

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 11, 2016
Screener: Thomas Hammond
Panel member validation by: Brian Child
Consultant(s):

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

FULL SIZE PROJECT	GEF TRUST FUND
GEF PROJECT ID:	9361
PROJECT DURATION:	
COUNTRIES:	Vietnam
PROJECT TITLE:	Mainstreaming Natural Resource Management and Biodiversity Conservation objectives into socio-economic development planning and management of Biosphere Reserve in Viet Nam
GEF AGENCIES:	UNDP
OTHER EXECUTING PARTNERS:	Biodiversity Conservation Agency (BCA)
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

The background to the project is nicely described, and the overall structure of the project is logical. On the surface this is a great proposal, but on careful scrutiny is weakened by the absence of evidence or scientific/technical detail to support many of the proposed outputs, and the absence of references or critical analysis of lessons (including failures) from other projects.

Conceptually the project is well-balanced, but there are insufficient operational details to judge if the outputs and objectives are reasonable or over-ambitious. There are concerns about the match between the project's institutional and geographical scale and the budget, even if the Vietnamese authorities are fully behind the ambitious changes envisaged by the project. However, administrative and stakeholder buy in is a considerable risk factor not discussed in any detail in the proposal. Therefore, STAP recommends that:

- buy in to (1) national legislative change and (2) integrated stakeholder planning at local level is thoroughly addressed at PPG stage,
- stakeholder buy in is considered and included in the assumptions/risks analysis and monitoring,
- that the ambition of the project is down-scaled if these risks are significant.

The proposal is significantly weakened by the absence of specific, technical or economic details, or any reference to previous experience, regarding a large number of proposed activities such as innovative wildlife conservation whatever that is (output 2.3), sustainable ecotourism operations whatever that is even if it sounds nice (2.6), sustainable livelihood activities (long list in 2.7 and p14). STAP recommends that each activity proposed in PPG stage is carefully evaluated in terms of technical viability, return on investment, and experience with such activities elsewhere in GEF projects. Rather than listing a large number of feel-good activities, the Project should justify how it will allocate effort and funding most effectively to these many suggestions to get the greatest returns.

Similarly, STAP notes that many of the processes proposed are challenging in practice. These need to be carefully described in the PPG stage, and therefore need to be subject to the same level of technical and financial scrutiny and planning as claims about sustainable livelihood activities mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Technical familiarity with institutional change management may therefore need to be included in the PPG team, as much as or more so than biological capabilities. Some of the process so mentioned are:

- "national Biosphere Reserve management systems",
- "multi-sector planning platform",
- "spatially-based Biosphere Reserve information management system",
- "biodiversity-friendly standards for tourism development" ,
- "ecosystem based risk assessment system"

In general, claims that it will be possible to undertake these activities successfully should be supported by evidence. Care needs to be taken not to assume positive outcomes without a clear technical description and evidence base.

There is no mention of local rights in the document. Given the number of indigenous communities that will be affected, this omission needs to be corrected, while the PPG need to provide assurance that GEBs do not come at the cost of local livelihoods and rights. Indeed, given the importance of local rights to SFM in the Amazon (see Nepstad's various publications) and South Asia (e.g. Agrawal's Environmentalism, papers by Arnold), this omission is surprising.

The implicit assumption that targeted biosphere reserves "will be placed under non-consumptive use" (p14) needs to be argued and scrutinized with far greater care in terms of its effects on biodiversity, viability of reserves, local livelihoods, and where and why it has net benefits over a carefully controlled use approach. Again, technical details are missing.

STAP recommends that far more rigour is provided in describing what capacities exactly will be strengthened in support of INRM and BR (p14). Are these technical, legal, institutional capacities, and at what level, with which stakeholders?

STAP also recommends that the statement "the project will work to ensure that additional funding is in place for BD conservation and SLM/SFM interventions" is crucial to the viability of the proposal but needs to be specified much more carefully in the PPG stage.

STAP requests elaboration of what the document means by "improved conservation security in the entire area of 4,097,476 he of Biosphere Reserves (p15)" and how this will be measured. Is this goal obtainable? STAP suggests that indicators are provided for how "reduced pressure" on the 1,541,855 ha will be measured, and suggests a focus on management outcomes (i.e. biodiversity, socio-economic costs and benefits) for the 7 PA units more than management effectiveness (because of the unproven correlation between METT measures of effectiveness and GEB outcomes). The indicators for LD and SFM look good but appear to be expensive to measure and therefore need to be simplified using SMART indicator logic.

STAP seeks clarity on the governance of standards, and how the project will navigate between the practicalities and institutional realities of imposed standards (that often do not work) and self-enforced standards, for example with landholders in the three project areas and with tourism operators. What norms are prevalent in Vietnam regarding top-down versus devolved self-regulation, do norms need to be transformed, and what is a realistic (rather than nice sounding) outcome for the project.

<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	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:

<p>design</p>	<p>(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> <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>
<p>3. Major issues to be considered during project design</p>	<p>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:</p> <p>(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> <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> <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>