

Press Release

Scientific Congress in Cape Town: Remarkable Success for the African-German Research Project on biodiversity

October 3, Spier. More than 350 policy-makers, scientists, land users and other stakeholders from 20 African countries, Brazil and Germany discussed solutions for the challenges to Africa's basis for survival – biological diversity – at Spier, Stellenbosch, South Africa from September 29 to October 3. International organisations (UNESCO, GEOSS/GEOBON, WWF, IUCN, OSS) as well as relevant African ministries, research institutions and organisations attended the high-level congress which was organised by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI). Local land users and decision-makers participated in the congress as crucial partners in sustainable development.

Land use and climate change are regarded as prominent drivers of biodiversity change. The impact of climate change and unsustainable land use on ecosystem services and goods pose major threats for rural livelihoods in Africa. In order to address these pressing issues and to develop scenarios that demonstrate options for actions, African and German scientists carry out research projects in 10 African countries, most of them under the umbrella of the BIOTA AFRICA Network.

Namibias Secretary of State from the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF), Anna Shiveda, emphasized the commitment of national institutions, stating, that

“BIOTA AFRICA is too important to be left in the hands of the scientists alone”.

State Secretary of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), Prof. Frieder Meyer-Krahmer, also commented on Monday in Bonn/Germany that

“Farmers, local and national decision-makers as well as governments must respond without delay to environmental changes and prepare for the future”

But in order to be able to do so, information about future trends is needed at an early stage.

To this end, the African and German scientists involved in BIOTA develop scenarios to point up possible courses of action.

The congress has also further enhanced international cooperation:

“On this basis of mutual trust, the BMBF invites African partners to talk about organising future cooperations. The German government’s strategy for Africa is put into practice in a very pragmatic way here.”

The congress centred on the fundamental scientific work required for generating sound multi-disciplinary scientific data. Land use impact and value were discussed in order to elaborate pathways to reconcile biodiversity conservation with the immediate need to improve rural livelihoods in Africa. A wide range of tools for supporting sustainable land use practices has been developed jointly with local communities. The work presented ranges from “grassroots” projects, like the restoration of degraded soils with local plant or animal species up to sophisticated modelling of regional climate change or Decision Support Systems for local and national decision makers. Capacity Building - from the community level to academic training - ensures the implementation and further development of instruments and results. One of many successes is the contribution of the CoCE Project to the conservation and use of wild populations of *Coffea Arabica* to support economic development in the poor regions of the montane rainforests of Ethiopia.

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Background on BIOTA AFRICA

The African-German research network, BIOTA AFRICA, with more than 400 scientists, is the largest, continent-wide joint initiative to investigate into the complex relationships between humans and nature in Africa.

The BIOTA network has already notched up seven years of successful work since African and German researchers from various disciplines first joined forces to better understand the complex relationships between humans and nature. Over 400 scientists and more than 70 institutions form the BIOTA AFRICA (Biodiversity Monitoring Transect Analysis in Africa) research network. BIOTA monitors changes across the continent in four regions: BIOTA Southern Africa (South Africa, Namibia), BIOTA West Africa (Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Benin), BIOTA East Africa (Kenya, Uganda) and BIOTA Morocco. German and African scientists are also working together to find solutions to these complex problems in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia. All of these projects are sponsored by Germany’s Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and a number of African institutions. The researchers develop concepts for the protection and sustainable use of biological diversity in cooperation with local communities of land users and decision makers. All partners take care to ensure that the necessary know-how is established in the African countries and can develop further there.

To learn more about BIOTA AFRICA, please visit www.biota-africa.org