

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN A MULTI-TIERED FUND:

An example from the CI-GEF's Critical Ecosystem
Partnership Fund (CEPF)

CONSERVATION
INTERNATIONAL



CI-GEF Project Agency



Acronyms

CI	Conservation International
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CEPF	Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GFP	Gender Focal Point
GTT	Gender Tracking Tool
GMP	Gender Mainstreaming Plan
RIT	Regional Implementation Team
KII	Key Informant Interviews

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study documents the influence of the CI-GEF Agency's¹ requirement for gender mainstreaming on their grant to the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)².

Through a systematic review of documents and primary data, the case study documents: (1) the **systems, processes, and enabling** conditions that were put in place during the GEF project that drove intentional gender integration within the Secretariat³, RITs (Regional Implementation Teams) and CSOs (Civil Society Organizations); (2) the influence these efforts had on Secretariat staff, RIT staff, and grantees' **awareness, capacity/skills, and approach** to conservation, specifically around grant application, project design, and project implementation, and (3) observations about how this approach led to improved conservation effectiveness, women's leadership/empowerment and/or successfully advanced gender equality. The goal of the case study is to provide a clear example of how gender can be successfully integrated into a multi-tiered fund, with the expectation that this will be instructive for similar CI-GEF Agency grantmaking. At the same time, the case study identifies opportunities for further advancement of this approach.

The authors collected primary data through a series of key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus groups.

In total, the case study team conducted 12 KIIs or focus groups, reaching a total of 23 individuals. The case study focused specifically on the three hotspots where CI-GEF

invested from 2016-2022: Eastern Afromontane, Indo-Burma, and Cerrado.

The CI-GEF Agency's gender policy, and requirement for all projects to design and implement a gender mainstreaming plan, led to significant impacts at all levels of CEPF. Across the board, respondents pointed to the specific gender requirement as a catalyst that sparked new thinking, new approaches, new skill building, and better results all around. Over the last decade, and particularly due to the influence of the CI-GEF Agency's gender policy, the CEPF team "has evolved to be full supporters [of gender]." This is attributed to both the support and requirements of the GEF grant, but staff also point to the evolving "global discussion about gender." This integration of gender into the grantmaking process has become "business as usual." Among Regional Implementation Teams, having the explicit gender requirement in grantmaking helped to further drive action. The stand-alone gender policy "makes a strong point" and the requirements, along with guidelines and support, certainly contributed to meaningful integration. And among grantee CSOs, the specific CEPF gender requirement and support helped to further drive gender integration, influencing how grantees oriented their projects and engaged with men and women.

Most interviewees emphasized the benefits that the gender approach had on conservation outcomes and the importance of taking an inclusive approach to conservation. These include: (1) varied ecological knowledge and conservation priorities of women and

¹The CI-GEF Agency is an agency of the Global Environment Facility, disbursing funding for global conservation and sustainable development initiatives.

²Full project title: Effectively mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into government policy and private sector practice: piloting sustainability models to take the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) to scale.

³CEPF Secretariat refers to CEPF staff; most members are based out of CEPF's headquarters in Arlington, VA, USA.

men, (2) differences in conservation leadership, noting that women's leadership styles are sometimes more effective, (3) differences in how men and women approach conservation science.

At the same time, most interviewees also emphasized the positive impacts on social and gender norms as a result of this dedicated gender approach. These include: (1)

increased self-confidence among women who participated in the project, (2) increased income and respect from family members, including a reduction in gender-based violence, and (3) increased leadership opportunities.

It is clear that the CI-GEF Agency's gender requirements have had a significant influence at all levels of the CEPF.

The requirement gave CEPF the momentum needed to codify a gender approach that reached across the multi-tiered fund to influence grantmaking, project support, and project implementation. While there are certainly still some gaps, challenges, and inefficiencies, this first iteration of a CEPF gender approach can certainly claim some important successes. Several recommendations are provided, gleaned from interviews, including: (1) extending the gender approach equally across all hotspots, (2) revamp the Gender Tracking Tool as a needs-identification tool, (3) consider the gender approach as a proxy for other types of inclusion, (4) invest in a pipeline of women conservation leaders, and (5) go beyond quantitative monitoring.

