



**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 2025

Please note all projects that were active before 1st October 2025 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

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

Project reference	31-002
Project title	Seeds4Soils: regenerating soils with agrobiodiversity for climate resilience in Madagascar
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Madagascar
Lead Organisation	World Vegetable Center (legal name: Asian Vegetable Research and Development Center)
Partner(s)	National Center for Applied Research and Rural Development (FOFIFA), University of Antananarivo (UA), NGO CEEFFEL (Conseil, Expérimentation, Formation en Fruit Et Légume).
Project Leader	Lukas Pawera
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 October 2025 – HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	https://avrdc.org/seeds4soils-improving-climate-resilience-in-madagascar-by-regenerating-soils-with-agrobiodiversity/

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 monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) 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.

This report covers the period 1 April – 30 September 2025.
The progress within this period is described below for each project output.

Output 1: Biodiversity of TAVs and CWR (including soil microbiome and traditional knowledge) inventoried and collected

- A collecting permit was obtained from the local authorities, and between May and September 2025, four collection expeditions were conducted, resulting in the acquisition of 694 accessions of legume crops, traditional vegetables, and their wild relatives, surpassing the original target of 400 accessions.
- 35 rice bean (*Vigna umbellata*) leaf samples, along with rhizosphere and bulk soil samples, were collected to characterize soil microbiome and assess genetic diversity using landscape genomics. This study covered 49 villages across 13 municipalities.
- Information on the cropping systems and farmers' perceptions of the market importance of rice bean was documented during the landscape genomics survey and discussions with farmers. While many farmers appreciate local legumes such as rice bean for their drought tolerance, low labor requirements, and good taste, limited economic value and markets are reasons why this crop remains neglected.
- DNA extraction and genotyping activities will identify beneficial microorganisms and adaptive genes that enable rice bean and native legumes to thrive in marginal soils and under dry conditions.

Output 2: Crop & soil biodiversity conserved on-farm and in genebanks

- Regeneration and characterization of the newly collected accessions will begin in November 2025. The project also indirectly supports the conservation of existing landraces collected and conserved in the previous Darwin Initiative project (26-015).
- A protocol for on-farm conservation to support custodian farmers to conserve prioritised landraces on-farm together with associated microorganisms to stimulate soil resilience.
- Three seed germination protocols have been drafted and are being finalized. Currently, custodians are being engaged to begin implementing good on-farm conservation practices developed by the project team.

Output 3: TAVs and CWRs agroecologically characterised and good crop combinations identified

- The first round of agroecological characterization through on-farm trial started in year 1 and has been completed. Despite the severe hailstorm damage, soil analyses showed that Mucuna and Lima bean increased soil phosphorus levels to 1015.09 mg/kg and 854.72 mg/kg, respectively, compared to the baseline (392.94 mg/kg) and manure without cover crop (742 mg/kg), likely due to nutrient cycling in their higher biomass.
- Characterization for newly collected germplasm is planned to start in November 2025, in collaboration with the phylogenetic resources laboratory of FOFIFA and WorldVeg.
- In addition, the WorldVeg genebank in Taiwan sent accessions of selected legumes to FOFIFA in Madagascar to diversify the varietal portfolio and increase the likelihood of identifying well-performing materials. On-station screening will start in November 2025.

Output 4: Strengthened capacity of stakeholders in regenerative agriculture and seed production, and best practices promoted through participatory demonstrations-living labs

