

Sustainability in the Biodiversity Challenge Funds

Phase 2 Final Report

Defra

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Executive Summary

Purpose and scope

The Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs), comprising the Darwin Initiative, the Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus, are among the longest-running conservation funding programmes in the world. Together, they have supported more than 1,800 projects across more than 60 countries and territories since their respective inceptions. All BCFs projects are contractually required to report on their progress biannually and NIRAS, the funds' manager, has data on projects going back to the inception of each fund. However, reporting is project-based and focused on observed short-term results at the activity, output, and outcome level of the results-chain. There has been no systematic ex-post evaluation of long-term impacts and sustainability of benefits at the project, geographic or thematic level. Between 2007 and 2009, nine regional evaluations of closed projects were undertaken. These provided an external perspective on the legacy and impact of Darwin Initiative projects only, and identified innovations, lessons learned, and best practices that account for positive legacy and impact.

To address this evidence gap on long-term impacts and sustainability, Defra commissioned a two-phase *Sustainability in the Biodiversity Challenge Funds* evaluation. The purpose of this evaluation is to understand whether and how completed projects in the BCFs portfolio are continuing to have an impact after BCFs funding has ended.

This report presents the findings of Phase 2, the evidence-generating phase of that evaluation, combining in-country and desk-based approaches. It synthesises the evidence base across Kenya, Nepal, Bolivia, and St Helena to:

- identify the pathways by which BCFs projects have brought about sustained benefits;
- identify the factors that enable or constrain sustained impact, including the early hallmarks of weak or unsustainable interventions
- translate the findings into practical guidance, recommendations and red flags for Expert Committees, the Fund Manager and Defra, and grantees.

Approach and evidence base

Phase 2 generated evidence through 11 complementary review components across three ODA-eligible countries and one UK Overseas Territory:

- Kenya combined:
 - a country-level questionnaire summary,
 - two project deep dives,
 - an institutional review, and
 - a landscape-level review;
- Nepal combined:
 - a questionnaire summary
 - a project deep dive and
 - an institutional review
- Bolivia combined:
 - a questionnaire summary
 - a blended institutional- and landscape-level review

- St Helena was treated as an integrated territory-level review.

Across these components, the evaluation drew on structured questionnaires with project leaders, follow-up interviews, in-country field visits, project documentation, and analysis against an OECD DAC-based evaluation framework, with sustainability as the primary criterion. The evidence base is deliberately layered. The in-country Legacy Reviews provide the strongest basis for triangulated findings; the questionnaire summaries provide breadth across completed projects but, being self-reported and not all independently verified, are used cautiously; and project documentation is used to contextualise reported achievements at closure and distinguish them from benefits that appear to have continued afterwards.

Several limitations shape how the findings should be read. The country and project samples are purposive rather than representative, and findings should not be read as representative of the wider portfolio. The evidence is predominantly qualitative; while the in-country reviews provide triangulated evidence, the questionnaire summaries are largely self-reported. The absence of systematic post-project monitoring across the BCFs limits longitudinal verification. There is a risk of survivor bias, since projects and institutions that have persisted are more visible than those that have not. And because outcomes will have been shaped by subsequent funding and events, the analysis focuses on plausible contribution rather than direct attribution. The projects reviewed were implemented in previous funding rounds and were therefore guided by earlier BCFs guidance, meaning that Fund and project level objectives have evolved. Therefore, some of the issues raised in this report may already have started to be addressed through subsequent updates to BCFs application, reporting and guidance materials. Examples cited in this summary are therefore illustrative of broader patterns, not a ranking of project performance.

Overall finding

The Phase 2 evidence indicates that the BCFs have generated meaningful and durable legacy across a wide range of contexts. Benefits remain observable after project closure, particularly where projects have strengthened institutions, built individual and organisational capacity, supported locally valued governance arrangements, influenced policy or planning processes, and provided foundations for subsequent investment. In many cases, the strongest legacy was not the continuation of project activities as originally designed, but the absorption, adaptation or reuse of project-supported capacities, tools, relationships and approaches by actors that remained active after closure. A further central finding is that many of the strongest legacies were cumulative: they emerged where investment in the same landscape, institution or theme allowed capacity, relationships, evidence and credibility to compound over time.

This has important value for money implications. In several cases, BCFs funding appears to have seeded changes whose value extended beyond the scale and duration of the original grant because they were taken forward through institutional mandates, community ownership, government systems, market incentives, subsequent funding or cumulative programme pathways. However, sustained legacy should not be equated with the absence of further public or donor support: some conservation functions, particularly in UKOT contexts and in relation to continuous ecological management, require recurrent resourcing to remain viable.

What impacts and benefits remain observable?

Across the seven sustainability dimensions examined in Section 4, the evidence base is most consistent and well-evidenced for *individual capacity*, and *institutional and governance* outcomes. These emerge as the strongest forms of sustained legacy across the review contexts. They are reflected in the continued use of project-supported systems, tools and ways of working, and in the progression of trained staff, partners and community members into technical, leadership and coordination roles.

Community-level institutional outcomes are also moderately well-evidenced, though more variable. The strongest cases are those where local bodies retained a clear post-project function and visible benefit, such as community governance structures, producer associations, community finance mechanisms and resource-user

groups. Evidence was more mixed where community institutions depended on continued demand, finance or external facilitation. St Helena is structurally distinct: conservation delivery is mediated principally through the St Helena Government and the St Helena National Trust rather than through independent community institutions.

Policy, planning and legislative influence is significant but uneven. The strongest evidence is found where project supported evidence, tools and technical credibility were taken into mandated institutions, procedures, planning instruments or formal policy processes. Influence was more conditional where formal endorsement remained pending, where outputs remained advisory, or where there was not yet a clear institutional route for implementation. In St Helena, influence follows a structurally different pathway, operating mainly through government planning, management and regulation rather than externally driven legislative reform.

Socioeconomic and livelihood outcomes are moderate overall. They are strongest where benefits have been carried forward through functioning economic incentives, public compensation systems, community finance mechanisms, local governance arrangements or practical household benefit. However, across the evidence base, socioeconomic outcomes are less consistently verified than institutional and capacity outcomes, partly because household-level benefits were rarely tracked after closure. Where benefits depended on time-limited training, project specific incentives, free inputs or activities without institutional anchoring, evidence of sustained impact is weaker.

Biodiversity and environmental outcomes and *financial sustainability* are the most unevenly evidenced dimensions, though for different reasons. Biodiversity evidence is constrained primarily by the absence of long-term ecological monitoring rather than by an absence of impact. The strongest cases are demonstrated through the continued functioning of management systems, stewardship arrangements and area-based protections, rather than through long-term ecological data. Financial sustainability is the most conditional dimension: outcomes are sustained where they aligned with pre-existing government budgets, institutional expenditure or market systems, while standalone financial mechanisms and arrangements that assumed an unspecified future payer show more mixed evidence of continuation.

How benefits have been sustained

Section 5 identifies five recurring continuation pathways. Benefits continued through:

1. uptake into systems, mandates, budgets or policy processes;
2. local ownership and stewardship;
3. economic or practical value;
4. the reuse of evidence, tools, skills and relationships; and
5. sequenced and cumulative investment.

These are not mutually exclusive categories. The strongest cases often combined several routes: a public mandate, a local stake, a practical benefit, a reusable evidence base, and later investment that built on earlier work.

Sequenced and cumulative investment was the strongest cross-cutting route identified in the evidence. Some of the most mature legacies emerged not from single grants becoming self-sustaining in isolation, but from repeated engagement in the same landscape, institution or theme. In Kenya, projects implemented by different organisations added layers of evidence, governance practice and delivery capacity over time. In Bolivia, repeated engagement helped WCS build specialist capacity, trust with public and Indigenous institutions, and policy credibility. In St Helena, long-term cloud forest and marine-management legacies also emerged from cumulative programme pathways, although under much sharper structural constraints.

Cumulative investment is not, however, a sustainability signal on its own. Follow-on funding, scaling or replication matters where it deepens ownership, capacity, policy access, resourcing or independent

continuation. It is a weaker signal where it simply extends delivery without changing who owns, funds, maintains or uses the benefit. The key question is not whether further funding occurred, but what that funding changed.

What predicts or constrains sustained legacy?

The factors that separated durable from fragile continuation were consistent across the evidence base. Benefits were most likely to endure where there was clarity about:

1. What exactly was expected to continue after closure?
2. Who would be responsible for it?
3. Why would they continue?
4. What resources, incentives, benefits, or arrangements would sustain it?

That reason could take different forms: a public body acting within its mandate, a community with a practical stake, a market that made continuation worthwhile, skills and relationships carried forward through a continuing professional role, team or institution, or a sequence of further investment that built on what came before.

Continuation was most credible where a named actor with a mandate, stake or practical reason was positioned to hold the benefit; where recurring costs had a plausible payer, budget line or revenue route; where local actors had a visible benefit or role; where capacity was held in institutions, systems, groups or networks rather than in individuals or short-term posts alone; where evidence, tools and data had a user, custodian and practical function; where later investment built progression rather than dependency; and where the continuation route fitted the ecological, political, institutional and market realities of the context.

Context matters. In ODA-country contexts, the link between biodiversity and poverty remains important, but sustainability does not depend only on livelihood incentives. Benefits may continue through public or institutional uptake, community stewardship, household resilience, market value, or a combination of routes. In climate-stressed landscapes, or places where human-wildlife conflict interacts with pressure on land, water or other resources, durable legacy may also be visible in governance arrangements that help actors manage scarcity and negotiate trade-offs over time. In IWT projects, the additional test is whether enforcement, intelligence, coordination, procedures and trained personnel continue after support ends. In UKOT and Darwin Plus contexts, poverty reduction and self-financing are not the right measures of legacy. In St Helena, the relevant test is whether conservation functions have a public home, whether capacity and data can be retained, and whether continuous management needs have a realistic recurrent support pathway.

Early warning signs of weak sustainability

The evidence also identifies early warning signs that a benefit is unlikely to last. These include:

- no named owner for a function after closure;
- a recurring cost with no identified payer;
- community ownership claimed but not tied to a real role or benefit;
- livelihood approaches resting mainly on training, free inputs or temporary incentives;
- data, tools or monitoring systems with no custodian;
- policy, plans or procedures with no route into a decision-making body or operational system;
- follow-on funding that extends delivery without deepening ownership, capacity or resourcing;
- continuous management needs funded as short projects; and
- interventions weakly aligned with context, existing systems or prior investment.

These signs are diagnostic rather than determinative. A project may carry one risk and still have a credible pathway if other conditions are strong. Conversely, several warning signs together, for example no holder, no payer and no custodian, indicate a much higher likelihood that benefits will weaken after closure. Their value is that they make weak sustainability visible early enough for applicants, grantees, expert committees, reviewers and managers to scrutinise assumptions, adapt design, or narrow claims before closure.

Implications and recommendations

The report's recommendations are set out in Section 6 as guidance for three audiences. For Expert Committees, the main implication is to consider sustainability as part of project logic before award, using existing application materials to ask what is expected to continue, who will hold it, why they will continue, and what resources, incentives, benefits or arrangements will sustain it. Committees should scrutinise recurrent costs, livelihood and market assumptions, policy and evidence uptake, institutional capacity, and follow-on funding claims for realism rather than optimism.

For the Fund Manager and Defra, the central recommendation is to use existing guidance, reporting, review, closure and portfolio-learning processes more consistently to track whether sustainability assumptions are becoming more credible over time. This does not require a separate compliance layer. It requires the same continuation test to be applied across appraisal, annual reporting, Mid-Term Reviews, change processes, final reporting and, where proportionate, light touch project or portfolio follow-up. It also means making cumulative investment more visible, so that progression can be distinguished from dependency.

For grantees, the main recommendation is to design and implement with continuation in mind from the outset. Grantees should identify who will own, use or continue each major output, function or approach; make post-project costs explicit; design livelihood components around credible incentives, demand or practical benefit; embed capacity in institutions, groups and procedures rather than individuals alone; agree who will own and use data; and be clear about how the project contributes to a longer-term pathway where final outcomes cannot be secured within a single grant.

Final message

The evaluation demonstrates that the BCFs have generated significant long-term legacy, and that this legacy cannot be assumed from project completion, strong delivery or plausible statements of intent. Successful delivery at closure did not, by itself, predict sustained legacy; benefits endured where project-supported change became useful, feasible and owned by actors able to carry it forward.

The task ahead is not to impose a single model of sustainability across all contexts, nor to assume that all support should disappear. Some sustained benefits legitimately require continuing public-good investment, institutional support, community-based stewardship, market-based support or further sequenced funding. The common test is whether responsibility, incentives and resourcing have a realistic home. Sustainability should therefore be treated as a design, appraisal, management, closure and learning discipline across the whole BCFs project cycle, so that the BCFs are placed not only to support successful projects, but to support benefits that continue, adapt and compound after funding ends.

Acronyms

ACOFIVB	Community Association for the Commercialisation of Vicuña Fibre of Bolivia
ANMVB	National Association of Vicuña Managers of Bolivia
BCFs	Biodiversity Challenge Funds
CBAPU	Community-Based Anti-Poaching Unit
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCA	Community Conserved Area
CFA	Community Forest Association
CFUG	Community Forest User Group
CMPCA	Community-Managed Pangolin Conservation Area
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DNPWC	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GSTC	Global Sustainable Tourism Council
IBA	Important Bird Area
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IWT	Illegal Wildlife Trade
IWTCTF	Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund
JFM	Joint Forest Management
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
KFS	Kenya Forest Service
KWS	Kenya Wildlife Service
LIFE	Livelihoods Insurance from Elephants
LUP	Land Use Plan
LWF	Laikipia Wildlife Forum
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCA	Mutara Conservation Area
MoLMAC	Ministry of Land Management, Agriculture and Cooperatives
MPA	Marine Protected Area

MTR	Mid-Term Review
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRT	Northern Rangelands Trust
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
OPC	OI Pejeta Conservancy
OPM	Oxford Policy Management
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
POFOMA	Forest and Environmental Protection Police (Bolivia)
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SAPA	Social Assessment of Protected Areas
SAWEN	South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SERNAP	National Service of Protected Areas
SHG	St Helena Government
SHNT	St Helena National Trust
TBA	Tropical Biology Association
ToC	Theory of Change
UK	United Kingdom
UKOTs	UK Overseas Territories
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP-WCMC	United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association
WCD-MIS	Wildlife Crime Database-Management Information System
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WRUA	Water Resource User Association
ZSL	Zoological Society of London

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs), comprising the Darwin Initiative, the Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund and Darwin Plus, represent one of the largest and longest running conservation funding programmes in the world. Established at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the Darwin Initiative has awarded more than £259 million to over 1,300 biodiversity conservation projects worldwide. Since 2010¹, the Darwin Initiative has focused on countries eligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA), and poverty reduction has been an important complementary goal alongside biodiversity conservation. The IWT Challenge Fund, established in 2014, has supported 157 projects in over 60 countries to a value of over £51 million. Darwin Plus, established in 2012, has awarded over £55 million to more than 320 projects across the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs). Together, the three funds have supported over 1,800 projects across more than 60 countries and territories since their respective inceptions, supporting biodiversity conservation, poverty reduction, action to address IWT, and environmental protection in the UKOTs.

NIRAS, the BCFs fund manager, holds data on projects going back to the inception of each fund, and all projects are contractually required to report on their progress biannually. However, project level reporting focuses on observed short term results at the activity, output, and outcome level of the results chain. Terminal evaluations are not systematically undertaken, and monitoring and formal communications cease when a project closes. Less evidence is therefore routinely available on whether, how and under what conditions benefits continue after project closure. This creates an important evidence gap for understanding the long-term value and legacy of BCFs funding.

While several regional field-based evaluations of completed Darwin Initiative projects were undertaken between 2007 and 2009², providing an early external perspective on project legacy and impact, there has been no subsequent systematic ex-post evaluation of long-term impacts and sustainability of benefits at the project, geographic or thematic level. A BCFs wide scheme evaluation published by Ecorys in 2022³ examined sustainability as one of its analytical strands but found that assessing the sustainability of impacts was challenging precisely because the BCFs do not systematically monitor impacts beyond the life of projects.

This evaluation, *Sustainability in the Biodiversity Challenge Funds* (referred to as the Sustainability Deep Dive) was commissioned by Defra to address that gap. It forms part of BCFs Workstream 5: Building and Applying Evidence; which aims to collect and synthesise evidence and lessons from projects and processes across the BCFs. The overarching objective of the workstream is to understand what works at the project-level and across the BCFs, and to provide evidence-based recommendations to improve processes, strengthen projects and applications, increase knowledge sharing and maximise the positive impact of the funds in biodiversity conservation, improved livelihoods and poverty reduction. The evaluation is structured in two phases. Phase 1 established the analytical and methodological foundation for the study. This report presents the findings of Phase 2, which examines post-project legacy through structured stakeholder engagement and in-country Legacy Reviews.

¹ Up to May 2026

² To access the Evaluation of Closed Projects Archive please see: <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources/information-notes/evaluation-of-closed-projects-archive/>

³ Ecorys (2022). *Darwin Initiative, Darwin Plus and Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund scheme evaluation*. Final report. Ecorys.

1.2. Purpose of this report

Combining in-country and desk-based approaches, this report synthesises the evidence base across Kenya, Nepal, Bolivia and St Helena to:

- identify the pathways by which BCFs' projects have brought about sustained benefits;
- identify the factors that enable or constrain sustained impact, including the early hallmarks of weak or unsustainable interventions;
- translate the findings into practical guidance, recommendations, and red flags for Expert Committees, the Fund Manager and Defra, and grantees.

The report therefore links evidence on sustained impact to practical guidance for future BCFs project selection, management, implementation, and learning. This guidance is presented in Section 6.

The findings are intended to inform BCFs planning, management and learning, and to contribute to wider donor understanding of how conservation and development benefits endure after grant funding ends. From an efficiency perspective, the work also speaks to value for money by identifying the conditions under which benefits can continue, adapt or compound after closure, including where they are carried forward through public mandates, institutional systems, community stewardship, market incentives, or further sequenced investment rather than equivalent ongoing project funding from Defra.

1.3. Relationship to Phase 1

Phase 1 of this evaluation was a substantive desk-based analysis that generated initial learning on sustainability and helped establish the foundation for Phase 2. It drew on and synthesised several bodies of evidence, including the 2022 Ecorys BCFs scheme evaluation; nine regional field-based evaluations of closed Darwin Initiative projects undertaken between 2007 and 2009 (which provided an empirically grounded external perspective on project legacy and impact that strengthened the desk analysis considerably); the sustainability sections of 45 mid-term reviews (MTRs) undertaken since 2011; and findings from the BCFs markets and livelihoods deep dive. From this body of evidence, Phase 1 developed the evaluation framework and sampling approach used to guide the Phase 2 Legacy Reviews.

The Ecorys BCFs scheme evaluation focused primarily on effectiveness and impact. While the evaluation made efforts to assess the extent to which benefits of funded projects continue beyond project funding, the evaluation reported that assessing the sustainability of impacts was challenging: the BCFs do not monitor impacts beyond the life of projects and it is difficult to measure impact within the average project duration of three years since results may not be measurable for many years after. Acknowledging these limitations, Ecorys found limited evidence of sustainability. Where evidence was available, project sustainability was generally found to rely upon the assumption that relevant stakeholders (primarily government officials, local partners, and local communities) would be willing to continue working towards the project's original objectives – building on the foundations for achieving sustainable outcomes, such as awareness raising, training, and new technologies – and would continue to make use of outputs after project completion. Whilst most projects did implement these foundations, plans for how the resulting knowledge, skills, and resources would continue to be used were found to be limited.

The regional field-based evaluations of closed projects identified recurring themes that supported sustained benefits after closure including:

- strong local ownership and leadership;
- effective capacity building and institutional embedding;
- partnerships with established local institutions;
- clear and focused project objectives;

- policy influence through high quality research informing regulatory and management decisions;
- extended or follow-up funding and donor diversification and;
- cultural and communication competence.

It also identified recurring themes that supported fewer or no sustained benefits including:

- lack of long-term or follow-on funding;
- weak or overstretched local institutions;
- insufficient policy or decision-making influence;
- overambitious or unclear project scope;
- dependency on individual champions without institutional backing;
- lack of coordination among projects;
- challenges in data use and maintenance post-project and;
- limited dissemination of technical innovation.

The MTR analysis broadly corroborated these patterns, identifying similar themes as likely or less likely to result in sustained benefits after closure, while also highlighting cross cutting challenges around enforcement, funding uncertainty and livelihood viability, and opportunities around scalability, private sector integration and integration into national systems. The BCFs *Evaluation of livelihoods programming in Biodiversity Challenge Funds projects* (Hilton, Szefer and Roe, 2024⁴), added a further important finding – only around one in six reviewed livelihoods projects, with goals relating to income-generation, applied a programming model reflecting current best practice, with most relying on direct delivery approaches rather than systemic interventions – a pattern associated with limited potential for sustained results beyond BCFs funding.

This Phase 2 report does not repeat the Phase 1 analysis, nor does it treat Phase 1 as a primary evidence source for its findings. Instead, Phase 1 provides historical and analytical context, including the initial patterns and questions that informed the design of the Phase 2 Legacy Reviews. The findings and recommendations in this report are grounded primarily in the Phase 2 evidence base.

1.4. Scope of Phase 2

Phase 2 generated in-depth evidence on the post project legacy of selected BCFs investments through Legacy Reviews conducted across three countries and one UKOT – Kenya, Nepal, Bolivia, and St Helena. The reviews examined specific projects, institutions, partnerships and landscapes, exploring whether project benefits had continued after closure, whether outputs or approaches had been taken up by local actors, and what factors had supported or limited sustained impact.

The Phase 2 evidence was not intended to provide a statistically representative assessment of the full BCFs portfolio. Rather, it was designed to provide depth and explanatory insight to understand how legacy is generated in practice, how project level achievements translate, or fail to translate, into longer term change, and what this means for future project design and management. The cases were selected purposively to reflect different funds, geographies, institutional contexts and types of intervention. All three BCFs are represented across the four reviews. Darwin Initiative projects were reviewed in Kenya, Bolivia, Nepal and St Helena; IWT Challenge Fund projects were reviewed in Kenya, Nepal and Bolivia; and Darwin Plus was reviewed through St Helena. St Helena was selected to ensure that the UKOT perspective was incorporated into the study, while recognising the relative logistical complexity and cost of conducting field-based reviews in remote UKOTs. Findings should not be read as statistically representative of the full BCFs portfolio.

⁴ Tom Hilton, Piotr Szefer & Dilys Roe, 2024. Evaluation of livelihoods programming in Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects. EcoEvoRxiv. Available at: <https://ecoevorxiv.org/repository/view/7369/> (Accessed: 15 June 2026).

While the Legacy Reviews include detailed assessment of selected projects, institutions and landscapes, the combined evidence base is principally used to identify cross cutting findings on sustainability pathways, enabling and constraining factors, and lessons for the BCFs as a portfolio. It is not intended to rank individual projects or provide a comparative assessment of their relative long-term performance. The full methodology is described in Section 2.

1.5. Understanding sustainability and legacy

There is no single universal definition of sustainability in conservation and development programming. Sustainability is context-specific and depends on clarity about what is expected to continue, for whom, by whom and under what conditions. The wider literature reviewed during Phase 1 highlights factors such as local ownership and institutional capacity (Khang and Moe, 2008⁵), community participation, independent funding, political support, socio-cultural fit and programme design (Tintin, undated⁶), and the capacities of systems needed to sustain benefits over time (Agol *et al.*, 2014⁷). For the purposes of this report, and consistent with the evaluation framework developed in Phase 1, sustainability follows the latest OECD DAC definition⁸ – *The extent to which the net benefits of an intervention continue or are likely to continue*. In this report, it refers more broadly to the continuation, adaptation or embedding of benefits, capacities, behaviours, systems or outcomes after BCFs funding has ended. These benefits may be financial, socioeconomic, institutional or environmental. Assessing them requires attention not only to whether activities continued, but to whether the systems, incentives and capacities needed to sustain them remained in place, and to how risks, resilience and trade-offs shaped their continuation.

