BioFi Project



CEDPO

Turning Community Priorities into Investable Projects

OSA PENINSULA, COSTA RICA **WEBSITE**

The Osa Peninsula contains an estimated 2.5% of the planet's biodiversity on less than 0.0004% of its land area. Its rainforests, mangroves and marine ecosystems include one of the largest mangrove forests on Central America's Pacific coast, the Golfo Dulce, and a large stretch of undeveloped lowland rainforest. At the same time, communities face limited employment, land insecurity and gaps in education and healthcare, while illegal logging and mining, poaching, mass tourism and other forms of development put pressure on local ecosystems.

The Center for Strategic Development for the Osa Peninsula (CEDPO) grew out of participatory systems mapping that began in 2015 to understand these challenges together: what communities wanted for the peninsula, what was getting in the way and where there were opportunities to intervene. CEDPO was subsequently established as a Costa Rican association to turn that analysis into locally led projects and investment.

Its role is simple: develop, connect and invest. CEDPO identifies promising local projects, helps strengthen them, connects them with technical expertise and funding, and follows their

progress. Its portfolio spans rainforest restoration, regenerative agriculture, Indigenous culture, waste management and public services.

Challenge

Many of the initiatives CEDPO encounters need relatively small amounts of capital for specific needs: equipment, infrastructure, training or the next stage of a local enterprise. But funding alone is not always the constraint. Early-stage initiatives may need help developing a proposal, finding technical expertise or building the organizational capacity to receive and manage funding.

This creates a mismatch between local projects and potential funders. Individual communities may need only a few thousand dollars, while larger donors may be looking to deploy substantially more. CEDPO therefore works both to develop projects to the point where they can use funding effectively and to create a process through which local people determine which projects receive support.

Model

Projects are sourced and nominated by members of CEDPO and the Osa Territorial Council (OTC), a government-mandated participatory council representing communities and other stakeholders across the peninsula. Some arrive with developed proposals; others are still early ideas. When additional support is needed, CEDPO can connect project leaders with universities or NGOs to develop a proposal, strengthen the project or build organizational capacity.

Projects must be locally or Indigenous-led and are assessed using systems criteria. A proposal is first agreed upon by CEDPO's board and then presented to the OTC for approval. If there is not enough funding for every approved project, CEDPO and the OTC help prioritize which projects move forward.

CEDPO has seven directors and around 20 association members, all but one of whom are local or Indigenous community members. The OTC has a 30-person steering committee and 300-member assembly, with at least 60% local, non-governmental and Indigenous representation. Over the past three years, every project brought forward for funding has received unanimous agreement from both CEDPO and the OTC. This gives people with direct knowledge of the territory and its communities a formal role in deciding where funding goes.

Finance

CEDPO's financial model to date has relied on donations and grants, primarily from family foundations and individual donors in the United States and Costa Rica. It generally presents a group of prioritized projects for funding in November, receives funding for three or four projects in December and January, and raises additional funds for other approved projects during the year.

Funding reaches projects through two main routes:

- Direct grants to local organizations. When an organization has the legal capacity to receive funding, Regenerative Earth (the U.S. nonprofit that co-founded CEDPO) presents CEDPO- and OTC-approved projects to potential funders and acts as fiscal sponsor. Once funding is secured, the grant can go directly to the organization under an agreement drafted by CEDPO. For example, Regenerative Earth provided a $6,000 grant directly to BioSur for a women-led meliponiculture project. BioSur managed training for women from two communities to make value-added products from the honey of melipona bees they cultivate.
- Funding managed by CEDPO. When a project does not have a legal entity capable of receiving funds, or project members ask CEDPO to manage the money, Regenerative Earth receives the grant as fiscal sponsor and transfers it to CEDPO. CEDPO then purchases the materials required. A $6,663 circular economy project used this route to provide ten farming families with biodigesters, water catchment containers and other materials. The biodigesters turn animal waste into energy and compost, while water storage helps families manage the dry season.

In both cases, CEDPO helps move projects from locally identified needs to fundable proposals, connects them with funders and technical partners, and stays involved during implementation.



Outcomes

Over its first four years, CEDPO mobilized $226,013 in grant funding for twelve projects and strengthened the capacity of more than 25 initiatives across environmental, social and economic sectors. In 2025 alone, its work reached 22 communities and 558 people through training, services and education.

Its portfolio includes work with indigenous Ngäbe families to strengthen cultural systems and transfer knowledge between generations; vanilla production in agroforestry systems; recycling and recoverable-waste management; women-led meliponiculture; public sanitation infrastructure; inter-generational community gardens; addressing a bottle neck in organic cacao production for the OSACOOP; and circular-economy technologies for farming families.

Lessons

One of CEDPO’s clearest lessons is that locally important projects often do not require large amounts of money. A targeted grant of several thousand dollars can provide equipment, training or infrastructure, or help a local enterprise reach its next stage. The challenge is getting

appropriately sized capital to projects that may be too small or early-stage to attract larger funders directly.

CEDPO has also found that the work between a funder and a project matters. Some initiatives need help articulating their needs, developing proposals, connecting with technical expertise or building enough organizational capacity to use funding successfully. CEDPO sees this intermediary role, together with local participation in project selection, as a way to reduce risk for funders.

So far, CEDPO has not found a strong need for multiple forms of investment capital. Grants and donations have financed its portfolio, although it plans to explore whether other forms of capital could be useful. One experiment is already underway through Aromas de Osa, its vanilla agroforestry project. Farmers initially receive vanilla vines through project funding. Once the vanilla becomes productive, they begin repaying 50% of the cost of their vines at 0% interest to Aromas de Osa. Those repayments can then support other farmers. Repayment begins only once the crop is productive, and the returned funds remain within the initiative rather than requiring a new grant for every round of vines.

What's Next

CEDPO's next challenge is to move beyond project-by-project grant funding toward a more durable financing architecture for the Osa. It plans to support five to ten locally led projects each year, while exploring a dedicated financing structure that could bring larger and longer-term pools of capital into the territory while keeping allocation grounded in local priorities. CEDPO is also considering whether this model could eventually support a national fund serving multiple Costa Rican bioregions.