

STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	12280
Project title	Support to Chu-Talas Basin Strategic Action Programme Implementation
Date of screen	21 May 2026
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

The project advances earlier work on basin management in the Chu-Talas basins. It is a logical continuation of earlier TDA/SAP work and focuses on SAP implementation. This ensures continuity of GEF investments. The project is well designed, and STAP does not have major concerns with the design itself. However, several elements of the PIF could be improved or should be addressed as the project moves ahead in planning to ensure that the project can indeed deliver on its intended outcomes and generate the desired GEBs in an effective and efficient manner and in light of the various barriers. These elements are discussed in Sections 2 and 3 of this screen.

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.

- Generally, the **project rationale** is sound and convincing, yet not overly innovative or transformative; the project seems sound and if implemented as planned will improve water management in the basin and thus generate important benefits
- The **project description** is well written and addresses all key elements; the individual components are mutually supportive and do combine into a Theory-of-Change
- **GEBs** are described, yet not very clearly defined in how exactly the project intends to attain them (that is, the causal chain within the Theory-of-Change is not always entirely clear, especially with regard to the linkages of outputs and outcomes (which are well described) to specific GEB indicators such as 15/20% reduction in water loss at 3-4 pilot sites or 3 million m³/year watersavings)
- The **barriers** are well described and build on the work already conducted; they are linked well to the respective project components
- The **project design** is sound and components respond to the identified barriers (although it is not always entirely clear whether the activities in a specific component can fully address the identified barrier, which requires further clarification – see detailed comments below)
- The component-wise assumptions, risks and mitigation measures are identified clearly. The risk table classifies financial and business model risk as “Low,” with mitigation measures mainly focused on early and ongoing engagement with financing partners. STAP suggests to reassess this risk rating as realizing the financing from output 3.3 is not foreseen as part of the project outputs.
- Innovation and transformation potential of the project seems limited; while the PIF assumes considerable innovation and transformation potential, the project design is very standard and a continuation of earlier work (TDA/SAP) – and therefore not truly innovative, which is not an issue as it will nonetheless lead to GEB – without necessarily addressing the barriers in a transformative manner

- **Policy coherence** is emphasized and intended to be specifically addressed; however, barriers to policy coherence seem to be largely beyond the sphere of influence of the project (e.g. in national decision-making on economic and development priorities, agricultural strategies, etc.) and/or are difficult to change (e.g. countries' willingness to adapt national water needs and use to regional priorities); the project might benefit from more clearly defining what it can influence (also to monitor this appropriately) and what it cannot. It could also consider which stakeholders it can partner with to expand its circle of influence, and this should be reflected in the theory of change causal pathways.
- **Stakeholder engagement** is defined and described, yet might need some more detailing in the further project preparation given local water governance and management challenges in both countries (especially Kyrgyzstan), relating e.g. to the effectiveness of WUAs (this also relates to capacity development, where institutional capacity development in component 1 seems to focus strongly on the CTWC, but less at the national and local level)
- **Knowledge sharing** is included in the project design. It does, however, remain rather standard by focusing on knowledge products, communication materials, packages etc. (without further detailing what this would look like, who will be targeted and how the project achieves that there is impact of this knowledge sharing) and basin learning (also not further defined); the project might want to consider other, more innovative knowledge sharing approaches and describe them in more detail beyond general jargon as project planning moves ahead
- **M&E** is also described in rather generic terms and it is not detailed how it will be done (e.g., what will a gender-responsive monitoring system look like).

3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions

- The PIF is generally well-written and outlines all important elements; it is quite lengthy though, with several redundancies; there is, however, room for improvement, especially with regard to the Theory-of-Change and the different project components, including the underlying assessment of what challenges should be addressed, why and how
- The **first barrier (institutional weakness)** seems to be a critical one; it is well described and it is convincing that the project intends to focus on this barrier; however, it is not entirely clear how the project will overcome this barrier/how the measures planned will indeed address the weakness of the transboundary institution and related mechanisms (apparently countries have addressed issues such as a limited mandate, an insufficient representation of climate change, etc. but nonetheless do not seem interested in moving beyond water allocation, most likely for underlying reasons related to national agricultural strategies, national interests in water use, less political willingness to engage in environmental matters, etc., which are not sufficiently addressed in the project design); the project might want to carefully consider which underlying challenges it really can address and whether the measures suggested for addressing institutional challenges are appropriate
- Concerning **barrier 2 (demonstration/uptake/replication)**, it is not entirely clear what the exact barrier is and whether the intended measures really address them (the PIF argues that there is an insufficient portfolio of approaches, at the same time it shows that many measures have been implemented in the past years already, especially in Kazakhstan; potentially, the problem is then not the lack of a portfolio of demonstration projects but other reasons that prevent replication, which could range from insufficient political willingness to social inertia and traditional agricultural approaches, an insufficient fit of certain approaches to the region, etc. which would not be addressed by only providing more demonstration projects)
- **Barrier 3 (insufficient bankable projects)** could better explain what exactly the challenge is (why are there insufficient investment-ready packages in spite of existing investments and existing demonstrations (barrier 2) – it is stated what the gaps are, e.g. no robust prefeasibility studies, but not why, which then also means that the project does not very clearly address what exactly its measures will address); it might also be worth considering the differences between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan here, which have very different political economy and finance landscapes

