

## Darwin Initiative Main & Extra Annual Report

To be completed with reference to the "Project Reporting Information Note":

(<https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources/information-notes/>)

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 20 pages** in length, excluding annexes)

**Submission Deadline: 30<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

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### Darwin Initiative Project Information

Scheme (Main or Extra)	Main
Project reference	31-008
Project title	Lao communities tackle poverty and biodiversity loss for sustainable development
Country/ies	Lao PDR
Lead Organisation	Humana People to People Laos (HPPL)
Project partner(s)	Lao Biodiversity Association (LBA)
Darwin Initiative grant value	£415,200
Start/end dates of project	Start 01/04/2024 and expire on 31/03/2027
Reporting period (e.g. Apr 2024 – Mar 2025) and number (e.g. Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	Apr 2024 – Mar 2025 (Annual report 1)
Project Leader name	Gitte Hector
Project website/blog/social media	hpp-laos.org
Report author(s) and date	Inger Damkjaer 30.04.2025

### 1. Project summary

- *What biodiversity challenges is the project designed to address?*

**The project addresses three biodiversity challenges.**

- Biological resource use (hunting, gathering, logging, fishing).
- Agriculture & aquaculture (incl. plantations),
- Climate change & severe weather,

The 600 families included in the project lack sustainable incomes to lift themselves out of poverty, leading to destructive coping behavior and biodiversity loss from slash-and-burn agriculture, encroachment onto protected forests, illegal logging, and snaring of fauna. Target communities are also disadvantaged by a lack of access to knowledge and resources to engage in alternative income-generating activities that are climate-smart and environment-friendly. It drives environmental stress, contributing to climate change and reinforcing the negative trends already affecting the target area.

- *Why are they relevant, and for whom?*

The project addresses deforestation, which is relevant to the impoverished communities in the forest areas of Khounkham, Mahaxay, and Gnommalath Districts in Khammuane Province, Laos. The forest provides food for families when no other food production or income generation options are available.

*What human development and wellbeing challenges (poverty reduction) is the project also intended to address?*

The project addresses poverty, human development, and wellbeing.

The project addresses poverty alongside deforestation. The Lao Bureau of Statistics, WB, 2020 found a poverty rate of 25.5% and a rural food poverty rate of 26.5%, placing Khammuane's rural districts among Laos' poorest. More specific Poverty Headcount Rates from Open Development Mekong 2015 show figures for the target Khounkham, Mahaxay, and Gnommalath Districts of 27%, 27%, and 27.7%, respectively.

*How did you identify these problems?*

The lead applicant, Humana People to People Laos (HPPL), identified the need for the project based on its experience in reforestation and sustainable agriculture in the Khammuane Province since 2018, the knowledge of its partner, Lao Biodiversity Association (LBA), in biodiversity, non-timber-forest-products (NTFPs), and medicinal plants, and consultations with three District Agriculture and Forestry Offices (DAFOs), which recommended protected forest sites that require conservation efforts and present opportunities to address poverty in the adjacent villages.

## **2. Project stakeholders/ partners**

2.1 The Lao government demands cooperation regarding NGOs' implementation of projects in Laos. HPP Laos sees this demand as an advantage for implementing and sustaining the project activities. The Project Facilitator and field staff have closely cooperated with the Province and the District's Forestry and Agriculture Departments (PAFO/DAFO). The departments are knowledgeable about the forest areas and have been essential in planning the project's locations and activities. Each district has assigned an extension worker to the project, who participates in all activities with their expertise and knowledge.

DAFO has appointed the communities that participate in the project based on a needs assessment, and except for two villages, they were all happy to be involved, as they could see many advantages of gaining a better livelihood.

2.2 The DAFO extension workers expanded the project's knowledge of forest management. As they regularly contact the villages, they assist the field staff in reaching out at the start of the project, explaining the necessity of restoring the forest, and mobilizing the communities for action. Each village has organized a Farmers' Club of around 50 beneficiaries, working together to improve their agriculture and forest management. The project utilizes a tool called demonstration gardens. A demonstration garden is a practical outdoor classroom where the field officers teach the Farmers' Club members how to implement organic conservation agriculture, limit water use, and cultivate new types of vegetables and trees. During this period, the DAFO staff had one complaint concerning the management of demonstration gardens. They found that 50 people in the Farmers' Club were too many to organize when working in the gardens. The members discussed the issue in a common meeting, and they suggested better ways to manage the work and use their resources more efficiently.

Lao Biodiversity Association (LBA) partnered with Humana People to People Laos (HPPL) at the project's outset and has primarily trained the field staff and DAFO on the importance of biodiversity in the forest for sustaining wildlife and improving living conditions for communities in forest areas. A key achievement of LBA's contribution to the project's initiation is the comprehensive and well-executed biodiversity survey conducted in October 2024. (Please see Annex 4: Report on survey of plant species biodiversity.)

