

FINAL REPORT OF THE CHILDREN FOR NATURE PROGRAM (CFNP)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

“If you plan for a year, sow seeds.
If you plan for ten years, plant trees.
If you plan for hundred years, educate people.”

Nigeria is blessed with many natural resources, most of which go unnoticed, are under appreciated, understudied or over-exploited. Most Nigerians do not understand why they should spend time appreciating and preserving nature. Since most adults show such great ignorance and disinterest in nature and conservation, the average Nigerian child grows up with little or no interest in Nature, an attitude that is carried into adulthood. Children are future leaders and as the Bible admonishes parents to, ‘train up a children in the way they should go, and when they are grown, they will not depart from it’, this project is aimed at changing the attitudes of children by teaching them about our natural environment and the importance of conserving it. With an eye for the beauty in nature and a great interest in the natural environment by the younger generation, future Nigerians will be able to adequately study and conserve our natural heritage with great zeal, passion, knowledge and understanding of the way nature works. Ultimately, we will have future leaders who will advocate for nature. The target groups for the project are children between the ages of 6 to 12 years old and it is intended that through the education of this group, every Nigerian will eventually become an active participant in this struggle to protect our natural environment.

In science individuals are challenged to think globally but act locally. This is such an approach. This project currently covers two local government areas in plateau state, north-central Nigeria. The project is carried out in Jos-north the capital of Plateau state and Jos-east local government area. It is the first ever conservation education programme in the state, and the it is the first time that primary schools are having nature conservation clubs in their schools. There are a total of eight conservation clubs in the local government areas.

The programme is aimed at breaking the cycle of ignorance and disinterest in the natural environment and equipping children with conservation knowledge and practical skills in conserving biodiversity, with the ultimate goal of influencing all and sundry in the state and the nation on the importance of conservation of biodiversity.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

1. To educate children on their natural environment with special emphasis on biodiversity, thereby awakening a healthy interest in them about nature.
2. Equip teachers and schools with adequate tools and information on the teaching of biodiversity conservation by establishing a nature books library.
3. To strengthen partnership between school nature conservation clubs and the children for nature programme.

4. Advocate for biodiversity conservation using every available avenue such as the print media and local television and radio houses.

3.0 METHODS

We set about meeting our goals and objectives by using the following methods:

1. Nature library books project.
2. Teacher-training workshop.
3. Nature excursion to the Jos wildlife park.
4. Nature conservation media campaign and award presentation event.

3.1 NATURE LIBRARY BOOKS PROJECT

This phase of the project was started in December 2007 and is an on-going project. We want to address the issue of lack of educational resources for the proper teaching of nature conservation, and for reference purposes /for research by the clubs. We also want the nature clubs to have a library where they can always come to gain more knowledge about nature and the world's biodiversity. It is also to enable nature club teachers improve their knowledge on biodiversity and nature conservation. This activity involved going round all the local stores, and second hand book sales in search of nature materials. It also involved an online purchase of the most recent book by Mira Tweti titled 'Here, There and Everywhere'.

Few nature books which deal exclusively with natural plants and animals were found in the local bookstores, and these were mostly from religious angles. None of these books was written on Nigerian biodiversity, and most of the nature books were mostly for those within the ages of 3-4 for western kids.

3.1.1 IMPACT OF THE LIBRARY PROJECT

1. From our findings during this phase, we have decided to set up a special 'nature materials project'. The idea is to encourage individuals and groups both local and international to donate old nature books, or any material which they can help with in teaching and training the pupils.
2. Previous complaints from teachers of lack of training materials have been reduced. Now they have materials to use, as we keep growing the library.

3.2 TEACHER-TRAINING WORKSHOP

In February 14th 2008, we organized a teacher-training workshop for teachers from all participating schools. There were a total of sixteen teachers, two from the eight schools. The aim of the workshop was to create an avenue for deliberations with the schools on the way(s) to achieve greater success with the programme, and most importantly, to educate the teachers on nature conservation and their roles as teachers and partners with

us in the project. This became necessary because we had from previous activities seen a need for such a programme if the teachers were to be effective in handling the clubs in their respective schools. The concept of nature studies and conservation was and is still new to the teachers and pupils and so the workshop was meant to be an avenue where we could answer their questions, hear their challenges and their suggestions as well.

Various power-point presentations were made during the workshop on different topics such as what biodiversity conservation means, global conservation issues, the Nigerian environment and conservation issues, the role of teachers in conservation and how to carry out outdoor nature studies. Resource persons were drawn from APLORI and were made up of PhD students, research associates and research fellows.

At the end of the workshop, the participants expressed satisfaction with the workshop and gave very useful and practical suggestions towards the success of the programme. They also encouraged more of such meetings as a means of dialogue and assessment of our progress as partners.

3.2.1 IMPACT OF THE WORKSHOP

1. One of the main objectives of the workshop was to get the schools to understand the ownership together with us of the programme. And at the end of the workshop, they expressed their delight in having understood their position and roles in the project and made commitments towards ensuring the sustainability of the programme in their respective schools.
2. Teachers in government schools were faced with the problem of transfers from one school to the other and were concerned about the implication for the programme. Although we also saw this as a form of setback, we however think that it is a good means of spreading the programme to other schools. Teachers who have been involved with the programme can start up nature conservation clubs and projects wherever they find themselves. They were also encouraged to always mentor others who would take over from them in case of such transfers.
3. School head teachers were observed to be hindering the smooth running of the project due to a proper understanding of the importance and objectives of the programme. They felt that their school head teachers viewed the programme as an 'outside' programme owned by us, and that we only come to set up projects which we have the responsibility of maintaining. They therefore faced resistance when they wanted to initiate projects. They suggested we hold such a workshop for their school head teachers and enlighten them. Among the participants, one head teacher is a member of his school nature club who has been with us from inception. We observe that his school performs better and is in fact the school that won the 2008 outstanding nature club award.

