

GRANTEE VOICES FROM THE MED

Lessons learned and shared



Mid-term 2015

National Assessment Report

Lessons learned on a national-level as part of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund's mid-term evaluation of the Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot investment.

Grantee Voices from the Med

- Lessons learned and shared

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

CEPF IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN

The Mediterranean Basin is the second largest biodiversity hotspot in the world and the largest of the world's five Mediterranean-climate regions. Many of the ecosystems reached an equilibrium long ago with human activity dominating the landscapes. However, this delicate balance is in a precarious state as many local communities depend on remaining habitats for fresh water, food and a variety of other ecosystem services.

The CEPF* niche will be to work with all actors engaged in conservation and development activities in Mediterranean Basin countries to foster partnerships in priority corridors and sites. Such partnerships will seek to reduce impacts of these developments on natural resources and systems that the local communities are dependent on. The grants awarded to civil society organizations from CEPF will work towards safeguarding globally threatened species and critical sites in the Mediterranean Basin.

MID-TERM EVALUATION

CEPF investment in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot began in 2012 and the mid-term of the programme occurs in 2015. To assess the investment to-date a mid-term evaluation will be undertaken comprising of a series of participatory exercises to gather feedback from all stakeholders within the programme. These include a stakeholder survey, national assessments and a regional meeting. These different platforms will give the opportunity for all CEPF grantees and other stakeholders to feedback on areas such as CEPF granting processes, challenges faced by civil society and conservation priorities in the region.

Information gathered through the different exercises will feed into the mid-term evaluation report. The outcomes from this report will provide CEPF with recommendations for changes to processes, targets or the overall strategy for the Mediterranean Basin where appropriate.

NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

National assessments were undertaken for all 11 eligible countries in the Mediterranean Basin; Albania, Algeria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Cape Verde, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Macedonia, Montenegro, Morocco and Tunisia. A total of 186 people participated including CEPF grantees, local and national stakeholders.

It was conducted through in-country meetings, or through electronic consultation where this was not feasible (for Libya and Cape Verde). Individuals were given the opportunity to provide recommendations to CEPF on a number of key themes. The RIT provided the materials for the assessments but did not participate in order to encourage open discussions and ideas. This document summarizes the key themes outlined by the assessments, and presents the lessons learned for CSOs and CEPF.

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

This section encouraged feedback on the challenges faced by grantees in the implementation of their projects.

Challenges

“Security and communication issues make it increasingly difficult to ensure the progress of project activities; conflicts being mainly in the eastern part of the country mean project areas cannot be accessed, longer distances need to be travelled around high risk sites and internet connection problems cause delays on email” – Libya

Difficulties faced by CSOs were around:

Capacity, Logistics, Engagement, Time

- Organizational capacity gaps have hindered organizations in effectively carrying out, and in particular, sustaining their projects (training needed in conflict management, fundraising, financial management and administration)
- On-the-ground logistics (including security issues, obtaining and maintaining quality equipment, communication between project stakeholders)
- Interaction with governmental authorities (including differences in national priorities hindering project approval, political and staff changes create delays and affect project support)
- Timeliness and timescale of grants (harmonizing grants with other projects and national deadlines, short-term grants hampering project sustainability)

“Administrative and financial capacity of organizations is sometimes insufficient... although most associations have gained project management skills, they are faced with a lack of appropriate tools and qualified permanent staff to monitor the financial management of the funds” - Algeria

*“Software and tools for projects are quite specific so not easy to source; new materials have to be bought almost every year because the good ones are expensive; and a lot has to be brought in from overseas so there are delays, customs issues and it's costly to import”
– Cape Verde*

Lessons learned

CEPF can:

- **Engage with national authorities** to raise awareness of conservation priorities and give a platform for CSOs to be involved in a higher level
- **Support grants which build capacity of local CSOs** in key areas such as decision-making, financial monitoring, administrative management, fundraising and policy
- **Communicate to grantees about project flexibility** for project adaptation, maintenance, contingency

“CEPF might help through identifying the focal points in local governments within project implementation areas in order to provide better institutional support” - Montenegro

“CEPF could provide financial support to establish a “Regional Nature Protection Network” in order to improve coordination between countries, donor agencies, CSOs and governmental and public dealing with nature and environmental protection” – Bosnia and Hercegovina

Grantees can:

- **Ensure that project proposals have a basic risk assessment and that it is clearly communicated to donors** - to encourage donor flexibility in budgets for any changing circumstances, potential risks should be identified and justified in the preparation stage alongside mitigation measures and costs.
- **Include training on administrative and financial management, fundraising etc. in their proposals** - CEPF accepts specific capacity building components in each project
- **Dedicate time for a stakeholder analysis** - Engagement is key for the sustainability of projects. The key people, messages and timings need to be identified at project conception.

