

Mayumba National Park

Issue 5

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ENVIRONMENT DAY SPECIAL



Outreach Program News

Mayumba's First-Ever Environment Day Festival Goes Big!



In This Issue:

'Miss Environment' Contest Tests Girls' Environmental and Cultural Knowledge.

Student Actors Shine in the Spotlight.

Traditional Dancers Wow the Crowd.

Art Exchange Students Show Off their Works.



Special points of interest:

- 98 students from four elementary schools, one high school, and one lagoon village school participated in the Environment Day Festival.
- Over 400 people attended the festival, parts of which were also broadcast on the regional radio.



On June 16, 2007, the courtyard of Mayumba's Saint Therese Catholic School transformed into an festival ground, and came alive with a whirlwind of activities celebrating Mayumba's natural and cultural heritage.

The celebration, marking World Environment Day and the end of the school year, kicked off with Francia Voubou's recital of "Mayumba", a poem composed by Mr. Patrick Mombo, member of the Mayumba Nature Environmental Association and teacher at Public School 'B'.

From there, a group of student drummers got everyone's blood pumping as they watched performances by traditional dance troupes *Ndosy* (The Dream) and *Merveilles* (The Marvels). The dancers were led by Outreach Program Assistant Stephanie Mahinou Makaya, whose singing and energy seemed boundless all evening long.

Nine fetching young ladies then made their entrance to begin facing the trials of the Miss Environment Contest. The girls' knowledge of traditional costume, arts, and the environment would be tested over the course of the evening to determine Mayumba's very first Miss Environment.

Following another poetry recital, the crowd was treated to the Public School 'B' Theatre Group's performance of the original play *Tell Me A Story*. Tales of the wisdom of the ancestors came to life in colorful costumes, drawing cheers and laughter.

After a few more outings for the dance troupes and the Miss Environment contestants, students from Public School 'C', Saint



Copain Makanga, from Yoyo village, leads the percussion group during a traditional dance performance.

Mayumba National Park would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Sea World/Busch Gardens Conservation Fund for their generous support of the Mayumba Outreach Program.

Therese, and JB Moandat Secondary School explained drawings they had made for the Mayumba Environmental Art Exchange.

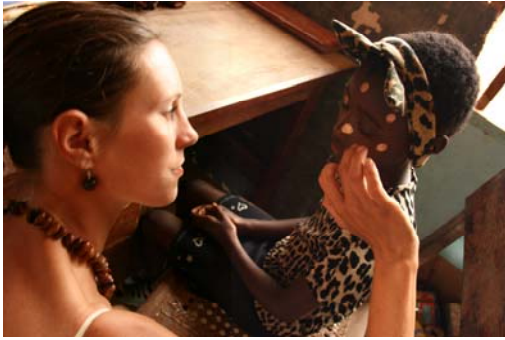
Finally, the time had come to announce the winner of the Miss Environment Contest and give prizes to participants. Each of the 27 dancers, 9 'misses', 30 actors, 21 artists, 3 poets, and 8 drummers received a brightly wrapped package full of school supplies and a thundering round of applause from the crowd of over 400.

Thank you to all of the participating students and teachers, and very special thanks to Mamissa, whose assistance in the preparation of this event was invaluable. See you all again next year!



Stephanie and the dance troupes, moments before their debut.

Student Actors Shine in the Spotlight



Bibi Boukandou Moandat, who plays a leopard, gets into character with some help from Outreach Program Manager Aimée Sanders.

Nighttime in the village: Grandfather and his grandchildren are sitting around the fire after another peaceful day by the Banio Lagoon. “Papa, tell me a story...”

Thus began the evening’s play, featuring students from Public School ‘B’ and 3 boys from Yoyo village. In the following half-hour, Mayumba would encounter wild animals, feuding mermaids, a water spirit, and fire dancers.

Inspired by local legends and stories she’d been told by village elders, Outreach Program Manager Aimée Sanders composed the play to give

students the opportunity to learn and share the rich folklore of their hometown.

With help from Achille Mombo, member of the Mayumba Nature Environmental Association and Professor of Art at the Mayumba Secondary School, Ms. Sanders designed scenery and costumes using a sewing machine donated by Idea WILD.

After two weeks of intense rehearsing, the actors were, despite standard pre-show jitters, ready for their moment in the spotlight.

In the first scene, Grandfather recalls an excursion into the forest with his father, where he learned about the importance of hunting with respect for the delicate balance of nature. In the second, a jealous dispute between mermaid sisters causes an upheaval of earth that forms the Mayumba peninsula. In the third, a fisherman learns a lesson about only catching what he needs when the lagoon spirit

ends up in his net. In the final scene, Grandmother’s song and the beat of the drums combine with the spectacle of fire dancing to demonstrate that traditions are something to be preserved and celebrated.

At the end of the show, the actors’ efforts were rewarded with hearty applause from the audience. Congratulations to all the actors for a job well done!



Rachide Sounda, in the role of a wise grandmother, recounts a local legend about two mermaids who influenced the formation of the Mayumba peninsula.

The Mayumba Miss Environment Contest: Not Just Another Beauty Pageant



Hermione (2nd runner-up) Stephanie (Miss), and Vanessa (1st runner-up), glow with pride after their coronation.

The nine contestants in Mayumba’s first annual Miss Environment Contest nervously put on their makeup and took one last look over their notes.

Over the school year, they had been learning about the environment with Mayumba’s Outreach Program, and today they would show what they’d learned; not only about the environment, but also about traditional costumes and crafts.

Each girl needed to remem-

ber the name of her traditional costume, art object, and the materials they were made from in French and her native language, as well as know upon what occasion they were used. The final gauntlet, however, lay in drawing a random question selected from a years’ worth of environmental education lessons— the girls must know the correct response to any one of 18 possible questions.

The contestants were judged solely upon their responses to the questions. The girl who answered the most questions correctly and who showed the most poise under pressure would be declared the winner. At the end of the evening, the tension was palpable as members of the jury withdrew to tally their scores and make their decision.

As Stephanie Elsa Koumba heard the president of the jury announce her name as the winner, she, in true beauty queen fashion, shed tears of joy. Each “Miss” received a framed photograph of herself and school supplies; the three honoraries received glittery silver sashes and tiaras made of raffia and seashells. Congratulations to all the “Misses”!

Dance Troupes Kindle New Energy for Ancient Traditions

On most days over the three weeks leading up to the Environment Day Festival, the girls of dance troupes *Ndosy* and *Merveilles* attended classes like all the other students in Mayumba. But on Wednesdays and Saturdays, a school-room at Public School ‘A’ became a dance studio, the girls’ 48 pounding feet sending clouds of dust billowing into the evening air where it was borne away by syncopated drum-beats and soaring voices.

Mayumba is home to several local ethnic groups, including Vili, Lumbu, and Punu, as

well as a Benino-Togolese community. All of these traditions were represented in the dances performed at the festival, and songs included lyrics in 5 different languages. The celebration of cultural and biological diversity is a central theme in Mayumba National Park’s Outreach Program, and the girls of *Ndosy* and *Merveilles* demonstrated that their traditions are alive and well in Mayumba.

Well done, girls!



Dance Troupe “Ndosy” performs at the Environment Day Festival.