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SUCCESS STORY

Promoting Bamboo to Save Forests

Poor farmers increase their incomes and preserve Vietnam's forests by planting bamboo



Photo: ARBCP

Farmers from Lam Dong province receive bamboo seedlings through the Asia Regional Biodiversity Conservation Program (ARBCP).

USAID program preserves forests and provides additional income for Vietnamese farmers whose agricultural practices previously destroyed habitats and eroded the land.

The greatest threat to biodiversity in the buffer zone of Vietnam's Cat Tien National Park is the clearing of natural forest and the conversion of the land to grow cashews, acacia and other crops. This isolates endangered species and limits their ability to cope with climate change, disease, and shrinking habitat.

Forests provide valuable environmental benefits such as clean water supplies, soil erosion control, carbon storage, and tourism opportunities. Public-private partnerships in the bamboo sector are helping to conserve these benefits and increase the incomes of needy farmers.

USAID's Asia Regional Biodiversity Conservation Program (ARBCP) is bringing governments, businesses, and non-profit organizations together in public-private partnerships to help farmers increase their incomes while minimizing forest clearing and preserving their environmental benefits.

ARBCP, in partnership with the Grass Company of Vietnam, promotes the planting of bamboo in small quantities to maintain the forest in its natural state to the greatest degree possible. This helps isolated communities increase their incomes by harvesting bamboo to make furniture, flooring, and construction materials. By providing income from bamboo, the program preserves the forests and minimizes slash-and-burn agriculture for other crops.

"Bamboo is the future of wood," said Dang Hao, the vice director of Grass Company.

His firm is working with 50 households in An Nhon and Huong Lam communes in Lam Dong province to plant 40 hectares of a biodiversity-friendly bamboo species as a pilot for the 1,000-hectare program. Grass Company is providing bamboo seedlings, fertilizer, and half of the labor costs required by farmers to plant and care for the crops over five years.

The program is expected to raise local farmers' incomes by about \$1,500 per hectare. Lam Dong families typically earn \$1,700-\$2,800 a year, so incomes will rise substantially.