

CEPF Final Project Completion Report

Organization Legal Name	Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment
Project Title	CEPF Regional Implementation Team in the Western Ghats
CEPF GEM No.	52956
Date of Report	31 st October 2016

CEPF Hotspot: CEPF Regional Implementation Team in the Western Ghats

Strategic Direction: 3. Regional implementation team

Grant Amount: \$ 650,000.00

Project Dates: May 1, 2008-Jun 30, 2016

1. Implementation Partners for this Project (*list each partner and explain how they were involved in the project*)

ATREE's RIT worked with a range of non-government, academic, private and government organizations to implement the program, but without any official partnership agreements except for those with the grantees. Many of the originally envisaged partners became grantees, in the course of the Program. Several experts (regional, national and international) were involved (anonymously) in the grant application review stage.

Eminent experts and even exemplary grantee representatives were involved in the grant awarding stage for decision- making. RIT involved regional stakeholders (including current grantees, Western Ghats Portal staff) in all local & regional workshops, which were delegated to grantees to conduct.

Conservation Impacts

2. Describe how your project has contributed to the implementation of the CEPF investment strategy set out in the ecosystem profile

ATREE has served as the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) to implement the CEPF investment strategy in the Western Ghats as articulated in the [Ecosystem Profile](#). The grant was implemented in line with Strategic Direction 3 and the linked Investment Priorities of the Ecosystem Profile. This grant served the overall objectives of the profile by bringing together civil society organizations, building relevant partnerships and networks, and enhancing their capacity to implement conservation planning and action for globally threatened species and their habitats in the Western Ghats.

The RIT implemented this by the following activities:

a) coordinating CEPF grant making in the Western Ghats to realize the objectives of the Western Ghats Profile, including broadcasting, communicating with and advising potential and actual grantees, monitoring and evaluating grant projects, forging

synergies between grantees and other agencies by facilitating partnerships and collaborations, suggesting larger initiatives to augment the grants, drawing lessons from grant-making experiences and developing a long term conservation plan for the region;

b) strengthening the capacity of (sometimes nascent) civil society organizations to develop new models and initiatives to conserve and manage priority species, key habitats and landscapes identified in the Profile, with a special emphasis on enhancing habitat connectivity within and between sites; and,

c) supporting assessments, research and action on the status and distribution of globally threatened and endemic species and key habitats and landscapes using concepts and tools of conservation science.

Summarize the overall results/impact of your project

Planned Long-term Impacts - 3+ years (as stated in the approved proposal)

List each long-term impact from Grant Writer proposal

Proposed:

Enhanced conservation of globally threatened species and priority sites and enhance habitat connectivity in all five landscape corridors in the Western Ghats by initiating and sustaining enduring partnerships between communities, government and civil society that involve new models of conservation action and that are synergistic with existing conservation initiatives in the Western Ghats within a systematic conservation planning framework.

3. Actual progress toward long-term impacts at completion

From the year 2008 to 2016, the RIT provided strategic leadership for the CEPF investment in the Western Ghats, by implementing the planned investment priorities in the Ecosystem Profile into grants that achieve the desired impact, and shared conservation goals as below:

- applied local knowledge, expertise and insights while representing CEPF in the Western Ghats region.
- has assisted individuals and civil society groups in designing, implementing, and replicating successful conservation activities;
- screened and reviewed grant applications and managed external reviews with technical experts and decision-making committees;
- Listed all grant reviewers and external experts on a website (<http://www.atree.org/reviewers>)
- awarded and monitored small 68 small grants (up to \$20,000). Disbursed a total of \$ 874,319 from 2009 to 2015 (<http://www.atree.org/sglist>)
- set up Panel of experts along with CEPF representatives to decide and award Large Grants
- led the monitoring and evaluation of individual projects using standard tools, site visits, and meetings with grantees;
- assisted the CEPF in portfolio-level monitoring and evaluation of investment in the Western Ghats;
- ensured the effective coordination with the CEPF Secretariat on all aspects of implementation;

- communicated widely the program objectives, opportunities to apply for grants, lessons learnt, and results through website (<http://cepf.atree.org/>) and other digital media (Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CEPFATREE> ; and Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CEPFATREE>);
- Print media (brochures & pamphlets) were distributed to stakeholders whenever and wherever possible
- involved the existing regional program of ATREE, CEPF donors such as World Bank and GEF, and implementing agency representatives such ATREE Fellows, grantees, state government officials, and other sectors within the hotspot in implementation.

