Leone
Lead organisation	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Partner(s)	Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) and the Gola Rainforest Conservation Limited by Guarantee (GRC LG)
Project leader	Richard Dixon
Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)	31 st October 2021 HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	www.golarainforest.org @Golarainforest

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

Progress by Activity

Output 1 (Areas of community forest of high conservation value (HCV-CF) in target area are identified and current rate of loss quantified)

Activities 1.1 & 1.2: Not scheduled for this period - Work completed in Year 1.

Activity 1.3: Not scheduled for this period - Work completed in Year 2; a species report will be presented alongside the 2022 Main Annual Report.

Activity 1.4: In Year 2, we identified that the 28 Community Champions for Globally Threatened Species (CC-GTSS) had challenges providing data, particularly related to low literacy levels. We therefore identified semi-structured interviews and participatory mapping exercises as the best methods for the CC-GTSS to capture local communities' knowledge of GTSS and community conflict 'hotspots'. This activity started in February/March 2021 and was followed up in May/June 2021 as scheduled. During this time, the CC-GTSS were successful in gathering information from a wider section of the village population (e.g., older persons, ex-hunters or other forest users). Responding to CC-GTSS feedback, we scheduled additional time for the participatory mapping exercises. After three months, in August/September 2021, the GRC Research team facilitated the transfer of all local communities' knowledge of GTSS and community conflict 'hotspots' by assisting the CC-GTSS in finalising the participatory mapping exercise. As well as producing important information, the exercise helped to highlight the role that the CC-GTSS are playing and to build community ownership of the community forest areas to be protected.

Activity 1.5: Field protocols for this activity consisted of deploying 37 camera traps along the Malema/Liberian border and retrieving them every three months for one year to establish GTSS areas of activity and potential migration routes. In the reporting period, the Research & Monitoring (R&M) department deployed and collected 67 camera traps (33 in the first quarter and 34 in the second), four of which successfully captured photos of African Forest Elephants. These are the first pictures of elephants collected in the GRNP after many years. Together with images of Pygmy Hippos (captured by seven camera traps) and Western Chimpanzees

(captured by two camera traps), these images will allow the Natural Resource Management Committees (NRMCs) to identify further areas of interest for connectivity with GFNP. It is important to stress the active role of the CC-GTSSs, who collaborated in the selection of the deployment sites based on detection of animal signs.

Activity 1.6: Whilst there is still outstanding work, we have identified some HCV-CF locations. In the Year 2 Change Request, we agreed that the identification of HCV-CF sites needed to have a more bottom-up approach if it was to be sustainable and owned by communities. Therefore, through the Community Forestry process, we started working with the NRMCs to identify these HCV-CF areas with the information we have currently gathered through Activity 1.3 (Globally Threatened Species (GTS) and forest dependent species occurrence). We still plan to undertake more comprehensive joint species modelling to ensure that this is aligned with the NRMCs work, and an interim report will be presented alongside the 2022 Main Annual Report.

Activity 1.7: Not scheduled for this period - Work due to be undertaken in Year 4.

Output 2 (Malema communities have increased awareness of the importance of maintaining forest and biodiversity for the REDD+ project and take an active role in their conservation and monitoring as a tool for long-term sustainability)

Activity 2.1: No roadshows have been completed as the rainy season (usually April – August) has been prolonged this year into late September. However, this period has been used to start developing new communication and outreach strategies to be rolled out during the dry season. In April 2021, a panel of GRC and CSSL staff joined to discuss challenges associated with outreach activities and delivering messages. The discussion was centred on the findings of a small survey conducted in some of the forest edge communities (FECs) by the Darwin Social Scientist showing that messages from roadshows and meetings do not always flow to the wider community. Some excellent proposals came from the team and will be tentatively implemented in the new roadshows, including the use of drama delivered by community members to communicate topics more effectively. In addition, from September 2021, all the relevant workstream leads started providing field updates and activity plans to the Community Outreach workstream to help design the key messages of the roadshows and radio programmes.

