EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is designed to safeguard the world's biologically richest and most threatened regions, known as biodiversity hotspots. It is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement (AFD), Conservation International (CI), the European Union (EU), Fondation Hans Wilsdorf, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Government of Canada, the Government of Japan and the World Bank.

A fundamental purpose of CEPF is to engage civil society, such as community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions and private enterprises, in biodiversity conservation in the biodiversity hotspots. To guarantee their success, these efforts must complement existing strategies and programs of national governments and other conservation funders. To this end, CEPF promotes working alliances among diverse groups, combining unique capacities and reducing duplication of efforts for a comprehensive, coordinated approach to conservation. One way in which CEPF does this is through preparation of ecosystem profiles: shared strategies, developed in consultation with local stakeholders, which articulate a five-year investment strategy informed by a detailed situational analysis.

This document represents the ecosystem profile for the Indo-Burma Hotspot, which comprises all non-marine parts of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, plus parts of southern China. With its high levels of plant and animal endemism and limited remaining natural habitat, Indo-Burma ranks among the top 10 biodiversity hotspots for irreplaceability and the top five for threat. Indo-Burma holds more people than any other hotspot and its remaining natural ecosystems, already greatly reduced in extent, are subject to intense and growing pressure from habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation and over-exploitation of natural resources.

Updating the Ecosystem Profile

CEPF has been making grants to civil society groups in the Indo-Burma Hotspot since July 2008, guided by an ecosystem profile developed in 2003 and updated in 2011 and 2020 through extensive stakeholder consultation, expert input and literature research. To date, 429 grants have been awarded. With this support, CEPF grantees have: strengthened the management of biodiversity within more than 3 million hectares of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), by promoting community-managed forests, fisheries and conservation areas and developing co-management mechanisms for protected areas; put in place long-term conservation programs for 35 globally threatened species, slowing and, in some cases, reversing declines in core populations; and delivered tangible wellbeing benefits to more than 250 local communities, including improved land tenure, food security and access to ecosystem services.

Much has changed in the five years since the ecosystem profile was last updated, including: the capacity of civil society and the characteristics of the political space in which it operates; the absolute and relative severity of threats to biodiversity and their social, economic and political drivers; and patterns of conservation investment by public and private donors.

There have also been significant improvements in knowledge about the status of biodiversity of global significance, including a 70 percent increase in the number of species assessed as globally threatened on the IUCN Red List. Although rates of tree cover loss have declined for all countries except Lao PDR, they remain high by global standards, driven by commercial timber extraction in all countries except Cambodia (commodity-driven) and

Myanmar (shifting agriculture). The direct use of biological resources (i.e., hunting and collecting animals, gathering and harvesting plants, logging and harvesting trees, fishing and harvesting of aquatic species) is one of the greatest threats to conservation outcomes in Indo-Burma and it is the threat affecting the largest number of globally threatened species in the hotspot. Such habitat loss and overexploitation have placed increasing pressure on plant and animal populations.

The impacts of climate change that are now clearly visible across the Indo-Burma Hotspot (i.e., increasing average temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns, rising sea levels, more frequent and intense extreme weather) are compounding existing pressures, such as habitat loss, overexploitation and pollution, creating a converging ecological crisis with major implications for biodiversity, livelihoods and regional stability. The hotspot's heavy dependence on agriculture, fisheries and natural resources heightens vulnerability to climate shocks, while continued deforestation and land conversion undermine ecosystem resilience and food security. Although all hotspot countries have established legal and policy frameworks for biodiversity and climate action, weak enforcement, fragmented coordination and insufficient integration of biodiversity into economic and infrastructure planning continue to limit effectiveness.

At the same time, funding for biodiversity conservation has evolved unevenly. While national governments have increased domestic investment, conservation funding remains heavily concentrated on large donor and government programs, with limited direct support to local organizations. Civil society organizations, community-based groups and research institutions continue to face regulatory restrictions and declining international funding, constraining their ability to address governance, rights and accountability gaps. Despite this, they remain central to advancing community-led conservation, policy reform and climate adaptation, particularly in rural and Indigenous landscapes where biodiversity and poverty intersect. Strengthening inclusive governance, sustainable finance and evidence-based policy implementation will be critical to achieving durable conservation.

Finally, there is a growing body of evidence on the effectiveness (or otherwise) of different conservation approaches tested in the hotspot since the emergence of the modern conservation movement in the early 1990s. Several approaches with positive impacts on biodiversity and human wellbeing have been demonstrated in specific local contexts and there is a growing volume of success stories, with declines in habitat or species populations being halted or reversed. Nevertheless, these remain limited when compared with the sheer scale of threats to the hotspot's biodiversity.

