



The Informal Economy of Wild Harvested Traditional Medicine in Cape Town



Sustainable
Livelihoods
Foundation

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Introduction

> The Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation FIME project team has been conducting path breaking research on South Africa's informal economy of micro-entrepreneurs. Of the thousands of businesses encountered during the extensive field work process across eight township localities in Cape Town and Johannesburg, the business activity of traditional healing emerged as a predominant ethno-culturally driven business within South Africa's informal economy. This brief outlines the findings of SLF's research into the informal economy of traditional medicine, and summarizes various research documents presently in the process of peer review for academic publication.

TRADITIONAL HEALING IN SOUTH AFRICA

South African traditional healers take numerous forms, invariably linked to their respective cultural identities. Prominent types include sangomas (shaman ancestor worshippers), inyangas (herbalists) and Rastafarian herbalists. All commonly work to resolve cultural afflictions and medical problems with specific herbal treatments and/or ancestor inspired wild medicine blends. The industry is primarily based on the use of biological ingredients as medicines that have been wild-harvested by the practitioners themselves. South Africa's trade of wild medicines has been estimated at R2 billion per year, based on 200,000 practitioners serving potentially 27 million South African consumers. The traditional medicine service has high consumer demand, with SLF consumer research revealing that nearly two thirds of black South Africans have reported to have used wild harvested medicine within the previous year.

Unlike much of South Africa which has a rich research basis for understanding the traditional medicine trade, Cape Town's industry of traditional healing is both less obvious and under explored. Conservation authorities are reporting increased incidences of wild resource harvesting from protected areas in the City, including the confiscation of more than 16,000 bulbs of known traditional medicines from illicit harvesters in the past two years in the 300 ha Tygerberg Nature Reserve. When taking into consideration the rapid population growth of the City in the last few decades, the growing prominence of South Africa's informal (cash) economy, the high consumer demand for traditional medicines amongst most South Africans and the unique conservation value of the city which is situated within the Cape Floristic Kingdom (CFR), SLF's current research is crucial in enhancing our understanding of this culturally important local economy of traditional medicine. Through developing a platform

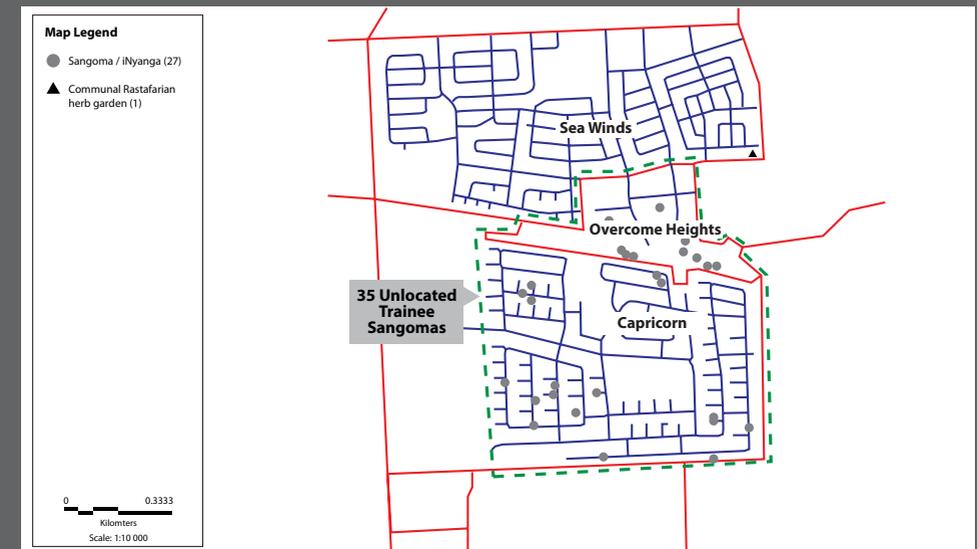
of evidence regarding this activity, the potential for developing increasingly ecologically and economically sustainable interventions for this culturally important industry becomes possible.

The research

Over the course of the FIME research process the SLF team conducted fieldwork in Delft, Vrygrond (consisting of the three separate communities of Seawinds, Overcome Heights and Capricorn) and Philippi (Sweet Home and Browns Farm) to locate traditional healing businesses. The SLF research team traversed across these townships on bicycle and by foot, progressively covering these areas street by street within the suburb boundaries. The combined area comprises of approximately 36,262 households, with

a population of approximately 160,000 people. All interviews consisted of primarily open-ended questions around the nature of the business of traditional healing, the medicines traded and consumer preferences.

The SLF researchers piloted a qualitative and quantitative interview process with traditional healer businesses and traditional medicine consumers (through a value chain approach) as a means of dissecting the harvest, trade and consumer demands for wild-harvested medicines in the City. The research aimed to develop economic, ecological and cultural sustainability insights based on the current state of this business activity, with a view to developing a strategy to respond to these threats to this economic and ecological sustainability.



