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**Cover image**

A photographic depiction of a traditional knowledge holder advising a park ranger about traditional controlled burning practices to protect a fynbos biome in the Western Cape. Image generated by Gemini 3.

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# Local knowledge to be proud of

I admit to being somewhat ignorant about the important impact that South African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) have had on the international scientific stage. I simply hadn't realised before. After planning this edition and receiving all the wonderful recent contributions to the issue however, I was inspired to do some digging to find out what have historically been the most impactful contributions of local IKS on science. I was astounded. Some of what I learned (and didn't know):

- Some of the most high-profile contributions come from the rich botanical knowledge of the San and Khoi peoples. For centuries, San hunters used the **Hoodia gordonii** succulent to stave off hunger and thirst during long desert treks. This led to the scientific isolation of the molecule P57, which was patented for its potential as a treatment for obesity.
- **Cancer Bush (Sutherlandia frutescens)** is widely used by various South African cultures to treat a range of ailments. Modern research has validated its adaptogenic and immune-boosting properties, showing promise in supporting patients with HIV/AIDS and certain cancers by reducing muscle wasting and stress.
- The use of **Buchu (Agathosma betulina)** as a potent antiseptic for wound care, and a diuretic, was adopted by early settlers and eventually included in the British Pharmacopoeia. It remains a staple in the global flavour and fragrance industry, as well as in natural medicine.
- Long before modern "fire ecology", indigenous groups used fire and **controlled burning** to manage grasslands, prevent devastating wildfires,

and encourage the growth of specific plant species. This traditional practice is now a core component of fynbos and savanna management in national parks.

- The "**Social-Ecological Systems**" model – now a gold standard in conservation – is rooted in indigenous practices that strictly regulated the harvesting of bark, roots, and seafood based on lunar cycles and seasonal availability.
- Indigenous knowledge of drought-resistant crops like **African potato (Amadumbe)**, **cowpeas** and **Bambara groundnut** is currently being leveraged by biotechnologists to develop "future-proof" food sources in the face of climate change.

The list goes on. As it does in this edition, where we highlight, amongst other topics, recent developments regarding African Ginger and advances in acknowledging traditional healers and knowledge holders through National Qualifications Framework (NQF) accreditation, legitimising IKS disciplines.

More South Africans – especially our children – need to be taught about all these incredible (and very lekker) African contributions to science at large. It truly is something to be proud of. I hope you will find the read as insightful and inspiring as I did.



Fanie (RS) van Rooyen (Editor)