

# **FINAL EVALUATION: CONSERVATION PRIORITY- SETTING FOR THE UPPER GUINEA FOREST ECOSYSTEM, WEST AFRICA**

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Introduction & Methodology: .....	3
Methodology: .....	3
Summary of the Project Design .....	4
Assessment of Project Implementation: .....	5
Proposed Deliverables of the Project: .....	5
Assessment of the Implementation of Deliverables:.....	6
Phase I From Building a State of Knowledge to Consensus Conservation Priorities.....	6
Strengths.....	6
Weaknesses .....	7
Phase II From Conservation Priorities to Sustainable Resource Planning.....	8
Strengths.....	9
Weaknesses .....	10
National Steering Processes .....	11
Phase III From National Action to Regional Collaboration.....	12
Stakeholder Participation and Information Dissemination .....	13
CI Challenges .....	14
Disbursement of Funds: .....	15
Assessment of Project Impact: .....	16
Stated Impacts: .....	16
Impacts Achieved to Date: .....	16
Catalytic Impact .....	18
Sustainability:.....	19
Lessons Learned & Missed Opportunities:.....	20
Conclusions & Recommendations for Follow-Up:.....	22
Annex 1: Participant List.....	25
Ghana .....	25
Cote d' Ivoire .....	25
Guinea .....	25
Liberia .....	25
Conservation International – DC.....	25

## **Introduction & Methodology:**

The purpose of this report is to provide a final evaluation of Conservation International's West Africa Priority-Setting Project. Its aim is to determine if the priority-setting process and products adequately lead to the integration of ecosystem-wide biodiversity priorities into regional and national planning throughout the region. In doing so, the evaluation will assess whether the project outputs, as articulated in the original project proposal, were successfully implemented, if there are early signs of success, what valuable lessons might be learned from the project's experiences, and will articulate any recommendations for possible follow-up interventions.

### **Methodology:**

The evaluation took place during the months of September and November of 2001 (unfortunately interrupted by the events of September 11) and involved a three-phased approach. The first, a desk study, was carried out prior to the field work and consisted of a review of the available project documents, the creation of an appropriate evaluation questionnaire for use in field interviews, and the development of a Table of Contents for the final evaluation report. The consultant, Jason Cole, had previously been involved in a GEF desk study of this project and had already conducted interviews of several members of the CI project team. Therefore, the desk study for this report was accomplished over the course of two days. The material review included project information such as the original project proposal, a logical framework design, progress and trip reports from project team members, project implementation reports, final products of the project, and others. To conclude this phase, a detailed plan for the fieldwork to be carried out in Phase II was developed. This plan included the development of a list of key people to be interviewed in the four countries to be visited. The list of participants interviewed is available in Annex 1.

Phase II of the evaluation was planned to include a four-country field visit to Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia. The Ghana portion of this plan was carried out during September 10-17. Unfortunately, the events of September 11 lead Conservation International to request that all field missions return to the US at once. Therefore, the proposed visits to Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia were not carried out according to plan. After receiving additional time from GEF to continue the evaluation, a second trip was carried out and covered Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire. The series of interviews held in each of these countries, together with the review of the projects products and reports, as well as follow-up interviews with members of the CI team resulted in a series of detailed evaluation notes to be used in the drafting of the final evaluation report.

Phase III of the evaluation included the drafting of the final evaluation report based on all information gathered, as well as some follow-up interviews and meetings with CI's West Africa team. This draft report was then circulated among the consultants involved and was revised as needed based on the consensus set of comments. Upon delivery of the final report there will be a 1-2 day debriefing session for the CI team, to be held in Washington, with the aim of ascertaining how the results of the evaluation may be used to further the original impacts proposed by the project and how new projects may be developed to compliment the results of the priority-setting project.

## Summary of the Project Design

The original project design, submitted as a logical framework in the final proposal document, is provided in summary below:

Narrative Summary	Performance Indicators	Means of Verification	Assumptions
<p><b>Goal:</b> Maintenance and restoration of biodiversity of the UG forest ecosystem</p>	<p>1.1 Decreased habitat destruction</p> <p>1.2 Increases in priority areas under restoration and regeneration</p> <p>1.3 Increase in area under conservation</p> <p>1.4 Increase in area under forest cover</p> <p>1.5 Improved protection of threatened wildlife species</p>	<p>1.1.1 Satellite images and aerial photographs (from baseline '99 measured in 5 yr increments)</p> <p>1.2.1 Legislation and policy documents creating zones of restoration and protection</p> <p>1.3.1 Ibid</p> <p>1.4.1 Ibid</p> <p>1.5.1 Population assessment surveys</p>	<p>1 Increased political stability</p> <p>2 Improved political relations across borders</p> <p>3 Countries with thriving economies continue</p> <p>4 Success in institutional reforms currently underway to strengthen PAs in Ghana and RCI</p> <p>5 Success with population and poverty alleviation initiatives</p>
<p><b>Purpose:</b> Actors (government [nat'l, local], donors, ngo's, communities, etc) integrate ecosystem-wide biodiversity priorities into regional and national planning and action.</p>	<p>1.1 Funded projects address priorities of the UG ecosystem</p> <p>1.2 Regional consensus priorities included in NEAP, TFAPs, Biodiversity Strategies</p> <p>1.3 Existing policies strengthened and new policies created that support biodiversity conservation</p> <p>1.4 Increased donor investment in conservation capacity building</p> <p>1.5 Increased coordination and action taking place across borders and regionally</p> <p>1.6 General population reduces actions that have a negative impact on biodiversity and engaged in developing alternatives</p> <p>1.7 National and international media popularize biodiversity threats and opportunities</p>	<p>1.1.1 Donor pledges for new projects</p> <p>1.1.2 Technical and Financial reports</p> <p>1.2.1 Documents renewed or amended to reflect these</p> <p>1.3.1 Legislation and local by-laws</p> <p>1.4.1 Projects supporting human resource development, training and infrastructure</p> <p>1.5.1 Government agreements</p> <p>1.5.2 Information exchange and expert resources shared</p> <p>1.5.3 Regional MOUs and standards</p> <p>1.6.1 Decrease poaching in protected areas</p> <p>1.6.2 Decrease trade in threatened species</p> <p>1.6.3 Increase production from existing agriculture areas</p> <p>1.6.4 Increase acceptance of alternatives (e.g. captive rearing, NTFP cultivation, etc.)</p>	<p>1 Global importance of ecosystem accepted</p> <p>2 Donor buy-in early on</p> <p>3 Documents are "organic" and subject to continuous upgrading</p> <p>4 Countries without NEAPs, TFAPs, Biodiversity Strategies produce them</p> <p>5 Effective links between national and regional process</p> <p>6 Process builds political will</p> <p>7 Stakeholders mobilized by process</p> <p>8 Successful institutional reforms</p> <p>9 Elevation of biodiversity concerns feasible even under political instability</p> <p>10 Threats are internalized</p> <p>11 Alternatives acceptable</p> <p>12 Appropriate traditional practices strengthened and regressive ones abandoned</p>

