



**BIODIVERSITY
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



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	IWT126
Project title	Strengthening measures to combat Illegal Wildlife Trade in the W-Arly-Pendjari landscape.
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Benin
Lead Organisation	Zoological Society of London
Partner(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. General Directorate of Water, Forests and Hunting (DGEFC)2. The Forensic Science Service for the City of London Police3. Kings College London (KCL)4. Initiative pour la Préservation de la Vie (IPV-ONG)
Project Leader	<i>Alain LUSHIMBA</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>April 2025 – September 2025</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).

During the first half of Year 2, the project focused on advancing activities under Outputs 2 and 3:

- **Output 2: Community-based livelihoods and awareness:** Efforts continued to expand income-generating initiatives in villages bordering the W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) complex. These activities were closely linked to raising awareness about the impacts of illegal wildlife trade (IWT), strengthening relationships between communities and protected areas, and promoting sustainable livelihood alternatives.
- **Output 3: Strengthening law enforcement:** Capacity-building activities were implemented to enhance the ability of law enforcement agencies to detect, investigate, and successfully prosecute wildlife crime cases.

Output 2

Following the community initiative support campaigns launched in Year 1, four new village groups. Danon, Yakimotoko, Tiffi, and Titedisu, located on the periphery of Pendjari National Park, received targeted equipment to initiate income-generating activities. The selection process mirrored that of previous phases, with validation carried out by local authorities, the Atacora forestry administration, and ZSL, ensuring transparency and alignment with community priorities.

Each group received equipment tailored to their chosen livelihood focus, including solar-powered motor pumps, cultivation and irrigation tools, rice milling and husking machines, and accessories for cereal and legume processing. Specifically:

- **Danon and Yakimotoko** focused on market gardening (onion, chili),
- **Tiffi** specialized in rice processing,
- **Titedisu** engaged in cereal and legume milling.

These interventions build on the momentum of Year 1, reinforcing local ownership and contributing to diversified, sustainable livelihoods in buffer zone communities. In total, 79 active members, including 54 women, benefited from this support.

The installation of equipment and launch of activities also provided an opportunity for awareness sessions led by the NGO IPV. These sessions aimed to:

- Enhance understanding of Pendjari Park's natural resources,
- Clarify existing laws protecting these resources,
- Promote stakeholder roles in combating illegal wildlife trade within their professional and community environments.

Additionally, in April 2025, a solar-powered water borehole was installed at the Korogone Igari A and B primary schools near W National Park. This initiative, which benefits both students and surrounding communities, aims to improve access to potable water while strengthening conservation awareness in schools, fostering closer ties between conservation actors and local populations.

In August 2025, twenty participants (including twelve women) from ten supported village groups took part in a two-day training on entrepreneurial and financial management of community initiatives. The training also introduced the WAP Complaints Management Mechanism (CMM), equipping participants with:

- Foundational knowledge in entrepreneurship and financial management
- Practical tools to structure and sustain their initiatives
- A clear understanding of the CMM's purpose, procedures, and importance in promoting inclusive and participatory protected area management, while addressing human rights abuses, harassment, and sexual exploitation risks in conservation projects.

Finally, a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mission was conducted in August 2025 across ten beneficiary villages surrounding W and Pendjari parks to assess the implementation of community-based income-generating activities. Key findings included:

- **Income generation:** 60% of beneficiary groups had begun generating income, particularly those engaged in processing activities, with some earning up to £200 per month.
- **Social impact:** The initiatives positively impacted a broad segment of the population, including dependents of group members, underscoring their potential to enhance community livelihoods.
- **Equipment utilization:** Performance varied, with the strongest results observed among groups that received equipment promptly and operated in areas with high local demand.
- **Adoption rate:** High adoption rates (80%–100%) reflected strong community ownership and engagement.

