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# RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

## 2002 Global Strategy for Plant Conservation

At the 1999 International Botanical Congress held in St Louis, Missouri, the President of the Congress, Dr Peter Raven, presented a keynote address emphasizing the importance of plants to human existence and underlined concerns that the Earth is undergoing a human-induced extinction crisis.[1] One of the resolutions of the congress was to establish a new co-ordinating body associated with the United Nations to monitor the status of plants throughout the world and take steps to conserve them.[2] The resolutions were followed up with a meeting in Gran Canaria on 3–4 April, 2000 when leading botanists met to formulate a declaration[3] which could be taken forward to the fifth Conference of the Parties (CoP5) to the Convention on Biological Diversity held in Nairobi in May 2000. CoP5 recognized that plant diversity is a common concern of humankind and an essential resource for the planet, with as many as two-thirds of the world's plant species in danger of extinction, and proposed that at the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP6) the establishment of a global strategy for plant conservation should be considered.[4] A strategy with 16 targets was presented and adopted at the CoP6 meeting held in The Hague in April 2002.[5] These targets differ from the normal approach adopted in the Convention on Biological Diversity of using general principles that can be interpreted by national policy, in that they are quantified.

Firstly the targets need to be met by the year 2010. This time frame was chosen to coincide with the overall strategic plan for the Convention on Biological Diversity,[6] in which it was decided that parties should "commit themselves to a more effective and coherent implementation of the three objectives of the Convention,[7] to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as

[1] P. Raven, "Plants in peril: what should we do?", Keynote address to the XVI International Botanical Congress, 1999.

[2] XVI International Botanical Congress (1999) Resolution I. The congress was attended by 5,000 botanists from 85 nations.

[3] The Gran Canaria Declaration calling for a Global Program for Plant Conservation formulated by an ad hoc group drawn from major international and national organizations, institutions and other bodies involved in biodiversity conservation from 14 countries held in Gran Canaria, Spain 3–4 April, 2000. (UNEP/CBD/COP/5/INF/32)

[4] Fifth ordinary meeting of the conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Nairobi, Kenya, 15–16 May, 2000, Decision V/10, Global strategy for plant conservation.

[5] Sixth ordinary meeting of the conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, The Hague, The Netherlands, 7–19 April, 2002, Decision VI/9, Global Strategy for Plant Conservation.

[6] CoP6 Decision VI/26 Strategic Plan for the Convention on Biological Diversity.

[7] The three objectives are "the conservation of biological diversity; the sustainable use of its components; and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources". CoP6 Decision VI/26 Annex part A para. 6.

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a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on earth".[8] Secondly the targets themselves have specific goals attached. For example, target four is that at least 10% of each of the world's ecological regions are effectively conserved; target five is assured protection of 50% of the most important areas for plant diversity; target six is at least 30% of production lands are managed consistent with the conservation of plant diversity; and target seven is 60% of the world's threatened species are conserved in situ.[9]

In Europe the response to target five has been to launch a programme for identifying important plant areas (IPA),[10] which drew on the experience of ornithologists who have created criteria for important bird areas.[11] The three basic principles of European IPA identification are: *A*. The site holds significant populations of one or more species that are of global or European conservation concern. *B*. The site has an exceptionally rich flora in a European context in relation to its biogeographic zone. *C*. The site is an outstanding example of a habitat type of global or European plant conservation and botanical importance. At a recent meeting in Pretoria[12] attended by representatives from the SABONET countries[13] these criteria were adapted for the southern African region. Selection of IPAs can be guided by "red-lists" which are based on IUCN categories of threat.[14] Red-lists for African countries are of varying quality and are constantly being updated, but they can contain large numbers of species. For example, about one-tenth of southern Africa's flora of 21,817 species are red-listed.[15] There is also a list of centres of plant diversity in Africa[16] based on expert opinion rather than plant distribution data and this could help inform the IPA selection process.

[8] CoP6 Decision VI/26 Annex part B para. 11.

[9] CoP6 Decision VI/9 Annex part C para. 12b.

[10] S. Anderson, *Identifying Important Plant Areas*. *Plantlife International*, Salisbury, UK, 2002.

