STAP guidelines for screening GEF projects

Part I: Project Information	Response	
	Response	
GEF ID	10676	
Project Title	Biodiversity conservation, sustainable land management and sustainable tourism development in North Macedonia	
Date of Screening	May 27, 2021	
STAP member screener	Graciela Metternicht	
STAP secretariat screener	Guadalupe Duron	
STAP Overall Assessment and Rating	**Minor issues to be considered during project design** STAP welcomes UNEP's project "Biodiversity conservation, sustainable land management and sustainable tourism development in North Macedonia" to be underpinned by integrated land use planning and integrated landscape management. The project aims to strengthen landscape management in the Shar Mountains, building on existing biodiversity, sustainable land and forest management initiatives. The project is novel in its consideration of Natural Capital Accounting (NCA) to monitor and report on benefits from sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation, including the provision of ecosystem services. STAP encourages the project team to specify the NCA methodology, along with the data, that will be used to monitor and assess progress achieved from activities planned for advancing the vision of 'land degradation neutrality', in tandem contributing to conservation of valuable biological diversity of the project area. As the project is developed, the project proponents are also encouraged to pay equal attention to direct biophysical and socio-cultural factors. The project has a strong emphasis on biophysical traits although effective restoration strategies are equally dependent on the cultural, political	

| | and economic dimensions that may influence global environmental outcomes. It would be appropriate, therefore, to build these multiple factors into the proposed integrated landscape management approach and theory of change. Given the proponents mention the need to overcome the inertia of long-entrenched existing systems, approaches and mindsets (Barrier #2), STAP strongly recommends the PPG considers behavioral change as a means (and also end) to the design and implementation of interventions that can be sustainable beyond the project lifetime.

STAP also recommends paying close attention to indirect effects, such as leakage of deforestation, in the theory of change and landscape management approach used by the project. Currently, these types of effects are not considered in the proposal. To reduce uncertainty of outputs and outcomes, STAP encourages the project team to develop one or two alternative scenarios that could deal effectively with the impacts brought about by changes in outmigration from the target sites, climate change, and other significant drivers of environmental change identified in the project.

The STAP commends the consideration given to inclusion of the private sector and encourages more work at the PPG phase to better articulate a strategy for their involvement in activities towards, for instance, creation of new markets and job opportunities for youth. As the project intends to develop a case study on utilization of genetic resources, the STAP strongly encourages drawing on previous GEF projects experiences in that regard.

Below, STAP presents suggestions on how to address these issues. | |
| **Part I: Project Information** | **What STAP looks for** | **Response** |

B. Indicative Project Description Summary		
Project Objective	Is the objective clearly defined, and consistently related to the problem diagnosis?	Yes, the objective is defined clearly and related to the problem definition.
Project components	A brief description of the planned activities. Do these support the project's objectives?	Yes, the activities support the project objective.
Outcomes	A description of the expected short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention. Do the planned outcomes encompass important global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits?	Yes, the outcomes represent global environmental benefits.
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits likely to be generated?	Possibly – with good monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and a good theory of change that is used to validate assumptions, and assess opportunities for adaptation and transformational change. STAP encourages the team to make emphasis on alternative livelihoods beyond sustainable tourism. The PIF identifies under Output 1.2.3 activities that will contribute to adaptation of the community to a changing climate and conservation of the biodiversity. STAP encourages linking those activities to the ToC, to ensure that investment occurs for the right interventions at local level that will generate GEBs.
Outputs	A description of the products and services which are expected to result from the project. Is the sum of the outputs likely to contribute to the outcomes?	Yes. Better articulation is needed in the PPG between outcomes, outputs and proposed activities.
Part II: Project justification	A simple narrative explaining the project's logic, i.e. a theory of change.	
1. Project description. Briefly describe: 1) the global environmental and/or adaptation problems, root causes and barriers that need to be addressed (systems description)	Is the problem statement well-defined?	Yes, the problem statement is well-defined. STAP recommends attention be paid to land tenure and migration in the design of project interventions to address the root causes and barriers stated.
	Are the barriers and threats well described, and substantiated by data and references?	Yes, the threats are well described, which include: 1) population pressure on forest resources (e.g. fuelwood) leading to deforestation, and

