



TROPICAL BIOLOGY ASSOCIATION

Civil society experience in conservation

Lessons from the Guinean Forest of West Africa



Report from experience-sharing workshops organised by the Tropical Biology Association in the Guinean Forest of West Africa hotspot, 2022

Funded by

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Rationale

“This workshop was a very enriching experience, full of knowledge sharing.”

Kenneth Tah, Cameroon

The Tropical Biology Association and its partners, hosted two workshops for civil society organizations (CSOs) to share their impacts and achievements as well as experiences and lessons in conservation in the Guinea Forest West Africa (GFWA) biodiversity hotspot. This was important in scaling local solutions and best practices beyond CEPF funding, and in helping the CSOs achieve sustainability in the long-term.

Held in Douala, Cameroon, and in Accra, Ghana, the workshops targeted the 45 CSOs involved in the TBA-led partnership to build conservation capacity of civil societies in the region, and funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF). Established conservation actors from the host countries were also invited to shared their experiences and inspire the CSOs.



Mr. Hans Njoka, the Regional Delegate for Environment Protection of Nature & Sustainable Development in Cameroon, responding to delegates' questions at the workshop in Doula.

The workshops

“Listening to all the great things different CSOs have achieved in their respective areas is humbling and encouraging at the same time.”

Emmanuel Lo-ah Kuh,
Cameroon

Lasting two days each, the workshop in Douala involved only CSOs from Cameroon, while the Accra one was regional: for CSOs from Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Togo.

The workshop followed an active participation approach with CSOs discussing and sharing case studies of their work, impacts and experiences in conservation. Because the workshops happened at the tail-end of a 5 days masterclass (on communicating conservation impacts), they gave participants an opportunity to practice their new skills on how to effectively communicate their impact to a diverse audience.

Guest speakers from the host country, provided keynote talks that highlighted relevant national and regional conservation issues and opportunities.



“Il est important d'identifier le impacts aussi bien négatifs que positifs car ceci peut nous permettre de mieux identifier nos problèmes auprès des communautés ainsi que dans la biodiversité.”

English translation:

“It is important to identify both negative and positive impacts as this can allow us to better identify our problems with communities as well as in biodiversity.”

Denis Gnamaloba, Cameroon

Quick highlights: threats to hotspot's biodiversity and solutions

*"Voracious demand for timbers
is fueling ruthless logging"*

John Akinnuba, Nigeria

Workshop speakers identified two key threats to biodiversity in the hotspot, both driven primarily by local communities strive for livelihoods:

- ❑ Hunting of wildlife species for bushmeat; reported as very rampant in most local communities across the hotspot.
- ❑ Illegal logging of indigenous tree species.

What are the solutions?

The following emerged as possible solutions:

1. Increased awareness and support for livelihood options to reduce pressure on natural resources.
2. Enhancing existing conservation and protected areas policy frameworks to increase biodiversity protection.
3. Collaboration between governments and CSOs for greater conservation impacts.

*Participant from Sierra Leones
engaging the keynote speaker at
the workshop in Accra, Ghana*





Shaping future conservation actions

Hotspot CSOs have over the years, accumulated much experience and best practices that can help improve future conservation outcomes. The next section details these experiences and lessons focusing on 5 areas: community conservation; saving species; conserving mangroves and marine ecosystems; and other cross-cutting impact areas

1. Conservation through communities

Involving communities in conservation is of great importance since people and nature are integrated. As such, hotspot CSOs have implemented diverse community projects to safeguard both livelihoods and biodiversity. Their focus included, for example, issues of customary laws and conservation; capacity building especially of indigenous institutions in sustainable natural resource management; livelihood investments and resilience; integrated rural development; resource management; collaborative protected areas management; and community-led conservation.

Through these projects, the CSOs came up with the following lessons:

- ❑ Projects on community development attract the full participation of communities.
- ❑ Identifying and analyzing stakeholders prior to project is integral to the project success.
- ❑ Project impact should be shared with all stakeholders.
- ❑ Sustainable forest management is better achieved with the community at the center.
- ❑ Traditional norms and cultural values influence conservation.
- ❑ Delay in disbursement of project funds can hinder community participation.
- ❑ Maintaining clear written terms of reference with local people and partners is important.
- ❑ Introducing village savings and loans associations in forest dependent communities helps reduce resource dependency.
- ❑ Community buy-in or ownership of project is possible if community members are involved from planning through to implementation.
- ❑ Adopting the term “livelihood options” INSTEAD of “livelihood alternatives” is better; the latter sounds more like disrupting community’s way of life.
- ❑ Livelihood options should be based on the priority needs of the community.
- ❑ Communities have greater ownership of projects they develop and/or driven by community members.

