

**Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund  
35<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the CEPF Donor Council  
European Commission  
Brussels, Belgium  
23 October 2019  
14:00-17:00 Central European Summer Time (CEST)**

**Results of the 2019 Grantee Perception Survey**

**Recommended Action Item:**

The Donor Council is asked to comment on the results of the 2019 Grantee Perception Survey and follow-up actions proposed by the Secretariat.

**Background**

Since its establishment in 2000, CEPF has continually strived to create a positive, flexible and efficient grant-making experience for the grantee. Efforts have been diverse and range from in-person technical and administrative support, to guidance material and improved grant-management processes, procedures and policies for all phases of the project cycle from application through to grant closure. Many of the improvements and changes in CEPF's practices have come about because of grantee feedback received via grantee meetings, in-person interactions, and discussions held at mid-term and final assessment workshops.

However, it was only in 2018 that CEPF conceived an initiative to collect grantee views in a comprehensive manner. Initiated as a means to improve interactions with grantees and inform our efforts to improve CEPF's policies and procedures, the CEPF Grantee Perception Survey was launched in mid-2018 and administered to all grantees whose projects came to a close in FY18, as well as to all closed projects in the East Melanesian Islands, in anticipation of their mid-term assessment held in December 2018.

The survey contains 42 questions in five categories (application process, administration, technical supervision, capacity building and donor-grantee relationship), is anonymous, and is available in English, French, Indonesian, Portuguese and Spanish. The survey is administered at the close of each small and large grant, and can be completed on a computer or mobile phone.

In September 2019, CEPF produced the first annual report of grantee perception (Annex A).

**Survey Responses**

All grantees whose grant came to a close after July 1, 2018, and all East Melanesian Islands grantees, received a request to complete the survey. A total of 83 responses (53%) were received out of a possible 156, from nine hotspots. Large grants, managed by the Secretariat, constituted 63% of the responses

while small grants managed by a regional implementation team constituted 37%. Responses by hotspot and size of grant are presented below.

Hotspot	# of large grants	# of small grants	Total # of grants
Cerrado	2	1	3
East Melanesian Islands	3	6	9
Eastern Afromontane	12	4	16
Guinean Forests of West Africa		1	1
Indo-Burma	14		14
Madagascar and Indian Ocean Islands	2	1	3
Mediterranean Basin	1		1
Tropical Andes	7		7
Wallacea	11	18	29
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>83</b>

Noteworthy is that throughout the survey, all responses attributed to “the Secretariat” are for large grants, and those attributed to “the Regional Implementation Team (RIT)” are for small grants.

### **Results and Recommendations**

Grantees were candid in their comments and recommendations for all five of the categories of questions. CEPF received consistent high marks for clarity, utility and quality of experience across the board for all five categories: application process, technical and administrative supervision, capacity building, and overall relationship with the RIT and Secretariat. A rating of 5.9 out of 7 was received for overall grantee experience. Negative responses were few, or absent for some questions. At the same time, grantees were open in their comments and provided useful observations and recommendations on each theme. The survey was anonymous and, therefore, grantees did not miss the opportunity to speak frankly about their concerns or, alternatively, about the many good things they see in CEPF.

The survey revealed three areas that CEPF can focus on to improve the grantee experience. Noting that for all three—capacity building/training, financial/technical advice and site visits—grantees expressed overall satisfaction with processes as they stand at present, they were nevertheless keen to receive more training, guidance and in-person interaction. For each focal area, bullet points describing actions that CEPF can take are listed.

*Capacity building/training:* Grantees were vocal about the importance of capacity building, and their desire to receive more of it on many different levels and topics. Actions that CEPF can take include:

- Be consistent about delivering capacity-building opportunities to all hotspots.
- Deliver capacity-building on both individual and organizational levels.
- Ensure that all grantees are aware of capacity-building events/opportunities.
- Improve training materials pertaining to social and environmental safeguards.

- Ensure dissemination of training materials pertaining to gender issues.
- Improve training materials on project management.
- Produce and deliver targeted webinars on specific administrative/financial topics such as procurement, subgrants, minimum financial management requirements, etc.

*Financial/technical guidance:* Grantees were positive about the financial and technical guidance that they receive during project implementation and would appreciate receiving more. Receiving this guidance in person was mentioned frequently throughout survey responses. Actions that CEPF can take include:

- Ensure periodic check-ins with grantees to support ongoing progress and assist if there are problem areas grantees would like help with.
- Ensure visits to grantees include review of reporting requirements and provision of guidance, if needed.

*Site visits:* Grantees appreciated both financial and programmatic site visits and found them to be valuable experiences. Grantees want guidance and discussion on how their projects are progressing, and they appreciate the opportunity to talk about the challenges they encounter. They also see site visits as key training opportunities. However, not all grantees received a site visit, with 37 percent stating they did not have a financial site visit, and 31 percent stating they did not have a programmatic site visit. Addressing this request is not a simple matter as visits require time and money, both of which are in short supply. It is not possible to visit all grantees, and thus visits are selected by considering various factors such as travel time, grantee risk and grant amount. Nevertheless, some actions can be taken:

- Secretariat and RIT to work together to produce a site visit plan in order to coordinate and reach more grantees.
- Provide refresher training to RITs on CEPF policies and procedures so that they can provide better guidance to the portfolio on the ground.
- Include a “day of training” in financial and programmatic site visit programs.
- Include additional funds in a grantee’s budget to allow attendance at regional events or to meet the Secretariat/RIT in the region when it is not possible for the Secretariat/RIT to visit that grantee’s site.

### **Next Steps**

CEPF is committed to continuing the survey, listening to grantees, reporting on results on an annual basis and, most importantly, to making changes to improve the grantee experience. This report has outlined some concrete actions that the Secretariat and RITs can take, and efforts will commence immediately to discuss the most efficient and effective ways to put the proposed actions into practice.

### **Discussion Points**

1. Is the Donor Council satisfied with the action points identified by the Secretariat to address the concerns of the grantees?
2. Are the survey results useful to the donors as a means to further justify partnership in CEPF?
3. Does the Donor Council see value in continuing the survey and reporting on an annual basis?
4. Does the Donor Council see value in making the survey results available to the public?

*Attachment: Annex A*  
*CEPF Grantee Perception Survey Report, September 2019*

## **CEPF Grantee Perception Survey Report September 2019**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International (CI), the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan and the World Bank. CEPF is a global program that provides grants to civil society to safeguard the world's biodiversity hotspots. As one of the founding partners, CI administers the global program through a CEPF Secretariat. CEPF's purpose is to strengthen the involvement and effectiveness of civil society in the conservation and management of globally important biodiversity.

Established in 2001, CEPF provides grants and technical support to diverse civil society partners ranging from community groups to non-governmental organizations to private sector entities. CEPF has continually strived, since the fund's inception, to create a positive, flexible and efficient grant-making experience for the grantee. Efforts have entailed improvement of grant management processes and procedures, for all phases of the project cycle from application through to grant closure.

Over the years, CEPF has solicited and received feedback from grantees about the CEPF experience, via grantee meetings and in-person interactions. However, not until 2018 did CEPF undertake a comprehensive effort to gather grantee perceptions via a survey administered to all grantees at the close of each project. Initiated as a means to improve interactions with grantees and inform our efforts to improve CEPF's policies and procedures, the survey was launched in mid-2018.

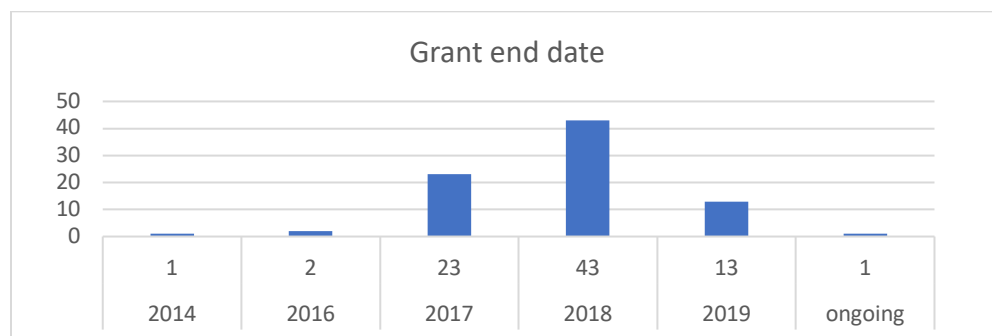
### **II. SURVEY DESCRIPTION**

The CEPF Post-Project Grantee Survey is has been prepared using Microsoft Forms. This program allows respondents to complete the survey on computer as well as mobile phone. The survey contains 42 questions in five categories (application process, administration, technical supervision, capacity building and donor-grantee relationship), is anonymous, and is available in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Indonesian. Grantees are instructed to consider each question as referring collectively to both the Secretariat and the RIT, unless there is a specific reference to the Secretariat or to the RIT.

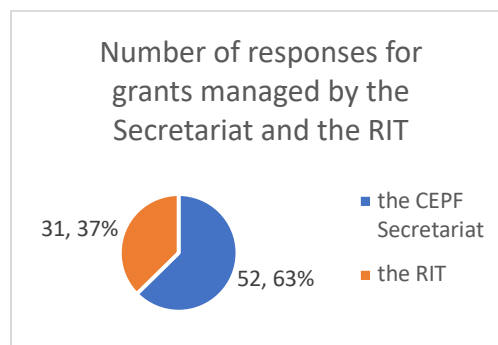
Grantees are requested to complete the survey at the end of their grant, and a link to the survey is included in the close out letter set to the grantee. Since the survey is anonymous, there is no way to know if a grantee has responded to the survey.

### III. SURVEY RESPONSES

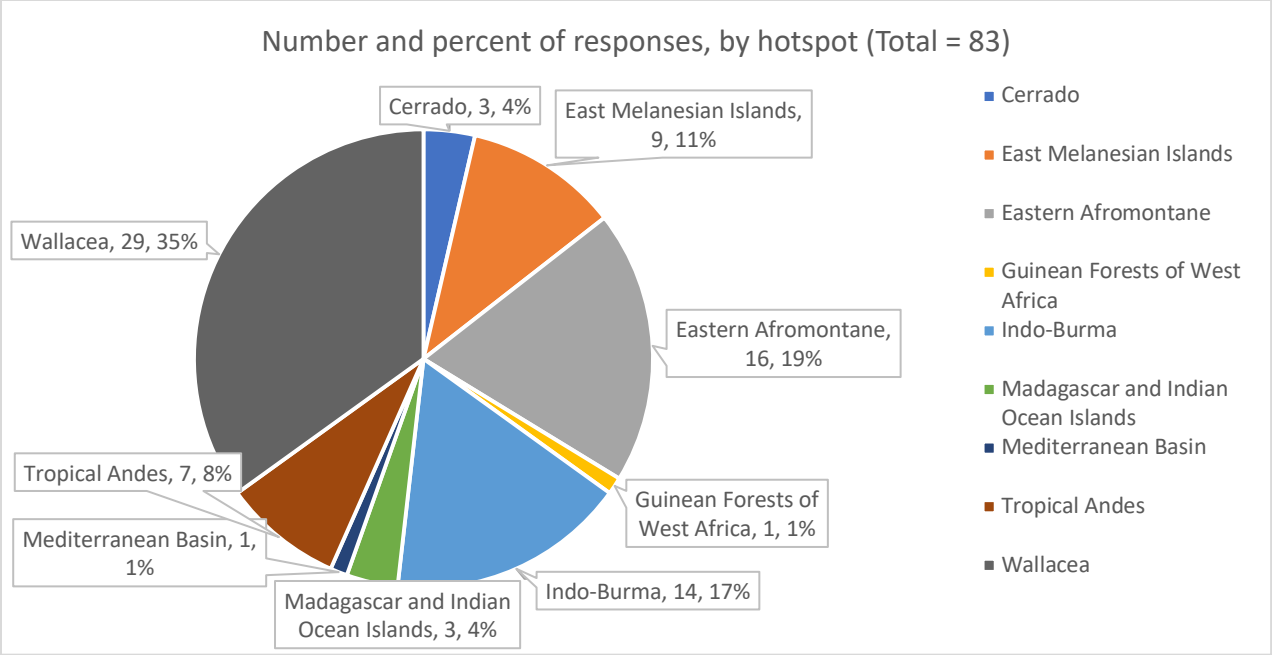
All grantees whose grant came to a close after July 1, 2018, received a request to complete the survey. However, in some hotspots, the survey was sent to additional grantees, in an effort to generate a comprehensive understanding of grantee perception. Specifically, the survey was sent to all grantees in the East Melanesian Hotspot in advance of their mid-term assessment. Further, the closure of some grants may have been delayed, in which case their grant might have ended in 2017 or earlier, but they only received the request to complete the survey upon receipt of their project's close out letter. The chart below illustrates the timeframe of grants participating in the survey.



