



Bon bo trees help reduce poverty, improve the livelihoods of ethnic minority groups and protect forest areas in Vietnam

The preservation, replanting, management and development of bon bo trees to reduce poverty and improve livelihoods of ethnic minority groups is one of the most successful forest business models developed under the USAID's Vietnam Forests and Deltas (VFD) project. The model has been implemented in Que Phong, Ky Son, and Tuong Duong districts in Nghe An province, and to date has substantially benefited local livelihoods as well as improving forest protection.

Introduction:

For many years, Nam Giai village in Nghe An province's Que Phong district, has been known for the large number of bon bo trees (*Alpinia bracteata* Roxb.) that grow naturally in the forest. In Nghe An, this type of tree is widely seen in mountainous areas, especially degraded secondary forests and forest corridors. A medicinal plant, bon bo seeds provide many benefits including relief for rheumatoid arthritis, back pain, chest pain, and stomach pain. In recent years, many locals used to harvest seeds too early and without considering their quality, which led to them receiving a low price at the local market. In addition, they paid little attention to replanting the trees after harvesting, which impacted their long-term income and reduced forest tree cover. Thus, educating and providing the locals with bon bo planting skills, and raising their awareness of forest protection has become more crucial than ever.

Project implementation:

After approximately three years of implementation, the bon bo tree planting model has brought some significant changes to the district including improving

local livelihoods, enhancing forest protection, improving forest management practices, and especially enabling locals to bring home additional income with little investment of time or money. Specifically, the project has provided support in:

- Bon bo guidebook: developing detailed instruction and guidance for local authorities' staff and communities.
- Training of Trainers (TOT): providing training courses for agriculture and forestry extension workers in terms of bon bo harvesting and management.
- On-job training courses: providing training courses for 1,200 households in the targeted areas to improve their harvesting and management skills.
- Supervision and management: evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the bon bo tree planting model after the farmers participate in the training courses.

Over the three years of the model, VFD provided 21 training courses on bon bo tree harvesting and management, with 286 households participating in 2016 and 963 households in 2017. With the project's support, these courses have been successfully held in 30 villages and 7 project targeted communes including Nam Giai, Chau Kim, Tien Phong, Tay Son, Huoi Tu, Muong Long, Yen Na, in Que Phong, Ky Son, and Tuong Duong districts. In addition, the project also focuses on TOT training courses to build capacity for local authorities' staff, project consultants, and the local management team in Nghe An province so that they can expand the models to other districts. With a good tree protection and preservation plan, it is estimated that each household will get at least VND 15-20 million/ha (US \$660-880) on average after each bon bo harvesting season.

Beneficiary story: A smallholder farmer gets higher income for their family through bon bo tree planting model

Mr. Lo Van Tinh and his wife, Ms. Lo Thi Thuong, a typical Thai ethnic minority household, applied the bon bo tree planting model in their village for more than two years. Like many of their neighbors, the family relies on land cultivation and cattle farming to earn a living. They previously harvested a lot of natural bon bo fruits in the forest to sell at the local market to supplement their income. Since project implementation began in their village, Mr. Tinh was an active participant in all training courses and meetings to learn about planting and management techniques. *"Before the project, there were a lot of natural bon bo trees around our house, but we did not harvest at the right moment. Sometimes the fruits were not good enough to sell for a high price. However, after participating in some project training courses, I learned about harvesting at the right moment to get a high yield of good quality products, preservation techniques and post-harvest management as well. I used to sell bon bo fruit at approximately VND 250,000 (USD \$11) for 10 kilograms, but now I am able to earn 50 to 100% more for the same amount",* Mr. Tinh shared happily.

After a few years of implementation, the VFD project has successfully raised people's awareness and improved their knowledge, skills on the preservation, replanting, management and development of bon bo trees. *"Although the project is coming to the final stage, I believe that we are still able to take care of the trees with all the knowledge and skills learnt from the training courses. I wish that we could have further training courses in the future for those who couldn't make time to join",* Mr. Tinh added.

The way forward:

By the end of the project, among the 1,249 households that had participated in the training courses in 30 villages, 960 households had applied the tree planting, management, protection and restoration techniques learnt from the training courses, which accounts for almost 80% of the total participation. With the right tools, effective techniques and good weather, the total productivity of bon bo trees in 2017 is estimated to be 20% higher than in 2016. VFD's TOT trainings have built up a group of trainers who have knowledge and capacity to organize trainings of bon bo tree planting model to other districts. With the model's economic and environmental benefits to local communities, bon bo tree planting model is a suitable livelihoods model for scaling up in mountains areas. It not only helps improve local people's lives but also encourages people to protect the forest, enhance climate smart practices, and ensure greater biodiversity.

