

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 2025

Please note all projects that were active before 1st October 2025 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

Submit to: BCF-Reports@niras.com including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	<i>IWTEV019</i>
Project title	Safeguarding southern Africa's succulents through analysing demand and supply networks
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	South Africa and Republic of Korea (South Korea)
Lead Organisation	University of Cape Town (UCT)
Partner(s)	Jared Margulies (University of Alabama), Juneseo Hwang (Sungkonghoe University)
Project Leader	Annette Hübschle
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media	

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 monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) 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.

0. Outcome (as 30 Sep 2025)

This outcome is not yet due for reporting. During April–September we focused on generating the empirical basis for downstream change (interviews, focus groups, survey finalisation, and stakeholder scheduling). Assumptions remain valid: partner engagement continues; hybrid delivery for 2026 events is feasible; safeguarding protocols are in place. We will evidence outcome change at endline using the agreed Means of Verification (MoVs) - partner self-assessments, attendance and role records, and adoption of recommendations - once analysis is complete and products are disseminated.

0.2 Stakeholder meeting

Foundational meetings with SANBI, the Seoul Botanic Garden, the Korean National Institute of Biological Resources, and the Cacti and Succulents Research Institute were held in November 2024 (pre-period) and informed planning in this period. A larger stakeholder meeting with relevant government departments and agencies is scheduled for 5 December 2025; the agenda and programme have been drafted, and invitations will be issued in November 2025. Venue, logistics, and budget coordination with Sungkonghoe University are in place, noting routine personnel changes at some institutions.

MEL reflection: Assumptions about host availability and hybrid delivery remain valid. We will capture attendance lists and roles for standard indicator reporting at the time of the event.

Output 1: Increased empirical evidence on consumption and drivers of illegal succulent trade in South Korea

The past six months were primarily dedicated to the preparation of the survey, conducting in-person interviews, and organising stakeholder meetings in South Korea. Below is a description of each activity.

1.1 Five hundred consumers targeted in South Korea via survey to understand consumer drivers of trade demand (50% women) by December 2025. (IWTCTF-07)

Following a fieldwork session and a co-design workshop in South Africa, jointly organised by the research team and the South African National Biological Institute (SANBI), the team summarised the main caveats and feedback related to the survey design. This survey is directed at understanding the motivations, purchase patterns, and regulation-related knowledge of succulent growers and collectors in South Korea. The team held a meeting regularly to check the progress of survey design.

The survey is composed of 64 questions which include both open text responses, rank order questions, multiple choice, and Likert scale questions. The survey also includes one unmatched count technique question. The survey went through several iterations in its development, which included translation checks for interpretability, as well as opportunities for stakeholder feedback from select participants in our 2024 Stakeholder meeting. The survey is hosted on UA's Qualtrics system and was approved by UA's IRB committee (IRB protocol # 24-08-7908, classified: exempt) in September 2025. Co-PI Margulies led the survey design and development, with significant assistance and feedback from Dr. Hwang and Dr. Hübschle. All Korean translations were produced by Dr. Hwang with the aid of a research assistant. The survey is currently ready for deployment (and will initially be disseminated within Korean succulent networks via online message boards, forums, and social media groups), but we are still awaiting ethics approval from UCT to deploy the survey tool, which has been unexpectedly and significantly delayed (see Annex K1–K4, R1).

MEL reflection: The survey indicator remains relevant. Once UCT approval is granted, we will report sex-disaggregated completions against the $\geq 50\%$ women benchmark. No standard indicators are triggered during this phase.

1.2 20 Qualitative interviews conducted with succulent traders and consumers in South Korea. 20 interviews in total by December 2025 (50% of interviews with women).

