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WORLD INTELLECTUAL
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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

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ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF INVENTORS' ASSOCIATIONS

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In November 1985, the *World Youth Exhibition* was held in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, organized jointly by the WIPO and the Bulgarian Government. Senegal was represented by two young inventors, Mr. Mbacké Niang and Mr. Taib Kebe, who had received support from the Ministry of Industry and Mining.

On that occasion, the African Federation of Inventors' Associations (AFIA) was established.

On their return, the representatives of Senegal, with the active support of the Industrial Property Service of the competent Ministry, took action that led to the creation of the Senegalese Association for the Promotion of Invention and Innovation (ASPI) on February 8, 1986.

This happened just after the death of the great Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop.

It has to be said that, paradoxically, the creation of the ASPI encountered on the part of some intellectuals an attitude that, although polite, revealed barely disguised scepticism.

In our view, such an attitude betrayed an unfounded but tenacious belief that Africans, who failed to invent the wheel, must content themselves with being spectators in a rapidly changing world.

The only right grudgingly recognized to Africans is in the sole area where they have been given some recognition: artistic works, even though they had to struggle here as well.

It was not always so. The “king” of learning Cheikh Anta Diopa showed this in his writings, notably *Antériorité des civilisations nègres, mythe ou réalité* (*The anteriority of black civilizations, fact or fiction*).

At the ASPI, we believe that no country can develop without exploiting the results of endogenous research. But this implies a strong sense of awareness of our intrinsic values at the mental level and a break with the Western looking-glass through which we constantly see ourselves.

We continue this struggle, knowing full well that it will be a long one and full of hidden obstacles. With the participation of all, however, we will succeed in making people see all the advantages which our countries can derive from exploiting national inventions and innovations.

The ASPI has set the following objectives for this purpose:

- to promote the development of inventive and innovative activities among the general public;
- to make better known, or just to make known, the economic benefits of invention and innovation;
- to enhance the image of inventors;
- to seek partnerships with industrialists;

- to take part in establishing an effective policy for promoting creativeness, particularly among young people.

Action is being taken to attain these objectives:

1 Aimed at the general public:

We participate in development-oriented scientific events:

- the biennial science gathering (AFRISTECT) which brings together scientists from Africa and from the North in Dakar to consider together the ways and means of developing Africa's scientific capital. An exhibition is held on this occasion and ASPI has the important task of organizing it;
- the African scientific renaissance day;
- the Technopolis Foundation in Dakar (whose mandate is to create a development synergy among scientists, industrialists, financiers and teachers).

2 Aimed at industrialists:

We organize study days to which we invite industrialists, bankers, public authorities, in order to make them aware of the importance of local inventions for development.

3 Aimed at the political authorities:

Our Association is at the origin of the creation of the President of the Republic's Prize for the promotion of invention and technological innovation.

This annual Prize is awarded for the best invention or innovation, in the agro-industrial sector in particular.

The President of the Republic's Grand Prix for Science has also been created under the auspices of the CRAT and ASPI is a member of the national jury.

This Grand Prix is awarded for applied and basic research findings.

4 Aimed at training institutions:

The ASPI organizes meetings with technical and vocational training colleges and also with general education facilities in Dakar in order to develop an inventive spirit among young people.

In the course of these meetings, we try to make young people understand that there is no particular age for invention, nor any particular diploma or nationality, nor any particular sex as the President of the AFIA often emphasizes.

5 Aimed at other regions:

We have initiated a project to visit the nine other regions of Senegal.

We stay three days in each region during which we organize meetings with the regional officials of the Ministries of Energy, Mining and Industry, Scientific Research and Technology, Education, and Agriculture. During these visits, we try to encourage inventiveness among the people, especially young people.

We also have partnership contacts with consumer associations in Senegal, particular ASCOSEN.

We consider that this partnership can also be beneficial to all, because to a certain extent the ASCOSEN can enhance the people's understanding of the importance of local products, both from the economic and health perspectives.

We can clearly see that inventors' associations, particularly in developing countries, have a vital role to play in economic and social development.

This is why we welcome meetings such as this. It is through such meetings that together, at the continental level, we can strive to exploit our inventions.

It must be recalled, however, that this meeting, like all the seminars in Africa, was made possible through the support of the WIPO. That is why it should be thanked, together with all its officials.

I hope that, in parallel with this seminar, a strong, dynamic and effective continent-wide organization will emerge, as envisaged in the programme.

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