



# UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

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MEKONG DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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## **ORGANISATION OVERVIEW**

Mekong Development Research Institute (MDRI) is an independent scientific research institute founded by professional researchers and consultants who have rich experiences and renowned expertise in development economics. The institute's mission is to provide research and consulting services in policy and development economics, sector research as well as to conduct surveys for the governments, international organizations and agencies in Vietnam and around the world.

MDRI's leading areas of expertise range from Development Economics, including but not limited to Poverty and Ethnic Minority, Agriculture and Rural Development, Labour; Trade Development; Social Issues; Water and Sanitation; Environment & Climate Change; Sector & Market Research to Impact evaluation, Survey & Data. Thanks to our huge experience developed over numerous development projects, MDRI's consultants have brought forward meaningful and valuable research and consulting products, part of which have been published in internationally recognized journals including American Economic Journal, World Development, Health Economic Journal, etc. Others were available under forms of consulting reports, policy briefs used for the Government leaders and presented in national and international conferences.

With our strongest commitment to deliver the highest quality assignments as well as our qualified team of researchers, MDRI is ranked No.1 among all economic institutions in Vietnam and among top 17% of the 12,700 economic institutes in the world by IDEAS: Economics and Finance Research<sup>1</sup>. MDRI aspires to bringing successful policy reforms as well as highlighting challenges in opening Vietnam's economy to share with countries with similar socio-economic conditions.

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<sup>1</sup><http://ideas.repec.org/top/top.vietnam.html>

# Organisation's Contributions to Improving Human Rights Situation in Vietnam

## Improved accessibility to basic human- needs services

With high expertise in development economics, MDRI is committed to the pressing mission of **eradicating poverty** in Vietnam, especially for the ethnic minority groups. Poverty reduction among ethnic minority groups is one of the key priorities of the Vietnamese Government and development partners. MDRI applies a multi- dimensional approach to measure and value the impact of supporting policies and programs. Our findings stand out by recognizing and embracing the cultural dimension, which has fundamental implications for the socio- economic development of ethnic minority communities. For example, in 2017, for World Bank's **Central Highland Poverty Reduction Project**, MDRI carried out the project beneficiary assessment to evaluate the understanding and perceptions of the project's objectives, approaches, assistance provided, and results achieved by beneficiaries and stakeholders in order to adjust and improve the various activities, technical support, communication efforts, and participatory processes to support the ultimate achievement of the project's overall objective.

Through years of research, our studies have shown that access to **clean water and sanitation** remains one of the most prevalent deprivations among the poor. While Vietnam has made significant advances in the access to improved water and sanitation, information about the availability, accessibility, and use of water in urban and rural areas is crucial for developing safe water supplies. With substantial experience in water and sanitation issues through a number of large-scale projects, we provided various consultation services in water and sanitation issues such as impact evaluation and decomposition analysis of water and sanitation projects for disadvantaged groups. Significantly, MDRI was appointed research consultant for the **Community Hygiene Output-Based Aid Program (CHOBA)** over a two year period. The program was carried out in poor rural areas in Vietnam with the goal of improving water supply and sanitation conditions.

Access to good **health care** is another important right of the people that is often deprived from the less advantaged groups. In 2015- 2016, MDRI undertook the project **Exploring Barriers to Accessing Maternal and Family Planning Service in Ethnic Minority Communities in Vietnam**. This was a large-scale survey conducted with selected randomly 60 communes to collect the data information about maternal health care and family planning service utilization among ethnic minority women by both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Through the intensive survey implementation, MDRI identified barriers to access the maternal health care and offered recommendations to improve the health care system to provide better maternal health services, adaptive to local contexts and responsive to local needs.

## Reduced inequality

Throughout our development work, MDRI always strives to reach less privileged groups, as we believe everyone deserves equal chance and social equality is a strong indicator of development. Thus, we actively seek to engage in projects that effect marginalized groups such as women, especially ethnic minority women, and disabled people.

