

Hulza and MCNV create new livelihood opportunities for upland communities in Quang Tri, Vietnam

The upland villages of Quang Tri province, Vietnam, are located along the mountainous border line with Laos and in the buffer zones of natural forests of the Central Annamite Range, one of the largest contiguous natural forest areas in continental Southeast Asia. Occupying these places are mostly Bru Van Kieu ethnic minority people. Here the poverty rates are very high, up to nearly 70% in some villages.

The indigenous people mainly live on annual cash crops of cassava and rice, but they always face risks of crop and income losses due to unstable market price fluctuations and negative impacts of climate change such as floods and landslides. These communities are assigned by the government to protect natural forests near their villages, but get paid very little due to the lack of financial resources. The management and protection of natural forests should be closely linked with the community livelihood development by diversifying their sources of income.



Bru Van Kieu women

With funding from Hulza, since 2021 MCNV has supported two communities of Chenh Venh and Trang Ta Puong villages to develop ecotourism services and bamboo production activities, aiming at generating alternative incomes for local people whilst improving their capacity in forest management and protection. The ecotourism services include sight-seeing, homestay and camping, traditional music, local food, and forest trekking; whereas, bamboo products such as bamboo straws, tubes, cups, candle holders and toothpick holders are handcrafted by the production groups. In addition, the villagers also collect other non-timber forest products (NTFPs) such as black locust seeds and soapberries to supply for an enterprise that produces hair care and floor cleaning products, thus generating seasonal jobs and extra income for their families.



Bamboo and black locust in the natural forest



Bamboo tubes and black locust seeds

The ecotourism service and bamboo production activities in the two villages have drawn much attention from the local government, enterprises and the publics, especially since the natural forests managed by these communities were certified with FSC® FM/CoC for non-timber forest products and FSC-ES for ecosystem services on carbon sequestration and storage, respectively in 2021 and 2022. These so far have become the first community-managed natural forests certified with FSC in Vietnam. There has been an increase in the number of visitors coming to the two villages, as well as an increase in income from ecotourism services. To take example, just within 3 or 4 days of a national holiday by the end of April 2023, about 4,000 visitors came to visit and enjoy the ecotourism services in the two villages, creating a revenue of more than EUR 5,000 for the local people.



Ta Puong Waterfall

In 2023, with funding from Hulza, MCNV continues supporting the two villages to improve the quality of ecotourism services and strengthen the production and market linkages of bamboo products. More specifically, the villagers in Chenh Venh have been enabled to upgrade a kitchen to serve food for visitors and upgrade the floor of the bamboo production group to make the place safer and cleaner for the handicraft work. At Trang Ta Puong waterfall site, a toilet will be built soon. In addition, besides helping the communities maintain the supply of NTFPs (black locust seeds and bamboo products) for an enterprise, we are connecting the bamboo production groups with a bamboo product designer and developer in Hoi An to create linkages to new markets for these products.



Material support to make the concrete floor and upgrade the kitchen



Concrete floor for bamboo production



The cooking space is roofed and floored

The support from Hulza and MCNV, plus the FSC certification, has opened up new opportunities for these communities in terms of livelihood development associated with sustainable forest management. To demonstrate, two enterprises in Europe are negotiating to pay for FSC ecosystem services on carbon sequestration for these upland communities; one group of households in Chenh Venh village is producing the first three tons of bamboo biochar for a German water treatment company based in the south of Vietnam who is in need of FSC-certified bamboo materials; a Vietnamese individual donor is willing to donate EUR 2,000 to further improve the tourism service conditions in Chenh Venh village; WWF-Vietnam is interested in maintaining and scaling up the model of ecotourism and NTFP production associated with nature conservation; and the local government's supporting policies.



A Vietnamese donor will help to upgrade this part of the kitchen



Smile of a bamboo production group member in Chenh Venh