

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	28-024
Project title	Diverse agroforestry protects natural capital around Betampona and Vohibe, Madagascar
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Madagascar
Lead partner	Madagascar Fauna and Flora Group
Partner(s)	Association Lovasoa, Association Soavinala, Madagascar National Parks, Missouri Botanical Gardens-Madagascar (MBG), Kew Madagascar Conservation Centre, Prof Christof den Biggelaar, The Fruits, Vegetables, and Environmental Education (FVEE) Program of the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM), MC Ingredients, Catholic Relief Services (CRS)
Project leader	Karen Freeman
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	www.madagascarfaunaflora.org

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).

During this reporting period we have reached and surpassed our target for agroforestry tree production for the project. At the MBG-managed site of Ampitabe (near the Vohibe forest), 4538 agroforestry trees were produced in their nursery during this period with a mix of 5 different species (orange, papaya, coffee, cloves and cinnamon), bringing the total production at that site to 13,898 trees since the project start. In addition, 1,861 agroforestry trees were grown at Ampasina (2,887 in total since project start) and 8,900 at Betampona during this same period. The aim across all three sites was to grow 12,000 trees by July 2023 so we are very happy that we have more than doubled our goal (25,685 in total). A further goal was to have 12,000 agroforestry trees (grown in our own nurseries) distributed to project participants by November 2023. At Ampitabe, 4,115 agroforestry trees were distributed during this period totalling 7,292 to date since project start. At Ampasina 3,109 agroforestry trees produced in their own nursery have been distributed to date. So far none of the Betampona-grown agroforestry trees have been distributed. So far 10,401 agroforestry trees of the target 12,000 have been distributed to the end of this project period and we anticipate being able to achieve this target on time by end November 2023.

During this period personal agroforestry plans for all participants have been completed detailing the crops that they are interested to plant and a specific planting plan for each plot (in map form). This information is vital as we enter the final stages of the project to make sure we maximise remaining project funds and time to try to facilitate progress against these plans as

far as possible. All plots are now also being mapped at each of the four corners by GPS to enable accurate estimations of total area planted per site.

After much negotiation during the Project Leader's field site visit to Ampasina in July 2023, the final outstanding MoU with VOI LOVASOA was signed in August 2023. The VOI LOVASOA are very keen for MFG to continue to support their work to protect the forest fragments under their management and have requested ongoing support post project end. Although no firm promises can be made to ensure ongoing funding, MFG has committed to helping the village association with their own funding applications.

This period saw the first project harvest of yams following the training provided during Kew's Madagascar Conservation Centre's interventions at each site. The Project Leader was lucky enough to be present at Ampasina for their first harvest and communal feast to celebrate the success. The yam project has proven particularly successful and popular with participants with an increased demand now for further plants. Dr Mamy Tiana Rajaonah has trained participants at all sites in the techniques of yam multiplication and these methods have been successfully applied in the field. Some issues have been reported, particularly at Ampasina, with yam plants being attacked by insects and also some cases where plants were not properly cared for so further follow up is required to try to resolve these issues. There is now interest to further diversify yam cultivation to include the most sought-after cultivars, thereby maximising profits. At Betampona alone in this period a total of 3460kg of yams were harvested with a market value of 6,081,500 MGA (Malagasy Ariary), which is approximately £1,106.

This period also saw the first harvests of plantains, another new introduction for the majority of participants at Betampona. The harvest in this first crop at Betampona was of a market value of 3,180,000 MGA (£578) and these profits are expected to double next year as more plants reach maturity. As these are new cultivars for the majority of participants, this production of yams and plantains alone demonstrates that the project has produced the capacity for greater food security and income-generation potential in the target households. In addition, the market gardening efforts initiated through this project have been extremely successful. During this period a further 3418 packets of seeds from 12 species were distributed amongst the Betampona participants, 630 packets of 26 species to Ampasina participants and 118 packets at Ampitabe.

