

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	DARCC017
Project title	Strengthening a leading NGO for conservation and development in Senegal
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Senegal
Lead Organisation	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Partner(s)	Association Nature Communautés Développement (NCD) and BirdLife International.
Project leader	<i>Wenceslas Gatarabirwa</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media	https://ncdsenegal.org/projet-darwin/

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.

The second year of the project started in a very transformed environment. Whilst most of the first year had been marked by political uncertainty and occasional violence, the clear outcome from the presidential elections in late March resettled the country with a new government being formed on 2nd April 2024. As a result, a delayed change request to the project schedule had to be submitted, which was further supported by a recommendation in the project's first annual report (AR1) feedback. The change request to extend the project's duration by six months was approved in late August and the new delivery plan was discussed at the Project's Steering Committee held in Dakar on 11th September 2024.

Using the feedback from the AR1, the roles and responsibilities for each of the project partners (RSPB, NCD and BirdLife International), the new timing for delivery of outcomes and the planned use of available human and financial resources for the project were clarified and agreed. The partners welcomed the approval of carrying forward all underspend funds into the

remainder of the project, and noted that only critical functions to the final stages of the project will be funded beyond 31st March 2025. Additional capacity required beyond that date will be funded through co-financing provided by RSPB's annual Institutional Support contract as well as the BirdLife HATCH Programme that raises unrestricted funding for its partners in the Global South (NCD included).

NCD's contribution: internal governance, conservation of sites and strengthening of Pôles and Local Conservation Groups (LCG)

NCD's President (Col. Abdoulaye DIOP), CEO (Mr Mouhamadou Aliou BAH) and three technical staff criss-crossed the country to re-energise existing Pôles and LCGs, as well as presenting the NCD model of community participation to biodiversity governance through LCGs, where interest has been expressed by some members of the communities.

Progress for the reporting period: three Pôles visited, two LCGs officially launched with at least five more in the making.

- a. A week-long visit to Pôle Casamance enabled the strengthening of the regional branch of NCD and restarted the creation of LCGs around protected areas. Several sites were visited, including Hitou in the Karone and Simbandi-Balante Islands.
- b. Still in Casamance, two meetings organised in Baïla with the managers of the Marine Protected Area (MPA) and in Abéné sought to catalyse the creation of LCG for land ecosystem to tackle the degradation of the environment from illegal logging and bushfires.
- c. Two LCGs of Fanaye-Dieri and RNUGNDP (Pôle Dakar) around the emblematic Grande Niayes de Pikine, the only wetland urban nature reserve in Senegal, were launched in May and September 2024 respectively.
- d. In Pôle Nord, and building on recent research on redefining the boundaries of IBAs in the region, NCD local and regional representatives engaged local leaders and major landowners to advise them on best scenarios to manage their land through the LCG approach.
- e. The committees of Pôles met regularly to prepare activities at key sites. All seven Pôles held events celebrating the World Migratory Bird Day in May, the largest gatherings were recorded in Tocc-Tocc (Pôle Nord) and the Grande Niayes de Pikine (Pôle Dakar).
- f. The Assessment for lac de Guiers as a possible Important Bird Area (IBA) in the Senegal River delta, revealed important populations of birds, many extending to nearby land owned by the national sugar company (CSS) which owns 12,000 ha of land. An MoU, to allow NCD access to CSS land and to provide advice on how best their operations would cause limited impacts on biodiversity, was signed in September 2024.
- g. NCD signed two further MoUs for the areas in the delta: one with the national agency for water and forests (DEF) and the other with the Commune of Fanaye-Diéri.

LCG training in bird monitoring and livelihood improvement:

A two-day training workshop (31/8-1/9/2024) was held for the members of Tocc-Tocc LCG in the Pôle Nord. Facilitated by the President of the Pôle, Mr Moussa KA, the training was a refresher in bird identification and bird census techniques at the time when only resident birds are found on the nature reserve. A field trip enabled participants to apply their knowledge in identifying 22 species confidently. A follow up session is planned for when migratory birds arrive in winter (Jan/Feb 2025).

