

An Overview of CEPF's Portfolio in the Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot: Upper Guinean Forest Ecosystem

The Guinean Forest Hotspot represents the Guinean portion of the Guinea-Congolian forests and contains two main blocks that incorporate several major Pleistocene refugia. The Upper Guinean Forest Ecosystem extends from Guinea into eastern Sierra Leone, and eastward through Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana into western Togo. The Lower Guinean Forest extends from western Nigeria into southwestern Cameroon and includes Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe. The two ecosystems are separated by the Dahomey Gap, a mixture of savanna and dry forest in Togo and Benin.

The Guinean Forest Hotspot contains impressive levels of biodiversity and endemism. Approximately 9,000 species of vascular plants occur in the hotspot, including significant assemblages of endemic plant species. New data released in 2005 following a global hotspots reanalysis indicates that there are 785 species of birds, and more than 200 reptile species and nearly 225 amphibian species, although knowledge of the herpetological fauna is regarded as inadequate. Mammal diversity is exceptional, with nearly a quarter of the mammals that are native to continental Africa represented. Sixty are endemic to the hotspot. With regard to primates, the hotspot is one of the top priorities for primate conservation – five species are Critically Endangered, and another 21 are considered Endangered; 92 percent of the hotspot's primates are endemic.

The main threats to biodiversity present a formidable challenge to conservation in this region. Most serious is poverty, which drives short-term needs that eliminate long-term opportunities. Much of the livelihood of the region's population is closely dependent on, or not far removed from, the natural resource base. Unemployment can stimulate social unrest, human migration, ethnic tension and land tenure conflicts, and all of these factors are now present in the region. Deforestation, due to both commercial logging and the slash and burn agriculture that often follows timber extraction, threatens populations of flora and fauna across the hotspot. Large-scale logging began as early as the 1840s in some countries (i.e. Sierra Leone and Ghana), and contributed to forest loss on a massive scale. Sierra Leone's forest cover for example, decreased from 70 percent to 6 percent in less than a century. Timber extraction continues to threaten the region's forests, with Liberia now being one of the key countries under pressure.

Small-scale and industrial mining pose serious threats to the region's remaining tropical forests, as most of these are located on substrates rich in iron ore, diamonds, gold and bauxite. The effects of mining vary, with large-scale mining a major concern in mountainous areas such as Mt. Nimba where mining can affect the health of freshwater systems and regional watersheds, and small-scale mining leading to forest clearance and increased levels of hunting for bushmeat. The harvest of bushmeat is a deep-rooted tradition in West Africa, and when practiced at subsistence levels in areas of low population density, may not necessarily result in negative impacts. However, bushmeat

harvest has increased dramatically in recent years, largely due to new logging roads that open up access to formerly remote areas, and the increasingly commercial nature of the bushmeat trade. Now, bushmeat is harvested at high levels for sale in markets in key urban areas such as Abidjan, Accra, Freetown and Monrovia, and there is evidence of cross-border trade, and even international trade to European markets where West African immigrants reside. This harvest is having immeasurable repercussions, and has resulted in the “empty forest syndrome” in many areas in the region.

Other obstacles that can be characterized as threats include the limited local capacity for conservation, which broadly speaking means that there are insufficient professionals, few local NGOs, insufficient academic support for training, research and implementation, and inadequate biodiversity data to use to meet conservation objectives.

Conflict, which ranges from tension to warfare to post-conflict recovery, is an ever-present factor and challenge to conservation. Conflicts for example in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo have resulted in differing levels of encroachment and unrest. The flow of refugees from one country to the next is a constant problem, as people arrive without resources and require at the very least food, shelter and fuel. Large refugee camps often deforest neighboring forests for firewood and consume all wildlife. Returning refugees present a similar challenge, as people return hoping to start anew, yet they have few resources. Civil unrest has indeed been, and continues to be, one of the most important factors affecting the ability of stakeholders to achieve success in the conservation arena.

