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**13 March 2014, Cape Town:**

**Africa’s growing community of Biodiversity Informaticians to strategize in Pretoria**

From 25 to 27 March 2014, over 25 delegates representing 19 African countries will convene in Pretoria at the National Botanical Garden. The purpose is to implement an innovative and collaborative project aimed at ensuring relevant biodiversity information is available to support efficient policy formulation and decision-making in Africa.

The project, entitled, *Mobilizing Africa’s policy and decision-making relevant biodiversity data*, is generously funded by the JRS Biodiversity Foundation and coordinated by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) in partnership with African Participants of the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF).

The overarching aim of the project is to develop and implement a strategy for mobilizing African biodiversity data while strengthening regional collaboration and capacity in biodiversity informatics. The strategy will set priorities for capturing, digitizing and publishing biodiversity data with a view to reinforcing the knowledge base on which policies and decisions concerning biodiversity are made.

To this end, delegates to the workshop in Pretoria will be asked to:

1. Decide what biodiversity data is required for making evidence-based policies and decisions in their respective countries;
2. Map institutional landscapes to determine the significant sources and repositories of required biodiversity data;
3. Determine the current availability and accessibility of required biodiversity data;
4. Set priorities for the mobilization (collection, digitization and publication) of required biodiversity data; and
5. Identify regional capacity constraints in biodiversity informatics and, accordingly, agree on the type of training to be provided at subsequent workshops.

In biodiversity conservation, natural resources management and, indeed, many other sectors, biodiversity data is essential for evidence-based policymaking. For example, economic policymakers require data on traded biological products like timber, food and medicine; agricultural policymakers require data on pollinators, pests, crop diversity and genetically modified organisms (GMOs); water policymakers require data on biological indicators and invasive alien species; and health policymakers require data on pathogens and disease vectors.

Convening a group of leading African biodiversity informaticians will present new opportunities for networking, mentoring and knowledge exchange. The momentum generated by such interactions will serve to accelerate the mobilization of policy-relevant biodiversity data. In doing so, it is anticipated that the business case for biodiversity informatics will become more self-evident and, consequently, this important field will draw greater financial, human and technical resources.

**Project webpage:**

<http://biodiversityadvisor.sanbi.org/?2nd_level_items=mobilising-africas-biodiversity-data&parent=projects&home_items=projects>

**JRS Biodiversity Foundation**

The JRS Biodiversity Foundation is a private foundation aiming to make biological knowledge more accessible and useful. Created in 2004 with the endowment of proceeds from the sale of the non-profit scientific abstracting company, BIOSIS, the foundation began grant making in 2007. Through 2013, the foundation has committed USD 11.6 million to grants that support biodiversity data and knowledge. JRS focuses upon supporting biodiversity informatics that is used to preserve and to sustainably manage biodiversity, especially in those developing economies where it is most threatened. Through the projects it funds, the foundation works to make biodiversity information more widely available to researchers, local communities, conservation practitioners, policy makers and the public.

See: <http://jrsbiodiversity.org/>

**SANBI**

The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) leads and coordinates research, and monitors and reports on the state of biodiversity in South Africa. The institute provides knowledge and information, gives planning and policy advice and pilots best-practice management models in partnership with stakeholders. SANBI engages in ecosystem restoration and rehabilitation, leads the human capital development strategy of the sector and manages the National Botanical Gardens as 'windows' to South Africa's biodiversity for enjoyment and education.

See: <http://www.sanbi.org/>

**GBIF**

The Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) is an international open data infrastructure, funded by governments. It allows anyone, anywhere to access data about all types of life on Earth, shared across national boundaries via the Internet. By encouraging and helping institutions to publish data according to common standards, GBIF enables research not possible before, and informs better decisions to conserve and sustainably use the biological resources of the planet. GBIF operates through a network of nodes, coordinating the biodiversity information facilities of Participant countries and organizations, collaborating with each other and the Secretariat to share skills, experiences and technical capacity. GBIF's vision: "A world in which biodiversity information is freely and universally available for science, society and a sustainable future."

See: <http://www.gbif.org>