STAP guidelines for screening GEF projects

Part I: Project Information	Response	
GEF ID	10854	
Project Title	Conservation and Sustainable Management of Land Resources and High Value Ecosystems in Lake Sevan Basin for Multiple Benefits.	
Date of Screening	09 November 2021	
STAP member screener	John Donaldson	
STAP secretariat screener	Alessandro Moscuzza	
STAP Overall Assessment and Rating	**Minor issues to be considered during project design:** our review concluded that this is a well-constructed proposal which covers all areas sufficiently well for this stage of the project development process. We identified a number of issues where additional attention is needed, most notably with regard to integrating biodiversity conservation into the project objectives and defining the Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs) that will be accrued from this project. The risk section was also slightly less developed than what would be normally expected for this stage of project development but still overall acceptable.	
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?	Yes, the project aims to promote land degradation neutrality, restore and improve the use of land and water resources in Armenia's Lake Sevan Basin. The objective is mostly aligned with the problem diagnosis. The one area that should be strengthened in the next phase of project development is the integration of biodiversity components into the overall project objective. The project title, which focuses on conservation AND sustainable management is consistent with proposed outcomes and outputs, but the biodiversity conservation component is not really captured in the objective.
Project components	A brief description of the planned activities. Do these support the project's objectives?	Yes, the PIF comprises 5 separate components, which tackle all major aspects one would expect to be covered for a project proposal of this scale and scope. Worthy of note was the separation of Knowledge Management and

		M&E into two separate components. As noted under "project objective", Due to the way the objective is structured, the activities relating to protected areas (e.g. a business plan for the NP) seem disconnected. The narrative motivation provides a good justification for including the NP in the project and it is also mentioned in the TOC so STAP recommends that the components relating to biodiversity should be captured in the project objectives
Outcomes	A description of the expected short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention. Do the planned outcomes encompass important adaptation benefits?	The proposal includes 7 outcomes spread across the project 5 components. All of the outcomes up to component 4 are well-thought through and linked to achieving the aim of the component they sit within. However, the outcome for component 5 (i.e. the M&E component) was prosaic and did not add any specificity as it stated: "Project results properly monitored and evaluated". The labelling was also incorrect (i.e. output 5.1, as opposed to outcome 5.1). STAP recommends that this be revised to add more specificity to it and better describe the expected results and level of ambition for the M&E component.
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits likely to be generated?	Even though the biodiversity benefits of this interventions were described in a dedicated sub-section of the proposal under the project description, this fell short of identifying specific (Global Environmental Benefits) GEBs and explaining why these were to be classified as such. STAP recommends that a separate section GEBs be added to provide this information.
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?	The project comprises a total of 18 outputs spread evenly over 5 components and 7 outcomes. Even though the total number of outputs is quite large and could pose issues of practicality related to M&E, the project's propose structure which includes a separate M&E component compensates for any potential project management and effectiveness issues.
Part II: Project justification	A simple narrative explaining the project's logic, i.e. a theory of change.	The project does include a narrative TOC which sets out the logic for the proposed components and how they contribute to the overall project outcomes.
1. Project description. Briefly describe: 1) the global environmental and/or adaptation problems, root causes and barriers that	Is the problem statement well-defined?	Yes, this section of the PIF is quite strong and provides a detailed analysis of the multiple issues affecting land degradation and biodiversity in the Lake Sevan Basin. This includes a general overview covering the geographical and other aspects of the project, plus a thorough description of a range of issues that the project

need to be addressed (systems description)		is aiming to address. This description is complemented by a range of complementary geographical data, information and maps that add clarity to the overall narrative.
	Are the barriers and threats well described, and substantiated by data and references?	Yes, the PIF includes an extensive section on key threats and barriers, which provides a comprehensive list and thorough description of issues.
	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?	Yes, the description of threats and barriers covers issues that straddle across the following focal areas: biodiversity, land degradation, international waters and chemicals & waste.
2) the baseline scenario or any associated baseline projects	Is the baseline identified clearly?	Yes, the PIF includes a dedicated section on the existing baseline, which comprises several current government investments programs and donor funded initiatives, as well as two government strategies (i.e. the Agricultural Development Strategy for the 2014-2025 period and the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy to 2030).
	Does it provide a feasible basis for quantifying the project's benefits?	Yes, the baseline scenario includes a range of national government targets, which provide a basis to quantify the project's benefits. The baseline tends to be narrative and qualitative and the increment is more quantitative, but it should be possible to measure the incremental contribution of the project.
	Is the baseline sufficiently robust to support the incremental (additional cost) reasoning for the project?	Yes, the description of previous and ongoing projects includes budget information for a number of key interventions, which provides a comparable baseline for the level of investment needed and/or which may need continued support in order to achieve previously agreed and/or set targets.
	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;	The information presented is supported by a wide array of technical data but not references.
	are the lessons learned from similar or related past GEF and non-GEF interventions described; and	We could not find any evidence of past or related GEF projects being evidenced or referenced in the relevant section of the PIF.
	how did these lessons inform the design of this project?	Above comment refers.