The Guinean Forest Hotspot covers 11 countries, and is characterized by significant cultural diversity and political complexity. Given the small amount of money available for investment in this region, CEPF has focused on the Upper Guinean Forest Ecosystem, while acknowledging that investment could expand in the future to the Lower Guinean Forest if additional funds become available.

CEPF's strategy for investment in the Upper Guinean Forest is based upon the West Africa Conservation Priority Setting (CPW) workshop held in Elmina, Ghana, in 1999. With funding from the UNDP/GEF, Conservation International organized this important workshop to assess the status of biological resources and to determine the areas most in need of urgent conservation intervention. All stakeholders, including government agencies, research institutions, NGOs, private sector interests, development agencies, and the 150 participating scientists, adopted the results of the workshop. The CEPF investment strategy, as articulated in the ecosystem profile, builds upon the recommendations of priority areas and actions that came out of this CPW. Analysis of the CPW priority sites and actions, coupled with CEPF's preparation of the ecosystem profile which included a threat assessment and review of current investment, led to the development of an investment strategy focusing on the most serious threats in the region, including forest loss and fragmentation, ecosystem degradation, limited local capacity for conservation, and ineffective policies and regulations. The primary niche for CEPF investment in the region is to support connectivity, seeking to address not only ecological but also political, social, and administrative fragmentation.

CEPF investment in the Upper Guinean Forest Ecosystem commenced in December 2000 with the approval of the Ecosystem Profile and an allocation of \$4.3 million to be spent over five years. In December 2001 an additional \$1.9 million was allocated to this hotspot for a total allocation of \$6.2 million over five years. The additional allocation was

made after the MacArthur Foundation joined the CEPF partnership and additional resources became available, resulting in a reassessment of allocations. The reallocation also responded to the MacArthur Foundation's desire to provide increased resources to a focused number of hotspots.

The CEPF strategy is described in the CEPF ecosystem profile, and includes the following strategic directions that guide CEPF investment in the region.

1. Strengthening institutional capacities for conservation.
2. Establishing a hotspot biodiversity monitoring system.
3. Developing conservation corridors.
4. Public awareness.
5. Biodiversity action fund.

In addition to the identification of the strategic directions outlined above, each strategic direction has further refined investment guidance provided through investment priorities, which are more specific and concrete. The investment priorities provide more specific targets for CEPF funding in the region and are used to inform grantmaking decisions. They are included as part of the full investment priority table in the ecosystem profile and/or on the CEPF Web site (www.cepf.net).

Although the main emphasis for CEPF investment is along the lines of the strategic directions described above, this is guided by geographic priorities that were defined at the CPW (see map following the overview). A total of 41 areas were identified during the CPW, and these include fragmented forests and coastal ecosystems. Of the intact forest remaining in the Upper Guinean Forest Ecosystem, the largest portion (43 percent) is believed to remain in Liberia. Côte d'Ivoire is estimated to harbor 28 percent, while Ghana has 16 percent, Guinea has 8 percent, Sierra Leone has 5 percent, and Togo has less than 1 percent. The three largest forest complexes in the region can be viewed as clusters of priority areas, and are:

- The Gola/Lofa/Mano complex of Sierra Leone and Liberia
- The Krahn-Bassa/Sapo/Grebo/Tai complex of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire
- The forest reserves of SE Côte d'Ivoire and SW Ghana

Investment has occurred in areas identified as priorities by the CPW, and where possible, investment has focused on one of the corridors described above. In addition, Conservation International has identified an additional corridor – the Greater Nimba Highlands, and this has been added into the list of priority corridors for CEPF investment.

To date, CEPF has awarded 65 grants valued at \$5,716,482 (see Chart 1). These grants range in size from \$1,000 to \$655,312, with the average grant size being \$89,000 (see list of grants). The full status of the portfolio to date and the timeline of grants awarded are illustrated in Charts 2 and 3.

