

NBiodiversity 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	29-014
Project title	Improving community sustainable natural resource management of Mount Mulanje
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Malawi
Lead partner	Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI)
Partner(s)	Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust (MMCT), WeForest (WF), TRAFFIC – FairWild, Forestry Research Institute of Malawi (FRIM)
Project leader	<i>Alex Hudson</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.bgci.org/our-work/projects-and-case-studies/miombo-restoration-sustainable-use-in-malawi

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.

1.1 Steering committee meetings

A steering committee meeting took place at Kara O'Mula, Mulanje on 12th October 2023 with representatives from FRIM, WF, MMCT, National Herbarium and Botanic Garden, FairWild, and BGCI. Project progress was discussed and options for changes to the project log frame outcomes, outputs, and indicators.

1.4 Species selection workshop

A workshop was held in Mulanje on 4th July 2023 with physical attendance by MMCT and WeForest, and online attendance by BGCI, FairWild, FRIM, and marketing consultants, Kadale. This finalised selection of five indigenous fruit and mushroom species considered the best options for local development. Each species was scored based on known level of abundance/market demand, known volumes available, and potential value addition opportunities.

1.5 List of 5 prioritised native economic plant and fungi species produced.

The species selected were (Chichewa and English common names in brackets):

1. *Uapaca kirkiana* (Masuku, Wild loquat)
2. *Syzygium cordatum* (Nanyole, Waterberry)
3. *Flacourtia indica* (Nthema/Nthema, Governor's plum)

4. *Parinari curatellifolia* (Maula, Mbola plum)
5. *Chantarelles* sp. – To be confirmed (Gundasuku, Mbuzi and Mnofu wa Nkuku).

2.1 Risk analysis conducted to identify resilience of target species to harvesting pressure

FairWild completed a desk-based risk analysis assessment for the four selected plant species (1 to 4 above) in collaboration with the IUCN Medicinal Plant Specialist Group. This classified them as “low risk” of unsustainable harvesting pressure. The project will now be featured on the FairWild website in the Pathway operators’ section and can be included in FairWild’s regular industry engagement and matchmaking work.

A fungi expert (Dr. Marcin Kotowski) has been contracted by the FairWild Foundation to finalise the risk analysis methodology and indicators required to assess the sustainability of wild fungi harvests – necessary to conduct a fungi FairWild certification audit or pre-audit. This is co-financed and proceeding in parallel with the revision process for the FairWild Standard.

A fungi expert consultant position to support the project has been advertised.

2.2 & 2.3 Harvesting trials / Sustainable harvest protocols produced for 5 economic plant and/or fungi species

To be done in second half of the year.

2.4 Resource assessment fieldwork

This will take place from October 2023 to March 2024 using methods developed by Bio Innovation Zimbabwe (BIZ), who are linked to FairWild. The team consist of a botanical expert from FRIM, support staff from MMCT, Forestry Department, and local members of the community recording information on location, abundance/yield, habitat, and threats.

An initial resource assessment for *P. curatellifolia* was completed in September 2023 since this species is the first of the target species with fruits available each year.

2.5 Resource assessment workshops

Workshops took place at the end of 2022 / early 2023. The resource users who took part in these workshops are supporting the resource assessment of target species.

3.1 Community sensitisation and selection meetings

In September, two representatives from the Malawi Ministry of Industry and Trade (MIT) delivered community co-operative sensitisation meetings in Kazembe and Tchete villages. The meetings introduced the Darwin project and presented the concept of a sustainable cooperative business model for the harvesting, purchase, processing, and/or sale of natural products.

3.2 Community groups selected to be in co-operatives based of their interest, knowledge of the species.

Recruitment of community groups will take place in November following Co-operative Member Education (CME) training involving those interested in co-operative establishment from 3.1.

3.3-3.6 Co-operative groups trained in sustainable harvesting and processing methods /Co-operative groups harvesting and processing products from economic plant and fungi species sustainably / Co-operative manger / administrators selected / Ministry of Industry trains manger / administrators and registers co-operatives

These activities will be completed following CME training in November.

