Darwin Initiative Main & Extra Annual Report

Darwin Initiative Project Information

Scheme (Main or Extra)	Main
Project reference	DIR30S2/1059
Project title	Afroalpine conservation through sustainable livelihoods and institutions inspired by tradition
Country/ies	Ethiopia
Lead Organisation	University of Oxford (Wildlife Conservation Research Unit - WildCRU)
Project partner(s)	Dinkenesh Ethiopia
Darwin Initiative grant value	
Start/end dates of project	April 2024 – March 2027
Reporting period (e.g. Apr 2024 – Mar 2025) and number (e.g. Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	April 2024 – March 2025
Project Leader name	Jorgelina Marino
Project website/blog/social media	ethiopianwolf.org
Report author(s) and date	Jorgelina Marino and Girma Eshete, 30 March 2025

1. Project summary

This project addresses the twin crises of environmental degradation and multi-dimensional poverty in Ethiopia's fragile Afroalpine highlands, a region of global biodiversity significance and national conservation priority. The highlands are home to the Ethiopian wolf (*Canis simensis*), the world's rarest canid, and a suite of endemic flora and fauna uniquely adapted to high-altitude ecosystems. These landscapes also provide vital services, such as water regulation, carbon storage, grazing land and other natural resources on which the livelihoods of rural communities depend on. Yet, these Afroalpine areas are under severe and accelerating pressure from land degradation, fuelwood harvesting, and unsustainable farming, and the erosion of traditional governance systems. The need to reverse degradation while supporting local livelihoods is urgent, for both people and biodiversity.

The development and wellbeing challenges include persistent poverty and food insecurity, lack of viable livelihood alternatives beyond subsistence agriculture, and barriers to decision-making. To respond to this challenge, this project builds on successful pilot work by the *Biodiversity Friendly Futures* project of the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Programme to scale up sustainable, locally embedded livelihoods, such as the cultivation of native *guassa* grasses ("Guassa Takala") and production of highland honey ("Asta Mar"), in tandem with strengthened community governance of natural resources. The project targets 550 households in mountain ranges of North and South Wollo Zones of the Amhara Region, organised into clusters of 15 *kebeles* (wards) and associated with two major protected areas: the Abuna Yosef Community Conservation Area (AYCCA) and Borena Saynt Worehimenu National Park (BSWNP). These sites were selected for their ecological importance, high poverty levels, and the presence community conservation structures.

The project approach is grounded in participatory approaches and peer learning, using community trainers, stakeholder-endorsed protocols, and cooperative structures (*budins*) to increase uptake and

reduce reliance on external support. The Guassa Takala has proven especially scalable with minimal inputs, while the honey livelihood is being refined through stakeholder meetings, training and technical collaboration with the Lalibela National Honey Museum. Ultimately, the project aims to restore degraded Afroalpine ecosystems, improve household resilience, and revive traditional conservation institutions, with benefits extending across ecological, economic, and social domains.

2. Project stakeholders/partners

This project is built on long-standing collaboration between the University of Oxford and Ethiopian partners as part of the long-term especially the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Programme (EWCP), along with local stakeholders. From inception, the project follows a demand-led approach shaped by Afroalpine communities and conservation institutions.

The Ethiopia-based and Oxford-based teams meet weekly online, including some monthly topic-specific meetings. Because international travel to northern Ethiopia has not been possible due to the ongoing political conflict, adaptive field planning and regular communication have been crucial. Additionally, our risk register enables local staff to report issues, which are reviewed collectively to support timely, consensus-based decisions.

Despite challenging conditions, community participation has been strong. Trust built over decades by EWCP has allowed continued implementation where other NGOs paused. Communities have shown enthusiasm for guassa cultivation and highland honey initiatives, with more communities now expressing interest in joining. Participatory activities in Year 1 included scenario interviews, community-led monitoring consultations, and local community meetings in Gimba and Lalibela. The integration of a social scientist has enhanced engagement, helping align project decisions with local priorities and cultures. Collaboration with local institutions, specifically Community Conservation Area offices, local governments authorities (land use, animal production, and women's affairs) has supported livelihood beneficiary selection, training, and monitoring. While there is no formal collaboration with the British Embassy yet, we remain open to engaging.

Raising awareness of the links between biodiversity and livelihood is embedded in both guassa and honey activities. All participatory activities begin with discussions on the ecological value of Afroalpine biodiversity and the role of restoration in supporting water, soil, and wildlife. These dialogues are strengthening shared goals of conservation and sustainable development.

3. Project progress

3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

Progress against project activities during the first year has been generally strong, despite contextual challenges in the Amhara highlands.

Output 1: Sustainable livelihood cooperatives and associations formed and livelihoods implemented, with poverty alleviation benefits.

