

**Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects
Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus
Half Year Report**

Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2022

Project reference	27-006
Project title	Developing an incentive-based model for community-led marine conservation in Comoros
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	The Comoros
Lead partner	Blue Ventures Conservation
Partner(s)	Dahari, Mohéli National Park, The National and Regional Fisheries Directorate
Project leader	<i>Dr Alasdair Harris</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>1st April - 30th September 2022 - HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media	<i>https://blueventures.org/</i>

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 - Locally-led fisheries management measures piloted in two new coastal areas (Z2 & Z3) and continued by communities in one coastal area (Z1) on Anjouan (ten communities in total), preserving marine resources.

Overall, Blue Ventures (BV), alongside partner Dahari, has made steady progress in developing management measures. In both zone one (Z1) (communities of Vassy, Dzindri, Salamani and Imere) and zone two (Z2) (communities of Moya, Kowe and Maweni) a management agreement document is being developed with the community associations and government bodies detailing both the management initiatives and the authority of those commissions (1.2). We expect to be able to share the completed management agreement document in the next annual report.

To support the management agreement document, we launched an awareness raising campaign championed by the women's association in Moya on the use of sustainable fishing techniques, benefits of octopus closures, and participative catch monitoring (1.1a). Six theatre sessions were held in both Z1 and Z2, reaching an audience of 558 people (283 female (F), 275 male (M)). In addition, information sharing sessions were also held with the wider community to inform and receive feedback on the document.

Awareness raising about the use of the wooden spear (mwiri), a more sustainable fishing method than the metal rebar (ntsontso), continues through door-to-door campaigns and informal conversations at monitoring sites. A further 16 women from Z1 and 43 women from Z2 who were using the metal rebar have now received training from their peers on the use of the mwiri since April (1.1b).

Initial work has started in zone three (Z3) (communities of Dar Salama, Chirove and Bandrani ya Vouani). Six focus workshop groups were conducted to better understand the context of management issues (total 70 fishers, 32 F). Baseline Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) (1.3) and livelihood surveys (1.4a) have been launched in Z3 to capture key livelihood indicators and will be completed by the end of November. The baseline report will be shared with the Darwin Initiative in the next annual report.

Output 2 - Ten communities from three coastal areas of Anjouan have access to data and improved knowledge for identifying key biodiversity hotspots and guiding adaptive management of local marine resources.

Participatory catch monitoring of boat and reef gleaning (2.1a) continues in Z1 and Z2. From July to August 2022, 30 fishers (100% women) were trained in catch monitoring for reef gleaning activities. A total of 71 community members have been trained in catch monitoring since the start of the project (92% F). Catch monitoring has not yet started in Z3, but is planned to start during the next quarter (Q3).

Following on from data literacy training provided last year, five members of the women's association 'Maecha Bora' presented reef gleaning data in six community feedback sessions for Z1, reaching 320 community members (53% F). A further four association members have now presented catch data to their communities (2.3b) and revision sessions have been held in preparation for the feedback sessions (2.3a).

Association representatives are embedded in the management commissions in both Z1 and Z2 and thus have been involved in developing the octopus closures, surveillance and wider management agreements. Annual General Meetings (AGMs) for the review and setting of individual association goals have been postponed to quarter four of the project, to allow for a more logical timeframe following delays as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

Output 3 - The livelihoods of 400 fishers (200 women) from six communities are improved through the adoption of value-addition activities for marine products and/or complementary sustainable agriculture activities.

Progress continues on the development phase of value addition activities in Z1. During this reporting period, technical support from BV and our partners has solidified the supply chain: agreements were made with fishers in various regions to supply the associations with catches, and support was provided in finances, logistics and organisation to enable the women fishers associations to increase production of dried and smoked products (3.2). Between July 2021 and April 2022, total production was around 1-2 kg per month. Following the consultant's visit in March this year and training in June, production has increased to 65 kg in total between April and September, the majority of this after the training in June.

In Z1, 260 (63% F) individuals (of which 146 are fishers (94% F)) have benefited from training and support, such as the distributions of seeds, cuttings and plantules, as well as a continued presence of Dahari staff in the zone to provide technical support and monitor progress (3.3b). In total there were 94 training sessions on pest management, the use of biopesticides and crop rotation (3.3a).