One analytical boundary condition shapes how this definition applies across this evaluation. St Helena, as an ODA-eligible UKOT, sits under a different mandate from the country programme contexts. The International Development Act (2002) exempts ODA-eligible Overseas Territories from the poverty-reduction criteria that apply elsewhere, and poverty reduction is not a goal of BCFs investment in UKOTs, whether funded through the Darwin Initiative or Darwin Plus. The socioeconomic and livelihood dimensions of sustainability that carry analytical weight in Kenya, Nepal and Bolivia are therefore not appropriate measures for the St Helena component. Its findings are assessed against the mandate the fund was given.

Legacy is used more broadly in this report to refer to the discernible post-project footprint of BCFs interventions. This may include intended or unintended effects, direct or indirect benefits, and outcomes that emerge or consolidate after project closure. Legacy may be visible through, but not limited to, continued activities, strengthened institutions, changed practices, policy influence, follow-on funding, individual leadership, improved community capacity, or sustained biodiversity and livelihood outcomes.

This distinction between sustainability and legacy matters. Sustained impact does not always mean that project activities continue exactly as originally designed. In some cases, the strongest legacy may be that a project approach has been adapted, mainstreamed, absorbed into institutional systems, or used as a foundation for later investment. Conversely, the continuation of project activities is not in itself evidence of sustainability if those activities remain dependent on short-term donor funding or external facilitation.

⁵ Khang, Do Ba, and Tun Lin Moe (2008) 'Success Criteria and Factors for International Development Projects: A Life-Cycle-Based Framework'. *Project Management Journal* 39(1): 72–84

⁶ Tintin, E. (undated) *Literature Review: Sustainability of Development Programmes*. Unpublished paper. FCDO

⁷ Agol *et al.* (2014) 'Evaluating impacts of development and conservation projects using sustainability indicators: Opportunities and challenges'. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review* (48): 1–9.

⁸ OECD (2021), *Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/543e84ed-en>.

1.6. Focus of the analysis

The analysis in this report follows a deliberately evidence-led sequence, moving from description to explanation to implication.

First, the report examines what has been sustained. This establishes the empirical picture before moving into explanatory analysis. It considers evidence of sustained biodiversity and environmental outcomes, poverty reduction and livelihood outcomes, institutional and governance outcomes, community-level institutional outcomes, policy and planning influence, individual capacity and financial sustainability. It also identifies where evidence of sustained impact is weaker, partial or unavailable, including where the absence of post-project monitoring limits verification.

Second, the report examines how benefits have been sustained. It identifies five recurring continuation pathways: uptake into systems, mandates, budgets or policy processes; local ownership and stewardship; economic or practical value; reuse of evidence, tools, skills and relationships; and sequenced and cumulative investment.

Third, the report examines why some benefits endured while others weakened or remained conditional. It identifies the factors that made continuation credible or fragile, including whether there was a clear post-project holder, a mandate or stake, a realistic resource route, visible local value, capacity held beyond individuals, evidence or tools with a user and custodian, progression through later investment, and fit with the ecological, institutional, political and market context.

This structure reflects the central purpose of the report: not only to document examples of legacy, but to understand the pathways and conditions that make sustained impact more or less likely. It also ensures that guidance for future BCFs selection, management and delivery is grounded in the Phase 2 evidence on what has actually endured.

1.7. Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the methodology and evidence base, including the evaluation framework, sampling approach, data collection methods, and constraints and limitations. Section 3 provides an overview of the Phase 2 evidence, with a summary table of countries, funds and projects reviewed, followed by a concise summary of each review component. Full detail is available in the standalone Legacy Review and questionnaire summary reports, which are referenced throughout.

The analytical weight of the report sits in Sections 4 to 7. Section 4 assesses what has been sustained across the evidence base, drawing on both the thematic dimensions of the questionnaire summaries and the evaluation framework dimensions applied in the project, institutional and landscape-level reviews. Section 5 analyses the pathways through which benefits have been sustained, and the factors that made continuation credible or fragile. Section 6 translates those findings into practical guidance, recommendations and red flags for Expert Committees, the Fund Manager and Defra, and grantees. Section 7 presents the overall assessment and conclusion.

2. Methodology and evidence base

2.1. Overview of the Phase 2 approach

Phase 2 of the Sustainability Deep Dive employed a collaborative, multi-method approach to generate in depth evidence on the post-project sustained impacts and legacies of BCFs investments across three countries and one UKOT. The approach was designed to combine breadth, through structured questionnaires targeting all

completed BCFs projects in each location, with depth – through follow-up interviews with selected project leaders and in-country field visits with project teams, partners, beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

The approach was developed in Phase 1 and piloted in Kenya, which was the first Legacy Review to be conducted. The Kenya pilot tested and refined the evaluation framework and data collection methods before their application in Nepal, Bolivia and St Helena. While a common approach was developed for all four reviews, the depth and balance of methods varied across locations, reflecting differences in the number of projects reviewed, the availability of stakeholders, logistical considerations, and the nature of each review design. This variation is discussed further in Section 2.9.

The Legacy Reviews were applied at three analytical levels. At the project level, the focus was on the sustained impacts and legacy of specific BCFs interventions. At the institutional level, the focus was on how BCFs funding contributed to organisational capacity, systems, partnerships, strategy and ways of working. At the landscape level, the focus was on cumulative effects across places, actors, institutions and sequenced investments over time. Not all reviews operated at all three levels – the depth and combination of levels varied across locations – but this three-level framework provides the organising logic for the Legacy Review design.

2.2. The evaluation framework

The evaluation framework was developed in Phase 1 and is presented in full in Annex 1. It is structured around the OECD DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, impact and sustainability), with sustainability as the primary criterion and the others considered in relation to their links and interdependencies with sustainability. The framework recognises that a project's sustainability is closely linked to whether it was relevant to key stakeholders (which in turn affects their ownership and buy-in), coherent with other interventions (which may support or undermine its net benefits over time), and effective in achieving its intended outcomes (since sustained impact is dependent on outcomes having been achieved in the first place).

Within the sustainability criterion, the framework assesses five principal dimensions: financial sustainability, socioeconomic sustainability, institutional sustainability, environmental sustainability, and individual capacity. Three cross cutting questions were also incorporated into the framework: to what extent has the project scaled; to what extent has the project leveraged additional funding; and to what extent has the project built an enabling environment for inclusive and equitable development. These were applied as additional analytical lenses within the project level reviews, alongside the five sustainability dimensions. Institutional and landscape-level reviews adopted a more contextual and interpretive approach, drawing on the framework as an analytical reference point rather than applying it question by question.

2.3. Country and territory selection

As recommended by NIRAS and set out in the Phase 1 report, Legacy Reviews were undertaken in clusters. For Darwin Initiative and IWT Challenge Fund projects, the evaluation focused on countries with the most significant history of BCFs implementation (in terms of total number of projects financed across both funds), and which host a good mix of Darwin Initiative and IWT Challenge Fund projects. For Darwin Plus, the evaluation focused on the most significant history of implementation, while taking into account the relative logistical complexity and cost of conducting field-based reviews in remote UKOTs.

On this basis, four review locations were selected:

Kenya was selected as the pilot location for several reasons. Kenya has the most extensive history of BCFs project implementation of any country globally – since 1994, a total of 99 Darwin Initiative and 14 IWT Challenge Fund projects have been funded. This scale of portfolio was expected to maximise opportunities for engagement with project leaders and to yield a high questionnaire response rate. Several institutions in Kenya have also received multiple BCFs grants over successive funding cycles, creating strong conditions for examining compounding institutional level impacts. Kenya was therefore well placed to test and refine the evaluation approach before its application elsewhere.

Nepal was selected as the focus country for Asia. Since 1994, 58 Darwin Initiative and 10 IWT Challenge Fund projects have been funded in Nepal. Logistical conditions are favourable – Nepal is a small country with good transport infrastructure, making travel across different landscapes relatively straightforward. During a Defra visit to Nepal in late 2024, the team encountered several compelling legacy stories and were keen to commission a deeper investigation. Other Asian countries were considered, including Indonesia (which has the highest number of funded projects: 63 Darwin Initiative and 18 IWT Challenge Fund), Vietnam and Cambodia, but these were excluded because they are likely to be included in a forthcoming external evaluation of BCFs funding being led by Oxford Policy Management (OPM) and Itad.

Bolivia was selected as the focal country in Latin America. Since 1994, 34 Darwin Initiative and seven IWT Challenge Fund projects have been funded in Bolivia. Bolivia was preferred over other Latin American candidates (including Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua and Mexico) based on its significant implementation history across both funds, the depth and range of its IWT portfolio, and the fact that Belize and Mexico are Higher Middle Income Countries, and Honduras and Nicaragua have smaller completed project portfolios.

St Helena was selected as the Darwin Plus location to ensure the UKOT perspective was incorporated into the study. St Helena was preferred over other UKOTs (including South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, Pitcairn, and the British Indian Ocean Territory) for its relative accessibility and for the strength and depth of its BCFs implementation history spanning over 30 years. Importantly, St Helena had never previously had an in-person BCFs project review, as travel had been difficult and time consuming prior to the opening of the island's airport.

2.4. Questionnaires

The structured questionnaire was the foundation of each Legacy Review. NIRAS sought to contact project leaders and key persons involved of all completed BCFs projects in each review location and invited them to participate in the evaluation. In total, questionnaires were sent to 238 persons involved in the projects across Kenya, Nepal, Bolivia and St Helena. The questionnaire was distributed using Microsoft Forms and covered 14 questions on the sustained impact and legacy of completed projects, including questions on biodiversity impact, livelihoods and poverty reduction, partnerships, policy influence, scaling and replication, individual capacity, and innovation and learning. The full questionnaire text is available in the Questionnaire Summary reports.

Table 2.1 summarises questionnaire distribution and response rates across the three countries and one territory. In Kenya, 21 responses were received but seven were excluded from the analysis because the projects concerned had only recently completed in 2025, which is too recently to allow meaningful observation of sustained impacts and legacy. In Nepal, seven responses were received but one was excluded on the same grounds. Similarly, in Bolivia, ten responses were received but one was excluded on the same grounds. In St Helena, seven responses were received but one was excluded as it related to a project not based in St Helena.

Table 2.1: Questionnaire distribution and response rates across the four reviews

Country / Territory	Questionnaires sent	Responses received	Included in analysis
Kenya	106	21	14
Nepal	50	7	6
Bolivia	37	10	9
St Helena	45	7	6

2.5. Follow-up interviews with project leaders

Following analysis of questionnaire responses, follow-up discussions were held with selected project leaders to provide contextual depth and to assess the feasibility and value of in-country field engagement. These discussions were not conducted with all questionnaire respondents but were targeted at those whose responses indicated the strongest potential for in-country work – in terms of the richness of evidence available, the continued presence of key individuals and institutions in the country, and the accessibility of project sites and stakeholders. The follow-up interviews also served as entry points to the in-country interviews and field visits described in Section 2.6, with project leaders helping to identify and facilitate access to key stakeholders.

2.6. Country field visits

Country field visits were conducted as part of each Legacy Review. In Kenya, the field visit was conducted from Monday 24 November to Friday 5 December 2025, across two landscapes – the Mount Kenya watershed and the Laikipia landscape – focusing on Nature Kenya and Fauna & Flora respectively. In Nepal, the field visit was conducted from Monday 23 February to Friday 27 February 2026, focusing on ZSL's work in the Chitwan-Sindhuli corridor and Greenhood Nepal's institutional context. In Bolivia, the field visit was conducted from 9 to 16 March 2026, and in St Helena a six-day island visit was conducted from 15 to 21 March 2026. Across all four geographies, visits involved face-to-face semi-structured interviews with key project team members, partners, beneficiaries and other stakeholders, focus group discussions, opportunistic informal discussions, and visits to project sites. Interview questions and discussion guides were aligned with the Evaluation Framework throughout, and notes taken during interviews produced rich qualitative data which was triangulated with questionnaire responses and project documentation.

2.7. Project documentation

The role of project documentation in this evaluation varied across the different components of the Legacy Reviews. For projects that responded to the questionnaire only, findings are based on self-reported evidence from project leaders, and no additional documentation review was undertaken. For the standalone project-level deep dives, project documentation submitted to the BCFs was reviewed systematically, including application forms, annual reports, final reports and report reviews. This provided a record of project objectives, activities, and reported results against which stakeholder accounts of sustained impact could be assessed. For the institutional and landscape level reviews, the nature of the analytical questions – focusing on organisational development, cumulative legacy and landscape-level change over time – meant that stakeholder perspectives were the most appropriate primary source. Documentary evidence was drawn on where it could usefully contextualise or corroborate stakeholder accounts.

2.8. Analytical approach

Evidence from questionnaires, follow-up interviews, field visits and project documentation was triangulated to build an understanding of the presence or absence of sustained impacts and legacy across each review. The Evaluation Framework dimensions provided the primary organising lens for the cross-portfolio synthesis presented in Section 4.

Pathways and explanatory patterns were identified through iterative analysis across the evidence base, looking for patterns that were consistent across multiple contexts as well as divergences that shed light on the conditions under which different pathways operate. This analysis informs Section 5 and the guidance in Section 6.

Throughout, the analysis focuses on plausible contribution rather than strict attribution. Given the retrospective nature of the reviews and the absence of counterfactuals, it is not possible to attribute sustained outcomes solely or directly to BCFs funding. The reviews therefore assess how BCFs supported activities interacted with wider contextual and institutional factors, using triangulated evidence to understand their contribution to observed outcomes.

2.9. Note on variation in approach across reviews

While a common approach and Evaluation Framework were developed for all four Legacy Reviews, the depth, balance and analytical emphasis of each review varied across locations. This reflected the nature of the available evidence, the structure of the BCFs investment history in each context, and the most appropriate level at which legacy could be assessed.

Kenya and Bolivia both operated across all three analytical levels – project, institutional and landscape. Kenya examined two focal institutions, Nature Kenya and Fauna & Flora, across the Mount Kenya watershed and the Laikipia landscape respectively. Bolivia examined one focal institution, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), across the Madidi landscape, with an additional questionnaire-based analysis of three projects from two Bolivian NGOs. Nepal operated at project and institutional levels, structured around two focal organisations – Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and Greenhood Nepal (Greenhood) – with distinct analytical emphases. St Helena adopted a territory-level approach, examining cumulative legacy across 30 years of BCFs engagement through two focal institutions, St Helena Government (SHG) and St Helena National Trust (SHNT), and several major programmes of work. This review deliberately went broad and shallow rather than deep and narrow on individual projects.

A further distinction concerns how questionnaire and in-country evidence are presented. For Kenya and Nepal, questionnaire analysis and in-country Legacy Review findings are presented as separate deliverables: a standalone questionnaire summary report and a separate Legacy Review report, respectively. A selection of questionnaire respondents in both countries were subsequently followed up through in-country interviews and field visits, which form the basis of the Legacy Review reports. For Bolivia and St Helena, questionnaire findings and in-country work are integrated into single Legacy Review reports.

This variation does not undermine the overall analysis, but it should be borne in mind when interpreting evidence across reviews. The common Evaluation Framework provides the basis for cross-review synthesis, while the tailored design of each review reflects the specific evidence base, institutional context and legacy pathways present in each location. The individual Legacy Review reports describe the specific methodology and scope of each review in full.

2.10. Constraints and limitations

Several constraints and limitations apply to the Phase 2 evidence base and should be considered when interpreting the findings of this report.

The sample is small and purposively selected. Four review locations, covering a limited number of focal institutions and projects, cannot be considered statistically representative of the full BCFs portfolio. Findings are analytically grounded and suitable for identifying plausible patterns, mechanisms and lessons, but should not be read as representative of the portfolio as a whole.

Evidence of long-term impact is predominantly qualitative and largely self-reported. Systematic post-project monitoring data were unavailable, incomplete or not directly comparable across projects, constraining longitudinal analysis and making it difficult to quantify long-term biodiversity and livelihood outcomes. The absence of quantified data does not imply the absence of impact, but limits the confidence with which specific claims can be made.

There is a risk of survivor bias. Projects and institutions that have persisted, and whose leaders remain engaged with BCFs processes, are more visible than those that have not, and the evidence base may therefore present a more optimistic picture of BCFs legacy than would emerge from a fully representative sample.

The retrospective nature of the reviews means that time has elapsed since project closure, and observed outcomes will have been shaped by subsequent funding, institutional change and external interventions beyond the BCFs projects themselves. Attribution of sustained outcomes to BCFs funding specifically is

therefore not always possible. The analysis therefore focuses on plausible contribution rather than direct attribution.

The projects reviewed in this evaluation were implemented in previous funding rounds and were therefore designed, delivered and reported against the BCFs guidance in place at the time. This is important context for interpreting the findings as a number of the issues identified in this report, including expectations around sustainability planning, legacy, monitoring, evidence use and post-project continuation, have already started to be addressed through subsequent updates to BCFs application, reporting and guidance materials. The findings should therefore be read as evidence of how earlier projects approached sustainability under older requirements, as well as a basis for further strengthening and applying the improvements already introduced across the funds.

Finally, access to original beneficiaries and stakeholders was uneven across reviews, reflecting differences in logistics, staff availability and the time elapsed since project closure. In some cases, key individuals had moved on from their implementing organisations and were not always best placed to respond to all questions.

Together, these limitations do not undermine the core findings of this report, but they shape how those findings should be interpreted. The evidence is strongest in relation to institutional, governance, partnership and capacity-related legacies, where multiple sources could often be triangulated. It is more indicative for long-term environmental and socioeconomic outcomes, where post-project monitoring data were limited and causal pathways were harder to verify.

2.11. Use of findings

The findings of this report are intended to inform practical improvements in BCFs project design, selection, management, reporting and learning. The report therefore focuses not only on whether legacy was achieved, but on what the BCFs can do to increase the likelihood of sustained impact in future.

The recommendations are directed towards three main user groups:

- Expert Committees: particularly in relation to project selection, assessment of sustainability claims, and identification of positive indicators or red flags in applications;
- Fund Manager and Defra: particularly in relation to project support, reporting, adaptive management, closure processes and portfolio-level learning;
- Grantees and applicants: particularly in relation to designing and implementing projects with sustainability in mind.

The recommendations are accompanied by practical red flags and indicators that can be used when reviewing applications, monitoring implementation or assessing final reports. This reflects the central purpose of the work – to translate evidence on legacy into actionable learning for future programming.

One exception to the Phase 2 primacy principle applies in Section 6. The Phase 1 evaluation included a review of the *Evaluation of Livelihoods Programming in Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects* deep dive, which contains recommendations directly relevant to the design and assessment of socioeconomic and livelihood components. Where Phase 2 findings on livelihoods sustainability converge with or are reinforced by those findings in the livelihoods deep dive, Section 6 draws on both, with explicit attribution distinguishing the Phase 1 source from recommendations grounded in Phase 2 evidence alone.

3. Overview of Legacy Review evidence

3.1. Purpose and structure of this section

This section provides an overview of the Phase 2 evidence base used in the synthesis. It introduces the review components undertaken across Kenya, Nepal, Bolivia and St Helena, clarifies the role of each evidence source, and summarises the headline contribution of each component. It does not repeat the full findings of the standalone Legacy Review and questionnaire summary reports. For each component it sets out the scope of the evidence, the main signals emerging from the review, and any caveats affecting interpretation.

The analytical findings are developed in subsequent sections. Section 4 assesses what has been sustained across the evidence base; Section 5 examines the pathways through which benefits have been sustained and the factors that made continuation credible or fragile; Section 6 translates those findings into practical guidance, recommendations and red flags; and Section 7 presents the overall assessment and conclusion.

3.2. How evidence is used and weighted

The evidence base is deliberately layered, combining broad self-reported questionnaire evidence with deeper evidence from in-country Legacy Reviews, stakeholder interviews, field visits and project documentation. These sources do not carry equal weight. The in-country Legacy Reviews provide the primary evidence base, offering the richest insight into whether benefits have continued after closure and what factors enabled or constrained them. Findings supported by multiple sources are treated with greatest confidence. The questionnaire summaries provide useful breadth across completed projects and are valuable for identifying recurring themes and candidates for deeper review, but because responses are self-reported and not all independently verified, they are used cautiously and do not carry the same weight as triangulated evidence. Project documentation is used mainly to distinguish achievements reported at closure from benefits that appear to have continued afterwards. Phase 1 provides important background to the wider Sustainability Deep Dive and helped establish the rationale for the Phase 2 reviews, but it is not treated as a primary evidence source. The findings and recommendations here are grounded in the Phase 2 evidence base.

3.3. Summary of review components

Phase 2 generated evidence through a set of complementary review components that were not identical in structure. Kenya combined a country-level questionnaire summary, two project deep dives, an institutional review and a landscape-level review. Nepal combined a questionnaire summary, a ZSL project deep dive and a Greenhood Nepal institutional review. Bolivia combined a WCS institutional and landscape level review with a separate questionnaire summary. St Helena was treated as an integrated territory level review. Table 3.1 sets out all 11 components, their analytical focus and their role in the synthesis.

Table 3.1: Phase 2 Legacy Review evidence components

Component	Country	Evidence component	Fund(s)	Analytical focus	Role in synthesis
1	Kenya	Kenya questionnaire summary	Darwin Initiative and IWTCF	Country-level questionnaire evidence from completed projects	Provides breadth across completed Kenya projects and identifies themes for deeper review
2	Kenya	Nature Kenya project deep dive	Darwin Initiative	Project-level review of <i>Partnering with Business for Restoration of Mt Kenya Ecosystem Services</i> (25-031)	Provides detailed evidence on sustained project-level legacy from restoration, ecosystem services assessment, business

					engagement and forest governance work
3	Kenya	Nature Kenya institutional review	Darwin Initiative	Institutional review of Nature Kenya's wider organisational legacy from BCFs engagement	Provides evidence on how BCFs funding contributed to Nature Kenya's organisational capacity, systems, partnerships, restoration planning and ways of working
4	Kenya	Fauna & Flora project deep dive	Darwin Initiative	Project-level review of <i>Cattle, Water and Wildlife: Enhancing Socio-Ecological Resilience in Laikipia</i> (24-002)	Provides detailed evidence on sustained project-level outcomes relating to rangeland management, water governance, livelihoods, coexistence and partnership development
5	Kenya	Fauna & Flora landscape-level review	Darwin Initiative and IWTCF	Landscape-level review of sequenced BCFs engagement in Laikipia, including Fauna & Flora, IIED, University of Cambridge and wider partner investments	Provides evidence on cumulative landscape-level legacy, project sequencing, governance relationships, institutional continuity and long-term partnership effects
6	Nepal	Nepal questionnaire summary	Darwin Initiative and IWTCF	Country-level questionnaire evidence from completed projects	Provides breadth across Nepal respondent projects and contextualises the in-country review
7	Nepal	ZSL project deep dive	IWTCF	Project-level review of <i>Securing Chitwan-Sindhuli green corridor: Strengthening community stewardship and law enforcement</i> (IWT099)	Provides evidence on sustained IWT outcomes, community stewardship, enforcement systems, livelihood mechanisms and post-project continuation
8	Nepal	Greenhood Nepal institutional review	IWTCF	Institutional review linked to <i>Illegal Trade and Sustainable Use of Medicinal Orchids in Nepal</i> (IWT083)	Provides evidence on organisational maturation, partnership legacy, individual capacity, technical credibility and follow-on enforcement work
9	Bolivia	Bolivia questionnaire summary	Darwin Initiative and IWTCF	Questionnaire-based review of three additional, unrelated projects where no further interviews with project leaders, partners or involved institutions took place	Provides supplementary breadth across additional completed projects, but is treated more cautiously because evidence is self-reported and not triangulated through follow-up interviews or fieldwork
10	Bolivia	WCS institutional and	Darwin Initiative and IWTCF	Institutional review of WCS, drawing on six selected WCS projects implemented between 2014 and 2025,	Provides the main Bolivia evidence on institutional legacy, sustained impact, organisational capacity, long-term engagement

		landscape level review		questionnaire evidence and in-country review work	and continuity of BCF-supported work
11	St Helena	St Helena Legacy Review	Darwin Initiative and Darwin Plus	Integrated territory-level review of long-term Darwin Plus engagement, drawing on questionnaire evidence, island visit evidence, interviews and documentation	Provides the UKOT perspective and evidence on cumulative territory-level legacy, institutional capacity and long-term conservation delivery

3.4. Kenya evidence components

The Kenya evidence base comprises five components: the Kenya country-level questionnaire summary; the Nature Kenya project deep dive; the Nature Kenya institutional review; the Fauna & Flora project deep dive; and the Laikipia landscape-level review. Together, these components provide the most disaggregated Phase 2 evidence base, combining broad self-reported evidence from completed projects with deeper project, institutional and landscape level analysis.