The cooperation between HPPL and LBA started off strongly, with the appointed LBA members deeply engaged in the project. Unfortunately, some had to leave for other commitments, and for a while, it was unclear who should take over. This issue has since been resolved, and LBA has come together to support the project with their expertise and has outlined how to proceed with HPPL.

2.3 The 12 local communities involved in the project consist of villages with 100 to 200 families. Of these families, 50 are members of a Farmers' Club project. When half to one-fourth of a village participates in the activities, it significantly influences the entire village. Training sessions are also shared with many other villagers, in addition to those who are members of the Farmers' Clubs. When people see progress, they are motivated to try new methods and seek advice from those who have succeeded.

In the district's offices, they discuss the projects being implemented in their area. For example, when the Health Departments learn about how the demonstration gardens function as classrooms for the villagers, they become interested in encouraging the expansion of food production to combat hunger and malnutrition.

2.4 It is a standard method practiced by Field Officers and organizers of HPP projects to test villagers' knowledge with questions that must be answered in writing before a training session. On average, their theoretical knowledge of farming, forestry, and biodiversity is around 40%. Through training, farmers gain a better understanding of why, how, and when, which enhances their extensive practical knowledge and motivates them for development. After the training sessions, participants take a test with new questions, and their understanding now rises to between 70% and 85%. Often, the Farmers' Clubs organize answer corrections in smaller groups, where they learn even more by explaining concepts that some understand better than others. They also realize that learning and understanding are not individual endeavors; instead, working together benefits all. (Please see the example of a test in Annex 4 Biodiversity Survey report on pages 2 and 3, and another example in Annex 8 Post training evaluation) The Field Officers live close to their members; some have grown up in the same districts. Their daily work takes place in the villages, as they frequently visit their members to observe their production, discuss challenges, and help solve them. In this close connection, common problems, misunderstandings, or gaps in knowledge become evident in the farmers' results. Consequently, lessons will be repeated when necessary, or discussions will address common issues to be resolved by all members.

### **3. Project progress**

#### **3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities**

##### **Output 1**

##### ***1.1 Conduct sample biodiversity surveys and studies***

LBA prepared the biodiversity survey by training all participants to understand why the survey was essential for measuring the outcome of the work done over the next two and a

half years. The method of conducting such a survey was also introduced, and for most of the field staff, this represented a new learning experience.

(Please see Annex 4: Report on survey of plant species biodiversity,

#### *Conduct environmental education sessions*

Planned for year 2

#### *1.2 Strengthen awareness and implementation of Lao law and regulations on illegal wildlife trade*

Planned for year 2

### **Output 2**

2.1 Conduct capacity training on tree/plant cultivation and sustainable forest management. The participants were introduced to the project and expressed their desire to engage in the proposed activities. They want to plant trees to restore the forest areas surrounding the villages, as their livelihoods depend on the forest. Training on planting and management is planned for year 2.

2.2 establish 12 village plant nurseries. The members of the 12 Farmers' Clubs have learned about and created a plant nursery in each demonstration garden. They successfully purchased Siamese Rosewood and Makha seeds for the 12 nurseries, planting a total of 23,500 seeds in nursery bags. Makha trees are used for medical purposes, while Rosewood is a valuable tree often utilized for furniture. The nursery plants grown from seeds are intended for replanting in case any of the seedlings they bought perish after being planted in the forest. Please see the photos in Annex 10.

The farmers also established nurseries to maintain hardwood tree seedlings, which they purchased for the 12 Farmers' Clubs. They planned to transplant 100,000 trees of 7 different species and plant them in selected forest areas during this year's rainy season. Each Farmers' Club has decided to plant and maintain 8,333 seedlings, averaging 166 trees per farmer. HPPL bought 200,000 tree seedlings to transplant into the forest during the project. One hundred thousand seedlings will be moved to the nurseries in April 2025 and planted during the upcoming rainy season. The field team will determine when to transfer the remaining 100,000 seedlings to the nurseries, based on when the first 100,000 seedlings will be planted.

ລ / ດ	ລາຍການເບີ້ໄມ້ List of seedlings	ຈຳນວນເບີ້ Number of seedlings	ໝາຍເຫດ
1	ໄມ້ຖູ່ Rosewood	30,000	
2	ໄມ້ແຕ້ Bengalkino	28,000	
3	ໄມ້ຂະບຸງ Mesua ferrea	30,000	
4	ໄມ້ຍາງ Dipterocarpus alatus	28,000	
5	ກະຖິນນະລິງ Acacia auriculiformis	28,000	
6	ໄມ້ສັກ teak	28,000	
7	ໄມ້ແຄນ Iron wood	28,000	
	ລວມ	200,000	

#### *2.3 Plant, cultivate, and monitor new trees/plants for increased conservation of protected forest areas*

Planned for year 2 (see point 2.2)