This project aims to conduct 20 in-person interviews with succulent collectors, growers, and consumers in South Korea. To do so, the list of potential interviewees, considering gender balance, has been created and it is currently being reviewed by the team. It is expected that 20 interviews will be completed by the end of December 2025, as outlined in the logframe (see Annex C0, C6)

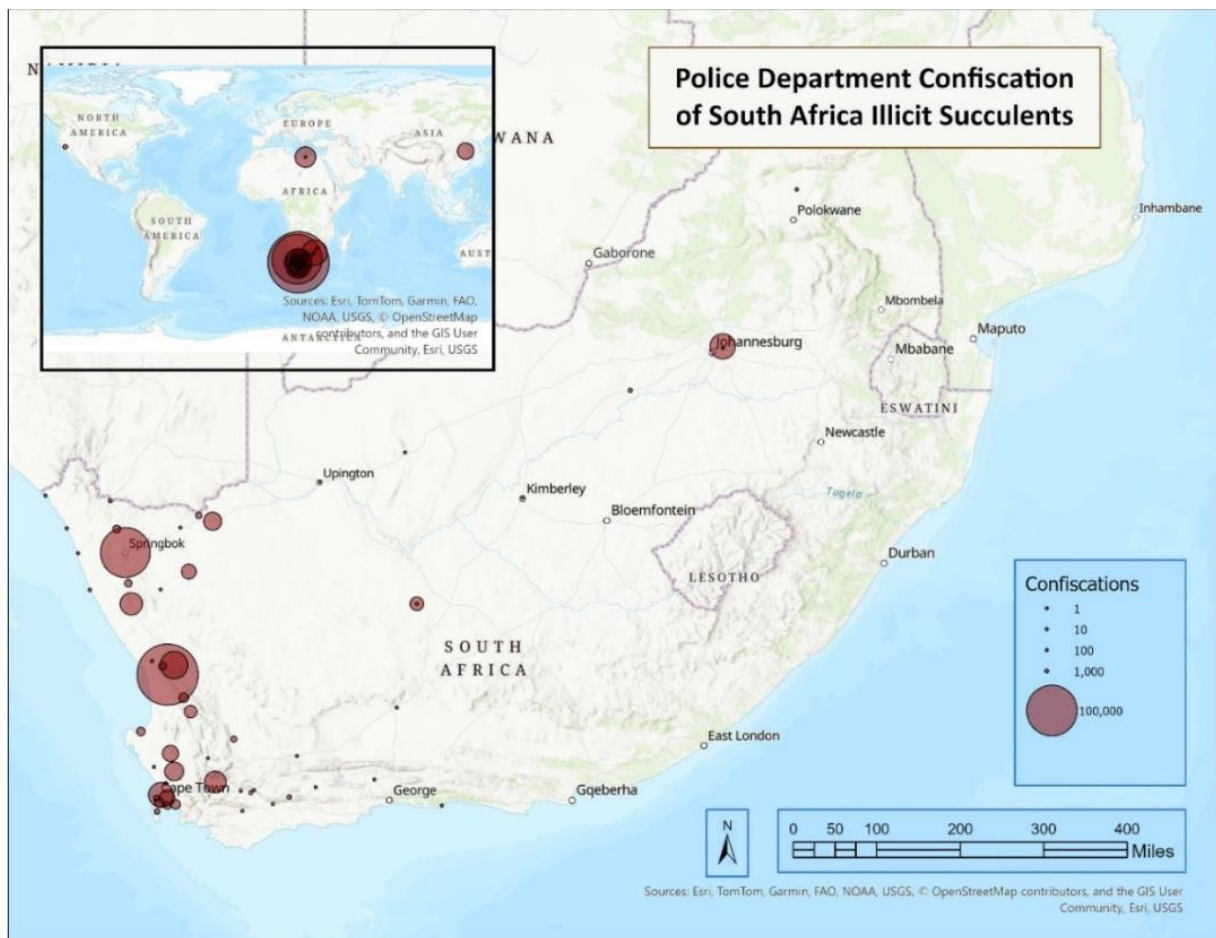
MEL reflection: The indicator remains appropriate. Sex-disaggregated logs will be maintained for all interviews. No IWT standard indicators are reportable for this output during this period.

