



**BIODIVERSITY
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects **Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus**

Half Year Report

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 2-3 pages** in length.

If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2024

Please note all projects that were active before 1 October 2024 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

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

Project reference	31-017
Project title	Biodiversity conservation and local livelihoods improvement in southern Tajikistan
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Tajikistan
Lead Organisation	BGCI
Partner(s)	Kulob Botanic Garden, Zam Zam, Ganji Tabiat
Project leader	Joachim Gratzfeld
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR 1
Project website/blog/social media	www.bgci.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 M&E 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.

Grant agreements have been signed between BGCI and the partner institutes. A project Steering Committee has been established and had its first meeting on June 16, 2024. It consists of 14 members and will meet at least bi-annually to discuss project progress and give recommendations. The next meeting will be in November.

Output 1. Forest restoration management planning is jointly developed and implemented by members of the community and forest departments and results in enhanced populations of at least 8 threatened and socio-economically important species in situ and ex situ.

Activity 1.1 In July and October 2024 Ganji Tabiat (GT) and Kulob Botanic Garden (KBG) visited target areas to carry out distribution surveys of target plant species and collected seeds for ex situ conservation. Seeds of 13 species have been collected: *Acer turkestanica* (0.5 kg), *Allium giganteum* (0.2 kg), *Allium stipitatum* (1kg), *Allium trautvetterianum* (0.1 kg), *Amygdalus*

bucharica (VU) (0.5 kg), *Amygdalus vavilovii* (NT) (0.4 kg), *Bunium persicum* (0.5 kg), *Cerasus avium* (2 kg), *Galagania fragrantissima* (0.1 kg), *Juglans regia* (5 kg), *Malus sieversii* (VU) (1.5 kg), *Paulita ovczinnikovii* (0.1 kg), *Pyrus tadshikistanica* (CR) (0.15kg)

Activity 1.2 Trial propagation methods at KBG for developing ex situ conservation collections/seed orchards at KBG and forest department nurseries in Shamsiddin Shohin and Baljuvon will start from November 2024 onwards.

Activity 1.3 GT signed an agreement with the tree sapling supplier Rozizoda Eraj, an individual entrepreneur from Kulob city, who will provide 26,150 saplings which will be planted from Q. 3 onwards.

Activity 1.4 Three new nurseries have been established in Kulob Botanic Garden, Sari Khosor, Baljuvon district and Nuriddin Mahmudov, Shamsiddin Shohin district in cooperation with the Forest Department to grow seedlings for reforestation of degraded forest lands in the target areas. The latter two are located within the forest area and all are prepared for planting seedlings. The nurseries have a capacity of 10,000, 5000 and 15,000 saplings, respectively.

Activity 1.5 In May and June 2024 meetings were conducted in all 12 villages with the target communities in which plans were created for individual households. During the community workshops of September 24-27 (activity 4.3 and 4.6) further project ideas were discussed about what land management and crops and plants are wanted in community owned areas. Representatives of the Forest Department were part of all meetings.

Activity 1.6 Planting season will start from November 2024, which is the normal planting season, despite the late arrival of funding. This will not impact the total number of seedlings and saplings planted in year 1 of the project.

Activity 1.7 The assessment of forest resources was part of the baseline survey carried out from Aug 29 - Sept 7 (see activity 2.1). The results will be used as a basis for the development of the Integrated Forest Restoration Management Plan.

Output 2. New agroforestry practices are established that enhance household livelihoods and food security in Sari Khosor and Yol based on an analysis of socio-economic status, income sources and market situation.

Activity 2.1 Lead partners jointly developed a socio-economic survey to assess the project's impacts on livelihoods, farming systems and forest uses. It was decided that the survey would be combined and delivered at the same time as the public awareness assessment survey to reduce the number of occasions and time needed to avoid survey fatigue of communities and disruption to their daily lives, which can lead to frustration with project implementers. The baseline survey was carried out from August 29 - September 7 2024 with 198 respondents, of which 99 were women (50%), in 12 villages. Baseline analysis and a report on the results will be completed in the second half of the year.

Activity 2.2 A survey was conducted as part of the market opportunities and value chain analysis using Kobo Toolbox. 47 community members who participated in the workshops to address activities 4.3 and 4.6 contributed to this survey.

Activity 2.3 10 producer groups have been established in the villages of Sari Khosor, Boghi Zoghon, Afardi and Shahidon in Sari Khosor sub-district, Baljuvon district and Kumrogh, Shahrison, Ruikash, Lov, Hasorak, Jirk, Dashtijum, Shuj, Yol, Sari Marghzor, Anjirob, Khirmanjo, and Kisht in Nuriddin Mahmudov sub-district, Shamsiddin Shohin district. Each group consists of 20 members, with in total 133 (67%) female members.

