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Grassroots

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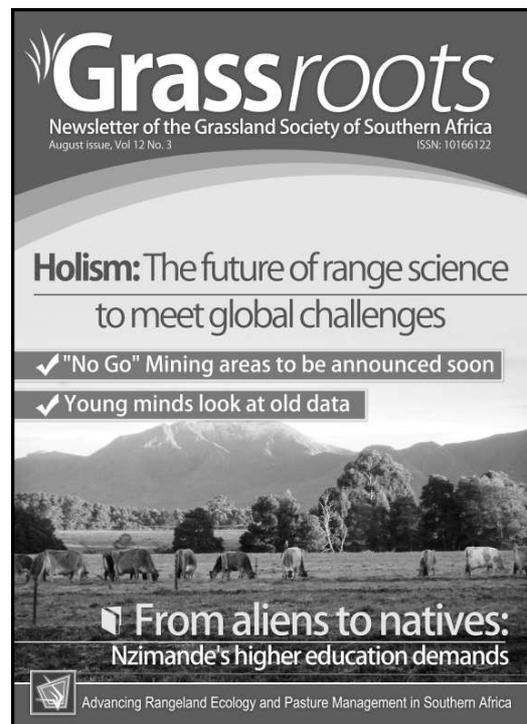
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Editor's Note



Welcome to the third edition of Grassroots for 2012. The 47th Annual Congress of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa held in Langebaan, Western Cape province was of the best. Thanks to Igshaan Samuels and team for organizing such a wonderful Congress. For those who could not attend this year's congress find a full report of the 47th Congress in this issue of Grassroots. The next 48th GSSA congress will be held in Limpopo province, Modimolle (former Nylstroom). There is always a room for improvement; I suggest that the organizing committee improve from this year's congress.

It was encouraging to see a good number of young scientist/students presents platform, posters and proposal in this year's congress, we hope to see even more next year and beyond. We also had a total of 10 keynote presentation, and guess every one enjoyed their talks.

We have devoted a lot of space to the subject of "Holism". And indeed, it was the subject of much lively debate and discussion at the Congress. In addition, there is a handy list of recent publications, a great deal of news and report-backs and information on up-coming events too.

Julius Tjelele



Letter to the Society

Kotie van den Berg is the recipient of this year's Peter Edwards Award.

To begin with, I want to thank the GSSA for the privilege and honour of receiving the Peter Edwards Award for the Best Conservation Farmer in the Western Cape. In the spirit of the Olympic Games, it feels like receiving a gold medal . . . although it is actually the farm that won the award! It just so happened that I did not make a speech at the award ceremony. That may give the impression that I do not care about the award, which is of course not the case. So, I would like to take this opportunity to share some thoughts about the farm, myself and conservation. Doing it through the GSSA Newsletter is probably also the best way.

I want to start by congratulating Dr. Loraine vd Berg with her election as president of the GSSA. Good luck with all the extra work and responsibilities. On a lighter note (with all the political nepotism around us . . .), I just want to state that Loraine's position has absolutely nothing to do with my receiving of the award! (We just share a surname, but are not related!) I was born in 1947 – the same year when the *Soil Conservation Act of 1946* came into operation. Murraysburg was the first district in the (then) Cape Province, and the second in South Africa to be declared as a soil conservation district.

My grandfather was one of the co-workers to get Murraysburg declared as a soil conservation district and became the first chairperson of the Soil Conservation Committee (SCC). Later, my father also served as chairperson of the SCC in Murraysburg. About 25 years ago I became chairperson of the SCC. Conservation; seems to be a heritable trait!

Through the years the name and approach of the SCCs changed. The name changed from SCC to Conservation Committee and then to Landcare Forum. The change in approach was also for the better. The emphasis shifted from mechanical and structural conservation to biological, agricultural resource conservation to holistic environmental conservation.

The farm Beeldhouersfontein has been in the Van den Berg family for almost one hundred years. My wife, Lina, and I are the third generation to farm here. The farm is situated in a region known as the Sneeuberg, with a diverse topography and vegetation. The vegetation varies from typical karoo, to mixed grassveld to highland *Merxmuellera* sour grassveld with “fynbos”. The altitude varies from 1300 m to 2200 m, and the rainfall from 300 mm to 500 mm per annum – with snow during the winter months.

