**PROJECT EVALUATION SERIES**

**Midterm Evaluation - Forest and Farm Facility**

**Viet Nam Country Case Report**

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

**OFFICE OF EVALUATION**

**June 2016**

# 

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# Acronyms and abbreviations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| FFF | Forest and Farm Facility |
| CPC | Commune People’s Committee |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations |
| FFPO | Forest and Farm Producer Organization |
| IIED | International Institute for Environment and Development |
| IR | Intermediate Result |
| IS | Intermediate State |
| IUCN | The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources |
| M&LS | Monitoring and Learning System |
| MA&D | Market Analysis and Development |
| MTE | Mid-Term Evaluation |
| NTFP | Non-Timber Forest Products |
| NVCARD | North Vietnam College of Agricultural and Rural Development |
| PROFOR | Program on Forests |
| RECOFTC | The Center for People and Forests |
| SEDP | Socio-Economic Development Plan |
| SEDS | Socio-Economic Development Strategy |
| SO | Strategic Objective |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| UNREDD | The United Nations Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation |
| VNFU | Viet Nam Farmers' Union |

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# Introduction

1. The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) was one of the first “umbrella programmes” within the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The FFF receives funding through a multi-donor trust fund, from donors including Sweden, Finland, United States, AgriCord (through its Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme) and Germany (under the Carlowitz project). The World Banks’ Program on Forests (PROFOR) also provided startup funds through two of the main partners: the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and the International Union for Conservation (IUCN). Though the Programme was established with a target budget of USD 50 million for five years, only USD 12.5 million dollars were secured by FAO as of June 2016.
2. The FFF was designed under a partnership co-managed by IIED, IUCN and AgriCord, with inputs from major alliances of forest and farm producer organizations including representatives from the International Family Forest Alliance, the Global Alliance for Community Forestry and the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests. The FFF was implemented through a participatory multi-stakeholder process and informed by scoping studies, resulting in a multi-year work plan that is country and context specific, and designed to improve the Country Programming Framework and to catalyze and leverage existing initiatives. The FFF was set up for a duration of five years, running from December 2012 to December 2017. However, the first significant funding was only received in August 2013, and a decision was made to launch in-country activities in six paired pilot countries during 2013: Guatemala and Nicaragua (Latin America), The Gambia and Liberia (Africa), and Nepal and Myanmar (Asia).
3. Beginning in November 2013, four more countries were selected (Bolivia, Kenya, Zambia and Vietnam) through a comprehensive selection process; work began in the second half of 2014 and the beginning of 2015. Expressions of interest were received in various forms from over 44 countries and 70 forest and farm producer organizations, indicating unmet demand.
4. The project has a monitoring and learning system (M&LS) to monitor progress on a range of indicators under each of the outputs described in the programme theory of change (ToC). An annual aggregated report on the FFF’s M&LS is presented to the Steering Committee each February, summarizing country level achievements and lessons learned.
5. FFF activities are currently underway across the 10 countries, albeit at different stages of intervention; Viet Nam is one of those countries. The interventions of the project include work by apex level producer organizations supported through partnership agreements, small grants to producer organizations to support enterprise and other organizational needs, multi-sectoral platforms led by government actors at national and sub-national levels, exchange visits and capacity building.
6. This MTE was conducted in accordance with the agreements signed with donors. With 1.5 years left in the current project, this evaluation provides an opportunity to improve implementation and to envisage its future after December 2017.

## Purpose of the evaluation

1. As mentioned above, the mid-term evaluation is programmed in the FFF project document and financing agreements. The purpose of the MTE is to inform the Project Steering Committee, the Programme Management Team, the Donor Support Group and other stakeholders about the project’s progress and performance toward attaining the expected outputs and outcomes. The intention is therefore to evaluate the programme for planning purposes as well as to inform the multi donor fund of progress to date. The mid-term evaluation is expected to bring valuable external reflections to help strengthen the programme, and to validate and complement the M&L system of the project.
2. The MTE draws specific conclusions and formulates recommendations for necessary further action by the Steering Committee, the Project Management Team and other international and in-country FFF stakeholders. It also identifies good practices and lessons learned for the formulation and execution of other similar projects that address forestry governance and/or utilizing a small grant scheme.

## Intended users

1. The intended users of the results of this MTE include the FFF Steering Committee, the Donor Support Group, the Project Management Team the FFF national facilitators, implementing partners, FAO country office staff, government stakeholders, and other international and in-country FFF parties.

## Scope and objective of the evaluation

1. **Scope:** This MTE evaluates the results achieved from the inception of FFF in December 2012 until December 2015, bearing in mind that activities did not start until mid- to late-2013. The evaluation assesses all key elements of the programme across its interventions as outlined in the ToC, with a representative set of forest and farmer producer organizations (FFPOs) and government partners in the selected five countries, and at the regional and global levels. Additionally, the management and governance structure of the project were assessed as well as the linkages between the project and other in-country and global initiatives in the context of FAO’s Strategic Objectives (in this case SO3 Output 1.1 and SO2 Output 2.2).

**Objectives and Evaluation Questions:**

1. The FFF mid-term evaluation had the following objectives:
   * Assess progress made toward achieving project results; and
   * Identify design and implementation issues that should be addressed in order to achieve the project’s intended results.
2. In order to achieve these objectives, the evaluation sought to deliver findings under the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, partnerships and coordination, normative values, sustainability, and coherence and synergies. In this regard, the evaluation was guided by the below preliminary evaluation questions respective to the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, partnership and coordination, sustainability, and FAO’s normative values. In the course of the work, the MTE added a question on the “Likelihood of Impact of the Project” to capture the project’s crucial early effects which were not recorded by its M&LS.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Relevance**

* Evaluation question 1: How relevant is the FFF’s primary focus and logic in terms of its stated mission, in relation to the target countries’ contexts, broader sustainable development initiatives, and smallholder farmers' needs?
* Evaluation question 2: How and to what extent does the project contribute to the broader strategic FAO objectives? Sub-questions: (2.1) How coherent is FFF in terms of how it fits in with the policies, programmes and projects undertaken by the governments, FAO and other development partners? (2.2) To what extent has the FFF integrated its programme with other technical teams within the Forestry Department; with FAO’s internal priorities, building on Country Programming Frameworks and regional initiatives; and especially by linking with the Strategic Objectives (in this case SO3 Output 1.1 and SO2 Output 2.2)? (2.3) Is FFF coherent with other forestry initiatives operating within the target countries?
* Evaluation question 3: Was the project design appropriate for achieving the mission, vision and outcomes?

