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## **The First San Code of Research Ethics Developed for Protecting San Indigenous Knowledge**

On March 2, 2017, as part of an EU-funded TRUST project, which promotes global research ethics, three South African San groups—the !Khomani, the !Xun and the Khwe—have developed their own Code of Research Ethics with the assistance of the South African San Institute. This code reflects the San people's own values and aims to put an end to more than a century of invasive and exploitative research. The San Code of Research Ethics is the first code of conduct for research to be developed by a vulnerable indigenous group in Africa. The San hope that it will empower other groups and communities who are also at risk of exploitation.

The San peoples of southern Africa are known to have the oldest human DNA on earth, so they have been subjects in population-wide genomic research aimed at understanding various aspects of human evolution. The Code also describes how many companies in South Africa and around the world are benefiting from San traditional knowledge in the sale of indigenous plant varieties without any of the benefits being shared with the indigenous people. As Lydia Kruiper, a Khomami San community member, said in a TRUST Project interview (2016), “We just give of our vision and our talents to them, and we would also like to give something back to our people, but out of this deal we get nothing.” Mario Mahongo, a !Xun Traditional leader, said, “As community members we want to be part of research, which should be for the benefit of the community, not only for researchers.”

There are global codes for research ethics such as the Declaration of Helsinki, but these locally developed codes can help ensure a more equitable relationship between researchers and participants at a local level. “The local code of ethics will ensure that researchers who come to the Kalahari will be aware of local context and cultural sensitivities,” said Professor Doris Schroder, a TRUST coordinator.

The San Code of Research Ethics is available on the TRUST project website.

Watch the TRUST Project Global Research Ethics interview from September 2016 “Protecting San Indigenous Knowledge From a Research Contract to a San Code of Ethics.”