

## STAP guidelines for screening GEF projects

Part I: Project Information	Response
<b>GEF ID</b>	10787
<b>Project Title</b>	Promote Wildlife Conservation and Responsible Nature Based Tourism for Sustainable Development in Vietnam
<b>Date of Screening</b>	25 May 2021
<b>STAP member screener</b>	John Donaldson
<b>STAP secretariat screener</b>	Alessandro Moscuza
<b>STAP Overall Assessment and Rating</b>	<p><b>Major issues to be considered during project design.</b></p> <p>Our review of this project proposal concluded that this is a well-presented proposal, which includes good elements aimed at reducing negative impacts of tourism on biodiversity in Viet Nam. Given the potential impact on biodiversity in the region, the project should progress to the next stage. However, the proposal is weighed down by a number of substantial issues, which should be addressed as early as possible in the next stage of project development. Given the nature of the issues to be addressed, <b>STAP recommends</b> that this proposal can be revised during the PPG phase of project development and that some elements such as the Theory of Change (ToC) can also be stress-tested and finalized during the early stages of project implementation (i.e. the project inception phase). The major issues that were identified as part of our review can be grouped into three categories: <b>i)</b> a noticeable level of inconsistency between and within the various elements of the project (i.e. between the project objective on the one hand and the project outcomes and outputs on the other, as well as within some of the outcomes, although the latter was a lot less prominent); <b>ii)</b> a lack of clearly defined pathways for achieving all the Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs) that can be tracked across the different components and that are directly linked to the projects proposed interventions; <b>iii)</b> a weak ToC, which presented significant gaps across a number of areas. Overall, <b>STAP assessment concluded</b> that this proposal makes a strong case for the economic or social development aspects of nature-based tourism, with excellent references and background information, but that it lacked the detail and specificity on biodiversity issues that we would expect for a single focal area project on biodiversity.</p>

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?	<p>The project objective is clearly defined, but our assessment concluded that this is not consistently aligned with the problem diagnosis or the project components, outcomes and outputs. The objective implies that the project will focus on innovative solutions for biodiversity conservation linked to nature-based tourism but the components and outputs range from high level mainstreaming activities to site specific promotion of nature based tourism (for socio-economic benefits) to broad scale awareness and capacity building. The objective reflects some of the duality in the proposal, i.e. does it aim to use innovations in nature based tourism as a mechanism to promote biodiversity conservation (through mainstreaming, alternative livelihoods, PES); or does it aim to mainstream biodiversity into nature based tourism (already a government priority) in order to minimize impacts; or does it promote sustainable livelihoods linked to NBT in order to achieve biodiversity benefits. The section describing the problem diagnosis is well written and very informative, but at the same time is also quite broad and appears to be more heavily slanted towards the socio-economic problems, which are more prominent than the environmental issues. Furthermore, we observed that the description of environmental issues was supported by a noticeably low level of sector-specific data and evidence. The project seems to significantly undersell the specific benefits for biodiversity which indicates that possibly the emphasis has been on the socio-economic benefits or that the pathways for achieving some of the environment benefits have not been clearly represented in the outputs and outcomes. <b>STAP recommends</b> that the project proponent revises this section of the proposal to ensure it is more consistent with the project objective. A more systematic use of sector specific data and evidence is also recommended as is a clearer focus on the environmental problems the project is aiming to address.</p>

Project components	A brief description of the planned activities. Do these support the project's objectives?	The project components are clearly framed and well-structured as they are underpinned by a strong logical flow that cuts across the outcomes, indicators and outputs. However, (starting from such a solid basis) STAP reviewers were surprised to observe a significant level of disconnect between the project components, outcome and outputs on the one hand and the project objective on the other. The project objective appears to state quite clearly that the project aims to promote BD conservation and sustainable livelihoods through innovative solution in NB tourism. However, all the aforementioned project elements include very little in terms of any actual solution, whether that be innovative or not. Rather they tend to focus mostly on high level technical assistance and capacity building. <b>STAP recommends</b> that the project proponents should carefully re-examine this section of the proposal and then revise <u>either</u> the project objective <u>or</u> the outcomes, outputs and indicators, to ensure that these are all aligned along a continuous logical flow.
Outcomes	A description of the expected short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention.  Do the planned outcomes encompass important adaptation benefits?	The outcomes when examined on their own stand-up well to scrutiny are well-aligned with the outputs and are supported by a a good set of indicators. However, as it was observed above these are not as closely aligned with the project objective as it should be expected.  The planned outcomes do not encompass any climate adaptation benefits.
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits likely to be generated?	The project has the potential to achieve significant GEBs if it can successfully mainstream biodiversity into the tourism sector, improve management of protected areas in Viet Nam and change community and tourist behaviour. Unfortunately, based on our review and assessment of the project proposal, we were not able to identify a clear set of pathways for achieving the mix of environmental benefits across all the components that this project would deliver, nor determine whether the incremental benefits arising from this project would meet the requirements to be classified as Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs). The focus of the project on two PAs with globally significant biodiversity provides a sound basis for achieving GEBs. However, these are associated mainly with Component 2 and activities and indicators