Activity 1.1. Introductory project meeting in Addis Aba with participation of all partners and collaborators (15 participants, 3 of them female, from high level stakeholders: ANRS EFPA, ACCA, BSWNP, University and Oxford, Dinkenesh Ethiopia, Addis Ababa University). This was followed by 3-day planning workshop with the entire project team (APP)

Activity 1.2.–1.3: Livelihood scenario interviews and socio-economic baseline surveys developed collaboratively within the team, benefiting from the collective past experiences and critical insights from the team's social scientist and anthropologist. Scenario interviews tested and adjusted, and subsequently implemented in North and South Wollo (56 *guassa* scenario interviews and 30 honey scenario interviews in Wodebiye kebele, North Wollo; 26 *guassa* scenario interviews in Gaya Kebele in South Wollo). APP questionaiires

Activity 1.4: Analyses of the results helped identify community preferences and barriers for the proposed livelihoods. The results were presented and discussed in local stakeholder meetings (including community scouts, wolf ambassadors, women and community representatives, woreda sector

representatives), with broad consensus on implementation protocols and priorities. One local meeting in Lalibela in July 2024 with 21 representatives from stakeholders on the Guassa Takala initiative in Abuna Yosef, North Wollo ; another local meeting in Lalibela in December 2024 with 41 participants (including 31 community members) related to the Highland Honey inittaive in Abuna Yosef, North Wollo; and a third local meeting in Gimba town in South Wollo with 40 Guassa Takala stakeholders, including 28 community members (8 of them female). (APP1 – scenario results)

Activity 1.5–1.8: *Guassa Takala*: In North Wollo, 82 households involved (of which 19 are female household heads); 1 *guassa* committee formed; households organised in 8 guassa *budins;* all housheolds planted guassa and signed conservation agreements. In South Wollo, 149 households were selected as beneficiaries (of which 51 are women) and land for guassa plantation has been identified and measured. In total, communities delimited 10.6 ha of degraded land for guassa cultivation; of which 52 % of was planted with guassa in Year 1. Supervisory visit measured an average survival of 80% of the seedling across plots (APP beneficiaries See EWCP AR guassa Field Visit Reports & Supervisory meeting reports.

Activity 1.9–1.10: *Asta Mar (Support to existing budins)*: 20 honey producers were selected to strengthen 4 existing honey *budins* in Abuna Yosef; bee hives were distributed (APP)

Activity 1.15–1.19: *Guassa nurseries:* Planning for guassa nurseries is underway but the political situation has limited the possibility to develop this initiative further.

Output 2: Communities, protected area councils, local and regional governments with better capacity for conservation and co-management, with strengthened natural resource governance and biodiversity benefits.

Activity 2.1–2.3: Due to the political situation, it was not possible to implement activities that required the meeting of managers and local communities in the highlands, such as the planned listening events; and Council meetings were not held during this year. However, issues related to governance, access to resources, and conflict were discussed during other project activities, and a review of the current governance structures and regulations regarding natural resources was conducted, providing a foundation for future activities on these topics.

Activity 2.4-2.5: The political situation prevented field training and other activities intended to promote community-led monitoring. Instead, the project team assessed and identified representatives from local communities and traditional institutions (such as priests, elders, women and Qire chairman) who could serve as strong candidates for promoting or participating in future community-led monitoring teams. A total of 40 individuals were identified across 9 kebeles in 3 woredas in North Wollo. Many of these representatives will be invited to the upcoming consultation meeting. (APP? see EWCP AR_Community-led Monitoring).

Output 3: Best practice disseminated and increased capability and capacity for scaling up.

Activity 3.1: Market studies were delayed due to the political situation.

Activity 3.2. Trainer of trainers was implemented in collaboration with the Honey Museum in Lalibela for 17 experts form local Woredas in North Wollo, and the training effectiveness was measured. APP

Activity 3.4 – 3.5: Guassa Takala demonstrations reached 82 households in Abuna Yosef, who received training on guassa plantation by the project team, and 31 households from South Wollo were trained in guassa plantations by 9 model farmers, in a peer-to-peer approach.

3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

Output 1: Progress toward this output has been encouraging, especially considering the challenges posed by the political context. At baseline, livelihood options in the highlands were limited and highly vulnerable. Over the past year, the project has laid a strong foundation for shifting this dynamic by introducing sustainable, culturally rooted livelihoods. What's especially promising is the collaborative spirit emerging around these new opportunities. Early signs of transformation are visible in the uptake of Guassa Takala and Asta Mar initiatives, the establishment of local cooperatives (*budin*s) and

agreements, and the community-driven identification of restoration sites. Measurement of changes in income and food security is pending analysis of post-intervention surveys. We are tracking progress using a combination of beneficiary records, training attendance, and field supervision reports. These tools confirm the trajectory is positive, and we remain confident that the project will meet this output by the end of its term, assuming continued community participation and improved field access. APP, same as above

Output 2: Progress under this output has been uneven, primarily due to the disruption of planned gatherings and training sessions. The baseline context for this component was one of fragmented governance and limited coordination among key actors in natural resource management. While we have not yet been able to convene formal Councils or launch structured co-management processes, we have made use of other project spaces to begin important conversations around access, rights, and responsibilities. A particularly valuable outcome has been the identification of respected local figures who are likely to be trusted facilitators in future governance and monitoring work. This sets the stage for more formal capacity-building when conditions permit. Additionally, our internal review of governance structures has created a reference point that will help shape future interventions and policy discussions. Given the constraints, measurable progress on indicators has been limited; qualitative progress in terms of relationships, understanding of governance gaps, and community readiness is evident. We expect this output can still be reached, provided that the political situation allows for resumed engagement in Year 2.

Output 3: This output is showing good promise, even if some planned activities have been delayed. The baseline reflected a lack of accessible training materials, weak dissemination networks, and limited local capacity to scale up learning. Over the past year, we have seen strong engagement with peer-led training models and growing interest in knowledge exchange at the community level. The development and delivery of a "Training of Trainers" programme and the emergence of peer trainers mark important steps toward a sustainable model. These early investments in human capital and training infrastructure are building a solid platform for future scaling. We are tracking indicators such as the number of community trainers and their cascading impact through local outreach. While further work is needed to expand and document reach, we are optimistic that this output is well within reach by project close.

