

## STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	12277
Project title	Conservation of Globally Significant Biodiversity of the Ulu Jelai - Fraser's Hill Watershed, Malaysia, through an Integrated Watershed Approach
Date of screen	May 19, 2026
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### 1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP welcomes Malaysia's project, "Conservation of Globally Significant Biodiversity of the Ulu Jelai - Fraser's Hill Watershed, Malaysia, through an Integrated Watershed Approach". This is an important project in a globally significant biodiversity area. The project aims to safeguard the biodiversity of the Ulu Jelai-Fraser's Hill landscape and enhance the livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples. The project design is based on a robust theory of change, with attention to innovation and scaling.

The project recognizes Indigenous Peoples' right to self determination and this is reflected throughout the project design. The project also will mainstream gender across components by ensuring ≥50% women (including Orang Asli women) co-create, curate, and lead the central hub for biodiversity data, standards and research, by embedding sex-disaggregated Key Performance Indicators, accessible formats/scheduling, women-focused mentorship and micro-grants, and governance quotas in the charter for the National Biodiversity Centre.

STAP commends the project team and encourages them to continue designing and implementing the project with the same rigor as the PIF.

*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\*

- X 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.

The project description and rationale describe Malaysia's globally significant biodiversity at a national level and also in the targeted Ulu Jelai-Fraser's Hill watershed. Peninsular Malaysia's forests, including those in the project area, are part of the Sundaland Global Biodiversity Hotspot, emphasizing the importance of the Ulu Jelai-Fraser's Hill landscape as a megadiverse ecosystem with significant global conservation value. The main threats to biodiversity in the project area include: (1) deforestation and habitat fragmentation; (2) poaching and illegal wildlife trade; (3) human wildlife conflict; and (4) climate change.

The project will address these threats through four components: (1) Integrated landscape planning (including a spatial plan) and area-based conservation of biodiversity; (2) wildlife corridor/habitat restoration, managing human-wildlife conflict and IPLC empowerment through green enterprises; (3) awareness and knowledge management; and (4) monitoring and evaluation. The proponents also emphasize the Orang Asli (Indigenous)

communities as the main population in the project site. Details about the sociocultural traits of the four Indigenous groups, Sema, Temiar, Mendriq, and Batek, and their dependence on natural resources for livelihoods are provided, including in the barrier descriptions, which highlight their governance limitations over conservation areas.

STAP commends the proponents on developing a cohesive and technically sound project design. The theory of change is well structured, by logical pathways from barriers to outputs and outcomes. STAP is particularly pleased with the description of the logic underpinning the theory of change. In this regard, STAP notes that several barriers are associated with the second pathway, which is helpful for analyzing whether the pathway is necessary and sufficient for achieving biodiversity conservation. The assumptions are clearly stated per pathway, which is also welcome. Many of the issues raised in the assumptions can also be addressed in the design to reduce residual risks. STAP is also pleased to see the GEF-8 levers for change clearly identified in each pathway, some of which are associated with the innovation the project will pursue to be transformative. In addition, STAP welcomes the descriptions of four future narratives grounded in a robust analysis of the interactions among key drivers (e.g., climate change, population pressure, weak governance).

STAP also appreciates the project's approach to strengthening the agency of Indigenous Peoples. For activities that may affect Orang Asli communities as rights-holders, the project will apply Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), using self-identified community decision-making structures and processes, rather than externally imposed mechanisms. The project also recognizes the value of traditional ecological knowledge in the context of corridor and watershed stewardship, e.g., knowledge of seasonal forest foods and tubers, medicinal plants, wildlife behavior and movement routes, saltlicks/fruited trees, and practical tracking skills. Traditional knowledge will be integrated with technology, e.g., Orang Asli ranger patrol models describe how Indigenous patrollers combine traditional rainforest knowledge with GPS mapping and apps for patrol/reporting systems, thereby improving detection and response to threats such as snares and illegal entry.

Below, STAP offers some minor recommendations to further improve an already strong project design.

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

STAP has only a few minor recommendations, intended to further strengthen the project:

1. The project will involve Indigenous Peoples, known as Orang Asli, in Malaysia. Four Indigenous groups in the project area will participate: Sema, Temiar, Mendriq, Batek. It would be useful to have a better description of these groups, including of sociocultural norms and values, as well as the gender and power dynamics. Accounting for social structures of these groups will help understand communities' relationships with biodiversity and nature, and identify the incentives most likely to lead to adopting certain practices or innovations, and empower communities. The proponents may want to refer to [STAP's Information Note on Social Resilience for System Transformation](#).
2. STAP is pleased to see that the project design recognizes climate change as a threat multiplier in the project area and that it is considered as part of the future narratives. Further, the project recognizes that warmer temperatures and shifting isotherms are already causing turnover in ecological communities, including upslope displacement of montane birds. The proponents recognize the importance of maintaining and restoring forest corridors, in the context of intensifying and erratic rainfall events, which increase risks of landslides and erosion, impacting both people and nature. In the context of the spatial plan that will be developed for the watershed, STAP encourages the project proponents to think beyond restoring specific corridors, but also to consider the overall permeability of the entire landscape to biodiversity. In this regard STAP's information note on [considerations for biodiversity conservation in the Anthropocene](#), especially the section on large landscape mosaics. The examples from Brazil and South Africa seem potentially relevant to the Ulu Jelai-Fraser's Hill context.

3. The project proponents may want to consider reframing human wildlife conflict as promoting management of human wildlife coexistence. The GEF Global Wildlife Program has found that expressing the positive side of this issue can lead to more positive outcomes.
4. The project hints at potential conflicts arising from competing land uses – conservation, agriculture, forestry, and mining of rare-earth elements – the latter of which puts environmental and economic objectives potentially at odds. Further discussion of this conflict might be needed when the Orang Asli communities and other local communities work with the project team to design the project so that this risk is accounted for in the project interventions, and mitigation responses are defined.

## 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.)