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## PRESS RELEASE

### EU-STREIT observed World Environment Day 2021 with Rural Sepik Students and Inland Fish Farmers

*Contributing to the global efforts in raising awareness on World Environment Day, the FAO-led EU-STREIT Programme held an event for rural high school students in the Yangoru-Saussia district in East Sepik Province, highlighting the values of nature, reviewing the damages caused by human activities to natural resources and equipping young generation with knowledge and understanding to take responsibility to restore the ecosystem.*

**Wewak, ESP** – The theme for this year’s World Environment Day, which is observed on 5 June annually across the globe, is “Ecosystem Restoration” and focuses on preventing, halting and reversing the damages caused to our planet’s ecosystem.

In East Sepik, the European Union-funded Programme for Support to Rural Entrepreneurship, Investment and Trade Programme in Papua New Guinea (EU-STREIT), took the campaign to 500 plus students of Yangoru Secondary on Thursday 4 June. The objective here was to ensure rural youth who are often left out in such United Nations events also appreciate the values of nature, so everyone takes responsibility to restore the ecosystem.

For EU-STREIT Programme, the occasion coincides with the first Inland Fish Farming Training held during the week at Yangoru Station; hence, 15 local male and female farmers also joined to observe the celebrations. Fisheries is one of the three food value chains EU-STREIT is supporting together with Cocoa and Vanilla to increase sustainable and inclusive economic development of rural areas in the Sepik Region.

In his keynote address, the EU-STREIT Programme Coordinator, Dr Xuebing Sun, explained the bleak status of the world ecosystem as a result of pollution and other human activities and the need to rehabilitate for future generations. “According to the UN, the world loses sufficient forest the size of a football pitch. Over the last century, we have destroyed half of the wetlands, and we have lost as much as 50 percent of our coral reefs. The situation we are facing now globally is very serious because the ecosystem affects the climate and the health of people. As long as the ecosystem is damaged, ourselves as human beings will be damaged. Hence your knowledge and understanding are important in various professions you will join later, like in science or as a lecturer at the University, to be aware of ecosystem restoration for the generations in the future,” said Dr Sun.

The School Principal, Ms Lucy Gavalalu Silum, in her speech encouraged the students to reimagine and recreate to restore the damages to the ecosystem like river pollution and cutting down of trees in their respective hamlets or villages.

The awareness also focused on the effects of human-induced pollutants on water resources, aquatic ecosystems and fisheries, with particular attention to the damages caused by releasing detergent residue to freshwater resources and how it affected the quality and quantity of fish stock in aquatic freshwater ecosystems and consequently downturns livelihoods.

The highlight of the day was a quiz session on the planet’s ecosystem and other significant issues related to environment and sustainable living where both male and female students confidently walked up to the stage to answer the questions and were presented with an EU-STREIT gift bag which includes a World Environment Day T-shirt.

Students were drilled on COVID-19 Safety Measures that must be observed in homes and communities, particularly on how to use facemasks properly so that it does not end up being a source of infection but a source of protection against the disease.

World Environment Day is one of the most significant events organised by the UN to generate awareness about the significance of nature. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), as the lead implementing agency of this United Nations-Joint Programme, and in line with its objective to strengthen climate-resilient and more efficient value chain enablers, supports fostering sustainable development by focusing on the regulatory environment and discouraging unsustainable practices that cause irreversible damages to the environmental ecosystem.

Likewise, and as part of its advocacy and awareness-raising domain of activity, EU-STREIT Programme is providing the rural communities, including Cocoa, Vanilla and Fisheries farmers supported under the Programme, with training and public awareness opportunities on best practices and environmental sustainability.

The EU-STREIT is the largest grant-funded programme of the European Union in the country and the Pacific sub-region, which focuses on supporting smallholder cocoa, vanilla and fish farmers in the ten districts of East and West Sepik provinces. The Programme is being implemented as a United Nations joint programme under the leadership of FAO, partnering with the International Labour Organization (ILO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and United Nations development programme (UNDP). FAO and the other four UN agencies operate in collaboration with the Government of Papua New Guinea.



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