



## The African Biodiversity Network Strategic Plan 2016 - 2018

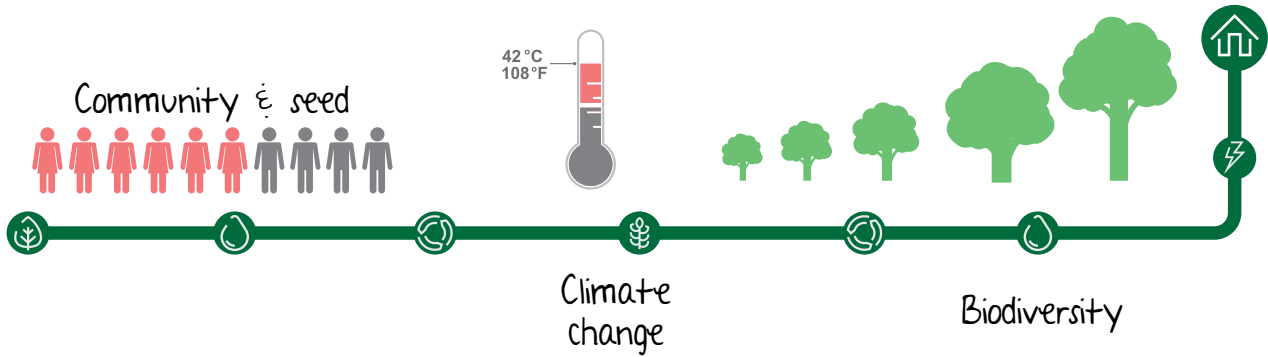
The African Biodiversity Network

# Strategic Plan 2016 - 2018



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>ABN</b>	African Biodiversity Network
<b>AFSA</b>	Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>CEG</b>	Community Ecological Governance
<b>CSK</b>	Community Seed and Knowledge
<b>CELUCT</b>	Chikukwa Ecological Land Use Community Trust
<b>CEVASTE</b>	Centre d’Eveil et de Stimulation pour Enfants (Centre of Awakening and Stimulation for Children)
<b>COMESA</b>	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
<b>CBD</b>	Convention on Biological Diversity
<b>CCIs</b>	Cross Cutting Issues
<b>CoP</b>	Communities of Practice
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EJ</b>	Earth Jurisprudence
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>GMO</b>	Genetically Modified Organisms
<b>GRABE-Benin</b>	Groupe De Recherche et D’Action pour le Bien-Etre au Benin
<b>ICE</b>	Institute for Culture and Ecology
<b>IKS</b>	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
<b>ILK</b>	Indigenous and Local Knowledge
<b>IPBES</b>	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
<b>ICCAs</b>	Indigenous Peoples’ and Community Conserved Territories and Areas
<b>IPACC</b>	Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee
<b>IUCN</b>	International Union for Conservation of Nature
<b>LFA</b>	Logical Framework Approach
<b>MEB</b>	Multiple Evidence Based Approach
<b>MELCA-Ethiopia</b>	Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action Ethiopia
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>NGOs</b>	Non Governmental Organisations
<b>MNCs</b>	Multi National Corporations
<b>PFE</b>	Principle Focused Evaluation
<b>ReSCOPE</b>	Regional Schools and Colleges Permaculture Programme
<b>SADC</b>	Southern African Development Community
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SEGNU</b>	Social Empowerment through Group Nature Interaction
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>WCPA</b>	World Commission on Protected Areas
<b>WIPO</b>	World Intellectual Property Organisation
<b>WSSD</b>	World Summit on Sustainable Development
<b>YCB</b>	Youth Culture and Biodiversity

“The African Biodiversity Network (ABN) offers a unique, very African, approach to sustainability and community resilience, rooted in traditional practices through its core thematic areas. The premise is that cultural and ecological diversity are intricately bound together and that only through restoring people’s strong and deep sense of connectedness to Nature and all that lies within it will people in Africa find ways to be resilient and to sustain their land and their natural resources.” (ABN 2012 Evaluation).



## Foreword



**T**he African Biodiversity Network (ABN) is fifteen years old and has come a long way; walking and trusting the ancestral path of unearthing and implementing true African solutions to African problems. Africa is at a crossroads, trying to reconcile the conservation and recuperation of its vast cultural and natural heritage and meet the many dynamic needs of a growing population. Powerful internal and external forces continue to divert Africa from looking for solutions that come from within Africa. African has witnessed a huge push for the privatisation, commoditisation and industrialisation of land, knowledge and biodiversity in the name of poverty alleviation. However, the solutions that we seek already lie deep within our Indigenous and Local Knowledge Systems and the diverse cultures of our people. International legal instruments like

the Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), International Labour Organisation 169, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services recognise the critical role and the value of the Indigenous and Local Knowledge System in informing policy formulation on biodiversity issues as this knowledge system has evolved over millennia through interacting very closely with Nature.

The disconnection from our Culture and Nature during the industrial revolution period has led to huge loss of biodiversity and land degradation. The total human cost of land degradation is not known, but the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) estimates the economic impact at more than \$40 billion annually. ABN has pioneered African-centred methodologies for working with communities for the sustainable management of biodiversity and protection of community rights. ABN focuses on Community Ecological Governance, Community Seed and Knowledge, and Youth, Culture and Biodiversity. The Network is pioneering culturally-centred approaches to social and environmental problems in Africa through sharing experiences, co-developing diverse methodologies such as community dialogues, nature experiential learning, intergenerational learning, and community exchange learning visits. ABN works to create a united African voice on the continent on bio-cultural diversity issues. ABN also nurtures alliances with like-minded others by linking the local to global. Through this, ABN thus offers a new, very African, approach to sustainability and community resilience, closely linked to traditional practices. The premise is that cultural and ecological diversity are intricately bound together and that only through restoring people's strong and deep sense of connectedness to Nature and all that lies within it will people in Africa find ways to be resilient and to sustain their land and other natural resources. A key part of this restoration is giving a substantial voice to Elders' indigenous knowledge.

There are now a small number of evolving examples, primarily in Benin, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and South Africa where communities are putting into practice this 'ABN stimulated approach', supported by ABN's methodologies. In Ethiopia, Uganda and Benin there are also examples of programmes to stimulate young people into becoming environmental and cultural activists.

**Simon Mitambo**  
**General Coordinator**  
**African Biodiversity Network (ABN)**

## Word from the ABN's Board Chairperson



**I**t is my great pleasure to serve as the Chair of the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) Board of Directors as the Network prepares for greater achievements. The Network is two years into its second decade. It remains a pioneer with a clear message and approach around African Peoples' relationship with their land and the ecosystems that can keep that land vibrant, productive and healthy. At the same time, it is galvanising itself to start reaching out more in the coming years towards its overall goal.

