

Darwin Initiative Main Annual Report

To be completed with reference to the “Project Reporting Information Note”:
(<https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources-for-projects/information-notes-learning-notes-briefing-papers-and-reviews/>).

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum** of 20 pages in length, excluding annexes)

Submission Deadline: 30th April 2022

Darwin Initiative Project Information

Project reference	27-007
Project title	Increasing the resilience of biodiversity and livelihoods in Colombo's wetlands
Country/ies	Sri Lanka
Lead partner	International Water Management Institute, Sri Lanka
Project partner(s)	Cobra Collective CIC (CC), UK Wetland Management Division, Sri Lanka Land Development Corporation (SLLDC), Ministry of Urban Development, Coast Conservation, Waste Disposal, and Community Cleanliness, Sri Lanka Department of Wildlife Conservation, Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Conservation Biodiversity Secretariat, Ministry of Environment Central Environment Authority (CEA), Ministry of Environment Urban Development Authority (UDA), Ministry of Urban Development, Coast Conservation, Waste Disposal, and Community Cleanliness, Sri Lanka Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka (FOGSL), University of Colombo, Sri Lanka
Darwin grant value	£344,670.00
Start/end dates of project	1 st September 2020 to 31 st January 2024
Reporting period (e.g. Apr 2021 – Mar 2022) and number (e.g. Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	1 st April 2021 to 31 st March 2022 Annual report 2
Project Leader name	Dr. Matthew Simpson
Project website/blog/social media	https://cobracollective.org/portfolio/increasing-the-resilience-of-biodiversity-and-livelihoods-in-colombos-wetlands/ https://twitter.com/project_cobra/status/1316718438505680896
Report author(s) and date	Matthew Simpson, Matthew McCartney and Priyanie Amerasinghe 12/05/22

1. Project summary

The urban wetlands of Colombo, Sri Lanka (Figure 1), contain unique biodiversity that supports numerous livelihood services. They are also recognised for the important role that they play in flood protection of the city. Despite this, wetland destruction continues. Although increased attention has been given to tackle wetland loss, government agencies need greater community engagement and biodiversity monitoring. This project develops a mechanism for aligning community wetland practices and monitoring with government policies. At the catchment scale, community best practices of wetland management, are being promoted to safeguard biodiversity, improve livelihoods and secure the well-being of 2.3 million people.

Colombo Wetland Complex (CWC)

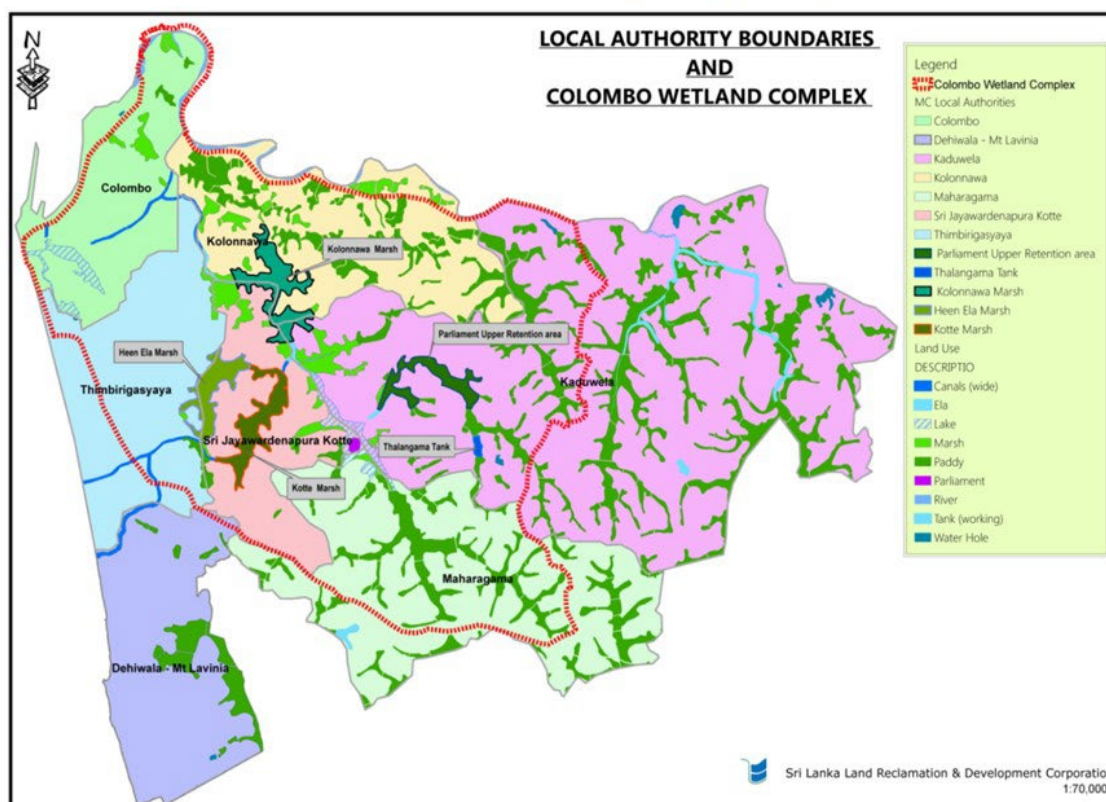


Figure 1: Map of the Colombo Wetland Complex (CWC)

The project involves the direct engagement of all stakeholders, including communities, civil society and the government, through training and consultation. The comprehensive engagement is being used to determine the following:

- The current status of Colombo's urban wetlands.
- Best practice community wetland monitoring and management examples.
- Wetland management principles to help inform policy.

Overall project impact

- Engaged communities of Colombo managing wetlands sustainably and delivering: a halt to wetland loss and degradation; biodiversity protection; improved direct and indirect benefits for households; and improved health and well-being.