In light of these changes, there was a need to update the ecosystem profile and the investment strategy it contains, to inform the next phase of CEPF investment in the hotspot, from 2026 to 2030. This was done with a view to developing a broad platform on which funders interested in supporting conservation efforts led by civil society could build shared goals and strategies that address the highest priorities, take advantage of emerging opportunities and align well with existing investments by governments and other donors.

The ecosystem profile was updated through a consultative process coordinated by WWF between March and October 2025. More than 350 stakeholders were consulted during the updating process, through input from subject matter experts, during country-level consultation workshops coordinated by WWF offices in each of the hotspot countries and a final assessment workshop organized by IUCN as the CEPF Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for the hotspot, held in Bangkok in July 2025. The updating of the ecosystem profile also benefited from the guidance of an Advisory Committee, comprising experts with

experience of designing, implementing and funding conservation projects and programs in the hotspot.

CEPF Niche

The ecosystem profile presents an overview of the Indo-Burma Hotspot in terms of its biodiversity conservation importance and socioeconomic, policy and civil society contexts. Assessments of recent conservation investment and the implications of climate change for biodiversity conservation complete the situational analysis. The ecosystem profile defines a suite of measurable conservation outcomes, at species, site and corridor scales and assesses the major direct threats to biodiversity and their root causes and enabling factors.

The ecosystem profile then articulates an overarching investment strategy for funders interested in supporting conservation efforts led by civil society. The strategy includes a niche for CEPF, where its investment can deliver the greatest incremental value. In essence, the niche for CEPF is to demonstrate approaches to responding to major conservation issues facing the hotspot (i.e., hunting and logging, dams and water management, agricultural expansion, fishing and climate change) that leverage the capabilities of civil society and that are scalable, through replication by civil society or private sector actors or incorporation into government programs.

The CEPF niche builds on experience from the first three investment phases (2008-2013, 2013-2020 and 2020-2025) by focusing on approaches that have demonstrated success, moving from pilot projects to longer-term interventions and integrating results more concretely into public policy and private sector practice. Recognizing that CEPF investment cannot realistically respond to the full range of conservation issues at play in the hotspot, the CEPF niche focuses on actions where civil society organizations can add the greatest value and addresses gaps in the overall landscape of donor funding for conservation.

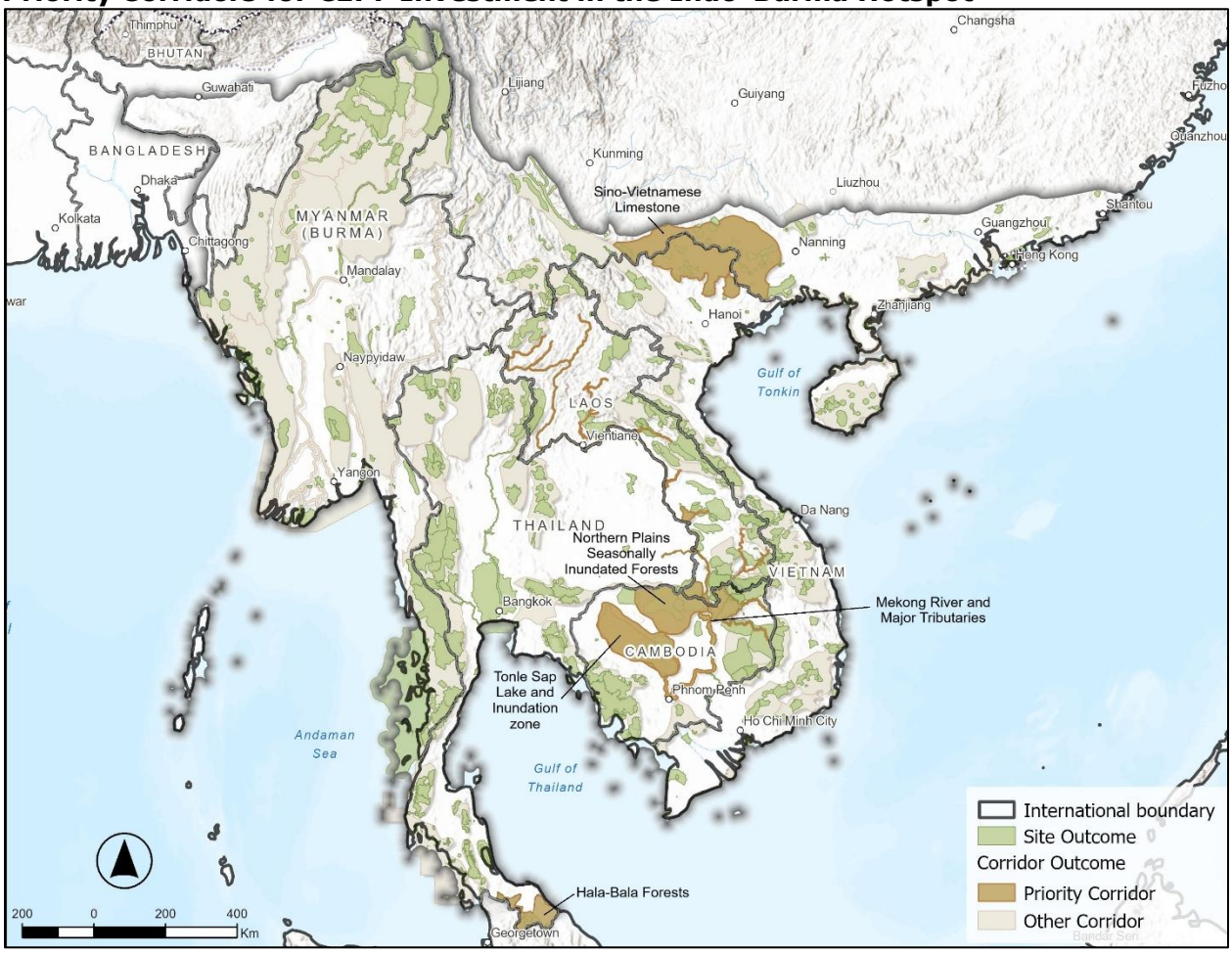
The shared investment strategy is both ambitious and indicative of the scale of the conservation challenges still facing the Indo-Burma Hotspot. The amount of resources required to adequately support work under all parts of the strategy over the next five years exceeds those available to any individual funder for investing in civil society. To this end, the implementation of the shared strategy will be coordinated through regular meetings between CEPF and other funders, under the auspices of the Lower Mekong Funder Collaborative. As other funders make decisions about investment in the region and develop their grant portfolios, CEPF will adapt its own investment niche to avoid duplication, address gaps and take advantage of opportunities for collaboration, synergy and amplification.