**Effectiveness**

* Evaluation question 4: To what extent is the FFF on track to achieving outcomes across the three pillars, and what changes are attributable to the FFF’s interventions which are directly linked to the FFF’s main objectives? Sub-questions: (4.1) To what extent were producer organizations strengthened for business development and engagement in policy dialogue? (4.2) Did FFF Catalyze multi-sectoral policy platforms? (4.3) Did FFF link local voices to global processes?

**Efficiency**

* Evaluation question 5: To what extent is the current operational modality contributing to the efficient achievement of the program outcomes?

**Likelihood of impact**

* Evaluation question 6: To what extent is FFF contributing to progress toward the expected outcomes and impact?

**Partnership and coordination**

* Evaluation question 7: Was FFF successful at engaging other partners in the FFF-supported processes?

**Sustainability**

* Evaluation question 8: How sustainable is the FFF concept of investing in the organizational capacity of forest farm producer organizations – and how might this be enhanced?

**Normative values**

* Evaluation question 9: To what extent have gender and human rights been taken into account in the design of the FFF and during the implementation?

## Methodology

1. The MTE adopted a consultative and transparent approach with FFF internal and external stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. The triangulation of evidence and information gathered underpins its validation and analysis, and supports the conclusions and recommendations.
2. To assess the contribution of the project toward its stated outcomes and expected impact, five participating countries were visited. In each country, national and sub-national stakeholders were interviewed and field visits were carried out to meet directly with FFF-targeted FFPOs. A sixth mission was planned for Nicaragua, but this was cancelled due to timing and logistical constraints. The five visited countries were The Gambia, Kenya, Guatemala, Myanmar and Vietnam. While these five countries were the primary focus countries for the evaluation, the MTE team also conducted desk reviews of the FFF activities carried out in the other five countries in order to corroborate the findings from the primary evaluation missions.
3. Desk reviews and consultative interviews with the FFF team at FAO headquarters constitute an important aspect of the evaluation approach, primarily in relation to questions of programme management, coherence and synergies. Interviews were also conducted with staff of IUCN and IIED, the two main FFF partners.
4. To answer the above evaluation questions, the MTE’s approach is based on mixed methods and triangulation of information. This approach was selected to ensure that the evaluation findings fully respond to the purpose of the evaluation. The methods used included the following:

* Review of existing documentation on FFF;
* Analysis of FFF self-reported information, in particular the 2014 and 2015 annual reports;
* Semi-structured interviews with key informants, stakeholders and participants, supported by the questions listed in the evaluation matrix;
* Targeted FFPOs discussion and direct observation during field visits in the focus countries;
* Validation of MTE mission observations through debriefing discussions with key stakeholders at country and FAO headquarters level.

1. In order to answer evaluation questions 1 and 3 on relevance, country visits and key informant interviews were conducted with in-country stakeholders and beneficiaries. To answer question 2 on the coherence and consistency of FFF with FAO’s strategic objectives and other FAO initiatives, the evaluation team conducted interviews with key informants at FAO headquarters and country level, as well as a desk review. For questions 4 and 9, the MTE used different analytical approaches for assessing progress and impact under each FFF pillar. In assessing progress towards Outcome 1, Pillar 1, the analysis was based on four levels for influencing forest and farm related policies (adapted from Keck and Sikkink, 1998[[2]](#footnote-2)), as follows:

* Getting issues on the political agenda;
* Encouraging discursive commitment from government;
* Securing procedural change at national level;
* Influencing behavioral change in key actors.

1. In assessing the effectiveness of activities under Outcome 2, the MTE analyzed progress made by FFF in supporting interventions aimed at improving forest and farm based value chain governance[[3]](#footnote-3) as well as the upgrading[[4]](#footnote-4) trajectories followed by FFPOs. On value chains governance, three analytical lenses were used:

* Analyzing support to policy and institutional improvements of the environment in which value chains operate;
* Analyzing support to new laws and regulations governing value chains;
* Analyzing the facilitation offered to the negotiation of trade relationships between FFPOs and downstream value chain operators.
* To analyze the upgrading strategies, three analytical lenses were used:
* Analyzing value chain upgrading strategies used by FFPOs with the support of FFF in different countries;
* Analyzing market access models practiced by FFPOs;
* Analyzing the outcomes for FFPOs and their member households.

1. The evaluation also analyzed why some FFPOs derived greater benefits from their participation in value chains. For Question 6 on the project’s expected impact on forest and farm livelihoods, the achievements under each pillar were framed in terms of the assets and capitals identified in the sustainable livelihood approach (i.e. human capital, social capital, political capital, natural assets, physical assets and financial assets).

