

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (ASA-10)

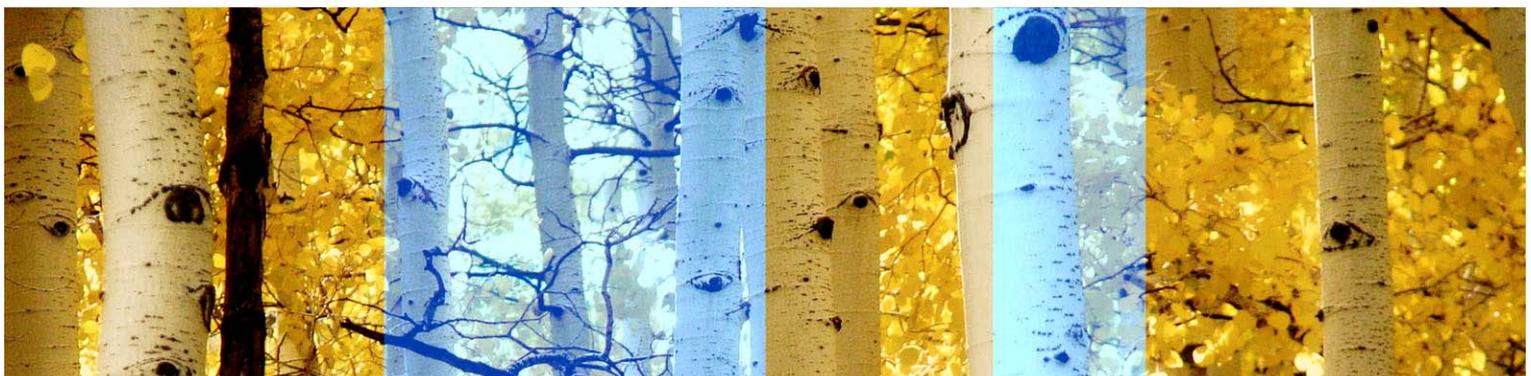
**Joint Final Evaluation of Two Forestry Projects in Vietnam
Development of Management Information System for the Forestry
Sector (FORMIS – Phase II) and People Participation in
Improvement of Forest Governance and Poverty Alleviation in
Vietnam (PFG)**

Final Report

Indufor Oy and Particip GmbH

Helsinki, Finland
March 4, 2019

8390
ID 129088





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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AAI	Action Aid International
AAV	ActionAid Vietnam
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BIFA	Binh Duong Forestry Association
CBFM	community-based forest management
CCG	Core Community Group
CFM	community forest management
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research
CIS	Center for Information and Statistics, MARD
CSO	civil society organisations
CTA	Chief Technical Adviser
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development [at provincial level]
DID	Data and Information Division, VNFOREST
EFI	European Forestry Institute
ELBAG	Economic Literacy and Budget Accountability for Governance
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCPF	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility
FDI	foreign direct investment
FIMS	forest industry monitoring system
FIPI	Forest Inventory and Planning Institute
FLEGT	Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade
FOMIS	Forest Sector Monitoring Information System
FORMIS	Forest Sector Management Information System
FORMIS I	FORMIS Project, Phase I (2009-2013)
FORMIS II	FORMIS Project, Phase II (2013-2018)
FPA	Forest Products Association
FPD	Forest Protection Department, MARD (<i>part of VNFOREST since 2010</i>)
FRMS	Forest Resource Monitoring System
FSSP	Forest Sector Support Partnership
FSSP CO	Forest Sector Support Partnership Coordination Office
GA	Green Annamites (Project)
GDP	gross domestic product
GIS	geographic information system
GOF	Government of Finland
GOV	Government of Vietnam
GSO	General Statistics Office
HAWA	Handicraft and Wood Industry Association
HRBA	human rights based approach
ICD	International Cooperation Department, MARD
ICI	Institutional Cooperation Instrument
ICT/IT	information and communication technology/information technology
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LTR	long term release (of computer software program)
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Vietnam)
MEL	monitoring, evaluation, and learning (framework)
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Finland)
MIS	management information system
MOIT	Ministry of Industry and Trade (Vietnam)
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (Vietnam)

MOU	memorandum of understanding
MRV	monitoring, reporting and verification
MTE	mid-term evaluation
NFIS	National Forest Inventory System
NGO	non-governmental organisation
ODA	official development aid
PFES	payments for forest environmental services
PFG	People Participation in Improvement of Forest Governance and Poverty Alleviation in Vietnam Project
PPP	person per day
RECOFTC	The Center for People and Forests
REDD+	reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation - plus (and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries)
REL	reference emission levels
SEDP	Social Economic Development Plan
SIS	Safeguards Information System
SMS	short message service
SNRM	Sustainable Natural Resources Management (JICA) Project
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
SPD	Support Programme Development (local NGO working in field with AAV)
SQL	standar query language
TA	technical assistance
TFF	Trust Fund for Forests
TOR	terms of reference
TOT	training of trainers
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UN-REDD	United Nations REDD Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
VFC	Vietnam Forests and Delta Project
VFDS	Viet Nam Forestry Development Strategy 2006-2020
VIFORES	Vietnam Timber and Forest Product Association
VND	Vietnamese dong
VNFF	Vietnam National Forests Fund
VNFOREST	Vietnam Forest Administration, MARD (<i>established 25 January 2010</i>)
VNTLAS	Viet Nam Timber Legality Assurance System
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreement
WWF	WorldWide Fund for Nature

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of a final joint evaluation of two forestry projects in Vietnam that have been supported by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Finland. The evaluation was conducted from October 2018 through December 2018.

The first project is the second phase of the Development of the Management Information System for the Forestry Sector (FORMIS – Phase II) project, which has operated from May 2013 through December 2018. The second project is People Participation in Improvement of Forest Governance and Poverty Alleviation in Vietnam (or Participatory Forest Governance, PFG, in brief), which operated from November 2014 through October 2018.

The FORMIS II project supported the Government of Vietnam (GOV)'s Forestry Administration (VNFOREST) in designing a modern forest management information system and putting this system into use nationwide. The first phase project (2010-2012) had done initial development on the information technology platform and applications and piloted their use in three provinces. The second phase project did considerable further development and refinement, and trained government staff at central level, in 60 forest provinces, and 547 districts to use the platform and key applications, especially the Forest Resource Management System (FRMS) and associated tools and databases. A national baseline was established, through standardization of data from the National Forest Inventory System (NFIS), which is updated on an annual basis by the forest rangers at the district level. Altogether, work was done on eight different applications, of which seven were successful.

The work has been a major achievement, which is well appreciated by the GOV and other development partners in the sector. The data is officially recognized by the Government, and the use of the FORMIS system is mandated by Government decisions and the 2017 Forestry Law¹, which goes into effect on 1 January 2019. Moreover, VNFOREST announced a decision on 30 October 2018 to make the data publicly available to anyone in the world, to meet a range of different stakeholder needs. This “opening of the data” has been a big step forward in improving transparency and accountability and providing opportunities to multiply the usefulness of the raw data in the future.

The FORMIS platform has not only improved the efficiency of management of the forest sector and the annual forest cover reporting, but has created opportunities for partners working on a range of different issues – such as the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA), certification of sustainable forest management, Payments for Forest Environmental Services (PFES), and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) – to use the data and add to the applications.

The PFG project has been implemented by an international non-governmental organization, ActionAid Vietnam (AAV), and its field organization Support Programme Development (SPD), working in four districts in four different provinces. It was designed to complement the FORMIS II project, and to make extend the use of the FORMIS platform and data to the grassroots level. Seventeen Core Community Groups (CCGs), each with ten members, were established, and provided with training on a range of topics – use of computers, smart phones, and the internet, participatory planning and development, and human rights-based approaches. Over half of the CCG members were women. The project also worked with two forestry co-operatives and helped them establish linkages to wood processing associations.

The PFG project has been a successful pilot, demonstrating that villagers can be trained to access information on the internet to improve their community-based forest management (CBFM) and forestry-related livelihood models. The project worked with two different models – tree plantations, in some cases intermixed with shorter-rotation agricultural crops, such as

¹ The 2017 Forestry Law was approved by the National Assembly on 15 November 2017. It replaces the 2004 Law on Forest Protection and Development.

pineapples or ginger, and semi-ecological approaches to shrimp cultivation, encouraging planting of mangroves in shrimp ponds. The project developed a smart phone application, which provided villagers with information from FRMS, and access to market prices for forestry, agricultural, and aquacultural products, and related news.

Both projects have contributed to increasing transparency and accountability regarding the forest sector and encouraging greater stakeholder participation in the sector. They both have contributed to policy dialogue on key issues, including the 2017 revision of the Forest Law, the opening of sector data to the public, institutionalizing the use of the new FORMIS platform, and promoting public participation in forestry planning and decision-making.

The five-member Final Evaluation Team prepared an inception report, based on a review of key documentation, in October. It then conducted a field mission between 31 October and 16 November. This mission included travel to four different provinces – Dak Lak, Binh Duong, Tra Vinh, and Thanh Hoa. Meetings with stakeholders were also held in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Stakeholders met included government staff at the central, regional, provincial, and district levels, academic staff at three universities, researchers, representatives of private sector wood processing associations, non-governmental organization staff members, and community members – including CCG representatives, forestry cooperative members, and other villagers. A self-assessment impact workshop was held in Hanoi. The Team also held discussions with MFA, the Embassy, other key projects and programs in the forest sector, and key project consultants and staff.

The final evaluation’s overall purpose is to provide lessons learnt and recommendations for:

1. Ensuring the sustainability of the results of the two projects and the future development of the sector (primarily MARD and ActionAid). The experience and lessons learned which can be mainstreamed to government policies and practices shall be highlighted.
2. Planning and implementing of similar future forestry sector programmes (for MFA and ActionAid in other countries and for MARD and ActionAid with other partners in Vietnam, for other donors in Vietnam and in other countries)
3. The implementation of Finland’s transition strategy for Vietnam 2016–2020 and planning and implementation the future transition phases of Finnish development cooperation with other partner countries.”

The analysis of the findings was organized in accordance with the Team’s Terms of Reference, following the overall purpose of the evaluation and 15 key evaluation questions. The topics for the evaluation followed basic evaluation criteria looking at the relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, aid effectiveness, coherence, and added value. The key findings, conclusions, and recommendations are provided in the following matrix (Table 1). This report also summarizes the conclusions to the key evaluation questions by using a “traffic light” system of rating the performance on the evaluation criteria.

Overall, the two projects were relevant to key stakeholders, the government, and poor community members, as well as a range of other stakeholders in the sector. The poorest households, however, were not able to participate in the PFG livelihood models.

The FORMIS II project has had a major impact on improving the availability of standardized, nationwide data, and establishing an information platform and key applications for the sector. Comprehensive training of trainers and staff has been conducted, and substantial capacity built. This work has transformed the collection, reporting, and use of data in the sector. MARD has recognized the importance of the project’s contributions through a gold medal award.

Overall, the PFG project has had good impacts on the participants, especially women, in increasing their access to information on the internet, through 19 information kiosks and 182 smart phones, and training in computer and internet use. Other important skills development has occurred, particularly related to human-rights based approaches to participatory planning

and development, and training in value-chain analysis for livelihood models. The project has contributed to improved CBFM and conservation, and establishment of tree plantations.

In terms of effectiveness, the FORMIS II project achieved most of its objectives in five result areas and the PFG project in three result areas. Future efforts are needed to strengthen the government management of the system, especially in the forest administration's Data and Information Division (DID), outreach to other stakeholders to increase data sharing, and work to reach the poorest households. Based on the information available, the two projects seem to have been efficiently managed.

The results of the projects should be sustainable, because they meet real needs of the stakeholders and stakeholder capacity to continue the activities has been built. The forest administration has found the FORMIS platform and its application very useful for improving management of the forest sector and increasing the involvement of non-public stakeholders in sector activities. The private sector is especially keen to deploy and further develop the application for Forest Industry Monitoring System (FIMS). Other stakeholders are using, or plan to use, data for ongoing efforts to promote FLEGT, forest certification and trade, PFES, and work to mitigate climate change, through REDD+. The latter is using data in the FORMIS system for its required baseline Reference Emissions Level (REL), the Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV), and its environmental and social Safeguards Information System (SIS). Community members are using FORMIS data to verify their land ownership and calculate PFES or forest protection contract payments due to them. They are also using information accessed through the PFG smart phone application, the "PFG app," to access information and news related to their livelihoods, market price data, and contacts with potential buyers for their products. Local forest governance and transparency has been improved.

The aid effectiveness of the two projects has been high. FORMIS II occupied a central spot in the forest sector and has enabled the contributions of a wide range of development partners and stakeholders. PFG has promoted the improved collaborations between rural communities and local government officials, and shown that community members, especially women, can be credible development partners. Despite a slow start, the collaboration between the two projects has been successful and coherent. The coherence could have been further enhanced, however, had the two projects been more closely designed.

Finnish added value to the projects has been significant – especially in terms of Finnish expertise in forest informatics, and Finnish development focus on expanding civic space and promoting human rights-based approaches to participatory planning and democracy at the grassroots. The FORMIS II project has worked hard, especially over the past year, to reach out to other stakeholders who can engage with the FORMIS platform in the future, especially those in the private sector. Thus, FORMIS II has contributed to the MFA's "transition strategy" for moving beyond bilateral grant aid to trade, commercial relations, and other forms of cooperation for the future.

In conclusion, the two projects have made very important contributions to the forest sector in Vietnam. It will be vital that the FORMIS platform not only be maintained, but regularly updated and gradually improved. As the Vietnam economy continues to develop, increasing access to information and data will play key roles in further development of the forest sector and the wood processing sector. These developments will, in turn, contribute to efforts to continue Vietnam's remarkable success in reducing poverty, and moving from one of the least developed countries to a lower middle-income country. Finland's support over the last several decades has been well appreciated, and the ground work for fruitful future cooperation.

The report provides 12 key recommendations on where further improvements to both FORMIS and the ActionAid activities can be made. These recommendations are summarised in Table 1, and further discussed in Section 5 of this report.

Important lessons have been learned about the value of providing long-term support to key sector activities where Finnish expertise can make real contributions, such as in the forest

sector. It is recommended that MFA continues its efforts to promote cooperation among various elements of the Vietnamese forest sector with counterparts in Finland – including government, private sector, forest industry and other private sector, forest owners' associations, universities, research institutes, and civil society organizations.

Given the growing urgency of addressing climate change, supporting informed and sustainable forest conservation and development forestry – a major land use throughout the world – continues to be vitally important. Thus, MFA's next Development Policy Programme should build upon Finnish expertise in the forest sector in addressing top development challenges, such as climate change, food security, and poverty reduction. The importance of robust national forest management of information systems in supporting such work needs to be better appreciated. Given the considerable investment into the FORMIS in Vietnam, it would be worth considering whether such work could be used to develop a generic model that could be useful – or adapted to be useful -- in other countries.

An important lesson, once again confirmed here, is that long-term support is needed to achieve significant and sustainable results in forestry and natural resource management initiatives. Although long-term support is vital, another lesson learned is the need to explicitly consider trade-offs between engagement of technical advisors to the very end of the project, versus a more gradual phase-out and handing over of responsibilities. More careful analysis of possibilities for collaboration between major government programmes and CSO projects would be useful, and where possible, more explicit joint design of such initiatives. Further consideration would be needed to agree upon funding modalities, i.e., whether different funding sources could be merged, or would better be handled as parallel financing.

For transitioning to new modalities of cooperation in other countries, MFA is encouraged to learn from the experience in Vietnam, and to allow greater time for such transition. It would be best if such transition strategies can be developed prior to formulation of the final projects or programmes (or phases thereof), so that the projects and programmes can be explicitly designed to contribute to this transition. Thus, transition strategies may need to be planned for at least ten years in advance of completion of direct bilateral grant assistance. Moreover, it is vital to promote not only future private sector, but also enhanced civic society, engagement in future cooperation.

Table 1 Summary matrix of key recommendations

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
<p>The building of the FORMIS system is a considerable achievement, especially the efforts to train government staff in 547 districts and 60 forest provinces in its use. Through PFG, 19 information kiosks have been established, and members of 17 Core Community Groups and two cooperatives trained in the use of FORMIS. Many other stakeholders – other projects, private sector, and academia – are beginning to use the system.</p>	<p>The FORMIS system as well as the FORMIS II and PFG projects, have been highly relevant to the target participants and beneficiaries, as well as other key stakeholders in the forest sector. A key factor in its relevance is having not only national—but regularly updated - data. The recent “opening” of the data to the public will make the system even more accessible.</p>	<p>1. Adequate political support and funding for the maintenance, annual updating, and training for the FORMIS system is needed to keep the platform relevant and useful for the forest sector.</p>
<p>VNFOREST now has responsibility for the entire FORMIS platform, databases, and applications. GOV has responsibility to manage certain databases and applications, such as FRMS, but not others. The existing system requires substantial efforts, human and financial resources to maintain.</p>	<p>Some other stakeholders may be better able to manage and further develop certain applications. For example, forest industry could manage the Forest Information Management System (FIMS), and FORMIS eLearning courses could be further developed by academia.</p>	<p>2. VNFOREST focus on the key elements of FORMIS, which should be managed by government, and hand over management of some applications to other stakeholders in the private sector and/or civil society.</p>
<p>DID has very limited staff, yet has a complex FORMIS platform, set of databases, and applications to manage. During FORMIS II, the project TA worked to solve problems with the platform and operations as they arose and functioned as the primary “help desk” for users.</p>	<p>With the departure of the FORMIS II project TA, the work load is expected to increase. A vital role is to keep the system and its core functions operating well, with minimal downtime, which would frustrate potential users.</p>	<p>3. DID focus, first and foremost, on keeping the FORMIS system running and operational, before devoting resources to adding more functions or applications.</p>
<p>Many FORMIS users focus on the FRMS, and its utility in generating required forest cover reports more quickly. University staff have used it for training students. The platform, databases, and applications are not yet being used for research, or private sector development. Community members use FORMIS to double-check records on their forest land ownership.</p>	<p>The full usefulness of the FORMIS platform is under-valued. Many broader uses of the digitized raw data are not yet well understood.</p>	<p>4. VNFOREST consider how to best add value to the forest data through analysis, especially the spatial dimension of forest development and forest change.</p>

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
<p>Although the DID was adequately staffed by the end of FORMIS II, the staff does not have all the expertise originally planned.</p>	<p>To adequately fulfil its mandate, MARD needs to provide DID with the missing expertise, either through hiring staff with the necessary qualifications or hiring such expertise on short-term contracts.</p>	<p>5. MARD provide adequate and required skills to DID, whether through existing or newly-resourced staff, or sourced externally, and frequent training to DID staff, so that it can effectively perform its envisaged roles.</p>
<p>Development of the FORMIS system has been a major achievement. It has come during a time when such a system has the potential to catalyse and support important changes and developments in the sector. Nonetheless, Vietnam – and its forest sector – face major ongoing changes in its overall development.</p>	<p>The sustainability of FORMIS requires ongoing political leadership, or political will, as well as dedicated resources. Given the strong demand for the platform and its information, it is likely to be sustained, at least in the short- and medium-term. But longer-range developments need further consideration.</p>	<p>6. MARD and VNFOREST further analyse and address the existing threats to the sustainability of the FORMIS platform and its applications.</p>
<p>The forest plantation livelihood models show particular promise, especially with the creation of two forestry cooperatives and linkages to potential partners, i.e., wood processing associations. Some owners of shrimp ponds have found the semi-ecological model, with planting of mangroves in the ponds, to yield better shrimp and reduce investment risks. Where these models have been successful, some neighbours are beginning to copy them.</p>	<p>While both livelihood models have had positive impacts, the forest plantation model more clearly links to the forest sector objectives of increasing forest cover.</p>	<p>7. Further support be provided to the viable household and community-based forest plantations and associated cooperatives, through continued support to value-chain linkages, with markets and timber and wood processing industries and associations.</p>
<p>Two livelihood models were promoted in 10 out of 16 PFG communes – forest plantations and planting trees (mangroves) in shrimp ponds. In some cases, other agricultural crops were planted alongside the trees in the plantations. These models were only promoted among those having clearly documented land rights to these lands or shrimp ponds.</p>	<p>Better screening and selection of project districts, communes, and villages would improve targeting of support to ethnic minorities and poorer members of the rural communities.</p>	<p>8. In any future replication of the forestry-related livelihood support models, improvements in the existing approach be made.</p>

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
<p>In addition to providing access to data from FORMIS, the PFG App provides market price information, which helps community members negotiate with buyers for their wood, agricultural and aquacultural products. Interest in the App is increasing as users find more more ways to make use of it. The next version of the PFG App will be released in January.</p>	<p>The PFG smartphone application has been highly useful and appreciated. While many rural Vietnamese have already had mobile phones used for phone calls, SMS messages, and Facebook, the PFG App has introduced more powerful ways to employ technology on smartphones.</p>	<p>9. Ongoing support be given to maintaining and updating the PFG App, as an important tool for accessing information, livelihood support, and democracy and governance.</p>
<p>The PFG information kiosks, the PFG App and smartphones, and training have greatly increased the ability of rural people to access the internet and a wide range of information. The project raised awareness of the human rights-based approach to development and promoted the empowerment of women, who comprise more than half the CCG members.</p> <p>To date, VNFOREST focused its efforts primarily on training government staff, down to the district level, to use FORMIS, especially FRMS.</p>	<p>PFG has been successful in piloting an approach to extend training on use of FORMIS and its data to the grassroots. These developments are improving participatory planning, democracy, forest governance, and livelihood improvement.</p>	<p>10. Working relationships between VNFOREST and CSOs – as well as other partners -- be strengthened, such that CSOs can more easily access information, technical support, and political leadership to support their field activities with forest-dependent communities and improve forest governance.</p>
<p>Following its MTE, PFG has put increased emphasis on increasing its outreach to a more community members and stakeholders, and to communications, including several workshops, a video and book about the project.</p> <p>FORMIS II also worked with a range of stakeholders, in other projects, the private sector, and academia, in developing its applications and training programs.</p>	<p>Greater attention could be given to enhancing future information dissemination and communications, to increase awareness among the general public and a broader range of stakeholders about the FORMIS system and its potential uses.</p>	<p>11. Increasing support be given to broader information dissemination and communications regarding the availability – and value – of the digitized raw data now available on the FORMIS platform, and the myriad ways in which such data could be analysed and used by a wide range of stakeholders.</p>

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
<p>The strategies to promote transition in Finnish-Vietnamese cooperation, from “aid to trade” and other forms of “mutual benefit”, have focused on improving commercial relationships between VNFOREST and the private sector. Finding new Finnish relations with the CSOs, however, has not received much attention. Overall investment and modes of cooperation in Vietnam are shifting, as many other donors have been phasing out their ODA support.</p>	<p>These strategies were implemented primarily through existing projects, over a relatively short time frame. Although both FORMIS II and PFG aimed to collaborate with a range of stakeholders, FORMIS II has been the focus for building new cooperation relationships. Opportunities to build new forms of collaboration with PFG, or the broader CSO community, could have received more support.</p>	<p>12. Development partners and key stakeholders develop and implement more comprehensive and specific plans for further institutional, commercial, educational, and cultural cooperation to support engagement of the entire Vietnamese society in more sustainable management and development of its forest resources and forest sector.</p>

1. INTRODUCTION: TWO COMPLEMENTARY FORESTRY PROJECTS IN VIETNAM

This final evaluation has been commissioned by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA). It is a final evaluation of two complementary forestry projects in Vietnam.

The first project, the Development of Management Information Systems for the Forestry Sector Phase II (FORMIS II) project has operated from May 2013 through December 2018. This project has expanded the initial work done on forest sector monitoring indicators (FOMIS, 2003-2011) and the FORMIS Phase I project (FORMIS I, 2009-2013) to further develop management information systems (MIS) for the Government's forest administration (VNFOREST), under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), and other stakeholders in the forest sector, including private sector, other projects, and civil society. While FORMIS I piloted activities in three provinces, FORMIS II scaled the work up to nationwide coverage of all 60 forest provinces and 547 districts. It also undertook major work on redesigning and expanding the forest information technology (IT) architecture for the platform and building Vietnamese capacity to manage and use it.

After this project was underway, the MFA put out a call for proposals from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), to undertake a complementary project to work with grassroots communities using the FORMIS system. ActionAid, through its Vietnam Country office, was selected to undertake this project, "People Participation in Improvement of Forest Governance and Poverty Alleviation (PFG)", from November 2014 through October 2017. The PFG project was later granted a one-year no-cost extension, through October 2018. Project activities were conducted in selected communes in four districts, in four different provinces.

The FORMIS II project was designed while MFA's *Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Vietnam 2013-2016* was in effect. This strategy was then replaced with MFA's "transition strategy," *Cooperation between Finland and Vietnam 2016-2020*, which aims to successfully conclude Finland's bilateral grant aid development projects with Vietnam, but to continue development cooperation through mutually beneficial activities such as trade, commercial relations, and collaboration between Vietnamese and Finnish institutions (such as research institutions, universities, forest owner associations, etc.). Finland has completed most of its bilateral development projects and programs² in Vietnam by the end of 2018, except for the Institutional Cooperation Instrument (ICI) projects³. MFA that will either continue into or commence in 2019. These projects are required to link to or build upon the FORMIS and contribute to the transition.

Thus, although collaboration with the PFG project and contributions towards the transition strategy were not originally part of the design of the FORMIS II project, the project has been asked to expand its activities to contribute towards these objectives.

This joint final evaluation aims, thus, to assess the achievements, impacts, and lessons of these two projects, both individually and jointly, and contributions to the transition of cooperation between Finland and Vietnam.

² Finland directly supports some multilateral projects, such as the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO's) Forest and Farm Facility – Phase II (2018-2022), which is operating in 10 countries, including Vietnam. MFA also supports multilateral institutions, such as the European Union, the United Nations, and the multilateral development banks, i.e., the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, etc., so thus supports some development programmes in Vietnam via this modality. One such example is the EU-FLEGT program: MFA no longer provides direct support, but still provides support through the EU.

³ One is on-going, two will start in January 2019, one in January 2020, one is starting its planning phase in 2019 and two more are in the drafting phase. One project will in the forestry sector and link to FORMIS. All ICI projects are required to contribute to the transition (Venla Voutilainen, personal communication).

The overall purpose of this final joint evaluation is to provide lessons learnt and recommendations for:

1. Ensuring the sustainability of the results of the two projects and the future development of the sector (primarily MARD and ActionAid). The experience and lessons learned which can be mainstreamed to government policies and practices shall be highlighted.
2. Planning and implementing of similar future forestry sector programmes (for MFA and ActionAid in other countries and for MARD and ActionAid with other partners in Vietnam, for other donors in Vietnam and in other countries)
3. The implementation of Finland's transition strategy for Vietnam 2016–2020 and planning and implementation the future transition phases of Finnish development cooperation with other partner countries.”

The Terms of Reference for this Joint Final Evaluation are provided in Annex 1 and the Joint Final Evaluation Team Members in Annex 2.

2. METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

Overview of the Evaluation Approach

Indufor Oy and Particip were selected to undertake this joint evaluation of two forestry projects in Vietnam on the basis of a Framework Agreement with MFA. While it was originally hoped that the evaluation could start in September 2018, the contract signing, and evaluation start-up were delayed until the beginning of October 2018.

The methodology for the work has been based on the requirements of the Terms of Reference for the joint evaluation (TOR, Annex 1), and the discussions held with MFA. An initial video conference with the MFA in Helsinki and the Embassy of Finland in Hanoi was held on 3 October 2018.

The Evaluation Team then reviewed a range of background documentation on the two projects provided by the MFA and had some initial contacts with staff in the two projects and the Embassy. This material provided the basis for a draft inception report, submitted to MFA on October 19, 2018, and discussed in a second video conference with MFA and the Embassy on October 25, 2018. Subsequently, a memo outlining the agreed amendments to the draft inception report was submitted to MFA and approved.

The Evaluation Team worked in Vietnam from 31 October 2018 through 16 November 2018. The team's detailed schedule of meetings is provided in Annex 4. The team's work began and ended with meetings at the Embassy of Finland in Hanoi, with staff from the Embassy, Vietnam's Forest Administration, and the two projects. A kick-off meeting was held at the Embassy on October 31, 2018, with participation of MFA by video link. The field trip was planned to ensure that the team visited at least four different provinces, as specified in the TOR.

While together in Vietnam, the Evaluation Team did an initial analysis of the data collected, through the documentation, field visits, and meetings. Towards the end of the mission, the Team constructed – for its own use – the first rough draft of the Summary Table of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations. Preliminary findings were discussed at a debriefing meeting held at the Embassy of Finland on November 16, 2018.

The Evaluation Team then produced a draft report, which was submitted to MFA on 9 December. The Team Leader then presented the draft report to MFA at a meeting held in Helsinki, Finland on 13 December. Participants in Vietnam joined the meeting via a video link with the Embassy of Finland in Hanoi.

At this meeting, the Vietnamese colleagues requested that the draft report be translated into Vietnamese so that they could review both the English and the Vietnamese versions. MFA and the consultants agreed that the request would improve the overall quality of the evaluation process, and thus it was agreed to allow additional time for the translation and commenting.

Written comments on the English draft were received between 20 December 2018 and 2 January 2019. No written comments on the Vietnamese translation were submitted.

Evaluation Methods Proposed in the Inception Report

As requested by MFA, the Evaluation Team prepared an Evaluation Matrix during the Inception Phase. The initial matrix was revised based on the 25 October discussion of the Inception Report and documented in the Memorandum prepared on the key points of that meeting. This Evaluation Matrix was structured according to the eight evaluation criteria and fifteen key evaluation questions specified by the MFA in the TOR for the Evaluation Team's work. This matrix contained the Team's proposals for more detailed evaluation questions, indicators and data sources. The revised matrix is in Annex 3.

The Inception Report also contained a proposal of key stakeholders to contact, to obtain their impressions of the performance (achievements) and impacts of the two projects, and the transition strategy.

Actual Data Collection

The Team aimed to follow the methodology proposed in the Inception Report. In some cases, however, some information was not readily available in the time available. During the evaluation data and information were collected from a wide variety of sources:

- Document review
- Review of FORMIS system
 - database and system architecture
 - data (standardization, completeness, quality, documentation, etc.)
 - applications and outputs or products
 - degree of usage
- Interviews with key resource people and stakeholder representatives, either individually or in focus group discussions
 - Project staff
 - Forestry administration
 - Other government leaders and staff (MARD, CIS, DID, FIPI, etc.)
 - Forestry staff in provinces, districts, and communes trained to use FORMIS, with field visits in Buon ma Thuot and Krong Bong District (in Dak Lak Province), Binh Duong Province, Thanh Hoa Province, Duyen Hai District (in Tra Vinh Province), Ho Chi Minh City, and Hanoi
 - CSOs, NGOs, civil society and private sector stakeholders, and associations, such as the Handicraft and Wood Industry Association (HAWA)
 - Villagers trained to use computers, the internet, and selected elements of the FORMIS platform, and/or those participating in the livelihood models or other PFG activities
 - Other villagers in those pilot communities
- Field site visits to PFG community sites and forestry plantations in Krong Bong, 6 November, and community sites and mangroves in Duyen Hai districts, 7-8 November
- Stakeholder participatory impact assessment workshop in Hanoi on 15 November

Wherever possible, at least two team members participated in each meeting or visit. The team aimed to conduct the evaluation in a participatory and inclusive manner. Multiple sources were used to cross-check all data. Meetings with stakeholders were voluntary, i.e., based upon the consent of the stakeholders concerned. The stakeholder workshop and other meetings were used to verify the initial findings and preliminary data analysis.

Languages Used

Documentation in both the English and Vietnamese languages was reviewed, with the two Vietnamese team members responsible for the Vietnamese documentation.

When meeting with Vietnamese stakeholders, the team often conducted discussions that involved translation between English and the Vietnamese language (Tieng Viet). In some cases, the translation was provided by the Vietnamese members of the Evaluation Team; in other cases, by project staff. In the PFG sites, one Vietnamese team member went off to interview some other villagers while the rest of the team interviewed CCG members.

As many meetings required interpretation and the time in each meeting was limited, the discussion could only cover a limited range of issues. This situation is common in this type of evaluation, and the Team aimed to focus on the most important issues and made a follow-up after the meeting when needed.

In the Inception Report, it was assumed that the Team might meet some ethnic minority community members who would not be able to speak Vietnamese, and thus would require interpretation into their respective language(s). As the field visits worked out, however, the Team did not meet such any villagers unable to communicate in the Vietnamese language.

Data Analysis

Team members have worked together to discuss the findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learnt according to the eight major evaluation criteria laid out in the TOR for the joint evaluation. Initial discussions were held while team members were still together in Vietnam, and then continued via email during the drafting of the final report. Each team member was responsible for drafting certain sections of the report, and then other team members commented on their drafts, as time permitted. The Team Leader was responsible for overall compilation and editing.

“Traffic Light” Ratings

As requested by MFA, the projects’ performance was rated against the eight evaluation criteria according to a system of “traffic lights” (table below). As the Team understands it, the MFA has adopted this rating system to make it easier to undertake MFA portfolio comparisons of project performance and the quality of project evaluations, such as when undertaking periodic meta-evaluations.

The team discussed and agreed upon the overall rating of the projects based on the empirical findings of the performance and impacts of the projects, as compared with their project design (project documents), the 15 key evaluation questions, and the standard evaluation criteria. In addition, the team provided remarks underpinning/explaining the rating.

Table 2 Traffic light rating

Traffic light rating	Rating of Performance	Reference criteria for rating
	Green connotes very good	Performance is very good or excellent, largely meeting the planned objectives and addressing the key evaluation questions. Recommendations are suggestions for further improvement.
	Yellow connotes good	Satisfactory performance, but there may be room for improvement, for which recommendations are provided.
	Orange connotes problems	Problems in performance, that need to be addressed to meet desired results.
	Red connotes serious deficiencies	Problems in performance or design, which require major restructuring to achieve success.

Limitations and Mitigation Measures

The time allocated for this Joint Evaluation was very limited, especially considering that two projects were being reviewed, as well as their input into the MFA transition strategy for cooperation with Vietnam. Time was rather short to review the extensive documentation, to conduct the field mission in Vietnam, and to analyse the data and draft the report.

The Inception Report had proposed a long list of key people to meet during the Team’s mission in Vietnam. The Evaluation Team greatly appreciates the assistance of VNFOREST, the FORMIS II and PFG projects, and local authorities to organize meetings and field visits. As it turned out, some key partners and stakeholders were not available for meetings, due to other prior commitments. For example, the Team was not able to meet with representatives of MONRE or GSO.

Both the FORMIS II and PFG projects had already conducted large Project Closing Workshops in October 2018, prior to the Evaluation Team’s work in Vietnam. When the Evaluation Team organized a stakeholder assessment workshop on 15 November, to discuss the impacts of the

two projects and the way forward, most of the workshop participants were from the project staff and project management teams, i.e., key personnel from VNFOREST, AAV, and the Embassy. Although other partners had been invited, only a couple participated.

The analysis of the key evaluation criteria was based on a comparison of the original (or revised) project design documents for each of the two projects. The project management teams, Embassy, and MFA had, however, aimed to manage the projects in an adaptable and flexible manner, and informally agreed to some changes in the projects during implementation.

All these limitations could have negatively affected the Evaluation Team's ability to analyse and assess the performance and impacts of the two projects. Nonetheless, the Team is confident to have obtained the necessary information and this also from a broad range of different and representative stakeholders. This data has been triangulated and cross-checked with information obtained from the documentation, as well as feedback received in meetings on November 15 and 16, December 13, 2018, and subsequent written comments.

Differences of Opinion among the Evaluation Team Members

The Evaluation Team did not have any significant differences of opinion regarding the Joint Evaluation's findings, conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned. As different Team members participated in different meetings, and focused on different issues, however, they did have slightly different points of view on certain issues.

Stakeholder Comments

Valuable stakeholder comments were obtained throughout the evaluation process, especially during the work of the Team in Vietnam. Further feedback has been provided during the discussion of the draft report, held on December 13, and through subsequent written review comments, which were received between December 20, 2018 and January 2, 2019. Review comments were received from MFA, and the project advisors for FORMIS II and PFG.

The narrative and track change comments on the draft final report asked for further explanations clarifications, and justification of certain statements, and provided the team members with some additional information for consideration. The evaluation team appreciates the careful reading of the draft report and constructive comments of the reviewers.

The team was already aware of some of these shortcomings in the draft report, which had been due to the constrained time schedule for the analysis and reporting. It has worked to improve the report during the additional time available.

MFA wanted more documentation of sources of information, and clearer linkages from findings to conclusions and then to recommendations and lessons learned. In revising the report, the team has worked to meet this request.

The FORMIS II project team was largely in agreement with the draft report but argued that it had a different perspective on the collaboration with PFG than presented by AAV and the evaluation team. The team has considered these comments and made some adjustments accordingly. An updated draft project completion report was provided to the team on December 31, 2018.

The PFG project team stated that the PFG project was a forest governance project, not a poverty reduction project. AAV commented that the PFG project had never aimed to reach the poorest farmers with its activities. The evaluation team took note of these comments. PFG also provided some new information on how it had already started to address the issue of assisting some community members to obtain documents for their land rights for forest lands. A final project report was prepared in November 2018, but the Annual Project report is not due until the end of January 2019 and the final financial report in April 2019.

A revised report was submitted to MFA on January 29, 2019. A few additional comments from MFA were received by February 20, 2019. This report was finalised to respond to those final comments.

3. DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

3.1 Forestry in Vietnam's Overall Socio-economic Development

3.1.1 Recent Development Trends in Vietnam

Vietnam has undergone remarkable social and economic development in the last half century, moving up from one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world to a lower middle-income country. This development has increased overall standards of living. At the same time, however, Vietnam shares in global challenges in economic development, and environmental and climate sustainability.

In 1986, Vietnam adopted its “Doi Moi” program of economic restructuring. In 2007, it was admitted to the World Trade Organization, and in 2010 it “graduated” from the group of least developed countries to a lower middle-income country, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) greater than USD 1 000 per year.

The country has made impressive strides in reducing overall poverty rates. According to a 2018 report by the World Bank, by 2016 the national poverty rate had fallen to 9.8%,⁴ and less than 2% are estimated to be living in extreme poverty.⁵ This reduction has been due to economic growth and transition of the economy, with more people moving from subsistence agriculture into commercial agriculture, and from agriculture into wage labour, especially in the industrial and service sectors. Vietnam has a growing middle class.

Poverty rates remain higher, however, in the rural areas, especially the more remote ones, and among 6.6 million who comprise Vietnam's ethnic minority populations. The 2016 poverty rate in rural areas was 13.6%, as compared with 1.6% in urban areas. As of 2016, the poverty rate of ethnic minorities was 44.6%, down from 57.8% in 2014. But, as the World Bank (2018:2) report notes, “ethnic minorities who make up only 15% of the country's population, constituted 73% of the poor in 2016.” Therefore, the report concludes, specific “targeted measures” will be needed to reduce ethnic minority poverty rates. To do so, it will be important to focus on improving education levels, using more of their agricultural land to grow perennial or industrial crops, increasing land titles and access to finance, and improving land use and crop choices.