- 50 champion farmers received training from CEFTEL in regenerative agriculture and vegetable production across five districts. During the mapping of the 10 sites that will host the living labs, it was observed that the 50 trained farmers did not cover all the prioritized communes, so additional champions were identified to cover them. Currently, a training session will be organised for the newly identified champions to strengthen their knowledge before the effective establishment of the living labs.
- To help champions promote regenerative agriculture practices, Ceffel designed large-format educational posters to serve as facilitation and extension tools, in alignment with the content of the training sessions. In Year 1, a 38-page training guide had already been developed for them. The posters serve as a complementary tool to help farmers visualize and implement practices. The posters will now be printed and distributed to all champions to support their awareness and training activities.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support 2,000 surrounding farmers trained by the champions, Ceffel also developed technical sheets for specific practices. These extension sheets serve as memory aids, enabling beneficiaries to replicate the demonstrated practices. The copies will first be provided to the champions during their training sessions, and the champions will then distribute them to the surrounding farmers. This approach ensures more consistent knowledge transmission and equips farmers with practical tools to implement regenerative agriculture techniques. <p>Output 5: Women's business capacities and livelihood enhanced through new networks, training and commercialisation of R-kits and vegetables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of the 127 women farmers who are enthusiastic participants in the project, many were selected as champion farmers, and some are interested in expanding their seed businesses through the project. Currently, selection criteria are being set to identify promising women to participate in training on seed production and business. During field visits to different communes and interactions with champion farmers, market opportunities and barriers are being discussed, and the demand for legume and vegetable seeds and produce is being explored. 	
<p>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.</p>	
<p>There have been recent political changes in Madagascar, including a military coup in October 2025 that ousted resident [REDACTED], following widespread youth-led protests. The protests and coup have caused a slight pause in activities in October, but the situation is now stabilized with no further effects on project implementation.</p>	
<p>3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?</p>	
Discussed with NIRAS:	Yes
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes
Change Request reference if known: CR25-087	

Guidance for Section 4: The information you provide in this section will be used by Defra to review the financial status of projects. This review will identify projects at random for spot checks on financial management and will include requests for evidence of the actual spend information provided below. Please ensure the figures you provide are as accurate as possible and that you have the evidence to support it. You do not need to provide it now.

<p>4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)</p> <p>Actual spend: [REDACTED]</p>	
<p>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 2026)?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Estimated underspend: £</p>	

4c. If you expect an 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, and not later than 31st December. 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.

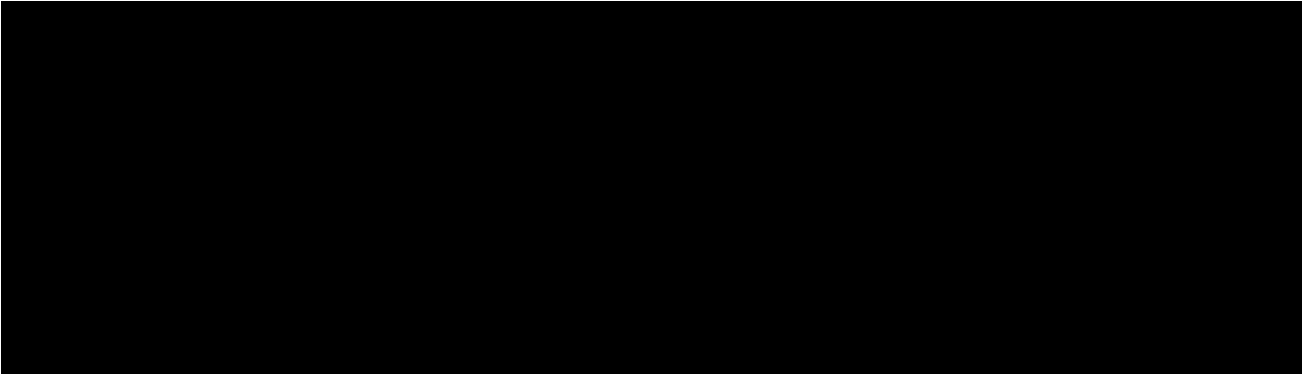
5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures? No.

Suspensions or allegations related to fraud and error concerns should be reported to fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk

6. Project risk management

6a. If your project has an Overseas Security and Justice assessment, please provide an update on any related risks, and any special conditions in your award paperwork if relevant for your project.

7. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent Annual Report. As a reminder, all projects that were scored as 'Not Yet Sensitive' in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment of their latest Annual Report should demonstrate how they are meeting the minimum GESI-Sensitive standard.



Comment #13: Provide details of the project's complaints and feedback response mechanism

Response: Regular team meetings are held online on a monthly basis to discuss issues related to project implementation and partner feedback. Complaints can also be directed to the project manager. Besides, WorldVeg has a complaints procedure in place, which was shared with the entire project team.

Checklist for submission

Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, and annexe other requested materials as appropriate.	Yes
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	Yes
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	N/A
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	Yes
Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com	Yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Yes