A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a dark blue shirt, focused on weaving a large, round basket. She is using several long, thin, greenish-brown stalks of vetiver grass. The basket she is working on has a complex, concentric spiral pattern in shades of green, orange, and brown. The background is a plain, light color.

**NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON THE  
VETIVER SYSTEM FOR SOIL &  
WATER CONSERVATION,  
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION &  
REHABILITATION IN ETHIOPIA**

**March 18, 2009**

**Vetiver handicrafts:  
An innovative economic community-based program  
implemented by the Polar Foundation in Venezuela**

**Dr. Dale Rachmeler**

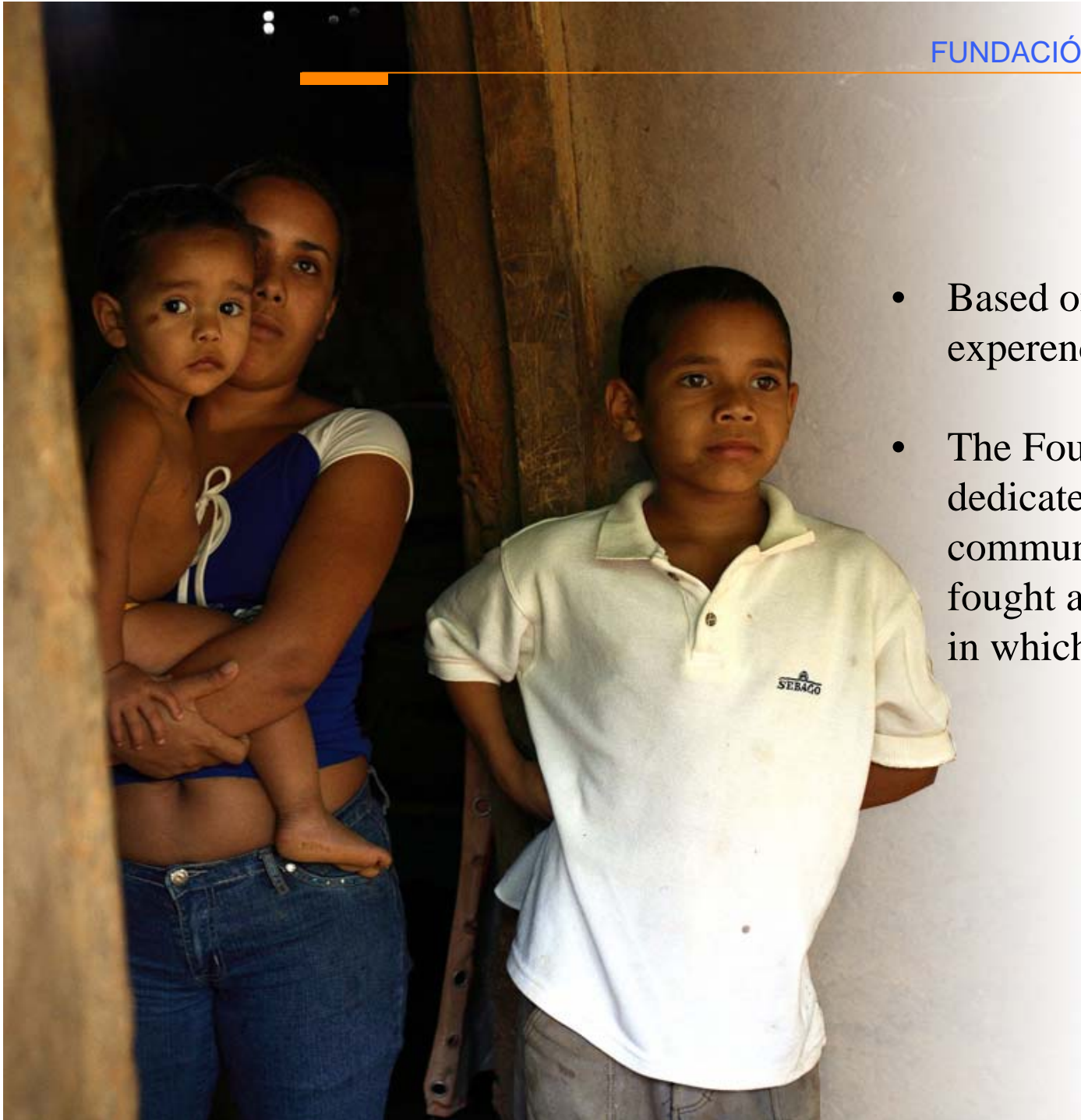


### **Principal objectives**

- Promote poverty alleviation at the community level in innovative ways
- Promote a new look at traditional problems

