

REVISED STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE, OCTOBER 2022

GEF ID	11510
Project title	Mex30x30: Conserving Mexican biodiversity through communities and their protected areas
Date of screen	10 May 2024
STAP Panel Member	John Donaldson
STAP Secretariat	Alessandro Moscuza

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

This is a well-prepared project that responds to a significant problem affecting the effectiveness of protected areas and the achievement of the 30x30 goals of the Global Biodiversity Framework. Strengths of the proposal include a sound and well described logic that builds on previous experience of the project finance for permanence approach, together with a theory of change that sets out a credible pathway to achieve the project's objectives. For the most part, the components are consistent with the overall TOC.

There are several aspects of the proposal where STAP has identified scientific and technical issues that should be addressed to ensure that the project's objectives are clear, the outputs and outcomes can be achieved, and they can be properly tracked and monitored (see Section 3). These deal primarily with: (i) the need for more technical information on how benefits will be evaluated, (ii) the targets for training; (iii) the scope of the scaling strategy.

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 overall rationale for the project is sound - without effective management of protected areas there will be ongoing erosion of GEBs associated with protected areas in Mexico. Therefore, finding ways to strengthen the effectiveness of PAs through more sustainable funding streams, as well as improved conservation effectiveness of areas managed by IP&LC is a logical approach.

The baseline situation is well described, and the objectives are appropriate to address the problem. The theory of change (TOC) generally describes the project's logic adequately and provides a reasonable explanation of actions and outcomes. However, STAP identified areas where the description of proposed actions was either unclear or presented some gaps. In the case of benefits for IP&LC, the project logic is that if people benefit from more effective management of PAs and voluntary conservation areas (ADVC), then they will support actions that improve these areas (or desist from ones that don't). However, there is very little information on how these benefits will be identified or measured. The proposal refers to the use of the '*i-effectiveness*' tool, which appears to include a component on 'use and benefits', but the tool's components are not accessible, and it is impossible to determine whether the tool is adequate for assessing socioeconomic benefits at the level required to influence the behavior of IP&LC. The project does not mention any stakeholder engagement to identify the relevant socioeconomic benefits that should be measured. Without having greater clarity on what benefits are envisaged

and how they will be measured, it may be impossible to measure the impact of the project as envisaged under the indicator and target for 3.1b, which cites that 163,200 people will experience socioeconomic and/or environmental benefits.

Under component 2, the proposal states that “The PFP is intended at a national level, but the number of PAs included will be confirmed as the work starts in the proposed steps.” It is STAP’s view that the proposal should have provided at the very least a provisional/preliminary number of PAs, which should have been determined as part of the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) and could have been determined from existing data.

Under Component 3, relating to training, the target for Indicator 3.1.2 applies an arbitrary number of ‘at least 100 participants from each PA or ADVC’, which is hard to justify since the number of people involved in each area varies considerably from 889 at one site to 59000 in another. In effect the expectation is that training will only be effective in some cases if >10% of the population receive training whereas in other cases it is assumed to be effective if <0.2% of the population do so. Since this is an important component of the project, there should be some justification for how many people need to be trained in each local population to achieve the desired level of change in sustainable land management, conservation and restoration practices. Along similar lines, the proposal stated that training activities (Output 3.1.2) and sustainable management initiatives (Output 3.1.3) will generate socioeconomic and/or environmental benefits for 163,200 people of which (at least 50% female, disaggregated by gender and IP&LCs) in the long term, however it did not provide an explanation or methodology of how this number was calculated.

The project would benefit from greater consideration of uncertain futures particularly since there are two major areas of uncertainty that could affect the project’s success. The first is that the government funding gap will close over 15 years, which assumes that all the proposed revenue streams can be achieved in the proposed timeframe and will endure into the future. The second is that ‘the project can mobilize philanthropic financing sources that ... respond to the need to bridge budget gaps’ (as set out in Fig.3). There is some discussion in the proposal of possible constraints on the project finance for permanence (PFP) approach but hardly any consideration of how these might be factored into project design.

The proposal mentions an evaluation of PFPs undertaken by Enduring Earth, but the report is not included in any references, nor does it appear on the websites of any of the mentioned organizations, so it is not possible to assess whether specific challenges or uncertainties associated with the PFP approach have been adequately dealt with. On a related point, the proposal includes several references, but does not have a “References” or “Bibliography” section that lists the full details of the sources cited.

The scaling strategy under Component 4 seems to assume that knowledge management and learning will be sufficient as a scale up strategy. Since there is an ambition to scale the PFP approach in Mexico, it makes sense for the scaling strategy to be more comprehensive and to include actions that go beyond knowledge and learning, (e.g. amendments to institutions and policies or technical support for the relevant entities to overcome some of the barriers identified in the ToC, such as “limited capacity for developing new revenue streams” and “optimizing use of available financing”).

3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions.

1. Indicate how benefits for IP&LC will be identified and measured to show that 163,200 people have benefited from improved management of protected areas and/or ADVC.
2. Provide a justification for training approximately 100 participants from each area or, preferably, adjust the target to reflect what is actually required to change the capacity of affected communities.
3. Provide greater clarity on the scaling strategy, particularly if it is intended only to guide scaling of the PFP approach in Mexico.

4. Indicate whether constraints/ barriers associated with the PFP approach have been fully considered and how this may affect project design.
5. Provide a full list of all references cited throughout the proposal.

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.

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.)