Describe any lessons learned during your project:

"Lessons learned" are experiences you have gained that you think would be valuable successes worth replicating or practices that you would do differently if you had the chance. Consider lessons that would inform project design and implementation, and any other lessons relevant to the conservation community. CEPF Lessons Learned Guidelines are available [here](#)

What went well?

<u>Training</u>

- Participants enjoyed being able to come together and be in one room, when restrictions allowed, in both Liberia and São Tomé and Príncipe. This increased the opportunity for networking and in some instances it may have been easier for participants to focus on the material as they were not based at their offices, meaning potentially less distractions.

- Online training meant that more people could attend at the times that the workshops were scheduled and potentially more people from each organisation could listen and participate as they were not restricted by attendance. Recordings from the workshop could also be sent out to others to listen to again, which is not easy to do for a live session.

- The two clinics in Liberia held after the training sessions worked well as they gave people more chance to ask questions on a personal level regarding their organisational circumstances. It individualised the training and allowed participants to apply the theory to their projects, helping to reassure them.

- Participants seemed to feel more confident and gained a basic understanding about what it meant to pitch a project to donors. The additional session they requested and received about logframes seemed to provide them with more confidence about how to complete these when writing a proposal.

- Having in-country FFI staff and mentor organisation staff support the training was essential as not only were they able to offer additional explanation and support if online trainers could not be heard/understood but they also were able to understand and offer a local context specific response better than a UK based trainer could, making learning more relevant for the participants.

- FFI developed an additional training session (hour and half) for mentors to attend to provide extra support in how to deliver mentoring. This was well attended by all English speaking mentor organisations. For Alisei and Fundação Príncipe separate sessions and discussions were held with them to talk through the process and outline any potential issues.

- Diverting some of the funding towards paying for internet connection for mentee organisations particular for the second and third series of workshops helped them to participate.

- The smaller training sessions, with smaller numbers of participants held independently in São Tomé and then in Príncipe helped to direct more focus from mentors on mentees during the training.

<u>Mentoring</u>

- Mentor organisations supporting other mentor organisations in country was a good model. The organisations were mentored by others in the same region, who understood the local context as well as challenges that each organisation might experience and who were able to offer support. This not only built stronger relationships between organisations but provided opportunities for mentee organisations to open up about challenges and receive peer support from others.

- The mentor organisations in São Tomé and Príncipe both provided excellent support to

mentee organisations, which was particularly helpful as FFI has less presence in this region. Fundação Príncipe is a partner to FFI and communication and the relationship between both is already strong so it was easy to stay in touch. Fundação Príncipe also did much more than they had to in terms of supporting their mentee organisations with the application for the mentoring programme, applying for the FFI Small Grant and enabling the two organisations on Príncipe to receive their funds for the small grant, and completing the tracking tools. Alisei also provided additional support through the training period and ensured that everyone had access to and received the necessary training.

- Partners in Development (PADEV) and the Society for the Conservation of Nature, Liberia (SCNL) supported their mentee organisations very well and kept in contact with FFI about any issues and progress.

CEPF Small Grant

- The CEPF grant was great opportunity for SADS as it was good experience for this organisation to go through the whole process and this seemingly has given them more confidence for managing this type of project.

- Associação Programa Tatô and Fundação Príncipe also benefitted from undertaking this grant and gained additional experience in project management.

- This was a useful opportunity for mentee organisations in Liberia to experience what is involved in applying for a grant of this complexity and also possibly have some insight as to how INGOs operate and obtain funds. It also provided mentee organisations with the opportunity to find out how donor organisations operate and ask questions about the process. The reviews from CEPF about the application process may also have provided valuable learning points.

- The structured support that CEPF provided to mentee organisations during the project implementation was well received.

FFI Small Grant

- All 15 organisations that decided to apply for the FFI Small Grant received it. Not only did this grant provide funds for goods and services deemed essential for improving the effectiveness of the organisation but also not easy to obtain in any other type of grant funding. This also gave all mentees the opportunity to practice applying for another grant.