Narrative Summary	Performance Indicators	MoVs	Assumptions
<b>Project Outputs:</b>			
1 Priority Setting Workshop process carried out and State of Knowledge and consensus on priorities agreed to	1.1 Priority Setting Workshop (to include key stakeholder representatives) carried out in Nov. '99 1.2 Consensus agreements on conservation priorities documented 1.3 Advisory group established contributing periodically by March '99 1.4 State of knowledge documented		
2 Information gathering process established and baseline database created	2.1 Preliminary reports, information releases, and maps in circulation prior to priority setting workshop 2.2 Integrated database of information developed by June '99 and continually updated 2.3 Thematic groups established and operational by April 30 '99		
3 State of knowledge and consensus action recommendations packaged	3.1 Products and information from workshop completed by June '00		
4 Dissemination mechanism established and information disseminated and capacity for use built	4.1 Information published in CDROMs, Maps, and others 4.2 Capacity building needs documented and training implemented		
5 Platform for national and regional level processes in place and operational	5.1 National Steering Committees including (who?) established and meeting by (when?) 5.2 Mechanisms established to enable exchange of info to integration biological, social and economic information		
6 CI West Africa strategy redefined and agreed to	6.1 Refined strategy incorporating Priority Setting information/decisions developed		
7 Monitoring and evaluation mechanism established based on information framework	7.1		

## Assessment of Project Implementation:

### Proposed Deliverables of the Project:

The project, according to the approved project proposal of April 1999, outlined a three-phased approach to the implementation of the project deliverables. The first phase, *From Building a State of Knowledge to Consensus Conservation Priorities*, covered two of the planned outputs defined in the Logical Framework design and was aimed at carrying out the planning and execution of a large scale West Africa Conservation Priority-Setting Workshop. The preliminary work to be done in this phase included tasks such as refining the goals and scope

of the workshop, selecting group leaders and participants, organizing the support team, compiling and processing data, generating a comprehensive map for the region, and organizing the workshop logistics. This was then to culminate in the actual workshop, a five-day event to involve representatives from national governments of six participating countries, prospective donors, as well as scientists and conservation professionals.

Phase II, *From Conservation Priorities to Sustainable Resource Planning*, planned to package the results of the workshop into a series of products to be disseminated by national steering committees. These products would also be used in national steering processes to incorporate the new regional consensus and information generated from the workshop into the review of National Biodiversity Strategies, Environmental Action Plans, and other policy processes. This would hopefully lead to both the integration of conservation priorities into development planning, and also catalyze the development of new concept papers to be considered in a Regional Donor Conference.

Phase III, *From National Action to Regional Collaboration*, was meant to ensure sustainability of project impact into the future. The main event of this phase was to organize a Donor Conference where the outcomes of the national strategic processes could be presented and donors would commit to funding key elements contained in these strategies.

### **Assessment of the Implementation of Deliverables:**

The assessment that follows is based on the review of Project Implementation Reports, a series of participant interviews from four countries, and various meetings with project team members. The assessment looks at the different Phases of the project plan in terms of the strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of each. It then draws conclusions and recommendations based on the assessment.

#### ***Phase I From Building a State of Knowledge to Consensus Conservation Priorities***

All evidence shows that Phase I, the Conservation Priority-Setting Workshop, proved to be a powerful and productive workshop. The Project Implementation Report submitted by CI states that the workshop brought together over 90 organizations and 150 experts to develop a set of consensus conservation priorities. While this led to several additional products, it in itself served as a significant product of the project.

#### **Strengths**

The consensus view among all those interviewed indicates that the workshop itself was a great success. As noted in the Project Implementation Report, and verified by virtually all those interviewed, “As the first project of its kind to establish conservation priorities for a critically important ecosystem at the regional scale in West Africa, the impacts for biodiversity were tremendous. In addition to the consensus-based process, participants from the six countries had a first hand opportunity to interact and share ideas about conservation challenges in the Upper Guinean Forest region. This interaction will likely leverage opportunities to enhance conservation across borders, as a vital complement to the national level planning processes already underway.”

One reason for the success of the workshop is likely found in the fact that several of the workshop participants were involved in the preparation process prior to the actual workshop. There was a large effort undertaken to gather the necessary data in order to have a constructive and meaningful workshop. As was discovered during the series of interviews, many had played a role in this preparation process, either by gathering data, or by verifying data to be used. This significant collaboration with key stakeholders prior to the workshop paid dividends when the actual workshop was carried out. There seems to have been a great sense of ownership of the process and the eventual products to come as a result.

Another strength of the workshop that was reiterated time and again was the fact that so many of the key stakeholders were present at the workshop and that the preparation was so thorough going into the workshop. As one participant noted, he was impressed with the diverse expertise present at the workshop, as well as the materials used. “Absolutely everything was there.” In addition to the people and materials, the workshop also included an on-site GIS team from the University of Ghana. This team was trained prior to the workshop and provided immediate input of data into maps for use during the workshop. This allowed stakeholders to immediately add their input and have it shared across the workshop. This proved to be a very powerful mechanism in such a large and diverse workshop.

The workshop, while aimed at defining conservation priorities, had an additional impact in that it provided an opportunity for participants to meet colleagues in the same field and to share their national expertise and knowledge. This was the first time that conservation of biodiversity was the subject of such a workshop in the region and the forum was very powerful. As many interviewed noted, it was a great opportunity for others to share, collaborate, and learn. It initiated a tremendous amount of interaction and enthusiasm. On top of this, the workshop provided the opportunity for organizations and individuals to strengthen their expertise and capacity through networking, knowledge sharing and experience, and practical lessons from other countries. This collaborative interaction and enthusiasm had the added benefit of being seen by several key donors that also participated in the workshop. Without question, it helped build their confidence in the conservation community across the region.

In conclusion on the strengths of the workshop and the ground it helped lay, one participant commented that, “the exchange of information broadened our knowledge about the Upper Guinea Forest and set the pace for regional cooperation.”

### Weaknesses

The workshop itself was clearly the strongest element of the entire project, however, some participants did note some weaknesses that are worth mentioning. As will always be the case, some participants felt that there were some information gaps in the materials prepared for the workshop. Some regions were better prepared than others based on participants’ experiences and knowledge across the region. This left some participants feeling somewhat slighted in the attention they were given in the process. For those areas where limited data was available, it was more difficult for their groups to prioritize and make decisions. In a few rare cases, participants felt that information was misrepresented and they became defensive about their area before turning that into constructive input into the workshop. While these types of comments came out as weaknesses of the workshop from a few participants, this is probably an anticipated reality of running such a large workshop. In most of these cases, participants

agreed that these minor hurdles were overcome by the strong facilitation that helped manage the workshop process.

A donor representative at the workshop noted an additional weakness of the workshop. He commented that, “As a donor, I expected commitments from other donors to be made during the workshop. The donors were reluctant to make any of these real commitments. There was an effort at the end of the workshop to draw donors to the table, but they hesitated to actually commit. While there was a lot of good discussion, no solid commitments resulted.” The evaluation relayed this sentiment to the project team in later interviews and it appears that such a donor bidding at the end of the workshop was avoided. It was suggested during the workshop, by several of the donors present, that such a bidding forum would not be the best approach, but to rather carry out a series of launch workshops once the project products were completed. In these, the donors would be better prepared to make commitments. This idea will be addressed later in the evaluation of Phase III.