### **Strategy**

- Generate employment in rural areas



- Based on 15 years of experience in rural areas
- The Foundation was dedicated to support communities as they fought against the poverty in which they lived

**Eleven states were selected  
for the promotion of  
Vetiver**





- Making handicrafts
- Provide increased income
- Community participation
- Reducing rural poverty



- The program strives to introduce the technical aspects of vetiver fiber production and assure its widespread use





- Traditional handicrafts are usually made with:

Metal

Wood

Fiber

**Fiber use in Venezuela has a long history using**

- Palm (*Mauritia flexuosa*, *Euterpe spp*)
- Agave cactus (*Agave cocui*)
- Wild pineapple (*Ananas crectifolius*)
- Sisal (*Agave sisalana*)



**Problems with traditional  
fiber use**

**Hard to get to plants**

**Indiscriminate use**

**Uncontrolled stripping of  
fibers from live plants**

**Overuse leads to its  
elimination from the  
ecosystem**





FUNDACION EMPRESAS POLAR

**Vetiver: A  
sustainable  
fiber for  
Venezuela**



- Santa Rosa del Sur  
estado Carabobo



• Güigüe  
estado Carabobo



• Aguirre  
estado Carabobo



- Cervecería Polar estado Carabobo



- Malpica El Toro estado Aragua



- Santa Cruz  
estado Aragua





- Planta San Pedro estado Miranda



- Birongo  
estado Miranda



- Cervecería Polar estado Anzoátegui



• Palmonagas  
estado Monagas



- Total Venezuela  
estado Monagas



- CVG Bauxilum  
Los Pijiguaos  
estado Bolívar



• Canagua-MARN  
estado Mérida



- Lomas de Bonilla estado Trujillo





• Cuicas  
estado Trujillo

- La Marroquina estado Yaracuy





Hato Viejo  
estado Yaracuy



- Nirgua MARN estado Yaracuy





## Social Impact

- Creates partnerships
- Promotes social values
- Strengthens rural organizations
- Promotes integration of social groups by increasing their incomes
- Strengthens family and community relationships



### **Agricultural Impact**

- Improved management practices
- Sustainable fiber production
- Landscape phytoremediation
- Improved yields



## **Impact on Handicraft Production**

- Easy to learn technology
- Fiber can be dyed - tinted
- Fiber can be combined with other materials
- Fiber is resistant to pests
- Sustainable production is low cost
- Plants are easily accessible
- It is very well adapted to the Venezuela environment



## **Environmental impact**

- Increases soil fertility
- Improves water quality
- Reduces pressure on other fiber species subject to overuse





## **Institutional Impact**

- It is an replicable model
- Permits technology transfer
- Is sustainable over time
- It encourages research
- Generates a multidisciplinary approach to problem solving



## **Institutional Impact**

- Does not require major investments in equipment or tools
- Local expertise can be used to improve products
- Responds to community needs for institutional frameworks
- Revenue generation is rapid as products can be sold locally
- Allows for individual modification and personalization



## Tools for market promotion

- Expo sales events
- Academic promotion
- Media sales publicity
- Print advertising
- Corporate promotion
- Word-of-mouth



## Lessons learned

- Must link production with actual sales
- Quality control is important
- Take advantage of self-worth to motivate high quality production
- Sales channels must be defined and fine-tuned
- Production units need strengthening
- Interventions must be more than just short-term help

## Lessons learned

- Strengthening transportation and market access is important
- Technical support must be community based, not-top down
- Difficult to create community based production and marketing organizations easily
- Large investments are not needed
- Accessible to all interested
- Difficult to meet high demand with diverse production capacity



