



S.E.T. for socio-economic growth

National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF)

media release

Harnessing nature's pharmacy for healthier communities

Celebrating Prof Namrita Lall on African Traditional Medicine Day, 31 August 2026

Nature has long provided humanity with remedies to treat disease, relieve suffering and promote wellbeing. Across Africa, generations have relied on traditional medicinal knowledge, much of which continues to inspire modern scientific discovery and pharmaceutical innovation.

As the continent commemorates [African Traditional Medicine Day](#) on 31 August, the [National Science and Technology Forum \(NSTF\)](#) proudly honours **Prof Namrita Lall**, recipient of the Innovation Award: Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise (SMME), of the [2025 NSTF-South32 Awards](#), known as the "Science Oscars" of South Africa (SA). This award is sponsored by the [National Intellectual Property Management Office \(NIPMO\)](#). She was recognised for developing innovative, science-based natural health and skincare products from African medicinal plants, successfully translating decades of research into commercially viable products that improve health while promoting the sustainable use of indigenous biodiversity.

"My work is not just about the research. It's about restoring value to our traditional knowledge, empowering women and youth, and creating products that the world needs," says Prof Lall.



Left to right: The Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Prof Blade Nzimande, Prof Namrita Lall, and Ms Mariwa Tshabalala, Deputy Director, Funds and Incentives Management at NIPMO

About Prof Lall: She is the DSTI-NRF Research Chair in Phytomedicine at the University of Pretoria (UP). Throughout her career, she has combined indigenous knowledge (IK), natural product chemistry and biotechnology to develop safe, effective and evidence-based health and skincare solutions.

Her research focuses on identifying biologically active compounds from indigenous plants that can be used to treat skin disorders, infectious diseases and other health conditions. Rather than relying solely on traditional claims, she applies advanced scientific techniques to isolate, test and validate plant-derived compounds, ensuring their safety, efficacy and quality.

One of her greatest achievements has been successfully translating laboratory research into commercially available products. Her work also contributes to biodiversity conservation by promoting the sustainable use of SA's rich plant resources. Her research encourages responsible harvesting practices and adds value to indigenous plant species, supporting local communities and helping preserve valuable IK for future generations.

"We follow SA's bioprospecting and benefit-sharing legislation closely. The communities where we work are always involved and benefit from scientific validation of their ancestral wisdom."

Reflecting on her work, she has emphasised the importance of bridging IK and modern science to develop innovative health solutions that are both scientifically credible and socially beneficial.

Her contribution demonstrates how African medicinal plants can serve as a foundation for innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainable development while improving public health.

Beyond scientific discovery, she has mentored numerous postgraduate students, empowering many young scientists to become innovators and entrepreneurs. Her work demonstrates that research excellence can simultaneously improve healthcare, protect biodiversity, strengthen local economies and preserve Africa's IK systems.

"Our students are not only getting a degree, we are actually doing something that could benefit mankind."

African Traditional Medicine Day: This significant day was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) after the ministers of health adopted a resolution at the 50th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa in Burkina Faso. The day recognises the important role that traditional medicine (from IK) plays in strengthening healthcare systems across Africa. It also highlights the need to integrate scientifically validated traditional medicine into national health systems while encouraging research, innovation and quality assurance.

Traditional medicine remains an essential source of healthcare for millions of people across the continent, particularly in communities where access to conventional healthcare services may be limited. Medicinal IK has been passed down through generations and continues to provide valuable insights into the prevention and treatment of disease.

Scientific research has become increasingly important in validating the safety, quality and effectiveness of traditional medicines. By combining IK with modern scientific methods, researchers can develop innovative healthcare products, create new economic opportunities and contribute to biodiversity conservation.

This day also raises awareness of the importance of protecting IK, promoting ethical research practices and ensuring that local communities benefit from the sustainable use of medicinal plant resources. The work of scientists such as Prof Lall demonstrates how research and innovation can transform traditional knowledge into globally competitive products that improve lives while preserving Africa's natural heritage.

Call to action: The NSTF encourages government, funders of research, investors and policymakers to support scientific research into African medicinal plants and IK systems. Investing in research, innovation and sustainable commercialisation of traditional medicine has the potential to improve healthcare, create employment opportunities and strengthen SA's and Africa's bioeconomy. *See also the [IK-based Technology Innovation Investment Summit](#) held by the NSTF alongside the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DST&I) in June 2026 for more interesting information and discussion.*

To young people: The NSTF encourages young people to pursue studies and careers in medicinal plant science, pharmacology, biotechnology, botany, chemistry, microbiology and other health-related STEM disciplines. (STEM = science, technology, engineering and mathematics.) These fields play a vital role in advancing scientific research, developing innovative healthcare solutions and promoting the sustainable use of Africa's rich biodiversity and IK. See the [NSTF Careers Booklet](#), particularly the career fields related to health sciences, biological sciences, biotechnology and chemistry, to learn more about STEM careers that contribute to improving health and wellbeing. Explore the NSTF's online learning platform, [STEMulator.org](#), where learners can discover a wide range of STEM careers and educational resources that inspire the next generation of scientists, innovators and entrepreneurs. Have a look in particular, at information on the agriculture section of the platform: [STEMulator_Agriculture](#); and the following careers:

- Botany: <https://www.stemulator.org/Careers/botanist.html>;
- Bio-chemistry: <https://www.stemulator.org/Careers/biochemist.html>
- Genetics: <https://www.stemulator.org/Careers/geneticist.html>

About the NSTF and the NSTF-South32 Awards: NSTF is an independent non-profit stakeholder body and network – a civil-society forum of over [150 member organisations across six membership sectors](#), involved in science, engineering, technology (SET) and innovation in SA.

The [NSTF-South32 Awards](#) is famously known as the 'Science Oscars' of SA and recognise excellence in SET and innovation in SA with 20 awards across [16 categories](#). The [gala dinners](#) to announce this year's [winners](#) took place on 16 July 2026.

Join the NSTF's conversations on social media:

- LinkedIn: [National Science and Technology Forum \(NSTF\)](#)
- Facebook: [@NSTFSA](#)
- X: [@NSTF_SA](#)
- Instagram: [@nstf_sa](#)
- YouTube: [National Science and Technology Forum \(NSTF\)](#)
- TikTok: [nstf_sa](#) (listen to [science career talks](#) on this platform)

References

- <https://nstf.org.za/awards/>
- <https://nstf.org.za/2026/04/16/prof-namrita-lall/>
- <https://www.up.ac.za/academic-achievers/professor-namrita-lall>
- <https://www.up.ac.za/research-matters/news/traditional-knowledge-enhance-modern-medicine-0>
- https://www.who.int/health-topics/traditional-complementary-and-integrative-medicine#tab=tab_1
- <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-09-2025-south-africa-celebrates-african-traditional-medicine-day-with-national-commemoration>

About the NSTF

The National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF), established in 1995:

- is a broadly-representative stakeholder body for all science, engineering and technology (SET) and innovation organisations in South Africa
- gathers stakeholders around burning issues of national and global interest, across the public and private sectors, including matters of public policy
- includes a network of professional societies in SET and STEM education (STEM = science, technology, engineering and mathematics) - the NSTF proSET membership sector.
- recognises, awards and profiles the outstanding contributions of individuals and groups to SET and innovation through the prestigious NSTF Awards
- runs and supports collaborative projects and youth outreach, including recognition of top performance in mathematics and science, role modelling, bursary and STEM career information
- runs and supports the STEMulator.org which attracts youth and educators to Explore>Discover>Learn the world of STEM including careers. (Established by NSTF proSET)

For more information

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