STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	**12290**
Project title	**Empowering conservation action on the East Asian Australasian Flyway (EAAF) through Establishment of a Global Flyways Grant Mechanism (GFGM) for Civil Society Organizations**
Date of screen	**May 19, 2026**
STAP Panel Member	**Sandy Andelman**
STAP Secretariat	**Guadalupe Duron**

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP welcomes the project, "Empowering conservation action on the East Asian Australasian Flyway (EAAF) through Establishment of a Global Flyways Grant Mechanism (GFGM) for Civil Society Organizations". This is an important, multi-country project that will provide much needed support to civil society organizations to expand conservation and raise awareness of the EAAF.

The objective of the project is to establish a Global Flyways Grant Mechanism (GFGM) for civil society organizations that enables civil society-led conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of globally significant wetland sites on the East Asian Australasian Flyway, producing benefits for biodiversity, climate, and people. The project description and rationale are clear and compelling. The project is innovative and leverages the strengths and track record of both the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and BirdLife International.

STAP welcomes these ambitions. However, it urges the project team to account for the challenges and risks associated with scaling during project design, rather than allowing these issues to become residual risks. For example, scaling the effect of blended finance on wetland conservation to achieve GEBs (biodiversity and climate change mitigation) is an important part of this project (via component 1). Designing with the intent of demonstrating these results will improve the project's logic and help achieve its objective.

STAP also strongly encourages the use of future narratives in the design. As currently designed, each future narrative is actually a description of a significant driver in the region. Without considering future narratives, the durability of the GEBs achieved is at risk.

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?

The project rationale explains the importance of migratory birds, their flyways, and habitats globally. The description also highlights the value of flyway sites for global environmental benefits in wetlands, marshes, and mangroves. These benefits include conservation of globally significant biodiversity, carbon sequestration, climate adaptation, and livelihood benefits for communities dependent on these sites. This broad overview of flyways is followed by a description of the targeted system, the East Asian Australasian Flyway (EAAF). A detailed overview of this globally important flyway is provided, along with a comprehensive description of the threats and drivers undermining its species and habitats, including increased population density, infrastructure development, agricultural expansion, pollution, hunting and illegal trade, mistargeted mangrove restoration projects, and climate change.

The barriers are also comprehensively described, noting a lack of available information on the ecology of wetlands and birds, which weakens the potential to effectively integrate biodiversity into development plans. To address these drivers and barriers, as well as the problem of wetland degradation, the project has five components: (1) Establishing the Global Flyways Grant Mechanism (GFGM) and governance using a multi-stakeholder approach; (2) the GFGM facility is operational and making grants; (3) capacity building; (4) research, monitoring, knowledge and influence; and (5) monitoring and evaluation. Together, the components form a clear, logical chain to support the project objective. STAP commends the proponents on developing a generally clear proposal on a complex topic. STAP also recognizes that, given the number of countries involved, not all details of the project can be fully articulated at this stage, but understands they will be fleshed out during the PPG phase.

The theory of change is informed by consideration of four future scenarios. However, STAP suggests that the scenarios be reconsidered. The four scenarios are: (1) worsening climate change; (2) increasing economic and demographic pressures; (3) limited progress in conservation efforts; and (4) increasing momentum and interest in nature markets. Rather than separate future narratives to describe a single driver of change in the region, STAP recommends developing future narratives based on the interactions among the main drivers.

The project's baseline and additionality, as articulated, depend significantly on the grantmaking mechanism for civil society and on scaling. While the grantmaking process is well described in the theory of change and narrative, scaling seems to depend on partnerships with multi-lateral, bilateral and philanthropic donors. It will be important to plan more explicitly in the theory of change (TOC), as well as in the project design and implementation, for how the scaling will be accomplished. Regarding the TOC, as described in more detail below, climate change is a significant driver, with potential to undermine the outcomes and compromise the project logic. It will be important in the TOC to explicitly consider climate change and its interaction with other key drivers.

Below, STAP offers some recommendations to further improve an already strong project design.

3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions

STAP has the following recommendations, intended to further strengthen the project:

1. The PIF accurately explains how conservation and restoration of flyway sites potentially can improve the adaptive capacity of species, ecosystems and communities to water disruptions caused by climate change. Further, flyway sites provide important ecosystem services. For example, the proposal points out that ecosystem services related to disaster risk reduction in coastal wetlands are valued at USD 447 billion per year. Climate risk to the project is considered to be low, and the proponents indicate climate change will be considered further during the PPG phase.

   STAP suggests revising the climate risk assessment based on further consideration of climate risks, not only in the context of individual sites and interventions, but also in the context of the overall flyway system. There is a substantial body of scientific literature related to climate change and flyways,

which should be consulted. For example, in the absence of natural wetlands, migratory birds, including waterfowl, forage in rice paddies. Climate change, between 1980-2010 has already significantly affected the extent and location of areas used for rice production in China (Lui et al. 2015). Further, waterfowl are known reservoirs of avian influenza, and changes in the distribution of rice production can impact, not only the movements of migratory waterfowl, but also the likelihood of disease spillover at the agriculture-wildlife interface (Takekawa et al. 2023).

