STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	11118
Project title	**Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program**
Date of screen	**June 13, 2023**
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1. **Summary of STAP's views of the project**

The Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program (IP) led by Conservation International has set an ambitious objective of restoring degraded ecosystem to generate multiple durable benefits for the global environment and people. This ambition is supported by components based on the GEF-8's transformation levers, namely, governance and policies, finance, innovation and learning. For this reason, STAP suggests extending the four core elements of the proposed approach to include KM&L (e.g. improved monitoring *and management of knowledge for learning*). STAP is pleased with the overarching logic of the program framework document, and encourages the child project teams to design and implement the global coordination project (GCP), and country activities with the same rigor while paying close attention to several issues raised below.

First, STAP recommends the theory of change of the GCP and child projects of selected countries make explicit the long-term drivers influencing restoration. At minimum, these long-term drivers ought to include climate change, population changes, market fluctuations, and conflicts which may affect several of the child projects. Secondly, because GEB and co-benefits risk being undermined by these long-term drivers, and possibly other long-term changes, STAP recommends for the child projects to plan for plausible future scenarios. This entails developing simple scenarios, or narratives, when envisioning the project, or articulating the problem, to identify robust solutions to uncertainty. Designing for resilience lies at the core of the GEF-8 programming directions.

Thirdly, because significant transformational change usually takes time, it is particularly important to define and monitor indicators of progress on the various processes that demonstrate the activities are heading in the right direction. Below, STAP proposes classes of indicators for monitoring transformation, which are linked to the IP's components and to the GEF-8's transformation levers.

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

☐   <mark>X Minor</mark> - 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 IP describes broadly the problems and drivers influencing degradation of natural resources and ecosystems, which will be addressed through four components on enabling conditions, innovation, sustainable finance, and monitoring and learning. The IP also describes some of the underlying causes of degradation (for example climate change, population growth, unsustainable practices), which are well-referenced with peer-reviewed literature.

As the program is designed, a comprehensive assessment of the local economic, ecological and cultural conditions is needed to identify degradation, and to define restoration solutions with the appropriate stakeholders and beneficiaries (i.e. agents of change). Thus, engaging the appropriate stakeholders and beneficiaries is necessary during the framing of the problem and articulation of solutions – an iterative process that will be necessary throughout the design and implementation of the program.

Furthermore, the program must pay careful attention to long-term drivers, such as climate change, population growth and political instability – all of which undermine restoration commitments and enduring GEB and co-benefit outcomes. Closely linked to the identification of long-term drivers is the necessity to plan for resilient outcomes. As currently described, a plan to respond to long-term drivers identified in the PFD (e.g. climate change and market changes) appears missing; hence, undermining the durability of the proposed GEB and socio-economic outcomes.

The IP recognizes the need to be innovative to achieve GEF-8's transformational levers on policies and governance, finance, and learning. With a view to meeting the IP's goal on resilient ecosystems, the theory of change can be made more robust to help assess whether the activities are necessary and sufficient to achieving this transformative vision. STAP details below advice on how to strengthen the theory of change for transformational pathways.

Furthermore, STAP appreciates the IP's theory of change, which provides a broad view of the causal logic. The diagram and narrative can be strengthened to provide more robust logical structure to the program. The ToC assumes that behavioral changes will occur (Figure 2). The narratives of the causal chain need to describe social aspects (e.g. gender, cultural values and norms) that characterize the system, to help understand the structure of the problem, and how behavioral change can be achieved (i.e. what interventions would be needed for that to happen). The current ToC mixes objectives with an expected outcome. One of the objectives is in fact an outcome statement that, properly elaborated, would read something like 'When our actions (i.e. outputs and interventions of the four components) work, we will achieve healthy and resilient ecosystems that foster green recovery and secure livelihoods'.

Risks mentioned in the risk section ought to be dealt with during the project design as many of these risks (e.g. environmental and social risks, climate risks) will undermine the durability of GEBs, or co-benefit outcomes.

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

STAP recommends addressing the following points during the design of the global coordination project, and country child projects:

1. The project rationale and description articulates well the importance of ecosystem restoration for generating global environmental benefits and livelihood benefits. Similarly, the PFD describes comprehensively the effects of ecosystem degradation on biodiversity, food systems, and people's adaptability to climate change, among others. Nonetheless, the project's rationale and description can improve technically, and scientifically, by detailing how long-term drivers that are highly likely to affect ecosystem restoration (e.g. climate change, market changes, population changes, conflict), will be dealt with in the design of the country child projects and in the global coordination project. Refer to STAP's enabling elements advice, and the Nature article cited below.

