

SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE HONOURABLE DEPUTY MINISTER, MS REJOICE MABUDAFHASI FOR THE GALA DINNER AT THE SUSTAINABLE LIVING FESTIVAL, 17 MAY 2008

LINKING LANDSCAPES, PEOPLE AND MINDS – RESTITUTION AND SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Limpopo MEC for Economic, Environment Affairs and Tourism Collins Chabane
German Ambassador to South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, Honourable Dieter Walter Haller
Executive Mayor of Mopani District, Mr. Humphrey Mogobi
IUCN Regional Counselor and Director of Frankfurt Zoo (Germany), Prof. Manfred Niekisch
Afro-Montane Eco System, Ms J Newenham
Grassland Eco System, Dr. Mike Peel
K2C Project Coordinator Ms D Thomson
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen.

We are gathered here tonight, on the eve of the International Day for Biological Diversity, to appreciate and celebrate our diverse and intricate environment which supports our daily existence. Without it, life for humans would be impossible. Everything we strive for, and everything we want to achieve, we do by utilising natural resources, and if we do not utilise these resources sustainably, human life will perish. There would be no future generations to talk about.

We welcome the recognition of this important day by our partners from around the globe to celebrate the gift of life that our natural environment bestows on us. It is a truly auspicious event, where the rich diversity in this truly remarkable place called “Kruger to Canyons”, is showcased by the people living in it. The theme for International Biodiversity Day is “**Biodiversity and Agriculture**”, and in this Biosphere Reserve the link between sustainable agriculture and the ecosystem services provided by a healthy ecosystem, was today so clearly shown in the interaction between the three different biomes represented in this biosphere reserve.

The hundreds of participants in today's biodiversity monitoring programme have experienced first-hand how biodiversity within the framework of a healthy ecosystem contributes to the provision of clean water, pest control, pollination, soil fertility, disaster management, and with all of these, to sustainable production of food. Without all of these services, sustainable agriculture will not be possible, and eradication of poverty will be a pipe dream.

Biospheres:

Biosphere Reserves are designated regions throughout the world where internationally important protected areas lie adjacent to human settlements which need to use the land for a multiplicity of purposes. This creates a link between the protection of biodiversity and the provision of ecosystem services with the management of environments outside of protected areas. It is this link between ecosystem services, capacity building and sustainable livelihoods that the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere is so well able to demonstrate, with its ecosystems ranging from grasslands containing mountain catchments, through forests that filter and purify the water, to savannahs providing grazing for both cattle and the rich diversity of African game that makes South Africa a prime tourism destination.

Internationally Biosphere Reserves are recognised as areas that include all types of land use – from conservation to agriculture and human habitation. It not only links land-use patterns, but provides an arena for the furthering of scientific knowledge, technical competence and human values through capacity building for sustainable resource management and use by communities themselves. It is areas where national, provincial and local action plans for sustainable development can be formulated through participative community involvement, and the sharing of benefits arising from the sustainable utilisation of resources.

Each Biosphere reserve is conceived to fulfil a developmental, conservation as well as logistical role. The developmental role combines conservation objectives with the sustainable use of natural resources by local communities for their benefit, while the conservation role protects natural resources, ecosystems and landscapes of value to maintain biodiversity and life-support systems.

The logistical role provides research, monitoring, education and training opportunities for the communities within the biosphere. This will lead to sustainable resource management through co-operation with local communities.

South Africa realised the advantage of biospheres, especially as a vehicle to achieve biodiversity conservation and community development as both are vital for poverty alleviation. DEAT has therefore placed the development of biospheres as one of the priority projects within the National Biodiversity Framework, and will work towards supporting the establishment of these reserves right across the country. This will strengthen the implementation of the goals of biosphere reserves in terms of equity, benefit-sharing and capacity building, while addressing both conservation of resources and development of communities equally. In this way the conservation of biodiversity will be reconciled with the quest for economic and social development and the maintenance of cultural values. To date 5 biosphere reserves have been listed on the world network of biosphere reserves by UNESCO with the newest addition listed in September 2007. A number of other initiatives are currently being developed that will lead to the expansion of the biosphere network in South Africa.

K2C contributing to national goals

The strength of these processes are that they benefit people by providing communities with the framework of opportunities to become stakeholders in their land and resources and at the same time give security to landowners and create opportunities to further develop their capacity to respond to community needs. The “Sustainable Living Festival” is but one of the ways in which the K2C strives to address capacity building in communities.

This Festival is organised to implement the main ideas around the establishment of Biospheres. It has targeted the ecological, social and economic dimensions of biodiversity loss, through an exercise in knowledge-sharing, research and monitoring that will lead to capacity building and participatory decision-making. The whole community, including learners, community members, farm labourers, politicians and private landowners have worked together to showcase the richness of their environment, and the ecosystem services that it can provide to the people of this land.

At the same time they have established a benchmark against which the environment can be evaluated, creating a rich learning environment for all who want to participate in future.