# Background and context of the programme

## 2.1 Context of the Viet Nam FFF programme

1. Viet Nam is a country in transition from a centrally planned economy to a market oriented economy, with a one-party government. It has a population of around 90 million people of which 75% live in rural areas. It has developed rapidly over the last two decades as a result of economic reforms undertaken since the 1980s. It recorded high growth rates which allowed to reach the middle-income status in 2010. Although poverty reduction over the last two decades has fallen impressively it remains overwhelming in rural areas. The country has transformed the agrarian sector from the one dominated by state-led cooperatives to household-based farms with relatively equal and secured land tenures. A sizable part of the population – mainly ethnic minority and other vulnerable groups – risk stagnating in poverty without access to basic services.
2. The country is administratively divided into provinces, the provinces into districts and the districts into communes. The communes are governed by Commune Peoples Committees (PC), which is the lowest level of government, and normally covers between six to fifteen villages. Extension services for agriculture, forestry and fishery are provided through the PC at commune or, at least, district, provincial and national levels. Farmers access to marketing, irrigation/drainage, veterinarian services and credit, and others is through various combinations of the state- or private-own commercial enterprises, service providers, banks and sometimes user groups.
3. Rural Viet Nam is characterized by extensive social networks which may be informal, semi-formal or formal organizations. These organizations are important elements in the country’s rural transformation.
4. While Viet Nam is not a multiparty democracy, there are formal legal and institutional settings which provide local people with a relative high degree of influence on their own situation and the people have several channels of voicing concerns. In rural contexts, these settings may be farmers organizations for example, which play an important role in promoting farmers self-help and cooperation. The ideology of the party emphasizes stability and equality. The Government ensures that the growing inequality does not become a source of dissatisfaction which could pose a threat to stability. For this reason, development assistance to rural areas is a high priority.
5. The Government of Viet Nam has adopted its ten-year vision (Socio-Economic Development Strategy, SEDS, to 2020) and endorsed its five-year plan, which is equivalent to a PRSP (Socio-Economic Development Plan, SEDP, 2011-2015). The Government continues to focus its efforts on achieving high growth, which is seen as a prerequisite for generating the large number of jobs (around 1.5 million per annum) that are needed to absorb the increasing population and the migration to urban areas. It also emphasizes sustainable development, dealing with climate change, and maintaining social equity. In the short term, the Government’s priority is on maintaining macroeconomic stability, improving the business environment, providing support to vulnerable groups and poorer regions, and designing a new social protection system.
6. FFF in Viet Nam is implemented by Viet Nam Farmers’ Union (VNFU). It was launched in August 2014, but implementation started in March 2015. Baseline studies in Bac Kan and Yen Bai Provinces and a planning workshop took place in 2015. Many activities were conducted in 2015, including a facilitation skills training that was organized for 24 Facilitators and heads of FFPOs. The Target FFPOs are located in two Northern Provinces, Bac Kan (Ba Be District: 2 communes) and Yen Bai (Yen Binh District: 1 communes, and Tran Yen District: 1 commune). The characteristics of FFPOs are given in Table 1.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Table 1: Characteristics of FFF’s target producer organizations in Vietnam | | | | | | | | |
| FFPO | **Registration Status** | **Number of household members** | | | **Number of members/ direct beneficiaries** | | | Type of production |
| **Headed by Male** | **Headed by Female** | **Total** | **Males** | **Females** | **Total** |
| Yen Bai province | | | | | | | | |
| Lem acacia cooperation group | Registered with commune authority | 9 | 6 | 15 | 21 | 18 | 39 | Timber and processing |
| Hop Thinh acacia cooperation group | Registered with commune authority | 6 | 8 | 12 | 15 | 16 | 31 | Timber/ fruit tree |
| Dao Thinh Cinnamon cooperation group | Registered with commune authority | 29 | 4 | 33 | 47 | 39 | 86 | Non-timber/bee keeping |
| Bac Kan province | | | | | | | | |
| May Phay forestry cooperation group | Registered with commune authority | 10 | 7 | 17 | 22 | 21 | 43 | Timber and processing |
| Khuoi Coong forestry cooperation group | Registered with commune authority | 8 | 4 | 12 | 16 | 13 | 29 | Timber/poultry |
| Khuoi Slien forestry cooperation group | Registered with commune authority | 5 | 4 | 9 | 11 | 9 | 21 | Timber |
| Thach Ngoa Star anise group | Registered with commune authority | 8 | 1 | 9 | 14 | 11 | 25 | Non-timber processing/ forest vegetable |
| Membership Totals | | 73 | 34 | 107 | 147 | 127 | 274 |  |

## Reconstruction of a contextualized FFF Theory of Change at country level

1. FFF developed a generic ToC that links development results at FFPOs level (organization capacity, access to technologies, access to markets) with voice and participation in policy processes at national and global levels, in order to achieve the intended Impact. The strategies to achieve the Impact are arranged under three Pillars, 4 Outcomes and 7 Outputs as presented in Figure 1. The MTE found that on this basis, the internal logic of the project is largely sound between the Outputs and Outcomes level.

**Outcome 1:** Strengthened producer organizations engage in policy dialogue

**Outcome 2**: Local communities and producers are organized and thereby have the capacity to invest in sustainable forest and farm management and integrate into market

**Outcome 3**: Cross-sectoral coordination (...) for sustainable forest and farm management operating at national and sub-national levels

**Outcome 4:** National and global agendas and initiatives (…) are informed about the knowledge and priorities of smallholders, women, communities and IPs.

**Vision:** Smallholders, communities and indigenous peoples’ organizations have improved their livelihoods and decision-making over forest and farm landscapes

**Impact:** Smallholders, women and indigenous peoples groups have improved income and food security from sustainable forest and farm management

**Pillar1:** Strengthen smallholder, women and indigenous peoples’ produces’ producer organizations for business/livelihoods and policy engagement

**Pillar 2:** Catalyze multi-sectoral stakeholder policy platforms with governments at local and national levels

**Pillar 3**: Link local voices and learning to global processes through communication and information dissemination

**Output 4.1**: International and regional organizations representing smallholder-, women-, and IPs groups in international fora and negotiations have established communication and information channels to their respective constituencies at national and local levels (….)

**Output 4.1**: International and regional organizations representing smallholder-, women-, and IPs groups in international fora and negotiations have established communication and information channels….

