



Recommendations for Partnership working under the Darwin Initiative: Developed by Staff from Host Country Institutions

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The Darwin Initiative

The Darwin Initiative is a UK Government small grants programme which was launched at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. It aims to assist countries rich in biodiversity but constrained by financial resources to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The Initiative is funded and managed by the UK Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). This is the UK Government's main support to other countries (including the UK's Overseas Territories) in their implementation of the CBD, and more recently the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), through the funding of collaborative projects which draw on UK biodiversity expertise.

Communicating Lessons Learnt

The Darwin Initiative has a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) programme in place which is central to informing on the progress of the Darwin Initiative against its goal – 'to support countries that are rich in biodiversity but poor in financial resources to meet their commitments under one or more of the major biodiversity conventions: the Convention on Biological Diversity; the Convention on Migratory Species; and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species'.

The M&E programme is used in a number of ways to help inform on best practice, to support ongoing projects in their delivery, to strengthen the Darwin Initiative itself, and to demonstrate the gains Darwin Initiative projects have made in conserving biodiversity through partnerships between the UK and developing countries.

The Darwin Initiative Communications programme is essentially centred on sharing those lessons derived from both the Darwin Initiative's M&E programme but also on those lessons derived from the Darwin projects themselves. The Communications programme supports networking and sharing of lessons through a number of avenues:

- Through the Darwin Initiative website – all public documents are shared through this website including project annual reports, Evaluations of Closed Projects, Thematic Reviews and guidance notes.
- Through the Darwin Initiative newsletter. This is a resource open to the whole Darwin Initiative community to share experiences, challenges and successes through delivering work in support of the CBD, CMS and CITES using Darwin Initiative funding.
- Through UK workshops and working groups such as the UK Project Leaders Workshop, the New Project Leaders Workshop and the annual Darwin Lecture.
- Through the Regional Workshops hosted for, and in celebration of, the host institutions and the work carried out by them in partnership with the UK.

Cover Photo: *Workshop group in the Serras dos Orgaos National Park, November 2009. Photo Credits: Calvin Bernard.*

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Introduction

The Darwin Initiative assists countries that are rich in biodiversity but poor in financial resources to meet their objectives under one or more of the three major biodiversity Conventions: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES); and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), through the funding of collaborative projects which draw on UK biodiversity expertise.

Central to the remit of the Darwin Initiative is for UK institutions to work **in partnership** with institutions in the host country to assist countries (including the UK's Overseas Territories) rich in biodiversity but with limited human and financial capacity to meet their commitments under the CBD, CITES and/or CMS.

In 2008 the Darwin Initiative held the first Regional Workshop specifically for host country Darwin staff to attend in Tanzania. Previously the Darwin Initiative had hosted regular workshops in the UK for UK staff and any visiting host country staff. This regional workshop provided an opportunity for those staff from the host country institutions to engage with one another and discuss issues of common interest. The theme of this first workshop was 'Partnership Working' and participants were encouraged to share experience and develop ideas of best practice.

Following the success of this workshop, the Darwin Initiative, supported by Defra's sustainability fund, continued this theme of discussion at the Brazil Regional Workshop in November 2009, thus providing the Latin American perspective. From these two meetings, recommendations have been developed to assist current and future collaborators working under the Darwin Initiative to deliver effective projects through good partnership working.

It is important to note that these recommendations were developed largely by staff of the host-country institutions that attended the Darwin Initiative Regional Workshops in Tanzania in 2008 and Brazil in 2009. Despite the different working cultures and approaches in these two regions, there were significant overlaps between the recommendations developed out of these meetings; therefore we present these recommendations as a coherent view of what is important when delivering under the Darwin Initiative from the perspective of host partners.

In summary the following recommendations for successful delivery of a Darwin Initiative project through partnership working are:

1. Establish a mutually beneficial collaboration;
2. Scoping visits are useful to cement relationships and project ideas;
3. Problem identification should be driven by the host country;
4. Roles and responsibilities of institutions involved should be clear, and balanced;
5. Roles and responsibilities of the individuals should be clear, and where possible, balanced;
6. Time taken to clarify the above should not be underestimated;
7. An inception period is useful to revisit and adapt plans;
8. Adaptive Management is essential, particularly in those countries where Darwin projects operate;

9. Milestone meetings are useful to review and evaluate progress towards project goals;
10. Capacity Building should be integral to project delivery.
11. Post-projects there is an opportunity for role reversals
12. Fellowships can create a strong legacy

Pre-Application for Funds

1. Establish a Mutually Beneficial Collaboration

The general consensus was that projects delivered through an existing and established partnership were far more successful than where it was a new one. It is, however, recognised that there will be need for new collaboration between institutions, particularly when seeking specific skills and expertise. In such instances, it is important that the collaborators agree on common goals and mutual understanding of the issues at hand prior to application.