### ***Phase II From Conservation Priorities to Sustainable Resource Planning***

Phase II of the project involved several elements including the packaging and distribution of the workshop results and the stimulation of national strategic planning processes in each of the target countries. The evaluation assesses each of the products proposed by the project, as well as the processes begun across the region toward stimulating the national planning efforts. The assessment will again focus on strengths and weaknesses of the implementation toward the delivery of the products and then discusses the steering processes that were stimulated in the region.

The products to be produced as a result of the workshop, and planned in the original project design, include a conservation priority map, a Final Report, and a CD-ROM all to be disseminated among the participants and other key stakeholders in the region. Below is a description of each planned product:

- **Conservation Priority Map** – The map is to include consensus of geographical and scientific conservation priorities for forests across the region including forest cover, population density, workshop participants, the workshop process, and a series of related maps (birds, biogeography, reptiles and amphibians, civil conflict, insects, protected areas, freshwater aquatic, land use, marine aquatic, and extractive industries).
- **Final Report** – The final report will be a published document including all of the results of the priority-setting process. This will be distributed to all workshop participants, all relevant organizations in the region, all relevant government agencies, as well as donors.
- **CD-ROM** – The CD-ROM is to be a compilation of all of the data collected during the project. The current index includes:
  - Upper Guinea Forest Ecosystem
  - Conservation Priority Setting
  - Biological Priorities
  - Socioeconomic Summaries
  - Integrated Priorities
  - Image Gallery
  - Map Gallery
  - Data Section



In addition to these elements, the CD is to include a CI-developed product called PRISMA, a stand-alone GIS package for the production of maps, analysis of data, and storage of metadata.

### Strengths

The *conservation priority map* was the first product to be produced by the project and provides a very detailed depiction of the conservation priorities of the Upper Guinea Forest. It is a very detailed and professionally completed product available both in French and English and contains all of the key elements it intended to illustrate. It was produced within a reasonable period after the workshop, which had the positive effect of giving the participants and stakeholders a direct result from their workshop efforts that they could then use to help guide their work and the work of others. The quality and timeliness of the map produced was strongly verified based on the consensus opinion of those interviewed.

One good indicator of the quality and usefulness of the map was found in the fact that it appeared on the wall of almost every office entered during the interview process for this evaluation. Several were very used, with pins, highlights, and other markings. Several of those interviewed expressed their support of the map in it providing a real representation of what took place in the workshop. They claimed that the map provides a very true illustration of the group work, deliberation, and consensus agreements that were generated during the workshop. They see their own faces in the map, which is a great success for the project.

The final Project Implementation Report expresses that CI focused a significant amount of its efforts on disseminating the priority-setting maps throughout the region. It did this through a series of media events to officially launch the map that were held in Ghana, Guinea, and Liberia. These events included the specified government counterparts of the project and typically involved between 40 and 60 key participants. These launches served an important role in the overall dissemination of the maps as they included clear descriptions of how to use the map in its entirety. These detailed explanations were targeted to the key stakeholders who would then relay this message to others in the region as they themselves continued the dissemination process. These events provided an initial distribution of 300-500 maps in each country. The situation in Cote d'Ivoire was a more difficult case given the civil-unrest at the end of 2000 and beginning of 2001. However, the map was distributed in Abidjan through the CI project staff based at Marahoue National Park and colleagues at WWF. In addition to the official launches, maps have also been distributed via various meetings, workshops and events, as well as through CI partners at WWF, the European Commission, the World Bank, and many others. To date, nearly 3,000 maps have been disseminated.

Both the *Final Report & CD-ROM* have taken longer to complete, but upon inspection of the final products, appear to be extremely thorough and complete with the data proposed in the original plans. The unfortunate reality for the purpose of this evaluation is the fact that these products are only being completed at project completion and have not been disseminated to the field to have a chance to be put to use. The evaluation strongly concludes that the actual products produced are of excellent quality and should serve the purpose they were intended to serve, however, they are being made available well behind schedule. As explained in interviews with the project team, the report and data elements for these products were actually completed a year ago. Unfortunately, it has taken a full year to publish the two. Reasons for

this are explained in detail in a later section titled, *Stakeholder Participation and Information Dissemination*.

To CI's credit, the delayed delivery of these products was due to the thorough process of reviewing drafts of the report with key stakeholders. They recognized the importance of gaining consensus on these products and this consensus was given priority over the timing of their completion. This thorough review process provided additional opportunities for impact and helped ensure the validity of the products. This should lead to improved use of, and commitment to, each. This was verified in the interviews in Guinea that noted, "the review process led to significant changes to the both the map and the report. This in itself was a big plus and was worth pursuing even at the price of delaying the final products. In addition, such engagement provided for a powerful capacity-building opportunity for several key Guinean stakeholders."

### Weaknesses

Weaknesses in the implementation of Phase II are focused around the delayed delivery of the Final Report and the CD-ROM. While it has been mentioned that these are now completed, they are well behind schedule and all those interviewed made note of this fact. The participants were extremely enthusiastic about the workshop and the map that was produced, but they also expected the remaining two products to complete the "package". Many of those interviewed have been waiting for these products to come out in order to follow up on strategy development and collaboration sessions they had planned for having after the workshop. This delay has, in many cases, resulted in the delay of many possible impacts that could have been realized by many of the stakeholders that participated in the workshop. As one participant stated in an interview, "The map came out basically on time; however, the other expected products have not yet arrived. We are aware of what is expected in terms of products, but we are still eagerly waiting and very interested. We really want to make use of the opportunity to use these results to make new decisions and maintain the partnerships developed during the workshop." Clearly, the opportunity may not yet be lost, but the delay is causing a negative impact.

Many of those interviewed emphasized the fact that while the products are late in coming, they are still very much in demand and they are eager to receive them. They recognize several opportunities for which they would make use of the products, and also recognize instances where these products would have been useful had they arrived sooner. A few good examples of this that come directly from the interview notes include:

- Bird Life International is now involved in a large GEF Regional Program that should be making use of the products to ensure that their strategy conforms to the priorities set from the Priority-Setting Process. This is possibly an opportunity lost for applying the results of the priority setting towards new initiatives.
- The African NGO-Government Partnership for Sustainable Biodiversity Action Program. This is another initiative underway that would otherwise be able to make use of the data provided in the products from the project.
- The UNDP is making great use of the map to determine its own investments in the country (Ghana), and region. However, the detailed data to be provided in the CD is sorely needed. The map has allowed UNDP to determine some priorities and justify

actions, but they would be much clearer on decisions if the detailed information were made available.

Unfortunately, the enthusiasm created in what was clearly an impressive and powerful workshop has been jeopardized by the lack of follow up on product delivery. The products were expected long ago and several participants explained that they had planned to join together to continue their collaboration in using these tools to form shared strategies. As one stakeholder described, “this process has been put on hold and is jeopardy of being lost.”

