What will we eat tomorrow?
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Discover our new brand: Rikolto

In 2017, Vredeseilanden / VECO took a big leap and became Rikolto. Rikolto is the Esperanto word for ‘harvest’. As an organisation, we aim to harvest new ideas and great solutions to improve our food systems, ensuring brilliant harvests for farmers in the future, and quality food for all consumers.

CHRIS CLAES
Co-director of Rikolto International

What motivated this change? Well, the double name – Vredeseilanden in Belgium and VECO in the rest of the world – often created confusion. Having a single name allows us to create a stronger, more recognisable international brand for our entire organisation.

We wanted a name that better reflects Rikolto’s transition into an international network organisation. While the organisation started in Belgium in the 1980s, it is now present on 4 continents and 8 regions around the world with both global and diverse local perspectives on how to improve food systems. As of 1 January 2017, decision-making has been decentralised and now takes place through our 8 regional offices. Therefore, we wanted a brand that suited this new phase of our organisation, and that better reflected our mission.

DR. THAI THI MINH
Regional Director, Rikolto in Vietnam

Worldwide, consumers, farmers, agri-food companies and policy makers alike are asking themselves this question: what will we eat tomorrow? For us, this question is a means to invite everybody to join in a conversation about finding solutions to make our food systems more sustainable and inclusive for smallholders. Our objective? To change the recipe of our food system, together.

Smallholder farmers remain one of the key actors we work with, along with supermarkets, retailers, policy-makers and consumers, to guarantee affordable, quality food for all. This challenge requires considerable collaboration, we cannot tackle it alone: building bridges between different stakeholders in the food systems is in our DNA and will continue to be at the core of our work.
Vietnam is facing a series of challenges that are hampering the development of more sustainable food systems in the country. Over 15 million smallholder farmers derive their livelihoods from rice in the Red River and Mekong deltas but the number of smallholders who can make a living from rice is declining. In northern Vietnam, the constraints of modern life, which require increasing amounts of disposable income, are pressuring farmers into maximising the productivity of their very small plots of land. The availability of cheap agrochemicals and farmers’ lack of awareness about their adequate use often leads to an overuse of fertilisers and pesticides, resulting in high levels of chemical residues in food, especially rice and vegetables. Scared by the prospect of ingesting unhealthy food, consumers are increasingly turning their backs on Vietnamese produce, seeking safer alternatives in food produced in foreign countries. In Hanoi, over 90% of consumers are worried about food safety. Despite their concern, only a few consume domestic safe products with clear traceability on a regular basis. According to a 2016 survey, about 50% of respondents declared that they did not trust food safety certifications (Vredeseilanden, 2016). Consumers’ lack of trust in certifications, coupled with the higher price of vegetables bearing a food safety label, were the main reasons why consumers were not purchasing more safe vegetables.

Global mission

Rikolto envisions a world with production and consumption systems, that allow poverty and hunger to be eradicated and that do not burden our planet more than it can bear. Therefore, Rikolto enables and supports smallholder farmers to take up their role in rural poverty alleviation and to contribute to feeding a growing world population in a sustainable way. In 2017, Rikolto in Vietnam started a 5-year programme named “Supporting Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural Value Chain Development Benefitting Smallholder Farmers in Vietnam”. Our work tends towards one aim: that vegetables, rice and tea in Vietnam are produced in safe and sustainable ways, and marketed through viable, competitive and efficient chains benefitting smallholder producers.

Picture taken in Trac Van, Ha Nam, after heavy rains and floods. Climate change is becoming an increasingly dire threat for rice and vegetable small-scale producers. Higher risks of droughts and floods are especially daunting in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam’s rice bowl.
Our priorities

To achieve this global mission, we aim to contribute to changes at the structural level that can have a wide-ranging impact. For our 2017-2021 programme, our interventions will primarily focus on two priorities:

- The promotion of sustainable and safe food policies tackling safe vegetable production, consumption and marketing that benefit smallholder farmers;
- The mainstreaming of inclusive business models and practices for sustainable rice across the Vietnamese rice subsector.

Our history

Rikolto (previously going by the name Vredeseilanden in Belgium) is the result of the 2001 merger of three Belgian development organizations: Vredeseilanden, FADO and COOPIBO. Each brought their own experiences, expertise, resources and geographical specialisations to the table, and together they decided to continue under the name Vredeseilanden. FADO, one of the three original organisations, had been active in Vietnam since 1994, mainly in the fields of mangrove reforestation, microcredits and agriculture. Rikolto in Vietnam has worked in a wide variety of sectors and provinces, but always with a primary focus on supporting farmers to increase their income and on supporting the sustainable development of specific agricultural chains. Through FADO, Rikolto has more than 20 years of experience working in Vietnam.

