

STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	12080
Project title	Promoting Sustainable Land Management to Achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), Enhance Livelihoods, and Strengthen the Farming Communities in the Aylagundet Watershed, Debub Region, Eritrea
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

The proposed project targets the Aylagundat Watershed in Eritrea, a strategically important agricultural landscape supporting over 25,800 people across 31 villages. It addresses severe land degradation driven by interacting climatic, environmental and socio-economic pressures, including drought, rising temperatures, water scarcity, population pressure, unsustainable land and water use, overgrazing, fuelwood collection, weak technical capacity and land tenure constraints.

It provides a strong and well-articulated rationale for the proposed intervention, clearly linking the drivers of degradation to declining soil fertility, reduced water availability and livelihood vulnerability. Overall, this is a promising project with a sound and logical design, well-identified risks, and a clear incremental value for GEF investment.

STAP's recommendations are to: institutionalize training, awareness-raising, farmer field schools and knowledge exchange through relevant national and regional institutions; apply a KAP-based approach to tailor stakeholder-specific capacity building; and consider a Training-of-Trainers model to support replication, scale-up and sustainability beyond project closure; and further strengthen policy coherence, , results monitoring, co-benefit tracking and selection/documentation of context-appropriate SLM practices during the PPG stage.

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 proposed project is in the **State of Eritrea** which is situated in **Horn of Africa region** where recurrent drought, rising temperatures, water scarcity and groundwater-quality risks are identified as key drivers of environmental degradation; recent studies also show that *human-induced climate change has worsened drought severity in the entire Horn of Africa, while salinity threatens groundwater-dependent communities, agriculture and human health.*

The project targets a strategically important agricultural and watershed area in the Aylagundat Watershed, supporting over **25,800 people across 31 villages**, where land degradation directly affects livelihoods, food security, ecosystem services and resilience. The proposal describes the **problem** comprehensively within its wider **systems context**, clearly linking climate and non-climate drivers of degradation, population pressure, unsustainable land and water use, overgrazing, fuelwood collection, weak technical capacity and land tenure constraints as primary drivers of degradation.

The **project design** is simple and straightforward, it first seeks to strengthen institutional and community-based governance for SLM and LDN, including land-use planning and local management committees, and then supports implementation on the ground through watershed restoration, soil and water conservation, drought-resilient agriculture and diversified livelihoods. It also identifies **key barriers and enablers** well, including land tenure system, limited technical capacity and awareness; policy and institutional framework etc. The proposal presents a comprehensive analysis on how **uncertain future** could unfold using simple narratives. During the PPG stage, these plausible future narratives should be used not only descriptively, but also to develop a simple ex ante outcome logic that tests whether proposed SLM, watershed restoration, drought-resilient agriculture, sustainable grazing, livelihood and governance interventions are likely to deliver durable land, biodiversity, carbon and livelihood outcomes under plausible climate, drought, rainfall variability, population-pressure, land-tenure and market scenarios. It should be ensured that the selected interventions are robust to the identified plausible futures.

The **Theory of Change** is well formulated and presents a clear, pathway linking strengthened governance, ecosystem restoration, SLM practices, and knowledge management to the achievement of LDN, biodiversity conservation and improved community resilience. The **project components** are logical and consistent with the barriers identified in the proposal.

The project would be further strengthened by making explicit how policy coherence will be achieved across MLWE, MoA, FWA, Zoba-level institutions and community-based land and water management committees, particularly in relation to land reforms, integrated land-use planning, watershed management, and SLM financing. . This would help ensure that regional planning, budgetary processes and institutional mandates reinforce, rather than fragment, the delivery of durable GEBs.

One observation is that insufficient technical capacity and community awareness are identified as key barriers, and the project appropriately responds through training, awareness-raising, farmer field schools (FFS), and national knowledge exchange. Given that these capacity gaps are also being addressed through other GEF and non-GEF initiatives, the project could further emphasize how these efforts will be institutionalized through the Agricultural Extension Department, MLWE, MoA, FWA, and relevant academic/research partners. This should also include Zoba-level institutions, which will be central to land-use planning, watershed management and local implementation.