3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

The project is making good progress toward its intended Outcome: *Sustainable livelihoods and increased capacity for local governance of natural resources, resulting in reduced multi-dimensional poverty in 550 households, and declining biodiversity losses and agriculture encroachment in the Amhara highlands*. By the end of Year 1, 112 households had been directly engaged in guassa cultivation or honey production, through newly formed or supported community cooperatives (*budins*), and signed conservation agreements; another 149 households have been selected for planting in the next rainy season. This enabled restoration on more than 5 hectares of degraded land so far but also symbolises a growing commitment to co-management and biodiversity conservation. Early feedback from local meetings and supervision visits suggests increased awareness of the links between ecological health and livelihood security, and stronger community ownership of resource governance. Although broader ecological impacts are not yet measurable, the foundational work has begun.

Outcome indicators related to household income and governance effectiveness will be further evaluated as progressive data from baseline and midline surveys is being analysed. The outcome indicators themselves remain broadly appropriate; however, the team has recognised the value of complementing quantitative measures with qualitative tools (including focus groups and narrative case studies) to better capture social change processes. In particular, participant reluctance to disclose sensitive income data has highlighted the importance of triangulation, for which tailored validation approaches developed by our Social Scientist, Dr Marshet Girmay, can proved essential. Given current momentum and adaptation to local realities, the project is well positioned to achieve its Outcome, though ongoing conflict in some regions will continue to require flexible, localised planning.

3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

At the end of Year 1, most assumptions remain valid, though some are partially tested or require ongoing attention.

Political and security conditions have significantly affected implementation, with instability in the Amhara region disrupting travel, meetings, and council activities. Climatic conditions, however, remained favourable for seasonal livelihoods. The project adapted using localised approaches, though sustained conflict could impact timelines moving forward.

Community participation and commitment remain strong. Over 250 households engaged in guassa and honey activities, and uptake has been high despite insecurity. While land availability is adequate, labour constraints vary, especially for female-headed households. Scenario interviews have helped adapt activities to these realities. Engagement in training has also been high.

Market demand for guassa and honey continues to grow. Guassa is traded regularly, with evolving local market systems. These trends support the long-term viability of project livelihoods.

Governance support and institutional buy-in has been promising. Members of the community were happy to sign individual conservation agreements, but formal co-management discussions via councils could not proceed due to political limitations. Nonetheless, over 100 government stakeholders actively participated in meetings, and engagement with CCAs and woreda offices remains strong.

Ecological and knowledge-based assumptions largely hold. No disease outbreaks recorded in Ethiopian wolves. Traditional resource management practices remain respected and functional. Proxy indicators are being trialled to strengthen socio-economic tracking.

Some assumptions, such as the generalisation of lessons beyond northern Ethiopia, are too early to assess. However, the integration of traditional institutions and participatory livelihoods shows promising potential for replication. Project data is of publishable quality, with validation and analysis underway.

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

Contribution to biodiversity conservation: The project contributes to biodiversity conservation by restoring degraded Afroalpine habitats through guassa grass cultivation and protecting Erica forests through community-based honey production. In both North and South Wollo, restored guassa plots are already reducing erosion and beginning to improve habitat quality. Local community reports confirm increased vegetation recovery and reduced livestock encroachment. The conservation agreements signed with 113 households commit beneficiaries to avoid illegal natural resource use and supporting ongoing efforts to protect the endangered Ethiopian wolf and its ecosystem. Moreover, community-based monitoring, participatory governance, and stakeholder workshops are strengthening local ownership and decision-making power.

Contribution to human development and poverty reduction: At the same time, the livelihoods supported by the project (guassa grass cultivation and highland honey production) are helping households to diversify incomes and reduce reliance on unsustainable natural resource use. Over 250 households have engaged in these activities so far, including female-headed households and marginalised groups. Scenario interviews and follow-up discussions show that beneficiaries see guassa and honey as valuable, low-risk income sources with strong local markets and cultural relevance. Training and peer-to-peer learning opportunities further build local capacity and resilience.

4. Project Support to the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements

At the national level, the project contributed to Ethiopia's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) and the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Action Plan (2017) by restoring over 5 hectares of degraded Afroalpine land through guassa cultivation, alongside the creation of community-led livelihood committees and increased commitment of over 100 household who benefits from alternative

livelihoods and committed to conservation agreements. The project also reinforced links between communities and Woreda-level offices for land use and animal production, aligning livelihoods with national conservation goals. These activities directly support NBSAP priorities on sustainable use and community-based conservation and contribute to Goal 3 of the wolf plan by reducing degradation in critical highland habitats.

At the international level, the project advances Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) goals by addressing direct pressures on biodiversity through alternative livelihoods and ecosystem restoration. It also contributes to SDG 15.5 (halting biodiversity loss) via habitat restoration and monitoring, and to SDGs 2.1 and 12.2 by promoting guassa and honey as sustainable income sources.

Although no formal reports were submitted to convention focal points during Year 1, the project maintained communication with authorities at Community Conservation Area and Woreda levels to ensure alignment with national strategies. Looking ahead, field evidence will be synthesised into policy briefings to inform national and international reporting, particularly where community-led approaches and landscape-level restoration are prioritised.

