**Darwin Initiative Capability & Capacity: Annual Report**

**Darwin Initiative Project Information**

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| Project reference | DARCC025 |
| Project title | Building Local Capacity to Protect National Marine Biodiversity |
| Country/ies | Cabo Verde |
| Lead Organisation | University of Aveiro |
| Project partner(s) | University of Plymouth, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, Biosfera, UNICV - Universidade de Cabo Verde, UTA - Universidade Técnica do Atlântico, Biosfera |
| Darwin Initiative grant value | £ 2000000.00 |
| Start/end dates of project | 1st April 2023-31st December 2025 |
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| Project Leader name | Teresa Amaro |
| Project website/blog/social media | https://www.cesam-la.pt/teresaamaro/<br>https://www.instagram/bait_cv |
| Report author(s) and date | Teresa Amaro, 29th April 2025 |

## 1. Project summary

The Cabo Verde archipelago's marine ecosystems face various threats, including illegal fishing, habitat degradation, and pollution, which endanger biodiversity and undermine the country's economy and wellbeing. The archipelago currently lacks the necessary infrastructure, expertise,
and resources to effectively observe, monitor, and manage its deep-water marine ecosystems (Figure 1).

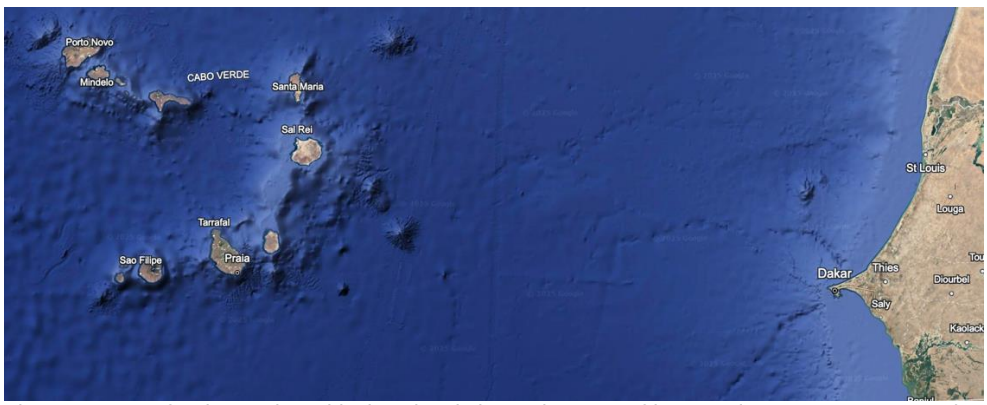

Figure 1 – Map of Cabo Verde archipelago in relation to the West African continent. Image generated using Google Earth

The absence of robust monitoring programs and sustainable management practices poses significant challenges to the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable development of the country's ocean economy. Reports from organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the UK-Portugal lead UN Ocean Decade Challenger 150 Programme highlighted the urgent need for sustainable management of marine resources in the archipelago and the importance of building local capacity and capability in marine biodiversity observation to address this challenge effectively. The BAIT project addresses the diagnostic in the reports by providing training programs, knowledge transfer initiatives, and technical support to local stakeholders.
The focused training initiatives built around a practical observation programme, deliver important information for policy to promote environmentally sustainable economic growth and subsequently help to alleviate poverty. By empowering local stakeholders with the skills and tools needed to manage marine

resources sustainably, BAIT contributes to the long-term economic and environmental wellbeing of the country. Furthermore, by fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange between local and international partners, the project enhances Cabo Verde's capacity to address global challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss. Finally, the project's knowledge exchange group of offshore scientists from other small island developing states and African nations, expands BAIT's capacity and capability potential beyond the archipelago. In a word, the project is highly relevant to Cabo Verde's sustainable development goals, biodiversity conservation efforts, and poverty reduction strategies. The BAIT agenda also contemplates conducting baseline surveys, implementing conservation measures, and creating employment opportunities for local scientists and researchers. By promoting the sustainable use of marine resources and integrating biodiversity conservation into policy-making processes, the project contributes to poverty reduction and improves the livelihoods of coastal communities. The need for BAIT was identified through comprehensive assessments and reports from organizations such as the Organisation for OECD and the UK-Portugal lead UN Ocean Decade Challenger 150 Programme. These initiatives and reports highlighted the urgent need for sustainable management of marine resources in Cabo Verde and the importance of building local capacity and capability in marine biodiversity observation to address this challenge effectively.
In conclusion, BAIT represents a critical step towards building resilience, promoting sustainability, and fostering inclusive growth in Cabo Verde. By addressing capacity and capability gaps in marine biodiversity observation, the project empowers local stakeholders to protect and sustainably manage the country's marine resources for the benefit of current and future generations. Through collaborative efforts and strategic investments, BAIT contributes to Cabo Verde's journey towards a more sustainable and prosperous future.

## 2. Project stakeholders/ partners

The partnership for the BAIT project was established in response to identified demand from Cabo Verde and its local communities. Formal partners—including academic institutions, NGOs, and research organisations from both Cabo Verde and international locations—have been actively involved in project planning, monitoring, evaluation, and decision-making processes from the outset. Meetings have been held regularly to discuss fieldwork plans, engagement strategies, camera design, logistics, and knowledge exchange opportunities. The collaborative efforts of all partners have facilitated smooth—albeit occasionally delayed—implementation of project activities, ensuring alignment with the needs and priorities of the host country.
Efforts have engaged local communities to gather input on project activities and promote participation in outreach components. BAIT was also represented at the UN Ocean Decade Conference in Barcelona (April 2024), facilitating connections with government stakeholders and enhancing the project's visibility and impact; for example, we presented a project postcard through the DOSI stand. Criteria for the selection of the Knowledge Exchange Fellows (KEFs) were agreed upon and advertised through our networks, ensuring transparency and accountability in the selection process. Six KEFs from other SIDS countries were identified to receive training in mesophotic survey methods, fostering an international knowledge transfer network.
Importantly, the project has actively engaged with the British Embassy in Cabo Verde. Several meetings were held to keep the embassy informed about the project's progress and outcomes. Most recently, BAIT was invited to participate in a meeting at the British Embassy focused on the Cabo Verde stakeholders network, scheduled for 15 May 2025. Additionally, the project has been invited to participate in a high-level meeting organised by the President of the Republic of Cabo Verde in October 2025, which will provide further opportunities to strengthen stakeholder relationships and expand the project's reach.
One of the key lessons has been the importance of maintaining flexible timelines to accommodate logistical delays while ensuring continued partner coordination and transparency.

## 3. Project progress

### 3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

At the start of the project, Cabo Verde had limited national capacity for mesophotic marine biodiversity research beyond SCUBA-accessible depths. Marine research efforts were primarily restricted to coastal environments due to a lack of appropriate offshore monitoring infrastructure, trained personnel, and data management systems. Prior to BAIT, no structured offshore monitoring programme existed within the country's academic or conservation institutions, and existing ad-hoc research was largely dependent on foreign institutions.
Substantial progress has been made towards the development of the necessary infrastructure and expertise for mesophotic biodiversity monitoring. This progress is reflected across the following activities:

**Activity 1.1: Develop training protocols and resources for fieldwork and data analysis**

Training materials were created to support the effective implementation of mesophotic biodiversity research in Cabo Verde. These resources included protocols for camera building (which is designed to be flat-packed), safe deployment and retrieval procedures, as well as maintenance guidelines. Additionally, data management protocols were developed to ensure that collected data could be stored, processed, and analysed efficiently. These resources were shared with local institutions and project partners.
Evidence: Training manuals; standard operating procedures; image annotation protocols.

**Activity 1.2: Identify in-person fieldwork trainees (advertise MSc scholarships and select recipients; identify knowledge transfer visit candidates)**
Eight on-island participants from Universidade Técnica do Atlântico (UTA), Universidade de Cabo Verde (UNICV), and the NGO Biosfera were selected for training. This selection included two students who received full scholarships, which allowed them to participate in the project's fieldwork and training activities. These students are currently working on their research, which will contribute to a peer-reviewed publication in the final project phase. Furthermore, six KEFs from other SIDS countries were identified to receive training in mesophotic survey methods, fostering an international knowledge transfer network. The BAIT project, the original plan was to fund 2 Master's students to support the research and activities. However, we encountered a challenge as there were no existing Master's programs in marine biodiversity or related fields at either Universidade Técnica do Atlântico (UTA) or Universidade de Cabo Verde (UNICV). In response to this, we adapted the project's approach and instead funded two "licenciatura" (equivalent to a master level degree) students to work on the project. These students have contributed significantly to the project's fieldwork and data analysis, and their work will be integrated into a peer-reviewed publication at the end of the project. Furthermore, if a Master's program in marine biodiversity or a related field is successfully initiated during the BAIT project, the work done by these students will be incorporated into the curriculum, providing them with a formal academic pathway. If this program is not established, their contributions will remain integral to the project's scientific output in the form of a published paper. In the Universidade de Aveiro (Portugal), we have also successfully identified one Master's student who is working with the BAIT data. This student will incorporate the findings and analysis into the thesis, thus continuing to contribute to the academic impact of the project through international collaboration.
Evidence: Scholarship applications; list of selected trainees.

