

## Plant trafficking a concern for MEFT

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OSHIKOTO - The environment ministry has raised concern over the increase in cases, arrests, convictions and seizures relating to plants in Namibia.

The ministry's spokesperson Romeo Muyunda told Nampa last week that plants provide the broad primary production layer for healthy environments, but their vital function is often overlooked. He said seizures of plant products have been significant, considering that these related to 22 arrests in 2022.

"Clearly, plant products are being illicitly harvested and trafficked in large volumes, which can have a rapid impact on plant populations, especially those of rare species with a localised distribution," he said.

Muyunda added that the main targets include *Adenia*, *Conophytum*, *Lithops*, *Cyphostemma*, *Pachypodium* and *Commiphora*.

"Most of these generally include species or sub-species endemic to Namibia. Many have a very localised distribution and are extremely slow-growing, which makes them susceptible to rapid extinction in the wild," he said.

According to the MEFT's national report for 2022, the smuggling of *Cyphostemma* and *Adenia* specimens via airfreight from Windhoek to Hong Kong with falsified permits has been uncovered. Muyunda said one of the consignments intercepted in Johannesburg, South Africa was a result of the authorities working with their Namibian counterparts to return the material and initiate joint investigations.

"Confiscated plants are being replanted in the wild, but survival rates are currently unknown. The Devil's Claw plant has valuable medicinal properties and is legally harvested in Namibia, yet illegal harvests from Angola, Zambia and Namibia are being channelled into legal harvests. A number of illegal harvests have been seized in the past," Muyunda said.

The report stated that targeted plants, such as the Devil's Claw and timber, have protected status in Namibia, yet few are listed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

A challenge for countermeasures is that some of the targeted species are being legally propagated in plant nurseries and offered for sale, making it difficult to distinguish between legally cultivated and illegally harvested wild specimens, the report adds. - *Nampa*

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