### **Output 3**

#### **3.1 Conduct baseline study**

The Field Officers began the project by conducting a baseline survey in 6 out of 12 focus villages, selecting 2 villages from each district. Individuals from 120 households responded

to baseline questions regarding their families, income, agricultural production, and animal assets. The survey questionnaire was crafted based on the relevant indicators from the project application and will serve throughout the project to measure progress against the farmers' starting point. The baseline questions posed to villagers addressed their recent food consumption, current use of herbs, the state of the community forest, forest usage and management, and tree cutting for personal use or sale during the past six months. In general, the survey revealed high poverty rates among families. Many households lack sufficient income to escape poverty. The average income per person is 0.70 USD per day (see Annex 6: Baseline survey). This situation is forcing families to rely on protected forests for their survival, leading to practices such as slash-and-burn agriculture, illegal logging, and trapping animals, which contribute to biodiversity loss. 60% of households depend on forest products and tree cutting for income. The Baseline survey also indicated that most people are aware of what threatens the forest. (Please see Annex 6)

### **3.2 *Establish 12 Farmers' Clubs***

The Field Officers, in cooperation with the District's Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO), held introduction meetings about the project in the 12 focus villages. Twelve Farmers' Clubs were established with 600 farmers, including 437 women. Each Farmers' Club was organized into five subgroups (Core groups), and members selected a committee of five to lead each club. Participants in the project meet every 14 days to receive training on agriculture and forestry production or to discuss the organization of the clubs. The main goal of the Farmers' Clubs is for each farmer to be the driving force in his agricultural production and to collaborate with fellow members to develop the work in their clubs and plant and maintain the forests around the village.

### **3.3 *Establish 12 demonstration plots and vegetable gardens***

The members selected suitable areas of community land to establish demonstration plots for learning conservation agriculture methods. All 12 Farmers' Clubs in the 12 villages have cleaned the plots, constructed fences, dug drains, and some have begun growing vegetables. Later, forest tree nurseries will be placed in the demonstration plot areas. Implementing the demonstration plots was challenging, as it occurred in the middle of the rice harvest, and beneficiaries did not have time to participate. Nonetheless, some of the Farmers' Clubs had to wait until after the rice harvest to complete their demonstration gardens. Another challenge arose in Nam Mahang Village, Khoun Kham District, where irrigation is still not feasible because the farmers have not yet reached the groundwater by digging a well, complicating activities at the group's nursery and demonstration garden. The issue was discussed at a meeting, and the members decided to continue digging deeper wells and explore other locations.

### **3.4 *Conduct capacity training on sustainable agriculture***

The Field Officers trained the farmer members in 12 target villages on using agricultural and climate conservation methods to grow various vegetables in the village demonstration gardens, aiming to enhance nutrition and community livelihoods. A total of 339 beneficiaries participated, including 251 women. They learned to integrate good agricultural practices, such as producing and utilizing compost made from organic leftovers from gardens and kitchens. They also learned how to efficiently use water through drip irrigation or the pot hole technique.

### **3.5 *Conduct capacity training on sustainable production of NTFP/medicinal plants***

LBA conducted training on medicinal plants in relation to the biodiversity survey. The primary objective of the first biodiversity survey was to count medicinal plants, assess and measure the trees in the selected areas, and determine the number and species of trees and plants in the test plots. LBA reviewed numerous species of plants, so the participants

learned what to observe during the survey. They did not have time to study each plant in detail but became familiar with them through pictures, live samples, and explanations. In year 2, LBA plans to train the field staff and DAFO on medicinal plants and establish a nursery in the forest areas.

### **3.6 *Promote value addition and market access***

Planned for year 2

## **Output 4**

Output 4 began during the project's first year and will continue into year 2, as there are still many lessons to go through.

### **4.1 *Facilitate access to health and social services for women***

The project completed lessons with the District Public Health Office and gained insight into nutrition access for pregnant women and healthcare practices among all participating members: 949 beneficiaries, including 707 women.

The women discussed and analyzed the roles of women as always being in the background, and they talked about creating women's focus groups for further discussion.

### **4.2 *Facilitate the establishment of rotating childcare systems***

HPP Laos has successfully implemented childcare systems in several projects over the past two years. This initiative is also part of the current project, where field officers introduced the concept to the members of the Farmers' Clubs in 12 target villages. The members with children under five years old are organizing a rotating childcare system. They take care of a group of children in turns, allowing all the women to have certain days each week when they do not have childcare responsibilities and can engage in their agricultural work or small businesses. The women liked the idea and are exploring how to organize it across the 12 villages.

### **4.3 *Conduct capacity training and facilitate the establishment of inclusive community savings groups with revolving funds***

The field staff provided training on organizing and understanding a revolving savings fund in the villages. Many villages in Laos have village banks, and most people are familiar with them. The members wanted to learn how to manage a revolving funding system and were given knowledge on how to establish it.

Total participants: 276 beneficiaries, 210 women.

