STAP SCREEN – GEF ID 11520

GEF ID	11520
Project title	Improving the source to sea governance to reduce the impacts on the transboundary large marine ecosystems in the SICA region
Date of screen	May 24, 2024
STAP Panel Member	Susanne Schmeier
STAP Secretariat	Virginia Gorsevski

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP acknowledges the project "Improving the source to sea governance to reduce the impacts on transboundary large marine ecosystems in the SICA region."

On one hand, this ambitious project is to be commended for its intent to support transboundary cooperation as a means of addressing a wide range of issues across a broad and disparate area. However, the project is not well summarized, nor is it clearly presented, making it difficult to follow the underlying logic behind how the proposed activities will be usefully combined to improve the current situation.

It is a standard GEF IW project that uses a 'source to sea' (S2S) management approach that includes upstream and downstream environmental, social, and economic linkages to coordinate across sectors and segments. While in general STAP supports the S2S management process, it is not clear that the approach is suitable for this project, as currently written.

While STAP appreciates that this project intends to build on several preceding and ongoing transboundary water projects, important details are lacking to indicate exactly *how* this will be accomplished including – importantly – how investments will overcome challenges and barriers that previous projects failed to accomplish.

STAP provides additional observations and recommendations below and has directly communicated major concerns with the GEF Secretariat and FAO to be addressed in project design.

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 project proposal explains the significance of the problems and issues to be addressed within the larger system, including the main drivers behind degradation of the LMEs. It also includes extensive baseline information – mainly in terms of prior and ongoing, related efforts (i.e. GEF projects, TDA-SAPs, etc.). The project does not, however, sufficiently explain how these projects have benefitted the LMEs already and how this proposed project would build on these gains, and what will happen in the absence of the proposed project. Importantly, it is not clear whether the project is targeting all the rivers and LMEs or only some rivers and one LME. Likewise, it is not clear whether the different rivers would require different interventions or whether they all face the same problems and barriers that can be overcome with the same measures.

- The barriers themselves are quite broad and all-encompassing to include governance, policy, finance, and technical and capacity gaps. While attempts are made to describe each one, it is not clear that this proposed project can successfully overcome one or more of them which (as stated) is necessary to alter course and whether these barriers are in fact the same for all parts of the region or whether they differ (which would then also require different approaches). For example, in the ToC, financing limitations and technical capacity gaps are combined into one barrier – addressed by innovative technologies and finance and KM&L with a laundry list of potential, as of yet undefined, interventions such as NbS, blue carbon, feasibility studies, etc. This type of uniform, 'one-size-fits-all approach' is unlikely to work under all circumstances given area-specific issues, contexts, etc.

- While climate change is mentioned as an 'amplifier' of impacts, the project does not provide sufficient (any) data to clearly connect the climate stresses to impacts in the project area beyond general statements that 'increases in temperature and changes in precipitation patterns will increase vulnerability… by increasing propensity for extreme droughts, wildfires, soil erosion, nutrient loading.' Nor does the project specify how changes in climate will interact with human-induced changes such as population growth, agricultural production, etc. While this is challenging given the large geographical area covered by this project, having a clearer understanding of potential future climate and socio-economic trends is essential for ensuring that proposed interventions can deliver positive and durable outcomes, particularly since a major focus of this project is to develop a long-term (2050) vision. See STAP's brief on Simple Future Narratives for additional guidance.

- Also missing from the ToC is an understanding of the incentives that people and industries have to change current practices. In particular, agriculture, municipalities, tourism, etc. – some of which are upstream and therefore disconnected from the negative impacts facing the LME. The lack of stakeholders from these groups (including relevant Ministries) reduces overall confidence that the plan will be universally supported, particularly given a seeming lack of understanding of the Blue Economy, the Source to Sea approach, and little mention of tools such as marine spatial planning (MSP) that can support these efforts.

- The gender dimension is generally well-worded but leaves open what exactly will be done (beyond "project will seek to amplify women's voices in shaping policies and actions related to improving the source-to-sea governance and reducing the impacts on the regional transboundary LMEs through gender-responsive consultations across sectors and disciplines"). There is no further explanation on how gender aspects will be addressed in any of the components (except

for mentioning the share of women in workshops and the intention to develop a gender-sensitive M&E plan), which is insufficient to "amplify women's voices" or to advance gender aspects.

- Component 1 focuses on policy and institutional frameworks, including at the transboundary level, which are crucial for a comprehensive S2S approach. However, the activities themselves are largely geared towards the national level and therefore miss potential for truly integrated and transboundary S2S management.

- Various components mention activities to be implemented in different/multiple areas (e.g. 12 watersheds, 8 watersheds, etc.). It is not clear whether these activities are interrelated or connected and to establish a transboundary dimension or whether activities are independent from each other and therefore national in scope.

- Various outputs are unspecific (e.g. "integrated basin governance structures"), with no clarification on e.g. what these governance structures will be, how the best options will be identified (especially in light of earlier work that was done whereby existing barriers could not be overcome), whether they will be uniform across basins, and whether they are connected in order to ensure true multi-level S2S governance.

- Knowledge management is not very well described – beyond participation in IW conferences and reference to the platform (with subscribed users not yet saying anything about actual knowledge management).

- The core indicators for terrestrial and marine protected areas under improved management are impressive; however, information on specific activities that will be undertaken to achieve these results and how barriers that have so far prevented achievements will be overcome is unclear.

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

Based on the issues identified above, STAP recommends the following specific points to be addressed:

1. Review and sharpen the theory of change to better describe the change mechanisms through causal pathways and the reason for why these (and not others) have been chosen. See STAP's Primer on Theory of Change for more guidance.

2. Substantiate how, specifically, the project uses a S2S approach and whether this is one that applies to the region in an integrated manner or only to each river (which would be national only, not transboundary and hence not IW) and its immediate recipient area in an LME.

3. Clearly articulate future potential scenarios, including climate change impacts, to indicate several possible future narratives to 2050, and what would happen in the absence of this project – particularly given the many other GEF IW projects taking place in the region.

4. Substantiate how providing information on S2S and developing regional plans will lead to mid-term outcomes such as behavior change. What is the mechanism?

5. Provide more detailed information on what types of technologies and financial schemes would make sense for this region and how they would be innovative and durable beyond general concepts such as PES, water funds, NbS, etc.

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.)