STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	**11987**
Project title	**Harnessing Natural Capital - Unlocking Zimbabwe's Biodiversity Potential in the Sebungwe Landscape**
Date of screen	**May 22, 2026**
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP acknowledges Zimbabwe's project, "Harnessing Natural Capital - Unlocking Zimbabwe's Biodiversity Potential in the Sebungwe Landscape." The initiative aims to develop a bioeconomy in the Sebungwe region that promotes biodiversity conservation, enhances livelihoods, and strengthens the national economy. Achieving this objective will require a robust theory of change (TOC), consistently applied throughout project implementation, to monitor progress on innovation, a strong focus of the project.

Overall, the project lacks a coherent structure. STAP strongly recommends that greater attention be paid to developing a clear objective statement, including which elements of biodiversity are the focus, and a TOC that articulates a technically sound project logic. This should be based on a systems analysis. Additionally, STAP recommends that, in designing the project, attention should be paid to explicitly addressing challenges that could undermine it, especially climate change and the strong likelihood that it will affect tamarind and agroforestry value chains, as well as other agribusinesses supported by the project. Attention should also be paid to the potential unintended consequences of tamarind orchards for increasing human wildlife conflict with elephants, depending on where plantings are located in relation to wildlife corridors. As currently described, the project is unlikely to achieve the socioeconomic benefits on which the global environmental benefits depend.

For these reasons, and other points raised below, STAP rates this project as major. STAP discussed a summary of its concerns with UNDP and the GEF Secretariat during a virtual meeting. During the discussion, UNDP provided substantial responses on how it will strengthen the project by the CEO endorsement phase, which STAP welcomed. UNDP also indicated that they will provide a supplementary document articulating how they plan to strengthen the underlying systems analysis and the theory of change prior to starting work on the PPG. UNDP is also committed to consulting STAP on the CEO-endorsed document before its formal submission to the GEF secretariat to ensure that STAP's comments have been addressed. In addition, STAP reiterated to UNDP that it is welcome to approach STAP for advice at any point during the project development. STAP believes that if its advice provided below is followed, the project can be strengthened to deliver durable outcomes.

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
- □ X 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 rationale provides an initial, very brief description of biodiversity in Zimbabwe, but it is not framed in terms of its global significance. There is little characterization of biodiversity in the Sebungwe region. There is a brief overview of land ownership types (e.g., communal lands, protected areas, buffer zones) and the region's

socioeconomic context, which is described as being closely linked to the drivers of degradation. Communities' livelihoods depend on the natural resource base, inclusive of biodiversity, e.g., wildlife, which is threatened by population growth, the country's political collapse and the associated Fast Rack Land Reform policy, that has led to land-use change and increased pressure on protected area buffer zones. Climate change is also briefly mentioned as exacerbating the degradation of natural resources, mainly through water shortages. The project also describes human-wildlife conflicts associated with increased pressure on natural resources from both humans and animals.

A more thorough description and analysis of the system would help strengthen the project's logic and structure. Identifying the key drivers and their interactions more clearly would help structure the project (starting with the system's problem analysis) in a more logical manner. This includes accounting for the barriers in the problem analysis and considering how the different key drivers interact (climate change, population pressure, conflict), including in the future. On this point, the project appears to be missing a description of future narratives, which STAP considers essential for managing trends, such as climate change, and their potential impacts on biodiversity, ecosystems, and livelihoods.

Thus, STAP strongly encourages the project team to give greater consideration to the theory of change and its underlying logic as part of project design. As currently articulated, the theory of change is highly preliminary. Backward-mapping of impact pathways that demonstrate the logic linking the project objective, outcomes, outputs, and activities is missing. As a result, the reasoning behind the proposed components, particularly components 1 to 3, needs to be strengthened considerably. This includes comprehensively accounting for the prerequisite co-benefits (e.g., increased incomes) that will be required to achieve the proposed global environmental benefits for biodiversity and land. Accounting for challenges to the project logic and innovation risks (e.g., natural capital accounting) in the theory of change is also necessary to achieve the proposed global environmental outcomes. Thinking through this logic would also strengthen the project's baseline narrative and the additionality reasoning – and, ultimately, the identification of the global environmental benefits and the activities necessary to support them. As written, the description of global environmental benefits on page 32 is incoherent with the activities – for example, rangeland management is mentioned on page 32 and nowhere else.

