

# How the science of behavioral change and the social sciences can help the GEF to deliver its objectives

Workshop Report

June 2020

## How the science of behavioral change and the social sciences can help the GEF to deliver its objectives

### Summary of main points from a workshop held on 25 and 26 March

STAP's advice on behavioral change, "[Why behavioral change matters to the GEF, and what to do about it](#)" (December 2020) stemmed from observing that while many GEF projects would only be successful if behavior changed, at both the individual and institutional levels, it was often an implicit - not explicit - objective. The outcome sought was clear, but *how* the outcome was to be achieved was not. STAP concluded that projects are more likely to succeed if the desired behavioral change was identified and addressed explicitly. The advice recommended [a checklist](#) of issues, with supporting questions, to be used in designing and implementing GEF projects (see Box 1 below).

The virtual workshop explored how STAP's advice might benefit from bringing in social science perspectives to help deliver better project outcomes. The workshop brought together experts from the social sciences from a variety of disciplines - anthropology, sociology, geography, and environmental science, many with research and practitioner experience in more than one discipline. Members of the GEF partnership also participated, from the GEF agencies, GEF secretariat, the Independent Evaluation Office, and STAP.

Overall, participants indicated that more comprehensive links between the behavioral and social sciences hold promise for improving the design of effective environmental interventions, including for successful [multi-stakeholder dialogue](#) processes, achieving more durable long-term results, and eventually contributing to transformational change. STAP's "enabling elements" for improving the design and implementation of project investments provide a useful guide in this context<sup>1</sup>.

#### Box 1: Behavioral change checklist

##### 1. Describe the desired change in behavior

- Think about the problem.
- What does success look like?
- Whose behavior has to change?

##### 2. Identify key stakeholders

- Bring together stakeholders to identify the problem and solutions.
- Who needs to be involved to change behaviors?
- Who can enable, and who might limit, decision-making and behavioral change?

##### 3. Map the desired change

- Describe the cause-and-effect relationships between coupled human-environment systems using systems thinking.
- What are the barriers, or enablers, of behavioral change?
- What are the behavioral assumptions or risks?

##### 4. Combine strategies, approaches, and tools

- Use multiple approaches, techniques, and tools to help address barriers to, or motivate, change.
- What are stakeholders' aspirations, values, and needs, and how could the selected strategies support stakeholders in building capacity and agency?

<sup>1</sup> Refer to STAP's enabling elements for good project design, pg. 16: [Nature-based Solutions and the GEF](#).

- 5. Pursue monitoring, evaluation, and learning**
- Develop deliberate learning during project implementation to monitor and evaluate behavioral change.
  - What changes need to be monitored? For instance, is the behavioral change in question a direct means to an environmental end (i.e. a change in practice), or is it the end in and of itself (i.e. changed views about the importance of conservation)?
  - What barriers are preventing the desired change, or what factors are enabling it?
  - What type of learning is needed to achieve the project objective?
- 6. Test and refine assumptions before implementing intervention at scale**
- Assess progress to foster reflection and innovation.
  - What opportunities exist to challenge established behaviors and patterns and create new ways for scaling, innovation, and transformation?

Source: Metternicht, G., Carr, E., Stafford Smith, M. 2020. Why behavioral change matters to the GEF and what to do about it.

## 1. Understanding the cultural setting and social norms

STAP's behavioral change [checklist](#) encourages project developers to consider 6 issues, including describing the desired change, identifying key stakeholders, and mapping the described change. Mapping expected change processes requires systems thinking to describe the cause-and-effect relationships between people and the environment, identifying barriers to and enablers of change, and thinking about assumptions and risks.

Human behavior responds to a wide range of influences, from the local to the global level. A primary strategy adopted by practitioners and policy makers is to identify levers or "nudges" to alter individuals' behaviors, for example giving rewards for the desired behavior, or encouraging behavior change through new rules and regulations. The public health sector has led the way in this regard, and the numerous recent inducements for COVID-19 vaccinations that have been enacted are a well-known case in point. Whether or not these levers or nudges are effective, however, depends on a good understanding of the cultural context and social norms within which the activity or project is functioning.

