



Intellectual Property, Regional Integration and Economic Growth in Africa

A pan-African forum to be held April 3-5, 2012

The Dynamic Role of IP Protection and Enforcement in Promoting Knowledge-Based Economies Through Innovation, Trade, and Investment

Background

Intellectual property (IP) rights protection is a vital aspect of the broader challenge of building a trade and investment enabling environment and facilitating Africa's efforts to promote economic development through innovation. Protection of IP rights encourages the development of new technologies to increase agricultural and industrial production, promotes domestic and foreign investment and facilitates technology transfer and trade – all of which contribute to social and economic growth. As Africa seeks to develop globally competitive value-added products, recruit investment in knowledge-based industries, spur innovation and increase trade, it must build and improve its capacity to protect intellectual property rights. In addition, effective IP protection is vital to protecting public health and safety. Counterfeit goods, including pharmaceuticals, food, electronics and other consumer goods, are often of substandard quality and have caused injury and death across Africa.

Africa has become a target for an increasing amount of counterfeit and pirated goods. From often dangerous counterfeit medicines to pirated films and music, Africa's path to economic development is impeded by the limited capacity for IP protection and enforcement. It is in this milieu that the U.S., French and Japanese governments, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and the African intellectual property organizations continue to engage with countries and regions in Africa on ways to build and improve their IP capacity.

As a natural outgrowth of many bilateral and regional interventions/consultations, it has become evident that there is a need for a continent-wide forum for African and international businesses, government officials, IP organizations, and IP stakeholders to bring needed visibility to these issues and address the many challenges. This continent-wide forum will enhance intellectual property protection and enforcement regimes that encourage innovation, trade and investment, while protecting public health and safety.

Issues

- Role of IP management, branding and value capture in improving innovation, entrepreneurship, trade and investment
- Role of IP in protecting public health and safety
- Role of IP in fostering creativity and building dynamic culture
- Technological and regulatory solutions to combat ever-increasing counterfeiting and piracy
- Regional and national coordination of IP protection and enforcement within governments and between industry and governments
- Facilitation of innovation – voluntary technology transfer, licensing, commercialization
- Realizing potential of creative industries (music, film, books)
- Copyright exceptions for the print disabled
- Targeted IP outreach and public awareness
- Discussion of traditional cultural expression and traditional knowledge in IP

Objectives

To highlight the integral and critical role of IP in the economic growth and development of Africa; and to bring together international, regional and national private sector and government stakeholders, to emphasize the successes, challenges and strategies to the establishment of strong intellectual property regimes that encourage innovation and entrepreneurship, and improve trade and investment, while protecting public health and safety in Africa.

Project Description

The U.S. government, in concert with WIPO, the African regional intellectual property organizations (OAPI and ARIPO), and the governments of South Africa, Japan and France, will develop and hold a continent-wide IP forum for African and international business, international government officials, IP organizations, and IP stakeholders, to discuss the integral and critical role of IP in African economic growth through the incentivizing of creation, innovation, trade, and investment.

The three-day forum will bring approximately 600 artists, entrepreneurs, industry stakeholders and government officials from across the African continent, the U.S. and from international organizations to Cape Town, South Africa April 3-5, 2012. The participants will engage each other in a series of plenary and breakout sessions which will encompass the primary issues under enforcement, management and use of IP. Additionally, the private sector may hold an accompanying trade fair and/or benefit concert by African musical artists to highlight the plight of many IP stakeholders who are suffering from piracy and counterfeiting. Major African and international news organizations will be invited to cover the events and outcomes related to this forum.

Outcomes

- Encourage public/private partnerships to facilitate entrepreneurship and innovation through licensing, voluntary technology transfer, branding, financing and promotion
- A private sector declaration on the importance of IP protection to trade and investment decision-making
- Increase adoption of technological solutions to counterfeiting
- Strengthen cooperation and collaboration between relevant government IP enforcement and protection agencies, regional organizations, and industries across the different regions of Africa
- Share best practices for targeted IP outreach programs on the role of IP in protecting public health and safety
- Promote knowledge-based economies through the adoption of IP policies and guidelines by the Regional Economic Communities on the management of IP, promotion of innovation, and enforcement against counterfeit, pirated and substandard goods

For more information about taking part in this first-ever Africa IP Forum, please contact the Commercial Law Development Program at the U.S. Department of Commerce: AfricaIPSummit@doc.gov.