

## 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: 30<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

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### Darwin Initiative Project Information

Project reference	27-009
Project title	Community-based integrated catchment management to conserve the Upper Chindwin River
Country/ies	Myanmar
Lead Partner	Stockholm Environment Institute
Project partner(s)	Myanmar Environment Institute (MEI) The Wildfowl and Wildlife Trust (WWT) Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UKCEH)
Darwin Initiative grant value	£369,912.00
Start/end dates of project	01/10/2020 - 30/09/2024
Reporting period (e.g. Apr 2022 – Mar 2023) and number (e.g. Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	April 2022- March 2023
Project Leader name	Thanapon Piman
Project website/blog/social media	<a href="https://www.sei.org/projects-and-tools/projects/community-based-water-management-chindwin/">https://www.sei.org/projects-and-tools/projects/community-based-water-management-chindwin/</a> (Project webpage)
Report author(s) and date	Ridhi Saluja and Thanapon Piman and May 23, 2023

### 1. Project summary

Based on over six years of SEI’s research in the area, ecosystems within the Upper Chindwin River are rapidly degrading due to mining, deforestation, and agriculture as well as the impacts of climate change. Most people in the study area are poor and communities are mainly subsistence based and depend on ecosystems to maintain livelihoods. The health and wellbeing of these communities and ecosystems are intrinsically interlinked.

To restore ecosystems and support livelihoods, it is critical to involve communities in ecosystem restoration. The main aim of the project is to implement a set of tailored land and water management practices for wetland conservation in Upper Chindwin River, Myanmar, to protect and restore the Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) and secure sustainable livelihoods for villagers in the vicinity of the project area.

The project will implement community wetland conservation practices using knowledge from assessments of baseline conditions. Community conservation practices that benefit biodiversity as well as communities such as agroforestry and rice-fish systems will be explored and integrated into community action plans to reduce pressure on ecosystem. Conservation successes at the community level will be scaled up to link with policy makers at national and subnational levels to promote community-based catchment management and find solutions for longer term wetland and ecosystem protections.

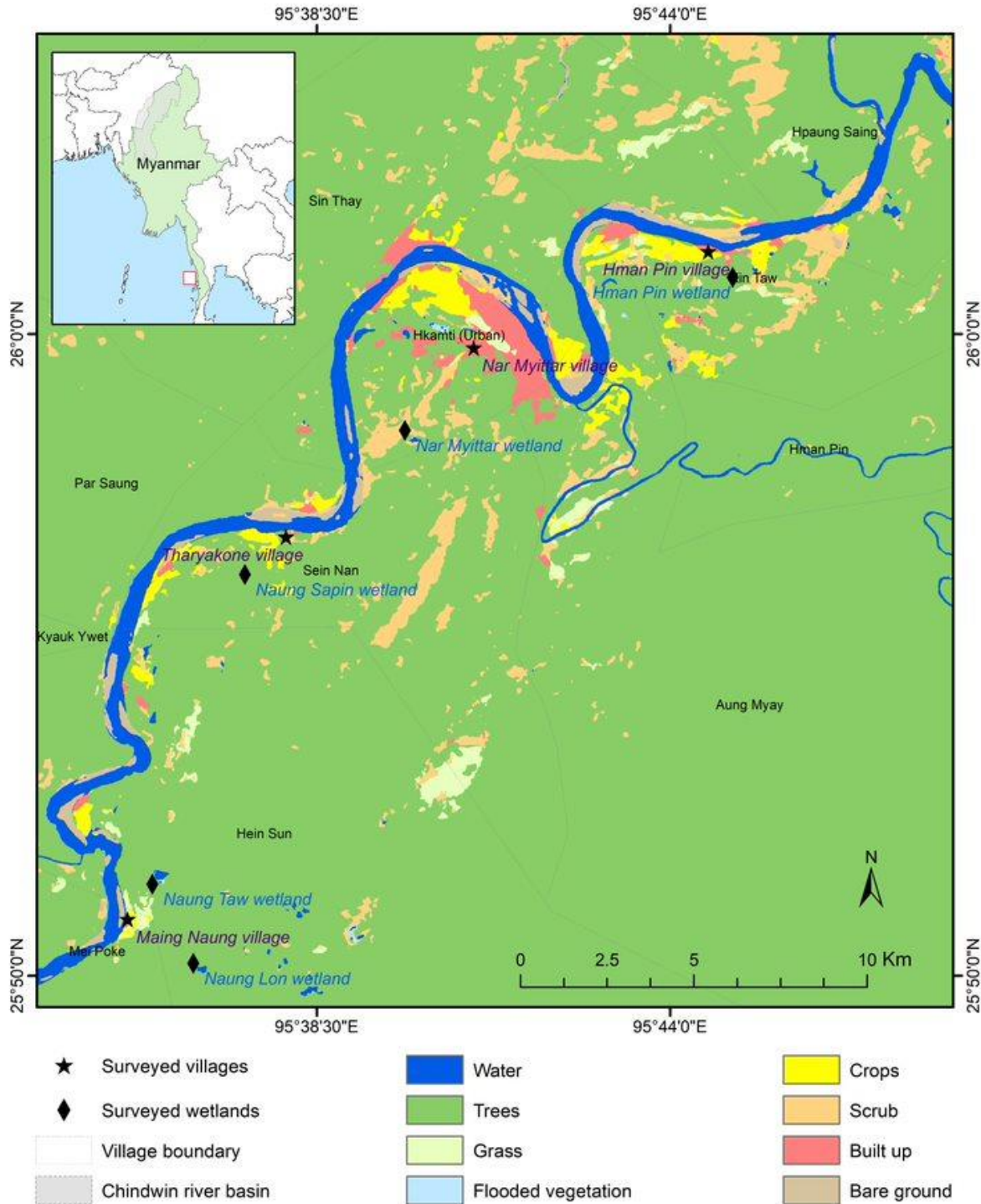


Figure 1: Map of study sites

## 2. Project stakeholders/ partners

Our British partners, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) and UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UKCEH), as well as our Myanmar partner, MEI, have participated in project planning and decision-making. In addition to planning, project partners will be responsible for monitoring project activities.

Partners were consulted and contributed to the design and implementation of activities that are feasible in light of the present political situation in Myanmar. On the basis of consultations and active communication, all partners take an active role in drafting the annual workplan and designing their respective scopes of responsibility.

