

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 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 including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	IWT134
Project title	Reducing medicinal plant illegal harvesting through cultivation and good governance
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	South Africa
Lead Organisation	The Endangered Wildlife Trust
Partner(s)	South African National Biodiversity Institute
Project leader	Jenny Botha
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	<i>Not yet on blog or website</i>

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 M&E 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.

Unanticipated staff changes in partner organisations resulted in a further delay of the project start date but the BCF funding has made it possible for us to ensure continuity to their community partners. The project is consequently still in the onboarding phase, and we are in the process of staff recruitment, procurement, and other logistics.

A key member of an additional partner organisation and member of our Medicinal Plant Working Group also recently resigned from her job. There is uncertainty at this stage regarding the continuity of her previous projects with the organisation, which included the mass propagation of several medicinal species, so we are seeking alternative suppliers to bridge the gap if necessary.

Engagement with traditional healers, traders, and harvesters is progressing well. Committee members of three major trader associations in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces were

extremely supportive of the proposed project during initial meetings, as were the government agencies who work with them. The associations are now in the process of canvassing members for approval for future engagement.

Gauteng Conservation officials have also greatly streamlined the permitting process, and we are currently applying for permits for donation of the first seedlings to traders in Gauteng.

In Limpopo, a group of harvesters have also expressed interest in participating, and are assisting with the identification of medicinal species at local level. Although there is an extensive literature on the ethnobotanic species utilised by diverse ethnic groups in South Africa, local names vary, and it is important to confirm species that traditional healers are using as far as possible.

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.

As is the case with any partnership or organisation, the loss of a team member who has been integral to various project activities can be challenging. To reduce these impacts, we are continuing to expand our networks of support for various project activities and outputs.

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/ No Yes
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes/ No Yes (two)
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes/ No Approval has been received for one change request (reference CR24-063), we are waiting for confirmation for the second, submitted on

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*

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)

Actual spend: £ [REDACTED] (see attached)

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.

- *Mitigations in place if SAPS are not responsive to training and relationship with community is poor.*

As far as possible, we are developing projects in areas in which we have sound relationships with communities. If a community does not support the approach, we would need to discuss the way forward with local leaders and/or potential project participants as it is futile and potentially dangerous to force projects onto people. Apart from wasted resources, this type of approach could heighten or create conflict. My key guiding principle is, to the best of my ability, to strive to work according to the tenet “First, do no harm” and to leave people better off than they were before we started working there.

Some SAPS officials may not open to training, or available, for various reasons including workload. In collaborative problem-solving approaches such as this project, we work with those who are aligned to the approach. There are many scenarios in which one group may not be on board, but others are, so each situation can only be evaluated in context. We are already discussing training with SAPS station commanders in some areas, however, and will move forward organically, adapting our approach to local circumstances in each area.

- *Supply of seedlings – where will seedlings be sourced from? Will this generate money? And what is planned for funds obtained from sale of seedlings to healers?*

In the initial phase of the project, we are procuring seedlings from commercial nurseries, including those owned by community entrepreneurs. As seedlings become available through community growers, including traditional healers, traders, and harvesters, we will also purchase seedlings from them as this will support local livelihoods.

We are donating seedlings as many people cannot afford to buy them and we are aiming for inclusivity. Furthermore, traders and harvesters need to see the benefit of cultivation before they invest their own money into seedlings. In past projects, those who could afford to buy seedlings often did so in parallel to donations. Over the long-term, traders, harvesters, and traditional healers, and others will start exchanging, and buying and selling seedlings and materials amongst themselves. This is the purpose of the project.

- *Impact of project on genetic diversity of wild populations*

There is highly unlikely to be any impact on genetic diversity of wild populations as we are confining cultivation to gardens and agricultural spaces and no enrichment planting will be implemented in wild populations.

- *Unclear why harvesters will engage since there does not appear to be an incentive for them to do so, and the focus is on growing plants with healers*

There appears to be a misconception over the focus of the project. We are working with all key stakeholders, including traders, harvesters, and traditional healers. Harvesters in one area have already expressed interest in participating in Limpopo. In Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, the traders themselves asked whether harvesters could also be included.

- Further details on the exit strategy, specifically regarding ongoing mass propagation of seedlings past the project time frame. Is maintaining relations through social media and occasional visits sufficient?*

This is the first phase of the upscaling of the pilot demonstrating the feasibility of the project over the past four years. For the project to succeed, we will need to expand to additional areas and communities over time, and continue to support those already involved through access to seedlings and maintaining relations. We also work closely with other organisations in each area to diversify support and synergise resources.
- In terms of training on wildlife legislation, is lack of knowledge a barrier to compliance or are there other barriers*

In some cases, yes.

There are also numerous other barriers depending on the sector, circumstances, offender attributes, etc. In the medicinal plant sector, lack of access to legal sources of low-cost medicinal plants is a primary driver.

Where an individual or organisation wishes to break the law, knowledge on its own will of course not deter them. To curb criminal conduct, barriers to committing the crime need to outweigh prospective benefits. South African levels of recidivism are unfortunately one of the highest in the world, so addressing the root causes of the motivation for offending is key, alongside effective law enforcement. In the case of medicinal plants, our objective is to make it easier to comply with legislation than it is to break the law. Law enforcement has been proven over decades to be ineffective in curbing the high volumes of material that are harvested from the wild.
- The logframe has been edited as per reviewer comment (attached).

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to any additional feedback (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.	Yes
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	Yes
For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	X
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	X
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	<i>None necessary</i>
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	X
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	X