## **3.2 Progress towards project Outputs**

### **Output 1. Human pressure on species and forest habitats in protected areas is reduced**

The official start date of the project "Lao communities tackle poverty and biodiversity loss for sustainable development" was 01.04.2024, and implementation began on 01.07.2024. A degraded area in each of the three districts, Khounkham, Mahaxay, and Gnommalath, was selected by the three DAFO departments. Additionally, four villages in or near these areas (a total of twelve villages) were designated by DAFO to be part of the project, as many poor families lived in those villages. Cooperation with the DAFO departments of the three districts regarding the project has been essential. They care deeply about the issue of deforestation and appreciate the support the project can provide, particularly the tree planting plan, which will enhance wildlife, biodiversity, and, last but not least, the lives of people in the area. HPP Laos introduced the project and outlined the planned activities.

The District Agriculture and Forestry Departments expressed enthusiasm and pledged to participate actively. Collaboration with the government is crucial due to their scientific and practical knowledge, which can significantly benefit the project and ensure the future maintenance and sustainability of the implemented activities. (Please see Annex 7 "Province Year conclusion 2024\_25 Darwin project." And Annex 7.1: "Finished translation of Provincial report")

The baseline conducted in May 2024 provided clear evidence of people's knowledge and opinions on the degraded forest. They understand why and how it has occurred, but they lack the resources to change the situation. They wish to learn more about restoring and maintaining their forest areas and planting trees. Mobilizing people for a good cause depends on necessity and the available tools. HPP Laos can provide these tools and collaboratively build the project with the communities. (Annex

HPP's managing committee held a preliminary meeting with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry regarding the upcoming project. They appreciated the project and considered it important for Laos. The ministry emphasized that the project should incorporate the three methods of dividing the forest areas and integrate them into the project:

- 1. Protection Forests:** These forests are designated to safeguard vital ecosystem services such as watershed protection, soil erosion control, and storm mitigation. They are often located in areas with sensitive ecosystems and are managed to maintain their natural state.
- 2. Conservation Forests:** These forests are established to preserve biodiversity and landscape beauty, including natural heritage sites. They are often found in regions with significant biodiversity values and are managed to safeguard their ecological integrity.
- 3. Production Forests:** These forests are designated for the sustainable production of both timber and non-timber forest products (NTFPs). While timber harvesting is currently prohibited in production forests in Laos, they continue to be managed for the sustainable production of other forest products.

These three categories are crucial for the sustainable management and development of Laos' forests, balancing the need for resource utilization with the preservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services

### **Output 2. Knowledge and capacities for sustainable community-based forest conservation are improved.**

Inhabitants living near protected areas have experienced forest degradation over the last 20 years due to rising prices for valuable hardwood. Illegal logging and cross-border trade are major drivers of deforestation in the country. Companies have cleared large areas and profited by exporting to other nations. Although the government enforces laws and export bans on timber, it has often struggled to maintain control. Another contributing factor to forest degradation, though not the primary cause, is the slash-and-burn methods used for agricultural cultivation. Residents of the villages are poor and require land to grow their crops. Virgin forest land produces high yields when cultivated, and the cut trees can be sold. However, HPPL's project aims to assist by first training residents in alternative methods of land cultivation, reducing the need for slash-and-burn techniques. Secondly, it seeks to share ideas about how to utilize the forest for production without damaging it and to educate communities on the benefits of protecting and maintaining it for their livelihoods. This encapsulates the essence of the project.

### **Output 3. Local climate-smart and environment-friendly livelihoods are diversified and strengthened.**

The 600 farmers in the 12 Farmers' Clubs have made significant progress in learning and practicing how to work with nature in food production. They utilize intercropping and mix

vegetables that support each other. They create natural fertilizer by composting plants and shrubs from the garden, along with leftover food from the kitchen, all combined with animal dung. They also produce pesticides from herbs and bio-extracts to spray on the plants. The Farmers' Clubs, established at the beginning of the project, emphasize cooperation among the participants. They collaboratively solve common agricultural problems, visit each other's gardens and farms, and learn from both successes and failures. The farmers now have structures for their clubs and hold regular meetings; however, building good cooperation takes time. Gradually, the benefits of sharing knowledge and support will become evident for everyone's gain.

#### **Output 4. Women have increased access to services that are vital for socio-economic development.**

A significant portion of the project members is women (439 out of 600). Although most of the village chiefs and leaders are men, the presence of many women at meetings and activities reduces the constraints of speaking and expressing one's opinion. The HPPL field staff is also very attentive to including women in the discussions and decisions. The project is not only about production but also about building trust among the participants and fostering close relationships, where issues beyond agriculture can be addressed. This can help encourage women to utilize the services offered by the government system when illness or other problems arise.

### **3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome**

#### **Outcome: Income generation activities and community-based forest management are improved through strengthened knowledge and capacities at the community and district levels, equitably increasing income and conserving protected forest areas in Khammouane Province**

Regarding what the project participants have achieved so far, HPPLL is confident that the direct outcomes and sustainable continuation will meet the aforementioned expectations. The field officers will persist in their efforts within the villages throughout the duration of the project. This fact is crucial as it reinforces the underlying assumptions. They will increasingly understand the community and will be able to assist when issues arise.

The project's first year has not yet achieved the outcome indicators, which include tree planting and forest management that have not started, but the provincial department report explains all the activities implemented. (Please see Annex 7 and 7.1)

The indicators for measuring the Outcome are adequate.

