

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	28-027
Project title	Strengthened livelihoods and conservation management in Virachey National Park
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Cambodia
Lead partner	FFI
Partner(s)	Cambodia Ministry of Environment; local NGO Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) Organization
Project leader	<i>Lou Vanny</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR3</i>
Project website/blog/social media	

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.

Output 1: Activities

Activity 1.1 Conduct targeted biodiversity surveys, with participation from IPs, of wildlife and key habitats to provide the knowledge for an evidence-based zonation and management plan (Y1).

Completed. See attached report. A total of 2,494 independent events were recorded over the course of the survey, comprising 59 species; 36 mammal, 21 bird and two reptile species. 647 records could not be identified beyond family and were excluded from the species list and species richness. Of the 59 species detected, 16 are categorised as Threatened on the IUCN Red List: three Critically Endangered, two Endangered and 11 Vulnerable. A further three species are Near Threatened.

Activity 1.2 Disseminate results of biodiversity surveys to raise awareness and galvanise a sense of pride nationally, and to augment political will (Y1-Y2).

Virachey camera trapping report has been shared with the Ministry of Environment and Provincial Departments of Environment in Ratanakiri and Stung Treng. Video of the elusive, Critically Endangered large-antlered muntjac was recorded for the first time anywhere, confirming the presence of multiple individuals of the species. The recent findings confirmed the importance of Virachey National Park for this species.

The results of the survey were presented during the national stakeholder consultation workshop on zoning in June 2023. (Please see the report attached)

Activity 1.3 Conduct participatory zonation consultations with MoE, IPs and other stakeholders, to inform a zoning of VNP that fulfils conservation needs and IPs' sustainable resource use rights (Y1-Y2)

In progress. On 5 June, 2023 Fauna & Flora supported the Ministry of Environment to organise the national zoning consultation workshop, where 50 key stakeholders at the national and sub-national levels were invited to officially validate the zonation results for government endorsement. The workshop fully agreed on the final draft zonation map for Virachey National Park including 134,417 ha for core zone, 109,293 ha for conservation zone and 87,908 ha for sustainable use zone and 882 ha for community zone. (Please see draft zonation map attached). However, in July 2023 the government expanded the area of Virachey National Park from 332,500 ha to 405,766 ha. This expansion has resulted in the need to zone the expanded area before approval of zonation by the Prime Ministerial Sub-Decree can be completed.

Activity 1.4 Develop an evidence-based management plan in partnership with MoE, following best practice guidance and with input from indigenous communities (Y2-Y3).

No reportable progress as activity depends on the finalization of the zonation for the park. MoE have requested that work on the management plan follows the zonation.

Output 2 Activities:

Activity 2.1 Assess current CPA management practices, customary institutions, land tenure and resource use need within four CPAs in Ratanakiri Province (Y1).

Completed.

Activity 2.2 Strengthen technical and organisational capacities of existing CPA Committees to update, implement and monitor existing management plans, and to engage in relevant decision-making (Y1-Y2).

In progress. Several meetings were organized at the village level to select candidates to stand for election to be CPA committee members to follow the CPA management guideline and ensure the transparency. There were 85 with 18 females were selected by the CPA members in the community as the candidates.

The CPA committee member's election event will be organized by the PDOE in collaboration with Fauna & Flora in November 2023 to officially finalize the selection. The official Deika (commune level) for the recognition of CPA committee members will be issued by the commune council.

Activity 2.3 Support the revision and monitoring of CPA management plans to ensure effectiveness and equitable distribution of risks/costs/benefits (Y2).

In progress. Fauna & Flora and our partner NTFP have undertaken a literature review and updated some key sections of the previous CPA management plans based on the availability of relevant data. The full revision process will be initiated after the final selection of CPA committee members which is scheduled for the completion in early December 2023 and will be discussed during the second gender-inclusive workshop to be scheduled in late December 2023.

Activity 2.4 Train and support CPA members to conduct monthly forest community patrols to record, remove and discourage threats to wildlife, in line with CPA management plans (Y2-Y3). Completed. However, the project plans to continue providing additional training and support to new CPA committee members after the selection by election.

Activity 2.5 Deliver two gender-inclusive workshops per year per target community within CPAs on regulations in protected areas including cultural and scientific contextual components (Y1-Y3).