**Activity 1.3: Deliver training courses to on-island participants and knowledge transfer participants**
Training was delivered in-person to both local participants and international knowledge exchange fellows. The sessions covered essential skills, such as camera system maintenance, deployment techniques, species identification, survey design, and data interpretation. Of the eight local participants, three received additional training in survey planning and data storage. The two fully funded MSc students contributed to the fieldwork and are now preparing to publish their results. The deep-water camera system, developed and deployed during the training, is now owned by the on-island NGO, Biosfera, ensuring the continuity of monitoring activities beyond the project's conclusion.
Evidence: Training attendance records; camera maintenance logs; fieldwork participation certificates.

**Activity 1.4: Collate feedback from training participants**
Feedback was collected through surveys and informal discussions with participants. All trainees reported an increased understanding of offshore biodiversity research, with many expressing increased confidence in their ability to operate the BAIT camera system and design surveys. Key project partner, Biosfera, emphasized the value of the training for their staff, which will enable them to continue marine monitoring and protection efforts after the project ends. Notably, Alberto Queiruga, the Conservation Department Director at Biosfera, stated: "The training and data collection experience that the Biosfera team has received within the BAIT project will be essential in opening the field of action of our NGO, in order to establish monitoring and protection plans for our marine protected areas. We can now explore at greater depths and continue studying and learning about the ocean floor around our islands."
Evidence: Feedback surveys; participant testimonials; summary of informal interviews.

**Activity 1.5: Write final project report outlining the capacity and capability that has been developed, evaluating the project as a whole (including feedback)**
This report synthesizes the project's achievements and evaluates the effectiveness of the capacity-building efforts. It includes feedback from training participants, as well as an assessment of the infrastructure and personnel developed over the course of the project. One of the most significant achievements is the establishment of a low-cost, locally operated deep-water camera system that is now used for ongoing research by local NGOs. Additionally, the project has laid the groundwork for sustainable offshore biodiversity monitoring by enhancing the technical capabilities of local institutions.
Evidence: Project report; peer-reviewed publication (in progress); evaluation forms from participants.

**Output 2: National-level community awareness of marine ecosystems and their importance**

**Activity 2.1: Design community engagement strategy based around sharing imagery and video from fieldwork**

Initial progress on this activity began in June 2024 with a national awareness workshop organized to mark World Environment Day. Held in collaboration with the "Conservation of Marine Ecosystems around Santo Antão" project and local partners (BIOSFERA, TERRIMAR, Porto Novo and Ribeira Grande City Halls), the workshop brought together stakeholders to discuss the ecological value of marine ecosystems and explore recommendations for Marine Protected Areas. Although BAIT imagery had not yet been collected, the workshop helped shape the focus of the engagement strategy by identifying key themes and community concerns.

In July 2024, the first field campaign was conducted, during which imagery and videos of marine biodiversity were collected using the BAIT system. These materials have since been used in pilot community engagement sessions with fishermen in Monte Trigo and Tarrafal, facilitated by Dr. Adilson Semedo (UNICV). The use of local marine visuals during discussions sparked interest in the ecological significance of marine life and its connection to sustainable fishing practices. These initial sessions are contributing to the development of a formal, image-based community engagement strategy, which remains in progress.

Evidence: Workshop participant list and agenda (June 2024); BAIT imagery archive (July 2024); community engagement meeting notes.

**Activity 2.2: Develop outreach resources (e.g., national marine species fact sheets) using BAIT-collected imagery**

While no outreach resources have yet been finalized under this activity, preparatory work has been initiated. Two local students are in charge of this activity. Following the July field campaign, the project team began reviewing BAIT-collected imagery to identify suitable content for future materials. A preliminary list of key marine species has been compiled and design concepts for fact sheets have been discussed internally, but the development and production of these resources are scheduled for the next project phase.

Evidence: BAIT imagery; internal notes on species prioritization; summary of initial planning discussions with outreach partners.

**Activity 2.3: Visit schools to run workshops, incorporating marine biodiversity and conservation into the state curriculum**

As of this reporting period, workshops have been conducted in two schools — one in Santiago and one in Fogo — introducing students to marine biodiversity, conservation practices, and the ecological relevance of Cabo Verde's marine ecosystems. These sessions incorporated content aligned with state curriculum objectives and utilized interactive presentations to engage students. Outreach teams included project members and local educators.

Additional school visits are planned for October in Santo Antão and São Vicente. These upcoming sessions will further support the integration of marine conservation topics into educational settings and help broaden geographic coverage across the islands.

Evidence: School visit reports; attendance lists; presentation materials used in classrooms; planning documents for upcoming school visits.

**Activity 2.4: Organise annual project conference, inviting stakeholders from different sectors of society including local government, youth ambassadors, university students, and the general public**

Preparations are underway for the project's final stakeholder workshop, scheduled for October 2025. The event will bring together representatives from local government, NGOs, university students, and community members. The goal is to facilitate dialogue around marine conservation priorities, share project progress, and strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration.

In addition, the BAIT project has been invited to participate in a high-level meeting organized by the President of the Republic of Cabo Verde in Fogo. This national recognition provides a significant platform to share project insights and reinforce the importance of marine biodiversity at the policy level.

Evidence: Preliminary agenda and stakeholder list for October conference; invitation letter to the presidential meeting in Fogo; coordination notes from project team.

**Output 3: Established pathways to policy impact for BAIT data (i.e. links to government) to promote blue growth**

**Activity 3.1: Invite individuals in key government departments (≥2) to sit on a science-policy interface board**

Preparatory steps for this activity are underway. Key government departments, including the Ministry of the Sea and the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, have been identified as priority institutions for participation. Initial informal consultations have been held with ministry representatives to introduce the BAIT project and gauge interest in joining a science-policy interface board. Formal invitations are scheduled to be issued in the third quarter of 2025, with the aim of establishing the board before year-end.

As an early step toward stakeholder engagement, the project team organised a successful workshop in Santo Antão in June 2024, which brought together local authorities, community representatives, and relevant institutions. The event provided valuable insights, strengthened local partnerships, and helped set the foundation for future policy-oriented engagement.
Additionally, the project team has been invited by the President of the Republic of Cabo Verde to participate in the Ocean Decade event in October 2025. This high-profile event will provide an excellent opportunity to engage directly with senior government officials and other stakeholders. During the Ocean Decade meetings, we plan to hold targeted discussions to further promote the establishment of the science-policy interface board and to strengthen the alignment of BAIT project outcomes with national priorities.
Evidence: Draft list of invitees; initial contact notes with government representatives; concept note outlining purpose and function of the interface board.

**Activity 3.2: Run workshops with the science-policy interface board to identify where and how BAIT data can contribute to Cabo Verde environmental legislation**
Initial progress on this activity began in June 2024 with a national awareness workshop held to mark World Environment Day(already mentioned in activity 3.1). Organized in collaboration with the "Conservation of Marine Ecosystems around Santo Antão" project and local partners (BIOSFERA, TERRIMAR, Porto Novo and Ribeira Grande City Halls), the workshop convened stakeholders from both civil society and local government. While the event's primary focus was on community engagement and MPA recommendations, it also served as an early platform for discussing the relevance of scientific data—including future BAIT outputs—for informing marine policy. Insights gained during the workshop are informing the design of future policy-focused workshops, including one scheduled for October 2024, where the BAIT project will present initial findings and facilitate structured dialogue around data application in environmental governance.
Evidence: Workshop agenda and participant list (June 2024); notes on policy-relevant discussion outcomes; draft agenda for October stakeholder workshop.

**Output 4: Knowledge Exchanged with Nations Outside Cabo Verde**
At the outset of the BAIT project, knowledge exchange between Cabo Verde and other SIDS or African nations in offshore marine monitoring was minimal. There was no established framework for transferring offshore survey methodologies or techniques to other developing nations. Given the shared environmental and logistical challenges faced by many SIDS, there was significant potential for broader knowledge exchange, yet this potential had not been fully realized. However, by the conclusion of BAIT, the project had successfully facilitated knowledge exchange with scientists from several developing nations, contributing to the broader goal of building capacity in offshore marine biodiversity monitoring. The project carried out the following activities:

**Activity 4.1: Introduce project to the wider knowledge exchange team**
The BAIT project introduced its goals and methodologies to a wide range of international scientists and practitioners, initiating discussions on how the project could be replicated in other SIDS and developing nations. Through this activity, key partnerships were established, and the foundation was laid for a wider knowledge exchange network.
Evidence: Meeting notes from initial introduction sessions, email correspondences with international partners, partnership agreements established.

**Activity 4.2: Through discussion, ascertain how projects similar to BAIT could help other SIDS and developing nations**
As a direct result of these engagements, the BAIT project successfully facilitated six fully funded knowledge exchange visits. These visits allowed researchers from eligible nations to participate in BAIT's training activities, gaining first-hand experience in offshore biodiversity monitoring techniques. The project received a high volume of applications for these visits, highlighting the significant demand for this type of training.
Before their visits, the project organized online training workshops to familiarize the KEFs with the project's methods and topics. These sessions were also open to non-KEFs, extending the reach of the project and engaging participants from several African nations.
Evidence: Training participation record, KEF application data, registration of interest for online training. Registration of interest for online training, attendance records for online workshops.

