

Media release
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The CSIR shares milestone payments with two Lephhalale communities

Two communities from the Lephhalale area in Limpopo will receive milestone payments from the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) resulting from the development of a non-carbohydrate sweetener.

The CSIR scientists investigated the properties of indigenous plant *Molomo monate* (loosely translated “nice mouth” in Sotho) by extracting and characterising a non-carbohydrate sweetener from this plant thus Monatin (nice).

As the indigenous knowledge holders, the two communities, namely the Shongoane and Seleka communities, will receive a payment of R2.6 million, which will be paid into the National Bioprospecting Trust Fund from where the funds will be distributed to the communities.

“Based on an analysis of the CSIR’s historical milestone and royalty income streams, and taking into consideration directly attributable costs in generating such income, and in negotiations with the communities and the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), it was agreed that an amount of R2.6 million will be paid to the indigenous knowledge holders,” says CSIR Research and Development Outcomes manager for biosciences, Tshidi Moroka.

The CSIR has a history of working with communities and indigenous knowledge holders on the use of plants and indigenous knowledge to develop value-added products. *Schlerochiton ilicifolius*, the scientific name of *Molomo monate*, is one of the plants that the CSIR researched. Scientists discovered that Monatin was more than 1 400 times sweeter than the normal sugar although it is a non-nutritive sweetener. The CSIR first filed a patent on this discovery in 1988 and various related patents followed.

The CSIR, through its wholly owned subsidiary, Technifin (Pty) Ltd.

signed a licence agreement with Cargill, a multinational company in 2004 and received milestone payments in 2004, 2006 and 2013, which can now be shared with the identified communities.

Process followed for selection of beneficiaries

In 2004, the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act was promulgated, stating that in the case where indigenous knowledge and plants are used and monetary benefits accrue, the communities or indigenous knowledge holders have to share in the benefits. After a lengthy process, the communities were identified by the Department of Science and Technology, the DEA and the Limpopo provincial Department of Environmental Affairs, which were part of a working committee formed by the CSIR.

In 2008, after the bioprospecting and benefit-sharing regulations were promulgated, the CSIR applied for a bioprospecting permit for *Molomo monate*, which was granted in 2012. This was one of the first such permits to be granted in South Africa.

“The two communities of Shongoane and Seleka, with whom the benefit-sharing agreement was concluded, were identified through the above process and with the assistance of the DEA; that agreement was gazetted in the *Government Gazette*. All benefits will be paid into the National Bioprospecting Trust Fund, which will manage further distribution,” says Moroka.

Representing the community, Molokomme Seletja of the Seleka Traditional Council says the money will be used for the beneficiation of the community. “The community appreciates this payment from the CSIR as it will help in community development. We have needs in the community and this money will help in fulfilling these needs,” says Seletja.

“This payment is testimonial that our indigenous knowledge does add value to society. Who knew that a plant we call *Molomo monate* could benefit the community in this manner. To us it was just another plant that we knew for its sweetness until the CSIR came along,” says Simon Makgae, Shongoane community spokesperson.

Any future benefits from the programme are dependent on future development of the project and successful regulatory approvals.