Participants also indicated that there will be occasions when both individual and societal support for change is high, but institutional support is low. In these cases, a number of participants indicated that projects should consider behavioral change interventions that focus on removing institutional barriers. Alternatively, institutional support can be high, and an intervention well aligned with best practice in behavioral psychology, but individual motivation for change is low due to how that change challenges the social norms in which that individual lives. Participants indicated that the most impactful interventions occur when these influences are aligned.

## 2. Building trust and legitimacy over time using appropriate multi-stakeholder dialogue

Participants noted that interventions predicated on universal assumptions about human behavior are often not effective. For example, a study in southern Ghana showed that the distribution of agricultural land within households did not maximize either food or livelihood outcomes, as women received far less land than they were capable of cultivating effectively<sup>2</sup>. However, land allocation in this context is

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<sup>2</sup> Carr, Edward R. "Men's crops and women's crops: The importance of gender to the understanding of agricultural and development outcomes in Ghana's central region." *World Development* 36.5 (2008): 900-915.

carefully calibrated to ensure that women meet the subsistence needs of the household, without generating a surplus that might threaten men's identity and authority. Any intervention aimed at encouraging men to increase the size of women's agricultural plots will not be successful as it comes into conflict with the cultural setting and/or the realities of social norms in these communities. Better and more durable outcomes depend on bringing stakeholders together in [multi-stakeholder processes](#) to design, implement, and evaluate interventions. Successful strategies include making use of existing coalitions or processes for engagement to sustain dialogue with stakeholders throughout the project investment, and through promoting greater inclusiveness and equity *intentionally* by being aware of and addressing any unique power dynamics which may exist.

### 3. Build capacity of communities, organizations, and teams

An early finding from the workshop is that there are many effective tools and methods available for building capacity among stakeholders that can enhance [the durability of project outcomes](#). From the working groups it was suggested that capacity can be thought of in multiple ways:

**At the community level** – When local communities own the outcomes and benefit from them there is a greater likelihood that global environmental benefits will endure after the project has been implemented. Community ownership is an important ingredient to innovation, scaling, and [transformational change](#). Understanding the capacity for change at the community level, through for instance ensuring the necessary skills, processes, and values for collaboration are in place to support effective multi-stakeholder dialogue, is key to ensuring project outcomes.

**Amongst project teams** – Ensuring project staff are collaborative in their approaches with the necessary facilitation skills and continuity in approach, both regarding the communities in which they are working and across the disciplinary backgrounds within their project teams, was also cited as important factors for success. Such efforts can ensure that executing agencies and community participants build lasting relationships with each other to support durable change.

**Within organizations** – Participants noted that executing organizations and other institutions involved in the project that are enabled and can facilitate effective project co-design with communities is often an important pathway for success. This entails that [participatory design and evaluation processes](#), including community participants and organization staff, are built into the project from the early stages so that practices can be continuously revised and improved.

### 4. GEF funding cycle

The GEF funding cycle can be a challenge to project design where behavioral change is required because it takes time and attention to build trust and legitimacy among stakeholders, and thereby change cultural norms and values. There is often a mismatch between project cycles and expectations of change. The durability of GEBs beyond the funding cycle is largely dependent on environmental and socio-economic benefits which continue to accrue to local stakeholders, raising the likelihood that they will support the outcomes of the project post-implementation. Understanding the system (structure,

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Carr, Edward R. "Livelihoods as Intimate Government: Reframing the logic of livelihoods for development." *Third World Quarterly* 34.1 (2013): 77-108. Should this be footnote 3? If so, needs a reference in the text somewhere.

norms, composition) within which the project operates, along with the incentives that enable desired change at the individual, community, or organizational levels, are important considerations in ensuring this durability in outcomes.

Following the workshop, STAP is further considering its advice to the GEF on behavioral change.