



AFoCO Landmark Program

“Restoring Degraded Forest in Southeast Asia as a Model for a Greener Asia: Capacity-building on Forest Restoration and Sustainable Forestry”

INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT ON “REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF MANGROVE FOREST ECOSYSTEM IN THAI BINH PROVINCE, VIET NAM”

Component 3 of the Landmark Program

17 October 2018

AFoCO Secretariat

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The AFoCO Landmark Program (**LP**) was designed to address the issues of forest deterioration and degradation through building the capacity of major stakeholders and promoting sustainable forest management in Southeast Asia.

This interim evaluation report focuses on the Phase 1 implementation of the LP. The evaluation has two objectives: evaluate the progress and achievements of the four components of the LP covering all the projects and activities in Phase 1 (2014-2018); and, provide future directions and recommendations for the Phase 2 (2019-2023) implementation of the LP. Detailed information of each component, the outline of the LP, the evaluation team, and the schedule are described in **Chapter I**.

Chapter II describes the evaluation methodologies. The assessment adopts the five (5) OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. Data for the analysis includes field interviews, survey data, annual plans and reports of the LP, and archival documents, among others.

Chapter III reveals the respective findings, issues, and results of the assessment. The rehabilitation and development of Mangrove Forest Ecosystem in Thai Binh Province in Viet Nam reflects an excellent performance.

Based on the finding issues, the evaluation team suggests and proposes recommendations for each component in **Chapter IV**. Based on the findings from the evaluation, for Component 3, two (2) recommendations are given to the project considering the country's situation in forestry sector. For Viet Nam, recommendations are provided for better management of mangrove forests in ecological and socio-economical ways. Firstly, there is a need to continuously develop ideas on how to make the planted mangrove forests rich in biodiversity in the long term. Keeping it in mind, it is recommended that the project team in the central and provincial governments would communicate closely with local communities on how to develop the concept of a model forest which can bring socio-economic benefits and improve livelihoods in the province. The evaluation findings and recommendations are also summarized in the tables in **Annex 2**.

Lastly, in the conclusion section of **Chapter V**, future directions within and beyond the scope of the LP are provided with the overall results of the evaluation, in which LP is showing a positive and excellent performance trend. The collaborative, innovative, and sustainable forest management perspective of the LP provides a strategic framework capable of leading forest management policy in the target region.

Abbreviation & Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
AFoCo agreement	Agreement between ASEAN and ROK for Forest Cooperation
AFoCO	Asian Forest Cooperation Organization
CLMV	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Viet Nam
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Viet Nam
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Product
IAI	Initiative for ASEAN Integration
KFS	Korea Forest Service
LP	Landmark Program
OECD/DAP	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Assistance Committee
PM	Project Manager
PPC	Provincial People's Committee
PSC	Project Steering Committee
ROK	Republic of Korea
PSC	Project Steering Committee
VASF	Vietnamese Academy of Forest Science
VNFOREST	Vietnamese Administration of Forestry

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I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

1. Introduction

The Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (**AFoCO**), which is initiated by Korea, was officially established on April 27, 2018 as an inter-governmental organization. The establishment of AFoCO was proposed by the government of the Republic of Korea (**ROK**) at the Korea-Association of South East Asian Nations (**ASEAN**) commemorative summit in 2009, and with the cooperation and support of 10 ASEAN members, it began activities in 2012, starting with the ASEAN-ROK Forest Cooperation. Until now, the AFoCO has successfully initiated 22 forest cooperation projects in ASEAN countries.

Under the Landmark Program (**LP**), a capacity building approach has been taken targeting ASEAN member states. Especially, under the framework of Initiative for ASEAN Integration (**IAI**) for narrowing development gap, the LP responded a rising demand for capacity building focused mainly on Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Viet Nam (**CLMV**) to address these issues in ASEAN region (**Table 1**). In this context, restoration of damaged forests in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia are in progress and in Myanmar, construction of a Regional Education and Training Center (**RETC**) was completed in January 2018, the first in Asia.

There are four main components under the LP – 1) Component 1: Establishment of the AFoCO Regional Education and Training Center; 2) Component 2: Development of Education and Training Programs for Capacity Building; 3) Component 3: Restoration of Degraded Forest Regions; and, 4) Component 4: Development of Advocating Activities.

Component 3 includes three (3) forest restoration projects aimed at promoting sustainable forest management in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam. These restoration projects have supported with the activities of new plantation, enrichment planting, protection of existing forests and genetic conservation. This year, the total plantation area will be 267 ha, and the planting activities will be conducted together with forest protection, capacity building and public awareness activities in cooperation with local communities.

Table 1. SWOT analysis for forest management in CLMV countries

	Positive	Negative
Internal	Strengths	Weaknesses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Abundant natural resource existing (forestry, land and water resources, mining sources, clean energy sources, biodiversity) and rich and pure in natural resources ▪ Geographic location makes it accessible for tourism in Southeast Asia or Asian Region ▪ Have environment law and regulation ▪ Clear air/low pollution ▪ Low density of population ▪ Good ecosystem ▪ Many tourism places and heritages ▪ Rich natural parks and protected wildlife sanctuary ▪ High internet connectivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Internal capacity ▪ Country status: a demand on socio-economic development at national level ▪ Less implementation reinforcement of environment laws, regulations and monitoring ▪ Agriculture and food security ▪ Fast growing in mining and hydropower ▪ Heavy exploration in underground natural resources ▪ With low experiences in the restoration phases ▪ Low awareness on environment impact and sustainable use ▪ Social awareness ▪ Ethnic wars/conflict (Myanmar)
External	Opportunities	Threats
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sustainable development approach ▪ Eco-tourism industrial development ▪ Green growth strategy ▪ Global assistance ▪ Support sustainable living life ▪ Life style can rely on natural resource ▪ Good health and safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Climate change and disaster impact ▪ Many investors came to explore the natural resources and impact from development activities (mining, forestry harvesting, Dam) ▪ Rapid urban development (lack of proper planning) and unsustainable development ▪ Many businesses with low health care ▪ Human vulnerability ▪ Infrastructure vulnerability and fast growing in the cities ▪ Un-bombing explosion 80 million tons in 270 million tons of bombs (from World War II) (Laos) ▪ Weak of controlling regulation and law

2. Purpose of the Evaluation

The Interim Evaluation for the LP has two (2) objectives: 1) evaluate the progress and achievements of each component during the phase 1 (2014-2018), and 2) provide future directions and recommendations of each component for the phase 2 (2019-2023), based on all factors relevant for the current implementation of the program.

