

THE PACIFIC RIM VETIVER NETWORK

Narong Chomchalow

Regional Coordinator, Pacific Rim Vetiver Network
Office of the Royal Development Projects Board
Bangkok, Thailand

Abstract

Vetiver grass technology was known to R&D institutes throughout the world but not often available to scientists in developing countries who had no access to modern communication facilities. Thus, there was a need to set up a regional network for the Pacific Rim countries to coordinate activities within the region. At ICV-1, Mr Richard G. Grimshaw, coordinator of The Vetiver Network, proposed that Thailand act as the core of the regional vetiver network for the Pacific Rim countries because Thailand was the site of the world's largest vetiver project, known as the Doi Tung Development Project implemented under the supervision of the Office of the Royal Development Projects Board (ORDPB), the organizer of ICV-1 and also ICV-2. ORDPB submitted the proposal to His Majesty the King to obtain his comments and approval. His Majesty agreed with the proposal and commissioned the setting up of the Pacific Rim Vetiver Network (PRVN) under the supervision of a committee. The objectives of PRVN are: (i) to serve the member countries as the centre to collect, compile and disseminate information on VGT in the forms of newsletters, technical bulletins, occasional publications and website, and (ii) to assist the member countries in training, study tours, and obtaining plant materials. The 22 countries located in the Pacific Rim are automatically assigned to be PRVN members. Activities include the production of a quarterly newsletter (VETIVERIM), a website (<http://www.prvn.rdpb.go.th>) and technical bulletins (five published so far).

Introduction

With the accelerated pace of research and development on vetiver worldwide, a little-known grass with great potential for soil and water conservation, information on vetiver grass technology (VGT) has been gathered by R&D institutes throughout the world. Unfortunately, such information was not available to scientists in developing countries who had no access to modern communication facilities such as email and the Internet. Thus, there was a need to set up a regional network for the Pacific Rim countries to coordinate activities within the region. Besides The Vetiver Network (TVN) in Washington, four networks operate in other regions of the world, namely the South African Vetiver Network, the West African Vetiver Network, the Europe and Mediterranean Vetiver Network and the Latin American Vetiver Network.

The creation of the Pacific Rim Vetiver Network (PRVN) was the result of a proposal made by TVN coordinator Richard G. Grimshaw at the First International Conference on Vetiver (ICV-1) held in Chiang Rai, Thailand, on 4-8 February 1996. Mr Grimshaw suggested that Thailand act as the core of PRVN since she is the site of the world's largest vetiver project, known as the Doi Tung Development Project, under the supervision of the Office of the Royal Development Projects Board (ORDPB), the organizer of ICV-1.

ORDPB submitted the proposal to His Majesty the King, a keen supporter of the use of vetiver grass, in order to obtain his comments and approval. His Majesty agreed with the proposal and commissioned the setting up of PRVN under the supervision of the Committee on the Development and Promotion for the Use of Vetiver Grass (CODPUV) at His Majesty's Initiative, to be administered by ORDPB.

In order to provide the network with a common view and flexibility, on 6 May 1997 CODPUV established a task force to handle PRVN. The task force is chaired by Mr Manoon Mookpradit, then Deputy Secretary-General of ORDPB, and has a number of experienced officials from concerned agencies and renowned institutions. ORDPB itself functions as the secretariat of the task force.

Objectives

The main objective of PRVN is to serve the countries of the Pacific Rim as the centre to collect, compile and disseminate information on vetiver grass technology in the form of a newsletter, occasional publications and a website. A secondary objective is to assist the member countries in training, attending study tours and obtaining plant materials, as requested and when necessary.

Members

Country Members

Twenty-two countries situated in the Pacific Rim are automatically entitled to become members of PRVN. These are, in alphabetical order, Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, the Cook Islands, China, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, Korea (Republic of), Lao PDR, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, the Solomon Islands, Taiwan, Thailand, Tonga, Vanuatu and Viet Nam. They are grouped under the following three categories:

Countries (4) with a national network and a national coordinator

China: China Vetiver Network (CVN), with Prof Liyu Xu as National Coordinator (NC)

