

Darwin Initiative Main Annual Report

To be completed with reference to the “Project Reporting Information Note”:
(<https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources-for-projects/information-notes-learning-notes-briefing-papers-and-reviews/>).

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum** of 20 pages in length, excluding annexes)

Submission Deadline: 30th April 2022

Darwin Initiative Project Information

Project reference	DIR26S2\1017
Project title	Community-based integrated catchment management to conserve the Upper Chindwin River
Country/ies	Myanmar
Lead partner	Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)
Project partner(s)	Myanmar Environment Institute (MEI) The Wildfowl and Wildlife Trust (WWT) UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH)
Darwin grant value	£369,912.00
Start/end dates of project	01/10/2020 - 30/09/2023
Reporting period (e.g., Apr 2021 – Mar 2022) and number (e.g., Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	April 2021- March 2022 Annual Report 2
Project Leader name	Thanapon Piman
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.sei.org/publications/conserving-biodiversity-myanmar-upper-chindwin-basin/
Report author(s) and date	Thanapon Piman and Ridhi Saluja

1. Project summary

Based on over six years of SEI’s research in this geographical area, ecosystems within the Upper Chindwin River are rapidly degrading due to mining, deforestation, and agriculture as well as the impacts of climate change. Most people in the study area are poor and communities are mainly subsistence based and depend on ecosystems to maintain livelihoods. The health and wellbeing of these communities and ecosystems are intrinsically interlinked.

To restore ecosystems and support livelihoods, it is critical to involve communities in ecosystem restoration. The main aim of the project is to implement a set of tailored land and water management practices for wetland conservation in Upper Chindwin River, Myanmar, to protect and restore the Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) and secure sustainable livelihoods for villagers in the vicinity of the project area.

The project will implement community wetland conservation practices using knowledge from assessments of baseline conditions. Community conservation practices that benefit biodiversity

as well as communities such as agroforestry and rice-fish systems will be explored and integrated into community action plans to reduce pressure on ecosystem. Conservation successes at the community level will be scaled up to link with policy makers at national and subnational levels to promote community-based catchment management and find solutions for longer term ecosystem conservation and protection.

