

**SGP**

Small Grants Programme  
by the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity  
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KFW



# SGP TECHNICAL SERIES

# Community Development

Technical guidance on implementing  
effective livelihood interventions







The 2003 Declaration of ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHPs) calls for the conservation of protected areas across ASEAN countries, preservation of biodiversity, and support for the sustainable use of natural resources.

AHPs are defined as “protected areas of high conservation importance, preserving in total a complete spectrum of representative ecosystems of the ASEAN region.” AHPs aim to protect wilderness areas with scenic, cultural, educational, and tourism value. They help raise awareness and appreciation of ASEAN’s natural heritage and encourage cooperation among member countries to conserve it.

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) serves as the secretariat of the AHP Programme and carries out activities to strengthen the management of AHPs. Moreover, the AHP Programme aims to promote biodiversity conservation and improve the livelihood of AHP communities by developing the capacity of AHP managers and other stakeholders, including the communities that depend on the forest and other natural resources.

The *Small Grants Programme by the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity II* (SGP II) is a financial cooperation between the ACB and the Federal Republic of Germany through the KfW Development Bank (KfW). It supports efforts to conserve biodiversity in the AHPs and assist livelihood development in and around selected AHPs. The SGP II was implemented in four AHPs in Viet Nam from 2017 to 2025, namely:

- Ba Be National Park (BBNP)
- Hoang Lien National Park (HLNP)
- Chu Mom Ray National Park (CMRNP)
- Kon Ka Kinh National Park (KCKNP)

This report aims to synthesise lessons and best practices from SGP II-supported community development projects to inform future programming, policy development, and replication across AHPs.



# Introduction



ASEAN region's rich biodiversity is not just ecological wealth—it is its direct economic foundation. Agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and tourism sectors across Southeast Asia greatly depend on healthy ecosystems. Thus, protecting ASEAN's biodiversity is central to economic and livelihood security.

In rural ASEAN, millions of smallholder farmers rely on biodiversity-based agriculture for food sufficiency, health, and livelihood. ASEAN waters form part of the Coral Triangle, one of the richest marine ecosystems on Earth, which provide food and marine resources to populations. Forests are important livelihood resources, especially for Indigenous peoples and upland communities.

Community-based forest management directly links biodiversity protection with livelihood programmes such as agroforestry, composting, and ecotourism—one of the fastest-growing sectors in Southeast Asia. ASEAN's ecosystems provide cost-effective natural infrastructure that reduces risks of climate-related disasters as well as disaster recovery expenses.

However, this vast biodiversity wealth is currently threatened by deforestation, land conversion, degradation, climate change impacts, and weak governance and law enforcement. Without intervention, biodiversity loss will accelerate rural poverty and economic underdevelopment.

The declaration of AHPs highlights the key role that local communities play in protected area management and biodiversity conservation. Programmes that support their livelihoods—while reducing environmental threats—help build cooperation among communities, park authorities, and local government agencies.

Communities can become allies in conservation as they play an important role in curbing illegal activities, raising awareness on the importance of conservation, and organising actions to preserve the AHPs and its resources.





# Best Practices

SGP II supported 31 community development projects with a total grant amount of EUR 1,355,175.75 or 50 per cent of the total grant amount awarded to the four AHPs. Among all sites, HLNP had the highest number of projects and the largest grant allocation.

## Significant Achievements



Developed **8** ecotourism skillsets



Developed a virtual tourism system



More than **170** households with new income streams



Capacity building in **8** major areas



More than **30** trainings and courses

## List of Community Development Projects

### BBNP

1. Enhancing Operational Efficiency of Agricultural Cooperatives
2. Developing Virtual Reality Tourism Model for Tourism Development
3. Improving Management, Collection, and Recycling of Domestic Waste
4. Enhancing Capacity of Local Communities and Improving Technical Facilities for Ecotourism Development
5. Raising Awareness and Strengthening Resilience of Ethnic Communities on the Impacts of Climate Change through *Hmong* Black Chicken Farming
6. Strengthening Capacities on Ecotourism Management and Participatory Threat Reduction
7. Organisation of Study Tour and Learning Exchanges on the Development and Management of Ecotourism and Participatory-based Tourism
8. Minimising Waste of Agricultural by-products through Organic Composting and Animal Feed Production

### CMRNP

1. Investigation and Conservation of Medicinal Plant Resources
2. Enhancing the Capacity of Women and Ethnic Communities in Tourism Services
3. Development of Curriculum and Capacity of Vocational Training and Agricultural Extension Centres
4. Native Beekeeping and Commercialisation of Honey Products
5. Reducing the Use of Chemicals in Farms through Compost Production
6. Supporting Women in Raising Native Striped Pigs
7. Supporting Households in Producing Organic Compost Fertiliser

### HLNP

1. Improving Language and Ecotourism Hospitality Service Skills of Local Communities
2. Agrobiodiversity and Traditional Farming Systems for One Commune One Product (OCOP) Development
3. Commercialisation of Sweet Bamboo Shoots in Buffer Zone
4. Capacity Building for Farmers' Union Officials and Teachers on Marketing and Value Chains
5. Enhancing Community Capacity on Organic Farming Techniques
6. Promoting HLNP and its Ecotourism Routes as a Recognised Provincial Tourism Destination
7. Building a Model of Composting from Manure and Organic Waste
8. Ecotourism and Biodiversity Day: Awareness Programme and Promotion of Local Products
9. Advancing Biodiversity Conservation through the Promotion of Ecologically Friendly Products and Traditional Handicrafts

### KKKNP

1. Enhancing Capacity and Skills of Local Farmers through Agricultural Models
2. Developing a Model of Native Black Pig Raising
3. Organising Workshops for Sustainable Ecotourism Development
4. Traditional Skills Training for Developing Handicrafts
5. Capacitating Stakeholders for Improved Ecotourism Services and Hospitality Skills
6. Building Sustainable Agricultural Livelihood Models
7. Commercialisation of Precious Mushroom

# Best Practices

Under SGP II, capacity building is closely tied in community development projects, with special focus on improving production, marketing, and ecotourism.

