

## 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: 31<sup>st</sup> 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](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com) including your project ref in the subject line.**

<b>Project reference</b>	<b>30-023</b>
<b>Project title</b>	Rights of Wetlands Operationalisation for Biodiversity and Community Resilience
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Bolivia, Ecuador, Guyana, Kenya and Sri Lanka
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Wetlands International Kenya
<b>Partner(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wetlands International Global Office, Netherlands</li> <li>• ATAYAK - Asociación de Yachak del Pueblo de Sarayaku, Ecuador</li> <li>• Cobra Collective, UK</li> <li>• Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, USA</li> <li>• International Water Management Institute, Sri Lanka</li> <li>• Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka</li> <li>• North Rupununi District Development Board, Guyana</li> <li>• Practical Action in Bolivia, Bolivia</li> <li>• Universidad Católica de Bolivia "San Pablo", Bolivia</li> <li>• Worcester State University, USA</li> </ul>
<b>Project leader</b>	Dr. Matthew Simpson
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2024 HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://cobracollective.org/portfolio/rights-of-wetlands-operationalisation-for-biodiversity-and-community-resilience/">https://cobracollective.org/portfolio/rights-of-wetlands-operationalisation-for-biodiversity-and-community-resilience/</a> <a href="http://www.rightsofwetlands.org">www.rightsofwetlands.org</a>

**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.

During the period June to September 2024 the focus has been setting up the project, undertaking a review of the Rights of Wetlands policy, legislation, governance, communication and management approaches context in each of the countries and developing a questionnaire to assess the baseline understanding regarding Rights of Wetlands. To this end the activities below have contributed to meeting the following output.

#### **Outputs**

Output 1 - Robust Evidence Base of Rights of Wetlands in Five Countries

#### **Activities**

- 1.5 – Annual Stakeholder Project Meeting – we have met with project stakeholders in all 5 countries
- 1.8 – We have held Rights of Wetlands Community Participatory Video workshops in Kenya and Bolivia
- 1.9 – Legal, Policy, Governance and Communication Workshops in Kenya and Bolivia

#### **Outputs**

Output 2 – Increased Capacity for Rights of Wetlands Implementation

#### **Activities**

- 2.1 – Training material production – Introduction to Wetlands, Introduction to Rights of Wetlands, Community Wetland Management and Participatory Community Engagement Techniques training programmes have been developed
- 2.2 – Community Engagement Training – this has commenced in Kenya and Bolivia and will also be delivered in Ecuador, Sri Lanka and Kenya in the next couple of months

#### **Outputs**

Output 4 – Upscaling and Dissemination

#### **Activities**

- 4.2 – Websites have been regularly updated. Most recently with new multi-language [quick guides](#)
- 4.5 – Policy briefings have been developed for each country and are being finalised with government stakeholders
- 4.9 – Dialogue with communities, CSOs, NGOs governments and the private sector has commenced with face-to-face meetings in all countries
- 4.10 – Support has been given in the formulation of policy / legislation/ strategies and plans for wetland management in all countries

Specific details have been given for each country below:

#### **Bolivia**

Activity 2.2 Community engagement training

- Bolivia project partners supported the organization, co-facilitation, and translation of community engagement training led by Cobra Collective, which included participation from 23 people (16 male, 7 female) from Aguaysal and Picaflor communities. The training covered an introduction to wetlands and the Rights of Wetlands, an overview of the project and available training resources, and the identification of wetland issues along with community-based solutions related to the Rights of Wetlands.
- We provided similar support for the participatory video training, which included an introduction to Participatory Video, the development of storyboards for two proposed films, and practical training in Participatory Video techniques. This training involved 18 people in total (7 female, 11 male). A group from Picaflores (2 male), a group from Aguaysal (4 male and 4 female) and Santa Rosa youth platform (5 male and 3 female).

