

## **Vetiver Highlights –The Fourth International Conference on Vetiver (ICV4)**

In October 2006 ICV4 was hosted by Fundacion Polar in Caracas, Venezuela. The conference was graced with the presence of the Vetiver Network's Patron, H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand. It was indeed a memorable conference, well attended and organized, and with more than 100 papers and presentations made.

The conference theme was "Vetiver and People", a theme truly demonstrated by the Venezuelans. Venezuela started working with Vetiver Systems (VS) some 10 years ago by approaching its introduction through community development as a handicraft for the rural poor. The impact is impressive and over 11,000 poor people have benefited from vetiver handicraft income. Many of these people have completely changed their lives and have a new sense of self-esteem. Soon some of the handicraft workers, mainly women and children, started using vetiver for on farm soil and water conservation with a result, for these families, that slash and burn agriculture is now a thing of the past. Fundacion Polar has nicely encapsulated the approach through a short documentary DVD "Una matica sagrada" (with English subtitles) that describes, in the words of the mother, how the life of her family has been changed forever with the introduction of the Vetiver System (contact for copies and other information: Graciela Pantin, General manager of Fundacion Polar, email: [graciela.pantin@gmail.com](mailto:graciela.pantin@gmail.com)).

The East Bali Poverty Alleviation Project has also demonstrated vetiver's impact on improving nutrition, health and incomes. Just as has NOBS (El Salvador), Royal Development Project Board Thailand, PTT Thailand, China Vetiver Network, and others, have shown the importance of the community approach.

The presentations provided a good picture of how the Vetiver System is advancing. Soil and water conservation programs using vetiver are expanding across the regions and research and practice shows the impact on improved crop yields, income, and sustainable farming systems. It is quite clear that VS will significantly cut down or eradicate slash and burn agriculture, particularly if associated with other cultural practices. Thailand's Land Development Department has amply demonstrated vetiver's use for land stabilization, and was justly awarded one of this year's King of Thailand prizes. Land reclamation – particularly in the mining sector – benefits greatly from VS – some great work by Venezuela's Vetiver Antierosion CA (Rafael and Oswaldo Luque) amply demonstrated this in the reclamation of bauxite mine tailings. The expansion of VS application for highway, building site, and other structural stabilization underscores its effectiveness and low cost.

Climate change impacts on the severity of the weather. We see severe weather conditions in more frequent and stronger tropical storms. VS for disaster mitigation is clearly demonstrated by the excellent work of our new Vetiver Champion – Tran Tan Van – Vetiver Coordinator for Vietnam Vetiver Network. Through his and his colleagues efforts VS is now being used in more than 40 provinces in Vietnam for the protection of river levees and sea dykes against major storm damage. Landslides that

impact on highways and villages are also a bi-product of severe rainfall events. Vetiver could do much to mitigate against the potential damage. Tran's team is also about to publish the "Vetiver brown book" A manual for engineers. It will be published first in Vietnamese and then in English.

VS is now a very serious technology for water quality improvement, effluent and wastewater treatment, and the associated health and environmental benefits. VS programs in Australia, China, Vietnam, and Venezuela demonstrate its effectiveness.

Basic research continues in various important areas of VS including investigations into propagation methods, varietal differences and ecotype selection, and mechanisms in plant function. Some very interesting work is being carried out in China by Bingbing Yang, - a Vetiver Network Award recipient - at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' South China Institute of Botany into developing cold tolerant varieties of vetiver in order to extend vetiver's application to hot summer/cold winter climate locations – such as north China, the high Andes, and North America.

We believe that the conference will greatly influence and expand the use of Vetiver Systems in Latin America. The next conference ICV5 is planned for South Africa in 2010. All this adds up to an exciting time for Vetiver Systems and for the many people around the world involved with the technology. Details of the ICV4 papers and power point presentations can be found at: <http://www.vetiver.org/ICV4pdfs/ICV4-PROGRAM.IN.htm>

One last word - the Vetiver Network has established a very large Vetiver picture gallery on Google at: <http://picasaweb.google.com/VetiverNetwork>

We would like to invite WASWC members who work with vetiver to establish their own vetiver picture gallery (it costs nothing - <http://picasaweb.google.com> ) and link them to TVN's. This would give people the opportunity to show what they are doing and share with others this great technology. TVN will award annually, for the next three years, a US\$ 500 prize to the best (quality and content) vetiver picture gallery. This should be a great way of showing the world what vetiver is all about and what it can do to improve people's lives and the environment at this difficult time when we are facing severe climate change and other disruptions. *A picture is worth a thousand words.*

***Dick Grimshaw, Bellingham, November 23, 2006***