The conservation process on the farm was started by my grandfather after the devastating drought of 1933. He started by controlling stock numbers and building small structures to combat soil erosion. After World War II, my father started to develop the infrastructure by building more fences and by improving the water supply for livestock. He also started to experiment with controlled burning and oversowing to improve the sour grassveld.

I always had an interest in farming and we had long and interesting discussions. Naturally, there were more questions than answers, so I decided to study agriculture at the University of the Free State with Pasture Science as one of my majors.

During my studies in the late 60's, several things happened to spark the interest of scientists, farmers, and even students, in veld and conservation. I was privileged to study under Prof. Brian Roberts from whom I learned the basics of conservation. My first job was at Grootfontein Agricultural College where Dr. Piet Roux became my practical mentor. I also learned a lot from my colleagues and from farmers at "Farmers Days" -- which were very popular during those times.

From 1975 to 1977 I lectured at UFS with Prof. Daan Opperman as a wonderful leader. In the beginning of 1978 I left the academic career to become a "veld" farmer. I farmed with my father for ten years which was a win-win partnership in every sense of the word.

Since 1994 we had a number of above average rainfall seasons which helped with veld conservation and veld improvement. The last two seasons were far above average, which definitely helped a lot to be selected for the Peter Edwards Award. There is much more to say on the subject of conservation, but let me conclude with the following:

- Conservation is mainly a commitment to a way of living, which you should do – not to get financial or other rewards, but out of respect for Creation and the environment.

- The main goal should be to leave the environment in a better condition than you have received it.

If you get any rewards, like the Peter Edwards Award, it is a pleasant surprise, a privilege and a bonus!

Thanks again.

Kotie van den Berg



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Young Minds Look at Old Data

Nicky Allsopp, SAEON Fynbos Node

The students, under the supervision of Professor Dominic Mazvimavi at the Institute of Water Studies in the Department of Earth Sciences, are exploring a variety of questions associated with the long term experimental catchment monitoring at Jonkershoek and Jakkalsrivier. Four of the students will be using data from the Jonkershoek and Jakkalsrivier catchment experiments and two will be doing field based studies.

Data from the 1930s onward

The CSIR has recently transferred custodianship to SAEON of the data from the experimental catchment monitoring programmes which were run in places like Jonkershoek, Jakkalsrivier and Cathedral Peak. Some of this data, such as that from Jonkershoek, stretches back to the 1930s and consists of several million records.

The experimental catchment monitoring programmes were set up to answer questions about how much water alien plantation species such as pines may use compared to natural vegetation. The evidence came out in favour of maintaining indigenous vegetation in catchments to secure the long-term sustainability of water delivery. Other evidence was used to determine the best fire cycles and season of burn in fynbos and grasslands for securing water delivery of high quality.

Answering new questions

However, data of this length continues to supply opportunities for answering new questions. In this day and age questions around the impacts of global change on the hydrology and ecology are particularly coming to the fore.

The students are exploring a variety of questions associated with the long term experimental catchment monitoring at Jonkershoek and Jakkalsrivier.

The students will be studying specific details of flood and low flow regimes, comparing between catchments and sites and asking questions such as have the catchments maintained similar responses to rainfall over time. One project will specifically look at temporal and spatial variation of rainfall in Jonkershoek, while another will look at potential changes in evapotranspiration. These projects can potentially refine hydrological models of impacts of global change on water delivery.

Two of the students will be engaged in more hands-on research and will be accompanying Node Technical Officer, Abri de Buys, on his regular monitoring rounds. One student will investigate the accuracy of rating equations in estimating flow rates and another will be examining the quality of water in the upper reaches of the Eersterivier.

Managing large data sets

Victoria Goodall, Node Data Scientist, will be helping the students get to grips with managing extremely large data sets, many with data recorded at hourly time intervals over several decades, as well as provide input on statistical approaches.

The Applied Center for Climate and Earth Systems Science (ACCESS) is acknowledged for funding for bursaries for four of the students.

SAEON Newsletter



Grassland Society of Southern Africa

Advancing
Rangeland Ecology
and Pasture Management in
Africa

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From Aliens to Natives: Nzimande's Higher Education Demands

Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande has plans to turn students and lecturers nationwide into information technology "natives". Every university must have a dining hall, every university student should have an email address, and the provision of laptops to certain students would be explored, Nzimande told a dialogue series convened by the ANC at the University of Johannesburg's Soweto campus on Thursday.

