



**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: 31<sup>st</sup> 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](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com) including your project ref in the subject line.**

<b>Project reference</b>	29-014
<b>Project title</b>	Improving community sustainable natural resource management of Mount Mulanje
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Malawi
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Botanic Gardens Conservation International
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust (MMCT), WeForest, TRAFFIC – FairWild, Forestry Research Institute of Malawi (FRIM)
<b>Project leader</b>	<i>Alex Hudson</i>
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	<i>HYR3</i>
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<i><a href="https://www.bgci.org/our-work/projects-and-case-studies/miombo-restoration-sustainable-use-in-malawi">https://www.bgci.org/our-work/projects-and-case-studies/miombo-restoration-sustainable-use-in-malawi</a></i>

**1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end of 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.

M&E systems: A Change Request has been submitted to the Darwin Initiative in July 2024 for updates to the logframe due to some indicators becoming less relevant to the project outcome and outputs following developments and discussions between lead partners in year 2. These

changes focus on the targets for restoration and value chain developments. To date, these have not been confirmed by the Darwin Initiative technical assessment team, although a reviewer did give comments at the start of October which have been responded to (see section 2 below).

Activity 1.1: The next steering committee meeting is to be organised in November 2024.

Activity 2.2: 11kgs of late season *Parinari curatellifolia* were purchased from Gibson village collectors in June 2024, however, the trees in the upper areas of the co-management blocks produced little fruit from May to August, and in the lower areas no fruit dropped in September as they did in 2023. Yields may be lower for the year for *P. curatellifolia*, perhaps due to the unseasonal rains in August and September, which are usually dry. *P. curatellifolia* is known to be productive in drought years, and so fruit yields may be negatively affected by wet periods.

A good harvest of *Uapaca kirkiana* fruit is expected this year, after failing to fruit in year 2. Good harvests are expected of *Garcinia buchananii* from December to Early February, and *Flacourtia indica* from January to March, depending on the rain. The above average heavy rainfall that is predicted for December and January may adversely affect the Chanterelle mushroom availability since heavy rain causes damage to the emerging fruiting bodies.

Activities 2.4 and 2.5: Only one day of *P. curatellifolia* resource assessment took place (09.04.2024) because most species do not fruit until after September, at the earliest. Sustainable harvest training was done instead (see activity 3.3 below).

Resource Assessment of *U. kirkiana* will be a focus in November to determine potential yields per tree and per population.

MMCT will work with registered collectors during harvest days in November, December and January to observe that the collection methods and protocols are followed by the harvesters. They will also note challenges and consider solutions in collaboration with the collectors.

Activity 2.6: FairWild audit/pre-audit will be in February 2025, to coincide with the fungi harvest.

Activity 3.3: Approximately ten people from each of the project's 27 target villages were selected to be trained in sustainable harvesting methods: 192 women and 82 men. They were trained on the protocols and guidelines regarding hygiene, environmentally sensitive collection, and safe storage of the raw materials once harvested. The trained collectors were made aware that they can register with the cooperative to be part of it, for a small fee. When the fruit are in good supply, basic processing methods will be demonstrated to the cooperative members and to trained collectors that have an interest in the value-addition and processing techniques.

74 women were also trained in paper and briquette making in September as an alternative livelihood opportunity. The briquettes provide an alternative to firewood being made from scrap paper and other waste plant materials.

In November, the following workshops are scheduled: Soap making (81 women), Beeswax Products (81 women), and Weaving and Embroidery Skills workshop (54 women).

Activity 3.4: A collaboration with Mayankho Community-based Organisation - centrally located in Likhubula - has started with their facilities used in training. Community processing is difficult because of challenges (see section 2) and an agreement with Mayankho will be signed to be a processing venue for collectors and cooperative members to process fruits hygienically (e.g., skin and seed separation from the fruit pulp), if the matched funded processing facility is not ready in December. Other livelihoods activities (activity 3.3) will also be run there.