		<p>don't clearly spell out how the specific project activities will enhance the status of these PAs or what GEBs will be achieved via the other components. For example, the project identifies threatened species affected by illegal wildlife trade as GEBs and implies that their status will improve through project interventions focused on tourism. An improved status for saola, or some of the world's most threatened primates, would indeed qualify as GEBs but the project does not make a clear link to how this will be achieved (?regulation, alternative livelihoods, changing land use, reduced demand), and how it will be different to previous interventions (e.g. to stop snaring in national parks) that seem to have not been effective. Studies of wildlife trade in Viet Nam suggest a complex set of drivers and interactions, with some links to tourism, but these are not referenced and the proposal assumes certain outcomes without clear justification. <b>STAP strongly advises</b> that the project proponents review this aspect of the proposal and identify a clear set of environmental benefits which should be described clearly as a self-standing suite of results, which should also be underpinning the main expected outcomes for the project. This description should also ideally be accompanied by an explanation of how the identified benefits would meet the <a href="#">criteria set by the GEF</a> for GEBs.</p>
Outputs	<p>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?</p>	<p>The outputs are clearly written and well-sequenced. Our review concluded that most of the outputs sum-up well to contribute to the achievements of the outcomes. However, we also found that achieving outcome 3 on the basis of the activities listed as part of outputs 3.1-3.3. would require more of a 'leap' than all the other outcomes. Component 3 highlights the disparities in the project design between high level national/provincial interventions and those focused on the two PAs and the surrounding communities.</p>
<b>Part II: Project justification</b>	<p>A simple narrative explaining the project's logic, i.e. a theory of change.</p>	
<p><b>1. Project description.</b> <b>Briefly describe:</b> 1) the global environmental and/or adaptation problems, root causes and barriers that</p>	<p>Is the problem statement well-defined?</p>	<p>The proposal includes a detailed section describing the problems, root causes and barriers that the project aims to address. This is certainly well-written and well-structured and starts by providing a good and informative overview of the 'baseline' scenario in Vietnam. However, this is affected by two major issues: a) it tends to focus on and</p>

need to be addressed (systems description)		prioritize socio-economic issues at the expenses of environmental ones; b) it is too broad and even generic in places, which often results in very broad definitions of environmental problems and a lack of focus/clarity on the specific issues the project is aiming to address. We also observed that data and evidence provided to support the case for intervention in support of biodiversity was quite thin and, in our view, not enough to support the case for intervention (i.e. we would have expected to see a clearer picture of the ecosystems and species present and the level of threat they are exposed to). <b>STAP recommends</b> that this section should be revised to address the concerns stated above.
	Are the barriers and threats well described, and substantiated by data and references?	The section describing the barriers that the project is trying to achieve is very detailed, well-written and informative, but affected by very similar issues to those observed elsewhere. More specifically, the description of barriers tends to focus disproportionately on the institutional, legal and regulatory framework, and its ramification for tourism. Environmental issues and biodiversity come across as secondary issues, which are addressed indirectly as a result of addressing socio-economic regulatory and structural issues. Even in those areas where the proposal delves more specifically into issues such as Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) or similar schemes, the emphasis is on tourism, economic development and revenues, as opposed to biodiversity conservation and/or environmental protection. <b>STAP recommends</b> that this section should be revised to address the concerns stated above.
	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?	N/A
2) the baseline scenario or any associated baseline projects	Is the baseline identified clearly?	Yes, the project proposal includes a very detailed and rich baseline section, which provides an informative overview of a wide range of initiatives funded and implemented by the Govt. of Vietnam as well as a number of interventions funded by international institutions and donors.

	Does it provide a feasible basis for quantifying the project's benefits?	The baseline provides a good basis for quantifying the added benefits and results that this project would deliver. However, it does not resolve the issues highlighted above concerning the lack of clarity or definition for the expected GEBs.
	Is the baseline sufficiently robust to support the incremental (additional cost) reasoning for the project?	The baseline was deemed to be sufficiently robust to support the additional investment related to this project, however STAP recommends that this section be strengthened by adding more specific references to the environmental benefits and GEBs generated by ongoing projects and government initiatives to help better quantify the added value of this project in that respect.
	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;	N/A
	are the lessons learned from similar or related past GEF and non-GEF interventions described; and	N/A
	how did these lessons inform the design of this project?	N/A
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 theory of change is that in order to promote biodiversity conservation and improved community livelihoods through nature-based tourism, there is a need to address the key barriers identified in the project proposal through five groups of activities: i) Development of harmonized policy, regulatory and incentive framework to minimize the negative impacts of tourism development in high-biodiversity areas; ii) Raising awareness, engagement and capacity of key government ministries; iii) Engagement of the private sector and the adoption of more sustainable, biodiversity-friendly practices by tourism operators; iv) Engagement of local communities and the provision of sustainable livelihood benefits through biodiversity-friendly nature-based tourism; v) Knowledge management and strategic communications aimed at increasing learning and uptake of the project's experiences to increase the adoption of sustainable tourism.