**Output 1.2:** Collaboration for policy dialogue between smallholder, women, community, IPs groups, large scale private sector and government enhanced

**Output 3.1**: Establishment and coordination of government’s inter-ministerial multi-stakeholder platforms/committees (involving local organizations, CSOs, and the private sector) facilitated

**Output 3.2**: Increased information sharing and coordination between sectors results in improved understanding and implementation of different policies and programs affecting FFPOs within forest and farm landscapes

**Output 1.1:** Dispersed local forest and farm smallholders, women, and IPs are organized and strengthened to cooperate in (effective and gender inclusive) networks, alliances and federations

**Output 2.1**: Local FFPOs have knowledge about business development (…) and access to financing mechanisms

**Output 2.2**: Establishment of services such as producer hubs in support of small scale FFF- facilitated (and actively provided) services to female and male members

**Output 2.3**: Experience sharing and exchanges between FFPOs involving men and women result in increased resilience, improved practices and continued networking

Figure 1 FFF Results Framework

1. However, a close analysis shows that it does not express the conditions that should be in place to allow development results to reach impact. The ToC lacks important building blocks in terms of Assumptions and Impact Drivers[[5]](#footnote-5), between Outcomes level and Impacts level.
2. It should be recalled that it is between the levels of Outcomes and Impacts that the design should express the main changes that are expected to take place as “Intermediate States (IS)”, as the stepping-stones to Impacts in the respective pathways. It is therefore important to indicate explicitly in the ToC what are the required assumptions allowing Outcomes to lead to intermediate results (IR), and from there to planned impacts. The MTE reconstructed the ToC based on the original one in order to include the missing building blocks (Assumptions and Impact Drivers); this provides a framework that more clearly articulates the conditions that are required to reach the expected impact. The reconstructed ToC does not modify the Outputs, Outcomes, Impact and Vision. Rather it places them together with Intermediate Results (the current Pillars), Assumptions and Impact Drivers into a graphic representation of the FFF.
3. The different FFF ToC building blocks are illustrated as shown in Figure 2. The original ToC blocks are illustrated in green color and connecting black arrows, and are unchanged. Dashed black arrows are added to show the actual connectedness from the Project implementation experience to date. Other colors indicate the blocks that are missing in the original ToC: blue for the Assumptions, and dark orange for Impact Drivers.
4. During the visit in Viet Nam, the MTE Team discussed with National Facilitator and key program partners the conditions that were necessary to reach impact. The information obtained was used to reconstruct a ToC for FFF in the context of its work in the country. The reconstructed ToC (Figure 2) shows that to reach the FFF Impact, three Intermediary States (IS) that correspond to the 3 Pillars must be achieved; these are:
5. IS-1: FFPOs capacity for doing business is enhanced and they engage in policy decision;
6. IS-2: Multi-sectoral stakeholders policy platforms are catalyzed;
7. IS-3: Local voices are linked to global processes.
8. To achieve IS-1, The MTE found that the following conditions must be met:

A: Partnerships with Banks extend loans to FFPOs.

ID: FFPOs access to national & export markets improved through VCD.

ID: FFPOs are supported to become cooperatives.

1. To achieve IS-2, the MTE also found that the following conditions must be met:

A: Authorities at all levels create enabling conditions for FFF strengthening.

ID: Lessons and best practices from FFF allow sharing experiences.

1. To achieve IS-3, the following conditions must be met:

A: Avenues for exchange at regional and global levels are offered

ID: Lessons and best practices from FFF allow sharing experiences.

**Figure 2: Reconstructed FFF Theory of Change**

Smallholders, communities and indigenous peoples organizations have improved their livelihoods and decision-making over forest and farm landscapes

FFF Impact/Vision

Intermediary states (IR)/Assumptions (A)/Impact Drivers (ID)

Outcomes

Producers are organized for policy dialogue

Producers are organized for business

Cross-sectoral policy coordination for sustainable forest and farm management

National and global agendas are informed about the priorities of local producers

ID: FFPOs are supported to become cooperatives.

ID: Lessons and best practices from FFF allow sharing experiences

**A/ID:** Avenues for exchange at regional and global levels are offered

**A:** Authorities at all levels create enabling conditions for FFF strengthening

ID: POs access to national & export markets improved through VCD

A: Partnerships with Banks extend loans to FFPOs.

IS-1: FFPOs capacity for doing business is enhanced and they engage in policy decision processes

IS-2: Multi-sectoral stakeholders policy platforms are catalyzed

IS-3: Local voices are linked to global processes

1. The Vision is stated as “Smallholders, communities and indigenous peoples’ organizations have improved their livelihoods and decision-making over forest and farm landscapes» is wider than the context of Viet Nam. This is why the MTE added a plain black arrow linking the Intermediary State “Local voices are linked to global processes” to the Vision, while the arrow link to Impact is dashed.

# Evaluation questions: key findings

1. This section presents the findings which are based on the desk review of the FFF documents, country visit and interviews with FFF Team, target FFPOs at grassroots level and key program stakeholders at provincial, district and communal levels.

## Evaluation question 1: How relevant is FFF primary focus and logic in terms of its stated mission, in relation to the target countries’ contexts, to broader sustainable development initiatives, and to smallholder farmers' needs?

1. FFF is strongly aligned with the Government policies, strategies and legal frameworks regarding rural social and economic development. In particular, the Prime Minister’s Decision No 673-QD/TTg of 2012 enabling VNFU directly to implement and collaborate with ministries in implementing the programs and projects to develop the rural economy, culture and society in the period 2011-2020.
2. The programme is highly relevant to smallholders’ development needs. According to the FFPOs representatives interviewed by MTE mission, by providing funding directly to FFPOs to support their projects, FFF fills a gap in both donor assistance and government assistance. It narrows this gap by recognizing that FFPOs can elaborate proposals based on the priorities of their members, implement them, and be the drivers of change for their own development if they receive support to address the challenges facing them.
3. In particular, FFF is strongly relevant to the needs of most smallholder upland and forest farmers. Their livelihoods depend on small farms in forest and farm landscapes. Their production in farming and forest plantation contributes significantly to forestry sector growth and local and national economies. However, many farmer households in upland and mountain areas barely cover their food needs and suffer from poverty during unfavorable seasons. On the other hand, many smallholders can produce some forest and non-timber forest products (NTFPs), but they usually sell their products individually to middlemen and traders at unfavorable prices.

