

Darwin Initiative Main Annual Report

To be completed with reference to the “Writing a Darwin/IWT Report” Information Note:
(<https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources-for-projects/reporting-forms-change-request-forms-and-terms-and-conditions/>).

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

Submission Deadline: 30th April 2021

Darwin Project Information

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| Project reference | 27-013 |
| Project title | Conserving Myanmar’s Wetland Biodiversity through Sustainable Rice Standards |
| Country/ies | Myanmar (Burma) |
| Lead organisation | Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) |
| Partner institution(s) | Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP), Olam International, Sansom Mlup Prey (SMP), Kyone Ka Pyin – Tap Seik Community Conservation Group (KTCCG), Maubin Agriculture Department, Maubin University |
| Darwin grant value | £370,063 |
| Start/end dates of project | September 1, 2020 – March 31, 2023 |
| Reporting period (e.g., Apr 2020 – Mar 2021) and number (e.g., Annual Report 1, 2, 3) | September 2020 – March 2021 – AR1 |
| Project Leader name | Robert Tizard |
| Project website/blog/social media | https://myanmar.wcs.org/ |
| Report author(s) and date | Robert Tizard, Naing Lin, April 2021 |

1. Project summary

Myanmar's Ayeyarwady Delta supports an ethno-cultural landscape in which otherwise globally threatened wetland biodiversity has thrived alongside traditional rice agriculture for centuries. This landscape is threatened by the spread of intensive industrial agriculture and aquaculture, negatively impacting both local people’s livelihoods, and important and iconic wildlife. It is regionally unique because traditional agricultural practices, along with a cultural acceptance of nature, have helped maintain healthy populations of globally threatened species among significant areas of semi-natural wetland and grassland, which are not well represented in Protected Area networks nationally or regionally.

The project area supports the world's largest population of the Southeast Asian subspecies of Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*: globally vulnerable), as well as populations of the migratory, Yellow-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza aureola*: critically endangered)

and Fishing Cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*: endangered). Surveys conducted by WCS and Maubin University have identified the Maubin and Wakema Townships (combined population > 600,000) as critical for the conservation of these species and overall biodiversity of the Delta.

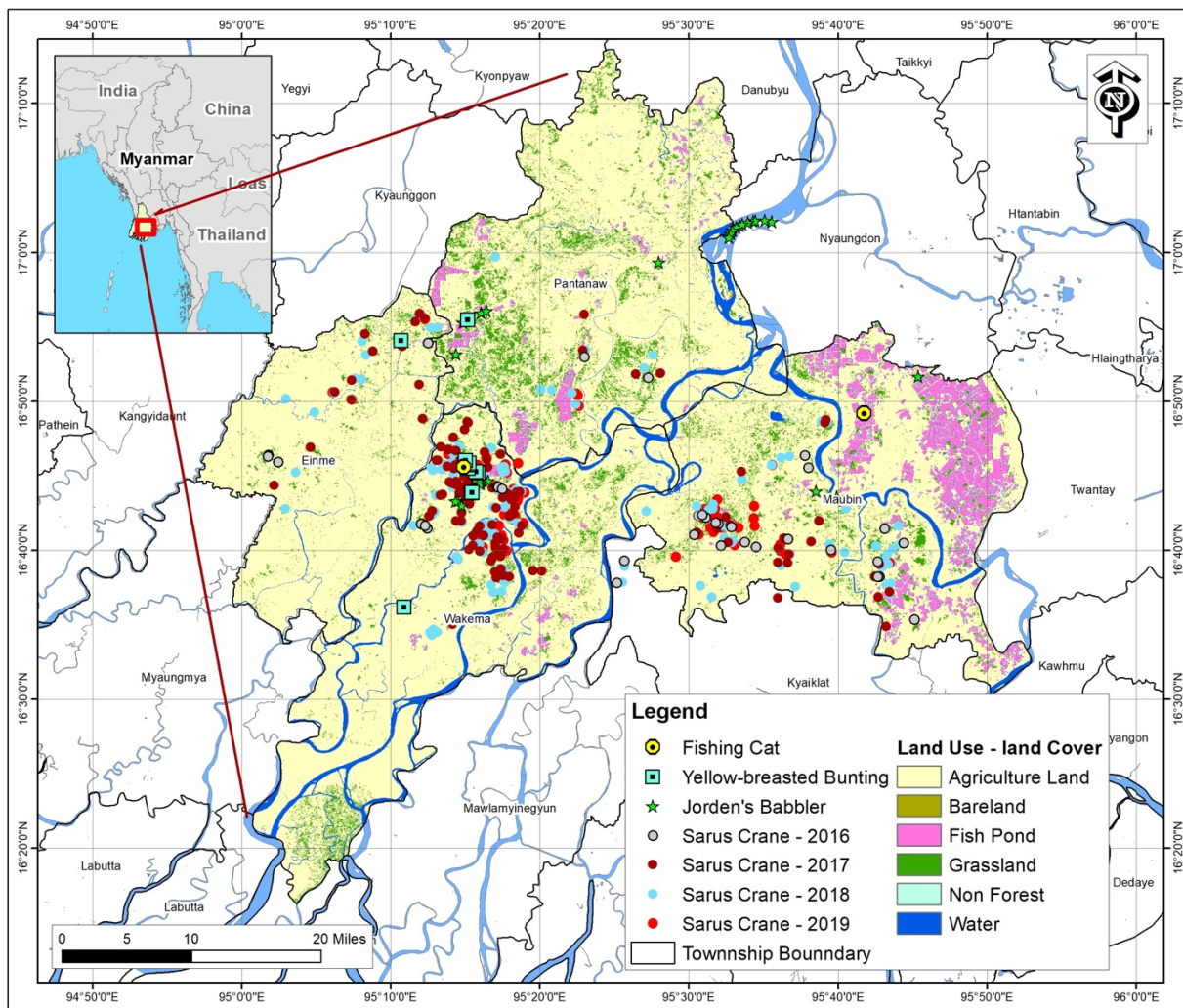


Figure 1. Map of Maubin and Wakema Townships, Ayeyarwady Region

As Myanmar experiences significant political, social, and demographic change, the ethno-cultural landscape in which these species thrive is threatened. The delta remains one of the poorest parts of Myanmar; World Bank data show 32% of households live under the poverty line. Such poverty, exacerbated by the low profitability of rice farms combined with a lack of access to modern agricultural knowledge, places pressure on farmers to either intensify agricultural practices with pesticide and chemical use or sell their under-performing land to large-scale agro-industrial companies. These practices stimulate land consolidation, conversion, intensification, and unsustainability, ultimately disrupting the balance between people and nature and threatening biodiversity.

