

REVISED STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	11181
Project title	Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution
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STAP Panel Member	Miriam Diamond
STAP Secretariat	Sunday Leonard

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

The circular solutions to plastic pollution IP, comprising 15 country child projects and a global child project, seeks to facilitate a transition to a circular economy of plastics in the food and beverage sector to prevent plastic pollution. This is a timely program given the significant impacts of plastics on the environment and human health, the increasing awareness of the need to address this problem, and the global momentum to come up with a lasting solution. This IP allows the GEF to contribute to this severe challenge and could catalyze transformation in the sector if well implemented.

Some strengths of the PFD and the program include targeting a key sector in plastic use (food and beverage) responsible for 50% of plastic use (usually comprising single-use plastics), focusing on upstream and midstream activities that can lead to lasting change, adequate systems thinking based analysis of the issues, and a well prepared global theory of change.

Areas that require strengthening in the proposal include the consideration of plausible futures; a more precise description of chemicals of concern in plastics used in the food and beverage sector; increasing the focus of child projects on upstream activities that can facilitate transformational change; and expanding policy coherence activities to address conflicting policies and incentives at the national and global levels.

Overall, STAP believes this is a viable IP that can deliver on its objectives if well-designed and effectively implemented. STAP has provided some recommendations to help further enhance the IP and will be happy to discuss these recommendations with the proponent if needed.

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 program rationale takes a systems analytical approach to situate the project and prioritize the overall effort (e.g., focusing on the food & beverage industry). It identified the high-level drivers and causes of the problems, including population growth, urbanization, economic development, etc., and the specific root causes the project seeks to address.

However, the high-level drivers, their future trends, and associated uncertainties should have been discussed in detail. Also, there was little discussion on how barriers and drivers could undermine the project's efforts. Considering how different drivers of change would play out in the future (plausible future) is essential when designing projects and programs, as understanding plausible futures will help identify and select interventions

that can be robust to different futures. Please see STAP's [brief and primer on simple future narratives](#) for more information and guidance.

The value chain approach bringing together relevant actors and stakeholders in the plastic-related food and beverage sector is excellent and needed in order to achieve the transformative change the IP seeks to deliver. Actions to foster behavior change among the actors and stakeholder is essential for success.

The discussion on harmful chemicals (or chemicals of concern) in plastics and what the IP intends to do about it needs to be tightened in the proposal, given that the IP is focused on the food and beverage sector, where the use of hazardous chemicals in food packaging is regulated. This discussion should include the entire life cycle of food packaging, including manufacturing and end-of-life. For example, the proponent needs to clarify the chemicals it referred to under the program's scope, where it talked about addressing "health risk caused by the migration of chemicals used in single-used food contact materials and chemicals and additives added to plastic packaging." What are these chemicals? Same for the 3a at the beginning of the program rationale, where it talked about "hazardous additives and chemicals, such as brominated flame retardants." There is a need to clarify if this applies to the program; whether these chemicals are used in food and packaging plastics. If the program addresses any chemicals of concern used in food and beverage packaging, this should be clearly noted, and the achieved benefits should be reported as co-benefits of the IP (i.e., if the MEAs financed by the GEF do not regulate the chemicals). An example is that PFAS can be used in manufacturing food packaging as a mold release agent and direct fluorination of plastics which causes the formation of some PFAS (e.g., [Whitehead & Peaslee, 2023](#)). A review of these publications would also be helpful: [Groh et al., 2021](#); [Chemicals in plastics technical report](#) and [Global governance of plastics and associated chemicals](#).

A detailed theory of change narrative and diagram was provided. All the critical elements of a good theory of change were presented, including causal pathways, drivers, assumptions, activities, outputs, and outcomes. While child projects were not required to have a theory of change, developing one for each could help ensure they are well-designed and aligned with the overall program theory of change. Also, the PFD identifies essential enablers such as "promoting just transition," especially for vulnerable groups such as waste pickers, but this goal isn't included in ToC or activities.

On the planned interventions:

- While the project framing speaks about up- and midstream activities, a significant part of the planned activities seems to focus on recycling, e.g., "recycled content or other alternative materials," rather than thinking more broadly about alternative systems to deliver the same function. A complete discussion of program benefits needs to consider the full life-cycle costs of recycling, e.g., GHG emissions from recycling activities.
- At the child project level, most (10/15) child projects focus on EPR and return & deposit schemes, but only 3/15 are engaged with circular design of materials, products & business models, which are activities that can bring about enduring change.

The proposal could benefit from a more detailed discussion on elements promoting different types of innovation (technology, finance, business model, policy, and institutional change) that could help achieve transformational change in the sector and how the IP will facilitate adoption and scaling, including the enablers need for success.

The proposal could also benefit from considering more information on "lessons learned" so far in the sector and why plastics production in the food and beverage sector continues to grow. Has this analysis been used to inform the program, and if so, how? This is related to risk analysis.