Training in governance, financial management and management of an ecotourism camp

Based on prior assessment of the capacity needs for the Tocc-Tocc LCG management committee, a three-day training workshop (23-25 April 2024) was organised. Twenty-five participants, including 22 women, took part in training on financial management, governance

and ecotourism, focusing on opportunities available locally. Key recommendations made were i) improving basic numeracy for some; ii) improving the management of the cooperative through mentoring; and iii) promoting local produces through processing and branding to add value.

BirdLife's contribution: NCD governance and co-hosting the African Council meeting

BirdLife have supported NCD in planning and co-hosting the Council for Africa Partnership meeting (CAP) which was held in Saly, Senegal (2-6 Sept 2024) and brought together 27 BirdLife Partners in the Africa region. The meeting was a success and NCD was praised for the leadership shown, despite being a young BirdLife partner, having only joined the network 3 years ago.

Pre- and post- CAP events included two important training workshops in which NCD staff actively took part. The first built on prior online training on KBA assessments to introduce participants, including two NCD technical staff, to IBA and KBA monitoring protocols and data entry in global databases managed by BirdLife. The KBA assessment work to be facilitated jointly by BirdLife and RSPB will take place from 18th – 21st February 2025.

The second workshop aimed at programme development and finance officers focused on fundraising for local community-led ecotourism. The workshop allowed partners to share their experiences, and to gain a better understanding of the opportunities and benefits associated with ecotourism structures, whilst also highlighting the challenges they're likely to face. Taken together, these two workshops contributed significantly towards equipping four technical NCD staff in site-level conservation and sustainable development.

Through the Darwin project, BirdLife continued to support the capacity of NCD in mobilising financial resources, in particular through preparation of grant applications and introduction to new donors (Alstom, AfD, Infinity Power etc.). BirdLife has also been supporting NCD senior leaders in reviewing internal procedure manuals in readiness for the next round of Quality Assurance System assessments due to start in early 2025.

RSPB's contribution: strengthening of financial management and project monitoring

Strengthening of financial management systems:

Both the RSPB and NCD Finance Managers continue to work systematically on improving NCD's internal financial management systems based on the root and branch review of existing systems and practice conducted during the August 2023 visit to Dakar. Three projects funded by or through the RSPB, namely the Darwin C&C, the Masters Programme and the RSPB Institutional Support are used to learn lessons and continually apply no or low-cost improvements after discussion. A project tracking tool for NCD is being developed to ensure effective cashflow for project-funded operations.

Project Monitoring:

In addition to regular meetings between the Project Manager at NCD and the Project Leader (at least once every fortnight) to ensure that the project remains on track, the reporting period saw two visits to Senegal that included elements of monitoring for projects funded by or through the RSPB including this Darwin C & C project.

During the period 26-28 June 2024, the RSPB Project Manager spent three days working with NCD and BirdLife colleagues on this project. The team carefully studied the feedback received on AR1, and put together the elements of the change request, especially the re-scheduling of activities that were delayed partially or in full, from year 1 to years 2 and 3.

During a visit to Senegal in September 2024, whilst the main purpose of the trip was to attend the BirdLife meeting, the RSPB Project Manager and the RSPB International Director also visited NCD during 8-11 September 2024 to:

- attend the University Gaston Berger (where a joint Masters in Ornithology is based);
- meet the Mayor of Sandiara Commune, who requested the support of NCD and their international partners to manage a partly degraded 1,200ha site for local communities and nature;

- meet with the national parks authority (DPN) and marine protected areas authority (DAMCP) both under the Ministry of Environment and Ecological Transition (METE), to witness the growing national standing of NCD.

For the three offices visited, financial resourcing was the main issue, with essential equipment either lacking or outdated. For human capacity, the Masters Programme in Ornithology, that is funded through the RSPB and the Leventis Foundation, was highlighted as a potential source for a well-trained workforce when the first cohort graduates in early 2025.

The visitors also scrutinised the developing financial management set up at NCD. A series of presentations given by senior NCD staff and board members, enabled their audience to appreciate the journey NCD has been on in recent years and the role that the Darwin C&C Grant has made in accelerating their institutional development.

