

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

*Note: 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 2023**

<b>Project reference</b>	IWT 118
<b>Project title</b>	Empowering local women to reduce Illegal Wildlife Trade in Liberia
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Liberia
<b>Lead partner</b>	Wild Chimpanzee Foundation
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia (SCNL), Libassa Wildlife Sanctuary (LiWiSa)
<b>Project leader</b>	Prof. Dr. Christophe Boesch
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	30 October 2023 (reporting period 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023) HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	
Project Leader name	Prof. Dr. Christophe Boesch
Project website/blog/social media	<a href="http://www.wildchimps.org">www.wildchimps.org</a> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/wildchimps">www.facebook.com/wildchimps</a> <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/company/15740334">www.linkedin.com/company/15740334</a>
Report author(s) and date	Tarik Bodasing – 20 October 2023 Dr. Annika Hillers – 27 October 2023

**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 end September).**

**Output 1. A nationwide community volunteer program with female bushmeat sellers established with education, training, and awareness-raising to reach the sellers and the broader community.**

**Activity 1.1 - Carry out bushmeat market surveys including income surveys of bushmeat sellers in 10 major Liberian cities at the beginning and end of project**

The first survey was completed and reported on in year 1.

**Activity 1.2 - Identify 300 female bushmeat sellers in marketplaces and engage them to formally commit to changing business to legal enterprise.**

Capacity building remains a vital component of the project implementation strategy, including for the female bushmeat sellers. Between the period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023, the project recruited and trained 165 female bushmeat sellers as community volunteers, across 5 target markets in Liberia: Greenville (20 women), ITI (30 women), Saclepea (30 women), Tappita (35 women), and Zwedru (50 women). These women became part of the Community Volunteer Program through agreements that obligate the bushmeat sellers to conduct awareness activities in their respective markets, and to fully support conservation policies particularly the National Wildlife Conservation and Protected Area Management Law of Liberia (2016) and support their transitioning into a legal and sustainable enterprise. The 165 female bushmeat sellers came on top of 85 women who became part of the program in year 1. Thus, in total, so far 250 female bushmeat sellers from eight markets joined the community volunteer program, while 50 still remain to be recruited from two markets, that were not accessible over the past months, due to extremely bad roads (Fishtown and Pleebo). The remaining 50 women will join before the end of 2023.

Evidence: Signed Community Volunteer Agreements with all women (female bushmeat sellers) on the program; monitoring and compliance reports from program pre- and post-intervention.

**Activity 1.3 - Train 300 female bushmeat sellers in relevant laws, protected species, importance of wildlife, risks of zoonotic diseases, and awareness communication methods based on successful pilot methods.**

During the reporting period, all new 165 female bushmeat sellers from five markets (see Activity 1.2) were given training in various key aspects of biodiversity conservation in Liberia. These included training on the National Wildlife Conservation and Protected Area Management Law, zoonotic disease outbreaks and the commonly traded protected species in Liberia. To ensure compliance with the agreement and with the community volunteer program, the M&E team conducted monitoring activities through data collection across all eight markets with active community volunteers. Based on the outputs we observed that 198 out of all 250 community volunteers (79.2%), including 124 out of 165 (75%) of the new recruited community volunteers complied with the agreement. Of the remaining women who continued to sell bushmeat despite signing the agreement, ten were dropped from the program (at Voinjama) after the probation period in the agreements. The remaining non-complying women from Zwedru (largest market being targeted under the project) have been given an initial warning and are currently being monitored. Despite this setback, 79.2% of sellers complying with the agreement and not selling bushmeat during the reporting period is still a big achievement and highlights the importance of such non-enforcement-based interventions when attempting to tackle illegal wildlife trade.

Evidence: Attendance sheets of training and community volunteer agreements signed, pictures from training, monitoring reports.



