

## World Environmental Day in Burundi

by *Cécile Gakima*

In Burundi, celebration of World Environmental Day has become a habit. This year, many activities were organised under the theme suggested by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP): “The Earth is our future : save it !”

Many activities were organised for the event, including:

A cultural evening organised in Gitega by local Environment Clubs; the aim of this event was to raise awareness among schoolchildren, teachers and civil servants in Gitega

A clean-up campaign organised by a women’s association from the Kinama zone of Bujumbura called “Women and Environment”

A symposium on the Environment to popularise the National Strategy for Burundi. All officials of the Ministry for Land Planning and Environment as well as other partners took part in the symposium

A day for raising awareness among the local population and administration.

In this issue, I will discuss the latter activity which was organised by the Lake Tanganyika Biodiversity Project, under the patronage of the Minister for Land Planning and Environment.



A dance troop from the Muhuta Commune, Burundi, performs for the World Environment Day celebrations.

The aim of the day was to raise awareness among decision makers, local administrators and the population on threats facing biodiversity in Lake Tanganyika. This was also the occasion to officially launch environmental education activities that will be carried out, in collaboration with partners, along the lakeshore within the Lake Tanganyika Biodiversity Project.

Ceremonies begun with a tour of Lake Tanganyika aboard the *R/V Tanganyika Explorer*. From this vantage point, participants observed for themselves the state of deforestation in the catchment. This tour also demonstrated to the local population that Lake Tanganyika can be used for tourism purposes.



Local Gitaza fisherman (left) receive awards for winning the boat race from members of the Ministry of Land Planning and Environment, including M. Gabriel Hakizimana (PSS Co-ordinator for Burundi), His Excellency the Minister, and Jean-Berchmans Manirakiza (National Co-ordinator for Burundi).

Upon their arrival, guests were welcomed by a large crowd and many cultural groups (farmers, schoolchildren, secondary school students, etc.). The cultural groups were supervised by project staff and local administration, exploiting the theme of the day. Sketches, skits and songs presented by different cultural groups were carrying messages about protecting biodiversity in Lake Tanganyika. The messages were addressed to the local population, to the administration and to political decision makers. In order to encourage fishermen (an important target group in environmental education matters) to widely participate, the project also organised a boating competition on Lake Tanganyika. This was also meant to demonstrate to the population that the lake can be used for recreation. Prizes were distributed to the best boatmen.

In his welcome address, the administrator of Muhuta Commune, Province of Bujumbura Rural, expressed his thanks to the Ministry for Land Planning in general as well as the Lake Tanganyika Biodiversity Project and the National Institute for the Environment and Conservation of Nature (INECN) in particular, for having celebrated World Environment Day in his commune. He also asked for many education sessions for the local population on environmental themes in general and on topics regarding the protection of Lake Tanganyika in particular, as most of the population living in Muhuta Commune make their living from the exploitation of the lake’s resources.

In his speech, the Minister for Land Planning and Environment first clarified the intended objective in organising the celebration under the theme “The Earth is our future: save it!” He then described the major threats facing biodiversity in Lake Tanganyika. He also explained to the population how they can contribute to the protection of Lake Tanganyika in using appropriate mesh sizes, controlling erosion in the hills surrounding the lake and in controlling all forms of pollution. He ended his speech by inviting everyone to become active in the protection of the lake for sustainable use.

Groups of dancers, drummers and schoolchildren from the commune continued to perform songs, dances and skits with environmental messages for the guests throughout the morning.

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