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.

In mid-September 2024, following many months battling a health issue that requires regular hospital visits, doctors ordered the CEO of NCD to slow down and stop working (on full pay) until further notice. It is not possible to recruit a replacement under the circumstances. Instead, his duties have been shared between the President (a volunteer, for strategic duties) and the Head of Finance and Admin (for operational duties). The leadership and regular quality assurance to deliver this project are continuing unhindered and this absence will have very minimal impact on the project. No changes are required at this time.

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
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes
Change Request reference if known: CR24-053	

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.

Comment 1: The three partners are described in AR1, but no additional information is provided nor evidence

Response: Not highlighting each of the three partners' contribution to the delivery of the project was an oversight on our part. It was assumed that this would be evident when the report read as a whole. This will be corrected, starting with this HYR2 report. Evidence will be provided in a combined annex to the report.

Comment 2: During meetings with the LCGs a lack of clarity for NCD's mission and respective roles and responsibilities was highlighted, furthermore, in some cases projects were being drawn up for local communities without involving them, and there was a lack of activity by some LCGs. Consequently, NCD cluster offices will be playing a greater role in encouraging and supporting the LCGs.

Response: NCD's Board, senior leadership and technical staff have started investing time further establishing LCGs in order to explain their mission and approaches to community-based conservation. The location of new LCGs is guided by (a) the biodiversity importance and (b) local invitation. Due care is taken to manage expectations throughout the process. Due to the lack of capacity in developing projects, participatory approaches to identifying conservation and livelihood challenges, and possible interventions, are being deployed thanks to this project and four others that NCD are implementing at site level. Decentralised leadership that hands ownership of such processes to NCD cluster offices (once their capacity is in place) is a proven approach elsewhere (the model was adopted from the French BirdLife partner LPO in 2010).

Comment 3: Photographs and basic information on the Ordinary General Meeting and General Assembly are shown on the NCD website but no meeting reports are shared with AR1. Likewise, no reports are shared on remote and in-person meetings between the main partners. The project application stated that a project steering group comprising all project partners would meet quarterly although there is no specific mention of this. Evidence of key meetings/events should be provided as annexes, and referenced in the AR1. This would provide more information on the quality of consultation processes and partnership practice.

Response: The minutes and a sample of the slide deck presented at the Ordinary General Meeting (Feb. 2024) are included in the annexes to this report (Annex C3a). Quarterly Steering Committee meetings: it was reported throughout AR1 that RSPB visits to Senegal took place in August & November 2023 and January 2024, when RSPB, NCD and BirdLife colleagues met to progress the delivery of activities as well as ensuring good governance of the project. In addition to photos, a summary minutes of the Steering Committee meetings will be included in the annexes to our reports.

Comment 4: NCD's financial and administrative management system was assessed, and recommendations accepted. A new accounting (and HR) software package was purchased and installed, supported by training to NCD central office staff from RSPB visiting experts. A firm of accountants was contracted to inspect and audit books. NCD capacity was bolstered with the recruitment of five additional staff, including three senior staff and an administrative/financial assistant. RSPB supported NCD to revise its safeguarding policy which is now part of a new staff induction package. No evidence of the above is provided.

Response: Both the RSPB and NCD Finance Managers are in regular collaboration using the shared understanding of where NCD's financial system is and immediate needs and the assessment/recommendations from August 2023 is attached (Annex C4a). The new accounting / HR system was not supplied by RSPB visiting experts. The software, data migration and staff training were provided by Tomate; a supplier based in Dakar (Annex C4b) NCD's updated Safeguarding Policy is also included in the annexes to this report (Annex C4c).

Comment 5: In HY1 the project wrote that it was too early to estimate how many LCGs would be created and this has not been updated.

Response: Indeed, the entire FY1 was impacted by the political instability and so it wasn't clear whether the country would pull through. By the time a change request was prepared by the project partners in June 2024, it became clear that NCD would not be able to create as many LCGs and a revised target of 8 (down from 10) was accepted.