Biological Priorities for Investment

Conservation outcomes provide the biological basis for CEPF investment in the Indo-Burma Hotspot: the quantifiable set of species, sites and corridors that must be conserved to curb loss of global biodiversity. The conservation outcomes for Indo-Burma were defined during the preparation of the original ecosystem profile and then updated in 2011 and 2020. During the latest update, the conservation outcomes were revised again, to reflect new information on the status of species, sites and corridors. In order to enable investment by CEPF and other funders to be directed effectively, the conservation outcomes were prioritized using standard criteria, including urgency of conservation action and opportunity to enhance existing conservation efforts.

The list of species outcomes increased from 1,298 in 2020 to 2,202 in 2025, reflecting increases in the number of globally threatened species officially recognized on the IUCN Red List. The greatest increases were among plants, for which the number of globally threatened species more than doubled; fish, amphibians and invertebrates also saw relatively steep increases. The list of site outcomes remained unchanged at 555, although 37 candidate sites and 59 boundary changes were proposed by stakeholders, highlighting the need to update the KBA network in Indo-Burma.

Priority Corridors for CEPF Investment in the Indo-Burma Hotspot



Note: not shown on this map is Myanmar Limestone Karst, a network of small sites dispersed throughout the country; these sites are too small to appear on a map this scale.

The list of corridor outcomes remained unchanged at 65 containing 416 KBAs (75 percent of the total). Five corridor outcomes were prioritized for conservation investment. They contain 73 KBAs (site outcomes), all of which were automatically selected as priority sites. In addition to the five corridors, a network of 24 limestone karst KBAs in Myanmar was identified as a geographic priority for investment. These five corridors and the network of limestone karst KBAs cover a combined area of 119,269 hectares, equivalent to 5 percent of the total area of the hotspot. This is a similar area to the geographic priorities in the 2020 ecosystem profile. The main change from the 2020 ecosystem profile was that the Chindwin River was dropped from the list of priority corridors, due to the unfavorable security situation in the area. It was replaced by the Hala-Bala Forests Corridor, which contains extensive and contiguous tracts of lowland and montane evergreen forest and significant

populations of Critically Endangered and Endangered species. The addition of this corridor increased opportunities for CEPF support to civil society groups in Thailand.