3) the proposed alternative scenario with a brief description of expected outcomes and components of the project	What is the theory of change?	The project's proposed Theory of Change (ToC) is based on the premise that land, water and biodiversity resources are managed in an integrated fashion. For an integrated landscape approach, a coherent and complete picture of the landscape must be visualized and addressed through multiple types of related management measures.
	What is the sequence of events (required or expected) that will lead to the desired outcomes?	1) Under Component 1, the LDN targets in Gegharkunik and Vayots Dzor regions hosting the Lake Sevan basin landscape will be established and will guide the Formulation of the Integrated Spatial and Land Use Plans (ISLUP). 2) Under Component 2, the project will strengthen the management of the Lake Sevan National Park which almost entirely overlaps with Sevan KBA, 3) Under Component 3, the project will effectively demonstrate sustainable use of biodiversity and land resources in PAs buffer and economic zones and in the vicinity of PAs, KBAs and ecological corridors reflected in the ISLUPs. It will offer financial incentives for the implementation of biodiversity sensitive SLM measures in prioritized areas.
	What is the set of linked activities, outputs, and outcomes to address the project's objectives?	The project will support biodiversity sensitive LDN-based Integrated Spatial and Land Use Plans (ISLUPs). LDN will be achieved through the implementation of the ISLUPs and scalable LDN compatible SLM measures that not only paves the way towards land degradation neutrality but also towards diminished water pollution-from agriculture and soil erosion- in the lake and the associated river systems (hosting spawning grounds for key fish species of Lake Sevan) and towards a better integration of biodiversity (within PAs and otherwise) into the broader landscape, to provide for the continuity of ecosystem services that sustain livelihoods. While the landscape approach is retained throughout the whole project, when it comes to working on the ground, the project is divided into closely aligned components.
	Are the mechanisms of change plausible, and is there a well-informed identification of the underlying assumptions?	Yes, the mechanisms of change are well designed and are very plausible. The ToC also includes a set of five underlying assumptions, which underpin the project's proposed impact pathways.
	Is there a recognition of what adaptations may be required during project implementation to respond to changing conditions in pursuit of the targeted outcomes?	The project components are closely aligned to ensure an integrated landscape approach within the Lake Sevan basin for sustainable land, biodiversity and water management that safeguards the continuity of ecosystem services on which local livelihoods depend. This is why

		the project targets different types of land use: pasture land, forestland, irrigated agricultural land and critical ecosystems (protected and otherwise).
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, our assessment concluded that successful implementation of the proposed activities would lead to the delivery of Global Environmental Benefits. However, here we **reiterate our previous recommendation** concerning the need to better articulate what the potential GEBs from this project would consist of.
	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?	Our assessment concluded that there is sufficient ground to assume that the environmental benefits to be delivered by this project would be truly global. However, here we further **reiterate our previous recommendation** concerning the need to better articulate what the potential GEBs from this project would consist of.
	Is the scale of projected benefits both plausible and compelling in relation to the proposed investment?	
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits explicitly defined?	No, previous comments and recommendation on GEBs refer, especially with regard to the **need to better articulate what the potential GEBs from this project would consist of**.
	Are indicators, or methodologies, provided to demonstrate how the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits will be measured and monitored during project implementation?	The proposal provided a number of core indicators, which consisted of measurable and concrete deliverables, such as: area of land, forest and wetlands restored. These were suitable to demonstrate whether environmental benefits will be delivered but not enough to establish whether these would be global in nature. Our previous comments on GEBs refer.
	What activities will be implemented to increase the project's resilience to climate change?	The project is proposing to ensure that the spatial development scenarios are reflective of the climate change threats and impacts, and climate resilience and adaptation solutions are considered within the spatial development priorities for the areas that are vulnerable to and/or affected by the effects of climate change. The project is also planning to coordinate with the UNDP Adaptation Fund project "Increased climate resilience of South Caucasus mountain communities and ecosystems through wildfire risk reduction" to select target forest areas.