“Lack of awareness of the importance of biodiversity causes difficulties in changing people’s culture and minds towards nature” - Lebanon



National Assessment Meeting in Lebanon

CO-FUNDING

This section encouraged feedback on the funding opportunities available, how to access them, what challenges they face and how CEPF can help grantees in the future with co-funding of projects.

Co-funding sources

Mediterranean CSO funding sources identified in this process:

- Foundations: MAVA Foundation, Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Rufford Foundation, Sea Shepherd Foundation, Marine Turtle Conservation Foundation
- Bilaterals: EU (LIFE+ Program, EuropeAid), FFEM, GIZ, Japan government, Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, USAID, USFWS
- Multi-laterals: World Bank, GEF, UNDP, UNEP
- National level: State institutions and agencies such as Ministries of Environment and Development
- Research, private or public institutions (universities)
- Corporates: Banks (CSR programs); Hotels and resorts; Energy companies (wind-farms)
- NGO co-funders: WWF, IUCN, PRCM, BirdLife International, Regional Partnership for Coastal and Marine Conservation in Western Africa, Wetlands International.

Challenges

“Local civil society has very limited access to funding sources due to the language barrier and technical skills. Local societies don’t know about the majority of funding opportunities because they don’t have enough skills to access their websites or subscribe to their regular announcements for new calls. Moreover, some local societies don’t have computers, internet or even the required skills to operate them” - Jordan

Difficulties faced by CSOs were around:

Capacity, Accessibility and Awareness

- Large and small organizations equally struggle with limited capacity in terms of lacking high-level technical abilities and the time/salary resources required to fundraise.
- Donor requirements are difficult to achieve, vary widely between donor organizations and do not always align with CSO priorities. Many are also restricted to online applications and not accepted in local languages.
- Funding opportunities do not penetrate to smaller grassroots organizations due to language barriers, lack of internet access and limited networks.

“The main difficulty lies in the fact that donors have different policies for awarding grants and consequently, access to co-financing is usually impossible for NGOs. In very rare cases co-financing can be envisaged between international and national donors” – Morocco

“Donor policies often promote short-term interventions which do not solve the problem” - Albania

Lessons learned

CEPF can:

- **Convene donors and other sectors/stakeholders** (including governments) to facilitate co-funding by aligning donor procedures and raising the profile of smaller grantees to bigger donors
- **Build capacity for fundraising** among its grantees
- **Raise awareness of funding opportunities** for its grantees
- **Help promulgate ideas about novel ways to raise funds** e.g. corporate collaboration, civil society income generation etc.

“CEPF could deliver a workshop on fundraising strategy that could be done in collaboration with the GEF and other institutions” – Algeria

“CEPF could provide support to establish a “Coordination Secretariat” which will serve as ‘clearing house’ responsible for representing the interest of CSOs in the donor community, and will be responsible for the allocation and monitoring of funds collected from different international donor agencies and state institutions” – Bosnia & Hercegovina

Grantees can:

- **Dedicate time to research and engage with companies** - Small-scale co-funding is really important and many innovative efforts are being undertaken to generate it e.g. from corporate donations, civil society profit-making enterprises, etc.

“In the absence of substantial national funding for conservation activities, civil society organizations manage to obtain some support under corporate and social responsibility schemes; some organizations generate income in tourism; others offer their services (training, coaching, guiding) to either public institutions (municipalities, communal enterprises, ZOOs, Gardens) or private companies” – Macedonia

“Local civil society mainly depends on local productive initiatives such as small farms and supermarkets” – Jordan

“A good way to get additional funds is through donations from small companies who will gain through advertising e.g. building rafts for nesting pelicans from the funds earned by selling cosmetic products” – Montenegro



National Assessment Meeting in Macedonia

COMMUNICATIONS

“Complexity of communication at various levels ranges between local people, tourists and administrations, hence the need to adapt the media to our target audience” - Tunisia

This section encouraged feedback on the communications tools used by grantees; who they were aimed at, how successful they were and how CEPF can help grantees in the future with communications.