Recent WCS research shows that many Delta rice farmers are keenly interested in improving farming practices, reducing their reliance on chemicals, and tapping into the expanding global market for sustainable rice. Our project unites local government, CSOs and private sector to support local farmers apply the new global SRP standards, increase profitability of their farms and maintain the Delta's ethno-cultural landscape. This project will benefit globally important biodiversity, and support rural farming communities, by linking international rice markets to local sustainable production and applying the new global standards developed by the Sustainable Rice Platform.

2. Project partnerships

The project partners outlined in the project document have supported the project implementation as much as possible during these challenging times. Our partners are still participating in the project and providing inputs listed below when possible.

Kyone Ka Pyin – Tap Seik Community Conservation Group (KTCG) continues to conserve the natural areas around their communities, with community members reporting on Sarus Crane nests and other important observation. The group are actively participating in our initial SRP trainings in the first year of the project and are continuing to grow as rice farmers from neighbouring communities continuing to join the KTCG. Following on from the February Coup KTCG will take on an even stronger role in the project until there is more clarity with the Myanmar government structure.

Maubin Agriculture Department and the Wakema Agriculture Department have been active participants in the project and understand how this project and the Sustainable Rice Platform align with their own projects and plans. The first year of the project was going well, despite the delays in access due to the Covid pandemic, but many of the Agriculture Department staff joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) following the coup, few of them have returned to their service.

Maubin University are eager to contribute to the project and we have drafted a MOU between WCS and the university. It was being reviewed by the Ministry of Education, but this is on hold following the coup. University staff and students are active leaders in the CDM movement, so their participation in the project is currently on hold.

Sansom Mlup Prey (SMP), especially Keo Socheat, our lead agronomist based in Cambodia have been active supporters of the project. Unfortunately, travel into Myanmar and to the field has been suspended during the pandemic. These activities will return once normal travel resumes.

The first year has seen multiple challenges that were not foreseen and have challenged our assumptions. Resuming normal activities will continue to be a challenge until the pandemic reseeds and there is greater clarity with the future Government of Myanmar.

3. Project progress

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many states, and regions of Myanmar have been locked down following the Ministry of Health and Sports (MOHS) instructions since the middle of March 2020. Following these instructions project activities were delayed to September 2020 due to the Covid-19 impacts and the project requested a delay for five months. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 second wave began at the end of August until now, for the City of Yangon and the other regions and states, including the small towns in the Ayeyarwady Delta have been under lock-down to limit the transmission of Covid-19. Despite these challenges the project activities have begun, including the recruitment of a trained agronomist as our SRP manager proceeding with reviewing, updating, and translating training materials under the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP). Our biodiversity monitoring team began surveying Sarus Cranes as they began their nesting season. 118 nests have been documented with 96 nests in Wakema Township and 22 nests in Maubin Township. Community members monitored the nests until the young fledged and reported these results back to our team. Despite the ongoing lockdown we began hosting zoom meetings with district and township Department of

Agriculture (DOA) to explain the project and share our workplan. We also worked with community leaders to learn about using zoom so we can expand online trainings. Our team also built new partnerships with Helvetas Network, on SRP and International Crane Foundation (ICF) on monitoring Sarus Cranes in the delta.

3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

The impact for the project is for rice farmers in Myanmar to maintain and improve farming practices to protect a traditional ethno-cultural landscape that safeguards globally threatened wetland biodiversity and increases the sustainability and profitability of their crops. The first year was planned to set baselines, build relationships with communities and the Department of Agriculture and to refine training materials to expand the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP). These actions have progressed slowly, delayed by the global pandemic, and now challenged by a military coup. Activities have been completed but much more is still to be done.

Output 1. By project end, SRP approaches are embedded in farming community, Government, CSOs and key rice industry bodies in the Delta.

In the first year, SRP training materials were developed and revised for Myanmar language. The materials and the project's structure and aspirations were introduced to the Department of Agriculture (DoA) in Wakema and Maubin and to CSO representatives from Kyonekapyin-Tapseik Community Conservation Group (KTCG). The DoA and KTCG have now begun to identify key farmers for training and mentoring in Year 2 but these identifications are still delayed due to Covid. These opportunities were discussed broadly with the rice purchasing company Olam.

In the second year, the SRP training materials will be field tested, and trainings will begin in earnest with DoA and KTCG as well as with Key Farmers. These partners and participants will conduct outreach to grow the number of beneficiaries. With a small group of active supporters there will be additional study tours to learn more about SRP in Myanmar and Cambodia. These visits will be carried out after the end of the Covid pandemic when travel returns to normal.

Output 2. Habitats beneficial to biodiversity are maintained and enhanced, protecting aquatic ecosystems and populations of threatened species.

In the first year, habitat maps were drafted using satellite imagery, interpretation of that data still needs field checking to understand the diversity of wetland habitat differences. Sarus Crane nests were monitored with the participation of KTCG members and interested farmers. Following the government lockdown during Covid, this was especially necessary to track the success of each Sarus Crane nest. These results are yet to inform SRP trainings, biodiversity interventions will inform SRP implementation and benefit from the participation of Maubin University. Unfortunately, widespread lockdowns and social distancing have delayed these actions.

In the second year, field testing will be carried out to finalize habitat maps and participatory field surveys will continue with KTCG and farmers but will be expanded with professors and students from the University of Maubin. These results will be used to inform SRP interventions during future farmer trainings.

Output 3. Farmer livelihoods are equitably enhanced through adopting farming improvements.

In the first year, the projects support to farming improvements have been introduced, including the use of farmer diaries but additional training is needed before farmers will start widespread use of the diaries. The Covid pandemic has restricted our access to and relationships with representative farmers so surveys and data are still needed. These challenges have been further complicated by the February coup putting questions on the business sector, the rice market, and the emergence of sustainable rice production.

In second year, farming improvements will be documented and reviewed through farmer diaries. Farmer's access to the emerging market for sustainable rice will be supported and the project team will collect additional data from representative farmers across a range of inputs and outputs as well as knowledge, attitudes, and practices in relation to improved rice farming, the SRP approach, biodiversity and Sarus cranes.

Output 4. Outcomes feed into growing regional and global agricultural biodiversity programs, and coordinate with existing national wetland conservation and agriculture initiatives and policy reforms.