The Board of Directors had the opportunity to participate fully in developing the Network's three-year Strategic Plan, 2016-2018. Factors that will challenge the Network in the coming years have been identified and innovative objectives and strategies to meet the challenges developed. ABN has been recognised as the pioneering authority in ecological governance and bio-cultural diversity in Africa. The achievement for this is through hard earned recognition by sharing ABN's experiences, practices and learning.

I am pleased to say we have built a plan that will allow the Network to focus on what it does best! Having worked with Networks for years, including ABN of course, they are difficult creatures to 'grow'. In the recent past, the Network has added great value to the work of the individual members/Partners, thereby enabling our efforts to be taken to another level. It is also important for us, the Board, to continue with the good team spirit of working closely with the Secretariat to build on its strength as a caring, effective and efficient system, able to support the work of our Partners on the ground. I know the Secretariat is excited about the new challenges ahead!

For the Network to work, everyone must play their role as fully as possible. The Partners should continue taking the Network fully on board into their own organisations, so that together, we can change attitudes and policies. To crown it all, "the ABN philosophy should be embedded in each of our Partner organisations."

This Strategic Plan clearly talks about deepening the ABN's methodologies to turn its philosophy into practice. Being a learning process, it is essential that Partners keep sharing their experiences in using the methodologies to affect great change. The Board and the Secretariat appreciates the work of Partners as we believe, "they are the face of ABN". It is our hope that ABN will become even more visible at local, national and international levels, as Partners continue scouting to bring new like-minded Partners on board and share the ABN approach. Furthermore, issues for ABN campaigns need to come from the work on the ground. That is the way ABN's advocacy is shifting!

These are exciting times for everyone on the Board of Directors as we set the Network's strategic direction. We are pleased to continue to support the Secretariat Team as they execute the 2016-2018 Strategic Plan. We look ahead to the coming years with excitement and optimism as the benefits of our efforts are realised.

**Sulemana Abudulai, PhD**  
**Chair, Board of Directors**  
**African Biodiversity Network (ABN)**

## 1. Executive Summary

Big industry is moving into Africa at a fast pace these days. It is doing this via the extractive industries, land grabs/'investments', and industrial agriculture and food systems. At the same time the 'Western/colonial' mind-set based on a reductionist outlook, exploitation (albeit more disguised), and unchecked free-market capitalism, continues to dominate the minds of most African leaders, filtering from there down into the general society. And the imminent and frightening threat of climate change hardly seems to be putting a dent into any of this! For example, the oil industries continue to forecast oil extraction plans to their shareholders far into the future, as if there was no climate change.

Nevertheless, and perhaps very much because of this situation, opportunities for the African Biodiversity Network continue to arise, particularly as the ABN becomes more established and is able to offer the world a clear alternative. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are significantly closer to what ABN is proposing than the MDGs were – a step in the right direction. Linked to this, sustainability (and the closely related concept of resilience) continues to be particularly difficult to put effectively into practice.

At the same time, many young Africans are floating aimlessly, lost in a quagmire of disconnection. Environmental and Cultural degradation continues. And most of the world knows that climate change is happening, despite vociferous and well-funded denials. Furthermore, there are an increasing number of people recognising and advocating for Indigenous Knowledge Systems. An example of this, related to ABN's work, is the recognition of farmers' role in improving and saving a huge diversity of seed, so critical to achieving nutrition security amongst other things. Another one is the role Sacred Natural Sites play in conserving critical ecosystems that are of great ecological, cultural and spiritual importance to indigenous and local communities.

ABN plunged into existence with the new Millennium to advocate for alternatives to the conventional, industrial approach to 'development'. A decade and a half later it has developed an approach, with methodologies, that it is ready to start sharing with the wider world. This approach revitalises, in a deeply rooted way, communities' care for, and determination to manage their land so that it is healthy and vibrant and not degrading. It does this by restoring people's and communities' connectedness to their culture and to Nature. Nearly all other alternative approaches, many of which have much to offer, fail when it comes to growing the care and determination in communities that is essential for longer-term sustainability and resilience. ABN adds this deeper and critically needed dimension.

Looking ahead at ABN's development then, and in order for ABN to respond to these opportunities, the next phase will see a **stronger emphasis** on the following:

1. **Embedding** the ABN approach and methodologies deeply into the Partner organisations and into the communities they work with, while continuing to share and develop these methodologies and introducing new ones where appropriate. The aim is that an increasing number of ABN Partners and the communities they work with become '**learning centres of Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK)**' for the ABN approach and methodologies.
2. ABN as a **coalition** of Partners.
3. ABN's **crosscutting issues** of Networking, Gender, Youth and Governance.
4. Beginning to **spread** ABN's approach and methodologies beyond ABN Partners by establishing carefully planned and managed strategic partnerships, and by producing published and accessible guidelines and case studies on ABN's approach and methodologies.
5. Working more closely with **AFSA**, the continental institution that ABN played a very big part in establishing; feeding issues and stories from the work of Partners on the ground into AFSA's continental voice.
6. Establishing ABN **country nodes**.





## 2. Background and Introduction

ABN's roots go back to the 1990s as part of rallying an African voice in international discussions on issues such as biodiversity, intellectual property, and biosafety. A band of African pioneers was drawn together to begin to give an African voice to these discussions. This included the late Wangari Maathai (Kenyan environmentalist and 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate), Dr. Tewolde (Ethiopian expert on Intellectual Property Rights), and Dr. Melaku Worede (agronomist and plant geneticist), the latter two being winners of the Right Livelihood Award. Their linkages then grew organically into the early 2000s. The Gaia Foundation and GRAIN provided essential moral and financial support in those early days.

In 2002, notably also the year of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) meeting in South Africa, the African Biodiversity Network formally came into existence as a continent-wide Network advocating for bio-cultural diversity. Advocacy and 'voice' were still its primary focus though there were moves towards community level work to reflect the bio-cultural diversity approach of this bold new set-up.

ABN was made up of Partners across the continent working closely with Gaia and GRAIN. Furthermore, in the first few years, four new organisations were born out of ABN, two in Kenya (Porini Association and the Institute for Culture and Ecology), one in Ethiopia (MELCA-Ethiopia) and one in South Africa (MUPO Foundation). These organisations began to take the lead in developing methodologies for working with communities; methods that deepened communities' connection with their own history (including their story of origin), their culture and their relationship with Nature.