Project partners in Bolivia also carried out:

- Engagement with the community and local stakeholders. In August, we visited Santa Rosa to design and verify a wetlands measurement methodology in collaboration with volunteers from the Aguayzal community, a local WCS officer, and the tourism officer from Aguayzal. We successfully finalized a guide outlining the measurement methodology and two key indicators.
- The volunteers have committed to completing the measurements by the end of October, enabling us to present the results at the community meeting in November. This will involve validating the data with the volunteers and potentially preparing graphics for them to share the results with the community. If everything proceeds as planned, we aim to provide a community measurement notebook with tables for at least a year, including logos and acknowledgments.
- We see significant potential in this methodology for empowering communities to manage their own monitoring processes and negotiate their demands based on evidence. This approach could also be scaled to other communities. Additionally, we can enhance our efforts with Aguayzal by offering satellite-generated graphics to visualize wetland loss, land use changes, and other relevant indicators.
- Survey data regarding community perceptions of the health of wetland ecosystems has been completed, and a first draft report is currently in development.

#### **Ecuador**

- The questionnaire data produced by the community survey which had been previously administered by community researchers in Sarayaku was analysed and reported that the survey

suggested the community had strong concurrence in some key areas regarding wetlands as follows:

- In Sarayaku wetlands are most immediately thought of as lakes, lagoons, rivers and streams. The community focuses above all on the social and environmental value of wetlands and sees their importance for the provision of clean drinking water and food sources as well as the maintenance of the forest ecosystem.
- The Sarayaku community is concerned with the fast deterioration of the wetlands in their territory and think that they need to be urgently protected through effective management, rational use and monitorization following local guidelines. They agree that wetland management should be conducted primarily by representative organizations based in the community.
- The Sarayaku people are extremely concerned with the disruptive impact of extreme climate events have on their wetlands. They are also concerned that mining, toxic contaminants, road building infrastructure is decreasing the health and resilience of their wetlands.
- Gillian Davies (BSC Group and Cobra Collective Consultant) and Kai Huschke (CELDf) visited the Sarayaku in September to engage with the community regarding Rights of Wetlands and to participate in an international multidisciplinary conference - <https://cobracollective.org/news/rights-of-wetlands-at-the-more-than-human-life-moth-gathering-in-sarayaku-ecuador.php>

### **Guyana**

- The team has begun working on a newsletter that speaks to what the project is about, the launch activities and wetlands ecology. We have produced 5 issues so far.
- During the rainy season, with access to communities reduced the community researchers spent time going through course materials, posted on the OU free course platform, to better understand some of the issues on wetland ecology and challenges related to monitoring and anthropomorphic impacts and how they may disrupt the wetland ecosystem that they could better facilitate discussions with communities.
- September was Amerindian Heritage Month and the community researchers spent time in the communities documenting cultural activities and interviewing community elders on their experiences living in the wetlands and how they overcame some of the challenges caused by droughts, floods and fires. Also how leadership would have helped manage community resources within the wetlands.

### **Kenya**

- Over the last six months, Wetlands International has successfully implemented several key activities under the Darwin Initiative Project, including a Water Protocol Workshop, a Rights of Wetlands Workshop, and Participatory Video Training with solution selection. Additionally, questionnaires were conducted in the Tana Delta and during the Rights of Wetlands workshop to gather valuable insights. These activities are aimed at strengthening community engagement, enhancing wetland management, and promoting sustainable conservation practices across the Lamu and Tana Delta Land and Seascape.  
Water Protocol Workshops:
  - We conducted workshops co-supported by Nature Kenya, to review and validate the "Lamu and Tana River Counties Position Paper on Water-Related Grievances." This document is crucial for developing an inter-county water management protocol for the River Tana basin. The meeting, attended by different representatives including high-level county officials, focused on establishing a roadmap for sustainable water use across the basin. Key outcomes of the workshops included the validation of the position paper, the commitment of counties to the process, and plans for continued collaboration and resource mobilization.Rights of Wetlands Workshop:
  - The workshop brought together 27 stakeholders (20 men, 7 women) to discuss critical topics related to wetlands conservation, Rights of Nature, and Rights of Wetlands. The sessions covered the significance of wetlands, the challenges they face, and potential solutions for enhancing both biodiversity and community resilience. Participants explored various wetland types, structural components, processes, and the essential services they provide, such as carbon sequestration, livelihood support, and climate regulation. Additionally, they identified key threats, including illegal logging, pollution, and land encroachment. The day concluded with group discussions aimed at formulating practical management practices and strategies such as giving Rights to Wetlands to address these issues. <https://cobracollective.org/news/working-with-communities-on-the-rights-of-wetlands-in-kenya.php>
  - Participatory Video Training and Solution Selection:
    - The training focused on participatory video making, where groups from Lamu and Tana (comprising 7 participants) assessed solutions discussed during the Rights of Wetlands