Finally, the case study provides some lessons that can be applied to other Fund-type investments of the CI-GEF Agency. This includes: (1) the importance of being explicit about gender requirements, (2) invest in dedicated gender expertise from the start to advise the Fund, (3) ensure that

any changes to established processes are fully thought through and are time and cost effective, (4) go beyond quantitative number counting, and (5) include gender experience as a criterion in selecting fund implementing partners (and/or building the capacity of those who don't have adequate experience).

BACKGROUND

Since its beginning in 2013, the CI-GEF Agency has taken a progressively proactive approach to mainstreaming gender into all projects.

In 2022, a gender review of the portfolio began to document good practices and lessons learned and identified several key areas for further consideration. One such observation was the need for a more precise approach to capturing and documenting the efforts and outcomes of the projects' gender approaches on both social norms and conservation outcomes. With this in mind, the CI-GEF Agency conducted this case study of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) grant (GEF #5735), chosen in large part due to indications of strong gender-related outcomes and because of its unique status as a fund.

INTRODUCTION

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund⁴ has financed biodiversity conservation projects led by more than 2,500 grantees around the world.

The Fund supports civil society organizations of all sizes—from farmers' cooperatives and community groups to universities and international nongovernmental organizations. Small grants (usually \$20,000-\$50,000)



⁴ <https://www.cepf.net/>

are managed by Regional Implementation Teams (RITs) while large grants (\$150,000 on average) are managed by the Secretariat housed at Conservation International. The Fund is a joint program of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, and the World Bank.

In 2016, CEPF received a \$9.8 million grant from GEF via the CI-GEF Agency to invest in three hotspots:

Cerrado, Eastern Afromontane and Indo-Burma⁵. The project objective was to demonstrate innovative tools, methodologies, and investments, and build related capacities of civil society in the three pilot biodiversity hotspots, and to replicate demonstrated approaches in nine additional hotspots. Project implementation in the three sites ended in FY20 (Eastern Afromontane), FY21 (Indo-Burma) and FY22 (Cerrado).

Guided by the CI-GEF Agency's requirements, the project designed and implemented a gender mainstreaming plan⁶. As a foundational element of this plan, CEPF prepared a gender mainstreaming policy⁷ in parallel with the development of the GEF project. The gender policy strives to ensure a “gender aware approach”. The policy explains this to mean that CEPF Secretariat staff, regional implementation teams and grantees aim to understand and consider the distinct roles of men and women in CEPF-related activities at all levels. The policy calls for gender issues and considerations to be actively incorporated throughout the grant-making process, and progress be monitored on gender-related outcomes. The policy is largely aspirational and high level, not prescriptive or specific about accountability or

tracking. Unlike the CEPF safeguard policies, the gender policy does not require grantees to design a specific gender plan, rather recommending general integration into project design, implementation, and monitoring processes. Annex 1 describes the quantitative gender-related outputs of the project.

This case study aims to document the influence and impact of the intentional gender approach across CEPF with specific focus on the three GEF-supported hotspots. Through a systematic review of documents and primary data, the case study documents:

- The **systems, processes, and enabling conditions** that were put in place during the GEF project that drove intentional gender integration within the Secretariat, RITs and CSOs.
- The influence these efforts had on Secretariat staff, RIT staff, and grantees' **awareness, capacity/skills, and approach** to conservation, specifically around grant application, project design, and project implementation.
- Observations about how this approach led to improved **conservation effectiveness, women's leadership/empowerment** and/or successfully advanced **gender equality**.

The goal of the case study is to provide a clear example of how gender can be successfully integrated into a multi-tiered fund, with the expectation that this will be instructive for similar CI-GEF Agency grantmaking. At the same time, the case study identifies opportunities for further advancement of this approach.

Figure 1: Theory of Change for CI-GEF Gender Requirement



⁵ <https://www.thegef.org/projects-operations/projects/5735>

⁶ https://www.conservation.org/docs/default-source/gef-documents/cepf/5735-cepf-gender-mainstreaming-plan-160205.pdf?sfvrsn=72f55d39_2

⁷ <https://www.cepf.net/sites/default/files/CEPF-gender-policy-English.pdf>



METHODOLOGY

The authors gathered primary data through a series of key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus groups.

