STAP guidelines for screening GEF projects

Part I: Project Information	Response	
GEF ID	10858	
Project Title	Securing Climate-Resilient Sustainable Land Management and Progress Towards Land Degradation Neutrality in the Federated States of Micronesia	
Date of Screening	November 16, 2021	
STAP member screener	Mark Stafford Smith	
STAP secretariat screener	Guadalupe Durón	
STAP Overall Assessment and Rating	Concur STAP welcomes Micronesia's and UNDP's proposal "Securing Climate-Resilient Sustainable Land Management and Progress Towards Land Degradation Neutrality". The project aims to tackle land degradation through a holistic Land Degradation Neutrality approach. Global environmental benefits will be achieved in land and forest restoration, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation resulting from avoided emissions from agriculture, forests, and other land uses. The project also will tackle drivers due to infrastructure development – eg. coral mining. The proposal is well-written and logically argued. STAP welcomes the comprehensive problem analysis, and proposed interventions embedding mitigations to tackle the adverse effects of climate change. As the proposal is developed, STAP recommends considering other long-term drivers that may influence the project's global environmental benefits, such as undesired fluctuations in the economy, or negative impacts of population changes. STAP also encourages the project team to consider one, or two, simple alternative impact pathways that are robust to anticipated changes. STAP is pleased the project will conduct preliminary assessments of the enabling environment. In addition to	

	this analysis, STAP encourages the project team to pursue a land potential assessment to help define a baseline of the current land conditions, and plan for land rehabilitation, if these are not already available. A resilience assessment also will be critical to help anticipate unwanted changes, for example climate change may further exacerbate land degradation, despite this project's efforts to reduce, or reverse land degradation. Close attention ought to be given to counterbalancing any losses with gains in the application of LDN, or, preferably, avoiding the losses at all. STAP details its guidance below.	
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, the objective is defined and relates to the problem analysis.
Project components	A brief description of the planned activities. Do these support the project's objectives?	Yes.
Outcomes	A description of the expected short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention. Do the planned outcomes encompass important global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits?	Yes, the outcomes focus on strengthening sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation.
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits likely to be generated?	Yes, with good monitoring and learning.
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.
Part II: Project justification	A simple narrative explaining the project's logic, i.e. a theory of change.	
1. Project description. Briefly describe: 1) the global environmental and/or adaptation problems, root causes and barriers that	Is the problem statement well-defined?	Yes, the problem is well-defined, as so is the context (e.g. land tenure and its relationship to adoption of sustainable land management) influencing environmental management, and livelihoods. The main drivers of degradation (biodiversity and land) are defined as economic

need to be addressed (systems description)		development challenges, changing cultural practices, demographic shifts and climate change. The PIF also establishes links between ecosystem health and services, biodiversity, and livelihoods.
	Are the barriers and threats well described, and substantiated by data and references?	Yes, barriers and threats are thoroughly described. During the project design, suggest embedding the barriers (those described in the PIF, as well as new barriers that might be identified by key stakeholders during project design) in the theory of change by asking which are the most significant barriers that need to be addressed to achieve outcomes.
	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?	Yes, the problem analysis identifies multiple drivers that need to be addressed holistically through sustainable land management, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. During the project design, suggest defining more precisely the drivers of degradation based on the target site's context and traits – i.e. biophysical (presence of degradation processes, e.g. soil and groundwater salinization), social traits (in, or out, migration, land tenure insecurity), economic development (coral reef mining), and other drivers of degradation that characterize the targeted site. Information about the selection of sites is included in the PIF, but at the end of the document. The problem analysis identifies declining soil fertility as a cause for low agricultural production. Increased deforestation as a result of land clearing for agricultural production, unsustainable timber harvesting, and other causes, has diminished biodiversity and the quality of ecosystem services – e.g. water quality, soil fertility. Migration (in-migration to high-islands due to job loss) has provoked changes in agricultural practices – i.e. an increase in unsustainable subsistence agricultural practices. In other instances, an increase in cash

