

REVISED STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE, OCTOBER 2022

GEF ID	11046
Project title	Armenia Integrated Resilient Landscape Improvement Project (AIR LIP)
Date of screen	08 November 2022
STAP Panel Member	John Donaldson
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

This project proposal provides a good description of the situation in Armenia and the issues it aims to tackle. It also includes a project structure, which presents a couple of incongruencies but is overall acceptable.

The "Project Outline" section in the PIF is incomplete and does not include the "project rationale" and "project description" sub-sections. The WB also submitted a Project Information Document (PID) form, which provided additional information on the project approach, components structure and results, as well as a Theory of Change (ToC) and risk framework. While most of the relevant information is contained in the two documents, the dual system is not ideal for effective screening of projects.

In general, the proposal makes a strong case for restoring and managing forests, pastures and wetlands and the proposed integrated approach, together with an ecosystem-based approach to restoration, reflects a sound technical basis. The proposal provided good detail on some of the actions but was not always clear on the goals and objectives of the restoration activities, i.e. whether it was intended to restore biodiversity to some level, increase productivity or function, or provide additional resources to communities. These are mentioned generically but it would help to tease them out in project documents so that the restoration activities can be more closely tied to the anticipated global environmental benefits.

Additional comments and recommendations have been provided below.

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.

The PIF and PID combined provide an extensive description of the baseline situation in Armenia, which includes a comprehensive geographical profile, as well as a sectoral and institutional context and places the problem and issues to be addressed in the wider country context. This description also provides elements of the wider system that affects the country's landscapes and includes economic development, climate change, sociocultural and political factors.

The project rationale is also solid and builds upon the description of the baseline issues, as well as a comprehensive assessment, commissioned by the World Bank and analytical case studies from an ongoing

program (EU4Environment). The project follows an integrated approach, which combines the restoration and sustainable management of a combination of different landscapes that include forests, pastures, and wetlands.

The project structure, which is articulated through the project components, follows a sound logic, which comprises interventions across three main areas: policy development and capacity building; landscape restoration, conservation, and management; and community forestry and livelihoods. The PID provides a ToC, which is underpinned by a sound logic but is also quite basic and superficial, and it is only broadly aligned with the components structure presented in the same document. For example, the TOC does not show how the logic results in better GEBs; it refers only to “improved management” of forests, pastures, and wetlands. Nor does it address assumptions and tradeoffs, which in this case can be important when biodiversity conservation, productivity and resource use may not afford a win-win outcome.

Neither the PIF nor the PID indicate how uncertain futures could unfold or provide alternative scenarios. The proposal also provided little evidence to explain how the project will be insulated or made resilient to possible future changes. The project does address the current institutional context and aims to make changes in that area but does not address behavioral change at the grassroots or community level.

The PIF does include a stakeholder engagement section, but this is quite limited and covers only institutional stakeholders. The PIF also mentions that local communities and civil society organizations have not been consulted yet and that the Project Preparation Grant stage will be used to undertake extensive consultation, although no further details are provided about the intended list of relevant stakeholders other than these will satisfy the requirements set under the World Bank Environmental and Social Framework.

We could not find any specific evidence in the project documents provided of a strategy or plan to generate, manage and exchange knowledge, although the PID mentions that the project will hire international experts and will provide training at all stages of project implementation to ensure effective knowledge transfer.

The PID included a section on risk, but it was quite broad and only identified two categories of risk. This provided a rather generic list and description of mitigation measures, which was not very specific and included a number of high level measures that did not clearly explain how risks will be effectively mitigated e.g: focused capacity development, contracting of international expertise and focusing within agreed landscapes with government and donor agencies.

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

This proposal did not really follow the new PIF format and template closely, nor did it provide all the information required under the STAP screening guidelines. The documentation provided consisted of two separate documents, a PIF and a PID, which, as described above, presented a number of weaknesses.

STAP recommends the following changes and improvements:

1. The project design should aim to submit one document instead of two separate ones and should try to follow the instructions provided in the new PIF template, which has been recently revised and streamlined to reduce the burden on project designers and reviewers alike;
2. The project design team should try to follow the STAP screening guidelines, which provide a revised streamlined overview of the elements that will be sought during the screening process and will determine the assessment and scoring of the proposal;

3. The ToC should be expanded and strengthened by including a more comprehensive list of assumptions as well as barriers and enablers in addition to a more systematic list of outputs and outcomes;
4. The stakeholder engagement section of the proposal should be expanded to include a more detailed list of stakeholders that will be consulted during the next phase of project design, as well as (at least) an outline of the role these will play and how any underlying power dynamics will be addressed;
5. The proposal should also include a more detailed knowledge management plan that at the very least provides some details of how the project will generate, manage, and exchange knowledge in practice;
6. The risk section should be strengthened and expanded to provide a more detailed description of the risk that goes beyond the Climate and Disaster Risk Screening Report and includes all categories of risk (e.g. institutional, financial, technical, operational, fiduciary etc.) and an explanation of how these will be monitored, managed and mitigated.

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.

*categories under review, subject to future revision

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.)