

STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	11541
Project title	Watershed Action for Restoring Ecosystems in the South Corridor of St. Vincent
Date of screen	21 May 2026
STAP Panel Member	Ermias Betemariam
STAP Secretariat	Geetha Nayak

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

The project will be implemented in the south-western watersheds of mainland St. Vincent, a critical agricultural and development zone where land degradation drives downstream pollution, increased sedimentation, coral reef degradation, and declining fisheries. The proposal clearly diagnoses the problem within a ridge-to-reef systems context and presents well-aligned objectives, a robust Theory of Change, and innovative linkages between land degradation neutrality and land-based pollution control. However, STAP recommends clearer articulation of the baseline scenario and key enabling conditions for achieving and sustaining the intended outcomes, stronger and more systematic integration of climate, drought and disaster risks, including the role and more explicit involvement of national disaster risk management authorities, and more practical detail on the sustainable finance mechanism, particularly how it will be governed and linked to adoption of nature-based solutions. While Component 2 introduces promising sustainable financing concepts, further detail is required on their operationalization, governance, links to existing national funds, adoption incentives, and long-term financial viability, with these aspects to be refined during the PPG stage. Overall, the project is well designed and innovative, with strong potential for learning, replication, and demonstration of synergies across the three Rio Conventions.

Note to STAP screeners: a summary of STAP's view of the project (not of the project itself), covering both strengths and weaknesses.

STAP's assessment*

- ☐ Concur - STAP acknowledges that the concept has scientific and technical merit
- ☒ **Minor - STAP has identified some scientific and technical points to be addressed in project design**
- ☐ Major - STAP has identified significant concerns to be addressed in project design

Please contact the STAP Secretariat if you would like to discuss.

2. Project rationale, and project description – are they sound?

The project intends to target the south-western part of mainland St. Vincent, specifically the lower and mid-watershed catchment zones characterized by intensive agriculture, urbanization, expanding commercial activity, and largely unchecked coastal development. *The target area is also a key agricultural production zone for the country.* The problem is clearly situated within the **systems context**, including how **land degradation-induced pollution** in the southwest corridor (upstream) affects water quality, increases sedimentation, impacts coral reefs, and contributes to declining fish biomass in coastal areas (downstream). This ridge-to-reef framing is one of the proposal's strengths. The proposal describes the **underlying drivers** and **core problem** well, and the project objectives are designed to address them in a *holistic and integrated manner*.

The PIF presents **uncertain futures** succinctly through a **simple futures narrative** and notes that the project is structured to be *“both responsive and resilient to changes in key drivers.”* This is useful, but the implications of the futures narrative should be linked more directly to project design choices, site selection, monitoring indicators, and decision points. STAP recommends that the futures narrative be complemented during the PPG stage by a simple ex ante outcome projection, comparing plausible “without project” and “with project” pathways for land degradation, land-based pollution, SLM/NbS

adoption, ecosystem-service outcomes, and durability under drought, extreme rainfall, landslides, hurricanes, and changing land-use pressures.

The proposal presents a comprehensive discussion of the **core barriers**; however, the **baseline scenario** and **key enablers** for achieving and sustaining the intended outcomes are not sufficiently addressed.

The **project objective** is clearly articulated and presents a convincing rationale for the proposed interventions as designed. It is noteworthy that the project seeks to achieve compliance with the Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS Protocol) under the Cartagena Convention; the lessons learnt will likely be valuable for replication in similar settings.

The Theory of Change is robust with clear outputs-outcomes alignment. It would be strengthened by making explicit the assumptions on institutional coordination, private-sector behaviour change, farmer adoption, and long-term maintenance of nature-based solutions. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, as one of the 39 Small Island Developing States and low-lying coastal developing states represented by AOSIS faces disproportionate risks from the impacts of climate change. The project acknowledges the potential for climate-related extreme events to affect project activities and outcomes, particularly in relation to field-based interventions. Climate risk and disaster screening, including drought and other climate- and disaster-related hazards, and site-specific mitigation measures and other operational contingencies should therefore be integrated into project design and implementation plans to ensure the durability and sustainability of project investments (refer to [World Bank Climate and Disaster Risk Screening | The World Bank Climate and Disaster Risk Screening Tools](#)).

The **project components** are well designed and clearly presented, including references to GEF and non-GEF projects, and applicable legislation and policies that will contribute to achieving the outputs under each component and **project additionality** is clearly articulated. The project proponents have conducted **stakeholder consultations** involving a wide range of stakeholders; however, STAP recommends that the relevant national authority responsible for disaster risk management be more explicitly involved in project design and implementation, and monitoring. This should explicitly consider drought and other climate- and disaster-related hazards that could influence the durability of project outcomes.