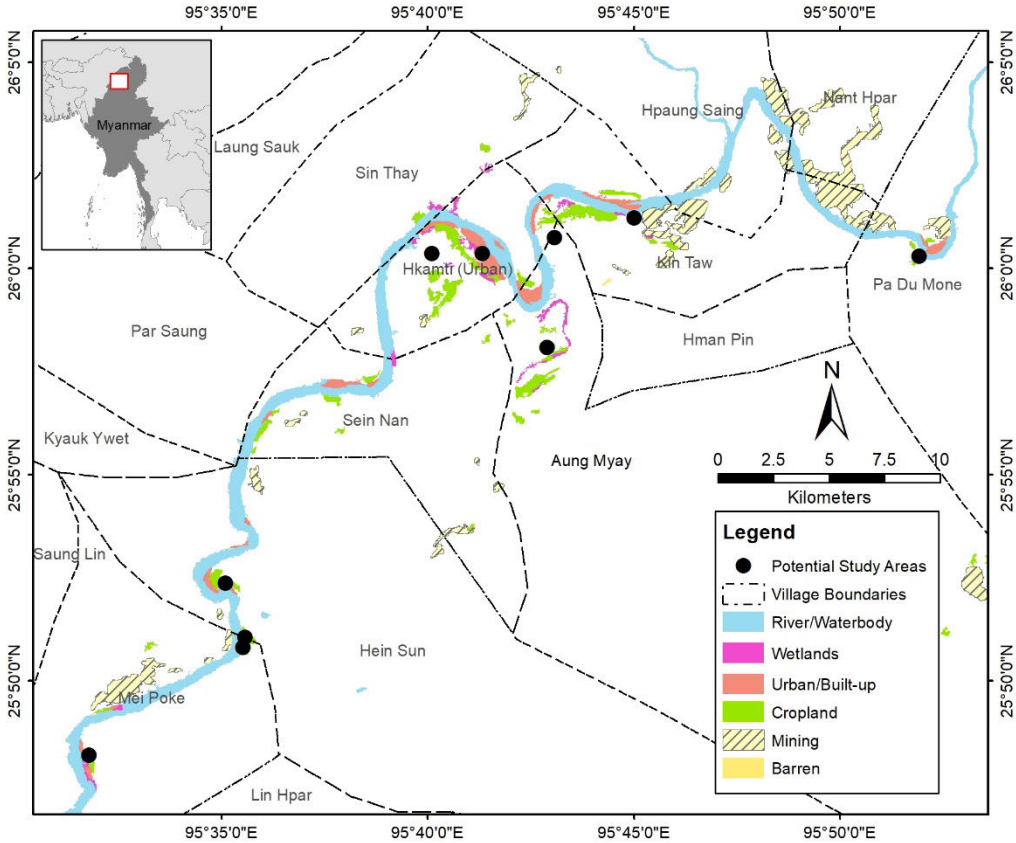


Figure 1 Map of potential study sites

2. Project stakeholders/ partners

Our UK partners, WWT and UKCEH and Myanmar partner, MEI have been involved in project planning and decision making. In addition to planning, the project partners will also be involved in the monitoring stage of the project. Partners have been consulted and have aided the design and implementation of activities feasible given the current situation in Myanmar. All partners are proactively involved in chalking out the annual workplan and designing their TORs based on consultations and active communication. Sub-grantee contract for UKCEH was successfully developed. Despite the difficult and challenging political situation in Myanmar and COVID 19, the partners were able to adapt to the situation, and manage and implement certain activities as planned. The approach to adaptive management is discussed in detail later.

3. Project progress

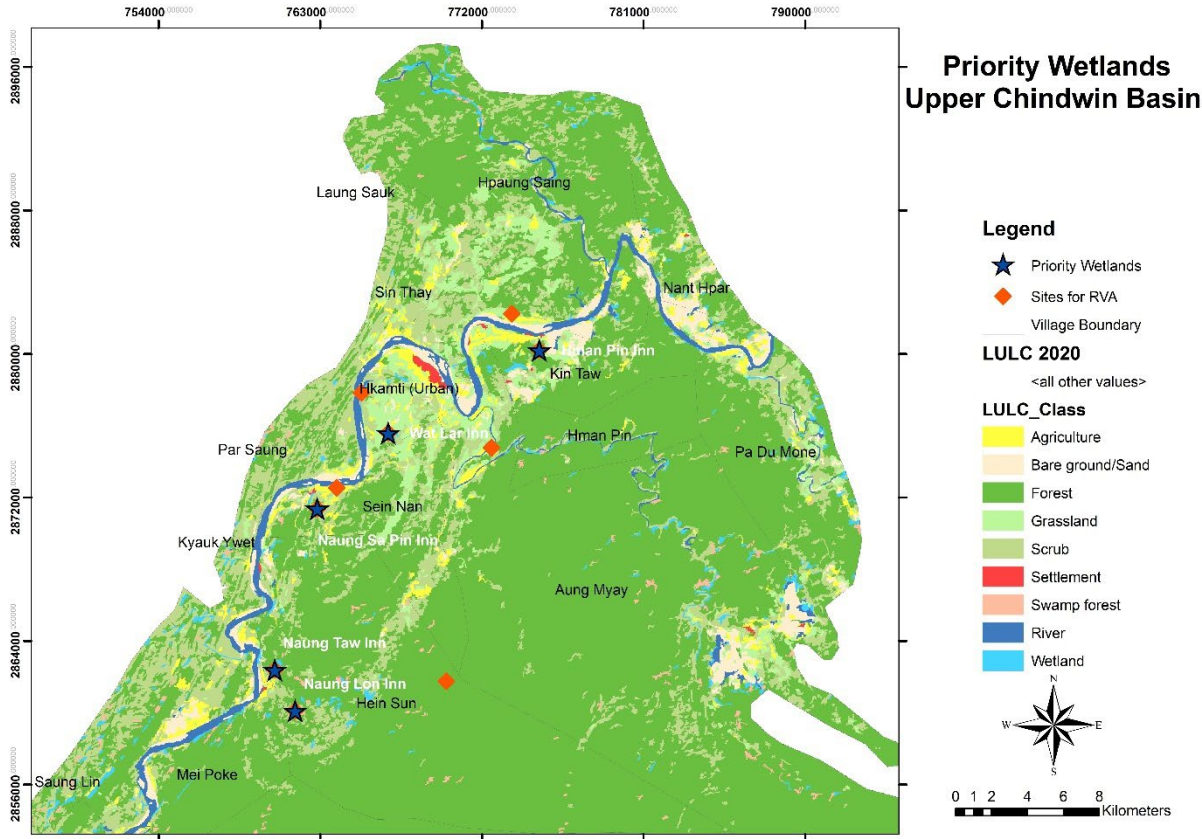
3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