Kenya was also the pilot country for the Phase 2 approach. As such, the Kenya review helped test the Evaluation Framework, refine the use of questionnaires and follow-up interviews, and explore how legacy could be assessed at different levels. The Kenya evidence is therefore important both substantively, because of the scale and depth of BCFs engagement in the country, and methodologically, because it informed the approach taken in subsequent reviews.

3.4.1. Kenya country-level questionnaire summary

The Kenya questionnaire summary is the broadest Kenya component. Of 82 completed BCFs projects in Kenya (68 Darwin Initiative, 14 IWTCF), 21 project leaders responded to the survey. After excluding seven projects completed in 2025 as too recent, 14 projects completed between 2002 and 2024 were in scope. The full list of projects is given in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: BCFs projects included in the Kenya questionnaire review

Project code	Project title	Fund	Lead organisation	Project period
11-003 and EIDPO007	<i>Kenyan Important Biodiversity Areas: Improving monitoring, management and conservation action and Ensuring legacy and conservation impact within Kenya's biodiversity monitoring network</i>	Darwin Initiative	RSPB	2002–2007
12-003	<i>Flamingo conservation and Ramsar site management at Lake Bogoria, Kenya</i>	Darwin Initiative	Earthwatch Institute	2003–2006
15-040	<i>Building capacity to alleviate human–elephant conflict in North Kenya</i>	Darwin Initiative	University of Cambridge	2006–2009
16-006	<i>Local action for global impact – community-based biodiversity conservation films</i>	Darwin Initiative	University of Leicester	2007–2010
IWT026	<i>Connecting enhanced livelihoods to elephant and rhino protection</i>	IWTCF	Northern Rangelands Trust	2016–2018
24-002	<i>Cattle, water and wildlife: enhancing socio-ecological resilience in Laikipia</i>	Darwin Initiative	Fauna & Flora	2017–2021
24-013	<i>Balancing water services for development and biodiversity in the Tana-Delta</i>	Darwin Initiative	RSPB	2017–2021

25-004	<i>Livelihoods Insurance from Elephants (LIFE) in Kenya and Sri Lanka</i>	Darwin Initiative	IIED	2018–2022
25-031	<i>Partnering with business for restoration of Mt Kenya ecosystem services</i>	Darwin Initiative	Nature Kenya	2018–2021
26-003	<i>Securing the long-term future of Kenya's largest freshwater wetland</i>	Darwin Initiative	Nature Kenya	2019–2022
26-006	<i>Conserving Tsavo's wildlife by building community resilience and fostering coexistence</i>	Darwin Initiative	Zoological Society of London	2019–2022
28-022	<i>Restoring the 'water tower' cloud forests of Kenya's Taita Hills</i>	Darwin Initiative	RSPB	2021–2024
IWT090	<i>Enhancing East-African judicial systems: increasing wildlife crimes asset-recovery and convictions</i>	IWTFCF	Space for Giants	2021–2024
28-017	<i>Establishing a biocultural heritage territory to protect Kenya's Kaya forests</i>	Darwin Initiative	IIED	2021–2024

The 14 responses span a diverse set of project types. Across them, project leaders reported sustained benefits across all themes, though depth and strength varied considerably. Sustained impact is most consistently reported through institutional, governance and partnership pathways rather than directly measurable biodiversity or livelihood outcomes – most visibly where projects embedded approaches within community institutions, aligned with statutory or planning frameworks, and built durable multi-actor partnerships. Where projects relied on timebound incentives or externally driven delivery, reported legacy is thinner.

Three key findings stand out. First, community and professional governance structures established or strengthened during projects, including Community Forest Associations (CFAs), Water Resource Users Associations (WRUAs), Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), conservancy structures and professional networks, continue functioning beyond closure across several projects. Second, sequential BCFs engagement in the same landscapes and institutions emerges as a distinctive feature, generating cumulative outcomes that cannot be attributed to any single project. Third, *Livelihoods insurance from elephants (LIFE) in Kenya and Sri Lanka* (25-004) represents one of the clearest reported scaling outcomes, with the Government of Kenya assuming ownership and committing approximately USD 8 million in public funds to support national scale delivery through an integrated public-private claims model. The model has since been replicated in Zambia.

One evidence gap is particularly relevant here. Post-project ecological monitoring is largely absent, making it difficult to verify biodiversity outcomes directly. In many cases, the evidence therefore rests on the continued presence of management, governance or stewardship systems rather than on measured changes in species populations, habitat condition or ecosystem health. This does not mean biodiversity impact is absent, but it does mean that claims about sustained biodiversity outcomes should be treated as plausible but only partly verified.

3.4.2. Nature Kenya: Project Deep Dive

Partnering with Business for Restoration of Mt Kenya Ecosystem Services (25-031) was led by Nature Kenya with Kenya Forest Service (KFS), 12 Community Forest Associations and public and private sector partners. It ran from 2018 to 2021 with a Darwin Initiative grant of £336,276 and was awarded an A+ at final review. The project linked forest restoration, ecosystem services assessment, CFA capacity and private-sector engagement.

The project demonstrates strong endurance of institutional, planning and capacity-related outcomes alongside more conditional financial and ecological sustainability. The strongest evidence relates to the embedding of restoration planning within formal governance systems. The project supported the Mt Kenya Forest Restoration Strategy (2019–2029), an Ecosystem Services Assessment and a revised Forest Restoration Business Case. The strategy was adopted by KFS and mainstreamed into the planning and budgeting of five county governments.

The project also strengthened alignment with statutory forest governance, including Joint Forest Management (JFM) and the recognised role of CFAs, and enhanced CFA capacity to deliver restoration. These structural changes do not depend on continued donor funding and provide a durable basis for further restoration. At community and individual level, sustained benefits are most evident through retained skills and adaptive livelihood strategies rather than persistent income streams.

Evidence of continued restoration activity and private sector engagement was more mixed. The project reported notable achievements at closure, but the deep dive found that the durability and scale of post-project financing varied. Some relationships and activities continued, but the wider Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) or buyer financed restoration model did not translate into a stable, self-sustaining mechanism. Environmental outcomes therefore show only partial endurance. Biodiversity and watershed outcomes remain unverified beyond closure, reflecting ecological time lags and the absence of post-project monitoring.

3.4.3. Nature Kenya: Institutional Review

This component examines the cumulative impact of BCFs funding on Nature Kenya as an organisation, drawing on multiple projects implemented over more than two decades, questionnaire responses and interviews with senior staff. Nature Kenya has engaged with the BCFs through the Darwin Initiative since 2002, both as lead and as partner alongside RSPB, across nine projects spanning montane forests, freshwater wetlands, coastal deltas and national biodiversity monitoring (listed in Table 3.3). The review identifies this sequence of linked, rather than discrete interventions, as an important precondition for institutional legacy, enabling Nature Kenya to retain institutional memory, refine approaches and embed learning into organisational systems.

Table 3.3: Longevity and overlap of Nature Kenya's engagement with BCFs funding

Project code	Project title	Lead organisation	Project period
11-003	<i>Kenyan Important Biodiversity Areas: Improving monitoring, management and conservation action</i>	RSPB	2002–2005
EIDPO007	<i>Ensuring legacy and conservation impact within Kenya's biodiversity monitoring network</i>	RSPB	2005–2007
21-015	<i>Balancing development and conservation in Kenya's largest freshwater wetland</i>	Nature Kenya	2014–2017
24-013	<i>Balancing water services for development and biodiversity in the Tana-Delta</i>	RSPB	2017–2021
25-031	<i>Partnering with Business for Restoration of Mt Kenya ecosystem services</i>	Nature Kenya	2018–2021
26-003	<i>Securing the long-term future of Kenya's largest freshwater wetland</i>	Nature Kenya	2019–2022
28-022	<i>Restoring the 'water tower' cloud forests of Kenya's Taita Hills</i>	RSPB	2021–2024
31-018	<i>Strengthening policy, capacity and climate resiliency to conserve Mutitu and Mumoni</i>	Nature Kenya	2024–2027
32-009	<i>Nandi's Green Lungs: sustainable restoration for thriving biodiversity and livelihoods</i>	Nature Kenya	2025–2030

Although BCFs funding has not been Nature Kenya's largest income source, it is assessed as having had a disproportionate influence on the organisation's development and ways of working, attributed to the rigour of Darwin Initiative requirements, including clear Theories of Change (ToC), robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), and explicit attention to sustainability and scaling, which team members described as shaping internal standards now applied across Nature Kenya's wider portfolio. This influence is captured by Paul Matiku (Nature Kenya's long-serving CEO): "BCFs funding was not Nature Kenya's largest funding source, but it had the greatest influence on how the organisation works", an individual insight that reflects how the funds' approaches influenced Nature Kenya's wider organisational culture.

Three areas of accrued institutional capacity are particularly well evidenced. First, national biodiversity monitoring (systems initiated under early Darwin-supported Important Bird Area (IBA) work) have continued for over two decades, evolving into the globally recognised Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) framework and now underpinning national reporting to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), with government progressively taking on monitoring responsibilities. Second, participatory land-use planning and governance at landscape scale, including the Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) and Land Use Plans (LUPs) behind a large Community Conserved Area (CCA) in the Tana Delta that continues to function, with planning approaches reapplied in other landscapes. Third, science led restoration planning and investment readiness, with approaches aligned to Kenya's National Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy (2023–2032). Across its portfolio Nature Kenya has also shown sustained capability in working through statutory governance arrangements and supporting CFAs as legitimate delivery partners.

Individual capacity reinforces this picture. For example, the career trajectory of Serah Munguti, from intern at Nature Kenya to Kenya Country Manager for Fauna & Flora, illustrates how cumulative exposure to Darwin-funded work generated durable leadership capacity. The review also identifies clear constraints. Nature Kenya's ability to sustain and scale impact remains dependent on continued donor engagement, and it has limited leverage over downstream private sector actors whose commitments are critical to landscape scale restoration.

3.4.4. Fauna & Flora: Project Deep Dive

Cattle, Water and Wildlife: Enhancing Socio-Ecological Resilience in Laikipia (24-002) was led by Fauna & Flora with Ol Pejeta Conservancy (OPC) and Laikipia Wildlife Forum (LWF). It ran from 2017 to 2021 with a Darwin Initiative grant of £399,383 and was awarded an A+ at final review. Focused on the 8,000 ha Mutara Conservation Area (MCA) adjacent to OPC, it targeted integrated improvements in rangeland management, water governance, human-wildlife coexistence and livelihoods. It is assessed alongside the Fauna & Flora landscape level review in Section 3.4.5, which examines the wider Laikipia trajectory of which it formed a part.

The project demonstrates strong sustained impact where outputs were translated into institutional practice, governance arrangements and individual behaviour embedded within organisations with long-term mandates. Sustainability was considered from the outset through concentration of delivery responsibility and budget within partners with a lasting landscape presence. Ecologically, continued wildlife movement and use of the MCA is evidenced through post-project monitoring and interviews, and ecological monitoring systems have been absorbed into OPC's routine practice; however, climate stress and external land-use pressure remain significant risks. At governance level the legacy is particularly strong. WRUA coordination, engagement with statutory authorities and negotiated water-sharing arrangements have persisted, with reduced water access conflict sustained against the project baseline.

Socioeconomic benefits endured where households adopted practices they could sustain with their own resources, indicating capability driven rather than donor dependent outcomes. Where gains depended on higher value market access, outcomes were more constrained, and market integration remains unresolved. Financial sustainability is evident, with OPC absorbing extension and biomonitoring functions within existing budgets, WRUAs continuing through existing mandates, and the project's most significant scaling outcome, funded through a Darwin Initiative Extra grant – *Increasing ecological and socio-economic resilience of Upper Ewaso Ng'iro North Ecosystem* (DAREX006) – builds on its approaches at greater scale.

3.4.5. Laikipia Landscape-level Review

The landscape level review examined the cumulative legacy of BCFs supported engagement in the Laikipia landscape over more than two decades. Unlike the project deep dive in Section 3.4.4, it considered how sequenced investments by different organisations contributed to longer term institutional relationships, governance systems, conflict mitigation, water and rangeland management, social equity assessment and integrated watershed scale programming. As shown in Table 3.4, this engagement spans early human-wildlife

conflict mitigation, ecosystem service scoping, social impact assessment and integrated conservation-livelihood programming, through to the current watershed scale phase under DAREX006.

Table 3.4: Longevity, sequencing and institutional leadership of BCF-supported engagement in the Laikipia landscape

Project code	Project title	Lead organisation	Key partners	Project period
15-040	<i>Building capacity to alleviate human-elephant conflict in north Kenya</i>	University of Cambridge	Laikipia Wildlife Forum (LWF), Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS)	2006–2009
EIDPR149	<i>Biodiversity and ecosystem Services in the Ewaso Ng'iro Upper Basin</i>	Fauna & Flora	OI Pejeta Conservancy (OPC), LWF	2012–2013
20-010	<i>Social Assessment of Protected Areas (SAPA)</i>	IIED	Fauna & Flora	2013–2016
25-006	<i>Enhancing equity and effectiveness of protected area conservation</i>	IIED	Fauna & Flora, KWS	2018–2021
24-002	<i>Cattle, water and wildlife: enhancing socio-ecological resilience in Laikipia</i>	Fauna & Flora	OPC, LWF, KWS	2017–2021
DARNV016	<i>Promoting equitable gender norms to strengthen conservation governance and impact</i>	Fauna & Flora	University College London, Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT), Pate Marine Community Conservancy, Sera Wildlife Conservancy, CARE International Kenya.	2023–2025
DAREX006	<i>Increasing ecological and socio-economic resilience of Upper Ewaso Ng'iro North ecosystem</i>	Fauna & Flora	OPC, Laikipia Conservancies Association, Mount Kenya Trust, NRT	2023–2028

Continuity of engagement was a critical enabling condition. Each initiative was designed within its own funding cycle, but together they addressed successive constraints, allowing learning, relationships and institutional capacity to be retained across cycles rather than each project starting afresh. A defining feature is the degree to which learning has been embedded, rather than remaining project bound. Approaches to conflict mitigation, social equity assessment, water governance and rangeland management have been absorbed into the operational practices of local institutions, particularly OPC and associated community and resource user organisations.

Early human-wildlife conflict work under *Building capacity to alleviate human-elephant conflict in North Kenya* (15-040) moved conflict mitigation beyond reactive responses towards transferable approaches and leadership development, with a notable individual and institutional legacy. The Social Assessment of Protected Areas (SAPA) methodology, piloted under project 20-010 at OPC and reinforced through later projects, has been reapplied periodically and is now a routine governance and learning tool used across Fauna & Flora's global portfolio, having informed the design of project 24-002. Within this trajectory, 24-002 represented a pivotal implementation phase that translated earlier diagnostic and governance insights into integrated action and exposed the limits of site level interventions under climatic stress, generating learning that shaped the watershed scale design of project DAREX006. Early implementation of DAREX006 shows meaningful progress,

though impact pathways remain contingent on continued cooperation and the transition from externally funded coordination towards longer-term institutional and financing arrangements.

The portfolio has also generated durable legacy through individuals, with repeated involvement of staff and partners across successive projects supporting professional capability, leadership and institutional memory.

3.5. Nepal evidence components

The Nepal evidence base comprises three components: the country-level questionnaire summary; the ZSL project deep dive; and the Greenhood institutional review. Together they combine broad self reported evidence with deeper project and institutional level analysis of two organisations with contrasting profiles. The review adopted a focused scope reflecting the scale of the available IWT Challenge Fund evidence. While the questionnaire spans both Darwin Initiative and IWT Challenge Fund projects, the in-country work concentrated on IWT Challenge Fund projects, complementing the Kenya review's Darwin Initiative emphasis. The ZSL component is a project-level deep dive of *Securing Chitwan–Sindhuli Green Corridor* (IWT099); the Greenhood component combines a brief project-level review of *Illegal Trade and Sustainable Use of Medicinal Orchids in Nepal* (IWT083) with a light-touch institutional review of the University of Lancaster partnership. The two offer complementary insights, namely sustained project-level outcomes within a defined landscape, and the longer-term institutional development of a young grassroots NGO.

3.5.1. Nepal questionnaire summary

The Nepal questionnaire summary provides the broader country level evidence. Of 64 completed BCFs projects in Nepal (54 Darwin Initiative, 10 IWTCF), seven project leaders responded. After excluding one project which ended in 2025 as too recent, six projects implemented between 2002 and 2024 were in scope. These projects are listed in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: BCFs projects included in the Nepal questionnaire review

Project code	Project title	Fund	Lead organisation	Project period
162/11/020	<i>Building capacity for biodiversity assessment and monitoring in Nepal</i>	Darwin Initiative	UNEP-WCMC	2002–2005
11-021	<i>Institutionalising participatory integrated forest management in Nepal – reconciling biodiversity management with local livelihoods</i>	Darwin Initiative	University of East Anglia	2002–2005
26-022	<i>Uprating community forest management in Nepal: enhancing biodiversity and livelihoods</i>	Darwin Initiative	Forest Action Nepal	2019–2023
IWT083	<i>Illegal trade and sustainable use of medicinal orchids in Nepal</i>	IWTCF	Lancaster University	2020–2022
IWT099	<i>Securing Chitwan-Sindhuli Green corridor: strengthening community stewardship and law enforcement</i>	IWTCF	Zoological Society of London	2021–2024
29-001	<i>Embedding sustainable pollination management into Nepalese agricultural systems</i>	Darwin Initiative	University of Bristol	2022–2024

Overall, the evidence indicates that many projects continue to generate benefits post-closure, though the type, strength and durability vary considerably. Sustained impacts are most consistently evidenced in institutional and human capacity, partnerships, and the continued application of knowledge, tools and approaches. Direct biodiversity and livelihood outcomes are more variable and often difficult to verify because of limited post-project monitoring.

The strongest and most consistent legacy is institutional and human capacity development. Individuals supported through BCFs funding have progressed into influential roles, and organisations continue to apply tools and practices developed during implementation, particularly where capacity was embedded within existing institutions and locally owned structures. Partnerships are an important secondary area and were most durable where linked to continued implementation or locally embedded structures. Evidence of sustained biodiversity impact is more limited and primarily inferred through the continued functioning of management, enforcement or stewardship systems rather than measured change. The clearest example of this is through IWT099, where community patrols, habitat monitoring, conservation-area management and enforcement coordination reportedly remain active, but absent ecological monitoring leaves longer-term outcomes uncertain. Livelihood outcomes are mixed and best evidenced where they were tied to functioning local economic institutions and enhanced agency, particularly among women, though household level durability is often unverified.

Policy influence is uneven but significant in selected cases – most notably IWT099's contribution to a national wildlife stockpile management procedure – and is more commonly visible through procedures, strategies and agenda setting than formal legislative reform. Evidence of scaling is limited to a minority of projects. Most legacy is better characterised as continuation within the original context than as expansion beyond it. Genuinely novel approaches are limited, with innovation more often seen in contextual adaptation.

3.5.2. Zoological Society of London: Project Deep Dive

Securing Chitwan–Sindhuli Green Corridor: Strengthening Community Stewardship and Law Enforcement (IWT099) was led by ZSL with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), SAWEN, Himalayan Nature and Mithila Wildlife Trust. It ran from 2021 to 2024 with an IWTCF grant of £548,287 and was awarded an A+ at final review. It targeted pangolin trafficking and habitat degradation through an integrated approach combining intelligence led enforcement, community-based conservation and livelihood support.

The project demonstrates a credible and differentiated legacy, with its most durable impacts at community and institutional levels and more conditional outcomes in financial sustainability and environmental terms. The strongest evidence relates to community-based structures and enforcement systems embedded within existing community forestry, buffer-zone and enforcement frameworks. Community Managed Pangolin Conservation Areas (CMPCAs) and Community Based Anti-Poaching Units (CBAPUs) remain operational post-project, supporting patrols, habitat monitoring and intelligence-sharing, and women-led cooperatives functioning as community banks remain active, contributing to household resilience and reduced reliance on forest-based activities.

At institutional level, the Wildlife Crime Database Management Information System (WCD-MIS) remains in active government use, with applications extending to enforcement analysis, investigation support and wildlife-damage compensation. An IWT route map continues to inform government understanding of trafficking, and the project contributed to a Stockpile Management Procedure (2024) and is informing a national strategic plan – an emerging architecture for a more coordinated national IWT response.

Evidence is more conditional in three areas. Financially, community mechanisms remain functional, but there is limited evidence of diversified resourcing for system level functions such as data management, training and coordination. Further funding has enabled ZSL to replicate its approach, but this represents continuity of delivery by the implementing partner rather than independent mobilisation by government. Environmentally, there are indications of reduced poaching pressure within protected areas, but also evidence of displacement to areas outside them and into urban trade networks, and no post-project ecological monitoring is available. At livelihood level, income gains at closure varied markedly between sites and the reasons were not analysed, limiting confidence in durability and replicability.

3.5.3. Greenhood Nepal: Institutional Review

This component combines a brief review of *Illegal Trade and Sustainable Use of Medicinal Orchids in Nepal* (IWT083) with a light touch institutional review of Greenhood, focused on its partnership with the University of Lancaster. IWT083 was led by the University of Lancaster with Greenhood, the University of Oxford, the IUCN SSC Orchid Specialist Group and the University of Hawaii. It ran from 2020 to 2022 with an IWT Challenge Fund grant of £132,114 and was awarded an A at final review, addressing the conservation and livelihood challenges of wild medicinal-orchid harvest and trade.

At project level, several achievements have endured, primarily through adaptation and continued use rather than direct continuation. Greenhood continues to compile and analyse orchid trade data, awareness among enforcement agencies has persisted, and gaps identified during implementation directly shaped a follow-on IWT Challenge Fund Evidence grant developing multi species identification tools. Structured harvester self-monitoring was not sustained, but relationships established during the project provide a basis for continued engagement, and although no formal policy change has occurred, the project created an entry point for continued engagement with government on orchid conservation.

The more significant legacy is institutional. Greenhood began IWT083 as a small, largely volunteer-led organisation with limited experience of international funding. The University of Lancaster partnership provided sustained mentorship across the full project cycle in proposal development, logframe design, financial management and reporting, enabling Greenhood to establish core capacity and systems that remain in place. The project marked a step change in its transition to a staffed organisation with defined roles and a growing portfolio, now able to develop proposals, respond to competitive calls and manage grants independently. It has since secured further BCFs and other funding, demonstrating a durable shift in capacity and confidence. The partnership with the University of Lancaster continues but is no longer a dependency. However, overall funding is limited by organisational size and eligibility thresholds, and long-term sustainability depends on continued success in competitive applications.

3.6. Bolivia evidence components

The Bolivia evidence base comprises two components, the Bolivia questionnaire summary and the WCS institutional and landscape level review. The questionnaire summary draws on three projects implemented by two Bolivian NGOs. The WCS review provides the primary Bolivia evidence, covering six BCF-funded projects in the Madidi landscape between 2014 and 2025 and operating across project, institutional and landscape levels. Together the components demonstrate a strong example of sustained engagement with linked conservation, governance and livelihood challenges in a single landscape.

3.6.1. Bolivia questionnaire summary

Of the ten project leaders who responded to the questionnaire, six were from WCS and are covered through in-country work in Section 3.6.2. Of the remaining four, one project that ended in 2025 was excluded from the analysis, leaving three eligible non-WCS projects implemented between 2014 and 2024 in scope. These projects are listed in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6: BCFs projects included in the Bolivia questionnaire summary

Project code	Project title	Fund	Lead organisation	Project period
21-008	<i>Reciprocal watershed agreements: conserving Bolivia's Chaco through improved livelihoods</i>	Darwin Initiative	Fundación Natura Bolivia	2014–2017
28-019	<i>Protecting ecosystem functions in key watersheds for biodiversity and people</i>	Darwin Initiative	Asociación Armonía	2021–2023
DARNV006	<i>Replenishing Bolivia's water footprint: scaling watershed conservation through public-private partnerships</i>	Darwin Initiative (Innovation)	Fundación Natura Bolivia	2022–2024

The three projects present a portfolio with strong reported sustained impact, though the strength and maturity of evidence varies. The evidence base is strongest where projects converted short-term grant activities into locally financed or institutionally embedded mechanisms, including watershed governance platforms, municipal water-conservation funds, community fire brigades, protected area designations and public-private water access models. Sustained impact is most consistently visible in conservation finance, local governance, watershed protection, water security and partnership continuity. Direct biodiversity outcomes are strongest where projects created or protected defined habitat and weakest where biodiversity was not a central monitoring focus. The three projects show different maturity profiles, from the clearest and most extensive long-term legacy, through expansion well beyond original scope, to a more recent and explicitly experimental trajectory.

