



**BIODIVERSITY
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



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

Half Year Report

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

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

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2025

Please note all projects that were active before 1st October 2025 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

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

Project reference	DARCC042
Project title	Strengthening conservation organisations' capacity to drive Eastern Malagasy forest restoration.
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Madagascar
Lead Organisation	The North England Zoological Society (Chester Zoo)
Partner(s)	Madagasikara Voakajy, Madagascar Fauna & Flora Group, Missouri Botanical Garden
Project Leader	Charles Wheeler
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2 DARCC042
Project website/blog/social media	Madagasikara Nursery Exchange Network Facebook Nursery Exchange Project - YouTube Chester Zoo Restoring Malagasy Forests Second Workshop of the 'Nursery Exchange Project': wake up to restore the forest Blog Madagasikara Voakajy

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

According to the implementation timetable & revised log frame submitted as part of the proposal, the activities listed below were planned for the first semester of Year 2.

*1.1.1 Develop and deliver workshop knowledge & skill assessment survey & task at each workshop.- **Completed.***

Two workshops were held in May and September 2025. The May workshop was attended by community members involved in agriculture and included both pre- and post-training surveys. A total of 70 adult participants from three villages took part in a seven-question survey designed to assess their knowledge of compost production, biological pesticides, and biological pot making. Participants rated their understanding on a scale ranging from no knowledge to good knowledge. The results have been collected and will be analysed and added to the project's results dashboard.

The September workshop was attended by nursery workers who had participated in previous sessions, as well as new participants from additional organisations. Unlike the May session, this workshop did not include a pre- and post-survey, as its primary objective was to evaluate the progress made through previous workshops and to gather feedback for improvement. This evaluation was conducted verbally through a Q&A session, and detailed notes were recorded and added to a separate tab within the centralised project database.

*1.1.2 Gather results into one centralised database – **Ongoing.***

The results from all pre- and post-workshop surveys, along with the livelihood and forest dependency surveys, have been consolidated into a centralised spreadsheet for analysis and interpretation. These data are being analysed to produce a clear overview of baseline information from both the workshop and livelihood surveys, which will be compared with post-training and follow-up survey results to assess impact. All interpreted data are stored on a static results dashboard for ongoing reference and reporting.

*1.2.6 Create standard best practice guidelines for forest restoration in Malagasy, French, and English with visual aids- **Ongoing.***

The Standard Best Practice Guidelines for Forest Restoration document was developed and distributed during the May workshops to community members at the Mangabe Protected Area. The content of the guide was shaped through collaboration between partner organisations, as well as insights and lessons learned from nursery workers during the two workshops held in Year 1. A graphic designer was commissioned to create clear, user-friendly visual aids for each technique outlined in the guide. This visual focus was a key priority to ensure the document is accessible to individuals of all educational backgrounds and competency levels seeking to enhance their knowledge and skills. This activity was reported in the Year 1 Annual Report (ARY1).

During the second workshop in September 2025, the guide was reviewed by nursery workers from all participating organisations, who provided valuable feedback for improvement. Suggested revisions included adding more detailed explanations to balance visuals with technical information, and incorporating additional techniques such as phenological surveying and seed storage. The Chester Zoo horticultural team, who supported the workshops in Years 1 and 2, have taken the lead on this task. They will work collaboratively with all project partners to gather further feedback, revise the content, and circulate drafts for approval. The final version of the guide is scheduled for completion by February 2026.

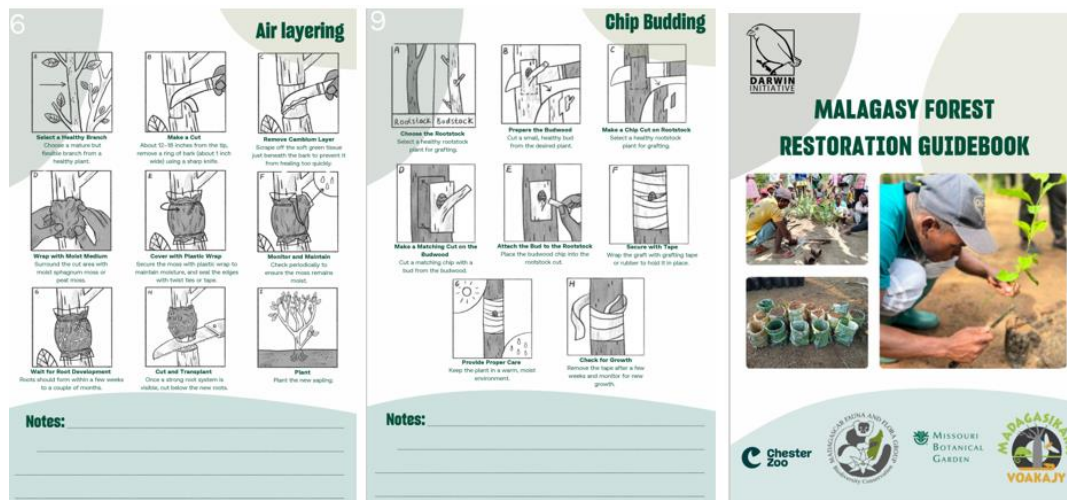
*1.2.7 Print and prepare all vocational resources to be accessible and sharable during y2 workshops – **Completed.***

