

## 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>	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 Organisation</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>	Hedwige Boesch-Achermann
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	30 October 2024 (reporting period 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024) HYR3
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<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>

**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).**

**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 in 10 major Liberian cities at the beginning and end of project*

Post intervention bushmeat surveys at all 10 markets were carried out from April-September 2024 by the same graduates from the Forestry Training Institute that participated in the initial market surveys. This ensured consistency in the approach and data collection. The data collection form for the post-survey was slightly adapted and students once again used the Kobocollect Toolbox software on smartphones to record data at markets. A total of 262 women were interviewed across the 10 markets with 248 of these women having been part of the community volunteer program (former bushmeat sellers). Notably, 91% of market sellers interviewed had successfully converted/transitioned to a new legal business and said they would not go back to selling bushmeat. This is a very high success rate for the community volunteer program and shows the potential value in short-term incentive-based approaches such as this. An additional 14 women interviews were identified as new sellers, who had not been part of the community volunteer program. These women were recorded mainly selling duiker and monkey meat; however, several pangolin sales were also noted, as well as one chimpanzee meat record.

The detailed analysis of the survey, as well as the comparison with the initial survey in 2022 will be presented in the final project report.

Evidence: Final bushmeat survey report and analysis

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

A total of 300 women were recruited over the course of the project across the 10 markets. However, during the period of agreement, the frequent monitoring through the Liberia Marketing Association and project staff showed that 30 women continued to sell bushmeat up to the third month of the 6-month agreement, and therefore were dropped from the program. Thus, in total, 270 community volunteers successfully transformed from selling bushmeat to legal businesses, representing 90% of the volunteers. The women who transformed to other businesses largely remained in the markets, but changed to the sale of other products. Of the 30 non-compliant community volunteers, 20 were from Zwedru and 10 from Voinjama. The overall information is summarized below.

*Table 1: Number of female bushmeat sellers/community volunteers, dropped or certified per market*

Market location	Target	Dropped	Certified
Buchanan	20	0	20
Bomi Wood	30	0	30
Voinjama	35	10	25
Saclepea	30	0	30
Tappita	35	0	35
ITI	30	0	30
Greenville	20	0	20
Pleebo	30	0	30
Fishtown	20	0	20
Zwedru	50	20	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>270</b>

Evidence: Signed Community Volunteer Agreements; 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

A total of exactly 300 women were trained and recruited as community volunteers. All 300 women were trained in the conservation and protected species laws, risks of disease and how to conduct their own market driven awareness of the illegality of bushmeat trade. The training was led by the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) and supported by WCF technical staff. It was based on successful models used under previous successful community volunteer projects.

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

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

A total of 113 awareness-raising events were conducted by and with the community volunteers, which far exceeds the target of 60. For the reporting period, 11 awareness events were carried out, including with support from the ex-bushmeat sellers drama team during the certification of the community volunteers

Evidence: Work plans and awareness events reporting forms.



*Certification program with ex-bushmeat sellers who successfully changed to legal businesses in Saclepea (left – with representative of the British Embassy), Bomiwood (middle) and Zwedru (right)*

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

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

A total of 40 community ecoguard teams patrolled over the reporting period. A breakdown of number of teams per location is given in Table 2 below.

*Table 2: Number of community ecoguard teams and number of female ecoguards per conservation area*

<b>Location</b>	<b># of teams</b>	<b># of female ecoguards</b>
Foya PPA	3	10
Lake Piso	5	11
Gola	10	10
Grebo Krahn	8	16
Krahn-Bassa (Kwa)	10	14
Sapo	4	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>74</b>

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

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

A total of 74 female ecoguards were active during the reporting period (Tab. 2). Though illegal activities have reduced over the course of the project, in the absence of law enforcement by FDA, they remain high at most locations, with Lake Piso recording a significantly higher number of illegal activities due to its status as a multiple use reserve.

*Evidence:* SMART patrol reports, patrol maps, and community ecoguard stipend payments registered.



*Community ecoguards on patrol at Lake Piso (left and middle) and snares collected during ecoguard patrols in Gola (right).*

**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.***

No specific training or capacity building activities were carried out over the reporting period. However, successful missions were carried out by rangers in collaboration with the FDA Wildlife Confiscation Unit that led to confiscation, arrests and successful convictions in 12 wildlife crime cases.

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

***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.***

WCF long-term interns continued to keep the central SMART database at FDA updated and worked with FDA staff to enter and save patrol data for all six conservation areas. SMART reports continue to be submitted to the Head of the Focal Unit at FDA as well with the intention that they can be used to plan actual law enforcement actions on the ground.

*Evidence:* Use of National SMART database, SMART reports

**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.**

Unexpected conflicts between FDA and few local communities in the southern area of Grebo-Krahn National Park led to reduced patrolling efforts. The continuous absence of regular law enforcement in all proposed and established protected areas leads to a continuously high level of illegal activities, which cannot be addressed by the community ecoguards alone. Likewise, the continuous delays in the gazettement of all proposed protected areas in Liberia and the looming threat of encroachment by industrial mining and commercial logging, supported by FDA and the Ministry of Mines and Energy, indicate that conservation has reduced priority for the current government. However, as the project is in its last stages and the women empowerment has successfully happened, no impact is expected on the project.

**3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with NIRAS:	No
Formal Change Request submitted:	No
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	No
Change Request reference if known: <i>If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome</i>	

**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  Estimated underspend: £

**4c. If you expect and 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. 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?**  
No

**6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report.** If your project was subject to an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment please use this space to comment on any changes to international human rights risks, and to address any additional mitigations outlined in your offer letters. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.