9-18 August 2023, the first series of gender inclusive workshop under the theme of ‘The Importance of Virachey National Park and Gender Integration Community Protected Areas’ was successfully organized by our partner NTFP in collaboration with PDOE and Fauna & Flora to 4 CPAs located in Veun Sai and Taveng districts of Ratanakiri province. 150 participants (70 women) attended the series of workshops for all 4 CPAs. The workshop built their understanding about key values of the park and provided opportunity for them to learn and share their knowledge, experience and challenges in protecting Virachey National Park to have better CPA management plans. Please see report attached.

The second gender inclusive workshop is scheduled for December 2023 to build capacity and ownership of indigenous communities in developing their new CPA management plans for year (2024-2028).

Activity 2.6 Support 4 youth eco-clubs to take an active role in conservation stewardship within their communities through capacity building and local awareness events (Y1-Y3).
Ongoing.

Output 3 Activities

Activity 3.1 Analyse and monitor gendered aspects of natural resource use, disaggregating roles in livelihoods and community decision-making processes to ensure gender-responsive project delivery (Y1).

The project has developed a methodology for conducting a research study on gender in natural resource management.

The project has conducted the field assessment, looking at the current roles of women in the use and access to natural resources and CPA management governance system, key challenges and barriers to their participation and opportunities the project should be aware of and recommendations to ensure the gender-responsive interventions for the better impacts on gender role in natural resource management. The key results from this analysis will be used to inform the updated CPA management plan and livelihood strategy development. The gender analysis is scheduled for completion in November 2023 and will be available in the next reporting.

Activity 3.2 Analyse community socio-economic status and assess traditional and current agricultural and NTFP/wildmeat harvesting practices, and cultural values (Y1).

The project has completed the field assessment and results are being analysed. The report will be available by March 2024. While the final report is being finalised, we are integrating information gathered to help advise ongoing activities.

Activity 3.3 With IPs, identify and evaluate strategies based on conservation goals, agro-ecological conditions, traditional practices, existing skills/interests, and market demand based on market system analysis (Y1).

Completed.

Activity 3.4 Deliver technical training and develop capacity for indigenous producers for climate-smart agriculture, poultry, and revitalisation of sustainable traditional NTFP harvesting (Y1-Y3).

In August the project collected 200 malva nut seedlings from O’ Kapha CPA for grafting in the nursery in order to make a planned clonal grafting during the fruiting season from March-May. The grafting assessment found that there is 99% of survival rate.

The planned clonal grafting trial during the fruiting season is important and promising from the local communities as they are interested to grow them within their own CPA territories. If the

trial is successful, the malva nut trees will be grown within the CPAs and local private lands. It is expected to provide significant benefits to local livelihoods as malva nut is a seasonal major source of income with very good price on the market and reduce pressure on malva nut trees inside the park. In the meantime, the project has also worked with local communities to ensure the sustainable use and collection of malva nuts in the park.

Activity 3.5 Improve market access for selected agricultural and NTFP goods through better linkage between target communities and private sector and development of processing unit if feasible (Y1-Y3).

As part of the broader activities on improving market access, the project has identified several potential buyers located in Banlung provincial town of Ratanakiri province for malva nut, cobra mushroom and cashew nuts. In the common practice, the community, district and provincial traders were unofficially connected to each other in terms of trading, which has led to unstable price for local products. In the meantime, the project has supported local farmers to improve the quality and quantity of the selected malva nuts and cashew nuts. The project has been engaging in discussion with buyers on the possible potential linkages and connection with local communities. The project plans to bring together interested buyers and CPAs to coordinate the initial discussion about the interests and partnership.

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.

- July 2023 witnessed a major change in protected area system in Cambodia, affecting 37 protected areas across the countries. Boundaries of most of the PAs bordering biodiversity conservation corridors were changed by sub-decrees dated on 17 July 2023, most of which have increased in sizes because of merging biodiversity conservation corridors into the PAs. A total of about 1,216,090 hectares from biodiversity conservation corridors were added to Cambodia protected area systems. The boundary of Virachey National Park was revised, leading to an increase in size from 332,500 ha to 405,766 ha. Parts of the new park areas are occupied by communities and have been degraded. However, the park expansion has been carried out without sufficient engagement with the indigenous peoples and local communities. Fauna & Flora are working to understand the implications of this decision, especially with regard to community members and in the context of social safeguards. Further details on this matter will be included in the upcoming annual report.
- This expansion has affected the zonation process over the old boundary of the park, which has led to the delay in the approval of zoning by the government.
- The project leader Garry Allen Shea, who managed this project, has passed away. A change request reflecting project leader change will be submitted.

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/No
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes/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 No 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?

The project plans to make another change request by relocating the budget from Y4 to Y3 before 31 December 2023.

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**