Under Component 2, the project intends to establish sustainable financing solutions to de-risk the transition to sustainable practices for improved land management. As noted in the project document, the current financing landscape in the country is characterized by limited options and a heavy reliance on donor-funded resources. However, it is not sufficiently clear how the proposed financing mechanisms such as payments for ecosystem services (PES), green bonds, and guarantees will be operationalized in practice, including institutional hosting, eligibility criteria, risk-sharing arrangements, governance, and sequencing. In particular, the proposal does not clearly demonstrate how these mechanisms would go beyond existing funds and grant-based schemes (e.g. the SVG Conservation Fund and the GEF Small Grants Programme). Furthermore, it remains unclear how the financing agreements with at least 20 farmers, agro-enterprises, and other enterprises under Component 3 will effectively lead to sustained adoption of nature-based solutions, and how adoption and maintenance will be monitored after support ends. STAP recommends that the PPG clarify the link between the financing mechanism, Component 3 demonstrations, and monitoring of adoption outcomes. STAP therefore recommends that these aspects be elaborated in greater detail during the PPG stage, including the long-term financial viability of the financing mechanisms beyond GEF support.

The project's approach is **innovative**, particularly in its explicit alignment of the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (LDN-TSP) with the Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS Protocol). The proposal highlights that this alignment is practical, as both frameworks rely on similar technical approaches and largely shared national regulatory and institutional arrangements. In addition, this integrated approach facilitates the adoption of scalable nature-based solutions to mitigate land degradation, supported by a financial incentive framework to be developed and applied across agri-food, tourism, and other commercial sectors to

promote best practices. STAP recommends that the lessons learned and practical implementation experiences from this approach be systematically captured and disseminated for adaptive management and national scaling beyond the target watersheds. The project also has the potential to demonstrate a good-practice model, showing how project activities can be aligned with national development objectives and international obligations under the three Rio Conventions.

Following resources may be consulted to further sharpen the project interventions - [Land restoration to safeguard nature and livelihoods: UNCCD and CBD working together | UNCCD](#) . The project may also draw on relevant UNCCD-CBD guidance on land restoration to further strengthen biodiversity and land-degradation synergies. The project may also consult the WOCAT Global SLM Database (<https://wocat.net/en/database/>) to identify field-tested SLM technologies and approaches relevant to watershed restoration, erosion control, drought resilience, agroforestry, buffer zones, and integrated soil and water management.

Risks to the project design and implementation have been identified appropriately. However, it is important to reiterate that climate-risk, drought, and disaster screening, along with site-specific mitigation measures, should be fully integrated into project planning, implementation, and the post-project phase, and reflected not only in the risk table but also in the Theory of Change, site-level design, implementation arrangements, and post-project sustainability measures, to ensure long-term resilience and sustainability.

3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions

- Provide a clear and more detailed baseline scenario and the key enabling conditions required to achieve and sustain the intended outcomes, including institutional coordination, enforcement capacity, technical capacity, farmer and enterprise incentives, and financing arrangements.
- Develop a simple ex ante outcome projection during the PPG stage to test whether the proposed policy, finance, and NbS/SLM interventions are likely to deliver durable outcomes under different plausible futures under differing climate, disaster, and land-use scenarios.
- Strengthen the Theory of Change by making explicit the assumptions on institutional change, behavioural change, private-sector engagement, farmer adoption, and long-term maintenance of nature-based solutions.
- Systematically integrate climate, drought, and disaster risk screening into project design, implementation, and post-project planning, including the identification of site-specific mitigation measures and operational contingencies, to ensure the durability and long-term sustainability of project investments (refer to [the World Bank Climate and Disaster Risk Screening Tools](#)).
- Ensure that national disaster risk management stakeholders are explicitly included alongside environmental, agricultural, planning, tourism, finance, community, and other actors in project design, implementation, and monitoring.
- Provide details on how the proposed financing mechanisms including payments for ecosystem services (PES), green bonds, and guarantees will operate in practice, including institutional arrangements and their governance, eligibility criteria, risk-sharing arrangements, sequencing, and links to existing national funds.
- Demonstrate clearly how the proposed financing mechanisms go beyond existing grant-based schemes (e.g. the SVG Conservation Fund and the GEF Small Grants Programme), rather than duplicating them.
- Clarify how financing agreements under Component 2 will be effectively linked to Component 3 demonstration activities, and how these arrangements will lead to sustained adoption of nature-based solutions by farmers, agro-enterprises, and other private-sector actors, including through monitoring of adoption and maintenance outcomes after financing agreements end.
- Elaborate on the long-term financial sustainability and viability of the proposed financing mechanisms beyond GEF support, and expand and refine these aspects during the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) stage, as recommended. During the PPG stage, use the WOCAT Global SLM Database (<https://wocat.net/en/database/>) to identify field-tested SLM practices

suitable for erosion control, runoff management, drought resilience, watershed restoration, agroforestry, and buffer-zone management.