		crop production has occurred that is affecting water quality (agrochemical runoff) and biodiversity (monoculture of cash crops). Degradation of watersheds has increased, leading to erosion, which is affecting surface freshwater and quality, and the quality of submarine groundwater discharge into the ocean, causing damage to marine biodiversity. Solid waste management (SWM) also contributes to land degradation due to the lack of regulations and provision of recycling and landfill facilities. Infrastructure development also has influenced environmental degradation (e.g. increased and unregulated demand for sand, coral, timber, for construction) and fragmented natural habitats. Increased sea level rise and drought also pose severe threats to land and marine resources.
2) the baseline scenario or any associated baseline projects	Is the baseline identified clearly?	Yes. Several baseline initiatives are described that will underpin this project. GEF and non-GEF projects are described. Satellite imagery will be used during the project design to establish the baseline for LDN indicators on land cover, land productivity, and carbon stocks. FAO's EX-ACT tool also will be used for establishing the baseline, and monitoring, of carbon stocks.
	Does it provide a feasible basis for quantifying the project's benefits?	The baseline does not, as it is a narrative of projects. However, core indicators were provided which will quantify the project's benefits. STAP recommends identifying sub-national metrics, or indicators, that can complement LDN indicators and the core indicators to help monitor and track progress on LDN, biodiversity conservation, and the most important ecosystem services in the target sites. Additionally, it would be useful to identify metrics or indicators to track local benefits on improved livelihoods.
	Is the baseline sufficiently robust to support the incremental (additional cost) reasoning for the project?	Yes. However, suggest complementing core indicators as suggested above.
	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;	At this stage, yes. Suggest identifying complementary metrics and indicators as suggested above.
	are the lessons learned from similar or related past GEF and non-GEF interventions described; and	Yes, lessons are described.
	how did these lessons inform the design of this project?	Lessons have only been generally identified. They will be defined more comprehensively and applied during project design.
3) the proposed alternative scenario with a brief description of expected outcomes and components of the project	What is the theory of change?	The project seeks to address land degradation through a holistic approach on LDN, while generating multiple benefits on biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, and climate resilience. The PIF includes a theory of change figure which STAP welcomes. A brief narrative is also included, which is good, with an excellent description of assumptions. STAP urges keeping these revised as the theory of change is improved. Collectively, four components aim to achieve the project objective and deliver global environmental benefits on carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and improved ecosystem services. These components are: (i) strengthen the strategic (institutional, policy, regulatory) framework for addressing land degradation; (ii) improve the information, decision/support tools and capacity for addressing land degradation; (iii) demonstrate climate-smart sustainable land management in critical landscapes and coastal zones to improve ecosystem services and reduce land degradation; and, (iv) ensure effective knowledge management, gender mainstreaming, and M&E. The PIF also makes eight causal pathways explicit (page 38), which STAP welcomes. As the project is developed, having a more comprehensive version of the ToC which reflects these explicitly will help to check and make the case that the

		proposed components truly are necessary and sufficient. Additionally, identify indicators, or metrics, to monitor changes in these causal pathways. Monitoring change will assist with the learning and scaling the project intends to achieve on sustainable land management, LDN, and biodiversity conservation. The narrative also identifies 5 (a-e) other explicit assumptions which is good; establishing some way (perhaps quite qualitatively in some cases) of monitoring these during the project implementation is important to ensure they are met and that there is early warning if the project needs adjusting because they are not. We urge continuing to consider whether there are other key assumptions (some are probably implicit in the risk assessment) that should be included here by the time of the ProDoc to keep an eye on during implementation.
	What is the sequence of events (required or expected) that will lead to the desired outcomes?	See above.
	What is the set of linked activities, outputs, and outcomes to address the project's objectives?	Together, the four components aim to achieve the project objective to halt land degradation through integrated LDN planning that improves biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services, while strengthening Micronesia's climate resilience. For component 1, STAP is pleased that an assessment of the enabling environment (e.g. policies, regulations, laws) will be conducted for tackling land degradation, and embedding sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation into the agricultural and infrastructure sectors. STAP encourages close attention is paid to land tenure security, stakeholder participation in land use decisions, and other social traits (governance, power dynamics) that enable the uptake of LDN through sustainable land management.

