

CYNOSURE

EVALUATION REPORT – FULL VERSION

EVALUATION OF LESSONS LEARNED IN RELATION TO THE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION TEAM FOR THE GUINEAN FORESTS OF WEST AFRICA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

SUBMITTED TO

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The implementation of the current CEPF investment strategy in the Guinean Forests of West Africa (GFWA) started in July 2016 with an initial total investment of USD 9 million for an initial five-year cycle until July 2021. In 2018, an additional USD 1.1 million were allocated to increase the spending authority on the current investment in the GFWA hotspot from the USD 2.55 million provided by the AFD, to a total investment of USD 10.1 million. The added funds extended the timeframe of the investment cycle by one additional year to conclude on 30th June 2022.

The CEPF commissioned Cynosure International to conduct an independent evaluation of the lessons learned in relation to the Regional Implementation Team for the Guinean Forests of West Africa hotspot. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the performance of the RIT in relation to the geography of the hotspot, the capacity of civil society there, the budget allocated to the RIT, and its achievement of individual deliverables as defined in its grant agreement with the CEPF. The Evaluation was undertaken through a consultative and participatory approach and employed mixed methodologies, combining qualitative and quantitative data from both primary and secondary data sources through Desk Review of relevant documents, key informant interviews with the CEPF, BirdLife International, and the RIT, and in-depth interviews with a sample of small and large grantees.

In terms of Relevance, the RIT's efforts to **coordinate the CEPF investment** in the hotspot involved donor coordination and engagement, and facilitating the formation of grantee networks and partnerships. With regards to engagement with other conservation actors, the RIT was seen to have formed partnerships with PPI, MAVFA Foundation, and IUCN Netherlands which resulted in close collaboration through co-funding projects, knowledge sharing and learning, as well as input into the external review processes. However, initial efforts to conduct multi-donor engagements and coordination were unable to be continued due to human resource constraints. Moreover, it was also found that the RIT's engagement with local representatives of CEPF donors in the region was minimal. In the case of grantees, the RIT was seen to have facilitated the formation of partnerships; however, local civil society organizations pointed to the need for deepening these efforts due to the pervasive perception of conservation actors to see one another as competitors. With regards to **communications**, the RIT conducted exchange visits with other RITs as well as held events such as the Mid-Term and Final Assessment Workshops which functioned as avenues for knowledge sharing, networking, and dissemination of learnings. However, the RIT faced sustained human resource and inadequate budgetary allocations and challenges, which affected its ability to effectively deliver various communication products and outputs. Lastly, the evaluation also revealed that the development of the **long-term vision** was delayed by 02 years from originally planned, and lacked sufficient representation of public sector stakeholders.

With regards to **Efficiency**, the evaluation found that the RIT encountered challenges within six months of implementation in terms of staffing arrangements and time management due to the

underestimation of management expenditure in its proposal to CEPF. While efforts to manage these challenges were made through reallocation of budget to increase the time for key personnel, these allocations reduced the share of budget for travel and events which are also key activities for supporting grantees throughout the investment cycle, but particularly during the initial years of the RIT's operations. Due to additional funding received from the AFD, the total budget allocated to the RIT's Management increased which allowed the RIT to cover the personnel costs needed, as well as increase the implementation duration by one additional year.

In terms of **Effectiveness** of the RIT structure, the RIT faced challenges in the form of retaining and recruiting staff which were further compounded by the overall restructuring of Birdlife International's West Africa Sub-regional Office and the limited alignment and integration of the RIT within the wider portfolio of Birdlife in the West Africa region. In addition, while the distribution of the RIT across different regions of the hotspot allowed for greater hands-on support to applicants and grantees through greater accessibility and mobility of the RIT, there were significant coordination, communication and management issues faced which negatively affected the performance of the RIT and caused delays during the implementation of the small grants mechanism. These challenges were alleviated through the relocation of the RIT staff to a central location, in Accra, Ghana, which allowed for greater supervision and monitoring of the RIT team. Furthermore, the frequent staffing changes necessitated in the RIT having to improvise by taking on additional responsibilities such as communications functions and management of grantees in additional countries, which stretched the internal capacity of the RIT thin. Overall, these continuous staffing challenges for most of the implementation period also strained the resources and capacity of the CEPF Secretariat and necessitated the Grant Director to allocate a disproportionately greater amount of time and effort to provide hands-on supervision and support.

With regards to **Coverage**, the current GFWA investment comprised of a total of 76 small and large grants awarded to 64 grantees, for a combined total of USD 8,293,914. A total of **46 small grants** (including those awarded to 19 mentees) were awarded to 38 grantee organizations through 04 calls for proposals over the course of the six-year implementation period for an overall total of USD 1,384,526. These small grants were distributed across 09 of the 11 hotspot countries (so excluding Benin and Togo). In total, **30 large grants** were awarded to 26 grantees through 04 calls for proposals over the six-year implementation period for a total of USD 6,909,388. These large grants were distributed across all 11 hotspot countries, with 08 countries covered under single-country awards; and Benin, Equatorial Guinea, and Togo covered through 01 multi-country grant. While the RIT was successful in developing a grant portfolio that met the target allocations against the four Strategic Directions, the evaluation found that the RIT faced challenges in terms of timely reviewing the submitted proposals which resulted in a backlog and caused delays in the implementation of the small grants mechanism.

Concerning **Accessibility and Impact**, the evaluation revealed that **the RIT provided significant support to grantees at various stages of the project cycle**. This support was extended to grantees **during the shortlisting stage** through **one-on-one support** to promising applicants by providing them with feedback on how they could further improve the design of their project so that it aligns

better with the CEPF's investment strategy. **The RIT's support to grantees continued during the implementation of their grants as well.** Such support was provided in various ways ranging from remote support on meeting technical and financial reporting standards to technical guidance and assistance vis-à-vis implementation. However, a significant majority of the small grant applications required additional hands-on support of varying levels to strengthen their applications which **put a strain on the RIT's own internal capacities to be responsive.** Nevertheless, grantees were unanimous in their view that the **RIT provided greater support, guidance, and assistance** at numerous stages of a project cycle, **in comparison to other donors who offer much limited support to grantees.**

Overall, the evaluation found that while the RIT was mostly successful in achieving its established targets and results, the overall efficiency of its delivery was found to be significantly hampered throughout the implementation duration due to the abovementioned factors. In light of the findings, the evaluation yielded the following recommendations to the CEPF for any future investments in the GFWA hotspot.

1. **Coverage of the GFWA Hotspot:** The GFWA hotspot is spread across 11 countries in West Africa, with vast linguistic and socio-political diversity (05 Francophonic countries, 04 Anglophonic countries, 01 Portuguese, and 01 Spanish). In addition, the geographic spread of the hotspot area poses limitations and challenges in terms of travel and logistics due to the relatively lower level of air connectivity in the region.

In light of such challenges and accounting for the diversity of the hotspot, it is recommended that the CEPF consider narrowing its geographic focus. Some suggested strategies could be focusing on a sub-set of countries in the hotspot with a higher proportion of geographic overlap, KBAs and corridors; or managing the GFWA hotspot by two RITs covering the upper and lower regions of the hotspot, respectively.

2. **Initial Outreach and Communications:** The evaluation revealed that the initial call for proposals resulted in the submission of relatively fewer proposals for both the small and large grants. Moreover, duplication and limited innovative approaches were also found in these initial batches of proposals.

It is therefore recommended that the future RIT utilize the inception period of a new investment cycle to undertake intensive stakeholder engagement efforts to socialize the aims of the CEPF's investment in a hotspot to ensure the CEPF's visibility in a hotspot and to facilitate the submission of quality proposals that align with the strategic vision and priorities of the CEPF in a given hotspot.

3. **Staggered Approach to Calls for Proposals:** The evaluation found that the second call for proposals for small and large grant applications was issued within a short span of approximately two months from one another, in which grantees from all 11 countries of the hotspots were eligible to apply for three of the four SDs. Consequently, nearly 300 LoIs were received, which posed significant strains on the RIT to review and process, resulting in a backlog of work, particularly on the implementation of the small grants mechanism.

It is therefore recommended that the future RIT and CEPF consider a more staggered approach to issuing call for proposals with more selective and targeted eligibility criteria in an effort to avoid these challenges.

4. **Structure of the RIT:** The evaluation found that the initial proposal submitted by BirdLife International for the RIT grant had underestimated the extent to which key personnel would need to dedicate their time to the RIT. Consequently, there was a need to reallocate budget away from other budget categories towards the core team of personnel to ensure that 100% of their time would be dedicated to the RIT.

It is therefore recommended that the CEPF pay particular attention to the staffing composition and time allocations of key personnel of the RIT proposal to ensure that reasonably sufficient human resources are dedicated within the RIT.

5. **Donor Engagement and Coordination:** Engagement and collaboration with other donors in the region is key to ensure synergies with ongoing activities and projects within the region, avoiding duplication of efforts, and facilitating greater collaboration through in-kind and/or financial support. The RIT was found to have led an initial round of multi-donor engagements but was unable to build upon the momentum due to the budgetary and time constraints.

It is therefore recommended that for future CEPF investments in the hotspot, the RIT ensure sufficient budgetary and human resources are allocated for leading these multi-donor engagement and coordination efforts over the course of implementation.

6. **Capacity Building of Grantees:** The evaluation found that the adoption of the Master Class workshop model from the RIT in the Eastern Afrotropical was highly beneficial to the grantees in improving their skills on various aspects of the project cycle from project design and proposal development to monitoring and implementation of safeguards.

It is thus recommended that the CEPF and the future RIT adopt the Master Class model systematically in the hotspot.

ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------------|--|
| AFD | Agence française de développement |
| CEPF | Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund |
| CI | Conservation International |
| CSO | Civil Society Organization |
| CSTT | Civil Society Tracking Tool |
| EFA | Environmental Foundation Africa |
| EPA | Environmental Protection Agency |
| EU | European Union |
| FODER | Forêts et Développement Rural |
| GEF | Global Environment Facility |
| GFWA | Guinean Forests of West Africa |
| GoG | Gulf of Guinea |
| GTT | Gender Tracking Tool |
| IDI | In-Depth Interview |
| KBA | Key Biodiversity Area |
| KII | Key Informant Interview |
| Lol | Letters of Inquiry |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| PPI | Programme des Petites Initiatives |
| RIT | Regional Implementation Team |
| RSPB | Royal Society for the Protection of Birds |
| SD | Strategic Direction |
| SGM | Small Grants Mechanism |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| SRPO | Sub-Regional Program Officer |
| SWOVUGE | Society for Women and Vulnerable Group Empowerment |
| USD | United States Dollar |
| WASRO | West Africa Sub-Regional Office |
| WB | World Bank |

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

To preserve the biodiversity of the 36 global hotspots, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) was initiated in 2000 as a joint initiative of Conservation International (CI), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and the World Bank (WB) to serve as a crucial mechanism for enabling civil society organizations (CSOs) to support conservation of critical ecosystems within biodiversity hotspots.¹ To date, the CEPF has invested in 24 hotspots and awarded USD 271 million in grants to over 2,500 civil society organizations across the world.² Within each of its biodiversity hotspots, the CEPF operates in five-year investment periods.

CEPF aims to address the dangers posed to the ‘critical ecosystems’ by empowering civil society in developing countries and transitional economies to protect the world’s biodiversity hotspots. It seeks to protect biodiversity, build local conservation leadership, and nurture sustainable development by supporting the development of conservation strategies driven by local communities and providing grants to civil society — nongovernmental, private sector and academic organizations, among others — to implement those strategies. The CEPF engages a Regional Implementation Team (RIT) in each biodiversity hotspot to provide strategic leadership to CEPF’s programs and investments made under it.

1.1 CEPF INVESTMENT IN THE GUINEAN FORESTS OF WEST AFRICA HOTSPOT

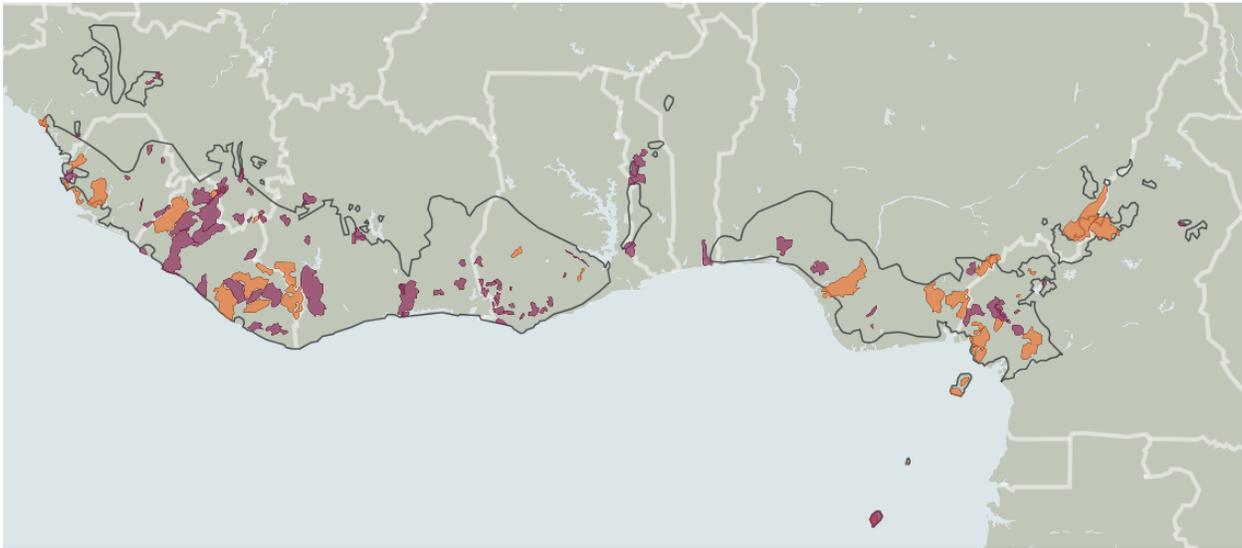
The implementation of the current CEPF investment strategy in the Guinean Forests of West Africa (GFWA) started in July 2016 with an initial total investment of USD 9 million for an initial five-year cycle until July 2021. In 2018, an additional USD 1.1 million were allocated to increase the spending authority on the current investment in the GFWA hotspot from the USD 2.55 million provided by the AFD, to a total investment of USD 10.1 million. The added funds extended the timeframe of the investment cycle by one additional year to conclude on 30th June 2022. The current investment cycle follows an initial investment (2001 to 2012) during which the CEPF provided a total of USD 8.3 million to support conservation projects in the Upper Guinean Forests subregion of the GFWA hotspot.

It is worth noting that the current investment cycle encompasses the entirety of the GFWA biodiversity hotspot, whereas the previous investment cycle from 2001 to 2012 covered only countries in the Upper Guinean Forests subregion. In total, the GFWA hotspot covers a total of 11 countries as depicted in the figure below.

¹ <https://www.cepf.net/about/our-history>

² <https://www.cepf.net/about>

FIGURE 1: GEOGRAPHY OF THE GFWA HOTSPOT



The current CEPF investment in the hotspot is undergirded by the ecosystem profile, finalized in December 2015, which serves as a detailed strategy for CEPF investment, over a five-year period between 2016 and 2021, to guide its reinvestment in the hotspot. The ecosystem profile provides a detailed overview of the hotspot including its biological and ecological importance, targets for conservation, socioeconomic, policy and civil society contexts, threats to biodiversity, and patterns in conservation investment in the region. In addition to a situational analysis, the ecosystem profile also lays out the definition of a niche for CEPF investment, an investment strategy, and a plan for sustaining results beyond the end of the investment phase.

Similar to other ecosystem profiles developed for other hotspots, the ecosystem profile for the GFWA hotspot was developed through a participatory process involving consultations with a range of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in the region, including civil society organizations and donors operating in the region, in order to account for the needs and ongoing activities of the region’s stakeholders and allow other donors and programs to complement CEPF’s investments.

The ecosystem profile outlines a total of 13 investment priorities organized into five strategic directions as outlined in the table below.