Below, STAP offers recommendations on these issues.

3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions

STAP recommends addressing the following points during the project design to strengthen its technical soundness:

1. In the project rationale, provide citations to document to support the assertions regarding (i) the definition of wildlife conservation, and (ii) the suggested failures of the CAMPFIRE program, and the underlying reasons. Some of the challenges faced by CAMPFIRE include significant in-migration, socioeconomic shocks resulting from political crisis, economic collapse and fast-track land reform, the COVID-19 pandemic, and climate change (as noted in the document), including related flooding that damaged infrastructure such as roads. The lessons learned from CAMPFIRE are directly relevant to the design and implementation of the current project and STAP suggests that the proponents review the relevant literature, e.g., Mudzengi et al. 2020 and references therein. There also is an extensive literature on CAMPFIRE relating to principles and practice of community-based wildlife management, payments for ecosystem services, ensuring sustainable economic benefits, etc., and this literature should be reviewed.

2. The project description and assertions therein should also be supported with data and citations. It would be useful to include a map of the Sebungwe region, including locations of protected areas,

community lands, private lands, villages, key wildlife corridors, and other land uses, including agriculture.

3. Strengthen the description of the sociocultural norms and values, as well as the gender and power dynamics, and patterns of in-migration that influence the targeted area. The description of these social aspects should then be integrated into the theory of change. As the project states repeatedly, improving communities' livelihoods through biodiversity conservation and improved land management is a prerequisite for achieving the project objective. Achieving the project's target GEBs will also depend on reducing poaching and illegal wildlife trade, which are causing declines of wildlife populations. Accounting for social structures in the project design is therefore essential to understand communities' relationships with biodiversity and nature, identify the incentives needed to adopt certain practices or innovations, and to empower communities. Refer to STAP's Information Note on Social Resilience for System Transformation.

4. Climate change is a major global driver affecting Zimbabwe's livelihoods and the environment. STAP strongly recommends that the project team articulate in the project rationale how climate change is affecting and will continue to affect Zimbabwe – and specifically the Sebungwe region - up to 2050 – relying on downscaled data as much as possible. The World Bank's Climate Change Portal offers climate information on Zimbabwe, which could be used, or another similar data source.

5. Furthermore, and equally importantly, beyond describing climate information, STAP recommends accounting for climate change impacts, especially climatic shocks and variability, in the analysis of future narratives when the interactions between key system drivers are analyzed – for example, the interactions between climate change, human population changes (e.g., outmigration or inmigration to the targeted sites), changes in wildlife populations and movements, and flunctuations in markets resulting from increased temperatures, and shocks such as droughts, floods, or other changes. This analysis should be used to develop 3–4 future narratives that inform the theory of change, project design, and implementation. It should be ensured that the final set of interventions are robust to the different plausible futures. Refer to STAP's future narrative primer (longer document) for guidance on how to do this.

6. As noted above, the theory of change can be substantially strengthened by mapping each pathway backwards from the project objective, to the outcomes, outputs, and then activities – for each component. Defining the assumptions, challenges and risks, including innovation risks (e.g., natural capital accounting) associated with each pathway would also help in dealing with these issues in the design of the project, as opposed to allowing them to become residual risks. Two documents that can support the project design in developing a robust theory of change, based on systems thinking, and articulate assumptions, challenges, and risks, including innovation risks, in the project logic, are: i) STAP's Theory of change primer; and ii) STAP's advisory note, Clarifying risks in GEF projects, with a focus on innovation risks.

7. STAP has the following comments on the components:
    a. Component 1: Achieving the expected outcomes from natural capital accounting, and mainstreaming biodiversity across economic sectors, will depend on policy coherence. STAP recommends that an analysis of the relevant policies to be undertaken and for it to inform the design and implementation of this component. Refer to STAP's advisory document on policy coherence, especially the activities that can be undertaken on policy coherence, table 3. Great that component 1 focuses on gender, such as gender sensitive messaging and equitable access for men and women to training material. In addition to this activity, STAP recommends accounting for gender dynamics and norms in the project design. Otherwise, the training will not be effective. Also, what is the purpose of the land degradation neutrality and biodiversity management platforms and sex-disaggregated data? Is the purpose to inform management within and outside of protected areas, or is this somehow one step of many in creating a

bioeconomy for Sebungwe? Please explain the rationale for mapping and monitoring the distribution of individual tamarind trees, or would it be more relevant to track the time women spend gathering and selling tamarind fruit, the amount of revenue they receive, and the opportunity costs of focusing on tamarind. Is this really the most significant information needed? What about data on wildlife populations and wildlife corridors? Weather?