Comment 6: The annual meeting of the executive committee was postponed until the 1st quarter of Y2 due to a clash of dates with the tri-annual general assembly which took place in the last quarter of Y1. The only evidence of the above is a link to project page on the NCD website which includes minimal information.

Response: The Executive Committee of NCD comprises its Board members and Presidents of Pôles. These members come from different parts of the country and political unrests throughout FY1 made it risky to travel between regions. The gathering at the tri-annual general assembly would have been an opportunity to extend their stay and hold the Executive Committee meeting. Unfortunately, the untimely passing of a close relative of one of the Board members during this event made the extension of the meeting inappropriate. Creative solutions, including holding online meetings to reduce time and financial investment in travel were recommended as an alternative. Copies of the minutes from these meetings have been requested and will be shared with our next report.

Comment 7: Progress towards outputs - The project writes the outputs are likely to be met assuming there is no more political unrest that prevents free movement of staff within the country or render visits from abroad unsafe. The only evidence of progress towards outputs is presented is a link to the project page on the NCD website which includes minimal information.

Response: We recognise that presenting one website throughout the AR1 report as a single source for evidence of progress being achieved was not sufficient. Starting from this report, a clearly designed annex document (or zipped folder) will contain as much evidence to illustrate the project's activities, outputs and impacts achieved.

Comment 8: The project contributed to the creation of two additional LCGs bringing the current total to 15 LCGs countrywide although it needs to be confirmed in the change request if it is feasible to achieve the target of ten in the time remaining. The project writes they have started raising interest in four other places where biodiversity remains under threat as the next targets for the creation of LCGs.

Response: Difficulties to travel throughout the country slowed down the pace at which LCGs were to be established. A revised down target of eight LCGs to be established was accepted. By September 2024, two more LCGs were established and the visits to different Pôles showed that five more LCGs are in the pipeline enabling us to feel fairly confident that the target of eight LCGs will be met and slightly exceeded by the end of the project (Annex_c8).

Comment 9: Evidence of progress is narrative in AR1 with limited supplemental information provided or referenced. Assumptions have been reviewed and hold true although benefits of IBAs/KBAs for local communities have yet to be tested. Given achievements in institutional strengthening (achieving outcome indicator 0.2), it seems likely that NCD will score higher on BirdLife's Quality Assurance System.

Response: As the project progresses, the partners are gathering more evidence of the benefits of IBA/KBA conservation for local communities. The test case presented is from Tocc-Tocc LCG (Annex_c9) where successful fundraising by NCD is leading to accelerated capacity building in all areas, including income generation that will contribute to improving livelihoods. We remain confident that the BirdLife's Quality Assurance System due to run in early 2025 will

pick up improvements achieved, thanks to this project, in all three outcome areas (with the results achieved in the 2020 assessment as a baseline).

Comment 10: The project reports that NCD is playing a leading role in KBA work thus far through the assessment of three sites as Important Bird Areas although no evidence is presented.

Response: This was clearly an oversight, since NCD's IBA Assessment report was located somewhere else on their website and not on the pages of this project. A copy is included in the annex to this report (Annex_c10). More generally, as the lead organisation on bird research and conservation in Senegal, NCD is called upon by national government agencies including during the annual international waterbird censuses. This project is contributing to building the capacity of NCD to lead the transition from IBAs to KBAs, and we remain confident that by the end of the project enough capacity to lead the establishment of the national coordination group for KBAs in Senegal will be in place.

Comment 11: NCD contributed to the World Biodiversity Day 2023 and the validation workshops for the Senegal NBSAP (CBD) (no evidence provided).

Response: Among the photos available on the project website, these showed LCGs in Dakar taking part to the WBD2023, but the labelling wasn't clear enough. As to NCD's participation to the validation workshops for Senegal NBSAP, as reported in the report is testament to NCD's expertise in biodiversity conservation, especially birds, and acknowledged by many government agencies, including the Director of National Park who serves as the CBD national focal point for Senegal. The Project Leader and Director of International Department at RSPB heard this first hand when they joined NCD leaders in paying curtesy visit to DPN (government agency where seats the CBD Focal Point, namely the DPN Director (see photo at the bottom)

Comment 12: NCD has expanded its footprint so that it has complete coverage of the national territory. The project contributed to the creation of two additional LCGs bringing the current total to 15. Whilst there is a delay in creating the target ten LCGs, the project reports (although presents no evidence) that interest in four other places where biodiversity remains under threat is being raised as the next targets for the creation of LCGs.

