Research will investigate principles of economic viability in bioregions

Biodiversity conservation should take place inside and outside protected areas, if biodiversity targets are to be met. This will only succeed if appropriate social and economic incentives and disincentives are in place. A research programme involving several economists and conservation agencies in South Africa, is currently being designed.

So said Harry Biggs, of SANParks scientific services, providing context for a joint presentation at the annual Bidoiversity Planning Forum held in March at the Mpekweni Beach resort in the Eastern Cape. Harry, Edwin Muchapondwa (of the University of Cape Town), Mandy Driver (of the South African National Biodiversity Institute) and Kelly Scheepers (of SANParks) talked about setting the research agenda for the economics of bioregions.

The challenge, according to Harry, lies in establishing some level of conservation-oriented regional management Corm) that encompasses both the protected and unprotected portions of the regional ecosystem. A research programme to help support this notion will rest on several principles and test several ideas as described below.

Social and especially economic factors could have major impacts on the vulnerability of biodiversity in such a regional project. This vulnerability may be reduced if people and enterprises benefit from biodiversity conservation and find that such regional management is adding to their goals. However, biodiversity competes with other land uses for scarce land and the survival of biodiversity depends on whether the people and enterprises living adjacent to it regard it as an asset or liability. This requires greater understanding of the relationship between the socioeconomic arrangements and any such intended biodiversity-friendly regional planning in a given area.

Within this framework and based on economic analyses, a cost-effective biodiversity plan that is both economically and ecologically acceptable could provide valuable guidance, and in fact probably the difference between success and failure. In addition, the role and effectiveness of the various institutions within an area should be analysed and changed if needed. But what are institutions? Within this context, institutions refer to the rules, norms and strategies adopted by individuals operating within organisations. They can be formal, or even exist in the minds of the participants, the latter sometimes shared as implicit knowledge rather than in an explicit and written form.

Conversely, the risks associated with open access and free-riding in biodiversity conservation could be mitigated through the cost-efficient restraint of human/enterprise actions. This could be done by using either 'command and control' or else economic incentives, depending on the circumstances and nature of the threat to biodiversity.

In general, command and control requires large enforcement efforts, while economic incentives free up "more resources to use to conserve ecosystems, even ones with low current economic viability."

Knowing how these institutions impact on people and enterprises, and their use of biodiversity assets, is critical for effective biodiversity conservation. "Institutions influence decisions for land-use, investment, natural resource use and therefore biodiversity conservation."

Outside protected areas, communities are often engaged in an attempt to influence land-use decisions with many initiatives building on decentralised decision making.

This approach has found a home in programmes such as the integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs) and community based natural resource management (CBNRM, such as the once successful CAMPFIRE programme in Zimbabwe), especially prominent since the 1980s.

The effectiveness of such programmes is constantly reviewed and some evidence indicates that decentralisation of power, plans and actions contributes to reducing poverty. It also suggests that where the cost of biodiversity is more than the benefits, biodiversity conservation cannot be effectively promoted.

The effectiveness of decentralisation programmes could be influenced by how a household sees the distinction between community and household benefits.

There is strong evidence that decentralisation "reduces poaching, improves perceptions, strengthens rights and reduces the liability aspect of biodiversity."

Several factors contribute to the success of decentralisation programmes and initiatives.

These could include similarity "between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions, collective choice arrangements, localised monitoring, rapid access to low cost conflict resolution mechanisms, recognition of rights by government authorities, and governance activities being organised in line with resource complexity."

