

## THE CAMEROON EXPERIENCE IN PUTTING TOGETHER A COUNTRYWIDE VETIVER PROGRAM

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### Introduction

I brought vetiver to Cameroon in early 1990 but the plants were destroyed in the same year by a person who unknowingly removed them. I however managed to get some again from Izuka University, Nigeria, and planted it in November 1990. That was only a small hedge of about ten slips. By June 1991, I planted almost fifty slips at the Mbingo Baptist Hospital where I was working. In March 1992 I multiplied the slips, which were then in their thousands. In view of this great amount, I shared a few with some hospital workers. In 1993, when I was about to change my station of work to Maroua, which is about 1700 km away from Bamenda, I decided to share the grass with the villagers. But it was not easy for the villagers to accept vetiver grass because it resembled some grass we have in the area.

### How Then did I Convince People to Accept?

Something came to my mind when I read that vetiver grass helps to keep snakes away. I decided to sensitize the villagers to the fact that if they plant vetiver in their backyards they would be free from snakes in their homes.

In this case, the first few people who came to collect vetiver did not wait again for me to ask them to bring more people for vetiver but they started preaching the message from one person to another and the message soon spread like wild fire as more people came for vetiver, just taking it to be safe from snakes. Therefore you see here I used the fear of snakes to achieve my goal. From this time, 1993-1996, many people planted vetiver solely as protection of their homes from snakes. Before leaving for Maroua, I handed over the promotion of vetiver to Mr. Ndong Joseph, who continued with the work in the Kom-Bamenda area. I carried some along with me to Maroua.

In 1994 in Maroua there was a flood that covered a whole village. Before then I had discovered that there was a small quantity of vetiver in the area, though people did not know of its use except for land boundaries. At that time I seized on this opportunity to introduce vetiver as a plant that can prevent floods in disaster areas. I tried hard to convince the villagers that vetiver could stop the nightmare of this flood but the people hardly believed me. I went on and planted vetiver on the banks of the flooded river in 1994. By 1996 the hedges of the vetiver were well established and the floods did not occur any longer. Seeing this, the *lamidou* (village head) of the area then forced all the villages to plant vetiver as they returned back to the village. The people then nicknamed me their “second God”. At that juncture, I used the opportunity to expand and create awareness of the importance of vetiver.

In February 1997, the first vetiver workshop was organized at Mbingo-Kom, which brought people from all over the province. This was to expand the uses of vetiver to the people of Cameroon. During that workshop, all details of the uses of vetiver to the farmers were exposed. This time, people started moving their vetiver grass from their backyards to the farms. With this we have had very positive results from the farms. The extension of vetiver on farms has greatly increased and we are facing the problem of vetiver shortage despite my efforts to establish many vetiver nurseries.

Another opportunity came when there was a constant landslide at a roadside under construction at Mbingo. Mr. Alemu Mekonnen, a resource person to the February 1997 workshop at Mbingo, after careful examination, said to me, “Simon, this is where you can make your name”. He advised that I should ask the road engineers to level up the place and I plant vetiver. I did exactly this and the results

today is speaking for itself. People who knew of this area of the road of about 50 m which after construction collapsed three times are now witnesses that vetiver can do great things.

Other areas I have used to promote the expansion of vetiver have been in using vetiver roots for storing grains, vetiver for erosion control, as manure and for roofing of houses and beehives, for fire tracing and as medicinal plant.

To sum up, we have been able to bring together 29 NGOs from the North West, Western and South West provinces of Cameroon and we now have a network of these NGOs who are concerned with environmental protection and are introducing VGT. Also the Cameroon Vetiver Network has been formed. Indigenous farmer innovators have also come up with a network.

With the help of an international NGO known as the Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation, we have come up with four experimental plots of vetiver, and the objectives are:

- to see how vetiver can control erosion;
- to see how vetiver can increase soil nutrient; and
- to see how vetiver grass can be used as manure.

I have introduced vetiver to: (i) a government research centre in Bambili-North West province, (ii) researchers in three universities in Cameroon and (iii) the regional college of agriculture.

Therefore, with these methods, VGT is spreading countrywide and we are working hard to get the government fully involved in the implementation of VGT. In all, I am expecting the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the Ministry of Animal Husbandry and the Ministry of Public Works to be involved in promoting this cheap but effective VGT in all its capacity.

With the above, I humbly end my paper here, hoping that all those who will read it will benefit from my methods of vetiver promotion.