**Discussion Brief: STAP’s proposal on selective project screening**

**May 2014**

**Background**

1. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel’s (STAP) mandate is to provide strategic scientific and technical advice to the GEF, and its role is defined in the revised Terms of Reference (TOR) approved by the GEF Council in March 2012. The Operational Advice section of the TORs details STAP’s responsibilities in the GEF Project Cycle (Paragraphs 16-23). The text defines STAP’s responsibilities for ensuring that “recent advances in the relevant aspects of science and technology” have been addressed in GEF projects[[1]](#footnote-1).

2. The STAP Secretariat and Panel members screen every full-sized project concept (submitted to the GEF on Project Identification Forms (PIFs)) at the time they are approved to a work program by the CEO. The objective is to identify, at an early opportunity, whether a project proposal could benefit from high-level scientific advice in its further preparation, and whether the project proponents have the necessary access to, and understanding of, recent advances in the relevant aspects of science and technology.

3. The screening involves reviewing sections of the PIF to assess the scientific and technical validity of the project concept. These sections include the following: the project framework, the project description (problem statement and barriers that need to be addressed), description of the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits and incremental cost reasoning/additional cost reasoning, description of the components, identification of risks (climate change, social, environmental), and description of stakeholders involved in the project and their relation to the components and expected outcomes. The STAP provides literature sources (published and unpublished) to support its recommendations, and help strengthen the project design where ever possible.

4. The STAP may provide further advice on project development between the Council’s approval of the work program and the CEO project endorsement if it has identified through its PIF screen that a project includes one of the following aspects: i) major components of scientific and technical innovation; ii) experimental designs or approaches; or, iii) significant implementation and methodological barriers. The STAP coordinates with the appropriate GEF Agency and the GEF Secretariat this detailed review.[[2]](#footnote-2)

5. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the GEF undertook a review of STAP as part of the Fifth Overall Performance Study (OPS-5). Among the study’s conclusions, the IEO remarked that STAP’s strategic contributions are recognized widely. Nonetheless, the study concluded that there is an “…increasing demand on STAP’s time and little growth in STAP’s resources…” Therefore, “…there is a need to formulate clear priorities between STAP’s role in identifying strategic long-term issues facing the global environment and its quality assurance role through project screening.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

6. In January 2014, the STAP Chair convened the Panel to review the substantive findings of the evaluation and to propose modifications to the current screening procedure, intended to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of STAP, in contributing to the quality of full-sized projects. This discussion brief articulates STAP’s proposed role in the project cycle in GEF-6.

**Initial selection criteria**

7. STAP currently screens every full-sized project. In GEF-6 STAP proposes to move towards a selective project screening process, recognizing that not all projects benefit equally from a STAP review, and that STAP resources may be more effectively and efficiently deployed by undertaking screening in a more targeted fashion. At the same time, STAP would like to ensure that screening can enhance project development and implementation. Systems that monitor project implementation can identify lessons and create opportunities for future project design.

8. This change is motivated by the observation that many projects are replicative in nature, and involve the application of standardized methodologies, well-established technologies and governance approaches at the project level. For such projects, there is relatively less need for a rigorous STAP review. Additionally, several GEF Agencies have significant internal scientific and technical expertise to address the basic elements of project design. Focusing the effort of screening on projects that meet agreed criteria will allow STAP to assign more time for strategic activities – scoping global environmental challenges, identifying ways to address these priorities, researching and developing guidance to GEF and its agencies to enhance the GEF’s ability to generate global environmental benefits.

