

## STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	12289
Project title	Ridge to Reef Ecosystem Restoration in Solomon Islands (R2R-ERSI)
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### 1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP acknowledges the Solomon Island's project, "Ridge to Reef Ecosystem Restoration in Solomon Islands (R2R-ERSI)". The project will apply a ridge-to-reef approach to restore degraded forests, coastal, and marine ecosystems, thereby improving biodiversity. The project recognizes the customary land and marine tenure systems in the Solomon Islands. These practices, and the cultural values and norms they embody, will need to be strongly accounted for throughout the project to ensure the outcomes are achieved. Free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) needs to be applied, although, as written, it is unclear whether it was used.

STAP also urges the project team to design the project based on future narratives to plan for uncertainty. This includes accounting for climate risks – current and future risks - and their interactions with the other key drivers identified in the project, such as population growth and markets for extractive industries. As currently designed, the project risks being maladaptive and potentially increasing communities' vulnerabilities to climate change.

Below, STAP details its recommendations.

### 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 begins by describing the importance of biodiversity to the Solomon Islands at the national level. Thorough descriptions of the abundance of biodiversity that characterizes the Solomon Islands, both terrestrial and marine, are provided in this section and elsewhere in the document. Descriptions of the socioeconomic conditions of the national population are also provided. Later in the document, a similar description is given for the targeted sites. On this point, it would be useful to reduce the amount of information provided on the national context and to profile the targeted sites in greater detail and earlier.

As the project document suggests, communities rely heavily on natural resources, both terrestrial and marine, to support their livelihoods. Achieving environmental benefits will depend on supporting communities' livelihoods and respecting their cultural norms and values, which are closely tied to the use and management of resources. Thus, embedding the social structures, such as the cultural identities, of the Solomon Islands peoples strongly in the design is essential. Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is essential to the project, since the overwhelming majority of the population in the Solomon Islands is Indigenous. As currently written, there is no evidence that FPIC was applied. This also underscores the importance of designing the project to account for the prerequisite co-benefits (e.g., increasing incomes) necessary to achieve the proposed biodiversity benefits.

The project recognizes the importance of inclusivity, including engaging and working with youth (~70% of the population) and women. In this regard, the PIF raises women’s employment in coastal fisheries, noting that no data exist to measure the extent of their engagement in the fisheries sector, whether formal or informal. As a result, policies and interventions, including those on capacity building, often fall short of investing in women as change agents. In STAP’s view, this is considered a substantial barrier to achieving the proposed outcomes in components 1 to 3, which seems to have gone unnoticed in the PIF design.

STAP notes an initial description of the drivers of environmental degradation. These include population growth, economic development dependent on extractive industries such as mining and logging, climate change, and inconsistencies between national policies and customary land and marine tenure arrangements. However, STAP is concerned that solid waste management and invasive alien species are not considered, despite their documented importance for R2R management in the Solomon Islands ([Kereseka 2021](#) and references therein). Further details on the drivers, especially for each landscape-seascape area, would be valuable, along with an analysis of interactions among the drivers. This description will help define plausible future narratives that appear to be missing, which can help address uncertainty.

Additionally, the proponents state that “the previous trend in ecosystem degradation will be reversed”, which seems overly ambitious, especially since the main output of Component 1 on policy and guidelines will be a plan to address gaps and needed policy reform, rather than actually implementing these reforms. When writing the project, it would be helpful to avoid making these assertions. Instead, these statements can be explicitly defined as assumptions in the theory of change and tested or validated as the project is implemented.

Below, STAP provides recommendations to improve the theory of change, along with additional recommendations on the components and issues raised above.

