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	DARCC024
Project title	Strengthening Local Partner Capacity for effective Biodiversity & Poverty Interventions
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Zambia
Lead partner	ACTION AGAINST HUNGER
Partner(s)	Environment Africa, Conservation Farming Unit & Kaluli Development Foundation
Project leader	*Cynthia Makunka Belemu*
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	*30ᵗʰ October,2023-HYR1*
Project website/blog/social media	Twitter: https://twitter.com/ACFinZambia Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ACFinZambia

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).

Management and Coordination: The project was signed on 1ˢᵗ April, 2023, which initiated the recruiting process and filling the vacancies of Team Leader and Project Officer, as other positions are supported by permanent staff through cost sharing.

Project Launch: On 21ˢᵗ July, 2023 the project was launched and attended by different collaborating partners, Government including the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment, UN Agencies and NGOs and was highly publicised through media coverage including National and Private TV, Radio and Print medias.

Inception meeting: In addition to the project launch, the project organised an inception meeting on 23ʳᵈ July 2023 with all three Local NGOs who are the direct implementing partners and discussed the project in detail, agreed on deliverables, reviewed the budget and raised any concerns. We continue to have regular meetings, most recently in September 2023.

Output 1

Activity 1.1: Three Local Organisations have been selected: Conservation Farming Unit, Kaluli Development Foundation and Environment Africa, guided by the thematic area focus of the project and the location for the project which is focusing along the Zambezi, Kafue Watershed. Environment Africa had been identified at proposal stage. The selection process for the two additional Local Organisations, as Environment included a letter to the Government responsible for a list of all compliant NGOs dealing in biodiversity and poverty reduction along the Zambezi/Kafue Watershed. After which an invitation for expression of interest was written to the local partners. Those who responded were then subjected to due diligence process, a questionnaire was administered and evaluation process . Thereafter, the Collaboration

Agreement have been signed with all the three organisations, detailing the roles and responsibilities of each part.

Activity 1.2: A workshop was held with the Local Organisations together with Action Against Hunger to reviewed past project reports, and recommendations were made and continue to be revised and discussed. Recommendations included insights on project management strategies and tools, understanding, flexibility and problem solving for donor requirements on reporting, and paying particular attention to changes that may arise even from traditional donors. Review of past project reports is an ongoing process and capacity building based on the recommendations will also continue through additional meetings with the local partners.

Activity 1.3: The local partner NGOs and Action Against Hunger Zambia MEAL collaborated to carry out an ecosystem baseline assessment in the watershed area. This initiative aimed to collect vital information regarding the ecosystem's health and the socio-economic aspects of the communities living within it. To achieve this, three staff members from each NGO underwent training in digital data collection using Kobo Collect. Kobo collect is a data collection tool designed to facilitate the collection of various types of data in the field using mobile devices like smartphones or tablets. It is often used in research, surveys and data collection.

Questionnaire Design
Following the training, the staff members from the three NGOs collaborated to design a set of comprehensive questionnaires. These questionnaires were carefully crafted to capture essential information related to both the ecosystem and the human element within the watershed communities.

Baseline Survey
Armed with their questionnaires and the skills acquired during the training, the staff members proceeded to conduct the baseline survey in the target communities within the watershed area. The survey methods included:
*   Household Surveys (targeting 225 households living around the watersheds, the sample was determined using a two-stage cluster sampling method and was based on the population around the watersheds) Structured interviews were conducted with representative households to collect data on household demographics, climate change and ecosystems (water, forest ,disaster risk reduction), climate smart agriculture (land, crops production, irrigation, conservation agriculture), food security and nutrition livelihoods and asset ownership
*   Key Informant Interviews (targeting 35 participants) drawn from government line ministries, traditional leadership and other influential members of the community: Local experts and community leaders were interviewed to gain insights into historical and cultural aspects of the communities' relationship with the ecosystem.
*   Focus Group Discussions (targeting 12 in total including 1 for children): Interactive discussions were held with community members to explore their perspectives, experiences, and aspirations regarding the ecosystem.

Data Analysis and Reporting
The data collected during the baseline survey is currently being analysed by the three partner NGOs. The findings will be compiled into a comprehensive report that will serve as the foundation for future conservation and development initiatives within the watershed area. The report will be shared with relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, donors, and the local communities.

Activity 1.4: The local organisations were taken through self-assessment, objective setting and project planning. To achieve this a questionnaire was formulated for self-examinations cutting across various departments of Finance and Administration, Human Resource, M&E and Programs of their internal processes. Further, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis was conducted with all three NGOs and then presented to the group for questions and further discussion. The process brought out a lot of information which was valuable. Each organization identified their own internal processes that need strengthening, and strategies for improvement. The capacity needs identified were mostly cutting across all

the three local partners. Under project management cycle, the key issues were lack of capacity for resource mobilisation, lack of information on funding opportunities, limited capacity to develop winning proposals and report writing, and these guided also the formulation of the training materials and follow up action being done.

