

## **Press Release**

**of the PT-DLR, project management agency of the  
German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)**

### **African-German Research-Partnership with Africa Research to conserve biological diversity in South Africa**

On 6 October 2007 German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited a research project near Cape Town sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). In the multilateral network project called **BIOTA AFRICA** German and African scientists cooperate with the aim to develop solid tools for a sustainable use and the protection of Africa's biological diversity.

The project acknowledges the outstanding significance of biodiversity in Africa as the basis for a sound economic development and a good quality of life. Thus the project is a significant German contribution for the accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

#### **Background**

Biological diversity in Africa is threatened by climate change as well as expanding and intensified land-use. Consequently the fast change and decline of biodiversity jeopardises economic development and people's quality of life. The declining capacity of natural ecosystems and a reduction of use potential result in increased risks for health and nutrition as well as a higher risk in case of extreme events.

The effects of climate change, especially global warming (climate models predict congruently the world's second largest temperature increase for Southern Africa), in conjunction with overexploitation, depletion and destruction of natural resources lead to a massive change in biodiversity. 30 to 50 % of all animal and plant species are threatened by extinction through climate change and destruction of natural habitats during the following decades.

Following the current trend, Africa needs to anticipate an extension of desert areas, a degradation of vegetation cover and ecosystems as well as a decreasing agricultural use potential. Exotic animal and plant species will spread increasingly and endanger agricultural and human health. Forest and bush fire occurrences have already become far more frequent.

#### **International integration**

BIOTA SOUTHERN AFRICA is an internationally acknowledged flagship project for state-of-the-art research in biodiversity and contributes significantly to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CDB), to the Global Earth Observing System of Systems (GEOSS), to the international DIVERSITAS Programme and the Consolidated Plan of Action of the "New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)".

### **Establishing a sustainable infrastructure**

Researchers of the BIOTA project use standardised areas in the size of one square kilometre for their observations. These biodiversity observatories are equipped with weather stations, sensors and a monitoring programme. The detailed monitoring programme comprises remote sensing, data on soil fertility and agricultural indicators (e.g. biomass). The observatories will be handed over to the partner countries by the end of the project (at the latest by the end of 2009).

Furthermore the BIOTA project delivers training and other capacity development activities to advance competencies for stakeholders from the university to the local level. Local land-user communities, local institutions focusing on sustainability and NGOs are involved at all observatories.

A large conference is planned for autumn 2008 in South Africa. It will provide a forum to discuss the application of scientific results with user groups and politicians from all over Africa.

The BIOTA AFRICA project was initiated by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) in October 2000 within the BIOLOG (Biodiversity and Global Change) framework. The BMBF provides funds amounting to around € 2.6 m per year for the South African part of the multilateral network project. Around 20% of the funds are directly granted to project partners in Namibia and South Africa. In early 2005 the South African Department of Science & Technology (DS&T) also sponsored further 11 subprojects with a total sum of ZAR 3 m.

#### Further information:

<http://www.biota-africa.org/> and  
<http://pt-uf.pt-dlr.de/de/257.php>



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