Additional comments suggested that the follow-up that was expected from the workshop included not only the products, but also action and that this has not come to fruition to the degree necessary. One stakeholder described that, “a map has come out, but the detailed data to be provided in the form of a CD Rom and a hard copy report have not come to the field. This has led to little or no action to take place. This was a critical piece necessary in order to have impact from this workshop. This is a huge opportunity lost given the serious enthusiasm that was generated in the workshop.”

In the project’s defense, there was action taken in the form of public launches of the Priority-Setting Map. These events are explained in the section that follows on “Steering processes”, but stakeholders referencing the launch in Guinea again note criticism, similar to that mentioned above. “At this workshop the map and a final report were distributed, again creating a lot of enthusiasm, but little follow-up has taken place. Maps have been distributed rather well, but there has been no push from the project itself to use this map to influence policy afterwards. This is a shame given the fact that the Chairperson of the launch workshop suggested this take place shortly after the workshop.”

One final weakness to note with regard to the final two products, the Report and the CD-Rom, is that neither of these has yet been translated into French. Obviously this limits the effects that these products can have in the Francophone countries of the region. These translations are, however, planned as CI is seeking new funding to complete the process.

### National Steering Processes

The original project design stated that the project would establish national steering processes to review National Biodiversity Strategies and Environmental Action Plans. When the evaluation studied what actually took place towards these steering processes, it was quick to realize that no formal arrangements had been developed such as the establishment of national steering committees and the like. While this was initially noted as a weakness in project implementation, follow up interviews with project team members as well as some key stakeholders shed light on the fact that CI properly adjusted their plan to react to the realities they encountered in the target countries in which these processes were to take place. As one team member explained, “Rather than creating new structures for the steering processes in each country, we decided to tap into existing structures by providing them with information and stimulating them to revise existing action plans and/or formulate new ones. We assisted in bringing key people into these existing groups and processes when we saw opportunities to do so.” The CI team wisely adapted their plan in this regard. The on-the-ground reality in most of the countries was that there was already a steering process and committee in place. It would have been inappropriate, therefore, for them to pursue the creation of new structures and processes that would have duplicated efforts and/or disturbed existing ones.

Several efforts did take place across the region to stimulate the steering processes and these included official launch efforts as well as working sessions with those steering groups tasked with the revision process. Examples include:

- Guinea, where a launch was held in October 2000 and working sessions were conducted with the steering committee. This has led to the development of a new national biodiversity strategy.
- Ghana, which also had a launch in October 2000 and CI is now proposing to finish this process under CEPF funding.
- Liberia, where meetings were held with key participants after the workshop and a map launch was carried out in Feb. 2001. The revision process is still underway there.

The cases of Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone are slightly different given the conflict situations occurring in both countries. In Cote d'Ivoire, preliminary work of the process was started with a planning meeting and team formation. The coup then hindered a lot of the process in that the national steering process could not get underway. This is now being planned outside of the project as WWF and CI are in dialogue to determine how best to restart the process. It appears that they will submit to CEPF for funding to continue this process. In the case of Sierra Leone, war has hindered the majority of the process. The project has not been able to do much other than invite a few participants from Sierra Leone to join in on the launch that took place in Ghana. These participants were able to take 300-400 maps for back for distribution, but little else has been possible.

Unfortunately, the processes they tapped into in each case are not well documented in their implementation reports and this is disappointing in that it could have provided a good opportunity for learning how they adapted their plan according to the realities they met on the ground. It is also clear, based on the interviews, that CI's efforts were better in some countries than in others with regard to stimulating the national revision process. This is partly due to the opportunities available in some countries as opposed to others, but also to the fact that the project came to a close when much of this stimulation effort was needed most. This is unfortunate as the response from those interviewed, almost across the board, is that the opportunity is still there to push the processes forward. The shared recommendation among many is that there is still enthusiasm and that CI should act as the leader for continuing this effort. As the recommendations that follow show, the opportunity still remains for completing the revision processes in each country and that it should be aggressively pursued. With very little additional investment, the total level of impact of the initial priority-setting project will be increased enormously. Without such an effort, the opportunity to realize the total potential impacts is jeopardized.

### ***Phase III From National Action to Regional Collaboration***

The original plan for Phase III, as defined in the project proposal and Logical Framework, was to organize a Donor Conference to review the results of the revised national plans and to highlight regional biodiversity opportunities. This original plan was altered very early on in the project and stems from what was already mentioned in the discussion of donor engagement at the priority-setting workshop. During the workshop itself, it was decided that the best avenue was not to do a donor-bidding forum at the end of the workshop. Additionally, it was felt that a special conference at the end of the entire project specifically for donors to be presented strategies and to make funding commitments was also an inappropriate avenue. The suggestion was to use the series of product launch events

(mentioned above) to stimulate donor interest and participation. The project team decided to carry out such events within the region (Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Ghana), and also to present the results in strategic donor locations such as Brussels, London and Washington, DC.

The adjustment in plans mentioned above was perhaps necessary based on the donor's views during the workshop and beyond, however, many of those interviewed were clear to point out that more does need to be done to generate a broader understanding and perspective among the donor community. They pointed specifically to the need for donors to recognize the importance of viewing the conservation issues across borders, from a regional perspective. In some cases donors have broadened their horizons, as is noted in a later section on impacts. However, there are still donors that do not appreciate participant's proposals that articulate regional conservation plans as opposed to site-specific interventions. Work remains in bringing these donors around to the growing realization and need for regional strategy and action that was begun from the priority-setting project.

### ***Stakeholder Participation and Information Dissemination***

The issues of stakeholder participation and information dissemination are ones that continually arose throughout the course of evaluating the priority-setting project. For this reason, special attention is drawn to these issues.

The project team has highlighted a tremendous amount of stakeholder participation beginning from the initial data collection processes, to workshop participation, and eventual dissemination of information as a result. This was evident from the interviews as well as the review of project reports. The workshop alone was a tremendous example of participatory priority setting that clearly generated many of the expected results from quality stakeholder involvement (consensus agreements, enthusiasm, commitment, information-sharing, networking, etc.). In addition, the dissemination of the post-workshop products listed above was aimed at continuing stakeholders' feeling of ownership and commitment by providing them with the resulting biodiversity priority information they helped create. These products provided, not only the results of the project, but also several lessons learned during the process. Additional dissemination mechanisms included the various product launch briefings that have been organized for relevant audiences. Especially interesting in this is the exchange now taking place through the Africa Biodiversity Collaboration Group (ABCG). This group is comprised of WWF, IUCN, AWF, BSP, WCS, WRI and CI and has a mission to tackle the complex problems and changing conservation challenges in the region by catalyzing and strengthening stakeholder collaboration. This group conducted a participatory workshop aimed at sharing detailed information about approaches and lessons from the collective experiences of its members with similar priority-setting processes. Through this, the positive lessons learned in the Upper Guinea Forest Priority-Setting project were shared.

Information about the priority-setting approach and the lessons learned from the West Africa experience has also been shared outside the region. This has been sited in the development of new GEF Medium Sized Programs such as ones being developed in Guatemala, Brazil and Papua New Guinea; and similar priority-setting projects such as that recently carried out in the Philippines. In addition, Guinean participants of a priority-setting workshop held in Mali in 2000 focusing on the Niger Basin drew from the efforts of the West Africa priority-setting workshop. Guinean participants used the West Africa map to demonstrate what was done at the workshop CI facilitated, thus enhancing and guiding the work undertaken in Mali.