Coordination

As one of the first hotspots approved for CEPF investment, models of coordination of CEPF on the ground did not exist. Although the ecosystem profile did advocate for coordination of activities within corridors (and specifically the three forest complexes mentioned above), coordination was poorly defined and described as a range of

activities such as aerial photography, multi-agency planning and community outreach. While a number of these activities are key tasks that comprise the overall mandate for coordination, these do not accomplish the need for coordination as CEPF sees it in hindsight.

It should be noted that this six-country hotspot consists of three francophone and three Anglophone countries, and at the start of CEPF investment, there was no clear indication of a single institution, or even a partnership, that could provide the sort of balanced leadership and expertise that would be essential for this region.

Thus, no specific “Coordination Unit” has been established to assist with implementation of CEPF on the ground. Coordination is in effect accomplished via the DC-based Grant Director, with heavy reliance on the many individuals and institutions knowledgeable about the region. In addition, a number of initiatives have contributed to greater “coordination,” including two grants to Conservation International for coordination within the corridors, and a grant to BirdLife International to build capacity amongst five NGOs in the region. This latter grant, although focused primarily on training and institutional capacity building, did and continues to contribute significantly to coordination in the region, as it has created a regional conservation spirit with national and regional conservation goals. Most recently, CEPF has supported the Environmental Foundation for Africa-Sierra Leone to establish a resource and Internet center in Freetown, and to host the first symposium for environmental NGOs in that country. This initiative has already developed a regional aspect, and is serving as a hub of coordination that benefits CEPF and other donors greatly. Finally, CI-Liberia is in the initial steps of setting up a “conservation campus” where a number of key NGOs will be based – this will increase collaboration and coordination within Liberia immensely.

It is evident that a coordination presence can be extremely helpful and can stimulate significant conservation activity. In the Upper Guinean Forest, some coordination efforts have reaped good results but others have met challenges difficult to overcome. In any future coordination effort, it will be important to assess models and lessons learned to develop a mechanism that can effectively coordinate amongst groups and across borders to benefit the entire region.

Portfolio Investment Highlights by Strategic Direction

SD1: Strengthening institutional capacities for conservation.

Throughout West Africa, CEPF investment has aimed to build capacity of local organizations and governmental institutions for implementing conservation efforts. The need for training in management, administration, financial accounting, project implementation, as well as specialist skills such as biological surveys and working with communities, is enormous. Some of these efforts have been more successful than others, and the reasons for failure appear to be numerous and include staff departure for higher-paying jobs, continued corruption despite new opportunities, and inability of trainees to make use of their new-found skills in their immediate job situations. Some of these factors are difficult to address, however, it is extremely evident that despite the lack of capacity in West Africa, it is not for lack of training courses. Some individuals in the region continue to request training courses, when in fact they have received so much training they ought to be teaching the courses themselves. The culture of needing more training is in some cases, a vicious circle in that some people and institutions feel that

they can't do anything until their capacity is built, and when they start to do something, they feel hindered because they would like to have some training.

In order to deal with this situation, CEPF is trying a new strategy in the most recent grant on this topic, one of on-the-ground training. A grant to CI-Liberia will involve training and on-the-ground, in-office supervision so that newly trained staff can receive backstopping when they have problems using their new financial, administrative or other skills. This project is a step up from CEPF's grant to BirdLife International, which sought to build the capacity of five NGOs in the region: Guinee Ecologie, Society for the Conservation of Nature in Liberia, Conservation Society of Sierra Leone, SOS Forests, and Ghana Wildlife Society. The emphasis of this recently concluded project was to raise the capacity of three institutions so that they could meet standards suitable to become a partner in the BirdLife network, and to continue training to two of the NGOs who already are BirdLife partners. This approach combines training by the BirdLife Secretariat and Birdlife partners to up and coming NGOs, and includes numerous field training sessions and many training opportunities where trainees meet colleagues from other countries (in this case the five participating countries/NGOs) and share experiences and objectives.

