

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

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2024

Project reference	DARCC058
Project title	AgroNative: Increasing Native Species in Beninese Agroforestry through Government Leadership
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Benin
Lead Organisation	JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.'s World Education Division (JSI/WorldEd)
Partner(s)	Alafia NGO
Project leader	JSI/WorldEd
Report date and number	HYR1; October 31, 2024
Project website/blog/social media	https://worlded.org/world-education-continues-partnerships-in-northern-benin-to-halt-biodiversity-loss-under-new-darwin-initiative-funded-project/

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).

Launching AgroNative required a thoughtful, in-depth implementation of a series of foundational activities. Such activities included a comprehensive landscape analysis and a collaborative selection of communities and ensured that the project builds the trusting relationships required with the right institutions to institutionalise sustainable capacity. These activities, implemented under Output 1, resulted in a slight delay of Output 2 activities although all activities originally planned for Year 1 (Y1) are scheduled for completion by the end of Y1.

During the reporting period, AgroNative initiated a series of strategic meetings involving municipal and departmental authorities to inform these key stakeholders about AgroNative and foster their ownership. The discussions proved highly effective. AgroNative will work with the **Territorial Agricultural Development Agency's "Pole 4" covering Northern Benin** (*Agence Territoriale de Développement Agricole [ATDA4]*), which enhances local agricultural practices and supports sustainable development to improve productivity and food security. AgroNative will also work with the **Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development** (*Ministère du Cadre de Vie et du Développement Durable [MCVDD]*), which is responsible for environmental protection and sustainable resource management. AgroNative leadership held a series of meetings with the head of Forest Inspectorate in Borgou and the Chief of the Forestry Division, both under the MCVDD and the head of the ATDA4 Community Cell in N'Dali. Each authority acknowledged the project's importance, emphasized its alignment with the Beninese government's vision, and expressed their commitment to achieving its objectives. This positive reception lays a strong foundation for collaborative efforts and institutional backing.

Activity	Status
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Output 1: Commune /department-level GOB knowledge, capacity and commitment to prioritise agroforestry systems integrating native species and engage communities in these practices, as well as participatory forest management - is increased	
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1.1 Assess commune- and department-level MAEP-ATDA capacity to	In-progress. Activities 1.1 and 1.2 involve refining an Integrated Technical and Organisational Capacity Assessment (ITOCA) tool for the ATDA4 and the MCVDD. To design effective assessment tools, AgroNative carried out a detailed landscape analysis and initial assessment, compiled in a report, entitled " Landscape Analysis:
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<p>support communities in improving their ability to monitor natural resources and improve agricultural practices to sustain biodiversity</p>	<p>Governmental Actors in Agriculture and Biodiversity Conservation in the N'Dali Commune (Borgou)." The report presents an analysis of the current state of agriculture and biodiversity in Benin, specifically focusing on the N'Dali commune. The report highlights major environmental and social challenges, outlines the roles of public and non-state actors, and discusses public-private partnerships. Additionally, it presents governance and monitoring frameworks, evaluates the roles of various stakeholders, and identifies key organisations involved in biodiversity conservation at national, regional, and local levels. It also notes capacity gaps among stakeholders and opportunities for strengthening their capabilities. The report concludes with organisational charts for local authorities, illustrating the relationships among stakeholders in N'Dali.</p>
<p>1.2 Build commune- and department-level MAEP-ATDA capacity to support communities in improving their ability to monitor natural resources and improve agricultural practices to sustain biodiversity</p>	<p>Based on the findings of the report, AgroNative developed its ITOCA tools for use on the ATDA4 and the MCVDD's Forestry Inspectorate, which will be administered in the second half of Y1. The ITOCA will culminate in the development of an action plan used to strengthen these institutions' capacity. AgroNative employs a learning-by-doing approach to capacity strengthening, meaning that points of contact within each of these two institutions will be engaged across all AgroNative activities. The AgroNative team met with the ATDA4 and the Forestry Inspectorate, and both institutions identified point people to engage throughout AgroNative – agricultural technicians and the deputy forestry officer. This will be crucial for continuity. Please see the activities under Output 2 for the first round of on-the-job capacity strengthening through community selection.</p>
<p>Output 2: Farmers and community knowledge, attitudes, and practices of biodiversity-sustaining agroforestry are increased and participation in CBNRM is improved</p>	
<p>2.1 Carry out Participatory Community Diagnostic (PCD) activity as an entry point to community engagement in each of the communities</p>	<p>In-progress. To ensure community engagement and buy-in local authorities, the AgroNative team took a comprehensive and objective approach to community selection, and engaged local authorities throughout the process. This marked the first learning-by-doing capacity strengthening exercise, reinforcing objective selection procedures and collectively thinking through approaches to biodiversity conservation.</p> <p>The AgroNative project selected the following five key localities: Kakara in Sirarou, Warikpa and Ouénou in the Ouénou Arrondissement, and Bahoun Guéou and Yéroumarou in N'Dali. The team conducted a thorough process involving the development of selection criteria, identification of potential sites, and engagement with local authorities. This included a desk review and site visits, where we discussed the project and eligibility criteria with local leaders, who then communicated this information to village councils. Per the selection criteria, each locality:</p>
<p>2.2 Implement community-led bioblitz activity to build community buy-in and design agroforestry systems that sustain native biodiversity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Should have at least 3 hectares of land available for agroforestry ● Should feature native forest or habitat in close proximity to the proposed agroforestry site. ● Should have natural resource management structures in place or commits to establishing one as the project's focal point. ● Should commit to setting up farmer field schools, contributing to demonstration agroforestry plots, and developing individual sites. ● Should agree to collaborate with existing structures to provide training on microenterprise development.
<p>2.3-2.4 Convene farmer and CBNRM field schools with community members</p>	<p>From our multiple site visits, we identified several localities and confirmed the sites listed above, which are well-positioned for project success, as they meet all criteria, are located near the classified Ouémé Supérieur forest, and have established forest management committees which will serve as community focal points for AgroNative.</p>