In total, the case study team conducted 12 KIIs or focus groups, reaching a total of 23 individuals. Interviews were conducted virtually and in English by the authors for the Secretariat, East Afromontane, and Indo-Burma hotspots, while interviews were conducted both in-person and virtually in Portuguese for the Cerrado hotspot. Questions were provided to participants beforehand (see Annex 2). CSOs were recommended by Secretariat grant directors specifically because of their strong gender performance.

1. **Secretariat:** One focus group with grant managers/directors and KIIs with the M&E manager, learning manager (tasked with gender capacity building), and managing director.
2. **RITs:** One KII or focus group with key RIT personnel in the three hotspots.
3. **CSOs:** One KII or focus group with up to 3 CSOs in each of the 3 hotspot regions.

Qualitative data were coded and entered in Excel based on common themes identified from document review and following the goals of the case study outlined above. The themes were mostly pre-set, but flexible enough to accommodate inductive theme identification. Other data were gathered from project documents (Mid-term Review and Terminal Evaluation), annual reports, blogs, gender-specific publications, CSO gender self-assessments, grantee, and RIT websites, etc.

RESULTS

The CI-GEF Agency’s gender policy, and requirement for all projects to design and implement a gender mainstreaming plan, led to significant impacts at all levels of CEPF.

Across the board, respondents pointed to the specific gender requirement as a catalyst that sparked new thinking, new approaches, new skill building, and better results all around. As one interviewee stated, “if you want to change attitudes and behaviors, good intentions are rarely enough...once it’s required, then it starts to become habitual.”

Systems, processes, and enabling conditions that drove gender integration and enhanced approaches to grantmaking, project design & implementation.

Within the Secretariat:

Processes & support tools

While CEPF had previously received GEF funds from other agencies, it was not until the CI-GEF Agency grant that a stand-alone gender policy was compulsory. Creating a gender policy was “certainly in the back of our minds, but this [requirement from CI-GEF] was the spur to do so” explained Secretariat staff. At the same time, the requirement for a Gender Mainstreaming Plan (GMP) helped to “put the policy into practice and communicate about the policy” and provided the “drive, time, and obligation to design [supporting] materials.”

The GEF project's Gender Mainstreaming Plan (GMP) recognizes the varying capacities of grantees, the size and scope of projects, and the socio-cultural differences in the three hotspots, all of which result in the need for a flexible and tailored approach. The plan identifies three areas to advance gender mainstreaming:

- 1. Organizational structures and tools:** Nominating a gender focal point within the Secretariat to drive the GMP, identifying gender focal points within each of the three RITs, and updating the Fund's templates, documents, protocols, scopes of work, tools, and training materials to integrate gender into routine grantmaking. This also includes training for RITs, selection of projects, and monitoring at the project and Fund levels.
- 2. Influence on grantmaking:** Providing gender training and capacity building for RITs, updating hotspot LogFrames with gender indicators, integrating gender into project design, training grantees, and supporting grantees to integrate gender-specific activities and indicators where appropriate.
- 3. Monitoring & evaluation:** Including gender-specific indicators in relevant grants and capturing and disseminating good practices.

Following from the GMP, CEPF produced several associated guidance documents and tools in the core CEPF languages. Notably, the CEPF **Gender Toolkit**⁸ was launched in 2018 as a resource for CEPF grantees offering guidance on how to integrate gender into conservation work at each stage of a project. Dissemination of the toolkit was complemented in some cases by training on gender mainstreaming for applicants and grantees, conducted by the CEPF Secretariat, the RITs, and third-party service providers.

The Gender Tracking Tool⁹ is a self-assessment that helps grantees to evaluate their institutional capacity based on a variety of topics including the status of an organizational gender policy, gender focal points, access to gender training, the practice of gender mainstreaming, and other areas. All CSO grantees are asked to complete the Gender Tracking Tool at the start and end of their grant period with the goal of determining if there has been any influence on gender capacity or awareness within the organizations. The GTT is meant to stimulate CSOs

to identify gender capacity gaps and highlight areas of intervention and support that the RIT could provide. As one grant director explained, the GTT “really helped to trigger questions for some local organizations, especially Indigenous organizations, and encourage them to respond to those questions.”

Gender has been mainstreamed throughout CEPF Secretariat operations. For example, ecosystem profiles include a short (~2 paragraph) high level section on gender. The regional call for proposals describes how priority is given to projects that demonstrate positive gender impacts and provides links to the CEPF gender reference materials to help applicants.

