



**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: 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 139
<b>Project title</b>	Towards Zero Poaching in the Greater Virunga Landscape
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	WWF UK
<b>Partner(s)</b>	WWF Uganda Country Office, WWF DRC, Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration GVTC), International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)
<b>Project leader</b>	Dervla Dowd
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	31/10/24 (HYR1)
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	N/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).**

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.

The project started on the 1st of August 2024 after being formally informed that the project was successful on the 27th of June 2024. As such, the first two months of the project have mainly focused on setting up the grant agreements (and developing the ToRs for each downstream partner) following the planned delivery chain; and developing and agreeing the ways of working as a large group of partners across three countries working in the Greater Virunga Landscape (GVL). WWF UCO, the lead in-country partner, conducted due diligence and compliance assessments for each downstream partner prior to issuing them project agreements. A Core Project Team has been set up with representatives from each partner, who have been meeting biweekly to set up the ways of working and begin to plan project delivery. A Monitoring & Evaluation Group has also been set up to review the project logframe, develop plans to complete the missing baselines, and develop the M&E Framework. Once the updates have been completed, and baselines added, this group will meet quarterly to review progress, update indicators and evaluate delivery towards outputs and outcomes. Additionally, Communications, Environmental & Social Safeguarding, and Financial Focal Points from each partner have been identified and introduced so as to facilitate working in a transboundary partnership and to ensure cost effectiveness in project delivery. A 'roles and responsibilities' matrix has been developed capturing each organisation's project staff members. Additionally, the recruitment of the full time Project Officer in WWF UCO has been completed, with the staff member starting on the 7th of October 2024. Their CV is provided in Annex 1.

At the activity level, there is little progress while we set up the grants and ways of working. The main focus has been on planning for the inception meeting and launch of the project. The meeting will take place in Rubavu, Rwanda on the 22nd and 23rd of October. The two days will focus on:

- Developing a detailed work plan with timings, roles and responsibilities, and deliverables
- Finalising the logframe and the M&E Framework, adding updated baselines where known and planning for completing the collation of baselines before the end of Q3.
- Reviewing the risk matrix, updating where needed and ensuring mitigation actions are in place
- Reviewing WWF's Environmental and Social safeguarding policies, how they relate to PSEAH, and ensuring all partners adhere to them.
- Approving a communications plan to promote visibility of the project and ensure coordination between all partners

A third day will bring together major stakeholders in the transboundary region, including representatives from the British High Commission/FCDA, national protected area authorities and other law enforcement authorities, to formally launch the project and ensure consultation and input from participants.

Lastly, the Risk Register has been updated and is provided in Annex 2. Please note the Risk Register contains sensitive information and is therefore confidential and should not be shared on the website.

A full change request will be submitted by the end of Q3 to reflect any major changes made to the implementation timetable, logframe and budget.

**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.**

Some minor delays have occurred following discussions on the delivery chain and how to be most cost-effective and efficient in project delivery between different partners. Solutions have been identified and now the grant agreement between WWF UK and WWF UCO has been signed, while WWF UCO is drafting all downstream grant agreements and conducting partner due diligence. The long delivery chain of partners was identified as a risk during project development, but all partners are working together to minimise further impact. Current delays do not affect the proposed project outputs and outcomes.

Because of these initial delays, we can only report on WWF UK expenditure to date. As such spend is low, but the project team are making plans to ensure that project expenditure increases significantly in Q3 and Q4 to avoid any underspend in Year 1 of the project, following the agreed project implementation timetable which has a lot more activity implementation and spend foreseen.

The core team will review project progress towards the end of Q3 and submit a formal Change Request if any major delays or changes are identified, though we do not currently anticipate this.

**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:

Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance:

Yes

Change Request reference if known: CR24-039

**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?**

Due to the delayed start and further delays we have been dealing with related to signing grant agreements with the downstream partners, we have not been able to include partner expenditure in the current Financial report, but will include all expenses in the Year 1 Annual Financial Report.

