

CONSERVING TROPICAL RAINFOREST WITHIN THE D.R. CONGO, A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT WITH SCHOOL GROUPS

REPORT FROM SCHOOL VISITS WITHIN THE NORTH-RHINE- WESTPHALIA REGION IN GERMANY From November 8th to 16th, 2005

BACKGROUND

Since 2001, Dialog International is running environmental projects with local communities in the Kivu region dealing with conserving rainforest through promoting solar energy and reforestation programmes.

This is one way for participating to the prevention of the global climate changes with a regard to Kyoto protocole.

The visit of school by existing people living in tropics and working within the rainforest is an objective way to invite european community especially the German youth to better understanding why we all need to protect the rainforest which is still existing in Democratic Republic of Congo, one of the most politically disturbed countries of the World.

The visit of schools by Mr. Innocent Balagizi from the Research Centre of Natural Sciences was made possible by the collaboration of DIALOG INTERNATIONAL with DR.Congo and was planned from November 8 to November 16.

OBJECTIVES

The visit in schools was focused on following objectives :

- To increase the better understanding of the rainforest among German student with its ecological importance as well as the major constraints for conserving its habitats and natural resources within the Democratic republic of Congo,
- to increase awareness in German youth for taking active part in preventing climate changes due to human pressures on the remaining rainforest, as well as it is done in Africa, and
- to define sound strategies and measures for conserving the rainforest with the participation of the youth from North and South.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the achievement of the objectives, we have prepared a general situation about the rainforest forest in the Democratic republic of Congo including the distribution of the rainforest, its biological richness as well as the major threats on natural resources and local effort to overcome.

The schedule of school visit has been kindly prepared with the collaboration of DIALOG INTERNATIONAL – Dusseldorf, involving students from 13 to 24 years old.

Maps, slides shows on powerpoint presentation or transparencies on overhead projection have been used during the visit. (Appendix 1)

During the course, discussions were focused on a better understanding of socio-economic aspects of people within the rainforest, and the major threats of the rainforest resources, towards a better conservation of this biome which is still supporting climate stability, and migrating birds of Europe and Africa.

How to survive in the rain forest? How developed countries as well as developing ones contribute and co-operate for the destruction of the rain forest; and how to contribute to its protection? This was the roots of debates during visits.

Translation from French to German or from English to German was made possible when needed by teachers from respective schools, and once Joel Nzengiyaremye of Dialog International helped to translate from French to German.

Table 1. Presentation of meeting schedule and schools

Date	Place	Schools	Students	Tutor
8.11.05	Düsseldorf	Luisengymnasium	14 – 16 years old	Frau Nicola Theis
	Düsseldorf	Ceciliengymnasium	11 – 14 years old	Frau Marianne Klaissle
9.11.05	Gummersbach-Derschlag,	Städt. Gesamtschule	12 – 16 years old	Herr Herring
	Köln	Liebfrauenschule	12 – 18 years old	Herr Wolfgang Weber
10.11.05	Münster,	Pascal-Gymnasium	17 – 22 years old	Herr Thomas Plettendorf
	Borken	Montessori-Gesamtschule	12 -16 years old	Herr Peter Wittmann
11.11.05	Neuss	Mildred-Scheel-Realschule	12 – 17 years old	Frau Karin Schickhaus
	Düsseldorf	Ceciliengymnasium	17 – 22 years old	Frau Marianne Klaissle
12.11.05	Bonn	<i>Collegium Josefinum</i>	17 -20 years old	Herr Georg Vollmer
14. 11.05	Lippstadt	Ostendorf-Gymnasium	14 – 20 years old	Herr Gottfried Tepper
	Hagen	Theodor-Heuss-Gymnasium	14 -17 years old	Herr Henning
15.11. 05	Moers	Realschule Moers	13 – 16 years old	Herr Brinkmann
		Mercator-Berufskolleg	18 – 24 years old	Frau Halfmann/Herr Schneider
16.11.05	Wuppertal	Berufskolleg - Elberfeld	19 – 24 years old	
		Städt. Gymnasium Bayreuther Strasse	18 -22 years old	Frau Isolde Müller

The present map shows locations of the 16 Schools which we visited for a speech on the rainforest.