TABLE 1: CEPF STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND INVESTMENT PRIORITIES IN THE GFWA HOTSPOT

| Strategic Direction | Investment Priorities |
|--|--|
| SD 1: Empower local communities to engage in sustainable management of 40 priority sites and consolidate ecological connectivity at the landscape scale | 1.1: Strengthen the elaboration and/or implementation of <u>land-use planning</u> , land tenure and forestry reforms to facilitate good governance in the management of community and private reserves and concessions |
| | 1.2: Promote preparation and implementation of participatory <u>management plans</u> that support stakeholder collaboration in protected area management |
| | 1.3: Demonstrate <u>sustainable livelihood/job creation activities</u> for local communities that will act as incentives |

| | |
|--|--|
| | for the conservation of priority sites (e.g. domestication of wildlife species, sustainable logging from locally controlled forests, harvesting of NTFPs, sustainable agriculture, etc.) |
| SD 2: Mainstream biodiversity conservation into public policy and private sector practice in the nine conservation corridors, at local, sub-national and national levels | 2.1: Conduct policy-relevant <u>research, analysis and outreach</u> that informs and influences the development of national government conservation policies, including on protected area management, payment for ecosystem services, REDD+ and ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change |
| | 2.2: Generate <u>locally-relevant information</u> on natural ecosystems (e.g., economic valuations of ecosystem services) to influence political and economic decision-making in favor of their conservation |
| | 2.3: Facilitate <u>partnerships</u> among local communities, private sector and government to demonstrate models for best practice mining, sustainable forestry and sustainable agriculture by private companies |
| SD 3: Safeguard priority globally threatened species by identifying and addressing major threats and information gap | 3.1: Support the implementation of <u>Conservation Action Plans</u> for Critically Endangered and Endangered species on the IUCN Red List |
| | 3.2: Update the <u>KBA analysis</u> by incorporating recently available data, including on Alliance for Zero Extinction sites and global Red List assessments and by conducting targeted research to fill critical knowledge gaps |
| SD 4: Build the capacity of local civil society organizations , including Indigenous People’s, women’s and youth groups, to conserve and manage globally important biodiversity | 4.1: Strengthen the <u>capacity of local civil society organizations</u> in financial, institutional and project management, organizational governance, and fundraising |
| | 4.2: Establish and strengthen <u>women-led conservation and development organizations</u> , associations and networks to foster gender equality in natural resource management and benefit sharing |
| | 4.3: Strengthen the <u>communication capacity</u> of local civil society organizations in support of their mission and to build public awareness on the importance of conservation outcomes |
| SD 5: Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination of conservation investment through a Regional Implementation Team | 5.1: Operationalize and coordinate <u>CEPF’s grant-making processes and procedures</u> to ensure effective implementation of the investment strategy throughout the hotspot |
| | 5.2: Build a <u>broad constituency of civil society groups</u> working across institutional and political boundaries to achieve common conservation objectives |

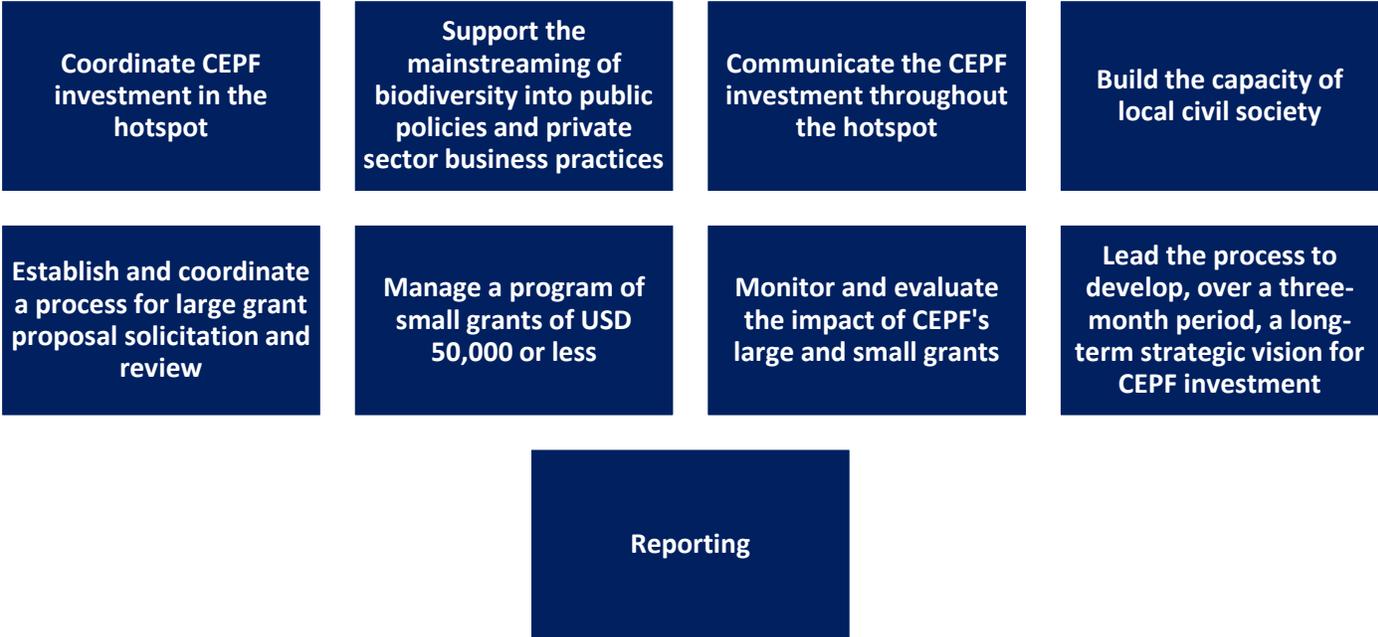
1.2 REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION TEAM OF THE GFWA HOTSPOT

Under the Strategic Direction (SD) 5, on July 01 2016, **Birdlife International** was awarded a grant of USD 1.5 million (of the total USD 9 million which covers all 5 SDs) to act as the Regional

Implementation Team (RIT). The total grant amount awarded to Birdlife International for RIT management was amended to USD 1.8 million in 2021 to cover for the extended duration of the investment period.

The RIT functions as a means of supporting the delivery of the full suite of Strategic Directions as identified in the ecosystem profile of the GFWA hotspot. The role of the RIT involves operationalizing and coordinating CEPF’s grant-making processes and procedures whilst building a broad constituency of civil society groups working across international and political boundaries. In addition, the role of the RIT also involves the solicitation and review of proposals, reporting and monitoring, communication to local and regional stakeholders, partnership and capacity building, and the management of the small grants mechanism (SGM). The role of the RIT is summarily presented in Figure 02 below.

FIGURE 2: SUMMARIZED COMPONENTS OF THE RIT’S WORK



2. ABOUT THE EVALUATION

The CEPF commissioned Cynosure International to conduct an independent evaluation of the lessons learned in relation to the Regional Implementation Team for the Guinean Forests of West Africa hotspot. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the performance of the RIT in relation to the geography of the hotspot, the capacity of civil society there, the budget allocated to the RIT, and its achievement of individual deliverables as defined in its grant agreement with the CEPF. The programmatic scope of the evaluation is summarily presented in the table below.

TABLE 2: PROGRAMMATIC SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

SCOPE OF WORK

In order to establish objectively comparable performance, the review team will assess and rate the project under review on the following criteria:

i) Relevance

- Were the activities undertaken relevant to the ecosystem profile, RIT terms of reference, the geography of the hotspot, the capacity of civil society there, and the global monitoring framework of CEPF?

ii) Efficiency

- How efficiently was the budget allocated to the RIT converted into results?

iii) Effectiveness

- What were the strengths and weakness of the RIT structure and capacities regarding effective delivery of results?

iv) Coverage

- To what extent does the portfolio of grants awarded to date cover the strategic directions and investment priorities set out in the investment strategy for the hotspot?

v) Impact

- To what extent have the targets set in the hotspot ecosystem profile for impacts on biodiversity conservation, human wellbeing, civil society capacity and enabling conditions been met?

vi) Accessibility

- Does the grant portfolio involve an appropriate balance of international and local grantees, taking into account the relative strengths of different organizations with regard to delivery of the investment strategy and considering the priority given by CEPF to building the capacity of local civil society?

vii) Adaptive management

- In what ways has the development of the grant portfolio been constrained by risks (political/institutional/security/health) or taken advantage of unanticipated opportunities?

▪ The evaluation will consider the performance of the RIT in relation to:

- the **geography** of the hotspot;
- the **capacity** of civil society there;
- the **budget** allocated;
- their **achievement of deliverables** as defined in their individual grant agreement with CEPF; and
- the **impacts of the investment** to date (in terms of biodiversity, human wellbeing, civil society capacity and enabling conditions for conservation); and
- the **review of the institutional landscape** in Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot and identify candidate organizations that could potentially perform the RIT role (either alone or as part of a consortium).

2.1 EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The Evaluation was undertaken from June 2022 to September 2022. The Evaluation Team adopted a consultative and participatory approach and employed mixed methodologies, combining qualitative and quantitative data from both primary and secondary data sources. The Evaluation was undertaken by Cynosure International, Inc.³ and the team included Ms. Umm e Zia as the International Team Leader, Mr. Maurice Henri Tadjuidje as the National Consultant for the Upper Guinean Forest Region, Mr. David Kwabena Essien as the National Consultant for the

³ www.cynosure-intl.com

Lower Guinean Forest Region, Mr. Faaiz Irfan as the Evaluation Assistant, and Ms. Hamda Arif as the Project Coordinator.

The Evaluation was designed to be undertaken based on a literature review, collection of primary data from a sample of stakeholders through key informant and in-depth interviews. The list of documents reviewed is provided in Annex 01.

Based on the **desk review**, the programmatic and geographic scope of the evaluation activities as well as samples for interviews was determined. In addition, Key Informant Interview (KII) and In-Depth Interview (IDI) guide sheets were developed by the Evaluation Team and utilized during the course of interviews with various stakeholders, partners, and beneficiaries, etc. The data collection tools pertaining to the various project participants are attached in Annex 03.

Key informant interviews were conducted with the CEPF, BirdLife International as the Regional Implementation Team. These interviews were conducted remotely using online communication software, including Zoom and MS Teams. In addition, **In-Depth Interviews** with a select sample of large and small project grantees were also conducted. In total, the Evaluation Team conducted 06 KIIs and 07 IDIs with the various stakeholders. The details of the interviewees are provided in Annex 02.

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

| No. | Data Collection Method | No. of Interviews |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Key Informant Interviews | 06 |
| 2. | In-Depth Interviews | 07 |
| Total Interviews | | 13 |

3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

3.1 RELEVANCE

This section seeks to assess the extent to which the activities undertaken by the RIT were relevant to the ecosystem profile, the geography of the hotspot, the capacity of civil society and the global monitoring framework of the CEPF. In addition, under the Relevance criteria, the evaluation also assessed the RIT's performance in terms of three components of the RIT's ToRs: a) Coordinate CEPF investment in the hotspot (C.1); b) Communicate the CEPF investment throughout the hotspot (C.3); and c) Lead the process to develop, over a three-month period, a long-term strategic vision for CEPF investment (C.8).

3.1.1 COORDINATE CEPF INVESTMENT IN THE HOTSPOT

The evaluation found that the RIT has undertaken the coordination of the CEPF investment in the hotspot through multiple avenues and channels. The **RIT was found to have regular engagements with other donors and regional programs** in the hotspot through attendance and participation in public events such as summits, seminars, panel sessions, and meetings. These engagements have led to greater **collaboration in a few key instances**. For instance, in 2017, a MoU was signed between the CEPF and Programme des Petites Initiatives (PPI) and the MAVA Foundation and IUCN Netherlands. The RIT subsequently collaborated with the signatories of the MoU and the key outcomes of this close cooperation and collaboration included the co-funding of projects falling in the geographic and thematic overlap among the CEPF and the PPI, consultation and review support from the PPI team and the MAVA Foundation for the CEPF capacity building implementation, and regular exchange of information among the organizations in an effort to avoid duplication and complement each other's investments in the region. In addition, the CEPF also provided external review support to the PPI for the applications it received.

The current CEPF investment in the GFWA hotspot was also utilized by other donor-funded programs and Birdlife programs such as the ECOFAC-funded project in Sao Tome and Principe, the Trillion Trees Initiative, and the Forest Programme in the Gola Landscape, who made efforts to ensure that their projects had direct linkages and synergies with those of the CEPF's. In addition, a key outcome of such collaboration was seen in the case of the ECOFAC-funded project, which provided funding support for the position of a part-time RIT focal point in Sao Tome and Principe who provided support to the monitoring of CEPF-funded projects on the ground.

A major lesson learned from the RIT's experience in coordinating and conducting donor engagement has been the **need for budget and human resource allocation to facilitate multi-donor engagement efforts**. For instance, in January 2017, the CEPF and the RIT promoted a two-day stakeholders and donor roundtable meeting to address financing, managing and implementing biodiversity conservation programs in the GFWA hotspot and the wider West Africa region which was attended by at least 40 participants from 34 organizations including donors, executing agencies and civil society organizations. However, the RIT was unable to continue facilitating such a donor roundtable in its subsequent years of implementation due to limited time and human resource capacity. Furthermore, the evaluation also found that the RIT's initial success in facilitating the donor roundtable was attributable to the strong leadership

profile and renown of the initial RIT Team Leader who was able to coordinate such an effort. Therefore, another key element to pay attention to in subsequent efforts at facilitating multi-donor coordination and **collaboration efforts within a hotspot pertains to the capacity of key RIT personnel in being able to successfully garner the interests of other donors** and actors in a hotspot.

Furthermore, it was also found that the RIT's engagement with local representatives of CEPF's existing donors such as EU and AFD has been minimal throughout implementation. The RIT joined the CEPF's Executive and Grant Directors to present the GFWA RIT portfolio to the EU members of the CEPF Donor Council in Brussels in May 2017 to discuss opportunities for the EU to increase funding for the GFWA grants portfolio. In the case of GEF, the RIT was found to have undertaken some engagements with the GEF Small Grants Programme in Togo in 2017 to present the CEPF investment portfolio and establish contact with civil society organizations in Togo and encourage responses to the second call for proposals. Although several small and large grant proposals were received from civil society organizations in Togo as a result of this engagement, none were awarded a grant. GEF was also engaged by the RIT during the long-term vision exercise and a representative from GEF Global was on the steering committee formed in December 2021 overseeing the development of the long-term vision.

The advent of the **COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges in terms of the RIT's engagements** and participation at relevant forums and events which ceased in the first half of 2020, due to restrictions on gatherings and mobility. However, the RIT continued engaging and collaborating with existing partners such as the PPI/IUCN, ECOFAC, and other Birdlife International projects in the region for the remaining duration of the investment period.

Another key element of the coordination of the CEPF investment in the hotspot involves building partnerships and networks among grantees in order to achieve the objectives of the ecosystem profile. The RIT undertook several activities to facilitate collaboration between grantees. For instance, In-country engagements were held in the first half of 2017 in 5 of the 11 countries, with remote engagements conducted in the remaining countries. These workshops provided an opportunity to grantees operating in the same country to network, and share knowledge, learnings and information with one another. The RIT also encouraged collaboration between grantees at the application stage and during implementation. For instance, to facilitate greater collaboration between grantees, the RIT informed grantees operating at the same sites and regions about each other's activities and encouraged communication between them to avoid overlaps and duplication of efforts in order to strengthen their implementation. For example, Hen Mpoano and ResourceTrust Network collaborated with each other throughout the implementation of their respective projects in the Cape Three Point Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) in Ghana as a result of the RIT's efforts.

The RIT's function as a **facilitator of a network and coordinated action of grantees was illustrated by work undertaken by grantees for identifying and filling critical information and knowledge gaps at the KBA level (SD 3)**. The work undertaken independently by large grantees such as IUCN, Missouri Botanical Gardens, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) was upscaled through the RIT in the form of increased coordination and collaboration between

these grantees and other small grantees across the region through shared training sessions and engagement and participation of the CEPF grantees network in various workshops.

Nevertheless, numerous stakeholders from the CEPF, the RIT, and grantees have indicated that **the lack of collaboration between civil society organizations towards common objectives and goals has been a challenge** in the context of the GFWA hotspot as civil society organizations see each other as competitors. To that end, the grantees indicated that the RIT should further its efforts towards convening civil society organizations and facilitating the formation of networks and partnerships.

3.1.2 COMMUNICATE THE CEPF INVESTMENT THROUGHOUT THE HOTSPOT

The RIT undertook several activities to **Communicate the CEPF investment throughout the hotspot**. In this regard, **a key achievement of the RIT was the development of a portfolio document for the mid-term and final assessment workshops** which documented all the grants that were completed and ongoing. Interviews with the CEPF and project grantees revealed that the RIT's effort to compile and publish the portfolio was well received as it provided an opportunity for grantees to learn about the work done by other grantees and use the tool as a reference to showcase their work. Moreover, the qualitative stories gathered by the RIT in preparation of the portfolio document facilitated the CEPF's MEL and Communications Units in the preparation of the Annual Impact Report and dissemination of lessons learned.