In the first year, the extension of sustainable rice to additional farmers has been curtailed during the Covid pandemic. Field visits and regional events have not been possible including visits to other regions and countries to share lessons directly with other farmers. The project engaged with policy development on National Wetland Policy, RAMSAR site development, Community Conservation Area establishment, and share experiences of sustainable rice production with union and regional governments. Sadly, the February coup has stalled these discussions and many of the most active participants have left government service because of the Civil Disobedience Movement. Despite our plans work with SRP Secretariat to develop the Myanmar SRP Round Table, and present key project outcomes at those meetings were prohibited through the military closing internet connectivity for 97% of the country.

In the second year, promotion and extension will resume now that training material have been developed and follow on from more widespread SRP implementation. We still plan to visit Cambodia and speak with SRP participating farmers once international travel resumes. The resumption of policy development is reliant on clarity with the future Myanmar government, and we are currently unsure if this clarity may not return during the project period. The project linkages with the SRP secretariat will continue but the future participation of the DoA is still unsure.

3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

Output 1. By project end, Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) approaches are embedded in farming community, Government, CSOs and key rice industry bodies in the Delta.

SRP has been introduced to an expanding group of stakeholders focused on 77 (44% women) farmers from communities in Myaungmya and Maubin districts. This work was conducted in partnership with DoA and the leaders and members of KTCG. The initial response was strong and their continued interest but the subsequent restrictions to address Covid have limited direct integration during the first year.

Output 2. Habitats beneficial to biodiversity are maintained and enhanced, protecting aquatic ecosystems and populations of threatened species.

There were no significant changes to habitat within the project area over the past year. We recorded Sarus Crane nests surveyed in 2020 declined from the 2018 baseline.

With only 118 pairs, down from 156; with 96 down from 102 in Wakema and 22 down from 54 in Maubin. This decrease was in part due to limited field access following the beginning of the pandemic. We will understand the actual trend after surveys in year 2.

Output 3. Farmer livelihoods are equitably enhanced through adopting farming improvements.

The project has had very limited access to regular meetings with farmers during the pandemic. Once public access is again possible, we are expecting lower profitability, sustainability, empowerment of women, and improved attitudes. If the access is restricted for another year of rice crops it will be difficult to document a significant transition during the project.

Output 4. Outcomes feed into growing regional and global agricultural biodiversity programs, and coordinate with existing national wetland conservation and agriculture initiatives and policy reforms.

Progress on policy changes were moving ahead well at the beginning of the project. Regular discussions with DoA on SRP and good farming practices were going well, and the Forest Department was actively engaged on developing future Ramsar Site recognition. These discussions were carried out online with a broad range of stakeholders despite the pandemic. Sadly, the February Coup has stopped any likely domestic policy reforms and commitments to regional and global biodiversity programs are also unlikely.

3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

The project has limited progress towards achieving the project outcome in year 1. Over 70 farmers were introduced to the Sustainable Rice Platform and are interested in learning more so they can increase farm profitability but the adoption of SRP has been delayed due to limited public access, delayed trainings, and significant challenges with the government, especially the DoA. Sarus Crane nests, the primary indicator species, were monitored. Fortunately, no agro-industrial rice cultivation was expanded. These delays may continue to challenge the project in achieving the outcome by end of funding. The project can still support farmers to follow the SRP standards and increase farm profitability, but poverty is likely to increase during Myanmar's challenging times.

3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

The project's primary assumption was that political stability in Myanmar would be maintained. Sadly, following the Coup D'état on February 1, 2021 this assumption is no longer true and the project will likely occur during a period of the greatest challenges to Myanmar society in over 30 years.

Outcome Assumptions

Assumption 1: Political stability in Myanmar is maintained. - Political stability in Myanmar is not being maintained, civil society is in open conflict with the State Administration Council (SAC) which was created by the military following a Coup D'état on February 1, 2021. This open conflict has led to a widespread Civil Disobedience Movement being supported by many Myanmar civil servants and professionals having a serious impact on the country's economy, especially banking and health services. After February 1, WCS withdrew from any direct support to the military government and we are currently reviewing our longer-term position. While there is much uncertainty the project remains committed to supporting rice farming communities to protect their biodiversity and benefit from the use of SRP in improving their livelihoods and

profitability. However, government participation through the DoA remains questionable at this time.

Assumption 2: Farmers maintain interest in complying with SRP standards. - This assumption remains reasonable.

Assumption 3: SRP biodiversity measures are sufficient to protect cranes, as intended. - This assumption remains reasonable.

Assumption 4: Externalities outside of project control do not cause farmers to consolidate farms or sell land. - This assumption is still possible, although increased poverty during this period of social upheaval may result in the need to sell land to cover necessities.

Output 1 Assumptions

Assumption 1: Government remains willing to cooperate. - Indications are that the military government are likely to remain willing to cooperate, However, such cooperation with government civil servants is unlikely to be possible at this time. There is a need for greater discussions with stakeholders on how to move forward with this challenge.

Assumption 2: Community trainers are interested to learn and on-train. - This assumption remains reasonable.

Assumption 3: Rice purchasing companies maintain an interest in SRP. - The Myanmar interest in SRP has been advancing slowly, this interest may slow further following the internal conflicts, due to reduced foreign investment and challenging links to transportation from farm to market.

Output 2 Assumptions

Assumption 1: SRP biodiversity measures are sufficient to protect cranes and other species. - This assumption remains reasonable.

Assumption 2: Farming improvements lead to increases in nest success of cranes. - This assumption remains reasonable.

Assumption 3: Agricultural improvements increase food availability for threatened species. - This assumption remains reasonable.

Output 3 Assumptions

Assumption 1: Farmers follow SRP approaches. - This assumption remains reasonable.

Assumption 2: Farmers adopt measures that improve their sustainability and profitability. - This assumption remains reasonable.

Assumption 3: Farmers maintain close cultural ties to the landscape. - This assumption remains reasonable, but this could change if conflict expands.

Output 4 Assumptions

Assumption 1: Township Agriculture Departments are interested to extend the SRP approaches further. - The role of the government in this project is likely to be limited for the foreseeable future.

Assumption 2: Policy development is open to input. - Policy development will be limited with the military government and direct interaction will not be possible for the next year and potentially longer.

Assumption 3: Stakeholders are interested to participate in SRP Round Table. - The organization of the SRP Round Table in Myanmar will be delayed until civil conflict ends.

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

The impact stated for this project is: Rice farmers in Myanmar maintain and improve farming practices to protect a traditional ethno-cultural landscape that safeguards globally threatened wetland biodiversity and increases the sustainability and profitability of their crops.