As mentioned above, there are four main components under the LP which should be assessed in a proper manner. The main objective is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the performance, effectiveness, and sustainability of LP and provide recommendations for future directions. The evaluation will cover an institutional/organizational, program, and individual level assessment.

Within Component 3, review the effectiveness, financial, and operational sustainability of the implementation of forest restoration and management in the currently covered countries (i.e., Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam). Specifically, the evaluation will not only look at the total area covered for reforestation but will also look at the mechanisms and actual activities (including policies or laws in place) in protecting the projects and involving the communities in all programs and projects under Component 3.

As part of the *evidence and data gathering*, field evaluation and interview were held from July 2-12, 2018 on beneficiaries, project implementers, officials, and experts in the CLMV countries (i.e., Cambodia, Laos PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam) where the projects under the AFoCO LP are located. Upon completion of the evaluation, the assessment report with key findings and recommendations is submitted. **Figure 1** is the flow of evaluation activities.

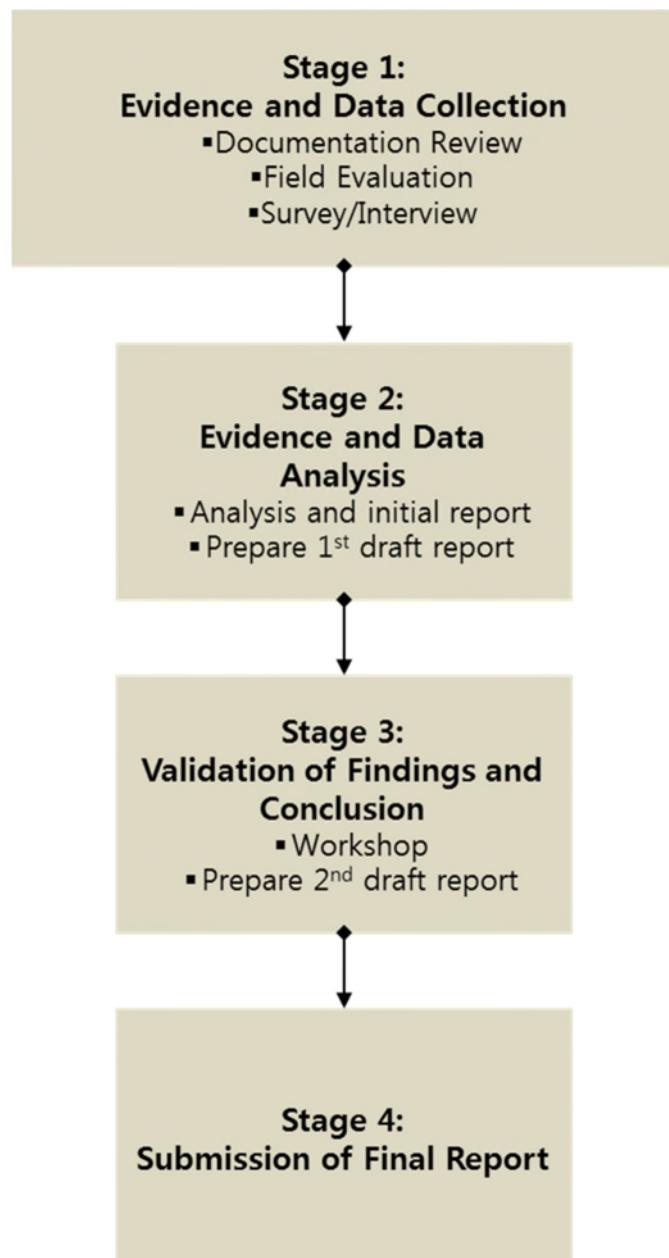


Figure 1. Overall Flow of Evaluation Activities

3. Evaluation Team

- 1) Dr. Park Sung Min (Main Evaluator)
 - Affiliation: Professor, Public Administration Department, Sungkyunkwan Univ., ROK
 - Responsibilities to the evaluation:
 - Leading the overall progress of the evaluation in communication with the Secretariat and other evaluators as the representative of the evaluation team;
 - Initial and final presentations/meetings with the Secretariat;
 - Developing detailed methodologies, quantitative and qualitative, based on the evaluation criteria;
 - Reviewing relevant project documents, focusing on five criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability;
 - Assessing project progress at the project site, focusing on five criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability;
 - Collecting supplementary information (e.g. photos, maps, policy documents of the country, etc.);
 - Verifying the negative and positive issues based on the evaluation criteria;
 - Identifying sustainability issues, if any, and future potentials; and,
 - Compiling and submitting the “Evaluation Report” to the Secretariat
- 2) Mr. Htain Lin (Main Evaluator)
 - Affiliation: Expert on institution and project development in Forestry
 - Responsibilities to the evaluation:
 - Participating to the overall evaluation of the LP, with specific guidance on forest restoration, and technical improvement on RETC training courses;
 - Developing detailed methodologies, quantitative and qualitative, based on the evaluation criteria ;
 - Reviewing relevant project documents, focusing on five criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability;
 - Assessing project progress at the project site, focusing on five criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability;
 - Collecting supplementary information (e.g. photos, maps, policy documents of the country, etc.);
 - Verifying the negative and positive issues based on the evaluation criteria;
 - Identifying sustainability issues, if any, and future potentials; and,
 - Completing the evaluation report
- 3) Dr. Ador. R. Torneo (Main Evaluator)
 - Affiliation: Associate Professor, Political Science Department, De La Salle Univ., The Philippines
 - Responsibilities to the evaluation:
 - Participating to the overall evaluation of the LP, with specific guidance on institutional development of RETC, and sustainable impact on the project beneficiaries at the community, national, and international level;
 - Developing detailed methodologies, quantitative and qualitative, based on the

evaluation criteria ;

- Reviewing relevant project documents, focusing on five criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability;
- Assessing project progress at the project site, focusing on five criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability;
- Collecting supplementary information (e.g. photos, maps, policy documents of the country, etc.);
- Verifying the negative and positive issues based on the evaluation criteria;
- Identifying sustainability issues, if any, and future potentials; and,
- Completing the evaluation report

4) Dr. Reginald G. Ugaddan (Research Assistant)

- Affiliation: Research Center for Public Human Resource Development, Sungkyunkwan University, ROK
- Responsibilities to the evaluation:
 - Support the evaluation team in terms of the data collection and analysis

5) Ms. Ryang Soozin (AFoCO Secretariat)

- Affiliation: Project Manager for Forest Restoration Projects under Landmark Program, AFoCO Secretariat
- Responsibilities to the evaluation:
 - Overall technical guidance and coordination of the evaluation process

4. Coordination and Facilitation Institutes and Organizations

- 1) Institute for Forest and Wildlife Research and Development under Forestry Administration of Cambodia
- 2) Department of Forestry, Lao PDR
- 3) Forest Department, Myanmar
- 4) Viet Nam Administration of Forestry, Viet Nam
- 5) AFoCO Secretariat

5. Schedule

21 – 30 June	To design and set up the evaluation plan To review project documents To arrange the schedule for site verification
2 – 12 July	To conduct site verification
13 July- 17 October	To submit the evaluation report to the Secretariat

II. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

1. Scope

The evaluation will focus on the implementation of Landmark Program (**LP**) from 2014-2018.