As of June 30, 2019, 83 responses were received. Of these, 31 responses were for small grants managed by a Regional Implementation Team (RIT), and 52 were for large grants managed by the Secretariat. All grants administered by the RIT are small grants with awards of \$50,000 or less, or for some regions \$20,000 or less, depending on the small grant ceiling amount agreed upon by the Secretariat and the Regional Implementation Team.



Nine hotspots are represented in the survey results. The survey was sent to all grantees with grants closing during FY19 (July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019), and to all grantees in the East Melanesian Islands Hotspot. A total of 156 grantees were requested to complete the survey (58 from East Melanesian Islands and 98 from other hotspots). CEPF received 83 responses which is a response rate of 53%. Possible reasons for this low response rate include that some projects were already closed when the survey was sent to them, grantees were under no obligation to complete the survey, or that grantee contacts may have changed since project completion.



The table below illustrates the number of responses pertaining to small grants and large grants, by hotspot. In this table, and throughout the report, graphics attributed to the Secretariat refer to grants administered by the Secretariat. All of these are large grants. Graphics attributed to the RIT refer to grants administered by the RIT. All of these are small grants.

Hotspot	# of large grants	# of small grants	Total # of grants
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## IV. RESULTS

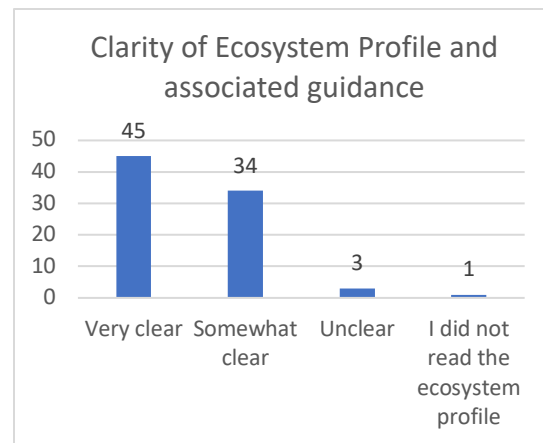
Results are discussed by category, with a chart presenting the results for each question, followed by grantee observations and recommendations.

### 1. Application Process

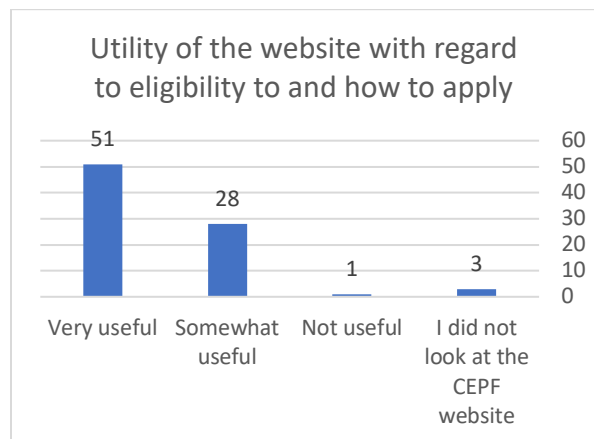
Grantees were asked seven questions in this section of the survey. The questions focused on the application process, covering CEPF's presentation of information and guidance on the website, financial and programmatic support provided during the application process, and overall efficiency of the process. Overall, grantees were satisfied with the material on the website, and the quality of support provided by both the Secretariat for large grants, and the RIT for small grants. Few responses were received indicating lack of clear guidance or support, and CEPF measures favorably against other donors in terms of time required to receive a grant, and number of steps needed to complete the process.

#### 1a. Application process: How clear was the ecosystem profile and any guidance provided about how to use it?

Most respondents (95%) reported ecosystem profiles and guidance to be Very Clear or Somewhat Clear, with a mix of respondents reporting Very Clear, and 23 of 34 respondents reporting Somewhat Clear to be from the Wallacea hotspot. The three Unclear responses came from Wallacea and Cerrado. Noting that as ecosystem profiles are available in both Portuguese and Indonesian, it is unlikely that language is a factor in the responses.



#### 1b. Application process: How would you rate the information on [www.cepf.net](http://www.cepf.net) with regard to eligibility and how to apply for a grant?

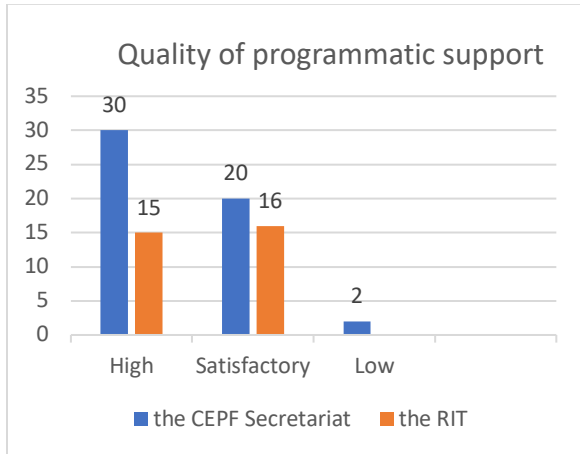


Responses to this question were extremely favorable, with only four responses indicating the website information was Not Useful or the respondent did not look at the website. Those finding the website Somewhat Useful were primarily from Wallacea (22 of 28), while those finding the website Very Useful came from a range of hotspots. No comments were received that specifically addressed this question.



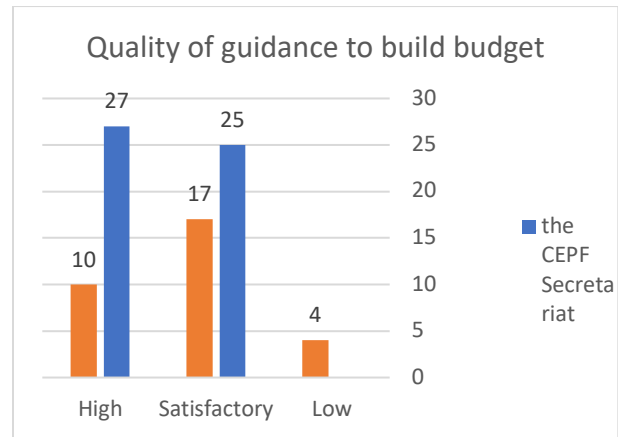
**1c. Application process: How would you rate the quality of programmatic support you received during the proposal design process?**

Both the RIT and the Secretariat are rated as providing Satisfactory or High-quality programmatic support (97%), with comments stating that staff are competent and helpful.



**1d. Application process: How would you rate the quality of guidance provided to build your budget?**

Both the Secretariat and the RIT received favorable ratings (95%) for the quality of support provided to build a budget. While no specific comments were received about budget preparation, a general comment was that more assistance is needed for proposal preparation.



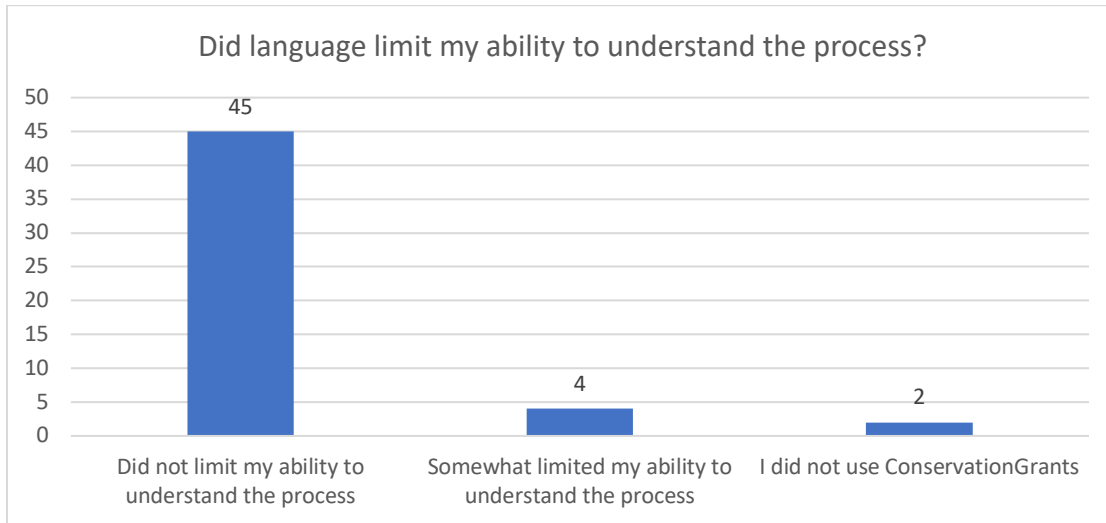
**1e. Application process: Did you use the CEPF's electronic grants system, ConservationGrants, to submit your application?**

ConservationGrants was used by 51 grantees out of a total of 83.

**1f. Application process: ConservationGrants is only available in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese. How much did this choice of languages, or the lack of other languages, limit your ability to understand the application process?**

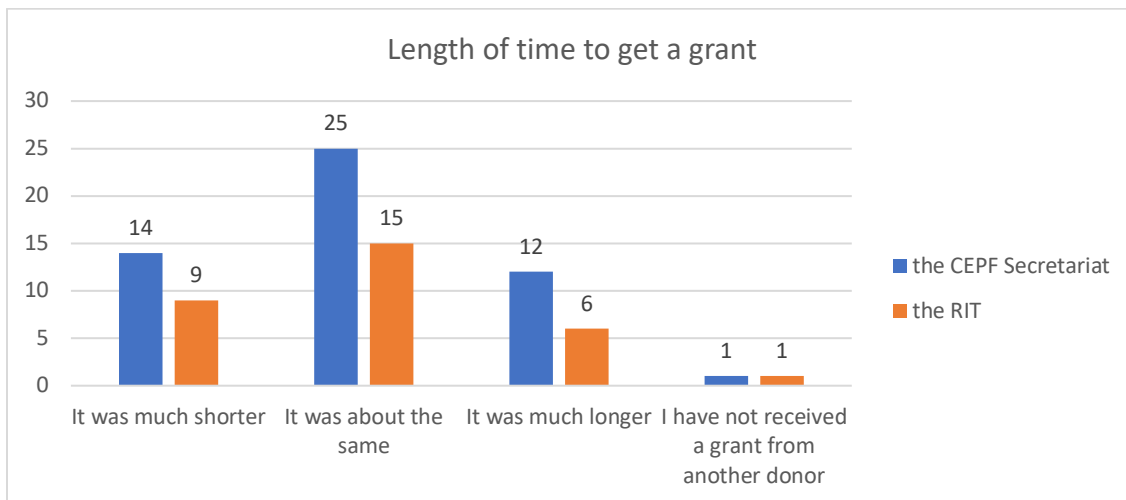
Of the 51 respondents indicating that they used ConservationGrants, 45 said that language was not an issue in understanding the application process. Interestingly, two respondents said that they did not use ConservationGrants, so it appears that there is some confusion about this question. This is further

supported by the respondents indicating that language Somewhat limited their ability to understand the process; three were from Wallacea, while the fourth was a small grantee from East Melanesian Islands, who probably did not use ConservationGrants.



