



**The Center of Excellence in Biodiversity and Natural Resource Management
(CoEB)**

University of Rwanda

Biology Department - CoEB Hub Workshop Report

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Executive Summary

The Center of Excellence in Biodiversity and Natural Resources Management (CoEB) is a knowledge management center consisting of a network of governmental and non-governmental environment-related research and higher learning institutions in Rwanda called *nodes*, coordinated by a central *hub* located at University of Rwanda.



On Thursday 26 January 2017, the Center of Excellence in Biodiversity and Natural Resource Management (CoEB) with the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) hosted a half day workshop for its hub, the Biology Department at the CoEB office, University of Rwanda – Huye campus, to present the mission and goals, current operating status, and solicit inputs and commitments from Biology Department staff for their integration with the CoEB.

The workshop used active group facilitation techniques to gather information from the participants and seek commitments to advance the CoEB. The workshop was opened by the Director General of Science Technology and Research at MINEDUC, and the Chair of the Steering Committee of the CoEB, Dr. Christine Gasingirwa, and facilitated discussions were run by Director of CoEB Prof. Beth Kaplin. In attendance were also the Head of Biology Department Prof. Donat Nsabimana, Pierre Claver Nyilingoga the M&E Expert from MINEDUC, Biology department staff, class representatives from Biology Department (BSc and MSc) and CoEB staff. In total 27 people were in attendance.

Participants discussed their interest in improving teaching skills, in gaining skills in proposal preparation and in conducting and publishing research, and in strengthening the academic and research standing of the Biology Department. Specific outcomes from the meeting include a set of activities and strategies identified by lecturers, researchers and students in Biology Department for how they can participate with the CoEB and what they can gain from the Center. Awareness was raised about CoEB and attendees committed to becoming engaged and active in the CoEB activities and contributing to achieving its goals and mission and functioning as hub. Participants also made commitments to support each other in their respective professional work including grant proposal preparation, editing manuscripts for publishing, etc. The workshop was followed by a networking cocktail at Credo Hotel in Butare.

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1. Introduction

The Center of Excellence in Biodiversity and Natural Resource Management (CoEB) has its hub at the College of Science and Technology, University of Rwanda, in the Biology Department where there are conservation biology BSc, MSc and PhD programs. This hub location was selected by stakeholders through a series of workshops and gap analyses conducted by consultants and funded by UNESCO. The UR was selected to host the hub due to the presence of biodiversity conservation programs at the BSc and MSc levels, and biodiversity research activity in an academic institution. It is a great honor that Rwanda's public institution of higher education was selected as the hub for this Center.



As the CoEB is establishing, there was an urgent need to present the mission and goals to the Biology Department staff that represent the constituency of the hub, and identify how each member will interact with the CoEB. It is in this regard that the half day workshop was organized to 1) present the mission and goals of the CoEB and current operating status, and 2) solicit inputs and commitments from Biology Department staff for their integration with the CoEB through interactive discussions and group activities.

The specific outcomes of the workshop were

- 1) To gain a clear understanding among Biology staff about the CoEB
- 2) To provide the CoEB with suggestions for specific activities and benefits the staff would like to see the Center accomplish
- 3) To have the Biology Department staff commit to the CoEB specific activities or offerings they can provide to help the Center achieve its mission and goals
- 4) To strengthen the Biology Department by having staff commit to each other support for various activities that are in line with their performance contracts, for example assistant editing a manuscript, collecting data, or preparing a grant proposal

2. Workshop activities

2.1. Welcoming remarks by the guest of honor, The Director General of Science and Technology and Research at MINEDUC, Dr Christine GASINGIRWA.

The Director General of Science, Technology and Research at MINEDUC and the Chair of the Steering Committee of the CoEB, Dr. Christine GASINGIRWA opened the workshop by welcoming participants. She added that it was a special day for her to be a part of this workshop because the Center of Excellence in Biodiversity and Natural Resources Management is the idea which emerged from a Rwandan conception and is the reason why we should work together to achieve its goals since its failure is the failure of everyone. The DG encouraged participants to not only do research in biological science, but extend our borders for multidisciplinary interdisciplinary approaches. This will be achieved through partnerships with professionals in these areas who have contributing expertise. The DG concluded by saying that Biology Department staff should be innovative, creative, passionate, critical thinkers, committed and interactive since knowledge is not only for Rwandans or biologists but universal.



Dr. Christine Gasingirwa, the Director General of Science, Technology and Research in MINEDUC and chair person of the CoEB steering committee. Photo credit: Alex Ndemezo

2.2. Presentation by the acting Director of the CoEB

The acting director of the CoEB, Prof Beth Kaplin introduced the Center to participants explaining why the Center was established, its brief history, objectives, functions, achievements and how to be involved. She explained that the center has been established as a result of five main reasons: 1) the importance biodiversity for sustainable development, poverty alleviation human wellbeing; 2) the richness of biodiversity in the Albertine Rift Region which includes Rwanda; 3) the lack of scientific knowledge and research capacity in the region; and 4) missing links between scientific knowledge/research and policies/development strategies.