2. OECD/DAC Criteria and Indicators for Evaluation

The Interim Evaluation of the AFoCO LP adopts the OECD/DAC criteria and indicators for evaluation—*Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, and Sustainability*—and each specific evaluation factors are developed based on these. Detailed assessment indicators according to each evaluation criteria are provided under each component (**Table 2**).

Table 2. OECD/DAC criteria and indicators for evaluation

Evaluation Criteria	Indicators
Criteria 1: Relevance Degree of the objectives of development projects satisfying the needs and priorities of beneficiaries and policies of donors and recipients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To check the relevance of the activity to the priorities and policies of target group, recipient and donor
Criteria 2: Effectiveness Degree of the objectives of projects achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To measure the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives
Criteria 3: Efficiency Degree to which the costs of development projects can be rationalized against alternatives. In other words, the degree of several inputs economically used and turned into outputs and results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To measure the outputs – qualitative and quantitative – in relation to the inputs. ■ It is an economic term which is used to assess the extent to which aid uses the least costly resources possible in order to achieve the desired results. ■ This generally requires comparing alternative approaches to achieving the same outputs, to see whether the most efficient process has been adopted.
Criteria 4: Impact Overall results of the positive, negative, intended or unintended effects of development projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To see the positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. ■ To see impacts and effects resulting from the activity on the local social, economic, environmental and other development indicators. ■ To find out external factors deriving unintended results and providing the positive and negative impact
Criteria 5: Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To measure whether the benefits of an

Possibility of a positive long-lasting effect after implementing an evaluation object policy or completing an evaluation object project	<p>activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To foresee environmental as well as financial sustainability
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2.1. Research portfolio and evaluation matrix

Component-3 has three (3) country-based projects formulated based on the need and priority of each country. The projects are uniquely different in terms of technical areas and implementation approaches. The projects have been implemented by the forestry agencies of 3 different countries, who are applying their own domestic regulation and procedure in the implementation. Therefore, it was planned to make country-based evaluations to give a better picture and more logical explanation, rather than program-based evaluation for the component. It is also appropriate to have a regional analysis on Mekong region undertaken in advance for each country to identify potential implications and influences on the project.

This evaluation mission will have a direct access to on-site information as well as interview with key stakeholders of these projects in the three (3) countries. Based on the current project review and analysis undertaken, specific assessment indicators are identified under the five (5) evaluation criteria for each project. Information against these indicators will be collected through various means, such as field survey, interview with stakeholders and online questionnaire survey (**Table 3**).

As AFoCO has adopted OECD evaluation methodology, the performance of these projects was assessed based on the five (5) criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. A matrix of research tools used for 5 evaluation criteria is shown in **Table 4**.

Table 3. Research Portfolio

Evaluation criteria	Document analysis	Data and statistics analysis	Interview with the local people and beneficiaries	Interview with the project stakeholders and implementers	Questionnaire survey of targeting group	On-site field trip and survey
Relevance	O		O	O	O	O
Effectiveness	O		O	O	O	O
Efficiency	O	O	O	O	O	O
Impact			O	O	O	O
Sustainability			O	O	O	O

Table 4. Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Criteria	Indicators and description	Stakeholders to engage
1. Rehabilitation and Development of Mangrove Forest Ecosystem in Thai Binh Province, Viet Nam		
Relevance	1. Explore the national priority on mangroves and environmental conservation (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials
	2. Clarify the status of current environmental challenges and extent of relationship with the project (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials, local community
	3. Identify regulation / policy constraints and issues in the implementation of project (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials
	4. Explore ways to improve relevance (comment)	Vietnamese officials, AFoCO officials
Effectiveness	1. Identify human resources and rank technical capability of the department on handling of the project (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials
	2. Identify the new technology / knowledge gained from the project (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials
	3. Identify local constraints (administrative and land dispute issues) in the implementation of the project (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials, local community
	4. Identify any interest and demand from other communities to do the same activities (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials, local community
	5. Explore ways to improve effectiveness (comment)	Vietnamese officials, AFoCO officials
Efficiency	1. Cost comparison with similar other projects on the implementation of mangroves plantation activity (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials
	2. Identify any unused items or abandoned program in the project (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials
	3. Identify activities with most efficient cost per return (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials
	4. Explore ways to improve cost efficiency of project implementation (comment)	Vietnamese officials, AFoCO officials
Impact	1. Identify any positive effect(s) other than relevance and effectiveness (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials, community leaders

Evaluation Criteria	Indicators and description	Stakeholders to engage
	2. Identify any negative effect(s) due to the project interventions (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials, community leaders
	3. Explore ways to improve synergy and increase positive impact (comment)	Vietnamese officials, AFoCO officials
Sustainability	1. Identify specific national policy of Viet Nam that are supportive to continue the project activities (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials
	2. Identify any similar activity supported by own budget in Viet Nam (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials
	3. Identify future management plan beyond the project (comment & score)	Vietnamese officials
	4. Explore ways and future interventions to enhance sustainability (comment)	Vietnamese officials, AFoCO officials

2.2. Evaluation questions

As a first step, the project documents, reports, and background information were reviewed before conducting on-site verification and personal interview with stakeholders and beneficiaries during the field visit. Secondly, online questionnaire survey forms were developed based on the questions for assessment indicators in **Table 4** and the forms were sent to the key stakeholders to collect their feedbacks. The information collected during the field visit were used to support for a qualitative evaluation analysis and key findings were consolidated with recommendations. Thirdly, the information received online were analyzed and calculated to get a set of performance scores for each criterion as well as an overall score for the whole project. The performance scoring system applied in this evaluation is shown in **Table 5**.