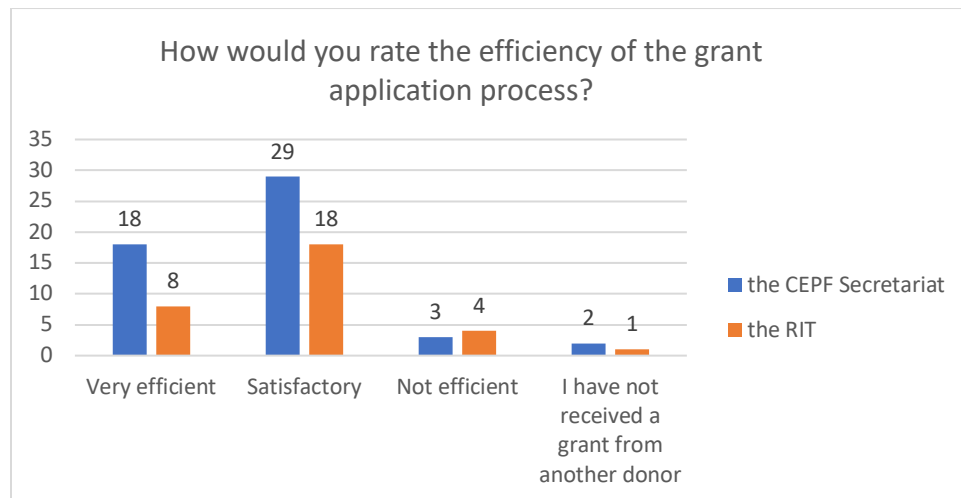
**1g. Application process: In comparison with other donors, how would you rate the length of time it took to get your grant?**

Respondents described CEPF’s application system as efficient, and many praised the online application process. However, several respondents, from a range of hotspots, indicated the application process was much longer. There was no significant difference between large grants and small grants.



**1h. Application process: In comparison with other donors, how would you rate the efficiency (number of steps, etc.) of the grant application process?**

Most respondents (88%) described CEPF’s application process Very efficient or Satisfactory. Only seven respondents recorded it as being Not efficient, and described it as time-consuming and slow. There was no significant difference between large grants and small grants.



**1i. Please provide any recommendations for how CEPF can improve its grant application process.**

Grantees were asked to provide additional comments and recommendations, and these are listed below. These comments have been edited for clarity, and duplicate statements have been consolidated. Comments are provided for the reader’s information, in no particular order or importance.

Observations and recommendations:

- CEPF should visit the field.
- CEPF should add images of species that are threatened globally or that are the focus of conservation so that it can be used by grant recipients and prospective grantees to know the types of species that are targeted for conservation in each priority area.
- Simplify the format of the proposal.
- Accelerate the review process.
- CEPF should allow submission in Indonesian and should have a staff person to assist entry of proposals into ConservationGrants, in Indonesian.
- The anti-terrorist screening is constraining - it is difficult to do let alone ask for the founders' data and others.
- A more transparent evaluation of the proposal system is needed, and needs to be explained why it was accepted or not accepted in terms of the weaknesses and advantages of the proposal, so that it becomes a learning material for all parties.
- More assistance is needed for proposal preparation.
- The process is exceptionally protracted, time consuming and frustrating (for all). Reasons included the need for 'support letters' and particularly from government, with seemingly little interest in responding (but did after a year or so of chasing). Changes also occurred to the project design (which flowed through to the budget) and while these amendments weren't rejected they also weren't integrated into CEPF systems and were picked up much later. The various supporting application documents on 'community impacts' etc meant this was an extremely process heavy grant, many times greater than that of similar sized grants from other

donors. None of this materially changed/improved the quality or effectiveness of the grant and while I don't know what the specifics are to improve the process it has to be striking a balance between 'information' and CEPF understanding the place in which these grants take place and the organizations/individuals it is engaging to deliver them (i.e. they have a proven track record or some such history that means CEPF can be confident they're going to deliver on the aims of the grant and that this is commensurate with the grant size).

- Slow internet makes the process very, very challenging.
- Provide regular updates about timeline/process
- Make the process much shorter and easier for local organizations.
- Processing a number of grantees at a time is time consuming. If you treat the applicants phase by phase with frequent/intensive contact and timelines you may get things done in a shorter period of time.
- The process has too many sheets and data to fill in.
- Make it more user friendly so that grantees and subgrantees can easily manipulate the projects that they implement and easily communicate with project management.
- Proposal and EOI assessment should be given to qualified reviewers with sufficient knowledge about the region and project itself. Thus, their assessment can be acceptable by applicants with fair treatment and justification.
- The process is too long.
- The ConservationGrants platform has bugs.

Positive comments:

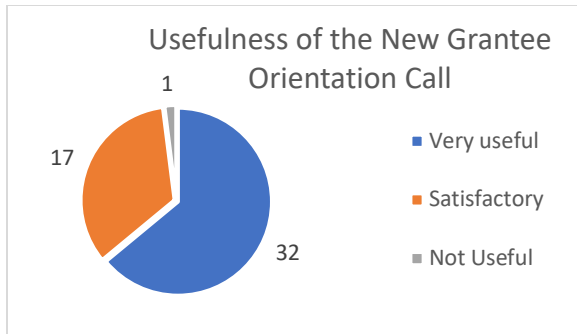
- Proposal process very efficient, simple and easy.
- Staff are competent.
- Staff are helpful.
- The process is excellent but long and detailed.
- Everything is satisfactory, especially the online system and the staff.
- The current budget Excel was helpful for our subsequent proposal.

## **2. Administration**

This section included six questions pertaining to the administrative elements of grant implementation such as orientation upon grant approval, guidance on financial reporting, procurement and financial procedures, utility of financial site visits and follow-up. The responses to all questions pointed to high satisfaction with the quality of administrative supervision, with comments pointing to competency of staff and quality of support.

### **2a. Administration: How would you rate the usefulness of the New Grantee Orientation call?**

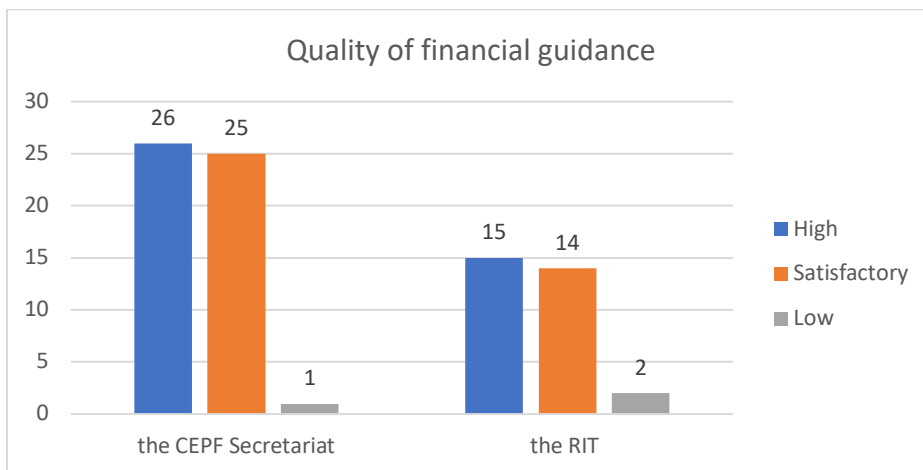
The New Grantee Orientation call is a quarterly conference call that all large grantees are required to attend. The agenda includes introductions to reporting requirements, financial management, procurement, communications, and a range of other information on CEPF policies and procedures. Calls are held in English, French, Malagasy, Portuguese and Spanish. Of the four respondents who said the call was Not Useful, three were from Eastern Afromontane and one was from Wallacea.



One respondent commented that they could not participate due to language.

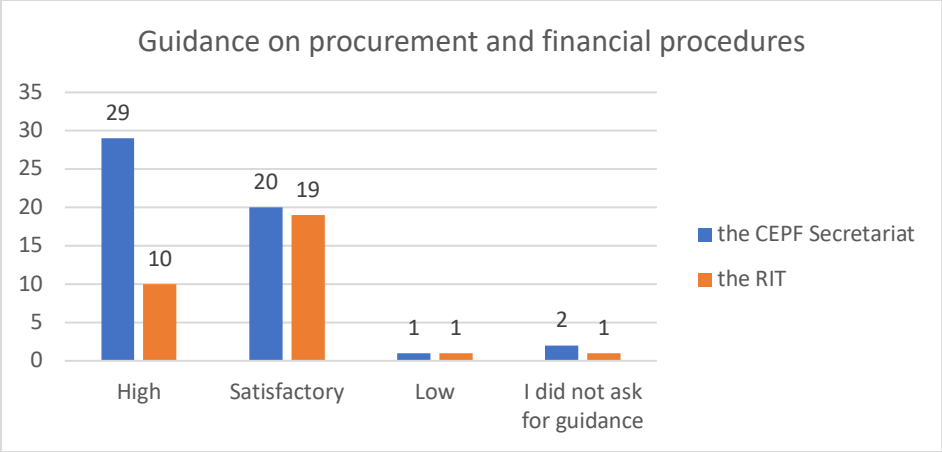
**2b. Administration: How would you rate the quality of guidance provided for completing financial and detailed financial transaction reports?**

Respondents were very satisfied (96%) with the quality of guidance on financial procedures. No comments were received specific to this question.



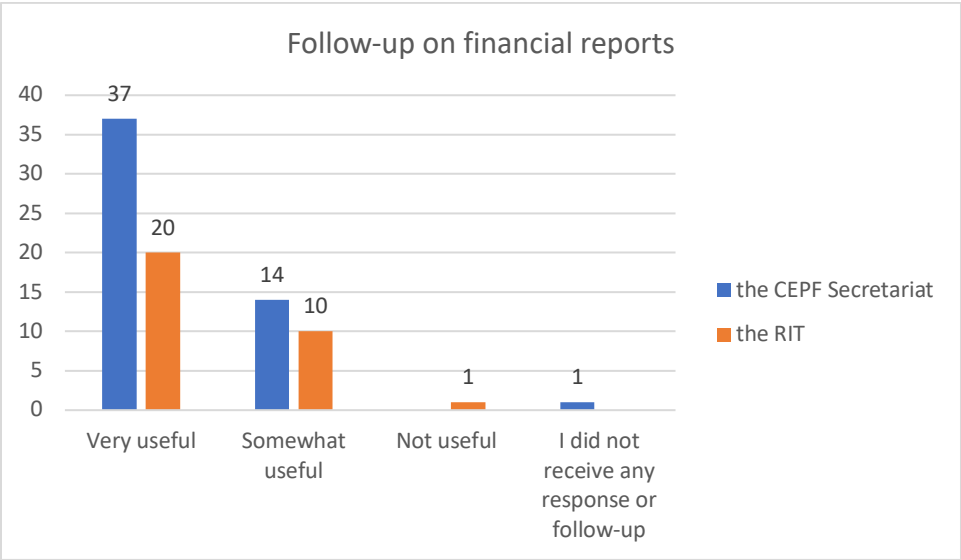
**2c. Administration: How would you rate the quality of guidance provided on procurement and other financial procedures?**

While 93% of respondents rated guidance on procurement and financial procedures as Satisfactory or High, several comments were received about the need for more training in financial management.



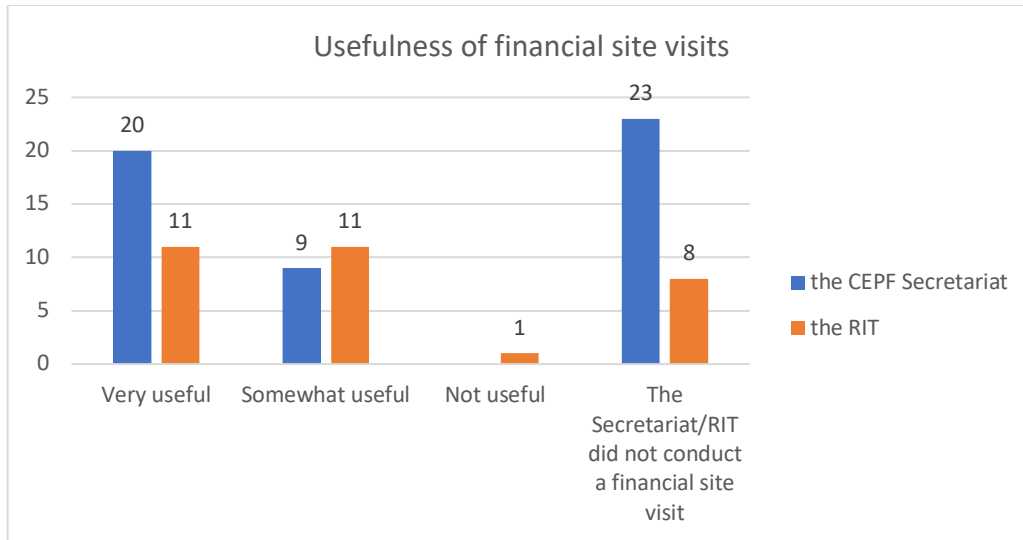
**2d. Administration: How would you rate the response and follow-up to the financial reports that you submitted?**

The vast majority (97%) of grantees rated follow-up on financial reports as Somewhat or Very Useful.