All vocational resources were printed and made available for the workshops during Y2. This included:

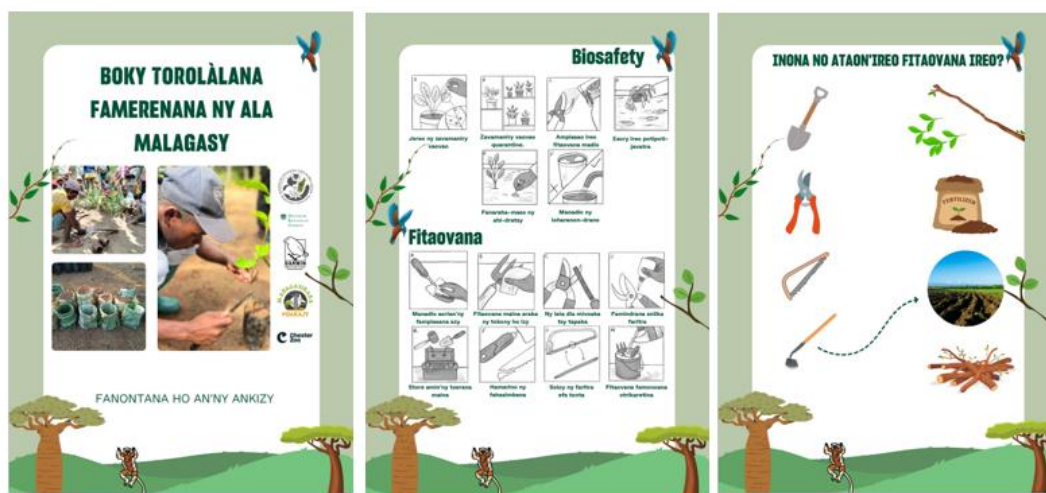
- A- The first draft of the Guide of best practice (Malagasy & English)
- B- Child version of the Guide of best practice work booklet (Malagasy)
- C- Training posters
- D- Training games

E- Training videos that were available on five iPads in the field.

Selections of the printed vocational resources can be found below. All training videos can be found following the YouTube link.



A. The first draft of the Guide of best practice (Malagasy & English)



B. Child version of the Guide of best practice work booklet (Malagasy)



C – Training poster & D- Training games (Compost)

1.3.4 Promote Y2 workshops to community groups & Identify community members interested in Y2 workshop and create register. – Completed

In preparation for the Year 2 workshop for community members at the Mangabe Protected Area, Madagasikara Voakajy staff and their local agents engaged with women's cooperative groups across the three villages of Andazoana, Andranomandry, and Ampahitra. This involved consulting the women's groups and other community members regarding their availability, experience, and familiarity with the training topics, specifically compost production and biological pesticides. A prospective register was created to help estimate workshop attendance and plan the resources required for effective delivery.

2.1.2 Design and develop two core workshops with structure, content, and logistics. (WS1 nursery management, WS2 out planting and restoration) – Completed.

During Y2, this activity was adapted in response to changes in the target audiences for the workshops. The first workshop was originally designed for community-based audiences engaged in small-scale agriculture and supporting local NGOs with restoration initiatives. Given the diversity of community needs and environmental contexts across project sites, it was decided that each partner organisation would deliver the first workshop independently at their respective home sites.