- Refine the results framework and monitoring plan to connect restored hectares, improved management, enterprise adoption, and awareness outcomes with measurable ridge-to-reef results, including reduced erosion/sedimentation risks, improved water-quality parameters, reduced nutrient/agrochemical runoff, and sustained maintenance of NbS/SLM practices beyond the financing agreements.
- Systematically capture, document, and disseminate lessons learned and practical implementation experiences, particularly those arising from the alignment of the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (LDN-TSP) with the Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS Protocol), and use them for adaptive management and national scaling, not only awareness raising.
- Finally, the project could be strategically positioned as a good-practice demonstration of how integrated policy and implementation approaches can advance synergies across the three Rio Conventions (UNCCD, CBD, and UNFCCC), with clear potential for national scaling and a clearer practical scaling pathway beyond the target watersheds.

ANNEX: STAP'S SCREENING GUIDELINES

1. How well does the proposal explain the problem and issues to be addressed in the context of the system within which the problem sits and its drivers (e.g. population growth, economic development, climate change, sociocultural and political factors, and technological changes), including how the various components of the system interact?

2. Does the project indicate how uncertain futures could unfold (e.g. using simple narratives), based on an understanding of the trends and interactions between the key elements of the system and its drivers?

3. Does the project describe the baseline problem and how it may evolve in the future in the absence of the project; and then identify the outcomes that the project seeks to achieve, how these outcomes will change the baseline, and what the key barriers and enablers are to achieving those outcomes?

4. Are the project's objectives well formulated and justified in relation to this system context? Is there a convincing explanation as to why this particular project has been selected in preference to other options, in the light of how the future may unfold?

5. How well does the theory of change provide an "explicit account of how and why the proposed interventions would achieve their intended outcomes and goal, based on outlining a set of key causal pathways arising from the activities and outputs of the interventions and the assumptions underlying these causal connections".

- Does the project logic show how the project would ensure that expected outcomes are enduring and resilient to possible future changes identified in question 2 above, and to the effects of any conflicting policies (see question 9 below).

- Is the theory of change grounded on a solid scientific foundation, and is it aligned with current scientific knowledge?

- Does it explicitly consider how any necessary institutional and behavioral changes are to be achieved?

- Does the theory of change diagram convincingly show the overall project logic, including causal pathways and outcomes?

6. Are the project components (interventions and activities) identified in the theory of change each described in sufficient detail to discern the main thrust and basis (including scientific) of the proposed solutions, how they address the problem, their justification as a robust solution, and the critical assumptions and risks to achieving them?

7. How likely is the project to generate global environmental benefits which would not have accrued without the GEF project (additionality)?

8. Does the project convincingly identify the relevant stakeholders, and their anticipated roles and responsibilities? Is there an adequate explanation of how stakeholders will contribute to the development and implementation of the project, and how they will benefit from the project to ensure enduring global environmental benefits, e.g. through co-benefits?

9. Does the description adequately explain:

- how the project will build on prior investments and complement current investments, both GEF and non-GEF,

- how the project incorporates lessons learned from previous projects in the country and region, and more widely from projects addressing similar issues elsewhere; and

- how country policies that are contradictory to the intended outcomes of the project (identified in section C) will be addressed (policy coherence)?

10. How adequate is the project's approach to generating, managing and exchanging knowledge, and how will lessons learned be captured for adaptive management and for the benefit of future projects?

11. Innovation and transformation:

- If the project is intended to be innovative: to what degree is it innovative, how will this ambition be achieved, how will barriers and enablers be addressed, and how might scaling be achieved?

- If the project is intended to be transformative: how well do the project's objectives contribute to transformative change, and are they sufficient to contribute to enduring, transformational change at a sufficient scale to deliver a step improvement in one or more GEBs? Is the proposed logic to achieve the goal credible, addressing necessary changes in institutions, social or cultural norms? Are barriers and enablers to scaling be addressed? And how will enduring scaling be achieved?

12. Have risks to the project design and implementation been identified appropriately in the risk table in section B, and have suitable mitigation measures been incorporated? (NB: risks to the durability of project outcomes from future changes in drivers should have been reflected in the theory of change and in project design, not in this table.)