Planned Short-term Impacts - 1 to 3 years (as stated in the approved proposal)

List each short-term impact from Grant Writer proposal

Proposed:

Enhanced conservation of a significant part of globally threatened species and habitats in the Western Ghats through improved monitoring and management plans for protected areas, implementation of systematic conservation planning for critical links and landscape corridors and by adoption of biodiversity friendly management practices in production landscapes

4. Actual progress toward short-term impacts at completion

- In 2008 RIT initiated grant making by announcing the grants by wide publicizing, and received applications from individuals and civil society organizations for targeted biodiversity conservation in the Western Ghats.
- RIT sent for expert review verified grant applications (Small Grant and LoI), formed committee of experts to make decision on grants, called shortlisted applications to make oral presentations at ATREE, and declared results of the deliberations (award of grants).
- RIT followed due procedure in the grant-making process and prepared to proceed with monitoring the approved grants, while also helping CEPF in screening Large Grant Applications.
- Small Grant funds were periodically and systematically disbursed and progress and financial reports obtained accordingly.
- Small Grantees were visited in the field and on-site progress was monitored and reviewed.
- RIT arranged and facilitated annual supervision mission visit by CEPF and donor representatives from the World Bank, GEF, AFD, EC etc to the RIT (ATREE), the field sites of grantees, and in some cases, the offices of the current grantees under the Program.
- CEPF Safeguard documentation and CEPF Tracking Tools from grantees were obtained systematically by the RIT.
- RIT representatives personally updated the Chief Wildlife Wardens of the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala on the progress of grants in their respective states
- RIT successfully organized and conducted participatory workshops for the Mid-term Assessment, 5-year Assessment, and Final Assessment of the Portfolio, with the participation of grantees and government stakeholders.

- All grantee project and safeguard documents and deliverables were uploaded into the CEPF database servers.

5. Describe the success or challenges of the project toward achieving its short-term and long-term impacts

ATREE has overcome a number of challenges inherent in working in one of the first regions to adopt the RIT model, and has added significant value to CEPF investment in the Western Ghats, by:

- (i) reaching out to a wide spectrum of civil society groups and non-government players enabling them to access international donor funds for conservation, in many cases for the very first time;
- (ii) enhancing the technical quality and relevance to CEPF investment priorities of individual projects, through providing feedback based on a firsthand knowledge of the issues addressed and the capacities of the applicant institution;
- (iii) guiding the development of a balanced grant portfolio, including by encouraging applicants to work synergistically and eliminate overlaps between projects;
- (iv) facilitating exchange of information, experience and lessons learned among grantees esp through regional and thematic meetings and workshops ;
- (v) assisting applicants to negotiate the requirements of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) that precluded access to international funds without prior permission and clearance; and
- (vi) helping early career conservationists identify work opportunities on CEPF projects.

6. Were there any unexpected impacts (positive or negative)?

RIT decided to follow up on the screening of grant applications, by short-listing the applications with best fit to CEPF priorities for oral presentations to decision-making committee, and approved grants then and there with the help of external experts. Not only did this help take clear and quick decision on award of grants, but also greatly improved applicant confidence in such an open process.

Local stakeholders at the grantee level are being informed about project activities in their vicinities by the respective grantees in the form of publications and summary posters in local language, including project and grievance contacts, besides stakeholder meetings. This strategy is more appropriate for varying audience at regional and state levels, especially w.r.t. language variation across the hotspot.

There were certain controversies when vested interests raised unfounded aspersions that CEPF investments in the Western Ghats were colluding with the government-appointed Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), also known as the Gadgil Commission, to stop all developmental activities in the Western Ghats. RIT had to maintain a low profile for some time for the controversy to die down.

Project Components and Products/Deliverables

Component 1 (as stated in the approved proposal)

List each component and product/deliverable from Grant Writer

See Annexure 1

7. Describe the results from Component 1 and each product/deliverable

See Annexure 1

8. Repeat point 8 above for each Component in your approved proposal

See Annexure 1

9. If you did not complete any component or deliverable, how did this affect the overall impact of the project?

Communication strategy:

Communications has been the weakness for the RIT due to inability to recruit a dedicated staff for the same. ATREE's Communications Officer too could not spare dedicated time to the CEPF Program due to pre-existing workload. As a consequence, the RIT was unable to develop a communications strategy for regularly disseminating the results of CEPF Grants. Ad hoc communications activities have taken place, with RIT communicating through website and other digital media. With the launch of the [Western Ghats Portal](#), a web-based portal on the biodiversity of the Western Ghats Region, the grant outputs and other public documents were uploaded there by RIT so that information made freely available to the public immediately. Finally RIT employed loraPro, a videography team, to document the successful grant initiatives through video and photographic medium. This proved to be a tool for rapid dissemination of information and visuals to a much wider audience via the internet [channel](#).