There also is recent work focused on the EAAF, predicting the resilience of migratory birds to global environmental change (Lisoovski et al. 2024), which can provide a tool for conservation planning, including, potentially, planning investments of the Global Flyways Grant Mechanism (GFGM). In this regard STAP's information note on considerations for biodiversity conservation in the Anthropocene, may be useful.

2. Regarding the future narratives, STAP welcomes the initial description and encourages the project team to refine them during the project development. STAP refers the proponents to STAP's exploratory future narratives primer and brief. The primer outlines the necessary steps for creating future narratives, including first identifying the priority drivers, of which climate change is one, that influence the system and then considering the interactions among the drivers. An analysis of the interactions between the main drivers is a key step to defining plausible futures. As noted above, this seems to be missing. **For the CEO endorsed project, STAP recommends writing a short narrative describing up to four plausible futures based on the interaction between the main drivers. Then, the proponents should ensure that project interventions are designed to be robust across all plausible futures**. See Table 2.4 in the STAP primer for further guidance on designing the project based on future narratives. The endorsed CEO project should identify response options – steps #5 and 6 in Table 2.4.

3. Blended finance is mentioned several times in the document. **STAP recommends clarifying, in both the theory of change diagram and the narrative, exactly what role, if any, blended finance will play in this project and how it will be mobilized**. The proponents indicate the GFGM will complement and maximize the impacts of loan finance to flyway countries enabled by Multilateral Finance Institutions (MFIs) through Regional Flyway Initiative (RFI) partnerships similar to the one developed by ADB, EAAFP, BirdLife International and other key stakeholders, which galvanized and enabled civil society and academia to contribute to the RFI. It specifically aims to build partnerships with MFIs and other donors to generate a minimum of USD 15 million to expand the geographic and thematic scope of the granting mechanism in the long term. It seems that this will be achieved by raising awareness and by developing partnership agreements. **However, STAP suggests that the logical pathways connecting these need to be fully articulated**.

4. In addition to accounting for blended finance in the overall project theory of change, **STAP is of the view that a separate theory of change on blended finance and how it will contribute to the overall project objective and scaling is necessary. Thus, STAP recommends it.** This theory of change will enable the project proponents to map the pathways to achieve wetland restoration and climate-mitigation benefits through blended finance. This will also facilitate mapping the different stakeholders, including banks, intermediaries (e.g., civil society organizations), and end-beneficiaries (e.g., communities, farmers) who are actually responsible for delivering the GEBs. This mapping will facilitate the identification of assumptions and risks along the pathway, which could undermine GEBs and financial benefits. STAP's checklist on blended finance can assist in designing the blended-finance theory of change logic. Additionally, component 1 depends on demonstrating biodiversity and climate-mitigation benefits through wetland restoration, supported by blended finance. This demonstration will depend on scaling innovation (e.g., blended finance, institutional, policy, as well use of incentives) to achieve these GEBs. A separate pathway for scaling will help identify risks associated with the proposed innovations, which can be designed for, along with monitoring plans, rather than allowing them to become residual risks during implementation.

5. Also, regarding finance, the proponents indicate that the exact mechanism for processing the funds through ADB has not yet been determined, but it is suggested that one option is to create a trust fund managed by ADB and another option is to use an existing multi-donor trust fund. It is not clear why a trust fund is needed at all, since the GEF funds would flow annually or biannually to the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF). **Please provide more details on the pros and cons of different financing models, including consideration of options that do not involve trust funds.** This will be needed for the PPG phase, including the cost effectiveness of different operational models.

6. Component 4 focuses on research, monitoring, knowledge & Influence. Outcome 4.1 states that GFGM results and data will be used by policy and decision makers to improve policy coherence. It seems unrealistic that domestic policy coherence will increase significantly, without a targeted strategy, including a policy coherence analysis for each country, with an assessment of critical policy gaps and current incoherence. This would entail a significant amount of work, beyond the GFGM. **STAP therefore recommends considering how the outcome related to policy coherence will be achieved, including the budget implications.** The proponents are encouraged to consider STAP's advisory document on policy coherence in the GEF.

7. With respect to IPLCs, it would be interesting and useful to know what percentage of the flyway sites identified occur on Indigenous territories or local community lands and waters. Depending on the answer, the GFGM might want to consider supporting work by communities to map tenure, resource rights, and areas valued by communities, with the aim of formalizing legal recognition.

8. STAP commends the proponents for their consideration of gender and women. Regarding the potential indicators of gender and social inclusion, **STAP suggests it might be useful to consider additional indicators, e.g., the number/percentage of proposals to the GFBM with women as project leaders, and the success rate of those proposals relative to those with men as project leaders. A similar indicator could be considered for Indigenous Peoples or IPLCs.**

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.)