

Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel

The Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel, administered by UNEP, advises the Global Environment Facility
(Version 5)

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

Date of screening: September 27, 2016
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Consultant(s):

I. PIF Information *(Copied from the PIF)*

FULL-SIZED PROJECT	GEF TRUST FUND
GEF PROJECT ID:	9420
PROJECT DURATION:	5
COUNTRIES:	Regional (Malawi, Tanzania)
PROJECT TITLE:	Strengthening Trans-boundary Cooperation and Integrated Natural Resources Management in the Songwe River Basin
GEF AGENCIES:	AfDB
OTHER EXECUTING PARTNERS:	Songwe River Basin Commission (SRBC); Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development of Malawi acting on behalf of Malawi and Tanzania
GEF FOCAL AREA:	International Waters

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):
Minor issues to be considered during project design

III. Further guidance from STAP

The project proposal concept (PIF) describes well the multifaceted pressures on the natural and human resources of the basin, along with the expected consequences of land degradation, namely increased runoff in the catchment leading to worsening floods, low flow induced dry season droughts, loss of soils and downstream impacts on aquatic ecology. Accordingly STAP welcomes the thesis that a coordinated basin wide approach to reverse degradation and to improve economic prospects is desirable.

The proposal seeks GEF support for the establishment of the proposed Songwe River Basin Commission (SRBC), a body envisaged to be created under the Songwe River Basin Development Project (SRBDP), which is a bilateral infrastructure and economic reform initiative of Malawi and Tanzania. The PIF outlines the path towards establishment of the River Basin Commission and proposes updates to a feasibility study undertaken in support of the SRBDP that is stated to be the equivalent to the TDA while updates to the Shared Vision 2050 (SRBDP strategy) is stated to be equivalent to a SAP. Additionally the PIF includes a request for support to a flood warning system and various demonstration pilots for reducing land degradation.

From a scientific and technical perspective STAP finds that there are serious deficiencies in the proposed design centered on the role and information base driving the establishment of the proposed SRBC. STAP has therefore focused its attention on suggestions for improvement of the intervention logic (theory of change) implied in the PIF and in turn the causal chain leading to stress reduction in the Songwe River Basin.

Intervention Logic:

STAP considers that the theory of change implicit in the design is fundamentally embedded within the conclusions already reached regarding the adopted infrastructural projects and economic and social measures set out in the SRBDP, as summarized in the PIF. STAP, however, has not had access to the document Songwe River Basin Vision 2050, but has reviewed available documents hosted by the websites of the SRBDP (<http://www.songwerbdp.go.tz/#>) the African Development Bank (<http://www.afdb.org/en/projects-and-operations/project-portfolio/project/p-z1-eaz-026/>) and SADC regarding the SADC Protocol on Shared Watercourses.

Given the work already invested in the SRBDP, the project proponents need to consider that there is likely to be an inherent tension between the outcomes of an open process using the GEF's TDA and SAP tools, even if only adopted to update existing plans, and the assumptions already made about the preferred development pathway that has been adopted through the SRBDP. Will the proponents and government stakeholders be willing to wait for formulation of (potentially) a new TDA and, from a political perspective, be able to back what might become a SAP with development objectives that differ from the assumed outcome, or at least act to delay and modify long-planned infrastructural projects? Our reasoning for this question is that a fully implemented stakeholder-led TDA with stress reduction actions carried forward into a SAP could very likely generate project alternatives to the existing adopted SRBDP, which the existing mandate and structure of the proposed SRBC may not be able to reconcile, given that equivalent river basin commissions supported through the GEF were largely mandated around the outcomes of the TDA/SAP process and not the other way round. The SRBC itself appears to STAP to be mandated to deliver the SRBDP; however, the role of a Commission, fully empowered by the respective governments, is broader and it will have to reconcile competing visions and project proposals. The project brief should be strengthened to deal with this scenario.

Taking the information provided in the PIF and the barriers listed, for example it would appear that many years work lie ahead to restore the basin catchment to a condition capable of supporting a dam, let alone a hydro-electric dam, given the need to reforest, restore water holding capacity and increase the buffering of water supply in uplands and stopping (not just reducing) sediment inflow to proposed dams, which would otherwise quickly render investment in them poor value. Also implied by the PIF's description of the SRBDP would be trade-offs between existing patterns of land occupancy towards organized irrigation schemes and presumably exclusion of communities, or at least prevention of extractive use, from a large area of upland, protected for water supply reasons. There are many other issues that could be mentioned related to the development destination implied by the PIF.

STAP's advice therefore is that the project could be re-formulated around a proposal for support for the capacity building measures required to establish the SRBC, which would be a core outcome and an essential tool for transboundary cooperation. Support for the proposed flood warning measures could also be included. However, as presently drafted STAP is not able to support the trajectory of the pilot projects (Component 3) and assumptions about the role of the SRBC without a better articulated theory of change for maximizing global environmental benefits, based on the outcome of a TDA, the case for which should be presented in the form of a gap analysis in a PPG document. In addition, the PIF could be much better informed from learning from other integrated river basin projects - with expected learning from this project incorporated into a project KM output (which is also lacking).

The PIF does not present a clear theory of change to help address STAP's concerns regarding the likelihood of achieving the proposed global environmental benefits. The project's target contributions to GEBs in Table F on page 5 are compelling in themselves but have no basis in project actions that would deliver them. We only have a component 3 that promises 'demonstration' of INRM, not of any comprehensive set of actions that would lead to actual delivery of GEBs. This is a fundamental limitation of the project. All we would get in reality is a random set of activities under the SRBDP without any coherent set of Outputs and Outcomes.

When developing the theory of change in preparation of the project, the following issues should be addressed: i) demonstrate the involvement of stakeholders in the development of the theory of change; ii) explore whether the objective can be achieved through incremental changes (adaptation) to the social-ecological system, or whether transforming the system will be required; iii) develop impact pathways that are needed to achieve the changes required to meet the objective (step ii); and, iv) adjust the theory of change to capture learning, including learning that evolves through adaptive management.

Knowledge management

GEF has supported the development or work of several river basin commissions across Africa, and while STAP welcomes the intention, identified in the PIF to learn from local and SADC regional catchment initiatives (e.g. Lake Nyasa), the experience of basin commissions elsewhere would be instructive, e.g. Chad Lake Basin, Senegal River Basin, Niger Basin, in order to bring lessons forward to inform the present

proposal. In particular, methods for the involvement of stakeholders in preparation of the TDA should be carefully examined.

<i>STAP advisory response</i>	<i>Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed</i>
1. Concur	In cases where STAP is satisfied with the scientific and technical quality of the proposal, a simple “Concur” response will be provided; the STAP may flag specific issues that should be pursued rigorously as the proposal is developed into a full project document. At any time during the development of the project, the proponent is invited to approach STAP to consult on the design prior to submission for CEO endorsement.
2. Minor issues to be considered during project design	<p>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:</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>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.</p>
3. Major issues to be considered during project design	<p>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:</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>The GEF Secretariat may, based on this screening outcome, delay the proposal and refer the proposal back to the proponents with STAP’s concerns.</p> <p>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.</p>