



# Researcher-land user linkage: Para-ecologists in BIOTA AFRICA

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## Structure of the talk

# BIOTA para-ecologist programmes

### Scientists' perspective

Why do we need BIOTA para-ecologists?

What is a para-ecologist?

How do the para-ecologists contribute to the research?

### Para-ecologists' perspective

Why did we become para-ecologists?

Where are the challenges for a para-ecologist?

What does the para-ecologist programme mean to our communities?

How do we see our future?



BIOTA aims to provide baseline information and tools for local stakeholders / land users that help them to manage their resources under environmental change conditions

→ **Knowledge exchange & mutual learning**

# How to get together?



# Land users become BIOTA partners



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# What are para-ecologists?

- Member of local land user communities in the vicinity of the BIOTA research sites
- Employed for the time period of the BIOTA funding phases
- No tertiary education
- Trained on the job and in special training courses
- Individually supervised by a BIOTA colleague to whom they also report etc.

# Objectives of the programmes

- Capacity development and job creation
- Empower land users to understand and support the aims, process and results of the research & develop problem solving skills
- Facilitate knowledge exchange between researchers and land users already during the research process
- Build ownership of research and results and to enhance the implementation of the results
- Support sustainable long-term monitoring



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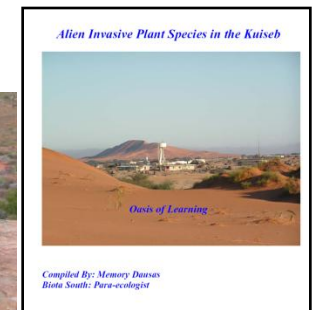
# Activities of para-ecologists

- Support biodiversity monitoring on BIOTA Observatories
- Support other research activities of BIOTA researchers
- Collaborate with other researchers and projects
- Present BIOTA para-ecologist programme at conferences, workshops, meetings, documentary films, fairs etc.



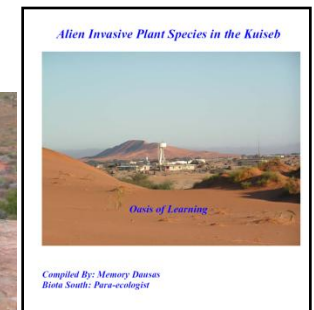
# Activities of para-ecologists

- Monthly phenological monitoring of plants
- Livestock census and monthly weighing of small livestock
- Collect information from land users on wild plants and animals
- Maintain and download weather stations and other loggers
- Organise logistics for researchers
- Awareness raising activities with schoolchildren
- Own research projects on medicinal plants, scorpions, tortoises, local land use history
- etc.



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# Para-ecologists' perspective



BIOTA West



BIOTA East (KEEP)

BIOTA South



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# Why to become a para-ecologist?

- We are “country people”, we grew up with nature
- We love nature and enjoy to work in the veld
- We want to learn more about biodiversity and environment
- We want to improve the communication between researchers and land users



# Training



# Use of technical equipment



# Field work





# Community feedback & presentations



Presentation at AZEF



International workshop



INSITE Science Fair 2008



Community feed back workshops



COP 9

# Collaboration with the communities

- We facilitate communication between communities and researchers
- We give feed back on research results
- We are important resource persons in the communities (computer, GPS etc. skills)

**The communities are proud of us!!**

# But there are also challenges ...

- Communication with researchers (technical problems, cultural and language differences)
- Being in between researchers and communities



# Our future

- Continue to work with nature and people (research, conservation, field guides, community development, e.g. with NGO, SANParks)
- Start studying nature conservation, biology
- To continue to work with BIOTA (we hope BIOTA will still go on ...)



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# Finally...

Thanks to BIOTA and the BMBF / DLR for the great opportunity to develop our capacity and for supporting our communities!



Kai-aio's!  
Asante Sana!  
Baie Dankie!  
Mpandu unene!  
Thank you very much!  
Merci beaucoup!



# For the future

- Involve relevant stakeholders already into the planning of applied research projects
- Continue with the para-ecologist programmes
  - to support the biodiversity monitoring on the Observatories
  - to support the land user – researcher knowledge exchange