

STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	11787
Project title	Empowering Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) for sustainable management and conservation of 700,000 hectares of critical ecosystems in three highland provinces in Papua New Guinea
Date of screen	May 14, 2026
STAP Panel Member	Sandy Andelman
STAP Secretariat	Guadalupe Duron

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP acknowledges the GBFF project for Papua New Guinea, "Empowering Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) for sustainable management and conservation of 700,000 hectares of critical ecosystems in three highland provinces in Papua New Guinea".

The main objective of the project, to enhance capacity of Indigenous Peoples for biodiversity conservation, is important, although the rationale for the second part of the objective on peace building is not clear, nor are the interventions related to peace building. Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) will be an important tool in the project, however, there seems to be a lack of understanding of the purpose of OECMs.

STAP recommends starting by applying a systems analysis to understand the interactions among the multiple drivers of biodiversity loss, both those outlined in the project document, and those highlighted below. This step would help strengthen the project's logic and structure. This systems analysis should then be incorporated into the Theory of Change; thereby, strengthening it substantially. These changes will also help shorten the document, especially the project rationale, which is unnecessarily long.

Below, STAP provides further details on its review and recommendations to help strengthen 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 objective, is "to enhance biodiversity conservation in three Highland provinces of Papua New Guinea by empowering Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) to foster connectivity in biodiversity corridors and peacebuilding." This objective is addressed throughout the project rationale, which could be substantially shortened. This could be done by reducing the description of the national context and focusing earlier and more in depth on the target provinces.

The three focal provinces in PNG are Enga, Jiwaka and Chimbu, which have significant biodiversity and potential for Global Environmental Benefits, including seven Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). Sometimes the province of Chimbu is called Chimbu and in others cases the document refers to Simbu. Please clarify whether these are the same province and, if so, use a single name. Also, without a map of KBAs and existing protected areas within

each province, or Tables 4 and 8, that are missing from the document, it is difficult to understand where the proposed interventions will take place in relation to biodiversity priorities.

There is a comprehensive description of the baseline, as determined by current and recently completed projects. However, it is difficult to determine how this initiative will leverage knowledge and learning from projects described as part of the baseline. In particular, the proponents need to clarify how this project will empower IPLCs (most of which are Indigenous Peoples) and how they will foster peacebuilding, as well as the connections between peacebuilding and biodiversity conservation.

The project has four components: (1) Planning and governance frameworks at provincial and landscape scales; (2) Community-level integrated conservation, NRM and livelihood development initiatives; (3) Sustainable finance for integrated conservation, NRM and livelihood development; and (4) Mainstreaming of community-led approaches into conservation strategies in PNG. Since components 2 and 4 are closely related, it is unclear why these are presented as separate, rather than integrated.

Although the proponents mention that PNG is the 10th most vulnerable country to climate change (citing Germanwatch), there is no consideration of climate change impacts at the scale of the proposed interventions. The Risk Table lists climate change as a high risk, however, in the TOC climate change is not listed as a threat to biodiversity and in the narrative there is merely a statement that national-level climate threats are largely reflected in the target provinces.

Mining and logging are listed as threats to biodiversity conservation in both the TOC diagram and narrative. The lack of accurate maps of Indigenous Peoples' and clan tenure areas and a lack of understanding by communities of their legal rights, are major barriers to addressing illegal mining and logging on Indigenous lands (~97% of the country) (e.g., [Bainton et al. 2022](#); [Harris 2026](#)). However, the project does not address these critical issues.

