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:	November 13, 2017
Screener:	Virginia Gorsevski
Panel member validation by:	Annette Cowie
Consultant(s):	

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

FULL-SIZED PROJECT	**GEF TRUST FUND**
GEF PROJECT ID:	9759
PROJECT DURATION:	4
COUNTRIES:	Macedonia
PROJECT TITLE:	Promoting Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Through Strengthening Legal and Institutional Framework, Capacity Building and Restoration of Most Vulnerable Mountain Landscapes
GEF AGENCIES:	UNEP
OTHER EXECUTING PARTNERS:	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of Macedonia (MoEPP)
GEF FOCAL AREA:	Land Degradation

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

STAP welcomes UN Environment's proposal on "Promoting Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Through Strengthening Legal and Institutional Framework, Capacity Building and Restoration of Most Vulnerable Mountain Landscapes" in the Republic of Macedonia.

The project aims to strengthen national policy and institutional capacity for SLM and contribute to achieving LDN targets with a focus on select mountain landscapes in the north-western region of the country.

STAP is pleased to see maps included in the annex of the project information document; however, notes that they could be improved by including legends (Map 3), English translation (Map 4), source information (Maps 2 – 5).

STAP feels that the overall objective of this proposed project is laudable and generally addresses the multiple problems identified in the background section (e.g. land degradation, erosion, fires, flooding, landslides, etc.) and underlying causes (e.g. excessive use of fertilizer, pollution from industry, unsustainable agricultural practices, unregulated waste disposal, deforestation, etc.). However, as written, the project lacks focus and clarity. In addition, the entire project is quite ambitious to be achieved in just four years in that it includes so many different major objectives – each of which will likely pose a separate challenge.

To strengthen the proposal further, STAP recommends addressing the following points during the development of the proposal:

1. Project Outcome 1.1 essentially restates what is written in Project Component 1. In addition, Project Output 1.14 is confusing in that the achievement of LDN is an outcome, whereas the rest of the sentence

(inclusion of targets, financing, etc. are outputs that contribute to the outcome). In general, the order of Project Outputs could be revised to reflect the order in which they would be accomplished. For example, it would make more sense to first set the scientific baseline and indicators (Output 1.1.2) and then to set targets (Output 1.1.4). Once the scientific analysis is completed and understood, then it would make sense to see how this matches up with existing activities, and to undertake a gap analysis, strengthen institutions, etc.

2. With regards to LDN, it is unclear from this project proposal what is the current state of efforts and how this work will complement (supersede?) activities already underway. For example, on p. 11, it appears that the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning is already currently implementing LDN activities including an LDN leveraging plan, LDN assessment, baseline, etc. and that this project is a continuation of this work through LDN mainstreaming. However, on page 15, it states that this project will help develop an LDN baseline. Regardless, STAP suggests that the project take advantage of guidance in the Scientific Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation (Orr et al., 2017) developed by the UNCCD, ensuring that all relevant elements are included in Macedonia's LDN Framework to enable achievement of LDN. Doing so can also help to more clearly target priority activities under Component 2, which at present don't appear to be organized or ranked in any systematic manner.

3. It is clear from this project proposal that current land use practices in Macedonia are contributing to severe land degradation, which is exacerbated by climate change and extreme weather events such as flooding. What is less clear is what information and/or incentives will be given to users of the land (e.g. land owners, farmers, foresters, mining companies, etc.) to adopt recommended sustainable land use practices. Is the assumption that increased regulation and enforcement will be sufficient or does the project intend to highlight the long-term economic and other potential benefits of sustainable land management practices and technologies? While the regulatory approach may be helpful, it will also likely be necessary to complement this with well-targeted extension materials and activities to enhance understanding by landholders, in order to facilitate behaviour change.

4. While the objectives are laudable and the strategy seems largely sound, there is little detail on the specific SLM practices to be promoted nor the methods to determine these. The details that are provided convey a limited understanding of practical and effective approaches to manage land degradation, and specifically water erosion, that is identified as the major form of land degradation. The measures described – use of geotextiles and windbreaks – are not suitable means of controlling water erosion in cultivated fields. Water erosion should be addressed through contour ploughing, creation of grassed contour banks, stubble retention, direct drilling, restricting cultivation to land identified as suitable (i.e. based on assessment of land potential that incorporates slope, soil type and erosivity – to be mapped in Component 1). The management of organic residues is raised as a problem, but the intended measures to address the problem are not specified.

5. In terms of Global Environmental Benefits, the project lists several including improved local livelihoods, which though not environmental are important. How does the project plan to improve local livelihoods based on the Components outlined in this proposal and how will any improvements in local livelihoods resulting from this project be measured? Apart from the improved SLM and SFM over 15,000 ha, the project also refers to improvements in biodiversity and the fact that this is a biodiversity hotspot and center of endemism. Therefore, please provide more information about endemic species and/or ecologically sensitive areas. Are these project sites located near protected areas?

6. The issue of conflict is mentioned in several instances throughout the project and is listed as a Medium level risk. Please specify what type of conflict may impact the project (between land owners? Ethnic groups? Is it competing use of land?). Whatever the case, STAP suggests that if the risk of conflict is substantial and could negatively impact the project, that additional effort is made during the stakeholder consultation process to use conflict sensitive planning tools such as those available through the UN Environment's Disasters and Conflicts program (http://www.unep.org/disastersandconflicts/) to reduce risk to project implementation and scaling up. Also please note that past projects in Macedonia have actually led to improved relations between ethnic groups (See GEF Project 32, including Final Evaluation).

7. Component 3 is dedicated to Knowledge Management and public awareness. Specifically, the project seeks to improve the understanding of benefits related to SLM so that these practices can be replicated. Output 3.1.2 relates to the development of project proposals for future funding which seems tangential to improved knowledge management and more aligned with goals of replication and scaling up. One aspect of knowledge management which isn't mentioned is the benefits of learning from other, similar efforts in the region with mountainous topography and facing comparable challenges. There may be significant potential for learning from past and ongoing regional SLM projects to share best practices and avoid pitfalls.

8. The description of additionality implies that the baseline projects will be entirely ineffective, despite that the SIDA project is stated as "promoting sustainable agricultural practices" through "institutional and legal framework development, capacity building, public awareness raising". Perhaps the "Scenario without the GEF investment" is inappropriately negative? Please clarify how the project will build on the SIDA project.

9. In further detailing the project please pay attention to proof reading. It would appear that the amount USD 350,000 million given as the value of the SIDA project is out by several orders of magnitude; perhaps the term "civil arrest" should say "civil unrest"; and there are several instances where sentences are incomplete or hard to follow.

10. Finally, in terms of stakeholders listed in Section 2, please clarify what constitutes the private sector. Are farmers the equivalent of land owners? Are these single family farms or large commercial enterprises? If individual farmers and families, how will their interests be represented during stakeholder consultations – particularly if conflict over land is an issue as mentioned above?

References

Orr, B.J., A.L. Cowie, V.M. Castillo Sanchez, P. Chasek, N.D. Crossman, A. Erlewein, G. Louwagie, M. Maron, G.I. Metternicht, S. Minelli, A.E. Tengberg, S. Walter, and S. Welton. 2017. Scientific Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality. A Report of the Science-Policy Interface. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Bonn, Germany.

STAP advisory response	*Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed*
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	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 GEF Secretariat may, based on this screening outcome, delay the proposal and refer the proposal back to the proponents with STAP's concerns. 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.