Table 5: Performance Scoring System

Score range	Performance description
0.1 – 1	Poor performance (below 20%) against the indicator
1.1 – 2	Limited performance (21 – 40%). Significant improvements needed.
2.1 – 3	Satisfactory performance (41 – 60%) but room for improvements.
3.1 – 4	Good Performance (61 – 80%) against the indicator
4.1 – 5	Excellent performance (81% and above) against the indicator

Since it is a mid-term evaluation and some criteria cannot be assessed at their full extent, a weighted scoring mechanism was adopted to calculate an overall performance score. A lower weighting of 30% was given to the criteria of “Impact” and “Sustainability” while the other three (3) criteria – “Relevance, Effectiveness and Efficiency”, which can be assessed fully, received a higher weighting of 70%. In fact, this scoring mechanism was discussed at length during a meeting with Vietnamese officials and as a result, this weighted scoring system was applied for a fair evaluation of all three (3) projects.

Basically, the performance scores should be used as complementary to support and consolidate in-depth qualitative analysis and its results. Therefore, performance score cannot be referred to as a sole performance indicator of the project.

In order to get in-depth view, critical response and feedback from the stakeholders of the project, specific assessment indicators and associated questions were developed for each of five (5) evaluation criteria, depending on the scope and direction of the project (**Table 6**). The detailed questions for each project are in **Annex 1**.

Table 6. Evaluation criteria and questions for assessment indicators

Evaluation Criteria	Questions for specific assessment indicators	Stakeholders to engage
1. Rehabilitation and Development of Mangrove Forest Ecosystem in Thai Binh Province, Viet Nam		
Relevance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Where do you rank the conservation of mangroves and environment according to your national priorities? (score & comment) Based on the existing environmental challenges (storm, flood, etc.) in Thai Binh province, where do you rank the relevance of this project? (score & comment) Identify regulatory and policy constraints and issues in the implementation of project. (comment & score) Please advise on ways to improve relevance of the project. (comment) 	<p>Vietnamese officials</p> <p>Vietnamese officials, local community</p> <p>Vietnamese officials</p> <p>Vietnamese officials, AFoCO officials</p>
Effectiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the staff members dedicated for the project and rank their collective technical capability (comment & score) Identify new technology / knowledge gained from the project (comment & score) Identify local constraints (administrative and land dispute issues) in the 	<p>Vietnamese officials</p> <p>Vietnamese officials</p> <p>Vietnamese officials, local community</p>

Evaluation Criteria	Questions for specific assessment indicators	Stakeholders to engage
	<p>implementation of the project (comment & score)</p> <p>4. Identify any interest and demand from other communities to do the same activities done in Thai Binh project (comment & score)</p> <p>5. Please advise on ways to improve effectiveness in the future (comment)</p>	<p>Vietnamese officials, local community</p> <p>Vietnamese officials, AFoCO officials</p>
Efficiency	<p>1. Please provide a cost comparison of “mangroves plantation per hectare” with similar other projects (comment & score)</p> <p>2. Identify any unused items or abandoned program in the project below (comment & score)</p> <p>1. Identify the most cost-efficient activities (efficient cost per return) in your opinion (comment & score)</p> <p>2. Please advise on ways to improve cost-efficiency in the future (comment)</p>	<p>Vietnamese officials</p> <p>Vietnamese officials</p> <p>Vietnamese officials</p> <p>Vietnamese officials, AFoCO officials</p>
Impact	<p>1. Identify any positive effect(s) other than relevance and effectiveness below (comment & score)</p> <p>2. Identify any negative effect(s) due to the project interventions below (comment & score)</p> <p>3. Please advise on ways to improve synergy and increase positive impact (comment)</p>	<p>Vietnamese officials, community leaders</p> <p>Vietnamese officials, community leaders</p> <p>Vietnamese officials, AFoCO officials</p>
Sustainability	<p>1. Identify specific national policies of Viet Nam that are supportive to continue the project activities (comment & score)</p> <p>2. Identify any similar activities supported by own budget in Viet Nam (comment & score)</p> <p>3. Identify future management plan after termination of the project (comment & score)</p> <p>4. Please advise on ways to enhance sustainability in the future (comment)</p>	<p>Vietnamese officials</p> <p>Vietnamese officials</p> <p>Vietnamese officials</p> <p>Vietnamese officials, AFoCO officials</p>

III. RESULTS OF EVALUATION

1. Overview

The framework objectives of the component-3 are to: 1) rehabilitate deforested and degraded forest areas in ASEAN region, especially in the lower Mekong countries; 2) promote public awareness on conservation and sustainable management of forest ecosystem; and, 3) promote participation of local communities in forest conservation activities.

Viet Nam is highly vulnerable to climate change due to frequent incidences of flood and typhoon along its 3,200 km long coastline in recent years. Protection of coastal areas become a top national priority and the project is designed to establish a mangrove ecosystem in a coastal area of Thai Binh province for multiple benefits of environmental protection from frequent disasters, biodiversity conservation, and local livelihood enhancement. A challenge, however, is to explore a specific methodology and right mangrove species to overcome a challenging condition of relatively low temperature regime and high latitude for mangroves.

1.1. Economic and environmental analysis on Mekong region

This component was designed to support the least developed members of ASEAN countries for restoration of their degraded forests and establishment of model forests. Among ten (10) ASEAN countries, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam are the least developed members and they are collectively termed as “CLMV countries”. There is a special program called “Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI)” with an aim to provide technical support to the CLMV countries to narrow their development gap with the rest of ASEAN members. The ROK proposed to designate the support under this component for CLMV countries in line with this IAI program. National economic and environmental indicators of CLMV countries are shown in **Table 7**. After Myanmar was granted to host the RETC (component 1) at the 3rd Session of the Governing Council of ASEAN-ROK Forest Cooperation in October 2013, the support under component – 3 was dedicated to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam for a duration of 10 years from 2014 to 2023.

