

Evaluation of Lessons Learned
in Relation to the Regional
Implementation Team for the East
Melanesian Islands Biodiversity
Hotspot

January, 2022

Prepared by



EcoAdvisors

Acknowledgments

The EcoAdvisors team thanks the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) for the opportunity to conduct this evaluation of lessons learned, and to learn about the contributions to biodiversity conservation that CEPF, the RIT and partners in the Eastern Melanesia Islands biodiversity hotspot have achieved.

We very much appreciate the generous contributions of time from RIT and partner organization staff who participated in the interviews listed in Annex A. This evaluation only was possible thanks to the rich array of perspectives and input received through these interviews.

We are extremely grateful to Antonia Cermak-Terzian, Olivier Langrand, Nina Marshall, Dan Rothberg, Jack Tordoff and Michele Zador from the CEPF Secretariat. The thorough preparation of background materials and information greatly facilitated our work, and we especially benefited from the thoughtful reflections shared by the CEPF team in interviews, thorough review of an earlier draft, and a concluding group discussion.



Acronyms

APO	Annual Portfolio Overview
CBO	Community-based organization
CEPF	Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
CSO	Civil society organization
CSTT	Civil Society Organizational Capacity Tracking Tool
EMI	East Melanesian Islands
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
LOI	Letter of Interest
PNG	Papua New Guinea
RFP	Request for Proposals
RIT	Regional Implementation Team
SGM	Small Grant Mechanism
SGP	Small Grant Program
SICCP	Solomon Islands Community Conservation Partnership
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
TOR	Terms of Reference
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VESS	Vanuatu Environmental Science Society



Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction.....	7
The East Melanesian Islands Hotspot.....	7
Regional Implementation Team	8
Purpose and Scope of Evaluation of Lessons Learned.....	9
Evaluation Approach	10
Methodology	10
Limitations.....	10
Background.....	11
Duties of Regional Implementation Team.....	11
Grant portfolio.....	12
Findings.....	13
Relevance.....	13
Efficiency	18
Effectiveness	21
Coverage	23
Impact	24
Accessibility.....	31
Adaptive Management.....	31
Discussion.....	33
Recommendations	35
RIT Structure.....	35
RIT Terms of Reference.....	36
Capacity building.....	37
Annexes	39
Annex A. List of Key Informants Contacted and Interviewed.....	39
Annex B. List of Documents Reviewed.....	41
Annex C. Interview Guide	42
Annex D. RIT Terms of Reference (as provided in evaluation RfP).....	46

Table 1: Strategic Directions and Investment Priorities Defined in the EMI Ecosystem Profile	7
Table 2: Budget Allocations per Strategic Direction	8
Table 3: Regional Implementation Team Members	9
Table 4: Summary of EMI Grant Portfolio (as of September 2021).....	12
Table 5: LOIs Submitted per Call.....	14
Table 6: Percentage of RIT budget expended over the course of CEPF investment.....	20
Table 7: Comparison of EMI to Other CEPF Portfolios.....	20
Table 8: Awarded (Active and Closed) Large and Small Grants by Country.....	23
Table 9: Awarded (Active and Closed) Large and Small Grants by Strategic Direction.....	24
Table 10: Summary of Impacts against Targets (as of June 2021; portfolio not yet closed).....	27
Table 11. CEPF EMI Grants Awarded (excluding grants to RIT), 2014-2021 (Sep.)	31
Table 12. Summary of Evaluation Criteria	34



Executive Summary

In December 2012, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) Donor Council formally approved the East Melanesian Islands (EMI) Ecosystem Profile¹ and allocated \$9 million for the hotspot. CEPF launched an eight-year program of investment in the hotspot in July 2013, focusing on 20 priority sites and 48 priority species distributed across the three countries. The program is due to end in early 2022. In each of the biodiversity hotspots where it invests, CEPF selects a Regional Implementation Team (RIT) to support operations and provide strategic leadership for the program. An RIT consists of one or more civil society organizations (CSOs) active in conservation in the hotspot. The objective of the RIT is to convert the plans in the Ecosystem Profile into a coherent grant portfolio that achieves the objectives outlined in the logical framework. Through a competitive selection process, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) was selected to serve as the EMI RIT. The RIT is headquartered in IUCN's Oceania office in Suva, Fiji, and the RIT structure includes positions for Country Coordinators located in each of the three EMI countries.

This independent evaluation of the incumbent RIT entails an examination of its performance and the challenges, opportunities and lessons learned associated with the RIT role. The purpose is to inform future RIT selection processes and applicants for the RIT role in the event of re-investment by CEPF in the EMI hotspot. The scope of the evaluation encompasses RIT performance and lessons learned in relation to the EMI geography, the capacity of civil society in the hotspot, the budget allocated to the RIT, and achievement of deliverables as defined in the RIT Terms of Reference (TOR) and grant agreement with CEPF. The evaluation of lessons learned covered seven main themes. Three of these themes relate to relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the RIT. Four of the themes concern the nature of the EMI grant portfolio, encompassing coverage, impact, accessibility, and adaptive management. Evaluation methods included document review and interviews.

The RIT faced a number of challenges over the period of CEPF investment. Some of these were anticipated: the lack of capacity in the region and limited number of potential grantees; communications and transportation challenges in remote island environments; and the distance and time difference between the region and the CEPF Secretariat. Others were surprises, and required flexibility and adaptability, for example, staff turnover at CEPF (three Grant Directors and five Grant Managers over the investment period), the inability of IUCN to hire staff for Country Coordinator positions requiring consultants (leading to turnover, positions left empty, and extra time spent on contracting), and the COVID-19 pandemic. While CEPF and the RIT both exhibited creativity and diligence in meeting these challenges, the combination of overstretched staff at CEPF and RIT and limited face-to-face time together strained relationships.

¹ https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/content/documents/emi_ecosystem_profile.pdf



Despite these challenges, the overall outcomes of the program and the performance of the RIT were largely successful. Over the 8 years of the investment window, CEPF supported 114 grants. Many of the investment targets have already been met or exceeded, and most are on track to be achieved by the close of the portfolio. The RIT implemented the program with an operations budget to grants ratio comparable to other CEPF investments. The share of the grant portfolio implemented by local organizations was significant, considering the low capacity in the region. Many organizations experienced an increase in capacity due to CEPF investment. Many grantees noted great appreciation for the CEPF grants, which fill an important geographic and thematic gap in the investment landscape.

Among the most prominent themes to emerge from the evaluation exercise is that challenges with respect to capacity building are easily underestimated. The CEPF approach in the EMI included a deliberate focus on capacity building in the beginning of the investment period, to strengthen the foundation for a portfolio of project grants. However, the approach to capacity-building itself may not have been commensurate with the very low baseline level of capacity within local civil society; local organizational culture; critical needs for effective implementation; and the time and effort required to achieve lasting capacity growth. If stronger capacity is fully embraced as a precondition for achieving other desired outcomes and the overall objective, there is an argument for a more deliberate, thorough and detailed approach to capacity-building with its own theory of change, strategic design and milestones that then trigger subsequent investment activities.

The main lessons learned with respect to CEPF investment in the EMI region include:

- The RIT TOR needs to be clear and consistently applied if there is CEPF staff turnover.
- Logistical challenges in this region suggest that more travel resources need to be budgeted for the RIT to fully execute its roles.
- The extended investment period was important to accommodate initial emphasis on capacity building.
- Capacity-building required more concerted time and strategic substantive focus than anticipated.
- Timelines and budgets in project design and selection need to be better calibrated to the complex tenure context.
- At present, the private companies (particularly in extractive sectors) have little appetite for collaboration on sustainability initiatives, such that this threat requires different kinds of interventions.
- In-country RIT presence was essential for ongoing mentoring, guidance and technical support.
- Tension between stringent reporting requirements and local norms and capacities further intensifies the need for direct RIT support to grantees.
- When small grantees successfully progress to large grants, they still require substantial guidance and support.



- Deep knowledge of the region and high degrees of cultural competence, responsiveness and sensitivity on the part of RIT leadership allowed the RIT to be effective despite various challenging circumstances.
- Despite low capacity and other challenges, the RIT demonstrated that increased civil society action and progress on conservation are achievable.

Principal recommendations to emerge from the evaluation include:

1. If possible select an organization situated in one of the hotspot countries for the RIT; it must at least have a legal presence in at least one of the hotspot countries. The RIT Team Leader/Program Manager should be located in one of the hotspot countries, even if the host institution is located outside of the hotspot. There should be at least one full-time Country Coordinator per country.
2. Make the role of the RIT in the large grant portfolio more explicit in the TOR and update as necessary, to maintain consistency in the case of staff turnover or other changes. From the outset, CEPF financial reporting and other administrative requirements need to be made very clear to the RIT, so that the RIT can assess whether it feels its role is viable in terms of communicating and imposing these requirements on grantees.
3. Consider ways to reduce the burden of CEPF requirements on small grantees. Possible measures include: increasing the small grant cap above US\$20,000; encouraging applications for multi-year small grants; and providing a simplified application process for successful prior grantees.
4. Develop a long-term vision for capacity building in the region. Elements in an overarching capacity-building strategy could include:
 - A mentoring program through which experienced organizations partner with low-capacity local organizations.
 - A longer initial period focused on capacity building.
 - Direct funds from CEPF to provide financial literacy training.
 - A regional conservation leadership fellowship program.
 - Grantee exchanges and training sessions, to include specific training on financial management.
 - Grants to fund PhD students from the region.
 - Consideration of RIT host organizations that are focused on capacity building (not necessarily conservation).
 - Increase the duration of grants to build in grantee capacity building in the first 6-12 months.



Introduction

The East Melanesian Islands Hotspot

In December 2012, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) Donor Council formally approved the East Melanesian Islands (EMI) Ecosystem Profile² and allocated \$9 million for the hotspot, across the five Strategic Directions described in Table 1. The EMI comprise some 1,600 islands to the northeast and east of the island of New Guinea, encompassing nearly 100,000 km² of land area in the countries of Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, and the islands region of Papua New Guinea (PNG). High levels of endemism and accelerating rates of habitat loss qualify the EMI as a biodiversity hotspot. The principal threats to biodiversity include commercial logging and mining, expanding subsistence and plantation agriculture, invasive species, growing human populations, and climate change. Most of the region's land and resources are under customary ownership, such that local people play a critical role as stewards of biodiversity. CEPF launched an eight-year program of investment in the hotspot in July 2013, focusing on 20 priority sites and 48 priority species distributed across the three countries. The program is due to end in early 2022.

The strategy that has guided CEPF investment in the EMI region is presented in Table 1; Table 2 summarizes budget allocations for each Strategic Direction.

