

# VETIVER HANDICRAFT PRODUCTION: AN INNOVATIVE FOCUS ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN RURAL VENEZUELA

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## ABSTRACT

The Vetiver “Fundacion Empresas Polar” Project (VFEPP) has been conducted in an wide and diverse geographic zones, having trained approximately 11.000 people.

Five years ago, (VFEPP) started the Vetiver Project with the following general objectives: (i) to alleviate social disparities, (ii) to promote the making of vetiver handicraft as an initial step in the execution of an integral, economic ecological and social development project. (iii) to develop markets for vetiver handicraft in Venezuela. (iv) to increase participation of the poor population. (v) to stimulate the fight against the destruction of the natural resources and (vi) to enhance the spiritual and moral value through appropriate dynamics.

The innovative approach of the PVFEP is aimed at raising interest in vetiver handicraft in participants: women, young people, children and later, to the whole family. The activities begin through the conference *Why vetiver? An economic, ecological and social project*. Shortly after that the training of the vetiver handicraft begins and connecting the participants to the market, setting basic principles for quality; which occurs very quickly (in some cases in a month). It provides extra income to the families, the community develops a great interest in the Project, the reason why the planting of vetiver with the intention of producing fiber is promoted, on sites close to the houses where erosion, and contaminated waters are the common ecological problems. The social aspect is focused on the principle of motivating the self-esteem, the community participation, the respect to their political, religious and cultural values. Music is a very important companion through sharing songs, directed readings and games, whose contents have been analyzed previously by professionals in the educational area. The groups consolidate through the local leaders and the position of the local coordinator is selected within the participants, by their personal conditions and disposition towards the handicrafts.

The participation of the PVFEP in each locality has a minimum of three years, and a maximum of five years, until the participants have been consolidated through businesses, companies, association or cooperatives. This methodology of work has been transferred to other government and private institutions, through strategic associations with the intention of promoting the use of vetiver in Venezuela. The development of the VFEPP is sustained by academic activities, supported too by national universities, and Research and Development projects.