### **3.4 Monitoring of assumptions**

The project has 5 assumed risks/assumptions, which are managed as follows:

1. Fiduciary: The misuse of funds by partners is monitored by a person at HPPL's National Headquarters, who signs all financial requests from the project staff as well as from the partner LBA. All expenses are accounted for monthly to the Finance Manager, who provides the monthly economic status for each of HPPL's projects. Probability: Unlikely
2. Safeguarding: Abuse, harassment, and sexual exploitation have never occurred, but whistle-blowing, feedback, and the close connection between all staff and leadership will ensure that any inappropriate behavior is reported and addressed. Probability: Rare
3. Delivery chain: Lack of engagement from the stakeholders in the project. This risk is unlikely, as the stakeholders have engaged enthusiastically during the first year. If



the project participants lose interest, it will be quickly identified in the reporting chain, and solutions will be attempted. Probability: unlikely

4. Staff members can contract communicable diseases, which may disrupt activities. If a situation like the Covid-19 outbreak occurs again, it will likely disrupt implementation temporarily. However, as with the pandemic, solutions were found through WhatsApp and telephone communication, allowing staff to maintain good connections with local leadership and district authorities. Probability: Possible
5. Extreme weather events can occur. Flooding is most likely in Khammuane Province; however, in the past year, none of the villages in the project experienced this. A strong connection and the presence of field staff in the districts will ensure a quick response if weather events happen. Probability: Possible (changed from unlikely)
6. High inflation is already occurring and has been a problem in Laos for the last year, where prices have doubled. However, it has not affected the project since the HPPL keeps donations in USD, and because the exchange rate has aligned with inflation, the payments for the project have remained stable. Probability: Moderate

### 3.5 Impact: achievement of a positive impact on biodiversity and multidimensional poverty reduction.

The project's impact is described in the application:

Multi-dimensional poverty and biodiversity loss are decreased, and welfare is improved through the adoption of a sustainable community-based model that integrates forest conservation with socio-economic development, supported by an inclusive and equitable environment.

The project has contributed to poverty reduction by organizing farmers into Farmers' Clubs and supporting better agricultural practices, which have resulted in improved yields. (Annexes 7 and 7.1 Province Year conclusion 2024 \_25)

The project has not yet made an impact on biodiversity conservation.

### 4. Project support to the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements:

No

### 5. Project support for multidimensional poverty reduction

Please read under 3 Project progress/point 3.5 Impact: achievement of a positive impact on biodiversity and multidimensional poverty reduction.

### 6. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

GESI Scale	Description	Put X where you think your project is on the scale
<b>Not yet sensitive</b>	The GESI context may have been considered but the project isn't quite meeting the requirements of a 'sensitive' approach	
<b>Sensitive</b>	The GESI context has been considered and project activities take this into account in their design and implementation. The project addresses basic needs and vulnerabilities of women and marginalised groups and the project will not contribute to or create further inequalities.	X
<b>Empowering</b>	The project has all the characteristics of a 'sensitive' approach whilst also increasing equal access to	

	assets, resources and capabilities for women and marginalised groups	
<b>Transformative</b>	The project has all the characteristics of an 'empowering' approach whilst also addressing unequal power relationships and seeking institutional and societal change	

### Regarding the GESI context:

How has HPP considered the GESI context in designing and implementing your approach?

- *Rights: Legal and customary*

Concerning the facilitation of access to health and social services for women, Lao law grants free access for poor families to consult health centers and hospitals. Field staff are tasked with investigating how this issue is managed in each district and informing the villagers, as many do not know about this right.

- *Practice: Attitudes, customs & beliefs*

HPP Laos received guidance from the district authorities regarding which villages needed to be involved in the project the most. The field staff and district authorities presented the project to the selected villages, allowing the residents to choose whether they wanted to participate. One village opted out as they felt unprepared to engage in the project. The field staff tried to persuade them that the families could benefit from participating, but it remained unclear whether this hesitation stemmed from their beliefs or other reasons. Although the project team did not succeed in gaining their participation, they decided they could invite these villages to some project events in the future. The authorities selected two other villages without difficulty, as many were eager to join.

- *Environment: Stressors & vulnerability*

Poor people in the villages engage in illegal logging and snaring. Many know that it is unlawful, but they must survive. In training field staff, HPP emphasized socio-economic understanding for the staff, as they should not judge the population on this point but offer alternative ways to cultivate their food. This is a difficult task that cannot be resolved immediately, but the attitude of the project leaders is crucial for its outcome.

- *Roles and Responsibilities: Division of time, space & labour*

As mentioned previously, the roles and responsibilities of the women in the project are regarded as equal to those of the men. Here, the women field staff are at the forefront, as they have transformed through training and practice. The Project Manager or Organizer is female. The male staff also understand the concepts through training and practice. The field staff's attitude fosters inclusiveness and equal roles. Beneficiaries in the project are busy caring for their families to survive and cannot always attend training or events. This is taken into consideration when the field staff plan, sometimes utilizing evenings or nighttime for training.

