

STAP guidelines for screening GEF projects

Part I: Project Information	Response
GEF ID	10672
Project Title	Promotion of Integrated Biodiversity Conservation and Land Degradation Neutrality in Highly Degraded Landscapes of Iraq
Date of Screening	November 27, 2020
STAP member screener	Graciela Metternicht
STAP secretariat screener	Guadalupe Duron
STAP Overall Assessment and Rating	<p>Minor issues to be considered during project design</p> <p>STAP welcomes UNEP’s proposal “Promotion of Integrated Biodiversity Conservation and Land Degradation Neutrality in Highly Degraded Landscapes of Iraq”. This project aims to strengthen governmental and non-governmental capacities to achieve biodiversity conservation and land degradation neutrality in Middle Euphrates landscape through integrated landscape management.</p> <p>The project identifies the interlinkages between land degradation and biodiversity loss, and the impacts of land degradation in the livelihoods and wellbeing of Iraq’s population. The project identifies the natural and socio-technological and political drivers of environmental degradation (climate change, low rainfall levels, overgrazing of nature pastures, illegal urban expansion to agricultural land, unsustainable farming practices and old irrigation techniques, weak institutional governance, impacts of armed conflicts and political unrest), and barriers causing biodiversity loss and degradation of land that the project is targeting to remove.</p> <p>Project implementation will be driven by four major components that connect with the four outcomes it envisions to deliver: Outcome 1 will create an enabling environment to support transforming capacities to integrate sustainable conservation management into decision</p>

making policies and frameworks. Outcome 2 will ensure that policies and frameworks also include avoiding degradation and biodiversity loss to enable ecosystem functions to be restored. Outcome 3 will strengthen the transition of land management by widely disseminating information, lessons learned and demonstrations for nature-based solutions in land management. Outcome 4 will ensure the project results can be scaled up through capacity building and knowledge management.

The project's theory of change is based on the interplay amongst the aforementioned four components. STAP recommends further work in the PPG to include external and internal factors (listed in the risk section) to be included in the ToC to develop alternative pathways (with related activities) that could be used in an adaptive management fashion for achieving the desired outcomes.

Given the significant baseline of complementary projects listed, STAP recommends the project has a Steering Committee that includes representatives of these projects, as well as representatives of educational institutions of Iraq (Universities, vocational training). The latter will ensure complementary of multi-projects efforts towards a common objective of human capacity development that can be sustained over the projects' funding cycles.

STAP congratulates the team for the emphasis on gender responsive actions, and it encourages that similar consideration is given to youth-responsive actions; with Iraq being one of the most youthful countries in the world, with over 60% of the population under the age of 25, this project is uniquely positioned to deliver alternative futures to that segment of population, seeking in tandem to avoid, reduce, reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss.

STAP acknowledges the focus on making this project about capacity and knowledge development to strengthen local know-how, which equips the communities with the right skills to pave their own paths in a sustainable manner.

	<p>The project interventions can deliver global environmental benefits, and will help advancing LDN targets set by the country, as well as commitments towards the CBD Aichi Targets. STAP suggests for the component indicators to be inclusive of locally-relevant indicators of LDN (associated with key ecosystem services of the project area). To this end, STAP recommends the team to familiarize with the recent STAP LDN guidelines, and the LDN Conceptual Framework that provide explanations on ‘how to’ develop metrics and indicators. The later will be of importance to track progress of all project components, and to evaluate whether the outcomes have been achieved at the end of the project.</p> <p>Hereafter follow suggestion for consideration in the PPG preparation.</p>	
Part I: Project Information B. Indicative Project Description Summary	What STAP looks for	Response
Project Objective	Is the objective clearly defined, and consistently related to the problem diagnosis?	Yes
Project components	A brief description of the planned activities. Do these support the project’s objectives?	Yes
Outcomes	<p>A description of the expected short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention.</p> <p>Do the planned outcomes encompass important global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits?</p>	<p>Yes. See the overall assessment mention about the need to revise the metrics and indicators that map GEBs, which can be better measured through properly designed locally relevant indicators that can be aggregated as evidence of generating GEBs. STAP suggest reading: UNCCD-SPI Scientific conceptual framework for LDN (https://knowledge.unccd.int/knowledge-products-and-pillars/guide-scientific-conceptual-framework-land-degradation-neutrality) and to consult the toolset available for implementation of LDN through project interventions. https://knowledge.unccd.int/knowledge-products-and-pillars/guide-scientific-conceptual-framework-ldn/tools-and-resources-land</p>

