

Belarus

National Environmental Forum

CONTACT

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FOCUS	Education/Learning	Environment	Peace, Human Rights & Security
	Educators	Water	Cultural Diversity
	Health Promotion	Climate Change	Tools and materials (e.g. Media & ICTs)
	Sustainable Urbanization	Biodiversity	Research / Development
	Economy	Disaster Reduction	Regional / international cooperation
		Rural Development	
		Sustainable Consumption	
		Sustainable Tourism	
		Citizenship	

DESCRIPTION

Type Governmental - Representatives of ministries, other national bodies attached to the government, local executive and administrative bodies, civil society, the media, cultural and educational institutions, State environmental institutions, sports and tourism associations and environmental activists are members of the national and local forum organizational committees.

Working language(s) At the Forum events the two official State languages of Belarus are used: Russian and Belarusian. The dialects of foreign guests may also be heard.

Target group(s) The National Environmental Forum has traditionally been conducted in three stages: district (municipal) level, the regional (Minsk municipal) forums, and the national stage, which ends with the gala finale of the Forum which includes awards for the winners of national competitions, an exhibition on modern technology in environmental management and protection, nature walks, trade fairs, stalls, a gala concert and a fireworks display. Depending on the event being held by the Forum, the target groups of the initiative are schoolchildren (children's drawing competition, a children's category in a photo competition and a competition for the best environmental publication), students of higher education institutions (a competition of the scientific work of students on the environment and its protection), journalists and amateurs (competition for the best publication and a photography competition), staff from public and school libraries (exhibition and competition for the best work of libraries in educating and raising public awareness about the environment), staff of motor haulage companies (review and contest for the best motor haulage company in reducing air pollution), staff of community services and aesthetic forestry (competition for the best-kept monumental arboretums, a competition for the best arrangement of landscaping of a site, a competition for the best landscaping and upkeep of

recreational facilities within the water conservation zones of water bodies), industrial companies (competition for the best reclamation of secondary material resources from public waste, an exhibition and competition for the best landscaping of an industrial site) and specialists from network hydrometeorological units, among others. Creative teams took part in the cultural events of all three phases: amateur talent groups, folk craftspeople and travelling merchants. Academics and paraprofessionals from both Belarus and the “near abroad” (former Soviet Union) take part in the theoretical and practical conferences and specialized exhibitions. Delegations from all the regions of Belarus (around 1,000 individuals) and members of the local community attend the gala finale. It is difficult to calculate the exact number of those who participate in all the activities of the Forum, but it may be supposed that they are not less than half a million.

<i>Starting year & duration</i>	The National Environmental Forums were set up in 2003 by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus and the Orsha District Executive Committee. The initiative was taken up by the administrations of the cities of Gorki (2004), Polotsk (2005) and in 2006 the spa town of Myadel received delegates from the Forum. The Forum is held annually from February to October, and the honour of holding the gala finale is granted to one of Belarus' smaller towns.
<i>Budget & funding sources</i>	Where do we find the resources? The main activities of the Forum are financed by the National Environmental Protection Fund and local budgets. Many activities (for the provision of urban amenities, landscaping, the introduction of resource-saving and environmental protection technologies, etc.) were run by the participating businesses and organizations, usually at their own expense.
<i>Partner organisations</i>	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Belarus, the World Bank, local executive and administrative bodies, civil society, and the local and national media. Who are our partners? We are grateful to UNDP in Belarus for supporting our initiative and the sponsoring, methodical and methodological help.
<i>Stakeholders</i>	The participation of society



OBJECTIVES The National Environmental Forum aims, in the first instance, to achieve the broadest possible involvement of all sections of society in the environmental movement. Its main objective, therefore, is to consolidate the efforts of the State authorities and society, an idea expressed in the motto of the Forum, “Pure intentions, united action, order on the planet!”. On this basis, many diverse initiatives are undertaken each year as part of the Forum; including national and local competitions, exhibitions, festivals, environmental activities, specialized exhibitions, an exhibition on modern technology in environmental management and protection, the Eco-film environmental film festival, the International Scientific Symposium on Environmental Problems of Natural and Industrial Areas. Each of these initiatives has its own goals and objectives, which may

be summarized as follows: making society aware of the solutions required for the environmental problems of the region and the country as a whole; raising awareness of members of society of practical activities to improve their own life (arranging courtyards, balconies and recreational areas, cleaning the housing estate of domestic waste, landscaping, using energy-saving technology in everyday life, etc.), raising environmental awareness, creating an environmentally friendly culture, promotion of the principles of sustainable development and, in the long term, changing society's behavioural model to one which is in harmony with nature.