5. Project Support for multidimensional poverty reduction

During this reporting period, the project made tangible progress toward poverty reduction in highland communities of the Amhara region through sustainable livelihoods, capacity building, and improved local governance, with benefits that go beyond income to include environmental sustainability, gender inclusion, and stronger institutions. A total of 251 households have actively engaged in guassa or highland honey livelihoods. These activities offer low-cost, low-risk income options that are culturally familiar and ecologically sustainable. From monitoring of the previous pilot in South Wollo during this year, we learnt that beneficiaries have begun harvesting guassa and collecting honey, with early returns already reported. These products were sold in local markets, generating direct income, which is expected to reduce dependence on unsustainable natural resource extraction.

Twenty guassa beneficiaries and six new honey producers are female-headed households, and nine peer educators (including three women) have been trained to lead knowledge exchange. This inclusive approach addresses structural marginalisation and ensures equitable access to skills and benefits. In parallel, the formation of budins (cooperatives) and livelihood committees has strengthened local participation in land-use and conservation decisions. These governance structures promote social cohesion, community responsibility, and local resilience, particularly valuable in areas with limited formal government presence at the moment, due to the political unrest.

Scenario interviews and stakeholder meetings show shifting perceptions around biodiversity and livelihoods, with beneficiaries citing the reliability of guassa and honey, lower vulnerability to draughts, and the benefits of communal planning. While formal income analysis will not be available until the end of the project, these early indicators point to improved food security and household security.

6. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

GESI Scale	Description	Put X where you think your project is on the scale
Not yet sensitive	The GESI context may have been considered but the project isn't quite meeting the requirements of a 'sensitive' approach	
Sensitive	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	x

	inequalities.	
Empowering	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	
Transformative	The project has all the characteristics of an 'empowering' approach whilst also addressing unequal power relationships and seeking institutional and societal change	

Based on Year 1 activities and commitments, the project would qualifies as GESI Sensitive and is laying foundations for more empowering practices in the future.

Justification: The project has incorporated a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) sensitive approach in its first year. The design and implementation of guassa and highland honey livelihoods were informed by scenario interviews that explicitly explored gendered barriers to participation. Female-headed households have been included in beneficiary selection (20 in guassa, 6 in honey), and women have been represented in the peer trainer selection process.

Core principles considered:

Rights: The project respects both customary and legal land use practices and recognises women's informal roles in natural resource management.

Practice: The team has addressed cultural and workload barriers by identifying activities that are feasible and appealing to women (e.g. homestead guassa cultivation).

Environment: The project has been implemented in fragile, conflict-affected areas where women and marginalised groups face heightened vulnerabilities. These contexts have informed both livelihood and safety planning.

Roles and responsibilities: Discussions during stakeholder meetings have highlighted unequal workloads, and efforts have been made to offer flexible participation options.

Representation: All project committees include at least one woman, and there are plans to strengthen women's voices in local councils through further training and support.

Resources: Guassa and honey are accessible, low-capital livelihoods that do not require ownership of large land plots or expensive equipment, which supports access by poorer households.

Lessons and challenges: A key challenge identified is the under-reporting of exclusion or barriers, especially by women in conservative or insecure areas. Continued relationship-building and attention to safe spaces for discussion are necessary.

Next steps: In Year 2, the project will revisit the scenario interview tools and community feedback processes to strengthen the GESI lens. There is potential to expand women's leadership in monitoring and training roles, and additional efforts will be made to understand and address other dimensions of exclusion, including age, where relevant.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities have been embedded throughout the first year of implementation, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools to assess whether outputs and activities are contributing meaningfully to the intended Outcome. The current framework supports real-time learning, inclusive decision-making, and adaptive management across all project sites.

The project uses multiple methods to monitor change and assess impact:

- Baseline socio-economic surveys with guassa and honey beneficiaries

- Scenario interviews to explore household preferences, capacity, and barriers
- Regular field visits and supervisory assessments to track progress and issues
- Community monitoring structures and stakeholder workshops for participatory verification
- Pre- and post-training evaluations to assess learning outcomes

These tools generate both numeric indicators (e.g. number of households supported, hectares restored, conservation agreements signed, people trained) and qualitative insights into changes in governance participation, perceptions of livelihood viability, and satisfaction with project activities.

Partners share M&E responsibilities: field-based monitoring is led by Dinkenesh Ethiopia, while the University of Oxford provides methodological oversight, data tools, and quality assurance. Weekly coordination calls and shared online platforms enable collaborative data sharing, and findings are jointly reviewed before inclusion in formal reports or presentations.

This approach has already shaped project delivery. For example, scenario interviews revealed a community preference for receiving one modern and one transitional beehive per household, rather than two modern ones, to allow both income generation and household honey consumption. As a result, the distribution model was adapted.

One ongoing challenge is collecting consistent income-related data, as participants are often reluctant to share sensitive financial information. In response, the team is triangulating income change through qualitative methods, including participant observation and indirect proxies. For example, ownership of solar lanterns, smartphones, or radios is now being tracked as a reflection of increased household purchasing power, which respondents are more comfortable reporting than income figures.

Long-term indicators, such as livelihood resilience, ecosystem health, and carbon sequestration, are not yet fully measurable. Ecological monitoring was delayed due to access restrictions, but Year 2 will launch comparative surveys (e.g. guassa plots under restoration vs. unmanaged areas) to assess progress even in the absence of baseline time series.

Finally, the project is laying the groundwork for community-led monitoring of biodiversity and natural resources. This will involve shared data collection, joint interpretation of findings, and the integration of local ecological knowledge.

