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Darwin Initiative, Darwin Plus and Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund scheme evaluation

Inception report

Ecorys

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This report

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Executive summary

The Darwin Initiative and the Darwin Plus schemes are a cornerstone of the UK's bilateral aid to tackle biodiversity loss and, together with the Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund, form a complementary and globally renowned portfolio of competitive grant funds that since 1992 have funded 1,305 projects in 159 countries, amounting to a total of £203 million. In September 2020, as the sole funder of the schemes, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), commissioned Ecorys to undertake an evaluation with the following key [objectives](#):

- ▶ assess the impact of each scheme in tackling key objectives and understand contributions towards meeting the UK's international commitments,
- ▶ identify gaps in logic and draw out key lessons, challenges, strengths and recommendations to help Defra prioritise future work and understand how processes/grant schemes can be improved,
- ▶ facilitate clearer communication of key achievements to the public, UK government departments, and development and academic partners,
- ▶ establish effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems to ensure regular monitoring and impact evaluations of each scheme beyond the evaluation.

The [results](#) of this evaluation will enable Defra to improve the quality of the schemes going into the future and also showcase Defra's contributions to global biodiversity and environmental protection ahead of upcoming international conferences.

The overall [approach](#) is theory based and systematic, participatory and uses mixed methods to answer the evaluation questions, which are focused on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and equity of the schemes. We will [sample](#) projects (both completed and ongoing) from each scheme and take a two-tiered approach:

- ▶ [Tier 1](#) will cover 100 projects that include all regions, all major ecosystems and, for IWT Challenge Fund projects, all four approaches used to tackle the illegal wildlife trade. For these 100 projects, we will review key project documents as well as conduct interviews with some key project stakeholders.
- ▶ [Tier 2](#) sample (30 projects) will be a sub-sample of the 100 Tier 1 projects. Tier 2 projects will cover four countries (Bolivia, Indonesia, Kenya and Nepal) and one UK Overseas Territory (Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha). For these 30 projects, we will conduct primary data collection (interviews) in the four countries as well as additional document review. The Tier 2 projects will have a greater focus on value for money, sustainability, gender, equity and social inclusion.

We will [collect data](#) from three sources. We will conduct a [desk review](#) of available documents, including: scheme documents, project documents, thematic reviews, briefing and information notes and documentation on similar programmes. We will use project assessment frameworks as tools to guide the collection and analysis of relevant project data for our sample. Our [portfolio review](#) will use existing monitoring data collected for all projects and allow us to conduct analysis of the overall portfolio as well as present results for our sample in the context of the overall scheme. We will also conduct [interviews](#) with both project-level stakeholders and programme strategic stakeholders. We will conduct a limited number (maximum 15) of short interviews with Tier 1 stakeholders and for each Tier 2 project, three or four longer in-depth interviews. We will also conduct interviews with strategic stakeholders (maximum 20) who understand the programme as a whole and can inform our scheme-wide analysis. All interviews will be semi-structured and follow discussion guides.

We will conduct [analysis at two levels](#): scheme level and project level. [Scheme-level](#) analysis will rely on our portfolio review and strategic stakeholders' interviews. It will focus on the schemes' contribution to multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), the internal factors that drive scheme effectiveness and the aspects of the general environment that enable projects, and therefore the scheme, to be successful. [Project-level](#) analysis will use process tracing, which is an analytical approach that allows us to structure

our understanding of the causal pathways linking project inputs to outputs, outcomes and impact. It also allows us to explore the contribution of projects to outcomes and the factors that enable or hinder their achievement.

In addition to process tracing, we will develop five concise [country case studies](#), which focus on the local context of each country and how relevant external factors influenced the effectiveness of the projects. These will build rich stories of the effectiveness of projects and the impact they had. The evaluation will also assess the extent that each scheme is delivering [value for money](#) (VfM) and whether it is achieving the right balance between economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity, in addition to schemes' sustainability and cost-effectiveness. We will assess VfM at the scheme and project level. We have further developed a bespoke [gender, equity and social inclusion](#) (GESI) framework to judge the degree to which projects and schemes are GESI-sensitive and consider power and safeguarding issues.

Our evaluation has started with a strong [inception phase](#) that included an initial review of programme documents and monitoring data, consultations with Defra, consultations with key stakeholders, assessments of theories of change (ToCs), finalising the sampling approach and process tracing, developing draft data collection tools, finalising the evaluation approach and two theory of change workshops.

The [next phases](#) of the evaluation will be secondary and primary data collection (from December 2020 to April 2021), followed by analysis and reporting (April–May 2021), the strengthening of results (June–July 2021), the development of M&E frameworks (July–December 2021) and dissemination activities (January–February 2022).

We will produce the following [evaluation outputs](#):

- ▶ [draft interim report and slide deck](#) presented to the evaluation steering group (May 2021),
- ▶ [final evaluation report](#), including impact assessment of each scheme, portfolio process evaluation, finalised theories of change, and draft recommendations and communication materials. This will include five country case studies (July 2021),
- ▶ [M&E frameworks for each scheme](#) (December 2021),
- ▶ [timelines for future evaluations](#) (December 2021),
- ▶ [two stand-alone policy briefs](#) (December 2021),
- ▶ [final presentation slide decks](#) (January–February 2022).

1.0 Introduction

In this section we describe the governance of the evaluation, factors that influenced its design and the inception process

1.1 Governance arrangements

There is clear value to conducting this evaluation, strong buy-in from Defra, LTS, and the expert committees for each scheme, and all stakeholders have been responsive and helpful to date. The evaluation team reports directly to the Evaluation Project Officer and regularly liaises with them and the Team Lead for Darwin & ODA Funds at Defra. Weekly meetings were held during inception and will be held semi-regularly during the implementation phase.

An evaluation steering group has been established by Defra and is due to meet on 26 November 2020. The steering group comprises the following groups:

- ▶ **Defra:** Evaluation Project Officer, Deputy Director for Official Development Assistance, Darwin & ODA Funds Team Lead, Darwin Plus Policy Officer and IWT Challenge Fund Policy Officer.
- ▶ **LTS:** Project Manager.
- ▶ **Ecorys:** Team Leader, Project Director, Evaluation Manager and IWT Evaluation Lead.

Defra will provide updates on the evaluation as appropriate to the Darwin Executive Committee, Darwin Plus Advisory Group and IWT Advisory Group. High level governance for the Programme is provided by the Official Development Assistance (ODA) Board, chaired by Defra.

1.2 Factors that influenced evaluation design

The **timing** of this evaluation (from September 2020 to March 2022) is occurring during a time when Darwin Initiative funding is projected to treble from £10 million to £30 million per annum over the next three years, and the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund doubles to around £6.5 million per annum over the same period. In this context the evaluation will provide useful evidence of impact of the schemes, feed back into the ongoing programme and inform future business cases. Furthermore, following the UK's exit from the European Union in January 2020 and its reaffirmation as an independent signatory to international biodiversity conventions, the evaluation provides a unique opportunity to showcase Defra's contributions to global biodiversity and environmental protection ahead of the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Glasgow in November 2021.

The following **contextual factors** have influenced the evaluation's design in the following ways:

- ▶ **Travel restrictions:** Under normal circumstances, field visits from UK-based staff would have been part of our evaluation design. However, given the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak and travel restrictions imposed, field visits by UK-based researchers have been replaced by phone/online interviews and face-to-face interviews conducted by local researchers.
- ▶ **Social distancing:** Due to the ongoing pandemic, in-person interviews have been replaced by phone/online interviews. Our meetings, workshops and presentations will continue to take place remotely in the foreseeable future. We will work closely with Defra and other stakeholders to ensure that the scheduling is appropriate for all parties.

Despite these contextual factors, we have made **no departures from the Terms of Reference (ToR)**.

1.3 Inception phase process

The inception phase of the evaluation began following a meeting between the evaluation team and Defra's Project Officer for the evaluation and Defra's Team Leader for ODA funds on 10 September 2020. The team clarified project management arrangements and agreed to the following immediate priorities: refine the team's understanding of the three schemes through consultations with the implementing partners (LTS), begin the rapid review of scheme and portfolio documentation, have initial consultations with key programme stakeholders, develop the evaluation framework, sampling strategy and methods to be used, and plan the theory of change workshops. The main activities undertaken have been the following:

- ▶ **Initial programme document review:** A scoping of existing available literature was undertaken, focusing on the biodiversity crisis and illegal wildlife trade and related international conventions and efforts to address them, the logical frameworks of the schemes and their existing theories of change, and the evidence to date on impacts of the schemes documented through thematic and project-level evaluations (internal and external to Defra). We have also reviewed documentation on the delivery of other comparator schemes.
- ▶ **Consultations with Defra:** During the evaluation's inception phase the team has had weekly consultations with the Defra team managing the evaluation, which has helped to refine key priorities, facilitate introductions to key stakeholders, improve access to programme-related documentation and shape the approach to the evaluation design.
- ▶ **Consultations with key stakeholders:** The evaluation team has met with the programme management team at LTS International, set up a secure file-sharing system for the extensive documentation available, and liaised on key points around the programme's management, and the availability and quality of monitoring data (see Annex 4 for a full list). We have also spoken with the Chair of the Darwin Executive Committee, the Chair of the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund and other members of the executive committees to inform our understanding of the programmes and the key issues to address.
- ▶ **Assessing theories of change:** We reviewed the existing impact pathways of each scheme, several project applications, the scoring criteria applied to them, mid-term and annual reviews, completion reports and completion report reviews, as well as monitoring data collected at the project level. This allowed us to understand what was feasible for assessing impact in our sample of projects, and the strengths and weaknesses of existing theories of change of the schemes, including the key challenges being addressed by the schemes, anticipated results, underlying assumptions, causal pathways and barriers to success. These will be further explored and developed during our theory of change workshops.
- ▶ **Finalising the sampling approach and process, and impact tracing:** Based on our theory of change assessments the evaluation team finalised its process and impact tracing approach. We also cleaned and assessed the quality of the existing monitoring data collected at the project level to finalise the sampling design. The team also solicited general thoughts on the design from Defra.
- ▶ **Finalising the evaluation framework:** The evaluation team finalised the evaluation framework. This included refining overarching research questions and including targeted sub-questions, as well as identifying and developing relevant data collection methods. We developed data collection tools (project assessment frameworks and interview guides), drafted data and ethical processes, and conducted our stakeholder mapping exercise in consultation with Defra, LTS and the chairs of the Darwin Expert Committee (DEC) and IWT Challenge Fund. We drafted our communications plan, mapped similar programmes, mapped documents to review during the implementation phase and finalised our evaluation workplan.

2.0 The Darwin Initiative, Darwin Plus and IWT Challenge Fund

In this section, we summarise the three schemes being evaluated. We include details of the types of projects funded, the lifecycle of a funding round and an overview of available scheme evidence and their impact pathways.

2.1 Biodiversity, the illegal wildlife trade, and poverty

Biological diversity is the variability among living organisms and the ecological complexes of which they are part, including diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems. In the last 50 years, there has been a [catastrophic decline of the Earth's biodiversity](#), driven by changes in land and sea use, direct exploitation of organisms, climate change, pollution, and invasive alien species. These pressures also inflict harm on human health and well-being and, unfortunately, there continues to be a decline in biodiversity worldwide, including Europe, Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean.

A related but distinct challenge the world faces is the [trade of illegal wildlife](#), which threatens some of the world's most iconic species with extinction. Estimated to be worth £17 billion per year, it is the fourth most lucrative transnational crime after drugs, weapons and human trafficking. The worldwide recognition of these shared challenges has resulted in numerous international conventions, the most prominent of which are the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Intersecting these issues of biodiversity and the illegal wildlife trade is poverty. Poverty has many different definitions, although it has long been accepted that it extends beyond solely considering some level of material wealth towards a multidimensional country and context-specific perspective that is reflective of wellbeing (Roe et al., 2014)¹. This includes other elements such health, education, water and sanitation, access to natural resources, gender and social inequalities, governance, and agency in decision-making, as well as livelihoods (UN, 1995; Chambers, 1995)^{2,3}.

It is well accepted that there are strong links between multidimensional poverty and biodiversity and the illegal wildlife trade. Regarding biodiversity, it is recognised that the poor depend disproportionately on biodiversity to meet their own needs in terms of income and insurance against risk, and biodiversity conservation can be used as an effective route out of poverty in some circumstances (Roe, 2010)⁴. Regarding the illegal wildlife trade, poverty and related development concerns are often a root cause underpinning the illegal hunting of wildlife and the behaviours of people to hunt illegally, where poor people may do this to satisfy basic material needs, but also may do so for other reasons such as local identity, prestige, lifestyle, or customs (Duffy et al., 2016)⁵. Therefore, there is a case to identify key interventions

¹ Roe, D., Fancourt, M., Sandbrook, C., Sibanda, M., Giuliani, A. and Gordon-Maclean, A. (2014). Which components or attributes of biodiversity influence which dimensions of poverty?. *Environ Evid*, 3(3), [link](#).

² United Nations (UN) (1995), *The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, World Summit for Social Development*, 6-12 March 1995, New York, United Nations, [link](#).

³ Chambers R. (1995). Poverty and livelihoods: whose reality counts? *Environment and Urbanization*. 7(1), 173-204, [link](#).

⁴ Roe, D. (2010). "Linking Biodiversity Conservation and Poverty Alleviation: A State of Knowledge Review", CBD Technical Series 55, Secretariat of the CBD, Montreal, [link](#).

⁵ Duffy, R., St John, F. A., Büscher, B., & Brockington, D. (2016). Toward a new understanding of the links between poverty and illegal wildlife hunting. *Conservation biology: the journal of the Society for Conservation Biology*, 30(1), 14–22, [link](#).

that promote poverty reduction alongside biodiversity conservation and reductions in the illegal wildlife trade.

However, due to poverty being multidimensional, as well as biodiversity and the illegal wildlife trade not being single category issues themselves, the causal relationships behind such interconnections are complex and difficult to disentangle, and thus the evidence for ‘win-win’ scenarios or integrated solutions is mixed or limited (Duffy et al., 2016; Roe, 2010; 2014)⁶. Nonetheless, due to the presence of these interlinkages, it is beneficial that conservation efforts in developing countries address biodiversity, the illegal wildlife trade, and poverty as mutual goals.

Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) is viewed as a significant source for biodiversity financing in low and lower middle-income countries, supporting the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems (Drustchinin and Ockenden, 2015)⁷. ODA also serves as a useful funding instrument for tackling the intersections between poverty and biodiversity and the illegal wildlife trade due to its requirements to promote economic development and welfare in developing countries.⁸

A cornerstone of the UK’s bilateral aid to tackle these three interrelated crises are the Darwin Initiative (established in 1992), the Darwin Plus Scheme (established in 2012) and the IWT Challenge Fund (established in 2014). Utilising ODA funds and operating under ODA requirements (except Darwin Plus which is 100% non-ODA), the schemes, funded by Defra and FCDO, together form a complementary and globally renowned portfolio of competitive grant funds that collectively tackle biodiversity, the illegal wildlife trade, and the reduction of multidimensional poverty.

Further detail on the context to this evaluation and the background to the three schemes is provided in Annex 2. Annex 3 covers proposed future changes to the Darwin Initiative, Darwin Plus and the IWT Challenge Fund.

2.2 The Darwin Initiative

The Darwin Initiative, established at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, is aimed at helping developing countries and communities that are rich in biodiversity but poor in financial resources to:

- ▶ **better implement and contribute to multilateral environmental agreements**, such as the CBD, CITES, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS)⁹, as well as meeting international targets or goals, such as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹⁰;
- ▶ **enhance the capacity of host countries** or territories to manage their natural resources and increase or better apply skills in biodiversity conservation;
- ▶ **improve the enabling environment** to protect and sustainably manage biodiversity and natural ecosystems, improve knowledge and understanding of the importance and diverse values of biodiversity, and reduce threat levels to species and habitats.¹¹

⁶ Roe, D. (2014). Poverty and biodiversity: evidence about nature and the nature of evidence. *IIED Briefing*, [link](#).