3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions

STAP recommends the following points be addressed:

1. To strengthen the problem analysis, provide a more detailed analysis of (a) the specific components of biodiversity the project will target in each province and landscape; (b) the local drivers of biodiversity loss; and (c) the interactions between the identified drivers of biodiversity loss, including climate change, lack of clear tenure boundaries for Indigenous and clan lands, and other trends identified in the project rationale. As part of the systems analysis, STAP also recommends describing the social characteristics of the communities targeted by the project. This information will help define the social systems, including norms, values, and power dynamics, as well as gender dimensions, that are essential for designing the project components and empowering Indigenous Peoples to conserve biodiversity.
2. Provide additional critical but missing information for the project description and rationale. Table 4, summarizing information on Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in the target provinces is missing, making it difficult to determine the priority of different landscapes. Similarly, the map on p 88 does not include a key and also does not include KBAs, or the proposed interventions. STAP requests that Table 4 be included and that the map on p 88 be revised to clarify the intended interventions and their justification in terms of biodiversity priorities. Similarly, Table 8, with information on proposed OECMs and protected areas is missing. It supposedly is included in the prodoc, which is not in the portal and STAP Panel Members do not have access. Table 8 is an important part of the project design and needs to be included.

In addition, clarification is needed on how the project interventions will contribute to habitat connectivity and peace building. These are listed as project outputs and outcomes, however, details of

the logic and the specific interventions are needed. Biodiversity corridors are mentioned, however, critical design considerations for these corridors is lacking. STAP suggests conducting biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning for the design of corridors, which aligns with the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) Target 1 and also will ensure that PNG's protected areas and OECMs in the target provinces are well-connected, as called for in GBF Target 3.

3. The logic underlying the Theory of Change (TOC) is not clear. STAP recommends that the project proponents start with a systems analysis and use this as a basis for developing the TOC. A description of the socio-cultural context of each targeted system is also necessary, given its importance in achieving the proposed outcomes, as indicated above. STAP recommends conducting a systems analysis and describing future narratives, as outlined in [STAP's future narrative advisory document](#), for each target landscape. The results of this analysis should then be reflected in the theory of change, including in the relevant components. Refer to section 2.4 in the future narratives document for a summary on how to apply the narratives in the project design to plan for uncertainty. Additional recommendations on the theory of change are:
 - a. Create individual pathways for each component along with their associated barriers and assumptions. This will clarify the logic shown in the figure and improve the description of this logic. This will also help analyze whether each pathway is necessary and sufficient to achieve its outcomes. For example, more than one pathway might be needed to address some of the barriers recognized by stakeholders. See [STAP Theory of Change Primer](#).
 - b. Some of the assumptions, or contextual risks from the risk table, should form part of designing the relevant pathway. This includes designing for assumptions such as "stakeholder consensus and continued political will" are present.
 - c. The narrative outlining the rationale underlying the theory of change should clarify the relationships among long-term outcomes (such as biodiversity and co-benefits), outcomes, outputs, and components. Currently, a description justifying these connections has not been provided.
 - d. Account for [prerequisite co-benefits](#) in the project design associated with achieving biodiversity benefits. This will help manage assumptions that target communities are motivated to invest in biodiversity conservation because these efforts yield economic benefits.
4. Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) are a major conservation tool to be used in this project, with ten OECMs to be designated, covering 268,480 hectares. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the definition of OECMs and this should be addressed prior to project implementation. The proponents state that "In the context of this project (and for the purposes of reporting on GEF core indicators), regional protected areas such as CCAs are considered to constitute other effective conservation measures (OECMs): although recognized under the PA Act, their primary focus is on traditional management and safeguarding the integrity of the interactions between people and nature. Biodiversity conservation is not, therefore, their primary objective as it is in more formal categories of PA, but in accordance with IUCN/WCPA guidance is achieved 'through the active conservation of an area where conservation outcomes are a secondary management objective'."

STAP refers the proponents to the CBD definition for OECMs ([CBD 2018](#)) and also to the [IUCN Guidance on other effective area-based conservation measures](#). An OECM is defined by the CBD in Decision 14/8 as: A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values. In multiple places within the CEO Endorsement Document, it sounds as though the idea is that OECMs will be dominated by agriculture, however, additional information is needed on which elements of biodiversity will be protected within OECMs and how. Please specify whether the focus of the OECMs will be on agricultural biodiversity,

e.g., crop wild relatives, or on wild vertebrates, as suggested in other places in the document (e.g., Table 10) and how this will be achieved. Also, please clarify the relationship between the OECMs and the connectivity corridors to be created.