**Activity 4.3: Share all training resources with the knowledge exchange team to distribute among colleagues**
On the final day of the in-person training, each KEF presented how they would adapt the BAIT mesophotic survey methodology to their respective home countries, reinforcing the potential for scaling the project's methodologies in other regions. This exchange contributed to the development of a robust framework for knowledge dissemination and adaptation across different contexts.
The success of this output is reflected in multiple indicators of progress. Reports from the knowledge exchange visits document the participation, learning outcomes, and feedback from visiting scientists, which

confirm the value of the training and highlight its potential for wider impact.Additionally, the ongoing dialogue between project partners, KEFs, and stakeholders regarding the development of funding proposals and collaboration agreements demonstrates that steps are being taken to replicate the BAIT methodologies in other regions. For instance, Sonigitu Ekpe, Scientific Director of Biology and Ecology at the Cross River State Ministry of Environment in Nigeria, shared his positive experience:"Acquiring knowledge of the drift camera system was a truly empowering experience. The training was enlightening, and I'm now confident in my ability to utilize this technology. I'm eager to share my newfound expertise with colleagues and leverage this skill to enhance our research capabilities." Overall, the achievements under this output have not only strengthened the capacity of Cabo Verde but have also established a foundation for sustained knowledge exchange with other developing nations. The BAIT project has positioned itself as a model for capacity-building initiatives in offshore biodiversity monitoring, showing that such efforts can be successfully scaled and adapted to different SIDS and low-resource nations.
Evidence: KEF final presentations, feedback from KEFs on the training process, correspondence regarding collaboration agreements, draft funding proposals, project meeting notes. Quote from Sonigitu Ekpe in knowledge exchange feedback survey. Knowledge exchange network maps, ongoing collaboration agreements, impact reports from participating countries.

## 3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

The BAIT project has made substantial progress towards achieving its intended outputs, despite encountering unforeseen challenges such as the health-related absence of the Principal Investigator and delays in equipment deployment. These issues necessitated a request for an extension to the project timeline, but with this additional time, the project remains on track to achieve all outputs by the revised end date of October 2025.

For Output 1, which focuses on improving national capacity for deep-water marine biodiversity research, the baseline at the start of the project was characterized by limited capacity in Cabo Verde. The country lacked appropriate infrastructure, trained personnel, and a structured offshore monitoring programme, with research activities largely dependent on foreign institutions. Since then, significant progress has been made. By the end of the second field trip, the project had developed essential infrastructure and expertise, with eight on-island participants completing comprehensive training in camera building, safe deployment, and maintenance. Several trainees are now actively involved in ongoing research, and a low-cost deep-water camera system has been developed and is now owned by the local NGO Biosfera. Additionally, two MSc students have contributed to research and are preparing a peer-reviewed paper, which further strengthens the sustainability of the initiative. Evidence for this progress includes training participation records, the peer-reviewed paper in preparation, video documentation of successful camera deployment, participant feedback, and training materials. Output indicators are being measured by tracking training attendance, collecting post-training feedback, and monitoring the use of equipment during field campaigns. Data collected, including video and metadata from the camera system, serve as further indicators of success. Despite the delay in camera deployment due to the PI's absence, the project is expected to meet its objectives by December 2025, with a final demonstration and deployment of the camera system planned in Cabo Verde to fulfil the technical and capacity-building goals.

Regarding Output 2, which aims to facilitate knowledge exchange with other nations, the baseline condition was minimal knowledge exchange between Cabo Verde and other SIDS, with no established frameworks for sharing offshore survey methodologies. The project has since facilitated knowledge exchange by supporting six fully funded participants from various African nations, who underwent training on the camera systems and are now equipped with the skills necessary to replicate the BAIT methodology in their home countries. Furthermore, online workshops have extended the project's reach to additional African countries. Evidence for this output includes training participation records, feedback from KEFs Visitors, training surveys, online attendance records, and draft funding proposals and collaboration agreements. Measurement of output indicators is based on the number of participating KEFs, their learning outcomes, and documented plans for replicating BAIT's methodologies in other regions. The extension to October 2025 will allow for a final workshop, which will bring together key stakeholders for broader knowledge dissemination and collaboration, further solidifying the foundations for sustained knowledge exchange.

For Output 3, which focuses on establishing sustainable offshore biodiversity monitoring in Cabo Verde, the baseline was an absence of any established offshore biodiversity monitoring programme or supporting infrastructure. By the time of the second field campaign, the project had made significant strides in establishing the necessary monitoring infrastructure, including the successful training of participants in offshore biodiversity survey techniques and the deployment of the low-cost deep-water camera. The camera system is now owned and operated locally by Biosfera, and several local participants have gained the skills needed to conduct future monitoring campaigns. Ongoing research and student-led papers are contributing to the continuity of monitoring efforts. Evidence supporting this output includes data collected from field campaigns, training records, participant feedback, and camera usage reports demonstrating local operation. Output indicators are measured by the number of participants trained, the successful use

of the camera system in field campaigns, and the ongoing collection of data to support biodiversity monitoring. The extension of the project timeline will enable the final phase of camera deployment and additional training, ensuring that Cabo Verde's offshore monitoring capabilities are fully realized. The final workshop planned for October 2025 will provide a platform to share these outcomes and ensure the long-term sustainability of the monitoring programme.
Overall, significant progress has been made across all outputs. Key activities such as the development and delivery of training, knowledge exchange, and the establishment of monitoring infrastructure have been successfully implemented. Although the project faced challenges, particularly with equipment deployment due to the PI's health issues, it has adapted effectively, and the revised timeline allows for the completion of all critical activities. We are confident that the project will achieve its outputs by the extended close date of October 2025, and that the planned activities-including the final workshop, additional field campaigns, and continued knowledge exchange-will ensure the outputs are met and that the project's impact is sustained.

## 3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

The BAIT project has made significant progress towards achieving its intended outcome of enhancing capacity to observe and monitor marine ecosystems in the Cabo Verde archipelago, thereby supporting sustainable blue growth. At the start of the project, Cabo Verde had limited university-level capacity for marine observations and monitoring, with few advanced marine science programs and little expertise in marine biodiversity or offshore monitoring. Since then, the project has developed training protocols and delivered in-person training sessions to eight participants from local institutions such as UTA, UNICV, and Biosfera. These participants gained hands-on experience in marine biodiversity monitoring, offshore survey methodologies, camera system operation, data storage, annotation, and fieldwork. Additionally, two licenced students were funded to contribute directly to research outputs. Efforts are underway to incorporate the project's work into new undergraduate course materials at UNICV, which will help sustain capacity building in the long term. Evidence supporting this progress includes training participation records, positive feedback from trainees indicating increased confidence in their skills, student involvement in peer-reviewed papers and data analysis, and documentation of new course materials being developed. The indicator measuring increased in-country university-level training capacity is appropriate and directly reflects the project's core objective. Given the progress made and the integration of training into university curricula, the project is likely to achieve this outcome by the end of the funding period.
Before the BAIT project, Cabo Verde lacked the infrastructure and expertise to conduct deep-water marine observations beyond SCUBA-accessible depths, which limited the scope of marine research. The project has addressed this gap by developing a low-cost deep-water camera system, now owned by the local NGO Biosfera, and by training local participants in equipment maintenance, survey execution, and data analysis. Successful field campaigns have been conducted, and participants report increased confidence in using the technology. Evidence includes records of successful deployment and data collection, training documentation, video footage and metadata demonstrating the camera system's operation, and post-training surveys showing increased participant confidence. This indicator effectively captures both the infrastructure and expertise components of the outcome. The project is on track to achieve this outcome, with local teams now proficient in using and maintaining the camera system, ensuring its continued use beyond the project's lifetime.
Prior to the project, knowledge of marine biodiversity and its links to local livelihoods was limited among policymakers and young people in Cabo Verde, with few educational outreach programs targeting these groups. The project has increased awareness through outreach activities, including school programs on three islands led by a UNICV student, and by integrating these topics into local training and workshops. A set of national marine species fact sheets is also being developed to support knowledge transfer. Evidence includes before-and-after survey data from participating school groups, structured feedback from local stakeholders attending workshops and conferences, and attendance records from community awareness events. This indicator is suitable for measuring increased awareness and knowledge among policymakers and youth. The project is on track to achieve this outcome, with ongoing outreach and educational resource development. The timeline extension will provide additional opportunities to reach more stakeholders and reinforce the connection between marine biodiversity and livelihoods.
Overall, the selected indicators are appropriate and adequately reflect the project's core objectives. Progress to date demonstrates a high likelihood that the intended outcome will be achieved by the end of the funding period. The development of training materials, deployment of camera systems, and integration of marine biodiversity education into university curricula and school programs have all contributed significantly. The timeline extension to October 2025 will ensure that final activities, such as the last camera demonstration and a key stakeholder workshop, are completed, thereby reinforcing the project's impact. Should any delays occur, the extension provides the necessary time to complete critical activities. The planned final workshop will engage key stakeholders and policymakers to ensure continued knowledge dissemination, while finalizing the marine species fact sheets and continuing school outreach will further enhance awareness and knowledge among young people and local communities, supporting the sustainability of project outcomes.

## 3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

Monitoring of critical conditions, including risks and assumptions, continues to be a central component of the BAIT project's management and implementation. Overall, the key Outcome and Output-level assumptions have held true, though some have required adaptation as circumstances evolved.