9. The STAP suggests the following draft criteria as the basis for selecting projects to be screened:

1. The project supports novel intervention approaches, or technologies, that are being piloted. This includes approaches that are new in a field, new in a particular application area or context, and/or interventions that have not been previously supported by the GEF. (e.g. UNDP proposal “Strengthening Management Effectiveness and Resilience of Protected Areas to Safeguard Biodiversity Threatened by Climate Change”[[4]](#footnote-4))
2. The project focuses on a thematic area or a strategic objective that is new to the GEF, and can help in addressing scientific and policy gaps. (e.g. Reduction or elimination of anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury to the environment)
3. The governance challenges are significant and involves GEF interventions in complex regions with multiple stakeholders at several levels: regional bodies; national agencies and local stakeholders (e.g. IOC/UNESCO “Strengthening Global Governance of Large Marine Ecosystems and their coasts through enhanced sharing and application of LME/ICM/MPA knowledge and information tools”)
4. The project seeks resources from one of the integrated approaches, which are: i) Sustainable Cities – Harnessing Local Action for Global Commons; ii) Taking Deforestation out of Commodity Supply Chains; and, iii) Fostering Sustainability and Resilience for Food Security in Africa.
5. The project applies complex and innovative integrated approaches. These include multiple focal area and multi-trust fund projects, or programmatic approaches. For the latter, STAP will review the umbrella programs, as well as those sub-projects that are scientifically and/or technically challenging– for example, as described in (a) and (b).

10. The screens will focus on the sections of the PIF that include scientific and technical issues critical to project development and implementation. These sections include the project framework (logic model), natural and social science baselines, technical aspects, incremental/additional cost reasoning, project and external governance frameworks, exit strategy and global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits.[[5]](#footnote-5) STAP will examine these sections with regard to issues such as: Is the project objective consistent with the problem; is there a scientifically valid baseline; are global environmental benefits, or adaptation benefits, scientifically valid and adequately characterized?

**The selection process**

11. The STAP proposes the following procedure to identify the projects to be screened:

1. As the work program is being assembled by the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Secretariat and/or GEF Agencies will identify projects that would benefit from a STAP screen based on the criteria identified in paragraph 5 a – d above.
2. The STAP will review the GEF work program once constituted, and identify projects that are scientific and technically challenging that warrant a review by STAP that may not have been identified under paragraph 7a above[[6]](#footnote-6).
   1. For projects financed by the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF), the GEF Secretariat and STAP will identify projects that merit further scrutiny by STAP during the PIF pre-selection process that recommends developing the concepts for the work program.
   2. For projects financed by the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF), the GEF Secretariat and STAP will monitor the rolling work-program to identify technically challenging projects.
3. Once the work program is posted on the GEF website (or circulated electronically in the case of LDCF projects), the GEF and LDCF/SCCF Councils may also exercise their prerogative to identify projects they specifically wish STAP to review.

12. The STAP proposes a working group be formed to refine the selection criteria and procedure for identifying projects to be screened. The outcomes of the working group will form the basis of a paper that will be submitted to the Council in October 2014.

**Aspects** **that can assist STAP implement an effective selective screening process**

13. There are a number of related issues the GEF and STAP Secretariats may need to address jointly in the upcoming year:

1. The Secretariats, along with the Independent Evaluation Office of the GEF, may wish to consider establishing a monitoring system to assess and follow the impact of STAP’s screens on project design, particularly those where major revisions were recommended. The assessment could be undertaken when the project is fully developed, and submitted for CEO endorsement. STAP could include a brief analysis of the uptake of its advice in the project design, including lessons learned, in its regular reports to Council.
2. The Secretariats may need to harmonize the content of the STAP screen and the GEF Secretariat review sheet. This task will aim to strengthen the complementarities between the reviews.

The timeline for these actions will be in the medium-term and will be defined further later this year.

**Conclusion/Recommendation**

14. The STAP will work with the GEF Secretariat, Agencies, and in particular the GEF Council to refine this proposal on STAP’s future role in the project cycle. This paper, which presents STAP’s initial input into these discussions, will be revised to reflect the outcomes of the working group and will be submitted to the Council at their meeting in October 2014.

1. GEF Project and Programmatic Approach Cycles (2010). Para. 87. GEF/C.39/Inf.3 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Further information about STAP’s screening process is available in GEF Project and Programmatic Approach Cycles (2010). Para. 87. GEF/C.39/Inf.3 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Final Report of the Fifth Overall Performance Study of the GEF: At Crossroads for Higher Impact. Independent Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility. November 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The STAP considered this project to be innovative and ground breaking - with potential for the development of effective and transformative approaches in addressing climate resilience challenges in protected area management. The approach also was considered as having high replication potential within the GEF protected area portfolio. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Independent Evaluation Office concluded in its OPS-5 that social science and governance aspects (within and outside the project environment) are important to achieving transformational change, and sustainability. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The working group will need to consider the unique project approval process for World Bank projects in this context. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)