Partners have been consulted in order to identify the project activities that can be prioritized, as well as the potential routes for ensuring that the activities are carried out. Our local partners, Naga Social Network (NSNO), and Myanmar partner, Myanmar Environment Institute (MEI), played a significant role in obtaining permissions from government departments to conduct fieldwork in the study area, as well as ensuring the safety and security of the project staff and field team. Local communities' interests were maintained through constant communication by local project staff and local CSO.

A three-day partners workshop was also organized in the month of March 2023 in hybrid mode with an objective to revise the log frame, address existing challenges in project implementation, exchange learnings, map progress and devise strategies for upcoming year. The workshop report has been attached in the Annex for further reference.

Despite the difficult and challenging political situation in Myanmar, consortium partners were able to adapt to the circumstances and carry out planned activities. Inability to conducting field work and organizing training workshops in the study area due to security issues still remains one of the most pertinent challenges to project implementation. The adaptive management approach devised to counter this will be discussed in detail later.

## 3. Project progress

### 3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

Following are the major activities which were undertaken in the second year of the project from March 2022 – April 2023.

#### **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)**.

- We have collected relevant data and information in the project area including previous studies on biodiversity and wetland conservation and livelihood developing, relevant policy document, GIS data.
- Data on socioeconomics and livelihoods has also been collected through the FDGs in 10 selected villages during the rapid village assessment conducted in the month of December 2021. Desk survey has also been carried to identify best practices to reduce impact on the wetlands and are related to sustainable agriculture, water, and soil management etc.
- An in-depth socio-economic, livelihoods and wetland dependence survey was carried out in four priority villages identified based on the Rapid Village Assessment in July 2022 for which a detailed field survey manual was designed and training was imparted by SEI team to the field team which included local members from SEI, NSNO and MEI.

Activity 1.2 Conduct GIS mapping to identify habitats, wetlands and potential nine target villages and key threats **(100% progress)**.

- Based on the LULC change analysis conducted earlier, we were able to identify 10 priority wetlands sites for rapid village assessment (RVA). During the same survey additional GPS data points for different classes were collected and based on which the results of mapping were cross validated.
- Wetlands maps for five prioritized villages have been prepared by MEI based on GPS data points and google earth imagery. These will now be validated using high resolution satellite data.
- Conservation zones for five priority wetlands have also been defined preliminary by MEI colleagues based on the field data collected by the team during last two years. These conservation zones are still preliminary and will be validated further in discussion with the village committees.

Activity 1.3 Organize implementation meeting to introduce the project, conduct stakeholder mapping including women and youth groups and pre-survey **(100% progress)**.

- A meeting was organized in the ten selected wetland villages headed by the respective Village heads where the aim and objectives of this project were presented to the local community groups with equal participation from women, facilitated by the local NGO, Naga Social Network (NSNO).
- Village committees have been formed in four villages that are dependent on five priority wetlands and the committees will be the focal point for imparting trainings and implementing project activities.

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

- WWT and MEI supported SEI to develop an assessment and monitoring framework based on RAWES. Key stakeholders were engaged through a local CSO i.e., Naga Social Network (NSNO) and SEI's local project representatives to discuss and comment on the structure of the questionnaire.
- Survey questionnaire and a manual has also been developed to conduct in-depth socio-economic and livelihood surveys with an aim to understand the dependence of communities on wetland resources.

**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 Village groups for developing CAP are formed, including village and household heads, elders who have local wisdom, women, and youth groups. Four pilot villages to implement CAP are selected by Q4 of Y1 **(100% Progress)**.

- Village committees in four priority villages have been established which are led by village heads and have participation from women and youth were established with support from our local CSO partner, NSNO and SEI project staff in Myanmar.

Activity 2.2 Three annual multistakeholder consultation workshops are organized to develop, implement, and monitor CAP. Multistakeholder groups will comprise community groups, technical agencies, NGOs, local and provincial administrations by Year 3 **(10% progress)**.

- Due to the ongoing military coup, the project has been unable to interact with stakeholders other than communities. Due to travel restrictions and safety concerns in

the study area, interaction with communities has also been limited to a maximum of two per year. Because international travel to Myanmar is also restricted, we have been unable to organize any workshops up to this point. However, we were able to interact with village committees, which are the project's primary target group.

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 **(70% progress)**.

- We have completed the desk review of best practices for community conservation measures including water, land, and forest management. This review will be used for co-development CAP with the selected village.
- Through the FGDs conducted during the Rapid village assessments across ten selected villages an initial attempt has been made to raise awareness regarding the project activities and sense the interest of community to lead conservation actions.
- The NSNO has also provided support in establishing contact with the village heads and form a communication bridge between the local communities and project team.
- Based on the inputs from communities during the FGDs conducted in the month of July, 2022 and partners meeting conducted in March 2023 at the SEI Asia Bangkok office, an outline for CAP has been developed along with the key trainings to be conducted as a part of CAP.

Activity 2.4 Implement CAP by Y3. By the middle of Year 2, 30 to 40% of the activities in the CAP are being implemented **(0% progress)**

- This activity has been pushed back, and once approval from the village committees has been received on the CAPs, it is expected to begin the implementation at the start of Q3.

Activity 2.5 By the middle of Year 3, 80 to 90% of activities in the CAP are being implemented **(0% progress)**

- This activity has been pushed back, and once approval from the village committees has been received on the CAPs, it is expected to begin the implementation at the start of Q3.

Activity 2.6 Training workshop with at least 40 participants to build community associations' capacity to manage CAP in future by the end of Year 3 **(15% progress)**

- During the partner's workshop in March 2023, keeping in mind the security challenges and accessibility issues to organize any large gathering in the study area, **a training of trainers (TOT) approach** will be taken to implement these trainings. Trainings will be conducted with smaller group of participants which would include village heads and local CSO partner who will then then the community members in each of the priority villages.

### **Output 3. Optimal ecological conditions agreed for endangered and key livelihood species and habitat restoration plan completed and shared**

Activity 3.1 Building upon information from Output 1, the location, management regimes and workplans for conservation zones are agreed through multistakeholder consultations and final workshop by middle of Y2 **(20% progress)**

- Based on the biodiversity surveys undertaken in the year 1 and 2 of the project, wetland habitat maps were prepared by MEI. Within these maps, different conservation zones have been identified by biodiversity experts based on the habitat zonation and suitability for endangered species. These conservation zones will now be shared with the village committees to draw up a workplan for demarcation and communication.

