

STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	11409
Project title	Integrated management of the doumeraie of the Goulbi N’kaba watershed and adjacent ecosystems (Maradi Region)
Date of screen	January 18, 2024
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1. Summary of STAP’s views of the project

STAP welcomes Niger’s project, “Integrated management of the doumeraie of the Goulbi N’kaba watershed and adjacent ecosystems in the Maradi region”. The project takes a comprehensive approach to addressing the complex interactions of agro-sylvo-pastoral systems affected by climate change. To address resilience, the project cogently presents a rationale and a logic to support an effective implementation of land use planning, and development of agricultural value chains. These activities and, ultimately, the project objective, are dependent on change to scale, innovate, and transform the targeted socioecological systems. To this end, STAP strongly encourages the project team to continue developing the proposal with the same rigor it wrote the PIF, while paying close attention to outcome measurements that track change and generate evidence on the impact of land restoration and value chains on the population’s climate resilience.

Below, STAP rates its assessment and provides details of its screening to help improve the project design.

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
- X 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 and project description are robust and written succinctly. STAP appreciates the thorough description of climate change as a key driver of change, and its influence on other key drivers, such as conflict arising between herders and farmers over land. The rationale also provides a detailed description of the links between climate change and degradation, and its influence on adaptive capacity to climate change. A deeper, integrated look at the challenges, and opportunities, posed by other key drivers of change, including population growth, conflict, and fluctuations in the economy, can strengthen the rationale.

While STAP appreciates the inclusion of a detailed future climate scenario in the project description, the future climate is somewhat uncertain. This uncertainty is not covered in the PIF by the inclusion of other climate scenarios, even if that inclusion serves to demonstrate that future uncertainty is relatively small. Further, the drivers of the challenges described in the PIF go beyond climate change. The interaction of drivers, all with somewhat uncertain futures, introduces significant uncertainties in our understanding of the future context. To address this uncertainty, and the systemic character of the challenges this project seeks to address, the PIF would benefit from the development of two or more simple narratives that integrate the various drivers of degradation and livelihoods challenges. Each narrative should incorporate plausible differences, for example in climate, population growth rate, and levels of farmer/herder conflict (among the many drivers referenced in the

PIF), such that they create different but plausible representations of the future. These different futures are valuable for assessing the likely efficacy of the proposed activities across a range of futures, and can inform robust project design by directing implementers toward interventions that work across a range of futures.

Another issue that warrants attention is the use of terms. The rationale indicates the project will rely on a landscape management approach to achieve resilience to climate risks. However, several approaches are mentioned subsequently (land use planning, ecosystem-based adaptation, forest land restoration), which is confusing. Careful attention on the use of terms will strengthen the project's reasoning.

STAP appreciates the thorough barrier analysis in the project description, which helpfully includes weak monitoring of climatic fluctuations, such as sensitivity to drought and seasonality variation for planting crops and tree species. Designing interventions based on drought sensitivity and seasonal shifts will be necessary for the outcomes to remain long-lasting. Additionally, the agroecological descriptions of the target sites, which STAP appreciates, will be useful for designing land and forest restoration interventions (component 2 and 3).

Several issues could help strengthen the project logic. For example, the synergy potential with other GEF, and non-GEF investments, can usefully be mapped to the appropriate project components and overall project logic. (Currently this baseline information is nearly at the end of the document.) Identifying outcome measurements to assess change also will be necessary to achieve the transformative scaling the project aims to achieve. While the theory of change is detailed in terms of outcomes and outputs, the connection between specific outcomes/outputs and direct impacts, mid-term effects/impacts/benefits, and long-term effects/impacts/benefits is unclear – that is, which outputs/outcomes are expected to produce what effects/impacts/benefits? A rigorous theory of change specifies these connections to identify project level assumptions guiding the selection of activities and interventions and allows project implementers to effectively monitor the project through implementation to ensure that activities are delivering not only their expected outcomes and outputs, but are producing expected effects/impacts/benefits.

In the section of the PIF dedicated to Risks to Project Preparation and Implementation, the discussion of climate risks is focused on the challenges the project is meant to address, rather than the challenges that climate variability might pose to implementation. As a result, the project does not identify any climate risks to implementation, nor does it present any options for mitigating those risks. Under environmental and social risks, the PIF notes that farmer/herder conflict could be a risk to project implementation, but treats such risks as addressable only through the outcomes of the project. However, for such outcomes to occur, the project must be implemented – the PIF should offer more specific plans for mitigating this conflict risk, including the potential for project interventions to exacerbate such risks.

Finally, the challenges to be addressed by this project are often implicitly framed as the result of deficits or decisions by local actors, particularly farmers and herders (this is the implicit rationale for component 3 and some of component 2). STAP notes that the consultations for this project thus far did not include these actors, and there is no reference to literature to support this framing of the challenge. Given long-standing evidence that farmers and herders in challenging environments often develop their own climate smart activities and practices, the project would benefit from consultation with these actors during the PPG phase to better understand if such knowledge and practice deficits exist, clearly characterize any that do exist, and tailor interventions to ensure that they target deficits without displacing effective existing practices.

