



## Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020)

<b>Project reference</b>	DIR25S2\100072 No: 26-004
<b>Project title</b>	Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Sierra Leone
<b>Lead organisation</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) and the Gola Rainforest Conservation Limited by Guarantee (GRC LG)
<b>Project leader</b>	Richard Dixon
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)</b>	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2020 HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="http://www.golarainforest.org">www.golarainforest.org</a> @Golarainforest

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

It was reported at the end of Year 1 that the project was behind schedule in a number of areas and this has been exacerbated by continued restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic. A change request for a project extension was due to be submitted following the submission of the Year 1 Technical Report but was delayed because of a high level of uncertainty in terms of ongoing impacts due to coronavirus. This change request including a request for a 6-month extension is now being submitted alongside this report. Status in this report is given against the current agreed plan / the new plan being submitted. Only those activities for which there was planned activity during this reporting period are included in the report.

***Output 1 (Areas of community forest of high conservation value (HCV-CF) in target area are identified and current rate of loss quantified)***

**\* Activity 1.3: Survey of forest birds and globally threatened species of mammals (behind schedule / on track):** Since April 2020 the survey of mammals and forest indicator species has been completed (31 camera traps deployed) and all data collected from the field. This data (20,288 images) is being reviewed and will be presented in a species report that will form the basis for species distribution modelling and the identification of HCV-CF areas by the end of December 2020 (Activity 1.6). To minimise delay in this work during the pandemic we choose not to survey the enclave in which one of the communities sits within GRNP and to not re-deploy 3 camera traps that were misplaced or showed technical problems. 4 bird point counts were completed in this period only, as the GRC Research & Monitoring ornithologist left us in July 2020. We have now hired a Sierra Leonian ornithologist based in Freetown to complete this work (28 bird point counts) by the end of December 2020.

**Activity 1.4 Capture of local community knowledge of globally threatened species (completed / extended):** With the completion of the mammal and forest indicator species field work local community knowledge of globally threatened species has also been captured. However, information from this activity was limited and therefore we are planning to collect more data as part of the work of the species champions (Activity 2.2) this year.

**Activity 1.5 Undertake camera trap study along Malema / Liberian border (behind schedule / on track):** The fieldwork on the camera trapping study of key biodiversity hotspots on the Malema-Liberian border to establish pygmy hippo areas of activity and potential elephant and chimpanzee migration routes has not yet started, due to limited ability to get to the field and a decision to prioritise finalising mammal and forest indicator specific survey work to enable the identification of HCV-CFs and allow progress in other areas of the project. However, during this period the protocols for deploying up to 37 camera traps have been agreed and the redeployment of the RSPB Research Technical Advisor (in November) means fieldwork in this area will start in December.

**Activity 1.6 Map High Conservation Value – Community Forest Areas (behind schedule / on track):** Whilst there is still some outstanding fieldwork to be undertaken this is not significant in terms of identifying where HCV-CFs should be located. As such the plan remains to identify HCV-CF areas by the end of December to allow work under Output 5 to commence this year with further information being fed in when available.

***Output 2 (Malema communities have increased awareness of the importance of maintaining forest and biodiversity for the REDD+ project and take an active role in their conservation and monitoring as a tool for long-term sustainability)***

**Activity 2.1 Run roadshows / radio broadcasts (on track / on track):** No roadshows or radio programmes have been completed this year to date because national controls during the pandemic meant that large crowds were not allowed to gather. As such both roadshows are scheduled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of this year and radio programmes will support them.

**Activities 2.2 & 2.3 Train community champions (on track / on track):** 10 champions have been trained in 5 villages since April in basic ecology and surveying of forest indicator species so there are trained champions in all villages. There is no clear difference in Activities 2.2 / 2.3 in terms of implementation. A request to merge these activities is part of the Change Request being submitted.

