Part I: Project Information	Response	
GEF ID	10876	
Project Title	Sustainable Management and Restoration of Degraded Landscapes for Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) in India	
Date of Screening	November 10, 2021	
STAP member screener	Graciela Metternicht	
STAP secretariat screener	Guadalupe Durón	
STAP Overall Assessment and Rating	**Minor issues to be considered during project design.** STAP welcomes UNDP's proposal "Sustainable Management and Restoration of Degraded Landscapes for Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality". The project aims to achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN) through sustainable ecosystem-based management and restoration of degraded landscapes across agricultural, forest, pastoral lands, and surface water bodies. The project will focus in the states of Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra. STAP welcomes the project's initiative to achieve multiple benefits resulting from LDN by focusing on the synergistic goals of the UNCCD, CBD, UNFCCC, and the Sustainable Development Goals with regards to integrated land and water management, forest management, and biodiversity conservation. STAP recommends acknowledging that trade-offs will occur as a result of targeting multiple objectives on improving community rangeland management; enhancing agricultural and agroforestry practices; sequestering carbon; and, contributing to biodiversity conservation. STAP's technical LDN guidelines, which STAP is pleased were used to develop the PIF, offer practical advice on how to manage trade-offs between benefits. STAP wishes to draw attention to the land potential assessment detailed in the guidelines. Assessing the potential of the land is necessary for planning the expected	

land uses, as well as generating, and maintaining, the expected ecosystem services (e.g. soil formation and retention, water regulation, climate regulation). Thus, to reduce the risk of land degradation, land uses need to be consistent with the land potential.

The targeted landscapes are highly vulnerable to drought. Disaster risk is to an extent driven by social vulnerability. Knowing the socioeconomic context of the project sites is important, therefore, for understanding the nature of the threats (climate and non-climate stressors). In the project document, STAP encourages the project developers to describe extensively the communities' socioeconomic characteristics.

STAP recommends developing a systems-based theory of change. This exercise will allow the causal links between social and environmental challenges to be tested and validated. In this regard, it will be important to establish the relationships between climate stresses (declining annual precipitation, temperature increase); the environmental impacts of these stresses (desertification, wind erosion, soil degradation), and other socio-economic stresses (lack of livelihood opportunities). STAP encourages the project developers to use this learning to contribute to the evidence base of the Acceleration Labs. The learning can also be a central element of course curriculums and knowledge exchanges in the Centre of Excellence for South-South Cooperation.

Additionally, STAP recommends the aforementioned systems-based theory of change explores options for addressing uncertainty brought on by unforeseen changes (e.g. climate change and population growth are identified as large-scale drivers in the PIF), and risks to the project (e.g. limited interest in soil and water technologies). This process calls for developing pathways in the theory of change that consider alternative options to deliver the project objective so that outcomes endure long-term drivers and risks.

	Below, STAP offers recommendations on how to improve the project design.	
Part I: Project Information **B. Indicative Project Description Summary**	**What STAP looks for**	**Response**
Project Objective	Is the objective clearly defined, and consistently related to the problem diagnosis?	Yes, the objective is defined clearly, and consistently linked to the problem statement. STAP welcomes the identification of assumptions underlying the achievement of the project objective. STAP also finds commendable the problem analysis model.
Project components	A brief description of the planned activities. Do these support the project's objectives?	Yes, the activities support the project objective.
Outcomes	A description of the expected short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention. Do the planned outcomes encompass important global environmental benefits?	Yes, the outcomes focus on global environmental outcomes – e.g. sequestering carbon through improved land management and land restoration).
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits likely to be generated?	The benefits are likely to be generated with careful monitoring – i.e. robust implementation of component 3.
Outputs	A description of the products and services which are expected to result from the project. Is the sum of the outputs likely to contribute to the outcomes?	Yes, outputs are likely to contribute to outcomes.
Part II: Project justification	A simple narrative explaining the project's logic, i.e. a theory of change.	
1. Project description. Briefly describe: 1) the global environmental and/or adaptation problems, root causes and barriers that need to be addressed (systems description)	Is the problem statement well-defined?	Yes, the problem is well defined. STAP appreciates the rationale for focusing on the targeted landscapes by demonstrating (based on referenced figures from ISRO) the acuteness of desertification and land degradation in these sites. A good description of the causes of land degradation is also provided for each target site, and at the national level. During the project design, STAP suggests describing the socioeconomic context of the