Project outputs

- Output 1 Production of the Metro Colombo Urban Wetland Status report.
- Output 2 Identification of best practices for community wetland management and monitoring protocols.
- Output 3 Development of Wetland Management Principles.
- Output 4 Project evaluation.
- Output 5 Dissemination of project findings.

The project delivery plan is presented in Figure 2.

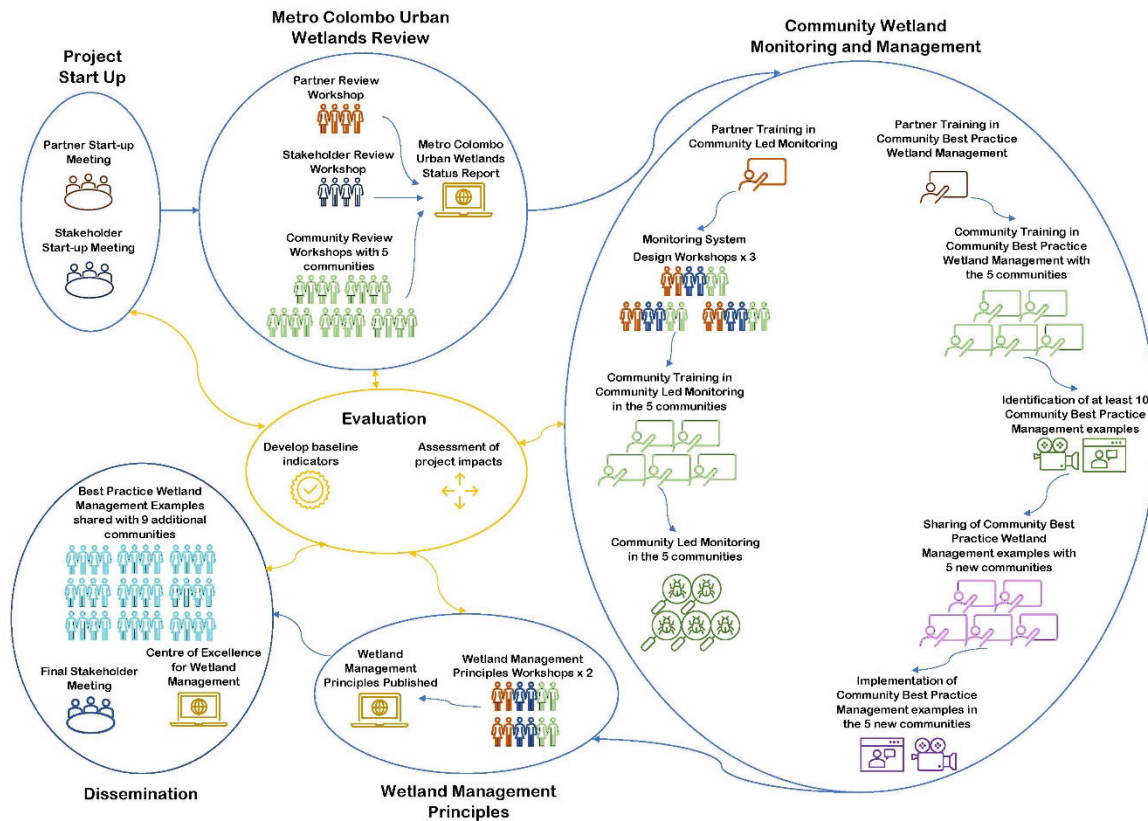


Figure 2: Schematic of the planned project delivery

2. Project stakeholders/ partners

The lead project partner, International Water Management Institute (IWMI) (Sri Lanka), is supported in terms of project management by the Cobra Collective (UK). The following partners are actively engaged on the project:

- Wetland Management Division, Sri Lanka Land Development Corporation (SLLDC), Ministry of Urban Development, Coast Conservation, Waste Disposal, and Community Cleanliness, Sri Lanka
- Department of Wildlife Conservation, Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Conservation
- Biodiversity Secretariat, Ministry of Environment
- Central Environment Authority (CEA), Ministry of Environment
- Urban Development Authority (UDA), Ministry of Urban Development, Coast Conservation, Waste Disposal, and Community Cleanliness, Sri Lanka
- Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka (FOGSL), University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

The project partnerships are underpinned by long-term relationships with Colombo’s community groups and key government agencies. Through extensive consultation during project development, communities and government agencies requested the need to link community initiatives and wetland management on the ground with government policy and practice and develop a more coordinated framework for management. Therefore, the project has been co-designed, and is now being delivered, with key groups in Colombo to deliver biodiversity conservation, household livelihoods and, human health and well-being improvements.

Although COVID-19 travel restrictions and restrictions on face-to-face meetings in Sri Lanka significantly reduced intended partner engagement in the first 18-months of the project, the project team still managed to meet regularly with project partners using Zoom and online tools.

The easing of travel and meeting restrictions from the end of 2021 has enabled much more direct engagement with both partners and communities. From January 2022 planned face-to-face interactions with partners and the 5 wetland communities selected for monitoring/study has been initiated and regular meetings (approximately weekly) are occurring to identifying good wetland management practices. Community members have been trained and are now implementing participatory video to record community owned solutions.

The CC team conducted a 3-week visit to Sri Lanka 17th January to 12th February. We are also working closely with an identified Sri Lankan NGO, *Emotional Intelligence and Life Skills (EIL)*, on the development of a mobile app that can be used by community members for wetland health monitoring. This app will enable reporting on wetland indicators that have been selected by communities and stakeholders themselves. It is an additional deliverable, on top of the Mapeo app being developed with matching funds as an in-kind contribution to the project.

In addition to the project partners, the project continues to have regular engagement with UNDP, and their Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (OP6). The programme has previously supported 14 urban wetland projects in Colombo, delivered by nine local non-profit organisation and is now moving into a new phase (OP7). Darwin project has engaged 2 NGOs that directly work on wetlands, namely, EIL and the Organization for Aquatic Resources Management (OARM). Dr Priyanie Amerasinghe (IWMI) has been appointed to the National Steering Committee (NSC) member of the Global Environment Facility/Small Grants Programme for Operational Phase VI and VII - (2021-2024) and is helping to coordinate activities and align project outputs.