The Secretariat supported RIT capacity and processes to integrate gender. All new RITs received gender training provided by the Secretariat, who also created a network of RIT gender focal points and organized monthly meetings. The network helped to review and advise on the creation of the gender tools and were important points of contact within their regional teams. As observed by the CEPF secretariat, uptake of gender by RITs was mixed, with some already doing it or really interested in being more intentional, while others were “not that keen” and the gender focal point role was more perfunctory.

Enabling Conditions:

Secretariat staff point to several enabling conditions that influenced design of the gender approach (the gender policy, plan & associated support) and which were critical to success. Staff tasked with gender pulled heavily from existing tools and examples, noting Conservation International's tools and capacity building as especially useful. Online intensive courses on gender mainstreaming also helped to showcase different ways to approach and monitor gender. Importantly, Secretariat staff note, there was also a “global shift in terms of gender awareness and among partners”, noting that all of the current CEPF donors had gender policies long before CEPF did itself¹⁰. These outside influences include the #MeToo movement, increased data, and awareness about the connections between gender and conservation generally and within Conservation International and growing interest from prominent environmental donors and organizations. Finally, the “element of obligation, not

⁸ <https://www.cepf.net/sites/default/files/cepf-gender-toolkit-2018-en.pdf>

⁹ The GTT can be downloaded: <https://www.cepf.net/resources/documents/gender-tracking-tool-2021-english>

¹⁰ Although the donor policies didn't have binding gender requirements.

just a recommendation” helped to clarify to grantees the importance of including gender into proposals in order to be successful.

Influence on Grantmaking:

Over the last decade, and particularly due to the influence of the CI-GEF Agency’s gender policy, the CEPF team “has evolved to be full supporters [of gender].” This is attributed to both the support and requirements of the GEF grant, but staff also point to the evolving “global discussion about gender.” This integration of gender into the grantmaking process has become “business as usual”. Grant directors and managers have a series of questions to help guide their review of proposals which often prompts further reflection from grantees. This discussion “creates an enabling environment” for talking about gender, “it creates a space to say, ‘this matters.’”

Grant directors report that most of the observed changes in projects happen during the proposal stage, as grantees come to understand the gender expectations which influence design. Changes during implementation tend to be more limited and focused on timelines due to unplanned gender-related additions - for example when a project realizes they “want to consult women more.” Furthermore, when discussing with grantees throughout implementation, grant directors noted that gender usually does not appear as a specific gender issue, but rather is wrapped up in good stakeholder engagement or unintended impacts of the project. As one grant director explained, the word ‘gender’ is not even used all that often, with grantees usually referring to men & women.

Becoming Business-as-usual:

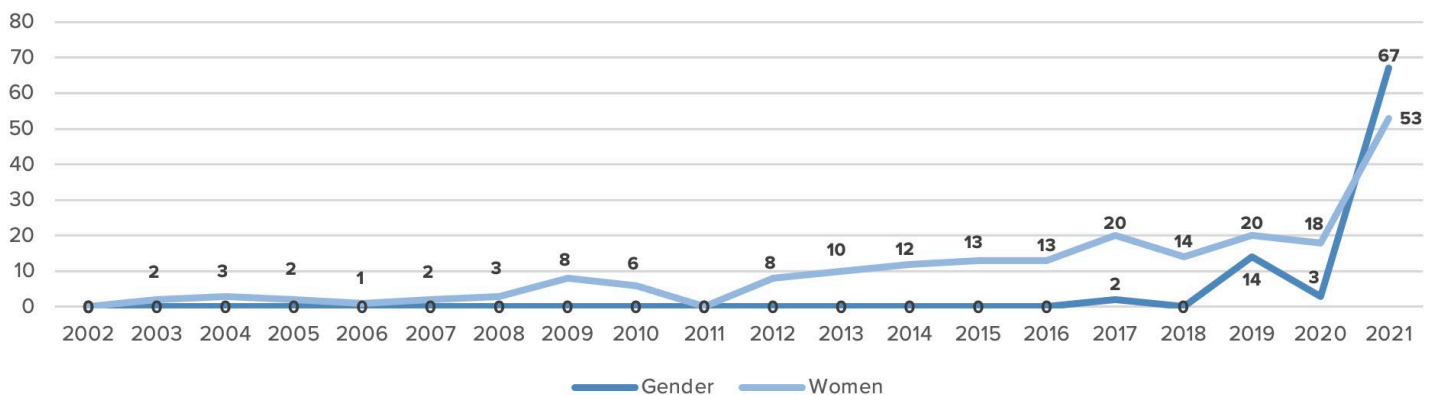
Increased focus on gender and women’s leadership also shows up in CEPF reporting and communication. As a CEPF Secretariat member noted, “you see [a change] in grantee reports; there is more mention of resource allocation and benefits, for women and men.” Likewise, as Figure 2 shows, mentions of the word ‘gender’ and ‘women’ in CEPF Annual Impact Reports provide an illustration of the change in content, and focus on this topic, over the years. **Increased focus on gender and women’s leadership also shows up in CEPF reporting** **The approach to mainstreaming gender has gone beyond just this GEF-funded project and has influenced newer projects.** As the Secretariat staff explained, “when we came to design the next project, [gender] is right there, front and center. We’re going to focus on gender and we’re looking for this in all of the grants. We are looking to see if gender is integrated and it’s in the selection criteria.”

