



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

**Submission Deadline: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024**

<b>Project reference</b>	DARNV019
<b>Project title</b>	Women-led School-based Agroforestry in Benin (WSAB) Project
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Benin
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.'s World Education Division (JSI/WorldEd)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Alafia NGO
<b>Project leader</b>	JSI/WorldEd
<b>Report date and number</b>	HYR2, October 31, 2024
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://worlded.org/project/women-led-school-based-agroforestry-project-in-benin/">https://worlded.org/project/women-led-school-based-agroforestry-project-in-benin/</a> <a href="https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/news/2024/09/03/citizen-science-to-build-climate-resilience/">https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/news/2024/09/03/citizen-science-to-build-climate-resilience/</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).**

In the past six months, WSAB made significant progress in promoting community-led biodiversity conservation, establishing and planting agroforestry plots, and advancing the AME-led microenterprises. All planned activities for this period were successfully completed.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Output 1: Communities engaged</b>	
1.1-1.4 Complete	<b>Complete.</b>
<b>Output 2: AMEs established and/or strengthened</b>	
2.1-2.3 Complete	<b>Complete.</b>
<b>Output 3: AMEs are trained and supported to manage microenterprises based on school-based agroforestry initiatives together with teachers and community farmers</b>	
3.1-3.6	<b>Complete.</b>
3.7 Support AMEs to develop microbusinesses and business plans	After entrepreneurship development and trainings, which started in Y1 and were finalized in early Y2, during this reporting period, WSAB assisted the three AMEs in developing their micro-enterprises and business plans. They assessed financial needs, projected income, and profitability, clarifying community budgets and facilitating financial support. The AMEs focused their initial business plans on agricultural crops, including maize, soybeans, and various vegetables. Wèrèkè expects revenue of 1,300,000 FCFA with a profit of 600,000 FCFA; Sonnoumon anticipates 1,200,000 FCFA in revenue and over 500,000 FCFA in profit; and Pouraparé aims for 1,500,000 FCFA in revenue with a profit of nearly 900,000 FCFA. In future years, the business plans will shift from agriculture-to agroforestry-based, as the agroforestry systems mature. It will be crucial to continue communicating this shift away from <i>primarily</i> crops (maize, soya), and away from using organic pest repellents. Once matured, agroforestry systems will replicate ecosystem services, such as pest regulation, and generate new produce (fruits, tree products, etc.) for future phases of the businesses.
3.8 Provide seed funds to AMES to launch businesses	After developing the business plans, WSAB provided funds to start operations, along with a borehole and fencing materials for security perimeters around each of the three AMEs. This support facilitated the launch of the enterprises. WSAB deposited funds into AME bank accounts.