⁷ Drustchinin, A, and Ockenden, S. (2015). Financing for Development in Support of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. OECD Development Cooperation Working Papers 23, Paris: OECD, [link](#)

⁸ Definition of ODA, [link](#).

⁹ Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization, also known as the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS).

¹⁰ The Darwin Initiative contributes towards 9 SDGs, including: SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 6 (availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all), SDG 8 (sustainable economic growth), SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 14 (sustainable use of marine resources), SDG 15 (protect terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity). DEFRA (2015), *Relationships Between Poverty and Biodiversity: Evidence from the Darwin Initiative: Technical Report Draft Final*, DEFRA internal document.

¹¹ Defra (2020). Darwin Initiative: Guidance Notes for Applicants – Round 27, [link](#).

In the 28 years since it began, the Darwin Initiative's objectives have been flexible, changing in response to different challenges faced. The Darwin Initiative's [objectives for 2020](#) (which can also be seen as possible routes to impact) are diverse, and based on developing understanding and supporting action around the following areas, which cut across biodiversity protection, climate change mitigation and poverty reduction:

- ▶ [stewardship of natural assets](#): promoting the responsible stewardship of natural assets through sustainable use and the practice of sustainable livelihoods, both within and across borders;
- ▶ [linkages to human health](#): addressing the linkages between biodiversity and human health;
- ▶ [agricultural practices](#): tackling the impacts of agriculture practices on biodiversity, livelihoods and climate change;
- ▶ [access to genetic resources](#): promoting the sharing of benefits arising from the use of biodiversity through facilitating sustainable access to genetic resources and traditional knowledge;
- ▶ [marine protected areas](#): increasing the area of coverage and effectiveness of marine protected areas to meet global targets;
- ▶ [blue ecosystem carbon sequestration](#): understanding the capacity for blue carbon ecosystems to sequester carbon to support climate change mitigation;
- ▶ [freshwater habitat decline](#): addressing the multiple pressures driving freshwater habitats decline, such as rapid habitat loss and agriculture, and industrial water use;
- ▶ [peatland restoration](#): focusing on practical restoration methods for peatlands, especially types, such as tropical peatlands.⁷

The history of the Darwin Initiative reflects the same evolution as the wider conservation movement, moving from its original goal of 1992 when it focussed on threatened species and habitats, as proclaimed by its title 'Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species', to the more diverse and mutually reinforcing focus of today, which incorporates biodiversity, livelihoods, the UN SDGs and UN Climate Change Goals.

2.3 Darwin Plus

[Darwin Plus](#) focuses on similar objectives and has a similar delivery model to the Darwin Initiative, but delivers long-term strategic outcomes for the natural environment in the UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs), with a focus on improving conservation, protection, or management of the [marine environment](#). With the notable exception of the British Antarctic Territory, most of the UKOTs are islands. Established in 2012,¹² Darwin Plus helps the UK meet its objectives under several multilateral agreements, such as the Ramsar Convention, Cartagena Convention for the Caribbean¹³, and the London Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution. It also helps to deliver the UN SDGs, particularly SDG 14 and SDG 15 on 'life below water' and 'life on land' respectively. Objectives include:

- ▶ [conservation and management](#): increase the effectiveness and area of coverage of marine protected areas in pursuit of global targets, and improve the conservation and management of coral reef, seagrass meadows and mangrove forest ecosystems as well as wetlands;
- ▶ [ecosystem-based initiatives](#): develop ecosystem-based initiatives for conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial and marine environments, such as objectives to promote sustainable fisheries and deal with invasive alien species, including prevention;

¹² Darwin Plus was previously called the Overseas Territories Challenge Fund (established in 2009).

¹³ The Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment in the Wider Caribbean Region, also known as the Cartagena Convention for the Caribbean.

- ▶ **biodiversity action plans and valuation methods:** enhance the implementation of national biodiversity action plans and develop tools to value biodiversity and ecosystem services;
- ▶ **data systems:** develop data systems on biodiversity, including human activities that affect biodiversity;
- ▶ **climate change:** develop approaches to deal with the effects of climate change, particularly those responding to, and mitigating against, the impacts of natural disasters;
- ▶ **waste management:** develop or improve waste management strategies, particularly those with a focus on plastics;
- ▶ **improved knowledge base:** develop and share its knowledge base on these issues as well as on community-led approaches to biodiversity and poverty alleviation;
- ▶ **COVID-19:** more recently, to develop environmental activities that respond to the effects or causes of the COVID-19, and other, pandemics.¹⁴

2.4 The IWT Challenge Fund

The IWT Challenge Fund contributes to the UK government's commitments to tackling the illegal wildlife trade and to meeting the UK's objectives under the 2018 London Conference on the Illegal Wildlife Trade. In particular, it has the following objectives:

- ▶ **sustainable livelihoods:** support engagement in alternative and sustainable livelihoods for IWT-affected communities, encouraging community-led wildlife conservation and retention of its benefits, and addressing challenges of human-wildlife conflict within local communities;
- ▶ **law enforcement:** strengthen law enforcement or criminal justice systems, especially in supply countries, to address issues such as corruption, illicit financial flows, border control and transnational cooperation;
- ▶ **policy and legislation:** develop, adopt, or implement effective policy and legislation;
- ▶ **reduction of demand** for illegally traded species, particularly through behaviour-change approaches;
- ▶ **capacity building:** provide training and capacity building;
- ▶ **knowledge sharing:** improve and share knowledge on IWT alongside education and awareness raising.¹⁵

The IWT Challenge Fund shares similar goals to the two Darwin funds in terms of supporting biodiversity and conservation but was created primarily to respond to the growing realisation of the link between the illegal wildlife trade and organised crime, and the threats that this poses to countries' security and prosperity.

2.5 Scheme comparison and recent developments

Since 1992, the three schemes have funded 1,305 projects in at least 159 countries. The Darwin Initiative has funded 1,098 projects, Darwin Plus has funded 122 projects, and the IWT Challenge Fund has funded 85 projects in total. These countries are displayed in the map below (Figure 1).

¹⁴ Defra (2020). Darwin Plus: Guidance Notes for Applicants – Round 9, [link](#).

¹⁵ Defra (2020). Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund: Guidance Notes for Applicants – Round 7, [link](#).

The organisations that have been awarded the most grants since the beginning of the schemes are: Fauna and Flora International (66); Zoological Society of London (65); Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew (50); Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (46); Natural History Museum (45) and University of Oxford (43).¹⁶ The table below summarises key facts and figures about the three schemes.

Table 1: Key facts and figures

	Darwin	Darwin Plus	IWT Challenge Fund
Year established	1992	2012	2014
Expert committee	Darwin Expert Committee	Darwin Plus Advisory Group	Illegal Wildlife Trade Advisory Group
Number of projects	1,098	122	85
Types	Main projects, fellowships, partnership, scoping (discontinued 2019), post-project (discontinued 2017), Overseas Territories Challenge Fund (discontinued 2012)	Main projects, fellowships	Main projects
Number of completed projects	937	63	37
Number of active projects	127 ¹⁷	59	48
Average project value ¹⁸	Main project: £193,664 Fellowships: £17,195 Scoping: £2,936 Partnership: £8,364 Post-project: £112,134 Challenge Fund: £24,188	£188,044	£314,151
Range of project duration	Main project: 0–9 years Fellowships: 0–1.5 years Scoping: 0.1–1 year Partnership: 0.1–1 year Post-project: 0–3 years Overseas Territories Challenge Fund: 0.3–1.3 years	0–3 years ¹⁹	0–4 years
Funding			
To date	£152.7m	£22.9m	£27.5m
ODA-funded	Partially since 2011, entirely since 2015	Only projects in ODA-eligible UKOTs (though note these are funded through the Darwin Initiative)	All projects since the fund's establishment in 2014

Source: LTS International and LTS monitoring data

¹⁶ Figures for frequency by institution are from the evaluation's Terms of Reference.

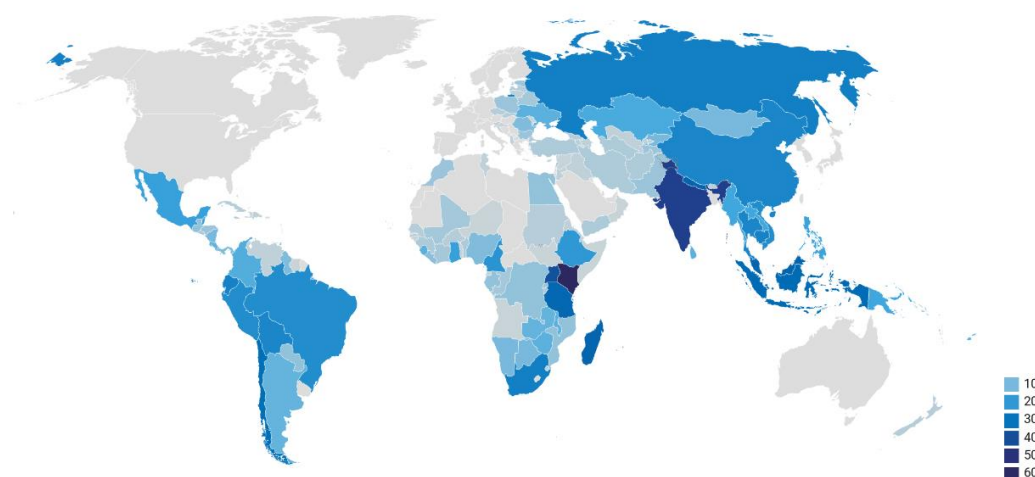
¹⁷ The number of completed and active Darwin Initiative projects does not equate to 1,098 due to some projects having been cancelled or withdrawn.

¹⁸ Average project value is calculated based on the value of Darwin funding provided. This excludes funding obtained from other sources.

¹⁹ Data for Darwin Plus is not disaggregated by main project and fellowship. Therefore, average value of funding and range of project duration is presented for the Darwin Plus scheme as a whole.

Given that funds for the Darwin Initiative and IWT Challenge Fund are drawn from ODA funding, projects funded under each of the schemes must therefore support poverty reduction in developing countries as a requirement. Within Darwin Plus, given that the scheme is entirely non-ODA funded, projects are not subject to having poverty reduction as a required objective. However, given that the livelihoods and economic activities of communities in UKOTs are highly dependent on biodiversity²⁰, Darwin Plus projects often involve community-based approaches and may either directly or indirectly influence poverty and livelihoods.

Figure 1: Number of projects in each country



Source: LTS monitoring data

In **Error! Reference source not found.** below we provide further detail on the main types of projects funded.

Table 2: Types of projects

Name	Description
Main	Multi-year grants, and the most common type of project. The aim is to build local capacity to manage local biodiversity and the natural environment for the future. Note: The IWT Challenge Fund has its own main project award category.
Fellowship awards (Darwin and Darwin Plus only)	Funding to enable and support future environmental leaders and promising individuals from developing countries and UKOTs to undertake a period of training or research within a UK host organisation. The scheme is also intended to build lasting positive relationships with UK institutions. Maximum value of £30,000. Introduced to the Darwin Initiative in 2002 (usually sponsors 4–5 awards/year). Introduced to Darwin Plus in 2012.

²⁰ Defra (2020). Darwin Plus: Guidance Notes for Applicants – Round 9, [link](#).

Partnership projects (Darwin only)	<p>Previously called 'Pre-project Awards' (2002–2016) and 'Scoping Awards' (2016–2019).</p> <p>Small grants of up to £10,000 to help develop robust applications by connecting organisations new to Darwin with more experienced partners who have managed successful Darwin projects, and supporting new partnerships between applicant organisations. The scheme also helps assess the feasibility of potential projects.</p> <p>These projects usually involve a scoping visit to the host country to develop or test a workable project idea and build potential partnerships. They are intended to encourage new applicants to apply.</p> <p>Successful projects should lead to recipients pursuing a main project.</p>
Post-project awards (Darwin only)	<p>Used when there was justification or need for a follow-on project from a successful main round project, often where a new discrete piece of work would generate clear and additional lasting impacts to consolidate and enhance the legacy of a project. This scheme often has few applicants (10–12 per year) and few approved (2–3). It has been discontinued since 2017.</p>

Source: Darwin application guidance

More recently, as part of its [response to the COVID-19](#) pandemic and the increased threat of further fast-spreading pandemics, Defra foresaw the need for [urgent funding](#) for the Darwin Initiative and IWT Challenge Fund to fill the gap between the most recent round (projects starting in May 2020) and the next round (projects starting in April (IWT) and July (Darwin, Darwin Plus) 2021). This one-off [Rapid Response Fund for COVID-19](#) is common across all three funds and provides funding for short-term rapid response projects with budgets between £15,000 and £60,000 to address the impact of COVID-19 on biodiversity, the illegal wildlife trade and sustainable livelihoods.

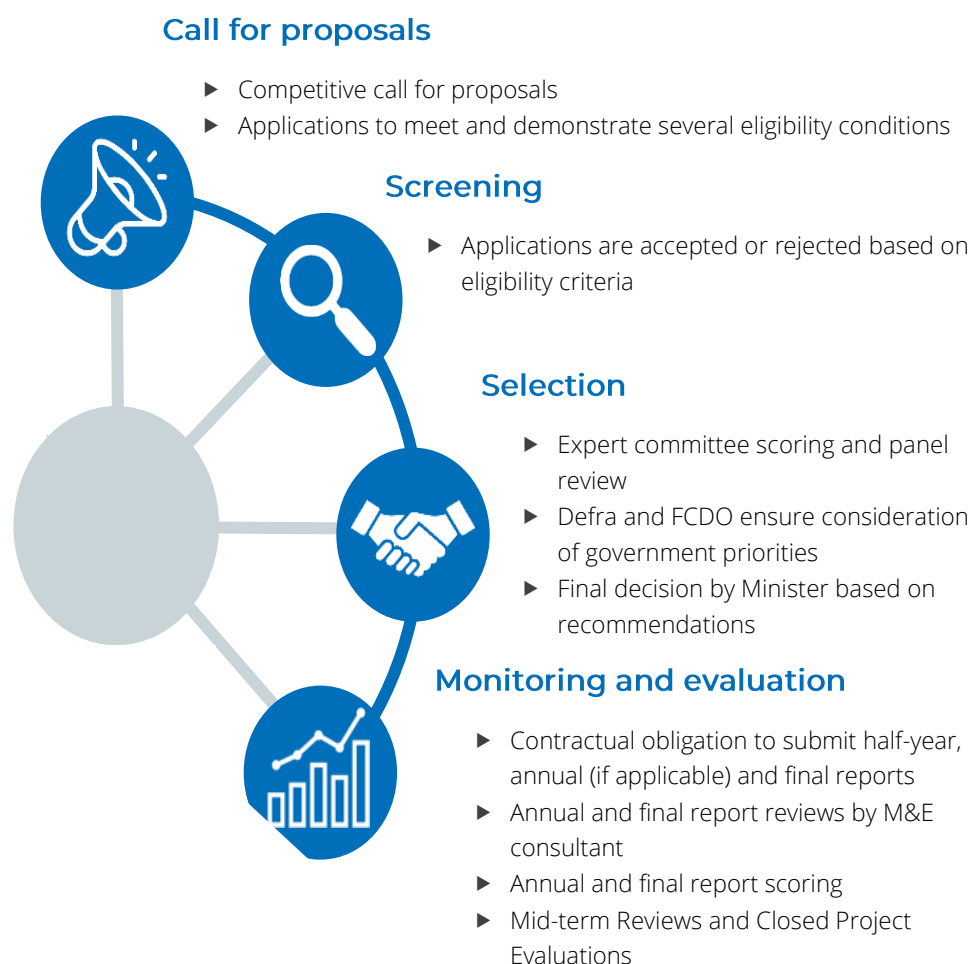
The application and project cycles for the three schemes share common stages described in **Error! Reference source not found.** below. The stages common to the schemes are the following:

- ▶ [Competitive call for proposals](#) is released annually for each scheme.
- ▶ [Initial screening for eligibility](#): Applications received must include a detailed logical framework demonstrating that the project activities and finances are transparent and provide sufficient accountability for the use of UK public spending. Applicants must also demonstrate how their projects provide good value for money. This initial screening is conducted by LTS International.
- ▶ [Expert committee scoring](#): Eligible applications are then scored by the respective expert committees of each scheme. These committees consist of experts from government, academia and the private sector who advise Defra on the strategic development of the grants, review applications and make overall recommendations. At least three members of the committee will score applications against specified criteria, including: technical merit and impacts on biodiversity, poverty and well-being (Darwin Initiative); policy priorities, impact and technical excellence (Darwin Plus); robust technical assessment and alignment with key priorities (IWT Challenge Fund). The highest-scoring applications are then discussed at the level of the committee and the strongest are shortlisted.
- ▶ [Ministerial approval of projects](#): Defra works closely with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to share expertise on priority issues and ensure that the shortlisted projects align with government priorities and concerns. Based on the recommendations of Defra and FCDO staff, the final decision on which projects to fund is made at ministerial level.
- ▶ [Internal monitoring of active projects](#): Throughout the implementation of a project there are several mandatory reporting requirements. Projects that last more than one year must submit half-year and annual progress reports, which report outputs and impacts against intended objectives.

