CABIN: Implementing a Biodiversity Information Network in Central Africa

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In 2007, the Royal Museum for Central Africa started the SABIN/Sub-Saharan African Biodiversity Network initiative. Its aim is the development, the installation and the maintenance of a network of databases on biodiversity, in cooperation with scientific institutions located in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2008, this initiative was made concrete with the launch of the CABIN project (Central African Biodiversity Information Network), which focuses on DR Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. CABIN is supported by the Belgian General Direction of Development Cooperation.

The activities encompassed by this project are:

- The conducting of an assessment and a need analysis in Central Africa, in terms of access to information about taxonomy and biodiversity on the Internet.
- The identification of specimen collections that may be digitized and later published on the Internet.
- Capacity Building: installation of a database and a web portal able to exchange data with the GBIF network (Global Biodiversity Information Facility), together with the possibility to train and teach staff for the maintenance of this technical infrastructure.
- Digitization and publishing of these data will take place in close collaboration with local researchers and researchers from the RMCA, using internationally recognized Internet protocols and software recommended by the GBIF and TDWG (Taxonomic Database Working Group).

We are in discussion with the CEDESURK (Centre de Documentation de l’Enseignement Supérieur, Universitaire et de la Recherche à Kinshasa) for the implementation of the project. CEDESURK is a knowledge centre based at Kinshasa University, which is co-funded by the VUJ-UDS (Flemish Interuniversity Council-University Development Cooperation) and the CUD (Walloon University Commission for Development Cooperation).

It organizes IT seminars and training sessions gathering scientists and technician from Congolese, Rwandan and Burundian universities and has the technical infrastructure to host big databases and publish them on the Internet. CEDESURK already collaborates with the Geological and anthropological department of the RMCA. It is also involved with the telephone operator Celtel in the Ebalé project which seeks to connect 9 universities from the Western, Southern and Eastern part of the Congo (UNIKIN, FCK, UPN, ISTA & UPC in Kinshasa, UL in Mbanda-Ngungu, UNILU in Lumumbashi, UNIKIS Kigangani & UCB in Bukavu) in a common Internet network, by using relay stations for cell-phones as carrier.

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