Under this component, the RIT was also responsible for conducting **exchange visits with other RITs to share lessons learned and best practices**. The RIT for the GFWA was one of the three Birdlife RITs operating in other biodiversity hotspots invested in by the CEPF, with the other two being the Eastern Afromontane hotspot and the Mediterranean hotspot. In total, 03 RIT exchange visits and coordination meetings were held in May 2017, July 2018, and February 2019. In addition to forming contacts, exchanging lessons learned and best practices and having access to high-level technical resource persons, a key outcome of these exchange visits was the **adoption of the Master Class workshop model** which was first piloted by the BirdLife RIT in Eastern Afromontane.

In terms of **communication with the grantees**, grantees interviewed as part of the evaluation found the RIT to be generally responsive and supportive in their communications at various stages of the application process as well as throughout the implementation of grants. **Grantees highlighted that compared to other donors, the RIT engaged more frequently and on a deeper level by having frequent check-ins** with the grantees regarding their progress towards implementing their grants.

Further, one of the components of the RIT's scope of work pertained to the production of engaging communication products over the life of the investment **through multi-media content in order to put a spotlight on the CEPF's investment in the GFWA hotspot** and portray news, information and knowledge generated on the ground by the RIT and the grantees. To that end, although the RIT developed a draft Investment **Communication Strategy** in March 2017, it took 6 months for it to be finalized and it still did not completely align with the CEPF's recommendations.

Overall, the RIT faced a series of challenges regarding delivering its communications outputs primarily due to challenges with retaining and recruiting staff and budgetary constraints. Between January 2019 and March 2022, there was no dedicated communications staff at the RIT and the role had to be filled in by other members of the RIT staff, which placed an additional burden and resulted in delays in the delivery of communications outputs. Budgetary constraints were faced because the position for Communications Officer was capped at 50% of time, as a result of which efforts to recruit for this position were unsuccessful. **However, the RIT did not address this constraint by reassigning the associated budget lines according to their needs through an amendment to the budget.** Furthermore, support from BirdLife International was also not extended to the RIT to help overcome the significant challenges in communications. As a result, **the RIT had to scale down the scope of communication products**, which were limited to quarterly newsletters and updates to the RIT’s website and Facebook page. In order to mitigate for the challenges in developing communication products, the RIT solicited stories from its grantees to be included in the quarterly newsletters.

In conclusion, the RIT undertook a number of successful activities to promote the CEPF investment in the region in the form of the Mid-Term and Final Assessment Workshops that convened grantees from across the GFWA hotspot and functioned as opportunities to foster communication and learning amongst civil society. The RIT also undertook three exchange visits with other RITs including those of BirdLife International’s which served as important forums for knowledge sharing, learning, and adopting best practices from other RITs. **Having said that, the RIT faced significant challenges in delivering its communication outputs and products as a result of difficulty with retaining and recruiting staff.** As a result, the RIT scaled down the scope of communication products by limiting them to quarterly newsletters and updates to the RIT’s website and Facebook pages which themselves were sometimes delayed.

3.1.3 LEAD THE PROCESS TO DEVELOP A LONG-TERM STRATEGIC VISION FOR CEPF INVESTMENT

In line with its Phase III Strategic Framework, the CEPF aims to develop long-term visions for the hotspots it invests in that set out a pathway for transitioning civil society away from CEPF support and towards greater sustainability through increased capacity, access to resources, and credibility to respond to biodiversity conservation challenges.⁴ To that end, the RIT led the process to develop a long-term vision for the GFWA hotspot.

The evaluation observed that although the long-term vision exercise was originally expected to be held during the Mid-Term Assessment in 2019, **the development of the long-term vision underwent significant delays. Based on interviews with the RIT, the development of the long-term vision was delayed because the RIT did not feel sufficiently confident in its understanding of the present challenges and strengths across the region to be able to develop a long-term vision.** Planning for the development of the long-term vision finally began in 2021, with the ToRs for a consultant to lead the process of developing the long-term vision finalized in the second half of 2021.

⁴ Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund. *Confronting the Biodiversity Conservation Challenge: CEPF Phase III (2014 – 2023)*. Available at: https://www.cepf.net/sites/default/files/cepf_strategicframeworkphaseiii.pdf

The RIT issued a call for professional services in September 2021 and a consultant was recruited to begin work on the long-term vision on 01 November 2021. An advisory committee comprised of key conservation actors and donors including the CEPF, IUCN NL, PPI, GEF, Re:Wild, Environmental Foundation Africa (EFA), and Birdlife International was formed in December 2021 which met biweekly and was responsible for ensuring that the long-term vision engaged with appropriate stakeholders. The long-term vision development exercise comprised of a total of 38 online interviews with key stakeholders for one-on-one consultations between February and April 2022, involving key national civil society organizations, donors, and international NGOs.

A draft of the long-term vision for the GFWA hotspot was developed in May 2022 and the long-term vision was also presented at the Final Assessment workshop in June 2022. The long-term vision document is expected to be finalized after consolidating and addressing comments and feedback received from participants during the Final Assessment workshop and from the CEPF's donors working group.

The evaluation found that overall there has been a delay of 02 years in the development of the long term vision. Furthermore, while consultations were undertaken with civil society, donor community, and private sector, the involvement of government representatives was marginal, at best. In fact, with the exception of the GEF Focal Point for Liberia based in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the long-term vision lacked representation of any public sector stakeholders.

In conclusion, the RIT's efforts to coordinate the CEPF investment in the hotspot involved donor coordination and engagement, and facilitating the formation of grantee networks and partnerships. With regards to engagement with other conservation actors, the RIT was seen to have formed partnerships with PPI, MAVA Foundation, and IUCN Netherlands which resulted in close collaboration through co-funding projects, knowledge sharing and learning, as well as input into the external review processes. However, initial efforts to conduct multi-donor engagements and coordination were unable to be continued due to human resource constraints. Moreover, it was also found that the RIT's engagement with local representatives of CEPF donors in the region was minimal. In the case of grantees, the RIT was seen to have facilitated the formation of partnerships; however, local civil society organizations pointed to the need for deepening these efforts due to the pervasive perception of conservation actors to see one another as competitors. With regards to communications, the RIT conducted exchange visits with other RITs as well as held events such as the Mid-Term and Final Assessment Workshops which functioned as avenues for knowledge sharing, networking, and dissemination of learnings. However, the RIT faced sustained human resource and inadequate budgetary allocations and challenges, which affected its ability to effectively deliver various communication products and outputs. Lastly, the evaluation also revealed that the development of the long-term vision was delayed by 02 years from originally planned, and lacked sufficient representation of public sector stakeholders.

3.2 EFFICIENCY

This section assesses the extent to which the budget allocations under each SD were efficiently allocated to achieve the targets associated with indicators of the CEPF's Investment Priorities in the GFWA hotspot.

As mentioned previously, the initial total investment for the second cycle of the GFWA hotspot amounted to USD 9 million, which was for an initial five-year period between July 2016 and June 2021. In 2018, an additional USD 1.1 million were allocated to increase the spending authority on the current investment in the GFWA hotspot from the USD 2.55 million provided by the AFD, to a total investment of USD 10.1 million. Of the original investment amount of USD 9 million, the greatest proportion of allocation was made towards SD1 (33%), followed by SD2 (22%), and SD5 (17%). Allocations to SD3 and SD4 were relatively equivalent at 13% and 14% respectively. The AFD grant in 2018 increased the spending authority towards the hotspot by 12% from USD 9 million to USD 10.1 million. The additional funds were allocated towards SD3 (30%; USD 335,370), SD4 (40%; USD 447,160), and SD5 (30%; USD 335,370). The following table details the original budget allocation along with the changes in the allocation of budgets as a result of the increased funding, across all 5 SDs.

TABLE 4: BUDGET ALLOCATIONS ACROSS SDs (ORIGINAL AND AFTER AFD FUNDING)

| SD | Amount Allocated (USD) | % of Total | Amount Allocated after AFD Funding | % of Total | % Increase |
|--|------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| SD1 (Empowering Communities) | 3,000,000 | 33% | 3,000,000 | 30% | 0% |
| SD2 (Mainstreaming Biodiversity) | 2,000,000 | 22% | 2,000,000 | 20% | 0% |
| SD3 (Species and KBAs) | 1,200,000 | 13% | 1,535,370 | 15% | 28% |
| SD4 (Capacity building of Civil Society) | 1,300,000 | 14% | 1,747,160 | 17% | 34% |
| SD5 (RIT) | 1,500,000 | 17% | 1,835,370 | 18% | 22% |
| Total | 9,000,000 | 100% | 10,117,900 | 100% | 12% |

In terms of SD5, the originally proposed budget submitted by Birdlife International to carry out functions associated with being an RIT for the five-year **implementation of the CEPF investment in the GFWA hotspot amounted to USD 1.5 million**. The evaluation found that within six months of implementation the RIT realized **challenges with the originally proposed budget of USD 1.5 million in terms of time management and staffing arrangements**. It was found that the RIT had hired key personnel who were involved in the project on a part-time basis. However, it became evident that the sheer number of activities and the anticipated increase in responsibilities necessitated an increase in the budget. As a result, the RIT undertook an extensive revision of the budget in 2017 to reflect these realities and increase the time allocated to these personnel. However, this was initially achieved through **reallocating the budget from other budget categories such as travel and special events, etc., as a result of which concerns were raised that support to logistics was lacking**. A subsequent review of the budget in comparison

to the proposal also revealed the need for additional adjustments to the budget because of **lack of clarity on how the RIT would fund some of the activities proposed in the RIT proposal.**

However, the issues pertaining to adequate time allocation were resolved to some extent in 2018, as the AFD granted EUR 2.55 million for the GFWA hotspot which allowed for the RIT budget to increase from USD 1.5 million to USD 1.715 million. This adjustment was made through an amendment to the grant award for USD 215,000 in 2019, resultantly allowing all staff members to be covered for 100% of their time through June 2021, while also covering additional travel costs. This was followed by a further **amendment to RIT grant in 2021 which increased the RIT budget from USD 1.715 million to USD 1.835 million and extended the operations of the RIT by one year to conclude on June 30th 2022.**

As of 31st December 2021, 88% of the total USD 1.835 million has been expended by the RIT, with the 92% of the amount allocated to salaries and benefits expended. Comparatively, only 64% of the amount allocated to consultancies and professional services was spent. However, the development of the long-term vision represented a significant share of the amount allocated to consultancies and professional services and had just been initiated at the time.

Overall, the evaluation found that the RIT encountered challenges within six months of implementation in terms of staffing arrangements and time management due to the underestimation of management expenditure in its proposal to CEPF. While efforts to manage these challenges were made through reallocation of budget to increase the time for key personnel, these allocations reduced the share of budget for travel and events which are also key activities for supporting grantees throughout the investment cycle, but particularly during the initial years of the RIT's operations. In hindsight, the budget allocated towards the core BirdLife staff whose input to the RIT was limited could have been reduced to mitigate the reduction in the budget allocated for travel during the initial years. Due to additional funding received from the AFD, the total budget allocated to the RIT's Management increased which allowed the RIT to cover the personnel costs for 100% of their time, as well as increase the implementation duration by one additional year.

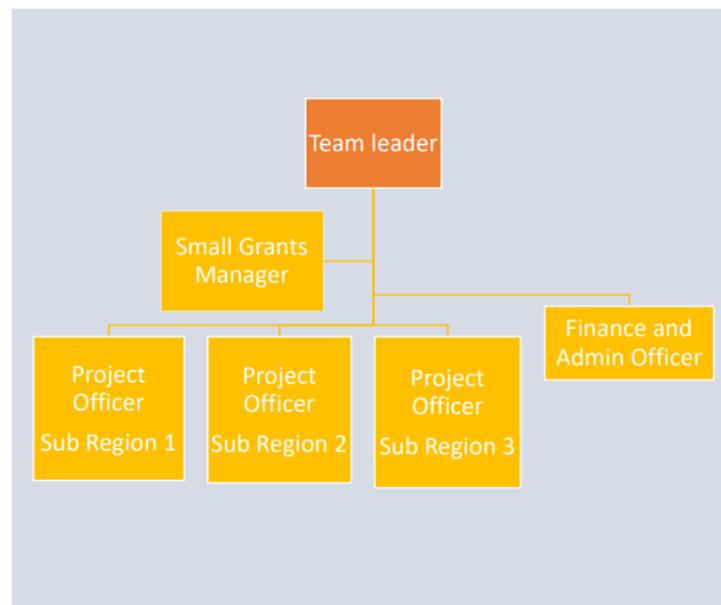
3.3 EFFECTIVENESS

This sections seeks to assess the **strengths and weaknesses of the RIT's structure and capacities** in terms of their effect on the overall effectiveness of delivering expected outcomes and results.

Birdlife originally proposed an RIT structure comprised of a team of 08 staff members: i) an RIT Team Leader; ii) Head of Birdlife West Africa Sub-Regional Office (WASRO); iii) a Small Grants Manager; iv) Communications Manager; v) Finance Officer; vi) RIT Sub-Regional Project Officer (SRPO) for Cameroon and Nigeria; vii) RIT SRPO for the Gulf of Guinea Islands; and viii) RIT SRPO for the Upper Guinean region. Of these positions, five, the RIT Team Leader, Head of Birdlife WASRO, and the three SRPOs, were recruited prior to the start of implementation. **By October 2016, three months into the start of the implementation period, the RIT had successfully recruited the required personnel for the remaining positions.**

However, Birdlife had indicated at the proposal stage that the originally proposed RIT Team Leader was only able to commit to lead the RIT for the first 18 months of implementation, and that a new RIT Team Leader would have to be recruited to fill the role for the remaining duration of the investment. After several rounds of communications between Birdlife and the CEPF and an unsuccessful recruitment effort to find a suitable replacement for the position, **the SRPO for the Gulf of Guinea was promoted to the position of the RIT Team Leader in April 2018**. The structure and institutional arrangements of the RIT are depicted in the figure below.

FIGURE 3: STRUCTURE OF THE RIT



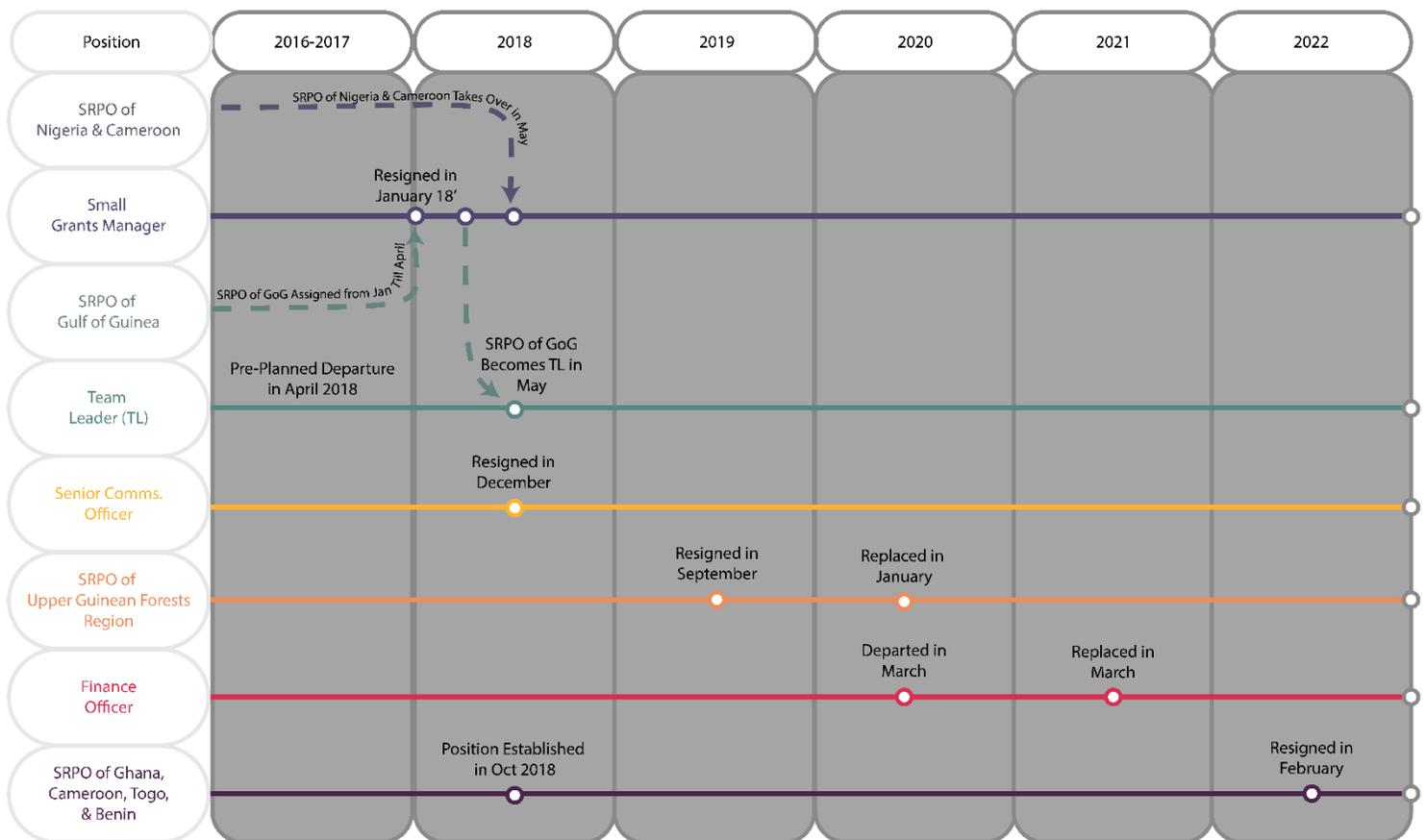
A key feature of the RIT team structure was the distribution of the team across different parts of the GFWA hotspot with **the three initial SRPOs based in Nigeria, Mozambique, and Liberia**. **This was perceived to be a strength of the RIT as it increased the outreach of the RIT** to different areas of the hotspot and allowed the SRPOs to interact with applicants and grantees more frequently through site visits and provide hands-on support to applicants. However, a couple of years into the implementation, the RIT management found this organizational structure to negatively impact effective team coordination and cohesion, and pose challenges for the RIT to manage its responsibilities and delivery of results. As a result, **in the first half of 2019, the CEPF and Birdlife decided to relocate the remaining team members to the project office in Accra, Ghana** to mitigate these challenges.