We have also met regularly with Andrew Price (Head of Prosperity Section), Sri Lanka British High Commission, and members of the High Commission communications team. We have participated in events that they have organized, including a visit by the COP regional ambassador Ken O' Flaherty to the wetlands, and to the Blue Planet Fund introductory meeting, organized by the British High Commission (BHC) (15/03/22) at which we presented insights from this project. We are also formally reporting to the BHC on a quarterly basis. Andrew Price supported our application for a follow-up Darwin project on "Rights of Wetlands" that included a component on Colombo's wetlands, but was unfortunately unsuccessful.

3. Project progress

3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

Covid-related travel and meeting restrictions throughout 2021 again severely constrained face-to-face project activities. Since January 2022 when restrictions were eased we have been working to make-up for lost time.

Output 1

Activity 1.1 - Review of all data related to Metro Colombo Urban Wetlands

In Year 1 (Sep 2020 to Mar 2021) we held a series of online meetings and issued an e-mail questionnaire to all partners and stakeholders to help us understand the data and information they hold. This activity continued into Year 2 as the task of collection and collation was delayed as partner and stakeholder staff were often in lockdown, due to COVID-19 restrictions, and unable to access data held at offices. The data collation and review was finalised in this reporting period (Apr to Sep 2021).

Activity 1.2 – Workshops to discuss and assess existing status of Colombo wetlands

Following meetings in Year 1 an online questionnaire was developed, issued and analysed to understand partner and stakeholder individual perceptions of the current status of the Colombo wetlands (63 respondents). The Project Partner Workshop and Stakeholder Workshop in June 2021 (see attached meeting report Annex 1) finalised and agreed a set of criteria for how to select which wetland communities the project will work with. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 restrictions, meaningful interaction with the wetland communities themselves was not possible

until January 2022 but is now actively ongoing following national protocols for COVID-19 risk mitigation.

Activity 1.3 – Production of Metro Colombo Urban Wetland Status report

Data from Activity 1 and Activity 2, including information from the online perception questionnaire, were collated to produce the Metro Colombo Urban Wetland Status report. It was shared with the stakeholders for comments and feedback. This is attached to this report (Annex 4).

Activity 1.4 – Production of baseline indicators to assess project activities against

The Project Partner Workshop and Stakeholder Workshops in Year1 produced an initial list of project indicators which was finalised and agreed with the wider group in June 2021 (see attached meeting report in Annex 4).

Activity 1.5 – Produce training materials

Originally the plan was to produce training materials for delivery at face-to-face meetings. However, in response to the COVID-19 restrictions, the project developed all training as an online course. The English version of the online course is now complete on the Open University's OpenLearn Create [platform](https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/index.php?categoryid=491) (<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/index.php?categoryid=491>). The course is now available for partner and stakeholders to complete. The comprehensive online course covers different topics to help individuals engage with their community or another community they are working with (see annex 1 for the course structure). It is designed to help monitoring and management carried out by the community and to encourage engagement with policy makers. The Sinhala and Tamil versions are built in OpenLearn Create and are just being finalised with final translations of video transcripts and testing with communities. Although the online course has been designed for a range of abilities, knowledge and understanding, we recognised that not everyone, particularly from poor and marginalised groups, was able to access the digital information. We therefore ran face-to-face community workshops in January and February 2022 and project partners now have weekly meetings with community groups. See Annex 4 for description of face-to-face meetings including breakdown of participants in terms of gender.

Activity 1.6 and 1.7 Training workshops in the community best practice wetland management approach and training workshops in gender-sensitive community-led monitoring

Originally, we had hoped to commence the training in March 2021, but due to the additional time required to transfer all training to online training, and COVID restrictions meaning many stakeholders could not access online content at home, this only commenced in September 2021. We have followed up this training with face-to-face meetings in January and February 2022. See Annex 4 for description of face-to-face meetings including breakdown of participants in terms of gender.

We have also managed to secure funding for Luisa Charles from the UK to support the monitoring aspect of the project. She is a double master's Design Engineering student at Imperial College London and the Royal College of Art, completing her final year major project with the Imperial College Robot Intelligence Lab. As part of her Master's program project she is co-developing a low cost, citizen science unmanned Surface Vehicle (USV) kit for community driven water quality monitoring. She visited Colombo in April 2022 and held a series of training sessions and workshops with community groups to develop the USV water quality monitoring approach. The Open University has now made available two paid summer internships to support Luisa and a new member of the team, Thamali Wijekoon, to further develop the system from June 2022.

Output 2

Activity 2.1 – Undertaking free, prior and informed consent process

The project was reviewed and approved by IWMI's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and given ethical clearance (number 2020_29). This includes the procedures proposed for free, prior and informed consent. The online course covers free, prior and informed consent in detail and we have followed this up by introducing this topic in face-to-face meetings and workshops and

have ensured that all participants understand and sign the consent form before being part of the project. The English version of the project consent form is included in Annex 4. For field level activities the forms were translated to Sinhala.

Activity 2.2 Workshops with community groups to introduce community best practice wetland management and 2.3 Design of the monitoring system with key stakeholders

Intensive efforts were made in January and February 2022 to engage five community groups within Colombo to introduce and identify community best practice wetland management. Meetings with project partners were held initially to finalise the communities to work with, identify project partner staff that would be involved in the community engagement and to identify community champions to work with. Five communities were chosen, using co-developed criteria with partners and stakeholders, with very different contexts to understand the range of issues facing communities and the community best practice wetland management solutions occurring within Colombo (see Annex 4 for more details). The five communities were: Beddagana, Kolonnawa, Heen Ela, Madiwela and Kottawa (Figure 3).