Rice farmers have maintained their farming practices and continue to protect ethno-cultural values and globally threatened wetland biodiversity are integrated with this landscape. This is especially important for the significant population of Sarus Cranes that are still being protected by the communities.

However, improved farming practices, sustainability and profitability of crops have not yet been shown to improve. This progress will be assessed at the end of year 2, although the current challenges in Myanmar may have significant additional impacts on poverty.

4. Contribution to the Global Goals for Sustainable Development (SDGs)

The project supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially Goals 1, 2, 5, 8, 12 and 15: reduce poverty, promote sustainable agriculture, achieve gender equality, ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns, and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

By improving farm incomes in some of Myanmar's poorest regions, we will undermine poverty, and seek long-term, scaled up pathways for long-term market access improvements, thus contributing towards Goal 1, end poverty in all forms.

Supporting agricultural productivity and enhancing the safety and yields of rice production sustainably directly support Goal 2, end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.

Goals 1, 2 and 8 support Goal 5, Gender Equality, by ensuring equitable consideration of women and men in local context, and the project's design and implementation.

The labour component of the SRP standards supports improved working conditions for farming families, contributing to Goal 8, to provide productive employment and decent work for all.

Rice is the main agricultural commodity for Myanmar, and accounts for 60% of cropland. The SRP Platform Standards are the only internationally recognised measures for sustainable rice growing. SRP must, therefore, be a key strategy to meet Myanmar's national SDGs, including Goal 12, to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. By preventing eco-system destabilisation, community reliance on natural resources for long-term economic security is also preserved.

The strong biodiversity and conservation links support Goal 15, through the protection, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, and the halting of biodiversity loss.

In year 1, Goal 2 the promotion of sustainable agriculture, Goal 5 ensuring equitable consideration of women and men in local context, and Goal 15 the sustainable use of globally threatened wetland biodiversity by supporting the ethno-cultural landscape.

5. Project support to the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements

The project was designed to support the delivery of the CBD (Strategic Goals A-E), and its Aichi Targets 2, 7, 11, 12, and 14. For instance, the project promotes the sustainable management of agricultural areas, ensuring conservation of biodiversity (Aichi Target 7), and safeguards an agricultural ecosystem that contributes to the livelihoods and well-being of communities (Aichi Target 14).

The project also delivers on Myanmar's country-specific obligations under the CBD, by addressing strategic goals stipulated in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), most directly Target 7.1.1, 'to develop sustainable rice cultivation guidelines and implement across 10% of rice cultivation area,' and 7.1.2, 'to hold agricultural extension events to train farmers in sustainable rice cultivation techniques and certification.'

The project directly supports the implementation of the Ramsar convention in Myanmar, especially as it relates to waterfowl habitat. Myanmar currently has only four designated Ramsar sites, but a tentative list of almost 100 additional sites was identified in 2018 by the government with technical support from the Ramsar Secretariat and WCS. One existing site is in the Ayeyarwady Delta area, which includes the Meinmahla Kyun Wildlife Sanctuary and its surrounding landscape. Additional tentative sites are in the rice-growing areas of the delta, including nearby to the project area. As these preliminary sites are refined, data from this project will feed directly into the plans for Ramsar site designation in the country. The project directly supports Myanmar's government towards the first main pillar of the Convention, to 'work towards wise use of wetlands', and the Fourth Ramsar Strategic Plan (2016-2024), especially Strategic Goal 1 ('addressing the drivers of wetland loss and degradation'), and Target 13 ('enhanced sustainability of key sectors such as...agriculture').

Amongst the wetland species the project is targeting the Sarus crane, which is listed under CMS Appendix II. While Myanmar is not a primary party to the CMS, it attends meetings, and has signed several MoUs and agreements, including the Asian Flyways for migratory birds. The project is supporting the protection to the agricultural habitat on which the Sarus crane relies, directly supporting implementation of the CMS.

The project team was in regular contact with the government focal points for CBD, NBSAP, Ramsar and CMS prior to the February 1 coup. The government's engagement with these conventions, treaties and agreements will be limited during the period of civil unrest. We hope to see clear action in year 2.

6. Project support to poverty alleviation

Food security and land tenure are both fundamental needs to alleviate poverty. Myanmar is still in the process of developing legal structures that will secure community and individual rights to reduce poverty and provide a sustainable platform for development in the area. The Sustainable Rice Platform has the potential to scale up

sustainability and food security as well as increase the profitability of food production. The investment in capacity building components and working with informed farmers and supportive local officials will help secure the long-term livelihoods of local communities and thus alleviate poverty.

7. Consideration of gender equality issues

Gender equality is a core value of WCS and the project team, offering equal opportunities to persons of all gender while also delivering project activities. The project team is working towards gender balance with a female Rice Project Manager and SRP Training Consultant we hope to add additional female field staff, following the Covid pandemic. This gender balance on the project staff have helped previous projects so the team can engage people of all gender.

During the limited field work in year 1, the WCS team and DoA staff have consulted elders, women, and men in planning meetings, to ensure that representative of each age and gender class participate. When collecting resource-use information, women and men are also consulted, as their perspective on important resources and key species for management, can be significantly different.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

The project is governed and monitored by a core team led by senior staff from WCS and SRP, with regular engagement with the township Agriculture departments. The team met bi-annually to review project objectives, assumptions, and risks, and completed and planned activities, and discussed the roles and responsibilities of each partner. This approach began to strengthen collaboration between project partners and ensure that partners are adequately briefed and understand their level of commitment in the project.

Using the project logical framework, a detailed annual workplan was developed for each output. Progress is now monitored through activity reports, emails, and phone calls, although site visits have been restricted during Covid.

This project began with Monitoring and Evaluation as an integral component, closely tracking the social and ecological impacts of our work. Although originally planned as 12 staff involved in monitoring, and two staff directly responsible for M&E, one responsible for the SRP standards and performance indicators, as well as a technician who manages biodiversity surveys and data collection, including liaison with the universities. This number was restricted during Covid to 5 staff. A substantial proportion, estimated at some 11% of the project budget, is allocated to M&E.

The comprehensive SRP Performance Indicators are measured as an integral part of the SRP process. These indicators track a wide range of metrics, relevant to environmental and social issues, such as water and soil management, labour standards, gender equity, and agricultural chemical use. Detailed scorecards were developed in Myanmar language to give additional resolution to the measurement of these metrics, and we introduced several of these, including the 'Women's Empowerment Scorecard', as well as the 'Basic Biodiversity Checklist'. Additionally, we use a suite of biodiversity indicators to gather detailed additional information on the ecological impacts of the project, as well as provide feedback to the SRP secretariat on the standard SRP Basic Biodiversity Checklist.

