

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: October 24, 2017
Screener: Sarah Lebel
Panel member validation by: Michael Anthony Stocking
Consultant(s):

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

FULL-SIZED PROJECT	GEF TRUST FUND
GEF PROJECT ID:	9573
PROJECT DURATION:	5
COUNTRIES:	Liberia
PROJECT TITLE:	Conservation and Sustainable use of Liberia's Coastal Natural Capital
GEF AGENCIES:	CI
OTHER EXECUTING PARTNERS:	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Conservation International - Liberia
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

STAP welcomes the CI proposal "Conservation and sustainable use of Liberia's coastal natural capital". The project sets out to "improve conservation and sustainable use of Liberia's coastal natural capital by mainstreaming the value of nature into Liberia's development trajectory". This project proposes to employ three tiers: (1) improve decision-making by including a natural capital accounting approach, (2) operationalize innovative finance mechanisms for the conservation and sustainable use of coastal natural capital, and (3) enhance the resource base for coastal conservation. STAP accepts that the PIF is well-developed and has some scientific and technical content. Yet there are some concerns which should be addressed as the project is developed in its PPG phase in order to strengthen the project, enhance its sustainability and ensure its credibility.

1. There is an implicit assumption throughout the proposal that Natural Capital Accounting (NCA) is the only way that Liberia, a poor country yet with natural assets of considerable significance, could proceed "to move towards sustainable development" (PIF, p.7). Implicit also is that NCA is a relatively straightforward toolbox of methods that will give an accurate account of ecosystems flows and services. NCA is not without its critics; and not without alternative approaches and tools. Its application in developed countries can be problematic; in developing countries it is contentious. Values arising from NCA have been called into question, especially when, say, a value for a mangrove forest is compared to the value of a shrimp farm. Forecasting ecosystem service flows is a challenge in analysing ecosystem asset value on the basis of the NPV of the expected service flow, particularly when these flows are non-sustainable. Ecosystems often do not change in a predictable, linear fashion, but may have complex dynamics such as multiple steady states, thresholds and hysteresis, as a function of positive and negative feedback mechanisms guiding ecosystem dynamics (see Hein, L. et al 2016. Defining ecosystem assets for natural capital accounting. PlosOne <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0164460>.) STAP is not suggesting that NCA be abandoned. However, it needs to be used circumspectly and with rather greater measure of critical analysis than appears currently in the PIF. If spurious – even unbelievable – data are generated by NCA, then the data will likely be ignored.

2. Closely related to the employment of NCA is the assumption (under 'barriers' in the PIF, para 26, p.9) that the lack of data on the values of coastal ecosystems is one of the main reasons that policy-makers and other stakeholders fail to conserve ecosystems and instead exploit them unsustainably. This is at best simplistic reasoning and at worst spurious. Even if the Liberian Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services were to have a data-base of ecosystem values in monetary terms, this would not protect those ecosystems; rather it may even encourage further exploitation as has been seen in analogous situations (e.g. forests) in other countries. The pricing, valuation, monetisation and financialisation of nature in the name of saving it is to some critics an illusion. The PIF should at least recognize these alternative views and seek to show in Component 1 of the proposal that having a body of monetary values of the various components of coastal ecosystems in Liberia is not the sole and sufficient route to conserving coastal ecosystems.
3. Related to the data issue above, the barriers listed including lack of data, poor accessibility, and scattering of information, there is ambiguity in the PIF as to what planned intervention may arise. Is it the intention to create a central digital database (e.g. via LISGIS) as part of a more comprehensive knowledge management strategy? This could be further detailed under the section entitled "Knowledge Management". Further parts of Outcome 3.1.1 may also form part of the knowledge management strategy (e.g. paragraph 84). CI is urged to examine some of STAP's on-going advice to the GEF at <http://www.stapgef.org/knowledge-management-gef> as well as some of the knowledge management tools that are currently recommended – see, for example <http://www.knowledge-management-tools.net/knowledge-management-systems.html>.
4. The map of the project area (p.16) appears to suggest that the proposed project may extend beyond the Liberian coastline to neighbouring countries, including Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast. Is that actually the case?
5. Paragraphs 73-75: It would be useful to clarify the rationale behind using palm as a conservation-friendly enterprise, in the form of an alternative to wood charcoal for fuel. A life-cycle analysis of the proposed product may be useful in determining the environmental impacts of such products, including in relation to deforestation. For instance, is the proposed product made from waste by-products of palm oil production?
6. STAP welcomes the acknowledgement that climate change may pose a significant risk to the mangrove conservation efforts, as well as the proposed mitigation measures for this project. However, should the project choose to protect mangroves which are more vulnerable to climate change impacts, there exist a number of strategies beyond site selection which may be useful (e.g. green-gray solutions). A brief overview of the impacts of climate change on mangroves worldwide can be found in Feller et al. (2017), available here: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10750-017-3331-z>

<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	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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (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>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	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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (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>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>
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