### **Output 4: Policy and recommendations published for upscaling CAP and conservation measures to other villages with Upper Chindwin Basin KBAs.**

Activity 4.1 Conduct policy/plans review on environment conservation and livelihood development at township and district levels to identify plans to be influenced by this project **(60% progress)**.

- We are conducting a review of biodiversity policies and the feasibility of community conservation at different levels of governance.

Activity 4.2 Report published on recommendations from policy makers to incorporate CAP and wetland conservation zones into township, district, and provincial levels by the end of Year 2 **(0% progress)**.

- The development of CAP has been slowed as a result of COVID 19 and the military coup due to delayed data collection and baseline information synthesis. And the military coup has made it even more difficult to interact with policymakers, despite the fact that the project will strive for incorporation by the township next year, subject to the working environment and the interest of policymakers at this level.

Activity 4.3 At least two policy briefs prepared to consult with Chindwin River Basin Organization at regional level for upscaling by the end of Year 3 **(25% progress)**.

- One policy brief is currently in the drafting phase, but its intended audience is unclear due to lack of interaction with relevant policymakers and local agencies. The current coup has also rendered the Chindwin RBO inoperable.

Activity 4.4 Impact story of the implemented CAP land and water conservation measures on the policy by the end of year 3 **(0% progress)**.

- This activity would be undertaken post the implementation of CAP at selected villages.

Activity 4.5 Prepare factsheet, photo story, short film, or blogs for publishing in local and international media for public awareness **(45% progress)**.

- Project factsheet has been prepared in two languages, English and Burmese to support interactions with community and stakeholders in the study area and also to share general project information (attached in Annex)
- A blog titled 'Community co-management can help protect wetlands biodiversity in the Chindwin River Basin' has been published on the website of Stockholm Environment Institute <https://www.sei.org/perspectives/community-comanagement-protect-wetlands-biodiversity-chindwin-river-basin/>
- A project page has been created on project partner MEI's website as well <https://mei-myanmar.org/upper-chindwin-river-and-wetland-management-project/>
- Project lead, SEI has launched a website page dedicated to the project which will allow sharing the project impact and progress with a wider audience and will also provide access to the knowledge products and training materials that have been created under the project lifetime (for ex. Baseline survey manual, rapid village assessment manual, report on wetlands and livelihoods survey in Upper Chindwin Basin, wetland maps, field photos etc.)

## 3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

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 **(85% progress)**.

- A manual to conduct rapid village assessment was developed with support from the project partners with an aim to fulfil three objectives i.e., develop a scalable ES assessment framework using the principles from RAWES toolkit
- Manual was applied at 10 villages, rapid assessment of key endangered and livelihood species and review of ecological habitat requirements, and detailed ES, land use and habitat maps of ten villages.

- A manual to conduct socio-economic, livelihoods, ES and biodiversity assessment was also developed with support from partners to conduct in depth surveys at five priority wetlands and four dependent villages and a report on this assessment has also been prepared which will soon be published on the project page.
- Assessment of key floral and faunal species at five priority wetlands has also been conducted based on which optimal ecological requirements and preliminary conservation zones have also been demarcated by the project team.
- Land use land cover map and wetland habitat sketches have been prepared for 10 villages and detailed wetland habitat maps have been prepared for five priority wetlands which will be validated during the next field trip by the local CSO partner.

Output 2. Community Action Plans (CAP) focusing on integrated water-land ecosystem measures developed for nine villages, implemented in three priority villages. **(60% progress)**

- A desk study on good practices of water, land, forest management as well as sustainable livelihood in Myanmar to support the preparation of Community Action Plan (CAP) has been conducted.
- Community interactions during the RVA and FGDs during baseline survey at priority villages have also highlighted strong interest in promoting livestock farming, sustainable agricultural practices and a rather less interest in rice fish farming.
- Capacity building and awareness programme calendar is also under development guided by the experiences from the field which would be implemented taking the training the trainer approach. This is an adaptive approach that the project consortium came up with as travel and gathering people in the study area is still a great risk due to ongoing civil unrest in Myanmar. This program will focus on areas including fish farming, livestock farming, agriculture (rice and soil management), community forestry and wetlands and biodiversity conservation.
- CAP is under development focusing on sustainable livelihoods, wetland conservation and rehabilitation along with capacity building and awareness raising.

Output 3: Optimal ecological conditions agreed for endangered and key livelihood species and habitat restoration plan completed and shared **(15% progress)**

- Based on the information from Output 1, habitat restoration plan is under development and will also specify the actions and activities to be undertaken in the conservation zone to the Output indicator 3.1. A hydrological and climate vulnerability assessment will also be conducted led by UKCEH and WWT to identify activities which need to be included within the habitat restoration plan to better adapt for climate vulnerability in the region.

Output 4: Policy Recommendations published for upscaling CAP and conservation measures to other villages with Upper Chindwin Basin KBAs **(20% progress)**

- Project factsheet presented in SEI website and has been translated to Myanmar language (<https://www.sei.org/publications/conserving-biodiversity-myanmar-upper-chindwin-basin/>) and perspective (<https://www.sei.org/perspectives/community-comanagement-protect-wetlands-biodiversity-chindwin-river-basin/>) contribute to the Output 4.5
- Based on policy review and analysis on environment conservation and livelihood development to prepare policy briefs and policy recommendations to mainstream CAP and wetland conservation zones. A policy brief on locally inclusive conservation of wetlands is under preparation and will be published in Q3 of 2023. This will contribute to output indicators 4.2 and 4.3.

### 3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

**Outcome:** The KBA in Upper Chindwin basin is providing improved and more secure habitats for endangered species and better livelihood pathways through enhanced ecosystem services for the local people.

**Indicator 0.1 (35% progress)** Conservation zone area increase by 20% from the baseline assessment for habitat suitable to endangered and key livelihood species.

**Comment:** This year the baseline assessment for five priority wetlands and four priority villages has been conducted. Based on this assessment preliminary conservation zones near priority wetlands have been demarcated.

