



**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	DAREX009
Project title	Local Governance of Forest Resources in Mali
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Mali
Lead Organisation	Tree Aid
Partner(s)	Sahel Eco
Project Leader	Aly Diarra
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.treeaid.org/projects/mali/local-governance-of-forest-resources/ https://www.facebook.com/treeaid/ https://www.linkedin.com/company/tree-aid https://twitter.com/treeaid

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).

1.9 Revitalisation of the Mio Resource Management Cooperative

Between April and June 2025, the Mio Forest Management Cooperative held meetings on organizing the 2025 planting campaign, requesting land from the traditional leadership of Mieou and Sosse Bamanan for its office, and opening a bank account. Livestock herders were sensitized to protect new trees. The three forest cooperatives jointly planned the 2025 campaign to strengthen local responsibility.

1.18–1.19 Gender and Inclusion Activities

A gender and inclusion strategy report was submitted in July 2025, with validation planned for November. From May to mid-June, 1,067 people (391 women) in 46 villages attended awareness sessions on gender, daily workloads, environment, and forest governance. These led to the inclusion of 2 displaced persons and one person with disabilities in local cooperative [REDACTED] improved land access for two displaced people ([REDACTED]), and the general recognition of women's heavier workloads.

2.3 Nursery Production

From April to August 2025, 2,043,016 seedlings were produced across 26 nurseries (7

community, 10 private, 9 nutrition gardens), covering 31 species. Nearly half of the seedlings were of species identified as locally endangered.

2.4 Seed Groves for Endangered Species

In July, three seed groves (Sossé-Bamanan, Tegouene, Dittara) were established. Beneficiaries were advised on solar panel and basin maintenance. Each seed grove has a 5m³ water basin. Gratitude was expressed to Tree Aid and Darwin Initiative for supporting biodiversity conservation. Endangered species including *Dalbergia melanoxylon*, *Khaya senegalensis*, and *Tamarindus indica* were planted in the groves.

2.7-9 Forest, Agricultural and Pastoral land Restoration (5,000 ha)

1,141,969 trees were planted across an estimated 3,326 ha¹ in Safienso, Mio, and Sanekuy forests. 4 boulis were constructed to retain 120 m³ each, improving groundwater recharge and biodiversity. An additional 3 large-capacity boulis (3,000 m³) were inaugurated in October, welcomed by local authorities as major contributions to land restoration. Between July and September, 109,736 agroforestry trees were distributed by Tree Aid mali and planted by 1,450 people (890 women) in Sibila and Kolongo. The complete data for trees distributed by Sahel Eco is still being collected. 461,777 trees were planted on an estimated 1,810 ha² pastoral land, 44% being endangered species. Community leaders praised Tree Aid and Sahel Eco for revitalizing degraded pastoral lands. Endangered species accounted for 47% of plantings across all sites, enhancing biodiversity- a significant win for this project.

3.3 Enterprise Development Plans In April 2025, 25 business plans were developed for small enterprises in Tominian to enable access to microfinance and structured growth.

3.10 Participation in Trade Fairs

From 11–15 June, 26 women-led enterprises showcased local products (shea butter, soumbala, honey, tamarind syrup, etc.) at the Environment Fortnight and Sankemon festival. Products worth 1,064,250 FCFA were exhibited, generating 1,002,500 FCFA in sales and new trade partnerships with five merchants and two processors.

3.11- 3.12 Nutritious Gardens equipped with Solar pumps and production support

Thirty nutrition gardens were completed in April and July 2025- fitted with solar pumps. Maintenance advice was given, and communities expressed appreciation for improved food security and nutrition prospects. In September, each nutrition garden site received baobab, moringa and Artemisia seeds, plus a 15-L sprayer.

3.13 Women's Training in Garden Management

Theoretical and Practical training sessions (Sept–Oct 2025) in Sibila and Tominian taught 5 staff and beneficiaries from 10 villages about garden design, soil enrichment, cultivation of baobab, moringa, and *Artemisia annua*, and nutrition demonstrations. There was first a ToT to staff, and then a training to the community. These efforts aim to ensure well-functioning gardens that enhance food and nutrition security for vulnerable communities.

Other

In August 2025, the project received additional funds from [REDACTED] to expand to the neighboring circle of Yorosso. The project will extend to 47 new communities and 4 forests. The Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the following activities are being finalised:

- Rhomis baseline survey baseline survey
- Diagnostic of the forest blocs
- Elaboration of the Forest Management Plans
- Identification of the Internally displaced people (IDPs)

¹¹ Actual hectareage to be confirmed after the land restoration survey in November.

²² Actual hectareage to be confirmed after the land restoration survey in November.

Assumptions of the project do still hold true. Although outcome level assumption 3: No significant political instability affects the project region is at risk of changing if the fuel situation described below does not improve.

Standard indicator progress: In the next Annual report, Tree Aid will be better placed to report on standard indicator progress as there will be a mid-term Rhomis in Q4 and the land restoration survey will be completed in November – allowing for the actual hectares restored to be calculated.

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.

- **Volatile insecurity in the project area:** [REDACTED]
- **Greater involvement of forest management cooperatives** in reforestation activities has taken place this season, allowing us to stay on schedule with the planting.
- **Most of the hole drillers for planting were damaged** due to the aridity of the soil: an assessment should be carried out, the repairable ones fixed, and new ones purchased before the start of the 2026 planting season.
- **Late start to planting campaign preparations:** Learning from previous challenges, the project began preparations for planting campaigns as early as May.
- **Fuel shortage in Mali:** [REDACTED]

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*
CR25-072

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)?

[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?

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

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

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

[REDACTED]

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

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.

[REDACTED]

We also received feedback that it would be helpful to see more concrete plans or progress in developing market linkages for VTE groups. This has been briefly reported on under activity 3.10 above but will be reported in more detail in the annual report.