Output 2: Increased empirical evidence on supply drivers of illegal succulent trade in South Africa

2.1 Trade route identified

Status: We are conducting interviews and completing transcripts; coding will proceed on a rolling basis as transcripts are finalised. No route has been identified yet at this stage by design. Dr. Margulies led a graduate student research group at UA in Spring 2025 in the development of a 'crime script' on transnational succulent trade, largely drawing on available court records and police confiscation data provided to us by TRAFFIC. However, because all provided cases involved perpetrators who pled guilty,

limited additional insight into trade routes was gained from this document review. Figure 1 is the confiscation map produced by the students working with Dr. Margulies.



Progress this period (Apr–Sep 2025): Interviews were done with harvesters; law enforcement officials, conservationists and NGO representatives. We applied verbal informed-consent and safeguarding procedures applied. Transcription workflow was established and underway (See Annex C0, C1, C2, R1.)

Evidence (interim, annexed): C0 interview schedule; C1 consent and safeguarding templates (redacted); C2 one redacted transcript sample; R1 storage screenshot showing encrypted, access-controlled folders.

MEL reflection: The indicator and MoV remain appropriate. We will only assert route identification once coded evidence is triangulated and validated.

Output 2 — Indicator 2.2: Twenty qualitative interviews with illicit succulent harvesters in the Northern Cape

Status (as at 30 Sep 2025): On track. We have completed fifteen interviews linked to the harvesting economy, of which thirteen are attributable to illegal harvesters as per the indicator’s scope. A further five interviews are scheduled, which keeps us on pace to reach the twenty-interview milestone within the planned timeframe.

Progress this period (Apr–Sep 2025): Recruitment proceeded through community contacts and prior scoping. Participants received a comprehensive overview of the project and provided verbal informed consent before each interview. Most interview partners agreed to audio recording, which supports accurate transcription; one participant requested that we take contemporaneous written notes instead of recording due to confidentiality concerns, and we accommodated this request and produced a transcript from the notes. Transcription is underway on a rolling basis as files are received. An anonymised interview log is maintained with unique IDs, dates, locations, consent status, and sex. To date, all

interviewed illegal harvesters in our sample are men, and we therefore record sex as 100 percent male for the harvester subset while continuing to capture sex-disaggregated information in the log.

Gender, safeguarding, and data security: Safeguarding procedures were applied at each interaction, including the option to withdraw at any point and meeting in neutral venues. All recordings, notes, and transcripts are stored in encrypted, access-controlled institutional drives, with access limited to the core research team.

Risks and mitigation: Intermittent concerns about being recorded are mitigated by offering a notes-only option without penalty and by reiterating anonymisation and storage protocols. Scheduling risks are managed through flexible timing and multiple recruitment channels.

Evidence (interim, annexed): C3 anonymised interview log extract showing fifteen completed interviews, and five additional interviews scheduled; C1 consent and safeguarding templates (redacted); C2 one redacted transcript sample.

Next steps (Oct–Dec 2025): Complete the five scheduled interviews, continue transcription, and begin initial coding once a critical mass of transcripts is available; update the anonymised log and prepare a short fieldwork summary for the next reporting period.

MEL reflection: The indicator remains appropriate. Sex-disaggregated reporting is feasible; no standard indicators are triggered during this phase.

Output 2 — Indicator 2.3: Focus groups with community members on succulent harvesting dynamics

Status (as at 30 Sep 2025): On track. We completed four focus groups during the reporting period. We plan to conduct up to four additional focus groups; two are scheduled for Oct–Dec 2025 to maintain momentum, and two are intentionally deferred to early 2026 to allow cross-checking and discussion of emerging survey findings with community members.

Progress this period (Apr–Sep 2025): Four focus groups were conducted using a consistent discussion guide covering local harvesting drivers, market intermediaries, community impacts, perceptions of enforcement and alternative livelihoods.

Rationale for staged scheduling: Two additional focus groups are planned after preliminary survey analysis so that participants can react to and engage with the consumer trends observed in South Korea.

Risks and mitigation: Participant scheduling is mitigated through repeat engagements by a fieldwork assistant in the Northern Cape. The curator of a community nursery in the Ai Ais Richtersveld has requested that focus groups be moved to March/April due to extreme heat

Evidence (interim, annexed): D1 focus group discussion guide; C1 consent and safeguarding templates (redacted); R1 storage screenshot demonstrating encrypted, access-controlled folders.