The result of this relocation saw coordination and communication between the different functions of the RITs including finance, grant management, and communication improve. However, a major lesson learned from the current investment was that applicants and grantees needed more hands-on support during the initial calls for proposals and prior to the implementation of grants, which was provided through the RIT's greater accessibility and ability to reach grantees where they were. But, **the RIT undertook fewer monitoring and field visits to the grantees due to the relocation of the staff and subsequently the COVID-19 pandemic**. While

attempt to mitigate this challenge was made by allocating more budget to field travel in the later part of the investment period, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant restrictions and lockdowns hampered the RIT’s efforts to make up for the reduced accessibility of the RIT due to their relocation to Accra, Ghana.

The RIT also faced major challenges with staff recruitment and retention. Excluding the pre-planned departure of the original TL in April 2018, there were a total of five additional resignations within the RIT over the six year implementation period. In fact, only 02 of the originally proposed team (25%) remained with the RIT for all six years. Amongst the reasons for the high turnover reported by interviewees included lower salary packages compared to market and difficult working context in the West Africa region. The following figure outlines the timeline and changes within the RIT structure over the course of the investment period.

FIGURE 4: TIMELINE OF STAFF CHANGES 2016 - 2022



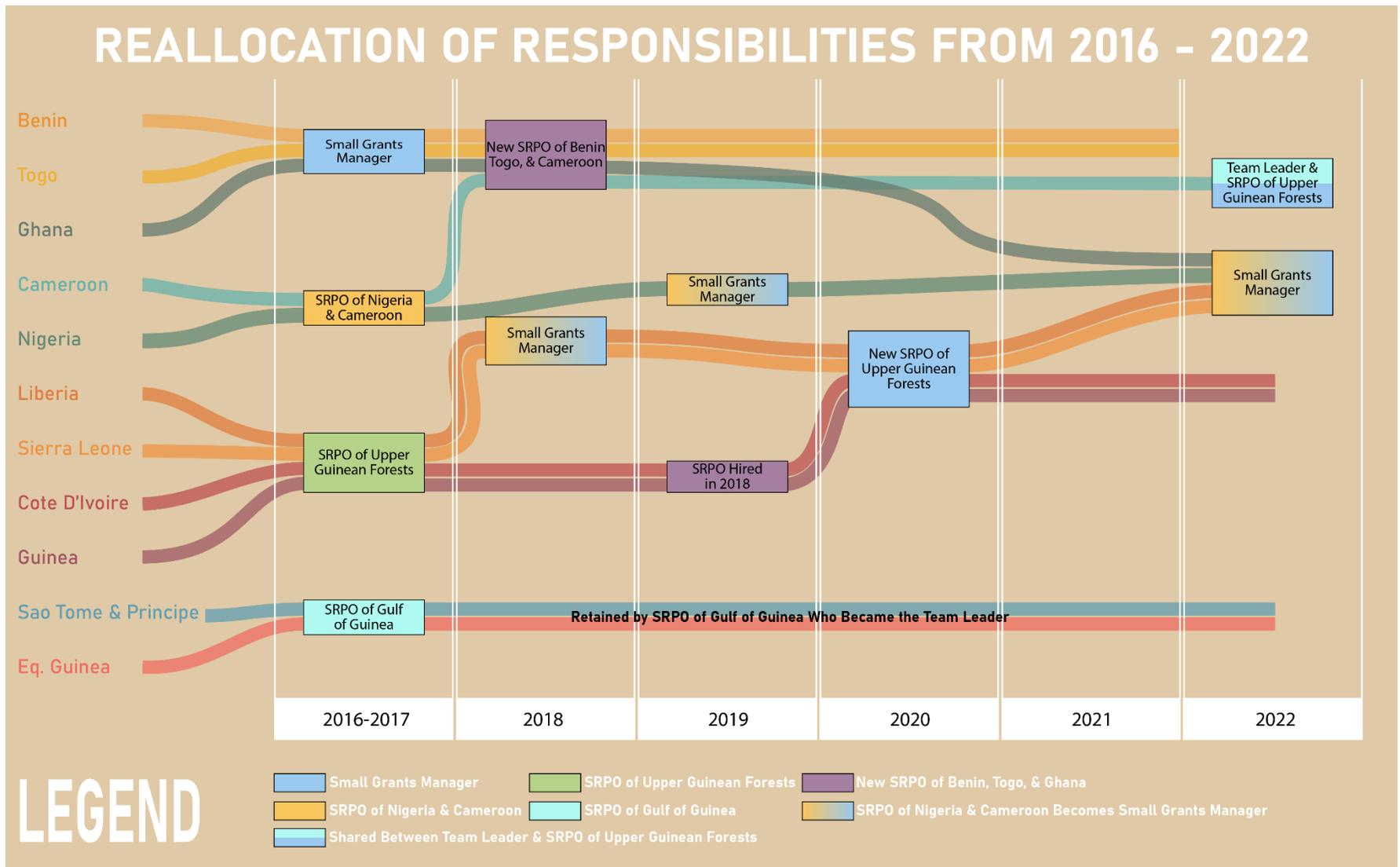
In the first two years of implementation, the Small Grants Manager position was reassigned twice in the same year, which caused disruptions and delays in the implementation of the small grants mechanism. The Senior Communications Officer also left the RIT in December 2018, and the position was not filled for the remaining duration of the implementation period. As a result, the remaining RIT team members took on the additional responsibilities associated with communications, which affected the delivery of communication outputs. The SRPO for the Upper Guinean Forests Region departed the RIT in September 2019 and the position was not filled until

January 2020, during which time the associated responsibilities were added on to the existing RIT team. Similarly, towards the end of the implementation period, the SRPO for Ghana, Cameroon, Togo and Benin resigned in February 2022, and the responsibilities associated with the position were split between the RIT Team Leader and the SRPO for the Upper Guinean Forests.

In some instances, the evaluation found that the RIT was able to mitigate staffing challenges by relying on support from Birdlife. For instance, although the Finance Officer position was vacant for an entire year, the RIT was able to cover the functions initially and in the interim through the support of the Finance Business Partner for Birdlife in West Africa. Similarly, the RIT also obtained support from Birdlife's Sao Tome Project Officer, based in Sao Tome and Principe, whose time was covered by counterpart funding from Birdlife. However, overall **the departures along with delays in recruitment of replacements added on to the responsibilities of the remaining RIT team and stretched their capacity in effectively delivering results.**

Furthermore, the GFWA hotspot is spread over a total of 11 countries, which required multiple countries to be covered by each SRPO. Therefore, **the challenges faced by the RIT in retaining staff necessitated multiple shifts and reallocations of countries to different staff members over the course of the implementation period.** As the figure below indicates, with the exception of Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, and Equatorial Guinea (27%), management of and coordination with grantees in the other 08 countries changed hands at least once. In particular, countries in the Upper Guinean Forests subregion (Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone) saw a yearly change in the responsible RIT staff between 2018 and 2020. **As a result of frequent reallocation of responsibilities between existing and new RIT staff, challenges in the form of delays in implementation of the small grants mechanism were experienced, mainly in the form of delays in awarding grants due to significant additional time needed to complete the review processes, and delays from the RIT in updating monitoring tools and online reporting.**

FIGURE 5: REALLOCATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES 2016 – 2022



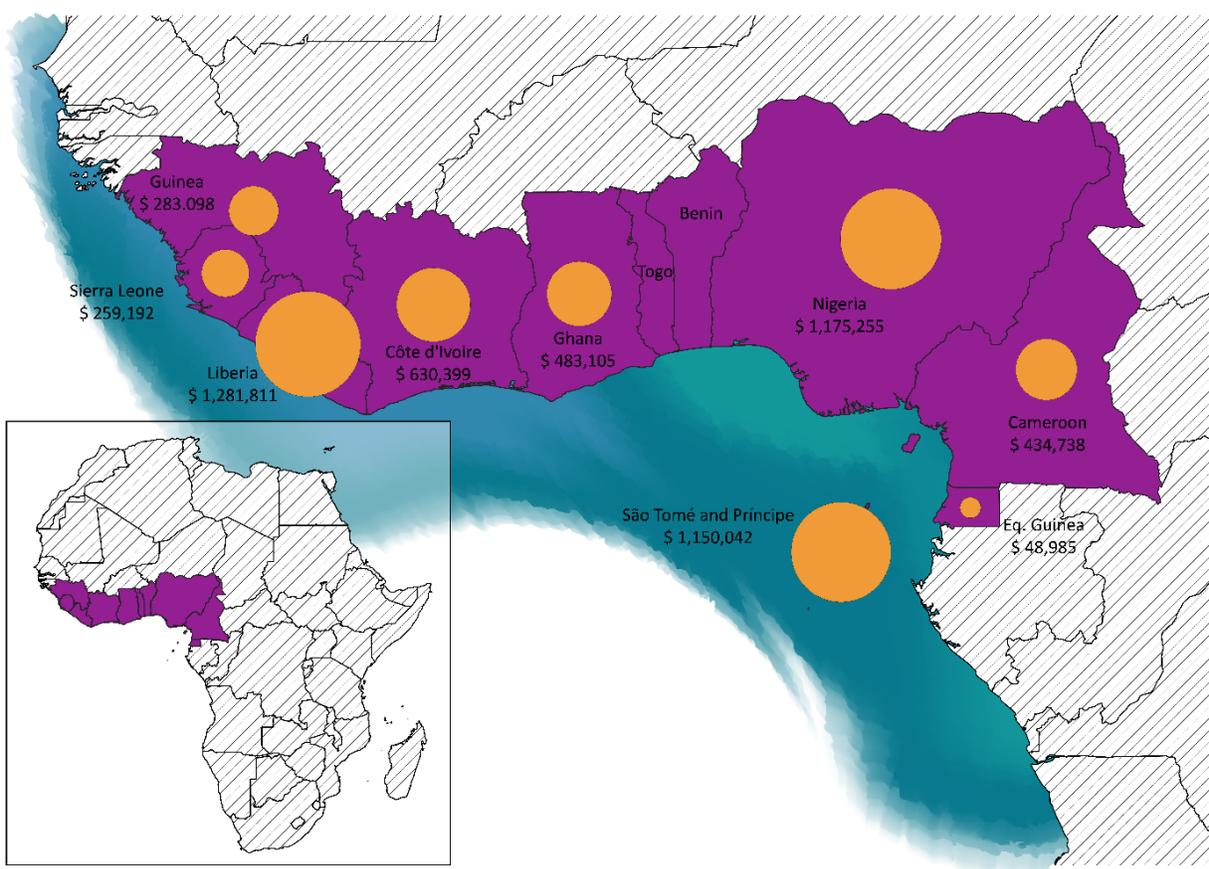
In conclusion, the RIT faced challenges in the form of retaining and recruiting staff which were further compounded by the overall restructuring of Birdlife International's West Africa Sub-regional Office and the limited alignment and integration of the RIT within the wider portfolio of Birdlife in the West Africa region. In addition, while the distribution of the RIT across different regions of the hotspot allowed for greater hands-on support to applicants and grantees through greater accessibility and mobility of the RIT, there were significant coordination, communication and management issues faced which negatively affected the performance of the RIT and caused delays during the implementation of the small grants mechanism. These challenges were alleviated through the relocation of the RIT staff to a central location, in Accra, Ghana, which allowed for greater supervision and monitoring of the RIT team. Furthermore, the frequent staffing changes necessitated in the RIT having to improvise by taking on additional responsibilities such as communications functions and management of grantees in additional countries, which stretched the internal capacity of the RIT thin. Overall, these continuous staffing challenges for most of the implementation period also strained the resources and capacity of the CEPF Secretariat and necessitated the Grant Director to allocate a disproportionately greater amount of time and effort to provide hands-on supervision and support.

3.4 COVERAGE

This section assesses the extent to which the portfolio of grants awarded covers the strategic directions and investment priorities set out in the investment strategy for the hotspot and the RIT's role in the delivery of results.

Overall, the current GFWA investment comprised of a total of 76 small and large grants awarded to 64 grantees, for a combined total of USD 8,293,914. The figure below represents the overall investment across the individual countries in the hotspot. All countries with the exception of Benin and Togo were represented through single-country grants. The RIT faced distinct challenges in terms of grant-making in some countries. In the cases of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Togo, the countries were excluded from the eligible list of countries in the first calls for proposals because endorsements from the respective GEF Focal Point in each country were not secured in time. With Benin, the RIT and the CEPF jointly decided that it was a low priority for the CEPF investment due to its poor representation in the hotspot due to the lack of corridors and priority KBAs. In Cameroon, a civil war erupted in the Southwest and Northwest regions of the country due to which most of the shortlisted projects from the second call for proposals had to be dropped either because the applicants withdrew or because the project areas were too dangerous to operate in. Moreover, two small grants in Cameroon were terminated due to the unfeasibility of the projects under the conflict.

FIGURE 6: TOTAL GRANT AMOUNTS ACROSS GFWA HOTSPOT COUNTRIES



3.4.1 MANAGE A PROGRAM OF SMALL GRANTS OF USD 50,000 OR LESS

One of the main responsibilities of the RIT is the overall management of the small grants in a given hotspot, which includes:

- Announcing the availability of CEPF small grants;
- Establishing and coordinating a process for solicitation of small grants application;
- Conducting due diligence to ensure applicant eligibility and capacity to comply with CEPF funding terms;
- Establishing a mechanism for the evaluation of the proposals;
- Managing the contracting of grants to grantees;
- Managing the disbursement of funds to grantees;
- Ensuring technical and financial compliance with CEPF requirements; and
- Monitoring the performance of the grantees throughout the implementation of their grants

The RIT for the GFWA hotspot was successful in launching its first call for proposals for both large and small grants in the first three months of implementation, on 16 September 2016. This call was open till 21 October 2016 to applicants from 08 of the 11 target countries for SDs 1, 3, and

4. In total, there were 63 Letters of Inquiry (Lols) received for the small grants, of which only 23 were deemed eligible (36%). Of the eligible grants 08 were contracted (13%).

The RIT and CEPF found that **the proposals received against the first call contained significant duplication and proposed approaches with little innovation**. As a result, there were no further calls for proposals in the first half of 2017 as the **CEPF and RIT took that time to reformulate the strategic focus of the next call in line with investment priorities**. This also afforded the RIT additional time to conclude administrative processes and finalize its documentation such as the small grant agreement template and the financial risk assessments. Most crucially, the gap in the launch of the next call for proposals also provided the RIT with an opportunity for increased stakeholder engagement through in-country workshops in five countries and remote engagements in the remaining other in order to promote the CEPF investment.