With relatively good funding from the EU, ABN became a hive of activity and began to raise its profile on the continent. ABN also had a presence at various international meetings related to bio-cultural diversity and climate change. Partners initially gathered every year to review and plan but in time this became a biannual event.

ABN reached out to more Partners and at one stage listed 36 Partners across 12 African countries. However, its piloting work became focused around the four organisations that had grown out of ABN. Gradually tension grew around how the work of ABN should spread.

In 2007 ABN established its own Secretariat in Kenya hosted by the Institute for Culture and Ecology until it gained its own legal registration in 2010. At this stage ABN had three thematic areas (Community Ecological Governance; Community, Seed and Knowledge; and Cultural Biodiversity) with a coordinator for each area based in a different country (Kenya, South Africa and Ethiopia). There was also a full time network administrator coordinating internal communication and administration, this having until then been managed out of the Gaia Foundation offices in London.

Over the next few years, as the advocacy work and piloting of methodologies with communities continued, ABN's identity became something of a crisis, and it became clear that this was stifling its development. This crisis revolved around whether ABN was primarily an advocacy organisation or one developing and piloting methodologies related to communities deeply reconnecting with their culture and with Nature. Linked to this, the identity crisis also related to the kind of Network ABN was.

In 2012 the ABN leaders tackled this identity crisis and made some clear decisions: ABN would become a Network in the full sense of the word, in that it would be 'owned' and governed by the Partners. But it would remain a tight knit Network based around Partners who had embraced its methodologies. With regard to advocacy, having helped to launch the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), ABN would shift its role and focus much more on bringing issues out from communities to inform ongoing advocacy, rather than being an African voice itself; leaving this role to AFSA.

Since 2013, ABN has been putting these 2012 decisions into practice. There are now 25 Partners who all belong to at least one of three Communities of Practice (CoP) or are strategic Partners for advocacy across

the continent or globally. The three CoP are: Community Ecological Governance (CEG); Community, Seed and Knowledge (CSK); and Youth, Culture and Biodiversity (YCB). Each of these CoP is a forum for sharing and learning as Partners take forward their practice. Each has done groundwork towards the production of a publication that captures the practice and lessons learnt. The advocacy work has been focused on strengthening national coalition, capacity building, influencing policies on forced solutions, and campaigns on biosafety, land grabbing, biofuels, biochar, and extractive industries – all these campaigns have been linked to the issues of climate change and biodiversity.

In terms of governance, the Board is the highest decision making organ of the ABN. It is composed of people with skills and expertise around the work of the ABN and nominated representatives of the Partner organisations. In the recent past, the Secretariat has strengthened its human resource to enable it to meet its mandate. ABN is becoming a vibrant Network with increased participation from Partners and allies and continues to be a source of inspiration. Partners are driving the ABN's agenda through participation in strategic planning, implementation of work on the ground and through forging strong linkages between Partners and like-minded agencies in and outside Africa.

**The table below gives examples of significant strides made during the period 2013-2015, often in response to challenges.**

<b>Governance amended to ensure ABN's Partners represented on the Board</b>	The ABN Board now has three Board members from Partner organisations – Grabe Benin, CELUCT and Envirocare. This addresses the challenge of Partners not feeling ownership for the Network in the past. This was strongly reflected in the Partners' meeting of June 2015.
<b>ABN Partners are actively learning from each other.</b>	Three Communities of Practice (CoP) have been established – Community, Seeds and Knowledge (CSK); Youth, Culture and Biodiversity (YCB); and Community Ecological Governance (CEG). These have improved planning and communication, thus heightening the vibrancy of the Network. However, communication still remains a challenge within ABN.
<b>Advocacy informed by work of communities/CoP and AFSA is independent</b>	<p>This is happening as the Communication and Advocacy Coordinator at ABN is working with Partners to develop communication materials. This is increasing the vibrancy and visibility of the Network. A number of case studies at community level were documented and shared within the Network.</p> <p>ABN supported setting up of the AFSA Secretariat in Uganda, which is now independent.</p>
<b>Much greater clarity around identity and ownership of ABN</b>	A statement of identity was developed together with representatives of Partners and has been clarified over time into its current form. It has been shared with Partners on various occasions, who continue to reflect on and internalise it for quality assurance of ABN work. This has also enabled some Partners to drop out as Partners because they do not fit into ABN, thus giving ABN a tighter, more united and cohesive partnership. There were Partners in ABN who shouldn't have been Partners. It is now clear that ABN is more of an 'Alliance of Partners' working together than a Network.
<b>Increased work with communities on the ground</b>	There is a growing number of evolving examples of communities that are putting into practice the ABN resilience methodologies on the ground in Benin, Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe. In Benin, Ethiopia, Togo and South Africa, there are good examples of programmes that stimulate young people into becoming environmental and cultural activists.
<b>Balancing between depth and spread</b>	The recent focus of ABN has been on deepening the work with Partners. This has included paralegal training, on-going distillation of the methodologies, experiential learning events in the wilderness, and combining traditional knowledge and science in agriculture. New Partners have also been identified and formally welcomed into ABN in 2015, for example, CEVASTE in Benin and KIVULINI Trust in Kenya. The Partners' meeting in 2015 identified the need to start putting more emphasis on spreading the ABN approach and methodologies and has developed strategies to this end for the next phase.







### 3. Lessons Learnt

In its thirteen years of existence, ABN has learnt many lessons about being a pioneering 'Network' of civil society organisations spread across many countries in Africa aiming to transform the mainstream approach to ecological governance. Here are some of those lessons.

