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World Wetlands Day Celebrations Wetlands Centre, Sandspit, Karachi 2 February 2008

WWF-Pakistan's Indus for All Programme and the Pakistan Wetlands Programme jointly organized a variety of activities in Karachi to commemorate World Wetlands Day 2008. More than 1600 schools of City District Government Karachi and four private schools of the city actively participated in the celebrations. The series of events focused on to achieve the following objectives:

- Pledge to conserve the unique and threatened ecosystems renewed;
- Awareness created among private and government school students and teachers about wetlands;
- Through media involvement, general people are also sensitized by highlighting human activities that are harmful for wetlands;
- Theme for the World Wetlands Day 2008 "Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People" is highlighted and the emphasis on maintaining functioning ecosystems and human health is laid.

On 2 February 2008, the activities were concluded in a ceremony organized at WWF-Pakistan's Wetlands Centre near Sandspit at Karachi Coast. The Consul General of United States in Karachi Kay L. Anske was the Chief Guest on the occasion. The event was attended by senior government officials, corporate members and a large number of media personnel. The following activities were held on the day:

Art Competitions

Art Competitions were held for two categories of students. One was for the Government Schools of the City District Government Karachi (CDGK), while the other category involved private school students. The competition for the Government schools was the final phase of the contest that was held earlier in 18 towns involving more than 1600 schools of the CDGK. The winning students of the earlier contests for primary and secondary classes participated in the final competition to win the first, second and third prizes for their respective categories.



Schoolchildren drawing their posters

The second was for the Private Schools of Karachi. The Art Competition for the Government Schools was contested between 36 students belonging to various schools of different towns. Whereas, the Art Competition contested for the private schools' category involved 12 students from 4 well-known private schools of the city.

Speech Competition

A speech competition amongst teachers of City District Government Schools was also held on the occasion in which the finalists of the competition, which took place earlier, participated. Amongst the finalists, the top three winners received prizes. The topic of the competition was The Importance of Wetlands.

Beach Cleaning

Students from The Citizen Foundation School participated in a beach cleaning activity carried out on the Sandspit Beach. The beach is famous for being a nesting ground for marine turtles. Two species of marine turtles, Olive Ridley and Green Turtle come onto the beach for nesting. Both the species have been declared endangered worldwide. The children collected solid waste material from the beach which they properly disposed of later.



Children collecting garbage from the beach.

Release of Turtle Hatchling

Another activity in the series was the release of turtle hatchling into the sea. The activity was carried out on Sandspit Beach near the Wetlands Centre. The Chief Guest Ms Kay L. Anske, Consul General of the United States, along with other distinguished guests released turtle hatchlings into the sea. WWF-Pakistan has been running a marine turtle conservation project on the beach since last several years. Sindh Wildlife Department has also established a turtle hatchery for the endangered marine species on the beach. Both the organizations often work in close collaboration to conserve marine biodiversity in the region. The release of the turtle hatchling symbolized the pledge to protect marine biodiversity.



US diplomat along with other guests releasing turtles hatchlings into the sea.

Concluding Ceremony

The concluding ceremony took place in the conference room of Wetlands Centre Sandspit. The day's proceedings started with the recitation of few verses from the Holy Qur'aan, which was followed by the welcome address by the Director of the Indus for All Programme Dr. Ghulam Akbar. After welcoming the participants and distinguished guests, Dr. Akbar gave a presentation underlining the activities and role of WWF-Pakistan in the country for nature conservation. He also gave a brief account of the definition of wetlands in addition to introducing Ramsar Convention to the guests. By elaborating WWF-Pakistan's initiatives to conserve the wetlands of Pakistan, he mentioned about Pakistan Wetlands Programme, Indus for All Programme and conservation of High Altitude Wetlands of Northern Pakistan.



The Chief Guest, Kay L. Anske, addressing the audience.

In her speech, the US Consul General emphasized on the conservation of the wetlands through collective efforts describing them as vital sources of food and livelihood for a great number of human beings around the world apart from being habitat for so many species. She also said that Pakistan can benefit from the advanced technological progress of the United States to save these fragile ecosystems.

Speaking on the occasion, the Secretary Forest and Wildlife, Government of Sindh Mr. Mahboob Alam Ansari also underlined the need for conserving natural resources through joint efforts. In this connection, he extended his support and cooperation to the civil society for the cause.

The Secretary Environment & Alternate Energy, Government of Sindh Mir Hussain Ali called for the conservation of wetlands through joint efforts of Government and the civil society while highlighting the need for exploring alternate sources of energy livelihood.



Ms Kay L. Anske giving away shield to a student.



Dr. Ghulam Akbar presenting a memento to the Chief Guest

Earlier, the Chief Guest presented shields to the winners of the Art and Speech Competitions. The First prize of the Art Competition for the private schools' category was won by Bushra Ali of Karachi American School; the Second prize went to Kamran Raza of BVS Parsi High School; while the Third Prize was won by Uneed Nadir of Falconhouse Grammar School (North Nazimabad Campus V).

For the category of government schools (Primary level), the First Prize was grabbed by Sidra Kaleem of Major Shaheed School (North Karachi Town); Second Prize was won by Zakia Batool of CDGK School

Number 19 (North Nazimabad Town); and Third prize was won by Amna Jaffar of CDGK School Number 28 (Saddar Town). Similarly, the First Prize for the Secondary level was won by Aqsa of Major Shabir Saheed School (North Karachi Town); Second prize went to Mohammad Ejaz of CDGK School Number 27 (Saddar Town); and the Third prize was grabbed by Tahira Raza of Azeem Pura Secondary School (Shah Faisal Town).

The first prize for the Speech Competition among City District Government School Teachers went to Sumayya Sadiq of Lyari Town; Second Prize was won by Tehzeeb Fatima of Korangi Town; and the Third prize was collected by Fauzia Khan of Baldia Town.

Other than the shields, all the participating students and teachers in each activity were given certificates of appreciation by the Indus for All Programme, WWF-Pakistan.



Participants of the Concluding Ceremony

Mass Awareness

Apart from the participants from different walks of life, a significant number of media people were also invited to attend and cover the event. As for the print media, a number of newspapers had covered the event in the next day's prints. Among them, Daily Dawn, Daily Times, The Nation, Qaumi Akhbar and other newspapers reported the event. Apart from the print media, Dawn News TV, Geo News, ARY One World, Aaj TV and TV One News channels showed news reports in their hourly bulletins of the day while Hum TV recorded the activities of the day for one of their weekly programmes.



US Consul General speaking to media.



Some clips of the newspapers that covered the event.

Conclusion

The event provided a good opportunity for students and teachers of government and private schools of the city to understand about numerous aspects of wetlands. Through art competition, they illustrated their understanding about the role of functioning wetlands ecosystems in maintaining human health and prosperity. They also demonstrated their commitment towards this objective by participating in the beach cleaning activity.

In addition, the events provided a platform for different stakeholders such as government officials, corporate members, media personnel, and public at large to renew their pledge for collective efforts towards conservation of the country's wetlands resources.



Some of the Prize-winning Posters in the Competition