



Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Half Year Report (due 31st October 2020)

Project reference	IWT 050
Project title	Developing elephant eco-guardians: fundamental for co-ordinated anti-poaching/trafficking initiatives in Mali
Country(ies)	Mali
Lead organisation	WILD Foundation
Partners(s)	The Mali Government: Ministry of Environment (MEADD) with its Direction Nationale des Eaux et Forêts (DNEF) as the principle contact; other ministries as appropriate but particularly the Ministries of Defence and Territorial Administration. Local communities Chengeta Wildlife The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) British and American embassies
Project leader	Dr Susan Canney
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	19 th October 2020, (HYR3)
Project website/blog/social media	Website: https://www.wild.org/mali-elephants/ Twitter: @MaliEleProject Facebook in Mali: https://www.facebook.com/gourmamali/ WILD Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/wildfoundation/

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to the end September).

Outcome: Community eco-guardians and enforcement agencies monitor and protect elephants across their range, preventing poaching, providing respected occupations, and improving multi-dimensional security.

The project is on target to meet its outputs and outcome despite the difficult operating environment. Community ecoguards and the anti-poaching unit continue to patrol with no poaching incident reported in the last six months. The bill for the creation of the Gourma Biosphere Reserve was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 27th May 2020 and is awaiting signature by the President. Covering 4,263,420 ha, the reserve's will provide for three levels of zonation under a biosphere reserve model, with strictly protected core areas surrounded by buffer and transition areas for partial or regulated resource use, that will integrate into and support the "elephant-centred" natural resource management systems developed by local communities, as well as give rangers the mandate to support communities in enforcing their conventions and the core areas centred around Lake Banzena.

Output 1. The capacity and motivation for eco-guardians to lead and promote elephant conservation activities is increased through training and the formalisation of their occupations, enabling them to work in synergy with the APU.

Training of ecoguards in monitoring key habitats for elephants continued during the first half of Y3 (target ≥ 20 ecoguards by end of Y3): 10 ecoguards attended a 3-day training on how to conduct a W-transect to assess tree cutting and bird abundance at two key sites. W-transects form part of the project long-term monitoring plan to assess the impact of community protection initiatives on natural resource availability which is crucial for elephants. The 10 ecoguards subsequently carried out the transects at the end of June.

The project has continued to engage ecoguards across the elephant range through training them in conducting activities that support elephant conservation (target ≥ 20 ecoguards per month): 6 ecoguards collected data on human and livestock pressure around Lake Banzena over the critical 3 months that they spend in this area. Lake Banzena holds water throughout the year and is therefore critical for elephants during the last 3 months of the dry season when the majority of other water sources are dry or nearly so. 13 ecoguards also dug a pond to facilitate water access for 17 elephants that had congregated around the hamlet of Massi. 108 ecoguards across the elephant range identified protected areas set aside by communities to help with habitat restoration. 74 ecoguards in the communes of Mondoro and Hombori monitored elephants for the period of three months that they were present in these areas.

The list of active ecoguards has been updated and the project now organises quarterly meetings with key ecoguards to follow-up on monitoring activities. Their crucial role as local leaders of elephant protection had previously been recognised in draft local conventions; these have now been agreed and signed by all relevant stakeholders officially formalising their occupations at the commune (district) and village levels.

An ecoguard household survey coupled with a household survey on multi-dimensional security have just been carried out that will provide information on the impact of their activities on local lives and livelihoods.

Output 2. The anti-poaching unit (APU) conducts effective proactive and reactive operations based on eco-guardian monitoring reports.

Ecoguards continue to monitor and report on elephant sightings, enabling the APU to target its patrols and the project to track elephant distribution over time. Between April and September 2020 the project received 13 reports per month on average (target 12/month), showing a clear elephant concentration at the end of the dry season in April when water resources are scarce, and a progressive dispersion towards the west and south-east in the following months with the onset of the rains.

The APU continues to patrol the elephant range based on information provided by ecoguards despite high levels of insecurity but adapts its routes accordingly. Between April and September 2020, the APU conducted 10.2 days of patrol per month on average (target 7 days/month) covering an average 890 km per month. No poaching incident has been reported during the first half of Y3 (target ≤ 0.25 /month in Y3).

Output 3. Community ecoguards are trained in elephant ground census methodology.

In preparation for the next elephant census, the project was able to conduct three ground census training counts with ecoguards. The first two were carried out in Boni on 21st and 28th April, and the third one in Korarou on 10th May (The project is still awaiting confirmation from the field team on the total number of individuals involved).

Output 4. Training materials are produced and distributed to community eco-guardians and APU personnel; and project progress and lessons learned are disseminated to the wider national and international community.

Training materials have been produced however the risk of these falling into the wrong hands means that they are not distributed as originally intended but the content is taught during training sessions. In the case of ecoguards this is also the only solution as most of them are illiterate.

The project has recently revised its security policy in light of the appearance of ISIS in the east of the elephant range. This means that the project's blog has been taken down and the website stripped of any potentially sensitive information to protect the field team and ecoguards from the consequences of being associated with a Western organisation.

All conferences and events that the project was planning to attend have been cancelled due to the covid-19 pandemic, however the project director delivered a presentation at the Global Biodiversity Festival held online (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rrs7U-JevZE&pp=QAA%3D>) and a book featuring each project has been produced as a result of this event (target 2 presentations/year).

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for Covid-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Confrontations between opposing jihadist factions in the project area of operation have increased as ISIS-backed militants try to gain territory in the east of the project area and along the border with Burkina Faso from Al Qaeda aligned groups. This has prompted the MEP to revise its online presence to protect its local staff and partners (see output 4). The shifting nature of the insecurity has also had an impact on a number of activities and indicators, notably the elephant census, which have been the subject of a recent change request approved on 29th September.

Reports of gold discovery in the elephant range has also sparked an influx of people using cyanide/mercury and water from the lakes, raising fears of environmental destruction and poaching. The MEP has written an alert with recommended actions and distributed it within government and to international partners to prompt action. This has resulted in a letter to the government in support from the head of the EU delegation and meetings with DNEF to discuss the way forward. As a result the military has evicted miners from the core zone of the new Reserve. Maintaining the anti-poaching unit in operation is essential as this will be the only part of the DNEF able to provide enforcement for the new Reserve. Going forward, the APU is to be funded by a 6-year GEF-UNDP project that was originally due to start in 2018 but has since suffered repeated delays. A new MINUSMA grant was due to bridge the funding gap until the beginning of 2021 but its pathway through the UN system has been substantially delayed as MINUSMA suspended the process following the overthrow of the president by a military junta in July and the imposition of sanctions on Mali, forcing the MEP to seek emergency funding elsewhere.

2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of Covid-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The Covid-19 pandemic mostly affected training and operations of the anti-poaching unit by delaying the start of the UNDP-GEF funded grant meant to support these activities and delaying the administrative process for the approval and signature of the MINUSMA “bridging” grant. The MEP has been able to secure emergency funding for now and is applying to other grants to ensure the APU remains in operation.

2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS: Yes/No

Formal change request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

3b. If yes, then you need to 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 rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget, so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to IWT Challenge Fund management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

If you were asked to provide a response to this year’s annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also** be raised with LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.**

Please send your **completed report** by email to IWT-Fund@ltsi.co.uk. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: IWT001 Half Year Report.**