**Female bushmeat sellers joining the community volunteer program in Saclepea (left) and one of the female bushmeat sellers who changed to selling pepper and local vegetables (right).**

**Activity 1.4 - Conduct at least 60 awareness-raising events targeting bushmeat markets, consumers, restaurant owners, and school children.**

The community volunteers (female (ex-) bushmeat sellers) are generating a positive attitude toward wildlife conservation through periodic awareness-raising events and behaviour-change activities. During the reporting period from April to September 2023, the community volunteers conducted 81 awareness raising events in 25 communities/local markets in Liberia, thus educating 3,501 people (1,970 women and 1,531 men). Community volunteer awareness-raising was supported by active centralized awareness-raising campaigns or events run by WCF and partners in Liberia, often to coincide with special days dedicated to biodiversity conservation. WCF and partners conducted five national awareness-raising events, including female bushmeat sellers and community ecoguards in Saclepea (200 persons), Zwedru (141), Jalay Town/Sapo National Park (120), Ziah Town/Grebo-Krahn National Park (75) and Kumah Town (75) over the reporting period as part of World Chimpanzee Day celebrations.

Evidence: Work plans and awareness events reporting forms, pictures



**Awareness conducted by community volunteers in Saclepea market (left and middle), and World Chimpanzee Day Celebration in Zwedru, led by the community volunteers and with female ecoguards.**



**World Chimpanzee Day Celebration in Saclepea, also led by the local community volunteers.**

**Output 2. Community Ecoguard Program supported in 7 (proposed) protected areas, with the number of female participants increased.**

**Activity 2.1 - Support 35 Community Ecoguard Teams in seven (proposed) protected areas to carry out regular patrols.**

During the period April to September 2023, twenty-three community ecoguard teams with female community ecoguards were actively patrolling in four of seven (proposed) protected areas: Grebo-Krahn National Park (8 mixed teams), Sapo National Park (3 mixed teams), Gola Forest National Park (10 mixed teams), Lake Piso Sustainable Multiple Use Reserve (2 female teams). In Foya Proposed Protected Area (2 mixed teams) patrols will commence in November 2023 due to delays surrounding national elections. No patrols took place during the reporting period at Krahn-Bassa (8 teams) and Cestos-Senkwehn (5 teams)

Proposed Protected Areas, but are expected to restart in October 2023 and in January/February 2024, respectively. For Krahn-Bassa, this was due to ongoing gazettement activities.

*Evidence:* Monthly or quarterly patrol reports (SMART reports), patrol maps and community ecoguard stipend payment registers.



*Female ecoguards on patrol at Lake Piso*

**Activity 2.2 - Train, equip, and support at least 70 female ecoguards to patrol in seven (proposed) protected areas.**

As of 30 September 2023, 46 female ecoguards are supported by the project and are going on regular patrol in four of seven (Proposed) Protected Areas: Grebo-Krahn National Park (16 women), Sapo National Park (10), Gola Forest National Park (10), Lake Piso Sustainable Multiple Use Reserve (10). In Foya Proposed Protected Area, 10 women were selected, and due to commence patrols in November 2023. Patrols at KBPPA (14 women) and CSPPA are expected to recommence in October 2023, and January/February 2024, respectively.

*Evidence:* SMART monthly or quarterly patrol reports, patrol maps, and community ecoguard stipend payment registers.



*10 new female tourist ecoguards for the Sapo National Park tourism zone who started patrolling in September 2023.*

**Output 3. Capacity of FDA rangers increased at (proposed) protected areas**

**Activity 3.1 - Train 100 FDA rangers from seven (P)PAs in Community Ecoguard Program methods, patrol planning, and wildlife crime law enforcement protocols.**

In addition to 57 rangers trained in year 1, from April to September 2023, 15 FDA rangers were selected as wildlife crime focal points (two per (Proposed) Protected Area) and were joined by five existing members of the Wildlife Crime Task Force for a 4-day training course on wildlife crime investigation and animal handling and release. Participants were trained in evidence collection, handling and processing, wildlife crime laws, confiscation and safe handling of threatened species, and on wildlife crime electronic data collection using Survey 123 and the Wildlife Crime data entry form. Overall, 82 FDA rangers have been trained in ecoguard patrols, law enforcement skills, and SMART data collection. 25 of the FDA staff were trained during this reporting period in addition to the previous 57 trained in year 1.

