STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	**11551**
Project title	**Rehabilitation and restoration of ecosystems in the Gum Arabic belt and sustainable use of forest resources in Mauritania**
Date of screen	**June 5, 2024**
STAP Panel Member	**Graciela Metternicht**
STAP Secretariat	**Guadalupe Duron**

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP welcomes Mauritania's project "Rehabilitation and restoration of ecosystems in the Gum Arabic belt and sustainable use of forest resources in Mauritania". STAP is pleased with the concise proposal and description of how the global environmental and socioeconomic benefits will be achieved through adoption of novel technologies and reliance on community-based knowledge. When developing the proposal, STAP encourages the proponents to embed gender, sociocultural norms and other social attributes important to the targeted socioecological systems. As currently written, there are several assumptions related to the adoption of practices and innovations which are contingent on changing social structures in a manner that influences long-lasting, positive outcomes.

Greater attention to the interrelationships between barriers and described risks (climate, market changes, conflict, and social structures) will also help project designers identify resilient options. STAP also expects for capacity building and knowledge transfer to be tailored to the beneficiaries' needs. This includes accounting for women's illiteracy (close to 60% of women in rural areas are illiterate) as the project is expected to target 50% women and, or youth, led cooperatives.

Below, STAP 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.

The project description details the problem, and the context influencing it. Deforestation and degradation as a result of unsustainable land use (e.g. intensive agriculture combined with overgrazing), and unstainable extraction of wood and charcoal, are thoroughly articulated as the drivers of biodiversity loss, and land degradation, in the target sites. The effects of climate change on land and water resources are also described as influencing significantly livelihoods and the agro-silvopastoral systems the project will target. The project rationale usefully describes the socioeconomic traits of the land uses and communities in the project sites. This description includes details about conflicts in land tenure between transhumance pastoralists and farmers, providing

context to component 1 on creating an enabling environment for sustainable agro-silvopastoral systems.

Moreover, the rationale starts to narrate observed and future trends and the necessary restoration responses, such as restoring forests and pastures, to enhance resilience. STAP appreciates this effort and encourages the project proponents to continue engaging with key stakeholders to explore uncertain futures and complex outcomes during the project design. This exploration may lead to alternative responses beyond those initially proposed in the theory of change, potentially requiring revisions to the theory of change.

The project would benefit from a more comprehensive analysis of the assumptions associated with each pathway outcome, particularly in detailing how the currently defined four assumptions influence the cause-effect relationship in each pathway. While the four components collectively support the project objective, more attention is required to assumptions related to changes in values and norms, which are often difficult to achieve.

In component 4, on knowledge management, STAP welcomes knowledge exchange and training opportunities on non-timber forest products to support the exchange of ideas and innovation. In addition to these efforts, the project proponents are encouraged to rely on component 4 as an opportunity for collecting and managing knowledge in relation to the learning and adaptive management needs of the project. STAP also advises that designing this component reflects the substantial risks (pg 25) identified in relation to capacity building, including the relatively low literacy rates of targeted beneficiaries. STAP also recommends engaging with local universities and colleges to co-design KM&L processes, including training on the use of drones, suited to the socio-cultural and political context of the project area.

Below, STAP further describes its advice.

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:

1. STAP is pleased with the project proponents' simple narrative of present and future trends and how they are likely to impact agro-silvopastoral systems and livelihoods. STAP recommends exploring these trends further with key stakeholders during the project design, specifying the opportunities and challenges (key barriers and risks highlighted in the PIF) to achieving the intended outcomes. Project proponents are encouraged to add to the theory of change (figure and description) the alternative pathways that may be needed as result of these explorations. For example, future trends in climate and market changes (associated strongly with component 3 on value chains) may lessen livelihood opportunities from non-timber forest products or agro-forestry systems, forcing targeted communities to shift to alternative livelihood options, including migrating. STAP recommends its advice on future narratives as a resource for strategizing how to build resilience through the project.

2. Tied to resilience through the project is the need to think about interactions between key drivers, for example climate and conflict – both of which are relevant to Mauritania and listed as part of the risk table. STAP recommends embedding these risks throughout the project logic and considering response options. The risk table is necessary for those risks that may occur during project implementation – not risks that are more certain, such as climate and conflict.

3. STAP notes the four assumptions listed in the theory of change are related to changes in mindsets. STAP recommends detailing these changes (e.g., targeting values, norms, power dynamics), and how the project proposes to monitor them. Addressing mindset issues is a powerful way to leverage change, although they are harder to achieve. Related to mindset changes is also gender equity. The proposal raises several issues relevant to gender equity towards the end. STAP recommends embedding, as relevant, gender equity throughout the project logic as opposed to addressing it separately. The theory of change should also accommodate alternative pathways that could enable prompt responses to the substantial security risks highlighted in the PIF, thus avoiding jeopardizing outputs and outcomes.

4. The proposal argues that forest restoration (tree planting of Acacias, and other tree native species) will strengthen coping strategies of the affected communities, farmers, and transhumance pastoralists to risks, including climate. As aforementioned, STAP strongly encourages a detailed description of the social aspects (sociocultural, socioeconomic) of the targeted recipients when thinking through the relationships between variables in a socioecological system. For example, increasing small-water infrastructures in Africa's drylands, (listed as an innovation in this proposal) has shown to enable a change in transhumance pastoralists whose coping mechanisms has been to migrate during drought periods. Forest restoration could also have unintended consequences on the sociocultural fabric of transhumance pastoralists, and on the ecology, which is necessary to consider across the interventions. In addition, research is emerging that tree planting in Africa's drylands may lead to increased warming due to albedo changes. Careful attention to cause and effect relationships in the theory of change should be articulated further throughout the proposal to avoid unintended consequences in the short and long-term.

5. STAP appreciates the descriptions of the baseline projects. When designing the project, describe how this initiative plans to leverage knowledge and learning from these past or on-going projects. Where relevant use these descriptions to strengthen the project rationale.

6. STAP recommends that component 4 on knowledge management link closely with monitoring and learning stemming from validating key assumptions, which include positive outcomes from innovations listed on page 21. This process will generate learning that can inform adaptive management. STAP suggests a desktop literature review to identify best knowledge transfer and learning practices for areas characterised by low literacy rates (e.g . see Chengalur-Smith, I., Potnis, D., & Mishra, G. (2021). Developing voice-based information sharing services to bridge the information divide in marginalized communities: A study of farmers using IBM's spoken web in rural India. *International Journal of Information Management*, *57*, 102283. Local Universities could become partners in the training local-level representatives of the Ministry of Environment (wilaya-level) on the use of drones and other technological innovations (output 1.2.1)

ANNEX: STAP'S SCREENING GUIDELINES

Project rationale

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.)