



**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 2023

Project reference	<i>28-010</i>
Project title	Developing rural pathways to community resilience and ecosystem restoration
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Ethiopia
Lead partner	Sustainable natural resource management Association
Partner(s)	Forest research, Swansea university
Project leader	<i>Cheru Tessema</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR 31st October 2023
Project website/blog/social media	<i>Saving Metema forest from the brink of extinction / Tree Aid</i>

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).

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your M&E systems (are your indicators still relevant, can you report against any Standard Indicators, do your assumptions still hold true?). The guidance can be found on the resources page of the relevant fund website.

In the reporting period, we accomplished activities that directly contribute to all four outputs of the project:

1. Strengthening local institutions (Output-1)
2. Promote sustainable harvest, enhance learning, and evidence building (Output-2)
3. Sustainable land management and promotion of farm diversity (Output-3)
4. Improve household income (Output-4)
5. Data gathering and project monitoring (M&E)

Strengthening local forest governance institutions

All 8 targeted participatory forest management cooperatives (PFMCs) completed development of a management plan for their respective forest areas and preparation of internal bye-laws that every member agreed to abide by. The documents were finalised after consecutive meetings with PFM leaders and all members. The project team began their facilitation by having meetings with the leaders of each PFMC in their respective villages to brainstorm the importance of managing the forest and having bye-laws and to discuss and define the contents of the bye-laws. Both documents were finally approved by the general assembly. The developed bye-laws comprise of the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of PFMC members and are designed to be gender sensitive in that statements that encourage increased women participation in PFM in terms of membership and leadership positions are included. The achieved result will highly support the effective and equitable governance and benefit sharing of resources in the community.

Promote sustainable harvest, enhance learning, and evidence building

Tree Aid Ethiopia attended the 1st international conference on 'Biodiversity conservation and Ecosystem management: opportunities and challenges' organised by the Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute. Our approach of working with relevant government institutions to conserve endangered biodiversity resources was appreciated and received certificate of recognition.

We also organised an internal annual review meeting aimed to enhance project performance with key implementing partner organisation, Sustainable Natural Resource Management Association (SUNARMA). A learning and experience-sharing event for key stakeholders including environmental consortiums, international organisations, government offices, research and academia was organized on August 1st, 2023. During the event, update reports, field observations and preliminary research findings were presented. Among others, three key research and assessment reports were presented and discussions made:

- Comparative study of traditional and new tapping methods on frankincense yield and other physical and health damage being conducted by the Ethiopian Forestry Development presented. The analysis is comparing two types of tools, traditional vs modified, commonly called the Indian tapping tool. The research also includes adoption of an Indian tapping method used to tap *B. serrata*, which has a strong resemblance with *B. papyrifera*. According to preliminary results obtained during the first year, tappers perceived that tapping using the Indian tapping method is more time-efficient than the local tapping method and the health condition of trees tapped using Indian tool is better. On other side, they suggested to consider the tapping height from the ground to be higher than the currently recommended 25cm initial tapping point from the ground, which is uncomfortable for tapping, risk for ground fire and resin thieves. Researchers recognised the issue and agreed to consider and revise the manual accordingly.
- The Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute presented their field findings conducted to identify an in-situ site to conserve mainly the *Boswellia papyrifera* tree species. According to their field assessment, although the *Boswellia* tree is among the top three abundant species in the sample areas, not a seedling or natural regeneration is observed. The situation highlighted the urgent need to work more in conserving the tree.
- Findings on the status of regeneration of the *Boswellia* forest in three forest areas was presented by University of Gondar. The result showed that there is actually a good natural regeneration capacity- large number of juveniles at certain times of year, but poor recruitment level/capacity of seedlings to saplings and mature trees due to high seedling mortality-survival of the seedlings affected by different factors including degradation of land by cattle and agricultural activities and forest fires. The institute is also conducting a regular monitoring survey on vegetation cover change in Tree Aid-supported PFM sites of Metema area, which will be shared when finalised.

Sustainable land management and promotion of farm diversity

We facilitated training on locally appropriate climate-smart agricultural practices and technologies for smallholder farmers. This training has been a follow-up to the training of trainers (ToT) provided on the same topic for technical experts from the local government sectors and project team. The training material on climate-smart agriculture, which was adapted from FAO technical papers for the purpose of the ToT training is further simplified and translated into Amharic. It was facilitated in two rounds for 954 beneficiaries of which 296 (31%) of them were women. This is 85% of the targeted 1125 members. The remaining members of one PFMC will be trained in the coming third quarter.