Following are the major activities which were undertaken in the second year of the project from March 2021 – April 2022.

Output 1. Baseline assessment of physical conditions, ecosystem services, key biodiversity hotspots and habitats, and existing practices of livelihood on water and land management, informing an endorsed habitat restoration plan and Community Action Plans (CAPs) development.

Activity 1.1 Desk study to collect relevant information in the project area from previous and existing works (100% progress). We have collected relevant data and information in the project area including previous studies on biodiversity and wetland conservation and livelihood developing, relevant policy document, GIS data. Data on socioeconomics and livelihoods has also been collected through the FDGs in 10 selected villages during the rapid village assessment conducted in the month of December 2022. Desk survey has also been carried to identify best practices to reduce impact on the wetlands and are related to sustainable agriculture, water, and soil management etc.

Activity 1.2 Conduct GIS mapping to identify habitats, wetlands and potential nine target villages and key threats (100% progress). Based on the LULC change analysis conducted earlier, we were able to identify 10 priority wetlands sites for rapid village assessment (RVA). During the same survey additional GPS data points for different classes were collected and based on which the results of mapping were cross validated.



Activity 1.3 Organize implementation meeting to introduce the project, conduct stakeholder mapping including women and youth groups and pre-survey (100% progress). A meeting was organized in the ten selected wetland villages headed by the respective Village heads where the aim and objectives of this project were presented to the local community groups with equal participation from women, facilitated by the local CSO, Naga Social Network (NSNO).

Activity 1.4 Develop an assessment and monitoring framework and survey questionnaire for the baseline survey based on Rapid Assessment of Wetland Ecosystem Services (RAWES) Toolkit (100% progress). WWT and MEI supported SEI to develop an assessment and monitoring framework based on RAWES. Key stakeholders were engaged through a local CSO i.e., NSNO and SEI’s local project representatives to discuss and comment on the structure of the questionnaire.

Activity 1.5 Conduct biodiversity baseline survey (30%). SEI, MEI, WWT and NSNO have conducted the rapid village assessment (RVA) which included a preliminary biodiversity baseline survey at the 10 priority wetlands sites. The full baseline survey is being planned to survey in June 2022.

Activity 1.6 Develop assessment and monitoring framework and survey questionnaire for the socio-economic baseline survey (70% progress). SEI is developing a comprehensive assessment framework based on the RVA. It will be finalized in May 2022.

Activity 1.7 Conduct baseline survey at selected nine villages and monitoring programme at start and end of the project (20%). SEI, MEI, WWT and NSNO have conducted the rapid village assessment (RVA) which included a preliminary socio-economic baseline survey at ten villages. The full baseline survey is being planned to survey in June 2022.

Output 2. Community Action Plans (CAP) focusing on integrated water-land ecosystem measures developed for nine villages, implemented in three priority villages.

Activity 2.1 Formulate village groups from selected nine villages for developing CAP based on stakeholder mapping (50%). Based on the RVA, we have established the village groups, particularly village heads for communication and discussion on developing CAP under COVID and political crisis via mobile communication. However, we can not engage with the government agencies yet.

Activity 2.2. Co-develop CAP with the village groups based on baseline assessment (Act.1.6) through focus group consultations (30%). We communicated with the village heads and local CSO for their initial ideas to develop CAP on integrated water, land, and ecosystem to improve livelihoods and reduce pressure to wetland ecosystem and biodiversity.

