

**Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
39th Meeting of the CEPF Donor Council
Virtual Meeting
Wednesday 15 December 2021
8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST)**

Minutes

1. Welcome by the Chair and Introduction of Participants:

Chairperson, Julia Marton-Lefèvre welcomed Astrid Schomaker, new CEPF Donor Council member and thanked Humberto Delgado Rosa for his many years working with CEPF.

2. Adoption of Agenda

[See meeting document.](#)

3. Presentation and Discussion of the Executive Director's Report

a) Action Points Review

[See meeting document.](#)

b) Partnership Highlights

[See meeting document.](#)

The Donor Council congratulated the Secretariat for its great efforts and successes, despite tight resources and inability to travel, to build social capital with partners and potential donors during this Covid-19 pandemic. It was suggested that in 2022, the Donor Council meet to reflect on the implications and perspectives of CEPF partnerships with the Green Climate Fund.

- The Secretariat highlighted that Conservation International (CI) had presented a proposal to Bezos Earth Fund and associated CEPF to this proposal. The proposal was successful in obtaining \$20M for the Tropical Andes. \$1M out of those \$20M will be channeled through CEPF for the support of civil societies in the Tropical Andes Biodiversity Hotspot.
- As part of the Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) Partnership (CEPF and CI are partners in the KBA Partnership), a proposal to Bezos Earth Fund was submitted by BirdLife International. This proposal of \$5M was also successful. It is to promote KBAs in the Tropical Andes and in the Congo Basin (CEPF is not working there). Those funds will support KBA identification, validation, and inclusion of those KBAs in the general database which is a valuable tool for CEPF work. None of those funds will be managed by CEPF. CEPF, as a partner in the KBA Partnership, was involved in the proposal submission. CEPF will benefit from the KBA identification, validation, and inclusion of those KBAs in general.

c) Financial Narrative (**CEPF/DC39/3/c**)

[See meeting document.](#)

d) Financial Report (**CEPF/DC39/3/d**)

[See meeting document.](#)

The Donor Council questioned the impact of the pandemic on grant making and implementation at the regional and local level, the savings on traveling and the reason for having no pledges. The government of Japan emphasized that its preference is to contribute funds through the GEF, and it would support the GEF to push for an increase in its contribution to the biodiversity conservation.

- The Secretariat explained that the fast burn rate on grant distribution is not because of any delays in 2020 as the CEPF had reached its goals even though it was a challenging year. Rather, this first quarter fast burn rate is because two large grants were made to the RIT for starting the investment in the Caribbean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot.
- The Financial Report is for the first quarter during which there were no pledged funds.
- The Secretariat has been very conservative on travel and CI has just started allowing some mission critical travel. However, travels were non-existent for most of the pandemic even though a few trips have taken place where and when possible.
- The Managing Director and Grants team monitor grantees closely to maintain good support to grantees. The RITs have been fundamental during this pandemic to provide that support. For grants with high social or financial risks, virtual visits are being planned. CEPF must continue grants supervision and therefore adapt its approaches. The impact of COVID-19 on grant making has been cyclical depending upon the local conditions related to the pandemic. As such, some locations have seen their grants suspended or restructured. However, grant making continues and has been in high demand. CEPF provides virtual support to applicants during the application process.

e) FY22 Q1 Approved Grants

[See meeting document.](#)

f) FY21 Q4 Approved Grants

See meeting document.

4. Conservation Achievements of the Investment in the Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot

[See meeting document.](#)

The Donor Council is impressed with the work achieved in the Mediterranean Basin hotspot and reiterated its support to this hotspot. Some members had specific questions and comments:

- How has the work experience been in Palestine, given that some organizations are not able to work there? What work has CEPF been doing there? What have been the outcomes? How are CSOs supported in the region?
- What are the results and lessons learned in terms of creating a regional hotspot-scale community of CSOs that have shared and pursued a similar vision, given that the region is difficult to coordinate?