		<p>and the STAP guidelines for LDN, chapter on indicators: https://stapgef.org/guidelines-land-degradation-neutrality</p> <p>Sims, N.C., England, J.R., Newnham, G.J., Alexander, S., Green, C., Minelli, S. and Held, A., 2019. Developing good practice guidance for estimating land degradation in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. <i>Environmental Science & Policy</i>, 92, pp.349-355.</p> <p>Sims, N.C., Barger, N.N., Metternicht, G.I. and England, J.R., 2020. A land degradation interpretation matrix for reporting on UN SDG indicator 15.3. 1 and land degradation neutrality. <i>Environmental Science & Policy</i>, 114, pp.1-6.</p>
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits likely to be generated?	Yes, provided the ToC considers also the risk elements cited in section 5, and alternative pathways that could be implemented (ie. adaptive management) to overcome these risks.
Outputs	A description of the products and services which are expected to result from the project. Is the sum of the outputs likely to contribute to the outcomes?	Yes, the outputs associated to each of the components add up to deliver the outcomes, and STAP congratulates the team for graphically showing this links in the ToC
Part II: Project justification	A simple narrative explaining the project's logic, i.e. a theory of change.	The project presents a good graphic and narrative of the ToC, and STAP encourages the ToC becomes an iterative process in the PPG preparation, where activities are mapped against proposed outputs, as well as key stakeholders relevant in the delivery of those outputs, plus external and internal factors that may affect achieving outcomes and proposed deliverables. STAP recommends the project team to think on whether the durability and ability to scale out some of the interventions may be dependent on behavioral change. In this regard, the STAP document on Multi-stake holder dialogues and the forthcoming review on levers for behavioral change are thought to be relevant to this project for the PPG phase.

		STAP recommends an exercise of taking one of the assumptions (e.g. uptake of knowledge and implementation) and work the ‘ToC’ for that assumption (who needs to be involved, when, what activities need to be done, what levers are best?, what external and internal factors can affect the deliveries, what investment is needed, how could te private sector be involved, etc). In doing this, a clear pathway can be established that will anticipate whether the assumption holds, and will deliver on the set ‘vision’.
1. Project description. Briefly describe: 1) the global environmental and/or adaptation problems, root causes and barriers that need to be addressed (systems description)	Is the problem statement well-defined?	Yes, a very coherent narrative of drivers of environmental degradation and barriers that need to be addressed is presented.
	Are the barriers and threats well described, and substantiated by data and references?	Barriers and threats are well described, though the project fails to provide good references. (Section 1.1 of the project)
	For multiple focal area projects: does the problem statement and analysis identify the drivers of environmental degradation which need to be addressed through multiple focal areas; and is the objective well-defined, and can it only be supported by integrating two, or more focal areas objectives or programs?	N/A
2) the baseline scenario or any associated baseline projects	Is the baseline identified clearly?	Yes
	Does it provide a feasible basis for quantifying the project’s benefits?	Yes
	Is the baseline sufficiently robust to support the incremental (additional cost) reasoning for the project?	Yes
	For multiple focal area projects:	
	are the multiple baseline analyses presented (supported by data and references), and the multiple benefits specified, including the proposed indicators;	

