

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

Project reference	27-012
Project title	Promoting Human-Elephant Coexistence Through Education and Seasonal Fencing
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Myanmar
Lead organisation	Elephant Family/British Asian Trust (EF/BAT)
Partner(s)	Grow Back For Posterity (GBP), Myanmar Compass Films (CF), France
Project leader	Belinda Stewart-Cox
Report date/number	HYR2 (Apr-Sept 2021)
Project website/blog/social media	www.elephant-family.org; www.growbackposterity.com; www.compassfilms.net;

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).

During this reporting period, Covid restrictions and Coup considerations continued to limit project activities. For example, a surge in Covid cases from March to July limited travel across the country, while from July onwards, military roadblocks and attacks by armed local pro-democracy militia in Magway/Sagaing constrained project activities and staff movement.

GBP is taking measures to ensure the safety and mitigate any risks to project staff and participants, such as by promoting their status as an independent NGO and investing in a vehicle to improve safety of movement. A few GBP team members caught covid, but recovered well. However, the director, Aung Myo Chit, caught it badly and was admitted to hospital in October. AMC and BAT are in close contact and supporting where we can in his recovery.

Overall, following the extension of Yr2 activities over two years, the project remains on track to meet targets. Despite the ongoing disruptions and challenging context, the project team has adapted well and delays limited to 6-months. All project partners continue to monitor the situation in Myanmar closely and adapt accordingly.

Output 1 - Saving Lives:

From Apr-Sept, the combined impacts of Covid and the Coup halted the HEC awareness-raising events scheduled for the northern provinces of Magway/Sagaing. These activities re-started in Oct, using existing kits and more will be printed as needed. In September, the H.EL.P education team held HEC awareness-raising workshops for all residents of the villages in Ayeyarwady province. In some villages, these sessions were a refresher from the previous Darwin project, while other would have been new awareness-raising, as their HEC problems arose more recently.

The Forest Dept (FD) was to have sent middle ranking staff to be trained as HEC-education trainers, but because of the unrest, they will send field staff from the Myanmar Timber Enterprise (MTE) elephant camps. The salaries of these trainees will continue to be paid by MTE/FD, but field costs will be covered by GBP. In effect, the MTE staff have been seconded to GBP so that the education programme can continue as planned.

To comply with Covid distancing rules, the team is still unable to conduct the planned questionnaire surveys, but data will be collected at a later date. Now this part of the project has re-started, and due to the project extension, GBP expects to reach its stated target numbers.

Output 2 - Protecting Lives & Livelihoods:

The fencing protocols, manual and data collection forms, drafted in English and translated into Burmese in YR1, are now being field trialled. Two versions of the manual will be printed in Burmese for distribution – a fully comprehensive version for fence trainers and government associates and a slightly simpler one for trainees. But for

covid/coup restraints, this process would have been completed sooner, but will be completed by the end of Yr2.

The fence training programme was recently resumed in Ayeyarwady and will soon get going in Magway. As with the HEC-education trainers above, rather than training two FD staff as fence trainers as in the original plan, the 2x FD reps are from MTE's elephant teams. The MTE staff are mandated to deal with HEC and are more acceptable to villagers/pro-democracy supporters.

In Ayeyarwady, two training fences were installed and 10 farmers trained in September. As noted in the Yr1 annual report, each fence training course cannot exceed 15 people because of Covid (as opposed to the 30 originally planned), but a higher-than-expected percentage of the trainees are attaining the certification. GBP expects to hold another three courses by the end of 2021 and to have certified another 30 fencers. Also, under the original plan, one training fence and 2-3 community fences would be installed in the first half of Yr2, but because many pilot project participants have joined this project, they have gone straight to erecting community fences.

GBP has not yet been able to complete the feedback survey or provide printed certificates, but will do so in the near future. In the Yr2 annual report, we will provide names for all trainees, indicating which are certified and which were part of the Smithsonian/USFWS pilot project (i.e. this was a refresher training for them with an added M&E component). Two additional staff members have been hired to help monitor the training fences, conduct surveys and oversee the installation of community fences.

A key component of electric fences is the energizer; four of which were imported from Thailand in March 2021. GBP is helping farmers import 50 more Gallagher units from New Zealand, which should soon reach Yangon. As soon as they arrive, the new fencing assistants will help the certified trainees in Yangon and Ayeyarwady to erect their new fences. We expect to overachieve our targets at the end of each year because the demand from farmers is so high.