- There was a larger diversity of goods and services asked for than anticipated and were viewed by the reviewers as those that might be particularly helpful for the fundamental functioning of these organisations including: electric generators or funds to run them, parts a maintenance for the organisations sole vehicle, website development, statistical training, financial audit, English classes, Microsoft Office training, driving licence, Microsoft Office package (genuine copies), printers, projector, cameras, laminator, Dropbox licence, laptops and also funds for one mentee organisation to develop and manage a plot of land to support the organisation.

- QuickBooks and training were also requested by several of the mentee organisations and whilst this was seen as a useful spend of the funds, it was also requested that each organisation check that the copies that they would be buying were genuine. It was also advised that given the potential complexity of the software, that training should be included in the costs. This was well received by mentee organisations, who did their best to accommodate this advice.

- Mentors were asked to discuss and review each mentee organisation's application before they sent it in. This may have helped organisations consider more thoroughly what they

really needed.

- The application forms and budget templates were straightforward enough for each mentee organisation to complete with some support from mentors if needed.

- Mentee organisations were also asked to provide a quote for items above $1,000 USD both for evidence and for organisations to have the practice in collecting and submitting materials like this.

What could have gone differently/better?

General

- It was not anticipated how difficult some organisations would find it to complete the Civil Society and Gender Tracking Tools.

- Many of the mentee organisations did not have a good grasp on how to use the internet to research donors or sign up for resources on the capacity for conservation website. Internet connection in both Liberia and São Tomé and Príncipe was also intermittent and not reliable. Assigning some of the funds to providing internet connection for mentee organisations helped somewhat with this and with attendance to online training sessions.

- There was too much to do in too short a time period for too many organisations. The time period for mentoring and training was too short to allow for any sustained change. Mentoring should continue for years. The mentee organisations realistically probably only had time to mentor one organisation effectively and FFI could have supported two or three.

Training

- It was difficult to direct the training according to the needs of each organisation as CEPF had given such a prescriptive level of training requirements for the CSO before their tracking tools had even been assessed. Right at proposal stage FFI was asked to "provide a description of the potential contents and topics, as well as, duration of each". We were also required to provide training on safeguards (environmental and social); development/revision of CSO's gender policy; include the monitoring of social media matrix (reaches/likes/fans/followers/…); the development of a communication piece for local press on each CSO's mission/work and how to identify relevant press-medias; include CEPF project management and monitoring for compliance. This did not give a lot of room for manoeuvre when then considering the needs of the mentee organisations.

- The level at which several of the training courses were delivered could have focused a more fundamental level particularly with regards project design. We adapted and added to the training when feedback from participants during the session suggested that they were not following as well as anticipate i.e. adding on an additional session about log-frames and making the exercise about situational analysis much more straightforward. The concept of 'gender' for some of the mentee organisations in Príncipe was new and training was also given at a more fundamental level.

- Mentee organisations from São Tomé and Príncipe were not able to mix with each other due to the Covid restrictions and may have benefitted from cross island shared learning.

- More training and evaluation forms could have been completed however, this would have been easier to ask participants to complete when face to face in a classroom at the end of a session, it was more difficult online as the sessions normally ran over (due to late starts in Liberia) and to chase participants more than once or twice after the sessions was very labour intensive.

Mentoring

- The mentor organisations were given a copy of the mentee organisation's tracking tools and asked to develop both a mentoring plan and an organisational development plan but this was only advisory and not a requirement. The mentors may have had better understanding of the needs of the mentees if they had been asked to facilitate the completion of the tracking tools with the mentee organisation.

- Mentors and mentees were asked to sign agreements that laid out how they were to work with each other as well as taken through the process in full during an introductory training session. However, it is not clear how much value was given to these agreements and how often they were actually referred to during the course of the mentoring programme. It was difficult to monitor this from the UK. In one or two instances in Liberia there were some unrealistic expectations on the part of the mentees who may have expected the mentors to undertake tasks for them (such as write policies and be available whenever the mentee organisation required support) rather than provide guidance at scheduled times. Although these issues were managed clearer communication about the purpose of a mentor may have been needed – a refresher session.

