

## 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: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023**

<b>Project reference</b>	DARCC038
<b>Project title</b>	Strengthening Mexican civil society leaders in implementing nature-based solutions
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	México (Northwest and western regions)
<b>Lead partner</b>	FONNOR
<b>Partner(s)</b>	
<b>Project leader</b>	<i>María José Mesén Arias</i>
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	<i>October 31, 2023 (HYR1)</i>
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<i>The project does not have a website, only a Learning Management System platform where organisations have access to material. Access is restricted at the moment: <a href="https://plataforma.fonnor.org/login/?lang=es_mx">https://plataforma.fonnor.org/login/?lang=es_mx</a></i>

**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 two months after it was expected since the funds were received by the end of June 2023. This made us move the start date of the program to October.

During July, FONNOR worked on the design of the capacity training program on Nature based Solutions (NbS), institutional development and leadership. With the program ready, we carried out an open call for proposals which was shared through different social-media channels. The call for proposal was open from July 28th to August 20 to ensure organisations would have enough time to present information on the projects they wanted to strengthen with a NbS perspective. The name provided for the training program is *RESPONSA: solutions through learning and adapting*. The objective of the call for proposal is to strengthen civil society leaders from northwest and west of Mexico to launch the design and execution of successful NbS projects through capacity strengthening on NbS knowledge, leadership abilities, institutional development and project management.

On August 20th, FONNOR received 28 applications from civil society organisations. From this, two were disqualified: one was not located in the states accepted (Baja California, Baja California Sur, Sonora, Sinaloa, Nayarit, Jalisco or Colima) and the other one was not a civil society organisation but a for profit. From the 26 remaining CSOs, 16 were chosen, one more than expected on our logframe. Two organisations presented a shared project which is why we could select 16.

The 16 organisations (30 participants in total) were selected based on: 1) where the project they proposed is based giving priority to those in states with greater percentage of poverty; 2)

the possibility of their proposed projects to become NbS projects; 3) organisations with more need from capacity strengthening from the training program; 4) projects with social welfare and conservation objectives; and 4) those that would benefit vulnerable populations (i.e. women, children, ethnic groups).

The selected organisations began the virtual training in October to learn how to assess their conservation projects with the IUCN Global Standard for NbS self-assessment tool, and will continue with their training in November with an in-person one-week capacity building activities

The project is at an early stage, hence we do not foresee at the moment any changes in our indicators and assumptions.

**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 first problem encountered was that the project did not start on time since the funding had not been received. Hence, we began two months later than expected. We adjusted the training dates to comply with the project end dates, and although it does not represent an issue in terms of indicators, we foresee two situations:

1. Trainings will be more constant and this will take a toll on the participants time to understand and adjust their projects.
2. Some trainings were postponed due to the above situation, hence, this has an effect on the budget as some consultancies are yet to be hired.

A second problem we encountered was that FONNOR’s conservation expert left the organisation at the beginning of the project. However, the position has been replaced. In regards to human talent, it was also difficult to hire a Nature based Solutions’ expert to provide specific training. Since NbS is new in the conservation arena in Mexico, there are not many national spanish-speaking experts available at the moment.

**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 No

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)?**

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?**

Mapping and tailoring 5 Core Indicators from the Standard Indicators has proven to be a challenge within the project. Projects are asked to use Standard Indicators, specifically five Core Indicators, however we are only capable of connecting 3 Core Indicators with the indicators from our logframe. We reached out to NIRAS on October 6th to request further assistance, unfortunately we have not received a response.

**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](mailto: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**