**Darwin Initiative Innovation: Annual Report Review**

**Submit to:** [**BCF-Reports@niras.com**](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com) **including the project ref in the subject line**

# Darwin Initiative Project Information

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Project reference |  |
| Project title |  |
| Country(ies) |  |
| Lead Organisation |  |
| Project partner(s) |  |
| Darwin Initiative grant value |  |
| Start/end dates of project |  |
| Reporting period (e.g. 1 Apr 2024 - 31 Mar 2025) and Annual Report number (e.g. 1, 2, 3) |  |
| Project Leader name |  |
| Project website/blog/social media |  |
| Review date |  |

**General Guidance:**

* Please ensure you have selected the correct template.
* The notes in blue are guidance for the reviewers. Please note not all guiding questions need to be answered – only those that are relevant to this project. **Please remove the blue guidance notes from all sections before submission.**

**Overview:**

This review should provide an independently verified summary of the progress the project has made in the last 12 months or since the project started. Please therefore ensure any statements of progress and/or impact are made with clear reference to evidence submitted. Please ensure all comments (positive and negative) can be supported by reference to material submitted with the Annual Report.

This review will be shared with the project and relevant UK Government Departments. It may also be shared with organisations asked by the UK Government to review the effectiveness of the Darwin Initiative. There is no plan to share the review publicly. However, you should be aware that all information held by HMG can be subject to a freedom of information request.

**Project documentation:**

You will be supplied with access to the full project file to undertake your review. The full application forms part of the contract between Defra and the project. Please ensure you read the application first. It may also be helpful to read the full Annual Report template as this includes similar guidance that will help you understand what the project was asked to report on.

Some projects may have made changes to their project since its start. Projects are required to seek approval for major logframe changes, i.e. at the Outcome and Output level (activity level changes do not require approval) in addition to budget and staff changes. These changes, if approved, should be documented in Change Request Forms which will be included in the project file you receive.

If you have a project that has unapproved changes to its design please check with the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Administrator before proceeding any further   
([BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com)).

It is expected that this report review will be 5-8 pages in length. Please see the Terms of Reference for full details.

### Project summary

Please use maximum of half a page (ideally less) on this section.

* Give a brief summary of the project, its intended Outputs and main activities.
* This section should only contain facts about the project based on information contained in the Annual Report.
* Feel free to copy and paste from the project report for this section if it is suitable, but ensure the language makes sense as your comments on the report.

### Comments and queries for Project Leader

Do you have any specific comments for the Project Leader? These should include an overall impression of the project as well as queries or concerns that you may have. Can you pass on information that could benefit the project? It is important that you state clearly whether your comments need to be addressed by the project and when. Therefore, please indicate whether your comments:

1. Are urgent and should be discussed between Biodiversity Challenge Funds Administrator and the project immediately (for financial and project management issues and immediate safeguarding concerns);
2. Are simple clarifications and that need to be addressed before the next Annual Report (i.e. with the next Half Year Report which is due 31st October each year, but does not get a full technical review). Use this option sparingly;
3. Are not urgent but require more than a simple clarification and should be addressed with next year’s Annual Report (due 30th April each year and which you may well be asked to review);
4. Do NOT require a response from the project and are merely for information.

Please use the following table to summarise your comments elsewhere in the review, perhaps referencing the section the comment arises from (ensure you provide adequate written text, but be concise):

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Comment** | **Discuss with BCFs Admin** | **Next Half Year Report** | **Next Annual Report** | **No response needed** |
| 1 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 5 |  |  |  |  |  |

### Project stakeholders/ partners

Comment on the extent and quality of collaboration between all formal partners and key stakeholders of this project.

* Has the project been working with host country institutions, including government?
* How well are partnerships managed and maintained?
* Have there been particular achievements, lessons, strengths or challenges with the partnership(s), and how have the latter been met?

