Capacity Building for Sustainable Development

Building a digital library in Mbandaka, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Capacity Building in the DRC: Where to Start?

In Equateur province in the northwestern DRC, REDD+ has been recognized as a financial mechanism that could help conserve forest resources and alleviate widespread poverty. The DRC REDD+ Investment Plan for 2015-2020 has identified that their first window of funding must address the need for national capacity building, as capacity deficits are a risk to a decentralized REDD+ structure. The plan also notes that “capacity building of local and national institutions to better manage space and natural resources” are a key to laying “the foundations for a harmonious and sustainable development of the country.”

Survey and Results

While national academic programs addressing environmental issues and sustainable development have been put in place, there is little information available that explores program content and quality. In order to learn more, Projet Equateur has partnered with the Higher Institute of Rural Development in Mbandaka (ISDR-MBK), a public tertiary education institution focused on rural development.

In the summer of 2014, a survey was carried out at ISDR-MBK with staff and students concerning environmental knowledge and educational experiences. Results revealed most notably that:

• Students and teachers lack access to updated and relevant learning materials to further studies and research
• Despite 66% of students surveyed being in their final year of a Sustainable Development and Environment degree program responses reflect low levels of environmental literacy
• Students have low French literacy, despite it being the primary language used for courses, learning materials and exams at the Institute.

“Development does not start with goods; it starts with people and their education, organization, and discipline.”
E. F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful

Looking Forward

Tertiary institutions, especially those with programs focused on environmental issues and sustainable development solutions are crucial in helping build informed and capable professionals with the skills and competencies to run, monitor, and evaluate REDD+ programs. In order for REDD+ to become successful in the DRC, widespread access to information is needed, along with:

• Basic technical capacity building and professional training
• Improvement and modernization of the country’s existing educational infrastructure to support digital materials
• French and English literacy support integrated into updated curriculums to improve access to online information, as computer operating systems and scientific journals are not available in local languages
• Support for private sector actors who are essential partners in delivering and maintaining solar and IT systems

Environmental Literacy Survey

The chart shows percentages of correct answers to the multiple-choice section of the survey broken down by grade level and gender. All students surveyed were in the final year of their program (either finishing a license or graduate degree), and 66% completing a degree specifically in Sustainable Development and the Environment. Questions were based on an environmental literacy survey given at universities in New Zealand and Australia and also created with regard to local environmental concerns. The average score was 53%.

Multi-Choice Question Breakdown

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Putting Research into Action

In the summer of 2016, Projet Équateur began working with ISDR administration to allow students and staff better access to current information, as well as give them computer training necessary for future development careers. The following were completed in August and September of this year:

• Digital library collection database consisting of open access papers and reports available on 10 computers and 20 tablets
• Solar panel system, VSAT installation and building renovations to help secure materials
• Development of a procedure manual to help manage new materials and computer classes for library staff
• Development of accessible documents to help users navigate the operating system, the Internet, the digital library, and find research and teaching materials
• Compilation of online links to videos, podcasts, online courses, international scholarship information and other resources relevant to subject matter as well as to help improve technical French and English reading and writing skills