Highlights to date

- Through a grant to BirdLife International, five local NGOs have improved their capacity in project management, communications, fundraising, administration and Important Bird Area (IBA) survey techniques. These local NGOs have also developed "sustainability" strategies that will allow their continued operations and contributions to conservation, after the close of the CEPF grant.
- Conservation International has established an office in Liberia, following the signing of an MOU between CI and the Government of Liberia to increase the size of the protected area network. CI's mandate to collaborate and coordinate is helping to bring together the various NGOs in Liberia, and follows on from the efforts of the ACL – Alliance for Conservation in Liberia – created in 2002. The ACL was an ideal forum for promoting conservation action, but was ineffective due to lack of leadership.
- CEPF support allowed CI-Ghana to partner with the Ministry of Environment and Science to update the National Biodiversity Strategy, synthesizing results of the West Africa Biodiversity Conservation Priority Setting Workshop into national level policies and further consolidating them into national action plans. A similar partnership with Ghana's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has resulted in the revision of the National Environmental Education Strategy.
- Several grants to the Environmental Foundation for Africa-Sierra Leone have helped to move conservation in Sierra Leone to a new level. Assistance to revitalize the Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary, and to host the first symposium of green NGOs, have made EFA and Sierra Leone a new center of enthusiasm and action on the conservation front. Collaboration with other donors (e.g. NC-IUCN) via EFA has stimulated collaboration and coordination within the region.

SD2: Establishing a hotspot biodiversity monitoring system.

CEPF has not been successful in establishing a hotspot-wide monitoring program, yet a number of projects have contributed to improved knowledge, and will be important additions to any future monitoring effort.

Highlights to date

- CEPF funds have supported the establishment of a West African Rapid Assessment (RAP) team to undertake site-specific assessments throughout the region. To date the team has conducted surveys in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Guinea, providing important data about species and their status. The project also provided hands-on training to West African scientists as part of the process, resulting in a capable team of West Africa scientists able to conduct future surveys.
- IUCN has been supported in its efforts to continue with the MIKE project (Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants), and CEPF funds contributed to training of West African park rangers and provision of equipment to undertake monitoring. CEPF funds were essential to the expansion of the MIKE project into West Africa, where 90 percent of elephant habitat has been lost in the last decade. Ultimately the elephant assessments taking place through MIKE will act as benchmarks for entire African ecosystems.

SD3: Developing conservation corridors.

CEPF's investment in this strategic direction has primarily been through several grants to Conservation International, as CI is the most prominent proponent of the corridor concept in the region.

Highlights to date

- CI has promoted the corridor concept by focusing on four corridors and involving partners – NGOs, government and private sector in their conservation.
- A MOU between CI and the Government of Liberia has set the foundation for the establishment of a network of protected areas in Liberia. Although this MOU was signed by the previous Liberian administration, the new government has agreed to uphold the MOU and thus progress toward this important objective continues.
- A grant to the Living Earth Foundation for work in the Ankasa Exploration Base has helped to disseminate the concept of conservation in the areas and communities around Ankasa.

SD4: Public awareness.

The CEPF Ecosystem Profile recognized that one of the factors contributing to natural resource destruction was lack of public awareness. CEPF has invested in numerous initiatives under this strategic direction, and a number have been quite innovative. One of the challenges under this strategic direction has been to work with partners to develop awareness projects and activities that are creative and stimulating, and not the traditional actions that result in products but little change in behavior.