Activity 2.3 Prepare draft CAP and discuss in the multi-stakeholder consultation in Year 1 to receive recommendations and select three pilot villages for implementation (30% progress). We have completed the desk review of best practices for community conservation measures including water, land, and forest management. This review will be used for co-development CAP with the selected village. Through the FGDs conducted during the Rapid village assessments across ten selected villages, an initial attempt has been made to raise awareness regarding the project activities and sense the interest of the community to lead conservation actions. The NSNO has also provided support in establishing contact with the village heads and form a communication bridge between the local communities and project team.

Output 4: Policy and recommendations published for upscaling CAP and conservation measures to other villages with Upper Chindwin Basin KBAs.

Activity 4.1 Conduct policy/plans review on environment conservation and livelihood development at township and district levels to identify plans to be influenced by this project (60% progress). We are conducting a review of biodiversity policies and the feasibility of community conservation at different levels of governance.

Activity 4.5 Prepare factsheet, photo story, short film, or blogs for publishing in local and international media for public awareness (20% progress). We have prepared a blog in English to present the lessons and experiences of the Rapid Village assessment which will be published on the SEI website in the coming month. Project information will also be disseminated via partners PR too (e.g., UKCEH news blog pointing to main SEI publication).

3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

Output 1 (15% progress). A manual to conduct rapid village assessment was developed with support from the project partners with an aim to fulfil three objectives i.e., develop a scalable ES assessment framework using the principles from RAWES toolkit and delivered at 10 villages, rapid assessment of key endangered and livelihood species and review of ecological habitat requirements, and detailed ES, land use and habitat maps of ten villages. This work contributes to measure the output indicator 1.1.

Output 2 (30% progress). A desk study on good practices of water, land, forest management as well as sustainable livelihood in Myanmar to support the preparation of CAP. Community interactions during the RVA have also highlighted strong interest in promoting livestock farming and a rather less interest in rice fish farming. Capacity building and awareness programme is also under development guided by the experiences from the field. This program will address areas including fish farming, livestock farming, agriculture (rice and soil management),

community forestry and wetlands and biodiversity conservation. These advancements will contribute to the Output indicator 2.3 CAP are developed in Year 2 comprising a series of village specific measures, enhanced livelihood options, linkages with biodiversity conservation measures.

Output 4 (5% progress). Project factsheet is hosted on SEI website and we have translated it into Myanmar language (<https://www.sei.org/publications/conserving-biodiversity-myanmar-upper-chindwin-basin/>) to the Output indicator contribute to 4.5. A series of communication and outreach materials created to increase public awareness on biodiversity conservation in Y1-3. We are doing policy review and analysis on environment conservation and livelihood development to prepare policy briefs and policy recommendations to mainstream CAP and wetland conservation zones into township, district, and provincial levels. The review report and policy brief will contribute to Output indicators 4.2 and 4.3.

3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

Outcome: The KBA in Upper Chindwin basin is providing improved and more secure habitats for endangered species and better livelihood pathways through enhanced ecosystem services for the local people.

Indicator 0.1 (20% progress) Conservation zone area increase by 20% from the baseline assessment for habitat suitable to endangered and key livelihood species.

Comment: This year the baseline assessment was conducted for selected ten priority villages based on this assessment 5 top priority villages have been identified which will be the focus of the next round of field survey in the coming months.

3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

Outcome level

Assumption 1: The political situation within Myanmar remains stable and no restrictions are imposed by the government on INGOs

Assumption 2: SEI and consortium partner relationship with Sagging regional government remains strong for buy-in for the project.

Output level

Assumption 3: The selected villages are easily accessible without any restrictions from the government

Assumption 4: Regional and national government representatives, and various government agencies continue to be supportive and are receptive to policy recommendations.

Assumption 5: Policy makers and practitioners are sufficiently interested and engaged to take part in the planned training course.

Comments: The political situation in Myanmar continues to be uncertain and unpredictable with civil unrest in several areas. International travel and communication within the country is still restricted. This has impeded the pace with which the project initially planned to carry out activities in the region. Communication with the government is currently impossible. Though in this year we tried extremely hard to conduct a rapid field survey with the help of local partners and local CSO and building capacity of field team.