Table 7. Key economic and environmental indicators of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam (2016 data except EPI)

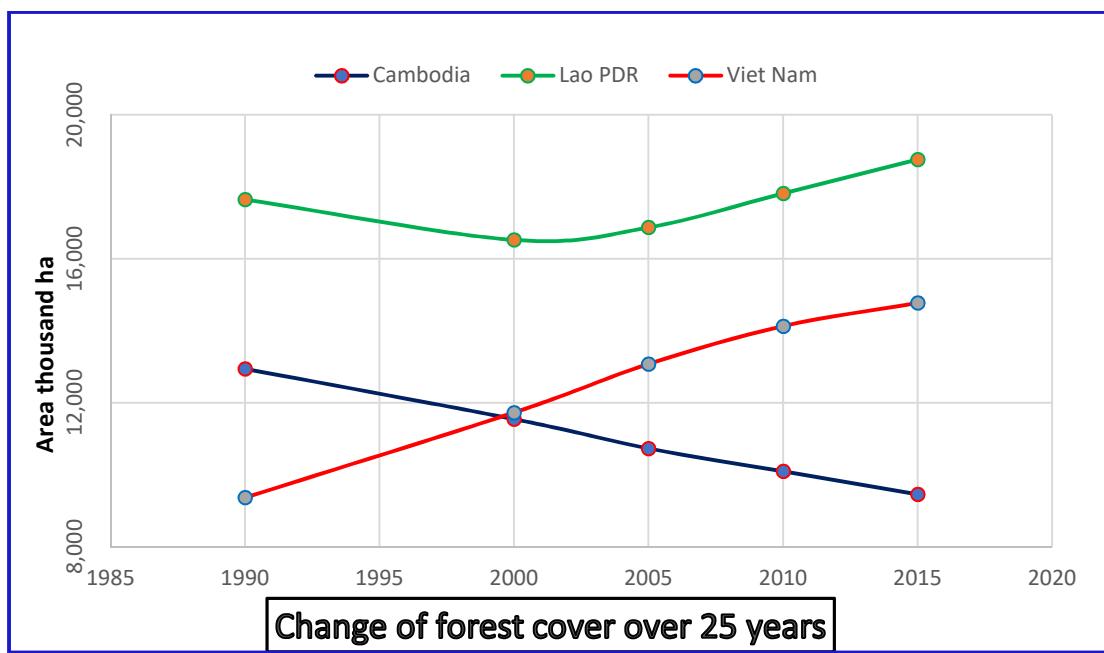
	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Myanmar	Viet Nam
Population (million)	15.76	6.76	52.89	94.57
Area (thousand sq. km)	181	236.8	676.6	331
GDP (current USD in billion)	20.02	15.81	63.23	205.28
GDP growth %	7	7	5.9	6.2
GNI (current USD in billion)	17.91	14.52	63.09	194.83
per capita GNI (current USD)	1140	2150	1190	2060

Inflation (%)	3.5	3	3.6	1.1
Forest area (thousand sq. km)	94.6	187.6	290.4	147.7
Forest cover (% of country area)	52%	79%	43%	45%
CO ₂ emissions (metric ton per capita)	0.44	0.3	0.42	1.8
Environmental Performance Index (EPI) rank – 2018 (out of 180 countries)	150	153	138	132

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/country> and <https://epi.envirocenter.yale.edu/epi-topline>

1.2. Country background in Viet Nam

A brief analysis was undertaken for each country to provide background and policy direction in the forestry sector. **Figure-2** shows change of forest cover in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam over the past 25 years from 1990 to 2015. While Cambodia has lost about 25% of its forest, Viet Nam has gained 25% more forest cover with an extensive reforestation program, making the country an exceptional case in Southeast Asia. In case of Lao PDR, the loss of forests in the 1990s and early 2000s appeared to have been recovered by 2015.



Data source: Global Forest Resources Assessments (FAO, 2018)

Figure 2. Change of forest cover in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam

Viet Nam's experience in forest management offers a good lesson for other countries as it started from a severely deforested situation where the forest cover was merely 25% of total land area in 1990. Over the next 25 years, Viet Nam was able to reclaim most of its lost forests from 9.4 million ha in 1990 to 14.8 million ha or 45% of country land area in 2015. Such

achievement of reforestation was largely due to a strong forestry policy that banned commercial logging and pushed for a nationwide reforestation / conservation campaign. It was coincided with promotion of domestic wood-based industries that were required to use imported logs for the export of finished products.

Viet Nam's recovery of forests occurred during its rapid economic growth and the trend is continuing until these days. In this recovery process, the country was also able to improve the quality of biomass stock from a poor and degraded forest stand to a level with rich and medium stocks. The forests are mostly located in the Central Highlands, Central North and Northeast areas of the country.

Sustainable forest management is a guiding national principle in Viet Nam. According to Viet Nam Forestry Development Strategy (2006–2020), first priority is to issue certification for sustainable forest management for at least 30% of production forests by 2020. The second priority is to promote Payment for Forest Environmental Services (PFES), which aims to increase annual revenue for forest protection and environmental services, up to USD 2 billion by 2020. The third priority focuses on forest rehabilitation and reforestation.

1.3. Brief project analysis

Although the 10-year Landmark Program was launched in March 2014, it took almost two (2) years for the component 3 projects to actually launch their ground activities in 2016. Basically, the officials from the Secretariat and recipient countries were occupied with the project formulation in 2014 and 2015.

The project is designed to establish a mangrove ecosystem in a coastal area of Thai Binh province for multiple benefits of environmental protection from frequent disasters, biodiversity conservation, and local livelihood enhancement. It has two (2) specific objectives to: 1) afforest, rehabilitate and sustainably manage mangrove forest ecosystems in Thai Binh province; and, 2) raise awareness and enhance knowledge and capacity of local communities on rehabilitation, protection and sustainable development of mangrove forests, biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and livelihood improvement strategies.

Under the objective-1, there are 4 activities, namely: 1) survey and design development for 960 ha area with plantation and conservation plan; 2) new plantation on 80 ha area; 3) enrichment plantation on 80 ha area, and; 4) comprehensive protection of entire 960 ha area. The objective-2 covers the capacity building activities for local communities such as conduct of local training courses, publication and dissemination of leaflets and posters, development of local regulations on maintenance and protection of mangroves for four (4) communes, and study tour to Thailand and Malaysia to learn the establishment and maintenance of mangroves.

A challenge, however, is to explore a specific methodology and suitable mangrove species for Thai Binh area to overcome a challenging condition of relatively low temperature regime and high latitude for mangroves.

2. Evaluation Findings

2.1. Relevance

Relevance with Viet Nam's environment conservation policy: Viet Nam is highly vulnerable to climate change and it is experiencing frequent natural disasters such as flood and typhoon along its 3,200-km long coastline in recent years. Protection of coastal areas has become a top national priority and accordingly, Viet Nam has made a national target of mangroves plantation for 25,000 ha. Currently, there are at least five (5) different financial sources supporting the conservation of coastal areas such as dike construction, mangroves plantation. These sources include public budget, private budget and international aids. There are at least 17 mangroves rehabilitation projects being implemented in the country including this project. Therefore, this project is highly relevant with the national policy and priority of Viet Nam.

Relevance with the challenge of natural disasters in Thai Binh province: During a meeting with local community members at project site in Thai Binh province on 6 July 2018, a community leader reported unusual and extreme weather patterns experienced in recent years in the province such as frequent incidences of typhoon, unusually hot weather, and incidences of flood. It was informed that there was a good mangrove vegetation existed in the area in the years before the 1980s. However, due to a government's land reclamation project, all mangroves vegetation was destroyed after the construction of dikes and the mangroves were never recovered since then.