3.7 Baseline Knowledge Attitude and Practice (KAP) survey undertaken to assess the general populace’s thoughts on conservation and sustainable use of natural resources

An expert from IPSOS (UK) supported the development of the KAP survey, as matched funding time to the project. Fourteen enumerators were recruited, trained and delivered the survey in October, conducting a pilot test at Nessa village. Data were collected from over 1,000 households (500 from Kazembe and Tchete linked village, 500 from outside these areas).

3.8 Conservation and sustainable use of miombo promoted, with the target species on local radio, television, in schools and at events like the yearly porters' race

Collaborations between MMCT, WF and BGCI have used a Behaviour Centre Design methodology (principles of design thinking and behavioural science) to decide the public awareness campaign would include a radio campaign (led by MMCT) and leadership training (led by WF). Two prototype sessions were held to get local stakeholders' comments and finalise activity designs – seven Group Village Heads took part in the leadership training, discussing awareness campaigns, bribery Prevention, men marrying community women to access forest resources and the negative impacts of unsustainable charcoal production.

The radio campaign will focus on spreading awareness of the Forestry act, and have guest interviews with local experts, to dispel myths that have developed locally regarding ownership and requirements related to planting trees on farmland. The goals are to increase awareness about the tree tenure/rights of people who plant trees in their homestead and inform communities about the impacts of charcoal burning and deforestation (including alternatives).

Leadership training will involve local chiefs, Traditional Authority leaders and village head women and men – since these have significant influence within their communities. The sessions will focus on the importance of leaders following good governance to address biodiversity conservation challenges in their communities, including against unsustainable charcoal production. This will include lessons on new bylaws, dealing with men marrying into communities to access resources and the link between cyclones' negative impacts and deforestation.

4.1 Community and stakeholder engagement workshops to understand opinions on enterprise development options

Following workshops in March 2023, a Social Enterprise, called “Inde Mulanje” was registered, a limited by guaranteed company, by MMCT using matched funding. This project will construct a processing facility for local natural products, including wild collected produce. The location of was identified with proximity to the main road and smallholder farmers, and access to water and local hydropower.

Inde Mulanje currently has three MMCT members as the directors, and 3 local sponsors (a local constituency MP, a local Group Village Head, and a local businessman).

4.2 Feasibility analysis for requirements to establish enterprise, including identification of business incubator option (legal structures, registration etc.)

Initial Memorandum of Association of the company were not drafted with Darwin Initiative project partners, or wider stakeholders and so comments and adjustments are to be suggested. Alex Hudson met with a representative from Social Enterprise UK to discuss this.

4.3 & 4.4 Business incubator supports social enterprise to become officially established / Training on conservation entrepreneurship and support to establish for enterprise team

To be done in second half of the year.

4.5 Relevant new product research carried out to create value added products from the 5 selected species

Project co-ordinator, Kate Chanthunya, has developed some initial trial products including dried chanterelle mushrooms and *P. curatellifolia* fruit syrup, fruit rolls, roasted nuts and dried fruits. Further trials for the other 3 plant species will follow their harvesting seasons this year.

Further research support is to be defined in the second half of the year, including potentially sending samples of *U. kirkiana* fruit mesocarp to a cosmetic testing laboratory to identify cosmeceutical properties.

4.7 FairWild training delivered

Consultant expert Valdon Smith, South Africa, visited Mulanje to deliver training in October on important considerations of value chain development to FairWild certification – including business structures and evidence that needs to be in place for auditing.

A second consultancy is planned to provide more specialised support on sustainable wild fungi harvesting, to take place between November 2023 – March 2024.

5.3 Collection and propagation training

An initial assessment of individual mother trees of target species miombo is scheduled for October 2023. Trees will be mapped recording GPS coordinates, phenology data, number of individuals in local populations, and height and Diameter at Breast Height data. This will involve staff from MMCT, botanists from FRIM and eight local knowledgeable community members.

5.4 Propagation of target species at community nurseries

Target species' seeds will be stored, processed and propagated at the MMCT Mulanje tree nursery. MMCT gardeners will be trained on propagation and management methods for each species. WeForest has a current aim to plant 40,000 seedlings in 2024/2025, but this may change depending on results seen of current law enforcement and fire protection efforts (see 5.7).

