

Fledgling College Near Kokolopori Seeks an American Sister University

The Djolu Technical College, or ISDR-Djolu (a French acronym for Institut Supérieur de Développement Rurale), is currently the only institute of higher learning within an area of more than 30,000 square miles (about half the size of New England.) Established in 2003, the college is located in the Maringa-Lopori-Wamba region of the Congo Basin rainforest in Djolu, about 50 miles from Kokolopori. The closest university is 300 miles away in Kisangani and is virtually inaccessible to Kokolopori/Djolu area students due to endemic poverty and lack of transportation infrastructure. The College has asked for help in finding a partner school here in the United States.

As Sir David King, Science Advisor to the British government, said in July 2007 at the World Bank, anyone who cares about the future of Africa must recognize the central importance of building the capacity of African science and technology. *“Science and technology is vital for good governance, stability and human capital. A technically skilled population is a prerequisite for economic and wealth sustainability, and well being.”*

Djolu Technical College was founded by Vie Sauvage, a local grassroots conservation/community development organization based in Kokolopori, in partnership with the Bonobo Conservation Initiative (BCI), the KFCSCP’s parent organization. The college was established at the recommendation of local Congolese community leaders and regional authorities as part of the agreement negotiating the creation of the Kokolopori Bonobo Reserve. This community-managed rainforest reserve is one of the richest known habitats for the most endangered great ape species, the bonobo.

The goal of Djolu Technical College is to become a regional hub of education and training in conservation management, sustainable agriculture and micro-enterprise development, and to build the capacity of local communities to establish sustainable livelihoods and reduce pressure on land and wildlife resources. Initial funding support for the ISDR was received from BCI, and last year, the college also received a grant from the Great Ape Conservation Fund of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. There has also been significant investment of time and resources by the local community.

Djolu Technical College has been approved by the DRC Ministry of Education and the curriculum includes the following courses: Environmental Management, Sustainable Agriculture, Forestry, Agricultural Techniques, Animal Husbandry, Harnessing Technology, Hygiene and Public Health, Mathematics, Demography, Biometry and Statistics, Agricultural Economics, Scientific Research Techniques, Accounting, English, Marketing, Psychology, Community Development, Rural Administration, Regional Planning, Civil and Land Law, and more.

At this point, the ISDR rents classrooms in a local school, and lacks computers, an internet connection, a library, and often even school supplies. Nevertheless, due to the remarkable commitment and motivation of College staff, including both Djolu-based

teachers and visiting professors from the University of Kisangani, the local community, and the students themselves, Djolu Technical College is effectively bringing higher education to an area of the country that is rich in biodiversity but whose populace suffers from extreme levels of poverty.

There are eight permanent positions on the teaching staff, as well as a number of visiting professors from the University of Kisangani, who travel several hundred miles by motorcycle and dugout canoe for rotations of one or more months at a time. The college is now in its fourth academic year with 35 students in the first undergraduate class, 22 students in the second class, and 14 students in the third. Tuition starts at \$60 for the first year, \$80 for the second and \$100 for the third. For many in this impoverished rural province of the DRC, these tuition fees represent an insurmountable impediment to pursuing an undergraduate degree.

The importance of establishing mechanisms and infrastructure to sustain Djolu Technical College into the future cannot be overstated. The college is already functioning very successfully despite what many Americans would consider impossible adversity. If it flourishes, the ISDR can serve as a model for one of the DRC's poorest and least developed regions.

African colleges and universities are essential to the development of their countries, enhancing opportunities for women, and preparing the continent's next generation of scientists, technologists and leaders. American university faculty, students and alumni have the ability to help African institutions realize this vision. Faculty exchanges, funding for faculty salaries, student scholarships or an internet connection, cultural exchanges, and sending books and equipment are among the opportunities that make such alliances particularly rewarding.

If you have connections to a university, college, or student group that may be interested in helping establish a sister university relationship for Djolu Technical College, or for more information, please contact info@kokolopori-partnership.org.

For Sir David King's views on the importance of home-grown science and technology to Africa's future, see <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/summary/314/5798/385> and http://www.britainusa.com/sections/articles_show_nt1.asp?a=46750&i=41085&L1=41013&L2=41085&d=-1.