

SYMPOSIUM PAPER

Training for the Future: Educational Opportunities in Economic Botany and Ethnobiology

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If ethnobotany and economic botany are to be viable disciplines, we must focus our efforts on three crises: (1) the depletion of key biological resources; (2) the transformation—and often impoverishment – of traditional ecological knowledge and (3) the decreasing number of researchers who are trained to participate in the study, monitoring and reversal of the previous two trends.

While we continue to analyze biological and cultural diversity around the world, we must support—especially in developing countries – anthropologists, biologists, historians, linguists and other field-oriented researchers interested in the relationship between culture and environment. In particular, we should provide training and field research opportunities that stress interdisciplinary, ecosystems approaches to integrating the diverse concepts, methods and perspectives that ethnobiology embraces.

In addition to other incentives, we should continue to build an educational program that includes undergraduate and post-graduate degrees as well as shorter certificate and diploma training courses. Drawing upon my past involvement with the WWF-UNESCO-Kew People and Plants Initiative, my current teaching in the ethnobotany MSc program of the University of Kent at Canterbury and the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, and my future work with The Global Diversity Foundation, I will discuss the advantages and drawbacks of various training options.