		stakeholders in the targeted landscape, which appear to be absent.
	Are the barriers and threats well described, and substantiated by data and references?	Yes, the PIF describes the barriers comprehensively. Suggest ensuring the barriers are embedded in the theory of change. This will facilitate their discussion when designing the project. Also, it would be useful to provide a brief justification as to why the four barriers were selected from the list of ten barriers.
	For multiple focal area projects: does the problem statement and analysis identify the drivers of environmental degradation which need to be addressed through multiple focal areas; and is the objective well-defined, and can it only be supported by integrating two, or more focal areas objectives or programs?	Does not apply.
2) the baseline scenario or any associated baseline projects	Is the baseline identified clearly?	Yes, the PIF includes a narrative baseline, describing on-going, future, and past initiatives on sustainable land management, landscape restoration, climate adaptation, water management, livestock management, and biodiversity conservation, which this project will build on. The PIF also provided land degradation statistics for the States where the targeted landscapes are located. These figures will contribute to quantifying the baseline.
	Does it provide a feasible basis for quantifying the project's benefits?	Partly. Suggest identifying metrics on land degradation in each targeted landscape, as well as other robust indicators that complement the core indicators and that measure benefits affiliated with the SDGs.
	Is the baseline sufficiently robust to support the incremental (additional cost) reasoning for the project?	See above.
	For multiple focal area projects:	
	are the multiple baseline analyses presented (supported by data and references), and the multiple benefits specified, including the proposed indicators;	Does not apply.

	are the lessons learned from similar or related past GEF and non-GEF interventions described; and	Lessons are not identified in the baseline projects. STAP encourages the project team to describe the learning that each baseline initiative is expected to contribute to this project.
	how did these lessons inform the design of this project?	See above.
3) the proposed alternative scenario with a brief description of expected outcomes and components of the project	What is the theory of change?	A theory of change figure is included in the PIF, which STAP welcomes. During the project design, STAP recommends defining further, with the appropriate stakeholders, the assumptions, barriers, and risks affiliated with achieving intermediate outcomes. Currently, the assumptions are broadly defined and relate to achieving impact, or long-term outcomes. A theory of change narrative is also provided in the PIF, which is provided below. STAP's recommendations for each component are embedded throughout the narrative. "The project theory of change is premised on arresting and reversing land degradation and desertification, and negative impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss across the degraded landscapes ultimately supporting the achievement of LDN, NDCs and Post-2020 Biodiversity commitments and will require interventions along the following pathways: 1. Policy and planning reform to put in place incentives for sustainable land management, climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation and remove disincentives, along with enhanced capacity of stakeholders at all levels to support a stronger enabling framework (Component 1);" STAP recommends applying its LDN guidelines. Refer to module D which focuses on the elements

underpinning a LDN process, such as a robust enabling environment. This includes establishing the appropriate policies and conducting preparatory assessments, such as a land potential analysis, to obtain baseline information, and achieve the desired results.

Additionally, STAP suggests drawing from the literature highlighting experiences in policy coherence for LDN implementation. Some resources include:
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2018.11.017
https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/8/8/115
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2019.04.007

2. "Multi-stakeholder processes to bring together all sectors with an impact or interest in LDN, NDCs and biodiversity conservation to jointly describe the landscape, vision and LDN, NDC and conservation priorities (Component 1);"

STAP recommends drawing from its advice on multi-stakeholder engagement (MSD) for transformational change. The advice specifies principles for robust and durable MSD.

