

Village Protection Team Evaluation, Que Phuoc Commune, Quang Nam Province, 2010



Xuan Hoa and Binh Yen Village Protect Team Workshop, Xuan Hoa Village

**WWF Greater Mekong - Vietnam Programme
Quang Nam Forest Protection Department**

Report to CEPF under the project entitled “*Sustainable community-based conservation of the priority population of Grey-shanked douc*”.

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Executive Summary

Quang Nam Province holds the largest known population of the Critically Endangered Grey-shanked douc, found within the proposed Central Quang Nam Species and Habitat Conservation Area. Overexploitation and illegal logging are the primary threats to the Grey-shanked douc population.

Village Protection Teams are community protection and monitoring teams, established in Quang Nam to increase the effectiveness of wildlife law enforcement implementation, by enabling forest dependent communities to share the responsibility for wildlife protection with the state, specifically by helping patrol the forest and protect its resources (Long et al, 2005).

WWF and Quang Nam FPD conducted an evaluation of Village Protection Teams at this important site for Grey-shanked douc, to assess their effectiveness and make recommendations for improvement of protection for this species. The Community Based Natural Resource Management Tracker Tool, developed by the WWF MOSAIC project, was modified to use for this purpose.

The evaluation found that although VPTs have a clear established framework, in implementation, the VPT system has many weaknesses and is unlikely to provide significant protection for Grey-shanked doucs and other wildlife under the current operational scenario.

VPTs are restricted to operate with FPD due to safety concerns and financial constraints, the latter a result of the failure of the provincial sustainable financing mechanism. Patrolling is much reduced, operations are restricted and patrolling needs are undoubtedly not being met. VPTs report increased sophistication of illegal loggers and their inability to deal with such violators effectively, due to logistical, financial and capacity constraints. As such, empowerment of the local community in management of local natural resources is probably limited. VPTs report that the legal framework for their operation is not clear or strong enough and is particularly limited when dealing with violators from the local communities.

Recommendations for improvement of VPT operations include: development and adoption of a cooperation regulation between adjacent districts; capacity building of commune and district rangers and VPTs in advanced enforcement techniques; further development of informant networks to support targeted and adaptive enforcement by FPD and VPTs; update and clarification of the legal framework for VPTs; alternative sources for sustainable financing mechanism for VPTs to be sought at the national and provincial level; increased awareness and support of local communities for VPT operations and community-based natural resource management.

However, it is unlikely that these measures will improve protection sufficiently enough due to a lack of resources to implement the level of patrolling required to

protect this area. Consequently, it is strongly recommended that the establishment of this area as a protected area be prioritized and enforcement activities should be a strong focus of all future work here. VPTs could play an important supportive role to the protected area if they are organized and supported appropriately by the district and provincial authorities.

Background

Quang Nam Province is an important area within one of WWF's priority landscapes - the Central Annamite Mountains. Quang Nam holds the largest known population of the Critically Endangered Grey-shanked douc, found within the proposed Central Quang Nam Species and Habitat Conservation Area. Following the discovery of the douc population in 2005, WWF have continued involvement at this site by building capacity of Forest Protection Department (FPD) staff in primate survey and monitoring, conducting surveys to determine the distribution and extent of the population, supporting law enforcement, community-based natural resource management, and the establishment of the site as a protected area (not yet achieved). Recent surveys suggest that overexploitation and illegal logging are the primary threats to the Grey-shanked douc population. WWF and Quang Nam FPD are keen to evaluate current protection efforts for Grey-shanked doucs, to determine how these can be improved, so threats to the doucs and other wildlife are reduced.

Introduction to the VPT framework

Village Protection Teams are community protection and monitoring teams consisting of four or five members, who have been voted into place by a majority of the community. VPTs were established in Quang Nam (and other provinces) to increase the effectiveness of wildlife law enforcement implementation in the province, by enabling forest dependent communities to share the responsibility for wildlife protection with the state, specifically by helping patrol the forest and protect its resources (Long et al, 2005). This name (VPT) was used to amplify the message that the teams were to protect village resources and not act as supplementary forest rangers.

