



AFoCo Landmark Program:
**PROJECT “REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF
MANGROVE FOREST ECOSYSTEM IN THAI BINH PROVINCE,
VIET NAM**

2016 ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

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I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Project overview

- **Project name:** Rehabilitation and development of mangrove forest ecosystem in Thai Binh province, Viet Nam
- **Donor:** The Government of the Republic of Korea
- **Managing agency:** Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
- **Project owner:** Viet Nam Administration of Forestry (VNFOREST)
- **Implementing agency:** Viet Nam Administration of Forestry and Thai Binh's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
- **Duration:** 10 years (2015-2024)
- **Project sites:** 4 Communes: Thuy Xuan and Thuy Hai of Thai Thuy District; and Dong Hoang and Dong Long of Tien Hai District, Thai Binh province

2. Project objectives

The overall objective of the project is to sustainably rehabilitate and develop mangrove ecosystem, protect biodiversity, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, minimize impacts of climate change, protect the coastal dyke system, enhance knowledge related to mangrove forest and improve livelihoods of local people in the long-run.

Major objectives of the project are:

- *Objective 1:* New planting 80ha and supplementary planting 80ha of mangrove forest, and protecting 960ha of mangrove forest, including new planted area, supplementary planted area and existing area of mangrove forest.
- *Objective 2:* Raising capacity and enhancing knowledge through training and communications.

II. RESULTS OF IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES IN 2016

1. Project management in 2016

1.1. Project management

2016 is the first year of project implementation, so project management activities are given priority. Under the Decree No. 38/2013/NĐ-CP dated 23 April 2013 on management and utilization of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and concessional loans from donors, the Circular No. 01/2014/BKHĐT dated 9 January 2014 guiding the implementation of the Decree No. 38/2013/NĐ-CP and in accordance with regulations by donor, mechanisms for project implementation and management were prepared and submitted to managing agency and project owner for approval. Results of project management activities in 2016 are as follows:

- Establishment of the central project management board (PMB): The central PMB was established under the Decision No. 4828/QĐ-BNN-TCCB dated 24 November 2015 of Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Its members include Director, Coordinator, Chief Accountant, who are seconded from VNFOREST, and a contracted

supporting staff.

- Establishment of the provincial PMB: The provincial PMB was established under the Decision No. 16/QĐ-UBND dated 7 January 2016 of Chairman of Thai Binh's People's Committee. Its members consist of Director, Deputy Director, Accountant, Technical Officer and Supporting Officer who are seconded from Thai Binh's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and Thai Binh's Forest Protection Department.

- Establishment of Project Steering Committee: The Project Steering Committee was established under the Decision No. 1576/QĐ-BNN-TCCB dated 4 May 2016 of Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Its head is leader of VNFOREST and its members include leaders of Departments under VNFOREST, leader of Thai Binh's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, representative of Vietnamese Academy of Forest Science and donor's representatives. As agreed at the 2nd Project Steering Committee meeting, held on 6 December 2016, two more members from the Interim Secretariat for the AFoCO were included who are (1) Coordinator of the Planning, Budget and Human Resources Management Team and (2) Project Manager for Restoration Projects under the Landmark Program.

- Preparation and approval of project management regulations: Regulation on organization and operation of the project management board was issued by VNFOREST on 15 January 2016 under the Decision No. 04/QĐ-TCLN-KH-HTQT. Internal regulations on planning and payment procedures, management and use of project assets were also introduced.

- The project's master bidding plan was issued by Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development under the Decision No. 1433/QĐ-BNN-XD dated 25 April 2016. This plan was adjusted based on proposal of the provincial PMB under the Decision No. 3743/QĐ-BNN-XD dated 13 September 2016.

- The project's master financial plan was issued under the Decision No. 1613/QĐ-BNN-TC dated 5 May 2016 of Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

- The detailed work plan and budget plan for 2016 was approved by the donor on 29 July 2016 and issued by VNFOREST under the Decision No. 357/QĐ-TCLN-KHTC dated 10 August 2016 and amended at the Decision No. 444/QĐ-TCLN-KHTC dated 18 October 2016.



