



**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	DI 29-019
Project title	Biocultural landscapes for livelihoods and connectivity in Verapaces, Guatemala.
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Guatemala
Lead Organisation	University of Greenwich
Partner(s)	Federation of Cooperatives of the Verapaces, FEDECOVERA, Association Private Nature Reserves of Guatemala, ARNPG
Project leader	Jeremy Haggar
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	Oct 2024 HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	

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.

Outcome 1: Two improved management plans for private nature reserves have been submitted by ARNPG for approval of the National Protected Areas Council (CONAP). Two new co-management agreements between cooperatives and CONAP are under discussion with support from FEDECOVERA and ARNPG. If agreed this would meet the target of 4 approved management plans. As regards the multi-actor landscape co-management plan, regular meetings continue between actors and they are providing support to beneficiaries, but this has not yet coalesced into a plan.

Outcome 2: Biocultural protocols are well advanced in 7 additional communities and should be ready for presentation to the community assemblies in Feb/March 2025. Biodiversity monitoring has been delayed by 3-4 months due to biologist consultants of ARPNG leaving to more permanent positions or to enter post-graduate programmes. New biologists have now been contracted but monitoring may need to continue beyond March 2025, the previous end-date.

Outcome 3: Planting material is available and being distributed to meet the planting targets for reforestation and agroforestry establishment. Areas established in 2023 have been documented and applications for reforestation incentive payments submitted to the Forestry Institute.

Outcome 4: FEDECOVERA staff have been trained in use of the Cool Farm Tool to assess carbon footprint of coffee and cardamon production on farm. A bespoke assessment has been made by Univ of Greenwich of the subsequent processing to export. Assessment of the overall carbon footprint of production and export of coffee and cardamon and implications for carbon neutrality are in progress.

Outcome 5: Two cooperatives now have established medicinal herb production areas, drying facilities are being constructed and women's groups have been trained in elaboration of simple products. An eco-tourism route has been identified including two of the cooperatives, a plan for promotion and training in receiving tourists is underway.

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 following response covers the period from April 2023 to present as we failed to cover this in the annual report.

The main lesson from the past year is one of adaptive management to respond to external factors affecting project implementation, increased understanding of the context within which the project is working, and new opportunities arising from engagement between project partners and stakeholders.

In the August-October last year there were political protests and road blockades in Guatemala as the results of the Presidential elections were being contested. This led to partners not being able to travel and access fields sites, which was made worse with excess rains and floods in November. This delayed biodiversity monitoring by about 3 months resulting in the need to pass budget from 2022/23 financial year to 2023/24. However, this delay has also resulted in some of the biologists seeking alternative opportunities and the need to find new specialists.

This has been achieved but we are now about 6 months behind were we aimed to be.

Nevertheless, the studies will be completed within the project time frame and sites were prioritised where the information was needed for key activities, such as the management plans. An area where advancing the project aims has been a challenge is with the private nature reserves and communities outside of the organized cooperatives. The Chicanab community have conserved a significant area of forest and merit support, but they lack organization with key members migrating outside of the region to work, which has made it almost impossible to coordinate the development of activities such as ecotourism. In contrast the cooperatives under FEDECOVERA are well organized as well as having the back stopping of federation. Two of the cooperatives have taken advantage of the diagnostic and training in ecotourism provided by the project and have invested their own funds in building accommodation to receive tourists.

In a similar vein at the start of the project it was hoped to support three private nature reserves and register a farm owned by FEDECOVERA as a fourth. However, one of the existing private reserves has been abandoned by the owners, and this and the farm owned by FEDECOVERA have been subject to invasion from surrounding communities resulting in deforestation. While FEDECOVERA are trying to resolve the situation of their farm this typically takes several years, and for the other farm we can take no action without the authorisation of the owners. However, again opportunities occurred to conserve the remaining forest fragments within five of the existing forest cooperatives through co-management agreements. The severe dry season during El Nino, impact of water supplies and unfortunately loss of some of the forest from fires (about 40 ha was lost of 200 ha of forest total), has motivated the cooperatives to conserve the remaining forest. The cooperatives have now established a buffer zone around the forest where no burning is permitted and anyone contravening this is subject to a fine of about £1000. This does mean that the target of 200 ha forest conserved may not be possible, although we hope the 40 ha lost may be restored.

These lesson ratifies the importance of working through a strong organizational partner such as FEDECOVERA and their members who have the capacity to adopt and integrate the contributions from an externally funded project, while at the same time the challenges of achieving conservation and development aims with communities that lack such organization.

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:	No
Change Request reference if known: <i>If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome</i>	

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?

None

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.

In our annual report we failed to complete the section on lessons learnt. We have provided a more extensive response to section 2 above to respond to this error.

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1st 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 ?	
For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1st 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.	X
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	X
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	X
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	X
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	X
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	X