Overall, the M&E system has proven fit for purpose, supporting accountability and adaptation. As more data becomes available in Year 2, the framework will continue to evolve, guided by community input and practical learning on the ground.

8. Lessons learnt

The first year of implementation offered multiple opportunities for reflection practical learning.

At the administrative level, one key lesson was the steep learning curve for Dinkenesh Ethiopia, a new NGO. While the recruitment of a project accountant initially proved challenging, the experience is informing a more effective second round; interim support from the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Programme ensured financial continuity. This highlighted the value cross-organisational support systems during institutional strengthening.

From a technical and methodological perspective, participatory tools such as scenario interviews and stakeholder workshops emerged as essential for adaptive management. These methods helped identify community preferences, shape activity design, and understand local barriers early. However, they also revealed a trade-off between the rigour of data collection and the time and capacity required to administer long surveys in complex field settings. As a result, the team plans to streamline M&E tools in Year 2, making them more focused and realistic without compromising the quality of insight.

The train-of-trainers and peer-led learning model has proven particularly effective. It boosts community ownership and ensures culturally grounded training. This model has shown strong potential for replication and scale-up, especially in contexts where formal training infrastructure is limited.

In terms of risk management, the risk register proved most valuable when treated not as a static document but as a living communication tool. Over time, it became clear that field staff, particularly those closest to insecure areas, needed safe, structured spaces to share risk information. This is now being integrated into regular check-ins, with a deliberate effort to build trust and create channels for honest reporting.

Finally, while conflict-related delays resulted in an underspend in Year 1, a timely budget reallocation (via an approved Change Request) allowed the team to preserve momentum and prepare for expanded activities in Year 2. At present, no further changes to the plan are foreseen.

Recommendations that would give to similar projects: 1) Use participatory tools for both implementation and M&E; 2) Prioritise trust-building and communication with field teams, particularly in fragile contexts; 3) Keep projects active, however modestly, even during instability, as this helps maintain community trust and program relevance; 4) View M&E as a strategy for learning, adaptation, and empowerment.

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

Not applicable.

10. Risk Management

The project operates in a highly dynamic and at times volatile context, which has required ongoing attention to risk management and adaptive planning.

During the past year, the continued political and security instability in northern Ethiopia presented challenges to staff mobility and activity planning. While conflict-related risks were anticipated at proposal stage, the specific forms of community governance that emerged in response to the absence of formal authorities (e.g. alternative local leadership structures) required adaptation. Other specific challenges related to the blocking of roads and the risk of kidnap have necessitated further adaptations to methods of travel and the planning of field activities. Recently, we have received reports of military drones sighted during project field operations in mountain areas.

Adaptations: Project activities were restructured geographically to focus on areas where travel and community engagement were feasible (e.g. Abuna Yosef). Informal, locally-grounded intelligence networks were used to assess risks in real-time and adjust fieldwork plans accordingly. The project created safe communication channels and routine check-ins with field staff to encourage open reporting of security concerns without pressure. Transport between cities was assisted via flights instead of road travel to avoid the risk of blockades, and other activities have been coordinated remotely by project staff with the assistance of local wolf ambassadors and livelihood committees from communities in affected conflict areas. The risks posed by drones is being assessed as a priority as part of the continued risk register. A budget change request was submitted and approved to reallocate unspent Year 1 funds to Year 2, due to access-related delays.

The project has maintained an active risk register, which is used during regular team meetings to assess changes, document mitigations, and guide decisions. An updated version of the risk register is submitted alongside this annual report. Looking ahead, risk management will continue to be a key pillar of project coordination. Emphasis will be placed on building internal capacity to respond to emerging risks with agility while continuing to centre staff and community safety in all implementation decisions.

11. Scalability and durability

Our project was designed with long-term sustainability and replication in mind. During the reporting period, several steps have been taken towards this objective:

Stakeholder awareness and potential for scaling: Key stakeholders, particularly communities, Woreda officials, and Community Conservation Area (CCA) representatives, have become well-acquainted with the project's objectives and methods through scenario interviews, trainings, and multiple stakeholder meetings. These forums have included discussions of the costs and benefits of guassa and honey production, as well as community-led conservation. The visibility of restored guassa plots and the economic benefits from honey harvests elsewhere have reinforced community interest and demonstrated tangible returns on effort.

Evidence of attractiveness to adopters: There is strong evidence that the project model is attractive. Several communities outside the original project sites have requested to participate in future expansion. This interest is rooted in local recognition of the environmental degradation they face and the reputation of EWCP's prior work. Additionally, the guassa and honey initiatives offer culturally familiar, low-input livelihood options, making them especially appealing in areas where economic alternatives are limited.

Alignment with incentives and policies: The project has worked closely with local government and community institutions, embedding its approach within existing governance frameworks. Individual's conservation agreements and active participation of Woreda land use officers and Kebele leaders is supporting buy-in from key actors and increasing the likelihood of continuation beyond project funding. Furthermore, the project's goals are aligned with national policy frameworks, which bolsters its relevance for wider adoption.

Changes in social norms and behaviours: Preliminary results from community dialogues and monitoring suggest that attitudes are shifting. Communities are increasingly recognising the ecological value of guassa and Erica forests. The formalisation of *budins* (cooperatives) and use of peer trainers are reinforcing positive social norms around cooperation and resource governance.

