

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	<i>This should be the project reference provided in your offer paperwork and not your application number</i> DAREX001
Project title	Developing a Global Biodiversity Standard certification for tree-planting and restoration
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Uganda, Kenya, Madagascar, Peru, Brazil, India
Lead partner	Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI)
Partner(s)	Society for Ecological Restoration (SER), World Agroforestry Centre – ICRAF, TRAFFIC, Ecosia, The Plan Vivo Foundation (PVF), 1t.org, Jardim Botânico Araribá, Huarango Nature, Auroville Botanical Gardens, Missouri Botanical Gardens Madagascar, Brackenhurst Botanic Gardens, Tooro Botanical Gardens.
Project leader	Paul Smith
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.biodiversitystandard.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 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.

Over the past six months, significant progress has been made towards the outputs of the project.

Output 1: Global Biodiversity Standard (GBS) methodology completed and applications available to tree-planting and forest restoration practitioners online in English, Spanish, Portuguese and French by the end of year 2.

In Q1 of year 2, a technical consultation was carried out with feedback on the methodology received from over 60 experts, covering the fields of ecological restoration, biodiversity conservation, remote sensing, land management, forestry, global policy and frameworks and community engagement. The feedback from this technical consultation was used to make adjustments to the methodology, including re-wording of the criteria, changes to the method used to assess stakeholder engagement and social benefits, and modifications to the field survey method (see Appendix 1). A full review of the remote sensing methodology was made by BGCI staff. This method is now being reviewed by Bioflore, a remote sensing specialist consultancy company. The method has also been tested on ~25 sites over the past 6 months by the hubs, with feedback provided (see Appendices 2-7). These test sites include those coordinated by Ecosia and PVF (see Appendices 8-9) A manual with the full technical specifications is being written and will be published in Q3. This manual is being written by BGCI, SER, TRAFFIC and PVF (see Appendices 9-11). A draft manual is appended to the report (Appendix 12).

Output 2: At least 10 training hubs established, ≥200 people trained and comprehensive data tools and resources available in at least 6 highly biodiverse countries by the end of year 3.

The training hubs have been compiling a range of resources to support the assessment process, including guidebooks, floras and vegetation maps (see Appendices 2-7). During the past six months, the TreeGOER and Global Useful Native Trees databases and associated open access peer-review articles have been published ([Kindt 2023](#); [Kindt et al. 2023](#)). These papers are available via the links provided and details about their development are provided in Appendix 13. In addition, a mobile app is being developed by RadixWeb to provide a tool to support the field surveys. A web-based app is also being developed to support the online application process. The draft mobile app can be found here:

Web Portal: <https://www.figma.com/proto/f2oSXWLq8sRNhjMam5jvcg/GBD?type=design&node-id=19-35&t=n1p7Ap5oEDufypIC-0&scaling=scale-down-width&page-id=0%3A1&starting-point-node-id=19%3A35&hide-ui=1>

Mobile App: <https://www.figma.com/proto/zxm0STZobir4vutMv09Jv9/Global-Biodiversity?type=design&node-id=628-684&t=smuk7SGBGCsk3cPT-0&scaling=scale-down&page-id=628%3A570&starting-point-node-id=628%3A571>

Output 3: A self-sustaining business model and plan for scaling up the GBS to at least 10 biodiverse countries worldwide developed by the end of year 3.

During the past six months, work has been ongoing with development of a market-research survey, meetings with many different stakeholders, including carbon credit markets, tree planting initiatives, nature reporting frameworks and brokers of land management initiatives. Consultants have been contracted to design and carry out this market research. Organisations that have been engaged include South Pole, Climate Asset partners, UNDP, UN high level climate champions and the Taskforce for nature-related financial disclosures (TNFD). A messaging document has been drafted to promote the GBS with key markets and stakeholders (see Appendix 14).

Output 4: GBS certification applied for and achieved by at least 250 tree-planting/ forest restoration projects by project end.

Whilst activities towards output 4 are not scheduled to take place until year 3 of the project, progress has been made by showcasing the Global Biodiversity Standard across many fora, including the GEOBON 2023 congress, the SER 2023 congress, the Global Landscapes Forum and via an online webinar hosted by SER. In addition, a presentation on the GBS has been selected to take place at COP-28 in Dubai on 4th December. We have also applied to present the project at the UK Pavilion, hosted by Defra, but are waiting to hear back.

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 development of the training materials has not progressed as quickly as outlined in the timeline. This is because the assessment methodology has proven to be more complex than initially planned. This is because of the need to increase scientific rigour in the assessment method to ensure an effective assessment of the site's impact on nature. This has delayed the progress of the development of training materials, but these will continue to be developed and finalised in the next 6 months.

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?

There are no other issues to raise at this point.

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**