

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects

Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2022

Project reference	<i>27-001</i>
Project title	Conserving High Atlas agrobiodiversity for improved Amazigh livelihoods in Morocco
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	High Atlas, Morocco
Lead partner	Global Diversity Foundation
Partner(s)	Moroccan Biodiversity and Livelihoods Association (MBLA); High Commissariat for Water and Forests and Desertification (HCWFD); Faculté des Sciences Semlalia Marrakech, Université Cadi Ayyad (FSSM-UCA); Institut Agronomique et Vétérinaire Hassan II, Rabat (IAV); International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and Agropolis Resource Center for Crop Conservation, Adaptation and Diversity (ARCAD); National Institute for Agronomic Research (INRA); Slow Food International; Federation of Leagues for Women's Rights (FLDF); University of Cagliari; Terre et Humanisme Maroc; Provincial Directorate of Agriculture (DPA); Réseau des initiatives agroécologiques au Maroc - RIAM and DEAFAL.
Project leader	<i>Gary Martin</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR3</i>
Project website/blog/social media	https://global-diversity.org/hacl-programme/

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).

The project has made significant progress in the first 6 months of the third and final year of implementation.

Our work under Output 1, which focuses on the assessment, characterisation and conservation of High Atlas agrobiodiversity, is mostly complete, and our programme reports are being finalised.

The regional seed survey and biometric characterisations are fully completed (activity 1.1). Through our collaboration with community researchers in our three partner communes, Imegdhal, Ait M'hamed and Oukaïmeden, we have collected and stored over 100 crop species accessions of alfalfa, fava bean, pea, barley and durum wheat, the 5 key species of the project (activity 1.2). In total, almost 150 crop accessions have been collected and stored across the community seed banks.

This work was further complemented through focus group characterization, using [DATAR](#), where 41 varieties were evaluated. The conservation assessments for the 5 key species are compiled and will be published and shared in the next reporting period (activity 1.3). Moreover, Community Biodiversity Registers were completed for 6 landraces (activity 1.5).

Through the intensive work on the 5 key species in this project, a standard procedures manual for High Atlas community seed banks has been compiled and is being finalised (activity 1.4). We are working to ensure it is user-friendly for all community partners. This is a key resource for our programme as we explore expansions of community seed banking to other parts of the High Atlas.

Due to the intense 2022 summer heat wave, enrichment planting activities and continued programming of community seed banks and plant nurseries were put on hiatus over the summer and restarted in September. Plant distribution events and capacity building on seeds (activities 1.6 & 1.7) will recommence with programming scheduled for November 2022. These will be our last training sessions on seed collection, post-harvest processing and seed conservation in Imegdhal and Oukaïmeden.

In our efforts to disseminate lessons learned from the field to the scientific community and the greater public under output 1, an article covering agrobiodiversity conservation is being drafted and will be submitted in early 2023 (activity 1.8). Data is currently being analysed and interpreted by the co-authors. Since the completion of data collection with DATAR, good progress has been made in data analysis under *activity 2.1, locally-adapted crop varieties selected and tested using participatory varietal selection*. The forthcoming article, "*Factors influencing the distribution of varietal diversity of five crops in Morocco, using DATAR for data collection and analysis*," will be submitted to the peer-reviewed journal "Sustainability".

We have progressed in our work on *sustainable and climate-resilient agroecosystem and crop management* under output 2. The core of our work on this output is done through capacity building with producers throughout the High Atlas in Farmer Field Schools (FFS) and other capacity-building initiatives. 3 FFS were carried out in this reporting period; an FFS on water management and an FFS on plant health were delivered (activities 2.3 & 2.4). On March 28, the FFS had 23 participants, including 6 women, in Ait M'hamed. The following FFS on water management on March 31 had 20 participants, including 5 women, in Imegdhal.

Innovative soil, pest, and water management practices were exhibited in terraces and agricultural plots of 10 local farmers, 5 in Imegdhal and 5 in Ait M'hamed (activity 2.2); the team monitored these sites illustrating agroecological practices throughout the programme and used them as didactic sites for the Farmer Field Schools.

Our efforts on livelihood improvement have been an important focus for our project in the last 6 months, as these efforts have been co-funded further by a Darwin Extra grant. In this reporting period, we have laid the foundation for that 5-year programme building on the successes of the Darwin 27-001 grant, specifically in implementing a robust capacity-building programme with current cooperative partners.

