



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2021)

Project reference	26-013
Project title	Conservation and poverty alleviation through sustainable ranching in Paraguay
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Paraguay – Chaco
Lead organisation	Wildlife Conservation Society – WCS
Partner(s)	Minerva Foods; National Vice-Ministry of Livestock; Faculty of Veterinarian Sciences – The National University of Asuncion; Government of the Department of Alto Paraguay
Project leader	María del Carmen Fleytas
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	29 October 2021, (HYR3)
Project website/blog/social media	https://paraguay.wcs.org/ https://www.facebook.com/WCSParaguay/

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).

With the relaxation of previous COVID-19 restrictions, in this period, we have directed our efforts to assist our beneficiaries in the implementation of palliative measures such as the provision of water systems and training in fodder storage, in the face of a strong and extended dry season in the project area, and fire preventive measures due to the high possibilities of forest fires following last year' record events for the same period. Despite of this situation, and in addition to these measures, we are making progress in achieving the project objectives as described below:

OUTPUT 1: IMPROVED SUSTAINABLE RANCHING SYSTEMS

1.1 Conduct baseline economic, social and environmental surveys: This activity was completed in previous periods.

Small producers (project goal: 150 families):

Whereas the goal was achieved and exceeded in previous periods, during this period we added 15 surveys with small to medium-scale producers, completing a total of 212 beneficiaries, due to the incorporation of a new community "San José II", with 15 members (53% women). This is a rural association legally recognized by a municipal resolution *IM 367/2020*. This community is located in Puerto Casado. They are dedicated to small agricultural and cattle production, and will be directly benefitted by technical assistance provided by the project according to what they expressed as needs, especially on pasture and cattle management and pasture storage to resist the dry season.

This community is developing small-scale agriculture that benefits all its members, in addition to cattle production. 100% of these producers expressed they need technical assistance to improve their low level of productivity and claimed more access to basic services (especially safe water). 100% of this community' members depend exclusively on cattle production and yet their production is extremely low, putting pressure on them to find other income sources for subsistence.

Large producers (project goal: 8 properties):

A total of 8 large ranches, totalling 196,688 hectares, continue to work with the project, distributed in Campo Nuevo (30,000 hectares), San Juan (22,000 hectares), Campo Grande:

(38,627 hectares), El Nono (4,000 hectares), Montania (37,411 hectares), La Huella (45,000 hectares), Paso de Tigre (6,650 hectares) and Rodeo Porá (12,000 hectares), all located in the proximity of *Defensores del Chaco National Park*, the largest protected area of the Chaco.

We continue to monitor conservation agreements with each large producer, checking the fulfilment of their commitments during each field visit. All eight properties have human-wildlife conflicts including carnivore predation on cattle, which we addressed with non-lethal predation control to mitigate economic losses in ranches and loss of wildlife. For example, LED lights have been installed in three properties (San Juan, Montania and La Huella), electric fences have been installed in four properties (San Juan, Campo Nuevo, La Huella, Montania), and the inclusion of donkeys in the cattle herd is currently being implemented in Campo Grande, therefore having 100% of the large producers implementing some non-lethal predator control measure. Following the proprietors' request, we have elaborated "no hunting" signs which are now ready to be installed in Rodeo Pora, Paso de Tigre and El Nono.

Our technical team initiated the second season of biodiversity monitoring via remote sensing (i.e. camera trap records) at all eight properties. These data will be compared to the biodiversity baseline to assess changes, especially on endangered species.

1.2 Deliver training for sustainable ranching:

During this period, we continued to make significant progress in this activity, supported by our partner, the Vice Ministry of Livestock. We have developed 17 one-day training modules including theory and practice, and reached 29 people in Puerto Casado, 96 in Fuerte Olimpo, 8 in Puerto Guaraní and 10 in San Carlos. Each of the participants represent a family, so the potential positive impact of this training is significant. Topics covered in these trainings include forage management, basic animal health care, production planning and types of pasture to secure food during dry season.