Rikolto: A nimble networked organisation

Rikolto is an International NGO with more than 40 years of experience in partnering with farmer organisations and food chain actors across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.

Rikolto runs programmes in 14 countries worldwide through eight regional offices. We are a close-knit network of accessible and knowledgeable colleagues, willing to share experience and eager to inspire others.

We support 134 partner organisations, reaching over 80,000 farmer families active in 8 commodities, rice, coffee, cocoa, and vegetables, among others. Our international office is located in Leuven, Belgium.
Our strategies & approaches

Our strategies

Rikolto’s programme in Vietnam aims to foster sustainable food production and consumption, and to ensure a fair share for all actors in the value chain. Reaching a critical mass of farmers, companies and consumers can only be achieved through changes at the structural level through improvements of the institutional and business environment. To contribute to making sustainable production and consumption the new norm, Rikolto is applying a combination of four strategies:

1. **Strengthening partner capacities for collective actions** by improving farmer organisations’ technical, organisational and business skills, and facilitating market linkages between chain actors;

2. **Fostering innovation** by investing in innovative methodologies to promote new inclusive and sustainable business models and deepen our understanding of how to bring about transformational changes in the food systems;

3. **Supporting an enabling environment** for Vietnamese smallholders and consumers. Together with our partners, we leverage our results at the project level to support evidence-based advocacy towards decision-makers for more sustainable policies.

4. **Partnering up with the private sector** to make their supply chains more sustainable and inclusive.

Our ambitions for the years to come

By the end of our 2017-2021 programme, we hope to be recognised by the government, donors, civil society, businesses and farmers for our expertise on:

- **Facilitating the uptake of Participatory Guarantee Systems** (PGS) by farmers, companies, and the government, for safe vegetables and rice produced according to the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) standard;

- **Adapting the principles and tools of inclusive business** to the context of Vietnam and fostering sustainable partnerships between small-scale farmers and companies;

- **Enabling private companies to make their agricultural supply chains more sustainable and farmer-friendly**;

- **Working with cities to improve their governance** on food safety and sustainability issues;

- **Supporting smallholder farmers to comply with food safety and sustainability standards**, and to strengthen their organisations to become reliable business partners;

- **Bringing safe food to traditional markets**, especially for the benefit of middle and low-income consumers.
What will we eat tomorrow?

Highlights from 2017

Accompanying farmers on their way to sustainable production

- Over 900 tea farmers were trained on sustainable land management practices as part of a joint project with the Rainforest Alliance. In total, 3,182 tea farmers were trained in 2016 and 2017, with an average 30% increase in income due to higher prices for quality tea leaves and a reduction in their use of agrochemicals.

- One of our partners, Tu Xa Cooperative, started supplying safe vegetables to VinEco, one of Vietnam’s leading safe vegetable brands. Another partner, Trac Van Collaborative Group, became a Cooperative and opened its first organic store at the local market.

- Together with Vietnam National University of Agriculture, we started a country-wide study to assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) in Vietnam. The study will be used to refine our PGS model and develop a practical toolbox for practitioners to set up their own PGS.

Strengthening our organisation

- In January 2017, we became an international network organisation and started our transition to Rikolto, a process formalised in April 2018 with the approval of our new name by Vietnamese authorities.

- We welcomed to our team a new Regional Director, Dr. Thai Thi Minh. Hailing from the University of Copenhagen, she brings in her experience as Associate Professor specialised in participatory training methodologies and value chains in a development context.

New partnerships for sustainable food systems

- We signed formal agreements with 10 new farmer organisations in Ha Nam, Vinh Phuc, Da Nang, Phu Tho and An Giang provinces.

- We signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Da Nang’s Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to collaborate on making Da Nang a Food Smart City.

- We started new partnerships with 11 organisations ranging from universities and provincial government departments to extension centres and mass organisations such as local women unions and farmer unions.

- We launched a new project with Vietnam National University of Agriculture (VNUA) and Gembloux Agro-BioTech (University of Liège, Belgium) to make our supported value chains more gender-sensitive and to explore ways to create more opportunities for the youth in agribusiness.

- We sponsored the 5th Conference of the Food Science and Technology Network between Vietnam and Belgium (VBFoodNET) which brings together Vietnamese and Belgian academic and research institutions in the field of food science and technology.
Launching the first Vietnam Bike Classics

We successfully organised the two first Rikolto Bike Classics ever organised in Vietnam. In total 54 Belgian bikers cycled across 400 km of countryside roads to discover Rikolto’s projects and Vietnam’s unique food, sceneries and culture. Beforehand, each one of them committed to raise EUR 3,000 for the organisation.

