

## STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

|                   |                                                                                                                                         |
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| GEF ID            | 12066                                                                                                                                   |
| Project title     | Accelerating Community-Led Actions for Ecosystem Resilience and Biodiversity Conservation Through Integrated Landscape Management (ACT) |
| Date of screen    | 21 May 2026                                                                                                                             |
| STAP Panel Member | Ermias Betemariam                                                                                                                       |
| STAP Secretariat  | Geetha Nayak                                                                                                                            |

### 1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

The project is well-designed, with a clear and systems-based approach to addressing key drivers of forest degradation, including forest fires, invasive species, unsustainable land use, and governance gaps. It presents a strong Theory of Change, a well-articulated baseline, and clearly differentiated best-case and realistic scenarios, with well-structured project components focused on governance strengthening, community-led implementation, and knowledge management. While the design is robust, STAP notes that greater clarity is needed on the operationalization of cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms for mainstreaming and the integration of ILM approaches, including linkages to existing planning instruments and budgetary processes, and especially within existing protected area management and institutional frameworks to ensure feasibility, complementarity, and long-term sustainability.

*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**
- ☐ 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.

This is a well-designed project with a clear **objective** on addressing the key drivers of forest loss and degradation such as forest fires, invasive species, unsustainable land use, and weak governance through community-led initiatives. The core issues to be addressed through this project are analysed in **systems context**, for example, forest fires are amplified as a result of human-ignited burning, changing climate conditions, spread of invasive species, forest degradation etc., and how these interact to cause a reinforcing feedback loop of increasing fuel loads, higher fire frequency and intensity, further ecosystem degradation, and growing livelihood vulnerability.

The **Theory of Change** is well-articulated with linkages to levers of transformation to deliver durable and scalable GEBs.

The **business-as-usual, best-case, and realistic scenarios** are presented succinctly and clearly, illustrating plausible trajectories under different levels of intervention. In particular, the contrast between a business-as-usual and a transformational ILM scenario effectively highlights the risks of inaction and the potential gains from ILM scale-up. The proposal also provides a strong articulation of **key barriers** such as fragmented governance, *limited cross-sector coordination*, and insufficient community engagement alongside **enabling conditions**, including existing policy frameworks, community institutions, and financing mechanisms, thereby grounding the analysis in both cost of inaction and attainable results through GEF investments. A clear,

supported **baseline** is presented, detailing increasing pressure from forest fires, invasive species, land degradation, and livelihood pressures in target landscapes lead to ecosystem degradation.

Overall, the **project components** are well-designed. However, there is a practical concern regarding the operationalization of the project component that aims to move beyond *single-threat planning and establish a state-led, cross-sectoral ILM architecture in Jharkhand and Uttarakhand*. The proposal envisages multi-stakeholder Working Groups co-chaired by the Forest Department and state-level planning or finance departments, with participation from agriculture, rural development, mining, energy, infrastructure, and community institutions. This is particularly relevant in light of Barrier 2 identified in the proposal that these sectors typically operate in silos, planning and budgeting in parallel, often resulting in actions that inadvertently contribute to further landscape degradation.

In this context, *the proposal could further clarify how such cross-sectoral coordination will be effectively operationalized in practice at PPG stage*. Specifically, the aspect as to how the Forest Department will lead or sustain this coordination when, in many cases, convening authority and inter-departmental coordination functions are institutionally anchored at the district administration level (e.g., District Collectorates). Greater clarity on the mechanisms for alignment between sectoral mandates, decision-making authority, and existing administrative structures would strengthen the feasibility of this otherwise well-conceived approach.

Another aspect relates to the ILM interventions proposed within protected areas. Across the three protected areas (PAs), the project will target management improvements across 167,899 ha of critical PA landscapes, with key interventions focusing on the participatory implementation of ILM-based restoration and conservation strategies to address drivers of biodiversity loss and degradation and enhance ecosystem and community resilience. However, it would be useful to further clarify how GEF investment will complement existing Forest Department mandates and financing. Management of National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries typically falls under the jurisdiction of the Forest Department, guided by approved management plans and supported through dedicated budgetary allocations. In this context, there is a need for clearer articulation of how the proposed participatory approaches and ILM interventions will be integrated within these statutory frameworks. Specifically, greater detail on how roles, responsibilities, and financing streams will be aligned so as to complement rather than duplicate existing efforts and how collaboration with established institutional arrangements will be operationalized. The PPG may also draw on STAP guidance on [policy coherence](#), and [transformation pathways](#) to sharpen the institutionalization and scaling logic.

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

- Further clarify how the proposed ILM architecture will be operationalized and sustained beyond the project duration, including which institutional entity will anchor it (e.g., Forest Department, planning/finance departments, or multi-sector platforms), and how it will be integrated into regular budgeting and planning processes of participating agencies to ensure its continuity beyond GEF support.
- Since the project includes interventions within protected areas, clearly articulate how ILM strategies will interface with existing PA management frameworks, including whether and how these approaches will be incorporated into statutory management plans (e.g., Wildlife Sanctuary Management Plans).
- Given that the project already proposes mainstreaming ILM strategies into key state instruments (e.g., SBSAPs, forest working plans, and State Action Plans on Forest Fire Prevention), clarify whether a similar mainstreaming approach will be extended to PA-level management plans to ensure alignment across planning frameworks; if so, highlight this as a key transformational outcome of the project demonstrating institutionalization and scalability across protected areas in India.

- Strengthen the policy coherence and convergence-finance pathway by clarifying how ILM strategies will align mandates, decision-making authority and implementation responsibilities across forest, agriculture, rural development, infrastructure, disaster-risk management and community institutions, including how CAMPA, Green India Mission, NRLM and CSR resources will be sequenced and budget-tagged
- Strengthen the results framework and monitoring plan so that plan adoption, hectares under improved management, livelihood outputs and knowledge products are linked to measurable outcomes, including fire frequency/severity or burned area, invasive-species cover, native regeneration, erosion or land-productivity trends, corridor functionality, carbon benefits and household livelihood resilience.
- Consider key STAP resources, especially Framing policy coherence for the GEF, and Achieving transformation through GEF investments.

## 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.)