

VIETNAM FORESTS AND DELTAS PROGRAM

PHASE II EVALUATION

Background

The USAID Vietnam Forest and Deltas Program (VFD) (2012–2021) supported Vietnam's transition to more resilient and sustainable development. Since 2018, the program's second phase focused on supporting the Government of Vietnam (GVN) to ensure that the payment for forest environmental services (PFES) system - a critical mechanism that requires users of forest environmental services to make payments to suppliers of these services - was effective in supporting the country's environmental and socio-economic goals.

Purpose

The evaluation assessed changes in outcomes that resulted from VFD, challenges encountered in implementation, factors that influenced VFD's successes and challenges, and VFD's contribution to policy change and implementation.

Methods

The evaluation team employed a mixed-methods approach consisting of desk review, key-informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and field observation.



Vietnam Forests and Deltas - Photo Credit: USAID

Significant changes

The evaluation identified seven significant changes, including:

- improved forest management and protection
- increased transparency through cashless e-payments
- forest reallocation and more accurate forest ownership records
- an improved PFES monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system
- improved participation and inclusion
- more openness to environmental protection efforts
- improved implementation of sector policies and strategies.

Consulted experts believed improvements in forest protections, changes in stakeholder perceptions, and improved participation and inclusion were among the most sustainable changes. Moreover, the improvements to forestland reallocation and corrections to forest ownership records, as well as improved implementation of GVN policies and strategies, were the most attributable to the program.

Story of reallocation of forestlands shared by a Thai ethnic villager, Bac Yen district, Son La province:

Chen Village is one of three villages in Muong Khoa Commune that participated in the forest red book review and reallocation process in 2020. Through meetings and participatory discussions, the VFD project helped community members decide to shift from individual forest land ownership to communal ownership. This was possible because communities saw the benefits of the latter approach over the former. The communal PFES revenues are sufficient to support community needs – such as the construction of cultural centers and embankments – while PFES benefits at the individual household level were not significant to do anything.

Challenges encountered during implementation

The evaluation team identified the following key challenges for implementation during the second phase:

- lack of incentives for businesses to participate in environmental initiatives,
- implementation challenges related to competing political priorities and limited resources,
- incomplete monitoring and evaluation systems and tools, and
- challenges in building solidarity and consensus among diverse stakeholders.

Lessons learned

Effective Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) practices were key to the program's success.

Overcoming the above-mentioned challenges, VFD successfully achieved its goals thanks to:

- effective cooperation among the national partners and between Vietnam partners and the international implementing agencies (Winrock International and others),
- strong political support and the commitment of GVN and local authorities,
- ownership of the project initiatives and results by the Vietnamese stakeholders, and
- flexibility and adaptive and participatory planning and budgeting.



Recommendations



- Future USAID-funded activities should continue to provide funding and technical support for the review, reallocation, and retitling of forestland red books for PFES-eligible households and support conversion of individual household forest ownership to village/community forest ownership.



- USAID-funded activities should continue to support sustainable forest protection and management-related policies.



- USAID and other stakeholders should allow flexibility in the overall workplan and budget allocations to allow for adaptive management and course correction.



- Future USAID implementing partners and Vietnamese counterparts should start working together as soon as possible after award to establish a coordination mechanism.



- Future USAID implementing partners should work closely with Vietnamese counterparts in addressing the needs and concerns of national implementing partners and beneficiaries. These stakeholders should be encouraged to take ownership of the activity's initiatives and results.

- Future USAID implementing partners should encourage direct engagement from local communities in activities like livelihood improvement where there is appropriate capacity.

- Vietnam Forest Protection and Development Fund (VNFF) should draft guidelines to allow forest owners to use a proportion of their PFES money to contribute to forest reallocation activities in their commune/village.

- VNFF should invest in synchronizing and further improving PFES monitoring indicators and also officially institutionalize the PFES M&E manual for application in all 44 PPFs.

To read the full report, please visit [here](#).

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