After experiencing frequent natural disasters and unusual weather patterns for some years, both the government and local people have learned from the past mistake and realized the need for natural barrier such as mangroves. Actually, the mangroves grow very slowly in Thai Binh area and there are only very few mangrove species surviving in that latitude and temperature regime. Nevertheless, the local people have a good memory and experience on the value of mangroves to counter the challenges of natural disasters and it is safe to presume that the project is receiving a strong local support.

Relevance with local policy, regulatory and socio-economic circumstances: The project activities have been implemented through the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (**DARD**) in Thai Binh province. Actual implementation is done through 6-month local contracts between DARD team and People's Committee of targeted commune. Therefore, actual implementers in the field are the villagers supervised by the local administration body. The workers are paid based on the local standard and market rate. Under this kind of implementation mechanism, it is understood that the project is implemented in compliance with the local regulations and in accordance with the socio-economic circumstances.

2.2. Effectiveness

Operational capability of local staff: Focal agency for this project is Vietnamese Administration of Forestry (**VNFOREST**) based in Hanoi. Since project activities are planned

and implemented at commune level, VNFOREST basically delegates the implementation authority to a provincial project team established at the DARD office in Thai Binh province. The DARD team is led by an officer-in-charge who is basically responsible for planning and implementation of all the activities in the field. Regarding technical matters, some officials from Vietnamese Academy of Forest Science (**VASF**) are providing the required trainings and technical guidelines as necessary. Based on discussion with the provincial project team and observation in the field, the local staff is fully capable of managing the project including technical matters.

Technical need and capacity building: Unlike the mangroves in the southern tropical zone, there are only three (3) mangrove species surviving in the project area (high latitude and low-temperature regime) and there is no natural regeneration of mangroves observed during the field visit. It indicates a technical challenge that the project has to address in finding out the most appropriate nursery technique, planting technique and protection method for the grown trees. In this project, the expertise from the VASF combined with local knowledge was used to solve these technical issues. In addition, group study tours for officials and local people were organized to learn more technical matters from other tropical countries such as Thailand and Indonesia. It is still a technical challenge to maintain mangroves properly in Thai Binh area.

Compliance with local administrative procedures: According to the 2013 Constitution and the Law on Organization of Local Administration (2015), it is required to establish two (2) main bodies, namely People's Council and People's Committee, at the province, district and commune levels. Especially, provincial level bodies have significant power of autonomy and decision-making on the local administrative matters. Therefore, any local activities implemented at the commune level are subject to regulations and supervision of Provincial People's Committee (**PPC**) of Thai Binh province. Since the project implementation team was formed at provincial DARD office, it was observed that the project matters were well consulted with and reported to the PPC in Thai Binh province regularly. It is assumed that the project is well in compliance with local administrative procedures.

External demand for a similar project: There are altogether eleven (11) communes along the coastal area where the project is being implemented. However, only four (4) communes have been selected for this project and the remaining seven (7) communes, namely, Thai Thuong, Thai Do, and Thuy Truong communes from Thai Thuy district; and Nam Thinh, Nam Hung, Nam Phu, and Dong Minh communes from Tien Hai district are expressing their interest to implement similar mangroves rehabilitation activities with the project support.

2.3. Efficiency

Cost comparison with other similar activities (cost of 1-ha mangrove plantation): A question was raised to the local officials who have knowledge about other similar mangrove plantation projects in Viet Nam to make a cost comparison on 1-ha plantation cost. Based on the five (5)

responses received, it can be concluded that the plantation cost in this project is slightly more efficient (10-25% cheaper) than other similar projects.

Unused items and inapplicable programs: Based on the local respondents of survey, there is no unused item or inapplicable program in the project so far.

Value for money: Based on the local respondents of survey, the activities and items with high value for money invested are listed below:

- New plantation (in comparison with an adjacent plot planted a year earlier under a different project, the growth and plant density in this project are more favourable, indicating a high return per investment);
- Forest protection (This activity is important to keep a regular patrol in the plantation area and it will give a high return per investment as the trees grow.); and,
- Tending (Instead of leaving plantation without tending (zero cost), it is worthy to invest in tending activities as it helps develop a uniform canopy and healthy mangroves.).

2.4. Impact

Positive impact other than relevance and effectiveness: There are many positive impacts identified by the respondents of survey and they are listed below:

- Environment protection through mitigation of disaster / climate impact;
- Public awareness raising regarding the role and value of mangrove forest;
- Local livelihood improvement;
- Capacity building for various stakeholders (provincial staff, local communities and authorities); and,
- Biodiversity conservation.

Negative impact caused by project intervention: Based on the local respondents of survey, there is no negative impact caused by the project.

2.5. Sustainability

Evidence of policy support in the future: Based on the five (5) responses received, there are at least five (5) legal documents issued for protection of environment and promotion of forest rehabilitation. A Forestry Law and some circulars were issued as recently as last year. It is a clear evidence that Viet Nam is taking serious actions on the matters related to environment protection and disaster management. These official legal documents are listed below.

- New Forestry Law enacted in November 2017
- Government Decree No. 119/2016/NĐ-CP issued on 23 August 2016 providing policies on sustainable management, protection and development of coastal forests to cope with climate change, effective from 10 October 2016

- Decision No. 120/QD-TTg issued by the Prime Minister on 22 Jan 2015 to approve the plan on coastal forest protection and development in response to climate change for the period from 2015 to 2020
- Decision 886/QD-TTg issued by the Prime Minister on 16 Jun 2017 to approve the target program on Sustainable Forest Development for the period from 2016 to 2020
- Circular 21/2017/TT-BNNPTNT dated 15/11/2017 of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development guiding the implementation of the Prime Minister's Decision No. 886 / QD-TTg on the approved program for Sustainable Forestry Development for the period from 2016 to 2020 (48 pages)

Evidence of similar activities with government budget: There are many similar activities supported with the state budget in Viet Nam. Some of these projects are listed below:

- Rehabilitation and development of mangrove forest in Thai Binh province to deal with climate change and sea level rise (2015-2019);
- Mitigating the sea wave and plantation of mangrove forest to protect the sea dykes (2015-2019);
- Annual state budget funding for mangrove management and protection (regular activity); and
- State budget for supplementary plantation (not so big budget, nor high priority).

The government has already committed to the cause of protecting environment and rehabilitation of mangroves by allocating substantial budget for the above-mentioned projects and activities. Therefore, it is highly likely that the mangrove plantations supported by this project will be maintained appropriately in the future.

