

Does figurative language contribute to public discourse on invasive species in Africa?

The use of metaphors and other figurative language in communicating scientific information is a topic of debate, and this was highlighted when Roger Day of CABI Africa reflected on the effects of such language in communicating matters of invasive species.

While delivering a paper entitled *Invasive Species: An Alien Idea to African Publics?* during a meeting on Promoting Public Understanding of Science held in Nairobi, Kenya, Day noted that much communication, particularly when attempting to bring scientific debates to a wider audience, uses metaphor, and this can colour public discourse in subtle ways.

He said, “Even the use of a word such as ‘alien’ can communicate particular values. However, in one sense all language is metaphor, so maintaining awareness of the possible implications of language may be more important than searching for the ‘right’ metaphor.”

He noted the use of figurative language is not entirely by the media and scientists, but also the general public. He gave examples of pests often acquiring local names with several being named after well known personalities, including the *Acheampong* weed in Ghana, invasive ants nicknamed *Charles Taylor Ant* and the larger grain borer in East Africa dubbed *Osama* by farmers.

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