Comment from reviewers for last annual report and response:

**1) Provide details on the mechanisms in place for collaboration across project partners and stakeholders and how such partnerships could be maintained beyond the initial period of funding.**  
*There are existing partner agreements or (draft) MoUs between the project leader and project partners, and collaborations do not only exist for this, but also for other projects, some of which will continue for several years. Partners are automatically part of all activities and decision-making and partnerships can be considered long-term partnerships that already existed prior to this project. Regular coordination and work planning meetings also go beyond the content of this project. While we hope to get additional funding to expand the successful approaches of this project, we are very confident that the end of the project will not have any impact on the existing collaboration.*

**2) Conduct a self-assessment against the GESI scale and provide more context on how specific GESI challenges are being addressed by interventions. If time and resources allow, increase female participation in FDA training sessions.**

*We are kindly asking for a more in-depth self-assessment to be part of the final project report. Obviously, project activities are largely focused on women only, showing the strong GESI focus, and for the community volunteer program and the female ecoguards, we did not encounter any major challenges. However, it is correct that the vast majority of FDA rangers and the Wildlife Crime Task Force members are men, some of which are beyond retirement age – these are government employees and in the absence of support from central government, FDA is not able to pay for the retirement and to recruit more women and youth. This problem obviously cannot be resolved by this project and NGO partners. As suggested, we are trying to advocate for an increase of female participation in FDA training sessions, but if these female rangers and law enforcement officer simply do not exist at this stage, our influence is limited. In the final GESI assessment, we wish to also include FDA, in order to discuss how the consideration for GESI can also be increased from their side, not only at the level of the local communities.*

**3) Provide detailed information on compliance measurement and factors contributing to non-compliance amongst ex-bushmeat sellers to inform learning and future scalability.**

*Regular (unannounced) monitoring of the ex-bushmeat sellers, in collaboration with the Liberia Marketing Association allows us to get a clear and true picture of the activities of the women. For the past 5 years, in this and in previous projects, we did not observe any women who stopped selling bushmeat and then re-started again. This means, once the change of business happened, it was permanent. For those women who were not compliant (30 out of 270 in this project), they never stopped selling bushmeat, which we could observe through our regular monitoring visits in the markets.*

*We observed that those women who did not comply were in only 2 out of 10 markets, and we believe that the level of involvement and attitude of the respective market superintendents representing the Liberia Marketing Association (LMA) in each market plays a key role. In several markets, the LMA acted very strictly and even completely stopped allowing the sale of bushmeat. But in the 2 markets where we observed the non-compliant women (Voinjema/Lofa County and Zwedru/Grand Gedeh), we believe the market superintendents were reluctant to really engage with the project and may also not have been very serious when the female bushmeat sellers were selected for the community volunteer program. The non-compliance of some women in the 2 markets is being discussed with the LMA President, in order to see how this could be addressed with the respective market superintendents and how the leadership and the compliance with existing laws can be improved.*

*Similarly, the level of law enforcement has an impact on the compliance. We observed that the compliance is higher in areas where the bushmeat sellers made more experience with confiscations, arrests and prosecution. This means, the program and attempts to reduce bushmeat trade are most successful when all three aspects i.e. increased awareness, alternative livelihoods, and law enforcement are combined.*

**4) Develop a comprehensive exit strategy to clarify how project outputs, outcomes, and impact can be sustained and scaled up in the long term, beyond this initial funding period.**

*While a comprehensive exit strategy will be presented with the final project report, at this stage we are certain that the successful approaches identified in this project will be maintained at the local scale through other projects. The community ecoguard program is being implemented at the national level, and WCF and partners are continuously looking for support in order to ensure the continuation of this program. Currently, in the absence of regular law enforcement patrols conducted by FDA rangers, the surveillance patrols conducted by the ecoguards are the only form of regular patrols in Liberia, and the importance of these patrols is generally recognized. Likewise, the community volunteer program with female bushmeat sellers is re-starting in Monrovia and Paynesville, with funding from another donor. However, we are seeking additional funding in order to scale up the successful approaches with more stakeholders relevant in the Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) and in more areas, as we believe this current project has been extremely successful and approaches can indeed support the successful fight at a much larger scale, nationally and internationally.*

**5) Given the project is due to close this year, it is recommended to reassess project risks and associated mitigation strategies, particularly related to the reasons for initial delays and risks to the sustainability of the project beyond project closure.**

*Initial risks identified were 1) low financial management capacity of partners, 2) the risk of (sexual) harassment during mixed ecoguard patrols (with female and male team members), 3) large number of partners involved leading to miscommunication/difficult coordination, 4) low capacity of partners and lack of passion and interest, and 5) delays caused by presidential elections.*

*When re-assessing the project risks and also the level of successful project implementation and level of completion of project indicators, we are pleased and confident to say that all potential risks were successfully and effectively mitigated and that also some initial delays did not have any longer-term impact in the project. The project was successfully completed, with numbers that go beyond the initial targets. If a more detailed answer is required, we can address each risk in detail in the final project report.*

## Checklist for submission

<b>For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you <b>responded to any additional feedback</b> (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
If not already submitted, have you attached your <b>risk register</b> ?	
<b>For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you responded to <b>feedback from your latest Annual Report Review</b> ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	yes
<b>For All Projects</b>	
Include your <b>project reference</b> in the subject line of submission email.	yes
Submit to <a href="mailto:BCFs-Report@niras.com">BCFs-Report@niras.com</a> .	yes
Have you <b>clearly highlighted any confidential information</b> within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	
Have you reported against the most <b>up to date information for your project</b> ?	yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	