Philippines: Vetiver Network Philippines (VENETPHIL), Mr Edwin Balbarino as NC

Thailand: Thailand Vetiver Network (THVN), Dr Apichai Theerathorn as NC

Viet Nam: Vetiver Network Viet Nam (VNV), Mr Ken Crismier as acting NC

Countries (9) with no national network but with a country representative in PRVN

Australia: Dr Paul N.V. Truong as Country Representative (CR)

Brunei: Mr Jonathan Davies as CR

Fiji: Mr Jai Gawander as CR

Indonesia: Mr Kucahyo B. Prayogo as CR

Lao PDR: Mr Boonkong Sengthavon as CR

Malaysia: Dr P.K. Yoon as CR

New Zealand: Mr Don Miller as CR

Papua New Guinea: Mr Rob Shelton as CR

Taiwan: Mr Yue-Wen Wang as CR

Vanuatu: Mr Henry Kathecau as CR

Countries (9) with no national network or country representative in PRVN

Cambodia (Contact person: Mr Numa Shams (1998)), *Cook Islands, Japan, Korea (Republic of), Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands and Tonga.*

Scientist Members

Scientists of the member countries of PRVN who had made prior contact with the PRVN secretariat are automatically registered as scientist members, and at present amount to about 1000. Others who want to join PRVN can apply directly to the secretariat, giving name, current position, place of work, mailing address, email address, and other information which is deemed necessary.

Activities

The following activities have been carried out under PRVN since it was established in early 1997:

Newsletter

An English language quarterly newsletter (8 pages A-4 size), VETIVERIM, has been issued since July 1997. Its circulation is 2 000 copies per issue. It has been sent in bulk to national coordinators and country

representatives of the member countries for further distribution to scientists and institutes within each country in order to save postage and other difficulties in international mailing. A bound volume of 11 issues, with subject index as well as other relevant information, is presented to every participant as a gift from the secretariat of PRVN. A four-page index has been attached to VETIVERIM-11 for use in binding by those who do not attend ICV-2 and wish to bind the 11 issues.

The author, who has been the editor of VETIVERIM from the beginning, has tried his best to include news and articles from as many countries of the Pacific Rim as possible. However, due to the lack of responses, not many news and articles from these countries have been published. It is hoped that with better communication, more news and articles from member countries will be published in future issues. Comments and suggestions for the improvement of VETIVERIM are most welcome. Other regional vetiver networks wishing to receive VETIVERIM should contact the secretariat.

Website

From the very beginning, a website for PRVN has been prepared by the secretariat at <http://www.prvn.rdpb.go.th>. Information has been revised from time to time, especially when worthwhile events are happening, e.g. conferences, study tours, visits, exchange of planting material, announcement of awards, research results, etc. It also includes eight pages of the current issue of VETIVERIM.

Scientists of the member countries are invited to submit information on research and technology on vetiver, especially those that are appropriate to the Pacific Rim countries. Information and photographs are most welcome. These can be sent to the secretariat by mail, fax or email.

Publications

The following technical bulletins (1000 copies each), have been prepared and distributed:

1. Technical Bulletin No. 1998/1 – “Vetiver grass technology for environmental protection” by Paul Truong and Dennis Baker, August 1998. (A second printing of 1000 copies was made for distribution to scientists of vetiver networks of other regions.)
2. Technical Bulletin No. 1998/2 – “Vetiver grass for slope stabilization and erosion control” by Diti Hengchaovanich, November 1998. (A second printing of 1000 copies has been made.)
3. Technical Bulletin No. 1999/1 – “Vetiver handicrafts in Thailand” by the (Thai) Department of Industrial Promotion, October 1999.
4. Technical Bulletin No. 1999/2 – “Vetiver grass technology for mine rehabilitation” by Paul Truong, November 1999.
5. Technical Bulletin No. 1999/3 – “The use of vetiver grass for erosion control and slope stabilization along the Yadana gas pipeline right of way” by the Petroleum Authority of Thailand, December 1999.

National activities

Since the system of operation of each national programme is independent of PRVN, no formal report of such activities has been received by the secretariat of PRVN. In order to make this report complete, the author has searched for such activities in VETIVERIM. They are presented in the annex.