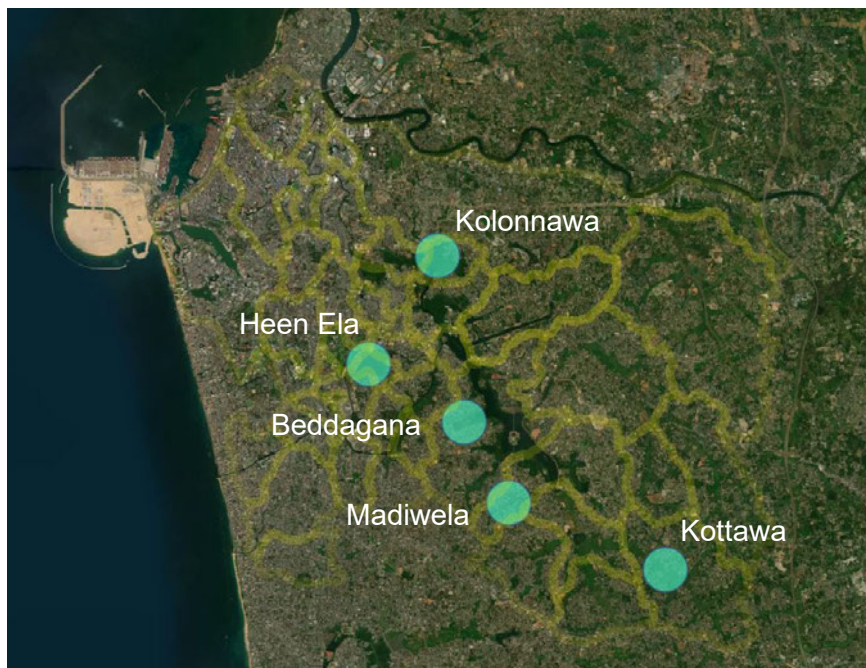


Figure 3: Map showing the location of the 5 selected wetland communities

The community groups have identified the challenges they face, particularly flooding, economic pressures and pollution and identified community best practice wetland management solutions to these challenges that some communities are practicing. The community groups have been trained in participatory video and are now recording these best practices to share with others.

2.4 Design and field testing of mobile App.

Emotional Intelligence and Life Skills, a NGO in Colombo, is working with project partners and community groups, particularly youth groups in Kolonnawa, to develop the following:

- A bespoke Colombo Wetlands Environmental monitoring app (see Annex 4 for more details of the questions developed for use within the App).
- Modification of Mapeo, an offline mapping tool, which can be used by communities to record what is happening in their locality and plan management actions beyond the monitoring capability of the monitoring app. This has been translated into Tamil and Sinhala and customised for the specific situation in Colombo so community groups can map environmental challenges and resources around wetlands.
- A Colombo Wetlands Environmental Data Visualization Dashboard website where users of the app can upload their data to be shared with others.

2.5 Training workshops for community groups in wetland monitoring approaches was undertaken in January and February 2022. The questions for the monitoring app (see Annex 4) were developed with community groups to monitor challenges such as pollution, flooding and

biodiversity loss that communities highlighted were issues that they face. The monitoring app will be functional in Q2 and communities will begin to monitor following that.

Output 3

Activities for output 3 are planned for Year 3. However, the Activity 3.4 Development of platform for sharing information has commenced, see 2.4 above, and Activity 3.5 Develop communication network and information chain through partner organisations to share community monitoring data on a regular basis with key government departments is an ongoing task which is being discussed and developed through regularly project meetings.

Output 4

Activity 4.1 – Assessment of project impacts using developed project impact indicators

The project impact indicators were finalised and agreed in June 2021 and the impact of the project will be assessed against these. Annex 4 provides a list of the agreed indicators and how they will be measured. A baseline has been developed at the start of engagement with communities in January and February 2022, through interviews and questionnaires. As project activities continue the impact of activities will be assessed using this methodology.

Output 5

Activity 5.7 - Share project outputs at national and international events

Presentations were given at public face-to-face and online events celebrating World Wetlands Day on 2nd February 2022 in Colombo sharing project outputs and progress.

Activity 5.8 – Establish and regularly update project websites

Project pages have been established: -

<https://cobracollective.org/portfolio/increasing-the-resilience-of-biodiversity-and-livelihoods-in-colombos-wetlands/>

<https://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/what-we-do/projects/show-projects/?C=1125>

Other activities

In addition, the project has actively engaged with the British High Commission in Sri Lanka, regularly updating them on project progress and developing a communication plan with High Commission staff. We have also supported a visit by Ambassador Ken O'Flaherty, Mr Andrew Price, Ms Ayuni Munasinghe (from Communication team) to the Colombo Wetlands and had the opportunity to showcase the project. We have also established close collaboration with the UNDP GEF Small Grants Program in Sri Lanka. Dr. Priyanie Amerasinghe (IWMI) has been asked to sit on their Advisory Board and provides an opportunity to coordinate our project activities with other organisations within the programme.

3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

Output 1 - A robust evidence base of current wetland status and management within the Metro Colombo region and trained staff in community best practice wetland management and monitoring approaches.

A review of the Metro Colombo wetlands was undertaken to develop the Wetland Management Strategy in 2016. Since that time an assessment of strategy implementation and current wetland status has not been undertaken and the condition of wetlands is unclear. Project partners, stakeholders and communities were engaged through online workshops and questionnaires to provide an assessment of the current wetland status. The Metro Colombo Urban Wetland Status report was published, distributed and presented at workshops to achieve a shared understanding of the wetland Status in Colombo.

Knowledge and experience of community wetland management and community wetland monitoring is limited in Colombo. The online training course and face-to-face training have provided the ability for partners, stakeholders and community members to increase their understanding of community wetland management and monitoring. Transferring the course

online has resulted in the training being available to many more people than the 30 we had originally planned and engagement is ongoing to encourage more partner and stakeholder staff and community members to undertake the course. Follow up training workshops will occur in August 2022.

