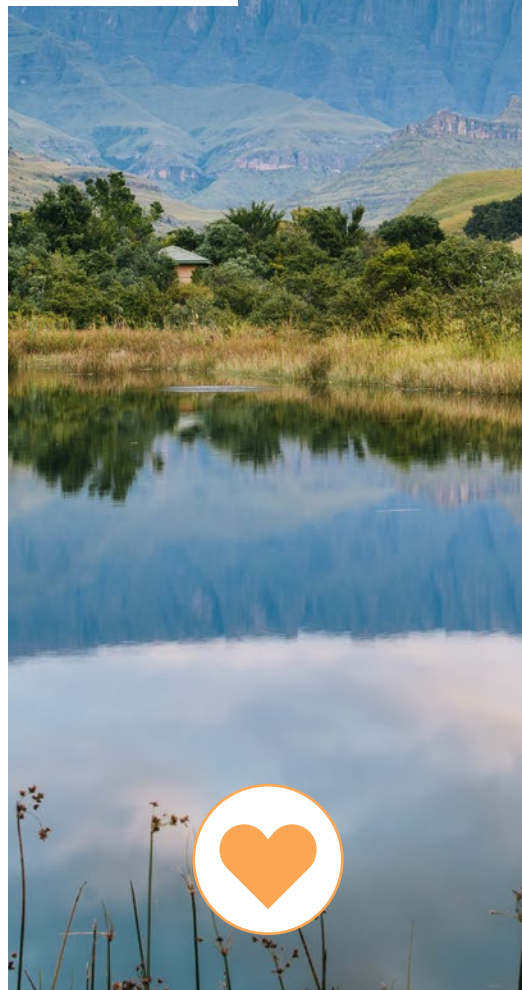


SANBI

Biodiversity for Life

South African National Biodiversity Institute



Making the case for biodiversity

A way to communicate the economic, emotional and practical value of biodiversity

'Making the case for biodiversity' is a strategy for how the biodiversity sector should frame its communication. It draws on the help of marketing experts to understand how the importance of biodiversity should be communicated to key audiences. Two lessons are crucial: First, the strongest message for decision-makers is that biodiversity is a national asset that can contribute to government's priorities, like job creation, poverty alleviation and rural development. Second, the 'doom and gloom' messages of impending extinctions and imminent collapse do not inspire action. Improved communication, using these insights, is helping the biodiversity sector to reposition itself as essential to socio-economic development.



forestry, fisheries
& the environment

Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Background

The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) realised that important messages about biodiversity were not effectively reaching the intended audience who needed to hear them. Biodiversity messages were often dismissed or ignored in favour of other government priorities. So, in 2010, SANBI and DFFE embarked on a project called 'Making the Case for Biodiversity'. The project involved in-depth market research and stakeholder analysis to test how different communication messages were received by target audiences. It resulted in a new communication language for the biodiversity sector that is focussed on showing the benefits of biodiversity for the country (often called the 'value proposition'). Since then, the improved way of communicating has helped to reposition biodiversity as a contributor to national development.

TIP: Explain key terms



Many people are not familiar with the terms used by the biodiversity sector. Even the word biodiversity is not always understood. Promote biodiversity awareness by explaining what terms mean. Use the *'Lexicon of Spatial Biodiversity Assessment, Prioritisation and Planning in South Africa'* for the latest definitions of terms.

Mainstreaming biodiversity is about integrating biodiversity considerations into the policies, plans and decisions of other sectors. It may involve a wide range of activities, such as the publication of knowledge resources, capacity development, or establishing collaborative platforms. **'Making the case for biodiversity'** is a messaging frame that can assist in mainstreaming biodiversity by conveying the importance of managing and conserving biodiversity to a broad audience, to create support and action.

The main principles

The value of biodiversity

The most convincing communication message is one of biodiversity as a national asset. This message speaks of biodiversity as natural capital that has economic value to the country, and points out how other sectors rely on ecosystem services. This message can also be backed up by a sustainability argument – using natural resources sustainably means that they will continue to provide benefits for future generations. All messaging should also include a practical element, telling the audience what they can do about the issue.

TIP: Remember to celebrate success

Acknowledge progress and achievements to motivate people to keep going.



Positive messages

It is important not to shy away from what is wrong, but experience has shown that negative messaging that focuses on threat or 'fear of loss' results in apathy. Dire warnings about biodiversity loss only make people feel helpless and do not inspire action. Instead, the tone of messages should be positive, showing how people can have 'hope of gain' by considering the benefits that arise from biodiversity.

TIP: Turn negative to positive

Often a negative message can be transformed into a positive message. For example, 'A lack of funds prevents...' would be better as 'Additional funding would allow...' because it gives a positive action that could be taken.

Messaging should position biodiversity as addressing things that society:

Has to do because they are **national priorities**
Wants to do because they draw on our **love and pride**
Can do because they are **practical and implementable**

TIP: Know your audience



The message will depend on who you are talking to. Policymakers may be more interested in a rational message, while the public may be more open to an emotional message. The level of technical jargon to use will also depend on the audience.



Economic value

Rational arguments about how biodiversity contributes to national goals such as job creation, poverty alleviation and rural development.



Emotional value

Emotional messages that inspire feeling and empathy, emphasising that biodiversity is important for the future of our children and country.



Practical value

Practical messages that give people concrete actions that are achievable, to avoid the sense of being overwhelmed by the task.

How does biodiversity benefit national development and people's lives?

