

## Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus

### Half Year Report

Submit to: [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com) including your project ref in the subject line.

<b>Project reference</b>	DARNV017
<b>Project title</b>	Testing experimental development economic programmes to protect Virunga's biodiversity
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	DRC
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of the University of Oxford
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Virunga Foundation
<b>Project leader</b>	Stefan Dercon
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	Apr 2024 – Sep 2024; HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://www.csae.ox.ac.uk/from-farms-to-jobs-job-creation-to-preserve-natural-ecosystems-in-eastern-drc">https://www.csae.ox.ac.uk/from-farms-to-jobs-job-creation-to-preserve-natural-ecosystems-in-eastern-drc</a>

**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.*

**Project summary:** In this study, we experimentally test interventions that make job markets more inclusive and improve access to off-farm jobs for farmers most negatively affected by conservation efforts in North Kivu. In a randomised control trial (RCT), we test whether offering young farmers a subsidised three-month internship in microenterprises in nearby cities can induce them to migrate and take up non-agricultural work. We compare the effects of this policy incentive to a short-term daily work scheme, which does not require farmers to move away from their villages. A third group of farmers receive nothing in the study. We also cross-randomise a short environmental education session across all three arms. We measure whether these incentives increase non-agricultural employment and reduce demand for agricultural land, thereby protecting natural habitats and biodiversity.

**Progress updates:** The RCT has been implemented in two phases to account for changes in security conditions in the eastern DRC. The first phase commenced in April 2023 with 300 participants and the interventions took place between July and November 2023, followed by the midline in December 2023. The endline survey was successfully completed in May and June 2024, with a 94% response rate.

The second phase commenced in March 2024 with 1024 participants in a different region of the park. The interventions took place between April and September 2024. 62% assigned to the internship group participated in the programme and 45% participated in the daily work programme. The midline survey commenced in early October 2024 and will conclude by mid-

November 2024, with an expected participation rate of 87%. The endline survey is scheduled for February 2025.

**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.**

**Revised project end date:** We requested and received approval to shift the project end date from 31 December 2024 to 31 March 2025, i.e. within the same financial year. Project implementation was delayed by three months, as the country held national election in late December 2023. As a result, we decided in partnership with our implementation partner (Virunga National Park) to put on hold field and data collection activities for security reasons. Once it became apparent that there were no real security threats from the M23 (a militia group operating in nearby areas, though not in our project area), we proceeded with the second phase of implementation.

**Lower participation rates in the daily work intervention:** Participation was lower than expected in the daily work intervention in phase 2, with participants citing security concerns as one of the main reasons for not participating. The rollout of this particular intervention was also delayed as our implementation partner (Virunga National Park) did not have daily work needs until the second half of the year.

Our primary research question seeks to measure the impact of offering an internship programme relative to the status quo of receiving nothing or this daily work intervention. The lower intensity of treatment in the latter treatment arm means that we will have less statistical power to measure the effect of this intervention relative to the other interventions or control group. Nevertheless, this will not undermine our ability to measure the impact of the internship programme relative to the control group, nor our budget or timelines.

**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: *Not known*

**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.

Section 2 of our Annual Report Review indicate that all comments need to be addressed only by the next annual report, not half year report. We intend to provide these clarifications in the next annual report.

## Checklist for submission

<b>For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you <b>responded to any additional feedback</b> (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 <b>risk register</b> ?	
<b>For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you responded to <b>feedback from your latest Annual Report Review</b> ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	X
<b>For All Projects</b>	
Include your <b>project reference</b> in the subject line of submission email.	X
Submit to <a href="mailto:BCFs-Report@niras.com">BCFs-Report@niras.com</a> .	X
Have you <b>clearly highlighted any confidential information</b> within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	X
Have you reported against the most <b>up to date information for your project</b> ?	X
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	X