Table 1: Strategic Directions and Investment Priorities Defined in the EMI Ecosystem Profile³

<i>1. Empower local communities to protect and manage globally significant biodiversity at priority Key Biodiversity Areas under-served by current conservation efforts</i>
1.1 Conduct baseline surveys of priority sites that build government-civil society partnerships and bridge political boundaries
1.2 Raise awareness about the values of biodiversity and the nature of threats and drivers among local communities at priority sites
1.3 Support local communities to design and implement locally relevant conservation actions that respond to major threats at priority sites
1.4 Demonstrate conservation incentives (ecotourism, payments for ecosystem services, conservation agreements, etc.) at priority sites
<i>2. Integrate biodiversity conservation into local land-use and development planning</i>
2.1 Conduct participatory ownership and tenure mapping of resources within customary lands at priority sites
2.2 Provide legal training and support to communities for effective enforcement of environmental protection regulations
2.3 Explore partnerships with private companies to promote sustainable development through better environmental and social practices in key natural resource sectors
<i>3. Safeguard priority globally threatened species by addressing major threats and information gaps</i>
3.1 Conduct research on six globally threatened species for which there is a need for greatly improved information on their status and distribution
3.2 Develop, implement and monitor species recovery plans for species most at risk, where their status and distribution are known

² https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/content/documents/emi_ecosystem_profile.pdf

³ Source: Annual Portfolio Overview East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot July 2020 – June 2021



3.3 Introduce science-based harvest management of priority species important to local food security
4. Increase local, national and regional capacity to conserve biodiversity through catalyzing civil society partnerships
4.1 Strengthen the capacity of local and national civil society organizations in financial management, project management and organizational governance
4.2 Provide core support for the development of civil society organizations into national and regional conservation leaders
4.3 Strengthen civil society capacity in conservation management, science and leadership through short-term training courses at domestic academic institutions
5. Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination of conservation investment through a Regional Implementation Team
5.1 Operationalize and coordinate CEPF's grant-making processes and procedures to ensure effective implementation of the investment strategy throughout the hotspot
5.2 Build a broad constituency of civil society groups working across institutional and political boundaries towards achieving the shared conservation goals described in the ecosystem profile

Table 2: Budget Allocations per Strategic Direction⁴

No.	Strategic Direction	Funding
1	Empower local communities to protect and manage globally significant biodiversity at priority Key Biodiversity Areas under-served by current conservation efforts.	\$3,200,000
2	Integrate biodiversity conservation into local land-use and development planning.	\$1,000,000
3	Safeguard priority globally threatened species by addressing major threats and information gaps.	\$1,200,000
4	Increase local, national and regional capacity to conserve biodiversity through catalyzing civil society partnerships.	\$2,100,000
5	Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination of conservation investment through a regional implementation team.	\$1,500,000
Total		\$9,000,000

Regional Implementation Team

In each of the biodiversity hotspots where it invests, CEPF selects a Regional Implementation Team (RIT) to support operations and provide strategic leadership for the program (Strategic Direction 5). An RIT consists of one or more civil society organizations (CSOs) active in conservation in the hotspot. The objective of the RIT is to convert the plans in the Ecosystem Profile into a coherent grant portfolio that achieves the objectives outlined in the logical framework.

Through a competitive selection process, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) was selected to serve as the EMI RIT. The arrangement initially was structured with two grants; one for Administration and one for Programs. These were merged in 2020.

The team is headquartered in IUCN's Oceania office in Suva, Fiji, and the RIT structure is intended to include Country Coordinators located in each of the three countries.

⁴ Source: Annual Portfolio Overview East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot July 2020 – June 2021



Table 3: Regional Implementation Team Members

Name	Position	Start Date	End Date
Mark Borg	Donor Relations (as needed basis)	2014	2015
Alan Saunders	Project Coordinator	July 2013	2015
Helen Pippard	Project Manager/ Team Leader	July 2013	March 2022
Luisa Tagicakibau	Team Leader-Admin	July 2013	June 2018
Anjani Gosai	Finance Officer	July 2013	March 2022
Evia Tavanavanu	Project Assistant (as needed basis)	2019	2019
Gae Gowae	PNG National Country Coordinator (part-time)	June 2014	May 2016
Zola Sangga	PNG National Country Coordinator (full-time)	May 2016	mid-2020
Lysa Wini	Solomon Islands National Country Coordinator (full-time)	July 2014	Sept. 2016
Fiona Rodie	Solomon Islands National Country Coordinator (full-time)	Jan 2017	April 2018
Minnie Rafe	Solomon Islands National Country Coordinator (full-time)	Oct 2018	Dec 2018
Ravin Dhari	Solomon Islands National Country Coordinator (full-time)	June 2019	Feb 2022
Vatumaraga Molisa	Vanuatu National Country Coordinator (half-time)	Sept 2014	June 2020

Purpose and Scope of Evaluation of Lessons Learned

This independent evaluation of the incumbent RIT entails an examination of its performance and the challenges, opportunities and lessons learned associated with the RIT role. The purpose of this evaluation is to inform future RIT selection processes and applicants for the RIT role in the event of re-investment by CEPF in the EMI hotspot, if future funding becomes available. Thus, the results will guide decisions by CEPF donors regarding optimal programmatic and management approaches for coordinating any future investment. The scope of the evaluation encompasses RIT performance and lessons learned in relation to the EMI geography, the capacity of civil society in the hotspot, the budget allocated to the RIT, and achievement of deliverables as defined in the RIT Terms of Reference (TOR) and grant agreement with CEPF.



Evaluation Approach

Methodology

The evaluation of lessons learned covered seven main themes. Three of these themes relate to relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the RIT. Four of the themes concern the nature of the EMI grant portfolio, encompassing coverage, impact, accessibility, and adaptive management.

Evaluation methods included document review and interviews. Documents reviewed included the Ecosystem Profile and logframe, RIT progress reports, Annual Portfolio Overviews and supervision mission reports, and the Midterm assessment (see Annex B for a full list). Themes and conclusions derived from the desk review provided the basis for interviews with key informants to refine and expand on findings. A semi-structured interview methodology was used: interviews were conducted using an interview guide with prepared open-ended questions and discussion topics (see Annex C for the interview guide). Semi-structured interviews allowed for discussions to evolve as they took place, and for pursuing promising lines of inquiry as they emerged. A complete list of key informants was provided by the CEPF Secretariat staff, including grantees, CEPF Secretariat staff, RIT staff, and members of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG). A sample of 28 grantees was selected to include representation across country, grant type (small/large), period of awards, habitat, pillar, organizational status, organization location (local/international). Key informants were contacted via email, and at least two follow up attempts to schedule an interview were made. A number of interviews were rescheduled one or more times, due to a variety of factors affecting respondents. Annex A contains the list of all key informants interviewed, as well as the selected sample of grantees.

Limitations

Although the evaluation team is confident that the lessons learned as compiled in this report are a fair reflection of the CEPF EMI investment experience, the evaluation process itself was subject to some limitations. Principally, the inability to travel to the region had several consequences. Firstly, input was limited to those persons who responded to requests for virtual meetings. The evaluation team made several attempts to interview Country Coordinators, as they were in a position to provide a particular perspective on the RIT implementation experience and impact. However, only one responded to requests for interviews. Similarly, government representatives on the TAG did not respond to requests for interviews, or did not attend their scheduled session. Secondly, the virtual format of the interviews itself impacted the nature of the exchanges. Moreover, there was no possibility of obtaining direct impressions with respect to such factors as capacity or impact on the ground. Assessment of impact necessarily relied on available documentation, which



principally took the form of self-reporting; thus, there was no practicable way to subject data to independent ground-truthing.

A second limitation relates to a recurring thread throughout interviews. The evaluation team sought to identify lessons learned relating to the RIT structure and capacity; however, an oft-present theme was that a non-trivial portion of the overall RIT/CEPF experience was impacted by interpersonal dynamics and clashes in work and communication styles. Although this does inform some reflections regarding lessons, it also reflects idiosyncratic aspects of the overall experience that are orthogonal to questions of structure and capacity. The degree to which interviews focused on this theme may to some extent have distracted from deeper learning relevant to eventual adapted replication of the CEPF investment in the region.

Background

Duties of Regional Implementation Team

The following are the key elements of the TOR for the RIT (see Annex D for the full TOR), as provided in the RfP for this evaluation:

- i. Establish and coordinate a process for proposal solicitation and review
- ii. Manage a program of small grants; that is, grants of less than US\$20,000
- iii. Reporting and monitoring
- iv. Coordinate and communicate CEPF investment, build partnerships and promote information exchange in the hotspot
- v. Build the capacity of grantees

The language in the TOR for this hotspot corresponds to that for RITs for CEPF investments in other hotspots.

The activities and deliverables of the RIT are described in a logframe in the contract and documented through semi-annual progress reports. The components of the logframe are consistent with the TORs, but organized differently. The following are the components of the logframe as of 2020 when the Program and Admin grants were merged:

1. Support CEPF grantees and the Secretariat in the management of the EMI large grant program (grants >\$20,000)
2. Management of a small grants program (<\$20,000)
3. Monitor and assess the impact of CEPF's large and small grants



4. Provide capacity support to grantees, especially domestic CSOs, in order to ensure efficient and effective project implementation and future sustainability
5. Strengthen networking, partnership building and information exchange amongst all EMI stakeholders
6. Communicate CEPF's investment in the East Melanesian Islands
7. Coordinate and manage CEPF's investment in the EMI hotspot with the RIT and the CEPF Secretariat

A review of the TOR and logframe indicates that TOR elements *i*, *ii* and *iii* correspond to logframe components 1, 2 and 3 respectively; TOR element *iv* corresponds to logframe components 5, 6, and 7; and TOR element *v* corresponds to logframe component 4.

Grant portfolio

Over the 8 years of the investment window, CEPF supported 114 grants (excluding the grants to the RIT). Table 4 below summarizes the grant portfolio:

Table 4: Summary of EMI Grant Portfolio (as of September 2021)

	PNG	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu	Multi-country	Total
Type of grant					
Large grant	11	25	14	6	56
Small grant	17	26	12	3	58
Grantee type					
Academic/Research Inst.	3	13	0	2	18
Community Group/NGO	24	37	25	6	92
Private Enterprise	1	1	1	1	4
Strategic Pillar					
Biodiversity	14	23	10	2	49
Civil Society	8	21	10	4	43
Enabling Conditions	5	4	4	3	16
Human Well-being	1	3	2	0	6
Habitat					
Caves and Subterranean	0	0	1	0	1
Forest	14	29	13	3	59
Marine	5	4	2	0	11
Wetlands	0	0	1	1	2
Other/No Specific Habitat	9	18	9	5	41
Total	28	51	26	9	114



Findings

Relevance

Relevance relates to the degree to which RIT activities were relevant to the Ecosystem Profile, the RIT TOR, the hotspot geography, civil society capacity, and the CEPF global monitoring framework. This section describes the RIT activities undertaken under each of the main elements of the TOR:

i. Establish and coordinate a process for proposal solicitation and review (logframe component 1)

For large grants, the RIT and Grant Director prepare calls for proposals together; the Grant Director coordinates preparation and posting of the Request for Proposals (RFP) to the CEPF website, and the RIT is responsible for local dissemination. Potential applicants submit letters of inquiry (LOIs) via an online template. The RIT and Grant Director review all LOIs for large grants independently, with the RIT soliciting expert review as relevant (see below for small grants). If an LOI receives a positive review from both the Grant Director and RIT, the applicant is invited to submit a full proposal. As of October 2021, 56 large grants have been awarded (excluding the RIT grants), with 20 still active.

As seen in Table 5 below, the number of LOI submissions began to decline in 2016 and then dropped markedly as of 2019. The following have been suggested as potential reasons: 1) Low number of potential grantees in the hotspot, many of which already were funded at this point and without spare capacity to take on additional work; therefore they were not in a position to seek more funding; 2) a decline in efforts to conduct outreach/communications about the call for LOIs, which could be linked to difficulty in keeping Country Coordinator positions filled; 3) Emergence of COVID-19 (for calls for LOIs after March 2020); 4) Challenges within the hotspot or within the program; a specific example mentioned is that for some previous grantees frustration with reporting processes may have reduced the appetite for submitting additional proposals. The submission of fewer LOIs over time also reflects a factor common to CEPF portfolios as they mature: early calls for proposals are dedicated to a larger share of the investment strategy, thus attracting more LOIs. As the portfolio advances and various strategic priorities are satisfied, the calls for proposal became more targeted and reduced in scope to fill specific gaps. Also, later in the investment period a number of organizations already are implementing projects supported by grants awarded in previous calls, and therefore not submitting LOIs.