To ensure relevance and accessibility, the workshop format was adjusted to consist of multiple shorter, two-day sessions per community, each focusing on one or two key techniques suitable to local conditions. The first of these Y2 workshops took place in May at the Mangabe Protected Area, delivered with the support of CZ and MV, and engaged three local villages. Each two-day session covered two main topics; composting and biological pot making, with one day dedicated to adults and the other to youth and children. The latter included games and interactive learning activities to enhance engagement. Workshop materials included printed vocational resources and practical demonstrations using locally available materials from the restoration nurseries in each community.

This community-based workshop structure will be replicated at two additional partner sites, Parc Ivoloina by MFG and Agnalazaha by MBG during Y2 Q3/4.

The second workshop of Y2 (September 2025) was designed based on feedback collected from Y1 and pilot workshops (2023). Participants, particularly nursery workers, highlighted the value of increasing the practical components and providing opportunities to observe restoration techniques applied in different environments, scales, and contexts. In response, the September workshop was held at Mitsinjo, allowing participants to visit new restoration sites, exchange experiences with additional organisations, and engage in hands-on learning. The sharing experience on entrepreneurial skills related to environment had a huge success and they were very happy on that : 2 entrepreneurs shared experience on their path and the code to respect with the contract in the work .

Interest in the workshops grew significantly through Y1 and early Y2, with several external organisations requesting to participate, reflecting the growing recognition of these capacity-building efforts across eastern Madagascar and beyond. Hosting the second Y2 workshop at Mitsinjo also provided a suitable space for group discussions and evaluations of the four workshops conducted to date, the resources developed, and opportunities for continued collaboration moving forward.

ANDRANOMANDRY		
DAY	WORKSHOP DAY 01	WORKSHOP DAY 2
A.M	Train of community local (Local villagers): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production Compost and CAM • Agroecology (Production of apricot, coffee, lychee, and forest trees in the same plot) 	Train of community local (Youths and Children): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production Compost and CAM • Agroecology (Production of apricot, coffee, lychee, and forest trees in the same plot)
P.M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production biological pesticides • Assessment of local communities regarding compost production, CAM and biological pesticides and agroecology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production biological pesticides • Assessment of Youths regarding compost production, CAM and biological pesticides • Assessment trainers
AMPAHITRA		
DAY	WORKSHOP DAY 01	WORKSHOP DAY 2
0	Train of community local (Local villagers): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production Compost and CAM • Agroecology (Production of apricot, coffee, lychee, Papaya, and forest trees in the same plot) 	Train of community local (Youths and Children): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production Compost and CAM • Agroecology (Production of apricot, coffee, lychee, Papaya, and forest trees in the same plot)
P.M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production biological pesticides • Assessment of local communities regarding compost production, CAM and biological pesticides and agroecology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production biological pesticides • Assessment of Youths regarding compost production, CAM and biological pesticides • Assessment trainers

ANDAZOANA		
DAY	WORKSHOP DAY 01	WORKSHOP DAY 2
A.M	Train of community local (Local villagers): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production Compost and CAM • Production Biological pots 	Train of community local (Youths and Children): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production Compost and CAM • Production Biological pots
P.M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production biological pesticides • Assessment of local communities regarding compost production, CAM and biological pesticides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production biological pesticides • Assessment of Youths regarding compost production, CAM and biological pesticides • Assessment trainers

Workshop plan for community workshops in Mangabe, May 2025.

V. Session plan

Dates		Activities	Responsibles	Places
From	To			
02 september 2025	02 september 2025	Travel to Moramanga-Mitsinjo et Toamasina-Mitsinjo	All teams	Mitsinjo
03 september 2025	03 september 2025	Sharing experiences, impacts and results on restoration research (plant treatments)	MV, MGB and MFG	Mitsinjo Meeting Room
04 september 2025	04 september 2025	Sharing experiences, impacts and results on vegetative propagation, compost and CAM	MV, MGB and MFG	Mitsinjo Meeting Room
05 september 2025	05 september 2025	Visit to Mitsinjo restoration site	Youssef Mitsinjo	Mitsinjo restoration site
06 september 2025	06 september 2025	Visit to Maromizaha restoration site	Dadafara Maromizaha	Maromizaha restoration site
07 september 2025	07 september 2025	Travel to Mitsinjo-Moramanga et Mitsinjo-Toamasina	All teams	Mitsinjo

Workshop plan for Mitsinjo, September 2025.