On production and marketing, the projects aimed to develop crops, raise poultry and livestock, promote sustainable agroforestry, and organic farming, and establish a market to sell the biodiversity-based products and services. Valuable innovations include the feasible propagation of medicinal plants and indigenous beekeeping, raising of native pigs, organic composting, and natural pest management. Development of cooperatives and business management have also been an integral component of improving production and marketing capacity.

On ecotourism, projects were focused on capacitating community members and park staff on communication, management, and hospitality skills, along with various ecotourism services, such as homestays, culinary, and tour guiding.

Strengthening local capacities has been invariably linked with biodiversity conservation. The projects integrated conservation, skills development, and inclusive local enterprise to improve household incomes while reinforcing long-term environmental sustainability.

These efforts have had positive impacts on sustainable livelihoods. Different communes have increased their production of *Hmong* black chicken, goats, native pigs, ducks, rice, bamboo shoots, mushrooms, honey, and organic composts or fertilisers, among others, and have produced steady income streams.

In KKKNP, SGP II grantees developed production models on chicken, goat, muscovy duck, rice, and mushroom, which can be replicated in the other AHPs. In HLNP, an Ecotourism and Biodiversity Day showcased local products among the youth and tourists. Likewise, they produced biodiversity-inspired handcraft designs for marketing promotion. Lastly, grantees in BBNP and HLNP completed a tourism database system, information boards, cadastral and tourism maps, and additional ecotourism routes that contributed to the overall improvement of ecotourism in the area.





# Case Study



## From Small Farms to Thriving Cooperatives in Ba Be National Park

BBNP in northern Viet Nam is widely recognised for its rich biodiversity and scenic landscapes. Covering more than 10,000 hectares and home to the largest freshwater lake in the country, the park supports communities whose livelihoods depend largely on agriculture and natural resources. In recent years, local authorities have encouraged the development of a collective economy, particularly through agricultural cooperatives, to improve rural livelihoods and strengthen socio-economic development in the area.

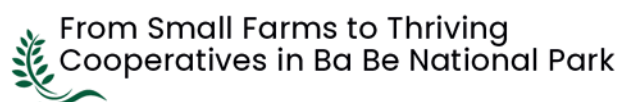
***The project strengthened cooperative operations and improved livelihoods.***

However, agricultural cooperatives in BBNP faced several constraints to their growth and sustainability. Most cooperatives engaged in crop cultivation, livestock raising, and agricultural processing were operating on a small scale with limited production capacity. Management skills among cooperative leaders were often weak, and there were few linkages between producers and consumer markets. As a result, many cooperatives struggled to expand production, improve product quality, or access stable markets.

To address these challenges, the Centre for Training and Research on Plant and Animal Breeding (CPA) implemented the project *Enhancing the Operational Efficiency of Agricultural Cooperatives in the Ba Be National Park* across three communes, namely *Khang Ninh* and *Quang Khe* in *Ba Be* district, and *Nam Cuong* in *Cho Don* district. The initiative engaged eight agricultural cooperatives and directly benefitted 110 household members. The project aimed to improve cooperative operational efficiency, increase employment opportunities, and enhance income and livelihoods for local communities, including the *Tay*, *Dao*, *Nung*, and *Hmong* ethnic households living in and around the national park.



# Case Study



CPA focused on strengthening organisational management and agricultural production systems through capacity building and resource support. Four training courses for 32 cooperative managers were organised to enhance their skills in governance, financial management, and marketing. Additionally, seven training courses for cooperative members strengthened their knowledge and skills in sustainable farming techniques for potato, hydroponic vegetables and cantaloupe, strawberry, and livestock raising, which were backed up by field visits of technical specialists. On top of these is the formulation of eight business plans that guided the operations of each cooperative in 2024.

Fifteen sets of equipment and supplies, including cantaloupe seeds, hydroponic fertilisers, vacuum packing machines, banana slicers, a solar fruit-drying system, cold storage units, and other tools, were also distributed to the cooperatives to further improve their production. As a result, the annual revenue of the eight cooperatives rose by approximately 40–60 per cent in 2024 compared to 2019. Some cooperatives achieved particularly notable gains: *Hoang Huong* Cooperative generated about VND 350 million through product sales and restaurant operations; *Hoang Huynh* Cooperative earned around VND 480 million from banana products; *Phuc Ba* Cooperative reached VND 1.5 billion from cantaloupe production; and *Nam Cuong* Cooperative generated nearly VND 2 billion through potato sales to processing factories.

Beyond economic benefits, the project strengthened community participation and ownership. Participatory approach ensured that cooperative members, local authorities,

and stakeholders were involved in planning, monitoring, and evaluating project activities. This collaborative process helped align cooperative development with local socio-economic priorities and the *National Target Programme on New Rural Development*.

***The cooperatives hurdled several implementation challenges, which led them to innovate ways to achieve their targets.***

The project team adopted several strategies to overcome limited investment scale, procurement delays, and steep learning curves in the adoption of e-commerce and digital marketing. They also scheduled training to avoid peak farming and harvesting periods, ensuring that cooperative members could participate without disrupting their agricultural work. Technical experts conducted field visits to give guidance to farmers, helping them apply new techniques more effectively.

To address gaps in knowledge application, cooperative managers were encouraged to monitor members' compliance with technical procedures more closely and provide peer support within the cooperatives. This helped increase the adoption of improved farming practices.

The project also strengthened coordination with local authorities and stakeholders, ensuring that activities remained aligned with local development plans and conservation goals within BBNP.

