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	**31-010**
Project title	**Decreasing climate change accelerated human-wildlife conflict in Armenia**
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	**Armenia**
Lead Organisation	**Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets**
Partner(s)	**Birdlife Europe**
Project Leader	***Ruben Khachatryan***
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	***31.10.2025***
Project website/blog/social media	***Fpwc.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.

Over the past six months, significant progress has been made towards achieving the project's expected outputs, with several key activities implemented across the Vayots Dzor region of Armenia.

On 10 June, the FPWC team participated in the celebration of His Majesty King Charles III's Birthday in Yerevan, an event hosted by the British Embassy. This initiative underscored the United Kingdom's continued commitment to supporting Armenia's efforts to address biodiversity loss and climate change, in alignment with global environmental and sustainable development goals. As Armenia prepares to host several major international events, including the upcoming COP17 Biodiversity Conference, the UK reaffirmed its support for Armenia's resilience, security, and sustainable development. As part of the celebration, FPWC was invited to showcase

Armenia's rich biodiversity through a dedicated biodiversity exhibition corner, allowing guests to explore the country's unique ecosystems and native species.

To engage visitors interactively, FPWC presented specially designed coasters and educational materials as well as small honey jars with the project's design featuring the ongoing Darwin Initiative project and Armenia's wildlife species, displayed on easels throughout the venue. This collaboration highlighted the strong partnership between FPWC and the UK in promoting environmental awareness and conservation as part of a broader effort to strengthen Armenia's engagement in global biodiversity initiatives.

During the reporting period, the project maintained close cooperation with the Vayots Dzor Regional Administration, with specific engagement through the Development Division of the Yeghegis Tourism Cluster. This collaboration aligns with national priorities and recent government discussions highlighting plans to develop tourism clusters in key regions, including Areni and Yeghegis, under a World Bank-funded initiative expected to reach full implementation by 2030.

The government's cluster development strategy envisions the rehabilitation of road infrastructure to enhance regional connectivity, support to cultural event organizers to promote local heritage and traditions, and the upgrading of tourism infrastructure to improve visitor experience and comfort. Within this framework, the project contributes by facilitating linkages among key stakeholders and promoting eco-friendly, sustainable tourism initiatives. These efforts ensure that community-based, nature-conscious models are integrated within the broader tourism development framework, reinforcing national objectives of environmental sustainability, resilience, and inclusive economic growth.

As part of its continued engagement in sustainable rural development and sectoral cooperation, the project team also participated in the 3rd Pan-Armenian Beekeeping Forum, organized in partnership with the Beekeeping Forge Educational and Scientific Center. This strategic participation reflected the project's commitment to addressing the evolving needs and priorities of Armenia's apiculture sector and its stakeholders.

The Forum served as an important platform for knowledge exchange and multi-stakeholder dialogue, bringing together a diverse group of participants, including beekeepers and apiculture enterprises, researchers and academics working on biodiversity and apiculture, importers, exporters, and suppliers of apiculture products and equipment, as well as representatives of local and international NGOs engaged in environmental and rural development.

During the event, the project team presented its ongoing achievements in the Yeghegis community, particularly in building local capacity and facilitating knowledge transfer among beekeepers, supporting improved apiculture practices and modern technologies, sharing preliminary results and lessons learned from field-level interventions, and gathering feedback from beneficiaries on economic and environmental impacts. Participation in the Forum increased awareness of project activities among key stakeholders and strengthened professional networks within the apiculture value chain. These efforts contribute directly to donor objectives of fostering inclusive rural development, environmental stewardship, and economic empowerment across Armenia's regions.

Output 1. Local communities are empowered to integrate 4,000 ha of communal lands into a protected area and improve land management practices.

1.1. Integration of the 4000ha land into CWR (Y1 – May-January)

1.2. Stakeholder outreach/consultations for PA management plan adaptation (Y1 – June-July)

1.3. Adaptation of the management plan for the integrated area (Y1 November – Y2 July)

1.4. Awareness raising activities (Y1)

1.4.1 Site engineering (installation of signboards, informational signs, ranger station, bear-proof bins in key touristic destinations (Y1 July - Y2 June)

During the half-year reporting period, the project successfully finalized the design and production of environmental signboards aimed at enhancing public awareness and promoting responsible behavior among community members and visitors within the project area. The design phase included both the visual layout and content, ensuring consistency with environmental communication standards and local cultural context.