2.1.3 Develop workshop knowledge & skill assessment survey & task for each workshop. – Completed see 1.1.1.

2.1.4 Deliver workshop 1 (Y2) – Completed

The community workshop in May: six mini workshops were successfully delivered across three villages within the Mangabe Protected Area (PA): Andazoana, Andranomandry, and Ampahitra. Each village hosted two workshops, one for adults and one for youth and children, focusing on composting and the use of natural biopesticides and fertilisers.

This activity marked a significant milestone in the “train-the-trainer” approach, providing an opportunity for trained nurserymen to deliver workshops using the facilitation skills gained in previous training sessions. It was also the first visit by Chester Zoo staff to the southern region of Mangabe PA.

Each workshop followed a structured format:

Morning: Theory and practical demonstrations on composting and biopesticide production.

Afternoon: Practical session on biological pot making using banana bark.

Youth and child sessions incorporated interactive games and age-appropriate educational tools, led by MV's education officer, Chantia.

A total of 180 participants were trained across all sessions. Each participant received a workshop booklet (adult or child version) detailing nursery management techniques, composting methods, and natural pest control. Visual "how-to" posters and interactive educational games (e.g., composting and coffee plant games) were also used to enhance engagement.

Daily participant surveys were conducted for adults and youth (16+), capturing pre- and post-workshop self-assessments of skills and confidence.

Workshops delivered: 6 (3 adult, 3 youth/child).

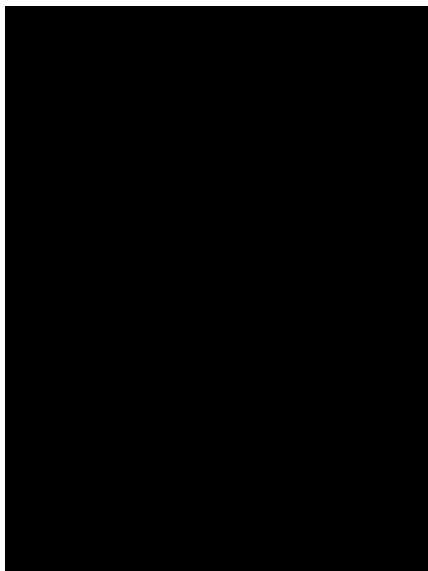
Participants trained: 180 during the workshop period and 70 in the weeks following by the nursery staff. ~250 total.

Biological pots produced: Over 3,000 created and purchased after quality checks.

Training materials: Workshop booklets, educational posters, and children's games distributed.

Community engagement: High overall, with particularly strong reception in Andazoana and Ampahitra.

Capacity building: Enabled nurserymen to practice facilitation, strengthening local leadership in sustainable agriculture.



Photos from WS1 Y2 (top left to right) Children watching training videos, Compost making, Adults with guide book, Biological pots being purchased by the project.

2.1.5 Deliver workshop 2 (Y2) – Completed

In September 2025, the second NEP Y2 workshop was successfully delivered. The workshop brought together representatives from eight organizations; MV Moramanga, MBG Agnalazaha, MFG Ivoloina and Betampona, UEBT, Kew, and GERP, Bristol Zoological Society, Money for Madagascar, and with support from Chester Zoo as project lead. The main objective of this exchange was to strengthen collaboration and share best practices in ecological restoration and nursery management, supporting broader goals to restore forest connectivity, enrich biodiversity, and enhance local development through sustainable habitat restoration.

The week-long program took place in Mitsinjo and Maromizaha, combining technical workshops and field visits. Sessions held at the Mitsinjo meeting room focused on sharing experiences and results in restoration research, vegetative propagation, composting, and CAM (Crassulacean Acid Metabolism) techniques. Participants also carried out practical field activities, including planting at the Mitsinjo restoration site and monitoring work at the Maromizaha agroforestry and restoration areas. The exchange fostered collaboration between NGOs, strengthened monitoring and maintenance approaches, and enhanced collective knowledge on restoration techniques, contributing to the ongoing improvement and networking of ecological restoration initiatives across Madagascar.