***Overall, the project demonstrated that strengthening cooperative management, improving sustainable agricultural practices, and building market linkages can significantly enhance rural livelihoods in protected landscapes such as BBNP.***



# Case Study



## From Foot Traffic to Virtual Paths: Saving *Ba Be*'s Fragile Ecosystems

Within the picturesque BBNP lies the renowned *Ba Be* Lake, one of the world's 20 unique freshwater lakes, and is recognised for its ecological and cultural significance. The park's diverse ecosystems, scenic landscapes, and ethnic cultural heritage make it a prime destination for ecotourism.

However, balancing tourism development with environmental protection remains a critical challenge. To address this, the University of Information and Communication Technology (ICTU) launched the project *Developing a Virtual Reality Tourism Model for Sustainable Tourism in the Ba Be National Park Area* to develop a Virtual Reality (VR360) tourism model that promotes the park's natural and cultural attractions while minimising the environmental footprint of physical tourism.

The initiative sought to harness digital technologies to enhance tourism promotion, raise awareness of biodiversity conservation, and create economic opportunities for local communities. By allowing visitors to experience the park virtually through immersive technology, the project aimed to support sustainable tourism while reducing pressure on ecologically sensitive sites.

ICTU followed a standard software development life cycle, combining innovation with stakeholder participation across data collection, content and multimedia production, software design, and system deployment. The process involved gathering information from more than 100 destinations and service providers or tourism agencies, in coordination with local authorities and communities in the *Ba Be* region. Bilingual content in Vietnamese and English was developed to ensure accessibility for both domestic and international





audiences, followed by workshops that refined the system's design and content and integrated the website into mobile and web platforms.

***The project successfully established a functional VR360 tourism system that significantly strengthens the digital promotion of BBNP.***

The VR360 system is a comprehensive virtual tourism platform that allows users to see the park and its attractions through smartphones or computers. It features more than 100 tourist attractions, biodiversity sites, cultural festivals, tourism services, and interactive tours with 51 out of 100 tourists destinations having bilingual audio explanations.

The system operates using the domain [babetourism.vn](http://babetourism.vn) and a mobile application available on Android devices under the name "Du lịch VQG Ba Be." Although the iOS version remains pending due to platform policy restrictions, the web-based system ensures broad accessibility. Promotion through provincial television, online media, and a dedicated Facebook page further expanded public awareness of *Ba Be's* natural and cultural attractions.

Notably, a 57 per cent increase in the number of local and international tourists from 2024 to 2025 may be attributed to the significant role played by digital promotion through the VR360 system. Still, beyond tourism promotion, the project supported biodiversity conservation by showcasing sensitive ecosystems and cultural heritage sites in the virtual environment. By allowing people to explore these areas digitally instead of physically, the system helps reduce direct pressure on fragile habitats while educating visitors about environmental protection.

Approximately 90 local service providers, including homestays, restaurants, and community tourism operators participated in training programmes focused on digital marketing, photography, video production, and content creation.

The training equipped the participants with new digital skills and confidence, enabling them to use graphic design tools and produce promotional videos for their tourism services.

Despite the project's success in innovation, some minor challenges emerged and were addressed. Weather conditions disrupted filming schedules



Scan to visit the BBNP VR360 website

***Another key achievement of the project was strengthening the capacity of local tourism providers.***



# Case Study

## From Foot Traffic to Virtual Paths: Saving *Ba Be's* Fragile Ecosystems

and delayed image capture at several locations. Meanwhile, some sites were not listed on digital mapping platforms, and this required additional support from local authorities to guide field teams to remote locations, increasing the time and effort needed for data collection and filming. Another challenge was Apple's strict application policies, which limit platform deployment.

Administrative changes also created technical complications. Following the merger of *Bac Kan* province with *Thai Nguyen* province, the original system domain was deactivated, requiring the project team to request a new domain name for system operation.

The project team addressed these challenges through adaptive planning and strong collaboration with stakeholders. Filming schedules were adjusted to account for weather conditions and seasonal tourism events. Close coordination with local authorities helped resolve logistical difficulties during site surveys and multimedia production.

To maintain system accessibility despite the iOS limitation, the team ensured that the full VR360 experience remained available through the website platform. This allowed users to continue accessing the system from multiple devices.

Workshops and stakeholder consultations were also used to refine system design, address technical issues, and ensure that the platform met the needs of both tourism providers and visitors.

Overall, the VR360 tourism initiative demonstrates how digital technology can support both conservation and sustainable tourism development. By combining immersive technology, community engagement, and capacity building, the project created an innovative platform that promotes the natural and cultural heritage of BBNP while empowering local communities. The experience offers a promising model for other protected areas seeking to balance tourism growth with environmental protection and community livelihoods.





# Case Study



## Commercialising Sweet Bamboo Shoots, Reclaiming Forest Livelihoods in Hoang Lien National Park

HLNP, located mainly in *Sa Pa and Bat Xat, Lao Cai* province and partially in *Than Uyen in Lai Chau* province, stands as one of Southeast Asia's most biologically and culturally rich landscapes. As an AHP, it is home not only to rare and endemic species, but also to diverse ethnic communities such as the *Hmong, Dao, Tay, and Giay*.

The Centre for Applied Silviculture Research and Extension (CASRE), through the project *Commercialisation of Sweet Bamboo Shoots in the Buffer Zone Areas of Hoang Lien National Park*, responded to two interconnected challenges, namely persistent poverty among ethnic households in the buffer zones of HLNP and the unsustainable use of forest resources, particularly non-timber forest products (NTFP), which contributed to biodiversity loss. Sweet bamboo, a locally available but underutilised species with strong market potential, was identified as a viable entry point for livelihood improvement and conservation.

The project aimed to increase household incomes by 5 to 10 per cent by developing sweet bamboo shoots into a commercially viable organic product, while also demonstrating that NTFP commercialisation can contribute to sustainable forest management.

To achieve this, the project adopted a participatory, community-based approach that integrated technical training, cooperative formation, and value chain development. Baseline surveys were conducted to understand bamboo distribution, growth conditions, market demand, and gender roles within the community. Capacity-building activities included eight training sessions attended by over 100 participants, nearly half of whom were women, covering bamboo cultivation, sustainable harvesting, processing techniques, and business management.