5. An analysis should be done of the feasibility of pursuing ecotourism as an effective approach for long-term biodiversity conservation and as a sustainable livelihood mechanism. The Highlands is the region of PNG most at risk for violence. Of the three provinces targeted by the project, Enga is considered very high risk and Chimbu and Jiwaka are considered high risk. At the same time, the PNG National Research Institute has produced a discussion paper on [Challenges and Opportunities for Developing Sustainable Rural Tourism in Papua New Guinea](#). The paper lists safety and security as one of the impediments to sustainable ecotourism, along with lack of infrastructure and accessibility, and other challenges. STAP's policy brief on [achieving durable outcomes in fragile and conflict-affected situations](#) may also be useful here.
6. Table 10 appears to be mis-referenced in the narrative as Table 11. The information in the table is offered as providing the ecological information on target species needed for designing corridors or stepping stones and protected area buffer zones.
7. Although an important project objective is empowering Indigenous Peoples to conserve biodiversity, it appears from the budget that much of this work will be done via intermediaries (e.g., international NGOs). STAP strongly encourages the proponents to support Indigenous Peoples to design or co-design the OECMs and project interventions within them, aligned with their rights to self-determination. STAP encourages the proponents to refer to its information note on [strengthening GEF support for Indigenous Peoples and the report on consultations with Indigenous Peoples](#) as well as to lessons learned from the GEF-7 Inclusive Conservation Initiative, which is Indigenous led and governed reflected in the [Inclusive Conservation Phase 3 Report](#).
8. Although the Risk Table identifies climate risk as high, climate change is absent from the TOC and the narrative merely states that PNG is the 10th most vulnerable country to climate change and national climate vulnerability largely maps to the target provinces. The TOC should include climate change as a driver of biodiversity loss, and also as a risk to communities. Without more detailed analyses of climate change, the project risks pursuing interventions that do not effectively account for system changes and uncertainties. Therefore, STAP urges the project team to design the activities based on the results of the analysis, to ensure as much as possible that the project interventions will be robust to climate change.
9. Furthermore, achieving the outcomes for components 2 and 3 depends on communities first realizing benefits from sustainable land management and market opportunities, such as the successful commercialization of coffee, ecotourism, and the agroforestry bioproducts the project aims to support (e.g., honey, fruit, oils). As recommended above, STAP strongly recommends developing distinct pathways for these components to address contextual risks, such as climate change impacts on agricultural and agroforestry productivity. Equally important, accounting for innovation risks (e.g., carbon markets and other sustainable finance mechanisms) in project design and monitoring for residual risks will also be important to achieve the expected biodiversity, land, and climate change benefits. Separate scaling pathways may also be necessary to address challenges to the project logic, rather than having them become residual risks. Refer to STAP's advisory note, ["Clarifying risks in GEF projects, with a focus on innovation risks"](#), for further guidance".
10. The social dimensions of climate change also should be considered. This includes considering beneficiaries' vulnerabilities to climate change in the project design, clarifying how climate change will affect the beneficiaries' abilities to conserve biodiversity, and how it could exacerbate social and economic inequalities for Tribal Peoples and local communities. In this context, the project has the potential to provide climate adaptation benefits. STAP's paper, ["Delivering climate change adaptation](#)

[benefits in GEF trust fund projects](#),” offers recommendations on designing for adaptation benefits that could be useful to the project team.

11. Amend the risk table. As recommended above, the contextual risks and innovation risks need to form part of the project design. Only residual risks that remain after designing project, should be listed in the risk table. This also applies to financial and business innovation risks in components 2 and 3.

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.)