



## Conservation and Communities Fellowship 2024



Global Diversity Foundation

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## The Conservation and Communities Fellowship

The Conservation & Communities Fellowship (CCF) offers tailored skills development, leadership growth and network-building for Global South grassroots changemakers and organisations working at the intersection of conservation and livelihoods.

Recent research has shown that conservation funding flows remain profoundly inequitable. Only a small proportion of funds go directly to grassroots organisations in the Global South. One of the core challenges these organisations face in accessing philanthropic and grant funds is a lack of capacity for fundraising, communications and effective project cycle management.

The CCF helps Global South conservation leaders build relationships with Global North donors to grow their programmes, strengthen their organisations and amplify their impact. This creates opportunities for donors to partner directly with well-resourced grassroots organisations.

This was a life-changing experience for me and I attribute the next part of my journey to a lot of the experiences I have held at CCF. Thank you for bringing me along on this journey.

- Rosebell Abwonji, CCF Cohort 2024

## Global Environments Network

The CCF is a programme of GDF's Global Environments Network (GEN), a community of 700 people from nearly 90 countries, working on the frontlines of social and ecological justice. GEN connects, supports and amplifies the work and voices of hundreds of changemakers, activists and innovators who are actively seeking solutions to our shared planetary crisis. GEN members have an extraordinary diversity of backgrounds and experiences, and are united by their passions and work to create a more equitable and sustainable world.

GEN was launched in 2012, following a successful first international event - the Global Environments Summer Academy (GESA) - in 2011. Since then, we have held 7 further GESAs, 4 regional academies and 5 community exchanges. Through these transformative events, we bring together communities of like-minded individuals and resource them with the skills and support they need to enhance their impact, including strong peer-to-peer connections to fellow engaged practitioners. Network members benefit from mentoring, seed funding, project guidance and tailored support alongside opportunities for learning and mentoring.

The CCF emerged from a regular encounter we were hosting in 2022 and 2023 for GEN members. That facilitated space offered support to those working at the intersection of biodiversity and livelihoods as they designed their projects, learned new skills and sought funding. As we decided to formalise this working group and sought funds for it, the concept grew



and evolved into the ambitious fellowship programme we have realised today. The first fellowship ran from 1 November 2023 to 29 August 2024, funded by the UK Darwin Initiative.



## Conservation Justice Programme

Expanding on the CCF, we established the Conservation Justice Programme (CJP), an integrated ecosystem of initiatives aimed at advancing equity, inclusivity and justice within conservation. Rooted in decades of Global Diversity Foundation's work, the CJP reflects our commitment to empowering Global South leaders and communities: to drive transformative conservation practices, strengthen organisational development, challenge systemic inequities, and contribute to sustainable biodiversity and livelihoods. The CJP currently gathers the CCF and its Alumni Programme (see below), as well as the [Conservation Futures Dialogues](#), which offers a curated public space for reimagining conservation, and we are seeking funds for the Grassroots Leadership Programme, which seeks to make this type of learning available at a community scale, in local languages.



## The CCF journey



### Partners

We delivered the CCF through a partnership with three exceptional organisations that each contributed unique skills, perspectives and awareness to the fellows. Common Purpose is a global not-for-profit on a mission to develop people who can cross cultural, institutional and social boundaries. Both at work and in society, they deliver compelling, surprising, and powerful leadership programmes and workshops. The Human Edge operates on the belief that effective mentoring empowers individuals and organisations to go further, faster. By enabling leaders to unlock their human potential, they can better lead others and support their communities to fulfil their potential. WildTeam offers conservationists worldwide the knowledge, skills, and community support they need to design and deliver conservation projects that have more impact.

The fellowship programme was designed in collaboration with Common Purpose and The Human Edge who generously offered their significant experience in programme development and management, helping GDF learn, grow and gain confidence in our leadership of the CCF programme.

## CCF Components

The CCF 2024 design integrated three thematic streams, offering complementary components that allow fellows to build their leadership capacities whilst establishing sustainable organisational development processes. We include below an additional stream planned for upcoming iterations of the CCF.