At the event, which the Mail & Guardian understands to be part of an ongoing series of engagements with all sectors leading up to the party's policy conference in June. Nzimande also addressed the burning issue of capacity at higher education institutions and the need to improve the quality of teaching at further education and training (FET) colleges.

The meeting, convened by ANC secretary general Gwede Mantashe, was titled "The State of Higher Education in South Africa: Prospects and Challenges". All 23 vice-chancellors of universities were invited but only one attended, the University of Johannesburg's Ihron Rensburg. Four other universities sent representatives.

Speaking about improving infrastructure at higher education institutions and the need to assist students who could not afford to buy their own food, Nzimande said there should be a dining hall at every university.

"There are some universities that don't have dining halls. Students don't go to university to cook, they go to university to learn." Dean of the faculty of science, engineering and technology, at Walter Sisulu University Phinda Songca, said the "revolution in information and communication technology [ICT] brought competencies that can be appropriated by all sectors and have an enormous impact on society".

'ICT aliens to natives'

He recommended that higher education address ICT setbacks "so our universities, FET colleges, students and lecturers are converted en masse from ICT aliens to natives, and they will perform better". In response, Nzimande said: "if you are a university student you must have an email address and access to wifi". He said the department was "considering" the idea that National Student Financial Aid Scheme of South Africa (NSFAS) students be given a laptop along with their textbooks.

Mail & Guardian



'No-go' Mining Areas to be Announced Soon – Molewa

Mineral Resources Minister Susan Shabangu would soon announce 'no-go' areas for mining, based on ecological sensitivity, Environmental and Water Affairs Minister Edna Molewa.

Speaking at a business briefing in Johannesburg, she said that the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) and the Department of Mineral Resources would also publish jointly developed mining and biodiversity guidelines. The DEA was working with other government departments to ensure that mining methods were less destructive and that appropriate mitigation and rehabilitation measures were in place and financially provided for. Molewa indicated that the mining industry currently accounted for about 7.7% of South Africa's gross domestic product and that it would continue to be a significant contributor. "It is therefore imperative that this important sector be treated as key in our greening of the economy.

"Not only do we need to address the significant legacy of environment degradation caused by past policies and practices, but also ensure that current and future mining activities take place in such a way that we do not leave the same undesirable legacy for the next generation," she urged.

Regarding land-use patterns, South Africa had made progress in mainstreaming environmental sustainability in the development processes. Molewa said this was visible in the integrated development plans and spatial development frameworks at local government level. "It is time to implement a resource-efficient, low-carbon and pro-employment growth path. Government, the private sector and civil society need to be jointly and actively involved as partners in this process. The conservation and wise use of our natural capital, which is valued, is key to ensuring a sustainable future," the Minister stressed.

Economic growth, business continuity, food and energy security and drinking water supplies were also currently under increasing pressure. "With finite limits to freshwater availability, we must always be innovative in our water resource management so that we deliver the much-needed water to sustain growth for humanity and the environment," Molewa stated. She warned that if South Africa wished to broaden its agricultural base, equity in water use was necessary.

“For agriculture to effectively drive green growth resilience, the focus should be on support of agrarian societies in implementing and using alternative inputs that are less vulnerable to fluctuating oil prices, alternative mechanisation options, water harvesting and irrigation technologies, and strengthening financial flows and investment in the sector,” Molewa said.

Irrigated agriculture currently made up 60% of the South Africa’s water user and was also the sector where large savings could be achieved with a focus on the efficiency of distribution systems, such as pipelines and canals, the Minister suggested.

“We must always be innovative in our Water Resource Management so that we deliver the much-needed water to sustain growth for humanity and the environment”



Ash Pile - *Flip Breytenbach*



IV International Wildlife Management Congress Cooperative Wildlife Management across Borders: Learning in the Face of Change

Ian Rushworth, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife

Despite being home to the most diverse array of wildlife on the planet, with some of the most serious and complex challenges in respect of the conservation thereof, Africa had never hosted an International Wildlife Management Congress. That all changed during 9-12 July 2012 when the IV International Wildlife Management Congress (IV IWMC) was held in Durban, South Africa. The Wildlife Society (TWS) in partnership with the Wildlife and Environmental Society of South Africa (WESSA), South African National Parks (SANParks), and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW) hosted and organized the congress. Appropriately, the theme of was ‘Cooperative Wildlife Management across Borders: “Learning in the Face of Change”

Sub-themes included human dimensions of wildlife management and conservation, climate change, wildlife health and disease, wildlife population management, endangered species recovery, invasive species, trans-border cooperation and conservation, natural resource use and sustainability, and habitat restoration, modification and stewardship.