At project completion, projects must submit final reports detailing progress towards logframe indicators.

- ▶ **External evaluation of projects:** Half-year, annual, and final project reports and the associated evidence submitted are reviewed by an M&E consultant using a prescribed template to provide an external and independent perspective of whether projects have achieved their intended outcomes. Reviews of these annual reports focus on project progress since the last annual report and are scored on a scale of 1 to 5 on their likelihood of meeting their proposed outcome statement. Final report reviews focus on what the project has achieved against its intended outputs and outcomes in its logframe, scoring projects with a letter grade (A++, A+, A, B, C) to reflect these achievements. In addition to these standard evaluations, each of the schemes regularly commissions additional external evaluations and reviews, which take place during the life of projects, often in the form of mid-term reviews or monitoring visits, as well as after a project award has ended through closed project evaluations.

Figure 2: The lifecycle of a project



Source: Darwin application guidance, LTS annual contractor's reports

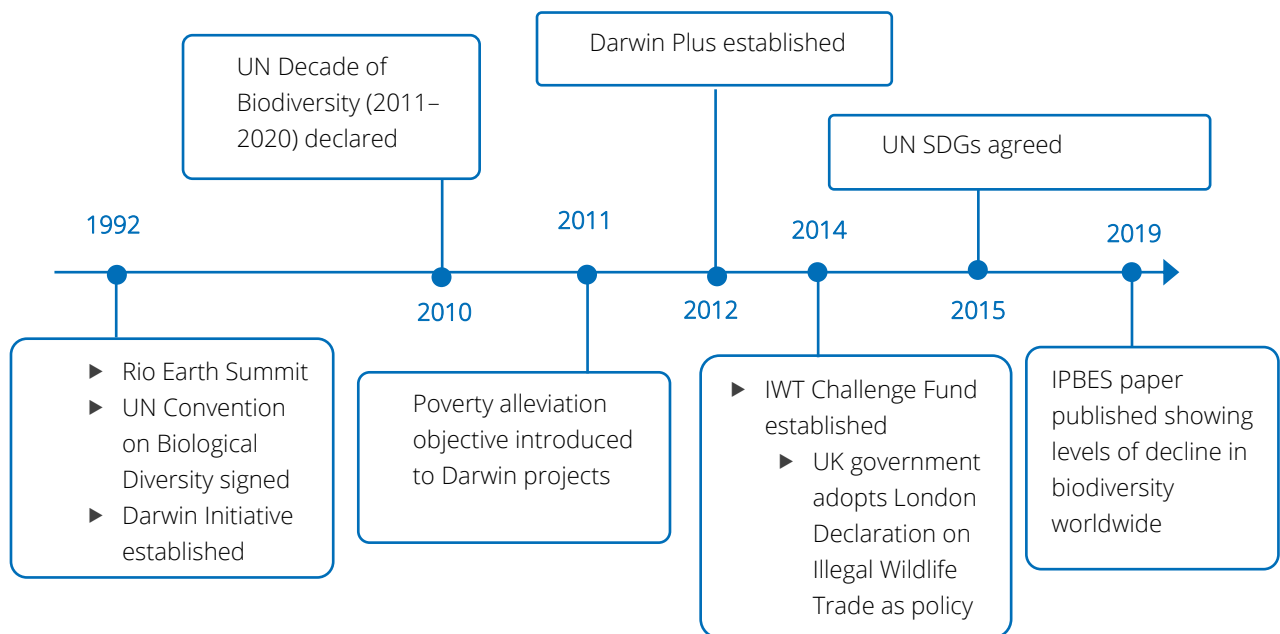
Together, the three schemes also fill a distinctive niche at the nexus of development and biodiversity. In 2011, FCDO (then Department for International Development) started co-funding Darwin projects (via Defra) and [ODA eligibility requirements](#) were introduced to the schemes. ODA funding requires projects to directly enhance the welfare and economic development of poor people with objectives addressing poverty

alleviation and gender equality, alongside improving biodiversity and conservation in countries on the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list of ODA-eligible countries.

Currently, there are plans to increase the [budget commitment](#) to each of the funds, and the Darwin Initiative scheme has announced plans to introduce new tiers to its list of funding projects and awards. These proposed changes are described in more detail in Annex 3.

Figure 3 below illustrates the introduction of the poverty reduction objective alongside other major milestones of the schemes. Currently, there are plans to increase the [budget commitment](#) to each of the funds, and the Darwin Initiative scheme has announced plans to introduce new tiers to its list of funding projects and awards. These proposed changes are described in more detail in Annex 3.

Figure 3: Programme key milestones



Source: Communications with LTS International

2.6 The wider landscape of conservation programmes

The family of conservation is diverse. Within this family, there are multilateral donors (for example, the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme, the Global Environment Facility and the World Bank), bilateral donors (Defra, the United States Agency for International Development, or USAID, and the KfW,) and independent foundations (the World Wildlife Fund, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Disney Conservation Fund, Whitley Fund for Nature and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service). Below we highlight other substantial funds operating in biodiversity conservation. While there are currently no formal links with other international schemes, like the Darwin portfolio, many of these schemes similarly operate in the context of funding both environment and development efforts together. It is important that the evaluation is aware of complementary initiatives and examines how these may interact with Darwin, Darwin Plus and the IWT Challenge Fund in the delivery of outcomes and impact.

We also intend for learning from this evaluation to benefit other relevant programmes, including in particular those commissioned by the UK government.

Table 3: Other relevant programmes

	Funder	Value and timing	Details (objectives/activities)
Biodiversity			
Biodiverse Landscapes Fund	FCDO and Defra	£100m 2021–2026	Will support five highly biodiverse landscapes across the globe to improve biodiversity as well as secure sustainable development.
Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme	Global Environment Facility	\$550m 1996–present	The Small Grants Programme (SGP) is in over 125 countries and promotes grassroots action that addresses global environmental problems, including biodiversity protection.
PROGREEN	World Bank	€200m with target of \$1bn 2019–present	Supports efforts to improve livelihoods while tackling declining biodiversity, loss of forests, deteriorating land fertility and increasing climate risks.
PROBLUE	World Bank	\$150m 2018–present	Supports biodiversity protection in oceans and sustainable use of oceans and marine resources.
LIFE+	European Commission	€3.4bn 2014–2020	The EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action, €544m allocated under the funding area Nature and Biodiversity. Benefiting countries include EU Member States and EU Neighbourhood countries.
West Africa Biodiversity and Climate Change Programme	USAID	\$50m 2016–2021	Works with regional, national and sub-national institutions in West Africa on combatting wildlife trafficking, increasing coastal resilience to climate change, reducing deforestation, forest degradation and biodiversity loss.
Dutch Fund for Climate and Development	Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs	€160m 2019–2030	Mobilises private sector investments in climate mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. Biodiversity is one of the markers against which the fund's activities will be assessed.
Illegal wildlife trade			
Global Wildlife Programme	Global Environment Facility	\$82m 2019–present (current phase)	Promotes wildlife conservation and sustainable development by combatting illicit trafficking in wildlife.
Partnership against Poaching and Illegal Wildlife Trade (in Africa and Asia)	German Environment and Aid Ministries: BMU and BMZ	€14.9m 2017–2020	Aims to reduce supply and demand, strengthen cross-border and inter-sectoral cooperation and cooperation between Africa and Asia. Activities are implemented in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organisations.
W-TRAPS	USAID	\$9m 2013–2020	Supports partnerships and innovative approaches to identify and advance interventions that can break IWT chains and disrupt organised criminal networks.
Law Enforcement and Combating	European Commission	€43.5 2017–present	Aims to boost the operational capacities of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime to improve wildlife and forest law enforcement.

Wildlife and Forest Crime		Supports civil society organisations and local communities in preventing and fighting wildlife trafficking in Asia, Africa and Latin America.
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Source: Each programme's website (see Annex 2)

2.7 Overview of available evidence for the schemes

The impact of each scheme can in part be understood as the cumulative impact of project-level impacts. [Monitoring data](#) is collected for each project and compiled in databases and able to be analysed at the level of each scheme. Internal [project monitoring reports](#) provide some evidence of impact, including annual and final reports and report reviews, and mid-term review reports. Since 2007, the Darwin Initiative has implemented a process to make information about all projects available through its [website](#).²¹ Much of the available evidence exists at the project-level. The following table highlights some useful information on effectiveness and impact, and its associated limitations, from existing [scheme-level documents](#).

Table 4: Documents with evidence of impact

Name	Description	Limitations
Closed project evaluations	Evidence of impact from clusters of closed projects, often from a group of adjacent countries. These evaluations aim to determine the impact and legacy of Darwin Initiative funding, and to draw out innovations, lessons learned and best practices.	These evaluations are limited in that: they only cover Darwin Initiative projects, they are mostly from 2007-2009, there is little systematic reporting of gender impacts, they cover a limited number of regions, and they rarely collate evidence beyond that of the project.
LTS syntheses of annual and final report reviews	Documents synthesising and analysing findings from all annual and final reports submitted by financial year, beginning from 2016. They extract key process lessons on project planning, implementation and reporting for the three schemes and include recommendations.	Project scores synthesised do not explain what specific impacts occurred, and projects scores are partially limited due to being derived from self-reported project achievements.
Thematic reviews	The primary documents with evidence of scheme-level impacts. They are designed as programme-level evaluations which identify impacts and lasting legacy and look at the Darwin Initiative's contribution to the following eight thematic areas: Climate Change and Biodiversity; the Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI); Support to UKOTs; Communication, Education and Public Awareness; Islands; Forest Biodiversity; the CBD 2010 Targets; and Poverty and the SDGs.	The majority were written during the period 2004–2010 and are thus slightly outdated and do not cover Darwin Plus, the IWT Challenge Fund or more recent policy priorities
Information, learning and briefing notes	Concise and simplified sources of information with some evidence of scheme-level impacts and some general guidance on different relevant topics (for example, M&E and relevant global initiatives). Previously called 'learning notes and briefing notes'.	Of the relevant notes which allude to evidence of impact, many of these notes are summaries of much larger documents (for example, LTS syntheses of annual and final report reviews and thematic reviews).

²¹ <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/project-search/>

Darwin Initiative gender analysis	Explicitly analyses the Darwin Initiative's contributions to addressing gender equality. Contains some useful insights into what kind of impacts projects produce related to gender and how they are produced.	Does not include Darwin Plus and IWT Challenge Fund schemes.
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Source: Review of available documentation (see Annex 4)

Annex 4 provides a more comprehensive list of the programme data and documentation available to the evaluation. Annex 10 provides a summary of existing findings from these documents on the impact of the schemes.

Cunningham and King (2013)²² emphasise that effectiveness is currently evaluated on a 'project-by-project basis' based on logical frameworks and final report narratives. This acknowledges the programme's diversity and the range of biodiversity issues being tackled. While this approach is outcome-focused, there is [no system in place to synthesise these results](#) at the scheme level. Furthermore, the monitoring data and reviews listed above are all internal documents and there is [almost no evidence produced by external organisations](#) or from publications such as peer-reviewed journal articles.

Howe and Milner-Gulland (2012)²³ acknowledge the limitations of impact reporting by the Darwin Initiative and argue that evidence of impact that is generated [ex-post](#) has not been synthesised and analysed at the scheme level. White (2019) highlights the limitations of the current evidence base for the IWT Challenge Fund (as a newer scheme) and notes (p4) that while there has been some progress made in evaluating and reviewing demand reduction schemes, this could be expanded to cover livelihoods, enforcement, legal frameworks and specific species and geographies. The dearth of evidence on the impact of the schemes is partly due to the [challenges of measuring impact at the project level](#):²⁴

- ▶ [The three-year lifecycle](#) of a project constrains longer-term M&E processes that could detect impacts that take longer to materialise, such as climate change, poverty and livelihoods, attitudes, perceptions and behaviours, or policy-related changes.
- ▶ [The M&E capacity of projects](#) and [financial constraints](#) sometimes make it difficult to collect high-quality data on project impacts, particularly over the longer term.
- ▶ [The metrics used](#) to measure impact are based on the objectives set by project applicants at the start of projects, and there are key missing metrics or indicators, for example for the IWT Challenge Fund in relation to tackling IWT.
- ▶ [Self-reporting](#) of project achievements against objectives (graded within annual and final reports) lacks objectivity. This contributes to the lack of an objective view of what schemes are achieving at the scheme level, and whether projects are implementing activities effectively and what impacts are taking place.

Such limitations are not unique to the Darwin Initiative, Darwin Plus and the IWT Challenge Fund, and are found across existing approaches to conservation evaluation (considered in more detail at the end of Annex 4).

2.8 Existing impact pathways for the schemes

[Theories of change](#) (ToC) provide a framework for understanding, analysing, and reporting on impacts at the programme or scheme level. Recently, the evaluation of conservation programmes has been moving

²² Cunningham, S. and King, L. (2013), 'Evaluating indices of conservation success', *Animal Conservation*, 16: pp. 137–138, [link](#).

²³ Howe, C., and E.J. Milner-Gulland (2012), *Evaluating Indices of Conservation Success: A Comparative Analysis of Outcome and Output-based Indices*, [link](#).

²⁴ This list draws upon the work of White, C. (2019), *Towards an Approach for Making Evidenced-Based Funding Investments and Ensuring Effective Progress Towards Global IWT Policy Goals*, DEFRA internal document.

towards better using theories of change to also understand the conditions in which desired impacts arise. Greater attention is being given to measuring interconnecting logical pathways and the examination of assumptions lying behind the project or programme's strategy and logical pathways.²⁵

There are currently no explicitly agreed ToCs for each of the three schemes, instead the ToCs are implicit in the guidance documents. The three schemes do not have fully developed ToCs, although [impact pathway](#) diagrams developed internally by Defra in 2018 have been produced for each scheme (Figures Figure 4: Impact pathway of the Darwin Initiative, Figure 5: Impact pathway of Darwin Plus, and Figure 6: Impact pathway of the IWT Challenge Fund).²⁶ Each pathway features four [sub-pathways](#) that combine to realise a single programme outcome and impact. In the case of the Darwin Initiative, the intended outcome is '[Improved capacity in developing countries to deliver sustainable biodiversity and human development](#)'; in the case of Darwin Plus, '[UKOTs are able to better manage their environment](#)'; and for IWT Challenge Fund, '[A reduction in levels of illegal wildlife trade](#)'.