MENTORING	LEADERSHIP	CAPABILITIES & CAPACITIES	COMMUNITIES & CONSERVATION (planned for 2025 onwards)
Led by The Human Edge through a process of individual and relational growth, fellows are trained in the art of mentoring to enhance their management and relationship-building. They are organised into active and supportive peer-mentoring pairs that last beyond the fellowship.	Led by Common Purpose, through dialogues with key conservation sector actors, this stream enhances fellows' capacities to engage with diverse stakeholders, lead their organisation through growth, and build communities of cooperation and collaboration. This stream includes the discovery of peer-coaching skills.	Led by GDF, with support from WildTeam, this stream focuses on technical skills including proposal writing, project management, and team management. It centres spaces for peer learning and exchange. Each fellow also receives at least 10 hours of bespoke individual mentoring from experienced conservation and NGO leaders.	Led by GDF, this new stream, included at the request of the first cohort of 2024 fellows, opens a space for critical dialogue and debate around policies, practices and public discourses on community-based conservation, integrating varied speakers and tailored workshops.

In addition to the core streams, CCF 2024 incorporated a series of complementary components designed to build fellows' networks and communications skills and enhance their organisations' management capacities. Again, we include here an additional stream planned for 2025.

COMMUNITY EXCHANGE	MSc INTERNSHIPS	COLLECTIVE PUBLICATION	SEED GRANT FUND (planned for 2025)
The in-person component of the fellowship is curated to facilitate intensive face-to-face learning, cohort consolidation and the seeding of long-term collaborations among fellows. A 2025 planned in-person event in Bolivia will be hosted by CCF 2024 fellows.	We fund 5-10 internships for MSc students within fellows' organisations. MSc research projects help catalyse the organisations' growth and expand their research horizons, while also offering primarily Global North students insight and embodied learning around the challenges of grassroots conservation practice.	As part of their learning, fellows are trained in public storytelling, including writing a compelling story of their work. We then produce a cohort publication to highlight their invaluable contributions to conservation, offering fresh perspectives and insights essential to shaping the future of the field. The 2024 publication, entitled <i>Our Land, Our Stories: Voices from the Edges</i> is available for download <a href="#">here</a> .	GDF offers a dedicated CCF-focused Seed Grant Fund to help fellows innovate and grow their programmes. Grantees receive ongoing mentoring and training around topics such as pitching, proposal writing, storytelling, communication, financial management and impact measurement.

"What CCF presented us with was fulfilling, all-rounded and beyond my expectations. The CCF has the potential to offer young conservationists a very wonderful learning journey. I am excited about the emerging opportunities and potential for future engagements beyond it."

Silole Malih, CCF Cohort 2024

## Schedule

The 10-month CCF 2024 programme combined 93 hours of online sessions and a 10-day in-person event.

Kick-off 1 November 2023			
Mentoring Stream (9 sessions; 20.5 hours)	Leading Beyond Authority Stream (8 sessions, 14.5 hours)	Capabilities & Capacities Stream (35 sessions, 56 hours)	In-Person Sessions (12-19 May 2024)
<p>Mentoring Training: Six 2.5-hour sessions laid the foundation for effective peer and organisational mentoring.</p> <p>Peer-mentoring pairing and check-ins: Fellows paired in February 2024, followed by two 1.5-hour check-ins in April and July 2024 to track progress and refine mentoring practices.</p>	<p>Five 2-hour sessions of facilitated dialogue with philanthropic donors, Global South conservation organisations and other inspiring actors in the environmental sphere.</p> <p>Three 1.5 hour peer coaching sessions provided a supportive space for practising non-traditional leadership skills and mutual learning to shift fellows' understanding and practice of leadership</p>	<p>Skills-building workshops: Seven 2-hour sessions enhanced technical competencies in project design, fundraising, and partnerships.</p> <p>Technical assistance clinics: Fourteen 1.5 hour drop-in clinics offered tailored support on conservation challenges.</p> <p>Darwin Initiative proposal writing seminars: Fourteen weekly sessions (June to September 2024, 1.5 hours each) provided in-depth guidance on crafting competitive funding proposals for the Darwin Initiative.</p>	<p>Community Exchange (12-14 May 2024): Three days of intensive exchange and networking consolidated relationships, built collaborations and an alumni programme.</p> <p>International Society for Ethnobiology Congress Participation (15-19 May 2024): Fellows presented their work in 3 self-organised panel sessions, and engaged with diverse scholars and practitioners.</p>
			Graduation 29 August 2024