In terms of taxonomic priorities for investment, 239 globally threatened species were selected as priority species, representing 11 percent of the globally threatened species in the hotspot. These comprise 99 reptiles, 68 fishes, 37 mammals and 35 birds. Globally threatened amphibians, plants and invertebrates will also be considered eligible for species-focused conservation action in exceptional cases. The priority species include 31 turtles (including eight endemic to the hotspot), 15 primates (12 endemic) and 12 ungulates (six endemic), reflecting the high threat posed to all these groups by overexploitation, mostly driven by demand from the illegal wildlife trade.

Thematic Priorities for Investment

The thematic priorities for conservation investment in the hotspot were defined through an extensive stakeholder consultation process, based upon an analysis of the main threats to biodiversity in the hotspot and their root causes. The overall ranking of threats did not change greatly from that generated by the stakeholder consultations during the 2020 update of the ecosystem profile. Hunting and logging are considered the most pervasive threats to both species and area-based conservation outcomes across the hotspot, with additional high-ranking pressures from dams and water management, agricultural expansion and fishing. While threat intensity varies by ecosystem and country, the overall pattern underscores escalating biological resource use, habitat conversion and climate-related impacts as the dominant drivers of biodiversity loss across the region

To respond to these and other threats and to begin to address some of their root causes, the five-year investment strategy was updated. Of the 13 strategic directions in the overall strategy detailed, six were prioritized as the investment niche based on stakeholder input and consultation with the CEPF Advisory Committee and form the thematic focus for CEPF investment in the Indo-Burma Hotspot for 2026–2030. These six strategic directions encompass 22 of the 51 investment priorities outlined in the overall strategy, focusing on those that leverage the fund's unique strengths and directly contribute to its global objectives. The six strategic directions that form the CEPF investment niche are described below.

Strategic Directions and Investment Priorities in the Indo-Burma Hotspot

Strategic Directions	Investment Priorities
COMPONENT I: CONSERVATION OF PRIORITY SPECIES	
1. Safeguard priority globally threatened species by mitigating major threats and restoring wild populations [CEPF niche]	1.1 Sustain long-term conservation and systematic monitoring programs for core populations of priority species
	1.2 Reestablish viable wild populations of priority species in line with global guidelines
	1.3 Research and pilot innovative and sustainable funding mechanisms to support long-term species conservation
	1.4 Support species champions at the community level to implement locally identified actions for priority species

Strategic Directions	Investment Priorities
	1.5 Improve knowledge of globally threatened species and candidate species, including through community action research, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and citizen science, for which greatly improved information is needed to inform strategic conservation planning and action
2. Mitigate health risks and biodiversity loss by addressing illegal wildlife trade, unsustainable consumption and spillover risks at the wildlife–livestock–human interface within a One Health framework [CEPF niche]	2.1 Support enforcement agencies to unravel wildlife trade networks by promoting the application of global best practice with investigations, intelligence and informants
	2.2 Facilitate coordination among enforcement, livestock, human health and environmental agencies to address illegal wildlife trade and associated disease risks through integrated One Health strategies
	2.3 Work with private and state-owned companies, with a particular focus on social media and online platforms, to reduce the risk that their platforms are used to facilitate wildlife trafficking
	2.4 Support targeted, evidence-based campaigns to reduce demand for illegal wildlife products, raise awareness of the health and conservation risks and mobilize public participation in detecting and reporting wildlife crime
	2.5 Support research and action to understand and address linkages between biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and the emergence of zoonotic diseases, as part of a coordinated One Health approach
COMPONENT II: PROTECTION AND STEWARDSHIP OF PRIORITY SITES	
3. Strengthen the management effectiveness of Protected and Conserved Areas (PCAs) and the engagement of CSOs and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in their management and governance to improve conservation at priority sites [CEPF niche]	3.1 Empower IPLCs and CSOs to participate in the governance of PCAs and to strengthen their rights and opportunities in broader resource management
	3.2 Enhance PCA effectiveness through the adoption of global standards and the development of accredited training programs
	3.3 Empower IPLCs to lead and sustain OECMs through authentic local processes
	3.4 Update the KBA network by applying the latest IUCN Global Standard and guidelines to existing and potential new KBAs
4. Support sustainable practices and livelihood opportunities that enhance biodiversity conservation and benefit IPLCs at priority sites	4.1 Promote sustainable livelihood projects that demonstrably link livelihood and socio-economic improvements to conservation outcomes at priority sites and document and share best practices and lessons learned
	4.2 Develop and strengthen best-practice ecotourism initiatives at priority sites