Project Steering Committee Meeting

1.2. Arrangement of central and provincial project offices

- Office of the central PMB is located at No.21 Ngoc Ha, Ha Noi where is close to VNFOREST in order to make it convenient for liaison between contracted and seconded staff as well as for the organization of regular and irregular meetings of the project.

- Office of the provincial PMB is located at No.1 Le Loi Street, Thai Binh City, within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

A supporting staff in charge of translation, communications and administration work was contracted by the central PMB.



Office of Central PMB



Office of Provincial PMB

1.3. Procurement of project's equipment and vehicles

- The project has purchased office equipment, field equipment and means of transportation under the Decision No. 3743/QĐ-BNN-XD dated 13 September 2016 on adjustment of the project's master bidding plan. Office equipment and field equipment were handed over to the central PMB on 24 November 2011 and handed over to the provincial PMB by the central PMB on the same day. Those equipment were checked and met requirements.

- As of 31 December 2016, the procurement of project's vehicles, including 1 car, 4 motorbikes and 1 speed boat which will be handed over to the provincial PMB for using and managing, was completed. However, those vehicles have not been handed over to the provincial PMB because it takes time to finish procedures relating to vehicle registration.

Table 1: List of project's equipment and vehicles

No.	Equipment, vehicle	Quantity	Central PMB	Provincial PMB
1	Laptop	8	4	4
2	Desktop computer	4	-	4
3	Printer	2	-	2
4	Photocopy machine	1	-	1
5	Digital camera	2	1	1
6	Handheld GPS	6	2	4
7	2-eye binocular	6	2	4
8	7-seat car (4 WD type)*	1	-	1
9	Motorbike	4	-	4
10	Speed boat	1	-	1
11	Office furniture (desk, chair, filing cabinet, etc)	2 packages	1 package	1 package

1.4. National technical consultancy agency

According to project document approved by the Government of Viet Nam and the Government of the Republic of Korea, Research Institute for Forest Ecology and Environment (RIFEE) was assigned as national technical consultancy agency to provide technical support for the project implementation. RIFEE will assist the central PMB to prepare annual work plan, appraise technical designs for new planting, supplementary planting and protection of mangrove forest, re-check silviculture activities, prepare training materials, as well as support the central PMB to monitor and evaluate project activities.

Terms of reference for the consultancy agency for 2016 was agreed by the central PMB and RIFEE on 25 May 2016 and the consultancy contract was signed on 31 May 2016.

Based on the terms of reference and consultancy contract, RIFEE has implemented the following activities:

- Verification and appraisal of forest status map and project map: On 19 October 2016, RIFEE completed the verification and appraisal of forest status map and project map and submitted maps to the central PMB to submit to VNFOREST for approval. VNFOREST issued the Decision No. 452/QĐ-TCLN-KH&HTQT dated 21 October 2016 on approval of forest status map and project map.

- Verification and appraisal of technical designs for new planting and supplementary planting of mangrove forest: On 19 October 2016, RIFEE completed the verification and appraisal of technical designs for new planting and supplementary planting of mangrove forest in 2016 and submitted appraisal reports to the central PMB to submit to VNFOREST for approval. VNFOREST issued the Decision No. 453/QĐ-TCLN-KH&HTQT dated 21 October 2010 on approval of technical designs and estimated budget for forest plantation in 2016.

- Preparation of technical guidelines for the project: Technical guidelines for the project, including: (i) Guideline for nursery gardens of *Sonneratia caseolaris*, *Kandelia obovata* and *Avicennia marina*; (ii) Guideline for new planting and supplementary planting of *Sonneratia caseolaris*, *Kandelia obovata* and *Avicennia marina*; (iii) Seedlings standard and criteria for checking silviculture activities; and (iv) Guideline for community-based forest management, were prepared and submitted to the central PMB to submit to VNFOREST for approval. VNFOREST issued the Decision No. 512/QĐ-TCLN-KH&HTQT dated 30 November 2016 on issuance of technical guidelines for the project.