		biodiversity loss; 2) degradation of pasture areas due to changes in grazing practices (reduced grazing has led to growth of low productivity scrub); 3) unsustainable grazing practices (reduced rotational grazing, high stock density in places) leading to land degradation; 4) poor grazing and pasture management leading to biodiversity loss (species loss, productivity decline); one year pasture lease which is leading to insufficient interest, and incentives, on sustainable pasture management; 5) decline of water resources; 6) replacement of traditional agrobiodiversity with high valued crops; and, 7) reduced ecosystem services, such as water. Barriers include lack of capacity on landscape management; and, limited capacity to upscale land management practices;
	For multiple focal area projects: does the problem statement and analysis identify the drivers of environmental degradation which need to be addressed through multiple focal areas; and is the objective well-defined, and can it only be supported by integrating two, or more focal areas objectives or programs?	Yes, the PIF identifies drivers of land and forest degradation, as well as biodiversity loss. These drivers will be addressed through sustainable land management, and biodiversity conservation. In particular, LDN will be used as unifying integrated landscape approach to tackle these multiple drivers.
2) the baseline scenario or any associated baseline projects	Is the baseline identified clearly?	The baseline is a narrative description of projects and initiatives that have strengthened policy, legal and institutional frameworks on landscape management, and biodiversity conservation. The baseline also describes projects on LDN and biodiversity conservation that are relevant to this initiative because of their approaches, tools, and methods on natural resource management. Of note is the
	Does it provide a feasible basis for quantifying the project's benefits?	Possibly – it is unclear from the PIF whether North Macedonia has defined its LDN targets. If it has, then it would be helpful to define the LDN targets as the baseline for land benefits. For biodiversity, we suggest describing which post-2020 global

		biodiversity framework targets the project will contribute towards, and select the appropriate indicators for these targets.
	Is the baseline sufficiently robust to support the incremental (additional cost) reasoning for the project?	See comment above.
	For multiple focal area projects:	
	are the multiple baseline analyses presented (supported by data and references), and the multiple benefits specified, including the proposed indicators;	Yes. However, suggest identifying LDN and post-2020 global biodiversity framework targets indicators.
	are the lessons learned from similar or related past GEF and non-GEF interventions described; and	Yes, the baseline narrative does this very well.
	how did these lessons inform the design of this project?	See the policy, or project, descriptions under the baseline scenario.
3) the proposed alternative scenario with a brief description of expected outcomes and components of the project	What is the theory of change?	The project will strengthen capacity on LDN and biodiversity conversation through landscape management in the Shar Mountains. To achieve this objective, the project will: "1) support stakeholders to plan and implement an interlinking set of actions, related to forestry, pasture, water resources, agriculture, and sustainable livelihoods, in the Shar Mountains. These actions will be aimed at avoiding, reducing or reversing land degradation, loss of biodiversity and ecosystem functions. Within this component, the project will also support the capacity for natural capital accounting, integrated LDN/BD monitoring and reporting system; and 2) capture the experience and lessons learned from previous initiatives. Opportunities for scaling forest and pasture management will be sought.
	What is the sequence of events (required or expected) that will lead to the desired outcomes?	See above.
	What is the set of linked activities, outputs, and outcomes to address the project's objectives?	See above.
	Are the mechanisms of change plausible, and is there a well-informed identification of the underlying assumptions?	The desired change is plausible with the implementation of the theory of change. Adapting the theory of change as assumptions are tested, and outcomes are monitored, will be important.