Our contribution to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals

![Image of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals icons]

1. No Poverty
2. Zero Hunger
3. Good Health and Well-Being
4. Quality Education
5. Gender Equality
6. Clean Water and Sanitation
7. Affordable and Clean Energy
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
10. Reduced Inequalities
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities
12. Responsible Consumption and Production
13. Climate Action
14. Life Below Water
15. Life on Land
16. Peace and Justice, Strong Institutions
17. Partnerships for the Goals
In order to meet the requirements of modern markets, farmers who produce safe and organic vegetables are expected to have their vegetables certified by an external party. Unfortunately, this process is often costly and very complex, meaning that most certifications are largely out of reach for smallholder farmers. Without this seal of approval, there are few incentives for farmers to invest in safe production and for consumers to trust their produce. Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) are a suitable alternative. PGS are low-cost, locally based systems of quality assurance with a strong emphasis on social control and knowledge building (IFOAM).

Supporting smallholder farmers to produce and market safe vegetables

Our vegetable programme

Supporting smallholder farmers to produce and market safe vegetables

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Our strategies

- Support farmers in implementing safe and organic production methods, in accordance with the BasicGAP or Organic PGS standards
- Set up and support the management of PGS to lead towards their independent operations
- Train and coach farmers on marketing, business management, production planning, organisational management, negotiation, accounting, and post-harvest loss
- Facilitate the development of long-term inclusive business relationships between farmers, wholesalers, supermarkets and vegetable stores to achieve win-win trading relationships
- Develop a PGS toolbox to support interested practitioners in setting up their own PGS systems
- Document our results and lessons learned to advocate district, provincial and national governments to support and invest in PGS as reliable and affordable quality assurance systems for the benefit of small-scale farmers and consumers.

As a participatory certification system, PGS helps build consumers’ trust by involving them and other stakeholders such as local authorities, retailers and wholesalers in the quality assurance mechanism. Ultimately, our goal is to develop sufficient evidence of the benefits of PGS to convince decision-makers, farmers and businesses to take them up widely and integrate them into their own strategies.

MS. PHAN THI KIM NHUNG
Senior Programme Officer (vegetables)
Our achievements in 2017

In 2017, we continued to support organisations that were previously included in our programme. Our activities focused on further developing their PGS operations, strengthening their organisational capacity, and further expanding their markets for vegetables. In Ha Nam, our partner, Trac Van Collaborative Group, became an official cooperative and started using a QR code system on its vegetable packaging to ensure traceability for consumers. In Phu Tho, Tu Xa Cooperative developed and strengthened its relationship with VinEco, the safe vegetable brand of VinMart. The cooperative expanded its network of regular buyers and succeeded in having its four PGS farmer groups certified for their safe vegetables. With the support of partners from PGS Vietnam, we started the lengthy process of developing a PGS toolbox for practitioners that includes a brand-new training curriculum on how to set up a PGS. Unfortunately, due to lengthy administrative procedures and delayed programme approval, we were not able to start implementing programme activities with new farmer organisations until 2018.

In May 2017, Rikolto embarked on a one-year project named “Empowering Female Farmers Through Organic Vegetables Production and Marketing”, funded by Hanoi International Women’s Club. Since then, we have supported Trac Van farmers to consolidate their organic PGS and produce their own earthworm compost. We trained them on how to reduce post-harvest loss and supported them to purchase equipment to improve their processing and reduce their vulnerability to bad weather. We also supported farmers to improve their business, IT and marketing skills to expand their market for organic vegetables. In August, the cooperative opened its first organic food store at the local market.

What do we expect by the end of 2021?

- Partner farmers adopt climate-smart and environmentally friendly practices;
- Supported farmer organisations improve their access to safe vegetables markets under good conditions, including through formal contracts that guarantee fair price, long-term commitment and reasonable volumes;
- At least 21 Participatory Guarantee Systems bringing together about 1,100 farmers in Hanoi, Vinh Phuc, Ha Nam, Da Nang and Phu Tho provinces are operational, able to function independently from Rikolto, and represent a diversity of stakeholders;
- Four provinces have adopted PGS as part of their policies towards safe food and sustainable agriculture;
- PGS networks are operational in 4 provinces to promote a more favourable institutional environment for safe vegetable in their respective province;
- The Vietnamese government has taken steps towards the recognition of PGS as a valid quality assurance mechanism and its adoption in national policies;
- An inspiring PGS model and toolbox is available for practitioners to set up their own PGS, independently from Rikolto’s support;
- Vietnam’s consumer protection system is better able to represent and defend consumers on food safety-related issues.
What will we eat tomorrow?