2. Future changes, such as due to a changing climate, are unavoidable. Therefore, the program must build in future conditions that may impact outputs and outcomes; implementing resilient measures will

ensure the GEB outcomes are sustained. To assist in identifying resilient responses, STAP recommends describing a small number of simple narratives about how the future may unfold and how the key drivers may interact with one another (e.g. climate change interactions exacerbating conflict), including any critical uncertainties in their trends. The link to STAP's guidance on how to develop simple narratives is available below.

3. Risks mentioned in the risk section ought to be discussed during the problem framing, and reflected in the theory of change. It is necessary to reflect risks related to the durability of project outcomes arising from future changes in the theory of change of the global coordination project, and in each child project, and above all in the project design. These include risks on climate change, environmental and social risks, policies, market instability, and population changes. Refer to the World Bank's methodology on resilience, and to STAP's theory of change primer cited below.

4. The transformative premise of the IP is captured in its ambitious goal of "achieving healthy and resilient ecosystems to foster green recovery and secure livelihoods". As the theory of change in the global coordination project is designed, STAP recommends for CI to revisit the IP's theory of change to ensure the logic is credible for achieving the proposed transformation pathways , i.e. components on policies/governance, innovation, and sustainable finance.

   Questions that CI (for the global coordination project) and country teams need to ask to assess the credibility of the theory of change include: are the barriers and enablers identified to achieve each transformation pathway? Are the key assumptions defined along each pathway, including those affiliated with scaling? Are the pathways set up to tackle levers that may be easier to achieve, and which are set up to pull in the right direction? – for example, incentives that might trigger an initial positive response to a change in practice, such as a policy incentive? Systems can be set up to change more easily (that is, be made more 'transformable') by pulling a number of weaker levers all in the same direction. This is the idea of small wins, which can effectively drive desired systems change. Harder to achieve levers such as changing a social structure (i.e. norms that are keeping a problem in place) will be more difficult, but important to scaling out. Refer to STAP's guidance on transformation cited below.

5. Consider identifying metrics for each of the transformation levers. In its transformation paper, STAP identified five classes of indicators, three of which are specific to governance/policies, finance, and learning; a fourth on multi-stakeholder dialogue, and a fifth on capacity to change. STAP's forthcoming paper on policy coherence includes a section on monitoring policy coherence, which the project teams can use. Refer to STAP's transformation paper for further guidance on metrics to monitor and learn about transformation.

6. STAP is pleased the IP will focus on sustainable finance. CI is highly encouraged to rely on standards, or principles, that ensure positive environmental, social, and economic impact – while addressing knowledge gaps that may exist in management practices of blended finance projects. Refer to the OECD-UNDP Impact Standards for Financing Sustainable Development.

7. The role of the global coordination child program as an agent to catalise, order and disseminate knowledge for learning, and connect with relevant existing platforms of knowledge and learning is well articulated. STAP notes that attention must be paid to the structure and architecture of the global platform to ensure inter-operability, open access and agility and to fulfill the aspirations cited in paragraphs 64 and 67 of the program description.

8. STAP advises the list of potential partners organisations to include WOCAT ((World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies) and the UNCCD Global Mechanism and the UNCCD Knowledge Hub. They are resources of best practices and technologies on sustainable land management and restoration.

Simple future narratives - https://stapgef.org/resources/policy-briefs/using-simple-narratives-ensure-durability-gef-investments

Nature - Future-proofing ecosystem restoration through enhancing adaptive capacity - https://doi.org/10.1038/s42003-023-04736-y

Enabling elements - https://stapgef.org/resources/advisory-documents/enabling-elements-good-project-design-synthesis-stap-guidance-gef

Standards of practice to guide ecosystem restoration, U.N. Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, 2023 https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc5223en

World Bank's resilience methodology: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/9920d826-21e5-5def-898d-8ccb1daaf4a0

STAP's Theory of Change Primer - https://stapgef.org/resources/advisory-documents/theory-change-primer

STAP's transformation guidance. https://stapgef.org/resources/advisory-documents/achieving-transformation-through-gef-investments

OECD-UNDP Impact Standards for Financing Sustainable Development - OECD-UNDP Impact Standards for Financing Sustainable Development

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

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.)