Component 2 describes briefly UNDP's India Accelerator Labs. STAP would like to see the activities detailed, which the Lab will pursue. Additionally, STAP recommends linking the Lab to a systems-based theory of change. This exercise will allow the causal links between social and environmental challenges (a focus of the Lab) to be tested and validated.

For example, identifying in the theory of change the various relationships between climate and the environment (e.g. climate stresses (declining annual precipitation and their impact on desertification, wind erosion, soil degradation),

and other socio-economic stresses (lack of livelihood opportunities), will become more visible for project planning, implementation, monitoring, and learning purposes. For learning, the project team is encouraged to contribute to the evidence base of the Labs by testing and validating (through the theory of change) collective intelligence and co-creation approaches to achieve global environmental benefits.

3. "Technical demonstrations to support adoption of economically, ecologically and socially sensitive climate resilient sustainable land management and energy efficient practices by relevant stakeholders across agricultural, grazing and forest lands; and successful on-the-ground restoration and rehabilitation of degraded areas (Component 2);"

STAP's LDN guidelines are a valuable resource to guide the project team in the development of LDN demonstration interventions, which includes a necessary analysis of trade-offs and positive synergies and avoidance of indirect effects, such as leakage. Additionally, STAP recommends applying the land degradation decision matrix to assist with localized land degradation assessments. The matrix provides guidance on how to determine degradation in cases of woody biomass/woody encroachment (e.g. invasive species).

Scaling of sustainable land management is central to component 2. In this vein, STAP recommends developing a scaling pathway that defines how the project seeks to scale SLM and land restoration across sectors (e.g. agriculture, forestry, livestock, biodiversity, water management, climate

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mitigation and adaptation) and spatial scales (e.g. landscape, state government levels).

4. Knowledge exchange and outreach to disseminate project approaches and lessons across project districts and with other countries facing similar challenges (Component 3)."

Combined, the project's focus on these interventions is expected to result in greater uptake of sustainable land management practices to avoid and reduce land degradation, and to rehabilitate and restore degraded land. The project also expects to generate benefits in biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and climate change resilience, as well as improved livelihoods.

STAP recommends developing indicators of 'learning' as part of Component 3.

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<td>What is the sequence of events (required or expected) that will lead to the desired outcomes?</td>
<td>See above.</td>
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<td>What is the set of linked activities, outputs, and outcomes to address the project's objectives?</td>
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<td>Are the mechanisms of change plausible, and is there a well-informed identification of the underlying assumptions?</td>
<td>Yes, with good results monitoring of the outcomes, which can be done through the theory of change in combination with component 3. This process includes identifying assumptions affiliated with intermediate outcomes (as suggested above), as well as indicators to track how, and what, outcomes are being achieved. As the project is implemented, the project team may need to identify additional assumptions as circumstances are anticipated that could undermine the causal relationship between outcomes. Please refer to STAP's theory of change primer for further information.</td>
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	Is there a recognition of what adaptations may be required during project implementation to respond to changing conditions in pursuit of the targeted outcomes?	The project acknowledges that adaptive management will be part of component 3. However, STAP also encourages the development of a systems-based theory of change to assist with this task to look for opportunities for adaptation, and/or transformational change to maintain the resilience of the social-ecological system.
5) incremental/additional cost reasoning and expected contributions from the baseline, the GEF trust fund, LDCF, SCCF, and co-financing	GEF trust fund: will the proposed incremental activities lead to the delivery of global environmental benefits?	Yes, with careful monitoring and a good theory of change.
	LDCF/SCCF: will the proposed incremental activities lead to adaptation which reduces vulnerability, builds adaptive capacity, and increases resilience to climate change?	Does not apply.
6) global environmental benefits (GEF trust fund) and/or adaptation benefits (LDCF/SCCF)	Are the benefits truly global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits, and are they measurable?	Yes, the global environmental benefits are articulated clearly. The GEBs are: improved ecosystem stability and productivity; carbon sequestration; and, conservation of existing forests to enhance biodiversity conservation. The project also proposes to achieve several local benefits, including improved livelihoods and economic productivity, enhanced institutional capacity, among others. Indicators will be provided in the final project document. STAP is pleased that the project will establish baselines on land cover, and land productivity – two of the three voluntary LDN indicators. Indicators on soil carbon (the third voluntary LDN indicator) are also encouraged to be used. As the project is developed, STAP also recommends the use of national and sub-national indicators to supplement the LDN indicators. The sub-national and national indicators also could be used to monitor the local benefits identified by the project.