**Indicator 0.2 (25% Progress)** Levels of fertilizer related determinants (e.g., Rapid dissolved oxygen, total nitrogen, ammonium nitrite and total phosphorus) reduced by 15-20% from the baseline assessment as a result of fish rice system or selected other adoption by 2023, conduct monitoring at the beginning and end of the CAP

**Comment:** Baseline levels of the water quality parameters have been established in five selected wetlands and regular community led monitoring will be initiated with the beginning of implementation of CAP.

### 3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

#### Outcome level

Assumption 1: The political situation within Myanmar remains stable and no restrictions are imposed by the government on INGOs

Assumption 2: SEI and consortium partner relationship with Sagging regional government remains strong for buy-in for the project.

#### Output level

Assumption 3: The selected villages are easily accessible without any restrictions from the government

Assumption 4: Regional and national government representatives, and various government agencies continue to be supportive and are receptive to policy recommendations.

Assumption 5: Policy makers and practitioners are sufficiently interested and engaged to take part in the planned training course.

#### Comments:

- The political situation in Myanmar continues to be uncertain and unpredictable with civil unrest in several areas.
- Getting permission from the current governance regime to implement project activities has emerged as an additional challenge this year. This has led to several delays in implementation of activities as even local partner MEI is now facing challenge to travel.
- International travel and communication within the country is still restricted. This has restricted the ability of international experts to visit the study area and design approaches based on their field experience and they now have to rely largely on reports prepared by local partner MEI.
- Communication with the government is still not viable.
- Though in this year we tried to conduct a baseline survey and biodiversity survey with the help of local partners and building capacity of field team on different aspects of conducting field interviews, FGDs, biodiversity surveys, water quality monitoring etc.
- If the conditions improve in the coming year, we will try to re-establish contact and rebuild the relationship with ECD and GAD departments to secure their support for the project. Through this we seek to ensure that the CAPs are internalized by these department within the rural development plans.



### **3.5 Impact: achievement of positive impact on biodiversity and poverty reduction**

- The overall impact of the project is to ensure that KBAs in the Upper Chindwin Basin have enhanced biodiversity and ecosystem service value as a result of community-based integrated water-land ecosystem management and enhanced sustainable livelihood pathways for local people.
- We expect a consistent decrease in negative impacts and pressure caused by unsustainable livelihoods and development actions through the Community Action Plans, restoration plans and a dedicated capacity building programme on wetlands and biodiversity conservation in the priority villages. Implementation of these plans aim to conserve and in the long term increase native species richness in the area.
- Alternative livelihood options such as fish farming, sustainable agriculture and livestock farming identified during the rapid village assessment have been revalidated during the full baseline survey conducted in July 2022. These activities will ensure sustained and stable income to the local community which will form a part of the overall Community Action Plan.
- Capacity building programme will also impart knowledge to local people on the sustainable and effective ways of natural resource management including land and water, thus enhancing the economic benefits and ensures wise use of natural resources and their services.
- A wetland monitoring and assessment program will also be established in the priority villages with support from the village committees following the principles of citizen science.
- Demarcation of conservation zones near the wetlands and establishing community level rules and regulations for wetland resource use will also contribute to addressing threats faced by wetlands and reducing pressure in the coming future.

## **4. Project support to the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements**

### **National Biodiversity Strategy and Action plan (NBSAP)**

The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action plan (2015-2020) of Myanmar clearly highlights two targets namely expanding the protected area network through both government and community-based approaches and ensuring that National law provides an incentive for community participation in biodiversity conservation. The plan also identifies that with the much-needed development in the country, increased pressure will be placed on rich biodiversity and natural resources.

- This project aims to ensure enhanced participation of the communities in establishing and management of defined conservation zones within the KBA.
- The biodiversity surveys and census from the priority villages would also help document presence and absence of certain species of conservation significance and also prepare habitat maps for these species.

### **Ramsar Convention**

The technical work in our project will contribute to the Strategic Goal 1 of the Ramsar Convention, focusing on addressal of drivers of wetland loss and degradation. Rapid Village Assessment undertaken earlier this year aligned with Ramsar's Strategic PLAN 2016-2024 in a way that it promoted, recognized, and strengthened the participation of local communities for wetlands conservation and management. Ramsar Convention endorses the community-led approach to wetlands management.

- Establishment of village committees with participation from the women and youth groups will ensure community ownership of the CAPs and restoration plans.

### **Convention on Biological diversity**

Myanmar in its sixth national report to CBD clearly identified its challenges related to biodiversity conservation. It identifies major threats to biodiversity and its underlying factors

which include limited environmental safeguards, undervaluation of ecosystems, ecosystem services and biodiversity along with limited grassroots support for conservation. It also highlights the importance of community participation in the conservation and sustainable use of Myanmar's natural resources.

- Our work aims to address these identified challenges by building capacity of the local communities on wetlands conservation and water and soil management and enhancing their participation and leadership in natural resources management.
- Communities through this project will be capacitated on various approaches for sustainable resource use and also be provided with additional livelihood options to reduce negative impact on ecosystems.

## **5. Project support to poverty reduction**

- Baseline survey assessment in four priority villages (namely Nar Myittar, Tharyarkone, Hman Pin and Maing Naung village) highlighted that communities have extreme dependence on natural resources such as wetlands for food, fuel, and timber.
- Multiple resource use systems were observed with agriculture being the main livelihood followed by livestock rearing.
- The average annual income in the area was 2,386,033 MKK which is equivalent to ~1132 USD.
- Our project is using a gender sensitive and participatory approach that indirectly aims to reduce some of these underlying barriers causing poverty for different social groups by gender, age, and ethnic group. Similar approach was adopted for conducting the full baseline survey. 39.1% of the respondents were female and nine ethnic groups participated in the survey.
- The interventions identified in the project are anticipated to increase income by 20% within selected villages by implementing conservation practices (indicator 0.3). As well, the catch per unit is expected to increase by 20% (indicator 0.4) which can contribute to improved community nutrition and income.
- Considering poverty under the multi-dimensional framework, indirect drivers of poverty include different external dimensions such as power, resources and opportunities in knowledge, skills, and opportunities. This project will provide alternate livelihood options to the local communities and will also enhance their skills on certain other options such as fish farming and pig farming which can help reduce poverty. Increase knowledge regarding ecosystems services and sustainable resource extraction will lead to enhanced productivity and therefore, improved catch for the community.

