

Fifth Overall Performance Study

Approach Paper Sub-study on the review of the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel July 9, 2013

Background

1. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) provides strategic scientific and technical advice to the GEF on its strategy and programs. It started operation in 1991 when it was constituted by the three Implementing Agencies. Article 19 of the 1994 GEF Instrument called for its establishment as an advisory body to the restructured Global Environment Facility. The GEF Instrument also indicated that UNEP shall provide STAP's Secretariat and operate as the liaison between the -GEF and STAP. Documents prepared for the first and second GEF Councils highlight the need for independent advice on GEF strategies and project to enhance credibility and effectiveness of the GEF (GEF/C1.5). It was also indicated that a sound scientific grounding could help steer strategies and programs while at the same time reduce risk inherent in innovative approaches, which GEF was mandated to support. Drawing on recommendations from the pilot phase of the Independent Evaluation, STAP's initial terms of reference included: Providing the GEF with strategic scientific and technical advice related to policies, strategies and a research agenda of targeted areas of research to improve design and implementation of GEF projects; the establishment of a system to ensure that GEF projects are scientifically and technically sound, and the coordination for scientific and technical purposes with conventions and other relevant scientific bodies. STAP was also asked to guide the choice of scientific indicators to measure project impact and to provide advice on special topics for evaluation. The STAP was thus established with 12 panel members, a small secretariat housed by UNEP and a roster of experts that with the guidance of panel members would review projects and allow panel members to concentrate on strategic issues (GEF/ C5.5).

2. There has not been a comprehensive evaluation of STAP, but Overall Performance Studies 1, 2 and 3 all touched on some aspect of STAP's work and made recommendations. In addition, OPS4 was enriched by a self-assessment conducted by STAP/UNEP on data between 2006 and 2008. In general, the tendency of evaluations has been to recommend a further focus of STAP on scientific and technical advice to the GEF on strategic and operational issues. The latest STAP reform took place in 2007 partly in response to the recommendations of OPS3. The reform aimed at making STAP's advice more strategic, timely and effective. This reform resulted in 1) the reduction of the number of panel members from 15 to 6, but also increased panel members contractual time; 2) the replacement of the existing STAP roster of consultants with MoUs with international science institutions that would help expand the technical resources available to the GEF; and 3) the strengthening of the STAP Secretariat to liaison with cooperating institutions and individuals, and the maintenance of data bases of experts to carry out selective reviews of projects (GEF/C.31/4). The STAP Secretariat is currently based at UNEP's regional office in Washington, DC, with backstopping from UNEP HQ.

The STAP's Mandate

3. The 2007 Revised Terms of Reference of STAP (GEF/C.31/4) indicate that the STAP mandate is to provide “objective, strategic, scientific and technical advice on GEF policies, operational strategies, programs and on projects and programmatic approaches; and, maintain a database of institutions, networks and individual scientists to provide the necessary expertise and advice for the GEF. STAP's activities shall be coordinated with the activities of the GEF secretariat and the Implementing and Executing Agencies (GEF Agencies) and be consistent with GEF processes and procedures approved by the Council.”
4. The Terms of Reference also indicate that “the STAP shall interact in a complementary manner with other relevant scientific and technical bodies, particularly with the subsidiary bodies of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention to Combat Desertification and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. For focal areas in which the GEF is not operating as a convention's financial mechanism, the STAP shall advise on the development of scientific and technical criteria and provide scientific and technical advice on priorities for GEF funding. The STAP shall provide expert scientific advice to inter-agency task forces and bodies handling other GEF processes, when such advice is requested.”
5. With regards to monitoring and evaluation functions in the GEF, STAP’s Revised Terms of Reference indicate that “STAP will provide timely and relevant advice on scientific and technical matters related to monitoring and evaluation activities...” It will also provide opinions on the evaluability of scientific aspects and related methodologies for measuring global environmental impacts, response to evaluation approach papers and Terms of Reference of reports. STAP members may also be called upon to directly support evaluations while respecting the independence both of STAP and the GEF Evaluation office.” STAP is also requested to support “the GEF Secretariat in the development and use of scientific indicators to measure impact at national and portfolio levels.”

Objectives

6. The objective of this evaluation is to assess the extent to which STAP has met its mandate and the extent to which the 2007 reforms have been implemented and resulted in STAP advice to GEF that is more strategic, timely and effective. The evaluation will also identify factors affecting STAP’s performance and will provide recommendations for improving, where necessary, the effectiveness of STAP advice to the GEF.