The Secretariat

Office

The PRVN secretariat office is located at the Office of the Royal Development Projects Board, 78 Rajadamnern Nok Avenue, Bangkok 10300; tel. (662) 280 6193 to 280 6200; fax: (662) 280 6206, 280 6209, 280 8915; email address: pasiri@mail.rdpb.go.th; Website: <<http://prvn.rdpb.go.th>>

Staff

There is no full-time staff working for PRVN. The responsible person is Mrs Suwanna Pasiri, head of the Information Section of ORDPB. Other staff members of ORDPB, especially in the divisions of Compilation and Foreign Relations, also assist in the operation of PRVN. The author himself is working voluntarily as the acting coordinator of PRVN and editor of VETIVERIM and of PRVN technical bulletins.

Budget

There is no regular budget for PRVN. All expenses incurred under PRVN are obtained either from ORDPB or from the Chaipattana Foundation, His Majesty's own development foundation.

Problems and Prospects

Problems

It is understandable that with no budget and staff of its own, PRVN has not functioned fully. However, since the objectives of PRVN are mainly to disseminate information through publications and a website, there seems to be no problem of budget or staff. The only problem is to obtain information and feedback from the scientists of the member countries.

Prospects

In spite of existing problems, PRVN is probably one of the most active regional vetiver networks, thanks to the support of ORDPB, TVN, member countries and a few dedicated persons. With more useful information being accumulated from the member countries, it is anticipated that PRVN will be more active in the future in the dissemination of information to the member countries.

ANNEX

Activities on Vetiver of Member Countries under PRVN

Australia: Although no official network has been set up, Australia has been one of the most active countries in the region. Dr Paul Truong of the Queensland Department of Natural Resources, who voluntarily acts as the country representative, together with his colleagues and a group of researchers at the Central Queensland University, have conducted various researches on vetiver (Ashwath 1998; Tomar 1998). Dr Truong has been a regular supplier of news and articles to VETIVERIM (Truong 1998b, 1999a, c) as well as to the technical bulletin (Nos. 1998/1, 1999/2). His group has done a lot of work on the role of VGT on environmental protection such as mine rehabilitation, treatment of toxic wastes, heavy metals, etc (Truong 1998b). He also produced CD-ROMs on various topics related to the application of VGT (viz. R&D and applications of VGT (Truong 1998a) and VGT for Infrastructure Protection (Truong 1999b)).

Brunei: a country representative has been nominated, but no activity on vetiver has been released yet.

Cambodia: Mr Numa Shams, manager of the Sustainable Agriculture and Integrating Farming project, is testing the feasibility of planting vetiver hedgerows to control erosion and as a source of animal feed during the dry season. He is requesting planting material and information from PRVN (Shams 1998).

China: A very active national network (China Vetiver Network – CVN) has been set up, with the head office in Nanjing under the leadership of Prof Liyu Xu. Prof Xu has been a regular supplier of news and articles to VETIVERIM (e.g. Xu 1999a and b). CVN has organized two international meetings on vetiver. One was held in Fuzhou, Fujian province, on 20-26 October 1997, the other in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, on 19-21 October 1999. A few national meetings were also held. Other activities include large-scale

demonstration of growing vetiver for soil stabilization on barren land, river beds and embankments and on farmland. A quarterly newsletter (in Chinese) and other occasional publications have been produced. Small grants for scientists have been provided with support from TVN. See details in Liyu Xu's contribution to this conference.

Fiji: A country representative has been nominated, but no activity on vetiver has been released yet.

Indonesia: A country representative has been nominated, but no activity on vetiver has been received yet.

Lao PDR: A country representative has been nominated, but no activity on vetiver has been released yet. However, an EU-funded provincial irrigation project is now working on introducing vetiver into Luang Prabang province. Two nurseries have been established, one at a local agricultural college and the other at a farmer's field. The main objective is to use vetiver for road erosion control or irrigation scheme erosion control, but there has been no effort to use vetiver on farmland at this early stage. The aim is to have the farmers learn of the benefits to be gained from VGS without first using vetiver on their lands. There is a growing awareness of VGS among Lao government officials and donor representatives (Gillespie 1998).

Malaysia: A country representative has been nominated, but no activity on vetiver has been received yet from Malaysia, a country which used to be very active in R&D on vetiver. This is probably because Dr P.K. Yoon has retired.

New Zealand: A country representative has been nominated, but no activity on vetiver has been registered yet.

Papua New Guinea: Vetiver was introduced in 1997 in Simbu province and farmers quickly realized the potential of VGT. A few months after planting, vetiver survived the severe drought of 1997. A booklet on VGT in Melanesian pidgin was prepared and widely distributed, even to community schools (Shelton 1998).