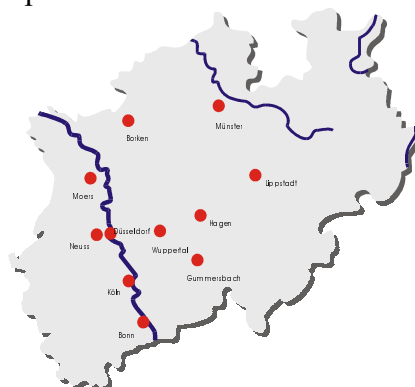


Fig 1. North-Rhine Westphalia state of Germany. Sites location of visited schools towns during the period between November 8 to November 16, 2005

RESULTS

The course was attended by about 480 students of the age between 12 and 24 years, assisted by about 27 teachers with much interest in Environmental management.
We present here some matters we discussed after slide showing:

What do you need when going to the rainforest :

- Umbrella and waterproof clothes (ex. raincoat)
- Plastic boots
- Map, GPS, Compass
- machetts, Matches for fire
- Mosquito / Insect nets
- Water cleaners
- Solar lamp
- Preventive medicines for tropical diseases
- Guides from the local community
- Field guides books or brochures (talking about frequent plants and animals to find) (if available)
- Tent and/or sleeping bag
- Satellite phone (but it is very expensive!)

How developed and developing countries work for destroying the rainforest

Purposes	What action which is done		Consequences
	Developed countries responsibility	Congolese people responsibility	
Production of Paper	Financing logging	Selective Logging	Tree cutting inducing habitat changes and highly loss of biodiversity, and soil erosion
Production of medicines	Financing logging	Selective Logging	Tree cutting inducing habitat changes and highly loss of biodiversity as well as soil erosion
Business of timber and hard wood for construction and furnitures	Financing logging	Selective Logging	Tree cutting inducing habitat changes and highly loss of biodiversity, as well as soil erosion
Production of mobile phones, and other electronic devices	Financing coltan mining and other hard rocks	Mining coltan, gold, diamond, copper,...	People are attracted by money to concentrate in specific forest areas, inducing changes of habitat, sex abuse (HIV-AIDS!), soil erosion as well as armed social conflicts
Wildlife business, Bush meat	Financing	Hunting , trapping	Loss of biodiversity, occurrence of orphans within Apes and Monkeys groups, inducing forest dynamics disturbance, and habitat changes
Production of Charcoal and Fire wood		Non-selective Logging	Tree cutting inducing habitat changes and highly loss of biodiversity and soil erosion
Expansion of agriculture		Bushfire, cutting trees	Loss of forest areas, CO ₂ increase
			Climate changes with all their consequences in coming future

General observations:

1. The contributions of the two categories are significantly high to induce the climate changes in the coming future if any effort is done.
2. To prevent the climate changes is not easy (according to economic interests from abroad) but it is urgent (according to the *Kyoto protocole*, and the *Convention of Biological Diversity*)
3. The Youth has no reason to close eyes when their environmental future is endangered.

Suggestions from German schools:

1. Develop public awareness for conserving rainforest: using posters, media, meetings,
2. Join working groups for conserving rainforest, e.g, Greenpeace, Dialog International,..
3. Create nature clubs in Germany to collaborate with school groups in the Congo
4. Forbid the business around tropical timber products
5. Increase recycling paper efforts and if possible for further more products from the forest
6. Negotiate with the government and international firms to reduce pressures on rainforests
7. Buy products like coffee, tea,.. only from tropical factories which give a reasonable salary to employees
8. Support local community living within the forest through economic activities to alleviate the rate of poverty leading to loss of natural resources
9. Contribute and Participate to reforestation campaigns undertaken in the Congo

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the discussions developed in schools following recommendations it appears that there is a urgent need that European and African youths need to stay together on one chair asking each other about their future if the climate changes because of actual human behaviour vis-à-vis of the rain forest:

Therefore:

- Develop partnerships between German and Congolese schools around the protection of the rainforest in the way of the better understanding of the *Kyoto protocole*
 - Develop collaborative projects that involve schools and educators focusing on conserving the rainforest underlined topics: field work training (biological inventories, international exchanges) – education (developing small scale museums, collections), conservation (reforestation, forest seedbanks, developing teaching materials)
 - Increase the partnership between German schools and Dialog International – Germany in the way of developing a sustainable collaboration with Congolese schools around environmental and conservation programs.
 - Encourage German and Congolese youth to co-operate and work together regarding the *Convention of Biological Diversity* and for a sustainable development towards ONE WORLD.
 - Encourage in Congo the creation of integrated “Environmental schools” likely in Germany.
 - Encourage German schools in Germany to define curriculum in environmental conservation programs to share with African schools
 - Encourage German citizens to learn foreign languages for a sustainable co-operation, and mostly to integrate English, French in educational curriculum.
- And think about “if you do not change with changes changes will change you!”

CONCLUSION

The visit to Germany was a good opportunity to meet schools and find their interests in environment management.

We are very thankful to all the 15 schools and 18 classes visited for all the arrangements and the kindly warm welcome we found in teachers and schools administrators as well as in students.

We are indebted to Heinz Rothenpieler of Dialog International-Dusseldorf who is totally minded to work for conserving the rain forest and genially organized the school contacts and visit plan.