The review found that the embedding of conservation finance in local funding arrangements is the most distinctive and durable reported legacy. In several cases, municipal co-financing replaced donor subsidy, while external partnerships secured finance for nurseries and replication. Second, scaling and replication are strongly reported, including replication across many Bolivian municipalities and into neighbouring countries, though attribution to the original BCFs grant should be treated cautiously where models predate and extend beyond the grant. Third, biodiversity and watershed outcomes are credible and in two cases substantial, including legally conserved areas subsequently recognised as KBAs and a community fire brigade system associated with reduced fire incidence. Direct post-project ecological monitoring is largely absent, making biodiversity outcomes difficult to verify beyond the persistence of governance, finance and stewardship systems.

3.6.2. Wildlife Conservation Society: Institutional and Landscape-level Review

The WCS review provides the primary Bolivia evidence, examining six BCF-funded projects implemented by WCS in the Madidi landscape over 11 years, between 2014 and 2025. The six projects group into three clusters – three successive vicuña management projects, two successive jaguar focused IWT Challenge Fund projects, and one COVID-19 tourism recovery project. The projects are listed in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7: BCF-funded projects in the WCS Bolivia portfolio

Project code	Project title	Fund	Project period
21-004	<i>Sustainable ranching and participatory land use planning in Bolivia and Paraguay</i>	Darwin Initiative	2014–2017
IWT068	<i>A price on their heads: addressing jaguar trafficking in Bolivia</i>	IWTFCF	2019–2021
26-021	<i>Biodiversity conservation, vicuña health and local livelihoods in Apolobamba, Bolivia</i>	Darwin Initiative	2019–2022
IWT080	<i>Expanding local intelligence networks to combat jaguar IWT in Bolivia</i>	IWTFCF	2021–2024
CV19RR15	<i>Strengthening tourism to combat COVID-related threats to Bolivia's Indigenous territories</i>	Darwin Initiative	2021
DARCC034	<i>Vicuña management for biodiversity conservation and local livelihoods in the Bolivian highlands</i>	Darwin Initiative	2023–2025

The review identifies strong, well evidenced legacy across institutional, policy, socioeconomic and individual capacity dimensions, with more conditional outcomes at the environmental level. The overarching finding is that the most durable impacts emerged from sequential investment in the same landscape, enabling WCS to deepen institutional relationships, evolve its organisational capacity and position itself as a recognised policy broker rather than solely a science-based organisation. Institutionally, WCS changed significantly over the period reviewed. The two IWT Challenge Fund grants enabled it to build a dedicated team combining biodiversity expertise, environmental law and wildlife-crime investigation, which is unusual among Bolivian conservation NGOs. This strengthened role is evident in WCS's contribution to national jaguar and condor policy, and in the transfer of a national IWT database to government for long-term use.

The three vicuña projects generated equally significant policy and institutional legacy, with the approach formally embedded in Bolivia's national conservation framework through a national vicuña management plan and technical guidelines, underpinned by sustained Indigenous and community participation and a community marketing association that has evolved into the primary national coordinating body. The tourism recovery project, though smaller, generated a distinct institutional and financial legacy, strengthening WCS's convening role and establishing a revolving fund and destination certifications that persist beyond closure. Individual capacity reinforces this institutional picture, with several staff progressing into national leadership and specialist roles.

Environmental outcomes are the least directly verifiable dimension, reflecting the challenges of post-project ecological monitoring across a large landscape. Available evidence points to continued management conditions and monitoring systems rather than comprehensive outcome verification, including stable vicuña populations, continued monitoring sites generating government and UNEP-WCMC data, and the landscape's selection by the Legacy Landscapes Fund for long-term support. The review also identified several risks, including illegal mining encroaching on vicuña grazing land, institutional turnover within public administration, and reduced US government funding for IWT work.

3.7. St Helena evidence components

The St Helena evidence base comprises a single integrated territory-level component. Unlike the other reviews, the St Helena Legacy Review adopted a broader territory-level approach, examining sustained impact across some 30 years of BCFs investment. St Helena is a remote volcanic island with globally significant and highly threatened biodiversity. It represents almost a third of the endemic species across the UK and UKOTs however, only a small fraction of its original habitat survives because of historical habitat loss, invasive non-native species, climate change and, more recently, *Phytophthora* affecting endemic cabbage trees. This context shapes the review's emphasis on long-term ecological management, institutional continuity and capacity retention.

The review is also the only Phase 2 component focused on a UKOT. Projects in St Helena have historically been funded through both the Darwin Initiative and Darwin Plus, though since 2026 only Darwin Plus supports UKOT work. Because the International Development Act 2002 exempts ODA-eligible UKOTs from the poverty-reduction criteria applied to the rest of the ODA budget, poverty reduction is not a goal of BCFs projects implemented in the UKOTs. The socioeconomic and poverty related findings therefore need to be interpreted differently from the country-based components. The review was the first in-person BCF-led legacy review in St Helena and deliberately adopted a "broad and shallow" approach, focusing on the institutions involved across most projects, primarily SHG and SHNT. The review was structured around four programmes of work: endemic plant conservation in the cloud forest of the Peaks National Park; marine planning and Blue Belt conservation; wirebird conservation; and data storage and iRecord.

3.7.1. St Helena: Territory-level Review

Of seven questionnaire responses received, one was excluded as relating to a project not based in St Helena, leaving six in scope. The review focused on SHG and SHNT, which play complementary but structurally distinct roles: SHG benefits from recurrent government budgeting and long staff tenure, while SHNT relies more heavily on donor funding and project-based posts. A full list of completed projects is given in the standalone Legacy Review.

Endemic plant conservation in the cloud forest is the most extensively sequenced programme. Early horticulture training built local capacity that endures today, and successive projects built progressively on earlier baselines, capacity and partnerships, producing an endemic plant dataset that shaped subsequent restoration (though the database itself is no longer accessible following data corruption). The programme established the importance of the cloud forest for biodiversity and water security, and the current RSPB led cloud forest work builds directly on this accumulated evidence, capacity and institutional foundation.

Marine planning and Blue Belt conservation provides the clearest example of BCFs investment enabling a major follow-on programme. Early marine mapping and management planning are credited by stakeholders with enabling SHG to respond rapidly to the UK Blue Belt Programme, with the territory designating its Exclusive Economic Zone as a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in 2016 – a clear link between earlier project investment and later policy uptake. Wirebird conservation has been a sustained focus since early baseline work, with continued monitoring supported by more recent invasive-vertebrate control. It also illustrates a central constraint, since invasive species control requires continuous intervention and short funding cycles have led to repeated pilots and backsliding where proven approaches were not maintained post-project. Data storage and iRecord respond to a cross-cutting legacy risk – globally significant datasets are threatened by data loss, fragmentation and uncertain ownership, and the iRecord platform is being extended to address this.

Across all four programmes, individual capacity is one of the strongest and most consistent legacies, with BCFs funded training and fellowships supporting individuals who continue to hold senior technical and leadership roles many years later, particularly important in a small island context dependent on retaining skilled local staff. Institutional sustainability differs markedly between the two focal institutions. SHG has recurrent budget support and many long-serving staff but remains exposed to public sector budget pressures, while SHNT has strong local retention and an important delivery role but is more dependent on donor funding, so that loss of project funding can translate directly into loss of trained staff. Senior level relationships between the two are generally strong, but informal or poorly communicated agreements on remits and post-project responsibilities can weaken sustainability at delivery level, as seen where expectations around follow on invasive species control were unclear.

Environmental sustainability is the least secure dimension, not because conservation value is absent, but because invasive species control, pathogen management, endemic plant recovery and habitat restoration require continuous or long-term intervention while BCFs projects operate over short cycles. Individual projects have generated valuable baselines, methods, skills and partnerships, but the ecological outcomes they seek often cannot be secured within a single cycle.

4. What has been sustained?

This section synthesises the Phase 2 evidence by type of sustained benefit. It addresses the first core evaluation question: are the impacts and associated benefits of BCFs projects still observable after BCFs funding has ended? The focus is on what appears to have endured across the evidence base, where the evidence is strongest or weakest, and whether sustained benefits are directly evidenced or inferred from the continuation of systems, behaviours, institutions, partnerships, financing arrangements, or management practices.

The sub-sections reflect the sustainability dimensions used in the evaluation framework: environmental, socioeconomic, institutional, financial, and individual capacity. Community-level outcomes are treated separately because they emerged as a distinct layer of legacy, sitting between socioeconomic benefit, local governance, and institutional sustainability.

The section does not repeat the component summaries presented in Section 3. Instead, it draws across Kenya, Nepal, Bolivia and St Helena evidence components to identify the main types of outcomes that have been sustained and the relative strength of evidence for each. Throughout, evidence is characterised cautiously. Institutional, governance, and capacity-related legacies are generally easier to verify, while long-term biodiversity, livelihood, and financial outcomes are often more dependent on proxy evidence, self-reporting or follow-on funding. Section 5 then examines the pathways, enabling factors, and constraints that explain how and why these benefits have endured, weakened or evolved.

4.1. Biodiversity and environmental outcomes

Across the Phase 2 evidence base, sustained biodiversity and environmental outcomes are present but unevenly evidenced. Direct, long-term measurement of ecological change, through post-project species population monitoring, habitat condition assessment or comparable ecological datasets, is limited across the evidence base. This reflects both the timescales required for ecological outcomes to materialise and the limited availability of post-project monitoring, rather than an absence of environmental legacy. Where sustained outcomes are evidenced, they are most commonly demonstrated through the continued functioning of management systems, stewardship mechanisms, habitat protection instruments, restoration activity, enforcement systems or monitoring protocols established or strengthened during implementation.

The strongest evidence comes from cases where environmental outcomes are linked to defined area based protection, restoration or management systems that continued or expanded beyond project closure. In Bolivia, *Protecting ecosystem functions in key watersheds for biodiversity and people* (28-019) provides one of the clearest cases of sustained restoration and habitat-protection legacy. The restoration programme expanded from 660,080 trees planted at project closure to over one million native seedlings and 1,809 ha of protected native forest by 2025, supported by community fire management capacity that grew from 50 trained firefighters at project end to 91 across seven active brigades. *Reciprocal watershed agreements: conserving Bolivia's Chaco through improved livelihoods* (21-008) provides a strong example of legal biodiversity protection, with three municipal protected areas conserving 490,589 ha, two of which (Héroes del Chaco and Cuenca Alta del Río Parapetí) have subsequently been recognised as KBAs. In Kenya, *Balancing water services for development and biodiversity in the Tana Delta* (24-013) reports sustained biodiversity legacy through the continued operation of a 116,000 ha CCA, underpinned by participatory planning tools that continue to guide land-use decisions.

Several reviews also provide evidence of continued ecological monitoring and adaptive management. In the Laikipia landscape in Kenya, the MCA continues to function as an actively managed conservation and dispersal area, with ecological monitoring systems established or strengthened through *Cattle, water and wildlife: enhancing socio-ecological resilience in Laikipia* (24-002), adopted by OPC and integrated into routine management practice. Wildlife movement and use of the MCA continue to be reported, including movement between OPC and the MCA by both predator and prey species. In Bolivia, the WCS portfolio provides some of the strongest species and monitoring related evidence. The vicuña population in Apolobamba is reported as stable, mange prevalence has been reduced to below 9%, and 27 peatland and wildlife monitoring sites established under *Vicuña management for biodiversity conservation and local livelihoods in the Bolivian highlands* (DARCC034) remain operational, generating indicator species data for the Bolivian Government and UNEP-WCMC. *Sustainable ranching and participatory land use planning in Bolivia and Paraguay* (21-004) achieved improved management across 226,000 ha of ranch land and reported that retaliatory jaguar killings were reduced to zero in both project countries.

A second category of sustained environmental legacy is credible but more indirect. Projects have contributed to conditions that plausibly support biodiversity outcomes, with environmental effects inferred through the continued functioning of management, enforcement and restoration systems rather than through direct ecological measurement. In Nepal, *Securing Chitwan-Sindhuli Green Corridor: strengthening community stewardship and law enforcement* (IWT099) provides the clearest example. CMPCAs, CBAPUs, community patrols, habitat monitoring and law enforcement coordination remain active, helping to regulate habitat access, detect illegal activity and maintain a local enforcement presence. However, no systematic post-project ecological monitoring data are available to assess impacts on pangolin populations or habitat condition, and stakeholder evidence also indicates that illegal activity may have shifted outside protected landscapes and into urban trade networks. In Kenya, *Partnering with business for restoration of Mt Kenya ecosystem services* (25-031) provides a parallel case in a restoration context. More than 1,800 ha of degraded forest were brought under restoration management, throughout a larger 20,000 hectare area. At project closure, bird surveys and sediment load monitoring provided early indications of positive environmental trends, but these indicators have not been

repeated post-closure, and the persistence, magnitude and trajectory of biodiversity and watershed service outcomes cannot be confirmed. The strongest sustained environmental evidence in both cases therefore lies in the persistence of functioning management conditions, systems and frameworks rather than verified long-term ecological recovery. More broadly, Nature Kenya's long-term contribution to biodiversity monitoring, from IBAs to KBAs, demonstrates that BCFs supported monitoring and prioritisation systems have continued to shape conservation decision-making, even where site-level ecological outcomes have not been directly measured after project closure.

St Helena presents a structurally distinct case. The evidence points to substantial long-term environmental value from sequenced Darwin Initiative and Darwin Plus investment, including the evidence base for MPA designation, cloud forest restoration linked to biodiversity and water security, continued wirebird monitoring, and emerging data systems such as iRecord. Wirebird census counts have not fallen below 580 since 2022, suggesting some endurance of conservation gains associated with ongoing monitoring and vertebrate control. However, the St Helena review also highlights the limits of short project cycles where ecological management requires continuous intervention. Invasive species control, pathogen management, endemic plant recovery and cloud forest restoration require sustained maintenance, and there is evidence of backsliding where proven approaches, including wasp control under *Conserving St Helena's endemic invertebrates through invasive invertebrate control* (DPLUS104), were not maintained post-project despite local demand and demonstrated effectiveness. The emergence of *Phytophthora*⁹ in the cloud forest adds a further layer of uncertainty to the territory's longer-term biodiversity outlook.

Evidence is weakest where ecological monitoring was not a central project focus, where projects concluded too recently for post-project verification, or where biodiversity outcomes were indirect rather than intended primary outcomes. *Replenishing Bolivia's water footprint: scaling watershed conservation through public-private partnerships* (DARNV006) explicitly notes that lasting biodiversity impact is "not known, and not measured", despite placing 4,574 ha under conservation agreements and returning water to ecosystems through green-grey infrastructure. *Illegal trade and sustainable use of medicinal orchids in Nepal* (IWT083) provides no evidence of reduced harvesting pressure or improved species status beyond implementation, although its evidence base and enforcement focus have informed subsequent work. Across the Kenya and Nepal questionnaire summaries, biodiversity outcomes are repeatedly identified as difficult to verify where post-project monitoring is absent.

Overall, BCFs investments have contributed to conditions conducive to sustained biodiversity and environmental outcomes. Evidence is strongest where outcomes are tied to protected or restored habitat, continued monitoring, active management systems, or legally recognised conservation instruments. Where direct measurement is absent, environmental legacy is most defensibly characterised as sustained management, stewardship and enforcement conditions with plausible but not fully verified ecological effects. In St Helena, the key issue is less the absence of conservation value than the difficulty of sustaining ecological management where threats require continuous intervention beyond short funding cycles. The evidence therefore suggests that the environmental legacy of BCFs projects is often mediated through systems, behaviours, and management arrangements whose ecological effects may take longer to materialise and require continued monitoring to verify.

⁹ The Darwin Plus funded project *Managing the pathogens threatening St Helena's biodiversity and food security* (DPLUS157) found that a number of endemic trees appear to be dying as a result of *Phytophthora* infection. *Phytophthora* is a water mould which looks and behaves like a fungus, despite not actually being a fungus. While it is unclear which species of *Phytophthora* is affecting the endemic trees it is now considered beyond reasonable doubt that it is the cause of tree death in some trees. The discovery of *Phytophthora* on St Helena is very significant, but it is unclear if it is the only pathogen causing tree death. <https://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/new-tree-disease-affecting-st-helenas-endemic-trees/>

4.2. Socioeconomic outcomes, livelihoods and poverty reduction

Across the Phase 2 evidence base, sustained socioeconomic outcomes are present but uneven in strength, scale, and verifiability. The most durable legacies are found where BCFs investments contributed to institutionalised economic mechanisms, including market-linked income streams, community financial structures or policy-backed compensation systems, which continued to operate beyond the original funding period, and where conservation incentives became sufficiently integrated into community economic and social life that stakeholders have a direct interest in their continuation. Where socioeconomic benefits were delivered through time-limited training, project specific incentives or activities without institutional anchoring, evidence of sustained impact is weaker. Post-project tracking of household level poverty outcomes is largely absent across the portfolio, meaning that even credible socioeconomic legacies are rarely fully verified.

The strongest sustained socioeconomic outcomes are those embedded in economic systems that have continued or expanded beyond project closure. In Bolivia, the vicuña management portfolio provides the most compelling case. Vicuña fibre sales exceeded USD 837,000 in 2024, household income increased from USD 119 to USD 225 per family across 19 communities, and the socioeconomic benefits have been mainstreamed into local community economies with the full support of national government, demonstrating that conservation-linked livelihoods have moved beyond donor subsidy into routine economic life. In Kenya, the *Livelihoods insurance from elephants (LIFE) in Kenya and Sri Lanka* (25-004) project provides a strong example of livelihood benefits sustained through institutionalisation rather than continued project delivery. The wildlife damage claims verification and compensation system transitioned from public-sector management to a private sector-led claims verification model, with ownership taken over by the Government of Kenya, and approximately USD 8 million of government funding invested. The reported livelihood benefit lies in faster and more transparent processing of wildlife damage claims, reaching approximately 10,000 people.

In Nepal, *Securing Chitwan–Sindhuli Green Corridor: strengthening community stewardship and law enforcement* (IWT099) provides the strongest community level evidence. Women-led cooperatives functioning as community banks remain operational post-project, providing savings and loan services that enable continued investment in livestock rearing and agriculture. Household incomes increased by over 67% and wellbeing scores by 19% during the project period, with these gains reported to have continued post-project. Stakeholder accounts indicate that pangolin conservation had become associated with livelihood opportunity and community wellbeing rather than only restriction. The livelihood legacy extends beyond income to strengthened women's agency, household decision making and leadership within community institutions. However, outcomes varied markedly between the project's two sites. 96.7% of households in Bhatighari Chure Buffer Zone Community Forest User Group reported increased income at project end compared to 38.5% in Shree Chetna Buffer Zone Community Forest User Group. The reasons for this variation were not analysed by the project, limiting confidence in the replicability and durability of livelihood gains across different contexts.

A broader category of sustained socioeconomic legacy is evidenced through the continued functioning of local economic and social institutions, though with more limited post-project verification at household level. In Kenya, *Partnering with business for restoration of Mt Kenya ecosystem services* (25-031) generated a socioeconomic legacy grounded in retained skills, adaptive decision making and organisational capacity within CFAs rather than any single income stream. In Kabaru, declining demand for indigenous tree seedlings prompted a community led shift into tea, coffee, macadamia and bamboo, financed from earlier nursery income – a pattern of self-directed economic adaptation that the Kenya Legacy Review characterises as capability driven rather than donor dependent. *Conserving Tsavo's wildlife by building community resilience and fostering coexistence* (26-006) established VSLAs that continue to operate beyond project closure with strong women's participation, supporting household investment and resilience. In Bolivia, *Protecting ecosystem functions in key watersheds for biodiversity and people* (28-019) expanded its water infrastructure post-project to eight reservoirs and 15.2 km of irrigation piping supporting 37 communities, with a reported 10% increase in agricultural productivity. The project also established a community financial mechanism, compensating communities at

£0.10 per tree planted, that had accumulated £28,000 by project end, split between nursery operations, counterpart funding for community projects and community savings accounts, providing a concrete example of conservation labour being mainstreamed into community finance. *Reciprocal watershed agreements: conserving Bolivia's Chaco through improved livelihoods* (21-008) has sustained livelihood benefits through all eight Municipal Water Conservation Funds remaining operational eight years after project closure, with Villa Vaca Guzmán adding 7,467 ha under conservation in 2024 with two thirds of costs covered by municipal government. *Strengthening tourism to combat COVID-related threats to Bolivia's Indigenous territories* (CV19RR15) established a revolving fund that has disbursed USD 120,000 to 12 family grantees to support small scale ecotourism enterprises in remote Indigenous territories with limited access to formal financial services, representing a community-level financial mechanism continuing beyond the project period. In Nepal, *Uprating community forest management in Nepal: enhancing biodiversity and livelihoods* (26-022) shows continued agroforestry-based livelihood approaches, particularly turmeric cultivation integrated with forest restoration, with income diversification and reduced dependence on forest extraction. However, the durability and scale of these gains are not fully evidenced.

Evidence is weakest where livelihoods were not a primary project focus, where benefits depended on continued external facilitation, or where post-project household level tracking is absent. *Replenishing Bolivia's water footprint: scaling watershed conservation through public-private partnerships* (DARNV006) improved water access for approximately 2,500 families, with plausible associated benefits including reduced gastrointestinal disease and reduced time burdens on women for water collection however, these outcomes were not quantified. In Nepal, *Embedding sustainable pollination management into Nepalese agricultural systems* (29-001) reported crop yield and honey production improvements during implementation. Continuation through a Darwin Extra follow-on phase and strong behavioural incentives provide a plausible basis for sustained socioeconomic benefits, but no post-project evidence has been gathered to confirm this. In Kenya, *Connecting enhanced livelihoods to elephant and rhino protection* (IWT026) presents a mixed picture. Some livelihood benefits persisted through conservancy linked activities, while others declined following the withdrawal of project incentives, illustrating the vulnerability of socioeconomic outcomes that remain dependent on project-specific mechanisms rather than independently functioning institutions. Across the Kenya portfolio more broadly, livelihoods components of conservation focused projects frequently underperformed relative to governance and capacity objectives, with *Establishing a Biocultural Heritage Territory to protect Kenya's Kaya forests* (28-017) providing a clear example where limited community involvement in enterprise selection constrained livelihood impact.

St Helena presents a structurally distinct case. Darwin Plus projects are not required to have poverty reduction objectives, and socioeconomic sustainability should be interpreted accordingly. Livelihood-relevant legacy is limited but present: *Building capacity to develop and provide long-term sustainability for St Helena's paper and card recycling unit* (DPLUS014) created employment for disabled adults through a social enterprise that has continued beyond the project period. Cloud forest restoration has broader plausible benefits for water security and agricultural resilience given that the cloud forest area supplies 38% of island-wide water, with mist capture contributing over 60% of precipitation there, though connections to household level socioeconomic outcomes have not been quantified. Across SHG and SHNT, a strong focus on gender equality and social inclusion is evident in high numbers of women in project leadership and delivery roles, reflecting an organisational culture of inclusion that has been sustained throughout the portfolio.

Overall, the Phase 2 evidence supports a finding that BCFs investments have contributed to sustained socioeconomic benefits, but the strength and character of that contribution varies considerably. The most durable and best evidenced legacies are those where conservation incentives became mainstreamed into community economic and social life, where local institutions took ownership of conservation linked benefits, and where economic mechanisms continued to function beyond the original funding period. Where socioeconomic benefits were delivered through project specific mechanisms without institutional anchoring,

sustainability is less certain and less well verified. Across the portfolio, household level poverty reduction outcomes are the hardest category to verify after project closure, with institutional and capacity legacies consistently more visible and more enduring than direct income or wellbeing gains.