Some of our projects related to **gender equality** included:

- **Engage Ethnic Minority Women Groups for Contributing Their Views to the Country Report (2017)** - MDRI conducted qualitative study in four provinces, Ha Giang, Dien Bien, Dak Lak, and

Dak Nong to gather ethnic minority women's views and assessment on the progress, as well as the challenges they experienced in accessing essential daily-life services, namely water, sanitation and energy.

- **Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) Baseline Survey** (2016, 2018) – in this project which aims to advance women's economic participation and improve women's capacity, MDRI conducted a survey to collect information on women's participation in socio-economic activities and on the role of male and female in each household to measure the level of women's empowerment and gender inequality in the community.

Relating to the **disabled people** group, in 2015, MDRI was commissioned by the USAID to carry out **Survey of Beneficiaries of USAID Disabilities Programming**. The survey measured the impact that USAID assistance had on the lives of people with disabilities. The survey provided essential information to answer key questions on the types of intervention received, their effects on the lives of the beneficiaries, and the extent to which the beneficiaries are aware of laws to protect their rights, thus serving as a rational base for USAID as a donor agency to introduce better program amendment and formulation in the coming stages of this program in Vietnam.

### **Promoted citizens' active participation**

From our experience working in poverty and inequality reductions, we believe that everyone has a right and responsibility to participate in and influence decisions that affect their lives. Thus, we have engaged in several projects to promote active participation of citizens in the government's decision-making process.

In 2016, MDRI was entrusted by Irish Aid to provide technical assistance for **Civil Society Organisations** (CSOs) to increase and improve Civil Society's role in the national development and democratization process. Civil Society Organisations allow citizens to come together to act collectively and participate in the development of their own communities and countries, whether through demanding better services from the state or acting together to respond to their own needs. Our supports included: assessments of organizational capacity; monitoring of individual projects against stated objectives; capacity building and networking; facilitating the coordination of CSOs efforts supported by Irish Aid, strengthening their capacity to contribute to a harmonized and effective response, and capture this in an aggregated monitoring framework of Irish Aid's support to CSOs.

In 2017, MDRI was commissioned by the World Bank in the project **Bridging Public Opinion to the Vietnam National Assembly Delegates 2017** to assess the impact of providing information for the Vietnam National Assembly (VNA) delegates to test whether better information would lead to more responsiveness in the VNA meetings. In this project, our expertise in survey was utilized to investigate opinions of citizens and businesses in all 63 provinces of Vietnam. The information collected was then used to communicate constituents' preferences to VNA delegates in personal meetings.

### **Informed policy- making and aided governance through research**

Governance is one of the most critical elements in the sustainable development of nations. In developing countries, fair governance ensures social inclusiveness throughout the course of development. This means that development projects and investments must be beneficial to the most impoverished and vulnerable communities; businesses are able to operate in a democratic environment under a fair and transparent regulatory framework; poor people have access to land, natural resources, and sustainable livelihoods; and government capacity is compatible with the pace of economic development in the country.

MDRI has involved in a number of research projects related to governance with the aim of supporting government policies and strategies in this area. For example, our ***National Millennium Development Goals Reports 2013 and 2015*** were highly regarded for their provision of a comprehensive and elaborate picture of Vietnam's progress towards MDGs, including both achievements and weaknesses, using the most updated statistics. Our research was instrumental in providing evidence-based policy advice for the government of Vietnam to plan the social-economic development strategy in the post-Millennium Development Goal period. Our strong relationships with the Vietnamese government at both the national and local level allow us to influence positive policy changes in areas such as educational reform, ethnic minority issues, and renovation of the household registration system.

One of our key projects related to governance is the design and implementation of a spot-check mechanism in 2014- 2015 for the ***Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI)***, a tool that tracks policy implementation and public service delivery over time.

More recently, we are involved in the project ***Monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Implementation in Vietnam***, in which we provide support for the Vietnam Agenda 21 Office, Ministry of Planning and Investment. In this task, our roles included: (i) performing a detailed assessment of feasibility of global SDG indicators related to gender and gender equality, people with disabilities, and green growth in the Vietnamese context; (ii) developing indicators in the areas of gender and gender equality, as well as green growth; (iii) identifying and recommending possible data collection methods; (iv) proposing a system for the monitoring of the indicators for the responsible ministry/agency; (v) proposing options for effective and systematic data-sharing related to monitoring SDG-implementation with the government and with other agencies.