**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.

**Response to feedback from reviewers:**

- **You should consider if it would be beneficial to secure more in-country law enforcement support:** The Project Team have taken this feedback on board and agree that wider law enforcement engagement is key to project success. Non-protected area law enforcement agencies, such as customs and public prosecution agencies have been invited to the project launch to begin engagement. Going forward, the project team, led by WCS and GVTC, will first identify a full list of organisations to approach and then begin further engagement.
- **When completing your risk register (due with your first half year report), please ensure you include corruption in your assessment:** the project team have added Corruption as a risk in the risk register (See ANNEX 2). Other risks have also been reviewed and updated.
- **Please clarify how the IWT Dashboard ownership and maintenance will function and be embedded institutionally for long term sustainability:** The IWT Dashboard will be owned by the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration and will be embedded in its Centre of Excellence (CoE) - a hub that will ensure data acquisition, storing, analysis and information sharing. The CoE is not yet fully functional, but this project will ensure that it is operational, with the Dashboard acting as a central component. A study has been commissioned by GVTC, with other funding, to explore how data and information can best be captured, generated and shared. The results of this study will inform the set-up of the Dashboard. For the longer-term, a plan will be put in place by the end of year 2 to ensure the sustainability of Dashboard after project funding has ended - though being embedded in the GVTC already provides the right basis.
- **Will the needs assessment exercises be conducted in parallel or rolled out in a phased manner, and what are the implications for budget expenditures if that is the case:** The capacity needs assessments will be conducted in a phased manner, with one session held in each country (whereby if needed, multiple protected areas in one country can be assessed at the same time). To be cost effective, where possible, METT assessment baselines will be conducted at the same time, while baseline data on poaching will also be updated.
- **the logframe should be strengthened:**
- **A number of the suggested short-term community benefits from the project outlined in the narrative of the proposal are not captured by logframe indicators, this should be rectified:** Upon review, we agree that the project outlines a number of community benefits but most of these are in the longer term (and indirect) and as such we would not be monitoring them as part of the project. However, we agree that the logframe is missing an indicator to monitor the benefits to communities from improved and inclusive governance and decision making in IWT in GVL. Upon reflection and further discussion, it was noted that given the mandate of the regional task force who will be dealing with sensitive information, having community members at all meetings would not be feasible. However, a system will be set up to ensure that meetings do happen between the Regional Task Force and communities. As such, the indicators will be updated where needed to reflect this and submitted as part of a formal change request before the end of Q3. This will not affect the overall planned output or outcome.
- **Consider whether some field verification could be added to indicator 0.2 to complement the subjective responses from the various government agency staff to Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool questions;** METT assessments are essentially field level assessments which are scored based on evidence gathered from

the field (without evidence available, a score cannot be provided). While this is an internal process, stakeholders are presented the results as part of the validation process, thereby providing an unbiased overview. Moreover, the reduction of IWT incidences and zero-poaching of key species are proxy indicators which point to improved effectiveness of management.

- **Indicator 0.1 needs to be clarified: is the target 5% increase across all scores or for each score?** Upon further reflection, it was noted GVTC could not be evaluated using the Assessment Framework already in place. As such, we will have to change the indicator and outcome to focus on the three Protected Area Authorities. As for the percentage change, to clarify, we are tracking a percentage increase overall rather than for each element, but will also disaggregate the data per organisation, country and protected area for information and to guide implementation. We are therefore aiming for a 5% annual increase with a total overall increase of 15%. This will be made clearer in our logframe which will be submitted as part of a change request before the end of Q3.
- **Please note a 15% decrease in IWT seizures might be due to less effective (rather than improved) enforcement (indicator 0.5), you should consider if this is the most appropriate way to measure progress:** We agree and have discussed this thoroughly. We expect to see an increase in seizures at the start as the capacity of the agencies is improved to detect seizures. By the end of the project, we are still aiming to see a decrease due to overall improved law enforcement. By looking at poaching and seizure data in conjunction with the capacity data, we will be able to interpret the data in terms of whether the status quo is improving - ie. If we see increased capacity and decreased poaching signs we can assume that IWT is decreasing. Qualitative rationale can be added to the monitoring to rationalise the results. An assumption will be added to the logframe to cover this.

## Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2024)	
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.	Y
If not already submitted, have you attached your <b>risk register</b> ?	Y
For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2024)	
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.	N/A
For All Projects	
Include your <b>project reference</b> in the subject line of submission email.	Y
Submit to <a href="mailto:BCFs-Report@niras.com">BCFs-Report@niras.com</a> .	Y
Have you <b>clearly highlighted any confidential information</b> within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	Y
Have you reported against the most <b>up to date information for your project</b> ?	Y
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Y