Each sub-pathway also has associated [assumptions](#) which should be tested. An important broader assumption underlying the four sub-pathways is that [they act in synergy to produce stronger outcomes than each sub-pathway acting alone](#). The Darwin thematic review *Relationship between Poverty and Biodiversity* (2015) makes a similar point: "Darwin Initiative projects select a combination of activities that will result in related wellbeing or biodiversity outputs... the underlying assumption is that these activities and outputs are complementary and address the [assumed] relationship between poverty/biodiversity."²⁷ The orange sub-pathway of the Darwin Initiative, therefore, has the important assumption 'Improved development contributes to biodiversity gains'. In the case of the IWT Challenge Fund, an important assumption to test is that an increased awareness of the consequences of purchasing illegally traded wildlife will ultimately lead to reduced demand in target countries.

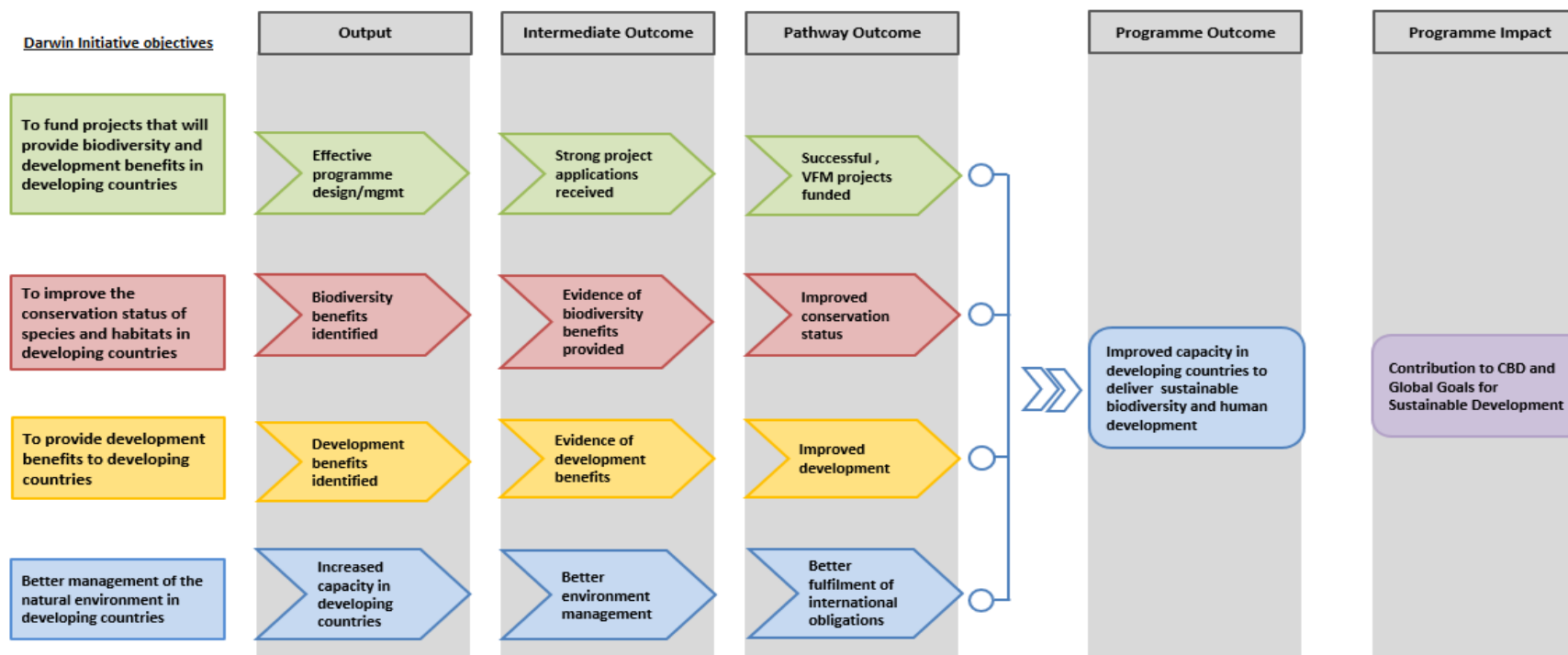
Defra also shared a [draft theory of change](#) with the evaluation team, developed by the Team Leader for Darwin and ODA Funds for the purposes of a Business Case for the future of the Darwin Initiative (included in Annex 2), which focuses on three sub-pathways relating to biodiversity, environmental management and development. These feature greater specificity of activities, outputs and outcomes, and converge at the level of impacts to deliver [enhanced biodiversity, ecosystem services and sustainable livelihoods](#). In light of the above, despite there being internally developed impact pathways as well as the draft theory of change, there is as yet no official nor publicly available ToC for each of the schemes.

²⁵ Baylis, K., et al. (2016), *Mainstreaming Impact Evaluation in Nature Conservation*, Conservation Letters 9(1), pp. 58–64, [link](#).

²⁶ As impact pathways were developed internally, they were not publicly shared with expert committees or to applicants through guidance documents.

²⁷ DEFRA (2015), *Relationships Between Poverty and Biodiversity: Evidence from the Darwin Initiative: Technical Report Draft Final*, DEFRA internal document.

Figure 4: Impact pathway of the Darwin Initiative

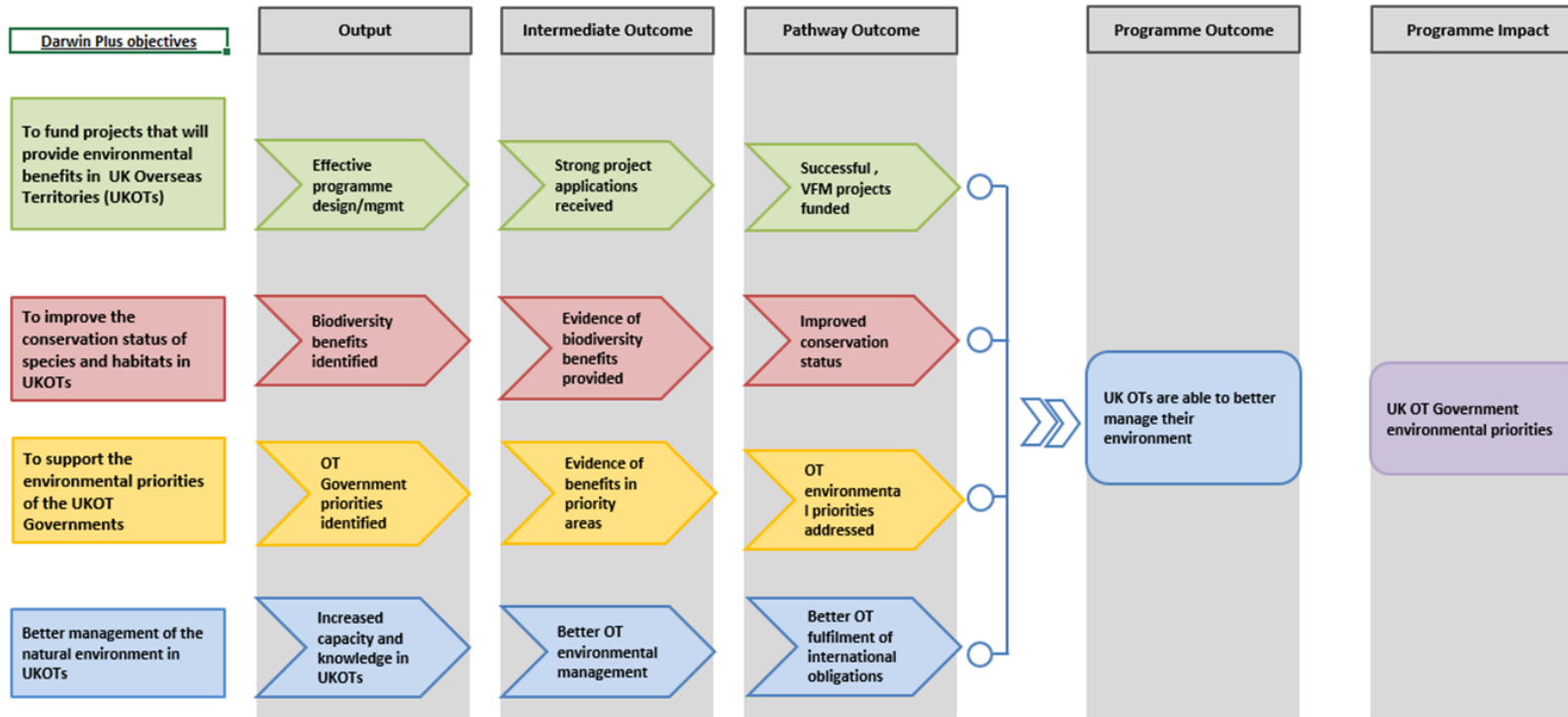


Key Output to Impact pathway assumptions

- Darwin Initiative continues to receive support from the UK Government
- Darwin Initiative is able to adapt to wider programme level changes
- Defra can attract and maintain world experts to DEC
- Well designed projects become well implemented projects
- Improved conservation contributes to wellbeing
- Improved conservation outcomes precipitate sustained behaviour change
- A lack of demonstration is preventing behaviour change
- Improved development contributes to biodiversity gains
- Possible to measure change in poverty and wellbeing over project lifetime
- Brain drain doesn't lead to loss of regional experts
- Better use of new and existing data
- Evidence informs policy and action
- Beneficiary countries are motivated to implement the conventions

Source: Terms of Reference

Figure 5: Impact pathway of Darwin Plus

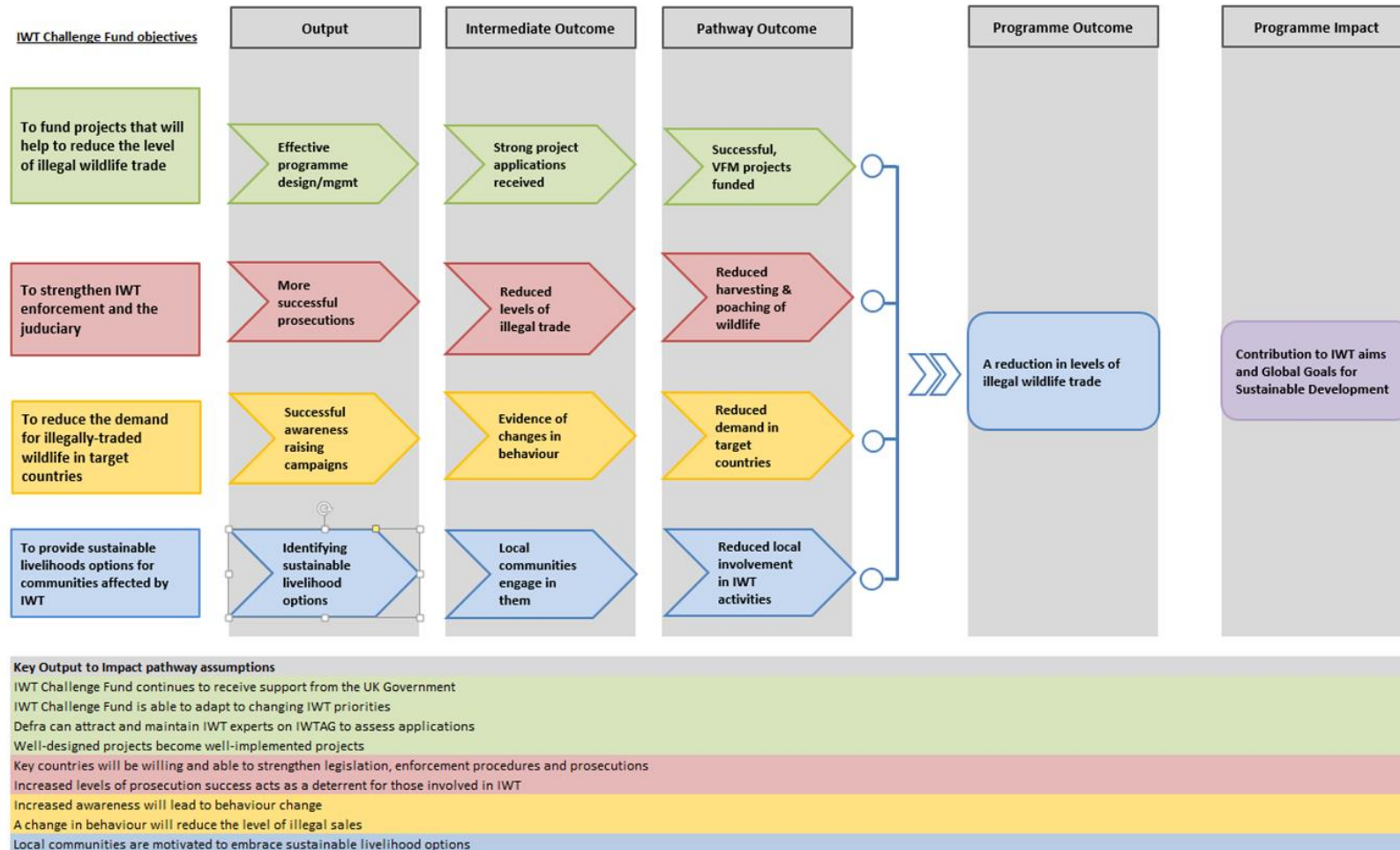


Key Output to Impact pathway assumptions

- Darwin Plus continues to receive support from the UK Government
- Defra can attract and maintain OT experts on DPAG to assess applications
- The volume and quality of Darwin Plus applications remains constant
- Well-designed projects become well-implemented projects
- Improved conservation outcomes precipitate sustained behaviour change
- A lack of demonstration is preventing behaviour change
- The OT Governments have the capacity to support/manage the volume of Darwin Plus projects in their Territory
- Possible to measure change in poverty and wellbeing over project lifetime
- Brain drain doesn't lead to loss of OT experts
- Better use of new and existing data
- Evidence informs policy and action
- UK OTs have the capacity to improve implementation of the conventions

Source: Terms of Reference

Figure 6: Impact pathway of the IWT Challenge Fund



Source: Terms of Reference

3.0 Evaluation approach and framework

In this section, we present the evaluation purpose and objectives, our evaluation approach and a revised evaluation framework.

3.1 Evaluation purpose, objectives and scope

The primary [purpose](#) of this evaluation is to better understand the impact of each scheme, what works, and to develop regular evaluations of each scheme in the future. The main [objectives](#) of the evaluation are to:

- ▶ [assess the impact](#) of each scheme in tackling key objectives and understand contributions towards meeting the UK's international commitments,
- ▶ [identify gaps in logic](#) and draw out key lessons, challenges, strengths and recommendations to help Defra prioritise future work and understand how processes/grant schemes can be improved,
- ▶ [facilitate clearer communication](#) of key achievements to the public, UK government departments, and development and academic partners
- ▶ [establish effective M&E systems](#) to ensure regular monitoring and impact evaluations of each scheme beyond the evaluation.

The [scope](#) of this evaluation covers the following aspects:

- ▶ [Time](#): All projects since the beginning of each scheme (1993 was the beginning of the Darwin Initiative) up to March 2021 (the end of the data collection for the impact evaluation) are within the scope of the evaluation. We do not exclude projects from the 1990s but do give a heavy weight in our sample to projects in the last 10 years.
- ▶ [Geography](#): All countries where there have been Darwin, Darwin Plus or IWT projects are within our scope.

The [results](#) of the evaluation (with the evaluation report due in July 2021 and the M&E framework scheduled for completion in December 2021, will enable Defra to improve the quality of the schemes in delivering their objectives and inform the operation of projects going forward. The evaluation also provides a unique opportunity to showcase Defra's contributions to global biodiversity and environmental protection ahead of the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Glasgow in November 2021.

The formal recipient of this evaluation is Defra (Defra will publish a response outlining steps taken to address key findings). The range of key [target audiences](#) for this evaluation are detailed in Section 5.8, Communications plan.

3.2 Evaluation approach

Based upon our knowledge of the schemes and relevant work, we will meet the evaluation objectives by:

- ▶ [Simplifying and strengthening overall theories of change](#), including refining the underlying assumptions for the funds. This will include clarifying the impact pathways for the programme and the links between conservation and development.