Highlights to date

- Via support to RARE, CEPF is supporting a pride campaign in Sierra Leone using the white-necked picathartes as a flagship to engage communities in minimizing threats to the Western Area Peninsular Forest Reserve. This exciting project brings environmental messages to people who have had little to no exposure to these issues before.
- CEPF is exploring the use of theatre to convey conservation messages, through several grants. AGORO is being supported in Ghana to train music/drama troops around Kakum National Park. Most recently, the project team performed for the President of Ghana – an incredible opportunity to demonstrate their skill and enthusiasm, and get the environmental message out to a higher level.
- CI-Ghana has conducted a national campaign aimed at reducing bushmeat consumption. This campaign attempts to revive Ghana's traditional conservation practices such as the totem concept, and has been monumental in changing public perception of wildlife as a 'free good' and curbing the devastating effects of this trade. Baseline and post-campaign surveys indicate a marked reduction in willingness to consume bushmeat.
- The Wild Chimpanzee Foundation is working in Tai National Park in Côte d'Ivoire, and is using drama in local communities living near the park to reduce the animosity that exists toward chimpanzees because of crop raiding.
- CEPF supported a conference that brought together 72 experts in Abidjan to assess the status of chimpanzees in West Africa and devise a strategy for ensuring their survival. CEPF funding also made possible the subsequent publication of the IUCN/SSC Action Plan for the Conservation of the West African Chimpanzee, which has become an important tool to raise awareness and attract further donor support.

SD5: Biodiversity action fund.

Designed to respond to unforeseen circumstances that affect biodiversity conservation and support small-scale capacity building, this strategic direction was created with a limit of \$10,000 for small grants. As the portfolio developed, it became evident that the need for small grants is very large. The main reason is that many of the civil society organizations in the region lack the capacity to handle larger quantities of funds. Therefore, although some applicants for CEPF funds requested large quantities, after review and recommendation, it was determined that they would be more appropriate to receive a small grant under this strategic direction, and if all went well, then additional requests for funds would be considered.

Highlights to date

- Grants have addressed key urgent needs for biological surveys, such as of sea turtles in Liberia, white-necked picathartes in Ghana, and reptiles and amphibians in the Ghana-Togo highlands.
- Grants have addressed capacity-building needs, such as that of local staff of Liberian NGOs, and the Tiwai Island Administrative Committee in Tiwai Island, Sierra Leone.
- Small grants have been useful to build the confidence of local NGOs and have given the experience (and project results) necessary to raise additional funds from CEPF and other donors to meet their conservation objectives.
- A new grant to CI-Liberia will establish a small grants coordination committee of partner organizations to be responsible for recommending small grants for Liberia for approval by CEPF. CEPF has allocated \$200,000 for small grants for this country, and will rely on the committee to refine biodiversity priorities, oversee the application process, review proposals and provide project design assistance, provide recommendations on applications, and conduct monitoring of approved projects.
- By mid-2005, CEPF will approve a block grant of \$50,000 to the IUCN/SSC Primate Specialist Group to manage a small grants fund supporting implementation of the IUCN/SSC Action Plan for the Conservation of West African Chimpanzees.

Conclusion

CEPF is now entering its fifth year of implementation in the Upper Guinean Forest Ecosystem. Regrettably, political instability, civil conflict and poor resource governance throughout the region continue to make conservation in West Africa a challenge. CEPF's partners confront these challenges everyday and have made significant progress despite them. CEPF has made a great effort to build capacity in the region and encourage sustainability of operations such that conservation work will continue without a break when CEPF investment comes to an end. While some NGOs have capitalized on this assistance, others have been slow to do so, and it is clear that we have not achieved the base of civil society involvement that is needed to meet the conservation challenge. At the same time, initiatives in some countries such as Sierra Leone, are proving exceptional and are likely to carry on well into the future with funds successfully leveraged by these enthusiastic and capable partners.

The need for external funding is still critical in West Africa. However, the current tumultuous political environment in the region has created a feeling of donor reluctance that makes fundraising extremely difficult. Core operational funding is needed for conservationists across the region to maintain activities. In Liberia, continuous funding is needed for partners to sustain the impact conservation is currently achieving in the country. New investment in Sierra Leone and Guinea is needed to develop partnerships and increase capacity for biodiversity conservation as political and economic stabilization occurs. Support to Côte d'Ivoire, when feasible, will be necessary to help this country emerge from civil unrest with a comprehensive strategy and the capacity for conservation. Additional funding is required to formalize partnerships and promote the biodiversity corridor concept in the country. Continued investment in conservation in

Ghana is needed to maintain the successes achieved to date and to extend efforts into the southwest Ghana corridor. In Togo, funding is needed to support local efforts to maintain the few fragmented forest patches that exist in the country.

