

STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	11455
Project title	Transformation Approach to Large Scale Investment in Support of the Implementation of the Great Green Wall Initiative
Date of screen	June 10, 2024
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP acknowledges the GEF and LDCF Program "Transformation Approach to Large Scale Investment in Support of the Implementation of the Great Green Wall Initiative" program. The Program Framework Document (PFD) was difficult to follow due to repetitive text, which made the document too long, and disjointed. STAP rates the Program as "Minor" on the condition that UNEP will improve the project rationale and the Program's theory of change, as well as commit to addressing several issues related to the country projects.

Overall, the theory of change needs to be significantly strengthened to ensure that the interventions are both necessary and sufficient to achieve the expected global environmental and climate adaptation benefits. Equally important is the need for the proponent to explicitly define the innovations the Program aims to achieve, and how learning from these innovations (whether they fail or succeed) will contribute to the scaling and transformation ambitions of the Program. STAP also recommends developing simple future narratives in each project to help achieve enduring GEB and climate adaptation outcomes.

Below, STAP details its advice.

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 Identification Form (PFD) is too lengthy and disjointed, making it difficult to follow. The sections on project summary, rationale, and description are repetitive and unnecessarily long. STAP strongly encourages the project developers to adhere to [the GEF's guidance](#) for developing PFDs.

Leaving aside the lack of compliance with guidance for PFD development, the project rationale describes the drivers of land degradation in the program area and the necessity to support the recipient countries adapt to climate change. The key drivers and their contributing factors described (at length and repeatedly) in the PFD include population growth (as population grows, land becomes more limited; fallow periods decrease, potentially affecting soil fertility); desertification (due to climate change and unsustainable land management practices); global climate change effects on people and the global environment across the Sahel region. Nonetheless, STAP took notice of the absence of future planning – that is, demonstrating convincingly that the Program has conceived interventions that are robust to different plausible futures. Individual country project

developers are encouraged to develop narratives of how the future could unfold and ensure that interventions are robust to the plausible futures.

STAP appreciates the inclusion of the problem tree diagnosis, illustrating how a variety of drivers interact to lessen communities' capacities to cope with climate change, as well as how these factors negatively impact the delivery of GEBs. However, the links between the problem tree and the theory of change could be made stronger. For example, the problem tree usefully identifies nine impact pathways where the Program can make a difference. These impact pathways need to be better reflected in the theory of change to demonstrate the desired change. STAP also questions why regional instability does not feature more prominently as a leverage point in the problem tree or in the theory of change, given that the project rationale raises conflict as a driver in several countries.

Four components (enabling environment; innovative finance; sustainable land management; knowledge management) are identified in the project description as supporting the Program objective. (STAP notes the project description repeats several of the drivers stated in the rationale, which is unfortunate. The essence of the project description starts on page 70.)

Several issues merit attention to ensure that the pathways in the theory of change are collectively necessary and sufficient. This includes strengthening the theory of change for the program by defining the assumptions on which the program is based – that is, assumptions explicitly tied to the logic chain. It is possible that these assumptions will be made more explicit once the individual projects are designed, in which case the program theory of change should also be revisited to reflect these assumptions. Second, although the components appear to support the Program objective, STAP expects them to be far more detailed in each of the individual proposals, based on a thorough problem diagnosis.

Lastly, STAP is pleased the Program recognises its potential to achieve socioeconomic benefits. STAP agrees with this outlook, as sustainable land management, forest restoration, biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation are intricately linked with local benefits. In this regard, STAP encourages the project team to consider a scientific conceptual framework underpinned by systems thinking, such as Land Degradation Neutrality, to coherently frame the project's four components. The framework and its [associated 19 principles](#) (e.g. inclusive governance, respect national sovereignty, use of participatory processes, application of local knowledge obtained through local multi-stakeholder platforms to interpret monitoring data according to local context and objectives, application of integrated land use planning and integrated landscape management, among other issues) are essential to the design of interventions that aim to safeguard biodiversity, adapt and build resilience to a changing climate, and combat land degradation.