With our partner institution the *Vice Ministry of Livestock* and the GEDF-UNDP *Green Chaco* project (with whom we signed a collaborative agreement for the project area) we have developed 11 one-day training at demonstrative plots installed by our project in Puerto Casado, Fuerte Olimpo and Puerto Guaraní, reaching approximately 143 people.

These training events included technical assistance for pasture management and storage, also cattle management and pasture seed quality improvement. In addition, equipment was delivered to beneficiaries (electric fences, shadow nets, weed and pest control equipment, etc.) and basic animal health kit.

1.3. Deliver training for water management and treatment:

This component is finished. However, we would like to highlight the positive impacts of this activity on our beneficiaries in Puerto Casado, since an outbreak of dysentery that occurred in this town did not affect the people who received water filters from the project. We will include means of verification in the next report and suggest ways of scaling this up.

1.4. Assist ranchers for on-the-ground implementation:

We have made visits to large and small ranchers under this activity:

- Large ranchers: we have continued monitoring each of the 8 large ranches: Rodeo Pora, El Nono, Paso del Tigre, Campo Grande, La Huella, Montania, San Juan and Campo Nuevo, to advice owners on best practices for cattle production. During this period we have verified the implementation of best practices such as waste management, installation of signs to prohibit hunting, or for wildlife crossing on internal roads and in forest reserve areas within properties. Due to extended damage of forest fires during 2020, proprietors were very interested in measures to prevent fires. Under WCS' suggestion, there were two measures that benefitted all of our eight landowners: a simple management measure consisting of the implementation of firewalls, and an early warning system consisting of a Whatsapp group where they communicate to each other news about fires in their areas, weather alerts and other, helping them to prevent future events.

- Small ranchers: During this period, WCS helped small producers to enter the National Registry of Beneficiaries (RENABE) - <http://sgm.mag.gov.py/renabeJavaEnvironment/servlet/com.renabe.homelugin> This is a database for the identification and characterization of producers, as well as the services received from the Ministry of Agriculture. Their integration into this system will be a key part of the project exit strategy, as these beneficiaries are now registered as users by the public extension service, improving their chance to be assisted in the near future.

We also continue to use our demonstrative plots with small ranchers in Puerto Casado, Fuerte Olimpo and Puerto Guaraní to provide hands-on training to our beneficiaries. The practices

being observed are: *i.* Fodder storage, management and use of water shortage-resistant seeds; *ii.* Installation and use of electric fences for cattle management; *iii.* Water storage and distribution for cattle.

Perhaps our greatest investment and achievement was the effort devoted on mitigation of negative effect of the extreme drought affecting our project area, consisting in technical assistance on pasture and water storage. Supported by the *Vice Ministry of Livestock* and the inputs provided by our project and project partners, we were able to improve the knowledge and preparation of our beneficiaries to better cope with the negative effects of a long drought season, demonstrated in decreased livestock deaths, supplementary livestock food reserves, improved water storage and distribution.

OUTPUT 2: CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS

2.1. Generate Conservation Agreements:

We have signed three additional conservation agreements that stipulate commitments of the producers to conserve forests and biodiversity in their lands in exchange for project assistance: *i.* With the president of “San José II” association in representation of 15 members, located in Puerto Casado; *ii.* Elva Marecos (Candelaria community) in representation of 9 members; and *iii.* Tomás Arce (Galván community) in representation of 8 members. Another individual agreement was signed with one medium producer, Adolfo Villalba, also from Puerto Casado. With the total of conservation agreements signed so far, either individually or representing a group, we have completed and surpassed the 150 expected Conservation Agreements.