The objectives of the establishment of Village Protection Teams are:

- To decrease community vulnerability to poverty through empowerment
- To provide an internal policing mechanism for community-based natural resource management
- To protect the community's natural resources from outsider harvest
- To monitor community-based natural resource harvest mechanisms
- To improve forest protection through increased enforcement effort.

Each VPT is managed in accordance with formally agreed local operational regulations outlining responsibilities, rights and benefits of team members. Each

member is entitled to receive a small monthly stipend plus bonuses through a commune level forest protection fund which is replenished through the administrative fining system and income generated from the sale of confiscated items. The whole system is managed by and under the responsibility of the commune People's Committees with support and monitoring provided by district departments. Monthly monitoring and planning meetings occur (Anderson and Long).

Village Protection Teams (VPTs) were established in 3 communes of Nong Son District (formerly Que Son District), Quang Nam Province, in 2005. Fourteen VPTs (65 people) were established in total: 6 teams in Que Lam commune (25 people); 4 teams in Que Phuoc commune (20 people) and 4 teams in Que Ninh Commune (20 people). WWF supported the development of the VPT system in Quang Nam Province, through the MOSAIC project (Management of Strategic Areas for Integrated Conservation), which focused on community-based natural resource management (CBNRM).

When established, the teams had limited enforcement power and hence required coordination to be built within ranger patrolling schedules and plans (Quang Nam People's Committee, 2005). The Quang Nam Law Enforcement Action Plan 2005-2010, specifically states the following target: "*VPT operations are incorporated into district FPD patrol plans and rangers routinely support VPT patrols*". A training course to equip district level rangers with the capacity to train VPTs in effective local-level enforcement and data collection was carried out in 2006-2007 with support from the MOSAIC project.

Evaluation Methods

With support from CEPF, WWF and Quang Nam FPD conducted an evaluation of Village Patrol Teams in the Grey-shanked douc focal area, Que Phuoc Commune, in early September 2010. Meetings were held with Village Protection Team members from villages surrounding the douc site, Provincial and District FPD, a WWF consultant and staff member. VPT operations were discussed and suggestions for improvement made by VPT members. Information gained from these meetings was then input into the modified WWF CBNRM tracker tool (see appendix 1). We present this evaluation based on these meetings and examination of the current operation of VPTs within the context in which they were established in 2005.

Evaluation of effectiveness

Scores (0 = low to 3 = high) for each of the categories used to assess the operation and effectiveness of VPTs were awarded on the basis of feedback from village meetings (see appendix 1). Each of these categories will be discussed, as strengths and weaknesses of the VPTs.

Strengths

Full consensus on VPT membership and no negative impacts of VPTs on local communities - VPT members are elected by the majority of each local community, which helps to provide community support for VPTs. Indeed, villagers reported no negative impacts as a consequence of VPTs. The teams are formed through community vote and can be changed at any time if the community doesn't feel they are representing their interests sufficiently. The village management board is responsible for convening meetings to change team membership if requested by any community member.

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities - VPTs are formed via a district level instruction drafted by the Commune People's Committee. This instruction outlines the roles and responsibilities of VPT members as well as their rights and benefits. The instruction also states the responsibilities of the Commune People's Committee and the commune ranger, in supporting VPT operations.

Clearly defined geographical boundaries – boundaries for VPT operation are clearly defined and demarcated in the field.

Weaknesses

Legal framework – The VPT framework forms part of forest management agreements which were developed out of existing village level policy options focusing on the maintenance of village traditions. These *Huong Uoc* or *Quy Uocs* were adapted within the legal framework to focus on natural resource management. These were written by the village, with facilitation provided by the commune rangers of the FPD, signed by the commune and endorsed by the District People's Committee.