CHALLENGES

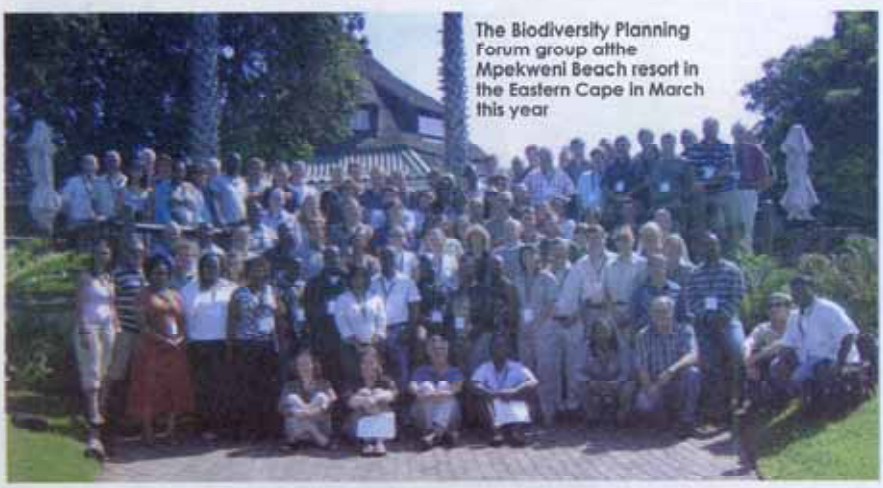
Programmes that facilitate decentralised biodiversity conservation would need to address a number of challenges.

- Biodiversity conservation should benefit specifically households on a level that is significant relative to total household income.
- Communities are not homogeneous entities that make harmonious biodiversity conservation decisions. Rather, they are characterised by heterogeneity of endowments and interests, which can lead to differing stakeholder needs that could contribute to conflict and influence conservation decisions.
- Decentralisation often leads to either the creation of new competing organisations or the assigning of new power to existing organisations.
- Most conservation efforts give land use rights to local stakeholders, while the ownership stays with the state. We need to understand better whether the lack of ownership will affect long-term conservation efforts.
- Financial sustainability, especially as derived from long-term investments due to conservation efforts, needs to be investigated.

BIOREGIONALISM

Linking biodiversity conservation with the concept of bioregionalism opens up a whole new set of questions related to, amongst others, ideal community conservation models, the impact on and effectiveness of institutions, land use benefits associated with conservation rather than alternative uses such as biofuels, the relationship between spatial planning and economic benefits, incentives and tenure systems.

Options to consider would include the ecological value of social grants as a motivation for external support for a bioregion, integrating economic costs and benefits into systemic conservation planning, the significance of payment for ecosystem services for biodiversity planning; and capacity building in terms of human resources to drive the programme.



The Biodiversity Planning Forum group atthe Mpekweni Beach resort in the Eastern Cape in March this year

New daily, non-stop flights between Dubai and Cape Town

Emirates Airlines touched down at Cape Town, its 100th global destination, at the end of March.

Signalling the start of daily, non-stop flights between Dubai and Cape Town the inaugural flight EK 770 piloted by South African captain Chris Rademan received a traditional water cannon salute.

A high-level Emirates delegation comprising Nabil Sultan, senior vice president commercial operations, Gulf, Middle East and Iran, and Adnan Kazim, senior vice president commercial operations, Africa flew on the first flight accompanied by some 250 passengers hailing from 18 different countries, some coming from as far as the United States, France, Germany, Poland, Kuwait, Bahrain, India and Pakistan, in addition to Emirates' home base, the United Arab Emirates.

The arriving Emirates delegation and passengers were welcomed by Lynne Brown, member of the executive council, Western Cape Province; Calvyn Gilfellan, chief executive officer, Cape Town Routes Unlimited, the official tourism destination marketing organisation for Cape Town and the Western Cape; and over 50 representatives from Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) and Emirates South Africa.

Last year, Emirates strengthened its 14-flights-per-week Johannesburg service with an additional frequency, taking the weekly total to 21 flights.

Adnan noted: "The new service will provide its customers in Europe, Middle East, the Indian-sub continent and Asia-Pacific with direct access to Cape Town, one of the world's most popular tourist destinations. At the same time it will also open up over 90 global destinations for Cape Town's travellers who can now avoid travelling via Johannesburg."

Cape Town represents the first new gateway to be launched by Emirates in 2008. The airline has already announced its plans to start services to Calicut, India and Guangzhou, China, both on July 1st followed by Los Angeles on September 1st.

To Cape Town, Emirates will introduce approximately 2000 seats and over 110 tons of cargo capacity per week.