- What is the proportion of the Mediterranean Basin hotspot portfolio focused on marine protected areas? As such, could there be conversations with the Blue Nature Alliance on investing in marine protected area expansion and strengthening management opportunities, including in the Mediterranean? Also, if there are countries within the hotspot where there is a strong political leadership on the 30 x 30 Initiative, it could be useful exploring those opportunities as there are rapid actions coming from countries in other regions (i.e. Latin America).
 - What lessons can be drawn from Turkey, especially on how CEPF can secure the endorsement of GEF Focal Points for supporting CSOs in this country?
 - The reporting of conservation achievements and investment is important in detailing the work of CEPF, especially by giving an understanding of how CEPF really impacts the building of a conservation community within civil society.
 - One of the key worries is the future of the Mediterranean Basin investment, as there will be a two-year gap that must be solved. An option is to look at funding opportunities through philanthropy and public funding.
 - The EU reminded the Secretariat that external funding for EU global programs was significantly cut down in the new EU programming cycle, and possible future funding opportunities would be mostly at the regional (or even national) level, where most of the financing is now located. As such, the EU offered its help acceding to the Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and iterated its support in the Eastern Balkans.
- The Secretariat is thankful for the proposition of the EU to open the door with the DG NEAR as it has been difficult, despite making contact, to have the opportunity to present CEPF achievements.
 - The Secretariat also highlighted that it has a good relationship with the GEF Small Grant Program (SGP) especially as members of the SGP are part of the advisory committee (Cape Verde and Jordan).
 - In terms of fundraising, the Secretariat is confident it will be able to obtain funding from philanthropists. But philanthropic funds might not be enough to support the entirety of the CEPF Program in the Mediterranean Basin.
 - A conversation should be continued on marine protected areas which represent about 25% of the current investment in the Mediterranean Basin. There are some other initiatives working on the marine aspect, such as MedFund (CI-GEF Implementing Agency), and CEPF will coordinate with these other initiatives.
 - The Secretariat explained that CEPF is not working in Turkey, even though it is an important country for biodiversity conservation as it is at the intersection of three hotspots. The GEF focal point never endorsed the Mediterranean Basin Ecosystem Profile, even though three visits to the government in Ankara were made.
- ❖ **Action Item: The EU will help CEPF gain access to the EU DG NEAR.**
 - ❖ **Action Item: The Grant Director will send the Donor Council the country fact sheet for Palestine, which includes the summary of the investment and the different organizations.**
 - ❖ **Action Item: The Secretariat will prepare a presentation on the role of the RIT in strengthening civil society organizations.**

5. Granting in Myanmar in the Current Political Context

[See meeting document.](#)

The Donor Council was clear that it supports CEPF to restart granting projects in Myanmar as biodiversity in this country is relevant to the Indo-Burma Hotspot, but with some clear provisions:

- Projects must be implemented by local NGOs to directly benefit the local community;
 - Any support, direct or indirect to any government institution, even at local government level, must be excluded;
 - CEPF should check its European partners on any official decision and on the conditions for European actors to intervene in Myanmar as there have been some EU Parliament decisions;
 - Be careful to ensure that no funding goes into any overt political situation. It is important for CEPF to remain neutral and focus on its biodiversity conservation and strengthening civil society to conserve biodiversity work which will allow CEPF to work there.
- The CEPF Secretariat clarified that its intent is to only work with known entities so that CEPF will not likely engage with a highly politicized organization. Nevertheless, CEPF will monitor the situation closely.
- ❖ **Action Item: CEPF will look at the restrictions from the US government as well as to the EU countries restrictions on working in Myanmar.**
- ❖ **Action Item: CEPF will monitor grantees to know if they become politicized.**

6. How can CEPF take advantage of the CBD COP15 and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework?

[See meeting document.](#)

- The Donor Council recognized that CEPF is science-based and has this proven track record in terms of delivering conservation impact through CSOs which are both so relevant to the CBD COP 15.
- The Donor Council commented that CEPF should also engage with UNCCD COP15 planned to take place in Côte d'Ivoire in 2022 as this convention will focus on land use, land degradation, land restoration and landscape restoration.
- The Donor Council suggested to organize a few side events with the partners, civil society, and the governments at the CBD COP 15.
- CEPF should define the many roles it is already playing in supporting countries implement that future framework. There are like eighteen targets and doing the exercise of looking at those targets and analyzing what CEPF has been doing and can do in the next decade is important.
- The Donor Council also commented that the position of CEPF in the COP is extremely important, but that it should position itself as a delivery mechanism to support countries in the implementation of the new framework, particularly in the proposed targets 14, 15, 16 that have to do with resource mobilization. This would position CEPF as a solid organization that not only works in mainstreaming biodiversity and protecting biodiversity, but most importantly it would position CEPF as a financial mechanism for resource mobilization too.
- The Donor Council recognized that CEPF needs to focus on recognizing the role of civil society as implementers, key actors, and key partners for countries at