## Stream integration

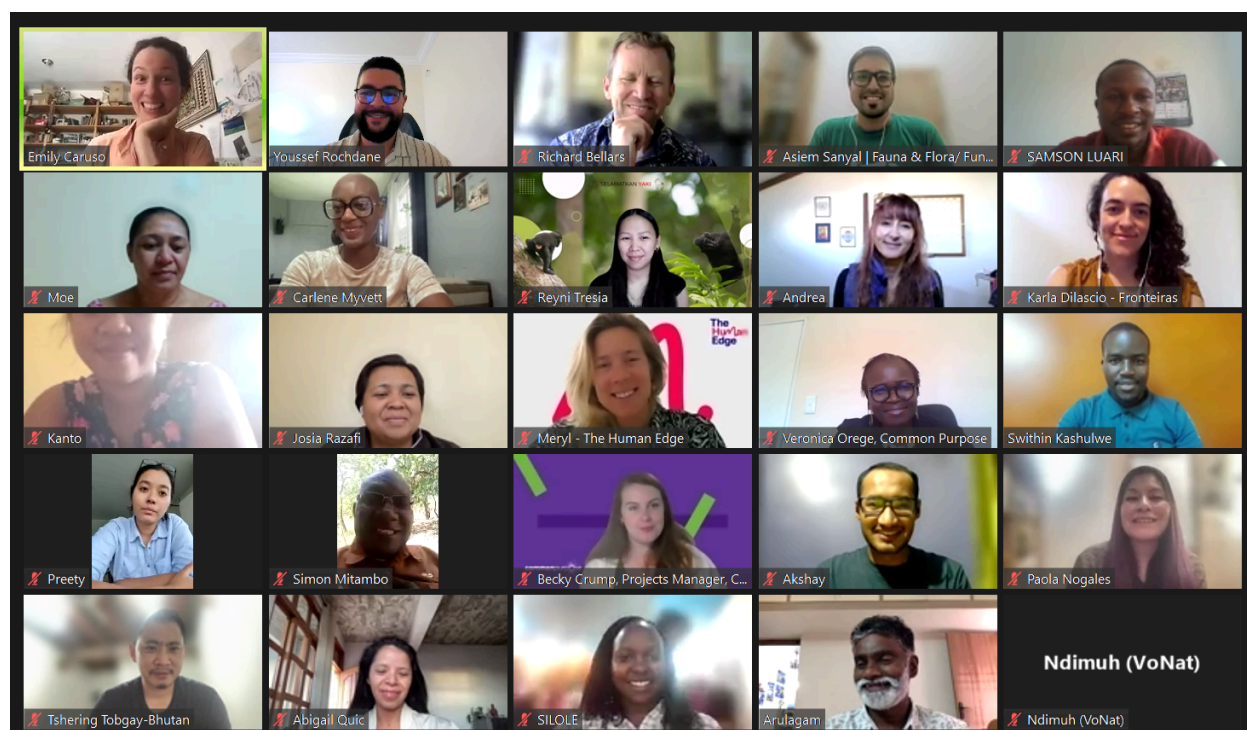
Certain streams were interwoven across the timeline to ensure a cohesive experience:

- Leadership and mentoring sessions complemented each other by aligning individual growth with team dynamics and organisational leadership.
- Skills-building workshops and clinics provided technical support at critical moments in the fellowship, reinforcing practical applications of leadership and mentoring learnings.
- We strategically placed proposal writing seminars and in-person sessions later in the timeline to allow fellows to apply their acquired skills to real-world challenges.

This integrated approach supported fellows to develop leadership confidence, enhance fundraising capabilities, and build sustainable grassroots organisations capable of driving long-term conservation impact.

The peer-to-peer mentorship session, with everyone taking turns to serve as a mentor, mentee and observer...was experiential and so inspiring. I left most of the experiential mentorship sessions feeling really inspired, encouraged and relieved.

