



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2020)

Project reference	26-013
Project title	Conservation and poverty alleviation through sustainable ranching in Paraguay
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Paraguay – Chaco
Lead organisation	Wildlife Conservation Society - WCS
Partner(s)	Minerva Foods; National Vice-Ministry of Livestock; Faculty of Veterinarian Sciences - The National University of Asuncion; Government of the Department of Alto Paraguay
Project leader	Maria Del Carmen Fleytas
Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)	HYR2 – 31 October 2020
Project website/blog/social media	https://paraguay.wcs.org/ https://www.facebook.com/WCSParaguay/

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).

Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic combined with unseasonable heavy rainfall our project started at a slower pace, as expected. However, through adaptive management and a relative improvement of external conditions we are returning to the established schedule and are making significant progress in achieving its objectives as described below:

Output 1: Improved sustainable ranching systems

1.1 Conduct baseline economic, social and environmental surveys:

Baseline work has been completed, with a total of 197 surveys with small to medium-scale producers, and 8 surveys with large-scale ranchers. We have therefore surpassed our original target, having secured assistance for more beneficiaries than initially planned and expected.

Small producers (project goal: 150 families):

Our small-scale beneficiaries are located in the towns of Puerto Casado (59 families), Puerto Guaraní (66 families), Fuerte Olimpo (26 families), San Carlos (16 families) and Toro Pampa (30 families). From the total of 809 people in these families 370 (46%) are women, and will be directly benefitted by the training and other assistance provided by the project. We now have a complete profile of our beneficiaries that will enable us better orient our assistance. For example, 89% of beneficiaries are agricultural producers, all of which have cattle and none of which have agricultural crops. One hundred percent of producers showed a clear need for technical assistance, as reflected by the low level of productivity in their properties, as well as by the lack of basic services (access to safe water, housing, others) needed to ensure basic quality of life. Also, one hundred percent of producers have low economic income, and isolated situations that aggravate their vulnerability. In addition, 89% of the producers surveyed depend exclusively on cattle production for their family income, and yet almost 100% of them consider their production insufficient to fulfill their basic needs. As a result, 11% of producers are currently developing other economic activities.

Large producers (project goal: 8 properties):

All of the targeted producers have now been surveyed, adding up to a total of 196,688 hectares of ranches working with the project, distributed in Campo Nuevo (30,000 hectares), San Juan (22,000 hectares), Campo Grande: (38,627 hectares), El Nono (4,000 hectares), Montanía (37,411 hectares), La Huella (45,000 hectares), Paso de Tigre (6,650 hectares) and Rodeo Porá (12,000 hectares). They are located in the Departments of Boqueron and Alto Paraguay, and are 100% devoted to cattle breeding and/or fattening. They all have the necessary infrastructure needed to produce, have basic services

provided, and are located in the proximity of Defensores del Chaco National Park, the largest protected area of the Chaco. As such, any effort made to make their cattle production more sustainable will greatly benefit this protected area and the surrounding region. All eight properties have human wildlife conflicts including cattle-felid conflict, causing economic losses variable in severity from one ranch to another. Therefore, non-lethal predation control measures and the prohibition of wildlife hunting will be key good practices to elevate productivity.

1.2 Deliver training for sustainable ranching:

This activity has started during this period and we made significant progress. With our partner institution the Vice Ministry of Livestock we have developed 17 one-day training modules including theory and practice, and reached 135 people to date. The subjects covered in this training efforts include forage management, basic animal health care, production planning and types of pasture for animal food security.

1.3. Deliver training for water management and treatment:

After a cooperation agreement was signed with the Health Center at Puerto Casado city, the public office has provided us with statistics on the health situation of the community, concluding that poor water quality is one of the main problems, especially affecting children. The most common health issues derived from bad water quality are diarrhea, dysentery, vomits, intestinal parasites, and nutritional deficiency. About 93% of families who benefitted with this project have no access to clean, safe water. Water distribution only covers the center of the city, while people working in agricultural properties drink water for any natural source they can find or from water reservoirs devoted to farm animals. Only 8% of Puerto Casado inhabitants have their own source of safe, clean water. The project is providing a practical initial solution to this problem by delivering an easy to use, artisanal mud filter, which turns any water into safe water in just 20-30 minutes through a filtering process.

WCS delivered 33 water filters to equal number of families this semester, and we also provided training in water management and use and importance of the filters to 49 people, of which 28 were women and 21 men.

1.4. Assist ranchers for on-the-ground implementation:

We have made visits to large ranches and small ranchers under this activity:

Large ranchers: we have visited twice each of the 8 large ranches Rodeo Pora, El Nono, Paso del Tigre, Campo Grande, La Huella, Montania, San Juan and Campo Nuevo, to advise owners on best practices for pasture management, water collection and storage, wildlife-cattle coexistence measures, and discuss simple strategies to increase productivity while conserving the environment, such as rotational grazing systems, electric fencing and others. We are also systematizing camera trap data to analyze and monitor their existing biodiversity.

Small ranchers: we have managed to get in-kind matching funds in the form of agricultural seeds and genetic resources (bovine sperm) as donations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, to assist our beneficiaries. Another project WCS is executing in Paraguay with USAID support also provided some inputs to support the installation of demonstrational plots, such as small forage-making machines, materials for veterinary use, wires to fence the plots, solar-powered electrifiers, batteries, and others. We have also launched two pilot projects with two small producers in the Puerto Casado location who have made small investments on their own, to help systematize their experience. These experiences will then serve as models for future field training to other beneficiaries.