- **Component 1** on institutional strengthening includes an update of the TDA; while necessary, the document would benefit from clarifying why this is needed, especially as a full TDA has been done before, countries operate their own monitoring system and other partners have also supported various elements of data collection and analysis (including, e.g., water accounting; see comment below)
- As the project moves forward in design, clarification on how a coordination and reporting mechanism for the SAP will look like will be needed, ensuring that it fits into the existing CTWC design; similarly, more clarification of what legal/procedural proposal might look like is needed (will this be draft agreements, draft MoUs, draft practices/procedures; do they intend to harmonize water codes of the countries or do they intend to incorporate water code principles at the transboundary level – depending on this, different activities will be needed)
- Institutional strengthening of the Commission also needs to address its **long-term financial sustainability**, given that the Commission continues to depend on donor projects and is currently not financially sustainable, even for its core costs (such as staffing, secretariat, etc.)
- In **component 2 (demonstration projects)**, the target of 50% **women-led demonstration projects** seems rather ambitious given the limited role of women in agricultural decision-making positions in both countries
- In component 2, it is not entirely clear from the description whether the priority hotspot sites will be selected and designed for demonstration (as described in output 2.1) and pilot measures will then be implemented in all of them or not)
- **Component 3** could benefit from some more clarification on what happens once the priority investments are screened and engagement packages are prepared; how will financing indeed be mobilized, what role do governments of riparian states play (also in light of water investments being priority tasks for governments, including with important implications for government effectiveness and legitimacy), that is, to what extent can the project control that investments will indeed be made and where are the project's limits (does the project responsibility end at the engagement package being prepared/what is done to achieve the investments of USD 100 million that are targeted – the link between the engagement package prepared and the funding mobilized is not clear)
- STAP appreciates that **co-benefits** are described clearly (including cooperation/trust-related ones, see also: https://cdn.unenvironment.org/stapgef/public/2025-10/Fostering%20Cooperation%20Managing%20Conflict.pdf?_ga=2.128979850.727842856.1778747545-707772147.1748870255); it is suggested to incorporate them in the M&E system for systematic tracking and reporting
- One of the key assumptions of the project is that both **countries remain committed to cooperation**, including SAP implementation and the CTWC; while this seems to be the case for now, it might be worth considering how strong Kyrgyzstan's commitment to regional cooperation is, given its position towards ICWC/IFAS (and thus water cooperation in the region) and what implications a continued freezing of its membership in IFAS and/or a deterioration of broader Amu Darya/Syr Darya relations would have
- More information on **what happened between SAP approval and now/beginning of the project** would be helpful (beyond meetings and the development of concepts at the national level, etc.); have countries advanced their cooperation in the meantime (if so, with which results and is this reflected in the PIF; if not, why not and how will this affect project implementation and deliverables)
- To what extent has the project considered **other support the Chu-Talas has received**? There have been several projects/support from several donors in the past years, but it is not always clear how the proposed project builds on those (for instance, SDC has supported both countries and the Commission in developing their data exchange capacities and setting up a water information system, including a data sharing agreement between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and support to local organizations applying water accounting; GIZ has supported them on climate-sensitive water management, including several water/energy/food-related assessments; OSCE and UNECE have supported the Commission, among other things, in various studies – which could provide a basis for the updated diagnostic – and in information sharing, especially for flood and drought) – while UNECE is mentioned, bilateral support is not covered, yet might have significant overlaps

- The **future scenarios description** is interesting and well thought-through; however, it is not clear how the probabilities are calculated; the link between the future scenarios and the Theory-of-Change is well done.
- While the project incorporates **gender elements** throughout the project, it does not address the various challenges related to women empowerment in the basin (including recent declines in women representation in the water sector) and in the commission, which might mean that gender-specific targets might not be reached, especially if objectives aren't supported by measures changing underlying practices and norms (see also: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/oa-edit/10.4324/9781003198918-11/gendered-river-basin-institutions-jenniver-sehring>)
- With regard to **knowledge sharing**, the project and its partners might also benefit from knowledge exchange beyond the project; while the UNECE is a good starting point, exchange with neighboring countries/in the region, especially with the support of other regional projects/other donor funded initiatives in the region (and sometimes even in the same basin), might be even more useful
- The PIF provides a good amount of references and sources which substantiate the statements made; however, formatting should be consistent and use either in-text references or footnotes

ANNEX: STAP'S SCREENING GUIDELINES

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.)