

**Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund  
38<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the CEPF Donor Council  
Virtual Meeting  
26 May 2021  
8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST)**

**COVID-19 Survey Results**

**Summary:**

In March 2020, CEPF conducted a survey to assess how CEPF grantees and their projects were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. On 13 October, CEPF conducted a follow-up to that initial survey. A total of 377 grantees from the nine hotspots where CEPF is investing were contacted and asked to complete a questionnaire. By 1 November, a total of 133 responses had been received. The CEPF Secretariat analyzed those responses and that information was presented during the 37th Donor Council meeting to inform CEPF donors of the impacts of COVID-19.

Responses were received from all nine biodiversity hotspots. A low number of responses were received from the Wallacea and Mountains of Central Asia biodiversity hotspots; the former is closing and the latter is new with a very low number of grants. However, the high response rate for the Tropical Andes reveals the situation on the ground: Many have been impacted by COVID-19.

Overall, about 87% of CEPF grantees have been able to continue working on their project deliverables, while 13% of grantees have seen 26% to 75% of their project deliverables canceled.

On the other hand, 50% of grantees have seen 26% to 100% of their projects delayed more than 3 months. Indeed, the CEPF Secretariat has received many requests for amendments to activities and projects. These were primarily due to restrictions put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and, therefore, limited on-the-ground activities.

There are three major impacts of COVID-19 that grantees have observed at their project sites. The most important one is an increased economic vulnerability of local communities; the gap between the poorest communities and other communities is increasing. This has led to increased inequality between vulnerable groups and other sections of society (46 reports). Grantees have also seen a strong reduction in capacity of the government to manage protected areas/natural resources (75 reports) as well as a reduction in incentives to conserve biodiversity (63 reports). In addition, 98 grantees have equally reported pressure on natural resources from community members and

from external stakeholders, such as land grabbing or clearance of natural habitat. In the East Melanesian Islands, however, no impacts from COVID-19 were reported.

Organizations have seen a large increase in costs related to COVID-19 compliance (87 reports). Many have seen a reduction in conservation activities (66 reports) and a reduction in income (55 reports) due to a dramatic decrease in ecotourism as well as job loss or an inability to go to work.

It is important to note that 50% of all grantees who responded to this survey have reported no support coming from their national or local governments, partner organizations, and/or external donors to help them respond to the impacts of COVID-19 and, therefore, used their own capacities to face difficulties. The other 50% received a combination of financial and logistical support (such as IT support) or food and drug supplies.

When asked what additional support their organization may need to respond to the impacts of COVID-19, grantees replied that financial and IT/logistical support were needed as well as COVID-19 protection-related support. Many also mentioned direct support to communities who have been greatly impacted by the situation, and many requested additional time to complete their projects.

The main actions that grantee organizations have taken to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 exposure to staff and communities include the development of internal policies (103 reports) and the supply of hygiene and protective materials to community members, staff, consultants or partners (110 reports). Seventy-four reported disseminating accurate information on COVID-19 to community members or restructuring their grant's activities and/or budget to help their organization adapt to the pandemic over the long term (65 reports).

Overall, 60% of grantees have not seen the long-term viability of their organization significantly impacted by COVID-19 while 30% have seen a decrease. Unfortunately, 10% of respondents—mainly from the Cerrado and Tropical Andes biodiversity hotspots—have been strongly impacted and reported that they believe their organization's viability has been severely impacted.

To the same extent, 63% percent of respondents said that the operating context for biodiversity conservation in the country had been somewhat impacted by the pandemic. On the other hand, 25% said they had not seen the operating context for biodiversity conservation impacted, and 20% mentioned they had been greatly impacted. A few mentioned that the context had greatly improved because lockdowns allowed some species to make a comeback.

There were five main categories of conservation opportunities that emerged due to COVID-19: Awareness/Importance of Biodiversity; Economic Valuation of Biodiversity; Reduced Human Disturbance; Financial Support; and Cooperation. Several grantees explained that the direct value and importance of biodiversity came to the forefront: People became more aware of the importance of nature and how humans rely on it to fulfill their needs. Grantees have also looked at different ways to obtain financial support since ecotourism was severely impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. In many places, too, grantees felt their cooperation improved as they were able to extend their

circle and communicate with broader audiences thanks to improved communication capabilities following investment in logistical and IT support.

