

STAP Screen:11332

GEF ID	11332
Project title	Building resilient livelihoods through nature-based solutions in the Tonle Sap Basin and Siem Reap/Phnom Kulen landscape
Date of screen	30 May 2024
STAP Panel Member	Edward Carr
STAP Secretariat	Virginia Gorsevski

1. Summary of STAP’s views of the project

STAP acknowledges the project “Building resilient livelihoods through nature-based solutions in the Tonle Sap Basin and Siem Reap/Phnom Kulen landscape.” The objective of this project is “to build the climate resilience of local communities in the Tonle Sap Basin through an integrated watershed management approach that also conserves the natural and cultural heritage that forms the foundation of the local societies.”

This project is aimed at a clear climate stress and demonstrates an understanding of the future uncertainty within which it is operating and proposes several steps to navigate that uncertainty.

To maximize the likelihood of success, project proponents should consider the future place of the livelihoods it seeks to make resilient in the country’s economy and economic plans. For example, are these the livelihoods that should be protected, and if so will this protection hinder needed transformations? In addition, the issue of land tenure should be made central to the project. Specifically, it could be moved from the risks section of the PIF to a central part of the narrative, as land tenure will greatly shape the likely uptake and durability of any NbS interventions.

STAP provides additional observations and recommendations below.

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
- X** **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.

- STAP appreciates that the PIF lays out two climate futures, one more moderate and the other more extreme. This creates a series of futures that captures at least some of the range of uncertainty related to future climate. Further, this PIF brings in the economic future and weaves climate and economic growth together. This integrated narrative does not really present more than one plausible future, which would have been helpful, but it does establish a baseline against which project impact can be reasonably measured.

- The theory of change, while complex, presents clear expected impact pathways whose assumptions can be assessed in the project preparation phase and whose outcomes should be measurable at project completion. Given this, it was surprising that the project chose to delay the assessment of the potential resilience of interventions to Component 2. The point of developing future narratives is to create something against which to measure that resilience, so the PIF might have presented at least a preliminary assessment.
- Given the integrated narrative presented by the project, and the high rates of economic growth sought/expected by the government, it seems clear that Cambodia is seeking a transformational pathway forward. Under such a pathway it makes sense to ask if the resilience of current practices that are not at the heart of that economic growth (i.e. farming) and which might be associated with some challenges of degradation (i.e. extensification) should be the goal of this project. Does Cambodia expect its workforce to shift from the agricultural to other (tourism, etc.) sectors to drive this growth? Should some of the workforce shift? If so, the discussion of rural livelihoods needs to carefully consider what the project is making resilient, and if it is doing so in a manner that will allow for these future transformations.
- Under Component 3, there appears to be an implicit assumption that unsustainable livelihoods practices are a significant driver of degradation. However, this is not mentioned earlier in the PIF (i.e. as part of the project rationale) and it is not clear whether or not this is in fact true, yet this assumption appears to be shaping proposed interventions. As the project has not yet consulted with local targeted communities, engagement with these communities and their practices will be critical to the successful final design of this project, otherwise there is a risk that selected interventions will be aimed at a problem that does not really exist.
- In the risk section of the PIF, there is a discussion of the challenges related to land tenure and some of the proposed interventions. Given the nature of these interventions and the importance of land tenure in general, it should be addressed as a central component of project design, not merely in the context of risk mitigation. It is impossible to select interventions that will be taken up and durable without incorporating land tenure issues into the project design.

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

Based on the issues identified above, STAP recommends the following specific points to be addressed:

1. Develop narratives of how the future could unfold that captures different futures in terms of economic growth and climate to fully assess the resilience of interventions across a range of plausible futures. Interventions can then be assessed in light of both futures to capture a sense of their robustness across diverse futures. See STAP's [Simple Future Narratives Brief and Primer](#) for more information.
2. Address the issue of land tenure as part of the interventions and activities. The project will need a clear plan for integrating existing land tenure arrangements into its project implementation or the interventions either will not be taken up, or will not be durable. Challenges to the local land tenure system could also spark local or even national political pushback.
3. Clearly align the project description and proposed activities and interventions with the intertwined climate/economic future of Cambodia. If Cambodia is seeking to transform itself, the project will have to carefully consider what it means to make an existing activity resilient. While protecting the food

supply in a country is certainly important, there are many ways to do this – making existing ways of raising food, etc. resilient might not do so in a manner that aligns with national economic goals. Interventions should promote outcomes that both address the impacts of climate change and the economic and social expectations of the government.

4. Assess the robustness of proposed interventions across a range of climate futures. This should be done early (i.e. design stage) so that PPG activities can focus on either new interventions that could not be assessed, or answer questions about existing envisioned interventions raised by a preliminary assessment of their robustness across plausible futures.
5. Engage with targeted communities and carefully identify the drivers of degradation so assumptions about local livelihoods are supported by data. This will allow the project to select interventions appropriate to the challenges they are trying to address without unnecessarily placing the burden for such outcomes on smallholders and other economically marginalized groups who might not be a significant source of these problems.

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.

*categories under review, subject to future revision

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.)