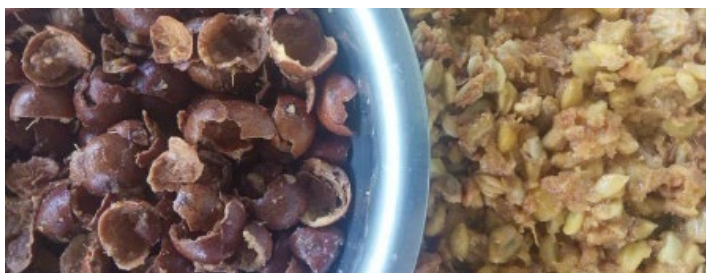


Figure 1: *U. kirkiana* fruits processed to separate pulp from skins.

Activity 3.7: A team with representatives from BGCI, MMCT, WeForest and Wildlife & Environmental Society of Malawi designed awareness raising activities for the rest of the project:

- Porter's Race promotion – July 2024
- Fire awareness campaign – September 2024
- Mobile van – October 2024
- Traditional dance competition event – October 2024
- Guided nature walks – October 2024
- Chief's forum – to project end
- Environmental education with schools
- Radio programs and jingles -November 2024 onwards

At the porter's race, 50 runners were sponsored from local villages and a stand with a banner, stickers and leaflets to promote the miombo conservation. This included information on sustainable harvesting and more efficient cookstoves to reduce firewood requirements. Between 30-50 people (10 women) visited the stand, from which 17 answered a questionnaire. The responses showed an awareness of ecosystem service values (water, timber, and biodiversity), deforestation, bushfires, reduced water levels and soil erosion. They suggested solutions of firebreaks, reforestation, tree protection, awareness campaigns, and civic education.

The fire hazard awareness campaign reached 445 participants (ca. 195 women). Activities included distributing educational materials, interactive question and answer sessions, and speeches from key stakeholders emphasising community responsibility, the consequences of forest fires and the importance of collaboration in management of forest fires.

Activity 3.8: Final KAP survey to be done January to March 2025. A mid-term KAP survey in May 2024 had 251 respondents (135 women), guiding the awareness campaign activities.

Activities 4.2 and 4.3: A business incubator has not been identified that focuses on wild native plants, with alternative projects TRAFFIC/FairWild manages not directly translatable to the local context. However, consultant experts from FairWild have advised on administrative and business structural and documentation requirements to achieve certification. This includes provision of guidance and generic template for collectors' contracts, and guidance on establishing fair pricing mechanisms.

Other experts Sarah Lilford - Dusty Road restaurant - and Caroline Jaquet - Bio-Innovation Zimbabwe (BIZ) Hutano Foods - in Zimbabwe have been advising the project co-ordinator, Kate Chanthunya, on product development options. This included steps for production of shelf-stable dried fruit powders, techniques for pulp extraction and discussions on target markets. Further engagement on market links is anticipated in the final six months of the year, built into FairWild's programme of annual exhibitions such as BioFach.

Project leader, Alex Hudson, will attend a Union for Ethical Biobase (UEBT) conference in October to discuss business options and research requirements for new value chain opportunities. The project co-ordinator, Kate Chanthunya, has also applied as an intrapreneur to partake in the Biodiversity Partners Programme that offers training for social enterprises and NGOs in business skills for Nature-positive projects and business ideas, in 2025.

Activity 4.4: The speed of development of a new processing facility has delayed staffing the social enterprise, delaying training (see section 2 below). Alternative facilities will be used to run activities (activity 3.4) if it is not completed by December and relevant staff will be trained.

Activities 4.5 and 4.6: A contract with the Malawi University of Science and Technology is being finalised to evaluate raw and processed nutrient content, and shelf-life assessment. The Malawi Bureau of Standards will also be engaged in the last 6 months to provide official assessments of food safety.

