



Darwin Initiative/D+ Project Half Year Report (due 31st October 2019)

Project reference	DIR25S2\100072 No: 26-004
Project title	Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Sierra Leone
Lead organisation	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Partner(s)	The Birdlife partner - Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) and the Gola Rainforest Conservation Limited by Guarantee (GRC LG)
Project leader	Richard Dixon
Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)	31 st October 2019 HYR1
Project website/blog/social media etc.	www.golarainforest.org @Golarainforest

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).

INTRODUCTION

Contracts have been signed with partners, Gola Rainforest Conservation (GRC) and Conservation Society for Sierra Leone (CSSL).

Major procurement: one 4x4 project vehicle for GRC has been delivered to Sierra Leone. Procurement for research equipment will be purchased this quarter in preparation for the dry season research programme.

Staff recruitment: All new RSPB positions have been filled. The new Social Scientist, Dr Sorrel Jones, has been contracted but cannot begin work until February. Although we planned for this position to start in October, Sorrel was an outstanding candidate, with considerable experience in Gola Rainforest and Darwin projects. We decided that she would be such an asset to the project that it would be worthwhile to make alternative arrangements to cover the work scheduled for the social scientist between October and February. Consequently, the baseline survey was carried out by a locally based consultant with considerable survey experience, Mr Daniel Scholler under the supervision of Dr Richard Bradbury. Data analysis was undertaken by Dr Richard Bradbury and Dr Andreas Kontoleon. Data will be further analysed by Sorrel when she begins her contract. In addition, Dr Richard Bradbury, a senior RSPB conservation scientist, has allocated more time to support the project. The Technical Advisor for Research, Benjamin Barca's contract ended on 30th September and he was replaced by Alessandro Albani.

All GRC positions, including Research technicians, Community Development Technicians, Agriculture Extension Officer, M&E Superintendent and Finance Officer are in place.

All CSSL positions are hired, except the Community Development Coordinator. The recruitment process has identified experienced local candidates and will be filled very soon.

PROGRESS AGAINST AGREED TIMETABLE

Summary

The project is largely on schedule. A few activities are slightly behind schedule, such as land use planning, but we are confident this can be delivered without delaying project progress. Activities to develop Village Savings and Loan groups and agricultural training are ahead of schedule.

Output 1. The aim is to identify High Conservation Value areas within the Community Forest and quantify the rate of habitat loss through ground surveys and monitoring.

Activity 1.1: Existing georeferenced species records of presences and, where data are available, absences, for the project area have been collated, covering the period 2008-2019. These comprise data from bird point counts carried out under Darwin Initiative project 20-022, amphibian surveys, camera trap records of large mammals and the results of species-specific surveys for forest elephant, pygmy hippo, western chimpanzee and white-necked picathartes. These results will be combined with the results of an analysis of forest patch size and connectivity derived from a land use map created under Darwin Initiative project 20-022, updated with Global Forest Watch forest loss data, to identify the largest and most connected remaining patches of high conservation value (HCV) forest, and used to target bird and mammal surveys for HCV species (Activity 1.3-1.5).

Activity 1.2: The second analysis, currently underway, will also assess baseline deforestation rates using GFW data (Activity 1.2 and 1.7) and the results presented by end of year 1.

Planning is underway for field surveys for HCV mammal and bird species (Activity 1.3-1.5), with fieldwork scheduled to start mid-November. A team of RSPB conservation scientists will visit the project in November, to ensure the project research activities are on track and provide training and guidance to project field staff.

Output 2. Community members have an increased awareness of the importance of the forest and its biodiversity and take an active role in monitoring and conserving them.

Activity 2.1: Education road shows and radio broadcasts have been prepared and will be implemented in the dry season at the beginning of November. The project is working with the gender empowerment partner AGALS to develop educational material and train gender facilitators. This will be a continuation of the work carried out in the other chiefdoms through the REDD programme.

Activity 2.2: The research team has trained two Pygmy Hippo volunteers in two intervention communities (Mogbaima and Missila). Training covered: Pygmy Hippo surveying; identification of foot impressions/prints; identifying breeding sites, feeding habits; and, reporting. Training is ongoing and species champions training is scheduled for November when the RSPB Conservation Science team will visit the project.

Learning materials were distributed to Mogbaima community Primary school to support 45 pupils (M-25 and F- 20) and three community teachers. Training materials covered: key species identification, habitats and feeding.

Output 3. Project communities develop their own community forest land use plans to manage natural resources and protect the HCV areas identified by the project. The aim is to increase agricultural yields and increase production and efficiency of the agricultural land to meet food needs and reduce forest encroachment.

Activity 3.1: Consultative meetings using Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) were held at chiefdom and village level (in all 14 target communities), beginning the process of developing agreements with the communities. However, this process takes time to ensure that it is transparent and inclusive. During this process the concept of land use planning was explained but will need continued work for the concept to be fully understood and accepted.