GPS recorded distribution of traditional healers in Capricorn, Overcome Heights and Seawinds communities – as revealed by research participant networking

MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

The spatial dynamics

The research identified hundreds of traditional healers of varying typologies within the city. Extensive interviews were conducted with 100 practitioners. Within Overcome Heights and Capricorn (~30,000 residents) 27 practising traditional healers including sangomas (25) and inyangas (2) were located and interviewed.

A further 35 non-practising, predominately trainee sangomas were also encountered, although they were excluded from further analysis as they were only intermittently practising the trade. A further 15 practising Rasta herbalists (all of coloured ethnicity) in neighbouring Seawinds (7,689 residents), were located operating from a communal herbalist nursery.

In all cases the great majority of raw biological material was wild-harvested by the retailer themselves, with supplies 'topped up' by the purchase of additional items from other traditional healers or traditional pharmacists.

In the case of sangomas self-conducted harvesting ensures cultural authenticity which is a pre-requisite for clients. This pre-requisite emphasizes that sangomas - as guided by ancestral deities - must play a critical role in the harvest, processing and administering of traditional medicines. Similarly, Rastas highlighted that harvesting must

only occur from natural habitats by knowledgeable Rastas. Both of these healer types went to considerable lengths to detail the importance of sourcing wild-grown materials.

Different healer types relied on different regions for sourcing their wild harvested materials. For Sangomas, the Eastern Cape (almost always their place of birth) was the area of greatest harvesting importance. Conversely Western Cape born Rastas primarily conducted wild harvesting in the Western Cape and around the City.

Rasta herbalists are the largest individual extractors of biological material, harvesting an average of 360 kg per healer per year, with Coloured Rastas collecting 72% of biomass in the Western Cape or the City. Overall wild harvesting by inyangas and sangomas is less and these users are primarily reliant on materials from outside the province. The nature of wild resource reliance and regional variation of wild harvesting activities by different healer types has important implications for conservation management.

The wild harvest of materials in Cape Town is substantial, with more than 220 plant species collected in, and around the vicinity of the metropolitan area, and a similar number imported from surrounding South African provinces. These species are blended together in specific medicinal mixes - of which 60 medicines are commonly prepared.



Herbalist Rastafarian, Seawinds.



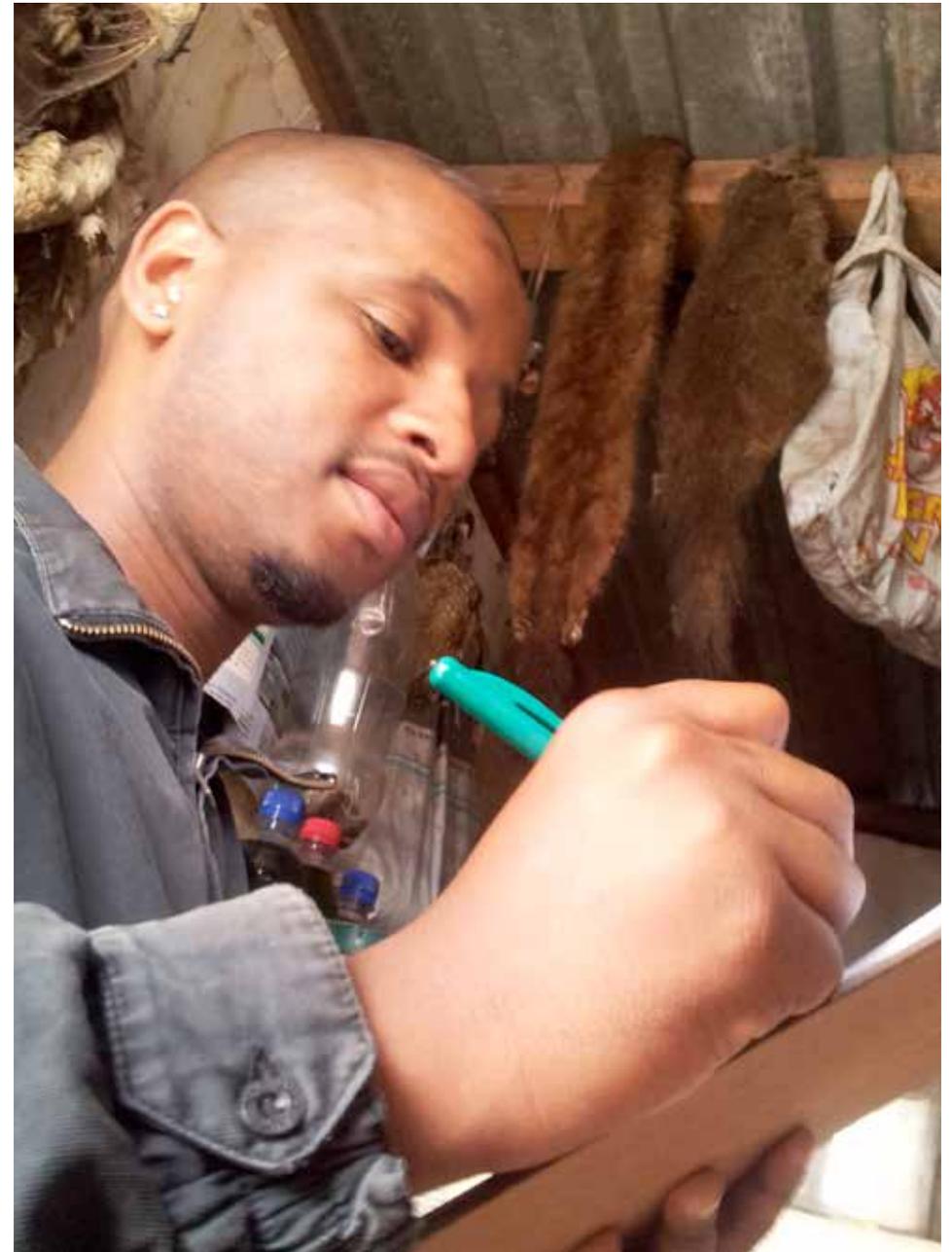
Practising sangomas in Vrygrond.



