

STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	12295
Project title	Sustainable Natural Resource and Livelihood Project – North (SNRLP-North)
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

The SNRLP-North project targets severe land degradation and desertification in Sudan's River Nile and Northern States. The project adopts a strong systems context including environmental, socio-economic, and conflict-driven analysis, and is supported by extensive stakeholder consultations with local communities.

The design is sound, with clearly defined objectives, components, and a well-articulated Theory of Change linking institutional strengthening, landscape restoration, climate-smart agro-sylvo-pastoral systems, water management and livelihood resilience. However, the analysis of barriers would benefit from a clearer distinction between institutional fragmentation (among line ministries) and underlying capacity constraints, to ensure interventions address root causes more effectively.

While the proposed GIS-based M&E system and the anticipatory drought management are relevant and potentially transformative, further clarification is needed on their practical implementation, institutional embedding, and long-term sustainability.

The strong focus on capacity development, particularly the proposed certified cohort of 3,000 stakeholders offers a solid foundation for scaling, which could be further strengthened through structured approaches such as training-of-trainers. STAP also recommends that the PPG strengthen conflict-sensitive implementation, FPIC, WOCAT/context-appropriate SLM practice selection, results monitoring, and co-benefit tracking.

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 SNRLP-North project in Sudan primarily focuses on addressing severe land degradation and desertification in priority localities of River Nile and Northern States. Sudan is one of the most affected countries in Africa, with approximately 92% of its territory classified as drylands, where widespread degradation has evolved into what is now described as a *"historical desertification disaster."*

The project document provides a comprehensive analysis of the environmental and socio-economic system context. It also details the role of conflict and displacement in exacerbating environmental stress. Although the target locations are not active conflict zones, they experience indirect impacts such as inflows of displaced populations and livestock, intensified pressure on land and water resources, and rising risks of local resource-based conflicts. This conflict-sensitive framing is important and should be carried through into site selection, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive implementation arrangements during the PPG stage.

The **problem statement** is clearly articulated within a **systems context** supported by a detailed narrative that explains **baseline conditions, key drivers, and future scenarios**. The project proponents have undertaken extensive and in-depth consultations with local communities and have acknowledged that FPIC will be systematically undertaken during the PPG phase.

The three future scenarios, business-as-usual degradation, fragmented recovery, and resilient transition, are useful but need to be revisited at the PPG stage. The purpose of developing future narratives is to explore how the key drivers of the issues the project seeks to address—and their interactions—could evolve over time. This should inform the design of interventions that remain robust across a range of plausible futures. The current scenarios do not yet serve this purpose. To strengthen this section, the proponent should identify the main drivers of future change, such as climate change, conflict, migration, demographic trends, and economic conditions, and use their interactions to develop three or four plausible future narratives. These narratives should then inform the project's Theory of Change and help determine which interventions are most appropriate. [STAP's guidance on exploratory future narratives](#) provides detailed advice on how to undertake this process.

Three major **barriers** are identified in the project, including institutional fragmentation and weak governance. However, the analysis suggests that the core constraint is less about fragmentation *per se* and more about limited institutional capacity across line ministries and relevant agencies. Therefore, STAP recommends that these underlying drivers be revisited and more clearly differentiated, drawing on lessons learned from the earlier SNRLAP (GEF ID 10350). This would help ensure that project interventions are more precisely designed to address the root causes of institutional inefficiencies, particularly capacity gaps.

The project's **objective and components** are clearly articulated, and the **Theory of Change** is well formulated, with clear causal linkages between institutional strengthening, landscape restoration, and livelihood resilience. The ToC would be strengthened by making more explicit the causal sequence through which monitoring and early warning lead to preparedness, anticipatory action, reduced degradation, reduced conflict risk, livelihood gains and durable global environmental benefits.

STAP would like to raise several important considerations regarding the proposed GIS-based Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system. While its introduction is relevant and aligns with the need for enhanced data-driven decision-making, further clarification would strengthen the proposal. STAP recommends additional elaboration during the PPG phase to ensure that the system is not only technically sound, but also institutionally embedded and effectively utilized as a decision-support tool.

