

STAP guidelines for screening GEF projects

Part I: Project Information	Response
GEF ID	10695
Project Title	Restoration of ecosystems, integrated natural resource management and promotion of SLM in Mbuluzi River Basin of Eswatini
Date of Screening	May 28, 2021
STAP member screener	Graciela Metternicht
STAP secretariat screener	Guadalupe Duron
STAP Overall Assessment and Rating	<p>Minor issues to be considered during project design</p> <p>STAP welcomes UNEP’s project “Restoration of ecosystems, integrated natural resource management and promotion of SLM in Mbuluzi River Basin of Eswatini”. The project aims to address land and forest degradation and biodiversity loss.</p> <p>STAP encourages the project developers to define the landscape approach that will be applied to address the drivers of degradation and biodiversity loss. Currently, it is unclear whether a Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) approach will be used as the framework that will underpin the land use plans, integrated landscape management activities, to address the set objectives on land, forest, and biodiversity. Additionally, it would be useful the project considers trade-offs between biodiversity conservation, agricultural productivity, and ecosystem restoration. Addressing trade-offs will make the land use plans more robust, and could reduce potential conflicts over land use.</p> <p>STAP notes that Eswatini and the project sites are experiencing drought. To make the project interventions enduring to long-term drivers, such as drought, STAP recommends ensuring the causal pathways identified are sufficient to deal with these risks.</p> <p>STAP further notes that more research is needed in the PPG phase to capture a wealth of lessons published from</p>

	<p>previous non-GEF projects implemented in Eswatini, as well as published science-based evidence on challenges around community based participatory project planning. Including lessons from previous projects that had similar objectives of reducing land degradation, conserving ecosystem services, while maintaining and diversifying livelihoods of the rural communities will bring innovation to this proposed project. STAP encourages uptake of past lessons in co-operated agribusiness, cooperative public-private partnerships, market-based instruments that have demonstrated the capacity to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation at landscape level while providing opportunities for sustainable livelihoods to youth and women, a highly vulnerable sector of the population —as stated in the project.</p> <p>STAP notes that less than 10% of the budget is committed to Knowledge management, sharing and monitoring and evaluation. Sufficient funding for dissemination, communication and monitoring of activities is key to ensure sustainability of the proposed outputs and outcomes, and the realization of the expected GEBs (which can take beyond the four years of funding sought).</p> <p>Below, STAP offers further advice on these issues.</p>	
Part I: Project Information B. Indicative Project Description Summary	What STAP looks for	Response
Project Objective	Is the objective clearly defined, and consistently related to the problem diagnosis?	Yes, the objective is clearly defined.
Project components	A brief description of the planned activities. Do these support the project’s objectives?	Yes, the planned activities support the project objectives.
Outcomes	A description of the expected short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention. Do the planned outcomes encompass important global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits?	Yes, the outcomes focus on reduced land degradation, and improved management of three nature reserves that are expected to enhance biodiversity.

	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits likely to be generated?	Yes, with good monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and a good theory of change.
Outputs	A description of the products and services which are expected to result from the project. Is the sum of the outputs likely to contribute to the outcomes?	Yes.
Part II: Project justification	A simple narrative explaining the project's logic, i.e. a theory of change.	
1. Project description. Briefly describe: 1) the global environmental and/or adaptation problems, root causes and barriers that need to be addressed (systems description)	Is the problem statement well-defined?	Yes, the problem statement is well defined. Problems include deforestation as a result of conversion of land for agriculture and settlements, extraction of timber and non-timber forest products. The project also will focus on over-exploitation of rangelands, which has occurred as a result of unsustainable grazing and unsustainable crop production.
	Are the barriers and threats well described, and substantiated by data and references?	Yes, the barriers are well described. Barriers include: lack of capacity to design and implement integrated land management plans; values of ecosystem goods and services are not embedded into land management plans; lack of experience on sustainable land management at the landscape scale; and ineffective management of protected areas (i.e. valuing and managing ecosystems are secondary to wildlife tourism). STAP encourages the project team to research outcomes of past projects (non-UNEP, non-GEF) that have identified how to effectively address some of the barriers and challenges this PIF identifies.
	For multiple focal area projects: does the problem statement and analysis identify the drivers of environmental degradation which need to be addressed through multiple focal areas; and is the objective well-defined, and can it only be supported by integrating two, or more focal areas objectives or programs?	Yes, the drivers of degradation need to address by investments in sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation. The project objective can only be reached by integrating sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation, using a landscape approach and linking the proposed interventions to the national plan for LDN.