Upon the finalization of documentation and conclusion of administrative processes, the second call for small grant proposals was launched on 30th June 2017 and closed on 14 August 2017. This call was open to applicants from all 11 countries of the GFWA hotspot and applicants were eligible to choose from SD 1, 2, and 3. The result of the increased stakeholder engagement were evident from the fact that the second call for proposals received a total of 145 Lols, an increase of 130% compared to the first call for proposals. Of the 145 Lols received, 111 Lols were considered to be eligible (77%) and 15 grants were awarded (10%). Overall, the RIT reported that **in addition to a significantly higher number of proposals received in the second call, the proposals submitted were also found to be more competitive and of higher quality**.

In this period, the RIT encountered **challenges in the review and processing of the large volume of proposals received**, particularly due to the departure of the Small Grants Manager in January 2018 and the Team Leader in April 2018. These departures necessitated internal restructuring with the SRPO of Nigeria and Cameroon and SRPO of Gulf of Guinea (GoG) taking on the positions of Small Grants Manager and Team Leader, respectively. As a result, the review of the Lols received was completed in the first half of 2018 and contracts with grantees were signed in August 2018, 13 months after the launch of the second call for proposals. Therefore, **a major lesson learned in terms of soliciting grant proposals is the need to issue selective and targeted calls in a staggered approach to prevent too many proposals from being submitted at once which results in a backlog and delays in processing and contracting awards**.

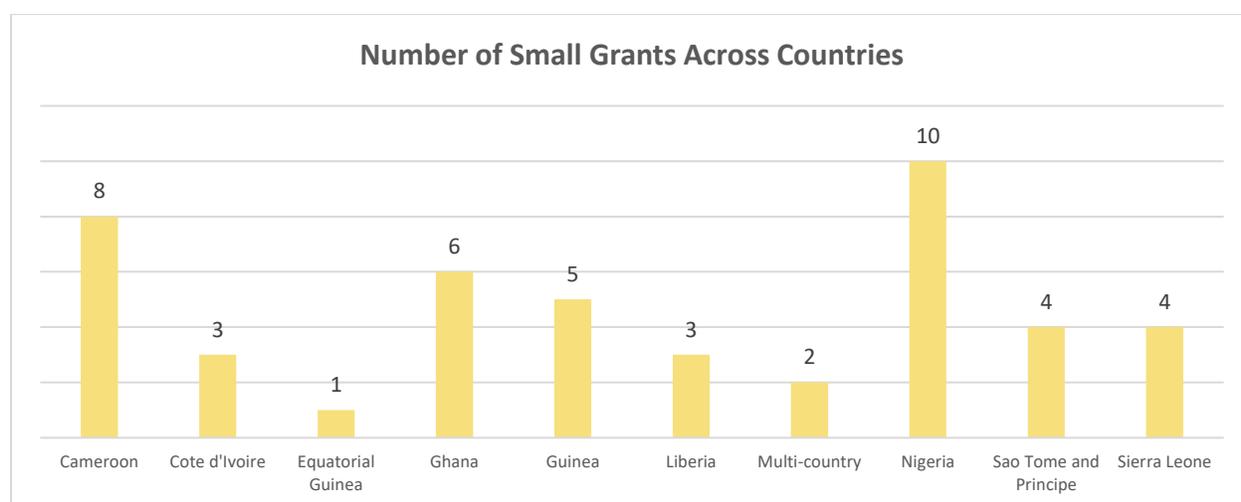
In 2019, there were two small grants by invitation awarded in the scope of the Mid-Term Assessment to build grantees capacities on how to effectively engage with public policies and the private sector. By the end of 2019, the RIT and CEPF reported that a total of USD 862,374 were awarded to small grants against an initial target of USD 1 million (86%). In the subsequent years of the implementation, two closed calls for proposals were launched, in 2020 and 2021, under the SD4 implementation for mentee civil society organizations for the mentorship program. In the closed call for proposals opened to mentee civil society organizations (in all countries except Cameroon) in 2020, a total of 41 Lols were received, of which 31 were considered eligible (76%) and 15 were awarded (37%). In 2021, a subsequent call was opened for mentees in Cameroon which saw the submission of 12 Lols, of which 11 were considered eligible (92%), and 04 were awarded (33%). The table below presents the year-wise breakdown of calls for proposals launched, number of Lols received and eligible, and number of awards granted.

TABLE 5: CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR SMALL GRANTS ISSUED BETWEEN 2016 AND 2022

| | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | Total |
|------------------------------|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| | Small Grants | | | | | | | |
| Call for proposals | 1 | 1 | - | | 1 | 1 | - | 04 |
| Received LOIs | 63 | 145 | - | | 41 | 12 | - | 261 |
| Eligible | 23 | 111 | - | | 31 | 11 | - | 176 |
| Contracted | 8 | 15 | - | | 15 | 4 | - | 42 |
| % of Contracted/Received LOI | 13% | 10% | - | | 37% | 33% | - | 16% |
| Grants by invitation | | | - | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | 04 |

In total, 46 small grants (including those awarded to 19 mentees) were awarded to 38 grantee organizations over the course of the six-year implementation period for an overall total of USD 1,384,526⁵, which allowed **the RIT to meet 138% of its initial target of USD 1 million for the small grants mechanism** (Deliverable 6.3). This was possible due to the overall additional USD 1.1 million allocated for the investment through the AFD funding received by CEPF in 2018. These **small grants were distributed across 09 of the 11 hotspot countries (so excluding Benin and Togo)**. As the figure below illustrates, Nigeria saw the largest share of small grants awarded (22%) which was followed by Cameroon (17%). Conversely, only one grant was awarded in Equatorial Guinea (02%) and 03 grants were awarded each in Cote d’Ivoire and Liberia (06% each). Two small grants covering multiple countries were also awarded (04%).

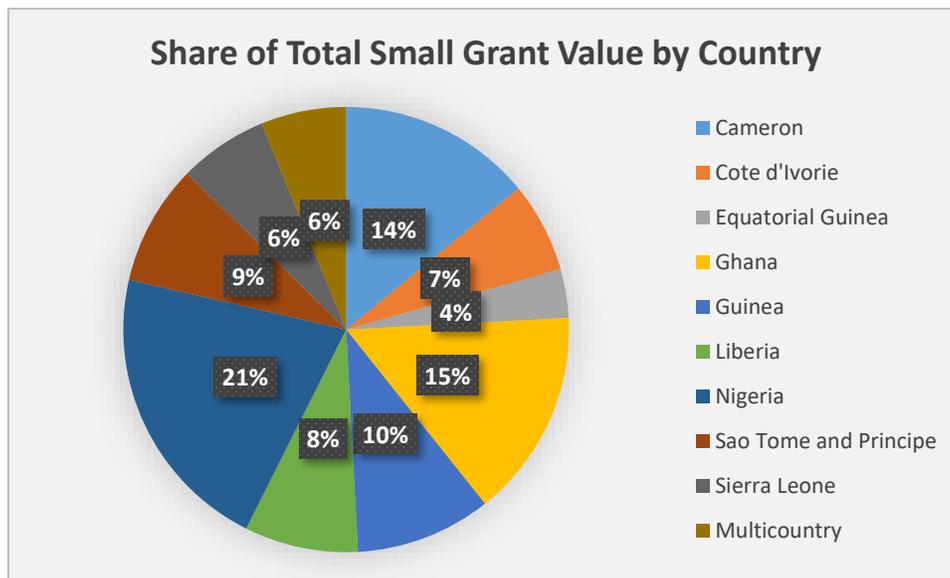
FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF SMALL GRANTS AWARDED ACROSS GFWA HOTSPOT COUNTRIES



In terms of the grant amounts, of the total USD 1,384,526 awarded, Nigeria had the largest share (21%), followed by Ghana (15%) and Cameroon (14%). Conversely, Equatorial Guinea represented the lowest share of total grant amount (04%) followed by the Multi-Country grant award (06%) and Sierra Leone (06%).

⁵ As of 25 April 2022

FIGURE 8: SHARE OF TOTAL SMALL GRANT AMOUNT BY COUNTRY



3.4.2 ESTABLISH AND COORDINATE A PROCESS FOR LARGE GRANT PROPOSAL SOLICITATION AND REVIEW

In addition to the overall management of the small grants mechanism, the RIT was also responsible for establishing and coordinating a process for the solicitation of applications for large grants, providing its assessments on the applications received, and coordinating technical review of applications, obtaining external reviews of applications over USD 250,000, and communicating with applicants throughout the application process. **While the large grants were awarded and contracted by the CEPF directly, the RIT was responsible for issuing calls for proposals, providing input in the evaluation of applications received, and jointly deciding with the CEPF on the award of large grants;** while, the CEPF was also responsible for the overall portfolio management and ensuring alignment with the SDs and Investment Priorities.

The first call for large grant proposals was launched simultaneously with the call for proposals for small grants in September 2016 and closed on 21 October 2017. This first call was open to 08 of the 11 hotspot countries and applicants were eligible to apply to any one of the four SDs. Against a total of 35 proposals received, 33 proposals were considered eligible (94%) and a total of 07 large grants were awarded (20%) by mid-June 2017. Similar to the small grant proposals received, **this initial batch of large grant proposals also had limitations in the form of duplications in scope and geographic areas and being overly ambitious and cost ineffective.** As a result, no further calls for large grants were issued in the first half of 2017. **However, due to holding off on the second call for proposals for both small and large grants, the RIT was unable to meet its target of awarding USD 2 million overall in grants (small and large) by the end of its first year of implementation.**

The second call for large proposals was issued on 15 September 2017 and closed on 30 October 2017 after extensive consultations between the CEPF and the RIT to ascertain the scope of the

call and determine eligibility of countries as well as the SDs to achieve the targets of the CEPF investment strategy. **Based on the outcome of the first call for proposals, SD 4 was excluded from eligibility under the second call as all large grants applications were rejected due to their high financial requests and lack of innovation in terms of capacity building approach.** Furthermore, it was decided by the CEPF and the RIT to take more time to reflect on their own strategy to achieve targets associated with SD4 and develop an internal Capacity Building strategy in order to have a targeted call at a subsequent time. As a result, the second call for proposals for large grants was opened for SDs 1, 2, and 3, to applicants in all 11 target countries. As was the case with the second call for small grants, **the second call for large grant proposals saw a significant increase in submitted applications.** In total, 148 applications were submitted – an increase of 322% from the previous call, of which 121 were considered eligible (82%), and which resulted in the award of 10 grants (07%).

In 2018 (25 July to 21 September), there was also a targeted call for proposals open for **mentor organizations**, in all countries except Benin, under SD4, with a budget limitation of USD 200,000. A total of 39 LOIs were received under this call, of which 33 were deemed eligible (85%) and 03 awards were granted (08%). No open or closed calls for large grants were issued in 2019 due to the development of the Mainstreaming Strategy which was made to coincide with the Mid-Term Assessment Workshop held in October 2019 for a call for proposals specific to SD2.

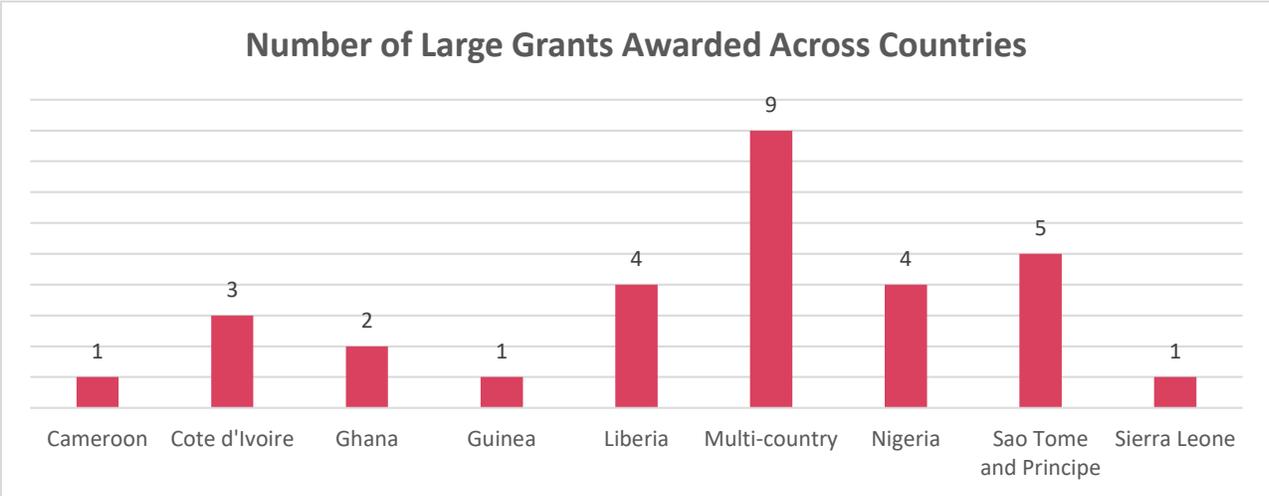
In 2020, the RIT finalized its Mainstreaming Strategy which was developed through two tailored workshops involving current and closed grantees conducted during the Mid Term Assessment events in 2019. These workshops aimed to facilitate the grantees’ understanding of the gaps and support their role in natural resource governance and influence government and private sector approaches to biodiversity and natural resources management. **The RIT and CEPF used the finalized Mainstreaming Strategy to issue a targeted call for large grant proposals pertaining specifically to SD 2**, on 07 February 2020 until 31 March 2020. This call was eligible for applicants in 08 of the 11 countries, and excluded Benin, Sao Tome and Principe, and Equatorial Guinea. A total of 94 LOIs were received, of which 62 were considered eligible (66%) and 08 grants were awarded (08%). The table below presents the year-wise breakdown of calls for proposals launched, number of LOIs received and eligible, and number of awards granted.

TABLE 6: CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR LARGE GRANTS ISSUED BETWEEN 2016 AND 2022

| | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| | Large Grants | | | | | | | |
| Call for proposals | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | 1 | | - | 04 |
| Received LOIs | 35 | 148 | 39 | - | 94 | | - | 316 |
| Eligible | 33 | 121 | 33 | - | 62 | | - | 249 |
| Contracted | 7 | 10 | 3 | - | 8 | | - | 28 |
| % of Contracted/Received LOI | 20% | 07% | 08% | - | 08% | | - | 9% |
| Grants by invitation | | | 1 | - | | 1 | - | 02 |

In total, 30 large grants were awarded to 26 grantees over the six-year implementation period for a total of USD 6,909,388⁶, which allowed the RIT and CEPF to meet 106% of the initial target of USD 6.5 million for the award of large grants (Deliverable 5.3). As mentioned earlier, this was made possible due to the additional funding received from the AFD. These large grants were distributed across all 11 hotspot countries, with 08 countries covered under single-country awards; and Benin, Equatorial Guinea, and Togo covered through 01 multi-country grant. As the figure below illustrates, multi-country large grants saw the largest share of large grants awarded (30%) which was followed by Sao Tome and Principe (17%). Conversely, only one grant was awarded in Cameroon, Guinea, and Sierra Leone (03% each).

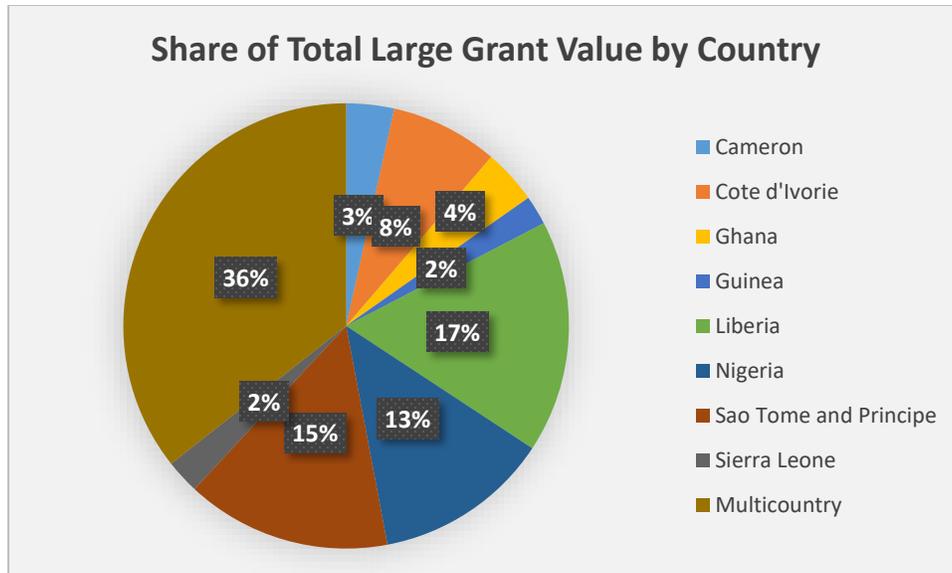
FIGURE 9: NUMBER OF LARGE GRANTS AWARDED ACROSS GFWA HOTSPOT COUNTRIES



In terms of the grant amounts, of the total USD 6,909,388 awarded, multi-country grants had the largest share (36%), followed by Liberia (17%) and Sao Tome and Principe (15%). Conversely, Guinea and Sierra Leone represented the lowest share of total grant amount (02%).