b. Component 2: It is unclear how the proposed activities and outputs will lead to thriving nature-based enterprises in Sebungwe. This needs to be clarified as part of a more detailed and logical TOC. Further, some of the challenges CAMPFIRE has faced included elite capture, poor management, nepotism, intimidation, ineffective participatory processes, donor withdrawal of funds, premature discontinuation of capacity building and reduced revenues because of a poor macroeconomic environment (Mudzengi et al. 2021; Tchakatumba et al. 2019; Gandiwa et al. 2014; Mudzengi & Chiutsi 2014). Explain how the current project will overcome or avoid these obstacles.

   This component will also depend on communities' social structures, inclusive of gender and power dynamics, to be strongly embedded in the project design and implementation. Otherwise, the project outcomes will likely not be durable. As recommended above, it will be important to account for these social aspects when articulating the impact pathway associated with this component. Equally important, during the PPG phase, the project team is encouraged to develop business plans for the economic enterprises it intends to create, and consider the incentives that might be necessary to innovate and make the business enterprises, and the socioeconomic benefits, resulting from them, sufficient and durable. For example, this could include shifting the necessary cultural norms and values to balance gender dynamics and empower women as change agents.

c. Unless the project plans for climate change impacts on tamarind value chains, and agroforestry interventions, this activity faces high risks. As recommended above, design the project based on climate change risks (and their cascading effects on markets and vulnerabilities). Similarly, if irrigation is planned in association with tamarind orchards, this potentially could increase human wildlife conflict. Developing narratives that are robust across the planned futures is highly recommended.

d. Component 3: Similar to Component 2, the major barrier that is relevant to this component is the lack of adequate and sustainable financing to support conservation of biodiversity. All of the protected areas in the region have management plans; however, they lack the resources to fully implement them. Also, communal lands will likely require a natural resources survey and mapping exercise before a management plan can usefully developed. Please clarify whether improving harvesting practices is the highest-priority intervention, or whether reducing poaching is needed to sustain wildlife populations that attract tourism and hunting revenues. Zimbabwe has apparently committed to channeling 100% of trophy-hunting revenues to communities through CAMPFIRE. STAP recommends clarifying: How much are community members in Sebungwe currently earning from trophy hunting concessions through CAMPFIRE? How are district-specific hunting quotas determined? How are fees for trophies from different species set?

   This component will depend on empowering communities to become change agents and on going beyond capacity building. Thus, training and management plans will need to account for existing practices, knowledge, and governance structures. Additionally, there are a number of assumptions associated with this component, which STAP recommends testing, and pursuing the necessary adaptive learning to strengthen biodiversity conservation. In this context, UNDP's MEL 360 tool might be useful. This includes the assumption that communities will benefit in the long term from ecotourism through better conservation management of the

targeted parks, and that this increased revenue will help reduce poaching, supported by anti-poaching training.

e. Component 4: STAP recommends linking this component to the TOC, so that learning is embedded throughout the project logic. Consider the value of MEL360 in this context.

f. Component 5: Unsure this component is necessary as it is about standard monitoring and reporting processes to the GEF – i.e., completing midterm and terminal evaluations.

8. Regarding stakeholders, STAP recommends carefully considering which prerequisite co-benefits are important to them so that GEBs are durable. The premise of this project closely links socioeconomic benefits with GEBs.

9. The section on coordination and cooperation with ongoing initiatives should be strengthened. There are many additional projects and initiatives in the region that are relevant to the current project. Conversely, is there a pathway and does the timing align for the National Biodiversity Finance Plan to provide finance to support biodiversity conservation in Senbungwe?

10. STAP recommends revising the risk table. As mentioned throughout this commentary, the contextual risks, including climate change, should form part of the project design. Risks that remain once the project has been designed, should be added to the risk table. The project also has several innovative interventions with accompanying risks. STAP's advisory note on risk (also mentioned above) provides examples of how different types of innovation risks can be addressed during project design and implementation.

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.)