		Suggest defining the assumptions, risks, and barriers behind each outcome – i.e. the conditions that must be met to achieve an outcome.
	Is there a recognition of what adaptations may be required during project implementation to respond to changing conditions in pursuit of the targeted outcomes?	Yes, component 2 will focus on embedding lessons learned into the project, and adapting its implementation accordingly. The PIF also recognizes opportunities for scaling and replication based on embedding knowledge and learning, which is valuable. Paying close attention to scaling (developing a separate theory of change – and identifying barriers to scaling) will help the project monitor the changes needed to achieve adaptation.
5) incremental/additional cost reasoning and expected contributions from the baseline, the GEF trust fund, LDCF, SCCF, and co-financing	GEF trust fund: will the proposed incremental activities lead to the delivery of global environmental benefits?	Possibly. However, there might be a possibility of 'leakage' of deforestation that the project team should manage as the project is designed and implemented. Could actions in the target sites result in forest clearing being moved to parts outside the newly established protected area?
	LDCF/SCCF: will the proposed incremental activities lead to adaptation which reduces vulnerability, builds adaptive capacity, and increases resilience to climate change?	Not applicable.
6) global environmental benefits (GEF trust fund) and/or adaptation benefits (LDCF/SCCF)	Are the benefits truly global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits, and are they measurable?	Yes, it is plausible to achieve the proposed global environmental benefits. However, recommend assessing the possibilities for leakage of deforestation, and identifying measures to address this indirect driver of biodiversity loss and forest degradation.
	Is the scale of projected benefits both plausible and compelling in relation to the proposed investment?	Yes, the scale of the project is plausible and compelling, especially if the leakage concern is built into the theory of change, and managed. The proposed investments are vague at this stage, and STAP recommends more careful screening of the plausible benefits (e.g. use of cost-benefit analysis for assessing whether the projected benefits can be achieved).
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits explicitly defined?	See above.
	Are indicators, or methodologies, provided to demonstrate how the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits	STAP LDN guidelines, among other methods, will be used to apply landscape management, and address land and forest restoration.

	will be measured and monitored during project implementation?	STAP recommends consideration of interventions that target behavioral change given the barriers mentioned in the project. A good starting point to understand when, how and what needs to change is in the [STAP work](#) presented in the December Council, and its related literature review.
	What activities will be implemented to increase the project's resilience to climate change?	Resilience is considered in the project, though not specific to climate change. The risk section recognizes that resilience (of landscapes) is linked to biodiversity of land uses and livelihoods, and it highlights the risks of undermining resilience by over-dependence on one activity (ie. tourism). STAP suggests framing one, or two, alternative pathways to deal with the uncertainties posed by climate change projected for the region and to wind-tunnel in that way proposed interventions for their resilience to climate change. Further advice is provided in the risk section. Another suggestion is around using the outputs of NCA to guide the design of ILM interventions that are climate-smart.
7) innovative, sustainability and potential for scaling-up	Is the project innovative, for example, in its design, method of financing, technology, business model, policy, monitoring and evaluation, or learning?	The project is innovative within its context. The project will build capacity to implement an integrated landscape management approach to address the root cases of degradation and biodiversity loss. Suggest identifying metrics to monitor a landscape approach, as well as defining trade-offs between the different objectives: that is, sustainable land management, restoration, and biodiversity conservation. Refer to the following paper on landscape approaches: Reed, James, et al. "Integrated landscape approaches to managing social and environmental issues in the tropics: learning from the past to guide the future." *Global change biology* 22.7 (2016): 2540-2554. Given the emphasis on NCA, the use of LDN as a framework, and the interest in diversification of livelihoods and maintenance of ecosystem services in the project area, STAP suggests the project team to investigate the potential of ILM options

