



Featured Story

Public-private Partnership in a Time of Crisis

Home to one of the largest sedimentary deposits in the world, the Mekong Delta serves as the rice bowl and fruit basket for Viet Nam's agricultural industry, with lush tropical gardens and sweeping rice fields.

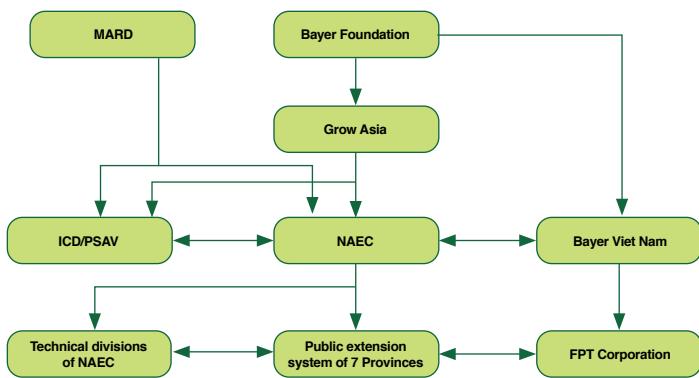
Adjacent to the Mekong Delta, the Southeast region – despite seeing impressive growth fueled by a massive energy sector and a thriving manufacturing industry – still positions agriculture as a major economic sector empowering the sustainable development of the region. The region is famous for a variety of crops such as rubber, coffee, cashew, peanut, sugarcane, soy, and vegetables.



7 provinces of the PPP project

However, drought and saltwater intrusion are putting great pressure on these agriculture hubs, affecting the livelihoods, food security, and water supply of people across provinces in the Mekong Delta and Southeast region of Viet Nam. Worse still, the COVID-19 pandemic presented additional socioeconomic strain on vulnerable smallholders already affected by drought and saltwater intrusion.

Faced with this urgent crisis, PSAV assembled partners from the public and private sectors in an effort to support the hardest-hit communities in the 2 regions. With the help of a donation from Bayer, facilitated through Grow Asia to Viet Nam, the PPP project was rolled out in 5 provinces in the Mekong Delta – Long An, Kien Giang, Ca Mau, Tien Giang, and Ben Tre – and 2 provinces in the Southeast region, namely Dong Nai and Ba Ria-Vung Tau. Many of these provinces had declared a state of emergency at the time of the intervention.



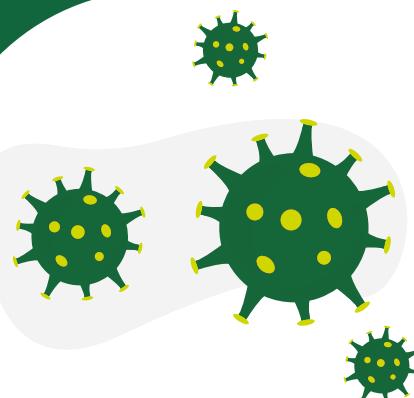
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The project was designed as a PPP initiative led by MARD through the National Agricultural Extension Center (NAEC), in collaboration with MARD's International Cooperation Department (ICD), the public extension system in communities across 7 provinces in the Mekong Delta and Southeastern regions, Bayer Viet Nam, and FPT Corporation.

As technical lead of the project, NAEC and the public extension system across the 7 project provinces accompanied smallholders from sowing to harvesting, providing in-depth technical advisories on crop, disease, and pest management.

Eighty thousand rice and maize smallholder farmers, whose livelihoods and welfare had been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic in addition to acute drought and saltwater intrusion, were provided with free care packages to help them restart their lives and cope with the crisis as much as possible. These packages were tailored to local needs, and included a combination of crop protection products, maize seeds, and corresponding training materials. The packages aimed to help smallholders protect crop productivity, ensure their sustainable recovery, and develop harvest products that meet global standards (both technical and safety requirements).

Women are among the worst affected segments of the population in the region that were significantly impacted by the combined forces of drought, saltwater intrusion and the pandemic. As such, women smallholders were the focus of this PPP initiative, to ensure they received the resources and knowledge they needed to cope, and protect themselves and the people around them. The PPP project also equipped farmers with training on a digital platform named Agrolink. Designed by FPT Corporation, this tool will provide farmers access to future virtual trainings, and improve their ability to use modern agricultural technologies.



Impact

80,000 smallholder farmers were reached.

60,000 kilograms of maize seeds, 60,000 care packages, and 80,000 sets of training materials on farming, COVID-19 prevention, and healthcare were distributed.

200 trainings-of-farmers were organized providing direct training to 28,631 farmers (43% female).

7 trainings-of-trainers were organized for 700 public extensionists.

61,157 digital accounts were created on the AgroLink app.

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The project fell under the umbrella of a global initiative by Bayer known as “Better Farms, Better Lives”. As part of its sustainability commitment, Bayer aims to support 100 million smallholder farmers in low- and middle-income countries by 2030. The immediate COVID-19 response through the Better Farms, Better Lives initiative complements Bayer’s ongoing smallholder support activities, which will aid in mid-term recovery and in building long-term resilience among smallholder farmers.

Beyond the immediate response in the form of support packages, the partners are working together to put in place medium- and long-term plans to build the resilience of the country’s food systems, particularly through initiatives championed by the PPP Task Force on Rice, and ensure smallholder farmers are better prepared for the future.



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This initiative comes at a critical time. It will have a massive and immediate impact on the ground, helping to fill the gaps, providing the neediest smallholders with access to quality inputs and technical knowledge. We welcome this extraordinary PPP, whose goal is to accelerate smallholders' recovery and spur sustainable development of Viet Nam's agriculture. This partnership is an example of how we can work together to overcome humanitarian threats, seize opportunities, and transform the agriculture sector. ■■

Dr Nguyen Do Anh Tuan, Director General of the ICD cum PSAV Director

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The main goal of the project is to help smallholders maintain and restore their farming activities, respond effectively to adverse situations such as drought, saltwater intrusion, and the COVID-19 pandemic in a sustainable way, and at the same time ensure that agricultural products can meet food safety and international standards. ■■

Dr. Le Quoc Thanh, Director General of the NAEC

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2020 was an unusual and unfortunate year for my family and our neighbors. Salinity hampered the growth and survival of my field crops, and it is not getting any better; it will take time for my family to get back on our feet. Worse still, because of COVID-19, my income has significantly reduced compared to the previous year and this also happened to many of my neighbors and other farmers in the area. We are grateful and relieved to see that there are increasing efforts by the government and influential organizations to help us to recover quicker and continue to deliver quality produce to the market. ■■

Trinh Thi Moi, a Mekong Delta farmer

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Smallholder farmers play a crucial role in ensuring food security for Viet Nam, but the ongoing COVID-19 situation as well as drought and saltwater intrusion have impacted their ability to grow sufficient food for their families and communities. The Better Farms, Better Lives initiative will provide immediate additional support to smallholder farmers in the form of agricultural inputs and advisory during this summer-autumn crop and beyond. We hope that this project, under the guidance of MARD and together with the NAEC, the ICD and Grow Asia, will not only contribute to the resilience of smallholders but also ensure the stability and sustainability of Viet Nam's agricultural sector. ■■

Weraphon Charoenpanit, Country Commercial Lead of Bayer Viet Nam's Crop Science Division