- It would be useful to clarify whether this represents the *first deployment of a GIS-based M&E* and land degradation monitoring system, or whether it builds on existing national initiatives.
- In light of the identified institutional capacity gaps, a clearer assessment of the *extent of institutional readiness* would be helpful.
- While the system is intended to support planning and monitoring, further clarity is needed on how the data generated will be *systematically integrated into policy processes* and operational decision-making at both national and local levels.
- It may also be clarified during the PPG phase whether relevant institutions will be able to commit to *data sharing and contribute ongoing operational costs*, to support long-term sustainability.

The project document states that the intervention is explicitly **transformational** in two respects: (i) shifting from reactive crisis response to anticipatory drought management, including strengthened early warning, planning, and preparedness systems; and (ii) advancing integrated landscape restoration that combines ecological rehabilitation with inclusive livelihood development.

However, it is unclear how the proposed activities operationalize the *anticipatory and pre-emptive aspects of drought management* in practice. For instance, although the project includes elements such as monitoring systems, capacity building, and institutional strengthening, the specific mechanisms through which these

translate into forward-looking risk reduction, early warning–triggered action, or preparedness-based interventions are not fully elaborated.

The project also places significant emphasis on *capacity development*, including the establishment of a certified cohort of 3,000 trained stakeholders. This is a strong feature of the design, and incorporating a training-of-trainers approach could further enhance sustainability, enable knowledge dissemination, and support scaling through national institutions.

For selection and documentation of SLM and restoration practices, the project could draw on the WOCAT Global SLM Database and relevant Sudanese experience to identify, adapt and document practices suited to arid and semi-arid agro-pastoral systems. This would strengthen the scientific basis for practice selection and improve the project's contribution to national learning. Relevant practices may include assisted natural regeneration, rangeland management, agroforestry, water harvesting, contour bunds, check dams, drought-resilient crop and fodder systems, women-managed nurseries and conflict-sensitive grazing management.

The results framework should also be sharpened during PPG by defining baselines, methods, monitoring frequency and responsibilities for restored hectares, improved management, vegetation recovery, land productivity, soil and water indicators, carbon benefits, biodiversity-relevant outcomes, livelihood resilience, adoption and maintenance of practices after project support ends. The project should distinguish co-benefits that are prerequisites for durable GEBs, such as livelihood resilience, water access, gender and youth inclusion, tenure security and conflict resolution, from co-benefits that are incidental.

3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions

- Revisit and refine the key barriers, clearly distinguishing between institutional fragmentation and core capacity constraints, and operational coordination gaps, and ensure interventions are appropriately designed, drawing on lessons from GEF and non-GEF projects.
- Revisit the future scenario using the guidance presented in Section 2 above. STAP's guidance on exploratory future narratives provides detailed advice on how to undertake this process.
- Clarify the GIS-based M&E system, including whether it builds on existing platforms, the level of institutional readiness, how data will inform decision-making, its relationship to anticipatory drought management and arrangements for ownership, data sharing, and long-term sustainability. Clarify how anticipatory drought management will be operationalized, including concrete mechanisms linking monitoring and early warning systems to early action and preparedness at both institutional and community levels
- Strengthen the conflict-sensitive implementation approach, including how the project will address IDP-related pressures, pastoral mobility, and inclusion of women, youth and vulnerable groups.
- Consider incorporating a training-of-trainers approach to strengthen knowledge dissemination and support scaling through national institutions. Consult WOCAT and relevant Sudanese evidence to identify, adapt and document suitable dryland SLM and restoration practices, including assisted natural regeneration, rangeland management, drought-resilient crops and fodder systems, and conflict-sensitive grazing management.
- Clarify which livelihood, food security, inclusion of gender and conflict-resolution mechanisms are prerequisites for durable GEBs, and track them accordingly, drawing on STAP guidance on co-benefits.

ANNEX: STAP'S SCREENING GUIDELINES

Project rationale

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 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?
- 10. 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?
11. 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.)