

STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	11795
Project title	Empowering Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities for Improved Biodiversity Stewardship in the Solomon Islands
Date of screen	April 2, 2026
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP is pleased to see the Solomon Islands GBFF project, "Empowering Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities for Improved Biodiversity Stewardship in the Solomon Islands".

This is an important project that aims to empower local communities for collaborative and adaptive sustainable management and conservation of biodiversity in selected Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in the Solomon Islands. However the structure and logic of the project could be improved to better support the problem definition and its context in the different target locations. STAP recommends starting by applying systems analysis to understand the interactions among the multiple drivers briefly outlined in the project document. It will be very important to include a detailed consideration of climate change and its interaction with other drivers. Currently, climate change is not considered in the theory of change (TOC) and, given the significant impacts of climate change for the Solomon Islands, this seems to be a major oversight.

Below, STAP provides further details on this recommendation and others to help strengthen the project.

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 is situated in the Isabel and Western Provinces of the Solomon Islands. The project rationale provides an overview of the biodiversity in the country, and to some extent, in these locations, e.g., highlighting the extremely high level coral and fish species diversity. Several maps are included, such as one showing the project sites.

The problem analysis states that the Solomon Islands has 36 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), of which 16 coincide with the project's target provinces (Isabel and Western). It also provides a detailed description of existing conservation efforts, including extensive stakeholder consultation and participatory mapping of areas of biodiversity and cultural significance. However, the specific rationale for choosing these provinces or these 16 KBAs could be clarified. There is a general description of the causes of biodiversity loss, e.g., logging, mining, unsustainable land use practices (including oil palm, coconut and cocoa plantations), waste and overharvesting of species, as well as the clearance of land for subsistence gardens.

These activities have led to biodiversity loss and continue to threaten terrestrial and marine ecosystems. More details about how misaligned policies affect biodiversity conservation would strengthen the context around the problem of biodiversity loss and the project rationale. Global change drivers, such as increasing coastal populations and climate change are also recognized as damaging biodiversity. The project could benefit from developing simple future narratives to explore how these drivers interact and what response options across all futures could be applied to manage uncertainty. These narratives would also complement the project's baseline narrative as they essentially describe the problem affecting the system.

The project description provides an overview of the theory of change and of the components, but they are very general. This section could be strengthened to improve the project logic and ensure that all of the necessary and sufficient interventions to address the various barriers and achieve the project outcomes have been articulated. The theory of change seems to overlook the contextual risks listed in the risk table, or the current trends and global drivers that would shape the future (e.g., climate change, increased migration from rural to urban areas, population growth). In addition, the component descriptions are fairly broad, particularly given that, at this stage of the project cycle, there has already been extensive stakeholders engagement. In addition, more detailed descriptions of the socioeconomic and sociopolitical traits and cultural values of the targeted communities would help understand the social factors that underpin the sustainable use and management of land and water, while conserving biodiversity.

The project document includes some discussion of an exit strategy, however, it would be helpful to include a description of how the project outcomes could be scaled to increase impact.

3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions

STAP recommends the following points be addressed before the start of the project:

1. To strengthen the problem analysis, provide a more detailed analysis of (a) the specific components of biodiversity the project will target in each area; (b) the drivers of biodiversity loss; and (c) the connections between the identified drivers of biodiversity loss, climate change, and other trends identified in the rationale, such as increased population growth. The TOC does not include climate change as a driver of loss or as a threat. This is a significant omission. The Solomon Islands has already lost five islands to climate change/sea level rise and six more islands are experiencing severe shoreline recession ([Albert et al. 2016](#)). In addition, the incidence of natural disasters also is increasing, in part related to climate change. Pollution from poor waste management and unsustainable coastal development are additional threats to biodiversity, but are not discussed. STAP recommends conducting a systems analysis, as outlined in [STAP's future narrative advisory document](#), for each target area. The results of this analysis should then be reflected in the theory of change, including in the components.

Without such analyses, the project risks pursuing interventions that do not effectively account for system changes and uncertainties. The social dimensions of climate change also should be considered. This includes considering beneficiaries' vulnerabilities to climate change in the project design, such as how it could exacerbate social and economic inequalities for those dependent on fisheries and agriculture. In this context, the project has the potential to provide climate adaptation benefits. STAP's paper, "[Delivering climate change adaptation benefits in GEF trust fund projects](#)," offers recommendations on designing for adaptation benefits that could be useful to the project team. Furthermore, there are multiple sources of information on climate change patterns and impacts (e.g., [World Bank Climate Knowledge Portal](#)) that the project team might want to consult.

2. As part of the systems analysis, describe the social characteristics of the communities targeted by the project. This information will help define the social systems, including norms, values, and gender power

dynamics, which are essential for designing the project components and for empowering local communities to make management decisions.

