
[Vietnam: Shrimps, Mangroves and the World Bank \(2\)](#)

Christopher Gibbs of the World Bank office in Hanoi, requested that WRM publish his response to article on Vietnam in WRM Bulletin 51. Mr Gibbs' letter is reproduced in full below, followed by Chris Lang's reply.

November 16, 2001

Dear WRM,

In WRM Bulletin #51, you published an article Vietnam: Shrimps, Mangroves and the World Bank by Chris Lang. This article was written and published without consulting the World Bank and, disappointingly, is inaccurate and makes a number of wrong assertions. In the interests of accuracy and your readers I would request that you publish on your website this response.

1. The World Bank's position on aquaculture in Vietnam

The World Bank's position throughout its dialog with the Government of Vietnam on aquaculture has been and continues to be consistent and clear, and is summarized in its 1998 rural development strategy report for Vietnam: Advancing Rural Development, which states:

"Without more careful site assessment and better practices, investments in aquaculture will be excessively risky. Shrimp, crab, prawn and fish farming, although risky can be highly profitable, and Vietnam has a high potential for aquaculture if solutions can be found for persistent disease and pollution problems. Further promotion of aquaculture must be preceded by enhanced knowledge of land use zoning and aquaculture practices. Otherwise, mangrove forests, wetlands and estuarine areas will be put at further risk, and poor households practicing intensive aquaculture will continue to gamble on risky investments."

2. The Vietnam Coastal Wetlands Protection and Development Project (CWDP)

CWDP is specifically designed to counteract mangrove destruction along 470 km of coastline in southern Vietnam. However, in the project area, it is the very poorest people who live among the mangroves and make a living by cutting them for firewood and charcoal who pose the threat to mangroves, the stability of the shoreline and the breeding grounds of fish. At the edge of the sea, poverty is the primary cause of coastal mangrove degradation and the project is responding directly to the development needs of the poor and environmental damage they do. CWDP responds by supporting both mangrove replanting and providing - inland, but close to the original settlements - new economic activities for the poor. That is why some resettlement is necessary.

3. Resettlement

Resettlement is always best avoided and difficult to do well. For these reasons, the World Bank has its safeguard policy on resettlement (Operational Policy 4.30) and why resettlement in CWDP has

been carefully planned and is well supported. The only people being resettled in CWPDP (some 2,150 people, not more than 2,000 families as mentioned in Chris Lang's article) are those from the government-defined full protection zone (FPZ), a narrow strip dedicated to mangroves at the very edge of the sea.

Those being resettled are the people who have depended on cutting mangroves for a livelihood. Others, in the FPZ who depend on fishing, or live in areas where land is accumulating or are farming sandy soils, may stay. The households being resettled are among Vietnam's very poorest people who subsist by exploiting mangroves, and that is why they are being helped to start a new life where there are alternative economic opportunities to cutting mangroves.

Resettlement is always tricky, but CWPDP offers substantial support to those being resettled - land-for-land compensation, housing, transport, subsistence, training, vocational training - plus substantial support to the receiving communities. More than US\$15.9 million is allocated for resettlement of FPZ occupants, including \$8.5 million in credit through the Vietnam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, US\$1.63 million for improved facilities in the receiving communities and an additional \$672,000 for ethnic minorities. This is a carefully planned and generously financed program that we expect to work well.

4. World Bank support for aquaculture in Vietnam

The World Bank does not support brackish-water shrimp aquaculture in Vietnam. However, the World Bank does support the extension of rice-fish and rice-freshwater shrimp farming in some areas of the Mekong Delta to help mitigate the impacts of flood control in seasonally flooded areas. But freshwater prawn farming is less susceptible to the diseases of brackish water shrimp farming and can help to control insect pests of rice and lower the use of pesticides which has reached hazardous levels in many rice growing areas.

Thank you.

Christopher Gibbs, Rural Sector Coordinator, The World Bank Office in Hanoi, Vietnam

Chris Lang's reply:

Christopher Gibbs' response to my article, disappointingly, is inaccurate and makes a number of wrong assertions. Gibbs states: "This article was written and published without consulting the World Bank". On 23 October 2001, I wrote to John Carstensen at the Danish Environmental Assistance Programme in Hanoi (which is also supporting the project), asking a series of questions about the Coastal Wetlands Protection and Development Project. I copied the e-mail to Ronald Zweig, the World Bank task manager for the project. Carstensen replied saying that the Bank should reply to my questions. I still haven't received a reply from Zweig.

In fact, I first contacted the World Bank in Hanoi about this project in June 1995 when I spoke to Choeng-Hoy Chung, who was then the World Bank representative in Vietnam. On 12 September 1995, I wrote to him with several questions about the project. Two months later I sent him and others at the Bank a copy of a report I'd written, "The World Bank in Vietnam", which included a critique of the Bank's mangrove project. I never received a reply either to my letter or to the report.

According to Gibbs, the Bank's position on aquaculture is "consistent and clear". Yet, the statement that Gibbs quotes simply recommends sorting out the disease and pollution associated with shrimp

farming and learning a bit about land use zoning and aquaculture practices. Then, Vietnam's "high potential for aquaculture" can be realised, "further promotion of aquaculture" can continue and presumably Charoen Pokphand can get on with selling shrimps to Europe.

Gibbs' letter makes no mention of companies such as Charoen Pokphand, who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the destruction of mangroves for the expansion of industrial shrimp farming.

In a similar vein to Ronald Zweig's comment quoted in my article, Gibbs puts the blame for mangrove loss on poor villagers. He says, "in the project area, it is the very poorest people who live among the mangroves and make a living by cutting them for firewood and charcoal who pose the threat to mangroves". Here, Gibbs is contradicting his own organisation's studies of the project area. The Bank's Resettlement Action Plan states: "The degradation of the mangrove forests can not solely be attributed to the families living in the FPZ [full protection zone]. Greatest harm to the forests has been caused by defoliation, indiscriminate cutting of timber by Forest Enterprises, illegal cutting by itinerant gangs from outside the region and, more recently, deforestation to enable the GOV [government of Vietnam] promoted shrimp production."

Gibbs and Zweig are not alone at the World Bank in blaming villagers for forest destruction. Before Choeng-Hoy Chung moved to Hanoi he was based at the World Bank in Bangkok. In an interview in 1994 with journalist Nantiya Tangwisutijit, he explained that a successful forest management programme required three things: "First you need the 'daab', the sword, second you need the 'khanom', what westerners call a carrot, and third you need the 'long thot', the stick."

The figure of "more than two thousand families" to be evicted comes from the World Bank's project information document and the Resettlement Action Plan available on the World Bank web-site. One of my questions in my 23 October e-mail to John Carstensen specifically asks how many people were to be resettled. The occupations of people to be resettled listed in my article came from the Resettlement Action Plan.

Gibbs points out that, "The World Bank does not support brackish-water shrimp aquaculture in Vietnam." My article does not say that the Bank directly supports shrimp farming in Vietnam. However, each time the World Bank lends money to Vietnam, the country's debt increases. The government has little choice other than to promote cash crops such as shrimps to earn the foreign exchange needed to repay its debts. The World Bank is part of the problem, not part of the solution.