Part I: Project Information		Response
GEF ID		10169
Project Title		Combating land degradation and biodiversity loss by promoting sustainable rangeland management and biodiversity conservation in Afghanistan
Date of Screening		28-May-19
STAP member Screener		Graciela Metternicht
STAP secretariat screener		Guadalupe Duron
STAP Overall Assessment		STAP rating: minor issues to be considered during project design. STAP welcomes this proposal that aims at combating land degradation and biodiversity loss by promoting sustainable rangeland management and biodiversity conservation in vulnerable landscapes of eastern Afghanistan (Khost, Laghman, Nuristan). The planned outputs include enhancing cross sectoral coordination mechanisms at national and provincial level to support integrated land use planning, sustainable rangeland management, and influencing policy decisions for Land Degradation Neutrality. The latter is an innovative policy component. STAP recommends the team adopts the LDN Conceptual Framework (https://knowledge.unccd.int/knowledge-products-and-pillars/guide-scientific-conceptual-framework-ldn/tools-and-resources-land), for enhanced science- and practice-based guidance to determine LDN targets, and to track progress on the achievement of these targets through planned interventions. The LDN conceptual framework, and associated methodological approaches, could guide implementation of project Components #1 and #2. Moreover, the LDN framework could provide missing evidence of the expected hectares to be restored by first assessing how to avoid and reduce land degradation as suggested in the LDN response hierarchy. The LDN framework also could help ensure that the outputs achieved count towards the country's commitment to achieve LDN by 2030. Furthermore, the use of the checklist on Land Degradation Neutrality Transformative Projects and Programmes is highly recommended to strengthen project design; this checklist has been prepared to aid country-level project developers and their technical and financial partners to design interventions that encourage innovation. STAP appreciates the various references cited in the document, especially in the problem analysis. STAP is also pleased the project will draw from USAID's SERVIR program that uses satellite data for land cover and land use mapping, and to build stakeholders' capacity for data analysis and land use planning decisions. As FAO and Afghanistan develop the project, STAP recommends strengthening the focus on rangeland management. The project team may wish to draw on the methodology of GEF-funded projects such as the "Participatory assessment of land degradation and sustainable management in grassland and pastoral systems - PRAGA) https://www.iucn.org/theme/ecosystem-management/our-work/global-drylands-initiative/gdi-projects/participatory-assessment-land-degradation-and-sustainable-land-management-grassland-and-pastoral-systems-praga; this project focused on addressing land degradation in pastoral areas could provide valuable methodological insights for strengthening component #1. Currently, the problem analysis predominantly focuses on biodiversity conservation and less on dryland and rangeland management. In addition, STAP would like to see pastoralists' rangeland management practices, their governance and institutional arrangements as a more central part of the project. At present, pastoralists are only mentioned briefly, for example, the Kuchi. Engaging all stakeholders is essential for developing the project, scaling, transformational change and durability of outcomes beyond the lifetime of project funding. STAP recommends for the theory of change to include the impact pathway, and the assumptions underlying each outcome. It is also important that the theory of change identifies internal and external factors (e.g. climate change risks, political factors, partnerships, and capacities) that could affect the intended outcomes so that adaptive action can be taken to ensure successful project deliverables. Lastly, STAP recommends establishing a project steering committee because of the multiple partners from UN, NGOs and government