## **6. Gender equality and social inclusion**

- As mentioned in section 6, our approach to gender relies on the multidimensional poverty framework that considers different external drivers affecting poverty and access and control over natural resources.
- Indicator 2.7 and 2.1 focuses on the women and youth participation in every stakeholder consultation and decision making to ensure the contribution of women and youth's contribution to the design of the conservation measures which will be participatory in both implementation and monitoring stages (Indicator 3.3.).
- There are also plans to train policy makers, under indicator 4.1 on the importance of considering gender in biodiversity policies and development plans.

Comments: Focus group discussions were conducted in the priority villages (4 in no.) which took into consideration gender balance and ensured equal and active participation of women group. Women were encouraged to voice their concerns related to resource use, wetlands management and biodiversity conservation. Women have also been encouraged to be a part of the village committees along with youth to help share their knowledge and insights on design and implementation of CAPs.

Please quantify the proportion of women on the Project Board <sup>1</sup> .	40%
Please quantify the proportion of project partners that are led by women, or which have a senior leadership team consisting of at least 50% women <sup>2</sup> .	0%

## 7. Monitoring and evaluation

- Baseline values for catch have been established based on the initial survey carried out by the Fisheries expert (report attached in Annex).
- Two online trainings have been conducted so far to build the capacity of local partners and field teams to undertake the field missions.
- 40% of the respondents in Baseline survey conducted in June 2022 were females and the composition of village committees have been shared within the baseline survey report.
- After accessing the overall situation in the region to carry out the activities set forth in the log frame, the consortium of partners has agreed to revise the log frame
- We will rely on local monitoring to reduce bias and clear attribution in selected indicators (indicators 1.2 and 3.3). We have made changes in the log frame and the change request form will be submitted separately.
- Dedicated meetings on M&E will be scheduled to allow transparency and information exchange between the partners once the revised log frame is approved.
- As a part of the Training and Capacity Building programme, the village committees and volunteers will be trained to monitor the progress of CAPs in addition to the local partner to ensure their ownership, active participation and long-term sustainability of the conservation and livelihood support activities.

## 8. Lessons learnt

- The continuing uncertainty caused by the ongoing military coup in the region prompted us to seek out measures that were more adaptable in nature and allowed us to carry out a few specific activities despite the difficult circumstances.
- Constant consultations and interactions with the international partners led to the development of an alternative approach to achieve desired outcomes which included an online training of the field team to build their capacity on full baseline survey and biodiversity assessment
- The year also saw commendable dedication from the Myanmar partners who undertook a field mission and completed it successfully despite the challenging situation in certain areas of Upper Chindwin.
- A second fieldtrip was planned in January 2023, which could not be completed due to restrictions imposed by the local government departments and the team could only collect water samples from the priority villages and this raised some more concerns regarding implementation of activities.
- To design a better implementation approach keeping in mind the ongoing challenges and the new challenges that had emerged in the most recent field visit, a

<sup>1</sup> A Project Board has overall authority for the project, is accountable for its success or failure, and supports the senior project manager to successfully deliver the project.

<sup>2</sup> Partners that have formal governance role in the project, and a formal relationship with the project that may involve staff costs and/or budget management responsibilities.

partner's workshop was planned for. This was a hybrid workshop with participation from all partners.

- During this workshop, a detailed discussion happened around the possibility to conduct activities listed in the log frame and it was unanimously decided that the log frame should be revised.
- The revised log frame will now be communicated to DARWIN to realign our commitments within the project.
- A collaborative approach was used to finalize the TORs of the partners based on expertise and feasibility to carry out specific tasks.
- To achieve results on the ground and connect with the local communities, the project continues to partner with a local NGO, NSNO which facilitated the interactions with the villagers as they already had established network in the region and also a fisheries expert to conduct baseline survey and later impart trainings.

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

- Taking reviewers comment into consideration, multiple biodiversity surveys were planned. One was conducted in the month of June 2022 and to ensure seasonality was accounted for another trip was undertaken in the month of January 2023.
- But due to the restrictions within the study area and security concerns for the field team, the mission during January 2023 could not be completed.
- The review suggested us to add more details on what actions have been planned to be undertaken and these details have been shared in the half yearly report submitted last year.
- As advised by the reviewer, the project team the log frame activities have been reviewed keeping in mind the time constraints. The project had also submitted a change request to extend the project till September 2024 which has been approved and the team will now submit a log frame change request as well.

## **11. Risk Management**

- COVID-19 outbreak and military coup in the Upper Chindwin region have significantly impacted the project. These challenges have led to revision of the mechanism of interacting with the partners and also the way in which activities are undertaken and implemented on the ground.
- This year the project also faced difficulties with travel within the study area and it was suggested by local agencies that it is very risky for the project team to visit different wetlands and villages. Therefore, the field mission in January 2023 was aborted.
- The project will now need to rely on the local CSO NSNO to implement most of the activities. Therefore, the project strategy will now focus on empowering and building capacity of NSNO and even MEI leading to impactful and effective training of trainers. Later the CSO will work with village committees to spread awareness and implement CAP and restoration activities.
- It has also been discussed with the partners that the project activities will initially focus on the most accessible village, namely Nar Myittar near Hkamti township, and will serve as a demonstration site for other villages.

## **12. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere**

N/A

## **13. Sustainability and legacy**

- The project has been able to maintain the interest of communities through the baseline survey and also interactions with village heads undertaken by Fisheries expert and local partner NSNO

- Through these interactions and analysis of survey data, project was able to identify key areas of community concern and also areas where maximum support is needed. (Details in Annex survey report)
- Also, continued interactions with the communities through the local CSO which was brought on board specific areas have been identified on which communities would need capacity building support on wetlands and biodiversity conservation and also certain activities which ensure livelihood support and help create another livelihood option either through design or knowledge sharing are areas of high interest from communities' perspective.
- Our original exit strategy still stands- we intend to support communities in integrating wetland conservation into their community action plans and building knowledge and awareness of the importance of conservation so that the project can be sustained overtime through regional and local government funds. We will build capacity of the communities to implement these plans and also update and adapt to these plans whenever needed.
- Currently however, the governance of natural resources and authorities at all levels are in question due to the military coup. In case the community action plans are not vetted by the government/authority we will ensure that the plans are owned by the local communities and supported through smaller funds.