Output 2 - Community wetland monitoring and management.

The five selected communities have identified the challenges they face and their community best practice wetland management solutions. They have been trained in participatory video and are currently producing videos to be shared with other communities in the Year 2.

Co-design of monitoring approaches, particularly the monitoring apps and the monitoring equipment, has taken place and is currently being developed for launch in Q2 Year 2. Training in wetland monitoring has been undertaken and will be ongoing in Year 2.

Output 3 - Development of wetland management principles to guide community wetland management.

Work to deliver this output has not fully commenced yet, but we expect to deliver the full programme of work as in the project plan (Annex 4) and detailed in the logframe. We are working on the data software web-based platform which will be operational for the launch of the mobile monitoring apps. We have also begun establishing the communication networks among community groups and government agencies through regular meetings and workshops.

Output 4 - Project impact evaluation.

Project impact indicators have been finalised with partners and stakeholders and data collection in the form of questionnaires for partners, stakeholders and communities has commenced and is ongoing. As face-to-face engagement did not occur until January 2022, this activity has been slightly delayed, particularly with communities, but a report on project impact will be published at the end of Year 2.

Output 5 - Community led wetland monitoring and management including best practices disseminated regionally and internationally.

Apart from setting up website pages, the work to deliver this output has not commenced yet, but we expect to deliver the full programme of work as detailed in the project plan (Annex 4) and in the logframe.

3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

We feel we have made a good start in developing an understanding among community, government and non-government agencies about wetland status, issues, management approaches, legislation and policy. The sharing of the Metro Colombo Urban Wetland Status report, presentations and workshops has helped deliver the initial engagement aspect of the outcome. It is too early in the project to assess the impact on livelihoods, biodiversity and water management but initial data collection against the agreed project impact indicators has commenced. The initial identification of community best practice wetland management solutions has taken place and the project, as planned, will translate lessons learned into project outputs such as policy updates and best practice guidance. Initial engagement, training and development has been undertaken of the project wetland monitoring approach. Communities have been engaged in the development of the monitoring apps and when they are launched it is hoped that in excess of 200 community members will carry out monitoring across the city. A communication and awareness raising programme has been developed to deliver this.

The impact evaluation indicators developed for the project (see Annex 4), in the logframe and further co-developed with project partners, stakeholders and communities are adequate for us to assess whether the outcome will be achieved or not.

Despite the COVID-19 delays and impacts we are confident that we will achieve the project outcome at the end of the extended project timetable that includes the 6 month no cost extension. This project has brought about the close collaboration of communities and the government institutions working and responsible for the wetlands (e.g. UDA and SLLDC). We have been able to appoint site coordinators who will lead at the site level and keep track of

project activities. The local coordinator has regular communications with each of the site coordinators and all activities are relayed to partners via email.

3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

Outcome Assumption 1: Political and economic stability in Sri Lanka enables the project to be completed.

In recent months, on top of COVID-19 impacts, the economic situation in Sri Lanka has become incredibly challenging with the country falling into massive debt and likely to default on loan payments. This has led to extremely high inflation and a severe cost of living crisis as well as power cuts, fuel, cooking gas and food shortages. There are increasing tensions with social unrest and protests increasing in severity and the potential for significant violence. The government has declared a state of emergency.

Comments: Despite the challenging situation project activities have managed to continue with project partners remaining flexible in their approach to delivering them. Communities are also remaining engaged. Continual dialogue with communities is allowing the project to respond to their needs and restrictions but maintaining engagement throughout 2022/23 will without doubt be a challenge as the economic situation will surely deteriorate further before it improves.

Outcome Assumption 2: Sri Lankan institutions, especially government agencies, remain committed to community led wetland management, biodiversity conservation, poverty alleviation, respect for human rights and sustainable development, and are willing to implement community wetland monitoring and management approaches to achieve these goals.

Comments: Despite the pressures on government agencies and the economic impact on their activities they remain committed to delivering the project and are happy to continue allocating staff time to deliver project activities. The project management team are in regular contact with government agencies to support them and we will adjust the work programme to be flexible to their requirements if needed.

Output 1 Assumption 1, Output 2 Assumption 2 and Output 3 Assumption 1: Appropriate government, non-governmental staff and male and female community members are available to participate in stakeholder workshops, contribute to the baseline assessment and attend training and retain their roles during the course of the project.

Comments: As discussed above, despite the challenging situation project activities have managed to continue with project partners remaining flexible in their approach and allocating staff time to delivering activities. Communities are also remaining engaged but continual dialogue with communities and project partners and stakeholders is allowing the project to respond to the needs and challenges faced by everyone engaged with the project. We are also monitoring the gender balance at meetings and within activities and will undertake positive initiatives to increase participation if needed.

Output 2 Assumption 1: Communities will have a continued interest in the project, and knowledge exchange will be sufficient for beneficiaries to successfully understand and apply community best practices.

Comments: We are actively engaging community groups, established and supported by project partners, in the first instance. This has provided a solid base to then engage further with other communities and groups. These established networks are proving important for developing a knowledge exchange. We are working hard to have regular communication with each community group by identifying project partner staff with a specific role of communication and facilitation and by identifying community champions to work in their own communities and help support communication regarding the project and to undertake project activities.

Output 4 Assumption 1: Project indicators are robust and provide criteria suitable for assessment, including the benefits across gender and various livelihoods.

Comments: The project impact indicators have been co-developed with project partners, stakeholders and community members (see Annex 4). The project partnership feels that these are now robust enough to assess the complex situation in Colombo and determine the impact of the project. These indicators will be reviewed annually to ensure that the assumptions of the partnership are valid.

Output 5 Assumption 1: All government and non-government organizations will engage with the Community Led Wetland Monitoring and Management Centre once established.

