Pioneering investment to protect Pacific ecosystems presents new opportunity for donors

Title

Conservationists and stakeholders in the Pacific region urge greater community engagement, government support, and new funding approaches to build on the strong results of Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) program to ensure natural resources are secured for the benefit of people. Invasive species removal from critical habitats and the implementation of community based bio-security programs were among the positive biodiversity conservation results achieved in Polynesia-Micronesia through a $7 million, five-year investment from the CEPF. At a recent workshop - organised by BirdLife International - marking the completion of that investment, participants called for donors, governments and local communities to help nongovernmental organisations build on these achievements and defend the region's unique natural resources from threats such as climate change and invasive species. The statement, issued jointly by the 58 representatives of 35 civil society organisations engaged in the program, including Conservation International (CI) and BirdLife International, highlighted the opportunity for new funding to further this urgent work. CI's Pacific Islands Program was the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for CEPF in this region. "The past five years of investment have provided a strong platform towards effective and essential biodiversity conservation in the Polynesia-Micronesia region," said Leilani Duffy-Iosefa of CI's Pacific Islands Program, and CEPF's RIT manager. "We have averted the imminent extinction of a bird in French Polynesia, developed effective community-based projects for the benefit of both wildlife and people, and removed invasive alien species from a number of islands, giving native wildlife a much greater chance of survival. New investment is vital to ensure ecosystem recovery and perpetuity."

Key to the future viability of conservation in the region is awareness and engagement among the people and ongoing support from governments, participants said. They prioritised initiatives that increase the community understanding of conservation issues, address threats to natural resources, and raise awareness of the importance of healthy ecosystems to human well-being. The participants also noted that capacity building among local people is essential to achieve long-term support for conservation and to sustain project outcomes. They recommended that community-managed protected areas be developed as an alternative to traditional state-managed protected areas. To ensure sustainable, long-term solutions, changes in funding strategies are needed, the participants suggest in their statement. These include securing assistance for nongovernmental organisations in the identification of alternative funding opportunities, such as certification schemes for private companies, and enforcing compliance with environmental regulations for development projects. Connectivity between such funding streams is important to ensure that conservation approaches across the region are coordinated, cooperative and unified. Duffy-Iosefa said, "I think I can speak on behalf of my fellow attendees when I say that we are very passionate about conservation in this region, but more work is needed to build on all of these exciting and strong projects that have come out of the CEPF investment. We hope that the value of this work is recognised and supported by all governments, international and local organizations and donor agencies, to ensure this good work continues for the people of the Pacific." The closing statement ends by advising that, "Representatives considered that new investment in a regional environment programme to build on the successes of the CEPF Polynesia-Micronesia Programme would yield the highest 'bang for buck' for donor investment." **About the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund -** 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.