

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

Half Year Report

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2024

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

Project reference	31-002
Project title	Seeds4Soils: regenerating soils with agrobiodiversity for climate resilience in Madagascar
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Madagascar
Lead Organisation	World Vegetable Center (legal name: AVRDC)
Partner(s)	National Center for Applied Research and Rural Development (FOFIFA), University of Antananarivo (UA), NGO CEFFEL (Conseil, Expérimentation, Formation en Fruit Et Légume).
Project leader	Sognigbe N'Danikou
Report date and number	31 October 2024 – HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	https://avrdc.org/seeds4soils-improving-climate-resilience-in-madagascar-by-regenerating-soils-with-agrobiodiversity/

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).

This report concerns the period 1 April – 30 September 2024.

Project inception workshop organized

An official project inception workshop was organized on 27 June 2024 in Antananarivo, Madagascar, and attended by 55 participants. Various stakeholders attended from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development, the University of Antananarivo, researchers from FOFIFA led by its Director General, the Director of CEFFEL, scientists from the World Vegetable Center, the FAO representative, the Africa Rice country representative, various NGOs, the GSDM, various companies working in organic farming, the LRI, the IRD, the ANAE, the CTAS, farmers representatives who attended in large number, communication houses and journalists. The workshop provided participants an insight into the project's objectives and expected results.

A panel discussion was also organized on the topic “*co-production of agricultural solutions in marginal environments: regenerative agricultural practices using opportunity crops and good soil management to increase the productivity of agricultural systems and climate resilience*”. The expected outcomes of this panel include identification of soil-related production constraints and discussion on how regenerative agricultural practices involving opportunity crops can be a part of the solutions to address low crop yields and climate vulnerability in Madagascar. The panelists were experts from WorldVeg, GSDM, CEFFEL, ANAE and FAO, who shared their experiences and insights. At the end of the panel discussion, an initial code that lists “dos” and

“don’ts” were drawn, which constitutes lessons learned and will guide the interventions during the Seeds4Soils project. One example is success factors for the introduction of cover crops include consideration of land tenure, the cover crop should have food use, should have an economic value, and keep technologies simple for better use by farmers. It is also important to consult farmers on what they want to grow, listen to their needs and involve them in decision making, give responsibility in the communities and coordinate with local authorities, advocate at the national level to gain political buy-in. Further, the stakeholders in the panel discussion, shared that there must be a market for the products or technologies that the project promotes. The workshop participants, including farmers representatives from different regions, showed significant interest in the project and asked several questions which were satisfactorily addressed by the project team.

Below is a summary against each project output.

Reviewed workplan, methods, responsibilities and MEL framework

The project team reviewed the workplan, defined milestones, research methods, the MEL framework and agreed on responsibilities. This exercise was an opportunity for the team to adjust the design and research methods. This also led to some readjustments in budget allocation for MEL activities across the three years and require a project re-budget that will be discussed with NIRAS, in a separate correspondence.

Output 1: Biodiversity of TAVs and CWR (including soil microbiome and traditional knowledge) inventoried and collected

- Project sites were selected in Itasy and Vakinankaratra regions, and Analamanga. Project sub-agreements developed between WorldVeg and national partners to conduct field activities in Madagascar. National partner University of Antananarivo applying for the collecting permit and collecting missions will start later in 2025.
- A baseline survey was organized from 22 September- 21 October 2024. The data screening and analysis were started. Findings will include current farming systems practices, soil management and local uses and perceptions of TAVs, CWR and cover crops in project sites.

Output 2: Crop & soil biodiversity conserved on-farm and in genebanks

- A list of 10 traditional African vegetables and wild relatives of legume crops were prioritized in a participatory assessment exercise with Malagasy farmers and researchers. The prioritized 5 TAV crops include African nightshade, African eggplant, amaranth, pumpkin, paracress, while the priority cover crops were rice bean, cowpea, soybean, common bean and Mucuna.
- Regeneration and characterization of 100 existing accessions of vegetable landraces and their wild relatives are ongoing at the World Vegetable Center in Arusha, Tanzania.

Output 3: TAVs and CWRs agroecologically characterised and good crop combinations identified

- Protocols being developed for on-station and field trials to conduct initial screening of agroecological benefits.

Output 4: Strengthened capacity of stakeholders in regenerative agriculture and seed production, and best practices promoted through participatory demonstrations-living labs

- NA

Output 5: Women’s business capacities and livelihood enhanced through new networks, training and commercialisation of R-kits and vegetables

- Beneficiary groups defined and a baseline survey was organized from 22 September- 21 October 2024 assessing household characteristics, farm characteristics, crop diversity and current regenerative agriculture practices. A total of 1,205 farmers were interviewed across 16 communes (municipalities). The data screening and analysis

were started. This baseline data will be combined with the endline for impact assessment of the project.

- An inventory indicated that out of the 200 women farmers beneficiaries of project #26-015, there were 127 women farmers identified as enthusiastic and willing to be involved in the current project #31-002. The other 73 women will not participate in the new project due to several reasons, including relocation to other regions, and having no land because it was owned by their husband or other people, or they were not found on the spot, and some have died.

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 project start was slightly delayed due to some administrative delays in the finalization of project sub-agreements with the national partners. However, this is solved and the implementation is on track and expect minimal impact of underspending.

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 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.

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

NA

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.

NA