

Bringing the unique taste of specialty coffee: a collective act for a collective future



Producing deforestation-free coffee in Vietnam

The conversion of land to farms is one of the biggest drivers of deforestation around the globe. In Vietnam, particularly the Lam Dong province, the expansion of coffee crops is also the main culprit behind the loss of our strongest carbon sink. But this does not mean everyone should give up their favorite cup of coffee.

SNV Vietnam is mobilizing the best resources from the public and private sectors at hand to support farmers producing deforestation-free coffee. What used to be a problematic industry might hold the transformative power to save communities and the planet.



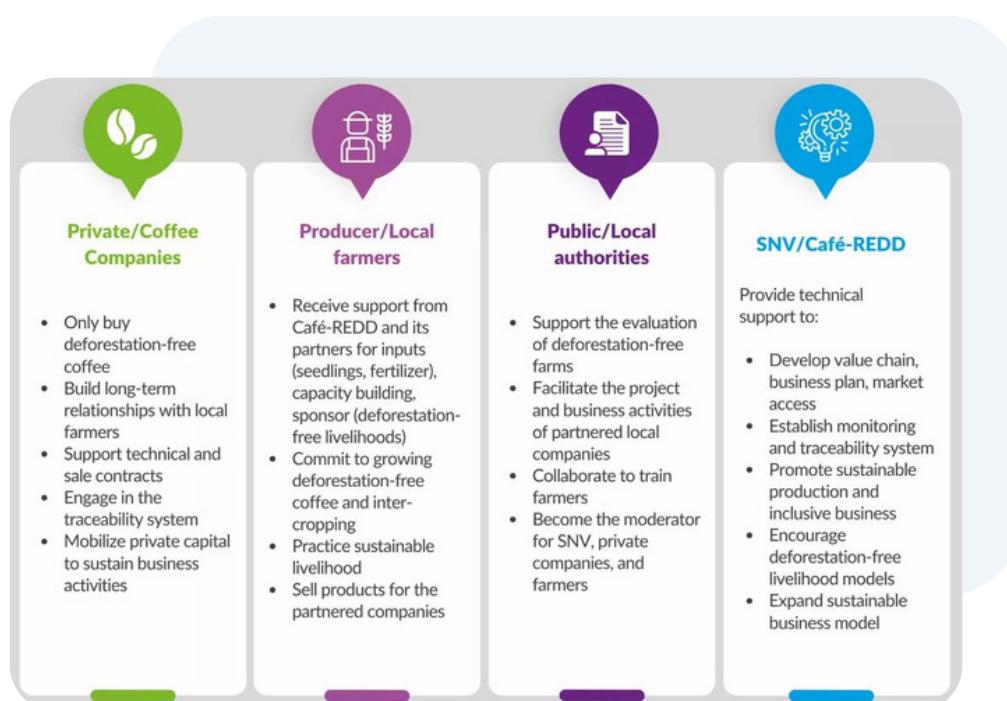
A farmer from Café-REDD project picking ripe coffee cherries during a harvest.

Coffee farmers work tirelessly year-round to prepare for their annual harvest. Picking ripe cherries is not as simple as it sounds. As these cherries turn red at a different pace over a period of a few months, it might be time-consuming for coffee pickers to ensure they are all evenly ripe. Especially when most farmers do not have a chance to taste their own coffee flavor, aggressive farm growth has largely been the ideal way to earn more by increasing coffee quantity rather than producing a high-quality coffee cup, which often requires multiple agents at play, more than just technical precision.

Toward a greener future: Lac Duong deforestation-free landscape

Since 2019, the Café-REDD project has aimed to establish a public-private-producer partnership (4Ps) to improve coffee quality and prices, reducing the dependency on agricultural expansion in one of Lam Dong's most important forested landscapes, Lac Duong District and Bidoup Nui Ba National Park. This 4Ps approach reflects an emerging consensus in the national policymaking, specifically the Government of Vietnam's updated National REDD+ Action Programme (NRAP), approved in 2017 – one that indicates new policies/measures beyond the forest sector, with more focus on sustainable and deforestation-free agriculture in key forest landscape.

To promote deforestation-free, traceable, premium coffee, the Café-REDD project has fostered the collaboration among farmers, companies, and the local government for more than four years. Each factor takes a different role in building a sustainable coffee value chain, see figure below.



The Café-REDD project's public-private-producer partnership key activities to promote sustainable coffee production, improve local livelihoods, and implement the traceability system.

Beyond a cupping event: a hallmark where producer, public, private sectors come together

A perfect case to depict the 4Ps approach is the recent cupping event, co-hosted by Café-REDD project and its trusted coffee buying partner, Tam Trinh Coffee Company. Coffee samples from smallholder farmers were prepared by a professional third party and presented to over 200 attendees ranging from experts, local authorities, domestic and international roasting coffee companies, farmer cooperatives, and the wider public. It was a perfect time for farmers to connect with coffee buyers, talk directly to consumers, and enjoy their own coffee flavors.



An overview sight of the cupping event with more than 200 representatives from the government, businesses, farmers, and consumers.

The favorable impression of experts and even first-time triers after tasting these specialty coffee samples echoes the fruitful partnerships throughout the project's activities. These beans are made much more attractive by the Rainforest Alliance Certification, representing sustainable practices that protect forests and improve livelihoods. SNV has connected with the local government to provide farmers in-depth trainings and constantly encouraged farm cooperatives to follow strict regulations of UTZ (part of the Rainforest Alliance). What offers further incentives for farmers to maintain consistent coffee quality is a stable earning paid by reliable coffee traders like Tam Trinh.

"We can sell our coffee above the market price and even receive extra bonuses of 4,000 VND/kilogram if all the criteria are met", said K'Thieu, a farmer from Lat Commune who was proud to share the successful ripening rate of their 2021-2022 harvest - almost 99-100%. "I'm excited for what the future holds for our commune now

that we have learned how to produce high-quality coffee and earn a decent income, instead of waiting for luck to be on our side every harvest".



Experts and non-experts actively engaged in the cupping event of diverse local Arabica and Robusta coffee samples.

The representative from Tam Trinh Coffee Company noted a key idea behind the Rainforest Alliance Certification: that farmers must not convert forest land to coffee crops, produce on forest protection belts or cut down primary forest trees on their garden. They must regularly plant or maintain the vegetation cover and shade trees, protect water sources, as well as refrain from chemical pesticides. "When you follow these standards, you get a higher price and a better standard of life, too. It's safer for farmers and their children", Mr. Doan Manh Trinh said.

What's next: spreading the love for a local and sustainable coffee cup

After the cupping event took place, various clients have revealed high hopes for future collaboration to put Lac Duong Coffee's name on the map. The Coffee House, a Vietnamese chain owning over 100 stores across the country and serving more than 40,000 customers per day, has just collaborated with Café-REDD to visit farm cooperatives and carry out pilot surveys in Dạ Sar commune, Lac Duong.

"Farmers that we work with have realised both the economic and environmental benefits brought by adopting more sustainable coffee production practices. As a secure link is forged between businesses and producers, farmers do not have to worry about the paradox of low prices despite bountiful harvest. Such a stable income will lay a solid foundation for farmers to continue growing high-quality crops and restoring our beautiful forest landscape" said Mr. Pham Thanh Nam, Café-REDD project manager.

Source: "Source: "Coffee Agroforestry and Forest Enhancement for REDD+ (CAFÉ-REDD) project" - <https://www.snv.org/update/bringing-unique-taste-specialty-coffee-collective-act-collective-future>