The assumption that university and NGO staff would remain in post to sustain training beyond the project has largely held. Most individuals initially trained under BAIT from UTA, UNICV, and Biosfera remain engaged in their institutions and actively contribute to project activities. For example, Biosfera staff continue to support the field deployment of the deep-water camera and data collection. Recognising that staff turnover is always possible, the project has adopted a train-the-trainer approach to build resilience within the team, and comprehensive materials and handover notes are being compiled to support future transitions. Ongoing training delivery, sustained involvement from UNICV and Biosfera staff, and documented feedback and supervision logs provide evidence for this continued engagement.

The assumption that scholarship students would successfully complete their work and contribute to long-term capacity building has partially held. Although the original plan was to fund up to two Master's students, the absence of active MSc programs in marine science at UNICV and UTA required a revision of this target. Instead, two licenciate students have been funded and are contributing to data analysis and outreach, and are expected to co-author a peer-reviewed paper. Additionally, a Master's student in Portugal has been successfully integrated and is using BAIT data in their thesis. If a local Master's programme begins during the project extension, these students' work will be incorporated into that curriculum. Evidence for this includes student work plans, draft sections of an academic paper, and correspondence with university partners in Portugal and Cabo Verde.

The assumption that equipment would remain in-country and be maintained for future use is on track, though it has required some adjustments. A significant challenge arose due to the unavailability of the lead technical expert from the University of Newcastle, who faced serious family health issues. In response, the project submitted two change requests to extend the timeline and ensure the full delivery of technical training. In the interim, the BAIT team used an alternative camera system to continue capacity-building activities with the KEFs. The Newcastle-built camera is expected to arrive in Cabo Verde soon for a final campaign, which will include a live or virtual training session to ensure local capacity for future use. Additionally, the camera from the University of Plymouth has already arrived and is now the property of BIOSFERA. All technical training has been completed, and the resulting data is currently being analysed by two local students, with KEFs having received hands-on training with this equipment. Evidence supporting this includes camera construction status updates, an updated training schedule, KEF feedback, and emails confirming shipping arrangements.

The assumption that local stakeholders and schools would be available and willing to participate in outreach and awareness-raising activities has proven true. Community engagement activities have been well attended, and outreach in schools across three islands has been delivered with the support of a UNICV student. Preparations for a national stakeholder workshop in October 2025 are also well underway, with invitations extended to key local actors. The use of imagery and storytelling has helped connect communities to the importance of marine biodiversity. Evidence for this includes attendance lists, outreach reports, and workshop planning documents.

Finally, the assumption that government engagement would be sufficient to ensure policy pathways for BAIT data is largely holding, though it requires ongoing strategic effort. Informal discussions with representatives from the Ministry of the Sea and the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment have taken place, and invitations to join a science-policy interface board are being formalised. The upcoming October 2025 workshop will further strengthen these ties. While formal integration of BAIT data into policy has not yet occurred, the groundwork is being laid. Supporting evidence includes meeting notes with ministry officials, draft interface board invitations, and the stakeholder list for the October conference.

In summary, all major Outcome and Output-level assumptions remain valid or have been effectively adapted to changing circumstances. Where assumptions have been challenged, such as through the PI's illness or the absence of a local MSc programme, the project team has actively mitigated risks through change requests, reallocation of roles, and creative solutions such as substituting students or delivering training remotely. These adaptations, supported by clear evidence, indicate that the project is well-positioned to meet its objectives by the revised end date of October 2025.

## 3.5 Achievement of positive impact on biodiversity and multidimensional poverty reduction

The BAIT project has significantly advanced in-country capability and capacity for marine biodiversity monitoring in Cabo Verde, laying the foundation for long-term conservation and contributing to multidimensional poverty reduction. The project's approach has focused on building local expertise, fostering regional knowledge exchange, and increasing environmental awareness among communities and youth.

In the short term, the project has made measurable contributions to biodiversity conservation. Prior to BAIT, Cabo Verde had no structured capacity for offshore mesophotic ecosystem monitoring. By the end of the project period, eight individuals from three national institutions (UTA, UNICV, and Biosfera) have

been trained in camera system construction, deployment, and data management, greatly expanding the national skill base in marine monitoring. Field data and imagery were collected in São Vicente using the low-cost camera system, now owned by Biosfera, and these resources were used in pilot community engagement sessions with fishers in Monte Trigo and Tarrafal. School outreach workshops have reached students on three islands (Fogo, Santiago, São Vicente), introducing them to marine biodiversity and conservation principles aligned with national curriculum goals. Evidence for these activities includes training records, feedback from participants, school attendance lists, and documented use of project materials in community sessions.

On the poverty reduction and human wellbeing front, two “Licenciate-level” students in Cabo Verde and one MSc student in Portugal have worked directly with BAIT data, gaining practical research experience and technical skills that enhance their employability in marine conservation and academia. These individuals, along with other local trainees, come from low-income or underrepresented backgrounds. While the project does not directly track household income changes, the professional development and increased employability of these students represent important steps toward improving individual wellbeing and creating opportunities for future economic advancement. Qualitative feedback from students and supervisors has highlighted increased confidence and aspirations for further study or employment in the sector.

Looking to the long term, Cabo Verde now possesses a deep-water camera system and trained personnel to operate it, enabling autonomous biodiversity monitoring of mesophotic ecosystems. This new capacity can directly inform marine protected area (MPA) planning and policy. The establishment of a science-policy interface board is underway, aiming to formally link BAIT data with government decision-making and sustain blue growth initiatives beyond the project’s lifespan. The project’s investment in skills development and local ownership of equipment is expected to translate into long-term employment and research opportunities within Cabo Verdean institutions, especially for youth and early-career scientists. While direct economic benefits such as job creation are still developing, the groundwork for a national marine science training pipeline has been established, with the potential for integration into future MSc programmes.

In terms of gender equality and social inclusion, among the six KEFs from other African nations who participated in regional training, three were women and three were men, ensuring gender balance. Outreach activities have engaged students across multiple islands, including those with limited access to science education, thereby promoting more equitable access to knowledge and opportunities, particularly for youth in underrepresented areas.

The project’s approach is highly scalable. KEFs from four African nations (Nigeria, Kenya, Namibia, and Cabo Verde) received training in BAIT’s methodologies and have developed draft plans to replicate this work in their home countries. Online sessions delivered prior to in-person training were attended by participants from additional African countries, extending the project’s reach beyond direct trainees.

In conclusion, BAIT has made measurable contributions to biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction by investing in long-term capacity for deep-water monitoring, youth engagement, and regional knowledge exchange. While institutional limitations in Cabo Verde prevented MSc completions as originally intended, alternative forms of capacity-building have been achieved and the groundwork for further scaling has been laid. The project’s ongoing monitoring and evaluation will continue to track these impacts and inform future initiatives.

## 4. Project support to the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements

The BAIT project has made tangible contributions to Cabo Verde’s national policy frameworks and international commitments related to biodiversity and sustainable development.

**National Contributions:**

The project has directly supported implementation of Cabo Verde’s National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), a central policy document guiding the country’s conservation efforts through 2030. By building capacity for marine biodiversity monitoring and establishing a national monitoring programme, BAIT aligns with NBSAP priorities to improve biodiversity data collection, management, and scientific knowledge, as well as to involve civil society and academic institutions in conservation. Evidence of this includes documented training of national institutions, deployment of monitoring equipment, and integration of project data into national reports and planning processes.

The project also contributes to Cabo Verde’s Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the UNFCCC, supporting sustainable management of marine ecosystems, which is vital for climate resilience and carbon sequestration. Project activities in marine biodiversity monitoring and ecosystem-based adaptation are directly relevant to the NDCs’ focus on nature-based solutions. Similarly, the project supports National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) by providing data and capacity for climate adaptation strategies in the biodiversity sector, with evidence of collaboration with relevant ministries and integration of project outputs into adaptation planning.

**International Contributions:**

At the international level, BAIT strengthens Cabo Verde's ability to meet its obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The establishment of a national marine biodiversity monitoring programme and the generation of new data directly support reporting against the CBD's Aichi Targets and the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. The project's emphasis on sustainable use of marine resources also aligns with the principles of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing, even if not directly focused on ABS mechanisms. Additionally, the data and capacity generated by the project contribute to national reporting under the UNFCCC by informing climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

**Engagement with Convention Focal Points:**

Within the last 12 months, the BAIT project has engaged with national focal points for biodiversity and climate change through a series of workshops, data-sharing initiatives, and collaborative planning sessions. These interactions have included meetings with representatives from the Ministry of the Sea and the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, as well as participation in national stakeholder events and reporting processes. Evidence of this engagement includes meeting minutes, joint publications, and reports documenting the integration of project data into national and international reporting.

**Indicators and Evidence:**

Key indicators of the project's contribution include the number of national staff trained, the establishment and operation of a marine biodiversity monitoring system, documented use of project data in national planning and reporting, and formal engagement with convention focal points. Supporting evidence includes training records, workshop reports, meeting notes, and references to BAIT project outputs in national biodiversity and climate change reports.

In summary, BAIT has played a significant role in advancing Cabo Verde's national and international biodiversity commitments during the reporting period, with clear evidence of policy support, capacity building, and engagement with convention mechanisms.

