



**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>	30-013
<b>Project title</b>	Better livelihoods for shifting-cultivators from conserving and restoring Malagasy forests.
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Madagascar
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Missouri Botanical Garden
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Fikambanana Bongolava Maitso
<b>Project leader</b>	Chris Birkinshaw
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	HYR2, 30 <sup>th</sup> October 2025
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	

**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. Infractions in target forest rapidly detected and controlled by local farmers with help of forest service*

During the reporting period the project site was patrolled daily by ca. 30 rangers during the wet season, and ca. 46 rangers during the dry season (when the risk of fire is much greater). In total they covered 252 km. The following infractions were reported: zero cases of the conversion of forest to agricultural land; 53 charcoal ovens and 196 tree stems cut for the production of charcoal; and 14 cases of wild fire within the protected area. During the dry season the role of the rangers was not merely to detect cases of wild fire but to intervene to prevent it from spreading. In collaboration with the Forest Service, 3 dossiers were submitted to the courts seeking punitive action. One of these resulted in X people being imprisoned.

*Output 2. Farmers launch reconstructive restoration on old fields within protected area*

One of the outputs stated in the proposal was to produce 200,000 seedlings of native trees are required to launch restoration over an area of 75 hectares. These plants were be produced by three “village” nurseries that all remain staffed and operational. These nurseries are located at Bemilolo, Ambalavary, Andranomena I. During the reporting period, a total of 159,550

seedlings were produced. Thus, together with the 145,559 seedlings produced by the end of YR2, in total 305,309 seedlings of 32 different tree species have been produced, significantly exceeding the target of 200,000. The current year's production remain in the nurseries and will be planted during the wet season that normally begins in December.

*Output 3. Best practices for the restoration of degraded dry deciduous forest defined and shared*

During the period 11 to 29 November 2024, the team installed an experiment that aimed to best practice for reconstructive restoration of dry deciduous forest. The trial was designed to compare the survival and growth of seedlings of 4 species of native tree under a range of treatments including: sandy soil versus clay soil, fertiliser versus no fertiliser, and shade versus no shade: in total, using different combinations of these parameters 12 different treatments will be used. In total 960 seedlings of each of the 4 species were planted under each treatment, making a total of 3,840 seedlings used for the experiment. Normally, as a minimum, the performance of the seedlings under the various treatments should be compared after one full year, and hence a serious comparison of species-specific performance in this experiment will be possible only at the end of the year. However preliminary results show best performance across species under conditions of shade and on clay soils. Surprisingly, addition of manure showed no positive effects.

*Output 4. Local farming families gain improved livelihoods through engagement with the project.*

During the 6-month reporting period 293 local people gained total compensation of £17,125 for the services that they provided to the project. The dissociation of this sum between different types of service is summarised in the table below.

However, the ultimate aim of the project is that benefits should be generated from the production and sale of seedlings of native trees. The business plan to guide this work has now been produced and has been submitted to the appropriate Malagasy authorities for validation. This validation is necessary because the rules about exploitation of natural resources (here seeds) in protected areas are strict. To date the project has provided seedlings or seeds to just two clients.

Beneficiaries of the Project			
Type of employment	YR3 April au September 2025		
	Number (Male/Female)	Sum received in MGA	Sum received in GBP
Head of Ranger groups	4 (4/0)		
Rangers	58 (58/0)		
Head of nurseries	4 (3/1)		
Nursery women/men	27 (9/18)		
Community fire fighters	150 (119/31)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>243/50</b>		

**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. Wild fires are an increasing problem for the conservation of dry deciduous forest throughout Madagascar, and the forests of Bongolava hills are no exception. In the landscape surrounding the protected area wild fires began early in 2025 with the first reports of significant fires in August, with even more in September. Typically the worst season for such fires is October and November, with the risk diminishing once the wet season begins. To reduce the impact of the wild fires on remaining native vegetation within the protected area we used some of the budget lines available for rangers to support community fire patrols and fire-fighting efforts.