Vietnam's growth in the industrial sector has been due, in part, to its focus on labour-intensive sectors for export markets (World Bank 2018a). This growth may be challenged in the coming years, however, with the anticipated and ongoing changes in the global economy. These changes have been referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR, also referred to as “Revolution 4.0”). It has been argued that this ongoing industrial revolution is being based on the technological developments, through computers, software, networks, digital automation. Robots, blockchain, 3D printing and artificial intelligence. This “Fourth Industrial Revolution is building on the Third, the digital revolution that has been occurring since the middle of the last century. It is characterized by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres” (Schwab 2016).

This idea was first introduced in Germany, but has subsequently been discussed in global, ASEAN, and Vietnamese meetings. In 2016-2017, Vietnamese leaders paid increasing attention to this concept, but they expressed a range of interpretations regarding the implications of this development. Some leaders see the changes as just part of the ongoing digital revolution. Others view the shift as more substantial: the GOV Ministry of Foreign Affairs has argued that Vietnam needs to “switch from the conventional development model of relying on natural resources exploitation, manufacturing and assembly to a more knowledge-based model with advanced technologies and skilled labour” (Truong-Minh and Nguyen 2017: 3).

⁴ The GOV General Statistics Office-World Bank poverty rate in 2011 was defined as “VND 969 167 per person per month, equivalent to USD 3.34 per day in 2011 purchasing-power-parity (PPP).” (World Bank 2018a: 1). The rate has been adjusted to account for inflation.

⁵ Extreme poverty is defined as “living on less than 2011 PPP USD 1.90 per day” (World Bank 2018a:6).

In response to this trend, the Government has called on all sectors of the economy to modernize, and especially to focus on putting into place digital information systems. The Deputy Prime Minister has been leading this effort.

Prior to the September 2018 World Economic Forum on ASEAN held in Hanoi, a conference was held on 21 August on “ASEAN 4.0: Entrepreneurship and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.” At this meeting, it was noted that “55% of Vietnam’s 93 million people use the internet,” that “85% of the population in urban areas and 68% in rural areas” use smartphones, and that Vietnam aims “to become one of the world’s 10 largest nations producing software and providing digital content, with about one million people working in the IT sector” (Thanh 2018). Thus, it was argued, Vietnam is well situated to take advantage of the ongoing Revolution 4.0.

3.1.2 Forestry Development in Vietnam

Forestry development in Vietnam has been influenced by the overall development trends, in terms of socio-economic development, efforts to reduce poverty, address environmental and climate sustainability, and adapt to the modern digital age and ongoing Revolution 4.0.

Typically, as many countries have developed, the forest sector – like other sectors relying on natural resources – has declined in economic importance. In Vietnam, however, the forest sector’s contribution to the national economy has increased in recent years, primarily due to Vietnam’s rapidly increasing wood products processing sector. In 2015, Vietnam’s timber and wood export value amounted to USD 6.9 billion, and was estimated to be over USD 8 billion in 2017. Meanwhile, the amount of Vietnam’s land under forest cover has increased to 41.4% in 2017 (Pham et al. 2018c). Vietnam is also counting on the forest sector to contribute to its international commitments to reduce carbon emissions and thus contribute to reducing climate change.

In Vietnam, the World Bank (2016) has noted that the more remote, mountainous regions of the country are those with the greatest forest cover, a high proportion of ethnic minority peoples, and the greatest depth of poverty. This issue had already been noted more than a decade earlier, when World Bank researchers noted the high degree of overlap in Vietnam between a national map of forest cover and a national map of poverty rates (for maps, see FSSP 2006).

Forestry activities have been seen in Vietnam as a means to reduce rural poverty. In particular, forest plantations have been promoted as a means to regreen barren forest lands and provide rural employment or livelihoods.

The forest sector had recognized the importance of improving its information systems. In the *Viet Nam Forestry Development Strategy (VFDS) 2006-2020*, “developing and consolidating the information system for forestry sector management” was identified as one of 21 top priorities for the sector (MARD 2007). This priority has been subsequently mentioned in the Government’s five-year plans for the sector. The hope is that by making data on the forest sector open and available to the public, it will encourage increased domestic and foreign private sector investment in the sector, in both production of raw materials, i.e. tree plantations, and processing.

The forest sector has been a key area of development cooperation between Vietnam and Finland for more than two decades, since 1996. Work to support improved forest sector monitoring and information systems began in 2003 under Finnish support to the Forest Sector Support Program and Partnership (FSSP&P, later renamed the Forest Sector Support Partnership, FSSP).

3.1.3 Financing and Economic Development of the Forestry Sector

Financing

A recent study by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) (Pham *et al.* 2018a, b, and c), has found that financing in the Vietnamese forestry sector comes mainly from the

State Budget, Official Development Aid (ODA), Payment for Forest Environmental Services PFES and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)⁶.

The State Budget invested EUR 396 million in forest protection and investment during the period 2011-2016. Annual budget allocations for nature conservation increased from EUR 70 million to EUR 114 million between 2009 and 2014, totalling a similar volume as the budget for forest protection and development.

ODA commitments for the forestry sector reached a total of EUR 215 million between 2011 and 2015 (of which EUR 125 million corresponded to non-refundable finance or grant aid) – or EUR 43 million per year on average. Commitments for REDD+ projects amounted to EUR 84 million in a similar period (2009-2014), of which more than 95% came from bilateral and multilateral donor institutions. That is, roughly one-quarter of total ODA commitments was earmarked for REDD+. Much of the REDD+ financing, however, has been for REDD+ readiness preparation activities, such as capacity-building at the central level: it is unclear how much in future REDD+ payments-for-performance for REDD+ implementation will be forthcoming from the international community (Pham Thu Thuy, interview, 9 November 2018).

PFES contributed with a similar share to total forestry sector financing as ODA. In the period 2011-2016, total PFES revenues amounted to EUR 250 million (EUR 42 million per year). More than 90% of PFES revenues in recent years come from hydropower. Since the unit price of electricity for hydropower plants was increased in January 2017 by Government Decree, it is expected that annual PFES revenues will substantially rise to about 75 million EUR. The Government appreciates the PFES scheme as it now covers a substantial portion of the national forest protection contracts, which were previously paid out of the state budget. Now the private sector, and in turn the consumers, are paying for many of these watershed and other environmental protection costs.

Economic Development of the Sector

GDP data published by the General Statistics Office (GSO) of Vietnam is aggregated for the wider sector of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, but is not separately available for the forestry sub-sector. It is thus not possible to quantify with GDP data how the weight of the forestry sector in the overall Vietnamese economy has developed over time.

The United Nations Commodity Trade (UN COMTRADE) data show that the forestry sector export has grown at similar rates as total exports of the country. Between 2006 and 2016, exports in the forestry sector rose by a factor of 3.4 (from EUR 1.7 to 5.9 billion – largely driven by increasing demand from China, Japan and South Korea) (FLEGT Independent Market Monitor 2018) while the total exports of Vietnam increased by a factor of 4.2 (World Bank 2018b). Forest product exports in 2017 reached EUR 7 billion.

The number of wood processing enterprises increased from 1 710 in 2005 to 3 880 in 2016 (Pham et al. 2018c) and reached 4 500 in 2018 (Gateway to International Timber Trade 2018); 95% of them are privately-owned. The country's wood processing industry is well known for high-end wood products, particularly furniture. Other main export products include wood chips and paper. Vietnam has imported significant amounts of wood from all over the world for its wood processing industry, but now increasingly uses locally-produced timber (ActionAid 2017).

3.2 Transition in Finnish-Vietnamese Relations

Finland and Vietnam have a long history of development cooperation and friendship, dating from their establishment of diplomatic relations in 1973. Vietnam has valued the fact that Finland was one of the first Western countries to offer support after the war ended in 1975.

⁶ Data in this section are taken from a recent CIFOR study (Pham *et al.* 2018a, b, c). Values indicated in USD or VND in the source documents have been converted using exchange rates of 1 EUR = 1.15 USD = 26 000 VND.

For decades, Finland has considered Vietnam to be one of its key development partner countries. In its *2007 Development Policy Programme: Towards a Just and Sustainable Future*, the MFA announced its decision to narrow its geographical scope of development assistance and to focus development support on eight key long-term partner countries, including Vietnam. In its *Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Vietnam 2013-2016*, Finland's MFA noted that due to Vietnam's middle-income status, the partnership between the two countries would be shifting towards a relationship of "mutual benefit."

Subsequently, Finland adopted a "transition strategy" for its development cooperation with Vietnam for the period from 2016 through 2020. This document was developed after extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders. Vietnam is the first among Finland's main development partners where such a transition is truly possible. The transition strategy and the long-term planning and preparation for the transition is prototype for transition that will probably take place at some point in Zambia and Kenya as well.

This transition strategy aims to replace traditional development cooperation with trade and other modalities of cooperation. This shift is similar to that of other donor countries, which have been phasing out ODA and/or replacing grant aid with concessional credit.

At the end of 2018, Finland is phasing out bilateral grant development cooperation aid to Vietnam. The current bilateral grant programmes cover three areas – forestry, rural water, and innovation. Only the latter programme was designed explicitly with the idea of transitioning out of bilateral aid. All three of these MFA-supported programmes were subject to final evaluations in 2018. Also, in 2017-18 a final joint evaluation was conducted of three MFA-supported Institutional Collaboration Instrument (ICI) projects in Vietnam.

Finland and Vietnam now strive for enhanced collaboration between the two countries using a variety of different cooperation mechanisms, including different financing mechanisms. Thus, the aim is to promote private sector linkages and investments, trade, public-private partnerships, as well as collaboration among different types of institutions, such as research or academic institutions, non-governmental organizations.

Therefore, the FORMIS II and PFG projects, the MFA, and the Embassy of Finland have emphasised reaching out to a range of different stakeholder groups with interest in the forest sector. This objective also has been promoted through visits of Finnish delegations to Vietnam, and Vietnamese delegations to Finland. The focus has been primarily on promoting possible trade (commercial) relationships. (The contributions of the FORMIS II and PFG to the transition strategy are discussed further in Section 3.8 of this report.)

3.3 Overview of the Two Projects and Their Relationship

3.3.1 Development of Management Information System for the Forestry Sector (FORMIS – Phase II)

Background

The GOV asked Finland for assistance to develop its systems for monitoring, evaluation, and management information for the forest sector. MARD's International Cooperation Department (ICD) had identified Finland as having expertise in this area of forest informatics. This Finnish support began between September 2003 and January 2008, when Finland provided support to the Forest Sector Support Program and Partnership Coordination Office (FSSP CO), and also worked with other donors to establish the Trust Fund for Forests (TFF), to provide joint funding for certain activities. This FSSP support included the early development of the Vietnam Forest Sector Monitoring and Information Systems (FOMIS), and support to an early database for PFES monitoring. In January 2008, the FSSP produced the first FOMIS report, *Sector Indicators and Baseline Data Report 2005*. This report compiled information related to monitoring the progress in implementing the Viet Nam Forestry Development Strategy 2006-2020 (VFDS).

Subsequently, the two governments agreed to collaborate on a new project, to support development of the Forest Sector Management Information Systems (FORMIS), which aimed to widen the scope of information to be monitored, compiled, and analysed. This FORMIS project has been conducted in two phases: Phase I ran from October 2009 through October 2012, extended to March 2013, and Phase II ran from May 2013 through the end of 2018.

The FORMIS Phase I project worked at the national level, as well as in three pilot provinces – Quang Ninh, Thanh Hoa, and Thua-Thien Hue. It aimed to develop a modern forest information system for management of the forest sector.⁷ This project was supported by the Governments of Vietnam and Finland, as well as the TFF (to which Finland was a contributor).

The final evaluation report assessed that FORMIS I had done a good job in development of the basic hardware and software for the FORMIS platform, the web portal, and the application “eOffice.” Further needs were noted, however in terms of capacity building, stakeholder engagement and ownership, and extending the program nationwide, to cover all forest provinces. Thus, it was agreed to cooperate on a second phase of the FORMIS project.

FORMIS II was designed for five years (2013-2018), with the final year to focus on “handover” of the system. The Inception Period for FORMIS II extended from June through November 2013. Funding for FORMIS II consisted of EUR 9.7 million from the GOF. The Government of Vietnam (GOV) provided counterpart funding of EUR 437 530 (equivalent to VND 11.7 billion).

Scope

Whereas FORMIS I had focused on national-level systems development, and piloting in three provinces, FORMIS II expanded the scope to cover all 60 forest provinces in the country. Thus, it aimed to institutionalize the systems developed in Phase I and scale up the application from pilot to national level. As such, it involved major training and capacity building efforts among government staff at various levels, and efforts to link with other stakeholders and potential users of the FORMIS system.

Objectives

The overall objective of FORMIS II is:

“Forest resources are managed in a sustainable way based on up-to-date information and they contribute to the alleviation of poverty in the socio-economic development framework of Vietnam.”

The project purpose is to develop:

“A fully integrated Management Information System (MIS) for forestry sector decision making.”

The FORMIS II project aimed to achieve results in five areas:

1. Procedures, standards and mechanisms to transfer information between Vietnamese agencies.
2. FORMIS platform and tools are operational in all provinces with a focus on forest covered provinces.
3. Forest Sector data standardized and converted into FORMIS standard database and reporting forest performance indicators in place.
4. Strengthened capacity for information management and collection.
5. Information Centre of the Forestry Sector/Forest IT Unit is established and operational.

⁷ After the project began, in January 2010, MARD reorganized the forest sector, combining the two previously separate departments, Forestry and Forest Protection, to create one unified Vietnam Forest Administration (VNFOREST). The Forest Protection Department (FPD) continued as a department within VNFOREST, and also is represented by sub-PFD offices and staff at four regional offices, as well as at provincial, district, and in some cases, commune levels. FPD has responsibility for forest cover data, and thus leads the substantive work related to the Forest Resource Management System.

Key Approaches

The key approach, or strategy, for FORMIS Phase II was to build upon the work and approaches inherited from FORMIS Phase I. While Phase I aimed to develop the FORMIS system and its modules, and to pilot it in three provinces, the approach for Phase II was to “make the management system operational” to support forest sector management nationwide. As summarized in the revised Project Document,

“at the local level FORMIS Phase II will: a) make operational and deploy the applications already completed; b) integrate datasets into FORMIS metadata catalogue; c) train users to ensure critical capacity at local level organizations to maintain the applications. At central level the project will: a) complete the information standards and data sharing mechanisms; b) develop 3 new applications; c) set up the Forest Information Centre to take responsibility of VNFOREST ICT.”

The approaches aimed to ensure sustainability of results, including financial and institutional sustainability, access to forest information, capacity building, and ownership. To achieve the latter, FORMIS II planned to apply the “user-centred” system development approach started in Phase I.

The approaches of FORMIS II were intended to support human-rights based approaches to development, including promoting participation of women and ethnic minorities, and to address poverty. This work was intended to involve both the type of information collected, to be disaggregated by ethnicity and gender, and also the participation of ethnic minorities and women in activities.

To promote climate sustainability, FORMIS was designed to work with the ongoing programs to promote REDD+. The system will provide information for MRV of REDD+, and the information will be used to promote more environmentally- and climate-friendly development.

The approaches were intended to develop a platform for consistent, reliable forest sector information that can be used for a variety of purposes – reporting to international processes and conventions, such as related to FLEGT and REDD+, required for reporting to international multi-lateral environmental agreements, national reporting and planning for socio-economic development, and promotion of investment in forest conservation and development by the private sector, civil society and local communities.

FORMIS II continued approaches of FORMIS I of applying open-source technologies, aiming at financial sustainability of the platform by reducing or avoiding licencing fees and supporting the transparency of both the FORMIS platform and database solutions and also the inherent data.

Mid-term Evaluation of FORMIS II

A Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) of FORMIS II was conducted between July and September 2015, and the report was finalized in October 2015. It confirmed the good progress made and the overall high relevance and effectiveness of the project. The MTE also confirmed that the project’s efficiency is in line with expectations. It even found early indications of possible future impacts, especially related to the capacity building and to data standards. It also found the project to be well in line with Finland’s development policy, arguing that it supports the policy’s principles of open data access and provides opportunities to use data in forest-related social development processes.

Regarding sustainability, the MTE appreciated the strong ownership that VNFOREST had already developed by then but cautioned at the same time that the overall sustainability depends on VNFOREST’s capacity to maintain and further develop the FORMIS platform and applications. The MTE team foresaw the need to continue capacity building until the very end of the project.

The MTE made numerous recommendations, most of which were effectively taken into account by the FORMIS II during the remaining project time. Some of the more important recommendations are listed and assessed below:

- **FRMS needs to be brought to district level:** The MTE suggested to have the FRMS effectively deployed down to the district level, accompanied by substantial capacity building. Thus, rather than training staff in 60 forest provinces, the project worked with staff in 547 districts. The FORMIS II project has effectively fulfilled this recommendation, in particular through a vast training programme targeting some 2000 end users.
- **Verification mechanisms with the support of satellite data needs to be developed:** The MTE suggested the project develops and establishes a methodology to allow district forest rangers to verify forest change from satellite imagery. This was effectively done by the JICA SNRM project that developed a web-based tool that allows forest rangers to analyse satellite imagery and highlight areas of presumed forest cover change. JICA built this tool to be compatible with the FRMS allowing rangers to compare the tool output with the reported changes.
- **Forest resource inventory standards need to be defined soonest:** This recommendation has effectively been achieved by VNFOREST officially adopting the existing NFIS standards. While FORMIS II had developed improved standards, MARD did not adopt them and thus the FORMIS II project continued using the existing official standards.
- **Topographic maps should be integrated to the platform's map interface:** FORMIS I never obtained the official topographic maps from the MONRE. Therefore, FORMIS II decided to use OpenStreetMap topographic map tiles as a backdrop to the map interface.
- **The MTE recommended additional FORMIS applications, such as a forestry industry database:** FORMIS II has effectively developed the FIMS application including an industry database. This application has been designed and piloted with 80 users but is not yet fully deployed. The final evaluation team recommends, however, that going forward, this FIMS application should be managed and further developed by the private sector.
- In their findings on capacity development, the **MTE strongly suggested the FORMIS II project hand over the responsibility of the FRMS help desk services to FPD by early 2016.** Unfortunately, this finding has not found its way into the many recommendations made by the MTE team. In the view of the final evaluation team, this finding was crucial to properly prepare DID for fully taking over the role of maintaining the FORMIS and its key applications. This finding may not have received sufficient attention by the project, however, as the MTE did not formulate it as a concrete recommendation.

3.3.2 People Participation in Improvement of Forest Governance and Poverty Alleviation in Vietnam (PFG)

Background

The MFA agreed to support an INGO, ActionAid Vietnam⁸, to undertake a project with forest-dependent communities, to aid them with forestry activities to improve local livelihoods, reduce poverty, and improve local forest governance.

The aim was to link these communities with the FORMIS digital information system, such that the forestry information could be used to support the development of these activities. Thus, this NGO project was designed to pilot extension of the FORMIS system to civil society and rural communities, thus expanding its outreach to a broader range of stakeholders.

⁸ ActionAid Vietnam (AAV) is part of an international federation, ActionAid International (AAI), which now operates in 45 countries. ActionAid was established in the United Kingdom in 1972. ActionAid began operating in Vietnam in 1989 and opened a country office in 1992. (For more information, see the latest country report and strategy (ActionAid Vietnam 2017a, 2018b).)

The PFG project was funded by a grant from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland of EUR 1 049 652, and counterpart funding from ActionAid of EUR 46 103. The original duration of the project was for three years, November 2014 through October 2017. A one-year no-cost extension was granted, extending the project through October 2018.

Scope

According to the PFG Project Document (October 2014), the project aimed to work with 22 communes located in six districts, with each district located in a different province. AAV has a country policy of supporting its operational sites for a significant period, of 10 to 15 years, and clustering various projects and activities in these supported sites. In 2014, AAV was working nationwide in 15 different sites nationwide. The six PFG sites were chosen after discussion with MFA, the FORMIS II staff, and local authorities. The original estimate of the target population, as described in the project document, was about 260 000 ethnic minority people.

In the end, the project has worked significantly in only four of the six districts⁹. In these districts, PFG provided training, set up information kiosks with computers, printers, and a small library, developed a smart phone application and provided smart phones. It has established 17 Core Community Groups (CCGs) and conducted extensive training, on IT, forestry, and human-rights based approaches to development. A baseline study was conducted, and information used to decide upon two different livelihood models to be followed. The project has provided training and inputs related to these livelihood models.

In two highland or mountainous districts, Thong Nong District in Cao Bang Province and in Krong Bong District in Dak Lak Province, the project has worked with villagers on forest plantations. In two Mekong River Delta districts, Dong Hai District in Bac Lieu Province and in Cau Ngang District in Tra Vinh Province, the project has promoted mangrove conservation and planting of mangrove trees in shrimp ponds. In all four project areas, community forestry management agreements have been negotiated.

PFG was originally designed to operate for three years, from November 2014 through October 2017. Due to the slow start-up of the project, it was subsequently decided to extend the project through October 2018. During the final year of operations, 2018, support focused on the two mountainous and highland districts with the most potential for forest plantation development and related value-chain activities.

Objectives

The project goal was:

“Participation of the grassroots communities and people in national forest management information system as their rights to make forest governance accountable and contribute to poverty alleviation in Vietnam.”

The three results areas for PFG were:

1. Accountable forest governance is ensured through community-based forest management supported by digitalized FORMIS project.

⁹ The project was scaled back from six districts to four districts for various reasons. First, Cho Don District in Bac Kan Province was located next to a military installation. Despite considerable effort, in 2015 the necessary provincial authorisation could not be obtained to go ahead. The MFA agreed with AAV to this change, especially given fluctuations in the foreign exchange rates, which had resulted in a decrease in the donor support available for PFG (ActionAid Vietnam 2016). Second, early in 2016, PFG efforts in Da Bac District in Hoa Binh Province had not really taken off, so it was agreed that PFG support be discontinued. According to the MTE, this site was also sensitive for military reasons, as are all areas along the national borders. AAV had also decided to conclude all support to Hoa Binh Province in 2017, after 11 years of support (ActionAid Vietnam 2017a, 2017b; Le et al. 2017).

2. Poor ethnic minority people in the project areas are capable to make use of the information generated by FORMIS and they are able to assert their rights to acquire land from the government for their livelihood.
3. Government changes its policy to include practices of good local forest governance based on the best practices generated by the project.

Key Approaches

The key approaches as proposed in the revised (2015) Project Document were based on a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) to development. The project is working in areas where ActionAid has already been providing development support, and thus has existing relationships with local communities upon which to build. In working at the local level, ActionAid Vietnam is working with local communities through its field operational arm, which is called the Support Programme Development (SPD).

The project aimed to support empowerment of local communities, especially women and ethnic minority people. It established 17 CCGs, each with 10 members, who constituted the focal group in their respective communities for training, and then further learning by doing. The topics for training have included HRBA, participatory planning and development, monitoring and evaluation, and Economic Literacy and Budget Accountability for Governance (ELBAG). They also learned about surveying, mapping, CBFM, forest governance, and the FORMIS database system. Altogether, PFG conducted 77 training courses, and trained 2 965 people. In addition, ActionAid supported the creation of a smart phone (internet) application, using some data from FORMIS's FRMS, to support community involvement in forest management. Selected research studies have been undertaken, and success case studies documented, for use in policy dialogue and general awareness-raising.

These efforts were intended to complement not only the work of the FORMIS project, but also other ongoing efforts to address environmental, climate change, and disaster issues, promote the rights of women and ethnic minorities, and ensure sustainability. The project met, or exceeded, its targets for engagement and training of women and ethnic minorities.

The approaches were best summed up in the project document as follows:

Most importantly, the project offers communities and other stakeholders a chance to sit down together, understand, discuss and agree together on how to decide and manage the forest resources in a more community- and environmentally-friendly way, so that forest governance will be improved.

PFG Mid-Term Evaluation

A Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) was conducted in December 2016, and the MTE report was finalized in April 2017. The PFG MTE team conducted field work conducted in Thong Nong District (Cao Bang Province) and Dong Hai District (Bac Lieu Province). The Final Joint Evaluation Team did not visit the same two districts where the MTE conducted its field work, but rather chose to visit the other two PFG districts – Krong Bong District (Dak Lak Province) and Duyen Hai District (Tra Vinh Province). The MTE team assessed three PFG activities -- namely livelihood models, information kiosks, capacity building and communication activities.

On effectiveness, the MTE found that project effectiveness could already be seen, especially in the use of FORMIS at grass root level. CCG members knew how to access information on each forest plots. The forest plantations livelihood model was suitable in Cao Bang. The plantation of *Avicennia alba* trees in shrimp ponds was welcome by farmers in Dong Hai. Another livelihood model that was under consideration for Dong Hai was to develop ecotourism in a 23-hectare mangrove site that was serving as a bird sanctuary, but the ecotourism model had ownership and feasibility issues that ultimately were not resolved, so after the MTE the idea was dropped.

At the time of the final evaluation, interviewed CCG members in Dak Lak and Tra Vinh know how to access information on FORMIS's web and use internet for their needs. The final

evaluation team also discussed with CCG members about cases of members who used information from FORMIS to correct errors or discrepancies between the data system and the reality.

On relevance, the MTE assessed that the project had been relevantly designed to assist the implementation of FORMIS. The project's choice of approaches and activities were well-suited to the local socio-economic characteristics in each site. The project design and objectives were in line with local SEDP and forestry development strategy. The final evaluation also found similar patterns with high appreciation from district and commune government officers for the support of the project to their district/commune development and forest protection/development agendas. Also, the final evaluation team found CCG members become representatives to deliver information on forest governance issues and forest-related livelihoods. In both Dak Lak and Tra Vinh, the team found that other community members came to CCG members for information and knowledge if they were uncertain about it.

On efficiency, the MTE found that the functioning of the project management boards at project sites was decent, although there were still some shortcomings during the process of implementation such as changes in project personnel and the delay in starting the project. Also, it found the cooperation between PFG, FORMIS and VNFOREST has been established and strengthened to support implementation of PFG project via regular meetings and joint activities.

On impact, the MTE looked at community participation and empowerment at the grassroots level. Initial foundation for community participation and empowerment in forest governance was established with the CCGs interacting with project and government staff and sharing knowledge among themselves via the information kiosks.

On sustainability, the MTE found that the project's sustainability was good given the fact that the replication of some project results could already take place such as expanding forest plantation by villagers with the support from private companies. Some community members followed CCG members and started to use FORMIS at the information hub. The Final Joint Evaluation Team had similar findings.

The MTE made several recommendations, which were effectively adopted by the project. Some key recommendations, with which the Joint Final Evaluation Team agrees, are assessed below:

- **The MTE had recommended extension of the PFG project** at least through June 2018, due to its delayed start-up. This recommendation was adopted, and the project was extended by one year, through October 2018.
- **The MTE recommended promoting more cooperation between PFG and FPD and other agencies**, so that the use of FORMIS application and livelihood models was spread and integrated into the district plans and policies for forest protection and development and poverty reduction. This recommendation was good but challenging to implement. According to AAV reports and interviews, it seems to have been most successful in Thong Nong District (Cao Bang Province).
- **Another MTE recommendation was to improve communications and outreach, including increasing training:** PFG has increased its outreach to local government at all levels and to a wider range of communities. The final evaluation's team found that the district governments from different departments were strongly involved. PFG provided training for other community members, outside of the CCGs, and diversified its use of communication methods, through use of plays, production of a high-quality video and accompanying book, and other materials. The MTE's recommendation to provide trainings and engage with people outside of the CCGs was implemented well in Tra Vinh and Dak Lak. The final evaluation team met with some non-CCG members who received training from the project on forest plantation skills, attending information and knowledge dissemination sessions from CCG members.
- **The MTE recommended that the project work at fewer sites, focusing on the most promising ones:** PFG decided to end support to the two Mekong districts in 2017, and in

2018 has focused further support on the two districts engaged in forest plantations, in the Northern Mountains (Thong Nong District) and Central Highlands District (Krong Bong).

The Joint Final Evaluation Team also found, however, that the MTE had missed opportunities to make some recommendations that would have been useful for the subsequent implementation of the PFG project:

- **Policy work:** The final evaluation's team found that the MTE did not discuss the policy work (result 3) throughout the MTE, which was a missed opportunity for the project to learn and improve especially achieving policy outcomes was not always a straightforward business. Nonetheless, despite the lack of recommendations on this matter, PFG did perform well in this area.
- **Monitoring and evaluation, logical framework, and cost analysis:** The final evaluation team found that no cost analysis was mentioned in the MTE. Moreover, the MTE provided neither analysis nor suggestions on how project logical framework and ME system could have helped the project to better achieve its results. The project could have increased impact on livelihood models if the MTE had included measures to help the project management team to monitor and measure their progress and achievements towards this outcome, such as setting up a simple Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework or pathway (theory) of change. These, the final evaluation team found, were missed opportunities for the project management team to monitor their results better, and thus better focus their attention and project resources.

3.3.3 Relationships between the Two Projects

The PFG project was designed to complement the already ongoing FORMIS project, and to extend its reach all the way to the grassroots communities. FORMIS had been designed to work first and foremost with the government forestry staff, at national, provincial, district, and to a limited degree, commune levels. PFG focuses on the community level, working with local people.

The design was intended to bring mutual benefits. For PFG, working with the FORMIS project supports local communities to access forest management and land ownership information in the FORMIS system, to support their community-based forest management activities. For FORMIS, the PFG project was intended to provide additional data and also additional IT applications for the overall FORMIS system. The hope was that community members would be able to provide ground-truthing and cross-checking of data in the FORMIS system, to help keep the system up-to-date and more accurate.

The closely-designed relationship between the two projects, however, has also had some difficulties. For example, according to AAV, some initial PFG activities, originally planned for 2014-2015, had to be postponed as the corresponding FORMIS interventions were behind schedule. For example, in its 2014-15 Annual Report on PFG, AAV argued that there was a delay in the data gathering software, with "no data on forest inventory in Cao Bang and Hoa Binh provinces" (AAV 2016: 12). As a result, the Inception Report argues, certain PFG activities were postponed until FORMIS could be ready.

The FORMIS II team, however, argues that all the FORMIS systems were ready. The FORMIS II technical advisors believe that delays in the PFG project were due to an unclear project document, which was difficult to operationalize and implement. After work was done during the PFG inception period to revise the PFG design, and after the initial project staff were replaced with a full-time national forestry advisor and a part-time international advisor, then the PFG activities began to move.

As the PFG project got underway, it was recognized that collaboration between the two projects would be clarified by agreement upon and signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). According to AAV, the MOU was drafted, but never signed. Nonetheless, the two projects held many meetings to discuss collaboration. FORMIS II advisors worked with PFG and its software

developer on the development of the PFG App, so that it could be integrated with FORMIS and access FRMS data.

PFG had originally planned to conduct some separate training on FORMIS, but eventually it was agreed that FORMIS would provide trainers to assist with training on using FORMIS, and that rather than PFG organizing separate GIS training, PFG would send participants to QGIS training organized by FORMIS. Community members told the final evaluation team that the training was good, but very short. AAV noted that some women initially had difficulties to learn how to use FORMIS, but after practice, were able to do so. These decisions seem to have worked well.

The PFG Inception Report noted that,

Although it is important to strengthen collaboration between the two projects, the original scope and objectives of the two projects should not be altered, e.g., activities that are not in line with the project purpose and planned results should not be introduced. (AAV 2015b: 17)

3.4 Stakeholders and their Roles in the Two Projects

For the two projects, most of the stakeholders overlap (see Table 3). The FORMIS II project focused initially on the Government forest administration (VNFOREST), at the central, provincial, and district levels. In its final year or so, however, the project expanded its efforts to focus more on outreach to other stakeholders.

FORMIS II did not directly engage with PFG CCG members or other community members, except for those who attended FORMIS training courses. But it was working with PFG and other projects that had direct support to rural communities.

FORMIS II worked with several universities, including Thay Nguyen University, Nong Lam University, the Institute of Forest Ecology and Environment at the Vietnam National University of Forestry, Hue University, and Bac Giang University. It did not, however, reach out to some key research organizations active in the forest sector, for example, the CIFOR country office.

The PFG project focused on working with commune authorities, community leaders, core community group members, and other community members. It also worked with district and commune forest rangers (FPD staff). Efforts were made to link community cooperative members with timber processing associations. Although the work of the PFG was highly relevant to the national forestry agenda, other than the notable exception of the VNFOREST Deputy Director, the government at central level was not much engaged in the project activities.

PFG work with the national government, thought its engagement in policy studies, related to the 2017 Forestry Law, its implementing decree, community-based forest management, and other topics. PFG organized three workshops with VNFOREST to promote dialogue on these issues. It also participated in many forestry and related workshops organized by others. The PFG project effectively collaborated with the Forestry University, Forest Science Institute of Vietnam, and Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry to support in capacity building for local stakeholders on forestry activities such as: the qualified process of afforestation to apply for wood certificates; community-based carbon counting; and monitoring or calculating the stock of planted forest.

PFG also collaborated with the private sector. It helped to establish two forestry cooperatives, in Thong Nong and Krong Bong Districts, and to link these cooperatives with wood processing associations. It involved private sector in its study of the wood and timber market and the related workshop on this topic.

Table 3 Stakeholders of the two projects

Stakeholders	FORMIS II	PFG
Government at central level, i.e., MARD, VNFOREST	√	√
Government at provincial and district level	√	√
Commune authorities	√	√
Core community groups		√
Other community members		√
Private sector	√	√
Civil society	√	√
Academic and research institutions	√	√
Other projects and programs in the forest sector	√	√

FORMIS II collaborated with several different forestry projects and programs, not just with PFG (see Table 4). The engagement of other partners with FORMIS is now expected to expand now that the data is “open,” i.e., publicly available to everyone. (VNFOREST officially authorized opening of the data on 30 October 2018.) Others who have not yet engaged with the FORMIS platform, databases, and/or applications have expressed interest to do so.

The FORMIS system thus, occupies a central and strategic position in the forest sector. The information now available through FORMIS is vital for a wide range of international and national forestry initiatives. The most notable include the FLEGT and REDD+ processes, both of which have considerable requirements for data and ongoing monitoring.

Table 4 Examples of key stakeholder collaboration with FORMIS System (i.e., FORMIS Platform and/or Applications)

Key Partner Projects	Area(s) of collaboration
Sustainable Natural Resource Program (JICA)	FRMS Mobile App, a tablet application for data entry for FRMS – now in use in 16 provinces (4 JICA provinces, 12 supported by other projects) Using Google platform (Google Earth)
REDD+ Project – Phase II (UN-REDD)	UN-REDD Geo Portal was integrated into FORMIS One project component supported development of national REDD+ Safeguards Information System (SIS), which has been turned over to DID. Also, Violation Database, supporting VNTLAS. Project provinces using FRMS Mobile App
REDD+ Readiness Project – Phase II (FCPF)	Also supporting development of SIS Project provinces using FRMS Mobile App
Vietnam Forests and Deltas Project (USAID)	Using Microsoft to develop software for management of PFES, hope to link with FORMIS and FRMS Project provinces using FRMS Mobile App
Green Annamites Project (USAID)	Project provinces using FRMS Mobile App
FLEGT Program (European Forestry Institute (EFI), EU)	Work on Vietnam Timber Legality Assurance System (VNTLAS) aims to: 1) digitize the FPD rudimentary paper system on reporting forest violations; 2) risk-based classification system for organization; 3) FLEGT licensing. Aim to link to FORMIS platform. Working with VNFOREST, FPD,

	<p>Customs, MONRE (land portal), and Ministry of Industry and Trade (MOIT)</p> <p>Support to VNTLAS was a key consideration when developing FRMS and FIMS</p>
EU/FAO-FLEGT Due Diligence Project	<p>Project supported HAWA access to forest resource data during the design of the application. HAWA builds upon FORMIS forest resource database and intends to use forestry industry registration in FORMIS FIMS as a basis for FLEGT Organizational Classification System.</p>
People Participation in Improvement of Forest Governance and Poverty Alleviation in Vietnam (PFG) (ActionAid-Vietnam, AAV, MFA)	<p>PFG App makes use of FORMIS (but based on Google maps), to check ownership of forest land, calculate PFES and forest protection contract payments, and prepare maps and community-based forest management plans. PFG App also provides information relevant for livelihood models.</p> <p>FORMIS II provided some training, supported integration of the PFG application, and carried out a gender and poverty study that included PFG areas.</p>
Key Institutional (Government) Partners	
MARD, especially VNFOREST, FPD and four Regional Sub-FPD offices, and Vietnam National Forestry Fund (VNFF)	<p>DID (VNFOREST) manages FORMIS platform; CIS (MARD) houses servers, FPD maintains parameters and data quality</p> <p>Regional Sub-FPDs provide support and training</p> <p>Vietnam National Forestry Fund working on PFES reporting, to be linked to FORMIS platform; also supporting Seed Management application</p>
Provincial and District governments, especially DARDS	<p>Training of rangers in 547 districts and 60 provinces to use FORMIS; district rangers responsible for updating FRMS data each year</p>
Private Sector	
Handicraft and Wood Association (HAWA)	<p>Involved in development of FIMS</p> <p>Working with EU/FAO FLEGT on Due Diligence system</p>
Forest Products Association of Binh Dinh (FPA BinhDinh)	<p>Involved in development of FIMS</p>
Binh Duong Furniture Association (BIFA)	<p>Involved in development of FIMS</p>
Vietnam Timber and Forest Product Association (VIFORES)	<p>Involved in development of FIMS</p>
Universities	
Tay Nguyen University (Buon ma Thout)	<p>Two staff members trained as FORMIS core trainers</p> <p>Staff are using FORMIS in instructing their forestry university students, and possibly in future research.</p>
Nong Lam University (Ho Chi Minh City)	<p>Two staff members trained as FORMIS core trainers. Staff are using FORMIS in instructing their forestry university students</p>
Institute of Forest Ecology and Environment - Vietnam National University of Forestry (Hanoi)	<p>Two staff members trained as FORMIS core trainers.</p>

Note: This list is illustrative: it is not an exhaustive list of all partners.

Source: Evaluation Team interviews.

4. KEY FINDINGS ON EVALUATION CRITERIA

4.1 Relevance

FORMIS II

The FORMIS II project has been designed as direct support to the MARD and the VNFOREST administration and directly addresses the needs of its final beneficiaries, the officials at the VNFOREST and to some extent also the autonomous provincial and district forestry authorities. At the central level, MARD, VNFOREST, and FPD leadership and staff see the FORMIS II project as having made important contributions by developing and deploying a state-of-the-art information platform and specific tools that digitize the monitoring of and reporting on forest change. Provincial officers reported to the final evaluation team that at the provincial level, the FORMIS II project has helped making data aggregation more efficient, increasingly transparent and significantly more reliable as compared to the previous ways of reporting, leading to more coherent data aggregation for annual reporting and speeding up preparation and submission of reports. At district level, forest rangers unanimously appreciate the benefits of the FRMS for data entry and maintenance and confirm their intention to use the FORMIS and FRMS for future reporting. The FORMIS II project management team agrees in the importance of reporting and aggregating statistics, but argues ultimately, in the long run, that the database and computer readable raw data will have a bigger impact than the aggregation of reports.

