

PROJETS

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The Tree Project enlists youth to plant trees

J. Jacobson

In an effort to combat increasing deforestation in the tropics and subtropics, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have joined forces in a unique collaborative effort with the United Nations to create The Tree Project. A programme of the Non-Governmental Liaison Service, The Tree Project aims to help reforest the earth by linking NGOs, U.N. agencies and governments interested in planting trees.

The Tree Project began as an activity for the U.N.'s International Youth Year, 1985. In 1982, the U.N. General Assembly began preparations for IYY, with the theme of promoting participation, development and peace by encouraging cooperative activities among young people. A major goal was to increase the awareness and involvement of youth in activities for the protection and enhancement of the global environment.

Deforestation has many adverse social and environmental consequences. Forest cover prevents soil erosion, protects wildlife and biological diversity, and has myriad other ecological benefits. Trees are an important source of food crops (i.e. fruits and nuts), fuelwood, fodder, and timber. Many of today's medicines have been synthesized from natural plant compounds in tropical forests, now fast disappearing. In many rural areas, deforestation most adversely affects women and children. As the traditional collectors of firewood, they will often spend several days a week at this task, going further and further afield to find fuelwood.

The Tree Project was formed to support local level responses to the common problems of deforestation. Today, several hundred NGOs around the world are involved.

Cooperation, networking and education are at the roots of the projects's efforts. The strategy to extend these roots includes consultations in developing nations, information collection and a worldwide promotional campaign. These activities are coordinated by the International Tree Project Clearinghouse (ITPC), headed by Jill Carr-Harris and a small but energetic professional staff.

The ITPC provides information on NGO forestry projects to promote tree planting and link NGOs together. Using a databank of detailed information on forestry and related projects compiled over the last year, the ITPC acts as a clearinghouse to match the specific financial and information needs of one organization with the resources of others.

Planting trees to renew depleted forests is not a new phenomenon. Several governments and private groups have been involved in tree planting efforts over the past decade. Governmental programmes for tree planting include Vietnam, where 14 million students and five hundred thousand teachers in schools and colleges throughout the country are involved in planting trees. Their goal: "to cover the plains, highlands and mountainous areas with green leaves". In China, a country once verdant with lush forests, afforestation campaigns are launched each spring. The youth of that country volunteered to plant 2.6 billion trees in 1984 alone. Other nations, such as Guatemala, Rwanda, Nepal, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Canada and the U.S., to name a few, have also declared their support of tree planting programmes for International Youth Year.

There are many notable examples of non-governmental efforts to engage young people in forestry as well.

Boy Scouts International has long been involved in tree planting. Since 1969, the Boy Scouts of the Philippines have supported government efforts to conserve forests and watersheds all over that country. Now they are cooperating with the Bureau of Forest Development to "regreen" areas of Mount Apo, the highest mountain in the Philippines. They expect to plant 10,000 tree seedlings. Scouts have also participated in Senegal, Nepal, Peru, India, and other countries.

KENGO (Kenyan Energy NGO), while not a youth organization, has incorporated young people into their forestry activities. As a consortium of sixty groups, KENGO acts as a facilitator between assistance agencies and community development

groups. By channelling funds through the KENGO network, hundreds of small-scale community projects can be supported. KENGO is deeply involved in all facets of forestry, meeting the needs of rural development organizations, procuring and supplying tree seed and basic materials for community agroforestry, and providing technical assistance on woodfuel conservation. Currently, KENGO is working with CARE-Kenya in an experimental woodfuel stove programme which is expected to save significant amounts of firewood if successful.

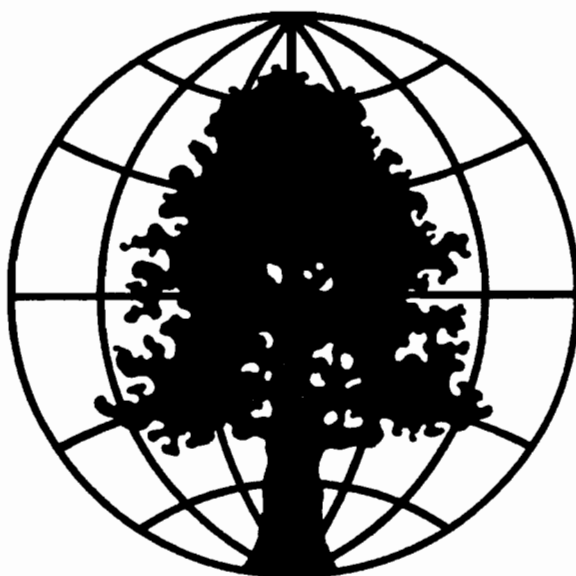
In 1985, millions of trees will be planted by the hands of youth and adults alike. But the task of "regreening" the earth will be far from finished. For this reason, The Tree Project has been planned as an ongoing effort to help meet the needs of NGOs worldwide, and promote the ideals of stewardship, cooperation, and integrated development. The Tree Project staff hopes to expand its information databank, and increase the effectiveness of its clearinghouse to match needs with resources.

How can you help promote the goals of The Tree Project? Register your groups or organization with The International Tree Project Clearinghouse. Encourage tree planting projects in your community. Arrange for the continued care and nurturing of trees that are planted. Look into partnership programmes that could link your group with groups in another country, furthering cooperation and sharing of resources.

For more information, contact the ITPC at the following address:

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The Tree Project is a collaborative effort of youth, religious, development, environmental, educational and community-service non-governmental organizations with the United Nations.

Le Projet Arbres est un programme entrepris en collaboration par des organisations non gouvernementales confessionnelles, scolaires, communautaires, de jeunesse, de protection de l'environnement ou de développement et l'Organisation des Nations Unies.