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 04, 2013 Screener: Guadalupe Duron

Panel member validation by: Michael Anthony Stocking
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I. PIF Information *(Copied from the PIF)*
FULL SIZE PROJECT GEF TRUST FUND
GEF PROJECT ID: 5139
PROJECT DURATION : 6
COUNTRIES : China
PROJECT TITLE: Sustainable Forest Management to Enhance the Resilience of Forests to Climate Change
GEF AGENCIES: FAO
OTHER EXECUTING PARTNERS: State Forestry Administration (SFA)
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 revision required**

III. Further guidance from STAP

STAP subscribes to the objective of this proposal from FAO and the SFA-China to enable rural communities better to manage their forests to achieve both sustainable forest and global environmental benefits. It is an ambitious remit, given the documented rapid change in land ownership and use-rights along with the acknowledged current poor quality of many of these lands and forest stands. Restoring the health of existing degraded forests should, indeed, become a high priority in the China context, given the area of old, even-age forest stands and their susceptibility to climate-change-induced degradation. The improvement of â€˜forest resilience' is a good banner â€“ or overall goal - under which to place this project.

The rationale for this project is well constructed in the PIF. The description of the baseline is clear, and the threats and barriers to forest quantity and quality are well described. The analysis is cogent, recognizing that probably the main current barrier is the lack of regulatory frameworks and the inability of local communities to manage their own forest resources to achieve multiple benefits.
STAP welcomes a number of aspects of this innovative project, especially in so far as they support some exciting developments already underway in China. The whole area of local inventory and monitoring of carbon is essential if communities are expected to be the guardians of sequestered carbon, and principal partners in voluntary carbon markets. Adoption of the Panda Standard is an interesting very recent development for these carbon markets, which clearly needs to be extended from its current focus on bamboo to forest lands more generally, especially those in a degraded state and of current low value.

STAP also appreciates the careful attention to describing the baseline and the global benefits. This includes the carbon accounting, about which more below.
There are a number of scientific and technical issues that will need to be addressed in the further development of this proposal that STAP wishes to highlight:

(1) Forest resilience and climate change. Although the term â€˜forest resilience' appears in the project title, nowhere in the PIF is it explained or elaborated or even used as a framework upon which a coherent project is designed. The rationale for the project is only explained in terms of threats to forests â€“ not in terms of building resilience of forest systems. This is unfortunate given the relatively recent coinage of the term â€˜ forest resilience', the general lack of understanding regarding the term and the potential for this project to make some real advance in enhancing forest management through addressing resilience to CC. STAP advises that it would be greatly preferable for the project to be justified by explaining how resilience can offset CC threats, what is included in actions to enhance resilience and how these are all linked in an overall forest management strategy. A good starting point for this is the IIED Opinion 2-

page piece by Macqueen and Vermeulen (2006) which sets forest resilience not only in the context of CC but also as part of sustainable development â€“ see http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/11054IIED.pdf

(2) Community management of forest resources. The PIF rightly points out that community management of forests that includes biodiversity management is a relatively new concept in China and poses one of the main barriers to the project because it is novel and not really understood, especially by professionals and political leaders more used to top-down management structures. The proposal says that this barrier will be overcome by "providing technical assistance and advice" (see para 24, p.9). STAP points out that the barrier is not merely a technical challenge but also a social and political one, requiring rather more innovative approaches, including local partnerships and community engagement. There is a copious body of experience from other countries especially in South Asia. STAP advises, for example, that the policy context and resource base for community forestry in Nepal is especially relevant and well described in the literature. A useful starting point is the short paper on the experience of eleven Forest User Groups in the Middle Hills, outlining their formation and post-formation processes â€“ see http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/794-institutional-development-forest-user-groups-nepal-processes-indicators . There is also experience in China from GEF-supported projects that is relevant. For example, the PLEC project helped to establish the Gaoligongshan Farmers' Association for Biodiversity Conservation in Yunnan, which played a significant part in mobilizing local level support for biodiversity conservation and forest management â€“ see http://archive.unu.edu/env/plec/country/china/index.htm . Experiences such as these should be used in order to develop an appropriate and sustainable way forward for what will be a significant challenge for this present project â€“ Forest Management Units that are embraced by the local community and which will yield benefits for both biodiversity and local livelihoods.

(3) Biodiversity and carbon monitoring. In Component 1, the proposal rightly draws attention to the essential role of monitoring and accounting for both biodiversity and carbon. Some preliminary ideas for how this may be done appear in para 33. However, in keeping with the emphasis on community management, it is disappointing that there is no apparent central involvement of local people in monitoring, an aspect that will be essential to give ownership and responsibility to the guardians of the biodiversity and carbon. Participatory biodiversity monitoring is well described in the literature â€“ see, for example, Lawrence, A. et al 2006. Adaptive value of participatory biodiversity monitoring in community forestry. Environmental Conservation 33: 325-334. There is also experience of forest and carbon monitoring by local people.

In making its Minor Revision advice, STAP would like to see this proposal far more firmly rooted in the scientific and technical literature; having a framework and strategy that links resilience and climate change with local forest management; and drawing upon lessons and experience from other places in China and more widely in Asia. Ideally some of this should be reflected in the PIF; but STAP appreciates that fuller description and rationale for the project approach will have to wait for the full Project Brief.

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.