Philippines: A national network, called Vetiver Network Philippines – VETINETPHIL, was established in December 1996, with Dr Edwin Balbarino of the Farm Resource Management Institute, ViSCA, Baybay, Leyte as the national coordinator. VETINETPHIL publishes a quarterly English-language newsletter *Vetiveria* and has organized a few national workshops and hosted an international meeting on Ground and Water Bioengineering in Manila, on 19-21 April 1999. During this meeting, a short course on VGT for erosion and sediment control, slope stabilization and environmental protection was offered to the participants. A field trip to observe VGT along the Famy-Infanta road and to visit Vetiver Farms, Inc, the main supplier of plant material to the Department of Highways and Public Works for this project, was organized. This is probably the world's first commercial farm supplying vetiver planting material (see the article entitled "Commercial propagation of vetiver" in VETIVERIM 3:5-6, Jan. 98). See details in Dr Balbarino's contribution to this conference.

Taiwan: a study on the application and research of vetiver grass has been made in Taiwan by Mr Yue-Wen Wang, Department of Agronomy, National University of Taiwan, who volunteers to act as the country representative for Taiwan. Dr Wang is currently working on germplasm collection. He has obtained 15 accessions from the US Germplasm Bank (Wang 1998).

Thailand: With full support from ORDPB, Thailand has one of the most active national programmes on vetiver. His Majesty is fully aware of the urgency of the problem of land degradation caused by erosion. After careful consideration of the potential of vetiver grass, he has adopted the idea of using vetiver for soil and water conservation and introduced a simple technology, first for the hill tribes on the highlands of Northern Thailand and later on all others who suffer from the same problem of soil erosion. His Majesty started to implement his concept in June 1991. ORDPB has been assigned to coordinate the R&D activities on vetiver in Thailand. Forty governmental and non-governmental agencies which are involved in vetiver activities are partially supported by budgets from ORDPB. A committee has been established under the administration of ORDPB to coordinate all R&D activities of all agencies in Thailand working on vetiver in

order to follow the policy set forth in the master plan and to evaluate the results obtained. Among its activities are organizing three national workshops and two international conferences, publishing a quarterly newsletter, *Bhumivarin Anurak* (Soil and water conservation) and a number of documents and providing training and planting material to scientists of neighbouring countries (Viet Nam, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines, etc) (Chomchalow 1998). See details in Dr Apichai Thirathorn's contribution to this conference.

Vanuatu: Jonathan Tomately (1999) is interested in using vetiver to deal with a broad and ever increasing range of environmental problems in the small island of Vanuatu. He has built a nursery to propagate vetiver and is about to plant them in the field. He is asking for information and other help from PRVN. Of late, Mr Don Miller of Land Use Consultant in New Zealand has suggested that Mr Henry Kathecau, who is knowledgeable about vetiver in Vanuatu, be the country representative of Vanuatu.

Viet Nam: With backup from US citizen Ken Crismier, who volunteers to be the acting country representative, an active farmers' group has been set up to take care of the vetiver activities in Viet Nam. Among these activities are: (i) formal seminars organized in Hanoi, Vinh and Saigon in January 1999, under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture (with Paul Truong and Diti Hengchaovanich as invited experts); (ii) informal presentations wherever and whenever an opportunity has presented itself during Ken Crismier's three trips and four months in Viet Nam in the past two years; (iii) production of the "green book" in Vietnamese (first printing: 5 000 copies) distributed to all seminar participants, along with a poster based on the "green book" cover but localized for Viet Nam; 2 000 copies of the "green book" and poster distribution in Nghe An province; "blue book" (100 copies), TVN and PRVN newsletters and PRVN research reports (all in English) distributed in small quantities to likely prospects; (iv) a team of two persons from Nghe An province (the main province town is Vinh) visited Thailand for a week in late May and early June 1999 to see what is going on there (hosted by Thai vetiver people); they returned with 12 varieties of vetiver, which have been planted at Vinh; a recent report indicates that most varieties are developing well; the goal of these efforts at this location is to make it a focal point for vetiver interest throughout Viet Nam (Crismier 1999a and b). See details in Mr Nguyen Hong Son's contribution to the conference.

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