

## STAP SCREEN

<b>GEF ID</b>	11378
<b>Project title</b>	Central Asia Water and Land Nexus (CAWLN) for Ecosystem Restoration, Improved Natural Resource Management and Increased Resilience
<b>Date of screen</b>	25 January 2024
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### 1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP acknowledges the program entitled, "Central Asia Water and Land Nexus (CAWLN) for Ecosystem Restoration, Improved Natural Resource Management and Increased Resilience," which seeks to 'enhance water-land nexus approaches and implementation for strengthening water security, increasing resilience and improving rural livelihoods in the Amu Darya and Syr Darya river basins.

Overall, STAP finds that the program is well designed and logical, with clearly described global environmental benefits (GEBs). STAP offers several suggestions for further improvements to sharpen the logic behind the theory of change (ToC) and to add greater emphasis on the transboundary water management aspect of the program.

*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.

Overall STAP finds that this proposed multi-focal area program is well designed with a strong underlying rationale. The objective of the program is clearly defined; however, it should be more clearly connected to the problem statement and the barriers (linking water security to institutional capacity/knowledge gaps and to biodiversity and land restoration). The linkage remains quite implicit and therefore makes it difficult to understand whether and how the activities in the program, which clearly link to the objective, are also suitable for addressing the underlying problem.

Similarly, the problem description is well formulated and clearly describes important issues such as declining biodiversity (among others). However, more clarity should be provided regarding the connections between land restoration and the proposed activities in the context of integrated water management. Currently, this connection is implicit, but should be made explicit through a clear description in the text of the document. Related, the political dimension of transboundary water resources appears to be somewhat detached from the rest of the problem statement and the root causes (and possibly also the barriers – one of which may include the inability of riparian states to effectively cooperate over shared water resources).

Global environmental benefits are clearly described, with specific targets and indicators. More information on how these were derived would be helpful. The description of what makes the program innovative and transformative is also convincing in the project description; however, greater clarity is needed regarding how activities under the various outcomes can really achieve these changes. This should go beyond claiming that more data and knowledge will automatically improve institutional capacity which will in turn address the problem, as there are several intervening factors at play, particularly with regards to governance.

The programmatic approach is well explained and visualized. More information is needed to explain how the two sub-regional projects (on the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya) will interact with each other to ensure sustainable water management in the entire system. Likewise, it would be helpful to include more information on how the national projects actually link (if they are supposed to), or at least how they support each other beyond mutual learning.

Greater clarification is needed regarding some of the underlying logic behind the program. For example, outcomes under Component 2 (integrated and participatory watershed management) focus on strengthened frameworks and mechanisms and enhanced stakeholder capacities, but do not entirely match the problem statement, the root causes and the barriers and remain somewhat vague in terms of what will be done to address the challenge. For instance, if transboundary water governance and related institutional capacity and frameworks for cooperation are key issues that keep countries and the region in an unfavorable situation (as it can be assumed, albeit rather implicitly, from the description of the problem and other parts of the PFD), how do Outcome 3 and Outcome 4 specifically address this? How will an updated TDA for the Syr Darya and a new TDA for the Amu Darya improve transboundary cooperation?

Likewise, Outcome 8 under Component 4 is quite detached from the rest. The problem statement mentions land management and land degradation and the outcome links to it, but the rest of the PFD does not really address this issue. Also, this outcome should be linked more clearly to water management to fully ensure integrated land-water management/the water-land nexus.

In general, the transboundary water management component of this program should be strengthened. For example, the barriers include problems related to integrated and transboundary water management, but the program description does not focus much on this important aspect. For instance, regional and global initiatives mention various land-relevant instruments, such as the UNCCD and the CBD, but omit important water-related instruments. Regional mechanisms, such as IFAS (the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea), are mentioned, but more information is needed to explain reasons behind its ineffectiveness in addressing the region's problems and whether these issues *can* be addressed within the context of this program. The proposed harmonized policy instruments might not only be unnecessary, but may also be unrealistic given the barriers relating to transboundary cooperation. Harmonization of legal instruments with a high formality, as suggested in the PFD, is a very long process requiring a considerable amount of political willingness.

The program mentions a gender-responsive approach, but does not provide much detail on how exactly this will be done (beyond the fact that it needs to be done). Given the various barriers to gender equality that exist in the region, more detail is needed to ensure that gender-related goals will actually be achieved through well-conceived activities.

The program puts emphasis on various stakeholders, including farmers and private sector actors which are crucial for addressing the underlying issues. More detail would be useful to understand whether such stakeholders (beyond government) will be involved directly in the program or via government institutions. How can the program ensure that stakeholders change their behavior in line with program objectives despite constraints they face due to rigid socioeconomic systems that are beyond their control?

*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**

Based on the above observations, STAP has the following suggestions:

1. Sharpen the logic underlying the ToC to address the issues raised above. Consult STAP's [Theory of Change Primer](#) for a review of the process and key factors to consider.
2. Strengthen the transboundary water management aspect of the PFD, as described above.
3. Reformat the main parts of the PFD to match the project summary, which is much more clearly presented.

*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

## 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.)