

**Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund  
28th Meeting of the CEPF Donor Council  
Brussels, Belgium  
20 January 2016  
2:00 to 5:00 pm CET**

**Ecosystem profile for the Guinean Forests of West Africa Hotspot**

**Recommended Action Item:**

The Donor Council is asked **to approve the ecosystem profile** for the Guinean Forests of West Africa biodiversity hotspot. Similarly, the Donor Council is asked to increase CEPF's spending authority by \$9 million for the implementation of this profile.

**Background**

The ecosystem profile for the Guinean Forests of West Africa Hotspot was developed during FY14 and FY15, following the Donor Council's approval of reinvestment in the hotspot on 12 September 2012 (CEPF/DC/electronic/24).

The ecosystem profile was prepared by a consortium consisting of the IUCN West and Central Africa Programme, the IUCN Global Species Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre. The development of the profile engaged more than 160 people representing over 110 organizations from the 11 hotspot countries: Benin; Cameroon; Côte d'Ivoire; Equatorial Guinea; Ghana; Guinea; Liberia; Nigeria; São Tomé and Príncipe; Sierra Leone; and Togo.

CEPF invested in the Guinean Forests of West Africa Hotspot between 2001 and 2011, during which it provided a total of \$8.3 million in support to conservation projects in the Upper Guinean Forests subregion. During the first full investment period, from 2001 to 2006, CEPF's investment niche focused on promoting connectivity in a broad sense, seeking not only to promote ecological connectivity but also to promote improved coordination from a political, social and administrative perspective. CEPF adopted this niche in response to the region's emergence from years of civil war, which created a great deal of political and administrative fragmentation in the governance of its natural resources.

At the end of the first funding phase, CEPF's donors and Secretariat, as well as stakeholders in the Upper Guinean Forests recognized that further CEPF investment was warranted due to several factors: the sustainability of CEPF-funded initiatives remained fragile; communities still needed support to strengthen the linkages between livelihoods generation and conservation; and capacity limitations within government agencies and civil society groups continued to stymie the achievement of conservation outcomes. As a result of these factors, the Donor Council approved a three-year consolidation phase from 2008 to 2011. The consolidation phase limited site-based investment to

priority areas in Liberia and Sierra Leone, while continuing to foster capacity building across the subregion.

CEPF's earlier investments provided an important foundation and important lessons upon which to base a new investment phase in the hotspot. The main lessons learned are summarized below:

- Emerging NGOs need to start small. They require oversight and capacity building in addition to just money, and they benefit from sharing experience with others.
- Some capacity building approaches appear to work better than others. For instance, mentoring of a small organization by a larger, longer established one seems to be more effective than professional training courses. Nevertheless, retaining trained staff is a major challenge for smaller CSOs, as they tend to leave to take up jobs that offer higher or more reliable salaries.
- Local groups have taken the initiative to form partnerships and networks, for example the Environmental Forum for Action in Sierra Leone. Such collaborations are integral to avoiding duplication of effort and maximizing conservation results.
- CEPF investments in environmental education and outreach have been innovative and unusual, in an effort to get beyond conventional efforts, which have not proven successful (but continue to be used). More innovative communication strategies, featuring the use of film, drama, music and hands-on experience, appear to have been more effective at generating enthusiasm and awareness.
- Community participation needs to be encouraged at all stages of the design and implementation of conservation interventions, to ensure they are locally owned.
- Sustaining community motivation to support conservation goals beyond the end of projects was identified as a challenge by several grantees, especially where financial incentives are used.
- Although CEPF investments were instrumental in generating biodiversity data, they fell short of setting up a region-wide biodiversity monitoring system, as originally planned. One lesson that can be drawn from this is the importance of setting feasible objectives that are well grounded in an analysis of the capacity of civil society in the region.
- Corridor creation in West Africa is complex and challenging, and requires substantial incorporation of livelihood components. Poverty is a constant obstacle to conservation success, and CEPF's projects that have included alternative income generation components have often yielded significant results.
- There is a great need for a range of grant sizes, to engage partners of differing capacities. Small grants can be particularly useful for engaging the many smaller CSOs in the hotspot that lack the capacity to handle larger amounts of funding.

The Ecosystem Profile was shared with the Working Group for review on 17 November 2015 and comments from its members have been incorporated into the final draft for the Donor Council's review. A matrix showing how comments from the Working Group have been addressed has been circulated as part of the Donor Council materials (CEPF/DC28/8b), together with an extended summary of the profile (CEPF/DC28/8c). The full text of the ecosystem profile for the Guinean Forests of West Africa Hotspot can be downloaded from:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/n45yjj651r9wgcu/AABVzgtPIn8O56nc-Ejw9h2a?dl=0>

A representative of IUCN's West and Central Africa Programme will be present at the Donor Council meeting to share the results of the profiling exercise and present the investment strategy outlined in the ecosystem profile.