

CEPF Mediterranean Basin Hotspot Mid-term Assessment National Meeting Report

Organization:	Regional Environmental Centre – Country Office Macedonia (REC COM)
Country:	Macedonia
Date of meeting:	3 rd of February, 2015

Objectives

The National Meeting will:

- i) Give the platform for CEPF grantees to assess the CEPF investment within their country and discuss challenges and the future of CEPF investment on a national scale.
- ii) Allow the opportunity for the exchange of experience and networking between national organizations.
- iii) Produce a national report summarizing the discussions and decisions taken collectively which will feed into the overall Mid-Term Assessment for CEPF's investment in the Mediterranean Hotspot

Meeting minutes:

1) Challenges grantees have in implementing their projects

- on-the-ground issues:
 - Three main “on-the-ground” issues have been identified: a) Data availability and/or data disclosure by relevant institutions; and b) Inability to implement project activities due to land property issues.

a. Data availability and/or data disclosure by relevant institutions:

- There is a significant data gap which renders ongoing research activities difficult or incomplete. Available data is not kept in coherent databases while the existing regulations specifying the data collection and record keeping methods are not complied with. Project results comprising of studies and research papers are not gathered centrally or are not made available by the developers. Certain intellectual property issues may be the reason for keeping the data mostly in the private domain; data is sometimes not shared to allow for its multiple use and additional financial benefits. Relevant institutions in charge of data collection, record keeping and reporting lack the capacity and time to extract and adequately present the relevant information from available studies into comprehensive data systems.
- Even though the Law on free access to information stipulates that every institution, national or local, is obliged to disclose public data, the

institutions who maintain relevant datasets are not responsive to requests. There is a general impression that local authorities / agencies are more open to sharing data than the national institutions. The Hydro-biological Institute (operating in Ohrid) was seen as a good example of data provision and proactive participation.

- b. Inability to implement project activities due to land property issues: one grantee reported difficulties in collecting samples on the ground, due to a restricted access to the area in private ownership.
- stakeholder/partner participation
 - Following challenges have been identified: a) lack of project ownership by project beneficiaries, b) insufficient capacity of project beneficiaries, and c) Lack of viable Local conservation/action groups.
 - a. Lack of project ownership by project beneficiaries:
 - Grantees presented different experiences regarding the stakeholder / partner participation. While there were positive examples (Dojran, Ohrid, Struga etc.), facing challenges in cooperating with the project beneficiaries was common among the majority of grantees. Stakeholders are either not motivated, or are not able to contribute to the project activities due to various reasons, such as lack of time, non-tailor-made communication/engagement tools deployed within the scope of the projects or insufficient capacities. Resistance to change is relatively high.
 - Teachers, who are to take part in certain innovative educational approaches, are not motivated to do extra work apart from their normal operations.
 - Students have proven to be the most responsive stakeholders` group. Some of targeted students implemented voluntary replication activities outside the project areas` boundaries.
 - b. Insufficient capacity of project beneficiaries:
 - Public administration, including the local authorities lacks relevant expertise in the fields of water management and nature protection. People with inadequate educational background are employed in water/nature departments. Most often, such departments do not exist at all, while the support to the projects is given by the local economic development and urban planning departments.
 - Good practice demonstration projects are scarce; it prevents the authorities from assigning higher priority to the water management and nature protection sectors.
 - c. Lack of viable Local conservation/action groups:
 - Some development aid agencies are phasing out and close their grant programmes which, in tandem with insufficient financial support of the national authorities, affects negatively the operations of Local Conservation/Action Groups. As reaching out to Local Conservation/Action Groups that would support bottom up approaches was assessed by the Grantees as very important for securing the sustainability of actions in the

field, it was proposed to further strengthen these local organisations with support of CEPF.