Following the initial desktop identification of ten wetlands, we then agreed a rather complex field survey methodology that incorporated RAWES and elements of the Ramsar RIS that were all new to the field team. We then remotely delivered an ambitious 3-day training programme for which we had clear learning objectives and very positive participant feedback. Despite the very limited supervision, SEI then amazingly undertook the RVAs as planned without any major setbacks. Based on their results, we have now been able to rank all the villages against a number of criteria to allow prioritisation for the next steps. The biological data is still very poor, but there was a military coup on top of an unprecedented global pandemic.

If the conditions improve in the coming year, we will try to re-establish contact and rebuild the relationship with the new government to secure their support for the project.

3.5 Impact: achievement of positive impact on biodiversity and poverty alleviation

Project impact: KBAs in the Upper Chindwin Basin have enhanced biodiversity and ecosystem service value as a result of community-based integrated water-land ecosystem management and enhanced sustainable livelihood pathways for local people.

We expect a consistent decrease in negative impacts and pressure caused by unsustainable livelihoods and development actions through the CAPs and a dedicated capacity building programme on wetlands and biodiversity conservation in the priority villages. Implementation of these plans aims to conserve and in the long term increase native species richness in the area. Alternative livelihood options such as fish farming and livestock farming identified during the rapid village assessment will ensure sustained and stable income to the local community which will form a part of the overall CAP. Capacity building programme will also impart knowledge to local people on the sustainable and effective ways of natural resource management including land and water, thus enhancing the economic benefits and ensures wise use of natural resources and their services.

4. Project support to the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements

National Biodiversity Strategy and Action plan (NBSAP)

The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action plan (2015-2020) of Myanmar clearly highlights two targets namely expanding the protected area network through both government and community-based approaches and ensuring that National law provides an incentive for community participation in biodiversity conservation. The plan also identifies that with the much-needed development in the country, increased pressure will be placed on rich biodiversity and natural resources. This project aims to ensure enhanced participation of the communities in establishing and management of defined conservation zones within the KBA.

Ramsar Convention

The technical work in our project will contribute to the Strategic Goal 1 of the Ramsar Convention, focusing on addressal of drivers of wetland loss and degradation. Rapid Village Assessment undertaken earlier this year aligned with Ramsar's Strategic PLAN 2016-2024 in a way that it promoted, recognized, and strengthened the participation of local communities for wetlands conservation and management. Ramsar Convention endorses the community-led approach to wetlands management.

Convention on Biological Diversity

Myanmar in its sixth national report to CBD clearly identified its challenges related to biodiversity conservation. It identifies major threats to biodiversity and its underlying factors which include limited environmental safeguards, undervaluation of ecosystems, ecosystem services and biodiversity along with limited grassroots support for conservation. It also highlights the importance of community participation in the conservation and sustainable use of Myanmar's natural resources. Our work aims to address these identified challenges by building capacity of the local communities on wetlands conservation and water and soil management and enhancing their participation and leadership in natural resources management.

5. Project support to poverty reduction

Based on the results of RVA it was realised that communities are highly reliant on natural resources for their livelihoods with as high as 100% population dependent on them in villages like Naung Khan Inn and Naung Sa Pin Inn. Multiple resource use systems have been

observed during the field survey with rice farming and livestock rearing being primary sources followed by fishing and hunting whereas only a small percentage of the population is also associated with mining activities. Further highlighting dependence of ~95% households in the surveyed villages on nature-based activities. The interventions identified in the project are anticipated to increase income by 20% within selected villages implementing conservation practices (indicator 0.3). As well, the catch per unit is expected to increase by 20% (indicator 0.4) which can contribute to improved community nutrition and income. Considering poverty under the multi-dimensional framework, indirect drivers of poverty include different external dimensions such as power, resources and opportunities in knowledge, skills, and opportunities. Our project is using a gender sensitive and participatory approach that indirectly aims to reduce some of these underlying barriers causing poverty for different social groups by gender, age, and ethnic group. Similar approach was adopted for conducting the rapid village assessment.