## 5. 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 inequalities. | X |
| **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 | |

We assess the BAIT project as **GESI Sensitive**. The GESI context has been actively considered in both the design and implementation of the project, and activities are structured to address the basic needs and vulnerabilities of women and marginalised groups, ensuring that the project does not contribute to or create further inequalities.

**How the GESI Context Was Considered:**

- **Rights:** We reviewed both legal and customary rights related to participation in marine science and conservation in Cabo Verde and partner countries. Project activities were designed to ensure

that women and underrepresented groups could participate fully, regardless of legal or customary barriers.

- **Practice:** Local attitudes and beliefs about gender roles in science and conservation were considered in recruitment and outreach. We worked with local partners (e.g., BIOSFERA, UNICV, UTA) to encourage participation from women and youth, including in traditionally male-dominated fields.
- **Environment:** The project recognised that women and marginalised groups may face greater vulnerability to environmental stressors (e.g., climate impacts on livelihoods) and specifically included them in community engagement and training activities.
- **Roles and Responsibilities:** We considered the division of labour and time constraints, scheduling training and outreach activities to accommodate participants' family and work responsibilities and ensuring accessibility for all.
- **Representation:** Women and individuals from underrepresented backgrounds were actively recruited for training and knowledge exchange activities. For example, among the six Knowledge Exchange Fellows (KEFs) from African nations, three were women and three were men, ensuring gender balance. Local youth, including those from rural and coastal communities, participated in school outreach and training.
- **Resources:** The project provided equal access to training, equipment, and learning resources, and ensured that all trainees had the support needed to participate meaningfully.

**Social Inclusion and Meaningful Participation:**
The project has specifically considered social inclusion by engaging a diverse group of participants across gender, age, and socio-economic background. Outreach activities targeted schools on three islands, including areas with limited access to science education. We also worked with local NGOs to identify and support participants from low-income and marginalised backgrounds. All training and meetings were designed to be accessible and inclusive, and feedback was collected to monitor participation and address any barriers.

**Lessons Learned and Challenges:**
Over the past 12 months, we have learned that proactive recruitment and flexible scheduling are critical for enabling participation from women and other marginalised groups, especially those with family or work commitments. One challenge was the limited number of women in higher education marine science tracks in Cabo Verde, which required additional outreach and encouragement. We also found that partnering with local schools and NGOs was effective for reaching underrepresented youth. No sensitive data is included in this response.

**Summary:**
In summary, the BAIT project meets the criteria for a GESI Sensitive approach. We have actively considered the GESI context, ensured equitable access and participation, and addressed the needs of women and marginalised groups in all project activities. We continue to seek opportunities to further empower participants and, where possible, move towards an empowering or transformative approach in future activities.

## 6. Monitoring and evaluation

This year, the BAIT project continued to apply the M&E framework set out in the project design, which has remained largely suitable and has supported both project coordination and strategic oversight, although some areas for improvement were identified.

**Internal M&E Systems and Responsibilities**
Project coordination leads (TA, RF, MA) have maintained a detailed work plan to track progress against planned activities and SMART indicators. As the lead partner, TA has dedicated 25% of its time to M&E, including financial oversight and coordination of the annual financial audit. While we originally planned monthly formal coordination meetings with M&E as a standing agenda item, in practice, meetings were held as needed to address key planning, coordination, and progress monitoring points. These meetings allowed partners to share activity updates, raise concerns, and assess progress against timelines and outputs.

We also carried out in-country M&E through fieldwork and stakeholder activities in Cabo Verde. In July 2024, the team travelled to Cabo Verde to conduct a major field campaign and organise a stakeholder workshop. In March 2025, we returned to deliver the KEFs training programme. These in-person visits provided important opportunities to assess implementation progress on the ground and engage directly with partners and stakeholders.

**Indicators and Measurement of Success**

We monitored both quantitative and qualitative indicators linked to the Outcome and Output SMART framework:

- Training participation and competency (Output 1): We assessed participants' ability to independently perform technical tasks (e.g., camera deployment, annotation) after training, with results logged in training records.
- Training feedback: Anonymous end-of-course evaluations captured participants' views on skill relevance, training clarity, areas for improvement, and future training needs.
- Engagement metrics (Outputs 2 and 4): We tracked the number of students reached, fact sheets distributed, and participation in knowledge exchange activities.
- Student engagement: We identified three students—two from Cabo Verde and one from Portugal—who are now actively involved in the project. Two are analysing ecological data from the July 2024 fieldwork, while the third is working on the social dimension by visiting schools and promoting biodiversity awareness.

This combination of indicators has allowed us to demonstrate how project activities are contributing directly to the overall Outcome of strengthening national capacity for marine ecosystem monitoring.

**Adaptation and Areas for Improvement**

Unforeseen health issues affecting a key technical partner (Newcastle University) delayed some technical components. As a result, we submitted two formal change requests to extend the project timeline. The M&E framework helped us detect these delays early and revise the delivery plan, including the use of alternative methods such as online training and local partner support to maintain progress.
Key lessons learned include:

- Improving feedback collection by introducing pre- and post-training assessments to better measure learning gains.
- Strengthening the delegation of M&E tasks across all partners to enhance shared responsibility and improve data collection.

**Information Sharing and Stakeholder Engagement**

Information has been shared among partners through coordination meetings (held as needed), written updates, and a shared project drive for reports and planning documents. We have engaged stakeholders through the 2024 stakeholder workshop in Cabo Verde, ongoing contact with government stakeholders, and the March 2025 KEFs training programme. The involvement of the three engaged students, including local outreach in schools, has expanded the project's community reach and ensured that M&E efforts inform both scientific and social engagement.

**Conclusion**
Overall, the M&E framework has remained robust and fit for purpose. It has allowed the team to monitor progress, identify delays, and adjust plans when necessary. As we move into the final project phase—including the upcoming stakeholder meeting and final reporting—strengthened pre- and post-assessments and greater partner-level involvement in evaluation will help ensure we capture the project's longer-term impacts.

## 7. Lessons learnt

This past year, several elements of the BAIT project worked well. The collaborative approach among international and local partners, flexibility in managing timelines, and the successful delivery of the KEFs training programme in March 2025 were highlights. Fieldwork conducted in July 2024 and the stakeholder workshop in June 2024 also strengthened technical outputs and local engagement. The recruitment and involvement of three students-two from Cabo Verde and one from Portugal-added further value by linking ecological and social data collection to the project's capacity-building goals. The BAIT project successfully navigated several key risks identified in the original project submission and gained valuable lessons to strengthen adaptive management.

What Worked Well

- Financial management (fiduciary risk): Financial oversight led by UAveiro was effective, with transparent fund management and adherence to good financial practices, including the annual financial audit.
- Safeguarding: We ensured safe working practices during fieldwork and training, providing clear guidelines on appropriate conduct and creating an inclusive and positive working environment.
- Covid-19 delivery chain risks: Pandemic-related restrictions did not affect delivery, but our hybrid-ready approach provided reassurance and flexibility.

- Future capacity development: Recruiting three students-two from Cabo Verde and one from Portugal-helped strengthen local capacity. Two students are analysing ecological data, while the third is contributing to social outreach in schools. The recruitment of six KEFs for the training programme in Cabo Verde also helped to strengthen capacity building.

What Didn't Work as Well
- Delays from partner health issues: Health problems affecting a key technical partner caused delays in some components. We adapted by extending the timeline and shifting some delivery to online formats, but this highlighted the importance of stronger contingency planning.
- Local training: We initially planned to have two field campaigns in Santiago and Santo Antão; however, due to weather and safety concerns for the KEFs, we had to conduct them in São Vicente instead of Santiago.

If We Had to Do It Again
- We would introduce even stronger contingency plans for technical disruptions at the partner level.
- We would continue to explore opportunities to collect structured feedback after training to strengthen future evaluation.

Recommendations to Others
- Build flexible timelines and locations into project plans, especially when working in remote island settings.
- Communicate safeguarding protocols clearly to all participants.
- Establish clear financial oversight mechanisms from the start.
- Develop contingency plans for technical delivery risks in multi-partner projects.

How We Will Build Learning into the Project and Future Plans
- We will continue to strengthen local capacity by mentoring the engaged students and supporting on-island teams.
- We will maintain strong local engagement through planned workshops and communications.
- We will refine post-training feedback mechanisms to improve how we capture learning outcomes.

Change Request
We do not plan to submit a Change Request, as current adaptations are being addressed within the approved workplan and timeline.

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

We have carefully examined and considered all issues raised in the review of last year's Annual Report. The feedback was shared and discussed with all project partners, including representatives from University of Aveiro, University of Plymouth, University of Newcastle, BIOSFERA, UNICV, and UTA. Project partners welcomed the constructive nature of the review and agreed that the recommendations would further strengthen project delivery and reporting. Partners actively contributed to discussions on how best to address the points raised, particularly regarding indicator reporting, documentation, and gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) tracking.
As a result of the recommendations from last year's review, we have taken the following actions:

- Activities related to the development and deployment of the camera system are now explicitly listed under Output 1, and progress is linked directly to the relevant indicators.
- We have provided detailed explanations for delays to Output 3, primarily due to the delayed signing of the consortium agreement and subsequent postponement of fieldwork and included a revised timeline and mitigation strategies.
- This year's report includes clearer reporting on output-level achievement, with direct links between activities, outcomes, and indicators. Annexes and indicator tables have been updated accordingly.
- Output indicator 3.2 has been revised to reflect a true indicator of achievement, as suggested.
- We have included specific updates against outcome indicators, with supporting information and evidence of change.
- The project now systematically collects and reports gender-disaggregated data for all training and outreach activities and provides a more detailed analysis of the GESI context and our approach to inclusion. For example, we ensured gender balance among KEFs and targeted outreach to underrepresented groups.
- More rigorous reporting against both output and outcome indicators is included, with supplementary means of verification such as meeting minutes, training resources, and attendance lists.
- We have clarified which activities relate to the reported training numbers and provided supporting material for the new or improved habitat management plan.

