

Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
No Objection Approval Pursuant to Section 4.2 of the Operational Manual

26 September 2025

Selection of A Rocha Ghana as Regional Implementation Team for the Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot

1. Recommended Action Items

Pursuant to Section 4.2 of the Operational Manual, the Donor Council is asked to approve on a no-objection basis:

The selection of A Rocha Ghana in a consortium with Ajemalebu Self Help (AJESH) and Biopolis-CIBIO as the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for the for the Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot.

The deadline for no-objection approval is **10 October 2025**.

2. Background

On 17 April 2025, CEPF issued a request that organizations interested in serving as the RIT for the GFWA Hotspot submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) by 22 May, in order to pre-qualify to submit a formal proposal. Fifteen organizations submitted an eligible EOI by the deadline. CEPF issued a Call for Proposals (CfP) on 28 May, inviting the 15 eligible organizations to submit proposals. The CfP set the maximum value of proposals at US\$900,000 over three years, with the intention to extend by US\$600,000 for a further two years, subject to funding being secured.

Eight organizations submitted proposals by the closing date of 28 July, of which six were determined complete and eligible. A CEPF evaluation committee met on 15 July, and subsequently met with Olivier Langrand (Executive Director) and Jack Tordoff (Managing Director) to discuss the assessment results. Together, they determined that none of the proposals fully demonstrated the essential elements that CEPF considers critical to the successful establishment of an RIT, and that all applicants should be given an opportunity to revise their proposals to address the identified shortcomings. The Secretariat sent a request for revisions to each shortlisted applicant on 21 August, and received responses from them all by the deadline of 4 September. The evaluation team met again on 5 and 8 September, to finalize its assessment.

The Secretariat's assessment was presented to the CEPF Working Group on 24 September 2025 for its review and recommendation. Based on the discussions held with the Working

Group, it was recommended that CEPF enter into discussions and negotiations with the A Rocha Ghana Consortium for the reasons outlined below.

3. Assessment Summary

Of the six revised applications, two received relatively low scores and were, therefore, excluded from further analysis: West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI); and Centre Suisse de Recherches Scientifiques (CSRS). The other four applicants were shortlisted.

The score margin from the lowest ranked to the highest ranked proposal was less than 10 points (out of 100). The consolidated ranking of the four shortlisted proposals is, from highest to lowest, IUCN, BirdLife International, HATOF Foundation and A Rocha Ghana Consortium. However, no applicant fully met the criteria, and each raised specific concerns that require negotiation and resolution.

BirdLife International ranked highly but did not take advantage of the opportunity offered to revise the staffing or budget in its proposal. While the proposal included a clear approach based on relevant experience, concerns were raised regarding the location of the core team in São Tomé and Príncipe which is not strategic to cover the whole region efficiently; the limited staff time allocation for regional focal points; and the narrowing of priority sites and species.

HATOF Foundation submitted a thoughtful proposal with sound financial planning and qualified staff. However, concerns remained about the organization's relevant experience and capacity in managing a large and complex program at the regional level.

IUCN received the highest score for its strong regional team and comprehensive approach. Nonetheless, the proposed budget exceeded the allowable limit by more than US\$100,000, and was therefore deemed ineligible.

The **A Rocha Ghana Consortium** proposed an experienced consortium with organizations and regional focal points based in Ghana, Cameroon, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Equatorial Guinea. The consortium was able to demonstrate solid experience in managing complex programs, including some experience in managing a small grants mechanism. The staffing plan was well thought through and adequately budgeted for, covering various roles within the RIT, including a team lead, a small grants manager, four regional focal points, three finance positions, one monitoring and evaluation position and one communications position. The technical approach was deemed thorough and was of particular interest given the proposed approaches to mentoring and shared learning. While the budget lacked some level of detail and raised questions on allocated salary rates and the proposal did not provide extensive information on the financial management approach, the applicant did budget for more than adequate finance staff time, suggesting it had considered the importance of this aspect. Together the applicant presented a locally led consortium with strong biodiversity and organizational development expertise, and strategic presence across the biodiversity hotspot. Despite a lower score, the regional presence and local identity of the consortium offers an opportunity to build long-term leverage across the region and strengthen localization of support by building enduring local capacity for grant making and support to civil society. It was further discussed that there could be an opportunity to conduct an assessment on A Rocha Ghana and its partner AJESH, to identify any capacity gaps and opportunities to support their own organizational development, in line with CEPF's overall strategic approach in the region. For these reasons, the A Rocha Ghana Consortium was recommended by the Working Group.

The Secretariat intends to negotiate a number of key issues with the A Rocha Ghana consortium, should it receive approval. This will include asking A Rocha Ghana to: (1) confirm that the proposed team leader and small grants manager would be able to commit the allocated level of effort, given their leadership roles within the organization and, if not, who would take on these roles; (2) clarify salary rates for all roles; (3) provide further details on financial and administrative processes; and (4) provide a greater level of budgetary detail. The Secretariat is confident that any pending issues can be resolved, and that A Rocha Ghana, along with partners AJESH and Biopolis-CIBIO, is best placed to fulfill the role of the RIT for the Guinean Forests of West Africa.

4. Next Steps

The CEPF Secretariat will award a US\$900,000 grant to A Rocha Ghana to serve as the RIT for the new phase of CEPF investment in the Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot once the negotiations have been completed and a final proposal developed. It is anticipated that the RIT grant agreement will be signed in late November 2025.

5. Attachments (a link to access these documents will be sent by email)

Attachment 1: Call for Proposals for the GFWA RIT

Attachment 2: Proposal from A Rocha Ghana Consortium

Attachment 3: Proposal from BirdLife International

Attachment 4: Proposal from HATOF Foundation

Attachment 5: Proposal from IUCN

Attachment 6: Example of the letter requesting revisions from the CEPF Secretariat

Attachment 7: Evaluation of proposals by the CEPF Secretariat