6. Consideration of gender equality issues

As mentioned in section 6, our approach to gender relies on the multidimensional poverty framework that considers different external drivers affecting poverty and access and control over natural resources. Indicator 2.7 and 2.1 focuses on the women and youth participation in every stakeholder consultation and decision making to ensure the contribution of women and youth to the design of the conservation measures which will be participatory in both implementation and monitoring stages (Indicator 3.3.). There are also plans to train policy makers, under indicator 4.1 on the importance of considering gender in biodiversity policies and development plans.

Focus group discussions were conducted in the selected villages (10 in no.) which took into consideration gender balance and ensured equal and active participation of women group. Women were encouraged to voice their concerns related to resource use, wetlands management and biodiversity conservation. These were preliminary discussions and more in-depth interviews will be conducted in the coming months under the full baseline assessment survey for priority wetlands.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

We are currently not at the monitoring and evaluation stages of the project though we have established the use of both qualitative and quantitative indicators. We rely on local monitoring to reduce bias and clear attribution in selected indicators (indicators 1.2 and 3.3). We have not made any change to the log frame in the change form during this period. We will assess the overall situation in the region to carry out the activities set forth in the log frame and revise it if needed in the coming year. Monitoring will be done collaboratively with equal inputs and participation from local community and the project partners. Dedicated meetings on M&E will be scheduled transparency and information exchange between the partners. The International partners will train the communities on monitoring to ensure their active participation and sustainability of the conservation and livelihood support activities.

8. Lessons learnt

The uncertainty associated with the COVID-19 outbreak and the ongoing political crisis in the region made us look for measures which were more adaptive in nature and allowed us to carry out certain activities despite the difficult situation. Constant consultations and interactions with the international partners led to the development of an alternative approach to achieve desired outcomes which included an online training of the field team to build their capacity on rapid village assessments due to travel restrictions faced by international partners. Myanmar partners went above and beyond the call of duty and undertook a field mission in such life threatening and challenging situation and completed it successfully. A collaborative approach was used to finalize the TORs of the partners based on expertise and feasibility to carry out specific tasks. To achieve results on the ground and connect with the local communities, the project partnered with a local CSO, NSNO which facilitated the interactions with the villagers as they already had established a village group network in the study area.

9. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

The review committee had raised a comment that the project should comment on the progress and achievements against the output level indicators in the log frame. This year's report has taken this into consideration and has reported on the desired lines. Another comment was regarding the access to data that would show whether the remaining blocks of forest and remnant patches are pristine or have been degraded. The project has conducted a land use land cover analysis in the basin over two decades and the same data will be utilized to analyze the current state of the forests through literature already reports an increase in forest degradation (McGinn et al., 2021).

10. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

COVID-19 outbreak and military coup in the Upper Chindwin region have significantly impacted the project. These challenges have led to revision of the mechanism of interacting with the partners and also the way in which activities are undertaken and implemented on the ground. The details are further discussed in section 13.

11. Sustainability and legacy

This year we were able to gauge the interest of communities in the project through the rapid village assessment. Through the interactions with the communities, project gained an idea/analyzed the capacity and current state of knowledge on wetlands and biodiversity conservation in the region.

Also, continued interactions with the communities through the local CSO which was brought on board specific areas have been identified on which communities would need capacity building support on wetlands and biodiversity conservation and also certain activities which ensure livelihood support and help create another livelihood option either through design or knowledge sharing are areas of high interest from communities' perspective.

Our original exit strategy still stands- we intend to support communities in integrating wetland conservation into their community action plans and building knowledge and awareness of the importance of conservation so that the project can be sustained overtime through regional and local government funds. Currently however, the governance of natural resources and authorities at all levels are in question due to the military coup. In case the community action plans are not vetted by the government/authority we will ensure that the plans are owned by the local communities and supported through smaller funds.

12. Darwin identity

Project team is currently working on a perspective that highlights the achievements of the rapid village assessment and throws light on the way forward. This will be published on SEIs website and will be promoted through SEIs twitter channel as well. Also, international partners would relay the SEI material via their own websites and social media.

The local communities during the field visit were made aware of the Darwin initiative and how it is supporting the larger outcomes to conserve wetlands and biodiversity in the region.

13. Impact of COVID-19 on project delivery

The project has been both severely impacted by COVID and the political crisis in Myanmar. These two situations have restricted field work, stakeholder consultations and ground truthing, which are all essential elements of the project's science-based community-based approach.