Product development trials were carried out using frozen *F. indica* fruits. The organoleptic properties from prolonged frozen storage have been monitored, including the effect of storage in permeable or impermeable bags. *P. curatellifolia* fruit purchased in June were processed fresh into sweetened powders. The project co-ordinator has done some preliminary research into the effectiveness of dried fruit powders in cosmetic products such as face masks. Further products developed include:

- Energy bar made from many local Malawian ingredients: cacao nibs, hempseeds, finger millet and sorghum flours, dried wild fruit pieces.
- Dried fruit rolls with 50% banana to improve the texture.
- Dried *F. indica* fruit squares topped with caramelised fresh coconut.
- Dried cordial concentrate with *G. b Buchananii*, pineapple, honey and fresh Ginger.
- Dried fruit powders from *F. indica* and *P. curatellifolia*.
- Cold process soap made from fermented fruit skins and scoby culture from *P. curatellifolia* fruit, to add value to byproducts of fruit snack production.

FairWild Foundation attended an international meeting of the African Baobab Alliance in April 2024, which illustrated some lessons learned from the process of bringing Baobab to international markets.

**Activity 4.8:** Project co-ordinator, Kate Chanthunya, attended the Natural & Organic Fair in Cape Town in April 2024 as a trade visitor and visited businesses in the Cape Town to promote new products. Some companies and delis expressed interest when the range is complete.

Kate also exhibited at SustainFest Indigenous Foods Festival in early October in Lilongwe, Malawi. Visitors were asked to comment on the branding and on wild fruit products that they would most likely buy. Connections were made with native ingredient suppliers for the energy bars, and other potential products, such as a Masuku Sorghum porridge blend.

The project will contract Justin Williams, a South African marketing specialist, to advise and formulate a blueprint for a Demand Creation Strategy focusing on novel food and cosmetic products, applicable to the export market (long-term).

**Activity 4.9:** Business plans are in development and will be finalised by the project end. FairWild will support through inputs into harvester contracts, fair pricing policy, a grievance mechanism (see section 6) and new product development documentation.

**Activity 5.3:** In May, MMCT trained 7 more collectors (3 women) to collect native species in Thuchila and in August, WeForest trained 23 more community members (11 women) from Mphaya and Nsikita sub-blocks. A total of 42 community members (21 women) have been trained to collect seeds by MMCT and WeForest. Eighteen collection trips were conducted collecting 7 species (see table 1). Collectors are paid MK3,000 or MK6,000 for half a day or a day respectively by MMCT; and MK3,500/kg of seeds by WeForest.

Table 1: Collection and propagation by communities and at various nurseries in the project area.

Species name	No. seed collections made	Total weight (Kg)	No. seedlings (Oct 24)	% Germination	No. nurseries with seedlings
<i>Pericopsis angolensis</i>	7	3.4	7,070	72	4
<i>Sterculia quinqueloba</i>	1	0.68	1,890	48	2
<i>Burkea africana</i>	11	1.63	787	4.5	4
<i>Azelaia quanzensis</i>	3	10	747	50	3
<i>Dichrostachys cinerea</i>	4	0.21	417	3	2
<i>Faurea saligna</i>	2	0.84	0	0	2*
<i>Brachystegia</i> spp.	1	0.85	1,597	80	2
<i>Khaya nyasica</i>	1	0.1	26		1
TOTALS		16.77	12,534		

\*2 nurseries have been provided seeds, but none have germinated so far.

**Activity 5.4:** From the seeds collected, seven species have been propagated in two nurseries at MMCT and two community nurseries established by WeForest (see table 1). WeForest is also supporting nurseries to propagate 6 other species using purchased seeds for agroforestry planting, two are native (*Khaya nyasica* and *Faidherbia albida*) and the others are exotic.

**Activities 5.5, 5.8b and 5.9:** Following the Global Biodiversity Standard team support to establish new permanent monitoring plots (PMPs) in March 2024, 23 PMPs (10m x 40m) were set up

