

**Current Status and Future Requirements of the
Ethiopian Intellectual Property Office
In Education and Training Programs**

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1 Introduction

The Ethiopian Intellectual Property Office is a recently Established organization that was Established in 1984. Since there has not been skilled human resource in this field the manpower responsible in this new mission were mainly graduated in other professions. The need for trained professionals and identification of specific knowledge are problems and issue of the office accordingly until recently the number of employees running the office were limited to 55 in number , that has reached 73 recently the office is trying hard to keep the number of professionals to be sufficient both in number and quality of training but could not get people with the right skill due to the reason that Universities and colleges do not Produce Professionals in the area of Intellectual Property Knowledge. This Problem might continue for the coming few years because the learning institution in Ethiopia has recently started to include Intellectual Property Education in their curriculum.

2. National overview of Intellectual Property Education

In Ethiopia we do not find any higher learning institution that has included intellectual property education at program levels in its curriculum. However, Recently there are some law faculties in universities and colleges that provide intellectual property course. Addis Ababa University, Mekele University, Civil Service college, Two Private Colleges have begun offering a course on intellectual Property. Addis Ababa University has even made it possible that a course is given as part of the postgraduate program.

With the limited financial and institutional resources, over the years, the office has been challenged to seek a delicate balance between the customers need and the efficiency of its employees while addressing these pressing entanglements. Employees in the office have so far not been given opportunities to be trained at degree level in the field of intellectual property. The major bottleneck for this has been absence of any local higher learning institution that offers intellectual property education. Long term training opportunities from abroad have almost not been available and there has not been even a chance in this regard.

A careful examination of the employees training and related qualifications in the majority reveals that many of them have not been exposed to an in-depth intellectual property education. Short intellectual property human development training programs have been found very helpful in at least narrowing the knowledge gap and skill needed by the office since its establishment. These programs are mainly offered by the world intellectual property organization /WIPO/ as distance/online learning and short term trainings. There are also, though not up to the offices actual demands, short term professional scholarship chances for employees offered by some foreign national intellectual property offices and regional intellectual property organizations like ARIPO on different intellectual property topics.

The aforementioned intellectual property training programs are not in practical terms sufficient to fully accomplish the current missions contained in the newly designed business processes of the office. It is clear that the office finds it difficult, if not impossible, to afford the costly educational expenses in capacitating the professionals to the required level.

3. The Ethiopian Intellectual Property Office Employees' Educational Background

The existing capacity of the office obviously does not address all the tasks identified as its grand missions properly. The information provided in the table proves that there are no professionals who have specialized in intellectual property education at any degree level. Some might have, very often lawyers, taken just a course or two while working for other academic studies. Substantial support is required to help the employees so that they can turn up to be knowledgeable in intellectual property areas of focus. Employees can have roles in the development of strong national intellectual property system if only they are exposed on to a more level intellectual property field. This basically needs deep knowledge which many of the employees are missing.

The table below would apparently give an understanding of the current knowledge indicators of the organization in reference to the employees' educational background and other relevant trainings on intellectual property.

No	Qualification	Men	Women	Remark
1	Phd	-	-	
2	Msc/Bsc	6	1	
3	BA/BSc	26	8	
4	Diploma	4	11	
5	Under Diploma	9	8	
	Total	45	28	

4. Need For Trained Professionals

4.1. The Newly Designed Missions

EIPO has for the last two years been conducting studies to reengineer its business processes. This serious attempt of designing new business processes is made to establish a strong national intellectual property system that would pave ways for a comprehensive intellectual property protection, promotion and use of it as a development tool.

This could best be realized when the office manages to upgrade its employees capabilities in IP education and ensures that its professionals are competent with the business processes knowledge and skill requirements. The business processes in place clearly demand well trained and multidisciplinary intellectual property professionals.

The newly designed intellectual property business processes include the following.

- Trademark, industrial design protection and development.
- Intellectual property protection and technology Transfer.
- Copyright and community/Traditional knowledge development
- Intellectual property communications
- Intellectual property legal affairs.

4.2. Intellectual Property Professional For International Representation

These days intellectual property is not only becoming more and more interdisciplinary. It is also going to be increasingly a global phenomenon. Individual countries may have somehow different needs of professional IP training. Whatever their immediate needs demand what is to be an integral part is to meet the ever widening global intellectual property challenges posed, opportunities in the international context and the stretching national IP objectives.

Ethiopia needs to have strong and informed representation at the International Intellectual property fora. For this, it is essential to furthering the development of effective capacity development programs. Thus there should be a system for more in depth intellectual property study at higher levels form first degree to Phd in the field.

This would help enormously in generating trained professionals that can handle intellectual property issues such as legislation, cross cultural negotiations, mediation, arbitration/settling disputes, intellectual property management, enforcement, trademarking and licensing and promotion.

5. Specific Knowledge Needs of The Office

Areas of specializations needed by the office are as diverse as the activities contained in the respective business processes. Intellectual property professionals will have to be trained to think critically, creatively and innovatively. The office should have professionals that would be able to compete on a more equal footing in the global economy.

Given the varying levels of knowledge gaps on the part of the employees of the office the intellectual property training should base on the following subject matters.

- Intellectual property law
- Technology Transfer
- Patent, utility model
- Trademarks, industrial designs
- Copyright, traditional knowledge/community rights
- Intellectual Property promotion
- Intellectual property protection, enforcement
- International intellectual property laws etc.

6. Challenges The Office Currently Experiences

- