

CEPF Strategic Directions and Investment Priorities in the Guinean Forests Hotspot

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<p>4. Build the capacity of local civil society organizations, including Indigenous People's, women's and youth groups, to conserve and manage globally important biodiversity</p>	<p>4.1 Strengthen the capacity of local civil society organizations in financial, institutional and project management, organizational governance, and fundraising</p> <p>4.2 Establish and strengthen women-led conservation and development organizations, associations and networks to foster gender equality in natural resource management and benefit sharing</p> <p>4.3 Strengthen the communication capacity of local civil society organizations in support of their mission and to build public awareness on the importance of conservation outcomes</p>
<p>5. Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination of conservation investment through a Regional Implementation Team</p>	<p>5.1 Operationalize and coordinate CEPF's grant-making processes and procedures to ensure effective implementation of the investment strategy throughout the hotspot</p> <p>5.2 Build a broad constituency of civil society groups working across institutional and political boundaries to achieve common conservation objectives</p>

Strategic Direction 1. Empower local communities to engage in sustainable management of 40 priority sites and consolidate ecological connectivity at the landscape scale

Chapter 7 reveals that pressure from local communities to meet their basic daily needs is a threat to the conservation and sustainable management of many KBAs. Chapter 8 highlights that hunting and overfishing are threats to wildlife populations in all hotspot countries, driven in large part by the demand for protein among expanding rural communities, as well as urban populations with increasing purchasing power. This chapter also reveals that rural population growth, coupled with increasing demand for agricultural commodities within and outside of the hotspot, is driving agricultural expansion, leading to habitat loss. Illegal logging and unsustainable extraction of fuelwood and charcoal are additional threats, which are again driven by external demand combined with a lack of sustainable livelihood options for local communities. These threats are especially severe in KBAs that are not adequately covered by protected areas but even protected areas have serious problems with unsustainable resource use. Chapter 6 also highlights that most countries in the hotspot have legislation in place related to protected areas, forest management and environmental protection. However, the capacity of government agencies to actually enforce the law is, in many cases, weak. This is especially so in remote forest areas outside of protected areas. In this context, local communities are often the best placed actors to address key threats to priority sites, either alone or in collaboration with government agencies. Currently, however, local community involvement in conservation is patchy. Where they have limited incentives or economic alternatives, they may engage in illegal or unsustainable activities, such as conspiring with illegal loggers, miners and poachers to deplete species populations and degrade natural habitats.

To address these issues, CEPF will support projects that empower local communities to engage in sustainable management of the 40 priority sites identified in Table 12.2, in order to consolidate ecological connectivity at the landscape scale. Investment Priority 1.1 will focus outside of conventional protected areas, taking advantage of policy reforms to pilot new, community-led models for site conservation, such as community reserves and conservation concessions. Investment Priority 1.2 will work within protected areas, to promote participatory management plans that create opportunities to engage communities and other local stakeholders as active partners in conservation. Finally, Investment Priority 1.3 will focus on all priority sites and demonstrate sustainable livelihood activities that have the potential to address local people's needs and incentivize them to participate in the conservation and sustainable management of biological resources. The focus of these investments will be on those communities that are currently placing the greatest pressure on priority sites, which means that they may not necessarily be inside the boundaries of the KBAs themselves. To be eligible for CEPF support, all projects under this strategic direction must engage target communities at all stages of project design and implementation, take account of existing governance structures, including customary ones, and address access to resources for local people and equitable sharing of costs and benefits.

Investment Priority 1.1 Strengthen the elaboration and/or implementation of land-use planning, land tenure and forestry reforms to facilitate good governance in the management of community and private reserves and concessions

It has been observed in the hotspot that current land tenure arrangements are one of the main issues that are hampering conservation, mainly because communities and private companies do not typically own the agricultural or forestry land they use, because most land belongs to the State, which leases it out for temporary use. This land tenure system makes it very difficult for smallholder farmers or companies to invest in a wide parcel of land over a long period of time, since they are afraid that the government may retake or change ownership of their lands; especially considering, as field experiences have revealed, that land allocation is not done in a transparent way. Land-use planning is also an issue due to overlapping jurisdictions among different government bodies, leading to land-use practices that conflict with one another. For example, there have been cases where mining permits have been granted to exploit minerals in forest concessions owned by another concessionaire.

These problems with land-tenure are gradually being addressed through policy and legislative reforms that favor secured community and private ownership of lands over longer periods. Taking advantage of this opportunity, CEPF will support participatory land-use planning processes and methodologies, notably those that empower communities to own and manage land and forestry resources. At some sites, this will require supporting actions that protect the rights of communities and private sector investors against the whims and caprices of local government officials and other stakeholders. In some cases, CEPF investments will result in the establishment of community or private reserves or conservation concessions. However, the models that integrate biodiversity conservation into the management of production landscapes will also be supported under this investment priority, even if they do not explicitly involve the establishment of conservation areas.

Investment Priority 1.2 Promote preparation and implementation of participatory management plans that support stakeholder collaboration in protected area management

Elaboration and implementation of participatory management plans is an important approach to sustainably manage protected areas. The consultation process revealed, however, that some protected areas lack management plans, the legal duration of many other plans has expired, while some with valid legal status are not being respected due to a lack of participation of local stakeholders in their preparation. There is also a shortage of financial and human resources on the part of government agencies charged with protected area management. All this is not facilitating the participation of CSOs, local communities and other stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of protected area management plans.

CEPF will, therefore, support CSOs to work with local and national governments and designated private sector officials to brainstorm, elaborate, update, implement and monitor the implementation of participatory management plans. In this way, key enabling conditions will be put in place for collaborative management of protected areas, that treat local stakeholders as positive partners in conservation, and give them a voice in management decisions.

Investment Priority 1.3 Demonstrate sustainable livelihood/job creation activities for local communities that will act as incentives for the conservation of priority sites (e.g. domestication of wildlife species, sustainable logging from locally-controlled forests, harvesting of NTFPs, sustainable agriculture, etc)

It is widely recognized by stakeholders consulted during the preparation of the ecosystem profile that, because local communities depend heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods, it will be very difficult for them to conserve natural resources if they either do not have access to sustainable livelihood projects or alternative development strategies that reduce their dependence on unsustainable forms of natural resource use. Also, because of a high incidence of poverty, some community members connive with poachers and illegal loggers, in exchange for either part of the booty or funds to cover their immediate medical or household needs. This partially explains why many conservation projects in the hotspot have allocated an important part of their resources to incentivizing local communities to fully participate in conservation programs and activities, and experience from the first phase of investment suggests that such approaches yield significant results. However, it is important to note that lessons learned from the consultation process and previous CEPF investments in the hotspot show that local projects will also fail if sound and transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms are not set up to promote good governance virtues, and if the sustainability of financial incentives is not ensured.

CEPF will support local communities in and around the priority KBAs to conceive, develop and/or implement sustainable livelihood projects, such as domestication of wildlife and indigenous fruit species, apiculture, nature-based tourism and sustainable harvesting of NTFPs. With regard to domestication of wildlife species, there is an inherent risk of domestication projects facilitating the ‘laundering’ of wild-caught animals and, thereby, facilitating poaching and wildlife trade. To mitigate this risk, all activities will be closely monitored, support will only be given for domestication of non-threatened species, such as cane rats, and CEPF will support the development of legal community enterprises to facilitate the implementation of these activities.

With regard to domestication and transformation of NTFPs, the stakeholder consultations revealed that value-addition and marketing of NTFPs has been very difficult for communities in the hotspot because of a lack of funds, technology, know-how and markets. CEPF will therefore support communities (financially and technically) to sustainably harvest, transform and market these products, while supporting complementary activities to develop markets for the finished products.

As well as reducing pressure on natural resources and encouraging communities to support conservation efforts on the ground, sustainable livelihood activities are also expected to build capacity among community leaders. The skills developed can be later employed for community mobilization for conservation activities. Projects supported under this investment priority will be expected to ensure the equitable involvement of women in the design and implementation of project activities, including in leadership positions. Grantees must also ensure that participatory benefit sharing mechanisms are designed, implemented and monitored to enable all stakeholders to fully participate in and receive benefits from projects that are equivalent to their efforts and costs, giving priority to vulnerable groups, including Indigenous People and women.

Strategic Direction 2. Mainstream biodiversity conservation into public policy and private sector practice in the nine conservation corridors, at local, sub-national and national levels

Most countries in the hotspot are in dire need of development projects to create employment and generate revenues to pay for education, health care and other essential services. As such, development projects, such as mines, hydroelectric dams and large-scale cash crop plantations tend to be viewed positively by public officials and elected representatives. However, one of the main causes of biodiversity loss in the hotspots is the development and implementation of large development projects that do not adequately integrate environmental concerns and social safeguards.

As seen in Chapter 8, agriculture and aquaculture is viewed by stakeholders as the second ranked threat to biodiversity in the hotspot, while energy production and mining is the third ranked threat. A number of hotspot countries are currently planning and implementing large development projects within or close to priority sites. To balance the exigencies of development and the need to conserve biodiversity, there is, therefore, a need to mainstream biodiversity conservation into government development policies, legislation and regulatory frameworks, as well as the business practices of private sector companies.

Since most existing policies, laws and legislation were elaborated without full consultation with stakeholders, notably rural communities and civil society, significant opportunities exist for policy reforms that promote sustainable, pro-poor growth models. The availability of resources and the absorptive capacity of conservation organizations in the hotspot mean that CEPF investments over the next five years will be able to test and refine a range of innovative conservation and sustainable development approaches at selected sites but will not be able to amplify these alone. Rather, CEPF will support targeted research, analysis and outreach to facilitate evidence-based policy making that takes into account the economic and climate values of natural ecosystems, i.e. natural capital accounting (Investment Priority 2.1). This will be complemented by initiatives that generate locally relevant information that can influence political and economic decision making to facilitate the sustainable management of priority KBAs (Investment Priority 2.2). Finally, CEPF grants will empower local communities and their associations to engage with private sector and government actors and demonstrate good practice models for sustainable development, particularly with regard to mining, agriculture and forestry: the three sectors targeted by the CEPF investment program (Investment Priority 2.3). The geographic focus for investments under this strategic direction will be the nine conservation corridors (Figure 12.1).

Investment Priority 2.1 Conduct policy-relevant research, analysis and outreach that informs and influences the development of national government conservation policies, including on protected area management, payment for ecosystem services, REDD+ and ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change

Information on the conservation outcomes in the Guinean Forests is patchy, and mainly limited to the intrinsic values of biodiversity, such as levels of species richness, threat and endemism. This information, while highly relevant to apportioning conservation investment, is unlikely to influence national policy making, which needs to compare the socio-economic costs and benefits

of different alternatives. With a few exceptions, information on the social and economic values of natural ecosystems and the services they provide is either unavailable or limited to anecdote.

Consequently, CEPF will support the undertaking and dissemination of policy-relevant research and analysis that will facilitate the development of national policies that support sustainable protected areas management, payment for environmental services and the use of nature-based solutions to climate change, especially the elaboration and implementation of REDD+ and ecosystem-based adaptation. Activities under this investment priority may require the participation of research institutions and policy think-tanks, as well as NGOs with a poverty-alleviation focus. Projects will be encouraged to incorporate information generated on the values of natural ecosystems under Investment Priority 2.2, where relevant.

Investment Priority 2.2 Generate locally-relevant information on natural ecosystems (e.g., economic valuations of ecosystem services) to influence political and economic decision-making in favor of their conservation

In order to support policy-reform and economic decision-making that will favor conservation over alternative development visions inconsistent with the long-term persistence of biodiversity, it is very important to generate science-based and locally rooted information on the socio-economic values of natural ecosystems and the ecosystem services they provide.

