

Sutherlandia frutescens: The meeting of science and traditional knowledge

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FIG. 1. *Sutherlandia frutescens*, showing seedpods and flowers. Photo courtesy of Dr. Merlin Willcox (November 3, 2011).

Introduction

Sutherlandia frutescens (L.) R.Br. (syn. *Lessertia frutescens* (L.) Goldblatt and J.C. Manning) is an indigenous medicinal plant extensively used in South Africa to treat a variety of health conditions. It is a fairly widespread, drought-resistant plant that grows in the Western, Eastern, and Northern Cape provinces and some areas of KwaZulu-Natal, varying in its chemical and genetic makeup across these geographic areas.¹ *Sutherlandia* is widely used as a traditional medicine. Extensive scientific studies are being carried out on the safety, quality, and the efficacy of this medicinal plant to validate the traditional claims, elucidate the bioactive constituents, and conduct clinical trials. This has resulted in a unique situation in South Africa's history, where traditional knowledge and science intersect to provide insight into this popular plant. This photoessay attempts to illustrate the interlinkage of science with the indigenous knowledge of traditional healers, the local knowledge of people who care for the sick, product development, and innovation agenda of the country as it relates to this plant. The essay shows how *S. frutescens*, as a medicinal plant, and the study of its pharmacologic components are represented and understood differently, yet with a similar aim: to enhance its safety. The essay explores the plant as

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