

Paper Number: 4364

## **Africa Alive Corridors - a 3,5 billion year geological, biological and cultural biography of Africa**

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Africa is our Mother continent, and is the colossus amongst Earth's continents. It is here, through the past 10-million years, that we took every step of our evolutionary journey from being Great Apes to modern humans, *Homo sapiens*. It is the cradle of our primate ancestors and home of our closest cousins, the chimpanzees and gorillas. It includes the stem of human language and the roots of our human culture. In the Barberton Mountains of South Africa, we find the oldest, best-preserved piece of landscape, yielding one of the oldest known preserved life remains dating back to ca. 3.5 Ga. Africa was at the hearts of Pangaea and Gondwana, and is the centre of Earth's geo-biodiversity, with plant and animal diversity reflecting geological diversity. It's a great narrative yet, in the same breath, a grim story: Africa is home to Earth's only intact megafauna, the large mammals and flightless birds in all other continents having been decimated at least partly by humans as we colonised the world out of our home continent.

Yet, Africa today is the place of greatest human suffering, from poverty, hunger and disease, to warfare, inequality and illiteracy!

The Africa Alive Corridors Project embraces these two sides: place of unparalleled heritage and place of unpardonable suffering!

First, then, is exploring this autobiography of Africa along a selection of 20 Heritage Corridors, each including 20 heritage nodes, that network across all 54 countries of the continent to bring the narratives alive. Each Corridor is a winding strip of land some 2 to 3,000 km long and 50 km wide, and tells a chapter in the story of Africa (and as often as not the world) far better than it can be told elsewhere. Each has a primary theme, either geological, biological or cultural, whilst recognising all three as holistically inseparable.

The flip-side of the initiative aims at drawing in all 1.2 billion persons living in Africa as stakeholders. The challenge is to find ways of bringing in everyone, young and old, rich and poor, as co-curators of over 4-billion years of unmatched irreplaceable heritage. We are deep into the Anthropocene, threatened by the Sixth Extinction and runaway global warming of our own making. End of story? We are all in this together, and have to go for unrecognisable change!

*Imizila*, finding a new way forward, towards the dignity of all humans and all other species.