Output 3: Biodiversity-sustaining agroforestry plots are established and profitable (for both women and men) with the support of commune-level MAEP staff	
3.1 Design agroforestry plots that sustain native biodiversity	In-progress. Under JSI/WorldEd's Women-led, School-based Agroforestry Project (DARNV019), JSI/WorldEd and Alafia carried out desk research and bioblitz activities that informed the design of that project's agroforestry systems. AgroNative initiated discussions with ATDA4 and the Forestry Inspectorate on the use of those data and the development of similar data to design AgroNative Agroforestry sites together with the five AgroNative communities. The bulk of this activity is scheduled to take place in the second half of Y2.
3.2 – 3.5	Activities 3.2-3.4 are planned for the second half of Year 1, beyond this reporting period. Activity 3.5 is planned for Year 2.
Output 4: Agroforestry systems are planned and established in schools	
4.1-4.6	All Output 4 activities are planned for the 2 nd half of Year 1 and for Year 2, beyond this reporting period.
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.	
AgroNative has not encountered any notable problems or unexpected developments. The slight delay in implementation due to thorough foundational activities will not impact the completion of Y1 activities by the end of Y1, but will ensure their effectiveness / sustainability.	
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/ No N/A
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes/ No N/A
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes/ No N/A
Change Request reference if known: N/A	
4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)	
Actual spend: £ ██████████	
*This figure is provisional. Significant expenditures are planned for the second half of Y1.	
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 <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Estimated underspend: £ N/A	
4c. If you expect and underspend, then you should consider your project budget needs carefully. N/A	
5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?	
No issues to raise at this stage. Thank you.	
6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report.	
The following comments from feedback when the project was confirmed are addressed in Attachment A:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it is noted that the project seems quite ambitious for the time and budget; • the training aspects should be verified by means other than attendance: how will M&E assess real skills acquisition and transfer? • ensure all indicators are made timebound; • how will 'benefitting' and 'resilience' (indicator 0.1) be defined/measured? 	