- Ndimuh Bertrand Shanco, CCF Cohort 2024



## Alumni Programme

The Alumni Programme provides ongoing opportunities for networking, mentoring, and skills development, allowing alumni to stay connected and continue growing as leaders. We co-designed the AP with our fellows, who recommended the following:

- **Mentoring and Networking:** Continuation of mentoring (both for outgoing and incoming fellows) and facilitating opportunities for peer exchange, both in-person and virtually.
- **Alumni Engagement:** Establishing regional hubs, regular alumni newsletters, and platforms for sharing fellow profiles and opportunities.
- **Support Tools:** Creation of a living donor database, shared resources, and supports like proposal reviews and seed funding for collaborative projects.
- **Capacity Building:** Providing capacity-building workshops for community partners on grant writing, technical support, and international negotiations.
- **Scaling Learnings:** Sharing best practices and co-creating programs with community partners, especially in areas like storytelling, co-implementation, and local knowledge valorisation.

**What We Have Already Started:** We have begun developing a structure for the Alumni Programme, which will include ongoing access to resources, mentorship, and opportunities for collaborative projects. We have already begun offering two clinics each month, focused on fundraising and communications. These are spaces where alumni are welcome to bring any issues, questions or needs; we facilitate clinics to encourage peer learning and peer mentoring, and use them to encourage alumni to get out of their comfort zones and gain more confidence in exploring new ideas and promoting their work.

Additionally, we are exploring ways to expand our donor database, strengthen the network's and members' searchable profiles on our website, and integrate tools that support the capacity-building needs of both fellows and community partners. The Alumni Programme will be open to all future CCF alumni. For a summary overview of the Alumni Programme and our current plans, please refer to this [link](#).

## Fellows

### Selection process

The call for applications for the CCF was launched at the end of August 2023 and closed 7 weeks later. In that time, we received 627 applications from all over the world. We selected 32 participants from 19 countries, including new countries for the Global Environments Network such as Papua New Guinea, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, and Bhutan. Thirty-one of the fellows completed all 10 months of the programme.

Our criteria for selection were:

- Leaders from the grassroots in the Global South whose organisations work at the intersection of biodiversity and livelihoods, or from community-based organisations;
- Self-reflexivity and excellent analysis of their own and their organisation's challenges;
- Relative ease with spoken and written English;
- Strong motivation for and capacity to commit to the full 10-month programme, including the in-person event;
- A regularly functioning internet connection.



## Impact of the CCF

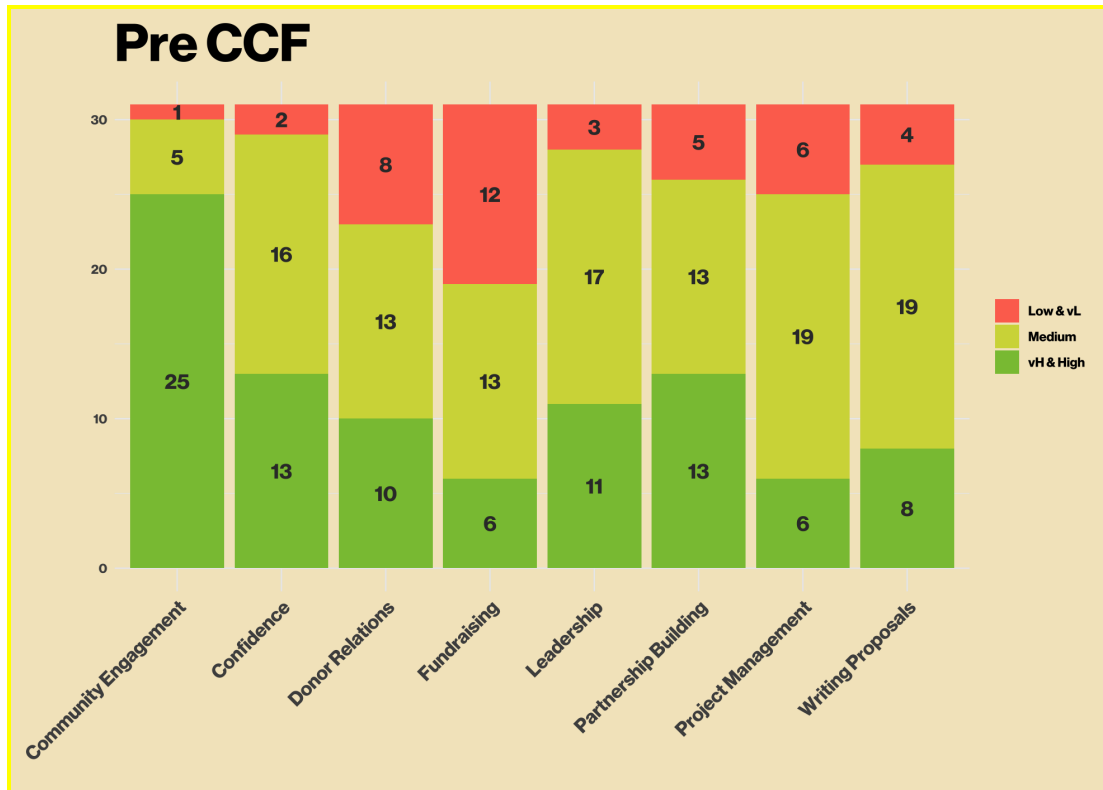
To measure the direct impact of the CCF on fellows individual skills and organisational capabilities, we carried out a baseline survey at the start of the CCF on 29 October 2023, followed by an identical survey on 29 August 2024, at their graduation. This process measures self-reported changes. We also carried out post-fellowship in-depth interviews with a subset of fellows to explore the more qualitative aspects of the fellowship's impact. In addition, in April 2025, we will update this report to offer a more objective assessment through an analysis of the success rate of funding proposals fellows submitted during and after the period of the fellowship.



