

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	30-014
Project title	Community-based agro-biodiversity systems for improved livelihoods and climate resilience
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica
Lead partner	The Development Fund (Norway)
Partner(s)	Association of Organizations of the Cuchumatanes (ASOCUCH); Foundation for Participatory Research with Honduran Farmers (FIPAH); Federation of Cooperatives for Development, Nicaragua (FECODESA R.L); University of Costa Rica (UCR), and Fabio Baudrit Moreno Agricultural Experimental Station
Project leader	Elin Ranum, The Development Fund
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31.10.2023 HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	This will be prepared during the first project year.

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).

The project began in July with the signing of the contract between DF and ASOCUCH, followed by the signing of the contract between ASOCUCH and the partners in Central America. We have had some significant advances the first quarter:

Start-up seminar in Guatemala. In Antigua, Guatemala, on August 22 and 23 a kick-off seminar was arranged for the programme where 16 persons from partner organizations, DF and representatives of producer organizations (1 per country) participated. During the event, various topics were touched upon: a) progress that has been made at the region level in the last 4 years b) contextualization of the management carried out before the Darwin Initiative c) the DF strategy in the region d) review of the project's logical framework e) regional activities linked to the collection of wild relatives f) administrative processes that must be considered in relation to the contract g) preparation of annual operative plan h) requirements and anti-corruption, including routines for notifications i) analysis of how the issue of farmers' rights has progressed in the ITPGRFA framework at the international level.

Activity 1.3: In Honduras, in order to identify maize materials with tolerance to drought and the disease Asphalt Stain Complex, a National Adaptation and Yield Trial of Maize Varieties (ENAR Maíz) was established in the community of El Porvenir, Jesús de Otoro, Intibucá.

Activity 1.4: Regarding bean seed production, in Nicaragua 3 manzanas (2,1 hectares) of beans and 2 manzanas (1,4 hectares) of maize have been established, with the use of irrigation to have enough seed and be able to replenish the most undersupplied organizations and families, this due to the climate crisis facing the area. In Costa Rica, 47 seed packages of participatory plant breeding bean varieties, improved maize varieties, and native varieties and under-utilized bean species have been delivered. In addition to the above, Foundation category bean seeds were delivered to the Association of United Communities Producers (ASOPRO) of Veracruz, Chánguena and Guagaral so that they could plant their plots with local seed reproduction.

In Nicaragua, in order to guarantee the viability and availability of seeds of the varieties collected and stored in seed banks, the refreshment plot has been harvested with a total of 67 varieties of native beans, in the municipality of Pueblo Nuevo. In Costa Rica, some native varieties were collected in the area of Mansión de Nicoya. Work has been underway on the cleaning phase of the collected varieties.

Activity 1.5: In Costa Rica, a training on participatory plant breeding varieties, native harvesting and adaptation to climate change in beans and maize was held on September 7 and 8, within the framework of the XVI National Meeting of the Bean Sector and V National Meeting of the Maize Sector. 49 participants, including technicians and farmers.

The planning process of the course for collectors of wild relatives has begun, which will take place the week of January 07 to 13, 2024, with the involvement of Dr. Daniel Debouck and a member of the staff of Seeds of the Future, for which the corresponding program is being developed.

Activity 2.2: In Guatemala and Honduras, 3 agrobiodiversity fairs have been held involving 680 farmers from local agricultural research committees (CIAL), Seed Banks, and Producer Organizations, who share experiences, seeds, and ancestral knowledge to promote the conservation and use of the agrobiodiversity present in their territories. In the case of Guatemala, a series of mini courses were developed focusing on the following topics: maize varieties suitable for the highland; underutilized species: diversity present, bottlenecks and the importance of consumption; importance of the use of organic fertilizers; bean varieties adaptable to the area and important potato varieties and innovation technologies. It is important to highlight that the involvement of researchers from the Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology (ICTA) was achieved.

Output 3: The approach of FIPAH (Honduras) and FECODESA (Nicaragua) has begun with those responsible for herbaria at the country level, with the aim of knowing their operation and inventory, as well as possibilities of collaboration in the process of collecting wild relatives of the bean.

It is also relevant to mention that, on August 31, the Fabio Baudrit Moreno Agricultural Experimental Station in Costa Rica received visit from the the British Ambassador, Mr. Benjamin Edward Noel Lyster-Binns, the Second Secretary of the Embassy in Costa Rica, Mr. Bryn Alexander Orton, and the Minister for Environmental Quality and Resilience (United Kingdom), Mrs. Rebecca Pow. The delegation included the Deputy Minister of Agriculture of Costa Rica, Mr. Julián Arias Varela.

The construction of the project's monitoring plan has begun based on the logical framework, which will clearly define how the project's indicators will be measured and how often.

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.

After the start of the project, there are currently problems with the signing of the contract with FECODESA. In order to transfer funds to the partner the approval of the Nicaraguan government must be obtained. This is in process, and in the meantime Fecodesa has covered the expenses with its own funds.

In the case of Guatemala, the technical staff linked to the project financially will move from January next year (2024), as it is currently being paid with ASOCUCH funds, however, the project activities are being implemented. Therefore, these funds will be reprogrammed in the coming months of project implementation.

After the meeting held with the different actors linked to the project, we have been able to identify that the achievements that have been made in terms of management, conservation and development of agrobiodiversity are significant, highlighting the importance of networking at the regional level.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: No

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 Juli 2023 – 30 September 2023)

Actual spend: £ [REDACTED]

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.

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?

See section below with answers to the comments made by the Darwin Expert Committee in March 2023. As required by Darwin, we attach the project risk register to this report.

