REVISED STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE, OCTOBER 2022

GEF ID	11490
Project title	Ecosystem restoration in seven national protected areas of Argentina
Date of screen	23 May 2024
STAP Panel Member	John Donaldson
STAP Secretariat	Alessandro Moscuzza

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

This is a reasonably sound proposal, which aims to fill significant gaps in the current efforts to address the main causes of biodiversity degradation and loss in Argentina. The project will operate in seven selected protected areas and their buffer zones with the aim of contributing to the recovery of their integrity, connectivity and ecological resilience. Argentina is home to a great diversity of species and natural ecosystems, which play an important role in maintaining the ecological balance of a number of ecoregions across Latin America and have global importance for people and nature.

The proposal presents a number of strengths, including a sound logic for intervention and a robust theory of change that sets out a detailed and credible pathway to achieve the project's objectives. The components are well-described and are fully consistent with the provisions made in the ToC.

STAP has identified a few minor issues (e.g. how project activities are clustered under the umbrella of restoration, the description of the baseline and the risk analysis) that should be addressed in the next stage of project design to ensure that all sections of the final proposal are consistent in their level of thoroughness, as well as the amount of detail and evidence they provide.

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?

See annex on STAP's screening guidelines.

The **project summary** section was well-written. In terms of content it provided a clear description of the problem and issues to be addressed, with a concise overview of the proposal, the project objectives and components as well as information on the seven targeted protected areas that were selected for intervention.

The **project objective** was clear and concise and conveyed effectively what the project is aiming to achieve. The **project rationale** section was well written and informative. The information provided was supported by a good range of data and resources with links to reference sources.

All the **project activities** are clustered under the umbrella of restoration and this makes it difficult to understand the issues that may be specific to only one of the threats (Invasive alien species (IAS), fire, habitat fragmentation) and their possible solutions. For example, the actions to limit the introduction and spread of IAS require different actions and actors to those dealing with habitat fragmentation. When these are aggregated under the umbrella of restoration, it is not always clear that all the aspects are being dealt with effectively.

The **baseline scenario** section provides a very good and detailed overview of the broader environmental and ecological situation, but less so about the institutional and legislative context, or pre-existing/ongoing interventions by government agencies or other international organizations.

The proposal shifted from the baseline scenario section to the description of the project approach and strategy without any clear headings, separation or demarcation, which should be provided in the next iteration of the proposal.

The **project approach** was clearly explained and set out a pathway to impact that focused on implementing demonstrative interventions in four areas: Invasive Alien Species, feral and private livestock, wildfires and landscape fragmentation. However, the proponents should note developments in the understanding of IAS in which options for management (prevent, eradicate, contain, manage impacts) depend on the stage of invasion (introduction, spread, invasion, impact) (Blackburn et al 2011). In many cases, control and eradication are only possible in the early stages of invasion. In the later stages, containment might be the only viable option and more intensive control would be reserved for IAS that have a critical impact on ecosystem services. The rationale and options for management of IAS would need to be considered as part of the proposed restoration strategy.

The proposal identified a number of **barriers**, actors and **stakeholders** which covered a broad range of technical, institutional and policy issues

The **theory of change (ToC)** was sound. The narrative description was detailed and provided an exhaustive amount of information and context about the proposed approach and strategy for the project. The root causes of the problems to be addressed were clearly identified and were integrated well with the description of the barriers, the components structure and the pathway to impact. The ToC diagram provided details about the different elements in a logical framework. However, it can be further improved by including a ToC statement that summarized the proposed logical pathway.

The narrative description of the **project components** was generally effective in conveying what the project will deliver and how, although in some places it could have been more concise. A welcome feature was the use of a table (table 2 pg.21) to match all the barriers identified with corresponding project components and outcomes.

The proposal includes a section on "Gender Equality And Women's Empowerment", which provides a simplified broad overview of the main issues affecting **gender equality** in Argentina, and is supported by some baseline data and statistics. The proposal also states explicitly that during the PPG stage a specific gender analysis will be prepared to understand the precise conditions in the context of each protected area participating in the project. STAP encourages the proponent to follow through with this commitment.

The **risk** management section provided a broad preliminary analysis of some of the risk categories for the project, which comprises a total of eight categories.The analysis for some of the categories such as "climate" or "environment & social" was more detailed than some of the others such as "political governance", "fiduciary" or "stakeholder", which should be expanded and other categories (e.g. institutional & policy or capacity for implementation) which should be added. In addition, it is important to determine how the risks affect the project.

In the case of climate risks, the analysis should go beyond a description of how the climate may change and analyse whether such changes present a risk to the outcomes of the project. It is also noted that technological innovation risks are rated as not applicable. This seems to assume that technologies for the management of IAS, fire control and restoration are all well developed and understood and pose no risk to the project. However, the literature and experience of these issues are replete with technical and technological challenges (e.g. ineffective control methods, impacts on non-target species and ecosystems, and technological gaps) as well as risks (e.g. societal pushback against particular technologies, concerns about use of poisons, lack of regulatory support for control methods).

Note: provide a general appraisal, asking whether relevant screening guideline questions have been addressed adequately – not all the questions will be relevant to all proposals; no need to comment on every question, only those needing more attention,

noting any done very well, but ensure that all are considered. Comments should be helpful, evaluative, and qualitative, rather than yes/no.

3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions

1. In the full proposal add some background about the political, macro-economic and institutional context for Argentina and how this is affecting the country's management and protection of natural resources.
2. Revise the baseline scenario analysis to include some additional analysis and context about the institutional and legislative context, or pre-existing/ongoing interventions by government agencies or other international organizations.
3. The proposal should included clear headings and sub-headings for all the different sections and sub-sections.
4. . The narrative section of the ToC should be shortened and made more concise. Adding a summary statement at the beginning that outlines the logical pathways would also be recommended.   ".
5. A more detailed gender analysis should be carried out during PPG stage as indicated in the project proposal.
6. The project development should ensure that a more detailed risk analysis is carried out during PPG stage, as indicated in the project proposal, and this process should look in greater depth at specific risks but also consider other risks such as the technical and technological risks flagged in Section 2.

Note: number key points clearly and provide useful information or suggestions, including key literature where relevant. Completed screens should be no more than two or three pages in length.

References

Blackburn et al 2011. A proposed unifying framework for biological invasion. Trends in Ecology & Evolution 26: 333-336.

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.)