Communication tools used:

- Face-to-face tools: workshops, information days, focus groups, educational activities, exhibitions, religious centers, visitor centers, international conferences
- Offline media: radio, leaflets, brochures, newspaper articles, flyers, posters
- Online media: websites, videos, documentaries, short movies, Facebook, Twitter

“The use of social networks is effective but remains personalized and linked to individual people much more than institutions or organizations” – Morocco

Challenges

Target Audiences:

- Governments: conflicting priorities, access to decision-makers, poor CSO advocacy skills
- Private sector: poor understanding of the potential benefit, limited strategy
- Other CSOs: limited opportunities to share ideas, no established networks
- General public: too wide an audience (national level), TV adverts expensive, lacking social media
- Local communities: mainly offline comms and in local languages
- Project stakeholders: traditional associations difficult to engage with new ideas

“Faced with difficulties to engage the elderly who are hardly convinced of environmental problems, we headed to schools to educate children and create a new generation more aware of the environmental challenges” - Libya

Capacity:

- Technical capacity: lack of skills in strategic planning, advocacy, social media, design, film-making etc.
- Financial capacity: few donors fund communications activities

“Generally communication activities are not included in a strategy or clear communication plan, and there’s no tool for evaluation” – Algeria

“There is a big gap between large and small CSOs. Large organizations have technical and financial resources to develop multi-media tools; whereas the majority of local societies don’t have an online presence, they usually only present their activities during General Assembly meetings, and develop simple flyers using their own resources and only distribute them within their communities” – Jordan

Resources:

- Tools: weakness of internet access in rural areas, poor quality media e.g. cameras, software
- Cost: high cost of communication services, professional communication expertise, consumer demand for sophisticated design increases cost

“The closure of websites after completion of projects is a sustainability issue” - Albania

“It is necessary to list all the stakeholders and directly contact them so they can get involved in the projects. The obstacle may be limited internet communication, especially with local residents of distant villages” – Montenegro

Lessons learned

CEPF can:

- **Help peer-to-peer communication** through facilitating meetings, funding national websites, exchanges
- **Strengthen grantee media capacity** on international/national communications and advocacy
- **Communicate clearly to grantees** that proposals can include a budget for communications activities
- **Support a position that could serve as communication officer** hosted by one organization for several other national organizations
- **Encourage training of communications professionals or students** through grants or with the help of grantees

“Develop interactive maps indicating biodiversity hotspots, the pressures that are harmful to nature and stakeholders views” – Macedonia

“Capacity building programs could involve universities because environmental journalists should receive specialized education to prepare them for careers in writing about nature and environment protection” – Bosnia and Hercegovina

“Support the formation of a core of journalists in the field of nature and the conservation of biodiversity, and encourage the creation of specialized pages in printed and electronic media” – Morocco

Grantees can:

- **Ensure the right communications medium is used for each audience** – social media is not the answer for many of the most important audiences e.g. local people near project sites or high-level governmental figures
- **Dedicate time to think strategically at the start of a project about your audiences and key messages** – all target audiences require an incentive to carry out the action you want them to do. Take time to understand their motivations and brainstorm the most effective ways to influence them.

- **Maintain and build upon strengths in local engagement** – CSOs of all sizes have many years of experience in face-to-face communications with the general public, and this is proven to work in local nature conservation. These engagement skills can be built upon and adapted to engage national audiences by using local advocates and case studies, so that local sites can become national treasures.
- **Encourage internal and external communications** – with limited resources, communications advances can be made by sharing of skills inside organizations and with similar NGOs

“The great concern of local people and civil society are development and job creation, therefore we must develop awareness to conserve resources with the notion of winning in those aspects. It’s important to involve the local population in the creation of income-generating activities to encourage them to protect their environment and we must promote affirmative profits to local communities” – Tunisia

“Link conservation issues with family health; use economic and social incentives; highlight the uniqueness of the natural resources” – Lebanon



National Assessment Meeting in Jordan

NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION

This section encouraged feedback on how CSOs networked between each other and other stakeholders in their countries, how successful they are and how CEPF can help grantees in the future with collaboration.