Ongoing evaluations continue to assess the survival of fruit trees distributed by FKJM's Fruits, Vegetables and Environmental Education Programme (FVEE) in both the project mother orchards and in participants' plots. While some trees have been inevitably lost, the majority are growing well and initial signs from all three project sites are that the techniques of grafting and air-layering are already being practised by some participants to replicate these initial trees as intended. Although it will still be some time until these trees are productive, it is an extremely encouraging sign that the trees are valued and the capacity has been developed to enable production to continue post project end to help achieve the desired cascade effect through non project target households. Already at Ampitabe, 8.8 ha of agroforestry plots have been established with now a request for a further 13 ha, showing that the project is valued and that some participants are already looking to expand their commitment to agroforestry.

Following the various training workshops run around Betampona in the last reporting period, one of the biggest achievements in this period has been the advancement of the set-up of cooperatives to increase farmers' access to markets and increase their profits. Around Betampona 5 new cooperatives are in the process of being created with 3 having already managed to complete their dossiers and a sixth has been set up for Ampasina. 60% of project participants at Ampasina reported having joined the cooperative during the mid-term evaluations carried out during this period.

Training workshops were provided in this period to participants from Ampitabe (MBG's site) with specialist trainers from DRICC (Direction Régionale de l'Industrialisation, de Commerce et de la Consommation) Atsinanana being brought in. We hope to see similar progress for the setting up of cooperatives at this site as it will be particularly key to the long-term success and sustainability of the project due to the relative inaccessibility of the site and the challenge of getting produce to market before it spoils. The training at Ampitabe was attended by 50 people (31 male and 19 female). After the cooperatives training, MFG staff led ecological monitoring training to help the village association with their commitment to conserve and monitor the forest under their management. Help had been requested to establish viable techniques for vertebrate fauna monitoring to bolster present efforts to monitor forest infractions as per the project plan.

Betampona's Head Conservation Agent, Jean Noel, with nearly 30 years' field experience in ecological monitoring, went to Ampitabe to provide the requested coaching. Quarterly patrols have been carried out at Betampona and Ampasina as planned. Advances have also been made with degraded forest areas being planted with native trees at all sites: 2535 (8 spp.) trees planted at Vohibe, 1055 at Ampasina and 4019 at Betampona during this period. Overall, it has been an extremely busy period with a lot of good progress made. We have already completed the majority of the deliverables for this project across all three sites. It remains now to consolidate the results and work towards making the various project goals as self-sustaining as possible post-project end to achieve the desired cascade effect to trigger uptake of agroforestry in non-target households across the various zones of intervention.

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.

We have been experiencing delays with the formal registration of the farmer cooperatives around Betampona and Ampasina. On investigation with the cooperative members, it transpires that the blockage is due to the requirement to pay an initial administrative fee to the government to be added to the register of formally recognised cooperatives. The fee is 1,500,000 MGA (approx. £273) per cooperative, and this is a very substantial sum (especially ahead of the main production season before any produce sales have been made). Given our commitment to support the cooperative members to formalise their status as soon as possible to allow them to access the full benefits of working as a cooperative, we feel that although this is an unanticipated expense, that we should pay these fees through the Darwin Initiative grant (with MFG directly paying the fees to the relevant authorities). It is entirely within the remit of the project to support cooperative set up and we can make savings in other budget lines to remain within our approved total annual budget. Negotiations are currently underway with representatives of each cooperative to explain that this would be a one-off financial support and that any further running costs for the cooperative would need to be covered by their own means (either through annual membership dues or however they choose to meet the costs). These discussions form part of an ongoing dialogue with the cooperatives to support them to develop their own business plans to ensure long-term sustainability of the cooperatives. Once any candidate cooperatives have completed their dossiers for the Ampitabe region (near the Vohibe forest), we will provide similar support for the registration fees.

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/No

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No

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: £0

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?

In answer to remarks made in the 2022/2023 annual report review (to which we will provide a full response in the next annual report), we would like to explain that it was never anticipated that we would be able to see a large cascade effect happening with new households being inspired to take up agroforestry in the surrounding areas until the trees planted by the target households through the course of this project are productive, This could take a few more years yet. We realise that the project needs to be assessed for its value within the duration of the project itself, but we ask that this unavoidable time delay until trees reach the point of production is taken into consideration. Nonetheless, much interest is being generated by this project even in these relatively early stages and we are receiving many requests from non-target households for trees, training and to be included particularly in the cooperatives training sessions. We will now start recording these requests on a formal basis to allow the impact of the project to be more easily evaluated. We propose to add this as a new project indicator to address the reviewer's recommendation.