

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.

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| Project reference | DAREX009 |
| Project title | Local Governance of Forest Resources in Mali |
| Country(ies)/territory(ies) | Mali |
| Lead Organisation | Tree Aid |
| Partner(s) | Sahel Eco |
| Project budget | |
| Report date and number | HYR1 |
| Project website/blog/social media | https://www.treeaid.org/projects/mali/local-governance-of-forest-resources/ |

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).

The project will improve biodiversity and the income of 2,550 households living around the Mio, Sanekuy and Safienso forests in the Segou region of Mali. We believe our M&E systems are appropriate at this stage. This will be tested with the annual report.

Activity 1.4: From 19 to 23 May 2024 a diagnostic activity took place in the Mio area, aimed at establishing a buffer zone around the forest and gathering insights from technical services on the causes and consequences of forest degradation. The mission included creating a resource map with 13 participants and discussions with the heads of two forestry departments on sustainable management solutions. Key findings highlighted the significant decline of tree populations, illegal logging, and lack of coordinated management efforts. Recommendations for improvement included planting trees in designated areas, establishing monitoring committees, and enhancing community engagement in forest protection and reforestation initiatives. The activity also identified a 200–300-hectare buffer zone between the Mio Forest and Kolongo-Tomo, affected by agricultural encroachments and other pressures.

Activity 1.14: On 14 June 2024 a workshop was held in Tominian to discuss the management of Forest Management Plans within the project intervention zones, attended by around sixty participants, including local mayors, technical services, cooperatives, and NGOs. Participants engaged in discussions about climate change impacts, evaluated previous action plans, and presented achievements related to PAGS. Questions raised regarding plantation beneficiaries and security measures were addressed satisfactorily, encouraging active participation and concrete proposals for improving forest management. An action plan for 2024 was adopted.

Activity 2.1: The authorities agreed to allocate a 0.5-hectare area to the Wassa Association through the signing of a land transfer certificate for the creation of a tree nursery. The tree nursery was installed in October 2024.

Activity 2.3: 594,459 plants were produced in community tree nurseries for planting.

Activity 2.7: 267,479 trees were planted from July – September 2024. To facilitate hole digging during collective planting efforts, the two cooperatives managing the Safienso and Sanekuy forest blocks 1 and 2 received augers on 18 July 2024.

Activity 2.8: A total of 1021 volunteer farmers from 39 villages were identified, with 1018 hectares surveyed, against a target of 400 hectares for the 2024-2025 campaign. Plant distribution was completed from June – Aug 2024, with facilitators providing technical support to ensure compliance with standards and improve success rates. Meetings with local authorities and community leaders have also been held to ensure effective mobilization during reforestation days. 6 communities were trained in good agroecological practices, with 386 beneficiaries (including 160 women) from six villages receiving training in techniques such as stone bunds, earth dikes, zai pits, and demi-lunes between 22-27 June 2024. The training comprised theoretical discussions and practical applications in crop fields. 100,000 trees were planted on farmland during the planting campaign.

Activity 2.9: The project team, working with cooperative management, identified four pastoral sites totalling 555.4 ha for restoration activities. Restoration work for the 2024 season was completed with the planting of 232,521 seedlings on 582 ha of two sites at a rate of 400 plants per ha out of a forecast of 200,000 trees on 500 ha. *Brakaria ruziziensis* was sown directly on five protected hectares to provide animals with quality fodder.

Activity 3.10: The project facilitated the participation of the "Sewesse" cooperatives from Sanekuy and Hanekuy at the launch of the "Restoration of Degraded Lands in Mali" project, where they showcased their high-quality Non-Timber Forest Products. Their presentation led to sales and heightened recognition, enabling them to explore potential partnerships, including a restaurant owner interested in sourcing shea butter.

Activity 3.11: Selection criteria were established to choose these villages from the 46 villages, focusing on factors such as year-round access, ease of land access for women, community mobilization, commitment to greening efforts, and the presence of women's groups. After community discussions regarding these criteria, 30 villages that met the requirements were selected.

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.

Flooding in the project area, which will have an impact on the beneficiaries' trees and crops, and which also makes access difficult in some villages. The synergy of collaboration between Sahel Eco staff on projects funded by DARWIN INITIATIVE was an asset in carrying out the project's activities during this period. The involvement of community leaders in the planning of the planting campaign was an important factor in carrying out the activities. The use of augers to drill holes enabled us to achieve this year's planting target. Due to a late start to activities in year 1, we are still behind with project implementation, although we have significant expenditure (£730k) planned in the next quarter for the construction of the nutrition gardens. We are also in the process of reviewing logistical questions regarding the delivery of the project (e.g. creating a Tree Aid office locally) that may require a budget change. If there are changes that require it, we may submit a Change Request form in 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:

Yes/ No

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| Formal Change Request submitted: | Yes/ No |
| Received confirmation of change acceptance: | Yes/ No |
| Change Request reference if known: <i>If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome</i> | |

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| <p>4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)</p> <p>Actual spend:</p> |
| <p>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)?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> |
| <p>5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?</p> <p>No</p> |

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| <p>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.</p> |
| <p>3. Risk register should include partnership work – New risk register attached annex A. 4. Attach safeguarding plan to the report – Tree Aid Safeguarding Policy annex B, and grievance mechanism, currently in use for Tong Tenga project in Burkina Faso, we are in the process of adapting and adopting the approach in Mali.</p> |

Checklist for submission

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| 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. | n/a |
| If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ? | y |
| 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. | y |

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