

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 2023

Project reference	27-009
Project title	Community-based integrated catchment management to conserve the Upper Chindwin River
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Myanmar
Lead partner	Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)
Partner(s)	Myanmar Environment Institute (MEI), Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UKCEH), Naga Social Network Organization (NSNO)
Project leader	<i>Dr Thanapon Piman (SEI)</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.sei.org/projects/community-based-water-management-chindwin/

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).

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your M&E systems (are your indicators still relevant, can you report against any Standard Indicators, do your assumptions still hold true?). The guidance can be found on the resources page of the relevant fund website.

Capacity Building Trainings in Upper Chindwin

- Community training programmes were co-designed with support from Environmental Conservation Department (ECD) of Hkamti District and Myanmar Environment Institute in the month of July 2023. On May 30th, 2023, after continuous follow-up ECD granted permission to the project team to organize training sessions at the meeting hall in Hkamti for the year 2023.
- Capacity building training (or Training of Trainers) on wetlands conservation at township level was successfully organized from 28-31 July. This training was led by resource persons from MEI and co-facilitated by experts from SEI. This training capacitated 29 participants which included members of the Village Working Committees, youth, women, and representatives of diverse ethnics having high reliance on wetland resources.
- Community training on wetlands conservation were conducted by Naga Social Network Organization at village level in the month of August at four villages, Tharyarkone, Nar Myittar, Hman Pin and Maing Naung. These trainings were able to gauge community's interest in conserving wetlands for sustainable livelihoods.
- These trainings also led to village level meetings chaired by the village heads especially in Maing Naung to further discuss the community action planning and identify the activities community members were willing to undertake. The most interesting session

during these informal trainings were the short discussions which allowed knowledge exchange especially among the village youth, women, and elders.

- An illustrative instance involves the village leader of Maing Naung village extending an invitation to the villagers to discuss the negative consequences associated with illegal fishing, unsustainable extraction of aquatic resources and depletion of wetland resources. The discussion also encompassed topics such as the importance of protecting fingerlings and their habitats within the wetlands, the various functions of wetlands, and the prudent utilization of these resources by the villagers.
- A three-day training programme focused on small-scale fish farming and aquaculture in the month of September (17-20). Approximately, 40 participants were trained by Mr Win Maung Kyaw, Fisheries expert from Myanmar with sessions focusing on practical food processing demonstrations. The training was highly appreciated especially by the women participants as this provides them with an additional opportunity to avoid losses and generate additional income from post processing.

Community Action Planning and Establishing Conservation Zone

- Community Action Plan drafted for Nar Myittar and a follow-up meeting on CAP has been conducted to understand communities needs and priorities for conservation activities and alternative livelihood strategies. Community has offered support to implementation of conservation activities identified under CAP and demarcating conservation zones. (***Annex 1 - Draft CAP attached with the report***)
- Conservation zones for five priority wetlands have been revised based on consultation with village working committees by Myanmar Environment Institute (MEI) and maps for conservation zones have been finalized for five priority wetlands in the Upper Chindwin Basin (***Annex 2 – Conservation zone maps for five wetlands attached with the report***).
- Under community awareness activities, five signage boards were set up at priority wetlands sites in the Upper Chindwin Basin and tree plantation drive was undertaken at Nar Myittar in the month of September 2023 in collaboration with ECD, Nar Myittar Village Working Committee, and MEI.

Research and Outreach

- Open-access research article titled "[Assessment of Community Dependence and Perceptions of Wetlands in the Upper Chindwin Basin, Myanmar](#)" has been published in the Resources Journal (IF 3.3)
- Newsletter article titled "***Local Stewardship to conserve Upper Chindwin Basin of Myanmar***" has been shared with BCF Comms for publication in the December 2023 issue.

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.

Challenges in implementing alternative livelihood approaches and related activities:

- Promoting rice-fish farming as an alternative strategy has been particularly challenging due to flooding in raining season and lean water supply during dry season with sandy soil in certain areas. There has been challenge in identifying suitable sites for implementing activities due to political unrest and limited access.
- Several concerns have also been highlighted by the village heads on developing fishponds at selected villages. These include land tenure issues, rules and regulations of land use, time and financial resources required pond preparation, water accessibility, labour availability, high inflation costs associated with these activities under uncertainty. Inflation is also a cause of concern for community's due to ongoing political unrest.
- Based on our continuous engagement with the communities, two sustainable livelihood activities have been identified as alternative livelihood options- Pig farming and

groundnut cultivation (most villagers being farmers identify these as options for enhanced income)

Operational challenges:

- Random security checks by military in Hkamti township, seeking personal IDs and permission to conduct project activities on ground.
- Project has not been able to secure permissions from General Administration Department (GAD) to conduct activities across villages and wetlands due to current political situation and safety issues. Thus, we need to rely on our local CSO partner NSNO to undertake training and consultation activities.
- Activities need to be planned way ahead in time as only limited options and seats are available to travel to Hkamti for other project partners including MEI and SEI team members from Myanmar to even travel from other states within the country.
- Electricity supply, phone, and internet connectivity still present operational challenges in the field for which the team has to rely on old school methods of using physical prints and handouts during trainings and consultations with key stakeholders including local CSO partners, ECD members and community members.
- Travel restrictions for international partners still persist and they have to be engaged only through online consultations.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: Yes

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No **(Under consideration, additional details requested from BCF)**

Change request reference if known:

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

Actual spend: **██████████**

4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2024)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: **██████████**

4c. 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.

NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.

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

- During the dry season of 2023, the biodiversity survey wasn't conducted due to GAD's rejection of permissions to project staff from accessing the villages and surrounding wetlands.
- Due to limited access and ability to engage only with Nar Myittar village might discourage other Village working committees to offer support for conservation actions, which presents serious risk to the project's success. Also, Village heads have raised request for both technical and financial resources to support CAP activity's implementation in respective villages and wetlands.
- The restricted access to the villages might present a risk to monitor and evaluate the progress of village level activities. The project team is developing an adaptive plan for monitoring the progress of village level activities.
- Due to challenges listed above, we may need to consider adjusting the log frame to be most realistic and achievable for the last year of project implementation with close consultation with BCF management.

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, 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.

All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS 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**