In close collaboration with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of Armenia, all necessary permits were secured for installation in conserved and touristic zones. Further consultations were conducted with the Vayots Dzor Regional Administration and the Mayor of Yeghegis Community to confirm the final locations and ensure community ownership of the initiative.

All preparatory activities, including technical design, printing, approvals, and logistical planning, have been completed. The installation of a total of 30 signboards is scheduled for the next reporting period, targeting strategically important locations across the Yeghegis cluster:

4 site identification signboards are planned for key access and entry points such as the entrance from Shatin towards the valley area, 50 m below Hostun district, the exit from Hermon towards Goghtanik Bridge, the Vardahovit–Arates road section, and the WCR main entrance.

8 bear-awareness signboards will be placed in high-traffic tourism zones — including the Shatin Monastery road, Artabuynk–Smbataberd trail, Yeghegis–Artabuynk near Smbataberd, Hors–Salli trail intersection, Horbategh geyser, Goghtanik waterfall, Hermon–Arates Monastery route, and near the Arevi guesthouse — to promote safe practices and reduce human–bear conflict.

10 community signboards will be installed across settlements such as Hermon (village entrance), Taratumb (1 km from stone mine), Hors (1 km from village), Artabuynk (near the bridge), Yeghegis (near the stone factory), Horbategh (above tourist sign), Karaglukh (near football field), Goghtanik (after Arpa River bridge), and Vardahovit (settlement entrance).

8 signboards along wild harvesting routes will guide sustainable resource use and biodiversity conservation in locations such as Shatin Gorge (narrow section), Aghnjadzor–Selim Gorge, Vardahovit (outside settlement), Horbategh (500 m past geysers), Hermon–Arates road, Goghtanik (towards waterfall), and 1 km outside Vardahovit.

The signboards will serve as an important visual tool to strengthen environmental communication, enhance visitor safety, and support community engagement in biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management.

In addition, FPWC received a request from the Vayots Dzor Regional Government to install similar informational signboards in neighboring communities. As we have savings of approximately GBP 790 under the signboard budget line, these funds will be allocated to produce additional signboards, ensuring wider coverage and improved visibility across the landscape. During our meeting, the Governor emphasized the importance of such signboards in raising awareness and strengthening compliance with wildlife protection regulations.

1.4.2. Printing materials on the community-based conservation and conservation/biodiversity value of the targeted site/communities to be disseminated in the targeted settlements (Y1 – July-September) *completed in Year 1,* maintained in this period
1.4.3. Meetings with community members about community-based conservation models and how they function; sustainable practices and behaviours. Over 400 people to attend. (Y1 August-October) *completed in Year 1,* maintained in this period

1.4.4. Workshops with local stakeholders and the most vulnerable households about human-bear conflict prevention measures. Over 400 people to attend. (Y1 August-October) *completed in Year 1,* maintained in this period.

1.5. Ranger recruitment (Y1)

1.5.1. Hiring, training rangers (first aid certification, basics on wildfire prevention, bird and mammal identification, workshops on HWC), providing them with necessary equipment (Y1 – June-September)

In 2025, CWR rangers, in coordination with the biodiversity team, participated in a revision of the CWR management plan. The revision applied field surveys, camera-trap records, and GIS layers to delineate core zones (including newly incorporated areas) and define buffer/transition areas. A site-specific grazing management plan was updated (seasonal rotations, stocking parameters, and no grazing refugia). Wildfire prevention measures were formalized (fuel-load reduction, firebreak upkeep, and an early-warning/response protocol). Anti-poaching patrol routes were optimized. Wildlife movement corridors and critical pinch points were identified, and targeted mitigation actions (community outreach, ranger checkpoints) scheduled.

1.5.2. Rangers assigned to land plots for patrolling and monitoring (Y1- October) *completed in Year 1,* maintained in this period.

1.6. Youth outreach and awareness raising. Establishment of three eco-clubs for youth in targeted settlements. (Y2-3)

1.6.1. During the reporting period, the project team developed a comprehensive curriculum and an accompanying implementation programme tailored for youth in the Yeghegis community. Through the establishment of Eco-Clubs, the initiative seeks to strengthen environmental awareness, improve pupils' digital literacy and communication skills, and foster their meaningful engagement in community-led environmental actions. These activities aim to promote sustainable development values and nurture a generation of environmentally conscious young citizens. Relevant materials and resources are accessible at the provided links.

