STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	11331
Project title	Restoration and sustainable management of Land for improved livelihoods in the degraded landscapes of Free State and Northwest Provinces of South Africa
Date of screen	January 18, 2024
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1. **Summary of STAP's views of the project**

STAP acknowledges South Africa's project in the Free State and Northwest Provinces. The overall objective of this project is to implement sustainable land management (SLM) practices for land rehabilitation, restoration, and protection to advance land degradation neutrality and strengthen resilience to climate change of local communities, farmers, and livelihoods. To do so, it aspires to develop and test innovative funding options including community SLM funds, microfinance, and land restoration trust funds; build investment partnerships between small and medium enterprises, national finance institutions and local land users, and business plans to take innovative approaches to scale.

STAP strongly encourages the project team to write a more concise and structured document to improve the project logic and use the LDN conceptual framework to provide coherence between aims, objectives, outputs and outcomes. While the project thoroughly maps the drivers and pressures of land degradation and barriers to implementation, the theory of change and risk management sections fail to mention how identified barriers should be addressed. STAP also notes that innovative financing is a key pillar of scaling best practices on sustainable land management and improving beneficiaries' incomes. To truly scale, the project team will need to be mindful of managing learning and knowledge, particularly to address assumptions along the innovative finance pathway.

In addition, STAP highly encourages the project team to design interventions with resilience in mind. As the PIF states, South Africa is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. To effectively address land restoration and strengthen resilience, the project needs to be designed so that its activities address risks to ecosystems and livelihoods. This process includes relying on climate screening tools, as well as developing simple future narratives to help plan activities that are robust to different plausible futures.

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

☐ 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 the description of land degradation and biodiversity loss this project aims to address in the Free State and North West province of South Africa. Clearly, these problems are affecting the environment and

well-being of local communities. Climate change is further exacerbating land degradation and biodiversity loss, the PIF explains. Droughts and floods are occurring more frequently, impacting communities and land condition. Besides climate, other drivers of change are listed in the rationale section. However, it is hard to grasp the current effect of these drivers or how they will do so in the future, in terms of the environment and communities.

STAP is also mindful that the project rationale section can be improved by linking the problem, the issues influencing these problems (e.g., key drivers of change), barriers to achieving the key outcomes, and key baseline issues important to this project. Currently, the baseline and barrier sections contain superfluous text. The PIF template provides guidance on how to complete this section, which the project team is encouraged to apply when designing the project. Similarly, the project description is too lengthy, and includes repetitive text. For this section it is necessary to focus on the project logic, or theory of change, its components, and the stakeholders whose knowledge is critical to the project design and implementation. Presently, the narrative for the theory of change comes too far down the project section, and it gets lost in the text that precedes it, which is likely unnecessary.

STAP appreciates the project's ambition to scale best practices on sustainable land management via innovative financing. Attention to strong levers of change (e.g., change of mindsets) will likely be needed, along with learning that results from testing/validating assumptions associated with outcomes on innovative financing and restoration. Thus, a theory of change (narrative and figure) that demonstrates the connections between an enabling environment, innovative finance, restoration, and knowledge management and learning, is needed.

Below, STAP provides advice on how to improve the project during its 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**

STAP recommends addressing the following points during the project design to strengthen it:

- STAP recommends making the project rationale more concise as described above. That is, describing pithily the problem and its context (biophysical and socioeconomic characteristics of the project sites); the interactions between key drivers of change (e.g., population changes, fluctuating in the economy, climate change) that influence, currently and possibly in the future, the project: the barriers associated with the key outcomes; and, the baseline which is related to on-going, or past, initiatives that are important to the project. For the baseline, STAP recommends detailing how this project will leverage knowledge (e.g., lessons learned and best practices) from the two projects (from GEF5 and GEF7) profiled in the summary, which are considered key contributors to this initiative.

- Given that climate change is already influencing land conditions and beneficiaries' livelihoods, STAP recommends thoroughly understanding the climate change trends affecting South Africa, and providing climate information for the target sites if available. Climate change information (trends and projections) can be found in the World Bank's climate knowledge portal https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/south-africa. A climate screening tool is also available on the same website, which STAP recommends the project team use or another similar tool like it, when designing the project. A climate risk screening will help with risk management and mitigation. Better attention is needed to climate change in the risk management section. Climate risks to this project go well beyond health impacts of heatwaves to those implementing the project. The

remediation of the climate risk needs to encompass the durability of the interventions in the face of a changing climate (based on the climatic projections stated in the project).