Within Regional Implementation Teams:

Over the last decade, and particularly due to the influence of the CI-GEF Agency’s gender policy, the CEPF team “has evolved to be full supporters [of gender].” In two of the hotspots, the RITs already had institutional gender policies and experience with gender-integrated conservation programming, which created an important enabling condition on which to build additional support for CEPF gender requirements. As one commented “we didn’t have to start from scratch, there was fertile ground.” However, this was not the case for all: one of the RITs reported that they did not have a strong background in gender before becoming a CEPF RIT.

Figure 2: CEPF Annual Reports

Mentions of ‘Gender’ and ‘Women’ in CEPF Annual Reports



Having the explicit gender requirement in grantmaking helped to further drive action. The stand-alone gender policy “makes a strong point” and having the requirement, along with guidelines and support, certainly contributed to meaningful integration. As one RIT explained, this “opened a lot of discussion and brought air into the topic... [it allowed us to] be more outspoken and ask specific questions about [gender], not just assume.” The “level of “resistance” from colleagues in this RIT has significantly changed, with nobody questioning the importance of gender now. In another RIT, however, where gender was a relatively new concept, they reported not having time to develop a gender agenda which resulted in missed opportunities and little spill over into other projects.

The Gender Focal Point position in the RIT provided an important learning and communication channel. The monthly GFP meetings were one of the few convening of RITs on one specific topic and allowed for important cross fertilization of ideas. Collaborating on design of the CEPF gender tools provided tangible outputs, ensured that they spoke to the differing regional contexts, and built RIT ownership of those tools. The GFPs also had the role of educating their RIT peers; as one GFP explained, it was critical to explain the ‘conservation argument’ for why gender is important – not just the moral imperative, but how a gender approach can contribute or lead to improved conservation outcomes.

RITs were responsible for conducting the Master Class¹¹ for grantees, into which a module on gender was incorporated. These Master Classes were reportedly very valuable, especially because of the timing - before the project was finalized and the contract signed – giving grantees an opportunity to evaluate their gender approach and adapt activities & budget at the design phase. It was during these Master Classes that grantees were able to work with the RIT’s GFP.

Among RITs, the reported usefulness of the Gender Tracking Tool was varied. As one RIT explained, because it was a self-assessment, CSOs would often over-grade themselves in the beginning and, because of this, their progress (as shown at the end evaluation) did not fully capture the magnitude of change. One way around this was to re-evaluate the beginning situation at the end, once the RIT and CSO had a strong relationship, and it was less awkward to ask for proof

or question the self-assessment. Another RIT explained that the GTT provides a “useful overview” but does not make a significant difference on the grantee and likely wouldn’t be replicated beyond that project. While one RIT explained that they would sometimes try to guide grantees to empower women to part of the organization’s decision-making structure, another explained how the “internalization of gender in organizations [requires] a lot of follow up and awareness.” Another RIT suggestion was to conduct the GTT during the mid-term as well to allow for monitoring and adaptation if needed.