A one-hectare demonstration farm involving 15 households was established to provide hands-



# Case Study

## Commercialising Sweet Bamboo Shoots, Reclaiming Forest Livelihoods in Hoang Lien National Park

on learning and proof of concept. The project then institutionalised the creation of the *Seo Trung Ho Organic Sweet Bamboo Cooperative*, composed of 25 members from vulnerable ethnic households, and supported it with operational guidelines, a three-year business plan, and essential infrastructure such as a drying kiln, packaging materials, branding, and an e-commerce platform. Market linkages were also developed through participation in trade fairs and engagement with local distributors, restaurants, and tourism operators.

### *The project produced tangible economic, social, and environmental results.*

By the end of October 2024, nearly 800 kilograms of fresh bamboo shoots had been harvested—of which 150 kilograms were sold fresh to local residents and tourists, while the remainder was processed into 36 kilograms of dried products. The total revenue generated from both fresh and processed bamboo reached VND 8.55 million. While modest, this income demonstrated the viability of sweet bamboo as a livelihood source.

The community's one-hectare plantation achieved an 86 per cent success rate, demonstrating the crop's adaptability and providing a strong foundation for expansion. Beyond income generation, the project significantly improved participants' technical knowledge and skills, enabling them to adopt better cultivation, processing, and business practices.

Importantly, the project contributed to behavioural change within the community. Sweet bamboo, previously viewed as a subsistence or secondary resource, came to be recognised as a strategic economic asset. At the same time, awareness of forest protection and biodiversity conservation increased, with community members gaining a deeper understanding of the link between livelihoods and sustainable



Currently, fresh bamboo shoots are sold for VND 15,000–20,000 per kilogram in *Phu Tho* province. If sweet bamboo develops stably, each household will gain a significant additional source of income, diversify livelihoods, and improve people's living standards.



**Diep Xuan Tuan**  
Project Manager of CASRE



resource management. The project also fostered stronger social cohesion, as households shifted from working individually toward collective production and marketing through the cooperative.

### **Several best practices emerged from the project.**

One key success factor was the community-centred cooperative model, which enabled vulnerable households to pool resources, strengthen their bargaining power, and access markets more effectively. This ensured that economic incentives are aligned with biodiversity protection, reducing reliance on unsustainable forest extraction.

Another key success factor was the use of participatory and hands-on training approaches, particularly through the demonstration plantation, which built local capacity and confidence. Gender inclusion was another important strength, as women actively participated in training and production, enhancing both equity and outcomes.

Furthermore, the project underscored the importance of value chain development, showing that commercialisation requires not only

production but also investments in processing, branding, and market access. Finally, strong collaboration among local authorities, technical experts, park management, and community members contributed to a sense of ownership and supported effective implementation.

### **The community collectively addressed several project challenges.**

At the start, there were several internal difficulties, which included low community awareness and limited knowledge, especially among ethnic groups, of the market potential of sweet bamboo shoots and proper techniques for cultivation, harvesting, processing, and preservation. Many cooperative members also had limited knowledge to engage fully in business operations and market systems. Meanwhile, there were also external problems, such as an unstable supply of raw bamboo shoots and natural hazards that posed threats to crop production.

To address these, the project provided intensive training on production, processing, and sustainable forest management, established a one-hectare demonstration model, and supported value chain development. As a result, participants improved technical skills, processed products for sale, increased conservation awareness, and began building market linkages for future expansion.

**Overall, the project demonstrated that community-based commercialisation of NTFPs can effectively bridge poverty reduction and conservation goals.**

By combining cooperative development, value chain integration, and participatory approaches, the project not only improved incomes but also transformed community attitudes toward forest management.





# Case Study



## Revitalising Traditional Farming Systems

The project *Agrobiodiversity and Traditional Farming Systems for OCOP Development* was implemented in *Ta Van* commune, located within the buffer zone of HLNP. This mountainous area is home to *Hmong* and *Giay* ethnic communities whose livelihoods depend largely on traditional agriculture, yet remain vulnerable due to limited market access, low productivity, and weak integration into value chains.

Although traditional duck-rice farming systems have long existed in the area, these practices were largely subsistence-oriented and not fully harnessed for income generation or linked to broader conservation and tourism opportunities. At the same time, economic pressures contributed to continued reliance on forest resources, posing risks to biodiversity.

To address this, the Vietnam Environment and Sustainable Development Institute (VESDI) designed the project to increase household incomes, particularly among vulnerable ethnic groups, by reintroducing and improving traditional duck-rice farming systems and organising farmers into cooperative groups capable of producing and marketing local

products. It adopted a participatory, community-driven approach combined with value chain development, focusing not only on production but also on processing, branding, and market access.

Two duck-rice cooperative groups were established, composed primarily of *Hmong* and *Giay* households, and were supported through training in duck raising, wet rice cultivation, disease prevention, and business management.

Beyond production, the project invested in branding and communication tools, including product packaging, logos, and a website ([vittavan.com](http://vittavan.com)), to position *Ta Van* duck as a distinctive local product. Market linkages were actively developed through engagement with restaurants, homestays, and food outlets in *Sa Pa* and *Hanoi*, effectively connecting local production to tourism and urban demand.

***The project achieved significant results across multiple dimensions.***



More than 65 participants benefitted from capacity-building activities, with at least 80 per cent successfully applying improved farming and business practices. In terms of production, 6,400 ducklings and 200 eggs were distributed, resulting in the sale of 4,298 ducks and the emergence of duck eggs as an additional income source.

Traditional rice cultivation was sustained across approximately 70 hectares in three villages, maintaining agrobiodiversity while enhancing productivity. Economic assessments also demonstrated that duck farming was significantly more profitable than traditional pig raising.

