

AFRICAN BOTANIC GARDEN NETWORK

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Cultivating an African Botanic Garden Network

Christopher Willis NBI South Africa

The first step in establishing an African Botanic Garden Network is to know which organisations could form part of it. Where are the functioning botanic gardens in sub-Saharan Africa and what are the contact details of the staff attached to these gardens? This mailing list (both post and email) should then be made available to all of Africa's botanic gardens and to other botanical garden networks world-wide.

Structure, Function and Role

The second step is to determine the structure, function and role of such a network. What are the main aims, goals and purpose of the network? Should there be an Africa Coordinator/Liaison Office for the Network? Should this be BGCi's Regional Office for Africa, as was called for by the African representatives attending the fifth BGCi Congress in Kirstenbosch? How should this office be structured? Who would fund this office and its networking activities? If the decision was made to establish a Network Secretariat, where in Africa should this be based? Should it be on a rotational basis of perhaps two- to three-year intervals to give different regions the opportunity to 'ghost' the African office? Who would be responsible for developing and maintaining the proposed associated web site?

Action Plan

The Network would need to develop an Action Plan, similar to that recently published by BGCi to guide its activities (*An Action Plan for Botanic Gardens in the European Union*). Without substantial financial support, how would the actions be implemented by individual botanic gardens? How would the Network function in relation to other existing networks (at local, national and regional levels) on the African continent and beyond? Are our gardens being optimally utilised by the local communities? If not, how can we change this? Should we not be developing partnerships with other botanic gardens in Africa and other parts of the World? What are the main issues in Africa's botanical gardens regarding horticulture, education and conservation? Is there sufficient plant taxonomic/systematic support and necessary literature for Africa's botanic gardens? How do our gardens link with the national and regional gene banks? Which languages will the Network use?

Finance

Networks are regularly established all over the World. Are they sustainable? Assuming that some donor funds are found to establish a network, how can the network's activities be sustained after donor support has ended? As Africans, we need to ensure that we establish a lasting Network which can function without major financial input from outside of Africa. Is this feasible? Should the Network function mainly as a conduit to source and channel funds to particular African botanic gardens and garden projects? Do our governments realise the conservation significance of their gardens enough to invest in them? There are clearly many questions that need to be addressed before a fully functional and effective African Botanic Gardens Network is established. If such a network is to materialise, it is ultimately up to us Africans *together* to make the African Botanic Garden Network a reality.

Future Harvest & ICRAF: working to preserve *Prunus africana*

In April this year scientists announced that due to the increased demand for *Prunus africana* in the West, the species was likely to become extinct in the wild within the next 5-10 years. Current demand in European and USA markets is worth \$220 million annually.

Future Harvest is a non-profit making organisation that builds support for international agricultural research. It is joined by the International Center for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) to establish a sustainable source for this tree, initially through local cultivation initiatives and sustainable methods of bark collection. Currently, efforts are being made to shorten the time it takes for trees to produce seed from 15 to 3 years. Using the 'marcotting' technique, the tree's branches are induced to root whilst still attached to the tree. This is a technique that has been successfully used on the African Pear *Dacryodes edulis*. Cameroon's Institut de Recherche Agronomique et Development and ICRAF are collecting wild seed and then growing it on to undertake selection for better varieties for domestication. This work has been funded by the Rome-based International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID).

Phytera Trust Fund for Biodiversity Conservation:

Applications for conservation project funding grants of between £1,000 - £1,500 to be received by 28 February 2001. Enquiries to the Awards Officer at BGCI or visit our website at <http://www.BGCI.org.uk>.

The *International Agenda for Botanic Gardens* is available free, by email attachment from BGCI:
<bgci@rbgkew.org.uk>

Development of Botanic Gardens in Nigeria

Donald Gordon, BGCI

Through the generous support of Leventis & Co (Ltd), and in collaboration with the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) and Aburi Botanic Gardens, Ghana, a *Pre-feasibility Study for Botanic Garden Development in Nigeria* was conducted and circulated widely to sponsors, colleagues, participants to the study and interested parties. The study set out to assess the roles of botanic gardens and affiliated institutions in supporting the conservation and sustainable use of plants in local, national and international contexts.

The study, conducted towards the end of 1999, involved discussions with a large number of in-country institutions and individuals, and established three overriding themes:

- The current network of botanic gardens is largely non-functional.
- There is a need for a representative network of botanic gardens to support the conservation and sustainable use of plant resources across the ecological zones of the country.
- There is interest and support for the development of botanic gardens by governments, academic institutions, corporations, donor agencies and the non-governmental sector.

One of the recommendations to the study was the preparation of mission statements and business plans for botanic gardens to provide a framework for development.