The first day started with workshop sessions, followed by the opening ceremony with usual pomp and speeches. The four workshops covered animal trapping techniques (summary of international research efforts conducted over the last 20 years to develop humane traps and trapping techniques as well as providing practical instruction in the types of traps and setting techniques used for research and in the management of wildlife); road ecology for Africa (highlighted the state of road ecology internationally and in Africa, identification of key lessons and principles of road ecology for Africa); Synoptic modeling of animal location data (a new approach of analysis of animal location data that combines animal movements, home range and resource selection analyses); and the use of porcine zonapellucida(pZP) immunocontraception as a technique in the management of captive and free-ranging wildlife populations, with emphasis on African elephants.

The remaining three days were run as a series of day-long themed symposia run in conjunction with three parallel sessions of presentations. Two plenary sessions stood out for me: Shaun Mahoney gave a stirring introduction to private land conservation, politics and ethics.

I was amazed at the extent of wildlife ranching in Texas where game has obtained economic value, but also noted some of the resultant impacts of artificial feeding and introduction of exotic species. This provided a glimpse of where the southern African wildlife industry is heading, and reinforced the need for strong policy and regulatory oversight in southern Africa! The point was made that we should be wary of the claims made about the conservation contribution of wildlife ranching, as beneath the claimed conservation benefits are serious negative impacts of fencing, genetic manipulation and pollution, and predator control, and that in many respects well run commercial livestock ranches may be better for the environment!

The plenary session on rhino management gave an overview of the trends in populations and poaching – and reminded us that in the recent past we have witnessed the extinction of at least three subspecies of rhino - and made public for the first time a proposed new approach, being championed by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, of establishing a legalized trade in rhino horn run through a central selling organization. The theory is that the legal trade will remove the speculation that is driving up the horn prices, meet some of the demand, and change the risk-to-reward ratio for poaching syndicates. Whilst there will always be uncertainties, the current approaches are not effective enough, and the trade can easily be stopped if there are unintended consequences.

Overall, the talks highlighted the global demise of wildlife and wild systems in the face of exponentially growing human pressure we are witnessing unprecedented rates of extinctions and disruptions of ecosystems and the services they provide to humanity. The massive impact of the new shale gas industry was profiled, where it was highlighted that political and economic pressure will see massive expansion, but where few options for mitigation of the impacts were provided. The need for landowners and other affected parties to have input into the establishment and operation of the industry was highlighted. Of course the impacts of climate change on wildlife and natural systems are being increasingly recorded and reported on, sometimes with surprising outcomes.

There is a growing trend towards fertility control as an alternative to culling in charismatic species or where there is strong public interest. Examples of kangaroos in Australian urban areas and African elephant were provided demonstrating that contraception can work. However, the management and budget overheads are enormous. Whilst contraception is a society values-driven necessity, that same society will need to accept that an increasing trend to non-lethal control will diminish budget for other aspects of saving threatened species. It is not generally appreciated in other parts of the world that the meat from culling represents an important protein source in impoverished rural communities, and provides an incentive to tolerate wildlife and its associated impacts which otherwise would not be there.

As humans and wildlife come into closer and closer contact, and as we attempt to create borderless transfrontier conservation areas, the issue of animal disease management is increasing in importance. Talks at the conference highlighted the importance of understanding animal ecology and behavior to develop effective disease management programmes – non-selective control programmes, such as that for bTB in English badgers, may exacerbate rather than reduce disease transmission.

The impact of rich nations' almost irrational fear of foot and mouth disease, and the consequent draconian policy, and how this affects the African livestock industry, wildlife and rural livelihoods, was highlighted. As wildlife gains importance in regional economies (wildlife and associated tourism and hunting already contributes more than agriculture in southern African GDPs) veterinary authorities, agriculture and conservation are going to have to re-think and re-define how animal diseases are approached and managed. At what point is agriculture going to compensate the wildlife industry for the introduction of bTB into wildlife herds with the associated costs and impacts?

Perhaps understandably there was a predominance of talks from North America (base of The Wildlife Society, funding) and southern Africa (location, focus on wildlife). Notably, there were very few talks from South America, northern and western Africa, Europe (understandably) and Asia (other than India and Sri Lanka).