Response: The establishment of Pôle Ferlo in NE Senegal completed the coverage of the country in regional leadership and coordination units for NCD. Photos from the occasion were presented as evidence. NCD acknowledged that achieving national coverage at that high level is an important milestone, but there is still much work to do. Careful capacity building of Pôle leaders and supporting them to craft winning projects so they can meet the needs on the ground, is to be implemented through LCGs that are created. This is thanks to the collaboration between the national HQ and the regional branch and is the way forward. This project (and other projects with site conservation outcomes/impacts) is contributing towards delivering this.

Comment 13: Work on KBAs features more prominently in Y2 but the establishment of a regional hub and additional LCGs will further aid the monitoring and protection IBAs/KBAs.

Response: Establishing LCGs and building their capacity is a sure way to establish sustainable site conservation at the local level. NCD and other national institutions, including universities and government agencies, are to take part in the National Coordination Group for KBAs and will be important in providing much needed leadership and governance for the KBA process, but the daily management and sustainable use of these important sites will be in the hands of the LCGs with direct oversight by the Pôles' committees.

Comment 14: It is not known if the project tends to fully capture (a) the impact/influence of organisational strengthening and training on NCD staff/board (confidence to make a difference, empowerment, sense of pride/security working for NCD); and (b) the impact/influence of being part of LCGs (confidence to make a difference, empowerment) but this could help capture more dimensions of poverty reduction. If baseline data has not been collected, it could take the form of interviews/stories of change towards project end.

Response: (a) Like most small NGOs, the influence of top leaders is much felt than in larger, more mature organisations. NCD is no different. However, by building capacity at all levels (board, senior leadership, technical staff), this project is empowering all to be more assertive in

making the case for the work they do, inspiring more pride to be a staff member or even volunteer with NCD, the BirdLife Partner in Senegal, which has important international backing as seen through the Darwin Project, the BirdLife Secretariat and the RSPB.

(b) At the LCG level, the most mature ones show an exceptional level of confidence based on visible impact they've had at local level. For example, the Somone LCG contributed to restoring an important area of mangroves in which a birdwatching circuit has been established. Its members now take pride in leading birding tours on the site, and earning income from it. Newer LCGs need support to further strengthen, and this project is helping them to start this journey. Next report (AR2) will endeavour to capture the impacts of this project at NCD's HQ, regional and LCG level through a survey.

Comment 15: The project writes that NCD has expanded its numbers and that five women have joined the organisation (3 in senior positions), achieving 50:50 gender parity in the workforce (previously all NCD permanent staff were men with women serving as interns and volunteers). It is not known if staff numbers/gender parity represent the central office in Dakar only or includes regional hubs. The project writes 50% of people on the board are women, and that two of three partners (RSPB & NCD) have women in senior leadership positions. No evidence is provided of any figures.

Response: The figures reported in AR1 chose to focus on RSPB and NCD which are the lead partner and lead beneficiary respectively. Since the "senior leadership" level is relative, a snapshot (as of April 2024) assessment was limited to the "director" level at RSPB and all paid staff at NCD in order to be manageable. ID NUMBERS ARE TO BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL

EMPLOYER'S NUMBER:					
0007360991					
YEAR	Month				
2024	SEPTEMBRE				
Surname	Forename	ID #	Code	Gender	Contract Type
Ndiaye	Paul Marie	1251196900601	CDI	M	Permanent
BAH	Mouhamadou Aliou	1752197903375	CDI	M	Permanent
Diallo	Mamadou Bassirou	1756197005265	CDI	M	Permanent
NDIAYE	Therese Fadieye	2870199104686	CDI	F	Permanent
Diop	Abdoulaye	1755199402306	CDI	M	Permanent
NDIAYE	MAME DIAKHERE	2605197901204	CDI	F	Permanent
SENGHOR	Maram Assoumodio	2870199301503	CDD	F	Fixed Term
Diallo	Ramatoulaye	2757199309127	CDI	F	Permanent
Sagna	Ambroise	1248200100490	CDD	M	Fixed Term
Bassène	Anne Marie Sylvie	20011993009986	CDI	F	Permanent
Diop	Fatoumata Hane	2767200000289	CDD	F	Fixed Term
BADJI	Mamadou Raoul	1080201400287	CDD	M	Fixed Term

