

STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	11336
Project title	Recovering the Sustainability of Ecosystems Affected by Drought in Northeastern Argentina
Date of screen	January 18, 2024
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

STAP welcomes Argentina's proposal, "Recovering the sustainability of ecosystems affected by drought in Northeastern Argentina". Overall, the proposal is technically robust and written clearly. STAP appreciated the comprehensive details explaining the biophysical and socioeconomic traits of the project sites, which were helpful in understanding the land degradation challenges this initiative seeks to address. The project logic was equally technically robust. STAP is pleased the project team perceives the theory of change as being a dynamic framework that can assist with the project's adaptive management. Given that Argentina is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, STAP expects adaptive management to play a key role in maintaining resilience. To this end, STAP highly encourages the project team to build climate risks, and other key drivers of change, in the project logic.

The project builds on a strong baseline for monitoring drought, land degradation and desertification (DLDD). Argentina's ambition to inform DLDD monitoring from the local to national level through this project is impressive, and highly attainable given the project's robustness. STAP highly encourages the project team to continue designing the project with this same rigor.

Below, STAP rates its assessment and provides details of its screening to help improve the 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

- X 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 rationale is comprehensive and robust. The problems were detailed thoroughly (deforestation, land degradation, and land conversion to livestock production) in the three areas the project will target. Detailed information regarding the biophysical status, agricultural, or livestock, systems, and socioeconomic conditions, were also described for the three target sites. In addition, the climate information, describing the trends in Northern Argentina (location of project sites) provided valuable context as to how climate change (i.e., drought) has already affected the local agricultural sector and communities. The brief analysis of how the climate projections to 2050 will affect precipitation and temperatures in dryland areas also contributed to the comprehensive context underpinning degradation and deforestation in Northern Argentina.

The baseline narrative comprehensively articulates the enabling policy and regulatory environment to support this project. This description included a brief analysis of policies supporting land use planning, Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), climate mitigation and climate adaptation, among others. In addition to these efforts, the PIF described national systems to monitor drought, land degradation and desertification – processes essential to the success of this project – particularly for component 3 on connecting knowledge and learning from the local level to the national level, and vice-versa.

As with the rationale, the project description is technically robust. The project objective is logically supported by three components. Several aspects of the theory of change can be strengthened in ways that contribute to long-lasting outcomes. This includes building explicitly climate risks into the logic chain, as well as other key drivers of change. STAP supports the innovative financing the project aims to tap into for drought-smart land management. Careful attention to this pathway is necessary so that it generates evidence about the relationship between innovative finance and GEBs.

Below, STAP details further these recommendations.

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

To strengthen the project during its design, STAP recommends addressing the following points:

- STAP is pleased with the description provided in the rationale of how climate change is affecting the agricultural sector, and communities in the target areas. Given the strong impacts of climate change that are occurring in Northern Argentina, STAP highly encourages the project team to design component 1 and component 2 accounting for climate risks. To do this, it will be necessary to reflect climate risks explicitly in the theory of change. STAP also recommends carrying out a climate risk screening before the project is designed. The World Bank's climate risk screening tool could be used <https://climatescreeningtools.worldbank.org/>. The World Bank's climate change knowledge portal also includes a climate risk profile for Argentina that could possibly complement the information provided in the PIF: https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/15850-WB_Argentina%20Country%20Profile-WEB%20%281%29.pdf
- As stated in the PIF, and above, climate change is a major driver of change affecting drylands and communities. The project team could consider applying the World Bank's resilience methodology to: i) assess whether the project considered climate and disaster risks in its components, and, in the project outcomes. The methodology can be accessed here: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/9920d826-21e5-5def-898d-8ccb1daaf4a0>
- Complementary to building resilience, is the development of simple future narratives – an activity that STAP highly encourages to ensure the pathways (i.e., component 1 and 2) remain robust to drivers – whether this is climate change, population changes, or fluctuations in the economy. STAP's simple future narrative advice can be accessed here: <https://stapgef.org/index.php/resources/advisory-documents/simple-future-narratives-brief-and-primer>
- The project is focused on LDN in drought affected areas. STAP suggests the project team access the publication 'The Land-Drought nexus' by UNCCD's Science Policy Interface (SPI). The publication is aimed at decision makers and land managers working on "proactive drought risk management", and interventions to improve community and ecosystem resilience to drought. The report also provides guidance for enhancing enablers to support adoption, implementation and scaling up of drought smart

sustainable land management practices. Vulnerability and risk assessments, covering both natural (climatic, soil and water) and socioeconomic aspects of land and drought management, are also detailed in the report. Available at:

http://catalogue.unccd.int/1211_03EP_UNCCD_SPI_2019_Report_2.pdf

- To address barrier #1, STAP recommends considering UNCCD SPI's publication on "The contribution of integrated land use planning and integrated landscape management to implementing Land Degradation Neutrality: Entry points and support tools"
<https://www.unccd.int/resources/reports/contribution-integrated-land-use-planning-and-integrated-landscape-management>
- To address barriers #1 and #2, the project team would benefit from the experiences learned by the GEF funded project "Participatory assessment of land degradation assessments and sustainable land management in grasslands and pastoral areas (Project GCP/GLO/530/GFF). The experience of Uruguay with the 'mesas redondas' is worth considering. The publication "Degradación y gestión sostenible del campo natural en el Uruguay: Resultados de una evaluación participativa en el sureste del país" provides useful insights on the learnings and value of participatory knowledge management. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb1027es> This project is an example of using existing institutional formal and informal arrangements (e.g. Mesas redondas) to enhance, build and disseminate knowledge at the local level.
- While STAP supports, and encourages, private – public partnerships and connecting small-holders to markets by engaging with the private sector, STAP recommends developing a separate pathway(s) for each agricultural/livestock financing activity. This will allow the project team to define and test key assumptions about the relationship between blended finance and drought-smart land management. Rapid learning mechanisms will need to be established so the necessary adaptive management can occur and lessen the risk of financial failure for the project beneficiaries. This adaptive, learning process will also assist in identifying barriers and opportunities for taking risks that lead to innovation and transformation. Close attention to the impacts, GEBs and improved livelihood outcomes, is highly encouraged.
- STAP recommends addressing these recommendations in the theory of change, which also should be reflected in the project's design and implementation:
 - Mainstream gender throughout the project logic. As an initial step, when characterizing the socioecological system, describe its gender traits – e.g. power dynamics between men and women and other important values and norms relevant to men and women.
 - Assess, and ensure, the three components are collectively sufficient to address the project objective. This might mean identifying interventions that are outside the scope of this project, and which will need to be taken by actors in complementary activities. This activity will help identify the need for critical alliances, and coordination across initiatives.
- STAP is pleased the project will pursue collaboration between national and province level stakeholders to implement sustainable land management. The stakeholder table on page 16, and its narrative, provides evidence of this collaboration. To complement the stakeholders forming part of the "Technical Commission on Droughts/National Comprehensive Risk Management System (CTS-SINAGIR)", STAP encourages the inclusion of local universities, such as the Universidad Tecnológica Nacional that has a regional Faculty in Reconquista (close to the project area <https://frrq.cvg.utn.edu.ar/>), or the University of Formosa (<https://www.unf.edu.ar/>).

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.

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.)