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The Story of Hoodia

The southern African countries of South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Angola are the abode of Hoodia gordonii. The San Bushmen who inhabits the Kalahari Desert had through generations transmitted their knowledge of the various uses of Hoodia. Of these uses, its use as an appetite suppressant was known to the outside world for some time. The San people used it to suppress their hunger during hunting expeditions that lasted a few days. The Hoodia extract was subject to scientific investigation by the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) who patented the extract as P57 in 1997. CSIR sold the exclusive right to its use to Phytopharm, a British pharmaceutical company. Phytopharm granted the license to production to Pfizer. But Hoodia became a craze as a weight loss product much later when BBC reported on its use in 2003 and 60 Minutes in the next year.

Hoodia became a favorite weight loss product in the global market. But the fact that this knowledge was owned by San Bushmen was simply not remembered or acknowledged. The media then raked up this issue accusing Phytopharm of biopiracy. Confronted with this, Phytopharm lamely defended itself saying that the San people no longer existed when tens of thousands of them actually inhabited the southern African countries covering the Kalahari Desert. CSIR then admitted in 2003 that the San people were the source of this knowledge and that a portion of the royalty would indeed be shared with them. It is estimated that 0.003 percent of the retail sales were to be their share. This was a pittance though the point was well taken. Meanwhile, Pfizer returned Phytopharm the production rights who later transferred the rights to Unilever. Unilever were into production of diet foods such as Slim Fast. The company announced its intention to produce functional foods with Hoodia as the main ingredient.

Meanwhile Hoodia began to be marketed widely by a number of companies who claimed that their product contained Hoodia. These are available in a variety of forms as liquid, shakes, powder, capsules and pills such as Dex-L10 Hoodia, Hoodia Pure, Hoodia Extract, HoodiThin Liquid, Tru Hoodia Diet, H57 Hoodia, Hoodia SlimQuick, Hoodia Gordonii Shake Mix, Hoodia Shake, Hoodia Supreme, Hoodoba, and Desert Burn. Hoodia, in most cases, are combined with a few other useful items. Some Hoodia products are marketed for specific sections of consumers for instance [Slimquick Hoodia diet](#) which combines calcium, Vitamin D3 and Green Tea for women.

In the meanwhile Phytopharm acquired two more patents for the treatment of gastric disorders. More patent applications have been subsequently filed. There are other potential uses of the Hoodia such as sexual dysfunction, and the operation of glands such as the sweat, saliva and prostrate glands.