

CENTROAMÉRICA: Biodiversidad para el desarrollo

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Nicaragua Is Preparing the Opening of Its First Botanical Garden

After four years of execution of the project “Developing Capacities and Sharing Technology for Biodiversity Conservation in Central America”, with financial support from the government of Norway, Nicaragua has proposed to establish a botanical garden in order to strengthen the environmental culture at the national and regional levels, to make science come closer to people and to directly contribute to the conservation of species of the most threatened ecosystem in the area, the dry forest.

This is why the country is planning to open, in December 2009, the Environmental Botanical Garden of Leon City (EBG). The aim is to establish an area of ecological significance in order to contribute to the development of knowledge and the education labor and to influence on the improvement of the quality of life of the dwellers in the city of León, through educational scientific, recreational and social components.

Mesoamerica has only 2% of its original dry forest cover, and the EBG is the only initiative in the region of ex-situ conservation of genetic resources of this threatened ecosystem.

This project seeks to go beyond establishing a traditional botanical garden, since the intention is to integrate educational activities on environmental management and sustainable production, which are part of the work of the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua - León (UNAN León), which would be strengthened by the EBG. This initiative will provide an opportunity to local, national and international visitors to learn about these practices and to enhance professional university training with a more integrated conservation and development approach.

The implementation of the EBG will be done in two stages. The first one counts on the financial support by the government of Norway and consists of the design, establishment and operation of the garden. The second phase will include a series of supplementary activities for visitors.

In the first stage, the Coordinating Unit at INBio of the “Developing Capacities and Sharing Technology for Biodiversity Conservation in Central America” project took over the tasks of the EBG as an integral part of this initiative with the Central American herbaria, including the search for funding of the second stage.



On the other hand, UNAN León has appointed a team to participate in tasks related to establishing the botanical garden, and it is committed to reaching political agreements and institutional arrangements required for the achievement of objectives.

The implementation phase will last for 20 months after its launch in November 2008. Some preliminary studies that are already under way include soil, water and zoning, in order to demarcate the different areas and attractions that the EBG will offer.

A Diversified Offer

Para la primera fase del JBA se contemplan como The target audiences that are being considered for the first phase of the EBG are foreign tourists, families from the city of Leon and other nearby departments in the country, students of biology, agroecology, tourism, health and others -both from UNAN Leon and other universities-; students from elementary, secondary and technical colleges and the private sector.

Guided and self-guided tours, printed information and signage in English will be offered to foreign tourists, in addition to visits to the butterfly garden, living collections, bird watching, food and beverage services, and a souvenir shop. The stay of foreign tourists at the EBG will last half a day and will complement the tourism offered by local tour operators. Some of these complementary attractions are tours to the city, the ruins of Leon Viejo and Las Peñitas and Poneloya beaches.

The families will be offered with guided tours by the butterfly garden, the compost worm farm and farm-related practices, in addition to a tour to the gallery forest, folk, classical and modern dances, traditions and legends of Leon, and an outdoor children's playground.

To high school, university and technical college students the offer will be practices associated to their formal courses, volunteer work and research opportunities in productive activities, such as botany and conservation (thesis or other projects), seminars and video and photograph shows.

The offer to elementary students will combine recreational and educational contents. The possibility to train teachers, in order to enable them to utilize the facilities offered by the EBG to complement their curricula is also being considered.

The offer to businesses, farmers, organizations and foundations includes a convention center, demonstrations of organic production techniques, organic fertilizers, plants (nursery) and the operation of an integrated farm. In addition, training in

agriculture, watershed management, development of an integrated farm, gardening, home orchards and home composting will be offered. The sale of services such as microbiological analysis of water, soil and agro-industrial samples -for which the facilities of the UNAN Leon in the area where the EBG will be established will be used-, in addition to identification of insects and identification and clinic of plants, are taken into consideration as well. Furthermore, forest and ornamental plants, fruit trees, and agricultural products (fruits and vegetables) will be sold.



Currently, one of the priorities is to raise the funding required for the second stage. Efforts are focused on an offer from the University of Alcalá de Henares to assist in fundraising in Spain. Also, the possibility of obtaining financial support from the Botanical Gardens Conservation International (BGCI), because of being the greatest effort in the region for the conservation of

genetic resources in dry forest is being explored. The Millennium Challenge Account initiative (AID-USA) has also expressed interest in supporting the transfer of plants from different parts of the country to the new botanical garden.

The EBG plans to open its doors in December 2009 and would be administered by the UNAN León Foundation. This seeks to achieve a smooth operation and the capacity needed for the botanical garden to generate its own operational resources. This way, the EBG would belong to UNAN while the Foundation would be accountable for marketing, operations, maintenance and management before the university authorities.

For more information

Randall García, Project Coordinator, rgarcia@inbio.ac.cr

Credits

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