Anyone who enters the village forest is held under the agreement and must act within the regulations set out in the document. It is the responsibility of the entire village to identify and report violations to the village management board, Commune People's Committee, Village Protection Team or commune ranger. The implementation framework is outlined in the regulation and varies according to the local situation. In general, the village management board is responsible for community adherence to the regulation and the establishment and management of the Village Forest Protection Fund. VPTs were established under this agreement, and are in charge of monitoring and enforcing the forest management agreement. Rewards and compensation for different stakeholders in the implementation of these agreements are outlined.

Community agreed harvest regulations on timber, non-timber forest products, hunting and fishing are provided. These include what products can be harvested, where, and when. Regulations have a strong focus on the protection of resources through over exploitation by people from outside the community. It is the belief among all communities in Quang Nam that it is the intense pressure by outsiders that has led to recent precipitous declines in natural resource abundance.

Punishments for violations are explicitly outlined separately for villagers and outsiders, with higher punishment levels provided to outsiders (Anderson and Long).

The uniform combined with the ability of VPTs to detain violators whilst transferring them to the relevant authorities for prosecution and their power of confiscation, in the past enabled the system to vastly decrease the amount of 'outsiders' harvesting natural resources from communes where VPTs are active. Moreover, the power to detain violators and confiscate goods provides an opportunity for a sustainable financing mechanism (Anderson and Long). VPTs are predominantly focused on 'outsider' violations, but VPT members report difficulty dealing with violations by local community members; their inability to deal with these violations restricts their law enforcement effectiveness.

The legal framework for VPTs therefore exists, but is said by some VPT teams to be 'unclear' and 'not strong'. VPTs in fact have sufficient status to handle and process violations by outsiders, but in reality they do not do this often enough. Both communities expressed a wish for further empowerment and clearer legal status of the VPTs.

Power & implementation support - VPT operations are limited to patrolling with the FPD or police, VPT members stated that they need to do this because they do not have enough legal status to deal with violators, particularly illegal loggers. They reported that patrolling is dangerous and that they do not feel safe to conduct patrolling alone, hence under these conditions they are restricted to operate with the police or FPD. This is against the objectives and operating regulations of VPTs for community empowerment; however this was adapted following feedback from VPTs that they lacked power and needed further support (Anderson and Long). Unfortunately, this means that VPT operations (frequency, duration and patrolling routes) are largely determined by the commune authorities. Consequently, VPT patrols are being conducted less frequently than when they were first established. Patrols are carried out at least 4 times a year, but under the VPT agreements a minimum of 2 days patrolling per month is meant to be conducted.

Strong institutionalization but weak government stakeholder understanding - VPTs are strongly institutionalized in theory, established within the government framework, with clear roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. However, implementation falls far short of the agreement.

VPTs conduct patrols with FPD and police and inform the authorities of violations of the law and forest management agreements, but other stakeholders are not supporting them more than is necessary. For example FPD host regular meetings, but are not always providing the planning and patrol support expected of them and now that VPT operations are limited to patrolling with FPD or Police, the roles have reversed in that VPTs now exist to support FPD in patrolling and any other forest duties (e.g. survey work). Thus, FPD is currently not implementing the actions

outlined under their formally agreed responsibilities. Commune forestry officers are supporting work planning and data collation, but the Commune People's Committee is not ensuring the finance mechanisms are operational (Anderson and Long), which is severely restricting VPT operations.

Inadequate funding & sustainable finance mechanisms - Another major limitation to VPT operation is the lack of adequate funds and equipment to support patrols. Although VPTs were provided with essential equipment (backpacks, hammocks, boots, uniforms, cooking equipment) and financial support for the first three months (100,000VND per month for a minimum of 2 days patrolling), this has not been sustained. Equipment originally bought 6 years ago is now broken and has not been replaced. Furthermore, the VPTs have no tools to enable them to fight forest fires, which is also their responsibility. Some support (per diem) is provided to VPTs when patrolling with FPD.

