REVISED STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE, OCTOBER 2022

GEF ID	11241
Project title	Congo Critical Forest Biome Integrated Program
Date of screen	05 June 2023
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

This is a reasonably well-defined proposal. Strong points of the proposal include: a good summary of the current state of knowledge and identification of the main causes and drivers of forest loss and degradation; a theory of change, which adequately outlines a basis for achieving the intended global environmental benefits; forefronting the need for policy coherence as an integral component of better governance; a concerted effort to align the proposal with the GEF-8 objectives for transformative change; a clear articulation of the likely focus for each of the participating countries; some consideration of uncertain futures and how these may influence project interventions; and a reasonable consideration of stakeholders for the overall IP design.

STAP has noted several weaknesses in the proposal that need to be addressed during the further development of the program. These include: the need for more specific information on designed actions for policy coherence and scaling; clearer identification of lessons learned from previous projects in the region so that child projects are designed to overcome these problems or at least to ensure that they do not face the same obstacles; some revisions to the ToC; ensuring that innovative components are properly identified so that projects are designed to test, select and scale the most promising solutions; and greater consideration of factors affecting the durability of outcomes for the program.

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 rationale** and project description are mostly sound and based on a **systems approach** to the problems affecting the Congo Basin. The background information on drivers of forest loss and degradation is mostly drawn from the CIFOR State of the Forests 2021 report on forests of the Congo Basin, so it represents the best and most recent available evidence. The analysis shows how interacting demographic, economic and technological drivers affect land use in different ways and at different scales.

The baseline information is relatively strong. It would be even stronger and more informative if there was a more explicit identification of the problems that have been obstacles to achieving GEBs in the past. This is not just about what the main challenges are, which are well identifed in the PFD (e.g. weak governance), but more particularly about what has prevented all the past interventions from achieving the desired outcomes. Is it just a matter of scaling up/or deeper what has already been achieved or are there ongoing obstacles that need further interventions?

The **theory of change** is underpinned by a separate **root cause analysis**, which positions the core problems in relation to a set of causal relationships and causal linkages. The ToC sets out a reasonably clear logic and pathways for how the proposed interventions will achieve the intended outcomes and identifies seven barriers that the program is designed to overcome. In doing so, there has been a concerted effort to align the program with the objectives under GEF-8 for transformative change with all the components linked to the four levers of transformation set out in the GEF-8 programming document. The ToC diagram could be strengthened by using more consistent terminology and linking the sections of the diagram to the outcomes and outputs in the narrative description. As it stands, the barriers, components and assumptions are all included but the outcomes are entirely missing and this diminishes the value of the ToC diagram as a logical framework for the program.

The intention to prove that forest loss and degradation can be prevented through 'effective forest governance within multi-use landscapes" is consistent with recommendations from the CIFOR report of Forests of the Congo Basin and there is good justification that this will greatly improve the status of forests. However, it is not always clear in the PFD whether some of the components are intended as a 'proof of concept' or are meant to achieve significant impacts as they are implemented.

The proposal includes multiple reference to **policy coherence**, recognizing that the current absence of policy coherence between different sectors (forest conservation, forestry, agriculture, mining and extraction) is a major cause of forest loss and degradation. However, the proposal does not provide sufficient detail on what this actually means and what actions will be linked to this intention. For example, will it include actions to review gaps in policies, identification of antagonistic policies across sectors or the bringing together of ministries to facilitate greater coherence. These are important considerations given that the lessons learnt from the IP would be of great value to the GEF's broader focus on policy coherence.

The proposal generally includes reference to other projects in the area and how these link to the overall program. There is a large focus on comparing the components of the GEF-7 program in the same geographical region with the components of this GEF-8 proposal. The primary intention of the comparison seems to be to show there is no double-dipping and to highlight additional elements in GEF-8 that were not dealt with under the GEF-7 program. Extending this reflection on the GEF-7 program to include **lessons learned** would provide a more solid basis to inform the activities in the GEF-8 IP. The PFD does not identify areas where there were particular obstacles in the GEF-7 program and how these could be addressed through more targeted intervention in the GEF-8 IP.

The proposal adequately identifies relevant **stakeholders**. Many of the stakeholders are identified in a generic way (e.g. CSOs), but their importance and role is acknowledged and there is a commitment to engage with relevant groups across the region. There is also some consideration of **uncertain futures**, mainly framed as 'extant drivers' in the ToC and comprising high level uncertainties relating to future shocks, changes in commodity pricing and demand, and impacts of socio-economic development. These are assessed in terms of risks to the program but there is no further elaboration of uncertain futures to determine the durability of the program outcomes.

The PFD includes a range of **innovations** relating to governance and finance, including valuing natural capital and increasing the access of IPLC to financial instruments, as well as technological innovations to support conservation. However, in the the PFD diagram linking program components to the GEF levers of transformation (Fig 7), only the technological components are flagged under innovation and learning.

There is a general intention to support **transformational change** and the different components are linked to the four transformational levers identified in the GEF-8 Programming document. However, the exact modalities for achieving transformational change are not elaborated and there is no mention of what metrics will be used to measure transformational change.

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. Provide greater clarity on which activities are meant to provide **proof of concept** and which are expected to deliver impacts at a greater scale. The overall program is pitched as proving the concept that integrated forest management can overcome ongoing deforestation.
2. The components on **policy coherence** should provide more information on what sort of interventions are planned. STAP guidance on policy coherence identifies several types of actions that can be considered, including: a review gaps in policies; identifying antagonistic policies (e.g., regulations in other sectors that can facilitate forest degradation, subsidies or incentives that encourage degrading activities, etc.); bringing together different ministries and departments.
3. Identify **lessons learned** from other projects in the region, specifically challenges that have prevented previous projects from achieving the sorts of outcomes envisaged in the IP.
4. The **ToC diagram** should be revised to include outcomes and use of terminology that is more consistent with other GEF programs and projects. As an example, the term 'extant' drivers should be reviewed as the normal meaning would be synonymous with current or existing drivers and this would apply to all drivers.
5. Provide more specifics on **scaling**. The proposal refers frequently to achieving impact at scale and support for strategic and scaled up actions but it is not clear what exactly is intended. If these points refer to existing solutions, where they have been successfully tested in parts of the Congo Basin, then it would be important for projects to specify how the solutions will be scaled.
6. The outcomes and learning from all forms of **innovation** will be much stronger if they are recognized as areas of innovation so that program and project design is structured to identify effective solutions, determine how they can be scaled and ensure that learning takes place to minimize risk and increase uptake of effective solutions. If solutions still need to be tested as part of the IP, then it is important for the design of the Regional Coordination project and child projects to consider the level of testing that is required, the possible pathways for scaling and how scaling would be coordinated across projects and regions.
7. Include consideration of issues that affect the **durability of outcomes**. STAP has recommended the use of uncertain futures as a way to think through issues affecting durability.

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.

*categories under review, subject to future revision

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.)