		In addition to the baseline and resilience assessments described in component 2, STAP also encourages the project team to conduct a land potential assessment. This assessment is essential to defining interventions that rehabilitate the land (component 3), improve the land's resilience to shocks and stresses (climate and non-climate), and ensuring its long-term capacity to sequester carbon, conserve biodiversity, and generate ecosystem services. Please refer to STAP's guidelines on LDN for further information on land potential assessments. The following paper on the application of UNCCD's LDN framework is also a useful resource: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2017.10.011 When designing and implementing LDN, STAP suggests remaining cognizant of potential land degradation so that losses can be anticipated and avoided as much as possible. In this regard, assessing for resilience will play an important part in planning counterbalancing interventions, and suggest a continued reference to RAPTA, or other resilience assessment methods during project design and implementation (e.g. Wayfinder). Possible degradation could result, for example, due to sea level rise affecting mangroves' abilities to serve as coastal resilience measures (mangroves' thresholds to sea level rise appears to be 6.1 millimeters a year); trees that are planted to ameliorate erosion might suffer from pests and disease; soil fertility and agricultural productivity might be affected by continuing effects of sea level rise, such as soil salinity. The project team is also encouraged to apply Module C (how to integrate counterbalancing in land use planning) of the LDN framework to pro-actively plan for anticipated losses in land-based natural capital with planned gains.

	Are the mechanisms of change plausible, and is there a well-informed identification of the underlying assumptions?	Please revisit the initial assumptions with key stakeholders described thus far (assumptions listed on page 39). During this exercise, consider whether there are additional underlying conditions, or resources, that are necessary for planned changes to occur, or for the objective to be achieved.
	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, component 4 will focus on adaptive management. Suggest connecting component 4 with the theory of change. The theory of change can also be used for results monitoring – i.e. monitoring progress towards achieving the outcomes.
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, with careful monitoring, evaluation, and learning.
	LDCF/SCCF: will the proposed incremental activities lead to adaptation which reduces vulnerability, builds adaptive capacity, and increases resilience to climate change?	Non-applicable.
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, the benefits focus on soil carbon sequestration, or emissions avoided from agriculture, forestry and other land use; and benefits from biodiversity conservation.
	Is the scale of projected benefits both plausible and compelling in relation to the proposed investment?	Yes.
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits explicitly defined?	Yes.
	Are indicators, or methodologies, provided to demonstrate how the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits will be measured and monitored during project implementation?	Yes, EX-ACT will be used to measure and monitor carbon stocks, satellite imagery will be used to establish LDN baselines on land cover, and land productivity. Other methods will possibly be used.
	What activities will be implemented to increase the project's resilience to climate change?	The project has taken an initial assessment of the climate risks. This analysis will be deepened during the project development, and mitigation measures applied.

		Given the projected changes from climate change, STAP encourages the project team to consider one, or two additional pathways to ensure the benefits resulting from this project outlast the long-term drivers of change, resulting from climate change, population changes, and fluctuations to the economy. Suggest applying STAP's advice on scenario planning, which is described in STAP's resilience information brief. Please refer to STAP's website for new advice on scenario planning.
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 is innovative in developing Micronesia's National Action Programme on land degradation. The Programme will apply a holistic LDN approach to effectively address land degradation while achieving co-benefits in biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
	Is there a clearly-articulated vision of how the innovation will be scaled-up, for example, over time, across geographies, among institutional actors?	Partly. In addition to training and knowledge exchanges, suggest articulating a pathway in the theory of change that details what is necessary to scale successful outcomes from an LDN approach, or other holistic practices. Some questions to consider when developing a scaling pathway include: who (including stakeholder partnerships/platforms) needs to be involved to successfully scale outcomes? what capacity is needed to scale; what are the enablers (e.g. secure land tenure), or barriers (e.g. lack of land tenure) to scale?; what resources are required? (e.g. financial, knowledge repositories); how will monitoring and evaluation (component 4) capture the learning and knowledge required for scaling? Suggest referring to STAP's workshop report on behavioral change, emphasizing the role of social structures (e.g. power dynamics) in achieving desired change.
	Will incremental adaptation be required, or more fundamental transformational change to achieve long term sustainability?	Transformational change is likely to be required given the climate projections, particularly on sea level rise and drought.

