# STAP guidelines for screening GEF projects

| **Part I: Project Information** | **Response** | |
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| **GEF ID** | 10780 | |
| **Project Title** | Enhancing biodiversity considerations and effective protected area management to safeguard the Cook Islands integrated ecosystems and species | |
| **Date of Screening** | 24 May 2021 | |
| **STAP member screener** | John Donaldson | |
| **STAP secretariat screener** | Alessandro Moscuzza | |
| **STAP Overall Assessment and Rating** | **Concur**<br>STAP assessment concluded that this was a well-written proposal, which was based on sound principles and underlying structure. Our review identified some minor issues, which we have recommended should be addressed during the next phase of project development. Some of the issues identifies (i.e. those related to the project objective, components and outcomes) were more superficial in nature and in our view can be rectified by simply rewording specific elements of the project proposal. Other issues identified in areas such as the Theory of Change (ToC) or Knowledge Management (KM) will need some additional re-thinking and/or information to be provided. More detailed comments have been provided in the relevant sections of the STAP screening document. | |
| **Part I: Project Information<br>B. Indicative Project Description Summary** | **What STAP looks for** | **Response** |
| Project Objective | Is the objective clearly defined, and consistently related to the problem diagnosis? | The overall purpose of the project is clear by reading through the project proposal, but the project objective is not defined very clearly. It is broadly related to the problem diagnosis, but this aspect could also be improved. However, STAP would like to clarify that we concluded this is not a deep structural issue, but rather a more superficial one, which could be easily addressed by simply rephrasing the objective to make more clearly reflective of what the project is trying to achieve. |
| Project components | A brief description of the planned activities. Do these support the project's objectives? | Yes, the planned activities as a whole present a coherent framework for an intervention. However, our review |

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| | | noticed some inconsistencies in the language used for the project outcomes and outputs. For example, in Outcome 1 we were not sure what it was meant by "*embedding safeguards into institutional capacities".* As we already remarked, our assessment concluded that these inconsistencies were mostly due to an incorrect/confusing use of terminology, rather than deeper issues with the project structure. |
| Outcomes | A description of the expected short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention.<br><br>Do the planned outcomes encompass important adaptation benefits? | Above comments refer to this section as well.<br><br>The planned outcomes do not encompass any specific adaptation benefits, although some of these are inferred further down in the proposal. |
| | Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits likely to be generated? | Our review concluded that, if all activities are implemented as planned and all assumptions included in the proposal are realized, the stated environmental benefits are achievable. |
| Outputs | A description of the products and services which are expected to result from the project.<br>Is the sum of the outputs likely to contribute to the outcomes? | The outputs were described adequately well, and our assessment concluded that the sum of the outputs is likely to contribute to the outcomes, although we observed a couple of relatively minor inconsistencies. For example, under output 4.2, we were not clear why 'participatory monitoring and evaluation' was coupled with 'gender mainstreaming'. |
| **Part II: Project justification** | A simple narrative explaining the project's logic, i.e. a theory of change. | |
| **1. Project description. Briefly describe:**<br>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, the problem statement is well-defined. The project description provides a good introduction to the geography of the Cook Islands, its environmental characteristics and the implicit challenges associated with managing a country with those characteristics. It also provides a good analysis of the socio-economic factors and associated environmental threats, which require addressing by the project activities. |
| | Are the barriers and threats well described, and substantiated by data and references? | Yes, the barriers that the project is aiming to address are well-described. These focus exclusively on the legal, institutional and regulatory framework and complement well the environmental and climate-related threats, which are described in the previous section of the project proposal. |

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| | 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, the baseline scenario is well defined and very comprehensive in scope, as it includes a good range of government policies and plans, legislation and ongoing projects funded through the GEF and other donors. The latter spanned a good range of relevant interventions and funding sources, including: The Adaptation Fund, GEF3, 5,7 and the GCF. |
| | Does it provide a feasible basis for quantifying the project's benefits? | Yes, the information provided in the proposal included details of the results delivered by ongoing and past projects, which the current project plans to use as building blocks for its activities. Our assessment concluded that this information provided a good basis to quantify the project's added benefits. |
| | Is the baseline sufficiently robust to support the incremental (additional cost) reasoning for the project? | Yes, see above comments. |
| | 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; | N/A |
| | are the lessons learned from similar or related past GEF and non-GEF interventions described; and | N/A |
| | how did these lessons inform the design of this project? | N/A |
| 3) the proposed alternative scenario with a brief description of expected outcomes and components of the project | What is the theory of change? | -If government policy, coordination and regulations are improved, then government investments in conserving biodiversity and combatting land degradation will be more effective and mainstreaming across other sectors facilitated. If capacity of government officials is enhanced this will lead to improved delivery of mandates and greater implementation and enforcement of legislation. If capacity of communities in SLM and biodiversity conservation techniques and approaches is enhanced, then this will solicit their greater engagement and participation. If awareness is raised of the values of |