	<p>are the lessons learned from similar or related past GEF and non-GEF interventions described; and</p>	<p>Current and past GEF and non-GEF projects in the area are identified and cited as sources for collaboration and learning. STAP recommends consultation with representatives of these projects occurs in the PPG to avoid duplication, and to build on activities that these projects have initiated and are relevant to the outputs and outcomes of this project. STAP also recommends the team searches the database of GEF projects with ‘similar’ objectives undertaken in other geographies with similar socio-ecological and/or cultural and political contexts; extend this search to non-GEF projects. For instance, there is a mention on the difficulties of reaching out to women in patriarchal societies. There are lessons and recommendations in the literature on how this could be done, and it is worth this be considered in the design of activities related to components 2 and 3. See for instance: Design Within a Patriarchal Society: Opportunities and Challenges in Designing for Rural Women in Bangladesh. https://doi.org/10.1145/3173574.3174110</p>
	<p>how did these lessons inform the design of this project?</p>	<p>Pages 16-18 explain aspects of the baseline projects that have been identified and used to inform the design of this PIF. Pg 15 also describes how current work of relevant Ministries has helped in designing this PIF (E.G. “ For example ..the Ministry of Agriculture is also working with several UN agencies, funded by the EU on addressing creation of livelihood and employment and will increase smallholder farming families food security, raise their income and therefore improve their health and living standard. These efforts will establish the baseline on which the project will further build on, by local land use planning with conservation planning to achieve a more comprehensive approach to habitat and biodiversity preservation”. Another good example is how the project team plans to use information</p>

		<p>and knowledge from the GCG funded project “Building capacity to advance the National Adaptation Plan process in Iraq to help identify the climate change scenarios, and options to enhance resilience of Protected areas to climate change. STAP congratulates the team for identifies these synergies that will avoid duplication of efforts and unnecessary expenditures.</p> <p>STAP also recommends to reach out to initiatives of the UNCCD that are relevant to drought and youth (e.g. the drought initiative and its tool box, https://www.unccd.int/actions/drought-initiative , the 3S initiative https://www.unccd.int/actions/sustainability-stability-security-3s-initiative). Mechanisms of two way learning and knowledge sharing can be established that will benefit this project and advance GEBs through knowledge sharing.</p>
3) the proposed alternative scenario with a brief description of expected outcomes and components of the project	What is the theory of change?	Page 54 provides a graphic and short narrative of the project’s ToC. See earlier comments on the aspects of that ToC that needs more consideration/development in the PPG phase.
	What is the sequence of events (required or expected) that will lead to the desired outcomes?	The ToC list the outputs and their linkages with desired outcomes. The four project components describe the activities that will deliver those outputs. More work is needed in the PPG to develop the ‘sequence of events’ (methodological framework) of this project, including the activities to avert risk (mentioned in section 5). The STAP
	What is the set of linked activities, outputs, and outcomes to address the project’s objectives?	Described in the four components.
	Are the mechanisms of change plausible, and is there a well-informed identification of the underlying assumptions?	See earlier comments, change is plausible, but the assumptions need to be ‘mapped’ through the interventions and ‘agents’ that will make change possible.
	Is there a recognition of what adaptations may be required during project implementation to respond to changing conditions in pursuit of the targeted outcomes?	The Risk section somehow address this point, STAP recommends revision of the ToC to include ‘external’ factors that may affect project delivery

		<p>and the adaptation pathways that may be needed to achieve the target outcomes. Of relevance for this work are the STAP primer on Theory of Change https://www.stapgef.org/theory-change-primer</p> <p>STAP recommends attention to climate change adaptation and the projections on future climate variability. STAP also recommends that knowledge and information on assessments related to climate change vulnerability (sensitivity, exposure and adaptive capacity of the target beneficiaries and ecosystems) are included in the design of interventions.</p> <p>Lastly, STAP recommends that propositions around nature-based solutions, such as eco-tourism, be ‘wind tunnelled’ for the impacts of COVID</p>
5) incremental/additional cost reasoning and expected contributions from the baseline, the GEF trust fund, LDCF, SCCF, and co-financing	GEF trust fund: will the proposed incremental activities lead to the delivery of global environmental benefits?	The narrative presented in section 1.5 points to a high likelihood of the activities delivering GEBs identified in the PIF. STAP recommends revising/enhancing indicators associated to the GEBs that are to be delivered; ensure the indicators are suitable to the track and measure progress of the proposed GEBs; align with global core indicators of LDN and others related to biodiversity gains from creation of Protected Areas; complement with indicators of locally-relevant ecosystem services, and propose the latter to be aggregated to add evidence-base towards the achievement of the GEBs the project claims will deliver. Consult the LDN guidelines and the Good Practice Guidance on LDN mentioned earlier.
	LDCF/SCCF: will the proposed incremental activities lead to adaptation which reduces vulnerability, builds adaptive capacity, and increases resilience to climate change?	N/A
6) global environmental benefits (GEF trust fund) and/or adaptation benefits (LDCF/SCCF)	Are the benefits truly global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits, and are they measurable?	See above comments on the need to improve the indicators and metrics associated to those indicators
	Is the scale of projected benefits both plausible and compelling in relation to the proposed investment?	Yes, projected benefits are plausible, and the team is encouraged to map co-operation and

