

## **First African Botanic Gardens Congress**

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### **Overview**

From 24-29 November 2002, 67 delegates representing 23 African countries and various non-African delegates attended the first ever African Botanic Gardens Congress in Durban Botanic Gardens, South Africa, to establish the new African Botanic Gardens Network (ABGN). Africa, defined as continental Africa and the surrounding islands, was divided into six regions, namely North Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands. The theme of the Congress was 'Partnerships and Linkages'. Non-African delegates included representatives from Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI; Peter Wyse Jackson), the Millennium Seed Bank Project (MSBP; Clare Tenner), National Botanic Garden of Belgium and the European Botanic Gardens Network (Jan Rammeloo), Fairchild Tropical Garden (Mike Maunder), American Association of Botanic Gardens and Arboreta (AABGA; Christopher Davidson) and Lyon Botanical Garden, France (Christian Dumas). The Congress was officially launched by South Africa's Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Mr Mohammed Valli Moosa, who also opened the recently completed 'Garden of the Senses' in the Durban Botanic Gardens.

Pre-Congress training workshops on Plant Collecting Techniques (Facilitators: Ian Oliver and Nouhou Ndam), Red Data Lists and botanical gardens (Facilitators: Mike Maunder and Janice Golding) and Environmental Education and Interpretation in botanical gardens (Facilitators: Alexis Symonds, John Roff and Cyprian Mathaba) were presented to various delegates on the Sunday before the Congress.

The main objectives of the Congress were:

1. To create a contemporary database of African botanical gardens.

2. To undertake a comprehensive assessment of the common needs of African botanical gardens.
3. To identify ways to address these needs.
4. To determine the structure of and support required for an African Botanic Gardens Network and its Secretariat.
5. To adopt the universally applauded *International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation*, BGC I 2000.
6. To review and adopt a draft constitution for the African Botanic Gardens Network.
7. To produce an Action Plan for the conservation of Africa's threatened endemic flora.
8. To publish the Proceedings of the Congress.

Presentations from various delegates were made during the Congress. The opening lecture was given by Peter Wyse Jackson (Secretary General: BGC I) on 'International Agenda: A key role for African Botanic Gardens in the Adoption of the International Agenda'. Other topics included the Southern African Botanical Diversity Network (SABONET; Stefan Siebert), the Millennium Seed Bank Project (MSBP; Clare Tenner), the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation and its relevance to African botanical gardens (Stella Simiyu) as well as lessons learnt from national and international networks and partnerships. Mike Maunder presented a paper entitled 'Towards an African Action Plan: Conservation of Threatened Plants and Habitats by African Botanic Gardens'. African Regional Coordinators presented talks on the status of botanical gardens in their regions as well as the needs expressed by those gardens that responded to the Needs Assessment questionnaire that was initially used to produce the *Southern African Botanical Gardens Needs Assessment (SABONET Report Series 11, November 2000)*. An historical perspective on Africa's botanical gardens was presented by Prof. Donal McCracken during the Congress.

A mid-week field excursion was undertaken to the Silverglen Medicinal Plant Nursery, Durban's renowned Medicinal Market and the National Botanical Institute's Natal National Botanical Garden in Pietermaritzburg.

The outcomes of the Congress included a draft Strategic Framework and Action Plan for the African Botanic Gardens Network. Activities, expected outcomes and targets of the ABGN were aligned with the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation and the International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation. Members have until 30 June 2003 to comment on the proposed Network management structure, that includes membership details and associated fees.

The Chair of the ABGN Steering Committee is George Owusu-Afriyie of Ghana. The Coordinator in the newly established Network Secretariat, which is currently based in the Durban Botanic Gardens, South Africa, is Christopher Dalzell, Curator of the Durban Botanic Gardens and host for the Congress. The *African Botanic Gardens Network Bulletin* (six issues published between October 2000 and November 2002) will continue to be edited by Mark Mattson at Durban Botanic Gardens. Anyone interested in receiving this Bulletin and who would like to be added to the mailing list can contact Mark Mattson at markm@prcsu.durban.gov.za. The Congress proceedings are expected to be published in 2003.

Whilst the ABGN endorsed the *International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation* as the guiding document for plant conservation efforts in Africa's botanical gardens, each African botanical garden was encouraged to register (either formally or informally) with the *International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation*.

