



## Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021)

<b>Project reference</b>	26-010
<b>Project title</b>	Know your onions: sustainable plant use in Tajikistan
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Tajikistan
<b>Lead organisation</b>	Centre for Middle Eastern Plants, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Kulob Botanic Garden Ganji Tabiat Zam-Zam Fauna & Flora International
<b>Project leader</b>	Dr Alan Forrest
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2021, (HYR3)
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="http://www.tajikistandarwin.cmep.org.uk">www.tajikistandarwin.cmep.org.uk</a>

**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).**

In relation to Outcome One Biodiversity, considerable effort has been made to obtain market information to inform PMSD and future planning. This has included conducting and summarizing 22 interviews with a variety of small and medium sized businesses that harvest and/or process the target species. This has demonstrated that a clear market already exists – especially for anzur onions (*Allium stipitatum*) to the extent where some companies are importing this species from neighbouring states and exporting to other states. This in some way alleviates concerns that the project would *create* a market that may lead to additional wild harvesting of target species. These companies noted especially the reduction in the amount of anzur onion being collected, processed and sold, and were unaware that these species could be grown commercially rather than being collected in the wild – and showed interest in being involved in cultivation and buying produce from growers. Smaller traders tend to collect their own products from the wild for sale in local markets. Discussion is ongoing in Tajikistan as to how to progress this information towards sustainable market-based activities that will contribute to both livelihoods and species conservation measures.

Species mapping from a variety of sources is ongoing, with additional herbarium and expert-inferred information identified and being gathered. This will input into conservation assessment training and species modelling by the end of 2021.

*In situ* monitoring has been undertaken at a number of field plots focusing on target species. It was noted that compared to previous visits there were favourable weather conditions during the spring of 2021 leading to an increase in observed plants of certain target species. However, in other areas a large amount of trampling by cattle was observed, including the removal of sub-shrubs that protect target species from trampling and grazing. It is clear that over-harvesting is being compounded by additional threats and that while a reduction in harvesting will benefit the target species the issue of inappropriate grazing remains. This is especially a problem when grazing occurs during seed production. Discussion with relevant stakeholders is planned.



Further seeds of target species were collected, with assistance from a number of project beneficiaries with seeds distributed to communities.

In relation to awareness and education, the majority of these activities are planned for the last six months of Y3 and early Y4. However, planning is already underway, a short film about the project is being produced locally, and a symposium in October 2021 will gather additional data from non-project participants to widen awareness within Tajikistan. With the easing of travel restrictions, early plans for the possibility of travel to Tajikistan or a third country are underway to complete training and project discussions.

For livelihoods and health, detailed discussion on how to progress PMSD in communities and further demonstrate success and potential income generation is ongoing. Markets have been assessed through detailed interviews (see above and examples and summary attached to this report).



For those beneficiaries growing target species, many were provided with jars, seals and sealing machines to enable local small-scale processing and storage of products.



Discussions have started with partners about the content of the National Report and horticulture sheets for target species. Additional data gathering and engagement will be undertaken at a symposium hosted in Kulob in October 2021. The draft National Report is on track to be circulated to partners and stakeholders by the end of 2021.

**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.**

Some ongoing delays relating to remote/online training and data gathering persist but are moving forwards. This applies mostly to species distribution data and its' application in species modelling and subsequently in conservation assessments.

Tajik partners have highlighted that engaging new families and households in establishing plots has at times been challenging, and the continuation of growing target species after the project is complete needs to be addressed. A particular issue here is growing onions from seeds and having to wait three or four years for a first harvest. Horticulture staff at RBGE are considering ways to alleviate these issues through the establishment of bulb standards that could achieve faster results at the initial stages, and that could also be applied to other bulb plants grown for horticulture, medicine and food locally and at Kulob Botanic Garden. Highlighting the successes of households that have been growing target species for several years may also alleviate this issue somewhat.

**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.**

There are some training activities that can only be completed in person/face-to-face – this has been highlighted by Tajik partners. Although enough knowledge and practical skills were available locally to undertake the project without this training, Tajik partners are keen to complete this and receive certification. COVID-19 travel restrictions have until now prevented this from happening – but as travel restrictions ease it is being considered that travel from the UK to Tajikistan may become possible before the end of the project, and alternate “third” locations for training are also being considered. As and when this situation becomes clearer, we will notify Darwin Initiative if funds need to be moved to the final fiscal year of the project or whether a non-financial project extension would be beneficial to complete this activity.

Some companies producing anzur onion that import from neighbouring states reported that during lockdown periods the borders were closed and no onions could be imported or exported via road transport. This potentially leads to an additional advantage of growing anzur onions locally as this would be more sustainable and robust to border issues.

**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: Yes

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.** 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. 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?**

Not at this time.

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**