- *Representation: Participation, inclusion & power*

Generally, women do not hold as much power as men in the villages. This varies among ethnic groups in Laos. While women in the majority ethnic group, Lao Leum (53%), appear to have more power than their counterparts in other ethnic groups, as they are often responsible for managing the family economy.

Most of the 12 villages have a mixed ethnicity, and Lao Leum is included in nearly all of them. This fact assists women from some of the ethnic groups with stricter gender roles, as members collaborate regardless of their ethnic background.

- *Resources: Access & control of assets and services*

This point has not been taken into account in the project.

## **7. Monitoring and evaluation**

Project monitoring begins with the people involved, a principle highly valued by HPPL. It offers several advantages: 1. Obtaining accurate reports, and 2. Serving as a tool for participants to track their own progress as well as that of their fellow participants.

The monitoring tool used by the participants is the project Logbook, which each unit (group of 10 beneficiaries) in the Farmers' Clubs received at the start of the project. The Field Officers trained the farmers on how to use the Logbook, and currently, they note their progress once a month at their common meeting, where each group bases its discussions on the results obtained. This serves as the foundation for identifying challenges and successes experienced during the previous month. The Field Officers connected to each Farmers' Club actively participate in updating the logbooks. They ask questions and assist in identifying the challenges that need resolution. The Field Officers receive a copy of the logbook results after the monthly meeting, which they use to compile the Farmers' Clubs' production results and prepare the monthly report that accurately reflects the project's reality.

The Project Organizer collects reports from all Field Officers and analyzes their content. She then writes a final report that evaluates the challenges and offers her insights on solutions. Additionally, she updates the list of indicators and incorporates them into the final conclusion. The Project Organizer sends her report to the Grant Administration office, where the activities and results are analyzed and compared with the donor's requirements and priorities.

The report is now used by supervisors at HPPL's National Headquarter to train field staff in correcting mistakes and incorporating missing actions into the project's future activity planning.

See Annex 9

## **8. Lessons learnt**

Mobilizing non-members in the tree planting:

1. The project involves planting 200,000 trees in the forest areas of the three target districts. The participants expressed concern regarding the amount and suggested mobilizing villagers who were not project members but were also interested in restoring the forest areas. A suggestion was made to organize capacity-building for the village development committees and promote activities and events to encourage community participation in tree planting.

Saving groups:

2. Creating savings groups requires strict regulations, which were discussed at length when the groups established their rules. The participants considered whether it would be feasible to use some of the project's funds to initiate the savings fund group. Based on lessons learned from another project, the Field Officers proposed a system in which the savings group members would contribute a small amount of money each month into the fund and implement a rule for an interest rate on the loans, which would gradually increase the fund's liquid capital. The rationale was that the donor's budget had already been allocated for other activities. It is worth discussing whether future projects should allocate a small amount to initiate the village fund groups, which would benefit villagers by providing a rapid working loan option.

Collecting tree seeds:

3. The project's beneficiaries can find and collect tree seeds in the forest, eliminating the need to buy them in the future. This will expedite the supply of seedlings in time for the planting season, but it requires research on the forest areas and careful planning for collection at the appropriate time before the planting season.

To learn from others:

4. The Project Organizer had learned from previous projects the benefits that Farmers' Club members could gain by visiting other projects or agricultural businesses, and she suggested organizing an educational visit to environmental conservation, farming, or animal husbandry businesses. The members were very interested.

## **9. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)**

Not applicable.

## **10. Risk Management**

The questions regarding Risk Management are explained under point 3.4, Monitoring of assumptions.

### **Risk 5:**

“Extreme weather events such as floods/droughts hamper the implementation of project activities.” has changed in probability from UNLIKELY to POSSIBLE

Otherwise, the Risk Management continues equal to the agreed list in the project application, pages 11 and 12.

## **11. Scalability and durability**

The project aims to sustainably enhance income generation and forest management in three districts of Khammouane Province (Outcome) through the implementation of four interlinked activities:

1. Reduce human pressure on habitats in project areas.
- 2) Enhance knowledge and skills in forest conservation, thereby connecting training and action to ensure long-term results.
3. The project enhances sustainable agriculture and livelihoods while also contributing to reducing pressure on habitats and improving capacities for natural resource management.
4. Expanding women’s access to health services, child care, and loan options supports and interconnects with the three other Outputs.

Working with community-based organizations (clubs), the project strengthens social capital, reinforcing not only overall resilience but also ensuring the long-term sustainability of results. Additionally, collaborating with local authorities and leveraging expertise from all selected partners, including local communities, creates a supportive environment for project continuation.

The project's organization, with the Farmers’ Clubs as the main element, closely aligns with the Lao Government’s structure of grouping farmers in the villages. The Farmers’ Clubs promote additional tools for farmers and provide a proven system of cooperation among the beneficiaries. Extension workers from each district participate in daily activities and learn new methods, which they report to their leaders; all of this can be replicated at no cost to the district. Given that a low budget is a constant challenge for government departments, adapting HPPLs’ methods is both feasible and appealing.

