

**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 2022

Project reference	DARCC008
Project title	Strengthening civil society engagement in conservation and fisheries governance, Belize
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Belize
Lead partner	Blue Ventures Conservation
Partner(s)	Wabafu Fishermen's Association (WFA) and Chunox Fishermen's Association (CFA)
Project leader	Ruth Sharman
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	1st April - 30th September 2022 - HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	https://blueventures.org/

1. 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).

Goal 1. Enhance engagement between government and civil society through increased representation of fishers in existing participatory frameworks for natural resource governance and management in Belize, including the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Fishery Improvement Project, Managed Access Committees and Fisheries Advisory Council.

Objective 1.1 Strengthen institutional management of two fisher associations

Following the launch of this project, the Blue Ventures (BV) Belize team continues meaningful engagement with both Wabafu Fishermen's Association (WFA) and Chunox Fishermen's Association (CFA). Partnerships with both organisations were established in early September 2021 and late January 2022, respectively. Since April 2022, WFA's executive membership has worked to improve their internal governance, meanwhile CFA has successfully elected a new executive committee. The significant progress made by both associations thus far has resulted from the following capacity building project activities.

Activity 1.1.1 Meetings between Blue Ventures and Wabafu Fishermen's Association

A total of seven in-person engagement sessions have been convened since the start of the grant period in April. These meetings have included capacity building workshops, training sessions and community consultations with WFA's wider membership. The primary objective of these sessions is to provide technical support to the association and to build their capacity in the following thematic areas:

1. Internal Operations and Administrative Affairs
2. Communications and Public Relations
3. Compliance and Good Governance
4. Stakeholder Engagement
5. Advocacy, Partnering and Networking

Activity 1.1.2 Meeting between Blue Ventures and New CSO partner (Chunox Fishermen's Association)

BV's capacity building programme seeks to deliver technical support to all partners using an impartial participatory approach that creates equal opportunities for the communities targeted. Between April and

September 2022, a total of five meetings have been convened with CFA, including the facilitation of a “needs assessment” to determine how the team can effectively support them based on the needs and challenges that are unique to their community.

Activity 1.2.3 Decision on new CSO partner

BV was successful in securing a partnership with CFA in early 2022. CFA is based in one of the largest fishing communities in northern Belize and has a membership size of close to 50 active fishers. Currently, CFA holds a seat on the Belize Fisheries Advisory Council, a governing body that plays a key role in Belize’s fisheries sector. Although the association has a strong membership, enthusiasm for the partnership with BV has been expressed, as it will equip them with the capacity and necessary skills to become a Marine Protected Area (MPA) co-manager, and to source and manage grants independently. Between April and September, BV facilitated several discussions with CFA to identify their organisational priorities, which are to streamline administration and improve operations of their executive committee. The discussions were also an opportunity to determine the next steps required for continued institutional strengthening, which include strategic planning.

Activity 1.1.3 CSO Annual General Meeting

On the 7th of May 2022, WFA successfully held their 2022 annual general meeting to review progress made, and also for the treasurer to provide an update on how funds were spent. This event was a milestone accomplishment for WFA, and saw the attendance and participation of local government officials as well as several NGOs from the conservation community. The mayor of the town showed his support and endorsement of the association.

In April and May, whilst preparing for this event, BV provided technical, logistical and financial support to WFA through a series of meetings and in-person engagement to build their capacity in the thematic areas outlined in activity 1.1.1.

Similar support functions were provided to CFA, in preparation for their annual general meeting in mid-September. In July and August there were delays in meeting with CFA to discuss project activities, and re-engagement with the association revealed that this was as a result of internal conflicts among the executive committee. To address this issue, the wider membership requested an election for a new executive committee as the main agenda item for their annual general meeting. Following the outcome of their election, the newly elected leadership of CFA has confirmed their interest in continuing our partnership and now stands in a position to participate in activities that are scheduled for the remainder of this project.