To this end, CEPF will support the generation of locally relevant information that will encourage sound economic and political decision-making. Because decision-makers in government and private sector will quantify the development alternatives to investments in the conservation of priority sites in economic terms, the conservation scenario must also be quantified in the same terms, if decision makers are to be influenced in favor of it. Projects under this investment priority could help establish the evidence basis for subsequent development of payment for ecosystem services or other long-term financing mechanisms under Investment Priority.2.1

Investment Priority 2.3 Facilitate partnerships among local communities, private sector and government to demonstrate models for best practice mining, sustainable forestry and sustainable agriculture by private companies

Most countries in the hotspot have elaborated national development strategies and goals that emphasize the mining, agriculture and forestry sectors as engines of development. To ensure that developments in these sectors proceed in ways consistent with the conservation of biodiversity, there is a need for demonstration models that adapt global best practice and sustainability standards, and apply them in the local context. To this end, CEPF will support projects that aim to facilitate partnerships among local communities, private companies and government bodies to demonstrate such models at priority sites. CSOs are well placed to facilitate such partnerships, to introduce the partners to international standards, such as FSC certification for forestry projects, and the RSPO and Sustainable Agriculture Network standards in the agriculture sector, and to develop market linkages for certified commodities.

Strategic Direction 3. Safeguard priority globally threatened species by identifying and addressing major threats and information gaps

At least 936 species in the Guinean Forests Hotspot are globally threatened (Table 4.1). The analysis presented in Chapter 8 indicates that the most widespread threat affecting these species is unsustainable biological resource use, followed by agriculture and aquaculture, and pollution. Moreover, as seen in Chapter 10, there is very limited funding from donors for species based conservation. The conservation needs of many globally threatened species would be adequately addressed through habitat protection and controls on unsustainable exploitation at the KBAs where they occur; this calls for site-based conservation actions. Such actions will be taken for the most highly threatened species, and guided by available species conservation action plans, to ensure they align with other investments by national governments and international donors (Investment Priority 3.1). In parallel, CEPF will support analysis of newly available data, complemented by targeted research to fill critical gaps, in order to provide more reliable information on which to base allocation of scarce resources and design of strategies for the conservation of globally threatened species (Investment Priority 3.2).

Investment Priority 3.1 Support the implementation of Conservation Action Plans for Critically Endangered and Endangered species on the IUCN Red List

Other species have conservation needs that require species-specific actions. For instance, poaching is a threat to many populations of globally threatened primates across the hotspot. While site-based protection can alleviate this pressure, it needs to be complemented by actions to address illegal trade in bushmeat, which is driving poaching at many sites. This requires complementary actions away from KBAs, for instance consumer demand reduction campaigns in urban centers. Another example is globally threatened vultures, which are wide-ranging species that can cover hundreds of kilometers in search of carrion and occur widely outside of KBAs. Site-based action is not sufficient to meet the conservation needs of vultures, which are exposed to threats in the wider landscape, including decline in wild ungulate populations, secondary poisoning by toxins used to kill carnivores, and targeted killing to provide parts for traditional medical practices.

Under this investment priority, CEPF will support species-specific conservation actions that address priorities set out in Conservation Action Plans for globally threatened species. CEPF funds will not be used to prepare the plans themselves but will be reserved for implementation of plans already prepared or to be prepared with other sources of support. In order to focus limited resources among the extensive list of threatened species in the hotspot, support will be limited to species assessed as Critically Endangered or Endangered: the two highest threat categories. Although 405 species fall into one of these categories, it is likely that most activities under this investment priority will address either mammals or birds, of which there are only 35 and 17, respectively (Table 4.1), because site-based conservation actions will be largely sufficient for most species in other taxonomic groups.

Investment Priority 3.2. Update the KBA analysis by incorporating recently available data, including on Alliance for Zero Extinction sites and global Red List assessments and by conducting targeted research to fill critical knowledge gaps

As has been seen, this profile has highlighted some important information taxonomic and regional gaps that make it very difficult to accurately evaluate the conservation status of many species or the relative biological importance of different KBAs in the hotspot. Of perhaps greater concern is the fact that many sites of global importance for the persistence of biodiversity have not yet been identified and documented as KBA, especially in the freshwater realm. A more comprehensive KBA identification would not only draw attention to sites in need of conservation action but also facilitate the implementation of environmental standards, for instance those of the International Finance Corporation and the Equator Banks.

