

STAP SCREEN

GEF ID	11387
Project title	Nature based solutions for increased climate resilience in Vulnerable Rural communities of Lesotho
Date of screen	8 January 2023
STAP Panel Member	Edward Carr
STAP Secretariat	Virginia Gorsevski

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP acknowledges the project “Nature based solutions for increased climate resilience in vulnerable rural communities of Lesotho,” which sets an ambitious goal of increasing resilience by reducing threats to landscapes, ecosystems, and biodiversity. However, to fully understand the future threats this project will help people adapt to, and to ensure the project designs effective interventions, the project needs to develop two or more future narratives that integrate different plausible combinations of drivers, climate and otherwise, that shape the challenges faced by the people of Lesotho. See STAP’s [Simple Future Narratives Brief and Primer](#) for more information.

Further, project designers should carefully examine their theory of change to ensure that resilience can serve as a means to the end of improved human well-being, as in contexts that require transformative change resilience can, at times, become a barrier to needed change.

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 objective is to “implement structured nature-based solutions for increased climate change resilience, sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation in vulnerable rural communities of Lesotho.” The PIF presents a clear rationale for the project and offers compelling components and interventions aimed at achieving project goals. However, the project would benefit from a baseline scenario that does the following: 1) clearly integrates the different drivers of the challenges this project seeks to address. As it stands, such integration is uneven and at times absent in the PIF, and generally occurs when a discussion of one driver happens to mention the impact of another driver (i.e. climate change making land degradation worse) and 2) develops two or more plausible future narratives that illustrate how the current baseline situation might play out in the future.

STAP has recommended the use of these integrated narratives as a means of addressing the uncertainty of future conditions (see [Simple future narratives brief and primer](#)). For example, one scenario might reflect a world under RCP2.6, with no improvement to land management and current rates of growth, versus another

scenario reflecting RCP4.5 with somewhat improved land management (due to adjacent projects) and lower economic growth. With two or more plausible futures such as these, the project designers can readily assess which interventions are likely to be robust across the range of plausible futures that might emerge. The current PIF has no such narratives, or in fact any integrated narrative of the future that the project is meant to address.

In addition, the project's treatment of resilience as a goal should be carefully considered. While it is certainly good practice to help vulnerable populations manage the shocks and stresses associated with climate change and other drivers of environmental degradation, in a project that so prominently discusses the need for transformation, resilience can itself become a barrier to achieving project goals. Generally speaking, rendering livelihoods activities resilient also makes their attendant social roles and political-economic structures resilient, even if those roles and structures are barriers to long-term improvements in well-being or environmental quality. Because there are no clear future narratives in the PIF, and mentions of transformation in the PIF are not clear about what current conditions and practices are being transformed into, it is not clear if resilience should in fact be the goal of the project. STAP recommends that project designers consider if resilience is a means to project ends, and if so, exactly how it helps achieve those ends or if in fact resilience might present a barrier to addressing the challenges identified in the PIF.

STAP appreciates the articulation of the ToC using conditional logic (if/then), but in fact the statement feels somewhat circular (if NbS is mainstreamed and there is access to financial products, knowledge, etc. then rural communities will have increased resilience because they benefit from enabling environment, access to finance and knowledge).

Importantly, the entire project rests on the ability to implement Nature based Solutions for climate adaptation and other benefits related to biodiversity conservation and reduced land degradation. However, numerous studies have indicated that a major barrier to implementing durable NbS is lack of sustained investment beyond initial grants from international and bilateral donors (see for example Seddon N., et al (2020). [Understanding the value and limits of nature-based solutions to climate change and other global challenges](#). *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B375*: 20190120. Component 2 contends that the project will develop innovative financial tools and mechanisms to apply NbS; however, these innovations are not clearly articulated and the examples provided are not innovative. Rather, they describe grants and tree planting programs which, while helpful, will not likely be sustainable once initial funding is depleted.

Finally, while the PIF offers a comprehensive listing of relevant baseline projects, it falls short of explaining how the outcomes or – more importantly – the lessons learned from these projects are informing the design of this one. The statement that the proposed project will 'build on lessons learned from previous projects by producing and disseminating appropriate NbS strategies and thus promote climate resilient communities' is – like the ToC logic – somewhat circular and uninformative.

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

Based on the issues identified above, STAP recommends the following specific points to be addressed:

- 1) Develop at least two plausible future narratives that are not limited to different climate futures, but which also include other relevant trends, including plausible political, demographic, and economic situations. Climate change will be part of these narratives, and might exacerbate any challenges that emerge in other aspects of the system in the future, but in each narrative it should be clearly interwoven with the wider system. Such narratives can help define what interventions and goals make sense and what adaptation benefits are likely to be achieved.

- 2) Alongside the future narratives, the PIF should clarify what aspects of these baseline scenarios would be transformed, and what they would be transformed into, should the project work to expectations.
- 3) Consider where increased resilience will be an asset and where it could be a barrier when achieving transformative change using this enhanced framing of the future and transformation.

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.)