### 3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions

STAP recommends addressing the following points during the project design:

1. The PIF outlines climate trends for the Solomon Islands in 2030 and 2090, which STAP welcomes, however, the description lacks consideration of climate change impacts already present, e.g., sea-level rise, storms and temperature changes. The country lies within the Pacific Ring of Fire and the cyclone zone, making it vulnerable to natural disasters (volcanoes, earthquakes, tsunamis) and extreme weather events. See, for example, [Albert et al. 2016](#) and [Solomon Islands Ridge to Reef Island Diagnostic Analysis Report 2021](#). STAP recommends designing the project to include data from periods earlier than 2090 – for example, current and recent patterns and trends, that will impact the likely success of proposed project interventions. Climate change is not only a process to be considered for the future, but needs to be considered now, especially in the context of managing and restoring biodiversity (see [STAP information note on considerations for biodiversity conservation in the Anthropocene](#)). The [World Bank Climate Knowledge Portal](#) provides this data, along with an explanation of the trends and interannual variability, which is often more important than trends themselves, especially in the Solomon Islands which is already impacted by extreme climatic events.
2. As indicated above, STAP urges the project team to develop future narratives to plan for uncertainty, and to design the project based on them. This involves describing the interactions among key drivers, including climate change, population growth, and market demands for extractive industries such as mining and logging – and identifying response options that work across the plausible futures. Further details can be found in [STAP’s future narrative guidance](#) – see table 2.4 in the primer which summarizes steps for applying the narratives in project design. The future narratives should also inform the development of the theory of change and its assumptions.

3. On the theory of change (TOC), STAP recommends addressing the following points when consulting with community-based organizations and other key stakeholders:
  - a. Build the identified assumptions into the project design, as they will influence the project logic and the delivery of outcomes. There are likely additional assumptions to consider for each pathway. Hence, STAP suggests defining them. Monitoring the assumptions closely will be necessary, as will managing the residual risks that result from them.
  - b. For the barriers, consider whether more than one pathway will be necessary and sufficient to address the barrier. For example, barriers to achieving strengthened capacity for biodiversity conservation (component 2), might also require institutional support to organize multi-stakeholder dialogues (component 1). Refer to [STAP's theory of change](#) primer to learn more about developing the necessary and sufficient activities.
  - c. Revise the narrative (page 29) describing the logic of the theory of change, along with the theory of change figure, once the changes above have been made.

4. STAP strongly urges the project team to apply FPIC. As currently written, there is no evidence that FPIC was applied, or that they are part of Annex D (environmental and social safeguards), as STAP does not have access to this document.

5. Component 1 is focused on implementing a ridge-to-reef approach, integrating land, water, and coastal management. The approach serves as a policy-coherence framework for agriculture, forestry, and coastal protection. STAP recommends that this component be reconsidered, to address poor solid waste management and its interactions with the other challenges identified, since the [Solomon Islands Ridge to Reef Island Diagnostic Analysis Report](#) lists improved solid waste management and controlling associated pollution as the #1 priority for Ridge to Reef management. Given that customary land and marine tenure systems are common in the Solomon Islands, STAP strongly recommends supporting these practices in the design of this intervention.

Component 1 also involves identification and recognition of OECMs and states that some community-managed areas function as *de facto* OECMs. There is no such thing as *de facto* OECMs, and the proponents recognize that legal recognition of and a national policy on OECMs are required. STAP encourages the proponents to review the [IUCN guidance on OECMs](#) (2024).

6. For component 2, STAP recommends approaching training and capacity building as a way to strengthen communities and individuals to become agents of change. Doing so will require empowering and supporting communities to challenge systemic barriers that hampers their decision-making. Investing in inclusive governance is particularly important to support women in fisheries value chains, which are substantially involved in them.

7. Component 3 largely focuses on ecosystem restoration. For coral reefs, STAP encourages the proponents to consult the analysis of the causes of coral reef degradation in the above-referenced diagnostic assessment and to revise the TOC to specifically address the causal chain of coral degradation. Further, given the severe impacts that climate change is projected to have on coral reefs in the Solomon Islands, including higher water temperatures and ocean acidification, STAP encourages the proponents to carefully consider and justify the feasibility of coral reef restoration. Substantial attention to climate change, and its interactions with other key drivers (e.g., solid waste management, extractive economies, expanding tourism, and population growth), is recommended. The diagnostic analysis also identifies expanding tourism as a documented threat to coral reefs in the Solomon Islands, and STAP suggests this should also be considered when designing reef restoration interventions.

8. For component 4, STAP recommends strengthening its focus by linking it to the theory of change and to other results management processes to manage knowledge and learning.

9. Revise the risk table to reflect risks that remain after the project has been designed. Currently, there are a number of contextual risks, such as climate risks, political risks, and others, that should be accounted for in the project design – and only listed in the table if these risks remain.

## 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.)