CEPF will support actions to fill these information gaps. Data on the status of species and sites that became available during the profiling process or that become available during the implementation of the investment strategy will be used to update the KBA analysis. In particular, there is a need to define additional terrestrial KBAs in the Lower Guinean Forests for taxonomic groups other than birds, and to conduct comprehensive identification of freshwater KBAs across the entire hotspot. This investment priority will also support a limited number of highly targeted field surveys to fill critical gaps in knowledge with regard to the status of selected species and sites. The information generated will inform planning, implementation and monitoring of conservation actions for globally threatened species, while the surveys themselves will provide early career conservationists, such as postgraduate students, with opportunities to gain field experience and work with conservation organizations.

Strategic Direction 4 Build the capacity of local civil society organizations, including Indigenous People's, women's and youth groups, to conserve and manage globally important biodiversity

Lessons learned from ongoing and recent conservation projects in West Africa have highlighted the need to build partnerships and alliances among the three key sectors of society – government, private sector and civil society – to develop and implement solutions to the complex sustainable development challenges facing the region. Civil society faces a number of barriers to engaging in such partnerships, the most significant of which are capacity ones. The CEPF investment program provides an important opportunity to invest in the capacity development of local CSOs, ranging from national NGOs to community-based organizations, to facilitate their emergence as agents of change and credible partners to government and private sector partners.

One of the lessons learned of the first phase of CEPF investment was the need to link grant making to capacity building, especially when working with small, emerging CSOs. To this end, capacity building under this strategic direction will complement the small grant making to local CSOs that will take place throughout the investment strategy as a whole. Both strategies are essential elements of facilitating the emergence of local conservation movements in the hotspot countries but neither is sufficient alone. Small grants not linked to capacity building can ignite a certain level of enthusiasm and energy in recipient organizations but this can be dissipated unless

they can build a reputation for sound programmatic and financial management and attract funding from other sources. Capacity building without resources prevents CSOs from applying their new capabilities. Therefore, capacity building activities under this strategic direction will be closely coordinated with the overall development of the grant portfolio, with the RIT playing the key coordinating role. To this end, grants will be awarded to a mixture of CSOs in need of capacity building and local and international service providers, able to provide training, mentoring and/or networking for groups of CSOs with common capacity needs. Specific emphasis will be placed on strengthening Indigenous People's organizations, women's groups and youth groups and engaging them in conservation of globally threatened species, priority sites and conservation corridors. To help manage the volume of applications from CSOs for capacity building grants, other grant-making modalities may be considered in addition to open calls for proposals, including restricted, competitive calls, and grants by invitation.

Investment Priority 4.1 Strengthen the capacity of local civil society organizations in financial, institutional and project management, organizational governance, and fundraising

As seen in Chapter 7 and throughout the consultation process, although some CSOs are fully involved in natural resource management, they lack the necessary knowledge to manage conservation projects, notably conceiving, implementing and monitoring the implementation of projects. Specifically, many groups lack the capacity to design projects and write funding proposals to the standard required by international donors. Local CSOs often also lack the capacity to manage project funds according to donor requirements, since their staff have generally not received any formal training in financial management. To effectively engage these organizations as partners in conservation and sustainable development, there is a fundamental need to strengthen their core capacity in the areas of financial and institutional management, strategic planning, organizational governance, and fundraising. There is also the issue of good governance in financial management of funds generated by the projects. It is common in the region to witness corruption at the local level, notably unequal sharing of cost and benefits. Vulnerable groups like Indigenous People are often neglected when it comes to benefit-sharing, and priority will be given to capacity building initiatives that target Indigenous People's organizations.

As part of this investment priority, CEPF will support independent community-based organizations to improve their capacities, notably by improving their governance structures and accounting systems. It will be important to support decentralized civil society structures, to effectively involve local and vulnerable groups like indigenous communities stakeholders in natural resource management, establish a foundation for equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms, and avoid over-emphasizing the development of a professional class of national NGOs that can become a barrier to the growth of grassroots civil society, as has been seen in some other hotspots where CEPF operates. Taking on board experience from the first phase, priority will be given to mentoring arrangements and other innovative approaches, as opposed to conventional training courses.

