

Plan of Action for Mobilising and Mainstreaming Africa's Biodiversity Data



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BACKGROUND

The conference, Africa Rising: Mobilising Biodiversity Data for Sustainable Development, took place at Kirstenbosch National Botanic Garden in Cape Town, South Africa, from 19 to 22 May 2015. It was organised by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) in partnership with the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), United Nations Environment Programme – World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), and the Resilience in the Limpopo Basin Programme (RESILIM), with funding from the JRS Biodiversity Foundation and European Union (EU). It set out to achieve the following objectives:

- Increase regional understanding of the biodiversity data-science-policy value chain and identify the opportunities and solutions that it presents for sustainable development in Africa;
- Draw attention to relevant tools, resources and learning networks for building effective biodiversity information systems in Africa; and
- Articulate a 'Plan of Action' for mobilising and mainstreaming Africa's policy-relevant biodiversity data, and forge international partnerships to implement it.

Approximately 100 delegates attended the conference, representing various national agencies, research institutions, international organisations and private foundations. A total of 21 African countries were represented. Collectively, the participants may be regarded as part of a diverse 'community of practice' for biodiversity information management in Africa.

THE DECLARATION AND PLAN OF ACTION

A 'Plan of Action' for mobilising and mainstreaming Africa's biodiversity data was conceptualised as a key output of the conference. Its purpose was to foster consensus around a set of goals, objectives and priority actions, thereby creating a framework for collaboration in Africa's community of practice.

Guided by a professional facilitator, the conference participants worked in breakout groups over two days to draft the Plan of Action. The document comprises 43 priority actions nested within 15 objectives and 4 goals. It may be regarded as a 'living document' which can be continuously updated and adapted to meet the community's evolving needs.

While in breakout groups, the participants also composed a Declaration on Biodiversity Information for Sustainable Development in Africa. In the Declaration, participants set out their common vision for 2030 as "a world in which biodiversity information contributes fully to sustainable development in Africa." Proclaimed on the International Day for Biological Diversity, the Declaration serves as a formal record of the conference, a rallying call for increased action, and a calling card for increased investment in unlocking Africa's biodiversity information. Compared to the Plan of Action, the Declaration is relatively static in nature.



THE PLAN OF ACTION

Vision for 2030

“A world in which biodiversity information contributes fully to sustainable development in Africa.”

The following list comprises the **GOALS**, *objectives* and priority actions as formulated by the conference participants.

1. EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION-MAKING SUPPORTED BY COORDINATED SCIENCE-POLICY DIALOGUE WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF THE BIODIVERSITY SECTOR

- 1.1. *To increase the capacity of scientists to understand policy issues and policymaking needs*
 - 1.1.1. Encourage students to include a module in communication/political science/economics when studying environmental science
- 1.2. *To embed a coordinated outreach strategy included as part of the operations budget of relevant projects from the outset*
 - 1.2.1. Encourage universities to offer this option
 - 1.2.2. Creation of well-packaged, copy-written, well-marketed case studies that show impact
 - 1.2.3. To include in any gathering of scientists at various fora, sessions or workshop on effective communication (perhaps lead by a marketing specialist)
 - 1.2.4. Make better use of our media/journalists network to report and highlight biodiversity matters and the stories that intrigue and capture imaginations
 - 1.2.5. Facilitate biodiversity in the popular press through workshop bringing journalists and scientists together to learn from each other
- 1.3. *To develop a suite of biodiversity indicators which translate scientific data into a language which embeds biodiversity into the sustainable development agenda*
 - 1.3.1. Change the narrative of biodiversity indicators to reflect that natural assets are inextricably linked to the integrity of our economy
- 1.4. *Inclusion of biodiversity dialogue on the agenda of high-level African regional meetings or gatherings such as the AU and AMCEN*



2. CAPACITY BUILDING ACROSS THE VALUE CHAIN OF DATA/INFORMATION, TO EMPOWER STAKEHOLDERS TO PRODUCE AND MAKE ACCESSIBLE ACCURATE BIODIVERSITY DATA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Building the institutional capacity of staff

2.1.1. Capacity enhancement to support institutional relations and frameworks i.e. MoUs, MoAs, Legislation, Convention.

2.1.2. Enhance collaborations

2.1.3. Increasing technical skills of staff

2.1.4. Increase in human staff capacity and numbers of skilled staff

2.2. Building institutional capacity relating to infrastructure and facilities

2.2.1. Biodiversity informatics infrastructure in place

2.2.2. Enhance internet connectivity and information & communications technology

2.2.3. Data collecting tools in place

2.2.4. Link to sustained financial resources

2.3. Capacity development to ensure fitness for use and publishing of data

2.3.1. Training on biodiversity data collection and dissemination and use and analysis and application

2.3.2. Empowerment and training for all stakeholders involved in order to produce reliable and accurate biodiversity data that will be easily accessible

2.3.3. Training on tools for generation of biodiversity data

2.3.4. Enhancing, mobilising, digitizing, and mapping information management skills

2.3.5. Methodology for collecting reliable biodiversity data using standards

2.4. Capacity building to support sustainability

2.4.1. Grant proposal development

2.4.2. Facilitation skills – awareness creation on the importance of data

2.4.3. Capacity building in information & communications technology

2.4.4. Use and implementation of data portals

2.5. Human Capital development in Academia/ Biodiversity informatics

2.5.1. Development of curriculum for biodiversity informatics

2.5.2. Building human capital in biodiversity informatics at universities

2.6. Capacity assessment for biodiversity informatics

2.6.1. Mapping of actors and stakeholders

2.6.2. Gap analysis – needs, what are the existing capacity building initiatives



3. MOBILISE AND MAKE OPENLY ACCESSIBLE RELEVANT BIODIVERSITY DATA TO SUPPORT EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND DECISION MAKING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

3.1. Mobilising historic/legacy data

- 3.1.1. Inventory, structured metadata mobilisation
- 3.1.2. Digitization of data and associate resources
- 3.1.3. Business case for legacy data mobilisation
- 3.1.4. Identify and encourage the use of existing data type repositories

3.2. Mobilise current biodiversity data for status and trends

- 3.2.1. Status: identify data gaps – data deficiencies, taxonomic and geographic coverage – to help set data mobilisation priorities
- 3.2.2. Identify data sharing platform for non-species data
- 3.2.3. Comment: for the data mobilisation a very important aspect is missing: reflection on the type of data needed for sustainable development

3.3. Promote the collection of a minimum set of data for countries Protected Areas and key ecosystems

- 3.3.1. Make any land cover maps available.
- 3.3.2. Mobilise best possible checklists for – species per country, protected areas, & key ecosystems

4. LEVERAGE SUSTAINED FUNDING

4.1. Equip stakeholders to make the case for biodiversity informatics

- 4.1.1. Assess and summarize the value and benefits of biodiversity information
- 4.1.2. Summarize models and document successes

4.2. Develop engagement strategies

- 4.2.1. Identify and engage with key actors
- 4.2.2. Develop a strategy to target key actors
- 4.2.3. Execute engagement strategy
- 4.2.4. Documents and information materials for key actors