Table 5: LOIs Submitted per Call⁵

No.	Release Date	Due Date	LOIs Received	
			Large	Small
1	19 August 2013	28 October 2013	40	25
2	1 July 2014	26 August 2014	31	21
3	1 July 2015	31 August 2015	31	31
4	24 August 2016	30 September 2016	24	13
5	18 October 2016	28 November 2016	14	8
6	8 September 2017	25 October 2017	11	33
7	30 August 2018	7 October 2018	15	18
8	11 February 2019	11 April 2019	3	8
9	15 October 2019	22 November 2019	8	10
10	4 December 2020	15 January 2021	5	NA
11	4 December 2020	15 January 2021	NA	5
Total			182	172
			354	

A significant issue was ongoing confusion regarding the management of the large grant portfolio. In most hotspots, the RIT is responsible for various aspects of managing the large grants. However, at the EMI RIT inception and training, it was decided that the RIT would be less involved in the large grant portfolio, due to the expected challenges of managing the small grants program in this region. When the CEPF Grant Director changed in 2016, it was decided that the RIT would have more responsibilities related to the large grant portfolio. For example, some of the smaller local organizations that received large grants required support with project and financial management (logframes, budgets, monitoring, etc.). Additional tasks required for supporting the large grant portfolio included drafting calls for proposals, drafting response letters and communicating with grantees. These tasks are described in the TORs and the logframe and corresponding performance tracker. However, it appears that the adjusted expectations of the RIT responsibilities led to divergent perspectives between the RIT and CEPF regarding roles. The resulting frustration on both sides also affected the experience of grantees, as signaled in several grantee interviews.

ii. Manage a program of small grants; that is, grants of less than US\$20,000 (logframe component 2)

IUCN is responsible for managing the CEPF small grants mechanism in the hotspot. CEPF obligated US\$1,000,000 to the Small Grant Mechanism (SGM) upon inception, from which IUCN can issue grants of up to US\$20,000. The RIT receives LOIs and sends them to country-specific RIT members for screening. The LOIs that pass the screening are sent to external reviewers as necessary. The RIT and IUCN financial personnel manage the small grants and disbursements. As of October 2021, IUCN has awarded 58 small grants, with 14 still active.

Interviews indicate that the RIT's management of the small grants is perceived as very successful. Grantees were very appreciative of RIT support, including responsive

⁵ Source: Annual Portfolio Overview East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot July 2020 – June 2021



communications assistance on many fronts. However, although the RIT spent significant time assisting small grantees, several continued to struggle with administrative and financial processes. For example, one small grantee misunderstood the meaning of a “no cost extension” and incurred several months of additional expenses; with CEPF as sole funder, a several-month payment delay greatly impacted the ability to execute planned activities, and they currently are operating with no funds. A challenge expressed by several grantees was the burden of financial reporting, and payments delayed for several months due to small reporting errors. One international grantee described a two-year process to get funding, noting that the process was much lengthier with this grant compared to other similar-size grants.

iii. Reporting and monitoring (logframe component 3)

The RIT is responsible for tracking grantee accomplishments in relation to the Ecosystem Profile logical framework and according to the CEPF global monitoring framework. Grantees submit results online or in an offline template, and the RIT verifies and ground-truths grantee results.

The RIT is also responsible for ensuring that grantees follow their commitments to implement safeguards per their proposals. As of October 2021, 15 large grants and 10 small grants triggered at least one World Bank safeguard. All 25 of these grants triggered the Indigenous People safeguard. Of those, 8 triggered the safeguard on involuntary restriction on access to resources and one of the 25 triggered the safeguards on environmental assessment.

The RIT was responsible for conducting a Midterm assessment, which was conducted in December, 2018. Due to a variety of factors that appear beyond the control of the RIT, the Midterm assessment occurred later than initially planned. The report was submitted by the RIT to CEPF in March, 2019 and was finalized by CEPF in late 2021. According to CEPF, the report had significant weaknesses and as a result CEPF staff devoted significantly more time than anticipated to finalizing the report. Several interviewees expressed frustration with the fact that the Midterm Report had not yet been released (as of the time of the interview), and questioned whether their inputs or the Midterm assessment findings in general had any impact. (Note that the February 2019 call for proposals stated that the priorities to be funded reflect the recommendations from the mid-term assessment.)

iv. Coordinate and communicate CEPF investment, build partnerships and promote information exchange in the hotspot (logframe components 5, 6, 7)

In terms of communicating and disseminating information about CEPF in the hotspot, the RIT performs a number of activities. IUCN Oceania maintains a portion of its website dedicated to the work of CEPF, including a guide to accessing CEPF funds, and a “Hotspot News” site highlighting grantee accomplishments. Since July 2014, the RIT has released 24 newsletters.



One item in this section of the TORs is “Provide regular communications and reports to the CEPF Grant Director on the progress of the project.” Although the RIT was meeting this requirement, until 2017 progress reports from the RIT to CEPF were very general; activity and deliverable updates were noted simply as “Achieved” or “Ongoing.” Beginning in 2017, the reports became much more detailed, with specific activities undertaken, description of issues, etc. There was a specific request in a 2019 Progress Report for the RIT to provide more details on such topics as lists of RIT site visits, description of Country Coordinator tasks and accomplishments, and additional detail on financial reporting. This level of reporting is helpful for assessing the performance of the RIT and perhaps could be described more explicitly in the TORs, to avoid sudden changes in reporting requirements that may be perceived as micromanaging.

There appeared to be less effort dedicated to facilitating partnerships and collaboration/coordination amongst stakeholders and leveraging additional funds in the region. While there was some coordination facilitated amongst grantees, and meetings and workshops attended by RIT members, the effort on these activities appears to have been limited. This may reflect precedence given to other RIT responsibilities under time and budget constraints.

v. Build the capacity of grantees (logframe component 4)

Recognizing the degree to which capacity was limited among local organizations in the three EMI countries, CEPF’s investment placed considerable priority on capacity building. This was evidenced by the significant emphasis of grant-making in the initial three years on enabling conditions and capacity, which also reinforced the rationale for planning an 8-year investment period from the outset rather than the more typical 5-year window.

Several of the program metrics indicate successful outcomes towards the goal of building grantee capacity. For example, 41 local organizations have been direct recipients of small or large grants, 5 local organizations were awarded large grants after first successfully securing and implementing small grants, and 12 new organizations have been established. To date, twenty local CSOs have shown an increase in CSTT scores, and 13 organizations have secured follow-up funding. Thus, the CEPF investment has measurably enhanced local capacity in the region. On the other hand, capacity targets have not all been met and many grantees express continued need for capacity building. One challenge in particular, was to facilitate the emergence of local civil society organizations as national conservation leaders. To date, only two such organizations have emerged.

Several grantees expressed gratitude for the capacity building they experienced through CEPF and the RIT. For example, a number of grantees that had no experience in proposal writing gained that experience through the process and gained confidence to apply for other grants. One local organization (VESS) was essentially built from the ground up through the CEPF grants, and they state they are the organization they are today because of CEPF. Some



grantees mentioned that despite the burden of the CEPF proposal process, the rigor (particularly logframes) helped with implementation of the project, explaining the project to others, and writing other proposals. Some grantees stated that working directly with Grant Managers and Grant Directors helped to see issues through a donor lens, providing a valuable opportunity to grow and learn from detailed feedback, and that this was not a burden but rather a learning opportunity.

Five local organizations were awarded large grants after first successfully securing and implementing small grants. This reflects some success in capacity building, while noting that the RIT's support for further capacity growth diminished once these organizations progressed to large grants. One key informant stated that there was no explicit strategy in place for transitioning organizations from small grants to large grants. Some smaller local organizations that received large grants found it very difficult to meet stringent CEPF requirements. In addition, as donors became stricter in 2017/2018, CEPF modified its practices and as a result, grantees found themselves in a difficult shifting environment. Furthermore, based on financial risk assessments of grantees, further mitigation measures were imposed on some of the lowest-capacity grantees. These inputs raised the general question of how well CEPF requirements fit a region starting at such a low level of capacity. However, it also needs to be recognized that CEPF provides training on requirements and works with grantees to prevent problems before they arise. Moreover, CEPF has engaged its own donors to explain these issues, but has found little flexibility with respect to donor requirements.

Despite the importance of capacity building to the CEPF strategy, it appears that the level of activity that the RIT would have needed to undertake to achieve significant lasting results may not have been possible under the given budget and RIT structure, staff turnover, and competing priorities. In addition, while the timeline for the EMI hotspot was longer than the usual 5-year CEPF investment, the level of capacity building needed in the region is likely to take decades.

An area highlighted as effective in terms of capacity building is support for advanced training and education, particularly in ecology or related fields. Recognizing that to meet CEPF expectations such support needed to be framed to include effective fieldwork that advances concrete biodiversity conservation metrics, interviews suggested that this type of investment produced enduring capacity and leadership enhancements.

The overall impression from the full set of interviews is that, while some capacity strengthening demonstrably was achieved, results with respect to capacity building of local organizations have been mixed. Reflections offered during interviews with respect to capacity building included:

- Grantees were extremely appreciative of the assistance provided by the RIT on many fronts, including the proposal process, financial and technical reporting, and project troubleshooting. The RIT provided hands-on support through meetings and



site visits, but they were stretched thin due to the high level of need. Many grantees expressed that the RIT seemed overworked and they would have liked to see more in-country presence.

- More direct interaction between the RIT and grantees would have been helpful, particularly structured around training on specific topics (e.g. finance and reporting), which could be delivered in group settings.
- Local organizations working with the RIT or large/international NGO partners to prepare proposals was a potential form of capacity-building, but instead in some instances the local organizations saw that more as a division of roles and responsibilities under a standard way of doing business.
- Some investments appeared to offer capacity enhancements, but turn-over of personnel eroded the impact at an organizational level.
- Some local organizations appear loathe to expand their ambitions (in terms of seeking larger grants), because they are concerned about the burdens of enhanced scrutiny and accountability that may come with larger grants.

Efficiency

The efficiency of RIT operations considers how effectively the RIT converted its budget into results. Program impacts will be discussed in a later section; this section will focus mainly on the RIT's disbursement of grants.

During the CEPF investment phase, 11 calls for proposals were issued. The calls generated 354 letters of inquiry, comprising 182 for large grants and 172 for small grants. Overall, 31% of large grant applications and 34% of small grant applications were successful. In addition to awarding grants through competitive calls, 5 grants were made on an invitation basis. Excluding the RIT grants, a total of 114 grants were awarded, with a total value of US\$7.2 million to date. These comprised 56 large grants, with a total value of US\$6.26 million, and 58 small grants, with a total value of US\$0.98 million.

Figure 1 shows disbursement of funding over time. The initial disbursement rate was somewhat slow; to some extent, this may be attributable to the initial focus on capacity building as a preparatory phase before larger programmatic grants. In any case, disbursements accelerated and remained on track. As of information available in December 2021, 97% of the allocation has been obligated.