In light of the high level of participation and information sharing that occurred, many participants interviewed still stressed the need for more involvement. In further pursuing the issue during the participant interviews, it became apparent that the real weakness of the project, and something for which planning was perhaps lacking, was the importance of timely and adequate dissemination of information. This issue was revisited with the project team during follow-up interviews and the suggestion was made that, “additional national level workshops and technical assistance in conservation planning are required to continue the process begun by setting geographic priorities. This would magnify the results of the project by applying the knowledge gained through the process to developing specific conservation initiatives that flow from within governments as well as civil-society, based upon a regional, ecosystem approach rooted in the best scientific information available. In the end, more resources to ensure further integration and follow-up would enhance the project design.” On the surface this seems plausible and may in fact be the necessary path forward given the current situation. However, the evaluation argues that these activities were actually built into the original design but were lacking in their actual implementation. There was, in fact, an entire Output of the project dedicated to this theme: *Dissemination mechanism established and information disseminated and capacity for use built*. Some of this was carried out, as mentioned before, but with the project development objective stated as, *Actors (government [nat'l, local], donors, NGO's, communities, etc) integrate ecosystem-wide biodiversity priorities into regional and national planning and action*, much stronger emphasis needed to be applied to this Output. The activities suggested for follow-up are most likely appropriate and are in fact mentioned in the conclusions and recommendations that follow, but they should have been more aggressively pursued as part of the project rather than as a suggested follow-up activity.

### ***CI Challenges***

CI faced some unexpected internal challenges during the course of the project that are worthy of mention in the assessment of project implementation, and there are also some disbursement issues that created added difficulties to project implementation.

One of these challenges to consider in the evaluation of project implementation is that by the project's end, all but one member of the original CI team to begin the project were in new positions within CI, including the senior director of CI's West Africa division. While this was not necessarily due to the project team itself, but rather institutional issues at the time, it certainly had a disturbing impact on project implementation. At the same time, CI as an institution changed its working focus from that of site-specific interventions to larger scale efforts at what they call the “corridor level”. This set in motion a series of institutional adjustments that may have hindered the team's ability to implement at their otherwise efficient pace. To add to the challenges, CI moved its headquarters at the end of 2000 causing some delays in producing the final report and CD-ROM. Nonetheless, the majority of the project deliverables have been completed and there clearly are signs of impact already, as are noted in the following section on impact of the project.

The CD-Rom was also slowed during production as the new management of the West Africa Division placed in question the validity of using PRISMA, CI's GIS package for the production of maps, analysis of data, and storage of metadata. They felt the need to develop an additional, HTML version to facilitate end-user usability. In the end, both versions have

been produced, but this involved having to contract a web team to design the HTML version, thus delaying delivery of the final product.

Continued instability and periodic unrest throughout the region also hampered communication and travel to the region, slowing down the production of products.

#### Disbursement of Funds:

There appear to have been some irregularities in fund disbursements that may also have had an impact on CI's ability to implement according to schedule. Disbursement of funds seems to have begun smoothly with an initial payment made by UNDP at the beginning of the project. From that point on, however, the project team reports that the flow of funds was irregular and difficult to deal with. Apparently, the project team would submit the required reports that were then questioned back and forth in a cumbersome manner taking an unnecessarily long time to complete. According to the project team, an initial payment was made in October of 1998 and a second payment in June/July of 1999. After the 1999 payment, they report that no further funds were received until the end of the first quarter of 2001. It was at this point that UNDP agreed to pay the balance remaining on the total grant. Clearly, this is an irregular schedule and, perhaps, process. The view taken by this evaluation is that the burden most likely falls on both parties. It seems as though the process began as planned but then stalled somewhat during the first reporting and replenishing period. This led to a less efficient and regular reporting method by the project team. Their efforts were further frustrated by what they explain as a process in which they would submit reports only to have a series of questions arise based on the reports. These questions would then linger until the next reporting cycle. It appears that this process continued with the contract office claiming a preference to make an eventual lump payment based on a series of these reports. The final observation by the project team regarding disbursement of funds was to point out that they received only three payments through the life of the project. Two of these payments were made during the first 9 months of implementation and a final lump sum payment was made over a year later, close to the project completion date, and accounted for almost a third of the entire project funds (\$304,000).

The above observations also call into discussion the financial management of the project funds by the project team that they admit were not very strong. Their financial reporting was behind schedule almost from the beginning of project implementation. While this was a weakness of the implementation team, they also made it clear that the reporting format was very difficult and unclear and that they could not find helpful guidelines for the financial reporting requirements. They claim they could not get this from their contract officer either. After reviewing a series of these reports, it became clear to both parties that Conservation International had not been able to follow the guidelines and had therefore consistently submitted reports incorrectly to UNDP, but that these were accepted without comment. At the end of 1999 the mistakes were caught by the project team and corrected. These were submitted in a January 2000 report that was initially rejected by the contract officer due to the fact that they conflicted with the earlier, albeit incorrect, versions. Apparently, the reconciliation process took nearly six months to complete and was then questioned once again because the results of the correct report would require some re-reporting on the side of the contract officer. The final agreement was that CI would receive a lump sum payment to cover all outstanding and anticipated expenses. A final report for this funding had yet to be submitted at the time of the evaluation.

Clearly, there are lessons to be learned from this experience. On the surface it is an easy suggestion to make the financial reporting requirements clear and to provide adequate guidelines for such reporting. This must then be understood and managed by the contracting officers responsible for the grants. This is the beginning, however, there is much to learn from a process that begins to go array and is not caught until late in the project cycle. These inconsistencies need to be recognized as early as possible and acted upon. The impression from this evaluation is that both sides of this contract have had the best intentions but have been frustrated by processes and requirements that may not have been clearly outlined and understood. Efforts should be made to smooth out such processes as we all understand how critical the relationship is between borrower and lender, and, of course, success or failure of the project objectives is what lies in the balance in these cases.

## **Assessment of Project Impact:**

The following section addresses the issue of project impact and does so by first outlining what the stated impacts were, based on the original project design. It then continues by highlighting a series of early impacts achieved-to-date as well as some catalytic impacts that allow us to predict longer-term impact of the project.

### **Stated Impacts:**

The stated impacts for the priority-setting project come both from the original project document, and also from the Logical Framework. These documents are not included as Annexes to this evaluation, but may be easily retrieved from CI's West Africa Program. The Development Objective stated in the Logical Framework is the following:

*Actors (government [nat'l, local], donors, NGO's, communities, etc) integrate ecosystem-wide biodiversity priorities into regional and national planning and action.*

This development objective was to be measured by a series of performance indicators highlighting such things as:

- *Newly funded projects address the priorities of the Upper Guinea Forest ecosystem as developed within the project.*
- *Regional consensus priorities (developed in the project) included in National Environmental Action Plans, Tropical Forestry Action Plans, and Biodiversity Strategies.*
- *New policies created that support the biodiversity conservation priorities established within the project.*
- *Increased donor investment in conservation capacity building.*
- *Increased coordination and action taking place across borders and regionally.*

### **Impacts Achieved to Date:**

The assessment of project implementation described above has pointed out both strengths and weaknesses encountered during the course of the project. Given the realities of this implementation, it is impressive to recognize the amount of early success this project is already showing. True, many of the impacts of this project will only be realized over a longer period of time, however, there is a significant degree of success already found in the region.