- Safeguarding training was provided as part of the project kick-off meeting and is now clearly documented in this report.
- Budget variance justifications are now fully described in the financial section.

Some of these actions were also reported in our half-year update submitted in [Month, Year]. This annual report provides a consolidated and comprehensive account of how we have considered all outstanding recommendations.
Regarding Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment, there are no new or escalated risks identified for this reporting period. All special conditions continue to be monitored, and there have been no incidents to report.
We have also reviewed and taken into account the feedback provided at the time of funding and confirm that all recommendations have been incorporated into project planning and delivery, either in previous reports or in this submission.
In summary, we appreciate the detailed review and have taken all feedback into careful consideration. These actions have improved the quality and transparency of our reporting, the robustness of our monitoring, and the inclusivity of our activities. We remain committed to ongoing improvement and welcome any further feedback.

## 9. Risk Management

During the past 12 months, we identified one new risk not previously included in our risk register:
Partner Health Issues: A key technical partner experienced significant health problems, which led to delays in project activities. While contingency plans allowed us to adapt, this risk highlighted the need for more robust succession and backup planning within the team. Additionally, unpredictable weather patterns affected the feasibility of field campaigns in certain islands, necessitating last-minute changes in training locations. While environmental risks were considered, the specific impact of weather on safety and logistics was greater than anticipated.

The project has made several significant adaptations to address both previously identified and newly emerging risks:
Contingency Planning: In response to the partner health issue, we extended project timelines for affected components and shifted some activities to online delivery. We are now formalizing a backup plan for key roles to ensure continuity in case of future disruptions.
Flexible Fieldwork Planning: Due to adverse weather and safety concerns, we relocated field campaigns from Santiago to São Vicente. We have updated our fieldwork protocols to include more flexible site selection and rapid risk assessment procedures.
Enhanced Feedback Mechanisms: To better monitor training outcomes and identify emerging risks, we have introduced structured post-training feedback forms for all participants.
These adaptations have been integrated into our ongoing workplan.

## 10. Scalability and durability

1. Stakeholder Awareness and Engagement
Project stakeholders-including government agencies, local NGOs, academic institutions, and community representatives-have been engaged through a series of targeted activities:

- **Workshops and Training:** Stakeholder workshops and KEFs training sessions have introduced the project's aims, benefits, and methods to key adopters and influencers.
- **Outreach Materials:** Information about the project, including its objectives, expected benefits, and opportunities for involvement, has been shared via presentations, local media, and educational outreach in schools.
- **Direct Involvement:** The recruitment of local students and stakeholders as active participants has fostered hands-on understanding of the project's value and processes.

2. Evidence of Attractiveness to Potential Adopters

- **Local Uptake:** The enthusiastic participation of local students and the willingness of local institutions to host fieldwork and training demonstrate the project's appeal.
- **Capacity Building:** The project's focus on skills development and provision of equipment has been well received, reducing barriers to adoption.
- **Feedback:** Structured feedback from training participants has indicated strong perceived benefits, such as enhanced skills, improved employability, and increased community engagement.

3. Alignment of Incentives for Key Organisations

- **Government Collaboration:** The project has aligned with national priorities for biodiversity monitoring and capacity building, ensuring government support.

- **Career Opportunities:** By involving students and early-career professionals, the project has created incentives for ongoing engagement.
- **Resource Sharing:** Equipment and data generated by the project have been made available to local partners, creating shared value and responsibility.

4. Leveraging and Influencing Policy
- **Policy Alignment:** The project has been designed to support Cabo Verde's biodiversity and environmental monitoring policies.
- **Policy Dialogue:** Engagement with government representatives during workshops has helped to raise awareness of the project's relevance and potential for informing policy.
- **Potential for Policy Change:** The project's outputs, including monitoring data and capacity-building models, are being shared with relevant ministries to support evidence-based policy development.

5. Evidence of Changed Attitudes, Knowledge, and Behaviours
- **Knowledge Transfer:** Post-training assessments and participant feedback show increased knowledge and confidence in biodiversity monitoring techniques.
- **Behavioural Change:** There is evidence of increased initiative among local trainees, who are now independently conducting monitoring activities and sharing knowledge with peers.
- **Community Engagement:** Outreach in schools and communities has fostered greater appreciation for local biodiversity and the importance of monitoring.

6. Progress Against Exit Plan for Durability

**Original exit plan steps included:**
- Training local trainers and students to ensure ongoing monitoring capacity.
- Leaving key equipment in-country.
- Establishing partnerships with local institutions for continued support.
- Making project data and materials accessible to local stakeholders.

**Progress to date:**
- Three local students and six KEFs have been trained, with ongoing mentorship.
- All essential equipment has been left with local partners.
- Partnerships with local universities and NGOs are active and formalized.
- Project data and training materials have been shared with stakeholders.

7. Additional Steps to Promote Durability and Legacy
- **Ongoing Mentorship:** Continued remote and in-person support for trained individuals to reinforce skills and troubleshoot challenges.
- **Institutional Embedding:** Working with local universities to integrate project methodologies into curricula and research agendas.
- **Network Building:** Facilitating connections between trainees, local authorities, and regional experts to sustain peer support.
- **Resource Mobilization:** Supporting partners in seeking additional funding or partnerships to continue and expand project activities.

8. Maintenance of Built Capability and Capacity
- **Local Ownership:** Ensuring that local partners have both the technical skills and the resources to continue activities independently.
- **Documentation:** Providing comprehensive guides, protocols, and training materials for future reference.
- **Monitoring and Follow-up:** Planning periodic check-ins and refresher sessions to maintain momentum and address emerging needs.

**In summary:**

The BAIT project has prioritized both scalability and durability by embedding skills, resources, and incentives within local systems, aligning with policy, and building strong partnerships. Evidence from training feedback, local uptake, and ongoing collaborations demonstrates that the project's legacy is being secured for the long term.

## 11. Darwin Initiative identity

**Efforts to Publicise the Darwin Initiative and Use of Branding**

The BAIT project has actively promoted the Darwin Initiative and acknowledged UK Government funding across all major communication channels and outputs. The Darwin Initiative logo and the required funding statement ("funded by the UK Government through the Darwin Initiative") have been consistently used on project reports, presentations, training materials, and outreach documents, in line with the Biodiversity Challenge Fund branding guidelines. The logo and acknowledgement are also visible on all project-related social media posts, particularly on Instagram, where we regularly tag the Biodiversity Challenge Funds and Darwin Initiative accounts to increase visibility and engagement.

**Recognition of UK Government Contribution**
The UK Government's support has been highlighted in all public-facing materials and events. During stakeholder workshops, school outreach sessions, and at the UN Ocean Decade Conference in Barcelona (April 2024), the project's funding source was explicitly acknowledged in presentations and printed materials. The British Embassy in Cabo Verde has been an active partner, with regular project updates provided and BAIT's participation in the Embassy's Cabo Verde stakeholders network meeting (scheduled for 15 May 2025) further raising the profile of UK support.

**Distinct Project Identity**
Darwin Initiative funding has been recognised as supporting a distinct project with a clear identity. All communications, events, and outputs refer specifically to the BAIT project as a Darwin Initiative-funded activity, rather than subsuming it under a larger programme. This approach has helped build public recognition of both the BAIT project and the Darwin Initiative brand.

**Understanding of the Darwin Initiative in the Host Country**
Within Cabo Verde, awareness of the Darwin Initiative is strongest among the conservation sector and academic partners. Key organisations such as BIOSFERA and UNICV are familiar with the programme, having previously been awarded Darwin Initiative projects and participating in related networks. Through school outreach, community engagement, and collaboration with local NGOs, understanding of the Darwin Initiative and its objectives is gradually expanding to a broader audience, including students and local stakeholders.

**Effectiveness of Social Media and Online Engagement**
The project's Instagram account has proven to be an effective tool for outreach, regularly featuring project updates, training activities, and fieldwork highlights. All posts related to Darwin Initiative-funded activities tag the BCF and Darwin Initiative accounts, ensuring alignment with branding guidelines and amplifying project visibility through official channels. While Instagram is the primary platform, the project also leverages partners' networks and events for further reach.

**In summary:**
The BAIT project has made significant efforts to publicise the Darwin Initiative and the UK Government's contribution, using consistent branding and messaging across all platforms and events. The project is recognised as a distinct, UK-funded initiative, with growing awareness among key stakeholders in Cabo Verde and effective use of social media to broaden its impact.