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| | | biodiversity and ecosystem services, this will lead to behavioral shifts and increase support for biodiversity conservation and SLM across communities, government ministries and key development sectors. If tangible economic incentives and resilient, sustainable livelihoods are identified and developed for local communities, this will further enhance desirable behavior shifts and uptake in SLM and biodiversity conservation practices. If opportunities are made to engage with SLM impacting sectors (i.e. infrastructure, agriculture and tourism), raised awareness and understanding about the values of biodiversity will result in more biodiversity- and land-friendly attitudes and practices. |
| | What is the sequence of events (required or expected) that will lead to the desired outcomes? | - |
| | What is the set of linked activities, outputs, and outcomes to address the project's objectives? | - |
| | Are the mechanisms of change plausible, and is there a well-informed identification of the underlying assumptions? | Yes, the logical pathways to impact proposed in the project proposal are very robust and provide a very clear causal link between activities, outputs and outcomes. The underlying assumptions are also well articulated and provide additional strength to the ToC construct. However, in the ToC diagram we found a level of disconnection between the top three (orange) strategy boxes on the left-hand side of the diagram, and some of the intermediate results (i.e. the second, third and fourth maroon color boxes from the top). For example, we could not understand how "*Mainstreaming BD and ecosystem services across the public sector"* would lead to "*Improved capacities".* **STAP recommends** that the project proponent revises this element of the ToC. |
| | Is there a recognition of what adaptations may be required during project implementation to respond to changing conditions in pursuit of the targeted outcomes? | Yes, the section of the ToC describing the project strategy includes elements of this. |
| 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? | Yes, our assessment concluded that the proposed activities can lead to the delivery of Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs). We also concluded that the proposed environmental benefits meet the requirements to be classified as GEBs. |

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| | 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? | Yes, our assessment concluded that the proposed environmental benefits meet the requirements to be classified as GEBs, both in terms of the terrestrial and marine sites and species it will directly impact/benefit. |
| | Is the scale of projected benefits both plausible and compelling in relation to the proposed investment? | Yes, especially if considering GEF investment alone. |
| | Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits explicitly defined? | Yes, the proposed GEBs are clearly articulated. We could not find a specific description of adaptation benefits, but some of these can be inferred from reading the section on climate impacts. |
| | Are indicators, or methodologies, provided to demonstrate how the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits will be measured and monitored during project implementation? | The proposal includes a range of preliminary indicators, which in our view can be used to measure and monitor some of the proposed GEBs. |
| | What activities will be implemented to increase the project's resilience to climate change? | The project proposal includes a preliminary basic climate risk assessment, which presents a comprehensive list of climate risks and impacts for the Cook Island. It also provides an analysis of how these are likely to affect the project, and a list of proposed mitigation measures. The proposal also stated that further analysis will be carried out using the CC risk assessment tool developed by the World Bank during the PPG phase of project design. Overall, STAP found this section to be outstanding among others in terms of its clarity, structure and thoroughness. |
| 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? | The project proposal presented a list of proposed innovation measures, which covered program approaches, use of technology and applications. Our assessment concluded that these will likely introduce innovative elements to the context of the Cook Islands, even though most of these approaches have already been piloted and/or used elsewhere. |
| | Is there a clearly-articulated vision of how the innovation will be scaled-up, for example, over time, across geographies, among institutional actors? | The project proposal includes two very short sections on scaling up and sustainability, which provide very brief outlines of how the project may achieve this. These provisions can be sufficient at this stage of the program design but **STAP recommends** that the project proponents expand this section during the PPG phase. |