4.3. Institutional and governance outcomes

Institutional and governance outcomes represent the best evidenced and most consistently observable category of sustained legacy across the Phase 2 evidence base. Unlike biodiversity and livelihood outcomes, where post-project verification is limited, institutional change is directly observable through how organisations work, what systems they use, how they coordinate with partners, and what planning frameworks they have adopted or embedded. Three analytically distinct forms of institutional legacy are visible across the evidence:

- organisational transformation, where BCFs investment has changed what an organisation is capable of and how it is positioned;
- system and tool institutionalisation, where specific methods, tools or practices have been absorbed into routine institutional operations and;
- governance capacity, where new coordination mechanisms, planning frameworks or governance platforms have continued to function beyond project closure.

The most analytically distinctive form of institutional legacy is organisational transformation, where BCFs support did not merely fund project delivery but catalysed a step change in what an organisation is capable of and how it is positioned. In Kenya, repeated BCFs engagement strengthened Nature Kenya's role as a credible interface between community-based conservation, national policy processes and international networks. The review characterises it as effective at building foundations for long-term impact, particularly in policy, planning and delivery capacity, while noting that legacy outcomes remain contingent on continued donor and partner engagement and the actions of external factors beyond Nature Kenya's direct control. In Bolivia, two successive IWT Challenge Fund grants helped transform WCS from a science-driven organisation into a recognised policy broker with a multi-disciplinary team combining biodiversity expertise, environmental law and wildlife crime investigation, a combination described in the review as unusual among Bolivian conservation NGOs. In Nepal, *Illegal trade and sustainable use of medicinal orchids in Nepal* (IWT083) catalysed Greenhood's transition from a largely volunteer led initiative to a staffed, independently functioning NGO capable of developing proposals, managing grants and implementing projects without external lead partner support. Across all three cases, the transformation was enabled by sustained engagement over multiple project cycles rather than any single grant.

The strongest evidence of system and tool institutionalisation comes from cases where specific methods or practices have been embedded in the routine operations of organisations with long-term mandates. In Kenya, the Social Assessment of Protected Areas (SAPA) protocol, applied at OPC in 2014, 2019 and 2025, provides the clearest single example in the evidence base. A tool partially developed through BCFs funded projects has become a routine governance and learning instrument that continues to shape decision making and programme design independently of project funding, and has been adopted into Fauna & Flora's global portfolio. In the Laikipia landscape, the livestock and agricultural extension approaches, ecological biomonitoring protocols and community engagement models developed under *Cattle, water and wildlife: enhancing socio-ecological resilience in Laikipia* (24-002) have been absorbed into OPC's routine Community Development Programme, with project developed manuals, monitoring tools and extension models remaining in active use. The project also strengthened WRUAs' governance, with negotiated rationing arrangements, coordinated scarcity responses and a jointly developed common intake initiative continuing beyond project closure. A 27.5% reduction in reported water access conflicts was maintained through severe climatic stress in Year 4, providing evidence of durable governance capacity under pressure. In Nepal, the WCD-MIS is in active use by government agencies for wildlife crime recording, enforcement analysis and administrative functions, including wildlife damage compensation. This indicates a meaningful degree of embedding within government

systems, although continued functionality remains partly dependent on external technical support. In Bolivia, the vicuña management approach developed across three successive BCFs funded projects is now fully integrated into the Ministry of Planning and Environment and the Directorate-General for Biodiversity and Protected Areas, evidenced by the publication of the National Plan for the Management and Sustainable Use of the Vicuña 2025–2029 and accompanying national technical guidelines.

Governance platforms and formal planning frameworks provide a further dimension of institutional legacy, where project investment has produced durable structures and instruments that continue to guide decisions beyond project closure. In Kenya, the Mt Kenya Forest Restoration Strategy (2019–2029), generated through *Partnering with business for restoration of Mt Kenya ecosystem services* (25-031) embedded the project's evidence base and restoration logic within a statutory planning framework independent of continued project funding. The strategy was subsequently reflected in county-level planning and budgeting processes, indicating uptake within routine governance. In Bolivia, all eight Municipal Water Conservation Funds established under *Reciprocal watershed agreements: conserving Bolivia's Chaco through improved livelihoods* (21-008) remain operational eight years after project closure, designed with a graduated transfer of responsibility requiring municipal governments to assume increasing financial ownership over time. The Rurrenabaque-Madidi Pampas Tourism Council continues as an active inter-institutional platform, and the destination's certification to GSTC Silver standard in January 2026 reflects enduring institutional influence well beyond the original COVID-19 recovery project. In Bolivia, WCS's partnership with the Forest and Environmental Protection Police (POFOMA), formalised through a collaboration agreement in 2020 and maintained through subsequent collaboration, represents a durable inter-institutional governance relationship.

Evidence is more partial where coordination mechanisms continue to operate but remain dependent on personal relationships, or where transfer into government systems is still incomplete. In Nepal, inter-agency intelligence exchange and joint operational practices established under IWT099 persist, but remain partly informal and reliant on personal networks rather than formal protocols. This limits their consistency and reliability, particularly for transboundary enforcement. Law enforcement agencies also continue to apply investigation and prosecution procedures developed through IWT099 training, but high staff turnover and frequent transfers mean that this capacity requires ongoing reinforcement rather than functioning as a fully self-sustaining system. In Bolivia, a national IWT database developed under *A price on their heads: addressing jaguar trafficking in Bolivia* (IWT068) has been transferred to the National Museum of Natural History, creating a pathway for government ownership and long-term use. However, the process for updating the database is still under discussion, so its long-term functionality is not yet fully secured.

St Helena presents a structurally distinct case. SHG is institutionally sustainable by virtue of its status and recurrent budget, with many long-serving staff critical to ongoing conservation work. SHNT maintains good staff retention but remains heavily donor-dependent, with institutional sustainability closely tied to financial sustainability. The Kew partnership established through *Cultivation and conservation of threatened plant species for UK Overseas Territories* (4-148) in 1995 has continued through successive projects and remains active three decades later, a durable institutional relationship that illustrates the long-term value of early BCFs investment in building international conservation partnerships with small island territories.

Overall, institutional and governance outcomes are the most consistently sustained and directly observable form of legacy across the evidence base. The strongest cases combine organisational development, embedded tools and practices, and durable governance structures, often across multiple project cycles within the same organisation or landscape. Evidence is weaker where coordination depends on personal relationships rather than formalised protocols, where staff turnover dilutes institutional memory, or where institutional functions remain dependent on continued external support.

4.4. Community-level institutional outcomes

Community level institutional outcomes represent a distinct and consistently evidenced layer of sustained legacy across the evidence base. This subsection focuses on community-based institutions and governance structures, complementing Section 4.3, which focuses on NGO- and government-level institutional outcomes. The evidence points to three main categories of community-level institutional legacy:

- community conservation, enforcement and stewardship institutions;
- community economic and financial institutions that continue to support conservation-linked livelihoods; and
- community governance structures embedded within wider natural resource management systems.

A cross-cutting feature across these categories is the sustained participation of women in community institutions.

The first category is community conservation, enforcement and stewardship institutions. Some of the clearest evidence of these institutions continuing beyond project closure comes from Nepal and Bolivia. In Nepal, CMPCAs and CBAPUs established under *Securing Chitwan–Sindhuli green corridor: strengthening community stewardship and law enforcement* (IWT099) remain operational post-project, actively supporting patrols, habitat monitoring and the generation and sharing of intelligence with law enforcement agencies. Community members continue to report suspicious activities and contribute to enforcement responses, reflecting a sustained shift from passive resource use towards active stewardship. In Bolivia, community fire brigades established under *Protecting ecosystem functions in key watersheds for biodiversity and people* (28-019) expanded from 50 trained firefighters at project end to 91 across seven active brigades, integrated into the regional government's rapid response mechanism and contributing to a sustained reduction in fire incidence. In Kenya, conservancies linked to the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) remain embedded within a functioning partnership architecture with KWS, with KWS assuming responsibility for key wildlife security elements as NRT has downsized, indicating that partnership arrangements established through earlier BCFs collaboration continued to have operational relevance.

Community economic and financial institutions provide a second category of well-evidenced community-level legacy. Women-led cooperatives established under IWT099 remain operational, functioning as community banks providing savings and loan services that enable continued investment in income generating activities and strengthening women's participation in financial decision making and local governance. In Kenya VSLAs established under *Conserving Tsavo's wildlife by building community resilience and fostering coexistence* (26-006) continue to operate beyond project closure with strong women's participation. In Bolivia, the Community Association for the Marketing of Vicuña Fibre (ACOFIVB) has exceeded its original commercial mandate and evolved into the primary coordinating body for the entire process of vicuña conservation and utilisation in Bolivia, a particularly clear example of a community institution developing agency and scope beyond its founding purpose. The formal establishment of the successor body, the National Association of Vicuña Managers of Bolivia (ANMVB), is underway, with BCFs supported projects having built the community governance foundations that this national structure requires.

Community governance structures within natural resource management systems provide a third category of sustained legacy, particularly in Kenya. CFAs strengthened through *Partnering with business for restoration of Mt Kenya ecosystem services* (25-031) continue to provide an important community level delivery channel within Joint Forest Management arrangements, but post-project performance has been uneven. Some CFAs have continued to apply nursery, restoration and enterprise skills and have maintained partnerships linked to

restoration activity, while others have faced weaker demand, reduced financing or limited continuity of private-sector engagement. In the Tana Delta, community institutions operate as governance partners in land-use planning and negotiation with external actors, underpinning the continued functioning of the 116,000 ha CCA. In Nepal, CFUGs continue to apply biodiversity profiling methods, invasive species management techniques and practical resources developed during *Uprating community forest management in Nepal: enhancing biodiversity and livelihoods* (26-022). In Bolivia, Indigenous and local communities remain directly involved in defining vicuña management rules, monitoring wildlife populations and organising fibre collection through regional associations, demonstrating continued community ownership within the vicuña management approach.

A cross-cutting dimension of community level institutional legacy is the sustained participation of women in community institutions. This is most explicitly evidenced through *Promoting equitable gender norms to strengthen conservation governance and impact* (DARNV016), which generated observable changes in women's participation and leadership within community governance structures at Pate Marine Community Conservancy and Sera Wildlife Conservancy. Women also hold leadership positions in cooperatives, governance boards and management structures across multiple country contexts, including 30% of the River Basin Management Authority directorate in Bolivia and leadership of the Alternative Livelihood Group in Nepal. This indicates that women's participation in community governance has endured beyond project closure in several contexts.

St Helena presents a structurally distinct case. Conservation delivery on the island is primarily mediated through SHG and SHNT rather than through independent community institutions, reflecting the island's small population, limited NGO ecosystem and the dominant role of government in conservation delivery.

Overall, community-level institutional outcomes are most durable where institutions were embedded in continuing economic activity, anchored in existing governance systems or reinforced by incentives that give communities a direct and ongoing interest in conservation. Evidence is weaker where institutions were created as project delivery mechanisms without independent function, or where their continuation depends on external facilitation rather than locally generated purpose. Across the portfolio, women's participation in community institutions is a recurring positive feature of sustained community governance.

4.5. Policy, planning and legislative influence

Policy, planning and legislative influence represents one of the most varied and, in places, most significant forms of sustained legacy across the evidence base. The evidence ranges from enacted national legislation, through adopted statutory planning frameworks, formally designated conservation areas, and operational guidance adopted into institutional practice, to emerging policy contributions where formal endorsement is still pending. Across the portfolio, policy influence is most consistently observed not through the advocacy of individual projects but through the cumulative positioning of implementing organisations as technically credible, institutionally connected partners in national and sub-national governance processes. Bolivia provides the strongest evidence of this trajectory, and Kenya and Nepal provide important complementary examples.

The most significant single policy legacy in the evidence base is the National Condor Law, enacted in Bolivia in 2023. The law penalises illegal wildlife trade, poisoning and fire starting in protected areas, and for the first time includes IWT and other environmental crimes within the Bolivian penal code, with penalties reflecting the ecological role of protected species. WCS collaborated actively in its development, drawing on scientific credibility and institutional relationships built across two successive IWT Challenge Fund grants. Political commitment to implementation has been confirmed at presidential level. The National Jaguar Action Plan, developed with Bolivian government authorities through the same IWT grants, *A price on their heads: addressing jaguar trafficking in Bolivia* (IWT068) and *Expanding local intelligence networks to combat jaguar IWT in Bolivia* (IWT080), constitutes a further strategic policy legacy, establishing for the first time a coordinated multi-institutional response to jaguar trafficking involving SERNAP, the Ministry of Environment, POFOMA and WCS, and providing the foundation for a planned National Jaguar Law currently in preparation. Together these

instruments represent a qualitative shift in Bolivia's institutional policy landscape for environmental crime, in which IWT Challenge Fund investment made a substantive contribution. The Specialist Guide to Forensic Investigation Procedures at the Scene of Wildlife Crimes, co-produced with POFOMA and the Police Academy Antonio José de Sucre and presented at the Bolivian Parliament in March 2026, provides operational policy guidance translating this legislative architecture into enforcement practice.

At the level of national planning frameworks, Bolivia's National Plan for the Management and Sustainable Use of the Vicuña 2025–2029 represents the policy culmination of three successive projects: *Sustainable ranching and participatory land use planning in Bolivia and Paraguay* (21-004), *Biodiversity conservation, vicuña health and local livelihoods in Apolobamba, Bolivia* (26-021), and *Vicuña management for biodiversity conservation and local livelihoods in the Bolivian highlands* (DARCC034). The plan was developed with WCS, ANMVB and corresponding governmental institutions, is fully integrated into the Ministry of Planning and Environment and the Directorate-General for Biodiversity and Protected Areas, and is accompanied by national Technical Guidelines for Vicuña Management. This is one of the clearest examples of successive investment contributing to policy through multi-stakeholder planning processes embedded in national governance. In Kenya, the Mt Kenya Forest Restoration Strategy (2019–2029), developed under *Partnering with business for restoration of Mt Kenya ecosystem services* (25-031) demonstrates a statutory planning legacy. Adopted by KFS, the framework guides restoration decision-making independently of project support, and is reflected in five county-level Annual Development Plans, Forest Policies and Climate Change Bills. The designation of St Helena's Exclusive Economic Zone as a MPA in September 2016, supported by the evidence base and management planning priorities established through *Mapping St Helena's marine biodiversity to create a marine management plan* (19-031) and *Sustainable development and management of St Helena fisheries and marine tourism* (DPLUS039), represents a strong example of a BCFs funded evidence investment producing a legally binding conservation designation at territory level.

A further tier of policy legacy is evidenced through formally adopted or operationally embedded planning instruments at municipal and sub-national levels. In Bolivia, *Reciprocal watershed agreements: conserving Bolivia's Chaco through improved livelihoods* (21-008) produced three municipal protected areas legally conserving 490,589 ha, two of which are now designated KBAs, alongside Municipal Water Conservation Fund frameworks that created binding local fiscal and governance commitments operating eight years post-project. *Protecting ecosystem functions in key watersheds for biodiversity and people* (28-019) produced a sustainable forestry management plan approved by the community, Tiquipaya Municipal Government and the National Forestry Authority, alongside a 10 year sustainable development and watershed protection strategy running to 2032, both underpinned by a municipal decree establishing the River Basin Management Authority as a formal governance platform. In Kenya, a Land Use Plan developed through *Securing the long-term future of Kenya's largest freshwater wetland* (26-003) was formally approved as county policy, while the Strategic Environmental Assessment from *Balancing water services for development and biodiversity in the Tana Delta* (24-013) continues to underpin governance of the 116,000 ha CCA. Prosecutorial tools and guidance developed under *Enhancing East-African judicial systems: increasing wildlife crimes asset-recovery and convictions* (IWT090) have been integrated into prosecutorial practice and regional cooperation mechanisms including Mutual Legal Assistance processes, a form of policy influence operating at the level of how wildlife crime legislation is interpreted and applied rather than the content of legislation itself.

Policy influence is more partial where formal endorsement is still pending or where contributions are procedural rather than legislative. In Nepal, the Stockpile Management Procedure (2024), developed with DNPWC and aligned with Clause 33(a) of the DNPWC Act, is already influencing institutional practice but awaits formal cabinet endorsement. The IWT route map, developed through *Securing Chitwan–Sindhuli Green Corridor: strengthening community stewardship and law enforcement* (IWT099) to identify trafficking routes and hotspots, continues to guide law enforcement priorities with confirmed government uptake, though further development remains dependent on external support. The Wildlife Trade and Poaching Control Strategic Plan (2023–2030)

has been informed by evidence from IWT099 and provides a longer-term planning horizon for enforcement, though its implementation remains nascent. The Karnali Pollinator Strategy, emerging from *Embedding sustainable pollination management into Nepalese agricultural systems* (29-001) and developed through a Technical Working Group, policy workshop with MoLMAC and multiple rounds of government revision, has been finalised and submitted for endorsement, with a national pollinator strategy expected as an output of the Darwin Extra follow-on phase; but formal adoption was still pending at the time of reporting. In Bolivia, *Replenishing Bolivia's water footprint: scaling watershed conservation through public-private partnerships* (DARNV006) contributed to municipal policy refinement through an iterative process of navigating and clarifying legal frameworks for green-grey infrastructure finance, a procedural and emerging contribution that informs future investment rather than producing a discrete policy instrument. Across the Kenya questionnaire portfolio, policy influence is most commonly visible through planning instruments, governance strengthening and agenda-setting rather than legislative reform, with Nature Kenya's contributions to the Kenya NBSAP process, Sixth National Report to the CBD and KBA reporting providing a further example of enduring influence on policy discourse.

St Helena's principal policy legacy is the MPA designation, addressed above. More broadly, policy influence in the territory context reflects the dominant role of SHG as both implementing partner and regulatory authority. Darwin Initiative and Darwin Plus investments have primarily shaped how government plans, prioritises and manages conservation rather than producing legislation or policy instruments in the conventional sense.

Overall, the evidence supports a finding that BCFs investments have contributed to sustained policy, planning and legislative influence, with the strength of that influence varying from enacted legislation in Bolivia to emerging procedural contributions in Nepal. The most durable examples are those where BCFs investment supported implementing organisations to position themselves as credible contributors to national and sub-national governance processes over multiple project cycles, producing instruments that continue to guide decisions beyond the original funding period. Evidence is weakest where formal endorsement remains pending or where influence depended on advocacy that has not translated into adopted instruments.

4.6. Individual capacity outcomes

Individual capacity outcomes represent one of the most consistently and directly evidenced forms of sustained legacy across the evidence base. Individual capacity is directly observable through professional trajectories, continued application of skills and current leadership roles of people whose development was shaped by BCFs funded work. Four analytically distinct dimensions are visible across the evidence – career trajectory transformation, where sustained BCFs engagement enabled individuals to move from junior or early-career roles into senior leadership; multiplier effects, where individuals carried learning into organisations, systems and subsequent programmes; community level capacity shifts, where participation built confidence, agency and governance capacity among individuals; and sector level effects, where early career training contributed to wider conservation leadership over longer timeframes.

The first dimension of sustained individual capacity legacy is career trajectory transformation. For example, in Kenya, Serah Munguti began her career as an intern at Nature Kenya, progressed through successive Darwin Initiative-funded projects to become Project Leader for a major Darwin Initiative grant, and subsequently became Kenya Country Manager for Fauna & Flora. Her trajectory illustrates how repeated involvement in BCF-funded programmes can function as a sustained professional apprenticeship. In Bolivia, Mariana da Silva joined WCS as a researcher on the first IWT grant, *A price on their heads: addressing jaguar trafficking in Bolivia* (IWT068), and progressively built the organisation's IWT function from a single-person research role into a formally recognised institutional unit: "*Support from the BCFs enabled us to lay the technical, operational, and strategic foundations for the progressive growth of this line of work... This journey demonstrates how BCFs funding not only strengthened technical capacities but also drove the development of internal leadership and the consolidation of a key line of work for long-term conservation.*" In Nepal, Reshu Bashyal served as Nepal based

project lead for *Illegal trade and sustainable use of medicinal orchids in Nepal* (IWT083) and is now recognised as a leading plant conservationist in Nepal, receiving the Whitley Fund for Nature Award in 2025, with her trajectory reflecting both the opportunities the project opened and the sustained mentorship of the University of Lancaster partnership. José Luis Mollericona Quispe's involvement across Bolivia's three successive vicuña-related projects implemented between 2014 and 2025 has positioned him as a nationally recognised vicuña health expert, contributor to the 2025–2029 national management plan and technical adviser now requested by neighbouring countries, while he simultaneously pursues a PhD in Animal Science and Technology.

Box 1: Tropical Biology Association: early-career training and Kenya's conservation leadership pipeline

The Tropical Biology Association (TBA), consulted separately during the 2026 Kenya field visit, provides a supplementary illustration of sector-level pipeline effects. Since the early 1990s, TBA has delivered field-based training for emerging conservation professionals, with programmes designed to provide practical experience of ecological research, applied conservation and professional networking. The *Darwin African Research Fellowship* (31–69), implemented by TBA in Kenya between 1993 and 1997, was modest in financial terms, but the alumni evidence suggests that it contributed to a significant human-capital legacy.

TBA's alumni database identifies 16 leading Kenyan alumni from the 1994–1997 Darwin-supported period, of whom 13 continue to work in Kenya. Three alumni are particularly relevant to the Phase 2 evidence base. Dr Paul Matiku is Executive Director of Nature Kenya, one of the two focal institutions in the Kenya Legacy Review. Prof Geoffrey Wahungu is Chief Programs Officer at Ol Pejeta Conservancy, which was central to the Fauna & Flora Legacy Review in Laikipia. Dr Erustus Mutembei Kanga is Director General of Kenya Wildlife Service, representing one of the most senior public-sector conservation leadership roles in Kenya. Together, these examples show that TBA alumni are not only present in the wider conservation sector but also occupy leadership roles in institutions directly connected to the Phase 2 evidence base.

TBA was one influence among several in these alumni career pathways. Alumni careers were shaped by multiple institutions, opportunities and professional experiences. However, the evidence suggests that TBA helped bridge the gap between university study and professional entry into the conservation sector by providing practical field skills, confidence, professional networks and exposure to applied conservation challenges. The key legacy is therefore not a single project output, but the creation and reinforcement of a conservation leadership pipeline whose influence extended beyond the original Darwin Initiative grant period.

The second dimension of individual capacity legacy is the multiplier effect, where an individual's skills, confidence and networks generate consequences that extend beyond their own career. For example, Ann Komen, Fauna & Flora Technical Specialist, Livelihoods and Governance, and a conservation practitioner whose career has been shaped through repeated engagement with Darwin Initiative-funded work, provides a well documented example. Her own framing is direct, her first Darwin Initiative project report "*changed how I work forever*", embedding habits of continuous data collection, anticipatory learning and rigorous justification that she now applies across multiple donor portfolios. As she puts it, "*Darwin taught me to think beyond activities, to ask what really changes and how we know*", and "*Darwin gave me the confidence to lead, not just deliver*." She now actively mentors others and champions a partnership centred model of conservation delivery that she attributes to BCFs experience: "*Working through partners is harder at the start, but it's the only way things last*". The organisational culture dimension of this multiplier is captured by Paul Matiku's reflection on BCFs funding's influence on Nature Kenya as an institution: "*BCFs funding was not Nature Kenya's largest funding source, but it had the greatest influence on how the organisation works*", an individual insight that reflects how the funds' approaches influenced Nature Kenya's wider organisational culture. Max Graham's trajectory from co-project lead on *Building capacity to alleviate human–elephant conflict in North Kenya* (15–040) to founder of Space for Giants illustrates a different kind of multiplier. Individual credibility and networks built through BCFs work were

later linked to the mobilisation of approximately EUR 5 million from the Dutch government for large-scale elephant fencing in Laikipia. In Bolivia, Vania Irene Arroyo Arce's integration of WCS scientific expertise into legal practice has produced specific, verifiable policy consequences: *"The scientific contributions of WCS have been the cornerstone of transforming my legal approach, allowing me to integrate scientific evidence with regulations... I have been able to establish critical legal criteria, such as harsher penalties for wildlife trafficking as for example the consideration of the biological role of females in species survival"*. Her team has grown to three lawyers and extended its work beyond wildlife trafficking to illegal mining, poisoning and forest fires.