VPTs were originally established to be financially self-sustaining through village forest protection funds, which were designed to be replenished from fines through the forest management agreement and the sale of confiscated items. The project provided an initial three months salary to this fund to enable the sustainable financing mechanism to establish itself.

The sustainable financing mechanism is not effective in financing VPT operations; VPTs and FPD have requested external support for VPT patrols. The MOSAIC project identified similar problems with this system in all communes surveyed several years ago. The failure of the sustainable financing mechanism then was due to a combination of reasons; 1) fines from the *Quy Uocs* were not being awarded, 2) resources to transport confiscated timber are limited, 3) the effectiveness of VPTs had reduced the amount of forest crime, 4) the administrative fining system is too slow, 5) the administrative fining system does not allow a sufficient proportion of the fine to be returned to the commune and 6) the low levels of motivation of district FPD and commune People's Committees (Anderson and Long). Despite the lack of funds, community involvement in the process has continued; albeit at a much lower level with reduced enforcement activity and in a different manner to the original system.

Enforcement needs, aims & objectives - Although enforcement needs are identified through regular meetings in each commune, they are not being met due to the limited operation of VPTs, despite having clear aims and objectives for enforcement agreed by all stakeholders. The VPT framework has been institutionalized within the government system, but they are not currently operating in the manner in which they were set up to do (more information above).

Monitoring system - Quang Nam has established a system of monthly meetings with each commune for VPTs, CPC and FPD to discuss the situation and design work plans for the month ahead. VPTs are provided patrol data sheets and this system was developed further through a monitoring system for the commune ranger.

Monthly meetings continue, between FPD and VPT's, however with VPTs reliant on FPD for implementation, there is no independent monitoring of patrolling activities.

Low capacity - VPT members report the need for further training in enforcement and illegal case handling, to improve patrolling effectiveness. Villagers report that the Khe Dien reservoir has increased illegal harvesting of natural resources from many outsiders, through improved access to the forest. More patrols for this area have been recommended to FPD but not yet acted upon sufficiently.

VPTs also report that enforcement activities are monitored by illegal loggers in the area and communicated to each other by mobile phone, so enforcement against these activities is very difficult, with illegal logging being quite well organized and advanced in comparison to enforcement. Patrols are not carried out along both waterways and trails/roads, due to limitations of transportation methods and infrequent patrolling. Despite the increased organization and sophistication of illegal loggers, patrolling does not seem to have been increased or adapted to try to counteract this.

Geographical boundary defined but inflexible – The geographical area for VPT operation has been agreed and clearly defined, but is reported to be too large to enable effective enforcement of the area. Furthermore, some of the trails that illegal loggers use to transport timber are not within the VPTs' locality and therefore they cannot easily prevent transportation of illegal timber harvested from within their area. VPTs recommended a cooperation regulation be developed between different districts, to combat these issues and improve enforcement effectiveness.

Patrolling rules - Despite patrolling being based on some knowledge of natural resource use, the operational constraints (patrolling with FPD or police only and lack of equipment and funds etc) do not allow patrolling to be conducted often enough to reduce overexploitation sufficiently (illegal hunting and logging).

Understanding and support of VPTs amongst local communities - Community support for VPTs could be strengthened through training and workshops to educate local communities on VPT operations and sustainable natural resource use; awareness of local people is low. VPT leaders report that it is difficult to deal with violations committed by people from the same villages due to family relationships.

Costs and benefits – It is difficult to determine whether the benefits of VPTs currently outweigh the costs, due to VPTs being restricted to operate with provincial authorities and lack the funding and power to operate frequently enough. VPTs are consequently being funded by FPD, instead of through the Village Protection Funds. Current benefits of VPTs are likely to be low, providing limited additional benefits to FPD patrols (other than additional manpower and information).