As regards human resource, the issue of high staff turnover, limited tools for effectively conducting work were highlighted. The lack of clarity on some policies as most policies are covered under a general policy. The gender policy was lacking clarity in all the three local partners, so a training has been scheduled for November 2023.

For leveraging on future project designs also we learnt about successful conservation farming techniques that Conservation Farming Unit is promoting that contribute to biodiversity conservation through minimised soil disturbance. Kaluli Development Foundation has also successfully run livelihood diversification projects, through livestock pass on to improve resilience to climatic shocks. Environment Africa also shared their experience working with the youth in the communities for sustainable interventions and long-term change. The training also focused on understanding the mission statements of the organisations, and the objective setting for clarity in program implementation and keep staff engaged. The training also looked at different steps of project planning and its importance for successful project implementation.

Activity 1.5 Finance System Training:
The training with Finance staff from Environment Africa, Kaluli Development Foundation and Conservation Farming Unit focused on assessments of their existing finance systems, Finance manuals, reporting template development and orientation, Risk Registers, Audits, workflows, successes and challenges of project implementation to mention a few.

Considering the huge cost attached to Finance systems such as the initial set up costs, Training and Data migration, it was recommended to supplement and upgrade existing Finance systems for sustainability beyond the project life span and provide onsite support to the three (3) organisations.

Activity 1.6 The local partners did not have stand-alone procurement policies, as they were embedded in the finance policies. So, Members of staff from each of the three organisations were Trained to develop procurement and logistics policy and guidelines. The training focused on the procurement processes, Asset Management and control in order to fill the gaps of the capacity analysis that was conducted. The follow up will continue to be made through out the project period in order to ensure that the systems are fully embedded in the organisations.

Activity 1.7 The three local organisations were trained to develop and update Human Resources policy and guidelines. The training also focused specifically on discipline grievance procedures to guide management and general staff.

Activity 1. 8: The training on the project Life-cycle and tools development was conducted between 19th to 22nd September for the three organisations. Trained staff will train others in their organisations. The biggest gap identified for the partners was intel on available funding opportunities. Henceforth, what Action Against Hunger has done is to partner with the three local NGOs to develop concept notes to secure funding for implementation of climate resilient food systems, nature-based solutions, water resource management and Disaster Risk Reduction. To continue enhancing the capacity, Action Against Hunger is sharing relevant funding calls to the local partners and also is continuing with consortiums in responding to funding opportunities

Output 2

2.1 and 2.2 are planned in the coming quarters

Activity 2.3 The participants were trained and mentored to update their internal policies especially on safeguarding as well as operational manuals to support elaborate project design and implementation. Follow up monitoring will continue to strengthen the policies.

Output 3.

The activities in this reporting period under Output 3 are 3.3, 3.4 and prep for 3.5

Activity 3.3 Generated Updated Maps (in QGIS) of the watersheds that the local organization covers.

In an effort to enhance the environmental conservation and management efforts in the local community, three staff members from the local partners received training on how to generate updated maps of the watersheds within their operational area using Quantum Geographic Information System (QGIS). This initiative aims to improve the accuracy and accessibility of watershed information.

Activity 3.4 Conduct routine Monitoring, Evaluation and learning once every quarter

A desk review of partner capacity assessment was done to review the gaps and training needs for each partner just to ensure there is no duplication of efforts with what is already being done by the partners, this was done using a two staged partner capacity assessment tool which highlighted the gaps such as inadequate capacity in Dashboard reporting, Open data kits and Open HDS design and configuration, Data Mapping design and configuration QGIS, Data collection analysis & Reporting, KPI monitoring, as well as Theory of Change. The M&E report is being worked and will be shared in the next report.

Activity 3.5 Exit and close out reporting: The project has been having monthly meeting where progress of the project is shared, which is critical to the build-up to the preparation of close out report at the end of the project. The local partners have also been shared with in advance the reporting requirements and templates to ensure that they are collecting and reporting on relevant activities to easy and meet the donor requirement on the overall.

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 notable challenges have been the inflation which has put pressure on the resources for effective program management. With the cost of fuel having doubled in Zambia, all the other costs for purchases, monitoring, training have also doubled, making the implementation challenging. Due to limited budget allocation for some key activities, such as conducting a baseline survey under the local partner NGO, the M&E tasks cannot be conducted effectively and might impact the quality of data. The learning is to ensure that we are budgeting at proposal stage effectively for the partner's M&E activities. We plan to submit a change request to assist address some of the budgetary issues.

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	N/A
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)?

☐ **No** ☒ Estimated underspend: £

No funds are expected to remain, the activities on the project have just reached the pick and so we expect the expenditures to go up. The first few months of the project start up were more focused on project set up, selecting partners, recruiting and all, but all that is in place.

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?

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**