

Problem and potential analysis (related to the module)

Initial situation in the area of intervention: Vietnam's national climate change strategy (2022) envisages the net-zero emissions target by 2050. Improved management and effective protection of forests should reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from forestry and agriculture by 70 % and expand GHG sinks. Forests and forest ecosystems are to store 185 megatons of CO₂ equivalents. This represents a massive increase compared to the currently estimated 12.24 megatonnes of CO₂ equivalents stored in forests. The national action plan for the Glasgow Declaration on Forest and Land Use sets out the most important measures to achieve this. The national forest development strategy 2021-2030 also aims to a. focuses on the protection and restoration of species-rich natural forests as well as effective protected area management.

Vietnam is one of the 20 regions with the highest biodiversity in the world. Nationwide, 172 protected areas of different categories have been designated (7.5 % of the country's area). However, Vietnam's resource-intensive development model exerts steadily increasing pressure on ecosystems, including forests. A large part of the natural forests is degraded. Only up to 5 % of the natural forest areas still have a high ecological integrity.

Many people in rural areas, especially members of ethnic minorities, depend on the natural resources found in forests to secure their livelihoods. However, protected areas in Vietnam were sometimes designated without the involvement of the local population. For this reason, village communities continue to participate in the unregulated collection of forest products or other forms of unsustainable use in the protected areas, e.g. poaching or agricultural activities. In addition, overlay of use by industrial or tourist development endangers both the rights of use of the residents and the integrity of protected areas.

Responsibility for the regulatory framework as well as the strengthening of competencies and capacities for the management of most protected areas lies within different departments of MAE, previously MARD, which is responsible for forest and marine ecosystems. The former MONRE, on the other hand, is responsible for protected areas with a high proportion of wetlands and biodiversity in general. Interrelationships between different ecosystems are insufficiently taken into account. The Forestry Act (2017), the Biodiversity Act (2008) and the Environmental Protection Act (2020) form the legal framework with partly overlapping or contradictory regulations. This makes management more difficult, in particular, where different ecosystems have to be managed collectively, such as protected areas with parts of forest, large bodies of water, seasonal wetlands, open grasslands or rocky areas.

Protected area administrations are not sufficiently equipped financially and in terms of personnel to effectively manage the protected areas. Through an existing payment mechanism for forest environmental services (PFES), payments for forest area control are made to communities and households participating in these activities. However, PFES cannot be used for regular management tasks. The protected area administrations are required to raise their own funds, but this often lacks the appropriate knowledge. They are hardly aware of options in the carbon market or for negotiating payments from the private

sector within the framework of *Corporate Social Responsibility* (CSR). There is also a lack of specific standards for environmental impact assessments for tourism in and around protected areas, as well as regulations on how more income from tourism can be collected by the protected area administrations. Tourism development plans are often developed by other local authorities and are mainly geared towards the interests of external investors. They hardly take into account the interests of the local population or the goals of habitat and species conservation.

At the same time, there is a lack of (digital) data on the state of ecosystems with regard to carbon sequestration, biodiversity or degradation. The lack of data basis and the lack of exchange of digital data between national and provincial level also make it difficult to report on national and international commitments (e.g. NBSAP and national climate contributions, national reports to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change).

Existing concepts of MAE for ecosystem restoration aim v. a. focus on afforestation without taking into account the diversity of ecosystems and the necessary restoration measures, including the suppression of invasive species. At the same time, social components are neglected. Ecosystems in protected areas are often degraded because they are not sustainable and e.g. T. can be used illegally. However, there are hardly any dialogues with the local population to resolve conflicts of use in the sense of a *Just Transition*.

Vietnam has made significant progress in promoting gender equality in recent decades, including improvements to the legal framework. However, women still face numerous challenges caused by a lack of political, social and economic participation and discrimination. Women, especially members of ethnic minorities, have limited access to and control over resources and are underrepresented in the management of protected areas and in participation in the use of resources. Women have poorer access to information, resources, credit, markets, vocational training and counselling services (International Labour Organisation, 2019).

