

Extending the Botanical Infrastructure

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A strong botanical foundation is a critical element in many disciplines, for example ethnobotany, plant breeding, conservation biology. Traditionally, botanical knowledge has been passed on primarily via personal interactions and print communication. These are still of major importance but the last few decades have seen increasing use of digital technology in expanding access to botanical knowledge via online journals, development of international databases, and mobilization of specimen records. These, however, although extremely valuable, address only later phases in developing botanical knowledge. We need to consider how we can use digital technology to help potential botanists in all parts of the world acquire a strong foundation. Such developments must be designed to complement and strengthen what has been found to be the strongest determiners of student engagement, great educators and field experiences. In this talk, I shall present my ideas on the developments needed but only to stimulate discussion. I shall be drawing on my recent work in Pakistan and Somaliland, two developing countries with very different botanical traditions and resources from each other – and from the US and Russia.