- financial issues
 - Following challenges have been identified: a) Insufficient budgeting flexibility of CEPF sponsored projects, and b) Increased taxes affecting budget planning and implementation of envisaged activities.
 - a. Increased taxes:
 - Recent changes in the legislation regulating taxation of consultants` fees and other honoraria reduced the available project budgets. Restructuring budgets may be challenging as the taxes increased from 10 to almost 40%.
 - b. Insufficient budgeting flexibility of CEPF sponsored projects:
 - Some Grantees stated that strict budgeting rules of the CEPF may not allow for accommodating to changing environments during the project implementation;
- operational issues
 - Following challenges have been identified: a) logistical problems during field works, b) changing project management staff of the grantees; and c) lack of clarity regarding the persons in charge at the CEPF.
 - 1. Logistical problems during field works:
 - In remote rural areas, but also in some smaller urban areas, finding adequate accommodation for participants was difficult. There was also a lack of medical persons to offer preventive and/or emergency services.
 - c. Changing project management staff of the grantees:
 - Some grantees reported that the project implementation was delayed due to changes in the project management team. Transferring the duties and resources was not always smooth. Such issues should be anticipated at an early planning stage and exit strategies should be developed by the CSOs.
 - d. Lack of clarity regarding the persons in charge at the CEPF:
 - At some points, when guidance was needed by the donor, Grantees did not know which people to approach at the CEPF.
 - CEPF may clearly assign focal points for content or financial management related issues.
- external factors
 - No external factors were identified.

ii) Conclusion of discussion: The following priority issues have been identified and following strategies have been proposed:

1. *Data availability and disclosure: A Cover Letter signed by the CEPF, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP), as well as the GEF Focal Operational Point should be made available to grantees to facilitate data collection from institutions;*
2. *Financial issues: more flexible budget planning in future CEPF projects and adding a contingency margin was proposed.*

3. *Stakeholders' participation: Need for a longer-term presence in the project area to build the confidence and local capacities; setting a seed funding programme to build the capacities of Local conservation/action groups; implementing good practice demonstration projects as a basis for replication activities.*

2) Exercise on the national position to CEPF long-term goals

The group unanimously concluded that all the long-term goals addressed within the Collective Civil Society Assessment Tool Worksheet are partially met; an exception is found for the goal "financial resources" that was assessed as **not met**. No changes were observed in the indicated period 2011-2013. Grantees agreed that three years is a relatively short period to provide a serious impact. *The Grid supplied by CEPF is added as Annex 2.* Discussions surrounding the grantees' position to the CEPF long-term goals are summarised below.

- Human resources. Local and national civil society groups collectively possess technical competencies of critical importance to conservation:
 - A few civil society organisations possess technical competencies of critical importance to conservation, such as ability to conduct scientific and/or research activities. Others work on public awareness rising or capacity building activities. Local conservation/action groups are in urgent need of strengthening their capacities on research, acting constructively on the science - policy or science - society interface.
- Management systems and strategic planning. Local and national civil society groups collectively possess sufficient institutional and operational capacity and structures to raise funds for conservation and to ensure the efficient management of conservation projects and strategies.
 - Fund raising capabilities of civil society organisations are limited. In the absence of stable funding from public sources, certain organisations manage to obtain sponsorships under corporate responsibility schemes. Others provide their services (training, coaching, guiding etc.) to public entities such as Zoo Gardens, etc. There aren't either national or international funding mechanisms for conservation activities. UNDP and SDC used to support a kind of Conservation enterprises mostly in the area of Prespa Lake. Endowments are available from foundations for small scale activities; a very limited number of civil society organizations benefits from endowments. Memberships are not deemed a source of funding that may foster any significant conservation activities.
- Partnerships. Effective mechanisms exist for conservation-focused civil society groups to work in partnership with one another, and through networks with local communities, governments, the private sector, donors, and other important stakeholders, in pursuit of common objectives.
 - There are examples of conservation-focused civil society groups working in partnership with one another; networks with local communities, governments, the private sector, donors, and other important stakeholders are created during the implementation of projects. Organisations make partnerships if they share common goals, complement their expertise and not compete. There is certain segregation among the civil society organisations in Macedonia, but partnerships can be created by those who can naturally cooperate. Partnerships between the civil society organisations and governments are not

common. Municipalities which manage protected areas may look for partnerships with civil society organisations, in order to delegate certain management responsibilities to them.