Mission, goals and objectives of the CoEB

Prof. Beth Kaplin, the acting director of the CoEB highlighted the mission, goal and objectives of the center.

***Mission:** Enhance knowledge of biodiversity and natural resource management for sustainable development.*

***Goal:** To encourage, enable and support stakeholders to generate and apply knowledge on Biodiversity and Natural Resources for sustainable development.*

Specific Objectives

- Enable stakeholders to generate knowledge through research and monitoring in biodiversity and natural resources
- Contribute to efficient valorization of biodiversity
- Enhance education for biodiversity and natural resources management
- Enhance information sharing in biodiversity and natural resources in Rwanda

A brief history of the Center of Excellence in Biodiversity and Natural Resources Management

The Acting Director of the CoEB explained that in the first International Research Conference on Biodiversity & Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in Kigali, 2007, H.E. President Paul Kagame emphasized the importance of biodiversity for the country's national development and called for establishment of a Center of Excellence for knowledge-based approaches to sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources in the Albertine Rift region. She acknowledged the role of UNESCO for its support, the role of the CoEB Steering Committee, the Technical Advisory Committee and other stakeholders. Major achievements thus far are: 1) Funding received from UNESCO for two capacity building workshops in Geosciences & Biodiversity for secondary school teachers and a training for terrestrial insect ecology and conservation; 2) CoEB as a member of One UN Fund Green Economy initiative; 3) Capacity building workshops: GIS tools for tropical forest conservation (MaxEnt) and Indigenous knowledge for resource management; 4) Bi-annual Newsletter; 5) Environmental education programs in primary & secondary schools in collaboration with REMA District environmental officers; and 6) Internships opportunities for University of Rwanda students in both bachelor and masters level and international students as well.

The Director also highlighted the role of the CoEB to meet National and International Targets such as Sustainable Development Goals especially goal 15, EDPRS II, Rwanda Green Growth and Climate Resiliency Strategy, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Aichi targets, Rwanda vision 2020 and the vision 2050. The Center is awaiting formal establishment as an autonomous institution under University of Rwanda, which is nearly

finalized, and this will be followed by hiring of staff while continuing to seek funds for different activities such as research, monitoring and outreach activities.

2.2. Interactive group activities

After the opening presentation about the CoEB, Prof Kaplin led three different activities to develop interactive dialogue among the participants.



Activity 1: What the Biology Department staff would like to see from the CoEB

Biology Department staff members were asked what are their expectations of the CoEB in different activities including research, teaching, capacity building and events (e.g., symposia, workshops, conferences). After small groups discussions that took one hour, each group came up with different views which they placed onto flip chart pages organized by each category of activity; these are summarized in the following table.

Category	Activities suggested for the CoEB to offer
Events (Conference, training and workshop)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organize professional trainings 2. Support staff to attend trainings, conferences and workshops 3. Organize at least one conference per year gathering all nodes 4. Organize workshops 5. Organize conferences 6. Raise biodiversity awareness by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing field trips in different Rwandan ecosystems • Give talks on radio, TV (media) about biodiversity issues • Organize public seminars and talks 7. Organize international symposium and presentation of research results 8. Organize multidisciplinary field study trips

Teaching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organize staff training about interactive teaching methods 2. Update teaching materials and equipment 3. Create museum and herbarium for teaching or biodiversity illustration 4. Enhance the quality of education 5. Provide opportunities for young conservationists or students for data collection 6. Provide internship support for students 7. Train all student about publishing, bibliography software, etc.
Capacity building	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide trainings about mechanisms of raising funds 2. Increase awareness to all relevant & potential stakeholders 3. Increase local capacity for keeping species, collections and identification 4. Identify gaps in terms of knowledge and resources (have(s) and have not) 5. Capacity building among node staff for specific knowledge needed



Activity 2: The contribution of the Biology Department staff to CoEB

Biology department staff was asked to think about how he/she can be involved with the CoEB. Each participant was requested to write down how he/she can contribute to CoEB in order to achieve its goals.