Over last year the situation with respect to COVID -19 has eased to an extent but international travel restrictions were still in place which prevented international partners from traveling to the region.

The military coup in the region has been a major challenge that the project is still facing. Many areas in the study region present a high risk to the staff, stakeholders along with partners due to which the activities were delayed.

The project team and partners were closely monitoring the conditions and deliberated on the issues. In the month of November when the conditions were slightly conducive and travel risks for project coordinators within Myanmar were low, team came up with a strategy to initiate the field work with extensive support from the local CSO, which ensured that the local community was informed prior to the initiation of field work and facilitated timely discussions to obtain the information to move ahead with project activities. The field team was trained online to conduct the survey by international partner, WWT which allowed us to achieve desired outputs in a limited period of time on the field.

We continue to closely monitor, communicate, and proceed with extreme caution.

14. Safeguarding

Please tick this box if any safeguarding or human rights violations have occurred during this financial year.

If you have ticked the box, please ensure these are reported to ODA.safeguarding@defra.gov.uk as indicated in the T&Cs.

No safeguarding and violations have occurred. We have shared and discussed ethical standards, code of conduct, and safeguarding procedures with MEI, Myanmar Project Coordinator, Project Assistant, and Local CSO before conducting the field survey and interviewing local communities. During the field survey, we also request the team on the ground to report daily if there are any risks, safeguarding, or human rights issues. This helps us to manage situations immediately according to the procedures. SEI has a whistle blowing service that can report cases through [Whistleblowing | SEI](#)

15. Project expenditure

Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022)

Project spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2021/22 Grant (£)	2021/22 Total Darwin Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs (see below)	██████	██████	██████	On the track, no variance
Consultancy costs	██████	██████	██████	Delay in recruiting Fisheries expert
Overhead Costs	██████	██████	██████	On the track, no variance
Travel and subsistence	██████	██████	██████	On the track, no variance
Operating Costs	██████	██████	██████	Bank fee and operating cost of MEI local partner to host project coordinator and project assistant in Myanmar
Capital items (see below)	██████	██████	██████	On the track, no variance
Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)	██████	██████	██████	

Others (see below)				No Consumables and printing to be charged over the year
TOTAL				

16. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements of your project during the reporting period (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes

I agree for the Darwin Initiative Secretariat to publish the content of this section (please leave this line in to indicate your agreement to use any material you provide here).

In the uncertain times of COVID and even more challenging environment due to political crisis, the project team didn't give up and especially the Myanmar partners went over and above the call of duty to achieve critical outputs for the project. Beginning with the initial desktop identification of ten relevant wetlands, partners agreed on a rather complex field survey methodology that incorporated RAWES and elements of the Ramsar RIS that were all new to the field team. WWT then remotely delivered an ambitious 3-day training programme for which we had clear learning objectives and very positive participant feedback.

Despite the very limited supervision, SEI then amazingly undertook the RVAs as planned without any major setbacks. Based on their results, we have now been able to rank all the villages against a number of criteria to allow prioritisation for the next steps. The biological data is still very poor, but there was political crisis on top of an unprecedented global pandemic, we think the results are very impressive under the circumstances and speak to the commitment of everyone, but the Myanmar partners especially.

Checklist for submission

	Check
Different reporting templates have different questions, and it is important you use the correct one. Have you checked you have used the correct template (checking fund, type of report (i.e. Annual or Final), and year) and deleted the blue guidance text before submission?	X
Is the report less than 10MB? If so, please email to Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk putting the project number in the Subject line.	X
Is your report more than 10MB? If so, please discuss with Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk about the best way to deliver the report, putting the project number in the Subject line.	
Have you included means of verification? You should not submit every project document, but the main outputs and a selection of the others would strengthen the report.	X
Do you have hard copies of material you need to submit with the report? If so, please make this clear in the covering email and ensure all material is marked with the project number. However, we would expect that most material will now be electronic.	No
Have you involved your partners in preparation of the report and named the main contributors	Yes
Have you completed the Project Expenditure table fully?	Yes
Do not include claim forms or other communications with this report.	