

## EDITORIAL NOTE TO *AJIC* ISSUE 16

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Innovation in technology, in production of goods and services, in business processes, in formal and informal economic settings, in electronic media and audio-visual content, in music – all these and other fields of innovation sit on foundations of knowledge, either private or common, appropriated via various mechanisms, including intellectual property (IP) tools. For almost two decades, the movement for access to knowledge (A2K) has slowly emerged, seeking open approaches to appropriation and IP and giving rise to a range of new phenomena for investigation.

Innovators, researchers and academics, and A2K advocates will gather at the 4th Global Congress on Intellectual Property and the Public Interest in New Delhi from 15 to 17 December 2015, to present their extensive work in this field, with thematic tracks being Access to Medicines (A2M); IP and Development; Openness; and User Rights. African scholars, particularly those from the Open African Innovation Research (Open AIR) network, will participate in the three-day event, introducing research on topics in innovation and IP policy, law, economic and social regulation, and practice. Some of the Global Congress topics are explored in this *AJIC* thematic issue; for example, the topic of plant breeders' rights, and the topic of patenting and access to medicines.

In the age of the Internet, knowledge can flow easily across borders, across industries and economic sectors, and across and among economic and social interest groups. The availability of rich sources of knowledge for productive innovation can enrich the African continent – it is possible. However, policy, law and regulation have not kept pace with the rapid changes in the availability of knowledge. Outdated policy, law and regulation, or practice, may limit the potential for knowledge resources to have full economic or social impact. These and other research problems are explored in the articles and thematic reports in this thematic issue.

Economic development on the African continent is partly dependent on the regularity and impact of innovation, without which agriculture, mining, manufacturing, construction and services will (a) remain moribund and/or (b) continue in a high state of dependence on technology and innovation imports, rather than building on innovations indigenous to the African continent and gradually becoming exporters of innovation. Those countries and economic regions that have experienced an early shift to innovation-based economies have successfully concentrated and harvested knowledge, and embedded that knowledge in publications, inventions, and goods and services (both commercialised and public).

Some African countries are successfully building their innovation capacities; however, the concentrations of harvested, embedded knowledge indigenous to, and appropriated by, the economic regions of the African continent are small relative to concentrations in many other economic regions. For example, the concentrations of locally-developed and locally-controlled knowledge in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, or in the North Africa region, are relatively small as compared to those of the European, North American or East Asian economic regions. One of the important dimensions in this knowledge and innovation ecosystem is A2K, increasingly practised in the innovation-based economies. Knowledge, whether in private hands or commonly held, has economic agency. The A2K movement seeks to ensure, inter alia, the existence of balancing mechanisms that mediate between public and private interests in the use of embedded knowledge.

In particular, innovation in the field of electronic communications and the Internet of Things for Africa, and innovations in e-health, e-education, mobile money, cloud computing and the evolution of an African software industry – these all raise important avenues for future research on innovation, appropriation, IP rights and A2K.

*The African Journal of Information and Communication* welcomes contributions in this thematic area, which we regard as the field of “knowledge governance for development”, and we aim to publish several thematic issues on this theme in the coming years.