national level, in implementing and helping implement biodiversity strategies in local activities; therefore, playing a crucial role in conservation and in implementing the global biodiversity framework.

- The Donor Council also suggested that it could be useful that CEPF's message focuses on conservation but also on sustainable development and poverty eradication as biodiversity is essential for sustainable development and climate change.
- The Secretariat commented that:
 - CEPF can demonstrate the value of the grants made to conserve biodiversity, in the context of sustainable development, as one of its pillars focuses on human wellbeing.
 - CEPF stays very often on the backstage: grantees, and not CEPF, deliver conservation on the ground. Grantees are the ones put forward by CEPF. An example are hotspot heroes honored at CEPF 20th anniversary: CEPF is barely mentioned. COP 15 must see that civil society should be empowered to undertake biodiversity conservation on the ground and that CEPF is a conduit to help it.

- ❖ **Action Item: The Donor Council will make sure to identify opportunities for CEPF, inserting it in relevant conversations during the preparation leading to the COP15.**

7. Could CEPF invest in CSOs of non-OECD/DAC countries if funding becomes available?

[See meeting document.](#)

The Donor Council commented that this topic is mislabeled and discusses Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs). It also commented that CEPF working in OCTs would make complete sense as it would help CEPF consolidate its geographical coherence. An example is the Caribbeans Islands biodiversity hotspot: Guadeloupe and Martinique are included in the Ecosystem Profile as species have no national boundaries but those OCTs will not be invested in despite their ecological importance. The Donor Council emphasized that current funds could not be used in OCTs but that new funding should be sought for such investment. However, it will be important to identify what the practical consequences and implications would be for working in currently ineligible countries.

- The Secretariat agreed that an investment in OCTs would be made through new funding and that it will present text for changes to the statutes.
- ❖ **Action Item: The CEPF secretariat will propose text for the changes of the statutes to be allowed to such investment.**

8. Next steps for the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF)

[See meeting document.](#)

The Donor Council agreed that while it is important to develop an environmental and social monitoring framework so that their funding is safely managed and with no environmental and social impact, it is also key to simplify the burden of bureaucracy on grantees, especially small grantees who work in very difficult spots, and deliver quality

projects. CEPF has continued to work to minimize the bureaucracy in its requirements. Therefore, the new framework should be tested to ensure the right balance between Donors' investment safety and the workload of grantees.

- CEPF cannot work without a framework but wants to take the time to explain to grantees what they are asked to sign on and help them to apply these safeguards.

❖ **Action Item: The CEPF Secretariat will update its Environmental and Social Management Framework for review by the Working Group and approval by the Donor Council.**

9. Any Other Business

The Chairperson mentioned that when it will be possible to travel for in-person meetings, it could be an idea that one of the yearly Donor Council meetings take place in a biodiversity hotspot to attend the meeting but also to visit the program to learn and be able to discuss what happens on the ground.

The next 2 Donor Council meetings should take place in May or June and September or October, with one hopefully in person.

The GEF also shared information on its current replenishment for GEF-8:

- The GEF and the Green Climate Fund (GCF) have come together with a long-term agreement to complement their collaborative work based on a long-term vision.
- The GEF will be presenting its new framework to partners on how to work together with countries.
- GEF has received a strong signal from their donors that biodiversity is extremely important and may be the main topic of interest within donors. GEF is therefore making a proposal where biodiversity will be about 35% of the GEF-8 resources.
- GEF's new approach is to provide countries with full flexibility. This means that countries can use their focal areas in a more flexible way looking for integration across all sectors and across all conventions.
- The GEF will be speaking further with CEPF especially in light of the revamping of SGP.