Our partners in 2017:

- **Farmer organisations:** Tu Xa Safe Vegetables Cooperative (Phu Tho) and Trac Van Organic Vegetables Cooperative (Ha Nam)
- **Implementing partners:** Duy Tien Women Union (Ha Nam) and Lam Thao Agricultural Division

New partnerships developed in 2017 and starting in 2018:

- **Farmer organisations:** Tu Vu Safe Vegetables Cooperative (Phu Tho), Van Hoi Green Cooperative (Vinh Phuc), An Hoa Agri-Service Cooperative (Vinh Phuc), Thanh Ha Safe Vegetables Cooperative (Vinh Phuc), Cat Lai Agri-Service Cooperative (Ha Nam), Tuy Loan Safe Vegetable Sale and Production Service Cooperative (Da Nang), Ninh An Safe Vegetable Production Group (Da Nang), and La Huong Safe Vegetable Cooperative (Da Nang).
- **Implementing partners:** Da Nang Union of Science and Technology Associations (DANUSTA), Da Nang Women Union, Da Nang Crop Production and Plant Protection Department, Ha Nam Agro-Forestry-Fishery Quality Assurance Department, Ha Nam Crop Production and Plant Protection Department, Vinh Phuc Farmers’ Union, Vinh Phuc Crop Production and Plant Protection Department, Phu Tho Department of Plant Protection, and Vietnam National University of Agriculture.

The Safe and Organic Food Finder (SOFF) is an online platform launched in 2016 by Rikolto. Composed of a website and two apps, the platform enables people in Hanoi to find reliable stores selling safe and organic vegetables in their neighbourhood. By clicking on stores’ profile, they have access to a wide range of information such as the types of food safety certificates available, opening hours, pictures, contact information, and delivery options. In late 2017, the platform’s database and interface were completely updated. After visiting over 200 stores claiming to sell safe vegetables, Rikolto uploaded 80 new store profiles onto the platform. So far, the apps have been downloaded over 5,700 times.
Our Food Smart Cities Programme

Towards a sustainable food system in Da Nang

Among the country’s rapidly growing cities, Da Nang has emerged as one of Vietnam’s largest and most economically dynamic city. Known for its entrepreneurial and managerial spirit, Da Nang is one of the most committed cities in Vietnam on food safety and environmental sustainability. In recent years, the authorities developed safe food supply chains with a series of major companies focusing on consumers’ access to certified products, sample testing, and traceability. Da Nang is one of four cities piloting a new governance model for food safety management. In January 2018, the city established a Food Safety Management Authority, building on the expertise of various departments (agriculture, trade and industry, and health) to strengthen the effectiveness of its food safety governance. Nevertheless, despite the city’s efforts, consumers’ concern for food safety is still soaring. Da Nang is unable to produce most of the food that it consumes and has to rely on other provinces to meet its needs. Only 100 ha of land are cultivated for vegetable production, supporting less than 10% of the city’s demand. Other challenges include the low per capita yearly income of vegetable farmers around Da Nang and their vulnerability to climate change.

Our strategies

Together with our partners in Da Nang and following a multi-stakeholder planning process, we decided to focus our resources on the following priorities:

- To support the development of a food smart city strategy for Da Nang that facilitates consumers’ access to safe food and smallholder farmers’ participation in safe food value chains;
- To foster a more enabling environment for Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) in Da Nang through the establishment of local PGS in the city and recommendations to Da Nang People’s Committee for the inclusion of PGS in municipal policies;
- To raise consumers’ awareness about the importance of consuming sustainable and safe food through a city-wide communication campaign;
- To facilitate sustainable linkages between actors in Da Nang’s food chains by supporting the development of a learning community for safe food producers, and facilitating market linkage between producers and markets;
- To collaborate with local consumer protection organisations to build their capacity to better represent and inform consumers on food-related issues.

Achievements in 2017

In July 2017, Rikolto and Da Nang’s Department of Agriculture and Rural Development organised a participatory planning workshop to agree on the main orientations of their 5-year collaboration. The workshop was attended by representatives of various city departments, farmer organisations, private sector and civil society. Together, the participants came up with a draft plan to improve the management of food safety in the city, increase safe vegetables supply in Da Nang, and improve consumers’ access and trust in safe food. Shortly after, Da Nang’s Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and Rikolto signed a Memorandum of Understanding to kick-start their partnership. The programme’s official approval is expected in the spring of 2018.
Ensuring consumers’ access to quality safe food and making sure that small-scale farmers are involved in safe food chains are among the priorities of our collaboration with Da Nang.

What results do we expect by 2021?

