

Raising awareness on indigenous knowledge

In 2020 the North-West University (NWU) joined forces with the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) to position, develop and promote indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in South Africa, particularly the Indigenous Knowledge Act (IK Act) and the Bio-cultural Community Protocol (BCP).

The awareness campaign kicked off last year in the Northern Cape and Gauteng, and was recently extended to Caguba in the Port St Johns district and Ngqeleni in the Nyandeni district of the Eastern Cape.

The campaign was spearheaded by officials from the DSI's National Indigenous Knowledge Systems Office (NIKSO) and Legal Service Unit, together with Lesley Mashego and Otsile Maditsi from the NWU's Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Systems. The team also included facilitators employed by the DSI in response to the recommendation by Parliament that the campaign should be conducted in the language(s) of the various communities.

In Caguba a rigorous and positive engagement was held with the amaMpondo tribe of the Eastern Cape. The audience included community development workers, traditional leaders and healers, as well as members of the community.

During these sessions the team explained the purpose of the IK Act and the BCP. The IK Act focuses on the protection, promotion, management and development of indigenous knowledge in the country, and the BCP was adopted by the DSI as a tool to enforce the act. A BCP is a document that is developed after a community undertakes a consultative process to outline their core cultural and spiritual values and customary laws relating to their traditional knowledge and resources.

"The BCP is meant to provide clarity to community members about their rights and responsibilities, and



The awareness-raising sessions in the Eastern Cape were well attended.

outlines appropriate behaviour of both the community and those interacting with them," explains Lesley. "Adherence to these community protocols helps to ensure social cohesion and reinforces customary laws, values and decision-making processes."

Information was also shared about NWU's Bachelor's degree in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (BIKS).

"The NWU is the first tertiary institution to offer a BIKS degree as a strategic intervention in the development of human capital in indigenous knowledge systems," says Otsile. "We want to encourage young people to actively participate in the promotion and preservation of indigenous knowledge, and to consider the BIKS degree as a possible profession over and above the orthodox careers."

Written by Belinda Bantham, communications officer at North-West University.

IKS Job Summit

At the end of March, a National IKS Job Summit – themed 'Exploring decent work, productive employment and sustainable entrepreneurship prospects for IKS graduates: Cultivating grounds for grassroots innovation' – was held online over two days. Currently, four universities have registered bachelor's degrees or are in the process of doing so, but the vast majority of IKS graduates have been unable to find employment in their field. In his keynote address, Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande, said that the summit provided a platform to brainstorm and find strategies and plans to address this problem. He suggested that a database of all unemployed and underemployed IKS graduates be compiled to assist government, in partnership with other stakeholders, to provide intervention measures through work integrated learning, internships, job opportunities and training in entrepreneurship.