- At the beginning of the project mentors were provided with training (Liberia) and consultation (São Tomé and Príncipe) about how to mentor, as well as check-ins with the project lead about progress. However, mentors may have benefitted from more training or a refresher session mid-point to remind them about the process of mentoring and discuss together in a group how different organisations responded to mentoring.

- More could have been done to get mentees to support each other. They started doing this in Liberia particularly when it came to writing the gender policy. Particularly in Liberia if training had been face-to-face and there had been fewer restrictions due to Covid, it may have been easier to encourage further peer-support and shared learning.

- It was harder for FFI UK staff to form relationships with the mentor organisations as we were not able to travel there. PADEV was a little easier as they were also a mentee organisation and we already had a strong relationship with FP so were able to work more effectively with them.

CEPF Small Grant

- At the time of application some organisations did not have the infrastructure or equipment needed to develop these proposals i.e. CARD did not have a functioning laptop, RICCE had poor internet and a couple of organisations in São Tomé and Príncipe are not as computer literate as needed to be able to write a proposal at this level.
  Estrela, Mentor, FP: "COOPAPIP have a computer from the bee project, however it have problems and is on IT at the moment. Cuco said he have an email but he lost the access - which is something that happens many times here, actually. We can create emails for them but they struggle with using it anyway. These groups are normally older and with less literate people, so they do not have the basics for technology. Indeed this kind limits them as organization".

- The outcome of mentee organisations submitting grant proposals to either CEPF or another relevant donor was too ambitious. In order for an organisation to submit a proposal there is a lot of areas that need to be developed before this can even happen. In the first instance the organisation needs to have in place key resources such as reliable internet connection, working laptops, generator power to maintain the systems needed for an organisation to operate. It order to apply for a grant such as a CEPF grant, in many cases there needed to be much more understanding of how a project can be developed and managed, many of the organisations seem to be contracted by government institutions or INGOs, or corporates to implement work already planned and being managed. The weeks training provided during

this programme opened the door to many about how to manage a project but the size and limited experience of most of having not had the chance to develop and manage projects meant that they were not at the stage where they could apply for donor funding at a level they need for resources.

- The CEPF application process was extremely high level/capacity compared to the level of the capacity of the organisations who had to complete the application, even after a week of training. The jump from what they had learnt to what they had to deliver in the CEPF Small Grant proposal was huge. Feedback from PADEV was that they felt that the capacity needed to complete the proposal was too high for many of the organisations. Indeed they as a mentor did not get shortlisted.

- On review with the RIT it was suggested that organisations from São Tomé and Príncipe could apply for less funding and potentially put together a simpler project, which was fed back to mentors. The application process however, was still too much for the mentee organisations and the mentors were not able to set aside (nor had the provision for) the time to provide the support it required.

<u>FFI Small Grant</u>

- It could not have been anticipated how difficult it would be to get the funds from FFI UK into either Liberia or São Tomé and Príncipe and for the most part this was out of everyone's control. This delay however, slowed down and extended the process, meaning that not all organisations could purchase their goods and services in the time provided and were delayed with producing final reports and receipts.

- More time could have been taken to consult with other FFI staff about how much time things would actually take with the revision of the plan to include the FFI Small Grant. It was much more administrative and financially management intensive than originally anticipated.

What did we learn?
<u>General</u>

- Be as transparent as possible with the donor. It really helped being open with CEPF/RIT about the issues that we were facing as they helped us come up with potential ways to tackle them and were understanding and supportive of those issues, particularly those they faced in terms of writing proposals.

