

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2010)

Project Ref. No.	17/011
Project Title	A participatory conservation programme for the Comoro Islands
Country(ies)	Comoro Islands (Western Indian Ocean)
UK Organisation	Bristol Conservation and Science Foundation (BCSF) – known as Bristol Zoo Gardens
Collaborator(s)	Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (DWCT), Department for International Development at the University of East Anglia (UEA) , International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN, funded through the French Development Agency FDA), Cranfield University, Government of the Union of the Comoros
Project Leader	Neil Maddison
Report date	31 October 2010
Report No.	HYR 2
Project website	www.bcsf.org.uk/comoros

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project.

Output 1: Innovative participatory biodiversity conservation and community sustainable development model defined for the Comoro Islands, integrated into local policy, and publicised locally and internationally

The only activities planned for Year 2 under this output are communications. The Communication Officer, now part-funded through Darwin, has produced a detailed communication strategy for the project, and an implementation plan to the end of 2011. Activities already implemented at the international level include the creation of a dedicated project micro-site (see link above), with contributions to the DWCT field blog beginning in October 2010, and the development of a 'house style' to guide all communications. At the local level, a film was produced about the project's work on improving field structure (*aménagement*), which was shown in all villages at the start of the field season and proved a useful tool in engaging new beneficiaries in sustainable actions. Activities planned in the second half of the year include production of further films covering different project interventions, development of visual displays in the villages to show project progress and impacts, and hosting a government field visit.

Output 2: At least 16 local communities surrounding remaining forest on Anjouan and Mohéli empowered to develop sustainably in a manner compatible with forest conservation and management

The project is now working in seven villages in Anjouan, with expansion to a further two planned by the end of the calendar year. Advances have been made on many livelihood activities, both in developing new innovations, and in engaging more beneficiaries in those that have already proved successful. Progress in the new villages for 2010 has been particularly encouraging, showing the benefits of the evolution of the project strategy during the first year of Darwin funding.

- The project worked with around 100 beneficiaries during the 2010 market gardening campaign, which is nearly completed.
- Over 50,000 tree cuttings have been planted by over 250 beneficiaries in the first two months of the *aménagement* season, thanks to the employment of village 'relay trainers' who assist other beneficiaries for a small fee.
- The poultry farm in one village based on locally-produced feed is now producing around 50 eggs per day. A model for sustainable poultry keeping in individual households is being

tested for expansion later in the year, using the poultry farm as a demonstration centre.

- The Darwin-funded agricultural experimentation budget has been used to finance production of new seed (improved productivity) varieties, and for studies that will allow the testing of a loan system for cattle based on traditional arrangements between poor and rich villagers. The project aims to have supplied five cows by the end of the calendar year on an annual loan basis to assist with field fertilisation, using Darwin funding.
- Other activities in the testing phase include bee-keeping for honey (and related products) production, distribution of improved seed and tuber varieties, and packages of technical advice to improve yields in the short-term, including training on composting, crop associations and rotations.
- A Masters student (French) is nearing completion of a study looking at agricultural innovations in one of the zones the project will shortly be expanding into, as well as performing a study of wood-use.

Good progress has also been made in four villages on natural resource management, with planning workshops with local committees performed in two villages and two more to be completed in October 2010. The six-month plans produced have focussed on the development of tree nurseries and subsequent tree-planting, detailed mapping of water catchment areas including land tenure, creation of rules and regulations governing tree-cutting and agriculture, small investments in water infrastructure, and wider engagement of the community towards formalisation of zones, rules-of-use, and sanctions. One village committee has committed to creating the first area for wildlife protection as one of its core zones, with plans to be developed in careful discussion with relevant stakeholders.

Output 3: Protected area zoning plan produced from a biodiversity perspective, and biodiversity and habitat quality monitoring system created

Good progress on the monitoring work, with dry-season surveys completed across Anjouan and Mohéli, and ground-truthing of satellite images to be completed by the end of October 2010. The project developed and supported the first detailed study of the distribution and population of the Critically Endangered Anjouan scops owl – performed by a UK masters student – during May-July 2010. Results suggest that the population is healthier than previous estimate of 400 individuals. A report will be submitted for publication in early 2011. A programme of detailed ecological monitoring of water catchment areas under management is being developed to assess project impacts and the contribution of different agricultural regimes to biodiversity protection. A new expatriate ecologist, recruited and funded through DWCT, will be starting in November 2010, with a focus on enlarging survey areas across the three islands and capacity transfer to the local team.

Output 4: New local NGO created and supported to become a major independent force for conservation in the Comoros.

Improvement of the administration and management system (with the arrival of the FDA funding and subsequent project expansion), and advancement in the field have been prioritised over development of the NGO since the workshop in March 2010 detailed in the annual report. With these other activities now progressing well, focus is returning to the NGO development, with a study of legal requirements to be completed in November 2010, strategic plans finalised by the end of the calendar year, and an exchange visit to Madagascar to learn from other approaches planned for January 2011.

Monitoring and evaluation:

A new, detailed set of key performance indicators has been developed to take account of the evolution of the project strategy and activities, as discussed in the annual report. Poverty and livelihood analyses will be completed for each village during the mid-term evaluation to be performed by the UEA consultant in November 2010.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments 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.

The FDA funding agreement (totalling 750,000 Euros, but only covering activities on Anjouan), was signed a year later than planned in March 2010. Funding was retrospective from 1st January 2010 and continues until 31st December 2012. Progress in the field was subsequently restricted as the local management team adapted to a significant increase in administrative and management procedures required under the conditions of the FDA grant, whilst lacking an Anjouan Coordinator and a trained secretary because these higher level posts have proved difficult to recruit (these are now filled, after a considerable investment in time). Please see the discussion in the change request submitted and accepted by the Darwin Initiative in July 2010.

Mapping work has encountered problems due to cloud cover over much of the higher slopes in all procured images (two types of satellite images and Google Earth images), notably over half of the area targeted for natural resource management on Anjouan. The consultant from Cranfield University is working to resolve these issues. Land tenure mapping could be hampered after the student recruited to support this work through Cranfield withdrew for personal reasons, although a replacement is currently being sought.

Project expansion has been slowed due to the difficulties discussed in the change request, and because project vehicles will only be arriving in October as FDA procurement procedures have proved slow (note: these have subsequently arrived).

Lastly, the contract for the expatriate head of agricultural development has not been renewed due to concerns over their ability to spend considerable amounts of time in the field. This should not cause problems, with a recruitment process currently underway and a replacement expected to start in November 2010.

Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement? Yes, change request submitted and accepted in July 2010: a no-cost extension until the end of 2012 was accepted to allow project results to be evaluated on the length of the whole intervention, rather than until the end of Darwin funding in March 2012; the planned expansion to Mohéli was cancelled (though a feasibility study programmed for 2011/2012); and money for Mohéli salaries and the months for which the Anjouan coordinator post was vacant was transferred to the communications officer's salary and a fund to support agricultural experimentation.

Discussed with LTS: Yes, by email in July and August 2010, and in the Year 1 annual report.

Formal change request submitted: Yes, in July 2010.

Received confirmation of change acceptance: Yes, in July 2010.

3. Do you expect to have any significant (eg more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures? No

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan or budget should not be discussed in this report but raised with LTS International directly.

Please send your **completed form** by email to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk. The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 17-075 Darwin Half Year Report**