- ▶ **Strengthening the way that schemes understand outcomes and impact**, by building on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) DAC evaluation good practice, systematically testing theories of change, and generating and communicating useful lessons learned. This will include use of innovative approaches, which acknowledge organisational culture, including process tracing, as well as GESI and VfM analyses.
- ▶ **Making assumption testing (linked to adaptive management) a key part of an enhanced M&E framework, which aims to improve learning and development.** Gaining more clarity on both the theory of change and scheme objectives, and how these can be measured, should ultimately improve project impact prospects.

Our overall approach to this evaluation is based on the following principles:

- ▶ **Theory based:** A theory-based approach provides a systematic way of assessing how projects and a wider portfolio are contributing to objectives. Theory-based approaches use explicit theories of change, allow the linkage of process and impact evaluation, and are suited to using qualitative and quantitative data. They also support this evaluation's objective of clearly communicating key achievements to a range of audiences. Adopting this approach will support the assessment of achievements against target outputs, outcomes and impacts (across each scheme's impact pathway), and provide a structure for assessing the factors enabling or hindering change, based on interrogation of the underlying assumptions within each scheme's theory of change.
- ▶ **Mixed methods:** The results of the three schemes cannot be assessed through quantitative or qualitative methods alone and instead require using various methods and approaches to construct a picture over time of what has changed, why it has changed and how this learning can be applied in the future. For this reason, we take a mixed-method approach to this evaluation, which includes triangulating data collected from qualitative and quantitative desk reviews and semi-structured interviews (sections 4.3 and 4.4), mapped against the evaluation questions (Section 3.3).
- ▶ **Participatory:** A key priority of the evaluation is to ensure relevant Defra, expert committee and project-level stakeholders have an opportunity to shape and learn from the evaluation. Our approach will, therefore, be participatory, supporting them to share their experiences, make discoveries, prompt discussions and take an active learning role. We will include Defra through a facilitated self-reflection process, including: a kick-off meeting to share understanding of the evaluation's priorities and build familiarisation with the evaluation's methodology and approach; two theory of change workshops; formal meetings with the chairs of the expert committees; and final presentations with Defra. At each stage, our role will be a 'critical friend', facilitating and bringing a level of external rigour to the evaluation.
- ▶ **Tiered sample:** Since they were established, the three schemes have supported 1,305 projects. It is neither necessary nor feasible to review all projects in depth. Instead, we adopt a tiered approach, reporting on descriptive statistics on all projects at the **scheme level** (based on LTS' monitoring data), before exploring the impact of each scheme and underlying change processes in more depth through two **project samples** covering each scheme and five **country/UKOT case studies**. The **Tier 1 sample** will involve a larger but lighter touch review of key project documents from 100 representative projects. The **Tier 2 sample** will be a sub-sample of 30 Tier 1 projects, involving primary data collection across four countries (and one UKOT), to explore issues of impact and sustainability, gender and social inclusion, and VfM in more depth. Adopting a country case study approach will allow for comparative analysis between projects and their interaction with different country contexts.

The evaluation data collection methods are covered in Section 4, and analysis and reporting are covered in Section 5. Overleaf, we first present our evaluation framework.

3.3 Evaluation framework

Drawing on the Terms of Reference and the feedback provided by Defra to our proposal, we have developed a detailed evaluation framework. We have generated overarching evaluation questions and linked them to the ToR questions. We have also mapped questions back to the evaluation objectives and relevant OECD DAC criteria. We present these questions and detail our assessment criteria and data sources (scheme-level data analysis, scheme-level interviews, Tier 1 and Tier 2 project reviews) in the abridged evaluation framework below. Evaluation questions (with DAC criteria in bold) are in the orange cells. The full evaluation framework (Annex 5) includes more detail. Question 6 in the ToR evaluation ('How can a standardised monitoring and evaluation be designed to better reflect the impact of funding through the three schemes while retaining the different objectives of each scheme?') is covered in Section 5.6 Developing monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks.

Table 5: Abridged evaluation framework

Sub-questions	Indicators/Assessment criteria	Methods			
		Desk review	Tier 1 projects	Tier 2 projects	Strategic interviews
1. Relevance: To what extent have the three grant schemes contributed to meeting the targets of relevant MEAs? ²⁸ [ToR q7]					
1.1 Do the project objectives under each scheme contribute directly to biodiversity aims or goals?	Percentage of projects in each scheme that have objectives which contribute directly to biodiversity conservation (including the CBD, CITES, the CMS, the Nagoya Protocol, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the Ramsar Convention)	X			
	Qualitative/quantitative assessment of the relevance of the design of Tier 1 sample projects to global and country biodiversity, needs and priorities		X		
1.2 Do the project objectives under each scheme contribute directly to climate change aims or goals?	Percentage of projects that have objectives which contribute directly to climate change in each scheme (including the UNFCCC)	X			
	Qualitative/quantitative assessment of the relevance of the design of Tier 1 sample projects to global and country climate change needs and priorities		X		
1.3 Do the project objectives under each scheme contribute directly to wider poverty	Qualitative/quantitative assessment of the relevance of the design of Tier 1 sample projects to sustainable livelihoods goals and priorities (by relevant UN SDGs)		X		

²⁸ Including the CBD, the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, CITES, the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the UN SDGs.

reduction/sustainable livelihoods aims or goals?					
1.4 To what extent do the project objectives under each scheme contribute to multiple goals (and pathways)?	Qualitative/quantitative assessment of the extent to which the design of projects addresses multiple biodiversity, poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods and climate change/other environmental goals simultaneously, and how/extent of synergies, based on Tier 1 and Tier 2 samples		X	X	
2. Effectiveness/impact: To what extent has each scheme achieved its objectives and intended impacts? [ToR q1]		Desk review	Tier 1 projects	Tier 2 projects	Strategic interviews
2.1 How have the projects funded under each scheme enabled this? [ToR q1.a]	Comparison of achieved outputs, outcomes, and average project scores (by scheme and for Tier 1 sample), by contribution to relevant biodiversity, poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods, climate change/other environmental and multiple goals	X	X		
	Qualitative/quantitative assessment of the effectiveness of Tier 1 sample projects (output and outcome levels) and the impact of Tier 2 sample projects, by scheme, against their original applications/log frames (across biodiversity, sustainable livelihoods, climate change/other environmental and multiple goals)		X	X	
	Qualitative assessment of where projects under each scheme are stronger or weaker in relation to biodiversity, sustainable livelihoods, climate change/other environmental and multiple goals (grounded in the above data), including in comparison with similar programmes, and why				
2.2 How effective is the scheme in delivering results/outcomes in certain project activities, geographies, types of partner organisation or overall project contexts? Or in other words, what has worked well, what has not, and in what context? [ToR q1.b]	Percentage of scheme projects within specific categories of activity, region, biome, partner organisation, threat to biodiversity (for example climate change, land use, invasive species) and species (IWT)	X			
	Comparison of scheme average project scores within each category: activities, geographies, partner organisation, etc.	X			
	Qualitative assessment across Tier 2 projects of what has worked well (for high-performing projects) and what has not (for less well-performing projects) in different contexts				X
2.3 What are the main enablers and barriers to meeting each scheme's objectives? [ToR q1.c]	Statistical correlation of different internal variables with project scores by scheme, including relevance (single/multiple goals), funding received/project size, staffing costs, high project leader site presence, media/public exposure (for example, number of press articles and other dissemination outputs), research outputs (PhD, master's and undergrad), etc.	X			

	Qualitative/quantitative assessment of internal and external factors behind scoring decisions for Tier 1 projects, by scheme		X		
	Qualitative assessment across Tier 2 projects of key enablers and barriers to success (internal and external), by scheme			X	
	Qualitative assessment of the main enablers and barriers to meeting each scheme's objectives (grounded in the above evidence and data)				X
2.4 How have projects scored in the past at different stages (for example, application stage, interim and final stages of implementation)? [ToR q5]	Comparison of project ratings/statistical correlation between project application scores, annual report review scores and/or project completion scores for all projects and/or Tier 1 projects.	X	X		
3. Efficiency: To what extent is each scheme delivering VfM? [ToR q2]		Desk review	Tier 1 projects	Tier 2 projects	Strategic interviews
3.1 How economical, efficient, effective and equitable is each scheme?	Economy (scheme-level): Rigorous and transparent selection of projects based on consideration of VfM; LTS actively monitoring and managing own costs and project budget management; maintaining of downward pressure on scheme and project cost drivers; scheme delivery on time and within budget; suitable proportion of funding leveraged compared to overall budget; LTS management costs as percentage of overall scheme costs benchmarked against comparable schemes	X			X
	Economy (project-level): Projects have systems to report and monitor on spend against VfM metrics and deliver to budget over the project lifetime; project budget management over duration			X	
	Efficiency (scheme-level): Efficiency and flexibility of fund allocation processes (to meet project emerging priorities); level of collaboration between Defra, LTS International, expert committees and other actors in allocating funds to priorities; LTS supporting achievement of scheme-level outputs through screening, monitoring and other activities to ensure delivery of output; achievement of target outputs within budgeted costs	X			X
	Efficiency (project-level): Projects demonstrate evidence of fund reallocation and adaptive management to meet emerging priorities; achievement of target outputs within budgeted costs; project output milestones met on time			X	

	Effectiveness (scheme-level): LTS supporting achievement of scheme-level outcomes and impacts through screening, monitoring and other activities to ensure delivery of outcomes and impacts; scheme logframe indicators reflect achievement of outcomes and impacts against milestones; scheme identification and management of risks	X			X
	Effectiveness (project-level): Project logframe indicators show achievement of outcomes and impacts; projects identify assumptions and risks on an ongoing basis and actively manage and mitigate risks			X	
	Equity (scheme-level): Fair, transparent and accessible application process; mainstreaming of equity and inclusiveness across schemes; schemes recognise, consider and act on potential trade-offs of projects related to costs and benefits delivered to different groups	X			X
	Equity (project-level): Mainstreaming of equity and inclusiveness across projects; equitable results across gender, socio-economic status and location through disaggregation of reporting; consideration of trade-offs in design and delivery of project activities and outcomes			X	
	Cost effectiveness (scheme-level): Variation in level of achievement of outcomes compared to project size (see 2.3)	X			
	Sustainability (scheme-level): Post-project monitoring in place to track sustainability of projects	X			X
	Sustainability (project-level): Sustainability plans/exit strategies are in place; funding leveraged to sustain outcomes/continue project			X	
2.5 How could the grant schemes be improved from the design and application stages to the implementation and completion phases to better achieve their objectives and deliver VfM? [ToR q4]	Quantitative assessment of ingredients of highest-scoring projects by scheme, based on the relationship between different project categories (funding, staffing costs, activities, partner organisation, in-country presence, etc.) and project completion scores	X			
	Qualitative assessment of key process lessons at the project (Tier 2) level focused on the design, application, implementation and completion phases (and approach to M&E)			X	
	Qualitative assessment of key process lessons at the scheme level focused on the design, application, implementation and completion phases (and approach to M&E) to help increase scheme effectiveness, impact on MEA and SDG targets, and VfM (grounded in the above evidence and data)				X
4. Sustainability To what extent have benefits of the funded projects continued beyond project funding, and what benefits have been long lasting? [ToR q. 3]		Desk review	Tier 1 projects	Tier 2 projects	Strategic interviews
	Qualitative/quantitative assessment of potential sustainability of Tier 1 sample of projects and their benefits		X		

4.1 Have the project benefits been sustained and what factors have influenced this? [ToR q3a]	Qualitative analysis of actual sustainability of Tier 2 project benefits, which benefits are long lasting and factors related to sustainability			X	
	Composition of project categories in projects with likely long-lasting benefits (Tier 1/2), compared with composition of project categories for all projects	X	X	X	
4.2 How have the projects funded across the schemes built on each other? [ToR q3b]	Percentage of all projects in each scheme and/or Tier 1 projects that represent follow-on projects (and comparisons with project type and final scores achieved)	X	X		
	Qualitative assessment of the factors that have given rise to follow on work, by scheme, based upon the Tier 2 project sample			X	
	Qualitative assessment of how projects have built on, and complemented, each other (by scheme and across schemes) in case study countries (Tier 2)			X	
4.3 How can these lessons be used to improve fund design? [ToR q3c]	Qualitative assessment of the enablers and barriers to sustainability, by scheme, and how fund design can be improved (grounded in the above evidence and data)				X
5. Equity: How GESI-sensitive are the schemes? (New q)		Desk review	Tier 1 projects	Tier 2 projects	Strategic interviews
5.1 How effectively has gender (and intersectional issues such as age, poverty status and ethnic group), power considerations and safeguarding been mainstreamed into projects?	Percentage of scheme projects that have broad approaches covering gender issues	X			
	Deep dive analysis of selected Tier 2 projects to assess the number of projects scored as GESI-transformative, GESI-mainstreaming and/or GESI-sensitive (at design, delivery, and M&E project cycle phases), and why			X	
	Qualitative assessment of how schemes can be made more GESI-sensitive (grounded in the above evidence and data)				X
5.2 To what extent have the schemes benefited marginalised groups such as women and girls and indigenous communities?	Deep dive analysis of selected Tier 2 projects to assess qualitatively: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ evidence of projects identifying and responding to the articulated needs of marginalised groups and adapting to these throughout the project length, ▶ extent to which marginalised groups have been consulted during project design, ▶ extent to which marginalised groups report tangible, sustainable benefits from interventions. 			X	

Source: Developed from Terms of Reference

4.0 Evaluation methods

In this section, we present our sampling strategy, the methods for the evaluation and any limitations.

Our proposed approach relies on triangulation between different methods and data sources, both qualitative and quantitative, to evidence the progress of each scheme against their theory of change. As outlined in our evaluation framework, the primary data collection methods for this evaluation include desk review and semi-structured interviews and group discussions. Alongside scheme-level data analysis and interviews at the portfolio level, we firstly sample a representative selection of projects to conduct more in-depth project assessments against our evaluation questions. In using multiple methods, the aim is to adequately address each evaluation objective and question, mitigate the limitations of each and conduct a robust assessment that will enable us to confidently respond to all evaluation questions.

4.1 Developing theories of change

A key principle of theory-based evaluation is to identify the causal pathways between inputs and outputs, outputs and outcomes, and outcomes and impact, in other words, the processes that need to occur for changes to take place.²⁹ This is usually represented in a visual [theory of change](#) and accompanying narrative, with a logical framework (logframe) providing a more practical tool for implementers to manage progress through defining specific objectives and indicators of success.

As a minimum, a ToC should encompass the following:³⁰

- ▶ [The context for the initiative](#), including social, political and environmental challenges, barriers, necessary pre-conditions and other actors that may influence change.
- ▶ [The long-term change](#) the initiative seeks to support, and who will benefit from it.
- ▶ [The causal pathways](#) that connect inputs to outputs and outputs to outcomes, thus creating the required conditions for desired long-term change.
- ▶ [Assumptions](#) describing salient events or conditions necessary for a particular causal pathway to be realised. If an assumption does not hold true, then an expected effect may not occur.³¹

The existing diagrammatic [impact pathways](#) in figures 4-6 provide a concise model of how the three schemes are being implemented; however, they [do not satisfy generally accepted norms for ToCs](#) in terms of the following:

- ▶ [Inconsistent language](#) used for different components, including (a) the headings of columns and rows and (b) the phrasing and logic of the text in the matrix boxes. For example, there is no column of 'Activities' that lead to 'Outputs'. Under the heading 'Programme impact' the current references to a contribution to CBD, SDGs, UKOT government environmental priorities and IWT aims are valid objectives of the three schemes, but they are not 'impacts' consistent with a properly formulated ToC.
- ▶ [No distinction between testable and untestable assumptions](#): It will be useful to distinguish between those testable assumptions that lie behind the performance of the schemes (key performance assumptions) and those that are either untestable or outwith the control of the scheme.