Activity 1.1.4 Partner CSO Board Meetings

The technical support provided to WFA has led to a rebranding of their association, and its executive committee is now well positioned to effectively represent and engage the association’s wider membership. Since April, WFA’s executive committee has convened regular meetings, and provides timely updates to their wider membership. Meanwhile, CFA’s newly elected executives have committed to maintaining transparent leadership and will work to host regular meetings with their wider membership.

Objective 1.2 Support participation, representation and community feedback for two coastal small scale fishing communities

Activity 1.2.1 Partner CSOs attend meetings

BV’s intervention has led to improved community representation and engagement for both organisations as they now fully understand their roles and responsibilities and the importance of being organised. WFA is an active member of the Belize National Lionfish Working Group (LWG) and the Belize Mangrove Alliance Working Group (MAWG), and members of the association have attended meetings for both groups. By being part of these two groups, both organisations can participate towards the protection and preservation of Belize’s marine resources, promoting sustainable practices and improved compliance.

CFA currently holds a seat on the Belize Fisheries Advisory Council, which focuses on improving the

coordination of sustainable growth in the fisheries sector and overall economic development. The chairman of CFA attended two meetings during this reporting period, giving him an insight into how issues in the sector will be addressed and an opportunity to advocate for fishers and safeguard their rights in the sector.

Activity 1.2.2 Community engagement and feedback sessions

In mid June, WFA invited the Belize Fisheries Department to co-host a community consultation in the town of Dangriga on the proposed Statutory Instruments (SIs). These are widely opposed by fishers regarding the amended lobster regulations that establish a new lobster carapace length of 3.25 inches and a minimum tail weight of 4.5 ounces. This community engagement initiative was led by WFA with support from BV. The association's ability to organise and execute an event of this magnitude speaks to their commitment to their community and their interest in compliance and improving relations with the Belize Fisheries Department.

Goal 2. Build the capacity of two community-based civil society organisations in Belize to drive fisheries improvements and promote transparency.

Objective 2.1 Increase capacity for responsible marine management within two fisher-led civil society organisations

Activity 2.1.1 Wabafu capacity assessment (policy, participation)

After 12 months of partnership with WFA, the BV Belize technical team conducted a capacity assessment to ascertain the efficacy of their intervention and support. The assessment was carried out in early September with the participation of WFA's executive committee, using a survey to assess the organisation's operational and administrative capacity. The results of this assessment revealed that there are still several gaps in their capacity, including that they have yet to organise the WFA finances and develop a financial management plan. They have not yet demonstrated the capacity to source and manage grants independently and are still struggling to effectively engage with their full membership.association.

Activity 2.1.2 Co-create priorities/plans with Wabafu

In early September, BV completed WFA's strategic planning process. The team utilised a participatory approach to engage WFA's wider membership in a series of group activities that helped them to solidify their identity, and define the values that would govern their association.

Following the launch of this project, WFA has demonstrated tremendous growth; their internal communication has improved, and through their commitment to the association, they have been able to organise meetings and events independently. Collectively, their vision is to "establish Wabafu as the premier sustainable fishing association in Belize through innovation, education, research and advocacy". Their overall mission is to "function as the most recognized and respected fishing association in Belize, which promotes a standardised quality of marketing in our fishing community and amplifies the voices of fishers".

Activity 2.1.3 Safeguarding training with Wabafu

In the coming months (planned to commence in December), BV will facilitate an environmental and social safeguarding training with the participation of WFA's executive committee and wider membership.

Activity 2.1.4 Training: SSF guidelines with two CSO partners

BV is preparing to deliver a one-day small-scale fisher (SSF) workshop to both WFA and CFA in early 2023. The team anticipates collaborating with the Belize Fisheries Department to discuss the rights of SSF and to highlight the integral role that they play in Belize's fisheries sector.