Within Grantee Organizations:

The CSO grantees we spoke with were preferentially selected as good examples of gender integration, and all of them (perhaps unsurprisingly) pointed to previous experiences and focus on inclusive conservation. As one RIT explained “many grantees had strong gender capacity already which CEPF was able to capitalize on and choose high quality partners.” CSO efforts at a community level are informed and influenced by local gender norms, which most noted were generally highly patriarchal. CEPF funding allowed the grantees to strengthen this focus and more precisely assess gender issues and design projects with gender as a central theme. In some cases, those organizations had gender policies or practices which provided “good ground” for CEPF to align with expectations and reinforce gender ambitions. One CSO shared their pre-existing institutional goal of targeting a minimum of 40% women in their projects, a goal they were close to achieving.

The specific CEPF gender requirement and support helped to further drive gender integration. Pointing to the Master Class specifically, one grantee explained that the CEPF project “helped because it required gender [to be integrated].” Another said the gender focus “contributed 100%” to the project’s design and success. Another explained how the CEPF gender guidance “gave a sense of direction and ideas on how to monitor and measures changes.”

The Gender Tracking Tool was reportedly very useful at the grantee level, although with some variety. The GTT was noted as a nice tool to track progress of an institution. As one put it, “[the GTT] was an eye opener to us; it facilitated gender actualization...helped us to keep pushing for further guidelines and realizing our gender

¹¹ The Master Class is a training course for short-listed applicants on how to design conservation projects and write effective proposals for CEPF grants.

ambitions.” Another explained that the GTT was helpful in planning ahead, setting targets and tracking. In one of the hotspots, at least 5 grantees (~25% of the total) developed institutional gender policies as a result of the GTT and RIT support. However, not all agreed, as a grantee in another hotspot shared that the GTT exercise for the organization has not been institutionalized and does “not perceive that gender has changed in a more permanent way” for the organization.

The focus on gender had significant influence on how grantees oriented their projects and engaged with people. For example, one grantee “had not experienced working with women before” [in such a dedicated way] and that it is “how he learned to work with women.” The project’s design allowed community women to lead the activities and negotiate the project with male leaders, while specifically structuring activities to focus on “topics that women would be good at” and thus reduce potential jealousy from men. Another grantee explained that the project’s gender focus helped her women-focused organization to recognize the critical role that men can play, orienting the project to include clear roles for men and women that aligned well with physical ability and culture. In this way, the project was more readily accepted by the community in comparison to previous projects that focused solely on women and garnered backlash from some men. Another explained how they were able to experiment with new approaches to engaging women, appointing two women in each village as project focal points and increased per diem for women participants so they could bring their children.

Improved conservation effectiveness, women’s leadership/empowerment, advancing gender equality.

Most interviewees emphasized the benefits that the gender approach had on conservation outcomes and the importance of taking an inclusive approach to conservation.

- **Varied ecological knowledge and conservation priorities:** As one grantee explained, “climate change and water management are complex and dynamic, we need the participation and knowledge [of everyone].” Another noted that “the knowledge and priorities of women and men are different; men think about working outside the community while women think about the kitchen, so if the purpose [of our intervention] is community conservation and adaptation, then women are the obvious target group.” While this comment perpetuates gender stereotyping, the observation that gender influences ecological knowledge and priorities is important.
- **Conservation leadership practices may be different:** Another observed that men tend to lead singly, while women lead more collectively; this collective nature is more sustainable (if, for example, the leader migrates away, there are others to take over). Another grantee in the same region noted that “through the years we see that women are more involved, are more knowledgeable of conservation aspects and an interesting thing is that women push their husbands



into following conservation guidelines and to following conservation agreements that we have made.” Women pass on the education on conservation to their children and hold men accountable on conservation commitments. Another interviewee has noticed that women are more effective during meetings with environment authorities, being less aggressive and more respectful.

- **Approaches to conservation are different:** A RIT interview highlighted an observed transition of more women in conservation science, who approach conservation differently, asking different questions and taking different approaches in conservation initiatives. Examples of this in the conservation field include the Female Bird Song Project¹², led by a women researcher wanting to fill the historical gap of mostly male-led research focusing only male songbirds, and Jane Goodall who was reprimanded repeatedly for conducting her chimpanzee research in new and different ways from the traditional male researchers – for example in naming her research subjects instead of numbering them¹³.