- ⦿ ABN needs to focus strongly on developing the deep roots of allegiance within each Partner. In the early days, ABN raised a lot of funds to give to Partners. This led to too much association to funding as the main benefit of being a Partner. ABN needs to become more of a Coalition than a Network; a Coalition in which fundraising should be for joint activities.
- ⦿ There has been too much focus on individuals and not the whole Partner organisation. While it is important to build individuals' capacity in the approach and methodologies of ABN, it is just as important for the whole Partner organisation to have a thorough understanding of ABN's approach. This will ensure continuity and sustainability.
- ⦿ "ABN" works better in an organisation where the emphasis is on processes and not distinct activities. The ABN approach is fundamentally about changing mindsets that have developed over years of colonial and post-colonial indoctrination, marginalisation and devaluation of African cultures and ecological governance systems. This is a long-term and gradual process. But it is a process that is critical to revitalising communities' deep-rooted commitment to looking after their resources; and without such commitment this revitalisation is unlikely to happen.
- ⦿ Linked to the point above, ABN brings a dimension to 'development work' that is largely missing from most agencies' work. With this added dimension, there will be much greater chance for this work to be sustainable. However, ABN has learnt, and continues to learn, that it needs to communicate its approach in a way that is much more accessible to others. Too often ABN has lost others in the way it articulates its work. The controversy that surrounds 'spirituality' is one such example – with better articulation the controversy is negated.
- ⦿ ABN depends completely on communication and flow of information to be effective and this is difficult and still needs lots more attention and creativity.
- ⦿ A tight-knit pioneering Network/Coalition such as ABN needs to be made up of strong and active Partners who fulfil the criteria for partnership. Inactive Partners create dead weight and hold the overall partnership back. For their sake, and for the sake of ABN, such Partners should cease to be Partners.
- ⦿ The primary focus of the Network Secretariat is to facilitate networking; this includes continually making sure Partner organisations as a whole understand what it means to be an ABN Partner. This emphasis on networking as the primary Secretariat task has been not been strong enough to date.
- ⦿ ABN has been very strategic in playing the lead role to establish AFSA. It can now feed into a continental wide Network of Networks, which is much more powerful than being an African voice on its own. ABN will continue to use this lesson of the power of strategic collaboration as it seeks out allies to increase the spread of its approach. Another example of this has been the way in which ABN has used its international connections to stop ecological destruction in Venda, Karima and Mabira.
- ⦿ Through participation in carefully-selected international events, ABN has been able to increase its profile significantly.
- ⦿ As a pioneering coalition of organisations, innovation and creativity are the keys to ABN's ongoing development.
- ⦿ For longer-term sustainability ABN needs to focus more on establishing country nodes. The support for advocacy alliances such as KBioC illustrates the potential of this country-focus.
- ⦿ Strong involvement of Partners in the governance of any Network/Coalition is crucial to the sense of ownership that is the foundation of any such joint endeavour. ABN has now evolved to the stage where Partners are ready to be fully involved in its governance.

### 4. ABN's Vision, Mission and Principles

#### Vision:

Vibrant and resilient African communities rooted in their own biological, cultural and spiritual diversity, governing their own lives and livelihoods, in harmony with healthy ecosystems.

#### Mission:

To ignite and nurture a growing African network of individuals and organisations working passionately from global to local level, with capacity to resist harmful developments, to influence and implement policies and practices that promote recognition and respect for people and Nature.

#### Principles:

##### It starts with each of us

Strengthening individuals to share and deepen their personal conviction, determination, understanding of, and commitment to ABN's philosophy and practice as a basis of all ABN's work.

##### Our work with communities

Recognising the devastating impact of colonisation and industrialisation, we accompany communities we work with in a patient, non-prescriptive and potentiating way that draws particularly on the knowledge of elders towards deep level transformation.

##### Those on the edge

Emphasising recognition of those who are marginalised by today's modern world and bringing to light their knowledge and beauty as well as helping them to know their rights.

##### Learning towards practice

Developing an expanding range of methodologies and practice that are based on experiential learning and African traditional knowledge system and which validate traditional knowledge and build confidence.

##### Ethical documentation

Documenting rigorously, carefully, selectively and creatively the experiences of our work, whilst always seeking permission from those we work with, following community protocols and sharing information back to the sources.

##### Building alliances towards a stronger global movement

Reaching out to work collaboratively with those who we recognise as allies in the bigger struggle and movement towards healthy communities and ecosystems across Africa.

##### Bringing in new Partners

Continually seeking out and actively supporting new Partners, communities and individuals to bring into the ABN fold.

##### Networking amongst Partners

Partners and the Secretariat taking up the responsibility to share often and openly their experiences, knowledge and skills with each other, towards a strong sense of collective ownership for the Network.

##### ABN gatherings

All ABN events, at whatever level, should strive to reflect ABN's deeply felt respect towards, and celebration of, Nature and diverse African cultures.

##### Our institution

Having an effective and well-run organisation that is transparent and accountable while reflecting the Pan-African value of Ubuntu.

# Principles of the African Biodiversity Network

01

## It starts with each of us

Vibrant and resilient African communities rooted in their own biological, cultural and spiritual diversity.

02

## Our work with communities

Recognising the devastating impact of colonisation and industrialisation, we accompany communities we work with.

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## Ethical documentation

Documenting rigorously, carefully, selectively and creatively the experiences of our work, whilst always seeking permission from those we work with.

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## Those on the edge

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## ABN gatherings

All ABN events, should strive to reflect ABN's deeply felt respect towards, and celebration of, Nature and diverse African cultures.

10

## Our institution

Having an effective and well-run organisation that is transparent and accountable while reflecting the Pan-African value of Ubuntu.

## 5. The Current Context

In many ways the context ABN Partners are working in remains similar to when the last strategic planning was developed in 2012. But, at the same time, there are important intensifications of certain issues. The process of globalisation continues to push and spread a very Western-oriented approach to the use of land and natural resources. It is an approach that commodifies everything and is relentless in its pursuit of economic growth.

Africa is now feeling the full force of the extractive industries, as world attention shifts to this continent that until now has been relatively untouched in this regard. As technology becomes more sophisticated it brings within reach previously unreachable minerals.

Oil is being found everywhere it seems, with the oil companies suspiciously undaunted by climate change discussions. And these discussions seem to be going nowhere, while the impact of climate change is being increasingly felt across the continent. Though more attention is being paid to renewables it remains a mystery why this attention is not far greater, given the potential of renewables to mitigate climate change. One can only assume that this relates to the economic and political power of the extractive industries.

Many African governments have tied their 'new growth' strategies to these extractive industries. This, in turn, is leading to a fast increase in demand for energy across the continent. Resistance to the onslaught of the extractive industries is still minimal in Africa, especially compared to what is happening elsewhere in the world.

The multinational corporations' drive to move fully into Africa continues in the field of agriculture too. 'Investment' in large plantations, also referred to as land grabbing, seems to be continuing apace. Furthermore, the MNCs are very much behind the push for green revolution farming for small-scale farmers in Africa, willingly offering funds to Obama's G8 food and nutrition initiative, which in turn is arm-twisting African governments in various ways. One example of this is the push for laws and protocols related to seed via the regional economic blocks such as ECOWAS, SADC and COMESA. These laws and protocols put plant breeders' rights at the forefront and largely ignore community-based seed systems.

Land grabbing continues to intensify. Governments and traditional authorities are shirking their responsibilities as custodians of customary and ancestral rights to land, thereby dispossessing communities' access to land and other natural resources required for productive activities. Women are being particularly hard hit by this.