Figure 1: EMI Obligations over Time (as of September 2021)⁶

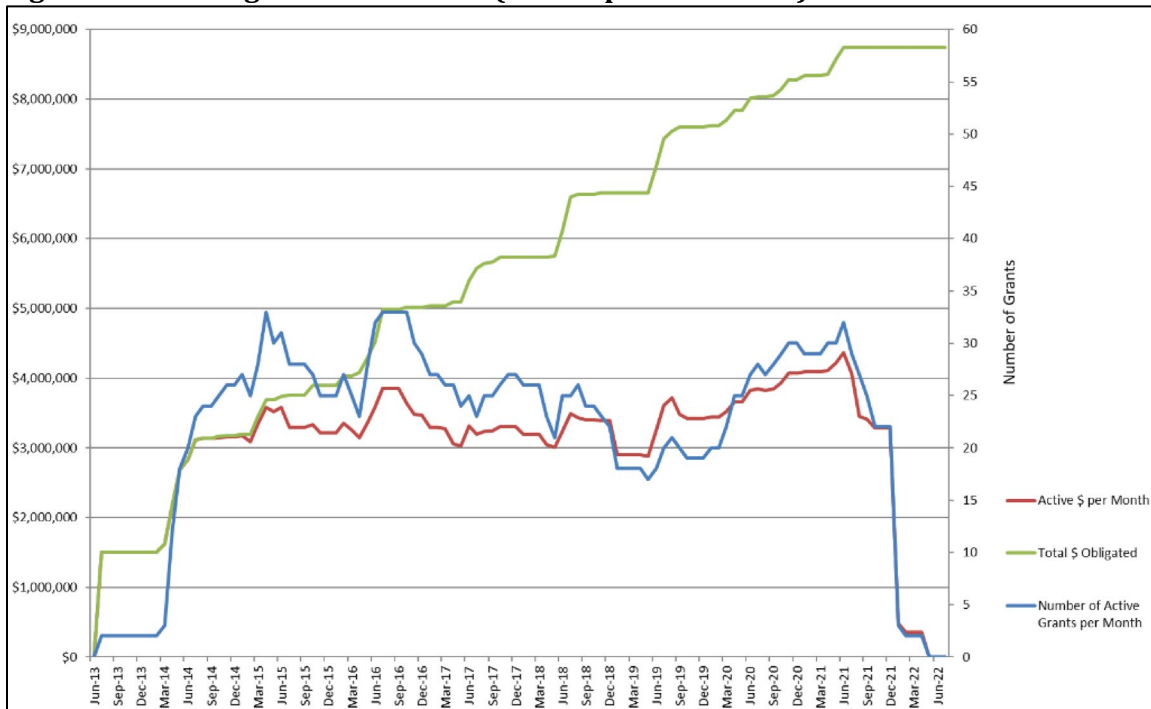


Figure Legend:

- Red line: active \$ per month
- Green line: total \$ obligated
- Blue line: number of active grants per month

With respect to the US\$1.5 million RIT budget, the RIT has been slightly underspent throughout the life of the portfolio. Table 6 presents the approximate percentage of budget spent by the RIT per quarter of the grant lifetime. Although the underspending of total budget could be interpreted to indicate that the budget was adequate for performing all the tasks in the logframe, it is of note that expenditures were significantly higher than budgeted for consultancies, professional services, and travel and special events. The overall underspend may be attributable to IUCN’s unanticipated inability to hire Country Coordinators as staff; the overspent category suggests the need for a substantial travel budget, particularly given the structure of this RIT. While these figures in and of themselves do not indicate whether or not the budget was sufficient, they do suggest that its original allocation among budget lines did not align with the ultimate RIT structure.

⁶ Source: Annual Portfolio Overview East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot July 2020 – June 2021



Table 6: Percentage of RIT budget expended over the course of CEPF investment

	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter
Salaries and benefits	13%	35%	54%	75%
Consultancies and professional services	8%	47%	89%	127%
Travel and special events	13%	63%	133%	153%
Total	12%	41%	70%	90%

To further reflect on efficiency, Table 7 shows a set of ratios comparing the EMI investment to those in other regions. This gives rise to the following observations with respect to the EMI RIT:

- The number of grants issued is a little below average, while the number of LOIs received (total and even more so per year) is well below average.
- As a result, the number of grants issued as a proportion of LOIs submitted is well above average and on par with the highest of the others (Caribbean, also at 32%). Of these, the proportion comprising large grants is slightly more than average.
- Although the RIT share of the total budget is slightly above average, the annual budget of the RIT is well below average.
- The amount of RIT expenditure per grant is close to the average.
- The ratio of RIT grant to project grant funding is 20%, or \$0.20 expenditure for each \$1.00 disbursed; this is about average for CEPF portfolios.

Table 7: Comparison of EMI to Other CEPF Portfolios

	Tropical Andes*	Wallacea	Indo-Burma*	Eastern Afro-Montane	Caribbean	Average	East Melanesian Islands
<i>Years</i>	5	5	7	8	6	6.2	8
<i>LOIs</i>	443	362	1056	1097	241	640	354
<i># of grants</i>	98	99	187	161	76	124	114
<i>(large grants)</i>	67	32	82	64	46	58	56
<i>Project funding</i>	\$ 8,500,000	\$ 5,350,000	\$ 13,500,000	\$ 10,000,000	\$ 5,800,000	\$ 8,630,000	\$ 7,500,000
<i>RIT grant</i>	\$ 1,500,000	\$ 1,500,000	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 1,600,000	\$ 1,500,000
<i>LOIs/year</i>	89	72	151	137	40	103	44
<i>grants/LOI**</i>	22%	27%	18%	15%	32%	19%	32%
<i>large grants share</i>	68%	32%	44%	40%	61%	47%	49%
<i>RIT/Total budget</i>	15%	22%	13%	17%	15%	16%	17%
<i>RIT/grant</i>	\$ 15,306	\$ 15,152	\$ 10,695	\$ 12,422	\$ 13,158	\$ 12,882	\$ 13,158
<i>RIT/grant funding</i>	18%	28%	15%	20%	17%	19%	20%
<i>RIT/Year</i>	300,000	300,000	285,714	250,000	166,667	258,065	187,500

* Second funding streams

** Per CEPF, LOI success rate may be seen as an overall "success" rate reflecting the quality of applications and the RIT work-rate to develop appropriate projects.

Taken together, and noting that the region is characterized by very low local capacity, high transportation costs, and communications challenges, these observations suggest that, in



terms of cost-effective deployment of a grant portfolio, the RIT for the EMI performed on par with those in other regions, working with a constrained budget. The high number of grants issued as a proportion of LOIs submitted in part reflects a low number of submissions, but also indicates that the RIT (and CEPF) worked effectively with a large share of project proponents to help prepare viable proposals.

Effectiveness

With respect to effectiveness, the evaluation explored the strengths and weaknesses of the RIT structure and capacities regarding effective delivery of results.

Strengths

IUCN offered a valuable set of strengths as the RIT. As a leading global conservation organization, IUCN is well-respected and viewed as an impartial actor with an objective, science-based approach to its work. This reputation combined with extensive links to global and regional networks endow IUCN with strong convening power, reinforced by knowledge of political landscapes within the region and effective working relationships with governments. This further benefited from housing the RIT within IUCN's regional headquarters in Suva, as this also serves as the base for several large grantees and other relevant regional institutions.

IUCN's wealth of biodiversity and conservation expertise provided the RIT with a robust technical background to review and evaluate proposals, as well as to provide technical input to project design and implementation. Institutional experience with small grant programs contributed to RIT understanding of needs and challenges of grantees, as well as ability to assess project-level impacts and reporting with respect to global-level indicators. These institutional characteristics were reinforced by continuity and capability of RIT leadership, particularly the Team Leader and Finance Officer, throughout the life of the portfolio. This allowed the program to benefit from growing institutional memory as well as continuity in key relationships.

Finally, grantees noted that a particular strength offered by IUCN was its capacity with respect to financing options, and the potential for the RIT to facilitate grantee links to other potential sources and mechanisms. This related to connections with philanthropic, bilateral, and multilateral donors in general, as well as the specific example of climate finance and the market for carbon credits. For example, the RIT reportedly maintained strong working relationships with the United Nations Development Programme's GEF-funded Small Grant Programme (SGP) to identify opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of lessons learned and exchange of ideas. CEPF and the SGP co-funded several projects in EMI. Additional leveraging of CEPF funding includes \$5,394,492 in additional funding secured by grantees (as of Jan. 5, 2022). The leverage achieved arguably was limited as a percentage of



budget (~60%), but is comparable to what was secured in the Tropical Andes and Wallacea hotspots (though lower than several other hotspots).

Thus, the RIT provided a structure and capacities that largely were conducive to effective delivery, with most of the interviewed grantees emphasizing that the Country Coordinators and the RIT Team Leader in particular were responsive, substantively helpful, and able to help navigate procedural challenges ranging from government permitting to financial reporting. The RIT also was credited with a strong track record of timely financial reporting, and effective communication to alert CEPF of financial issues with grantees.

Weaknesses

Although Suva served as a strategic base for the RIT, it also presented a challenge with respect to grantee engagement given the difficulty of travel in the region in terms of time and expense. The budget available for RIT operations constrained the amount of direct interaction with grantees, both in terms of travel costs and the size of the team (though noting that there was underspending in terms of the RIT's overall budget (Table 6)). A structure that used Country Coordinators in each geography to enable ongoing direct interaction with grantees was plausible, but undermined by instability with respect to the Country Coordinator positions. The lack of legal presence led to contracting issues that precluded stable employment arrangements for Country Coordinators, resulting in uncertainty, turnover and staffing gaps. This challenge was compounded by the part-time nature of some of the consultancy contracts for the Coordinators, such that Coordinators could not commit fully to their roles. These circumstances, in addition to time and effort needed to accommodate IUCN's internal administrative procedures, led to continuity gaps. For example, the Solomon Islands was without a Country Coordinator for nearly a year before the current Solomon Islands Country Coordinator was contracted. The Country Coordinator in Papua New Guinea departed in mid-2020, due to contracting issues. These circumstances resulted in additional stress and burdens for the Coordinators as well as Suva-based RIT members; it also undermined capacity to consistently follow up with grantees.

Thus, the principal weakness highlighted throughout interviews was IUCN's lack of presence in the three EMI geographies. Many grantees mentioned that more local presence would have been beneficial. There was also confusion over the distinction between CEPF and RIT, and why there was no local office. For some grantees additional confusion was caused by the Country Coordinator working out of a government office.

Further challenges mentioned in documentation and interviews largely relate back to the Country Coordinator situation as a weakness. One source at CEPF noted that they had limited direct access to the Coordinators, as the RIT Team Leader preferred to act as intermediary between them, which could result in delays as well as miscommunication. However, given the overall challenges linked to Country Coordinators, there is an argument



to be made that running communications through the Team Leader was warranted in the interest of consistency and continuity. CEPF Secretariat concerns over Country Coordinator performance resulted in additional RIT time spent on administrative processes to revise Terms of Reference and Country Coordinator contracts, and frustration on the part of the RIT and CEPF as well as the Coordinators themselves. This suggests value to greater upfront coordination and alignment between CEPF and the RIT regarding expectations and performance standards for the Country Coordinators.

The remainder of this section examines indicators and criteria related to the grant portfolio itself. While portfolio results provide some reflection of RIT performance and functionality of the RIT structure, the portfolio results also are affected by factors outside the control of the RIT.