3.9 Provide guidance and follow-up support to AMEs	WSAB provided advisory support to AMEs on their income-generating activities and created agreements to define resource distribution from their operations. WSAB also offered initial guidance during the launch and initiated weekly formative supervision to ensure ongoing support.
3.10 Provide collaborative, mid-term review on business plans and provide support	The WSAB team carried out a mid-term analysis to assess each community's progress and support with challenges they identified as hindering their success, followed by an exchange visit with AME members who presented their opportunities, challenges, and strategies for success in their micro-enterprises. Challenges included member engagement, access to vegetable seeds, and effective weed identification/management. WSAB provided guidance around the importance of teamwork, identifying reliable seed suppliers, and weeding methods avoiding the use of herbicides.
<b>Output 4: Agroforestry systems are planned and established in schools</b>	
4.1-4.4	<b>Complete.</b>
4.5 Build tree nurseries in schools	The WSAB team trained participants on constructing and organising nursery areas, the components of growing media, potting techniques, germination methods, and essential maintenance practices. WSAB then assisted communities in gathering materials and establishing nurseries.
4.6 Procure and propagate seedlings for agroforestry systems	Following species identification through the DPC and BioBlitz (Y1), WSAB collaborated with communities to identify various native and fruit tree species for the agroforestry system. The team propagated native species, sourced through seed collection in the wild and through collaboration with the local government. Species include <i>Parkia biglobosa</i> , <i>Vitex doniana</i> , <i>Vitellaria paradoxa</i> , <i>Blighia sapida</i> , <i>Diospyros mespiliformis</i> , and <i>Tamarindus indica</i> . Through AMEs, WSAB supported communities to source fruit tree species such as guava, mango, orange, papaya, and moringa. Locating native seedlings proved challenging. Establishing native tree nurseries offers a promising income-generating opportunity that the WSAB team plans to explore with the AMEs.
4.7 Coordinate and implement community planting days	The community action plans (CAP) developed during the DPC includes monthly community agroforestry upkeep days, led by a small farmer field school (FFS)-managed committee. WSAB provides formative supervision. The primary planting days during which the agroforestry systems were planted took place in June and July, which given the early rainy season, is an opportune time to plant. Each community's agroforestry plot blueprint includes sections of pure native plants. Communities chose to implement the Miyawaki method, which involves planting trees in close proximity to foster competition and accelerate growth. This dense canopy promotes moisture retention and produces substantial litter that decomposes into organic matter, thereby enhancing soil fertility and supporting biodiversity.
4.8 Support farmers and schools to design long-term plans	The WSAB CAP outlines a plan for managing natural resources, conserving biodiversity, promoting sustainable agriculture, and reducing poverty. It details activities, timelines, and responsible parties, updated by farmer field schools after the initial agroforestry planting. Operating biweekly across three locations, these schools cover themes like ecosystem changes, sustainable agriculture practices, vegetable production, composting, and nursery techniques. This approach enhances participants' theoretical and practical knowledge, fostering ecological agriculture that supports biodiversity and ensuring a long-term strategy for community management.
4.9 Provide supervision for long-term forest/ agroforestry management	
<b>Output 5. Schools are supported to lead activities engaging communities in environmental monitoring, conservation, and biodiversity- sustaining agriculture</b>	
5.1 Train teachers, farmers and AMEs on CBNRM	WSAB will achieve Activities 5.1-5.3 through an intergenerational learning model designed to invoke environmental action among students, community members, AMEs and educators. WSAB engaged a local curriculum and pedagogy expert to develop a curriculum covering topics including biodiversity, conservation, CBNRM, climate resilience, agriculture, and gender. The curriculum is rooted in local knowledge and context and aligns environmental content housed with Benin's government authority in charge
5.2 Train teachers and AMEs to involve children in CBNRM	

5.3 Support AMEs to ensure agroforestry activities provide hands-on learning	of curriculum and teacher training (INFRE, the National Institute for Research in Education). The curriculum will be delivered by community representatives in the local language (A5.1), and by instructors in French (A5.2). This bilingual approach is proven to maximise engagement and understanding of the content. WSAB will use the agroforestry plots and local landscapes (native forest, fallow, monoculture, etc.) as hands-on learning opportunities to further connect learners with the content (A5.3).
5.4 AMEs to liaise with school management to ensure canteens benefit from crops	WSAB will support AMEs to liaise with school management to ensure school canteens benefit from and take advantage from increased and diversified crops. WSAB worked with AMEs to determine a potential distribution of agroforestry / kitchen garden products, which includes a portion designated for school canteens, a portion to support the AMEs themselves, and a final portion for the individual women involved.
5.5 AME-hosted agroforestry days	WSAB held community planting days in each community and has broader education days planned in the coming period (see Activity 4.7).

**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.**

WSAB faces two main challenges: erratic climate conditions and animal straying/ trampling/ trespassing. This season, rainfall has been irregular, starting late and resulting in dry pockets that have caused plant wilting and decreased seed viability. WSAB has needed to replant plants multiple times. While this does affect project timelines, ultimately, agroforestry is a methodology that increases crop resilience to erratic climatic patterns. Attempts to address animal straying / trampling through low-cost methods (such as owner awareness and signage) have not been successful. Consequently, the local management associations hired a guard for the agroforestry site, which has increased their financial burden with only mixed results. While many community members have suggested installing a wire fence, this requires significant funding which is ultimately unsustainable. The project is exploring natural fence solutions.

**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/ <b>No</b> - not extreme enough
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes/ <b>No</b> - N/A
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes/ <b>No</b> - 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: £ [REDACTED] (provisionary)

**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  Estimated underspend: £

**4c. If you expect and underspend, then you should consider your project budget needs carefully.** No underspend is expected, however should it be deemed justifiable, we will send a re-budget request to Defra via the official channels.

**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.**

Please find attached as annexes the following documents requested in the annual report:

- Annex 1: Updated timeline
- Annex 2: PCD tool/summary report (A1.1) and community action plans (A1.4)
- Annex 3: Training documents / attendance records for AMEs (A2.2)
- Annex 4: AME Business plans (A3.7)
- Annex 5: Risk Register