About the LEAF programme

Through interactive learning and field trips which engage students and teachers alike in learning outdoors, the Learning About Forests programme reconnects the next generation with their environment, educating them to be more conscious of protecting it and instilling in the participants a deeper sense of ownership of the natural world that surrounds them.

Learning about Forests aims to increase knowledge about the key role forests play in sustaining life on our planet through outdoor and classroom learning. The programme encourages students to reconnect with their woodland heritage and imbues them with a sense of ownership of their environment which, in many places, has become lost over time.

While the focus of the LEAF programme is on tree-based ecosystems, but the understanding and knowledge acquired can be applied to any environment on earth. What LEAF ultimately strives for is to enable future generations to not only make environmentally sustainable and informed decisions in their lives, but also offers them the opportunity to rediscover the beauty and wonder of the natural world.

Learning about Forests rekindles in students a desire to engage more with their natural surroundings

– A unique network

- LEAF has an all-inclusive, participatory approach involving students, teachers and the local community.
- It follows the Forest Cycle methodology: a series of carefully engineered measures to help schools maximise the success of their LEAF ambitions.
- LEAF facilitates contact between participating institutions not just at the national level, but also internationally.
- The LEAF programme is linked to and helps achieve the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030 addressed by the United Nations.

LEAF COOPERATES WITH

Institutional Partners

Corporate Partners

LEARNING ABOUT FORESTS IS RUN IN 25 COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD

600 000 Students

25 Countries
It has been another busy year for the Learning About Forests programme!

Over the course of 2017 Learning About Forests was delighted to welcome on board two new member organisations from South Africa and Northern Ireland and see the programme launched officially in Trinidad and Tobago and the Republic of Ireland.

The LEAF National Operators Meeting took place in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and was a huge success with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Tiny Forests concept proving very engaging focal points. Indeed the tiny Forests proved so popular that several National Operators have already started their own!

The purpose of this report is to highlight the global impact that LEAF has annually and showcase some of the successes our National Operators achieved over the past year. The impressive facts and figures speak for themselves, but it is the stories of the countries that have the deepest meaning and I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I do.

I look forward to the year ahead and working again with all the passionate LEAF coordinators from around the world to help strengthen the programme, raise awareness about the importance of our forests and help the next generation grow in an environment they can feel proud of.
## Participating Countries

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<th>Country</th>
<th>Year started LEAF</th>
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<td>Belgium</td>
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<td>Bulgaria</td>
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<td>Japan</td>
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<td>South Africa</td>
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<td>Trinidad and Tobago</td>
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<td>Uganda</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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## REPORT TO DATE

### Overall update

With more than 4,000 schools, 20,439 teachers and 600,000 students involved actively in the programme in 2017, the past year has seen impressive growth for Learning about Forests.

During 2017 LEAF welcomed two new member organisations from the USA and Northern Ireland, and was officially launched in Trinidad and Tobago and the Republic of Ireland, countries that had informally adopted the programme over some years.

LEAF has successfully continued its collaboration with General Motors in order to run the ‘Eco-Green’ project. Initially launched in Brazil, the project expanded in Mexico in late 2017. The project aims to pilot the LEAF programme in these countries and run the project alongside GM facilities in a bid to improve sustainability in local communities. Together they develop goals and action plans that result in on-the-ground school and community actions for a sustainable future.

While the Global Forest Fund (GFF) continues to be an effective tool for offsetting carbon emissions from travel, it is finally getting an upgrade to make it a cutting-edge solution for the issue of carbon offsetting for businesses, conferences, industrial areas and even cities! The fund, which is overseen by International LEAF Director Barry McGonigal, continues to invest 90% of its income directly into tree planting and other CO2 compensation efforts in conjunction with community-based environmental education activities. In 2017, FEE funded 7 projects around the world, from Bangladesh to Ghana, which planted thousands of native trees and educated hundreds of local schoolchildren and community members. Under redevelopment in 2018, the GFF will be relaunched in the near future in a format that will allow all FEE NOs, non-FEE organisations, private travelers and businesses worldwide to offset their carbon and enact ESD instruction across the globe.

