

## **MODULE 7: Communities and Conservation**

### **Practicum 1: Documenting Local Environmental Knowledge**

#### **Introduction**

This practicum helps students learn how to document changes in communities over time, from seasonal cycles to family trees to historical events.

#### **Rationale**

Local environmental knowledge underpins the choices people make about what and where to hunt fish and gather plant resources. Knowledge includes an understanding of natural cycles in the environment, e.g., weather, phenology and migration. Local people's knowledge includes understanding of history of land use and resource conflicts as well as expectations for the future, which can have a powerful effect on current behavior.

#### **Instructions**

Visit a local community. Ask interviewees about their uses of nature. What categories are important to people, how they are arranged, and what values are attached to them?

### **Practicum 2: Assessing local community attitudes and values towards conservation**

Being a conservationist means taking action to maintain the world's biological diversity, a prospect often fraught with controversy because of people's conflicting values and subsistence need. Conservationists need to consider social, political, and economic perspectives and to understand how people think and feel about the other life forms with which they live in dynamic interactions.

#### **Objectives**

To learn about community values and perspectives concerning a biodiversity-related issue, to practice survey techniques, and to learn how to report results from the survey.

#### **Rationale**

People's values – what they hold as important – and their subsistence needs influence their choices about how to use the resources in the environment around them. When developing strategies for biodiversity conservation, core values as well as political, cultural, and economic factors are all important to consider. Taking these into account and understanding the stakeholders – people who will be directly or indirectly affected by a management option – are critical in developing a successful conservation strategy.

Researchers use participant observation, surveys and interviews to gather information about people's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. A survey is a systematic way of collecting information from a sample of people that represents a population. Results from surveys may be used to inform policy or to develop an appropriate educational campaign. Results from surveys can be used to develop communication strategies appropriate for different audiences. Surveys can also be used to gauge the economic value that people place on biodiversity.

## **Instructions**

Simulate that you are carrying out a survey of a local community adjacent to a conservation area. Gather information about local people's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in relation to that conservation area.

In small groups, choose a protected area in Liberia. Find out all you can about the natural and social environment of the selected protected area and its surroundings. Pretend that you have been asked to prepare a 10-year community conservation plan, with the goal of turning over complete management authority at the end of the 10 years to local/indigenous people who live in the region.

You will need to:

1. Briefly describe the natural and social environment of the area – landscape, climate, unique characteristics of the region. Who and what lives and grows there?
2. Describe the specific initiatives that you will take to involve communities in conservation of the area, and specific ways that these conservation initiatives will benefit local people.
3. In describing the initiatives in #2, how will you prepare the local population in the kinds of resource management and administrative expertise that is required to conserve a natural area on their own? This should include a time-line for training and development of institutional structures needed to manage the resource.