The project also strengthened value chains and broadened the group's network by facilitating study tours, participation in agricultural fairs, and securing commitments from six local restaurants and homestays to feature *Ta Van* duck on their menus. While OCOP certification was not achieved due to regulatory constraints, local authorities and the grantee, VESDI, pledged continued support.

More importantly, improved livelihoods contributed to reduced pressure on forest resources, while the integration of agriculture with ecotourism helped raise awareness among visitors about biodiversity conservation and cultural heritage.

Climate-resilient measures were introduced, including adjusting production schedules to avoid peak rainy seasons, improving drainage systems, reinforcing duck shelters, and promoting disease prevention and vaccination. Coordination with local veterinary services enabled more responsive and climate-informed planning.

Efforts were also made to strengthen the production system by introducing egg incubation techniques for local duckling supply, establishing hygienic slaughtering facilities, and expanding marketing channels through both tourism linkages and digital platforms.

***Overall, the Ta Van duck initiative demonstrates that agrobiodiversity-based livelihood models can effectively combine economic development with environmental protection.***

By revitalising traditional farming systems and linking them to ecotourism and market opportunities, the project offers a replicable model for buffer zone development in protected areas across ASEAN, highlighting the potential of community-driven, value chain-oriented approaches to deliver both socio-economic and conservation outcomes.

***In response to the challenges posed by climate change, the project team adopted adaptive strategies.***





# Case Study



## Weaving Nature into Culture

HLNP holds one of Viet Nam's richest plant diversity centres. Still, beneath this richness lies a growing tension—biodiversity is increasingly threatened by climate change and human activities, while local awareness of conservation remains limited.

In many buffer zone communities, people have long lived alongside forests and wildlife without fully recognising their ecological significance. At the same time, traditional handicrafts—once central to cultural identity and livelihoods—have been losing relevance, as designs become diluted by external influences and fail to capture the uniqueness of local heritage.

The Centre for Water Resources Conservation and Development (WARECOD) implemented the project *Advancing Biodiversity Conservation through the Promotion of Ecologically Friendly Products and Traditional Handicrafts in Hoang Lien National Park*, seeking to address two interconnected challenges: declining biodiversity awareness and weakening livelihood opportunities.

Its core aim was simple yet transformative, to integrate biodiversity imagery into traditional handicrafts, thereby linking conservation with culture, and livelihoods with identity.

By embedding motifs of endemic species, landscapes, and local flora into textiles, embroidery, and beeswax art, the project envisioned products that could tell stories and attract tourists, strengthen community pride, and create sustainable income streams.

From the outset, the communities were engaged through needs assessments, group discussions, and hands-on design sessions. Twenty-four artisans, mostly women from ethnic groups, formed core handicraft groups across three communes. Rather than imposing external ideas, the project built on local knowledge and traditions, encouraging participants to co-create new designs inspired by their own environment. Training sessions were practical and accessible, focusing on product design, storytelling, marketing, and digital promotion. Regular meetings, peer learning exchanges, and continuous support through online platforms like Zalo and Facebook helped sustain engagement.

### ***Tangible results were striking.***

Within months, project participants developed 22 new biodiversity-inspired patterns, featuring images of endemic birds, medicinal plants, mountain landscapes, and rare species such



as pangolins and azaleas. These designs transformed ordinary handicrafts into meaningful cultural artefacts.

Tourists responded positively, drawn not only to the aesthetic appeal but also to the stories embedded in each product.

*As one artisan reflected, “Now, I don’t just make patterns—I create stories about nature and our lives.”*

In just three months, the group produced 322 products and sold 231, generating additional monthly income equivalent to about 14 per cent of their pre-project earnings. While modest, this increase represented a significant shift from subsistence-level production to market-oriented enterprise. They began to see handicrafts not just as cultural expressions but as a viable livelihood.

Market linkages were established through partnerships with cooperatives and local businesses, including formal contracts and purchase orders. The Economic Office of *Sa Pa* and local women’s unions also played active roles in promoting products and mobilising participation.

### *Beyond income, the project fostered profound social and cultural transformation.*

Awareness of biodiversity improved remarkably. After visiting the Hoang Lien Centre for Tourism and Wildlife Conservation, participants could identify rare species and understand their ecological importance. Conservation was no longer seen as an external mandate, but as a shared responsibility. This shift was reflected in practice: artisans consciously incorporated biodiversity themes into their work, reinforcing conservation messages through everyday objects.

Equally significant was the strengthening of intergenerational and gender dynamics. Mothers and daughters collaborated on designs, blending traditional techniques with modern skills. Young women contributed digital expertise—managing social media, livestreaming, and marketing

online—while learning embroidery and dyeing from elders. Men, traditionally less involved in handicrafts, began supporting household responsibilities and even participating in production activities. **This redistribution of roles enabled women to engage more fully in training and enterprise, enhancing both gender equity and household cohesion.**

### *Overcoming challenges with flying colours*

Geographic isolation and difficult terrain limited mobility and access to markets. Many participants, especially women, struggled to balance project activities with heavy workloads, including farming, childcare, and income-generating labour. Deeply rooted traditions also posed barriers; some artisans were hesitant to experiment with new designs, fearing uncertainty in market demand. Additionally, digital literacy gaps made it difficult for older participants to use online marketing tools.

To address these challenges, training schedules were adjusted to accommodate participants’ availability, including evening sessions. An innovation contest was redesigned as an online event that was spread over four weeks, allowing more inclusive participation and deeper evaluation. Study tours and product promotion workshops exposed artisans to market trends and business opportunities, building confidence in innovation. The recruitment of a young digital expert proved particularly effective, bridging the gap between traditional knowledge and modern marketing.

Overall, the project illustrated that conservation is most effective when it resonates with people’s culture.

In HLNP, biodiversity is no longer an abstract concept confined to park boundaries. **It is woven into fabrics, embroidered into patterns, and carried into markets—alive in the hands and stories of the community.** By reconnecting culture with nature, the project not only protected ecosystems but also revitalised identities and livelihoods, offering a pathway toward sustainable and inclusive development.



