

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Legal developments, higher learning and research funding

On 5 March 2019 the Protection, Promotion, Development and Management of Indigenous Knowledge Systems Bill was finally passed by Parliament and sent to President Cyril Ramaphosa for signing into law, having initially been published for public comment in February 2015 and then tabled in Parliament in April 2016.

The Bill is designed to give legal effect to the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Policy approved by Cabinet in 2004. Its main objective is to protect the indigenous knowledge of indigenous communities from unauthorised use, misappropriation and misuse.

Anyone intending to use indigenous knowledge for commercial purposes will need to apply for a licence to do so, and the benefits arising from such commercial use will be fairly shared. In addition, indigenous knowledge practitioners – such as traditional healers, or *sangomas* – will in future need to be certified by accredited assessors in order to ‘practise for gain’.

Once the Bill has been signed into law, the new Act will be implemented by the National Indigenous Knowledge Systems Office (NIKSO), which was set up as a unit within the Department of Science and Technology (DST) in 2006 to facilitate the IKS Policy objectives.

The DST has also established an Indigenous Knowledge-based Bioinnovation Programme, which has six platforms: African medicines, cosmeceuticals, nutraceuticals, health beverages, technology transfer and incubation, and commercialisation.

The DST is supporting a number of small enterprises, cooperatives and individual entrepreneurs in their indigenous knowledge ventures by, for example, providing training in aspects such as agricultural practices and financial management, as well as assisting in the development of business plans for marketing and commercialisation.

Learners interested in focussing on indigenous knowledge studies at university can choose between North-West University (NWU: Mafikeng campus) or the University of Venda (Univen), both of which offer an undergraduate Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge Systems degree.

At postgraduate level, a number of universities have strong research programmes in indigenous knowledge, some projects being funded through the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Funding Instrument, administered by the National Research Foundation. The funding instrument focusses on experimental research that will lead to mutual benefits for both researchers and communities, under the following themes:

- IKS and bioeconomy (African traditional medicine, food security, technology, nutraceuticals, health, beauty and cosmetics)
- IKS epistemology (ubuntu and cosmology, taxonomies, pedagogies and methodologies)
- IKS and climate change (environmental management)
- Women and IKS-based technology innovations
- IKS and energy (alternative and clean sources)
- IKS practices among specific communities, in particular of Khoi, Nama, Griqua and San communities
- Issues involving the San and Khoi communities
- Novel and creative thinking that will shift the boundaries of IKS knowledge production and that address national priorities in South Africa
- Capacity building, development of high-end skills on knowledge generation and human capacity development
- IKS and astronomy
- IKS legislation and public policy
- Indigenous farming practices
- Story-telling and music.

Recognising the need to raise awareness about the importance of indigenous knowledge, *Quest* will include content on IKS research in future issues.

Did you know?

2019 is not only the International Year of the Periodic Table. It is also the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL2019), proclaimed by the United Nations to raise awareness of the need to preserve, revitalise and promote indigenous languages around the world. Languages play a crucial role in our lives as a tool for communication, education and social integration. They are also at the heart of each person's unique identity, cultural history, traditions and memory, making them an important part of indigenous knowledge.

Ubuwazi nje?

Ukuthi u 2019 akusiwo nje kuphela unyaka we tafula le periodic emhlabeni wonke. Kodwa unyaka wezilimi zendabuko emhlabeni wonke jikelele (IYIL2019), ngokusho kwenhlangano yezizwe kubalulekile ukuthi kuqwashiswe, futhi kuvuselelwe ulwazi ngezilimi zendabuko kumhlaba wonke. Izilima zidlala indima esemqoka ezimpilweni zethu njengendlela yokuxoxisana, yokufunda no kuhlanganisa imiphakathi. Ziwumgogodla womuntu ngamunye ukutshengisa imvelaphi yakhe, imvelaphi yamasiko, namasiko akhe jikelele, yingakho zibalulekile njengenxenyeye yolwazi lwendabuko.

Translation by Zamantimande Kunene