



**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	30-006
Project title	Improving integrated landscape management on the Zunil - Atitlán - Balam Juyu biocultural corridor
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Guatemala
Lead Organisation	The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
Partner(s)	Asociación Vivamos Mejor (VMA)
Project leader	<i>Jorge Cardona (TNC)</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>October 30th 2024</i> <i>HYR2</i>
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.

Project Launch Event: In May, we held the project launch event with the United Kingdom Embassy in Guatemala at Vivamos Mejor's Educational Centre with media coverage

Output 1. By 2026, local governments, institutions and indigenous communities have enhanced capacities for the inclusive governance and sustainable management of 63,000ha in the core zone the Zunil – Atitlán - Balam Juyu' biocultural corridor: Last six months, the project have focused on strengthening the governance platform for the Corridor by facilitating planning and logistics for the Central Highlands and RUMCLA Conservation Area Roundtable meetings, and supporting the documentation for official recognition by CONAP (Indicator 1.1). A request for recognition of the Roundtable was submitted, and regional CONAP offices issued a favourable opinion. The request is now awaiting resolution from

CONAP's Executive Secretariat . A gender and safeguards workshop was held to respond to VM requests to strengthen specific approaches among their team. The Roundtable training is expected to be completed next semester. The Ecological Monitoring System is set up in AVMG offices (1.4), with camera traps and climate dataloggers deployed in permanent field plots. A report on monitoring results is anticipated by the end of the next fiscal year. Activities related to the Corridor's management plan (1.5) were postponed to focus as the government transition required significant engagement with newly elected officials. We plan to resume this activity next semester along with stakeholder engagement for fire management activities (Output 2) ahead of the upcoming fire season. We completed the current and future ecological niche modelling for 25 species (1.6) and validated our results with field experts which predict that their ecological niches will shift north. This suggests the need to adapt the current Corridor design to accommodate north-south connectivity throughout the forest landscape. We are developing the technical study and management plan for a new protected area: Jaibal Atitlán Regional Municipal Park. We have completed 12 workshops to update management plans for four other conservation areas (3 per each conservation area).

Output 2. By mid-2026, the number of wildfires and the rate of loss of key ecosystems due to wildfires has at least stabilised in the Zunil-Atitlán-Balam Juyu' biocultural corridor: Having developed the Project's wildfire baseline report and secured INAB's support during the last fiscal year, we focused this semester on engaging other stakeholders to support the Fire Management Strategy (2.1), including the Environmental Commission of the Departmental Development Council of Sololá and CONRED (National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction). We began supporting the Commission's fire training activities and created a municipal fire management capacity assessment survey to inform the development of the Strategy. Acquisition of forest fire equipment is also underway (2.3). During the next semester, we will secure CONRED's support and hold workshops for the Strategy's development and validation (2.1) continue with the certification of community brigades in the control and prevention of forest fires with the support of CONRED and INAB as part of this process of strengthening the communities. (2.2 and 2.3), and support the maintenance of blacklines and firebreaks (2.4).

Output 3. By 2026, 75ha of forests in key biological connectivity areas of the Zunil-Atitlán-Balam Juyu' biocultural corridor are restored and serve as demonstration sites: Based on our preliminary analyses of key degraded areas to restore connectivity (3.1), during this semester we restored 31.6 hectares (42 % of the Project's goal set for the next fiscal year) by planting 34,960 trees of 32 endemic, endangered, and key ecological species (3.4). We have begun assessing seed availability and collecting seeds from local seed sources to achieve our biodiversity goals for next year's planting season. We are also procuring plants from regional forest tree nurseries and preparing reforestation plans for the Project's National Forest Incentive Program reforestation goals set for the next fiscal year (3.3). During the next semester, we will continue these activities and also focus on the Project's demonstration site activities (3.2). We expect to finish our analyses of key degraded areas to restore connectivity by the end of this fiscal year and complete our demonstration site and restoration goals in the next fiscal year, as planned.

Output 4. By mid-2026, 390 indigenous families will improve their household economy, with a minimum 10% increase of their annual income derived from sustainable livelihoods and savings from reduced fuelwood consumption: Regarding sustainable honey production activities (4.1), we've begun developing a diagnostic baseline and providing training for 50 beekeepers within the Corridor. Equipment acquisition is also underway. For sustainable coffee production (4.2), during this semester we supported 60 coffee-growers in the implementation of water and soil conservation practices and provided coffee seedlings to renew 8.6 hectares of coffee plots within the Corridor (57 % of the Project's goal set for the next fiscal year). We will continue providing training and equipment during the next semester, while the remaining coffee renewal activities are planned for the next fiscal year. As for our improved wood-saving stove activities (4.3), during this semester we finished our baseline study of wood consumption, and during the next semester we will complete the deployment of a total of 379 improved wood-saving stoves throughout the Corridor, surpassing the Project's goal of 300 stoves. Since the area of work is in an indigenous territory, we state that the families who

received improved wood-saving stoves are all indigenous. Monitoring all sustainable livelihood activities will continue during the next fiscal year, as planned.	
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.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In engaging government stakeholders, some agencies require a formal approach to secure their official support for the project's regional planning efforts. While INAB required only a couple of meetings to secure their support, other agencies like CONRED, which also plays a key role in developing the Integrated Fire Management Strategy, need approval from the local governor to participate. Additionally, potential stakeholder burnout from Roundtable activities may delay the strategy's development. However, we are taking steps to secure support from CONRED and the local governor and plan to hold the necessary meetings and workshops to advance the strategy in the upcoming semester. During this semester, we prioritized the official recognition of the Central Highlands and RUMCLA Roundtable activities, which had been delayed due to the government transition process. In the upcoming semester, we will focus on Integrated Fire Management activities in preparation for the approaching forest fire season. Additionally, the next semester includes two months (December and January) with very low or no stakeholder participation. As a result, we anticipate possible delays in the development of the Corridor's updated management plan. As a lesson learned, we will design projects with timelines that specifically accommodate government bureaucracy, particularly in relation to timelines affected by government transition processes. During the last semester, acquiring coffee plants of the Caturra and Catuaí varieties proved challenging, primarily because these varieties sought by the Project's coffee grower groups, which are linked to specific organic market requirements, are becoming increasingly rare in national coffee nurseries. Additionally, the project's fiscal year and budget availability do not align well with the coffee plant production cycle and the mechanisms for reserving and securing the provision of the requested varieties. As a lesson learned, we will design future projects with this consideration in mind. In the upcoming semester, we aim to secure coffee plants for the next fiscal year, although fluctuating prices and the availability of varieties may still pose challenges. 	
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)? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Estimated underspend:

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?

No

6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.

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)?	
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 ?	
We responded partially and plan to respond totally in the next Annual Report	
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	
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.	