

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	DARNV013
Project title	Trialling Wild Harvest Improvement Projects for sustainable wild plant trade
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Morocco, Uzbekistan
Lead Organisation	TRAFFIC
Partner(s)	FairWild Foundation, Global Diversity Foundation, Moroccan Biodiversity and Livelihoods Association, Uzbekistan Association of organisations for the production and processing of liquorice and other medicinal plants
Project leader	Cara Flowers
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 st October 2024_HYR 2
Project website/blog/social media	Trialling Wild Harvest Improvement Projects WHIPS for a sustainable wild plant trade Facebook: International Day of Argania

Progress has continued against our implementation timetable and outputs. The Multi-Expert Group (MEG) (SD3) has met six times on a monthly basis since May 2024 (SD4). Discussion has been rich and detailed and this group is likely to prove a great resource and mechanism for momentum on wild plant and fungi harvesting after the project end date (SD5) (**Activity 1.1**). The WHIP research report has now been summarised into a shorter WHIPs framework document which is being used for consultation (SD1) (**Activity 1.3**). In addition, an infographic was created to elucidate the WHIPs approach (SD2). The project influence plan continues to be a working document for all project team members. A stakeholder mapping workshop was held online on 25th October to support project partners in developing stakeholder assessments further and thinking through key messaging for influencing (**Activities 2.1, 3.1**). In August 2024, the baseline assessment was carried out in Morocco with the support of a consultant. The report and supporting documentation for this is available (SD6). MBLA hosted the consultant. Five cooperatives have been selected MBLA for further collaboration (**Activity 2.2**). The baseline assessment for Uzbekistan will take place in November 2024. This will include a stakeholder consultation meeting. TRAFFIC, FairWild and GIZ are collaborating on this to maximise impact. One company in Uzbekistan is currently pursuing FairWild certification. They will be assessed in November (**Activity 2.2**).

The WHIPs project manager attended the International Society for Ethnobiology Congress in May 2024. The WHIPs concept was presented. The project manager also spent a week in the field with MBLA accompanying them on initial meetings with landscape stakeholders, This included supporting stakeholder mapping and explaining the approach; Providing additional information about the FairWild standard and certification to potential WHIPs stakeholders and undertaking an initial assessment of potential cooperative operations (**Activity 2.1, 1.4, 2.3**). Up to the present 6 meetings with cooperative stakeholders have been held and 6 meetings with those in government. A multi-cooperative meeting will be held in the second week of November by MBLA involving discussion on improvements for wild harvesting landscapes (**Activity 2.3**). A multi-stakeholder meeting is also planned for the next quarter. A stakeholder meeting in Uzbekistan is planned in November 2024.

Members of the project team attended various events in 2024 in order to discuss the WHIPs work and draw upon learning from other supply chain initiatives. These included:

Global Baobab Congress, London, April 2024: The project lead from FairWild attended the Global Baobab Congress in April 2024 (**Activity 3.4**)

Conservation Optimism, Oxford, September 2024: [Conservation Optimism Summit 2024 – Conservation Optimism's 2024 Summit in Oxford, UK](#). The WHIPs project manager attended the Conservation Optimism summit for one day to present on the WHIP concept (SD7) and work thus far in Morocco as part of a joint event organised by FairWild. Four new contacts were made from industry and consultancy services (**Activity 2.5**). TRAFFIC has joined the Conservation Now network as a result: [Join ConservationNOW - Conservation Optimism](#)

BfN Maintaining Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Worldwide, Bonn October 2024: The WHIPs project manager attended an event organised by BfN in Germany. While the event was primarily focussed on commodities, it presented a good opportunity to highlight the connection between wild plant and fungi harvesting and efforts to maintain biodiversity and ecosystem services (**Activity 3.4**).

In May, three MBLA team members were trained remotely in the FairWild standard including auditing principles and how to complete the management plan. This training was deemed successful and helpful by participants. Stakeholders in Uzbekistan have also been trained in FairWild standards. In Uzbekistan, training and capacity-building measures continued to be provided through the aligned GIZ project "Ecologically Oriented Regional Development in the Aral Sea Region" (ECO-ARAL), to which FairWild Foundation is providing technical support on the topic of sustainable wild liquorice production (**Activity 2.6**).

The project indicators are still relevant although we propose reducing the scope of DI-D01 - 'By the end of Q8, a measurable number of hectares of habitat is under sustainable management practices according to the WHIPs framework'. We will be able to report on a potential area for improvement and steps taken towards ensuring sustainable management in the long term (having developed conceptual WHIPs framework and testing the approach), but sustainable management is likely to take longer to materialise.