Activity 2.1.5 Capacity assessment (policy, participation) with new CSO partner

Engagement sessions thus far with the new CFA executive committee have revealed that a good foundation is crucial to maximise capacity. A rapid assessment of their needs for further capacity building is under way and will be complete by the end of January. Once the assessment is completed, we will lead a strategic planning session (detailed under activity 2.1.6) for the executive members to define

targets for increasing the capacity of CSOs and the next steps to continue to engage in marine management.

Activity 2.1.6 Co-create priorities/plans with new CSO partner

After a successful re-engagement with CFA, the newly elected executive committee has agreed to begin the strategic planning process in early December with the technical support of the BV Belize team.

Activity 2.1.7 Safeguarding training new CSO partner

BV anticipates delivering this training to CFA in early 2023. The one-day workshop will replicate the session scheduled to be delivered to WFA in December 2022 (activity 2.1.3).

Objective 2.2 Strengthen capacity for participatory marine management, monitoring and evaluation within two fisher-led civil society organisations

Activity 2.2.1 Training: using data and understanding indicators

In early June, BV collaborated with the Belize Fisheries Department to facilitate a one-day Marine Data Literacy workshop which was organised by the Wabafu Fisher Association. This workshop highlighted the importance of understanding the different types of marine data for key indicators to protect fish stocks and ecosystem management. During the workshop, the Belize Fisheries Department gave a presentation on the managed access catch log forms and the purpose of the data collected. Additionally, the department had a direct consultation with the fishers on the newly amended regulation on the increase of lobster carapace length of 3.25 inches and a minimum tail weight of 4.5 ounces, which was opposed by fishers nationally. In consideration, the department clarifies and announces that it will take a phased approach, deferring the implementation for the following in March 2023 to allow for more public consultation with fishers.

Activity 2.2.2 Compliance review

BV uses a compliance review survey to assess how compliance may improve as a result of capacity building interventions, and measure our impact. BV launched the measurement of compliance as an indicator earlier this year and has scheduled an annual review every January to March (starting in 2023 for WFA and CFA).

Activity 2.2.3 Review national CPUE data

BV uses national catch per unit effort (CPUE) data to review fishery activity within partnered MPAs. CFA and WFA are major stakeholders in the Turneffe MPA and the South Water Caye Marine Reserve (SWCMR), respectively. The 2022 CPUE analysis will be shared with both associations in 2023. This knowledge exchange session will include best practices of catch data collection, catch log regulations and it will be paired with the compliance review session (under activity 2.2.2).

Activity 2.2.4 Training: scientific diving and invasive lionfish control

In August, BV began scoping for preliminary project activities to establish a 10-member lionfish brigade in SWCMR. In September, BV launched the application process for stakeholders to join the brigade, where members will become certified in Advanced Open Water Scuba, and will receive additional training in Lionfish Focused Search Survey Method (LFS). Following robust training, the brigade members are expected to monitor and control lionfish populations in the reserve.

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.

Unexpected developments that have impacted the timetable of the project activities include:

1. Unavailability of fishers to participate in project activity due to an active fishing season: members from both WFA and CFA were unavailable to meet on numerous occasions due to their demanding work schedules. This was exacerbated by staff changes in June that led to a change in project roles and responsibilities within the team. This delayed activities 1.1.2, 2.1.2, 2.1.3 and 2.1.6.
2. The Belize Fisheries Department declined to authorise licensed fishers to conduct lionfish removal in fish replenishment zones (restricted areas of the MPA). Securing the department's endorsement for the inclusion of fishers as part of the brigade to implement the lionfish control plan in SWCMR has caused a delay in activity 2.2.4. In mid September the Department provided its endorsement and training is scheduled to commence in early November.
3. The election of a new CFA Executive delayed further engagement on planning and priority setting until the new executive was in place.

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

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS: Yes

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes

Change request reference if known: Change request March 2022 (logframe etc) and May 2022 (Project lead)

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

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

4b. 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.

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

No

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), 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.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but should also be raised with NIRAS-LTS International 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**