

## REVISED STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE, OCTOBER 2022

GEF ID	11394
Project title	Inclusive Conservation, Restoration, and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in Priority Ecoregions
Date of screen	17 January 2024
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### 1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

This project identifies important barriers to achieving global environmental benefits in Argentina and proposes an appropriate suite of interventions to overcome these barriers. The project is based on a well described baseline providing a solid assessment of current initiatives and a well documented description of the barriers. The theory of change outlines a reasonable logic for the project although there are limitations in the way assumptions are identified. The overall logic for the four proposed components is sound and aligns with the TOC. Nevertheless, some additional information could be provided for Components 1 & 2 where there is some uncertainty about the status of methods and protocols for restoration and sustainable use. Additionally, Component 4, dealing with knowledge management, M&E, does not seem to include adequate activities to support the learning from pilot projects and the proactive steps that are required to support uptake and scaling of effective solutions. The project should also consider the possible impact of market forces on the development of economic opportunities.

STAP assesses this project as a 'minor' and has made several suggestions for strengthening project design during the next stages of project development, in particular: a review of the **assumptions** identified in the TOC and strengthening of Component 4 to ensure rapid learning and uptake from pilot projects.

*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 PIF sets out a compelling **rationale** for the project, outlining current **threats** and **barriers** and motivation for an **integrated approach** to conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity of global importance. The background information is generally good, although it would be helpful to explain why the section on vulnerability to invasive species focuses only on a selection of vertebrates. There may be a good justification for this bias (e.g. beaver invasions are specifically dealt with in one of the interventions) but recent scientific studies document higher impacts from invertebrates and plants in addition to vertebrates in Argentina<sup>1</sup>. If the project intends to

<sup>1</sup> Duboscq-Carra VG, Fernandez RD, Haubrock PJ, Dimarco RD, Angulo E, Ballesteros-Mejia L, Diagne C, Courchamp F, Nuñez MA (2021) Economic impact of invasive alien species in Argentina: a first national synthesis. In: Zenni RD, McDermott S, García-Berthou E, Essl F (Eds) The economic costs of biological invasions around the world. NeoBiota 67: 329-348. <https://doi.org/10.3897/neobiota.67.6320>

only deal with vertebrate invasions, this section could be more specific about the rationale to support this decision.

The **baseline** information and the description of **barriers** are very informative and provide a good understanding of the project context, what is currently being done and how the GEF project would add value and secure global environmental benefits.

The **theory of change (TOC)** provides a reasonable diagram of the project logic accompanied by a narrative description and the causal pathway. The project team should consider revising the assumptions, which in many cases refer to facts already established in the project description (e.g. Assumption 1 that degradation is caused by unsustainable land use...) or that simply refers to the project's intentions (e.g. Assumption 5 that the project's interventions will be informed by scientific data and knowledge). The PIF does not identify **assumptions** implied in the 'if-then' logic of the project description and that should be considered in project design, e.g. that generating socio-economic **co-benefits** from conservation and restoration will increase investments in the environment and or reduce environmental degradation; or that improving access to information from successful pilot projects is sufficient for uptake and rollout of these solutions.

The **components** are generally well designed to overcome barriers and align with the objectives and logic of the TOC. The narrative for the outcomes mostly describes actions that will be taken rather than what the outcome will look like but this is adequate for this stage of project development. The outputs also vary in the level of detail from quite descriptive outlines (Output 1.1.2) to those with only a headline (3.1.4 -3.1.6, 4.1.3 -4.2.2). but overall they provide sufficient detail and are aligned with the intended outcome. In the case of Components 1&2, it is not clear from the proposal whether the project is relying on existing models and practices that can be deployed under Component 2 or whether they first need to be developed and validated as per Component 1 (Output 1.1.3.). Validation of restoration methods and sustainable use practices can take several years unless there are good existing baselines and monitoring systems, which may then have knock on implications for the delivery of outputs under Component 2. The next stage of project development should clarify what is envisaged here and ensure that the project is designed accordingly. Component 4, dealing with knowledge management, monitoring and evaluation is quite lean and should be expanded to provide more information. Several of the project outcomes depend on models, validation of different techniques for restoration, and uptake and learning from pilot initiatives, yet Component 4 describes a relatively passive approach without any design elements that would deliver the intended project outcomes. Good practice for testing novel solutions includes robust systems for monitoring and rapid learning so that it is possible to identify what works and why as soon as possible to facilitate replication and scaling.

Although the project includes development of economic opportunities linked to natural resources, there does not seem to be any consideration of how these may be impacted by competing market forces (either under project assumptions or risks). The intended outcomes could be affected in at least two ways. One question is whether the envisaged environmentally friendly forms of land use and biodiversity-based commodities can endure if more economically attractive land use options become available. A second example would be if large commercial interests compete with IP and local communities in markets for biodiversity based products, including supplying these commodities from farmed sources. Argentina already has examples with vicuña fiber and there are other global examples where rapid growth in commercial development of NTFPs has made it difficult for IP and local communities to compete (e.g. devils claw and Hoodia in southern Africa). In these cases, the proposed benefits from conservation and restoration may not materialise for IP and local communities.

The project would likely benefit from some consideration of **possible futures** and/ or scenarios given the dynamic and uncertain nature of the issues being addressed and this should be explored during ongoing development of the project.

*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**

1. Review the theory of change to identify critical assumptions in the logic of the TOC and which could affect the outcomes of the project. The STAP primer on the TOC<sup>2</sup> defines assumptions as ‘a belief that is accepted as true or taken for granted in defining the causal links in the causal pathway’ of the TOC. It is important to properly identify these assumptions so that the project can be designed to test critical assumptions and adapt project design if they turn out to be untrue.
2. Review the outputs under Component 4 to ensure that the knowledge management, monitoring and learning systems are designed to (i) facilitate uptake and scaling from successful pilot initiatives, and (ii) monitor assumptions underlying the TOC to facilitate adaptive responses in project implementation. STAP’s findings from a recent workshop on Knowledge Management Learning and the GEF<sup>3</sup> may provide some useful guidance in this area.

*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

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<sup>2</sup> Stafford Smith, M. 2020. *Theory of Change Primer, A STAP Advisory Document*. Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel to the Global Environment Facility. Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.stapgef.org/resources/policy-briefs/workshop-knowledge-management-and-learning-gef>

## 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.)