Our assumptions still hold true and we have discussed these during the Multi-Expert Group meetings. For example, a minority of the MEG felt that any approach we develop should not include social criteria due to the difficulty that FIPs have experienced in tracking and proving

improvement in this area – particularly for small-scale artisanal fisheries. This was supported by further discussion with Conservation Alliance for Sustainable Seafood. However, it was felt that wild plant harvesting relates so intimately to traditional cultural and economic practices that it would not be possible to develop a credible approach that includes this. It was well recognised that consumer markets are not sufficiently well educated in sustainability issues to understand the inequity and exploitation that wild plant harvesting landscapes can include. We want the WHIPs framework provides a way of addressing these inequities.

Another key assumption was that collaborative approaches such as sharing of harvesting data would be possible. This has held to be true in Morocco but has been much more challenging in Uzbekistan. It is understood that there are fewer incentives for collaborative approaches in Uzbekistan and that these will take time to develop. However, the cooperative organisation model and relative strong civil society environment in Morocco have meant this is a more collaborative environment for a local multi-stakeholder approach.

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.

As noted by the last report, the late commencement of the project has led to delay in delivery. The project team plan to accept the reviewers suggestion and request an extension from DEFRA to June 2025 to account for this.

It has been difficult to engage a coordination partner in Uzbekistan. This has meant that progress has been slower than envisaged there with engagement via the GIZ work FairWild have been undertaking. TRAFFIC has now engaged their Kyrgyzstan project office in support of work in Uzbekistan.

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 but happy to discuss further
Formal Change Request submitted:	No but planned
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	No

Change Request reference if known: *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)?

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?

N/A

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.

The feedback we received upon receipt of the project award requires our response. This has been copied below as bullet points and our response typed below.

1. It is unclear why the staff named in the application do not correspond with named staff in the budget;

This is now rectified on more recent budget submissions. Subsequent to the awarding of the grant there have been several staff changes and amendments to staffing which have been reflected in budget updates.

2. The application indicates that FairWild has not had significant traction with market. It would be useful to know if there is a plan to share lessons learned with other sustainability marks such as Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)

The Multi-expert group meetings have involved rich discussion on barriers to wider certification in wild plant and fungi harvesting as well as comparison of similarities and differences between MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) or FSC (Forestry Stewardship Council) and FairWild. This has helped us to learn from other certifications and their approaches as well as exchange on common challenges.

3. You should provide a clearer statement on how certification has impacted harvester livelihoods and biodiversity elsewhere (for example, in fisheries);

Certification is likely to provide positive impacts on livelihoods and biodiversity. However attributing improvement solely to certification can be challenging when certification impacts more widely upon the socio-economic landscape within which harvester communities operate. This is highlighted in academic papers on the impact of MSC certification.¹

4. The application indicates that most of the project impact will be seen through work of the in-country partners. You should be clear how these partnerships will work in practice and how market linkages will be improved.

TRAFFIC has contracted project partners to work in country. TRAFFIC has provided training in FairWild certification to our Moroccan partner (Moroccan Biodiversity and Livelihoods Association (MBLA) and Uzbek organisations involved in liquorice harvesting. Local partners are invited to the project meetings and multi-expert group meetings. MBLA hosted the baseline assessment with support from TRAFFIC and FairWild. Local partners contribute to the stakeholder assessment and undertake local landscape mapping and stakeholder analysis. This will inform business engagement in 2025. The FairWild Foundation are now leading work in Uzbekistan after the consultant from the Uzbekistan Liquorice Producers Association was unable to commence work.

5. There is only one combined biodiversity and poverty indicator (at Outcome level) in the logframe. This is understandable as impacts are indirect and beyond the timeframe of the project but it would be useful to see a clearer means of verification for this particular aspect.

The relevant outcome level indicator for this in the logframe is as follows *0.4 By the end of Q7, stakeholders across the pilot landscapes agree on practical steps to increase equity and*

¹ [Frontiers | Social and Economic Outcomes of Fisheries Certification: Characterizing Pathways of Change in Canned Fish Markets](#)

benefits for women and any disadvantaged groups involved in wild collection in the two landscapes, e.g. higher participation of women in harvesting and processing activities, fairer wages. The WHIPs innovation project is focusing on proof of concept and testing out approaches in country within wild plant harvesting communities. As acknowledged the project will have limited direct impact on income, equity or benefits for women or disadvantaged groups in these landscapes. Reporting from stakeholder engagement and feedback at national WHIPs workshops will demonstrate whether some practical steps have been agreed among local stakeholders.

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