#### 14. Darwin Initiative identity

- A perspective that highlights the achievements of the rapid village assessment and throws light on the way forward has been published on SEI website.
- The local communities during the field visit were made aware about the Darwin initiative and how it is supporting the larger outcomes to conserve wetlands and biodiversity in the region.
- Team is also working on a research paper which will soon be communicated to a peer-reviewed journal, highlighting the funding support by Darwin.
- All the outputs from the project have acknowledged the funding support by Darwin Initiative be it manuals, training materials, project factsheet, blog, reports etc.

#### 15. Safeguarding

SEI has a whistle blowing service. This will be summarized and shared with Myanmar partners and communities. [Whistleblowing | SEI](#)

Has your Safeguarding Policy been updated in the past 12 months?	No
Have any concerns been investigated in the past 12 months	No
Does your project have a Safeguarding focal point?	Yes, Ridhi Saluja ████████████████████
Has the focal point attended any formal training in the last 12 months?	No
What proportion (and number) of project staff have received formal training on Safeguarding?	Past: 20% [3] Planned: 40% [6]
Has there been any lessons learnt or challenges on Safeguarding in the past 12 months? Please ensure no sensitive data is included within responses.	
The military representatives often raid the hotels to check for any activity or planning against the armed forces, which was a challenge brought up by our field team during their January field visit that had to be cut short. Our group had to be prepared to present appropriate	

documentation and identification to military personnel at any time. If the field team can't provide valid reasons for congregating and staying in a hotel, the situation could easily get out of hand. To deal with this, the project has already reached out to the GAD and ECD departments for additional permission to conduct field visits and implement activities that would guarantee the field team's safety in the future should they be questioned by military representatives.

Does the project have any developments or activities planned around Safeguarding in the coming 12 months? If so please specify.

No

## 16. Project expenditure

Please expand and complete Table 1. If all receipts have not yet been received, please provide indicative figures and clearly mark them as Draft. The Actual claim form will be taken as the final accounting for funds.

**Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023)**

Project spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2022/23 Grant (£)	2022/23 Total Darwin Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs (see below)				
Consultancy costs				
Overhead Costs				
Travel and subsistence				
Operating Costs				
Capital items (see below)				
Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)				
Others (see below)				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>98,500</b>	<b>91,814.44</b>		

Highlight any agreed changes to the budget and **fully** explain any variation in expenditure where this is +/- 10% of the budget. Have these changes been discussed with and approved by Darwin Initiative?

**Table 2: Project mobilising of matched funding during the reporting period (1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023)**

	Matched funding secured to date	Total matched funding expected by end of project
Matched funding leveraged by the partners to deliver the project.		
Total additional finance mobilised by new activities building on evidence, best practices and project (£)		

**17. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements or progress of your project so far (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes**

I agree for the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat to publish the content of this section (please leave this line in to indicate your agreement to use any material you provide here).

The project team did not give up despite the challenging political climate, and the Myanmar partners, in particular, went above and beyond the call of duty to achieve this year's critical outputs. A comprehensive baseline survey was planned in July 2022 to begin with the results of the 2021 Rapid village assessment. To prepare the partners for the fieldwork, SEI had designed and implemented an ambitious 1-day training program. The learning objectives of the training were clearly articulated, and participants provided overwhelmingly positive feedback.

Under the direction of SEI project staff in Myanmar and Myanmar Environment Institute, the household survey and focus group discussions were conducted in four priority villages, as well as biodiversity surveys and water quality monitoring in five wetlands. Surprisingly, field team still managed to carry out the field survey as planned despite the light supervision they were given. We have now been able to draft a Community Action Plan and identify key conservation zones based on their findings. Subsequently, in January 2023, an additional attempt was made to conduct a field survey, but it was unsuccessful, and the mission was abandoned due to the risk to the field team's lives.

The accomplishments of the project over the past year are commendable in light of the ongoing political crisis and the ever-growing safety concerns. This annual progress demonstrates the dedication of the entire team, particularly Myanmar partners.

## Annex 1: Report of progress and achievements against logframe for Financial Year 2022-2023

Project summary	SMART Indicators	Progress and Achievements April 2022 - March 2023	Actions required/planned for next period
<p><b>Impact</b></p> <p>KBAs in the Upper Chindwin Basin have enhanced biodiversity and ecosystem service value as a result of community-based integrated water-land ecosystem management and enhanced sustainable livelihood pathways for local people.</p>		<p>Project is still at the designing stage of activities that would have a positive impact on the biodiversity and community of the study area.</p>	
<p><b>Outcome</b></p> <p>The KBA in Upper Chindwin basin is providing improved and more secure habitats for endangered species and better livelihood pathways through enhanced ecosystem services for the local people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservation zone area increase by 20% from the baseline assessment for habitat suitable to endangered and key livelihood species.</li> <li>• Levels of fertilizer related determinants (e.g., Rapid dissolved oxygen, total nitrogen, ammonium nitrite and total phosphorus) reduced by 15-20% from the baseline assessment as a result of fish rice system or selected other adoption by 2023, conduct monitoring at the beginning and end of the CAP</li> <li>• 200 local people adopting rice-fish system and 800 local people adopting other conservation practices, with proportional representation from women, record at least 20% increase in income by 2023</li> <li>• Mean catch per unit effort increases by 20% by 2023 from a representative sample of 100 local fisherman within selected villages included in CAP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This year the baseline assessment for five priority wetlands and four priority villages has been conducted. Based on this assessment preliminary conservation zones near priority wetlands have been demarcated.</li> <li>• Baseline levels of the water quality parameters have been established in five selected wetlands and regular community led monitoring will be initiated with the beginning of implementation of CAP.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the next year, the project plans to submit a change request to modify its outcome indicators to the more achievable ones keeping in mind the current challenges with the ongoing military coup in the area and travel restrictions still imposed.</li> <li>- Early next year, we will be discussing the demarcation of conservation zone areas with village committees for their suggestions and acceptance.</li> <li>- Setting up monitoring programme to map the overall impact of the project at outcome level including income increase, increase in catch and also decrease in levels of fertilizer related determinants.</li> </ul>



