

# Briefing

Climate change; Food and agriculture

Reflections on knowledge gained and key lessons learnt from IIED research and action

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## Project overview

**Title:** Scaling up community-led ecosystem-based adaptation in biodiverse forest landscapes in Viet Nam

**Timeframe:** September 2022–March 2025

**Summary:** IIED and the Viet Nam Farmers Union (VNFU) aimed to reduce climate risks and improve livelihoods for Viet Nam's upland communities facing extreme weather events and pest outbreaks exacerbated by climate change. This was done through increasing knowledge exchange and market access to enable the scaling up of ecosystem-based adaptation approaches (EbA).

## Change in action

Smallholder farmers can best adapt to climate change through EbA involving diversified systems that support more secure livelihoods. Scaling up EbA is hindered by limited knowledge exchange and market access. Producer organisations can enable more efficient adaptation by pooling their knowledge, costs and negotiating power. This project worked with producer organisations to enhance their knowledge of and capacity on EbA, diversify their economic systems with shared labels and gain wider sociopolitical support for EbA through peer-to-peer exchanges, market research and innovative marketing strategy development.



Credit: Ho Thi Thuan

## Scaling up ecosystem-based adaptation: lessons from Viet Nam

*Smallholders adapt to climate change with ecosystem-based approaches, knowledge sharing and marketing*

### Vulnerability of smallholders and the case for ecosystem-based adaptation

Smallholder farmers, including Viet Nam's upland Indigenous Peoples and local communities, are facing the daily realities of climate change. Farming on average plots of just one hectare, these communities face intensifying droughts, typhoons and pest outbreaks that threaten their livelihoods and food security. Deeply reliant on tropical and montane (mountainside) rainforest ecosystems for rice, forest fallow agriculture and agroforestry, they are highly vulnerable to both environmental shocks and market pressures. In the absence of adequate support, many are forced to adopt land-degrading practices or encroach on protected areas, further eroding biodiversity and ecosystem services.

This vicious cycle — where climate impacts drive unsustainable land use, which in turn worsens climate vulnerability — demands urgent

intervention. Ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) offers a promising path forward. EbA is a strategy that uses natural solutions, like restoring forests and wetlands, to help people adapt to climate change. By diversifying farming systems and restoring degraded landscapes, EbA leverages the benefits of healthy ecosystems to enhance communities' resilience. Since 2014, initiatives like the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) have supported forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs) in Viet Nam to implement EbA through agroforestry and forest corridor conservation.

Yet, scaling these efforts remains a challenge. Many FFPOs remain isolated from successful EbA models due to limited resources for documenting and sharing learning. Smallholders also struggle to compete in markets that reward uniformity over sustainability. Without mechanisms to reward their contributions to climate mitigation and biodiversity conservation, FFPOs' efforts remain undervalued.

Contact: [Kata Wagner](mailto:kata.wagner@iied.org) [kata.wagner@iied.org](mailto:kata.wagner@iied.org) | ISBN 978-1-83759-158-9

[www.linkedin.com/company/iied](https://www.linkedin.com/company/iied) | [www.iied.org](http://www.iied.org)

Supported by the Global EbA Fund, IIED ran a project with VNFU to scale up EbA approaches by tackling knowledge and market barriers. The project set out with three core goals: to enhance EbA capacity among rural producers; to improve access to markets and finance for products emerging from EbA systems; and to contribute to scaling up EbA within Viet Nam and globally.

## Ecosystem-based adaptation is knowledge- and labour-intensive

Recognising that farmers are more likely to adopt practices they can see working in similar contexts, our approach prioritised peer-to-peer exchange. IIED and VNFU worked closely with FFPOs to document and share five case studies of innovative EbA practices that not only reduced climate risks but also created new income streams for producers. For example, in Bac Kan, women-led cooperatives grow organic squash and rice in multifunctional agroforestry systems using traditional knowledge and then sell value-added products like squash tea and vermicelli. In Thai Nguyen, farmers raise chickens under acacia trees, which keep the animals cooler and healthier during heatwaves. In Hoa Binh, cooperatives combine mushroom farming with beekeeping and fruit trees to make better use of forest land.

