

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	DARCC019
Project title	Building Government Capability and Capacity to Facilitate Human-Elephant Coexistence
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Angola, Ethiopia, Gabon, and Malawi
Lead partner	The Elephant Protection Initiative Foundation
Partner(s)	1. National Institute for Biodiversity and Protected Areas Angola (INBAC) 2. Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) 3. National Parks Agency, Gabon (ANPNG) 4. Department of National Parks and Wildlife, Malawi (DNPW)
Project leader	Dr Hugo Jachmann, Technical Director
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.elephantprotectioninitiative.org/

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 from 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.

Project DAPCC019 was approved on 24 March 2023, and letters to the relevant Ministers of 3 target countries (Angola, Gabon, and Malawi) were formulated, discussed and dispatched on 17 April, 2 May and 3 May 2003 respectively. After a discussion with the Director General of the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) it was decided to initiate the project, but to wait on seeking Ministerial approval, primarily due to challenges within the Federal Government, until the political and conflict situation in the country had improved. To obtain Ministerial approval for the project in each target country is a prerequisite to success, but precious time was lost due to a slow response from Angola, the situation in Ethiopia, and a military coup in Gabon. Ministerial approval for Malawi was received on 02 June 2023.

Our progress and developments for each of the 4 target countries is set out below:

Angola: It took 5 months to obtain Ministerial approval for the project and to then organise the first scoping to Angola, due to take place between 12 - 17 November 2023. During this trip, meetings will be held with the Minister, INBAC and various local stakeholders (including NGOs, community organisations, journalists, etc). The objectives of the trip are to confirm the official nomination and appointment of a National HEC Focal Point (NHFP) as well as a needs assessment for INBAC. The visit to Angola, including transport and meetings, have been organised by our EPIF staff member in Angola, Mr José Agostinho, with support from Angola's EPI Focal Point, Mr Miguel Kinavuidi (within the Minister's office).

Ethiopia: The first scoping trip to Ethiopia was undertaken in June 2023, with the objective of discussing the project with EWCA management and to nominate and appoint a NHFP. As noted above, although EWCA management decided to wait on seeking Ministerial approval, a NHFP was successfully nominated and appointed, and the way forward was discussed. The second trip to Ethiopia will take place next month, between 22 - 25 November 2023, with the objective of undertaking a needs assessment, and discuss the timing for Ministerial approval and financial matters.

Gabon: On Saturday 26 August 2023, Gabon went to the polls for the country's presidential election. Early on Wednesday 30 August 2023, the country's national electoral authority announced that President Bongo, who had been in power for 14 years, was re-elected for a third term. Soon after, a group of soldiers appeared on State TV saying they were seizing power, cancelling the election results. They announced they were speaking on behalf of the "Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions", and announced the annulment of the election, closure of all borders, and the dissolution of institutions of State including the Government, the Senate, the National Assembly, the Constitutional Court, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council, and the Gabonese Elections Centre.

Professor Lee White CBE, Gabon's Minister of Water, Forests, the Sea, and Environment in charge of Climate Change and Land-use Planning, was removed from his post and is possibly being investigated. Prior to becoming Minister, Professor White had served as the Director of the Gabonese National Parks Agency for 10 years. Lee White was instrumental in setting up the Elephant Protection Initiative (EPI) in 2014, and has since been working closely with the staff of the EPI's secretariat, the EPI Foundation. Under the current circumstances, EPIF staff face an uncertain reception in Gabon. We hope that the situation will stabilise, and we will seek to make contact with the new Minister in due course and once appointments have been finalised. However, we cannot state with any confidence how long this process will take.

In the interim, on 04 October, we submitted a Change Request to remove Gabon from our list of target countries. An updated Change Request will be issued on 26 October, which will supersede the initial request. The primary alteration in this follow on Change Request pertains to our budget adjustment. Instead of simply reallocating funds from four countries to three, we have opted for a more nuanced approach, which will provide more details on the allocation of funds. After careful consideration, we have decided to re-allocate items on a line-by-line basis. A comprehensive breakdown of these changes has been provided separately within the revised Change Request.

Malawi: Due to the holiday season and the availability of DNPW staff, the first scoping trip to Malawi was undertaken between 10 - 22 September 2023, to discuss the project with DNPW management in Lilongwe as well as with staff in two main HEC hotspots, Kasungu National Park (DNPW) and Thuma/Dedza-Salima Forest Reserves, the latter managed by the Wildlife Action Group (WAG), but with DNPW officially being responsible for HEC mitigation.

