

## 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: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2022**

<b>Project reference</b>	27-016
<b>Project title</b>	Responsible exchange of plant genetic resources for research and development
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Ethiopia, Uganda
<b>Lead partner</b>	Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia) Makerere University (Uganda) University of Vienna (Austria) African Botanic Garden Network European Botanic Gardens Consortium
<b>Project leader</b>	Dr Paul Smith
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2022 HYR3
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://www.bgci.org/our-work/projects-and-case-studies/responsible-exchange-of-plant-genetic-resources-for-research-and-development/">https://www.bgci.org/our-work/projects-and-case-studies/responsible-exchange-of-plant-genetic-resources-for-research-and-development/</a>

### **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).**

Progress has been made on the following outputs and activities over the last six months:

*Output 1. Levels of plant material/data exchange between European and African PGR organisations characterized and quantified.*

Activity 1.1. Two MSc studies carried out on the extent and nature of plant material exchange for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development (years 1 and 2). **Achieved.**

Peter Omaswa, MSc student at Makerere University in Uganda, has been awarded his MSc based on his research and thesis on *The importance of the exchange of plant material to plant conservation and sustainable development* in support of his MSc at Makerere University (Supporting paper 1). In addition, a draft manuscript paper has been prepared entitled ‘*The relevance of plant material and data exchange to conservation and sustainable development*’ (Supporting paper 2).

Ashenafi Ayenew, PhD student at the University of Ababa has continued to work on a manuscript paper entitled ‘*A study on exchange of plant material between European and African Plant Genetic Resource organizations for research and development*’ (Supporting paper 3), which will be submitted to the peer-reviewed journal *Plants, People, Planet*.

*Output 3. Digital platform for efficient and responsible exchange and tracking of plant data and material designed, developed, launched and used by the global research community*

Activity 3.2. Country by country data on ABS, biosafety and CITES compliance regulations gathered and incorporated into the digital platform by the end of year 3. **In progress**

Activity 3.3. Digital platform tested and launched by the end of year 2. **Achieved.**

Activities 3.2 and 3.3 were carried forward to Year 3 under a Change Request following the repeated postponement of COP-15 due to COVID-19, and continued uncertainty about the status of Digital Sequence Information under the Nagoya Protocol. COP-15 is now scheduled for 7-19<sup>th</sup> December in Montreal. However, it is possible that no resolution will be achieved or that negotiations will be protracted beyond the life of the project. In view of this, we are gathering compliance guidance information to support the platform and the compliance certification (activities 3.2 and 4.2) anyway (see 'Unexpected developments' below).

The digital material/data exchange platform (activity 3.3) has now been launched publicly, and comprises two exchange tools – [Index Seminum](#) and [PlantShare](#). The Index Seminum tool builds on a (largely European) user network established over the past 200 years, and enables the exchange of seeds only. The PlantShare tool is more flexible, enabling exchange of any kind of plant material. Instructional videos are provided for both of these tools (follow the links above), and for both plant material suppliers and recipients. The support of the Darwin Initiative is acknowledged on the landing pages of both of these tools. The exchange platform was promoted at three major meetings this year – Eurogard in Budapest, Hungary (May 16-20<sup>th</sup>), AETFAT/African Botanic Garden Network meeting in Livingstone, Zambia (26<sup>th</sup> June-1<sup>st</sup> July) and the 7<sup>th</sup> Global Botanic Gardens Congress in Melbourne, Australia (September 26-30<sup>th</sup>). An onboarding workshop is planned for December 1<sup>st</sup>.

*Output 4. A mutually agreed, peer-reviewed global mechanism for recognising botanical research institutions that apply best practice ABS and biosafety procedures is developed and launched.*

Activity 4.1. Side-meetings held at Eurogard Conference in Hungary to test digital platform and to discuss accreditation methodology for recognising ABS and biosafety best practice by end of 1st quarter year 3 (Change Request). **Achieved.**

Activity 4.2. Online accreditation scheme developed by end of 2nd quarter year 3. **Achieved.**

As mentioned in previous reports, a draft set of criteria and questions related to ABS/biosecurity/CITES compliance accreditation (activities 4.1 and 4.2) were presented to our Ethiopian partners at a consultation workshop held on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2021. The draft criteria and questions were modified following this consultation. Ethiopia was selected for this consultation because ABS legislation in Ethiopia is amongst the toughest in the world. As a consequence, the bar has been set very high in the draft online certification scheme that has been designed as a result of this workshop. Further consultation took place with our European partners at a workshop at the Eurogard meeting in Budapest on May 20<sup>th</sup> 2022. The workshop was attended by 21 people (10 females and 11 males) from 16 botanical organisations. The workshop participants split into groups and went through the criteria and questions for each of the ABS, biosecurity and CITES certifications, testing them and refining them where further clarity was needed. The certification scheme questionnaires (activity 4.2) were modified accordingly and are now online [here](#). Guidance documentation is currently being developed and an onboarding workshop is scheduled for December 1<sup>st</sup>.

Output 5. Researchers trained in data management and the use of the digital platform.

5.1. Online training content developed, and webinar training module launched by the second quarter of year 3, and used by at least 50 researchers with equal gender representation by the end of the project.

5.2. Face-to-face training in Ethiopia provided to at least 30 African researchers (equal male/ female representation) by the end of the 3rd quarter in year 3

5.3. Staff from at least 40 institutions using the tool for exchange of material by the end of the project.

The online training content (5.1) is currently under development, and will be used to support an onboarding workshop on December 1<sup>st</sup> as well as a face to face workshop planned for Ethiopia in Q4.

**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.**

The project is on track to achieve all of its objectives on time and on budget.

However, the continued postponement of CoP-15 has delayed the development of guidance related to compliance with national and international Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) regulations – particularly with continued uncertainty related to Digital Sequence Information (DSI). Although CoP15 is now scheduled to take place in Montreal in December, it is possible that there will be no clear resolution of this issue. We will deal with this in the following ways:

Activity 3.2. The material exchange platform tools (Index Seminum and PlantShare) place the onus on suppliers of plant material to stipulate whether there are ABS, biosecurity or CITES regulations pertaining to the material they supply. For both tools it is *obligatory* for suppliers of material to indicate (yes or no) whether individual collections are subject to compliance regulations. General and specific guidance will be provided about where suppliers of plant material can find up to date information on compliance regulations/laws. In addition, the material exchange platform is only open to bona fide, registered botanical institutions for non-commercial purposes (research, education and conservation). The platform is run through GardenSearch, BGCI's digital register of botanical institutions. This means that the platform will not be accessible to commercial nurseries or private individuals.

Activity 4.2. The ABS, biosecurity and CITES certifications are also only open to *bona fide*, verified institutions, and guidance is being developed based on compliance best practice and a suite of training and support tools developed by BGCI over many years.

**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 Yes/No

Change request reference if known:

**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?**

None

**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](mailto: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**