The project was instrumental in producing the FORMIS platform and related applications and services for VNFOREST and the wider forest sector, including the forestry industry. The FORMIS platform provides the basis for an “ecosystem” of applications that can be extended and complemented after the project. The key elements of the FORMIS system are the FRMS application and its underlying forest resource database, which cover 60 out of 63 provinces. Of equally high importance are the public web interface and the data sharing system that allows selecting and downloading data.

Various external sector stakeholders have effectively built their interventions or part of their interventions on FORMIS outputs (Table 4), making the FORMIS II project relevant to them. One example is Vietnam’s REDD+ Safeguard Information System (SIS) that directly reads data from the FORMIS databases and is therefore relying on their maintenance and regular updating. The UN-REDD’s REDD+ project supported development of Vietnam’s SIS, with contributions by other partners, such as the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility’s REDD+ Readiness Project. Before the UN-REDD project closed at the end of December 2018, the SIS application was handed over to DID. According to the national REDD+ focal point, the FORMIS system has also provided information for two of the other three key elements of the national REDD+ program – the Reference Emissions Level (REL) and the Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) (Mr. Pham Van Binh, personal communication)¹⁰.

Other sector stakeholders have added onto the FORMIS by developing specific mobile applications for reading from or collecting data for the forest resource database. Examples are the PFG project with its mobile smartphone application, the PFG app (which is discussed more under the PFG project). The JICA SNRM Program developed a tablet-based application, called the FRMS Mobile App, for district forest rangers to collect forest change data on their tablets and then submit these data directly to the FRMS. This JICA app is currently in use in 16 provinces that are supported by SNRM and other projects, i.e., UN-REDD, the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) and two USAID projects, the Vietnam Forests and Delta (VFD) Project and the Green Annamites (GA) Project.

¹⁰ The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agreed in Warsaw in 2013 that a national REDD+ program must include four elements: 1) a national REDD+ strategy or action plan; 2) REL; 3) MRV; and 4) SIS. The Vietnamese National REDD+ Program relies on FORMIS for data for three of these four requirements.

Work is ongoing on development of a Due Diligence System based at the Green Annamites Project, with support also from HAWA and the FAO-FLEGT project HAWA is also in the process to develop an IT-based solution that reads data from the FRMS and the forest resource database.

In developing the FORMIS platform and tools and by integrating national-level forest inventory data, the project responded to the high demand by the GOV at various levels, domestic and international forest industry and both large and small-scale forest owners for quality data and reliable information on forest resources in Vietnam. The project and its results support fact-based decision making in the forestry sector in general and at MARD and VNFOREST in particular. Data and aggregated information from the FORMIS system are fed into various processes and projects and are of relevance to universities, research institutions, the private sector and forest-dependent communities.

The FORMIS II project has worked with several universities, such as the Vietnam Forestry University, the Thai Nguyen University, Hue University, Nong Lam University, the Institute of Forest Ecology and Environment at the Vietnam National University of Forestry, and Bac Giang University. For each university, FORMIS II trained two university staff members as core trainers for FORMIS and FRMS. They can thus be hired in the future by provinces to provide training for provincial and district staff. But in addition, the main forestry universities and faculties are using or intend to use FORMIS in their teaching forestry students, and in future research.

The FORMIS platform and its data have apparently not yet been used in any major research work or scientific publications. Some important international and national forestry research organizations working in Vietnam, such as the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), have not been Involved in FORMIS development, but would be interested in possibly using the FORMIS data in future research.

The project has obtained official recognition and support through VNFOREST decisions and instructions to personnel, such as MARD Circular No. 26 and the 2017 Forestry Law and its implementing regulations. Whereas in the past government staff could submit the forest cover change reports in hard copy, now they are required to use the FRMS system and submit digitally.

In addition, the key FORMIS results, the information system and the forest resource database are explicitly referred to in the 2017 Forest Law as the tools to use in monitoring and reporting, highlighting the relevance the project and its results have to the GOV. This combination of providing competent technical support with a nation-wide scope and assisting the partner country government to adopt supporting legislation could well serve as a best practice for similar, future initiatives in other countries.

The FORMIS II project developed a forest industry monitoring system (FIMS) as an additional application to the FORMIS platform. This application allows forestry companies to report to the FPD on their wood transformation and production and to assess available forest resources or available land for plantations in their concession areas. In addition, it supports business intelligence, business and investment planning, and allows for analysis of local or regional competition. As the application was based on parameters required for FLEGT, it will also provide information that is needed for enterprises' due diligence reporting for legal exports of wood products to the EU. Around 80 private sector forestry companies have been involved in testing this application together with the FORMIS II project. According to one of the major forest industry associations, the Handicraft and Wood Industry Association (HAWA), there is great interest in the FIMS at the level of individual companies but also at association level. HAWA is also involved in developing a due diligence system for the EU-FLEGT process, which will directly be based on the FRMS data.

After years of preparation, Vietnam just signed a FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the EU on October 19, 2018. This potential future application to and use of the FORMIS system confirms the high level of relevance this project result has to the private sector in Vietnam. The FLEGT process in return requires data on forest industry organizations where

the soon-to-be deployed FIMS will become highly relevant, as forestry companies register within the system.

The FORMIS II project is aligned to the Viet Nam Forestry Development Strategy (VFDS) 2006–2020 with which it shares common objectives. The VFDS calls for sustainable management of forest land, increased participation in forest development, and a reduction in poverty, which are shared by the FORMIS II project. In its solutions on planning and monitoring, the VFDS suggests to “consolidate the existing forestry sector information and monitoring system to facilitate monitoring and evaluation of forestry sector’s strategy implementation and to meet requirements on forestry sector management and international integration” (MARD 2007). Here the FORMIS II project clearly contributed in a highly relevant manner by setting up a sector wide information platform, including a functioning monitoring and reporting system, and by integrating and consolidation official forest inventory and resource assessment data into one standardized forest resource database. In its priority #21 for the period of 2007–2010, the VFDS asked explicitly for “developing and consolidating the information system for forestry sector management”, which underlines again the high relevance the FORMIS II project and its precursor, the FORMIS I project, have had to the GOV.

To the scientific community in Vietnam the FORMIS II project and its results are equally relevant. Universities confirm interest in using the FRMS forest resource data as a baseline in change detection and analysis for publication in scientific papers. Teaching and research staff interviewed at the universities voiced some concern related to data quality and consistency issues with the FRMS data¹¹, but it was agreed that this issue could be improved over time. From a teaching perspective, the visited universities confirmed their interest in using the FRMS in their curriculum for professional foresters. They also provide some of the FORMIS core trainers and may play a role in data quality assessments. The project developed a moodle-based¹² e-learning platform to facilitate training of district forest rangers in FORMIS and FRMS use. Universities are familiar with this tool and showed interest in contributing to the maintenance and updating of training materials on the FORMIS e-learning platform.

During development of FORMIS and its applications, partners had to be granted access to the system by VNFOREST. Now that the data is officially open and publicly available to everyone, use can be expected to increase.

Very recently the FORMIS II project has been awarded the Golden Rice Award by MARD for its contribution to the development of rural areas in Vietnam. More specifically, it was selected as an outstanding product in the group of scientific studied products, including inventions, innovations and useful solutions (Annex 6). FORMIS II was honoured for playing an important role in contributing to the sustainable forest management in the forestry sector in Vietnam.

PFG

The PFG Project has been relevant to its target beneficiaries, the members of 17 CCGs in 16 selected communes in four pilot districts, other community members, and two cooperatives. It was also relevant to district and commune forest rangers. It has been consistent with district-level socio-economic development plans, as well as national development and poverty

¹¹ The issue of data quality and consistency was discussed by the Joint Final Evaluation Team with university staff interviewed and with FORMIS II staff. FRMS data is based on both satellite imagery interpretation and human observations, both of which can be subject to error. Moreover, the FRMS methodology provides data that is accurate at the district level or above, but not adequate for operational planning at the plot level, which requires additional data. Some users do not fully understand these limitations and become concerned if the FORMIS data does not match their own data. The advantage of the FRMS data, however, is that it is now publicly available and transparent, and follows national standards. If forest owners discover errors regarding their land, they can contact the district rangers to have the data corrected in the official database. Currently, no independent channels exist for research institutes to provide feedback on the validity of the data. Third-party independent verification is used, however, in forest certification processes.

¹² www.moodle.org

reduction strategies. It promotes community self-reliance, which is another national policy objective.

Community forest management agreements have been developed in all four project districts, which are aiding local communities and officials to better manage both natural forests and forest plantations. In terms of providing greater access to forestry information for CBFM, the project's 19 information kiosks, provision of smartphones, and its smartphone application have been relevant and appreciated.

The project is relevant for the government stakeholders who need local participation in forest management to increase the efficiency for their own work (i.e. local people helping to protect forest at a much lower cost than if the agencies do it themselves). Community members can also inform the forest rangers if FORMIS information needs to be updated or corrected.

The PFG smartphone app builds on FORMIS's Forest Resource Management System (FRMS). It is relevant to land owners in terms of double-checking their land ownership and as a basis for calculating their PFES or forest protection contract payments. Cooperatives can check on the availability of bare land for tree planting, and also where timber raw materials supplies exist, that can and should be harvested. The smartphone app also provides links to market prices for timber and agricultural products and helps community members to sell their products through connecting with potential buyers. The proliferation of the smartphones, together with the support for market access for timber, encourage local people to take part in forest plantation (in Dak Lak).

The project has contributed to empowering women and rural community members, through its promotion of human rights-based approaches, participatory planning, computer and internet literacy, improved access to information, local governance and transparency, and value-chain analysis. The CCG members were initially the focus of the training and study tours, but the project has broadened its efforts to train other community members.

The pilot sites are selected communes in poor districts, with poor ethnic minority populations, who are the intended ultimate beneficiaries of the project. While such people have benefited from some project training courses and inputs, in some sites the very poorest households have not been able to benefit from the forestry-related livelihood activities, as they may lack land, clear land rights, labour, and/or investment for such activities. For example, in Krong Bong District in Dak Lak Province, the tree plantation activities only were piloted in two communes of Kinh people who had been resettled from northern Vietnam. In a third commune in Krong Bong, with a mix of traditional and immigrated ethnic groups, land rights are not clear, and people lack land right documents, so the project has not (yet) promoted the livelihood models. Obviously having secure land rights is an important pre-requisite for engaging in long-term land use practices, such as planting trees. AAV has begun working, and plans to continue, to assist ethnic minorities in this commune to obtain their land rights.

This situation raises questions as to whether the choice of project communes could have been improved, such that only communes where land rights were clear would participate in the project. AAV argues, however, that they did not implement all the project interventions in all 16 project communes, but rather selected which interventions would be appropriate for each commune. In reviewing the project data provided to the evaluation team, it seems that livelihood models were only promoted in 10 out of the 16 project communes. The other communes did receive support for establishing CCGs, information kiosks, and training.

Thus, the forest plantation initiative does not reach the ethnic minorities in Krong Bong district in Dak Lak (because they do not have clear forest ownership certificates); however, 100% of the participating households in Cao Bang are ethnic minorities (Tay, Nung, Dao, and H'mong) and 31% in Tra Vinh (Khmer).

The forestry livelihood models are relevant to those who participate. In two project districts (in Cao Bang and Dak Lak Provinces), the livelihood model has focused on tree plantations, in some cases intercropped with shorter-rotation crops such as ginger, pineapples, ginseng, or medicinal plants. In the other two project districts (Tra Vinh and Bac Lieu), the focus has been

on promoting a “semi-ecological” shrimp farming, wherein mangroves and other trees are planted in shrimp ponds for habitat enrichment. No data on the impacts of these livelihood models on household or community incomes or poverty levels was available to the final evaluation team, so it is difficult to assess their relevance. But community members stated that their incomes had increased.

In some sites the very poorest households have not been able to benefit from livelihood activities due to their lack of land or clear land rights. Nonetheless, 65% of participating households in Dak Lak and in Tran Vinh and 74% in Cao Bang are classified as poor.

The types of trees planted at both sites visited are wanted by farmers. For Tra Vinh planting more mangrove trees boost shrimp production in the ecologically-friendly farms. For Dak Lak, acacias are also preferred as a suitable tree for poorer soils that are not, or no longer, productive for coffee plantations.

The project’s research studies and workshops, especially on timber demands, provisions for the 2017 revision of the Forest Law, and CBFM, have been relevant to ongoing policy discussions on these issues. The project activities have been relevant to government socio-economic development and forestry strategies and plans, at national, provincial, and district level, including priorities to use forest plantation as a tool for poverty reduction in the forestry sector. In Cao Bang Province, the work aligns with Thong Nong District’s own plans to promote forestry-related livelihoods. The project is relevant in terms of government and MFA priorities promoting tree planting as a means to works towards climate sustainability. The project has been especially relevant for promoting women’s empowerment, as over half the participants are women, and aligns with government and donor gender policies.

But in both field sites visited (Dak Lak and Tra Vinh), most trees were planted in agricultural land (for instance, in Dak Lak 82% of participating households has agricultural land supported by the project) while all mangrove trees planted in aquaculture/agricultural land in Tra Vinh). The FRMS data in FORMIS covers forest land, but not agricultural land: as such, the relevance of the FORMIS for some farmers is low. Moreover, although some farmers can update data to the FRMS on land ownership and forest cover, via their local district forest rangers, they have no way to provide data on tree planting that occurs on agricultural lands.

More information on the PFG project is provided in Annex 7.

Evaluation Question 1. Are the objectives and achievements of the projects consistent with the needs and priorities of the stakeholders, including final beneficiaries?

Together, the two projects have been relevant in proving that digital solutions combined with open access data can make a significant difference in how government institutions, private sector companies, and communities and households perceive forest resources and their sustainable use. By providing facts and reliable data on forest resources, the FORMIS II and the PFG projects have positively shaped the stakeholder perceptions towards transparency and sharing of information for a better use and management of Vietnam’s forests.

Table 5 Overall rating for relevance

Project	Rating	Remarks
FORMIS	Highly relevant	Highly relevant to government administration. Relevant to other stakeholders.
PFG	Highly relevant	Highly relevant to government administration and poor people. Not relevant to the poorest stakeholders.

FORMIS II

The FORMIS II project has been highly relevant to its primary target stakeholder, the forest administration (VNFOREST) of the GOV. On 30 October 2018, MARD has awarded the project

a gold medal, the Ministry's Golden Rice Flower Award. This recognition was one of 45 awarded for contributions made over the previous three years to the development of agriculture and rural areas.

As a sector project with a focus on IT capacity development and information management the project has been relevant to the Government of Vietnam in its pursuit of digitization of administrative processes and the introduction of e-government. Prior to the FORMIS I and II projects, the government's forest sector had relied upon a paper-based reporting system, and published data in static tables and paper maps. The FORMIS II project intervention fulfilled a major need, to modernize the forest sector: it confirms its thematic relevance to the forestry sector and its major governmental actors.

The project was relevant to the VNFOREST in overcoming the perceived shortcomings and limitations in data collection and information management for a sustainable forest management by successfully introducing digital approaches and solutions. Especially at the province and district level the benefits of sound and reliable data are clearly recognized and appreciated, confirming the relevance of the project and the solutions introduced by the project at the implementation level.

There is a general consensus among primary project stakeholders that the FORMIS II achieved its objectives and delivered a good and useful product to the forest sector in Vietnam. To complementary projects, such as the PFG, the project provided the basis for operation. Others built their interventions directly on FORMIS II outputs or developed complementary tools and applications. These facts underline the high relevance the project had to forest sector stakeholders.

With respect to the MFA and its development policies and strategies, the FORMIS II project has been relevant as it successfully provided the basis for a data and fact-based management and sustainable use of Vietnam's forest resources. Open access to the FORMIS and its data products and services lays the foundation for the forestry sector to contribute to a green economy. Direct involvement of forest industry bodies increased the project's relevance to the private sector. Providing increased transparency on forest resources makes the FORMIS platform, and in particular the FRMS and its underlying forest resource database, indirectly relevant to communities and households depending on forest-based livelihoods.

In the long run, the most relevant factor may be the access of stakeholders to the computer readable raw data now publicly available in the FORMIS platform and its applications. In the future forest owners may use also other methods and customise FRMS for their own purposes.

PFG

Overall, relevance of the PFG is assessed as good. PFG has been relevant in piloting the extension of the FORMIS system to the grassroots level. The information has supported community forestry activities. The PFG project has been relevant to the needs of most of beneficiaries. The project is relevant for the government stakeholders who need local participation in forest management to increase the efficiency for their own work (i.e. local people helping to protect forest at a much lower cost than if the agencies do it themselves). The project is relevant for poor families from both majority and ethnic minority groups who benefit from capacity building activities and welcome support on livelihood activities.

Contextual constraints need to be recognised in this assessment. For example, the lack of legally binding papers for land ownership among ethnic minority families in Dak Lak has prevented these families to benefit from forest plantation initiatives. ActionAid is planned to continue to advocate for providing ownership certificates for these households in their programme in the Central Highland after the project finishes. Also, the lack of available forestry land at the visited sites while the project aims to promote forest plantation makes the planting trees on agricultural land unavoidable.

4.2 Impact

FORMIS II

Possible impacts from the FORMIS II project can be expected at three levels: environmental, institutional, and socio-economic, as the project's objectives and purpose aimed to promote: 1) sustainable management of forest resources, 2) improved decision-making based on up-to-date information, and 3) alleviation of poverty. These long-range objectives can only be met over time, following a logical sequence: the earliest impacts from a successful project intervention can be expected at institutional levels, through improved data and information management. Then these impacts would lead ideally to a more sustainable use and management of natural resources and forests, which in return would improve the overall management of the forest sector, livelihood situations for forest-dependent communities, forest-related household incomes, and potentially also productivity at forest industry level. Consequently, at the end of the project all that can possibly be assessed are early changes and improvements at the institutional level, while the subsequent and dependent impacts might only materialize much later.

As a matter of fact, the project succeeded in modernizing existing internal processes at VNFOREST and MARD by converting the previously paper-based¹³ monitoring and reporting on forest change into a fully digitized and IT-based reporting through the FORMIS platform and the FRMS application. Given the situation at the onset of the project, this amounts to a major institutional change, brought about by targeted IT-investments, capacity building and substantial external technical assistance. As a result, FORMIS II managed to upscale from FORMIS II pilot levels of 3 provinces, 6 districts and 10 communes to a total of 60 provinces, 547 districts and several thousand communes. These levels of achievement were only possible with significant institutional adjustments of roles and responsibilities at various levels.

With the project providing capacity building to a very large number of VNFOREST, and in particular FPD, staff members, positive effects on staff skills and changes in work attitude can be attested. The project successfully trained some 2 000 staff, of which around 1 300 are still registered and active users of the system, most of them FRMS users at district level. The project has lifted the skill levels in general IT use, which in return has positive effects on general efficiency at VNFOREST and provincial and district FPD offices. In addition, the project has trained and built-up more than 30 trainers who extend training to the provinces and districts. This again has a multiplication effect and indirectly translates into enhanced institutional capacity.

A similar multiplication effect exists in the use of the FORMIS and in particular the FRMS in teaching activities at some of the universities. Here, some of the trainers are using their newly acquired skills and knowledge as well as the FORMIS II e-learning platform and materials to teach forestry students in information systems and management.

Actual effects of the institutional changes and the improved use and management of forest resource data on the environment in form of a more sustainable forest management cannot yet be observed. However, there are individual reports that illegal logging has significantly been reduced. This has been confirmed in one district visited by the evaluation team. Other positive effects are related to improved identification of land available for establishing tree plantations. Here not only communities show interest, as confirmed by the PFG project, but also the private sector, as indicated by one major forestry industry association (HAWA).

All the above findings in relation to possible impacts receive additional support from a clearly observable change in mindset among the forestry sector actors, be it government institutions or

¹³ Previous reporting may have used computer software to generate reports, i.e., word processing and spreadsheet programs, to produce static tables. Previous regulations required such reports to be submitted in hard copy with an official stamp. The new system, however, relies on digital input and transmission of raw data.

private sector representative bodies. From the FPD at district level all the way up to the central level at MARD and VNFOREST, staff members confirm the needs for and the benefits of “going digital” and of sharing data (see Annex 9). This enthusiasm and positive attitude are mirrored by members of the PFG’s CCGs and local-level cooperatives, and the high-level representatives of forestry industry bodies, who are eager to adopt the new tools and exploit the available data for livelihood and business opportunities.

PFG

The project on Participatory Forest Governance has been an important pilot project, demonstrating what can be done with improving access to forest information to the grassroots level. It has had a range of impacts, some of which are beyond the original PFG forestry focus.

PFG has improved community forestry management, based on community agreements. Four agreements have been developed in the four pilot districts. ActionAid reports that the agreement has been most successful in Thong Nong District in Cao Bang Province, where the local population is comprised of several different ethnic groups. This improvement in forest management has included both improved conservation of existing forests and also increased tree planting. In Thong Nong, tree plantations have been established both as community activities (four models) and also as household-level activities. Reportedly 57 households are growing ginger in the tree plantations. The digital information from FORMIS has been used in developing community forest management plans.

In Krong Bong District in Dak Lak Province, the project has supported establishment of 93 ha of plantations by 80 households. Five households are also growing pineapple amongst their acacia trees. This livelihood model has been developed in two of the three project communes. In the third commune, land ownership conflicts exist among different ethnic minority groups and households lack clear land rights documents, so no tree planting was supported. ActionAid hopes to solve this problem in the future.

In Duyen Hai District in Tra Vinh Province and in Dong Hai District in Bac Lieu Province, some households have received support to plant mangroves and other trees in their shrimp ponds, to adopt a “semi-ecological” model of raising shrimp (and crabs), as compared with the more widespread industrial model that has no trees. PFG support has included tree seedlings, fertilizer, and micro-organisms for a healthy ecosystem in the ponds. In Dong Hai, 32 households have been supported.

The Core Community Members and other villagers have agreed to respect the forest management agreements in exchange for project support. The project has supported access to information from FORMIS, and information from the internet more generally, through training, the provision of 19 information kiosks (with a computer, printer, internet access, and small library) and also supplying CCG members and others with smart phones. A specific smart phone application has been developed, that allows users to get news on forestry and agriculture issues, information on forest land boundaries, market prices on agricultural and forestry products.

Local officials report that there is now greater awareness of forest conservation issues: in Duyen Hai district, for example, district officers noted that the amount of illegal logging in 2018 was only half that of the previous year. They attribute increased understanding of the ecological services that can support livelihood activities as contributing to better forest protection efforts at the commune level.

The project is working to support two cooperatives in Cao Bang and Dak Lak Provinces, to work on forest plantations and wood processing, and linking them up with buyers who want their products. This approach is part of AAV’s larger work on value chains. In Dak Lak, the project has facilitated the establishment of Hoang Lam Forest Cooperative, supplying nursery trees, providing training to the Cooperative’s members, and linking the cooperative with external markets is promoting development of the private sector. Similar activities are underway in Cao Bang Province.

Some participants have benefited from increased access to the internet and information in general, which has helped them with livelihood activities and sales of their products, through improved communication with potential buyers. As a result, some households have experienced financial benefits. One woman CCG member in Duyen Hai, for example, told the evaluation team that she had already sold 50 shipments of shrimp to buyers in Ho Chi Minh City, and also uses the smart phone to track other livelihood activities, such as her goat rearing.

PFG has provided training on human rights-based development, women's rights, democracy, and participatory development planning, in addition to the internet and forestry training. The PFG efforts have promoted local institutional development, i.e. 17 Core community groups (CCGs) with a total of 170 members, of whom slightly more than half are women. They have also promoted dialogue of community members with local authorities in development planning.

Being able to use computers for many core members, especially women, improves their status within their communities: villagers approach the CCG members to have more information about forest management and market information for key agricultural and aquacultural products. Thus, the political and economic empowerment of some women has also been noted.

As a result of access to FORMIS data, there is now improved transparency regarding forest ownership, and bare land (that might be suitable for planting trees). With better understanding of their forest land holdings, households can now calculate their forest protection contract or PFES payments, which has improved transparency on this issue. In some cases where mistakes have been found in the land ownership as recorded in the FRMS database, the villagers have informed the district forest rangers to correct the data, and then transmit it to the provincial level for authorisation. Increased transparency improves democracy and reduces opportunities for fraud and corruption.

The impacts on household income (poverty reduction) are unclear, as livelihood models often started quite recently and results from these models have not yet materialized. For example, forest plantation takes at least five years or other crops such as ginger takes at least 10 months, or pineapple two years. At some degree the poorest families might not benefit from these models as they do not have surplus land, labour, and funds to invest.

The project support on forest plantation (acacia planting) and market access for timber encourage villagers with available land in Dak Lak to shift from high-maintenance coffee growing to forest plantation. In some cases, trees have been planted on lands too exhausted (degraded) to continue with coffee production. The PFG support to growing ginger, pineapple and medical plants in the timber plantations, however, does not receive the same enthusiasm from villagers, because of low benefits, relatively long time to harvest and fluctuation in prices.

In general, the support and training to forest plantations is well regarded. But some villagers in Dak Lak reported to the Evaluation Team that they do not really appreciate the training on silviculture, as either they do not gain much new information or skills, or alternatively, that some of the skills taught are too complicated, such as for calculating timber volume.

For ActionAid the project strengthens organizational skills and knowledge in the CBFM, which helps them to build their foundation for future fund-raising to continue the work in all project locations. In addition, in one CCG interview members told the evaluation team that they planned to create a revolving fund and use the interest on the loans to finance their ongoing internet costs.

Evaluation Questions 2-3 on the Impacts of the Projects

The FORMIS II and PFG projects already have had positive impacts on Vietnam's forest sector. FORMIS II has supported VNFOREST and its partners to develop a fully-functioning forest information system and web platform, which has important impacts on the forest administration and supports the forestry activities of many partners. PFG has successfully promoted forest governance, increased computer literacy and internet access, and supported forestry-related

livelihood models. PFG has had positive impacts on the empowerment of women, through their inclusion in Core Community Groups, and related training and participatory planning.

Table 6 Overall rating for impact

Project	Rating	Remarks
FORMIS II		Early impacts visible at institutional level. Impacts at environmental level are likely but extent as of yet still uncertain.
PFG		High impacts for stakeholders and on the way to achieve its overall objective

Evaluation Question 2. How well have the projects succeeded to make progress towards achieving its [their] overall objectives including the promotion of human rights-based approach and cross-cutting objectives of Finland's development policy?

The MFA raised a question with the evaluation team, as to whether or not the two projects together could be seen as supporting the human rights-based approach, i.e., with the FORMIS II project developing the capacity of government staff, the “duty bearers”, to support the rights of the citizens, i.e., the “rights holders”, and specifically those of forest-dependent community members, and the PFG project supporting such community members to understand and claim their rights. While the PFG project certainly placed emphasis on the human rights-based approach in its work, this approach was less prominent in the work of the FORMIS II project.

FORMIS II

While the overall objective of forest resources being managed in a sustainable manner cannot be achieved solely by the installation of an information system, the project did successfully lay the foundation for a sustainable use and management of forests by providing up-to-date information for monitoring, assessment and management of forest resources in Vietnam at a national scale¹⁴. As such, the project has made important progress towards achieving the long-range overall development objective. To what extent the country's forest management will improve -- and whether it will contribute to poverty alleviation -- is too early to ascertain.

The FORMIS II project's purpose to make a fully integrated management information system available to the forestry sector has effectively been achieved. The project has succeeded in streamlining internal reporting processes at VNFOREST and in integrating external solutions to the FORMIS platform. The data now available to forest owners and forest companies can be used to improve their productivity. In addition, the FORMIS platform and open data can reduce future IT investment costs and create benefits through reusing data and through web applications and web services.

Whether or not the FORMIS is “fully integrated” remains debatable as direct data access and exchange between MARD and other relevant ministries and government agencies (i.e. MONRE, GSO) could not be established. While MARD shares data with other government agencies via the public access, there is a lack of reciprocity and thus no direct data integration with MONRE or with GSO. Still, the project provided solutions that serve as a direct basis for other sector actors or institutions and their respective processes and has therefore left a distinctive mark in Vietnam's forestry sector by influencing the way forest resource data are used. In addition, providing the GOV with a digital platform and related capacity improvements provides a basis for potential other and complementary uses of the data and applications.

¹⁴ While a forest MIS system is an important and necessary element, it will not be sufficient by itself, but will rely upon other elements as well, such as good leadership, sufficient resources, effective core SFM processes, and effective stakeholders.

The FORMIS II project successfully pushed for providing open access to Vietnam's forest resource information via its online platform and related services. This solution is non-discriminatory and allows men and women equal access to relevant data and information on forest resources. The project therefore strengthened the basic right of equal access to information. Of the government staff trained to use FORMIS, however, only about 20% were women. The project did undertake a consultancy that examined gender and poverty issues, with recommendations on how the FORMIS system – and the draft Forestry Law – could be improved. The FORMIS system, however, does not have any data yet, i.e., no data yet on forest land ownership by gender.

While a technological barrier remained (computer and internet access are required), the PFG project carried the principle of open access further by providing selected village communities with computer and internet access to overcome this barrier.

The project made efforts to integrate data on forest ownership from the provincial Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARDs) into the forest resource database and FRMS application, which allowed forest owners and community members to verify their ownership situation with comparatively little effort. Hereby the project significantly contributed to increase transparency and accountability in forest resource related data.

PFG

PFG's impacts are good. Many of its positive impacts, however, fall outside of the project's three result areas. The strongest impact of the project was building capacity of local groups and women in navigating digital information both within and outside the forestry sector to support these group members' needs. This kind of support has been the first of its kind to local people in many of the project sites. The ability to access digital information, however, has focused initially on CCG and cooperative members. Following the MTE, PFG has worked to expand its training. Slowly other members of their rural communities are picking up these skills and access to information: the goal is for CCG members to train other community members. AAV estimates that on average, around 100 community members benefit from each information kiosk. The joint final evaluation team, however, was unable to verify this estimate.

The project might have great impact on livelihoods of project beneficiaries. However, to measure the impact on poverty reduction the project design should have included a more concrete indicator system integrated into a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework to steer project implementation and monitor its progress towards this desired impact. The indicator for poverty reduction in the Logframe (version Oct 2015) is too general (i.e. reduced poverty rate in the project areas). Having a more concrete indicator integrated in a MEL framework might have helped the project to plan the livelihood activities earlier to show some livelihood achievement (for shorter-term crops) by the time the project finished. Unfortunately, the MTE of the project did not pick up this point, which could have helped the project to considerably improve its impacts.

It is still too early to say whether PFG will achieve its objective to alleviate poverty by protecting and utilizing forest resources effectively through accountable forest governance at the project sites in Vietnam. This is partly because support to livelihood activities require few years from the end of the project for these activities to show results. However, the project seems poised to achieve this objective in few year times. Commitment from the government to support forest plantations lays the foundation for the achievement of the project's overall objective a few years from now. This is more likely to be achieved as ActionAid plans to continue to support these outcomes from different interventions at the project sites.

Evaluation Question 3. What are the intended and unintended, short- and long-term, positive and negative impacts of the projects?

FORMIS II

While it is still too early to assess any potential long-term impacts of the project at objective level, it is fair to say that one important intended positive impact is the widespread use at MARD and VNFOREST of digital data and information that comes from the FORMIS platform and its applications. This has immediate effects on the efficiency and quality of forest monitoring and reporting within VNFOREST. Data are deemed more reliable than previous data resulting from paper-based reporting. In addition, summary reports are now available several months earlier than with the previous analogue reporting system.

One of the most important unintended positive impacts of the FORMIS II might be its contribution to a change in mindset within forest sector institutions away from paper-based reporting that was difficult to verify to a more transparent management of information and data. This change of attitude may have contributed to the inclusion of the use of forest information systems and forest resource databases in the 2017 Forest Law. The project's results asked for development of common data standards and procedures but did not imply a change in law. The fact that Vietnam has proactively made these changes to the forest law can be seen as an unintended but important impact that may even be highly relevant to the sustainability of the FORMIS platform in the long run.

Additional unintended impacts will undoubtedly arise from other initiatives using and benefiting from the FORMIS system, its applications, and most importantly openly-available digitized raw data. Other donor-funded development projects might be able to generate increased impacts on their target groups and beneficiaries from making use of the FORMIS and the forest resource data.

PFG

The strongest intended impact of the PFG is to promote good governance by using human rights-based approach in forest sector and increase the participation and status of women in social forestry and socioeconomic development. The types of training and support given to local groups and women in using information technology and communication (ITC) in forest management for their livelihood enhancement is the first of its kind – for local people in general and for ethnic people in particular - at the project sites.

PFG also has unintended positive impacts. Its SmartPhone Application (“PFG app”) is leading to income increases from forestry, agricultural and aquacultural products due to better information regarding prices and communications with potential buyers via social media. Moreover, being able to use the internet for many core members, especially women, improves their status within communities - especially when villagers approach them to have more information about forest management and market information for key agricultural and aquacultural products.

The project also contributes to shifting to more sustainable land use, by replacing high-maintenance coffee plantations with acacia. The shift will contribute to more sustainable resource management in these areas, as the demand for using ground water for coffee plantation and chemical fertilizers for the crop will decrease. The shift is possible when the project helps tree grower cooperatives to access markets and the cooperatives can use the PFG app to identify potential members to join them and increase the raw material supply for their cooperative.

4.3 Effectiveness

FORMIS II

One of the most important findings on effectiveness of the FORMIS II project is the fact that it successfully reached nation-wide coverage starting from the very small footprint of the FORMIS-I project. All 60 provinces with official forest land are covered by the FORMIS and the forest resource database, with a total of 547 districts updating the forest resource database through the FRMS application.

The project was successful in developing and populating a spatial database with over 7 million data objects, each representing a statistically coherent forest stand unit. To each object are attached more than 50 attributes, including stand, species and volume data as well as ownership information. This database is the backbone of the FRMS application, which is considered by VNFOREST and FPD as one of the key applications of the FORMIS system and one of the most important results of the project.

For three years in a row¹⁵, districts have updated the forest change data and reported on forest monitoring through the FORMIS and the FRMS application, confirming improved levels of staff skills and institutional capacity as a consequence of FORMIS II interventions.

The project was effective in bringing about standardization efforts, although improved standards developed by FORMIS I had to be abandoned with MARD deciding on the adoption of existing NFIS data formats as the standard. While these were judged as not optimal, it was still an important achievement to reach consensus on data standards for forest resources and to make them official. Subsequently, the project was instrumental in integrating forest resource data from 4 different data providers. As a result, the FORMIS system is using a consolidated baseline that is widely recognized as the single official source of forest resource information in the country. Achieved levels of data quality and consistency are acceptable despite remaining topological errors in some of the data, which resulted from inconsistencies on the data provider side. There are ongoing efforts to resolve and correct these problems before the end of the project. Nonetheless, data quality improvement will be a continuous, ongoing task for district forest rangers, who are aware of these errors and know how to resolve them manually on a case-by-case basis. Core trainers, the Regional Sub-FPD's, and DID have been trained to analyse and improve data quality.

An outstanding issue on data ownership between the FIPI and VNFOREST has effectively been resolved with assistance from the project. If not resolved, this disagreement between the two institutions would have resulted in a stalemate situation and would have jeopardized the central FORMIS II approach of providing open and transparent access to forest resource data.

With regard to capacity building, the project actually exceeded initial targets by providing training to more than 2 000 staff members at MARD and VNFOREST. The project set up and maintained an e-learning platform to provide access to teaching materials and software manuals. On this platform, FORMIS users can participate in online courses including course exams and to exchange experiences in a dedicated and managed user forum. The high number of the staff trained was also the result of the project responding to the ongoing administrative reform at MARD leading to a general reduction of staff, including already trained personnel. Currently there are about 1 300 registered users remaining. The project's target was to have two trained staff per district, amounting already to more than 1 000 trained persons indicating where the bulk of the training budget was invested.

FORMIS II was expected to maintain applications developed under FORMIS I and to develop additional applications, although these were not exactly specified. In total, eight different tools and applications were developed with only one, the Quick Reporting System, having been discarded for lack of uptake by FPD. The central applications, which are the FRMS, the FIMS

¹⁵ 2016 and 2017 completed with updates for some 700 000 plots and 2018 about to be completed by end of January 2019 with updates on an estimated 1 000 000 plots.

and the data sharing system, together with the platform itself are the most relevant to VNFOREST, FPD, the industry and the wider public, and are very likely to be maintained in the long run.

The project handed over responsibility for the maintenance and further development of the FORMIS platform and applications to the DID. The DID was established by VNFOREST with project support. The FORMIS II project was particularly instrumental in defining required skills and in providing substantial capacity building to DID staff. Today, the DID appears still understaffed and not fully prepared to assume all responsibilities and tasks related to the FORMIS maintenance and development. As a matter of fact, MARD was not able to build the required skills and capacities within the DID nor to fill all required positions. To date, the DID does not have either a GIS specialist or a data manager. The constraint is mainly that MARD is required by government regulations to recruit “in-house”, however, adequate skills are not available within MARD.

The FORMIS II project and TA team remained the dominant driving force behind the FORMIS development for a very long time, with DID only gradually taking over some of the responsibilities. For instance, in November 2018 when the Evaluation Team was conducting its field mission, the district FDP officers were still contacting the FORMIS II project team for assistance and troubleshooting rather than the DID; several staff members interviewed stated that this situation was partly the result of unclear responsibilities or of a lack of communication on new roles within VNFOREST and FPD.

Several other forest sector initiatives started building some of their services on the FORMIS and the forest resource database. For instances, the UN-REDD has benefited from the existence of the FORMIS and the open access to forest resource data to enrich parts of its Safeguard Information System (SIS). The JICA-supported SNRM Program agreed to discontinue efforts to develop an information product and decided instead to build upon and extend the FORMIS FRMS tool. Here the project effectively provided a basis for other donors and institutions to directly benefit from the FORMIS and its open access approaches.

Other key players in the forest sector acknowledge the role Finland assistance has played in bringing about change at the VNFOREST and in improving the overall information landscape in the sector. Integration of other systems and users was required by the project document and the project effectively implemented this. However, in as much as other projects benefitted from integrating with the FORMIS, they also became dependent in their own services on the continuous and meaningful development of the FORMIS platform and its services.

Just prior to the ending of FORMIS II, on October 30, 2018, the VNFOREST opened up the forest resource data to the general public as part of its commitment to the FORMIS and to the principles of data sharing. Official instructions have been issued to make the use of the FRMS mandatory for reporting within VNFOREST.

