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24 hour nature inventory in Dogon country (Mali)

GEO and GTZ support the dialogue between science und traditional medicine

Eschborn, 9 June 2005. Last Saturday some 100 scientists, politicians, conservationists and media representatives joined traditional healers in conducting a survey of the Dogon country plateau and the steep slope of the Bandiagara escarpment. Along with nearly 1,000 interested locals, they analysed the ecological quality and the biodiversity of this absolutely unique region of the Sahel. The Dogon plateau reservoir allows the survival in a tiny area of plants and animals that are otherwise only found in far more humid regions of West Africa. Many of these plant species are used as traditional healing medicines – including a shrub which is virtually unknown to science and which the indigenous people call *Sagontara*. This is the only place in the world – over a radius of less than 100 km – where this endemic plant is found. Its leaves are used by the Dogon as an effective treatment for malaria.

This wealth of species, however, is endangered by population growth, the spread of agriculture and timber felling. The experts taking part in the day of action were unanimous: only greater awareness of the uniqueness of the region can ensure the long-term future of the Dogon country “oasis”.

Since 2001, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) and GEO magazine have been working together to organise the GEO Day of Biological Diversity in a number of different countries. This year experts are analysing the New York Bronx and the 500-year-old Berlin zoological gardens in parallel events.

“In this project we and GEO want to show the importance of species conservation in populated areas,” said Konrad Uebelhör, who is in charge of the event at GTZ. “At the same time we are keen to arouse people’s interest in their natural surroundings. What species are found in urban and rural areas, how do they affect the quality of our life and how can we conserve and use ‘nature on our doorstep’?” Patronage of the day of action has been assumed by the German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul.

The results of the nature inventory will be presented at a press conference in the Berlin Sony Center at 18.00 on Saturday, 11 June and – over a live link – compared with the data in New York. Uebelhör said, “We are looking forward to finding out what the areas have in common and where there are differences.”

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GTZ is an international cooperation enterprise for sustainable development with worldwide operations. For 30 years it has been providing viable, forward-looking solutions for political, economic, ecological and social developments in a globalised world. GTZ promotes complex reforms and change processes, often working under difficult conditions. Its corporate goal is to improve people's living conditions on a sustainable basis. GTZ's main client is the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

For further information see www.geo.de/artenvielfalt (current information 2005)
and www.gtz.de/biodiv

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