	What is the sequence of events (required or expected) that will lead to the desired outcomes?	-
	What is the set of linked activities, outputs, and outcomes to address the project’s objectives?	-
	Are the mechanisms of change plausible, and is there a well-informed identification of the underlying assumptions?	<p>Our assessment concluded that the mechanisms of change described in the ToC need to be strengthened to support the achievement of any GEBs. The most prominent issues we observed were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The premise that biodiversity conservation could be addressed by promoting nature-based tourism alone was too weak and did not take into account some of the realities (for example around IWT) which exist in the region. There is also a tendency to conflate nature-based tourism with nature positive (biodiversity supporting) tourism. It should be clear for each section how the promotion of nature-based tourism will enhance biodiversity;</li> <li>▪ The type of activities proposed in themselves did not provide a clear enough pathway to achieve GEBs;</li> <li>▪ The ToC appears to be based on the single assumption that biodiversity benefits will accrue from the <i>“demonstration of the positive impacts that healthy ecosystems can provide for tourism and the local economy in high biodiversity areas”</i> which was deemed to be too broad.</li> <li>▪ The ToC diagram revealed a number of further weaknesses and gaps in the logical construct and pathway to impact. To mention a few: it was not clear what the outcomes and outputs were and how the content of the orange boxes corresponded with the outcomes and outputs, if at all; no assumptions, measurable indicators or project objective; no clear flow or sequencing between components, which appeared to converge unilaterally into the mid-term impacts; no clear explanation of how the mid-term impacts would be achieved; no clarity on how the mid-term impacts would lead to the long term outcomes; long- term outcomes were too broad and generic (i.e. not SMART) to the point of being vague. <b>STAP recommends</b> that this section of the PIF should be thoroughly revised to address the abovementioned issues.</li> </ul>

	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 ToC provides a broad recognition that, in order to achieve improved ecological conditions and biodiversity conservation, sustainable tourism activities will need to take place.
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?	STAP assessment concluded that this could be the case but that the proposal needs more specific details on how these will be achieved. Whilst we found some adequate (proposed) benefits such as an improvement in the management of specific Protected Areas (PAs), the environmental benefits described in the proposal were by far and large too broad and lacked detail. In other cases, they were inferred as an indirect result or secondary co-benefit of other activities and socio-economic results. Even when we identified some biodiversity specific results (e.g. reduced market demand for wildlife-related products), we found that these were in some cases based on incorrect assumptions and facts. For example, the proposal stated that tourism is a cause and a driver of illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) and consumption in Vietnam. This does not correspond with STAP's assessment of the situation in Vietnam, which is widely considered as a major transit hub for large shipments of illegal IWT products (including ivory and rhino horn from Africa) en route to China and other consumer countries in Asia including Japan. In STAP's view, domestic consumption of wildlife products in Vietnam is also an issue, but this is by far and large not related to tourism activities (for further details see above comments on GEBs). <b>STAP recommendation</b> is that the proposed activities can be implemented as planned but that these should be reframed in the proposal to ensure that the proposed environmental benefits are brought to the forefront and described in more detail. The causal link between the proposed activities and expected environmental benefits should also be described more clearly where possible.
	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 the environmental benefits proposed as part of this proposal were too vague and were not measurable, as a result it could also not be established if this project would indeed lead to the achievement of any GEBs. The project certainly aims to