		that apply market-based instruments (e.g. payment for ecosystem services). Some guidance on how this can be applied in the context of LDN is provided in Using Market-Based Instruments to Enhance Climate Resilience and Synergies between Land Degradation Neutrality goals and existing market-based instruments
	Is there a clearly-articulated vision of how the innovation will be scaled-up, for example, over time, across geographies, among institutional actors?	The project could benefit from a separate theory of change that is specific to scaling out (replication), deep (influencing cultural values), and up (changing institutions). Achieving change at scale requires alignment between knowledge of potential solutions (e.g. improved land management practices), and social structures (e.g. shift in cultural values and norms). The project team, therefore, should pay close attention to potential barriers, and enablers, of change influencing knowledge of solutions and social structures. Often, scaling and transformational change, will require context specific scaling up, deep, and out. Refer to the following sources for further information on scaling: STAP's theory of change primer; STAP's durability advice; Why behavioral change matters and what to do about it? and, Moore, Michele-Lee, Darcy Riddell, and Dana Vocisano. "Scaling out, scaling up, scaling deep: strategies of non-profits in advancing systemic social innovation." *Journal of Corporate Citizenship* 58 (2015): 67-84.); Pandit, Ram, et al. "A framework to evaluate land degradation and restoration responses for improved planning and decision-making." *Ecosystems and People* 16.1 (2020): 1-18.
	Will incremental adaptation be required, or more fundamental transformational change to achieve long term sustainability?	Possibly both – incremental and transformational change to deal with the present long-term drivers of population change (outmigration) and climate change.
1b. Project Map and Coordinates. Please provide geo-referenced information		Yes, a map is provided showing the target area. Suggest adding the different land uses, and state of degradation if this information is available.

and map where the project interventions will take place.		Additional advice on the use of earth observation for project design is available in this [technical guide](#) commissioned by STAP.
2. Stakeholders. Select the stakeholders that have participated in consultations during the project identification phase: Indigenous people and local communities; Civil society organizations; Private sector entities. If none of the above, please explain why. In addition, provide indicative information on how stakeholders, including civil society and indigenous peoples, will be engaged in the project preparation, and their respective roles and means of engagement.	Have all the key relevant stakeholders been identified to cover the complexity of the problem, and project implementation barriers?	Yes. Suggest revisiting stakeholders as the project is designed and implemented. Different stakeholders may be needed, or stakeholders' roles may change, as the activities are implemented. Additionally, suggest describing how each stakeholder is linked to achieving the project outcomes. The role of the private sector is identified, and STAP expects that it will be better articulated in the PPG phase.
	What are the stakeholders' roles, and how will their combined roles contribute to robust project design, to achieving global environmental outcomes, and to lessons learned and knowledge?	Please address questions to the left during project design.
3. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Please briefly include below any gender dimensions relevant to the project, and any plans to address gender in project design (e.g. gender analysis). Does the project expect to include any gender-responsive measures to address gender gaps or promote gender equality and women	Have gender differentiated risks and opportunities been identified, and were preliminary response measures described that would address these differences?	Partly. Recommend identifying the social and power relations within the stakeholder group, and any barriers, or enablers, of change that are essential for transforming gender norms and power relationships.

empowerment? Yes/no/ tbd. If possible, indicate in which results area(s) the project is expected to contribute to gender equality: access to and control over resources; participation and decision-making; and/or economic benefits or services. Will the project's results framework or logical framework include gender-sensitive indicators? yes/no /tbd		
	Do gender considerations hinder full participation of an important stakeholder group (or groups)? If so, how will these obstacles be addressed?	See above advice on power dynamics within the stakeholder group.
5. Risks. Indicate risks, including climate change, potential social and environmental risks that might prevent the project objectives from being achieved, and, if possible, propose measures that address these risks to be further developed during the project design	Are the identified risks valid and comprehensive? Are the risks specifically for things outside the project's control? Are there social and environmental risks which could affect the project? For climate risk, and climate resilience measures: • How will the project's objectives or outputs be affected by climate risks over the period 2020 to 2050, and have the impact of these risks been addressed adequately? • Has the sensitivity to climate change, and its impacts, been assessed? • Have resilience practices and measures to address projected climate risks and impacts been considered? How will these be dealt with? • What technical and institutional capacity, and information, will be needed to address climate risks and resilience enhancement measures?	The risks identified are valid, and need to be identified in the theory of change. Additionally, STAP recommends identifying risks, or barriers, that may hamper the achievement of outcomes. As the theory of change is implemented, these risks and barriers can be addressed, and the theory of change revisited and adapted. The reflection of page 35 on factors that hamper project implementation is very valid and applicable to the context of this project. STAP recommends these be attended in the PPG, in addition to the risks highlighted in the section 'risks'. As previously mentioned, STAP suggests considering two, or three, additional pathways, or scenarios to anticipate how external and internal factors may affect the intended outputs and outcome. For example, how will climate change, changes in population (out-migration from target sites identified in the PIF) affect the project

