

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects

Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus

Half-Year Report

Darwin Initiative Project Information

Project reference	31-008
Project title	Lao communities tackle poverty and biodiversity loss for sustainable development
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Lao PDR
Lead Organisation	Humana People to People Laos (HPPL)
Partner(s)	Lao Biodiversity Association
Project Leader	<i>Gitte Hector</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	hpp-laos.org

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.

HYR2 Progress Report Summary (April–September 2025)

Humana People to People Laos (HPPL) completed the first half of its second project year, intensifying efforts to support the Lao PDR's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2016 to 2025 through innovative multistakeholder initiatives aimed at combating ecosystem degradation and enhancing biodiversity conservation. A total of 145 Ha of deforested protected areas were replanted with 200,238 hardwood trees, rattan palms, and other medicinal plants. These efforts directly contribute to global frameworks, including Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15.2 and Articles 8 and 10 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), namely Articles 8 and 10. HPPL regularly shares updates of its work with the Districts and Province Agriculture and Forestry Office at the local and national level, thus assuring that these efforts inform policies and local implementation of the CBD.

Outcome: Income generation activities and community-based forest management are improved

Key indicators being tracked, among others: DI-A04 number of small-holder farmers applying sustainable agriculture and forest-related IGA practices against 2024 baseline; and DI-A01 number of community members capable of forest conservation practices after completing structured and relevant training. In the past half-year, 46% (277) of the farmers applying new practices produced a surplus of agricultural products, which were sold, and all 600 farmers are capable of forest conservation after completing theoretical and practical training (as measured by questionnaires).

Output 1: Human pressure on species and forest habitats in protected areas is reduced

Key indicators being tracked, among others: DI-B05 Number of community members in target villages with increased participation in community-led forest management; and [DI-B09] number of target households reporting a decrease in unsustainable practices used as a result of project activities. HPPL, in collaboration with its partner LBA, has raised awareness of the importance of biodiversity and forest recovery among the targeted communities. Through 2 training sessions in each of the 12 Farmers' Clubs and, most notably, successful tree planting events, both the Farmers' Club members and their communities have enhanced their knowledge and practical skills. This has fostered greater pride, a stronger commitment to caring for and sustaining the forest areas they have developed, and increased community awareness of biodiversity and forest recovery. Despite logistical challenges, including difficult terrain and heavy rains, 1,314 villagers (629 women) planted 200,238 hardwood seedlings and 17,000 rattan and other medicinal plants across 145 hectares of protected forest, exceeding the target of 200,000 trees. (Rattan belongs to the palm family. It is a plant used for medical purposes and for food.)

Output 2: Knowledge and capacities for sustainable community-based forest conservation are improved

Key indicators being tracked: DI-A01 By project year 2, number of community members capable of forest conservation practices after completing structured and relevant training (target: 200, disaggregated); and DI-B05 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) At all activities and events, the participants are registered and sign in (see example attached, Attachment 1). HPPL and the District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO) conducted 8 environmental and forest protection awareness campaigns for Farmers' Clubs and their communities, including primary and secondary school students in each of the 3 target districts. A total of 185 students and 523 adults, totaling 708 individuals (410 female), participated, gaining insights into the benefits of forests, the impacts of deforestation, and sustainable conservation practices. Interactive Q&A sessions deepened understanding and reinforced long-term engagement. This notable increase in awareness among both adults and youth in the focus areas enhances the project's sustainability; as explained in Output 1, a total of 1,314 villagers were mobilized to participate in the tree planning events, and greater knowledge contributed to this strong mobilization. The 145 Ha is divided among the 600 Farmers' Club members, each of whom can take care of 0.24 Ha, based on their training.

Output 3: Local climate-smart and environment-friendly livelihoods are diversified and strengthened

Key indicators being tracked: DI-A04 By the end of the project, number of small-holder farmers applying sustainable agriculture and forest-related IGA practices against 2024 baseline (target: 300, i.e. 50% of participants, disaggregated); and DI-B10 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). These 2 indicators are tracked via monthly updates from field staff, who collect information from the participants' logbooks.

Twelve Farmers' Clubs constructed 60 greenhouses (8x15 meters each) for diversified vegetable cultivation during the rainy season. The members sowed and cared for 7 kinds of vegetables - lettuce, cabbage, yams, onions, carrots, spinach, and beans - under the close supervision of the project leaders, leading to promising results. The initiative yielded 13,741 kg of vegetables, of which 5,686 kg were consumed and 8,055 kg were sold at markets or within their village, generating 124,877,000 kip (approx. USD 5,808.23) in income for 277 farmers. Training in climate-friendly agriculture reached 273 participants (175 women), covering organic gardening, natural pest control, soil improvement, and bio-extract production.