***Output 3: Communities in target area develop village community land use and agricultural training plans to regulate natural resource use in HCV-CF areas whilst increasing yields in existing farmland to meet community food needs and prevent encroachment on community forests.***

**Activity 3.1 Use FPIC to develop general agreements in the 14 villages (completed / completed):** It was reported in the Year 1 Technical Report that along with the verbal consent that we got in that year to undertake the Darwin Project we would in Year 2 get more formalised consent. However, in re-planning our approach to Output 5 (establishment of Conservation Agreements) and based on learning from previous projects (WABiCC) we decided that requesting more formalised consent at this stage, given the verbal consent and agreements between Malema and GRC already in place, would cause confusion and lead to a significant further delay in the project. Therefore, to fully address the intent of this activity any boundaries, land use zones and land use plans will be signed off by the natural resource committees that will be established and by the village chiefs, section chiefs, the Paramount Chief and the District Council to ensure that there is clear community ownership of the outcome.

**Activity 3.2 Map community boundaries and land use zones (behind schedule / on track):** Work on this activity was delayed in Year 1 as the Forest Cover Analyst was unable to travel to Sierra Leone to undertake a ground-truthing exercise due to the coronavirus as reported in the Year 1 Technical Report. Work has not been undertaken on the ground in this area due to coronavirus travel restrictions also the need to integrate this activity with community forestry work in Output 5 to develop a cohesive and effective sequencing on the ground. This activity will be carried out in the next 6 months.

**Activity 3.3 / 3.5 Facilitate setting of agricultural targets and training plans (behind schedule / on track):** A team of 12 staff from GRC undertook a PRA-based consultation exercise across a period of 2 weeks with the 14 communities in September to identify agricultural targets, develop village level agricultural training plans and identify community demonstration / on-farm research plots to be established. The Project Social Scientist, in the UK due to coronavirus restrictions, fed into planning for this work drawing on the findings of the Food Security and Diet Diversity Report undertaken in Year 1.

The most common activities and training requirements identified were:

- Rehabilitation of old cocoa farms to support inputs from nurseries
- Wetland rice expansion with inputs of seeds and tools
- Expansion of groundnuts, vegetables, beans, ginger, pepper and cassava planting
- Training on agroforestry, good agricultural practices and nursery establishment
- Training on the rearing of livestock

**Activity 3.4 Facilitate development of land use plans (behind schedule / behind schedule):** This activity was due to be undertaken in Year 1 but as reported in the Year 1 Technical Report was delayed. During this period a number of planning meetings have been held to clarify the way in which this work will be carried out in the second half of the year, during the dry season, to ensure effective sequencing of activities on the ground.

**Activity 3.6 Understand constraints in participation (behind schedule / on track):** Although this activity was scheduled to start during this period this was delayed by the Project Social Scientist not being able to deploy to the field due to coronavirus. The Project Social Scientist deployed to the field at the beginning of November and this work will therefore commence in the second half of this year.

*Note that advice from LTSI was to look for local resource to undertake the activity of the Project Social Scientist if it was impossible to travel to Sierra Leone. We considered this and would have taken action in this direction if we had not been able to deploy the Social Scientist at the beginning of the dry season in November.*

**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 Establish community demonstration / on-farm research plots (behind schedule / on track):** Following the identification of targets and training in Output 3 that happened this period nurseries will be established during Q3/Q4 and seedling s from these nurseries will subsequently be moved into demonstration plots in Year 3.

**Activities 4.2 / 4.3 Train farmers in improved agriculture / forest-based livelihoods (behind schedule / on track):** During this period 3 local farmers elected as cocoa buying officers for the 14 Darwin communities were given refresher training on quality assessment and procurement (Sep 2020). Further training will be given in Q3/Q4 following the identification of training requirements this period (Activity 3.5).

**Activity 4.5 / 4.6 Undertake food for work schemes (behind schedule / on track):** : In May a 5km stretch of the main access road to the northern Darwin communities allowing improved access for motorbikes to the chiefdom headquarter town / biggest market in the area was started. Because of the onset of the rainy season repairs to this access route were not completed and will now be completed in Q3/Q4. No work was undertaken during this period on the agricultural side as this will be undertaken in line with the establishment of nurseries / demonstration plots.

**Output 5: 14 Target communities have committed to protect HCV-CF in return for tailored agricultural training/ equipment to increase yields sustainably provided by the GRC REDD+ project through Conservation Agreements (revised MOUs) which will be embedded, post-project, in Sierra Leone's Community Forest Laws.**

**Activities 5.1 / 5.2 Support establishment of HCV-CF committees and develop by-laws (behind schedule / on track):** This activity has been delayed due to coronavirus because of the requirement for large crowds and has been re-planned to occur during the second half of this year (committees) and the first few months of next year (by-laws).