3. In addition, both GEF social safeguard policies and Solomon Islands law, which recognizes customary land and sea rights of Indigenous Peoples, will require informed consent of communities affected by the project. This means that culturally appropriate and effective FPIC processes will be needed, both in the context of proposed Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) and protected areas, and also in the context of the proposed data platform in component 4. Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes should observe Indigenous processes and be led through village councils, elders, women's groups, youth leaders, etc.
4. Further, with regard to Indigenous Peoples, it will be important for the project to clarify how the conservation interventions will be community-led, and how kastom, i.e., Indigenous systems of knowledge, practices, governance and spirituality, will be followed, and will drive project design and monitoring. Currently, the document states that the interventions will be Indigenous-led, however, it also states that Indigenous Peoples are not part of the project steering committee and will only receive in kind support, rather than receiving and managing financial resources. Most of the emphasis seems to be on leadership and/or governance by national and provincial government agencies and through delegation to international NGOs. This should be reconsidered to ensure that Indigenous Peoples are actually leading the efforts. To ensure social safeguards and FPIC processes are culturally appropriate and to integrate Indigenous knowledge with mainstream scientific and knowledge systems, STAP recommends reviewing its advice in the information note on [Strengthening GEF support for Indigenous Peoples](#), as well as STAP's meeting report on [consultations on strengthening GEF support for Indigenous Peoples](#). The GEF Inclusive Conservation Initiative [Phase Three Report](#) also provides recommendations and lessons learned from ten Indigenous-led projects in twelve countries, including the Pasifik.
5. Further, it will be important for component 4 to focus, not primarily on traditional data platforms, but to consider using a culturally appropriate platform, such as [Guardian Connector](#), which was developed in the Solomon Islands, is guided by Principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty, and enables Indigenous community organizations to control, connect and protect their data.
6. The theory of change (TOC) should be strengthened to better support the project. Currently the TOC is rather general. The box labeled "levers" should be revised. Are these intended to be leverage points? If so, the intended "intervention levers" should be specified. Logical pathways should be defined that explicitly link drivers, threats, barriers to each component, and to outcomes, so it is clear which threats and barriers each component (and its interventions) is intended to address. Also, please define "latent barriers" in the TOC. It is not clear how or why they are latent. Currently, it is difficult to understand the causal logic from the TOC diagram and narrative, although the details in Annex C are helpful in this regard. Rather than listing a few general assumptions, it would be helpful to articulate the key assumptions and risks for each pathway. The key assumptions and risks involved in achieving the outcomes, are likely to be different for each component pathway.

When revisiting the TOC, STAP recommends incorporating risk into the theory of change and designing the components accordingly. This includes addressing the contextual risks which should not be listed in the risk table, such as the communities' exposure to climate hazards. Residual risks that persist despite good project design should be added to the risk table, monitored, and the project adapted as needed. The same applies to innovation risk, including the financial, institutional, and policy innovations described in components 2 and 3. Refer to STAP's advisory note on ["Clarifying risks in GEF projects, with a focus on innovation risks"](#), which includes worked examples of financial, institutional and policy risks for the risk table.

7. STAP appreciates the detailed description of the context for the project and of the relevant baseline investments that have already been made, however, it would be useful to have a more explicit description of the additive value of this project, beyond what has already been done or is underway in each target location.
8. It appears that identification and designation of Other-Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) is an important approach the project will employ, however, details are lacking and parts of the narrative are confusing. It seems there are a number of unspecified assumptions related to OECMs, e.g., the proponents suggest that areas that have been proposed as protected areas, but have not yet been formally designated, should, in the interim, be considered OECMs. It also suggests that areas designated under other legislative instruments, such as Locally Managed Marine Areas under the Fisheries Act may be considered as OECMs. Designation of OECMs, whether terrestrial or marine, requires documentation of the specific biodiversity values to be conserved. Currently only the locations of target Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) are mentioned. The [Convention on Biological Diversity has identified four criteria, and ten sub-criteria, for identifying an OECM](#), and the proponents should specify what these criteria are in this project. Further, for any proposed marine fisheries OECMs, STAP encourages the proponents to apply the processes identified in [FAO's handbook for identifying, evaluating and reporting other effective area-based measures in marine fisheries](#). The handbook identifies several area-based management tools that may qualify as fisheries OECMs in specific circumstances, but these must be defined based on the local context. Similarly, further guidance on OECMs, including terrestrial OECMs, [provided by IUCN](#) should be followed.
9. STAP is pleased to see that policy alignment to better enable and support biodiversity conservation is one area of emphasis for the project. In this context, STAP's advisory document, [Policy Coherence in the GEF](#), is a useful resource for conducting policy analysis.
10. It is unclear why the project needs to develop new decision support tools. Please specify the needs that cannot be met by applying the many existing decision support tools, what specific new functions will tools provide, and given the project timeframe, provide a rationale.
11. The map in Figure 10 shows a "buffer zone" which is targeted for unspecified sustainable agriculture. However, this buffer zone overlaps the protected area. Please provide data and rationale to support the appropriateness of agricultural development within a protected area or remove it.
12. Par. 90 says the project will mobilize resources from the private sector, however, there is no discussion of which companies or sectors and why/how they will be engaged.
13. Given the demographics of the Solomon Islands (par 14 indicates 41% of Solomon Islanders are under 15 years of age), a more explicit strategy for targeting youth and an articulation of their role in the project would be helpful.

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.)