Our broader monitoring programme is designed to assess whether SRP achieves both its conservation and poverty reduction objectives. In addition, we will do targeted surveys of a sample of farmers, to capture relevant changes in attitudes and practices. We will then document and disseminate learning and knowledge generated by the implementation of the project. Once normality returns after Covid we will focus on lessons learned and best practices that will provide crucial knowledge in the design and implementation of future projects aiming to proliferate the potential of sustainable agriculture to support poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation.

9. Lessons learnt

Following the delayed implementation of the project because of the covid pandemic and the new challenges of supporting communities without a reliable government partner, it will still take more time than usual for us to learn from these experiences.

At the beginning of the project, we did have good experience with using digital platforms for conducting training exercises. This was effective for communicating with our teams, training NGO partners and DoA; but this was not very effective for training farmers since they have fewer phones/computers, limited digital connections and less patience for dealing with delays and technical bugs, so audiences do not actively participate for long enough periods to cover the breadth of materials needing to be presented.

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

Our first half year report was accepted without comment.

11. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

No other comments on progress are presented at this time.

12. Sustainability and legacy

This report takes place during a period of extreme social and political upheaval in Myanmar. While we are confident of our commitment to supporting rice farming communities to protect their biodiversity and benefit from the use of SRP in improving their livelihoods and profitability. The future of a Myanmar government, accepted by civil society is still unclear. As the political situation becomes clear revisions to the project may be necessary. WCS will continue to monitor the situation and continue to support rice farmers and conserve the globally threatened biodiversity in the delta.

13. Darwin identity

The identity of the Darwin Initiative and the UK Government are documented in every agreement signed with government and civil society partners. DI and UK Government have also been mentioned during project introduction meetings and all events including trainings, workshops, and meetings. Since almost all interactions have been online, logos have been placed on all presentations.

14. Impact of COVID-19 on project delivery

WCS began implementing actions in response to public and government reactions to the Covid-19 pandemic in late-March 2020. The WCS office implemented a nationwide shutdown including the suspension of national travel and implementing a new working from home system. This was just prior to the first year of the project, so because of these new challenges we requested a change in timing from April to September 2020 in our optimistic hope to avoid the Covid-19 challenges, this was confirmed by LTS International in mid-August 2020.

Fortunately, this first round of infections began to reduce in August and starting the project in September appeared to be a good decision. Unfortunately, the second phase began soon after and travel was stopped again. This resulted in our initial activities being conducted online in Skype and Zoom meetings to reach out to our team and partners. This was effective for a few months while the initial project activities were being conducted but has become more challenging to work directly with rice farmers. The project team is now having growing challenges to support the day-to-day field activities by getting access to work in the field. There is also a challenge to expand our core number of participating farmers and to training growing numbers while social distancing is necessary and technical connections are limited.

Our continued work could benefit from increased use of technology. Unfortunately, the Coup D'état has strictly limited the internet and mobile phone access pushing these advantages out of reach for the foreseeable future.

15. 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.

WCS has a safeguarding policy, which includes a statement of our commitment to safeguarding and a zero-tolerance statement on bullying, harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. We keep a register of safeguarding issues raised and how they were addressed, with clear investigation and disciplinary procedures to use when allegations and complaints are made and have clear processes in place for when a disclosure is made. Our safeguarding policy is shared with our partners include clear processes for dealing with concerns raised. WCS's Code of Conduct is in place for staff and volunteers that sets out clear expectations of behaviours -- inside and outside the work-place – and make clear what will happen in the event of non-compliance or breach of these standards. No breach of these standards was reported in year 1.

16. Project expenditure

Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021)

| Project spend (indicative) since last annual report | 2020/21 Grant (£) | 2020/21 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) | |
| Others (see below) | |
| TOTAL | |

A budget revision was submitted in December 2020 and approved in February 2021, shortly after the military coup. The coup has resulted in extreme challenges for project staff, civil servants, and the banking sector so spending has been reduced further since our revision from December 2020. We request that these funds are carried over into year 2 activities and we look forward to discussing this further.

Annex 1: Report of progress and achievements against Logical Framework for Financial Year 2020-2021

| Project summary | Measurable Indicators | Progress and Achievements April 2020 - March 2021 | Actions required/planned for next period |
|---|---|--|--|
| <p>Impact</p> <p>Rice farmers in Myanmar maintain and improve farming practices to protect a traditional ethno-cultural landscape that safeguards globally threatened wetland biodiversity and increases the sustainability and profitability of their crops.</p> | | <p>The project has limited impact in the first year following restrictions on field access and public participation during the Covid Pandemic. Initial introductions and building partners began using Zoom but participation of government has stalled following a military coup in Feb 2021.</p> | |
| <p>Outcome A traditional ethno-cultural landscape in Myanmar's Ayeyarwady Delta, critical for globally threatened biodiversity, is maintained by farming communities adopting new global sustainability standards for rice production, which increases farm profitability.</p> | <p>0.1 At least 1,000 farmers (at least 35% women) are following the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) standards by Year 3, from a baseline of 0 in 2019.</p> <p>0.2 At least 75% of farmers that adopt SRP in Year 1 (at least 30% women) measure an increase in farm profitability (per kg value of sale minus cost of inputs) by Year 3, from a baseline established in Year 1.</p> <p>0.3 Increased number of nesting cranes and increase in nest success led to stable or increasing Sarus crane populations by project end, from the baseline (156 pairs: 102 in Wakema and 54 in Maubin) established in 2018.</p> <p>0.4 Number of hectares under agro-industrial rice cultivation within project area maintained at 0 by project end.</p> | <p>0.1 71 (44% women) farmers were introduced to the SRP standards.</p> <p>0.2 Farm profitability will be recorded in Year 2.</p> <p>0.3 Sarus Crane nests surveyed in 2020 declined from the 2018 baseline. With only 118 pairs, down from 156; with 96 down from 102 in Wakema and 22 down from 54 in Maubin.</p> <p>0.4 Hectares under agro-industrial rice cultivation was maintained.</p> | <p>0.1 Rice production will begin in Year 2.</p> <p>0.2 Farm profitability will be recorded in Year 2, following the first rice outputs following SRP standards.</p> <p>0.3 Sarus Crane nests will be surveyed again in Year 2.</p> <p>0.4 Vigilance in tracking the expansion of agro-industrial rice cultivation with be maintained.</p> |
| <p>Output 1. By project end, Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) approaches are embedded in farming community, Government, CSOs and key rice industry bodies in the Delta.</p> | <p>1.1 SRP standards and training materials are developed and translated, and training delivered to at least 20 government agency representatives and 25 CSO</p> | <p>1.1 SRP standards were used to develop training materials in Myanmar language. Training was delivered to 8 government agency representatives and 5 CSO representatives.</p> | |

