

Exchange of Korean and South African science skills in the new year

Several scientists from CSIR Biosciences are set to exchange science skills and colleagues with their Korean counterparts in the new year. This follows the recent signing of a memorandum of agreement between the CSIR and the Korea Institute of Science and Technology (KIST).

Dr Vinesh Maharaj, who leads the bioprospecting research group, is the main contact between the CSIR and KIST and explained that the institutions will jointly explore the potential South African medicinal plants hold for the treatment of various diseases.

Maharaj said they would focus on plant-based leads for anti-cancer drugs and treatment of Alzheimers disease while several local researchers would visit Korea from March 2009 as part of a joint experiential programme. Korean scientists will visit the CSIR to tap into the repository of more than 30 000 indigenous plant extracts housed in cold rooms at CSIR Biosciences.

"They'll be applying new technology to our biodiversity, in particular novel biological assays for the identification of active ingredients," says Maharaj.

CSIR Biosciences have also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Korean Research Institute of Bioscience and Biotechnology. This agreement seals a deal to exploit South African biodiversity to aid research into new treatments for cancer and diabetes which is a problem in mainly Western countries. This agreement will also take effect in 2009.