Output 3:

From 11 to 12 June 2025, ZSL, in collaboration with the General Directorate of Water, Forests and Hunting of Benin, organised a training and exchange workshop for magistrates. The event brought together twelve magistrates from various courts across Benin with the objective of strengthening their capacity to investigate and prosecute wildlife-related offences. The training focused on enhancing skills in legal procedures, case management, and investigative techniques. Key topics included:

- An overview of the legislative and regulatory framework for wildlife protection, with emphasis on the CITES Law (Law No. 2021-04 of 08 July 2021), which governs the protection and international trade of endangered species in Benin.
- Experience sharing on combating wildlife crime within the national context.
- Discussions on the potential use of forensic evidence and emerging techniques for adjudicating wildlife crimes in the region.

Later in June 2025, ZSL's Law Enforcement and Wildlife Trade team conducted a four-day "Training of Trainers" workshop in Ouidah, targeting law enforcement personnel from various agencies, including Forestry, Customs, Police, and Forensic Police. Sixteen delegates participated, fifteen of whom had previously attended ZSL's Year 1 training.

The workshop aimed to strengthen institutional training capacity in intelligence gathering, investigations, and first response. Participants were introduced to adult learning methodologies, course planning, and practical administrative skills. A review of prior knowledge demonstrated strong retention among attendees. Each participant developed and delivered a 15-minute training module, which was evaluated through structured feedback and formal assessments, 95% met the expected standards. To support continued peer-to-peer learning, a WhatsApp mentoring group was established. Additionally, equipment procured by the project, along with forensic tools donated by the City of London Police and the Forensic Science Service, was distributed to relevant agencies based on operational needs and practical application.

Between April and September 2025, significant progress was made across the WAP landscape through community engagement and livelihood initiatives. The provision of equipment, capacity building, and awareness-raising efforts strengthened local participation, improved community collaboration, and enhanced natural resource protection, fostering ownership and long-term sustainability. Concurrently, targeted training for judicial and law enforcement actors in Benin reinforced national capacity to combat illegal wildlife trade. These efforts improved technical competencies and inter-agency coordination, contributing to a more effective legal and operational framework for conservation law enforcement. The quality of training has been recognised by the Forestry Department, Customs Department, and the Scientific Police, who have requested ZSL's support in further developing their college curriculum.

This positions ZSL as a preferred partner to drive strategic-level change in how new recruits, future leaders, and subject matter specialists are trained in the coming years. It marks a shift from building capacity among a limited number of enforcement staff to embedding skills development within national systems, reaching all future officers.

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.

1. Community engagement and adoption of alternative livelihoods

A positive shift in community dynamics has been observed across several villages, with increasing uptake of income-generating activities (IGAs). Initiatives such as soybean processing, milling of spices and cereals, rice parboiling and marketing, and vegetable production have gained traction. In parallel, communities have shown stronger support for efforts to combat illegal wildlife trade, notably through active participation in awareness campaigns conducted in schools and villages.

Lesson learned: Strengthening alternative livelihoods and fostering community involvement in local governance are effective levers for reducing illegal wildlife trade.

Impact: These developments align with the project's objectives and may justify a potential budget reallocation to conduct a Basic Necessities Survey (BNS) by the end of the project. This would provide a credible assessment of the project's impact on household livelihoods and well-being and help monitor changes over time and across villages.

2. Challenges facing IGAs

Despite growing interest in IGAs, several obstacles have emerged: lack of value chain structuring, limited market access, low entrepreneurial capacity among some beneficiaries, and dependency on external inputs.

Lesson learned: To ensure sustainability, IGAs must be supported through targeted training, marketing assistance, and stronger coordination with local economic actors.

Impact: These challenges may slow down the expected medium-term benefits and call for adjustments in capacity-building activities, with a moderate budgetary impact.

3. Capacity building for judicial and law enforcement agents

As part of efforts to combat IWT, Beninese law enforcement agents received training as trainers, enabling them to disseminate best practices within their units. Additionally, magistrates were sensitised to the challenges of wildlife crime, particularly regarding prosecution and sentencing. These trainings have strengthened the technical and legal capacities of key actors, fostering better coordination between security forces and the judicial system. They contribute to improving the enforcement chain for wildlife related offences.

