

## The Need for a Region of the I.P.P.S. in South Africa

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On the 2 Feb. 1990 F.W. de Klerk, who was the president of South Africa at that time, made a momentous announcement. The African National Congress (ANC) was no longer banned as a political party. The South Africa Communist Party was free to operate without restrictions. A number of political figures who had been in jail for many years were to be released, and the way was paved for the first multi-party, multi-racial, truly democratic elections in South Africa (SA). Apartheid was at last being dismantled. With those words, South Africa stepped back from the abyss of chaos and anarchy looming before it, and re-entered the world from which it had been excluded.

For most people like ourselves, the relief was immense. We could now start taking greater control of our lives and plan our future in SA. However this posed a number of problems for SA business people. South Africans were now exposed to the full cut-throat competition of world trade. Previously SA business had been able to shelter behind a whole host of protective tariffs, sanction busting activities, and a wide range of bureaucratic regulations.

Two years down the line and certain old attitudes still exist. There is a tendency for South Africans, when exposed to competition, to retire into a laager, the traditional circle of locked ox-drawn wagons. The attitude of "if you can't control it, ban it!" still exists—a prime example of this is the ostrich industry which with co-operation could have become a world industry with SA as an equal partner. As a result of banning the export of live eggs, birds, and expertise, SA has now been sidelined in the industry. Eggs were eventually exported illegally through Namibia and the industry is now flourishing, without SA. An example of a successful co-operative venture is the protea industry, which is expanding throughout the world together with SA growers who have not tried to keep the flowers to themselves and who have co-operated with growers overseas. Regulations such as "banning" do not stop trade in a commodity, they merely drives it underground. We are now seeing the emergence of a group of people who feel that SA's plants belong to us and us alone. It is "our" flora, and no one outside SA should be allowed to make money out of it either horticulturally or in any other way. We see this as a threat to our entire flora, as at present, we are unable to look after it adequately on our own. There are insufficient people interested in our native plants to be able to exploit or manage them in the most profitable way.

As South Africans we need to change our attitudes, become responsive to competition, become more cooperative and open, and break down the laager mentality. We need to become part of the world again, and joining international organisations is one method of sharing and learning.

Historically a number of organisations have served the interests of researchers and horticulturalists working in the nursery trade both in the public and private sectors. Firstly there is the SANA, the South African Nurserymen's Association. This looks after the interest of the nursery and landscaping industries, but it is mainly concerned with marketing and deals little with mastering horticultural

problems. The newsletters published by this organisation do not mention "growing" anything—only selling or landscaping it.

Serving the public sector is the Institute for Parks and Recreation Management. In the past this organisation served horticulturists, but it has now been taken over by managers and administrators, and is little concerned with the practical application of basic horticulture. This organisation focuses on meeting the needs of greater urbanisation, park development, bowling greens, etc. and growing of plants is rarely mentioned.

To some extent the needs of propagators working in the field of native plant growing have been met by a group called the "Indigenous Propagation Group" based in Natal. Members of this organisation receive the informative journal 'Plant Life', and at one stage the membership seemed to be growing but it is now fighting for existence. In the words of the chairman, "there are plenty of willing followers, but insufficient leaders" and somebody has to drive the bus! Another problem is that the group has become firmly established in Natal, no members from other areas have attempted to establish their own local groups. This means that Natal has regular meetings and outings to botanically interesting places or nurseries, but the members who live in other areas do nothing. On speaking to the chairman of the Indigenous Propagation Group in Natal about their recent problems, he stressed that the secretary is the driving force behind the organisation. The organisation needs to constantly look for new members and all new members must be in the same geographical region to facilitate communication.

Another example of this is the Indigenous Bulb Society of SA (IBSA). The committee of the organisation is based in Cape Town, and it is therefore only the Capetonians that are active in the Society. This is an extremely open and informative organisation with members sharing knowledge freely, but rarely do members from other regions become involved. Is this the fate for a new region of the I.P.P.S. in South Africa? It is something we will have to think about carefully.

Apart from these two organisations, there are also several others operating in specialised fields, e.g. SAPPEX—the Protea organisation which funds research into propagation of Proteaceae, The Succulent Society, The Pelargonium Society, and a few others. All are open, useful organisations, but are obviously limited in their interests. The Botanical Society through its magazine *Veld and Flora* publishes a number of horticultural articles, but can only print submitted material so these are not a regular feature.

For researchers and academics working in the botanical field there is SAAB, the South African Association of Botanists. This organisation has many members throughout SA, some of whom are working in horticulturally related fields. Most however are still very much research orientated with little experience in practical application. We recently attended a SAAB congress in Cape Town where a number of innovative propagation techniques were presented in papers. Out of several hundred delegates there was only a handful who, to put it bluntly, could apply this knowledge with a view to "turning a buck" or saving our endangered flora.

In the rapidly changing world there are two types of people in our economic communities, those who create information and those who use and apply it. Most researchers fall into the former category and may not be of a practical disposition, although their ideas may be very innovative. Propagators and horticulturists tend to be of a practical but imaginative disposition (or at least the good ones are). They

are experimenters rather than innovators and will apply a range of tried techniques to many groups of plants in order to propagate and grow them successfully. We feel that an organisation such as the I.P.P.S. in SA would help to mix the two types of people mentioned above, and get us out of our laager. It would provide a forum where researchers and propagators, the creators and the users, could meet and exchange information. With honesty and openness it could be a highly symbiotic arrangement.

The I.P.P.S. embraces academics, the public sector, horticulturists, commercial nursery people, cut flower growers, farmers, and conservationists. In all of these occupations plant propagation is an integral part of their livelihood.

The wealth of South Africa's native flora is sufficient reason for establishing a Region of the I.P.P.S. in SA. A few years ago our local botanical institution used the catch phrase "Conservation through Cultivation". The Institution no longer uses the phrase—but it still applies. South Africa is home to about 22,000 species of plants of which 8500 species occur in less than 4% of the land area. This area is the Cape floral kingdom, and of the 8500 species, 2000 or more are rare and endangered. Cultivation is their only hope for survival. In many cases the threat endangering plants is habitat destruction, both by urban and farming development, and by alien or exotic vegetation encroachment. Many of the plants are difficult to grow, and seed germination protocols are lacking.

At present there is no forum in South Africa for sharing knowledge gained through experience. One propagator may work out how to grow a particularly difficult species, but at present this knowledge is not shared at all. This is one of the reasons we are ill equipped to save our native flora and must seek help from abroad. At present the attitude in South Africa, if one mentions propagation of native plants, is that "Kirstenbosch, Roodeplaat, or Elsenburg should do it", these are all government organisations. However Kirstenbosch, for example, is financed mainly by the state and funding is becoming increasingly limited. No matter how good the staff or their intentions they can not solve the propagation problems of all 22,000 plants. The time has come for individuals like us to take more interest and initiative in growing and preserving our native flora, not wait for government institutions to lead the way. Many propagation techniques established for flora in other parts of the world may be extremely useful in helping us to propagate our own plants. But sharing goes both ways. We can not deny access to our flora on one hand and expect to get help on the other.