<p>across the two forest blocks: Kazembe (14 plots) and Tchete (9 plots). WeForest will recollect data from 12 PMP's in the first quarter of 2025. An initial report was submitted by the Centre for Ecosystem Restoration and once the assessments from the established PMP's have been conducted, a detailed analysis on the biodiversity differences will be completed.</p> <p><u>Activity 5.6:</u> WeForest trained 30 lead farmers (19 women) in agroforestry methods. A further 10 lead farmers (6 women) will be trained in the last six months of the project.</p> <p><u>Activities 5.7 and 5.8:</u> Restoration activities have focused on firebreaks, prescribed burns, and protection from fire and illegal harvesting. Across 11 of Kazembe and Tchete's sub blocks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firebreaks: 100.1km.</li> <li>• Prescribed burn: 261.2ha</li> <li>• Firefighting equipment: 120 fire beaters, 22 panga knives, 33 slashers and 33 hoes</li> <li>• Protection training: 26 new scouts trained (6 women)</li> </ul> <p>A community sensitisation meeting on fire management was conducted and all sub blocks in the co-management area were provided with the firefighting equipment.</p> <p>Trained scouts have been equipped with, whistles, gumboots, work suits and torches to do patrols in the co-management blocks to protect natural resources. Patrol data from April to September, covering incidents, confiscated items, and arrests, show an incident decline. Panga knives, charcoal bags, timber, fuelwood, hoes, pit saws, bicycles, sickles, and hammers, were confiscated. Courts case statuses reveal most cases are concluded with fines ranging from MK300,000 to MK700,000 and a considerable number of warnings in September.</p>	
<p><b>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.</b></p>	
<p>During the project second year partners noted that some targets were no longer relevant or achievable because:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the restoration strategy switched from active restoration to assisted natural regeneration with protection practices (fire and overharvesting) to allow native flora to regrow.</li> <li>2. the Ministry of Industry and Trade representatives confirmed that 1 co-operative was better than having 5 established.</li> </ol> <p>There were also staff changes at WeForest, including their Country Director, and so a Change Request was submitted in August for these changes, following agreement by all partners.</p> <p>Processing of fruit into food products at the village level faces challenges with availability of adequate clean running water, a dedicated space for processing, and a lack of electricity for refrigeration/freezing and drying. Solar drying is not recommended during the main fruiting season as the weather is humid and rainy, with high risks of fungal contamination. Delays to the processing facility (matched funded project) that will include wild fruit product processing area has caused delays to staff hiring and therefore people to be trained in business management skills as well as providing a space for hygienic processing. A backup plan for processing is to upgrade a smaller facility in December (see activities 3.4 and 4.1 in section 1).</p> <p>These changes do not impact the budget.</p>	
<p><b>3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?</b></p>	
Discussed with NIRAS:	Yes
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	No
Change Request reference if known: None provided so far with no response	

**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)?**

Yes ☐ No ☒

**4c. If you expect and underspend, then you should 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 to your project 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?**

The management team has been working to ensure that there is an improved system of monitoring the socio-economic impacts of the project through engagement with the Interdisciplinary Centre for Conservation Science group at the University of Oxford. This has identified an external consultant that will focus on assessing subjective, material, and relational dimensions of the project's impacts on local people, including perceptions of the project, the benefits they have received and their goals and aspirations for the future management of the reserve and nature.

Financial management team and procedures at MMCT have improved significantly for the institute (a previous issue), whilst the BGCI and the role of MMCT project manager to keep better track have made tracking project expenditure much improved for this half year. This is expected to continue to the end of project making final reporting simpler and more accurate.

**6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report.** If your project was subject to an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment please use this space to comment on any changes to international human rights risks, and to address any additional mitigations outlined in your offer letters. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.

The BGCI team are going to deliver Safeguarding training in November 2024, including outlining a mechanism for grievance complaints for the project. At the same time, the FairWild consultant, Valdon Smith, is advising of inclusion of a grievance mechanism into the social enterprise framework documentation, as a requirement for the certification standard.

## Checklist for submission

<b>For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you <b>responded to any additional feedback</b> (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.	NA
If not already submitted, have you attached your <b>risk register</b> ?	NA
<b>For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you responded to <b>feedback from your latest Annual Report Review</b> ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	Yes
<b>For All Projects</b>	
Include your <b>project reference</b> in the subject line of submission email.	Yes
Submit to <a href="mailto:BCFs-Report@niras.com">BCFs-Report@niras.com</a> .	Yes
Have you <b>clearly highlighted any confidential information</b> within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	Yes
Have you reported against the most <b>up to date information for your project</b> ?	Yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Yes