

## 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: 31<sup>st</sup> 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](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com) including your project ref in the subject line.

<b>Project reference</b>	<b>DARNV020</b>
<b>Project title</b>	<b>Upscaling innovative ‘planting-baskets’ to restore landscape diversity, enhancing climate-resilient livelihoods</b>
<b>Country</b>	Belize
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	University of Edinburgh
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Belize Botanical Gardens,
<b>Project leader</b>	Dr Neil Stuart
<b>Report date and number</b>	HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-funds-darwin-initiative-innovation-project-in-belize">https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-funds-darwin-initiative-innovation-project-in-belize</a>  <a href="https://fb.watch/nWjUP9Fcot/">https://fb.watch/nWjUP9Fcot/</a> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/ukinbelize/videos/658172843131023/">https://www.facebook.com/ukinbelize/videos/658172843131023/</a>  latest posts (to 31 October 2024) <a href="https://www.iied.org/benefits-backing-family-agroforestry-businesses-food-for-thought">https://www.iied.org/benefits-backing-family-agroforestry-businesses-food-for-thought</a>  <a href="https://stories.rbge.org.uk/archives/39341">https://stories.rbge.org.uk/archives/39341</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).**

The project continues to make good progress and remains on track to complete or exceed all the outputs anticipated by EoP on 31 March 2025. The M&E indicators are still relevant, and our project assumptions still hold true. We have taken on board comments from the reviewer of our annual report, and provide responses in section 6.

For activities that are not yet completed, progress toward completion is summarised in the following table:

## Progress against implementation timetable

Activity	Description	Progress during Year 2
1.1	Training of BBG and NGO partners staff in native plant and seed identification & basic taxonomy for conservation assessment and biodiversity monitoring (RBGE)	Dr Zoë Goodwin (RBGE) and Rudy Aguilar (BBG) led training at Belize Botanic Gardens for staff from BBG and other local conservation and research organisations from 30 May to 6 June. 2024. Twenty participants (35% female) from seven organizations attended a course of three half-days, run twice on 30 May–1 June and again on 4 – 6 June, in response to unexpected high demand. Course feedback stated that participants believed they had acquired useful practical skills they could apply. Course materials and attendance lists are available.
2.2	Experimental trials on 20-30 target native species, assessing ease of propagation, survival and drought resistance. (BBG)	In year one, 20 native plants and trees were selected for propagation trials in the BBG nursery. This year, a further 15-20 native species (e.g. Ceiba, Fiddlewood, Guanacaste, Inga, Madre de cacao, Mamey, Rosewood, Salmwood, Sapodilla, Zericote) are growing successfully in the nursery. Those already planted out are being assessed for their growth and drought resistance. A spreadsheet summarising the results of these trials is being compiled to evidence completion.
2.4	12 Individuals (>30% female) identified as 'champion growers' selected to attend further training in year 2. (BBG)	Many 'Gardens to Grow' participants and smallholders have work or duties, and so cannot attend residential training courses. Instead, BBG staff are visiting their backyards or fields to give on-site training in e.g. mulching, organic pest control, soil erosion control, transplanting and pruning. Each smallholder received 70-80 plants from 20-25 species (40-50% native). The ongoing support is helping retaining participants, enhancing their skills and building a network of practice in growing these native plants successfully.
3.2	3 x 1 ha demonstration agro-forestry plots are co-designed and landscaped on land of project beneficiaries. (BBG)	Demonstration plots at Galen University and Friends for Conservation & Development were installed in year 1. A third plot identified at Mopan Tech. College has proved unsuitable due to poor drainage, and BBG are currently working with Mopan to identify a more suitable site. BBG have plants ready and plan to instal this last plot as soon as possible before the end of the year.
3.3	~30 landless local forest users (>75% female) obtain plants, training and ongoing support from BBG to install and maintain backyard 'Gardens to Grow' (BBG)	16 landless families (~ 45 forest users) have now received planting baskets with 22 different kinds of seeds (25% natives), with follow-on training in germinating, fertilizing, watering, transplanting, companion planting and pruning. All families received an installation visit at their home, and at least 1 follow-up visit from BBG with further advice and assistance. Many also joined a social media group co-ordinated by BBG which enables them to access help and give support.
4.2	Up to 4 groups (~50% female) trained and mentored during Year 2 in the resilience benefits of diversified production & sale of diversified produce.(IIED).	Two, 2-day workshop courses will be delivered by IIED in year 2, for ~20 participants each (a novel mix of 4 groups - smallholder farmers, NGO practitioners, educators and business owners). The first workshop, on agri-business and diversified production was in August 2024. The second, on marketing and sale of produce, will take place at BBG in February 2025.
4.3	Locally-led assessments of markets for surplus produce for up to 6 food plants by Dec 2024.	Before the next training, participants will assess markets for up to 6 food or plant-based products. In the February workshop, participants will analyse existing promotional materials and packaging and begin designing materials for potential products. By re-designing the training, the groups will receive a more extended training in business options, sale and organisation than originally planned.
4.4	Promotional materials for 3 existing/potential food products analysed	

