

Darwin Initiative Main Project Half Year Report (due 31 October 2015)

Project Ref No	20-008
Project Title	Evaluating community-based conservation agreements in Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve
Country(ies)	Guatemala
Lead Organisation	Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)
Collaborator(s)	National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP); Asociación Balam, Uaxactún COCODE, Paso Caballos COCODE, Centre for Monitoring and Evaluation of CONAP (CEMEC), Organización, Manejo y Conservación (OMYC), Fundación ProPetén, Centro de Estudios Conservacionistas/ Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (CECON/USAC), Asociación Bioitzá, Corozal Community Development Council (COCODE).
Project Leader	Roan Balas McNab, WCS Guatemala
Report date and number (e.g., HYR3)	October 31 st , 2015. HYR3
Project website/Twitter/ Blog/Instagram	www.wcsguatemala.org ; www.wcs.org
Funder (DFID/Defra)	Defra

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

- **Progress towards Output 1: Four community agreements in four sections of Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve (Uaxactun, Carmelita, Paso Caballos, Bioitzá-Corozal-Zotz)**

Implementation of agreements in the Maya Biosphere Reserve continue, yielding the following notable results:

Fire prevention: The four participating communities within the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) have successfully implemented the Fire Early Warning System (FEWS). This was implemented during the fire season (March-June), to better prevent runaway forest fires. During the 2015 season, 256 farmers complied with FEWS in Paso Caballos, 74 in Uaxactún, 21 in Carmelita and 32 in Corozal, for a total of 383 farmers assisted.

In Paso Caballos, only two minor fire events occurred, affecting 19.7 acres (8 hectares) of an agricultural polygon. Fire control actions were implemented immediately and as a result no surrounding forest was affected.

The involvement of farmers in Corozal had a direct impact on the reduction of vulnerability in Bioitza Reserve (managed by Asociación Bioitzá) and the El Zotz Biotope (managed by CECON/USAC). As a result of the new conservation agreement, all the actors involved in the 39,010 hectare landscape (Bioitzá-Corozal-Zotz) have strengthened their coordination to reduce the risk of forest fires and there increase resiliency at the community level. In addition,

Tikal National Park has collaborated with the other Biotzá-Corozal-Zotz conservation agreement partners to support the prevention of fires. As part of Darwin Initiative funds, the Biotiza Reserve received equipment for fire prevention.

Detailed reports for each site were prepared (in Spanish) to summarize the results of the 2015 fire season.

- **Control and surveillance:**

During the past six months, the four participating communities have carried out patrolling (i.e. control and surveillance) to reduce illegal activities, including illegal encroachment, hunting and looting of archaeological sites within the MBR protected areas. The community of Uaxactún carried out 21 patrols within its forest concession spanning 83,558 hectares; Paso Caballos carried out 6 patrols, covering 6,482 hectares; Carmelita undertook 6 patrols, covering their concession area spanning 53,797 hectares; and 11 patrols were carried out within the limits of Biotzá-Zotz and Corozal, the newest conservation agreement. Patrol activities were coordinated and executed in collaboration with partner institutions: The Las Guacamayas Biological Station adjacent to Paso Caballos; Tikal National Park, neighbour of Uaxactún and Biotzá; and the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP), the governmental entity responsible for MBR management.

In October, the Biotzá-Coroza-Zotz conservation agreement partner institutions (CECON; ProPetén, Tikal National Park and Asociación Biotzá) received a Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) methodology training from CEMEC/CONAP, our government partner. SMART is a reporting tool used to track the effort and efficacy of field patrols.

- **Xate sustainable management in Uaxactún:**

In October, 20,500 new xate palm plants were planted in the Uaxactún forest; planting was focused in areas that have been historically overharvested. A total of 168,500 plants have been planted in the forest, with an annual survival rate of 85%, propelling an increase in the wild xate stocks as a direct result of the conservation agreement. During this period, 230 local people have received monetary benefits through employment in the xate sorting-house, and commercialization centre (bodega).

Negotiation of a time extension for Paso Caballos Conservation Agreement: A time extension of six months has been approved for the Paso Caballos conservation agreement by CONAP. This extension will facilitate increased consolidation of results and maintain the participatory governance mechanisms prior to implementing a third phase of the agreement – for which funding has already been confirmed. On July 24th, a ceremony was held with CONAP authorities, community leaders (COCODE), WCS and other honourable guests to recognize the advances during the agreement, and to re-affirm interest in continued collaboration.

Progress towards Output 2: Report on the impacts of community conservation agreements synthesizing experiences in the distinct community contexts, evaluating biodiversity and poverty reduction impacts, and demonstrating value for money.

