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Project analyzes foreign aid use

Dr. Craig Packer is highly revered for his research in the Serengeti.

By Jeremiah Oetting [3] December 09, 2009 (3 years ago)

“All I know how to do is measure stuff,” Dr. Craig Packer said over a plate of sushi, chewing his first bite of lunch thoughtfully.

It was a modest statement. Packer, an Ecology, Evolution and Behavior professor at the University of Minnesota, has been involved in conservation efforts and research around the globe. From his early days studying primates with Jane Goodall to his highly revered work with lions in the Serengeti, his ability to “measure stuff” has served the world well.

This time, however, he wasn’t talking about monkeys or lions. He was talking about humans.

Sitting at the Outside In café in Moos Tower, surrounded by people happily enjoying lunch, Packer explained the harsh reality of the poverty he witnessed for more than 20 years studying in Tanzania.

“I’m watching this fabulous country being eaten alive,” he said. It was his growing concern for Tanzania, which he described as a “heritage to the whole world,” that inspired him to design the Whole Village Project, which became a part of the University in January. The idea is to analyze how foreign aid is being used like never before.

He explained that while millions of dollars go to foreign aid annually, the results are disappointing.

“We’re not getting value from our efforts,” he said.

According to Packer, there is little follow-up on how aid is used, and the methods of analysis produce unreliable data.

Packer hopes to obtain information over a long period of time from roughly 250 villages in Tanzania with the help of University students and students in Tanzania. Eventually, he hopes the model will be applied to countries all over the world.

“In Washington, there’s discussion of reforming how [foreign] aid is used,” he said. “We’re trying to be a little bit noisy.”

Packer wants Congress to support the project in Tanzania as a possible model for future aid analysis.



^[4] University Ecology, Evolution and Behavior professor Dr. Craig Packer has been involved in conservation efforts and research around the globe.

By Jules Ameel ^[5]

Kari Hartwig was hired in May as the program director of the Whole Village Project. She explained that the project requires collaboration from areas across the University.

“This is an interdisciplinary research and evaluation project,” she said. “We’re doing work with public health and nursing, veterinary medicine and areas of food security.”

Hartwig said the project also has partnerships with universities and non-government agencies that are doing work in Tanzania.

The project will give data back to villages so they can make decisions on where more help is needed.

Packer said that by October 2010, the goal is to have data from 55 villages. Currently there are only data from eight.

Gene Allen is an adviser of the project and a member of the executive board.

“The Whole Village title means we’re trying to look holistically at all the issues that impact a village in Tanzania,” he said.

Allen accompanied Hartwig in Tanzania for two weeks over the summer.

“The need is tremendous,” he said. “Tanzania is a very poor country.”

He explained that the University was interested in having larger efforts in countries in Africa, and Tanzania was identified as a country in need.

As the first year of the University’s involvement with the project comes to a close, Packer remains determined.

“You have to be persistent,” he said. “It has to eat at you. It has to be done right.”

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