**Output 7: Project partners increase their capacity to implement the Gola programme**

**Activity 7.3 Build GRC capacity in financial reporting (behind schedule / behind schedule):** During this period RSPB staff have continued to work with GRC finance staff on project and management reporting through the development of a full organisational budgeting model (covering core and project budgets), improved reporting and governance on the cocoa

business account (separating these revolving funds from other costs). Progress on this activity has been impacted by coronavirus because RSPB, in line with many organisations had a recruitment freeze for 5 months and it was not possible to recruit a new Technical Advisor to assist with the installation of a new finance system in GRC. The position is currently being recruited and should be in place in Q4.

**Activities 7.4 Give presentations of importance of measuring social impact (on track / on track):** As 2 out of the 4 presentations were given in Year 1 the final two presentations will be undertaken once the Project Social Scientist has undertaken further work on this project to enable the presentations to utilise information from the project.

**Activity 7.5 Train GRC / CSSL staff in the use of social science techniques (behind schedule / on track):** Because the Project Social Scientist was not able to deploy because of the coronavirus pandemic during this period it was not possible to undertake any GRC / CSSL staff training even though this was scheduled to start during this period. With the deployment of the Project Social Scientist this will now start in the second half of this year.

**2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for Covid-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

- There is limited capacity in GRC in specific biological areas and as such the resignation of the organisation's ornithologist left us with a lack of capacity in this area. We have had to contract another ornithologist within Sierra Leone which was difficult given the limited number of people in the country who have the experience of surveying and identifying forest birds. However, we are confident that we will be able to complete this work without significant impact on the timing of the project and the additional cost involved is included as part of the change request but will not increase the overall cost of the project
- Delays in getting camera traps to Sierra Leone as reported in Year 1 means there has always been a challenge in Output 1 to get activities completed in line with the implementation timetable. As such we have been forced to make pragmatic decisions around prioritising to enable the identification of HCV-CF areas and will need to be flexible in utilising further information as it becomes available. These delays, exacerbated by coronavirus (see Section 2b) have impacted the commencement of Output 5
- Because of the project delays (see above and Section 2b) we have had to adapt the approach and are setting a very aggressive timeline for the completion of activities around Community Forestry and Co-Management. In doing this we fully recognise that there may be delays with specific communities going forward in terms of ensuring ownership and may have to proceed at different speeds in different communities. Similar work under WABiCC has taken significantly over 2 years which is why we are requesting a 6-month no-cost extension to the project, but at the same time we are looking to see if it is possible to accelerate delivery.
- In September 2020 the government of Sierra Leone bought in a law that increased the cost of employment of all staff by over 100% overnight. The project partners are still working out how to deal with this at an organisational level, which will inevitably reduce the capacity of these organisations and this has an impact that will be addressed in the change request.

**2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of Covid-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

- All RSPB personnel who were based in Sierra Leone were repatriated in March 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic, including the Technical Advisor for Research. This also meant that the Project Social Scientist was unable to deploy. In April RSPB was also forced to furlough a significant number of staff including this Technical Advisor. As such there have been significant delays during this period but as of the 1 Nov, we have been able to redeploy both of these people and are therefore looking to accelerate activity where possible over the next 6 months.
- All Sierra Leone based staff were limited in the fieldwork they could carry out during the period. This was particularly true of the period between April-July when there were travel restrictions between Districts, with the GRC office and location of the majority of staff in Kenema being in a different District to Malema. Up to the end of October there has also been a curfew in place and a directive for reduced working hours in Sierra Leone with offices shutting at 3pm. As such there has been an impact on the project in terms of the speed in which activities could be implemented which has been further exacerbated by the need for GRC and RSPB to provide specific directed coronavirus support during this period.  
The residual impact is that we have had to spend time to re-plan and re-budget the whole project and this is being submitted alongside this report in a change request, including a no-cost 6-month extension to the project.

**2c. 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: (alongside this report)	No (a change request is being submitted alongside this report)
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: £ (due mainly from inability to implement because of coronavirus)

**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 re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.**

**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

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 DO NOT send these in the same email.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to [Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk](mailto: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: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**