| | | |
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| | <p>representatives by project end (baseline 0 in 2018).</p> <p>1.2 At least 60 key farmer-trainers (at least 40% women) are trained in SRP standards and use of farmer diaries by project end (baseline 0 in 2018).</p> <p>1.3 At least two pre-purchase visits are made by large international rice purchasing companies to participating farms by project end (baseline 0).</p> | <p>1.2 Training farmer-trainers were delayed due to Covid. They will be trained in Year 2.</p> <p>1.3 Discussions with large international rice purchasing companies are ongoing. Site visits were not possible in Year 1 due to Covid.</p> |
| Activity 1.1 Develop training materials for local farmers, including SRP standards, and farmer diaries. | Training materials have been developed | Training materials need to be field tested and trainings to begin in Year 2. |
| Activity 1.2 Identify key influencers, and deliver targeted training and outreach to government officials and CSO representatives | The project has been introduced to the Department of Agriculture (DoA) in Wakema and Maubin and to CSO representatives from Kyonekapyin-Tapseik Community Conservation Group (KTCCG). | Trainings will begin with DoA and KTCCG in Year 2. |
| Activity 1.3 Identify at least 60 key farmers (at least 40% female), and provide training and mentoring to them in SRP, outreach techniques, and data collection. | DoA and KTCCG have begun identifying key farmers for training and mentoring. | Trainings will begin with Key Farmers in Year 2. |
| Activity 1.4 Support key farmers to outreach around 20 further farmers each, scaling to reach at least 1,000 farmers. | The identification of Key Farmers was delayed due to Covid. | Key Farmers will conduct outreach in Year 2. |
| Activity 1.5 Promote and facilitate visits by rice purchasing companies to SRP trial sites. | Discussions are ongoing with rice purchasing companies including Olam. | Visits will be carried out after the end of the Covid pandemic, in Year 2. |
| <p>Output 2.</p> <p>Habitats beneficial to biodiversity are maintained and enhanced, protecting aquatic ecosystems and populations of threatened species.</p> | <p>2.1 Number of nesting Sarus Cranes in the project's pilot area increases by at least 5% per annum from a baseline of 14 breeding pairs, in 2018.</p> <p>2.2 Sarus crane nest success increases by at least 5% per annum from a baseline established in 2019-20.</p> | <p>2.1 The number of nesting Sarus Cranes in the project pilot area were 15 pairs. This was a 7% increase from a baseline of 14 breeding pairs.</p> <p>2.2 Sarus Crane nest success baseline was calculated in Year 1. 45% in Wakema (43 out of 96 nests had at least once chick survive) and 82% in Maubin (18 out of 22 nests)</p> <p>2.3 Consistent surveys were not possible during Year 1, due to multiple government lockdowns to reduce the expansion of Covid. Small numbers of</p> |

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| | <p>2.3 Records of other indicator species in rice landscapes (e.g., Asian openbill stork and fishing cat) are stable or increasing each year (e.g., from a baseline of 126 openbills and 2 fishing cats confirmed by records in 2018).</p> <p>2.4 Aquatic ecosystem indicator species stable or increasing by Year 3 (from a baseline suite of indicators to be developed in Year 1).</p> | <p>Asian Openbill we recorded opportunistically, and no fishing cats were confirmed during Year 1.</p> <p>2.4 Ecosystem indicator baseline suite was in discussions with Maubin University for ongoing monitoring. Field access was not possible due to multiple government lockdowns.</p> | |
| <p>Activity 2.1. Identify potential habitat areas for Sarus cranes and other globally threatened wetland species, as well as threat monitoring, using remote sensed data.</p> | | <p>While satellite imagery is available clear interpretation of that data still needs field checking to understand wetland habitat differences. Field activities were restricted during the Covid pandemic.</p> | <p>Field testing will be carried out in Year 2 to finalize habitat maps.</p> |
| <p>Activity 2.2. Conduct participatory field surveys of Sarus cranes and other key wetland species.</p> | | <p>Sarus Crane nests were monitored with the participation of KTCCG members and interested farmers. Following the government lockdown during Covid, this was especially necessary to track Sarus Crane nest success.</p> | <p>Participatory field surveys will continue with KTCCG and farmers but will be expanded with professors and students from University of Maubin in Year 2.</p> |
| <p>Activity 2.3. Use results to inform SRP biodiversity interventions, and the identification of key areas for community-based conservation measures to reduce threats.</p> | | <p>SRP trainings were delayed due to Covid. Biodiversity interventions will inform SRP implementation once it begins.</p> | <p>Results will be used to inform SRP interventions following farmer trainings in Year 2.</p> |
| <p>Activity 2.4. Together with University partners, monitor broader impacts of SRP on wetland ecology, including biodiversity and livelihood indicators (e.g., fish and invertebrates).</p> | | <p>Maubin University participation was delayed due to Covid.</p> | <p>Maubin University participation will begin after the end of the Covid pandemic, in Year 2.</p> |
| <p>Output 3. Farmer livelihoods are equitably enhanced through adopting farming improvements.</p> | <p>3.1 Farm profitability (value of sale minus cost of inputs) increases by at least 15% by Year 3 from a baseline established in Year 1.</p> <p>3.2 At least 1,500 ha of rice in project area show an increase in SRP sustainability scores (15% by Year 3 above a baseline established in Year 1).</p> | <p>3.1 Data collection with farmers was delayed due to Covid. The baseline for farm profitability will be finalized in Year 2.</p> <p>3.2 Data collection with farmers was delayed due to Covid. The baseline for SRP sustainability scores will be finalized in Year 2.</p> <p>3.3 Data collection with farmers was delayed due to Covid. The baseline for women's empowerment measures will be finalized in Year 2.</p> | |