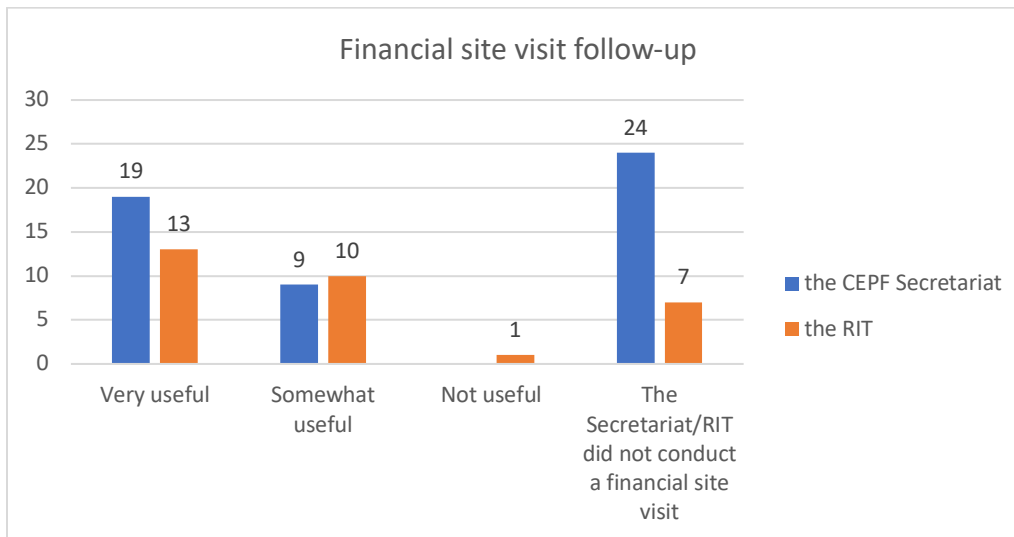
**2e. Administration: If your project received a financial site visit, how would you rate the usefulness of the visit?**

Site visits, when they took place, were found to be Somewhat Useful or Very Useful. Notably, 31 of 83 respondents (37%) did not receive a financial site visit. While several grantees stated that more financial site visits would be welcome, it should be clarified that financial site visits are not scheduled for each grantee, rather, CEPF selects grantees to visit based on risk and amount of allocation.



**2f. Administration: If your project received a financial site visit, how would you rate the follow-up that took place?**

98% of grantees reported that financial site visit follow-up was Very Useful or Somewhat Useful.



**2g. Please provide any recommendations for how CEPF can improve its administrative supervision.**

Grantees were asked to provide additional comments and recommendations, and these are listed below. These comments have been edited for clarity, and duplicate statements have been consolidated. Comments are provided for the reader’s information, in no particular order or importance.

Observations and recommendations:

- The process is extremely bureaucratic with excessive requirements.

- It is a good idea for all grantees to have the opportunity to attend financial management training.
- Need to carry out financial assistance directly to partner institutions.
- Simplify the funds transfer administration system.
- We were unable to disburse all the funds received (problem with report review and approval).
- Regular emails from country coordinators, and face to face visits to grantees would be helpful.
- Capacity building is needed.
- Ensure there is follow-up and training; our grant did not receive any.
- The Secretariat/RIT should conduct site visits to get views regarding the grant applications before they can make a final decision as to whom shall receive the funding.
- Conduct site visits, especially financial site visits.
- Have additional staff on hand during peak times.
- Support grantees to visit each other, and share administrative experiences.
- It would have been helpful list the required elements for the detailed financial report.
- CEPF did not always respond to our requests and inquiries. This is possibly due to the change in administrative staff during our project.
- In the last call we received two grants from CEPF (one small and one large), the large grant managed by CEPF secretariat is professionally managed however the small grant managed by the RIT is managed incredibly slowly and communication is not well maintained.
- The issue of submitting reports online has caused us regret repeatedly because perhaps the server becomes saturated or what happened to us is that we changed the administrative monitoring manager several times.
- Hold scheduled meetings.
- We really need assistance from the RIT, but sometimes due to time constraints we need more direct assistance from CEPF than the RIT. Procurement and financial assistance was once offered through a teleconference, but due to language problems we could not participate.
- In the context of financial management assistance, it is necessary to pay attention to differences in prices in each partner's working area, which due to geographical factors makes operational costs more (or less) than in other regions.

Positive comments:

- The guidance and procedures provided are completely adequate. the rest is up to the grant recipient.
- There is useful dialog and CEPF is open to discussing views and opinions, thereby allowing mutual understanding, particularly about financial issues.
- Staff are excellent.
- Regular communication with CEPF/RIT has been really useful.
- The administrative support is very good.
- The RIT / CEPF Secretariat have been very proactive in providing assistance both directly and via email / telephone.
- Communication regarding financial management has been easy.

### **3. Technical Supervision**

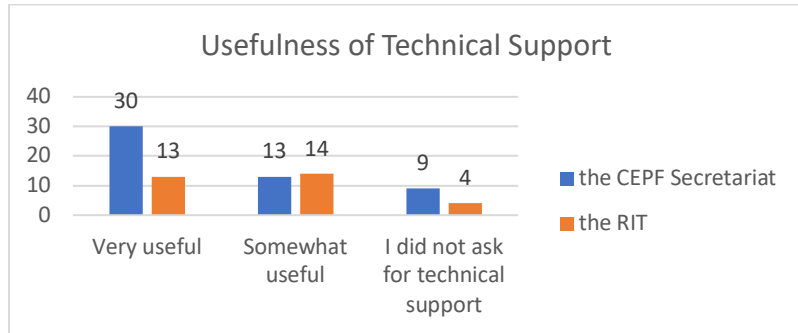
This section covered matters relating to technical supervision, including quality of support; usefulness of programmatic site visits and follow-up; and guidance provided on monitoring and evaluation, gender issues and safeguards. While respondents were for the most part very positive about technical support, site visits, guidance on technical reporting, monitoring and evaluation, and support for partnerships,



several areas for improvement came to light. Specifically, grantees reported that information/training for gender issues and safeguards could be improved. Additionally, while grantees generally found follow-up to site visits to be useful, 10% of grantees reported no follow-up, pointing to an area where CEPF could improve its practices.

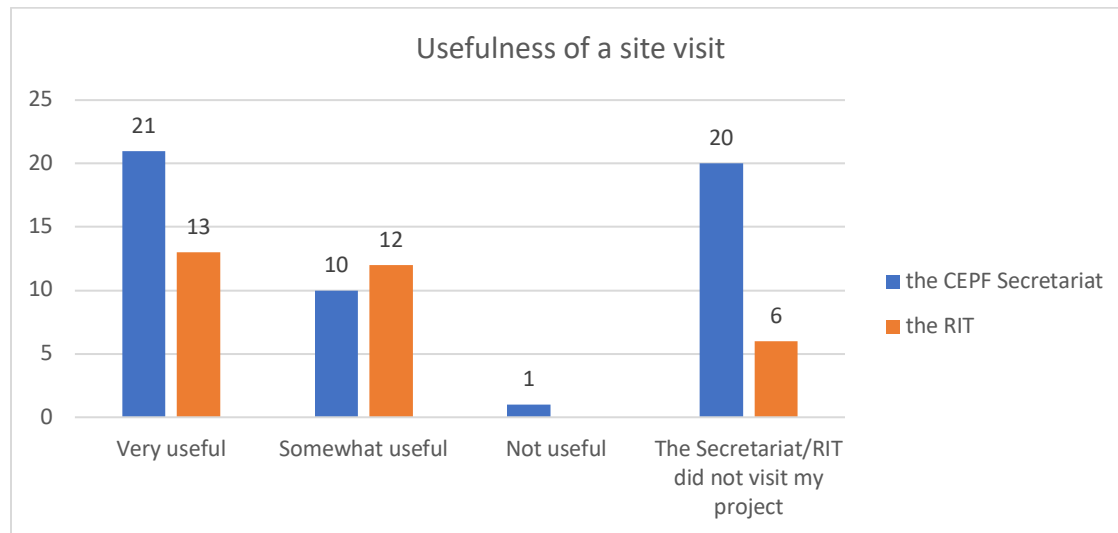
**3a. Technical supervision: how would you rate the usefulness of CEPF's technical support during project implementation?**

100% of survey respondents who either received or requested support praised the technical support they received during their projects but made the point that more is needed. Thirteen grantees did not ask for technical support.



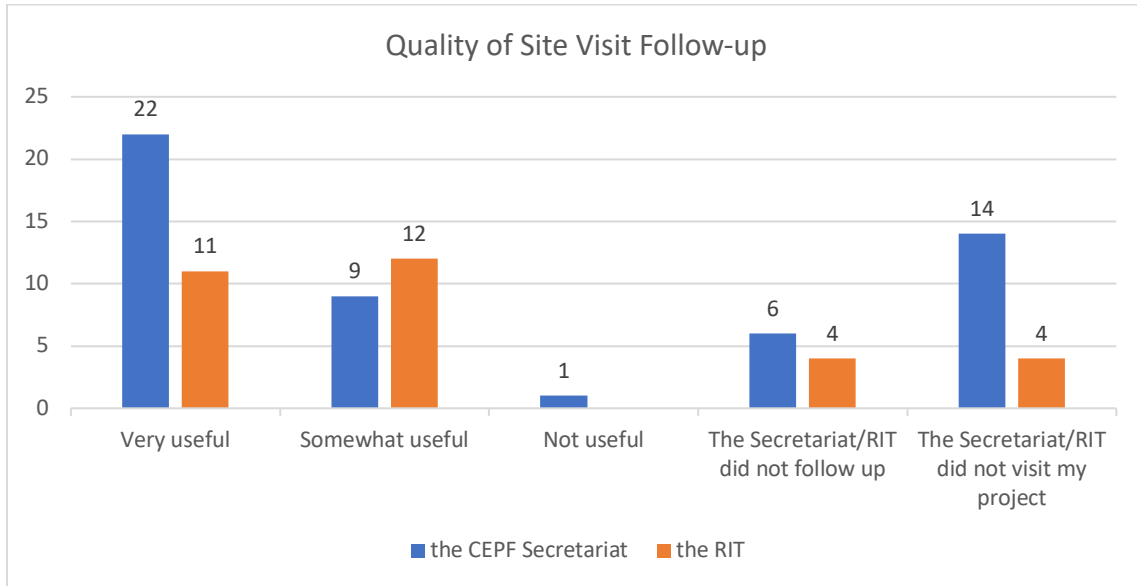
**3b. Technical supervision: How would you rate the usefulness of a site visit by the Secretariat or RIT?**

As with financial site visits, grantees appreciate programmatic site visits, with 98% of grantees who received a visit stating the visits were Very Useful or Somewhat Useful. Several comments were received stating that grantees appreciated the visits and would like more of them. A total of 31% did not receive a programmatic site visit.