	communities, catch monitored by communities		
<p><b>Output 1.</b></p> <p>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.</p>	<p>1.1 Scalable local ecosystem services assessment framework developed using principles from the RAWES Toolkit and delivered at nine villages within Hkamti township by end of Y1</p> <p>1.2 Local assessment of key endangered and livelihood species completed, and optimal ecological habitat requirements agreed by expert working group by end of Y1</p> <p>1.3 Detailed ecosystem services, land use, and habitat maps of nine villages within the Hkamti township by the end of Year 1</p> <p>1.4 Optimal habitat restoration plan, including strategic placement of natural treatment wetlands to filter agricultural and mining effluent completed by the end of Y2.</p>	<p>1.1 Framework for village assessment developed and evidence shared in Annex 1 Manual for Rapid village assessment</p> <p>1.2 Assessment of key species and livelihood species was led by MEI and report of the same is provided as Annex 2 for reference</p> <p>1.3 Report of assessment of ten selected villages in Upper Chindwin is provided as Annex 3 and baseline assessment report for five selected wetlands and four dependent villages is provided as annex 4. Water quality analysis report is attached as annex 5.</p> <p>1.4 Habitat restoration plan is under preparation and project will decide on what extent of activities can be implemented, keeping field conditions in mind.</p>	
Activity 1.1 Desk study to collect relevant information in the project area from previous and existing works		Completed	(Outline what will be carried out in the next period)
Activity 1.2, Conduct GIS mapping to identify habitats, wetlands and potential nine target villages and key threats		Completed	
Activity 1.3 Organize implementation meeting to introduce the project, conduct stakeholder mapping including women and youth groups and pre-survey		Completed	
Activity 1.4 Develop assessment and monitoring framework and survey questionnaire for the baseline survey based on RAWES Toolkit		Completed	
Activity 1.5 Agree ToR for Biodiversity Assessment		Completed	
Activity 1.6 Conduct baseline survey at selected nine villages and monitoring programme at start and end of the project		Completed	
Activity 1.7 Conduct Biodiversity Assessment		Completed	
Activity 1.8 Analyze survey data and prepare the baseline report including detailed GIS maps		Completed	

Activity 1.9 Expert working group workshop to agree optimal ecological habitat requirements and strategies and ideal locations of habitat restoration	Partial progress has been made as MEI has identified key areas for conservation	The strategies and locations will be finalized in the next year.
<p><b>Output 2.</b></p> <p>Community Action Plans (CAP) focusing on integrated water-land ecosystem measures developed for nine villages and, implemented in three priority villages.</p>	<p>2.1 Nine village groups for developing CAP are formed, including village and household heads, elders who have local wisdom, women, and youth groups. Three pilot villages to implement CAP are selected by Q4 of Y1.</p> <p>2.2 Three annual multistakeholder consultation workshops are organized to develop, implement, and monitor CAP. Multistakeholder groups will comprise community groups, technical agencies, NGOs, local and provincial administrations by Year 3</p> <p>2.3 CAP are developed in early Year 2 comprising a series of village specific measures, enhanced livelihood options, linkages with biodiversity conservation measures</p> <p>2.4 By the middle of Year 3, 80 to 90% of activities in CAP are being implemented.</p> <p>2.5 Training workshop with at least 40 participants to build community associations' capacity to manage CAP in future by the end of Year 3</p> <p>2.6 At least 30% of women and youth participated in every stakeholder consultation</p>	<p>2.1 and 2.6 Village committees have been established in four selected villages with equal participation from women and youth (details provided in Annex 4)</p> <p>2.2 Consultation workshops will be organized only with village committee given the current field conditions in the coming (details shared in the report earlier)</p> <p>2.3 CAP is under development for four selected villages</p> <p>2.4 Activities will be implemented from Q3 of the next year once CAP are approved by the expert group and agreed by communities.</p> <p>2.5 Training of trainer's model approach will be undertaken to ensure trainings are imparted to the communities with one of the villages i.e. Nar Myittar as our key demonstration site due to easy accessibility and safety. Whereas NSNO will conduct trainings at other three villages.</p>
Activity 2.1. Formulate village groups from selected nine villages for developing CAP based on stakeholder mapping (Act.1.3)	Completed	
Activity 2.2. Co-develop CAP with the village groups based on baseline assessment (Act.1.6) through focus group consultations	Ongoing	
Activity 2.3. Prepare draft CAP and discuss in the multistakeholder consultation in Y1	Preparation of draft CAP Ongoing	

Activity 2.4. Finalise CAP and get agreement with relevant implementors		CAP will be finalized in consultation with village committees
Activity 2.5. Conduct training for the farmers in the selected three pilot villages on integrated land-water management practices		Will be done next year in selected four villages and proposed change in the log frame to be submitted in next request
Activity 2.6. Implement CAP at three pilot villages and monitor the implementation progress		Will be done next year with support from the local CSO, NSNO in four selected villages and proposed change in the log frame to be submitted in next request
<p><b>Output 3.</b></p> <p>Optimal ecological conditions agreed for endangered and key livelihood species and habitat restoration plan completed and shared</p>	<p>3.1 Building upon information from output 1, the location, management regimes and workplans for conservation zones are agreed through multistakeholders consultations and final workshop by the middle of Y2</p> <p>3.2 Demarcated conservation zones are included in township/in regional land use plans and officially endorsed by the community groups and regional government by the end of year 2 and regional government plans by year 3</p> <p>3.3 Community-based habitat restoration (supported by WWT) completed over 500 hectares by Y3, with community monitoring programme in place in conservation zones by middle of year 2</p> <p>3.4 At least 75% of local community are aware of rules and regulations of the conservation zones by end of Y3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Based on the information from Output 1, habitat restoration plan is under development and will also specify the actions and activities to be undertaken in the conservation zone to the Output indicator 3.1</li> </ul>
Activity 3.1 Multistakeholder workshop reviews expert group recommendations and provides feedback		Project team plans to propose some changes to the activities identified under output 3 and the revised log frame will be shared soon for approval.

