

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: March 14, 2013

Screener: Lev Neretin

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: 5266

PROJECT DURATION : 4

COUNTRIES : Tunisia

PROJECT TITLE: Oases Ecosystems and Livelihoods Project

GEF AGENCIES: World Bank

OTHER EXECUTING PARTNERS: General Directorate for the Environment and Quality of Life

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 welcomes this World Bank-led proposal aimed at supporting a national strategy for sustainable management of the ecosystems of traditional oases. Strong elements of this proposal noted by STAP are the intentions to promote integrated management of land and water resources, livelihood diversification, and local ownership and participatory approach in the project design. It is good that aspects of gender and local (or traditional) knowledge receive specific mention in the PIF. The analysis of the baseline situation is good with the PIF identifying a number of very real threats to sustainability of traditional oases ecosystems: the expansion of farm land, unsustainable and high ground water abstraction rates, high degree of land parcelling, extensive agricultural practices, uncontrolled urbanization, illegal expansion of private irrigated parcels usually downstream of the traditional oases and other degradation drivers. The overall project framework consisting of the three components including development of a national strategy for sustainable management of oases ecosystems including participatory development plans (PDPs) for selected oases supported by targeted investments to implement PDPs appears to be sufficient given the limited information provided in the PIF.

STAP recommends a number of issues/challenges to be addressed during project preparation:

1. In the Tunisian context, a significant factor contributing to unsustainable use of land and water resources is uncontrolled expansion of privately-owned parcels on the periphery of oases. These parcels and often-illegal associated activities contribute significantly to high levels of groundwater abstraction, salinization and other forms of degradation, including desertification. While the focus of this project is on farmers' collectives and communities, it is not clear how this problem will be addressed either in the national strategy or in the proposed PDPs in selected oases. Careful and site-specific consideration of how to tackle this problem should be provided. An oases-level planning framework needs to be developed, including issues of land use survey and institutional involvement, along with the type and method of community participation.

2. The National Strategy for Climate Adaptation in Tunisia (2009) projects by 2030 about 30% decrease in water availability in groundwater aquifers, reduced by about 50% agricultural productivity in dry periods, about 80% decrease in livestock production. Arguably, oases ecosystems are amongst the most vulnerable to climate change impacts. The PIF mentions climate resilience as an important factor but no systematic approach or strategy of climate resilience or adaptation mainstreaming into project activities and supported policies is proposed. STAP strongly recommends conducting systematic assessment of climate risks of project interventions and outcomes.

3. While increasing water use efficiency remains the key challenge in irrigated agriculture in Tunisia, climate change will reduce significantly water availability in the medium- to long-term. Systemic change is required not only in agricultural practices but also in the composition of the agricultural production. Wide national support for more drought-resistant or elimination of some agricultural commodities could be required. STAP recommends that project proponents consider developing specific provisions for systemic reform of the agricultural sector in Tunisian oases taking into account climate change impacts.

4. Reform of the existing water pricing policy and more effective implementation of water pricing on the ground is an important ingredient to assure sustainable management of oases ecosystems. Water pricing measures should be closely coordinated at all levels and properly enforced. PIF is silent on how water pricing mechanisms will be supported by the project.

5. Use of geothermal water in heating greenhouses simultaneously supplying water for irrigation is increasing in southern Tunisia. Use of geothermal water provides opportunities to satisfy energy and water needs in irrigation agriculture and increase the employment opportunities. But it can also lead to water wastage and salinization if not managed properly. Project activities could contribute to enhanced national capacity for sustainable use of geothermal water.

6. The proposal is relatively strong on biophysical and productive aspects of the ecosystem services provided by oases. However, STAP would like to see a greater appreciation of the importance of cultural ecosystem services provided by oases in Tunisia and especially their role in protection of indigenous cultures such as that of the Berber. In an interesting paper Leslie Friedman and Benjamin Marcus (2008. In: Responsibilities and Opportunities in Architectural Conservation: Theory, Education and Practice, Vol. 1: 145-163. see http://www.academia.edu/981397/Architecture_and_Ecosystem_of_the_Oasis_Towards_a_Conservation_Plan_for_a_Tunisian_Cultural_Landscape) argue the importance of and relative neglect of historical oases sites near the borders with Algeria. They propose a framework for their stabilization and management, which would be well worth studying for the current project. Local knowledge should be an important element of this proposal, being embedded in a wider management plan that includes formal scientific knowledge.

7. STAP questions the legitimacy of the risk analysis in the proposal, especially the statement, "Another risk could be the reluctance of targeted communities to participate in planned oases activities." "Risks' are those threats outside the control of the project; they are external aspects such as political change. In the case of communities failing to participate in activities, this is a failure of the project itself. It may indicate that insufficient attention has been paid to the type and mode of participation. There is generally a somewhat top-down approach to 'participation' in the proposal, and STAP would like to see a stronger and more integrated framework, not just for local people to involve themselves with the project, but with the communities themselves able to shape the planning and take decisions. There is a large body of literature on community and local participation which should be consulted " STAP would be happy to assist with further advice here.

<i>STAP advisory response</i>	<i>Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed</i>
1. Consent	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
2. Minor revision required.	<p>STAP has identified specific scientific or technical challenges, omissions or opportunities that should be addressed by the project proponents during project development.</p> <p>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.</p>
3. Major revision required	<p>STAP has identified significant scientific or technical challenges or omissions in the PIF and recommends significant improvements to project design.</p> <p>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.</p>