The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at least give more recognition to the importance of biodiversity and moving towards a healthier planet (SDGs 2, 3, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14 and 15) and are an improvement on the old Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, as long as the same economic development framework and the mind-set that goes with it remains they are unlikely to be effective. It is this economic model of non-stop economic growth that gives license and support to the activities outlined in the paragraphs above.

Along with all this, and very relevant to the work of ABN, is the ongoing disconnection of young people from their roots and culture as they adopt a Western mind-set.

Another worrying trend is the growing intolerance of some religions towards traditions and culture. At the same time, while there is more recognition of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in some circles, the slow-to-change mainstream education set-ups still demean and belittle IKS and the traditions and culture that go with it. There is also the danger that academic interest in IKS will distort and hijack this source of knowledge.







Turning to donor funding, most bilateral support seems to be continuing or shifting to support of industrial land-use practices. At the same time the greater emphasis on accountability, while apparently a good thing at face value, means that it is becoming more difficult to get funding for process-oriented work as opposed to 'project' funding. This is also affecting independent funders such as church organisations who now get more of their funding from governments. While there is greater recognition for sustainable land-use approaches such as agroecology, there is little funding to go with this.

**Opportunities for ABN in the current context:**

The paradox remains that as things get worse, so do opportunities for ABN increase.

- ⦿ ABN's unique approach and methods bring the depth of connection that leads to the strong sense of caring for, and connection to, the land that is necessary if whole communities are going to galvanise effectively towards management of their ecosystems. Without this depth of concern and connection, the tendency will be to continue treating symptoms in isolation.
- ⦿ As the push for plant breeders' rights intensifies, so does the recognition of community-based seed systems. This is especially so given the high levels of malnutrition in many places. Community-based seed systems emphasise diversity, which in turn strengthens nutrition.
- ⦿ It appears as if young people are seeking for more connection to their roots and culture to give them a sense of identity. And it is extraordinary what some of the ABN practices, such as SEGNI, Wilderness Experiential Learning, Intergenerational Learning and Graine Future can achieve in giving young people that sense of identity and purpose in life.
- ⦿ Everything about the ABN approach builds resilience for and mitigates against climate change. As the challenges of climate change and other factors continue to escalate, ABN has continued to amplify the voices from the local and regional levels to influence policy at the international level. Some of the international forums that the ABN Network is actively involved in include CBD, WIPO, IPBES and ICCAs. The Network also enables its Partners and communities to participate in forums that are organised by relevant UN bodies.
- ⦿ Information technology to support vibrant networking is becoming increasingly available (but there is still a 'technology gap').

There is no doubt that the context continues to call out for what ABN is offering. The challenge for the Network, as a small and pioneering set-up, is to be very strategic in its response to this.





## 6. Strategic Priorities

### Overall objective:

Partners are increasingly building strong relationships, documenting and fully embracing ABN's philosophy, principles and resilience methodologies with the aim of contributing towards holistic development and sustainability in community and ecosystem resilience, biodiversity conservation and equity in Africa.

With the realisation that ABN is as much a Coalition as a Network has come the need to have an overarching objective as depicted above. Current Partners are at various levels in terms of taking on board what could be described as the 'ABN approach'. Much has been learnt in piloting this approach and now is the time to build ABN as a strong Coalition of Partners, all of whom understand the approach throughout their organisation and who use the methodologies easily and effectively as well as contributing regularly to their improvement.

ABN has two main thrusts in its programmatic work: i) Partners working directly with communities and ii) Advocacy and communication. These two are closely linked.

There are also a number of critical **cross-cutting issues (CCIs)**, and the objective in the next phase will be to ensure that ABN's CCIs are fully integrated into all of its work. ABN will develop guidelines for each of the four CCIs to ensure that this happens. For example, **all reporting should include feedback on each of the CCIs**. This greater emphasis on CCIs will be a special feature of this next Strategic Plan. This focus has, of course, been there to some degree in the work of ABN to date. But recent reviews and planning processes have revealed the need for ABN to place more concerted and systematic effort into ensuring that these cross-cutting issues do indeed cut across all **of ABN's work all the time**.

ABN's four cross-cutting issues are, in no specific order: Gender, Youth, Networking and Governance.

### Working with communities:

In the past ABN has focused this work around three 'thematic areas', which were named as: Community Ecological Governance (CEG); Community Seed and Knowledge (CSK) and Youth and Cultural Biodiversity (YCB). It has now become clear that having these separate thematic areas is not appropriate to the holistic nature of ABN's work. It puts the work too much into boxes and a number of Partners have been struggling with dealing with this separation, as their work with communities is more integrated than this.

In future this community-level work will aim towards objectives and outcomes rather than work within the domain of thematic areas. Those working at the Secretariat will be Programme Coordinators and not Thematic Coordinators and will work across the objectives.

For this next phase the three outcomes that ABN will work towards are:

- 1 Inclusive and equitable Community Ecological Governance systems revived
- 2 Revived, recognised and vibrant Community Seed networks
- 3 Culture and Biodiversity Youth movement established

The activities to achieve the above outcomes fall into the following broad activity areas:

- 1 Capacity building of individuals and organisations
- 2 Strengthening learning centres
- 3 Strengthening alliances
- 4 Documentation

There has always been tension in ABN around depth and spread. The potency theory, in relating it to ABN, expounds that communities who deeply and comprehensively revive their traditional practices and their reconnection with their land and Nature will 'infect' others in a natural process of spread. ABN will continue to develop within this 'potency' framework but it will also, at the same time, undertake more conscious efforts to spread its experience and practice. Activity areas 2 and 3 above are primarily aimed at this strategy of **spread** in the next phase.

The following presents notes on each of the activity areas to highlight the main thrusts, shifts and emphases for the next phase of ABN:

### Capacity building:

To date ABN has put more emphasis on building the capacity of individuals. While this will continue, there will be greater emphasis towards **building the capacity of whole partner organisations** in the approach and methodologies of ABN. This capacity building will be aimed at:

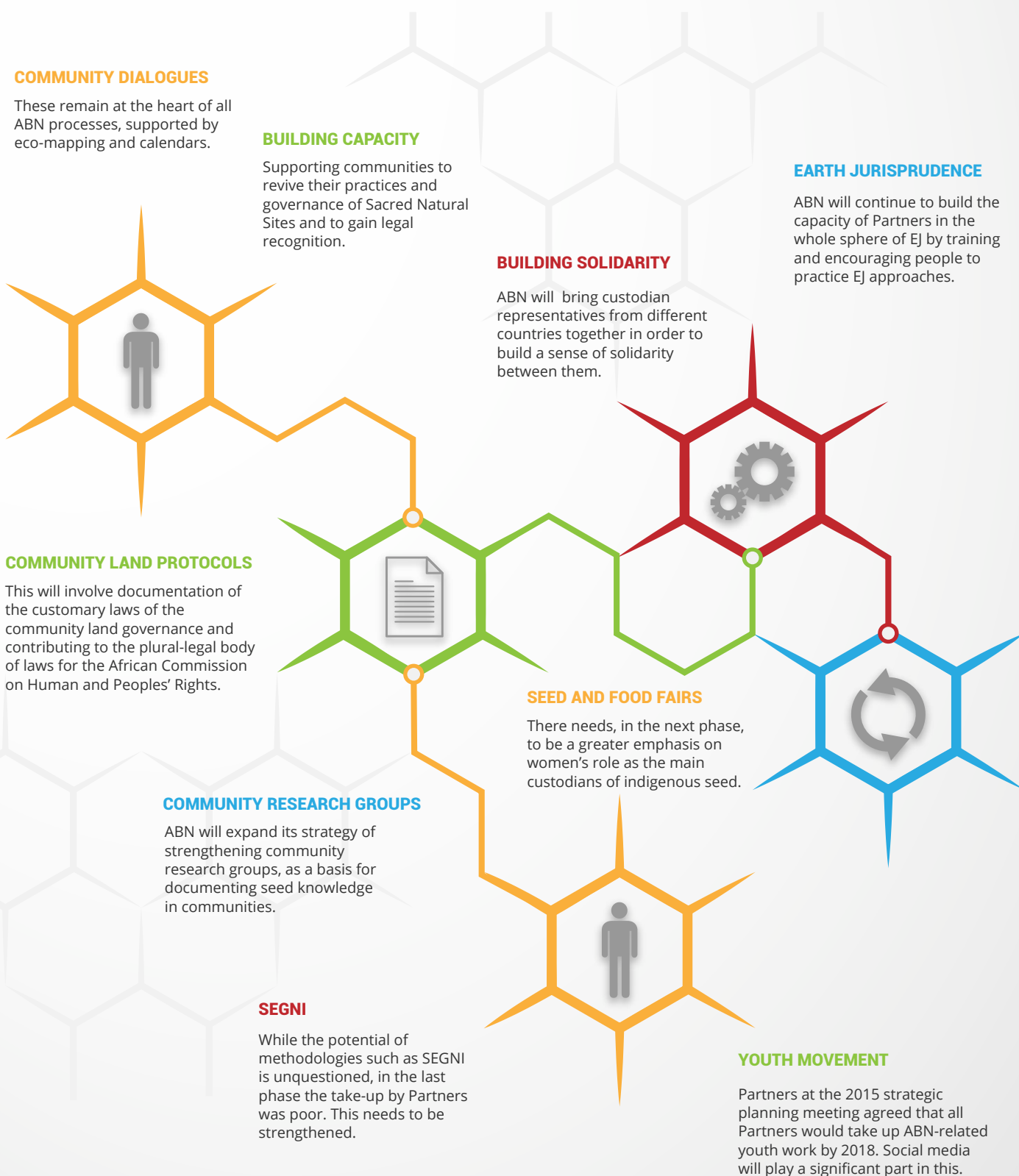
- ⊙ **Community dialogues**, which will remain at the heart of all ABN processes, supported by **eco-mapping and calendars**. There is recognition of the need for more training on these methodologies. Also there is a need to **bring the question of seed** more consciously into these methodologies. Also, in line with the 2012 Evaluation recommendation and discussions at the June 2015 strategic planning workshop, ABN will ensure that these **training programmes are run as a process** and not one-off events. This will usually mean i) carrying out thorough preparatory work, ii) meeting for a training event, iii) ensuring regular follow-up and report-back, and iv) longer-term ongoing support, which will come via the Communities of Practice.
- ⊙ Continuing to build the capacity and skills of each other to support communities to **revive their practices and governance of Sacred Natural Sites** and to gain legal recognition of their laws, practices and ecological governance systems. ABN has learnt that, wherever possible, it is best to **target traditional institutions** like clans and chiefdoms rather than working through mixed groups, which can also be used by politicians and NGOs, and may also have demands, such as payments for transport and food. However, the 'targeting of traditional institutions' approach may not be possible in communities made up of migrants.
- ⊙ The strategy of **building solidarity between custodians of Sacred Natural Sites**, which has been working well in the last phase, will continue to be developed. The aim is to have a number of local coalitions of custodians. ABN will also bring custodian representatives from different countries together in order to build a sense of solidarity between them and to increase the learning between custodians.
- ⊙ One new thrust in this thematic area for ABN will be that of beginning to popularise the **concept of Earth Jurisprudence**. It will do this by supporting EJ training for selected Partner members as a way of building more capacity. At the same time ABN will continue to build the capacity of Partners in the whole sphere of EJ by training and encouraging people to practice EJ approaches.
- ⊙ Another area in which ABN will give more focus in the next phase is to help communities develop **community land protocols** in relation to land governance. This will involve documentation of the customary laws of the community land governance and contributing to the plural-legal body of laws for the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. ABN will also pilot the Multi Evidence Based (MEB) approach.
- ⊙ ABN Partners will continue to build each other's capacity around their seed work in communities. In the next phase all Partners involved in seed-related work will organise and hold **seed and food fairs**, as platforms for sharing indigenous seed and associated knowledge. The experience of these will be continually documented and shared between Partners. There needs, in the next phase, to be a greater emphasis on **women's role as the main custodians of indigenous seed**.







# ABN Capacity Building Methodologies



- ABN will expand its strategy of strengthening **community research groups**, as a basis for documenting seed knowledge in communities. This, along with other documentation from the community level, will feed into ABN's advocacy work.
- While the potential of **methodologies such as SEGNI** is unquestioned, in the last phase the take-up by Partners was again not as much as had been expected. Part of the problem was relying too much on one-off events and not seeing capacity building as a process (as outlined in the first bullet point above). This will be dealt with in the next phase.
- Partners at the 2015 strategic planning meeting agreed that, with the need for a particular emphasis on working with young people, **all Partners would take up ABN-related youth work by 2018**. In order for this to happen, ABN will designate one organisation in West Africa, one in East Africa and one in Southern Africa to act as a mentor to other Partners in their region. There is no doubt about the potential of this work as seen in what four ABN Partners have achieved. It is time now for ABN to make a concerted effort to spread this work to all Partners. As part of linking up young people who become involved in ABN-related work, ABN will initiate a **Youth Movement** in this next phase. Social media will play a significant part in this.