FIGURE 10: SHARE OF TOTAL LARGE GRANT AMOUNT BY COUNTRY

⁶ As of 25 April 2022



3.5 ACCESSIBILITY

This section assesses the RIT's performance in terms of building the capacity of local civil society and the RIT's role in addressing and mitigating challenges encountered by local civil society in the hotspot at various points in the project cycle throughout the investment period.

3.5.1 BUILD THE CAPACITY OF LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY

Building the capacity of local civil society is one of the key responsibilities of an RIT. To achieve that end, the RIT initiated **national capacity needs assessments and stakeholder mapping exercises** in the first six months of operations in 08 of the 11 hotspot countries. In early 2017, the three remaining hotspot countries were included in the capacity needs assessments as endorsements from GEF Focal Points were obtained. These capacity need assessments were conducted through in-person workshops in Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sao Tome and Principe, Nigeria, and Togo, with remote engagement with representatives of civil society actors in the remaining countries. The purpose of these capacity needs assessment and stakeholder engagements was for the RIT to obtain useful insights regarding the capacity gaps among local civil society organizations across the hotspot and gain a better sense of how the CEPF funds could directly contribute to or leverage support for development of capacities among civil society organizations.

As previously mentioned, the RIT and CEPF jointly determined the need to develop a dedicated Capacity Building Strategy for the GFWA hotspot based on the outcome of the first call for large grant proposals. The RIT worked with the CEPF to develop the Capacity Building Strategy in the first half of 2018, with input from IUCN PPI, prior to the launch for a targeted call for large grant proposals launched in July 2018. The key outcome of the development of the Capacity Building Strategy was that the RIT and CEPF through targeted calls for LoIs would **seek to explore possibilities for linking international civil society organizations to local civil society**

organizations as part of a national-level mentorship initiative. Under this mentorship initiative, international civil society organizations with proven capacities in specific areas such as project/grant management would provide ongoing guidance to local civil society grantees in a way that enhances collaboration and partnership between international and local civil society organizations. **The other component of the Capacity Building Strategy that the RIT and CEPF decided to focus on was the award of small grants to smaller organizations,** which would allow them to build their experience and gradually progress towards larger and more complex grants by building their project management capacities.

Crucially, **the RIT has relied on two main M&E tools to track progress of the grantees' organizational capacities (the Civil Society Tracking Tool) and gender mainstreaming capacities (Gender Tracking Tool).** The Civil Society Tracking Tool (CSTT) is a bespoke CEPF tool which aims to monitor civil society organizations' capacity to effectively plan, implement, and evaluate actions for biodiversity conservation along five main axes, including the availability of: a) human resources; b) financial resources; c) management systems to translate resources into effective actions; d) strategic planning resources and capacities to ensure that actions target conservation priorities; and e) delivery mechanisms. Similarly, the Gender Tracking Tool (GTT) was also employed to assess the extent to which gender is integrated into civil society organizations' operations and planning procedures. The RIT commissioned a complementary tool for visualization/ spatial analysis of capacity in the hotspot to inform the LTV and further investment. Using a CSOs mapping based on the LOI's submitted and CSTTs of a sample of organizations, and their positioning towards main threats and deforestation levels, a gaps and strengths analysis was undertaken by students of the MPhil in Conservation Leadership from the Cambridge University.

The evaluation revealed that **the RIT provided significant support to grantees at various stages of the project cycle.** This support was extended to grantees **during the shortlisting stage** through various means. For instance, the RIT was found to have **extended one-on-one support** to promising applicants by providing them with feedback on how they could further improve the design of their project so that it aligns better with the CEPF's investment strategy. An example in order is the Hen Mpoano, a local grantee in Ghana implementing projects to improve participatory planning and management of Cape Three Points KBA, reporting that initial consultations with the RIT during the shortlisting stage resulted in the inclusion of a sustainable alternative livelihood component, in the form of village savings and loan associations, organic vegetable cultivation and honey production, which strengthened the design of the project.

However, interviews with multiple RIT staff revealed that a significant majority of the small grant applications required additional hands-on support of varying levels to strengthen their applications which **put a strain on the RIT's own internal capacities to be responsive.** To mitigate this and based on a suggestion from the CEPF Secretariat, **the RIT switched its approach from one-on-one support to grantees to conducting more regional level workshops and targeted training sessions through the 'Master Class' workshops.** This switch allowed the RIT to provide support to multiple grantees collectively to address pertinent issues arising in proposals. This change in approach resulted in a more streamlined process where the RIT did not have to extend

significant support to the applicants afterwards as most major issues were addressed by the applicants themselves as a result of the trainings and workshops.

To that end, the RIT conducted a series of 'Master Class' workshops with shortlisted applicants to better prepare them in the development of their full proposals and effectively submit all the required documentation. **In an exchange visit with BirdLife's RIT for Eastern Afrotropical hotspot in July 2018, the RIT for GFWA observed the 'Master Class' approach being utilized.** The GFWA RIT subsequently conducted the Master Class workshops in 2020 and 2021 with shortlisted mentees. However, due to the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, these Master Classes were held virtually in both 2020 and 2021. These Master Classes comprised of modules covering project design and proposal writing, financial management, diversity and inclusion, communications and networking, and reporting.

The RIT's support to grantees continued during the implementation of their grants as well. Interviews with grantees and the RIT revealed that such support was provided in various ways ranging from remote support on meeting technical and financial reporting standards to technical guidance and assistance vis-à-vis implementation. For instance, African Research Association, a local large grantee supporting 12 local communities and local government in the Obudu Plateau in Southeast Nigeria by implementing integrated sustainable forest management, biodiversity conservation, and environmentally-friendly alternative livelihood actions, reported that the RIT's field monitoring mission to the site (as CEPF was unable to travel during COVID) was beneficial as the RIT technical team was able to advise on alternative solutions to the problem of low tree survival rates. Similarly, the African Research Association also reported that the RIT provided technical advice with regards to environmental and social safeguards pertaining to guidelines on the distance between a watershed and location of potential farms which were disseminated to project stakeholders to ensure compliance.

In addition, **the RIT also extended support to grantees through remote and virtual means.** For instance, the Society for Women and Vulnerable Group Empowerment (SWOVUGE) supporting the restoration of degraded community mangrove forests in Nigeria, reported that the RIT convened multiple virtual meetings with the grantee to review reports and facilitate the grantee in making the necessary modifications to reports to meet their requirements. In the case of Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER), which implemented a grant to support conservation and participatory management of the Tchabal Mbabo forest massif in Cameroon, the RIT advised the grantee on their strategy to mitigate and resolve conflicts with other conservation actors in the region to enable effective implementation of their project.

In some instances, the RIT also provided support to grantees in strengthening their strategic organizational capacities. SWOVUGE reported that the RIT supervised the development of a five-year long-term strategic plan for the organization to ensure the sustainability of the project activities and plans. **The RIT has also played a supportive role in facilitating greater collaboration between different civil society organizations,** such as in the case of Hen Mpoano, which was able to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with another civil society organization to collaborate on activities and create synergies in the work of the two organizations.

Grantees reported several positive outcomes as a result of the capacity building activities undertaken by the RIT. Hen Mpoano reported that the capacity building trainings provided by the RIT and mentor organizations (under SD4 large grants) improved the organization’s capacity for effective proposal writing and fundraising which enabled the organization to secure additional funding from three donor sources to supplement the work undertaken through the CEPF-funded grant. In addition, the capacity building support provided by the RIT to FODER enabled the organization to develop and institute grievance redressal mechanisms as a fundamental tool in the implementation of current and future projects. In conclusion, **grantees interviewed as part of the evaluation were unanimous in their view that the RIT provided greater support, guidance, and assistance at numerous stages of a project cycle, in comparison to other donors who offer much limited support to grantees.**

3.6 IMPACT

Overall, based on data available as of 13th March 2022, the total amount granted under the second GFWA investment amounts to USD 10,129,284, which slightly exceeds the total spending authority for the hotspot by USD 11,384. The overspending was due an anticipated substantial deobligation on a large grant. Across the SDs, some variances were observed in the proportion of allocated amount awarded through grants. The amounts awarded to grants targeting SDs 2 and 3 exceeded their allocated amounts by 19% and 27% respectively. Conversely, 81% and 89% of the allocated amounts under SDs 1 and 4 were awarded in grants. The table below describes the amount of funds awarded in grants in comparison with the amounts allocated under each SD as of March 13, 2022.

TABLE 7: AMOUNT AWARDED IN GRANTS AGAINST ALLOCATED AMOUNT BY SD⁷

| SD | Amount Granted (USD) | Amount Allocated (USD) | % of Allocated Amount Granted |
|-------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| SD1 | 2,416,368 | 3,000,000 | 81% |
| SD2 | 2,378,972 | 2,000,000 | 119% |
| SD3 | 1,945,534 | 1,535,370 | 127% |
| SD4 | 1,553,040 | 1,747,160 | 89% |
| SD5 | 1,835,370 | 1,835,370 | 100% |
| TOTAL | 10,129,284 | 10,117,900 | 100% |

3.6.1 SUPPORT THE MAINSTREAMING OF BIODIVERSITY INTO PUBLIC POLICIES AND PRIVATE SECTOR BUSINESS PRACTICES

Among the RIT’s scope of work is extending support to grantees in their efforts to mainstream biodiversity conservation into public policies and private sector business practices through facilitating grantees’ engagements with government and the private sector. To that end, the RIT was responsible for developing a **Biodiversity Mainstreaming Strategy to engage with private sector partners and government officials as a RIT** and to guide and support grantees in the

⁷ Data as of March 13, 2022

delivery and implementation of activities pertaining to biodiversity mainstreaming. The RIT initiated the process to develop the Mainstreaming Strategy in the first year of implementation by capturing relevant information pertaining to various stakeholders operating across the hotspot, with a particular focus on civil society organizations with the potential to become grantees. Simultaneously, the RIT also initiated a consultative process with a number of donors and their executing agencies by hosting a donor roundtable in Accra, Ghana in January 2017 which resulted in the development of a **plan of action to pursue an active agenda for biodiversity conservation** and knowledge sharing regarding lessons learned about efforts to mainstream biodiversity conservation in the public and private sectors.

However, as previously noted in the Relevance Section, **the RIT was unsuccessful in building on the outcomes of this initial donor coordination, which had significant scope for biodiversity mainstreaming.** In spite of having the key preparatory steps completed by its first year of implementation, the elaboration and development of a Mainstreaming Strategy faced significant delays due to the RIT workload associated with the departures of staff and restructuring of the RIT team. In early 2019, the RIT and the CEPF decided to plan the development of the Mainstreaming Strategy to coincide with and synergize with other activities planned around the Mid-Term Assessment. To that end, an external consultant was hired in the second half of 2019 to lead the desk-based research as well as a consultative process to develop the Mainstreaming Strategy. The consultative process took place in the form of a dedicated workshop held with representatives of 34 civil society organizations for the participative development and elaboration of a Theory of Change for mainstreaming biodiversity in the hotspot to feed into the development of the Mainstreaming Strategy.

As described in the Coverage Section, the Mainstreaming Strategy developed as an outcome of the Mid-Term Assessment was used to issue a targeted call for large proposals in 2020 specifically for SD2. The evaluation found that the outcome of this call for large proposals resulted in a significantly higher number of proposals overall as well as of better quality, than what the RIT received in the previous call for large grants, thereby **demonstrating the success of engaging grantees in the development and dissemination of the Mainstreaming Strategy.** Interviews with the RIT and CEPF also revealed that the development of the Mainstreaming Strategy also facilitated the RIT in providing the team with the necessary orientation towards optimizing their efforts to support the achievement of targets for SD2.

Interviews with several **grantees indicated that there is a strong desire and need for the RIT to provide greater support to them by engaging either directly with government agencies and departments or facilitating such engagements.** To that end, grantees suggested that the RIT undertake frequent and sustained engagements with government agencies to socialize and raise awareness of the CEPF's investment in the region and highlight how and where the CEPF's investment strategy aligns with national priorities. The evaluation found some evidence of public sector stakeholders' interest and willingness to engage with the RIT. For instance, it was reported that government officials from Ghana requested further engagements with the RIT prior to the initiation of the investment cycle. Therefore, there may be opportunities in the future to capitalize on government stakeholder's interest in the CEPF's investments as a way to facilitate grantees' efforts in mainstreaming biodiversity conservation in the public sector. In addition,

although grantees reported that the capacity building workshop aimed at developing a Mainstreaming Strategy and disseminating knowledge and information on gaps and best practices was highly relevant and useful, there was a **strong desire to for additional targeted capacity building specific to mainstreaming efforts as civil society in the context of Western Africa** faces significant challenges to that end.

3.7 ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

This section assesses the extent to which the RIT demonstrated an aptitude for adaptability in terms of the management of the grant portfolio and towards the achievement of deliverables. In addition, the section also covers the monitoring functions of the RIT as well as its reporting requirements.

Overall, the RIT was found to have demonstrated effective adaptive management in terms of the overall investment portfolio with support and guidance from the CEPF. Since the award of the first grants in 2017, **the RIT has undertaken regular review and analysis of the targets and gaps of the investment** in order to adjust its implementation with regards to issuing calls for proposals, strategies for biodiversity mainstreaming, strategies for capacity building and communication, as well as collaboration with other donors and stakeholders. For instance, the decision to exclude calls for proposals for SD4 (capacity building) was called off based on the outcomes of the first call wherein all proposals received were rejected. Similarly, the decision to issue a dedicated call for proposals for SD2 was made based on the outcomes of the participatory Mainstreaming Strategy development processes around the time of the Mid-Term Assessment. As a result, a significantly higher number of proposals of better quality were received in the subsequent dedicated call, and the capacity and strategic ability of the RIT to optimize its efforts to achieve SD2 outcomes were improved simultaneously.

In terms of **geographic spread of the grants**, a decision was made by the RIT in consultation with the CEPF to strategically prioritize those countries within the eleven-country hotspot that have greater geographic overlap and presence of higher number of KBAs and priority corridors. Consequently, the portfolio of grants were successful in meeting or are anticipated to meet most of the indicators for the SDs and Investment Priorities as outlined in the Ecosystem Profile.

3.7.1 MONITORING OF CEPF'S SMALL AND LARGE GRANTS

In terms of monitoring, the RIT was responsible for collecting and reporting on data for portfolio-level indicators as well as the CEPF's global monitoring indicators by obtaining and verifying data obtained from small and large grantees. To that end, the RIT received significant support and training from the CEPF at multiple points of the implementation period which also covered the CEPF's monitoring systems, an overview of the monitoring processes, as well as data verification and validation.

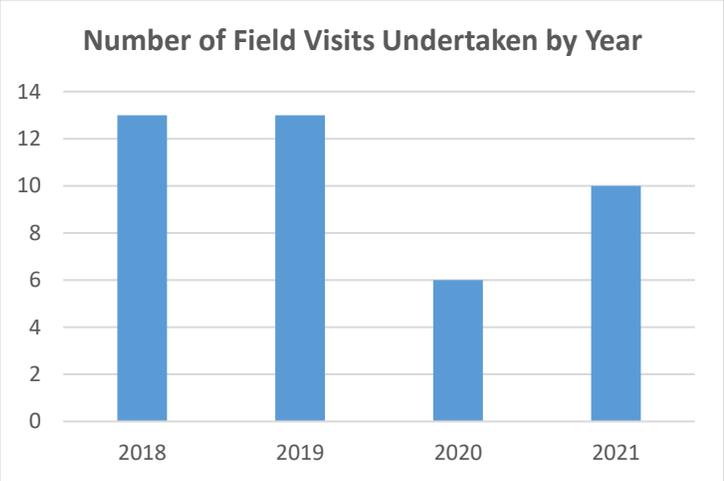
The RIT was found to have benefitted from having a resource person within the RIT structure dedicated to the monitoring and compiling of data obtained from grantees as the process of collecting and verifying self-report data required significant back and forth to assure data quality and accuracy. The evaluation ascertained that **the RIT was also diligent in its efforts to verify the**

accuracy of the provided information using various validation measures such as requesting official government documents, maps of protected areas or agreements with communities to co-manage forests.