Activity 3.2: Mapping community boundaries has begun using data from the REDD+ repeat baseline survey (collected April 2019) - results for key staple crop yields were used to estimate farm size per HH. The farm size was then multiplied by the number of households in each village to give a total community agricultural area. These calculations provided estimates for community boundaries. These boundaries will be ground-truthed through a survey scheduled for January 2020 - 100 villages throughout the REDD project area will be visited to verify the data.

Activity 3.3: Focus groups have been facilitated to set agricultural targets in ten of the 14 villages, the other four villages sent representatives and traditional leaders to participate in the focus groups in neighbouring villages, specific agricultural targets were set in terms of yields,

support required, quantities and types of improved seeds, development of cocoa nurseries and the quantities of cocoa seedling required.

Activity 3.4: The development of specific land use plans is ongoing, we are using the gender facilitation process developed with local Gender Empowerment Organisation, AGALS through the REDD programme.

Activity 3.5: Community meetings have taken place to plan location and type of agricultural/livelihood interventions in the project area. The main focus will be on food security crops, rice and groundnut. Cash crops will initially focus on cocoa. Agricultural training plans have been developed with the FFS groups in each of the 14 villages. Training in forest friendly cocoa production techniques has taken place in nine villages. Other livelihood interventions with potential are honey production, NTFP's (rattan baskets and wild pepper), vegetable plots, etc.

Activity 3.7: Socio-economic Baseline Survey: fieldwork and preliminary analysis has been completed.

Methodology: 535 Households (HH) were surveyed from across 28 villages, 14 target villages and 14 control villages. HH sample sizes were proportional to village size. Below are preliminary results, a full analysis will be completed by the Social Scientist.

Preliminary results are:

1. ***Household Food Insecurity Assessment Score (HFIAS):*** Average HFIAS per village ranged from a minimum of 0.93 to 1.88. Looking at the raw data, the HFIAS of control village HH's was significantly higher than that of intervention village HH's. this can be attributed to the work previously implemented at the beginning for the REDD project five years ago.
2. ***Household Diet Diversity Score (HDDS):*** Average HDDS of control village HH was significantly higher than that of intervention village HH. This could be because road access to the control villages is slightly better than for intervention villages, allowing for a greater variety of different types of food to be available on in the market. There appeared to be a significant positive effect of the number of children in the household, i.e. as the number of children increased so did the HH diet diversity, perhaps attributed to family labour producing more or collecting more wild foods.
3. ***Specific food groups:*** of the range of individual food groups inspected, fish & shellfish only the only food group found more frequently in the diet of control than intervention village HHs.
4. There was no overall difference between control and intervention village HH in probability of collecting and using Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP's), or in the overall diversity of NTFPs used. Neither were there any significant differences between control and intervention sites in the prevalence of sale (% of HH selling) of different goods in local markets, once controlling for village and HH size variables.

The Baseline Report will be included as an annex to the Project Annual Report.

Output 4. Target communities trial implementation of land use and agricultural training plans which regulate natural resource use in HCV-community forest whilst increasing crop production/diversification in existing farmland to meet community food needs and prevent encroachment on HCV-community forest.

Activity 4.1: Training for cocoa crop husbandry has started with voluntary participation of farmer field schools. The aim is to join these farmers with the Malema Farmer Association, which is a member of the Producer Organisation, Ngoleagorbu. Areas to establish community demonstration/on-farm research plots (1 per village) are now being identified and inputs (e.g. quality seeds for target value chains Rice, cassava, groundnuts, vegetables and cocoa) will then be provided through the Farmer Field Schools (FFS). Ten Master cocoa farmers and ten young farmers have started training in the establishment of cocoa nurseries.

Activity 4.4: Initial training for five village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) has begun. Setting up these groups takes time to ensure that protocols and transparency are clear to everyone. A number of saving rounds (8 months each) need to be completed before small loans can be offered for income generating activities.

In May the VSLA Team organized a one day launching activity in Jojoima to formally promote and explain the VSLA project and hand over VSLA materials to community members interested in forming a VSL group. Key stakeholders of the chiefdom and some GRCLG staff members were invited to participate in this activity. The VSLA team was introduced to the stakeholders of the chiefdom.

VSLA Kits (Metal boxes, Keys and stationeries) were presented to the Gola Conservation Development Committees (GCDC) in all 14 Darwin supported communities. A total of 420 (M-230 and F-190) VSLA group members were then trained on VSLA Methodology. VSLA kits were distributed to all of the 14 VSLA Groups.

One meeting of the Project Implementation Team was held during this reporting period. These meetings will be held quarterly to coordinate project activities and for learning and reflection.

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.

Heavy rains began slightly earlier than usual restricting access in July to October. Now that the dry season is imminent, staff are confident that activities can be rapidly implemented to keep the workplan on schedule.

It is difficult to predict how long the land use planning process (activity 3.4) takes, as it takes time to explain the concept, communities are often suspicious of motive and can relate discussions on land use to taking land away from the community. The process must be transparent, open and participatory. The benefits of planning, setting management objectives with the community and managing natural resources sustainably need to be stressed. The only reason to raise this issue now is that the activity may extend into the second year of the project.

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:	Yes/No
Formal change request submitted:	Yes/No
Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes/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. 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 rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary.

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

No further issues.