# Case Study



## Turning Honey into Hope—and Conservation

CMRNP is in the western part of *Kon Tum* province in the Central Highlands of Viet Nam. It is adjacent to the Virachey National Park in Cambodia and the Nam Ghong Protected Area in Lao PDR, forming an important tri cross-border conservation area that helps protect Southeast Asia's rich biodiversity.

In the buffer zone, local communities have long depended on NTFPs for their livelihood. However, increasing market demand and rising prices of these resources have intensified unsustainable extraction practices. Over 70 per cent of residents reportedly collect NTFPs without proper permits, placing significant pressure on forest ecosystems and biodiversity. At the same time, while dependence on forest resources remains high, few NTFPs have been successfully developed into sustainable, marketable livelihood products. This reflects both limited technical capacity and weak market linkages among local communities.

Over the years, honey has emerged as a promising alternative, as it is a high-value, non-perishable product with growing demand and strong potential for commercialisation. In the communes of *Sa Son* and *Sa Nhon*, where coffee plantations are widespread, ecological conditions are favourable for beekeeping due to the availability of nectar sources. Despite this, local communities lacked the technical knowledge and organisational capacity to develop beekeeping as a viable livelihood.

The Research and Inclusive Development Action (IDEA) designed the project *Native Beekeeping and Commercialisation of Honey Products in Buffer Zone Communes of Chu Mom Ray National Park* to address these challenges. Its core objective was to

improve local livelihoods while reducing pressure on forest resources by promoting indigenous beekeeping using the Indian honey bee (*Apis cerana indica*). Specifically, the project aimed to: 1) assess the status of indigenous bee populations and market potential, 2) establish and strengthen cooperative groups through capacity building, and; 3) develop a value chain for honey products, including branding and market access.

A community-based and participatory approach was central to the project's design and implementation. Local communities, park authorities, and technical experts collaborated from planning to monitoring. Two cooperative groups were established in Village 2 of *Sa Son* commune and *Nhon Nghia* village of *Sa Nhon* commune, engaging a total of 30 households, half of which were identified as near-poor. Importantly, the project also promoted inclusive participation, with eight women and four members of ethnic groups actively involved in production, decision-making, and marketing.

Capacity building was a key pillar of the project. Cooperative members received training in bee colony management, honey harvesting, processing, business planning, and marketing. Training sessions were adapted to local contexts, using accessible formats and local languages to ensure participation of women and ethnic groups. Partnerships with local organisations, such as the Women's Union and Farmers' Association, further strengthened outreach and institutional support.

***The project yielded several notable achievements.***

# Case Study



From an initial 40 supported beehives, the number of bee colonies increased to 50, reflecting a 25 per cent growth. The first honey harvest produced 120 litres, all of which were sold at VND 350,000 per litre. Subsequent harvests yielded 107 litres, also fully sold at local markets, tourism outlets, and on online platforms. These results demonstrate strong market demand and the viability of honey as a livelihood product.

Beyond production, the project made significant progress in value chain development. Cooperative groups developed business plans outlining production targets, diversification strategies, and income projections. Branding, packaging, and product promotion were introduced, enabling participation in trade fairs such as the *Mang Den* agricultural fair, which attracted over 200 visitors. Partnerships with buyers, including a commitment from a local enterprise to purchase raw honey, further strengthened market linkages.

Equally important were the project's contributions to conservation. By promoting beekeeping as an alternative livelihood, the project reduced reliance on forest extraction.

Conservation messages were integrated into training activities, encouraging the protection of indigenous bee habitats. A honey commercialisation regulation was also incorporated into the park's management framework, aligning livelihood activities with conservation goals. Additionally, ecotourism routes featuring beekeeping experiences were developed, linking conservation, livelihoods, and tourism.



Since receiving beehives from the cooperative, I no longer collect wild honey in the forest, which was dangerous. Now, I earn additional income at home while caring for the bees and I have come to love and develop a passion for them.



**Ho Quoc Viet**

Member of Sa Thay Commune Beekeeping Cooperative.

## *Several challenges were effectively managed.*

Limited technical knowledge and prior experience among cooperative members made it difficult for them to adopt technical practices and engage with market mechanisms. Women and ethnic group participants were initially hesitant to speak up or participate actively in group discussions. Furthermore, most members had little understanding of pricing, customer preferences, or marketing, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation by middlemen.

External risks also emerged during implementation. A delayed project start meant that bee colonies were introduced outside the peak flowering season, reducing natural food availability.

In response, the project provided supplemental feeding and technical guidance to ensure colony survival. Conflicts with non-native bee species in nearby areas posed another risk, which was mitigated by relocating indigenous colonies at least two kilometres away. Administrative disruptions due to government restructuring also delayed certification processes, prompting the project to proactively coordinate with authorities to secure food safety compliance.

The project responded by deploying experts to guide recovery and developing improved care plans aligned with bee life cycles. Where initial plans—such as participation in trade fairs—could not be realised due to timing constraints, the project shifted focus to brand development and local market testing.

***Overall, the project demonstrates that indigenous beekeeping can serve as a viable pathway for linking livelihood development with biodiversity conservation.***

By strengthening local capacities, fostering inclusive participation, and building market connections, the initiative not only improved livelihoods but also contributed to the long-term sustainability of CMRNP's ecosystems.





# Case Study



## Skilling Women as Participants in the Tourism Economy

In the buffer zone of CMRNP—an area rich in biodiversity yet marked by limited livelihood opportunities—local communities have long stood at the margins of a growing tourism economy. Despite the park’s strong potential for ecotourism and community-based tourism (CBT), women and ethnic groups in villages such as *Bar Goc* and *Dak Me* have faced persistent barriers—limited skills in hospitality and tour guiding, low awareness of ecotourism principles, and minimal access to digital tools for promotion and market engagement.