The Field Officers with HPPL’s program train farmers to be the driving force in their development from the outset. Thus, the future continuation of activities begins at the start of the project. Evidence will emerge during the project, but the Farmers’ Clubs, the program's backbone, are already functioning as intended.

## **12. Darwin Initiative identity**

The “Lao communities tackle poverty and biodiversity loss for sustainable development” project is recognized as a distinct project funded by the Darwin Initiative. Participants, along with government authorities, acknowledge it as such. Furthermore, it does not belong to any larger program.

In all project introductions to participants, the Field Officers informed them about the Darwin Initiative and the important work carried out by the organization. The participants and government authorities appreciate the donation, which helps restore their forests and livelihoods. Although the public is not very familiar with the Darwin Initiative, several grants have been awarded to Laos, providing participants in the project villages with a new learning experience.

HPPL has published numerous project descriptions for the Darwin Initiative on their Facebook account. Please look at Annex 3, Table 2 Publications: Darwin Initiative Facebook links.

## Safeguarding

### 4 Project expenditure

**Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025)**

Project spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2024/25 Grant (£)	2024/25 Total Darwin Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs (see below)				
Consultancy costs				
Overhead Costs				
Travel and subsistence				
Operating Costs				
Capital items (see below)				
Others (see below)				
<b>TOTAL</b>	£120,873.00			

**Table 2: Project mobilised or matched funding during the reporting period (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025)**

	Secured to date	Expected by end of project	Sources
Matched funding leveraged by the partners to deliver the project (£)			HPPL
Total additional finance mobilised for new activities occurring outside of the project, building on evidence, best practices and the project (£)			

### 5 Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

N/A

### 6 OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements or progress of your project so far (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes.

I agree for the Biodiversity Challenge Funds to edit and use the following for various promotional purposes (please leave this line in to indicate your agreement to use any material you provide here).

File Type (Image / Video / Graphic)	File Name or File Location	Caption including description,	Social media accounts and websites to be	Consent of subjects received (delete as necessary)
-------------------------------------	----------------------------	--------------------------------	--	--

		<b>country and credit</b>	<b>tagged (leave blank if none)</b>	
				Yes / No
				Yes / No
				Yes / No
				Yes / No
				Yes / No

## Annex 1: Report of progress and achievements against logframe for Financial Year 2024-2025

Project summary	Progress and Achievements April 2024 - March 2025	Actions required/planned for next period
<p><b>Impact</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reduce human pressure on habitats in project areas.</li> <li>2. Improve knowledge and capacities in forest conservation, thereby interlinking training and action to ensure long-term results.</li> <li>3. The project strengthens environment-friendly agriculture and livelihoods and will equally contribute to reducing pressure on habitats and enhancing the capacities for natural resource management.</li> <li>4. Increasing women's access to health services, child care, and loan options is cross-cutting and reinforces the three other Outputs.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Beneficiaries use conservation agriculture, which in the future will diminish their need for slash-and-burn practices</li> <li>2. The beneficiaries have improved knowledge of forest conservation, but have not yet developed practical capacities.</li> <li>3. The beneficiaries have strengthened their livelihood by learning environment-friendly-agriculture, which has enabled them to produce more vegetables for consumption and sale. It has increased and will further increase their production in the future, which decreases the pressure on the forest.</li> <li>4. Women's empowerment through increased production and equality has an expanded impact on the outcome of the project.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Outcome:</b> Income generation activities and community-based forest management are improved through strengthened knowledge and capacities at the community and district level, equitably increasing income and conserving protected forest areas in Khammouane Province.</p>		
<p>Outcome indicator 0.1</p> <p>Hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices as a result of improved conservation awareness and capacity for community-based forest resource stewardship (target: 96, i.e., 12ha per Farmers' Club) <b>[DI-D01]</b></p>	Not yet implemented	
<p>Outcome indicator 0.2</p> <p>0.2 Percentage of deforestation in the targeted protected areas is reduced by 50% compared to 2024 baseline.</p>	Not yet implemented	
<p>Outcome indicator 0.3</p> <p>Percentage increase of target species compared to 2024 baseline (target: 50% of the following: Siamese Rosewood,</p>	Not yet implemented	

Sindora Siamensis, Plerocarpus Macrocarpus (reforestation underpinned by endangered tree species) and rattan species).		
Outcome indicator 0.4 Number of households with an increased revenue of 15% compared to 2024 baseline as a result of improved conservation and sustainable livelihoods practices promoted by the project (target: 200).	Not yet reached	
Outcome indicator 0.5 Number of new/improved sustainable livelihoods/poverty reduction management plans endorsed by local authorities (target: 8)	Not yet implemented	
<b>Regarding Outputs:</b> As none of the indicators listed in the indicator list should be reached in year 1, we have omitted repetition of Output 1 to 4, but refer to the report described under point Output 3 above.		
<b>Output 1</b> Human pressure on species and forest habitats in protected areas is reduced.		
<b>Output 2.</b> Knowledge and capacities for sustainable community-based forest conservation are improved		
<b>Output 3.</b> Local climate-smart and environment-friendly livelihoods are diversified and strengthened		
<b>Output 4.</b> Women have increased access to services that are vital for socio-economic development		



## Annex 3: Standard Indicators

**Table 1 Project Standard Indicators**

Please see the Standard Indicator guidance for more information on how to report in this section, including appropriate disaggregation.