2. Saving species

The Guinean forests of West Africa hotspot supports impressive levels of biodiversity, including numerous endemic species, making it a conservation priority at the global scale.

Hotspot CSOs are saving rare and threatened sea turtles, frogs and reptiles using local ecological knowledge, and protecting endangered primates in key biodiversity areas.

Lessons from these species-specific conservation actions, are that:

- ❑ It takes a lot of effort to see some form of impact, but even very small efforts count.
- ❑ Species focused conservation has greater impact if integrated with habitat conservation.
- ❑ Bush meat consumption is a major threat for primates and needs integrated management approaches.



Sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)

3. Conserving mangroves and marine ecosystems

Several hotspot CSOs are working on mangrove restoration; on community forest management, planning and integration; on the conservation of sharks and rays, and in sustainable marine protected areas management.

These CSOs have learnt that:

- ❑ Local community and law enforcers' understanding of marine biodiversity e.g., sharks and rays is a prerequisite to sustainable marine ecosystems.
- ❑ Mangrove restoration is an underutilized natural climate solution, as mangroves and coastal ecosystems are an important carbon sink.
- ❑ Mangrove restoration may be considered a win-win investment, providing mitigation and adaption solutions to climate change.



4. Capacity building

The CSOs participated in a capacity building program that was designed to enhance their skills and conservation results eventually. This, Tropical Biology Association -led program provide staff of the CSOs with training, mentoring and follow up support. Due to the covid 19 pandemic, some events happened online, and some in person.

This experience generated the following lessons:

- ❑ Virtual learning works but face-to-face learning is more effective as it provides adequate opportunities for interactions.
- ❑ Effective communication improves partners participation and project impacts.
- ❑ Skills in strategic management, together with having administrative documents like communication strategy, fundraising plan, gender policy and strategic plan, enhances CSOs sustainability.
- ❑ Continuous conservation education especially with local content can lead to behavioral change in the long term
- ❑ Learning-by-doing approach increases retention of the knowledge acquired.

Specific lessons from the Tropical Biology Association;

- ❑ Going virtual was challenging but an important adaptive strategy to meet the project's objectives
- ❑ The combined expertise of the TBA and national mentors created a valuable learning opportunity.
- ❑ CSO staff have limited time – so they and their mentors needed to plan ahead to meet online.
- ❑ Group mentoring – on shared challenges -was very effective and popular.

5. Cross cutting actions

Conserving nature often involves different disciplines. This cross-cutting thinking helps ensure actions are integrated and mainstreamed, for greater outcome. This is something CSOs working in the hotspot have adopted as part of their work on wild bushfires, agroforestry and restoration, and they shared the following lessons on what works and what does not work

The lessons thelearnt the outlined below:

- ❑ Land use plans are effective ways of applying the 3Cs: Community, Commercial and Conservation.
- ❑ Conservation is an investment and the community are also investors in the desire to derive tangible benefits.
- ❑ Local indigenous and ecological knowledge should not be overlooked in conservation.
- ❑ Conservation without the provision of economic benefits, often fails when working with communities.
- ❑ CSOs must network and collaborate, among themselves and with government to bring about wider impact.
- ❑ Regular and timely reporting is essential for stakeholders' consistency and commitment.
- ❑ Conflict analysis should be prioritized before project commencement, and practiced on a regular basis to ensure project flow and sustainability.

Looking ahead:



After taking stock of the current situation in the hotspot (the big picture), the lessons learnt, and the best practices from investments in the GFWA hotspot; it is vital to think about what next.

The hotspot is rich with biodiversity and complex interrelated ecosystems. Therefore, to achieve sustainable conservation results it is necessary to consider integrated landscape-level approaches. This will ensure diverse factors that influence the integrity of the hotspot, and its Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) are considered and appropriately planned for.

Similarly, sustainability in the hotspot cannot be achieved without communities' ownership. For future priorities and strategies for conservation in the GFWA hotspot, the contribution of the CSOs (and by

extension the local communities) is of importance.

The CSOs are passionate about conservation, and about engaging their communities to conserve threatened species and precious habitats.

Moving the hotspot CSOs discussed and generated recommendations that they felt would result in more sustainable conservation actions in the hotspot. These, they outlined for each of the CEPF's strategic directions, as below.