Coverage

Coverage relates to the extent to which the portfolio of awarded grants addresses the strategic directions and investment priorities set out in the investment strategy for the hotspot. Achieving a cohesive and coherent portfolio of supported projects that aligns with the investment strategy is a challenging endeavor, constrained in part by the scope and quality of the proposals received. Dissemination of the funding opportunity and program priorities are key activities to this end.

Distribution of the portfolio across EMI geographies indicates convincing coverage across countries as of the 2021 Annual Portfolio Overview (see Table 8 below). The Solomon Islands accounts for the bulk of this portfolio, in terms of numbers of small and large grants provided, as well as total obligations.

Table 8: Awarded (Active and Closed) Large and Small Grants by Country⁷

Country	Large Grants		Small Grants		Total	
	Count	Obligation	Count	Obligation	Count	Obligation
Papua New Guinea	11	\$1,533,569	17	\$270,489	28	\$1,804,058
Solomon Islands	25	\$2,254,523	26	\$106,185	51	\$2,360,708
Vanuatu	14	\$1,718,727	11	\$91,644	25	\$1,810,372
Multi-country	6	\$749,615	3	\$0	9	\$749,615
RIT	2	\$1,499,878	0	\$515,125	2	\$2,015,003
Total	58	\$7,756,313	57	\$983,443	115	\$8,739,756

With respect to Strategic Directions, the portfolio reflects investment in each priority set out in the strategy (see Table 9 below), but with notable gaps between original allocation and ultimate obligations for Strategic Directions 2 (54% of allocation obligated) and 3 (61% of allocation obligated) (as of APO 2021). Interviews with the CEPF Secretariat and RIT as

⁷ Source: Annual Portfolio Overview East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot July 2020 – June 2021



well as grantees indicate that Investment Priority 2.3 (*Explore partnerships with private companies to promote sustainable development through better environmental and social practices in key natural resource sectors*) proved particularly challenging. The consensus appears to be that the analysis that informed the Ecosystem Profile underestimated the lack of appetite on the part of private companies, especially in extractive sectors (mining and timber), to partner with communities or conservation organizations on sustainability initiatives; in addition, capacity constraints on the part of local organizations included those relating to private sector engagement. Consequently, few proposals were received corresponding to this priority. Strategic priorities were discussed and assessed at the mid-term evaluation, and participants underscored the importance of working with the private sector. As a result, this investment priority was included in the call for proposals that was issued immediately after the mid-term assessment. Despite the continued inclusion of the investment priority for private-sector engagement in subsequent calls for proposals, CEPF did not receive any successful LOIs in response. Reasons given for the lower than expected amount of species-focused work were: the dearth of people in the region working on the species identified in the Ecosystem Profile; the length of time required to prepare a species action or recovery plan and ensure community ownership of that plan; and the difficulty of coordinating required actions among multiple stakeholders including landowners, government, and other interested parties.

Table 9: Awarded (Active and Closed) Large and Small Grants by Strategic Direction⁸

Strategic Direction	Allocation	Large Grants		Small Grants		Total		Obligation to Allocation
		Count	Obligation	Count	Obligation	Ct.	Obligation	
1. KBAs	\$3,200,000	28	\$3,444,859	16	\$270,489	44	\$3,715,348	116%
2. Land use	\$1,000,000	4	\$433,937	7	\$106,185	11	\$540,122	54%
3. Species	\$1,200,000	7	\$644,585	5	\$91,644	12	\$736,229	61%
4. Capacity	\$2,100,000	17	\$1,733,055	29	\$515,125	46	\$2,248,180	107%
5. RIT	\$1,500,000	2	\$1,499,878	0	\$0	2	\$1,499,878	100%
Total	\$9,000,000	58	\$7,756,313	57	\$983,443	115	\$8,739,756	97%
Percentage (without RIT)		50%	86%	50%	14%			

Impact

With respect to impact, the question of interest is the extent to which the targets set in the hotspot Ecosystem Profile have been met, for impacts on biodiversity conservation, human wellbeing, civil society capacity and enabling conditions. The latest Annual Portfolio Overview provides the most recent available review of progress against these targets, as of June 2021. Table 10 below summarizes this progress. Note that these results only include

⁸ Source: Annual Portfolio Overview East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot July 2020 – June 2021



results reported for closed grants as of June 2021. Thirty-four grants were still active at that time, therefore actual impact will be greater at portfolio close.

For the overall Objective (*Engage civil society in the conservation of globally threatened biodiversity through targeted investments with maximum impact on the highest conservation priorities*), impact against targets is mixed. Portfolio-building successfully encompassed work in all 20 priority Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs); the degree to which this concretely has resulted in new or strengthened protection and management is not possible to determine from the available information. Another area of success is the number of civil society organizations engaged in conservation actions aligned with the Ecosystem Profile, catalyzed by CEPF grants, reaching 165% of the overall target and 137% of the target for domestic organizations. To date, results have not yet met targets with respect to land use plans (40%) and productive landscapes (1.5%); the explanation for the latter relates to above-mentioned Investment Priority 2.3 concerning engagement of private companies in extractive sectors.

The portfolio shows considerable success with respect to the Intermediate Outcome relating to community empowerment, exceeding targets related to baseline surveys (140%), awareness raising (200%), and incentives (120%). However, the degree to which threats to biodiversity have been reduced or human wellbeing increased is not reflected in the information available.

For the Intermediate Outcome relating to integration of biodiversity into local land-use and development planning, projects in the portfolio thus far have achieved 60% of targets for tenure mapping, legal training and support, and integration of ecosystem values into land-use or development plans. Given the important role of these areas of work for community-based conservation in the traditional tenure context that characterizes the EMI, this may seem surprising; on the other hand, these targets required relatively sophisticated capacity that remains in scarce supply in the region, and grantees reported that they involve considerably more time than anticipated. The 0% result for fostering partnerships with natural resource companies links to earlier remarks on Investment Priority 2.3 above.

To date there is a sizable gap between results and targets under the Intermediate Outcome relating to safeguarding of globally important species: 40% for *Knowledge of the status and distribution of at least 5 priority species improved through research*; 30% for *Species recovery plans developed, implemented and monitored for at least 20 priority species* (given ongoing projects this may increase before the end of the investment period); and 33% for *Science-based harvest management introduced for at least 3 priority species important to local food security*. In addition to reasons summarized earlier, this may be explained in part by the fact that the initial phase of the investment period focused on capacity building, and the final phase of the investment period was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which was particularly disruptive for the intensive field-work based activities relevant to these targets.



Additionally, as mentioned, many grants are still active, and therefore greater actual impact is anticipated at portfolio close.

The portfolio performed well on most targets for the Intermediate Outcome relating to *Local and national capacity to conserve biodiversity increased through civil society partnerships*, meeting or exceeding the targets for network strengthening, organizational capacity improvements, and individual capacity strengthening. This is as one might expect given the initial focus of the overall CEPF investment on this area of work. However, whereas this Intermediate Outcome included a target of *At least two civil society organizations emerge as national conservation leaders in each hotspot country*, a total of only two civil society organizations have emerged as leaders in the region. Although the RIT did work with other groups, there is no indication that they would be described as national conservation leaders. This is consistent with input shared in numerous interviews regarding the challenges of institutional capacity building, generally but in this region in particular, especially given the extremely low baseline level of capacity at the outset.

Finally, in relation to the Intermediate Outcome concerning delivery by the RIT itself, results for most targets have yet to be compiled. However, with respect to catalyzing active participation of civil society organizations in conservation actions, the RIT achieved 235% of the overall target (94 CSOs) and 203% of the target for domestic organizations in the three countries (61 local organizations, 12 of which were newly established). While acknowledging that achieving lasting growth in capacity for any given entity is difficult, the RIT's marked over-performance with respect to the overall number of organizations reached, combined with an expectation that capacity improvements will endure for a portion of this set of organizations, suggests meaningful progress in terms of enhanced conservation capacity in the region.



Table 10: Summary of Impacts against Targets (as of June 2021; portfolio not yet closed)

Objective	Indicator	Result (as of APO 2021)	Comment
Engage civil society in the conservation of globally threatened biodiversity through targeted investments with maximum impact on the highest conservation priorities	20 key biodiversity areas covering 1,549,009 hectares have new or strengthened protection and management	103,811 hectares confirmed in 11 KBAs with work currently expected to take place in a total of 20 KBAs	Work has taken place in all of the 20 priority KBAs. Grantees also have worked in 14 additional KBAs.
	At least 100,000 hectares within production landscapes are managed for biodiversity conservation or sustainable use	446 hectares achieved with 1,062 hectares expected	1.5% of target
	At least 5 local land-use or development plans influenced to accommodate biodiversity	2 plans have been influenced	40% of target
	48 globally threatened species have improved conservation status and/or available information on status and distribution	33 species are the subject of ongoing and completed grants	Just under 70% in terms of number of species, though demonstration of improved status and/or available information is unclear.
	At least 10 partnerships and networks formed among civil society, government and communities to leverage complementary capacities and maximize impact in support of the ecosystem profile	7 networks have been formed or strengthened	70% of target (if 'strengthened' is included)
	At least 40 civil society organizations, including at least 30 domestic organizations, actively participate in conservation actions guided by the ecosystem profile	25 unique international organizations and 41 unique local organizations have received 114 grants	165% of overall target 137% of target for domestic organizations
	Intermediate Outcome	Intermediate Indicators	Result
Local communities empowered to protect and manage globally significant biodiversity at priority Key	Baseline surveys completed for at least 10 priority sites	14 priority sites have baseline surveys completed	140% of target
	Awareness of the values of biodiversity and the nature of threats and drivers raised among local communities within at least 10 priority sites	Awareness has been raised at all 20 sites	200% of target



Intermediate Outcome	Intermediate Indicators	Result	
Biodiversity Areas under served by current conservation efforts	Threat levels to at least 15 priority sites reduced through locally relevant conservation actions implemented by local communities	While reduction of threats is still to be determined, at least 12 priority sites have been targeted; 2 sites ongoing	Potentially 93% of target, though unclear whether threats demonstrably have been reduced
	Conservation incentives (ecotourism, payments for ecosystem services, conservation agreements, etc.) demonstrated for at least 5 priority sites	Conservation incentives have been demonstrated for 6 priority sites	120% of target
	At least 75 percent of local communities targeted by site-based projects show tangible wellbeing benefits	No measurement to date	No data, though anecdotally several projects claim this impact.
Biodiversity conservation integrated into local land-use and development planning	Ownership and tenure rights within customary lands mapped for at least 5 priority sites	Ownership and tenure rights have been mapped for 3 priority sites	60% of target
	At least 200 landowners (10 communities) affected by incompatible development projects provided with legal training and support	6 communities have been provided with legal training and support	60% of target
	At least 3 partnerships catalyzed between civil society organizations and natural resource companies to promote sustainable development through better environmental and social practices	No results to date	0% of target
	Biodiversity and ecosystem service values of at least 5 priority sites integrated into local land-use and/or development plans and policies	Biodiversity and ecosystem service values of 3 priority sites have been integrated	60% of target
Priority globally threatened species safeguarded by addressing major threats and information gaps	Knowledge of the status and distribution of at least 5 priority species improved through research	2 species addressed; 3 publications	40% of target
	Species recovery plans developed, implemented and monitored for at least 20 priority species	Species recovery plans developed for 6 priority species; Work in progress for 9 further species	30% of target; potentially 75% of target



Intermediate Outcome	Intermediate Indicators	Result	
	Science-based harvest management introduced for at least 3 priority species important to local food security	Science-based harvest management has been introduced for 1 priority species	33% of target
Local and national capacity to conserve biodiversity increased through civil society partnerships	At least 5 civil society networks enable collective responses to priority and emerging threats	7 networks have been formed or strengthened	140% of target
	At least 20 domestic civil society organizations demonstrate improvements in organizational capacity	20 local CSOs have shown improvement; 13 of these with greater than 10 percent increase in CSTT score	100% of target
	At least two civil society organizations emerge as national conservation leaders in each hotspot country	2 civil society organizations have emerged as leaders: Solomon Islands Community Conservation Partnership, Vanuatu Environmental Science Society	33% of target (<i>i.t.o. total # of leaders</i>)
	At least 30 conservationists demonstrate strengthened capacity in conservation management, science and leadership	15 conservationists have been trained in cost-benefit analysis for managing invasive species 15 conservationists have been trained to become “conservation champions” 20 conservationists have been trained on management of Giant Clams 30 conservationists have been trained to be	Presume that the different sets listed include some overlap. Nevertheless, target well exceeded by a large margin.



