



**BIODIVERSITY  
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



## Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects

### Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus

### Half Year Report

31<sup>st</sup> October 2025

<b>Project reference</b>	DARCC08
<b>Project title</b>	AgroNative: Increasing Native Species in Beninese Agroforestry through Government Leadership
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Benin
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.'s World Education Initiative (JSI/WorldEd)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Alafia NGO
<b>Project Leader</b>	JSI/WorldEd
<b>Report date and number</b>	HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	worlded.org

#### 1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed project implementation timetable.

Activity	Status
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##### **Output 1: Local-level GOB knowledge, capacity and commitment to prioritise agroforestry systems integrating native species and engage communities increased**

The activities under Output 1 were completed in Y1, however all AgroNative activities build on the community action plans and capacity strengthening plans established early in the project.

##### **Output 2: Farmers and community members knowledge, attitudes, and practices of biodiversity-sustaining agroforestry are increased and participation in forest management is improved**

Activities 2.1-2.2 are **complete**.

2.1 - 2.2	<b>Completed in Y1.</b>
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2.3 and 2.4: Convene Farmer Field Schools (FFS) and Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBRNM) Field Schools	<b>In progress.</b> Bi-weekly sessions, following the FFS cover key integrated agricultural practices and biodiversity conservation techniques. Following lessons from the FFS manual developed specifically for Northern Benin in Y1, led by FFS, communities planted trees (See A3.3) using recommended spacing (4 m between trees, 1 m between crops) and emphasizing the trees' ecological benefits—shade, soil fertility, food, and traditional medicine. Theoretical sessions focused on compost production from agricultural residues and food scraps. Finally, FFS sessions trained communities on nursery setup, specifying materials and placement near water sources for proper care. To ensure government involvement and capacity, the activities involve ATDA focal points (focal points).
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##### **Output 3: Biodiversity-sustaining agroforestry plots are established and profitable (for both women and men) with the support of commune-level MAEP staff**