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| | Will incremental adaptation be required, or more fundamental transformational change to achieve long term sustainability? | STAP assessment was that, given the nature of the activities proposed, this project will require incremental adaptation to achieve long-term sustainability. |
| **1b.** Project Map and Coordinates. Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place. | | - |
| **2. Stakeholders**.<br>Select the stakeholders that have participated in consultations during the project identification phase: Indigenous people and local communities; Civil society organizations; Private sector entities.<br>If none of the above, please explain why.<br>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. | Have all the key relevant stakeholders been identified to cover the complexity of the problem, and project implementation barriers? | Yes, the proposal included a section that listed a wide range of stakeholders, which we found to be very comprehensive, as it included all key sectors of the government, the economy and society on the island. Moreover, the proposal described clearly and concisely the roles that each stakeholder will play, including how they will contribute to the project activities and how the project is planning to approach them (i.e. the means of engagement). |
| | What are the stakeholders' roles, and how will their combined roles contribute to robust project design, to achieving global environmental outcomes, and to lessons learned and knowledge? | See above comments. |
| **3. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.**<br>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 | Have gender differentiated risks and opportunities been identified, and were preliminary response measures described that would address these differences? | Yes, the proposal included a "*Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment"*, which provided a brief gender analysis of the institutional landscape in the Cook Islands and an outline plan of how the project will aim to mainstream gender issues into its activities and support women's rights. We assessed this to be balanced and appropriate for this stage of the project design but |

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| project expect to include any gender-responsive measures to address gender gaps or promote gender equality and women empowerment? Yes/no/ tbd.<br>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.<br>Will the project's results framework or logical framework include gender-sensitive indicators? yes/no /tbd | | recognized that further details will need to be developed during the PPG phase. |
| | Do gender considerations hinder full participation of an important stakeholder group (or groups)? If so, how will these obstacles be addressed? | On the basis of the evidence provided in the proposal, this did not appear to be an issue of concern for this project. |
| **5. Risks.** Indicate risks, including climate change, potential social and environmental risks that 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 | 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?<br>For climate risk, and climate resilience measures:<br>• 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?<br>• Has the sensitivity to climate change, and its impacts, been assessed?<br>• Have resilience practices and measures to address projected climate risks and impacts been considered? How will these be dealt with? | Yes, the proposal included a well-articulated risk section, which in our assessment provided a thorough assessment of the potential risks that could affect this project. We also found that the choice of risk categories was very comprehensive and the allocation of risk finely balanced. The risk section did conflate risks that are part of project implementation with those that are outside the projects control, e.g. risks 1 & 8 in the general section and risks 1 &3 under Social and environmental risks are directly linked to project design and implementation. |

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| | • What technical and institutional capacity, and information, will be needed to address climate risks and resilience enhancement measures? | |
| **6. Coordination**. Outline the coordination with other relevant GEF-financed and other related initiatives | Are the project proponents tapping into relevant knowledge and learning generated by other projects, including GEF projects? | Yes, the project proposal identified a range of ongoing projects (including some GEF funded) government actors and initiatives, which it is planning to co-ordinate with in order to improve the effectiveness of project activities and its overall results. We found these provisions to be appropriate and proportionate for a project of this size and scope. |
| | Is there adequate recognition of previous projects and the learning derived from them? | Yes, elements of lessons learning are included in the baseline and knowledge management section of the proposal as well as being integrated into some of the outputs. |
| | Have specific lessons learned from previous projects been cited? | Above comments refers. |
| | How have these lessons informed the project's formulation? | We found some evidence of this in the baseline section and the project structure including the ToC (above comments refer). |
| | 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? | Yes, we found evidence in the proposal stating that the lessons learning will be fed through the KM element of the project. |
| **8. Knowledge management.** Outline the "Knowledge Management Approach" for the project, and how it will contribute to the project's overall impact, including plans to learn from relevant projects, initiatives and evaluations. | What overall approach will be taken, and what knowledge management indicators and metrics will be used? | The project proposal included a knowledge management section, which covered the basic elements for a project of this scope and size. Whilst this was deemed appropriate for this stage of the project design in light of the above considerations, it would be advisable that a more detailed knowledge management plan is further developed during the inception phase of the project. More specifically STAP recommends that the project proponents further articulate and develop their plans to create a National Environment Information System for the Cook Islands. |
| | What plans are proposed for sharing, disseminating and scaling-up results, lessons and experience? | - |

**Notes**

| STAP advisory response | Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed |
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| **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 ***"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."*** |
| **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. |

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| **3. Major issues to be considered during project design** | 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: |
| | (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. |