Derivation of the module goal: The interrelationships of ecosystems and a critical reflection of continued use by residents are not sufficiently taken into account in the planning and management of protected areas. Participatory approaches are insufficiently implemented, if at all. Approaches to ecosystem restoration are insufficiently tested and digital tools for sustainable management are insufficiently used. Sustainable financing is not guaranteed. This means that there is no integrated approach to the management of protected areas in Vietnam. The insufficient institutional, regulatory and technical capacities for the integrated management of protected areas lead to a progressive degradation of the ecosystems in the protected areas and thus endanger their functions for climate and nature conservation (core problem). The aim of the module is therefore to improve the regulatory, institutional and technical capacities of the responsible authorities and the local population for the implementation of integrated management of protected areas. In this way, the module also contributes to strengthening the Vietnamese forest areas in their climate protection function (development cooperation programme goal).

Causes and assessment of changeability: Existing regulations hardly take into account an integrated approach to the management of protected areas. This can be partially changed by consulting on appropriate policy instruments by the project. The technical capacities for the integrated management of protected areas are insufficient. This can be changed by the project through the implementation of training courses in selected areas and the establishment of standardised, digital training modules at national level. There are no suitable instruments available for the financing of protected areas. This can be partially changed by testing a model for mobilising financial resources from the project. Another challenge is the lack of methods for the development of scenarios for the socially responsible restoration of degraded ecosystems. This can be changed by the project in selected areas.

Results achieved so far: The results of the TC module "Protection and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of Forests in Vietnam" (PN 2015.2053.5), which was completed in 2021, and a subsequent individual measure from the Study and Skilled Workers Fund (PN 2011.3520.1-028) have sensitized MAE (previously MARD and MONRE) to the topic of integrated protected area management. MAE has incorporated results developed in completed FC and TC modules into national regulatory frameworks and strategies. Training materials on various topics of forest protection and sustainable forest management are available for scaling. In addition, the TC project has specifically *standardised and institutionalised the internationally applied* Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) for Vietnam. This allows data from protected areas to be aggregated and compared for the first time. In addition, a method for assessing the financial situation of protected areas (*Protected Area Financing Self-Assessment Tool*, PAFSAT) has been developed, which can be used as a basis for financing strategies. The methodology for the analysis of governance and equity in protected areas (*Site-level assessment of governance and equity*, SAGE) was piloted in Vietnam and is available for use in Vietnamese translation. The internationally recognized method for assessing the management effectiveness of protected areas was introduced by the FZ (*Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool*, METT), but is not yet used as standard.

Objectives, impact hypotheses, indicators and partners of the module

Objectives, target group, impact hypotheses and indicators

Module objective: The regulatory, institutional and technical capacities for the implementation of integrated management of protected areas have been improved among the responsible authorities and the local population.

Indicators:

1. Two policy instruments for the integrated management of protected areas have been adopted by the responsible authorities.

Baseline: 0 Policy instruments (existing policy instruments do not target integrated management of protected areas in a differentiated way)

Target: 2 policy instruments adopted (1 by 12/2026, 1 by 12/2027).

2. The implementation of 2 participatory plans for the restoration of ecosystems taking into account carbon sequestration is initiated by the protected area authorities.

Baseline: 0 plans in implementation (so far there are no plans to restore ecosystems in protected areas)

Target value: 2 plans in implementation (12/2027)

3. The number of representatives of the local population involved in gender-responsive, community-based, sustainable tourism offers in the selected protected areas has increased by 20%, half of whom are women.

Base value: x representatives, of which y women

Target value: x + 20 % representatives, of which 50 % women (06/2028)

The target values of module target indicators 1 and 3 are provisional. They will be reviewed in the first year of implementation and adjusted if necessary as part of the reporting. No national SDG indicator was used because they are too highly aggregated. For more details, see the graphical representation of the impact logic and the impact matrix in the appendix.

Target groups: The target group is the local population of three protected areas that comprise different ecosystems. A special focus is on strengthening the position of women in and around these protected areas. The target group also includes selected companies from the private sector (e.g. tourism service providers) that benefit from the protected areas. The project is facilitated by experts and managers from the protected area administrations as well as the specialist departments of MAE.

Result hypotheses:

Output 1 aims to improve the institutional and regulatory conditions for the integrated management of protected areas among the responsible authorities at national level. The effect hypothesis is that needs analyses carried out in multi-stakeholder processes increase the willingness of the authorities to align policy instruments towards integrated protected area management. In addition, evidence from the implementation of integrated management in selected protected areas can be directly incorporated into the multi-stakeholder processes by the stakeholders. The use of institutionalised standardised training modules strengthens the competences of the national authorities. The multi-stakeholder and multi-level approach to the adaptation of policy instruments has already been successfully implemented in the completed and ongoing TC modules (see e.g. B. Project progress reports of the projects "Protection and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services of forests in Vietnam" (PN 2015.2053.5), "Support for the implementation of the FLEGT VPA in Vietnam" (PN 2019.2249.1) and "Scaling sustainable forest management and certification in Vietnam" (PN 2019.2276.4).

