



Policy Brief

Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management
Collaborative Research Support Program

Issue No. 2

Development-Induced Displacement and Coffee Cultivation in Vietnam

Development-induced displacement

The concept of development-induced displacement (DID) has primarily been applied to situations of geographic displacement resulting from large development projects. However, displacement from access to resources, from cultural identity, and from general welfare can occur *in situ*, without any spatial movement.

This type of DID is evident among the *Ede* minority in the central highlands of Vietnam, where coffee expansion and related government policies have created dramatic changes in the socio-cultural landscape.



Traditional *Ede* longhouses shared by extended families (left) are being replaced by more modern single-family homes (right).

History of government policy and coffee cultivation in Vietnam

Vietnam's coffee production has increased from 1.2 percent of the world market in 1989 to 12.4 percent a decade later -- exceeded only by Brazil in total production. Sixty percent of Vietnam's coffee grows in the Dak Lak Province in the Central Highlands. With its thick basalt soil, two growing seasons, large temperature variation between day and night, and a four to five month dry season that allows for harvesting and drying coffee with minimal fuel inputs, it has an ideal climate for coffee cultivation.

In the late 1970s, Vietnam's government coordinated large resettlement programs to encourage the *Kinh* ethnic majority from the overpopulated coastal lowlands to migrate to the Central Highlands, promising cleared fertile land and lucrative opportunities in coffee production.

Consequently, the population of the highlands increased from approximately 3 people per square kilometer in 1940 to 77 people per square kilometer in 1997. The change in ethnic demographics is equally dramatic, with the population of *Kinh* growing from non-existent in the 1920s, to 5 percent of the population in 1940, to 70 percent in 2002.

The 1993 Land Law allowed individuals to acquire, sell, lease, and mortgage land use rights. Coupled with the booming coffee prices of the 1990s, the law prompted both *Ede* and *Kinh* to scramble for coffee cultivation land rights and attracted a wave of coffee farmers to the region. Coffee production grew twelve-fold between 1986 and 1996. In Dak Lak Province, the 6,000 hectares under coffee cultivation in 1975 expanded to 130,000 hectares by 1997.

Ethnic disparities due to government policies

Although the recent history of coffee cultivation in Dak Lak Province appears to be an example of economic development and growth, an analysis of how the minority *Ede* group has been affected reveals a different story. Many of the government policies have been incongruous with *Ede* culture, necessitating significant and often undesirable changes to *Ede* society.

- Longhouses, where one or several extended families live, are a foundational structure to *Ede* society. The government land policies consider each longhouse a single household regardless of the number of nuclear families residing there; therefore, a limit is placed on the amount of land a longhouse can acquire. Consequently, some *Ede* families are moving out of their family longhouses and establishing separate households to be eligible for farmland.
- The increase in population has made land rights more important. While some *Ede* families have ample fields for cash and subsistence production, many families are facing a shortage of land that compromises their ability to meet their subsistence needs. There is greater wealth inequality among the *Ede* than ever, with a few households prospering and many more financially struggling. Conflict and disputes arise from the unequal distribution of land.
- Farmers have largely lost their self-sufficiency as land use has shifted from household food production to coffee cultivation. Dependence on fluctuating world coffee market prices creates instability -- a drop in coffee prices from \$1.40/kilo in 1999 to \$0.40 in 2001, along with a growing reliance on purchased food, contributed to food insecurity among many families dependent on coffee.
- The *Ede* practice of swidden agriculture, which consists of mixed-use land cleared, cultivated, and fallowed in long cycles extending to decades, has been directly targeted by the government. The Fixed Cultivation and Sedentarization Program (FCSP) of 1975 attempted to curtail the shifting cultivation and nomadic practices of ethnic minorities. Purportedly to limit environmentally destructive shifting cultivation, the 1993 Land Law also supported “permanent agriculture.” However, fixed cultivation necessitates the use of fertilizer and other capital-intensive inputs for maintaining soil fertility instead of the fallowing in the *Ede* traditional swidden agricultural system. The transition from swidden to permanent agriculture also has ecological and cultural implications for the *Ede*. It limits their ability to continue agroforestry practices and removes the cultural barriers against clearing forests, which had served as a safety net in times of drought and crisis.
- Policies also ignored the matrilineal structure of *Ede* society, giving land certificates to the senior male in the household.

Policy Recommendations

To prevent the *in situ* displacement experienced by the *Ede* in Vietnam, government policies must manage the competition for coffee space in ways that reduce rather than reinforce ethnic disparities. Greater ethnic equality can be achieved with policies that give minority groups more opportunities for education, economic advancement, land ownership, and access to resources.

More information: Doutriaux, S., C. Geistler, and G. Shively. 2008. Competing for coffee space: Development-induced displacement in the central highlands of Vietnam. *Rural Sociology*: 73(4) 528-554
<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/122618054/abstract>

In comparison to the *Kinh*, *Ede* tend to have:

- Larger family size
- Less education
- Larger farms (but only holding official land rights to a fraction of their land)
- Less productive coffee trees
- Higher percentage of income from coffee (fewer opportunities for off-farm work)
- Lower family income levels



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SANREM CRSP is made possible by the United States Agency for International Development and the generous support of the American people through USAID Cooperative Agreement No. EPP-A-00-04-00013-00.