Comments: The project is actively developing a communication and implementation network among government, non-government and community organizations and members. This will be further established so that project outputs can be disseminated and enacted as the project progresses and beyond the project.

3.5 Impact: achievement of positive impact on biodiversity and poverty alleviation

The intended project impact was that engaged communities of Colombo manage wetlands sustainably and deliver: a halt to wetland loss and degradation; biodiversity protection; improved direct and indirect benefits for households; and improved health and wellbeing.

The project has started to deliver a shared understanding of the importance, status, challenges and threats to Colombo's urban wetlands among government, non-government and communities. This has been achieved through the development of the Metro Colombo Urban Wetland status report and associated activities, and through a series of workshops, training sessions and public event presentations (see Annex 4 for evidence). Once the App is ready, biodiversity monitoring will take high priority, identifying the common species and comparing them with past reports.

Wetland management best practice solutions have been identified and are being recorded. These will be shared among communities engaged within the project and other communities over the next year. An impact indicator framework (Annex 4) has been agreed by the project partnership, stakeholders and communities and will be used to assess the impact of the project on halting wetland loss, biodiversity protection, benefits for households and improved health and wellbeing.

4. Project support to the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements

The project is contributing to the following:

- Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) - This project will support Sri Lanka deliver CBD and National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan 2016-2022, specifically Aichi Targets: 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17 and 19.
- Convention on Climate Change (CCC) - The project will assist Sri Lanka fulfil its obligations under the convention and the Kyoto and Paris agreements in terms of both mitigation and adaptation.
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) - will collect data on migratory bird species and promote species and habitat conservation.
- Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar) - at its core the project promotes the wise use of wetlands through community led management. We will report to the National Wetland Steering Committee, through CEA, DWC, IWMI and SLLDC, so all outputs can be integrated into national wetland planning. Metro Colombo was awarded Ramsar Wetland City accreditation (2018) and the project will support stakeholder engagement/community management approaches required under the accreditation and under the Wetland Management Strategy 2016.

Working with the Biodiversity Secretariat, Ministry of Environment, ensures that the work of the project aligns with government requirements under the above Conventions and will ensure that all impacts will be mapped against government initiatives.

The project is building on several initiatives already developed within Colombo including the Wetland Management Strategy, produced in 2016, which called for greater community and stakeholder engagement, the development of community wetland management, increased capacity for wetland management among government agencies, improved monitoring and improved governance.

The project has had direct liaison with Ramsar Focal point, the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC). The representative from the DWC, Mr *Manjula* Amararatna is included as a partner and has attended all workshops and meetings.

Project staff and partners contributed to World Wetlands Day events, such as online webinars and face-to-face public meetings (see Annex 4), in Colombo organised by the Wetland Management Division of SLLDC and the National Wetlands Day by the Central Environment Authority.

5. Project support to poverty reduction

Colombo's wetlands are fundamental to the well-being of the 2.3 million people of Colombo, particularly the urban poor, with 60% of households directly benefiting from wetland livelihoods and products, such as fish and rice, and 100% receiving indirect benefits from flood protection, climate cooling and pest regulation.

Wetland loss and degradation are threatening Colombo's biodiversity and linked security of local livelihoods. Extensive pre-project engagement with community groups (e.g. farmers, fishers), civil society and government has resulted in calls for a catchment scale approach that: identifies and implements community best practices that maintain biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods; improves wetland monitoring to inform management and reduce flood risk; and establishes management and planning principles to enhance wetland resilience. This project addresses this call and will provide direct benefits to resident's livelihoods and wellbeing.

There are no notable achievements in this so far but in the next phase of the project best practice wetland management solutions that enhance household livelihoods, such as an initiative in the Kolonnawa community where community members are recycling waste found in the wetlands and turning them into gift items, will be shared and implemented elsewhere in Colombo.

6. Consideration of gender equality issues

The project positively encourages the active participation of women in all project activities. We have attempted in all meetings and workshops to use participatory techniques such as Miro whiteboards with online meetings and post it notes for individual comments in face-to-face meetings so all participants, irrespective of gender, feel comfortable sharing their opinions, experience and knowledge. We are disaggregating all meeting and workshop attendance data to ensure we track participation of both women and men (Annex 4). If we notice that women are not participating then we undertake positive action to remedy this situation. Currently our workshops and meetings have demonstrated 71% participation from women and 29% participation from men.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are a key part of the project. This is demonstrated through Output 4 being dedicated to project impact evaluation. IWMI and the Cobra Collective are leading the evaluation activities. We co-developed the project evaluation criteria, building on the project proposal, that will be used to assess the project's impact (Annex 4). These include the biodiversity, water quality and ecosystem service data gathered during the 2016 Wetland

Management Strategy work as a baseline. The review of the current wetland status has also provided data to inform the criteria and provide a baseline for the project.

Questionnaires have been undertaken by project partners, stakeholders and communities and these will be repeated annually to assess the impact the project is having. An annual workshop with partners and stakeholders will discuss in more detail the monitoring and evaluation that has taken place.

8. Lessons learnt

What worked well?

The flexible approach adopted by all partners and stakeholders to transfer activities, particularly training, online and their willingness to positively contribute to the project.

The willingness, despite COVID-19 and the current economic situation in Sri Lanka, for government agencies and non-government agencies to commit staff time and resources to the project and for communities to be actively engaged in project activities. It remains to be seen as the economic and political crisis deepens, how much longer this will remain possible; already government staff find it difficult to get to work and community priorities are not surprisingly, on other things.

What has not worked well?

The need to transfer all activities online has meant that the delivery of activities has taken longer than originally planned. The project was designed to be highly participatory and this has been harder without face-to-face meetings. An element of zoom fatigue made it increasingly difficult to guarantee participation in meetings. Now face-to-face meetings are taking place we are finding that there is more active involvement by communities.

