

Vetiver Grass – “The Community Plant”

This year, from October 22 – 26, the Fourth International Conference on Vetiver (ICV4) will be held in Caracas, Venezuela, and will have the theme “Vetiver and People”. This is actually a rather good name as Vetiver Grass is the “People’s Grass”, and has found to be very acceptable to communities when the latter have been properly educated about its application and uses. In particular rural communities can use vetiver for, amongst other purposes: soil and water conservation, house plot protection, village road stabilization, village land reclamation, land slip prevention, boundary markers and dividers between closely spaced houses, water supply protection and water quality improvement, village pond purifier, house by house sewage treatment, mulch, thatch, medicinal application, drinking water purifier, termite excluder, livestock forage, and material for handicrafts. A pretty good list – a plant of many purposes for all people at a very low cost, and basically an easy to understand technology.

A couple of soil related examples came to my attention recently that I would like to share with you.

Gulley – ravine rehabilitation and control. There are many parts of the tropics where gullies are so large that they consume houses in the relentless erosion process that creates them. There are huge gullies in eastern Nigeria, Cameroon and the Congo, particular where the soils are of light and alluvial origin. These gullies that destroy property and result in loss of land can be rehabilitated and stabilized by the Vetiver System. Recent experience under a USAID development project in the Congo (DR) is a good example. A very large gully was cutting back into a Kikwit Town, houses were at risk and following meetings with the villagers the community as a whole took action. The community created its own vetiver nursery, reshaped the gully and then planted vetiver grass. Two months after planting the vetiver is growing well. The Vetiver Network was actively involved with this project

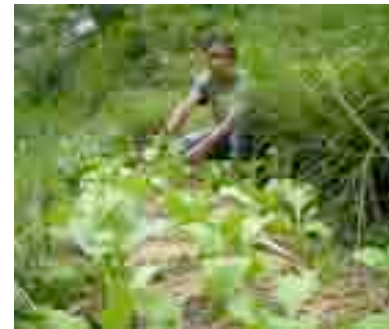


The upper end of the gully threatening the town. The picture on the right shows the gully head already stabilized with vetiver and the slopes being prepared for planting.



Slope preparation on the left, and the final product after 4 months on the right with the Alain Ndona (right of the sign) who worked with the community on this gully reclamation.

Community Rehabilitation in East Bali, Indonesia. The Vetiver System has been instrumental in changing the lives of 11,500 impoverished, undernourished, illiterate adults and children in the barren mountains of East Bali over the past 8 years. The main thrust was to educate children through better schools to go back to their parents and teach them what they had learned at school about vetiver and other agricultural and health issues and remedies. Working with these communities the NGO responsible for the project used vetiver for a wide range of uses:



The hamlet roads (left) were improved and stabilized with Vetiver, as were the surrounds of village houses (center). Organic gardens were established using vetiver for soil and water conservation and for mulch (right).



Organic gardens protected by well managed vetiver (left), a spring head stabilized with vetiver (center), children and their families compete to see who can plant the best "technical" row of vetiver (right).

As a result of this program by the Ekoturin Foundation, Bali, Indonesia, 20 km of roads were community constructed and stabilized with vetiver allowing 2500 families to travel for the first time to markets and other services including health; 600 children attended the schools and were educated in organic farming and the use of the Vetiver System; the Vetiver System enabled nutritious organic vegetables to be grown by 2500 families – malnutrition almost eliminated; child mortality (before 1 year old) was reduced from 25% to near 0%; palpable goitre in children reduced from 84% to less than 20%; and 1,300 families have safe and clean drinking water. The power of Vetiver!! There are many other examples of communities being involved with the Vetiver System. I believe it provides a technical focus for the community, each person being able to use vetiver for the purpose best suited to his or her needs; it is easy to understand, it is low cost, and does not need government support or sanction.

I invite you to the Fourth International Conference on Vetiver (ICV4) to see and learn about this remarkable plant and its uses. Details are at: <http://www.vetiver.org/ICV4%20-2%20announcement.pdf>

Dick Grimshaw - March 2006