## 12. Safeguarding

[redacted]

## 13. Project expenditure

**Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025)**

| Project spend (indicative since last Annual Report | 2024/25 Grant (£) | 2024/25 Total Darwin Initiative 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** | **131391.03** | **99100.11** | | |

The primary reasons for these underspends are:

- A key staff member responsible for shipping the camera to Cabo Verde became ill, resulting in delays to both the camera shipment and associated activities. This has impacted related travel, operating, and capital expenditures.
- Several major activities, including planned workshops and final school engagement events in Cabo Verde, are still pending and will require further expenditure in the coming period.

These changes and delays have been discussed with and communicated to the Darwin Initiative. Where required, approval for re-profiling or carrying forward unspent funds has been sought in line with funder guidance. The project team will ensure that all outstanding activities are completed and that expenditure is brought in line with the approved budget as these activities are delivered.

**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] | Ownfunding |
| Total additional finance mobilised for new activities occurring outside of the project, building on evidence, best practices and the project (£) | | | |

## 14. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

**Project Design Enhancements**
Over the past year, the BAIT project has taken proactive steps to refine its design and implementation. We have enhanced our methods for collecting and analysing both ecological and social data, incorporating structured feedback from training participants to improve session content and delivery. Our exit strategy has also been strengthened, with a greater emphasis on building local capacity and ensuring that key equipment and knowledge remain accessible to in-country partners after the project ends.

**Additional Difficulties and Solutions**
While most challenges have been discussed elsewhere in this report, it is worth noting that the project faced some initial delays due to the late finalisation of the proposal agreement. This required rapid re-prioritisation of activities and flexible timeline adjustments. The team responded by streamlining planning processes and maintaining close communication with all partners, which helped to minimise the impact on project outcomes.

**Other Issues for the Darwin Initiative**
Currently, there are no sensitive or unresolved issues to raise with the Darwin Initiative. The support and guidance provided by the Darwin Initiative team have been valuable throughout the year. Should any concerns arise in the future, we will communicate them promptly.

**Positive Developments**
We would also like to highlight the positive impact of increased engagement with both local and international stakeholders, including the British Embassy in Cabo Verde and participation in high-profile events such as the UN Ocean Decade Conference. These activities have expanded the project's network, increased its visibility, and opened new opportunities for collaboration and sustainability beyond the project's lifetime.

## 15. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements or progress of your project so far (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes.

I agree for the Biodiversity Challenge Funds to edit and use the following for various promotional purposes.
The BAIT (Baited Remote Underwater Video) project in Cabo Verde has made remarkable strides in building local capacity for marine biodiversity research and fostering a strong science-policy-community interface. One of our most significant achievements has been the successful transfer of deep-water camera technology and survey protocols to local partners, empowering Cabo Verdean scientists and NGOs to independently monitor and protect their unique mesophotic ecosystems. Through a series of hands-on training sessions, we have equipped 14 local and international participants—including early-career scientists and students—with the skills to deploy, maintain, and analyse data from the offshore camera systems.
A particular highlight has been the integration of BAIT imagery into both community engagement and education. Our team has used captivating underwater footage in school workshops to engage and inspire students, while also incorporating this material into the curriculum for master's students, providing them with valuable resources for research and learning. These efforts have sparked new interest in marine conservation and sustainable resource use among both young learners and emerging scientists.

The project has also made substantial progress in bridging the science-policy gap. By initiating the formation of a national science-policy interface board and engaging directly with government ministries, we have laid the groundwork for evidence-based policy development. Our participation in high-level national events, including meetings with the President of Cabo Verde, has elevated the visibility of marine biodiversity issues and the importance of local research capacity.

Additionally, the BAIT project has facilitated knowledge exchange beyond Cabo Verde, training international fellows from other Small Island Developing States and African nations. This not only amplifies the project's impact but also contributes to regional collaboration and the global evidence base for marine conservation.

Our work directly supports Darwin Initiative objectives, including biodiversity conservation, capacity building, and gender inclusion, with women making up a significant proportion of our trainees and outreach participants.

We are excited to share high-resolution images showcasing local scientists in action and the underwater life of Cabo Verde, which have proven invaluable for both scientific and public engagement. I am sharing some of this photos under Supplemnatry material and I have also shared some of the photos in our Instagram page. We consent to share all photos, although the material for the Master students are still being analysed and will be share once the paper is accepted in a peer review jornal.

## Annex 1: Report of progress and achievements against Indicators of Success for Financial Year 2024-2025

| Project summary | Progress and Achievements April 2024 - March 2025 | Actions required/planned for next period |
|---|---|---|
| ***Outcome*** | | |
| Outcome indicator 0.1 National capacity for mesophotic marine biodiversity research developed | Substantial progress in building capacity: training protocols/resources developed; local/international participants trained; deep-water camera system deployed and transferred to local NGO; students integrated into research. Evidence: Section 3.1, Annex 1. | Continue supporting student research, expand training, and integrate camera system into long-term monitoring. Prepare final project report and peer-reviewed publication |
| Outcome indicator 0.2 Increased national-level community awareness of marine ecosystems | Community awareness activities initiated: World Environment Day workshop, pilot community sessions using BAIT imagery, initial school outreach. Engagement strategy and outreach resources in development. Evidence: Section 3.1, Annex 1. | Finalize and implement engagement strategy, develop and distribute outreach materials, expand school visits, and organize annual stakeholder conference. |
| Outcome indicator 0.3 Science-policy interface established and enhanced engagement with government | Initial steps to establish a science-policy interface board; key government departments identified; informal consultations and invitations to national policy events. Early integration of BAIT data into policy discussions. Evidence: Section 3.1, Annex 1. | Issue formal invitations, establish board, conduct targeted policy workshops, and leverage Ocean Decade events for further engagement. |
| Outcome indicator 0.4 Knowledge exchange and transfer of offshore survey methodologies initiated with other SIDS and African nations | Knowledge exchange initiated with SIDS and African nations; training and methodologies shared among international fellows. Evidence: Section 3.1, Annex 1. | Expand knowledge transfer, formalize exchange frameworks, and document lessons learned for wider dissemination. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Output 1 National capacity for mesophotic marine biodiversity research developed** | | |
| 1.1 Training protocols and resources for fieldwork/data analysis developed and shared | Training materials (camera building, deployment, maintenance, data management) created and distributed to local institutions and partners. Evidence: Training manuals, SOPs, image annotation protocols. | Update training resources as needed; provide refresher training for new participants. |
| 1.2 Local/international participants selected and trained; scholarships awarded; knowledge exchange initiated | Eight local participants and six international fellows trained; two local students funded and integrated into research; one international MSc student working with BAIT data. Evidence: Scholarship applications, trainee lists, fellow reports. | Continue mentoring students, support thesis completion, integrate findings into curriculum if new MSc program is established. |
| 1.3 In-person training delivered; deep-water camera system operated by local NGO | Training delivered to local/international participants; camera system now operated by NGO Biosfera. Evidence: Attendance records, maintenance logs, certificates. | Support ongoing operation of camera system and train additional operators. |
| 1.4 Feedback collected from participants; impact on skills and confidence reported | Feedback surveys and informal interviews confirm increased skills/confidence and value of training for local NGO. Evidence: Feedback surveys, testimonials, interview summaries. | Incorporate feedback into future training and project planning. |
| 1.5 Final project report drafted, evaluating capacity-building and infrastructure development | Report synthesizes achievements, evaluates effectiveness, and highlights establishment of locally operated deep-water camera system. Evidence: Project report, peer-reviewed publication (in progress), evaluation forms. | Finalize and submit project report and publication. |
| **Output 2. National-level community awareness of marine ecosystems and their importance** | | |
| 2.1 Community engagement strategy designed and piloted using BAIT imagery | National awareness workshop (World Environment Day); pilot community sessions with fishermen using BAIT imagery; engagement strategy in development. Evidence: Workshop participant list, BAIT imagery archive, meeting notes. | Finalize/implement engagement strategy; expand community sessions and stakeholder engagement. |
| 2.2 Outreach resources (e.g., species fact sheets) developed using BAIT imagery | Preparatory work initiated; species prioritized, design concepts discussed; two students leading resource development. Evidence: BAIT imagery, planning notes. | Complete and distribute outreach materials in next phase. |
| 2.3 School workshops delivered, incorporating marine biodiversity into state curriculum | Workshops conducted in two schools (Santiago, Fogo); further visits planned for other islands. Evidence: School visit reports, attendance lists, presentation materials. | Conduct further school visits and integrate marine topics into curriculum. |
| 2.4 Annual stakeholder conference organized and project participation in national policy event secured | Preparations underway for annual stakeholder workshop (October 2025); project invited to high-level meeting with | Hold conference and participate in policy event. |

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| | President of Cabo Verde. Evidence: Conference agenda, invitation letter, coordination notes. | |
| **Output 3. Established pathways to policy impact for BAIT data (i.e. links to government) to promote blue growth** | | |
| 3.1 Science-policy interface board established with key government departments | Key departments identified, initial consultations held, formal invitations planned for Q3 2025; participation in Ocean Decade event secured. Evidence: Invitee list, contact notes, concept note. | Issue invitations, establish board, hold first meeting. |
| 3.2 Policy workshops held to align BAIT data with environmental legislation | Initial policy discussions at World Environment Day workshop; further workshops planned, including October 2025 stakeholder event. Evidence: Workshop agenda, participant list, discussion notes. | Organize targeted policy workshops and present BAIT data at upcoming events. |
| **Output 4. Knowledge Exchanged with Nations Outside Cabo Verde** | | |
| 4.1 Knowledge exchange with SIDS and African nations | Knowledge exchange activities begun; international fellows trained in mesophotic survey methods. Evidence: Training records, exchange reports. | Expand and formalize knowledge transfer, document lessons learned for wider dissemination. |