		objective? Refer to STAP's theory of change primer and Moallemi, E. A., et al. "Evaluating Participatory Modeling Methods for Co-creating Pathways to Sustainability." *Earth's Future* 9.3 (2021): e2020EF001843.
6. Coordination. Outline the coordination with other relevant GEF-financed and other related initiatives	Are the project proponents tapping into relevant knowledge and learning generated by other projects, including GEF projects?	The baseline scenario begins to describe lessons learned from several baseline projects. Suggest addressing the questions below to help specify how knowledge generated from the baseline projects will contribute to this initiative.
	Is there adequate recognition of previous projects and the learning derived from them?	See above.
	Have specific lessons learned from previous projects been cited?	See above.
	How have these lessons informed the project's formulation?	See above.
	Is there an adequate mechanism to feed the lessons learned from earlier projects into this project, and to share lessons learned from it into future projects?	See above.
8. Knowledge management. Outline the "Knowledge Management Approach" for the project, and how it will contribute to the project's overall impact, including plans to learn from relevant projects, initiatives and evaluations.	What overall approach will be taken, and what knowledge management indicators and metrics will be used?	The project will rely on an innovative approach, Natural Capital Accounting (NCA) system, to generate knowledge by monitoring and reporting on LDN and biodiversity conservation. Knowledge from previous initiatives in the Shar Mountains demonstration site will be used as input to the NCA system. Recommend detailing the NCA methodology, along with the data that will be used to monitor forest and land restoration, and biodiversity conservation. It is recommended the project uses prior knowledge of global databases like WOCAT to identify sustainable land management options suitable to the multiple objectives of this project. Linking this project to global databases like WOCAT would enable better sharing of lessons learned from this project, and transfer of knowledge and skills to other GEF and non-GEF projects that focus on LDN and biodiversity conservation through the lens of ILM.

	What plans are proposed for sharing, disseminating and scaling-up results, lessons and experience?	The project proposes to share knowledge generated from the project through different forums. Scaling and replication are also objectives of this project which are tied to managing knowledge. Suggest paying close attention to scaling, including barriers and enablers of change that facilitate scaling up, scaling out and scaling deep. See advice provided above.

Notes

STAP advisory response	Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed
1. Concur	STAP acknowledges that on scientific or technical grounds the concept has merit. The proponent is invited to approach STAP for advice at any time during the development of the project brief prior to submission for CEO endorsement.
	* In cases where the STAP acknowledges the project has merit on scientific and technical grounds, the STAP will recognize this in the screen by stating that ***"STAP is satisfied with the scientific and technical quality of the proposal and encourages the proponent to develop it with same rigor. At any time during the development of the project, the proponent is invited to approach STAP to consult on the design."***
2. Minor issues to be considered during project design	STAP has identified specific scientific /technical suggestions or opportunities that should be discussed with the project proponent as early as possible during development of the project brief. The proponent may wish to:
	(i) Open a dialogue with STAP regarding the technical and/or scientific issues raised;
	(ii) Set a review point at an early stage during project development, and possibly agreeing to terms of reference for an independent expert to be appointed to conduct this review.
	The proponent should provide a report of the action agreed and taken, at the time of submission of the full project brief for CEO endorsement.

3. Major issues to be considered during project design	STAP proposes significant improvements or has concerns on the grounds of specified major scientific/technical methodological issues, barriers, or omissions in the project concept. If STAP provides this advisory response, a full explanation would also be provided. The proponent is strongly encouraged to:
	(i) Open a dialogue with STAP regarding the technical and/or scientific issues raised; (ii) Set a review point at an early stage during project development including an independent expert as required. The proponent should provide a report of the action agreed and taken, at the time of submission of the full project brief for CEO endorsement.