## Strengthening learning centres of indigenous and local knowledge:

Over the years 'community learning centres of indigenous and local knowledge' have emerged out of the work of ABN. These are communities that have the potential to host visitors from elsewhere and to share their story of moving towards a community with revived community ecological governance and seed playing a central part in this process. ABN will focus on strengthening these 'learning centres' to play this role of hosting others on experiential learning visits. The emphasis will very much be on these learning centres supporting each other in this process.

## Strengthening alliances with others:

As indicated above, ABN in this next phase will put more emphasis on spreading its approach and methodologies. One of the main strategies will be to establish and develop alliances with strategic allies. These allies may have some views divergent from ABN, but they will need to empathise with the basic ABN philosophy and methodologies. ABN is aware that there is a danger that their practices and methods will be watered down, but there is also recognition that ABN must spread its practice more. By plunging into this reaching out, ABN will learn a great deal about what works and doesn't work in this spreading process.

As well as continuing to closely work with longstanding allies like the Gaia Foundation, ABN will explore other strategic alliances amongst these possibilities: the Seed and Knowledge Initiative in Southern Africa (which has grown out of ABN work), GRAIN (an old ally), IUCN, IPBES, IPACC, ICCAS, COMPAS, the Resilience Centre, the PELUM Association, La Via Campesina, ReSCOPE, UNESCO, AU advocates, and WCPA Young Professionals Group. It is envisaged that JVE, an ABN partner and itself a Network that reaches young people in many countries in Africa, can play a special and significant role in the next phase.

## Documentation:

A lot of groundwork has been done via the Communities of Practice to develop guidelines that capture ABN experiences to date in using its approach. This next phase will see the publication of at least three guideline documents. This will happen in the first year of the phase (2016). Furthermore, ABN will continue to develop case studies, both written and filmed, of Partners' work with communities. Another area of documentation will relate to Guides for the cross-cutting areas (as mentioned above) and Briefs on ABN's approach to controversial areas such as spirituality. These briefs will help avoid misunderstanding.

All this documentation will strengthen the possibility of developing strategic alliances for ABN.

## Advocacy and Communication, Networking and Network Development:

### Strategic objective 2016-18:

To enhance ownership and learning among Partners, communities and allies through strengthening linkages and joint actions aimed at influencing attitudes and policies on prioritised issues at all levels.

ABN began as an advocacy organisation in the early 2000s and quickly moved to include work with communities. Gradually over the years, the community work took centre stage in ABN's work but nevertheless ABN continued to accomplish a great deal around advocacy, being a strong African voice in international meetings, publishing studies on a range of issues such as land grabbing, and galvanising much activity around genetic engineering in many countries during its first decade.

Perhaps ABN's biggest achievement has been leading the way to set up the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA). In the last couple of years AFSA has taken off as a continental voice. It now has over 20 regional Network members, including of course ABN, and is gathering momentum around issues of seed, land and making the case for agroecology. In many ways the creation of AFSA took over the advocacy role that ABN had been playing. During the last phase ABN, therefore, has created a new advocacy niche, which is less of a continental voice and focuses more on a direct relationship with Partners.

In this upcoming phase ABN will strengthen this focus, with 'focus' being a key word for ABN's advocacy in future, as follows:

- ⊙ The Secretariat will identify regional/continental/global issues that are relevant to the Partners and will distil these so as to keep the Partners up-to-date and informed on these issues. Partners, in turn, will ensure that the communities they work with are aware of what is happening in relation to these issues.
- ⊙ ABN will be a magnifying voice for the work that Partners are doing on the ground. ABN's philosophy and approach, backed up with examples of these in practice, will be shared widely, including via a regular ABN newsletter. To achieve this, ABN Partners will consistently share about their work.
- ⊙ ABN will become much more effective at using social media. This will include training for Partners on this.
- ⊙ ABN advocacy will focus on the following themes: land grabbing/'investment', extractive industries, and seed policies and laws. ABN will develop specific campaigns around these themes. In this process Partners will focus on being the voice at local and national levels and the Secretariat will take this voice to regional, continental and global levels. This may include participating in international meetings where relevant.
- ⊙ ABN will continue to strengthen national alliances that focus on the genetic engineering/biosafety issue. Over the years, ABN has contributed significantly to initiating national alliances in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and, more recently, Zimbabwe and will continue supporting and strengthening more alliances in Africa.
- ⊙ ABN will build a strong relationship with AFSA and work closely with this continental voice that it worked so hard to set up. This will, at the same time, bring it closer to many other regional networks across the continent and, out of these relationships, joint efforts are likely to emerge. ABN's campaigns will of course feed directly into the AFSA Network.
- ⊙ Continuing efforts to strengthen the documentation and advocacy efforts of Partners, such as the participatory video training that ABN provided during the last phase.

All of the above implies a very tight and well-monitored communication strategy for ABN.

## 7. Functioning of the Network/Coalition

ABN has had a difficult time organisationally, especially in relation to its **identity**. Much work was done in 2012-13 to clarify this aspect of ABN and to understand what kind of Network ABN is. Since then definite steps have been taken towards making ABN into a **fully-fledged Network where Partners feel ownership** for the Network. This is an ongoing process and the next phase needs to continue to work hard on this aspect. This needs **all the organs of ABN playing their roles** and taking responsibilities – Partners, Board and Secretariat. The 2015 Biennial Partners' Meeting spent some time on clarifying the roles of each of these 'parts' of ABN. This should help ABN function better in future. (See Appendix Two for an outline of these roles).

Generally, the **Board** has functioned well during this phase, providing oversight and support to the Secretariat as it moves towards becoming fully representative of Partners. However, some members of the Board have not been active at all and the Board will need to address this inactivity in future. During a self-reflection exercise by the Board and Secretariat they described their relationship as "cordial, respectful, harmonious, close and warm, but professional."

The **Secretariat** has made good progress in supporting the thematic areas of the last phase. But as outlined elsewhere it is time to move on beyond having thematic areas and to address the work **more holistically**. The Secretariat will play a leading role in leading this into the future. The Secretariat is also aware that **networking should in future be at the centre of all its work**. In order to play its networking role, the Secretariat needs to know each Partner very well and be up-to-date about what each Partner is doing. This will receive more emphasis in future. Another underlying necessity for ABN is **communication**. The Secretariat sets the example and takes every opportunity to communicate. When a staff member visits a Partner, for example, let there be a story to share across the Network coming out of this, updating everyone on what that Partner is doing and sharing observations and reflections. The same can apply when attending any meetings or workshops.