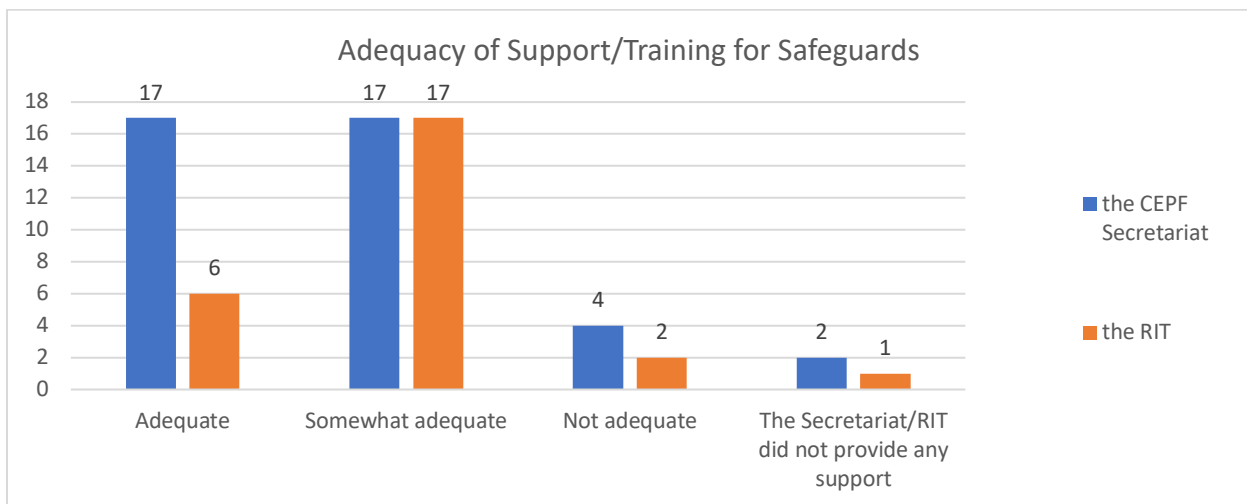
**3c. Technical supervision: How would you rate the quality of follow-up after a site visit?**

For the most part, grantees were satisfied with the level of follow-up from site visits when they occurred, but notably 10 grantees (15%) reported receiving no follow-up.



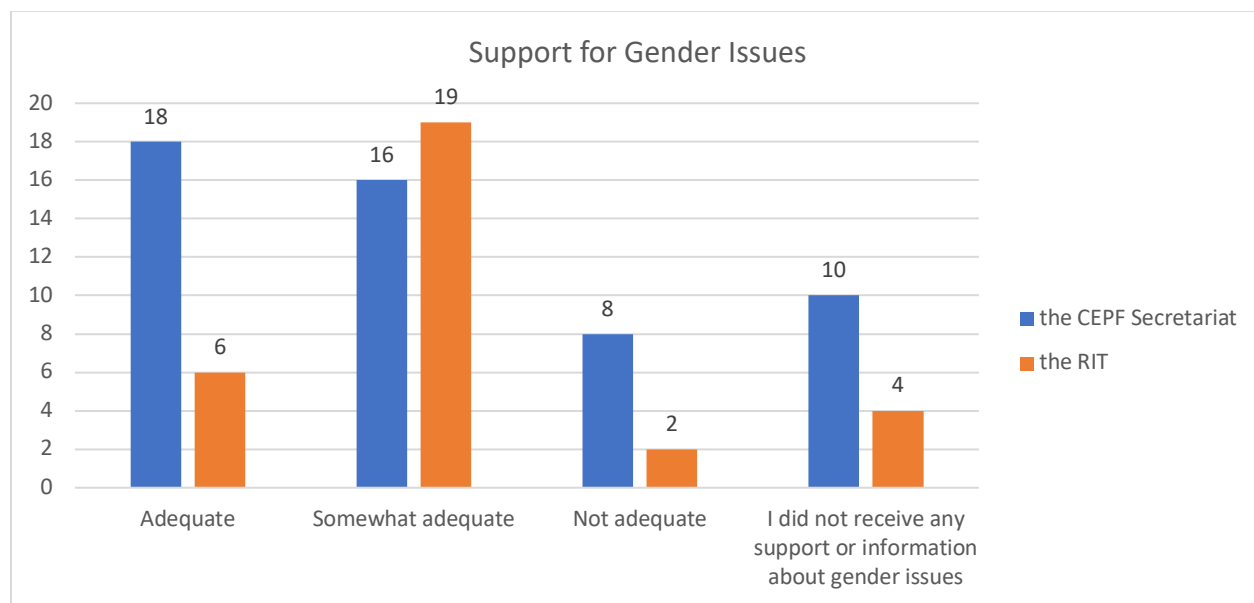
**3d. Technical supervision: How adequate was the support/training provided for Environmental and Social Safeguards?**

Fifty-seven respondents (68%) reported that support provided for safeguards was Adequate or Somewhat Adequate, with six stating that it was Not Adequate. From the responses received indicating 10% of respondents either did not receive training or found it to lacking, CEPF can conclude that more and better support/training on social and environmental safeguards would be an improvement.



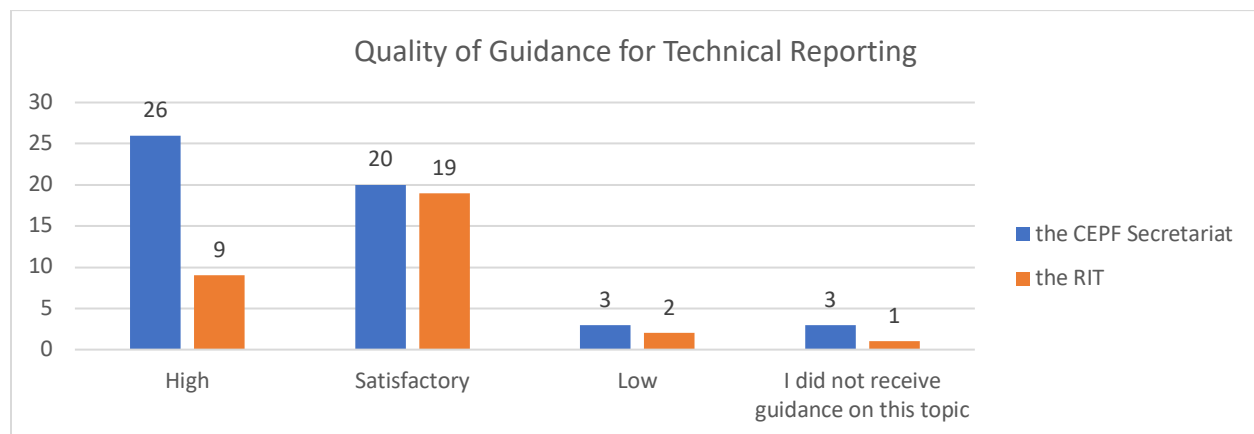
**3e. Technical supervision: How adequate was the support/information provided for gender issues?**

Noting that any support for gender issues prior to 2018 would have been dependent on the knowledge of the individual grant director or RIT staff, as this was when CEPF finalized and launched its Gender Toolkit, overall, respondents gave varied reviews of support for this topic. Going forward, with availability of the Gender Toolkit as well as trainings provided to Secretariat and RIT staff, this should improve.



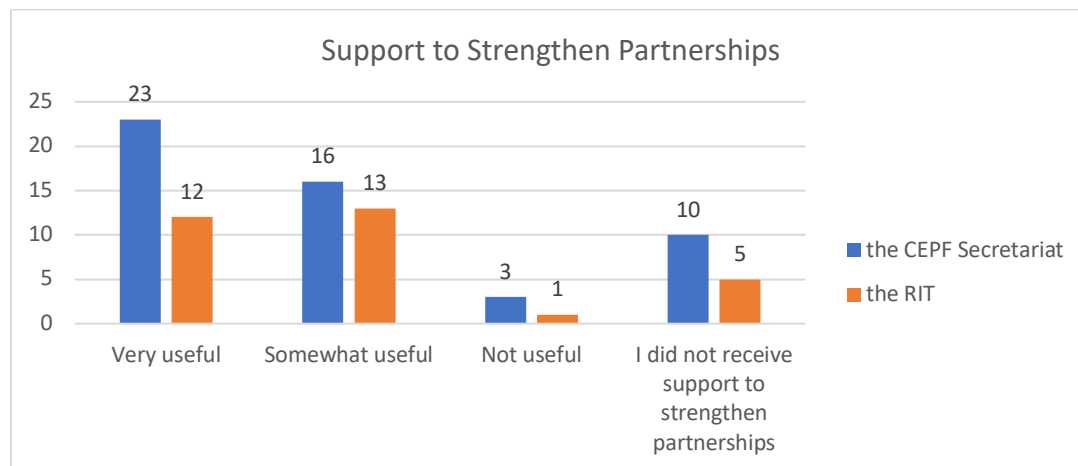
**3f. Technical supervision: How would you rate the quality of guidance provided for preparing the project's programmatic reports (including progress reports, technical reports, CSTT, GTT, Impact report and Final Completion Report)?**

Most respondents (89%) regarded guidance for reporting to be Satisfactory or High, and this was supported by comments stating that the technical support was valuable and high quality. While satisfaction was high, grantees expressed a desire for more technical training and guidance.



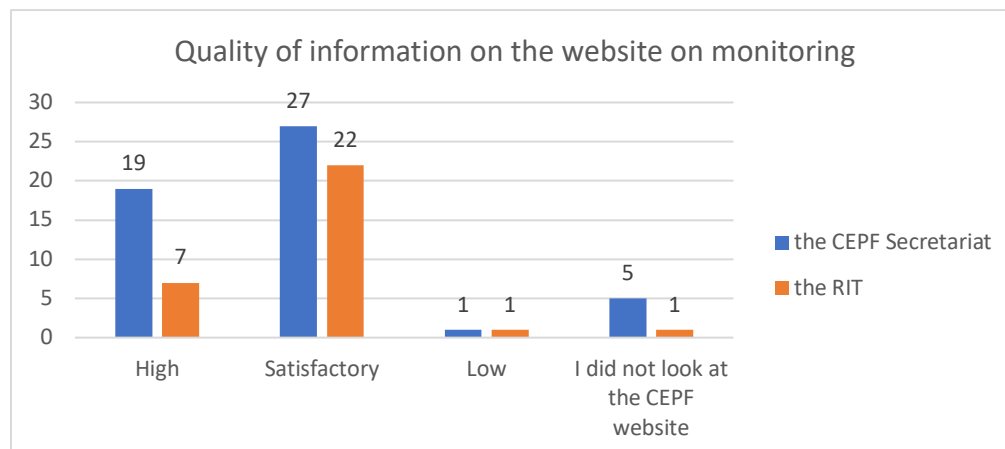
**3g. Technical supervision: How would you rate the support you received to strengthen partnerships with other projects doing similar work?**

Of those respondents receiving support to strengthen partnerships, 94% reported that it was Very Useful or Somewhat Useful. No comments were received specifically related to this topic.



**3h. Technical supervision: How would you rate the quality of information on www.cepf.net with regard to impact, and monitoring and evaluation?**

Of those respondents that did look at the website, 97% found the quality of information to be High or Satisfactory. No comments were received specifically related to this topic.



**3i. Please provide any recommendations for how CEPF can improve its technical supervision.**

Grantees were asked to provide additional comments and recommendations, and these are listed below. These comments have been edited for clarity, and duplicate statements have been consolidated. Comments are provided for the reader’s information, in no particular order or importance.

Observations and recommendations:

- Systems are far too complex.
- The technical components sought by CEPF were of limited relevance to the focus of the project (as agreed through the LOI etc). If a more nuanced granting/reporting process was possible this would avoid unnecessary administrative commitments and increase efficiencies (for all).

