

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	30-027
Project title	Improving fisher livelihoods and protecting marine biodiversity in Timor-Leste
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Timor-Leste
Lead Organisation	Blue Ventures Conservation
Partner(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government of Timor-Leste, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries • WorldFish • Dreamers Dive Academy (DDA) • Assosiasaun Mariniero Timor Leste (AMTL)
Project leader	Bernadette Fonesca
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 st October 2024 HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	http://www.blueventures.org

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 - Savings and loans groups established and livelihood projects piloted with fishing dependent households, are improving the economic resilience of coastal community households and contributing to support for conservation goals by the end of the project period.

In year one, savings and loans groups were established with two communities. Further communities expressed interest in establishing their own groups, and subsequently a series of trainings were delivered to five groups (32 participants, 21 men and 11 women) over three days in April 2024 on the objective of establishing a Village Saving and Loans Association (VSLA), developing policies and regulations for a group, transaction procedures, and the use of a record keeping book. The training received positive feedback from the participants, demonstrating an eagerness to establish saving and loans groups in their communities. Subsequently, four groups have been established this reporting period, bringing the total number of groups to six, with 99 members (76 women and 23 men) (Activity 1.2). Monthly monitoring of savings and loans groups has taken place to track activity progress, provide support when needed and collect information on the total savings and loans (Activity 1.5).

In August, a value chain assessment was completed with 67 people (63 men and 4 women) across three communities on the mainland and Atauro island (Activity 1.7) to assess species sustainability and resilience, market demand, post-harvest losses, and the potential increase in income from value chain activities. Next, the results will be shared with communities via data feedback sessions to identify which species to focus on for future value chain work.

On the 23rd July 2024 Blue Ventures (BV) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Secretary of State of Cooperative (SECoop), a government department responsible for national savings and micro-credit schemes. The MoU serves to strengthen stakeholder collaboration, open access for local savings groups to government schemes, and support the delivery of capacity building to community members. Cooperating with institutions and the government also strengthens the sustainability of the project by developing recognition of the community groups, and building a starting point for longer-term support beyond the project should the groups wish to become legalised at the national level in the future.

Gender and social inclusion training was conducted with savings and loans group members and fisheries monitoring members (see output 3) from six communities in September (and continued into October) with a total of 100 participants (82 female and 18 male) (Activities 1.3 & 3.14). This training aimed to improve understanding of issues related to domestic violence, Gender Based Violence (GBV) and sexual abuse of minors and women's roles in decision making processes. Community members expressed enthusiasm with receiving gender and inclusion training for the very first time. After the training, feedback was received which stated that the training helped them to better understand women's role and participation in decision-making, and expressed that they would like to continue this work to empower women, particularly in coastal areas. Next, a gender action plan will be prepared for each community to incorporate into their co-management Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) plan.

Output 2 - Local marine management plans in place, governed by effective LMMA committees and implementing sustainable marine management measures which reduce threats to biodiversity, by the end of the project period.

Under this output, BV aims to establish a total of five *Tara Bandu* (customary law that enables the establishment of LMMAs) by the end of the project. In year one, community consultations began with three initial *aldeias* (villages) that had been identified to work with to establish local management measures using *Tara Bandu*: Iliknamu (Atauro island); Biqueli Pala (Atauro island); and Ilimano (Manatuto Municipality, on the mainland). In the first half of year two, work has focused on developing the *Tara Bandu* and LMMA committees themselves within each *aldeia*, as further outlined below.

Aldeia Ilimano, Manatuto

Consultations with the local authorities and community continued in preparation for the LMMA in Behedan, a sub-village of Ilimano. Initially, the *Tara Bandu* was to cover a three-month closure over a 1.18 km² area, followed by a two-week opening period. However, after conducting GPS marking and discussions with the local authority, the community decided to expand the area to cover 1.37 km² and to be closed to octopus fishing for six months, followed by a one-month reopening period; this cycle will continue for two years. Following this, the LMMA committee in Behedan was formed, consisting of 19 members (4 women and 15 men) (Activity 2.4.10). BV facilitated a one-day workshop to support the establishment of this structure and revise the LMMA regulations for the octopus closure. The workshop was attended by 30 participants (12 women and 18 men), including members of the council and *aldeia* chiefs, LMMA committee representatives, and the fisheries monitoring group from Behedan. To ensure all households in Behedan were informed about and agreed with the decision, visits were conducted to households that had missed the meeting to introduce the new proposal for the regulation, and gather feedback and agreement. All 57 households surveyed (100% of those approached) expressed their support for the regulation (Activity 2.4.7).

The regulation was drafted, presented to the council, and is now awaiting approval from the President of the Manatuto Municipal Authority and the Administrative Post of Laclo (Activity 2.4.11). Meanwhile, the LMMA area was marked with GPS points and planning began with the LMMA committee for the installation of buoys and information boards (Activity 2.4.8). While awaiting approval from the Municipal Authority, preparations have begun for a formal *Tara Bandu* ceremony in Behedan. During the ceremony, LMMA regulations will be signed, and buoys and signs will be installed (Activities 2.4.12 - 2.4.14).

Aldeias Iliknamu and Pala, Biqueli, Atauro Island

Following the decision to establish an Iliknamu *Tara Bandu* area of 1.11 km², covering two zones from Ano Ai'i Ina to Uhu Rua, the community and fishers agreed upon a regulation for a general fisheries closure for five years over this area. The plan for this regulation was shared via house-to-house visits (67 households, 100% of those approached) and with neighbouring villages to ensure widespread community support (Activity 2.4.7).

