STAP guidelines for screening GEF projects

Part I: Project Information	Response	
GEF ID	10710	
Project Title	Yangtze River Basin Biodiversity Conservation Programme	
Date of Screening	November 24, 2020	
STAP member screener	Rosie Cooney	
STAP secretariat screener	Virginia Gorsevski	
STAP Overall Assessment and Rating	**Minor** STAP welcomes this project from IUCN to support conservation along the Yangtze River Basin in China. This is large and important program (with several child projects) that encompasses an area of significant biodiversity as well as providing ecosystem services to millions of people living in the Yangtze River Basin (see Zheng, L., Liu, H., Huang, Y. et al. Assessment and analysis of ecosystem services value along the Yangtze River under the background of the Yangtze River protection strategy. J. Geogr. Sci. 30, 553–568 (2020). The project provides a very good visual representation of the theory of change, showing interconnections among actions and outcomes, as well as underlying assumptions. Given stated intentions to scale up this programme to other river basins, it would be useful to include this as a parallel to the existing TOC to indicate the connection between this program, each of the child projects, and larger efforts in the country. Climate change is mentioned as a risk (medium); however, information provided here is quite general, with the stated intention to follow the STAP guidance document during PPG phase to develop adaptive mitigation measures. While the program has the potential to yield significant benefits given the importance of the Yangtze Basin and the geographical scope of the program and child projects, many implementation details are left to be determined (for the child projects). Because of	

	this lack of specifics, the project seems to be mainly focused on coordination. Several interesting concepts are mentioned (i.e. PES, financial models, digital technology, etc.) but not elaborated. Similarly, there is discussion of data collection and sharing but no mention of what type of data and for what purpose. Overall, STAP is pleased to see such a large and ambitious program, noting that much of the detail is left to be worked out during the PPG phase and for each of the child projects.	
Part I: Project Information **B. Indicative Project Description Summary**	**What STAP looks for**	**Response**
Project Objective	Is the objective clearly defined, and consistently related to the problem diagnosis?	The program objective is "Enhanced and mainstreamed biodiversity conservation in the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt of China." The objective is general and relates overall to the main problems facing the Yangtze River Basin, of which there are many.
Project components	A brief description of the planned activities. Do these support the project's objectives?	Yes, in a general sense (i.e. in situ conservation and mainstreaming through strengthening PA networks, spatial planning, etc.)
Outcomes	A description of the expected short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention. Do the planned outcomes encompass important adaptation benefits?	Specific outputs are not specified for each of the outcomes. It appears that these will result from actions in each of the child projects. Adaptation is not a key focus of this project. It is assumed that increasing the natural capital along the basin will enhance adaptation capabilities.
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits likely to be generated?	Yes, if successful.
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?	Without a prior information about the child project activities, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not they will result in the overall stated outcome. However, assuming PAs are enhanced, biodiversity is mainstreamed, etc. then yes.
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 problems are clear. The project could benefit from undertaking a more rigorous review of existing studies, including scientific journal articles, about the Yangtze River Basin.
	Are the barriers and threats well described, and substantiated by data and references?	The project does a good job separating out the challenges – identified as habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation, and threats including infrastructure and urban development, pollution, invasive species, climate change, and over-utilization of resources such as over fishing and finally, the root causes (lack of information, legislation, etc.)
	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?	N/A
2) the baseline scenario or any associated baseline projects	Is the baseline identified clearly?	A lot of information is given about baseline conditions in China in terms of existing laws, etc. Also a good understanding of other, ongoing and related projects. Good information on species living in and around the river basin. Interestingly, one of the expected outcomes is improved management of PAs; however, there is no mention of the METT, including baseline scores (if they exist)
	Does it provide a feasible basis for quantifying the project's benefits?	Only in terms of total area (ha) targeted by the project.
	Is the baseline sufficiently robust to support the incremental (additional cost) reasoning for the project?	Not really.
	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;	N/A
	are the lessons learned from similar or related past GEF and non-GEF interventions described; and	N/A