## Recommendations

1. Vietnam has focused on improving the effectiveness of its governance in recent years. As the country has reached the middle-income status, it realizes the needs to enhance governmental and institutional capabilities for the next period of development. In order to achieve that goal, it is crucial for the government to place more importance on research and the role of NGOs in monitoring and evaluation. Research is essential but often overlooked in the policy-making process in Vietnam. Research can provide policy-makers with insights and clear understanding of complex problems, contexts and stakeholders, thus helping them to develop more well-informed strategies to tackle the challenges to society.
2. From our experience, NGOs still face challenges in working with local authorities due to the heavily bureaucratic system. Sometimes, the process of obtaining permissions to carry out a research or program at different managerial levels can be unnecessarily prolonged, which not only halts the progress and costs the project a great amount of time and resources but also leads to failure of the project in some cases. Thus, in order for NGOs to maximize their potentials and roles in contributing to the development of society, it is important that NGOs receive more support from the authorities through more flexible managerial mechanisms.
3. Throughout the years, the majority of our research work have been funded by foreign organizations. This clearly demonstrates the limited national resources available for the development field. Development projects in Vietnam are still vastly relying on the donation of big international organization such as the World Bank, ADB, UNDP, UNICEF etc. or governmental bodies of developed countries such as Australia, US, UK, Germany. However, relying on external resources is not a sustainable strategy. There is a need for the government to gather more internal forces and engage big national corporations in tackling development issues.

## Annex

### MDRI AT A GLANCE

8

#### ADVISORS

Consulted and entrusted by experts with rich international experience in diverse fields.

12

#### PARTNERS

Established strong partnerships with internationally renowned research institutes and universities working in similar fields.

20

#### RESEARCHERS

Formed an interdisciplinary team of highly qualified, experienced and motivated researchers who are committed to solving concrete problems and delivering meaningful results.

51

#### DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS

Provided services for 18 domestic clients and 33 international clients, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations and international institutions.

57

#### PROJECTS SINCE ESTABLISHMENT IN 2013

Conducted 57 research and consulting projects in a variety of fields.

70

#### PUBLICATIONS

Released 70 publications in the form of journals, books, reports and policy briefs.

63

#### PROVINCES IN VIETNAM

Have experience working across cultures and practices, at both formal and grassroots levels, in 63 provinces throughout Vietnam.

7000

#### ENUMERATORS

Expanded a wide network of over 3,000 dedicated and experienced enumerators with university degree and specialized knowledge.



## RESEARCH AREAS

### Development Economics

Development economics has significant contributions to economic growth, poverty reduction, equality improvement and social conflict prevention.

### Poverty and Ethnic Minority

Poverty reduction among ethnic minority groups is one of the key priorities of the Vietnamese Government and development partners. MDRI applies a multi-dimensional approach to measure and value the impact of supporting policies and programs. Our findings stand out by recognizing and embracing cultural diversity and uniqueness, as these have fundamental implications for socio-economic development of ethnic minority communities.

### Agriculture and Rural Development

Agricultural productivity is highly affected by pollution, degradation of land and water, climate change, price fluctuations and local cultivation practices. MDRI works to raise awareness on the importance of investment in the agricultural sector and the use of rural development as a crucial instrument to eradicate poverty and improve food security, by emphasizing the linkage between agricultural livelihoods and economic empowerment.

### Labor

In many emerging and fast-growing economies, the labor force is unable to meet the increasing demands of the market due to a lack of skilled and protected workers. In addition, rapid urbanization has put higher pressure on employment, vocational training, infrastructure, social stability and poverty reduction initiatives in urban areas. Our research on labor markets and employment considers these dynamics, with a focus on vulnerable groups, e.g. migrants, child labor, women and the informal sector.



## RESEARCH AREAS

### SOCIAL ISSUES

In alignment with our aim to combine consultancy works with socially influential research, MDRI has worked on various research projects that address the prickliest issues of the constantly evolving Vietnamese society.