In September 2017 FEE said goodbye to Learning about Forests Assistant Karine Galstyan and welcomed on board Irene Míguez-Valero. Irene has joined LEAF as part of the EVS programme and will be with FEE until June of 2018.

LEAF has seen impressive increases in the online profile of the programme and has taken a proactive approach to increasing this presence over the past 12 months to reach on average 8% more people through online social media than at the same time last year.
LEAF Themes

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 21 March the International Day of Forests. The Day celebrates and raises awareness of the importance of all types of forests. On each International Day of Forests, countries are encouraged to undertake local, national and international efforts to organize activities involving forests and trees, such as tree planting campaigns.

Since 2017, LEAF is adopting FAO’s annual themes for its initiatives around the world, in its effort to ensure the integration of the SDGs in the programme.

PLANTING TREES FOR PEACE

The ENO, Plant A Tree For Peace Day took place on 21st September to coincide with the United Nations World Peace Day. It is part of a global campaign which invites children all over the world to focus on environmental issues, fostering an appreciation of peace and increasing the awareness of school children about the importance of trees and forests on a global scale.

The first trees are planted at dawn in Oceania with the rising of the sun, and this process is repeated around the world, linking the peoples of the world through this one common, simple act of environmental conservation.

The planting of trees symbolises hope and the continuity of life. This year the LEAF network was extremely well-represented with 169 tree-planting activities taking place involving some 6,672 students, teachers and community members.
In 2017, over 4,000 schools took part in the LEAF programme. 77% of the schools engage specific classes of the school in the LEAF programme and 23% engages the whole school.

600,000 students took part in the programme, engaged by and under the supervision of 20,439 teachers.

Teachers around the world engaged in the LEAF programme receive special training through 94 workshops organised during the academic year. In addition, a total of 184 LEAF Student Workshops were organised.

According to the participating schools data, 72% of the countries carried through outdoor activities 2-3 times a year, 11% performed 1-2 monthly lessons in nature and 11% complemented their curriculum with outside activities several times a week.
Tiny Forests at a glance

What is a tiny forest?

A Tiny Forest is a dense, native woodland around the size of a tennis court.

The forest is not only an attractive location for butterflies, birds, bees and small mammals, but a pleasant place for people as well.

In the outdoor classroom, children can learn about their native flora and fauna. More than fifty percent of the world’s population lives in an urban environment.

Tiny Forests and trees in the city help the urban population to stay connected to nature while improving their lives with better air quality and lower instances of flooding.

Effects

- The forest brings nature experience closer. A Tiny Forest in front of the door stimulates curiosity and gives people the chance to discover nature in their own environment.
- The construction of Tiny Forests increase water storage capacity, improves air quality and counteracts heat stress.
- It stimulates biodiversity: the forest of 200 m² consists of many different types of trees which attract insects and birds.
- Finally, a forest has a positive effect on health: more nature in the neighborhood can result in less stress and stress-related complaints.

The Netherlands and Ireland

“This is so cool. This really feels like our forest! In ten years when I walk by and look at this forest, then I will know that I have planted these trees. That is what I will be thinking off!”

IVN, our member organisation in the Netherlands introduced the concept of Tiny Forests to Europe and, in 2015, the first Tiny Forest has been officially planted in Zaanstad: 600 trees divided in over 40 species.

Tiny Forests are spreading across the Netherlands and there are now 7 forests in various locations. After the NOM last year, Ireland decided to adopt the concept and it is planning a pilot ‘Tiny Forests initiative’ in early 2018.
REGIONAL INITIATIVE

Forest Action for Climate Change Mitigation (FACCM)

During 2017, a LEAF initiative steered by the Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature in Greece was piloted between four neighbouring LEAF countries. Focused on dealing with the topic of climate change from a regional perspective, Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania are collaborating on materials across four distinct themes, each of which educates the participants about the role of forests in mitigating climate change.

