

UNIFIED & RISING: AFRICAN NATIONS CONVENE AT KIRSTENBOSCH NATIONAL BOTANICAL GARDEN TO LIBERATE BIODIVERSITY DATA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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How can biodiversity information catalyse scientific research, enable evidence-based decision-making and spur sustainable development in Africa? What tools, resources and learning networks are available to build effective biodiversity information systems in Africa?

These questions will be in central focus at the international conference, ***Africa Rising: Mobilising Biodiversity Data for Sustainable Development***, which will take place at Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden from 19 to 22 May 2015, hosted by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI). Approximately 100 delegates will attend this exclusive invitation-only meeting, representing over 20 African governments as well as various UN agencies, international organisations and research institutions.

Biodiversity is the bedrock of sustainable development. Our societies and economies depend on flows of ecosystem services that are generated and mediated by biodiversity e.g. food, medicine, clean air, water and beauty. This is particularly true in Africa where the benefits of biodiversity are inextricably linked to the well-being and security of people. To manage this precious resource, decision-makers require vast volumes of relevant, reliable data. Yet in Africa, such data is typically non-existent, inadequate or inaccessible. Addressing Africa's biodiversity data-deficit will require a sharp increase in investment and a strengthening of regional coordination.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE:

- Increase regional understanding of the biodiversity data-science-policy value chain and identify the opportunities and solutions that it presents for sustainable development in Africa;
- Draw attention to relevant tools, resources and learning networks for building effective biodiversity information systems in Africa; and
- Articulate a 'Plan of Action' for mobilising and mainstreaming Africa's policy-relevant biodiversity data, and forge collaborative partnerships to implement it.

To this end, *Africa Rising 2015* will feature the official launch and first regional meeting of Biodiversity Information for Development, a €3.9m EU-funded project focused on enhancing capacity and mobilising biodiversity data in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

The event programme will comprise of interactive and engaging sessions over four days culminating on 22 May, which is the UN International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB). This year, the IDB has the theme, 'Biodiversity and Sustainable Development'. The conference participants will mark the occasion by jointly proclaiming a Declaration on Biodiversity Information for African Development. This will be followed by a press conference at c. 12h00 in which the media will have an opportunity to engage directly with conference delegates including high-level officials.

The event is being organised by SANBI in partnership with the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), the United Nations Environment Programme – World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) and the USAID Resilience in the Limpopo Basin Programme (RESILIM). Financial support is being provided by the JRS Biodiversity Foundation and the European Union.

For updates and news of the conference, follow SANBI on Twitter @SANBI_ZA and the hashtag #AFRICARISING.

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