The same pattern was apparent in the delegates. I personally gained knowledge across a diverse range of subjects, and have already started incorporating some of this in my work. It is just regrettable that for me - like so many other African conservationists - this is likely to be the first and last IWMC that we attend because Africa has now had its turn and the costs of international conference attendance are prohibitive.



ABSA Wildlife Conference

The Economy of Ecology: Empowering the Wildlife Sector to Invest in Responsible Wildlife Management

Minette van Lingen, DAFF-Grootfontein ADI

The third annual ABSA Wildlife Conference was held in Port Elizabeth on 31 May 2012. The theme of the day was “The Economy of Ecology: Empowering the wildlife sector to invest in responsible wildlife management”. The speakers that contributed to the day included Dr Flippie Cloete from the North-West University’s Centre for Environmental Science, Dr Mike Knight from SANParks, Dr Johan Joubert from Shamwari Private Game Reserve, Ernst Janovsky from ABSA Financial Solutions, Japie Buckle from SANBI and Matthew Norval from the Wilderness Foundation.

Dr Flippie Cloete opened the day’s proceedings with his presentation “Investing in change”. His talk highlighted that game ranching and game farming should not be confused and that many game ranchers are actually game farmers especially when breeding intensively with rare species like buffalo and sable etc. Game farmers and stock farmers are experiencing the same economic pressures and because the financial returns from farming with rare game species are so much greater than conventional stock farming the game farming industry has grown tremendously with many new farmers converting from stock farming to game farming.

Currently the breeding value of rare species determines the price, which in many cases exceeds the industry’s wildest expectations such as a buffalo bull sold for R 18 million or a golden gnu for R 1.2 million. He warned that this trend is not sustainable and posed a question of what will happen when the supply of these animals exceeds the demand. He urged the game industry to explore other options to find ways to stimulate the demand for game products like meat and skins as it is such a unique product.

Dr Mike Knight looked at national policy and parks management plans. He used the example of one of their very successful parks namely Addo National Elephant Park to explain how protected areas can be utilised to fight poverty and to protect ecosystems. He stressed that it was important to conserve unique biodiversity and reduce critical threats with efficient and effective management and that the objectives of any management strategy should not only include conservation of biodiversity but strive to uplift local communities and to promote sustainable ecotourism. Knight also drew a lot of response when he criticized the game industry for the “fashion trend” of breeding with rare, colour variants with recessive genes like golden and king wildebeest, etc.

According to Knight such animals are not natural and do not contribute to conservation and that these small intensive farming operations only contribute to fragmentation of natural systems.

Dr Johan Joubert continued on the topic of management of protected areas using Shamwari Private Game Reserve as a case-study and gave insight into their winning formula for environmental, social and financial sustainability. He explained that private game reserves often experience problems with funding so they reverted to using the term “Big 5 Reserves” and advocating 5-star game lodges to entice tourists, but with the current economy it is becoming more difficult to fill beds within the reserves. According to Joubert to be able to remain financially viable these private game reserves will have to rethink their approach and offer something different. He concluded that it will always remain a challenge to balance the needs of the accountants’ vs the needs of the hoteliers vs the needs of the conservationists.

Ernst Janovsky explored the strategic financial services and considerations for wildlife and agri-sectors. According to Janovsky it is important for game ranching in South Africa to be profitable as this will contribute to conservation, but that this will inevitably lead to game ranches becoming bigger. Policies governing the game ranching industry should also be reconsidered as it is a farming activity and should therefore fall under the Department of Agriculture.

It is also of great importance that new markets in Asia and India be investigated as the economic crises in Europe and America will lead to a decrease of visitors from these markets. Japie Buckle discussed the degradation of biodiversity in game ranching. According to him it seems that land managers have lost the ability/knowledge/willingness to manage land properly. This was ascribed to the difficult economic climate, expenses with regards to erosion control, the lack of subsidies and agricultural extension services and the fact that we have highly erodible soils. Game farming is a science often more complicated than livestock farming, and most game ranches are too small for the diversity of species that land managers would like to keep, which often leads to increased degradation. According to Buckle these are serious issues that need to be addressed to ensure sustainability of the game ranching sector over the long-term.

Matthew Norval gave insight surrounding the role of private game ranches and agri-lands in conservation corridors. Norval believes that many productive commercial farms have the potential to make a positive contribution to conservation objectives. This can be done via voluntary contractual agreements with private land owners to establish conservation corridors and this would provide opportunities to consolidate and expand protected areas. These agreements would also stimulate conservation-friendly economic development in regions and also protect areas from inappropriate development, with a good example being that of the Mountain Zebra – Camdeboo National Park corridor project.