Intermediate Outcome	Intermediate Indicators	Result	
		protected area managers and rangers	
A Regional Implementation Team provides strategic leadership and effectively coordinates CEPF investment in the East Melanesian Islands Hotspot	At least 40 civil society organizations, including at least 30 domestic organizations actively participate in conservation actions guided by the ecosystem profile	94 CSOs have been involved as grantee, sub-grantee, or major project partner; of these, 61 are local organizations. 41 local groups are direct recipients of small or large grants. 12 new organizations have been established.	235% of overall target (203% of target for domestic organizations)
	At least 80 percent of domestic civil society organizations receiving grants demonstrate more effective capacity to design and implement conservation actions	20 local groups that have completed a baseline and final CSTT have shown improvement (final percent to be tabulated at conclusion of investment)	Reporting is still pending
	At least 20 civil society organizations supported by CEPF secure follow-up funding from conservation trust funds and/or the GEF Small Grants Programme	13 organizations have secured follow-up funding to date (final number to be tabulated at conclusion of investment)	65% of target to date; final reporting is still pending
	At least 2 participatory assessments are undertaken and lessons learned and best practices from the hotspot are documented	1 participatory assessment has been undertaken: the mid-term review in December 2018	50% of target for participatory assessments Lessons learned currently being documented



Accessibility

With respect to accessibility, the question of interest is whether the grant portfolio reflects an appropriate balance of international and local grantees, considering the relative strengths of different organizations and considering the priority given by CEPF to building the capacity of local civil society. As noted above under *Impact*, the 114 grants in the EMI portfolio were distributed among 25 international organizations and 41 local organizations, well above the targets. From Table 11 below, we may note the following:

- 39% of grants went to international grantees (61% to local grantees)
- 24% of small grants went to international grantees (76% to local grantees)
- 55% of large grants went to international grantees (45% to local grantees)
- 57% of grant funding went to international grantees (43% to local grantees)

Table 11. CEPF EMI Grants Awarded (excluding grants to RIT), 2014-2021 (Sep.)

	Large Grant		Small Grant		Total	
	# <i>Grants</i>	<i>Funding</i>	# <i>Grants</i>	<i>Funding</i>	# <i>Grants</i>	<i>Funding</i>
International	31	\$3,852,081	14	\$256,279	45	\$4,108,360
Local	25	\$2,404,354	44	\$739,164	69	\$3,143,519
Total	56	\$6,256,435	58	\$995,443	114	\$7,251,878

These percentages were fairly consistent across the three countries. Granting in the Solomon Islands matched these percentages; PNG had slightly lower local granting percentages (36% of large grants; 71% of small grants; 33% of funding) and Vanuatu had higher percentages of local granting (64% of large grants; 100% of small grants; 63% of funding). Grants for projects in multiple countries were mostly awarded to international grantees.

These figures reflect a credible balance between local and international grantees in the portfolio. Given the capacity constraints prevalent throughout local civil society in the three countries, the fact that international organizations account for the bulk of large grants is reasonable. That said, 5 local organizations were awarded large grants after first successfully securing and implementing small grants. This reflects some success in capacity building, while noting that the RIT's ability to support further capacity growth was limited once these organizations progressed to large grants.

Adaptive Management

With respect to adaptive management topics of interest include the ways in which the development of the grant portfolio was constrained by risks (political/institutional/security/health), and how it took advantage of unanticipated opportunities. The main development requiring adaptive management of course was the outbreak of the global



COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to interrupting on-the-ground project work due to restrictions on gatherings and travel, this precluded RIT leadership travel to the countries from Suva as well as CEPF travel to the region from Washington DC. Constraints to direct, real-time contact between the RIT and CEPF already have been noted; in the final two years of the investment this necessarily became even more acute. A readily observable impact of the pandemic on the development of the grant portfolio is the sharp drop-off in LOI submissions, explained by the difficulty of executing projects compounded by uncertainty about the future.

As indicated above, having the RIT housed as a program within IUCN offered distinct strengths and advantages. However, an issue that emerged was that CEPF and the RIT role appeared to enjoy diminished priority within IUCN over time; this was attributed in no small part to changes in IUCN leadership within around two years after the EMI investment launched. An example mentioned in more than one interview was that productive linkages might have been made between the CEPF investment and the USAID Pacific Islands Coastal Community Adaptation Project, also based in Suva, but that IUCN at a higher institutional level did not elect to pursue this possibility. IUCN leadership also chose not to collaborate with CEPF to secure financing from the Green Climate Fund that would have made possible continued work in the EMI Biodiversity Hotspot (the successful proposal ultimately covered only the Madagascar and Indian Ocean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot).

Some interviewees also noted that IUCN could have more proactively linked grantees to various networks in which it is active such as the Invasive Species Specialist Group and other Specialist Groups under the IUCN Species Survival Commission. This may have meant that several potentially fruitful dynamics were foregone: grantee access to expertise and potential partnerships; dissemination of the EMI investment opportunity to other potential applications; and cross-fertilization between CEPF-funded on-the-ground work in the three EMI countries and other IUCN programs.

Interviewees emphasized two other factors that affected the development of the portfolio: 1) the degree of difficulty of productively engaging the extractive sector in the region, and 2) the amount of time required to navigate customary tenure issues. On both these fronts, interviewees felt that the Ecosystem Profile and subsequent CEPF expectations reflected significant under-appreciation of challenges and complexities involved. For the first, the portfolio ultimately omitted significant private sector engagement; for the second, complexities surrounding tenure presented difficulties for timelines and budgets.



Discussion

The RIT in the Eastern Melanesian Islands hotspot faced a number of challenges over the period of CEPF investment. Some of these were at least partially anticipated, for example the lack of capacity in the region and limited number of potential implementing organizations, the communications and transportation challenges in remote island environments, and the distance and time difference between the region and the CEPF Secretariat. Others were surprises, and required flexibility and adaptability, for example, staff turnover at CEPF (three Grant Directors and five Grant Managers over the life of the investment), the inability of IUCN to hire nationals for Country Coordinator positions (requiring time-bound consultancies and leading to staff turnover, positions left empty, and extra time spent on contracting), and the COVID-19 pandemic. While CEPF and the RIT both exhibited creativity and diligence in meeting these challenges, the combination of overstretched staff at CEPF and RIT and limited face-to-face time together led to strained relationships and distraction from the mission.

Despite these significant challenges and struggles throughout the investment period, the overall outcomes of the program and the performance of the RIT were largely successful. Many of the targets have already been met or exceeded, and most are on track to be achieved by the close of the portfolio. In addition, the RIT implemented the program with a RIT budget percentage comparable to other regions. The share of the grant portfolio implemented by local organizations was significant, considering the low capacity in the region. Many organizations experienced an increase in capacity due to CEPF investment. Many grantees noted great appreciation for the CEPF grants, which fill an important geographic and thematic gap in the investment landscape. On the other hand, grantees also emphasized the administrative burdens that came with these grants, which led grantees to question whether the net benefit of a grant was large enough to warrant applying again.

Among the most prominent themes to emerge from the evaluation exercise is that challenges with respect to capacity building are easily underestimated. The CEPF approach in the EMI included a deliberate focus on capacity building in the beginning of the investment period, to strengthen the foundation for a portfolio of project grants. However, the approach to capacity-building itself may not have been commensurate with the very low baseline level of capacity within local civil society; local organizational culture; critical needs for effective implementation; and the time and effort required to achieve lasting capacity growth. If stronger capacity is fully embraced as a precondition for achieving other desired outcomes and the overall objective, there is an argument for a more deliberate, thorough and detailed approach to capacity-building with its own theory of change, strategic design and milestones that then trigger subsequent investment activities.



Table 12. Summary of Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Element	Summary
RIT PERFORMANCE	
<i>Relevance</i>	
Were the activities undertaken relevant to the Ecosystem profile, RIT Terms of Reference, Hotspot geography, civil society capacity, CEPF global monitoring framework	In general, activities were relevant. Given the context, the focus on capacity building and the Small Grants Program was appropriate. Some misunderstanding arose over responsibilities related to the large grants. There was less emphasis on building partnerships and promoting information exchange in the hotspot.
<i>Efficiency</i>	
How efficiently was the budget allocated to the RIT converted into results ?	Cost-effective deployment of a grant portfolio, comparable to other hotspots. Low number of potential grantees in region led to lower number of LOIs, higher acceptance rate. Relatively consistent disbursement over time. To date, 97% of the allocation has been obligated.
<i>Effectiveness</i>	
What were the strengths and weakness of the RIT structure and capacities regarding effective delivery of results ?	Strengths: Host organization's reputation and partnerships in the region; Experience with small grants programs; Responsiveness to grantees and cultural sensitivity. Weaknesses: Lack of presence in the region; Employment/contracting issues; Limited high-level institutional support for RIT.
PORTFOLIO	
<i>Coverage</i>	
To what extent does the portfolio of grants awarded to date cover the strategic directions and investment priorities set out in the investment strategy for the hotspot?	The portfolio geographically was well-distributed. Grants pertaining to engagement of private companies and species-focused work were underrepresented. Other Strategic Directions and investment priorities appear well covered.
<i>Impact</i>	
To what extent have the targets set in the hotspot ecosystem profile for impacts on biodiversity conservation, human wellbeing, civil society capacity and enabling conditions been met?	The portfolio includes work in all priority KBAs and beyond, and exceeds targets for numbers of CSOs engaged in conservation actions. Targets also were surpassed for baseline surveys, awareness-raising, and incentives. Targets have not yet been met with respect to land use plans and work with private companies; tenure mapping, legal training and support, and integration of ecosystem values into land-use or development plans; and work on globally important species. Although most targets for capacity building were met, the target related to CSOs emerging as national leaders has not yet been met.
<i>Accessibility</i>	
Does the grant portfolio involve an appropriate balance of international and local grantees , considering the relative strengths of different organizations regarding delivery of the investment strategy and considering the priority given by CEPF to building the capacity of local civil society?	The grant portfolio is well balanced with respect to international and local grantees, in terms of both small and large grants. Outperforming with respect to the number of local grantees relative to the target is noteworthy given the degree to which baseline capacity was limited.
<i>Adaptive management</i>	
In what ways has the development of the grant portfolio been constrained by risks (political/institutional/security/ health) or taken advantage of unanticipated opportunities ?	The main development constraining the development of the grant portfolio was the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing to a large drop in LOI submissions in 2020. Other constraints included the lack of private sector appetite for engagement, and challenges linked to customary land tenure. There was limited evidence of the RIT or IUCN taking advantage of unanticipated opportunities or the potential for linking the CEPF investment to other programs, aside from some mention of UNDP's GEF-funded SGP.



