

Special Feature: Technology transfer in action – empowering southern African technology transfer with an on-the-job training program

WIPO, in collaboration with the Southern African Research & Innovation Management Association (SARIMA), the Japan Patent Office (JPO) and South Africa's National Intellectual Property Management Office (NIPMO), successfully concluded a technology transfer on-the-job training program. This pioneering initiative, designed to enhance technology transfer within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, serves as a practical and impactful example of technology transfer in action.

Between August 15 and October 31, an eight-week needs-based experiential pilot on-the-job training program, based at South African TTOs, was offered to 12 individuals who are actively involved in technology transfer activities at public research universities or institutions in six SADC member countries, namely Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, following a competitive selection process facilitated by WIPO and SARIMA. The selected individuals were given the opportunity to work closely with experienced technology transfer professionals at South African TTOs, gaining firsthand experience in the daily operations of TTOs, processes and strategies.

Host institutions

1. North-West University (NWU)
2. Stellenbosch University (SUN)
3. University of Cape Town (UCT)
4. University of Johannesburg (UJ)
5. University of South Africa (UNISA)
6. University of the Western Cape (UWC)



Photo: William Mulders

The Namibian technology transfer delegates with the UWC TTO team, from left to right: Nadia Jansen (NUST), Luan Africa (UWC TTO), Leonard Imene (UNAM), Oko Lwana (UWC TTO), Monique Heystek (UWC TTO), Njabulo Kubheka (UWC TTO), Aisha Mahomed Ali (UWC TTO) and Ana Casanueva (UWC TTO)



Photo: William Mulders

Nadia Jansen (NUST) and Leonard Imene (UNAM), from Namibia



Photo: William Mulders

Chrispin Kaphaika and Livison Msonthe (participants from Malawi), with Doug Sanyahumbi, project coordinator

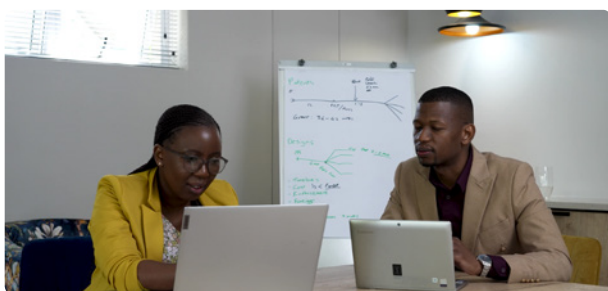


Photo: William Mulders

Mathogonolo Ntutu and Lame Ramaloto (participants from Botswana)



Photo: William Mulders

Chrispin Kaphaika and Livison Msonthe (participants from Malawi)

This pioneering initiative was implemented within the framework of a new partnership established between WIPO and SARIMA, a stakeholder organization dedicated to advancing the management of research and innovation and to fostering social and economic development within the SADC region. The Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two organizations on October 19 aims to enhance the management of IP in the SADC region and outlines joint initiatives including raising awareness, providing training, and strengthening technology transfer structures in the SADC region.

Key benefits and value

The experiential learning program has delivered significant benefits and value, including:

1. **Mentorship:** Host TTOs served as mentors, providing participants with guidance and support. Drawing on their extensive experience in TT, they offered practical advice on navigating challenges, making informed decisions, and understanding the complexities of TT processes and activities.
2. **Mutual knowledge exchange:** The program facilitated a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge between the experienced technology transfer practitioners at host institutions and visiting participants from the SADC.
3. **Real-world application:** Participants gained exposure to real-life technology transfer challenges and successes by actively participating in technology transfer activities at established host TTOs and sharing experiences. This hands-on experience provided invaluable practical insights.
4. **Networking opportunities:** Participants were introduced to extensive networks within host TTOs' technology transfer communities, connecting them with professionals such as patent attorneys, members of the Regional TTO Forum in the Western Cape and SARIMA members. These networking opportunities should pave the way for future collaborations.
5. **Benchmarking and exposure to diverse perspectives:** Host TTOs offered diverse perspectives based on their varied experiences. This exposure broadened the participants' understanding of different TTO structures and policies, as well as various aspects of technology transfer, including industry engagement, negotiation of agreements and IP management.
6. **Hands-on assignments:** Participants undertook practical benchmarking exercises, comparing institutional IP policies, researcher incentives, TTO staff incentives, and funding opportunities between their home institutions and host institutions. Additionally, they collaborated with host TTOs to develop case studies, further enhancing their learning experience.

Impactful initiative for capacity development

This program provided participants with a transformative learning experience, allowing them to delve into various aspects of the technology transfer process guided by the extensive expertise available at South African host TTOs. Participants expressed newfound confidence in their ability to lead IP-related initiatives, formulate institutional strategies, and raise awareness about IP and technology transfer within their organizations. Furthermore, collaboration with host institutions and the comparative analysis of IP policies were viewed as valuable opportunities for enhancing IP management and protection. Ultimately, participants believed that the program would have a tangible impact by fostering IP awareness and technology transfer, thereby supporting researchers and innovators within their institutions and beyond.

“As a participant, I have gained greater insight into managing technology transfer and IP ecosystems, which is crucial in establishing the TTO at [my institution]. I highly recommend similar training opportunities to other professionals in the TTO sphere in Southern Africa.”

Leonard Imene
Namibia

“This program has been very different in the sense that it’s a hands-on program.”

Christopher Liswaniso
Zambia

“I now have multifaceted skills at my fingertips, and I can do my job with confidence.”

Jephias Gwamuri
Zimbabwe

“The biggest benefit for me of this program was the networking that I made, the contacts that I’ve built up.”

Nadia Jansen
Namibia

“I’m at the stage where I can actually pick up the phone and call someone to just offer assistance or if I’m lost or stuck with something.”

Tharusha Naidoo
South Africa

“Through this program we are going to have quite a lot in terms of capacity building by rolling out similar training workshops within my institution and within the country as a whole.”

Wilbert Mtangi
Zimbabwe

“It was just one of the best trainings ever.”

Livison Msonthe
Malawi

“I wanted to see how established TTOs like Innovus operate, so that I can determine what I can implement in our institution back home.”

Matlhogonolo Ntutu
Botswana

Moving forward and ensuring sustainability

The impact of this groundbreaking program extends beyond merely equipping the 12 participants with skills; it also encompasses the establishment of a networked community within the region.

The program’s vision entails ongoing support, networking and engagement among organizers, host TTOs, participants and their respective home institutions, even after the program concludes. The aspiration is that this inaugural on-the-job program will serve as a beacon of innovative capacity building in technology transfer, fostering a renewed sense of collaboration and knowledge exchange among technology transfer stakeholders across borders in the SADC region.

To support this progression in future, WIPO envisions two main facets of the initiative:

- **Replication:** There is considerable interest in exploring the potential to replicate this on-the-job training model in other contexts and regions, with the aim of enhancing technology transfer skills and ecosystems on a global scale.
- **TTO network:** The overarching objective is to cultivate a sustainable community where participants can rely on each other for guidance, resources and collaboration long after the program’s conclusion. To achieve this, efforts are underway to introduce a mentoring program and an online TTO networking platform, modeled on WIPO’s TISC platform.