The Secretariat is also like a **think tank for the Network**, suggesting ways forward, coming up with ideas, developing draft plans, linking up with strategic Partners and so on; in short, forging a way forward for ABN. But the critical thing here is always keeping Partners up to date and on board with any of these developments. As many people who have experienced Networks will tell you, the danger with Secretariats is that they 'do their own thing' and become like an organisation themselves. This is very unlikely to happen if there is constant communication.

As part of this much stronger focus on networking in the next phase, the Secretariat, with Partner input, will develop **guidelines and templates on working relationships** in the Network in line with what is expressed above. Furthermore, the Secretariat will also establish a regime for acknowledging Partners' contribution in all publications with, for example, the visible display of Partner logos. And ABN will go back to producing a newsletter every quarter.

In future, the Secretariat will continue to take the lead in **fundraising** but it is important that everyone in ABN sees this process as a joint effort. While ABN will continue to ensure that substantial funds go to Partners for their work on the ground, a shift that has been taking place in the last phase, **the funds are in support of ABN joint programmes** and not the work of individual Partners. It is important that both Secretariat and Partners understand it in this way. This will mean continual communication with and between Partners to this end.

Partners need to take the Network more fully on board into their own organisation. All staff and Board members of a Partner should be completely up to date all the time about what is happening in ABN. And in fact more than that, "the ABN philosophy should be embedded in each of our organisations"; as one person put it at the ABN 2015 Partners' meeting. An ABN Partner is ABN on the ground.

One focus that has been raised in the past but has not really been followed through on is the establishment of ABN country nodes. This will be pursued vigorously in the next phase. This will not only bring in more potential for longevity/sustainability for ABN as an African-wide institution with deep roots, but will also open up greater possibilities for individual members, another aspect that ABN has discussed but not fully pursued to date.







## HOW WE DO IT



## 8. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation is inherently difficult for a Network/Coalition working across a number of countries and at different levels. How does one link all this together and how does one establish attribution? These are two of many questions that arise. ABN has been developing its Monitoring and Evaluation over the years, learning what works and what does not.

At the ABN Partners' Meeting of June 2015, participants devoted significant time towards the development of an M&E manual. Since then the Secretariat, working closely with a small team of Partners, has developed a draft manual. This manual will guide all actors within ABN during the next strategic period.

ABN's M&E will be a combination of two broad approaches:

- The Logical Framework approach, which establishes and logically links direction (objectives, outcomes and so on) with ways of measuring (predetermined indicators). Most donors now require this kind of approach if they are to provide funds.
- Reflecting back on past events. This will include use of the Principles Focused Evaluation approach and development of case studies/most significant change stories.

The M&E manual details how ABN will go about using these two approaches, particularly spelling out processes related to using the LFA. While ABN recognises that the use of the LFA in one form or another will be a requirement for most donors, it also recognises that it needs to go beyond this. ABN is working in highly complex situations and Principles Focused Evaluation (PFE) is an appropriate method for enriching one's monitoring/evaluation in such situations. In this approach one goes back to the core principles of ABN in order to assess progress and impact and to inform future direction. In other words, one applies the systematic rigour of evaluation to the very reason ABN exists.

At the same time case studies/most significant change stories obviously enrich M&E processes and bring it alive, both within ABN and for other interested stakeholders, including donors.

Another advantage of using open 'reflecting back' approaches to M&E, as well as those based on predetermined outcomes and indicators, is that it is much easier to capture unexpected changes/impacts because one's looking back is not narrowed by what one predetermined in the planning. These approaches also enable an organisation to 'stay on its toes' more easily and be more dynamic as it responds to the ever-changing nature of complex situations.



## 9. Budget

The African Biodiversity Network’s budget will be approximately 750,000 (Seven Hundred and Fifty Thousand) Euros per year. It will be financed through funding from development Partners, Partners contributions and other sources including viable investments.

## 10. Conclusion

Everyone knows that Networks are not easy institutions to sustain with vibrancy. ABN has had its struggles as a Network. One of its strengths has been facing up to its issues and tensions and dealing with them. A contextual analysis reveals that Africa needs the ABN as much as ever. ABN’s approach brings hope and reconnection to a continent that has lost its way in terms of its relationship with its natural resources and its own cultures. Within both of these lie the seeds for communities across the continent to reconnect to their land and to their evolving culture. This will be the basis for the resilience that is badly needed today in the face of the ongoing degradation of natural resources and people’s disconnection from them and, especially, in the face of mounting climate change.

ABN will continue to deepen its practice as a forum for sharing and learning amongst Partners around this practice. At the same time, it will start making a much more concerted effort to work closely with allies to share its philosophy and methodologies more widely. And through its advocacy dimension, ABN will bring out the issues and stories from the communities that Partners are working with. In AFSA it has helped create a powerful voice through which to magnify these issues and stories and will continue working with AFSA to help amplify Pan-African voices.

The next phase of ABN, then, will be focused much more on reaching out. This has its dangers of course but this is not a reason for not plunging in to take ABN to the wider world.



## 11. Glossary

**ABN Methodologies:** These are the ABN strategies for re-connecting people with culture and Nature to enhance the community and ecosystem resilience and local governance.

**Community Resilience:** ABN defines resilience as the ability of a community to withstand negative internal and external pressure and threats and enables adaptation.

**Country Nodes:** These are the ABN Partners coming together in a country to raise the ABN voice and spread its visibility and methodologies to the like-minded others.

**Community of Practice:** Partners of the ABN coming together according to their areas of interest to implement joint activities and share learning and experiences.

**Community Learning Centres of Indigenous and Local Knowledge:** These are strong communities working with Partners' organisations to implement ABN methodologies and where other Partners and communities can go to learn.

**Connection with Nature:** This is a process of re-building and enhancing good relationship with the land and the natural environment of which all the human beings are part of and to promote wellbeing.

**Depth and Spread:** It is process of enhancing application of the ABN methodologies and scaling up to other like-minded others for higher impact.

**Extractive Industry:** Exploitation of commoditised life supporting system (known as natural resources and ecosystem services) without due exercise to the principle of reciprocity.

**Food Sovereignty:** Having healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and having farmers' ability to define their own food and agriculture systems.

**Industrial Agriculture:** This is a form of farming system that refers to the mechanised or industrialised production of livestock, poultry, fish, and crops.

**Indigenous and Local Seeds:** Refers to seeds that originate in a particular location and are adapted to specific local conditions. They occur naturally in a particular region, state, ecosystem, or habitat without direct or indirect human activity.

**Principles Focused Evaluation:** It is an appropriate methodology for enriching one's monitoring and evaluation process for situations that are highly complex.

**Sacred Natural Sites and Territories:** These are places of ecological, cultural and spiritual significance to the people and communities at large. They are places of traditional worship and sacrifice.



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