Community-level individual capacity provides a third dimension, particularly visible in Kenya and Nepal, where projects have built confidence, agency and leadership capacity among individual project beneficiaries. Mithe Kumari Moktan's progression, supported through *Securing Chitwan–Sindhuli Green Corridor: strengthening community stewardship and law enforcement* (IWT099), from subsistence livestock herding to Chairperson of her community's Alternative Livelihood Group, and from local participant to panellist at World Pangolin Day alongside district and national experts, illustrates how project supported capacity building translated into sustained individual agency, peer-to-peer learning and engagement with formal institutions. Jane Wanjiku of Kangaiti CFA in Kenya was trained through *Partnering with business for restoration of Mt Kenya ecosystem services* (25-031) in group dynamics, strategic planning and conflict mediation. She now represents CFAs across six counties on the Forest Conservation Committee and mediates disputes between community institutions and KFS: *"The reason why I have been managing to solve the problem is because of the capacity which was done by Darwin"*. Teresa Wangui's transition, supported through *Cattle, water and wildlife: enhancing socio-ecological resilience in Laikipia* (24-002), from subsistence maize and bean farming to deliberate diversification into perennial fruit crops, self-financed, driven by enhanced planning capacity and market awareness rather than project subsidy, reinforces the finding that the most durable community-level capacity shifts are observable in changed decision-making and strategic thinking rather than in temporary income gains. As Teresa expressed in an interview: *"When you are young, plant a tree so when you are old you enjoy the fruits of your youth"*.

St Helena presents a structurally distinct case shaped by the island's small population and the dominant role of government in conservation delivery. BCFs investment has built a cadre of local Saint Helenians whose continued presence in conservation roles over multiple decades limits the brain drain risk that small island contexts face acutely. Vanessa Thomas-Williams received horticulture training from Kew under *Cultivation and conservation of threatened plant species for UK Overseas Territories* (4-148) in 1996 and is now endemic nursery manager at SHG, involved in plant conservation across three decades and awarded an OBE for services to conservation in 2022. Shayla Ellick was involved in *A rare plant census of St Helena* (DPLUS008) as a young conservationist, received Darwin Plus Fellowship support and is now Project Leader for the RSPB cloud forest project DPLUS224, a progression from beneficiary to programme lead across 15 years of Darwin-supported work. Natasha Stevens, a previous Darwin Plus Fellow, is current Invasive Invertebrate Project Manager at SHNT. Selene Gough, data manager for the iRecord projects and Darwin Plus Fellow, has recently been appointed to a permanent government role, representing a direct institutionalisation of BCF-funded capacity.

Overall, individual capacity outcomes are among the most consistently evidenced and directly observable forms of sustained legacy across the evidence base. The evidence is strongest where individuals remained connected to institutions, projects or networks through which their skills could continue to influence conservation practice. Across all contexts, individual capacity pathways reinforce the institutional and governance legacies previously documented, because the people who carry learning forward are often central to the structures through which that learning continues to operate.

4.7. Financial sustainability

Across the evidence base, financial sustainability is highly uneven and context-dependent. The evidence supports a three-tier characterisation. A small number of cases demonstrate financial independence from donor support, where activities continue to be financed from non-donor sources without material reliance on project

funding. A broader set of cases shows partial independence, where transitional financial mechanisms have been established but their long-term viability remains conditional. And across significant parts of the Kenya and Nepal portfolios, and in St Helena as a structurally distinct case, donor dependency persists as the principal basis for ongoing conservation activity, with financial sustainability representing the weakest sustained outcome dimension across the portfolio.

The strongest and most clearly evidenced cases of financial independence from donor support come from Bolivia. Across three successive vicuña management projects (21-004, 26-021 and DARCC034), the financial basis for conservation has shifted from donor grants to market income. Vicuña fibre sales exceeded USD 837,000 in 2024, with fibre income now mainstreamed into local community economies and supported explicitly by SERNAP and the Vice-Ministry of the Environment. Conservation management is no longer financed by donor subsidy but by revenues generated from a high-value natural product within a functioning, nationally regulated market. The principal emerging financial risk to this model is the expansion of illegal mining activities into vicuña grazing areas, which has the potential to constrain available land and erode the market viability on which financial independence rests. The Municipal Water Conservation Funds established under *Reciprocal watershed agreements: conserving Bolivia's Chaco through improved livelihoods* (21-008) provide a further example of financial independence from donor support achieved through a different mechanism: all eight Funds remain operational eight years after project closure, and Villa Vaca Guzmán was contributing two-thirds of conservation costs from the municipal budget by 2024, with 7,467 additional ha brought under conservation in that year. This represents a clear transition from donor financed pilot to government financed recurrent expenditure within a functioning municipal fiscal framework. In Kenya, the *Livelihoods Insurance from Elephants* (LIFE) model (25-004) represents the clearest case within the Kenya portfolio of a project transitioning to a government-owned and government-financed mechanism. Here, an existing public compensation function was strengthened through a private sector led claims verification model, with the Government of Kenya assuming ownership and committing approximately USD 8 million in public funds to support national scale delivery.

A further category of financial independence is provided by cases where continuation was achieved through cost absorption into existing institutional budgets rather than through revenue generation or government adoption. In Laikipia, *Cattle, water and wildlife: enhancing socio-ecological resilience in Laikipia* (24-002) demonstrates this pathway clearly. OPC absorbed the continuation of livestock and agricultural extension services and ecological biomonitoring within existing institutional budgets and staffing structures post-project, and the continuation of WRUA coordination and water governance activities relied on existing institutional mandates rather than project finance. The project did not create financial liabilities that could not be sustained by its partners because several core activities aligned with existing institutional and household expenditure patterns. *Protecting ecosystem functions in key watersheds for biodiversity and people* (28-019) in Bolivia provides a community-level example of financial sustainability. The project established a community financial mechanism that had accumulated £28,000 by project end through payments to communities of £0.10 per tree planted. The funds were divided between nursery operations, counterpart funding for community projects and community savings accounts, creating a functional community finance model that was not reliant on continued donor support. The same project also provides an example of public cost absorption. Community fire brigades established through the project were integrated into the regional government's rapid response mechanism, with operational costs absorbed into regional government structures. This removed the need for the project or communities to carry the long-term cost of maintaining trained emergency response capacity after closure.

Evidence of partial financial independence, where transitional financial mechanisms have been established but remain conditional in their viability, is present across the Bolivia portfolio and in selected Kenya project evidence. The revolving fund established under *Strengthening tourism to combat COVID-related threats to Bolivia's Indigenous territories* (CV19RR15) had disbursed USD 120,000 to 12 family grantees by project end, functioning as a community lending mechanism with potential for self-sustaining credit cycles. Its long-term viability, however, depends on repayment discipline, continued technical accompaniment and the capacity to

mobilise additional capital beyond the initial fund, none of which is yet confirmed. *Replenishing Bolivia's water footprint: scaling watershed conservation through public-private partnerships* (DARNV006) secured a USD 280,000 loan from the Inter-American Development Bank following project closure to replicate the green-grey infrastructure model, a meaningful signal that a multilateral development bank regards the approach as creditworthy, and a genuine step towards replacing donor grants with commercial financing. Whether this constitutes durable financial independence depends on repayment capacity and the ability to attract further commercial investment without continued technical backstopping. Within the Laikipia landscape evidence from Kenya, household level financial sustainability for project 24-002 is more credibly established than system level sustainability. Many farmers and pastoralists trained during the project have continued to finance agricultural and livestock inputs from their own resources, and livelihood groups supported by the project were linked to government microfinance institutions, enabling access to credit beyond project closure for reinvestment in poultry, horticulture and related enterprises. Larger infrastructure investments, notably common water intake systems, nonetheless remain dependent on additional financing, placing a ceiling on the degree of financial independence achievable within the current model. Under *Protecting ecosystem functions in key watersheds for biodiversity and people* (28-019), Acción Andina and Trillion Trees secured external partnership funding for nursery management through to 2032. This represents secured partnership finance rather than market-derived income and therefore represents a partial rather than complete step towards financial independence.

Across the Kenya and Nepal portfolios, financial sustainability is the weakest dimension of sustained impact. Most projects in these portfolios relied on continued donor engagement or partner absorption to sustain core activities rather than generating independent financial mechanisms. The strongest community-level financial sustainability in the Nepal portfolio is provided by women-led cooperatives operating as community banks under *Securing Chitwan–Sindhuli green corridor: strengthening community stewardship and law enforcement* (IWT099), which continue to mobilise savings and provide loans to members, supporting ongoing investment in livelihood activities. These mechanisms are locally owned and operationally embedded, but oriented towards household-level needs rather than the financing of conservation or institutional functions. At the institutional level, financial sustainability within the Nepal portfolio is more constrained. The continued effectiveness of the WCD-MIS depends on the availability of trained personnel in a context of high staff turnover, with limited evidence of arrangements to ensure ongoing training at scale. Other functions, such as updating the IWT route map and sustaining coordination mechanisms, require continued technical inputs for which no formalised resourcing has been identified.

St Helena presents a structurally distinct case. SHNT receives a government grant covering one core administrative salary, with all remaining staff and operational costs dependent on donor sources. Short-term funding cycles constrain the ability to plan or finance interventions requiring sustained long-term investment, and the loss of the BEST initiative (a significant European Union funding stream for UKOTs that was removed following Brexit) has not been replaced. A deeper structural constraint is the mismatch between short project cycles and the continuous management requirements of St Helena's most significant conservation challenges. Invasive species control, pathogen management and cloud forest restoration all require recurrent expenditure rather than one-off investment and financial sustainability is inherently limited for activities where each funding gap risks undermining the gains of the preceding cycle. SHG's conservation functions are institutionally sustainable within its recurrent statutory budget, providing a foundation for government-delivered activities, but for the SHNT dependent components of the portfolio, financial sustainability remains limited and structurally contingent on future grant availability.

Overall, the evidence supports a finding that financial independence from donor support is achievable within the BCFs portfolio but remains exceptional rather than typical. The clearest and best evidenced cases are those where investment contributed to functioning market mechanisms, government budget adoption or institutional cost absorption. Cases of partial independence exist, particularly through community lending mechanisms and commercial lending instruments, but their long-term viability has not yet been demonstrated. Financial

sustainability is weakest where conservation activities require continuous expenditure without corresponding recurrent revenue, where financial mechanisms were not embedded in independent revenue streams, or where institutional functions depend on technical inputs without formalised resourcing. Across the portfolio, the most reliably durable financial outcomes are associated with activities that aligned with pre-existing government budgets, institutional expenditure patterns or market systems already capable of sustaining them independently, while standalone financial mechanisms show more mixed evidence of continuation after project closure.

4.8. Summary of evidence on sustained outcomes

Across the seven dimensions examined in Section 4, the evidence base is most consistent and well evidenced for individual capacity outcomes and institutional and governance outcomes, which emerge as the strongest forms of sustained legacy. Community-level institutional outcomes and policy, planning and legislative influence are also moderately well evidenced, with meaningful variation across contexts. Policy influence is clearest in Bolivia, where cumulative multi-cycle investment supported formal legislative, regulatory and planning change, while in Kenya and Nepal it is more often expressed through planning uptake, procedural influence and the application of existing governance frameworks. Socioeconomic and livelihood outcomes are moderate overall, with the strongest evidence concentrated in Bolivia's vicuña and watershed programmes and more variable findings elsewhere.

Biodiversity and environmental outcomes and financial sustainability are the most unevenly evidenced dimensions, though for different reasons. Biodiversity evidence is constrained primarily by the absence of long-term ecological monitoring rather than by an absence of impact; most projects were not designed or resourced to track ecological outcomes beyond the project period, and the evidence that does exist is predominantly short-term or inferential. Financial sustainability is constrained by programme design and resourcing assumptions. Some outcomes are sustained through legitimate public budgets, community mechanisms, market returns or institutional cost absorption. The recurring weakness is where ongoing costs are expected to continue without a clearly identified payer, budget holder or financing mechanism. In those cases, sustainability remains conditional rather than secured.

St Helena is a structurally distinct case across multiple dimensions. Because government is simultaneously implementing partner, regulatory authority and the main absorbing institution, policy influence is expressed less through external advocacy or formal reform and more through changes in how government plans, regulates and manages environmental priorities. Its small island ecology, continuous management needs, limited alternative finance, and the different funding positions of government and NGO delivery partners mean that its findings are not directly comparable with the other three contexts.

5. What explains sustained impact?

Section 4 set out what has been sustained across the Phase 2 evidence base and how strongly it could be evidenced. This section draws out the main patterns that explain how and why those benefits continued, weakened or remained conditional. It does not repeat the outcome categories or re-present the case evidence.

The pattern is consistent across the evidence base. Benefits were sustained where there was clarity about:

- what was expected to continue after closure;
- who would be responsible for it;
- why they would continue and;
- what resources, incentives, benefits or other arrangements would sustain it?

That modality took different forms: a public body acting within its mandate, a community with a practical stake, a market that made continuation worthwhile, a professional or team carrying skills and relationships into later work, or a sequence of further investment that built on what came before. Where there was no such route, even strong project results tended to weaken once funding stopped.

Sustainability is therefore not one mechanism but several. Nor does it necessarily mean that support disappears. The stronger test is whether responsibility, incentives and resourcing have a realistic home, suited to the context. The subsections below set out the main routes by which benefits continued, the factors that made continuation credible or fragile, and the early signs that a benefit is unlikely to last. Context changes how this is read, and Section 5.5 sets out the main qualifications, including those that apply to St Helena as a UKOT.

5.1. The main continuation pathways

Benefits continued through five recurring routes. These routes are not separate categories, and the strongest cases often combined several. In Bolivia, for example, the vicuña work combined market value, community ownership, national policy uptake and repeated investment. In Laikipia, sustained legacy combined institutional routines, water governance, social assessment tools and later watershed-scale investment. The questionnaire summaries add breadth to this pattern, showing that continued community institutions, governance structures, monitoring systems, livelihood groups and partnerships were reported beyond the detailed review cases, although these self-reported examples carry less evidential weight than the triangulated Legacy Reviews.

Policy, planning and legislative influence cuts across these routes rather than sitting as a separate pathway. Policy legacy was sustained where project-generated evidence, tools, relationships or technical credibility were taken into formal instruments, planning processes, procedures or government practice. Similarly, biodiversity is not treated as a pathway in itself. As Section 4 showed, sustained biodiversity benefits were usually mediated through continuing management systems, stewardship mechanisms, monitoring arrangements, protected-area instruments, enforcement systems or cumulative investment. Policy legacy therefore appears across several routes including uptake, evidence reuse, operational procedures and cumulative credibility.

Table 5.1 summarises the main routes and selected examples. Section 4 provides the detailed evidence; the purpose here is to show the continuation logic across it. Inclusion in the table indicates the route through which a benefit continued. It does not imply that the route was fully secure or free of constraints. Those constraints are assessed in Sections 5.3 and 5.4.

Table 5.1: Main benefit continuation pathways

Continuation pathway	What it means?	Where it is most clearly seen?
Uptake into systems, mandates, budgets or policy processes	A continuing public body, organisation or institution takes on a function, tool, plan, procedure, policy instrument or cost.	LIFE moving into Government of Kenya ownership and public financing (25-004); Municipal Water Conservation Funds moving onto municipal budgets (21-008); the Mt Kenya Forest Restoration Strategy adopted by KFS and reflected in county planning (25-031); Bolivia's National Vicuña Management Plan 2025–2029; WCS Bolivia's contribution to the National Condor Law and jaguar policy work; St Helena's MPA designation drawing on earlier marine evidence.
Local ownership and stewardship	Local or community bodies hold a continuing management, governance, finance or stewardship role.	Community anti-poaching and conservation units under IWT099; CFAs within Joint Forest Management under 25-031; WRUAs under 24-002; the Tana Delta CCA under 24-013;

vicuña community associations in Bolivia; community fire brigades under 28-019.

Economic or practical value	Benefits continue because people, communities or institutions have a direct reason to maintain them.	Vicuña fibre income across the vicuña sequence (21-004; 26-021; DARCC034); women-led cooperatives acting as community banks under IWT099; VSLAs under 26-006; the per-tree community fund under 28-019; household adaptation and reinvestment in the Mt Kenya restoration project (25-031); LIFE compensation reducing the livelihood shock of human-elephant conflict (25-004).
Reuse of evidence, tools, skills and relationships	Assets created or strengthened by projects continue to be used after closure, including in management, planning, reporting, enforcement or later project design.	SAPA reused at OPC and across Fauna & Flora; IBA/KBA monitoring feeding national reporting through Nature Kenya; WCD-MIS and IWT route mapping under IWT099; evidence contributing to Nepal's stockpile procedure; St Helena datasets and iRecord; individual career trajectories and professional networks.
Sequenced and cumulative investment	Later projects build on earlier evidence, capacity, relationships, credibility, policy access and delivery models.	Laikipia; Nature Kenya's repeated BCFs engagement; WCS Bolivia's progression into national jaguar, condor and vicuña policy influence; Greenhood's progression from mentored partner to independent grantee; the St Helena cloud forest and marine sequences; the vicuña sequence.

The examples in the table vary in strength. For example, the WCD-MIS in Nepal under IWT099 demonstrates continued operational use, but its durability depends on trained personnel, maintenance and updating in a context of staff turnover. St Helena's datasets are significant legacy assets, but the evidence also shows that data custody, storage and maintenance are themselves sustainability risks. The table therefore identifies routes to continuation, not completed guarantees of sustainability.

The pathways also differ in depth: continued use, continued ownership and continued financing are not equally strong sustainability signals. This distinction is developed in Section 5.3.

The fifth route, sequenced and cumulative investment, is different from the others. The first four describe mechanisms through which benefits were carried forward. Sequenced and cumulative investment describes a pattern in which those mechanisms became stronger because work continued in the same landscape, institution, theme or partnership over time. It is therefore treated separately in Section 5.2.

The routes also overlap. The same case may appear in more than one row because sustained impact often depended on more than one continuation mechanism. The vicuña sequence is simultaneously an economic, community, policy and cumulative-investment case. St Helena's marine legacy combines evidence reuse, policy uptake and sequenced public-good investment. The point of the table is therefore not to allocate each project to a single category, but to show the main ways in which project-supported benefits moved beyond the original grant.

5.2. Cumulative investment as the strongest cross-cutting pathway

The strongest legacies in the evidence base were often not produced by single projects becoming self-sustaining on their own. They came most clearly from repeated investment in the same landscape, institution or theme, where each grant built on the relationships, evidence, methods and credibility of the ones before it. The point is not that single projects cannot leave durable legacy. Some do. Rather, the evidence shows that many of the strongest and most mature legacies were produced where project-level achievements accumulated over

more than one funding cycle. In those cases, sustainability was strengthened because capacity, trust, evidence, policy access and delivery systems had time to compound.

It is visible in more than one form. In the Laikipia landscape, more than two decades of BCFs grants led by different organisations addressed successive problems in the same system, from human-elephant conflict, through social assessment and water governance, to the current watershed-scale work under *Increasing ecological and socio-economic resilience of Upper Ewaso Ng'iro North ecosystem* (DAREX006). No single grant designed this sequence, but relationships, methods and credibility accumulated across it, giving later work a stronger base than any one project could have built. A similar institutional pattern is visible in Nature Kenya and WCS Bolivia. Repeated engagement over more than twenty years built standards and capabilities in Nature Kenya that it now applies across work funded by other donors, while successive WCS Bolivia grants helped the organisation evolve from a science-led conservation body into a recognised contributor to national jaguar, condor and vicuña policy. Greenhood shows a more focused version of the same principle: a well-structured mentoring relationship under *Illegal trade and sustainable use of medicinal orchids in Nepal* (IWT083) helped build the organisational systems and confidence needed for later independent grant management.

Compounding was not only institutional. The vicuña sequence in Bolivia (21-004; 26-021; DARCC034) shows the same logic running through an economic and governance route. Three successive projects moved vicuña management from community organisation, through a working market for fibre, to a nationally regulated system. By the end of the sequence, fibre sales, community association capacity and national planning had become mutually reinforcing. Here it was not simply the market that carried the benefit, but the combination of market value, community ownership and government adoption built across successive grants. Individual capacity and community structures also became stronger where repeated engagement allowed skills, relationships and leadership roles to mature over time. These are important parts of the cumulative pathway, but they matter because they became embedded in institutions, associations or later programmes rather than remaining as isolated training outcomes.

This cumulative effect was, for the most part, not the result of deliberate planning by the fund. The BCFs operate as a competitive grant programme that assesses projects individually, and although instruments such as scoping grants and Darwin Extra can carry investment forward, the fund does not plan or guarantee sequences of investment in the same place or institution. The compounding seen in the evidence arose mainly because grantees recognised the opportunities that earlier investment had created and designed later applications around them. In that sense, cumulative investment mattered not only because funding was repeated, but because later projects were coherent with earlier work and remained relevant to the institutional, landscape or policy problems they were trying to address. Darwin Extra is the clearest formal mechanism for this, and the Laikipia and Nepal evidence shows it working, but it remains different from the fund managing cumulative investment by design. This distinction matters: the evidence does not imply that every project should receive follow-on funding. The implications for appraisal and portfolio learning are taken up in Section 6.

St Helena shows both the value and the limits of cumulative investment. Its most durable work, especially in cloud forest conservation and marine management, was built across successive projects on earlier baselines, capacity and partnerships. But the island's main conservation needs, including invasive species control and pathogen management, require continuous management rather than a sequence of discrete projects. Where funding gaps occurred, gains slipped back. St Helena therefore shows both the value of cumulative investment and what it cannot do on its own: it can build capacity, evidence and momentum, but it cannot by itself meet a continuous management cost. In that context, the sustainability question is not whether one project leads neatly to the next, but whether cumulative project investment is matched by a realistic recurrent home for the functions that cannot stop.

Cumulative investment also reframes how follow-on funding should be read. Follow-on funding, scaling and replication matter because they can allow evidence, relationships, capacity and delivery models to compound, supporting landscape- and institutional-level adaptive management. But they are not automatically evidence of sustainability. Further funding is a strong sign of sustainability only where it changes who carries the benefit, by deepening ownership, capacity, scale or independent resourcing. It is a weaker sign where it simply extends delivery. Greenhood maturing into an independent grant holder is one clear example of follow-on activity changing the underlying capacity to continue. By contrast, the replication of the Chitwan-Sindhuli project (IWT099) into new areas was led by ZSL rather than taken up independently by government, so continuation there still depends on the implementing organisation winning further grants. Counting instances of follow-on funding is therefore less useful than asking what each instance changed. Did it transfer ownership, deepen local or institutional capacity, secure a recurrent payer, strengthen a policy or governance route, or simply extend the same delivery model into another cycle?

Cumulative investment is the strongest cross-cutting route identified in the evidence, but it is not sufficient on its own. Repeated funding compounds into lasting benefit only where the same continuation test is met: the benefit needs a clear holder, a reason to continue and realistic resources, incentives or arrangements to sustain it.

5.3. What made continuation credible or fragile

The routes above worked or weakened for recurring reasons. Reading across the evidence, continuation was most credible where the four questions set out at the start of Section 5 had a concrete answer. These questions were closely linked to relevance and coherence: benefits were more likely to continue where they responded to a continuing need and fitted the institutional, policy, market or landscape context into which they were expected to pass. These conditions applied across the pathways identified in Section 5.1. They determined whether a project output became part of a continuing system, a community role, an economic incentive, a reusable asset, or a cumulative investment pathway.

The table below summarises these factors in their enabling and fragile forms. The fragile forms are not yet the warning signs to look for in a proposal, which are set out in Section 5.4. Here they describe the conditions that, in the evidence, made continuation less likely or made otherwise credible pathways more conditional.