	Is the scale of projected benefits both plausible and compelling in relation to the proposed investment?	Unclear. Suggest identifying the barriers and enablers to scaling in the theory of change. STAP also proposes developing a pathway specific to scaling, which specifies who needs to be involved (e.g. what partnerships, stakeholders), what resources are needed (e.g. capacity building, financial resources, knowledge repositories, social science – i.e. attention to power dynamics and other social constructs influencing decision making, agency and capacity), and how learning from scaling will take place (e.g. monitoring evaluation and learning).
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits explicitly defined?	Yes, global environmental benefits are defined.
	Are indicators, or methodologies, provided to demonstrate how the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits will be measured and monitored during project implementation?	STAP welcomes the project's intention to generate multiple benefits. The PIF does not include methodologies for measuring and monitoring all of the benefits; thus, STAP recommends describing the methods in the final project document.

As aforementioned, STAP encourages the use of national and sub-national indicators to complement the LDN indicators on land cover, land productivity, and carbon sequestration.

In addition to listing the GEF core indicators related to sustainable land management (hectares of land restored, hectares of production land under improved practices), carbon sequestration benefits, and biodiversity benefits, STAP suggests identifying indicators to monitor and track progress of the causal links in the theory of change. These indicators will test the validity of the causal pathway, which requires the theory of change to be explicit about assumptions, barriers, and enablers of change. |
| | What activities will be implemented to increase the project's resilience to climate change? | The climate risk analysis identified several options to increase the project's resilience to climate change. These included: soil water conservation to |

		increase available water to crops; aquifer recharge management; selection of high-yield variety crops; and drought tolerant crops. On the use of high-yield variety crops, STAP cautions against the use of water resources that may be in short supply.
7) innovative, sustainability and potential for scaling-up	Is the project innovative, for example, in its design, method of financing, technology, business model, policy, monitoring and evaluation, or learning?	The project is innovative in applying collaborative decision-making processes to tackle environmental and social challenges via UNDP's Acceleration Labs. As mentioned above, STAP recommends the project developers establish clear relationships between climate stresses, environmental degradation, and social stresses by testing the causal relationships between these variables. This process will help assess the threats under consideration, as well generate evidence and learning about the concepts underpinning UNDP's Acceleration Labs. On scaling, the assumption is that knowledge transfer (component 2 and 3), replication of SLM practices through SLM management centers and platforms - scaling out (component 2 and 3), and enhancing land use planning processes will generate the conditions to scale deep (i.e. influence social innovation). STAP would like to see these assumptions on scaling identified and tested in a theory of change, and for the necessary adaptive management to take place based on this learning. Once more, testing assumptions, including on scaling, is needed to help the project achieve durable outcomes. Furthermore, testing assumptions can generate learning and evidence on how to deal with complexity, and contribute to the concepts of the Acceleration Labs.

		STAP recommends its papers on [durability](), [theory of change](), and [resilience]() - where it lists principles that need attention to achieve scaling. UNDP's resource on [scaling]() might also be useful.
	Is there a clearly-articulated vision of how the innovation will be scaled-up, for example, over time, across geographies, among institutional actors?	Partly. However, STAP would like for the assumptions on scaling to be dealt with in a theory of change.
	Will incremental adaptation be required, or more fundamental transformational change to achieve long term sustainability?	Incremental, and/or transformational change, is likely to be required given that the western region of India is projected to see an increase in droughts in the future: https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2017_USAID%20ATLAS_Climate%20Risk%20Profile%20-%20India.pdf https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/india/vulnerability STAP encourages the project team to consider uncertainty to cope with the level of change (desired and un-desired) that may take place as result of climate change, and other social and economic stressors (e.g. population changes, poor economic growth). This requires considering systematically time scales and spatial scales when planning the interventions. A few pathways could be envisioned that map alternative courses of actions. A source that is useful for developing scenarios and sequencing alternative pathways based on systems thinking is [Resilience Adaptation Pathways and Transformation Approach]().
1b. Project Map and Coordinates. Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place.		Maps of the target sites are provided indicating status of land degradation.