“The driving force for collaboration is motivation. In order for a collaboration to succeed, everyone involved needs to feel that they gain something from the collaboration or feel that they are doing a meaningful thing and working towards a valuable end result” - Bosnia and Hercegovina

Different forms of collaboration were identified:

- Informal exchanges of information on areas such as sources of funding, sharing calls for proposals, sharing skills for project development or facilitating the authorization of grants.
- Formal via partnership agreements or MOUs to mobilize co-financing, sharing of human resources and scientific and technical expertise.

Different actors for collaboration were identified:

- Project beneficiaries and stakeholders, experts, local communities, government authorities, NGO networks, NGOs, private sector companies and institutions, associations, academia and donors.

Challenges

“It is necessary to communicate more with each other to jointly solve the issues that concern CSOs, especially because there are more projects which are implemented in the same area and therefore there are common interests. Also, related projects that are financed from other funds should be more understood” - Montenegro.

“Local grantees are in continuous need for collaboration with donors, the local community and relevant authorities, but they usually can’t gain such support. Larger NGOs can easily participate in national projects and conferences” – Jordan

CSOs vary in size and there is a big gap between them in terms of collaboration skills and experience. Different NGOs have different backgrounds, expertise, areas of interest, goals, work protocols, internal operations, etc. which can also make collaboration difficult. There is a lack of coordination and networking between CSOs nationally and regionally.

Barriers to collaboration:

Mistrust, Bureaucracy, Opportunity, Conflict of interest, Language, Lack of tradition, Competition for Funding & Influence, Location, Lack of interest, Lack of commitment, Lack of know-how, Miscommunication

Lack of collaboration causes duplication of efforts, conflicting strategies at a community and national level, and a lack of learning from experience.

It is clear that insufficient strong linkages with key stakeholders limit the success of conservation projects.

“Grantees believe that their organizations are too isolated and have few opportunities to meet. They also realize that their relationship with other stakeholders (government, universities, etc.) are too episodic” –Algeria

“The problem with contact inside Cabo Verde falls in the geography of the country, nine inhabited islands. All the projects need to have this issue in mind and some money needs to be reserved to realize trips between the islands, mainly to Santiago (where the government and offices of international organizations are located). But access to high-level government officials is generally quite easy, mainly because the country is so small” – Cape Verde

Lessons learned

It was noted that despite the many barriers, there was a clear request for more in-depth and varied collaboration across sectors, during every stage of a project.

CEPF can:

- **Assist more to promote partnerships among organizations at the stage of project design** – funding can be set aside for involving and strengthening the capacities of smaller local organizations; CEPF can announce calls for proposals with a required networking component between several CSOs and/or state institutions and universities etc.; host workshops to identify collaborations
- **Promote learning across grantee organizations through projects** - create opportunities for sharing of lessons learned e.g. workshops sharing information on the planned project activities among the grantees and the targeted/benefitting institutions, discuss about necessary data and most suitable methods for their collection, exchange and presentation during the project implementation. Facilitate access to networking experiences in other countries through exchanges and organizing training workshop on the subject; fund training on technical dialogue, negotiation and networking skills.
- **Promote learning between donors and grantees** – develop a framework for effective collaboration and donor coordination; open a dialogue through information days on calls for proposals; provide an opportunity for donors to present their programs and funding opportunities. Facilitate the same opportunity for the relevant government departments that have programs to support local NGOs. Give the opportunity for local NGOs to communicate, meet each other, market their activities, and discuss the different challenges they are facing.

“The CEPF may predefine in the Call for proposals joint implementation of activities with partner organizations (national or international). This would enable the organizations to create partnerships with associates they already cooperated with. This would lead to creating complementary activities prior to the grant award” – Macedonia