Pilot project 1: installation of pasture and rotational grazing system: This pilot has so far showed very good results in terms of efficiency, since the pasture seeds chosen had 100% of germination rate, and the rotation of cattle showed a weight increase in cattle of 80-100 kilograms per head in one month, this is, at least 30% increase from baseline weight. This is already one of the demonstrational plots installed to promote adoption of good practices in pasture management, being used by WCS with the Vice Ministry of Livestock during the last visits for practical training with small producers. During the upcoming semester, the ranch owner will test with a different group of cattle, the resiliency of this pasture and the efficiency of the rotation system after a long period (six months) of extreme drought.

Pilot project 2: grass recovery through cleaning and rotational grazing: this pilot was aimed at registering the resiliency and recovery capacity of a grass variety (Gatton panic) in the characteristic soils of the Chaco region. The cultural work of cleaning weeds and wiring was performed, but the long period without rain made the proper growth of the pasture impossible to register.

Output 2: Conservation Agreements

2.1. Generate Conservation Agreements:

We have signed conservation agreements with all 8 large landowners and with the 197 small producers, where both parties commit to a series of actions; ranchers to pursue conservation outcomes and WCS/the project to technical assistance in exchange for those conservation actions.

2.2. Monitor performance of Conservation Agreements:

During field visits, we have a checklist of the commitments made by proprietors and we regularly review their fulfilment with them. With large producers, this has been more in the form of conversations on the good practices for and incipient results of current cattle management and the conditions of their properties. With small producers, the main progress has been based on extended training provided and provision of veterinary and agricultural inputs, which will allow them to improve their productivity, cattle

health and management. All the assistance provided by WCS and the Vice Ministry of Livestock was already considering the adoption of best practices as committed in the agreements, so that their replication and fulfilment was immediate.

Output 3: Diffusion and replication of best practices:

3.1. Elaboration of a final publication: this activity is to be completed by Year 3.

3.2. Local, national and regional diffusion of best practices:

We have already started promoting best practices through a local radio station, "Frecuencia Pantanal", which covers most of the project area where small beneficiaries are located, reaching not only them but also the radio's broader audience. This audience currently approaches about 3,000 listeners, but the radio and associated social networks (especially Facebook) have the potential to reach the entire Department of Alto Paraguay, which has over 15,000 inhabitants. WCS and one of the local leaders have also been actively spreading the message about the project activities and initial results through social networks:

August 5, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/WCSParaguay/posts/1362408280612096>;

August 27, 2020:

<https://www.facebook.com/omingopatrocinio.benitezbalbuena/posts/3275380319211731>

September 8, 2020:

<https://www.facebook.com/omingopatrocinio.benitezbalbuena/posts/3310311355718627>

We have also prepared signage showing the Darwin Initiative support which have been placed in the demonstrational plots in order to acknowledge our donor.

3.3. Field exchange visits:

A first exchange visit was performed during this semester. A large rancher, Federico Robinson, who owns 5 ranches in the Eastern and Chaco regions, and with large experience in cattle management under all type of conditions, visited with WCS staff 4 of the 8 large ranches which are part of the project. During these visits, each rancher exchanged ideas with Robinson on pasture management, water collection/storage, productivity increase without land use conversion and many others. The properties visited included Campo Grande, El Nono, Rodeo Pora and Paso de Tigre.

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.

COVID-19 has been obviously a big challenge, due to travel restrictions imposed by the Government and the risk/fear of getting infected between our staff and also among beneficiaries in the field. In addition, the **climatic conditions** and weather patterns represented a very significant challenge as well. The irregular distribution of heavy rainfalls, and the unusual duration of those, led to initial delay in completing the baseline surveys. However, we do not foresee any further delay in timetable of project activities, as we have been successfully resuming actions in the last months, to the best of our abilities, and as a result returning to schedule. Another problem we expect to successfully overcome in the upcoming months is the **lack of participation of some partners**, even after repeated communications and attempts from our side. This has been due to different reasons such as political context (the Government of Alto Paraguay has been prioritizing other populations where they have more votes) or commercial issues (Minerva Foods is facing accusations of monopolizing the beef market by cattle ranchers). Regarding budget, we do foresee some **unspent funds** at the end of this year, and we are processing a modification request in order to better distribute the available funds. The main consequence of three main delays we experienced, all of them out of our control, is a delay in the start the project (it started in July 2019 instead of April the same year, due to internal donor issues).

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.

Despite the fact that our project already experienced some delay due to its late start in July 2019, we were able to make up for such delay and had been spending our funds according to schedule. After a very rainy period in February 2020, March 2020 was a key month for completing field trips and finishing baseline data collection, but due to COVID-19 pandemic, we could not carry out those activities at the intended level and therefore could not completely spend all the funds we had allocated for these activities. COVID-19 pandemic made the Paraguayan government halt all activities, including internal and external travel, since March 7th, 2020 to end of June 2020. This has not affected as much our scheduled activities, which we have been able to resume, but it has affected our budget, since we are carrying an underspend since Year 1, and as Year 2 is slowly developing still with some COVID-19 restrictions, we foresee budget will still not be completely spent this second year.

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: Yes/No

Formal change request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No

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.

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**