

# 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: May 11, 2016  
Screener: Guadalupe Duron  
Panel member validation by: Michael Anthony Stocking  
Consultant(s):

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

FULL SIZE PROJECT	GEF TRUST FUND
GEF PROJECT ID:	9270
PROJECT DURATION:	4
COUNTRIES:	Malaysia
PROJECT TITLE:	Sustainable Management of Peatland Ecosystems in Malaysia (SMPEM)
GEF AGENCIES:	IFAD
OTHER EXECUTING PARTNERS:	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, ASEAN Secretariat, Global Environment Centre
GEF FOCAL AREA:	Multi Focal Area

### 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

1. STAP welcomes this proposal to sustainably manage the peatlands of Malaysia, partly because of the critical importance of peat as a sink for carbon, and partly because of the widespread utilization of peatlands for conversion to cultivation and oil palm. Several conversion projects have failed, leading to considerable degradation of peatland ecosystems. STAP has screened this proposal from IFAD in the light of scientific and technical validity of the proposed actions, outputs and outcomes, as well as cognisance of lessons derived on other peatlands and by scientific studies to determine best practice in restoration and management.

2. STAP notes with concern that the PIF is unsupported by any references to previous studies or to actual lessons learned in other projects. There is, therefore, no cited evidence as to (i) choice of priority sites and the criteria used for the six sites featured in the PIF, other than qualitative information on species occurring; (ii) the current status of the chosen sites and hence the particular technical needs for protection and/or restoration; (iii) the nature of the peat (e.g. coastal, riverine, lowland, upland) and its conservation and ecosystem value; and (iv) techniques for monitoring and tracking any change in status of the peatlands consequent upon the project. At the very least, STAP would have liked to see some reference to, say, the work of Wetlands International (2010) in undertaking a national assessment of peatlands in Malaysia. This appears to be a most thorough and balanced review, containing much of the relevant literature which should also be informing the current proposal – see [http://archive.wetlands.org/Portals/0/publications/Report/Quickscan%20of%20Peatlands%20in%20Malaysia\\_Feb3.pdf](http://archive.wetlands.org/Portals/0/publications/Report/Quickscan%20of%20Peatlands%20in%20Malaysia_Feb3.pdf)

3. Peatlands vary considerably in both natural attributes and in current status of degradation. Even at this early stage in project development, STAP would have liked to see some typology of peatlands in Malaysia that would then inform the management approach. Malaysian peats may, for example, be classified as sapric, hemic or fibric, depending on the stage of decomposition ; this distinction will critically affect not only

CO2 emissions but also how management strategies should be formulated. One typology developed for Malaysia distinguishes between:

- a. "Undisturbed/relatively undisturbed HCV forest'. No drainage undertaken in forest area (although there may be drainage in peripheral areas of peat), canopy cover >70%, and forest either unlogged or, logged selectively without drainage.
- b. "Moderately disturbed peatland'. Peatland which has normally been drained and selectively logged. Canopy cover 30-70%, few fire events, canopy cover may be from residual trees left after the disturbance or from natural succession.
- c. "Severely degraded peatland'. Peatland which has been drained and clear-felled, with frequent fire events. Vegetation mostly herbaceous (grasses/sedges/ferns) with scattered trees/shrubs, canopy cover.

The table of sites on pages 12-15 does have some information on appropriate management approaches, as well as current importance of sites. Annex 1 gives more detailed site-specific information. However, this is not set within a clear set of parameters and criteria for choice of site, relative priority, degradation condition and optimization of global environmental benefits.

4. One of the innovative aspects of the proposal is said to be the intended multi-stakeholder engagement (c.f page 15). Reading further, this engagement appears to be what is called "Smart Partnerships' between the relevant agencies involved in the "landscape approach'. STAP would like to see, not only a proper stakeholder analysis from the grass roots through to line ministries and donor agencies, but also a commentary on how a high-level of local participation will be engendered. From the table of stakeholders on page 16, it is apparent that the local community "participation' is solely in the implementation of what has already been decided by other stakeholders " this is not a good start to a trusting relationship with the guardians of the peatlands, the local people. There is some "hand-waving' at gender issues but no mention of how the interests and knowledge of women and the poor will be properly represented above that of the ministries and agencies.

5. STAP notes the risk analysis on page 18. The four risks are not quantified into low-medium-high. In addition the first three risks would appear to be largely within the scope of the project. Specifying these as "risks' is in effect saying that the risk is that the project design is not good enough. Risks are supposed to be outside the remit and scope of the project from sources external to the project.

6. Section 7 of the PIF outlines "knowledge management'. STAP notes that it is intended that the project will develop its own KM Strategy. STAP would prefer the KM Strategy to be explicitly described for the start of the project and not be left as an add-on to be accomplished sometime during the project. For KM to be truly successful, the project must develop its "Theory of Change", identify its uptake pathways through different sources and media, as well as articulate the repositories for learning and knowledge. Without a more rigorous identification of how the project will have a lasting impact and legacy, STAP worries that project developers will have insufficient focus on uptake (including up-scaling) and lessons learned will be lost.

<i>STAP advisory response</i>	<i>Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed</i>
<b>1. Concur</b>	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.
<b>2. Minor issues to be considered during project design</b>	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: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Open a dialogue with STAP regarding the technical and/or scientific issues raised.</li> <li>(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.</li> </ol>

	<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>
<p><b>3. Major issues to be considered during project design</b></p>	<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>