1.6.2. During the reporting period, the project expanded its outreach efforts to promote youth engagement in the newly established Eco-Clubs. A Google Form was developed to streamline the registration process and encourage participation among pupils, ensuring an inclusive and accessible approach to joining the initiative. [redacted]

Information on Eco-Club activities and registration opportunities was widely disseminated through social media platforms, and across the Yeghegis cluster.

In parallel, three coordination meetings were organised with school principals in Shatin, Artabuynk, and Karaglukh communities to strengthen collaboration, align school-level engagement strategies, and facilitate the integration of Eco-Club activities within the broader educational framework. These actions laid the groundwork for sustained institutional support and long-term youth participation in environmental initiatives.

1.6.3. Eco-club classes for at least 100 pupils are due in **Q3.**

1.6.4. Summer School for distinguished eco-club members, up to 20 pupils are due in **Q3**.

Output 2.Land restoration to enhance habitats, expand species range, restore migratory corridor connectivity, and reduce interactions between bears and people.

2.1 Wild fruit trees grown and planted (Y1-2) *completed*

The wild fruit tree species are successfully grown in the greenhouses, currently the seedlings are going through adaptation period ready to be transported to the planting area in late October.

2.1.1 Mapping of the areas favorable for tree planting (Y1) *completed*

2.1.2. Environmental Impact Assessment for the tree planting (Y1)

The EIA process completion was extended via change request which was approved (CR25-007).

During this reporting period the EIA documentation was finalised and submitted to the State Department for the final confirmation.

2.1.3. Growing the trees in the tree nurseries (at least five people employed) (Y2 March-October) *completed*

2.2. Planting the trees (seasonal work for at least 100 locals) (Y2 October-November) due in **Q3**

2.3. Forestation activities establish a baseline for increased corridor connectivity and enhancement of habitats

2.3.1. In-situ conservation of the integrated lands (Y1-3)

Throughout the reporting period, FPWC rangers have continuously conducted patrolling and monitoring activities across the integrated landscapes to ensure effective in-situ conservation. Regular patrols focused on detecting and preventing illegal logging, poaching, and grazing, as well as monitoring key wildlife species and habitat conditions.

Starting from September, patrolling activities were further intensified with the beginning of the hunting season to ensure strict control and prevent any illegal hunting incidents. The ranger teams also maintained close collaboration with local communities, reporting any potential threats and raising awareness about wildlife protection regulations.

Overall, consistent field presence and surveillance by the rangers have contributed to the sustained protection of biodiversity and habitats within the target areas.

2.3.2. Identification of key movement paths and routes of large mammals (Y2 October - Y3 December)

In process, the final results will be available in later stages, when the main monitoring data is analyzed and consolidated.

2.4. Biodiversity and human-wildlife coexistence in Yeghegis Valley are better understood through improved knowledge systems and data availability

2.4.1. Biodiversity monitoring of the area through camera trapping and rangers' involvement (Y1-3)

Fifteen camera traps were deployed across the target area to monitor biodiversity with an emphasis on large mammals, including vulnerable species (Persian leopard, Brown bear, Bezoar goat). Installations were undertaken by Vayots Dzor rangers in line with species-specific protocols and siting guidelines. Priority placements targeted Brown bear behaviour and conflict drivers near settlements, with units positioned to detect individual identification features, movement corridors, seasonal activity patterns, and potential conflict hotspots. Rangers conducted all field servicing (installation, battery/media replacement, functional checks) and verified detections following a standardized review workflow. Data were logged using consistent metadata (date/time, GPS, habitat, effort) to enable analysis of occupancy, activity peaks, and corridor use, and to support adaptive management of conflict-prone areas.

2.4.2. Assessment and monitoring of human-wildlife conflict in Yeghegis Community/valley (Y1 July - November; Y2 April - November; Y3 April - November)

To ensure systematic coverage and minimize placement bias, the Yeghegis Valley was overlaid with a 5 × 5 km grid serving as a stratification layer. Grid cells intersecting likely movement corridors (ridge passes, saddles, and riparian thickets) and settlement buffers were identified as priority areas. Within these priority cells, potential camera-trap stations were screened along game paths and natural funnels. Final station locations were selected jointly by FPWC rangers and mammal experts, based on field sign evidence (tracks, scats), visibility and safety considerations, and accessibility.