Link with Government:

Meetings and Communications with the top officials of the State Forest Departments have not occurred on a periodic basis due to frequent promotions and transfers of officers, and scheduling issues. Some middle-level officers have been contacted and updated on grant and portfolio activities through grantees about CEPF's program during their briefings. RIT has been successful however in involvement of mid-level officers in grantee workshops & meetings.

10. Please describe and submit any tools, products, or methodologies that resulted from this project or contributed to the results

The contracting of loraPro team, to thematically videograph the successful grant initiatives through video and photographic medium, worked out wonderfully in communicating and connecting to a much wider audience, packing in a lot of information in a very short time.

A lot of time in deliberations of suitability of awards of grant was saved by short-listing the applications with best fit to CEPF priorities and arranging for the applicants to make oral presentations to decision-making committee, in defense of their proposals, .

Thereafter approving suitable grants became very easy, It also greatly improved applicant confidence in such an open process. The oral presentation initiative saved a lot of time and efforts for all involved in the process. It helped that the call was made with specific topics to be taken up rather than leaving it open.

Following the final assessment workshop, RIT representatives met with a limited number of conservation-linked grantees, enterprises and individuals over the course of the last six months of the RIT grant, to evaluate the feasibility of setting up a social venture fund based on the green economy theme emerging from this grant program, following up on a grant-based mechanism,

With the approval of the CEPF secretariat, RIT used some limited funds to engage the services of a Fund Advisory firm ([SAS Partners](#)) to do an assessment of the funding landscape for natural products in India. In addition to detailed internal workings for the Fund Manager, RIT has put together a marketing document to elicit the interest of potential investors into the Fund (Annexure 2 and 3).

Benefits to Communities

11. Please describe the communities that have benefited from CEPF support

*Please report on the size and characteristics of communities and the benefits that they have received, as a result of CEPF investment. Please provide information for all communities that have benefited **from project start to project completion**.*

RIT did not directly involve with communities as this was a grant monitoring and implementation program. However, several grantees have reported their involvement and benefit sharing with local communities in their grant reports.

Community Name	Community Characteristics							Nature of Socioeconomic Benefit												
	Subsistence economy	Small landowners	Indigenous/ ethnic peoples	Pastoralists / nomadic peoples	Recent migrants	Urban communities	Other*	Size of Community				Increased access to clean water	Increased food security	Increased access to energy	Increased access to public services (e.g. health care)	Increased resilience to climate change	Improved land tenure	Improved recognition of traditional knowledge	Improved representation and decision-making in governance	Improved access to ecosystem services
								50-250 people	251-500 people	501-1,000 people	Over 1,001 people									

*If you marked "Other" to describe the community characteristic, please explain:

Lessons Learned

12. Describe any lessons learned related to organizational development and capacity building.

The programmatic and financial training provided at CEPF HQ at the onset of the Western Ghats Program was very informative and instrumental in RIT's progress. It would make a lot of sense for RITs to undertake a similar exercise within the Hotspot for new grantees.

This hotspot-specific exercise and the inter-hotspot RIT Exchange initiative, greatly helped not only the RIT members but positives were conveyed to ATREE and several grantees to add to their organizational strategies.

13. Describe any lessons learned related to project Design Process (*aspects of the project design that contributed to its success/shortcomings*)

RIT requires personnel who are assigned fulltime to the Program, rather than part-time employees. If the latter cannot be avoided, then clear timetables and work monitoring should be set right at the planning, proposal and budgeting stage. The same should be conveyed by RITs to the grantees too.

In the same way, having experienced and knowledgeable experts within the RIT and ATREE does not necessarily guarantee they would be able make timely contributions to RIT requirements such as proposal and workshops, due to organizational commitments and schedules. However, for flexible activities such as or grantee site visits or report reviews or grant evaluation, RIT was able to get useful contributions from ATREE staff by timing the same according to staff availability. Therefore, event that require maximum contribution from several staff need to be scheduled according to suitable staff availability.

Describe any lesson learned related to project Implementation (*aspects of the project execution that contributed to its success/shortcomings*)

When the grant call for proposals and Lols was issued, an unexpected flood of applications were received only on the penultimate and last date (some even after deadline too). RIT took quite some time to sort through and assemble these applications for screening, and then reviews. The only way out of such a crisis is for RIT to employ extra temporary staff to clear such flood of applications on those specific high volume days only.

Grant applicants rarely targeted the call and instead were attempting to strategize their own home-grown proposal into the format. Therefore it was vital that re-orientation of proposal towards call topics be undertaken, with time, effort and resources allocated for the same. It helped that the call was made with specific topics to be taken up rather than leaving it open.