### Summary of progress

### Implementation of Activities

Briefly comment on how the project has progressed with the implementation of its activities. Give a brief assessment of the quality of the activities conducted (e.g. the technical, research or training component(s)) according to the information available. Are any variations from the planned activities (in the original application) explained adequately?

### Progress towards Outputs

Please comment on information provided in the report on Outputs for the year.

* Is the project making adequate progress towards their expected Outputs?
* Are any variations from the Outputs (in the original application) explained adequately?
* Has the project established baselines and is it measuring Output level indicators? Is adequate evidence of progress provided?
* Has it reviewed its Output level assumptions to ensure they still hold true?
* What external factors have constrained or enabled the delivery of Outputs?

### Progress towards Outcome

**Outcome:** Please include the project’s intended Outcome here.

* Is there evidence that the project is achieving its Outcome?
* Is the project on track to achieve its Outcome targets?
* Has it established baselines and is it measuring Outcome level indicators? Is adequate evidence of progress provided? Has the project assessed the extent to which the measured Outcome can be attributed to the project activities?
* Has it reviewed its Outcome level assumptions to ensure they still hold true?
* What external factors have constrained or enabled the delivery of its Outcome?
* Could the project do anything differently (adapt or refine current activities) to improve project Outcome?

### Progress towards Impact

**Impact:** Please include the project’s intended impact here.

* Is there evidence that the project is contributing to its Impact? Has the project considered the extent to which measured Impacts can be attributed to project activities and impacts?
* Could the project do anything differently to improve project Impact?

### Project support to at least one of the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements supported by the fund: the CBD, CITES, the Nagoya Protocol on ABS, ITPGRFA, Ramsar, CMS and UNFCCC.

* Is there evidence that the project is working to support the host country/ies to meet their obligations under one or more of the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements supported by Darwin Initiative?
* Are there any Treaties etc that this project could/would be contributing to that have not been identified by the project?
* Are there any notable achievements this year?

### Project support to multidimensional poverty reduction

Darwin Initiative projects are required to contribute to biodiversity conservation and multidimensional poverty reduction. Projects working in Upper Middle Income Countries must clearly demonstrate that they:

* Advance knowledge, evidence and impact in Least Developed or Low-Income Countries, or
* Contribute to the global public good, for example by advancing understanding and/or strengthening the knowledge base related to biodiversity conservation/sustainable use and poverty reduction, or
* Contribute to serious and unique advancements on a critical issue as a result of specific circumstances of the Upper Middle Income Country that could not be made elsewhere.

All projects should be able to demonstrate direct and/or indirect poverty benefits.

* What evidence is there that the project is contributing to multidimensional poverty reduction?
* Has the project considered different types/dimensions of multidimensional poverty reduction?
* Could the project do anything differently to improve poverty reduction activities?
* Are there any notable achievements this year?

### Contribution to Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

All projects are asked to provide a self-assessment against the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) scale provided below. The scale goes from less ambitious to more ambitious moving top to bottom. All Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs) projects should be aiming for a GESI Sensitive approach at a minimum.

For further guidance, please see the [BCFs GESI Guidelines for Experts](https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources/expert-groups-resources/) and [GESI Analysis “How to Guide”](https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources/gender-equality-and-social-inclusion/).

Please provide an assessment of where you think the project sits on the scale by placing an X on the scale.

| **GESI Scale** | **Description** | **Reviewer’s Assessment** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Not yet sensitive** | The GESI context may have been considered but the project isn’t quite meeting the requirements of a ‘sensitive’ approach |  |
| **Sensitive** | The GESI context has been considered and project activities take this into account in their design and implementation. The project addresses basic needs and vulnerabilities of women and marginalised groups and the project will not contribute to or create further inequalities. |  |
| **Empowering** | The project has all the characteristics of a ‘sensitive’ approach whilst also increasing equal access to assets, resources and capabilities for women and marginalised groups |  |
| **Transformative** | The project has all the characteristics of an ‘empowering’ approach whilst also addressing unequal power relationships and seeking institutional and societal change |  |

Please justify your assessment with explicit reference to the criteria outlined above. You should also comment on if you agree or disagree with the project’s assessment and provide an explanation for your reasoning.