Bear Population Monitoring in Yeghegis Valley: A total of eight cameras were deployed across natural habitats corresponding to the selected corridor and ridge-line grid cells. Each camera was mounted at a height of 80-120 cm, angled along the expected direction of animal movement, and configured with standardized sensitivity settings; no bait was used.
The cameras were active from late June to late September, accumulating 156 camera-trap nights. Over this period, the network recorded 7,797 trigger events, including wild species, domestic animals, and vegetation movement. After verification, 38 Brown bear events were confirmed, corresponding to approximately nine distinct individuals. Rangers maintained a fixed rotation schedule for battery and media replacement, functionality checks, and maintenance.

Bear Monitoring in Settlements: In addition, three cameras were installed in the most vulnerable villages, where bear intrusions and crop or livestock damage had been most frequently reported. These stations were positioned at typical entry points—orchards and backyards and identified through experts and ranger observations and community consultations. The settlement cameras operated over 185 camera-trap nights, generating 7,084 total trigger events out which 495 Brown bear events were verified, representing approximately 28 distinct individuals. These cameras followed identical configuration and maintenance protocols as the wild stations, providing complementary data on bear activity, behavior, and timing of visits in human-dominated landscapes.

Data Processing: All Brown bear photos or videos captured by the same camera within a 30-minute window (in the wild) were treated as a single visit event to prevent overcounting. While in the settlements each record was identified and verified by local experts. Each record included a station ID, timestamp, and species identification.
Questionable images were flagged for secondary review, while false triggers (e.g., vegetation movement, livestock) were removed from analysis.
Between April and late September, a total of 69 bear attacks were recorded through ranger logs, community reports, and field verification. As in previous years, age and sex tagging revealed that approximately 50% of the bears entering settlements were females with cubs or subadults, indicating a persistent tendency of family groups and younger individuals to approach villages. This behavior is likely driven by seasonal food shortages in natural habitats and the presence of easily accessible food sources, notably orchard fruits and small livestock—within settlements.
Spatially, most of the incidents clustered around the Shatin, Yeghegis, and Vardahovit settlements, consistent with previously identified conflict hotspots.
Temporally, the peak period occurred during June–July, when wild fruits are not yet fully ripe and natural forage is limited, whereas cherries, apricots, and other orchard fruits in villages offer readily available food.
In line with previous monitoring years, most incidents involved orchards and small domestic animals such as chickens, ducks, and rabbits. Conversely, damage to beehives was comparatively rare, reflecting the growing use of electric fencing by local beekeepers as an effective mitigation measure supported through FPWC's community-based conflict prevention initiatives.

2.4.3. Creation of Biodiversity Database of Yeghegis Valley (Y1 October – Y3 January)

A comprehensive Biodiversity Database of the Yeghegis Valley has been established to consolidate all species and habitat data generated within the project and to serve as a long-term monitoring and management tool. The database is continuously updated by FPWC experts and trained rangers based on systematic field observations, camera-trap results, and vegetation surveys.
Currently, the database contains verified data on mammals, birds, and plants, along with initial records of selected invertebrate groups collected during field surveys. Data entries include both direct observations and indirect evidence (tracks, nests, scats, calls, or photographic confirmation). Species records are validated by taxonomic specialists before being integrated into the central dataset.
To ensure consistency and long-term usability, FPWC adopted SmartBirds Pro as the main digital platform for data collection, storage, and sharing. SmartBirds Pro enables the integration of field

data directly from mobile devices, allowing rangers and researchers to record observations with GPS precision and upload them to a shared cloud environment. Each record includes standardized attributes such as observer name, date, coordinates, habitat description, and confidence level of identification.

Output 3. Capacity-building through education and adoption of sustainable and climate change-resilient land management practices to ensure economic growth for rural populations.

3.1. Informational sessions for the local communities about nature-based solutions, green jobs, and sustainable production of local agricultural products (Y1-2)

This section highlights the capacity-building efforts aimed at strengthening community knowledge and practices in green solutions and the sustainable production of local agricultural products.