	how did these lessons inform the design of this project?	N/A
3) the proposed alternative scenario with a brief description of expected outcomes and components of the project	What is the theory of change?	A TOC diagram with explanation is provided on p. 29. Essentially, in situ conservation through strengthened PAs, etc. plus biodiversity mainstreaming (policies, coordination), plus KM form the basis of the outcome, which is to enhance biodiversity along the Yangtze River. Numerous assumptions are included – some of which are better integrated into the project design than others (i.e. willingness of industries to participate vs. land tenure issues).
	What is the sequence of events (required or expected) that will lead to the desired outcomes?	Yes, though many details for specific activities within the child projects are TBD.
	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?	Yes.
	Is there a recognition of what adaptations may be required during project implementation to respond to changing conditions in pursuit of the targeted outcomes?	Unclear.
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?	Yes.
	LDCF/SCCF: will the proposed incremental activities lead to adaptation which reduces vulnerability, builds adaptive capacity, and increases resilience to climate change?	N/A
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.
	Is the scale of projected benefits both plausible and compelling in relation to the proposed investment?	$6.5 M in GEF grants + large co-financing ($51 m). 1,159,801 ha PA created or under improved management + 1,250,000 area of landscape (non PA) under improved management.

	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 will be measured and monitored during project implementation?	There is a dedicated component for knowledge management, including M&E. There is much discussion of how this program will generate knowledge and data, but few details provided at this stage.
	What activities will be implemented to increase the project's resilience to climate change?	The project will use the STAP guidance on CRS as well as 'demonstrate an improved resilience within the target sites.'
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?	There are elements scattered throughout the project which have the potential to be innovative (i.e. PES, use of IBAT, landscape or river basin approach, financial models, digital technology, etc.) but none are well developed or explained in any detail. Rather, this project is mainly focused on serving as a "cross-sectoral coordination mechanism," (p. 37) which is standard for nearly all GEF projects.
	Is there a clearly-articulated vision of how the innovation will be scaled-up, for example, over time, across geographies, among institutional actors?	Standard language.
	Will incremental adaptation be required, or more fundamental transformational change to achieve long term sustainability?	Fundamental transformational change will be necessary to ensure that economic growth and development along the Yangtze River will not further erode biodiversity and ecosystem services.
1b. Project Map and Coordinates. Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place.		Maps are plentiful throughout the document and land cover maps are provided for three provinces, which is helpful. However, the maps do not indicate where the projects are (either by coordinates or overlaying shapefiles), nor do they provide information on the underlying data for the land cover map (not necessary but would be helpful and is good practice).
2. Stakeholders. Select the stakeholders that have participated in consultations during the project identification phase: Indigenous people and local	Have all the key relevant stakeholders been identified to cover the complexity of the problem, and project implementation barriers?	Most of the stakeholders are government and their role is "suggestion provider" which is somewhat unclear in terms of level of involvement.

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.		
	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?	See above.
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 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.	Have gender differentiated risks and opportunities been identified, and were preliminary response measures described that would address these differences?	The project is vague on gender issues, stating that "the programme will make certain that women are not disadvantaged by the programme activities and will benefit from programme activities." (p. 53)

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.
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?	Overall, the risks appear comprehensive and include a rating. Climate change is mentioned as an underlying threat and also a risk to the project. PPG phase will carry out explicit climate risk analysis to ensure hazard identification, assessment of sensitivity to climate change and its impacts, risk classification and development of risk.
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?	Yes, the project has a good understanding of existing, related ongoing projects. This project is very closely related to the GEF-6 UNDP Protected Area System Reform.
	Is there adequate recognition of previous projects and the learning derived from them?	Yes
	Have specific lessons learned from previous projects been cited?	No. However, the programme will "learn from other ongoing GEF and non-GEF PA and Yangtze related initiatives implemented by IUCN worldwide, such as the Restoration Initiative, the World Bank/GEF Sahel and West Africa Program in support of the Great Green Wall Initiative, the UNEP/GEF project "Building the Foundation for Forest Landscape Restoration at Scale" and other GEF programmatic approaches,

		including the PRC-GEF Land Degradation Partnership."
	How have these lessons informed the project's formulation?	N/A
	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?	The main issue is that there are 3 other very closely related GEF projects underway (these are: GEF-7 Demonstrating Eco-Compensation Mechanisms in Yangtze River Basin (ECM) – being formulated by ADB and NDRC; GEF-7 Transformational wildlife conservation management in China (TWC), being formulated by UNDP and NFGA; and GEF-6 China's Protected Area System Reform (C-PAR), being implemented by UNDP as the lead IA, CI and Foreign Economic Cooperation Office of MEE
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?	There is a dedicated KM component. No indicators are specified.
	What plans are proposed for sharing, disseminating and scaling-up results, lessons and experience?	Standard.

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.