Immigrant traditional 'doctors' have introduced a more commercial approach to the informal traditional medicine sector.



There is a culture of 'brotherhood' within the Rastafarian community.



Interviewing a traditional healer at their shop in Philippi.

Estimating the population of traditional healers in Cape Town

Using the City of Cape Town population estimates for 2011, combined with average densities of rastas and sangomas across the entire FIME population sample, the City population of practicing traditional healers was estimated to be 4,600 practitioners. Predominant groups were sangomas (2,400 individuals) and Rasta herbalists (1,900 individuals).

Estimating wild harvest volumes

Based on the individual harvest loads by specific healer types, and the estimated number of traditional healers within Cape Town, the total volume of harvested materials traded within the City can be estimated.

The total annual estimate of wild harvested medicine currently traded in the City, across all healer types is 1,100 tonnes of biological material.

Within the Cape Town area approximately 217 tonnes of biological material are extracted by traditional healers for medicinal purposes every year. These extractions are primarily conducted by Rasta herbalists who extract ~98 kg of material each per year (when individually, incrementally gathered this equates to under 2 kg per harvester each week). Western Cape wild lands provide 279 tonnes of biological material for traditional medicinal use annually. Some is harvested from formalised arrangements between

CapeNature and Rasta populations outside the city. Once again, the data shows that Rasta herbalists harvest the most materials at 136 kg each per year.

Eastern Cape harvesting data reveals the importance of cultural origin for sangomas when sourcing wild harvested traditional medicines. Over 500 tonnes of biological material was harvested from the Eastern Cape for use as traditional medicines in Cape Town over the past year.

The value of the trade

Based on average monthly incomes reported by traditional healers (sangomas earn R2,100, and Rastas earn R2,000 per month from the trade) Cape Town's trade in bush medicine is worth approximately R115 million per year. This direct use value is not included in any economic analysis and points to a considerable undervaluation of local natural capital. Including Cape Town, the Western Cape (and largely CFR) biological capital contribution of natural resources for the Cape Town informal economy of traditional healing is worth R53 million per year. The Cape Town vicinity biological contribution to this economy is R23 million per year – which is greater than the annual municipal budget of R22 million for local biodiversity conservation (including management of 24 protected areas).

Recommendations

This situation presents a considerable challenge to policy makers who will

Table 1: Average traditional healer reliance per year for biological materials, according to general localities of harvest

Healer type	Cape Town*	Western Cape	Eastern Cape	Johannesburg	Mpumalanga	KwaZulu Natal	Swaziland	Malawi	Zimbabwe	Limpopo	Total
Sangoma	5	6	114	11	4	17	1	1	1	1	161 kg
	3%	4%	71%	7%	2%	11%					
Rasta herbalists (Coloured)	97	138	74	0	4	10	3	0	0	0	326 kg
	30%	42%	23%		1%	3%	1%				

Table 2: Relative total harvest volumes by Cape Town healer types for wild harvested medicine resources

Healer type	Total volume harvested for Cape Town trade (Kg)
Sangoma	417,473
Rasta herbalists (Coloured)	557,786
Other groups	159,585
Total	1,134,844



Neville van Schalkwyk and the Seawinds common ground garden.

to balance the priorities of socio-economic development and the cultural need by the majority of Cape Town's residents, where policy makers will need to coordinate the behavior of many thousands of mostly non-connected wild resource harvesters, whilst maintaining ecosystem function in largely fragmented natural habitat areas. In the face of these considerable challenges, innovative solutions to preserving this culturally important industry are required.

SLF is piloting a project in response to this development challenge. In conjunction with the Rasta herbalist community of Seawinds, SLF have piloted a collaborative programme of landscape restoration utilizing culturally important medicinal plants. The approach is entitled "Creating Common Ground" and involves propagating locally indigenous

medicinally important plant species in a nursery environment, for planting in degraded public open spaces in poor residential areas. The project mixes urban greening with local economic development by establishing open access medicine gardens of culturally useful plants. The intervention bolsters conservation efforts through potentially reducing the need for wildily sourced materials, and the culture and business of medicinal plant use in ways compatible with informal economy function.

Although current healer preferences are for (potentially declining) stocks of wild grown materials, planting medicinally important species in urban landscapes will serve to broaden conservation awareness, and brings about future biological stocks for medicinal use – thereby reducing pressure on protected areas.

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