Below, STAP details further its recommendations.

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

To further strengthen the project, STAP recommends the following points to be addressed during the project design:

- While STAP is pleased with the description of the climate change reasoning, STAP highly encourages the project team to design using the climate information to inform the interventions. Currently, it is unclear how the climate information (some of which is downscaled data), will be used to design project interventions. Drought, floods, changes in crop growing seasons, and heat tolerance (crops and livestock) are some of the issues that will need to be dealt with in the activities.
- To this effect, STAP recommends defining climate risks in the project logic by including climate, environmental and social risks in the risk table as part of the project logic, and not treated separately. Specifying explicitly climate risks throughout the logic, along with its plausible effects on land degradation and livelihoods, can help the project select and implement interventions that are robust to these risks. For example, the project logic ought to reflect how the outputs will be resilient to climate – i.e., how will tree species (output 2.1) and the agricultural value chains (component 3) be resilient to drought? Similarly, the outcomes (e.g., landscape management) ought to explicitly state how they will improve resilience – e.g., landscape management will manage for water scarcity and flood management to improve population’s resilience to climate.
- Identifying the risks most salient to project outcomes, and therefore those that should be addressed as part of the project logic, requires the development of simple future narratives as described above. The project team may find useful to apply STAP’s simple future narratives advice. STAP also recommends the World Bank publication on designing and monitoring for resilience. Both resources can be accessed here:
<https://stapgef.org/index.php/resources/advisory-documents/simple-future-narratives-brief-and-primer>
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/701011613082635276/pdf/Summary.pdf>
- STAP welcomes the theory of change figure and narrative in the PIF. In particular, STAP is pleased the theory of change includes hypotheses. Hypotheses are often assumptions, or knowledge gaps, that need to be tested or validated during the project implementation to generate learning; and adaptive management as necessary. During the project design, when the theory of change is being revisited, STAP encourages the project to rephrase the hypotheses as key assumptions, or questions, that correspond to key outcomes. Doing so, will contribute to the project’s knowledge and learning. Also, please note that the assumptions currently in the PIF – which are at a higher level – are not specific to outcomes; therefore, need to be revisited.
- Further, STAP encourages the project to revise the theory of change to more clearly link specific outputs and outcomes to specific effects/impacts/benefits to allow for robust monitoring and evaluation of the project. This process will help identify risks and assumptions that correspond to each component and thus facilitate appropriately addressing them. For example, there are a number of risks (including climate as mentioned above) that are affiliated with outputs and outcomes from component 2 on forest and landscape restoration. Similarly, there are a number of assumptions that need to be validated – e.g., livelihoods will be made more climate resilient through land and forest restoration. The same is true for component 3, which involves several types of risks (financial, social, environmental) that are hypothesized to contribute to innovation via the adoption and scaling of value chains. Planning for risks and validating assumptions will generate evidence about the impact of agricultural/agro-silvo-pastoral value chains, or the Association Villageoise d’Épargne et de Crédit’s (AVEC) impact, on agricultural productivity and climate resilience. This learning is necessary to scale, innovate, transform, and achieve resilience.
- On component 1, STAP is pleased with its focus on policy coherence across different types of environmental, climate, and development policies. STAP encourages a policy analysis between sectors (agriculture, forest, livestock, climate adaptation) and across governance levels to identify, and resolve fragmentation, and competing interests – the latter, which the PIF identifies exists between farmers

and herders. As the PIF suggests, having an enabling environment in place, is important to the success of land use planning.

- Component 1 strives to improve land tenure. STAP recommends for this activity to be developed further. For example, land tenure seems to be tied loosely as an output, or output indicator, to component 1 (paragraph 29, page 20). STAP recommends relying on the VGGT (Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land). The nine pathways described in the summary of this report are particularly applicable for embedding land tenure throughout the project logic. <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-05/cb9656en.pdf>
- For both component 1 and 2, a land potential assessment is necessary. Without knowing the capacity of the land to recover or resist (further) degradation, there are inherent assumptions throughout the components that restoring land, or the forest, is possible. STAP recommends two resources that provide guidance on conducting a land potential assessment: <https://stapgef.org/index.php/resources/advisory-documents/guidelines-land-degradation-neutrality> <https://www.unccd.int/resources/reports/contribution-integrated-land-use-planning-and-integrated-landscape-management>
- For both component 2 and 3, consultation with local actors (i.e. farmers and herders) is necessary to empirically identify opportunities to support changes in behavior and practice by assessing existing actions, decisions, and rationales. Through consultations with these actors, the project will be able to identify if and where there are areas of knowledge or technical deficit that might be effectively addressed by the project. At least as important, this process will help the project identify existing practices, decisions, and rationales that are effective in the context and build on them, rather than compromising them and producing maladaptive outcomes.
- STAP recommends identifying outcome measurements to assess change, and complement the core indicators. For example, social change, complexity and adaptability are processes the project will be reliant on to achieve its objective. STAP's guidance on transformation metrics can be valuable in this regard. The paper can be accessed here: <https://stapgef.org/index.php/resources/advisory-documents/achieving-transformation-through-gef-investments>

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.

*categories under review, subject to future revision

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.)