In the last six months, 772 grafted mango seedlings were distributed and planted by 198 households (188 men and 10 women) who are members of the PFMCs. The support is aimed at improving the livelihoods of the PFMC members through agroforestry practices, which is one of the alternatives to diversify the livelihood options for the local communities. Before the distribution of the seedlings, assessments were made on whether the farmers had suitable land for mango

fruit tree production, and the availability of water in the dry season. With this, the project achieved 77% of its project target.

We distributed 6.3 quintals of cowpeas to 166 households (153 men and 13 women). All the smallholder farmers planted all the distributed seeds and the performance of the forage seed was very good as observed during field monitoring visits. This forage has been chosen for its multipurpose benefits such as increasing biomass, supplementing household food demands and nutritional needs, and improving the farmland soil fertility (because it is a nitrogen-fixing legume). In the reporting period, we contracted a consultancy firm to lead on a gender study to map and support an understanding and future interventions of women in relation to the frankincense value chain. The research and field data collection and preliminary report will be available in the next quarter.

Forest Research and Swansea University have assisted with producing a protocol for data collection to understand the health and condition of *Boswellia* trees, using equipment purchased through the project, to assess the health of the trees leaves. The actual data collection has been delayed due to the fact that it can only take place during a period that the leaves are available (June-September). During that time, this year, security issues meant that the team were limited in their movements to be trained and collect data.

Data collected on sites of high density of *boswellia* (untapped), high density (heavily tapped) and low density *boswellia* was provided to Swansea University to support in mapping *boswellia* dispersal throughout the sites. However, the remote sensing process has not been successful and more data is required. This data collection has been delayed for the same reasons as above.

Improve household income

In the 2023 production year, all the eight PFMCs were engaged in the production of frankincense and sold all the products in this reporting period. Totally, 1379.21 quintal of frankincense produced and sold for 23,372,042.72 birr or (£370,985). Of all production, 84% is first grade white while the remaining 16% is lower grade. This year's price per quintal of both first grade white and blackish lower grade product price is lower than last year – 18,500.03 ETB for white this year v 23,021 ETB last year; and 8,600.05 ETB for lower grade v 9000 ETB last year.

Data gathering and project monitoring

The regular updates on beneficiary data have been made and people who attended different events, received inputs, joined or left the PFMCs have been collected. In addition, project staff conducted monitoring visits to observe the status of fruit seedlings, forage crops, and facilitate discussions with target communities. Furthermore, data on regeneration status of different tree and shrubs from six monitoring plots established in the forest was collected. This will continue in the coming quarter.

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.

- The recent government's disarmament attempt of Special Forces (claimed as part of a recent countrywide military reform process) in the Amhara region has caused social insecurity across the region and hence it has extended to the project areas where such development has been resulting in instability that is happening in an irregular pattern since April 2023. The result of this was periods of kidnappings and even killings within the target kebeles. This development has hindered the project's progress in the reporting period. The frequency of travel to some project sites such as Zewde Badima, Meshaha, and Dellelo PFMCs was limited. Since the end of July, we have been working as per the following implementation;
- A) High-risk area - Zewde Badima – no activity
- B) Medium risk area - Das Gundo, Meshiha & Lemlem Terra – remote activities and possible field activities with community police
- C) Risk-free area Delello and Agamwuha – continue activities

We receive 2-weekly security briefings from the partner Sunarma and continue to monitor the situation very closely. Amhara is under a 6-month State of Emergency since 4th August which has brought more stability to the region.

- The longstanding blockage of internet connection by the government and the project vehicle being out of use due to repairs needed limited regular monitoring and supply of inputs
- The ongoing-armed conflict in the region has exacerbated the security situation in the project area and restricted safe travels to project sites particularly to the Zewude Badima, and Meshaha PFMCs. The security situation coupled with the peak farming season in the reporting quarter, it was very difficult to get PFMC members to implement activities as planned.
- The ever-increasing inflation in the country has been badly affecting the project performance as the prices of commodities and service providers is highly appreciated. For example, because of the increased price of mango fruits and cost of transportation including labour costs at the farm gate it was not possible to buy as many fruit seedlings as planned by the project.
- Occurrence of seasonal and recurrent fire damaging the forest and its precious resources

Learning

- Review and discussion forums help to strengthen networking, experience sharing and cross learning opportunities
- Strengthening linkage between research and development helps in developing and implementation of activities
- Mechanisms shall be devised to reduce seedling mortality and hence improve recruitment
- The need for domestication of high value dry forest tree species
- Development of flexible work plan and be able to perform activities to overcome unexpected challenges

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

Discussed with NIRAS: Yes

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No

Change request reference if known:

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

Actual spend: ██████████

4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2024)?

Yes Estimated underspend: ██████████

4c. 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.**

NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.

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

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.

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

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**