Link to one of the partners experience in joining the NEP workshop:

[MfM Partners in Dynamic, Innovative Nursery Workshop – Money for Madagascar](#)

Link to Photos of September 2025 - [Here](#)

2.2.2 Year 2 deliver both workshops to 30 participants (additional nursery staff & community members) at Mangabe & Parc Ivoloina. – Completed, see 2.1.4 & 2.1.5

2.4 WS implementation evaluation survey (gather data on WS participant success at home sites)- Ongoing.

Between April and October 2025, plant production and field survival were recorded across five sites: Andazoana, Andranomandry, Mangabe, Ambodiroatra, and Ampahitra. Mangabe had the highest total production with 11,683 plants, followed by Andranomandry (8,500), Ambodiroatra (8,195), Andazoana (6,700), and Ampahitra (6,670). Most plants produced were forest seedlings, with smaller numbers of agroforestry species and no food or ornamental plants reported. Germination rates after transplanting remained high across all sites, ranging from 90% to 98%, while survival rates at restoration sites varied between 60.09% and 80%, showing differences in field conditions and management success. The evaluation of techniques used by nurserymen who received training in the workshops indicates positive yields from the nurseries, and the nurserymen reported improved knowledge and skills, contributing to overall nursery performance and plant survival outcomes.

Plant production and field survival APRIL - OCTOBER 2025	Andazoana	Andranomandry	Mangabe	Ambodiroatra	Ampahitra
A. Total production (plants)	6700	8500	11683	8195	6670
▶ of which forest seedlings	6200	8080	10958	7575	6670
▶ of which agroforestry species	500	420	725	620	0
▶ of which others (food/ornamental)**	0	0	0	0	0
B. Germination rate (%) after transplanting or transplanting	98%	95%	98%	92%	90%
C. Survival rate at restoration sites (%)	64%	61%	80%	63.81%	60.09%

Table of nursery yields and survival rates April – October 2025. The low survival rate were due to: lack of rainfall and transport, pulling seedlings by offenders

The participants of the first workshop held in May 2025 will be evaluated in the fourth quarter (Q4) to assess their nursery yields and the application of techniques learned. The table below summarizes the training sessions conducted between April and October 2025.

Village / Nursery	Training theme from APRIL - OCTOBER 2025	Total number of participants	Of which women	Date de formation
Andazoana	Training in the production of composts, organic pots and biological control	62	35	13-14/05/2025
Andranomandry		68	59	16-17/05/2025
Ampahitra		65	55	19-20/05/2025

3.1.2 Encourage WS participants to join platforms whilst on WS / 3.1.3 Gather emails & numbers form participants register to send network invitations- **Completed.**

All community members who participated in the May workshop, along with additional participants from external organisations, were encouraged to join the Facebook group and subscribe to the YouTube channel to access and review training videos as needed. We have 47 members now , and have an improvement of 33% on the publications made. External organisations that took part in the September workshop have also been added to a mailing list to facilitate information sharing with restoration managers, who can distribute resources to those without internet access. Furthermore, all external organisations have been included in the review committee for the upcoming revisions of the Guide of Best Practices document.

3.2.1 Make training resources open source and upload to platforms- **Ongoing.**

All vocational resources have been posted on the private Facebook network group and all the training videos are openly available on the YouTube channel. Additionally, everything that was printable has been dispatched to all communities and participants of the workshops. At Chester Zoo, we are currently discussing using the vocational resources and training videos to build a bespoke accredited free online course in multiple languages accessible through the *International Conservation Academy*, [Chester Zoo Professional Training course portal](#). This would allow the resources, skills, and knowledge shared throughout these workshops to reach a much wider audience across Madagascar and beyond.

3.2.2 Develop and share communication material. – Ongoing. Through the Facebook and YouTube websites.

3.3 Develop and share quarterly newsletters, restoration champion case studies, and videos. - Ongoing.

A short documentary film was produced this year from the workshops during Y1. This has been shared multiple times on partner organisation's websites, socials, and has received over 300 views in three months on YouTube.

3.4.1 Identify NGO staff and nursery workers to receive comms training and manage platforms- **Ongoing.**

As part of her professional development and wider training commitments with Chester Zoo, Sydonie Rabarison, the in-country project lead, undertook a one-month training placement in the United Kingdom. During her time at Chester Zoo, she participated in communications and media training with the Marketing and Fundraising team. The skills gained through this programme will strengthen her capacity to manage and enhance the online NEP platforms, supporting more effective communication and engagement across the project's networks.

3.4.3 Identify 1 person as NREN manager to pull together and manage admin reports / content. **Ongoing – see 3.4.1**

4.1.7 Promote sale of products at the end of each workshop in Mangabe with a stall in the camp – Ongoing.

During workshop 1 in May over 3000 biological pots were purchased off community groups within Mangabe for use within the restoration nurseries. Alongside this over 1000 seed pouches have been purchased off 3 women's groups in Mangabe protected area.

