



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

Project reference	26-019
Project title	Secure Wetland Ecosystems to improve livelihoods through Community Conservation Agreements
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Uganda
Lead organisation	NatureUganda
Partner(s)	BirdLife International Wetland Management Department (WMD) Kabale and Rubanda District Local Governments Ramsar Committee of East Africa (RAMCEA) Community Rural Development (CRD)
Project leader	Mr. Achilles Byaruhanga
Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)	31 October 2020 HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	www.natureuganda.org https://twitter.com/NatureUganda https://www.facebook.com/NatureUganda

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).

Output 1: Wetland ecosystem values known and availed to local and national decision makers.

Progress

During the first year of the project, NatureUganda (NU) conducted assessments for ecosystem evaluation, assessed the quality of peat from the three different wetlands in the project area and assessed the impact of different farming practices and conservation activities on carbon emissions. The studies provided information to commence on the stakeholder meetings especially local governments to raise awareness on wetland resources and values. In this regard, NatureUganda with support from the Darwin initiative project organised three meetings with stakeholders focusing on Local governments in Kabale and Rubanda districts districts. The meetings included a preliminary planning meeting with District Natural Resource team to lay a way forward for the Lake Bunyonyi Ramsar site designation process. This meeting, held in Kabale town resulted into a stakeholders' consultation meeting of the two districts on the Ramsar designation process (Annex 1).

The stakeholders' consultation meeting on Lake Bunyonyi Ramsar designation was held at the shores of Lake Bunyonyi in Kabale. This meeting introduced the stakeholders to the bio-social components of Bunyonyi and the Ecosystem services derived thereof. The meeting highlighted the values of Lake Bunyonyi and related wetlands in the development of the landscape as well as in improving community livelihoods. This meeting included stakeholders from both districts of Kabale and Rubanda as well as experts on biodiversity and ecosystem services. Results from the ecosystem services and biodiversity baseline studies were shared and both districts pledged to fast track the designation process through the respective district councils.

Subsequently, the Kabale district council held its council meeting and recommended to the Ministry of Water and Environment (who are the focal point for Ramsar Convention) to progress with designation of Lake Bunyonyi wetland system as a Ramsar site (Annex 2). A supporting letter from the District

council will be provided recommending to the Ministry to move the designation process forward.

Output 2: Wetlands biodiversity assessed, indicator species monitored and data obtained and used to evaluate Ramsar status of the sites to enable designation.

Progress

Following the completion of the biodiversity and ecosystem services baseline studies (see previous April 2020 Annual report), NatureUganda started to synthesise the data needed for completing the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS). Based on the information from the studies, the wetlands qualify for the Ramsar designation under the following criteria; Criteria 2, 3, 6 and 9. The RIS is a standard guide that determines the need or qualification of the site to be or not be a Ramsar site. The process to fill the RIS has started and after satisfactory completion, it will be presented to the National Ramsar Committee and with support from RAMCEA, the form will be assessed and forwarded to the Ramsar secretariat for final consideration for Ramsar designation. We target to complete this process by end of 2021.

Output 3: Community stakeholders engaged in the implementation of Community Conservation Agreements to sustainably manage and wisely use wetlands

Progress

Since the completion of the baseline studies for biodiversity and ecosystem services, and the mobilisation of local governments to support the project activities, it was time to mobilise the local communities in the project sites. Using experience from other NatureUganda project where CCAs have been implemented, we embarked on the feasibility assessments for the status of the selected communities for engaging in the wetlands conservation in these areas. Attached are the field assessment reports of selected communities (Annex 3). Three of the community groups have already signed the conservation agreements. The remaining seven groups have completed the assessments and initial training in wetlands management and conservation as well as governance. The conservation agreements will be completed in the next reporting period. In the next quarter work plans will also be completed. The communities have already shown great commitments to the conservation of the wetlands sites and they have started implementing the agreed-upon conservation actions or interventions in the project area as detailed in the monitoring report of 30th September 2020 (Annex 4).

Output 4: Wise use/sustainable use strategies and plans developed, demonstrated and adopted to improve community livelihoods

Progress

Based on the landscape, the communities are dependent on agricultural related activities on the hillslopes. In order to understand the potential for crop production and the need to improve productivity, an assessment was made of the quality of upland soils in the project area as baseline before the establishment of the pilot activities through the Farmer Field Schools. This was premised on the understanding that upland soil degradation has led to encroachment into wetland areas, addressing wetland encroachment requires addressing the cause of productivity declines, i.e. upland soil degradation. This study aimed to gain insight into the soil condition on these slopes and explore ideas around soil conservation and restoration to maintain upland soil productivity, thus reducing the need for wetland encroachment for agriculture. The study found that Organic matter is present in all soils, but in some cases low and some important nutrients as Phosphorous, are very low across the entire study area. Therefore there is need for Conservation of existing soil nutrients and retention of soils in-situ is also necessary (i.e. erosion prevention). The study recommended that Farmer field schools offer an opportunity for grassroots education and collaboration. And that agro-forestry technique be used to bring trees back into the landscape, whilst achieving agricultural production output. Details are contained in the study report (Annex 5). Subsequently the project will develop sustainable strategies to improve community livelihoods through Farmer Field Schools working in collaboration with the CCAs. .

Output 5: Lessons from management of wetlands in Kabale shared at national, regional and

international levels for future replication to protect high altitude wetlands

Progress

Public awareness and education has been made through meetings, stakeholder consultations and visits to the project area. In addition, we have used NatureUganda Newsletter, The Naturalist (Annex 6)) shared with all members and other networks such as BirdLife International. The newsletter is also accessed through website (www.natureuganda.org) and is available to NU members and stakeholders. Various articles published (Annex 7) have reinforced publicity of the importance of Lake Bunyonyi and importance of securing the ecosystem of landscape in the region and the need to raise the profile of Lake Bunyonyi as a wetland of international importance.

The information and reports produced have attracted public print media (<https://www.independent.co.ug/environmentalists-want-lake-bunyonyi-turned-into-ramsar-site/>), (<https://guide2uganda.ug/africas-second-deepest-lake-on-way-to-become-ramsar-site/>) and electronic media and appeared on six radio stations in Kabale and Rubanda districts.

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.

None

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.

Coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on the project mainly it slowed down the momentum of activity implementation. The planned activities from mid-march to the end of June 2020 were slowed but not stopped. NatureUganda field team remained active and study reports were duly completed during the lockdown. Whereas the whole NatureUganda team were advised to work from home during lockdown period and movements were restricted, rural communities were not as affected. The field officer using a motorcycle visited the rural community (observing the SOPs) from April to June 2020. Some of the affected planned activities were the Biodiversity Conservation Forum meeting which was meant for the project team to share the reports from the baseline assessment of the Lake Bunyonyi landscape and the status of Lake Bunyonyi Catchment in Kabale district which was slated for 26th March 2020. This was rescheduled for the next reporting period since the lockdown restrictions have been removed. The Lockdown was lifted in June 2020, but public meetings or gatherings were still limited to only ten people, ensuring, social distance and wearing of masks with frequent washing and sanitizing of hands. Limited community meetings were held to keep track of project work. The mode of training was also altered as only a few members could be allowed at a time, so the meetings were broken down to several small meetings instead of one. This innovation helped to progress the project activities with less delay and observing Covid-19 guidelines. Most affected were the meetings on finalising the Community Conservation agreements, which will be finished and signed in the next reporting period. In the next quarter, we expect disruption from national presidential and local elections (extent not known).

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: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance 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: £0

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?

None

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**