- Need more orientation workshop where community partners and technical supervisors to work together to make it more meaningful.
- Develop on-site trainings for communities.
- Aim for more timely disbursement of funds.
- The secretariat/RIT should visit all projects to verify the progress being made and recommend any improvements, if necessary.
- Technical supervision is very important especially for local organizations, because these smaller local organizations do not have the technical capacity they need, and they require guidance. CEPF should have a full time person in-country, with the capacity and funding to engage these smaller local NGOs/community associations with technical know-how and experience, otherwise the chance for success is very minimal.
- Support to establish partnerships with groups doing similar work elsewhere was too weak. It would be good to arrange site visits to share experiences and best practices.
- Reduce the technical jargon.
- Based in the supervision of the Secretariat or RIT, it would be good to implement some remedial actions to accomplish the remaining activities. It would also be good to think of future project activities to maintain the status of the hotspot.
- Field visits by the RIT every three months to monitor projects would be preferable.
- Gender mainstreaming and social safeguards should be well oriented to the partners.
- We found the safeguards to be onerous.
- More time should be spent on technical supervision and site visits.
- I only received training in Conservation Grants, but it would be opportune to also receive training in gender, safeguards and other topics.
- CEPF should hold workshops and meetings to share experiences between projects.
- CEPF should have periodic meetings to understand project progress, and to advise on advances or areas that need correction.
- Spend more time on technical supervision.
- Need to have both genders represented to go to the field to improve the intervention and the monitoring.
- Assistance is needed, and could be further extended, such as: 1) a day at the institution's office to hear stories about the implementation of the program with its various difficulties; 2) days for field visits to meet groups and see the results of work and 3) a day to submit the results of the visit and identify recommendations for project progress.
- Together with partners generate more information about the root causes of threats to each KBA in relation to ecological, social and economic aspects so that it can give birth to a solution that can truly reduce threats to biodiversity.
- We are entering the second phase of the program, and need assistance in terms of policy technical advocacy.
- Provide an opportunity for partners to provide feedback.

Positive comments:

- During our grants we always received guidance on any bottlenecks from both the Secretariat and the RIT. When issues arise we are given guidance, and instructions to address these issues so that we have been able to move forward.
- Things are satisfactory; keep them the way they are.
- The idea of having the Regional Implementation Team to frequently provide technical support is excellent. The CEPF Secretariat is equally very support and greatly appreciated.

- In my opinion, until now the programmatic program management assistance method has been quite good, and will continue to be strengthened in the future.
- It is very good.

#### 4. Capacity Building

This part of the survey aimed to generate perspectives about CEPF’s efforts to build capacity at the level of the individual as well as the organization. This question could be perceived as duplicating other parts of the survey, e.g., the New Grantee Orientation Call, or site visits. Thus, the questions could have been better phrased; regardless, the breadth of comments received help to elucidate grantees’ thoughts on this topic.

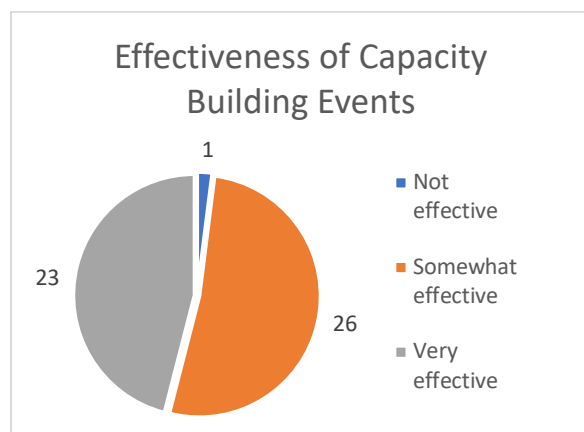
Overall, grantees reported that the capacity-building activities that they were involved in were 98% effective, and 78% rated CEPF’s efforts to build capacity at the organizational level as effective. Grantees expressed appreciation for capacity-building opportunities and were keen to see more offered.

##### 4a. Capacity Building: Did you receive any capacity building or training during your project?

Of the 83 respondents, 51 received some form of capacity building during their project while 32 did not.

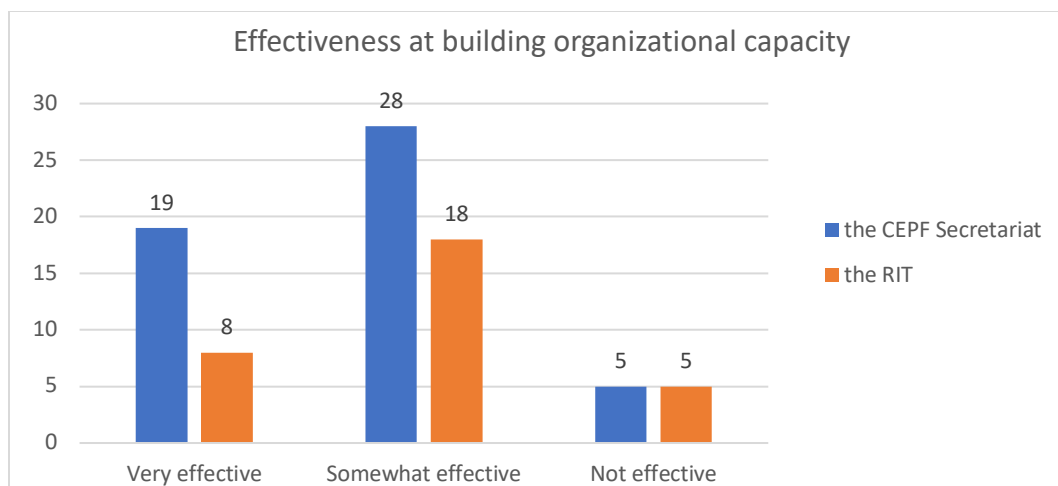
##### 4b. Capacity Building: If you participated in any of capacity building workshops or events organized by CEPF or the Regional Implementation Team, how would you rate their effectiveness?

Of the 51 respondents who reported to have received some form of training, all except one reported these events to be Very Effective or Somewhat Effective. At the same time, suggestions and recommendations about the need for more capacity-building events and efforts abounded in the survey. Grantees want more training on financial and program management, as well as on other topics. Training in-person (via site visits) was also mentioned as a priority.



##### 4c. Capacity Building: How would you rate CEPF's efforts to build your organization’s capacity?

As mentioned in the previous question, there is a great demand for additional capacity-building efforts from CEPF. Numerous grantees mentioned the importance of improving governance and institutional strengthening, implying that CEPF could expend more effort in this area. Even so, 78% of grantees reported CEPF’s efforts to be either Very Effective or Somewhat Effective.



#### 4d. Please provide any recommendations for how CEPF can improve its capacity building.

Grantees were asked to provide additional comments and recommendations, and these are listed below. These comments have been edited for clarity, and duplicate statements have been consolidated. Comments are provided for the reader's information, in no particular order or importance.

##### Observations and recommendations:

- More learning exchange visits would be useful.
- We would appreciate and value any future or potential trainings around conservation and project management for organizational development. This would be very relevant to local NGOs/ community associations, and providing capacity to these groups would be high priority. These groups are inexperienced and the lack of knowledge of donor finance/reporting requirements and processes). It is a high priority that training is provided to these smaller local organizations to better understand and build capacity within these organization to meet their donor responsibilities
- There was no effective CEPF representative in our country throughout the project.
- Funding should allow for a training component for grantees to use for training activities.
- Capacity building as per the needs of the applicants and communities working with the project is so limited. Thus, need-based capacity building should be highly encouraged by CEPF during project implementation.
- Capacity building is needed in project management, financial management, project reporting and planning. (donor reports, workplans), fundraising and proposal development.
- Allow grantees to receive funds directly for capacity building activities with subgrantees.
- Conduct trainings for communities and research institutions.
- Different donors use different reporting systems and it would be helpful for CEPF to include financial staff in the capacity trainings or better still include financial/administrative staff when training project/technical staff on project design/ management and reporting to improve on reporting requirements and modalities.
- We did not know that any capacity building opportunities existed.
- Hold meetings by region so that grantees can exchange experiences and discuss approaches to interventions.
- Relevant capacity building should be provided to implementing partners in order to ensure quality of the project deliveries.

- The capacity of the RIT should be improved.
- To increase the capacity, sufficient time needs to be allocated to help the partners.
- Capacity building must be more on organizational development and institutional strengthening.
- Capacity building on forest cover monitoring would be helpful.
- Capacity building for partners should more targeted.
- Hold capacity building workshops.
- Capacity building is indeed preceded by assessment of partner organizations to find out the capacity to be improved. The methodology needs to be considered as well as field visits for practical learning in the field.
- Always provide a capacity building program.
- We need training on policy advocacy that can support the synergy and integration of the results we have achieved in the project with the government and other private parties.
- A transparent evaluation system is needed.
- Training is needed 2x per year in program and finance.

Positive comments:

- Part of the funding provided by CEPF has supported building and strengthening local NGOs which has improved their governance and their financial systems.
- It is very effective. We recommend that they keep increasing capacity building events. They are really helpful.
- I received an online training for the using of the online system, which was quite clear and effective.
- Good approach and method, just adjust the time.
- Nothing yet because so far Very effective

### **5. Donor-Grantee Relationship**

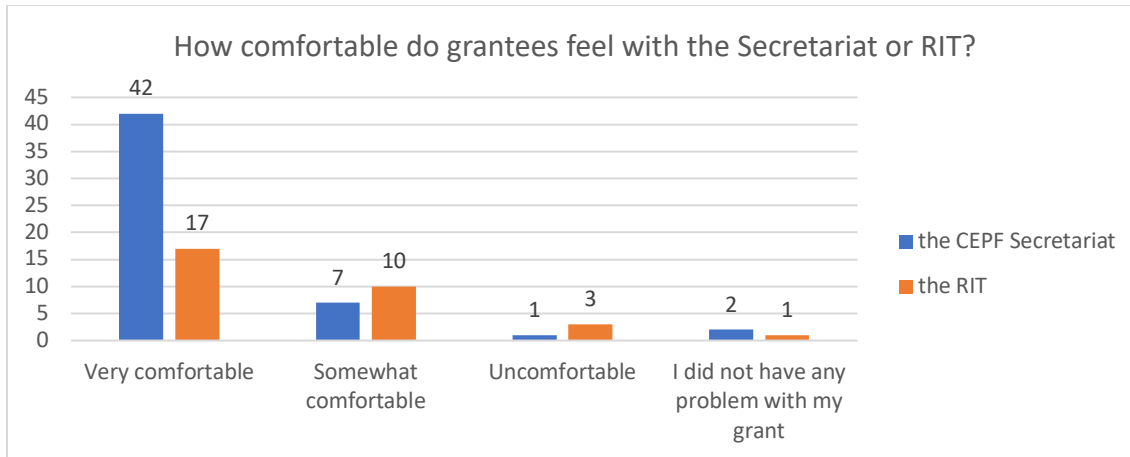
This final section of the survey covered six questions pertaining to grantee comfort level in approaching CEPF about problems, responsiveness and consistency in the messaging, amount of time required to report to donors, impact of any changes in CEPF staffing, and support for communications activities.

Grantees report feeling very comfortable in talking to CEPF, and regard CEPF as being responsive and consistent. Interaction about communications is rated as satisfactory. Overall, grantees praise CEPF for the quality of support and staff.

#### **5a. Donor-Grantee Relationship: How comfortable did you feel approaching CEPF or the RIT if you had a problem with your grant**

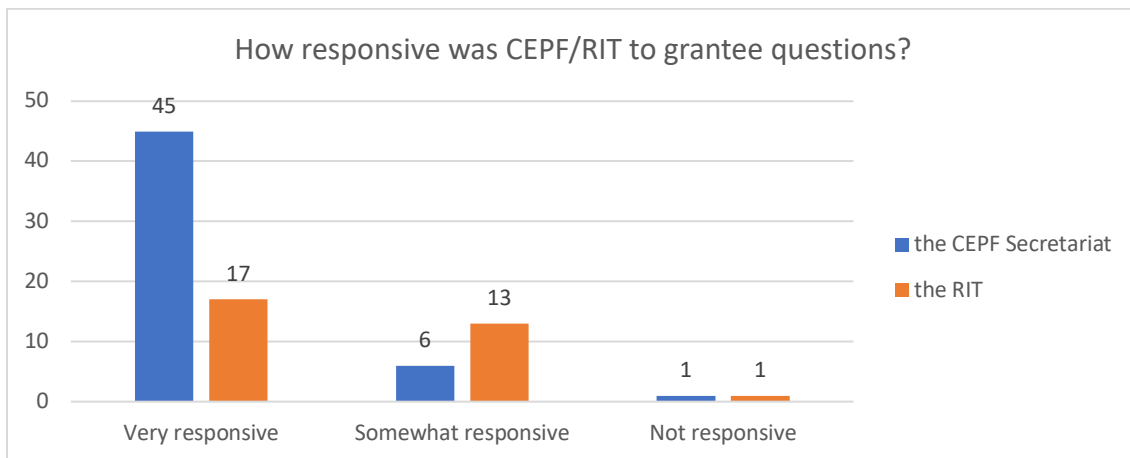
Most grantees (95%) report having a good relationship with the Secretariat and RIT. Staff are praised for being available and competent. Discussion is mentioned as a positive part of the relationship, with time taken to explain issues and talk about problems.