2. Stakeholders.	Have all the key relevant stakeholders been identified to cover the complexity of the problem, and project implementation barriers?	Yes, the PIF provides a comprehensive list of stakeholders, which are essential to addressing the barriers and solving the problem. STAP recommends specifying further each stakeholder's role in relation to delivering the project outcomes. STAP welcomes the inclusion of State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) in the various research and extension activities of the project. As the stakeholder engagement strategy is developed, STAP recommends thinking through the various issues: i) who will be affected by interventions; ii) who needs to be involved to implement activities – this may change as learning takes places; iii) what are the values, norms, formal and informal arrangements, gender dynamics, and other considerations that influence stakeholders' capacities to enact change.
Select the stakeholders that have participated in consultations during the project identification phase: Indigenous people and local communities; Civil society organizations; Private sector entities. If none of the above, please explain why. In addition, provide indicative information on how stakeholders, including civil society and indigenous peoples, will be engaged in the project preparation, and their respective roles and means of engagement.		
	What are the stakeholders' roles, and how will their combined roles contribute to robust project design, to achieving global environmental outcomes, and to lessons learned and knowledge?	See above.
3. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Please briefly include below any gender dimensions relevant to the project, and any plans to address gender in project design (e.g. gender analysis). Does the project expect to include any gender-responsive measures to address gender gaps or promote gender equality and women empowerment? Yes/no/ tbd.	Have gender differentiated risks and opportunities been identified, and were preliminary response measures described that would address these differences?	The project will develop its interventions based on a gender assessment that will be conducted during the PPG phase. The project will reflect gender differentiated components in the logical framework, and will include gender indicators. Additionally, STAP recommends considering whether the full participation of an important stakeholder group is hindered as a result of the gender analysis, and describing how will the project address these obstacles. STAP also recommends consulting recent literature of the UNCCD and UN Women on gender-responsive LDN, and the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD's publication on Land

If possible, indicate in which results area(s) the project is expected to contribute to gender equality: access to and control over resources; participation and decision-making; and/or economic benefits or services. Will the project's results framework or logical framework include gender-sensitive indicators? yes/no /tbd		Degradation Neutrality Interventions to Foster Gender Equality.
	Do gender considerations hinder full participation of an important stakeholder group (or groups)? If so, how will these obstacles be addressed?	Unsure as the gender analysis will be done during the project design. STAP recommended (above) to give due consideration of how a gender analysis may hinder the full participation of an important stakeholder group.
5. Risks. Indicate risks, including climate change, potential social and environmental risks that might prevent the project objectives from being achieved, and, if possible, propose measures that address these risks to be further developed during the project design	Are the identified risks valid and comprehensive? Are the risks specifically for things outside the project's control? Are there social and environmental risks which could affect the project? For climate risk, and climate resilience measures: ● How will the project's objectives or outputs be affected by climate risks over the period 2020 to 2050, and have the impact of these risks been addressed adequately? ● Has the sensitivity to climate change, and its impacts, been assessed? ● Have resilience practices and measures to address projected climate risks and impacts been considered? How will these be dealt with? ● What technical and institutional capacity, and information, will be needed to address climate risks and resilience enhancement measures?	A comprehensive environmental and social safeguard screening was provided to complement the PIF risk section. The screening considered risks related to indigenous peoples and vulnerable groups (i.e. lack of appropriate consultation), vulnerability to access to land or displacement, gender equality, environmental sustainability, among other risks. STAP looks forward to the risk assessments, and mitigation responses being embedded in the final project document. In addition to the climate risks identified in the PIF and in the climate risk analysis, STAP recommends addressing the climate resilience measures described to the left. This process will enable the project team to assess for the resilience of the system – identify how, and where, the system is weak, or strong, in its capacity to deal with disturbances.