2. The review of the YR2 report stated “...the project’s main challenge for its remaining year: to leave a legacy of a small but embedded supply chain which will outlast the project and become part of the income generation ecosystem for the project area in the Bongolava Forest.” This is indeed the main challenge and whether or not it can be met will determine whether this project qualifies as a success or a failure. To date the project has only attracted two clients which is disappointing. In part this meagre result is because the original assumption that there are enough reforestation projects in the area to provide ample buyers for seedlings has proved false. and rather, because of cost of transporting seedlings, we now perceive that the market is for the sale of high quality seeds that can be propagated at the client’s restoration site. In response to this new understanding we submitted a change request that would allow seed storage facilities to be constructed next to the nursery.

**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: reply from Eilidh Young 19/10/25

**4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)**

Actual spend: [REDACTED]

**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?**

None

**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.

Activities

*1. COS has a seat on the project Board but no statement is made regarding oversight that has been provided during the reporting period. Information on this would provide confidence that the project does enjoy more guidance and oversight than two NGOs working together in isolation.*

A meeting of the Committee on Orientation and Evaluation was held in Mampikony for two days from 09 to 10 April 2025. The minutes of this meeting are available.

*2. Forest Service whose staff dealt with them (with the updated logframe noting the newly bad relationship with the Forest Service, resolution of which is noted as an action for Year).*

*3. Activity 2.4 – propagation of 40,000 seedlings of native woody plants by each nursery – has fallen somewhat short, with a total of 145,759 which the Annual report notes will be made up in Year 3. It would be useful for a Half Year Report update on that.*

Please see the update above: the project has now produced 305,309 seedlings, well exceeding the target of 200,000.

*4. The project expresses confidence in producing a further 90,000 seedlings, enabling another 38 ha to be out-planted, delivering a total of some 85 ha. by project end. Again, project acknowledging of the need for acceleration in Year 3 is welcome and a Half Year update would*

*be appropriate on progress on this.*

Please see update above.

*5. To contribute towards sharing of best practice, the project designed an experimental protocol to compare survival and growth of four local seedling species set out under Activities, above. This began only in the first quarter of 2025, so results are expected in Year 3. Again the project is now in its final year, a Half Year update would be welcome.*

Please see Output 3 above.

*6. Matters of real concern: first, the relationship with the Forest Service because of the long term negative impact if their positive engagement (including after the project) is not forthcoming and, second, local farming family views towards FBM some of which, according to the project's survey, have very clear reservation about what FBM is trying to achieve and their motivation. Working to improve these attitudes must be a priority for the project in Year 3 if it is to have good chance of durability.*

## Outcomes

*7. This Review assesses that the project is advancing towards its Outcome but against strong headwinds (Forest Service; local scepticism; high seedling propagation and sale ambitions; limited FBM resources) which do have the potential to prevent meeting all its targets and/or make it difficult to sustain after project end.*

Sadly, we have to say that this evaluation is reasonable. While FBM's relationship with the Forest Service has improved (they are now treating the infractions detected by the patrols) this is mostly due to pressure of local staff from above and not due to a change in heart. While those locals who have found employment through the project support the conservation of the protected area, those who were not so employed resent the restrictions placed on their exploitation of natural resources within the projected area. Widespread local support will depend on either providing significant widespread benefits to a critical mass of those hosting the protected area or the strict and unforgiving application of the law. The first option, while most desirable, would require massive support for smart development in the landscape, which, given international cuts in support for development seems unlikely. While the seedling production ambitions have been met we have yet to successfully access significant and lucrative markets for seedlings. The diversification to the sale of seeds offers the potential to develop simpler value chains (seeds can be dispatched much more easily than seedlings).

## 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.	
If not already submitted, have you attached your <b>risk register</b> ?	
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.	X
For All Projects	
Include your <b>project reference</b> in the subject line of submission email.	X
Submit to <a href="mailto:BCFs-Report@niras.com">BCFs-Report@niras.com</a> .	X
Have you <b>clearly highlighted any confidential information</b> within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	X
Have you reported against the most <b>up to date information for your project</b> ?	X
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	X