This project developed the first-ever coordinated set of regional priorities for conserving biodiversity in the Upper Guinea forest ecosystem. In doing so, it has provided conservationists and decision-makers with accurate, up-to-date information on biodiversity, socio-economic conditions, threats and trends, and identified consensus priority conservation actions. This was made available early on by the conservation priority map, the first published regional depiction of the Upper Guinea Forest Ecosystem, and is continuing with the completion of the final report and CD Rom. The map, as noted in project reports and through several interviews, has proven to be an extremely useful tool for environmental planning in the region. Already, this has been seen in examples such as the use of the Conservation Priority-Setting Map in the delineation of the National Biodiversity Strategy of Cote d'Ivoire, the priority results being incorporated into a redraft of the Biodiversity Strategy of Guinea and that of Ghana as well. In addition, the World Wildlife Fund is using the Map as the basis for re-focusing their investments across six countries in the region.

In addition to the use of the data for strategic planning, a great example of how this project has leveraged new funding and attention to biodiversity conservation in the region is found in the new Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund that has targeted the Upper Guinea Forest Ecosystem as a first year priority. The CEPF has committed \$4.3 million towards a set of strategic themes derived directly from the results of the priority-setting project and began funding project activities at the beginning of 2001. This is an enormous success for the region as the CEPF brings together funding from a partner base that includes the World Bank, GEF, Conservation International and the MacArthur Foundation. With some of the key multilateral agencies involved at such a significant level, an additional, anticipated impact is that the regional strategies of these large multilateral organizations and NGOs will continue to align themselves with the priorities set out from this priority-setting project. Had the priority-setting process not been successfully implemented, it is unlikely that CEPF would have chosen the region for investment.

Additional examples of impact are found on a country-by-country basis. In Liberia, for example, the map demonstrates the biological importance and regional significance of Liberia's forests in protecting the largest remaining blocks of mature forest. This has helped channel nearly 1 million Euros from the European Commission into a new Forest Re-assessment project, a collaboration between the Forestry Development Authority, CI, FFI, SCNL and the Environmental Commission. In addition to that funding, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund is also contributing to the Forest Re-assessment. In addition to the Forest Re-Assessment Project, Liberia has also seen the resumption of the management of Sapo National Park, the establishment of community forests, and the carrying out of new surveys of methods and bio-monitoring. These are all results of the priority-setting project stressed by key stakeholders from Liberia. An additional example of transboundary efforts can be seen in the fact that Liberia, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire are holding talks geared towards Transboundary conservation of Mount Nimba.

In Cote d'Ivoire the priority-setting project established a framework for managing the protected areas, which was not in place in Cote d'Ivoire prior to the project. Such a framework takes into account the needs and knowledge of others and is now playing an important role in the formulation of a revised national action plan.

Interviews in Guinea provided several examples of how the results of the priority-setting are having early signs of impact. Already mentioned is the design of the national strategy and

action plan, but there has also been the design and validation of a national monograph in the four regions of Guinea. As a result, 70 projects were designed; all based on the priorities laid out from the priority-setting workshop results. An ethno botanical survey on Guinean ecology is not underway, independent researchers and NGOs are harmonizing data on conservation priorities of sub-regions, new projects are being designed based on the validation of the priority map, and universities are focusing their research and course work around the results of the priority-setting.

A regional coordination and planning meeting for critical ecosystems conservation activities held in West Africa in June 2001 brought together devoted conservation partners to address conservation issues and provide guidance. The need for coordination was perceived and it was acknowledged that there are a variety of actors pursuing conservation and or sustainable forest biodiversity management initiatives in sites marked as priorities on the conservation priority setting map for the Upper Guinea Forest. Some of these sites meanwhile, are known to be under intense pressure resulting from factors as varied as logging, grazing, plantation agriculture, mining, poaching, popular encroachment etc. It was proposed in this meeting to begin a collaborative process starting with a sampling of committed actors on the ground and how they address conservation challenges. This model will then be expanded.

### *Catalytic Impact*

Some of the catalytic impact has already been mentioned above, however, the project team responded to this issue by mentioning some additional examples. One of these is the realization that the map and its recommendations and priorities are being referenced by donors and governments in their planning and project designs. An example of this was seen with an EU desk officer for the region in Brussels using the materials as a basis for planning in late 2000. In addition to this, donors such as USAID Ghana are using the results to influence their site selection for economic growth projects so that they can simultaneously leverage this investment on biodiversity conservation.

The Ghana Wildlife Society pointed out that the map alone has already been very important in allowing them, and other organizations, to better focus their efforts. In fact, they have used the map to collaboratively strategize so as not to duplicate efforts as evidenced by GWS moving out of certain areas and letting others take over where they are better suited. These organizations are also using the map to provide justification for new initiatives, proposals, and advocacy work. As explained by the GWS communications manager, “The map is great for taking to Ministries to justify and argue issues and proposals. This has already stimulated the government to develop an inter-ministerial committee to incorporate and integrate the ministry activities; the main focus of which are natural resource management, sustainable development, and tourism.” Based on such advocacy work, GWS has been asked to present the conservation issues and priorities to each of these ministerial committees. GWS is using the map to its fullest and are eager to have the other products to continue their own efforts, but this needs doing also by other key stakeholders both on a national and regional level. On a more anecdotal note, GWS has used the map to introduce conservation priorities to kids in the classroom. Wildlife representatives presented to a total of 200 schools. In all cases they received a map and a total of approx. 20,000 children were covered. In an enthusiastic exchange with GWS, a director commented, “We did this with just the map. Imagine if we could use the CD and report to easily organize and present data for greater purposes of marketing and advocacy!”

The Ghana Wildlife Division provides a similar example in how it has used the results of the workshop to deliver advocacy and generate new conservation activity toward the area of Chabolo National Park; one of the areas under an identified as a priority. This area also includes the Agumatsu Wildlife Center. The Wildlife Division's efforts and awareness campaigns in this area have led to other ministries coming to visit and to explore complimentary ways of implementing activities within the priority area.

Finally, there are two new Rapid Assessments being carried out in Sapo National Park and the Liberian Forest. These responses to the priorities will hopefully catalyze further investment and action toward the conservation of these areas and thus provides a sign of sustainability.

The above impacts are significant and the project team expressed their opinion that it may even signal sufficient impact to call the project a total success. However, they are quick to point out that the full benefits will not be seen in full for a handful of years. Part of this is do to donor cycles and the slower evolution of larger, multi-sectoral lending strategies and the fact that this region is fragmented by language, systems, and civil unrest. However, several of those interviewed were careful to explain that the impacts they presented, while good, could have been far greater had they had access to the complete set of project products in a timely fashion. This suggestion is important to point out here, but is further developed in the section on "Lessons Learned".