At the same time, interviewees also noted how this dedicated approach has resulted in many positive impacts on social and gender norms and women’s empowerment.

- **Increased self-confidence:** One grantee focused on supporting women to conduct participatory research, which is then published in their name. The grantee reports that the process of collecting and reporting data, along with ownership rights of published knowledge, is empowering to women.
- **Increased income and respect:** As reported through a RIT, a project which resulted in women bringing in money to the household described how women stated that they were treated better by their families because they had an economic value, including ending partner violence. Another grantee explained how, because of the project’s gender approach, “husbands now come with wives” to meetings, and because of training on joint decision-making and financial planning, they “use collective money for good things.”
- **Leadership opportunities:** “Some people say that women are shy and are not good leaders, but if

they’re in a comfortable space, they can show their power and the capacity they have... [this is often hidden because] society doesn’t open much for women, because norms don’t give women space.”

CONCLUSION & LESSONS LEARNED

CEPF Gender Approach:

It is clear that the CI-GEF Agency’s gender requirements have had a significant influence at all levels of the CEPF. The requirement gave CEPF the momentum needed to codify a gender approach that reached across the multi-tiered fund to influence grantmaking, project support, and project implementation. While there are certainly still some gaps, challenges, and inefficiencies, this first iteration of a CEPF gender approach can certainly claim some important successes.

Despite strong strides, there is always more to do. As a Secretariat staff explained “while we seem to do a lot, it’s still relatively light touch and grantees are given latitude. We’re asking for the bare minimum – for example, haven’t asked for a gender analysis.” As gender requirements increase among all donors, it is especially beneficial for CEPF to increase this specific capacity among CSOs so that they might be better positioned to manage more robust gender requirements in the future.

Community norms can be slow to change. Despite efforts to create policies, action plans, tools, and guides, and build capacity, the CEPF projects operate in complex socio-cultural contexts which often have long-standing gender norms. Some interviewees noted the challenges of advancing a gender approach in these contexts, observing reluctance by leaders to acknowledge women’s roles in conservation, noting a limited number of women who are ready and able to effectively lead conservation activities due to skills or the remoteness of work, and mentioning that women find it difficult to engage in the project due to the heavy burden of household duties. As one grantee notes “[changes in gender norms] is a gradual change, and at the beginning it is necessary to say it is a requirement by the donor, but little by little it becomes more accepted, and they see the benefits.”

Likewise, institutions like CEPF, the RITs, and CSOs operate with their own norms and within cultures which can stifle or accelerate change. One RIT interviewee

¹² <https://www.birdlife.org/news/2022/03/08/the-unexpected-gender-gaps-in-the-science-of-birds/>

¹³ <https://time.com/5192249/jane-goodall-sexism-gender-equality-documentary/>



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observed that “gender is not as top down as we often think,” that it’s often already happening at the local level and there is perhaps more hesitancy among the larger organizations (like RITs). As one grant director explained, a relatively small percentage of grantees were ready to jump right in and perhaps a similar percentage never really understood the importance, while “the grand majority saw some type of subtle change” in how they think about and incorporate gender into their projects, but “this change matters.”

It is also noted that not all CEPF projects lend themselves easily to significant gender outcomes or are more challenging. For example, projects that focus on GIS or CSO financial management are simply often not relevant for gender outcomes. Other projects, such as those focused on patrolling, can be very challenging; “even if men are not creating barriers, there simply are not women who want to do that job.” In this way, expectations about what ‘satisfactory’ gender integration looks like vary according to the scope and focus of the project. As one grantee shared, “sometimes women are not interested in some activities, for example jungle patrols,” but there are other associated activities in which they contribute, such as registering the collected data, and the organization has set targets that align with these different roles.