5.1	Training resources made available during 2024. By EoP consultation to incorporate into courses on agroforestry at technical colleges/ university	Initial consultations have taken place with Mopan Technical high School, Galen University and University of Belize ERI, who have all attended meetings to begin to identify relevant programmes and curricula. Ongoing email discussions and further meetings are planned in February 2025 to continue this activity.
5.2	Production of up to 10 new episodes of 'The Garden Show' on Cayo TV, showcasing native species, & uses in cooking, during 2024	10/10 episodes of the popular TV series 'The Garden Show' hosted by BBG, have now been recorded. The final two episodes encouraging growing of native species, feature this Darwin project; the first is on our smallholder champion growers and the second, the most successful Gardens to Go participants. In September, BBG received confirmation from the National Channel (TNC 10) that these episodes are tentatively scheduled for broadcast during November and December this year.
5.4	Project findings shared and promoted internationally as an innovative, scalable scheme; lobbying of government to expand the scheme	On 18 October, updates about the project were given to the UK-Belize Annual Meeting (Edinburgh Centre for Climate Innovation) and the Centre for Sustainable Forest Landscapes, to an audience of 60+, including online attendance by FCDO and the High Commissioner from both the UK and Belize.

**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.**

None

**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

Formal Change Request submitted:

Yes/ No

Received confirmation of change acceptance:

Yes/ No

**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 an underspend, then you should consider your project budget needs carefully.**

**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?**

We also anticipate greater expenditure on T&S in the last six months of the project, as we have a number of workshops and dissemination activities planned, and BBG are planning to continue on-site visits to the project beneficiaries.

**6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback from your most recent annual report. Please provide the comment and then your response.**

We respond to two comments received from the reviewer of our first annual report:

**Reviewer comment 1**

“Activity 4.2 (Up to 4 groups (~50% female) trained and mentored during 2024 in the resilience benefits of diversified production, and sale of diversified produce). Does the IIED proposal to modify this activity mean that growers will not receive training in business options, sale and organisation”?

**Project team response 1**

After consulting with the beneficiary groups, we agreed to adapt the IIED training to now deliver two, 2-day workshop courses during year 2. The first, on ‘Agri-business and diversified production’, was delivered in August 2024. The second, on marketing and sale of produce, will take place in February 2025. Between the two trainings, ~20 participants (a novel mix of smallholder farmers and practitioners from NGOs) have been tasked to undertake locally-led assessments of markets for up to 6 food or plant-based products. By re-designing the training to respond to these local needs, growers will now receive a more extended training in business options, sale and organisation than originally planned, whilst also having more opportunity to interact with NGO professionals and also with local owners of small agri-businesses, who will also contribute to these restyled workshops. The new workshops are more innovative, and the feedback received from the participants of the first workshop showed excellent satisfaction among both the farmers and the NGO professionals who participated.

**Reviewer comment 2**

“In Y1 only 20 native species were selected for nursery trials and although another 50 or so native species have been identified for trials in Y2, it will be difficult to achieve useful information related to their cultivation in the remaining time left in the project. Is there a commitment from the hosts of the experimental plots to maintain and monitor them beyond the end of the project?”

**Project team response 2:** As a ‘BCF Innovation’ project with only 2 year’s funding, we acknowledge we will still be continuing to learn about the challenges and benefits of diversifying native planting beyond the end of this small project’s timeframe. For that reason, we have focused on obtaining commitment from the partners (Belize Botanic Gardens, Galen University, Friends for Conservation & Development, Mopan Technical College) to continue to maintain and monitor their demonstration plots after the funding ends.

During year 1 we adapted our strategy for recruiting farmers to participate; this involved incentivising farmers by providing them in year 1 with some exotic plants that provide short-term food security, as well as native plants that enhance biodiversity but take longer to reach maturity. By carefully recruiting beneficiaries committed to native planting, we now have good retention of farmers willing to accept more native plants in this second year. Therefore, despite the project timeframe being limited, BBG are confident they will be able to meet the indicator for activity 2.2 (20-30 native species trialled for propagation) by end of project, and share information about how to successfully propagate these native plants and trees.