

# 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 27, 2015

Screeners: Thomas Hammond

Panel member validation by: Brian Huntley; Thomas Lovejoy  
Consultant(s):

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

**FULL SIZE PROJECT GEF TRUST FUND**

**GEF PROJECT ID:** 9272

**PROJECT DURATION :** 6

**COUNTRIES :** Regional (Brazil, Colombia, Peru)

**PROJECT TITLE:** Amazon Sustainable Landscapes Program

**GEF AGENCIES:** World Bank, WWF-US and UNDP

**OTHER EXECUTING PARTNERS:** Governments of Participating Countries

**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

STAP welcomes this program, which targets a highly worthwhile challenge (i.e. conservation and the maintenance of intact forest landscapes in the Amazon basin) and notes that the PFD is well intentioned with many good ideas and expected outcomes. The Amazon produces globally important benefits in biodiversity conservation (terrestrial and aquatic), in national and continental climate regulation (via its hydrological cycle in which the forest generates half of its own rainfall), and in global climate regulation as a major stock of terrestrial carbon and as a carbon sink (the mature forest can fluctuate in this depending on weather cycles such as El Nino, but when it is sequestering it is significant globally).

The three countries in question comprise about 82% of the Amazon. There has been minimal collaboration between these countries on conservation and management, except during the period when the Amazon Cooperation Treaty was led by former Ecuadorean President Rosalia Arteaga. Most conservation and management has been conducted at the national level. While important, national level efforts are insufficient as in the end the Amazon needs to be managed as a system.

The biodiversity and magnitude of the Amazon Basin is summarized well, and the Panel believes that the proposed activities if undertaken successfully will result in significant global environmental benefits. There are clearly sections that reflect deep practitioner and empirical experience. STAP is reasonably confident that this program can deliver on its expected outcome of "globally significant biodiversity and sustainable land use and restoration of native cover". The Panel notes that the Program expects to build resilience in forested and agro-ecosystems, and urges the proponents to review STAP's recent publications in this domain as part of the Food Security IAP.

Concomitantly, this highly ambitious program appears to draw very little on past knowledge and experience, including little explicit evidence from projects that have worked or failed in this area, or lessons from the GEF portfolio in the same and other regions. Given so many past investments in this area, it is surprising that this document provides little evidence of this or proof of concept for proposed activities.

Threats to biodiversity and integrated landscape management (i.e. agricultural expansion, roads, energy infrastructure, mining oil and game, illegal timber trade) are described well but generally, without quantified data, in most cases, which is surely available. Barriers to more effective approaches are also well discussed, such as open access to land (weak individual/group tenure), absence of land planning and zoning, environmentally harmful subsidies, lack of farmer incentives for good land use, weak management capacity

in conservation and indigenous areas, threats from infrastructure, and limited capacity for monitoring of land use change.

For a large \$112 million project (in GEF funding) the technical quality of this document is light and it should focus more on what is proven to work, or is theorized to work in the future, than on intentions. The challenge for a reviewer is that, while a PFD is only a concept note and while we might fully anticipate that many of these weaknesses will be corrected in the programme and project preparation phases, the Panel's responsibility is to highlight potential concerns as this will be the last point in time that the Program is subject to external scrutiny or peer review by STAP.

STAP is reasonably confident that the 4 main components described (in theory and at a general level) together support the project objective. However, as noted above a weakness throughout the PFD is that it rarely provides explicit analysis or lessons learned from past success, or to the relevant scientific literature to validate claims on approaches such as protected area investments and financing, integrated land use (including communities and CBNRM) and so on. STAP reviewers, in reading this PFD, frequently noted very significant claims that did not provide confirmation of a proof of concept or other evidence. Indeed, there is little or no explicit evidence of lessons being incorporated from earlier projects (including GEF). For example, in Component 1, how well did ARPA-activities work, what worked (or did not) and why, what is the evidence of financial success, and on what basis is it assumed that past financing can be projected into the future?

The Capacity Building and regional Cooperation Component is welcomed by STAP, but Component 4 is only very weakly developed at present and extremely general. STAP urges that this component include explicit testing of practices employed, action-oriented research, and ongoing peer review of results "feeding lessons back into child projects as the basis for adaptive management/learning. The intention to share lessons with future projects is stated, and STAP welcomes this approach to openly share experience, lessons, and data gathered from this initiative. In addition, STAP also urges that through this component the Program forges explicit links to the GEF's emerging approach in KM as well as other related initiatives " particularly the Integrated Approach Pilot under development focused on commodity agriculture and deforestation.

The assessment of risks are not well developed in the view of STAP, particularly where the complexity of the program "makes the overall risk substantial" by the PFD's own admission. Key risks such as protected area financing, the devolution of rights to communities, the relative viability of forest-based land uses, the capacity to implement regulations are ignored or addressed superficially. Of particular note is that there is little specific analysis of socio-economic issues such as the impact of parks, land rights, regulatory restrictions, etc. on society, especially local people and groups which may be marginalized. For example, in Colombia (and other areas) particular attention needs to be focused on recognizing rights of indigenous peoples who are inside large protected areas, e.g. Chiribiquete.

Risks related to future potential agricultural expansion and infrastructure development in the Amazon (as outlined in the PFD) cannot be understated. As currently being explored in the Commodities IAP, the pressure for increasing expansion of the oil palm estate is significant. Massive expansion in oil palm commodity production in the Amazon, of course, would be a biodiversity and hydrological disaster as well as a CO2 emissions source of considerable consequence. Future growth in commodities production, such as oil palm and cacao, should be restricted to already cleared land (and some of that land should also be reforested). Discussion on growth in energy infrastructure should also include the issue of transmission lines. Innovative alternatives to cleared rights of way should be explored. Expansion of the railway network in the region in the past, for example in Carajas, represented a direct contributor to extensive deforestation in the region, as well as the illegal trade in timber.

Perhaps the weakest area of the PFD is discussion of the theory of change, which is only discussed in general terms. The PFD would be much stronger if it clearly stated a proposed theory of change, based on lessons from past experience, that could be explicitly tested during implementation of the program, thus providing validated evidence to justify this and future interventions. A possible example would be: landholders (including parks) and communities are deterministic of land use outcomes. The purpose of the program is to "get incentives for maintaining or rehabilitating biodiversity right" at landholder community level by (1) strengthening land rights (2) strengthening knowledge and capacity to make good decisions (3) incorporating the costs and benefits of biodiversity impacts into land use through zoning, incentives and by addressing perverse subsidies (4) addressing macro-drivers like roads and (5) monitoring and evaluating (researching?) if this hypothesis is correct. STAP welcomes the opportunity to work with the proponents in the development of central theory of change proposed for this initiative.

References:

<i>STAP advisory response</i>	<i>Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed</i>
<b>1. Concur</b>	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.
<b>2. Minor issues to be considered during project design</b>	<p>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> <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>
<b>3. Major issues to be considered during project design</b>	<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>