Next steps (Oct–Dec 2025): Run two additional focus groups and update the attendance and summary pack; prepare a short brief of preliminary survey findings to support the two validation focus groups planned for early 2026.

MEL reflection: Indicator and MoV remain appropriate. We will capture sex-disaggregated attendance in the next period when tallies across all sessions are complete.

Output 2 — Indicator 2.4: Ten interviews with conservation and law-enforcement officials in southern Africa (due Oct 2025)

Status (as at 30 Sep 2025): On track. We have completed eight interviews with conservation and law-enforcement officials and have additional contacts lined up to reach the target within the planned timeframe. The current composition is majority women (6 out of 8), and we will purposefully sample to sustain this profile as we complete the remaining interviews.

Progress this period (Apr–Sep 2025): We conducted eight semi-structured interviews across relevant conservation agencies and law-enforcement units. All participants provided informed consent. All sessions were audio-recorded with permission. Transcription is proceeding on a rolling basis, and each interview is logged with a unique anonymised identifier, date, institutional role, consent status, and sex. The interim gender balance reflects strong participation by women officials.

Gender, safeguarding, and data security: The anonymised interview log records sex for every interview, with women constituting the majority to date. Safeguarding protocols were followed at each interaction, including the option to withdraw. All recordings, notes, and transcripts are stored in encrypted, access-controlled institutional drives.

Risks and mitigation: Scheduling constraints and operational sensitivities are mitigated through flexible timing, multiple points of contact, and the option of notes-only interviews where recording is not acceptable. We will maintain targeted invitations to women officials to preserve balanced representation as we complete the series.

Evidence (interim, annexed): E1 anonymised officials' interview log extract showing eight completed interviews and recording the interim gender balance; C1 consent and safeguarding templates (redacted); C2 one redacted transcript sample.

Next steps (Oct–Dec 2025): Complete at least two additional interviews to reach ten, continue transcription, and begin initial thematic coding after the tenth interview; update the anonymised log and prepare a short summary note for the next reporting period.

MEL reflection: The updated target of ten remains realistic. We will continue purposive outreach to women officials to sustain representation.

Output 2 — Indicator 2.5: By project completion, three state institutions (National Task Team, SANBI, DFFE), two local/Indigenous communities, and one NGO demonstrate enhanced awareness and understanding of poverty linked to the illegal succulent trade (IWTFCF-B24)

Status (as at 30 Sep 2025): Not yet due; groundwork underway. This indicator measures end-of-project awareness and understanding, so no claims are made at mid-year. During the reporting period we prepared the engagement schedule and materials for the bi-annual feedback cycle and planned co-design touchpoints with community partners and Socio-Tech.

Progress this period (Apr–Sep 2025): We had three feedback sessions with project partner SANBI. We also engaged with Socio-Tech and representatives from the UK High Commission on project progress.

Evidence (interim, annexed): P1 email invite for meeting with SANBI.

MEL reflection: The end-line indicator remains appropriate. We will use short, repeatable agendas and a simple baseline/endline self-assessment to evidence change at project close.

The project team is finalising a Legal and Policy Analysis of Illegal Succulent Poaching in South Africa, now approximately 80% complete. This paper examines international and national legal frameworks (including CITES, NEMBA, and related provincial laws), analyses landmark court cases and enforcement gaps and proposes policy measures to strengthen regulation and enable sustainable, community-based trade alternatives. The analysis will inform forthcoming policy briefs and stakeholder workshops and contribute directly to the project's evidence base on governance and legal reform for succulent conservation.

Output 3: Research outputs developed and shared with target audiences (governments, researchers, and civil social organisations)

Status as at 30 September 2025: Not yet due; preparatory steps completed and sequencing confirmed. All Output 3 products intentionally depend on analysis from the interviews, focus groups, and the KR survey.

Indicator 3.1: One journal article submitted

Status: Not yet due. A manuscript outline and author roles have been drafted, and a shortlist of target journals with timelines has been compiled.

MEL reflection: Indicator remains appropriate; no standard indicators are triggered this period.