- Being transparent about the issues we had with the needs of the organisations for survival meant that we were able to explain to CEPF and gain their agreement about why it was important that the underspend in funds be put towards a small grant that would support the supply of necessary goods and services, important for organisational functioning

- There are far too many 'main' areas that each organisation needs to strengthen (as evidenced by the tracking tools) to even begin to address all of them over the course of the project - this will actually take years and need a far greater amount of resource for the mentee.

<u>Training</u>

- People did not always seem to read or access the resources sent. On many occasions resources and information that had been sent prior to the training had to be sent again during the training and several participants did not seem aware that they had been sent at all. Printed copies in this instance may have been better and provision could have been made to get these to the organisations.

<u>Mentoring</u>

- Managing expectations of mentees was key - as was keeping in touch with them. This however, was very labour intensive not only for mentors but also for FFI staff keeping track of the relationships.

- The mentor-mentee relationships that seemed to work best were those that were organisations were already known to each other – as were able to build on foundations that were already in place.

- The tracking tools demonstrated that the organisational development that each mentee organisation might want/need to make could be substantial. Changes needed to support organisations with becoming more effective and resilient will need much longer term support than the mentoring programme offered.

<u>CEPF Small Grant</u>

- This is the first time that many organisations will have completed a proposal in this format - particularly with the focus on a project concept.

  In Liberia much of their funding comes from International NGOs as sub-grants or from Government tenders. Creating a project and writing a concept with clear objectives, deliverables and impact is completely new. In Liberia with the sub-grants they are given by INGOs, although large, these grants are ultimately managed by the INGO who are asking these organisations to deliver on specific outcomes but the organisations are not in control of the project in its entirety and never have had to be.

  In São Tomé and Príncipe most of the organisations are very small and several have not applied for or received a grant this size before or type. Hence the very basic mistakes made during submission of the applications for the CEPF small grant of not handing in a proposal on time or going over the budget amount, potentially demonstrates that these are not things that organisations realise are so important when applying for a grant (despite having been told in the training).

- This was the first time many organisations have come across a 'logframe' or terms such as 'indicators' and 'outputs/outcomes'. Many of the concepts in both set of training were fairly new to organisations and although aware of them, this is perhaps the first time participants would have had to consider them in-depth, with their first proper exposure only during the project development training. It may not have been fair to expect them to complete a logframe for the application.

- There was also a great deal of information for the mentees to absorb in the CEPF Ecosystem Profile and CEPF's Strategic Direction documents. Many would not have experience this type of application before nor had to applying this type of information to managing work within their organisation.

  This very limited experience in proposal writing may be why organisations "failed to demonstrate the alignment of their project strategy with the CEPF's Strategic Direction and Investment Priority(ies)"; had "poor description of their project contribution to the achievement of CEPF's investment strategy" and "lacked critical information especially regarding the implementation of their proposed activities".

  Mentors would have had to provide a great deal more time to mentee organisations than planned for (and some indeed did at FFI) to write proposals that were to the level that CEPF were looking for, for submission.

  Some applications were reported as 'poorly written'. This literacy level of many of these organisations is not particularly high - indeed definitely not as high as those in an INGO. Without actually having written the application for them, it is hard to see how mentors

could have supported this.

Note also that not many individuals are that experienced with Excel and in some cases Word so even using these has been a difficult for some particularly with regards creating the budget.

Additional note: - Given that one of the issues the reviewers of the CEPF Small Grant had with the applications was the lack of a link between the project and conservation impact - it could be that actually many of these organisations are not directly focused on 'conservation outcomes' but rather on community development and sustainability. As a case in point, when mentoring SADS looking for donors to fund the organisation, it was hard to determine what the conservation focus would be - indeed it was much easier to look for donors who were interested in funding forestry and agriculture projects and it seems that a lot of the work that Liberian mentee organisations focuses on is to do with agriculture and livelihoods and providing for the communities. It was not clear how many participants even knew about the purpose of direct conservation work. This might also explain why it was difficult for some to align with the CEPF investment strategy.