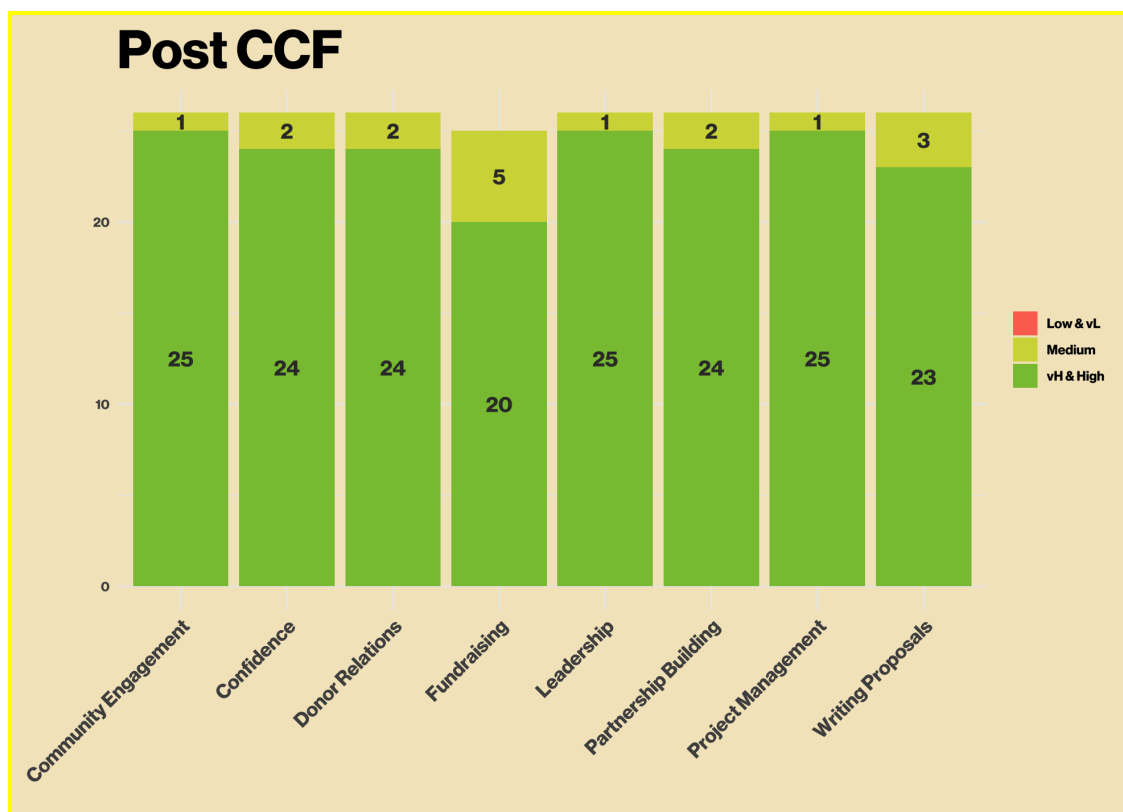
## Skills and Capabilities Survey

Here we summarise the results of the survey that measured post-CCF improvement in individual skills and organisational capabilities compared to the pre-CCF baseline; a fuller report is available [here](#).