Conclusions

The most serious constraints to VPT operations and effectiveness appear to be:

1. Lack of sustainable funding and patrolling equipment (uniforms, camping equipment and transportation)
2. Lack of security and empowerment – VPTs do not feel safe to patrol without FPD and do not have the legal jurisdiction to deal with some of the issues, so are restricted to supporting FPD in their patrolling activities
3. Inability to deal with violators from local communities (unclear legal framework and low awareness of local communities of role and benefits of VPTs)
4. Low capacity (of VPTs and provincial authorities) to deal with organized and sophisticated illegal logging and hunting operations

Consequently, VPTs are likely to be having little impact in terms of reducing the threats to Grey-shanked douc and other wildlife and in preventing illegal logging and other natural resource extraction. Furthermore, the objectives of VPTs outlined above, are not being achieved.

Recommendations for improvement of enforcement and VPT operations

The following factors would make some headway towards improving the operation and effectiveness of VPTs in Que Phuoc:

- Development and adoption of a **cooperation regulation** between adjacent districts to allow improved enforcement by FPD and VPTs along waterways and illegal transportation routes
- **Capacity building** of commune and district rangers and VPTs in advanced enforcement techniques, illegal case handling and processing of violators to enable them to deal with organized and advanced criminal activities
- **Further development of informant networks** to support targeted and adaptive enforcement by FPD and VPTs
- **Update and clarification of the legal framework** for VPTs, particularly as it relates to dealing with violators from local communities
- **Alternative sources for sustainable financing mechanism** for VPTs should be sought at the national and provincial level, to allow VPTs to operate more frequently in collaboration with FPD
- **Increased awareness and support of local communities** for upholding community and government laws and regulations relating to harvesting of natural resources

However, with VPTs having requested patrolling with commune authorities at all times to ensure their safety, it is unlikely that operational effectiveness will increase markedly even with these measures; the level of patrolling currently implemented by VPTs and FPD is not adequate to confer protection of the site from hunters and illegal loggers who are reportedly very active within the area.

The establishment of the site as a protected area, with a functional management board, staff and appropriate budget allocated, will significantly increase the protection and management of the site, helping to reduce illegal logging and hunting. With increased enforcement under a protected area management system (enforcement should be made a high priority activity) and capacity building in advanced enforcement and illegal case handling, more violations would be detected and processed, providing more funds to support VPT operations through the sustainable finance mechanism already established *if* this is actively supported by the provincial authorities which has not been the case thus far. Should the current sustainable financing mechanism remain unprofitable or unfavourable, alternative sources of sustainable financing need to be sought and developed by the provincial authorities.

The role of VPTs in upholding the laws and regulations of a protected area and in raising awareness of local community members would be invaluable and complementary to the activities of the protected area management board if organised and implemented appropriately.

References

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Issues	Criteria	Score
VPTs address enforcement needs	Enforcement needs and requirements have not been identified Enforcement needs have been identified but not integrated in the VPT framework Enforcement needs are identified and partly integrated into the VPT framework Enforcement needs are identified and the VPT framework meets all	2
Aims and objectives of VPTs are agreed by all stakeholders	VPT objectives not identified VPT objectives agreed but not managed accordingly VPT objectives agreed but only partially implemented VPT objectives agreed and implemented	2
Understanding of VPT framework with government stakeholders	No knowledge of VPT framework or its context Some stakeholders are aware of the framework but no-one understands the context All stakeholders aware of framework and context but only a few have understanding All stakeholders are aware of framework and have full understanding of context	3
Understanding of VPT framework with community stakeholders	No knowledge of VPT framework or its context Some stakeholders are aware of the framework but no-one understands the context All stakeholders aware of framework and context but only a few have understanding All stakeholders are aware of framework and have full understanding of context	2
VPTs have the necessary power to implement patrolling and law enforcement	VPT have no power to implement resource protection VPT have limited power to implement resource protection VPT have power but cannot effectively use it VPT have power and are effectively wielding it	1
VPT framework effectively institutionalised within the government system	VPT framework not institutionalised VPT framework institutionalised external to a government agency VPT framework has been institutionalised to government system but is not yet effectively implemented VPT framework has been institutionalised to government system and is effectively implemented	2
Implementation support from community	Community does not agree to support implementation Incomplete community agreement on implementation support Full community agreement on implementation but weak support Full community agreement and strong implementation support from all community members	2
Implementation support by all	No government support for implementation Support has been agreed by all but not provided	1