Strategic Directions	Investment Priorities
	4.3 Engage the private sector in conservation-compatible investments and livelihood initiatives at priority sites and support them in adopting and championing best practices that enhance ecosystem health and community well-being
	4.4 Integrate community-based monitoring of environmental pollution and health risks into biodiversity conservation through a One Health approach
	4.5 Promote adoption of safer, biodiversity-friendly agricultural practices, including reduced use of pesticides and fertilizers, especially near priority KBAs and water bodies
5. Build a stronger evidence base for conservation through site-based research to assess ecological and socio-economic factors	5.1 Support research on biodiversity, ecosystems and ecosystem services at priority sites, including socio-economic context, valuation, processes and innovative monitoring
	5.2 Synthesize existing knowledge, engage stakeholders to assess information needs and integrate data to identify and prioritize key knowledge gaps
	5.3 Translate scientific findings into accessible formats, formulate evidence-based policy recommendations, incorporate new insights into site management plans and build capacity among stakeholders to apply this knowledge effectively
COMPONENT III: ENHANCEMENT OF ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY AND RESILIENCE	
6. Implement scalable approaches for integrating biodiversity, ecosystem services and Nature-based Solutions (NbS) into development planning in priority corridors [CEPF niche]	6.1 Assess development policies and their impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem services and promote alternative scenarios, NbS and mitigation measures
	6.2 Implement and scale ecosystem restoration efforts, including demonstration projects, to generate replicable models and inform broader application
	6.3 Engage the media to increase awareness, inform public debate and influence decision-making on mainstreaming biodiversity into development planning
7. Minimize the social and environmental impacts of energy and transportation infrastructure, industrial agriculture and mining within priority corridors	7.1 Strengthen the tenure security and decision-making power of IPLCs threatened by large-scale development
	7.2 Upgrade the legal status of unprotected priority sites threatened by large-scale development
	7.3 Work with the private sector to ensure that large-scale projects are developed and operated responsibly and in accordance with environmental and social safeguards
	7.4 Support integrated planning that balances water, food and energy needs with conservation using models like watershed co-

Strategic Directions	Investment Priorities
	management and sustainable agriculture to reduce pressure on biodiversity
	7.5 Support research and monitoring of the environmental and social impacts of large-scale developments in priority corridors
	7.6 Facilitate CSO-government collaboration to enhance policy influence and joint initiatives
8. Promote and enhance sustainable agriculture practices and landscape management models that sustain healthy, connected ecosystems in priority corridors	8.1 Improve agricultural practices and build farmer and extension capacity for biodiversity-friendly production
	8.2 Pilot and scale-up models for biodiversity-friendly production, including certification and eco-labelling
	8.3 Advocate for policies that integrate ecological considerations, establish financial rewards for sustainable practices and support market linkages for environmentally friendly products
	8.4 Foster cross-sector and regional collaboration to empower IPLCs and promote sustainable agriculture
COMPONENT IV: DEVELOPMENT OF A CONSERVATION CONSTITUENCY	
9. Support the establishment, capacity and organizational development of civil society organizations to work on biodiversity, communities and livelihoods at regional, national, local and grassroots levels [CEPF niche]	9.1 Support networking and knowledge exchange mechanisms, including mentoring partnerships between established CSOs and new or informal groups, that enable collective civil society responses to priority and emerging threats
	9.2 Provide support for organizational and technical capacity development of CSOs, including tailored capacity-building programs for emerging organizations
	9.3 Establish mechanisms to match technical expertise, whether volunteer-based, peer-to-peer or paid, with the capacity development needs of CSOs and IPLCs
	9.4 Provide start-up support and flexible financing (e.g., mini-grants, seed funding) to new grassroots and IPLC-led organizations, helping them establish governance systems, pilot initiatives and build credibility
10. Conduct targeted education, training and awareness raising to build capacity and support for biodiversity conservation among all sections of society	10.1 Invest in the education, training and leadership development of future conservation leaders and key individuals
	10.2 Investigate the feasibility of establishing an Indo-Burma conservation field studies center
	10.3 Build conservation awareness and behavior change through education and outreach
	10.4 Conduct targeted training and awareness-raising activities for decision makers in government and the private sector on biodiversity