## Steps to create a community-based project in Venezuela



7  
Introductory sessions



2  
Capacity building training



Identifying trainers

## Steps to create a community-based project in Venezuela

3



Select production sites carefully

4



Assure fiber availability

## Steps to create a community-based project in Venezuela

5



Define labor speciality needs

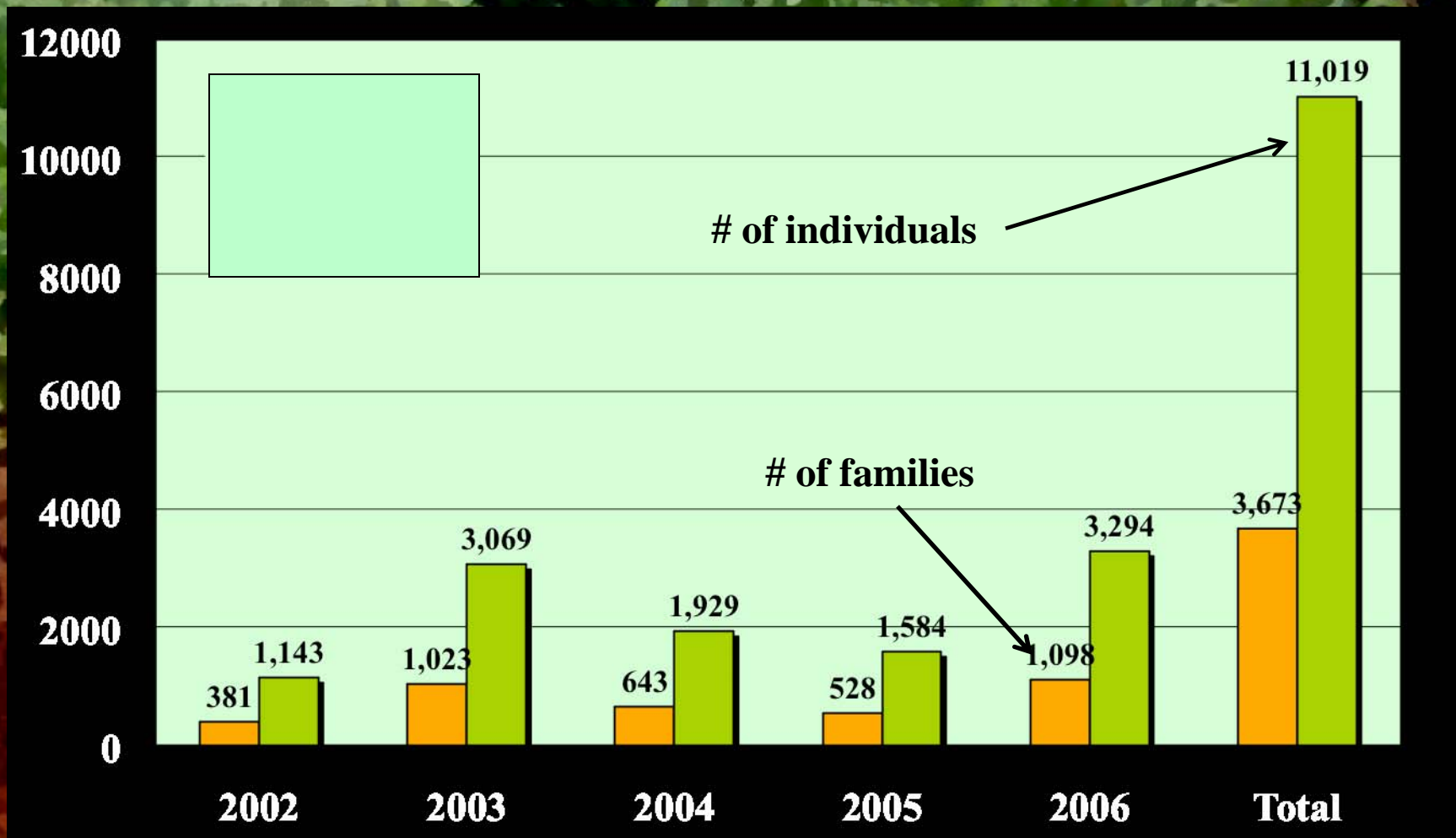