*Evidence:* Attendance registers from training sessions, attendance on patrols, number of patrols, patrol hours, number of arrests and seizures.



***Training of Wildlife Crime Task Force Focal persons in evidence collection, investigation and animal care.***

***Activity 3.2 - Establish and implement systems for rangers to use the CEP-collected data, and to conduct awareness-raising with the community ecoguards and other community members.***

The Forestry Training Institute graduates (two long-term interns) continue to support the National Community Ecoguard unit at the central FDA office by assisting with training, as well as updating and maintaining the national community ecoguard database twice a week. The two graduates are also now assisting with SMART Mobile refresher training of rangers and ecoguards during active patrols at Lake Piso, and will soon be assisting at Foya Proposed Protected Area as well (November 2023). In the South-East landscape, an additional two FDA rangers and 18 female community ecoguards were trained of which 10 were selected as Sapo Tourist Ecoguards.

Evidence: Community Ecoguard Patrol Manuals, SMART and awareness reports and database.

**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.**

- Non-compliance by few female bushmeat sellers (community volunteers) noted at two of the larger markets (Voinjama and Zwedru). 52 out of 250 women continued to sell bushmeat after being recruited to the community volunteer programme. Acting on information received from confidential informants and the Liberia Marketing Association during project monitoring activities, 10 out of these 52 women were dropped from the program and stipend payments were curtailed. Based on the community volunteer program agreement, the remaining 42 have been warned and appropriate behaviour change communication activities will be introduced to them. It is expected that the target of 300 will still be achieved based on the continuing popularity of the program and the planned recruitment pending at the final two markets (Fishtown and Pleebo).
- During the last six months ongoing gazettelement activities continued to hamper the progress of the community ecoguard program at Krahn-Bassa Proposed Protected Area (KBPPA). However, it is expected that community ecoguard patrols will resume at KBPPA in late October 2023.
- At Sapo National Park, the situation has been resolved and three tourist ecoguard teams (including 10 female ecoguards), are now patrolling every month.
- As FDA's lead partners for Cestos-Senkwehn PPA does not welcome another international NGO in the area, it is planned that WCF will train a national NGO (The Nature Compact) in the community ecoguard methodology, and they will coordinate the community ecoguard team from January/February 2024 onwards.
- In the North-West protected areas, FDA staffing shortages are a major setback at Lake Piso, Gola and Foya PPA. However, we have managed to ensure that patrols have continued despite these shortages, and female ecoguards are due to conduct their first patrols at Foya in November 2023.
- The lack of law enforcement in all Liberian protected areas continues to be a major challenge with FDA. Despite ongoing training and capacity building exercises, and issuing of equipment for patrolling and monitoring activities, rangers continue to operate at a very low capacity and minimal or no enforcement operations are taking place in or around protected areas. In addition, the national election campaign and ongoing process have restricted operations due to absences of staff and lack of facilitation and coordination by FDA during this period. It is hoped that this will return to a more normal state after final results are released.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delays in the finalizing and implementation of the gazette packages for Krahn-Bassa and Foya have also led to large uncertainty and some confusion around FDA and community ecoguard activities within these landscapes. It is hoped that these packages can be approved and gazette finalized before December 2023.</li> </ul>	
<b>3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?</b>	
Discussed with NIRAS:	No
Formal Change Request submitted:	No
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	No
Change request reference if known:	

<b>4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)</b> Actual spend: ██████████	
<b>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 2024)?</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Estimated underspend: £	
<b>4c. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully.</b> Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.  <b>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 if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.</b>  <b>NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.</b>	
<b>5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?</b>	
No	

**If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.**

**All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.**

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

Please send your **completed report by email** to [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com). The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**