Strategic Directions	Investment Priorities
	conservation, including impacts of development policies and projects on ecosystems
COMPONENT V: COORDINATION AND MONITORING OF CONSERVATION INVESTMENT	
11. Evaluate the impacts of conservation investment on biodiversity and human wellbeing through systematic, transparent and inclusive monitoring, emphasizing learning, accountability and adaptive management	11.1 Use common standards and systems for monitoring the impacts and effectiveness of conservation actions
	11.2 Develop common standards and systems for monitoring the impacts of development policies, plans and projects across multiple scales
	11.3 Build capacity for monitoring and data analysis among CSOs and IPLCs and promote shared learning
	11.4 Ensure that monitoring results, including indicators related to biodiversity and human well-being, inform both national policies and local-level adaptive management
12. Support coordination mechanisms at the national and local level to ensure that conservation investments are aligned, effective and responsive to site- and species-based needs and opportunities	12.1 Support the establishment and strengthening of local conservation coordination platforms to enhance collaboration, funding access and policy influence
	12.2 Facilitate joint planning and implementation among multiple conservation actors working in the same site or landscape to reduce duplication, increase impact and foster synergies
	12.3 Support participatory monitoring and adaptive management frameworks that enable coordinated decision-making and learning at the site or corridor level
13. Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination of conservation investment through a regional implementation team (RIT) [CEPF niche]	13.1 Build a broad constituency of CSOs working across institutional and political boundaries towards achieving the shared conservation goals described in the ecosystem profile

Strategic Direction 1: Safeguard Priority Globally Threatened Species by Mitigating Major Threats and Restoring Wild Population

Indo-Burma is one of the most important hotspots in the world for the conservation of globally threatened species. According to the IUCN Red List, there are currently 2,202 globally threatened species that occur (or have recently occurred) in the Indo-Burma Hotspot, including many endemic species. For certain taxonomic groups, such as turtles, Indo-Burma supports more globally threatened species than any other hotspot. Furthermore, conservation of threatened species is recognized as a high priority by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It is addressed under Target 4 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which aims to ensure that by 2030, the extinction of known threatened species is halted, and, by 2050, extinction risk is reduced tenfold and the abundance of native wild species has increased.

This strategic direction directly responds to the most severe threats identified across the Hotspot, particularly hunting terrestrial animals (the highest-ranked threat to biodiversity in the hotspot), as well as fishing of aquatic species.

Despite the importance of Indo-Burma for globally threatened species, species-focused conservation receives little attention from national governments in the hotspot. Although several international donors (including CEPF) have opened specific funding windows for species-focused conservation, it only receives a small proportion of overall conservation investment. In part, this reflects an assumption on the part of governments and some donors that conservation of representative examples of natural ecosystems, for instance through the establishment of protected or conserved areas (PCAs), will be sufficient to maintain viable populations of the species that occur there. While this is true for many species, a significant number require additional action, particularly to address overexploitation.

Consultation workshops in the six Indo-Burma Hotspot countries in 2025 reaffirmed the critical need to prioritize species conservation and emphasized that many globally threatened species cannot recover without focused efforts. A key revision to this strategic direction is an enhanced focus on restoring wild populations, including reintroductions, head-starting, ex situ linkages and habitat enhancement. In line with stakeholder feedback, this strategic direction also places stronger emphasis on improving knowledge on globally threatened species, to address significant gaps regarding species behavior, ecology, distributions, population trends and socio-economic drivers of their declines. By supporting ecological research, long-term monitoring and partnerships that bridge science, TEK and citizen science, CEPF will help close these knowledge gaps and ensure that conservation actions are based on robust and inclusive evidence.

Strategic Direction 2: Mitigate Health Risks and Biodiversity Loss by Addressing Illegal Wildlife Trade, Unsustainable Consumption and Spillover Risks at the Wildlife–Livestock–Human Interface within a One Health Framework

Zoonotic disease risks linked to wildlife trade and consumption are well documented in the hotspot, with pathogens such as H5N1 avian influenza, African Swine Fever and livestock-borne diseases (e.g., lumpy skin disease, rabies, canine distemper) posing major threats to human health, livestock and wildlife. Poaching, trade and consumption of wildlife were also identified as the highest direct threats to species during the 2025 stakeholder consultations. These pressures occur within a broader context of unsustainable consumption and increasing spillover risks at the wildlife–livestock–human interface. Demand for wildlife products, both legal and illegal, continues to drive species declines, especially among priority species, while land-use change, agricultural intensification and close contact between people, livestock and wildlife elevate zoonotic emergence risks. Despite international initiatives (e.g., INL, DEFRA, EU), funding is concentrated in a few large programs and often poorly integrated with national One Health strategies or sustainable consumption efforts. Bilateral funding reductions, limited enforcement budgets and low political prioritization further constrain responses across the Indo-Burma countries.