These studies include social networks and the household registration system; public perception of contemporary issues; national and international migration; corruption; education; health and social security policies. We seek to yield findings that bring these matters to the central of public discussion and ultimately influence relevant policies.



### SECTOR & MARKET RESEARCH AND TRADE

As the country becomes more integrated in the global economy, MDRI recognizes the increasing development opportunities offered by trade. At the same time, we understand that trade is a fast evolving and complex process that can exert negative impacts, especially on poor and vulnerable groups. We strive to capture global trends such as technology transfer and sustainability, while embracing local context and cultural sensitivity.

Our research activities and services in sector & market research and trade cover the following: feasibility study; cost-benefit analysis; assessment of competitive advantages of goods and sectors, specialized in agricultural goods; impact evaluation of trade agreements; market research for enterprises; and development of national strategies for different goods and sectors.

### GOVERNANCE

In recent years, Vietnam has been paying special attention to empowering its governance effectiveness as the country has reached the middle-income country status and is now aiming to enhance its government and institutions' capability for the next period of development.

MDRI has assisted government policies and strategies by providing evidence-based research and policy advisory services. Through our consultancy and advisory roles, we have established strong relationships with government authorities at both national and local levels to disseminate our research findings with a view to influencing positive policy changes, such as in educational reforms, ethnic minority issues and renovation of the household registration system.

### ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE

We adopt a holistic approach to environmental issues and development by examining the connections among the society, economy, and environment. Environmental sustainability is not simply a buzzword, but a means to improve livelihoods, especially of the most disadvantaged communities with the highest vulnerability to environmental and climatic risks.

Our activities involve formulating a ranking list of the vulnerability level of communes, assessing the local impact of climate change, finding suitable forms of livelihoods and assessing coping capacities with extreme weather events. Besides, through our impact assessment projects, we have successfully contributed to the environmental-social knowledge base, including water and sanitation interventions and impacts of controversial hydropower plant construction.

# KEY SERVICES

## 1 | IMPACT EVALUATION

Impact evaluation studies inform government agencies and donors about the level of impact each designed program or policy has on its beneficiaries.

MDRI has a group of experts with extensive experience in impact evaluation, especially in designing impact evaluation methodologies using randomization, discontinuity regression, the Instrumental Variable method, score matching method and other state-of-the-art techniques. In addition to impact evaluation, our researchers provide in-depth analyses that answer critical questions, such as "Why are the impacts differentiated across groups of beneficiaries?" and "What are the key ingredients for a successful/disastrous program/policy?"

## 2 | SURVEY AND DATA MANAGEMENT

We understand that excellent research thrives on reliable data. With ample experience in survey design, execution and data analysis, MDRI determines the most effective solution in implementing large-scale surveys using innovative, transparent and reliable approaches.

We combine sophisticated technologies, including PAPI, CAPI, CATI and CAWI with our experience in employing strict monitoring and quality control measures. We can accomplish this using a system of indicators that we designed to assess enumerators' performance and to minimize data collection errors, especially non-sampling errors.

Never underestimating the human role, we also pride ourselves on our team of surveyors with strong motivation and work ethics, who strictly abide by MDRI's principles of honesty and integrity when collecting data.

## 3 | MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A properly structured M&E system provides accurate, updated, and meaningful information for well-informed decision-making during the policy formulation and implementation processes.

MDRI has been chosen by many government agencies and donors to design M&E systems for multiple development programs and projects. With a team of experts that possess substantial experience and knowledge in development and statistics, our institute designed an M&E framework and measurement indicators that can be tailored to a range of interventions. Our M&E system is backed by advanced data collection and management methodologies that combine the latest tablet technologies with rigorous quality control

measures.

## 4 | DATABASE

MDRI has access to a rich, up-to-date, and reliable dataset, which includes data collected by MDRI and the Vietnam national database. We have established a strict data management and collection system that allows for efficient data analysis and adapts to specific research needs.

## 5 | APPLIED RESEARCH

MDRI has conducted a large number of applied research projects including policy review, market research, KAP surveys and randomized control trials. These empirical projects were influential elements in the initiation of development programs and policies of the Government of Vietnam. Our researchers have strong academic backgrounds in economics and econometrics, including mastery of statistical packages such as STATA, SPSS and SAS. Our team also has experienced social science researchers who use their investigative methodologies and dedication to evoke important anecdotes from stakeholders that reveal the core of the issues.