Grantees can

- **Establish their own networks** - invite each other to project events, share information about funding sources, share human resources for major events/emergencies
- **Engage new stakeholders for future collaboration** - establish an informal network of young people to be responsible for local projects; engage with Environmental Science students; international university and NGO collaborations are important as they offer staff time and knowledge (particularly in new methodologies); Citizen Science based projects can be fostered to contribute to scientific research.
- **Communicate about the project early** - giving information about the project and its goals helps people decide whether to participate or not, if people are involved in project conception they are more likely to commit to it long-term.
- **Focus networking in key sectors** – many CSOs see networking as important for their policy engagement, especially with similar actors with whom ‘bonding’ networks have proven useful for information sharing and learning.
- **Collaborate with communities** – attend as many stakeholder meetings as possible, conduct education and community development activities, and attend public events. Integrate with local associations in various fields such as environmental, cultural and youth associations.
- **Engage in national-level programs** - be aware of opportunities for civil society to engage in national projects and programs, existing conventions and agreements (e.g. National Biodiversity Strategy & Action Plans), these can be free to participate in and will be a chance to meet people face-to-face.

“In the meeting one grantee offered help to another in designing a short movie out of pictures taken by a mobile phone from the field” – Macedonia

“Collaboration with private companies contributes enormously to projects e.g. the role that the private companies play in promoting ecotourism activities” – Tunisia



National Assessment Meeting in Tunisia

NATIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

Aspects of national conservation priorities were discussed; grantees and stakeholders highlighted new emerging issues, and where changes to political and social sectors impacted on the environment.

Grantees were also given the opportunity to give their feedback on the relevance of the current Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) which are eligible for CEPF funding, and give recommendations for additional areas or the strategic directions for their countries.

These individual country assessments will not be mentioned in this report but the information can be shared if contacted through the RIT. All the details will be put forward to aid the discussions relating to the re-profiling of the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot, which is hoped to occur in 2016.



National Assessment Meeting in Bosnia and Hercegovina

CONCLUSIONS

A number of overarching conclusions can be made from this national assessment exercise. Even though 11 individual countries were involved, each with their own specific conservation priorities, constraints, cultures and histories; common themes are clearly apparent across the Mediterranean Basin.

- ***There is a large capacity gap between grassroots and large CSOs*** – the variation in capacity is significant and so there needs to be tailored funding to suit these different types of organizations in order to build on their strengths; and there is a need for more funding on specific areas of capacity building to enable organizational growth.
- ***There is an overwhelming willingness to collaborate*** – a common theme within the discussions and in feedback given about the national assessment process highlighted how much CSOs value the opportunity to network and exchange ideas. There is a need to create platforms for multiple actors to meet and exchange lessons learned, as well as to discuss plans on a project level and wider, more national levels.
- ***There is deep concern about sustainability*** – CSOs need commitment and support from higher levels to ensure environmental issues are addressed into the future. There is a need to align donor and governmental strategies to ensure conservation priorities are addressed effectively; a need to enable CSOs to engage with decision-makers in future policy; and a need for donors to commit to longer-term investments so CSOs can tackle the larger projects which are needed.

“Participants noted that the number of civil society organizations involved in the field of biodiversity is still inadequate and quite scattered. CEPF can effectively contribute to the strengthening of this associative fabric, and support consensus and cohesion at a local level”
– Algeria

A number of challenges have been identified which will hopefully highlight the issues to other donors and institutions, and help initiate creative solutions.

The National Assessment process was insightful for all parties involved, giving CEPF grantees the opportunity to discuss these topics in an open and informal environment producing thoughtful and honest ideas. Meeting feedback stated that participants considered the workshop as a “*foundation for networking and the launch of a communication process between CEPF grantees*”, and for CEPF it has been a valuable tool to extract lessons learned from the first years of the CEPF Mediterranean Basin investment.

“Although the CEPF program is in final stage there is a real need to continue this program in the future. It will allow us to manage our sites better and will secure sustainability of projects results achieved in this period” – Bosnia and Hercegovina

FURTHER INFORMATION

* The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a joint initiative of l’Agence Française de Développement (AFD), Conservation International (CI), the European Union, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Government of Japan, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank. Additional support in the Mediterranean Basin is provided by the MAVA Foundation. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation. More information on CEPF can be found at www.cepf.net.

BirdLife International - including its Middle East office and the BirdLife Partners [DOPPS/BirdLife Slovenia](#) and [LPO \(Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux, BirdLife in France\)](#) - is providing the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for CEPF in the Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot.

Find out more at www.birdlife.org/cepf-med; www.lpo.fr/cepf/cepf; www.facebook.com/CEPF.MED and www.twitter.com/CEPFmed

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