2.2. Monitor performance of Conservation Agreements:

We continue monitoring conservation agreements made by proprietors. With large producers there has been a positive collaboration in the implementation of best practices that reduce their livestock mortality rates while coexisting with carnivores. They are also not causing further forest conversion into pasture, and are adopting non-lethal predation control as electric fences, LED lights and inclusion of donkeys, as advised by WCS in the project. We also mentioned the early warning network through a Whatsapp group that allowed the early implementation of firewalls to prevent fire, reducing the risk of economic losses they have suffered over the past year from major forest fire. With small producers, the fulfilment of their commitments is closely linked to the mitigation strategies they are adopting in the face of the long drought, which largely rely on the project assistance, consisting of training and provision of veterinary and agricultural inputs, allowing them to improve their water storage and distribution, pasture storage and to reduce their livestock mortality rates through the use of medication provided for basic health care of the animals. The adoption of such measures avoids the need to further forest conversion as they can maintain their livelihoods adopting these practices.

OUTPUT 3: DIFFUSION AND REPLICATION OF BEST PRACTICES:

3.1. Elaboration of a final publication: this activity is to be completed by the end of Year 3.

3.2. Local, national and regional diffusion of best practices:

We continue to promote best practices through a journalist, Alcides Manena, hired by the project. The following are the links to the articles he wrote:

April 1, 2021:

<https://m.facebook.com/1743738715705735/posts/3922516764494575/?sfnsn=mo>

April 2, 2021: <https://www.launion.com.py/wcs-paraguay-fortalece-practicas-de-ganaderia-sostenible-de-pequenos-productores-de-alto-paraguay-158295.html>

April 3, 2021: <https://www.ultimahora.com/practica-conservacion-fortalece-ganaderia-chaquena-n2934407.html>

September 8, 2021: <https://www.ultimahora.com/instalan-sistemas-provision-agua-productores-chaquenos-n2960259.html>

We also hired a network called Red Chaqueña de Comunicación (RCC), which reaches the entire Chaco region, and consists of a TV channel, a web page and a radio station, who has been diffusing messages on the project:

<https://rcc.com.py/chaco/realizan-instalacion-de-sistemas-de-aprovisionamiento-de-agua-en-plena-seguia/>

Interview to project leader Maria Fleytas– September 9, 2021: <https://youtu.be/-12d3X3W84c>

Our partner the Vice Ministry of Livestock has also been promoting the project through its social networks, as seen below:

April 19, 2021:

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=2286093091534211&id=1187343951409136

September 7, 2021: <https://fb.watch/8Rh6u6YkGs/>

September 24, 2021:

<https://www.facebook.com/viceministeriodeganaderiaparaguay/posts/217696073726056>

3.3. Field exchange visits:

No activity was developed during this period.

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.

During this period, there were two major facts that affected the project, but only one of them was significant and unexpected: the extremely long dry season the Chaco region has been suffering since 2020, as seen in the links below:

<https://www.ultimahora.com/chaquenos-sufren-la-falta-agua-y-claman-asistencia-n2963998.html>

<https://www.lanacion.com.py/pais/2021/08/21/chaco-sequia-altas-temperaturas-y-vientos-son-las-principales-causas-de-incendios/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3-pEY9zgw>

This has significantly re-oriented the technical assistance towards containing and reducing the cattle mortality rates and addressing the low pasture production, considering the low availability of water. The baseline data re-collection for improvement measuring has been put on hold, since project priorities have been oriented to emergency assistance to communities.

Another fact was the change of municipal authorities on October, 10, which made the project staff restarts all conversations with the new authorities to plan for long-term sustainability of the project. But this last fact was expected as per the election calendar.

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.

During the first year of the project, due to COVID-19, we had to halt key on-the ground activities such as Travel, resulting in a slower pace of assistance being delivered. For that reason, on-the ground results are slowly being achieved, a situation which has worsened due to the extended period of drought that depressed land productivity and food security. This has further impacted our project goals. To address this, and since we have underspent funds at the end of the original project period, we would like to extend the project for 6 more months via a no-cost extension request, to secure the project expected results are achieved in full.

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/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. **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?

N/A

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. 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**