6



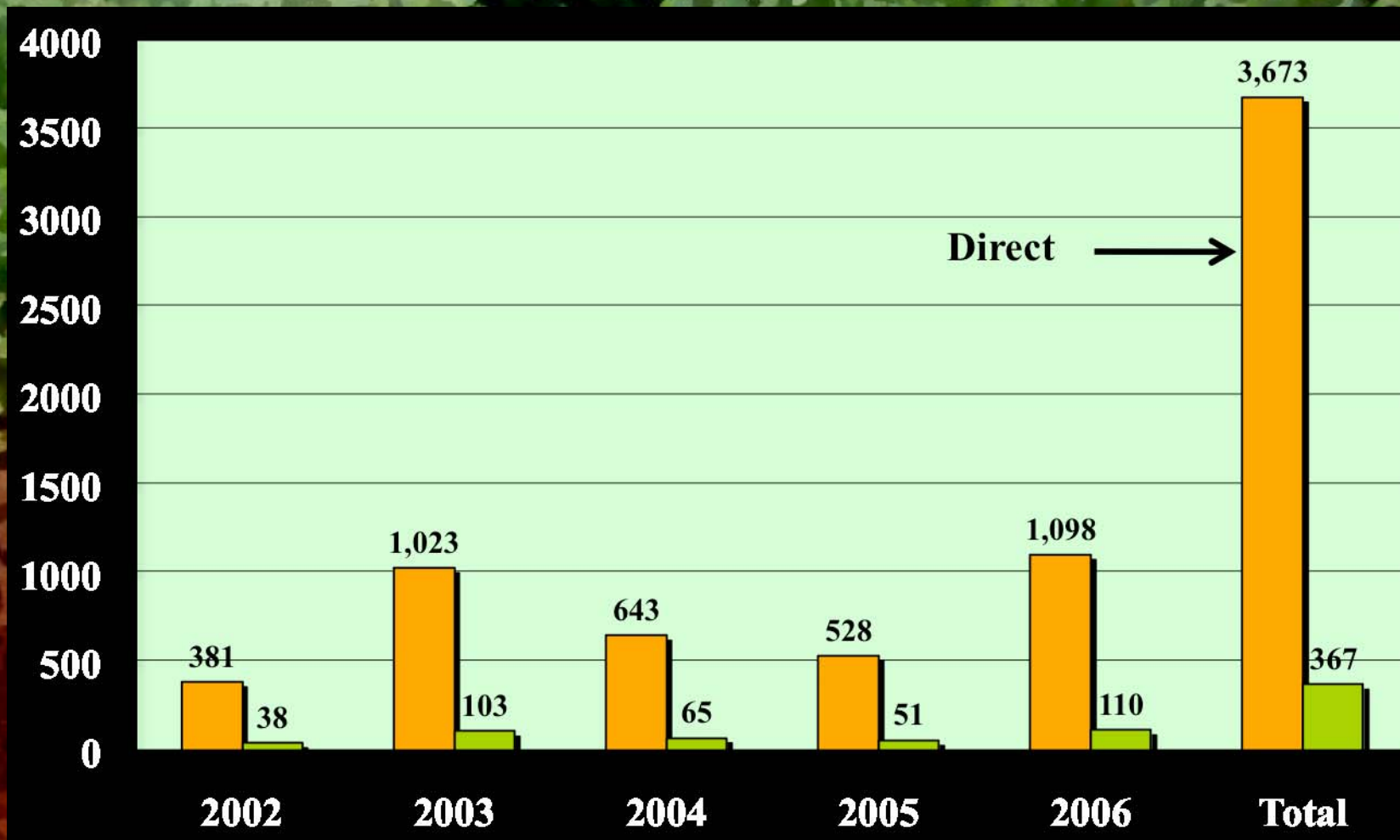
Test the market demand



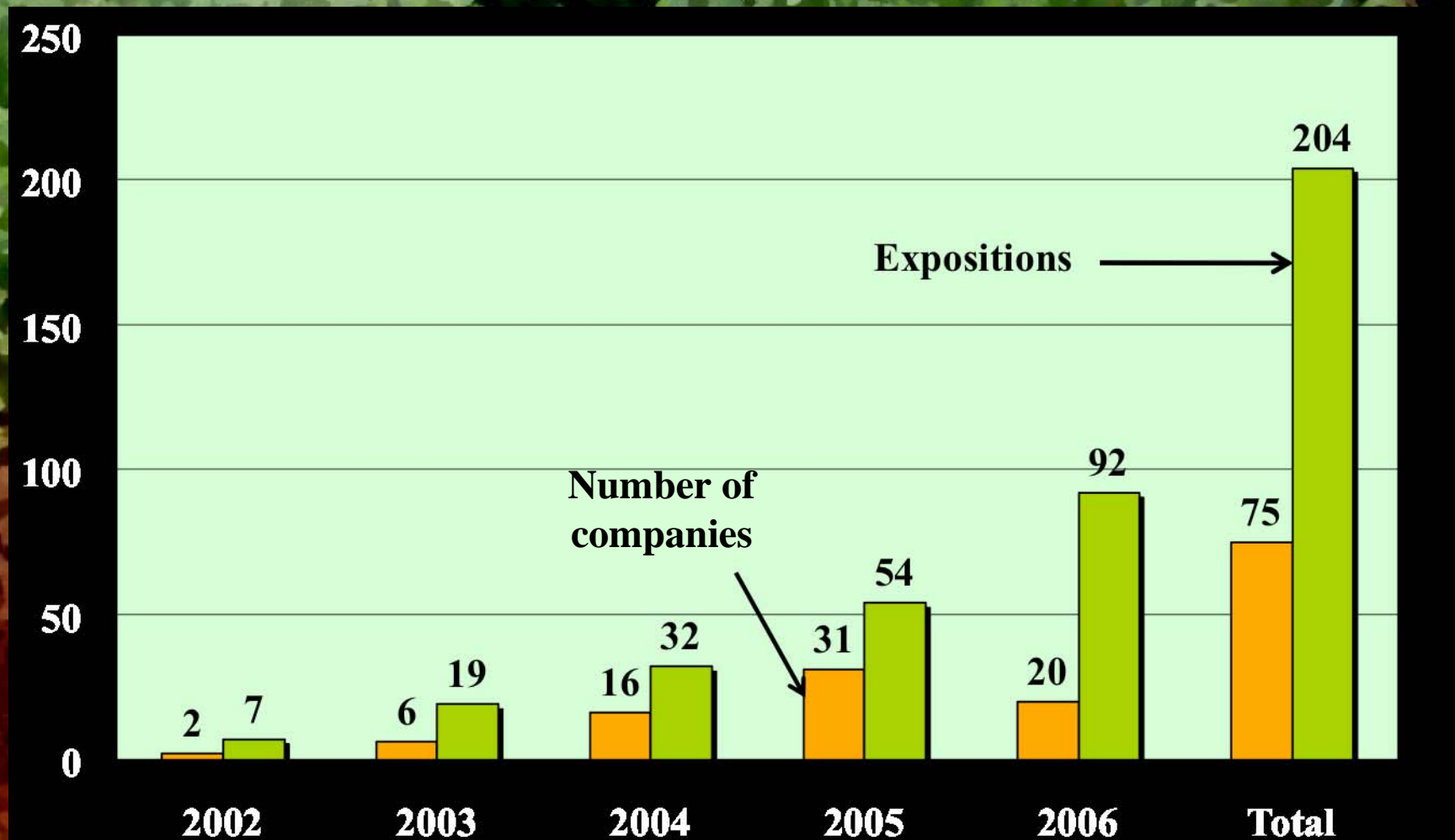
## Number of families and individuals involved during 2002-2006