- The project states that by 2050, the Free State province is to be affected by higher annual average temperatures, which will adversely affect water and food security because of increased evaporation rates causing a reduction in agricultural outputs. Xhariep district municipality is projected to experience changes in annual average temperatures of between 3°C and 3.5°C. The current theory of change does appear to ignore these considerations (which could be included in Component 2). Component 2 needs to develop or consider existing scenarios of the impacts of climate change on those proposed interventions.

- The project is about alternative livelihoods (that advance LDN and create climate-resilient communities and livelihoods). The PIF does not mention how those alternative livelihoods, that respond to LDN, will be identified and developed. STAP recommends that PPG considers guidelines such as the IUCN 'Sustainable Livelihoods Enhancement and Diversification (SLED): A Manual for Practitioners' jointly with the guidelines for LDN implementation developed by the STAP. STAP also recommends relying on its background note on "Alternative Livelihoods": https://stapgef.org/resources/advisory-documents/alternative-livelihoods

- To help plan for plausible futures, which include dealing with climate risks, STAP highly encourages the team to develop simple future narratives. This process will help assess how the future may unfold, and propose interventions that are robust to different plausible futures. For example, thinking broadly about the future might encourage crop diversification in the value chains to withstand climate stresses. STAP's advice on future narratives can be accessed here: https://stapgef.org/index.php/resources/advisory-documents/simple-future-narratives-brief-and-primer

- Similar to the rationale, the project description should be written more concisely. Some sections of the description repeat text. More substantively, STAP suggests addressing the following points to the theory of change:

    o STAP considers the three components need to be interlinked. Component 1 on the enabling environment (which includes policy coherence between sectors public-private actors, and across governance scales) is necessary to support lasting GEB benefits that result from agricultural value chains, or other rehabilitation and restoration measures the project invests in. As currently written, the theory of change narrative and figure do not appear to reflect these relationships across the components. STAP recommends detailing further each causal (component) pathway, identifying interlinkages across activities.

    o Along each pathway, STAP recommends defining the key assumptions for each outcome. For example, the impact pathway for component 2 ought to define assumptions around how blended finance, or other innovative financing models, will lead to sustainable land management practices, ecosystem restoration, and/or climate resilience. During the project implementation, it will be necessary to test these assumptions to generate learning, identify opportunities, or barriers, to innovate or shift a lever of change, like changing mindsets (or behaviour) which is tied to scaling. STAP recommends relying on STAP's advice on theory of change and transformation for practical advice on developing the theory of change and identifying metrics for categories of systems change: https://stapgef.org/resources/advisory-documents/theory-change-primer https://stapgef.org/index.php/resources/advisory-documents/achieving-transformation-through-gef-investments

- o Knowledge management, monitoring and evaluation is currently part of component 3. However, STAP recommends that it becomes a separate component as it is truly different from rehabilitation and restoration, which is the main thrust of component 3. In addition, STAP strongly recommends that knowledge management extend beyond communication and outreach and focus on managing learning for adaptive management (e.g. adapt to maintain resilience) and learning for scaling purposes.

- o As indicated above, the project team is encouraged to account for the socioeconomic traits of the project area and its beneficiaries. Taking into account the social aspects that define the socio-ecological system, such as gender, power dynamics, cultural values and norms, is necessary to achieve adoption and scaling of sustainable land management practices. Therefore, STAP urges the project team to embed these social aspects throughout the project, particularly throughout the theory of change.

- The section on risk to project implementation and preparation would benefit from including risks of land grabbing in the process of developing interventions that address land restoration and invite private sector investment. The project states that "*Adoption of SLM good practices on communal lands has been hampered by the challenges over tenure security, local governance, and capacity among land managers. Good practices in SLM have been successfully tested, but they have not been sufficiently adapted to the unique conditions of communal lands*". The STAP recommends that the project team consider some basic guidance provided in the WEF (2023) publication on *Embedding Indigenous Knowledge in the Conservation and Restoration of Landscapes* (chapter 2 on different investment models to engage and empower local communities and indigenous people). Available at: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Embedding_Indigenous_Knowledge_2023.pdf

- Please add a map with the georeferencing information for the project sites.

- Other recommended resources include: use the LDN Scientific Conceptual framework https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/2019-06/LDN_CF_report_web-english.pdf; account for learnings on LDN that have occurred in South Africa and are documented in Von Maltitz, G. P., Gambiza, J., Kellner, K., Rambau, T., Lindeque, L., & Kgope, B. (2019). Experiences from the South African land degradation neutrality target setting process. *Environmental science & policy*, *101*, 54-62; UNCCD's publication on embedding LDN in integrated land use planning can assist in enhancing components 1 and 2 of the PIF: https://www.unccd.int/resources/reports/contribution-integrated-land-use-planning-and-integrated-landscape-management

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:

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.)