

STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	11333
Project title	Integrated landscape management in the Napo River Basin for sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation
Date of screen	June 3, 2024
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP welcomes Ecuador's proposal on integrated landscape management in the Napo river basin. The project will rely on sustainable land and forest management, and conservation strategies, to deliver global environmental benefits and co-benefits that improve the lives of the communities living in the basin.

Given the basin's vulnerability to climate change, STAP encourages the project proponents to plan for the possible impacts of climatic change (e.g. floods or droughts) and market changes that could affect sustainable land management, agricultural production, and proposed diversification of livelihoods. The project is also dependent on testing and tracking critical assumptions related to integrated land use planning, such as policy coherence, as well as sustainable finance. Learning from these interventions is key to the project impact. STAP also encourages the project proponents to embed local and traditional knowledge into Nature-based Solutions. The resilience and efficiency of agricultural productivity is dependent on this knowledge.

Below, STAP details its advice.

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.

STAP understands the project will focus on the Napo River Basin, an area facing multiple environmental challenges, including biodiversity loss, land degradation and deforestation. To address these drivers, and a host of barriers which are well described in the PIF, the project proponents seek to implement integrated landscape management. Although this information supports the project rationale, STAP recommends providing more specific details in the final project design. This includes defined target sites and a description of their socioecological systems.

A description of the drivers beyond climate change (in addition to flooding, which appears to be the main focus of the project) would also strengthen the rationale – such as drivers related to market fluctuations. Describing how this project would leverage learning from other projects (those described in the coordination section) would also strengthen the baseline and the project rationale. At present this description appears absent. Attention to future narratives, a key strategy for dealing with uncertainty, is not present in the proposal's current form. Future planning is a necessity for outcomes to remain resilient to global change.

For the project description, STAP welcomes the theory of change and highly encourages the proponents to revisit it during the project design to strengthen it – including by embedding more robustly knowledge management and learning. Although the components, joined-up, could contribute to enhanced biodiversity, sustainable land and forest management in the Napo River basin, the proposed logic could be strengthened by giving more attention to the assumptions underlying the logic chain (or pathways) of outcomes and proposed interventions. Focusing more deeply on the pathways will give greater attention to whether they are necessary and sufficient to achieve the proposed GEBs and project objectives. This process will also indicate what learning is necessary to achieve the objective and who the key stakeholders are to ensure that the dissemination of knowledge and learning occurs as planned in a way that is sustainable beyond the project's lifetime.

As written, the project expects to be innovative by improving regulatory frameworks and policy coherence for improved sustainable land and forest management, as well as by strengthening sustainable financing for agricultural production. Identifying learning opportunities and tracking the results (i.e., testing assumptions) associated with each pathway will be important to achieve scaling.

STAP commends the consideration of the “Life Plans’ as a baseline for planning interventions, and it encourages the project team to consider the 2022 publication of the UNCCD-SPI [‘The contribution of integrated land use planning and integrated landscape management to implementing Land Degradation Neutrality: Entry points and support tools’](#) to enhance activities related to component 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Below, STAP details further its advice.

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

STAP recommends for the following issues to be addressed during the project design:

1. The project could usefully benefit from integrated land use planning that organizes, in their totality, the logic of the three components: improved regulatory mechanisms; improved sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation; and strengthened access to innovative financing. Integrated land use planning, or a similar integrated approach, would establish stronger causal links between the components – emphasizing a systems thinking approach. Guidelines and exemplars of best practice for using integrated, systems thinking approaches can be found in : [UNCCD’s Integrated Land Use Planning for LDN](#), [STAP’s LDN guidelines](#), [STAP’s Theory of Change Primer](#).
2. Applying systems thinking will also be valuable in describing the targeted socioecological systems, which appear missing in the PIF. Describing the context of the target sites and what matters to stakeholders from the socioecological system (which include indigenous peoples and local communities), including a description of the institutional and governance arrangements, cultural norms, and socioeconomic traits, will underpin the logic and rationale, and help further define the drivers, barriers and enablers to achieve the proposed GEBs and local benefits in a durable manner.
3. Analysis as suggested in point #2 may likely reveal other important drivers to consider in addition to climate change, which STAP recommends paying attention to - such as fluctuating markets, at the local, national and regional level, or possibly global if global commodities are a focus of the project On climate change, the project appears to be predominantly focused on flooding, although other stressors could also be relevant to the basin, such as drought. To analyze comprehensively the climate risks, STAP recommends applying the [World Bank’s climate and disaster screening tool](#), or a similar method that assesses such risks and enable designing climate-resilient solutions.