These nature-based approaches have improved food security, diversified and increased smallholders' incomes, empowered women, and helped conserve biodiversity — showing that EbA can be a powerful tool for rural development and climate resilience. Yet, despite progress, key challenges remain for scaling up EbA in Viet Nam: policy frameworks are fragmented and there is limited technical support, especially in remote areas; some FFPOs have weak internal structures and planning; fragmented land ownership and reliance on traditional knowledge hinder collective action; many FFPOs lack training in organic farming, biodiversity conservation and modern processing; uneven EbA reduces its effectiveness; and financial barriers, youth disengagement, insecure land tenure, weak marketing, fragmented markets and poor infrastructure limit sustainability, profitability and scalability.

To close these gaps and help smallholders scale up EbA and market engagement, FFPOs need access to tailored extension services, improved seed systems and climate information, better

rural infrastructure, and stronger links to agribusiness and finance.

## Shared labels can provide marketing resilience for smallholders

The analysis of five prevalent value chains in the project area — medicinal plants, honey, bamboo shoots, fruits and vegetables — highlighted the strong market potential of, but also persistent weaknesses in, processing, infrastructure and profitability. Our analyses also highlighted opportunities provided by the rising demand for certified, sustainable products. To create new market access prospects, a collective labelling strategy was developed, enabling producer groups to collectively market products under a 'shared label' — a marketing tag used to promote products collectively based on aspects such as its environmental sustainability or sociocultural origin.

Private companies were invited to meet with FFPOs in Viet Nam to explore interest in and potential partnerships for products carrying an EbA or similar sustainability label. However, our market assessments show that the concept of EbA is too technical and unclear for most consumers. A shared label is more likely to succeed if it highlights broader themes like sustainability, fairness and community benefits, rather than focusing on EbA alone.

To make shared sustainability labels effective for scaling up EbA, more work is therefore needed to build consumer awareness, provide technical support to producers and strengthen distribution networks. These steps will help increase trust and demand for ecosystem-friendly products.

## Looking forward

This project showed that EbA can strengthen rural livelihoods, restore ecosystems and build climate resilience, but only if smallholders are supported with the right knowledge, tools and market access. To unlock the full potential of EbA, FFPOs need more than just resources — they need recognition, investment and inclusive markets that value their role as stewards of resilient landscapes.

### Kata Wagner

Researcher, IIED

## Key lessons & innovations

- FFPOs can scale up EbA solutions to boost smallholder resilience to climate change through their dual reach to members and decision makers.
- Market access can be improved to compensate for the more management- and labour-intensive nature of EbA production through innovative shared sustainability labels.
- Other challenges of EbA can be addressed by developing equitable land use plans, providing reliable information, adapting extension services, ensuring quality seeds, building infrastructure and facilitating contracts.

Funded by:



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44 Southampton Buildings  
London, WC2A 1AP  
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399

IIED's mission is to build a fairer, more sustainable world, using evidence, action and influence in partnership with others.



Knowledge  
Products

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> UNEP, Ecosystem-based Adaptation, [www.unep.org/topics/climate-action/adaptation/ecosystem-based-adaptation](http://www.unep.org/topics/climate-action/adaptation/ecosystem-based-adaptation). Accessed 22 May 2025. / <sup>2</sup> For more information, see: <https://globalebafund.org/> / <sup>3</sup> For more information, see: [www.iied.org/scaling-up-community-led-ecosystem-based-adaptation-biodiverse-forest-landscapes-viet-nam](http://www.iied.org/scaling-up-community-led-ecosystem-based-adaptation-biodiverse-forest-landscapes-viet-nam) / <sup>4</sup> Huong, DT (2025) Scaling up ecosystem-based adaptation in Vietnam: five case studies on best practice. IIED, London. / <sup>5</sup> Binh, TTT et al, Hai, PH, Voan, VLY and Thoan, HT (2025) Participatory situation analysis report on the ecosystem-based adaptation practices, capacities and needs of selected FFPOs. IIED, London. / <sup>6</sup> Extension services support rural communities by creating awareness and providing technical assistance, training and resources to improve agricultural output. / <sup>7</sup> Hai, P and Tran Thi Thanh, B (2025) Ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) value chain analysis: recommendations for forest and farm producers in Vietnam. IIED, London. / <sup>8</sup> Hai, P and Tran Thi Thanh, B (2025) Marketing products based on ecosystem-based adaptation approaches for selected forest and farm producer organisations. IIED, London. / <sup>9</sup> Wagner, K (ed) (2022) Shared labels: selling stories that conserve biocultural diversity and promote resilience. IIED, London.