Future management plan beyond the project term: As for the future management after the end of this project, the following three (3) options were identified by the local respondents.

- Provision of regular funding from annual state budget for mangrove management and protection (It is a regular budget allocated to support the protection activities in the country and it is possible to allocate some budget for mangrove protection after the end of this project.);
- Developing a plan for future management and protection of the forests under the framework laid out by the project and handing over to the local authorities in accordance with the policies and regulations of Viet Nam; and,
- Transferring the activities into annual planning process and seeking further support from the other donors and State budget.

One option or all of them could be considered depending on the feasibility, budget availability and local circumstances. The future management options for the project are sound and viable given the current local circumstances and political will of the government.

3. Summary and Overall Assessment

Considering that it is a mid-term evaluation and some criteria cannot be assessed at their full extent, a lower assessment weighting of 30% was given to the criteria of “Impact” and “Sustainability” while the other three (3) criteria of “Relevance, Effectiveness and Efficiency” received a higher assessment weighting of 70%.

Mangrove ecosystem plays an important role in the protection of coastal erosion, which is worsened by the increasing incidences of heavy flood and stronger typhoon due to the impact of climate change. Especially in northern Viet Nam where the project site is located, the mangrove forests have shown difficult to recover since the government’s construction of dykes under a national land reclamation project in the 1980s. The local people still have a good memory on the value of mangroves to counter the challenges of natural disasters.

It was easily observed that the project is receiving a strong local support. More importantly, the government has committed its own financial resources to support the maintenance and protection of such mangrove rehabilitation project and it is a positive sign for the success of the project. In addition, the Vietnamese Academy of Forest Science has provided required technical support which is important for the survival of mangrove species in such a challenging condition in northern Viet Nam due to lower sea temperature and high latitude.

Based on the performance scoring system (**Table 5**), the overall performance score of the project in Viet Nam is “**4.34**” out of the total score of 5.00. The project is in **excellent performance** and it is consistent with the qualitative evaluation analysis made above for all five (5) criteria. Basically, the performance scores should be used as complementary to support and consolidate in-depth qualitative analysis and its results.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

This interim evaluation was conducted through documents review, on-site field survey, personal interview, and online questionnaire survey. Based on the observations in the field and feedback from various stakeholders, the project was evaluated critically for the improvement of planning and implementation in the remaining project period. The following recommendations were made to be considered by project. Every attempt was made to ensure that recommendations provided in this section are content specific and applicable under the local circumstances of the country.

1. Rich Biodiversity of Mangrove Ecosystem

The project initiated in Thai Binh province is a well planned and executed project. The restoration of mangroves in the area is in line with the government policy to counter the threat of natural disasters and in the interest of local communities as well. With the guidance of a project team at the level of the central government, the project has been managed by the provincial DARD office in consultation with the relevant authorities. For the implementation of the activities in the field, commune authorities are involved through entering local contracts with DARD office. A protection mechanism has been in place and it is planned to seek the state funding source on the protection activities after the end of this project. In short, the project is implemented in a transparent, accountable and inclusive manner with a long-term vision.

It may be a technical challenge to establish a mangrove ecosystem with rich biodiversity in Thai Binh area. Only three (3) mangrove species can survive in the area and the growth of mangroves is quite slow by its standard. It will require more technical studies and capacity building activities if the project is aiming for the establishment of a healthy mangrove-based ecosystem that can provide a habitat for diverse species of flora and fauna.

2. Expansion of Concept for Model Forest

Although there are certain technical issues, the project itself presents a model of community-based mangrove rehabilitation project from which the other countries can learn the many other aspects of planning, stakeholder engagement, community mobilization & participation, technical support and execution. It is recommended that the progress of this project should be monitored closely including dispute settlement in the future.

V. CONCLUSION

The overall results of the evaluation of the Phase 1 implementation of the AFoCO Landmark Program (LP) suggest a positive and excellent performance trend. The LP is only on its 5-year of operation but it has already established the basic foundation and instilled the importance and public value of "*Restoring Degraded Forest in Southeast Asia as a Model for a Greener Asia*". The collaborative, innovative, and sustainable forest management perspective of the LP provides a strategic framework capable of leading forest management policy in the region.

The results of the interim evaluation provide findings and recommendations to consider in the next stage of the LP implementation. The aforementioned specific recommendations may help to enhance the management and implementation of the LP in Phase 2 (2019-2023). In addition, the AFoCO Assembly may consider following general observations from a wider perspective on the management of various outputs and resources from the LP.

Within the scope of the Landmark Program, at the entering point to the next phase, it would be an appropriate time to re-check the direction of each component and determine if it indeed aligned with the main objective of the LP: to tackle down the unequal distribution of resources, technology, and funding amongst the ASEAN Member States. Intensifying research and leading the policy discussion on sustainable forest management in the region can be suggested through various advocacy activities such as research publications, conferences, colloquia, and among others. The LP should dedicate more effort in pursuing such endeavors in order to gain recognition as a leader on forest management policy initiatives, innovations, and research.

The three (3) forest restoration projects are expected to establish three (3) diverse model forests as part of the final stage of each project. For this to be achieved, the countries in cooperation with the Secretariat need to steadily monitor the project progress and surroundings socio-environmental situations surrounding the project areas and practically discuss with the project stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Annex 1. Questionnaire Survey for Component 3

Questionnaire survey for Viet Nam project

This questionnaire survey is for interim evaluation of the project "**Rehabilitation and Development of Mangrove Forest Ecosystem in Thai Binh Province, Viet Nam**". Your participation in this survey is very important because as a key stakeholder, your assessment on the project will be taken as key inputs for evaluation and further improvement of this project. Please be assured that the information you have provided will be strictly treated as "confidential".

Section 1: Information about your role in the project

Your email:

Official position:

Choose an item.

Education level:

Choose an item.

Current work place:

Choose an item.

Main responsibility:

Choose an item.

Membership in PSC:

Choose an item.

Duration of your involvement:

From: Click or tap to enter a date.

To: Click or tap to enter a date.

Any specific comments about your role:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 2: Assessment of the project

For the purpose of program evaluation, the following performance scoring system will be applied.

Score range	Ranking description
0.1 - 1	Poor performance (below 20%) against the indicator
1.1 - 2	Limited performance (21 – 40%). Significant improvements needed.
2.1 - 3	Satisfactory performance (41 – 60%) but room for improvements.

3.1 - 4	Good Performance (61 – 80%) against the indicator
4.1 - 5	Excellent performance (81% and above) against the indicator

For questions below, please give a performance score where relevant and provide comments if necessary.

