

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	Darwin Initiative Main Project (Grant 20-030).
Project title	Fungal Conservation in Sub-Saharan Africa: sustainability and livelihood implications
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Benin Republic; Zimbabwe; United Kingdom
Lead partner	University of Parakou (Benin Republic)
Partner(s)	CABI (United Kingdom); Permaculture Association (United Kingdom); Matobo Conservation Society (Zimbabwe) NGO Collaborating: NGO REDERC (Benin)
Project leader	Prof. Nourou S. Yorou
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	12/10/2023 HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	Website: https://fc-ssa.org/ Social media: https://web.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61552153022482

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.

All activities set for the first half year have been completed duly and those planned over several quarters are in progress. Indeed, at the onset of the project, three calls were made in May 2023, to recruit graduates from the University of Parakou, on a gender-equal basis to encourage both female and male to apply. The FC-SSA website and social media accounts are created for Benin and **still** ongoing for the rest of beneficiary countries. Five meetings were carried out on Zoom and in person in the UK and Benin for M&E, disaggregating measurables by gender while household income data will be covered in later reports.

For output 1 on conservation planning, a database has been initiated to accumulate information. Information is being accumulated about:

- fungal diversity impact on wealth and well-being and its loss impact on poverty and gender issue (in Benin and Zimbabwe).
- national awareness of fungi among administrators and politicians, in education and in public using media, social media, journals, and official websites (in Benin and Zimbabwe).

For the Outputs 2 and 5 about livelihoods protection and public awareness, the project leader and some graduates have introduced the project to authorities and local communities in the project target villages in Benin and work on plans for future visits by other core staff. Agreed dates March/April 2024 on course delivery based on gender neutrally basis. A call for the course will be issued in the next quarter in four languages and will be published in Women Major Group and social media accounts (official and personal) to ensure wider outreach and gender-equal response. Between July and August 2023, flyers and stickers bearing the image of the FC-SSA Project were designed for publicity and awareness. Digital Marketing Course (National Qualification) is in progress, in preparation for publicity campaigns and data analysis. We plan to hold exhibitions in national and regional universities, at the head quarter of UNEP and at other scientific events. Also, forest inventory was carried out in community forests in the target villages in Benin from July to August 2023 to evaluate the potential of regeneration sites for receiving transplants from nurseries and for agroforestry intercropping and other restoration treatments. The same thing has been done in Zimbabwe. Introductory course in permaculture to the project leader in the UK during August-September 2023, to highlight the elements of gender equality in community participation and designs. Other courses for participants are planned for subsequent quarters. The course materials drafting is ongoing. Facilitation software and materials have been purchased.

For output 3 about poverty and gender equality issues, a review of relevant literature is in progress. Initial search using Google scholar, Academia, ResearchGate, FAO website, CABI website, UN and UN associated organisations websites.

For output 4 about infrastructure, trainings were provided and planned to continue during the next quarters, to develop expertise for graduates in fungal status assessing at national level, fungal data management, ecological restoration of damaged ecosystems, collaboration with national conservation NGOs, ethnomycological survey and literature review, software and website development. The preparation of the West Africa field guides still ongoing.

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 main problem so far encountered in this project has been in promoting a gender balance in its activities. Despite a clear indication that women candidates were sought, only one of the graduate applicants was female, and the gender balanced interviewing panel found that, compared with the other candidates, she was too weak to be a viable option. Similar problems are being encountered in village outreach, where women are proving very reticent. Project partners recognize this and intend to explore new ways to achieve gender balance. Another problem encountered is difficulty in accessing few sacred forests. The fact that access to this type of forest is restricted by its sacred nature is a real barrier to anthropogenic threats and an effective means of protecting the biodiversity that it shelters. Dialogue with those responsible for sacred forests is continuing.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: Not yet

Formal Change Request submitted: Not yet

Received confirmation of change acceptance No yet

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: £ [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.

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?

YES: We have been able to recruit three PhD students. Unfortunately, we did not budgeted the training fees for the three PhD students. Therefore, our budget needs an adjustment that will be sent by next week latest.

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**