Even in situations where there is a long-standing institutional relationship between the partners, these initial steps should not be ignored. Individuals, not institutions, will deliver much of the eventual project therefore clear agreement of goals, objectives and approach is important for the individuals even when the institutions have historical links.

2. Scoping Visits are useful to cement relationships and project ideas

Face-to-face meetings are useful and important during development of a project. Despite the availability of new technology such as video-conferencing and Skype providing opportunities to interact remotely, face-to-face meetings, particularly in the early stages, give better opportunities to establish clear consensus. Such opportunities may arise in regional and international conferences and workshops but the Darwin Initiative's Scoping Funding (<http://darwin.defra.gov.uk/apply/scoping/>), which provides funds for UK partners to travel to the host country to develop an application in collaboration remains an ideal option, as it provides time specifically devoted to securing agreement.

3. Problem Identification should be driven by the host country

Sound problem identification is crucial to a successful Darwin project, particularly in distinguishing the causes from the symptoms. There was consensus that the bulk of the knowledge about local situations and problems sits with the host country institution staff. Although identifying a strategy to reduce/remove the problem will be a joint effort, as a general rule, the best understanding of the problem comes from the host-country, while the UK partner may bring experience of resolution of similar problems elsewhere. It is vital that in developing a project application, the host-country institution is fully involved from the outset.

4. Roles and Responsibilities of the Institutions should be clear and balanced

Darwin Initiative projects are expected to support host countries in meeting their commitments under the CBD, CITES and/or CMS and it was agreed there should be joint responsibility for the delivery of the project among the collaborators. This makes it essential that the roles and responsibilities of each institution be clearly laid out and agreed.

Darwin Initiative projects are expected and encouraged to use various tools to facilitate partnership functioning including:

- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) confirming each partner's role, obligations and responsibilities;
- Partnership Agreement detailing how the partnership will operate; and

- Code of Practice ensuring clear commitment to agreed standards and processes.

These documents need to be carefully drafted as, taken together, they define, by agreement, the specific principles and objectives of the work to be carried out and the role to be played by each institution. Under Darwin contractual rules, funds can only be released to the UK partner (metropolitan or Overseas Territory); this does not, however, dictate the expected balance of power in a project, it is merely a means of ensuring accountability for UK public funds.

5. Roles and Responsibilities of the Individuals should be clear and balanced as far as possible

The need for a clear management structure is important for effective delivery. It was suggested also, that some mirroring of roles has been useful. For example, the UK project leader is complemented by the host-country Project Leader, a UK coordinator is complemented by a host-country coordinator and so on. At a minimum, It was suggested that there should be mirroring at least at the senior level, where decisions are made by agreement. Clear joint responsibility helps to ensure that decisions are made with full understanding of all relevant cultural and situational issues.

A locally employed project-coordinator was identified as an important position in ensuring the success of Darwin projects. This individual is responsible for liaising between the partners as well being the driving force for the project team. This person needs to be central to the project from the outset, with clear understanding of the eventual outcomes of the project. Some staff-turnover is inevitable, particularly in conservation, but all projects rely on a small group of pivotal roles supported by other more peripheral roles. The coordinator, by providing a constant contact point, greatly aids communication among the team members and common understanding of the goals.

6. Time taken to clarify the above should not be under estimated

One of the common themes in all the discussions is the time it takes to develop a Darwin project proposal, particularly when partners are new to one another. Contractual agreements can be a particularly slow process but ensuring this groundwork is well done contributes immensely to the success of the resulting project.

Post-Application

7. An inception period is useful to revisit and adapt plans

Notwithstanding the emphasis placed on ensuring the groundwork is fully covered prior to submission of a Darwin Application, host-country staff were insistent that revisiting this groundwork during the inception period is very useful, noting that there may well be changes in the underlying situation in the time between submission of an application and subsequent funding. The inception period can be used to revisit the logic of the “problem-intervention-solution” and ensure it is still valid as intended. It was also noted that under the DFID Forestry Research Programme, the cost of a meeting among the

partners to clarify and confirm project strategy, goals and responsibilities was included in the funding.

