

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>27-009</i>
Project title	Community based integrated catchment management to conserve the Upper Chindwin River
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Myanmar
Lead partner	Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)
Partner(s)	Myanmar Environment Institute (MEI) The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UK-CEH)
Project leader	<i>Thanapon Piman</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.sei.org/perspectives/community-comanagement-protect-wetlands-biodiversity-chindwin-river-basin/

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).

Output 1. Baseline assessment of physical conditions, ecosystem services, key biodiversity hotspots and habitats, and existing practices of livelihood on water and land management, informing an endorsed habitat restoration plan and CAPs development.

Activity 1.1 Desk study to collect relevant information in the project area from previous and existing works (100% progress).

Relevant data and information have been collected and results have been synthesized on biodiversity, wetland related policies and restoration and conservation efforts within Myanmar along with required GIS data. Socio-economic data will be collected during the wetland baseline assessment conducted in July 2022.

Activity 1.2 Conduct GIS mapping to identify habitats, wetlands and potential nine target villages and key threats (85% progress).

Potential wetland sites have been identified using the LULC map of 2020. Rapid assessment survey was carried out for the selected ten wetlands in 2021 out of which 5 wetlands were prioritized for the full baseline survey conducted in July 2022. The LULC maps have also been validated using sample data points from the field using data from the rapid assessment survey.

Activity 1.3 Organize implementation meeting to introduce the project, conduct stakeholder mapping including women and youth groups and pre-survey (65% progress).

Since the project team was able to travel to Hkamti area, as a part of the full baseline survey conducted in July 2022, interactions with the local communities were initiated and they made significant contribution to data collection process and participated in FGDs which led to the identification of major threats and challenges faced by wetlands and some livelihood challenges. Village committees, ensuring women participation and leadership wherever possible, have been formed at four of the wetlands associated villages and these committees will be supporting the implementation and monitoring of project activities in the field. Due to the current political regime in Myanmar, the project has not been able to contact any of the government stakeholders.

Activity 1.4 Develop assessment and monitoring framework and survey questionnaire for the baseline survey based on RAWES Toolkit (100% progress).

WWT, MEI and SEI have together developed an assessment and monitoring framework based on RAWES and R-METT. This framework was applied to identify five priority wetlands in the Upper Chindwin Basin during the rapid field assessment and full baseline survey for these wetlands was completed in the month of July 2022.

Activity 1.5 Conduct biodiversity baseline survey (60% progress).

Rapid biodiversity surveys were led by MEI for ten selected wetlands in November 2021. Full baseline survey for biodiversity in five prioritized wetlands were led by the MEI team in the month of July 2022 which included floral (herbs, shrubs, trees, and climbers) and faunal surveys (for fish, butterfly, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals).

Activity 1.6 Develop assessment and monitoring framework and survey questionnaire for the socio-economic baseline survey (50% progress).

A full baseline survey manual was designed to conduct the full baseline survey at four villages dependent on five priority villages in the Upper Chindwin basin. The survey manual provided guidance on i). conducting Focus group discussions (FGDs) with local communities; ii). included an in-depth survey questionnaire seeking information on two main aspects socioeconomics and livelihoods and attitude, preference, and dependence on wetlands and iii). biodiversity survey protocol.

Activity 1.7 Conduct baseline survey at selected five villages and monitoring programme at start and end of the project (60% progress).

Baseline survey was conducted at the five priority villages in the month of July 2022 by SEI, MEI, and our local partners NSNO following an online training programme early in July 2022. Focus group discussions were also conducted in each of these villages following the guidelines

from the manual to identify needs of the community, manage expectation and to promote and ensure meaningful participation.

Activity 1.8 Analyse survey data and prepare the baseline report including detailed GIS maps. (85% progress)

Survey data analysis has been completed and a baseline survey report has been prepared for the five priority villages which highlights key implementation priorities, establishment of village committees, identification of monitoring indicators and a way forward. GIS maps for these villages will be updated by UKCEH to account for hydrological characteristics of the wetlands based on the information collected from the field during January 2023.

Activity 1.9 Expert working group workshop to agree on optimal ecological habitat requirements and strategies and ideal locations of habitat restoration (15% progress)

Expert working group workshop is planned to be conducted in the month of February-March 2023 with participation of experts from MEI, WWT and UKCEH. This workshop will focus on setting monitoring priorities and designing strategies for habitat restoration and ecological conservation in the selected wetland areas keeping in mind the limited time for project implementation and impact maximization.

Output 2. Community Action Plans (CAP) focusing on integrated water-land ecosystem measures developed for nine villages, implemented in three priority villages.

Activity 2.1 Formulate village groups from selected four villages for developing CAP based on stakeholder mapping (100% progress)

Villages working committees or village groups from selected four villages have been formulated with participation from women as well. Due to the current political conditions in the country, the project has not been able to interact with any of the government stakeholders in these villages. The project now aims to work closely with these community groups to implement project activities and lead impact monitoring and reporting.

Activity 2.3 Prepare draft CAP and discuss in the multi-stakeholder consultation in Year 1 to receive recommendations and select three pilot villages for implementation (65% progress).

Desk review of best practices for community conservation measures including agriculture, soil, water, and forest management along with ecosystem restoration and sustainable management has been completed. This synthesis will help the project team to lead the discussions with the village groups for implementation of water-land ecosystem measures in priority villages and design the community training products for implementation and inducing behavioural change in the communities.

Activity 2.5 Conduct training for the farmers in the selected four pilot villages on integrated land-water management practices. (25% progress).

A 2- day training programme on fish farming has been designed by the Fisheries expert of the project based on his assessment conducted in the month of July 2022. This training aims to support livelihood diversification in the wetland area and to reduce the pressure on wetland resources. The training will be conducted in March 2023 subject to political conditions and permissions in the area.

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.

Due to the political unrest/coup in Myanmar, the project's field implementation and surveys have suffered delays. This has resulted in slow implementation and progress of activities under output 1 and 2 whereas the project has not been able to interact with any government stakeholders and/or implementors.

Despite the challenges presented by the current governance regime in Myanmar and restricted travel to Myanmar through International partners policies, the project has increased its reliance on local partners and local CSOs to lead data collection activities with handholding support, training, and guidance from international experts of SEI, UKCEH and WWT. Local fisheries expert provided additional assistance in assessing alternative livelihood options such as fish farming.

Using an adaptive approach, project has been in constant touch with the international partners through online meetings and interactions and was able to design a manual to train the Myanmar colleagues of SEI, local partner (MEI) and local CSO (NSNO) on data collection methods for baseline survey. Due to the current political situation in Myanmar, the project has also submitted a formal change request to NIRAS-LTS International.

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

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes

Change request reference if known: N/A

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: ████████

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?

The local partner in Myanmar has raised the issue on significant loss of the budget due to rate of exchange during money transfer to Myanmar. They have a question how the project can help/cover this loss.

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 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**