

## Activist from Burundi receives top forestry award

16 October 2019



Leonidas Nzigiympa receives the Wangari Maathai 'Forest Champions' Award 2019 in Curitiba, Brazil.

**Rome/Curitiba, Brazil** - Burundian forestry activist Leonidas Nzigiympa was awarded the 2019 Wangari Maathai 'Forest Champions' Award in recognition of his passionate commitment and outstanding contribution to improving forests and the lives of indigenous peoples, women and youth in his country.

The award ceremony took place on Monday on the sidelines of [the 25th World Congress](#) of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO).

Mr. Nzigiympa is known for his tireless efforts sometimes at risk of his personal safety to boost food security and living standards of local populations in his country. He was also instrumental in improving education for children in such areas as ecology, restoration and sustainable forest management.

Among other achievements, Mr Nzigiympa led the first effort in the history of Burundi to involve indigenous peoples in sustainable forest management. He

reached out to a community of 130 Batwa indigenous people who had been living on the streets of the city of Bururi in precarious conditions.

They formed an association, pooled their savings, opened a bank account, and eventually purchased three hectares of land on the Bururi Nature Reserve, where they built their own houses and became the guardians of the forest, which has long been threatened by illegal logging.

Accepting the award, Nzigiympa said: "I decided to embark young people by connecting them to their nature, educating them, influencing them and finally changing them: as the youth is the future of my country, planting trees is also planting for the future."

### **"Forests need champions"**

Since 2012, the award has recognized inspiring individuals who have helped preserve, restore and sustainably manage forests and improve the lives of people who depend on them. It was established by the [Collaborative Partnership on Forests](#) (CPF), and named after the Kenyan environmentalist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai.

"The world needs champions. People need champions. Forests need champions," said FAO Assistant Director-General for Forestry and the CPF Chair Hiroto Mitsugi at the ceremony today. "All the awardees are immensely impressive people working on the front line against forest and landscape degradation. They are helping win the battle, seedling by seedling, farmer by farmer, community by community".

"These are the people we need on our side. These are our champions," Mitsugi added.

The Collaborative Partnership on Forests, which is chaired by FAO, is comprised of 15 international organizations working together to promote sustainable management of all types of forests and strengthen long-term political commitment to this end.

Source: <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1235744/icode/>