Output 4 - The first LMMA in the Comoros is established in one coastal area, with the foundations laid for additional LMMAs in two further areas, as a result of governance structures that are created and supported to design, implement and enforce adaptive fisheries management

Seven management associations are now established in Z1 and Z2, comprised of 393 active members. Since April, two associations have completed their initial leadership (communication) and management (association roles) training (48 M, 52 F). A third association has completed the leadership module and will complete the management module which will terminate training for Z2. Support is ongoing for Z1 associations, through developing infrastructure (for smoking and drying, and purchasing a solar freezer for fish), to increase inscription to associations and support finance management (4.1c). Activities in Z3 started in June, with focus groups taking place, with fishers present, to discuss and understand the communities' management needs. Feedback sessions to the wider community following those focus groups are ongoing, and support to existing associations will start next quarter.

Meetings and coaching in conflict resolution have been held during this reporting period to support development of the long-term management agreements in Z1 and Z2 (4.2). As a result, progress has been made in further developing the commissions in Z1 and Z2 to be more representative of the net fishers and women's associations by incorporating them, as well as boat fishers, in the commissions. Working closer with local authorities to achieve this and having more formalised processes and documentation in place will better represent and address the communities' needs.

Temporary octopus closures have not yet been put in place this year due to conflicts between stakeholders and reconciliation activities. In Z2, a closure is currently being put in place at the time of writing (official start date is the 15th of October to last until February 2023), and for Z1 the closure is planned for November. A surveillance document has been produced and reviewed in preparation for the Z1 closure, and is embedded in the closure agreement for Z2. Surveillance of the permanent reserve in Z1 is ongoing informally, as a result of the high levels of boat traffic, which allows surveillance monitoring to be implemented as fishers go about their day. Infractions are recorded in log books maintained by the

association members, and verified by Dahari staff (zero infractions have so far been recorded during this reporting period) (4.3).

Output 5 - A network of fishing communities and implementing partners in the Comoros shares best practices in local fisheries management and community conservation.

Regular meetings and phone calls between the authorities and Z1 and Z2 commissions (which include the president of the fisher trade union) continue on an ad-hoc basis to discuss management with regional authorities and local partners.

The second meeting of the National Reef Monitoring group was held in August, with a focus on reviewing the progress being made nationwide on monitoring activities in relation to the protocol developed in February, as well as developing capacity for data processing. A framework for the first national reef monitoring report was produced (5.1).

A learning exchange visit took place in July with a total of 28 fisherwomen from Z1 visiting fisherwomen in Z2 to discuss the impact of leadership and literacy training, and inspire their peers to engage in these training programmes. Participation in the six-month literacy course in particular had started to decline, however, following the visit, participation significantly rebounded (5.2).

Regular local media coverage and social media exposure continues in the Comoros primarily through Dahari Facebook posts and local newspapers, as well as more widely through BV publications, including this blog, [‘Fish smoking to boost income’](#).

2. 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.

Complications in implementing temporary octopus closure in Z1.

We have experienced difficulty in implementing a temporary octopus closure in Z1 earlier in the year. This was in part due to a circulation of false information by a few community members, including the approaches used by other implementing bodies who have previously worked in neighbouring communities. Historic project teams from other NGOs often have little presence on the ground, lack transparency, and are seen to offer hand outs, as well as push their agenda onto communities. This has had a negative effect on creating misunderstandings and trust issues, as well as a culture of expectation and reliance on external intervention. There is a complicated social structure in the Comoros, with close family ties which are able to exert pressure and expectations around loyalty. During this reporting period, there has been some push back from a few community members, including non-resource users. As a result, the process of reconciliation with stakeholders, rebuilding confidence with community members and the negotiation process, has taken longer than initially estimated. Consequently, the process of forming and training associations in Z3 has been delayed. Through a desk study last year and the closure workshop we organised in February, we identified that the best octopus temporary closure periods are November to February and June to September. Although activities have started in Z3 we predict that it will not be possible to implement a temporary closure by the end of year three and we are therefore looking to submit a change request in the next month. We will continue to build the capacity of associations and start catch monitoring in Z3, and work towards establishing long-term management and locally managed marine areas in Z1 and Z2.

Restructure of implementing partner Dahari

Dahari’s strategic plan is moving away from supporting a large number of individuals, towards a more targeted approach where agricultural support is provided to individuals involved in conservation initiatives (for example, association members), to act as an incentive towards engagement in conservation. This will require the development of adapted strategies for field implementation, including discussions with beneficiaries (association members) to assess their needs and tailor support better. The new approach is projected to be launched at the start of 2023. Support for agricultural activities from this project for Z2 and Z3 communities will commence in line with the new strategic plan. We do not anticipate a negative impact to achieving indicators 3.3a/b given the timeline by the end of the project.

3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS-LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS: No

Formal Change Request submitted:	No
Received confirmation of change acceptance	No
Change request reference if known:	N/A

4a. 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: £

4b. 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. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

N/A

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response 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 NIRAS-LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**