The two charts below show the difference in self-reported skills and capabilities across key areas of learning for individuals and their organisations, pre- and post-fellowship.



NB: vL = very low; vH = very high



#### Key findings:

- The CCF yielded positive results across a broad range of skills. All organisational capabilities and individual skills, except Community Engagement, showed a median improvement of at least 1 rating score (such as moving from "Medium" to "High" or from "High" to "Very High"), indicating substantial progress across most areas. Because Community Engagement stood out as the highest-rated skill in pre-CCF self-assessments, with over 80% of fellows rating their proficiency as High or Very High, which left limited room for further improvement.
- Monitoring and Evaluation had the highest average improvement, highlighting the program's strong impact in this area. This skill was initially the lowest-rated, on average, in fellows' pre-CCF surveys.
- Notable improvement was observed in Time Management, Leadership, and Mentoring, reflecting the positive development of these skills among the fellows.
- Skills like Writing Proposals and Reports and Financial and Technical Reporting exhibited low variability in their reported improvement, indicating that these were uniformly impacted by the training. Fellows across the cohort reported similar levels of improvement in these skills.
- Some skills, such as Donor Relations and Communication and Partnership Building, displayed higher variability in improvement, reflecting that while some fellows benefited greatly, others showed little to no progress. This suggests that a more tailored approach might be necessary in these areas to ensure consistent improvement across fellows. We

will address this through an increase in focus on individual mentoring in future fellowship cohorts.

Overall, the results of the survey show significant improvements in individual skills and organisational capabilities over the fellowship time period, with data pointing to the need for a greater focus on organisational development. The CCF team is planning to enhance the organisational development components of the fellowship in future iterations, including through a seed grant fund to support fellows' organisations post-fellowship, inviting team members from fellows' organization to join capacity-building sessions, and building team capacity-building into the fellowship curriculum. We piloted the seed funds in 2024, with 5 fellows receiving seed funds for their projects (four of which are available for viewing below).

[Empowering Indigenous Magar Communities to Restore Threatened Medicinal Plants and Uplift Livelihoods](#) in Jaljala, Parbat District, Nepal

[Bridging the Gulf of Guinea - Leveraging Cross-Country Learning on Marine Protected Areas for Scale](#), connecting São Tomé and Príncipe with Nigeria

[Saving the Aquatic Giants: Conservation of Hippopotamuses](#) in the Ruzizi Plain, Democratic Republic of Congo

[Weaving Steps Towards Coexistence](#) in Corral Pampa, Bolivia

## Proposal success metrics

In April 2024, we asked fellows to share topline information about the proposals they had written between 1 November 2023 when the fellowship started and 31 March 2024. If they had information regarding the success of the proposal, it was included in the survey responses. In April 2025, we surveyed them again to find out if any of the previously-submitted proposals had been successful, and to learn about any new proposals submitted (and their success). While this is a rather gross metric to assess the impact of the fellowship, we received qualitative feedback within the survey regarding the role of the CCF in supporting them during these fundraising activities.

The results are as follows:

November 2023 - April 2024

Between 1 November 2023 and 31 March 2024, 27 CCF fellows submitted a total of 127 proposals. Of these, 35 had received a positive response by the time we carried out the survey in late March 2024, while an additional 52 proposals were still pending review. We are planning to follow up with a further survey on 31 March 2025, to extend these figures and assess post-fellowship fundraising growth.

While responding to this survey, the fellows noted that the support they had received in the first few months of the fellowship had been crucial in strengthening their grant-writing skills,



leadership development, and fundraising abilities. For example, fellow Preeti Sharma (India) highlighted how the mentorship and workshops not only improved her proposal-writing process but also helped her empower her team to think independently, contributing innovative ideas to collective proposal writing, resulting in successful grants. Kelly Caichihua Castro (Peru) found that the fellowship had significantly helped her organisation refine its approach to fundraising and project planning, leading to the submission of multiple proposals. Notably, Lameck Mkuburo (Tanzania) credited the fellowship's fundraising training for equipping him with the skills to secure a USD \$100,000 grant just months after the fellowship started, in January 2024.

