

CELEBRATION OF JUNE 17 WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION IN ILLIMO, PERU

By Pauline Boureau

For the first time, on June 17, 2009, Centro ECO, a Peruvian NGO that has been implementing development programs to help families in the rural areas of Northern Peru for 13 years, organized a special event to celebrate the world day to combat desertification.



It took place in Illimo, in the district of Chiclayo, in the Lambayeque region. The programming around this year theme “Conserving land and water to secure our common future” was realized in cooperation with the Regional Natural Resources Management

Office (*Gerencia de recursos naturales del gobierno regional de Lambayeque*) who sent representatives of the regional government of Lambayeque and an engineer to give more perspective to the event.

With its diversity and its unique ecosystem, recognized by the World Bank and the World Wildlife Fund, the Lambayeque region in the Northern part of the country, constitutes one of the most endangered zones of the world by desertification. Dry lands and loss of vegetal cover are expanding at the expense of the dry forest, which puts the area into the category of necessary maximal protection to conserve and restore lands.



Centro ECO – which continuing action has been led by Executive Director, Lic. María Dolores Vásquez — since 1996, has been uniting efforts to secure a sustainable development in the region, promoting projects with the will of participating families. The NGO has implemented with success many programs to support healthy rural living conditions. It has also contributed to many activities to raise awareness among the population.



The event in itself was a real success thanks to the much appreciated presence of representatives of the regional government of Lambayeque, Director of Regional Natural Resources Management Office, Engineer Juan Mercedes Sandoval Valdivieso, of the mayor of the city of Illimo, Mr Juan Pablo Santamaria Baldera, of the Economist and student in Master in Agriculture Economy (USA), Robert Elliott, of the student in Master in Microfinance and Development at the School of Political Sciences (France), Pauline Boureau, and the intervention of Dr José Antonio Vásquez, among others.



A fair amount of inhabitants, associations and environmental committees of the Jayanca, Pacora, and Illimo districts, came to participate to the whole day-long program.

It started with a gathering inside the Illimo church for a special mass given for the occasion. It was followed by a procession around the Plaza de Armas with all participants and the raising of the flag to the sound of the Peruvian national anthem.



Shortly after, the population was invited to listen to a series of conferences given by experts on the problem of desertification in Peru and in the world. Thus, everyone was able to learn more about the process, the causes and consequences of this striking phenomenon as



well as the existing solutions to better manage, in a more sustainable way, our natural resources.

Then, all participants were offered a traditional meal prepared with local products after a short demonstration of Marinera, famous dance of Northern Peru.

The day was put to an end with a visit to activities that have been initiated by Centro ECO through the “project of development and sustainable management of the natural resources in the diminishing zone of the historical sanctuary of dry forest in Pomac”.



Centro ECO has been working for these communities for years to help them live in healthier conditions. The NGO, with the will of the families, implemented improved kitchen sets to avoid cooking on the ground and prevent respiratory diseases engendered by the smoke. It also built outdoor protected latrines and organized the waste management of the community.



The success of this first experience showed the importance of awareness campaigns that Centro ECO, with the support of different international funds –USAID, Heifer International, and Fund for the Americas in Peru, among others— has been realizing since its creation. The event should be repeated and expanded for the following years.