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. Given the Sahel's vulnerability to climate change, economic instability, conflict, population growth, and possibly other key drivers, STAP highly recommends that each country project to develop simple future narratives that describe interactions between the key drivers and uncertainties, as well as response measures that ensure the proposed interventions are necessary and sufficient to achieve the proposed GEBs and climate adaptation benefits. This process is rooted in applying resilience thinking through project interventions to ensure they are robust to different plausible futures. STAP recommends its advice on [future narratives](#) as well as the [World Bank's resilience methodology](#).

2. The PFD lists several ongoing and past initiatives as part of the baseline. In each of the individual projects, STAP recommends that the appropriate links be made, demonstrating how learning will be leveraged between this project and ongoing, or past, initiatives.
3. For each individual project, it is necessary for the theory of change to identify assumptions tied to each outcome, and which will be verified and tracked to ensure the GEBs and adaptation outcomes are realized. There are multiple assumptions made, including on farmers and communities changing mindsets to adopt new sustainable land management, or ecosystem-based management practices, which will need to be confirmed and monitored, potentially leading to adaptive management of the proposed interventions. This learning should be reflected in the overall Program's theory of change and knowledge management, as innovation and scaling are dependent on learning. STAP also recommends strengthening the narrative describing the theory of change, as this is currently weak. STAP's [theory of change primer](#) is a useful resource for project developers to use.
4. STAP encourages the project proponents to develop a separate theory of change on scaling. This process will provide close attention to changes and innovation in policies and governance arrangements (tied to component 1 and 2), changes in cultural norms and values (component 2 and 3), and other powerful levers for [scaling and transformation](#). Furthermore, STAP encourages the adoption of steps similar to those in a policy cycle, outlined in [STAP's policy coherence paper](#). These steps help with a policy analysis process (component 1), which can contribute to identifying coherence and incoherence between policies supporting climate resilience, sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation. For component 2 and 3, close monitoring of changes in land management practices and cultural values and norms, will be necessary. While STAP embraces innovative financing mechanisms, such as Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), as incentives to adopt and scale a nature-positive practice, STAP recommends validating (test, monitor, and learn for scaling purposes) key assumptions affiliated with PES adoption and GEB and climate adaptation impacts.
5. To design and implement component 4, focused on the regional integrated knowledge management platform (IKMP), STAP recommends collaborating and coordinating with existing Pan-African open-access platforms, such as Digital Earth Africa. A successful transformative approach goes beyond technological and financial innovation. This effort also requires partnerships of knowledge with local stakeholders such as African Universities of the Sahel. Scaling up, resilience and sustainability of outcomes could be further enhanced through partnerships with organisations such as the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA). STAP agrees with the recommendations of a 2022 Danish report on [The Great Green Wall: An Overview and Lessons Learnt](#) that emphasizes "... Collaboration with national-level organisations that understand contextualised livelihood vulnerabilities is also recommended; promote improved coordination of activities and consistent monitoring across partner countries and subprojects; ...More qualitative analyses of project site contexts should also be included among monitoring tools". STAP recommends that the proponent consult its 2022 document titled '[Understanding South-South Cooperation for Knowledge Exchange](#)' and the recent paper of [Goffner et al \(2019\)](#), "The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative", as sources for understanding how to create knowledge management and adaptive learning systems that enhance resilience in the Sahelian landscapes and livelihoods.
6. STAP agrees the Program has substantial potential to generate socioeconomic co-benefits. Several of these benefits will be deemed as pre-requisites for achieving GEBs (e.g., improved food security through improved soil fertility as a result of improved sustainable land management) and climate adaptation benefits (e.g., increased resilience to climate change via mixed income sources that reduce economic risks). STAP recommends thinking of potential co-benefits (both prerequisite and non-prerequisite) when designing the projects and their logic chains. [STAP's advice on co-benefits](#) can be a useful resource for the Program.

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.

Project rationale

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.)