The agreed ABGN Mission Statement, Vision, Guiding Principles and Targets are listed below.

#### **Mission Statement**

The African Botanic Gardens Network promotes and supports the work of botanical gardens and associated institutions through education, conservation and sustainable use of plants for development, poverty alleviation and halting biodiversity loss.

#### **Vision**

African botanical gardens will be integral and valued partners in the conservation and sustainable

use of Africa's unique environmental, botanical and cultural heritage.

### **Guiding Principles**

The African Botanic Gardens Network (ABGN) is committed to:

- promoting and implementing key national and international instruments relating to the environment and sustainable development, including National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), the Convention on Biological Diversity (in particular the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation), the International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation, Local Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.
- the fundamental importance of an ecosystem approach to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and will undertake an integrated approach to biodiversity conservation.
- botanical gardens reaching their full potential through partnerships and effective collaboration at local, national, regional and international levels.
- the need for monitoring and coordination in the activities of botanical gardens, the effective use of resources and delivering the identified objectives of the network.
- the urgent need to undertake assessments of the conservation status and management needs for African plant diversity and will work to identify and strengthen the roles of botanical gardens in this process.
- its role as the representative body for African botanical gardens.-Furthermore, the ABGN will work closely with BGCI and other key organisations active in education, conservation and sustainable use of plants, such as IUCN, VWVF, IPGRI and other relevant UN and national/international agencies, particularly as regards the implementation of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation.
- the fundamental link between botanical gardens and taxonomic botany and their contribution towards resolving the taxonomic impediment.
- the development of relevant regional, sub-regional and thematic networks and their contributions within the ABGN.
- ensuring that its programmes and activities are complementary to those of relevant existing networks operating at all levels.
- encouraging all African botanical gardens to strengthen their amenity, cultural, historical and recreational roles.
- encouraging all African botanical gardens to focus primarily on the cultivation, display and study of African plant taxa.

### **Summary of Targets**

1. [All] botanical gardens with adequate access to electronic information in support of education, conservation and sustainable use programmes.
2. Botanical gardens contribute to the development of national lists of threatened plant species in [all] countries of Africa.
3. Completion of an African programme [with models and protocols] for education, plant conservation and sustainable use, based on research and practical experience.
4. All botanical gardens to promote at least [one] local culture and its plant-related knowledge, innovations and practices.
5. Based on assessment of candidate taxa, [40%] of threatened plant species in accessible *ex situ* collections, preferably in the country of origin, and [2%] of them included in recovery or restoration programmes.
6. At least [50%] of Africa's botanical gardens participate in measures to conserve nationally and locally important areas of plant diversity.
7. Africa's botanical gardens carry out invasive plant risk assessments within their collections and [60%] contribute to model control programmes on a total of [20] invasive species.
8. Botanical gardens participate in the national implementation of CITES in [each] country of Africa.
9. [20] botanical gardens develop and implement management models and protocols for [40] economically and culturally important plant taxa.

10. At least [50%] of botanical gardens contribute to national programmes that aim to halt the decline of plant resources and associated indigenous and local knowledge innovations and practices, that support sustainable livelihoods, local food security and health care.
11. Environmental education programmes operating with trained staff in [60%] of Africa's botanical gardens.
12. [20] model environmental education programmes in place that illustrate the value of indigenous flora, natural habitats and ecosystem services, especially of nationally important sites for plant diversity, local community benefits and sustainable use.
13. At least [one] botanical garden established in each country of Africa, preferably in areas of important plant diversity and endemism.
14. Training courses for [seven] subjects completed by the network, involving [300] participants.
15. ABGN and regional networks strengthened and supported with adequate resources to achieve the targets in this action plan.
16. [One million] visitors access the ABGN web site and associated resources.

### ***Acknowledgements***

Delegates to the African Botanic Gardens Congress are thanked for their constructive input and participation in the Congress. Contributions from Peter Wyse Jackson and Mike Maunder were particularly appreciated. The following sponsors are gratefully acknowledged for making it possible for delegates from 23 African countries to be represented at the Congress: the SABONET Project, Missouri Botanical Garden, the Winslow Foundation, Conservation International's Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, Huntington Botanical Gardens, San Diego Zoo, North Carolina Zoo, Lotusland and the eThekweni Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Special thanks are extended to Durban Parks Department for hosting the Congress and to all the organizers and field excursion leaders and hosts.

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