STAP also recommends that the project apply a Knowledge–Attitude–Practice (KAP) approach to better identify stakeholder-specific training and capacity-building needs. This would be particularly useful given the wide range of actors targeted under the project such as local service providers, extension officers, agricultural input suppliers, financial service providers, community-based land and water management committees, farmers and local communities, thereby strengthening uptake, behavioural change and sustainability of project interventions.

In addition, **Training-of-Trainers approach**, building on the proposed FFS model and knowledge exchange programme, could also be considered to strengthen sustainability, support replication beyond the Aylagundat Watershed, and help ensure that project-supported SLM, LDN and climate-resilient agriculture practices continue after project closure.

The project could also draw on the WOCAT Global SLM Database (<https://wocat.net/en/database/>) to identify, adapt and document relevant dryland SLM practices for Eritrea-like conditions, including soil and water

conservation, sustainable grazing management, agroforestry, water harvesting, enclosures, community-based restoration and drought-resilient agriculture. This would strengthen both the scientific basis for practice selection and the project's contribution to national and regional knowledge exchange.

The results framework is promising, including targets for restored grazing land, land under improved management, land under improved practices, carbon benefits, beneficiary numbers, soil-loss reduction and agricultural productivity. During the PPG stage, the project should define the baselines, methods, monitoring frequency and responsibilities for these indicators, and link them explicitly to LDN metrics such as land cover, land productivity and soil organic carbon where feasible, as well as to adoption and maintenance of SLM practices after project support ends.

The project should also make a clearer distinction between co-benefits that are prerequisites for durable GEBs and co-benefits that are incidental. In this project, improved livelihoods, food security, water access, tenure incentives, farmer capacity and functioning community institutions are not only social benefits; they are also enabling conditions for sustaining SLM, restoration, biodiversity and carbon outcomes beyond the project period; and should therefore be prioritize in the project design and implementation.

Key risks to project design and implementation have been appropriately identified, and the proposed **mitigation measures** are clearly described. Overall, this is a promising project with a sound design and clearly demonstrate the incremental value of GEF investment.

During the PPG stage, the project may draw selectively on the following STAP guidance: [Framing policy coherence for the GEF](#); [Refining the tracking of co-benefits in future GEF investments](#);

3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions

- Clarify how training, awareness-raising, FFS and knowledge exchange will be institutionalized to ensure continuity beyond the project period. This should specify the roles of national, regional and local institutions.
- Recommend using a Knowledge–Attitude–Practice approach to identify stakeholder-specific knowledge gaps, attitudes and practices, and tailor capacity-building for wide range of stakeholders identified in the project
- consider a Training-of-Trainers approach linked to the FFS model and knowledge exchange programme to support replication beyond the Aylagundat Watershed and sustain SLM, LDN and climate-resilient agriculture practices after project closure.
- Use the existing plausible future narratives to develop a simple ex ante outcome logic, testing whether proposed SLM, watershed restoration, drought-resilient agriculture, sustainable grazing, livelihood and governance interventions are likely to deliver durable GEBs under plausible climate, drought, rainfall variability, population-pressure and land-tenure
- Strengthen policy coherence by clarifying how SLM, LDN, biodiversity conservation and climate mitigation will be integrated into regional planning, budgetary processes, land reform implementation, watershed management and extension systems across MLWE, MoA, FWA, Zoba-level institutions and community-based land and water management committees.
- Use the WOCAT Global SLM Database to identify, adapt and document relevant dryland SLM practices, including soil and water conservation, sustainable grazing management, agroforestry, water harvesting, enclosures and drought-resilient agriculture, while also documenting Eritrea-specific lessons from the project for wider learning.

- Refine the results framework by defining baselines, methods, monitoring frequency and responsibilities for soil-loss reduction, agricultural productivity, carbon benefits, land restoration, improved management and adoption/maintenance of SLM practices after project support ends.
- Clarify which livelihood, food security, water, tenure and capacity-building benefits are prerequisites for durable GEBs, and track them accordingly, [drawing on STAP guidance on co-benefits](#).

ANNEX: STAP'S SCREENING GUIDELINES

Project rationale

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 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?
- 10. 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?
11. 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.)