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## SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIC FARMING SYSTEMS & AGRO-ECOTOURISM FOR SMALL FARMERS COMMUNITIES IN THE SOUTHERN MEKONG RIVER PROVINCES

February 2023

SDGs:



Country:

Viet Nam

Project Code:

TCP/VIE/3703

FAO Contribution:

USD 200 000

Duration:

1 January 2020-31 December 2021

Contact Info:

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### Implementing Partner

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD).

### Beneficiaries

Farmers (including women) in the Mekong Delta province of Ca Mau.

### Country Programming Framework (CPF) Outputs

Output 2.1: Strengthened producers' capacities, women and men's, to adopt innovative technologies and agro-ecological practices, protect bio-diversity, treat agricultural environments in order to sustainably increase productivity and production, contributing to restructuring agricultural economy and addressing climate change and environmental degradation.

Output 3.1: Improved agricultural livelihoods and decent work promoted in rural areas with focus on poor farmers, people from minority groups and vulnerable people for improved multi dimensional rural wellness; and capacity building for local institutions, communities and farmers for rolling out, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of NTPs and agricultural restructuring plan.

Output 3.3: Enhanced competitiveness and inclusiveness of agricultural, aquatic and forest value-chains via promoted investments, business linkages, contract farming, traceability, quality certifications, branding and marketing; revised and abolished barriers and improper conditions in agri-business in order to improve the investment environment, harmonize domestic, regional and international business procedures.



### BACKGROUND

There is a global concern over environmental and ecological degradation and the associated health and environmental hazards arising out of agricultural production systems that are heavily dependent on chemicals. Organic agriculture (OA) is a holistic production management system that promotes and enhances agroecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles, and biological soil activity by using agronomic, biological, and mechanical methods, as opposed to synthetic materials, to fulfil any specific function within the system.

Whilst Viet Nam has tremendous potential for OA production thanks to favourable agroecological conditions, only 0.5 percent of national cropland (63 536 ha) is used for this purpose, according to 2020 data from the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL).

In recent years, the combination of agricultural and ecotourism has received increasing attention from both national and subnational level, thanks to its effects on closing critical gaps in sustainable income generation and environmental protection. Due to its tropical climate, unique natural habitat and rich cultural heritage, agroecotourism in Viet Nam has huge economic potential. At the request of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), this project was formulated to increase diversification in rural incomes through the development of small-scale organic farming systems and agroecotourism operations in pilot areas, contributing to the transformation of farming systems from chemical-based into organic-based practices. The targeted area was the Ca Mau province in the Mekong Delta Region (MDR), selected because of its potential for the development and integration of OA with ecotourism.

### IMPACT

The project contributed to creating an enabling environment for the development and integration of organic farming systems with ecotourism models. To do so, the project operated at different levels. At policy and planning level, one of the milestones of the project was the formulation of the Proposal for the 5 Year Plan for Integration of Organic Agriculture and Eco-Tourism in Ca Mau Province, which provided strategic guidance to all relevant stakeholders in the province, including the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), public and private service providers and farmers. This proposal was then endorsed as a part of the Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development 2021 – 2030, with a vision to 2050, issued by the Provincial People's Committee (PPC) Decision 2461/QD-UBND on 29 September 2022 (<https://tinyurl.com/2hyhx3vt>). The project also developed the capacity of individual smallholder farmers to integrate ecotourism and organic rice production in their businesses. Lastly, the project facilitated dialogue and synergies between government officials, private stakeholders (including tour operators) and farmers in Ca Mau and 12 other provinces in the MDR, with a view to spur public-private partnerships in the rural tourism industry.

## ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS

At the inception workshop, project stakeholders, including representatives from all relevant departments of MARD and the Viet Nam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), potential pilot provinces and development partners were sensitized to the project's objectives and design.

Project activities were based on an assessment on the uptake of OA and ecotourism in local farms, as well as the investigation of opportunities for and challenges to further developing this business model. The assessment filled a significant knowledge gap, which was essential for informing agricultural development plans and strategies in Ca Mau, as well as the design of capacity development activities for stakeholders in the ecotourism sector. The assessment used a mixed methodology, encompassing a desk-based review of local government strategies and plans for the tourism sector and consultations with local government officials and representatives from the private sector and community-based ecotourism service providers. The findings of the assessment were consolidated into a report and formed the basis for the development of the 5 Year Plan for Integration of Organic Agriculture and Eco-Tourism in Ca Mau Province, presented at national and provincial workshops and finalized for approval.