relevant government agencies	Support has been agreed and provided but insufficient Support has been agreed and provision is strong	
Full group consensus on membership of VPT teams	VPT membership has not been identified VPT membership has been identified but not agreed to by all stakeholders VPT membership has been identified and agreed to but not formally recognised by all stakeholders VPT membership has been identified and agreed to and formally recognised by all stakeholders	3
Clearly defined roles and responsibilities of VPTs	The roles of VPTs have not been clearly identified or documented The roles of VPTs have been clearly identified but not agreed to by all stakeholders The roles of VPTs have been clearly identified, agreed to but not recognised by all stakeholders The roles of VPTs have been clearly identified, agreed to and formally recognised by all stakeholders	3
Benefits of VPTs outweigh costs	VPT costs are perceived to outweigh the benefits Benefits are perceived to outweigh the costs by some stakeholders Benefits are perceived to outweigh the costs by all stakeholders Benefits are calculated to outweigh the costs by all stakeholders	
Legal framework provides support to VPTs	Legal framework provides no support to VPTs Legal framework exists but does not provide sufficient support to VPTs Local legal framework exists but is not supported by higher level policy Legal framework exists on all levels providing support to VPTs	1
Clearly defined and agreed geographical boundaries	Geographical area of VPTs has not been identified Geographical area of VPTs has been identified but not agreed by all stakeholders Geographical area of VPTs has been identified and agreed but not formally recognised Geographical area of VPTs has been identified, agreed and formally recognised	3
Patrolling rules	Patrolling rules are not based on any knowledge of exploitation of natural resources Patrolling rules are based on local perceptions of the exploitation of natural resources Patrolling rules are based on knowledge of exploitation of natural resources but patrolling is not reducing overexploitation Patrolling rules are based on knowledge of exploitation of natural resources and patrolling is resulting in reduced overexploitation	2
Adequate funding is available	No funding is available Inadequate funding is available Adequate funding available but not managed appropriately	1

	Adequate funding is available and managed in an appropriate manner	
Sustainable financing mechanism is in place	<p>No sustainable financing mechanism has been identified</p> <p>A sustainable financing mechanism has been identified but not been implemented</p> <p>A sustainable financing mechanism has been identified and implemented but is not operating effectively</p> <p>A sustainable financing mechanism has been identified, implemented and is proving adequate financing for VPTs</p>	1
A monitoring system developed and implemented	<p>No monitoring mechanism has been developed</p> <p>A monitoring mechanism has been developed but is not being implemented or is insufficient in terms of providing data</p> <p>A monitoring mechanism has been developed based on sufficient data and is being implemented but not effectively</p> <p>A monitoring system has been implemented and is working effectively</p>	1
Sufficient capacity exists in VPTs	<p>There is little to no capacity in all VPT stakeholders to ensure effective implementation</p> <p>There is some capacity in some stakeholders but it is insufficient for effective VPT implementation</p> <p>The capacity of some but not all stakeholders is sufficient for implementation</p> <p>The capacity of all stakeholders is sufficient for implementation</p>	1
No negative social, cultural or long term economic impact on the community is felt	<p>VPTs are having negative effects on local communities</p> <p>VPTs are having limited negative impacts on a minority of the local community</p> <p>VPTs are having a negative but short-term impact only on the local community</p> <p>No negative impacts have emerged as a consequence of VPTs</p>	3
TOTAL SCORE (out of 57)		34