* Does the project reference the GESI context in which it is working within? Has it referred to the GESI Analysis six core principles (rights, practice, environment, roles and responsibilities, representation and resources)?
* Is there evidence the project is actively considering social inclusion and ensuring meaningful participation?
* Could the project do anything differently (refine or adapt current activities) to improve how it addresses gender equality and social inclusion?

### Monitoring, evaluation and lessons learnt

* Is the MEL sufficiently robust for this project? If not, how could they do better?
* Have they made suitable use of evidence and indicators to highlight their progress?
* Have the Darwin Initiative Standard Indicators been selected and reported against appropriately?
* Has the project considered the extent to which measured Outcome and Impact can be attributed to their activities?
* Would anything improve the project e.g., revision of logframe, integration of lesson-learning to project etc.?
* Are there any obvious lessons learnt that the project has not highlighted?

### Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

* Has the report responded suitably to issues raised in the review of last year’s Annual Report or in any award letter which included feedback for the project to consider?

### Risk Management

* Have any new risks arisen in the last 12 months the project had not previously accounted for?
* Have any significant adaptions been made to the project design to address changes to risk?

### Scalability and durability

* Is there clear evidence of how stakeholders important to future scaling of the project (i.e. ‘adopters’) learn about the project or activity and why engagement might be attractive to them? For example, projects might have conducted workshops to co-develop the project to meet ‘adopters’ needs and interests, evidenced by a description of those needs and interests with supporting quotes.
* Is there clear evidence of how the project has sought to build or modify institutions (government policy, private-public sector collaborations, etc.) to incentivise initial and ongoing engagement with the project or activity? For example, through eco-certification programmes or government tax breaks.
* Is there clear evidence that the project has changed attitudes, social norms, knowledge, values and behaviours to support initial and ongoing engagement with the project or activity? For example, projects might have conducted a campaign to shift social norms related to a pro-conservation practice within a clearly defined target group, supported by attitudes surveys conducted before and following the campaign.
* Is there evidence that the project Outputs, Outcome and Impact are to be sustained after the project ends?
* Does the project have a suitable exit strategy?
* Is there anything that could be done to improve the project’s durability?

### Early indicators of transformational change

Defra is eager to understand key success factors of Darwin Initiative projects, in particular considering their potential to catalyse transformational change. Projects are likely to be more transformational if several of the following criteria are met. Please indicate whether you believe this project meets these criteria. If so, which ones and how, and do you believe this project has the potential to be transformational?

Please select the criteria you think apply in the case of this project and write a short narrative in support of your assessment. Feel free to cross reference other sections of the review if appropriate.

| **Criteria** | **Put X if this applies** |
| --- | --- |
| **Political will and local ownership:** Where the need for change is agreed locally, and the process is locally owned. Where high-level political buy-in and broad support from across societies, cultures, and interest groups enable widespread changes to patterns of development. |  |
| **Capacity and capability is increased**: Where a target country and target communities have the capacities and capabilities necessary to bring about the change. |  |
| **Increased innovation:** Where wider and sustained change comes from innovation, such as new technologies, with the potential to demonstrate new ways of doing things. |  |
| **Evidence of effectiveness is shared:** Where approaches which have proven successful in one location are disseminated widely, and lessons on their usefulness are **credible.** |  |
| **Leverage / create incentives for others to act:** Where the costs of action are reduced to the point that acting on identified risks and challenges is a sensible decision for public agencies, commercial firms, and private individuals. These cost reductions may need to be steep enough to overcome behavioural inertia. |  |
| **Replicability:** Where good ideas piloted by the projects are replicated by others in the same country, and more widely. |  |
| **Scalability:** Where interventions have sufficient reach to achieve progressive institutional and policy reform, or drive down the costs of technology deployment. |  |
| **Sustainability:** Where activities are likely to be sustained once project support ends. |  |
| **Critical Mass:** Ultimately, many truly transformational changes will require a critical mass, to overcome political, market and other sources of inertia. Many of the points above relate to achieving this critical mass and the more of the above an intervention can promote, the greater the likelihood that it will lead to transformational change. **Indicate whether you think this project has the potential to achieve critical mass.** |  |