2) the baseline scenario or any associated baseline projects	Is the baseline identified clearly?	<p>Yes, the baseline narrative describes initiatives on land use planning, and biodiversity conservation in Eswatini.</p> <p>While the narrative describes past GEF projects and current projects of partners, there are significant omissions of past projects funded by the likes of the African Development Bank, others implemented by ILRI (e.g. The SwaziBeef project: successes, challenges and lessons learned). STAP encourages a thorough desktop search and review of past projects conducted in Eswatini to avoid the potential of duplicating efforts funded by past projects, and to learn from those interventions valuable lessons on successes and failures.</p>
	Does it provide a feasible basis for quantifying the project's benefits?	Yes – and suggest defining a quantitative baseline on land and forest degradation, and biodiversity conservation during the PPG. It is unclear whether the LDN targets will be used as the baseline.
	Is the baseline sufficiently robust to support the incremental (additional cost) reasoning for the project?	Yes.
	For multiple focal area projects:	
	are the multiple baseline analyses presented (supported by data and references), and the multiple benefits specified, including the proposed indicators;	Yes, the baseline narrative describes efforts on land management and biodiversity conservation. It is expected that baseline indicators will be identified during the PPG.
	are the lessons learned from similar or related past GEF and non-GEF interventions described; and	Yes.
	how did these lessons inform the design of this project?	Suggest describing how lessons learned, or best practices, from the baseline initiatives will inform this project. STAP appreciates the link made between the GEF 5 project on protected areas and this initiative.
3) the proposed alternative scenario with a brief description of expected	What is the theory of change?	A narrative description and theory of change figure is provided in an annex. A brief summary of the theory of change is: “The project will promote

<p>outcomes and components of the project</p>		<p>integrated sustainable land management and ecosystem restoration to safeguard the integrity of key ecosystems in the Mbuluzi Catchment in Eswatini. The project will ensure that the sustainable management of ecosystem goods and services is fully integrated into national and local level development planning. It will also build upon the strong commitment by the Government of Eswatini to promote productivity through improved biomes and productive ecosystems in the Mbuluzi catchment. The project is fully aligned with Eswatini’s National Voluntary Targets on Land Degradation Neutrality. The Targets were defined during a LDN Target Setting Process, and seek to avoid, minimize and reverse land degradation; reduce current annual loss of forest to cropland; increase forest cover through afforestation and agroforestry programmes; increase land productivity in all the country’s four regions through SLM practices; increase the amount of land set aside for nature and wildlife conservation; rehabilitate degraded and abandoned land for crop production. The project will be implemented through four components that strengthen policy frameworks; enhances ecosystem restoration through SLM; effective management of three protected areas; and monitoring, evaluation and learning to enhance knowledge.</p> <p>STAP notes that some outcomes and outputs are dependent on ‘behavior change’ and therefore encourages the team to apply the advice provided in the STAP work presented in the December 2020 Council (Why behavior change matters to the GEF and what to do about it), and its related review of literature and projects that have included behavioral change.</p>
	<p>What is the sequence of events (required or expected) that will lead to the desired outcomes?</p>	<p>See above.</p>