3.1.1. Mapping stakeholders for eco-friendly initiatives involving identifying interests and involvement of local businesses, entrepreneurs (Y1 -Y2)

During the reporting period, the project advanced stakeholder mapping to identify and engage local businesses, entrepreneurs, and community actors interested in eco-friendly initiatives. A Google Form was developed to streamline applications for training, supported by targeted social media outreach, which ensured wide visibility across all 12 settlements of the project area.
A transparent selection process based on clear criteria: motivation, experience in agriculture, tourism, and related fields resulted in 128 applications, of which 73 participants were selected and trained. Participants were grouped by professional focus, enabling tailored learning aligned with community needs.
This approach strengthened inclusiveness and representation across gender, age, and settlement size, while fostering collaboration among local stakeholders. As a result, the project laid the foundation for a network of community-based actors committed to sustainable livelihoods and eco-friendly economic development in the Yeghegis cluster. [redacted]

3.1.2. Organization of workshops on identified topics/directions (Y1 January – March) – extended via change request

During the reporting period, the project implemented a series of targeted training sessions aimed at strengthening local entrepreneurship through nature-based solutions, promoting green jobs, and supporting the sustainable production of local agricultural products. These capacity-building activities enhanced participants' practical skills to improve livelihoods while contributing to environmental sustainability and inclusive economic growth in the Vayots Dzor region.
A total of 73 residents (including 70 percent were women) from all 12 settlements of the Yeghegis cluster took part in two thematic trainings: Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy and Conceptual Planning (19 participants) and Strategic and Conceptual Planning of Green Agribusiness (54 participants). The sessions were held in the Shatin community and organised in close coordination with the Vayots Dzor Regional Administration and Yeghegis Cluster Community to ensure effective logistical and institutional support.

The training methodology combined theory (20–30%) with hands-on practice (70–80%), enabling participants to actively develop their business concepts. Participants were introduced to the fundamentals of the green economy, sustainability, resource efficiency, and examples of organic beekeeping and water-saving horticulture. They subsequently worked on drafting 2–3-page conceptual business plans incorporating green economy principles, target audience identification, and marketing and financial planning components.

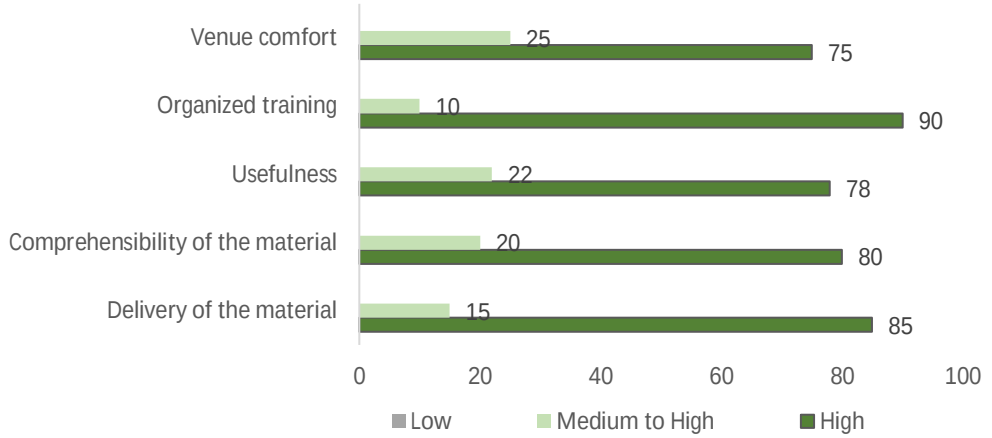
By the conclusion of the trainings, participants had strengthened their knowledge of sustainable tourism and agribusiness practices, gained practical skills in marketing, financial forecasting, and

environmentally responsible business planning, and developed initial green business concepts for further refinement.

Post-training evaluations demonstrated strong participant satisfaction, with 85% rating the delivery of materials as high, 80% finding the content easily comprehensible, and 78% assessing it as highly useful. Organizational aspects were rated particularly positively (90% satisfaction), while 75% expressed full satisfaction with the venue and learning conditions. Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring training continuity, highlighting the relevance and applicability of the topics covered.

The training received highly positive feedback from participants across all evaluation criteria. Specifically, 85% rated the delivery of material as high, 80% assessed the material as easily comprehensible, and 78% considered it highly useful. Organizational aspects were evaluated very strongly, with 90% of participants providing high ratings, while 75% expressed full satisfaction with the comfort of the venue. Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring the continuity of trainings, noting that the topics covered are broad and engaging.

Figure 1.Training Evaluation: Informational Sessions for Local Communities on Nature-Based Solutions"



The training in Yeghegis was particularly motivating for the participants and encouraged their active involvement. In terms of future needs, participants expressed strong interest in deepening their knowledge in marketing and sales, financial literacy, product validation, and target audience analysis. Overall, the evaluation demonstrates that the training effectively addressed participant needs and was implemented at a high organizational and professional level, while also providing clear guidance for further capacity-building efforts.