Exit plan and progress: The exit plan includes capacity building, peer-to-peer knowledge transfer, and integration of project activities into local institutions. During Year 1, the foundations of this plan were laid with the training of 17 Training of Trainers participants and selection of 9 peer trainers. These efforts aim to ensure continuity of practices and leadership once external support is reduced.

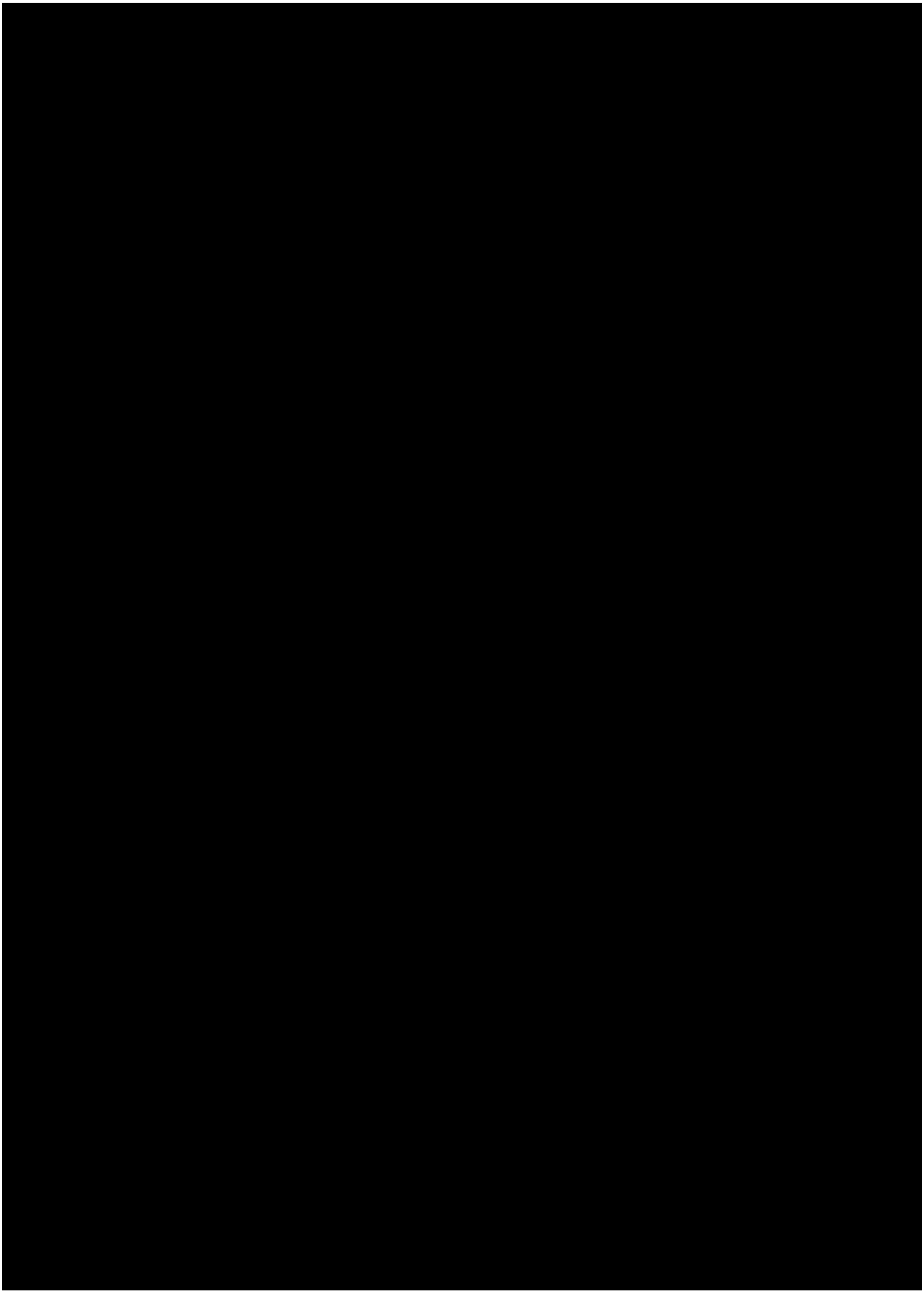
Additional steps for durability: Joint planning with CCAs and community councils to integrate guassa and honey activities into local land use priorities; exploration of market partnerships for guassa and honey products; development of simplified training materials for continued peer dissemination.

Together, these strategies position the project well to achieve lasting impact and wider adoption across other Afroalpine areas in Ethiopia.

12. Darwin Initiative identity

We have ensured the use of the Darwin BCF logo in the launch meeting in Addis Ababa, as well as in our community meetings with local partners and beneficiaries whenever there are printed or visual materials of any kind. The funder is always made known to all participants. We are also clear in our highlighting of the Darwin Initiative's funding in our EWCP annual reporting for national government and partners as well as other international supporters. We aim to expand our messaging online and via social media during Year 2.

13. Safeguarding



14. Project expenditure

Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025)
Subject to a change request approved on 14th April 2025. *Variance is explained against in the method of forecasting Q4 expenditure to produce the CR.*

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)	[redacted]			
Consultancy costs				
Overhead Costs				
Travel and subsistence				
Operating Costs				
Capital items (see below)				
Others (see below)				
TOTAL	**£132,439.00**	**£135,415.12**	[redacted]	

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 (£)	[redacted]	[redacted]	Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN), Horne Family Foundation, WildCRU, University of Oxford
Total additional finance mobilised for new activities occurring outside of the project, building on evidence, best practices and the project (£)		[redacted]	University of Oxford MPLS Division PCER Engagement Fund 2025/26

15. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

We think we have covered everything.

