REVISED STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE, OCTOBER 2022

GEF ID	11509
Project title	Caatinga Protected Areas Program - ARCA
Date of screen	14 May 2024
STAP Panel Member	John Donaldson
STAP Secretariat	Alessandro Moscuzza

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

This project aligns with the objectives of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund by focusing on the Caatinga region of Brazil, an area with globally significant biodiversity and relatively high levels of endemism.

Positive aspects of the proposal include good background information on the Caatinga ecosystem, a consideration of future narratives, a large component focusing on extending the protected area system and the inclusion of an innovative allocation of subgrants to IP, TP&LC to allow for the development and execution of projects that are relevant to these communities.

However, some aspects of the proposal, particularly Component 2, are not well conceived and do not take cognizance of the steps that are required to achieve the stated outcomes, such as the reduction in illegal wildlife trade.

STAPs assessment concludes that elements of the project should be clarified or strengthened. The most important issues that require attention relate to Component 2, particularly for interventions to address illegal trade (see Section 3 for details). The timeframes required to achieve Output 3.1.2 should also be clarified.

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.

The proposal presents a well-motivated argument for improved conservation of biodiversity in the Caatinga biome in Brazil. This biome has high levels of biodiversity and endemism that are not adequately protected and face numerous threats. The problems faced in the Caatinga biome are reasonably well described in the context of a system that is experiencing both demographic pressures and projected impacts of climate change.

The **project summary** reasonably described the activities that the project plans to implement, and the project objective was clear, even though it could have been written more succinctly.

The **project rationale** provided a very thorough description of the current situation in the target region and the issues/problems the project is trying to address. The description of problems was presented clearly and was also informed by an analysis of underlying issues, which was supported by academic references and data.

It is encouraging that the proposal includes a discussion of future narratives and the elaboration of three possible scenarios centered around two of the main pressures (i.e. climate change and socio-economic pressures driven by broader macro-economic trends). The analysis was well-reasoned, and the scenarios envisaged were all plausible but could have been strengthened by using hard data and evidence. The possible futures for climate change focus only on factors such as fire frequency and intensity whereas models for vegetation change in the Caatinga (e.g. Silva et al 2019, Moura et al 2023) suggest that climate change could result in significant shifts in the composition and distribution of vegetation. Such shifts would affect planning for PAs and the effectiveness of species national action plans (PAN) yet they were not explored under climate change scenarios. The future narratives could also have been more informative if they were used to test the durability of the proposed outcomes for the project.

The "**project approach**" section of the proposal relayed the outcome of the consultations carried out as part of the stakeholder engagement process during the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) stage. STAP found this to be adequate. It was good to see that the project proposal had been actively reviewed and modified in response to the findings from those consultations. The description of the project baseline was adequate and provided a good overview of the existing landscape of interventions and institutions, which the project will need to interface with in order to be effective.

The section covering the project stakeholders provided a good description of the roles that each individual stakeholder will cover but was heavily weighted in favor of institutional and government actors but there was no inclusion of other sectors of society (e.g. civil society organizations, private sector or academia). The description of Indigenous People, Traditional People and Local Communities (IP-TP &LC) was very generic and did not provide any details about the specific communities that would be involved in the implementation of the project, or whether any of these had been consulted during the design of the project.

The **project's objectives** are aligned with the Global Biodiversity Framework although the inclusion of an ambition to "improve livelihoods" raises questions about the ability to achieve this objective given the projects components and the allocated budgets. The objective is based on an untested assumption (under Component 2) that it will be possible to (i) identify viable livelihood options as an alternative to illegal collecting and trade in animals, (ii) that affected people will make the shift to these livelihood options, and (iii) there is sufficient time and allocation of resources to ensure that these shifts endure. The literature on livelihood interventions highlights major challenges in achieving these steps (see STAP 2024) and no evidence is presented to indicate how this will be achieved. The project's reference to Tortato & Izzo (2017) as 'demonstrating' the value of alternative income seems to be misapplied since the paper is an essay discussing possibilities with no empirical demonstration of changes in behavior. The total budget for Component 2 is $519,000 and this includes other major activities (development of species action plans, a diagnostic study of illegal trade and training of law enforcement officers), which suggests that the intention to improve livelihoods has not been sufficiently thought through and is significantly under resourced.

The **theory of change** (ToC) provides an adequate explanation of the overall logic and an understanding of pathways for achieving project outcomes. The "if, then" narrative condenses a series of activities and outcomes into two steps which is a bit unclear, but the ToC diagram is well constructed and provides clarity about the details and rationale underpinning some of the project activities, as well as how these will lead to the proposed outcomes.