		Currently it is difficult to interact with any of the government stakeholders due to ongoing military coup and the project plans to work in close collaboration with the village community groups as major implementors of the strategies and plan keeping in mind the time left for project implementation as well
Activity 3.2 Co-development of habitat restoration strategies/plan and wetland protection zones with expert group		Some of the strategies have been identified by MEI and will be soon discussed with all the partners to evaluate the ability to implement these given the current field challenges
Activity 3.3 Prepare draft habitat restoration strategies/plan and wetland protection zones and seek approval from all relevant stakeholders		Will be undertaken next year either as separate plan or will be integrated as some strategic activities within the CAP
Activity 3.4 Finalize habitat restoration strategies/plan		Will be undertaken next year either as separate plan or will be integrated as some strategic activities within the CAP
<b>Output 4</b> Policy and Recommendations published for upscaling CAP and conservation measures to other villages with Upper Chindwin Basin KBAs	4.1 At least 20 policy makers considering gender equity have completed a project training course to mainstream CAP and biodiversity conservation into development plans by year 2 4.2 Report published on recommendations from policy makers to incorporate CAP and wetland conservation zones into township, district and provincial levels by the end of Y2 4.3 At least two policy briefs prepared to consult with Chindwin River Basin Organization at regional level for upscaling by the end of Year 3 4.4 Impact story of the implemented CAP land and water conservation measures on policy by the end of year 3 4.5 A series of communication and outreach materials created to increase public awareness on biodiversity conservation in years 1-3	4.1 and 4.2 Due to ongoing military coup in Myanmar and inability to interact with stakeholders the project will revise these two activities in the next change request.  4.3 One policy brief is currently being drafted and will be published in the next year but consultation with CBO is not possible as it doesn't exist anymore due to the military coup.  4.5 Communication materials have been prepared for the project including a project webpage, project factsheets and a blog along with 4 reports and 2 manuals which will also be published on SEI website soon.

Activity 4.1 Conduct policy/plans review on environment conservation and livelihood development at township and district levels to identify plans to be influenced by this project	Completed a desk review	
Activity 4.2 Conduct certified training course for policy makers to mainstream CAP and biodiversity conservation into development plans		Activity to be revised next year; can't be implemented due to current military coup
Activity 4.3 Organise policy dialogues to identify ways to integrate CAP and identified biodiversity conservation measures into township, district and provincial level		Activity to be revised next year; can't be implemented due to current military coup
Activity 4.4 Prepare policy briefs and impact stories at the end of the project		One policy brief is under preparation, details provided in the report.
Activity 4.5 Present policy briefs and impact story in the multistakeholders consultation workshops in year 2 and year 3		Activity to be revised next year; can't be implemented due to current military coup
Activity 4.6 Prepare factsheet, photo story, short film, or blogs for publishing in local and international media for public awareness		In progress, a project webpage has been created, factsheets have been prepared in two languages and blog has also been published on SEI website.

**Annex 2: Project’s full current logframe as presented in the application form (unless changes have been agreed)**

Project summary	SMART Indicators	Means of verification	Important Assumptions
<b>Impact:</b> .			
<b>Outcome:</b>			
<b>Output 1</b> Add more outputs as necessary	1.1 1.2 1.3 etc.	1.1 1.2 1.3 etc.	
<b>Output 2</b>	2.1 2.2	2.1 2.2	
<b>Output 3</b>	3.1	3.1	
<b>Activities</b> (each activity is numbered according to the output that it will contribute towards, for example 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 are contributing to Output 1)			

## Annex 3: Standard Indicators

The Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs) use high quality and accessible Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) to enable scaling, replication and increase the impact of the funds and the projects we support.

By asking project teams to align indicators with the Darwin Initiative Standard Indicators, we aim to increase our contribution to the global evidence base for activities that support biodiversity conservation, poverty reduction and capability & capacity.

The tables below are provided to assist project teams in reporting against Standard Indicators. Please report against the Standard Indicators that you have selected specifically for your project in Table 1 below. Refer to the Standard Indicator Guidance & Menu available on the [Darwin Initiative](#) website for guidance on how to select indicators, as well as how to disaggregate reporting within your chosen indicators.

New projects should complete the Y1 column and also indicate the number planned during the project lifetime. Continuing projects should copy and paste the information from previous years and add in data for the most recent reporting period.

We recognise that our menu cannot cover all the potential monitoring needs for all projects – where necessary you can select indicators from other sources or develop your own. See our BCF MEL guidance on best practices for selecting and developing indicators.

**Table 1 Project Standard Indicators**

DI Indicator number	Name of indicator using original wording	Name of Indicator after adjusting wording to align with DI Standard Indicators	Units	Disaggregation	Year 1 Total	Year 2 Total	Year 3 Total	Total to date	Total planned during the project
E.g. DI-A01	E.g. People who attended training on CBD Reporting Standards	E.g. Number of officials from national Department of Environment who attended training on CBD Reporting Standards	People	Men	20			20	60
E.g. DI-C17	E.g. Articles published by members of the project team	E.g. Number of unique papers published in peer reviewed journals	Number	None	1			1	4

In addition to reporting any information on publications under relevant standard indicators, in Table 2, provide full details of all publications and material produced over the last year that can be publicly accessed, e.g. title, name of publisher, contact details, cost. Mark with an asterisk (\*) all publications and other material that you have included with this report.

**Table 2 Publications**

Title	Type (e.g. journals, manual, CDs)	Detail (authors, year)	Gender of Lead Author	Nationality of Lead Author	Publishers (name, city)	Available from (e.g. weblink or publisher if not available online)



## 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 <b>correct template</b> (checking fund, type of report (i.e. Annual or Final), and year) and <b>deleted the blue guidance text</b> before submission?	✓
<b>Is the report less than 10MB?</b> If so, please email to <a href="mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com">BCF-Reports@niras.com</a> putting the project number in the Subject line.	✓
<b>Is your report more than 10MB?</b> If so, please discuss with <a href="mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com">BCF-Reports@niras.com</a> about the best way to deliver the report, putting the project number in the Subject line.	✓
<b>Have you included means of verification?</b> You should not submit every project document, but the main outputs and a selection of the others would strengthen the report.	✓
<b>Do you have hard copies of material you need to submit with the report?</b> 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.	No
If you are submitting photos for publicity purposes, do these meet the outlined requirements (see section 16)?	N/A
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.	