We expect that by 2021:

- Safe food consumption by Da Nang citizens has increased, including in lower and middle-income groups;
- Consumers adopt safer food handling and processing behaviours;
- Safe food supply chains are established in traditional markets to increase the availability of quality food at consumers’ most popular shopping places;
- A food smart city strategy and action plan is adopted by the authorities and implemented within Da Nang;
- PGS are integrated within the City’s food and agriculture policies and constitute an integral part of its strategy to supply safe food to consumers;
- Da Nang’s municipal governance on food safety is strengthened;
- Da Nang actively contributes to the activities of Rikolto’s International Food Smart Cities Cluster by providing evidence of successful policies and initiatives for a more sustainable urban food system;
- Da Nang becomes an example of a food smart city in Vietnam, inspiring other cities in the country to follow suit.

Implementing partners

Da Nang’s Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Da Nang Food Safety Management Authority, DANUSTA, Da Nang’s Crop Production and Plant Protection Department and Da Nang’s Women Union.

Rikolto’s International Food Smart Cities Cluster

The Food Smart Cities Cluster is an initiative that brings together the cities of Ghent (Belgium), Da Nang (Vietnam), Solo (Indonesia), Quito (Ecuador), Tegucigalpa (Honduras), and Arusha (Tanzania), with 6 regional Rikolto offices. The Food Smart Cities cluster aims to develop multi-stakeholder partnerships on a variety of issues such as rural urban linkages, inclusive business models in the food chain, sustainable catering, healthy food for schools, and consumers’ access to quality food. Ultimately, by promoting learning exchanges and providing evidence of successful practices and policies at the city-level, our aim is to influence international discussions towards more sustainable urban food systems. More information on our website: https://www.rikolto.org/en/project/fsc.
Emerging opportunities

In 2016, the Vietnamese government adopted a policy strategy for restructuring the rice sector which shifts the government’s focus from quantity to quality, from food security to food safety, and from a supply-driven sector to a market-driven one, thus contributing to a more enabling environment for quality sustainable rice.

As income levels increase and consumers’ food preferences change, there is a growing demand for quality rice.

Rice farmers are increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. In 2016, an estimated 1.29 million tonnes of rice were lost to the country’s biggest drought in 90 years affecting the livelihoods of nearly 2 million smallholder farmers and poor households.

The Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP), an initiative of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), recently adopted a new standard for sustainable rice production. As discussions move forward on appropriate quality assurance mechanisms for the standard, Rikolto believes that reliable and affordable participatory certifications can ensure that small-scale farmers are part of the transition to sustainable rice.

Our rice programme

Facilitating inclusive and sustainable rice value chains

The rice sector plays an important role in Vietnam’s social and economic development. However, several challenges must be tackled to ensure that the sector develops in a sustainable way. Due to high levels of pesticide residues and a lack of know-how on good agricultural practices, smallholder farmers struggle to meet the increasing demand of quality rice markets. The country’s exports consist mainly of white rice at the lower end of the market. This market niche occupied by Vietnam enables the country to easily export rice to lower income countries. However, Vietnam’s reputation for providing low quality rice contributes to keeping prices low for farmers. Rice paddies are also a major producer of methane, a greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change. It is estimated that 1.5% of all greenhouse gas emissions worldwide can be attributed to rice production.

Furthermore, farmers’ common practice of side-selling despite having signed supply contracts with buyers discourages companies to invest in them, making it challenging to source rice that complies with quality standards and ensure traceability.
Our strategies

Together with cooperatives, the private sector and authorities, Rikolto aims to mainstream inclusive business and sustainable production practices across the Vietnamese rice sector. Our interventions combine a mix of the following five strategies:

- Strengthening farmer organisations to improve their capacity to engage in inclusive business relationships with rice companies and supermarket;
- Improving the sustainability, gender-sensitiveness and youth inclusiveness of rice value chains;
- Testing the feasibility of using Participatory Guarantee Systems as a quality assurance mechanism for rice produced according to the SRP standard;
- Facilitating the development of long-term inclusive business relationships between companies and farmer organisations;
- Scaling out and up inclusive and sustainable practices for rice value chains. We therefore closely document our approaches and pilot experiences to support evidence-based advocacy towards policy-makers and the private sector.

What results do we expect by 2021?