Indicator 3.2: Two policy briefs (English and Korean)

Status: Not yet due. A two-page brief template and a translation/dissemination workflow have been prepared.

MEL reflection: Indicator remains appropriate; templates support timely delivery once results are available.

Indicator 3.3: International hybrid workshop

Status: Host and timing agreed for the second week of April 2026 at Sungkonghoe University with online participation. A save-the-date and draft agenda will be issued following preliminary findings. Host and timing are agreed for the second week of April 2026 at Sungkonghoe University with online participation (see Annex G1). We await the outcome of the change request regarding the April timing.

MEL reflection: Assumptions on hybrid delivery and host availability hold; attendance and role capture will support standard indicator reporting at event time.

Indicator 3.4: Initiation workshop with decision-makers

Status: Reported previously; no action required this period. Documentation remains on file.

Indicator 3.5: Report on alternative livelihoods intervention (due March 2026)

Status: Not yet due. A draft table of contents and delivery workplan have been prepared to align with Outputs 1–2 and co-design timing.

MEL reflection: Indicator remains appropriate; sequencing depends on completion of field analysis.

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 one change request for [REDACTED] portion of funding to move to University College London was approved. - CR25-096. The change request to extend the project by three months is currently under consideration.

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*

Guidance for Section 4: The information you provide in this section will be used by Defra to review the financial status of projects. This review will identify projects at random for spot checks on financial management and will include requests for evidence of the actual spend information provided below. Please ensure the figures you provide are as accurate as possible and that you have the evidence to support it. You do not need to provide it now.

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)

Actual spend: [REDACTED]

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 2026)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £ not applicable – we are however requesting for a portion of the funding to be moved to Y3 2026/27 due to unforeseen circumstances (see section 2 and Change Request)

4c. If you expect an 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, and not later than 31st December. 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.

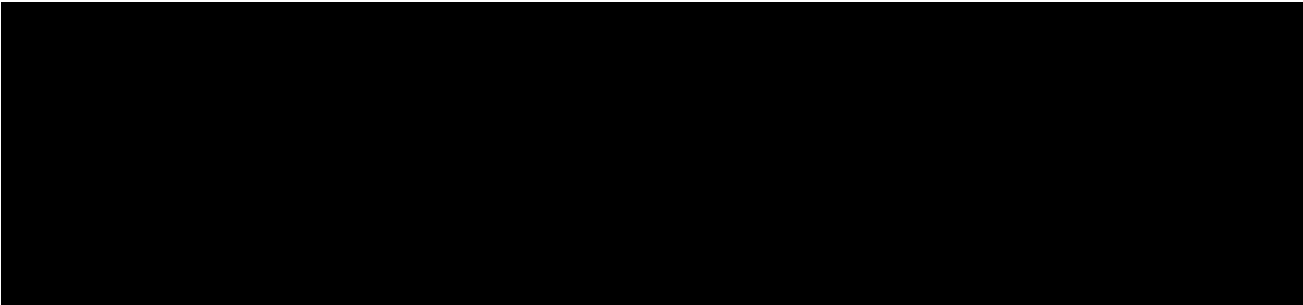
5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

Suspicious or allegations related to fraud and error concerns should be reported to fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk

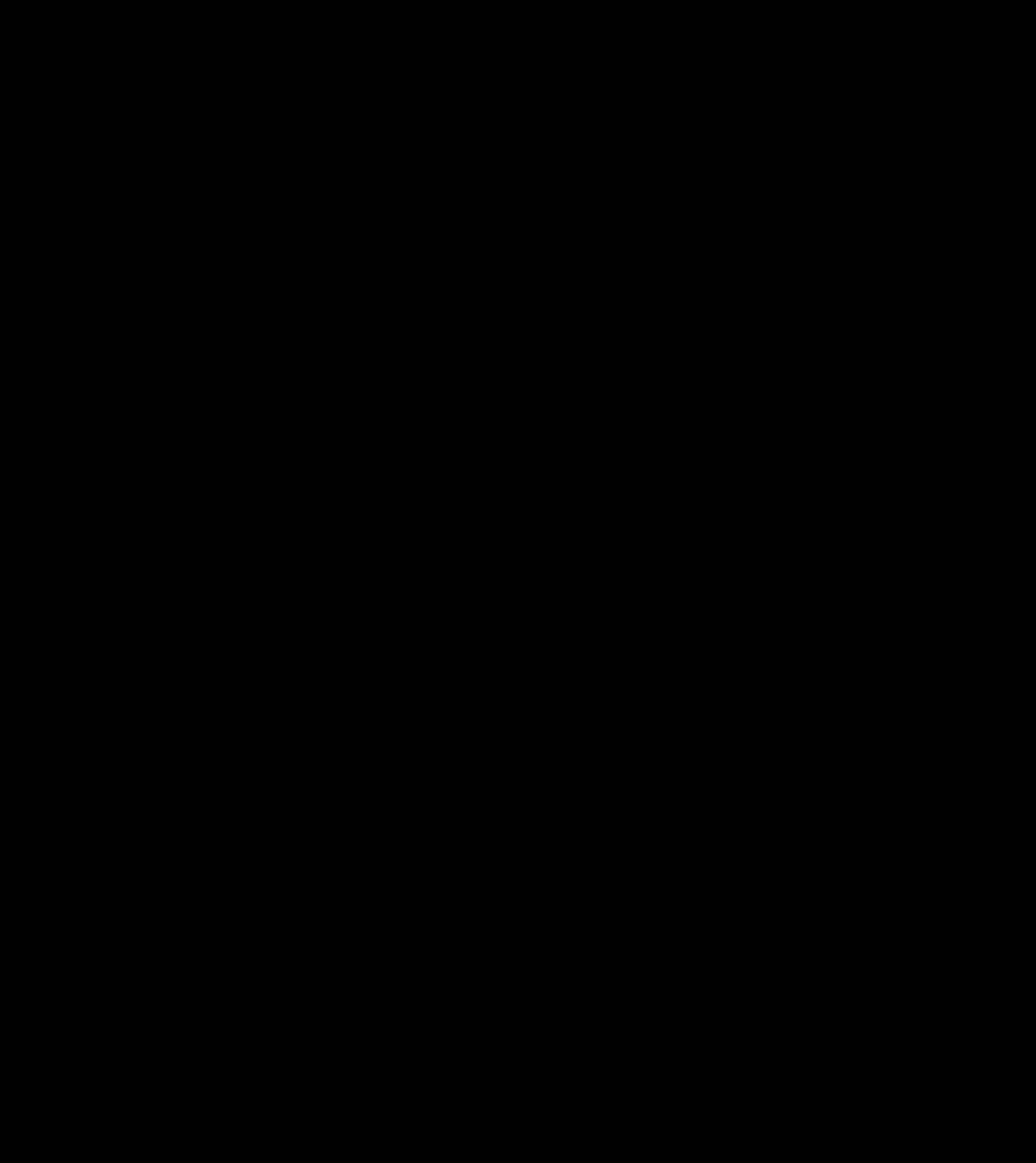
We have no concerns to report regarding fraud or error. We would like to flag, respectfully, that the current reporting and evidencing requirements create a disproportionate administrative burden for a project of this scale, particularly given international partners, staggered ethics approvals, and fieldwork dependencies. We would welcome: (1) proportionate mid-year reporting focused on progress and risks, with final MoVs supplied at year-end; (2) streamlined templates and annex registers; and (3) flexibility on timing where external approvals affect sequencing. These adjustments would allow us to spend more time delivering high-quality empirical work while preserving transparency and accountability.