Commitments of the Biology Department staff to the CoEB

Category	Name of the staff member	Contribution
a) Capacity building	Methode Majyambere	I need to provide any competent skills for field data collection To attend trainings
	Frank Nshimiyimana	Offering different training and teaching on biodiversity conservation to community Mobilization and marketing in increasing awareness of CoEB in relevant stakeholders

	Uwizeriman J.de Dieu	Training and workshops organization
	Venant Nzibaza	Get involved in education program and awareness raising
	Alliance Nyiragatare	Giving seminars in nematology and agricultural microbiology related topics
	Jeanne Uyisenga	Training people on methods of statistical data analysis Talk in seminar or conferences
	Dr. Aisha Nyiramana	Presentation on biodiversity conservation and management in primary and secondary schools and local population Organize workshops and public talks
	Leonce Ngirinshuti	Organizing and participating in community outreach activities for capacity building
	Benjamin Manirakiza	I have a background in waste disposal and waste water treatment so I can contribute for any help you may need Training and workshop organized in nodes To work in team with different disciplines but my own contribution will be in the area of bioinformatics and as well as biodiversity conservation, through data storage and retrieval during research and this can be achieved through training and workshops.
b) Research	Josiane Mukayisenga	Participant in carrying out research Data collection
	Methode Majyambere	Write research projects (grants) with some CoEB members as collaborators or CoEB as partner institution I need to participate to the work of CoEB with keeping data bases and field collections
	Yvette Umurungi	Proposal writing Collaboration of donors and researchers (fundraising scheme)
	Alphonse Ngiruwonsanga	Carrying out research under CoEB
	Samuel Nshutiyayesu	Editing of reports and research findings
	Jeanne Uyisenga	Help in research proposal writing Be a team member
	Alliance Nyiragatare	Participate in research activities related to microbiology and nematology Contribution to data collection Advertise CoEB research outcomes
	Dr. Aisha Nyiramana	Research establishing or proposal on biology of seed disposal and forest regeneration (especially mammals and birds) and bird ecology.

	Jean Baptiste Nsabimana	Training about the use and importance of the medical plants protection To conduct research
	Venant Nzibaza	Writing proposals for grants
	Leonce Ngirinshuti	Participating in field activities for data collection and data entry Contributing to monitoring of biodiversity in different ecosystems
c) Teaching	Yvette Umurungi	Participating in biodiversity informatics program Getting involved in training (capacity building)
	Dr. Donat Nsabimana	Collaboration with Chinese academy of science (how can we involved)
	Jean Baptiste	Information about medicinal plants and how they can be protected
	Alphonse Ngiruwonsanga	Raising biodiversity awareness (Through education department)
	Alliance Nyiragatare	Participate in teaching and workshop related to microbiology and Nematology
	Dieudonne Mutangana	Seminar on the need for Bioinformatics in biodiversity conservation
	Josiane Mukayisenga	Information about how we can protect our environment using living microorganisms (Nematodes) eg: Entomopathogenic nematodes to control insect
	Aisha Nyiramana	Participate in giving lectures on biodiversity ecology and conservation Environmental impact assessment
	Samuel Nshutiyayesu	Field excursions on plant species Knowledge sharing on field techniques/ data collection
d) Other (events, symposium, etc)	Methodie Majyambere	Introduce CoEB to external interested parties, researchers, and individuals.
	Yvette Umurungi	Facilitate symposium and presentation activities
	Jean de Dieu Uwizerimana	Biodiversity awareness raising Organize and deliver talks to students (primary and secondary schools) and local population on biodiversity issues. Networking in research (external and university researchers and students) Support in interdisciplinary research Multidisciplinary and inter institutional research and grand proposals
	Nshutiyayesu Samuel	Any other business

	Jules Cesar	Information sharing on the status of wildlife in protected and non protected areas Education and awareness campaign on conservation of biodiversity using social media(radio)
	Léonce Ngirinshuti	Participating and organizing workshop, and seminars Organizing events/workshops/symposia for concentration and to share experience

Activity 3: Two goals exercise – committing to assist each other

Participants were requested to write at least two professional goals on the paper and deposit it on the table. Each staff member read every paper and wrote on it his/her name and his commitment to help the concerned person achieve his/he goal(s). At the end of this activity, every one picked his/her paper and copied contacts of the person who agreed to help him/her.

Closing Cocktail at Credo Hotel, Butare

The workshop was concluded in Credo Hotel where a networking cocktail was prepared. It was a good time to know each other and discuss other ideas related to professional or social life.



Prof Beth Kaplin, the Acting Director of the CoEB and Jean Pierre Ngiringoga , in charge of research and monitoring in MINEDUC. Photo credit: Alex Ndezemo

3. Conclusion

The workshop solicited from its participants some specific steps and actions – these include specific suggestions for activities the CoEB should conduct such as workshops, training, and public lectures. Another important outcome was the generation of a list of commitments the Biology staff made to the CoEB, including willingness to provide trainings, statistical support, public talks, etc. Lastly, the workshop helped staff find ways to support each other in their professional work.

Next steps and resolutions:

- A strong tie between the CoEB and the biology department has been established with clear steps for following up with specific activities to continue and strengthen this tie for the betterment of the Center and the Biology Department
- Participants were able to give their suggestions and ideas for the Center to function and what their expectations are and the Center will follow up to implement as many suggestions as is feasible within time and money constraints
- We believe these outcomes will strengthen academic work at UR and will also contribute to improved biodiversity conservation in the long run

Acknowledgements

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4. List of participants

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