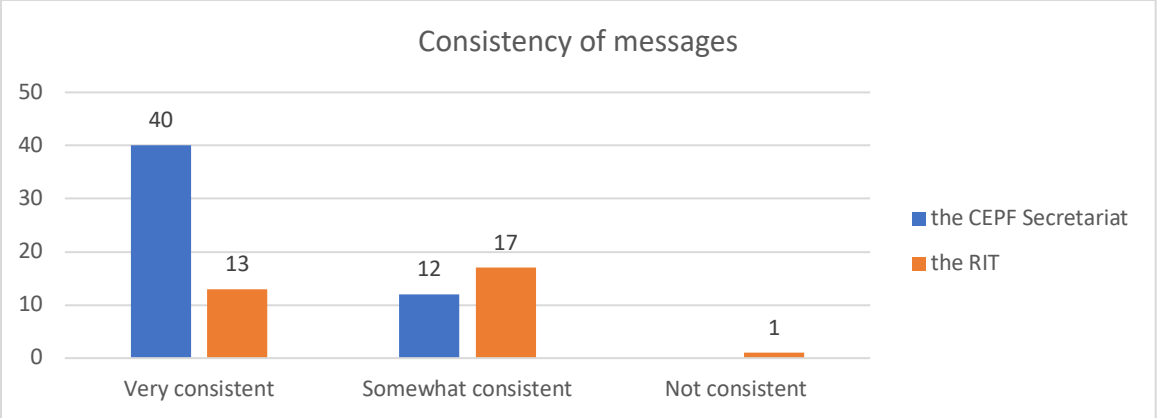
**5b. Donor-Grantee Relationship: Overall, how responsive was CEPF or the RIT to your questions and requests?**

As the graph suggests, both the Secretariat and the RITs are responsive to the needs of grantees.



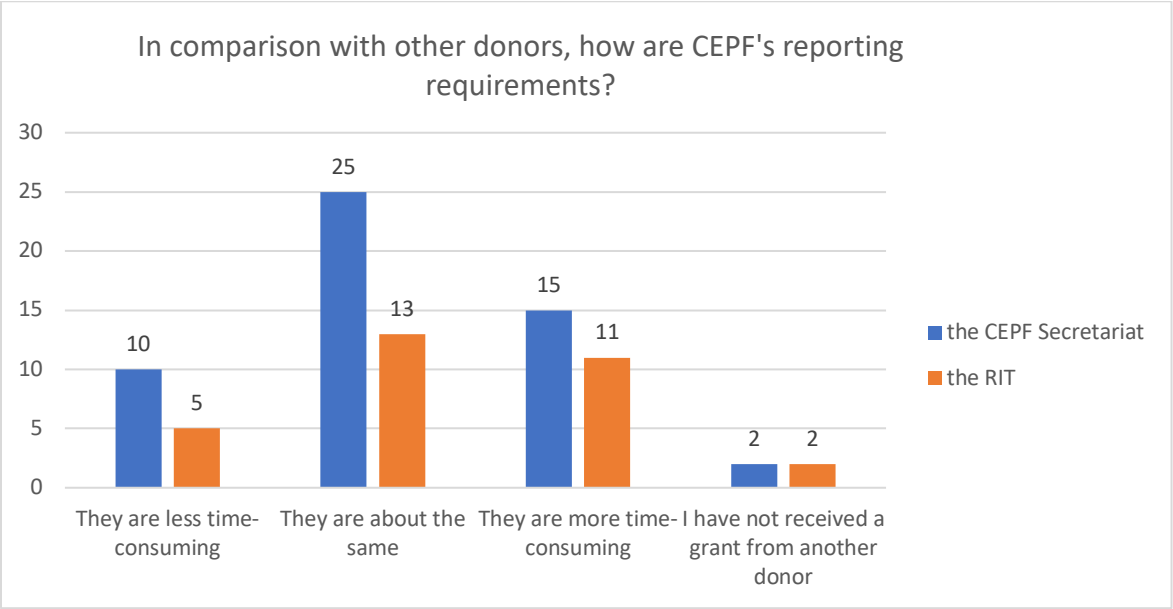
**5c. Donor-Grantee Relationship: How would you rate the consistency of the information and messages that you received?**

99% of grantees described the consistency of messaging to be Very consistent or Somewhat consistent. No specific comments were received on this topic.



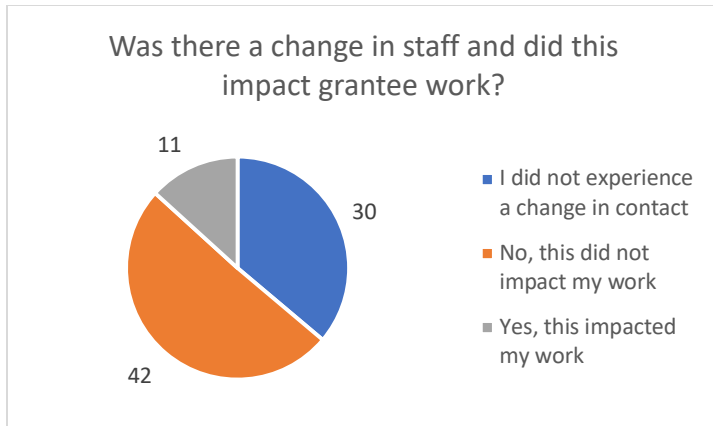
**5d. Donor-Grantee Relationship: In comparison with other donors, how would you rate CEPF's reporting requirements?**

Of the respondents who had received a grant from another donor, 67% reported CEPF's reporting requirements to be Less Consuming or About the Same as other donors. Comments on this topic varied widely, with some grantees describing the reporting requirements as lengthy and tedious, while others found them acceptable. Capacity is often mentioned as a factor in making this determination.



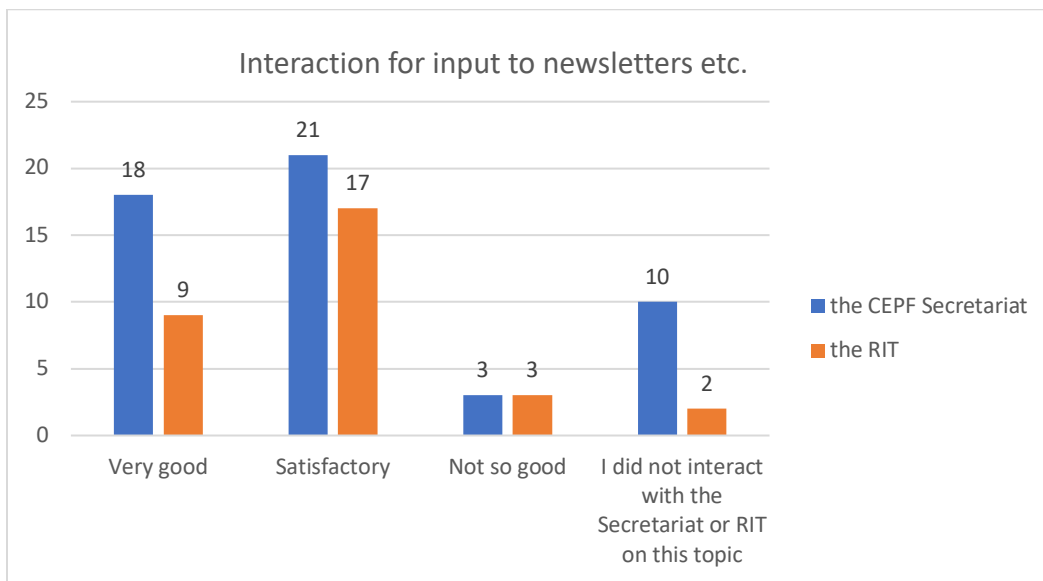
**5e. Donor-Grantee Relationship: Did you experience a change in the CEPF or RIT staff that you worked with, and did this impact your work?**

A total of 53 grantees reported experiencing a change in Secretariat or RIT staffing during their, with 11 (20%) stating this impacted their work. Several comments were also received in various sections of the survey, mentioning that a delay in communication might have occurred due to a staff change.



**5f. Donor-Grantee relationship: How would you rate your relationship with the Secretariat or RIT in terms of providing inputs for the CEPF newsletter or social media stories, or receiving support for your own communications activities?**

Most grantees (78%) report their interaction on this topic to be Very Good or Satisfactory. Many grantees had something to say about communications with the takeaway being that CEPF could improve its procedures by having better contact with grantees about their projects.



**5g. Please provide any recommendations for how CEPF can improve its Donor-Grantee Relationships.**

Grantees were asked to provide additional comments and recommendations, and these are listed below. These comments have been edited for clarity, and duplicate statements have been consolidated. Comments are provided for the reader’s information, in no particular order or importance.

Observations and recommendations:

- The systems could be improved. The ConservationGrants introduction wasn't a good experience; time was wasted in accessing and using it. The online platform has problems retaining data that has been entered (i.e. it's lost). This is an issue where internet access is unreliable.

- More visits to grantees to monitor their progress.
- Much more hands on time in country is required.
- I experienced some delays in communication or responses. So, it needs to be improved.
- My contact persons were excellent. The reporting process was horrible, but they got me through it with patience.
- Grantees should automatically be added to the CEPF Newsletter mailing list.
- CEPF should ensure deliberate and timely requests for submission of articles or stories for the newsletter.
- Grantees are provided with a place in the CEPF website, but it is not clear on how the grantee can update their page. Hence guidance should be provided on how to update the page as well as provide updates for any other social media and communication platforms.
- CEPF should think about large regional partnerships.
- Give more emphasis to activities on the ground, instead of the large amount of paperwork that makes donors happy.
- Many of our messages and material for the CEPF newsletter got lost, or we had to send it numerous times. Even now we do not know if some of our material arrived.
- We have not communicated well with CEPF about communications materials, so we need to improve, as should CEPF.
- Some of CEPF's decisions are very centralized; it might be good to give a little more independence to the RIT so they can take technical and administrative decisions.
- In the future, it is also necessary to meet with a face to face meeting.
- During the project period, it is hoped that CEPF will facilitate partners and communities to exchange experiences, especially partners who work in the same elementary school and have the same issues.
- CEPF and/or the RIT could provide assistance (or provide legal assistance) to help partners advocate policy.
- To maintain focus in the region, there should be a continuous meeting between the partners to get the latest information about the hotspot, so that after the project period is finished there remains a good relationship and sustainability.
- CEPF and the RIT can connect us with other donors who can support the sustainability of the program.
- There needs to be a web site specifically for success stories with information from all partners.

Positive comments:

- The relationships are positive.
- We have a good relationship with the Secretariat and RIT, and they are always making sure our email queries are answered and checking and making sure our project activities are up and running.
- CEPF is an excellent donor. Nothing to improve. Build on the same approach.
- The response from staff was quite immediate and the communication between us was quite clear.
- So far the method and method of relations have been very good.

**6. Additional Grantee Comments**

The following two questions capture the general perception of survey respondents on their experiences as CEPF grantees. While CEPF receives a high score, grantees have plenty to say about their experiences and what they would like to see in the way of changes and improvements.

## 6a. How would you rate your overall experience as a CEPF grantee?

On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being Extremely Negative and 7 being Extremely Positive, CEPF received an average score of 5.9.