These reflections showcase the impact of the fellowship, not just on individual participants but also on the communities and organisations they support.

April 2024 - April 2025

*[This section will be updated in April 2025]*

In October 2024, 12 CCF fellows submitted proposals to the Darwin Initiative round 31. We are expecting feedback on these proposals in February or March 2025.

Since the CCF programme has started (...) a lot has changed as far as our fundraising abilities are concerned. With the skills we have acquired, we are beginning to confidently approach bigger donors and we are beginning to get multi-year funding, which is what we have always wanted. With multi-year funding, we're able to make long-term plans, take time implementing them, get real results, and create tangible impact!

- Aghah Valery Binda (Cameroon), CCF Cohort 2024

## In-depth interviews

After the conclusion of the fellowship, we carried out in-depth interviews with four fellows: Beatriz Murer (Brazil), Aghah Valery Binda (Cameroon), Silole Malih (Kenya) and Tresia Reyni Palohoen (Indonesia). The interviews demonstrated the significant value the fellows attributed to their participation in the CCF.

An overall take-away that emerged from all the four interviewees was the ways in which CCF significantly improved their skills as leaders of their organisations or of specific programmes/teams within them, reinforcing their confidence, strengthening their capacity to manage and communicate with compassion and listen their team, as well as improvements in specific skill sets.

For example, Valery Binda, founding director of Agriculture and Bio-conservation Organization for Youth Empowerment and Rural Development (ABOYERD), highlighted how, on the one hand, the fellowship was a *transformative* experience in his approaches and methodologies as

an organisational leader. On the other hand, both the training in fundraising and the possibility offered by the fellowship to enter in direct conversation with donors, has given him the material grounds to establish a financial partnership which will have significant consequences on ABOYERD's long-lasting capacity to continue their conservation mission.

I think the CCF transformed me. I am a better leader. Now I have developed conflict management skills within the team, and I have better communication skills, which is something that has always been very, very important for me as a conservation leader, as a team leader, as someone who works with indigenous communities and also fundraising. It was a huge problem, but I think that I got my breakthrough by participating in the CCF.

- Valery Binda, CCF 2024 Cohort

Interviewed fellows also attributed strong value to the mentorship component of the CCF programme.. They described both the opportunity to engage in extensive one-to-one mentorship sessions with fellow participants and receiving support through mentoring clinics as a 'transformative' experience – one offering take-aways not only for the fellows' immediate professional needs, but also for life.

Both Beatriz Murer, a programme manager at Instituto Socioambiental, and Silole Malih, programme lead at Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement & Conflict Transformation (I.M.P.A.C.T) Kenya, described how the fellowship offered a learning experience that exceeded their original expectations. It profoundly changed their understanding of how to work within the field, by offering not only actionable tools and skills, but also new ways to position themselves, especially at the interpersonal level.

My journey at CCF was about reinforcing how diverse we are and how great diversity is, while at the same time recognizing that we are more alike than different across the world. But most importantly, it highlights that there is space and importance for everyone and each individual[....] Learning how to ask questions, how to understand and share problems with others are the two biggest things that I learned, through CCF, for my life and I've been trying to apply them within my team, in my professional daily work.

- Beatriz Murer

Fellows described the CCF as a life-changing journey, one that has allowed them to feel and practice how to belong to a diverse and solid community of practice. The CCF curricula and pedagogy offered a blend of hands-on tools, relational skills, and systemic perspectives in a context that fostered long-lasting relationships. By strengthening fellows' individual skills, CCF has transformed the ways in which they operate in their organisations and communities proving itself as a powerful learning experience to enhance the organisational capacities and resilience of Global South conservation professionals and their initiatives.

I originally expected the fellowship to offer mainly practical learning - just sitting and sharing lessons. But I was actually able to learn leadership skills, mentorship skills, and how to become vulnerable[....] CCF offered a wholesome picture, in [these] .... also in terms of engaging with donors. Having the opportunity to be engaged in peer coaching and or to even just interact with other conservationists or practitioners in this sector was a really good experience.

- Silole Malih

A more comprehensive analysis and edited versions of the interviews run with the fellows will be published in February 2025.