We expect that by the end of 2021:

- Our partner farmer organisations will have developed the necessary business and management capacities to access quality rice markets;
- Rice produced by our partner farmers complies with national and/or international quality standards such as the Sustainable Rice Platform standard, and is grown using environmentally-friendly and climate-smart practices;
- Approximately 5,000 supported farmers are able to meet high value rice markets’ requirements, and can make a better income out of the sale of rice;
- Local Participatory Guarantee Systems for rice produced according to the Sustainable Rice Platform standard are fully operational and able to function independently from Rikolto;
- Farmers’ views are better reflected in contracts with rice companies and they are able to trade rice under good conditions in terms of price, quantity and contract duration;
- Vietnamese consumers have better access to affordable quality rice produced in a sustainable way;
- National and international discussions on rice sustainability are nurtured by evidence and experiences from Rikolto’s partners in Vietnam;
- Participatory certification mechanisms are recognised as a valid quality assurance mechanism for rice produced according to the SRP standard by the Sustainable Rice Platform.

Rikolto’s International Rice Cluster

Rikolto works within rice value chains in 9 countries: Indonesia, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Vietnam. Through pilot projects with farmer organisations and other actors, Rikolto tests innovative practices and builds evidence to help answer crucial questions in the rice sector. Three issues are at the forefront of the cluster’s work: sustainably produced rice, quality rice for consumers, and inclusive business relations in rice value chains. In addition to fostering knowledge exchanges, the cluster aims to share common evidence at the continental and global level to contribute to the international debate on sustainable rice, particularly within the Sustainable Rice Platform.
Rikolto believes that family farms are a big part of the solution to making our food systems more sustainable. Change on a global scale demands that food markets become more inclusive of smallholders and offer value to all actors in the food chain. Smallholder farmers must be offered a fair deal.
Our tea project

Rikolto and the Rainforest Alliance partner up to reduce land degradation

In 2015, the Rainforest Alliance with the financial support of the Global Environment Facility (United Nations Environment Programme) launched the project “Mainstreaming Sustainable Management of Tea Production Landscapes”. Spanning across Darjeeling (India), Assam (India), Sri Lanka, Yunnan (China), and Vietnam’s Northern Highlands, the project aims to reduce land degradation associated with tea production in Asia. The project is supporting farmers and tea estates to adopt sustainable land management practices and encourages the tea industry and government leaders to mainstream these practices in their business operations and policies. In addition to reducing farmers’ vulnerability and improving their livelihoods, the project aimed to achieve a large number of environmental protection objectives such as restoring soil fertility, conserving water and soil, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, enhancing carbon sequestration, preserving biodiversity and increasing the flow of ecosystem services in tea production landscapes.

Supporting environmentally-friendly tea production by smallholders

Tea is one of Vietnam’s national drinks and the second most popular beverage in the world. However, less and less Vietnamese farmers are willing to invest in tea due to a regular decline in prices. The high use of chemical fertilizers and herbicides has resulted in poor soil health and undermined Vietnamese tea’s reputation on international markets. The increasing global demand for tea will likely intensify pressures on already nutrient-deprived farmland while climate change is expected to further exacerbate soil erosion. Against this backdrop, improved soil conservation measures can help reduce the pressure on tea farming landscapes.
Main activities

To ensure farmers’ buy-in and the suitability of the practices to the local context, the project relied on farmers’ traditional knowledge of sustainable land management. After investigating the local practices to fight erosion and preserve soils’ fertility, 8 practices were documented and integrated in the project’s training curriculum such as mulching, composting, intercropping, and establishing hedgerows. Using a Training of Trainers (ToT) approach, Rikolto created a pool of 23 qualified trainers, including young staff from local tea factories, a cooperative and a government department to train tea farmers in Yen Bai, Lai Chau and Thai Nguyen provinces.


Achievements in 2017

Using a Farmer Field School (FFS) methodology, over 900 tea farmers were trained on sustainable land management practices in 2017. In total, **3,182 tea farmers were trained** in Vietnam in 2016 and 2017, with an **average 30% increase** in income due to higher prices for quality tea leaves and a reduction in chemical use. Following an event to advocate national and provincial governments to integrate those practices in their policies, one provincial government committed to provide **1 billion VND (approx. 35,000 EUR)** for the upscaling of specific land conservation practices. A policy brief recommending the upscaling of these practices at the national level was also presented to Vietnam’s Ministry for Agriculture and Rural Development through VITAS.
What have we done on gender?

In 2017, Rikolto launched three initiatives to improve the situation of female farmers in its intervention areas.

**First**, in May, we started a one-year project to specifically support female farmers to produce and market organic vegetables. Through this project funded by Hanoi International Women’s Club, we aim to create employment and increase the income of female farmers in Trac Van, while improving the liveability of their environment.

**Second**, with the financial support of ARES (Académie de Recherche et d’Enseignement Supérieur), Rikolto, Vietnam National University of Agriculture (VNUA) and Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech (University of Liège, Belgium) launched a new project on **youth and gender** in Vietnam. The project aims to understand the situation of women and young people in Rikolto’s project areas and to build staff capacity to increase youth involvement in agriculture and to make target value chains more gender-sensitive.

