



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	DAREX001
Project title	Developing a Global Biodiversity Standard certification for tree-planting and restoration
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Brazil, China, Colombia, France, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Philippines, Uganda
Lead Organisation	Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI)
Partner(s)	Society for Ecological Restoration (SER), Centre for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry Centre (CIFOR-ICRAF), TRAFFIC, Ecosia, The Plan Vivo Foundation (PVF), 1t.org, Jardim Botânico Araribá, Huarango Nature, Auroville Botanical Gardens, Missouri Botanical Gardens Madagascar, Brackenhurst Botanic Gardens, Tooro Botanical Gardens.
Project Leader	Paul Smith
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR4
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.biodiversitystandard.org/ https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-global-biodiversity-standard/

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 monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) 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 has made strong progress in consolidating The Global Biodiversity Standard (TGBS) network across the past six months. [The Global Biodiversity Standard Ltd](#) has been registered as a private company limited by guarantee with a board formed. The TGBS trademark has also been registered in the UK and European Union, with trademarking in progress in the United States.

The project has expanded access to native species propagation data to help mentor tree planting projects. A comprehensive review of existing germination and propagation protocols was completed across [SER](#), [CIFOR-ICRAF](#), and [BGCI](#) databases, with additional contributions from hub partners in Kenya and India. In total 1769 protocols have been identified from pre-existing databases and 1224 protocols published over the past six months across Kenya and [India](#). Using matched funding, BGCI has also initiated collection of new protocols in Latin America with a workshop delivered in Costa Rica. These efforts are laying the groundwork to achieve the target of making protocols for at least 10,000 native tree species accessible online.

Engagement and outreach have advanced significantly. Over 3,000 contacts have been segmented through a targeted campaign, and 100 priority organisations identified for direct engagement. Several proposals for new certifications are under development, and pilots for double certification with FSC and FairWild are being planned. Assessments have been completed in India and Hong Kong (receiving Advanced and Premium certifications, respectively), with a pipeline of over 20 projects now in preparation. Certified sites are now shown on the TGBS website via a [public registry](#), with spatial data shown on either [restor.eco](#) or [explorer.land](#). The curriculum and content for the TGBS Essentials module have also been developed over the past month. Ecosia has supported the mentoring programme through a pilot in Uganda.

TGBS and its partners have promoted the Standard widely through international events including Eurogard 10, the African Climate Summit, and the SER World Conference. Promotion through partner and TGBS's dedicated platforms has continued, including via websites, webinars, newsletters, and LinkedIn pages and posts. A [case study](#) on the certified site in Uganda was also published to help promote TGBS. Fourteen hubs are now operational, with a new hub being established in Chile and strong interest from partners in other regions, such as Puerto Rico, United States, West Africa, Mongolia and South Korea. Planned activities on indicator development and spatial prioritisation will commence later this year.

MEL data are collected through biannual partner reporting, hub forum and steering committee meetings and event tracking databases. All project indicators remain relevant and all assumptions remain valid with growing international interest for certification and active partner engagement.

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.

A key challenge over the past six months has been the broader uncertainty in both the global economy and the emerging nature market. Many companies remain focused on meeting new reporting requirements rather than setting measurable biodiversity targets that require independent verification. Combined with financial caution linked to global economic instability, this has slowed firm commitments to certification, even as interest in The Global Biodiversity Standard (TGBS) continues to grow. In response, the project has prioritised relationship building, communication, and pilot development to sustain engagement, and has reallocated part of the budget towards public relations and marketing to strengthen visibility and generation of demand.

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:	Yes
Change Request reference if known:	

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)?

[REDACTED]

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?

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

[REDACTED]

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.

Not applicable.

6b. Have any concerns or allegations relating to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment been reported in the past 6 months?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Suspicions or allegations related to safeguarding concerns should be reported to ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk

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.

The independent reviewer identified that M&E for measuring impact on low-income households and communities of certified projects should be developed. In response, the project has developed a mid-term assessment report form that includes questions on benefits since certification, covering both financial, social and other benefits.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]