Workshop to determine their relevance and impact on both wetlands and communities. The groups evaluated solutions based on criteria like community control, fairness, and sustainability, ultimately selecting restoration of degraded sites as the top solution. Participants were trained in creating short videos to highlight and promote these solutions within their communities. They developed storyboards and were to then film content showcasing practical restoration methods, aiming to inspire other communities to adopt similar conservation efforts.

Questionnaires:

- We conducted questionnaires as part of the "Rights of Wetlands Operationalization for Biodiversity and Community Resilience" project in the Tana Delta and during the Rights of Wetlands workshops. These questionnaires aimed to assess participants' awareness of the Rights of Wetlands and gather feedback on how to enhance engagement, training, and communication. The responses will help shape the development of the project, which focuses on using a Rights of Nature approach to conserve wetlands and improve community resilience.

### **Sri Lanka**

- The final version of the National Policy on Living Entities has been submitted by the consultant and is currently being reviewed prior to submission to the Ministry of Environment. The project partners have been assisting the Sri Lankan government in developing this policy
- A project brief has been developed for dissemination and is available [online](#)
- IWMI also conducted a preliminary review of Rights of Nature application in Asian context, using Bangladesh as an example. The document can be found [here](#)
- The project partnership has also been holding discussions with the Sri Lankan government regarding the submission of a Draft Resolution on Rights of Wetlands to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

## **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.**

### **Bolivia**

Over the past six months (April to September), the project has encountered several significant challenges and unexpected developments:

- In September, Bolivia experienced severe forest fires, which caused flight cancellations due to smoke in the area. As a result, we had to travel by land to continue our work with local beneficiaries, who have prioritized emergency responses. We expect similar challenges to persist until November, which has hindered our planned engagements and may affect the timeline for achieving specific project milestones.
- Additionally, by the end of September, Bolivia faced social unrest, marked by road blockages between La Paz and Rurrenabaque. With elections approaching next year, we anticipate that tensions could escalate, particularly in October and November. This situation may further complicate logistics and communications with stakeholders.
- As a result of these challenges, we have had to postpone the visit from NIRAS, which is now tentatively rescheduled for February 2025. This delay may impact our project's timeline and requires careful reassessment of our activities and budget to accommodate the changes.

### **Ecuador**

- As with all project partners we have lost money from the project due to currency exchange fluctuations. José Gualinga has reported several times that there are outstanding discrepancies in the amount of money Atayak has received in relation to what was stipulated in the original budget. This issue is creating ill-at-ease in Sarayaku. While this issue does not significantly affect the budget or the timetable for completion of the project's activities, it needs clarification and will be addressed in a meeting with José Gualinga in November.

### **Guyana**

- The project has still not received the research permit to day due to ongoing delays with the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. The Officer responsible for processing the application and forwarding to the Minister's Secretariat has not processed the application in a timely manner and spends a lot of time in the field. It is therefore, difficult making contact. This issue has delayed working in the communities but discussion with NRDDDB leadership has suggested perhaps working out of the Organisation's office to facilitate discussions that would allow progress to be made on project activities.
- While there is some delay in getting project activities going, the intent is to intensify interactive activities with communities and other stakeholders to ensure that progress is being made with community engagement and ensure that the dialogue between local and national decisions

makers progress. Key meetings are to be held in October and November so we are working to get the permit issued as soon as possible.