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?	The project is proposing a range of innovative activities and approaches. Our assessment concluded that most of these have a high potential to be cutting edge and, in some cases, even ground-breaking. Among the most notable examples were: i) the use of o multi-sector land-use planning based on remote sensing data in mapping and geospatial analysis; ii) the use of the UNCCD-endorsed innovative online tool LUP4LDN, which will be piloted in selected municipalities to produce "neutrality maps"; and iii) the proposed use of innovative irrigation technologies, such as laser leveling and targeted software for monitoring crop-water productivity.
	Is there a clearly-articulated vision of how the innovation will be scaled-up, for example, over time, across geographies, among institutional actors?	Yes, the project is planning to identify LDN targets and support their implementation in selected municipalities and provide replicable models that could be immediately scaled up to the entire Lake Sevan Basin. STAP has recently produced a guidance, which offers practical help to those developing projects which contribute to Land Degradation Neutrality, we would therefore recommend that the project developers consult this with the aim to gain further insight on any specific issues such as setting Safeguard Criteria or National Targets. This can be accessed on the STAP website: (https://www.stapgef.org/resources?keys=neutrality&archived=285).
	Will incremental adaptation be required, or more fundamental transformational change to achieve long term sustainability?	Given the nature of this project we assessed that a certain amount f transformational change will be required when dealing with some of the farming and land-management practices, whereas for other aspects such as: restoring degrading land or increasing vegetation and tree coverage, a more gradual adaptation would be appropriate.
1b. Project Map and Coordinates. Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place.		-
2. Stakeholders. Select the stakeholders that have participated in consultations during the project identification phase:	Have all the key relevant stakeholders been identified to cover the complexity of the problem, and project implementation barriers?	Yes, the initial stakeholders' engagement activities which were conducted during the PIF stage has preliminarily secured support from key government partners, civil society and academia. UNDP has also engaged with key partners primarily for assessing the opportunity and

Indigenous people and local 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.		feasibility of the proposed project, as well as its alignment with government priorities.
	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?	Different stakeholder groups are being consulted for differing reasons varying from planning to technical assistance and implementation of project activities, training and knowledge sharing.
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-	Have gender differentiated risks and opportunities been identified, and were preliminary response measures described that would address these differences?	The PIF includes an informative and clearly written section on gender analysis, which provides a very good overview of gender related issues in Armenia, ranging from disparities in education (where there has been a lot of improvement) to the persistent gender pay gap (with women' average wages representing 66% of men's average wages). The project is planning to mainstream gender considerations will into project implementation and gender issues have already been integrated into the current structure of the project under outputs 1.1.3, 3.1.1, 3.1.2 and 4.1.1.

making; and/or economic benefits or services. 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?	Our review did not identify any such issues.
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?	The PIF included a risk section, which provided an acceptable level of analysis for this stage of project design. A number of categories have been selected for further screening and analysis during the next phase of project development (i.e. the PPG phase) when more appropriate mitigation measures will also be identified. STAP recommends that the risk impact and likelihood categories should also be clarified by providing a full list of the levels that are being used to score both categories. This can be done in a legend at the bottom of the risk table.
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?	The PIF includes a co-ordination section which explains how the project governance structure will be organized and how the delivery of project activities will be coordinated.
	Is there adequate recognition of previous projects and the learning derived from them?	Yes, the project is planning to learn from previous and ongoing initiatives that have been successful in a number of ways (e.g. implementing socio economic small-scale SLM measures in production areas and helping people to improve their livelihoods). For additional details, please refer also to comments on pre-existing baseline.
	Have specific lessons learned from previous projects been cited?	Yes, the PIF is specifically mentioning that the project will learn from the previous GEF/UNDP Project "Mainstreaming Sustainable Land and Forest

		Management in Dry Mountain Landscape of Northeastern Armenia" and will use the generated knowledge in forest management planning and community-based activities piloted by this project in Tavush and Lori regions. It will also draw lessons from the previous European Neighborhood Programme Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD), which will provide lessons learned from the support to rural development, farming techniques and crop diversification, income generating activities in the rural areas.
	How have these lessons informed the project's formulation?	Above comment refers.
	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?	Yes, this will be done through the Knowledge Management (KM) plan, which will be further developed during the PPG phase. By building on lessons learned and best practices generated under different initiatives, the project will actively disseminate the project results, seeking opportunities for replication and upscaling.
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?	The project knowledge management strategy will be built around three key elements: (i) learning from existing lessons and best practices; (ii) assessing and documenting results; (iii) knowledge sharing and communication.
	What plans are proposed for sharing, disseminating and scaling-up results, lessons and experience?	The project is planning to undertake a comprehensive review of relevant good practices and lessons relevant for the project design will be undertaken during the PPG phase. The project will also generate new lessons and good practices, particularly in relation to SLM and land restoration, which will be shared broadly through regional communication channels and knowledge management platforms.

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.