STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE

GEF ID	**11141**
Project title	**Transforming Policy and Investment through Improving Ecosystem Management and Restoration of Degraded Drylands of DedoplistskaroBiosphere Reserve in Georgia to Generate Multiple Environmental and Socio-Economic Benefits**
Date of screen	**June 16, 2023**
STAP Panel Member	**Graciela Metternicht**
STAP Secretariat	**Guadalupe Duron**

1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

The project aims to improve biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of ecosystems and restoration of degraded drylands in Dedoplistskaro Biosphere Reserve (BR), located in the southeastern part of Georgia.

A logic chain has been well articulated (in addition to a good preliminary theory of change figure), including a description of the drivers, the context influencing the problem, and pathways to achieve the desired GEBs on biodiversity conservation and land management. STAP highly encourages the project team to give particular attention to considerations of cultural norms and values, gender, power, and different types of knowledge required to achieve the desired change as they will influence stakeholders' decision making. During the stakeholder engagement process in the design stage, STAP recommends revising the theory of change by accounting for these social aspects.

Policy change is a thrust of the project. STAP recommends pursuing policy coherence analysis to identify opportunities for greater synergies, or actions to address conflicting interests. STAP's policy coherence paper includes project activities in relation to steps in a policy cycle (See reference below to STAP's paper.).

There are plenty of standards and principles on ecosystem restoration which the project could usefully draw from to design integrated land use planning in support of biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management. This includes the Standards of Practice on Ecosystem Restoration developed by U.N. Decade on Ecosystem Restoration partners.

STAP is pleased with the initiative to develop simple narratives of plausible futures. Further guidance on this issue, and other key points, are provided below.

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
- □ X 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 context is described in relation to the project site being an important area for conservation of biodiversity, its sustainable use and the restoration of degraded land. The causes of land and forest degradation are also solidly described. Climate as a driver of land degradation is explained, including its long-term effects on agricultural productivity. Whether other long-term changes, e.g. population growth, market changes, and conflict, are key drivers of degradation and deforestation is not explained. This is a gap the project team will need to address as it develops the activities related to each of the causal pathways, and connects them to the barriers, and drivers that could impact each of the planned outcomes. Additionally, this information will be important for consideration of the resilience of the project – that is, what are the risks, in addition to climate change, which the project needs to take into account as it is designed.

STAP appreciates the effort to develop future narratives, which are necessary to ensure the outcomes endure. Below, STAP provides further advice on how to strengthen the narratives, which can usefully inform further development of the components – i.e. additional consideration of the barriers, and opportunities, associated with the outcomes which can be reflected in a revised theory of change.

The selection of the components is based on good logic, as so is their interaction. Nonetheless, STAP would argue there are key characteristics missing of the socio-ecological ecosystems, which would greatly benefit the project logic. The LDN scientific conceptual framework could be used to establish a logical order and connection between the activities of the three components. Suggestions for strengthening the theory of change are also provided further.

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 for the following issues to be addressed during the project design:

1. For component 1, suggest mapping the key policies influencing sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation. This includes identifying the synergies, and conflicts between policies, and defining specific activities that address incoherence. Refer to STAP's policy coherence guidance listed below.

2. Revisit the theory of change – the narrative and the figure. For the narrative, STAP recommends describing the problem, a brief context analysis, which then leads to a rationale of each of the components, including an explanation of the barriers, and enablers, that underpin each pathway. As the theory of change is revisited, ask whether the components are necessary and sufficient to achieve the project objective. This includes assessing whether the logic has been designed based on the social characteristics of the targeted systems, which include gender, cultural values and norms – all of which are necessary to achieve outcomes, scale results, innovate, and transform a misaligned practice, or behaviour. Additionally, it is important to ask what are the knowledge gaps related to the seven assumptions identified, that need to be explored further for designing the interventions associated with each of the components. In the diagram, consider adding the long-term drivers (e.g. climate change, and others) that will influence the project activities. Refer to STAP's theory of change primer cited below for further information.

3. For further narratives, please amend the text by following these steps: consider what are the 3-4 long term drivers of degradation and deforestation in the project area. Develop a few plausible scenarios (a few sentences) of how the future may unfold based on these drivers, and their interactions. Then consider the implications of these futures while revisiting the project components and ask whether the

outcomes will be resilient to the unwanted changes the future might bring, or are set up to embrace opportunities. Refer to STAP's simple narratives guidance cited below.

4. As component 1 is developed, consider drawing from available resources on ecosystem restoration, including the Standards of Practice on Ecosystem Restoration which profiles five essential components for restoration that complement the project: i) undertaking an assessment of restoration, including social, economic and biophysical traits of the system; ii) designing interventions holistically (e.g. policy analysis, selection and prioritization of activities, and others) by engaging the necessary stakeholders through participatory mechanisms; iii) implementation while managing for risks, including leakage from deforestation or other negative spillovers resulting from policy incoherence, or misaligned activities; iv) management which considers the necessary resources to pursue the activities, learn, and adapt as necessary. Refer to the link below to access the Standards of Practice. In designing interventions related to components 1 and 2 consider the principles of LDN, including integrated land use planning to decide where interventions (e.g. eco-tourism, community-based forest management, sustainable pasture management) are to be more effective to achieve the objectives set.

5. In component 3, revisit its description and intent so that it encompasses knowledge and learning. As currently written this component is focused predominantly on outputs, and less so on the knowledge and learning required to monitor the project's impact pathways.

6. As the project is designed and implemented, ask whether additional, or different, stakeholders are necessary to achieve the outcomes. Are agents of change included in the group of stakeholders?

Policy coherence in the GEF: https://stapgef.org/resources/advisory-documents/policy-coherence-gef
Framing policy coherence for the GEF: https://stapgef.org/resources/policy-briefs/framing-policy-coherence-gef
Using simple narratives to ensure durability of GEF investments: https://stapgef.org/resources/policy-briefs/using-simple-narratives-ensure-durability-gef-investments
Standards of Practice on Ecosystem Restoration: https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc5223en
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
Land Degradation Neutrality: guidelines for GEF projects. https://stapgef.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/STAP%20LDN%20Guidelines%2016-pager%20web%20version%20%281%29_0.pdf

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.)