### **Sustainability:**

The project team addressed project sustainability by noting the tremendously participatory nature of the entire priority-setting process. With over 90 institutions and 150 experts represented in the process, a significant amount of buy-in to the results has been achieved. In addition to this, the detailed list of impacts, many of which are catalytic in their stimulation of new conservation action and investment, helps signal the sustainability of the efforts begun by the priority-setting project. Key examples of this include the resources leveraged as noted by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) committing \$4.3 million dollars to conservation efforts, and the European Union funding approximately \$1 million for the Liberia Forest Reassessment. The priority-setting project provided focus for the investment. Several projects are funded and many more are in the pipeline.

Sustainability is also suggested through the impacts found in the results of the priority-setting process being integrated into the national biodiversity action plans. As mentioned in the impacts section, some of these have been revised and others are underway.

A final example of impact that suggests sustainability comes from an interview response from Liberia:

*In Liberia, the results have demonstrated the significance of Liberia's forests and biodiversity to government. This has aided in efforts to ratify the convention on biological diversity, establish an environmental commission, and increase support for the government sanctioned Liberia Forest Re-assessment.*

The issue of sustainability appears to be well addressed on the surface but, as in the case of "Impacts" described above, more could have been done to ensure this sustainability. The Centre for African Wetlands at the University of Ghana, a participant in workshop preparation, the workshop, and follow-up revisions, is using the map to direct their research

and course study plans, but suggested that much more could have been done to ensure the projects long-term success. One very clear example they gave was the neglect of the project to pursue and facilitate the coordination of information networks that could so easily have been developed and would now be providing a good avenue for sustaining the early impacts of the project and advocating further impacts. There was such a diverse group present in the workshop and this was one of the great accomplishments it had. So many of these interesting and knowledgeable conservationists had the opportunity to meet, many for the first time, yet the opportunity to facilitate the continuation of interaction among this diverse group was not realized. These personnel and organizational exchanges should have been built on as part of the project design, as some of the participants may never have the opportunity to meet face-to-face again.

The above example is but one, however, the interviews of several participants as well as the project team members suggest that while there has been success at the impact level, and there are good signs of sustainability, more still could have been done, and should have. Again, this is addressed in more depth in the following section.

### **Lessons Learned & Missed Opportunities:**

Many lessons learned and opportunities missed have been brought up already in various sections of the evaluation, particularly when describing the weaknesses of implementation elements and the discussion of impacts-to-date. This section, while possibly repeating some of these, attempts to consolidate the array of issues and lessons that may be drawn from the project experience in order to provide for sound integration into the final section on conclusions and follow-up recommendations. In consolidating the lessons learned, a series of themes begins to appear including the timely delivery of project results, capacity-building opportunities toward sustainability, networking and forming partnerships, and engaging donors to commit to action. The remainder of this section focuses on each of these and provides comments that come directly from the interviews targeted to these issues.

Timely delivery of the project deliverables has received significant mention in previous areas of the evaluation; however, it was continually repeated as an area in which opportunities, while not necessarily lost, were delayed and/or potential impacts were reduced. Communicating the results of the workshop was a key element of the project design, and rightly so. As one participant reminded, “The results of the priority-setting need to be pushed over and over again to all of the relevant stakeholders. This is the only way to create the necessary impacts expected of this process.” What needs to be taken from the CI experience is the importance of getting this element of the design right, and implementing it in a timely manner. Developing consensus-based products on a scale such as that of the priority-setting project takes a significant deal of time and management and carries with it higher costs than are typically estimated. The constraints of communication, schedules, and resources involved in gaining agreement on detailed scientific priorities in a multi-country, multi-lingual region such as West Africa, should not be under-estimated. Because the products are such a critical element in the degree of success of a priority-setting project, better attention needs to be given to the design of this element, and careful monitoring needs to be put in place during implementation to help keep the work on track. In the case of this particular project, the delay in delivery of the products appears to have been successfully overcome. As an interviewee put it, “Participants have been left empty by the lack of final results from the workshop, but fortunately they are still eager to make use of these. This is because the workshop was so

impressive that participants will still come together nearly two years later to strategize based on these results.”

Capacity-building issues were commented on frequently and this is often linked to the issue of sustainability which has been touched on already in an earlier section. The workshop itself proved that the capacity levels across the region are varying. Therefore, the project, which utilized the strengths of those with greater capacity during the workshop, should have encouraged follow-up activities that allowed for these early capacity-building opportunities to continue. In fact, certain individuals and organizations were selected to gather data prior to the actual workshop. This should have been used more carefully as an opportunity to provide training for local NGOs and others. By selecting participants to have training and practical experience through this early process of data collection, they could now better continue such collection in future years from within their perspective countries. These locally handled updates and revisions would allow for much more fluidity in knowledge and would continue the development of ownership within the region. While this was done in the case of the Ghanaian GIS team used during the workshop, there are few other examples of such efforts. This appears as an obvious opportunity missed that could have aided in the support of long-term sustainability of conservation in the region.

Similar to the discussion on capacity building opportunities that need to be taken advantage of in this type of project, the alliance building and networking opportunities need to be catalyzed in order to increase the impacts from the project. This was an opportunity that again was not taken full advantage of. Organizations had the opportunity to form alliances they could then use to collaborate in future work such as data collection, strategic planning, and collaborative advocacy. During the workshop, many of these organizations agreed to follow up on such efforts once the final products of the project were delivered. Due to the delay in the delivery of these, many of these networking and alliance-building plans never materialized. Had information come out quickly, as was planned, these alliances would have better continued to strategize and work together. In addition to this, some participants suggested that the project could have tried to keep the individuals and organizations that attended the workshop together by at least initiating things like discussion lists, regular progress reports, and news bulletins.

The final area to discuss is that of engaging the donors and gaining commitments to actions based on the results of the priority setting. A suggestion from several participants was that prior to the conclusion of the workshop, action items should have been targeted in order to stimulate the necessary proposals and funding for the priorities identified. This opportunity was not taken at the workshop and was justified in the review of implementation in that it would be followed up through the series of launch events and workshops. At the launch of the map, according to those interviewed, a very good presentation of the map was made and more importantly, how to use it was covered well. The drawback was that this was only useful for those present at the “one” launch in a given country. Therefore, the opportunity to ensure that stakeholders could effectively use the map, and that donors would commit funds toward the priorities described in it, was not addressed thoroughly enough. This is a consideration for future priority-setting projects to develop and implement carefully.

This is not an exhaustive list of the possible lessons learned and opportunities missed, and other examples do appear throughout the report. The aim here was to capture some of the key themes under which there are lessons to be recorded in order to help us focus on what some of the possible conclusions and recommendations may be for follow-up to the West Africa Priority-Setting Project.

## Conclusions & Recommendations for Follow-Up:

Several recommendations for how to ensure maximum impact from this project have been made during the interview process, and the evaluation has already alluded to many. This final section of the report does not try to repeat these, but aims at outlining the themes and possible actions that might best take place now that the project itself is completed.

