

## Food for thought on AISWG

Strategic Aim 3.8 of the 10-year strategic plan of action for sustainable development through biodiversity conservation outline the six major tasks how to reduce the threat of biological diversity from alien invasive species. Some of the activities of this strategic aim have been achieved, others are ongoing and some need to be revised. In addition we have to re-formulate and integrate some of the remaining objectives into a strategic plan for the road ahead. It may also imply the formulation of new activities, especially to achieve an integrative, cohesive approach.

The proposed strategic realignment of the Biodiversity Programme narrowed the core potential project activities to (1) *Sustainable Land Reform Programme*; (2) *Natural Product Development*; (3) *Coping with Environmental Change and Degradation* and (4) *Sustainable Woodland Management*. This means that our continuing participation in the Biodiversity Programme finds room under *Sustainable Woodland Management* focussing chiefly on the following activities:

- Identifying Alien Invasives and valuing costs of action/inaction;
- Testing biodiversity-compatible control/eradication measures; and
- Promoting marketing of invasive and encroacher fuelwood.

But these activities are also inseparable with focal areas under *Coping with Environmental Change and Degradation*, emphasising the need to formulate tangible activities within a cross-cutting approach. Inevitably, we need to plan our ongoing and future activities also in synergy with the thematic priorities of the Southern Africa Biodiversity Support Program (SABSP), which are *Agricultural Biodiversity*; *Alien Invasive Species*; *Access and Benefit Sharing* and *Dryland Biodiversity*.

Johann Malan recently completed a discussion document on the regulation of alien and invasive species in Namibia. This very comprehensive and useful document highlights many of the recurring issues we are faced with. Very clearly, it emphasises the need to strategise future action through a step-wise, multi-dimensional and concerted approach. Furthermore, we need to plan also ahead in terms of financial needs for the period after June 2004.

Against this background it becomes essential to have a strategic planning session for future activities related to alien and invasive species in Namibia soon. Certainly the effectiveness of such a planning session depends on the structuring of an agenda. For this purpose I suggest a few points for discussion by e-mail.

1. *Definitions*: We still have confusion about the use of terminology about alien and invasive species related to the Namibian context. Invasive species are not always alien and alien species are not always invasive. Similarly, the distinctions between alien and exotic and cosmopolitan species are not always clear. Although international applications of terminology may assist us, we need to formulate Namibian definitions. Even if these definitions do exist, we need to make it known to a wider audience.
2. A database on alien invasive plant species has been established during 2003 and is operated by the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Namibia. Ongoing information on Namibia's Nasty Nine could be added to the database anytime. To utilise the database better and to add other species to it, require from us to identify possible new entries in a systematic way. It seems necessary to work on the compilation of a *comprehensive register* of all alien and invasive species. Complimentary to the register would be a classification of each species in terms of (potential) invasiveness and status with regard to (potential) ecological and economical impacts, abundance, and spatial distribution.

3. The document of Johann provides us with excellent information on appropriate legislation relevant to the regulation of alien species in Namibia. Although Johann advocates the use of existing legislation to regulate alien species, the refinement and eventual *enforcement* by the various ministries seem to be uncertain. The most applicable legislation to regulate alien and invasive species would be the Nature Conservation Ordinance, the Forest Act and the Marine Resources Act. But there might be jurisdictional overlapping between these pieces of legislation and concerted enforcement is not necessarily guaranteed.

Land tenure and ownership of property complicate matters further. Town lands, for example, provide often excellent breeding grounds for rapid spreading plant species affecting many land owners further away, but local authorities are apathetic to practice any control. Spreading of terrestrial species along roads and on agricultural land has the same dilemma – denial of responsibility. In a similar way pose watercourses, including the perennial ones on Namibia's borders, uncalculated potential for invasion by undesirable species. Along Namibia 's coast the impacts of alien invasions could be similarly disastrous.

Furthermore, ministries that are affected by trans-boundary control of people and commodities (e.g. Home Affairs, Defence, Trade and Industry and Finance) are key players in the possible enforcement of Namibian legislation. Therefore, a mandated consultation process between the various Ministries and all cabinet members whose areas of responsibility will be affected by the exercise of power as well as public participation in the exercise of powers, including the compilation of a register on alien and invasive species, is recommended.

Without doubt, the strengthening of capacity in the regulation of alien and invasive species challenge us for an innovative approach that combines synergy with autonomy between ministries.

4. Appropriate, low-impact *control projects* for problem species must be initiated. We need to think wider than financial constrains here – how can we initiate ideas that are financially innovative while simultaneously benefit people and the land they live on optimally?

Let us discuss the content above by e-mail. This is to avoid another uninspiring workshop. Consider also that we have to think about a budget for after July 2004 and that our ideas now can shape many of the budgeted items by then.

I cannot remember the author of this document, but think it may have been Pierre Smit who chaired the AISWG then.