

Global Intellectual Property Issues

PCT-EaSY moves ahead

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WIPO mission focuses on traditional knowledge in eastern and southern Africa

The difficulties faced by the indigenous peoples and local communities of eastern and southern Africa in protecting their traditional knowledge, innovation and culture were at the heart of a WIPO fact-finding mission to Uganda, Tanzania, Namibia, and South Africa in September.

In all four countries, the government departments responsible for intellectual property provided valuable support in organizing some of the meetings as well as vital information on their national intellectual property systems.

The mission started in Uganda, where its members gained insight into traditional healing methods during a meeting with healers from THETA (Traditional and Modern Health Practitioners Together against AIDS), an organization trying to bring together the best in traditional and modern healing methods for the benefit of AIDS patients; and during a visit to the nearby rural village of Mpigi, which has a well-organized and extensive health-care project, based on traditional knowledge, that includes a vast herbal farm.

The members of the mission also visited the center for the study of indigenous music at Makerere



Photo: Faith Odibo

Part of the extensive herbal farm that is central to the Mpigi health-care project

University and had discussions with the directors of the National Theatre and the Uganda Museum as well as with government officials and academics.

The next stop was Tanzania, where a visit to a rural Maasai village allowed the members of the mission to discuss with village leaders the protection of the traditional values and knowledge that guide their lives and those of their people.