PFG

Community forest management (CFM) agreements were established in all four sites. However, CFM agreement is supported by digitalized FORMIS only in Cao Bang (Result 1). CCG and other community members can double-check forest land ownership in FORMIS at the information kiosk, or on their smart phones, and if they find errors, they can ask forest rangers for corrections.

The poorest and/or ethnic minority households have less access to land in most project sites, and/or where land ownership conflicts exist. Livelihood models only applicable to those with land rights. FORMIS benefits are only applicable to those with forestry land rights (Result 2). Poor ethnic minority people in the project areas are capable to make use of the information generated by FORMIS (Result 2) only in Cao Bang, where the population is entirely ethnic minority and ethnic minority people have land rights.

The PFG project built upon a peer learning approach already being utilized by AAV with other projects, to establish Core Community Groups (CCGs) of ten members, who would be trained

by the project and its collaborators, and then in turn expected to share their new knowledge with others in their communities. For example, CCG members could show others how to use the desktop computer (or smartphone app) to access the internet and the FORMIS data. This extension method – of training a smaller core group, and then have them replicate the training, skills, and/or knowledge among others – is often more effective than trying to undertake mass training of all residents in a given community.

It is difficult to know exactly how many people were reached by the 17 CCGs. AAV estimated that one of their information kiosks was used by up to 100 villagers, which is a ten-fold increase over the number of CCG members. In the 2019 PFG project completion report, AAV reported that over 2500 people – CCG members, other community members, and government officials – were trained by the project.

The 2016 MTE of PFG had found, however, that the outreach needed to be further emphasized. Following the MTE recommendations, AAV then worked to train a broader number of community members and also to particularly target youth, as well as to expand their communications efforts.

The Joint Final Evaluation Team had limited time in the field to explore this issue. But when discussing the PFG project with other villagers, it seemed that varying degrees of transfer of knowledge had occurred from the CCG members to other community members. In going forward, this issue is one that AAV would be advised to monitor more closely, so as to be able to improve the effectiveness of its outreach and capacity-building efforts.

In Dak Lak, provincial authorities did not allow the project to distribute smart phones and to deploy the PFG app. In these areas, the local people could only access the FORMIS platform through the information kiosk computer. At the visited project sites visited by the final evaluation team in Dak Lak by the end of the project, poor ethnic minority people are unable to assert their rights to acquire land from the government for PFG livelihood models. Other sites visited by the final evaluation team in Tra Vinh did not have problem with land right issues (Result 2).

In other project areas, interviews reported the increased capacity of local groups in using information to support their forest-based livelihood activities. The smartphones were judged useful by CCG members for establishing linkages for forest plantation owners with the national timber market, or for users to access market price information and negotiate with potential buyers – for timber, other forest products, aquaculture products such as shrimp and crabs, and agricultural products.

ActionAid claims that PFG has contributed to policy dialogue on forestry issues. For example, they claim to have contributed to changes two articles in the revised 2017 Forestry Law (Result 3), through their policy paper and a workshop held on this topic. But it is difficult to assess how much AAV contributed to this outcome, as many Vietnamese CSOs, such as those in LandNet, also were advocating for changes in the Forestry Law.

Impact of the Evolving National Context on the Project Performance

Key elements of the overall evolving national context that affected the effectiveness and performance of the two projects, as discussed in Section 2, included issues relating to national socio-economic development, poverty reduction, information technology, changes in the forest sector, especially in terms of sources of financing and investment, and the transition in relationships between Vietnam and Finland.

During the implementation of FORMIS II and PFG, these trends have been further developed, in terms of growing reliance on information technology, increasing saturation of mobile telephones, shifts in investment and sources of financing in the overall economy and the forest sector. These trends have favored the adoption of FORMIS and other digital information systems, among the government, private sector, civil society, and general population. The increasing use of digital IT systems is changing the economy at all levels – including how villagers get information on markets, prices, and reach out to contact potential buyers of their products, including forest, agricultural, and aquacultural products. In this respect, the projects

have been very timely, as they serve current and emerging needs of the government and the general population.

Poverty reduction is a top priority for the socio-economic development of Vietnam – and for the development policy of Finland and other development partners. The issue of poverty reduction remains a difficult topic to address, however – especially in the forest sector. Although the overall Vietnamese poverty rates have decreased, poverty has become increasingly concentrated among rural ethnic minority populations in remote areas.

These two forestry projects have aimed to address poverty reduction by targeting field interventions in areas with poor, ethnic minority populations. Insofar as forestry-related livelihood interventions have been targeted at households or communities with clear land rights, whether to forest lands or shrimp ponds, they have helped participants to diversify and improve their incomes. But while forestry-related activities can assist, under certain conditions, with rural livelihood improvement, they often are not the major pathway out of poverty for rural people. In many cases, the best ways out of rural poverty may involve either transition to commercial agriculture or migration into wage labor, such as in the industrial sector.

This situation is especially true in cases where people lack land rights, or their land rights are contested. Targeted efforts are needed to assist such poor families, especially if they belong to ethnic minorities, and thus have greater challenges in accessing development support – or in even communicating with government staff and other development partners (if these ethnic people do not speak or read the Vietnamese language, and the partners cannot communicate in the ethnic languages).

Evaluation Questions 4-6 on the Effectiveness of the Projects

Overall the projects have been effective in reaching their planned results and building local capacity. Together, they have demonstrated the potential for transforming the forest sector in Vietnam, by sharing access to national data regarding the situation of Vietnam’s forests. The establishment of the FORMIS system, its FRMS, and database are key elements for this transformation.

FORMIS II has achieved its five results, but more work remains to strengthen the capacities of VNFOREST’s DID. The PFG has achieved its intended strengthening of forest governance and contributing to policy dialogue on forest governance but has had limited achievements in assisting poor ethnic minority households to assert their land rights to improve their livelihoods.

Table 7 Overall rating for effectiveness

Project	Rating	Remarks
FORMIS II		Project has been very effective in achieving its results albeit at some cost to ownership.
PFG		Most results are achieved

Evaluation Question 4. To what extent is the quality and quantity of the produced results and outputs in accordance with the plans?

FORMIS II

The project’s logical framework lays out 5 result areas that broadly cover: 1) data standards and procedures, 2) platform and tools, 3) data and database, 4) capacity and 5) the IT unit. From a quantity point of view the project basically achieved all results. To some extent it went even beyond expected results in effectively deploying the FRMS down to the district level while result 2 specifies only province level. It has also gone beyond the previous minimum unit of a sub-compartment to effectively establish a forest resource database down to the stand level, with

more than 7 million forest plots in the central database. This is considerably more detailed than previous levels of data disaggregation.

In terms of quality, the project effectively standardized all FRMS related data collection and reporting procedures (result 1) by applying the NFIS data standards and by strictly adhering to the reporting forms and templates of the VNFOREST circular no. 26. This, however, only applies to internal processes within VNFOREST and MARD but does not apply to other Vietnamese agencies as demanded by the result.

In relation to result 2 (FORMIS platform and tools), especially the forest resource database and the already used FRMS application satisfy the expected output quality. The FPD quick reporting tool was less successful and may not have satisfied the level of expectations, but this should not diminish the importance and the high level of effectiveness with which the project delivered the key elements of result 2, which are the platform itself, the FRMS with its underlying forest resource database, and the data sharing application.

The project has been effective in converting and integrating available official forest resource data from the NFIS into the standardized forest resource database and into the FORMIS applications and tools (result 3). Some data quality concerns remain, which are related to inconsistencies in the data from four different NFIS data providers and the software, i.e., Access and MapInfo, that they used. As the project does not generate any primary data these data issues are beyond the scope of the project. Still, FORMIS II attempted to clean most errors and these efforts are still ongoing until the end of the project. FORMIS II had to convert all the data to new software, Postgre SQL and PostGIS.

Initially data quality improvement was not within the project mandate. Later, however, it was decided that this will be added as a new objective under result 3. Therefore, the PMU mobilised TA resources for extensive data quality improvement and trained Regional FPD staff and other core trainers in data quality improvement.

The FORMIS II project has been very effective in building up the technical capacity in using and maintaining the FORMIS system from initially very low levels (result 4) to acceptable levels of quality at province and district offices. While some capacity issues remain at central level (DID) and in some districts, overall assessment of the effectiveness in building up capacity is positive and generally recognized and appreciated within the Vietnam forestry sector.

PFG

The quality of project results is high where and when it is achieved. Result 1, accountable forest governance, has been achieved in all four districts where forest management agreements have been reached. According to project reports, only in Cao Bang Province, however, has the digitized forest data from FORMIS been used in the preparation of this agreement.

Result 2 specifies that poor ethnic minority people would be able to use FORMIS information to manage their forests and claim their rights from their forest protection and development efforts. Result 2 of the project is only partly achieved. This result has been achieved in Thong Nong District, where the local population is 100% ethnic minority and has documented land rights. Other districts were less successful in their respect, as in some areas ethnic minority people lacked documented land rights and/or land rights were contested.

For the Result 3, PFG has undertaken six studies and three workshops that pertain to policy dialogue issues. AAV stated that the project influenced changes in the government's policy in the revised Forestry Law was given. (Further discussion of this issue is provided in the PFG Project Completion Report.)

Evaluation Question 5. How are the results/outputs applied by the beneficiaries and other intended stakeholders?

FORMIS II

The key application of the FORMIS system, the Forest Resource Management System (FRMS), is effectively in use by the Vietnam Forest Administration (VNFOREST) and its Forest Protection Department (FPD) from central level down to district level. It is already in use for annual reporting of changes in forest cover and forest function, with all provinces effectively updating data through the FRMS. This is supported by recently issued official VNFOREST and FPD instructions. Only a very small number of districts reported technical difficulties, mainly related to synchronization between local and central databases, in which case the regional FPD offices assisted with data entry.

The FORMIS web interface that is open to the public has recorded increasing levels of visits and with the recent VNFOREST decision to open all forest resource data to the public this is expected to increase even further. Via the PFG information kiosks, community members in pilot areas are using the forest resource database to cross-check their forest ownership data. It is fair to assume that this kind of grass-root use will increase in the future by individuals using or sharing mobile phone access to verify their ownership data.

Reportedly 80 private sector forestry companies were involved in testing the FIMS application, but official deployment is still pending. Once released, interest in and usage of the FIMS application is expected to increase, especially now that the FLEGT VPA has been signed.

PFG

PFG's beneficiaries used their improved ICT skills and equipment, including the PFG app, to identify market information and exploring business opportunities, which helps increase their employment and income opportunities. Women used these skills and tools to increase their credibility within their communities. Also, all beneficiaries with forestry land ownership used information from FORMIS, whether accessed via PFG apps or the web, to ensure the government map their land correctly. In this regard, transparency in forest governance is enhanced. In addition, local people take their own initiative to roll out the forest plantation initiatives to other types of land when market access for selling timber become more secured under the facilitation of the PFG.

Evaluation Question 6. Are the results/outputs and the projects' purpose[s] making a contribution towards improved condition and services?

FORMIS II

The results and outputs of the FORMIS II project, especially the key applications and the central forest resource database, are effectively making contributions to improved services at VNFOREST. Monitoring and reporting are now standardized and reportedly faster than with the previous analogue reporting system. The fact that the project effectively helped constructing a nationwide forest resource database with full spatial data coverage carries huge potentials for further improving services, although this seems not yet to be fully realized by all ranks within VNFOREST.

The projects purpose of providing a fully integrated information system for decision making in the forestry sector has effectively improved services at VNFOREST and MARD with the FORMIS and its key applications having successfully obtained official status. Planning at central level is now based on aggregated data from the FORMIS and the FRMS. VNFOREST officials stress the importance of having one official data set accessible to all users within the institution effectively taking away previous issues of inconsistencies in aggregated data.

PFG

The PFG's results, or outputs, and purposes contribute to improved forest protection at the project sites. Government agencies shared that after interacting with the project, and when FPD rangers could talk about the importance of forest protection from PFG platform, local people become more receptive of the importance of forest. As a result, they became more active in forest protection and have committed fewer illegal forest activities, such as forest clearance.

The PFG helped channel the available service (i.e. FORMIS) provided by the national government to local people. In this regard, the flow of information has improved the right to information for local people, which helps increase the accountability of the government at different levels of its operation.

4.4 Efficiency

FORMIS II

The estimated (one-time) development costs for the FRMS database were EUR 0.10 per forestry plot, and it is expected that the data of any given plot will be updated every seven years at a cost of EUR 0.24 on average. Given the complexity of the plot attribute data (and its value for users), these figures suggest that the FRMS is cost efficient. The training costs per participant correspond a few hundred EUR, with a decreasing trend over time.

The expected value for money of FORMIS II is high because the project entails a series of potential economic and environment benefits (such as increased foreign investment and trade, PFES revenues and cost savings in sustainability forest management) that are likely to eventually outweigh projects costs. Direct value for money comes in form of reduced IT investment. FORMIS enables effective reuse of data and web-applications, which are less expensive than the conventional stand-alone applications.

FORMIS II, and MIS in general, is one of the enabling factors in business development. The value for money depends on whether, with the help of FORMIS, the forest owners and forest industry can improve productivity of activities related to forest conservation and wood production.

PFG

The economic and social value for money of PFG should ideally be measured with data on income gains generated by PFG livelihood projects; yet no such data are available.

The Final Evaluation Team visited the project sites and office in November 2018. Activities for the final financial year were well under way. Although the project formally closed on 31 October 2018, the final project completion reports were not due until January 2019. Thus, the last annual financial report available was the 2017 Financial Report.¹⁶ The Final Evaluation Team has no concerns regarding the delay of the project execution and the completion of the budget disbursement by the end of the project.

Evaluation Questions 7-8 on Efficiency of the Projects

FORMIS II and PFG have achieved good results, and the two projects have been efficient in their use of project resources. Although both projects suffered from delays in project start-up, their implementation then picked up and they have reached most of their results by project completion. FORMIS II was delayed because of the gap between Phase I and II, and the lengthy required recruitment process for local staff. PFG was delayed due to the need to revise the

¹⁶ The Final Evaluation Team saw the project annual financial reports through December 2017. They showed that as of that date, 79% of the total budget had been spent and 81% of the budget for direct activities had been spent (Result 1: 88% of the budget spent; Result 2: 76%; Result 3: 28%). In the final report, 100% disbursement was reported.

project during the inception phase, and the need to recruit international and national personnel with expertise in community forestry.

Now the national FORMIS system is in place, and its key applications are functioning nationwide. The PFG project has piloted outreach to the community level and demonstrated how access to forest information can mobilize rural communities to engage more in forest protection and development. It is difficult on the basis of information available to undertake a rigorous cost-benefit analysis, or even to compare the projects with similar projects elsewhere. Nonetheless, the projects seem to have achieved good value for the resources and efforts invested.

Table 8 Overall rating for efficiency

Project	Rating	Remarks
FORMIS II		Good use of resources, impacts achieved more efficiently over time
PFG		Efficient in piloting approach and building upon other AAV efforts

Evaluation Question 7. How well did the activities transform the available resources into the intended outputs/results, in terms of quantity, quality, and time?

FORMIS II

The project start-up was delayed, with a gap between Phases I and II, and slow recruitment of local staff.

The 29 November 2018 draft FORMIS II project completion report (2018) provides a self-assessment of cost efficiency of the different project outputs provided. The Evaluation Team concurs with the project's own assessment regarding the development of the IT systems, data entry, and training.

System development and data entry

The FRMS system development costs amounted to EUR 453 per user. With approximately 2 users per district and a total of 7.1 million plots in the FRMS, one can calculate from these data that system development costs were approximately EUR 1 000 per district, which in turn corresponds to an initial investment of EUR 0.10 per plot. Given the wide range of plot attributes captured and its value for users, this seems relatively cost efficient.

FORMIS II staff also estimated that future data entry costs for local administration will be equal to EUR 240 000 per year, with data of an expected 1 million plots to be updated each year. That is, one would expect that any given plot would require EUR 0.24 of data entry costs every seven years (this does not include the survey of the change of forest cover and status).

The project's use of open source software was very cost-efficient, saving annual software license fees. As a matter of fact, not only the use of open source operating system software (Linux) and open source database system software (PostGres) on the FORMIS servers, but especially the deployment of open source GIS software to end users in more than 500 districts, helped to avoid investments in and recurrent cost for software licence and maintenance contracts. Along the same lines, the choice of having the FRMS developed as a QGIS plugin that can be deployed freely to the districts reduced the cost of this tool to the actual development cost. If only software cost is considered the choice of open source software is generally favourable. There is, however, a flipside to this. The pure software cost does not reflect the total cost of ownership and operation, as open source software might require additional staff time or external inputs to personalise or maintain installations. However, in the case of specialised developments such as the FRMS and the FIMS, the actual development cost for the tools would still have come on top of commercial software licence cost and maintenance cost for the specific

tools would incur. Seen from this angle, the project's choice of open source solutions can still be considered as cost efficient.

Training

The TOT turned out very cost efficient due to the introduction of core trainers. The costs per training participants eventually decreased from EUR 1 600 in the first training – which was outsourced to a service provider – to EUR 140 after core trainers were sufficiently trained and gathered experience in teaching the (regular) trainers themselves.

The costs of user training for the project decreased from initially EUR 1 080 to EUR 380. However, this is mainly due to the fact that the initial training(s) were largely paid by the project itself whereas the later training was co-funded by provinces. It is worth noting that only the costs covered from the project budget are included in the previous figures, but not those borne by provinces and districts.

PFG

The project start-up was delayed, with delays in the FORMIS-related activities, as well as delayed recruitment of experts to support the project. The project later received a one-year no-cost extension, such that the life of the project was extended from three years to four years.

The project costs were reduced since ActionAid conducted in the project in sites where they had other ongoing activities. Thus, the project staff had already established relationships with local residents and officials. Project monitoring trips from the AAV office in Hanoi were more efficient, as they could cover several different activities.

No evidence on cost efficiency was provided with respect to the livelihood models.

Evaluation Question 8. Can the costs of the projects be justified by the results?

FORMIS II

A detailed assessment of the value for money of FORMIS II would require a careful comparison of project costs and potential economic and environment benefits. While the costs are known, most of the benefits of FORMIS II have not yet started to materialise. However, various stakeholders acknowledged the large potential for economic and environmental benefits through FORMIS II in the future. This potential includes, for example:

- Use of platform technology and service-oriented architecture reduces future ICT investment cost, especially as services and data can be re-used in future application development.
- Attraction of foreign investment through high-quality FRMS data on forestry plots (ownership etc.)
- Increased international trade, e.g. through improved capability to certify the origin of timber for exports under FLEGT
- Better data for calculating PFES payments from hydropower operators and similar companies, and thus higher PFES revenues for the public administration
- Cost savings in sustainable forestry management
- Improved cost efficiency of data collection and management for a given level of data quality
- Provision of data needed for the national REDD+ program, related to REL MRV, and SIS, which may assist Vietnam to qualify for REDD+ payments-for-performance
- More research opportunities through the availability of new data
- Enhanced livelihoods for forestry plot owners (see PFG).

While it is not possible to quantify these benefits, it is clear that they are potentially large and will likely outweigh the project costs and the investment in the NFIS by the GOV and others¹⁷. For example, it would not be surprising if the influx of foreign investment, export increases and additional PFES revenues induced by FORMIS II might be significant. Yet, no hard (quantitative) evidence on value for money is available yet.

The Audit Report 2017 also highlights several aspects that evidence value for money (albeit more generically) – such as the added value and efficiency in forestry plans, data integrity and directing in the sectors; the value of baseline and trend data perceived for users; and the capacity gains through training.

PFG

While the economic and environmental benefits of FORMIS II are only long-term impacts eventually following from the project outputs and outcomes, the PFG aims to directly foster livelihoods as project outcome. The clearest indicator of value for money would be evidence on additional income by all participants in PFG livelihood projects exceeding total project costs. In the projects visited for the final evaluation, it was not possible to quantify these additional gains, in part because some of the livelihood activities already existed before project inception. For example, shrimp farming had been introduced in Tra Vinh Province in 1991. Those farmers participating in the semi-ecological shrimp farming livelihood activities were already shrimp farmers with existing shrimp ponds, who were just trying some different technologies.

The PFG MTE does not provide any before/after comparison of the livelihood models either. It argued, however, that project management was organized in a cost-efficient manner. The project benefited from other AAV activities in the same areas. For example, in Cao Bang Province, 4 information kiosks were shared with (funded by) another AAV project. Thus, the PFG project only funded 15 of the 19 information kiosks.

With the budget of EUR 275 000 per year, ActionAid has used the project resources wisely to achieve wide range of outputs and outcomes including providing trees, fertilizers, computers and smartphones, training courses and increased knowledge of project beneficiaries in four districts.

The project will be completed on time. ActionAid plans to continue supporting the livelihood models and value chain development in the future, with funding from other sources. Moreover, the project resources have also provided ActionAid and its partners including local government's partners and local people with valuable foundation for future operations in participatory natural management and human right-based approaches, in this regard, the project efficiency is greatly shown.

For PFG, the cost of the project is well justified by the results and impact of the project. By December 2017, 62% of the project's total expenses was used for direct activities, while 35% of the total expenses was for HR and administration.

4.5 Sustainability

FORMIS II

Both MARD and VNFOREST have clearly expressed their commitment to maintain the FORMIS and its applications and services in the future. VNFOREST has already requested annual budgets to upgrade the FORMIS infrastructure over the coming years. Equally, the majority of the provincial FPDs have already prepared their budget requests for providing training and support to the district forest rangers in the continuous use of the FRMS.

¹⁷ The Evaluation Team did not assess the NFIS investment costs. The NFIS that served as the baseline for the FRMS was the latest in a series of periodic national forest inventories, and involved data provided by four different service providers.

The general push for digitization of the administration and of government services towards establishment of eGovernment is likely to increase FORMIS's chances of being sustained in the long run. Currently, the VNFOREST appears to be ahead of the wave with regard to digitization efforts among Vietnamese government agencies. MARD leadership considers it to be a model, which they hope can be followed by other MARD departments (Deputy Minister Tuan, personal communication).

Existing and new government regulations are clearly in support of continued use and maintenance of the FORMIS system, the forest resource database and at least the FRMS application. VNFOREST Circular No. 26 specifies that the NFIS data integrated into the FORMIS and the central forest resource database form the baseline for forest change monitoring. At the same time, the circular requests the use of the FRMS for monitoring and updating the changes in resources and forest lands. It further specifies that the FRMS is the tool to be used to process changes in forest resources and that it has to be used uniformly in the whole country.

Equally important for the long-term sustainability of the FORMIS system is the fact that the new (2017) Forest Law explicitly requires the use of the forest information system and the forest resource database. This law will come into effect on 1 January 2019, immediately after the end of the FORMIS II project. It provides the legal foundation for the continuous operation of the system and its main applications by the forestry administration. While this legal requirement is not a direct achievement of FORMIS II, the project's good performance and overall positive visibility in the forest sector appear to have contributed to this government decision.

While overall the institutional commitment at VNFOREST and MARD to maintain the FORMIS is high, some challenges remain. District and province level officers appear to be motivated and clearly see the need to continue using the FRMS and top-level officers equally support the FORMIS operation. Judging from interviews held in provinces and districts, it seems that mid-level management may not fully be in support of the FORMIS being sandwiched between the requests for reports from above and the difficulties to provide consistent and timely updates from the districts. The mid-level management's lack of enthusiasm and support could, if not adequately addressed, threaten the long-term sustainability of the system, especially as much of the work needs to be supported and financed by provincial budgets.

This situation might be the result of the project's focus on purely technical training at the lower levels, combined with exposure to and lobbying for FORMIS use at the highest levels of VNFOREST and MARD. Based on the discussions held, mid-level managers appear to be less convinced of the usefulness of the FORMIS and in particular the FRMS for annual reporting. While they understand its use is a requirement with superiors asking for annual FRMS, some express their feeling of being caught between the expectation to provide coherent report figures and the dependence on district staff to provide these through the system. Sometimes very small discrepancies in reporting figures occur that pose a problem to provincial FPD staff to reconcile.

The benefits of the FRMS related to the ease of data entry and maintenance might be felt more at the district level, leading to generally high levels of acceptance of and support for the FRMS by district officers. At province and higher levels, where reports have to be aggregated and reconciled these benefits are not felt. At this level, any inconsistency in the reports creates discomfort for those responsible for the reports but not involved in data generation. As a consequence, officers at these levels seem not fully convinced and some express their clear preference of the old reporting system.

From a technical point of view, the FORMIS's service-oriented architecture is adequate for the task and the consequent use of open source software and applications reduces the need for software maintenance fees. A few important issues, however, remain. First, the CIS, which already hosts and maintains the FORMIS servers has no particular experience in open source server operating systems or database management systems. CIS mainly uses Microsoft products and is used to relying upon assistance and support from software vendors. This kind of support is not directly available from the developers of open source solutions but can be sourced from independent software companies (QGIS 2018).

Second, the FRMS application has been built as a plugin to the open source GIS software “QGIS”. While this is generally a good choice, there is no real capacity or experience within CIS or DID to maintain, modify or update this kind of plugin. To continue the development of the FRMS the DID is likely to require services from its original developer, Arbonaut, in Finland. (Following the Vietnamese delegation’s visit to Finland in late November 2018, VNFOREST and Arbonaut are making a consultancy contract for Arbonaut to provide assistance to VNFOREST after the end of the project.)

Third, the current FRMS is built on QGIS version 2.14, which is not a long-term release (LTR) version¹⁸. The latest stable release version is QGIS 3.4, which will become the next LTR version. There is no guarantee that the current FRMS plugin will work with the new QGIS LTR version if VNFOREST or FPD decides to upgrade. The FORMIS II project has no more time and means to develop and test a new version of the FRMS plugin. This task will be left to the DID, who will have to involve external service providers. There is, however, a high chance the plugin will continue working well with QGIS version 3.4 or might only require minor adjustments. Still, this is an aspect that has not been clarified before the end of the project.

Aside from purely technical issues, some organizational challenges remain. It seems currently not entirely clear to all district-level Sub-FPDs who within VNFOREST will provide any assistance and backstopping after FORMIS II ends. The project sees this responsibility clearly with the DID, who should assist the regional sub-FPDs, which in return will support the districts. It appears that this has not yet sufficiently and obviously not yet officially been communicated. DID confirms being aware of their expected role and having seen the description in the FRMS manual. At the time of the final evaluation, however, the DID had not yet formally been instructed to take over this mandate and to effectively carry out this role.

The not yet fully deployed FIMS application for the forest industry is keenly awaited by forestry companies and industry associations. As a matter of fact, the HAWA association in cooperation with an EU-funded project intends to develop a due diligence system to add onto the FIMS. HAWA manifested its interest to provide support for the FIMS development or even to fully take over the future development of this application, increasing the likelihood for sustainability of the FIMS application.

Financial sustainability of the FORMIS system, or FORMIS II project results, refers its capacity to meet future financing needs after the phase-out of Finnish funding. For the FORMIS system, future financing needs will arise mainly for the following cost categories:

- Further system development and operation at the central level;
- Training and IT investment at the central and decentralised levels;
- Data collection at the decentralized level.

In a nutshell, analysis shows that financial sustainability is likely to be high for some project components that require only limited funding in the future (namely system operation and training). In contrast, continued funding for further system development was still uncertain at the end of 2018. The financial burden of FORMIS on provincial and district budgets will continue to be significant – mainly because of data collection costs in the field - but might not be much affected by the phase-out of Finnish support at the central level. (For more detailed discussion, see Annex 8.)

PFG

While the direct partners at district level demonstrated strong ownership exemplified by their confidence and knowledge of the project activities and achievements, the ownership at the commune and village levels was less evident in term of the knowledge of project activities and future plans. Livelihood support in Dak Lak is very likely to sustain after the project completes because it has a good support throughout value chain: planting new trees will be supported by

¹⁸ Current LTR version is 2.18.x, which will be supported and maintained with bug fixes and general improvements for up to 3 years.

potential buyers, buyers reach out to plantation owners to buy timber, timber processing cooperative established to increase value of timber through initial processing (peeling bark, cutting into required logs with certain length and width).

The clear benefits of growing mangrove trees in shrimp ponds (increase food, creating hide and shade for shrimps, thus increasing productivity and taste of shrimps) guarantees the continuous application of this semi-ecological model of growing trees together with farming shrimp. The semi-ecological model is less risky than the industrial model, which relies upon a lot of investment and inputs, but has higher risks of disease or contamination. In addition, interviewed farmers shared with the evaluation team that the quality of aquacultural products from the semi-ecological model are better and get better prices in the market. Some shrimp farmers interviewed in Tra Vinh were pursuing a mixed strategy, of both semi-ecological and industrial ponds, for diversification and risk minimization.

The application of the PFG smartphone app on forest cover and ownership is based on the FORMIS platform, and thus covers only forest land. The team is concerned that it might not be applied as widely as it could be otherwise, as it does not cover agricultural land. The villager skills in using computers or smart phones to access information on market prices on agricultural, aquacultural, and forestry products will last and will be shared widely among community members. As a result, future funding for replacing the information kiosk computers or the smart phones might not be a problem, especially when the livelihood models become successful.

The continuation of PFG app will be influenced by the sustainability of the FORMIS platform and FRMS application, upon which the PFG application has been built. Nonetheless, the PFG App has been based on Google maps, so even if the FORMIS platform has problems, the PFG App will work normally. The Vietnamese company that developed the PFG App has been working on Version 2.0, which had a Beta version in August 2018 and the final version was released in February 2019 and was to be publicly available.

To further expand the scope of using PFG App, AAV has developed an application for disaster warning and livelihood management accessing market (PDG). This application inherits all the features of PFG's livelihood management and market connectivity. The PFG project has also developed a wood-based traceability application, of which, in its preparation, has consulted content of the draft Circular "Regulations on exploitation and management records, traceability of timber products" of MARD to ensure the app's features can meet practical requirements.

Evaluation Questions 9–11 on Sustainability of the projects

Overall, the forest management information system development and capacity built to use the system – at central, regional, provincial, district, commune and community levels – seems highly sustainable. Considerable efforts have been put into designing a FORMIS platform and various applications, especially FRMS, that are user-friendly and meet real stakeholder needs.

FORMIS far exceeded its original training objectives, in providing training to staff at 547 districts, and developing a core group of trainers. It also developed a number of different eLearning courses, for stakeholders to learn, or refresh, their understanding.

Training provided by PFG to CCGs, cooperatives, and other community members has built grassroots capacity to access data in FORMIS using the web platform or the PFG smart phone application. Although many rural people have mobile phones, PFG trained community members in how to access FORMIS, and the internet in general, to get information regarding their forest land ownership and related to their PFES or forest protection contract payments, information on livelihood issues, and market prices for agricultural, forestry, and aquacultural products. This information has the potential to help them improve their household income, and better negotiate sales of their products with potential buyers.

Table 9 Overall rating for sustainability

Project	Rating	Remarks
FORMIS II	Yellow	External conditions are positive for sustainability. Institutional conditions at VNFOREST are not fully satisfactory.
PFG	Green	The project's achieved results are highly sustainable.

Evaluation Question 9. To what extent have the projects achieved sustainable results?

FORMIS II

Especially in result areas 2 and 3 the FORMIS II project is very likely to have achieved sustainable results with the FORMIS platform and tools developed and technically handed over to MARD and VNFOREST. Acceptable technical capacity to maintain and sustain the platform and database has been created and adequate budget request have been prepared. The institutional “willingness” to maintain the FORMIS system, applications and services seems to be ensured.

The likelihood of the FORMIS system to remain sustainable has significantly increased with the recent decisions by VNFOREST to make all forest resource data available to the general public via download. This effectively creates a demand for the FORMIS-related data and services and in return increases the need for VNFOREST to keep the system alive and to maintain its underlying data.

The inclusion of the use of forest information system and forest resource database into the new forest law, which comes into effect in January 2019 right after the project ends creates not only the legal basis for the use of the system but also a legal requirement for VNFOREST and FPD to use and maintain the FORMIS system in the future. Consequently, the likelihood of these key project results and its purpose being sustainable can be seen as high.

Regarding staff capacity and internal processes at VNFOREST and MARD (results 1, 4 and 5), achieved results are satisfactory but their long-term sustainability remains less certain. While staff capacity has significantly increased, it is not yet clear to what extent the VNFOREST and regional FPD are effectively able to maintain the capacity levels by continuously providing relevant technical training. Equally, some official internal instructions are still outstanding at time of writing, such as the official instruction to the MARD DID to maintain the forest resource database and the FRMS. Given the above legal requirement for the use of the FRMS, there is a high likelihood that these official instructions may soon be issued.

The IT infrastructure and the software solutions provided by the FORMIS II project are technically sustainable for the time being and are sufficient for immediate and continuous operation of the platform and its services beyond the end of the project. Despite this, future investments in upgrades and replacements cannot be avoided, given the generally short half-life of any IT equipment. As long as MARD and VNFORST provide adequate budgets, the technical sustainability of the FORMIS II results is very likely.

PFG

The PFG activities are highly sustainable.

What the PFG has achieved at their project sites is very likely to be sustained partly because these sites are priority areas for ActionAid. After the PFG project's funding is up, ActionAid is still in these areas to continue work. ActionAid has on-going activities at the project sites from other funding. It is also committed to continue support to core group members to continue the use and application of the PFG apps and to mainstream the 17 groups and two cooperatives into more participatory forest governance and development processes at the project sites. In this regard, all three results are likely to be maintained.

The question here is whether the sustainability should be made at the expense of the right sites for project objectives. For example, if ActionAid were not bound by its prioritized geographical zones (for their good reasons), it could have very possibly worked in other provinces with more favourable conditions (such as in a less sensitive province than Dak Lak) to test FORMIS's contribution to the achievement of PFG results 1 and 2.

Evaluation Question 10. What are the possible factors that enhance or inhibit the different aspects of sustainability of projects' achievements (ownership/commitment, economic/financial, institutional, technical, socio-cultural and environmental) including cross-cutting objectives?

FORMIS II

One factor that risks inhibiting the technical/physical sustainability of the key FORMIS II results is the maintenance and upgrading of end-user equipment. The project itself was not expected to provide any IT equipment at district level effectively leaving necessary upgrades to MARD. Many district officers perceive their IT equipment as unsuitable for an efficient use of the FRMS: reportedly, some officers, in fact, use their own personal laptops. The government procurement system is lengthy and may take more than one year. (The evaluation team was told that if the need was identified in 2018, it would go into the 2019 budget, and be procured in 2020.) This situation may result in users being put off by frequent and recurrent errors in entering data especially when reporting deadlines are close. In return, this may invite users to discontinue FRMS use and fall back to the previous way of reporting.

The FORMIS II project, however, could have done little to mitigate this hardware problem other than recommending replacements and upgrades of end user IT equipment. Providing more than 500 districts with computers was clearly beyond the scope of the project. Generally, the use of FORMIS and FRMS does not require any particular or highly-specialized computer equipment so VNFOREST simply needs to provide standard, off-the-shelf laptops to end users -- a task it can clearly accomplish without external assistance.

As with any digital or online service, continuous availability and accessibility are crucial for a positive user experience. In the case of the FORMIS, system uptime has to be maintained at high levels and the underlying forest resource database has to be updated to maintain its meaningfulness and relevance to end users.

An important external factor that has the potential of significantly enhancing sustainability of the FORMIS II results is the general push of the Vietnamese government for e-government and for the digitization of government services. The FORMIS platform and applications, and here in particular the access provided to the forest industry and the general public, are fully in line with government efforts and strategies.

PFG

For PFG's livelihood initiatives to be sustained, it is important the timber demand, for timber from acacia plantations, continue. Currently, demand for the product is high, which drives companies to advance funding for timber growers and guarantee the sale of the timber. The high demand for timber is forecasted to remain in the next ten years or so, especially as Vietnam has now officially joined the European market under the FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreement¹⁹. This high timber demand was also confirmed by PFG's study and workshop on this issue.

The semi-ecological model of shrimp farming is also likely to be sustainable, especially if the farmers are able to market their products as more environmentally-friendly and/or healthier, i.e., more sanitary.

¹⁹ Vietnam and the EU signed the VPA for FLEGT in Brussels on October 19, 2018.

The application of the PFG apps might not be applied widely especially as FORMIS only covers forestry land while trees may also be planted on agricultural land, i.e., tree plantations replacing coffee plantations, or trees planted in shrimp ponds.

In addition, as the continuation of PFG app is influenced by the sustainability of FORMIS. If, in the future, the FORMIS system were to stop functioning, then the PFG app would be likely to die out too.

Internet, computer, and smart phone skills in accessing information on the internet is likely to be sustained, as are knowledge and skills related to participatory planning, democracy, human-rights based approaches to development, and women's empowerment.

Evaluation Question 11. To what extent are the implementing partners committed to maintaining the achieved results?

FORMIS II

Regarding FORMIS II results, the VNFOREST as main implementing institution is effectively committed to maintain the FORMIS platform and tools in continuous operation. VNFOREST has requested MARD to provide a substantial budget for 2019 and beyond to keep up the system and infrastructure. VNFOREST has shown willingness to engage external service providers from Vietnam and from Finland in maintenance and further development of the platform and tools. Regional FPD offices have already started providing some backstopping and training to district level users. All of these are encouraging signs that VNFOREST and MARD are effectively committed and prepared to maintain the key project results.

PFG

ActionAid already has clear vision for taking the three results up and integrating them in other existing projects being implemented at the project sites. For instance, the organisation plans to continue to support one village in the project district in Dak Lak to legalize tenure rights for their existing land. In doing so, ActionAid is committed to support poor ethnic minority groups to acquire land from the government to improve their livelihoods (Result 2). Also, the core group members are intended to be supported as change agents at the communities.

Local officials, community members, and ActionAid have strong ownership of the project activities.

The FORMIS II project has tried to facilitate PFG's work and supported the idea of improving local forest governance. Nonetheless, this collaboration has been a relatively minor element in the work of FORMIS II.

The government at the national level, however, has not expressed strong support for this important pilot effort, but has rather focused its attention primarily on its own government activities, and then secondarily, on foreign or large-scale domestic private sector investment in the sector. The role of civil society and local communities in contributing to private sector, or non-governmental, action has not been adequately recognized and supported.

4.6 Aid Effectiveness

FORMIS II

Finland's support to the Vietnam forestry sector during the FORMIS II project has contributed invaluable inputs to the sector by effectively establishing a unified and standardized forest resource database and by developing the FORMIS system and application environment as a one-stop-shop for forest related information. Not only does it serve the VNFOREST and the FPD in their continuous monitoring and annual reporting, it lays the groundwork for other sector actors and initiatives to build upon and the FORMIS products and/or to add additional tools for specific purposes. The FORMIS service-oriented architecture allows developing and integrating additional services that make use of the FORMIS resources and data.

