

CALAO EXPRESS 209 (October 2021)

Online bulletin of the African Movement of Working Children and Youth
(AMWCY)

Published by Enda TM

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Special: the role of WCYs in protecting the environment

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Introduction

The need to protect the environment has become more urgent now than ever for the world as the planet continues to be threatened. It is with this in mind that the working children and youth who are members of the AMWCY, undertake cleaning activities and other activities that can contribute to human development, particularly in terms of socioeconomic development, public health and improving living standards. Below are some examples of the activities undertaken by the WCY.

***Gambia: Essau Serer beach clean-up activity**

On 18 September 2021, the Association of Working Children and Youth (AWCY) of Barra embarked on a cleaning exercise on Essau Serer beach. The activity was undertaken in collaboration with the Essau Village Development Committee (VDC), the National Environment Agency and the Regional Council. A total of 28 WCY members of the AWCY participated in the exercise. The Essau beach was selected because it is located in the coastal area and where many harmful items such as plastic bags are thrown on the beach.

The WCY deemed it necessary to participate in the cleaning exercise because they understood that these harmful materials on the beach affect the environment, the fish in the river as well as the people who go to the beach to bathe, including children.

The community appreciated the activity since it was jointly conducted with many organizations and community members, including children and youth.

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***Guinea: cleaning of gutters and public places**

In collaboration with the communal authorities, the AWCY of Mamou organizes activities to clean gutters and public places including the town hall, the hospital, the mosques, the church, markets and the bus stations. These activities aim to prevent children from diseases such as malaria, cholera, skin diseases, etc. They are backed up by awareness-raising intended to dissuade children from going to unhealthy and/or dangerous places.

The activities which began in June, are carried out every Sunday by the WCY and other organizations in the city such as the Girl Leaders of the city, the Youth Group for the Development of Mamou, etc.

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***Nigeria: community sanitation to mark Cleaning Day**

On 18 September 2021, AWCY Makoko joined other volunteers from all over the world to mark the World Cleaning Day of our Planet by undertaking community sanitation in the Ori -Oke Makoko-Lagos community. A total of 18 people including 13 members of the AWCY and 5 members of other communities took part in the exercise. The following communities were concerned with the cleaning: Act of Apostle Street, the Better Life Market, and Ori-Oke Makoko. Within a few hours, the participants made their environment clean as they were equipped with protective gloves, brooms, rakes, recycling bins and disposable polyethylene bags. In addition, they sensitized communities about waste management and the prohibition to throw waste everywhere and especially in public places.

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***CAR: awareness on environmental protection**

In a bid to ensure a healthy environment and by extension a better life for children, AWCY CAR launched a campaign to clean the gutters so as to enable water to run out freely. Indeed, the localities of the 7th and 6th Districts of Bangui are the most affected by floods which are caused by the extraction of sand to make bricks. The floods are also caused by people who deposit garbage in the gutters and thereby preventing the circulation of water. This constitutes a major danger for the environment and requires extensive awareness-raising since hundreds of trees are cut weekly while large holes are dug in neighborhoods for brick making.

The campaign follows the training on public awareness techniques concerning environmental protection and how to prevent floods. The WCY received the training from July 20 to 22, 2021. Organized by the International NGO COOPI, the training was designed for child protection organizations including AWCY CAR. At the end of the training, the participating WCY began to raise awareness on youth who make charcoal and bricks in their respective localities.

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***DRC: Call for compliance with urban planning standards to prevent floods**

It has been observed that due to the absence of salongo (community work), some water drainage channels are blocked. CNAEJTRD Congo with the support of the international organization ZOA, took part in a training session on community work from August 23 to 26, 2021. At the end of the session, the WCY appealed to the authorities to limit the issuance of building permits, and also called on cadaster, town planning and housing services not to authorize any construction. In short, the WCY also urged the population to responsibly manage the environment. The AWCY/Bukavu was represented at the training by 20 WCY including 8 girls and 12 boys from its different grassroots groups. The session follows the floods and erosion caused by heavy rain on 19 August 2021 in the city of Bukavu. There were material damage in several neighborhoods in three communes of Bukavu namely: Ibanda, Kadutu and Bagira.

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***Senegal: Reforestation Day**

In order to contribute towards the protection of the environment and fight against desertification, the AWCY of Guédiawaye, mobilized a crowd and commemorated the Reforestation Days in 5 districts of the said city, namely: Gounass, Sam Ntaire, Comico, Baye Laye and Salif Diallo. In each of these districts, the AWCY planted 21 trees totaling 105 trees. These Reforestation Days are in keeping with the pledge of AWCY Guédiawaye to always protect children and youth, reduce the excessive cutting of trees through reforestation and awareness-raising activities on environmental protection, and participate in ensuring the well-being of children.

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***Zambia: WCY negotiate to remove children from a polluted area**

In June 2021, the WCY carried out a mapping exercise to determine the hot spots for working children and the challenges they face. In the industrial Black Mountain area, children face all kinds of problems ranging from air to soil pollution. The WCY realized that their right to work in a clean and safe environment was denied justified by the health risks they faced. Hence, they engaged the local government, health officials, the labor office and together, they discussed key interventions. The first priority being the life of children, so they agreed that it was necessary to urgently remove the children from the polluted area.

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***Zimbabwe: Children's National Conference on Environmental Child Rights (ECR)**

From 16 to 19 March 2021, 30 children (17 boys and 13 girls) from all the provinces of Zimbabwe participated in a national conference during which the children wrote a position paper addressed to the Zimbabwean Parliament. The conference was made possible through the initiative of the RNCYPT which is a member of the AMWCY and with the support of TdH Germany. Hence, on 30 August 2021, 10 children and youth (6 boys and 4 girls) participated in a dialogue with 10 members of the Parliament Portfolio Committee on Environment and the Parliamentary Child Rights Caucus. The children presented their position paper and among the key issues raised were access to safe drinking water and harmful mining activities such as riverbed mining. This leads to the contamination of water sources due to the use of mercury and which kills flora and fauna. The most salient point of the commitment is the vulnerability of girls to violations of children's rights in communities. The dialogue made the parliamentarians realize that they had neglected a key issue. They then assured the children that the issues will be discussed during parliamentary debate sessions.

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