²⁹ White, H. (2019), 'Theory-based Impact Evaluation: Principles and Practice', *Journal of Development Effectiveness* 1(3), [link](#).

³⁰ Vogel I. (2012), *Review of the use of Theory of Change in International Development*, UK Department of International Development, [link](#).

³¹ Mayne, J. (2017), 'Theory of Change Analysis: Building Robust Theories of Change'. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, [link](#).

- ▶ **Out-of-date impact pathways:** The existing impact pathways no longer correspond with more recent documents related to the three schemes. On the IWT Challenge Fund, for example, one of the listed objectives is to 'strengthen IWT enforcement and the judiciary'. However, the guidelines for applicants in May 2020 split this into two separate objectives, one linked to improving law enforcement *per se*, and the other for policy/legal frameworks and processes (including the judiciary). Similarly, for the Darwin Initiative, the guidance notes for applicants in July 2020 list eight objectives as opposed to the four included in Figure 8.
- ▶ **The risks to outcomes being achieved are not explicit:** In ToCs, risks are external factors that have an influence on the capacity of the programme to achieve its outcomes and are distinct from failures due to wrong assumptions.

To build updated ToCs we will host separate [theory of change workshops](#). Because Darwin and Darwin Plus have similar programme structures and aims, we will host one for them and one for the IWT Challenge Fund. We will invite Defra, LTS and the members of the expert committees of each scheme. The participatory nature of this will use the large and shared knowledge of these groups. These workshops will have the following objectives:

- ▶ agreement on the conceptual framework for developing a new theory of change, which defines and describes change processes targeted by each scheme,
- ▶ clear articulation of the challenges and barriers being addressed,
- ▶ map out any additional causal pathways of the ToC for each scheme (including gaining clarity on what is in scope and outside of the direct control of interventions),
- ▶ further develop understanding of the external factors which may enable or inhibit success, and the assumptions that must hold true for change to take place, and
- ▶ use the experience of the participants to identify potential evidence sources for the causal pathways.

The theory of change workshops will be held in December 2020. The evaluation team will incorporate feedback from the workshops before sharing draft scheme ToCs with Defra and selected reviewers for comment in January 2021. We will then update and re-submit the revised and updated ToCs for final approval.

4.2 Sampling strategy

During the inception phase, we constructed a robust and two-tiered project sample, to support more in-depth assessment of specific projects. We used [stratified purposive sampling](#) for this purpose. We firstly divided the universe of projects into separate sub-groups (strata),³² before [purposively](#) selecting sub-samples from each stratum. We stratified using the following variables – type of award, region and ecosystem – before purposively sampling along the following variables: selected case study countries, grant size and time period.³³ The case study countries and UKOTs were selected to provide broad regional representation and high combined numbers of Darwin Initiative and IWT Challenge Fund projects (Darwin Plus in the case of UKOTs). For the Tier 2 sampling, a further criterion was added based on project start date (from 2010 onwards) to ensure that Darwin Initiative projects are sufficiently contemporary to be able to explore their impact with stakeholders. Finally, due to IWT Challenge Fund demand reduction projects not being represented in the selected case study countries (and following feedback from Defra), the

³² This was done using the statistical software Stata and in line with best practice from the World Bank. World Bank (undated), Stratified Random Sample, DIME Wiki, [link](#).

³³ Despite IWT typologies not being an explicit stratification variable, the four thematic areas of Sustainable livelihoods, increased enforcement, legal frameworks and demand reduction have been considered and sufficiently represented in the sample.

sampling strategy was extended to include an additional mini-case study of two demand reduction projects in one additional country.

Using this iterative and purposive process, we have selected the following projects:

- ▶ **Tier 1:** 100 projects with the following distribution – Darwin (50), Darwin Plus (15), IWT Challenge Fund (31) and Fellowships (4).
- ▶ **Tier 2:** From the above, we selected 30 projects, including in Kenya (6), Indonesia (6), Nepal (6), Bolivia (6), Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha (4) and Vietnam (2 demand reduction projects).

The total number of Tier 1 projects sampled (100) is roughly 10% of the total population of all projects. The total number of Tier 2 projects (30) is roughly a third of this sample.

For a comprehensive overview of the sampling approach and the selected projects for the evaluation, see Annex 6. This includes descriptive statistics (by scheme) on time period, region, biome (Darwin and Darwin Plus), IWT typology (sustainable livelihoods, increased enforcement, legal frameworks, and demand reduction), funding and type of partner at both the Tier 1 and Tier 2 levels.

4.3 Desk review

Scheme documents

Underpinning the evaluation, we are conducting an extensive desk review of [programme documents](#). This will help us to refine our understanding of the schemes and their theories of change, the impact of each scheme (including relative to other programmes), lessons learnt to date, and our data collection tools. As part of this exercise, we expect to review the following programme-level documents:

- ▶ [internal programme documents](#), including the implementing agency/s annual report to Defra; Darwin Initiative application guidance, and strategy group meeting minutes,
- ▶ [thematic reviews](#) of the Darwin Initiative’s contribution to global taxonomy, the biodiversity of islands, education and awareness, forest biodiversity, climate change, overseas territories and poverty,
- ▶ [briefing, information and learning notes](#) including those on the SDGs, the Nagoya Protocol and ODA,
- ▶ [documentation on similar programmes](#), including the Biodiverse Landscapes Fund, the GEF Small Grants Programme, the World Bank’s PROGREEN, PROBLUE and Global Wildlife programmes.
- ▶ [documents on poverty and development, including FCDO guidance on ODA objectives and managing ODA](#),
- ▶ [other relevant documents](#) including the House of Lords notes on integrating evidence in conservation funding.

A mapping of the documents to review has been included in Annex 4. Of the above, several have already been reviewed during the inception phase, informing, for example, our summary of the programme and its existing impact pathways and the wider landscape of biodiversity programmes.

Scheme monitoring data

Following this, a quantitative desk review will use existing [monitoring data](#) collected and collated by LTS to report on the make-up of the portfolio, provide a comparison of project scores and with various project

characteristics (where feasible), and extract cost data, as per the requirements of the evaluation framework. This will also allow us to present the results from our sample within the context of the overall scheme. We have already reviewed the monitoring data during inception to assess the quality of the data collected (as well as to develop our project review frameworks, sampling approach and overall evaluation framework).

Project data

Finally, we will collect secondary data necessary for our [project assessments](#). For [Tier 1](#) projects, we will extract relevant data from their original applications, the application review form, annual reports, annual report reviews, the final report, and the final report reviews, again according to the requirements of the evaluation framework. For [Tier 2](#) projects, we will review these documents in more depth and include any additional evaluations or reviews that covered the project (alongside conducting project interviews – see below). This will collect additional data and evidence on project [impact](#), and will cover in particular [VfM](#), [gender and social inclusion](#) and [other factors](#) that may have contributed to outcomes and impact. These topics are not covered at Tier 1 because of the level of detailed information required. Further evidence on such factors, which is not present in the project documentation, will be gathered through the interviews conducted for Tier 2 projects (see below).

Finally, to support evidence collection and analysis for the Tier 2 sample, we will also conduct a light-touch review of relevant national policy documents, such as national biodiversity strategies and actions plans, national sustainable development strategies, and national reports for different conventions like CITES. These documents will help us to assess the results achieved at the country level, particularly where projects have contributed to changes in policy, and to contextualise the effectiveness and relevance of the schemes to corroborate claims that projects are in line with national strategies.

As part of the inception phase, we have developed [project assessment frameworks](#), which will guide the collection and (analysis) of relevant project data during the desk review. They set out all the questions and how they should be answered, drawing on the range of secondary and primary evidence available to the evaluation, and are informed by the questions in the overarching evaluation framework. Completed frameworks can be transferred to Excel for analysis across the sample. Draft frameworks are presented in Annex 7. The questions may be altered or added to following client feedback and the theory of change workshop. We will then pilot the project assessment process for Tier 1 and Tier 2 projects for around five of the sampled projects to ensure that the project assessment frameworks and other aspects of the process work effectively. We will make modifications following this piloting. The first five projects assessed will be quality assured by senior members of the team to ensure consistency in the way questions are answered/judgements are made.

The desk review is the first task to be completed after the inception phase. In-depth interviews at two levels will complement the various desk reviews.

4.4 Semi-structured interviews

Project level

In parallel to the desk research, our team will organise a limited number of short (less than 45 mins) interviews with Tier 1 stakeholders. We envisage up to 15 of these interviews from the sample of 70 Tier 1 projects (which are not part of the Tier 2 sample). These short interviews will help to fill any important gaps in the existing project documentation.

We will also organise interviews with key Tier 2 project stakeholders as part of our in-country field research. We envisage that we will carry out between three and four interviews/group interviews per project (90–120 in total), principally with representatives of the lead project delivery partner, in-country collaborators, project beneficiaries, relevant academics and other local experts. The desk research will, as noted above,

serve to identify candidates for interview. We will make the final selection of the interviewees in agreement with Defra. We will cover the topics outlined in the evaluation framework, but with a focus on [impact](#) and the [sustainability](#) of project outcomes (the existing project documentation is unlikely to provide information on actual sustainability, only on likely sustainability), as well as on [gender and social inclusion](#).

These interviews will last between 60 and 90 minutes and will be carried out on a semi-structured basis, following the Tier 2 project frameworks, and an agreed interview guide. The interviews will be carried out in the language of the country (all national experts are fluent in the language of the country in which they will carry out the research). The researchers may, with the permission of the interviewee, record the interview for their own analysis purposes (all recordings will be erased after the project has been completed). The interviewers will write up the interview notes in English under the question headings, which they will then use to input key information from the interview into the project assessment framework.

Some interviews may be carried out over the telephone or via video conferencing (Microsoft Teams, Skype for Business or similar platforms) due to COVID-19 restrictions, although we also envisage carrying out interviews face to face where safe to do so. It is useful to conduct face-to-face interviews, where circumstances allow, to benefit from the extra depth of information that can be gleaned from face-to-face interactions. Section 6 provides further detail on our approach to conducting fieldwork ethically and on safeguarding. Prior to the interviews, a full fieldwork protocol will be finalised and shared, and online training/briefing session held, to help ensure a consistent and ethical approach to data collection.

Strategic stakeholder level

Key informant interviews with programme strategic stakeholders will take place at the start and towards the end of the data collection phase. These will inform our scheme-wide analysis, and in particular the process-related evaluation questions highlighted as relevant to strategic stakeholders, in the evaluation framework. The interview questions will be structured according to the OECD DAC criteria, and will cover such topics as:

- ▶ the [strengths and weaknesses](#) of each scheme with regards to impacts on biodiversity, climate change/other environmental goals and poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods, as well as on multiple goals,
- ▶ the [coherence and added value](#) of the three schemes with regards to other conservation and IWT prevention programmes,
- ▶ the main [enablers and barriers](#) to the schemes achieving their intended impacts, as well as sustainable benefits (and how these relate to [programme assumptions](#)),
- ▶ the [value for money](#) of the schemes and portfolio across relevant measures of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness,
- ▶ how the schemes can be [improved](#) (from the project design and application stages to the project implementation and completion phases) to better achieve their objectives,
- ▶ [lessons learned](#) for similar programmes.

Interviews will be conducted as [face-to-face interviews](#) and [group discussions](#) and will be [semi-structured](#) and follow [a discussion guide](#) (a draft guide, to be updated with specific questions and prompts as the evaluation progresses and new lines of enquiry emerge), which is included in Annex 7.

We propose engaging a [wide variety of stakeholder groups](#). Stakeholders can be broadly categorised as:

- ▶ [Programme management](#): LTS and Defra staff with management responsibilities.
- ▶ [Advisory Group members](#): We have interviewed the chairs of the DEC and the IWT Advisory Group (IWTAG) and will interview a further sample of committee members.

- ▶ **Comparator programmes:** Programme management stakeholders from similar schemes, such as the Biodiverse Landscapes Fund.
- ▶ **Other external experts:** Including academics and representatives of international NGOs.

We have conducted a preliminary **stakeholder mapping exercise**, which LTS, Defra, the chairs of the expert committees and other committee members have inputted into during the inception phase. This consisted of asking partners and interviewees to provide the contact details of other relevant stakeholders they believed we should consult with. Independently, we also added our own suggested external experts to the long list, based on our knowledge of the sector and of similar schemes (with the requirement that these stakeholders have sufficient knowledge of Darwin and its structures to meaningfully comment). Our sample frame currently includes 50 organisations/individuals from the groups above.

We then prioritised and selected a range of stakeholders from each group to participate in strategic stakeholder interviews and/or group discussions. The next step will be to agree and finalise this shortlist, working with Defra. We will aim to gather perspectives from around 30 stakeholders (the remainder can be targeted for dissemination activity – see Section 5.8), by conducting up to 20 interviews and group discussions. We may also identify additional stakeholders working across the priority areas, following further review of programme documentation.

We will aim to split the interviews into different stages to ensure we take an iterative approach that can help test as well as generate evaluation findings, for example, interviewing members of the Defra and LTS management teams earlier in the evaluation, and the DEC and IWTAG towards the end (see Section 5.9).

4.5 Limitations of the method

Detailed below are the key limitations of our method and mitigation measures.

Gaps in secondary data: The central risk to our evaluation is an absence of evidence on the components of the programme's theory of change. There is currently a lack of project ex-post evaluations, as well as limitations within the existing monitoring data. Specifically, certain scheme-level analyses highlighted in the evaluation framework are limited by the monitoring data available for each scheme. Firstly, analyses involving comparisons of final report review scores can only be undertaken for 219 projects across the three schemes (the current system of scoring was only implemented in 2014/2015). Secondly, categorical data (for example, biome, specific tools used, broad approaches employed and threats to biodiversity addressed) are only available for a subset of 592 Darwin Initiative and Darwin Plus projects (data collection for these categories only started with the introduction of the Darwin Information Project in 2001). Finally, analyses involving the use of standard outputs (for example, variables that measure project leader site presence, media/public exposure and research outputs) are only available for 731 Darwin Initiative and Darwin Plus projects. The IWT Challenge Fund has only recently developed a standard output framework; therefore, no monitoring data on these outputs has yet been collected. We will mitigate this by being clear on what subsets of projects our scheme-level analysis relates to (and the associated limitations) and by using process tracing to make a judgement on the strength of existing evidence before purposefully trying to find more evidence where weak evidence exists.

Limited number of projects in sample: The method we employ and the resource available allows us to sample 100 projects (including 30 of these in depth) to help infer the impact and process lessons for the whole portfolio (over 1,000 projects). This poses a risk that there is an overemphasis of our findings from these projects. We mitigate this by careful sampling, through scheme-level analysis of monitoring data (where possible), and by having interviews with key strategic stakeholders who have knowledge of the whole portfolio and projects outside of our sample. At all stages of answering the main evaluation questions, we will triangulate evidence from multiple sources to avoid relying on any one source.

Fieldwork limitations due to COVID-19: The preferred approach would have been for members of the core evaluation team to travel to case study countries and conduct Tier 2 project assessments alongside national researchers (or, in the case of UKOTs, in person alone). This would have allowed for a greater depth of data collection and additional quality assurance. Mindful of the rapidly changing situation with the pandemic and the potential for some countries to open to visitors sooner than others, the team have prepared a budget for country travel, should this become possible, and contingent upon approval by Defra.

Possible stakeholder interviewee sampling bias: Our sampling approach for strategic stakeholders uses a combination of snowball sampling and purposeful sampling. The limits of snowball sampling are that stakeholders referred by Defra, LTS and expert committee members may have an overly positive impression of the impact and effectiveness of the portfolio. To limit this potential bias, additional external interviewees, representative of the wider population of experts and organisations involved in addressing biodiversity and the illegal wildlife trade, were selected by the evaluation team.

5.0 Evaluation analysis and reporting

This section details the evaluation analysis at different levels (scheme, project, value for money, and gender and social inclusion) before describing the outputs of the evaluation. We conclude with our communications plan.

