

Ghanaian taxonomic needs assessment: criteria and findings

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Abstract

Ghana has started a project of national taxonomic needs assessment to understand all the issues connected with the paucity of information on biodiversity. This is considered as a way to initiate the implementation of the programme of work of the Global Taxonomy Initiative. The project has an 18 month duration and it is a joint effort between Ghanaian national institutions and two UK institutions that had earlier demonstrated a successful taxonomic assessment for the UK.

The project is going through a seven-step process identified in the UK example. Collation and analysis of the raw data from the field including those from interviews and questionnaires are being done.

The outcome of the project is expected to feed into national policy decision on training and practice of taxonomy in issues of conservation, sustainable use and equity (benefit-sharing) of Ghanaian biodiversity.

Introduction

In providing information on the implementation of the Programme of Work of the Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI) as part of the 3rd national report to the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Ghana highlighted the urgency to undertake national level Taxonomic Needs Assessment. This was borne out of the desire to overcome the dearth in the training and practice of taxonomy in Ghana and the obvious appreciation of the promise inherent in the noble ideals of the GTI programme which were considered as useful.

Project duration

The assessment in Ghana is scheduled for 18 months from January 2006 to August 2007.

The purpose of the project

The main purpose of the assessment is to provide the Government of Ghana and the key stakeholders (those who use and those who provide taxonomic services) with a clear priority analysis of the taxonomic needs of biodiversity-related sectors in the country. The aim is to provide a basis for the integration of taxonomic issues in biodiversity into government policies, and to provide appropriate actions of the Ghanaian taxonomic institutions on identified needs.

The Main Actors in the project

The following institutions have been identified as the main actors:

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- The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) which is the foremost Ghanaian science and technology organization with 13 institutes responsible for specific mandates for national research and development. It has direct contact with all the other academic institutions including the universities.
 - BioNET-WAFRINET which is the West African loop of BioNET-INTERNATIONAL and whose secretary based in Accra Ghana
 - BioNET-INTERNATIONAL which is the secretariat for all the loops and based in the UK
 - Natural History Museum (NHM) of the UK based in London

The concept and beginning of the project

BioNET-INTERNATIONAL acting through the BioNET-WAFRINET and the CBD focal point in Ghana started discussing the possibility of funding a project that will enable Ghana to achieve her desires in addressing the GTI issue mentioned in its 3rd national report. Through a funding support source from the WSSD Implementation Fund (WIF) of the UK Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) made available to the Natural History Museum of London, the start of the project became possible.

At COP 6 of the Convention on Biological Diversity held in Curitiba, Brazil in March 2006, a workshop was held as a side event to introduce and formally launch the project.

The Approach

The approach adopted to this project is based on the one developed by the UK. Prior to the launch of the Ghanaian project, the UK had published a needs assessment which brought out a seven-step operational focus and this was found useful and adopted for the Ghanaian project. The process identified was as follows:

- Selection of assessment focus
- Assessment of national user needs and priorities for taxonomic information
- Assessment of existing taxonomic knowledge about national biodiversity, its availability to and employment by users, and the sustainability of these sources
- Assessment of current national taxonomic infrastructure
- Assessment of current national human resources in taxonomy
- Analysis of results; and
- Recommendations for action

In following these steps, the methods adopted to get the required base-line information in Ghana identified the consideration of workshops, interview schedules and questionnaire application.

The purpose of the adoption of these methods, referring particularly to the first five bullet points, was to enable an identification of the wide spectrum of taxonomic users (across all sectors of the Ghanaian economy for selection) , available sources of important documentation and knowledge about Ghanaian biodiversity.

Achievements

The following actions have taken place:

- A first national workshop has been held
- Questionnaires have been circulated and are being collected for analysis
- Interviews are on-going and details will be collated for analysis

The outcome of the first national workshop was very impressive. The opening ceremony attracted a very large spectrum of the Ghanaian society and the Press carried it widely on radio, print and electronic media. The news was also carried on the internet and by other international press. The main part of the national workshop was restricted to only nominated representatives of national institutions that had been identified in the assessment focus and it lasted for additional four days.

The following topics were presented and discussed: Taxonomic practice, process and product; Case studies situations from the African Pollinator Initiative, fruit fly taxonomy in national and international economies and BioNET-WAFRINET initiatives; the why and the how for a needs assessment including other relevant questions; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and taxonomy in Ghana ; possible regional solutions to issues of taxonomy.

The case studies component provided opportunity for the workshop participants to understand why taxonomy matters through a series of information provided on the following:

- how Invasive Alien Species were prevented from establishment
- how taxonomy promotes trade
- how it encouraged development of a cheaper and safer road network
- how safer herbal medicines are prepared
- how an insect pest was identified as responsible for mango and citrus devastation in West Africa
- how identification skills contribute to prevention of harmful algal blooms and the development of very healthy fish stocks
- how information on pollinators of crop plants contribute to wealth creation
- how taxonomy of fruit fly can remove trade restrictions placed on exports from Ghana

The next activities

By the end of August 2007 when the project would have come to an end, the following activities are expected to have been conducted:

- Collation of interview reports

- Collation of questionnaire reports
- Analysis of all collated data
- Development of Draft Recommendations including strategies for goals and actions
- Holding of second national workshop to discuss and adopt the draft recommendations.

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