STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	**11679**
Project title	**Participatory restoration to improve ecosystem service provision and connectivity at the landscape scale in Colombia**
Date of screen	**November 26, 2024**
STAP Panel Member	**Ermias Betamariam**
STAP Secretariat	**Guadalupe Duron**

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP welcomes Colombia's project "Participatory restoration to improve ecosystem service provisions and connectivity at the landscape scale". The proposal strongly focuses on the cultural diversity of Afro-descent Peoples, local communities, and Indigenous Peoples living in the target sites in the Caribbean and the Pacific coastlines. STAP is pleased with these descriptions as the project will need to be designed based on this cultural diversity, among other social aspects inherent to the project's success.

STAP is less pleased, however, with the absence of a description of how the future may unfold by exploring the interactions between drivers, such as climate change and population changes. Both drivers were mentioned as part of the problems and contexts relevant to the target sites. Because there is no evidence that the project was designed based on an analysis of climate risks or by exploring options that are more likely to lead to enduring outcomes, the interventions are at risk of not achieving land restoration and ecosystem services important for food security, climate adaptation, and a host of other benefits envisioned by the project.

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.

The project rationale describes well the problem of land degradation and deforestation in Colombia. Several references and figures support the extent of land degradation and biodiversity loss in the country. The rationale also articulates extensively the problem of environmental degradation in the Pacific and Caribbean—the areas where the project will focus. A thorough description of biodiversity and the agro-ecological characteristics of each territory and localized project site was also given.

The territory descriptions extensively recognized the range of cultural diversity (Afro-descent Peoples, local communities, and Indigenous Peoples). The PIF also begins to describe men's and women's differentiated roles in land management – at least for the Caribbean project sites. The proposal's emphasis on the role of sub-national actors is commendable. STAP also appreciates the project's focus on participatory restoration, particularly its alignment with Colombia's National Restoration Strategy (ENR). The emphasis on ecosystem connectivity, particularly across the Caribbean and Pacific regions, is a strong approach to addressing deforestation and land degradation while promoting climate resilience. However, STAP notes that the project might face challenges in scaling restoration activities from demonstration landscapes to larger regions, especially given the complexity of land tenure issues and competing land uses in the targeted areas.

STAP also notes that the rationale could be further justified by providing a baseline narrative about the different GEF and non-GEF initiatives, and describing how the project will leverage their knowledge on land restoration. Currently, a description of the baseline and additionality seems missing. Also missing is some thought about how the future might unfold. Scant details are provided about the potential effects of climate change on the target sites.

The project description includes a narrative of the logic that outlines how and why the combined pathways will improve land restoration in the Caribbean and Pacific and communities' resilience. The PIF aptly states that socioeconomic and climate adaptation co-benefits can be generated due to this project. Designing and monitoring these co-benefits will be important to track their progress, as they are intricately linked with achieving the project objective. Nonetheless, STAP notes that key risks, such as climate risks, are absent in the logic, which can potentially weaken the project's effectiveness. The project description needs strengthening, including giving greater attention to assumptions and risks.

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 strengthen the project, STAP offers the following recommendations:

1. The project aptly considers generating co-benefits, including climate adaptation benefits. To ensure the project duly captures co-benefits, STAP recommends explicitly designing the interventions and monitoring system to capture their progress and achievement. STAP's briefing note on co-benefits is a helpful resource on this topic.
2. To strengthen further the project logic articulated in the theory of change, STAP recommends:
    a. Linking the assumptions to outcomes. They are a general listing of assumptions.
    b. Consider the risks associated with the assumptions—for example, what potential assumptions/risks could prevent the outcome from being achieved? Some of these assumptions and risks, such as those surrounding climate change, will need to form part of the project design.
3. Under component 1, partly focused on capacity building, STAP suggests embracing the variety of cultural norms and values, and gender labor differences (e.g., women are the primary source of agricultural labor while men do non-farm work according to the PIF) when designing this activity. The project should consider the social aspects underpinning capacity building in each demonstration landscape. There might be residual risks associated with social aspects despite designing the project based on these factors. For example, there might be prolonged resistance to abandoning illegal mining for restoration activities because mining is more economically beneficial in the short-term.
5. Given the critical role that policy coherence will play in achieving the project objective, the proponent is encouraged to review the STAP paper on policy coherence in the GEF for guidance on addressing policy coherence across the project cycle. In component 2, STAP recommends assessing the potential of the land to be restored. As currently written, there is an inherent assumption that land resources in all project sites will be able to be restored and generate GEBs or ecosystem services important for food security and climate adaptation. STAP's LDN guidelines offer advice on how to conduct a land assessment.
6. Furthermore, the project must recognize innovation risks associated with the proposed restoration activities. As stated above, the assumption that the land can be restored needs to be validated during, ideally via a land potential assessment early during the project implementation. The ability to restore land will also depend on how well the interventions are resilient to risks, such as climate change and population pressure. Therefore, important connections need to be made between context risks (climate change risks) and innovation risks (restoration techniques).

7. The need to design by accounting for climate risks is intrinsically tied to achieving the project objective. The PIF mentions climate risks very little, yet climate projections for sea level rise and average annual temperatures show that Colombia's data is significantly above the global average. This puts the restoration activities at risk. The project needs to be designed to account for climate risks. See UNDP's Human Climate Horizons for climate projection data.
8. Developing simple narratives of plausible futures is also strongly recommended. This exercise includes imagining interactions between different drivers, such as climate change and increased population (refer to in the PIF), and identifying options that contribute to enduring outcomes. STAP defines steps to developing future narratives in its advisory document.
9. The project's focus on localized, demonstration-oriented interventions raises concerns about scaling up to broader regions with differing socio-economic, political, and environmental contexts. A clear scaling strategy is needed, which includes capacity-building for local governments and communities, cost-benefit analyses, and alignment with national governance frameworks to ensure long-term sustainability.
10. While the project emphasizes gender-sensitive approaches, it lacks detail on how women, indigenous groups, and youth will be empowered throughout the restoration process. A gender-responsive action plan, including training in leadership and land management, and early engagement with women's organizations and indigenous leaders, is essential for ensuring equity and meaningful participation.
11. To achieve transformative, sustainable change at scale, the project should strengthen policy and governance frameworks, build institutional capacity through training in restoration techniques and adaptive management, and foster collaboration among local governments, NGOs, the private sector, and communities to drive systemic, multi-stakeholder impact.

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.)