5.1 Scheme-level data analysis

Based upon the evaluation framework, we will, as far as possible, undertake the following analyses with available output and outcome [monitoring data](#).

To understand scheme-level [contributions to MEAs](#), we will use existing monitoring data collected and collated by LTS to create descriptive statistics. For example, we will report the percentage of projects that have objectives contributing directly to biodiversity conservation agreements. These currently exist as binary variables on the contribution to the CBD, CMS, CITES, the Ramsar Convention, World Heritage Sites, the UNFCCC and Desertification. We may use proxy indicators to elicit contribution to other MEAs. For example, monitoring data on project contributions to certain CBD cross-cutting issues and/or CBD articles could indicate contribution to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Similarly, we use the binary variable 'contribution to the UNFCCC' as an indicator of contribution to climate change. We will also present descriptive statistics about average project scores (where available from final report reviews in the database) at the scheme level and for Tier 1 projects by MEA (and for Tier 2, for projects that tackle both MEAs and sustainable livelihoods). This will be indicative of which MEAs (and combinations of goals, including poverty reduction) the schemes are most strong in.

To [describe the portfolio](#), we will first present the percentage of projects by different categories (activity, region, biome, IWT typology (sustainable livelihoods, increased enforcement, legal frameworks, and demand reduction), IWT focus species, partner organisation, threat to biodiversity, etc.), by scheme. To help understand [factors that drive effectiveness](#), we will present average project review scores for each of these categories.³⁴ We will also try to understand [enabling factors and barriers to the success](#) of projects that are more internal, such as their relevance (to single/multiple goals), total funding received, staffing costs, high project leader site presence, media/public exposure, research outputs, etc. We will again look for correlation of these variables with project final report review scores. Similarly, we will look for patterns/correlations with regards to the [stability of project scores across the lifecycle](#), in other words, we

³⁴ This analysis is limited to the projects for which this data is available in the existing monitoring database (see the expanded evaluation framework in Annex 5).

will compare project scores across different stages of the project lifecycle, including application scores, annual report review scores and/or final report review scores, and understand the reasons behind strong/weak scoring (where practical to do so). This will identify whether projects that score well at the application stage also do well in practice by the end of the project lifecycle. We will build upon existing analysis conducted by LTS International on this last point.

We will conduct light-touch analysis of the [sustainability](#) at the scheme level using the percentage of all projects in each scheme that represent follow-on projects. We will then compare the average final report review score for the sample of projects that are follow-on projects with the universe of projects that are not to help analyse whether follow-on projects are more or less effective. Finally, we will also compare a sub-sample of projects that are particularly high scoring in their final report review scores to the rest of the projects, to see if there are compositions of project categories that lead to high project scores and, therefore, provide stronger [value for money](#).

In addition to the analysis of monitoring data, a thematic analysis of [strategic stakeholder interview notes](#) will allow us to explore further topics at the level of the scheme (as per the evaluation framework), including, but not limited, to: areas of strength and weakness in relation to impact and sustainability; process lessons regarding the design, application, implementation and completion of each scheme; and general insights on how to improve fund design.

5.2 Project-level data analysis

Process tracing will guide our approach to the collection and analysis of project data. Process tracing is a qualitative research method for assessing causal inference and is well suited to evaluations of the three schemes, whereby change takes place through multiple causes across a diverse range of contexts, and where levels of evidence may vary. In addition to supporting our assessment of each scheme's achievements against target outputs and outcomes, the methodology provides a structure to assess the process factors enabling or hindering the achievement of outcomes and the relationship between these factors.³⁵ It is more appropriate than contribution analysis, given the large variability in scheme implementation and target outcomes.³⁶

Process tracing consists of a series of tests to assess the strength of evidence for an intervention's contribution to observed outputs and outcomes (the hypothesis), and provides a fine-grained analysis of the processes leading to change. It will enable us to assess the causal pathways that link independent variables and outcomes in each scheme's ToC (as they relate to biodiversity, sustainable livelihoods and climate change/other environmental goals), test the underlying assumptions articulated and explore the degree to which change is taking place as anticipated. Process tracing recognises that there is not one single factor that explains why an outcome has been achieved, and instead seeks to assess the relative contribution of different factors.

Towards the end of the evaluation, it will also help us to refine each scheme's ToC to ensure that future projects improve their performance through robust learning about how and why an effect has occurred,³⁷ and that schemes maximise their impact.³⁸

Theory-testing (TT) process tracing

We will use theory-testing (TT) as our chosen approach. This is the most appropriate method when:

³⁵ HM Magenta Book (2020), *Central Government Guidance on Evaluation*, [link](#).

³⁶ HM Magenta Book (2020), *Central Government Guidance on Evaluation*, [link](#).

³⁷ Puntun, M. and K. Welle (2015), *Straws-in-the-wind, Hoops and Smoking Guns: What can Process Tracing Offer to Impact Evaluation?*, Institute of Development Studies, [link](#).

³⁸ Pawson, R. (2008), *Causality for Beginners*, [link](#).

- ▶ we know what A and B are (for example, we know that intervention A took place and outcome B has occurred),
- ▶ we believe there is a causal link between A and B (for example, we think the outcome occurred at least in part because of intervention A),
- ▶ we think we know why A led to B (for example, there is a ToC that explains why and how intervention A should lead to outcome B).

Case sampling

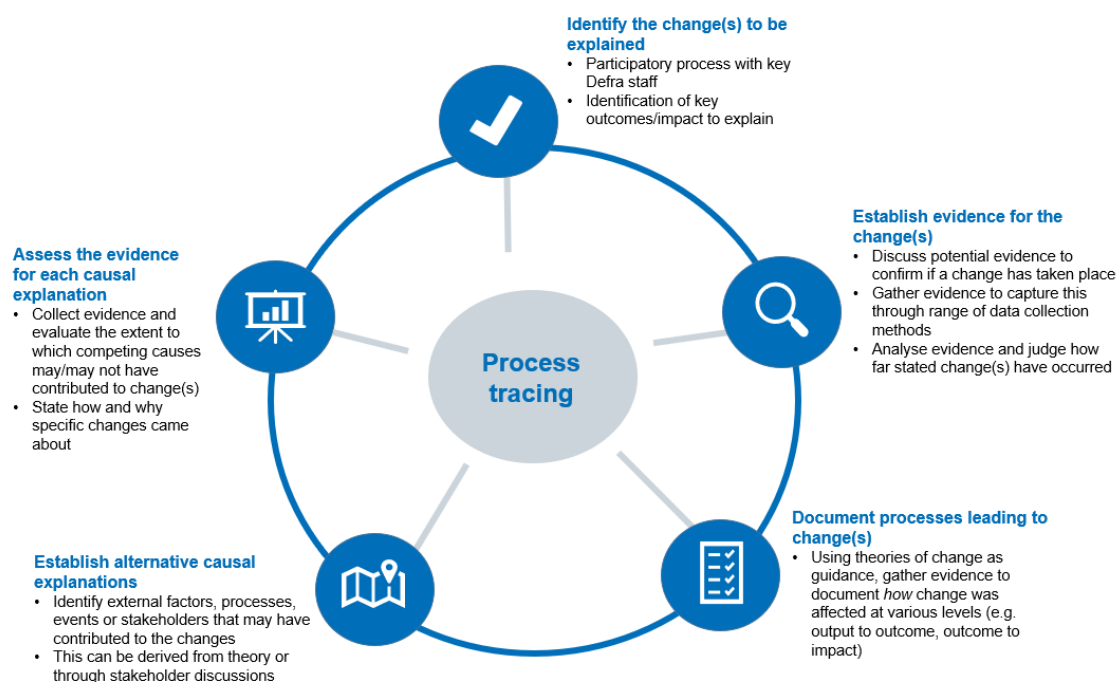
TT process tracing involves in-depth analysis of cases. A case must include a) the effect under investigation (such as outcome or impact), b) the hypothesised cause (for example, a specific project intervention) and c) the process or events that link the cause and effect (for example, inputs, activities, outputs and intermediate outcomes leading to outcomes and impact). To ensure that contributory factors are considered at all stages of a causal pathway,³⁹ we will conduct analysis of case projects within the Tier 1 and Tier 2 samples:

- ▶ **Tier 1:** The focus will be on assessing the links between project inputs, activities and outputs to understand the strengths and weaknesses of design and implementation of projects and the factors that contribute to projects achieving outputs. However, we will also assess the contribution of project outputs to outcomes, as well as to impacts to a more limited degree.
- ▶ **Tier 2:** A sub-sample of projects from Tier 1 will be assessed through deep dive case studies involving secondary and primary data collection. We will focus on assessing in-depth the degree to which project outputs have contributed to outcomes and, in turn, delivered impact (including sustainable impact).

³⁹ Collier, D., (2011), *Understanding Process Tracing*, University of Berkeley, Political Science and Politics, 44(4), pp. 823–830, [link](#).

Applying process tracing in practice

Figure 7: Process tracing in practice



Step 1: Refine ToCs and hypotheses for why and how change is occurring (descriptive inference)

The first step of process tracing will be to work with Defra teams to develop scheme-level ToCs, including clear articulations of the causal pathways necessary for change to take place (as they relate to biodiversity, poverty reduction and climate change) – see Section 4.1. These should describe the dependent variable (for example, the impact expected to take place) and a series of independent variables (such as the links and sequencing between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes required for this to be achieved), as well as the assumptions underpinning this.

Step 2: Gather evidence of change

Using the project assessment frameworks, we will then analyse relevant secondary and primary data to identify the extent to which change has taken place at the output, outcome and impact levels and summarise the key processes that have enabled this change.

Tier 1 sample: The project assessment framework includes a range of tailored questions supporting us to address the following points:

- ▶ understand the degree to which project inputs enabled activities to be implemented effectively,
- ▶ understand the degree to which project activities were relevant and appropriate and enabled outputs to be delivered,
- ▶ assess projects' delivery against logframe targets (focusing primarily on links between inputs, activities, and outputs),
- ▶ identify what has, and has not, worked well in terms of the design and delivery of projects (including internal contributory factors, such as staff, resources and skills),
- ▶ identify external factors/stakeholders that affected the achievement of outputs,
- ▶ explore why certain projects might fall short of expectations outlined within their applications,

- ▶ assess whether project designs are realistic, appropriate to contexts, sufficiently resourced and targeting relevant needs.

Tier 2 sample: The project assessment framework includes a range of tailored questions to guide analysis of the following points:

- ▶ assess the degree to which project outputs have contributed to observed outcomes,
- ▶ understand whether outcomes and impact specified in applications have been achieved in line with logframe targets (and if not, why),
- ▶ assess the degree to which outputs and impact are sustainable,
- ▶ identify 'unintended' outcomes and effects,
- ▶ explore the contribution of contextual factors to achievement (or non-achievement) of outcomes, such as external interventions, political economy factors, actions of duty-bearers, infrastructure and institutions, and social and cultural attitudes,
- ▶ identify examples that support or refute causal pathways specified in ToCs.

Step 3: Document the processes leading to change

We will then extract key evidence from the Tier 1 and Tier 2 project assessment frameworks and systematically map this against the broad causal pathways articulated in each scheme ToC. This will enable us to identify independent variables and contributory factors leading to change (or lack of change) across the range of projects. A key part of this documentation process will be to develop a clear narrative of the different activities being carried out, the tangible outputs delivered resulting in intermediate and eventual changes, and contributory factors that have affected change and when.⁴⁰

At this stage, we will develop a strong understanding of what projects are achieving at different levels and, most importantly, how and why changes at one level have affected progress (or lack of progress) at higher levels. We can then construct a hypothesis to clearly show how change is taking place (or is not) for each scheme.

We will analyse data from our assessments of Tier 1 and Tier 2 projects and report against the main pathways of each scheme, as described in the revised ToCs, as well as against the assumptions underpinning each ToC. In this way, we will draw conclusions at the scheme level on what has worked, what has not (including for whom and in what contexts) and why.

Within or across schemes, we will also be able to compare projects with different characteristics, including projects:

- ▶ of different sizes,
- ▶ in different regions and ecosystems,
- ▶ with different types of project partners,
- ▶ from different time periods when scheme aims have differed,
- ▶ with different degrees of focus on biodiversity (and/or climate change) and poverty, including those that most clearly aim to achieve both in a mutually reinforcing way and those that most successfully achieve this synergy,
- ▶ involving different kinds of activities or addressing different themes.

Step 4: Construct counterfactuals (alternative causal explanations)

⁴⁰ INTRAC (2017), Process Tracing, [link](#).

We will also work with key project stakeholders to explore what might have happened in a given case (for example, project context) if an intervention had not taken place. Through a tailored review of documents, context analysis and interviews with external parties, we will identify key external factors and stakeholders that may contribute to change and include alternative hypotheses and potential conditions that may have contributed to any observed outcomes. These alternative causes are then systematically eliminated as further evidence is gathered to support or refute them (see Step 5).

Step 5: Process verification (assess evidence for each causal explanation)

This step is key in establishing causal inference (for example, the probability that a hypothesised causal pathway – in this instance, as articulated in Defra’s ToCs – led to an isolated effect). To determine this, we will assess all evidence of projects’ contributions to outcomes and impact, including the extent to which there is agreement between secondary sources and key informant interviews, and weigh the strength of these in comparison to other possible explanations identified during Step 4, eliminating explanations until we are left with the strongest evidence. Based on this, we will decide whether to confirm the hypotheses outlined in ToCs and whether evidence is sufficient to eliminate alternative hypotheses:

- **Strong evidence:** Evidence is sufficient to confirm hypotheses and eliminate other potential causal explanations
- **Moderate evidence:** Evidence affirms the relevance of the hypotheses but is not strong enough to confirm and cannot eliminate other contributory factors
- **Weak evidence:** Evidence for the hypotheses is weak and cannot eliminate other contributory factors.⁴¹

Step 6: Revisit and refine ToCs

When available evidence has been judged and hypotheses confirmed or refuted for each project, we will have a greater understanding of the degree to which key aspects of each ToC have (or have not) held true, and the contribution of other factors (and their respective weight of evidence). In cases where ToCs have not held true, we can begin to assess whether this is because of false causal pathways in design (theory failure), aspects of programme implementation which were difficult in practice (implementation failure) or the influence of external social, political or economic causes.

We will revisit ToCs and refine these to reflect a clearer, evidence-based link between inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts, including key assumptions and external contributory factors identified through the analysis. We will work with Defra teams to explore the potential implications of this for future funded projects, advising on how these can be designed and implemented to ensure maximum impact.

5.3 Country case studies

In addition to completing the process tracing analysis, we will develop five concise country case studies. These will provide an overview of each country’s conservation and development status and a summary of the effectiveness of the Tier 2 projects reviewed in each country and UKOT. Each case study will focus on the local context of each country and how relevant external factors influenced the effectiveness of the projects. There will be a focus on building rich stories of the effectiveness of the projects, the impact they had, why they did or did not have impact and how they succeeded in having an impact, with reference to the overarching scheme-level ToCs. Together, the case studies will also provide valuable dissemination products.

⁴¹ See Bennett, A. (2010), *Process Tracing and Causal Inference*, University of Pittsburgh, PhilSci-Archive, [link](#), and Better Evaluation (2010), *Process Tracing: Introduction and Exercises*, [link](#).

5.4 Value for money assessment

This evaluation will assess to what extent each scheme is delivering VfM, that is, whether schemes achieve the right balance between economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity, in addition to the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of schemes. VfM cannot be assessed through one of these dimensions in isolation; therefore, the analysis must consider these together.

We will assess VfM at the scheme and project levels:

- ▶ **Scheme level:** We will assess the processes in place as well as the VfM of LTS' management, across economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- ▶ **Project level:** We plan to extract specific information on VfM from our Tier 2 sample of 30 projects, as set out in the evaluation framework, to strengthen the assessment of VfM at the scheme level.

