

SANBI's Biodiversity Information Policy Framework: a mechanism to facilitate free and open access to information

Selwyn Willoughby

South African National Biodiversity Institute, Biodiversity Information Management Directorate, Private Bag X7, Claremont, 7735.
H.Terrapon@sanbi.org.za

The South African National Biodiversity Institute has initiated the development of the Biodiversity Information Policy Framework (BIPF). The aim of this Framework is to ensure proactive access to biodiversity information to support research, planning, policy formulation, decision-making and monitoring. The BIPF consist of legal, governance, technological and ethical components. To date the legal component has been completed and will provide the basis upon which the three remaining components will be expanded. The BIPF's legal component provides the general principles and guidelines on effectively managing access to information, as well as two key policies on digital access to sensitive biodiversity data and protecting intellectual property rights.

In general, through the BIPF SANBI promotes democratic governance ideals of transparency, equality and openness. Open and free access to biodiversity information ensures that informed decisions are made about the environment and its impact on citizens. The sharing of this information can lead to new research and innovation for effective biodiversity management and conservation as well as improved human livelihood. The challenge is to ensure that a balance is struck between using information for advancement against that of exploitation and destruction.

This paper will explore how SANBI, through this comprehensive policy framework, complies with relevant legislation, allows for easy streamlined access to biodiversity information and makes relevant contributions to the national developmental objectives.