The project's four components align with the pathways outlined in the TOC. Component 1 is reasonably well described. Although the project description does not elaborate on any systematic conservation planning methods, the description is broadly consistent with this approach and includes consideration of both social and environmental dimensions. The activities outlined under Component 2 raise several questions. The emphasis on species action plans (PANs) under 2.1 indicates a focus solely on animals and it is therefore not clear whether the project excludes any activities for plants even though the area has a high number of endemic plants (327 in the document but 526 in Fernandes et al 2020) and many of the threats directly affect plant species (e.g. harvest of

cacti for trade, overharvest of medicinal species, firewood, fire cycles). Moreover, climate models indicate that the vegetation could experience major shifts in composition and distribution, with a high potential impact on local endemic species of plants and animals. It is not clear how these higher-level systems changes will be factored into the species management plans, nor how the choice of focal species for PANs will ensure that all the globally significant species in the Caatinga are conserved.

Component 2.2, responding to illegal wildlife trade, is based on untested assumptions about the nature of the trade and the likely effectiveness of possible solutions. There is an action item to assess and understand the extent and drivers of illegal trade, but the project then identifies mitigation actions comprising a media campaign, alternative livelihoods, and increasing the capacity of law enforcement. No evidence is presented to show that a media campaign or alternative livelihoods are the most appropriate interventions nor how the project has learned from the considerable investments in these interventions elsewhere, including the GEF's Global Wildlife Program. As pointed out earlier, alternative livelihoods interventions require careful planning, an in depth understanding of the drivers of livelihood decisions, and well-resourced interventions. The media campaign needs to be clear about the audience (end users, brokers, collectors) and should determine whether raising awareness is sufficient to achieve the desired level of behavior change. It was good to see the proposal to train local law enforcement officers from different agencies and the breadth of the training which is envisaged. However, it is important to establish what level of law enforcement is most problematic for illegal trade (on the ground policing, prosecutors, magistrates) so that interventions are appropriately designed and have the intended impact on illegal trade. The logical approach would be to undertake the proposed assessment of illegal trade and to then evaluate a range of possible interventions based on learning from successes in other projects tackling Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT).

Component 3 (Output 3.1.2) presents an innovative initiative to involve IP, TP & LC in project development. It would, therefore, be important to get clarity on whether shortening the overall project period from 60 months to 48 months could compromise this activity. The shorter timeframe requires the project to set up the funding mechanism (with its technical review panel), support local institutions to develop projects (including the proposed involvement of consultants), solicit and review proposals and implement the projects within 48 months.

The knowledge management component is not described in any detail. The emphasis is on ensuring learning for further applications once the project is completed. There is no mention of ongoing learning during the project cycle to allow for adaptive management. Yet, there are various aspects where this could be crucial for project success, e.g. aligning the motivation for additional PAs with changing socioeconomic circumstances, responding to the results from the assessment of illegal trade, and learning from the implementation of the sub-grants to IP/TP&LC groups. In the latter case, rapid learning during the implementation phase could be crucial to ensure that projects can be developed and implemented in the required timeframes.

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.

1. Clarify whether the species conservation actions under Component 2 deal only with animals and provide additional information on how the choice of focal species will ensure greater conservation for globally significant biodiversity. This may require a more complete explanation of how national action plans (PANs) address the conservation requirements for multiple species.
2. Revise the narrative description of the ToC to better explain the logical pathways connecting project activities to outputs and outcomes.
3. For Component 2.2, either provide evidence to support the proposed interventions or revise the outputs to be more consistent with the current understanding of the problem. In particular, it is important to show how

the project will progress from the assessment of illegal trade to the development and implementation of mitigating interventions based on the evidence provided by the assessment.

4. Review the intention to improve livelihoods as one response to illegal wildlife trade and show that the various steps required to undertake livelihood interventions have been properly considered and adequately resourced.

5. Clarify the timeframes required to achieve Output 3.1.2 to ensure that the outputs can be achieved within the 48-month period of the entire project.

6. Revise the project stakeholders section to include the following elements: a more detailed description of the different IP-TP&LC groups that will be involved in the project (even if only limited to those that have been consulted so far) and the roles they will play in the project; a description of how the project will engage with other categories of stakeholders/sectors of society.

7. Engage with other IWT initiatives to ensure that the project benefits the latest learning and innovation in this field, including those relating to behavior change, improved law enforcement and deployment of technological innovations.

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.

References

Fernandes et al 2020. An updated plant checklist of the Brazilian Caatinga seasonally dry forests and woodlands reveals high species richness and endemism. Journal of Arid Environments, 174. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaridenv.2019.104079

Moura et al, 2023. Pervasive impacts of climate change on the woodiness and ecological generalism of dry forest plant assemblages, *Journal of Ecology* (2023). DOI: 10.1111/1365-2745.14139

Silva JLSe, Cruz-Neto O, Peres CA, Tabarelli M, Lopes AV (2019) Climate change will reduce suitable Caatinga dry forest habitat for endemic plants with disproportionate impacts on specialized reproductive strategies. PLoS ONE 14(5): e0217028. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0217028

STAP 2024. Alternative Livelihoods, a STAP background note. Scientific & Technical Advisory Panel to the GEF, Washington DC, USA.

Tortato, F.R., Izzo, T. J. 2017. Advances and barriers to the development of jaguar-tourism in the Brazilian Pantanal. Perspectives in Ecology and Conservation, 15: 61-63. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pecon.2017.02.003