- Whenever a CSO is working longer in a specific area partnerships with authorities and other beneficiaries strengthen; therefore, longer term presence in the region coupled by a continued support to local stakeholders, volunteers and Local Conservation/Action Groups is a prerequisite for sustainability.
- Financial resources. Local civil society organizations have access to long-term funding sources to maintain the conservation results achieved via CEPF grants and/or other initiatives, through access to new donor funds, conservation enterprises, memberships, endowments, and/or other funding mechanisms.
- Long-term funding sources to maintain the conservation results achieved via CEPF grants and/or other initiatives are not available. Bilateral grants are scarce; donors focus their funding to specific regions, such as Prespa Lake and Bregalnica Catchment (UNDP and SDC), as well as Dojran and Ohrid Lakes (CEPF). Local civil society organizations stated that funding from national sources is needed to sustain activities in areas already targeted by donor sponsored projects, but also to initiate conservation activities in regions not covered so far.
- Trans-boundary cooperation. In multi-country hotspots, mechanisms exist for collaboration across political boundaries at site, corridor and/or national scales.
- There are examples of trans-boundary cooperation in multi-country hotspots (i.e. Ohrid and Prespa Lakes, mainly supported by UNDP). Multilateral donors and EU (IPA) also dedicate funds for transboundary cooperation in nature conservation. However, their major beneficiaries are the municipalities which may not always decide to partner with civil society organisations.

3) Co-funding discussion

- Summary of discussion:
 - Among larger Donors supporting nature conservation in Macedonia, worth mentioning are: Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), UNDP, UNEP, EU (Natura2000, LIFE+ Program), MAVA Foundation pour la Nature, WWF and CEPF.
 - Civil Society Organisations may get an access to available funding via participating in international networks such as Mediterranean Information Office. Checking the donor portals on a regular basis is also needed.
 - National funding for conservation activities is scarce. The Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (through its investment programme) allocates annually a limited amount for the civil society sector which is not sufficient to implement meaningful activities. Some municipalities provide support to the civil society organizations, but it is also insignificant.
 - In the absence of substantial national funding for conservation activities, the civil society organisations manage to obtain some support under corporate and social responsibility schemes; some organisations generate income in the tourism; others offer their services (training, coaching, guiding) to either public institutions (municipalities, communal enterprises, ZOO Garden, etc.) or private companies.

- Grantees discussed about earmarked funding originating from tourism taxes, entrance fees in protected areas and other funding sources that may be used for conservation activities. Civil Society Organisations are not influential enough to change the current practice and convince the authorities about the importance of setting funding schemes to support nature conservation activities.

ii) Conclusion of discussion: The final output will be a collective decision of the whole group of at least 3 ideas of how CEPF can help grantees in the future with co-funding

1. *CEPF may foster a network of donors supporting nature conservation, coordinate funds and complement various initiatives. As a minimum, CEPF may inform the civil society organisations of any prospects for funding on its web portal showing links to Calls of other donors.*
2. *CEPF may device programmes towards CSOs getting involved in existing nature conservation networks; networking may be very beneficial for the CSOs in terms of building their capacity and getting access to funding.*
3. *CEPF should continue its support to the CSOs towards building the capacity of local smaller CSOs to ensure that these organizations are stronger and more effective as a result of their engagement in CEPF funded activities.*
4. *CEPF may adopt programmes in support of voluntarism;*

4) Communications: discussion covering how grantees are communicating conservation activities in KBAs to the wider audience, what is working, what tools are being used and how CEPF can help

i) Summary of discussion:

- There are various ways for presenting the project activities. They differ from organization to organization. The most common are the following:
 - *Leaflets and Brochures*
 - *Regular posting information on the WEB portals (electronic media)*
 - *Social media (Facebook, Twiter etc.)*
 - *Articles in newspapers and electronic media*
 - *Photo and video documentation, documentaries, short movies*
 - *Collecting statements from stakeholders on topics they find important for improved nature conservation.*
 - *Interactive maps indicating biodiversity hotspots, pressures that are harmful to the nature and stakeholders views.*
 - *There is no research available to address the most suitable communication tools or Communication Study developed to promote the nature conservation.*
- The choice of methods and tools for communication depend on the focus group. The traditional methods are used for targets groups who are not acquainted to the internet. Social networks and electronic media are used to target young population.

ii) Conclusion of discussion: The final output will be a collective decision of the whole group of at least 3 ideas of how CEPF can help grantees in the future with communications.