16. Outstanding achievements or progress of your project so far.

I agree for the Biodiversity Challenge Funds to edit and use the following for various promotional purposes.

In the face of ongoing insecurity in northern Ethiopia, the Biodiversity Friendly Futures project has achieved a remarkable first-year milestone: reviving sustainable livelihoods and governance practices in one of the country's most fragile and ecologically significant regions.

A standout success has been the restoration of over 5 hectares of degraded Afroalpine land through the collective efforts of 82 farming households who planted guassa grass, a native species with deep cultural roots and ecological importance. In parallel, 20 highland honey producers were supported to strengthen traditional honey cooperatives ("budins") with modern beekeeping equipment and training, helping reduce pressure on wild Erica forests. These efforts have already produced harvests, income, and demand for expansion from nearby communities.

Equally significant is the project's grassroots model for governance. All the households involved signed formal conservation agreements committing to biodiversity-friendly practices. This year also saw the successful integration of gender-sensitive approaches, with female-headed households and women peer trainers playing key roles in project implementation.

Underpinning these achievements is the resilience and commitment of partner organisations, particularly Dinkenesh Ethiopia, a new national NGO that has navigated steep operational learning curves while delivering field activities with consistency and care.

What makes this progress particularly noteworthy is that it was accomplished in regions affected by armed conflict and institutional breakdown. Through careful risk planning, community trust-building, and adaptive management, the team has not only delivered on its objectives but laid a foundation for lasting impact.

These achievements reflect the power of community-led conservation, and offer replicable models for linking poverty reduction with biodiversity protection, even under the most challenging conditions.

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
Impact *More resilient ecosystems and livelihoods in the Ethiopian highlands as local economies shift from overutilization to sustainable uses of natural resources, with enhanced social equality and revived community-led governance systems*	Signs of progress toward the intended impact: Community-led structures such as *budins* and livelihood committees are active, with strong local participation and inclusion of women. Guassa and honey livelihoods are gaining traction, with more communities expressing interest and degraded land voluntarily allocated for restoration. Early benefits reported by participants include reduced erosion, improved fodder availability, and increased local ownership of conservation. These developments indicate a shift toward more resilient livelihoods and ecosystems, even amid ongoing political challenges.	[redacted]
Outcome *Sustainable livelihoods and increased capacity for local governance of natural resources, resulting in reduced multi-dimensional poverty in 550 households, and declining biodiversity losses and agriculture encroachment in the Amhara highlands.*		
Outcome indicator 0.1 At least 70% of households that harvested a Guassa or honey product by the end of the project (expected to be ~200 households or 1,200 people, of which 30% women), report at 10% increment in household income, compared to the baseline by Y3Q4 **[DI-D16]**.	Socio-economic baseline surveys of 129 household heads (92 male, 37 female) provided pre-project data on income, assets, and livelihood practices. Full income tracking is planned for the end of the project.	Continue recording baseline conditions. Measure income increments for honey producers that might start harvesting honey.
Outcome indicator 0.2 At least 90% of households that harvested a Guassa or honey product by the end of the project (expected to be ~200 households or 1,200 people, of which 30% women), will achieve an average of at least 20% improvement in at least one aspect of locally-defined multidimensional poverty scores (including food security, livelihood assets, education, health and energy security) compared to the baseline by Y3Q3. **[DI-E02]**	Baseline data for multidimensional poverty indicators (food security, livelihood assets, health, energy, education) collected. Assessment of score changes are planned for end of project.	Continue recording baseline conditions. Measure poverty alleviation in honey producers that might start harvesting honey.

Outcome indicator 0.3 Ecosystem degradation avoided in ~60 hectares re-allocated for guassa growing, previously used for crops or grazing and with high levels of environmental degradation by Y3Q4. Milestones: 20ha by Y1, 40ha by Y2, and 60ha by Y3. [DI-E01]	10.6 ha of degraded land allocated for guassa cultivation in three *kebeles*; of these, 5.5 ha were planted in Year 1.	Plant the remaining 5 ha already allocated in the upcoming rainy season (July 2025). Toral target for Year 2 is 20 ha.
Outcome indicator 0.4 Drivers of Afroalpine biodiversity loss (e.g. number of households involved in illegal grazing and collection of wild guassa during closed seasons in the CCA, cases of firewood extraction in *Erica* forests, and new agriculture areas in Afroalpine land) reduced by an average of 20% compared to the baseline by Y3Q4, [DI-D18]	Baseline survey data included questions on natural resource extraction, forming the basis for monitoring biodiversity threat reduction.	Baseline and annual assessment will continue in Year 2.
Output 1 *Sustainable livelihood cooperatives formed and livelihoods implemented, with poverty alleviation benefits.*		
Output indicator 1.1 460 people from local stakeholder groups (of which 30% women) complete training in grass and honey production by Y3Q3. Milestones: 110 people by Y1, 375 by Y2 and 450 by Y3. [DI-A01].	A total of 135 individuals (80 men, 43 women farmers; 9 men, 3 women experts) received training on guassa or honey production in Year 1. This meets and exceeds the milestone of 110 people trained.	Training reach to another 350 people.
Output indicator 1.2, 1.2. 90% of the 460 people trained in grass and honey production report that a) have gained new capabilities (skills and knowledge) and b) are applying them 6 or more months after training by Y3Q3. Milestones for 1.2a: 70% of 110 people by Y1, 375 by Y2 and 450 by Y3. [DI-A04].	Pre- and post-training evaluations were conducted for all 135 trainees.	Six-month post-application assessment will take place in Year 2 to verify capabilities are sustained Evaluations to be conducted in 350 trainees
Output indicator 1.3, 70% of sustainable livelihood enterprises established are functioning (e.g. are they still growing and/or harvesting products) at least a year after project establishment. Milestones: 70% of 110 people by Y2, 375 by Y3 [I-A10].	Ongoing (impact to be measured in Year2).	Milestones: 70% of 110 people by Year 2.
Output 2. *Communities, protected area councils, local and regional governments with better capacity for conservation and co-management, with strengthened natural resource governance and biodiversity benefits.*		
Output indicator 2.1. Two improved community management agreements available	Postponed No new or revised community resource management	We expect community council to resume in Year 2, expecting at