As a matter of fact, the FORMIS platform is already widely used by other donor-supported initiatives (see Table 4). Aside from the PFG project, which built upon the FORMIS forest resource database by extending it to the grassroots level in selected communities, the EU FLEGT process and the industry driven due diligence and chain-of-custody solutions are directly benefitting from the FORMIS products. UN-REDD has developed its SIS with direct links to the forest resource database. Other initiatives such as the PFES services also intend to use the forest resource database as a reference to establish and monitor payments. Private sector forestry companies from Vietnam and also Finland are showing interest in analysing the forest resource data for timber supply scenarios and for assessing availability of available land for plantation establishment.

With its extensive capacity building programme, the FORMIS II project made a significant contribution to uplift IT skills and information management capacity within Vietnam Government. Even if staff trained by the project have left their original positions and rotated to different posts or institutions, the general IT skills are not lost and will help to improve services and service delivery elsewhere in the forestry sector or beyond. Future bi- or multilateral donor initiatives may well benefit from the enhanced IT skills and potentially save time and inputs otherwise consumed for training.

PFG

Some of PFG activities could not have been done without FORMIS. PFG has developed smartphone app based on the FORMIS database.

The Embassy of Finland worked to promote FORMIS-PFG collaboration. It agreed to adapt the PFG approach to allow for expert recruitment, and also to scale back the geographical scope of the project, to focus on four districts instead of the original six planned.

Interviewed government officers highly praise that the project support local government's efforts in better managing forest and contributing to economic development for rural population. Thanks to the project, community awareness of forest protection increased. As a result, local people take a greater part in supporting the government to protect the forest by not cutting trees and reporting illegal use of forest resources. In addition, livelihood supports go in line with the local government's plans for economic development in the areas, such as promoting eco-friendly aquacultural practices while protecting mangrove forests; or increasing forest cover or promoting forestry livelihood development. In this regard, good coordination of efforts and the channelling of funds to the local government is observed.

Funding from the MFA plays a role of seed funding for ActionAid to pilot new ways of working with local governments and develop working relationship for the continued support that ActionAid aims to continue at the project sites.

Evaluation Question 12. How and to what extent have the projects promoted mutual accountability and ownership?

Aid effectiveness of the two projects overall is high. Without the linkage with FORMIS and without access to training and tools on information and technology, many local people of the Core Community Groups – especially women – might not have the same opportunity to learn and prove themselves as credible actors of development process in their communities. At the same time, for government partners of the PFG project, it is the first time that the government partners in the project sites were shown how to work with local people using modern technologies (PFG app, smartphones, and training in using these tools).

The FORMIS II collaboration with projects working at grass root level, however, was not limited to PFG. The SNRM Project, supported by JICA, UN-REDD project supported by Norway, and Forests and Delta's project supported by the USAID, all worked at community level and benefitted from FORMIS data and platform.

Table 10 Overall rating for aid effectiveness

Project	Rating	Remarks
FORMIS II		Use of Finland's aid has been very effective.
PFG		Highly effective

FORMIS II

By design, the FORMIS II project has provided direct support to the VNFOREST. No particular project intervention targeted institutions outside of the government, other than some support to forestry industry associations, i.e., HAWA and Binh Dinh Wood Association (FORMIS II supported them in getting access to data and developing a Due Diligence System to comply with FLEGT). Consequently, FORMIS II did not address issues of mutual accountability but certainly increased government accountability by making forest resource data, including ownership data, transparent and accessible to the general public. By doing so, the GOV effectively fulfils its obligations to provide citizens access to data and generally upholds citizen's rights to information, as stipulated by the Constitution and supported by Vietnam's 2018 Law on Access to Information of 2018. The project has therefore significantly contributed to increase government accountability towards its citizens.

Overall, VNFOREST and MARD appear to have effectively taken over ownership of the FORMIS II results. At the very least, both institutions clearly identify with the FORMIS and with what it stands for, i.e. free and open access to data and information. In summary, the project has succeeded in effectively translating external aid into fully owned government processes that are mainstreamed into the institutions and became binding by the law.

PFG

The PFG promotes mutual accountability in forest management in places. For its government partners (i.e. district and commune Peoples' Committees) of the PFG project, it is the first time they are shown how to work with local people using modern technologies (PFG app, smartphones, and training in using these). As a result, they are presented opportunities to work with local people more "authentically" and in more modern ways than they traditionally used to do. They become more approachable to local people. For core group members, improved skills and knowledge make them a more credible partners in the eyes of the authorities. As a result, the two sides work together more effectively and contribute to increased mutual accountability in the forest management in the sense that local people are accountable to the government not to be committed to forest violation (cutting trees) and local government is more likely to be held accountable to local people when they become more approachable. This process also increases ownership for the local people in forestry governance and decision-making processes when they can access information from FORMIS.

4.7 Coherence of the Two Projects, FORMIS II and PFG

The PFG project was designed as a logical extension to the FORMIS II to the community and grassroots level, and as such the coherence between the two projects has been marked by a relatively high level of dependency on the progress made by FORMIS II. For the PFG project to initiate community engagement in forestry activities it depended on the FORMIS II to successfully establish the forest resource database and to make it accessible via the VNFOREST. Similarly, the PFG depended on the FORMIS II project for training of CCG members in the use of the FRMS and FORMIS web tools. To develop its smartphone app for use by community members, the PFG project worked with a Vietnamese software developer. FORMIS II staff commented on the design, and later supported with integration planning.

Given its large scope and nation-wide footprint, the FORMIS II project focussed its attention and concentrated its efforts on the bigger challenges at MARD and VNFOREST, which are its main direct beneficiaries. Interest in and cooperation between the two projects could have been better with the FORMIS II technical advisors providing more guidance to the PFG team, in particular

in its early stages. MARD also could have shown more interest and support to the PFG project activities and the participating communities.

AAV argued that greater collaboration between the two projects could have been developed, such as engaging forest rangers in PFG training (aside from FORMIS topics, such as on participatory planning, democracy, human rights-based approaches to development, or women’s empowerment) or work on gender and poverty issues. Although FORMIS engaged an international and a national consultant to carry out studies on gender and poverty, and explicitly targeted the PFG sites for more in-depth analysis, AAV claims that they would have liked to have had the opportunity to participate in these studies, or to comment on their TORs.

Work to explore further support and collaboration with AAV, such as working with other Finnish NGOs, or with private sector, i.e., encouraging foreign companies to provide support to AAV or other CSOs’ projects through purchase of carbon emissions offsets, could have been better supported. AAV did organize some workshops, which aimed to link community members with other potential partners, such as forest owner associations, or university researchers, in Finland. AAV was not, however, included in the Vietnamese delegation to Finland – to explore further possibilities of collaboration -- in late November 2018.

Encouraging participation of local people in forest governance process is encouraged in Vietnam, as seen in various legal frameworks and policies in the forestry sector, such as the 2017 revision of the Forestry Law and the VFDS.

The application of PFG app go in hand with the government plans to encourage all sectors to modernize and adopt digital technologies, including the forest sector.

According to AAV, the two projects agreed to develop a Memorandum of Understanding for their collaboration, but although such a MOU was drafted, it was never signed. In the PFG inception report, AAV also noted that while the two projects agreed to work closely together, they agreed not to revise designs of the two projects.

Evaluation Question 13. How complementary have the two projects been to each other?

Overall, the policy coherence of the PFG project with the FORMIS II project is high. The potential contributions of the PFG project to the achievement of the FORMIS II goals, however, could have received more attention. The FORMIS II National Project Director has noted, however, that PFG has been vital in piloting an approach to extending the use of FORMIS system to the grassroots level. He stated that MARD and VNFOREST want to build upon this approach in their planned new government project for the next five-year plan (2021-2025). The challenge now is to further develop the synergy resulting from the partnership between PFG and the VNFOREST, to further mutual objectives.

Table 11 Overall rating for coherence between the two projects

Project	Rating	Remarks
FORMIS II		FORMIS II paid only limited attention to the PFG project.
PFG		PFG project relied upon FORMIS II.

Seen from a thematic angle, both projects have been perfectly complementary, with the FORMIS II project effectively developing and providing a new and improved government information service that is accessible via modern media and means of communication and the with PFG project extending this access to the final users of this information in selected village communities.

When looking at the actual footprints of both projects it becomes obvious that these are incongruent with the FORMIS II covering 60 out of 63 provinces with 547 districts. This area encompasses several thousand communes. The PFG was able to pilot its approaches in only

16 selected communes located in four districts in four different provinces. Seen from this angle complementarity is limited but the potential for upscaling the PFG approaches certainly exists. The PFG project has been useful in piloting and demonstrating the approach.

4.8 Coherence with MFA's Transition Strategy

The evaluation team concurs with the findings of an earlier review on the transition strategy in Vietnam (Katila et al. 2016), which argues that the transition strategy did not provide adequate time or resources to support the transition in cooperation modalities. In addition, it was primarily shaped, or “retrofitted,” around the existing projects, such as FORMIS II and PFG, rather than providing the design of such projects with guidance.

The Joint Final Evaluation Team believes that the FORMIS II and PFG projects would have been able to contribute more to the transition strategy, if they had been designed as transition projects from the start – and had been designed following, rather than before, the preparation of a transition strategy. As a result, there were missed opportunities for developing broader and stronger forms of collaboration prior to the conclusion of Finnish direct bilateral support to these two forestry projects.

As the two projects both were designed without this transition objective in mind, they did not have explicit objectives, inputs, activities, or anticipate outcomes related to the transition of Finnish-Vietnamese cooperation modalities. As a result, their annual work plans, budgets, and monitoring reports do not address the degree to which they did, or did not, contribute to transition, and thus it is difficult to assess and evaluate this matter at the end of the projects.

In agreement with the MFA and the Embassy of Finland, the two projects were managed in a flexible manner, with revisions during implementation. As a result, this flexibility did allow the projects to contribute more to the transition strategy than might have otherwise occurred. But this flexibility was not well documented.

Nonetheless, despite these shortcomings in the design of the transition strategy, the two projects did make efforts to reach out to a broader range of stakeholders, to ensure the sustainability of their efforts.

Regarding the transition of Finland – Vietnam relations, the FORMIS II project successfully engaged Finnish IT expertise in the development of the key FORMIS applications. In doing so, the project has helped promoting Finnish forestry IT expertise in the Vietnam forestry sector and effectively paved the way for future engagement of the companies involved in the FORMIS development. This may take the shape of government service procurement contracts or business-to-business ventures between Vietnamese forestry companies and specialized Finnish IT developers.

The project also successfully engaged with Vietnamese forestry industry associations in developing and testing the FIMS application. While not established during the FORMIS II project, there is a possibility of linking Vietnamese forestry associations to industry bodies in Finland for exchange of knowledge and to encourage direct business contacts. FORMIS II supported a visit of representatives of two Vietnamese associations to Finland during a forestry business delegation visit in November 2018.

Further collaboration between Finland and Vietnam could have been promoted between the scientific and research community in both countries, but this obviously did not happen during the project lifetime. The only recently established access to the forest resource data for the general public even outside Vietnam, may trigger interest by foreign research institutes to access and use the data in research projects. Direct collaboration may therefore emerge even without direct project support.

In terms of developing other partnerships with Finnish entities, this issue was one pursued by FORMIS II, especially through business delegation visits from Finland to Vietnam and from Vietnam to Finland. PFG stakeholders, however, did not participate in the November 2018 business delegation to Finland. Opportunities for PFG collaboration with Finnish

organizations—such as forest owner associations, private sector enterprises, or CSOs – were not explored to any great extent.

One element in the forestry section of the transition strategy had proposed that efforts be undertaken to promote the export of Finnish timber to Vietnam. Evidently this idea had previously been proposed by Business Finland (formerly FinPro) and WWF, but this idea was not followed up.

Evaluation Question 14. How has FORMIS II [and PFG] contributed to the implementation of the transition strategy?

Although the two projects were not designed to contribute to the transition strategy, they did manage to broaden their outreach to other development partners and thus lay the groundwork for other types of cooperation between Vietnam and Finland in the future.

Table 12 Overall rating for coherence with the transition strategy

Project	Rating	Remarks
FORMIS II	5	FORMIS II contributed to development of transition approaches and broadened outreach to engage various stakeholders.
PFG	5	PFG also reached out to engage more stakeholders in civil society, the private sector, and academia

FORMIS II

The FORMIS II project has not been designed as a transition project, however, certain elements of the project make it valuable for the Finland – Vietnam transition strategy. First and foremost, by successfully involving specialized forestry IT companies from Finland the project effectively created openings for Finnish private sector companies to continue engaging in Vietnam’s forestry sector in the future.

The project has also significantly contributed to position Finland in a central spot in forestry IT in Vietnam. Finland’s specific expertise in forestry IT solutions is widely acknowledged within VNFOREST and MARD and equally appreciated by other forest sector stakeholders, such as forest industry associations. This situation provides Finland with an important opportunity to leverage on these achievements and to effectively create and prepare new avenues for direct private sector collaboration, which might, for example, include cooperation and alliances between forest industry associations or forest owner associations in Vietnam and Finland, or collaboration in the wood processing industries. Other opportunities may exist for collaboration among, for example, Finnish and Vietnamese universities on forest informatics training.

For FORMIS II, if transition had been more explicitly part of the project, or at least Phase II, design, then perhaps different options might have been considered with respect to: 1) development of the FIMS application and plans for its future management; 2) development of the eLearning platform and collaboration with universities and training institutes on this activity; and 3) development of the Help Desk for the FORMIS platform. Moreover, the project inputs could have been programmed in a different way, to allow for earlier handing over management of FORMIS to VNFOREST, with a more gradual phasing out of the technical advisors, and thus a “softer landing.” Some advisors might have been available in the latter part of the project, but on a part-time, or as needed, basis, rather than full-time.

PFG

Similarly, the PFG project was not designed to contribute directly to the transition in cooperation modalities between Finland and Vietnam. Nonetheless, it has expanded its outreach and communications to engage stakeholders in the private sector, academia, and other civil society organizations in activities. For example, it has promoted links between forestry cooperatives

and timber and wood processing associations. It has, moreover, contributed to the transition strategy objectives of promoting a “knowledge society.”

For PFG, if transition had been more explicitly part of the project design, perhaps more could have been done to partner with other forestry projects and other CSOs, especially those also working with FORMIS. It would have been interesting to know, for example, whether or not the CSO platform developed under the FLEGT VPA process could have been one of the possible avenues for such partnerships.

4.9 Added-Value

The concept of “Finnish added value” has been variously interpreted over the years in Finnish development policy and programming. A very comprehensive and provocative review (Koponen et al. 2012) argues that this concept can be viewed in numerous different ways, including:

- 1) Finnish technology, technical expertise (know-how), and priorities (based on this Finnish “comparative advantage” or competency);
- 2) promotion of Finnish, Nordic and/or European values and behavioural patterns, based on values of democracy and capitalism, such as promotion of human rights, gender issues, social inclusivity, or poverty reduction;
- 3) traits that Finns acquired in development, such as perseverance (*sisu*), pragmatism, focus on more action and less talk, honesty, equalitarian treatment of others, etc.

Finnish added value can also be seen in some circumstances when Finnish assistance has played a catalytic role in a sector, and/or provided important seed funding that has leveraged other investments.

Koponen and co-authors (2012) argue that Finns believe that they can provide considerable Finnish added value to forest sector development in partner countries, based on Finland’s own development experience that built heavily upon development of the forest sector in Finland after World War II. They then highlight the key elements of the Finnish perspective on forest development. First, they see forests first and foremost as economic assets, even though their environmental and social functions are also acknowledged. Second, the Finns perceive that they have a comparative advantage in forestry, based on Finnish experience, expertise, and technology. Third, the Finnish side has a strong belief in the importance of the private sector and private forest and land ownership in forestry and sees that government and private sector (including farmers) can work together.

In this evaluation, the team has focused primarily on two dimensions of Finnish added value—the “comparative advantage” of Finnish expertise and technology, and also the values stressed in Finnish development policy. In terms of these two forestry projects in Vietnam, the Finnish added value can be seen in terms of Finnish technology and technical expertise in forest informatics; and development values and priorities prioritized by Finns, such as human rights, gender, social inclusivity, poverty reduction.

The role of individual Finnish advisors, both in the projects and the MFA, especially the Embassy, has also been an important factor of success. The FORMIS I and II projects were implemented by the same Finnish consulting company, with the same Chief Technical Advisor, for the entire period. This continuity was a factor in the ultimate achievements of FORMIS II, due to the understated but effective perseverance and persistence of the CTA and his team. The efforts of key staff at the Embassy of Finland, with a programme officer in place for over twelve years and a Finnish Counselor for over four years, also contributed to the success of both the FORMIS II and PFG projects – the Embassy staff were acknowledged by the partners to be hard-working and flexible, doing their best to ensure that the projects were successful.

Important Finnish added value to the forest sector in Vietnam has occurred through the Finnish support to FORMIS, which is playing a catalytic role in enabling further development of the entire forest sector -- it was the right project at the right time and place. The Finnish support to PFG

can be seen as providing important seed funding to pilot a new approach – whether or not this support will leverage additional investments remains to be seen. (Possibilities for scaling up this grassroots approach are further discussed in Section 7.)

FORMIS II

MARD and VNFOREST stressed that Finland is a key partner in forestry related IT solutions and will remain to be so in the future. The FORMIS II project with its achievements and well recognized results, managed to position Finland as the reference in forestry-related IT in Vietnam, and this at government as well as industry level. This has a long history dating back to the FOMIS initiative and the FORMIS I project. It appears that the MARD clearly favoured, and in this case actively requested, support from the Government of Finland.

As a result of the FORMIS II, two Finnish IT companies have been able to expose their expertise to key government agencies and a good selection of forestry companies. Both companies are now well recognized and are positively associated with the success of the FORMIS and its main applications, the FRMS which is relevant for government and the FIMS which relates to the forest industry. Here the role of the Finland IT-related TA positions should not be underrated.

Transparency in data handling and sharing is a cornerstone in improved forest governance. Finland clearly commits to the principles of open data and open access to information as a foundation to good governance in general but also to good governance in forestry in particular. With the FORMIS II project upholding these principles, Finland's reputation and recognition in Vietnam as a promoter of good governance was clearly strengthened.

PFG

Finnish expertise stressed forest governance, and supported the linking of FORMIS with PFG, or grassroots transparency and engagement.

FORMIS was supported by MFA and used by PFG to bridge local people with data in the FORMIS, which was said as a break-through by Tra Vinh government officers because traditionally local people cannot access or know how to use computer or apps to access information that they would like to have to better their livelihoods.

The fact that local people can access information (via providing training on how to use computer or smartphones and how to access internet) about their forest allotments, market prices on their phone screen has not yet been done by other donors or NGOs at least at the project sites. As a result, the project has added values to villagers' livelihoods by allowing them to access information on where to buy, and sell, at what prices. Also, knowing market prices enable local people to bargain for a better deal for their products.

By building capacity for local groups (CCGs) and women, and making data accessible for local people, PFG thus has increased transparency and allowed for local people's input into forest management. In so doing, the project has expanded political space for local people to take part in forest governance. Whether local people can take up this space is another matter, which will need longer-term support from ActionAid and other development partners.

Evaluation Question 15. What is the added value provided by the Finnish support?

Finland has added important value to Vietnam's forest sector through the support of these two important projects. Finnish expertise and Finland's development objectives have promoted the establishment of a robust Forest Management Information System platform and applications, and convinced VNFOREST and MARD of the importance of opening up the raw data to the public.

Finland has also stressed the importance of good governance, human rights based, more inclusive, participatory, and democratic approaches to development. These cross-cutting objectives formed a major part of the rationale for linking the two projects. Given the more technical nature of the FORMIS II work, it is understandable that the cross-cutting objectives

had a higher profile in the PFG project. But both projects have laid important groundwork for further collaboration, to build upon these Finnish contributions.

Table 13 Overall rating for added-value

Project	Rating	Remarks
FORMIS II		FORMIS II has added substantial value to existing forest sector initiatives
PFG		Finnish support has promoted grassroots engagement.

FORMIS II

Finland's support through the FORMIS II project added considerable value to efforts made and results achieved by the GOV, in particular by adding a digital dimension to Vietnam's recurrent forest resource inventories (NFIS). By developing a nationwide platform and database, as well as relevant tools, the MFA support effectively and significantly increased the usability of the NFIS data and made their dissemination easier.

With other institutions, such as universities and private sector associations, using or showing interest in using these data via the FORMIS tools, Finnish support made a distinct difference to the forest sector in Vietnam and to how forest resource data are being used and shared.

PFG

The added value of the PFG to Vietnam's forest sector is high. The project has been designed to bring about the best added-value to local people and local governments outside the MARD.

The creation of FORMIS has made possible the creation and use of the PFG information kiosks. The smart phone application, PFG APP, has been built by a Vietnamese software company based upon FORMIS. In this regard, Finnish technical knowledge in forestry sector has been shared and trickled down to the grassroots level in Vietnam. The application allows local people to explore news, market information, which open up a new world beyond their village gates.

The Finnish development policy emphasis on decreasing inequality, empowering women, promoting local democracy, transparency, and accountability has made possible this type of forestry project, which has gone beyond the merely technical forestry information system issues to consider how such information is used to better society, and to combat climate change.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The FORMIS II and PFG projects have made important contributions to the forest sector in Vietnam. The FORMIS platform and applications developed fill a central need in the sector, and provide information that can, and will, be used by many stakeholders and development partners. The huge achievements are the national coverage of the system, now working in 60 provinces and 547 districts, and the opening of the data to the general public.

The data is vital not only for improved management of the sector, but also for participation in numerous other national and international processes. Improved data on private sector involvement in the forest sector, through future use of the Forest Industry Management System (FIMS) application, will be important for certification and FLEGT initiatives, including export of timber and wood products. The data is important for monitoring the payments in the national PFES system and forest protection contracts. The data can be used by the government for its national REDD+ program, in terms of providing information on the REL, MRV, and Safeguard Information Systems (SIS). It is also under use by the Sustainable Forest Management project supported by JICA, which has developed a tablet application for data entry in the field, now operational in 16 provinces. This app is also being used by UN-REDD, FCPF, and USAID supported projects.

The PFG project has been a useful pilot project, demonstrating the importance of extending use of FORMIS to the grassroots level. The information has assisted community members to develop community forestry management plans and forestry-related livelihood [improvement] models. It has improved local forest governance, transparency, and accountability, insofar as villagers can now cross-check FORMIS data on land ownership and report any errors to their local forest rangers. The data can also be used to calculate PFES and forest protection contract payments for individual households or communities. CCG members have developed skills in using computers and smart phones to access information on the internet, related to general news, livelihood development, and market prices for their products. They are sharing this knowledge with other community members. Moreover, the PFG has promoted human rights-based approaches to development and the empowerment of women. The project has worked with two forestry cooperatives, assisting them with land rights documents and linking them to potential partners in the wood processing sector.

Overall, the two projects have performed well, with very good to excellent performance on many criteria, and satisfactory performance on the other criteria (Table 14).

Table 14 Rating of Evaluation Criteria

Criteria	FORMIS II	PFG
Relevance	Green	Yellow
Impact	Green	Green
Effectiveness	Green	Yellow
Efficiency	Green	Green
Sustainability	Yellow	Green
Aid Effectiveness	Green	Green
Coherence of two projects	Yellow	Green
Coherence with transition strategy	Green	Green
Value added	Green	Yellow

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the report provides recommendations related to ensuring the sustainability of the results of the two projects. Recommendations to MFA of a more general nature and broader lessons learned are in the following section.

6.1 Recommendations for the FORMIS System

For the FORMIS System, the Joint Final Evaluation Team recommends that:

Recommendation 1. Adequate political support and funding for the maintenance, annual updating, and training for the FORMIS system is needed to keep the platform relevant and useful for the forest sector.

VNFOREST has secured funding for 2019-2020 to maintain core functions of FORMIS. It has prepared a proposal for expanded support for the upcoming 5-year plan period, 2021-2025. MARD leadership has stated that such support will be forthcoming, but that remains to be seen when MARD prepares the next 5-year plan and makes decisions among competing budget demands. Similarly, increasing support will be required on the provincial and district levels to continue use and updating of the system. Keeping the databases updated is key to keeping the whole FORMIS system alive and relevant to a broad range of users. MARD is recommended to engage with other stakeholders for additional support to the overall FORMIS platform.

Timing: 2019-2020

Responsible: MARD Deputy Minister as well as the Deputy Director of VNFOREST; Heads of Provincial DARDs

Recommendation 2. VNFOREST focus on the key elements of FORMIS, which should be managed by government, and hand over management of some applications to other stakeholders in the private sector and/or civil society.

For example,

2.1 VNFOREST consider handing over management of the Forest Industry Monitoring System (FIMS) to the private sector, such as forest industry sector associations; and

MARD and VNFOREST should concentrate on those parts of the FORMIS system that directly relate to their core mandate and activities. These parts include the FORMIS platform, the FRMS, the forest resource database and the data sharing functions. As VNFOREST has no official role in producing and maintaining an information system for the private sector, VNFOREST should consider handing over further development of the FIMS to the private sector.

2.2 VNFOREST consider handing over maintenance and future development of the FORMIS eLearning platform to an interested university or consortium of universities.

Similarly, to reduce the workload for DID and to focus on core functions, VNFOREST should envisage to hand over maintenance and future development of the FORMIS eLearning platform to an interested university or a consortium of universities.

Timing: 2019-2020

Responsible: VNFOREST leadership, DID, forest industry associations, Vietnamese universities with forest faculties, and international partners

Recommendation 3. DID focus, first and foremost, on keeping the FORMIS system running and operational, before devoting resources to adding more functions or applications.

VNFOREST has been handed over a fully functioning information platform and application environment. While the continued development and improvement of the applications is vital to keep the system alive and meaningful, VNFOREST should initially focus on maintaining the current system functional and operational and to minimize system downtime, as this could negatively affect user experience and uptake. Once a continued operation is ensured, VNFOREST may engage in adding new features and functionalities to the FORMIS applications.

Timing: 2019-2020

Responsible: DID

Recommendation 4. VNFOREST consider how to best add value to the forest data through analysis, especially the spatial dimension of forest development and forest change.

The FORMIS II results provide the basis for a fact-based and data-driven forest resource management. VNFOREST should therefore raise the stakes by not only using the FORMIS applications and data for monitoring and reporting on forest change but to add value through analysis, especially of the spatial dimension of forest development and forest change. In doing so, VNFOREST would increase the chances of positive environmental, economic, and social impacts on the forest sector through sound and analytic forest management decisions.

Timing: 2019-2025

Responsible: VNFOREST, research partners (at universities or research organizations)

Recommendation 5. MARD provide adequate and required skills to DID, whether through existing or newly-resourced staff, or sourced externally, and frequent training to DID staff, so that it can effectively perform its envisaged roles.

DID skill development needs to cover four key issues:

5.1 Management, administration and maintenance of the spatial database, i.e., DID IT and GIS staff require very advanced skills in database management using PgAdmn and SQL and in spatial data management using PostGIS, Spatial SQL and GIS applications (QGIS, ArcGIS)

5.2 Management of continuous training programmes, i.e., DID training experts need advanced skills in: 1) planning; 2) preparing budgets for, and 3) organizing large-scale training events, which may include the procurement of external training services. Required skills include assessment of training achievements and evaluation of training results and collaboration with external experts, e.g., universities, on maintenance and development of the the FORMIS e-learning platform;

5.3 Management of FORMIS application development and maintenance, i.e., the DID head requires an advanced level of competence in the procurement and management of external services from IT companies or individual IT experts, which includes preparation of detailed Terms of Reference and required budgets; and

5.4 Management and administration of FORMIS users, i.e. the DID Data and Web Specialists require advanced skills in: 1) user account management and maintenance using the FORMIS central authentication system, 2) data and network security management, and 3) help desk management.

MARD needs to provide adequate and required skills to the DID by either acquiring external services, e.g. by embedding long-term national consultants for GIS, data base and data

management into the DID, or by asking government for exemption from current recruiting restrictions, given the fact that long-term maintenance and operation cannot be ensured with existing staff resources.

With the departure of the FORMIS II Project TA, MARD needs to further strengthen and institutionalize ownership of the FORMIS platform, to maximize its positive impacts and sustainability. Particularly crucial will be the ability for the central and regional offices to provide support and troubleshooting to the provincial and district staff to maintain and update the system. This support includes the capacity of VNFOREST and DID to manage a continuous training programme.

MARD should envisage to provide recurrent training to DID staff on the key FORMIS apps and platform services (FRMS, data sharing, web portal), ideally through original app developers. The focus of these trainings should initially be set on application maintenance and troubleshooting, and on IT project management in the long run (see “DID skill development” below). Training could be delivered on-site or online (skype, team viewer, etc.), in which case DID staff have to be allowed to use their work time for online sessions with the trainers.

Timing: 2019-2020

Responsible: VNFOREST, DID, external service providers, universities and/or training institutes

Recommendation 6. MARD and VNFOREST further analyse and address the existing threats to the sustainability of the FORMIS platform and its applications.

The evaluation identified numerous challenges to the ongoing sustainability of the FORMIS platform. For example, many middle management personnel in the government forest institutions, did not fully understand nor support the FORMIS platform, how and why its data results differed from previous data, and the importance of FORMIS for much more than merely making reporting in a timelier manner. If not addressed, such misunderstandings could undermine political will for ongoing maintenance and implementation. Another issue is the ongoing evolution of forest informatics by different stakeholders, which could fragment the sector and undermine commitment to a unified platform. A third issue is the inadequate computer hardware that exists in many forest districts, which requires upgrading. Therefore, it is important that a more thorough analysis be undertaken of existing threats to FORMIS sustainability.

Timing: 2019-2020

Responsible: MARD and VNFOREST leadership, DID, possibly external expertise (either within Vietnam or available internationally)

6.2 Recommendations for Participatory Forest Governance

For participatory forest governance, the Joint Final Evaluation Team recommends that:

Recommendation 7. Further support be provided to the viable household and community-based forest plantations and associated cooperatives, through continued support to value-chain linkages, with markets and timber and wood processing industries and associations.

PFG has promoted forest plantations as livelihood improvement activities on the household and community-based levels, as well as the establishment of cooperatives of owners. Training has been provided on value-chain linkages, as developing commercial contacts (and contracts) with potential buyers and investors. These activities show great promise, and in Thong Nong District, the district is focusing its socio-economic development plans on such forestry activities.

Timing: 2019 onwards

Responsible: AAV, other CSOs and projects working on community-based forest management

Recommendation 8. In any future replication of the forestry-related livelihood support models, improvements in the existing approach be made.

Thus, for example,

8.1 careful analysis be done in selection of suitable sites, to ensure that that the target participants and beneficiaries already have well-documented land rights. Alternatively, if work is to be done in areas where land rights are unclear or undocumented, assistance be provided for resolving and documenting those prior to engaging in the livelihood work;

8.2 if participation of ethnic minorities and the poor are priorities, then more specific targeting of sites and criteria be done;

8.3 improved monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks be used to guide implementation and increase beneficial social, economic, and environmental impacts; and

8.4 increased government, civil society, and private sector collaboration be promoted for such forestry-based livelihood improvement activities.

The PFG project introduced livelihood models in 10 out of its 16 project communes. Some sites were not suitable – due to local people’s lack of documented land rights, and/or their lack of interest in the livelihood models. In some areas, farmers planted trees on agriculture land, rather than land designated as forestry land. Site choice, thus, should be better targeted in the future.

The project design had specific objectives of assisting poor, ethnic minority forest-dependent communities to improve forest governance and livelihoods. The objective of reaching ethnic minorities was achieved in Thong Nong District, as the population there was 100% ethnic minority. In other districts, ethnic minority participation was variable, partially dependent upon their existing land rights. The cooperative of forest land owners in Krong Bong was established by villagers with funds to invest, which was planned for a factory to do initial processing of timber and wood products. They did inform the evaluation team, however, that they planned to offer employment to poor people in their area once the factory becomes operational.

The evaluation team was unable to assess whether, or to what degree, the livelihood activities or other project activities had benefited ethnic minority or poor people. In the future, such activities could be more precisely targeted and monitored with improved MEL frameworks.

Timing: 2019 onwards

Responsible: AAV, VNFOREST, and other partners

Recommendation 9. Ongoing support be given to maintaining and updating the PFG App, as an important tool for accessing information, livelihood support, and democracy and governance.

The PFG App has been extremely useful. It not only provides access to information from FORMIS, but provides information related to livelihood models, access to market price data regarding agricultural, forestry, and aquaculture products, and related agriculture and forestry news. Users can also develop their own forms for tracking various livelihood activities. Some villagers also used FORMIS data to review their forest land ownership and calculate their PFES or forest protection contract payments.

AAV is supporting an updating of this PFG smartphone application, with a planned release for January 2019. Continued updating, support, and linkage of this application with the FORMIS platform will be important.

Communities have developed forest management agreements and improved forest governance. As part of this agreement, support was provided not only through the PFG App and provision of smart phones, but also the information kiosks, training, and livelihood support, was provided to communities, CCGs, and cooperatives.

Timing: 2019 onwards

Responsible: AAV, VNFOREST

6.3 Recommendations for Improving Collaboration Between Government and Civil Society on Community-based Forest Management

For improving collaboration between government and civil society on community-based forest management, including household-level activities, the Joint Final Evaluation Team recommends the following:

Recommendation 10. Working relationships between VNFOREST and CSOs – as well as other partners -- be strengthened, such that CSOs can more easily access information, technical support, and political leadership to support their field activities with forest-dependent communities and improve forest governance.

VNFOREST has acknowledged that the PFG project was an important pilot, demonstrating how the outreach of FORMIS could be extended beyond the district level down to the community level. VNFOREST wants to provide more support to this approach in the coming 5-year plan (2021-2025). It will be important to see how VNFOREST could best collaborate with – rather than aim to replace -- AAV, other CSOs, and private sector to achieve this objective.

Timing: 2019-2020, and henceforth

Responsible: VNFOREST, AAV, other CSOs active in the forest sector in Vietnam

Recommendation 11. Increasing support be given to broader information dissemination and communications regarding the availability – and value – of the digitized raw data now available on the FORMIS platform, and the myriad ways in which such data could be analyzed and used by a wide range of stakeholders.

Following the PFG MTE, the PFG project devoted increasing attention to preparation of communications materials and outreach regarding their activities, and how access to FORMIS data could improve forest governance and rural livelihoods. Although FORMIS II worked with several key stakeholders in the sector, many of those met by the evaluation team did not understand the larger significance of the FORMIS platform, and the value of the digitized raw data. This topic of improved communication and outreach needs greater support in the future.

Timing: 2019-2020

Responsible: VNFOREST, AAV, other key stakeholders

6.4 Recommendations for Further Supporting the Transition of the Cooperation Relationships between Vietnam and Finland

For further supporting the transition of the cooperation relationships between Vietnam and Finland, the Joint Final Evaluation Team recommends that:

Recommendation 12. Development partners and key stakeholders develop and implement more comprehensive and specific plans for further institutional, commercial, educational, and cultural cooperation to support engagement of the entire Vietnamese society in more sustainable management and development of its forest resources and forest sector.

In discussion with stakeholders, the MFA developed strategies for transition from direct bilateral support (grant aid projects) to other forms of cooperation between Vietnam and Finland -- in three sectors, namely forestry and climate change, rural water and sanitation, and innovation partnerships. The transition strategy did not, however, influence the project design of either of the forestry projects, FORMIS II or PFG. Nonetheless, the two projects have endeavoured to

work with other key stakeholders in the sector, to develop relationships with the private sector, academia, civil society, and others. A recent Vietnamese delegation to Finland, organized by FORMIS II in November 2018, explored possibilities for future collaboration between VNFOREST and private sector organizations with possible Finnish partners: the civil society partners, however, were not involved. A more comprehensive and specific plan could have been developed – and could have promoted relationships among CSOs and other partners.

Timing: 2019-2020

Responsible: MFA, MARD, forestry associations, private sector and civil society partners engaged in forest sector activities in Vietnam.

7. LESSONS LEARNED

For this assessment, the Evaluation Team was asked to provide recommendations and lessons learned on the following three topics:

- Ensuring the sustainability of the results of the two projects and the future development of the sector (primarily MARD and ActionAid). The experience and lessons learned which can be mainstreamed to government policies and practices shall be highlighted.
- Planning and implementing of similar future forestry sector programmes (for MFA and ActionAid in other countries and for MARD and ActionAid with other partners in Vietnam, for other donors in Vietnam and in other countries)
- The implementation of Finland's transition strategy for Vietnam 2016–2020 and planning and implementation the future transition phases of Finnish development cooperation with other partner countries.”

Section 6 of the report responds partially to the first topic - providing recommendations for the two projects, in view of ensuring their sustainability. The remaining issues are addressed here.

7.1 Lessons Learned for FORMIS, PFG, and the Forest Sector in Vietnam

Through support to FORMIS II and PFG, Finnish development assistance to the forest sector in Vietnam has been a matter of supporting a strategic need, in such a way as to catalyse considerable additional support to the forest sector. Thus, it has been an excellent example of the “right” project(s) provided at the right time. Another important factor has been the length of Finnish support to development of forest information in Vietnam, and the consistency of support provided, including the long-term engagement of several key individuals, such as the National Project Director and Chief Technical Advisor of FORMIS (both Phases I and II) and the Counsellor and Programme Officer at the Embassy of Finland in Hanoi. This longevity of committed and well-qualified personnel was an important element in the success of the two projects.

Insofar as Finland and Vietnam continue to collaborate on forestry issues, and forest management information systems:

- It is recommended that the MFA continues its ongoing efforts to link the Vietnam forest sector with Finnish partners, in terms of forest information technology expertise, forestry equipment, and forestry know-how. These linkages have already been promoted with Vietnamese government staff, and representatives of forest industry associations and private sector. Further linkages could be supported further through different financing mechanisms. Finnish development cooperation has a range of different financing instruments, in addition to direct bilateral grant assistance.
- The Government of Finland should evaluate options to financially support Finnish forestry universities and research institutes to establish direct academic partnerships with Vietnam with a focus on forestry information and FORMIS, forestry universities and by doing this indirectly support the continued and long-term development of forest information management capacity in Vietnam.
- MFA is recommended to explore further ways in which to support civil society engagement in the forest sector, such as through the CSO platform of EU FLEGT initiatives, partnering CSOs with Finnish private sector support, etc. The Finnish added value in the next phase of cooperation between two countries might take the form of Finnish private sector doing business with Vietnamese forestry business associations who support forestry farmers to continue to use and upgrading PFG app. In this scenario, social accountability and safeguards can also be part of business contracts or exchanges. MFA is recommended to consider how support to CSO projects could be linked to the broader civic space and civil society strengthening initiatives, so that promising pilot projects could more easily be replicated or scaled up. More links of CSOs with the Finnish private sector, academia and research could be encouraged.

Scaling up of the PFG operating model, or pilots, could be done in several different ways. AAV has stated that they plan to continue supporting the forest plantation activities started under PFG in Cao Bang and Dak Lak Provinces, especially the efforts to link the forestry cooperatives to potential buyers. They would be interested to expand the forest plantation model to other appropriate sites, if they can secure funding to do so.