The monitoring missions undertaken by the RIT since 2018 to small and large grantees have played an important role in the management of the overall portfolio. The RIT was seen to have undertaken its due diligence by conducting the timely monitoring visits of projects in which performance and compliance issues were seen. In one instance, the RIT was able to investigate and confirm an allegation of financial fraud it received through a complaint received by a mentor and passed on to the RIT. In another instance, the RIT’s field mission also facilitated in the decision to terminate grants early due to the timely identification of poor management and non-compliance with CEPF reporting requirements.

In total, the RIT conducted 38 monitoring mission to large and small grantees over the course of the investment duration. In the initial two years of the investment period, the spread of the RIT team across different areas of the hotspot facilitated the monitoring of grantees due to greater accessibility and proximity to grantees. The relocation of the RIT team to Accra, Ghana in 2019 and the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic affected the ability of the RIT to undertake frequent monitoring visits to grantees. Nevertheless, it is notable that the RIT was successful in undertaking 06 field visits in 2020 even at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 12 illustrates the number of field visits undertaken by the RIT over the six-year implementation period.

FIGURE 11: NUMBER OF FIELD VISITS UNDERTAKEN BY YEAR



4. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 LESSONS LEARNED

The in-depth review of the current investment period has yielded the following major lessons learned:

- i) The launch of a new investment cycle in a hotspot should be accompanied by an **explicit entry and communications strategy** that enables effective stakeholder engagement and outreach to ensure greater alignment of applicants' proposals with CEPF's investment strategy.
- ii) Issuing calls for proposals with more **expansive eligibility criteria** can lead to receiving a high volume of proposals at once, which can strain the capacity of the RIT and result in a backlog of work delays in the award of grants.
- iii) **Facilitating multi-donor engagement efforts** requires dedicated budgetary and human resource allocation within the RIT structure.
- iv) In the context of hotspots such as the GFWA which are spread out across a wide geographic area, the structure of the RIT requires **dedicated key personnel** who devote 100% of their time to the various functions of the RIT.
- v) Applicants and grantees need more hands-on support during the initial calls for proposals and prior to the implementation of grants during which time **greater access to the RIT**, through proximity to grantees, is important to effectively address applicants' and grantees' concerns and challenges.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the in-depth evaluation of the RIT for the GFWA hotspot, the Evaluation Team presents the following recommendations directed at CEPF:

7. **Coverage of the GFWA Hotspot:** The GFWA hotspot is spread across 11 countries in West Africa, with vast linguistic and socio-political diversity (05 Francophonic countries, 04 Anglophonic countries, 01 Portuguese, and 01 Spanish). In addition, the geographic spread of the hotspot area poses limitations and challenges in terms of travel and logistics due to the relatively lower level of air connectivity in the region.

In light of such challenges and accounting for the diversity of the hotspot, it is recommended that the CEPF consider narrowing its geographic focus. Some suggested strategies could be focusing on a sub-set of countries in the hotspot with a higher proportion of geographic overlap, KBAs and corridors; or managing the GFWA hotspot by two RITs covering the upper and lower regions of the hotspot, respectively.

8. **Initial Outreach and Communications:** The evaluation revealed that the initial call for proposals resulted in the submission of relatively fewer proposals for both the small and

large grants. Moreover, duplication and limited innovative approaches were also found in these initial batches of proposals.

It is therefore recommended that the future RIT utilize the inception period of a new investment cycle to undertake intensive stakeholder engagement efforts to socialize the aims of the CEPF's investment in a hotspot to ensure the CEPF's visibility in a hotspot and to facilitate the submission of quality proposals that align with the strategic vision and priorities of the CEPF in a given hotspot.

9. **Staggered Approach to Calls for Proposals:** The evaluation found that the second call for proposals for small and large grant applications was issued within a short span of approximately two months from one another, in which grantees from all 11 countries of the hotspots were eligible to apply for three of the four SDs. Consequently, nearly 300 LoIs were received, which posed significant strains on the RIT to review and process, resulting in a backlog of work, particularly on the implementation of the small grants mechanism.

It is therefore recommended that the future RIT and CEPF consider a more staggered approach to issuing call for proposals with more selective and targeted eligibility criteria in an effort to avoid these challenges.

10. **Structure of the RIT:** The evaluation found that the initial proposal submitted by BirdLife International for the RIT grant had underestimated the extent to which key personnel would need to dedicate their time to the RIT. Consequently, there was a need to reallocate budget away from other budget categories towards the core team of personnel to ensure that 100% of their time would be dedicated to the RIT.

It is therefore recommended that the CEPF pay particular attention to the staffing composition and time allocations of key personnel of the RIT proposal to ensure that reasonably sufficient human resources are dedicated within the RIT.

11. **Donor Engagement and Coordination:** Engagement and collaboration with other donors in the region is key to ensure synergies with ongoing activities and projects within the region, avoiding duplication of efforts, and facilitating greater collaboration through in-kind and/or financial support. The RIT was found to have led an initial round of multi-donor engagements but was unable to build upon the momentum due to the budgetary and time constraints.

It is therefore recommended that for future CEPF investments in the hotspot, the RIT ensure sufficient budgetary and human resources are allocated for leading these multi-donor engagement and coordination efforts over the course of implementation.

12. **Capacity Building of Grantees:** The evaluation found that the adoption of the Master Class workshop model from the RIT in the Eastern Afromontane was highly beneficial to the grantees in improving their skills on various aspects of the project cycle from project design and proposal development to monitoring and implementation of safeguards.

It is thus recommended that the CEPF and the future RIT adopt the Master Class model systematically in the hotspot.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 01:
LIST OF DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

LIST OF DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

| Ecosystem Profile | | | |
|--|--|--|--------------|
| | Document Title | Prepared by | Dated |
| 1 | Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot | Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund | 31-Dec-15 |
| Grant Agreements and Amendments | | | |
| Agreements | | | |
| 1 | Grant Agreement of Regional Implementation team for Guinean Forests II Hotspot | | 1-Jul-16 |
| 2 | Birdlife Guinean RIT budget | | 18-May-16 |
| 3 | Copy of Cashflow Projection | | 25-May-16 |
| 4 | Final Proposal | | 1-Jul-16 |
| 5 | Signatories | Birdlife international & Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund | 26-May-16 |
| Amendments | | | |
| 1 | Amendment 1 | | 12-Apr-17 |
| 2 | Amendment 2 | | 15-Aug-17 |
| 3 | Amendment 3 | | 8-May-19 |
| 4 | Amendment 4 | | 24-Jul-20 |
| 5 | Amendment 5 | | 6-May-21 |
| Grantee Survey | | | |
| 1 | Guinean Forests of West Africa Final Assessment Workshop: CEPF Post - Project Survey | Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund | 6-9/June/22 |
| 2 | GFWA Grantee Perception Survey Data | | |
| Long Term Vision | | | |
| 1 | Long - Term Strategic Vision for CEPF investment in the Guinean Forests of West Africa Hotspot | | May-22 |
| Mid Term and Final Assessment | | | |
| 1 | Mid - Term Assessment July 2016-October 2019 | | Jun-20 |
| 2 | CEPF GFWA 2016-2022 Investment Final Assessment | Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund | Jun-22 |
| 3 | CEPF-FAW Participant List | | |
| 4 | CEPF GFWA Portfolio Brochure 2022 | | |
| 5 | Final Assessment Workshop | | 6-9/Jun/2022 |
| 6 | Guinean Forests of West Africa Final Assessment Workshop: CEPF Post - Project Survey | Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund | 6-9/June/22 |
| 7 | Long - Term Vision for the Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot | Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund/ Bird Life International/ GFWA | Jun-22 |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|-------------|
| 8 | GFWA Regional Implementation Team (RIT) set up and work Reflexions of the phase of investment 2016 - 22 | Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund/ Bird Life International/ GFWA | |
| Outreach Materials | | | |
| No documents provided | | | |
| Portfolio Data | | | |
| 1 | GFWA Small and Large Grants Data | Conservation International | Apr-22 |
| Proposal | | | |
| 1 | Proposal by BirdLife International to implement the role of a Regional Implementation Team | BirdLife International | |
| 2 | Curricula Vitae and Job Descriptions | BirdLife International | |
| 3 | Work Plan & Work Flow Diagram | BirdLife International | |
| 4 | Budget Summary & Admin Budget | BirdLife International | |
| 5 | Organogram of BirdLife International Africa Regional Offices | Birdlife International | |
| 6 | Chart of Leadership and Employee Structure of Birdlife International | Birdlife International | |
| 7 | Cover Letter | BirdLife International | 28-Jan-16 |
| 8 | Final Proposal | BirdLife International | 31-May-16 |
| Regional Implementation Team (RIT) Financial Reports | | | |
| 1 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q1 | | 28-Oct-16 |
| 2 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q2 | | 28-Mar-17 |
| 3 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q3 | | 22-Aug-17 |
| 4 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q4 | | 10-Aug-17 |
| 5 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q1 | | 30-Aug-17 |
| 6 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q2 | | 22-May-18 |
| 7 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q3 | | 3-Jul-18 |
| 8 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q4 | | 6-Nov-18 |
| 9 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q1 | | 28-Feb-19 |
| 10 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q2 | | 28-Feb-19 |
| 11 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q3 | | 29-May-19 |
| 12 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q4 | | 30-Jul-19 |
| 13 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q1 | | 9-Mar-20 |
| 14 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q2 | | 19-Mar-20 |
| 15 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q3 | | 8-May-20 |
| 16 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q4 | | 26-Aug-20 |
| 17 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q1 | | 5-Nov-20 |
| 18 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q2 | | 2-Feb-21 |
| 19 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q3 | | 30-April-21 |
| 20 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q4 | | 12-Aug-21 |
| 21 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q1 | | 1-Nov-21 |
| 22 | CEPF QFR GFWA RIT Q2 | | 23-Feb-22 |

| Project Audit Report 1 | | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Audit Report 2017 | Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) | 30-Jun-17 |
| 2 | Audit Report 2018 | Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) | 30-Jun-18 |
| 3 | Signed Management Report | Cardinal Consult | 3-Jan-19 |
| Project Audit Report 2 | | | |
| 1 | Audit Report June 2019 | CEPF/ BirdLife International | 30-Jun-19 |
| 2 | Audit Report June 2020 | CEPF/ BirdLife International | 30-Jun-20 |
| 3 | Audit Report December 2020 | CEPF/ BirdLife International | 31-Dec-20 |
| 4 | Signed Management Report | Cardinal Consult | 20-Jul-21 |
| Progress Reports | | | |
| 1 | Progress Report July-December 2016 | BirdLife International | 13-Mar-17 |
| 2 | Progress Report January-June 2017 | BirdLife International | 9-Aug-17 |
| 3 | Progress Report July-December 2017 | BirdLife International | 26-Mar-18 |
| 4 | Progress Report January-June 2018 | BirdLife International | 8-Aug-18 |
| 5 | Progress Report July-December 2018 | BirdLife International | 5-Feb-19 |
| 6 | Progress Report January-June 2019 | BirdLife International | 9-Aug-19 |
| 7 | Progress Report July-December 2019 | BirdLife International | 7-Feb-20 |
| 8 | Progress Report January-June 2020 | BirdLife International | 31-Jul-20 |
| 9 | Progress Report July-December 2020 | BirdLife International | 30-Jan-21 |
| 10 | Progress Report January-June 2021 | BirdLife International | 12-Aug-21 |
| 11 | Progress Report July-December 2021 | BirdLife International | 22-Feb-22 |
| Supervision and Monitoring Reports | | | |
| 1 | GFWA Supervision Mission Report | CEPF | 4 to 9 Dec 2017 |
| 2 | GFWA Supervision Mission Report | CEPF | 10 to 18 Jan 2017 |
| 3 | GFWA Supervision Mission Report | CEPF | 31 May - 12 June 2019 |
| 4 | GFWA Supervision Mission Report | CEPF | 8 to 18 Oct 2018 23 Oct to 1 Nov |
| 5 | GFWA Supervision Mission Report | CEPF | 2019 |
| 6 | GFWA Supervision Mission Report | CEPF | Nov-19 to June 2021 |
| 7 | GFWA Supervision Mission Report | CEPF | 13 to 23 Mar 2022 |

ANNEX 02:
LIST OF INTERVIEWS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

LIST OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH STAKEHOLDERS

| KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|---|---------|--------------------------|
| # | RESPONDENT(S) | ORGANIZATION | DESIGNATION/ROLE | COUNTRY | DATE INTERVIEW CONDUCTED |
| 1 | Nina Marshall Peggy Poncelet | CEPF | Senior Director of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Outreach Grant Director, GFWA | USA | July 1, 2022 |
| 2 | Mariana Carvalho | BirdLife International | RIT Team Leader | Kenya | August 09, 2022 |
| 3 | Ruth Akagu | BirdLife International | Small Grants Manager | Ghana | August 16, 2022 |
| 4 | Jack Tordoff | CEPF | Managing Director | UK | August 25, 2022 |
| 5 | Olivier Langrand | CEPF | Executive Director | USA | August 25, 2022 |
| 6 | Jean-Baptiste Deffontaines | BirdLife International | Head of WASRO | Senegal | September 01, 2022 |

| IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS | | | | | |
|---------------------|--|--|--|---------------|--------------------------|
| # | RESPONDENT(S) | ORGANIZATION | DESIGNATION/ROLE | COUNTRY | DATE INTERVIEW CONDUCTED |
| 1 | Undebe Mary A. | African Research Association | Project Grant Administrator | Nigeria | July 27, 2022 |
| 2 | Justin Landry Chekoua Justin Kamga | Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER) | Program Officer Program Coordinator | Cameroon | July 27, 2022 |
| 3 | Emem Umoh | Society for Women and Vulnerable Group Empowerment | Project Coordinator | Nigeria | July 28, 2022 |
| 4 | Justice Camillus Mensah | Hen Mpoano | Project Manager | Ghana | July 29, 2022 |
| 5 | Marianne Carter | Fauna and Flora International | Director, Conservation Capacity and Leadership | Multi-country | August 02, 2022 |
| 6 | Ehoarn Bidaut | Missouri Botanical Garden | Project Manager in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone | France | August 04, 2022 |
| 7 | Ibrahima Doumbouya | Développement Pour Tous (DPT) | President | Guinea | August 08, 2022 |

**ANNEX 03:
DATA COLLECTION TOOLS**

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW (KII) SHEET

Evaluation of Lessons Learned in Relation to the Regional Implementation Team for the Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot

| CEPF Secretariat | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1. Name of the Respondent | |
| 2. Designation | |
| 3. Contact Details | |
| 4. Location | |
| 5. Date of KII | |
| 6. Starting Time of KII | |
| 7. Finishing Time of KII | |

BACKGROUND

1. Were any of the key management staff from the CEPF Team involved in the prior CEPF investment in the GFWA? If yes, who? And what was the role of these staff members?
2. Based on your experience of implementing this investment, what have been the major positive elements of the approach utilized by CEPF that have contributed to achievement of results under this investment? E.g. flexibility, approach to financial management, partnership, and inclusion of particular activities that are easy to implement and/or highly welcomed by beneficiaries, SMART logframe, etc. Please elaborate.
3. And, what have been the major elements of CEPF approach that resulted in implementation problems? E.g. three-tier model (CEPF-RIT-CSOs), ambitious targets, ambiguity in activities, etc. Please explain.
4. What, if any, changes were made in the approaches utilized to mitigate some of the challenges faced during implementation? What have been the effect on overall project management, operations, impact and sustainability as a result of implementing these changes?

RIT SELECTION

5. What was the process for the selection of the RIT in the GFWA Hotspot? What were the outstanding features of BirdLife that led to its selection as the RIT?

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

6. What has been the role of the CEPF throughout the execution of this project?
7. What is the composition of the CEPF Secretariat? What are the functions of the various teams within the CEPF Secretariat in terms of the current investment in GFWA?
8. What is the functional relationship between the CEPF Secretariat and: a) the Regional Implementation Team (RIT); and b) CSOs awarded with large grants?
9. How has the CEPF Secretariat supported the RIT throughout the implementation of the GFWA investment?
10. In your opinion, what have been the major strengths of the RIT (BirdLife) throughout the investment period and what challenges have been encountered throughout implementation?
11. Have there been changes in the management structure of the RIT over the course of the current investment? If so, what were the reasons for the changes and to what extent did they mitigate the challenges faced as a result of the management structure?
12. What are the major management challenges faced by the CEPF Secretariat in delivering its responsibilities? E.g. stakeholder capacity, internal capacity, post-COVID-19 global financial conditions, etc. How were some of these challenges mitigated? Please provide details.