Accessing wetland status data and information from partners and stakeholders has been very time consuming due to most people working from home and not having access to servers containing data or staff having slow internet speeds at home. Again this situation has now improved and we hope the momentum now achieved will continue throughout the project. We are ensuring this by having weekly meetings with communities.

Lessons learnt

The main lesson is that activities and communication took longer than if we could have met face-to-face for the initial stages of the project. To counter this, we planned longer time periods and additional follow up to deliver activities, such as having a longer engagement session from Cobra Collective staff in January and February 2022. The communities are engaging in multiple livelihood activities and household activities and so availability is limited primarily to weekends

9. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

Response to comments received in relation to the 1st Annual Review

We thank the reviewers for their comments and suggestions on the 1st Annual Review. Each specific comment is addressed below. Though the reviewer proposed changes to the logframe, we do not feel that this is necessary and hope that our responses to the points raised are sufficiently clear.

Comment 1 - How is social inclusion for the poor and vulnerable addressed in project decision-making, and in a “do no harm” context? Steps to be taken to ensure social inclusion in consultation, training, and decision-making relating to the wetlands should be made explicit in the log-frame with robust indicators (N.B. any changes to the logframe to be agreed via Change Request).

Comment 1 response – The project methodology is explicitly designed to ensure social inclusion in consultation, training and decision-making in relation to the wetlands. The entire modular structure is designed to address inclusivity and equity. Understanding the community

structure is at the core of the learning exercises. Details can now be found online in the training course (<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/index.php?categoryid=491>), which details every aspect of the approach taken within the project. In particular see unit 1 (core concepts) and unit 2 (participatory techniques) but note that social inclusion is a core principle throughout all aspects of the project method. The project implements participatory engagement techniques which have been specifically developed to engage poor and marginalised members of communities, rigorously safeguarding their interests and empowering them to engage with decision-makers. As explained in the online course, this project explicitly addresses engagement ethics and, importantly, engagement techniques which are focused on ensuring all voices are heard and represented. The main emphasis of the project, delivered through the training courses and engagement activities, is about developing on-going structures and capacity building of partner and stakeholder staff to improve social inclusion regarding decision making in relation to wetlands. A key element of this is in identifying Community Best Practices for wetland management. Community Best Practice identification uses the community owned solutions approach that promotes the abilities that are already found within a community.

Community owned solutions are defined as:

- The community needs it
- The community does it
- The community controls it
- The community benefits from it
- The solution is fair
- The solution is good for the environment
- The solution is self-reliant and not dependent on long term external support

Within the logframe the measurable indicator 2.1 'Number of Community Best Practices for wetland management that lead to maximizing biodiversity, and increased household livelihoods, identified and recorded' provides a robust measure for assessing whether social inclusion has been achieved or not. If Community Best Practices are not identified and recorded through participatory video techniques then social inclusion will not have been achieved. However, if they are identified then through the very definition of what a Community Best Practice is then social inclusion of the poor, differently abled and marginalized will have been achieved. We therefore feel that we do not, at this stage, require an alteration to the logframe.

Comment 2 - Poverty alleviation - incomes for 16,700 people are to increase by 15%. What remains unclear is how this is to be accomplished, and where the voice of the poor is represented in consultation and decision-making throughout the programme. Selection of communities the project will work with is crucial, and the project needs to be explicit in how this will reflect inclusion of poor and marginalised stakeholders.

Comment 2 response – The process of identifying and sharing Community Best Practices for wetland management is the main mechanism for delivering improved household incomes within the project. Understanding the community structure among the beneficiaries is at the very centre of the discussions. As such, inclusivity is assured throughout the process. Identifying and sharing the best management practices, that are already being implemented by the five wetland communities, with other communities will enable community members to improve their household incomes whilst delivering other benefits. A community engagement process, using participatory visual methods, is followed with the community to identify Community Best Practices that maximise biodiversity, increase household livelihoods, deliver flood reduction, maintain or improve water quality etc. These engagement techniques are explicitly designed to ensure that all community voices are heard and represented.

Based on criteria, that were co-developed, communities have been and continue to be engaged. Communities have been selected using the criteria co-developed and agreed with project partners and stakeholders. Unfortunately, as a consequence of COVID-19 restrictions, direct engagement with communities was delayed but we have used the additional time on the project to carefully select communities that are representative of different contexts within Colombo. We have been actively involved, through established networks of community groups,

in directly engaging all sections of the wetland communities with particular focus on working with poor and marginalized groups.

With the wetland communities we have also re-visited the project impact evaluation criteria to ensure community groups are also happy with how the impact of the project is measured. Wetland communities will contribute to the impact evaluation by collective action on the ground with project implementors. This will help us better understand how the communities perceive success.

The recent and ongoing economic crisis in Sri Lanka has hit the communities we are working with very hard. Pressure on wetlands may well increase in the near future as costs spiral and incomes plummet. There will likely be a need to revisit some of the evaluation criteria.

Comment 3 - A plan to develop training materials for delivery at meetings had to be amended to support on-line training. This is understandable and the project is encouraged to develop strategies for outreach to those without technology access.

Comment 3 response – This is a very important point that we have been concerned about but we feel that the online course, in addition to face-to-face engagement we have now commenced, will actually allow us to engage with more people than we had originally intended. Partners have also reported that with the COVID-19 situation, many individuals were purchasing phones for educational purposes. This has presented a new opportunity emerging with COVID-19 especially among poor communities. The engagement we have now developed is more flexible in terms of the timing of engagement. For example, if people cannot attend some face-to-face meetings or training they will be able to follow up with online content. We are also aware that not all community members have digital access so we now have a programme where face-to-face engagement is delivered for these community members. We are adopting a strategic approach for school children and working groups.

Comment 4 - Online training is a good substitute for face-to-face training given COVID restrictions: the project should state how it will measure success on its online platform.