Methodology

Evaluation Scope

7. On the basis of the STAP Revised Terms of Reference quoted above, this evaluation will focus on the period from June 2007 to the present following five core areas of STAP’s mandates:
 - Provision of Strategic Scientific and Technical Advice on GEF policies, operational strategies and programs
 - Provision of Strategic Scientific and Technical Advice on projects and programmatic approaches

- Maintain a database of institutions, networks and individuals that can provide scientific advice to GEF
- Coordinate with scientific bodies of conventions
- Provide support and advice to monitoring and evaluation

Evaluation Questions

8. Three overarching questions will guide this evaluation:

- a) ***To what extent has STAP met its core mandate?*** The evaluation will assess the relevance, effectiveness and timeliness of STAP advisory support. It will focus on the extent to which STAP has met the five core areas of its mandate identified above. The evaluation will specifically enquire on the utility of STAP outputs and services from the stand point of the various GEF partners. This part of the assessment will also assess the effectiveness of STAP's operations and delivery of outputs and services.
- b) ***What factors or conditions have contributed or hindered STAPs fulfillment of its mandate?*** While addressing this question, the evaluation will identify and assess the factors affecting the fulfillment of STAP's mandate. Topics that the evaluation will address include the clarity of STAP's mandate to GEF Partners, composition and dynamics of the panel, organization and staffing of STAP's secretariat, consistency of STAP's rules and procedures and STAP TORs, modes and timing of the interactions with the GEF Secretariat, Agencies, conventions and Council), current oversight and organizational support arrangements with UNEP and broader contextual factors related to the GEF. The evaluation will also consider factors external to STAP such as the effect of changes that have taken place in the GEF and the dynamic nature of the sciences pertaining to the global environment.
- c) ***What steps should be taken to ensure the further strengthening of STAP's strategic, timely and effective advice to the GEF?*** On the basis of the evidence gathered and considering foreseeable challenges and opportunities, this evaluation will assess if there is a need for adjustments in STAP's mandate, the forms and timing of STAP interaction with other GEF partners and the conventions, and UNEP's oversight and arrangements for administrative support.

9. Annex 1 consists of a breakdown of the issues which will be considered while addressing the three questions in the evaluation. The points raised in this table will be updated and adjusted as the evaluation generates more information. This is particularly the case with regards to question two on factors that contribute or hinder STAP's fulfillment of its mandate and question three on steps to be taken to strengthen STAP's advisory mandate to the GEF.

Evaluation components

10. The Office will adopt an evaluation approach that includes an important self-evaluation component and reflection on the part of STAP. At all times, the evaluation will seek to distinguish UNEP's role as an element of STAP and UNEP's role in project implementation. The evaluation will include the following components:

- a) **Desk review of pertinent documents.** The Evaluation Office started reviewing documents pertinent to the evaluation as part of the drafting of the approach paper. This review will continue concurrently to STAP's self-assessment. This desk review will include the review of pertinent Council documents, reports of the STAP Chair to the Council, previous self-assessments carried out by STAP, relevant sections of OPS 2, 3 and 4, and sections of other evaluations.
- b) **STAP self-assessment.** The first component will consist of a self-assessment by STAP that will consist of separate assessments by two key entities involved in STAP: the panel and UNEP (which provides the Secretariat and support from headquarters). The Panel itself will provide a self-assessment as panel. UNEP will provide a statement on how it assesses its support to the panel, both from the Secretariat and from headquarters. These self-assessments will also identify opportunities to further strengthen STAPs contributions and address shortcomings if any are identified. Annex 2 presents the proposed list of questions for each assessment.
- c) **Independent technical review of STAP advisory products.** This review will be to assess the quality of STAP advisory products in terms of their relevance, scientific quality and utility to keep GEF policies and strategies up to date on scientific developments in critical areas related to the GEF. It will include the examination of a sample of specific advisory products by a set of specialized peers hired by the Evaluation Office. A tool will be developed in consultation with STAP on the basis of the relevant issues that have been identified in Annex 1.
- d) **Survey of GEF stakeholders.** The Evaluation Office will carry out a survey that will address perceptions among the various GEF Stakeholders related to the overall role of STAP in the GEF, the scientific quality, utility, and timeliness of STAP services and products, and on the factors enabling or hindering STAP's performance. The survey will include current and former panel members, current and past STAP Secretariat staff, Agency GEF coordination units, a sample of project Task Team Leaders that have prepared GEF projects during GEF 5, the GEF Secretariat team leaders and focal area specialists, selected GEF Council members and conventions representatives.
- e) **Interviews with key informants.** Based on the evidence gathered through the previous components, the evaluation team will identify a set of issues or questions that require further inquiry, including amongst others the identification of challenges and opportunities for STAP. The evaluation team will then interview a selection of stakeholders which both represent the major perspectives with in the GEF partnership and address the issues that require further proving. Interviews will include current and past STAP Chairs and panel members, GEF Council members, GEF CEO, current and past STAP Secretaries, GEF Secretariat team leaders, convention representatives and UNEP and other Agency representatives.
- f) **Data analysis and drafting of the report.** The report will be drafted in two stages. The first stage will focus on the analysis of the evidence obtained and identification of findings pertaining STAPs performance and factors affecting STAP performance. When information is available this analysis will consider lessons on the scientific function from other global funds or comparable organizations. The findings will be shared and discussed in an interagency meeting which will include STAP representatives, GEF agency representatives and representatives of the GEF Secretariat. The meeting will also address challenges of opportunities related to the functioning of STAP and when appropriate will also explore ways forward to strengthen STAP. The Evaluation Office will then include findings and