Following the recommendations of this study, a new proposal has been prepared entitled *Development of Botanic Gardens in Nigeria*. The overall objective of this project is to build the capacity of botanic gardens to support conservation, poverty alleviation and the sustainable use of plants in various regions of the country. This process is to be initiated through the development of model business plans for three botanic gardens which would, respectively: define strategic direction; provide

a framework for building institutional capacity; and provide outlines, financial estimates and proposals for new projects which would assist those gardens to achieve conservation objectives and establish more secure financial positions. Complementing business plan development, a further goal of the project is to prepare *A National Strategy for Botanic Gardens in Nigeria*.

It is anticipated that the models developed as a result of this project will be applicable for other botanic gardens in Nigeria and more widely across West Africa, while the *National Strategy* will support the development of national and regional networks of botanic gardens. BGCI has worked in close collaboration with the Nigerian Conservation Foundation and Iroko Foundation in developing this proposal, and partial funding has been secured from Leventis & Co Ltd., with co-financing proposals currently under consideration by the EU and Shell. The project is scheduled for implementation in 2001 and 2002.

The Tropical Biology Association: Taking a lead in tropical ecology and conservation in the tropics

Anthony Kuria, TBA/NK Project Officer

The Tropical Biology Association is a non-governmental organisation working to meet the challenge of biodiversity conservation by building capacity in the Old World tropics. The objectives of the TBA are to:

Transfer expertise and research techniques in biodiversity and conservation

- Forge collaborative links between biologists and conservation professionals and their institutions worldwide.
- Build the capacity of host country institutions to carry out their own training and research programmes.

The TBA runs field courses in tropical ecology and conservation, in partnership with

Uganda's Makerere University, the National Museums of Kenya, the East Africa Natural History Society; the Tanzania Forestry Research Institute, and the East Usambara Conservation Area Management Programme. TBA's activities are directly relevant to the needs of its partner institutions.

The TBA was established through funding from the Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species.

Meeting the challenges of biodiversity conservation

Biodiversity conservation requires action at local, national and international levels. Many international conventions emphasis on the need for sound scientific information for making rational conservation decisions. Such information is largely lacking, as are the scientists needed. Unlike its biodiversity, the world's biologists are concentrated in the temperate regions. Biologists in the tropics, particularly Africa, have little experience, lack resources and are largely isolated from the global scientific community. So we continue to loose our rich biodiversity. To redress this imbalance, TBA's training plays an important role by building suitable capacity in developing tropical countries.

This is the seventh year of TBA's field courses. The courses are held in Kibale forest (Uganda), East Usambara Mountains (Tanzania), Naivasha and Taita (Kenya), and Malaysia (once). The graduates of our courses in turn become trainers, and enthuse their own students, so the effects multiply! Over 450 graduate biologists from America and Europe have received training. Students carry out short projects and learn from researchers at the forefront of their disciplines. The students also visit various neighbouring community conservation initiatives. This enables them to discuss real-life issues affecting biodiversity. The direct contact with nature, the excitement of testing new ideas and the interaction with teachers of international calibre, all combine to shape the student's career. Personal contacts

made during the courses are a firm foundation for international co-operation.

What lies in the future?

TBA has launched a new programme of follow-up support for its African alumni. It is based at Nature Kenya (the EANHS) and is funded through the European Union. It helps alumni gain further training, seek internships and fellowships, find jobs, and source project funding. Because of its involvement with its students and its growing network, TBA is in a unique position to match them with specific opportunities that will further their careers and research objectives.

We require persons, projects, institutions and other organisations with available opportunities to get in touch with us, particularly teachers in botany and rangeland ecology. Teaching on the courses is voluntary. This need is being satisfied as TBA strengthens its links with botanists, plant specialists and their affiliate institutions. It is our hope that with your support we shall build a self-sustaining community of informed, well motivated conservationists, researchers, wildlife managers and biologists with a substantial impact in conservation.



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Networking Southern African Botanical Gardens

Christopher Willis, NBI

The National Botanical Institute (NBI) has managed and administered the Southern African Botanical Diversity Network (SABONET) project for almost five years now, with most of the support to date having been given by the southern African herbaria. SABONET is now set to start networking botanical gardens and associated staff in the

region. The project has recently published the 11th number in its occasional SABONET Report Series entitled *Southern African Botanic Gardens Needs Assessment* by Daan Botha, Christopher Willis and John Winter. (The report is available free of charge from the Regional SABONET Coordinator, Stefan Siebert, who can be contacted by email <stefan@nbipre.nbi.ac.za>.) This publication, which serves as a milestone for regional co-operation, will form the basis of a regional botanical garden workshop scheduled to be held in southern Africa in March 2001. The aim of the workshop is to draw up a Action Plan for the implementation of the botanical garden component of the SABONET Project, including the implementation of a tailor-made Botanical Gardens Management Course for staff attached to southern Africa's botanical gardens. We also anticipate establishing mechanisms to implement a proposed twinning programme for these gardens.

Rotating Editorial

African Botanic Gardens Bulletin

Chris Dalzell & Mark Mattson have kindly agreed to edit the next edition.

For the No. 3 edition, June 2001, send your articles to Chris and Mark:

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