The day was ended off with a panel discussion on rhino protection, where the panel and delegates explored the impacts of militarisation, legalisation and conservation policy as possible solutions to the current rhino crises. Dr Knight stressed the fact that 93% of Africa's rhino are in South Africa and that we were losing about 1.2 rhino every day. He felt that all the options should be considered but that we must make sure that what we are doing is really in the best interest of rhinos. Dr Joubert supported his argument but he felt very strongly against the dehorning of rhino as he felt it sends a message that we have already lost the battle against rhino poaching.

There were mixed feelings regarding legalising trade in rhino horn as some delegates felt it would decrease the black market activities as prices would drop and others felt it would make no difference as it would not decrease the demand for rhino horn. The panel concluded that the way forward should be to increase intelligence, create improved awareness and to gain the necessary equipment and funding to be able to react proactively rather than reactively as is the current situation.



2012 Panel of Speakers from left to right: Dr Johan Joubert (Shamwari Group), Derrich Gardner, Japie Buckle (SANBI), Matthew Norval (Wilderness Foundation), Dr Mike Knight (SANParks), Ernst Janovsky (Absa), Dr Flippie Cloete (North West University). *Photograph - Avenue-IMC*

The Biodiversity Information Management Forum

Paula Hathorn, SANBI

Making a difference: the Forum explored the role of information collection and management to support research, policy, biodiversity management and a comprehensive national monitoring framework, and was held from 12 to 13 June 2012 at the Old Mutual Conference Centre, Cape Town, South Africa

In the opening address to the Biodiversity Information Management Forum (BIMF) 2012 Jon Hutton, Director of UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, emphasised that measuring biodiversity is not a trivial task because biodiversity is multi - dimensional and complex. Biodiversity information is required to encompass variety, quantity, composition distribution and quality of biodiversity.

In his presentation Dr Hutton pointed to a number of shortcomings across the links of the biodiversity data chain from data gathering, data organising, data sharing, data synthesis to analysis and tools for decision. However, he pointed to the success of high quality national biodiversity centres such as SANBI in organising data and developing tools for decisions. Delegates at the BIMF were clear that strong taxonomic and natural science skills should remain the solid foundation of biodiversity information management.

An exciting initiative that contributes to gathering data and monitoring biodiversity was launched at the Forum. Carmel Mbizvo, SANBI DDG, officially launched the southern African citizen science portal iSpot by uploading an observation of the iconic *Leucadendron argenteum*. www.ispot.org.za

Data quality was the theme of the training course hosted by the South African Biodiversity Information Facility (SABIF). Participants appreciated the experience and expertise of trainer, Arthur Chapman, of the Australian Biodiversity Information Services, and expressed interest in inviting him to return to South Africa and continue build local capacity through sharing his extensive biodiversity information skills.





A group photo of all BIMF participants - *Photograph: SANBI*



Lively discussion as delegates respond to the round table inputs on achievements and challenges in ensuring biodiversity data is relevant - *Photograph: George Davis, SANBI*

Millennium Development Goals Review

Summit and Exhibition

3 – 4 May 2012

M Igshaan Samuels , Agricultural Research Council

The aim of the summit was mainly to identify and discuss how the private sector may assist government and stakeholders from across the world to accelerate progress towards achieving their respective Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that are due in 2015. The summit also provided a platform to outline directions how governments can facilitate further business involvement for sustainable development and achieving the 8 MDG goals.

The 8 MDG goals are to:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty & hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality & empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria & other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a Global Partnership for development

Several businesses, including agri-businesses had exhibitions and their representatives made presentations about how their products could assist in achieving some of these goals. However, due to visa constraints most of the key delegates and exhibitors were not in time for their presentations or exhibitions. Ensuring environmental sustainability (Goal 7) in the longer term is the goal GSSA could make a significant contribution to, especially in South Africa.

This would include reducing our carbon footprint, promoting conservation farming methods, conserving ecosystem services, discouraging habitat destruction and encouraging environmental rehabilitation.

The MDG Summit & Exhibition which was scheduled for the 24th – 25th of April 2013 next year in Johannesburg South Africa is now going to be held in the United Kingdom on the 8th – 9th May 2013 at the NEC in Birmingham.



For more information on the event and how to register please visit the event site www.mdgsummit.org.

