



Success Story: Reducing Emissions and Increasing Resilience in Vietnam

Central Vietnam is known for its pristine coastlines, fertile rainforests, soaring mountains, and 3,000 animal and plant species, including endangered species like elephants and rare monkeys. More than half a million people in this area rely on natural resources in forests for their incomes. But poor natural resources management (NRM) and overexploitation have led to deforestation, forest degradation, and large amounts of carbon emissions, which threaten livelihoods and communities.

Luckily, the tide is starting to turn. After decades of deforestation—a 2005 United Nations report showed Vietnam had the second-highest rate of deforestation in the world—Vietnam is starting to rebuild its forests, and the Annamites Region in central Vietnam is leading the charge.

With support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), ECODIT, a U.S. small business, helped catalyze this movement. Through the \$24 million Vietnam Green Annamites Activity (VNGA, 2016-2021), ECODIT significantly reduced emissions, improved NRM, increased prosperity, and incentivized thousands of community members, businesses and officials across Central Vietnam to work together to combat climate change and protect their environment for the long term

In its work to build a more prosperous and sustainable future for Vietnam, ECODIT drew on its 27 years of experience of partnering with stakeholders to foster innovation and build capacity for improved NRM in more

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than 50 countries. Activities have included training institutions and provincial governments to protect forests, reduce emissions, and manage biodiversity; supporting forest-dependent communities to engage in sustainable alternative livelihoods; establishing voluntary carbon markets; and facilitating partnerships with the private sector.

VNGA met or exceeded all of its targets. As a result of the project, 11.6 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent have been reduced, sequestered or avoided, and more than half a million hectares of land in the target region are now under improved management. These achievements have had a ripple effect on local animals and plants. For example, in an event that was celebrated throughout Vietnam, the country’s Elephant



Photo Credit: ECODIT

Habitat and Species Conservation Area saw the birth of its first baby elephant since its establishment—a sign that the environment there is now healthy enough to support the gestation and rearing of new baby elephants.

Moreover, VNGA empowered and improved the incomes of local communities. ECODIT imparted knowledge and skills to the communities about how to better manage natural resources, respond to disasters and boost resilience, and supported them to adopt new environmentally friendly alternative livelihoods via ecotourism and other conservation enterprises. As a result, the livelihoods of more than 28,000 people were enhanced, all while combatting climate change and conserving natural resources.

Community members said their lives have improved substantially as a result of these changes. Blup Phu, a community leader from A Hoi, a village next to a forest close to Vietnam’s border with Laos, said he saw a complete transformation in the forests—and in the behavior of fellow community members. “Today, people no longer burn down the forests for paddy fields; they use natural resources in an effective and sustainable way,” Mr. Phu said. “The forest is thriving. Trees are big again.”



VNGA empowered these community members to forego exploitative livelihoods in favor of more sustainable—yet also more lucrative—livelihoods. “Our community members no longer change anything in the forest; we just use forest land under canopies to grow rattan and Homalomena Ocutta,” Mr. Phu explained. “The revived forests have increased our wellbeing and helped us earn more money.”

This enthusiasm for combatting climate change and preserving natural resources now extends to the highest reaches of government, civil society and the private sector. Now, more than 90 institutions have increased capacity in climate change adaption and sustainable landscapes, and with project support, the government has designated areas of high biodiversity as protected areas or national parks. Moreover, the project succeeded in mobilizing more than \$59 million in private sector investment—nearly three times its target—for the environment from both large companies, such as IKEA supplier Scansia Pacific, and small agricultural and handicraft cooperatives.

“The USAID Vietnam Green Annamites Activity is a strong example of ECODIT’s approach to sustainable development in action,” ECODIT Executive Vice President Joseph Karam said. “We team up with a broad range of partners to lay the groundwork for durable, long-lasting change. We can see the impact of our work among local communities in Vietnam today, and it is truly rewarding.”