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 2024

Please note all projects that were active before 1 October 2024 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

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

Project reference	DARCC052
Project title	Small but mighty: Empowering Tajik conservation organisations through capacity building
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Tajikistan
Lead Organisation	Fauna & Flora International
Partner(s)	Center for the Support of Specially Protected Natural Areas of Tajikistan (CSSPNAT) Tourist of Mountain Maschoh (ToMM) Youth Group on Protection of Environment (YOPE)
Project leader	Mr Ubayd Gulamadshoev
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	N/a

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).

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.

The project officially began in April 2024, though we faced some delay in initiating our project activities as outlined in Section 2. Nevertheless, positive progress towards a number of activities and outputs was achieved during the reporting period, including:

1.1 Sign MoUs with three CSOs

We successfully prepared and signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with three CSOs in this project, following a detailed review and clarification of the project objectives with each CSO. This helped to lay the foundation for our future collaboration as well as the overall project outcome of building their institutional and technical capacity to create, implement and sustain biodiversity conservation initiatives.

1.2 Obtain formal permissions

We obtained necessary formal permissions from the Committee of Environmental Protection, the National Academy of Science of the Republic of Tajikistan, and Agency for Forestry, facilitated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which ensures smooth cooperation in the implementation of project activities. In result, these procedures provided clear guidelines and expectations for all parties involved, helping to prevent misunderstandings or disagreements later on in the project. It also promoted an open and transparent communication with all relevant stakeholders, creating a strong foundation for future negotiations or formal agreements.

1.3 Complete a baseline Organisational Resilience Check (ORC) and SWOT analysis with each of the three CSOs

All tools, presentations, and preparatory materials required for conducting the needs assessment through the ORC and SWOC analysis have been developed, reviewed, and finalised during this reporting period, in readiness for their application with each CSO in the next reporting period.

Reflecting on the most suitable tools and materials, our team decided to customise and adapt these specifically to the scale and needs of the three CSOs in the project. Four tools of capacity assessment were initially planned to be used, including: needs assessment, SWOC analyses, Organizational Resilience Checklist and Individual Development Plan (IDP). Based on the level of current development of the CSOs, the ORC and IDP were shortened and simplified, with unnecessary sections removed to ensure these tools are practical, appropriate and useful. The standard needs assessment and SWOC analyses tools are naturally more open-ended and adaptable to different organisation sizes and types, so these did not need adjustment.

This adjustment helped us tailor the capacity-building activities to fit the needs of each organisation, regardless of their level of existing institutional capacity and development, and ensure that the training and support provided are useful for both newer organisations as well as the more established ones. This way, each CSO can benefit and build their capacity at its own pace, making the training and capacity building programme more effective overall.

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.

Delay in Project start-up:
After receiving confirmation of our Grant Award earlier this year, Fauna & Flora's legal team raised a number of queries regarding the Defra T&Cs outlined in the initial Offer Letter. Following prolonged discussions between Fauna & Flora and Defra (via NIRAS), and with added delays from all sides due to the summer holidays, we were able to eventually finalise and sign a revised Offer Letter on 16th August 2024. Unavoidably, this resulted in a delayed start to project implementation, with knock-on impact on the timeline of planned activities as

well as the budget. As such, over the past few weeks, our project team took time to revisit and revise our original timeline of activities to reflect the shorter implementation period in practice. As a result, we submitted a formal Change Request on October 21st, to propose our new project Workplan and revised Budget, which necessitates some changes in costs moving across Financial Years. We are awaiting to hear the outcome of our change request.

Adaptation of tools to complete an organisational self-assessment of CSOs:
An important lesson learnt was the need for flexibility when working with smaller or newer organisations. The decision to simplify the Organizational Resilience Checklist (Fauna & Flora's standard self-assessment of organisational strength) and Individual Development Plan template (an action plan for organisational strengthening priorities) was important in ensuring that the tools were appropriate for the scale and capacity of the three CSOs, which helped us make these tools more appropriate and useful for the three CSOs involved in this project.

During the whole reporting period, our project team kept in regular contact with the three CSOs, answering their questions and offering support whenever needed. By doing this, the team helped create a strong working relationship with each of the CSOs. This open communication helped ensure that the CSOs felt confident and prepared to move forward with the next steps of the project, despite some initial delays.

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
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	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*

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)

Actual spend:

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 2025)?

4c. If you expect and 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. 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 BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

N/a

6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report. If your project was subject to an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment please use this space to comment on any changes to international human rights risks, and to address any additional mitigations outlined in your offer letters. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.
N/a. We have not received any additional feedback at this time.

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1st April 2024)	
Have you **responded to any additional feedback** (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	N/a
If not already submitted, have you attached your **risk register**?	Y
For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to **feedback from your latest Annual Report Review?** You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	N/a
For All Projects	
Include your **project reference** in the subject line of submission email.	Y
Submit to **BCFs-Report@niras.com**.	Y
Have you **clearly highlighted any confidential information** within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	N/a
Have you reported against the most **up to date information for your project**?	Y
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Y