5.5 Baseline biodiversity data collected from degraded co-managed land areas

Baseline data will be gathered from 12 permanent monitoring plots established by WeForest since 2020. Data will be assessed from 2020 and 2022. Each plot measures 20m by 20m, with a land area of 400m². More plots across the landscape will be established in 2023/2024 rainy season. Guidance from The Global Biodiversity Standard (GBS) certification scheme will be adopted to assess and monitor selected degraded areas within the co-managed blocks. A site visit and initial assessment from GBS experts is being planned for March 2024.

5.6 Training to plant, manage and monitor restored sites

WeForest facilitated the selection of lead farmers for Kazembe (11) and Tchete (4), using the systems established by the Agricultural Department, and with vetting by the local leadership. Each lead farmer has approximately 25 follower farmers. A training guide (based on ICRAF 2006 manual) was compiled, with two-day training for all lead farmers. A rapid assessment was also conducted in September to investigate the willingness for farmers to plant indigenous species alongside the WeForest facilitated exotic species (identified for fast fuelwood production). Eleven species were identified to be valued by the farmers, with utilisation for firewood, timber, fruits, soil fertility and shade. This will be used to develop how species will be incorporated into the farmers' landscape later this year.

5.7 300 hectares of co-management areas restored, including with assisted natural regeneration of native plant and fungi species

Forest Block Committees (FBC) and Village Natural Resources Management Committees were trained by WeForest and the Department of Forestry to conduct early burns in June/July 2023. 211.75 ha was burned, representing 14.30% of the total co-managed area. Firebreaks have also been established in the following sub-blocks (length in km in brackets): Kumwamba (0.8), Mwanyali (1.2), Mangombo (1.5), Nkanda (1.6), Kazembe (0.9), Mbewa (1.2), Tchete (1.1).

Personal protective equipment (uniforms, boots, whistles) has been provided to law enforcement patrol groups. From 17th August to 12th September, 16 patrols were organized resulting in 27 people arrested (1 woman) and the following confiscated: 18 hoes, 22 axes, 39 pangas, 26 bags of charcoal, 19 planks, 4 pit saws, 2 slashers, 2 sepi-sepi, 2 shovels. 13 cases went to court with successful hearings (100.000-200.000 MWK fine / 12-24 months in prison).

In May, a key 4-day technical workshop was organized with MMCT, Department of Forestry and WeForest to progress the bylaws, maps, management objectives, constitution and a monitoring plan for co-management blocks. A 2-day community validation meeting, facilitated by MMCT and WeForest, was held to ensure user-restrictions and management activities were discussed with local communities. The buffer/transition and the co-management activities were also presented to the local Area Development Committees and Village Development Committees. WeForest is providing match funds for much of these activities with a small amount of total funding from the Darwin Initiative.

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.

WeForest and FBCs decided to postpone enrichment planting this year to ensure law enforcement and fire protection is effective and not waste resources. In late September, uncontrolled fires were observed, indicating that fire management efforts could be improved.

Due to capacity issues at MMCT, the management team decided WeForest would play a larger roll incorporating indigenous tree species in their agroforestry work and lead on leadership training as part of the behaviour-change component. This is a trial this year with WeForest in a leading role, whilst the finances are controlled by MMCT in this financial year.

Emily King (FairWild Business Engagement Officer – FairWild Foundation & TRAFFIC) will be going on maternity leave in December 2023 and so her responsibilities were reassigned to Deborah Vorhies (FairWild Foundation’s CEO) – agreed in submitted Change Request.

It has become apparent there are identification issues with local fungi species (Chanterelles) so the fungi consultant will need to resolve this. FairWild are re-thinking plans to support international market links for the wild harvested resources now species are selected.

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: Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes

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?

It proved crucial to share and confirm the work plan, so that all partners could review and validate their responsibilities and deadlines. This will be used to track progress and keep partners accountable. Roles and responsibilities were also defined and documented between lead partners (BGCI, WeForest and MMCT) to facilitate this further.

After a delay in Year 1 to the finalisation of the fungi certification methodologies (to align with the FairWild Standard revision), the activities are now on track and no delays are anticipated overall with FairWild Foundation's commitments caught up by the end of Year 2.

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**