

STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	11114
Project title	Rehabilitating and conserving the mountain landscapes in Khangai region of Mongolia for improved ecosystem services and community livelihoods
Date of screen	18 th January 2024
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP welcomes Mongolia's project, "Rehabilitating and conserving mountain landscapes in the Khangai region for improved ecosystem services and community livelihoods", which is well-written, logical and clear. To achieve the project's ambitious objective of rehabilitating the land, improving globally important biodiversity, mitigating climate change through nature-based solutions, while improving livelihoods, the project seeks to incentivize herders and farmers in several ways. These incentives include engaging in community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) groups, adopting payment for ecosystem services, and connecting to markets via improved value chains on cashmere and forest products.

Given the importance of scaling for replication, innovation and transformation, STAP highly encourages the project team to adopt measurements that monitor change. For instance, there are several inherent processes of social change (e.g. changes in norms and rules), adaptability (e.g., changes in governance across different levels – national, soum, CBNRM), among others, that could be monitored to understand whether change is heading in the right direction to achieve the desired scaling and transformation that is needed for GEBs, and livelihood improvement.

While STAP acknowledges that a preliminary climate risk screening has been done, as is reported well, STAP strongly encourages the project team to embed the implications of this and other major drivers throughout the project and its logic more profoundly. Mongolia, and its Khangai region, are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, and the project must be conscious of not creating maladaptation.

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 project's rationale and description are clearly described. STAP appreciates the rationale for the project selection area, the Khangai mountains, and the description of the global environmental challenges affecting it: land degradation, loss of globally important biodiversity, and forest degradation. The baseline and barriers descriptions are also helpful, and linked to the three global environmental benefits this initiative is focused on - biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, and land restoration. Attention to key drivers of change (e.g. climate change, population changes, economy changes) is missing, however. Climate risks, in particular, need to be embedded throughout the project logic, given Mongolia's high vulnerability to climate change, but

interventions should also be robust to uncertainty in the other drivers. The rationale also points to mining as a significant driver, but this is not addressed much in the remainder of the proposal, nor is this absence explained.

The project provides evidence of policy and regulatory mechanisms to support integrated land use planning across governance scales and sectors, as well as useful survey of aligned projects and initiatives. This is welcome and will facilitate the implementation of rehabilitation, and community-based management of natural resources (CBNRM). STAP welcomes the integration of economic incentives, such as payment for ecosystem services (PES) and value chains, into CBNRM models to encourage adoption of sustainable land management. Alignment between financial incentives (e.g., value chains and PES) and component 4, on knowledge management and learning, is greatly encouraged to achieve the project's ambition to catalyze scaling for replication and transformation. STAP also highly encourages monitoring for systems change using transformation metrics that assess for social change, adaptability, complexity, among other issues.

Below, STAP details its advice further.

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 for the following issues to be addressed during the project design:

- STAP values the climate risk screening which was annexed to the PIF. As the project is designed, STAP strongly recommends for the key actions from the climate screening to be embedded throughout the project rationale and description, particularly throughout the theory of change and its components. Currently, the project logic lacks this analysis of how climate change, which is certain to occur (is already occurring), will influence rehabilitation of degraded land (component 2) or value chains from livestock products (e.g., cashmere) and forest resources. Whilst the general directions may create more resilience, there are many detailed issues (such as what enterprises to encourage, what species to plant, etc) that should be affected by climate projections to avoid future maladaptation; whilst not all of these may be foreseen before more consultation, the intent to ensure these issues are considered should be made crystal clear.
- Additionally, STAP suggests paying close attention to other drivers of change (e.g., population changes or a fluctuating economy) and how these issues may present opportunities, or barriers, to achieving outcomes. A description of how these key drivers of change (or others) are presently influencing, or are likely to influence in the future, the targeted socioecological systems, is needed to ensure that the approaches chosen to deliver the outcomes and GEBs are robust to uncertainty in these changes and interactions among them (including climate change). STAP recommends the use of some simple future narratives to address the issue of robustness during project design. Further guidance on simple future narratives can be found here: <https://stapgef.org/index.php/resources/advisory-documents/simple-future-narratives-brief-and-primer>
- STAP is pleased to see an enabling regulatory and policy framework that supports integrated land use planning. Furthermore, STAP welcomes the theory of change narrative, and its emphasis on how the components are interlinked, such as the necessity to have policies and governance systems in place (component 1) for integrated land use planning (component 1) to support rehabilitation of degraded areas (component 2), plus CBNRM, PES, and value chains, to further encourage land and forest rehabilitation, or restoration efforts (component 3). However, STAP would like to see a more critical assessment of whether these components together with aligned external activities are in fact *sufficient*