	What is the set of linked activities, outputs, and outcomes to address the project's objectives?	See above.
	Are the mechanisms of change plausible, and is there a well-informed identification of the underlying assumptions?	Suggest better identifying the assumptions, risks (external and internal to the project) that underlie each of the four outcomes. The underlying assumptions of the theory of change that "government is fully committed to the conservation and sustainable use of the Mbuluzi river basin (pg 40) is very general, and vague to an extent'. The project team is encourage to familiarize with the STAP Primer on Theory of Change , and to develop well-informed underlying assumptions.
	Is there a recognition of what adaptations may be required during project implementation to respond to changing conditions in pursuit of the targeted outcomes?	Unclear. Suggest considering what adaptations will be needed as the theory of change is applied, and outcomes are being monitored and evaluated.
5) incremental/additional cost reasoning and expected contributions from the baseline, the GEF trust fund, LDCF, SCCF, and co-financing	GEF trust fund: will the proposed incremental activities lead to the delivery of global environmental benefits?	Possibly. The main thrust of the project is to strengthen landscape management to address land and forest degradation, and enhance ecosystem services. To track progress in achieving the global environmental outcomes, STAP recommends complementing the GEF's core indicators by identifying metrics to monitor landscape management in the target sites. Additionally, suggest identifying metrics that can track this project's contribution to the Aichi Target 12. In this regard, STAP recommends the PPG adopts the targets to be approved through the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, that will supersede the Aichi Targets.
	LDCF/SCCF: will the proposed incremental activities lead to adaptation which reduces vulnerability, builds adaptive capacity, and increases resilience to climate change?	
6) global environmental benefits (GEF trust fund) and/or adaptation benefits (LDCF/SCCF)	Are the benefits truly global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits, and are they measurable?	Yes, the global environmental benefits stated are valid. As the project is developed, STAP recommends defining further the landscape management activities, including the SLM and SFM activities that will contribute to land productivity across the four sites. Currently, these SLM activities do not appear to be defined in the proposal. Similarly, it would be valuable for the

		<p>project to detail the biodiversity conservation activities that will help improve species conservation in the three selected protected area sites. Providing further details on SLM, SFM, and species conservation will help balance the afforestation and fire management activities described in component 2 and component 3. To this end the STAP strongly recommends the project proponents to become acquainted with the Scientific Conceptual Framework of land degradation neutrality and the Guidelines for LDN interventions within GEF funded projects .</p>
	<p>Is the scale of projected benefits both plausible and compelling in relation to the proposed investment?</p>	<p>Possibly. Recommend developing a separate theory of change on scaling to achieve the project’s goal of “supporting the country’s transformational agenda to achieve greater environmental and economic security”. Refer to point #7 below for further advice on scaling.</p>
	<p>Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits explicitly defined?</p>	<p>Yes, the global environmental benefits are defined.</p>
	<p>Are indicators, or methodologies, provided to demonstrate how the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits will be measured and monitored during project implementation?</p>	<p>Core indicators are provided on protected areas under improved management, area of land restored, area of landscape under improved practices, and areas of landscape under sustainable land management in production systems.</p> <p>ExAct was used to calculate GHG emissions from agricultural systems (maize and beans). The project team might also consider the UNCCD’s SPI methodology to calculate the carbon benefits. Additionally, the project could usefully identify metrics for landscape management, which target environmental and social benefits. Metrics should be specific to the landscape context encompassing the monitoring and evaluation of agricultural production, biodiversity conservation, social and institutional variables (activities affiliated with components 1, 2, and 3).</p>