Thus, as CEPF investment comes to an end, efforts are being made to ensure that the few remaining fund are spent as wisely as possible, and that they can be used to leave the region in the best possible state to ensure that CEPF funds leverage funds for the future, to carry on the many excellent efforts that have begun over the past four years.

- *March 2005*

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Charts through March 2005: Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot: Upper Guinean Forest Ecosystem

Chart 1. Approved Grants by Strategic Direction

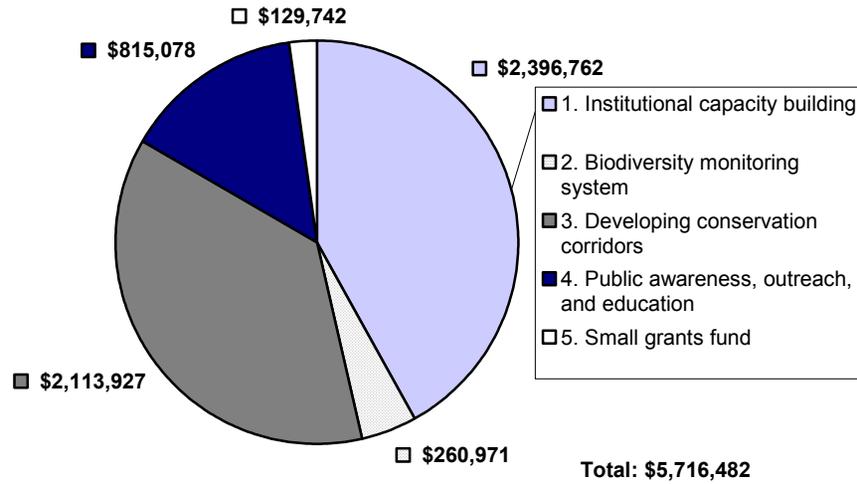


Chart 2. Portfolio Status by Strategic Direction

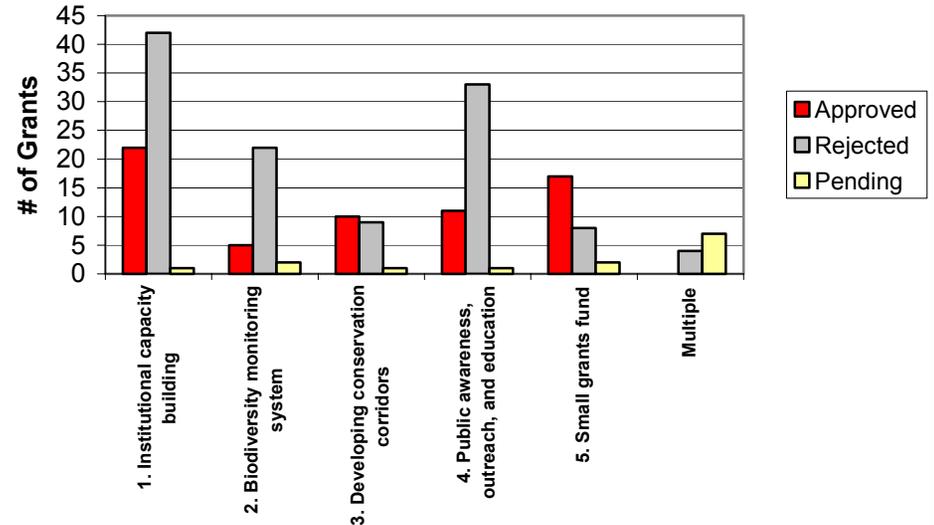


Chart 3. Combined Value of Grants Awarded