The PFG pilot has demonstrated well this model, and the ability of an INGO to work well with VNFOREST on promoting greater grassroots-level forest governance. The success of this effort was undoubtedly due to AAV's engagement of an energetic and experienced Vietnamese woman forester, who had previously worked with the Forestry University and had support from a part-time international forestry advisor. Both staff members had good experience in community forestry and in working with government forestry staff.

Meanwhile, VNFOREST is preparing a new project for the upcoming 2021-2025 MARD 5-year plan. According to Dr. Ngai, the FORMIS II's national project director, they want to build upon the ideas piloted under PFG, to extend the reach of FORMIS out to the grassroots level. The Joint Final Evaluation Team does not have any further details on this idea, in terms of whether the community outreach is planned to be done through the government staff and/or working with civil society, university, and private sector partners. Given the success of the PFG approach, however, the evaluation team hopes that government will be encouraged to continue collaboration with CSO and other partners.

Other options for scaling up participatory forest governance and grassroots engagement with FORMIS could be considered. For example, a civil society platform has been established under the FLEGT VPA. This platform might be a forum to promote the idea of replicating this approach by other CSOs. Another option would be to explore this idea with other projects already working with elements of FORMIS and with local communities, such as the SNRM, FCPF, UN-REDD, VFD and GA projects.

7.2 Lessons Learned for Future Forestry Development in Vietnam and Elsewhere

Forestry development remains a vital element in national socio-economic development, and thus an important area for development cooperation. Although some people will argue that forestry development projects are “old-fashioned,” forests clearly play a significant role in global land use, climate change mitigation, food security, and other important issues. Future development policy in Finland should build upon its long experience in the forest sector yet look at how this expertise can best be adapted to meet ongoing and emerging new developments.

- MFA's next Development Policy Programme should build upon Finnish expertise in the forest sector in addressing top development challenges, such as climate change, and food security, and poverty reduction.

The relatively long and consistent Finland support to IT solutions in the forestry sector in Vietnam has clearly paid off. It has also proven that a long-term engagement is required to make such ventures a success. MFA could consider similar long-term focus on one single theme in a comparable country context elsewhere. This lesson has been learned many times over around the world – long-term support, i.e., 8–20 years (or even more) – is essential for achieving significant results in many development initiatives, particularly those involving forestry and natural resource management. The FORMIS project (Phases I and II) together were much more successful than just Phase I alone, due to the longer time commitment. The PFG project, however, was designed for a very short time frame of only 3 years, although it did receive a one-year no-cost extension due to delays in start-up.

- MFA is encouraged to support long-term support to projects and programmes to achieve significant and sustainable results, especially in the forestry and natural resource management field.

When considerable investment has been made into development of a system, such as a national forest management information system, it might be worthwhile to consider whether such an information system might be useful in other countries and adapted to meet their needs. Such an idea would need to be carefully examined, however; all too many examples exist of efforts to replicate development projects from one country to another that have been unsuccessful, due to inadequate consideration of the peculiarities of each country's needs and context.

- MFA could evaluate options to use Finnish forestry IT competence to develop a generic version of a forestry sector information platform that could be useful – or adapted to be useful - in other countries.

It is important to find the right balance between national ownership, getting the project done in a timely manner, and ensuring effectiveness and sustainability of the results. The very dominant role of FORMIS II technical advisors, both national and international, was key to successful realization of FORMIS II results. The downside is that limited or late institutional ownership was developed by VNFOREST (except for the National Project Director). A more gradual hand-over to national colleagues and more gradual phase-out of technical advisors might support sustainability better in the long run. In other words, the national colleagues could have more opportunity to manage the activities on their own, but still have support of technical advisors when needed during this transition period. In the case of FORMIS II, intermittent technical support may now be available to MARD through a services contract with a private sector company (i.e., a Finnish company with expertise in forest informatics). Other ongoing forestry projects and programmes in Vietnam are willing to provide additional assistance to VNFOREST and DID for FORMIS, should it be necessary.

- In future programmes and projects, MFA could consider more explicitly the trade-offs between engagement of technical advisers until almost the very end of the project, versus a more gradual phase-out and handing over of responsibilities.

If MFA wishes to support collaboration between government and CSOs in implementing programmes or projects, significant advantages would be possible if such collaboration was explicitly part of the design of the initiatives. The policy coherence would be improved through joint design and improved collaboration. Then the issues of joint work programming, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation would be much more straightforward.

In future bilateral forestry projects or programmes, MFA could consider that if it wishes to incorporate CSO participation, then such participation be specified in the TOR and tender proposals be submitted from consortia that include such CSOs. The civil society organizations may be better placed to undertake grassroots development work, or other elements or components of a larger project or programme. A tender could be prepared, for example, by a consulting company partnered with an INGO, similar to tenders prepared by consortia of two or more consulting firms. Examples exist of such approaches being followed with other donors, such as European or North American projects that may include one or more consulting companies partnered with an INGO, such as SNV, RECOFTC, Winrock International, WWF, Care International, etc. The MFA would have to consider how to manage the project or programme funding, i.e., whether to blend funding from two or more different MFA sources into one project, or whether to provide parallel funding, with different funding streams supporting different elements of the project.

It should be noted, however, that such efforts will be inherently challenging, as often governments and civil society organizations compete – or view themselves as competing -- for donor resources. Moreover, both governments and CSOs like to have autonomy in their own

programming. Thus, it is vital that there be genuine interest in such collaboration, rather than creating the partnership as a “forced marriage.” Nonetheless, many examples exist of successful collaboration, wherein CSOs have worked with consulting companies, other private sector companies, and/or government agencies to jointly implement programmes or projects.

7.3 Lessons Learned for Transitions in Finland’s Relationships with Development Partners

Vietnam, Finland, and other countries face a broad range of ongoing transformation challenges. As countries develop in socio-economic terms, their relationships with development partners also undergoes transformation. Such changes can be better supported through improved transition strategies for development cooperation.

MFA is encouraged to prepare its transition strategies further in advance, i.e. ten years, of phasing out direct bilateral grant support. It would be useful if projects were designed to support a transition strategy, rather than a transition strategy being “retro-fitted” around existing or already planned projects. Moreover, a longer time frame would allow for a “soft landing” of projects and for greater sustainability of their aggregated achievements. Such strategies should consider not only direct government-government support, but also MFA support to CSOs and other partners.

Moreover, the design of projects to fit a transition strategy, rather than the reverse, would lead to improved targeting of objectives, inputs, activities, and outcomes to support the transition, and would facilitate the monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of the degree to which the projects or programmes did, or did not, contribute to the transition.

Although both FORMIS II and PFG contributed to the transition strategy in Vietnam, they were able to do so because of their responsiveness to the MFA ideas and the flexibility of the MFA (both headquarters and Embassy staff) in authorizing changes in work plans and budgets. These contributions to the transition were not part of the design of either project, and thus were not explicitly monitored nor reported upon. As a consequence, it is more difficult to assess their actual contributions.

- In other countries where MFA plans to transition from direct bilateral grant development support to other forms of collaboration, it would be best if the transition strategy can be developed prior to formulation of the final projects and programmes (or phases thereof), so that the projects and programmes can be explicitly designed to contribute to this transition. Thus, transition strategies may need to be planned for at least ten years in advance of completion of direct bilateral grant assistance.



Annex 1

Terms of Reference for the Evaluation

Terms of Reference for the Final Evaluation of
Development of Management Information System for the Forestry Sector
(FORMIS – phase II) and
People Participation in Improvement of Forest Governance and Poverty
Alleviation in Vietnam (PFG)
Unit for Eastern Asia and Oceania, Ministry for Foreign Affairs
14.9.2018

1. Background to the evaluation

1.1. Programme context

The Government of Vietnam's (GoV) main strategy for development comprises the 10-year Social Economic Development Strategy (SEDS) and the five years Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP). The Vietnamese Government has the SEDS for 2011-2020. The SEDS for 2011-2020 highlights several ICT related development goals. It contains the goal to modernize the information-communication sector and the information technology infrastructure in the country.

Vietnam Administration of Forestry (VNFOREST) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) has the leading role in the implementation of the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy (VFDS) for 2006-2020. The MARD Minister issued Decision 3427 in November 2006, on the "Approval of the information and technology application and development program". The overall objective is to develop a modern forestry information system, applied consistently from central to local level, to meet successfully requirements on state administration (decision making, planning, monitoring and reporting) as well as production and business activities of localities. In addition to VNFOREST a range of other agencies under the MARD is responsible for supervising and managing forestry activities, and collecting information.

Vietnam reached the status of a lower middle-income country in 2010 and it is ambitiously determined to become a modern industrial country by 2020. As a result of its lower middle-income country status, Vietnam's ODA profile is changing. In the Finnish Development Policy Programme, Vietnam is identified as a long-term partner country, with which Finland is gradually shifting to new cooperation modalities by 2018. This means that bilateral grant-based development cooperation will continue but it is in a state of transition towards a more comprehensive partnership for mutual benefit. Finland concentrates its efforts on sectors where Vietnam anticipates challenges in the future and where Finland can produce added value and complementarity based on Finnish know-how and the long experience of development cooperation with Vietnam.

Finland supports Vietnam to foster sustainable use and management of natural resources and enhance climate sustainability, and improve the basis for a knowledge-based society. To contribute to the achievement of these country development results, Finland has the following objectives:

1. Increased openness and access to information, knowledge, and innovation for all;



2. Enhanced green economy that creates entrepreneurial activity and decent jobs;
3. Improved sustainability, inclusiveness, equality and climate sustainability of the use and management of forest resources; and
4. Sustainable and equal access to improved water supply and sanitation services.

The main goal of the ongoing bilateral development cooperation projects in innovation, forest, and water and sanitation sectors is to ensure ownership and sustainability of the results while implementing Implementation of the human rights based approach and the crosscutting objectives of Finland's Development Policy Programme.

Vietnam has undergone a rapid change as regards to the availability and attainability of information in recent years. The number of internet and mobile internet users has multiplied and sharing and obtaining information is easier and faster than ever. In April 2016, the National Assembly of Vietnam endorsed the Law on Assessing Information, which becomes into effect from 1 July 2018. Despite this trend and the good will of the new law, the information sharing among and between the public and private sector still lags behind partly due to centrally controlled information structures and inefficient and overlapping information systems.

Therefore, Finland promotes horizontal and vertical sharing of information between and within public and private sector institutions and individuals. In order to advance the development objectives related to increased openness and access to information as well as sustainability, inclusiveness, equality and climate sustainability of the use and management of forest resources, Finland supports the development of efficient information systems and accountability mechanisms through a project entitled Development of Management Information Systems for Forestry Sector project.

The first phase of the FORMIS project was implemented from October 2009 to March 2013 in three pilot provinces in Vietnam. The second phase, which commenced in April 2013, was formulated to ensure a nationwide scaling up of the results which were achieved during the first phase. The FORMIS II is designed to be implemented over a period of five years, of which the first four years form the actual implementation period, and the 5th year is dedicated for monitoring and handing over of the project outcomes.

The budget allocated by the Government of Finland to the project is 9.7 million EUR. The contribution from the Government of Vietnam is 437,530 EUR. The project closing date is December 2018.

PFG project has provided complementary action for the FORMIS II and other policy processes in improving forest governance in Vietnam. PFG project has been implemented originally from November 2014– October 2017 but then has been extended to October 2018.

Both FORMIS II and PFG projects are coming to an end by the end of 2018 and these two projects complement each other. There is a need to carry out a joint evaluation of the two projects' success.

1.2. Description of the programmes to be evaluated

Development of Management Information System for the Forestry Sector in Viet Nam – Phase II (FORMIS II)

The project on Development of Management Information System for the Forestry Sector in Viet Nam – Phase II (FORMIS II) was formulated by ensuring that the next phase is built on the achievements of the first phase of FORMIS (10/2009–10/2012). The FORMIS II was designed to



take 5 years, of which the first 4 years formed an implementation period, and the 5th year was dedicated for the handover of the project outcomes. The budget of the project from the Government of Finland is 9.7 million EUR. Counterpart funding from the Government of Viet Nam is 437,530 Euro, equivalent to 11,700,000,000 VND.

The overall objective of the FORMIS II is that forest resources are managed in a sustainable way based on up-to-date information and they contribute to the alleviation of poverty in the socio-economic development framework of Viet Nam. The purpose of the project is to establish a fully integrated Management Information System (MIS) for forestry decision making supporting forest management, REDD and FLEGT activities.

The FORMIS II has focused achieving the following results:

1. Procedures, standards and mechanisms to transfer information between Vietnamese agencies: Electronic data transfer within VNFOREST, external stakeholders and FORMIS databases; VNFOREST has organised department level IT-support and guidance on IT and FORMIS products; Official regulations for data management are formulated and approved for core processes.
2. FORMIS platform and tools are operational in all provinces with a focus on forest covered provinces: Improved Forest Resource Management Information System (including: Forest Resource Information, Interventions and Reporting of Activities/Incidents, Information related to forest products and financial performance) especially the new applications of the system is tested and running operational in full in 3 provinces of phase I before applying them at nationwide. The light version of Forest Management Information & Reporting System with selected FORMIS applications is trained and running in all provinces.
3. Forest Sector data standardized and converted into FORMIS standard database and reporting forest performance indicators in place: Mobilisation and operationalisation of data collection sharing and reporting to obtain national coverage; Increased use of GPS based data collection practices in commune level; Needed off-line data entry applications are available and capable to be connected to FORMIS. Continuation of identification and integration of datasets; Two new forest business cases have been identified and conceptual plan is established; pilot system of two new forest business cases have been created and tested in 3 provinces of phase I; Supporting stakeholders in standardisation of datasets for compliance with FORMIS. Refinement of forest sector performance indicators.
4. Strengthened capacity for information management and collection: Training material of the FORMIS system is prepared into Web. FORMIS User-guide is available; Basic IT+GIS training and FORMIS specific training given in provinces and staff of these districts.
5. Information Centre of the Forestry sector/ Forest IT Unit is established and operational.

The Competent Authorities and co-chairs of the Steering Committee are the Ministry of Rural Development and Agriculture of Vietnam and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.

The People Participation in Improvement of Forest Governance and Poverty Alleviation in Vietnam (PFG)

The project People Participation in Improvement of Forest Governance and Poverty Alleviation in Vietnam (PFG) implemented by ActionAid Vietnam aims to create an open and interactive space for people from grassroots communities to participate in national forest management



information system to improve forest governance and contribute to poverty alleviation in Vietnam. The overall objective of the project is to alleviate poverty by protecting and utilizing forest resources effectively through accountable forest governance in Vietnam. The project was designed with the objectives from Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland:

- (i) to achieve the goals of Finland's development policy;
- (ii) to achieve Finland's country- and organisation-specific objectives and
- (iii) to strengthen civil societies and democracies in developing countries paying due regard to the citizens' opinions and needs in the national and international decision-making.

The project purpose is to enhance the participation of the grassroots communities and people in national forest management information system as their rights to make forest governance accountable, thus contributing to poverty alleviation in Vietnam. The project implementation included activities that focused on e.g. capacity building in basic IT skills and accessing information from various sources as well as piloting livelihood models that integrated elements of sustainable forest governance. The project has focused to achieve the following results:

1. Accountable forest governance is ensured through community based forest management supported by digitalized FORMIS project (Development of Management Information System for the Forestry Sector in Vietnam).
2. Poor ethnic minority people in the project areas are capable to make use of the information generated by FORMIS and they are able to assert their rights to acquire land from the government for their livelihood.
3. Government changes its policy to include practices of good local forest governance based on the best practices generated by the project.

The total grand budget of PFG project is EUR 1,095,755 of which EUR 1,049,652 is from Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, EUR 46,103 contributed by ActionAid. The PFG project's original duration was three years starting from November 2014. However, the project start was delayed and the PFG was extended to continue until the end of October 2018.

1.3. Results of previous evaluations

A Mid Term Evaluation (MTE) of FORMIS II project was conducted July–September 2015. The MTE assessed FORMIS II overall as a highly relevant for Vietnam and for Finland. As reliable, comprehensive, open and easy access data is essential for sustainable forestry management, the FORMIS platform and applications have created an enabling system for improved monitoring, planning and decision making. Easily accessible data has also provided tools for planning of forestry-related livelihood development, and has also important in protecting the rights of communities living in forest areas. The MTE identified recommendations to ensure sustainable exit of the project. The recommendations were as fine tuning of an otherwise soundly based project. More details of the finding, recommendations are available in the MTE report.

However, some key recommendations are as the following:

- Result 1: Data sharing standard and mechanisms
 - o Working groups with clearly assigned experts, work plan, schedule and resource allocations with MONRE and MPI/GSO need to be established to develop the data sharing mechanisms.
 - o The finalization and official approvals of the "Data License" and "Special Terms and Conditions for Information System Services" need to be processed by the end of 2015.
- Result 2: FORMIS platform and tools



- Forest Resource Inventory Standard needs to be defined soonest possible to ensure unified set of parameters for application. FIPI/MARD should be brought in to cooperate in standardization of the inventory parameters and methods.
- Topographic maps should be integrated to the platform's map interface; this is one of the core issues for the working group with MONRE.
- Regulation on FORMIS system (Forestry MIS) should be completed MARD, by the end of 2015.
- Recommended new applications: (1) HR application, (2) Forestry industry database, (3) Document processing application (as part of the FRMS). Regarding the second application, an identification and feasibility study should be conducted as the first step.
- Result 3: Forestry sector data integration to FORMIS
 - Data integration should be conducted at two levels: Integration of data necessary for national forestry planning, decision making, management and monitoring (based on approved data standards and parameters); this data should be fully integrated to the FORMIS system interface and should have full national coverage. Integration of other data (variable data produced by various projects etc.). This data covers typically only some provinces and may use different kinds of parameters. Therefore, it cannot be used for national level monitoring, planning and/or decision making. However, if the data might be interesting for various users, it would be useful to make it available through the FORMIS platform with metadata descriptions and links to the original sources.
 - MARD/VNFOREST should define the forest data standard (NFIS or other?) soonest possible (by the end of 2015) to ensure that the applications are based on an approved parameters and data standard.
 - Based on the approved data standard, FORMIS should strongly focus on achieving national coverage of FRMS by using NFIS data during 2016 to ensure the usability of data to national policy formulation, planning and reporting. Full coverage is also essential for training on the usage of the FRMS application.
- Result 4: Capacity development
 - Comprehensive capacity development strategy needs to be prepared to ensure a systematic approach for capacity building. An international short-term expert should be recruited to support the work (allocation 2-3 working months in 2 work periods). As the first step, the expert should review the CNA plan and make relevant improvements. Based on the strategy, a clear capacity development plan needs to be prepared by the end of spring 2016. MARD's training staff should be brought in to this process to ensure continuity of capacity building.
 - Linked with the capacity development strategy, a comprehensive dissemination strategy should be prepared as well.
 - A small group of pilot provinces should be selected for developing and testing the capacity building approach down to ranger level. The actual capacity building for rangers will be the responsibility of VNFOREST and provinces/districts, but FORMIS needs to develop the training modules, programs and provide training for trainers.
- Result 5: IT Unit
 - A working group should be established with DID and CIS to develop the relevant solution for server management and data security



- CNA and future capacity building should also address DID's and CIS's needs to ensure maintenance and system development after project exit.
- The role of the IT Working Groups (DARD/VNFOREST) in provinces should be clarified, and their capacity improved to support the usage and maintenance of FORMIS in provinces and districts.
- A working group should be established with the AAV-PFG project to develop the "Forest Owners' Data Bank" and/or "Extension Toolkit" under the FORMIS platform to ensure easy access of forest owners to relevant data and guidance.
- The PMU with VNFOREST should clarify what socio-economic data is really needed for forestry management. Only highly relevant data should be integrated to the applications (especially FRMS). Some basic data will be made available through the Agricultural Census 2016. Otherwise, social-related data from other projects etc. may be included as "other data" described in other recommendation.

The MTE of PFG project was conducted in December 2016. The extension of the project till 2018 was one of the MTE recommendations due to a slow start of the project. Some key recommendations of the MTE are as follows:

- Projects activities should be expanded to other groups in addition to CCGs, and to other villages and communities outside of the project. The project should also involve and mobilize available resources (such as on-going projects) to create synergies and ensure sustainability. Advocacy and cooperation from local governments and Forest Protection Units should also be promoted to integrate forest development and protection into local SEDPs.
- In terms of efficiency, the project should focus more on trainings and communication to boost the application of FORMIS at local area, expanding the training on FORMIS to wider groups.
- To boost the impacts of the project, other activities, such as livelihood models, should be concentrated on several key villages (most suitable ones). The activities of the project would be carried out with the focus of financial and personnel resources.
- Further cooperation and coordination with FORMIS and related government bodies at all level should also be focused and invested on.

2. Rationale, purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The main rationale of this final evaluation is to provide independent and objective evidence to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Vietnam and ActionAid on the achieved results in FORMIS II and PFG and their sustainability. To a lesser extent, the rationale of this evaluation is also to provide information to the MFA on the role of FORMIS II in the transition phase in Vietnam from bilateral development cooperation to wider commercial, political and cultural relations.

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide lessons learnt and recommendations for

1. Ensuring the sustainability of the results of the two projects and the future development of the sector (primarily MARD and ActionAid). The experience and lessons learned which can be mainstreamed to government policies and practices shall be highlighted.



2. Planning and implementing of similar future forestry sector programmes (for MFA and ActionAid in other countries and for MARD and ActionAid with other partners in Vietnam, for other donors in Vietnam and in other countries)
3. The implementation of Finland's transition strategy for Vietnam 2016–2020 and planning and implementation the future transition phases of Finnish development cooperation with other partner countries

The priority objectives are to assess and analyse:

1. The achieved results and impact of FORMIS II and its value and merit in the perspective of the key stakeholders. The priority areas to analyze include:
 - a. Capacity building
 - b. Information and data sharing policies and practices
 - c. IT architecture, functioning and user-friendliness of the platform, applications and databases
 - d. The extent of use of the system within and outside of the Vietnam forest administration
 - e. The contribution and impact of FORMIS project to the ongoing policy reforms
2. The achieved results and impact of PFG and its value and merit in the perspective of the key stakeholders. The priority areas to analyze include:
 - a. The extent of use of the FORMIS system by communities in the pilot areas
 - b. The appropriateness of the livelihood models selected for the pilot sites
 - c. Contribution of the PFG to enhanced participatory forest governance in the pilot areas.
3. The role of FORMIS II in supporting the transition from development cooperation partnership towards more mutually beneficial relations between Finland and Vietnam

3. Scope of the evaluation

The evaluation is expected to cover the period of the FORMIS Phase II (2014–2018) and the implementation period of the PFG (2014–2018). The fieldwork should include a minimum of four provinces in addition to Hanoi. It preferred if a province where both PFG and FORMIS have been active as well as a province with a FORMIS regional office are included in the provinces visited.

The stakeholders to be consulted in Vietnam include i.e. the central government (MARD), VNFOREST, central, regional and sub-regional Forest Protection Departments (FPDs), forest rangers, MONRE, JICA, GIZ, USAID, UNREDD, VIFOREST, VIFORA and HAWA.

4. Issues to be addressed and evaluation questions

While the evaluation questions below and in chapter 2 of this ToR indicate the priority issues under each criterion, the evaluation team should not limit the evaluation to these questions only. Emphasis should be on assessing impact, effectiveness and sustainability of the Programme. More detailed evaluation questions will be presented in the inception report.

**Relevance**

- Are the objectives and achievements of the projects consistent with the needs and priorities of the stakeholders, including final beneficiaries?

Impact

- How well have the projects succeeded to make progress towards achieving its overall objectives including the promotion of the human rights-based approach and cross-cutting objectives of Finland's development policy?
- What are the intended and unintended, short- and long-term, positive and negative impacts of the projects?

Effectiveness

- To what extent is the quality and quantity of the produced results and outputs in accordance with the plans? How are the results/outputs applied by the beneficiaries and other intended stakeholders?
- Are the results/outputs and the projects' purpose making a contribution towards improved condition and services?

Efficiency

- How well did the activities transform the available resources into the intended outputs/results, in terms of quantity, quality and time? Can the costs of the projects be justified by the results?

Aid effectiveness (Effectiveness of aid management and delivery)

- How and to what extent have the projects promoted mutual accountability and ownership?

Sustainability

- To what extent have the projects achieved sustainable results?
- What are the possible factors that enhance or inhibit the different aspects of sustainability of projects' achievements (ownership/commitment, economic/financial, institutional, technical, socio-cultural and environmental) including cross-cutting objectives?
- To what extent are the implementing partners committed to maintaining the achieved results?

Coherence

- How complimentary have the two projects been to each other?
- How has FORMIS II contributed to the implementation of the transition strategy?



Added value

- What is the added value provided by the Finnish support?

5. Methodology

The choice of methodology will be left to the evaluation team to propose in the inception report. With the aim of having an objective and independent evaluation, the team is expected to conduct the evaluation according to international criteria, and professional norms and standards adopted by the MFA (see annexes). The methodology defines methods of data collection and analysis. It is expected that multiple methods are used, both qualitative and quantitative.

Consultations with the relevant partners and stakeholders will be conducted. These include Finnish and Vietnamese government officials, members of the TA team and final beneficiaries of the projects.

Validation of results must be done through multiple sources. The evaluation shall demonstrate how triangulation of methods and multiple information sources are used to substantiate the findings and the assessment. Data shall be disaggregated by relevant categories. The evaluation must be gender and culturally sensitive and respect the confidentiality, the protection of the sources and dignity of those interviewed.

The evaluation is expected to summarize the evidence-based findings of the overall performance of the project under each OECD evaluation criteria using a four level grading system: (4/green =very good), (3/yellow = good), (2/orange = problems) and (1/red = serious deficiencies). The overall performance grading must reflect the findings of all evaluation questions under each evaluation criteria.

6. The evaluation process and time schedule

The evaluation is expected to be conducted in October–December 2018. The tentative starting date is 3 October 2018. The evaluation will include inception and desk study phases, field work and reporting. Field work will take place in some projects' sites.

The assignment will begin with a kick-off meeting with the MFA and the Embassy of Finland. The evaluation team can join virtually via Skype or other similar medium.

When the evaluation team has submitted an inception report, before field work, a meeting will be held between the team, the MFA, the Embassy of Finland, MARD and ActionAid. The two international experts are expected to be physically present in Helsinki in the inception meeting.

At the end of the field phase, the team will organize a debriefing meeting with Embassy of Finland, MARD and ActionAid and if deemed feasible, with other stakeholders.

After submitting the draft final report, the team will present the findings of the evaluation to the MFA and Embassy of Finland. Other stakeholders may join virtually. The team leader should preferably be present for the presentation of the findings in Helsinki.

The MFA will provide background documents. However, the evaluation team should also search for additional relevant documentation.



Brief tentative outline/dates:

- Kick-off meeting on 11 or 12 October
- Approximately two and a half weeks for the desk review, initial interviews in Helsinki or via Skype and preparations, inception report to the MFA by 21 October 2018. The Embassy staff is not available for interviews on the week starting 15 October
- Inception report meeting and presentation to the MFA and Embassy of Finland (via videoconference) by 26 October 2018. Additional interviews, if necessary, can be organized adjacent to this meeting in Finland.
- 2.5 weeks in the field mission, until 21 November 2018. The exact timing needs to be agreed during the inception phase as the FORMIS team will be in Finland for one week during November.
- Debriefing of the field mission in Vietnam on 21 or 22 November 2018
- Two weeks finalizing the evaluation report, draft to the MFA by 9 December 2018
- Presentation of the evaluation report, meeting with the MFA and Embassy in Helsinki (via videoconference) by 14 December 2018
- One week finalizing the evaluation report after receiving the MFA's comments.

7. Reporting

The evaluation team is requested to submit the following deliverables:

- Work plan (before the signing of the contract)
- Inception report (max. 20 pages)
- A debriefing workshop at the end of the field mission
- Draft final report
- Final report (max. 40 pages excl. annexes)

Inception report: Before fieldwork and based on the desk study, the evaluation team shall present an inception report including initial findings and conclusions of the desk study, detailed and updated work methodologies, a work plan with planned field sites, detailed division of labour within the evaluation team, a list of major meetings and interviews planned for the field visits, and detailed evaluation questions linked to the evaluation criteria in an evaluation matrix.

The outline of an inception report can be found in the MFA Evaluation Manual through the following link:

Presentation on the field findings: At the end of the mission, the team shall prepare and organize a meeting to present the key findings and recommendations to MFA, the Embassy, MARD and other stakeholders (if deemed feasible)

Draft final report of the evaluation will be submitted to the MFA three weeks after the field work. It will combine the desk study and the field findings. The MFA will submit comments to the report, which will then be revised based on these comments.

The outline of the final report is attached to this ToR.

The final report shall be submitted to the MFA in two weeks after receiving the comments on the draft final report.



Language of the deliverables is English but the final report will be both in English and Vietnamese. The consultant is responsible for good quality translation to Vietnamese.

Each deliverable is subject to specific approval. The evaluation team is able to move to the next phase only after receiving a written statement of acceptance by the MFA.

8. Quality assurance

The tenderer is also requested to propose and implement a quality assurance system for the evaluation. The proposal must specify the quality assurance process, methodology, tools and resources (QA personnel and resource allocations).

There should be debriefings in the MFA in Helsinki both prior and after the field mission. Kick-off and wrap-up meetings are also expected to take place in Vietnam at the beginning and the end of the field mission.

The MFA may also contract internationally recognized experts as external peer reviewer(s) for the whole evaluation process or for some phases/deliverables of the evaluation process, e.g. final and draft reports (evaluation plan, draft final and final reports). The views of the peer reviewers will be made available to the Consultant.

9. Expertise required

It is expected that the MTE team will comprise of two international and two Vietnamese experts covering all aspects of the assignment. The team can also have an emerging evaluator. One person is nominated as a Team Leader with a proven track record of having carried out evaluations successfully as a Team Leader.

The evaluation team shall ensure solid experience and knowledge in the following fields:

- Evaluations (especially final, ex-post or impact evaluations but mid-term reviews/evaluations are also considered) of development cooperation programmes. Experience in evaluations of forestry sector development programmes is beneficial.
- Forest management information systems preferably on a national level
- Database development and service oriented architecture
- GIS application development
- Experience in Results Based Management (RBM), and their application in programme design, monitoring and evaluation (M&E);
- Finnish development policy guidelines Experience in integrating cross-cutting objectives in project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation: Promotion of human rights and gender equality, reduction of inequalities, climate sustainability.
- Fluency in English, both written and oral. The national experts shall have fluency in Vietnamese, both written and oral.
- Quality assurance in accordance to the quality assurance approach proposed in the tender.

The team members must not have been involved in the planning or the implementation of the programmes evaluated or in the implementing organizations. This applies to the sub-projects and other activities financed by the programmes and the organizations implementing these.



10. Budget

The total available budget for this evaluation is 95 000 (excluding VAT), which cannot be exceeded. The budget will include the fees of the experts and the reimbursable costs.

11. Mandate

The evaluation team is entitled and expected to discuss matters relevant to this evaluation with pertinent persons and organizations. However, it is not authorized to make any commitments on the behalf of the Government of Finland, those of the partner countries or on behalf of the implementing organisations.

Annexes:

1. MFA's evaluation manual, to be found at <https://eoppiva.zapter.io/evaluationmanual2018>
2. Outline of the Evaluation Report
3. Evaluation report quality checklist (OECD/DAC and EU standards)
4. List of key documentation



Annex 2: Outline of an evaluation report

The quality criteria of an evaluation report have been defined by the OECD/DAC and the EU (see table 11 of the manual). The main components of an evaluation report are outlined below. The outline is not compulsory, but intended as a guideline in defining the appropriate table of contents for a specific evaluation. It is recommended that based on this general outline, the evaluators propose a report outline e.g. in their Inception Report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Providing an overview of the report, highlighting the main findings, conclusions, recommendations and any overall lessons.
- Includes a summary table presenting main findings, conclusions and recommendations and their logical links

Relevance: findings – conclusions – recommendations

Impact: findings – conclusions – recommendations

Effectiveness: findings – conclusions – recommendations

Efficiency: findings – conclusions – recommendations

Sustainability: findings – conclusions – recommendations

Etc.

INTRODUCTION

- Evaluation's rationale, purpose and objectives, scope and main evaluation questions

DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTEXT AND THE EVALUATED PROJECT/PROGRAMME

- Description of the broader context and its influence on the performance of the project/programme.
- Introduction of the intervention being evaluated: objectives including the cross-cutting objectives, implementation strategies, resources for implementation.
- Introduction of the stakeholders and their roles, including both final beneficiaries and involved institutions

KEY FINDINGS

13 (17)



- Empirical data, facts, evidence relevant to the indicators of the evaluation questions.
- Overall progress in the implementation.
- Findings by evaluation criteria / issue (e.g. Relevance, Impact, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability)

CONCLUSIONS

- The evaluators' assessment of the performance of the project/programme based on the findings in relation to the set evaluation criteria, performance standards or policy issues (e.g. Relevance, Impact, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Proposed improvements, changes, action to remedy problems in performance or to capitalise on strengths. Recommendations are based on the findings and conclusions. There should be a clear indication of
 - o to whom is the recommendation directed (MFA, partner institutions, consultant providing support services, etc.)
 - o who is responsible for implementing the recommendation, and
 - o when the recommendation should be implemented.

NOTE: Findings, conclusions and recommendations are summarized in a table in the Executive Summary of the evaluation report.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Are there any general conclusions that are likely to have the potential for wider application and use?

ANNEXES

- The ToR
- Description of the evaluation methodology used
- Limitations of the study
- Lists of information sources e.g. people interviewed, documents reviewed, etc.
- Quality assurance statement produced by the quality assurance mechanism used
- 1-2 page evaluation brief for communicating the evaluation results, including
- The key message of the evaluation,
- Who has benefitted and what are the most important positive results,
- Any unexpected impacts,
- Key recommendations and lessons learned.



Annex 3: Evaluation report quality checklist (OECD/DAC and EU standards)

Executive summary

- contains a clear and representative executive summary of the report
- summarises the main findings, conclusions, recommendations in a summary table
- presents overall lessons learned

NOTE: The executive summary is the part of the evaluation report that will be read most often. That is why its high quality is very important!

Context

- describes the context of the development programme
- assesses the influence of the context on programme performance

Intervention logic

- describes and assesses the intervention logic (e.g. in the form of a logical framework) or theory
- describes and assesses the underlying assumptions and factors affecting the success of the programme
- takes into account the evolution of the programme

Sources of information

- describes the sources of information (documents, interviews, other) used so that the adequacy of the information can be assessed,
- explains the selection of case studies or any samples,
- cross-validates the information sources
- critically assesses the validity and reliability of the data

Methodology



- annexed to the report explains and justifies the evaluation methodology and its application, including techniques used for data collection and analysis
- explains limitations and shortcomings, risks and potential biases associated with the evaluation method

Analysis

- presents clear analysis covering findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons separately and with a clear logical distinction between them.
- makes explicit the assumptions that underlie the analysis.

Answers to ToR evaluation questions

- answers all the questions detailed in the TOR for the evaluation
- covers the requested period of time, and the target groups and socio-geographical areas linked to the programme
- if not, justifications are given

Limitations

- explains any limitations in process, methodology or data, and discusses validity and reliability
- indicates any obstruction of a free and open evaluation process which may have influenced the findings
- explains any discrepancies between the planned and actual implementation and products of the evaluation

Differences of opinion

- acknowledges unresolved differences of opinion within the evaluation team

Stakeholders' comments

- reflects stakeholders' comments on the report and acknowledges any substantive disagreements





Annex 2

Joint Final Evaluation Team Members

Evaluation Team

The Joint Final Evaluation Team has considerable experience in working in the Vietnam forestry sector, with MARD and Finnish development cooperation, and with civil society. They also have significant expertise in development cooperation evaluation. The technical team is gender-balanced, comprised of two women and three men, as is the quality assurance team, with one woman and one man.

A brief summary of their expertise relevant to this assignment follows:

Team Leader, Dr. Paula J. Williams is a well-experienced forester and team leader, with considerable expertise in forest policy and strategy issues, REDD+, safeguards, stakeholder participation issues, community forestry, and gender issues. She has been working since 1983 on forestry development issues in Asia and Africa. Dr. Williams has led many short-term missions on project evaluation, design, and appraisal, as well as some longer-term assignments, much of it with Finnish development cooperation. In Vietnam she served as the Finnish-funded Chief Technical Adviser to the Forest Sector Support Program (FSSP), providing support to development of the national Forest Strategy, the forest sector monitoring reports, and other key sector activities. During this 4.5-year period, she contributed to the development of the Vietnam Forest Sector Monitoring and Information Systems (FOMIS), which was the precursor to FORMIS. She edited the English versions of the 2005 and 2010 FOMIS Forest Sector Reports. She has undertaken other short-term forestry and related assignments in Vietnam. At the end of her FSSP assignment, she was awarded a medal by MARD for her development contributions for a total of more than 7 years of work in Vietnam.

Mr. Martin Schweter, Senior Evaluator, is a specialist in GIS, spatial data collection and database development, and information management systems. He has applied these skills in working on numerous forestry, natural resource, and biodiversity projects over 18 years. Martin has worked previously in Vietnam, elsewhere in Asia, the Pacific, and Africa. Martin Schweter has over 20 years of international consulting experience in development projects focusing on management of spatial data, remote sensing, monitoring and project implementation in the context of natural resources, forestry and conservation. While working for many different bi- and multilateral donor agencies, he has been engaged in different MFA funded projects and with the Finnish consulting sector (Kenya, Vietnam, Morocco, Mongolia). In Vietnam he undertook a short-term consultancy for the FORMIS I project, between 2011-12, evaluating specific remote sensing approaches for forest resource assessment.

Dr Marian Meller, Evaluator, is a development economist and works as an evaluation consultant at Particip. Marian has over 12 years of experience conducting evaluation and research studies in international development cooperation. He has a strong academic background in programme and impact evaluation and has broadened his expertise through complex evaluations in various sectors, including forestry (in Central America, for the Finnish MFA), environment and climate change (e.g. in Vietnam, for the EU), and energy (in Peru and East Africa, for GIZ). He has intensively reviewed and worked with content of management information systems in various sectors.

Dr Tran Thi Binh, Vietnamese Evaluator, has over 15 years' work experience on various international development and conservation projects with non-governmental, governmental and United Nations organizations and private sector both within and outside Vietnam. She has extensive experience on designing and implementing various types of evaluations on forest governance in Vietnam. Binh completed her PhD on the role of grassroots organisations in forest management in Vietnam.

Dr Ngyuen Dinh Tien, Vietnamese Evaluator, is a Researcher and lecturer at the Faculty of Development Economics of the Vietnam National University in Hanoi. He has over 10 years of experience in environment, climate change, forestry, and agriculture. Tien has worked on

various consultancy projects, including work with the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) on forest governance and payment for forest environmental services.

