UFS tea farming project gets financial boost

The University of the Free State's Department of Pharmacology has received a combined R15m from two South African government departments for the establishment of four tea farms in disadvantaged communities in the North West and Eastern Cape. The head of the project Professor Motlalepula Matsabisa at the Department of Pharmacology said that that Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) has granted an amount of R10m for the community research in the respective provinces.

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This grant is a top-up to the R5 million they received from the Department of Science and Technology for the "community implementation on indigenous health infusions or teas as commonly known."

The DEA will in the near future sign a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the university.

"The project is to implement and build structures in the four communities we work within the North West and Eastern Cape," said Matsabisa.

The identified areas for the project are in the Eastern Cape towns of Alice and Idutywa as well another two North West communities in Zeerust.

Matsabisa indicated that the project will be a manifestation of "how science can contribute to economic growth, poverty

alleviation and job creation."

He stated that a project of this nature is a good initiative by the UFS and it will also show that the university's research activities are national. "We have been researching and developing indigenous teas which have now attracted interest locally and internationally by companies such as Nestle, Tiger Brands, Moringa World, etc.," he said.

At the initial stages of the tea farming project, Matsabisa said they would start in small portions of utilising five hectares in each of the four projects and as the project gains momentum, they would expand.

Matsabisa added that an environmental impact assessment has already been conducted and that they were waiting for the DEA to give them a go ahead for the land preparations.