One important theme, and necessary area for further work, is that of continuing the national review processes of conservation strategies and environmental action plans. The opportunity now is to actively pursue these processes in the countries that have yet to complete these revisions. That is not to say that the NGO community needs to take over the processes already in place, but they do need to collaboratively and strategically stimulate these processes through the realization of revised plans. Fortunately, most of those interviewed do see these still as opportunity stemming from the priority-setting workshop. While time is running out to take advantage of the enthusiasm from the workshop and its products, the window is still open and this must be taken aggressively pursued. With a small amount of additional investment, CI and the other NGOs should continue to move this forward so that the larger impacts of the initial priority-setting project are realized.

Continued collaboration and networking is another theme that provides opportunity for constructive follow-up work. The workshop generated a realization among many participants that their individual efforts are part of something much larger. The region got together, shared objectives, and broadened their horizons. This generated an interest and willingness to continue such efforts collaboratively, but to maximize its effectiveness, there is a need for one or more cohesive mechanisms that would provide ongoing information exchange. Therefore, many have suggested that more periodic regional workshops take place to facilitate the collaboration and networking among environmental specialists that was begun through the first workshop. It is not, however, a simple matter of having workshops, and some will certainly argue against too many workshops. A balance should be struck. But other opportunities exist that can easily facilitate continued and improved collaboration. A repeated suggestion is to establish some form of an electronic network system to make information available and accessible to all interested and participating organizations across the region. As one participant suggested, “Even just a newsletter to keep people in touch with progress after the workshop would have helped. Of course, of larger use would be the possibility of having a “clearing house” of information on current data and research.”

Some additional suggestion recommended include:

- An “Upper Guinea Forest Conservation” web site/discussion group, managed through a regional entity, that showcases conservation projects and approaches throughout the region;
- A periodic regional conservation conference, with formal presentations as well as working groups and training opportunities;
- A regional newsletter, or bulletin, highlighting current activities and lessons learned;
- Focused professional networks for specific groups (i.e. wetland managers, environmental education experts, advocacy and policy work, community development experts, etc.) that periodically produce a journal or compendium of project and research updates.

There are several possible avenues to proceed by and the important point made here is that some of these need to be facilitated and stimulated before the recognition and understand of their potential value is lost.

The possible options mentioned above are certainly plausible follow-up activities, however, a critical element appears to be missing and that is the issue of capacity within the region to continually carry out the data updates and strategic revisions necessary to maintain the information base. This is something that would best be handled locally to allow for continued ownership and collaboration among partners in the region, but will necessitate focused capacity building from, and among, the most appropriate stakeholders. One suggestion offered by the university participants interviewed is for there to be some targeted institutional strengthening programs carried out in one or two key universities, with expanded and updated curricula and degree offerings in conservation science. These programs would then be able to continue the capacity building efforts within their countries, and also across the region. In addition to the universities, there may be an obvious opportunity in providing capacity in a series of focused national level workshops and technical assistance programs in conservation planning. These are required to ensure the effective use of the products of the workshop (map, report and CD), and also for the continuation data gathering, updating and revising. This would magnify the results of the project by applying the knowledge gained through the process to developing specific conservation initiatives that flow from within governments as well as civil-society, based upon a regional, ecosystem approach rooted in the best scientific information available. This could lead, for example, to government ministries better using the most up-to-date tools and information to revise and develop policies and plans regarding the hotspot and priority areas. As the interviews confirmed, not only are the NGOs eager to participate in such capacity building events, the government is also enthusiastic to participate; they are in fact expecting this to happen.

The capacity building issue has already hinted at another issue, that of filling in information gaps and updating information on a periodic basis. The capacity opportunities have been mentioned about, but there is also an immediate need for those with existing capacity to complete the data gather to fill in various gaps discovered through the project process. This is already happening in the case of the Liberia Forest Reassessment, but could happen in other areas as well. Some suggestions include the conducting of regular monitoring and evaluation efforts, rapid assessment programs for areas with information gaps, and the revision of the priority map on a planned basis such as every 2 or 3 years. In carrying out these processes, organizations should be innovative and find collaborative ways in which to include local groups and individuals for whom capacity building would lead to longer-term benefits for the region.

A final opportunity for follow-up activity is in promoting the conservation priorities and opportunities to the donor community. The donor community is currently active and investing in the region, however, there is still a strong tendency to focus efforts on specific sites, thus missing out on regional conservation issues and opportunities to collaborate and compliment others. The products of the workshop should be disseminated widely, and quickly to this donor community, but there is also the suggestion coming from several participants to follow through with a regional workshop that would allow the national strategies and plans being revised to be presented to donors and hopefully integrated into their funding plans across the region.

These are some of the obvious recommendations for follow up work, and the consultants involved in this report plan to carry out a follow-up workshop with the project team to further develop the logical follow-up steps that might best be pursued in the region. A tremendous amount of enthusiasm and behavioral change has occurred through the implementation of this project and the tough work that lies ahead is in harnessing this opportunity to create larger impacts in the region.



## **Annex 1: Participant List**

### Ghana

Dr. Stephen Duah-Yentumi, UNDP Country Office Environment Officer  
M. Mike Adu-Nsiah, Wildlife Division, Ministry of Land and Forestry  
Pr. A. Oteng-Yeboah, Deputy Director, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research  
Okyeame Ampadu-Agyei, Country Director, Conservation International  
M. Gerard Hillary Osei Boakye, Project Manager, Ghana Wildlife Society  
Dr. Chris Gordon, Centre for African Wetlands, University of Ghana

### Cote d' Ivoire

Dr. Martine Tahoux Touao, Director, Centre de Recherche en Ecologie  
Dr. Soulemane Konate, Centre de Recherche en Ecologie  
Dr. Jerome Tondoh, Centre de Recherche en Ecologie  
Mme Alimata Kone, Caisse de Autonome d' Amortissement, Ministry of Finance  
M. Souleymane Zeba, World Wildlife Fund/WARPO, West Africa  
M. Eloi Kouadio IV, UNDP Field Office  
M. Jean Michel Pavy, The World Bank  
M. Sombo Tano, Direction de la Protection de la Nature, Ministry of Environment  
M. Francois Ngoran Dje, Protected Areas Management Programme, Ministry of Environment  
M. Patrick Pedia, Convention on Biological Diversity Focal Point, Ministry of Environment

### Guinea

M. Mohamed Efas Sylla, UNDP, Country Office  
M. Maadjoh Bah, Convention on Biological Diversity Focal Point, Ministry of Environment  
M. Ahmed Faya Traore, Project Coordinator, Climate Change  
M. Saramady Toure, Project Coordinator, Biodiversity of Nimba Mountain  
M. Selly Camara, Guinee Ecologie, CERESCOR, Scientific Research Center  
Mrs. Kadiatou Ndiaye, GEF Focal Point, Ministry of Mining, Geology and Environment  
Dr. Sara Daraba Kaba, President, COFEG (a coordination of 40 Women's Associations  
(Mano River Women Peace Network (Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea)

### Liberia

Ben Donnie  
Alex Peale

### Conservation International – DC

Dirck Byler  
Mari Omland  
Karen Semkow  
Silvio Oliveri  
Brent Bailey