

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2022

Project reference	28-010
Project title	Developing rural pathways to community resilience and ecosystem restoration
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Ethiopia, North West, Amhara Region, Metema
Lead partner	Tree Aid
Partner(s)	Sustainable Natural Resources Management Association (SUNARMA)
Project leader	Cheru Tessema
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	

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).

In the last update we reported that due to ethnic tension in one of the project kebeles, Gubai Jejebit, the local government had ceased traveling there. Therefore, we had made the decision to temporarily cease operations there. However, since submission of the report, we received official communication from the regional government that the area was safe and we were given the necessary permissions to continue our plans in the area and with communities. Therefore, Gubai Jejebit and Zewdie Badma PFMC remains one of the kebeles and PFMC in this project.

After 12 months of the project, we report on the following activities;

Activity 1.3

With the purpose of increasing the capacity of the PFMCs to understand their roles, rights, and responsibilities regarding forest management, training on cooperative management was organised for 63 PFMC leaders and 11 other stakeholders from local government. The training was delivered by experts from the cooperative offices of Metema district and West Gondar zone. The training covered the principles of cooperation and cooperative management, rights and obligations of members, duties of cooperative leaders, and management skills including financial management and auditing. They also acquired technical skills in the areas of marketing and income generation activities.

Of the 63 PFMC trainees that attended, 100% responded that they had gained new skills. They reflected that with the training they received that they will be capable to ensure the proper functioning of their cooperatives and able to keep records of their transactions and meetings.

Activity 2.1

The Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute (EBI) conducted field data collection of the Combretum- Terminalia woodland ecosystem in Metema across 3 kebeles. Following the data analysis, it was decided that the in-situ conservation site was to be in Das Gundo forest which has been GPS delineated. The site was selected due to its good density of Boswellia trees, there is potential for good regeneration of Boswellia and it is biodiverse in terms of its flora and fauna. This is attributed to low human intervention, and linked to this, lower livestock disturbance and resultant reduction of fires. Final verification visits are needed to two kebeles to conduct verification of some species' leaves that were dry when collected during the initial data collection as it was the dry season. The final report will be available by the end of 2022.

The in-situ conservation site which will be a national site focused on conserving the Combretum–Terminalia woodlands is dominated by Boswellia papyrifera trees. The management of the site will be handed to the local government post project and will form one of the governments biodiverse sites across the country. A management plan has been created by EBI for the site which the project will follow. We will map the other areas of the forest together with the in-situ site to easily determine their proximity to each other.

Activity 2.2

The research site that will be used to conduct comparative analysis using Indian tapping tool verses traditional methods has been identified in two kebeles: Lemlem Terara and Agamwuha. Sixty trees per site (30 trees for Indian tapping and 30 for traditional tapping) have been selected, and trees marked and their diameter at breast (DBH) and latitude and longitude of each selected tree recorded. For the identification of sites in the following three kebeles (Das Gundo, Delello, and Meshiha) the team will do this in advance of their training in the next quarter.

Activity 2.3

The Indian tapping method training manual has been prepared in the local (Amharic) language. 300 copies will be printed and distributed to trainees and collaborating woreda experts before the tapping training in November.

Activity 2.4

The Ethiopian Forest Development Office (formerly known as EFFRI) is leading on the design preparation and production of the Indian tapping tools whereby 250 tools will be produced and distributed to the trainees. The design for the new tool has been provided and contractual agreement made with a well experienced local tool producer to prepare the Indian tapping tool.

Activity 2.5

There has been extensive partnership development between the UK based research institutions, Tree Aid Ethiopia, Tree Aid UK and the lead partner, SUNARMA. This has been important to forge positive working relationships and to ensure each partner has a clear understanding of their role and impact within the project.

To assess the condition of the Boswellia tree, a data collection template was prepared and field staff trained by Forest Research on how to do the data gathering. SUNARMA aimed to collect central GPS points from 120 sites categorised under three categories; sparsely grown, densely grown and un or under tapped, and densely grown and over tapped location. The data collection will resume in the next quarter.

The team from Swansea University have produced the scripts to enable remote sensing time-series analysis once the data has been received. Further, the team are in the process of generating the high resolution basemap and the other complementary products to understand the dynamic nature and factors influencing the forest.