		<p>It also would beneficially for stakeholders to identify trade-offs and synergies in their respective land use plans between sustainable land management, biodiversity conservation, and other social benefits. Trade-offs and synergies will be better managed if they are identified in the design of land use plans. STAP's guidelines on LDN would usefully assist in developing land use plans bearing in mind trade-offs related to LDN. STAP notes that Component 2 needs to include an assessment of 'land potential' (see LDN guidelines).</p>
	<p>What activities will be implemented to increase the project's resilience to climate change?</p>	<p>Disaster risk and management plans will be developed for certain sites. Although STAP welcomes this effort, it suggests better framing and the application of the GEF guidelines for climate change screening to ensure activities proposed will decrease vulnerability to climate change and increase resilience of people and the landscapes.</p>
<p>7) innovative, sustainability and potential for scaling-up</p>	<p>Is the project innovative, for example, in its design, method of financing, technology, business model, policy, monitoring and evaluation, or learning?</p>	<p>The project is innovative within its context – that is, building capacity to design and implement landscape approaches for land and forest management, and biodiversity conservation. The project could, however, apply further innovation in the design of activities leading to expected outputs and outcomes. The STAP suggests review of literature and past projects that have been led in the region, pursuing similar outputs and outcomes. Some examples of ideas that are innovative, have been applied in the region and are not mentioned in this PIF: co-operated agribusiness; cooperative public and private partnerships. Science-based evidence also exists for other innovative ways to achieve LDN while conserving biodiversity and enhancing livelihoods: market-based instruments for LDN, Indigenous Protected Areas, community-based management of national parks. The aforementioned instruments are mentioned as example of interventions that can avoid, reduce or</p>

		<p>reverse land degradation (see the LDN Conceptual framework for more guidance). STAP wishes to note that while a multi-sectoral approach can be seen innovative, the LDN conceptual framework ‘expects’ that interventions be multi-sectoral.</p> <p>Lastly, in regard to innovation, STAP recommends the PPG phase conducts context analysis around education and preferred means of women and youth to access materials for learning and capacity building. The PIF states <i>“Innovation through use of audio-visual, social media and interactive materials on conservation issues for education, awareness and advocacy will be developed, involving community-based organizations and building their capacities to reach out to the communities.”</i></p> <p>However, these means may not be suitable to the context (e.g. what is the internet capability, do women use social media, do they have access to smartphone or other type of devices that can cater for these audio-visuals proposed?)</p>
	<p>Is there a clearly-articulated vision of how the innovation will be scaled-up, for example, over time, across geographies, among institutional actors?</p>	<p>The project could usefully develop a separate theory of change on scaling to achieve its ultimate goal of “supporting the country’s transformational agenda to achieve greater environmental and economic security”.</p> <p>Developing a theory of change for transformation involves developing credible causal pathways that address scaling – including its barriers and enablers. Scaling often will involve multiple forms of innovation and alignment between local socio-cultural needs and values and global environmental outcomes. The project team should be cognizant, therefore, of the barriers and enablers, for scaling focused on social-cultural values, needs, and rules. Refer to STAP’s advice on transformation (upcoming as a paper to GEF council in June 2021) and theory of change primer.</p>

	Will incremental adaptation be required, or more fundamental transformational change to achieve long term sustainability?	It is likely that both, incremental, and transformational, change will be required to maintain resilience of the targeted social-ecological systems. Suggest using the theory of change to generate knowledge and learning by monitoring the outcomes while looking for opportunities to adapt (incremental change) or transform more fundamentally its pathway.
1b. Project Map and Coordinates. Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place.		The PIF includes several maps of the Mbuluzi river basin. One of the maps possibly focuses on the target sites, but this is unclear. Suggest providing a better maps of the target sites and their land uses in the final project document. STAP's advice on the use of earth observation might also be useful to the project team as land use plans are developed.
2. Stakeholders. Select the stakeholders that have participated in consultations during the project identification phase: Indigenous people and local communities; Civil society organizations; Private sector entities. If none of the above, please explain why. In addition, provide indicative information on how stakeholders, including civil society and indigenous peoples, will be engaged in the project preparation, and their respective roles and means of engagement.	Have all the key relevant stakeholders been identified to cover the complexity of the problem, and project implementation barriers?	Yes. It would be good to revisit the stakeholders as the projects is designed and developed. This will ensure a stakeholder engagement process that is ongoing and linked to the project needs. During the consultation processes, STAP highly recommends for the project activities to be formulated based on stakeholders' socio-cultural values and needs. Paying close attention to the socio-cultural context and values during the project design and implementation will assist in understanding stakeholders' motivations for behavioral change. Furthermore, the project proponents should aim to build trust and legitimacy during the stakeholder engagement process. Such efforts establish relationships that facilitate the uptake of behavioral change interventions, which are linked to scaling and transformational change. STAP's advice on behavioral change would be useful to consider during stakeholder consultations.
	What are the stakeholders' roles, and how will their combined roles contribute to robust project design, to	Please address question to the left during the project design.