**Third**, based on the results of the gender analysis and with support from the City of Leuven, we will develop a **gender strategy** to guide our interventions towards more gender-sensitiveness in our project areas. We will also come up with gender indicators to monitor progress towards better outcomes for women who participate in our target agricultural value chains.
Supporting farmers to adopt more environmentally-sustainable and climate smart practices is one of the backbones of our programme. In the autumn and winter of 2017, we conducted an in-depth environmental sustainability survey with farmers from all our target locations covering more than 20 criteria related to soil, water, nutrient management, climate change, landscape, biodiversity conservation, and pesticide use. Based on the scores obtained, we identified key issues that need to be improved in the next 4 years such as integrated pest management and nutrient management for rice, and water management and carbon sequestration for vegetables.

Both our rice and vegetable programmes heavily focus on the adoption of quality standards such as the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) and BasicGAP standards with a strong focus on environmental sustainability. While the SRP standard has a stronger emphasis on climate change mitigation, both include criteria related to waste management, water management, land use, conservation, and nutrient management, among others. Our training programmes all include a strong focus on those environmentally-sustainable production practices.

In October 2017, partner farmers in Ha Nam province lost their entire crop to unusual heavy floods. Rikolto supported the affected farmers by providing funds to purchase new seedlings and decided together with the partners that the funds would be repaid by the farmers into a community risk-management fund. In 2018, Rikolto will explore the possibility of setting up similar funds in other farming communities at risk from natural disasters.

Sustainable land management practices such as mulching, cover crops, planting shade trees, and composting help preserve biodiversity and precious ecosystem services in tea landscapes
Trial and error:
What have we learned in 2017?

Poor business linkage and commitment hampers sustainable production in the rice sector

In 2017, we realised that we had underestimated the problem of poor linkage among rice value chain actors. We expected contract farming to be an effective tool towards more inclusive business relationships. However, we realised that even when supply contracts are signed, farmers often sell part or all of their production to other buyers. Meanwhile we often hear farmers complain about companies’ misuse of farming contracts, seeking only profit. The reasons behind farmers’ and companies’ behaviour are multiple, resulting in unstable business relationships. Without a stable business relationship, companies must often source paddy from collectors, leading to a loss of traceability in the value chain and difficulties in sourcing sufficient quality rice. Under those circumstances, there are few incentives for companies to invest in training farmers to produce rice according to quality and sustainability standards. Ultimately, consumers are the victims of this poor linkage, which explains partly why their preferences are changing to rice from foreign countries. Inclusive business and quality standards in Vietnam’s rice sector will continue to be a struggle until stable and committed relationships are set up between farmers and buyers. Therefore, in 2018, we are conducting research to better understand the drivers and obstacles to a committed business relationship between farmers and companies. We will then adapt our interventions to target the root causes preventing farmers and companies from working more effectively together.

A comprehensive mapping of Da Nang’s food system and policies is much needed

Over the past year, we realised that more comprehensive information was needed about Da Nang’s food system to identify bottlenecks and opportunities for collaboration towards a safer and more sustainable food system. We need to define what “Food Smart Cities” means in the context of Da Nang to set a clear framework and vision to guide our interventions in the city. Therefore, Rikolto is supporting Da Nang to access additional funds to conduct a study on the city’s food system and policies and to identify what a Food Smart City could look like in Da Nang.
Online data collection and management software such as KoboToolbox are a cheap and efficient way to collect large amounts of data. In 2017, we started using tablets and KoboToolbox to collect data for our baseline and environmental sustainability surveys, and to measure rice farmers’ progress towards the SRP standard. We also supported a masters student from the USA to collect over 200 questionnaires from consumers on their attitudes and practices towards food safety at traditional markets. Although some partners initially experienced issues when first using the tablets due to a lack of familiarity with the technology, they are now able to conduct the surveys almost autonomously. We plan to use the same approach again in 2018 for at least two studies: one on a gender and youth analysis in our target value chains, and one on market linkage in the vegetable sector.

In the course of our project with the Rainforest Alliance, we identified some key success factors behind the adoption of sustainable farming practices by tea farmers:

1. The use of practices compiled mostly from local knowledge ensured the suitability of the practices to farmers’ context;
2. The selected practices were low-cost and easy to apply from a technical standpoint making them easy to be adopted;
3. The existing trade relationship between the project’s partner tea companies and the farmers, as well as companies’ commitment to the project, helped maintain farmers’ motivation;
4. The involvement of key stakeholders from the planning phase of the project facilitated their commitment;
5. Farmers’ understanding of markets’ demand for better quality tea made them more aware of the need to change their practices to meet that demand.