## Evaluation question 2: Consistency with FAO’s strategic objectives: How and to what extent does the project contribute to the broader FAO strategic objectives?

1. FFF’s activities in Viet Nam are aligned to FAO’s Strategic Objective 2 (SO2), «Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner». They are particularly aligned with FAO’s Strategic Objective 3 (SO3), “Reduce rural poverty”, to which they strongly contribute. Under SO3, FAO recognizes that rural poverty is mostly concentrated among households of small-scale subsistence producers and family farmers, among others. It further recognizes that women are often amongst the most marginalized and need strengthened rights to the natural resources on which they depend. Though FFF started its activities slightly before current FAO’s strategic objectives were adopted, its design was based on the same analysis of the factors of rural poverty. Its focus target groups are also poor smallholders’ farmers whose livelihoods are tied to small forests and farm assets.
2. More specifically, the FFF programme in Viet Nam is aligned to FAO’s corporate outcome 3.1: The rural poor have enhanced and equitable access to productive resources, services, organizations and markets, and can manage their resources more sustainably. The output under this outcome to which FFF is contributing most is Output 3.1.1: Support to strengthen rural organizations and institutions and facilitate empowerment of rural poor.
3. At the heart of FFF consistency with FAO’s SO3 are principally FFF’s Outcomes 1 and 2. Outcome 1 is instrumental in enabling poor rural smallholder farmers to get organized and be able to engage in policy dialogue on forest and farm resource management and use related issues. Outcome 2 is instrumental in enhancing the capacity of the same target groups to invest in forest and farm management to participate in value chains and integrate into the markets.
   1. Evaluation question 3: Was the project design appropriate for achieving the Outcomes and the Vision?
4. In the context of rural development in Viet Nam, the appropriateness of FFF’s design for achieving its Outcomes and Vision is unquestionable. The country’s Forest and farm smallholders face challenges that include limited organization skills, limited access to national and international markets and market information, to financial capital, smallholder friendly technologies, and limited or no participation in policy formation processes relating to forest and farm landscape management and use. Addressing these challenges is in the realm of FFF’s Vision and Outcomes.
5. The main strength of the FFF model resides in its having a wide scope for addressing smallholder farmers’ challenges, being demand-driven, and supporting with direct grants the proposals submitted by FFPOs for funding. While the ultimate goal is ensuring sustainable management and use of forest and farm landscapes, FFF’s niche is in strengthening FFPOs directly, complementing other approaches with focus on rights, legality, payments for environmental services including REDD+ and technical capacity for sustainable forest management.
   1. Evaluation question 4: To what extent is the FFF on track to achieving outcomes across the three pillars and what changes can be observed that are attributable to the FFF’s interventions and are directly linked to the FFF’s main objectives?
6. This section presents the MTE findings with respect to overall achievements per Outcome for each Pillar. The MTE found substantive evidence that FFF programme in the country is on track for most Outcomes of Pillars 1 and 3.

**Pillar 1, “Strengthen smallholder, women, community and indigenous peoples’ producer organizations for business/livelihoods and policy engagement”**

1. With regarding to progress to Outcome 1, “Strengthened producer organizations engage in policy dialogue”, FFF is on track in supporting grassroots FFPOs. Under Output 1.1, “Dispersed local producers are organized into effective and gender inclusive groups”, FFF’s approach of targeting smallholders through FFPOs as the vehicle to transfer knowledge and skills for getting organized has led to increased awareness of the many advantages of working together.
2. With regard to Output 1.2, “Producer groups work together with government and private sector to improve policy”, the MTE mission noted that foundations for interaction between FFPOs and local administrations (communal, district and provincial) are quite good. FFF can get issues on local government strategy agenda through roundtable discussions with all stakeholders at all levels. These roundtables are facilitated by VNFU, and agendas focus on how to support FFPOs in production and sustainable forest business by creating a more enabling policy environment.
3. FFF-supported FFPOs rightly chose to focus their effort on a limited number of main value chains: Magnolia and Star Anise in Bac Kan Province, and Acacia and Cinnamon in Yen Bai Province. There are already interesting early experiences in value chain governance for a programme that started its implementation only in 2015. With regard to improving the institutional environment in which smallholder farmers can organize to manage and use forest and farm landscapes, FFF supported the development of FFPOs and the strengthening of their bargaining power within value chains. There is a high level of attention by VNFU at all levels, and of administrative authorities at provincial, district and communal levels to the activities of FFF aimed at improving the governance of value chains. However, there are still challenges in passing of FFPOs to a higher status such as cooperatives, so that they can engage for example with financial institutions for loans. In the area of application of laws and regulations, FFF is actively lobbying local Districts and Communal authorities in Bak Kan Province for delivering to FFPOs Licenses for timber processing. FFF is currently assembling information on pertinent policies and laws for FFPOs and other potential users.
4. There is an emerging experience in value chain upgrading in FFF country programme. The MTE found that FFF implicitly supports value chains upgrading through the activities aimed at value addition. It identified the following upgrading trajectories: products upgrading[[6]](#footnote-6), process upgrading[[7]](#footnote-7), and inter-chain (or inter-sector) upgrading[[8]](#footnote-8). Table 2 presents examples of these emerging experiences.
5. ***Products upgrading.*** FFF’s support implicitly enhances products upgrading activities that raise the forest and farm producers’ awareness on the standards and quality that attract consumers. Products upgrading goes hand in hand with process upgrading because improving product quality often involves improving production processes. With products upgrading through processed products and process upgrading, FFF is transforming forest and farm economics in target communities. New livelihoods opportunities are created for the beneficiaries and smallholders are helped to build up technological skills and are stimulated to participate in value chains and engage in business. Favorable factors influencing product upgrading include a good link of the chains to national market or to national and export markets.