Table 5.2: Factors making benefit continuation credible or fragile

Factor	Enabling form	Fragile form
Actor	A named body with a mandate, stake or practical reason to continue takes the function on, as with OPC (24-002), KFS (25-031), the Government of Kenya for LIFE (25-004), municipal governments, or recognised community associations.	No clear post-project carrier, or a carrier whose role is assumed rather than agreed. This is visible where financing models, weaker community institutions or project-created functions lack a clear post-closure holder.
Finance	A payer, budget line or working revenue route is identified. LIFE's (25-004) movement into Government of Kenya ownership and public financing, municipal budgets supporting the Water Conservation Funds (21-008), and the vicuña fibre market (21-004; 26-021; DARCC034) are the strongest examples.	A recurrent cost remains without a secure payer. This includes cases where plans, tools or functions continue in use, but maintenance, implementation or staffing costs remain unresolved. In St Helena, the issue is not weak commitment by SHNT, but the vulnerability of functions held through project-funded capacity in a narrow finance ecosystem.
Local value	Local actors have a visible benefit or practical reason to continue, such as vicuña income (21-004; 26-021; DARCC034), community banks	Participation does not translate into a continuing role or benefit. Livelihood gains are more fragile where they depend mainly on temporary

	(IWT099), VSLAs (26-006), community fire brigades (28-019) or self-financed livelihood practices.	incentives, free inputs, or externally selected enterprises.
Capacity	Capacity is held in an institution, system, group, or network, as with SAPA (20-010; 25-006) in OPCs routine practice, Greenhood's organisational systems (IWT083), or community associations that continue to perform a recognised role.	Capacity is concentrated in individuals, short-term project posts or systems that require repeated retraining. WCD-MIS (IWT099), for example, demonstrates continued use but remains vulnerable to staff turnover, maintenance and retraining needs.
Evidence and tools	Evidence, data, or tools have a user, custodian, and practical function, as with SAPA (20-010; 25-006), IBA/KBA monitoring (11-003; EIDPO007), iRecord, or tools used in planning, reporting or enforcement.	A tool or dataset exists but lacks secure custody, maintenance or long-term accessibility. The St Helena evidence shows that data can be a major legacy asset while also becoming a sustainability risk where storage, ownership or resourcing are unresolved.
Sequencing	Later investment deepens durability by building ownership, capacity, policy access, scale or resourcing, as in Laikipia, the vicuña sequence (21-004; 26-021; DARCC034) and Nature Kenya's repeated BCFs engagement.	Follow-on funding extends delivery without changing who owns, funds, maintains or uses the benefit. The risk is not further funding itself, but continuation without progression towards a more durable holder.
Context, relevance, and coherence	The continuation route fits ecological, political, institutional and market realities. It remains relevant to a continuing need and coherent with existing mandates, plans, investments or landscape dynamics, as with the vicuña market (21-004; 26-021; DARCC034), Bolivia's policy openings, or Laikipia's long-term landscape engagement. In climate-stressed or contested landscapes, durable continuation may run more through governance of resource competition, negotiated resource-sharing and conflict management rather than through improved resource condition alone. These arrangements can endure under variable ecological conditions where biophysical outcomes remain uncertain.	A pathway is unrealistic for the context, poorly aligned with existing systems, or dependent on assumptions that do not fit local ecological, political or market conditions. Biophysical targets are set without a governance mechanism to sustain them where resource conditions are contested or variable. Examples include a continuous ecological management need treated as a short project, or a market-based route assumed where markets are too thin to carry the function. St Helena's invasive species and pathogen management examples illustrate this constraint.

The distinction between continued use, continued ownership and continued financing is central. Some benefits endured because an output or tool continued to be used. Others were stronger because a body or community institution had taken ownership of a function. The most robust cases went further, with financing also transferred or secured. LIFE (25-004) is the clearest example of this stronger form: the benefit did not merely continue in use, but moved into a government-owned and publicly financed delivery route. The Municipal Water Conservation Funds (21-008) show a similar logic at municipal level. By contrast, tools such as WCD-MIS (IWT099), or planning frameworks such as the Mt Kenya Forest Restoration Strategy (25-031), show meaningful continuation while also illustrating that use or adoption does not automatically resolve maintenance, training, or implementation finance.

These factors also show why continuation is often partial rather than simply present or absent. The Mt Kenya case (25-031), for example, should not be read as a weak legacy: the restoration strategy, planning alignment and CFA capacity are significant. The more limited point is that the buyer-financed restoration model did not consolidate into a fully stable revenue route. Similarly, St Helena's challenge is not a lack of conservation commitment, but the structural difficulty of sustaining continuous public-good management through short project cycles and a narrow funding base.

The questionnaire summaries provide breadth for these patterns, particularly around the recurrence of community institutions, partnerships, livelihood groups, monitoring systems, and follow-on activity. However, the more detailed Legacy Reviews provide the stronger evidence on why those arrangements were credible or fragile. For that reason, the table uses the questionnaire evidence mainly to support recurrence, while relying on triangulated cases to explain the underlying conditions.

Together, the evidence suggests that durable continuation depended less on the formal category of outcome than on the credibility of the continuation arrangement behind it. A policy instrument, community structure, livelihood mechanism, dataset or follow-on project was more likely to endure where it had a carrier, a reason to continue and a realistic resource base. Where one of these was missing, benefits could still continue, but they were more conditional. Section 5.4 turns these fragile conditions into early warning signs that can be identified during design, implementation and closure.

5.4. Early hallmarks of weak sustainability

The fragile forms above can usually be spotted early, often in the proposal or in the first year of delivery, well before a project closes. These signs vary in nature. Some indicate weaknesses in design, feasibility or technical logic. Others indicate that the continuation arrangement has not yet been made credible. Where the continuation test depends on an untested assumption, a future fundraising plan, an assumed handover or capacity that remains concentrated in individuals or project-funded posts rather than embedded in an institution, team or system, the benefit is at risk.

The warning signs in Table 5.3 translate the fragile conditions identified in Section 5.3 into issues that can be detected during design, implementation or closure. They are grouped into three diagnostic categories: ownership, responsibility and resourcing; community incentives and livelihood viability; and progression, uptake and contextual fit. They are diagnostic rather than determinative. Their presence does not mean a project should not proceed, but it should trigger closer scrutiny, adaptation or support. These feed directly into the guidance for each audience in Section 6.

Table 5.3: Early hallmarks of weak sustainability

Diagnostic grouping	Early warning sign	Why it matters	Where it tends to appear
Ownership, responsibility and resourcing	No named owner for a function after closure	No actor is clearly positioned to carry the benefit once project delivery ends.	Application and design
Ownership, responsibility and resourcing	A recurring cost with no identified payer	The benefit may weaken once grant finance ends, particularly where maintenance, staffing, monitoring or implementation costs recur.	Application and budget
Ownership, responsibility and resourcing	Data or tools have no named custodian	Evidence, databases or tools can lose value after closure if storage, updating, ownership or user responsibility is unresolved. The St Helena evidence shows this risk in relation to data custody and storage.	Delivery and closure

Diagnostic grouping	Early warning sign	Why it matters	Where it tends to appear
Community incentives and livelihood viability	Community ownership claimed but not tied to a real benefit or role	Participation may not become stewardship if local actors have no continuing function, authority or practical reason to remain engaged.	Design and delivery
Community incentives and livelihood viability	A livelihood approach rests mainly on training, free inputs or temporary incentives	Behaviour may stop when support ends, especially where incentives, market access or commercial viability have not been tested. This pattern is visible in weaker or more partial livelihood outcomes where benefits depended on temporary incentives or externally supported activities.	Design and delivery
Progression, uptake and contextual fit	A policy, plan or procedure has no route into a decision-making body or operational system	Influence may remain advisory if no mandated actor is positioned to use, implement or finance the output.	Design and delivery
Progression, uptake and contextual fit	Follow-on funding extends delivery without deepening ownership, capacity or resourcing	Activities may continue, but sustainability may not improve if the same implementer remains the only realistic carrier. The ZSL-led replication of the Chitwan-Sindhuli model (IWT099; IWT135) illustrates the need to distinguish expansion from independent uptake.	Follow-on applications
Progression, uptake and contextual fit	A continuous need is funded as a one-off short project	Backsliding is likely where the problem requires recurrent management rather than time-limited intervention. St Helena's invasive species and pathogen management examples illustrate this risk.	Application and closure
Progression, uptake and contextual fit	The intervention is weakly aligned with context, existing systems or prior investment	Sustainability is less likely where the project is relevant in general terms but not coherent with the institutions, mandates, markets, policies or landscape dynamics needed to carry it forward.	Application and design

The first group of warning signs concerns ownership, responsibility and resourcing. A project may deliver a useful tool, plan, institution or management function, but sustainability remains weak if no actor is clearly responsible for carrying it after closure, or if the recurrent costs of staffing, maintenance, monitoring or implementation have no identified payer, or if data, tools or evidence products have no clear custodian.

The second group concerns community incentives and livelihood viability. Community participation, training or livelihood support do not automatically become sustained stewardship or poverty-related impact. The evidence points to stronger continuation where local actors have a continuing role, authority or practical benefit, and weaker continuation where livelihood approaches depend mainly on temporary incentives, free inputs or untested assumptions about behaviour change.

The third group concerns progression, uptake and contextual fit. Policy instruments, plans, procedures, guidance, follow-on funding and short project extensions are often positive, but they are not sustainability

signals on their own. They matter where they move an approach into a decision-making system, deepen ownership, build independent capacity, remain relevant to a continuing need, or fit the ecological, institutional, policy or market context needed to sustain them. They are weaker where they leave the same delivery model dependent on further grants, or where a continuous management problem is treated as a time-limited project.

These hallmarks should be read together rather than individually. A project may carry one risk and still have a credible sustainability pathway if other conditions are strong. Conversely, several warning signs together – for example, no owner, no payer and no custodian – can indicate a much higher likelihood that benefits will weaken after closure.

The questionnaire summaries reinforce the recurrence of these hallmarks across a wider set of projects, but the strongest evidence for why they matter comes from the detailed Legacy Reviews, where the conditions behind continuation could be examined more closely.

The purpose of identifying these hallmarks is not to make sustainability a rigid pass/fail test. Some conservation and livelihood outcomes are inherently uncertain, and in all contexts the credible exit pathway may involve continued public-good investment, institutional support, community-based stewardship or market-based support rather than the disappearance of recurrent cost. The test is not whether support continues, but whether responsibility and resourcing have a realistic home. The value of the hallmarks is that they make weak sustainability visible earlier, when project design, management support or expectations can still be adjusted.

5.5. Context-specific qualifications

Three qualifications shape how these findings should be read across different settings. Across the evidence base, the same continuation test recurs. What varies is how that test should be interpreted in different contexts.

In the Darwin Initiative and IWT Challenge Fund country contexts, where projects must meet ODA poverty-reduction requirements, the link between biodiversity and poverty matters, and durability often runs through community economic institutions and visible local benefit. Livelihood incentives are central, but they are not the only route to sustainability. The strongest cases were those where biodiversity, poverty or livelihood benefits were relevant to local needs and coherent with the institutions, markets, governance systems or public mandates expected to carry them forward. In some cases, this meant conservation becoming economically worthwhile for the people involved; in others it meant public or institutional uptake, community stewardship, improved subsistence or resilience benefits, or a credible combination of these routes. In landscapes under climate stress or resource competition, durable legacy may also be visible in the governance arrangements that allow actors to manage scarcity and competing claims over time. The Laikipia project (24-002) is the clearest example in the evidence base: while water availability remained sensitive to drought, WRUA coordination, negotiated water sharing and conflict management arrangements persisted beyond closure, helping maintain reduced water-access conflict under climatic stress.

In IWT Challenge Fund projects, livelihood and poverty-reduction pathways remain important, especially where sustainable livelihoods reduce pressure on IWT at source. The additional sustainability test is whether enforcement, intelligence, coordination, procedures and trained personnel continue to operate after project support ends. The Chitwan-Sindhuli project (IWT099) in Nepal and the jaguar work in Bolivia (IWT068; IWT080) show that the durable assets here are working systems, evidence flows, procedures and credible institutions, and that their main vulnerability is staff turnover, retraining needs and the difficulty of keeping specialist capacity embedded in public systems rather than held only through project-supported teams.

In St Helena, as a UKOT, the test is different again. Poverty reduction and self-financing are not goals the fund was given there, so they are not the right measures of legacy. Two of the routes that carried benefits elsewhere, the market and community-economic ones, are sharply limited by the island's small population and markets, which leaves uptake by the SHG as the main realistic route. The relevant tests are therefore whether conservation functions have a clear public home, whether trained staff are retained, and whether continuous

management needs have realistic long-term funding. St Helena is best understood as a structurally different case rather than a weaker version of the same pattern. At the same time, the St Helena finding should not be read as an exception to an otherwise self-financing model. Across all contexts, some sustained benefits legitimately require continuing public-good investment, institutional support, community-based stewardship or market-based support. The common test is not whether support disappears, but whether responsibility, incentives and resourcing have a realistic home.

5.6. Summary: what predicts long-term legacy

The pattern across the evidence is consistent. A benefit is most likely to last where there is clarity about what exactly is expected to continue after closure, who will hold it, why they will continue, and what resources, incentives, benefits or other arrangements will sustain it. The reason why can be a public mandate, a community stake, a market return, a practical household, livelihood or subsistence benefit or the continued usefulness of a skill or tool, and the strongest cases usually combine more than one. Above all, the most durable legacies were built up over time, where repeated investment in the same place, theme, landscape or institution allowed capacity, relationships, evidence and credibility to compound. Cumulative investment was therefore the strongest cross-cutting pathway, but only where it deepened ownership, capacity, policy access, scale or resourcing rather than simply extending delivery.

The main implication is that many of these conditions are visible early enough to be tested and strengthened. Both the conditions for lasting benefit and the early signs of fragility can be seen at the application stage, during delivery and at closure. The difference between benefits that last and those that fade is therefore not wholly within the fund's control, but it is often something Expert Committees, the Fund Manager, Defra and grantees can identify, scrutinise, support or adapt before closure. How they might do so is the subject of Section 6.

6. Guidance, recommendations and red Flags

6.1. How to use this guidance

Section 6 translates the findings of Section 5 into practical guidance for future BCFs project selection, management and delivery. It is directed at the three audiences: Expert Committees, the Fund Manager and Defra, and grantees. The section does not introduce new findings or repeat the analysis. It sets out how the continuation pathways, credibility factors and early warning signs identified in Section 5 can be tested, supported and adapted across the project cycle.

The recommendations build from a simple diagnostic question: when the grant ends, what exactly is expected to continue, who will hold it, why will they continue, and what resources, incentives, benefits or other arrangements will sustain it? This question is not intended to create a rigid pass/fail test. It is a way of making sustainability assumptions visible early enough for applicants, reviewers and managers to scrutinise them, strengthen them or narrow claims where they remain uncertain.

The guidance should also be read proportionately. Sustainability does not mean that all support disappears, nor that every benefit becomes self-financing. Some conservation, governance, livelihood and enforcement benefits legitimately require continuing public-good investment, institutional support, community-based stewardship or market-based support. The relevant test is whether responsibility, incentives and resourcing have a realistic home, suited to the context and to the type of benefit being sustained. For livelihood components, the guidance also draws on the Phase 1 Evaluation of Livelihoods Programming in Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects (Hilton, Szefer and Roe, 2024).

Many of the elements identified in this section already appear in BCFs application, reporting, review and monitoring processes, including prompts on sustainability, scalability, assumptions, risk, partnerships, MEL, finance and evidence. The recommendation is therefore not to add a separate layer of compliance, but to sharpen the way existing processes are used. This should also be read in light of the fact that the projects reviewed were implemented under earlier versions of BCFs guidance, which has since been updated in several areas relevant to the issues discussed in this report. Sustainability should be treated as a design and management discipline throughout the project cycle, rather than as an exit statement considered mainly at closure.

The recommendations are differentiated by audience. Expert Committees are asked to test sustainability before award, when assumptions are most visible and most easily corrected. The Fund Manager and Defra are asked to track, support and learn from sustainability during implementation, closure and, where proportionate, after projects end. Grantees are asked to build continuation into project design and delivery from the outset. The final table consolidates the main positive factors and red flags for use across application review, implementation monitoring and final reporting.

6.2. Guidance for Expert Committees

Expert Committees act at the point where sustainability assumptions are most visible and most easily corrected. Existing application materials already ask applicants to explain expected long-term change, sustainable benefits, scaling potential, risk, assumptions, partnerships, MEL and finance. The task for Committees is therefore not to apply a separate sustainability test, but to use these existing parts of the application to judge whether the proposed continuation pathway is credible.

The central question is whether the application gives a concrete answer to the continuation test set out in Section 6.1: what exactly is expected to continue after closure, who will hold it, why they will continue, and what resources, incentives, benefits or other arrangements will sustain it. Where the answer is plausible but incomplete, Expert Committees can use feedback to strengthen the pathway before award. Where the answer is weak, they should narrow the applicant's claims about post-project legacy or request clarification on the assumptions that matter most.

Table 6.1 sets out the main issues Expert Committees should consider during selection and proposal feedback.

Table 6.1: Considerations for Expert Committees when reviewing applications

Consideration	What Expert Committees should ask	Red flags
The proposed continuation pathway before award	Does the proposal identify the main outputs, functions, capacities, tools, relationships or benefits expected to continue after closure and the actor, institution, community structure, network, market actor or public body positioned to hold them? Where precise arrangements cannot yet be fully specified, does the proposal set out a credible process for identifying, testing and confirming them during inception or implementation?	Vague references to "stakeholders", "communities" or "partners"; no named or plausible post-project holder; no credible process for confirming who will hold, use, fund or maintain major benefits during delivery; technical outputs assumed to endure because they are high quality; exit strategy treated separately from project logic.
Recurrent costs and resourcing realism	Does the application distinguish between costs that can be absorbed, costs that require public or institutional support, costs that depend on future grants, and costs that may be covered through market, community or local finance mechanisms?	"Funding will be sought" without specifics; assumed government, private-sector or community finance without evidence; continuous management,

monitoring, staffing or maintenance costs with no plausible payer.

Livelihood, incentive and practical-benefit logic	Where livelihood or income-generating activities are included, is there credible evidence of demand, incentives, adoption, behaviour change, market relationships, household value or low-dependency local finance, such as functioning VSLAs, community banks or revolving funds where these are appropriate to the context?	Training, equipment or free inputs treated as sufficient for sustained livelihood change; activities chosen because familiar rather than viable; no evidence of demand, continued use, buyer engagement, savings, income or practical benefit; local finance mechanisms named but not yet functioning, not locally governed, or dependent on continued project facilitation.
Policy, governance, evidence and monitoring uptake	Where the intended legacy is policy, planning, governance, evidence, monitoring or data, is there a route into a mandated body, operational system, decision-making process or continuing user group?	Advocacy or evidence outputs with no institutional sponsor; policy influence assumed to follow from technical quality alone; data, tools or monitoring systems with no named custodian, user or maintenance route.
Capacity and partnerships that outlast individuals and project posts	Is capacity held in teams, institutions, community structures, procedures, job roles, curricula, protocols or partner systems, rather than only in trained individuals or project-funded posts? Are partnerships likely to continue without the lead organisation's facilitation?	Reliance on one champion, consultant, project-funded post or personal relationship; no plan for staff turnover; partnerships dependent on the lead organisation remaining present indefinitely.
Sequencing and follow-on funding	Where a proposal builds on earlier BCFs or other investment, does it show progression by deepening ownership, capacity, policy access, scale, resourcing or independent continuation?	Repeat funding repackages the same activities; earlier outputs have not been adopted or adapted; the same implementer remains the only realistic carrier; follow-on funding extends delivery without changing who owns, funds or maintains the benefit.

These considerations should be applied proportionately. A proposal should not be marked down simply because it cannot guarantee post-project continuation, or because the expected legacy requires further public, institutional, community or market-based support. The more important question is whether the applicant has been realistic about the pathway. Stronger proposals will usually be clear about what would still function, at reduced but viable scale, if follow-on funding were not secured, what remains uncertain, and what will be done during implementation to make the pathway more credible.

This is particularly important where benefits depend on behaviour change, livelihood incentives, policy uptake, data systems, staff capacity or recurrent ecological management. In these cases, the proposal may be technically strong but still fragile if it does not explain who will carry the function after closure and why they will be able to do so. Committee feedback should therefore focus on the few assumptions most likely to determine legacy, rather than asking applicants to make broad or unrealistic claims about sustainability.

6.3. Guidance for the Fund Manager and Defra

The Fund Manager and Defra shape sustainability not only through project selection, but through guidance, reporting, review, implementation support, closure processes and portfolio-level learning. Many of the relevant entry points already exist across the BCFs project cycle. The priority is therefore not to create a separate

sustainability process, but to use these mechanisms more consistently to test whether sustainability assumptions are becoming more credible over time.

This role matters because some sustainability risks only become clear during implementation. A proposal may identify a plausible holder, payer, policy route, livelihood incentive or monitoring system, but the credibility of that pathway may change as partners move, budgets shift, markets underperform, political windows close, staff rotate, or ecological pressures intensify. Annual reporting, annual reviews, Mid-Term Reviews, change requests and final reporting all provide opportunities to test whether the continuation pathway remains realistic and whether adaptation is needed before closure.

Table 6.2 sets out the main actions for the Fund Manager and Defra.

Table 6.2: Actions for the Fund Manager and Defra

Recommendation	What the Fund Manager and Defra should do	Red flags or risks to track
Use a shared continuation-test lens across the project cycle	Use the same core questions at application, annual reporting, review, MTR, change request and final reporting: what is expected to continue, who will hold it, why will they continue, and what resources, incentives, benefits or arrangements will sustain it?	Sustainability treated as a closure stage issue; different review stages use different language; risks identified in one part of the process are not followed up later.
Use reporting and review processes to address sustainability risks before closure	Use annual reviews, MTRs and change processes to test whether the intended holder remains engaged, whether resourcing assumptions remain plausible, whether partnerships are functioning, and whether the project is adapting where assumptions weaken.	Repeated risks are noted in annual reports without action; handover remains informal; partners or public bodies are named as future owners but are not becoming more engaged during delivery.
Strengthen closure and light-touch post-project learning	Final reports should identify what is expected to endure, who holds it, what remains uncertain, and what evidence would verify later legacy. For larger, strategically important, innovative or high-risk projects, consider proportionate follow-up 36 months after closure.	Final reports describe outputs delivered but not what is likely to continue; unresolved risks are left implicit; no mechanism exists to learn which sustainability assumptions proved valid after closure.
Provide proportionate support on livelihood, market and finance design	Where projects rely on enterprise, market demand, PES, buyer relationships, VSLAs, community banks, revolving funds or other finance mechanisms, provide light-touch prompts, examples or signposting to help applicants and grantees test feasibility and subsidy dependency risks.	Complex finance or livelihood models are accepted without evidence of demand, governance, payer willingness or continued use; support requirements become too heavy for smaller or local organisations.
Make cumulative investment and portfolio learning more visible	Track repeated investment by landscape, institution, theme or delivery partner, and use this information to distinguish progression from dependency. Existing instruments, including scoping grants, Main projects and Darwin Extra, can support progression where later funding deepens ownership, capacity, policy access, scale or resourcing.	Follow-on funding is treated as success without testing what has changed; repeat grants extend delivery but do not shift responsibility, ownership, cost or capacity; learning from prior investments is not visible in later appraisal or reporting.

The common thread is that sustainability should become easier to track over time. At application stage, some assumptions will inevitably be uncertain. By annual reporting or MTR, there should be clearer evidence of whether the intended actor is taking ownership, whether capacity is moving into a durable home, whether finance assumptions remain plausible, whether data and tools have users and custodians, and whether livelihood or incentive mechanisms are functioning beyond project support. If the pathway is weakening, the project should be encouraged to adapt rather than continue with an unrealistic exit claim.

This does not require new reporting. It requires more consistent use of evidence already requested through the project cycle. The Fund Manager and Defra can support this by ensuring that review feedback distinguishes between delivery problems and adaptive changes that strengthen sustainability. A project that narrows an over-ambitious livelihood model, shifts from direct delivery to partner ownership, simplifies a monitoring system so it can be maintained locally, or revises an unfunded handover assumption may be improving its legacy prospects rather than weakening performance.

The same logic applies at portfolio level. The evidence base shows that some of the strongest legacies arose where repeated investment in the same landscape, institution or theme allowed capacity, evidence, relationships and credibility to compound. The implication is not that previous grantees should automatically be favoured, or that every successful project should receive follow-on funding. It is that Defra and the Fund Manager should be able to see where cumulative investment is generating progression, and where repeat funding is simply extending dependency. This requires portfolio learning to distinguish projects that build a stronger continuation pathway from those that merely continue delivery.