Photo credit: UN Environment / Lisa Murray 2018

Digitalisation is key!

Sustainable production leads to higher income for tea farmers
# 2017 Financial Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of income</th>
<th>Amount in EUR</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgian Directorate General for Development</td>
<td>301,680</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Means</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainforest Alliance</td>
<td>35,609</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.11.11</td>
<td>34,183</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Lottery</td>
<td>28,000</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rikolto’s Innovation fund</td>
<td>13,629</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanoi International Women Club</td>
<td>6,903</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Antwerp</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALiSEA-GRET</td>
<td>4,953</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>504,956</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We thank our donors and partners for their continued support and commitment to more sustainable and inclusive food systems in Vietnam.
2018 at a glance

In addition to the continuation of our activities related to farmers’ capacity building on safe food production, quality assurance, and marketing, here are a few outstanding activities that we plan to carry out in 2018.

**Official launch of our new brand in Vietnam**

Our new name was officially approved in April 2018. This is the occasion for us to celebrate our new identity and to launch our new programme.

**Completion of our PGS toolbox for practitioners**

The toolbox will include a PGS training curriculum, a training of trainer (ToT) manual, posters for farmers on the BasicGAP standard, good farming practices and PGS, practical factsheets, and a summary for decision-makers.

**New partnership with Hanoi’s Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to expand the use of Participatory Guarantee Systems in Hanoi**

Thanks to the support of the Conservation Food and Health Foundation, we will support Dang Xa and Yen My cooperatives to set up their PGS and to market their safe vegetables. We will also pilot a safe vegetable supply chain for a traditional market in Hanoi.

**10 new PGS units set up in Ha Nam, Ha Noi, Da Nang and Vinh Phuc provinces**

We will support 10 farmer organisations to set up their own Participatory Guarantee Systems to certify vegetables that are produced according to the BasicGAP standard.

**Awareness-raising campaign on consumers’ access to safe food in Da Nang**

Together with Da Nang’s Women Union, we will launch a campaign aimed at raising consumers’ awareness of food safety.

**Supporting Da Nang to map its food system**

We will work with the city to carry out an analysis of Da Nang’s key value chains, conduct a food policy analysis, and conceptualize the idea of “food smart cities” in the context of Vietnam.

**Expansion of our rice programme to Dong Thap province in the Mekong Delta**

Neighbouring An Giang, one of our target provinces, Dong Thap is one of the biggest rice provinces in the Mekong Delta but also one of the poorest.

**Piloting climate-smart rice production practices in An Giang province**

In 2018, we will support farmers from Tri Ton district to implement Alternate Wetting and Drying, a very promising method that enables rice farmers to reduce water use by 30% and methane emissions by 48% compared to when rice fields are continuously flooded.

**Development of a gender strategy for all our intervention areas**

With the support of the City of Leuven and ARES, we will conduct a gender and youth analysis in our target value chains and develop strategies to tackle those 2 critical issues.

**Research on the drivers and obstacles to effective business relationships between farmers and companies**

Inclusive business cannot be achieved without stable and effective relationships between farmers and companies. In 2018, we will investigate the root causes preventing a strong commitment between both parties and try to come up with creative solutions to building sustainable partnerships.
Meet our team!

Rikolto’s team in Vietnam is currently composed of 12 staff members with a wide range of backgrounds and expertise. Hailing from the private sector, the NGO world, or from academia, this diversity is one of our strengths!

To learn more about the profile and experience of our staff members, visit our webpage:


From left to right, from top row to bottom row:

- Mr. Dang Dinh Thanh - Programme Officer (Rice),
- Mr. Le Tuan - Senior Programme Officer (Rice),
- Ms. Le Hong Hanh - Junior Planning, Learning and Accountability Officer,
- Dr. Thai Thi Minh - Regional Director,
- Ms. Phan Thi Kim Nhung - Senior Programme Officer (Vegetables),
- Ms. Nguyen Thi Den - Programme Officer (Vegetables),
- Mr. Hoang Thanh Hai - Vegetable Programme Coordinator and Tea Project Manager,
- Ms. Nguyen Thi Nhu Hoa - Finance, Admin and Human Resources Manager,
- Ms. Nguyen Khanh Linh - Admin Assistant,
- Ms. Charlotte Flechet - Programme Development Advisor,
- and Ms. Ngo Thi Thu Phuong - Finance Officer.

Missing on the picture is Ms. Nguyen Thai Binh - Event Officer.
Our Rikolto network – Where we work