1. *Communication on conservation activities should convey a story; it should demonstrate a Case in order to make the project closer to the beneficiaries and the wider public. The CEPF can help sharing proven practices with this respect.*
2. *Stakeholders and the local population should be approached by using communication methods/tools which demonstrate that the project solves some important issue for their better living or improvement of nature status.*
3. *CEPF may support activities that identify the most successful communication methods promoting the nature conservation.*

5) Networking and collaboration

i) Summary of discussion:

- CEPF sometimes forces partnerships among CSOs after the grant award. It may happen that these partnerships are not natural rendering CSOs unable to share or split respective activities in the most favourable way.
- To avoid this, CEPF may predefine in the Call for proposals joint implementation of activities with partner organizations (national or international). This would enable the organizations to create partnerships with associates they already cooperated with. This would lead to creating complementary activities prior to the grant award.
- CEPF may set an obligation in the Call for the use of a certain percentage [%] of the Total Grant Request Amount for involving and strengthening the capacities of smaller local organizations.
- Right after the CfP is announced CEPF may organise an Info Day for interested organisations to set a floor for their questions and clarifications. Such an Info day may be beneficial for creating partnerships between the CSOs as well.
- After the grant award, CEPF may organize a Coordination Meeting for all winning CSOs to exchange information on the scope of awarded projects. At the Coordination Meeting the grantees may discuss about necessary data and most suitable methods for their collection, exchange and presentation during the project implementation. Key relevant institutions (local and/or national) targeted and/or benefitting from the project may be invited at the Coordination Meeting as well.

ii) Conclusion of discussion: The final output will be a collective decision of the whole group of at least 3 ideas of how CEPF can help encourage and facilitate this.

1. *Partnerships to be created before and not after the grant awards.*
2. *An Info Day after announcing the CfP for the CSOs seeking clarifications and/or partners would be beneficial*
3. *A Coordination Meeting after the grant awards for sharing information on the planned project activities among the grantees and the targeted/benefitting institutions would improve the efficiency of the CEPF investments.*

6) National Conservation Priorities

Please summarise and state the overall opinion of meeting participants on the Investment Priorities:

Grantees agreed that the current CEPF Investment Priorities are relevant; establishing Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) initiatives for pilot basins was deemed as most challenging due to the lack of structured and coherent background information.

Grantees pointed out to the most relevant Investment Priorities in the region as follows:

1.3 Support local stakeholders to advance and benefit from nature-based tourism through the diversification of tourism-related activities and generation of alternative livelihoods

2.1. Contribute to and replicate best practices to reduce the negative impacts of insufficiently planned water infrastructures

2.3. Support innovative financing mechanisms for conserving and restoring freshwater ecosystems and traditional water catchments

3.1. Establish new protected areas and promote improved management of existing protected areas by developing and implementing sustainable management plans

3.2. Develop financial mechanisms that support protected areas while enhancing sustainable livelihood and promoting community management of priority key biodiversity areas

3.3. Raise awareness of the importance of priority key biodiversity areas, including those that have irreplaceable plant and marine biodiversity

4.1. Build a broad constituency of civil society groups working across institutional and political boundaries toward achieving the shared conservation goals described in the ecosystem.

7) Changes in priority Key Biodiversity Areas

Please provide any information on the suggestions made by participants to add or remove current KBAs.

Grantees agreed that the present Key Biodiversity Areas are most relevant, in view of the need to secure longer term presence in these regions to sustain the project outcomes.

8) Additional points raised in the meeting

Please add any other questions raised or statements made by participants which CEPF should take into consideration.

i) Summary of discussion:

1. *Data collected/analysed in all CEPF supported projects (especially the specialized scientific data) should be gathered and integrated in databases of the MoEPP (Macedonian Environmental Information Centre – MEIC). Cadastre of Protected Areas should also be continuously updated.*
2. *MoEPP is about to launch a WEB portal on biodiversity status in Macedonia. Any contribution from the CEPF beneficiaries (grantees) to the web content will be of great importance.*
3. *MoEPP suggested to CSOs and CEPF to allocate funding for scientific data collection and their integration in existing databases as well as the Cadastre of Protected Areas.*
4. *Citizen Science Based Projects can be fostered as a platform for a variety of organizations to meaningfully contribute to scientific research, such as observing and counting birds (at home or in the field). After an expert validation, data collected can become official. Citizens` contribution to `monitor` environmental pressures may be important as well.*
5. *The NGO BioSfera offered their capacities for the maintenance of a WEB portal (following the example of former EKONET network), with the aim to collect, store and share biodiversity and nature conservation related information.*

Meeting conclusions

General meeting conclusion

Please summarise a general meeting overview and record the general feedback from stakeholders

