

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: 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 2023

Project reference	DARCC006 Darwin Initiative Capability & Capacity
Project title	Strengthening collaborative tree seed supply systems for restoration in Asia
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Philippines
Lead partner	Bioversity International
Partner(s)	Bangladesh Forest Department Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB), India National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Indonesia University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) Royal Botanic Garden of Edinburgh (RBGE)
Project leader	Riina Jalonen
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.apforngen.org/initiatives/strengthening-seed-supply

Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end 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.

Cross-cutting:

To make the methods and results publicly available (activity 2.3), a journal manuscript was drafted. The manuscript will be finalised and submitted by Q4 of Year 2. The methods and results were also presented at the Society of Ecological Restoration (SER) World Congress in Australia in September 2023.

Philippines:

A stakeholder workshop with FLR implementers was organised in September 2023 to review species distribution maps and gather additional occurrence data to further improve the predictions of the distribution models. The results were presented at the Congress on Sustainable and Climate Resilient Watershed Management through Ecosystem-based Approaches in the Asia-Pacific Region (24-26 October, 2023, Philippines). Terms of Reference were prepared for a web developer to develop a seed information system for the Mindanao Forest Tree Seed Centre (MFTSC), with recruitment being finalised as of October 2023. Local nurseries producing native trees in the Mindanao region are being identified, with site visits and capacity strengthening in seed collection and seedling production scheduled for Q3 of Year 2.

Indonesia:

The sub-contract was signed after prolonged negotiations on 1 May 2023. However, the partner could only receive funds in October 2023 and so field activities could not be implemented in Q1-Q2 of Year 2 (see Section 2). The information system (online database) on forest tree seed developed in Year 1 of the project received approval from the Director General of Watershed Control and Forest Rehabilitation (BPDASRH), Ministry of Environment and Forestry, for national use (Standard indicator DI-B02). To initiate the nation-wide adoption of the information system, a National Coordination meeting was held in August 2023 to present the database to stakeholders, and gather input from the representatives of the central and regional governments who are responsible for managing tree seed sources throughout Indonesia.

The methods and early results of the project were also presented to stakeholders at a widely attended Talk series by the National Research and Innovation Agency's (BRIN) Research Center for Plant Conservation, Botanical Gardens and Forestry. The event featured presentations by the Director of Forest Tree Seeds of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and BRIN. The hybrid event was attended by approximately 590 participants, many of whom expressed support for the project to be implemented across the country.

From the start, the project has received appreciation from the Directorate of Forest Tree Seed because the activities could directly support the Directorate's main tasks. The Directorate has shown a strong willingness to work with BRIN to continue these activities in the coming years, beyond the project duration.

India:

Project sub-contract was signed after prolonged negotiations on 15 May 2023. However, they could not receive funds until October 2023 (see Section 2), and so activities could not be implemented in Q1-Q2 of Year 2. Memorandum of Understanding between the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE, research institute under the Indian Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change) and Lead partner was agreed on, with signing scheduled for November 2023. The agreement demonstrates significant interest and commitment by Government of India for forest and landscape restoration and genetic resources conservation, and lays an important foundation for continuing collaboration on these topics for the next several years.

Bangladesh:

Memorandum of Understanding between the Economic Relations Division of Government of Bangladesh and the Lead partner was signed on 17 September 2023. Again, the agreement demonstrates significant interest and commitment by the Government for the project themes and lays a foundation for long-term collaboration. Nevertheless, the sub-contract has not yet been signed and so the partner could not yet receive funds nor start implementation (see Section 2)

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.

While subcontracts have now been signed with India and Indonesia, the country partners could not receive project funds until October 2023. In India, the first funds transfer was held by anti-money laundering compliance screening, which the transfer for some reason did not pass, and the funds were returned to the lead partner in September 2023. We then re-attempted the transfer on 19 September in US\$ instead of GBP, based on information that it may be more successful, and the partner confirmed receipt of funds finally in October 2023, allowing them to start implementation.

In Indonesia, a new government procedure requires each project to open a bank account and this was only completed in October 2023, after which the funds were immediately transferred to the partner.

Subcontract still has not been signed with Bangladesh and realistically, they will not have the time to implement the planned in-country activities in the remaining 6 months of the project. We have, therefore, agreed to submit a change request to allocate the respective funds to instead organising a results workshop at the end of the project.

These delays unfortunately have a significant impact on the project as the partners were not able to implement in-country activities without first receiving the funds. Year 1 funds for in Indonesia were spent through direct spending arrangements with the leading partner and so only the Year 2 activities and spending were affected. For India and Bangladesh, similar arrangements were not possible and so in-country activities and spending have been on hold for both Years 1 and 2. The affected countries will not be able to complete the project activities within Year 2, hence we have submitted a 12-month project extension and financial change request.

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 (18 July 2023)

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes (31 October 2023)

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

Change request reference if known: N/A

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

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 2024)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £ [REDACTED]

***The low actual expenditure as of 30 September 2023 is due to the delays in having the sub-agreements signed as outlined in the change request. This has led to the delay in implementation by partners and no financial reports have yet been received. Lead partner's Year 2 budget (apart from overheads) was already re-allocated to Year 1 (CR22-113) to allow partners to delay their spending to Year 2 while waiting for the sub-contracts to be signed.**

However, as per the change request submitted, we are expecting to fully expend the re-budgeted £ [REDACTED] in FY 2023/24. A new financial change request has been submitted as of 31 October 2023 to request rebudgeting of the underspent funds to a new implementation Year 3, given the significant administrative challenges at partner organisations.

4c. If yes, then you need to 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 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?

N/A

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**