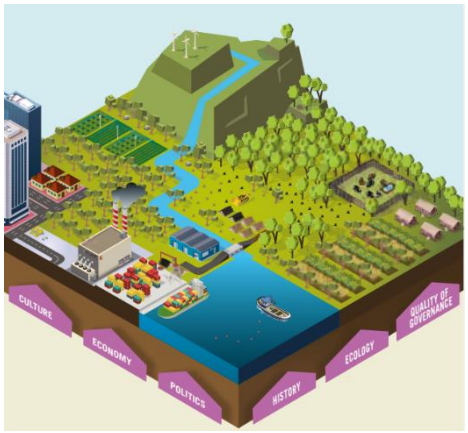
Objectives of the project

To facilitate smart agro-ecological transformation of agri-food farming systems of the Viet Nam's Mekong Delta (VMD) and strengthen resilience to climate change, environmental degradation, and other external shocks.



Background

VMD is one of the world's largest staple-crop producing areas providing food for more than 245 million people worldwide. It is home to 17 million people (17.5% of Viet Nam's population) and produces 50% of Viet Nam's rice, 65% of its aquaculture and 70% of its fruits. Agriculture contributes 33.5% of the VMD GDP (including 56.7% of VMD export value). The VMD had a poverty rate of 17.1% in 2018, which was the highest in all regions of the country despite the significant economic contribution of the region. Today, the majority surface area of the VMD has been converted to agriculture (predominantly rice-based) and/or aquaculture. The VMD and its associated agriculture/rural sectors are facing serious challenges in one of the most climate-impacted regions on earth.

Since 2000s, many of Vietnam's farming systems have drifted towards an unsustainable trend, with excessive use, or sometimes misuse, of inputs (fertilizers and pesticides) to achieve high levels but non-lasting yields. Such phenomena jeopardize public health, affecting both farmers who spray with limited guidance on toxic molecules and consumers that are affected by unsafe, high-level residues, scandal-prone food products, in addition to degradation of the soils and increases GHG emissions.

Trends in global markets toward agricultural products that meet sustainable standards of quality with regards to health and sustainability (organic, fair trade, environmentally safe, etc.), may limit future opportunities for Vietnam to secure agricultural exports. In addition, farmers and particularly women and youth are suffering from increasing market volatility affecting their livelihoods and push them to regularly change to best valued commodities. In other cases, reduced prospects in rural areas encourage migration to urban centres where vulnerable groups may expect to find better economic opportunities.

The limitation of the policies that provide incentives for changing farming practices to more sustainable ones and the lack of capacity building and knowledge in farmers' communities and agribusinesses with regards to agro-ecological production systems can aggravate the above-stated issues. They can also make ethnic minorities, vulnerable groups, and smallholder farmers unable to contribute to a change of their livelihoods.

The theory of change (ToC) to achieve the objectives

The four-year project is expected to improve performance at the production system, value chain levels and territorial level. Throughout the development and implementation of the project, the driving processes will aim at reshaping the current agro-ecosystems by considering the focus at the landscape level, and by promoting gender-sensitive, sustainable agro-ecological value chains (AEVC), including agro-ecological farming system, which can mitigate the causes of climate change and environment degradation and improve the livelihoods of rural communities. The project is aligned with the Government's Holistic Program for Sustainable Agriculture Development to adapt to climate change in VMD towards 2030. The project interventions will be based on research results to fine tune diagnosis and to be used for designing innovation, co-design of science-based agro-ecological

innovations in farming system and value chain[i]; establishment of multi-stakeholders' platforms to mobilize the participation of and contribution from different partners and Government agencies; and the development of bottom-up, government led policies

The project includes three outcomes:

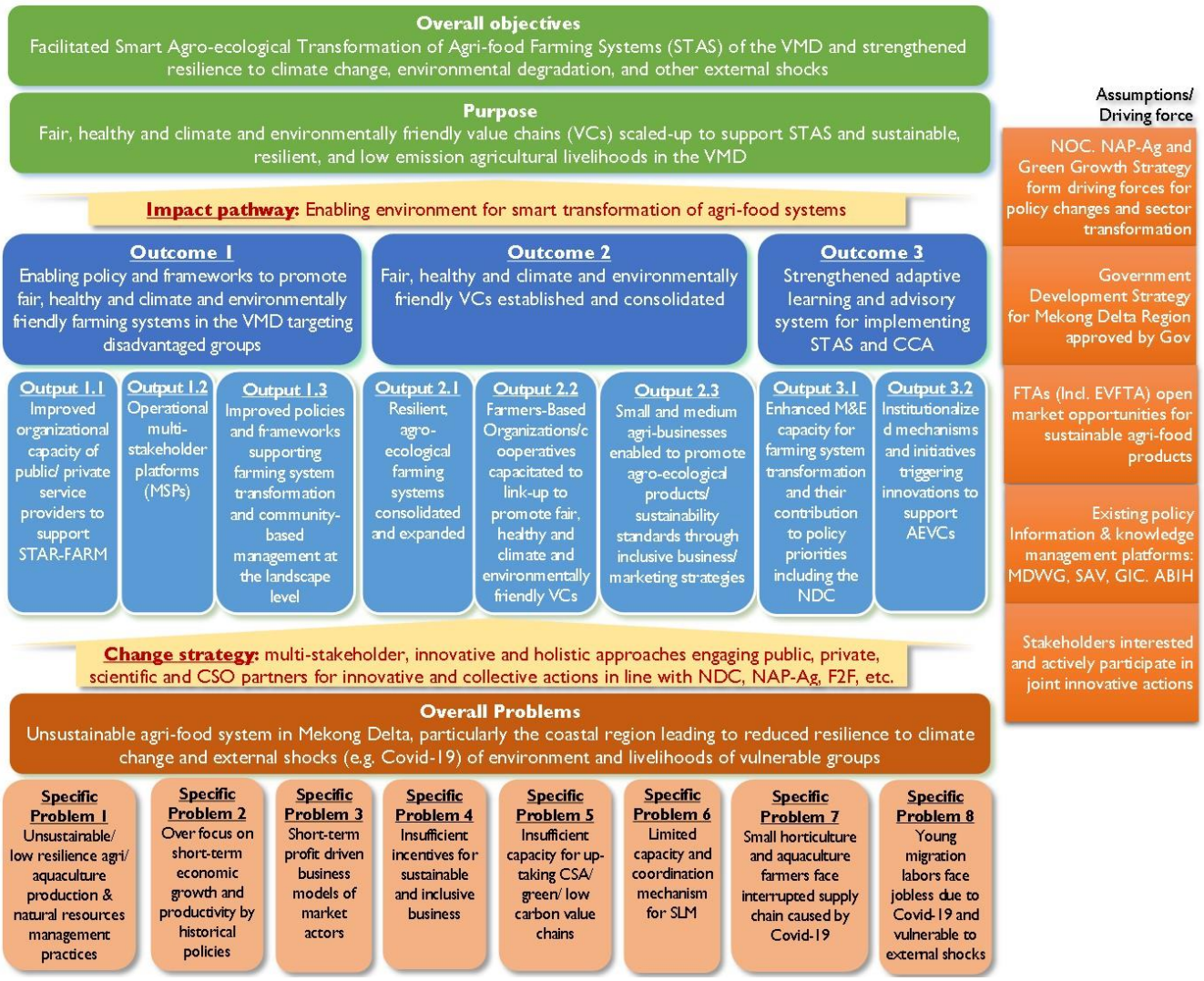
- ✓ enabling policy and frameworks to promote fair, healthy and climate and environmentally friendly farming systems in VMD targeting disadvantaged groups; the project will strengthen public and private advisory services able to support the agroecological transition, design and support multistakeholder platforms to foster participation and dialogue, and develop advocacy and exchanges with policy makers to improve policies addressing agroecological farming systems and landscape management by rural communities. Through these multi stakeholder platforms, the project will support communities to prepare management plans at landscape level with participation from district government agencies and on consultation. These plans will also be integrated within the provincial master plans, and the Mekong Delta Master Plan to ensure continuity and sustainability of these plans and associated activities over time;

