

LION D'OR

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In July 2013, IRGM (Institute of Geological and Mining Research- Cameroon) was awarded the 2014 Presidential Prize for its outstanding activities toward mitigation of natural gas disasters at Lakes Nyos and Monoun. The prize, "LION D'OR" (Lion's Gold medal) symbolized excellence and was accompanied by a check of 20 million FCFA. This prize meant that among all the research institutions (public and private) that postulated for the prize, IRGM was found to be the best in Cameroon in 2013. A replica of the LION D'OR is shown in Photo 1.



Photo 1. A replica of the "LION D'OR" trophy. It is 37 cm long and weighs 3 kg.

Since 1986 when the Lake Nyos gas disaster took place, the Government of Cameroon (represented by IRGM) in collaboration with foreign countries (Japan included) has taken various measures such as artificial degassing of the lakes, reinforcement of the natural dam of Lake Nyos, necessary steps to ensure safe rehabilitation of refugees after the Lake Nyos disaster to their ancestral homeland. This synergy has not only created a friendly diplomatic bridge between the collaborating countries, but outcomes such as the 'LION D'OR' is a sign of IRGM success that was well appreciated by the Cameroon Government, and pleasing to the IRGM administrative machinery and its employees.

It is worth noting that Japanese scientists have played a central role in monitoring of Lakes Nyos and Monoun since 1986. Although the Japanese Government did not make substantial financial contribution for the aspects related to hardware for the construction of degassing systems and dam reinforcement, they made a great contribution related to capacity building. This capacity building that started in 1990 involved invitation of young

IRGM scientists to Japanese Universities. Such invitations exposed them to cutting edge approach of obtaining Ph.D. or M.Sc. degree. I am glad to observe that such a capacity building approach has nurtured mature scientists who are making remarkable contributions for IRGM to attain the objectives of its missions.

In April 2011, a new mission as a project entitled “Magmatic Fluid Supply into Lakes Nyos and Monoun, and Mitigation of Natural Disasters through Capacity Building in Cameroon” was launched as a cooperative program between some Japanese universities and IRGM. The project is an offshoot of a bigger project called ‘Science and Technology Research Partnership for Sustainable Development (SATREPS)’ that is sponsored by JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) and JST (Japan Science and Technology Agency). The ongoing SATREPS project which I like to call “SATREPS-NyMo” is headed by Prof. T. Ohba of Tokai University. The most important objective of the project is capacity building of young Cameroonian scientists. So within the framework of the project young and motivated researchers and students from research organizations (research institutes and universities) in Cameroon have been invited to various Japanese universities. These young Cameroonians are working hard toward obtaining Ph.D. degree, and are expected to continue working actively in the field of disaster mitigation after returning home. Additionally, the analytical capability of the geochemical laboratory of IRGM was strengthened through donation of some analytical equipment, such as an ion chromatograph, IR-laser-based water isotope analyzer, atomic absorption spectrometer, ultra-pure water maker, etc. Thus, for the first time in the Central African sub-Region, IRGM is having a standard laboratory for water analyses.

With the assistance of other Japanese researchers, Minoru Kusakabe who has been working to monitor the geochemical evolution of Lakes Nyos and Monoun for more than 28 years in collaboration with IRGM scientists and technicians has also been ensuring the proper functioning of the laboratory in IRGM. Such long-lasting collaboration and scientific devotion to disaster mitigation by M. Kusakabe certainly constituted the background for JICA and JST to accept the creation of the ongoing SATREPS-NyMo project. Accordingly, IRGM expressed their deep appreciation to M. Kusakabe by handing over a replica of the Cameroon’s President prize "LION D'OR" and awarded an attestation of gratitude and recognition to him (Photo 2). The award ceremony was held at the Japanese Ambassador’s residence on 8th November 2013 as shown in Photo 3.



Photo 2. Attestation given to M. Kusakabe from IRGM

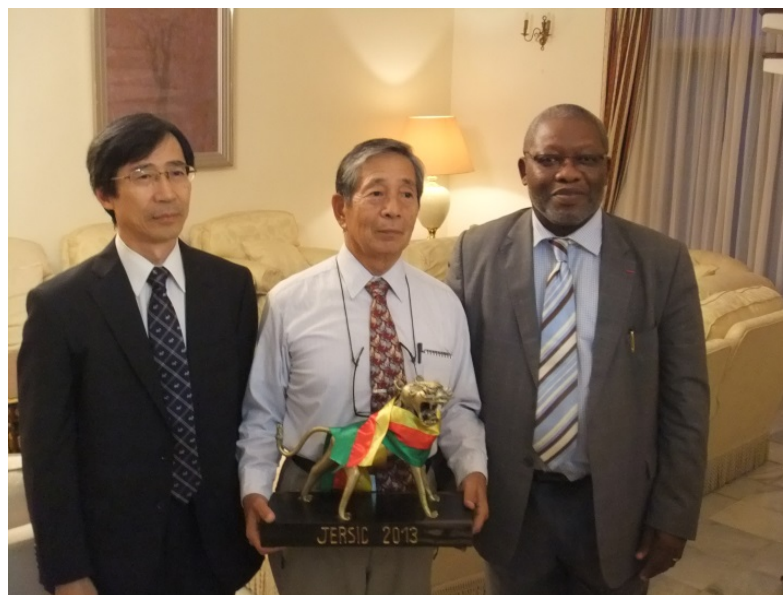


Photo 3. A ceremony of awarding "LION D'OR" to Minoru Kusakabe. From left to right, Mr. T. Arai, Japanese Ambassador to Cameroon, M.K. and Dr. J.V. Hell, Director of IRGM. The photograph was taken at the ambassador's residence in Yaounde on 8th November 2013.