3.2. Further mentorship of participants to assist in their endeavors

Following the completion of the training sessions, the project established a transparent selection process to identify participants for tailored mentorship support, ensuring that the most feasible and relevant business concepts were prioritized. The selection included a two-stage evaluation: a preliminary screening for completeness and a content-based assessment using a 100-point scoring system. Although initially planned for 15 participants, 17(including 15 women) were ultimately selected, as two additional applicants received equal scores to shortlisted candidates.

The mentorship program was designed around participants' identified needs, with a strong focus on financial literacy, marketing and sales, target audience identification, and product validation. The model combines in-person group sessions, online webinars, and individual mentoring to balance theory with practical application. The implementation plan included 3 in-person group sessions (4 hours each) and 3 webinars (1.5 hours each) and individual counseling and mentoring based on the participants' needs.

Each participant completed a pre-assessment and financial literacy test to ensure targeted support. During the reporting period, two online sessions and one in-person group session were delivered, focusing on audience identification and product validation. Participants demonstrated improved understanding of market-based approaches and enhanced capacity to refine their business concepts, contributing to the project's broader goals of promoting green entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods in the Yeghegis cluster.

3.3. Workshops in sustainable honey making practices for active beekeepers for over 150 people (Y1 November – February) completed in Year 1, maintained in this period.

3.4. A 15-ha area is equipped with technical means to protect villages' beehives from bear intrusion within the first half of Y2

During this reporting period, project initiated the activity 3.4 to protect village's beehives from bear intrusion. On this purpose, electric fences have been procured from Gallagher, ensuring high quality, durability, and long-term value. The equipment is expected to protect community farmland from bear intrusions, thereby safeguarding crops, reducing economic losses, and strengthening community resilience.

3.4.1. Establishing beekeeping plots for community members within the conserved area, strategically located outside the biodiversity core zones to prevent contact with wild bee populations and other wildlife. (Y1 March – Y2 May)

The project team, in close collaboration with the Vayots Dzor Regional Administration, worked to identify and support households most affected by bear intrusions. Based on data provided by the Yeghegis cluster community, a consolidated list of beneficiaries was developed. In line with the established selection criteria, those who agreed to share plots with neighboring households will receive electric fences.

According to data from the Vayots Dzor Regional Administration and Yeghegis cluster community, a total of 116 community residents have been directly affected by bear-related damages, highlighting the urgent need for targeted support and mitigation measures. The project team, together with the Regional Administration, carefully reviewed all reported cases and prioritized the most critical ones with sharing to neighbors. As a result, 15 residents were selected to receive electric fences to protect their beehives and properties from wildlife intrusions.

3.4.2. Purchase and allocation of at least 15 electric fences (15ha in total) to the communities to protect villagers' beehives from bear intrusions (Y2)

During the reporting period, the project team collaborated closely with key stakeholders and suppliers to implement practical solutions supporting human–wildlife coexistence in the Yeghegis cluster. Following a thorough assessment of six available options, ArmSolar LLC was selected as the supplier of Gallagher electric fences, chosen for their proven durability, efficiency, and compliance with international safety standards.

In partnership with the Vayots Dzor Regional Administration and representatives of the Yeghegis cluster community, the project conducted a series of inclusive consultations to ensure strong local engagement, ownership, and sustainability of the intervention. The official distribution ceremony brought together key stakeholders, including Mr. Kolya Mikayelyan, Governor of Vayots Dzor Province; Mr. Ruben Khachatryan, Founding Director of FPWC; community leaders from all 12 settlements; and local residents.

As a direct outcome, 15 high-quality electric fences were distributed to households most affected by wildlife intrusions. The intervention now secures around 18 hectares of agricultural land across Shatin, Karaglukh, Yeghegis, and neighboring settlements, directly benefiting approximately 150 residents.

This initiative delivers clear dual impacts:
• For rural communities – prevention of significant economic losses, particularly the destruction of beehives, thereby strengthening livelihoods and food security.
• For wildlife – introduction of a humane, non-lethal deterrent that ensures animal safety while reducing human–bear conflict incidents.

By combining technological innovation with participatory community engagement, the project has established a scalable and sustainable model for coexistence between people and wildlife. The intervention contributes directly to donor objectives on biodiversity conservation, rural resilience, and environmentally responsible local development.

3.5. ≥120 individuals from target villages who have never worked with honey gain capacity, including tools, resources, and know-how for sustainable honey-making within the first half of Y2 completed in Year 1, maintained in this period.