- Preparation of the project monitoring and evaluation plan: the project monitoring and evaluation plan was prepared and submitted to the central PMB. The plan mainly focuses on assessing progress and quality of the silviculture activities, including assessing preparatory work, technical designs as well as evaluating the planting process in terms of area, tree species, density and quality of planted trees. The monitoring and evaluation report will be submitted to the central PMB by December 2016.

2. Results of implemented activities in 2016

The detailed work plan and budget plan for 2016 was approved by the donor on 29 July 2016 and issued by VNFOREST under the Decision No. 357/QĐ-TCLN-KHTC dated 10 August 2016 and amended at the Decision No. 444/QĐ-TCLN-KHTC dated 18 October 2016.

2.1. Objective 1: New planting, supplementary planting and protection of mangrove forest

Specific indicators of the Objective 1 in 2016 include:

- 20ha of mangrove forest in Thuy Xuan Commune of Thai Thuy District (10ha) and Dong Long Commune of Tien Hai District (10ha) are to be newly planted;

- 20ha of mangrove forest in Thuy Xuan Commune of Thai Thuy District (10ha) and Dong Long Commune of Tien Hai District (10ha) are to be supplementarily planted;

- 800ha of existing mangrove forest of 4 Communes involving in the project are to be protected.

In accordance with the approved detailed plan, the Objective 1 consists of the following activities:

- *Activity 1:* Preparing forest status map and project map

9 sets of map with the scale of 1/5,000, including 1 set of map of land and forest status of the project site, 4 sets of map of forest status of 4 communes and 4 sets of map of project area of 4 communes, were prepared. Those maps were verified and appraised by RIFEE and approved under the Decision No. 452/QĐ-TCLN-KH&HTQT dated 21 October 2016.



Maps of two (2) communes of Thai Thuy District in Thai Binh Province



Maps of two (2) communes of Tien Hai District in Thai Binh Province

- *Activity 2: Designing new planting and supplementary planting of mangrove forest*

Technical designs and estimated budgets for new planting of 20ha and supplementary planting of 20ha were prepared by consultant, appraised by RIFEE and approved by VNFOREST under the Decision No. 453/QĐ-TCLN-KH&HTQT dated 21 October 2016.



Review of designs of new planting and supplementary planting of mangrove forest

- *Activity 3: Planting new mangrove forest (20ha)*

As planned for 2016, mangrove forest was scheduled to be planted in August and September, but this activity was postponed to the end of October and early November because the fact that the province was affected by 3 continuously severe hurricanes between August and October. As of 31 December 2016, new mangrove forest was planted in Thuy Xuan Commune of Thai Thuy District (10ha) and in Dong Long Commune of Tien Hai District (10ha). *Sonneratia caseolaris* was planted with the density of 1,667 seedlings/ha. Yet, the check-and-acceptance of planted forest has not been conducted for the reason that the check-and-acceptance of forest plantation will be carried out after 3 months since the plantation time.



New planted mangrove forest in Thuy Xuan Commune

- *Activity 4: Supplementary planting mangrove forest (20ha)*

Similarly to new planting activity, as of 31 December 2016, mangrove forest was supplementary planted in November 2016 in Thuy Xuan Commune of Thai Thuy District (10ha) and in Dong Long Commune of Tien Hai District (10ha). *Sonneratia caseolaris* was supplementary planted with the density of 600 seedlings/ha. The check-and-acceptance of this activity has not been conducted.



Supplementary planted mangrove forest in Dong Long Commune

- Actovity 5: Protecting 800ha of existing mangrove forest

This is very important activity of the project because the existing mangrove forest in Thai Binh province has been degraded in terms of area and quality. Given the importance of mangrove forest protection, provincial PMB has signed principle contract on forest protection with 4 communes involving in the project since early 2016. The provincial PMB and provincial Forest Protection Department have frequently supervised, monitored and directed 4 communes to prepare regulation on community-based forest protection. The payment for forest protection groups was conducted twice in 2016, once in May 2016 (50%) and once in December 2016 (50%) after the completion of check-and-acceptance of forest protection by central PMB, provincial PMB and RIFEE.