		target biodiversity that should deliver GEBs and the proposal needs to be developed further in a way that makes these benefits more explicit and measurable.
	Is the scale of projected benefits both plausible and compelling in relation to the proposed investment?	Above comments refer.
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits explicitly defined?	Our assessment concluded that the environmental benefits proposed as part of this proposal were not adequately defined and it could not be established if these could indeed qualify as GEBs.
	Are indicators, or methodologies, provided to demonstrate how the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits will be measured and monitored during project implementation?	The proposal includes a number of indicators that support the project outcomes, including several relating to improved management of protected areas. These were deemed inadequate to fully measure and monitor the GEBs.
	What activities will be implemented to increase the project's resilience to climate change?	-
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 proposes a range of approaches, which have already been tested and used widely elsewhere, but can be innovative to the context of Vietnam, even though as the proposal itself states: " <i>there are already projects on ecotourism development in national parks and protected areas or special areas</i> ".
	Is there a clearly-articulated vision of how the innovation will be scaled-up, for example, over time, across geographies, among institutional actors?	The proposal provides a description of how activities piloted as part of this project can be scaled up at the national level within Vietnam.
	Will incremental adaptation be required, or more fundamental transformational change to achieve long term sustainability?	Our assessment concluded that the activities proposed as part of this project would require incremental adaptation to achieve long-terms sustainability.
<b>1b. Project Map and Coordinates.</b> Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place.		-
<b>2. Stakeholders.</b> Select the stakeholders that have participated in consultations during the project identification phase: Indigenous people and local	Have all the key relevant stakeholders been identified to cover the complexity of the problem, and project implementation barriers?	Yes, the proposal included a section that listed a wide range of stakeholders, which we found to be adequately comprehensive. This also described the roles that each stakeholder will play, including how they will contribute to the project activities and how the project is planning to approach them (i.e. the means of engagement).

<p>communities; Civil society organizations; Private sector entities.</p> <p>If none of the above, please explain why.</p> <p>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.</p>		<p>However, our review of the private sector engagement strategy proposed at this stage, concluded that this is still too broad and generic for this stage of planning of the project. Even though the proposal states clearly in more than one place that: “<i>efforts will be made at the PPG stage to include activities that integrate biodiversity conservation practices into the design, planning development and management of tourism products and services and into supply chain management</i>” <u>and that</u> “<i>the list of private-sector entities will be further consulted and clear responsibilities defined for each of the participating entities</i>”, the project proponents should recognize that engaging with private sector entities in the manner proposed in this proposal is very often a time consuming and resource-intensive process, which will need to be carefully planned and time-factored.</p>
	<p>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?</p>	<p>-</p>
<p><b>3. Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment.</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p>If possible, indicate in which results area(s) the project is expected to contribute to gender equality: access to and</p>	<p>Have gender differentiated risks and opportunities been identified, and were preliminary response measures described that would address these differences?</p>	<p>Yes, the proposal included a “<i>Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment</i>” section, which provides an outline plan of how the project will aim to mainstream gender issues into its activities and support women’s rights. We assessed this to be very balanced and appropriate for this stage of the project design.</p>

<p>control over resources; participation and decision-making; and/or economic benefits or services. Will the project's results framework or logical framework include gender-sensitive indicators? yes/no /tbd</p>		
	<p>Do gender considerations hinder full participation of an important stakeholder group (or groups)? If so, how will these obstacles be addressed?</p>	<p>This aspect did not appear to be an issue of concern for the success of this project.</p>
<p><b>5. Risks.</b> 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</p>	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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?</li> <li>• Has the sensitivity to climate change, and its impacts, been assessed?</li> <li>• Have resilience practices and measures to address projected climate risks and impacts been considered? How will these be dealt with?</li> <li>• What technical and institutional capacity, and information, will be needed to address climate risks and resilience enhancement measures?</li> </ul>	<p>Yes, the proposal includes a risk section, which in our view took into account all the main factors and identified all the relevant risk categories and appropriate mitigation actions.</p>
<p><b>6. Coordination.</b> Outline the coordination with other relevant GEF-financed and other related initiatives</p>	<p>Are the project proponents tapping into relevant knowledge and learning generated by other projects, including GEF projects?</p>	<p>The proposal included a co-ordination section, which provided an outline of how this project will co-ordinate activities with other Govt. funded initiatives and projects funded by other donors such as USAID and the WB. It also included a mention to a GEF project. There do seem to have been other initiatives and consultations relating to tourism and wildlife trade, convened by TRAFFIC and WWF, which are not included but could add important perspectives and learning.</p>
	<p>Is there adequate recognition of previous projects and the learning derived from them?</p>	<p>Yes, this aspect is mentioned in the coordination and knowledge management sections of the proposal.</p>

	Have specific lessons learned from previous projects been cited?	Yes, lessons from previous projects were mentioned in the knowledge management section.
	How have these lessons informed the project's formulation?	We found no evidence of this.
	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, means of lessons sharing are mentioned in the KM section.
<b>8. Knowledge management.</b> 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?	-
	What plans are proposed for sharing, disseminating and scaling-up results, lessons and experience?	-

Notes

STAP advisory response	Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed
<p><b>1. Concur</b></p>	<p>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.</p>
	<p>* 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 <b><i>“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.”</i></b></p>
<p><b>2. Minor issues to be considered during project design</b></p>	<p>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:</p>
	<p>(i) Open a dialogue with STAP regarding the technical and/or scientific issues raised;</p>
	<p>(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.</p>
	<p>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.</p>

<p><b>3. Major issues to be considered during project design</b></p>	<p>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:</p>
	<p>(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.</p>