



**BIODIVERSITY
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus

Half Year Report

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 2-3 pages** in length.

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 2024

Please note all projects that were active before 1 October 2024 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

Submit to: BCF-Reports@niras.com including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	<i>29-007 Darwin Initiative Half-Year Report</i>
Project title	Developing Sustainable Management of Tropical Peatlands in Southern Borneo
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Indonesia
Lead Organisation	University of Exeter
Partner(s)	Borneo Nature Foundation
Project leader	Prof Frank Van Veen
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	October 2024 - HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	Darwin project website ; BNF Website ; BNF Facebook ; BNF Twitter ; BNF Instagram ,

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed project implementation timetable.

During the last six months of the project (April – September 2024) we have continued to make substantial progress towards achieving the project objectives, including continued development of the following initiatives:

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Programme Management:

BNF Programme and Division Managers continue to coordinate their teams to ensure the project progresses according to the workplan. External meetings with key stakeholders take place regularly, including with university departments, community groups, schools and government agencies, as well as other NGOs. We are expanding our social forestry efforts in the Rungan Landscape with four new proposed Community-managed Protected Areas, and in the Sebangau Landscape with a new team lead who is focusing on social forestry opportunities surrounding the Sebangau National Park.

Stakeholders' partnerships:

Important progress has been made in this reporting period towards the long-term sustainability and lasting impacts of the Darwin initiative; the MoU between the Sebangau National Park and the Borneo Nature Foundation has been extended for the next 5 years, with an increased scope of work and expanding activities towards the whole National Park (568,700 ha of tropical peat-swamps).

In partnership with the Central Kalimantan Government, we have made good progress towards having the 170,000 ha of the Rungan-Kahayan landscape acknowledged and designated as a Kalimantan Provincial Strategic Area (KSP). It has been agreed that the landscape falls within two key categories of interest for the KSP: the southern part as 'economic interest' and the northern part as 'environmental interest'. This will allow the development of regional policies and the revision of spatial plans for the sustainable management of the Landscape, reducing environmental threats and land degradation.

BNF has met with the Ministry of Agrarian and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency and the Public Works and Housing Ministry to work on finalising the Revised Spatial Plan for Central Kalimantan Province for the next 20 years. It is hoped that this will soon be approved by the Governor of Central Kalimantan.

We continue to work closely with the Palangka Raya City Environmental Agency (DLH) on redrafting and updating the Local Regulation on Forest and Land Fires from 2003, which required major revisions.

Collaborative work has continued on developing tools and systems to support the management of fire risk by the Fire-free Alliance, including the rollout of the PERISAI early warning system to local communities.

During HKAN (National Nature Conservation Day) on 29th August, the Ministry of Forestry recognised BNF with an award for the best community-based conservation work of 2023.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Regular data gathering and M&E protocols are continuing, ensuring that our M&E systems can report against standard indicators. Monitoring activities continue as normal across our intervention areas, including regular biodiversity monitoring, fire patrolling, ecological restoration monitoring, community development impacts and behaviour change assessments, and detailed spatial analysis at the landscape level, looking at forest change and recovery.

In partnership with the Sebangau National Park (BTNS), we have developed and implemented a large-scale orangutan population density assessment across the park. This has included orangutan nest surveys and an in-depth analysis of habitat types and forest structure within the national park, to gain a clearer understanding of the current orangutan population status, forest quality and long-term population viability.

Risk Analysis and Management Framework:

We have continued enhancing the effectiveness of the Risk Register and Management Framework and ensuring that clear systems and good risk-mitigation practices are in place. Future improvements will require revisions of existing and detailed risk mitigation plans, clearer accountability mechanisms and specific training sessions to ensure that all staff understand how to effectively use the risk management tools.

Recruitment:

During the reporting period, several Indonesian staff members joined the BNF team, including a communications manager and an international Visits coordinator, bringing valuable skills to the team.

PEATLANDS RESTORATION

Hydrology Restoration: BNF and BTNS have made further progress on socialising the canal-blocking strategy with local communities. Working with members of the community and BTNS staff, BNF has built 48 new dams during this period, fully blocking three large canals on the Rasau river. Preparatory work has been carried out and materials and equipment readied in preparation to construct a further 48 dams. Monthly hydrology monitoring has continued both pre- and post-canal blocking, as part of our monitoring protocols and impact evaluation practices.

Reforestation of degraded areas: During this reporting period, a total of 27,071 seedlings provided by the community seedling nurseries' stock have been planted. Ground and aerial surveys have taken place on potential new reforestation sites, with one large site (~ 250 ha) identified in Sei Bangah area, south Sebangau, being prioritised for 2024's planting. As the main planting season approaches, 137,000 seedlings from 15 Community Seedling Nurseries have been mobilised to the planting site, to acclimatise in readiness for planting. Monitoring of planted seedlings has continued throughout the reporting period, with data informing planting strategy going forward, to support optimal survival rates.

Community Seedling Nurseries: During the last six months five new community seedling nurseries have been established, bringing the total up to 20 operational nurseries, supplying regular seedling stock for the reforestation programme. A total of 166 community members are currently involved in habitat restoration activities, managing their own community nurseries in 7 villages. Altogether, the nurseries have produced over 220,000 seedlings for sale to BNF, generating a total income of £ for the community members involved.