		The durability concerns currently addressed (Institutional, financial, social) are important but do not really address durability of the GEB outcomes in the face of changes in other drivers. STAP encourages the project team to consider uncertainty to cope with the level of change that will take place as result of climate change, and population changes (in and out-migration). A few pathways could be envisioned that map alternative courses of actions as suggested above. A source that is useful for developing scenarios and sequencing alternative pathways based on systems thinking is STAP's resilience information brief (refer to section on scenario planning) along with Resilience Adaptation Pathways and Transformation Approach Version 2 . Although most stakeholders may understandably have a 10 to 20 year time horizon in their thinking, issues such as sea level rise unfortunately but unequivocally will not cease on that timeframe. Hence, taking a longer time horizon in thinking about these pathways will help ensure that path dependencies are not locked in that cause maladaptation in the decades following the project lifetime. For example, the project could explicitly commit to reviewing the promoted CSA practices over time as more information about climate impacts emerges.
1b. Project Map and Coordinates. Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place.		A good map is provided.
2. Stakeholders. Select the stakeholders that have participated in consultations during the project identification phase:	Have all the key relevant stakeholders been identified to cover the complexity of the problem, and project implementation barriers?	The list of stakeholders is comprehensive. STAP encourages the project team to revisit the stakeholder list during the project design, identifying stakeholders that are essential for

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.		validating the causal pathways, scaling, and achieving the outcomes.
	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?	Stakeholders' roles have been identified in table under stakeholder section. STAP appreciates the level of detail in the table.
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. 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-	Have gender differentiated risks and opportunities been identified, and were preliminary response measures described that would address these differences?	Partly. A gender analysis and action plan will be prepared by a gender specialist during the PPG with a view to mainstreaming gender in the project design. This plan is welcomed by STAP, especially as the problem analysis and interventions needs to be assessed from a gender perspective. STAP also commends how gender is mentioned throughout the document, not just in this section. (Component 3.3 may wish also to look at the Australian ACIAR groups of projects applying the well-established "Family Farms Team" approach in PNG and the Pacific, which could be a helpful approach here: if of interest, see https://www.aciar.gov.au/media-search/blogs/family-farm-teams-gaining-momentum-png).

making; and/or economic benefits or services. Will the project's results framework or logical framework include gender-sensitive indicators? yes/no /tbd		
	Do gender considerations hinder full participation of an important stakeholder group (or groups)? If so, how will these obstacles be addressed?	Please consider whether gender hinders the full participation of an important stakeholder group.
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? For climate risk, and climate resilience measures: • 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?	The PIF describes several implementation risks, such as lack of coordination between government stakeholders, lack of commitment from indigenous peoples and local communities, and other risks. Suggest embedding into the theory of change these implementation risks, along with the social and environmental risks identified in UNDP's Social and Environmental Screening Procedure (SESP). Climate risks have been identified thoroughly, and mitigation strategies will be embedded throughout the project.
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. STAP appreciates the table listing projects to be coordinated with this initiative.
	Is there adequate recognition of previous projects and the learning derived from them?	Yes. Some of the learning (lessons) are described in the list of coordination projects. More information on lessons learned will be provided in the complete project.
	Have specific lessons learned from previous projects been cited?	See above.
	How have these lessons informed the project's formulation?	See above.

	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, Yes, component 4 and the theory of change.
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?	Examples of best practices and lessons learned from projects throughout the Pacific will be sought, along with best practices from projects in Micronesia. Lessons and learning will be embedded into the final project document.
	What plans are proposed for sharing, disseminating and scaling-up results, lessons and experience?	The project will promote learning within the targeted landscapes (e.g. across communities), across the target sites, across the islands, and to other countries in the Pacific. STAP suggests applying the recommendations on scaling previously described in this report.

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 ***"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.

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.