3.3 NATURE KIDS' CLUB OUTING TO THE JOS WILDLIFE PARK.

As part of the practical sessions with both teachers and nature conservation club members (called nature Kids), we went on an excursion to the Jos wildlife park on the 21st of June,

2008. The purpose of the outing was to enable teachers and their pupils experience the aesthetic side of nature while also learning new things. During the exercise, we hoped to help pupils become very observant of biodiversity around them, so we carried out various fun activities with the goal in mind. We encouraged the sightings of various insects, pointed out plants and emphasized relationships in nature such as pollinators and flowers, predation avoidance strategies of various plants and animals we observed and pointed out conservation issues such as animals in captivity, cruelty to animals etc.

We also had a reading session where various group readings and discussions were conducted. All literature was nature based. The aim was to arouse an interest in the reading and studying of natural sciences from an early age. There was also time for animal identification quiz, where rewards were given for correct identification of various animals. The kids also had time to play at the recreation centre.

3.3.1 IMPACT OF THE OUTING

1. At the end of the outing, the children were given writing materials and colored pencils and asked to express their feelings concerning the day's events and write down what they learnt. This was a form of assessment of the impact the activity had on them. Most of the children drew pictures of new animals they had seen, relationships in nature they observed, and one kid wrote 'I learnt that animals will not harm me unless I make them feel threatened'.

2. New friends were made. For some of the children who came from the villages, this was a first experience for them, going to a park, sitting with 'city kids' all on the same level. We watched with interest as they gradually released themselves and joined in the fun. It was really touching to see how a seemingly small thing as taking a child out to nature with others could help make the child have a greater feeling of satisfaction and self-worth. This was not part of our objectives but we did learn something of value from this.

3. Teachers learnt how easy nature studies can be done while having fun outdoors both as parents and teachers. Most of them promised to repeat the event with their families and class.

In conclusion, the children kept asking that this becomes an annual event, a part of our activities.

3.4 END OF YEAR NATURE CLUBS CONSERVATION EVENT.

To round up the year's event, all participating school clubs met at the national museum of traditional and natural arts auditorium for an end of year event and awards presentation. The event took place on the 26th of February 2009. It replaced our initial plan to hold an awareness rally in the city of Jos in December 2008. The plan was interrupted by the civil unrest that ensued in the state on the 1st of December 2008. Due to the crisis, all such rallying was cancelled officially.

The aim of the event was to assess the level of understanding of conservation and the impact of our activities for the year in each school. Various presentations such as plays,

poems, talk shows, exhibitions were made by the children while different stakeholders in the community attended as resource persons, making various presentations to add to the children's knowledge. Among them were the manager of the Jos wildlife park gave the children a presentation on the importance of nature conservation, the curator of the National museum was also represented and offered us an opportunity for partnership in our future events. Because we still wanted to carry out our campaign, we invited all the three media houses in the state capital and had our programme publicized by them on both the television and radio houses, we were also featured on a 20 minutes talk show on radio where our activities, aims and objectives were discussed at length. The day's event was also broadcasted on the local evening news of the two local television houses, and one print media house carried the story.

As part of the end of year event, we also held an award ceremony for the schools. This was a way of motivating each school to do more and to also acknowledge schools that had been outstanding in the year.

The star award was given to one of the schools for having initiated and embarked on a nature trip and for writing an article in their school magazine on the activities of the children conservation programme. It was also an avenue for them to officially inform their parent-teacher association of the formation of a nature conservation club in their school.

3.4.1 IMPACT OF THE CAMPAIGN AND AWARD PROGRAM

1. The greatest impact this event had was an addition in the number of individuals who showed interest in partnering with us. As a result of the radio talk show, many more people got to know about us and what we do. The radio house also made a commitment to partnership and offered to continue having such presentations with us in order to educate the public.
2. The award event also served to encourage the clubs doing well and motivated others to do more. They expressed this by committing themselves to getting the star award next year.

4.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

During the 2008 project, we targeted improving the level of participation and commitment by participating schools. Therefore we worked towards ensuring they begin to take on more responsibility towards their school conservation clubs. Every event was organized in such a way that this goal could be reached. We believe that as long as conservation projects are established FOR people, without a plan to gradually shift the focus of the beneficiaries from the donors, to fully taking responsibility for such projects and owning them, the goals of such projects will hardly be accomplished.

People need to feel relevant, and they must be made to know that they matter in every decision made concerning what is theirs. In our case, we need the support and cooperation of schools in working with both their pupils and teachers. By seeking their

inputs and making available avenues for dialogue, we have seen a greater level of interest and commitment in most schools, and have gained also immensely from their contributions.

We look forward to improving on our achievements in 2008, and carrying out more projects that will have greater and lasting impact on the pupils and society at large.

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PHOTO GALLERY

Team members welcoming clubs and their teachers to the outing venue.



Nature Kids club @ the Jos wildlife Park.



A participant at the teacher-training workshop making a contribution.



Participants pose for a shot during a nature walk at APLORI.

Participants at the teacher-training workshop 2008



Here, I am giving a talk to participants at the 2008 teacher-training workshop.

Pam giving a talk at the teacher-training workshop 2008



Samson and the kids having a great time at the Jos wildlife Park recreation site 2008 outing.

Team member Samson at play with kids



Nature kids and guests at the award event 2009.



A drama presentation by one of the schools on the importance of afforestation.