recommendations from this sub-study in OPS5 and will produce a technical report on this review. The report will be circulated among the GEF stakeholders prior to its finalization.

Evaluation challenges and limitations of the approach

11. Evaluation of the scientific function in the GEF poses several challenges. First the scientific function is highly technical and pertains to fields that are rapidly changing. To be credible, evaluation of such function requires the engagement of qualified technical specialists. Second, assessing the extent to which STAP has been effective in helping the GEF to keep abreast of relevant scientific developments will require an understanding of the processes by which such integration might take place. To address this challenge, the evaluation has included a benchmarking component on how comparable institutions incorporate science into their policies, strategies and operations. This also poses a challenge on the extent of “comparability” of comparable organizations. Also, given that significant differences exist among organizations benchmarks and criteria derived from this analysis can only be taken as indicative and would need to be assessed in the context of other evidence derived during the evaluation.

Evaluation time line

12. The evaluation time line will be as follows:

Desk Review of Documents	June to July 30				
STAP Self-assessment	July 1 – 30				
Stakeholder survey		July 15 – August 30			
Independent technical review of STAP advisory products		July 15 – 30			
Stakeholder Interviews			August 15 to September 15		
Drafting report				September 10 to 28	
Interagency meeting (comments from stakeholders due)					October 9
Technical report completed					October 12

Annex 1. Questions and issues addressed by the evaluation

To what extent has STAP met its core mandate?	What factors contribute or hinder the extent of STAP's fulfillment of its mandate.	What steps should be taken to ensure the further strengthening of STAP's strategic, timely and effective advice to the GEF?
Provision of Strategic Scientific and Technical Advice on GEF policies, operational strategies and programs This part of the evaluation will assess: - the evolution of the extent and breath of advisory products and services (such as engagement in the TAGs and replenishment process) delivered by STAP since 2007. - the relevance, utility and timeliness of STAP outputs and services for the GEF partnership on policies, operational strategies and programs, (including an assessment of the extent to which STAP's annual work programs address the GEF replenishment priorities). - the effectiveness of STAP's modalities for delivering or communicating STAP strategic advice to the GEF partnership provide an assessment of the extent. - the extent of uptake of STAP strategic advice in GEF policies, operational strategies and programs. Provision of Strategic Scientific and Technical Advice on projects and programmatic approaches This part of the evaluation will assess: - the evolution of the types, extent and coverage of project and program advisory services	This question will be responded by addressing factors from different perspectives: The Panel -clarity of STAP's TORs and Rules of Procedure. -Extent to which the panel selected is adequate for the tasks. -extent to the panel composition and review modalities are well suited to address Multifocal area issues and issues related to social, economic and gender matters germane to GEF operations.. -extent to which STAP operational plans reflect needs and are flexible to respond to changing demands of the GEF partnership. -the adequacy of resources available for STAP to undertake its mandate; STAP's secretariat -extent to which the STAP Secretariat is organized and staffed to respond to the challenges, including the formulation and implementation of STAP's work program. The adequacy of the division of responsibilities between STAP Secretariat and STAP Panel. Interactions with the GEF Partnership -clarity among GEF partners on STAP's advisory role. -the extent to which GEF Agencies and NGO Network provide input into the Work Programme of STAP - topics, extent and frequency of demands for services	On the basis of the evidence gathered and considering foreseeable challenges and opportunities facing the GEF the evaluation will assess the extent to which there is a need for : -changes on STAP's mandate. - adjustment in the priority and effort STAP dedicates to its five core mandates to better meet demands and needs of the GEF partnership. -changes in the topics, forms and timing in which STAP interacts with other GEF partners. - revisit the modalities by which STAP's links GEF partners with networks of scientists and other bodies to better enable STAP to help GEF partners access relevant and updated scientific information. - adjust oversight and support structure and service delivery mechanisms

