

**WIPO/INN/ABJ/99/4**

**ORIGINAL:** English

**DATE:** September 1999



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC  
OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE



WORLD INTELLECTUAL  
PROPERTY ORGANIZATION

## **WIPO REGIONAL SEMINAR ON INVENTION AND INNOVATION IN AFRICA**

organized by  
the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)  
in cooperation with  
the Government of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

**Abidjan, September 1 to 3, 1999**

### **NEEDS FOR ESTABLISHING SUPPORT SERVICES FOR INVENTORS, INNOVATORS, SMES AND R&D ORGANIZATIONS IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

*Document prepared by Mr. Craig Burton-Durham, Deputy Registrar  
Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Pretoria*

## **1. Introduction**

The increased awareness by many countries of the importance of promoting inventive and innovative activity and furthering the role which inventors and innovators play in the stimulation of economic activity, has resulted in the establishment of different organizations and institutions in such countries to provide support services for those engaged in the advancement of technology and innovation. By doing so, a very important investment is made in securing economic and social progress for such countries.

Whilst government support for innovation and invention plays a key role in creating and ensuring an environment conducive to the development of a culture of innovation and invention, this is not the only factor which contributes to the successful development of a supportive infrastructure in this area. Governments to a large extent emphasize the establishment of technical and scientific councils but the existence of such bodies alone is not enough to guarantee the future of all inventive activity. One needs only to consider the extent of inventive and innovative activity which occurs outside of research and development institutions and which requires a support system of a different nature, to appreciate the need for a diversity of bodies to cater for the requirements of all inventors. It is here, that the establishment of associations and institutes, which provide for the specific needs of inventors, is crucial in ensuring the future of creative activity in this area.

## **2. Support for inventive activity at the government level**

**2.1** Inventors play a vital role in economic development by contributing to the improvement of technology and industrial progress and government support for inventors is an essential part of ensuring the achievement of economic policy.

**2.2** Technical innovation policy is usually articulated at two different levels. At the primary level, broad policy objectives directed toward the achievement of socio-economic growth and which only indirectly influence technological innovation are to be found. These policies at the secondary level translate into policies, which directly influence the process of technological innovation, invention and innovative activities in particular. It is within the latter category, that one will find the implementation of steps to create awareness of the value of technological innovation for industrial and economic use and the establishment of centres of technological learning and research.

**2.3** Implementation of such policy could be given effect in the following ways:

- the establishment of research and development facilities;
- emphasizing and recognizing the role of national inventors and innovators by the implementation of award systems, etc.;
- the granting of assistance to individual inventors and innovators through the provision of technical and financial aid to enable them to develop their inventions and innovations;
- providing for better and more efficient coordination between research institutions and industry;
- the granting of assistance in the testing of new products and processes; and

- the promotion of production and commercialization.

**2.4** The protection of industrial property is the best guarantee of inventive activity, in that the inventor has the prospect of securing the right to commercially exploit and benefit the product of his intellect for a determined period of time. Government makes a considerable contribution by setting the legal framework for such protection in place.

**2.5** The formal legislative framework must however be complemented by an administrative system which guarantees procedural effectiveness and efficiency both in terms of the processes required to obtain protection and the cost implications. All too often experience has shown that high costs of obtaining protection make the system inaccessible to the small inventor and many valuable inventions are lost to society.

**2.6** The level of support offered by countries varies considerably from country to country. The establishment of support services separate from the industrial property administration departments is to be encouraged in order to promote an awareness of the role which intellectual property plays in economic development.

**2.7** The establishment of special structures in providing for the requirements of individual inventors and small business enterprises is also to be encouraged. This would typically include the provision of free advice to small inventors.

The granting of support could also include provisions in national laws allowing for fee reductions to individual inventors and the granting of special loans at low interest rates for the development of inventions.

### **3. Support for inventors and innovators through the formation of associations of inventors**

**3.1** Important as government support and assistance for inventors may be, it is necessary for inventors to form their own associations which provide the mutual assistance and support which is not available at the government level. The active participation by inventors in such associations on national, regional and even international levels, is one of the most effective methods of ensuring the continued growth of inventive and innovative activity in a country.

**3.2** Most inventors start with a basic idea and wonder where to find assistance developing the idea into a commercially viable product. Those who achieve success have invariably done so by joining an active inventors' innovators association or institute.

**3.3** Membership in an inventor's association gives meaning to invention and status to the inventor. By attending regular meetings and listening carefully to selected speakers in addition to exchanging ideas with fellow inventors, the inventor is able to obtain essential information and valuable case histories, which enables him to proceed on in developing his invention.

**3.4** An active and well-organized inventor's association will *inter alia* provide the following services to its members:

- workshops presented by experts on special subjects (e.g. industrial property, design and development, materials and methods, marketing methods, etc.);

- participation in inventors' exhibitions both nationally and internationally;
- strategies on how to market and network for special services (e.g. mechanical engineering, chemist, electronics, graphic or industrial design, model maker, etc.);
- regular newsletters to keep members informed and abreast of developments;
- assistance with the filing of patent applications;
- the holding of annual exhibitions to promote member's products and award medals in recognition of excellence;
- advise inventors on how to avoid financial pitfalls and where to seek financial assistance;
- invite briefs from industry for trouble shooting or improving existing methods;
- assist members in the profitable exploitation of their inventions and negotiate on behalf of the inventor and aid in the drawing of contracts to adequately protect him;
- liaise with other convention countries; and
- establish links with other inventor/innovation organizations.

**3.5** The benefit of membership in an inventor's association lies primarily in the fact that such associations consist of like-minded people who are able to exchange constructive views on problems and matters of mutual interest to the benefit of all parties. The pool of knowledge and expertise which exists in such inventors' associations also greatly contributes to the resolution of problems which inventors may encounter.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The process of ensuring a thriving and viable culture of innovation and invention in a country cannot succeed without a clear understanding on the part of government of the fundamental role which the inventors and innovators play in sound economic development. In order for the maximum benefit to be gained from the promotion of invention and innovation, it is essential that partnerships be forged between government and those engaged in the process of technology promotion through invention and innovation.

Whilst government must promote the development of invention and innovation by ensuring that a sound, effective and accessible industrial property protection system is in place, the role which inventors' associations play in this process is indispensable.

Only through the establishment of support services, which are conducive to the promotion of invention and innovation, can the industrial property system play a meaningful role in economic development.

[End of document]