To address these gaps, Hue Tourism College (HUETC) implemented the project *Enhancing the Capacity of Women and Ethnic Groups in Tourism Services and Service Skills, and Commercialising Rural and Nature-based Tourism using Social Media Platforms*. The initiative aimed to transform

local communities from passive bystanders into active participants in the tourism economy, while aligning livelihood development with biodiversity conservation.

At its core, the project sought to empower women and ethnic groups by equipping them with practical tourism skills, strengthening their confidence, and enabling them to leverage digital platforms—particularly Facebook—to promote their services and local products. More broadly, it aimed to foster sustainable livelihoods rooted in CBT while reinforcing environmental awareness and conservation practices.

The project adopted a multi-component, hands-on approach. It combined capacity-building sessions on ecotourism and biodiversity conservation with practical training in homestay management, food and beverage services, and tour guiding. Study visits to successful CBT models allowed



“ Since receiving support from SGP II, I have come to understand what community-based tourism is. When visitors come here, we welcome them, take them to famous tourist sites in our homeland, and offer cultural and culinary experiences. They express a high level of satisfaction. ”

**Dinh Thi Sen**

Leader of *Dak Me* Village  
Women’s Union



participants to learn by example, while workshops on social media marketing introduced them to new ways of reaching tourists. Importantly, the project also developed localised learning materials to ensure that knowledge could be sustained beyond the training period.

***The results were both tangible and transformative.***

A total of 80 individuals were trained in tourism service skills, while 40 participants deepened their understanding of ecotourism and biodiversity conservation. Twenty community members acquired digital marketing skills, including the management of social media platforms. Two CBT tour packages were developed and piloted in both villages, showcasing local culture, landscapes, and traditions. Complementing these efforts, two Facebook fan pages were created to promote community tourism and local products, marking a significant step toward digital inclusion.

Beyond numbers, the project achieved strong engagement among target groups. Women comprised approximately 95 per cent of participants, demonstrating the project's success in reaching and empowering female community members. Ethnic groups—including *Gia Rai*, *Brau*, and *Muong*—were actively involved, ensuring that the initiative remained inclusive and culturally grounded. Partnerships with local women's unions proved particularly effective in mobilising participation, building trust, and sustaining engagement.

The project also contributed meaningfully to conservation efforts. By integrating biodiversity education into tourism training, it helped communities understand the link between environmental protection and sustainable livelihoods. Participants began to see conservation not as a restriction, but as an opportunity—an asset that could attract visitors and generate income. At the same time, improved tourism skills opened new economic pathways, reducing dependence on unsustainable resource extraction.

***However, the project was not without challenges.***

Many residents were initially unfamiliar with CBT and sceptical about its long-term benefits. Some villagers were hesitant to participate in training sessions, reflecting both uncertainty and competing livelihood priorities. Communication barriers also emerged due to the diverse ethnic backgrounds of participants, requiring trainers to adapt their methods and materials. Differences in cultural perceptions of hospitality further complicated the learning process.

Additional risks surfaced during implementation. The need for deeper stakeholder engagement became evident, as successful tourism development required coordination among local authorities, park management, and community organisations. Logistical challenges—such as scheduling conflicts with local events—also affected training delivery.

The project team responded to these challenges with flexibility and adaptive strategies. Collaboration with local women's unions and people's committees was intensified, ensuring broader community buy-in and institutional support. Training sessions were redesigned to be more practical, culturally sensitive, and context-specific, making them more accessible to participants. Scheduling was adjusted to accommodate local realities, while continuous communication helped maintain trust and participation. By grounding the project in local partnerships and iterative learning, the team overcame initial resistance and built momentum.

When given the skills, confidence, and platforms to participate, these groups can become leaders in shaping CBT that is both economically viable and environmentally responsible.

In CMRNP, the shift has begun—from marginalisation to participation, from extraction to sustainability, and from invisibility to digital presence.

***Overall, the project underscored that empowering women and ethnic groups is not only a matter of inclusion but a pathway to more resilient and sustainable development.***



# Lessons Learned



Across diverse community-based conservation and livelihood best practices in the four AHPs, a consistent set of lessons emerges: what works is not just technical intervention, but development that is deeply rooted in people and communities.

Projects that succeed begin with strong, grounded design. They are anchored in local realities, informed by meaningful consultation, and guided by realistic timelines and resources. Without this foundation, even well-intended initiatives risk delays, inefficiencies, or outright failure.

At the core is community ownership. Sustainable outcomes are achieved not through top-down delivery, but through participatory, flexible, and culturally grounded approaches that recognise the lived realities and needs of communities, especially women, Indigenous peoples, and other vulnerable groups. Intergenerational learning strengthens both innovation and cultural continuity. Trust and sustained engagement are not optional—they are decisive.

Equally critical is capacity building that is context-specific, continuous, and goes beyond training. Hands-on learning, peer exchange, and continuous skills development, covering both technical and enterprise dimensions, enable communities not just to adopt innovations, but to sustain and scale them up. Digital tools and new technologies offer promise, but only when matched with sustained training.

Livelihood success hinges on one key shift: from production to value chains. Projects that integrate production, processing, and market access, supported by cooperatives and strong buyer linkages, are far more likely to deliver lasting income gains. Small pilots can spark change, but scaling requires deliberate, phased expansion and institutional backing.

Most importantly, these experiences affirm that livelihoods and conservation are not competing

goals—they are mutually reinforcing. When communities derive real economic benefits from sustainable practices, conservation becomes embedded in everyday decision-making. Forest protection, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience become shared responsibilities, not imposed obligations.

Yet sustainability does not end with project completion. Post-project support is critical for sustaining gains. Strong collaboration with local authorities ensures policy alignment and continuity. Improved coordination and monitoring systems enhance efficiency. Finally, local capacity building underpins long-term sustainability.

