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### **ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF INVENTORS' ASSOCIATIONS**

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**CONTENTS**

	Pages
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	3
<b>2 MALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF RESEARCH, INVENTION AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION (AMPRIT)</b>	3-4
<b>3 INFORMATION</b>	4-5
<b>4 PROMOTION</b>	5
<b>5 AMPRIT'S FUTURE ACTION</b>	6
<b>6 CONCLUSION</b>	6

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

In Africa, invention and innovation have to confront the inadequacy, or even absence, of specific policies in almost all countries. This lacuna can be seen in the low level of resources allocated to research and development and the lack of structures to promote the results of research and development and invention. Nevertheless, African researchers and inventors remain active.

In African countries, many inventors and researchers have developed technology and products adapted to local conditions that meet the needs of the population in Africa and elsewhere. These inventions usually concern systems for production, conservation and processing (dehusking machinery, mills, presses, etc.) in various agricultural, agro-industrial and medico-pharmaceutical sectors. Despite their modest means, some inventors have gone on to exploit their inventions. They manufacture them on a small or semi-industrial scale. Taking the patents granted by the OAPI to nationals of its 15 member States as an example, less than 1 per cent start to be exploited.

If we really want to encourage invention and innovation, we must first focus on this special creative being.

In order to do this, there must be a policy to promote invention and innovation that takes account of the inventor as the pivotal element and there must be synergy between action by government bodies and by inventors' groups and associations. It is in this way that society will derive the greatest benefit from inventive activity.

## **2 MALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF RESEARCH, INVENTION AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION (AMPRIT)**

A study of the situation of research and inventions in Mali has revealed the following:

- a) the predominant role played by research in economic and social development;
- b) the problems hampering the development of research, invention and technological innovation, in particular:
  - scientific isolation;
  - lack of motivation;
  - absence of a policy on inventions;
  - lack of esteem for researchers and their inventions.

In order to overcome these difficulties and to ensure healthy imitation of inventors in our country, there needs to be an effective policy for the promotion of inventive activity and action by government bodies needs to be backed up by that of inventors' associations, which was why the Malian Association for the Promotion of Research, Invention and Technological Innovation (AMPRIT) was set up.

The Malian Association for the Promotion of Research, Invention and Technological Innovation (AMPRIT) was established on February 6, 1993, with the following objectives:

- to promote research, invention and technological innovation in Mali;
- to defend the material and moral interests of researchers and inventors.

To reach these objectives, the Association has adopted the following strategies:

### 3 INFORMATION

- a) To provide researchers, decision-makers and beneficiaries with regular information on the general situation of research, invention and technological innovation, particularly in the following areas:
  - human resources;
  - structures and their potential;
  - priority areas;
  - major results achieved.
- b) To make available to researchers, inventors and innovators, free of charge, all information on the state of science and technology in their respective fields.

This assistance is given by the National Directorate of Industry in the following form:

- providing researchers and inventors with the technical and scientific information to be found in patent documents so as to allow them to evaluate the technical and legal levels of their invention. For this purpose, the National Directorate of Industry has a collection of around 10,000 specifications for patents granted by the African Intellectual Property Organization (OAPI) and several databases on CD-Rom concerning inventive activities in Europe and the United States of America;
- the preparation of research reports on the state of the art in given fields by the national and international institutions with which it cooperates;
- helping to inform inventors and promote awareness among them through the regular organization of seminars and visits to enterprises;
- assistance to inventors in preparing and filing their patent applications;
- helping inventors to benefit from the quota of five free patents granted to national inventors by OAPI each year.

- c) Making researchers and their work better known, using appropriate means such as:
- organizing invention and innovation exhibitions and facilitating participation in international conferences and exhibitions on inventions: for example, the Malian Association for the Promotion of Research, Invention and Technological Innovation helped Malian inventors to participate in the following:
    - the Geneva International Exhibition of Inventions in April 1996. The two inventors received silver medals;
    - the African Exhibition of Inventions in Dakar in December 1997;
    - a woman inventor received the prize for best woman inventor in Africa.
  - proposing annual prizes for research, invention and technological innovation:
    - in March 1995, an inventor received first prize from the President of the Republic for his creativeness. His invention concerned new Bogolan printing technology.
  - designating a National Research, Invention and Technological Innovation Day.

#### **4 PROMOTION**

Encouraging healthy imitation of researchers and inventors by:

- a) establishing a National Fund for Research, Invention and Technological Innovation;
- b) awarding prizes and titles to researchers;
- c) inciting industrialists to use the results of scientific and technological research;
- d) encouraging the inventive spirit of schoolchildren and students by organizing competitions in schools and universities.

Since it was set up, AMPRIT has joined the International Federation of Inventors' Associations (IFIA), which groups inventors' associations in 68 different countries.

## **5 AMPRIT'S FUTURE ACTION**

Future action by the Malian Association for the Promotion of Research, Invention and Technological Innovation will mainly focus on encouraging the Government to adopt energetic policies to promote inventive activity such as the following:

- a) including the exploitation of an invention or research findings in the Investment Code;
- b) achieving major priority objectives in the socio-economic field which will have a beneficial impact on invention and innovation;
- c) establishing mechanisms, ways and means to assist inventors with a view to the development and industrial exploitation of their inventions;
- d) creating a National Fund for the Promotion of Research, Invention and Innovation.

In addition, the Malian Association for the Promotion of Research, Invention and Technological Innovation welcomes the establishment of a Fund for the Promotion of Invention and Innovation within the OAPI and will make every effort to ensure that Malian inventors can benefit from the Fund, whose objective is to encourage the creation of small and medium innovative enterprises on the one hand and to enhance the performance of existing enterprises on the other by making available inventions and innovations that have already reached a certain level of exploitation.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

African inventors have a vital role to play in creating endogenous technology and properly adapted local innovations which will help to resolve the specific problems facing the population.

Through inventors, we shall reach the important goal of producing the consumer goods our country needs locally and at competitive prices.

As a result of their determination, it will be possible for Africa to end its technological imitation and bequeath a valuable treasure to future generations. The economic and social development of a country necessitates creative and innovative capacity as well as mastery of technology. These are inescapable requirements if the living standards of the people are to be raised and their deep-rooted hopes are to be met, while at the same time respecting their cultural identity.

Achievement of this goal implies that governments, economic agents and our development partners give inventors the technical and financial assistance essential to put into practice their ingenious ideas.

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