METHODOLOGY To organize the Forum events, national and local organizational committees of the Forum and initiative groups are created, whose members include representatives of environmental protection bodies, local authorities, staff from the education, culture, healthcare sectors and other relevant organizations. At each level, the relevant plans are drawn up, laws and regulations are adopted and cost estimates are established. To calculate the cost of the exhibitions and competitions, panels of judges are appointed and deadlines for the competitions are set. Special editions of the local and national media are prepared and leaflets, booklets and posters are printed. The final events of each stage of the Forum are conducted in a festive atmosphere. The regional (municipal) phase is the biggest and, as a rule, coincides with World Environment Day on 5 June. Important aspects of the National Environmental Forum are its continuity (events are held over a long period of time, almost all year round) and its ongoing nature (the winners of the district and municipal phases of the Forum are given the right to participate at the regional phase, and the winners of the regional phase attend the gala finale as delegates).

The tradition of holding the gala finale in one of the smaller towns of Belarus is very telling. The town to hold the gala finale is chosen through a competition. That town is transformed for the gala: it is landscaped and decorated, which also takes place with the involvement of the local inhabitants. The holding of the exhibition on modern technology in environmental management and protection since 1994 has enabled country dwellers, who have sometimes never been to Minsk or even to such an exhibition, to become acquainted with new technology and equipment relating to protecting the atmosphere, and using and protecting water resources, the earth and flora and fauna. In addition, separate sections of the exhibition are always devoted to the issues of environmental teaching, education and enlightenment of the country's population. Site visits are also included in the programme of the Forum, visiting environmentally friendly children's nurseries, schools, libraries and industrial companies, craft displays by artisans, local bakers, confectioners and cheese-makers, craft demonstrations for children and teenagers relating to craftsmanship and work with natural materials, such as willow-weaving, straw, clay and making environmentally friendly clothing.

Environmental activists who achieve the best results are awarded the special National Environmental Globe prize, a crystal globe symbolizing the fragility and the beauty of the Earth.

RESULTS & EVALUATION

Results The Forum has produced the following results in the four years it has been held:

- Both the number of local forums and those attending have increased;
- Comprehensive programmes have been carried out for the landscaping of local areas, roads, parks and public gardens;
- The network of nurseries, schools and libraries determinedly concentrating on environmental education has been expanded (the number of establishments is now more than 500), and their work has been intensified;
- Materials on conservation, protection of the environment and principles and foundations of sustainable development have been published and widely disseminated.

Strengths The greatest strength of the Environmental Forums held is their size: all of the country's regions are covered by the environmental movement. All the events held are widely covered by the press, i.e. on local television channels, local radio and in the newspapers. The number of events held also varies greatly: each local forum organizing committee may organize its own competitions, exhibitions and concerts according to the cultural and natural characteristics of the place. Competition winners, initiatives and the most active participants receive prizes and gifts and become

delegates at the gala finale of the National Environmental Forum. All the events held are widely covered in the press: local television channels, radio and in the newspapers.

Weaknesses & risks

Limited financial resources mean that not enough local forums are always held. The local environmental forums are not as dynamic in all regions as would be hoped. The efforts of all the relevant State bodies and society cannot always be co-ordinated as they should be.

Problems encountered

The public environmental movement is not sufficiently developed in Belarus. Only a small percentage of registered civil society associations work on the environment.

Conditions for successful replication

The necessary prerequisite for passing on our experience is strong local environmental initiatives, i.e. civil environmental organizations or educational institutions active in teaching, educating and raising awareness of the environment and sustainable development.

Unresolved issues

Unfortunately, we have so far not been able to establish contacts with similar initiatives in other countries.

Why do you consider this a good practice?

The Environmental Forums give everyone, regardless of sex, age or education, the chance to play a role in stabilizing society, conserving the natural and cultural heritage of their country for future generations, and making the best contribution within their power.