	achieving global environmental outcomes, and to lessons learned and knowledge?	
<p>3. Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. Please briefly include below any gender dimensions relevant to the project, and any plans to address gender in project design (e.g. gender analysis). Does the project expect to include any gender-responsive measures to address gender gaps or promote gender equality and women empowerment? Yes/no/tbd.</p> <p>If possible, indicate in which results area(s) the project is expected to contribute to gender equality: access to and control over resources; participation and decision-making; and/or economic benefits or services.</p> <p>Will the project’s results framework or logical framework include gender-sensitive indicators? yes/no/tbd</p>	<p>Have gender differentiated risks and opportunities been identified, and were preliminary response measures described that would address these differences?</p>	<p>Yes. The PIF identifies the gendered differentiated risks and opportunities, along with preliminary response measures. As the project is developed, STAP recommends paying close attention to power dynamics, and other social factors (e.g. culture, ethnicity, age) influencing interactions between men and women within the stakeholder group.</p> <p>The STAP recommends the project team consider experiences on women empowerment reported in: Kunene, N. A. "<u>The role of rural development projects on women empowerment in Eswatini: a case study of the Lower Usuthu Development Project (Lusip) Phase 1.</u>" PhD diss., University of the Free State, 2020.</p> <p>And for better inclusion of youth: Okwusi, M. C. "Youths attitude to rural development projects in Ogba communities of Rivers state, Nigeria." <i>Global Approaches to Extension Practice: A Journal of Agricultural Extension</i> 4, no. 1 (2008): 11-19.</p> <p>And these publications as reference for participatory planning in general: Musyoki, Benjamin Mang'atu, John Bosco Kisimbii, and Dorothy Ndunge Kyalo. "Participatory Project Planning Approaches: Reflections from Community Development Initiatives in Low Resourced Countries." <i>Journal of Entrepreneurship & Project management</i> 4, no. 5 (2020): 51-67.</p> <p>Dlamini, Marietta P., Welcome M. Mkhalihi, and Sibusiso T. Mbingo. "<u>Impact of Microprojects Program on Poverty Alleviation in Rural and Peri-urban Eswatini/Swaziland.</u>" <i>Asian Journal of</i></p>

		Agricultural Extension, Economics & Sociology (2019): 1-10.
	Do gender considerations hinder full participation of an important stakeholder group (or groups)? If so, how will these obstacles be addressed?	Please address question to the left during the project design.
5. Risks. Indicate risks, including climate change, potential social and environmental risks that might prevent the project objectives from being achieved, and, if possible, propose measures that address these risks to be further developed during the project design	<p>Are the identified risks valid and comprehensive? Are the risks specifically for things outside the project's control? Are there social and environmental risks which could affect the project?</p> <p>For climate risk, and climate resilience measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the project's objectives or outputs be affected by climate risks over the period 2020 to 2050, and have the impact of these risks been addressed adequately? • Has the sensitivity to climate change, and its impacts, been assessed? • Have resilience practices and measures to address projected climate risks and impacts been considered? How will these be dealt with? • What technical and institutional capacity, and information, will be needed to address climate risks and resilience enhancement measures? 	<p>The risks are identified in the PIF along with mitigation responses. STAP recommends paying close attention to climate variability (mentioned as natural hazards in the risk section), given the incidence and extent of drought in the country, and target sites.</p> <p>In addition to considering the questions stated on the left during project design and implementation, STAP suggests developing two, or three, alternative pathways. This scenario planning will help the project manage and respond to long-term drivers, such as drought, economic slow-down, and others (e.g. COVID, AIDS). Refer to STAP's advice on theory of change and durability for assistance on scenario planning. The following paper also may be useful for thinking about scenario planning: Moallemi, E. A., et al. "Evaluating Participatory Modeling Methods for Co-creating Pathways to Sustainability." Earth's Future 9.3 (2021): e2020EF001843.</p>
6. Coordination. Outline the coordination with other relevant GEF-financed and other related initiatives	Are the project proponents tapping into relevant knowledge and learning generated by other projects, including GEF projects?	Yes. However, STAP recommends to continue tapping into relevant knowledge from other non-GEF funded projects in the area (e.g. African Dev Bank, ILRI, etc).
	Is there adequate recognition of previous projects and the learning derived from them?	Partly. Lessons learned from some initiatives are described, but not for others. Suggest adding a table listing the projects, specifying the lessons, and how these lessons will inform the design of this project.
	Have specific lessons learned from previous projects been cited?	See above.
	How have these lessons informed the project's formulation?	See above.