In terms of expansion, replication, and innovation, small-scale pilots are effective in demonstrating viability. Models can be replicated in similar socio-ecological contexts. Storytelling and product identity enhance market differentiation and tourism appeal, while digital and innovative approaches, with ample institutional support, can expand market access.

Also, one key lesson across the best practices is that climate resilience must be embedded in project design. Projects must anticipate extreme weather and environmental risks. Adaptive management is essential to respond to ecological and institutional uncertainties.

Behavioural change is critical for long-term success. Shifting how communities value natural resources strengthens conservation outcomes, while their improved working relationship with park management has not only increased ownership but also strengthened long-term stewardship. Community development works when it is context-sensitive, inclusive, and anchored in both ecological realities and human agency. Anything less risks short-lived gains.



# Overcoming Challenges

Across the projects, a consistent set of interrelated challenges emerged, reflecting both structural constraints and context-specific risks. These ranged from limited technical capacity, low awareness, and weak market integration among communities to external pressures such as climate shocks, logistical barriers, and institutional bottlenecks. Together, these challenges highlighted the complexity of implementing community-based livelihood and conservation initiatives, where success depends not only on technical solutions but also on adaptive planning, strong local partnerships, and sustained capacity building.

- **Limited knowledge, skills, and awareness.** At the outset, there was low understanding of production techniques, value addition, and market potential. There was also weak capacity in business management, pricing, and market engagement, as well as digital literacy gaps.
- **Weak adoption and ownership.** Some participants also had a limited sense of ownership, simply viewing projects as external support. They were also hesitant to innovate due to uncertainty and risk aversion.
- **Market and value chain constraints.** There was limited experience in marketing and e-commerce. Unstable supply of raw materials also affected production continuity.
- **Institutional and administrative barriers,** including registration and certification, procurement delays, and disruptions due

to government restructuring and policy requirements

- **Geographic and logistical challenges,** including schedule conflicts with local activities and agricultural cycles
- **Socio-cultural barriers,** such as language and communication barriers, gendered constraints, and cultural resistance to new practices and technologies
- **Technology and platform limitations**
- **Climate and environmental risks,** including extreme weather events, seasonal variability, and broader climate vulnerability of agriculture-based interventions
- **Production and ecological risks,** including diseases, pests, and competition from non-native species; misalignment with natural cycles; and the need for climate-resilient and adaptive production systems
- **Coordination and stakeholder engagement gaps.** There was a need for stronger alignment among communities, local authorities, and project teams.

Overall, the projects revealed two layers of constraints: structural barriers embedded in broader systems and institutions, and operational gaps arising from project design, delivery, and day-to-day realities. Distinguishing between these two was critical to designing interventions that were not only effective in the short term but also sustainable at scale.





# Recommendations



There is the need to stress participatory approaches, strengthening people's capacities over time, building durable partnerships, and ensuring that systems support long-term impact. Taken together, these strategies provide a comprehensive framework for improving future grant projects to be more responsive, scalable, and resilient.

## ***Adopt inclusive and participatory approaches***

Projects should be designed and implemented with the active involvement of communities, local leaders, and relevant stakeholders from the project design and planning phase. This includes conducting thorough needs assessments and ensuring that interventions reflect local priorities, capacities, and socio-economic conditions. Participatory approaches strengthen ownership, improve relevance, and increase the likelihood that project benefits will be sustained beyond the project period.

## ***Strengthen continuous capacity building and local support systems***

Capacity building should go beyond one-time training sessions and instead focus on sustained learning. This can include mentorship, refresher training, peer-to-peer support, and regular follow-ups. Combining practical/hands-on guidance with theoretical learning helps ensure that knowledge is applied effectively. Establishing local resource persons or "champions" within communities can further support long-term adoption and knowledge transfer.

## ***Build strong partnerships and market linkages***

Effective projects rely on strong collaboration with local governments, community

organisations, private sector actors, and service providers. Strengthening these partnerships helps expand access to markets, services, and technical support. Facilitating linkages between producers and buyers, or communities and service providers, is particularly important for sustaining livelihoods and scaling project impacts beyond initial interventions.

## ***Embed sustainability and economic viability in project design***

Long-term success depends on integrating clear sustainability strategies from the beginning. This includes identifying revenue streams, cost-recovery mechanisms, and incentives that encourage and sustain participation. Projects should align economic benefits with desired outcomes (e.g., conservation, improved practices), ensuring that stakeholders have tangible reasons to sustain activities even after external support ends.

## ***Improve monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge sharing systems***

Robust monitoring and evaluation systems are essential for tracking progress, identifying



challenges, and reducing and managing risks. Projects should establish clear indicators, regular reporting mechanisms, and feedback loops. Equally important is documenting lessons learned and best practices to support replication and scaling in other contexts.

### ***Integrate appropriate technology and outreach strategies***

Leveraging digital tools and innovative approaches for communication, education, and public awareness can strengthen knowledge-sharing, outreach, and stakeholder engagement. This may include online training platforms, mobile applications, virtual learning systems, and digital marketing tools with tailor-fitted messages for various audiences to improve awareness, build capacities, and expand the market reach of local products.

### ***Ensure flexible and responsive funding and administration***

Administrative systems should allow for flexibility in budgeting, fund disbursement, and timelines to accommodate real-world conditions. Delays and rigid procedures can undermine implementation, especially in dynamic or resource-constrained environments. Aligning funding flows with activity schedules and allowing adjustments when needed can significantly improve project efficiency and outcomes.

### ***Promote inclusivity and equitable access***

Projects should actively reach marginalised or hard-to-access groups and tailor interventions to different community needs. This includes addressing geographic, economic, and social barriers to participation. Designing inclusive strategies ensures that benefits are distributed more equitably and that no groups are left behind.

***Overall, these recommendations highlight that successful projects are not only technically sound but also socially grounded, institutionally supported, and economically viable. Strengthening these dimensions together is key to achieving lasting and transformative impact.***

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