and endorsed - agreements for regulated use of natural resources within the CCAs. In English and Amharic by Y1Q3. [DI-B03]	agreements were completed due to the political situation. However, groundwork was laid through stakeholder engagement and a review of current governance structures.	least one revised or new agreement in place.
Output indicator 2.2. Representatives of 15 Kebeles (local), 5 Woredas (district), 2 Community Councils (local), 1 Zonal and 1 Regional Authority, of which 20% women, with enhanced awareness and understanding of threats to Afroalpine biodiversity and associated poverty issues compared to the baseline survey by Y3Q3 [DI-A07].	Stakeholder participation reached 117 individuals (100 men, 17 women) from community, NGO, and government sectors across project events and planning forums. This surpasses the Year 1 milestone of 50 participants.	Formalise awareness approaches Strengthen tools for measuring awareness and knowledge in Year 2.
Output indicator 2.3. 200 people from local communities with increased participation in Livelihood Committees, Community Councils, Advisory Committees and Community Monitoring groups; including at least 60 women, by Y2Q4. Milestones: 50 by Y1, 200 by Y2. [DI-B05]	Stakeholder participation reached 117 individuals (100 men, 17 women) from community, NGO, and government sectors across project events and planning forums. This surpasses the Year 1 milestone of 50 participants.	Stakeholder participation to reach 200 people in Year 2.
Output indicator 2.4 Stabilised or improved (10% increase) Ethiopian wolf population abundance and distribution (extent of habitat used by wolves), within the project sites by Y3Q3. [DI-D04]	Due to security constraints, regular monitoring was limited, and population estimates could not be conducted. Ethiopian wolf presence was confirmed in all three North Wollo subpopulations, with evidence of breeding in one area and good pup survival in another.	Based a strong baseline in Year 2
Output indicator 2.5 Four new stock assessments of Afroalpine species at project sites (high altitude rodents, endemic Starck's hare *Lepus starcki*, guassa *Festuca* spp. and *Erica* spp), using vegetation plots, counts along transects, camera traps, and mapping. [DI-C02]	Ecological surveys were not initiated due to field access constraints.	Standard wildlife surveys (at least one every two months). Sample vegetation and soil in guassa plantations. Mapping and measuring condition of Erica vegetation. Start community guard training, AFTER community-led consultation meeting.
Output 3. *Best practice disseminated and increased capability and capacity for scaling up.*		
Output indicator 3.1 Two best practice guides (community-led guassa cultivation and *Erica* honey production) published and endorsed; in English and Amharic by Y3Q2. [DI-C01]	NA	Best practice guides for guassa and honey production continue to be developed, incorporating best practices and lessons

		learned.
Output indicator 3.2 One assessment of community alternative livelihoods, use and governance of Afroalpine natural resources (from data collected during scenarios interviews and listening events)	Analysis is underway and will feed into Year 2 planning and dissemination outputs First draft.	Results feed into Year 2 planning and dissemination outputs. One publication.
Output indicator 3.3. At least 100 people (30% women) from various local stakeholder (farmers, local governments, conservationists, etc.) completing training on at least one of the training workshops to be build capacity for scaling up and sustainability (finances and micro-enterprises, honey production, community-based tourism, carbon sequestration) by Y3Q4. Milestones: 33 trained by Y1Q4, 66 by Y2Q4 and 100 by Y3Q4. [DI-A01]	Some scaling-up workshops were postponed. 17 experts from local governments received training on honey production (training of trainers).	At least 60 people trained on finances and micro-enterprises, to support enhanced benefit from the alternative livelihoods.
Output indicator 3.4. At least 20 local producers of Guassa and honey disseminate technical knowledge regarding livelihood activities to at least 200 household representatives not included in this project, of which 100 are women.	Peer-to-peer training began with 10 model farmers (7 men, 3 women) disseminating guassa practices to 31 households.	A larger rollout is planned in Year 2 with at least 10 peer trainers
Output indicator 3.5 Webinar hosted by Dinkenesh Ethiopia to disseminate results of sustainable livelihoods and natural resources governance in Y3Q4. Target 30 national and 10 international attendees, 30% women. [DI-C13]	NA	

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	Local stakeholder groups complete training on guassa cultivation	1.1	People	20 men, 30 women	50			50	460
DI-A07	Stakeholders with enhanced awareness and understanding of threats to Afroalpine biodiversity and associated poverty issues	2.3	people	100 men, 17 women	117			117	
DI-E01	Ecosystem degradation avoided in areas re-allocated for guassa growing	0.3	Hectares		5.5			60	