3.1 Design plots	<b>Completed in Y1.</b>
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3.2 Communities to build and stock nurseries with seedlings for crop and native species	In Y1, the communities developed nursery plans. In Y2, communities used the seed funds transferred by the project in Y1 to build nurseries. Each community built a joint nursery with both native and crop seedlings (see Activity 3.3 for species names) that they will use to replenish their community plots (3.1-3.3) as well as sell to individual nurseries (3.5).
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3.3 Plant agroforestry plots	The project organized community planting days to establish the agroforestry plots. Tree planting took place in two phases. In the first phase, fruit and leguminous species (see below) were planted. The
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through community planting days	<p>second phase focused on native species identified during the BioBlitz (Output 2). The activity was carried out on the following dates: Gounin (July 27–29 and August 14–20, 2025), Warikpa (July 8–9 and September 8, 2025), Banhoun-Guéou (July 16–17 and August 18–19, 2025), Ouénou (July 11–12 and August 25–29, 2025), and Kakara (July 30–31 and August 30–31, 2025). A total of 7,500 seedlings were distributed across the five communities, including 2,500 native to northern Benin (2,449 purchased from vendors with the remaining donated)—<i>Parkia biglobosa</i> (500), <i>Vitellaria paradoxa</i> (850), <i>Diospyros mespiliformis</i> (249), <i>Blighia sapida</i> (150), <i>Tamarindus indica</i> (400), <i>Vitex doniana</i> (200), and <i>Detarium macrocarpum</i> (100)—and 5,000 (4,916 purchased from the vendor with the remaining donated) economically important ones, namely <i>Gliricidia sepium</i> (3,910, for enclosure purposes), <i>Khaya senegalensis</i> (156) and <i>Anacardium occidentale</i> (100) and fruit trees including guava (150), mango (150), papaya (300), and orange (150). Following the purchase of native and fruit tree species, communities, with support from the project, successfully transplanted the seedlings. Addressing previous challenges with livestock trampling, communities built living fences, while carefully planting the other species inside, respecting the required distances between plants.</p>
3.4 Train farmers on agroforestry-based microbusiness development with attention to gender equitable financial management, and will support participants to found savings groups	<p>To ensure long-term sustainability, the project delivered a training on agroforestry-based micro-enterprises and gender-equitable financial management between May 6 and 10, 2025. Sessions were held in Ouénou (22 participants: 6 men and 16 women), Gounin (27 participants: 20 men and 7 women), Warikpa (19 participants: 8 men and 11 women), Banhoun-Guéou (20 participants: 9 men and 11 women), and Kakara (28 participants: 2 men and 26 women). The first session focused on strategies to support biodiversity conservation. The second session trained participants in procurement and accounting, covering transparent purchasing, vendor selection, acquisition planning, offer solicitation, and proper documentation of orders, receipts, and invoices—establishing solid financial records for all microprojects.</p>
3.5 Provide resources for 20 farmer field school participants (at least 50% women) to plant agroforestry plots	<p><b>3.5.1: Identifying Opportunities for Plot Replication:</b> Alongside community agroforestry activities (3.3), communities selected 20 FFS participants (≥50% women) for individual agroforestry plots. This involved validating selection criteria through the project team, focal points, and community review, producing a clear, documented standard. The project then clarified support objectives—providing native seedlings and work materials for four people per community—and launched applications.</p> <p><b>3.5.2: Selecting Individual Beneficiaries:</b> The project team supported local leaders to identify candidates against the criteria, and administered a short test to gauge their understanding and commitment. In each community, nine candidates were pre-selected. The final selection involved community participation: the nine candidates per community presented testimonials and the communities cast votes to choose the four most committed individuals—two men and two women per community. The village chief, having observed every step, commended the transparent process and urged the selected beneficiaries to demonstrate strong commitment.</p> <p><b>3.5.3: Providing Materials and Seedlings:</b> Finally, we proceeded with the handover of materials and seedlings for 20 nurseries. The project team and focal points distributed the packages to the individual beneficiaries in each locality reminding the awardees that they must replicate the successful practices from the demonstration (A3.3) sites on their private land to serve as a model for others.</p> <p><b>3.5.4: Providing Post-Planting Advice and Monitoring Support:</b> Following the distribution, the focal points and project team provided technical advice and ongoing support.</p>

**Output 4: Data from a participatory action research demonstrates the added value of integrated native species in agroforestry systems and improved participatory forest management and action researchers build environmental leadership skills**

The Project team developed a 6-module action research course tailored for northern Beninese communities, rooted in transformative green life skills (leadership, self-confidence, and community-nature connection). The first four modules—Introduction to Action Research, Designing a Research Question, Developing Data Collection Tools, and Planning the Research—guide communities in designing projects aligned with AgroNative objectives. Communities will launch their research in mid-November. The final two modules—Data Cleaning and Analysis, and Data Presentation—allow communities to present findings and, with the project team, to integrate recommendations into ongoing activities.

**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.**

Two key lessons were learned, though neither threatens the overall project results:

**1. Insufficient Timeframe for Biodiversity Benefits:** 2 years is insufficient to fully realize the benefits of biodiversity-sustaining agriculture. For example, farmers did not see yield benefits when transitioning from chemical fertilizers to organic/compost-based methods and long-term benefits of practices like agroforestry on soil health are not yet visible. Future activities require additional awareness raising, site visits to mature agroforestry systems, or a longer timeframe.

**2. Availability of GoB Focal Points:** Engagement by GoB focal points, while appreciated, was often challenging due to limited availability. This was addressed successfully by shifting to a lighter-touch capacity strengthening model, which improved engagement and still allowed us to achieve similar capacity strengthening outcomes.

**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: N/A – None needed. Issues have not yet affected results.	

**4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025) - 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 2026)?**

Yes ☐ No ☒ Estimated underspend: £

**4c. If you expect an underspend, then you should consider your project budget needs carefully. N/A**

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

**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. N/A**

**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.**