	Is there an adequate mechanism to feed the lessons learned from earlier projects into this project, and to share lessons learned from it into future projects?	Yes, component 4 and the theory of change.
8. Knowledge management. Outline the “Knowledge Management Approach” for the project, and how it will contribute to the project’s overall impact, including plans to learn from relevant projects, initiatives and evaluations.	What overall approach will be taken, and what knowledge management indicators and metrics will be used?	<p>The project will rely on South-South cooperation, systematic analysis of lessons learned from past projects for sharing information, and scaling results.</p> <p>STAP recommends connecting component 4 on monitoring to the theory of change. This will ensure that the theory of change is adapted according to the knowledge and learning gained during monitoring and evaluation.</p> <p>STAP recommends reviewing the budget to ensure that the less than 10% of the funding requested is enough to ensure KM that is sustainable overtime.</p> <p>STAP recommends explicit plan in the PPG to show how the knowledge generated will be shared with the community beyond Eswatini (e.g. using the WOCAT as a repository of best practice in SLM that empower women and youth in projects with objectives like the ones proposed in this PIF).</p>
	What plans are proposed for sharing, disseminating and scaling-up results, lessons and experience?	<p>Suggest describing plans for disseminating results and lessons. This appears to be missing in the PIF.</p> <p>For scaling, suggest referring to the advice described above on this topic.</p>

Notes

STAP advisory response	Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed
<p>1. Concur</p>	<p>STAP acknowledges that on scientific or technical grounds the concept has merit. The proponent is invited to approach STAP for advice at any time during the development of the project brief prior to submission for CEO endorsement.</p>
	<p>* In cases where the STAP acknowledges the project has merit on scientific and technical grounds, the STAP will recognize this in the screen by stating that <i>“STAP is satisfied with the scientific and technical quality of the proposal and encourages the proponent to develop it with same rigor. At any time during the development of the project, the proponent is invited to approach STAP to consult on the design.”</i></p>
<p>2. Minor issues to be considered during project design</p>	<p>STAP has identified specific scientific /technical suggestions or opportunities that should be discussed with the project proponent as early as possible during development of the project brief. The proponent may wish to:</p>
	<p>(i) Open a dialogue with STAP regarding the technical and/or scientific issues raised;</p>
	<p>(ii) Set a review point at an early stage during project development, and possibly agreeing to terms of reference for an independent expert to be appointed to conduct this review.</p>
	<p>The proponent should provide a report of the action agreed and taken, at the time of submission of the full project brief for CEO endorsement.</p>

<p>3. Major issues to be considered during project design</p>	<p>STAP proposes significant improvements or has concerns on the grounds of specified major scientific/technical methodological issues, barriers, or omissions in the project concept. If STAP provides this advisory response, a full explanation would also be provided. The proponent is strongly encouraged to:</p>
	<p>(i) Open a dialogue with STAP regarding the technical and/or scientific issues raised; (ii) Set a review point at an early stage during project development including an independent expert as required. The proponent should provide a report of the action agreed and taken, at the time of submission of the full project brief for CEO endorsement.</p>