- The donor pool for these small organisations is also very small and competition for them high and even smaller for those that do not speak English. The requirements from many donors is often still too high for smaller organisations like this to be able to consider applying for them.

FFI Small Grant

- Two of the eight organisations in STP did not apply for the FFI Small Grant and we are not sure why. There is a possibility that the language may have been a barrier, or what was being asked of them to provide in terms of proof of costs for goods and services was too difficult. Communication with these organisations was harder, as was getting their buy-in.

What does this mean for practice? (start doing/stop doing)
Training

- Taking the mentee organisations through the CEPF investment strategies at the start of the training and making sure these were understood as far as possible may have been useful. It would also be useful for a member of the RIT or CEPF to participate in these discussions to get a clearer idea of what it is organisations in these regions understand by the investment priorities and whether there is actual buy-in to these priorities from these organisations. Organisations may suggest in an application form or written document that they understand the priorities but discussion can uncover if there are any issues and what these might be. A workshop setting may have been useful for this. Also for helping CEPF to understand why there might not be total buy-in from these organisations.

Mentoring

- Working with fewer mentee organisations may have been easier for all mentors to manage. Perhaps just one each for the smaller in-country mentor organisations and two or three for FFI. Greater focus and resources could have been provided to these organisations with more time spent on working through all aspects of the tracking tools together; be more intentional about what the mentee organisation would like to develop and how; develop a plan of training with a smaller number of mentees but much more specific to their requirements; and more emphasis placed on building the relationship between the mentor and mentee. The requirements of the mentee organisations were large and potentially need investment of more than a year or so – but more long term. This model suggested doesn't include as many organisations in the process but it may be much more supportive.

- If this were to be done again it would be better to include a facilitated session with mentor organisations to help them complete the full Civil Society and Gender Tracking Tools as well and from this facilitate a session to complete an organisational development plan. Once they had participated in this process it then they could have been asked to undertake the same process with their mentee organisations. The mentor organisations could have come together after doing this to discuss the main needs of their mentees and decide an appropriate training and mentoring plan.

- This could then have followed in to the training for mentors about how to mentor. An hour and a half session was possibly not enough.

CEPF Small Grant

- It may have been better to offer mentee organisations a smaller grant initially (i.e. for $10,000) with a simpler application form – or given organisations the choice to apply for a more complex grant with a more complex application or smaller grant with a more straightforward application.

- And/or it may have been better to outline more clearly the different stages of application and CEPF to have provided more feedback on the application - or less organisations should have been involved and more time allocated to mentors to support each organisation with writing an application. Learning comes from experience not just from being told what to do. It would have been better to offer a much more guided, supported application process that was easier for organisations to understand and complete.

- Another session of workshops could have been tailored specifically to completing the CEPF small grant, completing it one step at a time and getting organisations to submit each section before moving to the next. However, this would be very labour intensive with 15+ organisations and maybe better suited to five or more funds given to mentors to support the process (assuming they have the time within their own roles to undertake this work).

FFI Small Grant

- Understanding at the start of working with CSOs and NGOs not only their organisational development needs but also the practical limitations of the organisation that can stop them from functioning effectively is very useful. This is something that should be considered at the start of all projects.

Summarize successes or challenges related to the sustainability or replicability of your project's results:

Challenges:
1. There were too many mentee organisations to support as effectively as they needed.
2. The time period for mentoring and training was too short to allow for any visible change. Mentoring should continue for years. The mentee organisations realistically probably only had time to mentor one organisation effectively and FFI could have supported two or three.
3. Working in a different country and in a different language meant that it was sometimes very difficult to retrieve documents from mentee (and sometimes mentor organisations) needed for assessment as well as pre and post training work.

Successes:
1. Each organisation now has access to improved resources and learning that could support organisational development processes.
2. Mentee organisations have increased the opportunities and likelihood of communicating with and sharing support and advice from peer organisations and mentor organisations.
3. Mentee organisations have been exposed to project management and donor application

processes that they otherwise may never have been introduced to or learn about and in some instances experience directly.