Output 2 aims to improve the financial situation of selected protected areas. The impact hypothesis is that advice on sustainable financial strategies, financing instruments and efficient and effective use of funds shows the responsible institutions the potential for financing. This enables them to create framework conditions for implementation in their area of responsibility or to comment on relevant proposals for policy instruments of other

authorities in a targeted manner. The approach is in line with the learning lessons learned from the completed TC module and the *Biodiversity Finance Initiative* (BIOFIN) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with regard to diversification of the financing base, more efficient use of funds, involvement of the financial and tourism sectors and attracting private capital for the financing of protected areas.

Output 3 aims at the participatory development of ecosystem restoration plans in selected protected areas. It is assumed that the authorities are open to a participatory approach to protected area management. In this way, the agreements negotiated in dialogue with the population on the phase-out of non-sustainable use can be included in plans and their implementation can be initiated. The effect hypothesis is that this contributes to the restoration of degraded ecosystems in the long term. Furthermore, the methodology developed to assess the impact of carbon sequestration restoration measures is expected to be used to mobilise finance. A study in *Restoration Ecology* (2021) shows the different perspectives of local communities and authorities in ecosystem restoration and demonstrates the relevance of a participatory approach.

Output 4 aims to improve the technical and conceptual capacities of the administration and residents of protected areas for the planning and implementation of community-based sustainable tourism. It is assumed that the protected area administrations can initiate better coordination with the various actors and integrate tourism into their own planning documents. The effect hypothesis is that training of authorities and community-based initiatives on sustainable tourism increases the quality of tourism offers and that women in particular benefit from it. It is assumed that income from tourism is an alternative source for the local population and supports the phase-out of unsustainable use of protected areas. The potential to successfully integrate local communities into tourism models is e.g. B. by a study by Strydom et al (2018). At the same time, the need to involve the population in decision-making processes on the planning and management of tourism in their community at an early stage and in an informed manner is emphasised.

The BMZ's strategic guidelines were taken into account.

Partner structure

The lead executing agency is the *Ministry of Agriculture and the Environment* (MAE).

In the MAE, the Department of *Forestry* (VNFOREST) is the **implementation partner**. The VNFOREST is responsible for shaping the regulatory and administrative framework for forests. It currently employs 54 people at the central level in Hanoi. There is a need to strengthen capacities for policy-making, for integrated protected area management, for the design of a multifunctional approach to the use of forests, for the monitoring of carbon storage in forests, biodiversity and habitats, and for methods for the restoration of ecosystems.

In MAE, the *Forest Protection Department* (FPD) is another implementation partner. FPD is responsible for monitoring the use of forests and the resulting value chains. It maintains a system of forest rangers for this purpose. Due to an internal restructuring in the ministry,

departments of VNFOREST and FPD have only existed in their current form for a short time. The detailed clarification of roles and responsibilities is still being worked on.

At the local level, the respective protected area administration is responsible for planning and implementing the management of the protected area. As at the national level, there is a need to strengthen technical skills. In addition, competencies for financial management, for the implementation of various instruments (METT, SAGE, PAFSAT, etc.) and for participatory cooperation with residents to reach agreements must be strengthened.

Other implementation partners: Another implementation partner is the *Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment* (MONRE). MONRE is responsible for the framework and fulfilment of international reporting obligations in the climate and environmental sector. The responsible departments in MONRE are the *Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Agency* (NBCA) and the *Department of Climate Change* (DCC). There is a need to strengthen competences for the application of existing guidelines and for improved interministerial cooperation.

For the three protected areas in which the integrated management approach is to be supported, cooperation with the respective provincial government (*Provincial People's Committee*, PPC) as well as with the respective provincial authorities for agriculture and environment (DAE). There is a need for coordination between the various local structures and the targeted use of digital instruments for data collection, analysis and exchange.

In addition, cooperation with companies within the framework of *Corporate Social Responsibility* (CSR) approaches is sought to promote financing options for protected areas. The *Vietnam Forest Protection and Development Fund* (VNFF) has been responsible for the implementation of PFES under MAE (previously MARD) since 2008 and is thus another implementation partner.