		collaboration with projects of the baseline to generate 'positive' spillovers that can extend to areas that are neighboring the selected project area.
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits explicitly defined?	Global benefits are explicitly defined; links between proposed interventions and GEBs can be made more explicit through the ToC. (e.g. link outputs to GEBs, and map activities that enable those outputs and stakeholders, funding, etc needed). Do consider how climate change projections for the project area will affect (or not) the achievement of GEBs. Do consider if , for instance, proposed nature-based solutions, are effective to address exposure, sensitivity, and/or adaptive capacity to a changing climate in the project area.
	Are indicators, or methodologies, provided to demonstrate how the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits will be measured and monitored during project implementation?	More work on the specific methodology and approaches (e.g. what set of nature based solutions?) needs to be included in the PPG; more work is needed to define metrics and associated indicators that can facilitate tracking progress of the activities during project implementation, and that can help assessing the achievement of set project outcomes.
	What activities will be implemented to increase the project's resilience to climate change?	The PIF mentions an IFAD funded project on Building Resilience of the Agriculture Sector to Climate Change in Iraq , and how this baseline Project will provide climate smart solutions, which the proposed Project will ensure these solutions are also part of the LDN implementation actions. Component 2 will also factor climate resilience in the management plans of Protected Areas. Component #4 envisages that all stakeholders must have the capacities, knowledge, resources, and support from enabling policies to plan and manage land use for sustainability and resilience to climate change. This is an ambitious goal and STAP recommends the application of multi-stakeholder dialogue processes, and the use of tools such as the RAPTA (https://www.stapgef.org/rapta-guidelines) , GIS

		multi-criteria based prioritisation that can account for spatial variations of factors related to climate change vulnerability.
7) innovative, sustainability and potential for scaling-up	Is the project innovative, for example, in its design, method of financing, technology, business model, policy, monitoring and evaluation, or learning?	<p>Project proponents claim innovation is present in this PIF because project will develop an Integrated Conservation Management Framework which has yet to be established in Iraq. This will be achieved after the identification of legal, policy, and institutional gaps. Innovation will also happen through the inclusion of interventions focused on smart agriculture, land management and nature-based solutions.</p> <p>The project offers more avenues for innovation in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the design of activities (e.g. community based management of PAs); consider SLM activities that include local and traditional knowledge; • in the method of financing (e.g. consider PPP and the use of market based instruments such as payments for ecosystem services), • in the monitoring (through identifying locally relevant indicators for LDN progress and improvement in conservation of biodiversity). • More innovation could be added in monitoring through identifying co-benefits (job opportunities created for youth and women; etc), and their associated indicators. • Incorporate Earth Observation and GIS technologies for prioritization, baseline assessments, monitoring. See https://www.stapgef.org/earth-observation-and-gef for examples • Explore market based instruments (Component #3): STAP recommends also the IUCN publication Enabling Investments for Sustainable Land Management

		<p>https://www.iucn.org/downloads/investing_in_drylands_latest_comprehensive_ver_2 .pdf and the publication Baumber, A., Berry, E. and Metternicht, G., 2019. Synergies between Land Degradation Neutrality goals and existing market-based instruments. Environmental Science & Policy, 94, pp.174-181.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce innovation in training and education; component #4 and component #3 will benefit from including Universities of Iraq. It is a form of build capacity and transfer knowledge on ‘how to’ and transfer technology (GIS, earth observation) that can also inform development of curriculum of university degrees pursued by the youth of the country. • Do consider land rehabilitation and land reclamation as part of the ‘LDN interventions. The Scientific Conceptual framework of LDN recommends those in charge of designing interventions do consider that there are a range of pathways leading to LDN, and in that some instances land rehabilitation or land reclamation may be more feasible/effective than attempting costly land restoration (particularly in areas subject to land salinization). • Do conduct stakeholder analysis and users needs in the design of training (e.g. how to deliver training for women of patriarchal systems) for knowledge and technology transfer.
	<p>Is there a clearly-articulated vision of how the innovation will be scaled-up, for example, over time, across geographies, among institutional actors?</p>	<p>The vision and scaling up are described; the team needs to also think how to ensure durability of the project outcomes through scaling deep (what cultural changes are needed -> is behavioral change needed?); and scaling out. The project</p>

