

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BIODIVERSITY: THE ROLE OF MEDICINAL PLANTS IN URBAN AFRICAN CULTURAL PRACTICES IN THE EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT.—Since the International Convention on Biodiversity in 1992 conservation biologists, ecologists and conservationists have devoted considerable attention to the conservation of biodiversity. With this has come the realization that solutions to biological problems often lie in the mechanisms of social, cultural, and economic systems. This shift has emphasized the relationship between biodiversity and human diversity, i.e., what the Declaration of Belém (1988) calls an “inextricable link” between biological and cultural diversity. The term *bicultural diversity* was introduced by Procy to describe the concept denoting this link. To date this concept has been used only in reference to “indigenous people” who, as part of their traditional lifestyles, use biodiversity to sustain their cultural identity. Our research, however, demonstrates that Xhosa people (*amaXhosa*) living in an urban context in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa continue to use wild plants for cultural purposes and often access these through commercial trade. We suggest that recognition of the cultural and spiritual values associated with wild plants would greatly enhance biodiversity conservation efforts. Recognition of the significant role that wild plants play in fulfilling cultural needs for urban Xhosa people would go a long way towards achieving this.

Key words: bicultural diversity, medicinal plants, South Africa, Xhosa people.

RESUMEN.—Desde la aprobación del Convenio Internacional sobre la Biodiversidad en 1992, biólogos de la conservación, ecólogos y conservacionistas han dedicado una atención especial a la conservación de la biodiversidad. Desde entonces, se acepta que para solucionar muchos problemas biológicos es necesario atender al funcionamiento de los sistemas sociales, culturales y económicos. Todo ello ha puesto de manifiesto la gran relación entre la biodiversidad y la diversidad humana, lo que la Declaración de Belém (1988) llamó el “vínculo inextricable” entre la diversidad biológica y cultural. El término *diversidad bicultural* fue introducido por Procy para expresar el concepto que implica este vínculo. Este término se ha utilizado hasta ahora para referirse a “comunidades indígenas” que incluyen en su modo de vida tradicional, como un elemento de su identidad cultural, el uso de la biodiversidad. Sin embargo, este artículo muestra que los Xhosa (*amaXhosa*) que viven en un contexto urbano en Sudáfrica, en la provincia Oriental del Cabo continúan usando plantas