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| Table2: Emerging experiences in value chain upgrading in FFF supported FFPOs | |
| Type of upgrading | Example of FFPOs supported by FFF |
| Product upgrading | * An FFPO in Bac Kan Province which has installed a plywood mill; its members have been trained to respect the plywood standards. * Timber producing FFPOs in Bac Kan and Yen Bai provinces intend to achieve FSC certification so that they can meet requirements of export markets. |
| Process upgrading | FFPOs processing timber or intending to process it are organizing harvesting infrastructure and delivery systems for processed products. |
| Inter-chain upgrading | In Yen Bai Province, of an FFPO sells Cinnamon bark as the main chain product, and sells logs to sawmills, and branches and leaves to plants that make cinnamon oil. |

1. ***Process upgrading.*** With regard to Process upgrading, there are FFPOs which are processing or are intending to process timber, and are organizing harvesting infrastructure and delivery systems for processed products.
2. ***Inter-chain upgrading***. An FFPO in Yen Bai Province sells Cinnamon bark as the main chain product, and sells logs to sawmills, and branches and leaves to plants that make cinnamon oil.
3. FFF is also having success in helping FFPOs to know business and access markets. With the training activities targeting FFPOs’ members, it has been effective in the implementation of Output 2.1. The application of the acquired knowledge has further motivated target FFPOs to improve commercialization of their products. In Table 3, the MTE mission summarizes FFF country programme experiences to date in helping FFPOs to know business and access to markets. From field observations and discussion with target FFPOs, three main business models have been identified as follows: (i) Trader-driven; (ii) Buyer company-driven; (iii) FFPOs-driven.

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| Table 3: Main business models driving FFF supported FFPOs’ business | |
| Type of business model | Examples of FFF targeted FFPOs |
| Trader-driven | In Bac Kan and Yen Bai Provinces FFPOs which have not yet started processing their timber production sell logs to traders. |
| Buyer company-driven | FFPOs which have started to process timber in Bac Kan and Yen Bai Provinces are selling production to companies. |
| FFPOs-driven | In perspective: In Bac Kan and Yen Bai Provinces FFPOs which have started processing timber intend to get FSC certification for their forest management in order to link to external markets. |

1. The FFPO-driven model is most likely to give higher and more sustainable benefits to FFPOs and their members. It reflects not only higher internal organization but also entrepreneurship skills. Buyer company-driven model is also interesting because it provides incentives to FFPOs to maximize their production efficiency and reliability as far as product quality and respect of standards are concerned.
2. Access to finance is considered by many FFPOs visited by the MTE missions as an important barrier as far as strengthening their business development is concerned. They consider that without bank loans they cannot buy the equipment and material that processing activities require. Access to finance is a common problem for agroforestry producers in Vietnam in general and for FFPOs in the FFF program in particular. FFF is trying to support FFPOs to access loans through different methods, for example by involving financial institutions in roundtable meetings at different levels. FU at district and provincial levels have signed regulation for collaboration with the Social Bank and the Bank of Agriculture and Rural development to facilitate farmers and FFPOs gain access to mortgage loans. The FFF is also trying to assist FFPOs to access loans of Fund for Supporting for Farmer.
3. Under Output 2.3, “Experience sharing between producer organizations in-country”, FFF has had considerable success in organizing sharing of experience between producer organizations. FFPOs representatives in Bac Kan Province told the MTE mission that they used exchange visits in other provinces to learn how to process Magnolia timber to produce veneer, and get high prices. The information from the exchange visits was so interesting to the participants that they organized themselves follow-up exchange visits to their peers to learn more on processing technology. The incentive for this rapid pace of peer-to-peer learning seems to be the prospect of better prices and the possibility of shortening the value chain by connecting to bigger companies to sell their produce and avoid the traders who do not pay well.

**Pillar 2: “Catalyze multi-sectoral stakeholder policy platforms with governments and at local and national levels”**

1. The MTE noted the distinctiveness of Pillar 2, which is a highly “political pillar”. It faces challenges in the domain of influencing policy formation processes in the country. These challenges need to be addressed through adequate political economy analysis and recommendations. This applies to Outcome 3, “Cross-sectoral coordination (…) for sustainable forest and farm management operating at national and sub-national levels”, whose achievement depends on appropriate approaches to engage national policy levels.
2. Although FFF country programme did not make important progress in supporting the enhancement of cross-sectoral coordination for sustainable forest and farm management, VNFU - which implements FFF activities in Viet Nam - facilitates roundtable multi-stakeholder meetings involving the Viet Nam Administration of Forestry (VNFOREST), the Viet Nam Academy of Forest Sciences, the provincial governments and other organizations. The meetings focus on how to support FFPOs in production and sustainable forest business by collaborating to create a more enabling working environment.
3. Influencing policy formation is a long process with unpredictable difficulties and challenges. The outcomes are therefore as unpredictable because they are influenced by many actors. The formulation of Outcome 3 ought to have taken this complexity into account, and recognized that as far as ToC design is concerned, the outcome in influencing policy formation can be realistically achieved at Intermediary State level. Outcome 3 should therefore be formulated to reflect what FFF can achieve and leave what is in the power of decision-makers at the level of Assumptions.

**Pillar 3 “Link local voices and learning to global processes through communication and information dissemination”**

1. With regard to Outcome 4, “National and global agendas and initiatives (…) are informed about knowledge and priorities of smallholders, women, communities and indigenous peoples”, FFF programme in Viet Nam has received delegations from Asian countries in which FFF is implemented. These exchanges provided to visiting delegations excellent opportunities for learning and for exchanging ideas amongst themselves.
2. At global level, FFF country programme has been was effective in contributing to the formulation of messages aiming at making forest and farmers voices head in international for a such as the XIV World Forestry Congress, UNFCCC COP21, and COFO, but also in regional fora.

