

How to design a conservation project: masterclass turns ideas into reality

- By Jude Fuhnwi

In November 2017, conservationists from four East African countries attended a masterclass in conservation project design. This has enabled them to create projects with the power to influence private companies, public policies, and secure the long-term future of the Eastern Afrotropical Hotspot as it enters a new phase of conservation.



Masterclass participants at the end of training © Jude Fuhnwi

It doesn't matter how good an idea is if it's not communicated effectively. You could have a vision for a conservation project that would save the world – but unless your project proposal passes muster, it's unlikely to get funded. That's why it's so important to bridge the gap between ideas and implementation.

Right now, the Eastern Afrotropical Hotspot – a thriving but threatened oasis of biodiversity – is welcoming ideas from its conservation experts. We know that there's a wealth of local knowledge, expertise and ideas on the ground, but it's important to make sure that these ideas reach their full potential, with proposals that are as good as they deserve to be.

That's why, between 13 and 17 November 2017, thirteen conservation project managers – representing seven civil society organisations from Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania – met in Tanzania's main city, Dar es Salaam, for a 'masterclass' on this very subject.

The session was organized by the Tropical Biology Association through BirdLife International, the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) in the Eastern Afrotropical Hotspot.

Trainees arrived with potential project ideas which they developed into full proposals during the training

The masterclass developed participants' project design skills, and their ability to measure and communicate the impacts of their projects. Trainees arrived with potential project ideas which they developed into full proposals during the sessions. The main objective of this training was to ensure that funding from CEPF is awarded to conservation groups that have well-thought through proposals, for a greater chance of delivering real and measurable conservation work on the ground.

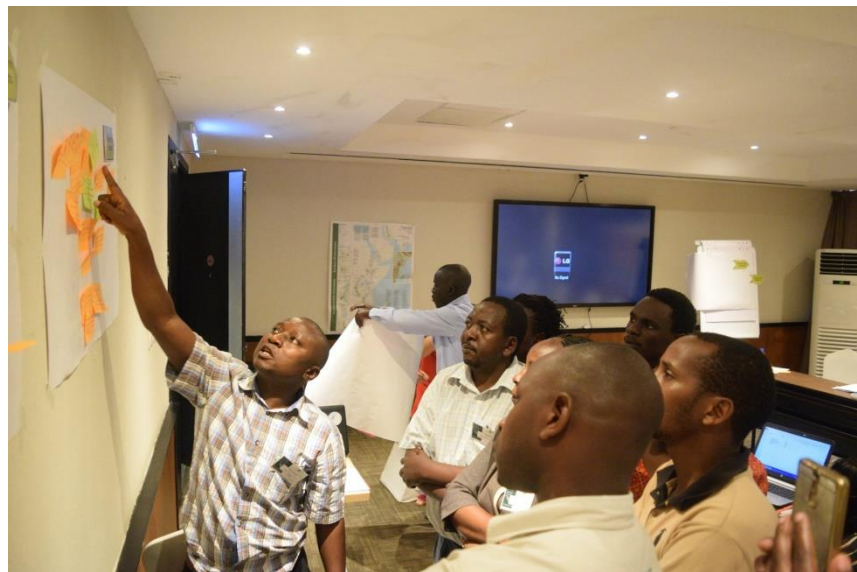
And it worked. These conservationists now have the capacity to develop practical, effective and eloquent project proposals. When put into action, their projects could help to influence public policies, introduce conservation goals into private sector practices, and develop sustainable farming. Above all, they will help to ensure that Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in their own countries are properly managed.

"I have learned how to use grant money effectively, to network with other organisations implementing similar projects, and how we can share lessons for our projects to get more conservation impact," said Paul Gacheru of Nature Kenya.

The trainees will use the skills acquired from the masterclass to work with local communities in their respective countries, finding long-lasting solutions to threats facing natural resources.

"[The training] was an opportunity for me to fine-tune my project, and to communicate in a more convincing way," said Bettie Luwage of the Tanzania Forest Conservation Group.

Bettie said the knowledge and skills gained will be useful for her to "help the local community to benefit from the forest in the Udzungwa Mountains, while ensuring the ecological integrity of the forest is upheld."



Participants present their group work © Jude Fuhnwi

The masterclass training is part of the CEPF RIT's new investment in the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot, which seeks to build on the lessons learned from a previous five-year cycle in order to fund more sustainable projects in targeted areas in the next two years.

Participants can go on to train people in their own organisations

Dr Rosie Trevelyan, the lead trainer and Director of the Tropical Biology Association (TBA), described the training as a “much more sustainable approach”.

“The participants can train people in their own organisations, and that means more people can put all this learning into practice,” said Rosie, who added that: “This helps them to build confidence among stakeholders that their project really is having an impact.”

Participants learned how to incorporate gender issues in their projects, and to engage key stakeholders. The learning opportunity also created a forum for them to interact with the Regional Implementation Team, in order to have a deeper understanding of CEPF tracking and management tools.

“I have to go back and make this really happen”

The (mostly practical) sessions helped them to get their project objectives, activities and impacts clear. For many participants, the masterclass was fundamental and timely.

“I enjoyed the communications tips on how to write stories that create positive reactions, and how to deal with communication that creates negative reactions. I have to go back and make this really happen,” explained Simon Nampindo, Country Manager of Wildlife Conservation Society, Uganda.

In the coming years, trainees will transform this knowledge into practice by effectively implementing their selected CEPF-funded projects in Key Biodiversity Areas. They will work closely with local communities to ensure that their activities push for sustainable energy, forestry and water management policies. They will also be working with private mining and well companies, encouraging them to change their behaviour and adopt practices that are less destructive to natural resources. And they will strive to introduce better farming practices through Payment for Ecosystem Services schemes – incentives offered to farmers to manage their land more sustainably.

All in all, the masterclass will make sure that all the best ideas get the attention they deserve.

BirdLife International, together with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (BirdLife in Ethiopia) form the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) investment in the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot (2012 -2017). The investment will support

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civil society in applying innovative approaches to conservation in under-capacitated and underfunded protected areas, Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and priority corridors in the region.



The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation. More information on the CEPF can be found at www.cepf.net.