Through the facilitation of a regional workshop entitled Rural Tourism Recovery and Development in the Mekong Delta, Viet Nam, held on 17 November 2021, the project created momentum and facilitated the identification of practical solutions to revive and develop the tourism sector in the MDR, particularly in the challenging context created by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the workshop, the findings and recommendations from the assessment were introduced and discussed with participants from both the public and private sectors. The workshop also served as a platform to build and strengthen local networks and partnerships for sustainable rural tourism development in the MDR.

The project identified and trained smallholder farmers in Ca Mau province to develop their operations and management skills on agrotourism. Four participants were selected, based on their potential and interest to take up and develop sustainable agroecotourism businesses. Capacity development activities included a three-day study visit to successful agroecotourism businesses in Ha Giang province and a two-day training session on entrepreneurship, high-quality service provision, trends in the tourism market and storytelling for tourism.

Finally, the project leveraged private-sector engagement to design and pilot models for partnerships between private service providers, namely travel agencies, and community-based ecotourism service providers. To do so, the project supported the development of two itineraries in Ca Mau, which included visits to traditional fishing villages and handicraft shops. The project also delivered capacity development support to two cooperatives (Tri Luc and Minh Tam), benefitting a total of 31 households, on organic farming and organic rice production. The Tri Luc Cooperative received a Certificate of Organic Conformity in accordance with TCVN 11041-5, valid until 25 December 2024, and the Minh Tam Cooperative received a Certificate of Organic Conversion, valid until 1 September 2023.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

One no-cost extension was requested and granted. All project activities were carried out within the original budget.

Implementation was affected by the enforcement of preventative measures against COVID-19 and restrictions on travel and public gatherings, especially throughout 2021; however, alternative arrangements were put into place to ensure the delivery of project Outputs, even in this challenging context. For instance, travel restrictions affected the possibility for the research team to carry out the assessment in person. The assessment was originally scheduled for June 2021, but instead, it was carried out between September and October 2021, relying on local agriculture extension staff and online interviews. At the same time, the number of participants in the study visit was limited in compliance with the COVID-19 measures in place.

## FOLLOW-UP FOR GOVERNMENT ATTENTION

Due to the limited budget available, the project did not upscale the promising options to combine agroecotourism and OA. One of the milestones of the project was the development of the Proposal for the 5 Year Plan for Integration of Organic Agriculture and Eco-Tourism in Ca Mau Province. The Plan provides a roadmap for promoting and developing the ecotourism sector in Ca Mau and provides a blueprint for policy action in this area.



## SUSTAINABILITY

### 1. Capacity development

Capacity development was a key component of the project, targeting smallholder farmers in particular to strengthen their skills to set up and manage ecotourism activities, through both a training session and a study visit to Ha Giang. Post-training evaluation showed that all participants considered the content highly relevant to developing their businesses. In addition, during the training session, an informal network connecting local farmers and service providers was established to facilitate future knowledge exchange and the sharing of best practices.

### 2. Gender equality

Roughly 50 percent of women participated in the training courses (on both OA and agroecotourism).

### 3. Environmental sustainability

This project contributed to improving smallholder farmer incomes and rural economies through the creation of new opportunities for farmers to diversify their products and services by facilitating the integration and linkages of smallholder farmers to the tourism value chain. The cooperatives that received organic production certificates are also expected to benefit from the production of high quality rice beyond the duration of the project.

### 4. Human Rights-based Approach (HRBA) – in particular Right to Food and Decent Work

Throughout its activities, the project took an inclusive approach, engaging with a broad range of stakeholders, including central and provincial governments, mass organizations, academia and civil society organizations (CSOs) (namely the Mekong Organic Association). This approach facilitated the participation of the communities that will play a crucial role in the implementation of the proposed 5 Year Plan for Integration of Organic Agriculture and Eco-Tourism in Ca Mau Province.

