STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	**12293**
Project title	**Consolidating the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund's (CEPF) achievements in fostering CSO leadership in biodiversity conservation in global biodiversity hotspots**
Date of screen	**May 19, 2026**
STAP Panel Member	**Sandy Andelman**
STAP Secretariat	**Guadalupe Duron**

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP acknowledges the project, "Consolidating the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund's (CEPF) achievements in fostering CSO leadership in biodiversity conservation in global biodiversity hotspots". CEPF has a very strong track record, based on an effective model, which will be supported by this project.

The project will focus on four biodiversity hotspots: the Cerrado, East Melanesia, Guinean Forests of West Africa, and the Mediterranean Basin. STAP recommends that the project develop a clear objective that addresses biodiversity. Also, rather than focusing the theory of change (TOC) on CEPF's operational process, STAP strongly encourages the proponents, during the PPG phase, to develop a separate TOC for each hotspot, based on its ecosystem profile and the extensive stakeholder input that went into the profile. Also, STAP recommends that climate change be considered separately for each hotspot, since climate hazards and climate vulnerability will vary among them. Plus, each site will have specific key drivers that interact with climate change. Therefore, designing interventions for each hotspot based on future narratives will be important.

STAP rates the proposal as minor and provides comments to strengthen its design in each hotspot.

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 for this project underscores the importance of biodiversity globally and the impact of the triple planetary crisis (biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution) on it. It also describes briefly how these intertwined global drivers interact with more localized drivers and threats, including unsustainable management of natural resources, gender inequalities, weak governance, and increased pressure on forests (e.g., commercial logging and mining).

The aim of the project is to foster leadership of civil society organizations in biodiversity conservation in four hotspots, through the CEPF grantmaking. The rationale describes each of these hotspots, and the main drivers of biodiversity loss. To address the problem of biodiversity loss, the project will implement four components: (1) establishing and enabling Regional Implementation Teams in each of the four biodiversity hotspots; (2) grantmaking; (3) organizational development and mentorship for larger scale impact; (4) knowledge management and tools for increasing synergies, upscaling and replication. The project builds on a strong baseline established by previous CEPF investments and also on the baseline of the GEF Small Grants Program.

A more thorough description of the socio-cultural-ecological system in each of the hotspots would help strengthen the project logic. Using this approach, and based on the ecosystem profiles, a separate theory of change should be developed for each hotspot. This includes considering the key drivers in each system and how they interact. Each hotspot should also have a description of future narratives, which STAP considers important for delivering durable global environmental benefits. STAP's exploratory future narratives primer and brief provides advice on designing resilient and durable projects. This can be done as part of the PPG phase, at which point the CEPF Donor Council will have approved the ecosystem profiles for each hotspot.

Below, STAP offers some recommendations to improve the project design and implementation.

3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions

STAP has the following recommendations to strengthen the project:

1. Clarify the project objective. Currently, the objective is referred to on p. 19 as the "Sphere of Control". Please define what is meant by Sphere of Control or remove it. The objective is stated as: Support and foster the effective leadership of CSOs in biodiversity conservation and management in globally important biodiversity hotspots. This currently focuses on the CSOs as the main outcome rather than biodiversity conservation. It might better be expressed as: Support and foster the effective leadership of CSOs **to enhance** biodiversity conservation and management in globally important biodiversity hotspots. Presumably the objective is not only to improve the leadership of CSOs, but also to enhance conservation outcomes.

2. The theory of change (TOC) diagram is very fuzzy, making it very difficult to read. Since this is central to the proposed project, please provide a clear TOC diagram. The logical pathways in the TOC need to be fully articulated. For example, from the narrative, the ecosystem profile is a critical part of CEPF's strategy, and is what guides investments, but it does not appear in the TOC diagram. Another example is Outcome 3.1: Grantees upscale their biodiversity conservation impact after targeted organizational development support. The TOC should articulate the full logical pathway to upscaling. Since the pathways will likely differ among hotspots, STAP suggests that once the ecosystem profiles for all four hotspots have been approved by the CEPF Donor Council, a separate TOC should be developed for each hotspot, based on its ecosystem profile and the extensive stakeholder consultations that informed it.

3. Barriers 2, 3 and 5 are all closely related and STAP suggests these could be consolidated into a single barrier, or at most two. Please make Barrier 6 more explicit. Is the point here that civil society organizations lack opportunities for knowledge exchange and peer-to-peer learning?

4. As stated above, STAP recommends describing future narratives for each targeted hotspot once the ecosystems are approved by the Donor Council and the drivers of biodiversity loss are detailed for each hotspot. The steps for developing future narratives are outlined in STAP's future narrative primer. As the primer indicates, the future narratives and their responses will need to be assessed against the project components with key stakeholders during project development. This means that, in the CEO-endorsed document, STAP expects to see the future narratives applied to the theory of change and comprehensively integrated into the design of each targeted intervention for each hotspot. The project interventions in each hotspot should be robust across the range of plausible futures identified for that hotspot.

5. Component 2: Clarify what is meant by "private sector organizations…..working on a non-profit basis". Usually, profit is the primary motivation for private sector organizations, so, as stated, this does not make sense. Also, clarify why the target for this component is 100 CSOs receive grants, but only 40 CSOs have improved capacity. This would seem to imply the target is only a 40% success rate in enabling CSOs.

6. Both components 3 and 4 seem to focus on upscaling CSO impact and are addressing essentially the same barriers (see comment 3 above). STAP suggests the proponents either combine these two components or clearly separate them based on a logical criterion.

7. Component 5: Usually, learning and adaptive management are two key objectives of the project monitoring and evaluation framework. STAP suggests that the proponents incorporate these two objectives into this component. Consult STAP and IEO's information note on real-time monitoring, evaluation, and learning, which highlights best practices and approaches.

8. On risks, climate change is a significant consideration. Climate hazards and climate vulnerability will not be uniform across the four hotspots. Therefore, climate change and its interactions with other drivers need to be considered separately for each hotspot. Otherwise, there is significant potential that some CEPF investments could be maladaptive.

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.)