Activity 2.7

Prior field level preparation, topic identification and participant selection are on-going, with training to be facilitated by Forest Research in November 2022. Most likely, due to the national security situation, this will take place remotely as the UK partners are unlikely to receive clearance for travel.

Activity 3.1

A three-day training of trainers led by an experienced and skilled expert in climate-smart approaches from Gondar University was organised on locally appropriate climate-smart agriculture practices and technologies for three project staff and seven local government experts who were drawn from the district offices of Agriculture, Environment, and Cooperative. The training was designed with the purpose of increasing land productivity and reducing agricultural expansion as a response to the increasing climate change impacts. Specifically, the training was focused on climate-smart crop and livestock production, agroforestry, and the role of forest, water, and energy management in reducing the impacts of climate change and creating climate change resilient livelihoods. The training also touched on climate change and its impacts, and the recent global and national experiences and best practices in the areas of climate-smart agriculture. The training also addressed important interventions to create climate change resilient communities in the context of the project areas.

Activity 3.2

Training materials have been prepared and translated into Amharic language to cascade the climate smart agricultural training to members of the PFMCs. This is planned for Q3.

Activity 3.3

During July to September, the team conducted a needs assessment in preparation for distributing agroforestry seedlings amongst communities. It was decided that beneficiaries across five kebeles and seven PFMC sites would benefit. Please note Mesha kebele was inaccessible due to its topography of steep and rough ground and during the rains made travel to the area unsafe.

Grafted mango seedlings were procured from Gondar town with about 1,050 mango seedlings distributed for planting amongst 179 people (163 men, 16 women) from Das, Gundo, Delleo, Agamwuha, Zewde Badima, Lay lemlem Terara and Tach Lemlem Terara PFMCs.

These target beneficiaries have the potential to support the planted seedlings in the form of irrigation as these beneficiaries have supplementary water sources to irrigate in the dry seasons. Please see distribution table in Annex 2.

Activity 4.1 and 4.4

To date, the specific PFMC sites with potential for frankincense and beekeeping enterprises development have been identified. While the VTEs to be organised around frankincense are from the eight target PFMC sites, those to be engaged in beekeeping will be from six PFMCs namely Das, Gundo, Delleo, Meshiha, Agamwuha, and Lay lemlem terara.

Six beekeeping VTE groups have now been established. In total, there are 74 beekeeping VTE members (71 male, 3 female) and further efforts needed to add more beekeeping members.

In this reporting period, 74 members of the VTEs have also received beekeeping training delivered by a beekeeping expert from woreda animal production office, looking at; Scientific knowledge on modern beekeeping and honey processing; Practical training on how to transfer bees from traditional beehive to modern one, training on how to bake honey pancake using waxes, how to manage bee colonies, and on how to process honey.

As part of the post training survey, a high percentage of participants felt that they acquired new skills from the training, as per the graph in annex 2. As shown in the graph 86.5% and 8.1% of respondents

agreed and strongly agreed respectively that they gained new skills from the training. This training will help the forest management cooperatives to execute beekeeping activities based on scientific knowledge.

For the frankincense VTE groups, consensus was reached with PFMC leaders to form 12 enterprise groups, each with 20 members. PFMC leaders are now working on establishing the groups with a view to finalising membership over the next few weeks.

Activity 4.2

Training on drying, storing and grading of frankincense has been pushed back to take place in October. It is important this takes place before the tapping season to ensure the frankincense tappers collect and produce good quality product. In advance, training materials are being prepared to ensure the training takes place as per the reforecast plan. The FCDO funded project in the same area will be providing warehouses to support storage.

Activity 4.5

Procurement of the beehives for the 6 groups is underway. Due to budget constraints linked to high inflation, the number of hives has had to be reduced from 120 to 60. In addition, the team will mobilise communities to also produce other hives using traditional/local materials to supplement the modern hives provided.

Monitoring and Evaluation

In the April-June quarter, five project kebeles namely Das Gundo, Lemlem Terara, Agamwuha, Dellelo and Meshiha were visited by the project team. During this visit, the team members oriented the local communities, particularly the members of the PFMCs about the new project. They also assessed the status of each FMCs and their forest management plans. The team also provided technical backstopping and orientation about the production of frankincense and the economic importance of engaging in frankincense enterprise.