The project team leaders collaborated with staff from the DAFO to train members of Farmers' Clubs on animal husbandry, ex, cows and poultry, including basic veterinary care and vaccine use. This included vaccines for cows (Pendistrep, Oxycline) and for poultry (Avian cholera, Newcastle disease, and vaccination nova.) 302 villagers (193 women) were trained.

Additionally, each village received a livestock vaccination kit (including a Medicine bag, a Cooler box, Syringes 5 cc and 10 cc, needles number 14 and 16, gloves, masks, and all the vaccines mentioned above). Revolving funds were established among farmers who wanted to start or expand their poultry production. Each farmer contributes a decided amount of money monthly to a common savings fund. Members of these local savings fund groups have begun borrowing from the pooled funds to purchase poultry. The farmers revolve their loans with a small interest rate to the common fund, according to their agreements.

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

Key indicators being tracked: DI-A06 By end of the project, the number of women with increased access to services for improved well-being (target: 200, disaggregated by age)

In partnership with the District Health Office (DHO), HPPL delivered health education sessions on nutrition, hygiene, and disease prevention. Women were also trained to access national health and social services, including legal rights under the Decree on the Development and Protection of Women and the Law on Combating Human Trafficking. A rotation child care system was also established. The project team leaders collaborated with staff from the District's Women's Union Offices to start the rotating childcare group; in this system, 1-2 adults care for the children daily, and the adults take turns on a weekly basis. Twelve rotating childcare groups were established, supporting 169 children (111 girls) and freeing time for mothers to pursue income-generating activities. Training for 177 participants (154 women) ensured effective management of these groups. Women are predominant in the project. This is evident across many of the activities, except for the planting of tree seedlings, which is typically male-dominated, though 48% of participants were female.

As mentioned above, HPPL mobilized and trained the Farmers' Clubs members to manage the formation of nine new savings funds and strengthened three existing ones across Farmers' Clubs. These self-managed funds, governed by democratically elected committees, empowered 421 members (207 female) to access loans otherwise unavailable through formal banking systems. A total of 73 committee members were elected, including 31 females. Although a major male dominance usually characterizes economic decision-making power, the project has 42% of women elected to the committees.

All project staff, HPPL's National Headquarter, and Grant Administration meet monthly to review the project results and the plans for the coming month. Key assumptions, such as community participation, permissions granted by government offices, or difficulties in selling surplus vegetables, are discussed.

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 tree-planting activity encountered significant challenges, including poor road conditions and extremely heavy rainfall, which prevented some villages from transporting seedlings to the designated sites. In response, affected communities collaboratively relocated the planting site to an alternative location within the village's protected forest conservation zone. Farmers from the 2 target villages most impacted by these difficulties conducted joint surveys and successfully replanted in the new location. A total of 150,179 seedlings (out of 200,238) survived for 2 months after planting, achieving a 75% survival rate, according to technical assessments based on data from experts at the District Agriculture and Forestry Office. This is notable, given that newly established forest plantations typically experience high mortality rates during the critical early years, when seedlings must adapt to new environments and compete with existing vegetation. Although a 25% mortality rate is considered low by standard forest planting benchmarks, some additional losses may still occur. To address this, the project team is preparing a replanting strategy for the next rainy season, scheduled for June 2026. Farmers will establish tree nurseries using their greenhouses to cultivate new tree and rattan seedlings, fostering long-term sustainability by enabling local seedling production and reducing future dependency on external sources.

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:	N/A

Change Request reference if known: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

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.

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)

Actual spend: £ [REDACTED]

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)?

Yes No X Estimated underspend: £ x

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?

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

N/A

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.

N/A

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.

HPP Laos gratefully acknowledges the comprehensive Annual Year Report Review from Defra-Eilidh Young, and has diligently integrated the 2024 recommendations, particularly on monitoring and indicator progress, while continuing to meet GESI-sensitive standards through expanded women's participation in savings funds, childcare, and training.

Regarding specific comments cited for action in the next half-year report:

Comment: Monitoring could be strengthened at the output and outcome levels, including indicators and milestones that demonstrate progress along the results chain

- a. All activities and events register participants, who sign their names to confirm their participation. See attachment 1, as an example.
- b. The project presents results and plans at monthly meetings with Grant Administration and at the HPP National Headquarters.
- c. The Grant Administration visits the project quarterly.
- d. The team has developed and is using a Results Tracking Dashboard, which lists key indicators and milestones at a monthly level. This is attached (attachment 2).

Checklist for submission

Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, and annex 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?	All information can be shared
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