delivered by STAP since 2007 - the relevance, utility and timeliness of STAP screens to the Council, the GEF Secretariat, the Agencies and the countries (consider differences by focal area). -extent to which STAP is equipped to respond to the increased screenings in the light of demands for strategic advice. -aspects that are valued the most/least by the various stakeholders. -extent to which STAP advice is incorporated into GEF projects. Maintain a database of institutions, networks and individuals that can provide scientific advice to GEF. -what has been the demand within the GEF partnership for information of institutions, networks and individuals that provide scientific advice. -to what extent does STAP maintain databases of institutions, networks and individual scientists that are relevant to the GEF focal areas. -other services provided by STAP to the GEF partners in accessing to relevant, up-to-date and useful scientific advice. - how effective are STAP members to leverage their professional networks in support of the GEF partnership. Coordination with scientific bodies of conventions The evaluation will assess:	from the GEF partnership to STAP. -extent to which there are overlaps between STAP's mandate and other entities in the GEF such as the GEF Secretariat and Agencies, -timing and extent of involvement of STAP throughout the business cycles of other GEF entities to ensure sound advice Interactions with the GEF Council -The extent to which the GEF Council perceives the STAP as being an independent body and value added to the system (including providing adequate financing) Interaction with UNEP -extent to which STAP reforms have been implemented - Efficiency and effectiveness of the current arrangements between STAP and its Secretariat, STAP and UNEP headquarters and the STAP Secretariat and UNEP headquarters. Context -contextual factors that need to be taken into account in assessing STAP's support to the partnership (changes within the partnership, rapid expansion of knowledge on issues pertaining global environment, emerging role of middle income countries in generating knowledge, etc.).	
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-the forms and extent to which STAP coordinates with conventions (including topics, mechanisms, frequently of interactions, etc.). -perceptions within STAP and the conventions on the adequacy coordination (strengths and weaknesses). -important accomplishments (“impact”) and lost opportunities affected by extent of coordination of STAP with conventions. -STAP’s experience of cross-cutting work with conventions. Support and advise to M&E This part of the evaluation will assess: -topics, extent, frequency and “pick up” of STAP advice on monitoring -topics, extent, frequency and utility of STAP support to evaluations -extent to which the GEF partnership draws on STAP support on KM		
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Annex 2: Self-assessment Questions for STAP

Questions to the Panel

- 1 What is the Panel's overall assessment of STAP's scientific and technical advice to the GEF? Please indicate overall areas of strengths and weaknesses.
- 2 What are STAP's most important products and services to the GEF? How effective have each of these been as tools to advise and to update the GEF on relevant scientific and technical issues? Please distinguish among those which have been more and less effective and explain why some have been more effective than others.
- 3 What have been the factors that enabled or hindered STAP's effectiveness in meeting its mission. Please address the following factors plus others that the Panel considers important:
 - Interactions with and responsiveness of other GEF stakeholders such as Council, GEF Secretariat, Agencies, Evaluation Office, Conventions, etc.
 - Support provided by the STAP Secretariat
 - Composition of the panel
 - Support /liaison provided by UNEP
 - Other
- 4 Are there steps that could be taken to strengthen STAP's strategic, timely and effective advice to the GEF? What are those steps and indicate why they are needed and who should take action.
- 5 What additional considerations or factors would the panel like to address as part of this self-assessment?

Questions to UNEP

- 1 What is UNEP's overall assessment of STAP's scientific and technical advice to the GEF? Please indicate overall areas of strengths and weaknesses.
- 2 What are the main functions provided by UNEP to STAP?
- 3 How effective has UNEP fulfilled such functions?
- 4 What have been the factors that enabled or hindered STAP's effectiveness in meeting its mission? Please address the following factors and others that UNEP considers important.
 - Clarity of UNEP's mandate
 - Interactions with and composition of the Panel
 - Interactions with STAP Secretariat
 - Interactions with and responsiveness of other GEF stakeholders such as Council, GEF Secretariat, Agencies, conventions, etc.
 - Other factors
- 5 What steps could be taken to ensure the further strengthen STAP's strategic, timely and effective advice to the GEF?
- 6 What other additional factors or considerations would UNEP like to address as part of this self-assessment?