Principal lessons learned with respect to CEPF investment in the EMI region, given very low initial capacity in the local civil society sector, include:

- TORs for the RIT need to be clear and consistently applied by CEPF if there is staff turnover.
- In addition to low capacity, logistical challenges in this region suggest that more travel resources need to be budgeted for the RIT to fully execute its roles.
- The extended investment period was important to accommodate initial emphasis on capacity building.
- Capacity-building required more concerted time and strategic substantive focus than anticipated.
- Timelines and budgets in project design and selection need to be better calibrated to the complex tenure context.
- At present, the private companies (particularly in extractive sectors) have little appetite for collaboration on sustainability initiatives, such that this threat requires different kinds of interventions.
- In-country RIT presence was essential for ongoing mentoring, guidance and technical support; when this presence was lacking posed significant difficulties for the Suva-based team.
- Tension between stringent reporting requirements and local norms and capacities further intensifies the need for direct RIT support to grantees.
- When small grantees successfully progress to large grants, they still require substantial guidance and support.
- Deep knowledge of the region and high degrees of cultural competence, responsiveness and sensitivity on the part of RIT leadership allowed the RIT to be effective despite various challenging circumstances.
- Despite low capacity and other challenges, the RIT demonstrated that increased civil society action and progress on conservation are achievable.

Recommendations

RIT Structure

One of the key questions regarding the RIT in the Eastern Melanesian Islands is whether its structure, location, and capacity were effective for results delivery. This assessment revealed a number of lessons regarding the structure of the RIT. Overall, there was insufficient RIT presence in the countries of the hotspot. This was due to a number of factors including lack of IUCN legal presence in the countries, contracting difficulties, and travel restrictions due to COVID-19. Given the low capacity in this region, a well-staffed RIT that has consistent presence in all three countries is essential to building capacity and delivering conservation results. This motivates the following recommendations:



1. The RIT ideally would be an organization situated in one of the hotspot countries, or have a local office in one of the countries. It must at least have a legal presence in at least one of the hotspot countries.
2. The RIT Team Leader/Program Manager should be located in one of the hotspot countries, even if the host institution is located outside of the hotspot. Although IUCN's location in Fiji was a convenient location in its proximity to several of the large grantees and other organizations, communication and oversight with the local grantees and Country Coordinators is a greater priority.
3. There should be at least one full-time Country Coordinator per country, and the possibility of budgeting for additional in-country staff should be explored to enable comprehensive attention to capacity constraints and training needs.
4. Staffing and travel budget must be adequate for providing the level of on-the-ground assistance needed in this region. One key informant stated that their organization seriously considered the RIT role, but that the budget was not sufficient to do the job right.
5. Training of the RIT, including Country Coordinators, should be prioritized. Training of Country Coordinators by CEPF should be performed at least annually, to accommodate for staff turnover and to provide a refresher for incumbent staff.⁹
6. In addition to selecting an RIT host organization with a mission aligned with CEPF objectives for the region, the agreement should include explicit organizational commitment at the leadership level over the life of the investment.¹⁰

RIT Terms of Reference

There were a number of challenges regarding differing expectations with respect to the responsibilities of the RIT, particularly in relation to large grants. Misaligned expectations create frustration and tension and can undermine performance. The role of the RIT in the large grant portfolio should be explicit in the TOR and updated as necessary, in order to maintain consistency in the case of staff turnover or other changes. Finally, from the outset, CEPF financial reporting and other administrative requirements need to be made very clear to the RIT, so that the RIT can assess whether it feels its role is viable in terms of communicating and imposing these requirements on grantees.

⁹ Note that the CEPF Secretariat now includes a training coordinator position.

¹⁰ Some interviewees suggested that the RIT could be staffed by CEPF itself to more seamlessly align missions, improve communications, and direct staff, though this does not appear to be within the range of possibilities.



Small Grants

The small grants program was largely successful, but would benefit from attention to ways to reduce the burden of CEPF requirements on small grantees. One suggestion from grantees and RIT members was to increase the small grant cap above US\$20,000, noting that other CEPF hotspots provide small grants up to US\$50,000. Some grantees stated that multi-year small grants (e.g. 3 years) would help reduce the burden of applying each year; although neither CEPF nor IUCN rules preclude multi-year grants, this input shows there is some misconception on this point among at least some grantees. While there were organizations that received small grants that were longer than one year, the size of these small grants essentially constrains the ability of most organizations to conduct longer-term work. Increasing the funding cap on small grants could allow for more multi-year grants, with the release of funds each year contingent on the previous year's performance. This would increase the ability of organizations to attract and retain staff, and generate greater impact. Alternatively, a simplified application process for successful prior grantees could reduce the application burden.

Capacity building

The need for capacity building in this region was recognized from the outset, and a strategy was developed, including an 8-year investment with an initial focus on capacity building. Given that the need for capacity building will continue for the foreseeable future, the effectiveness of the overall strategy should be assessed. We offer the following recommendations:

1. Elaborate a long-term vision for capacity building in the region. Some options to consider include:
 - a. A mentoring program through which experienced organizations partner with low-capacity local organizations. In the Midterm Assessment, grantees suggested establishing a mentoring program and/or online platform to promote learning by smaller CSOs and achieve sustainability beyond CEPF's investment.
 - b. Establish a longer initial period focused on capacity building.
 - c. Direct funds from CEPF to provide financial literacy training; this could involve a RIT staff member that does training and ongoing oversight to all grantees for basic financial processes. Alternatively, this (and other kinds of mentoring) could be sub-contracted to local CSOs with specific organizational capacity-building expertise.
 - d. A conservation leadership fellowship program, focused on training professionals in the region.



- e. A suggestion from the Midterm Assessment was to promote the exchange of knowledge and experiences within each country through grantee exchanges and training sessions, to include specific training on financial management.
 - f. Continued granting that funds PhD students from the region.
 - g. Considering RIT host organizations that are focused on capacity building (not necessarily conservation).
 - h. Adequate staffing of the RIT to allow for greater capacity-building impact.
 - i. Increase the duration of grants to build in grantee capacity building in first 6 months-1 year.
2. Another potential strategy is to move more slowly with grant-making in the initial years. A large number of small grants in initial years stretches the capacity of the RIT and forces it to be reactive, thus hindering the ability to approach capacity building in a strategic way.



Annexes

Annex A. List of Key Informants Contacted and Interviewed

Grantees		
<i>Name</i>	<i>Organization</i>	<i>Interview Date</i>
Chris Filardi	American Museum of Natural History (now with Nia Tero)	Did not respond
Mark O'Brien	Birdlife International	11/30/2021
Marjorie Warisaiho	Centre for Environmental Law and Community Rights Inc.	11/16/2021
Genester Siro	Eco-Livelihood Development Association Inc	Unable to schedule interview
Nicola Trethowan	Edenhope Foundation	11/16/2021
Peter Dam	FORCERT - Forests for Certain: Forests for Life!	12/8/2021
Philippe Gerbeaux	French Ichthyological Society	Interview scheduled; Did not attend or reschedule
Stephen Suti	Gizo Women in Business Development Incorporation	12/2/2021
Glarinda Andre	Live & Learn Vanuatu	11/17/2021
Jessie Kampai	Live & Learn Vanuatu	11/17/2021
Serge Warakar	Live & Learn Vanuatu	11/17/2021
Wilko Bosma	Natural Resources Development Foundation	11/16/2021
Jacqueline Pil	NGOPro	Interview scheduled; Did not attend or reschedule
Junias Repiriri	Rotokas Ecotourism	Did not respond
Mandus Boselalu	SICCP	Did not respond
Minnie McDonald	SICCP	Did not respond
John Fasi	Solomon Islands National University	Did not respond
Lyra Atu	Solomon Islands National University	Did not respond
Diana Fisher	The University of Queensland	12/1/2021
Junior Novera	The University of Queensland, The Kainake Project Inc.	11/19/2021
Albert Taufa	The Vanuatu Environmental Law Association Committee (INC.)	11/15/2021
Jeremy Bird	Treweek Environmental Consultants	11/30/2021
John Genolagani	University of Papua New Guinea	Unable to schedule interview
Lai Sakita	Vanuatu Environmental Advocacy Network	Did not respond
Christina Shaw	Vanuatu Environmental Science Society	11/10/2021
Ben Namu	Wai-Hau Conservation Foundation Inc	Did not respond



Felix Naitoro	Wai-Hau Conservation Foundation Inc	Did not respond
Stacy Jupiter	Wildlife Conservation Society	11/11/2021
CEPF Secretariat		
<i>Name</i>	<i>Organization</i>	
Nina Marshall	CEPF Secretariat, Senior Director of M&E	01/19/2022
Jack Tordoff	CEPF Secretariat, Managing Director (1st Grant Director)	11/11/2021
Michele Zador	CEPF Secretariat, 2nd Grant Director	11/2/2021
Dan Rothberg	CEPF Secretariat, Current Grant Director	11/4/2021
Antonia Cermak-Terzian	CEPF Secretariat, Director of Grants Management	12/8/2021
Regional Implementation Team		
<i>Name</i>	<i>Organization</i>	
Helen Pippard	RIT Project Manager	11/4/2021
Anjani Gosai	RIT Finance Officer	Did not respond
Zola Sangga	PNG Country Coordinator	01/25/2022
Ravin Dhari	Solomon Islands Country Coordinator	Did not respond
Vatumaraga Molisa	Vanuatu Advisor	Did not respond
Gae Gowae	PNG Country Coordinator (former)	Did not respond
Technical Advisory Group		
<i>Name</i>	<i>Organization</i>	
Greg Sherley	Former UNEP (Expert Reviewer)	11/11/2021
Agnetha Vavekaramui	Solomon Islands Department of Environment and Conservation	Interview scheduled; Did not attend or reschedule
Kay Kalim	PNG Department of Environment and Conservation/ CEPA	Did not respond
Gunther Joku	Department of Environment and Conservation, GEF Focal Point	Did not respond
Donna Kalfatak	Vanuatu Department of Environment and Conservation	Did not respond
Trinison Tari	Department of Environment and Conservation (alternate Govt. rep)	Did not respond



Annex B. List of Documents Reviewed

2019 Call for Letters of Inquiry East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot Large and Small Grants.

An Overview of CEPF's Portfolio in the East Melanesian Islands Hotspot (September 2014; September 2015).

Annual Portfolio Overview East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot (July 2019 – June 2020; July 2020 – June 2021).

Annual Portfolio Overview (Wallacea; Indo-Burma; Eastern Afro-Montane; Caribbean; Tropical Andes).

Assessment of Proposals for the Regional Implementation Team for the East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot.

Ecosystem Profile East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot December 2012.

CEPF Eastern Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot Regional Implementation Team IUCN Oceania Proposal.

CEPF EMI Grant database.

CEPF EMI Grantee Survey Results.

CEPF Operations Manual.

CEPF Supervision Mission to the East Melanesian Islands (EMI) Hotspot (May 2014; October 2021).

Evaluation of Lessons Learned to Inform Reinvestment in the Caribbean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot.

Evaluation of Lessons Learned to Inform Reinvestment in the Eastern Afro-Montane, Indo-Burma and Wallacea Biodiversity Hotspots.

Grant Agreement: CEPF Regional Implementation Team in the East Melanesia Islands July 2013; also June and December 2020 Amendments.