4.3 Continue to deliver income & forest dependency surveys at 6 month intervals, collecting data in a centralised database.- Ongoing and partly delayed to Q4`

The initial baseline survey of 278 household across ten Community Based Organisations (CBOS) or VOIs in Malagasy were carried out between April and September within the Mangabe Protected area. This survey consisted of 66 questions covering seven sections; Contact with the project, household, income, agriculture/livestock, markets, forest dependency, financial management, climate change, capacity requirements. This data was collected using Kobo collect application on tablets during in person interviews of one member from one household and conducted by a member of MV staff. The data has been anonymised to ensure data protection and is stored on a centralised database. The follow up surveys will be conducted in Q4 of Y2 to ensure a full 6-month interval is met and to capture all impacts of the project.

*4.5 Evaluate the data collected from the climate resilience proxy questions in the income & forest dependency surveys and summarise results into final report along with forest cover imagery-**Ongoing**.*

The results will be analysed and evaluated upon receiving the data from the follow up surveys in Q4. Satellite imagery of forest cover pre and post project will be analysed in Q4.

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.

1-The process of buying the bio pot : MV has a process of having proforma invoice before buying , local community knowledge slow it down.
2-The Mini workshop done were very remote area, only motorbike can access it. And sometimes, the motorbike hired broke down in the road and delayed the activity.
3-The transport of the seedlings and the climate give the result on the survival rate.
4-MV planned to host Kew in September for giving more details and were prepared for it, in the last time they could not do the trip .

3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with NIRAS:

Yes/ No

Formal Change Request submitted:

Yes/ No

Received confirmation of change acceptance:

Yes/ No

Change Request reference if known: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

Guidance for Section 4: The information you provide in this section will be used by Defra to review the financial status of projects. This review will identify projects at random for spot checks on financial management and will include requests for evidence of the actual spend information provided below. Please ensure the figures you provide are as accurate as possible and that you have the evidence to support it. You do not need to provide it now.

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)

Actual spend: [REDACTED]

4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2026)?

No Estimated underspend: £

4c. If you expect an underspend, then you should consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible, and not later than 31st December. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes to your project if necessary. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.**

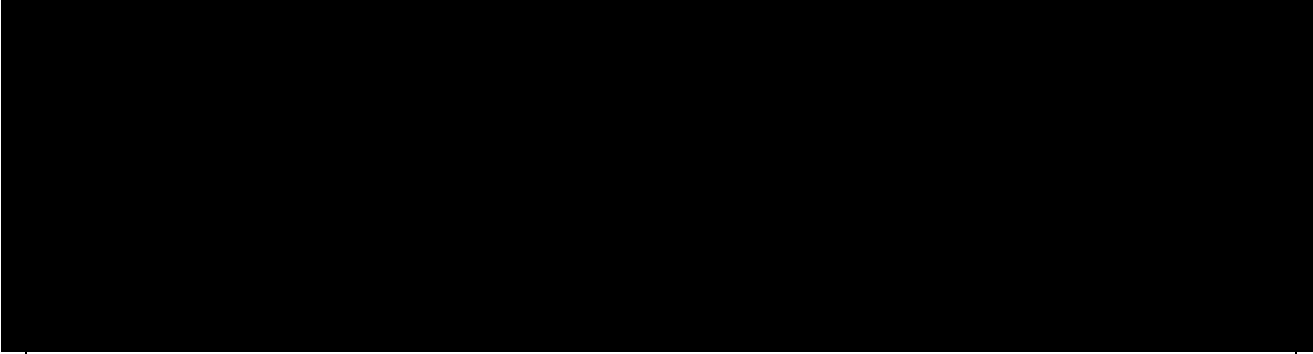
NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

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

6. Project risk management

6a. If your project has an Overseas Security and Justice assessment, please provide an update on any related risks, and any special conditions in your award paperwork if relevant for your project.



7. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent Annual Report. As a reminder, all projects that were scored as 'Not Yet Sensitive' in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment of their latest Annual Report should demonstrate how they are meeting the minimum GESI-Sensitive standard.

Attached in the email with this report is the updated workplan document.

Checklist for submission

Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, and annexe other requested materials as appropriate.	yes
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	yes
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	yes
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	
Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com	
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	