The well-rounded qualitative and quantitative approaches we provide ensure that research topics are tackled with the utmost dedication and quality.

## 6 | CAPACITY BUILDING

MDRI provides capacity building services to individuals and organizations through short-term training courses. Enriched with practical cases and concrete examples from development contexts all over the world and our own working experiences, the courses seek to equip participants with knowledge and skills in the following topics:

- Econometrics
- Sampling Techniques
- Impact Evaluation
- STATA

## PARTNERSHIPS



### Alfred Deakin Research Institute

Deakin University, Australia



### Center for Analysis and Forecasting

Vietnam



### Economics and Management Institute

Leibniz Hannover University, Germany



### IMPAQ International

USA



### Institute of Policy and Strategy for Rural and Agriculture Development



### Landell Mills Limited

United Kingdom



### Lund University

Sweden



### Management Systems International

USA



### Institute for Security & Development Policy

Sweden



### The Crawford School of Public Policy

Australian National University, Australia



### Fraser Mustard Institute for Human Development

University of Toronto, Canada



### IP Consulting

NIRAS Group

## INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS



## DOMESTIC CLIENTS

- General Statistics Office
- Vietnam Women's Union
- Vietnam Bank for Social Policies
- Vietnam Trade Promotion Agency
- Center for Analysis and Forecasting
- Vietnam Northern Food Cooperation
- Yen Binh Investment & Development Corporation
- Committee for Ethnic Minority and Mountainous

### Area Affairs

- The Vietnam Initiative
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs
- Ministry of Planning and Investment
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
- Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
- Ministry of Education and Training

## PROJECTS

No.	Projects	Time
1	Research to Improve Vietnam's Education System (RISE programme)	2016 – 2022
2	Cao Lanh Bridge Impact Evaluation	12/2016 – 06/2021
3	Assisting Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to Access International Markets through Enhanced Business-to-Business Connectivity and Improved Capacity.	8/2017 – 12/2018
4	Survey on Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) Regarding School Eye Care	11/2016 – 12/2018
5	Randomized Control Trial (RCT) on the Impact of Glasses Provision on Glasses Wearing Behaviour and Educational Outcome	11/2016 - 06/2018
6	Tax Justice for Equitable Health Care (H-SCORE)	12/2016 – 02/2018
7	In-depth Reviews of SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4	12/2017 – 01/2018
8	Assessment of Residential Electricity Demand Patterns and Potential Impacts of Electricity Tariff increases	05/2017 – 11/2017
9	Livelihood Restorations Endline Survey – Nghi Son Refinery and Petrochemical Limited Liability Company	10/2017 – 12/2017
10	Preparation for a full-scale project “Expanding partnerships and promoting innovations for eliminating multi-dimensional poverty among ethnic minority women”	06/2017 – 12/2017
11	Global Value Chain Survey Vietnam 2017	03/2017 – 11/2017
12	Engaging Ethnic Minority Women Groups for Contributing Their Views to The Country Report	08/2017 – 12/2017
13	Impact Assessment of Programme 135 Infrastructure Projects Funded by Irish Aid (Fiscal year 2014-2015)	05/2017 – 10/2017
14	Assessment of Mass Media Communication on Child Labour in Vietnam 2017	10/2016 – 09/2017
15	Baseline Survey for Scaling up Rural Water Supply and Sanitation in Vietnam	03/2017 – 06/2017
16	Project Beneficiary Assessment: The Central Highlands Poverty Reduction Project	01/2017 – 06/2017
17	Bring public opinion to the Vietnam National Assembly	04/2017 – 06/2017
18	Vietnam Public Opinion Survey 2016 for the Australian Embassy	10/2016 – 06/2017
19	Vietnam Escuela Nueva Project (GPE-VNEN) – Independent Impact for the Second and Third Years	2014 – 2016
20	Rural household survey for “Towards more profitable and sustainable vegetable farming systems in north-western Vietnam” project	07/2016 – 12/2016
21	Technical assistance for Irish Aid Civil Society support Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR	01/2016—12/2016
22	Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) Baseline Survey	07/2016 – 09/2016
23	Quantitative socio-economic survey for Emission Reduction-Program (ER-P) Provinces area	11/2015—06/2016