This fellowship was very crucial (...) not just to myself as a leader but to my team, because it was a learning opportunity that helped translate the outcome to members of my team. The fellowship was instrumental in building the kind of network and skillset not just in accessing funds or grant writing, but also in engaging with stakeholders, international donors or landscape stakeholders. It also helped us in assessing peer-to-peer learning opportunities, not only with African grassroots conservationists but also some others from South America, Central America and across the world.

- Rachel Ashegbofe Ikemeh (Nigeria), CCF Cohort 2024

## Evaluation and recommendations

Over the course of the fellowship and beyond, we carried out multiple evaluations:

1. We implemented a baseline survey at the start of the fellowship which we followed up at its close (see Impact section above);
2. Each stream was individually evaluated through a survey;
3. We carried out a participatory evaluation during the in-person event in May 2024;
4. We carried out long-form interviews with a sample of fellows after the fellowship ended;



5. We held numerous informal individual and focus group conversations during and after the fellowship to ensure we were continuously adapting our approach to fellows' feedback.



Through these mechanisms we learned what the fellows believe are core and essential components of the fellowship, and what needs to change.

#### What Needs to Stay:

- Networking and peer support, including unbiased feedback, vulnerable sharing, and meeting donors.
- Sessions on fundraising, proposal structuring, Theory of Change (TOC) development, and storytelling.
- Mentoring sessions, especially breakout rooms for shyer participants and the Wheel of Life tool.
- Diversity within the cohort and content support for non-native English speakers.

#### What Needs to Change:

- Tech: Zoom is not the preferred platform for everyone, and Miro board for content-sharing was not well received. Calendar reminders were recommended.

- Length/Intensity/Order: Reduce session length to 1.5 hours max with more homework/assignments (4-6 hours/month). Balance between shorter, intense sessions and longer sessions. Longer in-person meetings ( $\geq 3$  days) are needed for deeper engagement. A shorter, more intense programme calendar.
- Other Suggestions: Introduce more emerging leaders, provide comprehensive resources (e.g., handbooks) upfront, and include a dedicated session for creating shared agreements. Consider smaller cohorts. Integrate more systems thinking, with content contextualised to participants' needs, and include a focus on conservation policy and practice.

## CCF 2025



The second edition of the CCF builds and learns from the first, making responsive changes to the overall learning journey while maintaining the pillars of its success. Scheduled to begin in June 2025/September 2025, it includes:

- A 5-month programme: Fellows' evaluations oriented us towards a shorter, more intensive programme.
- A cohort of 24 fellows: A smaller group offers more focused individual support to leaders and organisations.
- Conservation and Communities Stream: The new stream will explore the policies, practices and public discourses that shape community-based conservation.

- An in-person community exchange: Tentatively planned for Bolivia, it will take place at the start of the programme.
- Individual mentoring sessions and peer-mentoring extended.
- Peer-learning and -sharing increased.
- Maintaining network-building and increasing diverse outreach opportunities and platforms for fellows and their organisations.
- A dedicated CCF Seed Grant Fund, embedded in a package of ongoing mentoring and training, to help fellows grow their programmes.

The programme also extends its impact into the post-fellowship phase, offering additional opportunities - such as grants to host MSc interns, seed funding for projects, collective publications, and ongoing individual mentoring to support fellows in implementing their learnings and scaling their conservation efforts - beyond the 5-month fellowship term.

The CCF fellowship demonstrates the transformative power of investing in conservation leadership and community-driven approaches. By equipping fellows with critical skills, fostering meaningful mentorship, and enabling collaborative networks, we are building an inclusive community of leaders with the power to sustain and grow grassroots conservation initiatives. The results of these efforts extend beyond the fellowship by strengthening the capacity of fellows' organizations and local partners, advancing equitable conservation practices, and shifting conservation discourse at the global level.

Through shared learning, co-creation, and scaling of best practices, this initiative contributes to the ongoing shift towards funding equity, grassroots leadership, and championing community knowledge within the conservation sector. Together, we are shaping a sector that is more just, locally grounded, and globally impactful.

## Acknowledgements

The 2024 Conservation and Communities Fellowship was made possible by the Darwin Initiative, Salvia Foundation and an anonymous donor. We are very grateful for their support.