4. Linked to this assessment, is the necessity to consider how drivers of change (climate and non-climate) can affect the durability of the project outcomes. . To ensure this, STAP highly recommends for the project proponents to consider future planning, by developing simple narratives of the future and how the project aims to address uncertainty – or resilience to different plausible futures. STAP’s advice on future narratives as well as the World Bank’s resilience methodology are two useful resources the project proponents are encouraged to use.
5. To strengthen the viability of component 1, STAP also recommends applying steps in a policy cycle to strengthen policy coherence and regulatory frameworks supporting sustainable land and forest management, and biodiversity conservation. STAP’s Policy Coherence Advisory document spells out steps of the policy cycle, which, if applied, translates to a theory of change for component 1.
6. For component 3, STAP draws attention to its Blended Finance Information Note. STAP’s Information Note spells-out five topics of relevance to blended finance projects, or components, for the GEF. These include a clear logic for delivering GEB impacts, better measurement of environmental impacts, demonstrated GEB additionality, enabling institutional context, and a learning culture. The project proponents are encouraged to design the project, particularly component 3, based on these issues. In fact, a separate theory of change for component 3 could be developed to further articulate the logic chain between innovative finance and GEBs to generate learning, support the project’s goal of innovation and scaling.
7. Component #3 will use financial incentives to support drainage actions within farms, along with training processes focused on the management of waterlogged soils. In this regard, STAP recommends that interventions follow the principles of nature-based solutions and embed local and traditional knowledge. Guidance can be taken from Miralles-Wilhelm, F. (2021). Nature-based solutions in agriculture: Sustainable management and conservation of land, water and biodiversity. FAO.
8. Component #4: STAP encourages the planned Early Warning System (output 4.1.1) to be designed under the principles of ‘data/information as a service’. Access to information (ie. ‘The information generated will be made accessible to every individual in the territory, irrespective of gender, with due consideration for their unique circumstances, geographical location, and access to technology”) is insufficient. User-friendly services and education on how the information generated can contribute to better planning and management at landscape, catchment and farm levels is essential to ensure its uptake and use. In this regard, Ouput 4.1.1 needs to be considered and adequately embedded in the design of activities and actions related to outputs 4.1.2 and 4.1.3.
9. STAP notes that the project area supports 67% of the areas under conservation mechanisms in the country, which includes areas within the National System of Protected Areas, State Forest Heritage, and Biosphere Reserves, among others. Yet deforestation and expansion of the agricultural frontier are cited as drivers of land degradation and biodiversity loss. In this regard, STAP recommends ‘conservation planning for retention, not just protection’, a principle underpinned by a recent analysis of successes and failures in the expansion of protected areas in South America. (See Negret, P. J., Venegas, R., Sonter, L. J., Possingham, H. P., & Maron, M. (2024). Conservation planning for retention, not just protection. *Global change biology*, 30(3), e17211.) Such principle can be considered in the assumptions of the Theory of Change that will underpin the outputs and activities needed to reach the desired outcome of advancing land degradation neutrality, through diversification of livelihoods, improvement of the efficiency of productive systems and the conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity in the Napo River Basin.

10. Lastly, STAP is pleased the project will apply a traceability system to reduce leakage from deforestation. Project proponents may wish to rely on [Trase.Earth](#) in addition to the system put in place by PROAmazonía.

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.

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 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.)