We made great progress on output 3, particularly capacity building and institutional strengthening for rural cooperatives through an intensive workshop series. Sixteen participants, representing 16 cooperatives, participated in this series. The first workshop (18 - 20 August) covered "Market Analysis & Testing" and "Brand Identity & Positioning." The following sessions (15 - 17 September) covered "Food Safety Practices & Quality Control" and "Certification & Product Labelling," key training areas that will be further developed for ONSSA certification. "Project Management & Administration" and "Grant Writing & Management" were covered in the following workshop (7 - 9 October). Another workshop took place from 11 - 13 November, focusing on e-commerce and sales techniques.

"Tissoutine N'Oska" & "Amoud N'Oska" or 'Future Generations' and 'Seed of the Future' in Tamazight respectively, were launched in the last reporting period to bring together women of different generations and raise awareness of their indispensable role in sustainable agriculture. Following the launch, a series of focus groups and field surveys for seed entrepreneurship programming helped us establish interest among community collaborators in developing plant nurseries and internal seed collection, production, and conservation. Activity 3.2 on *access to seeds of locally appropriate crop varieties* has progressed with partner cooperatives and local farmers. Cooperatives Nisae ASKA, Aboghlo, and Amaguar operate internal plant nurseries that offer multiple advantages in terms of commercialization and sustainability of our biodiversity conservation initiatives.

Our collaboration with Cooperatives Nisae ASKA and Amaguar in Azilal are a cornerstone for these efforts, as they have produced aromatic and medicinal plants for their products for over two years, implementing their training on seeds, improving their products, and lessening the impact of their wild harvesting.

Embedding plant nurseries within cooperatives is one of our strategies to increase the sustainability of the nurseries. We are working with cooperatives to train women on seed entrepreneurship who are already embedded in a cooperative structure and are already commercialising local products. We were able to confirm interest in the establishment of nurseries and training for cooperatives on seed entrepreneurship; we plan to launch these programmes with Cooperatives Doutmaquite (Al Haouz), Demnatna (Azilal), and Taghya (Azilal).

Progress has continued on output 4 in this reporting period, as the programme delivered a national workshop on the ITPGRFA and dialogue on supporting High Atlas seed systems (26 July). Under outputs 3 and 4, the annual Biocultural Festival, coordinated by our partner MBLA, builds on the experience of the Carrefour des APAC in June 2021. From July 25 - 28, The Biocultural Festival (activity 3.5) took place in Azilal bringing together over 100 participants around '[territories of life](#)' and national policy-making with the Moroccan ICCA Consortium (CAM Maroc), of which our local partner MBLA is a founding member and lead coordinator. During the event, we organised a national policy-making workshop on the Moroccan agricultural legal and policy frameworks and their interactions with the ITPGRFA while disseminating our key findings that emerged when we prepared the policy briefs (activity 2.2). Our partners ICARDA, IAV, and INRA were participants in the national workshop and supported the festival's reach by getting the participation of their audiences. This was coupled with a workshop on seed networks, international dialogue with fellow members of the ICCA International Consortium, and biocultural events highlighting High Atlas-specific foodways and traditional practices.

In terms of written reports for output 4, progress was made to finalise the case studies on how High Atlas cultural landscapes - and GDF's programme to conserve them - contribute to Morocco's requirements under international environmental and social law and policy.

The Biocultural Festival followed our [Harvest Festival](#) programming in May 2022. The Harvest Festival celebrates the High Atlas agroecosystem and creates opportunities for custodians of biodiversity to commercialise their products in the urban centre of Marrakech amongst various cultural events that mirror a traditional harvest festival, or *mousse*m. As of October 2022, we have hosted 4 editions of the Harvest Festival. Building on the experience of the first edition celebrating World Food Day (16 October 2021), the Spring Harvest Festival celebrated World Biodiversity Day (22 May 2022) with activities spanning over two weeks. The Programme also

hosted a 4-day special edition of the Harvest Festival for Ramadan and Earth Day in April 2022.

Each Festival includes at least one market where cooperative partners travel to Marrakech to sell their products and participate in capacity-building workshops. The Festival continues to contribute to rural incomes through marketing events and long-term sales opportunities including the addition of their products to restaurant, hotel, and cafe menus and urban selling points, such as partners [Bey 961](#) and [El Fenn Hotel](#). Harvest partners have grown from 25 in the first edition to over 50 partners in September 2022.

2. 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.

Throughout the first year of the project, we, unfortunately, dealt with significant delays due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These delays meant we had to speed up certain activities. While not ideal, this allowed us to catch up with programme deadlines. We are confident about completing our programme activities according to our proposed timeline.

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

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS:	Yes/No
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Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes/No
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Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes/No
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Change request reference if known:

4a. 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: £0

4b. 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.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

None

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please see below.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS-LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**