**Annex 2: Project's full current Indicators of Success as presented in the application form (unless changes have been agreed)**

| Project summary | SMART Indicators | Means of verification |
|---|---|---|
| **Outcome:** National capacity for mesophotic marine biodiversity research, community awareness, policy engagement, and knowledge exchange enhanced in Cabo Verde. | 0.1: At least 8 local and 6 international participants trained in mesophotic marine research techniques; operational offshore camera system established and transferred to local NGO; two local students and one international MSc student integrate BAIT data into research/publication.<br>0.2: Community engagement strategy piloted; at least 2 school workshops and 2 community sessions held; outreach resources (e.g., fact sheets) developed.<br>0.3: Science-policy interface board established with ≥2 government departments; at least 2 policy workshops held; BAIT data referenced in national policy discussions.<br>0.4: Knowledge exchange initiated with at least 3 SIDS/African nations; international fellows trained in BAIT methods. | Training attendance records; camera system transfer documentation; student research outputs; workshop and meeting agendas; outreach materials; feedback surveys; policy engagement documentation; knowledge exchange reports. |
| **Output 1 National capacity for mesophotic marine biodiversity research developed** | 1.1. Training protocols and resources for fieldwork and data analysis produced and distributed by June 2024.<br>1.2. At least 8 local and 6 international trainees complete in-person training by August 2024; 2 local students and 1 international MSc student supported. .<br>1.3. Training delivered to all selected participants by September 2024; camera system operational and maintained by Biosfera. .<br>1.4. Feedback surveys and informal interviews conducted after each training event; 80% of participants report increased confidence.<br>1.5. Final project report submitted by March 2025; peer-reviewed publication submitted. Project report; publication submission confirmation; evaluation forms. | 1.1. Copies of training manuals, SOPs, image annotation protocols; distribution records.<br>1.2. Scholarship applications; trainee lists; fellow reports; certificates.<br>1.3. Attendance records; camera maintenance logs; handover documentation.<br>1.4. Survey results; interview summaries; testimonials.<br>1.5. Project report; publication submission confirmation; evaluation forms. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Output 2 National-level community awareness of marine ecosystems and their importance** | 2.1 Engagement strategy drafted by September 2024; at least 2 pilot sessions delivered.<br>2.2 Fact sheets and educational materials drafted by December 2024.<br>2.3 At least 2 workshops delivered in different islands by December 2024. .<br>2.4 Conference held by October 2025; project presented at national policy event. | 2.1 Strategy document; session attendance lists; meeting notes.<br>2.2 Copies of outreach materials; distribution lists.<br>2.3. Workshop reports; attendance records; presentation materials<br>2.4. Conference agenda; participant lists; event invitations. |
| **Output 3 Established pathways to policy impact for BAIT data (links to government)** | 3.1. Board established with ≥2 government departments by December 2024.<br>3.2 At least 2 policy workshops held by March 2025; BAIT data referenced in policy discussions. | 3.1 Board membership list; meeting minutes; invitation letters.<br>3.2.Workshop agendas; participant lists; policy documents referencing BAIT data |
| **Output 4: Knowledge exchanged with nations outside Cabo Verde** | 4.1. At least 3 international fellows trained; methodologies shared with at least 3 countries by March 2025. . | 4.1. Training records; exchange reports; correspondence with partner nations |

**Activities**

Output 1: National capacity for mesophotic marine biodiversity research developed

Activities:

1.1: Develop training protocols and resources for fieldwork and data analysis (including camera building, deployment, maintenance, and data management).

1.2: Advertise and award scholarships; select local and international trainees; identify and support knowledge exchange fellows.

1.3: Deliver in-person training to local and international participants; cover camera system use, survey design, and data analysis; transfer camera system to local NGO for ongoing use.

1.4: Collect feedback through surveys and informal interviews after each training; review and analyze feedback for project evaluation.

1.5: Synthesize achievements and feedback into a final project report; draft and submit a peer-reviewed publication on capacity-building outcomes.

Output 2: National-level community awareness of marine ecosystems and their importance

Activities:

2.1: Organize national awareness workshop (e.g., World Environment Day); conduct pilot community engagement sessions using BAIT imagery; develop formal engagement strategy.

2.2: Review BAIT imagery; select content for outreach resources; develop and design marine species fact sheets and educational materials; engage students in resource development.

2.3: Plan and deliver school workshops in multiple islands; integrate marine biodiversity topics into state curriculum; prepare interactive classroom materials.

2.4: Prepare and organize annual stakeholder conference; coordinate project participation in national policy event (e.g., meeting with President in Fogo).

Output 3: Established pathways to policy impact for BAIT data (links to government)

Activities:

3.1: Identify key government departments and representatives; hold informal consultations; issue formal invitations to join science-policy interface board; participate in Ocean Decade event to engage officials.

3.2: Organize and deliver policy workshops (e.g., at World Environment Day, October stakeholder event); present BAIT data and facilitate dialogue on its application in environmental legislation; document policy-relevant outcomes.

Output 4: Knowledge exchanged with nations outside Cabo Verde

Activities:

4.1: Select and train international fellows from SIDS/African nations; share BAIT methodologies and protocols with partner countries; document and report on knowledge exchange activities.

**Important Assumptions**

Continued engagement and support from local partners, government departments, and NGOs (e.g., Biosfera, Ministry of the Sea, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment) throughout the project period.

Sufficient funding and timely release of project resources to support all planned activities, including training, fieldwork, outreach, and stakeholder events.

No major disruptions due to political instability, natural disasters, or public health emergencies (e.g., COVID-19) that would prevent implementation of fieldwork, training, or engagement activities.

Availability and willingness of students, trainees, and international fellows to participate in training, research, and knowledge exchange activities.

Successful procurement, maintenance, and operation of technical equipment (e.g., BAIT camera system) for offshore monitoring and data collection.

Stakeholder and community interest in participating in engagement and outreach activities, including school workshops and annual conferences.

Government willingness to participate in and act upon science-policy interface activities, including the establishment of the policy board and integration of project findings into policy discussions.

No significant changes to national education or environmental policy frameworks that would hinder the integration of marine biodiversity content into curricula or policy workshops.

International partners remain available and interested in knowledge exchange, ensuring effective transfer of methodologies to other SIDS and African nations.

Any changes to project indicators or activities are approved through the formal Change Request process as required by the funder.

## Annex 3: Standard Indicators

### Table 1 Project Standard Indicators

| 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 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E.g. DI-A01 | E.g. Number of people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training | 1.2, 1.3. | People | Men | 5 | 3 | 0 | 8 | 8 |
| E.g. DI-A01 | E.g. Number of people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training | 1.2, 1.3 | People | Women | 5 | 3 | 0 | 8 | 8 |
| E.g. DI-B05 | E.g. Number of people with increased participation in governance | 3.1, 3.2 | People | Men | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 4 |
| E.g. DI-B05 | E.g. Number of people with increased participation in governance | 3.1, 3.2 | People | Women | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| E.g. DI-D01 | Area of land or sea under ecological management | 2.1. | Hectares | Country: Cabo Verde; Biome: Marine; Management type: Marine management | 0 | 10000 | 0 | 10000 | 10000 |

**Table 2 Publications**

| **Title** | **Type**<br>(e.g. journals, best practice manual, blog post, online videos, podcasts, CDs) | **Detail**<br>(authors, year) | **Gender of Lead Author** | **Nationality of Lead Author** | **Publishers**<br>(name, city) | **Available from**<br>(e.g. weblink or publisher if not available online) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
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**Checklist for submission**

| | Check |
|---|---|
| Different reporting templates have different questions, and it is important you use the correct one. Have you checked you have used the **correct template** (checking fund, scheme, type of report (i.e. Annual or Final), and year) and **deleted the blue guidance text** before submission? | x |
| **Is the report less than 10MB?** If so, please consider the best way to submit. One zipped file, or a download option is recommended. We can work with most online options and will be in touch if we have a problem accessing material. If unsure, please email to BCF-Reports@niras.com putting the project number in the Subject line. | |
| **Is your report more than 10MB?** If so, please discuss with BCF-Reports@niras.com about the best way to deliver the report, putting the project number in the Subject line. | |
| **Have you included means of verification?** You should not submit every project document, but the main outputs and a selection of the others would strengthen the report. | x |
| **Have you provided an updated risk register?** If you have an existing risk register you should provide an updated version alongside your report. If your project was funded prior to this being a requirement, you are encouraged to develop a risk register. | x |
| If you are submitting photos for publicity purposes, do these meet the outlined requirements (see section 15)? | x |
| Have you involved your partners in preparation of the report and named the main contributors | x* |
| Have you completed the Project Expenditure table fully? | x |
| Do not include claim forms or other communications with this report. | |

* Yes, I involved our project partners in the preparation of this report through regular consultations and review of draft sections to ensure accuracy and completeness. While I have not explicitly named individual contributors within the report text, their input and feedback have been integral to the content presented.

If required, I can provide a list of the main contributors and their roles separately.