DI Indicator number	Name of indicator	If this links directly to a project indicator(s), please note the indicator number here	Units	Disaggregation	Year 1 Total	Year 2 Total	Year 3 Total	Total to date	Total planned during the project
DI-A01	4.2 By project year 3, number of women capable to access community-based finance services after completing structured training in financial management and literacy (target: 200, disaggregated by age) <b>[DI-A01]</b>				0				200
DI-A01	3.1 By project year 3, number of community members, DAFO staff and LBA staff capable of sustainable agriculture and forest-related IGAs after completing structured and relevant training (target: 406 (400 farmers, 3 LBA staff and 3 DAFO staff, disaggregated by age, gender and stakeholder group) <b>[DI-A01]</b>				0				406
DI-A01	2.1 By project year 2, number of community members capable of forest conservation practices after completing structured and relevant training (target: 200, disaggregated by age and gender) <b>[DI-A01]</b>				0				200
DI-A04	3.2 By the end of the project, number of small-holder farmers applying sustainable agriculture and forest-related IGA practices against 2024				0				300

DI Indicator number	Name of indicator	If this links directly to a project indicator(s), please note the indicator number here	Units	Disaggregation	Year 1 Total	Year 2 Total	Year 3 Total	Total to date	Total planned during the project
	baseline (target: 300, i.e. 50% of participants, disaggregated by age and gender)) <b>[DI-A04]</b>								
DI-A06	4.1 By end of the project, number of women with increased access to services for improved well-being (target: 200, disaggregated by age) <b>[DI-A06]</b>				0				300
DI-B03	2.3 Number of new community trees/plants species management plan endorsed by local authorities (target: 8) <b>[DI-B03]</b>				0				12
DI-B04	0.5 Number of new/improved sustainable livelihoods/poverty reduction management plans endorsed by local authorities (target: 8) <b>[DI-B04]</b>				0				12
DI-B05	2.2 Number of community members in target villages with increased participation in community-led forest management (target: 300 i.e. 50% of target participants, people, disaggregated by age and gender) <b>[DI-B05]</b>				0				300
DI-B09	1.2 By the end of the project, number of target households reporting a decrease in unsustainable practices used as a result of project activities (target: 300, i.e. 75% of target household) <b>[DI-B09]</b>				0				300

DI Indicator number	Name of indicator	If this links directly to a project indicator(s), please note the indicator number here	Units	Disaggregation	Year 1 Total	Year 2 Total	Year 3 Total	Total to date	Total planned during the project
DI-B10	3.3 Number of small-holder farmers reporting adoption of diversified livelihood practices as a result of project activities (target: 300, i.e. 50% of participants, disaggregated by age and gender and number/type of practices) <b>[DI-B10]</b>				0				300
DI-C03	1.5 Number of new assessments of habitat conservation action needs are formulated for target protected areas, based on project biodiversity surveys and studies (target: 3) <b>[DI-C03]</b>				1				3
DI-D01	Hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices as a result of improved conservation awareness and capacity for community-based forest resource stewardship (target: 144, i.e. 12ha per Farmers' Club) <b>[DI-D01]</b>				0				144

## Checklist for submission

	Check
Different reporting templates have different questions, and it is important you use the correct one. Have you checked you have used the <b>correct template</b> (checking fund, scheme, type of report (i.e. Annual or Final), and year) and <b>deleted the blue guidance text</b> before submission?	Yes
<b>Is the report less than 10MB?</b> If so, please email to <a href="mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com">BCF-Reports@niras.com</a> putting the project number in the Subject line. <b>Narrative report is sent as e-mail</b>	Yes
<b>Is your report more than 10MB?</b> If so, please consider the best way to submit. One zipped file, or a download option, is recommended. We can work with most online options and will be in touch if we have a problem accessing material. If unsure, please discuss with <a href="mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com">BCF-Reports@niras.com</a> about the best way to deliver the report, putting the project number in the Subject line. <b>Attachments are sent via WeTransfer</b>	Yes
<b>Have you included means of verification?</b> You should not submit every project document, but the main outputs and a selection of the others would strengthen the report.	Yes
<b>Have you provided an updated risk register?</b> If you have an existing risk register you should provide an updated version alongside your report. If your project was funded prior to this being a requirement, you are encouraged to develop a risk register.	Yes
If you are submitting photos for publicity purposes, do these meet the outlined requirements (see Section 16)?	Yes
Have you involved your partners in preparation of the report and named the main contributors	Yes
Have you completed the Project Expenditure table fully?	Yes
Do not include claim forms or other communications with this report.	