#### Kenya

- Over the last six months, the project has encountered several notable challenges. Limited funds have constrained some activities, while security issues in the Tana Delta have posed occasional risks to movements and engagements. Additionally, flooding in the Tana Delta has caused road blockages, cutting off access to certain areas. Despite these challenges, the project timetable has not been significantly affected, and we have been able to adjust and continue activities as planned. These developments are not expected to affect the budget or overall timeline of the project.

#### Sri Lanka

- The National Policy on Living Entities is still under review having gone through multiple iterations and stakeholder consultations due to the novelty and complexity of the subject. Elections in Sri Lanka may disrupt the progress of this policy.
- Additional awareness and capacity building is required for the stakeholders and communities to fully comprehend the concept and how it can be translated into practical action through legal means and behavioural/attitude changes. These activities will be delivered in November 2024.

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

Discussed with NIRAS:

Yes

Formal Change Request submitted:

Yes in January 2024

Received confirmation of change acceptance:

Yes

Change Request reference if known: **CR23-144**

### 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  Estimated underspend: £

**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.

We received the following comments from our most recent annual review and although we are not required to respond until our next Annual Review we have made some comments below.

1. The project reports that two online start-up meetings were held (for different time zones), but participant numbers varied between countries, ranging from four government officials in Ecuador to 43 people in a follow-up workshop in Sri Lanka. It would be helpful to include more details on participant numbers and affiliations from all the countries.  
*We have tried to provide more detail on participation at workshops and training in this report and will provide more detail in our annual report.*
2. Stakeholder and community questionnaires were undertaken in each country, but the methodology differed between countries. For example, a small and reportedly 'unrepresentative' sample of 10 Sarayaku people in Ecuador contrasts with Guyana, where 200 people from civil society organisations and NGOs completed the questionnaire. Is the project concerned by the differences in the way activities such as this are undertaken in the different countries?  
*The situation in each country is very different so representation within all activities is varied. However, we have discussed with project partners regarding representation and the need to make sure engagement is as effective as possible.*
3. With respect to Outputs 2 and 4, some of the indicators are scheduled for delivery in "Yr1 and 2", suggesting that some progress might have been expected in the first year. It is not clear therefore whether the project has fallen behind with the activities associated with any of these indicators.  
*The project is currently on target in relation to activities but more detailed evidence will be provided in the annual report.*
4. The project could provide more information on how the host countries have supported the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements over the reporting year, in future reports.  
*We will provide more evidence regarding how the host countries have engaged with Conventions etc. in the next annual report.*
5. In future reports, it would be helpful to the reviewer to provide a little more evidence, and to provide more even coverage of country activities when responding to the various questions in the report template (see comments in sections below).  
*We have tried to address this within this report but will also provide more detailed evidence in the annual report.*
6. The budget table should be represented to include the revised budget lines agreed with Darwin.  
*We will include this within the annual report.*
7. One of the comments made by the Darwin Expert Committee concerns a survey before and after 'of community, CSO and government stakeholders, and will assess wetland biodiversity, wetland health, poverty and livelihood status'; the panel point out that this is not in the activities and it is not clear how surveys of these actors can tell us directly about biodiversity. The project responds that it is included in Activity 1.3 – however, the reviewer is still unsure how the activity set out in 1.3 will provide information directly about biodiversity, as there are no direct measures, just opinions sought from stakeholders in a questionnaire.  
*The project is not undertaking direct measurement of biodiversity because this is outside the scope of the project activities. However, the project questionnaires will collect qualitative data on the status and trends in biodiversity and wetland health through the questionnaires. This relies on the perception of participants but we still feel this is a valid measure of the overall status of wetland biodiversity within the project locations.*

## Checklist for submission

<b>For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you <b>responded to any additional feedback</b> (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 <b>risk register</b> ?	
<b>For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you responded to <b>feedback from your latest Annual Report Review</b> ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	Yes
<b>For All Projects</b>	
Include your <b>project reference</b> in the subject line of submission email.	Yes
Submit to <a href="mailto:BCFs-Report@niras.com">BCFs-Report@niras.com</a> .	Yes
Have you <b>clearly highlighted any confidential information</b> within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	N/A
Have you reported against the most <b>up to date information for your project</b> ?	Yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Yes