RIT actively engaged in helping applicants revise proposals to fit the funding criteria. Helping grant applicants revise their proposals drastically increases the quality and relevance of proposal to CEPF investment priorities and improves the review process, besides earning the RIT the goodwill of applicants. However a lot of quality time and expert scrutiny is necessary for the above. Effort and resource has to be allocated and arranged for beforehand for these necessary interventions.

A significant obstacle to overcome was the context of Ecosystem Profile belonging to an older period (2003) and most applicants wishing to concentrate on current (post-2009) conservation priorities. It took a lot of effort on the part of the RIT and CEPF Grant Director to bridge the gap and link the investment priorities to extant issues taken up by grant applicants. The time between profiling and grant making has to be minimized.

RIT assisted applicants to negotiate the requirements of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA). Several individual and small NGO grant applicants were encouraged to approach NGOs that best matched the niche of their proposed grant activities and already obtained clearance to foreign currency grants under the FCRA Act. The option of Prior Permission for one-time grant-wise clearance was encouraged for small NGOs who fulfilled the criteria for Prior Permission.

Describe any other lessons learned relevant to the conservation community

Projects working with assumptions and requirements outside their control require some time and augmented resources to show results, and may require considerable modification and localization. These considerations have to be kept in mind by the RIT and also conveyed to grantees.

It is vital that the conservation community focusses urgent conservation priorities, local funding sources, and impactful conservation action clearly with its capacity and scope.

Sustainability / Replication

14. Summarize the success or challenges in ensuring the project will be sustained or replicated

Getting disparate or competing civil society organizations to work towards a common goal. Sustainability of any program requires long-term financial and institutional commitment.

Independent of being the RIT for CEPF investments in the Western Ghats, ATREE was and will be committed to conservation research and action in the Western Ghats, and is most suitable to continue its leadership role in the Hotspot, mirrored by the perception of several grantees. Having empowering individuals and institutions to engage in impactful conservation practices, ATREE will help sustain the new wave of effective conservation in the Western Ghats.

15. Summarize any unplanned activities that are likely to result in increased sustainability or replicability

ATREE along with other organizations in the region have strong commitments to the goals of the Western Ghats Profile. ATREE has several trust funds for long term sustainability of its efforts. The RIT at ATREE will further strengthen ATREE's efforts to raise additional funds and to expand programs outlined in the Profile beyond the CEPF's grant period.

Safeguards

16. If not listed as a separate Project Component and described above, summarize the implementation of any required action related to social and environmental safeguards that your project may have triggered

As a implementation grant this grant did not trigger any social or environmental safeguards. However, we ensured all grantees were screened for potential triggering of social and environmental safeguards, right from the application stage. Triggered grants were subjected to safeguard compliance guidance and diligently followed up to ensure total compliance. In some cases, detailed explanations were sought where grantees opined the safeguards were not triggered. All small grantees submitted the necessary documentation and circulated posters, explaining the objectives of their work in the local vernacular, and giving their contact details and those of the RIT, in case anyone has a grievance about their project. All such compliance documents were uploaded to CEPF server and made publically available. An important activity of grantee site visits was to verify compliance of safeguards in field. In particular, the grantees were asked to describe the measures they had taken to establish grievance mechanisms and, where relevant, conduct Free, Informed, and Prior Consultations when working with tribal communities.

Additional Funding

17. Provide details of any additional funding that supported this project and any funding secured for the project, organization, or the region, as a result of CEPF investment

Donor	Type of Funding*	Amount	Notes

* Categorize the type of funding as:

- A *Project Co-Financing (other donors or your organization contribute to the direct costs of this project)*
- B *Grantee and Partner Leveraging (other donors contribute to your organization or a partner organization as a direct result of successes with this CEPF funded project)*
- C *Regional/Portfolio Leveraging (other donors make large investments in a region because of CEPF investment or successes related to this project)*

Additional Comments/Recommendations

18. Use this space to provide any further comments or recommendations in relation to your project or CEPF

As above.

Information Sharing and CEPF Policy

CEPF is committed to transparent operations and to helping civil society groups share experiences, lessons learned, and results. Final project completion reports are made available on our Web site, www.cepf.net, and publicized in our newsletter and other communications.

Please include your full contact details below:

19. Name: B Bhaskar Acharya

Organization: Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment

Mailing address: ATREE, Royal Enclave, Srirampura,
Jakkur Post, Bengaluru 560064, INDIA

Telephone number: +91-80-23635555

E-mail address: bhaskar.acharya@atree.org