As of September 2024, NCD had 12 paid members of staff. The gender was split six-six male/female. Also based on type of contract, four of each gender had a permanent post, and two were on fixed term contracts (each lasting 3-5 years). NCD has an ambition to appoint at least one paid staff at each Pôle in the coming years. The gender balance is one of the important aspects of recruitment that this small, but growing, organisation has achieved and are keen to sustain.

At the RSPB a snapshot of CEO, Executive Directors and Directors (excluding administrative staff) shows that females occupy 56% to 44% male. At Executive Director level (column 2), there is a clear parity 50/50: FIRST NAME ONLY USED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY REASONS

			Female	Male
CEO	Beccy	F	1	
GC	Katie-Jo	F	5	3
ICI	Andrew	M	4	4
DTC	Emma	F	4	1
FGS	Russell	M	2	3
COO	James	M	3	4
			19	15

The project partners are aware of the importance of gender diversity among the project beneficiaries at site level. However, cultural sensitivities must also be observed throughout if the project's impacts are going to be sustainable.

***Comment 16:** The project writes that the recruitment of LCGs members is through public announcements to communities through word of mouth and pamphlets distributed locally at markets, places of worship and schools, to try and reach a diverse representation of members from target communities. There is no selection process, but admission is through an expression of interest to be included in the group. In some LCGs, more women have come forward than men, and in others, there were more men than women. The application stated that LCGs include women among their members and that one has 70% female membership (those LCGs with more activities related to livelihoods have higher female representation). However, no data on numbers generally, nor with gender disaggregated data, for those participating in LCDs and associated events/training as part of the project have been provided. Photographs on the website show that women have been part of events/meetings.*

Response: NCD's membership database is not segregated by gender but existing data that will be analysed and reported on in the future. This will form part of future monitoring to understand how gender is effectively represented beyond the anecdotal evidence based on rough estimates made at looking at meeting attendance, which can be heavily influenced subject matter for the meeting.

***Comment 17:** The project references the GESI context and considers itself sensitive. Whilst there is evidence (as written in AR1) that recruitment is successfully achieving gender parity and is therefore sensitive, with an absence of gender disaggregated data from wider project activities, this aspect of the project is not sensitive.*

Response: This is linked to comment 16, and the desegregation of gender will be extended to the staff of NCD, in addition to current members per LCGs and regional branches.

***Comment 18:** Whilst indicators have been referred to and the project has indicated in report narrative it is tracking activities and progress, no evidence has been provided (and consequently not referenced it) other than report narrative. A link to the project page on the NCD website provides minimal information and is unsatisfactory for M&E. Project Standard Indicators have been selected and reported on. The project needs to generate evidence and reference it in reporting. As stated previously, gender disaggregated data needs to be collected on wider project activities beyond staff recruitment. Furthermore, the project may be able to collect additional data on poverty gains (see Section 6).*

The project has included lessons learnt, particularly given the delays due to political unrest. They write that mentoring in leadership and management, and training, has been successfully delivered online, although provide no evidence. Given accessibility issues the project developed a manual (not provided) that was shared with communities aspiring to set up one (no information on how the manual was distributed nor evidence of use is provided). The project write this will get the LCGs ready to be established and launched in Y2 although given previous inactivity (see Section 3) and bigger concerns of political instability, this may not be the case.

