

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	31-019	
Project title	Sustainable Shea: Supporting communities, ecosystems restoration, and livelihoods in Gambella	
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Ethiopia	
Lead Organisation	Tree Aid	
Partner(s)	NA	
Project Leader	<i>Fazal Mabood</i>	
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR1 (April-Sep 2025)</i>	
Project website/blog/social media	https://treeaid.org/projects/ethiopia/sustainable-shea	

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).

During the reporting period, the project primarily focused on strengthening community-based institutions and enhancing the technical capacities of target beneficiaries, project staff, and relevant government counterparts. These efforts aimed to build a stronger foundation for sustainable resource management and improve the effectiveness of local implementation.

In addition to capacity-building activities, regular field-level monitoring and community discussions were conducted to assess progress, identify challenges, and gather feedback from stakeholders. These participatory engagements helped ensure that project interventions remained responsive to local needs and priorities.

In July, the Head of Programmes from Tree Aid UK conducted a field visit to gain a deeper understanding of the local context and the on-the-ground needs of the communities. The visit

aimed to strengthen project planning and ensure that future interventions are more responsive and well-informed.

To further build the project team's technical knowledge and design more robust interventions in these early stages of the project, Tree Aid UK also facilitated an exposure visit with the Tree Aid Ethiopia team to Ghana, where shea value chain work has also been conducted. The visit provided the team with practical insights into shea nut processing and introduced them to good practices in cultivating shea seedlings in nurseries. These learning experiences are expected to inform and enhance the implementation of project activities in Ethiopia.

Based on these activities, the major achievements accomplished during the period are as follows:

- Two tree nursery sites were established, and two groups comprising 60 members (48 or 80% women) were organized and provided with practical training on nursery management. A total of 67,419 tree seedlings were successfully raised
Vitlaria Paradoxa (Shea) = 23,200
Tamarindus Indica = 8,000
Balanites = 36,000
Cashew = 219
- 3,000 hectares of degraded forest land were identified and mapped, and 44,219 assorted tree seedlings were planted across 13 hectares of these degraded areas. Additionally, 23,200 shea tree seedlings remain in the nursery for planting in the coming year.
- 300 beneficiaries (of which 230 or 77% are women) were organized into eight shea groups to strengthen collective production and marketing initiatives.
- 445 target beneficiaries (including 365 or 82% women) participated in awareness sessions on biodiversity conservation and gender equality.
- 20 project and government staff attended a Training of Trainers (ToT) on sustainable resource management, cooperative management, and conflict resolution. These trained facilitators subsequently trained 320 PFMC members. Two of the ten newly established enterprises—one focused on shea and another on nursery production—were supported in preparing their enterprise development plans.
- A four-day project visit and community discussion were conducted jointly by Tree Aid UK and Tree Aid Ethiopia staff to review progress and engage with local stakeholders.
- A team of six experts from the Bureaus of Finance and Agriculture visited the project areas and held discussions with project beneficiaries.
- The Project Coordinator and Programme Manager from Tree Aid Ethiopia, along with the Programme Officer from Tree Aid UK, undertook a one-week exposure visit to Ghana, where they gained hands-on experience in shea butter processing, shea tree propagation, and marketing practices in Yendi (Tamale). Based on the experience a step by step guide was developed on Shea nuts and butter processing. This is still in draft form. A copy is attached to this report as an annex.
- Two project staff participated in causal mapping training and contributed to data collection activities for another Darwin-funded project in Metema region of Ethiopia

- Beneficiary data was reviewed and updated. Based on the latest figures, the total number of beneficiaries reached 480 individuals — 360 direct and 120 indirect beneficiaries.

Plan for next half of the year(October 2025– Mar 2026)

- Facilitate forest resource inventory and shea butter marketing and value chain study
- Begin construction of warehouses, Shea nuts and butter processing units and kiosk
- Purchase the Shea processing equipment (including Crushing machine, grinding machine, kneading machine, and roasting drums)
- Assist natural regenerated tree seedling with focus on Shea tree
- Nurturing of planted seedlings in restoration sites
- Conduct land restoration survey, establish permanent monitoring plot (PMPs) , and organisational capacity assessment for cooperatives and enterprises

Status	Number	Shea group	Nursery group	Remarks
Direct	360	300	60	
- Men	-	70	12	
- women	-	230	48	
Indirect	120	-	-	Indirect beneficiaries are people living in the village and involve in awareness rising and other mass mobilisation events
Men	48	-	-	-
Women	72	-	-	-

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.

In the past six months, the value of the Ethiopian Birr has declined significantly, leading to an increase in the cost of materials. This had a direct impact on the purchase and distribution of project materials and inputs to beneficiaries. To mitigate these challenges, the project team began revising the project budget and implementation schedule accordingly. Additionally, the Project Coordinator resigned in the final month of the previous year. Tree Aid Ethiopia responded promptly by initiating the recruitment process, and a new coordinator was appointed soon after. To strengthen their understanding of project activities, an exposure visit was organized for the new coordinator and the Country Programme Manager to Ghana. The visit focused on learning the practical processes of shea butter extraction and the best practices for cultivating shea seedlings in nurseries.

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 [REDACTED]
Formal Change Request submitted:	No
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	N/A

Change Request reference if known: [REDACTED]

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)?

[REDACTED]

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?

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

Tree Aid is currently reviewing the project budget with the intention of adding additional activities, which will soon be shared through a formal change request. This revision has been prompted by new findings from the field that highlight evolving needs within the project area and is made possible through savings in the budget due to exchange rate gains.

Specifically, the recent assessments revealed that land ownership patterns in the target locations are more complex than initially understood. Agricultural and forest lands are often interwoven, with some areas under varying degrees of control by different stakeholders. In several cases, community members must pass through security-controlled zones to access their forest lands. These contextual challenges have underscored the need for adaptive project planning and the inclusion of targeted interventions that address land access, security coordination, and community engagement to ensure effective implementation and sustainability of project outcomes.

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.

[REDACTED]

6b. Have any concerns or allegations relating to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment been reported in the past 6 months?

[REDACTED]

Suspicions or allegations related to safeguarding concerns should be reported to ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk

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.