The objectives of the Malawi visit were to achieve the nomination and official appointment of the NHFP, conduct a needs assessment for DNPW Headquarters in Lilongwe and the two HEC hotspots, and hold meetings with several in-country stakeholders. The NHFP had been appointed by the Minister, and a preliminary needs assessment was done in 3 locations. During the last two weeks of October 2023, we hope to finalise the needs assessment in close collaboration with DNPW management and field staff, starting procurement of equipment in November 2023. Training requirements are internally under discussion, with a training for DNPW and WAG staff with regard to the latest SMART release (monitoring system) and the use of the mobile apps tentatively planned for early 2024. Whilst training on Monitoring & Evaluation, HEC analyses, reporting and the use of feedback for the adaptive management system planned for later in the year.

In summary, with the exception of Gabon, a case of force majeure, and in spite of the late response from certain ministries, progress has been following the agreed project implementation timetable.

In terms of monitoring, and due to the late start, the year 2023 will be used as the baseline for most indicators, including some of the Darwin Initiative Standard and Core indicators. Although we are aware of the availability of monitoring data for Malawi and Ethiopia, it is not known whether Angola has any HEC data available. HEC management and mitigation in Angola has to start from scratch. Nevertheless, even with a smaller dataset for only two countries, as of now, our assumptions still hold true. We should note however that for a two-year project period, with the first year used for baselines, one year of monitoring may not yet yield any significant trends.

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.

Gabon: Due to the military coup in Gabon, a Change Request was submitted to drop Gabon as a target country.

Ethiopia: The project was initiated with the appointment of a NHFP, with a second trip planned for 22 – 25 November 2023. Although EWCA management will inform us when the time is ripe to seek Ministerial approval, the needs assessment and procurement of equipment and training will continue as planned.

Due to removing Gabon from the project, requiring a budget alignment by itself, a late start of the project activities (due to slow ministerial responses, steep inflation since drafting the first budget prior to submission, and updated requirements for the monitoring system, as well as the field equipment for the respective wildlife authorities), an updated Change Request for the budget has also recently submitted. Although there are no changes for the total project budget (total financial ask), changes in the budget split (project focus) have been proposed.

As for the updated requirements for the monitoring system and field equipment, we have used Malawi as an example. With a hard interface between elephant habitat and cultivation, the only sound and permanent solution to HEC involves the construction of or the extension of an existing electric fence, such as can be seen at Kasungu National Park and Thuma/Dedza-Salima Forest Reserves. On the eastern boundary of Kasungu, IFAW has constructed roughly 67km of electric fence, with another 20km that will be constructed in the next 6 months. However, this area will still be lacking 35km when finished.

Elephants translocated from Liwonde National Park in 2022, prime elephant habitat on rich alluvial soils with good quality vegetation and permanent water, settled in the northern part of Kasungu, an area with poor elephant habitat on deep sandy soils with low quality vegetation, heavily defended by plant secondary compounds, and scarce water resources.

This can be compared with moving them from a high-end hotel with excellent services and cuisine, to a low-end hotel with extremely poor cuisine. As a result, in their quest to find suitable food and water, these elephants circumvent the fence every night and cause havoc in the surrounding villages.

Two options to tackle this problem exist: construct another 35km of fence, or support the communities by chasing elephants back into the park on a regular basis. As soon as funds are available (roughly US\$ 350,000.00), the fence will be finished up to the Zambian border in the north; but in the meantime the DNPW plans on using vehicles and motorcycles to chase the elephants back into the park. Therefore, until construction of the fence has been finalised, DNPW feels it is better served with transport and monitoring support than only temporarily effective HEC mitigation equipment for many community members in a heavily built-up area. Although Thuma has been fenced, the Dedza-Salima Forest Reserve lacks fencing in some built-up areas to the east, resulting in similar problems as in Kasungu.

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

First change request submitted to omit Gabon with no changes to the budget, however this is superseded by second change request to omit again Gabon and concurrently make changes to the budget.

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No

Change request reference if known: Pending

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: £ [REDACTED]

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 to 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 initial grant documents specified that the Other Partners, consisting of government wildlife departments, would be responsible for overseeing the funds. However, through our ongoing evaluation, we have determined that entrusting the Lead Partner, the EPIF, with this responsibility would better serve the interests of all stakeholders involved. We believe that this adjustment will significantly improve the overall effectiveness and success of the project, mitigating potential mismanagement risks associated with government handling funds directly.

On 13 October 2023, the EPIF's Head of Finance, Harry Thorold, engaged in a discussion regarding the above with Darwin (specifically, with Eilidh Young), who confirmed that as long as the funds are dedicated to partner benefit, it would be acceptable to have the funds managed by the EPIF internally. We want to reiterate our commitment to utilising these funds exclusively for partner benefit. The only costs that will remain entirely with the Lead Partner are mandatory audit costs and Lead Partner overheads.

Change Request updates:

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As part of this change request, we have moved the funds from Other Partner to Lead Partner.

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**