Response: This comment is very important as it summarises critical points to evidence the progress being achieved by the project, and ways to improve the measurement of our performance going forward. The established approach for capacity building through BirdLife

International's Partner-to-Partner model (RSPB-NCD in this case) is based on a high level of trust whereby the supporting partner and BirdLife Secretariat staff use available tools to identify needs and systematically go about trying to meet them. No minutes were taken of numerous meetings held over WhatsApp, Zoom and Teams during which mentoring and coaching for NCD colleagues took place, as they tried to find the best way to work as they could in often fast changing situations. Drawing on lessons learnt from elsewhere in the BirdLife partnership, we can now see the positive impacts such collaboration allows the partners to achieve, including keeping most of the work going despite the challenges linked to the then operating environment. Similarly, RSPB visits to Senegal enabled us to communicate what is expected of each of the partners, and the visitors to see first-hand the work that NCD are doing, including visits to communities on the ground. For future meetings and visits, a brief written record of the discussions and project activities observed will be gathered to form part of the next reporting. Finally, the suggested survey will be carried out with technical advice from RSPB social scientists during the design and analysis phase (as part of the reporting period planned for July-October 2025).

Comment 19: It is not clear if you have considered the feedback provided at award stage.

Response: This was another oversight, partially due to the change of Project Leader at RSPB in the first quarter of Year 1. These are being considered as the project is implemented:

a. *you should consider and provide clarification on the exit plan for the three funded posts.*

It is stated that RPSB and BirdLife would continue to provide funding but for how long?

Response: In line with NCD's strategy to boost its technical capacity at the national Head Office, the three posts currently funded by Darwin are permanent (CDI). The increased capacity leads us to believe that NCD staffing needs will continue beyond the lifetime of this project. Indeed, three fixed-term posts have been created in the past year and some more are likely to be created in the year ahead to meet the demands of projects following their fundraising successes.

b. *you could consider how assistance can be provided to Nature-Communautés-Développement (NCD) to determine their own strategies and policies in the longer term;*

Response: The Executive Committee of NCD, mandated by the general assembly, is responsible for driving forward the development and monitoring of NCD's strategies and policies. The RSPB's and BirdLife's role is advisory by nature, drawing from the experience of both organisations from elsewhere in the Global South, especially West Africa.

c. *staff costs are largely focused on UK staff: you should consider if this could be reallocated;*

Response: This observation wasn't quite correct. Most of the project funds are transferred to NCD as a subgrant, with a significant share of the cost being for salary costs. UK staff are represented as RSPB's co-financing to the project, except the Project Manager, the Finance Manager and the KBA focal point, but noting that these posts also provide co-financing per the recently approved change request.

d. *it is unclear as to what extent the work proposed is additional work given the long-term commitment from RSPB and BirdLife to the local NGOs;*

Response: Whilst BirdLife and RSPB are committed to building capacity of weaker partners in key locations like NCD in Senegal, with tested approaches and experience in NGO capacity building and proven tracking tools such as BirdLife's Quality Assurance System, both organisations are very limited on financial resources they can invest. For example, RSPB's Institutional Support contract, over the past three years, has ranged between £25,000 and £30,000 per year; whilst BirdLife input has mostly been in kind in form of staff time. The BCF's investment of £92k annual average is a step-change that is accelerating the capacity building for NCD and its regional branches, allowing them to have greater conservation impact in Senegal as a result.

e. *the simplified logframe should be strengthened:*

Response: Given how far we are into the project implementation (3/4 of the original project's duration), the project partners feel that it is no longer appropriate to revise the design of the logframe. Rather, concentrating on delivering the existing, and where possible, exceeding planned activities and reporting progress and impacts achieved is the best course of action.

Comment 20: A revised risk register was returned with AR1, but is blank and an updated data version should be returned with the next HY report.

Response: It's difficult to explain what might have happened to the Excel form during the transfer, as it was sent with updates dated 24-May-2024 (Annex_C20). A revised version dated 10-Dec-2024 is also attached.

Comment 21: The number of NCD members has grown from just under 400 at the start of the project to 632 at the end of Y1 due to the creation of one new regional hub and revitalisation of others, and establishment of two new LCGs (no evidence presented).