		<p>component#1 will contribute to scaling up of the project outcomes.</p> <p>Recommended papers that can help articulate how to scale up, out and deep the vision: https://www.stagef.org/achieving-enduring-outcomes-gef-investment ;</p>
	<p>Will incremental adaptation be required, or more fundamental transformational change to achieve long term sustainability?</p>	<p>Incremental adaptation in the way components of the project have been designed suffices. However, there are opportunities that can be explored in the PPG on how to achieve longer term sustainability if the project considers aspects of transformational change related to scaling deep (cultural changes, behavioral change). (see comment above)</p>
<p>1b. Project Map and Coordinates. Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place.</p>		<p>Yes</p>
<p>2. Stakeholders. Select the stakeholders that have participated in consultations during the project identification phase: Indigenous people and local communities; Civil society organizations; Private sector entities. If none of the above, please explain why. In addition, provide indicative information on how stakeholders, including civil society and indigenous peoples, will be engaged in the project preparation, and their respective roles and means of engagement.</p>	<p>Have all the key relevant stakeholders been identified to cover the complexity of the problem, and project implementation barriers?</p>	<p>Groups of relevant stakeholders are mentioned. See earlier comments about mapping them into the ToC.</p> <p>STAP recommends that ‘champion’s of the youth sector be identified and included in the design of interventions; STAP also recommends that interventions for LDN and nature-based solutions include actions to improve future prospects of this sector, whether through training, micro-finance of start up business, job opportunities.</p>
	<p>What are the stakeholders’ roles, and how will their combined roles contribute to robust project design, to</p>	<p>The section on coordination and stakeholders provides an overall description of roles of main</p>

	achieving global environmental outcomes, and to lessons learned and knowledge?	stakeholders. STAP recommends further work in mapping stakeholders roles into activities and outputs.
<p>3. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Please briefly include below any gender dimensions relevant to the project, and any plans to address gender in project design (e.g. gender analysis). Does the project expect to include any gender-responsive measures to address gender gaps or promote gender equality and women empowerment? Yes/no/tbd.</p> <p>If possible, indicate in which results area(s) the project is expected to contribute to gender equality: access to and control over resources; participation and decision-making; and/or economic benefits or services.</p> <p>Will the project's results framework or logical framework include gender-sensitive indicators? yes/no/tbd</p>	Have gender differentiated risks and opportunities been identified, and were preliminary response measures described that would address these differences?	<p>Yes, the section on gender is well developed, and STAP recommends the use the following documents in the preparation of the PPG, as these were developed with 'gender-responsive actions' to LDN in mind:</p> <p>Collantes, V., Kloos, K., Henry, P., Mboya, A., Mor, T. and Metternicht, G., 2018. Moving towards a twin-agenda: Gender equality and land degradation neutrality. Environmental science & policy, 89, pp.247-253.</p> <p>A Manual for Gender-Responsive Land Degradation Neutrality Transformative Projects and Programmes. https://www.unccd.int/publications/manual-gender-responsive-land-degradation-neutrality-transformative-projects-and</p>
	Do gender considerations hinder full participation of an important stakeholder group (or groups)? If so, how will these obstacles be addressed?	N/A
5. Risks. Indicate risks, including climate change, potential social and environmental risks that	Are the identified risks valid and comprehensive? Are the risks specifically for things outside the project's control? Are there social and environmental risks which could affect the project?	Risk section is comprehensive, and it includes climate change risk. STAP recommends to fine tune the addressing of climate risk by using approaches like RAPTA (see earlier comments) a

