

IITA marks the International Year of Biodiversity with future leaders

IITA marked this year's International Year of Biodiversity with a series of educational activities that brought together over 350 children from primary and secondary schools in Tanzania and Nigeria.

The events were organized to create awareness about the importance of biodiversity, and to promote the importance of conservation among the youths.

Western and Central Africa Hub

In Ibadan, Biodiversity Week was organized by the Genetic Resources Center (GRC) with visits to the IITA forest, the genebank, tissue culture lab, and screenhouses.

Five participating schools from the secondary level were invited to IITA headquarters in Ibadan. A quiz contest tagged: "The Biodiversity Battle of the Brains," and a tree planting exercise marked the climax of the celebration.

Dominique Dumet, Head of GRC, said the activity targeted the younger generation as participants because they were leaders of tomorrow.

"We want them to realize that biodiversity comes from somewhere, we are using it, and it is very valuable and we don't want to lose it," she said.

Consultant Adeniyi Jayeola of the University of Ibadan said the world was losing biodiversity at a rate faster than imagined. While it might be difficult



Biodiversity Week culminated in the first-ever Biodiversity Battle of the Brains, a quiz contest.

to attach a dollar figure to the loss, he admitted that the loss was colossal.

He said the initiative to involve the school

children was a step in the right direction that would promote sustainability of conservation efforts.

Eastern and Southern Africa Hub

In Dar es Salaam, the celebration started last month with the launch of an art contest that involved more than 25 primary-level schools. The activity was followed by an outreach program in seven selected schools where the organizers gave talks on biodiversity.

The highlight of the activities was the award of prizes to winners and the launch of the month-long exhibition on the children's

art competition entitled 'Biodiversity is our life, use it well' on Saturday 22 May, which was the International Day of Biodiversity.

The activity attracted policy makers including the Minister in the office of the vice president in charge of environment, Batilda Burian.

Burian was the guest of honor at the event. In her speech, she commended IITA and all its partners for efforts towards conservation,

stressing that "Our lives depend on this biological diversity." According to her, in Tanzania as in many other countries all over the world, biodiversity has been decreasing at an alarming rate due to our day-to-day activities.

"Many plants and animals are now on the verge of extinction or their populations are extremely low and are endangered," she said. "Conserving this rich biological diversity is everyone's duty."

She urged all government institutions, companies and non-governmental organizations to join forces in conserving the country's biodiversity.

The event, which was held at the museum and house of culture had the following partners: The World Agroforestry Centre, National Museum of Tanzania, Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania, and Tanzania Biodiversity Information Facility (TanBIF).

Also present at the event were Edward Kanju, IITA Scientist, and Claude Poulet, the Head of Cooperation of the Embassy of France in Tanzania that contributed financially towards the event. IITA and partners also distributed materials on biodiversity as well as trees to the schools.



Burian making a speech during the IYOB celebration in Dar

Schools win prizes, plant trees

Participating schools in the quiz competition—Biodiversity Battle of the Brains held in Nigeria and the art contest held in Tanzania—carted home fantastic prizes.

In the WCA hub, the Wesley Secondary School in Ibadan emerged the winner of the competition, besting Oladipo Alayande School of Science and Community Grammar School.

Questions in the quiz competition focused primarily on biodiversity and conservation with forest and genebank experiences playing a significant role.

Wesley Secondary School—the winner of the competition—got a microscope while the other schools got a biology book as a prize. Participating schools were also awarded certificates.

Other schools that participated in the competition were School of Science, Pade; and St Anne's Senior School.

In Dar, winners got cleaning equipment as prizes.

To underscore the need to regenerate and stem the loss in biodiversity, a tree planting session was held during the course of celebration. In the long term, there is a plan to organize Biodiversity Clubs in the schools and also conduct tree planting activities in the school



Jayeola of the University of Ibadan and a representative of the winning school planted *Pterocarpus osun* in a ceremony that marked International Year of Biodiversity.

Future leaders and teachers comment on IYOB



Teacher Hamzat, Saint Anne's

The visit to the forest is encouraging. It has affected the students positively. They now have better understanding towards conservation.



Ezekiel Lucas, Kilimahewa Primary School

Through biodiversity we get foreign exchange. We can conserve our biodiversity by taking care of our environment.



Teacher Aderonke Ilelaboye, Alayande School

We commend IITA for organizing the event because the knowledge from this exposure will help students and prevent species from extinction.



Abati, Alayande School

IITA has shown us endangered species and the need to conserve them.



Aishat, Saint Anne's

In my lifetime, I have never seen something like this before. It's educative and good.



Wesley wins star prize

Dumet (middle) hands over a microscope to a representative of Wesley School of Science



Abubakar Msuya, 14 years, Kilimahewa Primary School

Today is the International Day of Biodiversity. Biodiversity means all living creatures and they all depend on each other for their survival.



Teacher Oguntunde Eyitayo, School of Science, Pade

This is a wonderful experience. I read botany/zoology but I never had the opportunity to walk round a natural forest like this. Governments across the world need to encourage these kinds of projects.



Teacher Tekla Kasenge, Kisutu Primary School

The children were very enthusiastic and happy to participate. Through the drawing exercise, they were able to understand biodiversity and how to take care of it.