Building on CEPF's 2020 investment niche and based on stakeholder feedback during 2025 consultation workshops, this strategic direction has been reframed through a One Health lens: an integrated approach that recognizes the interconnected health of people, animals and ecosystems and promotes cross-sector collaboration to address shared risks. It also reflects a shift in emphasis from disease prevention alone to addressing underlying drivers such as habitat degradation, encroachment, unsafe wildlife handling and lack of livelihood

alternatives for Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs). This framing recognizes that reducing illegal wildlife trade, promoting sustainable consumption and reducing risky behaviors at the wildlife–livestock–human interface not only benefits biodiversity but also mitigates risks to human health and livelihoods. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the global dangers of spillover from wildlife to humans, particularly in regions such as the Indo-Burma Hotspot, which is both biodiversity-rich and has a high risk of spillover of zoonotic diseases.

Strategic Direction 3: Strengthen the Management Effectiveness of PCAs and the Engagement of CSOs and IPLCs in their Management and Governance to Improve Conservation at Priority Sites

Protected areas remain a cornerstone of biodiversity conservation in the Indo-Burma Hotspot but shortcomings in their effectiveness constrain what is being achieved for conservation. Protected areas are also generally under-resourced. Between 2020 and 2025, protected areas received approximately 13 percent of bilateral donor conservation funding, while national budgets primarily focused on infrastructure and salaries rather than operational management. Given this and considering that 67 percent of KBAs in the hotspot lie wholly or partly outside of gazetted protected areas, there is a need to broaden conservation approaches beyond conventional protected areas, while, in parallel, working to improve protected area management effectiveness.

Consultations in 2025 reaffirmed that strengthening protected area management effectiveness is a core need but stressed that donor support must also extend to engaging CSOs in protected areas and expanding support to OECMs, such as community forests, community fisheries, sacred groves and other locally governed conservation areas, where many of the most innovative and resilient models are found. Stakeholders also emphasized that CSO and IPLC equity and involvement in the management and governance of PCAs are not just enabling conditions but outcomes in their own right. Stakeholders believe CEPF can play a key role by enabling CSOs to partner with government authorities and rights-holders to provide sustained technical, financial and capacity support. Across the hotspot, community-based conservation has proven an effective complement or alternative to state-led systems, as demonstrated by village fish conservation zones in Lao PDR and community-managed primate sites in Vietnam.

Strengthening the management effectiveness of PCAs and the engagement of CSOs and IPLCs in their management and governance will directly address several of the highest-ranked threats to area-based outcomes, including hunting, logging, crops and fishing.

This strategic direction will focus on realizing stronger governance, inclusive participation and professional capacity. It will empower IPLCs and CSOs to engage meaningfully, applying global standards for PCAs, sustaining authentic IPLC-led OECMs and building accredited training programs.

Strategic Direction 6: Implement Scalable Approaches for Integrating Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services and Nature-based Solutions into Development Planning in Priority Corridors

Ecosystem fragmentation across the Indo-Burma Hotspot is weakening ecological integrity, threatening globally threatened species, reducing climate resilience and undermining essential ecosystem services such as water regulation, flood mitigation and soil stabilization. Past conservation investments have largely targeted site-based threats, while overlooking broader drivers, such as infrastructure expansion, regional economic integration,

unsustainable agriculture and weak land-use governance that continue to accelerate degradation. Large-scale pressures, including dams, irrigation schemes, mines and the expansion of agriculture, were identified during the 2025 consultations as among the most significant threats to biodiversity. Stakeholders also emphasized that these same drivers could serve as entry points for integrating biodiversity and Nature-based Solutions (NbS) into upstream planning and policy decisions.

Civil society has an important role in shaping these processes by advocating sustainable alternatives, applying tools such as Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), spatial planning and performance standards and promoting inclusive decision-making. By embedding biodiversity values and NbS into policy frameworks, corridor-level planning and development strategies, natural ecosystems can contribute more effectively to ecological connectivity, climate adaptation and sustainable development.

This strategic direction aligns with Target 1 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework on integrated spatial planning, as well as Sustainable Development Goal 15, which aims to mainstream biodiversity into national and local development. Stakeholders in 2025 called for a shift from "demonstrating" to "implementing" scalable and replicable models, particularly those that apply NbS to reconcile conservation and development outcomes. Projects supported under this direction must show clear potential for replication or policy uptake through civil society, government or private sector pathways. Priority will be given to approaches that address sectoral impacts in energy, transport and agriculture, promote inclusive and participatory processes and apply safeguard principles, such as the mitigation hierarchy.

Strategic Direction 9: Support the Establishment, Capacity and Organizational Development of Civil Society Organizations to Work on Biodiversity, Communities and Livelihoods at Regional, National, Local and Grassroots Levels

International NGOs continue to play important roles in convening partnerships, providing technical expertise, mobilizing finance and accessing global forums but their legitimacy at the local level can be limited. In contrast, domestic CSOs increasingly enjoy IPLC trust, contextual knowledge and the ability to influence policy from the bottom up. Responsibility for long-term conservation success is thus shifting toward national and grassroots actors, with INGOs positioned more as facilitators and supporters than primary drivers.