Activity 2.2/2.3: After MoUs were signed in February/March 2021 with the 28 CC-GTSSs, stipulating their work and remuneration, the R&M department visited the 14 FECs twice (May/June and August/September 2021) to retrieve the data collected by the CC-GTSSs during patrols. On both occasions, refresher training was provided by the R&M team for the less literate CC-GTSSs who had reported difficulties using the navigation sheets. This data is currently stored in the R&M department and was used in the participatory mapping exercises (see 1.4). As well as producing important data, the exercise helped build community ownership of the community forestry areas to be protected and to highlight the role that the CC-GTSSs are playing.

Activities 2.4 & 2.5: Not scheduled for this period - Work due to be undertaken in Year 4.

Output 3 (Communities in target area develop village community land use and agricultural training plans to regulate natural resource use in HCV-CF areas whilst increasing yields in existing farmland to meet community food needs and prevent encroachment on community forests)

Activity 3.1: Not scheduled for this period - Work completed in Year 1.

Activity 3.2: Existing community boundaries have been predicted using weighted Voronoi polygons. In Year 2, we identified that the best way to ensure that land use zone mapping was sustainable and owned by the communities was to establish NRMCs in each community before starting the mapping. NRMCs were established in Year 2 Q4, and the mapping of the HCV-CFs has commenced in Year 3 Q1, but it has not been completed. The main reasons for the delay are (i) the limited Community Forestry capacity within GRC (see section 2a), and (ii) that we are using a staggered approach to community rollout in order to ensure we have sufficient team

members focused on the activity.

Activity 3.3: As identified in the Year 2 Change Request, this activity was replanned from being a one-off activity to an annual activity, so that agricultural targets can be revisited based on community feedback. In Year 3, in addition to continuing Year 2 plans, beekeeping will be implemented, together with Organic/Compost fertilizer (Vaama) and intercropping with agricultural crops.

Activity 3.4: As identified in Year 2, the Co-Management and Land Use Planning (LUP) Officer has undertaken a series of stakeholder meetings to ensure that there is alignment in the land use planning process between Gola with other areas in Sierra Leone. In September 2021, a meeting was held with national partners and government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) to agree steps for community forest (CF) and LUP road maps.

Activity 3.5: As identified in the Year 2 Change Request, this training plan has been revisited along with the identification of agricultural targets for Year 3. The Community Outreach workstream trained 16 participants on ginger cultivation (in Vaama community), 66 participants on nursery establishment and IVS production (in Dukor, Makpoima, Seiyama and Mogboima), and 64 participants on cocoa out planting and economic trees (in Mayengema, Misila, Goli, Bani, Wangikor, Congo, Peyama and Dukor). In addition, marketing on cocoa is ongoing and Malema Cocoa Farmer's Association (MACFA) is currently buying in the targeted FECs.

Activity 3.6: The social scientist has visited communities, speaking to leaders and community members about livelihood issues, and gathering information about how GRC's work is received, projects' performance and understanding local constraints especially in food security. We have drafted a data collection workplan, a data analysis and a situation analysis.

Activity 3.7: Not scheduled for this period - Work due to be undertaken in Year 4.

Output 4 (Target communities trial implementation of land use and agricultural training plans which regulate natural resource use in HCV-CFs sites / other community forests being protected whilst increasing crop production / diversification in existing farmland to meet community food needs and prevent encroachment on HCV-CF sites / other community forests being protected)

Activity 4.1: 1,535 cocoa seedlings were out planted in 7 demonstration plots (in Mayengema, Misila, Goli, Bani, Wangikor, Congo and Peyama), alongside 1,575 mixture of plantain/banana suckers, 84 indigenous economic trees, and 120 improved seedlings. Eight bushels of NERICA L19 variety husk rice procured and distributed in Dokor, Makpoima, Seiyama and Mogboima, alongside tools for establishing four inland valley swamp (IVS) production sites. Two out of four developed IVS plots have been established in Dukor and Makpoima, while Seiyama and Mogboima outplanted the nursed rice seedlings in an undeveloped swamp. Input and materials (ginger, hoes, head pan, gardening liners) were provided to the Vaama community to establish one acre of ginger.

Activity 4.2: The Community Outreach workstream identified Gender Action Learning System methodology and approach as a gender sensitive training for one community member in each of the 14 villages. Proposed budget for this activity was prepared and captured in the next quarterly projection.

Activity 4.3: Not scheduled for this period - Work due to be undertaken in Year 4.

Activity 4.4: Not scheduled for this period - Work completed in Year 1.