We have developed a VfM framework and incorporated this in our overall evaluation framework (Table 5 above). The framework articulates what Defra considers to be VfM in the context of the schemes' portfolio. The framework covers FCDO's Four Es to define what good economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity⁴² look like, in addition to what sustainability would look like at both the scheme and project level. Using these dimensions, we developed a rubric of criteria and standards to assess processes and results relevant to key inputs, outputs, outcomes, impacts, sustainability and equity considerations to produce value for money metrics. Although cost-effectiveness is difficult to measure, metrics on economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity of actions are important intermediate steps to help signal cost-effectiveness.

Measures to assess VfM will include a mix of quantitative, qualitative and monetary metrics. Relevant monitoring and financial data, programme documentation and use of interviews with, for example, project leaders, LTS International staff, Defra officials and expert committees, will be used to inform the assessment of VfM at both the scheme and project levels. Relevant summary data from broader evaluation questions relating to effectiveness, sustainability and equity will be drawn in to avoid duplication.

The specific VfM framework developed is presented in Annex 8 and details the metrics of interest, the assessment criteria we will use, the type of data (monetary, qualitative or quantitative) and the source of the data. We will next work closely with Defra and LTS to prioritise these measures and what can feasibly be analysed by the current evaluation. This framework also provides Defra with a useful tool for analysing and comparing the VfM of each of the three schemes and other relevant programmes in the future.

5.5 Gender, inclusion, power and safeguarding assessment

One of the strongest lessons emerging from the body of literature on the gender and environment nexus is the critical need for gender-disaggregated information, without which it remains challenging to monitor progress and assess outcomes.⁴³ Furthermore, 'gender' is often still used as a proxy for 'women', with little analysis of the complex power relations that exist between women, men and third genders within households and in the public sphere, or of intersecting inequalities based on ethnic or religious identity, age, income, geographic location and disability status.⁴⁴

GESI considerations can help to determine a person's ability to respond to environmental changes, including access to land and tenure rights, access to natural resource assets, level of participation in environmental stewardship and decision-making, access to markets, capital, training and technologies, and the degree to which traditional land management and cultural practices are respected and upheld. Women

⁴² FCDO Finance and Performance Department (2020), *DFID's Approach to Value for Money (VfM)*, [link](#).

⁴³ Bechtel, J. and Seager, J. (2016), *Global Gender and Environment Outlook: The Critical Issues*, [link](#).

⁴⁴ Harris, G.L.A. (2011), *Review: The Quest for Gender Equity*, *Public Administration Review*, Public Administration Review 71(1), pp. 123–126, [link](#)

– especially those facing ‘double burdens’ – are particularly burdened by structural inequalities and additional domestic responsibilities, despite possessing unique knowledge and skills that are critical to finding sustainable solutions to environmental challenges.⁴⁵

Identifying and meaningfully addressing the needs, experiences and ideas of marginalised groups, as well as empowering them as decision-makers, is critical to ensuring the sustainability of environmental policy, planning and programming. By more effectively understanding GESI sensitivity and the benefits of its current portfolio, Defra can add clear value within the wider environmental sector, helping to share best practice on GESI mainstreaming, identifying areas for improvement and investing in a GESI-transformative portfolio in the future.

GESI mainstreaming

According to the Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office, international gender specialists are increasingly providing evidence that programmes and categories that do not traditionally take gender into account are still gender relevant.⁴⁶ Best practice highlights that GESI should be mainstreamed into all projects, including those which may perceive GESI to be less relevant (for example, targeting male-dominated settings). Mainstreaming GESI can help to ensure that different groups’ concerns and experiences are an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that groups can benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated.⁴⁷

GESI mainstreaming requires giving attention to the perspectives of different groups – including women, men, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, and indigenous people – as an integral part of all activities across all programmes. This involves making gender perspectives – what women and men do and what resources and decision-making processes they have access to – more central to all policy development, research, advocacy, development, implementation and monitoring of norms and standards, and planning, implementation and monitoring of projects.⁴⁸ For example, GESI mainstreaming could involve modifying climate and development interventions so that they will benefit men and women equally, and transforming social, economic and institutional structures towards gender equality and women’s empowerment in climate action and resilience building.⁴⁹

GESI framework

We have developed a GESI assessment framework (see Annex 9), to judge the degree to which projects and schemes are GESI-sensitive and consider power and safeguarding issues, at the planning, delivery and M&E stages. This has been developed and adapted based on other frameworks that Ecorys has produced for UK government departments, as well as external best practice regarding GESI and the environment (also summarised in Annex 10). The GESI framework has been used to guide questions and analysis of how GESI-sensitive Tier 2 projects are, with specific questions included in the project assessment framework (see Annex 7). The GESI framework can also be used as a best practice tool by Defra going forward to identify areas for improvement in the portfolio.

⁴⁵ UNEP-WCMC (2016), *The State of Biodiversity in Asia and the Pacific: A Mid-Term Review of Progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets*, [link](#).

⁴⁶ Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (2013), *Sub-study on the GEF’s Policy on Gender Mainstreaming*, [link](#).

⁴⁷

⁴⁸ UNDP (2013), *Gender Mainstreaming Made Easy: Handbook for Programme Staff*, [link](#).

⁴⁹ UN Women (2016), *Leveraging Co-benefits Between Gender Equality and Climate Action for Sustainable Development*, [link](#).

5.6 Developing monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks

Projects in the three schemes and their impacts have so far been evaluated in various ways, including from information provided by the projects themselves, scoring by independent reviewers and through ex-post evaluations. As a first step, during the inception phase we reviewed the quality, relevance and structure of existing project-level M&E. In addition to the general impact data limitations summarised in Section 4.5, including the lack of ex-post evaluation, our initial analysis has highlighted further specific issues to be addressed:

- ▶ **Advisory Groups:** Separation of tasks between project selection (expert committee/advisory groups), project management and evaluation (LTS) and the executive authority (Defra) may compound lack of understanding of impact. There is no apparent systematic feedback to advisory groups on how their selected projects subsequently perform, alongside no methodology for assessing project impact. This could be helped by better coordination of the management of projects from the time of first application and selection through to final review and ex-post evaluation.
- ▶ **LTS database:** The current access database used by LTS requires further investment before it can be interrogated and used effectively by new users. As a result, at present, it is an underused resource. The database may benefit from a redesign and modernisation to enable full access to data alongside simplified interrogation procedures.
- ▶ **Project application forms, project review guidelines and project review forms:** Project application forms and guidelines are currently difficult to follow even for experienced scientists on expert committees and advisory groups. They could be revised and simplified. Similarly, there is an apparent need for simplified guidelines and forms for project reviewers.

As outlined in our proposal, following the process and impact evaluation, we will develop an updated [monitoring, evaluation and learning \(MEL\) framework for each scheme](#) in line with our development of new ToCs. We will develop MEL indicators that allow for a focus on process, output and intermediate outcomes, as well as on final results, to help identify whether projects (which will have their own individual MEL frameworks) and the overall scheme are on the right trajectory towards delivering the intended impact. In addition, the new frameworks will include a strong learning element to ensure that the successes and failures of the evaluated schemes will serve to inform the development of new projects within them. This learning element will form an important part of our communications plan for this evaluation (see Section 5.8).

Based on our experience of supporting tailored MEL systems, we will take an iterative approach. This will include a series of [feedback consultations with Defra staff responsible for M&E](#) to clarify the purpose and scope of M&E systems, ensure these are tailored to reporting requirements and are feasible in terms of utility, resource constraints and capacities.

Based upon our initial research during the inception period, there are several further issues to be considered when developing new scheme-level MEL frameworks, including:

- ▶ **Key performance indicators (KPIs):** Scheme-specific KPIs should reflect a balance of quantitative and qualitative indicators and include accepted definitions across all schemes. In particular, we plan to develop clearer indicators related to the ODA aspects of projects, which can be mapped directly on to OECD DAC criteria, thereby making it easier to identify the social development outcomes and impact of projects. The development of these new project indicators could be facilitated through greater representation or attendance/involvement by FCDO officials in the schemes' advisory groups, particularly for the Darwin Initiative and Darwin Plus schemes.

Alternatively government officials may be able to input into the process separately from participation in the advisory groups.


- ▶ **Proxy indicators:** In an ideal world, the level of biodiversity in a project location would be mapped before and after a project's lifecycle to help measure its success and impact. However, as concluded by Howe and Millner-Gulland (2012), mapping levels of biodiversity is time-consuming and expensive, even though rapid assessment methods may be used in some cases.⁵⁰ A more practical method could be for an MEL framework to require projects to report on the threat levels to biodiversity in a given location throughout the project's lifecycle. A decline in the overall threat level can serve as an indicator of a project's success. This will be explored in greater detail as the MEL framework is developed further. In addition to biodiversity proxy indicators, new MEL frameworks will also consider proxy indicators for poverty and/or well-being.
- ▶ **Timing of, and responsibility for, evaluations:** We will produce an accompanying timetable for future evaluations and advise on what data should be collected at baseline, annually, biennially or at another frequency (for example, ex-post, 2 years following project completion), to feed into the MEL framework. This will take the form of an MEL activity plan outlining timings, frequencies and responsibilities.
- ▶ **Financing MEL:** It will be important to clarify how the monitoring, evaluation and learning from projects will be financed in the future (for example, should a minimum percentage of a project's budget be allocated to MEL, and if so what should that minimum be?).
- ▶ **Capacity building future project leaders:** In interviews during the inception phase, stakeholders for all three schemes have highlighted the importance of supporting local organisations to become involved in projects and in building their capacity to lead them. During the evaluation period, we will collect information from our sampled projects and further interviews with project stakeholders to provide an evidence base of existing capacity-building practice within the schemes. We will consult the client on the merits of developing KPIs to measure this type of capacity building in a new MEL framework.
- ▶ **Direct questions on impact:** The questions in a future MEL framework should get to the heart of project strengths and weaknesses, and their desired goals and impact. For example, 'What are/were the three main strengths/weaknesses of the project?', 'What were the enduring/long-term impacts of the project on safeguarding biodiversity?' and 'What were the enduring/long-term impacts of the project for the welfare of local people?'.

We will produce a more detailed workplan for completing the MEL frameworks during 2021.







5.7 Evaluation of deliverables and outputs

A summary of our deliverables is presented in the table below. Our evaluation workplan is included in Section 5.9.

Table 6: Deliverables

Task	Details	Outputs	Timing
ToC Workshops 	Develop draft ToCs for each scheme based on desk review of existing impact pathways. Facilitate a participatory workshop to sense-check, test and refine the ToC for each scheme and portfolio.	Draft ToCs	Jan 2021

⁵⁰ Howe, C., and Milner-Gulland, E.J. (2012), *Evaluating Indices of Conservation Success: A Comparative Analysis of Outcome and Output-based Indices*, [link](#).

Task	Details	Outputs	Timing
Secondary data collection 	Desk reviews of existing project-level documents for our sample and further synthesis of scheme level documentation	Desk review notes	Dec 2020–Feb 2021
Primary data collection 	Finalise data collection tools (project review framework, interview guides and case study templates). Attend Strategy Days : Share updated theories of change on IWT Strategy Day (20 January 2021), Darwin Plus strategy half-day (22 March) and Darwin Main Strategy days (week commencing on 12 April). Interviews with key stakeholders, such as programme management, advisory group members, comparator programmes and academics. Country field work : Tier 2 project level assessments using project documents and project-level semi-structured interviews by in-country researchers	Interview notes	Jan–April 2020
Analysis & reporting 	Draft interim report outlining the draft ToCs for each scheme, initial findings from the impact, process and VfM assessments across each scheme. Presentation of interim report findings to Project Steering Group followed by discussions on interpretation of findings.	Interim report	May–June 2021
Strengthening results 	Further data collection : Based on the discussions of the interim report presentation, the team will collect further data to strengthen the contribution stories. Finalise report , including impact assessment of each scheme, portfolio process evaluation, and draft recommendations. Draft communication materials.	Final evaluation report	June–July 2021
Developing M&E frameworks 	Develop M&E framework for each scheme: Develop KPIs, including outcome and impact metrics, that are relevant across the schemes as a whole. Develop timetable for future evaluations and propose which data should be collected regularly to underpin further evaluations.	M&E frameworks	July–Nov 2021
Dissemination 	Produce two stand-alone policy briefs for sharing key lessons in collaboration with Defra. Presentations to DEC and IWTAG : In February 2022, we plan to disseminate the findings of the report through presentation to the expert committees.	Policy briefs Presentations	Feb 2022

Source: Based on Terms of reference

5.8 Communications plan

The evaluation's objectives include helping Defra understand gaps in the scheme logic and key lessons for future work, and facilitating clearer communication of key achievements to the public, UK government departments and development and academic partners.

In line with these objectives, stakeholder engagement, communication and dissemination are core activities. An initial [stakeholder mapping](#) has been completed during inception phase. This mapping has helped us identify relevant stakeholders to consult as part of the evaluation and share our findings with. Initial consultations with key programme stakeholders (including Defra, LTS and members of the schemes' expert committees) were also held during inception. Based on the initial analysis of stakeholders and priorities, we propose the below types of communication and dissemination activities.

Communicating impact: Information about the outcomes and impact of the scheme at both portfolio and scheme levels will be systematically recorded and synthesised into communication products tailored to different target audiences. This will include:

- ▶ Two [stand-alone policy briefs](#) targeted at stakeholders from across the UK government and conservation and development community by Month 12 of the evaluation (September 2021). Each policy brief will be two to four pages long and accompanied with graphs and visualisations.
- ▶ [Summary of the evaluation report](#) targeted at stakeholders from across the UK government and conservation and development community by Month 18 of the evaluation (March 2022). The summary will be in the format of a short handout and provide an overview of key findings.
- ▶ [Infographics](#) targeted at the general public for use on Defra's social media.

Disseminating lessons: Lessons about the design and implementation of the scheme will be captured in the evaluation report and also disseminated to members of the three schemes' expert committees, UK government policymakers and other conservation funders. The dissemination will include:

- ▶ [DevTracker](#): Publishing the evaluation report on DevTracker.
- ▶ [Websites and social media](#): Publishing the evaluation report, its summary and thematic policy briefs on the scheme's website, the Ecorys website, the LTS website and Defra's social media.
- ▶ [Presentations](#): Two presentations of evaluation findings in months 17 and 18 of the evaluation (February–March 2022). One presentation will be targeted at Defra staff and other UK government policymakers and analysts. The second presentation will be targeted at other UK and international conservation funders and could be held as part of a larger event or conference with a relevant audience.

Regular communication with Defra: The evaluation team will maintain regular and transparent communication with Defra about the evaluation methodology and activities to ensure that the adopted methodology reflects Defra's needs and priorities. This will include:

- ▶ [communicating regularly](#) with the Defra Senior Responsible Owner to provide updates on changes to the methodology, timeline, evaluation plan or risks to the evaluation,
- ▶ regular [meetings](#) with the Defra team to provide updates on progress and planned activities during inception phase,
- ▶ sharing [preliminary findings](#) with the Defra team when possible to inform Defra's internal reporting and planning and to provide additional details on findings of relevance.

An overview of proposed communication outputs and their intended target audiences can be found in the table below. We will ensure all published materials are appropriately branded.

Table 7: Proposed communication outputs

Phase	Month	Communication deliverables	Target audience
Impact evaluation and process evaluation	Month 12 (September 2021)	Two policy briefs	UK government, stakeholders from the international conservation and development community
Communication	Months 16–18 (January–March 2022)	Updated policy briefs from September 2021	UK government, stakeholders from the international conservation and development community
		Summary of evaluation report	UK government, stakeholders, general public
		Infographics	UK government, stakeholders, general public
	Months 17–18 (February–March 2022)	Presentation on evaluation findings for Defra and schemes stakeholders	UK government policymakers and analysts, members of the schemes' expert committees
		Presentation on evaluation findings at an international forum	Other conservation funders, stakeholders from the international conservation and development community

Source: Based on Terms of reference



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