Ecosystem services are a vital part of poverty alleviation, as this provides communities with the basic resources needed for sustainable livelihoods. These services include the storage of water for dry seasons in mountain catchment areas, the purification of water through wetlands, the mitigation of weather extremes like floods and droughts through both catchments and wetlands, pollination of food crops and natural vegetation used for grazing, nutrient cycling and the improvement of soil fertility, prevention of erosion, climate stability and maintenance of biodiversity. All of these services, or the lack thereof, have a direct impact on the poverty levels of especially rural people. The biosphere, in maintaining these services, and building the capacity of communities to manage the ecosystems on which these services are dependent,

Communities have to manage their own environments, and for this to be successful, they have to be the landowners. Because of this, land restitution is one of the important issues that are being addressed in the biosphere. All DEAT-funded development in the National Park involves the communities in decision-making processes, and communities involved in land claims in Mpumalanga are working with the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency to establish agreements with respect to beneficiation and settlement agreements. The communities have already reached agreement on the 12 principles, and further workshops need to conduct to reach agreements on outstanding issues. The communities are very supportive of the continuation of protected areas and the associated eco-tourism.

This will enable the communities to empower themselves to access resources and develop the capacity to take part in the economic activities of the region on an equal footing. The capacity building programmes that form part of the Biosphere reserve will ensure skills transfer, equity and benefit-sharing for everybody.

The Future:

DEAT is committed to the implementation and support of the Man and the Biosphere programme. This "Sustainable Living Festival" is a vehicle that can be used to ensure continuity in capacity building programmes, and we will strive to support the K2C as one of the implementing partners in this programme wherever possible. Greater efforts should be made to bring onboard active participation of women in the vicinity and educating the adjacent communities about sustainable use of and the importance of protecting the environment.

Thank you,

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Background .
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Approach (Extract from UNESCO's Draft Programme 2006-2007) .
"The General Conference authorizes the Director-General [...] to implement the corresponding plan of action in the ecological sciences [...], in order to:¶
(i) Contribute to minimizing biodiversity loss through the use of ecological and biodiversity sciences in policy- and decision-making; ¶
(ii) Promote environmental sustainability through the World Network of Biosphere Reserves; ¶
(iii) Enhance the linkages between cultural and biological diversity, jointly with [Major Programme IV- Culture]" ¶
Main line of action 1: Minimizing biodiversity loss through research and capacity-building for ecosystem management .
Focus will be on a broad-based interdisciplinary research agenda with respect to the ecological, social and economic dimensions of biodiversity loss and its reduction. Capacity-building will be key [...], including the development of a network of learning centres for integrated ecosystem management and through South-South cooperation. In Africa, the regional postgraduate school in Kinshasa, Congo DR, will serve as the principal node for this network. .
Efforts will be made to promote interdisciplinary and multisectoral approaches to sustainable development in higher education and in-service training institutions, particularly in post-conflict countries.
State-of-the-art synthesis will be undertaken and new research initiatives on arid lands and humid tropics will be launched, capping 50 years (2006) of UNESCO's involvement in these areas. ¶
Research, training and education related to biodiversity loss and global assessments ¶
Urban systems, carbon economies and ecosystem management for biodiversity use ¶
Research, training and ecosystem management of drylands and mountains ¶
Research and ecosystem management in coastal areas and humid tropics and South-South cooperation for capacity-building ¶
Main line of action 2: Biosphere reserves - promoting environmental sustainability .
Emphasis will be placed on linkages between biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development in specific biosphere reserve contexts. The WNB and its regional networks will be used as vehicles for knowledge-sharing and exchange of experience, research and monitoring, education and training, and testing of participatory decision-m [...] [1]

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Emphasis will be placed on linkages between biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development in specific biosphere reserve contexts. The WNBR and its regional networks will be used as vehicles for knowledge-sharing and exchange of experience, research and monitoring, education and training, and testing of participatory decision-making, thereby contributing to the emergence of "quality economies" and to conflict prevention.

Establishing new biosphere reserves and transboundary biosphere reserves

Strengthening of knowledge base on environmental sustainability - including the Great Apes Survival Project (GRASP), and the Biosphere Reserve Integrated Monitoring (BRIM) programme

Using biosphere reserves as platform for conflict prevention

Statutory meetings and MAB Young Scientists Award Scheme

Supporting regional and thematic MAB networks

Main line of action 3: Enhancing linkages between cultural and biological diversity

Cultural landscapes and sacred sites will receive special attention and allow to learn about biological and cultural diversity interactions. Special attention will be given to biosphere reserves and World Heritage sites.

Establishing a knowledge base on cultural practices fostering local-level sustainable use of biodiversity in biosphere reserves

Local and indigenous knowledge as a basis for equitable biodiversity governance in Small Island Developing States

Raising awareness of the role of sacred natural sites, cultural landscapes and intangible heritage in ecosystem management and sustainable use of biodiversity