



**Regional Biodiversity Camp for Youth and Children
3-7 March 2010 – Hurghada, Red Sea**

**Report on assessment of activities and objective outcomes
9 March 2010**

Dr: Amal Hosny Hassan
*Focal person of IYB 2010 Egypt
Coordinator of UN project P.M. Egypt*

Preface:

In my opinion the camp was an overall success. The following assessment is meant as constructive criticism, with suggestions for increasing the intended outcomes. It is not meant as a dismissal or diminution of the objectives that were accomplished, or of the organization and hard work that was clearly evident in the planning of the camp.

Activities:

Media campaign in the official opening:

An informational presentation session was conducted, with a series of panelists increasing the awareness of issues related to biodiversity. This appeared to be well covered by the media for greater distribution.

Cleaning campaign for Abou Monqar Island:

This was a successful campaign in that we managed to clean a good portion of the garbage found on the island. However, the direct relevance to the camp (i.e. the impact of littering on biodiversity, habitat destruction, environmental protection, etc.) could have been discussed in greater detail.

Forestation campaign:

This was perhaps the most unsuccessful portion of the camp. It was poorly organized and poorly executed. The direct relevance of planting trees to biodiversity was never fully explained. Indirect relationships (i.e. removal of CO₂ from the atmosphere) were later discussed, however the execution of this activity was so poor that even this argument was barely legitimate. I question whether today (4 days later) any of the trees planted by the campers remain in the ground. A more effective (and appropriate to the region) alternative activity

would have been something related to desert development, such as the planting of native plant species identified as keystones to the promotion and sustainability of a given habitat.

Visiting the department of Environmental Affairs building and watching the laboratories specialized in Biodiversity:

An informational presentation session was conducted at the Environmental Affairs campaign, however (to my knowledge) laboratories were not toured and it was not explained why we were there or what work was done there.

Expedition at ElGeftoon:

This activity again suffered from a lack of adequate planning relevant to the

camp. We arrived on the island and received a tour of the two “eco-lodges,”

which consisted of thatch-huts, restaurants, and bars. We were informed that

there was no steel or concrete included in their construction, although we were not told why that was important in anyway to biodiversity or to the environment (and no mention was made of the imposing mobile phone towers lining the peak of the island). Following the brief tour, campers were left to their own inclinations, which primarily consisted of playtime in the water and on the beach. It was unclear exactly why we had come to this island. No birds, reptiles, or other animals were seen or even mentioned. An offshore snorkeling activity around a nearby coral reef was organized at the last minute. In my opinion, for a

biodiversity-themed camp this should have been the most important and detailed

activity. Instead, while highly enjoyable for those who participated, it was an unguided afterthought. A more effective (and appropriate to the unique region) alternative activity would have been a guided snorkeling tour of the various reef sites near Hurghada by a marine biologist. This could also be coupled, for example, with a visit to the new American University in Cairo environmental, marine, and desert ecology research center in El Gouna.

Objectives and outcomes:

Learning the importance of biodiversity and how our daily behaviors affect it:

The camp was reasonably successful in accomplishing this objective.

However, this could have been greatly increased with more relevant/focused activities followed by more discussion time with the campers. The two primary

informational sessions of the camp were well organized and suitable for media coverage/transmission beyond the camp, however in my opinion did not meet the needs of the campers, themselves. The most effective informational exchange of the camp was in the brief question/answer period following the presentations at the Environmental Affairs building.

This camp (and future camps) should increase the informational content, but should also shift this from presentation to interaction. The children and youth are curious and want to learn, however it was clear that much of the presented information was well understood, and very little time was left for clarifying interaction. Throughout the duration of the camp, I was repeatedly asked when we were going to “start learning about biodiversity”. Throughout the activities of the week, campers were broken into 4 groups without consideration for age or primary language. On the one hand I can see the motivation for such an action (i.e. increased teamwork, broader community, wider range of ideas, etc.), however in retrospect I believe that this was a mistake. The campers would have been better suited to be divided by ages, so that each group could be suitably assessed and targeted with appropriate activities and information. The age disparity within each group prevented meaningful discussion and reflection.

Motivate youth to work on maintaining biodiversity:

In my opinion and observation, the students arrived very motivated to learn and to work, and participated in the various activities with great gusto, despite incomplete understanding of the relevance to biodiversity (clean up) or faulty planning/permanence problems apparent even to the campers (forestation campaign). Ultimately, campers left with some newly acquired knowledge related to environmental protection, which they seemed motivated to act on and to share with others.

Add to the green spaces and learn its importance to biodiversity:

This was objective was not accomplished through active application, though was discussed indirectly.

Celebrate the international year of biodiversity through having youth participating in Hurghada Camp:

Accomplished.

Pay the attention of media to the necessity of spreading activities relevant to biodiversity:

Media coverage was extensive, however it remains to be seen if the information and objectives of the camp are appropriately transmitted to a greater audience.

Done by:

Prof: Brandon Canfield, PhD
*American University in Cairo
Visiting assistant professor
of Chemistry*

Dr: Amal Hosny Hassan
*Coordinator of UN project Egypt
Coordinator IYB 2010 Egypt*