

## Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

**Submission Deadline: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023**

<b>Project reference</b>	DARNV019
<b>Project title</b>	Women-led, School-based Agroforestry in Benin
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Benin
<b>Lead partner</b>	JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., World Education Division (JSI/WE)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Alafia NGO
<b>Project leader</b>	Nadege Djitrinou Fagla
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	October 30, 2023, HYR1
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	worlded.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).**

Below is a summary of activities planned for the period of April - September 2023 and an update on their status:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Status</b>
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**Output 1: Communities engaged in planning school-based reforestation activities and involved in decision-making around issues relating to conservation of biodiversity, management of funds, food insecurity, school management and women's leadership**

1.1 Adapt participatory community diagnostic (PCD) tool	<b>Complete.</b> In July, 2023, the Project team adapted the PCD tool to assess community perceptions around native ecosystems/the natural world, biodiversity, agriculture, women's leadership, education, and economic advancement and to pinpoint issues preventing communities from reaching their goals in each of these areas.
1.2 Engage relevant ministries to ensure buy-in and guidance	<b>Complete.</b> In August, 2023, the Project team met with the Mayor, the Territorial Agency for Agricultural Development 4's (ATDA4) Communal Unit, the Forestry Cantonment, the Pedagogy Office of the Commune of N'Dali, the Borgou Departments Forestry Inspectorate, the General Directorate of the ATDA4 and the Departmental Directorate of Pre and Primary Education in Borgou. The team presented the Project as both a formality and a means to seek input into the design. The government officials were enthusiastic about the project and made suggestions as to which tree species to plant, including native trees such as <i>Vitellaria paradoxa</i> , and fruit trees such as mangos and papayas.
1.3 Administer participatory diagnostic	<b>Complete.</b> In August, 2023, the Project team facilitated the PCD in the three Project communities: Wèrèkè, Pouraparé et Sonnoumon in the Borgou Department. Each PCD included plenary sessions with the entire community, one-on-one meetings, and focus groups with

	groups such as women’s groups and gatherings for men, youth, community leaders, teachers, and agricultural workers.
1.4 Develop Community Action Plan	<b>Complete.</b> During the final day of the PCD, the Project communities developed action plans with clear milestones to guide them in addressing the gaps they identified during the PCD.
<b>Output 2: Mothers Associations (AME) established and/or strengthened and provided capacity development support to better understand their roles and responsibilities</b>	
2.1 Identify schools and establish AMEs	<b>Complete.</b> The Project team developed a list of criteria for school identification, including proximity to native ecosystems, willingness and motivation to meaningfully engage women through AMEs, and the availability of land adjacent to the schools. The team then presented this list to department-level Ministry officials to develop a shortlist. Once shortlisted the team worked with communities and selected the three most motivated that most closely responded to all criteria.
2.2 Train AMEs on roles and responsibilities	<b>Complete.</b> After establishing the AMEs together with their communities and school leadership, the Project team trained each AME on their roles and responsibilities.
2.3 Strengthen AME management capacity	<b>In progress.</b> While AME roles and responsibility training provide some management capacity strengthening, the core training activities are planned for the next trimester.
<b>Output 3: AMEs are trained and supported to manage microenterprises based on school-based agroforestry initiatives together with teachers and community farmers</b>	
3.1 Identify farmers through the PCD	<b>Complete.</b> The Project identified participating farmers through the PCD and subsequent community engagement activities.
3.2 Develop farmer field (FFS) school course content	<b>In progress.</b> The bioblitz (see Activity 4.2) served as the initial introduction to the FFS. The remaining content is currently being developed.
3.3 Roll out FFS course	<b>In progress.</b> The bioblitz served as an initial introduction, however the remaining sessions are planned for November, 2023.
3.4 Train FFS participants and AMEs on micro entrepreneurship	<b>Not yet started</b> (see Section 2 below for details on the delay). This activity is scheduled to launch at the end of 2023 and early 2024.
3.5 Support AMEs to establish connections along value chain	<b>Not yet started</b> (see Section 2 below for details on the delay). This activity is scheduled to launch at the end of 2023 and early 2024.
<b>Output 4: Agroforestry systems are planned and established in schools</b>	
4.1 Compile research on key native plant species	<b>In progress.</b> The team continues gathering desk research on native plant species in the area that sustain native biodiversity.
4.2 Compile research on desired ratios integrated crops and native plant species	<b>In progress.</b> To best ensure the biodiversity sustaining agroforestry practices resonate with the communities and that the communities contribute to the data that informs the agroforestry system design, the project planned a bioblitz. The communities were oriented in September, 2023. The bioblitz took place in October, 2023 and will thus be present in the Project’s annual report.
4.3 Gather information based on community epistemologies around biodiversity	<b>Complete.</b> Community ways of knowing and perceptions around biodiversity were thoughtfully discussed during the PCD and continue to be explored through all community activities.
<b>Output 5: Schools are supported to lead activities engaging communities in environmental monitoring, conservation and biodiversity-sustaining agriculture</b>	
No Output 5 activities were planned for this reporting period.	

**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.**

1. The final Project paperwork was sent on April 25th, thus delaying the project by approximately one month. While this does not pose challenges to overall implementation of the Project, Activities (3.3 and 3.4) originally scheduled for the last month of this reporting period were delayed to the subsequent reporting period.

2. Initially, one of the Project communities wanted to clear cut fallow land for the Project's agroforestry sites, which included native plant species that are beneficial to existing ecosystems and that could be beneficial to their eventual agroforestry system. Through engaged community involvement; consultations with Alafia's agroforestry specialist; in-depth discussions during the PCD; several activities designed together with communities that ensure the sustainability of practices that conserve biodiversity and improve living conditions; and in October 2023 (in the reporting period following this report), a bioblitz activity, the community ultimately opted not to clear cut the land and to design their agroforestry system around existing native plant species. These activities remain a high focus priority to ensure that the Project does not touch native ecosystems and carefully approaches fallow land containing native species.

**3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement? N/A.**

Discussed with NIRAS: N/A

Formal Change Request submitted: N/A

Received confirmation of change acceptance: N/A

Change request reference if known: N/A

**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: £ N/A

**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.

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

No issues to raise, thank you.

**The following attachments were submitted to the Darwin Initiative but not included in this document:**

- Attachment A - Response to Feedback from Application
- Attachment B - CVs
- Attachment C - Risk Register