

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

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

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2023

Project reference	DARCC031
Project title	Strengthening community action for regeneration in the Colombian Caribbean
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Colombia- Barranquilla
Lead partner	Pilar Gomez
Partner(s)	Luisa Castellanos, Andres Perez, Sergio Borrero
Project leader	Laura Sandoval
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	October 20 2023 HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	https://opepa.org/red-dulcesal/ , https://twitter.com/OpEPA/ , https://www.facebook.com/opepa/reels/ , https://www.instagram.com/opepa/ https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/dulcesalpodcast/ , https://www.youtube.com/@oepacolombia , <i>Threads: OpEPA (@opepa)</i> https://co.linkedin.com/company/opepa

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

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your M&E systems (are your indicators still relevant, can you report against any Standard Indicators, do your assumptions still hold true?). The guidance can be found on the resources page of the relevant fund website.

In the last 6 months, from late April to October, we have achieved significant progress in the execution of our project. Compared to the agreed schedule, we are meeting the established deadlines, and the work team has effectively consolidated, demonstrating excellent collaboration and coordination in the implementation of planned activities.

The monitoring and evaluation systems have been appropriate, using an Excel matrix as suggested in the resources from the Darwin Initiative website. Additionally, there is a designated person responsible for continuously carrying out these tasks, maintaining constant communication with the rest of the team, making necessary adjustments to ensure compliance with the schedule, outputs, and outcomes.

The indicators used have proven to be relevant for evaluating the expected results and measuring the project's impact, including standard indicators, those related to policies, and project-specific internal indicators.

During this period, we have been able to validate some previously formulated hypotheses through the strategic plan of the network, which was developed in a participatory manner with the members in several working sessions. As we move forward, we will continue to work on the validation of the remaining hypotheses during the second year of implementation.

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

During the last 6 months, several noteworthy issues and unexpected events have come to light, along with valuable lessons learned that have impacted the project in various ways.

Institutional Schedule: One challenge encountered relates to the institutional schedules of the participating teachers. Their time restrictions, permissions granted by school principals, and school hours have posed logistical challenges. However, despite these restrictions, the project activities have been carried out according to the established timeline and budget.

Tourism Tax Increase: An important and unexpected problem emerged with the increase in the tourism tax from 12% to 19%. This has directly affected the project's budget since it is related to the airfare prices for instructors who need to travel. This unanticipated cost increase due to tax changes is impacting the project budget.

Fluctuations in Exchange Rates: The depreciation of the local currency (peso) against the US dollar has negatively affected project expenses. When the budget was initially prepared, the exchange rate was approximately \$4,900 pesos per dollar, but currently, it stands at \$4,000 pesos per dollar, resulting in reduced purchasing power and an increased cost for the project.

These unforeseen impacts have put additional strain on the project budget, forcing a reevaluation of the travel expenses. Funds from other budget items have been reallocated to address these increased costs.

Participant Numbers: Another challenge has been the lower number of participants compared to the initial target. The project aimed to train 40 teachers, but the actual average participation has been 33. To address this, an action plan is being developed to boost participation by actively reaching out to new schools, both public and private. The initial strategy to motivate registered teachers did not give the expected results, this required a more robust strategy to meet the participation objective.

Participant Attendance: Although participant attendance has been inconsistent, it hasn't affected the execution of project activities. Efforts are being made to ensure that teachers who missed some sessions have the opportunity to catch up and strengthen their capabilities across all proposed aspects.

These challenges and unexpected events are being addressed, and the team is actively working on strategies to overcome them and ensure that the project remains on track.

3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?	
Discussed with NIRAS:	No
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes
Change request reference if known: CR22-181	

<p>4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)</p> <p>Actual spend: £ [REDACTED]</p> <p>4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2024)?</p> <p>No</p>
<p>4c. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.</p> <p>If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.</p> <p>NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.</p>
<p>5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?</p> <p>No</p>

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

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

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

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: DARCC031 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**