The project addressed the human rights principles of participation, accountability, non discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment, and rule of law in decision making processes through robust engagement with farmers' groups and cooperative members to strengthen the notions of rights and obligations. By targeting primary production, the project directly contributed to the implementation of FAO's 2004 Right to Food Guidelines by creating gainful employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for targeted groups. The promotion of decent work brought added value to labour conditions in rural areas, especially occupational safety and health and environmental rights.

### 5. Technological sustainability

Whilst the project did not introduce new technology, it transferred knowledge and know-how on organic rice production and ecotourism, both relevant to the socioeconomic context of Ca Mau province. This provided beneficiaries with useful skills that can contribute to their livelihoods in the long term.

### 6. Economic sustainability

As mentioned above, the skills and capacity gained during the training sessions led to one cooperative receiving a Certificate of Organic Conformity and another receiving a Certificate of Organic Conversion, which are expected to benefit their business operations beyond the duration of the project.



## DOCUMENTS AND OUTREACH PRODUCTS

- ❑ **Ủy Ban Nhân Dân Tỉnh Cà Mau.** 2022. *Ban Hành Kế Hoạch Thực Hiện Chiến Lược Phát Triển Nông Nghiệp, Nông Thôn Bền Vững Gắn Với Cơ Cấu Lại Ngành Nông Nghiệp Tỉnh Cà Mau Giai Đoạn 2021 - 2030, Tầm Nhìn Đến Năm 2050.* Ca Mau, TP.HCM, Thư Viện Pháp Luật. <https://tinyurl.com/2hyhx3vt>.
- ❑ **Ca Mau PPC.** 2022. *Decision 2461/QĐ-UBND dated 29 September 2022 issuing the action plan to implement the Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture & Rural Development linked to Agricultural Restructuring Plan in Ca Mau province for 2021 – 2030 period, with vision to 2050.* Ca Mau, Ho Chi Minh City, Thư Viện Pháp Luật. <https://tinyurl.com/2hyhx3vt>.





## ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS - LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

<b>Expected Impact</b>	<b>Improved livelihoods, food security and income of small farmer communities by introducing and promoting organic agriculture in combination with agro-ecotourism</b>		
<b>Outcome</b>	Increased and diversified rural income through development of small-scale organic farming system and agro-ecotourism operations in pilot areas, environmental protection and sustainable resources development; Increased retention of rural population in their location of origin and reduced of rural-urban migration		
	<b>Indicator</b>	Provincial strategy and policy document on adoption and promotion of organic agriculture in combination with agro-ecotourism is developed and endorsed.	
	<b>Baseline</b>	0	
	<b>End Target</b>	1 document	
	<b>Comments and follow-up action to be taken</b>	Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, key field trips and events planned for the integration of the two sectors (agriculture and tourism) were cancelled. However, based on the existing provincial strategies (one for organic agriculture from March 2020 and the other for ecotourism from 2018), the project provided technical assistance to beneficiary households and officials to implement them in a practical manner. The scheme to combine both initiatives was then endorsed in PPC Decision 2461/QĐ-UBND of 29 September 2022 issuing the action plan to implement the Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture & Rural Development linked to the Agricultural Restructuring Plan in Ca Mau province for 2021 – 2030, with a vision to 2050.	
<b>Output 1</b>	Status of agri-food quality assurance systems, namely organic agriculture and good agricultural practices, agro-ecotourism and needs assessment report prepared		
	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
	Situation analysis and need assessment report.	One report.	Yes
<b>Baseline</b>	0		
<b>Comments</b>	The project produced a report outlining strategic priorities and recommendations for rural tourism, referring to community-based ecotourism (CBET) and agrotourism, recovery and development in Ca Mau province in the context of COVID-19. It highlights the overall tourism context and performance prepandemic, local government strategies and plans, critical rural tourism issues and development constraints.		
<b>Activity 1.1</b>	<b>Organize an inception workshop to present and discuss the project objectives with a wide group of stakeholders</b>		
	<b>Achieved</b>	Yes	
	<b>Comments</b>	The inception workshop was held in Ca Mau city on 11 February 2020. The objectives were to officially launch the project, mobilize stakeholders and build ownership among them by presenting and clarifying the project interventions and results framework, operation and management structures and implementation approaches. It was attended by 70 participants, coming from various stakeholder organizations, i.e. central government (MARD's Department of Crop Production [DCP]), provincial government (Commune People's Committee [CPC], DARD, Sub-department of Crop Production and Plant Protection [DCPP], District People's Committee [DPC] and PPC), mass organizations (Women's Union, Ca Mau Youth Union, Ca Mau Farmers' Union), neighbouring provinces (DARD and Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism [DoCST]), academia, CSOs (Mekong Organic Association) and the media. Media coverage was carried out by the online Vietnamese People's Newspaper ( <i>Báo Nhân Dân điện tử</i> ) and Ca Mau Television on the same day. The workshop was followed by a field visit to an agroecotourism project implemented by a private business.	
<b>Activity 1.2</b>	<b>Conduct an assessment on the current status of quality assurance systems, organic agriculture, and other certified guarantee systems and identify needs and potentials for further development</b>		
	<b>Achieved</b>	Yes	
	<b>Comments</b>	The project supported an assessment, which combined a desk review and primary data collection and analysis, on the current integration of organic/bioproduction and ecotourism options in Ca Mau province (Activities 1.2 and 1.3). Due to COVID-19 measures, interviews with five stakeholder groups were carried out online and in-person through the support of local facilitators between 20 September and 5 October 2021. Agriculture agencies, conventional and organic rice and shrimp cooperatives, farmers and agribusinesses were represented in the groups.	
<b>Activity 1.3</b>	<b>Conduct an assessment on the current status of agro-ecotourism and other related issues such culture conservation, local livelihood, village trade and etc.</b>		
	<b>Achieved</b>	Yes	
	<b>Comments</b>	The project supported an initial assessment of the rural tourism landscape in Ca Mau through desk research and in-depth consultations with representatives from the public and private sectors.	

