

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus

Half Year Report

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 2-3 pages** in length.

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 2024

Please note all projects that were active before 1 October 2024 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

Submit to: BCF-Reports@niras.com including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	29-015
Project title	Valorising Malagasy protected areas as seed sources for forest restoration
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Madagascar
Lead Organisation	Missouri Botanical Garden
Partner(s)	
Project leader	Chris Birkinshaw
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	Twitter: @c_birkinshaw, https://mobot.mg/conservation/analavelona-site/ https://vihy.mg/ https://www.facebook.com/people/Graines-pour-l%C3%A9ducation/100093160720795/

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end of 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.

Output 1. Improved education for children at three local schools that is understood by local people to be derived from the sale of seeds originating from the Analavelona Forest. On 17 August a meeting was held with the teachers who we support and the local head of education to discuss feedback (including the issue of absenteeism, see below). We continue to support 8 teachers in 4 schools. Following the visit to one of the schools by a private donor they agreed to provide funds to provide a new school building and also support the teachers at this school

Output 2. High quality seeds of named and evaluated native tree species provided to reforestation projects

Under the management of MBG's field botanist, 12 seed collectors continued to collect good quantities of high quality seeds. Some of these were sent to our three nurseries to be propagated. Restoration trials established during the previous wet season have been monitored and climate data loggers installed to recorded the contrasting microclimates conditions in the three sites. The results from these devices are astonishing with some sites recording peak temperatures exceeding 50°C, dropping down to a minimum of 6°C. The objective of these trials is to identify which of the native tree species perform well under different specified conditions. One of the trials failed almost completely (17% seedling survival after 9 months) because the selected experimental area was used as a resting place for cattle but the other two trials did better (ca. 70% survival of all species combined) and are providing useful insights. During the last 6 months the nurseries have continued to produce seedlings that will be used to launch further trials in the coming rainy season

Output 3. The creation of an effective self-sufficient business with capacity to continue operating the "community-based" seed supply chain, on a commercial basis, post-funding

The association VIHY continues to flourish under the day-to-day management of the two young entrepreneurs (Rado and Fabien) and Board members (MBG staff): the website is regularly undated; social media communications are frequent; an effective office in Sakaraha is maintained, a VIHY bank account is functional and the Manual of Procedures is applied. A consultant was hired to train Radio and Fabien in communications and marketing and to develop a marketing strategy. During the last 6 months a total of £2000 has been generated from the sale of seeds to 7 different clients. A major client was the project Programme de Lutte Anti- érosive (PLAE) that propagates and outplants trees to control erosion – we are delighted with this collaboration because this is exactly the sort of situation where we had hoped more native Malagasy trees would be used.

In addition, village meetings were held at Manasoa, Mahabo, Andranoheza and Ambinanitelo for local populations, seed collectors, teachers and Lonaky with the aim of informing them about progress with the project and clarifying the safeguarding policy (several communications were received that did not really concern safeguarding issues).

Output 4. The managers of other protected areas in Madagascar are sufficiently aware of the methods and results of this model project that they can evaluate its relevance at the sites where they work

During the last 6 months 19 social media posts were made.

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.

Problem 1. Parents report that some of the teachers supported by the Project are frequently absent. *Contribution to solution: meetings were held between the parents and teachers, facilitated by MBG staff to discuss this issue. The teachers agreed to be more diligent and parents invited to inform MBG if this behaviour continued. The head of education for this zone (so called, Chef ZAP) indicated that MBG must listen to the teachers explanations and not*

merely believe the parents. Sad to say that the desire to teachers to stay in towns rather than in the countryside is a fundamental cause of the low quality of rural education.

Problem 2. Anticipating on-going seed collection post-project. To date seed collection has been assured by Patrice, a field botanist from MBG. He was tasked not only with managing seed collection but also with selecting and training a member of his team of 12 collectors to replace him at the end of DI support. However, local capacity for such a management role is very low (e.g. most of the seed collectors cannot write) and, to date, Patrice has not been able to identify such a person. *Contribution to solution. Patrice has sought a possible replacement from outside his group of seed collectors who has a high school exam and also seems to like being in the countryside, and we have asked Patrice to spend 3 months training this person to replace him in his current role. At the end of this period we will evaluate whether this solution will work.*

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: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)

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 2025)?

Yes No

4c. If you expect and underspend, then you should 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 to your project 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?

None

6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report. If your project was subject to an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment please use this space to comment on any changes to international human rights risks, and to address any additional mitigations outlined in your offer letters. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.

Feedback 1 Activity 1.3 has not been carried out, and the explanation that an NGO has been set up instead of a Business Unit which precludes carrying out this activity is unconvincing. Given that metrics for measuring the success of the teachers and parent's attitudes are very incomplete (outputs 1.3 and 1.4), a FRAM Manual of Procedures is very much needed.

Reply: As originally conceived, the project would mobilise the FRAM teachers and the parents to collect, clean and dispatch seeds (and in return we would support the teachers). It was in this context that we proposed that a manual of procedures would need to be developed and not in the context of the teachers as teachers. However, the reality of locating and correctly identifying the target tree species (sometimes distant from the village), then collecting, labelling and storing samples of high quality ripe seeds and organising dispatch to our distant office was all just too complicated to be realistically managed by this group of people and hence we developed an alternative approach of training and compensating a small number of parents as part-time seed collectors with a condition of employment being that they kept their children in education. However, the reviewer does make a good point that since so much rural education depends on FRAM teachers, who are almost unsupervised by the local education authority, then it would be worthwhile investing to support the parents to develop a type of Memorandum of Understanding to frame the relationship between these informal teachers and the parents. We have already drafted of this agreement that we will present this for final validation with the parents (and the education authority) shortly, and then have this in place and functional before the end of the project. This would be an important outcome of our work.

Feedback 2 The indicators for Output 1 are incomplete with no reports available from the local education authority listing project teachers and evaluating the performance (Indicator 1.1). Similarly, exam results are only available for one out of three schools (Indicator 1.3).

To be honest, it is only through this program that we have truly understand how lamentable rural education is in this part of Madagascar. In reality the Local Education authority barely knows the names of the FRAM teachers and is not in a position to evaluate their work in a meaningful manner. However, we are pleased now to attach, in appendix, the evaluation of the 3 teachers working at the CEG (secondary school) that we support made by the Director of the school. As part of the new agreement proposed to frame the relationship between parents and the FRAM teachers working in the primary schools we will provide an evaluation of their work provided by the parents as part of the next report. Also, as requested, we are pleased to attach the exam results of students at the primary schools of Mikobaka and Andranoheza,

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to any additional feedback (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	
For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	X
For All Projects	

Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	X
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	X
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	X
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project?	X
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	X