The *Tara Bandu* regulations were drafted over a two-day workshop with 101 participants, including local stakeholders and community members, and the community LMMA structure was formed (15 members, 5 female and 10 male). The draft regulations were presented to the council and approved by the President of the Administrative Authority of Atauro (Activities 2.4.7 to 2.4.11). Following this, BV supported the LMMA committee to mark the *Tara Bandu* area using GPS (Activity 2.4.8).

The Iliknamu LMMA was officially launched on the 25th of September 2024 and will be in effect for five years. The launch ceremony, attended by 201 participants (108 women and 93 men), concluded with the signing of the LMMA regulations and the installation of buoys and signboards at the site (Activities 2.4.12 - 2.4.14). The launch was covered in the [news](#) and via BVTL's [social media](#). The next steps are to distribute the regulations to relevant stakeholders and train the Iliknamu LMMA committee on sea safety and surveillance. This training will empower the community to effectively monitor and protect the *Tara Bandu* area (Activities 2.5, 2.6, and 2.11).

Following the successful LMMA launch in Iliknamu, meetings with the local authorities of *aldeia* Pala resumed at the end of this reporting period. As reported in year one, the community of Pala voted to implement a *Tara Bandu*, and it was agreed with the *aldeia* chief that activities to progress the LMMA establishment would recommence following the Iliknamu launch. A further two potential communities have also been identified and shown interest in developing a *Tara Bandu* after hearing about the process from neighbouring communities. Initial meetings with these communities and local authorities have been positive, and we anticipate staggering the LMMA process with them, working towards the target of reaching a total of five communities by the project end.

BV continues to work with the Timor-Leste government, meeting quarterly with the Directorates of Fisheries and Biodiversity to discuss the project activities. The government has collaborated

with the implementation of field activities, the LMMA launch and the development of an LMMA manual for which discussions are anticipated to continue into year three (Activities 2.8 and 2.12).

Output 3 - Communities are engaged in collecting ecological and fisheries data, which is being regularly analysed and fed back to communities to inform marine-management decisions, by the end of the project period.

Community-based fisheries monitoring (CFM) groups were established in Behedan (Ilimano) and Iliknamu at the end of year one in March 2024 (Activity 3.4). Following this, in July a two-day training session was held for the 10 female CFM members in Behedan (Ilimano) and 16 female members in Iliknamu in landings profiling, monitoring using the Kobo Toolbox mobile app, and data collection methods, with a focus on fish and octopus data collection (Activity 3.5).

Both groups completed fisheries landing profiling to understand current fishing productivity and to use as baseline data to support the final discussions for LMMA regulations (Activity 3.8). In Iliknamu, a 30-day fisheries monitoring survey was successfully conducted in June and the CFM began regular weekly fisheries monitoring (Activities 3.8, 3.9, and 3.10). The data indicate that fishers in Iliknamu primarily rely on seagrass and coral reef habitats as their main fishing grounds, with several key species holding significant importance (parrotfish, fusilier and spinefoot, which were subsequently included in the LMMA regulation). These findings informed the decision-making of the community, fishers, and local authorities to protect 1.11 km² as a general fisheries closure area, with the *Tara Bandu* zone encompassing both coral and seagrass habitats.

Data from Behedan revealed that fishers predominantly depend on coral reef fishing grounds, with octopus being the key target for their catch; similarly, the community used this data to inform their decision to close a 1.37 km² to octopus fishing within their *Tara Bandu* zone. The Behedan CFM will focus on octopus data collection to support the planned closure, and will carry out twice-weekly fisheries monitoring throughout the LMMA closure period. When the LMMA reopens, fisheries landings will be monitored daily for a 30-day period until the subsequent closure (Activity 3.9).

BV is providing ongoing support through monthly meetings with the CFM groups in Iliknamu and Behedan to review collected data and provide additional support where needed, which has included training on fish species identification, data literacy and feeding the data back to the community (Activity 3.11). Additionally, data analysis and interpretation training was conducted with BV Timor-Leste staff in August to enhance staff skills in validation, visualisation, and data interpretation, enabling them to provide informed feedback to the community (Activity 3.7). Following this, data sharing events and a CFM exchange are planned for the second half of year two.

To support ecological data collection within the LMMA sites, BV is collaborating with the Coral Triangle Center (CTC), an expert in reef monitoring, to conduct joint monitoring surveys towards the end of year two and continuing in year three.

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.

Over the past six months, the project has at times faced challenges with ensuring consistent stakeholder engagement due to the remote locations of communities and a lack of availability of local transport. Availability of rental cars is limited, and a lack of access by road to some of the new communities the project is engaging with has meant that visits could only be carried out by motorbike, for which there are no rental companies available. This has constrained when field activities can be implemented which has led to longer than anticipated timeframes in finalising approval for *Tara Bandu* regulations and LMMA sign installations. This has been compounded by changes to local government availability (for instance, focus on religious activities during a visit from the Pope) and the schedules of local authorities. Additionally, adverse weather

conditions over June - August (strong winds that generated large waves) made it impossible for the community to carry out GPS markings and install buoys and signage at LMMA sites, and as such these activities were postponed until the weather subsided. These delays have led to minor adjustments in the project timeline but have not significantly affected overall progress.

To address these challenges, we have been flexible in adjusting our fieldwork schedules when possible. The project submitted a budget change request (approved October 2024) to move travel budget to capital equipment, in order to purchase motorbikes that will enable project staff to reliably and more efficiently reach communities, facilitating additional engagement efforts where needed and mitigating logistical risks.

For information, two new recruits have joined our Timor-Leste team - Communications and Advocacy Officer (Ricardo Valente Araujo), and Program Officer Data for Decision-Making (Afonso Ximenes). Two internal staff have transitioned into new management roles in line with ongoing organisational growth. Subsequently, the new staff appointed will be supporting their roles, and so are being charged to the Communications Coordinator and Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator staff budget lines respectively.

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
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Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes
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Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes
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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?

No

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.