

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	31-014
Project title	Community Engagement for Conservation of Mount Béro Classified Forest, Guinea.
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Guinea
Lead Organisation	BirdLife International
Partner(s)	Guinee Ecologie
Project leader	<i>George Ilebo</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31/10/2024 HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	

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).

Output 1: Multi-Stakeholder Engagement and Governance Structure for Béro Classified Forest are secured, including the engagement of 250 representatives (30% women) from 10 adjacent communities.

- Held project inception workshop on 22nd May 2024 N'Zérékoré where 35 project stakeholders attended, jointly launched the Kew Gardens and National Herbarium of Guinea (HNG) with the Darwin Capacity and Capability. The meeting was opened by the British Ambassador John Marshall, the Director of Cabinet on behalf of Mr. Governor of the Administrative Region of N'Zérékoré. The workshop was used to: clearly communicate the project's objectives, expected outcomes, and benefits; ensure that all parties understand their roles and responsibilities; discuss implementation arrangements and workplan; and identify potential challenges and strategies to address them, and opportunities for synergies between projects, among others.
- Developed and submitted to Government, the draft terms of reference for a Project Steering Committee for their review and/or approval.

Output 2: Sustainable agriculture livelihood interventions implemented in 10 adjacent villages benefitting 1,500 people, while facilitating knowledge transfer and capacity building to extend these sustainable practices beyond the targeted villages.

- A 4x4 pick-up vehicle was procured to enhance mobility and facilitate field activities.
- Conducted an assessment of sustainable agricultural practices in the local communities in collaboration with GRET. The results of this assessment will inform project interventions.

Output 3: 100 ha of degraded areas in Mount Béro Classified Forest and in direct periphery (within the buffer zone) actively restored using native/endemic trees, 10 ha under piloted Assisted Natural Regeneration, and more than 7,000 socio-economically valuable tree species planted in the surrounding areas.

- With co-financing from L'Occitane, 50 hectares of degraded land are being restored (10 hectares in Kabieta and 40 hectares in Ouléoun). So far, over 25,000 seedlings have been planted, enhancing local community involvement and capacity for forest restoration. Tree species planted include Carapa Procera (LC), Heritiera Utilis (VU), Lovoa Trichilioides (VU), Terminalia Ivoiriensis (VU), among others.

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.

Staff turn-over (including resignation of the Project Leader) caused delays in signing of the grant agreement between BirdLife International and Guinee Ecologie. The grant agreement was signed in August 2024. This explains why the burn rate is low. However, we are currently developing a strategy to realign the work plan and maximize the activities to be completed by March 2025. If necessary, we will submit a Change Request for any budget adjustments by December 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:

No

Formal Change Request submitted:

Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance:

No

Change Request reference if known: Sent at the same time as this report. *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

Presently, we are unable to ascertain if we will have an underspend because we are currently developing a strategy to catch up with the implementation of project activities. We will make a determination by end of November 2024, and will make a change request accordingly if necessary.

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 now.

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 will provide some initial feedback now and complete the response in the first annual report.

1. *clarify how the mining companies will be involved in an active way to better ensure offset funding is provided (and to a specified party) by the end of the project, and what would be the impact on the long-term benefits if this funding does not materialise.*

Further details on our private sector engagement plan will be included in the first annual report.

2. *how will increased patrolling be supported beyond the life of the project?*

The N'Zerekore Forestry Centre (CFZ), funded by the World Bank, has initiated monthly patrols in Bero through the OGPNRF, starting in January 2024 with three years of funding and potential for extension. Guinee Ecologie (GE) trained Bero agents in ecological monitoring and SMART surveillance in May and August 2024. The first CFZ-led patrol occurred in September 2024, funded by BirdLife projects, while subsequent reports were financed by the World Bank.

To avoid duplication, GE is reallocating patrol funds to ecological monitoring, deploying camera traps in areas with high species density. A meeting is set for November 7, 2024, with the CFZ Director to discuss collaboration and capacity building in ecological monitoring and financial management.

3. *the amount of proposed habitat restoration (100ha) appears low, and there is limited clarity on the actual nature of alternative livelihoods to be encouraged;*

Since the project's inception, a total of 75 hectares have been reforested (25 hectares in September 2023 and 50 hectares in September 2024). An agricultural assessment led by GRET and co-funded by the L'Occitane Foundation is ongoing, with the final report expected by the end of November due to initial delays. Based on the assessment results, a spatial land-use planning exercise will be completed by January 2025, incorporating assisted natural regeneration in select areas to enhance habitat restoration efforts

4. *in Question 17 'Change Expected' you mention restoration of 10ha of land to sustainable agriculture for improving income and living conditions of beneficiary communities. Please confirm that this 10ha is the same as in Output 3.3 and that this will be sustainable agroforestry that conserves natural regeneration of seedlings as this is currently unclear;*

Yes, this refers to the same 10 hectares of land designated for sustainable agricultural practices.

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.	Yes
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If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	N/A
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.	
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	Yes
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	Yes
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	Yes
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	Yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Yes