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| | <p>3.3 Women's empowerment measures in target communities show an increase by Year 3 (baseline to be established in Year 1 and interim progress reported in Year 2).</p> <p>3.4 Farmer attitudes to environmentally positive farming, SRP and wildlife are stable or show positive changes by Year 3 (baseline to be established during Year 1).</p> <p>3.5 Farmers report reduced use of chemicals by Year 3 (baseline to be established during Year 1).</p> | <p>3.4 Data collection with farmers was delayed due to Covid. The baseline for farmer attitudes will be finalized in Year 2.</p> <p>3.5 Data collection with farmers was delayed due to Covid. The baseline for chemical use will be finalized in Year 2.</p> | |
| <p>Activity 3.1. Support farmers to measure and improve SRP indicator scores, through analysis of farmer diaries, and targeted advisory services.</p> | <p>Use of Farmer diaries have been introduced but additional training is needed before farmers will start using the diaries.</p> | <p>Farmer diaries will be reviewed in Year 2</p> | |
| <p>Activity 3.2. Support and facilitate farmers to access the emerging market for sustainable rice.</p> | <p>Access to representative farmers have been limited and the market for sustainable rice is still limited.</p> | <p>Farmers will try to access the sustainable rice in Year 2.</p> | |
| <p>Activity 3.3. Collect data from representative farmers on rice sales revenue, cost of inputs, reports of chemical use, and therefore profitability.</p> | <p>Access to representative farmers have been limited and data is still needed</p> | <p>Data will be collected in Year 2.</p> | |
| <p>Activity 3.4. Conduct surveys of women's empowerment, and farmer knowledge, attitudes, and practice (KAP) in relation to improved rice farming, the SRP approach, biodiversity and Sarus cranes.</p> | <p>Access to representative farmers have been limited and surveys are still needed</p> | <p>Surveys will be conducted in Year 2.</p> | |
| <p>Output 4.</p> <p>Outcomes feed into growing regional and global agricultural biodiversity programs, and coordinate with existing national wetland conservation and agriculture initiatives and policy reforms.</p> | <p>4.1 An additional 5,000 farmers (at least 33% women) are exposed to SRP approaches by Year 3 (baseline 0).</p> <p>4.2 Rice agriculture and wetlands/grasslands considered in conservation policy development, including pilot Community Conservation Areas, Community-based ecotourism sites, and National Wetland Policy [Ramsar] by Year 3.</p> | <p>4.1 71 farmers (44% women) were exposed to SRP approaches in Year 1.</p> <p>4.2 Rice agriculture and wetlands/grasslands was being discussed with DoA as well as the Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division (NWCD) of the Forest Department (FD) in relation to Community Conservation, the National Wetland Policy, and future Ramsar Sites. These discussions are currently on hold following the Feb 1, 2021 Coup D'état. Many of the government expertise on these issues have been actively participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement and leaving government service.</p> | |

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| | 4.3 Project progress and results disseminated to key regional government, CSO and industry stakeholders in SRP Round Table, which meets at least twice per year, by Year 3. | 4.3 Project progress has been limited during Year 1, so no results have been disseminated. We had planned participation in the SRP 10 th Annual Plenary and Virtual Rice Week (March 29 - April 2, 2021) was not possible from Myanmar following the virtual collapse of internet connections. | |
| Activity 4.1. Promote and facilitate extension to additional farmers, through outreach, radio, field visits, presenting at regional events, etc. | | Promotion has been limited following the delays of earlier actions due to Covid. | Promotion and extension will follow on from SRP implementation in Year 2. |
| Activity 4.2. Conduct visits to other regions and countries to share lessons directly with other farmers. | | Visits were postponed in Year 1 because of Covid. | A visit to Cambodia will be implemented once international travel resumes. |
| Activity 4.3. Engage with policy development on National Wetland Policy, RAMSAR site development, Community Conservation Area establishment, and share experience of sustainable rice production. | | Policy development has stopped following the February Coup D'état | The resumption of policy development is reliant on clarity with the Myanmar government. This clarity may not return during the project period. |
| Activity 4.4. Work with SRP Secretariat to develop the Myanmar SRP Round Table, and present key project outcomes at those meetings. | | During Year 1, the project partnered with other SRP projects in Myanmar but the participation of the DoA was limited. | These project linkages will continue but the future participation of the DoA is still unclear. |

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

| Project summary | Measurable Indicators | Means of verification | Important Assumptions |
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| <p>Impact: Rice farmers in Myanmar maintain and improve farming practices to protect a traditional ethno-cultural landscape that safeguards globally threatened wetland biodiversity and increases the sustainability and profitability of their crops.</p> | | | |
| <p>Outcome: A traditional ethno-cultural landscape in Myanmar’s Ayeyarwady Delta, critical for globally threatened biodiversity, is maintained by farming communities adopting new global sustainability standards for rice production, which increases farm profitability.</p> | <p>0.1 At least 1,000 farmers (at least 35% women) are following the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) standards by Year 3, from a baseline of 0 in 2019.</p> <p>0.2 At least 75% of farmers that adopt SRP in Year 1 (at least 30% women) measure an increase in farm profitability (per kg value of sale minus cost of inputs) by Year 3, from a baseline established in Year 1.</p> <p>0.3 Increased number of nesting cranes and increase in nest success led to stable or increasing Sarus crane populations by project end, from the baseline (156 pairs: 102 in Wakema and 54 in Maubin) established in 2018.</p> <p>0.4 Number of hectares under agro-industrial rice cultivation within project area maintained at 0 by project end.</p> | <p>0.1 – 0.2 Reports generated by farmer Diaries and SRP Performance Indicator measures.</p> <p>0.3 Annual biodiversity and population surveys of key wetland areas.</p> <p>0.4 WCS GIS team data (annual analysis of remote sensing data).</p> | <p>Political stability in Myanmar is maintained.</p> <p>Farmers maintain interest in complying with SRP standards.</p> <p>SRP biodiversity measures are sufficient to protect cranes, as intended.</p> <p>Externalities outside of project control do not cause farmers to consolidate farms or sell land.</p> |
| <p>Output 1</p> <p>By project end, Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) approaches are embedded in farming community, Government, CSOs and key rice industry bodies in the Delta.</p> | <p>1.1 SRP standards and training materials are developed and translated, and training delivered to at least 20 government agency representatives and 25 CSO representatives by project end (baseline 0 in 2018).</p> <p>1.2 At least 60 key farmer-trainers (at least 40% women) are trained in SRP standards and use of farmer diaries by project end (baseline 0 in 2018).</p> | <p>1.1 SRP Standards training materials, training records/reports and attendance lists.</p> <p>1.2 SRP Standards training records including attendance lists.</p> <p>1.3 Visit reports.</p> | <p>Government remains willing to cooperate.</p> <p>Community trainers are interested to learn and on-train.</p> <p>Rice purchasing companies maintain an interest in SRP.</p> |