Dr Georg Ladj, Quality Management, is a partner and senior evaluation advisor at Particip GmbH. He was the Director of Particip's Evaluation Unit until June 2018. Georg is an evaluation specialist with extensive experience with providing quality assurance for complex, world-wide, regional, country-level and sectoral and thematic policy evaluations. Over the past two decades, Georg has served as team leader, project director and quality assurance expert for numerous complex evaluations. He has broad sectoral knowledge in the fields of rural development, agriculture, forestry and, among others.

Ms Anni Blasten, Quality Management and Support Services, is Senior Consultant and Marketing Manager at Indufor. In addition to marketing and tender preparation for several bi- and multilateral clients and development banks, she has been working on project work, mainly in Africa. She is an experienced project manager, paying close attention to information sharing within the team, respecting time-tables and planned logistics and ensuring the quality of the team's outputs. Anni holds a M.Sc. in forest products marketing.



Annex 3

Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Matrix: Evaluation question(s) related to each criterion in the TOR

Criterion	Detailing the TOR evaluation questions	Indicators	Source of data and/or methods for collecting data
1.Relevance:			
Q1. Are the objectives and achievements of the projects consistent with the needs and priorities of the stakeholders, including final beneficiaries?			
1. Relevance	<p>How relevant has FORMIS II been to the Vietnam Forestry Administration? To other stakeholders?</p> <p>How relevant have FORMIS II and PFG been to community members in PFG pilot community forestry sites?</p> <p>How relevant is FORMIS in the current international cooperation and donor landscape?</p> <p>How relevant is FORMIS in the evolving Vietnamese forest sector, especially among the private sector?</p>	<p>Degree to which Project objectives match with forestry administration and related policies</p> <p>Relevant stakeholders confirm needs and priorities set in the project documents</p> <p>Degree to which Project achievements meet stakeholder needs and priorities</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews with key resource people, especially MARD and VNFOREST leaders</p> <p>Focus group discussions with stakeholders (GOV, projects, other institutions, private sector, civil society, community members)</p> <p>Stakeholder workshop</p> <p>Document review, project documents and mid-term evaluations</p> <p>Examination of FORMIS system (data, applications, products, etc.)</p> <p>Field site visits</p>
2. Impact:			
Q2. How well have the projects succeeded to make progress towards achieving its [their] overall objectives including the promotion of the human rights-based approach and cross- cutting objectives of Finland's development policy?			
Q3. What are the intended and unintended, short- and long-term, positive and negative impacts of the projects?			
2. Impact	<p>How has FORMIS II contributed to ongoing policy reforms? What was the contribution of PFG to enhanced participatory forest governance?</p> <p>What is the extent of the use of FORMIS within and outside of the Vietnam forest administration?</p> <p>What is the extent of data sharing: 1) among GOV institutions, and 2) between VNFOREST and other forest sector actors?</p> <p>How has FORMIS contributed to the FLEGT, REDD+, and forest certification processes?</p>	<p>Evidence of FORMIS' and PFG's contributions to policy changes at national and/or provincial level, i.e., laws, policies, regulations</p> <p>Degree of uptake of FORMIS and of capacity built by stakeholder type, including CCG and other community members in PFG sites</p> <p>FLEGT and REDD+ data in FORMIS;</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews with key resource people</p> <p>Focus group discussions with stakeholders</p> <p>Stakeholder workshop</p> <p>Document review, including Finnish development policy</p> <p>Examination of FORMIS system (data standardization, data exchange protocols and documentation)</p> <p>Field site visits</p>

	<p>How much is FORMIS used by communities in pilot areas? What degree of capacity has been built, and what further training is needed?</p> <p>What has been the impact of FORMIS on private sector engagement in forestry in Vietnam?</p> <p>What has been the impact of the PFG community forestry livelihood models on poverty?</p> <p>What have been the impacts of the two projects (FORMIS II and PFG) in terms of promoting cross-cutting objectives, such as inclusion and diversity issues, including of women and ethnic minorities, and climate change issues?</p>	<p>FORMIS data used by forest certification companies;</p> <p>Stakeholder impact rankings (to reflect the number of intended and unintended, short- and long-term, positive and negative impacts of the projects)</p>	
<p>3. Effectiveness:</p> <p>Q4. To what extent is the quality and quantity of the produced results and outputs in accordance with the plans?</p> <p>Q5. How are the results/outputs applied by the beneficiaries and other intended stakeholders?</p> <p>Q6. Are the results/outputs and the projects' purpose making a contribution towards improved condition and services?</p>			
<p>3. Effectiveness</p>	<p>How effective have been the results achieved - in each of the five FORMIS II result areas: 1) procedures; 2) platform and tools; 3) data and database; 4) strengthened capacity; and 5) forest sector ICT unit?</p> <p>Is VNFOREST reporting effectively taking place through FORMIS applications?</p> <p>In the three PFG result areas: 1) community forest management supported by FORMIS; 2) poor ethnic minority people can use FORMIS data and assert rights to land; and 3) good local forest governance promotes government policy change?</p> <p>How effective has FORMIS been in contributing to the overall development of the forest sector, and engagement of different stakeholders, including the private sector, university, and research partners?</p> <p>How are these results contributing to the achievement of higher-order objectives, such as</p>	<p>Procedures and regulations adopted</p> <p>Development of FORMIS standardization and exchange protocols</p> <p>FORMIS applications vs. 3rd party applications</p> <p>No. And level of trained operators or users</p> <p>IT unit structure and operations</p> <p>Effectiveness of training</p> <p>Functional Forestry ICT Unit</p> <p>Changes in forest sector management</p> <p>Changes in land rights</p> <p>Improved local forest governance</p> <p>Increased investment in forest sector?</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews with key resource people</p> <p>Focal group discussions with stakeholders</p> <p>Stakeholder workshop</p> <p>Document review, especially annual reports, audits, evaluations</p> <p>Examination of FORMIS system (reporting / monitoring data, protocols, applications, users)</p> <p>Field site visits</p>

	improved management of forest sector and/or poverty alleviation?		
4. Efficiency: Q7. How well did the activities transform the available resources into the intended outputs/results, in terms of quantity, quality and time? Q8. Can the costs of the projects be justified by the results?			
4. Efficiency	Were resources used in a timely manner and according to plan? Were any activities more cost-effective or timely, and if so, what were the reasons?	Planned budgets vs. actual expenditures Achievement of activities and results according to work plans, reasons for deviations Evidence for M&E and appropriate measures being taken in case of delays or difficulties	Semi-structured interviews with key resource people Focal group discussions with stakeholders Stakeholder workshop Document review, especially budgets and audit reports Annual work plans and annual reports, also evaluations
5. Sustainability: Q9. To what extent have the projects achieved sustainable results? Q10. What are the possible factors that enhance or inhibit the different aspects of sustainability of projects' achievements (ownership/commitment, economic/financial, institutional, technical, socio-cultural and environmental) including cross-cutting objectives? Q11. To what extent are the implementing partners committed to maintaining the achieved results?			
5. Sustainability	Which are the results likely to be sustained? How sustainable is the FORMIS system, in terms of financial support, staff capacity, ownership? Does it have broad stakeholder support? Is FORMIS technology sufficiently future-proof? To what extent is the DID staff capacity sufficient for future operation and development of the FORMIS and its applications? Are planned VNFOREST / MARD budgets for FORMIS maintenance sufficient to assure financial sustainability? Are there options for contributions from other donors? To what extent is the current Training-of-trainers (TOT) model sustainable and what could be	Scoring of results??? List of factors (ranking) Current and planned government support (staff, budget, etc.) for FORMIS Degree of open-sourced software and applications Planned FORMIS budgets vs. cost scenarios Data sharing by other stakeholders (ministries, agencies, projects, etc.)	Semi-structured interviews with key resource people Focal group discussions with stakeholders Stakeholder workshop Document review Examination of FORMIS system (system architecture and components, data base system, system development and updating) VNFOREST capacity management plan Meetings with major donor representatives Field site visits

	<p>alternative options (outsourcing, etc.)? What are the mechanisms and regulations for alternative options?</p> <p>Which institution would be the most appropriate to oversee ongoing TOT?</p> <p>Can the community forestry initiatives and community use of FORMIS continue without project support?</p> <p>How inclusive have the projects been, i.e. working with ethnic minorities, women, the youth, and others?</p> <p>Identification and quantification/qualification of enhancing or inhibiting factors</p> <p>Level of commitment of implementing partners</p>		
<p>6. Aid effectiveness (Effectiveness of aid management and delivery):</p> <p>Q12. How and to what extent have the projects promoted mutual accountability and ownership?</p>			
<p>6. Aid effectiveness</p>	<p>To what extent does VNFOREST feel ownership of FORMIS?</p> <p>To what extent do the PFG pilot communities feel ownership of their community forestry initiatives? How helpful has FORMIS been to their community forestry efforts? Their land rights?</p> <p>How have FORMIS and PFG promoted mutual accountability between the projects, and with their respective stakeholders?</p>	<p>Stakeholder perceptions of ownership</p> <p>Interest in the community initiatives or use of FORMIS data spread beyond the original stakeholders</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews with key resource people</p> <p>Focal group discussions with stakeholders</p> <p>Stakeholder workshop</p> <p>Document review</p> <p>Examination of FORMIS system</p> <p>Field site visits</p>
<p>7. Coherence:</p> <p>Q13. How complementary have the two projects been to each other?</p> <p>Q14. How has FORMIS II contributed to the implementation of the transition strategy?</p>			
<p>7. Coherence</p>	<p>How has the FORMIS II project supported the PFG efforts?</p> <p>Has the PFG project contributed to FORMIS II objectives, and if so, how?</p>	<p>Rangers, community members trained in FORMIS use</p> <p>PFG results improving FORMIS IT architecture</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews with key resource people</p> <p>Focal group discussions with stakeholders</p> <p>Stakeholder workshop</p> <p>Document review, especially transition strategy</p>

	<p>Why has the relationship between the two projects worked well, and what are the implications for replication elsewhere?</p> <p>How has FORMIS II [and PFG] been promoting new relationships and partnerships, expanding its original group of key stakeholders? How are new types of relationships with Finnish partners being promoted?</p>	<p>Evidence for new relationships developed (beyond traditional aid relationships), i.e., private sector, NGO, university, research, etc.</p>	<p>Examination of FORMIS system</p> <p>Field site visits</p>
<p>8. Added value:</p> <p>Q15. What is the added value provided by the Finnish support?</p>			
<p>8. Added value</p>	<p>How has Finnish support contributed towards IT technology transfer and enhancing pre-existing Vietnamese capacities?</p> <p>To what extent has FORMIS contributed to partnerships between companies and universities from Finland and Vietnam.</p> <p>Are Vietnam forestry data effectively accessible to Finland forestry / forest IT companies and research institutions?</p>	<p>Development of new IT platform and applications</p> <p>IT Hardware</p> <p>Frequency and type of use of data by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> community forestry participants VN Forest Administration staff other stakeholders, including policy makers <p>Relevant policy reforms, such as on open data sharing</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews with key resource people</p> <p>Focal group discussions with stakeholders</p> <p>Stakeholder workshop</p> <p>Document review</p> <p>Examination of FORMIS system (degree of usage)</p> <p>Partnership agreements</p> <p>Field site visits</p>



Annex 4

Evaluation Work Plan and Mission Itinerary

Final Evaluation of FORMIS II and PFG - Work Plan

Task No	Activity/task/deliverable	Responsible	Phase 1: Inception phase					Phase 2: Fieldwork phase				Phase 3: Reporting phase			
			1.10.2018	8.10.2018	15.10.2018	22.10.2018	29.10.2018	5.11.2018	12.11.2018	19.11.2018	26.11.2018	3.12.2018	10.12.2018	17.12.2018	24/12/18
Phase 1: Inception phase															
1.1	Deliverable 1: Work Plan (before signing the contract)														
1.2	Contract awarded and team mobilised; document assembly and analysis 3.10.2018. Dropbox folder opened for team.	Indufor													
1.3	Kick-off meeting 3 October 2018 by Conference Call/Skype. Minutes prepared by TL and shared by email.	Team Leader (TL) /MFA													
1.4	Preparation of team guiding processes and specifying team roles to guide work during inception	TL													
1.5	Internal team meeting (Conference Call/Skype)	Core team													
1.6	Preliminary literature review and analysis, initial interviews via Skype, on-going desk review	Core team													
1.7	Preparation of country visit briefings and templates/outlines for initial briefings and debriefings (PowerPoints)	Core team													
1.8	Preparation of meetings and interviews with project staff and key stakeholders	SS/Core team													
1.9	Drafting of Inception Report (max 20 pages)	TL/Core team													
1.10	Submission of Draft Inception Report to internal QA for review, submission of the Work plan only to the MFA as advance info.	TL/Support Service (SS)													
1.11	Internal QA of Inception Report	Quality Assurance (QA)													
1.12	Revisions and incorporation of QA comments to Inception Report	TL/SS													
1.13	Submission of Draft Inception Report to MFA by 21 October 2018	SS													
1.14	Inception report meeting and presentation to the MFA and Embassy of Finland Thursday 25 October 2018 at 11:00 Finnish time. (Virtual)	TL/Senior Evaluator													
1.15	Review and preparation of comments from MFA	MFA													
1.16	Logistical arrangements ahead of country visit started (including flights, hotel bookings, transport, visas etc.)	SS/Core team													
1.17	Incorporation of comments and revisions to finalise Inception Report	TL													
1.18	Deliverable 2: Submission of Final Inception Report (max 20 pages) to MFA	SS													
1.19	Approval of Inception Report	MFA													

Task No	Activity/task/deliverable	Responsible	Phase 1: Inception phase					Phase 2: Fieldwork phase				Phase 3: Reporting phase			
			1-10-2018	8-10-2018	15-10-2018	22-10-2018	29-10-2018	5-11-2018	12-11-2018	19-11-2018	26-11-2018	3-12-2018	10-12-2018	17-12-2018	24/12/18
Phase 2: Fieldwork phase															
2.1	Ongoing desk review and analysis, revisions	Core team													
2.2	Preparation of country visit briefings and templates/outlines for initial briefings and debriefings (PowerPoints)	Core team													
2.3	Preparation of meetings and interviews with project staff and key stakeholders	SS/Core team													
2.4	Logistical arrangements ahead of country visit continued (including flights, hotel bookings, transport, visas etc.)	SS/Core team													
2.5	Field visit to Vietnam: Hanoi. Kick-off meeting at the Finnish Embassy in Hanoi Wednesday 31.10.2018 at 14:00	Core team													
2.6	Field visit to Vietnam: Provinces	Core team													
2.7	Preparation of initial findings in Power Point in English and Vietnamese	Core team													
2.8	Deliverable 3: Debriefing workshop at the Finnish Embassy in Hanoi Friday 16.11.2018 at 10:00 (5:00 Finnish time)	Core team													
2.9	Teleconference with MFA Helsinki to discuss the report and any outstanding issues (Friday 23.11.18 or Monday 26.11.18)	Core team													
2.10	Follow-up interviews and document review to complement information	Core team													
2.11	Drafting of Final Report started	TL/Core team													
Phase 3: Reporting phase															
3.1	Ongoing desk review and analysis, revisions	Core team													
3.2	Drafting of Final Report continued	TL/Core team													
3.3	Submission of Draft Final Report to internal QA for review	TL/SS													
3.4	Internal QA of Draft Final Report	QA													
3.5	Revisions and incorporation of QA comments to Draft Final Report	TL/SS													
3.6	Deliverable 4: Submission of Draft Final Report to the MFA by 9 December 2018	SS													
3.7	Presentation of the Draft Final Report to the MFA and Embassy of Finland on Thursday, 13.12.2018 at 10:30 Finnish time. TL presenting.	TL													
3.8	Provision of feedback and comments on Draft Final Report by MFA by 14.12.2018	MFA													
3.9	Incorporation of any outstanding comments/revisions to any factual errors in reports and preparation of the Final Report	TL													
3.10	Translation of report to Vietnamese and checking of the translation - during Christmas break, submission latest in January 2019	SS/National Experts													
3.11	Deliverable 5: Submission of Final Report in English and Vietnamese (max 40 pages each, excluding annexes) latest in January 2019	SS													
3.12	Approval of Final Report: January 2019	MFA													

Field Mission Schedule, October 31, 2018 – November 16, 2018

October 31, 2018	Meeting with Dr. Ngai and his senior staff Kick-off meeting at Embassy of Finland
November 1-2	Meetings with FORMIS II Project staff
November 3	Team travel to Buon Ma Thout
November 4	Meeting with Region IV Sub-FPD Meeting at Tay Nguyen University
November 5	Field visit to Krong Bong District Travel to HCMC
November 6-7	Part of team travelled to Duyen Hai District, Tra Vinh Province For meetings and field visits
November 6-8	Part of team had meetings in HCMC and Binh Duong with: Sub-FPD Regional staff Provincial Sub-FPD staff University HAWA
November 8	Meetings in Hanoi with: CIFOR ActionAid Vietnam Vietnam Forests and Delta Project VNFOREST DID Manager
November 9	Team Meeting
November 11	Part of team went to Thanh Hoa Province to meet with Regional and Provincial sub-FPD
November 11-14	Meetings in Hanoi with: SNRM Program UN-REDD Project MARD Deputy Minister REDD+ National Focal Point MARD Finance FPD DID staff CIS staff Forestry University FAO project at FIPI Eu-FLEGT Facilitator
November 15	Stakeholder FORMIS Assessment Workshop
November 16	Debriefing Meeting at Embassy of Finland

Annex 5

Information Sources: Documentation and Stakeholders Consulted

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STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

Organisations	Participants	Position	Contact Information
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD)			
Minister's Office	Mr Ha Cong Tuan	Permanent Deputy Minister MARD, Director VNFOREST, Head of FORMIS II Steering Committee	Mob. 0913223397 tuanfpd@gmail.com
MARD, International Cooperation Department (ICD)	Mr Nguyen Quang Huy	Desk officer	-
MARD, Department of Finance (DOF)	Ms Pham Thanh Huyen	Deputy Director of Department	Mobile: 0912632918T hanhhuyen692000@yahoo.com
MARD, Center for Information and Statistics	Mr. Bang	Head, CIS	Mob: 0913037950
Officer of the State Steering Committee for the Target Program on Sustainable Forest Development and REDD+ Implementation	Mr Pham Van Binh	Focal Officer for REDD+	+ 84 24 3724 5805 Mob: 0943.973.983 binhgsdg@gmail.com or reddvietnam@gmail.com
MARD, Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (FIPI)	Mr Nguyen Cao Tung	Director of Forest Information Consulting Centre	nguyencaotung67@gmail.com
MARD, Vietnam Forest Administration (VNFOREST)			
VNFOREST	Dr. Nguyen Ba Ngai	Deputy Director General of FORMIS (through 31/10/18); National Project Director FORMIS II (through 31/12/18)	Mob: 0912062179 nguyenbangai@gmail.com
VNFOREST	Mr. Nguyen Binh Minh	Deputy Project Director	minh.dof@gmail.com
VNFOREST, Forest Protection Department	Mr Đỗ Quang Tùng	Director of Forest Protection Department	tung.kl@mard.gov.vn

Organisations	Participants	Position	Contact Information
VNFOREST, FPD	Mr Nguyen Danh Thanh Hai	Deputy Director of Forest Protection and Management Section	hai@kiemlam.org.vn
VNFOREST Finance and Planning Dept.	Ms. Nguyen Van Vu	Director	
VNFOREST	Mr Nguyen Duy Thanh	Chief accountant	thanh.khnn@gmail.com
VNFOREST, Admin Dept.	Ms. Nguyen Thi Hong Ly	Deputy Director	Mob: 0915239907 hongly018@gmail.com
VNFOREST	Mr Nguyen Van Chinh	Chief Administrative Officer	chinhcln@gmail.com
VNFOREST, Data and Information Division (DID)	Mr. To Van Thao	Head of DID	Mob: 0917886887 thaovnforest@gmail.com
VNFOREST, DID	Mr. Cao Xuan Y	ICT staff	
VNFOREST, DID	Mr. Hoang Duy Tung	ICT staff	
VNFOREST, DID	Mr Nội Thế Nghiệp	ICT staff	
VNFOREST, DID	Mr. Dao Duc Phong	ICT staff	
FORMIS II Team			
Project Management Unit	Mr. Truong Le Hieu	National Coordinator	nguyenba73@yahoo.com
PMU	Mr. Tapio Leppanen	Chief Technical Advisor	tapio.formis@gmail.com
PMU	Mr. Mikko Nivala	Associate Technical Advisor	mikko.formis@gmail.com
PMU	Mr. Nguyen Trong Khanh	Advisor	khanhnt82@gmail.com >
PMU	Mr. Nguyen Dong	Advisor	dong.formis@gmail.com
PFG Project, ActionAid			
ActionAid	Ms Hoang Phuong Thao	Country Director	thao.hoangphuong@actionaid.org
PFG	Ms Chu Thi Ha	PFG Acting Program Manager	Ha.chuthi@actionaid.org
PFG	Ms. Vu Hong Trang	PFG Project Expert	-
PFG	Ms. Mai Thi Thanh Nhan	PFG Project Coordinator	nhan.maithithanh@actionaid.org

Organisations	Participants	Position	Contact Information
PFG	Mr Steffen Johnsen	PFG Technical Advisor	sj@nordeco.dk
ActionAid	Ms. Trần Tuấn Anh	Project Officer	anhtrantuan@actionaid.org
Regional Sub-FPD Offices			
Sub-FPD, Region IV (Buon ma Thuot)	Mr. Bùi Sanh	Phó Chi cục trưởng	Mobile: 0963467707 Email: buisanh68@gmail.com
Sub-FPD, Region IV (Buon ma Thuot)	Nguyễn Đình Thắng	Trưởng phòng nghiệp vụ II	Mobil: 0913444850 Email: thangqlrdo@gmail.com
Sub-FPD, Region IV (Buon ma Thuot)	Nguyễn Thị Hòa Bình	Phó trưởng phòng NV II	Mobile: 0918545298 Email: nguyenhoabinhkldno@gmail.com
Sub-FPD, Region IV (Buon ma Thuot)	Lương Thế Phương	Kiểm lâm viên phòng NV II - TOT	Mobile: 0903587172 Email: phuong.klv4@gmail.com
Sub-FPD, Region IV (Buon ma Thuot)	Nguyễn Văn Quang	Kiểm lâm viên phòng NV III - TOT	Mobile: 0917406060 Email: nguyenvanquangkl1971@gmail.com
Sub-FPD, Region II (Thanh Hoa)	Nguyễn Tuấn Thành	Deputy regional FPD	
Sub-FPD, Region II (Thanh Hoa)	Nguyễn Hữu Huấn	Vice chair of technical department	
Sub-FPD, Region II (Thanh Hoa)	Nguyễn Văn Tiên	Forest fire prevention ranger	
Sub-FPD, Region II (Thanh Hoa)	Hà Tổ Nam	Forest fire prevention ranger	
Sub-FPD, Region III (Ho Chi Minh City)	Lê Huy Hiệp	Deputy of Regional III	hiepk1@gmail.com
Sub-FPD, Region III (Ho Chi Minh City)	Bùi Tuấn Tú	Ranger	tuantu884@gmail.com
Sub-FPD, Region III (Ho Chi Minh City)	Nguyễn Thị Kim Thoa	Ranger	Kimthoaccklv3@gmail.com
Sub-FPD, Region III (Ho Chi Minh City)	Mai Công Quyết	Vice chair of technical department	quyetkl@gmail.com
Sub-FPD, Region III (Ho Chi Minh City)	Nguyễn Quang Hưng		quanghungln@gmail.com

Organisations	Participants	Position	Contact Information
Provincial Sub-FPD Offices			
Binh Duong Sub-FPD	Tran Van Nguyen	Head of Provincial FPD	Nguyentran1961@gmail.com
Binh Duong Sub-FPD	Nguyen Van O	Deputy of FPD	onv@binhduong.gov.vn
Binh Duong Sub-FPD	Tran Thi Ngoc My	Chair of Forest protection and management unit	Ngocmy472@yahoo.com.vn
Binh Duong Sub-FPD	Nguyen Van Bon	Head of FPD at Phu Giao district	
Binh Duong Sub-FPD	Pham Thanh Tam	Ranger at Phu Giao district	phamthanhtamkl@gmail.com
Binh Duong Sub-FPD	Pham Thanh Danh	Ranger at Tan Uyen district	Thanh danh kltw@gmail.com
Binh Duong Sub-FPD	Tran Quang Dung	Vice chairman of Dau tieng district FPD	Tranquandung1971@gmail.com
Thanh Hoa Sub-FPD	Vũ Văn Vân	Deputy of PFD	
Thanh Hoa Sub-FPD	Trịnh Đăng Tình	Vice chair of Forest protection and management unit	
Thanh Hoa Sub-FPD	Nguyễn Đức Hòa	Ranger	
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland			
MFA (Helsinki)	Ms. Venla Voutilainen	Vietnam Program Manager	Venla.Voutilainen@formin.fi
MFA (Helsinki)	Ms. Sanna Takala	Advisor, evaluation issues	
MFA (Helsinki)	Ms. Marita Meranto	Working on transition strategies	+ 358 0400 445 035; marita.meranto@formin.fi
MFA (Helsinki)	Mr. Vesa Karrakka	Forestry Advisor	vesa.kaarakka@formin.fi
MFA (Helsinki)	Ms. Minna Hares	Former Vietnam Program Manager	+ 358 40 5715 914; minna.hares@formin.fi
Embassy of Finland (Hanoi)	Ms. Annika Kaipola	Counsellor	Annika.Kaipola@formin.fi
Embassy of Finland (Hanoi)	Ms. Le Thi Thu Huong	Programme Officer	Huong.Le@formin.fi
Other projects, programs, or organizations			
FAO-NFA Project	Mr Ho Manh Tuong	National Project Coordinator	04 3 861 67 66;

Organisations	Participants	Position	Contact Information
			tuongfipi@gmail.com
UN-REDD Viet Nam Phase II Programme	Mr. Nguyen Thanh Phuong	National Programme Officer	+ 84 24 3828 6513 Mob: + 84 9 3423 6883 Phuong.Nguyen@un.org
JICA	Mr Baku Takahashi	Sustainable Natural Resources Management Project	baku.snrm@gmail.com
Provincial Forest Monitoring System (PFMS) JICA - REDD Vietnam	Mr. Nguyen Van Thanh	Consultant/GIS Expert	
Vietnam Forests and Deltas Program, USAID	Mr Brian Bean	Co-Director, Vietnam Forests and Delta Program	 (84-4) 3718 2127 ext. 215 Mob: (84-4) 3 718 2075 BBean@winrock.org
FLEGT	Mr Edwin Shanks	FLEGT Facilitator to Vietnam	+84 (0) 4 32321572 Mob: +84 (0) 916885859 e.shanks@mandala.vn
HAWA	Mr Huynh Van Hanh	Handicraft and Wood Industry Association of Ho Chi Minh City	hanh@hawacorp.com.vn
CIFOR (Center for International Forestry Research), Vietnam Country Office	Dr Pham Thu Thuy	Country Representative	t.pham@cgiar.org
SRD	Trần Ngọc Tuệ	FLEGT CSO Programme Manager	Skype call
Arbonaut	Ms. Raisa Sell	Former FORMIS II advisor	Skype call
Simosol	Mr. Jussi Rasinmäki	CEO	Skype call ; jussi.rasinmaki@simosol.fi
NIRAS	Ms. Marjo Paavola	Home office, FORMIS II Project	marjo.paavola@niras.fi
Universities			
Tay Nguyen University, Silvicultural forestry department	Nguyễn Thị Thanh Hương	Senior Lecturer	Email: huongthanh.frem@gmail.com

Organisations	Participants	Position	Contact Information
Tay Nguyen University, Silvicultural forestry department	Võ Hùng	Senior Lecturer	Vohung.frem@gmail.com
Tay Nguyen University, Silvicultural forestry department	Phạm Đoàn Phú Quốc	Researcher – TOT trainer	Email: phuquoc.frem@gmail.com
Thai Nguyen University, Silvicultural forestry department	Hồ Đính Bảo	Researcher – TOT trainer	Dinhbao.frem@gmail.com
Vietnam National University of Forestry, Institute of Forest Ecology and Environment	Dr. Vuong Van Quynh	Staff	0914491650 quynhxm_2005@yahoo.com
Vietnam National University of Forestry, Institute of Forest Ecology and Environment	Le Sy Doanh	Director	doanhls@vfu.edu.vn
Nong Lam University Ho Chi Minh	La Vinh Hai Ha	Deputy of Faculty of Forestry	lvhaiha@hcmuaf.edu.vn
Nong Lam University Ho Chi Minh	Nguyen Quoc Binh	Lecture	ngquocbinh@hcmuaf.edu.vn
Nong Lam University Ho Chi Minh	Nguyen Thi Kieu Nuong	Lecture	ntkieunuong@yahoo.com
Nong Lam University Ho Chi Minh	Vien Ngoc Nam	Lecture	vnam@hcmuaf.edu.vn
Krong Bong Districts People's Committee, Dak Lak Province			
Krong Bong District PC	Y Thu Eban	Vice Chairman of the People's Committee	
	Nguyễn Đình Đạt		0973906906
	Nguyễn Văn Luân		0912529639
	Hoàng Quốc Thủ		0943071919
	Nguyễn Mạnh Tuấn		
	Phạm Nguyễn Thu Thảo		0932572086
	Hồ Quỳnh Ngân		0935805056
	Hà Thanh Định		0972522322

Organisations	Participants	Position	Contact Information
Duyen Hai District People's Committee, Tra Vinh Province			
District People's Committee	Mr. Tran Dat Thong -	Vice Chairman	
District Forest Protection Department	Mr Hua Chien Thang	Director	Mobile: 0918135358 Email: huachienthang1975@gmail.com
District People's Committee	Mr Doan	Project Officer	Mobile: 0846718946 Email: bqldarduyenhai@gmail.com
Forestry Cooperative, Co Ty Commune, Krong Bong District			
	Mr Hoang -	Director	
	Mr On	Vice-Director	
	Mr Yen	Sivilcultural forestry	
	Mr An	Controller and marketing officer	
	Ms Ha	Safety and Secretary	
	Ms Lien	Health care	
	Ms Vinh	Cashier	
	Ms Nam	Accountant	
	Mr. Tien	Member	
	Ms. Hong	Member	
	Mr. Dai	Member	
11th Village, Hòa Lễ Commune, Krong Bong District, Dak Lak Province			
	Mr. Vinh	Core Community Group member	
	Mr. Thanh	CCG member	
	Mr. Thao	CCG member	
	4 women, 3 men	Other CCG members	
	Ms. Thu	Community member	Kinh ethnicity, born in 1952

Organisations	Participants	Position	Contact Information
	Mr. Ky	Community member	Kinh ethnicity, born in 1957
	Mr. Chun	Community member	Kinh ethnicity, born in 1962
Long Vinh Commune, Duyen Hai District, Tra Vinh Province			
	Ms Pham Thi Hong Diem	CCG member	
	Ms Dao Thi Chi	CCG member	
	Mr Phong	Community member	Born in 1970
	Mr. Ty	Community member	Born in 1983
Dan Thanh Commune, Duyen Hai District, Tra Vinh Province			
	Mr. Phu, 57 years old	Retired government worker	Participant in shrimp mangrove model
	Mr. Le, 42 years old	Farmer	Participant in shrimp mangrove model
	Mr. Thua, 33 years old	Current government worker	Participant in shrimp mangrove model



Annex 6

Golden Flower Award for FORMIS II

[translated from the original Vietnamese]

FORMIS IS GRANTED WITH GOLDEN RICE FLOWER AWARD

In 2018, the Golden Rice Flower Awards are granted to 45 groups of authors and co-authors representing 45 outstanding products that has big contribution to the development of agriculture and rural area. One of the award granted products is “Management Information System for the Forestry Sector” – FORMIS.

The award is published by MARD in Decision No.4264/QĐ-BNN-TCCB dated 30/10/2018 concerning the granting of Golden Rice Flower Awards in 2018.

The criteria for selecting products to be granted with Golden Rice Flower award is stipulated in Circular No. 06/2014/TT-BNNPTNT dated 10/02/2014 of MARD. This prestige pride award is organized per each 3 years. Maximum 100 products in 3 group types will be selected and granted with Awards, namely:

- Group of products as the results of scientific researches & studies: forestry seedlings, cattle, poultries and aqua-marine breeds, inventions, technical solutions, scientific researches, technological processes, new technologies;
- Group of products as consumer goods: agricultural, forestry, aquatic products, handicrafts, agricultural materials, machinery and equipment, and other prestige commodity brand names;
- Group of products as model of organization of production and rural development.

Management Information System for the Forestry Sector (FORMIS) is ranked as outstanding product in the group of scientific studied products (inventions, useful solutions) with the following reasons:

- FORMIS has played an important role in contributing to the sustainable forest management in the forestry sector. This is the first time for MARD to have an integrated platform system for integrating forest resource database through using some specialized application/software. Forest resource data sharing system and FRMS application are some typical applications.
- FRMS and Forest Resource Data Sharing System support the access to the most updated forestry data and information. The application of GIS technology and open source QGIS helps to provide reliable data and information and save the cost for licensing. At present, forest resource database has integrated data from 60 forested provinces in the nationwide level.
- FRMS has been promulgated in Decision No 4539/QĐ-BNN-TCLN of MARD dated 6/11/2017. On 11/10/2018, VNFOREST issued Decision No. 448/QĐ-TCLN-KL on the issuance of FRMS User Manual.



Annex 7
PFG Data on Project Sites

Additional data received from PFG project:

1) Total number of information kiosks

Serial	Name of project commune	Number of kiosks established in 2016	Number of additional kiosks established in 2017	Note
I				
Thông Nông District				
1	Đa Thông Commune	01 (used the kiosk which had been established in the previous EC2 project)	01 new kiosk	Make use of available resources to reduce costs
2	Lương Thông Commune	01 (used the kiosk which had been established in the previous EC2 project))		Make use of available resources to reduce costs
3	Lương Can Commune	01 (newly established by PFG project)		
4	Bình Lãng Commune	01 (used the kiosk which had been established in the previous EC2 project)	01 new kiosk	Make use of available resources to reduce costs
5	Cần Yên Commune	01 (used the kiosk which had been established in the previous EC2 project)		Make use of available resources to reduce costs
II				
Krông Bông District				
1	Hòa Lễ Commune	01 kiosk	01 kiosk	
2	Hòa Phong Commune	01 kiosk		
3	Cư Kty Commune		01 kiosk (newly established after CCGS group is formed in Cu Kty)	Cư Kty Commune is added into the project in 2017
III				
Đông Hải District				
1	An Phúc Commune	01 kiosk		
2	Long Điền Commune	01 kiosk		
3	Long Điền Đông Commune	01 kiosk		
4	Long Điền Tây Commune	01 kiosk		
IV				
Duyên Hải District				
1	Long Vĩnh Commune	01 kiosk		
2	Dân Thành Commune	01 kiosk		
3	Đông Hải Commune	01 kiosk		
4	Hiệp Thành Commune	01 kiosk		
	Total	15 kiosks	4 kiosks	

2) List of communes taking part in the PFG project (most up to date data. Others in previous documents are often older data)

Serial	Name of project commune	Proportion of ethnic people	Proportion of poor households	Project's supports
I				
Thông Nông District				
1	Đa Thông Commune	100%	56,55%	All training courses / workshops from the project; Model of forest plantation; Model of organic ginger planting; smartphone; informational kiosk; media; media products; travel to observe/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's living expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end 2017
2	Lương Thông Commune	100%	65,15%	All training courses / workshops from the project; Model of forest plantation; Model of organic ginger planting; Nursery model; smartphone; informational kiosk; media; media products; travel to observe/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's living expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end of 2017
3	Lương Can Commune	100%	60,62%	All training courses / workshops from the project; Model of forest plantation; Model of organic ginger planting; smartphone; informational kiosk; media; media products; travel to observe/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's living expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end 2017
4	Bình Lãng Commune	100%	55,56%	All training courses / workshops from the project; Model of forest plantation; Model of organic ginger planting; smartphone; informational kiosk; media; media products; travel to observe/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's living expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end 2017
5	Cần Yên Commune	100%	44,67%	All training courses / workshops from the project; Model of forest plantation; Model of organic ginger planting; Nursery model; smartphone; informational kiosk; media; media products; travel to observe/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's living expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end of 2017
II				
Krông Bông District				
1	Hòa Lễ Commune	2,8%	28,6%	All training courses from the project; model of forest plantation; model of polyscias fruticosa, pineapple planting; informational kiosk; media; media products; study tour/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end of 2017
2	Hòa Phong Commune	54,4%	45,7 %	All training courses from the project; informational kiosk; media; media products; study tour/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end of 2017
3	Cư Kty Commune	1,1%	27%	All training courses from the project (started from the beginning of 2017 as they join the project); model of forest plantation; informational kiosk;

Serial	Name of project commune	Proportion of ethnic people	Proportion of poor households	Project's supports
				media; media products; travel to observe/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end of 2017
III Đông Hải District				
1	An Phúc Commune	0,00%	22,74%	All training courses from the project; Model of mangrove planting combined with ecological shrimp and crab farming; smartphone; informational kiosk; media; media products; study tour/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end of 2017
2	Long Điền Commune	14,09%	26,06%	All training courses from the project; smartphone; informational kiosk; media; media products; study tour/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end of 2017
3	Long Điền Đông Commune	2,04%	11,52%	All training courses from the project; smartphone; informational kiosk; media; media products; study tour/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end of 2017
4	Long Điền Tây Commune	5,56%	15,56%	All training courses from the project; Model of mangrove planting combined with ecological shrimp and crab farming; smartphone; informational kiosk; media; media products; study tour/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end of 2017
IV Huyện Duyên Hải				
1	Long Vĩnh Commune (3350 households)	29%	3.85%	All training courses from the project; smartphone; informational kiosk; media; media products; study tour/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end of 2017
2	Dân Thành Commune (2750 hh)	0.98%	2.30%	All training courses from the project; Model of mangrove planting combined with ecological shrimp and crab farming; informational kiosk; media; media products; travel to observe/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end of 2017
3	Đông Hải Commune (3281 hh)	2.1%	2%	All training courses from the project; smartphone; informational kiosk; media; media products; study tour/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end of 2017
4	Hiệp Thạnh Commune (1258)	1.19%	2.5%	All training courses from the project; smartphone; informational kiosk; media; media products; study tour/ learning the practice of other localities; CCGS's expenses and kiosk maintenance fees until the end of 2017

In Duyen Hai district, only Dan Thanh commune participated in the model of forest plantation combined with ecological shrimp and crab farming. They were trained for forest plantation in combination with shrimp and crab farming. They were provided with mangroves, EM products.

The 3 remained communes of Duyen Hai district, which are: Hiep Thanh commune, Long Vinh commune and Dong Hai commune, did not participate in the livelihood model but were involved in other activities of the project (as stated above).