Design of the module

Methodological approach and duration

Duration: From 01/2025 to 06/2028 (3 years, 6 months)

Strategy: The project builds on the experience and results of the TC project "Protection and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of Forests in Vietnam" (PN 2015.2053.5) and an individual measure from 2023 of the Study and Skilled Workers Fund (PN 2011.3520.1-028). It pursues a multi-level approach. At the local level, approaches for effective protected area management, sustainable finance models, ecosystem restoration approaches and community-based tourism are being developed and piloted in three protected areas. At the provincial level, coordination mechanisms for monitoring are being improved with the environmental and agricultural authorities. The lessons learned will be incorporated into the adaptation of policy instruments at the national level. At the national level, sector policy advice is provided as well as the standardisation of approaches, e.g. in handouts or training modules.

The *Capacity Development* (CD) strategy is based on three levels. At the societal level, the project uses awareness-raising measures to promote an improved understanding of the

climate protection function of forests and the interactions of ecosystems that require integrated management. Gender justice is supported by strengthening participatory processes (quality feature human rights, gender equality and inclusion). At the organizational level, the module promotes cooperation between actors on the basis of needs analyses that are created in multi-stakeholder processes. This includes capacities at the local level to tap potential from the carbon market as well as from community-based sustainable tourism. Models and methods for integrated management and digital solutions (e.g. for protected area monitoring) are provided (quality feature digitalisation). At the individual level, the capacities of decision-makers, other knowledge holders from national and local authorities and the population adjacent to protected areas are being expanded to implement integrated protected area management, methods for quantifying carbon storage, digital tools for monitoring, mapping, financial management and community-based sustainable tourism. Institutionalized training modules and target group-specific training courses are used for this purpose.

In **Output 1**, the MEPA project advises on the moderation of multi-stakeholder processes in which representatives of provincial governments, protected area administrations and civil organisations analyse the legal framework. Stakeholders are advised on the development of proposals for the adaptation of policy instruments, taking into account international learning experiences and the approaches developed from outputs 2, 3 and 4. This can be e.g. include the assessment of carbon sequestration in protected areas, community-based tourism and related environmental and social impact assessments, financing instruments or participatory management of protected areas. Attention is paid to the mainstreaming of digital applications and analysis of how digital data exchange between competent authorities can succeed. The authorities are advised on how to design the analysis processes in such a way that they enable equal participation of women. Training modules are institutionalised or anchored via digital platforms, e.g. B. Atingi.

In **Output 2**, three protected area administrations are guided at the local level in the self-assessment of financing needs using the PAFSAT method and the development of financing plans. In addition, the administrations are advised on the identification of sources of financing, with a focus on voluntary commitments by local companies to social responsibility (CSR) and on the expansion of payments for ecosystem services. Where possible, conditions for implementation are negotiated with potential financing partners on a model basis. The models will be presented to the relevant authorities at provincial and national level to drive the adaptation of the regulatory framework (see Output 1). At the same time, it strengthens the capacity of local communities and protected area administrations to make efficient use of existing budgets, mobilise government funds and improve their understanding of the carbon market mechanism. This is supported by the digital preparation of financial information.

In **Output 3**, the project focuses on strengthening the capacities of protected area administrations in order to conduct consultation processes with the population. Here, SAGE and collaborative mapping methods can be applied. This is supported by digital solutions, such as digital mapping. The actors are advised on the analysis of social *safeguards*,

including gender, in order to develop socially acceptable solutions for the phase-out of unsustainable resource use. At the same time, the administrations are advised on methods with which the damage of degraded ecosystems and the expected costs of restoration measures can be assessed. In doing so, v. a. addressed the quantification of carbon stored as an option for mobilising finance (see Output 2) and as a method for substantiating regular sector reporting on carbon sequestration (see Output 1). Training on the implementation of integrated management, in particular on ecosystem monitoring via participatory patrols and digital technologies such as SMART, complements the approach.

Output 4 aims to improve the competence and networking of state, civil and private actors so that they can make better use of the potential of sustainable tourism through strategic partnerships. The protected area administrations are advised on the development of market analyses for tourism products and on the development of sustainable tourism plans. Another focus is the introduction of a method for assessing the social and environmental compatibility of tourist use and the development of appropriate professional skills. This is to ensure adequate management of tourism so that the environmental and social impacts remain acceptable. The information for the audits is to be digitally merged in order to be available for monitoring the planned tourism activities and the effects.