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| | 1.3 At least two pre-purchase visits are made by large international rice purchasing companies to participating farms by project end (baseline 0). | | |
| <p>Output 2</p> <p>Habitats beneficial to biodiversity are maintained and enhanced, protecting aquatic ecosystems and populations of threatened species.</p> | <p>2.1 Number of nesting Sarus cranes in the project's pilot area increases by at least 5% per annum from a baseline of 14 breeding pairs, in 2018.</p> <p>2.2 Sarus crane nest success increases by at least 5% per annum from a baseline established in 2019-20.</p> <p>2.3 Records of other indicator species in rice landscapes (e.g., Asian openbill stork and fishing cat) are stable or increasing each year (e.g., from a baseline of 126 openbills and 2 fishing cats confirmed by records in 2018).</p> <p>2.4 Aquatic ecosystem indicator species stable or increasing by Year 3 (from a baseline suite of indicators to be developed in Year 1).</p> | <p>2.1 Annual biodiversity surveys.</p> <p>2.2 Community nest guardian reports.</p> <p>2.3 WCS and partner field and camera trap surveys.</p> <p>2.4 Maubin University and WCS surveys of aquatic biodiversity in target areas.</p> | <p>SRP biodiversity measures are sufficient to protect cranes and other species.</p> <p>Farming improvements lead to increases in nest success of cranes.</p> <p>Agricultural improvements increase food availability for threatened species.</p> |
| <p>Output 3</p> <p>Farmer livelihoods are equitably enhanced through adopting farming improvements.</p> | <p>3.1 Farm profitability (value of sale minus cost of inputs) increases by at least 15% by Year 3 from a baseline established in Year 1.</p> <p>3.2 At least 1,500 ha of rice in project area show an increase in SRP sustainability scores (15% by Year 3 above a baseline established in Year 1).</p> <p>3.3 Women's empowerment measures in target communities show an increase by Year 3 (baseline to be established in Year 1 and interim progress reported in Year 2).</p> | <p>3.1 Analysis of net income from farmer surveys and farmer diaries.</p> <p>3.2 Analysis of farmer diaries and SRP benchmarking scores.</p> <p>3.3 Analysis of SRP Performance Indicator 13: "Women's Empowerment Scorecard".</p> <p>3.4 WCS IRB approval of farmer surveys; Analysis of farmer attitude surveys.</p> <p>3.5 Analysis of farmer attitude surveys.</p> | <p>Farmers follow SRP approaches.</p> <p>Farmers adopt measures that improve their sustainability and profitability.</p> <p>Farmers maintain close cultural ties to the landscape.</p> |

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| | <p>3.4 Farmer attitudes to environmentally positive farming, SRP and wildlife are stable or show positive changes by Year 3 (baseline to be established during Year 1).</p> <p>3.5 Farmers report reduced use of chemicals by Year 3 (baseline to be established during Year 1).</p> | | |
| <p>Output 4 Outcomes feed into growing regional and global agricultural biodiversity programs, and coordinate with existing national wetland conservation and agriculture initiatives and policy reforms.</p> | <p>4.1 An additional 5,000 farmers (at least 33% women) are exposed to SRP approaches by Year 3 (baseline 0).</p> <p>4.2 Rice agriculture and wetlands/grasslands considered in conservation policy development, including pilot Community Conservation Areas, Community-based ecotourism sites, and National Wetland Policy [Ramsar] by Year 3.</p> <p>4.3 Project progress and results disseminated to key regional government, CSO and industry stakeholders in SRP Round Table, which meets at least twice per year, by Year 3.</p> | <p>4.1 Township Agriculture Department extension program records.</p> <p>4.2 Protected Area policy and National Wetland policy documents.</p> <p>4.3 Minutes of meetings and participant lists.</p> | <p>Township Agriculture Departments are interested to extend the SRP approaches further.</p> <p>Policy development is open to input.</p> <p>Stakeholders are interested to participate in SRP Round Table.</p> |
| <p>Activities (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)</p> <p>1.1 Develop training materials for local farmers, including SRP standards, and farmer diaries.</p> <p>1.2 Identify key influencers, and deliver targeted training and outreach to government officials and CSO representatives</p> <p>1.3 Identify at least 60 key farmers (at least 40% female), and provide training and mentoring to them in SRP, outreach techniques, and data collection.</p> <p>1.4 Support key farmers to outreach around 20 further farmers each, scaling to reach at least 1,000 farmers.</p> <p>1.5 Promote and facilitate visits by rice purchasing companies to SRP trial sites.</p> <p>2.1 Identify potential habitat areas for Sarus cranes and other globally threatened wetland species, as well as threat monitoring, using remote sensed data.</p> <p>2.2 Conduct participatory field surveys of Sarus cranes and other key wetland species.</p> <p>2.3 Use results to inform SRP biodiversity interventions, and the identification of key areas for community-based conservation measures to reduce threats.</p> <p>2.4 Together with University partners, monitor broader impacts of SRP on wetland ecology, including biodiversity and livelihood indicators (e.g., fish and invertebrates).</p> <p>3.1 Support farmers to measure and improve SRP indicator scores, through analysis of farmer diaries, and targeted advisory services.</p> | | | |

- 3.2** Support and facilitate farmers to access the emerging market for sustainable rice.
- 3.3** Collect data from representative farmers on rice sales revenue, cost of inputs, reports of chemical use, and therefore profitability.
- 3.4** Conduct surveys of women's empowerment, and farmer knowledge, attitudes, and practice (KAP) in relation to improved rice farming, the SRP approach, biodiversity and Sarus cranes.

- 4.1** Promote and facilitate extension to additional farmers, through outreach, radio, field visits, presenting at regional events, etc.
- 4.2** Conduct visits to other regions and countries to share lessons directly with other farmers.
- 4.3** Engage with policy development on National Wetland Policy, RAMSAR site development, Community Conservation Area establishment, and share experience of sustainable rice production.
- 4.4** Work with SRP Secretariat to develop the Myanmar SRP Round Table, and present key project outcomes at those meetings.

Checklist for submission

| | Check |
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| Is the report less than 10MB? If so, please email to Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk putting the project number in the Subject line. | Yes |
| 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. | No |
| 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. | No |
| 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. | No |
| Have you involved your partners in preparation of the report and named the main contributors | Yes |
| Have you completed the Project Expenditure table fully? | Yes |
| Do not include claim forms or other communications with this report. | |