Sustaining conservation impacts in the hotspot: CSOs perspective

Strategic Direction 1 – Local Communities

Local Community Forest or environment management boards should be set up and trained to implement a monitoring scheme.

Build a strong network of civil society and community-based organisations at national and regional levels.

Conservation package for local communities should be attractive and ecologically sound.

Strategic Direction 2 – Biodiversity Conservation

Develop specific national and regional policy for mangrove protected areas within the Guinean Forests of West Africa hotspot.

Foster stronger collaboration with government, private sector, CSOs and communities on the implementation of biodiversity conservation

Build the capacities of CSOs to carry out biodiversity research on endangered species

Strategic Direction 3 – Globally Threatened Species

Determine/update population and distribution of threatened species in the hotspot – put all desired impacts in a logical framework with specific actions.

Reduce habitat loss in the hotspot by 20% in the next 10years; some of the habitat loss drivers to be addressed include farming, mining, bushfires, illegal logging.

To achieve the above, the following interventions are needed: policy review, education and sensitization, and training.

Strategic Direction 4 – Capacity of Local Civil Society Organizations

Strengthen CSOs (incl. women-led) in each KBAs to lead in overall project implementation.

Build CSOs capacity to engage and collaborate with government.

Develop a strong hotspot network for CSOs to sustain information, ideas and knowledge sharing.

Build capacity of CSOs, communities, government and private sector on biodiversity conservation

Appendix: Participants

55 staff (33% females) of 43 CSOs participated in the two workshops (F=Female; M=Male), as listed below.

Workshop Venue & dates	CSO country	CSO full name	Male	Female	
Accra, Ghana 14 – 15 March 2022	Ghana F3:M8	Biodiversity Alliance Ghana		1	
		Capacity for Sustainable Change - Ghana	1		
		Conservation Foundation	1		
		Daasgift Quality Foundation		1	
		HATOF Foundation		1	
		Hen Mpoano	1		
		Institute of Nature and Environmental Conservation	1		
		Resourcetrust Network	1		
		Save Our Environment Foundation	2		
		Wild Fauna Foundation	1		
	Liberia F2	Foundation for Community Initiatives			1
		Rural integrated centre for community Empowerment			1
	Nigeria F3:M8	Agriculture Gender and Environment foundation			1
		Biakwan Light	1		
		Biodiversity Preservation Center			1
		Centre for Ecological and Community Development	1		
		Development Concern	1		
		Etara Eyeyeng Forest Concerns	1		
		Green Concern for Development	1		
		Integrated Mangrove Watch Association of Nigeria	1		
		Non-Governmental Organization Coalition for Environment	1		
		Peace Point Development Foundation	1		
	Sierra Leone F3	Women in Nature Conservation Organization			1
		Falaba District Women's Network			1
		Muloma Women's Development Association			1
	Togo F1	Jeunes Volontaires pour l'Environnement			1
	Doula, Cameroon 7- 8 Feb 2022	Cameroon F6:M21	Action pour le Respect et la Protection de l'Environnement	1	1
African Marine Mammal Conservation Organization			2		
Agriculture and Bio-conservation Organization for Youth Empowerment and Rural Development			1		
Ajemalebu Self Help			1	1	
Bagyeli's Cultural and Development Association			1		
Biodiversité-Environnement et Développement Durable			2		
Cameroon Gender and Environment Watch			1	1	
Centre des ressources Agroforestières, forestières et de Formation continue du Nord			2		
Community Assistance in Development			2		
Daraja Reube Mbororo Development Association					1
Forest and Agroforestry Promoters			1		
Forest and Rural Development					2
Resource Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development			2		
Sustainable Agricultural Technicians			1		
Tube AWU			2		
Twahnto Mixed Farming Common Initiative Group			2		
World Economy Skills and Agro Development					1

Thank you note

“Sharing about our work has opened up opportunities for local and regional collaborations.”

Loretta Alethea Pope Kai,
Liberia

We register special gratitude to guest presenters/ facilitators;

- Hans Njoka – Regional Delegate for Environment Protection of Nature & Sustainable Development, Cameroon.
- Mor Bakia Achankap – WWF Cameroon
- Estelle Karyn Mandeng Ntsimi – WWF Cameroon
- Dr. Caleb Ofori - Herps Ghana and Forestry Department
- Michael David, Global Initiative for Food Security and Ecosystem Preservation, Nigeria.