Lesson learned: Training law enforcement and judicial actors in Benin has strengthened the fight against wildlife crime by improving prosecution and coordination. Empowering agents as

trainers and sensitising magistrates has reinforced the legal framework, enhanced deterrence, and ensured sustainable impact through institutional partnerships.

Impact: The legal and operational framework has been reinforced, with a positive expected effect on deterrence and prosecution. The budgetary impact remains controlled thanks to institutional partnerships.

5. Bushmeat detection tool: Innovation hindered by lack of funding

A presumptive field test based on COVID-style lateral flow kits was planned to help distinguish legal domestic meat from illegal wild meat. This tool was designed to enable enforcement teams to quickly rule out legal meat and prioritise suspected bushmeat for confirmatory testing, while also supporting legal trade for local communities. Despite its strategic relevance, the test kits were not produced due to insufficient funding.

Lesson learned: Even low-cost, high-impact innovations require early and targeted resource mobilisation. Relying solely on general donor funding without a dedicated financing strategy can delay or prevent implementation.

Impact on the project:

- **Project objectives:** The absence of this tool limits the ability of law enforcement agents to effectively detect and deter illegal bushmeat trade. It also reduces opportunities to support legal trade and build trust with local communities, key pillars of the project's conservation and livelihood goals.
- **Operational effectiveness:** Law enforcement agents continue to rely on slower, less targeted methods, which may reduce the overall effectiveness of wildlife crime interventions.
- **Budget and timeline:** As this activity was contingent on additional funding, the core budget remains unchanged. However, the timeline for deploying this innovation is indefinitely postponed, and its contribution to project outcomes remains unrealised unless alternative funding is secured.
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5. Heightened security risks in the WAP

Security incidents, including the presence of armed groups and uncontrolled cross-border movements, have restricted access to certain parts of the landscape.

Lesson learned: It is crucial to integrate a more rigorous security risk analysis into activity planning. This includes developing safety protocols, strengthening partnerships with local authorities, and ensuring flexibility in team deployment.

Impact: Activity schedules have been revised and human resources redeployed to safer areas. While this does not entail major budgetary consequences, it requires a strategic adaptation of operational priorities.

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: *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: £

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)?

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?

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

N/A

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.

The project implemented in the WAP landscape is subject to an overseas security and justice assessment,.

6b. Have any concerns or allegations relating to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment been reported in the past 6 months?

Suspensions or allegations related to safeguarding concerns should be reported to ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk

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.

No. 3

Section 8 of this Review notes that the Annual Report and application refer to GESI principles as a guide to project implementation, but do not provide specific detail on how each principle was applied during planning and execution in this reporting period. Greater specificity is requested in future reports.

1. Participation of women in law enforcement training The BLET and LEAP training sessions integrated GESI principles by actively promoting female participation, although representation remains limited (12% in October 2024, rising to 25% in June 2025). Women were involved in practical exercises, encouraged to speak freely, and provided positive feedback. The target for future sessions is to reach at least 40% female participation.

2. Economic and social inclusion of women in the traditional context of the WAP landscape, women often face barriers to accessing resources and participating in decision-making. The income-generating activities (IGA) support programme prioritised their inclusion: 64% of members across the ten beneficiary village associations are women, with eight associations led by women. Activities such as vegetable gardening and soybean processing were tailored to their interests and availability. Community awareness sessions were scheduled at convenient times and held in accessible locations, using local languages and formats suitable for low-literacy groups to ensure inclusive participation and open dialogue.

No. 5

The Annual Report notes that laboratory work requires additional funding for implementation. The latest log frame states that the kits are expected "with initial delivery at end of Year 2," but does not provide information on funding availability or actions planned for the new reporting year to progress this. An update is requested in the next report.

Laboratory work to develop presumptive field tests based on COVID-style lateral flow kits requires an additional in external funding. This amount could not be secured within the expected timeframe. As of now, no funding has been mobilised, increasing the risk of not achieving the expected output.

Consequently, the start of laboratory work has been postponed indefinitely, and its contribution to project results remains unrealised unless alternative funding is identified.