2.1 “Relevance”

- a) Where do you rank the conservation of mangroves and environment according to your national priorities? **(Question for Vietnamese officials)**

Please give a ranking below:

Choose an item.

Please provide comments as necessary

Click or tap here to enter text.

- b) Based on the existing environmental challenges (storm, flood, etc.) in Thai Binh province, where do you rank the relevance of this project? **(Question for Vietnamese officials and commune leaders)**

Please give a ranking from 1 to 5 (1 the bottom and 5 the top):

Choose an item.

Please provide comments as necessary

Click or tap here to enter text.

- c) Identify regulatory and policy constraints and issues in the implementation of project. **(Question for Vietnamese officials)**

Please list constraints and issues below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Based on the number of constraints and issues, provide a relevant score below:

Choose an item.

- d) Please advise on ways to improve relevance of the project. **(Question for Vietnamese officials and AFoCO officials)**

Click or tap here to enter text.

2.2 “Effectiveness”

- a) Identify the staff members dedicated for the project and rank their collective technical capability **(Question for Vietnamese officials)**

Please list staff members, positions and identify technical issues below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Based on the number of competent staff above, please give a score below:

Choose an item.

- b) Identify new technology / knowledge gained from the project ([Question for Vietnamese officials](#))

Please list specific new technology / knowledge gained below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Based on the number of new technology / knowledge gained, please give a score below:

Choose an item.

- c) Identify local constraints (administrative and land dispute issues) in the implementation of the project ([Question for Vietnamese officials and local community leaders](#))

Please list local constraints below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Depending on the number of local constraints above, please give a score below:

Choose an item.

- d) Identify any interest and demand from other communities to do the same activities done in Thai Binh project ([Question for Vietnamese officials and local community leaders](#))

Please list the interest / demand below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Depending on the number of external interest, please give a score below:

Choose an item.

- e) Please advise on ways to improve effectiveness in the future. ([Question for Vietnamese officials and AFoCO officials](#))

Click or tap here to enter text.

2.3 “Efficiency”

- a) Cost comparison of “mangroves plantation per hectare” with similar other projects. ([Question for Vietnamese officials](#))

Please provide some statistics and clarify below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Based on the difference in cost (%) above, please give a score below:

Choose an item.

- b) Identify any unused items or abandoned program in the project ([Question for Vietnamese officials](#))

Please list any unused items or abandoned program below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Please select one below depending on number of items found above:

Choose an item.

- c) Identify the most cost-efficient activities (efficient cost per return) in your opinion ([Question for Vietnamese officials](#))

Please provide answer and clarification below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Please select one below depending on number of items found above:

Choose an item.

- d) Please advise on ways to improve cost-efficiency in the future. ([Question for Vietnamese officials and AFoCO officials](#))

Click or tap here to enter text.

2.4 “Impact”

- a) Identify any positive effect(s) other than relevance and effectiveness ([Question for Vietnamese officials and local community leaders](#))

Please list positive effects below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Depending on the number of positive effects above, please give a score below:

Choose an item.

- b) Identify any negative effect(s) due to the project interventions ([Question for Vietnamese officials and local community leaders](#))

Please list negative effects below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Depending on the number of issues above, please give a score below:

Choose an item.

- c) Please advise on ways to improve synergy and increase positive impact. ([Question for Vietnamese officials and AFoCO officials](#))

Click or tap here to enter text.

2.5 “Sustainability”

- a) Identify specific national policies of Viet Nam that are supportive to continue the project activities ([Question for Vietnamese officials](#))

Please list positive national policies below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Depending on the number of policy above, please give a score below:

Choose an item.

- b) Identify any similar activities supported by own budget in Viet Nam ([Question for Vietnamese officials](#))

Please list similar activities below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Depending on the number of activity above, please give a score below:

Choose an item.

- c) Identify future management plan after termination of the project. ([Question for Vietnamese officials](#))

Please clarify the future management plan below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Judging on the inclusiveness of stakeholders and feasibility from financial and management aspects, please give a score below:

Choose an item.

- d) Please advise on ways to enhance sustainability in the future. ([Question for Vietnamese officials and AFoCO officials](#))

Click or tap here to enter text.

Annex 2. Summary on the Project in Viet Nam of Landmark Program (2014-2018)

Element/indicator	Key Findings and Issues	Recommendation	Responsibility	Time
[1] Viet Nam				
Relevance	This project is highly relevant with the national policy and priority to protect the long coastal line from natural disasters and the impact of climate change. However, there is a technical challenge that only three (3) mangrove species can survive at a slow growth at this latitude and temperature regime.	More technical studies and skill improvement activities should be pursued if the project is aiming for the establishment of a healthy mangrove-based ecosystem in the future that can provide a habitat for diverse species of flora and fauna.	Vietnam Administration of Forestry & Vietnamese Academy of Forest Science	2019 onward
Effectiveness	The project is implemented effectively by a provincial technical office in consultation with the relevant authorities. For implementation of the activities in the field, commune authorities are involved through entering local contracts with the provincial technical office.	The progress of this project should be monitored closely including dispute settlement mechanism so that other countries can learn the aspects of planning, stakeholder engagement, community mobilization & participation, technical support and execution in the future.	Vietnam Administration of Forestry	2019 onward
Efficiency	Cost of per hectare mangroves plantation in this project is 10 to 25% more efficient than a similar project implemented in an adjacent area by the other project.	For a higher return of value, it is recommended to invest in regular maintenance activities such as tending and regular patrolling.	Vietnam Administration of Forestry & provincial level officials	2019 onward
Impact	Positive impacts are identified as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment protection through mitigation of disaster / climate impact 	The objectives and long-term benefits of this project should be publicized such as	Vietnam Administration of Forestry &	2019 onward

[Annex-5]

Element/indicator	Key Findings and Issues	Recommendation	Responsibility	Time
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public awareness raising regarding the role and value of mangroves • Local livelihood improvement • Capacity building for various stakeholders (provincial staff, local communities and authorities) • Biodiversity conservation 	leaflet distribution, TV broadcasting for the stakeholders and local communities.	provincial level officials	
Sustainability	<p>There is a strong evidence of policy support as the Government and concerned ministries have issued recently legal documents for protection of environment and promotion of forest rehabilitation</p> <p>In addition, a budget for maintenance of planted forests has been allocated and it is highly likely that the planed mangroves will be supported with regular maintenance budget after the project end.</p>	The management of this project should be monitored and recorded regularly so that this example of sustainable management and conservation of mangroves can be showcased as a model to learn in the future.	Vietnam Administration of Forestry & provincial level officials	2019 onward