<p>might prevent the project objectives from being achieved, and, if possible, propose measures that address these risks to be further developed during the project design</p>	<p>For climate risk, and climate resilience measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the project’s objectives or outputs be affected by climate risks over the period 2020 to 2050, and have the impact of these risks been addressed adequately? • Has the sensitivity to climate change, and its impacts, been assessed? • Have resilience practices and measures to address projected climate risks and impacts been considered? How will these be dealt with? • What technical and institutional capacity, and information, will be needed to address climate risks and resilience enhancement measures? 	<p>GEF designed technique to help project designers and planners build the ideas of resilience, adaptation and transformation into their projects from the start, to ensure outcomes that are practicable, valuable and sustainable through time and change.</p> <p>There is no evidence of aspects of climate change related to exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity being assessed, but the PIF is clear in that a great deal of data, information and knowledge on climate change that is relevant to this project will be generated through other ongoing projects that are part of the projects baseline.</p>
<p>6. Coordination. Outline the coordination with other relevant GEF-financed and other related initiatives</p>	<p>Are the project proponents tapping into relevant knowledge and learning generated by other projects, including GEF projects?</p>	<p>Yes, and STAP recommends the project has a Project Steering Committee that includes representatives from other GEF and non-GEF projects that are named in the project baseline. Furthermore, STAP strongly recommends to include experts from Universities that can help mainstreaming learning from this project into undergraduates degrees to continue building human capital of the 60% of youth population that makes up this country.</p>
	<p>Is there adequate recognition of previous projects and the learning derived from them?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
	<p>Have specific lessons learned from previous projects been cited?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
	<p>How have these lessons informed the project’s formulation?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
	<p>Is there an adequate mechanism to feed the lessons learned from earlier projects into this project, and to share lessons learned from it into future projects?</p>	<p>Yes, the component #4 of knowledge management could be strengthened by considering how the knowledge of this project can be incorporated into other global knowledge hubs such as the UNCCD Knowledge Hub</p>
<p>8. Knowledge management. Outline the “Knowledge Management Approach” for the project, and how it will contribute to</p>	<p>What overall approach will be taken, and what knowledge management indicators and metrics will be used?</p>	<p>This section needs improvement, the current indicators are not enough to build a coherent narrative of the success that could be achieved through the way in which knowledge management and sharing is proposed in this project.</p>

the project's overall impact, including plans to learn from relevant projects, initiatives and evaluations.		
	What plans are proposed for sharing, disseminating and scaling-up results, lessons and experience?	Component #4 details those plans, and STAP recommends they be revised during the preparation of the PPG, incorporating the different suggestions provided in this screen template.

Notes

STAP advisory response	Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed
1. Concur	STAP acknowledges that on scientific or technical grounds the concept has merit. The proponent is invited to approach STAP for advice at any time during the development of the project brief prior to submission for CEO endorsement.
	* In cases where the STAP acknowledges the project has merit on scientific and technical grounds, the STAP will recognize this in the screen by stating that <i>“STAP is satisfied with the scientific and technical quality of the proposal and encourages the proponent to develop it with same rigor. At any time during the development of the project, the proponent is invited to approach STAP to consult on the design.”</i>
2. Minor issues to be considered during project design	STAP has identified specific scientific /technical suggestions or opportunities that should be discussed with the project proponent as early as possible during development of the project brief. The proponent may wish to:
	(i) Open a dialogue with STAP regarding the technical and/or scientific issues raised;
	(ii) Set a review point at an early stage during project development, and possibly agreeing to terms of reference for an independent expert to be appointed to conduct this review.
	The proponent should provide a report of the action agreed and taken, at the time of submission of the full project brief for CEO endorsement.

<p>3. Major issues to be considered during project design</p>	<p>STAP proposes significant improvements or has concerns on the grounds of specified major scientific/technical methodological issues, barriers, or omissions in the project concept. If STAP provides this advisory response, a full explanation would also be provided. The proponent is strongly encouraged to:</p>
	<p>(i) Open a dialogue with STAP regarding the technical and/or scientific issues raised; (ii) Set a review point at an early stage during project development including an independent expert as required. The proponent should provide a report of the action agreed and taken, at the time of submission of the full project brief for CEO endorsement.</p>