- ✓ fair, healthy and climate and environmentally friendly Value Chains (VC) established and coordinated; The VCs will target key commodities of plants and animals including aquatic species. Decisions will be made during the 10-month inception phase when baseline assessments are to be conducted. The project will promote agroecological farming systems based on farmers and scientific knowledge through participatory approaches and with capacity building activities and the creation of group of staffs and technicians to support technology development; a focus will be made on digital innovation : farm ID databases, e Traceability, e-extension, web-based carbon footprint tracking, and others; the project will strengthen farmers organizations to be able to transform and market products in line with agroecological principles, and will support the creation or strengthen agribusinesses to promote products linked to agroecology.

- ✓ strengthened adaptive learning and advisory system for implementing Smart Transformation of Agri-food Systems (STAS) and climate change adaptation (CCA)., The project will design and implement a monitoring and evaluation system to help actors adapt their actions and learn. The institutionalisation of innovative mechanisms to scale agroecological innovations will be addressed.

These activities below will help to create sustainable and reliable agri-food systems connected to research, capacity building, innovation at scale, and policies. .

The full ToC is provided below.



Main activities

During its life, the project will undertake the following key activities:

- ✓ Conduct participatory stakeholder and value chains needs and gap analysis;
- ✓ Develop and implement actions plans for capacity building;
- ✓ Establish/strengthen multi-stakeholder platforms based upon existing well-functioning networks and partnerships to discuss and formulate measures and policies
- ✓ Support multi-level bottom-up and government-based policy dialogues;
- ✓ Establish a mechanism for community-based management by supporting communities to prepare landscape level management plans;
- ✓ Introduce sustainable standards and agro-ecological approaches through dialogue between local communities, private stakeholders (input suppliers, retailers, cooperatives) and policy makers.
- ✓ Support start-up & business development targeting EM, women, and youth entrepreneurs;
- ✓ Assist agricultural cooperatives to develop and implement sustainable business plans;
- ✓ Support value chain actors to develop equitable and agro-ecology value chain/business models;
- ✓ Support research, development, branding and marketing of agro-ecological products;
- ✓ Develop key performance indicators and data collection tools;

- ✓ Develop scenario and foresight assessment and platform to promote the long-term recovery and resilience of the VMD agri-food system; and,
- ✓ Facilitate broader access to other potential VC innovations by developing digital innovation and strengthening advisory services

Organization

The project will be implemented by a consortium. The project is made up of a project coordinating agency (FAO), sub-component leaders (CIRAD, IRD, and FAO) who operate the sub-component work program, an advisory committee, and an executive committee.

The work packages will be:

- ✓ project management, collaboration with partners and stakeholders;
- ✓ project scoping to select specific project areas and collect information for baseline;
- ✓ detailed identification of project interventions and conducting of supports;
- ✓ testing the feasibility, adoption of models and innovations and dissemination;
- ✓ cross cutting themes covering smart agro-ecological and gender; and
- ✓ monitoring pathways to impact.

Implementing organizations

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Partners of the project

- ✓ Centre for International Research on Environment and Development (France) (CIRAD)
- ✓ Institute of Research for Development (France) (IRD)
- ✓ Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPSARD)
- ✓ Viet Nam Academy of Agriculture Science (VASS)
- ✓ Can Tho University (CTU)

Other main stakeholders

- ✓ Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Viet Nam
- ✓ Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of two to three provinces to be selected from the potential list of Kien Giang, Bac Lieu, Soc Trang, Dong Thap, Tra Vinh and Ben Tre in the Mekong Delta.

Region

Vietnam/ Mekong Delta

Funding and co-funding

EU	€ 4.150,000

Duration

48 months (expectedly from 1 June 2022 to 31 May 2026)