IN THE SPOTLIGHT- The Parataxonomists Training Center

Devoted to training Papuan New Guinean parataxonomists

Local capacity building is important to allow effective participation in any form of development. It is useful when we have local participation in any form of development to ensure continuity. Local capacity building also helps to create motivation and a sense of responsibility among the local people to look after and manage a development project in their area. Though recently established, The Parataxonomist Training Center has been one such vibrant organization in Papua New Guinea (PNG) that plays a vital role in encouraging local participation. The Parataxonomist Training Center was established in 1994 to cater for the study of PNG biodiversity. Since then it has been very instrumental in its projects especially in training of parataxonomists, and working with the local communities and scientists, in promoting PNG biodiversity work.

Based in Madang Province, its current training and research program includes eight parataxonomists. The trainees are all local school leavers from 18 to 28 years of age, with formal education from grades six to ten. Training of the parataxonomists include: i) teaching in general biology and other science related fields; ii) animal and plant collecting and field study, using a wide range of techniques; iii) animal and plant mounting and their preparation for taxonomic study; iv) microscopy and digital macro photography; v) computing, particularly data input and management of database, word editors, spreadsheets, internet access, and image editing software; and vi) principles of environmental awareness and design of educational materials.

Since its inception, education and conservation has been its major effort in working toward achieving its goals to: 1) train Papua New Guineans as parataxonomists, 2) facilitating their collaboration with various biological research projects in PNG, 3) developing their educational and nature conservation awareness programs, targeting grassroots audiences. The Center is currently sponsored mainly by the National Science Foundation (USA), as well as by training and research grants from the PNG Biological Foundation, Conservation Melanesia, and the Czech Academy of Sciences. Funding for the operational expenses of the Center, as well as for a variety of training, research, educational and nature conservation awareness projects is being sought for the year 2000 and beyond.

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