

COMMUNIQUÉ

COMMISSIONING BIODIVERSITY EDUCATION GARDEN PROJECT FOR SCHOOL

Theme: Water and Biodiversity; the Role of the Private Sector

Tema 22, May 2013 – over 150 people gathered at the Tema Secondary School, Tema - Greater Accra Region, Ghana, to mark the celebration of the International Day of Biodiversity 2013 on the **theme; water and Biodiversity; the role of the private sector**. This was against the backdrop of the UN Decade on Biodiversity (2011-2020).

The celebration was marked with the commissioning of the first ever **Biodiversity Education Garden Centre**, a NYCOB initiative to build the capacity of Senior High School Students in Eco Entrepreneurship and offer them skills training in landscaping, gardening, horticulture and organic farming. The project is being implemented by NYCOB Enterprise Consortium in partnership with the Forestry Commission Ghana and sponsored by Vodafone Ghana Ltd. The event involved the participation of students, teachers, parents, youth groups, media, and staff of Vodafone Ghana Ltd. The occasion was also graced with the presence of government officials including the Tema Municipal Education Director and his delegation, a representative the Forestry Commission Ghana, and the CEO of the Private Sector Development Strategy II who represented the Minister for Public Private Partnership Hon. Rashid Pelpuo as the Chairman.

Speaking in a welcome address by the Assistant Head Master of Tema Secondary School, Mr. Joseph Etroo with the support of Ms. Christine A. Fugar who both represented the Head Mistress, he highlighted on the need to increase awareness on water and biodiversity conservation and its relevance for sustainable development in the 21st century. He expressed the excitement of the school authorities for the opportunity to host such a project and commended NYCOB Enterprise Consortium for the initiative which is a service-learning project for students and also contributes to a school's agricultural practical facility for education. He expressed the school's gratitude to Vodafone Ghana Ltd for sponsoring the Biodiversity Education Garden Centre.

Mr. Joe Tackie the CEO of the Private Sector Development Strategy II, in his acceptance speech said that economic activity and infrastructural development is one of the major drivers of biodiversity loss, and Ghana is still losing biodiversity at an alarming rate. He stated that the key direct drivers of biodiversity decline are habitat loss, climate change, invasive species, over-exploitation and pollution. He urged the private sector businesses to help reduce these pressures by managing and mitigating their impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem services. He also called on the businesses to systematically review their operations in relation to biodiversity and ecosystem services (BES) and assess how direct and indirect drivers of change in ecosystem services may affect their business.

In youth statement presented from the Ghana Youth Environment Movement (GYEM) by Ms. Sylvia Yakari, she spoke on the price for pollution stating that it is wrong to pollute, it is equally wrong to make money out of pollution without the adequate compensation. She urged all private sectors to follow the steps Vodafone Ghana has taken to ensure a sustainable and safe environment for all.



Presenting a brief report on the project, Mr. Paul Peter Hammond the President NYCOB Enterprise Consortium stated that among the many barriers to achieving the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and of the other biodiversity-related conventions, the lack of education and public awareness on the importance of biodiversity ranks as one of the most serious. He stated that without an awareness of the importance of biodiversity to human well-being, citizens and stakeholders are not likely to take the steps needed to mainstream biodiversity considerations into their daily lives and practices. Hence there is the need for a market-based approach to biodiversity conservation in Ghana.

Ms. Mamle Asare the Sustainability Manager of Vodafone Ghana Ltd in her remarks spoke about Vodafone's commitment to offset the environmental impact resulting from the company's operations in Ghana and therefore saw the Biodiversity Education Garden project for schools as a very sustainable initiative that will increase climate change awareness and encourage more actions among the younger generation. She called of the school's agricultural department to sustain the gains made in establishing the educational facility by engaging the student in practical learning experiences and also in the maintenance of the facility.

Dr. Ameyaw Kwakew who represented the Chief Executive of the Forestry Commission in his key note address explained what Biodiversity is, the role it plays in human wellbeing, the challenges facing biodiversity conservation in Ghana and also highlighted on the responsibility of all stakeholders especially the business community in ensuring we reduce the loss of Ghana's biodiversity resources.

He stated that loss of biodiversity can slow down economic growth which causes a reduction in the companies' return on investments or causes a company to be less productive or even lose its core business (for example, the loss of pollinators for the fruit producing sector). He reiterated the Forestry Commission's commitment to promote the practical integration of biodiversity issues in the selected financial and economic sectors through the concept of biodiversity offsets which generate additional private sector investments in conservation that adds to the available resources contributing to conservation by governments' overall objectives for biodiversity conservation.

Thirty (30) students (mostly graduating students) engaged in the project for six (6) months were awarded with certificates endorsed by the Forestry Commission Ghana. They were also presented with Vodafone modems to aid them in research and knowledge sharing on the internet. The best voted student received a Vodafone branded mobile phone. Vodafone Ghana Ltd also received the first Biodiversity Offset Certificate from the Forestry Commission Ghana for sponsoring the creation a new landscape and ecosystem on a protected area of land as part of the company's efforts to offset its biodiversity and carbon footprints in Ghana.

The project was officially launched with a ceremonious tape cutting by the Tema Municipal Education Director Mr. Kwesi Hutchful who was represented by Mr. George Azriya Ayariga. There was a photo exhibition on the progressive stages of the pilot project within the garden. NYCOB Enterprise Consortium and the Forestry Commission Ghana will be partnering businesses in establishing more Biodiversity Education Garden Centres in various pre-tertiary schools across Ghana.