to achieve the intended outcomes? For example, is the absence of action on strategic environmental assessment only a matter of lack of capacity and tools (component 1)? This assumption could easily be made explicit and then tracked – if it is true, then good; if not, then adaptive adjustments to the project can be made quickly. In another example, if mining is one major driver as stated, it is not clear that any of the listed components (or aligned projects) will alter this problem (indeed it seems slightly implausible that there are not policy incoherences between the economics of mining development and the goals of this project, despite the assertion (p.26) that “there are no policies that would contradict the project outcomes”. To some extent the nominated assumptions (p.17) also speak to issues where the project activities may not be sufficient. These should be the explicit target of monitoring so that it is possible to determine rapidly if they are not being met and adjust the project design in this case.

Before integrated land use planning is carried out, STAP highly recommends conducting a land potential assessment, which will indicate the ability of land to resist future degradation, which is highly possible due to ongoing climate risks, as well as to recover from current degradation. Although restoration methods, or practices, have already been identified, (e.g., windbreak plantations), carrying out a land potential can inform further rehabilitation, or restoration interventions, including their suitability based on soil and other site attributes. This should be tempered with the likely implications of climate change. Two resources for carrying out a land potential assessment for rehabilitation and restoration purposes are: STAP’s LDN guidelines: <https://stagef.org/index.php/resources/advisory-documents/guidelines-land-degradation-neutrality> and UNCCD’s scientific conceptual framework on land degradation neutrality: <https://www.unccd.int/resources/reports/scientific-conceptual-framework-land-degradation-neutrality-report-science-policy> Additionally, this UNCCD resource on integrated land use planning may be helpful: <https://www.unccd.int/resources/brief/science-policy-brief-integrated-land-use-planning-and-integrated-landscape>

- There are two other features of integrated land use planning which the project team ought to keep in mind. First, apply land use planning to assess and manage trade-offs between multiple land uses. As the project aims to conserve globally significant biodiversity, improve ecosystem services (e.g., water availability), while balancing potential livelihood needs (e.g., extraction of firewood), informed solutions will be necessary that maximize benefits (environmental, social, economic), and minimize trade-offs; these will be socially determined. Secondly, while the project is committed to strengthening land policy management and alignment across ministries and sectors from the national level to soum level, the results of the integrated land use planning for this project can usefully be mainstreamed into national (territorial) development plans, for example by contributing to the land use planning/environmental database which the project will help upgrade. This vertical scaling process could be reflected as an outcome and output (worded accordingly) in the theory of change.
- STAP welcomes the innovativeness of component 3 that will strengthen CBNRM and PES schemes, as well as set up value chains, with the private sector, for forest and livestock products. STAP urges that this pathway be articulated comprehensively by defining risks within the catchment area, or CBNRM area, such as wildfire, or pest threats, that will affect forest health, drivers of change that are, or will, affect forest resources (e.g., increased population needing fuelwood), as well impacts of other uses like mining. As above, assumptions also should be made explicit, so these can be tested during the project implementation, and inform adaptive management.
- The project aims to achieve a great deal of scaling for innovation and transformation, involving complexity and social issues, such as governance, values and norms (especially for establishing value chains, organizing CBNRM, and carrying out PES schemes). Therefore, in addition to the core indicators, monitoring change of certain traits of transformation is highly encouraged. For example, systems change characteristics that could be monitored include: social change, complexity and adaptability, reciprocity and relationships, and the ability to consider multiple dimensions of an issue. STAP’s advice

on transformation metrics can be found here: <https://stapgef.org/index.php/resources/advisory-documents/achieving-transformation-through-gef-investments>

- Component 4 seems to be relatively passive and one way – communications and knowledge management needs to engage the ownership of all the players being reached. STAP urges more reflection of how this component could be made more dynamic and engaging, and what would be monitored again to ensure that assumptions about awareness of consequence action are actually happening, and potentially contributing to the scaling discussed earlier.
- Lastly, STAP appreciates the preliminary gender assessment. However, the words ‘gender-sensitive’ are pasted in (in a different font) so often, that the results of this are not credibly embedded in the project rationale, description, and particularly the logic. There are many places where a few more words would indicate a more genuine consideration, such as gender balance on different committees, explicit attention to known roles that are gender-differentiated, among other deliberations.

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.

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.)