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Lessons from a global review of Important Plant Areas

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Area-based approaches have long dominated biodiversity conservation, reinforced by the recent Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). Important Plant Areas (IPA) are a leading spatial conservation prioritisation approach for plants and fungi, with expertise and data from botanic gardens often crucial in their identification and implementation. Over 20 years since the launch of IPA guidelines, this study undertook a global evaluation to ask: (1) where and how has the IPA framework been applied? (2) to what extent has identification of IPAs led to plant conservation outcomes? (3) how are IPAs perceived by botanists globally? and (4) what are the key opportunities and challenges for IPAs to achieve conservation outcomes? Over 140 IPA-related sources were reviewed and systematically mapped. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 47 participants with direct experience of IPAs. While most publications focused on the development of IPA guidance or the application of identification criteria, 64% of respondents were aware of IPAs which have been incorporated into conservation designations or other in-country conservation processes. Overall perception of IPAs was positive, being seen to provide a unifying global spotlight and focus for plant conservation, while maintaining a flexible and inclusive approach. However, opinions were split on IPA effectiveness in engaging with broader stakeholders or incorporating local ecological knowledge. This presentation will highlight key recommendations made, how they are informing the Global IPA Network, and the role botanic gardens can play. This is timely as IPA application continues to grow to meet the 30x30 target of the GBF and new national programmes launched in some of the most biodiverse tropical countries in the world.