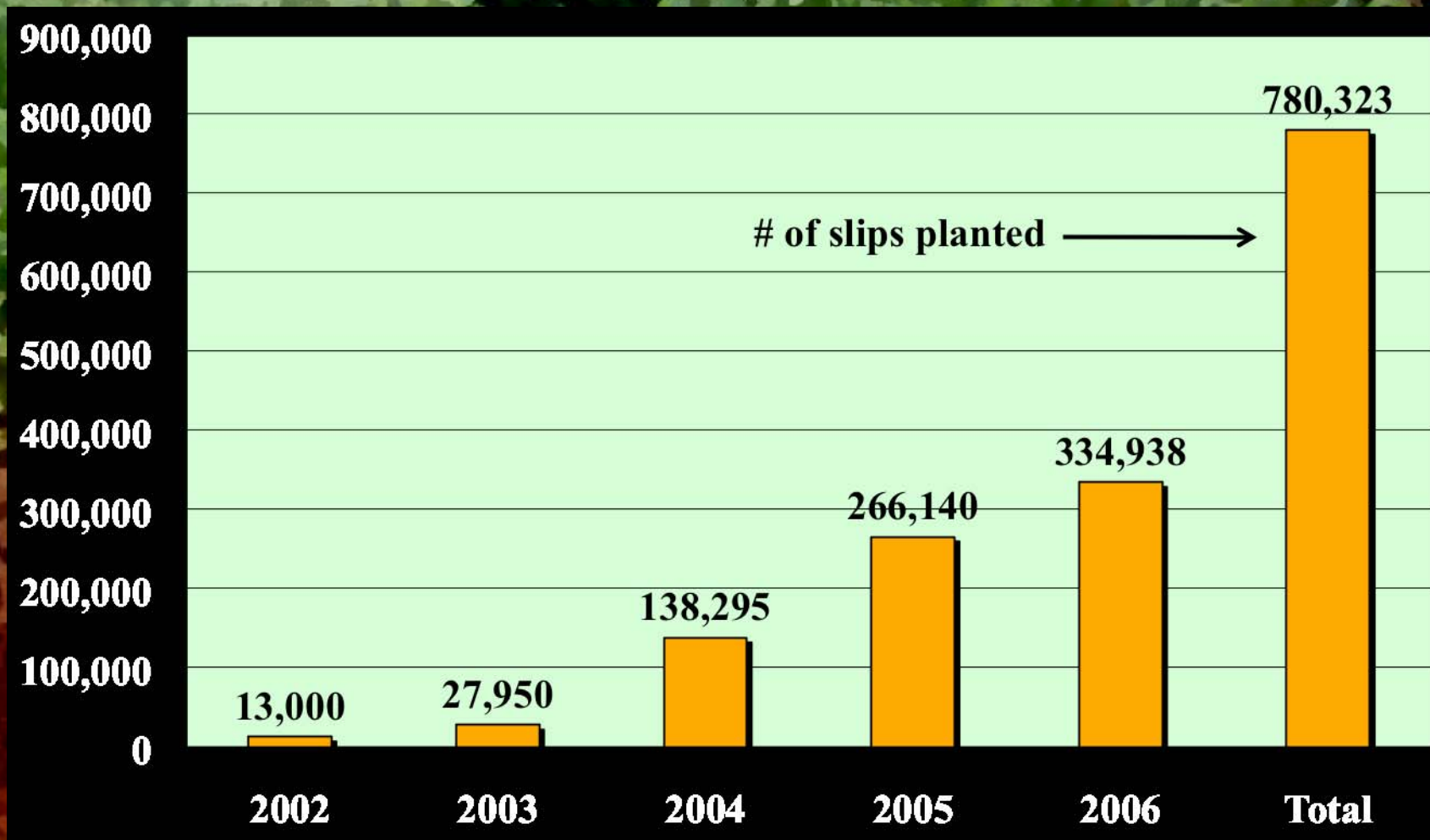
## Direct and indirect employment generated during 2001-2006



## Number of expositions held during the period 2001-2006



## Number of slips planted during 2001-2006



## Conclusions

**It is definitely possible to directly contribute to the improvement of poor rural communities economically, socially, environmentally and culturally**



## Conclusions

- Economic improvement occurs in the relative short to medium term
- Solves issues dealing with unsustainable use of natural fibers
- Forms a part of environmental protection programs
- Can help to improve water quality at the community level

*“The use of vetiver fiber as a raw material for handicraft production in poor communities, not only generates additional income - often the only income - it links the communities in shared activities ... This contrasts with traditional approaches in which farmers are encouraged to plant vetiver and not serve as an environmental project to earn money through the production of handicrafts.”*

Dr. Narong Chomchalow (2004)

Thank you