The funds that could not be used to travel to/from Sri Lanka in Yr1 (activity 2.1 + 2.2) were used to hire a vehicle on a long-lease – an essential and much-valued asset that is facilitating easier and safer movement between training sites and community fences. It may soon be necessary to lease a second vehicle so that two teams can work simultaneously to meet targets in the northern area where it would certainly not be safe to use any other transport.

To date, support for the project by the authorities has been very positive, but restricted to local or provincial level to minimise any political fall-out. There is a huge demand from villagers for help with fencing and the only way the Forest Dept can satisfy this need is to support GBP as they themselves can do nothing to help directly.

Output 3 - Building capacity:

Because it was not possible to hold the inception/M&E workshop face-to-face, there has been a huge number of online meetings. In the reporting period, 63 such meetings have been held (i.e. 2-3/week). Topics have ranged from reporting activities to discussing improving the data logging system (including recording expenses), reviewing the Covid situation and Coup impacts, and planning the revived HEC education and fence training plans.

Other capacity building activities have included support from Dr Peter Leimgruber, Head of the Smithsonian's Conservation Ecology Team and the leader of its programme in Myanmar, to improve the Excel spreadsheet for logging activity data and cascade changes to the GBP team. GBP's field staff have also been given new phones with high resolution cameras, so they can document activities more effectively, and photograph receipts for efficient accounting. They have also discussed how to conceal these from any ransom-seeking police or army personnel.

In the last 6-months, it has not been possible to collect historical HEC data (activity 3.2) as villagers were reluctant to give information by telephone. This exercise will resume now the GBP team can visit villages. Likewise, it is not yet possible to evaluate the education workshops or collect fence training feedback, but these will be carried out once surveys are possible.

However, 175 elephant sightings have been recorded by community members during this reporting period, as well as harmful HEC incidents. Most of these were near the electric fences at night and involved 1-8 bulls. Since April, many cases of property damage have been reported and one human death. We will provide more detailed coverage of all this data in the Yr2 annual report. This output has involved hundreds of hours of remote training to build the capacity of the entire GBP team and bring it up to international standards. Our impression thus far is that the entire GBP team is keen to work as effectively and efficiently as they can, meeting the highest standards possible. We will review progress in December, so tweaks can be made well before Yr2 annual report.

Output 4 - Sharing knowledge

As noted in the Yr1 annual report, this output has been scuppered by the Coup, partly because the government has shut down much of the internet and social media and partly because people are unwilling to use this means of communication as they know it is monitored by the government. As soon as it is safe and effective to do so, GBP will resume its online postings.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for COVID-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

All the lessons that were listed in the Yr1 annual report remain valid and need not be repeated. Chief among these is the value of the highly positive, trusting relationships established during our previous Darwin project and the USFWS-funded pilot fencing project between GBP and villagers, as well as with FD/MTE personnel. Without that it would be impossible for GBP to have done as well as it has in these difficult Covid and Coup imposed circumstances.

Another challenge imposed by the coup is the fact that military and police units have been targeting 20-25 year-olds – arresting and torturing them for no reason other than the fact that they are assumed to be the most active rebels. GBP’s two new recruits are therefore older, and are former government officials, who will always travel with the younger members of the team to keep them safe. Their collective commitment to this project and to the villagers and the elephants they aim to help, in spite of the dangers entailed, is as admirable as it is humbling.

2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of COVID-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

GBP anticipated that Covid restrictions, as well as the Coup ones, would hold up the project by 6-months. Hence the request last year to extend the project by a year, spreading Yr2 over two years. This was prescient as the hold-up has indeed been only 6-months, and the project is therefore well placed to meet its Yr2 targets over the next 2-years using the current budget. We are insisting that GBP should lease another vehicle so that the education and fence training teams can operate independently as well as safely. It is safer to travel in a dedicated NGO vehicle, with relevant papers and logos, than it is to take any form of public transport.

2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS: Yes

Formal change request submitted: Yes – Yr2 extended over 2-years

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend:

3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin’s management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

None, other than we responded to the Annual Report Review on 8th Sept 2021, modifying the wording of the baselines that need historic data to provide a measure of comparison (attached). Other comments - e.g. the need to report any indicators not met that were specified as Yr1 – have been addressed. This only applies to Output 4, as we expect to meet other targets because Yr2 has been extended, with Darwin’s permission, over two years. Other comments will be covered in the annual report, by which time we will have a better idea of what can and cannot be achieved. But at present, we expect to achieve most of what we set out to, with the possible exception of the outreach components of Output 4, especially social media postings.

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

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

Please send your **completed report by email** to Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**