Protection of mangrove forest by communal forest protection groups

2. Objective 2: Raising capacity and enhancing knowledge through training and communications

Activities under Objective 2 as planned in 2016 include:

- Activity 1: Organizing inception workshop

In order to introduce the project to wide range of stakeholders as well as discuss on project implementation solutions, the inception workshop was held on 18 March 2016 in Thai Binh province. The workshop attracted the attention of 80 participants who are donor's representative, representatives of VNFOREST, RIFEE, provincial branches and agencies, People's Committees and forest protection groups of communes involved in the project. Especially, Vice Chairman of Thai Binh People's Committee delivered opening remarks at the workshop and instructed the project implementation.



Participants to the Inception workshop



Opening speech by Vice Chairman of Thai Binh People's Committee

- Activity 2: Organizing training courses

It was expected to organize 3 training courses on: (1) technical guidelines for mangrove nursery garden and seedlings germination; (2) technical guidelines for mangrove forest plantation; and (3) community-based protection of mangrove forest; however, due to unfavorable weather condition, these training courses were not been organized in a timely manner. As of 31 December, two (02) training courses on (1) technical guidelines for plantation of mangrove species and (2) community-based mangrove forest protection were organized on 26-27 December 2016. There were 50 participants to the training courses, including representatives from central PMB, provincial PMB, RIFEE and local communities of 4 communes involving in the project.



Participants to training courses and field visit

- Activity 3: Communications

Communications activity is paid due attention and achieved following noticeable results in 2016:

- The project coordinated with central and provincial media agencies to produce (1) news about the project and (1) news on roles of mangrove forest in coastal protection responding to climate change which were broadcasted on VTV2 and Thai Binh's radio and television broadcasting station.

- 4 project boards were installed at 4 communes involving in the project.

- 4 posters introducing the project were designed and printed and have been placed at the People's Committee of 4 communes.

- Other communications products such as T-shirt, eco-bag, pens, New Year's calendar were printed and distributed to stakeholders, especially to 4 communes involving in the projects. Project name and logo of VNFOREST and logo of the donor were appeared on the products in order to promote the project's image.



Project boards at communes

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

1. General comment

Although 2016 is the first year of operation which took much time to finalize procedures related to project operation and management and in the context of unfavourable weather condition, activities have been generally implemented as scheduled and achieving quality and objectives as set out in 2016.

Due to unfavourable weather condition, new planting and supplementary planting activities were delayed 2 months compared with the approved plan. So, the check-and-acceptance of these activities will be transferred to early 2017.

2. Advantages

The commitment and support of local authorities and local people and communities of 4 communes involved in forest plantation and protection have helped the project achieve remarkable results. Additionally, the support and close guidance of VNFOREST and Thai Binh's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development as well as close coordination between central PMB, provincial PMB and RIFEE have ensured that activities are effectively implemented and problems arising from the project implementation are timely addressed.

3. Difficulties

Besides achieved results, some activities have not been conducted because of the following difficulties:

- Because 2016 is the first year of operation, both central and provincial PMBs have spent much time on completing procedures related to master bidding plan, master financial plan and annual work and budget plans as well as project management and operation. The longer time for appraisal and approval of these procedures has partially affected the progress of some activities such as forest plantation, forest plantation and equipment and vehicle purchase.

- Unfavorable weather condition in 2016 is also a cause for the postpone of forest plantation activity.

- Many activities have been implemented but not yet promptly paid due to the complexity of payment procedures which has influenced the disbursement rate of the project.

- In spite of the fact that Thai Binh has been implementing and coordinating to implement some projects and programs related to rehabilitation and sustainable development of mangrove forest ecosystem, this is the first ODA project being implemented in the province. Thus, the provincial PMB is inexperienced in bidding, reporting and accounting.

4. Lesson learnt

During the implementation of activities as planned for 2016, the following lessons-learnt have been figured out:

- The strong support of the donor, VNFOREST, provincial and communal authorities has facilitated the implementation and completion of project activities.

- The close coordination among central PMB, provincial PMB, RIFEE and the donor is necessary to address problems arising from the project implementation.

- Forest plantation time strongly depends on weather, which is an unpredictable factor, affecting the plantation, caring and protection of forest.