When making the case for biodiversity, it is useful to be explicit about how biodiversity can contribute to society, the economy, and to national and international development goals. South Africa is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world and the wealth of biodiversity is a national asset that provides many benefits to human well-being and economic prosperity.

The National Development Plan 2030 aims to foster growth and development that will reduce poverty and inequality, while ensuring that such development is sustainable. There are many instances where efforts towards sustainable development can help to conserve biodiversity **AND** at the same time contribute to socio-economic development in a range of sectors.



TIP: Make links with national priorities

Show how biodiversity can contribute to national priorities and promote sustainable development. Look out for aspects in national strategies or policies from other sectors that have a biodiversity connection.



TIP: Benefits of biodiversity

Create messaging that influences social behaviour and change by emphasising the benefits of biodiversity to people.

13 CLIMATE ACTION



Biodiversity and climate: Ecosystem-based Adaptation is the use of biodiversity to help people adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. Ecological infrastructure (like wetlands, coastal areas and rangelands) can help to protect communities from the impacts of extreme weather events, and make the provision of food and water more resilient to changes in climate.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Biodiversity and health: A strong connection with nature is associated with health and well-being of South Africans. Around 2 000 species are used in traditional medicines based on centuries of cultural practice. Studies show that natural spaces can improve mental health and filter out harmful pollution. Some natural areas are associated with cultural and spiritual beliefs and are considered sacred sites.

2 ZERO HUNGER



Biodiversity and food: People rely on plants and animals as a source of food. South Africa has about 1 300 edible plant species. Many coastal communities rely on subsistence fishing for food. More than 70% of South African land is used to graze livestock on natural veld. Biodiversity is the source of pollinators and pest control agents that play an important role in commercial agriculture. Fertile soils, nutrient cycling and water create the necessary environment for productive agriculture.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



Biodiversity and the economy: Research has valued just some of the ecosystem services provided by natural ecosystems in South Africa at R275 billion per year. South Africa has a growing wildlife economy that contributes to the economy and jobs. Products containing indigenous species like Aloe and Rooibos are economically important innovations. Many tourists travel in South Africa to view biodiversity, contributing to the tourism economy. In 2014, it was estimated that at least 418 000 jobs rely on biodiversity.

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



Biodiversity and water: South Africa is a water scarce country, and healthy rivers and wetlands help to ensure the flow and quality of water. More than half of South Africa's water supply comes from only 10% of the country's land area. These Strategic Water Source Areas provide water to 51% of the population and 64% of economic activity. Natural systems that store water, such as wetlands, can also help to mitigate the effects of droughts and floods.

Key messages

Key messages are the main points of information that the target audience should notice and remember. A useful way to structure key messages is to use the 'making the case for biodiversity' framing and include:

- **A finding** that includes a link to evidence. What do you want your target audience to know?
- **A 'so-what'** statement that describes why the finding is important. What do you want your target audience to feel? Why does this matter? What are the economic or emotional values? What is the link between the finding and the benefits of biodiversity?
- **A 'call to action'** that describes the practical actions that can be done. What do you want your target audience to do?

TIP: Simplify



The target audience will be overwhelmed by too many complex messages, so select only a few messages that the target audience should take notice of. Reduce detail, simplify complex science and don't overcomplicate. Keep the word count short and the wording simple.

TIP: Use visual aids



Use infographics or photos to get attention and illustrate a point. A graphic element is useful to make key messages more impactful. In the biodiversity sector, key messages should refer to the relevant spatial product (map) where possible.

TIP: Minimise uncertainty



Avoid words such as 'might', 'may' and 'but'. These words can weaken the impact of the message. While the scientific finding probably has a degree of uncertainty, the link to national development priorities and the call-to-action is usually not uncertain.

'Making the case for biodiversity' in action

In 2022, the city of Durban weathered some of the worst flooding that it has ever experienced. Thousands of homes were damaged and more than 400 people lost their lives. The devastation drew a significant amount of national and international **attention** to how vulnerable people are to extreme weather. Using the 'making the case for biodiversity' approach, SANBI staff were able to offer a **glimmer of hope**. Writing for a national newspaper, they **told the story** of how the Palmiet River had experienced less severe flooding thanks to efforts that had been made to restore natural riverbank vegetation. The article **explained** the concept of ecological infrastructure and how it could **benefit people** by reducing the impact of flood waters. The article ended with a **call to action** for further investment in ecological infrastructure.

TIP: Tell a story



Use narrative elements, like case studies or examples to tell a story that people can relate to. Think of story lines, characters or events that can help to create interest.



Read the full article.

The screenshot shows a news article from BusinessDay. The header includes the BusinessDay logo and navigation icons. The article is categorized as 'OPINION' and has the title 'PEARL GOLA: Ecological investments minimise damage from weather extremes'. The sub-headline reads 'Management of infrastructure brings real benefits to affected communities'. The date is '09 JUNE 2022 - 14:30' and the author is 'by PEARL GOLA'. To the right of the text is a large photograph of a river flowing through a city, with buildings and greenery visible.

For more information:

SANBI. 2011. Making the case for biodiversity: The Biodiversity Case Study Development Toolkit. South African National Biodiversity Institute, Pretoria. <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12143/5491>

Maze, K., Barnett, M., Guenther, L., Botts, E.A., Stephens, A. and Freedman, M., 2016. Making the case for biodiversity in South Africa: Re-framing biodiversity communications. Bothalia-African Biodiversity & Conservation, 46(1), pp.1-8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/abc.v46i1.2039>

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