SUSTAINABLE PEATLAND MANAGEMENT

Enhancing long-term sustainable management of peatlands:

Over the last six months, three new social forestry proposals (four villages) have been submitted (totalling a proposed 2,394 ha), aiming to establish new community-protected areas. Two further villages have also begun the process to draw up proposals. Tasks involved in this process have included socialisation of the social forestry schemes in target villages, surveying the Potential Indicative Areas (PIAPS), assistance with putting together the proposal itself, and submission, as well as technical verification of the proposal. We are currently supporting a total of 10 villages with both pre- and post-decree plans. Post-decree support has included supporting three villages with boundary marking and establishment of Social Forestry Business Groups.

Peat-friendly practices:

Training has taken place for the five newly established community seed nurseries, with sessions in May and July involving 49 participants from the 5 villages. These trainings covered seedling/seed procurement, stock management, seedling maintenance and pest management. Alongside this, continuous support has been provided to already established community nursery groups, and over 220,000 seedlings have been purchased so far, in preparation for the 2024 planting season.

Regular meetings, and assistance and training to build local community group capacity in alternative livelihoods have taken place, including developing workplans, agroforestry set-up activities, fisheries monitoring, seedling sowing training, plant monitoring, garden design, knowledge sharing, and ecotourism.

Education and community outreach:

During the past six months, BNF's education team has worked with 133 children and teenagers in after-school clubs and youth groups. In addition, work has continued within six schools, involving 96 children and 48 adults.

Two major peat-swamp and biodiversity conservation workshops and stakeholders' participation events took place during the reporting period; the National Nature Conservation Day (HKAN) and the Sebangau Biodiversity Fest. Both events highlighted the important work that BNF is doing in partnership with the Sebangau National Park to preserve tropical peatlands.

PEATLANDS PROTECTION

Integrated Fire Management:

During the last six months, a new community patrol and firefighting team has been established, bringing the total up to 9 in the Sebangau region, and 16 in total.

Training sessions have been held on the use of SMART software to enhance the effectiveness of the teams' patrolling activities. Five training sessions took place, with 67 in attendance from 5 firefighting teams. Regular patrols have taken place every month, with efforts ramping up during the months of July and August as conditions dried out. 80 people were involved in 97 patrols in July and 95 in August.

PROJECT COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION

Relevant publications and deliverables:

During the last six months, several publications have been developed and launched by BNF and in partnership with key stakeholders, including:

Peer-reviewed manuscripts:

- *Impacts of fire and prospects for recovery in a tropical peat forest ecosystem (PNAS)*
- *The power of gibbon song: Going beyond the research to inform conservation actions (American Journal of Primatology)*
- *Communicating conservation: Evidence of knowledge gains through a children's conservation club in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. (Folia Primatologica).*

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.

While the MoU between BNF Indonesia and Sebangau National Park has been successfully extended, discussions with the Ministry of Forestry on MoU extension have taken longer than expected. The bureaucratic processes involved in approvals have caused some delays in project activities. However, as things stand, project budget and timelines will not be affected by this delay.

The project has now entered its third and final year, and we are pleased with the progress and outcomes achieved thus far. However, ongoing commitments with community groups and key stakeholders, along with additional capacity-building needs, indicate a clear need for continued engagement with considerable opportunities to add further value to project outcomes. This means that implementation of an exit strategy at this point would be detrimental to medium-long term return on project investment. To sustain and build upon these accomplishments, we are currently pursuing future funding opportunities.

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:

n/a

Received confirmation of change acceptance:

n/a

Change Request reference if known: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)

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 2025)?

☐ No ☒

4c. If you expect and underspend, then you should consider your project budget needs carefully.

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

n/a

6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report.

"In year 3 the project is urged to identify stand out women and promote them as Local Champions and Roles Models"

-> We continue with our commitment to promote Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) across all the work areas and project levels. Despite the current challenges to involve women in typically male-led activities, we believe that the project is making an impact and is promoting gender equality and providing social inclusion opportunities. We will continue promoting women-led community groups as project champions.

"It will be especially important in year 3 to carefully analyse the metrics data through the lens of sustainable impact and to identify final issues which will need to be addressed before project closure. One issue will be to gauge the need an appetite for a follow on project to continue to build upon results from the project."

-> During the 3rd year of this project we have made a start, looking at follow-up project continuity, exit strategies and future needs. BNF and UoE, in partnership with several local and international stakeholders, have recently submitted a Darwin Extra project proposal aiming to build on results from this project and scale-up initiatives across Central Kalimantan.

“Prioritise training courses for project staff in social and environmental safeguards, and prepare an environmental safeguard guideline – prioritise in year 3.”

-> Both the University of Exeter and BNF have established safeguarding policies in place and we make sure that all staff and project participants are aware of these. We acknowledge the need to train our staff further and develop a project-specific safeguarding guide. We have explored options for training courses to achieve this but have not found suitable options within our limited budget, as we did not account for this in project costs. We have identified some free online resources that we have shared among the team and we have an application pending for funding to train the team further, especially with a view on continued activities beyond this project.

“The reviewer recommends discussion with PSKL regarding establishment of social forestry business groups and commodity development models.”

-> We have had several discussions and ongoing collaboration with the PSKL agency regarding new Social Forestry Proposals, as well as with the Central Kalimantan regional office, the Centre for Social Forestry and Environmental Partnership (BPSKL).

“The reviewer urges UoE to upload more data, technical information, results and lessons learned onto website.”

-> We agree with the need to make all this freely available, but we do not think the project website is the right place for this, as funding for its upkeep will cease at the end of the project. All this information will be published in peer-reviewed open-access journals as much as possible and associated data made available in relevant repositories.

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1 st April 2024)	
Have you responded to any additional feedback (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	Yes
For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1 st April 2024)	
Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	Yes
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	yes
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	yes
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	na
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	