Activity 2.5 A contract has been signed with an alfalfa supplier in Shamshiddin Shohin district for alfalfa seeds for home gardens and orchards.

Output 3. Knowledge of and capacities and capabilities of local communities in Sari Khosor and Yol in forest restoration, sustainable and revenue generating agroforestry, are increased, benefiting in particular women and people belonging to vulnerable groups.

Activity 3.1 The needs assessment was part of the baseline survey and community workshops described more in detail in activities 2.1, 4.3 and 4.7.

Activity 3.2 A pre- and post-training assessment plan has been developed which will be used to evaluate skills and knowledge of individuals attending the training events (ToT) and will be put into place as part of the first 2 trainings which are scheduled in Q.3 of this year.

Output 4. Project best-practice in joint forest restoration management planning and agroforestry (Outputs 1 and 2, supported by Output 3) is shared at national level through a series of public outreach events for community buy-in and incorporation into the government's efforts to develop future forest management policy.

Activity 4.1 The first Open Day will take place in March 2025 instead of Q. 3 when it is spring and visitor numbers to the garden are highest, to maximise visitor attendance.

Activity 4.2 Nine people, including four women, of Kulob Botanic Garden, Ganji Tabiat and Zam Zam have been trained by the BGCI education team in the co-creation methodology. A 2-day training session took place during the project visit on October 1st and 2nd. On the first day, the focus was on understanding public participation and the value of co-creation in enhancing community involvement in project decision-making, as well as the different co-creation steps and a practical session. On the second day, the two partners responsible for leading the co-creation sessions with the community rehearsed and practiced facilitating their sessions.

Activity 4.3 The BGCI education team led four community workshops, engaging 65 participants in total, including 47 women. The workshops took place on September 24 and 25 in the villages of Bogi Zogon and Shaidon in Sari Khosor sub-district, Baljuvon district and on September 26 and 27 in Kisht and Hasorak in the Shamsiddin Shohin district. Based on the input of the local community during these workshops, a public engagement plan has been developed that will be used when implementing the co-creation sessions.

Activity 4.6 The BGCI education team conducted four focus groups for market research, involving the same 65 participants from the community workshops on September 24-27. Both small and large group discussions were held to explore market needs and potential products. These will be analysed and an interim report produced in the second half of the year, which will inform future work. Additional focus groups are planned in year 3 after development of new products.

Activity 4.7 A baseline survey was carried out from August 29 - September 7 2024 with 198 respondents, of which 99 were women (50%), in 12 villages. The survey contained sections on demographics, livelihood and socio-economic status, forest use and KAP (Knowledge, Attitude and Practice) towards conservation. The data will be analysed and a report of results will be produced in the second half of the year.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The late approval of the project, and delayed official start date (June 2024) resulted in a shortened Q.1. Some of the activities that were planned to start in Q.1 have been moved to Q.2, but overall activities planned for the first half year have been carried out.

A change request has been submitted and approved regarding a rise in costs in purchasing 65,000 saplings.

Ganji Tabiat received their share of the project funds late due to international bank transfer issues, which has led to some parts of the project starting later than planned, but this is not expected to impact the overall project timeline.

Crataegus darvasica (CR) will be collected next year as part of Activity 1.1, because a special permission is needed as it grows in a cross-border territory.

Activity 4.1 will be moved from Q.3 to Q.4 each year to allow KBG to host their Open Days when the garden is at its most beautiful and visitor numbers are highest, to ensure maximum visitor attendance.

The project leader (Joachim Gratzfeld) went on sabbatical leave from July - Jan 2025. His tasks are being covered by Director of Conservation Carly Cowell and supported by the rest of the project team to ensure that this has no knock-on effect on the project's activities.

The capital equipment budget for year 1 has been used to purchase metallic nets and garden tools, this was prioritised to prevent the livestock trampling and destroying newly planted saplings. The allocated money for bee boxes will be spent in year 2. The total amount spent on capital equipment in year 1 and 2 will remain the same so a formal finance Change Request to the Darwin Initiative is not needed.

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/ No
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes/ No
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes/ No
Change Request reference if known: <i>If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome</i>	

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)

Actual spend:

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 2025)?

Yes ☐ No ☒

4c. If you expect and 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. 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 BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

No other issues noted so far in the project.

6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report. If your project was subject to an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment please use this space to comment on any changes to international human rights risks, and to address any additional mitigations outlined in your offer letters. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.

In February 2024 this project was put on the reserve list and additional questions were raised. A response letter was drafted and sent to you in March 2024.

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1 st April 2024)	
Have you responded to any additional feedback (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	Yes
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	Yes
For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1 st April 2024)	
Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	Yes
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	Yes
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	N/A
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	Yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Yes