24	Exploring barriers to accessing maternal and family planning services in ethnic minority communities in Vietnam	12/2015 – 05/2016
25	Firm Participation and Regulatory Compliance: A Randomized Control Trial	07/2014 – 01/2016
26	Design Activity of Impact Evaluation for Cao Lanh Bridge Project	07/2015—12/2015
27	Evaluation of the Long-Term Development Cooperation between the UK and Vietnam	01/2014– 12/2015
28	Rural Piped Water Connection Project - Time Preference Elicitation Experiment	9/2015 – 11/2015
29	Rural Piped Water Connection Project - Baseline Survey & Monitoring Survey	9/2015 – 11/2015
30	Policies for Sustainable Coffee Development	08/2015 – 10/2015
31	Vietnam Household Registration System Analysis	07/2015—08/2015
32	Vocational Education Training Financing/Cost Norm Studies	03/2015—08/ 2015
33	Survey on Vietnam Household Registration System	03/2015—08/2015
34	Survey of Beneficiaries of USAID Disabilities Programming	03/2015—06/2015
35	National Millennium Development Goals Reports 2015	03/2015—07/2015
36	Community Hygiene Output-Based Aid (CHOBA) in Vietnam	08/2012—07/2015
37	Public Perception Survey	02/2015—06/2015
38	An Thinh Water Utility – Rural Piped Water Connection Project	12/2014—06/2017
39	Survey on Household Business and Informal Sector in Vietnam (HBIS)	09/2014 – 03/2015
40	Designing and Implementing Spot-Check Mechanism for Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) survey	08/2014 – 04/2015
41	Analysis of the Baseline Survey Data Supporting the Impact Assessment of Central Highlands Poverty Reduction Project	06/2015
42	Impact Assessment of Irish Aid Funded Infrastructure Projects Under Programme 135 in 2011 & 2012, and Development of a Monitoring Framework for Infrastructure Projects in 2013-2015	10/2014—01/2015
43	Baseline survey and Impact evaluation for the first year of the Project “Global Partnership for Education”	09/2013 – 09/2014
44	Household Survey on Rural Piped Water Connection Project in My Huong Commune	04/2014 – 06/2014
45	Policy Guide on Private Sector Development and Chronic Poverty	06/2014 – 10/2014
46	A Situation Assessment in Vietnam of Persisting Poverty among National Ethnic Minority	09/2013—02/2014
47	Assessment on the Socio-Economic Impacts of Hydro-Power Projects’ Resettlement on Ethnic	01/2014 – 08/2014
48	Assessment on Land Use Situation of Ethnic Minorities in VLAP Project’s Areas	12/2013 – 08/2014
49	Poverty Reduction in the Central Highlands: Ethnic Minority Labor-related Issues	02/2014—04/2014
50	Export Potential Assessment of Agricultural products	12/2013 – 04/2014

51	Discrepancy in urban and rural governance at the disaggregated levels in Vietnam: A small area estimation approach	11/2012 – 06/2013
52	Resilient Livelihoods: Increasing the ability of communities to prevent, mitigate, and cope with extreme weather events	12/2012 – 09/2013
53	Household Survey on “International Migration and Development in Vietnam” 2013	07/2013 –10/2013
54	Baseline Survey for Verification - Program for Results Based Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Under the National Target Program in the Red River Delta Region Vietnam	01/2013—03/2013
55	Household Panel Surveys on “Impact of Shocks on the Vulnerability to Poverty: Consequences for the Development of Emerging Southeast Asian Economies”	2007 - 2013
56	National Millennium Development Goals Reports 2013	05/2013—09/2013
57	Impact Evaluation of Poverty Reduction Policies and Programs in Ho Chi Minh City 2013	2013
58	National Strategy Action Plan for Coffee Sector in Vietnam	1/2012 – 6/2012