

# 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: September 20, 2011

Screeener: Guadalupe Duron

Panel member validation by: Michael Anthony Stocking  
Consultant(s):

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

**FULL SIZE PROJECT MULTI TRUST FUNDS**

**GEF PROJECT ID:** 4620

**PROJECT DURATION :** 5

**COUNTRIES :** Regional (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco)

**PROJECT TITLE:** MENA-DELP Desert Ecosystems and Livelihoods Program

**GEF AGENCIES:** World Bank

**OTHER EXECUTING PARTNERS:**

**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): **Consent**

### III. Further guidance from STAP

#### 1. Overall Recommendation

STAP very much welcomes this PFD and is fully supportive of it progressing to full funding and implementation. It is technically sound and reflects much recent analysis and understanding of the problems of drylands and solutions to deliver developmental and environmental benefits. STAP proposes some minor revisions below to strengthen the programmatic approach and more fully support the UNCCD and its national focal points in dealing with what are truly difficult biophysical environments and marginal economic circumstances. Harmonization with UNCCD recent developments in national reporting, indicators and best practices is encouraged in the Programmatic Framework. STAP also is keen to assist the process towards a regional project, especially the Desert Ecosystem Assessment. STAP would like to see this programmatic approach spearhead similar integrated regional approaches in other drylands, and therefore urges careful tracking and monitoring of key indicators, including land cover, total systems carbon, climate resilience, biodiversity and rural livelihood/poverty status. Knowledge Management (KM), along with Decision Support (DS), systems must be firmly rooted both nationally and regionally.

#### 2. General comments/observations

This is an important integrated programmatic approach for desert ecosystems, the very systems that are the most difficult to address and which support some of the world's most marginal communities. The programmatic outcomes are well balanced, featuring two that focus on developmental issues (livelihoods and production) and two on environmental issues (biodiversity and an enabling environment for better understanding of desert ecosystems).

Investing in the economic opportunities of drylands is now acknowledged to be the primary way to spearhead environmental protection of these fragile lands. This was confirmed as far back as 2005 at COP7 of the UNCCD ([http://www.unccd.int/cop/cop7/docs/ss\\_background-eng.pdf](http://www.unccd.int/cop/cop7/docs/ss_background-eng.pdf)), where, inter alia, it is noted that, "successful traditional but evolving practices that mix species and life forms which create synergy rather than generate competition" should be encouraged, including "providing year-round soil cover, increased soil organic matter and water holding capacity, reduced evaporation, increased crop's water use efficiency and maintained soil biodiversity." It has been reiterated since in both the UNCCD and academic literature. However, few examples of the approach are extant, even though it is seen as a 'new paradigm' and has been widely accepted. This new program is therefore to be warmly welcomed.

The project goal is clear and its program results framework cascades logically from this goal. The program components are defined clearly, and the expected outputs are explicitly detailed. STAP welcomes the references to the various focal

area results based framework in each of the expected outputs. Furthermore, STAP values the regional project and its intention to tie the four projects together to ensure programmatic coordination by tracking the performance and delivery of project and program outcomes. In securing sustainable benefit, both environmental and developmental, STAP encourages the two-pronged approach as reflected by the two Components – (1) identifying technical solutions that capture multi-focal benefits; and (2) addressing the enabling environment, especially understanding, knowledge, dissemination, capacity and institutions. The second of these two sometimes is ignored, to the detriment of achieving lasting beneficial change.

Figure 1 is a helpful illustration of the MENA-DELP programmatic approach as it provides a succinct illustration of the multiple program investments by country, linked by the regional project. STAP would also like to emphasize that knowledge-sharing and co-operation is vital in-country, especially in breaking down divisions between line ministries and departments and fostering truly integrated national approaches – this is not solely a regional function. Figure 2 also is a useful illustration of the MENA-DELP Strategy, which demonstrates clearly how the program is rooted in an ecosystem-based approach that recognizes the role of livelihoods and desert goods and services.

The program rationale and description of the strategic approach are logical, and thorough. The problem statements and barriers are clear, and there is a strong emphasis on global environmental benefit outcomes. STAP especially welcomes the intended added value of demonstrating the synergies across GEF-5 focal areas. To deliver this, STAP re-emphasizes the need for explicit attention to monitoring and tracking systems for the key benefits.

### 3. Specific comments/observations

#### Programmatic Monitoring, Knowledge Sharing and Dissemination –

From the comments above and comments below on the two Components, STAP is clearly urging important attention to this part of the strategic approach in MENA-DELP. This will be the key lever in delivering the raised visibility of desert ecosystems and the new conceptual vision of them as assets – the ‘new paradigm’ of IUCN, IIED and UNDP/DDC. Therefore, as appropriate for a PFD, but recognizing that the PFD sets the model for the individual and regional projects, STAP suggests:

An explicit linkage to national reporting needs under the UNCCD; mentioning the minimum indicator reporting set of two, plus the further nine optional indicators – see UNCCD COP10 documentation

An explicit intention to monitor and describe ‘good practice’ in achieving multiple benefits through one of the KM existing platforms for Sustainable Land Management, such as WOCAT. This will also, coincidentally, meet national reporting needs for ‘best practices’ and further enhance the wider dissemination and knowledge sharing of desert ecosystem technical and approach solutions.