Following a kick-off meeting in November 2017 it was agreed that three LEAF schools from each country would participate. The international cooperation will see materials prepared which can be shared between the countries in the future. As the environmental situation in all four countries has several shared elements, these materials will be made so as to be easily relatable when used in each land. At the end of the project, each school will develop its own eco-code which will include their own innovative ideas on how to mitigate the impact of climate change on forests.
Feature story: Japan
Children with special needs in the forest

In 2017, FEE Japan had the opportunity to offer the LEAF programme to children with special needs who attend dedicated support classes.

The outdoor activities focused on the use of the five senses, as the forest is a place where all the senses can be stimulated. The children were excited to discover the leaves, flowers and trees, they chose their favorite trees and give them special names.

From this experience, we found out that the program is a great tool for the children who need special support. It truly was a great experience for them in school yard.

Feature story: Bulgaria
The impact of environmental education on families and communities

The environmental education carried out through the LEAF programme has the main goal to prepare and educate students, teachers and parents that the forest is an important and crucial element of our environment.

We try to make them care for and protect the forest in their everyday life. When analysing people’s behaviour, it emerges clearly that our work is fruitful. We often notice that our ideas influence whole families through their children, who are participating in our projects and activities.

All this, leads to a more reasonable and sustainable use of the forest – and when protecting the forest becomes a part of the environmental thinking of the future parents, we can’t be other than optimistic.
Feature story: Trinidad & Tobago

Through the Member Organisation Green T & T (formerly Asclepius Green) the LEAF programme is now active in the University School and Fast Learners Academy, in Trinidad and Tobago.
The participants came up with creative and innovative ways of engaging the students in activities throughout the entire year using Math, Science, Social Studies and Arts.

The University School has expressed their delight in participating in the LEAF program which they see as an extension of their own drive to produce enlightened and self-reliant children. The schools believe that instilling moral and cultural values in students produces caring and nurturing members of society.

What is also special about the University School is the entire student population will participate in the LEAF cycle for the entire year. For the tree planting exercise on September 21, there were over 303 students, teachers and parents participating. The school had a Special Assembly and Ceremony that comprised of tree planting, forming the peace sign and engaging in prayer before breaking out into song and singing the Jackson Miller classic "Let there be peace on Earth".

Feature Story: Latvia's Forest Olympics

"It is nice that the event took place in nature and the questions were educational. We also had to prepare, and this is the added value, that children are learning while preparing, and it is exactly this knowledge stays in their heads better than sitting by the desk in a classroom."

Teacher

The ten most active Latvian schoolchildren teams met on 27 April in the LVM Nature Park in Tērvete. Teams participating in the final of Forest Olympics had to show their strength in two rounds – in the active and educational orienteering competition and in the presentation of creative performances. To participants’ minds the most memorable tasks from the orienteering competition were the riddles in the Witch’s Forest of the Nature Park, sawing the birch disc to precisely 400 grams, and also recognising products that contain wood, which surprised not only children but also teachers with the wide possibilities of wood use.
The LEAF NOM 2017

The Learning about Forests National Operators meeting 2017 took place on 24th -26th April in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

The LEAF NOM 2017 was hosted by FEE’s Dutch member, IVN, and was underpinned by two main themes: LEAF’s role in supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Tiny Forests initiative.

Following a session outlining FEE’s commitment to the SDGs by FEE CEO Daniel Schaffer, the role of LEAF in promoting the SDGs worldwide was given an international context through a presentation by Hugo G. von Meijenfeldt, SDG coordinator for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A hands-on introduction to the concept of the Tiny Forests initiative was given by Daan Bleichrodt of the IVN who highlighted the importance of urban forests and trees in combating climate change and stimulating biodiversity while engaging the children of urban areas to learn more about their natural world.

Eco Green Project

Initially launched in Brazil, the project expanded in Mexico in late 2017.

The project aims to engage countries alongside GM facilities in a bid to introduce the LEAF programme while improving sustainability in local communities. Together they develop goals and action plans that result in on-the-ground school and community actions for a sustainable future.

Objectives of the project

✔ Ensure students learn to enjoy the outdoors, experience and observe
✔ Increase awareness about Forests and Water and ensure students are capable of making decisions on environmental issues
✔ Develop a project that is easy to apply to all types of educational facilities
✔ Promote critical thinking by ‘learn by doing’ study approach environmental education activities