- **Independent evaluation of the conservation agreement model:** During the past 6 months, WCS evaluated candidates and subsequently hired an independent consultant (Dr. Bayron Milian) to undertake an independent review of the impacts of the conservation agreements to date. Dr. Milian, received an 8-month contract, with the goal of presenting the final evaluation by February, 2016.
- Between July 27th 2015 and February 22th 2016, Mr. Milian will review all project reports produced and undertake site evaluations to gather first-hand information. He will carry out personal interviews with government and civil society representatives, community representatives, and leaders of agreement “witness of honour” organisations. Community visits are planned for November 2015. The final output will be a detailed report produced in both Spanish and English.
- **Monitoring** reports are currently being developed by the Centre for Monitoring and Evaluation of the National Council of Protected Areas (CEMEC/CONAP). We are currently ahead of schedule with these assessments, having completed 70% of the deforestation fire analyses based on satellite data spanning all four agreements: Uaxactún, Carmelita, Paso Caballos, and Biotiza-Corozal-Zotz. These reports will evaluate the impact of the

interventions during 2015 and compare them with the baseline data on deforestation and forest fires that was previously collected. Final reports will be available in mid-November.

- **Socioeconomic monitoring in Paso Caballos, Uaxactún and Carmelita.** In September, M.Sc. Ronaldo Chacon was hired as an independent consultant to evaluate the socioeconomic impacts of agreement interventions. In coordination with WCS and partner institutions he is currently engaged in the collection of data using the Basic Necessities Survey Plus methodology (BNS “plus” the collection of data on sources of income and the level of education within participating rural households). Data analysis will be completed during the last week of November and specific reports will be produced for each conservation agreement. Given the recent implementation of the Bioltzá-Corozal-Zotz agreement (signed in December, 2014), a re-survey of those households was not included in this evaluation.

- **Evaluation of awareness of, and support for, conservation agreements**

The social evaluation used to measure the degree of knowledge about, and support for, the conservation agreements among rural participants (i.e. beneficiaries) in the four agreement areas is being implemented parallel to the collection of household socioeconomic data. In the case of the Bioltza-Corozal-Zotz agreement, two separate reports will be produced: one for the village of Corozal, and one for the members of the Asociación Bioltza, the grassroots organization responsible for the management of the Bioltzá Municipal Reserve.

Finally, the annual participatory meetings to evaluate the conservation agreements will be held in the remaining project period. In Paso Caballos the meeting will be in late November; in Uaxactún and Corozal-Bioltzá-Zotz the meetings will be held in February 2016. Dr. Bayron Milian, the independent external evaluator, will participate in all meetings.

Progress towards Output 3: Synthetic outreach materials to disseminate lessons learned, each uniquely targeted toward a different audience.

- **Internal Project Evaluation based on ecological, socioeconomic, and social indicators**

Roan McNab is leading production of internal evaluation. The document under preparation will initially consist of an extensive technical document or “white paper”, developed in conjunction with all project implementing partners. External specialists have also been recruited to review the working draft and to collaborate as external authors. The goal of this initial technical document consists of reporting on the impact of conservation agreements as initially outlined, using quantified indicators covering ecological, socioeconomic, and social impacts. Additional qualitative evaluations will also be included, consisting of specific case studies of agreement interventions, as well as testimonials from project participants and co-implementing partners such as CONAP. The paper will review both the strengths and weaknesses of conservation agreements as implemented to date in the MBR, as well as make recommendations for the future – including those relevant to replication of agreements in other sites across Guatemala and Mesoamerica.

We expect to be able to have an initial draft of the technical document completed in late December. Following the termination of this technical paper we will proceed to translate the document into Spanish, and post it on the WCS website to make it available to a broader audience. At that point, we will also distill the document, reducing the scope to allow for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

Progress towards Output 4: Policy recommendations including analysis of opportunities for, and limitations to the replication of conservation agreements across the MBR and the Guatemala protected areas system.

Following completion of the socioeconomic reports, the technical document, the independent evaluation, and the CEMEC reports, WCS will prepare a report to be submitted to CONAP specifically focused on policy recommendations. This is of particular importance since in January 2016, the leadership of CONAP will change as a result of the recent presidential elections.

2a. 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.

None to report at this moment.

2b. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS: No

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

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

Yes **No** Estimated underspend: £

3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully as it is unlikely that any requests to carry forward funds will be approved this year. 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 and would like to talk to someone about the options available this year, please indicate below when you think you might be in a position to do this and what the reasons might be:

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

None to report at this moment.

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 can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with LTS International through a Change Request.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk . The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g., Subject: 20-035 Darwin Half Year Report**