

REVISED STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE, OCTOBER 2022

GEF ID	11426
Project title	Restoration and Preservation of Key Biodiversity Areas and Ecosystems in Anbar Province, Iraq
Date of screen	18 January 2024
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

This is a reasonably strong proposal with a sound rationale for achieving Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs) in landscapes with high biodiversity together with social and economic co-benefits. Most aspects of the project are well described and adequate for this stage of project development, including the background information, baseline, the theory of change, and description of the components. In some areas, the project document does not provide sufficient detail to determine whether key assumptions have been adequately considered or where technical issues may delay project deliverables. One weak area is the outputs relating to knowledge management, monitoring and learning where the emphasis is on compliance with GEF and UNDP standards rather than describing how they contribute to higher level outcomes and support innovation and adaptive project design.

STAP's assessment is that this project would be strengthened by considering some **minor** additions or amendments during the PPG phase. STAP recommends (section 3) reviewing the outputs associated with monitoring, learning and knowledge management and taking into consideration some suggestions regarding areas in the PIF where assumptions need to be considered or greater clarity is required.

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 proposal presents a well-reasoned rationale for the achievement of GEBs, as well as economic and climate related co-benefits in the Anbar Province of Iraq. The focus on areas that have already been confirmed as key biodiversity areas (KBAs) underpins the justification for the project.

The PIF outlines two **scenarios** for possible outcomes (with and without the GEF investment) but otherwise does not explore **possible futures** so the project has been developed based on an analysis of the current situation and the known threats. The **baseline** is reasonably well described under the heading of 'current landscape of investments and stakeholders' and should be sufficient to measure the additionality of the GEF investment.

The **theory of change** maps out the logic for a series of interventions organized under four components and 20 output that support overall objectives to conserve and restore ecosystems in the Anbar Province and also support more resilient livelihoods. In general the description and diagram adequately explain how the outputs

will support the overall objective. However, there are several underlying assumptions or outputs where the level of detail in the proposal is too limited to determine how well these have been considered in the project design and whether they have been sufficiently thought through to ensure enduring benefits. The areas where there may be a need for more information, thinking or analysis during the PPG phase are outlined in section 3.

Component 4 on “**Knowledge Management, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Social and Environmental Standards Safeguards**” is presented in a way that emphasizes compliance with GEF and UNDP standards and requirements. This diminishes the crucial role that monitoring, knowledge management and learning can contribute to the impact of the project. Monitoring, knowledge management and learning are crucial to almost all areas of the project, whether it is capturing biodiversity data for KBAs, leveraging information from the TEEB analysis to increase investment, or guiding restoration efforts but these aspects of KM&L are not reflected in the current set of outputs.

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. Further development of the project should consider how important issues relating to monitoring, learning and knowledge management can be incorporated into the outputs. The project includes several areas where good documentation is crucial (e.g. KBA assessments), where learning underpins project activities (e.g. citizen science), where access to information influences investment (e.g. TEEB valuations) and where innovation needs to be supported by monitoring and rapid learning to identify workable solutions. The design of monitoring, knowledge and learning activities should reflect these project imperatives.
2. Aspects of the project where assumptions should be validated or where further clarity would strengthen project design are:
 - Whether a ‘proper valuation of the contributions these ecosystems make to society and economies at all levels.’ will be sufficient to drive investment in the required timeframe. Valuation does not lead automatically to greater investment and there may be significant lags between the availability of good information and any change in investment.¹ There may therefore be a need for additional actions to increase investments or to plan for a timelag between valuation outputs and any change in finances for conservation.
 - The assumption that restoration (tree planting) will provide enduring ecosystem and livelihood benefits. Scientific studies show that this is not always true, e.g. tree planting in India where long term evaluations showed only modest gains in vegetation cover and livelihoods². This output should also clarify whether seed is available for planting indigenous trees since this is often a major constraint.
 - Whether alternative livelihoods (AL) can be successfully implemented to reduce environmental degradation across the target area and in the specified timeframe. Technically what is being proposed would be more correctly described as enhanced livelihoods but the project should also note the challenges associated with these interventions³ and be designed accordingly. The consideration of AL should also be more specific about the number of people who need to respond to these interventions, the baseline mentions ca. 225,000 people relying on natural resources so

¹ OECD (2019), Biodiversity: Finance and the Economic and Business Case for Action, report prepared for the G7 Environment Ministers’ Meeting, 5-6 May 2019.

² Coleman, E.A., Schultz, B., Ramprasad, V. *et al.* Limited effects of tree planting on forest canopy cover and rural livelihoods in Northern India. *Nat Sustain* **4**, 997–1004 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-021-00761-z>

³ STAP 2024. Improving outcomes from alternative livelihood interventions in GEF investments.

what proportion of people need to shift from current livelihoods to achieve the desired impact? Additional guidance on this topic can be found in the recently completed background note from STAP⁴.

- The extent to which interventions in Component 3 are dependent on existing models and techniques that can be applied early in the project versus ones that need to be developed as part of the project, and where they may still need to be tested to see if they work. These include restoration techniques, livelihood options, finance systems.

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.

*categories under review, subject to future revision

⁴ (<https://www.stapgef.org/resources/advisory-documents/alternative-livelihoods>).

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.)