Discussions on policy coherence mainly focus on new policy development and enforcement in child-project countries and alignment between regulatory development at the global level and implementation at the national level. While these are important aspects of policy coherence, the discussion could better describe how

policy coherence will be achieved at different levels, from local to international trade agreements, that could influence the uptake of solutions. For example, it is not enough at the child project level to create new supportive policies/regulations or strengthen existing ones. It is essential to understand if some contradictory policies or incentives can hinder achieving the program objectives or threaten the durability of project outcomes (for example, creating policies to encourage the reduced use of single-use plastics while there are incentives, e.g., subsidies for continued production or trade or import). This point relates back to fully understanding the influence of barriers and drivers to achieve durable change. Hence, it is essential that all child projects analyze supportive and antagonistic policies/regulations and develop actions to align them, including eliminating contradictory policies across different aspects of the economy that could affect the plastic sector (importance of using a systems thinking approach). Also, at the global level, it will be helpful to consider how to manage the tension presented by competing demands of packaging circularity with health requirements for food packaging.

The PFD included additional indicators beyond GEF core indicators to track the program objective. While the selected indicators are useful, it is essential also to have metrics that help demonstrate that transformation is happening or being catalyzed, given that the core objective of GEF-8 IPs is to catalyze transformation. The theory of change already included the GEF transformational levers as components; hence indicators that track these components would be appropriate for monitoring whether the program is achieving its objective. STAP has defined five lead indicators of transformation aligned with the GEF transformation levers (capacity for change, governance and policies, multi-stakeholder dialogues, innovation and learning, and financial leverage). The program should consider having indicators that measure these. See STAP paper on [achieving transformation through GEF investment](#).

The PFD provided useful information on strategic actions that will help scale up the program outcomes and impact through the global project, including how countries outside of the child projects will be brought in to benefit and possibly replicate. This is important for scaling, durability, and transformation; hence having this in the PFD is commendable.

The PFD presented the GEBs expected from the IP but did not explain how the numbers were estimated. Also, the use of GEBs and co-benefits needs to be aligned with the GEF context. For example, biodiversity benefit was termed a co-benefit but should be a GEB in the GEF context. Furthermore, it would be useful to consider how the co-benefits achieved through the IP would be tracked and reported.

3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions

STAP recommends the following to be done as the IP is further developed:

1. Suggested greater emphasis on promoting the incubation and scale-up of innovative technical and socio-economic systems that build on past experiences, e.g., critical evaluation of the performance of EPR and elements that would ensure durable and significant change.
2. Tighten the discussion on harmful chemical use in plastics throughout the life cycle in the food and beverage sector by being more specific on the chemicals of concern that may be used or formed during manufacturing and End-of-Life, and how the IP would address them.
3. Consider developing a narrative of plausible futures to inform the design of interventions. Please see the STAP brief of [simple future narratives](#) for more guidance. One example here is that upstream solutions by reducing plastic production and use in the food and beverage sector should consider possible unintended consequences of diverting the “avoided” plastic use in this sector to increase plastic use in another sector outside of this IP.
4. Consider strengthening the theory of change by including how socioeconomic dimensions and enablers, such as “promoting just transition,” would be addressed. Also, each child project could consider developing a theory of change aligned with the overall program theory of change to help guide their implementation.

5. To effectively track transformation, STAP encourages the IP to consider including indicators to measure how the IP is achieving the GEF transformation levers. Please see STAP's [paper on transformation](#) for more details.
6. Expand the scope of policy coherence in the program to include addressing antagonistic policies or conflicts between policies. Consider how this could be addressed locally, nationally, and globally. See section 2 for specific comments. See [STAP's paper on policy coherence](#) for more guidance.
7. Describe how the Global Child Coordination project will ensure that actions across child projects and the overall IP are directed towards the most impactful solutions. Also, consider what can be done to increase the number of child projects focusing on interventions that can bring about enduring change, such as the circular design of materials and products, alternative materials, business models, and financing mechanisms, and using a complete life cycle approach.
8. PFD could better describe how and what will be promoted through the knowledge management platform, e.g., what constitutes 'best practice' and who would decide.
9. To achieve innovation and enduring change, the analysis of upstream solutions should better consider technological barriers such as materials & alternatives that simplify plastics used to enable recycling and post-consumer handling; better consideration of full impacts, benefits/disbenefits of bio-based plastics and non-plastic alternatives. Is this included in the Global Platform to "identify potential policy instruments that may generate trade-offs or contradict with other measures"?
10. Also, towards achieving innovation and enduring change, it would be helpful to discuss behavior change among all actors and stakeholders, not just consumers, e.g., private sector behavior change.
11. Explain how the indicated GEBs were estimated, including their underlying assumptions and scientific basis.
12. We encourage the proponent to put in place the provision to track, measure and report these co-benefits. Please see STAP's paper on [incorporating co-benefits in GEF's investments](#) for guidance.

*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.)