## **COVID-19: Update from the Hotspots on Current Situation:**

### **Cerrado Biodiversity Hotspot**

The situation in the Cerrado has deteriorated since November 2020, with additional delays in project implementation (4-5 months on average) mainly due to the grantees' inability to perform field activities. Some have managed to adapt their projects by either implementing strict guidelines (e.g., use of COVID-19 test prior to field visits, use of PPE—both covered by CEPF—social distancing, smaller groups but more visits) or by shifting to virtual activities (e.g., purchasing online platform licensing, computers and internet connections for communities—again, covered by CEPF). One piece of good news came from the Quilombo Kalunga community: It was among the first communities to receive the vaccine.

### **Eastern Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot**

The Eastern Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot is quite isolated from the rest of the world and has been largely shielded from the major effects of the pandemic. The countries were affected by travel limitations, but the direct public health impacts—and ensuing effects on project implementation—were minimal. However, from January-May 2021, this situation changed for the worse, albeit marginally, with greater restrictions on travel and social gatherings.

### **Guinean Forest of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot**

The situation has been uneven in the hotspot. Most projects at the community level and in more isolated parts of the countries have resumed normal activities with the use of PPE. However, projects involving cross border or international expertise continue to be impacted. Projects in São Tomé and Príncipe are still impacted due to the total lockdown of the islands, followed now by severe power cuts. Guinea was also affected by an outbreak of Ebola in February, which was well contained.

### **Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot**

The situation in the Indo-Burma Hotspot has deteriorated somewhat. Until recently, most of the hotspot countries had very few cases of local transmission. Today, there is an increasing number of cases, which remains at a low level compared to most other parts of the world thanks to a strong public health response. In most countries, CEPF grantees continue to implement projects, albeit with some restrictions on public meetings and inter-provincial travel as well as a ban on visits from international experts. Otherwise, CEPF grants are being implemented with some delays and no-cost extensions.

### **Madagascar and the Indian Ocean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot**

In this hotspot, the burn rate has remained fairly even, which indicates that projects

have been continually implemented. It seems that despite the worsening COVID-19 situation in Madagascar, grantees have been able to adapt to the pandemic-related restrictions and hardships. Thus, the overall situation, while being different now compared to October 2020, has not had a substantial impact on the investment.

### **Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot**

A significant number of projects have experienced delays in implementation and required extensions. Consultation meetings, exchange visits, and other trainings and conferences have been significantly delayed. Many grantees have developed alternative means to reach their objectives (e.g., videoconferences, MOOCs, etc.), but the local communities' situation is more complicated, and activities have been delayed. In addition, projects have been impacted by the direct consequences of the pandemic with the death of one organization's leader as well as many deaths of staff members' relatives in several countries. In the Balkans, the situation is slowly returning to normal. Across the hotspot, there have been multiple amendments or adjustments to projects that were unexpected.

### **Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot**

The situation in this hotspot is better. Initial reactions were quite severe from national authorities in each country, with strict limitations on international and domestic travel. These have relaxed over time.

### **Tropical Andes Biodiversity Hotspot**

The Tropical Andes Biodiversity Hotspot continues to be heavily impacted by the pandemic, having experienced among the deepest economic recession and highest COVID-19 mortality rates globally. CEPF grantees report an increase in environmental degradation in the hotspot as poverty rates have soared, gold prices have reached new highs, and public budgets for environmental protection have been cut. CEPF's Phase II grant-making in the Tropical Andes, which came to an official close in January 2021, was significantly impacted by travel restrictions and government prohibition of outsiders visiting Indigenous communities. While vaccination programs are slowly ramping up and travel restrictions are slowly lifting in some countries, CEPF expects the hotspot to continue experiencing profound challenges in the short to medium term.

### **Wallacea Biodiversity Hotspot**

In Wallacea, the impact of COVID-19 on the CEPF investment has remained the same. Indonesia is a huge and diverse country where the pandemic has had widely differing impacts by region. Over the past year, parts of the hotspot (e.g., the Lesser Sundas) have been able to go about business as usual, whereas other parts (e.g., Sulawesi) have had more severe restrictions. Restrictions in the capital, Jakarta, have also limited the pace of work. There is no indication that this will change in the near term.