

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

Project reference	28-020
Project title	Safeguarding globally important forests by improving livelihoods and strengthening governance
Country(ies)/ territory(ies)	Viet Nam
Lead partner	Fauna & Flora International
Partner(s)	The Centre for Sustainable Rural Development (SRD)
Project leader	Lam Van Hoang, lam.van.hoang@fauna-flora.org
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	April 2023 – September 2023; HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.facebook.com/FaunaFloraVietnam

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).

The western black-crested gibbon (*Nomascus concolor*) is the second rarest primate in Vietnam, following the Cat Ba langurs, and faces pressures from hunting and habitat loss. It is listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, with approximately 80 individuals found in the Mu Cang Chai Species and Habitat Conservation Area (MCC SHCA) of Yen Bai province and Muong La Nature Reserve (ML NR) of Son La province.

FFI has been working to engage local communities and stakeholders to address the critical needs for transparent and collaborative governance around MCC SHCA and ML NR, as well as to improve local livelihoods. This project aims to empower marginalized ethnic minorities to become conservation advocates, reduce poverty, and ensure the survival of critically endangered primates, including the western black-crested gibbon. The population of western black-crested gibbons in the project area is believed to be stable based on monthly patrolling efforts. However, further data and information are needed to confirm the identification of individuals. The project team has been working diligently with partners to conduct monthly patrolling, intensive snare removal campaigns, and provide technical training on farming and establishing sustainable livelihoods for communities.

The implementation of project activities in this period began on April 15, 2022, in Muong La District. Its objective is to enhance forestry governance and improve local livelihoods to ensure the survival of critically endangered primates, including the western black-crested gibbon. During the first half of the third year of the project, FFI, in partnership with Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) and other stakeholders, focused on implementing the livelihood work plan, building livelihood models, and monitoring progress. The project has successfully established livelihood models in communities and connected with markets. Two out of five livelihood models have been created, and Knowledge Attitude Behaviour (KAB) surveys have been conducted. The surveys revealed that the majority of respondents, especially Hmong ethnic women, lacked knowledge of conservation. As a result, the project held discussions with female participants to increase their engagement, including organizing a gibbon festival to raise awareness and develop additional livelihood models. These events created a platform to bring local communities together to exchange experiences and learn about conservation and sustainable opportunities. Upcoming activities include building livelihood models in three adjacent communes to MCC SHCA, a second METT training workshop, and creating market linkages for agricultural products.

Output 1 – Quality and sustainability of community-based patrolling, crime prevention, and Protected Area (PA) monitoring have improved.

The project implemented SMART patrols conducted by rangers and Community Conservation Teams (CCTs) with 26 members across both sites. They provided support and training on snare removal, awareness raising, and SMART.

This activity continued from April 1st to September 30th, 2023. During this period, data was collected by 26 CCT members at both sites, resulting in 1,559 patrol days conducted over 3,653 kilometers. During 3,381 patrol hours, seven incidents of illegal logging were prevented, 27 illegal tools for hunting wildlife (including snares and guns) were confiscated, and 44 people who entered the PA without permission were stopped, providing protection for critically important forest habitats for western black-crested gibbons and other species. This information was used to strategically plan patrols targeting at-risk areas and achieving greater on-the-ground impact. Throughout this reporting period, the project also provided a range of field supplies for patrol teams, including one camera, five mobile devices, and various other equipment and consumables.

In April 2023, intensive snaring removal campaigns were completed using strategic methods based on collected data. These campaigns involved capacity building for rangers, local government officials, local youth, and CCTs. There were six sub-groups with 30 participants at both sites who joined six-day intensive patrolling trips. This intensive campaign is one of six campaigns to be completed by April 2024 to reduce threats in the protected area and raise awareness of law enforcement efforts. The focus will also be on engaging with local people to strengthen transparency and accountability in snaring issues.

Output 2 – PA governance is effective, sustainable, and collaborative.

The project plans to conduct training courses for PA staff based on training needs assessments using the ARCBC/IUCN Competency Standards for Protected Areas in October 2023. Additionally, refresher SMART training courses for CCT members in both project areas will be held.

KAB surveys were conducted in August 2023 with support from FFI staff. Ten youth from local communities assisted in conducting the survey in both project areas, with a total of 541 local participants, 48% of whom were women and 52% were men.

According to the survey results, 54% of total respondents earned their livelihood from payment for environmental forest services, and a majority of respondents highly valued forest protection, stating that protecting the forest was crucial to their lives (95.4%). However, 78.9% of respondents did not engage in any activities inside the forest. The primary concerns of the respondents were lack of market access (21.8%) and a reduction in family income (21.8%). In comparison with a KAB survey conducted in 2021, all concerns from local people were lower. For example, the concern about food shortage was 32.5% in 2023, compared to 58.2% in 2021, and the concern about market access difficulty was 21.8% in 2023, compared to 51.7% in 2021.

Output 3 – Resilience of forest-using communities is increased through land-use planning and sustainable livelihoods, creating result-based incentives for forest protection and reducing negative impacts on forests and species.

The project is continuously progressing with five livelihood models established in three communes in both project areas. These models include environmentally friendly seasonal vegetables (two models), local sticky rice (Nep Tan), and environmentally safe livestock raising (two models). Through collaboration with SRD to implement these models using participatory and market-oriented methods, all local people were trained and received technical support during the farming process. To increase market access, the project supported local people in completing the first farming season for tomato cultivation (three months) and sticky rice, and established one market channel to bring all products to Hanoi markets. In the fourth quarter of 2023, they will be farming cucumbers and cabbages. Other models for farming that encourage environmentally safe livestock raising were discussed and are planned to be implemented in the fourth quarter of 2023.



Photo 1 & 2: Vegetable cultivation friendly to the environment in Ngoc Chien commune

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.

During this six-month period, we have been working with local partners, Fauna & Flora’s UK team, and the in country technical team to address challenges that could impact achieving project objectives. All remaining project activities are planned to be implemented in the fourth quarter of 2023 and the first half of 2024.

In August of 2023, the Project Manager for Son La and Yen Bai was replaced however, the replacement manager left the position just shortly after starting the post for personal reasons. Unfortunately, other candidates who had applied for the position were vastly underqualified. Therefore, Fauna & Flora Vietnam decided to promote a member of the current team who previously held the role of Livelihoods Advisor.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance: N/A

Change request reference if known: N/A

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.

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

Comments and queries for Project Leader:

Comment: Eco-tourism seems to be a key component of Output 3. – increasing resilience of forest-using communities - in the application, however, the report has not commented on the progress of ecotourism strategies/interventions. Clarification of whether ecotourism remains a key livelihoods strategy and, if so, information regarding planned activities would be helpful.

Response: Yes, eco-tourism was considered one of activities under Output 3. However, the project focused more on land use planning and livelihood activities. During last six months, the project has discussed several times with local authorities in both Mu Cang Chai and Muong La on options of promoting eco-tourism in the region. It was suggested by local authorities that the project should pilot this intervention before introducing it to local farmers in order to demonstrate the benefits to communities and conservation. The project has contacted some primatologists and tourism experts to help with options that latter can develop in the region. Next month, from 8 – 12 November 2023, a group of primatologists and experts is visiting Mu Cang Chai as a first test of eco-tourism. If we see it works and local people are happy with, the project will continue to develop options/plan for eco-tourism.