<b>Output 2</b>	Piloted establishment of organic farming system with selected agro-products in selected areas of target province		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	Number for communes, community and small holders, farmers piloting organic farming system.	Two cooperatives (Tri Luc and Minh Tam) in two communes (Khan Binh Dong commune, Tran Van Thoi District and Tri Luc commune, Thoi Binh District, Ca Mau province) – as selected during field-level consultations with local governments, the cooperatives, and the companies from 5 to 10 August 2021.	Yes
<b>Baseline</b>	0		
<b>Comments</b>	Two cooperatives were identified and selected to participate in capacity-development activities under this Output. By the end of implementation, the two cooperatives, involving 31 households in total, received certificates of organic production.		
<b>Activity 2.1</b>	Identify priority crops and pilot project zones for implementation of target quality assurance systems (organic agriculture and GAP)		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	Rice was identified as a priority crop in Tri Luc and Minh Tam Cooperatives.	
<b>Activity 2.2</b>	Select a group of farmers and local investors preferably from a farmers' association or cooperative for pilot production		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	Two cooperatives (Tri Luc and Minh Tam), for a total of 31 households, were selected to participate in capacity-building activities.	
<b>Activity 2.3</b>	Conduct capacity building activities to target project groups		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	Between August and October 2022, the two cooperatives were trained on organic rice production.	
<b>Activity 2.4</b>	Verify a fully transparent and traceable quality management programme through product packaging, labelling and certification		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	Tri Luc Cooperative received a Certificate of Organic Conformity in accordance with TCVN 11041-5, valid until 25 December 2024; Minh Tam Cooperative received the Issued Certificate of Organic Conversion, valid until 1 September 2023.	
<b>Activity 2.5</b>	Identify market opportunities through a study on crops with comparative advantages in terms of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS), Control Union, GLOBAL-GAP, Fair Trade, Geographic Indication) and in-depth analysis of potential domestic (surveys in major cities) and export markets.		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	A feasibility study on the potential of organic farming systems and agroecotourism for small-scale farming communities was conducted in Ca Mau province. The study revealed that Ca Mau had the most suitable conditions for the development of OA in the Mekong Delta. That said, it also revealed that the province is facing difficulties caused by climate change, poor irrigation and traffic conditions, small landholdings, low organic farming yields, high labour and certification costs and a lack of technical guidance and standards, as well as a lack of farmer awareness of OA.	
<b>Output 3</b>	Promotion of agro-ecotourism in agricultural communities		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	Number for communes, community and small holders, farmers piloted agro-ecotourism system/services.	3 to 5 smallholder farmers.	Yes
<b>Baseline</b>	0		
<b>Comments</b>	Four smallholder farmers were identified and selected to take part in the activities under Output 4.		
<b>Activity 3.1</b>	Assess integrated agro-ecotourism dimensions in pilot project and surrounding communities		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	An initial assessment of the rural tourism landscape in Ca Mau was carried out to highlight key challenges and current trends following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to inform the strategy to be developed. This also contributed to the identification of key contacts and the establishment of relationships with local authorities for the subsequent implementation of project activities.	