3) List of communes and smartphones

Serial	Name of project commune	Number of mobile phone distributed	Note
I	Thông Nông district	121	
II	Krông Bông district	0	20 phones were taken and transferred to Thông Nông
III	Đông Hải district	29	11 phones were taken and transferred to Thông Nông
IV	Duyên Hải district	32	8 phones were taken and transferred to Thông Nông
	Total	182 mobile phones	

Regarding Dak Lak, despite having delivered 3 request letters and 2 meetings to present the PFG app to the Provincial People's Committee, the project failed to get approval from the provincial government to deploy the PFG app within the project sites in Dak Lak. Hence, in 2018, all 20 smart phones planned for the communes in Krong Bong district were transferred to Thong Nong.

4) Regarding the support to local communities to access red book (ownership) certificate,

- In Krong Bông district: The project management team, commune leaders support the Hoang Lam Cooperative to complete the land registration procedures and issue the red book certificate for the cooperative.
- In Thông Nông district: Ms. Nông Ánh Nguyệt (young households without land for production) has applied for land successfully with the project support
- Also in Thông Nông: Currently, a list of households applying for land in the district is made, so that the district government (the project partner) with the project management board, can mobilize support from relevant departments (land administration, Commune's people committee chairperson, district leaders (DARD, District Vice-chairman responsible for Economy)

5) Local people with information from FORMIS asked for adjustment to their boundaries to reflect reality

Adjusting incorrect information on the map happens all the time at communes of the project. FPD officers regularly meet up with CCGs (twice a month) to receive comments and adjust the information on FORMIS if there are any mismatch. In addition, FPD also look for the information on forest cover changes (i.e forest clearance or forest plantation) to update the FORMIS, so they discuss about forest cover changes with CCGs too.

In 2016, several families living in Đa Thông and Bình Lăng commune reported incorrect information on FORMIS. In 2018, there is no comment about this situation. The project officers asked and learnt that all the incorrect information had been adjusted by FPD.



Annex 8

Financial Sustainability of FORMIS System

Financial sustainability of FORMIS System

Financial sustainability refers to the capacity of a project to meet future financing needs after the phase-out of Finnish funding. For FORMIS II, financing needs arise mainly for the following cost categories:

- Further system development and operation at the central level;
- Training and IT investment at the central and decentralised levels;
- Data collection at the decentralized level.

In a nutshell, the subsequent analysis shows that financial sustainability is likely to be high for some project components that require only limited funding in the future (namely system operation and training). In contrast, continued funding for further system development was still uncertain at the end of 2018. The financial burden of FORMIS on provincial and district budgets will continue to be significant – mainly because of data collection costs in the field - but might not be much affected by the phase-out of Finnish support at the central level.

The Inception Report envisioned a comparison of financial scenarios prepared by FORMIS II with budget plans of VNFOREST to assess the financial sustainability of the project. However, neither of these two sources was available in detailed form to the evaluation team. The available exit and handover plans did not provide any concrete estimation of the financing needed to sustain the project results. The exit plan from August 2016 discussed a few potential future funding sources but left it to VNFOREST to develop the short- and long-term investment plan. At the time of writing, a budget proposal for 2019 and subsequent years had been developed by VNFOREST but had not yet been approved by MARD and or been shared with the evaluation team.

Nevertheless, the project documents and interviews with the Finance Departments of VNFOREST and MARD provide some hints about financial sustainability. Most of the analysis focuses on identifying financing needs for the different project components/cost categories and assess whether are likely to be covered by the budget central and local administrations in Vietnam. In general, any future financial plan depends crucially on the share of project costs – in particular, salaries – that will be outsourced to external service providers. In general, VNFOREST and local Forestry Protection Departments (FDPs) assume that a large part of the human resources requirements for sustaining FORMIS II can be covered by existing administrative staff. A reality check of this assumption is not possible with the information available to the evaluation team, and the different project documents²⁰ discuss distinct scenarios of outsourcing.

Actual project expenditure in the period of Finnish support can give some idea of funding requirements.²¹ Between May 2013 and November 2018, the project spent 9.6 million EUR of available Government of Finland funding. 4.9% of the total expenditure was spent on IT investment; 4.0% on operating costs; 3.2% on service contracts; 14.6% on training, and the remaining 73.4% on technical assistance and support staff (fees, salaries, reimbursables and similar items), according to the FORMIS-II draft audit report for 2017-2018 (KPMG 2019). Over the years 2013-2018, the annual expenditure pattern remained relatively flat both globally and within the individual cost categories. This suggests that a simple exploration of these costs may be a rough indicator for future financing needs and that financing needs at the central level should not be automatically expected to decline over the next years.

Operating costs have accounted for a total of 387.000 EUR (about 70.000 EUR per year) in the 5.5-year period indicate above. According to the 2017-2018 draft audit report (KPMG 2019), VNFOREST proposed a budget of 138.000 EUR to operate and maintain FORMIS results – in line with (and even above) past expenditure levels. A consultancy report (NIRIS 2017) estimates that at least 194.000 EUR will be needed for external consultancy services to operate the system over the 5-year period after project handover. While this excludes e.g. hardware costs and is only a minimum estimate, it is also roughly consistent with past project expenditure and the VNFOREST budget proposal. The categorisation of operating costs (e.g. in terms of service contracts and staff costs) presumably varies somewhat across these three sources of information, but in general the expenditure forecasts implied

²⁰ Such as the final project audit report, the ICT and human resources development strategy for VNFOREST, and others.

²¹ Before a minor tax refund.

by them are relatively similar. Overall the expected annual operating costs of EUR 70 000-80 000 do not seem to constitute an excessive financial burden for VNFOREST. The operating costs can thus be considered as financially sustainable.

The expected costs for system development (as reflected in technical assistance costs until 2018) are considerably higher than for operation and maintenance, which may undermine financial sustainability. While large part of the system development was done during the period of Finnish support, further development of some system components is still pending. The MTE report acknowledges that the open source solutions of FORMIS II should reduce the cost for system development in the long-term, but also highlighted that these solutions would require more competent and expensive staff. VNFOREST has requested from MARD about 800 000 EUR per year for system and application development in 2019 and 2020. However, it is not yet sure how much of this amount will be approved. The Finance Department of MARD pointed out that resources are scarce and that it is still uncertain which proportion of VNFOREST's budget proposal can be granted. Overall there is thus no evidence yet for a strong commitment by the national administration to fully finance the envisioned system development.

The financial sustainability of training costs, in contrast, is higher because expected future expenditure is relatively low. There is no information about budgeted training costs after 2018, but the NARIS (2017) report estimates that VNFOREST will need to contract training services for a total of at least EUR 146 000 over the next 5 years (approx. only EUR 30 000 per year) to keep knowledge at a reasonable level. These figures are consistent with the sharp decline in annual training expenditure from EUR 583 000 in 2016 to EUR 65 000 in the first 9 months of 2018. This is due to both the significant reduction in the number of people trained – essentially now being limited to refresher trainings and some initial training sessions linked to staff turnover – as well as clearly diminishing training costs per participant. Between 2015-16 and 2017-2018, user training costs per competent ranger and training-of-trainers costs per participants fell by 65% and 90% respectively (See draft FORMIS II Project Completion Report).

There are no data about planned IT investment at the central level, but actual investment financed through Finnish support was on average less than EUR 100 000 per year. However, requirements for IT investment may be larger at the local level. Interviewees at the regional Forestry Protection Departments highlighted that their computers are currently too slow to run the FRMS efficiently and that they would require hardware upgrades. Overall the data do not allow for making any statement about the financial sustainability of IT investments, though.

In general, the provincial governments (People's Committees) finance the bulk of FORMIS-related costs from their own budget without financial transfers from the centre. The FDPs agreed that data collection by rangers in the field accounts for the bulk of FORMIS-related costs at the local level. The annual data entry cost at EUR 240 000 per year; EUR 440 per district. This cost does not include the survey of the change of forest cover and status. Last year, when 40 out of 60 provinces used FRMS they updated 700 000 change plots, 10% of total number of plots in the database. This year all 60 provinces are expected to use the FRMS and they could potentially update one million plots. As a consequence, provinces have to allocate large amounts of their budgets to the districts. One of the FDPs interviewed suggested that the current Circular 26 does not specify from which budget (e.g. central vs. regional) the data collection and other cost of FORMIS should be covered. The regional FDPs, in contrast, are much less involved in data collection and focus on supervision, coordination and support functions for FORMIS – overall a relatively smaller share of their available budget than for the provinces. While the financial burden of FORMIS (especially of data collection) on provinces and districts is relatively high, the fact that they have not received any direct funding from the national budget or Finland implies that the phase-out of Finnish aid will not affect much financial sustainability at the local level.



Annex 9

Stakeholder Participatory Impact Assessment Workshop

Agenda, Stakeholder Workshop

**Participatory Assessment of
Forest Sector Management Information System (FORMIS):
Impacts Achieved and the Way Forward**

Thursday morning, 15 November 2018
Building B6, Room 102, MARD, 2 Ngoc Ha, Hanoi

08.30-08.45	Welcoming Remarks	VNFOREST
08.45-09.15	Workshop Objectives: Participatory Assessment of FORMIS Impacts and Ideas for the Future by Different Stakeholder Groups	Evaluation Team
	Coffee and Tea Break	
09.30 11.00	Plenary Discussion	Participants
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience with FORMIS 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views on Impacts (Positive, Negative, Intended, or Unintended) of FORMIS → noting ideas on cards	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Way Forward: Ideas for Sustaining and Further Developing FORMIS → noting ideas on cards	
11.00-11.45	Plenary Discussion	
11.45– 12.00	Closing Remarks	

Participants in FORMIS Stakeholder Assessment Workshop, 15 November 2018				
No.	Organisations	Participants	Position	Email
	MARD, VNFOREST			
1	ICD of MARD	Mr Nguyen Quang Huy	Desk officer	-
2	Finance Department of MARD	Ms Pham Thanh Huyen	Deputy Director of Department	thanhhuyen692000@yahoo.com
3	VNFOREST Finance and Planning Dept.	Ms. Nguyen Van Vu	Director	
4	VNFOREST, Admin Dept.	Ms. Nguyen Thi Hong Ly	Deputy Director	
5	VNFOREST, DID	Mr. Cao Xuan Y	ICT staff	
6	VNFOREST, DID	Mr. Hoang Duy Tung	ICT staff	
7	VNFOREST, DID	Mr. Noi The Nghiep	ICT staff	
8	VNFOREST, DID	Mr. Dao Duc Phong	ICT staff	
9	Forestry Projects Management Board	Mr. Vu Xuan Thon	Director	
	Forest ICT			
10	Greenfield, GFA	Mr. Hoang Viet Anh	Developer	hoangvietanh@gmail.com
	FORMIS Team			
11	PMU	Dr. Nguyen Ba Ngai	Project Director	Nguyenbangai@gmail.com
12	PMU	Mr. Nguyen Binh Minh	Deputy Project Director	minh.dof@gmail.com
13	PMU	Mr. Truong Le Hieu	National Coordinator	nguyenba73@yahoo.com
14	PMU	Mr. Tapio Leppanen	Chief Technical Advisor	tapio.formis@gmail.com
15	PMU	Mr. Mikko Nivala	Associate Technical Advisor	mikko.formis@gmail.com
16	PMU	Mr. Nguyen Trong Khanh	Advisor	khanhnt82@gmail.com >
17	PMU	Mr. Nguyen Dong	Advisor	dong.formis@gmail.com
	PFG Project, ActionAid			
18	PFG	Ms. Vu Hong Trang	PFG Project Expert	-
19	PFG	Ms. Mai Thi Thanh Nhan	PFG Project Coordinator	nhan.maithithanh@actionaid.org
	(continued on next page)			

	Other projects/programs			
20	Provincial Forest Monitoring System (PFMS) JICA - REDD Vietnam	Mr. Nguyen Van Thanh	Consultant/GIS Expert	
	Embassy of Finland			
21	Embassy of Finland	Ms. Annika Kaipola	Counsellor	Annika.Kaipola@formin.fi
22	Embassy of Finland	Ms. Le Thi Thu Huong	Programme Officer	Huong.Le@formin.fi
	Evaluation Team Members			
23	Evaluation Team	Dr. Paula J. Williams	Team Leader	paulajwms@gmail.com
24	Evaluation Team	Mr. Martin Schweter	Senior Evaluation Expert	m.schweter@ms-geo.com
25	Evaluation Team	Dr. Nguyen Dinh Tien	Evaluation Expert	ndtien.up@gmail.com
26	Evaluation Team	Dr. Marian Meller	Evaluation Expert	marian.meller@particip.de

Results from the Group Assessment

Participants wrote their ideas on cards, either in English or Vietnamese. The original language is shown first, then the translation in parantheses ().

I. Positive Impacts/Achievements

In English	In Vietnamese
Saving time and less cost	
Less costly applications using data many times (Ít chi phí vì dữ liệu được sử dụng nhiều lần)	Tiết kiệm nguồn nhân lực trong công tác điều tra khảo sát, lập báo cáo (Saving time and human resources in inventory, reporting)
Application development will be easier: Less transactions, easier data access, platform services and standard process in the integration make the application development in future more effective and less expensive (ứng dụng phát triển sẽ dễ dàng hơn, ít bước trung gian và dễ tiếp cận số liệu, các dịch vụ nền và quá trình chuẩn hóa số liệu phát triển trong tương lai sẽ hiệu quả hơn và ít tốn kém)	Giảm thời gian xử lý công việc (Less time to work on data analysing and reporting)
	Giúp cho cán bộ kiểm lâm theo dõi kiểm tra rừng có hiệu quả hơn giảm thiểu các rủi ro về rừng và giảm công sức của cán bộ kiểm lâm trong công tác này (Helps local rangers in better inventory, and checking more efficiency, reducing in risk of forests, saving time of forest rangers in this activities)
Institutional changes /better governance	
Better forest governance (Quản trị rừng tốt hơn)	Phục vụ tốt cho công tác quản lý nhà nước của ngành (Better for administration management of forest sector)
The institutional change in data sharing within VNFOREST (Hệ thống thể chế thay đổi trong việc chia sử dữ liệu trong tổng cục lâm nghiệp)	Góp phần cải cách hành chính, giảm 4 tháng để công bố hiện trạng rừng (Administration reform then reduce 4 months of publishing forest cover yearly)
	Giảm các thủ tục hành chính (Administration reform)
	Thay đổi được cách thức quản lý ra quyết định của cơ quan có thẩm quyền (change in administration management of related institutions decision)
	Người dân cập nhật được thông tin về rừng của mình đóng góp cho hệ thống thông tin quản trị rừng vì thế người dân tham gia bảo vệ và quản trị rừng (Local forest owners update their forest information which contributing to forest governance information system that mean forest owner participate in forest protection)
	Khuyến khích sự tham gia của cộng đồng trong quản trị rừng ở địa phương. Hỗ trợ tích cực cho kiểm lâm địa phương trong bảo vệ rừng (Encourage local people to participate in forest management which will help to forest rangers in forest protection)

For better forest resource (quản lý tài nguyên rừng tốt hơn)	Thay đổi phương pháp quản lý bảo vệ tài nguyên rừng (Changes in management methods in protecting forest resources)
	Quản lý rừng bền vững (Sustainable forest management)
Better decision and faster	
Better decisions faster (ra quyết định nhanh và chính xác)	Nhà quản lý tổng hợp số liệu nhanh chóng qua đó có những quyết sách phù hợp (Faster data reporting lead to having correct decisions)
	Giúp cấp quản lý ra được quyết định nhanh kịp thời (Helping managers make decisions quickly and in a timely manner)
	Giúp các cấp có thẩm quyền có thể dễ dàng truy xuất thông tin về rừng để phục vụ công tác chỉ đạo điều hành (managers can easily access data on forest information to have quick guidance and administration)
	Các cấp lãnh đạo ra quyết định chính xác kịp thời (The managers can make decision correctly and timely)
	Hỗ trợ các cấp quản lý (Helping high-level managers)
	Nắm được thông tin về lâm nghiệp sẽ đưa ra chính sách tốt phù hợp cho phát triển lâm nghiệp (Providing forest information that will help the policy maker to have good decisions for forest development)
Consistent data	
Higher consistency of forest data (Số liệu về lâm nghiệp nhất quán hơn)	Hệ thống dữ liệu từ trung ương đến địa phương (Consistency of data from central level to local levels)
	Thông tin được cập nhật đến trung ương và đồng bộ cơ sở dữ liệu lên trung tâm (Forest information has been updated to central level)
	Xây dựng được hệ thống thông tin dữ liệu về lâm nghiệp (Build up a Forest Resources Information system)
	Cung cấp thông tin nhanh, chính xác (Faster information and accuracy)
	Thông tin kịp thời nhanh chóng (information is more quickly and timely)
	Thống nhất hệ thống số liệu về rừng và đất lâm nghiệp (Clear data/information of forest and forest land between sectors)
Research and education: With help of the project, the access to the data will be easier and data is standardized. It is possible to make	Chia sẻ dữ liệu về lâm nghiệp phục vụ cho quản lý ngành đưa ra quyết định vĩ mô, nghiên cứu và học tập (Data sharing on forest resources will help policy

comparison studies with improved data and standards. During FORMIS training, university were able to learn and understand the training need and improve the curriculum of the university studies (Sự dụng trong nghiên cứu và đào tạo: Dự án mang lại sự tiếp cận dữ liệu dễ dàng hơn và số liệu được chuẩn hóa và có thể được nghiên cứu so sánh để nâng cao và chuẩn hóa số liệu. Trong quá trình tập huấn, các trường đại học có thể học và hiểu về nội dung tập huấn số liệu và tích hợp trong giảng dạy)	makers having macro-decision and in research and study)
	Hỗ trợ truy suất nguồn gốc gỗ (Help to identify timber sources)
	Hệ thống tài nguyên rừng trên nền FORMIS giúp cho việc truy xuất nguồn gốc gỗ (Phục vụ cho thực hiện hiệp định VPA/FLEGT) (The FRMS of FORMIS will help to identify timber sources which can be used for VPA/FLEGT)
	Cập nhật thông tin dữ liệu của ngành lâm nghiệp (Updating forest data information)
Forest resources are better managed (Số liệu tài nguyên rừng được quản lý tốt hơn)	Quản lý tập trung các cơ sở dữ liệu về lâm nghiệp (Forest resources are better managed)
	Sử dụng thông tin FORMIS để lập kế hoạch phát triển và bảo vệ rừng (Using FORMIS information to make forest development and protection planning)
	Hiệu quả Sản xuất kinh doanh của ngành công nghiệp Chế biến gỗ được nâng cao (The economic efficiency of the Industry Wood Processing will be improved)
Forest data is now in digital and standardized format (số liệu lâm nghiệp được số hóa và chuẩn hóa)	Người dân sử dụng và quản lý thông tin lô rừng của mình để lập kế hoạch sản xuất và cung cấp thông tin về sản phẩm (Forest owners can use their plot information to make production planning and product information)
Market information/advertising	
	Kết nối thị trường, quảng bá sản phẩm (Market integration and products advertising)
Wider data sharing	
Many stakeholders are benefited via using data and information provided through Web-base service of the FORMIS (Nhiều đối tác được hưởng lợi thông qua sử dụng số liệu trên trang web của FORMIS)	Người dùng (kiểm lâm địa bàn) có thể sử dụng một hệ thống hợp pháp có khả năng mở rộng trong tương lai (Forest rangers can use legal information system which will wider sharing in future)
Sharing forest data to stakeholder (chia sẻ dữ liệu lâm nghiệp với các đối tác)	Tất cả mọi người trên thế giới (học sinh, sinh viên, nghiên cứu, công ty...) có thể nhanh chóng tiếp cận nguồn dữ liệu hợp pháp để khai thác và ứng dụng (Many users such as pupils, students, researchers,

	companies... can access the legal data to use and application)
Enable ability to build applications base on forest resource data (not possible before). (Có khả năng xây dựng các ứng dụng khác dựa trên nền dữ liệu tài nguyên rừng)	Theo dõi diễn biến rừng thông qua ipad, smart phone (Management of Forest cover change via ipad and smart phone)
Data and information are stored and possible to access from one platform (số liệu và thông tin được lưu giữ và có khả năng truy cập từ một nền)	
Up to date, forest resource information is available to be viewed by anyone who has internet access (Cho đến hiện tại, thông tin tài nguyên rừng đã có thể được truy cập bởi nhiều người chỉ cần họ có internet)	Đời sống cộng đồng được nâng cao (improve local livelihoods)
	Thay đổi được cách nghĩ và trách nhiệm của cộng đồng với rừng (Change in local mind and responsibility on forest)
	Nhận thức về tài nguyên rừng (Improve perception local people on forest resources)
Enterprises	
	Hỗ trợ được doanh nghiệp kinh doanh lâm nghiệp (Supporting enterprises in forestry business)
	Hỗ trợ các doanh nghiệp trong phát triển kinh doanh về lâm sản (supporting enterprises in developing forestry products business)
	Chủ rừng đặc biệt là các chủ rừng hộ gia đình/chủ rừng nhỏ có thể liên kết với nhau để sản xuất lâm nghiệp -> hình thành vùng nguyên liệu đủ lớn (Forest owners/small forest owners can cooperate together in producing timber/wood leading to a timber resources/material areas)
Environment	
	Giảm ô nhiễm môi trường (Environmental pollution mitigation)
Transparency	
Accurate and up to date forest data and information are available → creates transparency of the forest monitoring to the public (Thông tin đúng đắn và cập nhật thường xuyên sẽ giúp cho sự minh bạch trong theo dõi diễn biến rừng)	Hệ thống thông tin đầy đủ, chính xác, minh bạch từ trung ương đến địa phương (the forest information system is accurate, transparent from central level to local levels)
Make forestry data more transparent in the process of reporting to international framework: VNFCCC, REDD, VPA, FLEGT (làm cho số liệu lâm nghiệp minh bạch hơn trong qua trình báo)	Minh bạch hóa thông tin về tài nguyên rừng, mọi cá nhân, tổ chức đều có thể tiếp cận các thông tin trên (Transparency information on forest natural resources. Everyone or groups can access that information)

cáo quốc tế khi thực hiện các khung chương trình về VNFCCC, REDD+, VPA, FLEGT)	
First time forest resource data is reported directly from commune level → more accurate, more transparent, less exposure to “cooking data” at lower levels (lần đầu tiên dữ liệu tài nguyên rừng được báo cáo trực tiếp từ cấp cơ sở, sẽ đúng hơn, minh bạch, sẽ giảm số liệu tự vẽ ở các cấp cơ sở)	Thông tin dữ liệu về tài nguyên rừng được minh bạch có tính khoa học (Forest resources information is transparent and scientific)
	Giám sát rừng minh bạch (transparency of forest monitoring)
	Người dân có thể kiểm tra tính chính xác của thông tin trên hệ thống FORMIS do đó đảm bảo tính minh bạch và khuyến khích sự tham gia (Forest owners can check the accuracy of forest information on FORMIS therefore it will encourage local participation)
Capacity Building	
	Nhận thức của kiểm lâm địa bàn về cập nhật diễn biến rừng (Improve capacity of local rangers in forest cover change)

II. Weakness/Difficulties (Need to improve)

In English	In Vietnamese
Exposing Private Information (Lộ các thông tin cá nhân)	Một vài ý kiến muốn duy trì hệ thống cũ (Some people would like to use the old version system)
Human resource	
Human resources scalability (Khan hiếm nguồn nhân lực)	Năng lực cán bộ công nghệ thông tin để làm chủ hệ thống còn hạn chế, cần bổ sung cán bộ công nghệ thông tin và đào tạo nâng cao năng lực (Capacity of information technology staff is limited. It is necessary to have more IT staff and improve capacity building for IT staff).
Competent need in each administration unit required continuously training (Cán bộ được cử đi đào tạo tại các đơn vị hành chính cần tham gia liên tục, tránh tình trạng thay đổi học viên)	
Applications	
FPD quick reporting application was never deployed and put in use (ứng dụng báo cáo nhanh kiểm lâm chưa được triển khai và đưa vào sử dụng)	
The decision to open data was delayed until the end of the project, so there was no time to test how it works in reality during project lifetime (Quyết định công bố dữ liệu mở bị trì hoãn đến	

cuối kỳ của dự án vì thế không có thời gian để thử nghiệm dữ liệu đó như thế nào trong thực tế)	
Some of the applications are not very user friendly for users that are not familiar with IT systems (Một vài ứng dụng không thân thiện với người dùng không am hiểu nhiều về hệ thống IT)	
Data	
Data need to be collected more accurate. The system requires that data in the field is collected more accurate including spatial location and attributes of the change (số liệu được thu thập cần phải chính xác hơn. Hệ thống yêu cầu số liệu thực địa cần chính xác bao gồm cả vị trí địa lý và các thuộc tính thay đổi)	Khi địa phương cập nhật không chính xác dẫn đến hệ thống thông tin trung ương không chính xác (Inaccuracy data at local levels can cause of inaccuracy data at central levels)
	Hệ thống phần mềm bị lỗi hoặc không cập nhật chính xác dẫn đến hệ thống không chính xác (The system often error or inaccuracy update data can cause of incorrect data)
Investments	
Investment need for ICT need to be increased (Đầu tư cho công nghệ thông tin cần nhiều hơn nữa)	Sự đầu tư về cơ sở hạ tầng công nghệ cho địa phương chưa tương xứng (Investment for infrastructure is not enough at local districts)
	Cần đầu tư trang thiết bị hiện đại từ trung ương đến địa phương (Need to be invested for ICT from central level to local levels)
	Đầu tư về hạ tầng và chi phí đào tạo tăng (Investment and training need to be increased)
	Dung lượng máy chủ hạn chế không đáp ứng nhu cầu lưu trữ dữ liệu lịch sử (Server capacity is limited which does not meet the need to store historical data)
Social issue	
	Có thể ảnh hưởng đến mất việc làm (Loss of job may occur)

III. Solutions

In English	In Vietnamese
Upgrading system/Investment	
Improve data download and application development interface for 3 rd party to build new application (Cải tiến tải dữ liệu và phát triển giao diện cho bên thứ 3 thiết kế các hệ thống ứng dụng mới)	Nâng cấp hệ thống phần cứng để đáp ứng nhu cầu dung lượng lưu trữ cơ sở dữ liệu (Upgrading computer capacity to meet the need of data store)
Improve documentation both internal and public (cải thiện hệ thống văn bản từ nội bộ đến công khai)	Nâng cấp cơ sở hạ tầng để người dùng dễ dàng truy cập vào hệ thống (Upgrading infrastructure of FORMIS system to easy access for users)
FRMS performance improvement and bug-fix (cải thiện và sửa lỗi các tính năng của FRMS)	Cần xem xét chất lượng đường truyền internet và nâng cấp phần mềm (Considering the internet quality and upgrading the system)
	Áp dụng công nghệ mới tiên tiến hơn trong quản trị cơ sở dữ liệu (New IT need to be applied in managing data system)
	Nâng cấp ứng dụng phần mềm, hạ tầng công nghệ thông tin và phát triển đội ngũ IT (Upgrading IT infrastructure and develop the IT staffs)
	Nâng cấp giao diện nhập dữ liệu diễn biến rừng (Upgrading interface of FRMS)
	Nâng cấp hệ thống quản lý dữ liệu lâm nghiệp để phù hợp hơn với thực tế (Upgrading FRMS to reality application)
	Hỗ trợ duy trì tính bền vững của dự án: tài chính, nhân sự và phát huy ảnh hưởng tích cực ra cộng đồng (Support the sustainability of the project: finance, human resources and promote positive impacts on the community)
	Bổ sung, nâng cấp dung lượng máy chủ (Addition, upgrade server capacity)
Training/supporting	
Central level competence to maintain system and continue the platform development (Học viên tại tổng cục cần duy trì hệ thống và tiếp tục phát triển hệ thống nền)	Đào tạo nâng cao năng lực cán bộ công nghệ thông tin của văn phòng tổng cục và cục kiểm lâm (Capacity building/Training for FPD and VNFOREST staffs about IT)
	Nâng cao năng lực cho bộ phận quản trị hệ thống để duy trì (Capacity building for administration staffs to maintain the system)
	Nâng cao nhận thức cho lãnh đạo (Improve capacity for leaders)
	Cần phải tiếp tục có sự hỗ trợ của các chuyên gia tổ chức quốc tế trong vận hành nâng cấp hệ thống thông tin này (It is needed to be supported from international experts and organizations in operating and updating the system)

Advertising/wider data sharing	
Further information sharing and dissemination to various stakeholders about the existence of the FORMIS system and its benefits (Thông tin cần được chia sẻ rộng rãi hơn nữa đến các bên liên quan về hệ thống FORMIS cũng như lợi ích của hệ thống)	Tăng cường truyền thông để nhiều bên liên quan biết và sử dụng hệ thống (Strengthening communication so that many stakeholders access and use the system)
	Cần quảng bá giới thiệu hệ thống này đến các tổ chức cá nhân trong nước và ngoài nước (Advertising the system to domestic and international agents)
Data quality need continuous improvement including data verification method (Chất lượng dữ liệu cần tiếp tục cải thiện bao gồm cả phương pháp xác minh dữ liệu)	Tối ưu hóa hệ thống máy chủ (Optimizing the server system)
	Có hệ thống sao lưu để đảm bảo an toàn dữ liệu, tránh các rủi ro như cháy, động đất (It is necessary to have a safe data store to avoid risks such as fire or earthquake)
	Hoàn thiện các chức năng ở góc độ người dùng (Completed fully applications functions for users)
Enhancement of institution (Nâng cao, hoàn thiện thể chế)	
Now there is already a management system, the next step is to move to forest planning system (Hệ thống quản lý đã sẵn sàng, bước tiếp theo là hướng đến một hệ thống kế hoạch lâm nghiệp)	
	Giao nhiệm vụ và trách nhiệm cho các đơn vị trong tổng cục lâm nghiệp, chi cục tỉnh, hạt kiểm lâm vì cập nhật thông tin, duy trì và khai thác (Handover the duties and responsibilities for VNFOREST, provincial forest departments, district FPD in updating information, maintaining and exploiting data)



Annex 10

Evaluation Brief

EVALUATION BRIEF

This report, the *Final Joint Evaluation of Two Forestry Projects in Vietnam*, has been commissioned by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Finland. The evaluation was conducted by a team of five consultants from October 2018 through December 2018.

The assessment evaluated the achievements and impacts of the second phase of the Development of the Management Information System for the Forestry Sector (FORMIS – Phase II) project, which has operated from May 2013 through December 2018. The second project is People Participation in Improvement of Forest Governance and Poverty Alleviation in Vietnam (or Participatory Forest Governance, PFG, in brief), which operated from November 2014 through October 2018.

The first project has been a major one, supporting the Government of Vietnam's Forest Administration to development an information platform and series of applications for management and further development of the forest sector. It has expanded the previous pilot activities into a nationwide program, operational now in 60 forest provinces and 547 districts. Information is available now to the general public, and in use by a range of different stakeholders in other forest sector projects and programs, academia and research organizations, and the private sector, especially those engaged in forest plantation development and the wood processing industries. It is contributing to numerous important national and global initiatives, such as the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT), Payments for Forest Environmental Services (PFES), and forestry contributions to mitigate climate change, through REDD+.

The second project has been a pilot activity implemented by an international non-governmental organization, ActionAid Vietnam, working in four districts in four different provinces. It has piloted extension of the FORMIS system to the grassroots, training members of 17 different Core Community Groups to use computers and smart phones to access FORMIS and other information on the internet, to improve their community forest management and related livelihood models. It has improved local forest governance and transparency, and increased the skills and credibility of local people, especially women, to function as development partners.

The second project was designed to complement the first one. The collaboration between the two projects got off to a slow start but has ultimately been successful in many regards.

The most important impacts have been creation of a unified national system for forestry information, which is leading to greater transparency and accountability, and improved governance. It promotes the greater engagement of non-governmental stakeholders in forest sector development and management, which in the long run should lead to improved conditions in Vietnam's forests and overall socio-economic development.

Given the benefits achieved, and the capacity built, the results of the two projects are highly likely to be sustained in the future. The projects have laid the way for future collaboration between Finland and Vietnam, especially in terms of private sector engagement. Other modalities of cooperation, however, remain important and could be further explored.

The evaluation report does highlight areas where further improvements could be made. It also provides some lessons learned, which could benefit MFA development cooperation activities elsewhere. In particular, where Finland plans to transition from bilateral grant aid (Official Development Assistance) to other modes of cooperation, MFA is encouraged to prepare such transitions further in advance. In addition to promoting commercial relations and trade, other forms of collaboration, especially for enlarging civic space, are recommended.



Annex 11

Quality Assurance Statement

Report of the Quality Assurance Team
Final Joint Evaluation of Two Forestry Projects in Vietnam:
Development of Management Information System for the Forestry Sector (FORMIS – Phase II) and People Participation in Improvement of Forest Governance and Poverty Alleviation in Vietnam (PFG)

Inception Report QA: October 2018 - Overall statement

The Draft Inception Report of the above evaluation, version of October 17, 2018, was assessed by the QA team, and suggestions were made to improve especially the evaluation matrix presented there. These were taken into account in the next version, which was then submitted to the client and result in a better presentation and clarity on what was to be evaluated. Moreover, the section on initial findings had also been further elaborated in this next version thus allowing for a better understanding of the context in which the projects were operating and had to be evaluated.

Overall approach and focus, methods and tools suggested were deemed appropriate.

Draft Final Report QA Report: December 2018 - Overall statement

The Draft Final Report (DFR) of the above evaluation, version of December 7, 2018 was deemed by the QA team to be coherent with the requirements of the overall contract, TOR of the assignment and the approved Inception Report of the evaluation and could be submitted to the client (MFA Finland).

Final Report QA Report: March 2019 - Overall statement

The Final Report (FR) of the above evaluation, version of March 4, 2019 was deemed by the QA team to have adequately considered all major comments received by the relevant stakeholders and was ready to be submitted to the client. Some major shifts and additions have been made in response to comment, so the report provides further background information, additional analysis and is presented in an improved structure.

Overall assessment of the final report

The following table presents the overall assessment of the report on individual quality criteria.

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Understanding of the criteria</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Criterion 1: Meeting needs	The evaluation report adequately addresses the information needs of the Client. It answers all questions included in the terms of reference in a way that reflects their stated level of priority. As far as possible, it satisfies incidental information needs that have arisen during the evaluation process.	The FR adequately replies to the elements asked for in section 2 of the ToR related, i.e.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It provides lessons learnt and recommendations for three main issues identified; It assesses the priority objectives as identified.
Criterion 2: Relevant scope	The report describes the rationale of the policy and its full set of outputs, results and intended impacts. It considers unintended consequences and policy interactions. This does not mean that all these issues are investigated in detail. Only key questions are subject to an in-depth treatment.	The report frames the topic by the relevant policies at stake during their implementation. Here it focuses on Vietnamese policies and on Finland's transition strategy.

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Understanding of the criteria</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Criterion 3: Defendable design	The evaluation method is clearly described, and it is appropriate and adequate to answering the key evaluation questions. Methodological limitations are explicitly stated.	Annex 3 has been introduced and refers to methodology and its limitations. It introduces a traffic light grading with which the projects are rated. Limitations and their repercussions are clearly indicated.
Criterion 4: Reliable data	Primary and secondary data are sufficiently reliable with respect to their use. This criterion does not assess the quality of pre-existing information but how the evaluation team has managed to retrieve and/or to produce information.	Both quantitative and qualitative sources have been identified. The data collection tools have been explained and adjusted to the data sought after.
Criterion 5: Sound analysis	Information is appropriately and systematically analysed or interpreted. Underlying assumptions are made explicit. Critical exogenous factors are identified and taken into account.	The evaluation matrix presented in the inception report, i.e. the set of questions allowing also for scoring of different sub-criteria along the DAC criteria has helped ensuring appropriate analysis and interpretation. Due to this basis, synthesis of the two projects was possible in most cases when answering the EQs. Where relevant the report mentions assumptions and external factors.
Criterion 6: Robust findings	The report provides stakeholders with a substantial amount of fresh knowledge (findings). Findings follow logically from evidence, analyses and interpretations.	By comparing the two projects, and putting them into perspective, the report has produced new knowledge. In general, findings are clearly linked to evidence collected.
Criterion 7: Valid/ Impartial conclusions	Value judgments (conclusions) are based on explicit criteria and benchmarks. Conclusions answer the evaluation questions in a fair way, unbiased by personnel or stakeholders' views. Conclusions take into account all legitimate standpoints in an impartial way. Dissenting views are presented in a fair way.	Conclusions are unbiased and clear, albeit a bit short. Beyond the summary scoring provided, a structuring of the conclusions would have helped, also probably to further shape the recommendations.

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Understanding of the criteria</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Criterion 8: Useful recom- mendations	Recommendations derive from conclusions. They are detailed enough and feasible.	The recommendations sometimes provide elements of more detailed conclusions, and relevant recommendations for specific target groups. Recommendations all appear detailed enough and feasible. In addition, the section on lessons learnt should help MFA in ensuring sustainability of the results of the projects, in transferring the knowledge generated by them to comparable endeavours, and in strengthening the implementation of the transition phase in Vietnam.
Criterion 9: Clear report	The report is interesting for and accessible to the intended readers. A short executive summary reflects the key findings, conclusions and recommendations in an impartial way.	The report is written in a clear and well-structured manner and provides an adequate summary.

The summary, although a bit long, provides a good narrative of the evaluation and also identifies relevant recommendations and lessons to be learnt. The table helps in identifying how findings relate to conclusions and recommendations/lessons learnt.

Final report

The version of the Draft final report of December 9, 2018 submitted to the client and assessed above reflected two rounds of comments and other communication exchange between the QA, the Team Leader and Indufor's project manager regarding specific issues. At this stage, the documents addressed sufficiently the main comments and requests for clarifications from the QA to be considered of adequate quality for submission to the client.

The QA team followed up on the extent to which comments received by the team from MFA (December 13, 2018; subsequent written comments December 20, 2018 and January 2, 2019), as well as those from the projects (PFG, 23 December 2018; FORMIS II, 26 and 31 December 2018) were adequately considered.

On March 4, 2019, QA considered this was the case and indicated to the team to submit the report.

Georg Ladj
Senior Evaluation Adviser
Particip GmbH

Anni Blåsten
Quality Management and Support Services
Indufor Oy



Indufor Oy

Esterinportti 2
FI-00240 Helsinki
FINLAND
Tel. +358 50 331 8217
Fax +358 9 135 2552
indufor@induforgroup.com
www.induforgroup.com

Indufor Asia Pacific Ltd

7th Floor, 55 Shortland St
PO Box 105 039
Auckland City 1143
NEW ZEALAND
Tel. +64 9 281 4750
Fax +64 9 281 4789
www.induforgroup.com

Indufor Asia Pacific (Australia) Pty Ltd

Flinders Lane
PO Box 425
Melbourne VIC 8009
AUSTRALIA
Tel. + 61 3 9639 1472
www.induforgroup.com

Indufor North America LLC

10th Floor
1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009
USA
www.induforgroup.com