### Darwin Initiative identity

* Has the Darwin Initiative been suitably recognised in the materials produced so far?
* Is Darwin Initiative funding recognised as a distinct project with a clear identity or does it form part of a larger programme?

### Safeguarding

NIRAS’s Safeguarding Manager will be reviewing project responses to the safeguarding question in their annual report and there is no specific need for you to comment here. However, please do flag any specific issues or concerns related to safeguarding – including sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and / or health, safety and security - as part of your review.

Please ensure no sensitive data is included within responses.

### Project expenditure

The Annual Report should tabulate the budget for the last financial year against expenditure, explaining any variations from the agreed project schedule. Are stated changes in the budget justified, and is the level of detail adequate? Please include comment on the level of matched funding mobilised during the reporting period. You are not expected to review the budget in detail. If this section is incomplete, please still carry out your review as we can deal with the finances separately if necessary.

### General assessment

* What is your overall impression of the project based on the information available to you?
* Please let us know of particularly noteworthy activities or Outputs that you consider are worth being highlighted by the Darwin Initiative as good practice.
* This section should be no more than half a page of text and should summarise the comments made above.

What score would you give this project based on the following scoring system? This should be a full score – no 2/3 please. Do not delete or amend the score tables below.

**Achievement of Outputs/Outcome Score:**

**Reporting Quality and Evidence Provision Score:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Score** | **Description** | **Achievement of Outputs/Outcome** |
| 1 | Likely to be **completely** achieved | Based on the information provided in this report, the Outputs/Outcome will be completely achieved by project end. This could be because this project is late-stage, and project achievements are well on the way to completion (or completed) or, for early-stage projects, the project is progressing well, with indicator targets being met or exceeded and project assumptions holding true. |
| 2 | Likely to be **largely** achieved | There is good progress towards Outcome and Output completion (particularly the most important), however there remains some uncertainty about whether or not the project will achieve its stated Outcome and Outputs. |
| 3 | Likely to be **partly** achieved | Only partial achievement of the Outcome is likely and/or achievement of some Outputs. |
| 4 | Only likely to be achieved **to a very limited extent** | Outcome unlikely to be achieved but a few Outputs likely to be achieved. |
| 5 | **Unlikely** to be achieved | There has been limited to no progress towards completing the Outputs or Outcome so there is significant uncertainty or limited likelihood these will be achieved by the end of the project. |
| X | **Too early** to judge | It is impossible to say whether there has been any progress towards the final achievement of Outputs or Outcome. This score should not be used unless at least one of the following criteria are met:  Project is postponed because of conflict; external constraints; recruitment delays. |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Score** | **Description** | **Comment on Reporting Quality and Evidence Provision** |
| 1 | Good | The report is well-written and is clear throughout. There is good provision of evidence (i.e. not too much or too little) to substantiate claims made, including achievement of indicators. Evidence is clearly sign-posted where relevant. |
| 2 | Acceptable | The report is complete and evidence is provided to support claims made, but there is room for improvement. Please provide specific feedback comments for the project on how reporting and provision of evidence could be improved, |
| 3 | Poor | There are some gaps in the project reporting and/or it is poorly written and confusing or hard to understand in places. The provision of evidence is poor (i.e. there isn’t enough evidence provided to substantiate the claims made in reporting and/or evidence is not clearly labelled / cross referenced which makes it hard to navigate – particularly where there are a lot of annexes). |
| X | Unacceptable | There are significant issues with project reporting and evidence provision which makes it challenging to complete the report review. |