

STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	11402
Project title	Land Degradation Neutrality for Increased Resilience to Climate Change in Dominican Republic
Date of screen	January 21, 2024
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP welcomes the Dominican Republic's project, "Land Degradation Neutrality for increased resilience". The project targets policy coherence between land and climate change sectors, while strengthening actions that advance land degradation neutrality (LDN) and enable climate change adaptation. The project relies on integrated land use planning, which is a central feature for effectively implementing LDN. STAP is pleased with the emphasis on developing a national soil information system and a decision support system to improve data availability and monitor land degradation.

The project logic is strong and could be made more robust by considering drivers of change besides climate, such as population changes and economic fluctuations, given the focus on promoting entrepreneurship for sustainable livelihood development. Given the Dominican Republic's high vulnerability to climate change impacts, planning for the future will be essential to sustain the socioeconomic co-benefits the project aspires to deliver. To deal with climate change impacts, STAP strongly recommends that the project team develop simple future narratives to ensure the outcomes remain resilient to unwanted changes, climate and non-climate. Managing knowledge and learning is a key feature of the project. To fully embrace this intent, it will be necessary to define hypotheses or assumptions associated with key outcomes.

Below, STAP rates its assessment and provides details of its screening to help improve the project design.

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 project rationale is technically strong. STAP appreciates the thorough description of how this project will build on lessons learned and draw from a strong enabling environment for LDN. To align policies and decision making across sectors, the project will draw from several national agreements and regulatory frameworks, including the Dominican Republic's National Adaptation Plan, the country's LDN targets, and its Gender Action Plan on Climate Change. The barrier analysis is also strongly focused on issues that need to be overcome to achieve sustainable land management, LDN, and climate resilience. A clear link between barriers and components is evident in the theory of change.

STAP also appreciates the climate information provided, including downscaled information for the target sites. Drawing from this information will be necessary to inform sustainable land management and LDN interventions. A broader consideration of other key drivers of change besides climate that affect the socioecological systems, presently and in the future, will also be necessary. A simple qualitative analysis, or narrative, of the key drivers, and how they may affect the outcomes, will help envision whether, and how, these drivers can create opportunities, or challenges, to resilience.

STAP is pleased with the project logic, detailed in the description section. Through efforts aimed at strengthening the enabling environment for LDN, the project will develop the national soil information system. This soil system will be integrated into the existing National Environmental Information System, and connected to the Caribbean Soil Information Systems. Additionally, a decision support system to be developed as part of the enabling environment will be valuable for monitoring land degradation and indicators on climate change. The remaining components on land restoration and resilience, better access to markets through value chains, and knowledge management, are technically solid and also necessary to achieve GEBs and climate adaptation benefits. STAP proposes the project developers think about indicators of co-benefits that could be integrated into the aforementioned information systems.

STAP has several suggests to improve the project design which are detailed below.

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

To help strengthen the project, STAP recommends addressing these points during the project design:

- STAP appreciates the strong rationale, describing the effects of climate change on agricultural productivity in the Dominican Republic and its influence on drought and rising sea levels. STAP is also pleased that a climate risk assessment will inform the selection of drought and flood management strategies (e.g., soil and water conservation, crop rotation, drought-resistant varieties), promoting proactive drought risk management. STAP recommends consulting the UNCCD-SPI publication “[The Land-Drought Nexus Enhancing the role of land-based interventions in drought mitigation and risk management](#)”. In addition to this information, STAP encourages the project team to embed other climatic information, such as seasonal shifts, that can inform land management strategies.
- Furthermore, STAP encourages a broader analysis of the drivers of change influencing the target sites and local populations. At present only climate change is described as a driver, and further thought should be given to population changes (which is mentioned as increasing), market changes (which will influence outcomes from component 3), and possibly conflicts which the PIF mentions briefly.
- While the LDN logic is robust, STAP would encourage the project team to consider the following issues to strengthen the project:
 - As a preparatory activity, or as part of the enabling environment component, suggest conducting a land potential assessment. This assessment informs integrated land use planning and the LDN hierarchy of avoiding, reducing, or reversing land degradation via rehabilitation or restoration measures. Guidance on carrying out a land potential assessment can be found in these two resources: <https://stapgef.org/index.php/resources/advisory-documents/guidelines-land-degradation-neutrality> <https://www.unccd.int/resources/reports/contribution-integrated-land-use-planning-and-integrated-landscape-management>
 - The central feature of LDN is counterbalancing anticipated net losses with planned gains. In this regard, STAP recommends assessing and managing for trade-offs between land uses (e.g., trade-offs between agriculture, agroforestry, silvopastoral) and ecosystems. Close monitoring should be paid to climate change impact on land degradation and ecosystem services. Climate

change could lead to net losses even though the project is working to reduce, or reverse land degradation.

- As the PIF states, the project will contribute to equitable development in the country by addressing land tenure insecurity through several ways, such as promoting PES and encouraging community participation in land management. In addition to these efforts, STAP highly encourages the project team to adopt the nine pathways in the “*Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure for Land, Fisheries and Forest (VGGT) into the implementation of the UNCCD and LDN*”, which it cites in the PIF. For example, the first pathway aligns with component 1 as it encourages coherence between policies, and regulatory frameworks, to support land tenure across governance scales.
- Scaling is important to components 2 and 3, as noted in the PIF. In component 4 on knowledge management, the PIF also states that scaling is important to generate learning; STAP fully agrees with this statement and it suggests that an appropriate budget is set for learning activities (at present, the budget appears devoted only to KM, M&E). The PIF identifies relevant regional platforms for KM&L; STAP encourages reaching out to the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre as a source of knowledge and learning about climate change adaptation in the region, which could help scale out and up essential lessons from this project.
- Component 3 is innovative, and STAP welcomes the focus on youth and women to pilot alternative livelihoods. Noteworthy lessons and guidance that can assist in design and implementation of these interventions have been captured in recent publications of the OECD (2018), “The Future of Rural Youth in Developing Countries: Tapping the Potential of Local Value Chains”, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264298521-en>: chapter 2 “Approaches for youth inclusion along the agricultural value chain”; and FAO(2020) Empowering young agri-entrepreneurs to invest in agriculture and food systems: Policy recommendations based on lessons learned from eleven African countries hal-03455781. Likewise platforms such as the YouthPower (learning and evaluation) contain good advice on What Works in Youth and Agriculture.
- To strengthen the success of scaling (e.g., shifting levers associated with changing mindsets and behavior, or shifting levers related to incentives, such as PES activities in component 2), STAP highly encourages defining those critical assumptions that are associated with each key outcome. This will strengthen the project’s ability to test the assumptions, which are knowledge gaps, and address learning through adaptive management. Validating assumptions in component 3 will be particularly important as it aims to establish new value chains. Generating quick learning lessons early in implementing this component by validating some key assumptions could help the project redirect actions to help durability of proposed enterprises (outcome 3.2).
- To assist with monitoring change, STAP recommends using outcome measurements. As noted earlier, the project will rely on social change, and it will need to remain adaptable to learning to inform LDN interventions and set up enterprises that achieve land restoration, increase incomes, and benefit adaptive capacity. STAP guidance on transformation metrics can be helpful in identifying outcome measures on social change, adaptability and complexity: <https://stapgef.org/index.php/resources/advisory-documents/achieving-transformation-through-gef-investments>
- STAP is pleased that gender is a strong element of the project’s transformative ambition. In this regard, STAP recommends considering the relevance of gender throughout the project logic, so that the activities, outcomes, and monitoring for change, reflects this social aspect.

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.)