		sectors who will contribute to the baseline information. Below, STAP provides further recommendations on how to strengthen the project design.
Part I: Project Information	**What STAP looks for**	**Response**
B. Indicative Project Description Summary		
Project Objective	Is the objective clearly defined, and consistently related to the problem diagnosis?	Yes.
Project components	A brief description of the planned activities. Do these support the project's objectives?	Partly. See below for details.
Outcomes	A description of the expected short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention.	Yes. If the theory of change recognizes the underlying assumptions, and the causal relationships between the outcomes.
	Do the planned outcomes encompass important global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits?	
	Are the global environmental benefits/adaptation benefits likely to be generated?	
Outputs	A description of the products and services which are expected to result from the project. Is the sum of the outputs likely to contribute to the outcomes?	Yes. The outputs are likely to contribute to the outcomes.
Part II: Project justification	A simple narrative explaining the project's logic, i.e. a theory of change.	
1. Project description. Briefly describe:		
1) the global environmental and/or adaptation problems, root causes and barriers that need to be addressed (systems description)	Is the problem statement well-defined?	Yes, the problem statement is defined. The factors and barriers contributing to land degradation, lack of capacity, and lack of integration are described in a general manner. When developing the project, STAP suggests detailing the drivers that underly the problem, including the conditions that affect each target site (e.g. socioeconomic characteristics of the targeted populated). Additionally, STAP recommends expanding on the status and trend of rangeland degradation in the project site(s). Currently, the problem analysis and components include minimal information about rangeland ecosystems. This information can include a description of the rangelands' ecology, and the status of land degradation in the rangelands. Furthermore, STAP recommends detailing the pastoral livelihoods, the challenges they face in dryland management, and the opportunities available to them to sustainably manage the rangelands. Understanding better pastoralists (e.g. Kuchi's) rangeland management strategies, their governance and institutional arrangements, are important considerations that underpin the delivery of global environmental and socioeconomic benefits. The project developers may wish to consider these papers on pastoralists and rangeland management in Afghanistan: 1) Ahearn, A, Sternberg, T with Hahn, A (eds.) Pastoralist Livelihoods in Asian Drylands: Environment, Governance and Risk Cambridgeshire: The White Horse Press, 2017; 2) Robinett, D. et al. (2008). "Central Afghanistan Rangelands A History of Tribal Rule, Grazing, War, and Rebuilding".
	Are the barriers and threats well described, and substantiated by data and references?	

	For multiple focal area projects: does the problem statement and analysis identify the drivers of environmental degradation which need to be addressed through multiple focal areas; and is the objective well-defined, and can it only be supported by integrating two, or more focal areas objectives or programs?	
2) the baseline scenario or any associated baseline projects	Is the baseline identified clearly?	Yes, the baseline scenario appears appropriate.
	Does it provide a feasible basis for quantifying the project's benefits?	
	Is the baseline sufficiently robust to support the incremental (additional cost) reasoning for the project?	
	For multiple focal area projects:	
	are the multiple baseline analyses presented (supported by data and references), and the multiple benefits specified, including the proposed indicators;	
	are the lessons learned from similar or related past GEF and non-GEF interventions described; and	
	how did these lessons inform the design of this project?	
3) the proposed alternative scenario with a brief description of expected outcomes and components of the project	What is the theory of change?	STAP welcomes the theory of change that is provided as annex. STAP recommends thinking further about the theory of change. This includes: 1) identifying the assumptions necessary to achieve the outcomes; 2) considering whether there is more than one causal pathway by which change is achieved; 3) defining indicators linked to each outcome; 4) identifying external and internal factors that may affect planned outputs and outcomes, so that adaptive actions can be put in place to ensure effectiveness in delivery. Additionally, please provide a narrative that describes the theory of change: that is, how the desired change will be achieved, and how stakeholders will be engaged throughout the process.
	What is the sequence of events (required or expected) that will lead to the desired outcomes?	
	· What is the set of linked activities, outputs, and outcomes to address the project's objectives?	
	· Are the mechanisms of change plausible, and is there a well-informed identification of the underlying assumptions?	
	· Is there a recognition of what adaptations may be required during project implementation to respond to changing conditions in pursuit of the targeted outcomes?	
5) incremental/additional cost reasoning and expected contributions from the baseline, the GEF trust fund, LDCF, SCCF, and co-financing	GEF trust fund: will the proposed incremental activities lead to the delivery of global environmental benefits?	
	LDCF/SCCF: will the proposed incremental activities lead to adaptation which reduces vulnerability, builds adaptive capacity, and increases resilience to climate change?	Yes.

| 6) global environmental benefits (GEF trust fund) and/or adaptation benefits (LDCF/SCCF) | Are the benefits truly global environmental benefits, and are they measurable? | STAP suggests describing the methods that will be used to monitor and assess the global environment benefits on land management, biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation. Currently, only the core indicators are listed – but not the methods behind how these indicators will be measured. Doing so, will support the incremental reasoning which specifies the project will generate benefits in ecosystem services (supporting services – formation of soils) land restoration, biodiversity and GHG emissions reduction.

In component 2, STAP suggests applying the "Scientific conceptual framework for Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)": https://knowledge.unccd.int/knowledge-products-and-pillars/guide-scientific-conceptual-framework-land-degradation-neutrality The LDN framework is a land planning tool that can be used to apply component 2 focused on integrated management and restoration of degraded landscapes.

