

A METHODOLOGY FOR PREPARING PLANT FIELD GUIDES IN THE TROPICS

If biodiversity is to be valued, conserved and used more effectively, it is important that a wide range of people should be able to identify the taxa, and learn more about them, either by linking with scientific knowledge or documenting and enhancing local knowledge. There is considerable experience in producing field guides, written by scientists for scientists, and in the North, experience in producing guides which are more accessible to a general public. When using biodiversity in rural development, however, and when meeting the commitments made under the Convention on Biological Diversity, many institutions in tropical countries wish to provide field guides to facilitate accurate species identification and provide wider knowledge about those species. What are the challenges for botanists, of writing guides for local communities, extension workers, or ecotourists? Conversely, what should a development worker do to write guides that are scientifically accurate?

Two new projects funded by the Forestry Research Programme of the UK Department for International Development will be working in tandem to address these questions. The two projects together will produce a handbook (*How to produce useful guides to forest plants in the tropics*) intended to stimulate and facilitate the production of new field guides. This will be in two parts: *Planning and process* (coordinated by Anna Lawrence, of the Green College Centre for Natural Resources and Development (CNRD)), and *Botanical aspects* (coordinated by Colin Hughes and William Hawthorne, of the Department of Plant Sciences (DPS)), both within Oxford University, UK.

The projects will explore different approaches to writing field guides, by assessing the experience of writing and using existing guides, working with a range of user groups to define their information needs, and particularly through a process approach to the preparation and empirical field testing of guides in collaboration with user groups and specialists. The research will also involve the analysis of resources required to prepare different types of guides.

Our aim is to enable botanical and non-specialist authors to work together with potential users, to produce field guides which benefit rural livelihoods and biodiversity. To do this, we will explore and document ways to combine scientific and local knowledge in an effective and usable way. Guides will be written as the result of an iterative and collaborative process with user groups, ensuring that they are accurate and effective as resources allow, and meet real user-group demands.

Each project will be collaborating with institutions in tropical countries to write field guides and learn from the process of doing so. The CNRD project links with Bolivia and Brazil, and is collaborating with the Fundación Amigos de la Naturaleza (FAN) and Centro de Investigación Agrícola Tropical (CIAT) in Bolivia, and with Universidade de Estadual de Feira de Santana, Bahia (UEFS), Assessoria e Serviços a Projetos em Agricultura Alternativa (AS-PTA), and the Centro Nordestino de Informação sobre Plantas (CNIP) of the Universidade Federal de Pernambuco in Brazil. Specifically, we

envisage producing the following guides:

In Bolivia: one guide for ecotourists, for the area around Bajo Paragua, Noel Kempff Mercado National Park; one guide to the timber tree species, for communities involved in sustainable forest management in the buffer zone. In Brazil: a technical identification guide to all forage legumes in the state of Bahia, for use by agronomists, including those working with the PTA network of NGOs, and for conservation / botanists / park wardens in Chapada Diamantina National Park; this will include more formal means of identification; a more practical guide to the 30 most promising species, for use by community workers; this would include cultivation and nutrition details for example. Details will be defined through consultation/participation with communities involved.

The DPS project links up with Ghana, Grenada and Mexico, and aims to prepare the following guides (i) In Ankasa, Ghana: the most important NTFPs (< 25 species in total - palms, Marantaceae and *Garcinia* species), the 100 big trees of Ankasa, the genera and species of Rubiaceae with particular emphasis on *Psychotria* species for ecotourists. (ii) In Grenada: woody forest plants (100-150 species), (iii) In Quintana Roo, Mexico: compound-leaved woody forest plants (ca. 150 species)

We would be interested in hearing from others with experience in producing user-friendly field guides in rural development contexts. Please contact:

Dr Anna Lawrence
Centre for Natural Resources and Development
Green College
University of Oxford
Woodstock Road
Oxford OX 2 6HG
United Kingdom
Email: AnnaL1@aol.com or anna.lawrence@green.ox.ac.uk

Drs Colin Hughes and William Hawthorne
Department of Plant Sciences
University of Oxford
South Parks Road
Oxford OX1 3RB
United Kingdom