A table of integrated indicators in the PFD, from which country-based projects will draw as appropriate. STAP feels that project proponents will need guidance and direction in choosing indicators that will both be effective in measuring project impacts but will also harmonize with other reporting commitments such as via the UNCCD.

The points immediately above will also enhance the important quantification of GEBs delivered by MENA-DELP. Currently, the PFD is somewhat vague about specifying GEBs except in outline terms (‘harnessing new opportunities’ and similar phrases). STAP would urge the proponents to set GEB targets in at least one or more of the following: change in total systems carbon; change in biodiversity; proportion of rural population below minimum threshold income; change in production of key primary commodities; and water use efficiency. The exact specification must depend on particular project, but the lead should be set in the PFD.

#### Component 1 -

It is unclear from the program document whether and to what extent the World Bank and Jordan will develop ecotourism business plans for the Burqu’ protected area with the aim to improve desert livelihoods and conserve desert biodiversity. Perhaps the World Bank could clarify this aspect further. STAP also suggests the World Bank considers doing an environmental risk analysis of the potential threats to the ecosystems, resulting from the various proposed ecotourism activities.

The program expects to improve the flow of agroecosystem services through better natural resource management; thereby, improving livelihood opportunities for farmers mainly via better market access (cooperatives, etc.). STAP supports this expected outcome, and suggests for the Solidarity-based Integrated Agriculture in Morocco (ASIMA) project to take into consideration the risks that may hamper farmers’ sustained engagement in each of the proposed

agro-food chains” for example, market uncertainties including price fluctuation, potential demand instability, and lack of policies/frameworks that may impede the flow of market information to farmers. Attention also should be given to the mitigation strategies for these risks.

STAP is encouraged that traditional knowledge on sustainable land water management (SLWM) will form the basis for developing climate change adaptation activities (Algeria proposal). However, the proposal and the program document are less clear on the potential risks of non-adoption/non-adaptation of SLWM as a result of weak land tenure rights (legal or customary). For example, the program document raises weak, or missing, tenure policies as a potential risk, but the mitigating measure is not specific to farmers' investments on SLWM and climate adaptation. Thus, STAP recommends detailing this risk and its mitigation strategy when the proposal is developed.

#### Component 2

STAP believes this component to be an integral part of the sustainability of the program, and contribution to the learning and knowledge of the GEF. As such, STAP encourages establishing the monitoring and evaluation system so that it links strongly to the results-based framework of the land degradation, biodiversity, and climate change focal areas” particularly, to the expected outcomes and indicators defined in these focal area frameworks. Ultimately, STAP's expectation is for the monitoring and evaluation results to contribute to the learning of the GEF-5 land degradation, biodiversity, and climate change portfolios, and help shape these future focal area strategies by enhancing the knowledge base on global environmental benefits generated by GEF investments on desert ecosystems and livelihoods.

STAP considers the Desert Ecosystem Services Assessment an important contribution to the GEF's knowledge and learning base. Because of its role and strong interest in strengthening the scientific foundation of the GEF, STAP would be grateful if the World Bank could share a draft of the regional project, so it can assist in strengthening the scientific underpinnings of the assessment. STAP also would be happy to serve on the "Expert Panel", and/or recommend peers to serve on it.

STAP suggests linking the Desert Ecosystem Services Assessment to UNCCD's Second Scientific Conference "Economic Assessment of Desertification, Sustainable Land Management and Resilience of arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas" in 2012. UNCCD and its scientific community, including STAP, will be contributing efforts on valuation of ecosystem services to UNCCD's Scientific Conference. Perhaps the Desert Ecosystem Services Assessment also could be a contributing effort to UNCCD's Scientific Conference if the timing is appropriate, and/or tap into the knowledge resources developed for the Scientific Conference.

<i>STAP advisory response</i>	<i>Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed</i>
<b>1. Consent</b>	STAP acknowledges that on scientific/technical grounds the concept has merit. However, STAP may state its views on the concept emphasising any issues that could be improved and the proponent is invited to approach STAP for advice at any time during the development of the project brief prior to submission for CEO endorsement.
<b>2. Minor revision required.</b>	STAP has identified specific scientific/technical suggestions or opportunities that should be discussed with the proponent as early as possible during development of the project brief. One or more options that remain open to STAP include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Opening a dialogue between STAP and the proponent to clarify issues</li> <li>(ii) Setting a review point during early stage project development and agreeing terms of reference for an independent expert to be appointed to conduct this review</li> </ul> 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.
<b>3. Major revision required</b>	STAP proposes significant improvements or has concerns on the grounds of specified major scientific/technical omissions in the concept. If STAP provides this advisory response, a full explanation would also be provided. Normally, a STAP approved review will be mandatory prior to submission of the project brief for CEO endorsement. 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.