Response: NCD has various sets of statistics for membership. The main membership list is kept centrally at the HQ, tracking new applicants and renewals and exits. There are also lists per region. It's worth noting that not every NCD member belongs to an LCG. Indeed, there are a handful of members abroad who continue to support NCD mission. A request has been sent to project colleagues at NCD to share the very latest data disaggregated by gender. These figures and a new analysis on trends in membership development will be shared with the next report.

Comment 22: The funding appears to form part of a larger programme rather than distinct project although there is a page on the NCD website dedicated to the project, but it is not well signposted nor contents well explained. Materials on the website page display BCFs logos. There are photographs of events which do not appear to have any banners/materials with logos. AR1 refers to internal communications and documents developed with support of the project having appropriate logos but none have been provided (other than the safeguarding policy on the website). The project also writes that support from the British government is acknowledged in government and non-governmental meetings but no evidence is presented.

Response: NCD's work receives funding from many external sources, in addition to a modest income generated internally. We welcome the donor diversity and NCD's vision to increase unrestricted funds over time. At the same time, NCD's communication tools are still developing and their website is no exception. This is why many projects that contribute towards LCGs, IBA or KBA are found on the same webpage. The NCD IT and Communications Managers have been contacted to check if it's possible to create a webpage dedicated to this Darwin project.

Comment 23: The safeguarding policy, created by of this project, is posted on the NCD website. The project reports that all staff, volunteers and NCD members were updated on the new policy at the Annual General Meeting in early 2024, and that safeguarding training is now part of NCD's inductions package for all new starters (no evidence is provided). The project states that it plans to train 100% of staff with seven trained so far (the project is halfway through so this will need to be fast tracked to benefit the project).

Response: We welcome the advice to speed up the roll out to existing staff. Indeed, now that the return to office is a reality, group sessions to introduce the policy can be done quickly and the project team at NCD are aware of the importance to deliver this as soon as practicable.

Comment 24: The long-term partnership approach of RSPB and Birdlife ensures commitment to the collaboration beyond the end of the project. The project plans to submit a change request to move some activities and funding to Y2; it is assumed that changes to output indicators may also be required. Monitoring needs to be strengthened with a greater emphasis on collecting

data and/or creating evidence (if this has been done then see next point), and reporting through presenting and referencing evidence and proof reading.

Response: Both BirdLife and RSPB carefully track the progress being made through our capacity development intervention under the Partner-to-Partner (P2P) agreements. In addition to regular communication with senior leadership, BirdLife gathers comparable data through the Quality Assurance System and the next one is scheduled in Q1 (2025). The RSPB gathers Saving Nature Scorecard indicators annually, covering governance & management, financial independence and conservation action. A change request was submitted and accepted and the three partners to the project accept that resourcing for the six final months of the project will come mostly from the P2P funding and other projects. The advice on how to improve our reporting is hereby acknowledged.

Comment 25: *Likely to be partly achieved - Only partial achievement of the Outcome is likely and/or achievement of some Outputs.*

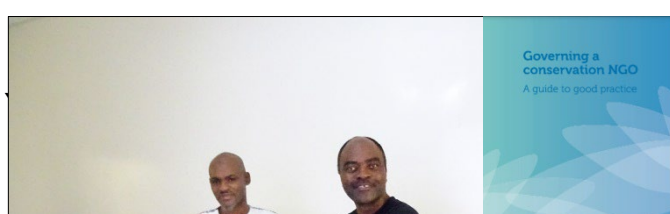
Response: As reported here, we're working to improve our tracking processes through the continued monitoring of the project implementation. With renewed efforts and a very favourable operating environment, it is hoped that faster progress can be achieved.

Comment 26: *Poor - There are some gaps in the project reporting and/or it is poorly written and confusing or hard to understand in places. The provision of evidence is poor (i.e. there isn't enough evidence provided to substantiate the claims made in reporting and/or evidence is not clearly labelled / cross referenced which makes it hard to navigate – particularly where there are a lot of annexes).*

Response: We accept these comments and promise to improve for future reports, starting with the present one.

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.	Yes
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



Below: NCD/RSPB curtesy visit to the Director of National Parks Authority (DPN), 11-Sep-2024