IUCN EMI Project Audit Report 2018.

IUCN Semiannual Progress Reports 2014-2021.

Lessons Learned to Inform Reinvestment in the Tropical Andes Hotspot.

Mid-term Assessment: CEPF's Investment in the East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot July 2013 – December 2018.



Annex C. Interview Guide

Questions for Grantees

1. Interviewee info (name, institution name, email, phone #)
2. Knowledge about CEPF
 - How did you find out about the CEPF program (e.g., word of mouth, workshop, Internet, etc.)? What is your level of knowledge of the CEPF program in the East Melanesian Islands?
3. Application process
 - How was your experience with the proposal application and evaluation process?
 - Did your organization design a new project to meet CEPF funding priorities or did you modify an existing project?
 - Were you clear on what kinds of projects were being funded, and did this influence how you designed your project?
 - Did you communicate with the RIT or CEPF while you developed your proposal? What input did you receive?
 - How long did it take from when you submitted the proposal to when you received a response? Were you satisfied with the response time?
4. Project implementation
 - How were communications with the RIT and the national coordinator? Was it clear to you who you should reach out to for specific kinds of questions?
 - How did the RIT contribute to the design of your organization's project? Were there any changes made to your project during the grant period?
 - Did the RIT explain the concept of Safeguards to your organization and how you should address them within the implementation of your project?
 - Did you attend any workshops conducted by the RIT? What topics were covered and were the workshops useful to your organization? In what way?
 - Please describe ways in which you think your organization's capacity was improved due to the work of the RIT?
 - How often did the RIT visit your organization? Were these visits helpful to your organization? In what way(s)?
 - How did the RIT help you exchange information with other grantees? In what ways was this useful to the work of your organization?
 - How was your experience with the technical and financial reporting process? Were there any issues?
 - What were the main challenges that your project encountered during the grant period? How did these challenges affect your grant deliverables? How did you overcome these challenges? Was the RIT or CEPF helpful?
 - In what ways did your project change after the grant period?
 - Are there areas in which you would have liked more support from the RIT?
 - Do you have any lessons learned relating to i) empowering local communities to protect and manage biodiversity at KBAs; ii) integrating biodiversity conservation into local land-use and development planning; iii) safeguarding species by



addressing major threats and info gaps; iv) increasing local, national, and regional capacity to catalyze civil society partnerships

5. Overall experience

- What were the most successful aspects of working with the RIT? What were the main challenges?
- What were the most successful aspects of working with the national coordinator? What were the main challenges?
- Do you have any recommendations for how the RIT could have improved its work?
- Have you received funding from other regional grant programs? How did those funding mechanisms compare with your CEPF experience?
- Did you complete the Post-project Grantee Survey that is requested of all grantees upon completion of their project?

Questions for RIT

1. Discussion of key activities and challenges and successes associated with fulfilling TORs

- Could you describe your evaluation process for large grants including obtaining external reviews
- Could you describe your communications with grantees, the CEPF Secretariat, and donors and other stakeholders?
- Please describe how you conducted due diligence for grantees and sub-grantees?
- Describe the process of convening a panel of experts to evaluate small grants proposals
- How often did you visit stakeholders and grantees on average? What criteria did you use to choose who to visit?
- What were the main challenges in working with grantees? How did you overcome these challenges?
- What were the challenges involved in building grantee capacity? What were some successes?
- What was the process for dealing with grantee technical and financial performance issues?
- Can you comment on how your work contributed to coordination and collaboration among stakeholders (grantees, donors, other stakeholders) in the region?
- Was your organization able to leverage additional funding in this region? If so, can you provide example(s)?
- In hindsight, was the TOR appropriate and complete? Are there things you would change? Were there any budgetary challenges?
- What were the challenges in collecting data for portfolio-level indicators?
- How did you ensure quality of performance data submitted by grantees?
- What were the main outcomes of the mid-term learning exchange workshop?

2. RIT structure and capacities

- What were the challenges and successes with respect to how the RIT was structured?



- If you were going to start over, is there anything you would change with the structure?
- What were the most important capacities that you brought to the table? What would be priorities to add or strengthen?

3. Grant portfolio

- What were the challenges with selecting a portfolio of grants that cover the strategic directions and investment priorities for the hotspot? What were the gaps in coverage? What was the reason for these gaps? What would have helped to fill these gaps?
- To what extent have the targets set in the hotspot ecosystem profile been met? Where they have not been met, what are the reasons?
- What were the challenges in balancing international and local grantees? How did you overcome these challenges?
- What risks (political/institutional/security/health) constrained the grant portfolio? How did you plan for or mitigate these risks? Were there any unanticipated risks? What about opportunities?

Questions for CEPF Secretariat

1. RIT structure and capacities

- What were the most important capacities that IUCN brought to the table? What would be priorities to add or strengthen?
- The org chart changed over time – what prompted the changes? What worked, what didn't?
- Location of RIT staff/consultants versus the portfolio geography – how well did this work?

2. Discussion of key activities and challenges and successes associated with fulfilling TORs

- What was your impression of IUCN's due diligence and evaluation process for grantees?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses with IUCN's monitoring and reporting processes?
- What were IUCN's strengths and weaknesses in terms of communicating with grantees, donors, and other stakeholders?
- Can you comment on how IUCN's work contributed to coordination and collaboration among stakeholders (grantees, donors, other stakeholders) in the region?
- How did IUCN build grantee capacity?
- What were IUCN's challenges with working with grantees? What were some successes?
- What was IUCN's process for dealing with grantee technical and financial performance issues?
- Was IUCN able to leverage additional funding in this region?



- What were the main lessons learned that IUCN shared?
- What were the main challenges in working with IUCN?
- In hindsight, was the TOR appropriate and complete? Are there things you would change? Were there any budgetary challenges?

3. Grant portfolio

- Regarding the grant portfolio, were there any gaps in coverage of strategic directions and investment priorities for the hotspot? What was the reason for these gaps? What might have helped to fill these gaps?
- To what extent have the targets set in the hotspot ecosystem profile for impacts on biodiversity conservation, human wellbeing, civil society capacity and enabling conditions been met? Where they have not been met, what do you think are the main reasons?
- How did IUCN overcome the challenges in balancing international and local grantees?
- In your opinion, what risks (political/institutional/security/health) constrained the grant portfolio? How did IUCN plan for or mitigate these risks? Were there any unanticipated risks? What about opportunities?
- Do you have suggestions of particular grantees we should speak with?
- Do you have suggestions of organizations to consider for the future role of RIT?

Questions for Other Stakeholders (government, donors, etc.)

1. Interviewee info (name, institution name, email, phone #)
2. What is your level of knowledge of the CEPF program in the East Melanesian Islands?
3. What is your level of knowledge of the work of the RIT in the East Melanesian Islands?
4. Did the CEPF program administered by IUCN in East Melanesia help further national conservation policies or specific government programs? If so, how?
5. What is IUCN's role and status as a conservation partner in the region? How visible and influential are they?
6. Can you comment on how the RIT's work contributed to coordination and collaboration among stakeholders (grantees, donors, other stakeholders) in the region?
7. Do you think the RIT was able to leverage additional funding in this region? If so, can you provide example(s)?
8. Do you have any observations about the work done by the RIT in implementing the CEPF program in the East Melanesian Islands? Are there areas for improvement?



Annex D. RIT Terms of Reference (as provided in evaluation RfP)

1	Establish and coordinate a process for proposal solicitation and review.
	Establish and coordinate a process for solicitation of applications.
	Announce the availability of CEPF grants.
	Publicize the contents of the ecosystem profile and information about the application process.
	With the CEPF Secretariat, establish schedules for the consideration of proposals at pre-determined intervals, including decision dates.
	Establish and coordinate a process for evaluation of applications.
	Evaluate all letters of inquiry.
	Evaluate all proposals.
	Facilitate technical advisory committee review, where appropriate (including convening a panel of experts).
	Obtain external reviews of all applications over US\$250,000
	Ensure that all application information is linked into the CEPF automated grants management system.
	Decide jointly with the CEPF Secretariat on the award of all grant applications of US\$20,000 and above.
	Communicate with applicants throughout the application process to ensure applicants are informed and fully understand the process.
2	Manage a program of small grants; that is, grants of less than US\$20,000.
	Announce the availability of CEPF small grants.
	Conduct due diligence to ensure sub-grantee applicant eligibility and capacity to comply with CEPF funding terms.
	Manage the contracting of these awards.
	Manage disbursement of funds to grantees.
	Ensure sub-grantee compliance with CEPF funding terms.
	Monitor, track, and document grantee technical and financial performance.
	Assist the Secretariat in maintaining the accuracy of the CEPF grants management database.
	Open a dedicated bank account in which the funding allocated by CEPF for Small Grants will be deposited, and report on the status of the account throughout the project. Convene a panel of experts to evaluate proposals.
	Conduct regular project site visits (at least once every six months) to monitor and document grantee technical and financial performance.
	Contact grantees regularly via email and telephone.
	Ensure that grantees complete regular (based on length of the project) technical and financial progress reports.
	Prepare bi-annual summary report to the CEPF Secretariat with detailed information of the Small Grants Programme, including names and contact information for all grantees, grant title or summary of grant, time period of grants, award amounts, disbursed amounts, and disbursement schedules.
3	Reporting and monitoring
	Collect and report on data for portfolio-level indicators.
	Ensure quality of performance data submitted by grantees.
	Support the CEPF Secretariat to monitor programmatic performance of grantees.
	Verify completion of products, deliverables and short-term impacts by grantees.
	Review grantee financial reports in relation to programmatic performance.
	Support grantees to comply with requirements for completion of GEF tracking tools, including the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool.
	Support a mid-term learning exchange workshop to build institutional capacity of grantees and convene a final assessment of the CEPF portfolio.
	Conduct a mid-term assessment.
	Visit grantees to monitor their progress and ensure outreach, verify compliance and support capacity building.
	Provide guidance to grantees for the effective design and implementation of safeguard policies to ensure that these activities comply with the guidelines detailed in the CEPF Operations Manual and with the World Bank's environmental and social safeguard policies. Provide additional support and guidance during the implementation and evaluation cycles at regular field visits to projects.
4	Coordinate and communicate CEPF investment, build partnerships and promote information exchange in the hotspot.



	Serve as the lead point of contact for CEPF in relation to international donors, host country governments and agencies, and other potential partners within the hotspot.
	Facilitate information exchange among stakeholders.
	Communicate regularly with CEPF and partners about the portfolio through face-to-face meetings, phone calls, the internet (website and electronic newsletter) and reports to forums and structures.
	Provide regular communications and reports to the CEPF Grant Director on the progress of the project.
	Provide lessons learned and other information to the Secretariat to be communicated via the CEPF website.
	Disseminate results via multiple and appropriate media.
	Facilitate partnerships between stakeholders in order to achieve the objectives of the ecosystem profile.
	Build partnerships between and among grantees and other stakeholders.
	Promote collaboration and coordination among local or international donors.
	In coordination with CEPF's Secretariat, ensure communication and collaboration with the six CEPF donors, as appropriate in the hotspot.
	Promote opportunities to leverage CEPF funds with donors and governments investing in the region.
	Visit stakeholders, and attend meetings and events to ensure collaboration, coordination and outreach.
5	Build the capacity of grantees.
	Assist civil society groups in designing projects that contribute to the achievement of objectives specified in the ecosystem profile and a coherent portfolio of mutually supportive grants.
	Build institutional capacity of grantees to ensure efficient and effective project implementation.