Investment Priority 4.2 Establish and strengthen women-led conservation and development organizations, associations and networks to foster gender equality in natural resource management and benefit sharing

Because of the patriarchal nature of most cultures in the hotspot, women are not often involved or included in decision making related to natural resource management and development projects. In fact, until very recently, conservation of biodiversity was seen as an all-male pursuit, and this is reflected in the composition of leadership positions within conservation NGOs. Until recently women's potential contributions to both natural resource management at the grassroots level and conservation practice at the national level had been hardly harnessed, due to disempowerment on issues such as insecure land tenure rights, limited opportunities in decision-making, lack of access to education, and inadequate training and career development opportunities.

Luckily, there is a glimmer of hope, because most of the hotspot countries are increasingly discovering the important contributions that women can make to conservation and sustainable livelihood projects, while the policy environment and societal attitudes are gradually becoming more supportive of women's participation and leadership. Through the activities of regional and national women's groups and networks, such as the Network of African Women for Sustainable Development (REFADD), and line ministries in charge of Women's Affairs, the vital role of women in conservation is increasingly being showcased through some important pilot projects. For example, some small grants schemes, such as CARPE and PPI, have not only supported women's groups to implement biodiversity conservation and rural development activities on the ground but have also acted as an instrument through which women have influenced numerous policies that are currently supporting women-led conservation actions.

To reinforce these positive trends, CEPF will strengthen the capacity of women's groups to advocate for natural resources management and development rights, especially gender equality. CEPF will also provide training to support women-led CSOs to address some institutional issues that do not favor women's participation in biodiversity conservation in priority sites. These activities could be linked to investments under Investment Priority 1.3 on sustainable livelihood and job creation activities. Livelihood activities that present especially good opportunities for participation by rural women include sustainable harvesting, value addition and marketing of NTFPs.

Investment Priority 4.3 Strengthen the communication capacity of local civil society organizations in support of their mission and build public awareness on the importance of conservation outcomes

Strategic communication is one of the major components of conservation programs, especially where they are competing with other development visions for the attention of decision makers and local communities. Stakeholders reported, however, that most conservation programs do not allocate sufficient time and resources to generating and disseminating information about the importance of species and ecosystems in locally appropriate formats. In addition, experience from the first phase of CEPF investment in the hotspot revealed a need to move beyond conventional environmental education and outreach efforts, which have not proven to be very successful. To address this gap, CEPF will fund activities that strengthen the communication capacity of local CSOs, so they can build awareness of the importance of conservation outcomes

among key audiences at local, sub-national and national levels. This capacity building will potentially cover a range of media, including scientific journals, policy and technical briefs, radio and television programs, newspapers and online media. CEPF will also support sensitization workshops to create public awareness on the importance in the conservation of conservation projects. Peer-to-peer education and social marketing will also be among the tools that CSOs could receive capacity building in, as they can be particularly appropriate to the catalyzing the types of behavioral change and consumer demand reduction needed to respond to threats such as poaching and wildlife trade.

It will also be very important to strengthen local CSOs' capacity to document and exchange experiences, lessons learned and innovative approaches both internally within their own organizations, and externally among peer CSOs. While much of this exchange among CSOs will take place within countries, CEPF will also take advantage of the regional nature of the investment program by facilitating exchange among CSOs in different hotspot countries working on similar themes. This will not only prevent other civil society actors from repeating approaches that have failed or not been useful elsewhere, but will also facilitate scaling up of experiences, lessons learned and success stories in other sites. This will enable actors to quickly achieve their conservation outcomes in a cost effective way.

Finally, that capacity of CSOs to disseminate the results of their demonstration projects to decision makers in the public and private sectors will be strengthened. Drawing on experience from other hotspots, building alliances of CSOs, including Indigenous People's organizations and women's groups, working on similar issues, who can communicate with these audiences in a coordinated fashion, has proven to be an effective strategy. This type of capacity building support will facilitate the biodiversity mainstreaming into public policy and private sector practice that is envisioned under Strategy Direction 3, drawing on results of demonstration projects supporting under Strategic Directions 1 and 2.