## Evaluation question 5: To what extent is the current operational modality contributing to the efficient achievement of the program outcomes?

1. The MTE also found that FFF country programme management structure is appropriate. The programme management unit based in VNFU provides the necessary expertise required to keep the programme activities on track as far as the planned outputs and outcomes are concerned. The work of the programme Facilitation is highly appreciated by target FFPOs and FFF program partners at provincial, district and communal levels.
2. To strengthen the efficiency in achieving program outcomes, the program Facilitation sought state support to FFPOs through mechanisms that include Round Table and Focus Group discussions and annual Multi-Stakeholders meetings at provincial and district level.
3. The operational FFF modality is one of the factors for its efficiency. FFF country program can be regarded as being highly efficient in terms of inputs relative to results if account is taken of the relatively limited financial resources invested and duration of implementation so far. Its main delivery mechanisms which include small grants to FFPOs, exchange visits, communications and training, are appreciated by target FFPOs and partners at provincial, district and communal levels. Collaborations with IUCN, RECOFTC, NVCARD and UN-REDD at Bac Kan province are among key factors of FFF country program effectiveness and efficiency. The Monitoring and Learning System has allowed an excellent learning by an upward flux of information that feeds into the communication effort of the three partners.

## Evaluation question 6: What is the likelihood that FFF will contribute to the expected impact?

1. There is a strong likelihood of reaching the Impact of the Project and contributing to its Vision. Full project impact is normally reached some time or many years after completion of its activities. At this stage, the MTE can only assess the likelihood for reaching that Impact and for contributing to the Vision which is “Smallholders, communities and indigenous peoples organizations have improved their livelihoods and decision-making over forest and farm landscapes”.
2. The likelihood of FFF rural poverty impact can be assessed by looking at the extent to which FFF small grants, trainings, and other interventions are likely to contribute to the following livelihoods “building blocks”: human, social, and political capital, and to natural, financial and physical assets.
3. Human capital. The strongest FFF country program results are in the fundamental domain of human capital development, in which there are considerable achievements in enhancing the stock of skills in FFPOs members (organizational, managerial, technological, MA&D). The smallholders that the MTE mission met were unanimous in their appreciation of the contribution of training to their performance in production, processing and marketing activities.
4. Social capital development. The most significant contribution of FFF to this domain has come from the support to FFPOs organizational capacity. Its interventions are increasing the stock of trust that FFPOs members have in the governance of their organizations, and strengthening solidarity in communities. Smallholders are being empowered through raised awareness on the benefits of working together. The FFPOs and their governing committees are effectively contributing to a sense of local ownership of FFF’s results by their members.
5. Political capital. This is understood as the increase in the stock of power held by FFPOs and the apex organizations that can be used to achieve the development goals of their members. The programme supported the enhancement of the political capital of its target FFPOs, and these are effective in interacting with communal authorities in particular.
6. Natural assets. FFF country programme main focus is to support sustainable forest and farm management for improved supply of forest products, NTFPs, and forest resource services. FFPOs are supported to build capacity for sustainable management and use of their forest resources.
7. Physical assets. In general, FFF grants to FFPOs do not cover investment in physical capital. However, the programme has leveraged target FFPOs own resources for investment. As a result, there are important FFPOs achievements in terms of physical assets such as sawmills and processing plants.
8. Financial assets. Due to limited data available, it is not possible to assess the full extent to which FFF is affecting financial assets of households of FFPOs members. From the interviews with FFPOs representatives and field observations, the MTE believes that production and value addition activities supported by FFF grants are positively affecting household income.

## Evaluation question 7: Is FFF having success in engaging other partners in the FFF supported processes?

1. Partnerships have featured prominently in FFF country programme interventions. As shown above, IUCN, NVCARD, RECOFTC, UN-REDD are collaborating in implementation of of certain interventions of the program. NVCARD and RECOFTC provides trainers and materials for MA&D training. It collaborates with UN-REDD in Bac Kan in understanding UN-REDD’s activities and how to link them with the activities of FFPOs.

## Evaluation question 8: How sustainable is the FFF concept of investing in the organizational capacity of forest farm producer organizations – and how might this be enhanced?

1. Sustainability is the likelihood of the programme benefits to be delivered for an extended period after its completion. The MTE found that the high political ownership of the programme at provincial, district and communal levels and the social ownership of FFF model are powerful factors of sustainability. The MTE also found that target FFPOs are satisfied with the FFF model, and the steadily increasing social and economic benefits of their members will contribute to the likelihood of its sustainability.
2. Another equally important factor is the success of the training activities targeting smallholders through their FFPOs. These activities are transforming farms into businesses and motivating them to move further in processing and commercialization activities.

# Crosscutting issues

## Evaluation question 9: To what extent have gender and human rights been taken into account in the design of the FFF and during the implementation?

1. In the context of FFF programme in Viet Nam, the main cross-cutting issues are Gender and the rights of indigenous people. With regard to Indigenous groups, it is worth to note that all the target FFPOs in Bac Kan Province belong to Indigenous groups.
2. With regard to gender, FFF country programme supports efforts to address gender equality and empowerment in target FFPOs’ governance and activities. Women are equal members of FFPOs and participate equally in the trainings offered by the programme. Gender equality awareness among women and men in target organizations has improved, and trainings supported by FFF have enhanced the capacity of female members of the FFPOs governance committees, and technology skills of female members of those organizations.
3. The MTE noted FFF country programme’s effort in supporting the development of women’s leadership skills. A woman who is accountant of an FFPO in Bak Kan Province told the MTE Mission that her increased knowledge from training in leadership organized by FFF has empowered her to more openly discuss in the Committee and make joint decisions with men.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The conclusions and recommendations are formulated in the overall MTE report.

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# List of people met

**Vetnam National Farmers Union**

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2. Mr. Phan Tai Thang, FFF Project Assistant

**Bac Kan Province Farmer Union**

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2. Be Ha Xuyen, Vice director of Socio-Economic Department, Bac Kan PFU
3. Luu Thi Bich Hien, Bac Kan PFU.

