Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel

STAP Scientific and Technical screening of the Project Identification Form (PIF)

Date of screening: October 08, 2013   Screener: Paul Grigoriev

Panel member validation by: Sandra Diaz
Consultant(s):

I. PIF Information *(Copied from the PIF)*
FULL SIZE PROJECT   GEF TRUST FUND
GEF PROJECT ID: 5534
PROJECT DURATION : 5
COUNTRIES : Ecuador
PROJECT TITLE: Conservation of Ecuadorian Amphibian Diversity and Sustainable Use of its Genetic Resources
GEF AGENCIES: UNDP
OTHER EXECUTING PARTNERS: Ministry of Environment (MAE); FundaciÃ³n Otonga: Centro Jambatu de InvestigaciÃ³n y ConservaciÃ³n de Anfibios.
GEF FOCAL AREA: Biodiversity

II. STAP Advisory Response *(see table below for explanation)*

Based on this PIF screening, STAP's advisory response to the GEF Secretariat and GEF Agency(ies): **Consent**

III. Further guidance from STAP

STAP welcomes the submission of this project concept intended to support the survival of highly endangered amphibian species, advance research on potential applications of amphibian skin secretions in biomedicine to promote the ABS agreement and strengthen key institutions for conserving biodiversity and ensuring sustainable and equitable use of genetic resources. Some general comments on the concept are provided first, followed by more specific observations.

The complex of synergistic pressures confronting amphibians in general is well presented. This makes the project complex and challenging. Nevertheless, the three pronged innovative approach being proposed (emergency measures to ensure the survival of selected highly endangered species; research into useful active compounds from skin secretions; and, institutional strengthening to support biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources) is logical given the circumstances. But some aspects require further explanation or elaboration.

1.   First, it is not clear how elements of what is being proposed actually fits within BD -1, Improve the sustainability of protected area systems. Peripherally or incidentally perhaps, through the eventual generation of alternative sources of financing for PAs. But in the present, the creation of municipal reserves or ex situ conservation efforts cannot be seen as something the makes the national system of PAs more sustainable. The creation of set asides does not equate to increasing the sustainability of protected area systems. Secondly, it is paradoxical, and disturbing, that while mining is moving ahead, with full knowledge of its impacts, including on endangered amphibian and other biodiversity, this project attempts to conserve it in a reactionary and emergency manner. Avoidance of the need to do this of course would have been the preferred option. Thirdly, since many amphibian species are endemic, and in the absence of information on their environmental tolerances and specific habitat requirements, the success of their desired eventual reintroductions remains a question mark.

2.   Overall, the proposal is structured in a coherent and consistent manner, with clear alignment among the levels. The objective as presented may be too ambitious and grandiose. Since the project focuses on selected amphibian species, this could be reflected in the objective phrasing.

3.   The globally important biodiversity of the country is presented rather well but the expected GEBs of this project are presented rather weakly (par. 27). More expansion and specificity will be required moving forward.

4.   The baseline is a little spotty but that is understandable and will be addressed during the PPG as stated.

5.   Barrier 1 refers to lack of capacity to undertake "extreme" measures for conserving amphibians. What precisely does this refer to? Ex situ conservation?

6.   The description of stakeholders is comprehensive and the definition of risks is appropriate. The description of the ABS aspects is thorough and cautious. One wild card of course is the risk of climate change, acting in concert with other threats, in particular chytridiomycosis. It is more than likely that over the next few decades it will only increase, and depending on the project sites, it could have catastrophic effects on remaining amphibian populations. The eventuality of this happening should be factored into the project's further development to a greater degree, although they are both mentioned as factors of relatively low concern in the ex-situ conservation activities.

STAP advisory response	Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed
1. Consent	STAP acknowledges that on scientific or technical grounds the concept has merit. However, STAP may state its views on the concept emphasizing any issues where the project could be improved. Follow up: The GEF Agency is invited to approach STAP for advice during the development of the project prior to submission of the final document for CEO endorsement.
2. Minor revision required.	STAP has identified specific scientific or technical challenges, omissions or opportunities that should be addressed by the project proponents during project development. Follow up: One or more options are open to STAP and the GEF Agency: (i) GEF Agency should discuss the issues with STAP to clarify them and possible solutions. (ii) In its request for CEO endorsement, the GEF Agency will report on actions taken in response to STAP's recommended actions.
3. Major revision required	STAP has identified significant scientific or technical challenges or omissions in the PIF and recommends significant improvements to project design. Follow-up: (i) The Agency should request that the project undergo a STAP review prior to CEO endorsement, at a point in time when the particular scientific or technical issue is sufficiently developed to be reviewed, or as agreed between the Agency and STAP. (ii) In its request for CEO endorsement, the Agency will report on actions taken in response to STAP concerns.