6.4. Guidance for grantees

Grantees have the greatest influence over sustainability through the design and implementation choices they make from the outset. Sustained impact is rarely secured by an exit statement written near the end of a grant. It is built through decisions about who is involved, what is strengthened, what is handed over, what incentives are created, how responsibilities shift, and how the project contributes to a longer-term pathway.

For grantees, the continuation test should therefore be used as a complementary design tool: what exactly is expected to continue after closure, who will hold it, why they will continue, and what resources, incentives, benefits or arrangements will sustain it? The answer should be reflected in the Theory of Change, workplan, partnerships, risk management, MEL and reporting, rather than sitting separately in an exit plan.

Table 6.3 sets out the main actions for grantees.

Table 6.3: Actions for grantees

Recommendation	What grantees should do	Red flags to avoid
Design around the continuation pathway from the start	Identify the main outputs, functions, capacities, tools, relationships or benefits expected to continue after closure, and design activities around the actor or system most likely to hold them. Where no credible holder exists, narrow the legacy claim or design the project as a step towards a longer pathway. In sensitive contexts, including where livelihood practices are linked to IWT or legally ambiguous activity, sequence community engagement deliberately, from awareness-raising and technical understanding to specific, timebound	Sustainability or exit strategy treated as a standalone application statement rather than embedded in project design and delivery; unclear post-project holder; broad claims of legacy without a realistic continuation route; project outputs designed around delivery rather than future use.

	commitments, at the pace of trust-building rather than the project calendar.	
Make post-project costs and resource routes explicit	Identify the costs that will remain after closure, including staffing, maintenance, monitoring, facilitation, governance meetings, equipment replacement, data management, enforcement functions or restoration aftercare. Distinguish costs that can be absorbed, costs that need continuing public or institutional support, costs that require future grants, and costs that may be covered through market, community or local finance mechanisms.	Recurrent costs hidden within project delivery; assumed government, private-sector or community finance without evidence; project benefits dependent on equipment, staff or facilitation that will not continue.
Design livelihoods around durable incentives or practical benefit	Base livelihood or income-generating components on a clear understanding of why people currently behave as they do, what would make alternative practices viable, and how benefits will continue after project support. Where high-value markets are unrealistic, consider lower-dependency pathways such as household practices, VSLAs, community banks, revolving funds or other locally governed mechanisms that pair capacity with continuing practical benefit.	Training or equipment treated as sufficient for livelihood change; production scaled before demand is confirmed; community finance mechanisms created but not governed locally or used after support ends; weak link between livelihood activity and conservation outcome.
Build capacity and partnerships that outlast the project	Embed capacity in teams, institutions, community structures, procedures, job roles, curricula, protocols, governance systems or partner organisations. Design partnerships so that responsibilities, incentives and benefits are clear, and so that the lead organisation's role can shift over time from delivery to mentoring, facilitation or technical backstopping where appropriate.	Capacity concentrated in project staff, external consultants or one trained individual; no plan for staff turnover; partnerships dependent on the lead organisation remaining present; partner roles unclear or mainly symbolic.
Secure monitoring, data ownership and adaptive management	Agree who will hold, maintain and use project data, tools, baselines, monitoring systems or evidence products after closure. Monitoring arrangements should be proportionate to the capacity and incentives of the actors expected to continue them. Use monitoring during implementation to adapt where market, policy, institutional, ecological or community assumptions change.	Databases, tools or monitoring systems with no custodian; methods too complex for future users; no baseline or proxy where long-term change is expected; evidence generated but not accessible to those expected to use it.
Be explicit about contribution to a longer-term pathway	State whether the project is piloting, consolidating, scaling, transferring responsibility, generating evidence, building capacity, influencing policy, strengthening trust or preparing the next stage. Where follow-on funding is likely to be needed, explain how the current project will make the next stage more credible rather than	Project treated as self-contained where the problem requires longer engagement; follow-on funding assumed but not explained; repeat activities do not deepen ownership, capacity, policy access, scale or resourcing.

implying that all benefits will continue independently.

The aim is not for grantees to guarantee sustainability in advance. Many BCFs projects work on problems where ecological change is slow, public finance is uncertain, markets are thin, policy uptake depends on political windows, or community incentives need time to mature. The more realistic expectation is that grantees make the continuation pathway explicit, test it during implementation and adapt where assumptions weaken.

This also means being honest about the type of legacy a project can credibly leave. Some projects will leave a function taken up by a public body. Others will leave stronger community institutions, a locally useful finance mechanism, a practical household benefit, a policy or planning tool, an evidence base, a trained team, a partnership, or a stronger platform for future investment. These are all valid forms of legacy where there is a realistic holder, reason to continue and resource route. They become fragile where they depend mainly on project presence, temporary incentives or untested assumptions.

Grantees should therefore avoid treating sustainability as a single exit model. In some contexts, the credible pathway will involve public-good investment, continuing institutional support, community-based stewardship, market-based support or further sequenced funding. The important discipline is to be clear about what is expected to continue independently, what will require continued support, and what the current project will do to make that continued support more credible, better owned or easier to justify.

6.5. Specific considerations for UKOT and Darwin Plus contexts

The same continuation test applies in UKOT and Darwin Plus contexts, but it should be interpreted differently. In these settings, sustainability should not be judged primarily by whether benefits become self-financing, generate livelihood returns or graduate from donor support. The more relevant questions are whether priority conservation functions have a clear institutional home, whether capacity can be retained, whether evidence and data remain accessible, and whether continuous public-good management needs have a realistic recurrent support pathway.

Expert Committees should therefore test Darwin Plus applications against the type of sustainability that is realistic for the territory and intervention. Positive factors include a clear assignment of post-project responsibility, evidence that the relevant public body or local institution is engaged, realistic treatment of recurrent costs, and contribution to a coherent longer-term programme pathway. Red flags include continuous ecological management needs being framed as short projects, repeated pilots of work that requires long-term maintenance, or assumptions that small markets, community finance or local institutions can carry costs that are structurally beyond them.

For the **Fund Manager and Defra**, the main implication is to distinguish between project sustainability, programme continuity and public-good maintenance. Some Darwin Plus projects may leave durable legacy through a dataset, monitoring protocol, management plan, trained team, institutional relationship or public decision, even where the underlying conservation need remains permanent. In such cases, the sustainability question is not whether all activity continues without further support, but whether the project has strengthened the recurrent system needed to manage the issue over time. For some continuous management needs, clearer sequencing or longer-term programme continuity may matter more than larger individual grants.

For **grantees**, the priority is to be explicit about what kind of continuation is being claimed. Where a project is contributing to a long-term conservation function, grantees should identify which elements can be held by government, local institutions, civil society organisations or community actors, and which elements will require continuing external, public or philanthropic support. Where work depends on specialist staff, technical equipment, long-term monitoring, data stewardship or repeated management intervention, the proposal and reporting should make those recurrent needs visible rather than presenting them as temporary project costs.

This qualification should not be read as a lower standard for UKOT or Darwin Plus projects. It is a different application of the same standard. The test remains whether responsibility, incentives and resourcing have a realistic home. What differs is that, in small island and UKOT contexts, that home may be a public-good conservation programme, a government function, a long-term partnership or a sequenced funding pathway, rather than a market, livelihood mechanism or self-financing model.

6.6. Summary table: positive factors, red flags and suggested actions

Table 6.4 consolidates the main positive factors and red flags from this section. It is intended for use across the project cycle: in application review, proposal feedback, implementation monitoring, Mid-Term Reviews, final reporting and portfolio learning. The table should be read alongside Section 5.4, which explains the early hallmarks of weak sustainability in more detail.

Table 6.4: Positive factors and red flags for sustained impact

Guidance area	Positive factors to look for	Red flags	Main audience
Continuation pathway	The proposal or report identifies what is expected to continue, who will hold it, why they will continue, and what resources, incentives, benefits or arrangements will sustain it.	Generic exit strategy; no named holder; continuation assumed rather than explained; sustainability discussed only at closure.	All
Ownership and mandate	A named actor, institution, community structure, network, public body or market actor has a clear role, mandate, stake or practical reason to continue.	Vague references to stakeholders, communities or partners; project-created structures with no future role; technical outputs with no user.	Expert Committees; grantees
Resourcing and recurrent costs	Post-project costs are identified and matched to a plausible payer, budget, institution, public-good support route, market mechanism, community finance mechanism or future funding pathway.	"Funding will be sought" without specifics; assumed public, private or community finance without evidence; continuous costs with no recurrent home.	All
Livelihoods, incentives and practical benefit	Livelihood or behaviour-change components are based on credible demand, incentives, adoption, practical benefit, savings, income, subsistence value or locally governed finance mechanisms.	Training, equipment or free inputs treated as sufficient; no evidence of demand, continued use or buyer engagement; VSLAs, community banks or revolving funds named but not functioning or locally governed.	Expert Committees; grantees
Policy, governance and institutional uptake	Policy, planning, governance or procedural outputs have a route into a mandated body, decision-making process, operational system or continuing user group.	Advocacy or evidence outputs with no institutional sponsor; policy influence assumed to follow from technical quality alone; adoption not linked to implementation.	Expert Committees; grantees
Governance strengthening in contested or climate-stressed landscapes	Negotiated resource-sharing, conflict management and coordination are built as durable outcomes; governance arrangements are recognised as potential primary	Biophysical targets are set without a governance mechanism; governance is treated only as a supporting activity; durable legacy is assessed only against resource condition in	Expert Committees; grantees

	legacies where biophysical outcomes remain variable or uncertain.	settings where that condition is inherently variable.	
Capacity and partnerships	Capacity is embedded in teams, institutions, community structures, procedures, job roles, curricula, protocols or partner systems. Partnerships have clear roles, incentives and mutual benefit.	Reliance on one champion, consultant, project-funded post or personal relationship; no plan for staff turnover; partnerships dependent on lead-organisation facilitation.	All
Evidence, tools, data and monitoring	Data, tools, baselines, monitoring systems or evidence products have a named user, custodian, maintenance route and proportionate method for future use.	Dataset, tool or monitoring system with no custodian; methods too complex for future users; evidence generated but not accessible to those expected to use it.	All
Sequencing, follow-on funding and portfolio learning	Later funding builds on prior evidence, relationships and capacity, and deepens ownership, policy access, scale, resourcing or independent continuation. Repeated investment is visible by landscape, institution or theme, so that progression can be distinguished from dependency.	Repeat funding repackages the same activities; earlier outputs have not been adopted or adapted; the same implementer remains the only realistic carrier; portfolio learning from prior investment is not visible in later appraisal or reporting.	Expert Committees; Fund Manager and Defra
Implementation adaptation	Annual reporting, reviews, MTRs and change processes are used to test whether sustainability assumptions still hold and to adapt where they weaken.	Repeated risks noted without action; informal handover expectations; delivery continues despite evidence that the continuation pathway is not credible.	Fund Manager and Defra; grantees
Closure and post-project learning	Final reports identify what is expected to endure, who holds it, what remains uncertain, and what evidence would verify later legacy. For larger, strategically important, innovative or high-risk projects, proportionate follow-up 36 months after closure is considered.	Final reports describe outputs delivered but not what is likely to continue; unresolved risks are left implicit; no mechanism exists to learn which sustainability assumptions proved valid after closure.	Fund Manager and Defra; grantees
Context-specific fit	The sustainability pathway fits the ecological, institutional, political, market and fund context, including the distinction between country programmes, IWT projects and UKOT/Darwin Plus contexts.	Self-financing, livelihood or market-graduation assumptions applied where inappropriate; continuous public-good management needs treated as short projects.	All
UKOT and Darwin Plus application	Public-good conservation functions have a clear institutional home, realistic recurrent support pathway, data/capacity retention plan, or place within a coherent longer-term programme.	Small markets or local institutions expected to carry structurally unrealistic costs; repeated short projects fund continuous management needs with no recurrent home.	Expert Committees; Fund Manager and Defra; grantees

The table is not intended to operate as a scoring framework. Its purpose is to make sustainability assumptions visible and to support proportionate judgement. A single red flag does not necessarily mean a project is weak, especially where the project is honest about uncertainty and has a credible plan to manage it. Conversely, several red flags together – for example no holder, no payer and no custodian – indicate a higher risk that benefits will weaken after closure.

The strongest applications and reports will not claim that all benefits are guaranteed to last. They will show that the most important benefits have a realistic continuation pathway, that uncertainty has been recognised, and that the project is using implementation to strengthen the conditions for legacy.

7. Overall assessment and conclusion

7.1. Overall assessment

The Sustainability Deep Dive found that across the evidence base, benefits of BCFs projects are still observable after funding has ended. Across Kenya, Nepal, Bolivia and St Helena, completed projects have left legacies in institutions, communities, policy, capacity and evidence that continue to function years after closure, and this review does not support the conclusion that BCFs investment fails to endure. What it shows instead is that durability varies, and varies predictably, according to the type of benefit, the strength of the available evidence, the route by which the benefit was carried forward, and the context in which the project worked. This is a positive but qualified assessment – the evidence base was purposive and is better able to examine legacies that remained traceable than those that disappeared entirely. The clearest single message is that the most durable legacies were rarely the achievement of a single grant. They were built where investment in the same landscape, institution or theme accumulated over time, allowing capacity, relationships, evidence and credibility to compound. How and why benefits endured is therefore as much a portfolio-level question as a project-level one.

7.2. Are impacts still observable after funding ended?

Yes, across all four review contexts, though the strength and verifiability of the evidence vary by type of outcome. The most directly observable legacies are in individual capacity and in institutional and governance outcomes, where trained people, established systems and strengthened organisations remain visibly active. Community-level institutions, partnerships and policy influence are also evident, though more dependent on context and on the continued engagement of the actors involved. Socioeconomic and livelihood outcomes are real but uneven, and most durable where a continuing local benefit or incentive was built into the design. Biodiversity outcomes are the hardest to verify: they are often plausible, but post-project ecological monitoring is uncommon across the portfolio, so sustained biodiversity benefits are usually inferred from the continued operation of management, stewardship and enforcement systems rather than measured directly. Financial sustainability is the most conditional dimension, and was strongest where a payer, budget line or market mechanism had been identified before closure. The overall picture is that impact persists, but unevenly, and most securely where it was given a realistic home before funding ended.

7.3. Through what pathways have benefits been sustained?

Section 5 identified five recurring routes. Benefits continued through uptake into systems, mandates, budgets or policy processes; through local ownership and stewardship; through economic or practical value that gave people a direct reason to maintain them; through the reuse of evidence, tools, skills and relationships in later work; and through sequenced and cumulative investment. These routes are not mutually exclusive, and the most durable cases combined several. The strongest cross-cutting route was cumulative investment. Many of the portfolio's most mature legacies emerged not from single projects but from repeated engagement in the

same landscape, institution or theme, where each cycle built on the relationships, evidence and credibility of the one before. Cumulative investment was not, however, sufficient on its own. Repeated funding compounded into lasting benefit only where the other conditions for continuation were also met, and where later projects deepened ownership, capacity, resourcing or independence rather than simply extending delivery.

7.4. What factors contribute to or constrain sustained impact?

The factors that separated durable from fragile continuation were consistent across the evidence base. Continuation was most credible where:

- a named actor with a mandate, stake or practical reason was positioned to hold the benefit;
- a payer, budget line or working revenue route met any recurring cost;
- local actors had a visible benefit or role that gave them reason to continue;
- capacity was held in institutions, systems or groups rather than in individuals or short-term posts alone;
- evidence, data and tools had an identified user and custodian;
- later investment built progression rather than dependency and;
- the continuation route fitted the ecological, political, institutional and market realities of its setting.

Where one or more of these was missing, benefits could still continue, but they were more conditional. Successful delivery at closure did not, by itself, predict sustained legacy. Benefits endured where project-supported change became useful, feasible and owned by actors able to carry it forward. An important qualification runs through this – sustainability does not mean that all support disappears, nor that every benefit becomes self-financing. Some conservation, governance, livelihood and enforcement benefits legitimately require continuing public, institutional, community or market-based support. The test is not whether support ends, but whether responsibility, incentives and resourcing have a realistic home, suited to the context.

7.5. Early hallmarks of weak sustainability

The conditions that made continuation fragile were often visible early, in the proposal or the first year of delivery, well before a project closed. The clearest warning signs include a key function with no named holder after closure; a recurring cost with no identified payer; community ownership asserted but not tied to a real role or benefit; a livelihood approach resting mainly on training or temporary incentives; data or tools with no custodian; and a continuous management need funded as a short project. These signs are diagnostic rather than determinative, and they matter most when several appear together.

7.6. Final conclusion

The BCFs have generated significant and in some cases substantial legacy over the period covered by this review. That legacy is strongest where investment was cumulative, where projects embedded their outputs in institutions, communities, markets and evidence bases with their own reasons to continue, and where the conditions for continuation were established during delivery rather than assumed at closure. The central practical implication is that the conditions for sustainability are significantly open to fund and grantee influence. It is best understood not as a claim to be made at the end of a project, but as a discipline applied across the whole project cycle: tested at appraisal, built into design, supported and adapted during implementation, tested at closure, and learned from across the portfolio. The existing BCFs processes are well placed to carry this. The task is not to impose a single model of sustainability across all contexts, but to make continuation more explicit, testable and operational throughout the project cycle.

Annex 1: Evaluation Framework

OECD DAC Criteria	Description	Overarching questions	Sub-questions
Relevance	The extent to which the project's objectives and design responded to beneficiaries' needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.	During implementation, to what extent did the project's objectives and design respond to the needs of project beneficiaries and stakeholders including, but not limited to, communities, organisations, government departments and/or ministries, and Multilateral Environmental Agreements? To what extent are the project's objectives and design still relevant today?	To what extent did the project address the problems identified at the design phase? Was a participatory design workshop used at project start up? To what extent did the project support local livelihoods and vulnerable populations? To what extent did the project support relevant local and national conservation and development priorities? To what extent did the project support relevant national and international biodiversity conventions? Were there any significant trade-offs affecting the needs and priorities including consideration of equity and power dynamics between people affected by the project directly or indirectly? To what extent has the project's support to local livelihoods and vulnerable populations been sustained? To what extent has the project's support to relevant local and national conservation and development priorities been sustained? To what extent has the project's support to relevant national and international biodiversity conventions been sustained? To what extent are project interventions and lessons reflected in subsequent conservation projects and programmes in the project area?
Coherence	The compatibility of the project with other interventions.	To what extent was the project complementary	To what extent did the project complement, harmonise and coordinate with other BCFs projects?

OECD DAC Criteria	Description	Overarching questions	Sub-questions
		with other actors' interventions in the same context?	To what extent did the project complement, harmonise and coordinate with relevant projects and programmes external to the BCFs? To what extent did the project build upon lessons learned from the design, management, outputs, and outcomes of previous BCFs projects? To what extent did the project add value, while avoiding duplication of effort from other BCFs and external activities? In other words, what specific gaps did the project fill?
Effectiveness	The extent to which the project achieved its objectives.	To what extent did the project achieve its intended objectives?	According to outcome and output level indicators, to what extent did the project achieve its objectives? What project activities worked well and didn't work well? What key lessons were learned?
Impact	The higher level objective that the project contributed to. The extent to which the project has generated significant positive or negative, intended, or unintended, higher-level effects.	To what extent did the project contribute towards its higher level impact objective, as identified at the application stage?	To what extent did the project contribute towards its intended impact and what is the evidence for this? Were there any unintended positive or negative impacts? What external interventions/ projects at the local/ provincial/ national/ international level contributed to the project's impact? To what extent? To what extent were these external interventions/ projects influenced/ supported by this project? To what extent did this project collaborate with external interventions/ projects to share data, findings and lessons learned?
Sustainability	The extent to which the net benefits of the	To what extent have the project's	To what extent have the project's outcome and outputs been sustained since the project closed? How likely is it that these will continue

OECD DAC Criteria	Description	Overarching questions	Sub-questions
	project have been sustained.	achievements endured?	to be sustained? Are there any further barriers that need to be overcome? To what extent has the project's higher level impact objective been sustained? How likely is it that this impact will continue to be sustained? Are there any further barriers that need to be overcome? What external interventions/ projects at the local/ provincial/ national/ international level which contributed to the higher level impact objective have been sustained? How likely is it that these interventions/ projects will continue to be sustained? Are there any further barriers that need to be overcome?
		To what extent did the project consider sustainability during planning and implementation?	What were the strengths and weaknesses of the project's exit strategy? Was the exit strategy appropriate? To what extent did the project's exit strategy address financial and capacity considerations?
		To what extent has the project achieved financial sustainability?	To what extent did the project reach a financially sustainable end point? Were further financial inputs required from the public or private sectors to sustain the project's outcome after BCFs funding? How were these financial inputs secured and managed? To what extent are financial benefits continuing to flow? Are there any further barriers to be overcome? What are the factors blocking or facilitating this flow of benefits?
		To what extent has the project achieved socioeconomic sustainability?	To what extent are the project's outcome and outputs owned by stakeholders? Do these stakeholders see that it is in their interest that project benefits continue to flow? Is there sufficient

OECD DAC Criteria	Description	Overarching questions	Sub-questions
			public/ stakeholder awareness in support of these benefits? To what extent have project activities been mainstreamed into the economy or community activities? To what extent did the project establish alternative livelihoods, value chains and market transformations? To what extent have these contributed to sustaining the project's outcome after BCFs funding? To what extent have socio economic benefits continued to flow and what is the likelihood that they will continue to do so. Are there any further barriers to be overcome?
		To what extent has the project achieved institutional sustainability?	To what extent did the project strengthen institutional capacity at the local, provincial, and national level. To what extent has this been sustained beyond BCFs funding? To what extent did the project strengthen conservation governance capacity at the local, provincial, and national levels? To what extent has this been sustained beyond BCFs funding? To what extent did the project strengthen conservation planning capacity at the local, provincial, and national levels. To what extent has this been sustained beyond BCFs funding? To what extent did the project strengthen policy and regulatory (legal) frameworks and reform beyond BCFs funding? To what extent has this been sustained beyond BCFs funding? What is the likelihood that institutional benefits will continue to flow? Are there any further barriers to be overcome?

OECD DAC Criteria	Description	Overarching questions	Sub-questions
		To what extent has the project achieved environmental sustainability	To what extent have biodiversity benefits resulting from the project been sustained post project? To what extent do current or future external activities in the project area threaten the project's sustained impact on biodiversity? To what extent are these external activities being mitigated? To what extent does climate change threaten the project's sustained impact on biodiversity? To what extent are these external activities being mitigated? What is the likelihood that environmental benefits will continue to flow? Are there any further barriers to be overcome?
		To what extent has the project scaled?	To what extent has the project scaled up and/or replicated its impact beyond BCFs funding? To what extent did learnings from this project provide the building blocks to support the design, management, outputs, and outcomes of future BCFs projects? To what extent did learnings from this project provide the building blocks to support the design, management, outputs, and outcomes of future projects by other donors, investors, and institutions? To what extent did human capacity built by this project provide subsequent BCFs projects, as well as projects by other donors, investors, and institutions, with sufficient local capacity to implement new activities?
		To what extent has the project	To what extent did the project secure additional finance from the BCFs to further its impact?

OECD DAC Criteria	Description	Overarching questions	Sub-questions
		leveraged additional funding?	To what extent did the project secure additional finance from other donors, investors, and institutions to further its impact? To what extent has the project been replicated elsewhere by other donors, investors, and institutions?
		To what extent has individual capacity been built?	To what extent has this project built the capacity of individuals? Is there evidence of project staff and beneficiaries benefitting from BCFs funding to build their careers in the conservation and development sectors? To what extent has the project identified and supported champions in the public and private sectors, and at the local community level, to promote sustainability of the project's outcome?
		To what extent has the project built an enabling environment for inclusive and equitable development?	To what extent has capacity and commitment from different stakeholder groups created and upheld an enabling environment for long term gender equality and women's empowerment? What barriers remain? To what extent has capacity and commitment from different stakeholder groups created and upheld an enabling environment for long term equality and empowerment for marginalised groups? What barriers remain? Were there any significant trade-offs between instant impact and potential longer-term benefits? Were there any significant trade-offs between financial, socioeconomic, institutional, and environmental benefits?