**Bac Kan Province – Ba Be District.**

1. Nguyen Van Dong, Chairman of Chu Huong Commune People’s Committee
2. Hoang Van Quan, Vice-Chairman of Chu Huong Commune People’s Committee (CPC)
3. Pham Van Dang, Commune forestry – agriculture staff
4. Dong Van Nghien, Na ngom – Chu Huong commune
5. Dong Van Huu, Na Ngom village – chief of Farmer Union
6. Ly Van An, Member of May Phay cooperation group
7. Le Van Tien, Chairman of Chu Huong Commune Farmer Union
8. Nong Trung Thong, Chief – May Phay cooperation group Trieu Hoang Hoan, Member of May Phay cooperation group
9. Hoang Van Cuong, Member of May Phay cooperation group Hoang Thi Mai, Vice-Chief – May Phay cooperation group Ly Van Linh, Ba Be District Farmer Union Chairman.

**Bac Kan Province, My Phuong Commune – Ba Be district**

1. Duong Van Huynh, Thach Ngoa cooperation group
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3. Dong Van Tong, Member – Chairman of Commune Farmer Union
4. Duong Van Khoa, Member- cashier Thach Ngoa cooperation group
5. Duong Thi Nga, Member Thach Ngoa cooperation group
6. Ha Quoc Hieu, Accountant Thach Ngoa cooperation group
7. Duong Van Chuong, Member Thach Ngoa cooperation group
8. Hoang Van Hoang, Vice-Chairman of Commune Peolple’s Committee
9. Hoang Van Anh, Member Khuooi Lien cooperation group
10. Hoang Thi Lo, member of Khuooi Lien cooperation group
11. Max Hoang Ta, leader of Khuooi Lien cooperation group
12. Hoang Van Hai, member of Khuooi Lien cooperation group

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5. Nguyen Van Mau, Facilitator – UN-REDD program at provincial level
6. Pham Ngoc Kien, Vice – director of Bac Kan province Sub-department of Forestry
7. Cao Thi Hong Thang, Staff of Bac Kan DARD
8. Tran Van Cuong, Vice – Director of Bac Kan province DOIT.

**Yen Bai Province Farmer Union (PFU)**

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2. Ho Van Tinh, Vice - Chairman of Farmer Union of Yen Bai Province
3. Nguyen Cong Loi , Director of Socio-Economic Department, Yen Bai FU
4. Do Thi Thu Hien, Vice director of Yen Bai FU Financial Department
5. Ha Thi Lien Phuong, Staff of Socio-Economic Department
6. Tran Hoang Thanh, Staff of Socio-Economic Department

**Yen Bai Province Yen Bai, Dao Thinh Commune**

1. Do Van Thuc, Secretary of Commune’s Party
2. Nguyen Xuan Hong, member of Cinnamon Cooperation Group
3. Pham Van Tien, Chairman of Commune’s Farmer Union
4. Doan Thu Phuong, Secretary of Youth Union
5. Tran Thi Tuoi, member of Cinnamon Cooperation Group
6. Vu Quoc Viet, member of Cinnamon Cooperation Group
7. Pham Xuan Giao, vice leader of Cinnamon Cooperation Group
8. Nguyen Thi Huong, Chairman of Women Farmer Union
9. Chu Duc Hien, Chairman of Commune People’ Council

**Yen Bai Province, Phu Thinh Commue – Yen Binh**

1. Trieu Anh Kim, Vice chairman – Commune FU
2. Nguyen Dinh Hai, Head of Lem ‘s Cooperation Group (CG)
3. Dao Quang Binh, Vice head of Lem CG
4. Nguyen Thi Thu, Member of Lem CG
5. Luong Thi Yen, Member of Lem CG
6. Hoang Thi Doan, Member of Lem CG
7. Chu Thi Hong, Member of Cooperative Group (CG) of Lem
8. Le Thi Hien, Member of Cooperative Group (CG) of Lem
9. Luong Van Ban, Member of Cooperative Group (CG) of Lem
10. Nguyen Van Mien, Member of Cooperative Group (CG) of Hop Thinh
11. Luong Hong Tháng, Member of Cooperative Group (CG) of Hop Thinh
12. Nguyen Thi Thom, Member of Cooperative Group (CG) of Hop Thinh
13. Nguyen Dinh Tuong, Member of Cooperative Group (CG) of Hop Thinh
14. Chu Duc Hien, Chairman of Commune People’ Council.

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5. Nguyen Cong Loi, Chairman of Socio-Economic Board - FU Yen Bai. Member of provincial FFF program PMU
6. Tong Quang Sau, Chairman of FU of Tran Yen District
7. Dao Thi Tam, Chairman of F U of Yen Binh District
8. Do Nhan Dao, Chairman of Cooperative Alliance of Yen Bai Province
9. Ha Thi Lien Phuong, Staff of Socio-Economic Board- FU of Yen Bai Province
10. Do Thi Thu Hien, Vice director of financial Department - Farmer Union of Yen Bai Province

1. In order to avoid repetition in the presentation of the findings, some questions from the Evaluation Terms of Reference have been reclassified as sub-questions here in the final evaluation report where it was appropriate. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998). Activists beyond borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics. Cornell University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Value chain governance is understood as the power to control, influence, and set the modes and rules of interaction in the value chain. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Value chain upgrading refers to the acquisition of capabilities and market linkages that enable enterprises to improve their competitiveness and move into higher-value activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Distinct from assumptions, impact drivers are factors that project/programme management can influence to a certain extent. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Products upgrading: where a chain actor engages in the production of more sophisticated products in order to increase unit value. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Process upgrading: where a chain actor increases the efficiency of internal processes (production, new technologies, storages, distribution, logistics). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Inter-chain upgrading: where a chain actor introduces value-adding processes from other chains to offer new products or services. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)