Comment 4 response – The online course enrolment, completion of individual units and coursework are all automatically recorded on the platform so we can analyse these data to measure the success of the platforms. We are confident that the local language translations will boost and enhance the understanding and engagement.

Comment 5 - Flexibility is encouraged from Darwin to accommodate the impact COVID will continue to have on opportunity for community and other training, while the project assesses options for delivery and M&E to track progress.

Comment 5 response – We greatly appreciate the flexibility that has been allowed the project to date. As discussed, community engagement has been the biggest challenge for us due to COVID-19 restrictions but with the 6 month no cost extension we are confident we can still deliver the project as intended.

Comment 6 - The biological aspects of the project appear well-thought through, but social inclusion and poverty aspects seem less clear and include development jargon. The project should be explicit about how poverty-related SDGs are accommodated and how the project will monitor progress.

Comment 6 response – The project impact indicators have now been developed, see Annex 4, and are now being implemented since community engagement has now commenced. These will measure poverty-related aspects of the project.

Comment 7 - The timelines in the project logframe are not always specific, and the project is recommended to set one up to assist in future reviews, and to contact Darwin should a Covid-related extension be needed. At the current time there is no reason to assume the project is not

on track concerning progress towards outputs, outcome, and impact, but clear timebound targets are needed to clarify further.

Comment 7 response – As mentioned above we have requested and been approved for a 6-month no cost extension and have developed an amended work programme which reflects this. This is presented in Annex 4.

Comment 8 - The project is still identifying project impact indicators. These are needed urgently as communities are engaged to verify that targets are being met.

Comment 8 response – These have now been developed, see Annex 4, and are being fully implemented now community engagement has commenced.

10. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

Not applicable.

11. Sustainability and legacy

Although the project is still within the first phase we have reached and engaged a large number of stakeholders (23 organisations) and developed a communication strategy with the Prosperity Division of the British High Commission. Our planned exit strategy is still valid and we will undertake more communication and dissemination activities now that we have started direct engagement with communities.

12. Darwin identity

All publicity material including project briefs and the project brochure, meeting and workshop presentations, official invitations etc. have included the Darwin Initiative logo and explain where the funds, for the project, have come from and recognised the UK Government's contribution.

The project is a distinct project and referred to in all communications as the Darwin Initiative project.

Among the project partners there is familiarisation of the Darwin Initiative and we are building the same level of understanding among the wider stakeholder group.

IWMI and Cobra Collective have been publicising the project via their Twitter accounts @IWMI_ and @project_cobra, respectively and link to the @Darwin_Defra account.

13. Impact of COVID-19 on project delivery

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the project as UK staff could not travel to Sri Lanka and face-to-face meetings in Sri Lanka, up until January 2022, were not possible.

As discussed, we responded by holding all meetings and workshops online and spending a significant amount of time transferring all training materials onto an online platform. We requested and have had agreed a contract change to reflect this and transferred the travel and subsistence budget for 2020/21 Q2, Q3 and Q4 to staff time to help develop the online course.

Engaging directly with communities was initially a challenge but at the start of 2022 we were able to do this. We organised meetings outside or in open temple structures and all participants wore masks to ensure we worked within national COVID-19 restrictions.

The pandemic, and how we have responded, has demonstrated that many activities can be delivered online and via virtual meetings without having a detrimental impact on the delivery of the project. This shift to online working will help to reduce the overall carbon impact of the project and is something that project partners will do more of during the entire project.

The project will be promoting a one health approach to urban wetlands, which will be identifying and sharing management practices that maintain and respect the health of nature and human

health. It is hoped that lessons learnt from the project will help reduce the negative relationships with nature that have led to health issues such as COVID-19.

14. Safeguarding

Please tick this box if any safeguarding or human rights violations have occurred during this financial year.

If you have ticked the box, please ensure these are reported to ODA.safeguarding@defra.gov.uk as indicated in the T&Cs.

No safeguarding or human rights violations occurred in 2021/22.

15. Project expenditure

Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022)

Project spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2021/22 Grant (£)	2021/22 Total Darwin Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs (see below)	██████████	██████████	██████	
Consultancy costs	██████████	██████████	██████	
Overhead Costs	██████████	██████████	██████	
Travel and subsistence	██████████	██████████	██████	Having not been able to travel throughout 2021, an extended 3 week visit was undertaken in January/February 2022. This was more expensive than anticipated.
Operating Costs	██████████	██████████	██████	Due to CD-19 restrictions and the need to move activities online, operating costs were less than originally anticipated.
Capital items (see below)	██████████	██████████	██████	Due to CD-19 pandemic an inability to do fieldwork it has made no sense to buy equipment. In Q4 we purchased tablets for participatory video, but this was considerably less than had been budgeted.
Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)	-	-	-	
Others (see below)	██████████	██████████	██████	Due to CD-19 restrictions and the need to move activities online, "other" costs were less than originally anticipated.
TOTAL	██████████	██████████	██████	Due primarily to CD-19 delays the overall project underspend is 16%. We have submit a request to allow transfer of these unspent funds to next 2022/23.

16. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements of your project during the reporting period (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes

We anticipate having something for this section next year.

Checklist for submission

	Check
Different reporting templates have different questions, and it is important you use the correct one. Have you checked you have used the correct template (checking fund, type of report (i.e. Annual or Final), and year) and deleted the blue guidance text before submission?	
Is the report less than 10MB? If so, please email to Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk putting the project number in the Subject line.	
Is your report more than 10MB? If so, please discuss with Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk about the best way to deliver the report, putting the project number in the Subject line.	
Have you included means of verification? You should not submit every project document, but the main outputs and a selection of the others would strengthen the report.	
Do you have hard copies of material you need to submit with the report? If so, please make this clear in the covering email and ensure all material is marked with the project number. However, we would expect that most material will now be electronic.	
Have you involved your partners in preparation of the report and named the main contributors	
Have you completed the Project Expenditure table fully?	
Do not include claim forms or other communications with this report.	