STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	**11718**
Project title	**Revitalizing Ecosystems for Sustainable Agriculture and Resilience in Fiji (RESAR)**
Date of screen	**November 26, 2024**
STAP Panel Member	**Ermias Betemariam**
STAP Secretariat	**Guadalupe Duron**

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

The project aims to generate global environmental benefits and improve communities' resilience to climate change by conserving biodiversity and improving land management. STAP is pleased to see a business model that connects agriculture and GEBs to tourism within their social-ecological system. Ensuring that the project's activities align with national climate strategies will help institutionalize climate resilience at the policy level and increase the likelihood of sustained impacts beyond the project's duration.

STAP notes the project developers recognize that integrated approaches are essential to achieving climate resilience, the various GEBs, and local benefits. However, the project could usefully apply an explicit integrated framework to organize the links between the various components, which rely on cross-sectoral coordination, different types of stakeholders (characterized by different motivations, environmental and social concerns), public-private partnerships, and policy coherence.

STAP is also highly concerned that climate change trends and projections are not extensively built into the project design. Fiji, including the project site, Vanua Levu, is highly vulnerable to climate change risks. STAP strongly recommends that Fiji and IFAD account for a high climate risk rating, and develop the project accordingly. This includes articulating future narratives to help identify robust interventions that are more likely to result in enduring outcomes and improve the communities' resilience.

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.

Overall, the project rationale could be more logically structured. For example, it is commendable that the PIF defines a project goal supporting GEBs and two development objectives on pre-requisite co-benefits necessary for GEBs. However, their descriptions are embedded much later in the PIF, although it would be more logical if the project led off with this information. In addition, the rationale can be further supported by better linking this project to the current investment landscape – GEF and non-GEF projects. The rationale section lists these ongoing and past projects without articulating how this IFAD project will leverage past lessons and opportunities from them.

STAP notes the rationale describes the problem (loss of biodiversity and ecosystem degradation) and the drivers of environmental degradation (poor market viability and increased pressure on natural resources from

increased tourism, agriculture, and mining). A better look into the interaction between these drivers (e.g., poor market viability for kava could result in a change of livelihoods that embraces mining, which then leads to deforestation and soil erosion) will help identify robust interventions that lead to durable outcomes. This analysis of drivers and trends will be necessary to develop simple narratives about the future. In this regard, STAP notes that climate change does not solidly form part of the project rationale, even though Fiji is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts.

The project description comes across as slightly disjointed. This may result from the absence of an integrated framework that joins the reasoning between the various cross-sectoral interventions between biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management, public-private partnerships, and policy coherence. Future narratives also need to be a central feature of the project description. As written, climate risks (droughts and floods) threaten agriculture productivity . Other context risks (e.g. socioeconomic, weak policy coherence) also need to be addressed more explicitly in the project design, including the theory of change. Additional risks and mitigation measures that occur after the project design should be part of the risk table. The same applies to innovation risk. Tracking the progress of risks, particularly innovation risks, will need to be linked to knowledge management, which is an essential feature of the project as it will signal when adaptive management is needed.

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

Below, STAP proposes recommendations to strengthen the project:

1. To strengthen the project rationale, STAP proposes describing how the project will link to ongoing and past initiatives, particularly to leverage knowledge and learning.
2. Climate change risks and trends should be a central feature of the project. Climate trends and projections should inform the integrated management plan for land and forests (component 1), better land management and biodiversity practices (component 2), value chain and agribusiness development (component 3), and knowledge management plans (component 4). STAP recommends undertaking a robust climate risk assessment and embedding the results throughout the project design. The World Bank's climate risk screening is recommended.
3. Because Fiji is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, has an economy that is highly dependent on connecting to agricultural markets (83% of the population depends on agriculture), faces increased pressure on its natural resources from tourism, agricultural expansion and mining, and possibly other factors, STAP recommends developing simple narratives during the project design to assess the key interactions between drivers, and help identify interventions that are robust to negative change. STAP elaborates on how to design projects relying on future narratives in this advisory document.
4. The theory of change can be strengthened in several ways, so it serves as a monitoring and knowledge management tool and articulates the project logic. This includes:
    a. Link assumptions to specific outcomes.
    b. Identify risks, such as risks associated with meeting an assumption (e.g. what are the potential risks associated with Fiji being a financially viable option for private agribusiness investors – which of these innovation risks can be captured in the theory of change, and which risks are residual and need to be listed in the risk table)
    c. Articulate the logic associated with the theory of change. Currently, this logic narrative is missing.
    d. Build in social aspects that underpin the logic – such as gender norms associated with land management practices, adoption of green technologies, or measures that reduce sensitivity to flooding, and drought (e.g. soil and water conservation practices new to the community).

Refer to Leimona, B. et al for a further look into how values and norms are integral to socioecological systems.

5. Establish a robust baseline to measure and track additionality effectively. As currently stated, incremental reasoning relies on several assumptions that need to be validated (e.g., integrated approaches applied in the project will lead to sustainable development, biodiversity conservation, and climate-resilient livelihoods, and strategic partnerships will lead to lasting positive impacts on the environment and people).
6. When completing the risk table, do not repeat risks that should have been accounted for in the project design – for example, climate risks, the examples provided under environmental and social risks, and political and governance risks. Essentially, the current set of context risks in the risk table should form part of the project design. The risk table should be used to address the risks that may still occur despite good project design and the appropriate mitigation measures.Refer to STAP's upcoming information note on "clarifying risk in GEF projects,"which will be listed in the publication section of STAP's website.
7. A few more issues related to risk:
    a. It is highly unlikely that residual climate risks will be moderate. According to future projections (in the next decade or even for 2050), Fiji is highly vulnerable to sea level rise, flood impact, and increased temperatures which can influence drought. See: https://horizons.hdr.undp.org/#/risk/rcp45/FJI. As stated above, design the project accounting for climate risk and it is more likely to rely on residual climate risks being high.
    b. Recommend assessing how, and whether, progress has been made in addressing risks, or whether new ones have arisen, in the knowledge management plan. The plan should focus on learning strategies to assess the need for adaptive management and much less on communication and knowledge products, which is the current focus.
    c. Several innovation risks depend on scaling, such as crowding in private-public investment, and scaling the effects of sustainable agriculture for climate mitigation and climate adaptation benefits. STAP recommends addressing these innovations in the project design, ideally through a separate theory of change on scaling.
8. Conservation alongside restoration efforts is essential to sustain REDD+-related Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) targets through forest management. While restoration focuses on rehabilitating degraded ecosystems, conservation ensures the protection and sustainable management of existing forests. This dual approach is critical for achieving Fiji's NDCs, as it helps maintain carbon stocks, preserve biodiversity, and enhance the resilience of forest ecosystems.
9. Suggest specifying further interventions that will help mitigate invasive species. Currently, the proposal does not mention interventions to address this issue, despite being recognized as a key threat to biodiversity (see component 2).
10. STAP welcomes the continuation of stakeholder consultations during the project implementation phase. During this stakeholder process, the project developers are encouraged to embrace Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and marginalized groups in decision-making processes to ensure broad ownership and sustainability. This should include participatory governance approaches that allow for continuous stakeholders' feedback and input into the project's interventions.
11. In addition to technical training for farmers and producers, STAP recommends explicitly building the capacities of local institutions (e.g., local government and community organizations) to support long-term sustainability and ensure knowledge transfer. This should include strengthening monitoring, reporting, and evaluation (M&E) systems at the local level (suggestion for component 4), which can track the project's environmental and socio-economic impacts.
12. A minor point: Is restoring 3,250 ha of land reasonable for the project? It seems small.

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.

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.)