Activity 3.2	Organize provincial and national workshops on organic agriculture and agro-ecotourism		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	At the inception workshop, the integration of the two subsectors was discussed by the participants coming from different provinces of the Mekong Delta. At the national workshop on 17 November 2021, the two Ministries (MARD and MoCST), recommended agroecotourism as one of the key One-Commune-One-Products (OCOPs) for Viet Nam, while recognizing a number of challenges ahead. At the time of writing, the integration of the subsectors was being support by the booming trend of gastronomy tourism, with can be attributed to a growing interest in reconnecting with nature and consuming organic food.	
Activity 3.3	Conduct survey of potential areas for agro-ecotourism		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	The project carried out field inspections and assessments, as well as on-site interviews to select the direct beneficiaries for this Output. Four smallholder farmers that demonstrated the potential to integrate agroecotourism activities were identified.	
Activity 3.4	Create business linkages between organic farming practices/outputs with potential existing eco-tourism models		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	A three-day study tour (from 14-16 December 2021) to Ha Giang was organized to facilitate the exchange of experiences and cross-learning among targeted beneficiaries from Tien Giang and actors engaged in agroecotourism in Ha Giang province. Due to COVID-19 measures in place at the time of the tour, the number of participants was limited to 11, including farmers (as identified from the inspection); representatives from the Ca Mau DoCST; the DCP; and the DCP at national level.  In addition, the project, in collaboration with a local tour operator in Tien Giang province, developed two itineraries that included visits to traditional fishing villages and handicraft shops.	
Activity 3.5	Capacity building to farmers and communities about necessary skills and knowledge for eco-tourism operations		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	The project supported a two-day training in Ca Mau city on 23 and 24 December 2021 with a total of nine participants, including four potential smallholder farmers and representatives from well-established CBET service providers in Ca Mau (the limited number of participants was due to COVID-19 restrictions). The training aimed at enhancing participants' knowledge about tourism markets, understanding tourists' characteristics and psychology, problem-solving skills and increasing awareness of the importance of health and hygiene in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were highly satisfied with the training and indicated that the content was extremely helpful for developing their business. The training was also an opportunity to connect the farmers with CBET service providers in the province.	
Output 4	Documentation and communication for a strong legal framework for organic agriculture established and linked to agro-ecotourism		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	Provincial Strategy and Policy Plan on Sustainable Organic farming, Bio-food Production and Eco-tourism.	One Strategy and Policy Plan document.	Yes
Baseline	0		
Comments	The Proposal for the 5 Year Plan for Integration of Organic Agriculture and Eco-Tourism in Ca Mau Province promotes ecotourism development in coordination with OA to improve the quality of life of rural people. It also provides a roadmap for developing OA production areas in line with the tourism plan of Ca Mau through 2025. It was endorsed by the local government (see the above Outcome description).		
Activity 4.1	Draft the Provincial Strategy and Policy Plan on Sustainable Organic farming, Bio-food Production and Eco-tourism (including specific articles on organic agriculture, GAP and other quality assurance systems) for submission to Provincial People's Committee		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	The project supported the development of the Proposal for the 5 Year Plan for Integration of Organic Agriculture and Eco-Tourism in Ca Mau Province.	
Activity 4.2	Organize the final workshop to discuss future activities		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	The project hosted a half-day hybrid workshop on 17 November 2021 to facilitate the sharing of best practices and lessons learned from the Department of Tourism of Tien Giang with representatives and officials from the DoCST and the DARD from 13 provinces in the MDR.	

**Partnerships and Outreach**

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