## 6b. Is there anything else that you would like to tell CEPF about your experience as a grantee?

- CEPF was flexible to project changes, which was important to our results. Administrative reports take longer than for other funders, some seemed duplicate / repeated, Portuguese, English, within the system, outside the system (word). The experience exchange workshop was great, and this questionnaire could have been applied to it - as it became another questionnaire I had to fill out after the grant was completed. One thing that may be important for institutions that do not have their own financial manager is to include one in the project budget as financial reporting can lead to complications. Overall, my opinion about CEPF is very positive.
- CEPF is an extremely important donor and their geographical and investment focus means valuable outcomes are targeted (that are otherwise difficult to secure funding for or just not available).
- Need to give opportunity for more community to engage in conservation through this grant.
- We are grateful to have CEPF supporting community conservation activities and will always appreciate CEPF in all its meetings and events as one of its main donor partners delivering conservation outcomes in our hotspot.
- Had mutual respect and especially getting to know the culture of the community.
- RIT are very nice people doing their best and we are very grateful for their assistance. But RIT are overworked as are most grantees. Insufficient monitoring of different grant applications meant that there was huge confusion in communities as 2 orgs were doing similar work to each other. The spreadsheets could easily be much improved so that they are consistent with small and large grants and could be used for budgeting and reporting too. With a little thought there could be just one spreadsheet. This would be a huge help. Grants are far too inflexible, the 15% needs to be increased to 25% and amendments need to be processed far faster.
- Continue to fund the small grant recipient so they can continue the work to realize the goals in a longer term.
- Keep up. Please continue the funding. Please keep it as it is for Civil Society. Without CEPF biodiversity conservation will be a huge challenge. Bring in more partners and increase the funding.
- You did great work in identifying the hotspots and in allocating funds to conserve these sensitive areas. However, a lot remains. Still there is more pressure in these areas. You need to come back. I am so happy to work with you.
- Keep going! Despite even bigger challenges! I always felt well supported by RIT.
- Thank you very much. We look forward to working together in the future.
- Working with CEPF has improved our capacity to design and implement, impact-oriented conservation projects. We are thankful for this support and it has been really helpful. We are glad to work with a good donor like CEPF.
- Although overall, it all went very well I would rather consider other granting agencies simply because of the horrible reporting for this grant. It is confusing, time-consuming, complicated and too detailed in terms of listing every expenditure right down to buying 5 dollar supplies etc instead of lumping costs under categories. This level of detail really does not seem necessary.
- Keep up the good work!

- I would appreciate future opportunities to take part in events for exchange of lessons learned among CEPF grantees and also to benefit from such engagement to establish new partnerships and linkages with them. Hence, CEPF contributed positively and largely to enhancing our organisation institutionalisation of bioinformatics as a unit. Now we have better capacity to further develop our product and to scale it up or replicate it in other critical ecosystems or countries.
- Our first experience working with CEPF was in 2015 when we were awarded a Small Grant and in 2016, we had an opportunity to implement a project under the Large Grant. Our relationship from the CEPF Secretariat to the RIT has been great and greatly appreciated. The experience in project management particularly the guidance we received to have realistic outputs and project design in general is something to remember in our conservation journey. The use of the grant portal for reporting was a great experience and a great innovation to not only promote efficiency, but also contributing to the conservation agenda by reducing the use of paper. The grant portal is a great piece of work. The dedication and continued support from CEPF was great. Please keep up the good work.
- Nothing else, if not to accept our request for funding of the 2nd phase of the project to allow the beneficiaries to honor the commitments made on the ground.
- Good experiences for conservation capacity building and support to local communities to protect the endangered species.
- Please continue support on species conservation as they are unlikely to have many supports from other donors. Providing supports to government counterpart is one of the successful story.
- CEPF play key role in supporting the species conservation in this biodiversity hot spot, please continue play this key role.
- We highly valued the flexible support and strong relationship with the CEPF team over the grant period. We hope we can continue to find opportunities to work together in future.
- If possible, it will be good to provide technical support on activities implementation.
- For this vision of sustainable development, it would be better to broaden the areas of grant activity, and facilitate the management of large grants at the regional team level.
- I was very happy with the way the project was handled and have no complaints. My only suggestion is to think about including a component within the grants for drafting the Hotspot Ecosystem Profiles to improve the information base upon which the subsequent grants will be made. E.g. if there is little information available on the status and distribution of species in a Hotspot it would be useful to obtain this information as part of the profiling process itself, making the information base stronger for creating the Strategic Directions and Investment Priorities.
- We greatly appreciated the work with CEPF / RIT and especially the flexibility of these procedures, its instant responsiveness to respond and meet our demands.
- Strengthen the payment or reimbursement scheduling system to avoid delays and financial gaps of projects. Reduce proposal review time to avoid financial gaps and take advantage of conservation opportunities in the field in a timely manner.
- We will continue applying to CEPF.
- Just to thank for this important support they have given us, which contributed significantly to the preservation of our key area for biodiversity and its recognition within local governments, organizations and community.
- Although we are very happy with the support provided by the CEPF team, we believe that the reports took a long time, which meant less time for the work team to implement real field conservation actions, and more time to report. We have experience with many other donors, and, in relation to the amount financed, reports for CEPF took disproportionately longer. On the

other hand, we feel that there is repetition by having so many formats, that it could be simplified and make the work more effective.

- The CEPF & RIT staff clearly care about grantees and their projects. There are some progress report Qs that seem redundant. The partner building with other CEPF grantees was wonderful.
- The story is that remote communication sometimes complicates the project implementation process.
- This project has provided valuable experience to institutions and staff in community development. Various strategies must be made so that the project objectives can be achieved. We are satisfied with this cooperation. However, efforts to improve the quality of institutions need to be improved.
- We hope that CEPF can connect us with its network to expand the impact of our activities through parties (both in the form of socialization or others).
- Very challenging.
- Initially we had no experience at all in the field of conservation, but with the guidance and direction of the RIT it felt sufficient, even RIT could not imagine that we would carry out natural resource protection activities which included in making a country regulation and could shape and turn on re-cultural / customary traditional institutions which function to protect / preserve natural resources. With our grant we can rebuild community trust in the preservation of natural resources for humanity. Thank you CEPF and our RIT.
- Our institution is very grateful for the assistance of the RIT / CEPF Secretariat, especially for financial administration. As an institution that was recently established, we have found the reporting forms to be helpful and we have adopted it as a standard.
- Our experience in running the CEPF grant program has greatly helped us in terms of increasing the capacity of both field and administrative staff. through field assistance, we are able to map problems and encourage finding new innovative approaches to program implementation that have been able to foster support from the government and local communities, there are many things we have found and completed effectively through the CEPF grant program and we have learn a lot from it.
- Our project site was in a distant location. CEPF should ensure that funding is allocated to support fieldwork, especially to reach locations that are quite difficult to get to.
- Having been a recipient of a grant from CEPF is a new learning experience because the projects that have been prepared by CEPF's program management are well structured.
- Sometimes we experience changes in project implementation. What has been planned cannot be realized in the field because there is a change. Changes that occur in the field are given space to be made to the extent that it does not interfere with the project's logical framework. Under these conditions, creativity and new strategies for implementing the project are growing more effective and efficient.
- Our experience is that we are dependent on the expertise of the contracted experts, and therefore our schedule could be delayed when we have to wait for documents to be completed by them. Despite the delays, we feel comfortable in our communications with CEPF/ the RIT. We are motivated to stay focused on implementing and maintaining the quality of activities and outputs, without neglecting our obligation to complete and input program results into documents. This pattern of relationships and mentoring makes us comfortable working, without feeling any pressure, while making us optimistic to ensure that the final program meets the proposal plan.
- Many things that we have institutionally and individually learned through this CEPF project are how to identify biodiversity issues in relationships with communities and offer good and rational solutions.

- Our best experience is that we can have the knowledge and experience in terms of conservation of coastal and marine areas.
- When getting a visit from the RIT the process of contract revision and amendment of the program activities and the budget went very fast.
- As recipients of Small Grants, in addition to funding support we also get capacity building in project management and development of biodiversity conservation methodologies that can be linked to community empowerment.
- Several times were told that our report did not arrive, even though we had sent it; at last we were told a change of staff in charge of project administration. We also experience staff changes in the RIT, and this made project implementation very challenging. Even at the end of the project we were not able to withdraw 100% of the project funds.
- Before the program started we had the opportunity to take part in training on proposal writing. We had the opportunity to consult with the RIT, which was a big help. Site visits by the RIT were not judgemental, but unstead provided input and guidance for us as partners. We also received guidance provided on programmatic and financial reporting, and we had the opportunity to visit other grantees to learn.
- Our first experience is working directly on the issue of the marine ecosystem. And this is an opportunity to learn because our region is an archipelago district with a wider sea area, so we have been given the opportunity to study and work on the issues of the sea and fishermen. Through this project we have new experiences and have had the opportunity to innovate.

## V. CONCLUSION

Although this survey presents a small slice in time, and includes only 83 responses from nine hotspots, it does provide some indications of where the grantees who took the time to complete the survey would like to see improvements. Noteworthy is that this survey was launched in 2018 and was only administered to grantees whose projects closed in FY18 as well as to all grantees in the East Melanesian Islands. Though low, the response rate ( 53%) does provide useful observations about what CEPF is doing well and where CEPF can improve procedures and policies.

Firstly, CEPF can be pleased with the consistent high marks for clarity, utility and quality of experience across the board. All categories that were explored—application process; technical and administrative supervision; capacity building; and overall relationship with the RIT and Secretariat—received extremely positive ratings, and an overall rating of 5.9 out of 7 for grantee experience. Negative responses were few, or absent for some questions. At the same time, grantees were open in their comments, and provided useful observations and recommendations on each theme.

Key points arising from the survey come under three linked areas. These are listed below, as are actions that CEPF can take to address them.

*Capacity building/training:* Grantees were vocal about the importance of capacity building, and their desire to receive more of it on many different levels and topics. Actions that CEPF can take include:

- Be consistent about delivering capacity-building opportunities to all hotspots.
- Deliver capacity building on both individual and organizational levels.
- Ensure that all grantees are aware of capacity-building events/opportunities.
- Improve training materials pertaining to social and environmental safeguards.



- Ensure dissemination of training materials pertaining to gender issues.
- Improve training materials on project management.
- Produce and deliver targeted webinars on specific administrative/financial topics such as procurement, subgrants, minimum financial management requirements, etc.

*Financial/technical guidance:* Grantees were positive about the financial and technical guidance that they received during project implementation and would appreciate receiving more. Receiving this guidance in person was mentioned frequently throughout survey responses. Actions that CEPF can take include:

- Ensure periodic check-ins with grantees to support ongoing progress and assist if there are problem areas grantees would like help with.
- Ensure visits to grantees include review of reporting requirements and provision of guidance, if needed.

*Site visits:* Grantees appreciated both financial and programmatic site visits and found them to be valuable experiences. Grantees want guidance and discussion on how their projects are progressing, and they appreciate the opportunity to talk about the challenges they encounter. They also see site visits as key training opportunities. However, not all grantees received a site visit, with 37% stating they did not have a financial site visit, and 31% stating that they did not have a programmatic site visit. Addressing this request is not a simple matter, as visits require time and money, both of which are in short supply. It is not possible to visit all grantees, and thus visits are selected by considering various factors such as travel time, grantee risk, and grant amount. Nevertheless, some actions can be taken:

- Secretariat and RIT to work together to produce a site visit plan, in order to coordinate and reach more grantees.
- Provide refresher training to RITs on CEPF policies and procedures, to assist them in being able to provide better guidance to the portfolio on the ground.
- Include a “day of training” in financial and programmatic site visit programs.
- Include additional funds in a grantee’s budget to allow attendance at regional events or to meet the Secretariat/RIT in the region when it is not possible for the Secretariat/RIT to visit that grantee’s site.

Additionally, although not a specific question in the survey, grantees did not pass up the opportunity to say how important CEPF is for biodiversity conservation in their countries, and as a source of funds for civil society and in particular organizations with low capacity.

CEPF is committed to listening to grantees, and to improving the grantee experience. Many areas of improvement do not pertain to CEPF policies, rather they relate to how work is planned, how time is scheduled, and how the Secretariat and RIT interact with partners. This survey is a small step in responding to one comment which was “Provide an opportunity for partners to provide feedback”. CEPF is now well on its way to meeting this request and taking action make the fund the best it can be.