[11] R.F.A. Grimmett and T.A. Jones, *Important Bird Areas in Europe*, International Council for Bird Preservation, Cambridge, UK, 1989. L.D.C. Fishpool and M.I. Evans (eds.), *Important Bird Areas in Africa and Associated Islands*, Birdlife International, Cambridge, UK, 2001.

[12] SABONET Important Plant Areas Workshop 10–14 May, 2004 held in the National Botanical Garden, Pretoria, South Africa.

[13] The Southern African Botanical Diversity Network (SABONET) started in 1996 and operates in herbaria in ten southern African countries, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Funding for the project has been provided by the Global Environment Facility (GEF)/ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/World Conservation Union-Regional Office for Southern Africa (IUCN-ROSA). The main objectives of SABONET are capacity building and responding to the technical and scientific needs of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

[14] There are nine Categories of Threat in the IUCN Red List system: Extinct, Extinct in the Wild, Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable, Near Threatened, Least Concern, Data Deficient, and Not Evaluated. A species is listed as threatened if it falls in the Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable categories.

[15] J.S. Golding, *Southern African Plant Red Data Lists*. Southern African Botanical Diversity Network Report Series No. 14. National Botanical Institute, Pretoria, South Africa, 2002. Also available as a cd-rom Access database produced in 2003 by SABONET. G. Germishuizen and N.L. Meyer (eds.), *Plants of Southern Africa: an Annotated Check-list*. Strelitzia 14, National Botanical Institute, Pretoria, South Africa, 2003, contains a list of all plant species known from the southern Africa area. SABONET recently held a workshop in Maputo to discuss how to integrate red-list data into policy, S.A. Izidine, I. Nhamntumbo, and J. Golding (eds.), *Integration of Red Data List concepts into the policy framework in Mozambique: proceedings of a workshop held in Kaya-Kwanga, Maputo, Mozambique, 29–31 August, 2001*. Southern African Botanical Diversity Network Report No. 23 SABONET, Pretoria, 2004.

[16] S.D. Davis, V.H. Heywood, and A.C. Hamilton, *Centres of Plant Diversity A Guide and Strategy for their Conservation. Volume 1. Europe, Africa, South West Asia and the Middle East*, WWF and IUCN, Cambridge, UK, 1994.

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The nature of the African flora is rather different to the situation in Europe, and this can create difficulties in applying the IPA identification criteria. In particular, most of the African flora is of highly restricted geographical distribution. This means that sites containing narrowly endemic plants may automatically qualify under criterion *A*, as changes in land use can mean that a species becomes of global conservation concern. For example, in the exceptionally species-rich southern African Cape lowland renosterveld much of the land is under vineyard cultivation but some 20,000 small fragments have been identified that contain, or potentially contain, plants of global conservation concern. However, with the exception of the Cape, there is a good correlation between plant species richness and the occurrence of species of restricted distribution in Africa,[17] so Criteria *A* and *B* may be met in the same site. Another problem in Africa is that historically, conservation has focused on the large mammal fauna rather than plants, so areas rich in threatened plants are not well covered by the established protected area network.[18] In addition, many African countries are not well documented botanically, so centres of plant diversity revealed by collection records may simply be places where botanists have visited, rather than real biological centres.

Although the seventh conference of the parties noted that the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation was progressing well, compliance with the targets will not be easy for African countries.[19] This is, firstly, because of the richness of the African flora and secondly because of the investment needed in botanical research and documentation. The IPA initiative is however an important step towards conserving the world's plant species and will provide important guidance in other areas of policy such as environmental impact assessment and national conservation legislation.

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[17] J.R.D. Taplin and J.C. Lovett, "Can we predict centres of plant species richness and rarity from environmental variables in sub-Saharan Africa?", (2003) 141 *Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society* 187–197.

[18] N. Burgess, W. Kuper, J. Mutke, J. Brown, S. Westaway, S. Turpie, C. Meshack, J. Taplin, C. McClean, and J.C. Lovett, "Major gaps in the distribution of protected areas for threatened and narrow range Afrotropical plants", (In press) *Biodiversity and Conservation.*

[19] Seventh ordinary meeting of the conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 9–20 February, 2004, Decision VII/10.

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