The workshops were designed and coordinated by the Tropical Biology Association, in partnership with:



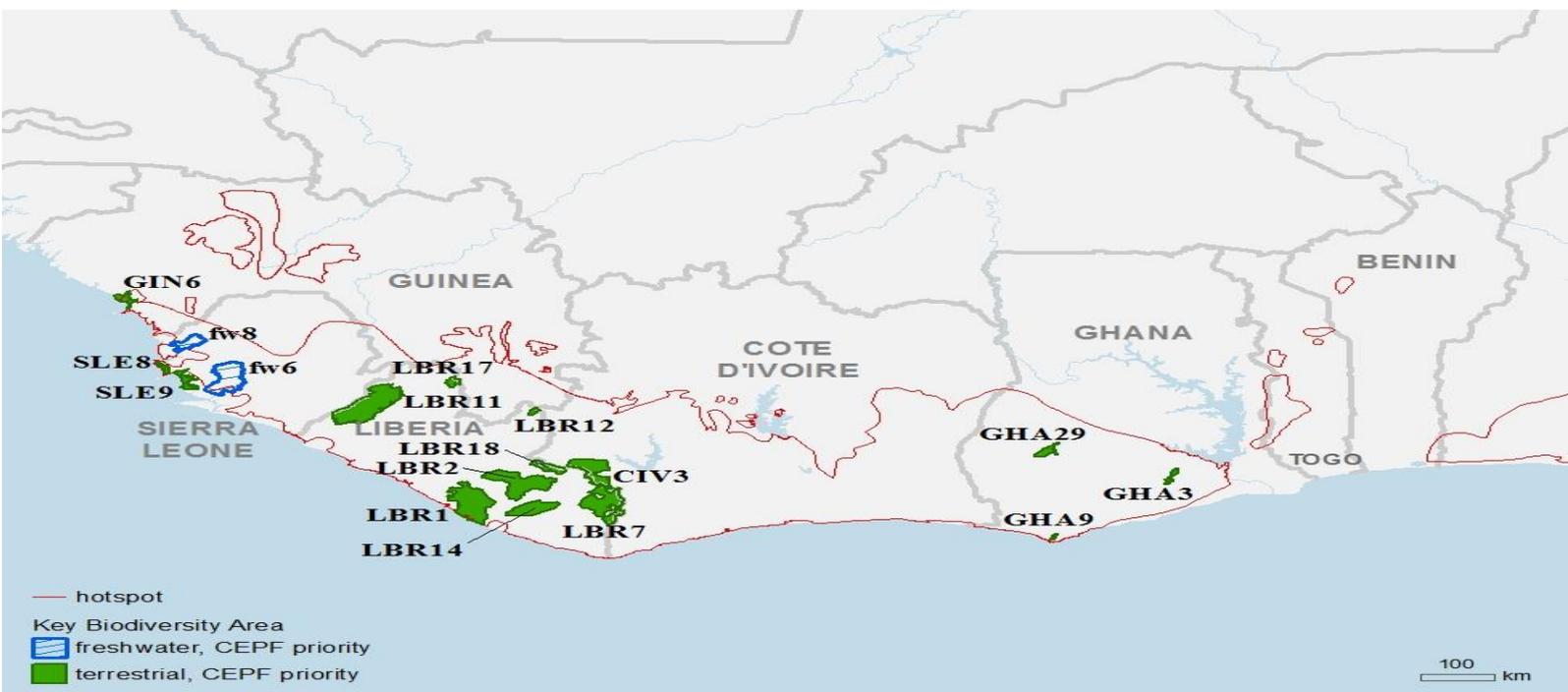
with additional support from the **CEPF Regional Implementing Team for the hotspot, Birdlife International, Ghana.**

Funding

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CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM PARTNERSHIP FUND

The **Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund** is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation.



About TBA

The Tropical Biology Association helps safeguard natural resources in Africa and other tropical regions by delivering innovative training and support to the people responsible for conserving nature.

We run practical field, and tailor-made courses in Africa and south-east Asia. By sharing expert knowledge across different cultures, we help ensure that the conservation community has the essential skills and capacity to manage resources sustainably.

To make sure our training has maximum impact, we provide on-going support for our trainees. This helps cement relations and build confidence as well as ensures our trainees apply skills learned effectively, afterwards.

Our growing network of over 2600 alumni span over 60 countries and is creating a potent international force for conserving precious habitats and threatened species.

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