



Africa's Conservation Funds Chart a Shared Course for Coastal and Marine Futures



16th CAFÉ General Assembly | Bissau, Guinea-Bissau | 28 September – 2 October 2026

160+ participants	58 countries represented	25 CAFÉ member CTFs	26 countries of member CTFs
-----------------------------	------------------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------------------



From the mangrove-fringed shores of West Africa, the continent's conservation finance community has sent a clear signal: protecting coastal and marine landscapes is a shared African responsibility that demands African leadership, durable financing and genuine partnership. The 16th General Assembly of the Consortium of African Funds for the Environment (CAFÉ), convened under the theme **“Coastal and Marine Landscapes – Integrating Ecosystems, People and Culture,”** closed with two landmark outcomes: the signing of the Bissau Declaration and the admission of four new Conservation Trust Funds (CTFs) to the network.

A Continental Gathering with Regional Resonance

The Assembly brought together more than 160 participants from 58 countries across Africa and beyond: CTF leaders, policymakers, government representatives, technical experts, practitioners, development partners and conservation stakeholders. It was officially opened by H.E. Dr. Carlos Pinto Pereira, Minister of Environment and Climate Action of Guinea-Bissau, alongside H.E. Dr. Virgínia Pires, Minister of Fisheries and Maritime Economy, whose presence underscored the country's commitment to safeguarding its rich coastal and marine ecosystems. The attendance of Senegal's Minister of Environment and Ecological Transition further highlighted the shared responsibility of West African countries for the Atlantic seascape they hold in common.

Over five days, the Assembly functioned as a platform for peer learning, strategic dialogue, partnership building and collective action. Its programme moved deliberately from the continental picture, to West African practice, to the financial mechanisms that can sustain conservation over decades.



A section of the audience during the General Assembly session

Key Themes and Messages

Seascapes are connected, and so must be the strategies that protect them. Opening sessions examined the state of Africa's coasts and seascapes, the added value a regional trust fund can bring to West Atlantic conservation, and how CTF strategies can integrate coastal, marine, freshwater and terrestrial areas with natural and cultural heritage. Practitioner exchanges on marine protected area governance and the seascape approach drew on collaborative and delegated management experience from iSimangaliso in South Africa and Pemba in Zanzibar, positioning sound governance as an enabler of sustainable finance.

Long-term sustainability depends on finance that lasts and keeps innovating. Technical sessions on managing conservation endowments, including global investment strategies and lessons from African funds, reflected the central concern of CTFs: protecting capital while delivering reliable resources for conservation. Dialogues and roundtables explored new frontiers, from blue economy and blue carbon to blended finance and debt-for-nature approaches, with the Gabon experience on finance for permanence and the West Africa Mangroves initiative, including its pilot in Guinea-Bissau, offering practical models. Senegal's CTF feasibility study for protected areas showed regional momentum for new institutions.

People and culture sit at the heart of conservation outcomes. A solutions dialogue tackled the barriers and enablers of direct access to CTF funding for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, while a conversation on Conserva Aves Africa examined partnership for locally led conservation at scale. A session on the corridor approach along the East Atlantic Flyway reinforced the value of connecting landscapes, communities and stakeholders.

African institutions learn best from one another. Sessions on peer mentorship, measuring conservation finance impact through the experience of Madagascar's FAPBM, the results and replication opportunities of the BRIDGE Project, and what CTF readiness requires for long-term financing mechanisms turned experience into shared tools. A special panel gave emerging funds from Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Mozambique, the Cubango-Okavango basin and Liberia a platform to present their paths and positioning, while an exhibition by Guinea-Bissau's Institute of Biodiversity and Protected Areas (IBAP) showcased turtles, protected areas and mangroves.

Experiential Learning: Field Visit to the Bijagós Archipelago

A landscape of global conservation significance. On 1 October, participants travelled from Bissau to the Bijagós Archipelago, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve of more than 80 islands off the coast of Guinea-Bissau. The archipelago hosts globally important populations of sea turtles, manatees, hippopotami and migratory birds, alongside remarkable mangrove and coral reef systems and the living cultural traditions of the Bijagó people, one of West Africa's most distinctive island civilisations.

Far from a peripheral excursion, the field visit was a core element of the programme. After an overnight stay on Rubane Island, participants visited João Vieira & Poilão Islands Marine National Park, while others went to Orango National Park, before returning to Bissau on 2 October. They encountered sea turtles in João Vieira and hippos at Orango, grounding the Assembly's dialogues in the ecosystems, communities and cultures that conservation finance must ultimately serve.

Major Outcomes and Milestones

✓ The Bissau Declaration

The Bissau Declaration stands as a key political and institutional outcome of the Assembly. It was signed by H.E. Mr. Aliou Gori Diouf, Minister of Environment and Ecological Transition of Senegal; H.E. Dr. Carlos Pinto Pereira, Minister of Environment and Climate Action of Guinea-Bissau; H.E. Dr. Virgínia Pires, Minister of Fisheries and Maritime Economy of Guinea-Bissau; and the President of CAFÉ.

Its significance lies in turning the Assembly's theme into shared commitment. By joining national leadership and the CTF community behind stronger cooperation, the Declaration affirms the sustainable protection of coastal and marine landscapes, biodiversity, communities and livelihoods as a common priority.

✓ Four New Members Strengthen the CAFÉ Network

The Assembly admitted four new members: the Liberia Conservation Fund (LCF), Liberia; the Cubango-Okavango River Basin (CORB) Fund, covering Botswana, Namibia and Angola; the Blue Economy Development Fund (ProAzul), Mozambique; and the Guinean Conservation Trust Fund, Guinea (Conakry). With this expansion, CAFÉ now counts 25 Conservation Trust Fund members operating across 26 countries, a clear measure of the growing strength, reach and relevance of the African conservation finance community.



From left to right: Ms. Charlotte Karibuhoye Said, Chairperson of the Board of the BioGuinea Foundation; H.E. Dr. Virgínia Pires, Minister of Fisheries and Maritime Economy; H.E. Dr. Carlos Pinto Pereira, Minister of Environment and Climate Action; and Professor Théophile Zognou, President of CAFÉ

With Thanks to Our Partners

The Assembly was made possible through the support of the BioGuinea Foundation, the World Bank, CAFÉ, The Nature Conservancy, Enduring Earth and The Pew Charitable Trusts. Their contributions helped bring together the people, knowledge and ideas that gave the Assembly its depth, and reinforce a wider agenda for sustainable conservation finance in Africa.

Looking Ahead

Bissau leaves CAFÉ with a larger network, a political commitment on record and a sharper shared agenda. The Assembly showed that Africa's conservation funds are not only recipients of support but institutions able to mobilize, manage and grow sustainable finance on the continent's own terms. The task now is to carry the Declaration's spirit into practice: strengthening endowments, opening finance to communities, scaling proven models and deepening collaboration among funds, governments and partners. In doing so, CAFÉ and its members will help secure healthy coasts, thriving communities and living cultures for generations to come.