Consultations across all six Indo-Burma countries in 2025 strongly reinforced this trend, emphasizing that supporting the growth of existing domestic CSOs and supporting the establishment of new ones, especially IPLC-based and for underrepresented groups, is central to achieving sustainable outcomes. Identified needs extend beyond technical training to include institutional governance, financial management, leadership development and communications.

Despite growing recognition, investment in civil society remains limited. Although funding for capacity building has more than doubled since 2020, it is still among the least supported conservation activities in the hotspot and there is limited dedicated support for longer-term organizational development. With the exception of Thailand, most governments provide little to no funding for civil society and few mechanisms exist for long-term institutional development.

This strategic direction places renewed emphasis on targeted, equitable and sustained investment in civil society, moving beyond short-term training toward long-term support for

organizational development that addresses issues of governance and financial sustainability. CEPF will prioritize underserved areas, community-led groups and organizations led by women and Indigenous peoples, who face disproportionate barriers to participation. All projects must integrate gender considerations into their design and implementation and demonstrate strategies to promote equity in access to capacity building and organizational development. By aligning with CEPF's niche of empowering civil society, this strategic direction responds to strong regional demand for locally led solutions that are credible, resilient and scalable.

Strategic Direction 13: Provide Strategic Leadership and Effective Coordination of Conservation Investment through a Regional Implementation Team

In every biodiversity hotspot where it invests, CEPF engages a RIT to translate the ecosystem profile into an integrated, impactful portfolio of CSO-led actions. The RIT plays a central role in grantmaking, capacity building, knowledge management and portfolio coordination, ensuring investments are strategic, cost-effective and aligned with local contexts and stakeholder priorities.

For 2026–2030, the RIT will consist of one or more qualified CSOs with strong operational presence in the Indo-Burma Hotspot, operating in line with CEPF's mission, Operational Manual and principles of transparency, inclusiveness and accountability. Consistent with CEPF policy, organizations serving as RIT members will not be eligible for grants within the hotspot, although legally independent affiliates with separate governance structures may be considered subject to external review and due diligence.

Stakeholder consultations in 2025 reaffirmed the RIT's essential role in strengthening national-level coordination, supporting underrepresented grantees and facilitating knowledge exchange across countries and sectors. There was strong support for maintaining localized presence and close alignment with national conservation priorities. The RIT's scope may, therefore, include additional responsibilities for national and local coordination where this adds value and strengthens links with government and donor priorities.

As a key institutional mechanism within the CEPF delivery model, the RIT will ensure that investments are strategically targeted, efficiently managed and responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities, maximizing the long-term impact of conservation in the Indo-Burma Hotspot.

Conclusion

The Indo-Burma Hotspot remains one of the most biologically important regions on Earth, with exceptional levels of species diversity and endemism. Conservation investment has increased significantly in recent years, reflecting both stronger national commitments and sustained international support. Between 2020 and 2024, at least US$5.5 billion was invested in biodiversity conservation across the hotspot (a 62 percent increase from 2015–2019), with around 80 percent financed by national governments and 20 percent by international partners.

Despite this progress, biodiversity continues to face escalating threats. Hunting and logging remain the most pervasive pressures on species and area-based conservation outcomes, alongside growing impacts from dams and water management, agricultural expansion, fishing and climate change. Without urgent action, continued ecosystem degradation will undermine ecosystem services, accelerate species extinctions and heighten vulnerability to climate and health crises.

Civil society organizations are well placed to address these threats and their underlying drivers, yet current investment does not always target the most critical priorities or promote the most effective, scalable approaches. To help close this gap, the 2025 update of the Indo-Burma Ecosystem Profile provides a refreshed, results-oriented investment strategy for 2026–2030. This strategy outlines 13 strategic directions and 52 investment priorities, with CEPF focusing on six directions and 17 investment priorities across five key corridors (Hala Bala Forests, Mekong River and Major Tributaries, Northern Plains Seasonally Inundated Forests, Sino-Vietnamese Limestone and Tonle Sap Lake and Inundation Zone) plus a network of limestone karst KBAs in Myanmar. CEPF will also target 239 priority species requiring focused conservation action. The new strategy represents an ambitious yet practical opportunity to harness civil society's innovation, energy and reach to safeguard Indo-Burma's unique and irreplaceable biodiversity.