3.5.1. Identification of underprivileged families (with the stress on women's engagement and refugees from Artsakh) who are willing to start beekeeping but do not have knowledge or resources (Y1 October-November) completed in Year 1, maintained in this period.

3.5.2. Workshops for identified families to start beekeeping (over 120 people) (Y1 November – February) completed in Year 1, maintained in this period**.**

3.6 At least 20 families receive remunerative means of support to start beekeeping and improve their knowledge during quarterly meetings with experts

The intervention contributed to improving household livelihoods, promoting self-reliance, and fostering community engagement in nature-based livelihoods. Through quarterly meetings and tailored consultations with apiculture experts, beneficiaries strengthened their capacity to manage hives effectively and generate sustainable income.

3.6.1. Need assessment and allocation of minimum means to start beekeeping for at least 20 families (Y1 October - March), *allocation extended to May 2025*

During the reporting period, 30 start-up beekeepers (including 18 were women) from the Yeghegis community received comprehensive beekeeping kits, each valued at approximately 500,000 AMD, to support the establishment and expansion of sustainable honey production businesses in the Yeghegnadzor region of Vayots Dzor Province. The support package provided beneficiaries with essential tools and equipment to initiate professional beekeeping activities and strengthen rural livelihoods.

An official distribution ceremony was held with the participation of key stakeholders, including Mr. Kolya Mikayelyan, Governor of Vayots Dzor Province; Mr. Ruben Khachatryan, Founding Director of FPWC; leaders of all 12 settlements within the Yeghegis cluster; and representatives from partner institutions. In his address, the Governor commended the initiative, noting the project's tangible contribution to rural development and environmental sustainability under the Human-Wildlife Conflict Mitigation framework.

Beyond individual support, the project also provided shared-use infrastructure to enhance community-level productivity and ensure equal access to modern processing tools. This included the honey extractors, creaming machines, and uncapping tables in Taratumb village, serving as a shared facility for nearby settlements. According to field data, approximately 67 percent of active beekeepers are concentrated around the Shatin cluster, making Taratumb a strategically accessible hub for honey processing.

The shared equipment is currently operational and managed under a structured payment mechanism coordinated by the community mayor, ensuring both sustainability and maintenance. To date, six community members have already utilized the honey extractors for personal production. As a result, all supported beneficiaries are now fully equipped to produce high-quality,

market-ready honey products, contributing to local income generation, diversification of rural economies, and environmentally responsible enterprise growth in the region.

3.6.2 Follow-up meetings with new beekeepers to evaluate the process and address ongoing challenges they might face (Y2 quarterly meetings)

During the reporting period, follow-up meetings were held with start-up beekeepers. On June 16, an exchange visit was organized to Malishka village in the Vayots Dzor region. The visit and accompanying training focused on the theme "Development of Community Beekeeping: Enhancing Queen-Rearing Knowledge and Experience Exchange."

20 participants toured a model apiary, learned about industry standards, equipment, and safety protocols, and then practiced hands-on skills in small working groups. Participants discussed common challenges and shared solutions, facilitated by Tigran Sedrakyan. Afterwards, masterclass was organized on Queen-Rearing and Bee Health: Tigran Sedrakyan conducted a highly practical session covering queen-rearing techniques and bee disease prevention. Another important aspect highlighted was the use of social media and branding: Marianna Asatryan discussed how social networks can help beekeepers promote their brand and reach customers more effectively. In total, 20 participants (including14 were women) participated in the on job training.

Following to exchange visit, it was organized individual consultancy and visits for 30 beneficiaries (including 18 were women) on July 25-to 26 and July 14 to15, to the beneficiary's beekeeping spots for the consultation and advisory purposes. The main point was to concentrate on the hygienic conditions of the beekeeping spots, watering and registering the daily results.

Three beneficiaries have embarked on their journey in beekeeping and are actively involved in intensive beekeeping development. They are participating in sessions organized by the Beekeeping Forge Scientific Educational Center to strengthen their knowledge and skills.

Output 4. Scaling up the project and sharing best practices in other parts of Armenia and beyond.

4.1. Bear Festival: organization of the festival in Yeghegis community with the participation of all direct and indirect stakeholders to showcase the project achievements, advertise local products, and to advocate for the traditional management of human-bear conflict in the region, etc. (Y3 July – September)

4.2. Environmental and socioeconomic impact assessment, including the impact of beekeeping on the ecosystem and the community. (Y1 – baseline; Y3 – impact assessment) Year 1 completed**,** maintained in this period.

