

## STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	11695
Project title	Promoting climate-resilience through ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) solutions in the Northern Lao PDR
Date of screen	November 27, 2024
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### 1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP welcomes the Lao People's Democratic Republic LDCF project "Promoting climate-resilience through ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) solutions in the Northern Lao PDR." This is an extremely logical and thoughtful proposal with strong scientific and technical merit. STAP has only minor suggestions for strengthening some aspects of the PPG.

These suggestions include designing the project by accounting for context risks, such as climate risks. Laos PDR is expected to experience temperatures above the global average as early as next decade, within the time frame that this project is expected to achieve enduring outcomes. Equally important will be validating assumptions and risks affiliated with rehabilitating or restoring land to a point that results in EbA and Nature-based Solutions (NbS). Assessing the potential of the land is probably necessary in the targeted sites. Thirdly, the proposal has the potential to generate environmental and social benefits via EbA and NbS. STAP recommends designing the project to achieve these benefits, while putting in place sound monitoring systems that create evidence of the impact of EbA and NbS on climate resilience, environment and social outcomes.

*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 rationale explains the problem clearly, including social drivers, location, the sectors it addresses, and the reasons for focusing on these drivers and regions. It also provides an in-depth description of climate projections and how climate is expected to impact land resources and agricultural crops. As a minor point, the climate descriptions are overly verbose, with 11 pages in the rationale, which can be summarized more cogently in the final project document.

STAP notes that the project includes scenarios with and without the project. This is a useful start to defining the project's additionality. As the project is developed, reasoning about how this project will build on the ongoing and past projects (GEF and non-GEF) will be necessary to define and measure the LDCF additionality robustly. Furthermore, it will be important that the PPG analyse lessons about enablers of and barriers to success from these ongoing projects and incorporate this knowledge into this project.

STAP also notes that the theory of change is clear, and well explained. Greater attention to assumptions is necessary as they are currently only provided as a general list and not linked to the logic depicted in the theory

of change. For example, it is possible that not all land in the targeted watershed(s) can provide ecological benefits to reduce communities' vulnerabilities to the impact of climate change. Furthermore, risks that hinder achieving outcomes, such as climate risks, should be reflected in the theory of change and its components. Building risks, such as climate risks, in the project design, can strengthen enduring outcomes.

STAP observes that developing a national climate information platform is a good idea but likely will demand more funds than are allocated in the budget. Given the importance of other components, reallocating funding for this is not justified. It may be more realistic to consider this activity as seed funding with a view to a longer-term plan.

The proposal includes an exemplary knowledge management component. Besides advancing knowledge by establishing a robust monitoring system that tracks progress toward achieving climate adaptation benefits, this component also includes a strong element of governance. UNDP is committed to putting in place a Grievance Redress Mechanism to empower communities to have a course of action if they believe the project is having a negative effect on them or the environment. STAP supports a Grievance Redress Mechanism process as it builds trust between the communities and the project through equity, transparency, and inclusiveness – key elements underpinning good project design. Thus, given the importance of the Grievance Redress Mechanism to the project's success, STAP encourages developing and explaining it in the PPG.

The project is informed by and will advance LAO PDRs' climate policy objectives, and it aligns well with GEF 8 objectives and the objectives of the LDCF. It promises to enhance policy coherence, and its governance mechanisms give reason to suggest this is likely. The project primarily focuses on adaptation, but the benefits for mitigation and biodiversity also seem likely. Designing with the intent to deliver and measure these co-benefits should be considered by the project developers.

The PIF has strong intentions for stakeholder engagement, gender equality, and women's empowerment and elevates these to core components of the design. Unfortunately, the outcomes from Annex I—"Preliminary Stakeholder Engagement Analysis & Plan"—are not reflected in the PIF, which is where they are needed to influence good project design.

*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**

Below, STAP offers suggestions to strengthen the project as it is further designed:

1. Plans to develop a national climate information platform would benefit from describing existing information systems. Because spending on such activities typically exceeds budgets, the PPG could consider a mechanism - or ensure that spending on this component will not crowd out other components.
2. STAP recommends strengthening the theory of change in the following ways:
  - a. Link assumptions to outcomes. Currently, the assumptions are only listed generally.
  - b. Identify risks associated with assumptions. For example, the project assumes that land throughout the target watershed(s) will have the conditions to generate ecosystem services, such as improved soil health, which is important for strengthened climate change adaptive capacity. However, given the current climate projections, the EbA/NbS approaches are at risk of not delivering the expected solutions. We suggest designing the components based on current and future climate risks (e.g. use projections for 2050), and listing in the risk table those residual risks that remain despite good project design – for example, implementation of innovative EbA/NbS, which will require continuous monitoring throughout the project to assess their impact on the communities' climate resilience.

- c. There are also assumptions and risks surrounding sustainable finance that need to be identified. For example, droughts and floods will impact agricultural productivity and the viability and scaling of sustainable finance. Analyzing the interactions between risks (context, innovation) can help detail these assumptions and risks.
3. As suggested above, component 2 needs to be designed to account for climate risks and possibly other drivers of change, such as market fluctuations that hamper agricultural productivity. The project developers could rely on UNDP's Human Climate Horizons data for Laos PDR: <https://horizons.hdr.undp.org/#/risk/rcp45/LAO>
4. In the risk table, STAP recommends designing the project based on the climate risks analysis, as stated above. STAP understands the risk analysis is attached to an annex, but the results of this analysis need to formulate the interventions even at the PIF stage. Currently, there is no evidence that this analysis has been applied, even minimally at best. The risks that should be listed as context risks are those risks that remain despite good project design. The same is true of innovation risks. For example, the risks of not having support for the policies or plans could form part of the project design by developing the interventions based on the social aspects underpinning the socioecological systems, including values and norms important to the targeted populations. The residual innovation risk stemming from these actions, could be unexpected resistance to adopting a policy despite accounting for cultural norms in the project design. Please refer to STAP's risk note listed on [STAP's website](#) for further guidance.
5. The project has the potential to generate global environmental benefits (e.g., improved biodiversity conservation, improved soil health), socioeconomic benefits, and climate adaptation. STAP recommends designing the project to quantify these benefits and track their progress through good monitoring (component 3). Not only will this contribute to monitoring this project's LDCF additionality, but it could also advance evidence about the impact of EbA/NbS on environmental and social outcomes. STAP recommends consulting its [briefing note on co-benefits](#).
6. The PPG would be strengthened by analysis of lessons about enablers of and barriers to success from related projects and the incorporation of responses to these into the project design
7. The PPG would benefit from information about methods for including stakeholders in the PPG and their involvement in governing the project.
8. The PPG would benefit from clearly describing methods for integrating gender equality and women's empowerment throughout the project.

*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.*

## 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.)