

# CONSERVATION AND TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

## SOME TRADE, RESOURCE DEGRADATION AND LEGAL ISSUES

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- Trade background
- Intentions of law
- Application of law
- Challenges

# Scale of trade- some facts and figures for KwaZulu-Natal (as of Mander 1998)

- Approximately 1020 plant and 150 animal species traded for traditional medicine in KZN. Approx. 450 plant species sold in large volumes at Durban and Umlazi. Animal trade little known.
- The medicinal plant trade ("raw" plants sold) is worth approximately R62 million annually in KZN. This equates to one third of the value of the entire provincial maize harvest.
- When Traditional Medical Practitioner consulting fees are included, the trade is worth approximately R588 million annually in KZN.
- Approximately 4 400 tonnes of medicinal plant material is traded annually in KZN.

## Scale of trade- some facts and figures (continued)

- Approx. 80% of the population in KZN (and South Africa?) rely on traditional medicine for their primary health care needs. Traditional medicine is deeply entrenched in African culture and use is not decreasing. It is in fact on the increase.
- An estimated 16 000 gatherers and traders (in 1998) harvested medicinal plants for the market in KZN. Growing unemployment and urbanisation likely to have caused this figure to increase substantially.
- Nine species account for approximately 1 fifth of the total market.
- Most plant material is harvested from wild stock.

| <b>Scientific name</b>  | <b>Tonnes traded per year and value per kg</b> |               |             |           | <b>Plant numbers used per year and part used</b> |
|-------------------------|--|---------------|-------------|-----------|--|
| <b>Tonnes</b>           | <b>RG</b>                                      | <b>Street</b> | <b>S,H,</b> |           |  |
| <i>Ocotea bullata</i>   | 25<br>.2<br>5                                  | ?<br>R3       | R6.<br>67   | R2<br>7.7 | 2104 (bark)                                      |
| <i>Curtisia dentata</i> | 23<br>.9                                       | R3<br>.28     | R7.<br>61   | R2<br>3.8 | 1993 (bark)                                      |

**RG** = price obtained by rural gatherer, **street** = price obtained by street traders, **S, H** = price obtained by shops, healers). (INR, 1998).

# Implications for Resource Base and Biodiversity

- Almost 50% (approx. 2107 tonnes) of the approximately 4 400 tonnes of medicinal plant material traded annually in KZN, is sourced from the forest biome.
- To meet market demand for forest sourced medicinal plant material, >8.1 tonnes per km<sup>2</sup> required. Existing forest resources unlikely to meet demand.
- Numerous forest derived species are declining as shown by effort required by gatherers to find adequate stocks. In many cases, this effort doubled in 10 years (1988 - 1998).

# Implications for Resource Base and Biodiversity

## (continued)

- Approximately 2 200 tonnes of medicinal plant material is sourced from grassland and savanna biomes.
- If the grassland/savanna area available (as in 1998) for potential future harvest were to be used to supply the medicinal plant trade at 1998 demand, approximately 80kg per km<sup>2</sup> of medicinal plants would need to be harvested.
- Land use change is destroying medicinal plant habitat - leading to increasing pressure on existing natural areas - including formally protected areas.

# What factors are driving illegal harvest and trade in Traditional Medicine?

- Urbanisation
- Unemployment
- Poverty
- Cost of alternative health care
- Pandemic diseases such as HIV/AIDS??
- Traditional belief systems

## So what??

- Were traditional medicine to disappear, and assuming that a primary health care substitute would be provided free of charge, it would cost the taxpayer > R500 million annually to provide the service which traditional medicine currently provides in KZN.
- Traditional medicine is a biodiversity component which is relevant to everyday lives of 80% of the population. It is a highly valuable "ecosystem service" to the people of this province and of South Africa. This provides an important opportunity to "market" biodiversity conservation by people who do care to people who may not (public and decision makers).
- Traditional medicine is deeply rooted in African culture and is unlikely to be replaced by western medicine.
- Commercial trade is driven by socio-economic factors which must be addressed at high level.

# How does law intend to address these issues?

- It is the intention of the current laws governing harvest and trade of indigenous plant species to ensure the survival of these species into the future.
- Based on
  - The need to secure the sustainability of traditional medicine, both as a health care system in South Africa and valuable economic base for the many players involved in the trade.
  - The need to conserve biological diversity.

It is not the intention of the law to make life difficult for people, or to restrict trade where there is no need to do that. Conservation agencies and the SAPS are tasked by governments of respective provinces and South Africa to enforce the laws governing trade in plants and animals to ensure their long-term survival.

# Relevant Legislation

- National Biodiversity Act
- National Forest Act
- CITES
- Provincial Legislation

# How is law being implemented?

- Permit systems
  - Landowner/land holder's written permission to harvest
  - Law enforcement
- Public awareness and education

# What are the challenges?

- Judicial apathy.
- Law enforcement apathy.
- Inadequate numbers of law enforcement staff.
- Inadequate penalties to discourage illegal activity.
- Outdated and varied legislation.
- Few alternatives to illegal harvest.

# Challenges (continued)

- Little co-ordinated effort to address the socio-economic drivers of the traditional medicine trade.
- Little co-ordinated effort between provinces.
- Little awareness of resource value by landowners/landholders.
- Land tenure issues.