Strategic Direction 5. Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination investment through a Regional Implementation Team

As can already be seen from the interdependencies that exist among different elements of the investment strategy, and the need to integrate grant making with capacity building, development of a grant portfolio whose impacts are greater than the sum of its parts will require strategic leadership and effective coordination. While the CEPF Secretariat will provide overall strategic oversight and ensure compliance with all policies and requirements, such leadership and coordination can be most effectively provided by an organization or organizations with a permanent presence the hotspot. This will also help ensure the sustainability of the program, by building a repository of know-how, experience and contacts that will endure beyond the end of the investment period. To this end, CEPF will implement its grant program in close collaboration with a Regional Implementation Team (RIT). The RIT will help promote and manage grant-making process, undertake key capacity-building, maintain and update data on conservation outcomes. It also will provide leadership to promote the overall conservation outcomes agenda to government and other stakeholders. The detailed terms of reference for the RIT can be found on CEPF's website: www.cepf.net.

Investment Priority 5.1 Operationalize and coordinate CEPF’s grant-making processes and procedures to ensure effective implementation of the investment strategy throughout the hotspot

For large grants, the RIT will assist the CEPF Secretariat by reviewing and processing grant applications, ensuring compliance with CEPF policies, and facilitating on-time and accurate grantee and portfolio reporting and monitoring. In particular, the RIT will play a very important role in soliciting and reviewing proposals. This role encompasses a wide range of activities, from issuing calls for proposals to establishing review committees to making final recommendations for approval or rejection. These tasks require technical expertise, knowledge of strategy, and the ability to understand that all selected projects will make a unique contribution to the achievement of CEPF’s objectives.

The RIT will also assume responsibility for management of the CEPF small grants mechanism in the hotspot, including budgeting, processing proposals, contracting grants and monitoring impacts. Small grants play an extremely important role in the CEPF portfolio. They can address themes or geographic areas of importance, serve as planning grants, or provide opportunities to engage local and grassroots groups that may not have the capacity to implement large grants. The strategic role that these grants play cannot be underestimated, and the RIT will be responsible for strategic oversight of the small grants portfolio to ensure coherence with the overall grant portfolio, will decide on the award of all grant applications. As mentioned in Section 11.2, in order to address the needs of local CSOs in the hotspot, the maximum small grant size will be set at USD 50,000, although the RIT will have the option of awarding small grants of a range of sizes.

The RIT will also be responsible for monitoring and reporting on portfolio performance, ensuring compliance with reporting requirements, ensuring that grantees understand and comply with social and environmental safeguard policies, and reviewing reports. To this end, the RIT will undertake site visits to grants, to identify needs for follow-up capacity building. This will ensure effective project implementation and monitoring, and requires technical expertise to be performed effectively and inform adaptive management.

Investment Priority 5.2 Build a broad constituency of civil society groups working across institutional and political boundaries to achieve common conservation objectives

The RIT will also perform programmatic duties that directly support strategic development of the grant portfolio and contribute in their own right to the achievement of conservation results that yield portfolio-wide benefits. Such duties will include facilitating learning exchanges among grantees and other stakeholders, identifying leveraging opportunities for CEPF, and aligning CEPF investment with investments by other donors. These functions will require the RIT to maintain in-house conservation expertise to ensure that CEPF funds are strategically channeled to optimize the achievement of its conservation objectives. They will also require the RIT to foster collaboration and build networks among CSOs, thereby responding to lessons learned from the first investment phase, which pointed to the value of such networks in avoiding duplication of effort and maximizing conservation results.

The objectives of this investment priority are mainly to coordinate and communicate CEPF investment, build partnerships and promote information exchange in the priority sites and

conservation corridors. It will also support capacity building, a function that is regarded as being at the core of the RIT's responsibility. While complementary forms of capacity building will be supported under Strategic Direction 4, the RIT will play an active role in building the capacity of local CSOs to access and make effective use of CEPF funding. Ensuring that partners have the institutional and individual ability to design and implement projects that contribute to the targets of the investment strategy is not capacity building for its own sake; rather, it is essential to the delivery of CEPF's global mission of engaging and strengthening civil society, and to the delivery of other elements of the investment strategy. Experience from earlier CEPF investments in the hotspot has shown that these capacity building efforts are essential to ensuring good projects that are integrated into a wider hotspot strategy and a common conservation vision. Capacity building for CSOs in project design, implementation and reporting will also help them access funding from other available donors, thereby enhancing the sustainability of the impacts of CEPF funding.