During the course of the interviews, several recommendations were given for future CEPF focus:

- **Extend the gender approach across all hotspots.** Despite the desire to replicate the GEF-inspired gender approach across all CEPF hotspots, uptake has been “variable” according to the project’s terminal evaluation. While there are certainly variations in culture, project scope, and other variables that may lead certain hotspots to easier incorporation, efforts should be made to cross fertilize and focus on those hotspots that are ‘behind.’
- **Revamp the Gender Tracking Tool.** Of all of the interventions, the merits of the GTT were by far the most debated. From the grantee’s point of view (those we interviewed), it seemed like a constructive tool, but RIT and Secretariat staff found it less so. Perhaps if the GTT was presented as a “needs identification” tool (rather than an organizational scoring card), its utility would become clearer, and it would be less of a top-down ‘test’ and more of a support tool.
- **Consider gender as a proxy for other types of inclusion.** As global awareness evolves, other social inclusion topics (e.g., youth, LGBTQ+, disability) will likely become more prominent in conservation practice, much like gender has done. CEPF can use

lessons from this gender approach to inform how those other social inclusion issues may be incorporated in the future. One possibility is to broaden the gender policy to a GESI (gender equity & social inclusion) policy.

- **Invest in a pipeline of women conservation leaders.** Several interviews (both RIT & CSO) highlighted the challenge of a strong pipeline of women leaders in conservation who are equipped to engage and influence conservation decision-making and governance. Consider how CEPF could actively close this gap through targeted investment in emerging women conservation leaders.
- Encourage monitoring beyond tracking numbers. As one interviewee observed, “CEPF likes quantitative monitoring and reporting,” which certainly has some important benefits. But documenting and reporting on other, more qualitative changes, can be even more illuminating and supportive of the gender policy’s true intent. A CSO grantee notes that “the team identifies [these changes] at team meetings, but usually doesn’t document them in a systematic way...this is a gap in CEPF monitoring requirements.”

Recommendations for Other Funds, Non-grant Instruments, and Projects that Provide Grants to CSOs:

The CEPF project provides an example to observe good practices and key enabling conditions that can inform and influence other similar initiatives:

- **Be specific about gender in conservation-related grantmaking.** Clearly stating the requirements, along with tailored tools and capacity building, is critical to ensuring that grantees are able to effectively integrate gender into their projects. As explained above, this “carrot and stick” approach led to CEPF grantee integration.
- **Move faster.** Because CEPF was starting from scratch (no policy or plan, no existing tools) it did take time for the Secretariat to become comfortable with gender concepts and adapt to the Fund’s structure and needs. By the time the suite of requirements, capacity building, and tools were available, many subprojects had already been awarded and begun, and this was reported as a missed opportunity. Interviews suggest that hiring a gender specialist at the start to jump-start the content development would have fast-tracked this process and

been able to provide more tailored, dedicated, and consistent support to GMP implementation.

- **Go beyond tracking numbers.** One criticism of monitoring something as complex as gender change is that numbers – representing participation or benefit – hardly tells the full story. Both GEF and CEPF monitoring is heavily quantitative and therefore does not adequately capture the qualitative change that might be happening. Furthermore, as the project’s Terminal Evaluation points out, the project is only reporting (to GEF) on the gender indicators in aggregate on a yearly basis; it is therefore difficult to gauge participation and benefit at the outcome level. Funds should consider including knowledge products (case studies) that focus on gender outcomes as key project deliverable can ensure this information is collected; examples from CEPF include the Indo-Burma Gender Case Study¹⁴ and the East Afromontane web stories¹⁵. In addition, monitoring frameworks can include methods like Most Significant Change or incorporating indicators that monitor impacts such as:
 - Indicative % of women who report positive change in their ability to engage in and influence household, project or NRM decision-making.
 - Indicative % of women who report increased access to and control of natural resources.
 - Indicative % of men who report observing change in women’s leadership and influence or access and control, due to project interventions.
- **Choose intermediaries who are committed to strong gender integration or commit to building capacity.** As this case study points out, those RITs who had previous experience with gender and had institutional policies and procedures, were able to support their grantees in a much more robust manner. When selecting partners, Funds should include gender skills as one of the criteria, or if this is not feasible, then include intentional capacity building of those intermediaries.

*This gender case study was produced by the CI-GEF Project Agency. For further information, please contact **Ian Kisson**, Senior Director, Environmental and Social Management Framework CI-GEF and GCF Project Agencies. Email: ikisson@conservation.org.*

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¹⁴ <https://www.cepf.net/sites/default/files/cepf-empowering-women-in-conservation-training-modules-2021-en.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.cepf.net/stories/five-ways-cepf-grantees-eastern-africa-are-considering-gender>