REVISED STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE, OCTOBER 2022

GEF ID	11524
Project title	Integrated Management of Seascapes of the Kazakhstani part of the Caspian Sea and Land Resources of Adjacent Territories
Date of screen	28 May 2024
STAP Panel Member	John Donaldson
STAP Secretariat	Alessandro Moscuzza

1. **Summary of STAP's views of the project**

This is a reasonably well designed project that aims to achieve global environmental benefits by improving the management effectiveness of protected areas and restoring pasture and degraded agricultural land around the Caspian Sea.

The proposal and the need to intervene are justified by the importance of the Caspian Sea as an ecosystem that provides unique biological resources and important habitats for migrating species, as well as providing an important source of economic development and income for several countries in the region.

The proposal includes all the main elements and meets the basic requirements that should be expected in a PIF (see STAP'S screening guidelines in annex below). The inclusion of future narratives and scenarios was one of the stronger aspects of the proposal. The theory change (ToC) diagram was well constructed and provided an effective illustration of the project's components and ToC elements, although the narrative description of the logical pathways presented a number of weaknesses.

STAP identified some aspects of the proposal requiring improvement to ensure it delivers intended GEBs. These include the description of some of the outcomes, outputs, barriers and baseline and, more importantly, the theory of change which presented a number of weakness in the description of the logical pathways. Details of the issues that need to be addressed and STAP recommended actions are presented in sections 2 and 3 of this document.

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 summary** provided a very basic overview of what the project is trying to achieve but did not really delve into the problems or issues to be addressed. Also some areas lacked clarity and would benefit from a more linear and simpler narrative. For example at one point the description refers to "sector and planning level" without explaining what each means and what the difference is between them.

The **project objective** provided a reasonable explanation of what the project is aiming to achieve.

The description and scope of **outcome #1** is not clear and does not match the scope of the outcome indicators or the outputs. The phrasing of outputs 1.3 and 1.4 is inadequate as it describes results, which should be rather

used for outcomes e.g. *Enhanced environmental monitoring of the Kazakhstani part of the Caspian Sea.* The description for the outcomes under components 2-4 is adequate and provides enough clarity about the scope of proposed activities, outputs and results. The description of the outcomes under component 5 is also adequate but could be merged and integrated with component 4 as they are quite germane.

The **project rationale** section provides enough information on the underlying issues that the project seek to address. The section on **key threats and drivers** provides an adequate analysis of the main environmental and socio-economic issues affecting the region but could be streamlined to avoid some of the duplication of content and repetitions between sub-sections (e.g. "*Degradation of catchments of the Caspian Sea*" and "*Sea and adjacent coastal land pollution*").

The description of the **barriers** is quite generic and lacks sufficient detail. For example, barrier 1 mentions the need for more stringent enforcement and compliance of existing laws and regulations and poor or absent financial incentives for conservation but does not provide enough clarity about the government ministries or agencies it is referring to.

The proposal also mentions **stakeholders** but does not provide any indications of who these may be. Having this information is important because it will be needed to design and tailor project activities to ensure effectiveness and impact.

The **baseline** provides an adequate description of the broad (macro-level) challenges affecting the Caspian Sea region, but is also quite generic and does not provide enough information or details about the existing policies and legislation that could be leveraged to achieve results. It also omits any details about on-going environmental or biodiversity conservation interventions, which should be identified in order to avoid duplication and foster synergies where applicable. Instead the proposal provides a list of infrastructure and economic development investments that provide some useful context but are not directly relevant to the proposed scope of the project. STAP also identified another project, which is currently being designed by the World Bank and could be leveraged to build synergies and improve impact, as it will be operating in the same area (i.e. GEF ID 11429 - Blueing the Caspian Sea).

The PIF included a section on **simple narratives** that explore potential future changes in key drivers, and it was good to see that this was used to inform project design. This was organized around three external drivers (i.e. uncertainty of external influences related to land and wetland uses; inability to accurately predict the future climate situation: and ineffective international collaborations along the Caspian Sea), which provided ample analyses of the scenarios that could unfold in each case.

The **project description** provides a reasonable account of the proposed approach and links well with the preceding section on simple narratives and future scenarios. The narrative description of the **Theory of Change (ToC)** covers the main points but presents some weaknesses. The project's logical pathways, , are not always clear.. For example #5 merges increased capacity and awareness to pursue monitoring and enforcement activities with livelihood options that are conservation-friendly into a single category. Whereas #7 appears to imply that improved management plans will lead to self-enforcement of rules and reduce the need to exploit natural resources, without explaining how one will lead to the other.

The **ToC diagram** is very well constructed and includes a comprehensive array of elements comprising the project objective, barriers, levers, components outcomes and assumptions among others. It is also visually effective in illustrating the pathway to impact.

The **description of the components** is provides a good overview and sufficient level of details for the activities that have been planned across all five components.

The **stakeholder engagement** section provided enough information for this stage of project design.

The section on **key risks** was articulated across nine different categories, which were grouped into three operational areas (i.e. context, innovation and execution). The explanation of the underlying causes and relevant mitigation measures provided a reasonable coverage of the main issues and was adequate for this stage of project development).

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

1. The project summary section should be revised with the aim of streamlining and simplifying the narrative. The meaning of terms such as "sector and planning levels" should be explained clearly and the difference between the two clarified.
2. The description of the outcomes should be revised to ensure that a) it explains clearly what the project is trying to achieve; and b) it is aligned with the scope and description of the outcome indicators and outputs.
3. The phrasing of outputs 1.3 and 1.4 needs to be revised to ensure it describes activities and/or deliverables.
4. The description of the barriers should be revised to provide more details about the specific context each refer to.
5. The proposal should provide a more detailed description of the stakeholders that need to be targeted by the project in order to achieve optimal levels of impact..
6. The baseline section should be revised to ensure that a) it provides enough details about current policies, regulations and legislation that are directly relevant to the scope of the project and b) that it identifies existing/ongoing investments and interventions in related fields (e.g. environmental management, biodiversity conservation) that can be leveraged for collaboration, sharing of knowledge and best practice, co-ordination of activities and interventions etc.
7. The proposing implementing agency, should also aim to collaborate and build synergies with another project (GEF ID 11429 - Blueing the Caspian Sea), which will be operating in the same area and is currently being designed by the World Bank.
8. The project's logical pathways should be revised to ensure that they are simplified and follow a clear linear logic without any gaps. The overall number of pathways should also be reduced and some of the existing ones should be merged to create simpler but more articulated ones.

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.)