Project developers also should consider STAP's advisory paper on "Mainstreaming biodiversity in practice": http://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/publications/Mainstreaming-Biodiversity-LowRes_1.pdf The paper describes the elements necessary in project design and implementation to achieve mainstreaming of biodiversity in GEF interventions.

Conflict is briefly mentioned in the paper as a condition that has affected the country. When developing the project and describing in detail the problem and underlying drivers of degradation in each project site, STAP recommends addressing environmental security in an explicit manner. STAP's paper on "Environmental security: dimensions and priorities" identifies ways to address environmental security in an integrated manner to achieve global environmental benefits. The paper can be accessed at: http://stapgef.org/sites/default/files/publications/52103%20STAP%20Report_WEB.PDF

The PIF states that it will generate socioeconomic benefits. However, the document does not define what these benefits may be. STAP recommends describing what socioeconomic benefits the project will generate. |
	Is the scale of projected benefits both plausible and compelling in relation to the proposed investment?	
	Are the global environmental benefits explicitly defined?	
	Are indicators, or methodologies, provided to demonstrate how the global environmental benefits will be measured and monitored during project implementation?	
	What activities will be implemented to increase the project's resilience to climate change?	

7) innovative, sustainability and potential for scaling-up	Is the project innovative, for example, in its design, method of financing, technology, business model, policy, monitoring and evaluation, or learning?	STAP recommends for the project developers to describe further the project's innovation: that is, how landscape management and the combination of traditional knowledge with Earth Observation tools and methods will be scaled-up. When developing this vision, it will be valuable to identify and analyze the barriers to scaling and transformation that exist. For example, what governance, institutional, or vested interests are present, what land tenure conflicts exist? And how will the relevant stakeholders be identified to help design appropriate interventions? Additionally, project managers may wish to look at STAP's paper on "Innovation and the GEF" for further recommendations on how to embed innovation in the project: http://stapgef.org/sites/default/files/publications/STAP%20Innovation%20report_WEB.PDF STAP wishes to highlight that planning for neutrality as this project claims in the innovation section involves counterbalancing anticipated losses with measures to achieve equivalent gains within individual land types, where land type is defined by land potential. It is therefore encouraged the project team conducts the planning for LDN interventions (whether conservation, restoration, rehabilitation) within the umbrella of spatial national land use planning (or at least articulating interventions with territorial land plans that may already be in palce). STAP wishes to suggest that applying the checklist for Checklist for Land Degradation Neutrality Transformative Projects and Programmes, may provide a structured frame to work towards transformational changes and durability of project outcomes.
	Is there a clearly-articulated vision of how the innovation will be scaled-up, for example, over time, across geographies, among institutional actors?	
	Will incremental adaptation be required, or more fundamental transformational change to achieve long term sustainability?	
1b. Project Map and Coordinates. Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place.		STAP welcomes the maps and land cover data provided for Afghanistan, Nuristan, Laghman, and Khost. If it possible, it would be useful if the province maps could provide the geo-referenced information, as well as illustrate where the project site are located as the Afghanistan map does.
2. Stakeholders. Select the stakeholders that have participated in consultations during the project identification phase: Indigenous people and local communities; Civil society organizations; Private sector entities.If none of the above, please explain why. In addition, provide indicative information on how stakeholders, including civil society and indigenous peoples, will be engaged in the project preparation, and their respective roles and means of engagement.	Have all the key relevant stakeholders been identified to cover the complexity of the problem, and project implementation barriers?	STAP suggests describing in greater detail the stakeholders required for designing and implementing the project. In this regard, the project proponents can consider developing the theory of change with stakeholders, specifying what stakeholders will be required along the causal pathway. A strategy for engaging multi-stakeholders should be defined in the project, as well as developing a governance structure. See the Resilience, Adaptation Pathways and Transformation Assessment (RAPTA) guidelines for more.Information on how to embed multi-stakeholder engagement and governance throughout the project to bring about collective learning, adaptive management, and responsibility. The document can be accessed at: http://www.stapgef.org/rapta-guidelines STAP wishes to point to the 2008 report 'Towards a pastoralist support strategy', which provides recommendations to support the pastoralists of Afghanistan to rebuild or maintain a sustainable livelihoods. http://lib.icimod.org/record/11983/files/1708.pdf
	What are the stakeholders' roles, and how will their combined roles contribute to robust project design, to achieving global environmental outcomes, and to lessons learned and knowledge?	

3. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Please briefly include below any gender dimensions relevant to the project, and any plans to address gender in project design (e.g. gender analysis). Does the project expect to include any gender-responsive measures to address gender gaps or promote gender equality and women empowerment? Yes/no/ tbd. If possible, indicate in which results area(s) the project is expected to contribute to gender equality: access to and control over resources; participation and decision-making; and/or economic benefits or services. Will the project's results framework or logical framework include gender-sensitive indicators? yes/no /tbd	Have gender differentiated risks and opportunities been identified, and were preliminary response measures described that would address these differences?	STAP recommends including a gender specialist in the project design team to mainstream gender in the theory of change. This task also would include addressing gender differentiated risks and opportunities in the project.
	Do gender considerations hinder full participation of an important stakeholder group (or groups)? If so, how will these obstacles be addressed?	
5. Risks. Indicate risks, including climate change, potential social and environmental risks that might prevent the project objectives from being achieved, and, if possible, propose measures that address these risks to be further developed during the project design	Are the identified risks valid and comprehensive? Are the risks specifically for things outside the project's control?	STAP recommends revisiting the risk section during the project design. In doing so, STAP recommends for the project to apply an environmental security lens and identify risks to ecosystem services, and livelihoods in the target sites. In addition, the project should consider the following climate risk, and climate resilience measures: • How will the project's objectives or outputs be affected by climate risks over the period 2020 to 2050, and have the impact of these risks been addressed adequately? • Has the sensitivity to climate change, and its impacts, been assessed? • Have resilience practices and measures to address projected climate risks and impacts been considered? How will these be dealt with? • What technical and institutional capacity, and information, will be needed to address climate risks and resilience enhancement measures? STAP would like to see these points addressed in the project.
	Are there social and environmental risks which could affect the project?	
	For climate risk, and climate resilience measures:	
	·　How will the project's objectives or outputs be affected by climate risks over the period 2020 to 2050, and have the impact of these risks been addressed adequately?	
	·　Has the sensitivity to climate change, and its impacts, been assessed?	
	·　Have resilience practices and measures to address projected climate risks and impacts been considered? How will these be dealt with?	
	·　What technical and institutional capacity, and information, will be needed to address climate risks and resilience enhancement measures?	

6. Coordination. Outline the coordination with other relevant GEF-financed and other related initiatives	Are the project proponents tapping into relevant knowledge and learning generated by other projects, including GEF projects?	Yes, the project appears to be tapping into the relevant initiatives. STAP looks forward for the areas of complementarity identified in the PIF to be built into the project design and envisaged implementation components.
	Is there adequate recognition of previous projects and the learning derived from them?	
	Have specific lessons learned from previous projects been cited?	
	How have these lessons informed the project's formulation?	
	Is there an adequate mechanism to feed the lessons learned from earlier projects into this project, and to share lessons learned from it into future projects?	
8. Knowledge management. Outline the "Knowledge Management Approach" for the project, and how it will contribute to the project's overall impact, including plans to learn from relevant projects, initiatives and evaluations.	What overall approach will be taken, and what knowledge management indicators and metrics will be used?	STAP acknowledges that component 3 forms part of the project's knowledge management. STAP recommends for the project to describe further the approach to managing knowledge, including how learning will be captured to adapt the implementation pathways in the theory of change

STAP also would like for the project to consider and design a mechanisms of feeding knowledge generated into the WOCAT's knowledge base for global benefit of stakeholders interested in sustainable land management of rangelands and drylands. |
	What plans are proposed for sharing, disseminating and scaling-up results, lessons and experience?	
STAP advisory response	**Brief explanation of advisory response and action proposed**	
1. Concur	STAP acknowledges that on scientific or technical grounds the concept has merit. The proponent is invited to approach STAP for advice at any time during the development of the project brief prior to submission for CEO endorsement.	
	* In cases where the STAP acknowledges the project has merit on scientific and technical grounds, the STAP will recognize this in the screen by stating that *"STAP is satisfied with the scientific and technical quality of the proposal and encourages the proponent to develop it with same rigor. At any time during the development of the project, the proponent is invited to approach STAP to consult on the design."*	
2. **Minor issues to be considered during project design**	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:	
	(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.	
	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.	
3. **Major issues to be considered during project design**	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:	
	(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. 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.	