1. Improved methods for data collection and data integration into existing databases are very important.
2. CEPF funding should be used to strengthen the capacity of both established and smaller and less skilled CSOs and Conservation/Action Groups that operate locally.
3. CEPF budgeting should be more flexible and a margin for contingencies should be allowed.
4. Longer term presence in a region is needed to sustain nature conservation activities. CEPF may consider supporting activities lasting for three or more years.
5. CSOs should learn about existing networks that support nature conservation activities either through the CEPF or by themselves.
6. CEPF should better inform the CSOs about the scope of duties of its officers to avoid confusions.
7. CEPF should foster partnerships among the CSOs before and not after the grant awards.
8. Use of CEPF grants for communicating the project results to wider public is important. There may be one central web portal created for disseminating the project content in greater detail than the information currently available at the CEPF website.
9. CSOs must design projects that are attractive for their beneficiaries to build their ownership over the projects.
10. Info Day (before the grant award) and Coordination Meeting (after the grant award) can improve the efficiency of CEPF investments.

Feedback from meeting organizer

Please add any comments to CEPF about the meeting logistics or content – suggested areas of improvement, challenges faced etc.

The grantees were very constructive and creative during the workshop.

They used this opportunity to share experiences and network. One grantee even offered help to another in designing a short movie out of pictures taken by a mobile phone from the field. Grantees learned about available funding, existing networks supporting nature conservation etc. They also learned about innovative communication methods (interactive maps, collecting statements etc.).

The representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (one coming from the Nature and another one from the Water Department) were also very constructive. They learned about the scope of CEPF projects and how they can contribute to improved nature conservation policy and enforcement.

The CSO “Grasnica” could not join the workshop due to a car accident during bad weather conditions. No injuries occurred, only car dysfunction.

Annexes:

Annex 1: List of Participants

CEPF Mid-term Assessment National Meeting – Macedonia

3rd of February, 2015

No.	Name/Surname	Organization	Position	Phone	E-mail	Signature
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14	Ilber Mirta	Water Sector				
15		Municipality of Bitola				
16		Municipality of Ohrid				
17		Municipality of Dojran				

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С. Јорданов

Annex 2: CEPF long-term goals – Civil Society worksheet

Collective Civil Society Assessment Tool Worksheet	2012		2015	
<p>Human resources. Local and national civil society groups collectively possess technical competencies of critical importance to conservation.</p>		Not met		Not met
	X	Partially met	X	Partially met
		Fully met		Fully met
<p>Management systems and strategic planning. Local and national civil society groups collectively possess sufficient institutional and operational capacity and structures to raise funds for conservation and to ensure the efficient management of conservation projects and strategies.</p>		Not met		Not met
	X	Partially met	X	Partially met
		Fully met		Fully met
<p>Partnerships. Effective mechanisms exist for conservation-focused civil society groups to work in partnership with one another, and through networks with local communities, governments, the private sector, donors, and other important stakeholders, in pursuit of common objectives.</p>		Not met		Not met
	X	Partially met	X	Partially met
		Fully met		Fully met
<p>Financial resources. Local civil society organizations have access to long-term funding sources to maintain the conservation results achieved via CEPF grants and/or other initiatives, through access to new donor funds, conservation enterprises, memberships, endowments, and/or other funding mechanisms.</p>	X	Not met	X	Not met
		Partially met		Partially met
		Fully met		Fully met
<p>Trans-boundary cooperation. In multi-country hotspots, mechanisms exist for collaboration across political boundaries at site, corridor and/or national scales.</p>		Not met		Not met
	X	Partially met	X	Partially met
		Fully met		Fully met

Annex 3: Photographs from the meeting (Maximum 4 imbedded in the document)





РЕГИОНАЛЕН ЦЕНТАР ЗА ЖИВОТНА СРЕДИНА
Македонија

CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM
PARTNERSHIP FUND

DOFPF BirdLife INTERNATIONAL ACR world BIODIVERSITY

- ДНЕВЕН РЕД -

НАЦИОНАЛЕН СОСТАНОК ЗА ОЦЕНКА НА НАПРЕДОКОТ ВО
СПРОВЕДУВАЊЕ НА ПРОЕКТИ ОД SERP* ПРОГРАМАТА – МАКЕДОНИЈА

Предлог дневен ред

Модерирано од: Ана Петровска, Сениор технички експерт, Канцеларија на РЕЦ во Македонија

3^т февруари 2015 год. (вторник)

8.30 – 9.00	Приспигнување и регистрација на учесници (ул. Руѓер Бошковиќ 66 • 1000 Скопје • Македонија)
Утринска сесија: Оценување на SERP програмата во Медитераниот од страна на корисничките организации	
Присутни: SERP кориснички организации	
Добредојде на учесниците:	

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