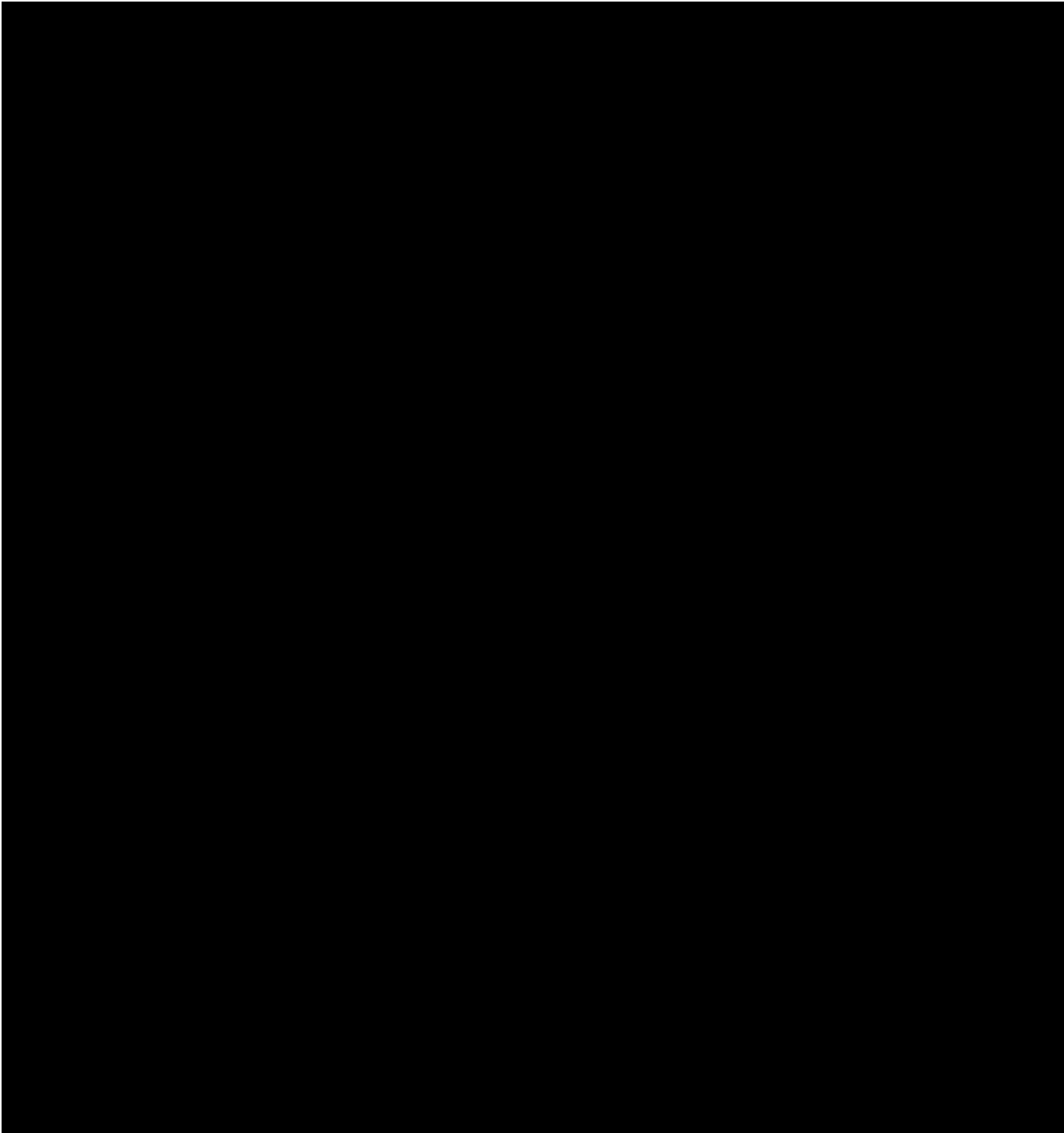
6. Project risk management

6a. If your project has an Overseas Security and Justice assessment, please provide an update on any related risks, and any special conditions in your award paperwork if relevant for your project.



7. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent Annual Report. As a reminder, all projects that were scored as ‘Not Yet Sensitive’ in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment of their latest Annual Report should demonstrate how they are meeting the minimum GESI-Sensitive standard.





Checklist for submission

Have you responded to **feedback from your latest Annual Report Review**? You should respond in section 6, and annexe other requested materials as appropriate.

Have you reported against the most **up to date information for your project**?

Have you **clearly highlighted any confidential information** within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?

Include your **project reference** in the subject line of submission email.

Y

Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com

Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.