A face-to-face meeting of the main partners during the first three months of a project is therefore to be encouraged. In the case of a new partnership, such meetings may be one of the first opportunities for the entire team to meet and cement the ideas and methods defined in the application. Such meetings should be encouraged and facilitated in every way possible.

8. Adaptive Management is essential, particularly in the countries where Darwin projects operate

Whilst a Darwin Initiative application requires applicants to be fairly specific on their methodology and timings of the work plan, there should be flexibility given to projects to adapt their plans as they gain experience and in the event of unforeseen changes in the operating environment. For many of the countries in which Darwin Initiative projects work, change, be it political, financial, ecological or other, is likely to be the norm. Consequently, adaptive management should be encouraged and supported, to take into consideration changing circumstances. Whilst challenges can present themselves in ways that require a project to adapt to meet them, it should not be overlooked that change may also bring opportunities that could strengthen the project and its impact, provided it is adapted to take full advantage of them.

For a project to adapt successfully, it is essential that both UK and host country partners understand the changing situation and have a clear grasp of the implications of such changes. Effective adaptation requires good mutual understanding of the situation, a high level of trust and an ability to take decisions correctly and quickly. The ability to do this depends directly on there being effective communication and a common framework for decision making.

9. Milestone Meetings are useful to review and evaluate progress towards project goals

The Project Proposal should identify times and periods when the core team will meet, and/or work jointly, either remotely or face-to-face (see Section 2, above). While these opportunities are important for the team to reflect adequately upon the progress made and make any necessary adjustments, they are also useful for cementing working relationships in groups that either work remotely or in relative isolation technically.

The work programme may provide opportunities that support this, such as training events, conferences or field expeditions. If none of these presents itself, then projects are encouraged to use relevant events in the Darwin calendar, such as the annual report submission date (April) to formalise such additional contact.

Towards the end of a project, such contacts are important to discuss the steps that may be required post-DI funding to improve the legacy and impact of the work. These steps could include, for example, obtaining further funding (e.g. [Darwin Post-Project Funding](#) or [Darwin Fellowship funding](#)), wider publishing of results of the work, engaging in wider networks, exploring new and emerging opportunities.

10. Capacity Building should be integral to project delivery

The ultimate aim of Darwin projects is to assist the host country to meet its objectives under the CBD, CITES and/or CMS. As a result, the transfer of skills and capacity to the host country institution(s) is a vital component in almost all Darwin Initiative projects. It is, therefore, useful to consider the roles and responsibilities of team members as being a fluid, rather than fixed, elements during the life of a project. Responsibilities of team members may increase during a project, particularly those of junior team members. An adaptive approach to team structure and roles is highly beneficial and should be revisited at agreed points during project delivery.

After the Darwin Initiative

11. Post-projects there is an opportunity for role reversals

Involvement in Darwin projects often generates ideas and opportunities for further collaboration between partners: Darwin Post-Project funding can support this. Its specific aim is to improve the enduring legacy of a Darwin project, with the requirement that most post-project funds should be spent in country. Engagement in further projects and schemes, including Post Projects, can provide an opportunity for the partners to review their experience of collaborating and to develop and refine appropriate niches, roles and systems for subsequent work together.

A well designed DI project should result in enhanced capacity of the host institution to deliver similar work with reduced need for input from UK expertise. Ideally, host institutions should be better able to capture future opportunities and be more capable of taking a leading role.

12. Fellowships can create a strong legacy

One avenue that is available to project staff post-DI funding (and even during a Darwin project) is the Darwin Fellowship Scheme. This gives opportunity for host country personnel who have been involved in a Darwin project to develop further their skills and expertise, using the experience, facilities and contacts of institutions in UK. Although this is primarily an opportunity to develop individual skills it can also be very helpful in enhancing and consolidating the legacy and impact of Darwin projects in the host country. It can additionally be used as an opportunity to develop more balanced future partnerships between institutions.

Conclusions

The contributors to this note recognise that not all of these recommendations are applicable to all Darwin Initiative projects. However they hope that, despite the diversity of topics addressed by Darwin Initiative projects through ever more diverse approaches, there will be some aspects of this note that will apply and will help to support planning and delivery of these projects. The importance of learning lessons from others is a central theme to this briefing note and there are many materials available to you in seeking advice on what has worked well including:

- The Darwin Initiative website and its project pages;
- The Darwin Initiative newsletter;
- Evaluations of Closed Projects; and
- Annual reports from individual Darwin Initiative projects.