		Additionally, the project team may find it useful to look at the following resources: STAP's screening guidelines and the World Bank's Climate Change Knowledge Portal.
		STAP also recommends reviewing relevant reports of the SPI UNCCD and the GM-UNCCD, such as The Land-Drought Nexus: Enhancing the Role of Land-Based Interventions in Drought Mitigation and Risk Management. A Report of the Science-Policy Interface. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Bonn, Germany.
6. Coordination. Outline the coordination with other relevant GEF-financed and other related initiatives	Are the project proponents tapping into relevant knowledge and learning generated by other projects, including GEF projects?	Yes, the project will build on the knowledge of other projects described in the coordination section. Lessons learned will be identified during the PPG phase. Given the substantial social and environmental risks identified, the STAP recommends the creation of a scientific and technical advisory committee that working closely with the Steering Committee will ensure that best practice, science and technology inform the actions (and corrections that may be needed) throughout the project lifetime, to maximise expected benefits.
	Is there adequate recognition of previous projects and the learning derived from them?	See above.
	Have specific lessons learned from previous projects been cited?	No. See above.
	How have these lessons informed the project's formulation?	See above.
	Is there an adequate mechanism to feed the lessons learned from earlier projects into this project, and to share lessons learned from it into future projects?	Yes, the project includes a component on monitoring (component 3). STAP recommends linking the theory of change (i.e. monitoring of short-term outcomes) to the monitoring component (i.e. monitoring of long-term outcomes).
8. Knowledge management. Outline the "Knowledge Management	What overall approach will be taken, and what knowledge management indicators and metrics will be used?	The knowledge management will be pursued through stakeholder engagement in platforms, including existing and new platforms; and, project

Approach" for the project, and how it will contribute to the project's overall impact, including plans to learn from relevant projects, initiatives and evaluations.		monitoring. STAP also recommends considering knowledge management metrics, and specifying further how the knowledge generated will influence the scaling of results.
	What plans are proposed for sharing, disseminating and scaling-up results, lessons and experience?	The project describes several methods to disseminate results and lessons, including course material, and capacity building of master trainers. Good practices will be documented through several virtual communities of practice.

Notes

STAP advisory response	Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed
1. **Concur**	STAP acknowledges that on scientific or technical grounds the concept has merit. The proponent is invited to approach STAP for advice at any time during the development of the project brief prior to submission for CEO endorsement.
	* In cases where the STAP acknowledges the project has merit on scientific and technical grounds, the STAP will recognize this in the screen by stating that *"STAP is satisfied with the scientific and technical quality of the proposal and encourages the proponent to develop it with same rigor. At any time during the development of the project, the proponent is invited to approach STAP to consult on the design."*
2. **Minor issues to be considered during project design**	STAP has identified specific scientific /technical suggestions or opportunities that should be discussed with the project proponent as early as possible during development of the project brief. The proponent may wish to:
	(i) Open a dialogue with STAP regarding the technical and/or scientific issues raised;
	(ii) Set a review point at an early stage during project development, and possibly agreeing to terms of reference for an independent expert to be appointed to conduct this review.
	The proponent should provide a report of the action agreed and taken, at the time of submission of the full project brief for CEO endorsement.

3. Major issues to be considered during project design	STAP proposes significant improvements or has concerns on the grounds of specified major scientific/technical methodological issues, barriers, or omissions in the project concept. If STAP provides this advisory response, a full explanation would also be provided. The proponent is strongly encouraged to:
	(i) Open a dialogue with STAP regarding the technical and/or scientific issues raised; (ii) Set a review point at an early stage during project development including an independent expert as required. The proponent should provide a report of the action agreed and taken, at the time of submission of the full project brief for CEO endorsement.