4.3. Elaboration of a project report, which will include best practices and lessons learned to be disseminated at the local, regional, and international levels (Y3 October-November)
4.3.1. Sharing the obtained knowledge among the leading actors working in the Vayots dzor region, including organizations working with human-wildlife conflict across the country, the scientific community, and international organizations (IUCN HWCC Specialist Group) (Y3 December – February)

4.4. Collaborating with the Ministry of Environment and the Human-Wildlife Conflict Mitigation Group to draft an action plan for reducing and preventing human-bear conflicts. (Y1 January-March, Y2 January – March, Y3 November - March)

4.5. Publications on project findings, best practices, and lessons learned for the general public to be disseminated for a broader audience in Armenia, in the Caucasus eco-region, and beyond (Y3, August-December)

4.6. Identification of potential communities and donors in Armenia and beyond for scaling and/or replication of the project Y3 (November – February)

4.6.1. Identification and preliminary meetings with potential communities willing to deploy similar actions (Y3 November)

4.6.2. Workshops with identified communities to help launch similar projects, workshops on how to develop project proposals (Y3 December – January)

4.6.3. Identification of potential donors willing to support similar actions for identified communities (Y3 December - February)

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.**

1.4.1. Site engineering (installation of signboards, informational signs, ranger station, bear-proof bins in key touristic destinations (Y1 July - Y2 June)

During the reporting period, several challenges were encountered regarding the installation of signboards. The required permits for placing road and informational signs near touristic zones and private areas were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure. The approval process experienced delays beyond the initial timeline due to two main factors. Firstly, the governmental approval procedures within the Ministry of Territorial Administration required additional time for review and coordination. Secondly, a change in the Governor of the Vayots Dzor Regional Administration further extended the approval cycle. These factors collectively resulted in a postponement of the signboard installation activities. However, the issue has since been resolved, and the process is now progressing smoothly.

3.1. Informational Sessions for Local Communities on Nature-Based Solutions, Green Jobs, and Sustainable Production of Local Agricultural Products

The planned information sessions for local communities on nature-based solutions were postponed and rescheduled for Year 2. The delay was primarily attributed to low participation levels during the peak agricultural season, which limited community availability. To ensure stronger engagement and improved outcomes, the sessions have been strategically shifted to the next quarter, with a clear and realistic timeline established for the selection and implementation phases.

Initial outreach efforts were notably successful, generating interest from 125 businesses exceeding the original target of 100. However, actual participation reached 73, revealing an important lesson: expressed interest does not necessarily translate into active attendance when participants face competing priorities such as seasonal workloads or logistical constraints. Timing challenges were also reported by several businesses due to overlapping commitments.

Despite these constraints, the training sessions delivered strong qualitative outcomes. All 73 participants completed the full course, and 17 developed actionable and context-appropriate business plans. This demonstrated that a smaller but more motivated group of participants can yield greater depth of learning and higher-quality results, strengthening the overall effectiveness and sustainability of project interventions.

Building on these insights, the project will enhance its future engagement strategy by introducing more structured follow-up mechanisms with registered participants, adopting flexible and hybrid training formats, and scheduling activities to better align with non-peak agricultural periods.

Success stories from this initial cohort will also be documented and disseminated to inspire peer learning and foster broader participation in subsequent phases.

While participation fell short of the initial quantitative target of 100 trainees, the 73 participants represent a solid foundation for continued engagement and capacity building.

3.2.4. Need assessment and allocation of minimum means to start beekeeping for at least 20 families

During implementation, several operational challenges were identified among start-up beekeepers, particularly related to the handling of beehives and the management of queen bees. These gaps initially constrained the efficiency and continuity of the beekeeping process.

In response, the project team conducted targeted follow-up visits and arranged expert consultations to provide tailored technical assistance. This hands-on mentoring enabled early identification and resolution of issues, ensuring that corrective measures were applied promptly. The personalized guidance delivered by specialists- significantly enhanced participants' practical skills and confidence in beekeeping operations.

As a result, beneficiaries began applying improved management techniques more consistently, demonstrating increased attentiveness to hive maintenance and queen rearing. These improvements have contributed to a noticeable reduction in colony losses and an overall increase in productivity, reinforcing the long-term sustainability of the beekeeping interventions.

3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with NIRAS:	Yes
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes
Change Request reference if known: *CR25-007*	

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** ☒ Estimated underspend: £

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
[redacted]
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.

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?	YES
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