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 09, 2016
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I. PIF Information *(Copied from the PIF)*

FULL SIZE PROJECT	**GEF TRUST FUND**
GEF PROJECT ID:	9243
PROJECT DURATION:	7
COUNTRIES:	India
PROJECT TITLE:	Green-Ag: Transforming Indian Agriculture for Global Environmental Benefits and the Conservation of Critical Biodiversity and Forest Landscapes
GEF AGENCIES:	FAO
OTHER EXECUTING PARTNERS:	Ministry of Agriculture (MoA); Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoE&CC)
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):
Major issues to be considered during project design

III. Further guidance from STAP

The FAO proposal "Green-Ag: Transforming Indian agriculture for global environmental benefits and the conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes" is an extremely ambitious project which seeks to overhaul the agricultural sector in several regions of India, with the aim to maintain ecosystem services at large. If the project is successful (and, indeed, STAP hopes that it will both meet and exceed expectations) contributions to global environmental benefits and national sustainable development objectives will be substantial. However, due to the scale and largely policy development nature of the project, the PIF reveals numerous weaknesses which preclude a thorough assessment of the technical and implementation challenges inherent in this undertaking or any reasonable assessment of the likelihood of achieving the global environmental benefits claimed.

In order to further strengthen the project, STAP makes the following recommendations:

1. Due to the scale of the project, concrete interventions have yet to be identified for the project, and this can muddle the real objectives. A well-considered multi-focal area (MFA) project should be able to effectively demonstrate the fundamental linkages and complementarities between two or more focal areas, while supporting a common objective (i.e. the project objective would not be achievable through a single focal area project). In this PIF, the objective(s) are confused. For instance, in some sections of the document, the agricultural sector is identified as the key focus, and is supported by ecosystem services from forests and land. However, in other parts, forested landscapes and endemic biodiversity represent the key focus of the project, as they face "threats from agricultural practices". While there are key interactions between all areas, and both "views" are correct by themselves, the way the PIF is presented lacks the necessary integration and in particular the necessary coherence which makes a good MFA.
2. Implementation of "Green Landscape Conservation Strategies" at state level are indicated as central to the success of this effort. Indeed, much of the project hinges on the development of "Green-Ag" policies and

frameworks and successful adoption â€“ along with adoption of a "Common Vision for Sustainable Agriculture". However, there is very little information provided in this lengthy PIF on what precisely will be implemented on the ground under these policies and strategies. In addition, despite the lengthy and thorough baseline description of complimentary initiatives underway or completed, little evidence (or a plausible theory of change) is provided which would credibly support the notion that the approach of preparing the strategies and policy frameworks proposed will actually achieve the project targets identified (1.5 million ha of direct and 5.0 million ha of indirect biodiversity conservation; 750,000 ha of SLM; 26.9 Mt of CO2 mitigated).

3. Under Ouput 1.5, the project seeks to use a digital knowledge base to enhance farmer-to-farmer interaction and learning. Are there specific examples in India where this approach has been implemented successfully? Is the infrastructure already in place to ensure access to all, or will this also be funded through the project?

4. Biodiversity conservation is a key component of the project. Competing demands for resources between humans and wildlife, and between communities, can also result in conflict. This risk factor should be addressed explicitly in design, and recognised as an overall risk to the project.
Management of the trade-offs between biodiversity conservation and agricultural productivity should be explicitly addressed.

5. There is a heavy reliance on Farmer Field Schools (FFS) to implement Green-Ag. While capacity-building through FFS will encourage adoption of sustainable practices that are cost-neutral, it is not clear what incentives (financial or otherwise) will be available to enable impoverished farmers to implement Green-Ag practices that entail investment or incur a yield penalty.

6. As the project moves towards the selection of specific interventions in the complex production landscape setting described, STAP urges project developers to consult the Resilience, Adaptation Pathways and Transformation Assessment (RAPTA) Framework at www.stapgef.org for guidance on assessing and enhancing resilience in the agro-ecological systems noted, and evaluating intervention options while devising workable adaptive implementation pathways.

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.