Further visits were made to Dellelo and Das kebeles, where house hold visits were undertaken to assess the income they earn from the sale of frankincense. In Dellelo PFMC individuals engaged in frankincense collection earned about 140,000 ETB per household, where as in Das kebele households got 2000 to 300,000 ETB. The amount earned varies based on their engagement in the production process as well as experince and expertise. In Lay Lemelem and Tach Lemelem Terara those beneficiaries who planted mango seedlings were visited and they are in a good condition so far.

To track the performance of the project on the status of regeneration of *Boswellia*, the presence of permanent monitoring plots (PMP) is crucial. So far, the team have established 18 PMPs across four PFM managed forests namely Dellelo, Tach and Laylemlem Terara and Agamwuha. This work will continue in the coming month until permanent plots are established across the entire PFM forest blocks. The size of the PMP is 20 m*20 m and each plot has been recorded using GPS.

The PMPs will provide a critical base for monitoring the forest, specifically the team can take inventories on the vegetation status, population structure and regeneration status on an annual basis. At the point of establishing the plots, measurements were taken on the vegetation parameters including height and diameter of trees, number of seedlings and saplings as baseline information. Stem height and diameter is measured in the main plot i.e. at 20m* 20m, saplings and seedlings were inventoried at 10 m* 10 m and 2 m* 2 m inside the main plot. Details of the measured vegetation variables will be analysed using different vegetation analysis techniques and separate reports will be prepared.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Security

In July 2022, there were issues on the Gallabat border with Ethiopia and Sudan. The border post was closed June 26 following clashes between Sudanese and Ethiopian border guards. There have been good negotiations between both sides, and the border has since opened. However, as of October, there remains heavy military presence on both sides of the border.

On the national front, there has been some progress with the government preparing for talks with the Northern Tigray National Front with people assigned from both sides. Negotiation with the African Union will begin in October.

Although outside of the reporting window, a more recent update on security from October 2022 is that the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) launched an attack in Northern Amhara, Kobo, North Wollo. The TPLF are increasing their numbers by deploying un-trained people with the government refraining to engage to avoid unprecedented loss of life.

Despite this, the project areas and communities remain stable and life is able to continue as normal. Tree Aid's Programme Manager and the Country Director have regular security briefings to ensure any change in the situation is reported and any necessary steps to safeguard staff are taken. A bi-weekly security briefing is prepared by the lead partner Sunarma and shared with relevant partner and Tree Aid staff members.

Inflation

Ethiopia continues to experience extremely high inflation of around 34.5% (obtained from IMF DataMapper, April 2022). Although inflation was previously high, it has increased significantly as a result of external factors which could not have been anticipated at the start of 2022. This is usually offset by the devaluation of the Ethiopia Birr, however as a result of the Pound Sterling depreciating, the gains obtained are very minimal and not significant enough to sustain the inflationary pressures within Ethiopia. This high rate of inflation has caused significant issues in terms of both managing the budget and planning activities. Linked to the inflationary issue, there have been challenges with recruitment. In the reporting period, the following positions were still vacant:

- Head of Finance and Admin. This is mainly due to higher salary expectations from candidates due to rising cost of living in Ethiopia, than the budget available.
- Development facilitators: we have not received applications that fulfil the minimum requirements for the position. This has added additional workload and pressure on existing staff as they strive to fill the gaps.

The Tree Aid M&E Officer and Country Director positions were filled, but unfortunately both candidates resigned for other opportunities. These posts have been re-advertised and a new Country Director appointed in July.

Budget revision

To respond to the high inflation, we are currently undergoing a re-budgeting exercise to reforecast in line with inflationary pressures. We are also looking at ways to mitigate against further inflation in the future as well as analysing the budget for savings in other areas. Until this has been finalised and approved, we have prioritised key activities for Q2 and pushed some activities that can afford to be slightly delayed, into Q3.

Field vehicle

The field vehicle was in need of repair and was off the road for longer than expected. This impacted on our ability to complete a number of activities based on the original plan.

There is clear consensus from the team that an accelerated work plan has been needed to catch up on delays in the project. However, there have been delays across outputs 1, 2 and 4, with some activities planned but not yet complete, and re-scheduled for Q3.

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

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

Change request reference if known:

4a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

No Estimated underspend: £0

4b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?