Activity 4.5: The Community Outreach workstream mobilized working groups and trained them on ginger cultivation and out planting of rice seedlings in the IVS plots. Cash for work schemes were implemented for the clearing and formation of canals on IVS demo-plots (10 people per community), brushing, clearing, digging for ginger cultivation (20 people per community), and land clearing, digging and outplanting of seedling (20 people per community).

Activity 4.6: No 'food/cash for work' schemes have been undertaken to improve access to local markets, as these activities would usually be focused on the dry season. However, this period has been used to draw up a short list of priority options that will be completed during the

dry season.

Output 5 (14 Target communities have committed through Conservation Agreements to protect HCV-CFs / sustainably manage their Community Forests in return for agricultural training and equipment to increase yields sustainably that will be provided by the GRC REDD+ programme)

Activity 5.1: Not scheduled for this period - Work completed in Year 2.

Activity 5.2: Not scheduled for this period - Work due to be undertaken in Year 4.

Activity 5.3: Not scheduled for this period - Work due to be undertaken in Year 4.

Activity 5.4: NRMCs have been established in Year 2 as a means of fully involving the people in the implementation process. In Year 3, we worked to gain the consent and endorsement of the people in the 14 targeted communities for the effective implementation of the project. Due to a delay in the identification and mapping of the HCV-CFs, bylaws, land use plans and management plans have yet to be signed. We aim to complete the activity by the end of Year 3.

Activity 5.5: We have trained the NRMC members in their roles and responsibilities, including sustainable natural resource management and leadership. The delay in the identification and mapping of the HCV-CFs has also delayed the development of Conservation Agreements between the 14 target communities and GRC.

Activity 5.6: Not scheduled for this period - Work due to be undertaken in Year 4.

Output 6 (GRC (proponent of the Gola REDD+ project) reviews/refines their model for providing livelihood support to communities in the REDD+ leakage belt to deliver greater impact for biodiversity and livelihoods)

Activity 6.1: Not scheduled for this period - Work due to be undertaken in Year 4.

Activity 6.2: Not scheduled for this period - Work due to be undertaken in Year 4.

Output 7 (Project partners increase their capacity to implement the Gola programme)

Activity 7.1: Not scheduled for this period - Work due to be undertaken in Year 4.

Activity 7.2: Not scheduled for this period - Work due to be undertaken in Year 4.

Activity 7.3: Since his deployment to GRC in March 2021, the new Finance Technical Assistant has been working with GRC staff to support the improvement of financial reporting, as well as of processes, governance, and controls. Changes to Finance operating models have been agreed and the implementation of a new financial package will be rolled out in January 2022.

Activity 7.4: The anthropology and conservation conference panel has been organised, with presentations submitted from affiliates of Wageningen, RSPB and GRC. Anthropology conference abstracts have been submitted by Darwin Social Scientist and GRC team.

Activity 7.5: A draft workplan has been completed by the Darwin Social Scientist with ideas about potential training schedule. The trainings will take place in November 2021 when a team of social scientists from the RSPB will visit Sierra Leone.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for Covid-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

A key lesson learned was the need to increase the limited human resources focused on community forestry within GRC, which negatively impacted on our ability to complete the land use zones mapping as planned. As such, GRC management will recruit a new Community Forestry position and increase the seniority of the current position. Recruitment is still ongoing, but we hope to complete it in the coming months.

Another challenge was the limited project management capacity embedded in the Darwin Project. This capacity was initially provided by the RSPB Country Manager, who took over the Darwin management in Year 2. After resignation of the RSPB Country Manager in May 2021, this gap was filled by the RSPB Head of Greater Gola Landscape and by the Research Technical Advisor. The GRC Directors have agreed to increase local capacity in GRC for Project Management.

2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of Covid-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

We had to replan and rebudget the whole project in response to the delay cumulated as an effect of the repatriation and furlough of RSPB staff based in Sierra Leone, and of the limitation in some of the fieldwork due to movement restrictions, reduced working hours, and curfew. There is a residual impact on the project in terms of the speed in which some activities could be implemented, but we are fairly in line with the timetable submitted alongside the 2020 Half Year Report in a change request, and that included a request for a 6 month no-cost extension to the project.

2c. 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:	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 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. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

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

No further issues

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 DO NOT send these in the same email.

Please send your **completed report by email** to 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: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**