EFFECTIVENESS

OVERALL

13. What challenges and opportunities has the CEPF Secretariat faced in the implementation of the current investment? Please provide an overview each major component, ie: the long-term vision, small grants program, large grants program, etc.

14. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the RIT structure and capacities regarding effective delivery of results?
15. Which investment targets have been achieved and overachieved? What were the supporting factors responsible for meeting or exceeding these targets?
16. Which components were delayed? And what were the reasons for these delays?
17. How did these delays affect progress of other components and what was the effect on overall investment? What mitigation measures were undertaken to bring these activities back on track? To what extent were these measures effective?

<RIT WORK COMPONENT-SPECIFIC PROBES>

18. What mechanisms did the RIT establish to coordinate a process for small and large grant proposal solicitation and review? How effective were they in soliciting a significant number of quality proposals?
19. Were any delays or challenges faced during the process of soliciting proposals for large and small grants at different stages? Eg: issuing calls for proposals, undertaking review of proposals, contracting to grantees, etc.
20. How effective has the RIT been in managing the small grants program in the GFWA Hotspot? What opportunities and challenges were faced throughout implementation? How were these challenges met and overcome?
21. How effective has the RIT been in coordinating and collaborating with the various stakeholders (such as regional and international donors, local and international CSOs, etc.) to achieve priorities set out in the Ecosystem Profile of GFWA?
22. What have been the major challenges and opportunities in terms of communicating the CEPF investment throughout the hotspot?
23. What opportunities and challenges were encountered in developing and obtaining endorsement for the long-term visions, financing plans, sector and/or development policy targets, and strategies for biodiversity mainstreaming within the business sector for the GFWA Hotspot? What strategies were utilized to mitigate these challenges?

24. Overall, how effective was the RIT in building the capacity of local CSOs operating in the GFWA Hotspot?
- Through which mechanisms and processes was support provided by the RIT to the grantees? (eg: through trainings and workshops, use of Master Class trainings, ongoing strategic support on a need-basis)
 - What was the CEPF's role in building the capacity of CSOs in the hotspots? What specific support did the CEPF provide to the RIT to facilitate the process of capacity building?

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

25. What is the monitoring activity undertaken by each of the key project stakeholders, including CEPF Secretariat, RIT, and CSOs, etc., e.g. monitoring visits, reports, etc. Were any of the key planning decisions based on M&E data? If yes, please provide examples.
26. What level of oversight did the CEPF have on the RIT's monitoring of the performance of small grants? How effective were the monitoring and evaluation processes implemented by the RIT?
27. What was the role of the RIT in undertaking monitoring and evaluation functions of large grants contracted by the CEPF?
28. What have been major challenges with collecting and reporting M&E data by each stakeholder? How has this affect progress reporting? E.g. delay in submission of reports, etc.
29. What special efforts are being made to collect gender-segregated data, stakeholder data, and E&S impact data?
30. What is your overall assessment of the RIT in terms of meeting its reporting requirements (eg: quarterly financial reports and semi-annual technical reports)? What challenges, if any, were encountered by the RIT in meeting its reporting obligations? How were these challenges addressed?

STAFFING

31. Did the RIT face any staffing challenges? If yes, please elaborate.
32. What was the impact of these challenges on the quality of delivery and efficiency?

33. How were these challenges resolved and to what extent were mitigation measures effective?

FINANCE

34. Have any challenges been encountered with regards to financing? E.g. late approvals, difficult reporting processes, unrealistic budgeting at design or AWP stage, etc. How have these issues affected the performance of the CEPF's investment in the GFWA? And what measures have been taken thus far to resolve some of these issues?

35. What challenges, if any, were faced in the disbursement of funds to the RIT? What was the impact of these challenges on the project's implementation?

36. What measures have been taken by the RIT to attract funding from various donor sources for the GFWA hotspot?

- a. To what extent were these measures effective?
- b. What challenges were encountered by the RIT in fundraising for the hotspot?

GRANT/RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

37. Has the RIT developed strategies to build synergies between the project's grantees? (e.g. by clustering grants in KBAs or based on the sectors/types of projects)

38. What has worked well in terms of effective collaboration with different types of grantees across the hotspot? What have been major challenges faced by the project when collaborating with different types of grantees across different regions?

IMPACT

39. In your opinion, which activities have had the highest potential for impact? Why?

40. Also, which activities do you think have had the lowest potential for impact? Why? How can the potential impact of these activities be enhanced?

SUSTAINABILITY AND RISKS

41. Of the activities implemented thus far, which are the most sustainable? Why? E.g. replicability by private sector or other development projects, change of government legislation, improved practices by industry, etc. Similarly, which activities are the least sustainable? Why?

42. How well-positioned is the RIT to evolve into a long-term implementing structure as a result of this project?
43. To what extent has the project been successful in making progress towards the civil society meeting the graduation targets set in the long-term vision?
44. What are the actual or potential threats to the sustainability of the implemented activities in terms of financial, socio-economic, and environmental factors?

Gender

45. What measures have been taken to ensure inclusion/mainstreaming of women's concerns throughout implementation of the current investment?
46. What have been the major challenges and opportunities regarding gender integration into the various activities? How are these being dealt with to ensure the achievement of the objectives of the current investment?

Knowledge Management And Dissemination

47. What methods of dissemination has the RIT used to share information with various stakeholders, e.g. participating communities, researchers, training institutions, policy and planning departments, etc.
48. How have knowledge management and dissemination activities undertaken by the RIT been effective? Please provide examples.
 - a. What have been the major challenges encountered by the RIT in delivering on this function?

LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

49. Based on your experience, what are the major lessons learned in terms of:
 - a. Design/Strategies utilized;
 - b. Execution and implementation arrangements;
 - c. Monitoring and evaluation;
 - d. Adaptive management;
 - e. Sustainability; and
 - f. Impact

50. What are your overall recommendations for the improvement of the following for similar future investments:

- a. Design/Strategies utilized;
- b. Execution and implementation arrangements;
- c. Monitoring and evaluation;
- d. Adaptive management;
- e. Sustainability; and
- f. Impact

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW (KII) SHEET
Evaluation of Lessons Learned in Relation to the Regional Implementation Team
for the Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot

| Regional Implementation Team | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Name of the Respondent | |
| 2. Designation | |
| 3. Name of Organization | |
| 4. Contact Details | |
| 5. Location | |
| 6. Date of KII | |
| 7. Starting Time of KII | |
| 8. Finishing Time of KII | |

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

1. Does your organization have prior experience of managing a CEPF grants program? If so, please elaborate on how it positioned you to undertake the function of the RIT for the current grants program.
2. What is the composition of your regional implementation team? What are the functions of the various teams within the RIT in terms of the current investment?
3. What is the functional relationship between your organization as an RIT and the CEPF Secretariat?
4. Overall, to what extent have the execution arrangements been effective in ensuring the smooth implementation of the current CEPF investment?
5. Have there been changes in the management structure over the course of the investment's implementation? If so, what were the reasons for the changes and to what extent did they mitigate the challenges faced as a result of the management structure?

6. What are the major management challenges faced by your organization in delivering its responsibilities? E.g. disbursement of grant funding, stakeholder capacity, internal capacity, post-COVID-19 global financial conditions, etc. How were/can some of these challenges mitigated? Please provide details.

SUPPORT FROM CEPF

7. Based on your experience of implementing this investment, what have been the major positive elements of the approach utilized by CEPF that have contributed to achievement of results under this investment? E.g. flexibility, approach to financial management, partnership, and inclusion of particular activities that are easy to implement and/or highly welcomed by beneficiaries, SMART logframe, etc. Please elaborate.
8. And, what have been the major elements of CEPF approach that resulted in implementation problems? E.g. three-tier model (CEPF-RIT-CSOs), ambitious targets, ambiguity in activities, etc. Please explain.

Grants Management

9. What mechanisms for outreach did your organization utilize for socializing and soliciting proposals in response to calls for proposals? To what extent were these mechanisms effective in garnering sufficient number of quality proposals?
10. What specific strategies did your organization utilize with regards to awarding small grants?
11. What was your organization's role in the evaluation and selection of large grants?
12. What specific support, if any, did the CEPF provide in the evaluation and selection of large vs small grants?
13. What mechanisms of oversight and progress tracking did your organization (as an RIT) have over the grantees?
14. What were some of the challenges your organization faced at various stages of the grant management process? What steps were taken by your organization to address these challenges and to what extent were these steps successful in mitigating the effects?

15. To what extent did the grantees meet their reporting requirements? What challenges, if any, did your organization face in that regard?
16. To what extent did the grantees require additional support on reporting? What impact did it have on your organization's level of effort, time and resources?

Monitoring and Evaluation

17. What are the major monitoring and evaluation responsibilities of your organizations as an RIT? How has the M&E been helpful in timely indication of critical gaps in implementation? Please provide examples.
18. What were the major elements of the M&E framework used by your organization for monitoring progress? What challenges, if any, were encountered in using this M&E framework?
19. How often were monitoring missions undertaken by your organization? What criteria was used to determine who to visit?
20. What have been major challenges with collecting and reporting M&E data by each stakeholder? How has this affect progress reporting? E.g. delay in submission of reports, etc.
21. What special efforts are being made to collect gender-segregated data, stakeholder data, and E&S impact data?
22. Did your organization conduct any additional verification of the grantees' self-reported results? (e.g. through the use of geospatial mapping to collect and verify data on areas under biodiversity mainstreaming)

Capacity Building

23. What support has the CEPF provided to your organization and what initiatives has your organization undertaken to ensure the RIT's evolution into a long-term implementation structure?
24. To what extent has this support enabled the realization of this outcome? What have been the key gaps and challenges impacting the achievement of this outcome?

25. What additional measures need to be undertaken to fill the gaps in terms of financing, technical capacity, advocacy and reach to enable your organization to evolve into a long-term implementation structure?
26. What processes and mechanisms did your organization implement to build the overall capacities of local CSOs awarded small grants? To what extent were these successful and what were the key challenges associated with the provision of capacity building activities to grantees?

IMPACT

27. How has your organization measured and verified the impact of the grant portfolio?
28. What is the extent of progress made towards achieving targets, goals, and objectives laid out in the Ecosystem Profile of the GFWA Hotspot under the current investment period?
29. What has been the major impact of your work on the local CSOs in the GFWA hotspot?
30. Which activities do you think have had the highest and which activities have had the lowest potential for impact? Why?
31. How can the potential impact of these activities be enhanced?

SUSTAINABILITY AND RISKS

32. Of the activities implemented thus far, which are the most sustainable? Why? E.g. replicability by private sector or other development projects, change of government legislation, improved practices by industry, etc. Similarly, which activities are the least sustainable? Why?
33. What is your organization's strategy in terms of ongoing and future engagement with the CEPF in the hotspot?
34. What are the actual or potential threats to the sustainability of the implemented or planned activities under the current CEPF investment?
35. What are your recommendations for improving the likelihood of sustainability of similar future investment cycles?

ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SAFEGUARDS

Gender

36. What measures have been taken to ensure inclusion/mainstreaming of women's concerns throughout implementation?
37. What have been the major challenges and opportunities regarding gender integration into the activities of the current investment?

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATIONS

38. What are the different ways in which various stakeholder types, including grantees, local communities, public, and private sector, etc., have been engaged throughout implementation? (e.g: co-funding, collaboration on other donor programs, new partnerships, etc.)
39. What steps has your organization undertaken to ensure that its various deliverables were delivered through effective stakeholder engagement at various levels?
40. What have been major challenges faced by your organization when collaborating with various partners and stakeholders? E.g. extensive variety of partners, limited capacity, etc.

LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

41. Based on your experience, what are the major lessons learned in terms of:
 - a. Design/Strategies utilized;
 - b. Execution and implementation arrangements;
 - c. Monitoring and evaluation;
 - d. Adaptive management;
 - e. Sustainability; and
 - f. Impact
42. What are your overall recommendations for the improvement of the following, for similar future programmes:
 - a. Design/Strategies utilized;
 - b. Execution and implementation arrangements;
 - c. Monitoring and evaluation;
 - d. Adaptive management;
 - e. Sustainability; and

f. Impact

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW (KII) SHEET

Evaluation of Lessons Learned in Relation to the Regional Implementation Team for the Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot

| Donors | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1. Name of the Respondent | |
| 2. Designation | |
| 3. Name of Organization | |
| 4. Contact Details | |
| 5. Location | |
| 6. Date of KII | |
| 7. Starting Time of KII | |
| 8. Finishing Time of KII | |

Donor Priorities and Perceptions

1. What are the development priorities of your organization in the GFWA Hotspot? And who are your key program implementing partners?
2. How does the CEPF investment approach of working through the RIT in the GFWA hotspot fit into these development priorities?
3. To what extent has your organization engaged with the RIT [BirdLife] over the course of the current investment period? What have been some of the key activities on which this collaboration has taken place?
4. What are the challenges and opportunities associated with the use of the RITs to support the CEPF in providing grants to local and international organization?

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

5. Based on your experience, to what extent do you think the approaches used in the current investment have potential to be replicated in other biodiversity hotspots?

6. What is your overall perception regarding the long-term sustainability of the outcomes and outputs achieved under the current investment?
7. What are your future plans for further collaboration with the CEPF in the GFWA Hotspot and other any other hotspots of interest?
8. What are some of the lessons learned and recommendations for improved implementation of similar future investments from your perspective?

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW (IDI) SHEET

Evaluation of Lessons Learned in Relation to the Regional Implementation Team for the Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot

| Grantees | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 9. Name of the Respondent | |
| 10. Designation | |
| 11. Name of Organization | |
| 12. Contact Details | |
| 13. Location | |
| 14. Date of KII | |
| 15. Starting Time of KII | |
| 16. Finishing Time of KII | |

Introduction and Background

1. Please provide an overview of your organization. What sector(s) is your organization involved in; and what activities is it engaged in.
2. Please provide an overview of the grant provided to you by the CEPF and/or BirdLife International.
3. Does your organization have experience of implementing similar projects in size and scale?
4. What are the various types of challenges faced by local CSOs in the context of the areas where you operate?
5. How and to what extent does the current CEPF-funded grant address these challenges and constraints?

Engagement Process

6. How did you find out about the grant opportunity from the RIT?
7. In your opinion, how effective were the outreach mechanisms used by the RIT in ensuring that the call for proposals/grant opportunity was disseminated to a wide audience?
8. In what ways did the RIT engage with you during the application process? (e.g: through support on application, responding to queries, provision of information, holding information sessions, etc.)
9. To what extent are you satisfied with the level of communication and support received from the RIT?
10. In the future, how can the RIT improve the level of communication and support it provides to applicants?
11. Compared to other donors, how would you consider the support and level of communication that the RIT provides to grant applicants?

Project Implementation and Management

12. What are the major management challenges faced by your organization in delivering its responsibilities? E.g. stakeholder capacity, internal capacity, post-COVID-19 global financial conditions, etc. How were/can some of these challenges mitigated? Please provide details.
13. To what extent has support from the CEPF and/or the RIT helped to mitigate these challenges?

Capacity Building

14. What support have you received from the RIT in building your organization's management, technical and financial capacities?
15. To what extent has this support been effective in improving your organization's technical, management, and financial capacities?
16. What challenges, if any, did your organization face in terms of the a) disbursements of grant funding and b) technical assistance from the CEPF/RIT to your organization? What impacts, if

any, did these challenges have on the overall progress towards results as well as the management of your project?

17. What type of support would you like to see future RITs provide to local civil society organizations similar to your size and capacity?

Stakeholder Engagement

18. What are the different ways in which various stakeholder types, including other grantees, local communities, public, and private sector, etc., have been engaged in your project activities?
19. What measures are taken to ensure that women and indigenous communities are actively involved in your project's activities?
20. What have been major challenges faced by the project when collaborating with each type of partners and stakeholders? E.g. extensive variety of partners, limited capacity, etc.
21. What support has the RIT provided, if any, in facilitating greater stakeholder engagement over the course of your project's implementation?

Sustainability

22. What support, if any, was your organization provided to improve the effectiveness of your organization's implementation and long-term sustainability?
23. What are the actual or potential threats to the sustainability of the implemented or planned activities by your organization?
24. Based on your experience, what are the major lessons learned from implementing the project in terms of overall management arrangements, effectiveness and progress towards results, and long-term impact and sustainability of project activities?
25. What are your recommendations for improving the likelihood of sustainability of similar future projects implemented through CEPF grants?

What are your current and future plans to build on the results achieved under this project?
What is your organization's vision and approach to do so?

CYNOSURE

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