

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 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	DARNV025
Project title	Improving wildlife health monitoring using community networks, screening and immunology
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda
Lead Organisation	University of Manchester
Partner(s)	Tanzanian Relief Institute, Mpala Research Centre, WRTI, ILRI, UN-AIST, University of Rwanda
Project leader	<i>Susanne Shultz</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR1</i>
Project website/blog/social media	<i>TBC</i>

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).

We have made good progress relative to our indicators for the first half year. We have been able to hold the first networking workshop. This was well attended and successful. We have identified the project manager and the country lead positions. However, delays with the University of Manchester processes and changes to the work visa eligibility since we submitted the application has resulted in significant delays to appointment. We are still on track to deliver the second workshop in January.

If we are not able to resolve the process delays internally within the next weeks, we will need to reassess our capacity to deliver some of the project.

Please see chart below for a summary of milestones and deliverables.

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.

We have had considerable delays internally (within the University of Manchester) with the contracts team, HR and appointments, Due Diligence etc. The delay in appointing a project PDRA/manager has been particularly difficult as we need the support of a team member to help with the logistics and management of budgets and activities. Changes to skilled worker visas have exacerbated these issues as we cannot hire through a normal visa route. In the future, we have learned that to hire someone from the Global South, we need to ensure that the position is advertised in a way that facilitates obtaining a visa.

We have also had issues with project management and budgets. The university finances team have been very inflexible in how we reimburse workshop attendees and participants. Even though the BCF guidelines allow for a per diem, the university initially insisted that all participants would have to front all costs and be reimbursed via an expense claim form. This process can take many months (based on experience) and this is not a viable solution for engaging global south team members. After many weeks of negotiation, the finance team eventually allowed us to pay a per diem. This caused a lot of conflict with the network as we were unable to confirm how to organise travel and accommodation.

A third lesson is that we named partners that do not receive funds and have planned to send small travel funds to some partners. This has caused a lot of unnecessary hassle and delay. The partner organisations have been reticent (understandably) to sign binding agreements when they receive no funds. Moreover, transferring funds for travel to partner organisations has also been problematic as the university will not release funds to partners prior to having a collaboration agreement signed. However, the university has yet to circulate a draft collaboration agreement. For future applications, we will limit the number of partners named on any application to minimise these issues.

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 (in part)
Formal Change Request submitted:	No
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	N/A

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)?

Yes No

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?

We have had a lot of internal issues at the University of Manchester with this project. They have not previously managed BCF funds. The degree of auditing and procedures have made the contracts, HR and finance team conservative and risk averse to the point that it is difficult to execute the project. The main issues arise where the financial procedures laid out for BCF differ from the HMRC guidelines the university follows (e.g. per diems). This has created a lot of issues with project management.

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.

Please find below responses to feedback on our application:

- the numbers in the narrative at Q19 and the logframe are inconsistent. For example, there are 30 experts (10 from each country) in the narrative and 20 in total in the logframe. This should be clarified;

- *We budgeted for 20 participants at the initial project workshop. We met this objective. The wider working network (to date) is 31 persons from Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda.*

- seeing as scaling a para-vet network will depend on maintaining community engagement in a feasible way, and that the project will work with communities, and engagement of para-vets is cited as a significant innovation, it would be useful to know why there are no specific outcomes for the community segment of the work;

- *We are working closely with the community stakeholder (namely IMPACT) to agree a set of clear deliverables and outcomes. Our goal is to have trained a cohort of community disease reporters (either de novo or as CPD). However, we had not agreed the best way to scale this across areas as the structure, training and responsibilities vary across regions and countries. We have included this discussion in our outline for a workshop summary document about animal disease reporting in East Africa.*

- the application states that "a critical indicator of success will be for communities to engage with reporting on animal diseases". It is unclear how will they be encouraged to do this. Linked to this, how will community engagement in disease monitoring be sustained post project?
 - *We will be encouraging reporting through the disease reporting network. We have already had discussions with stakeholders about how best to engage community members with causing unintended issues. We have some funding available to provide vaccinations or treatment for diseases of wildlife origin. However, we will need to formalise plans to distribute this support equitably.*
- consider if there is a potential long-term sustainability risk in terms of needing someone to lead the working group;
 - *The long-term sustainability of the network is a concern as the Innovation project is currently designed. We intend to apply for future funding to support the bedding in of the network and to facilitate regional activities. Without follow on funding there is a realy risk that the networks stops functioning. One of the key outcomes of workshop 1 was the recognition that numerous monitoring initiatives have failed to continue across the region. The network has already begun discussions about how to ensure there is capacity and leadership for a new network. The main ways to ensure sustainability is to build the project into resilient frameworks (such as KABS).*
- this application is designed around monitoring and adaptive feedback as a key objective is to evaluate the utility of a new framework. You should consider if the 15 days and budget allocated for Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is enough;
 - *We agree that this may not be sufficient. Once we have the project manager/PDRA in post we will review all reporting and evaluation plans.*
- it is unclear how various reports and best practice guidelines will be disseminated for outreach and impact;
 - *We will produce a range of grey and peer-reviewed literature as outcomes. For example, we are currently compiling a summary report from the first workshop that highlights regional structures for disease reporting, differences in priority diseases at the community and national level, and potential innovations to improve monitoring (in terms of community engagement and tools). This will be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal as a position piece. We will also disseminate the biomarker assays results as peer-reviewed papers. However, we will also deliver workshops at KWS, WRTI, Mpala, TAWIRI and University of Rwanda to ensure that there is capacity to implement these tools. We have already discussed future investment to ensure there are the facilities, infrastructure and trained staff to use the innovations generated by this project.*
- it would be useful to know how the working group members will be selected;
 - *We have tried to balance governmental, NGOs and academic stakeholders (see below for more details). Thus from each country we have at least two academics, one wildlife vet and one livestock vet. We have additional members from FAO, WHO, Smithsonian, ILRI, San Diego Zoo and IMPACT. However, given the capacity across all sectors, there are more Kenyan members than those from Tanzania and Rwanda.*
- the application states that the working group number will be limited to 30 - 10 from each country, although Kenya has more experience. Is this flexible?
 - *On review, we have come to appreciate that there is much more capacity in Kenya (as stated). We have adapted our network to try to balance representation from the wildlife and livestock governmental sectors (e.g. KWS, WRTI, DVS, TAWIRI, TANAPA, African Parks). However, we have more non-governmental stakeholders from Kenya (wildlife vets, ILRI, Smithsonian, Mpala, IMPACT).*
- the application states that skills training will be for 20 regional stakeholders. It would be useful to know if this is over and above 30 people involved in the working group or only for some of them;
 - *This workshop is geared toward researchers and animal health workers. The researchers are part of the network (10). The additional 10 to be trained will be wildlife and livestock veterinarians that will be using these tools in the community. As we will not be able to support international travel for all participants, we will deliver training sessions*

outside of the second project workshop as an additional activity for our field teams (in Laikipia, Kajiado and Akageera).

- you should talk to the Darwin Main project “*Leveraging community-led animal health surveillance for conservation and poverty alleviation*” funded in this round to the University of Birmingham to clarify any overlaps
 - *We have spoken with this team and look forward to collaborating with them. Unfortunately, they were ultimately not awarded the main project funds.*

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.	
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	
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.	
Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com .	
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	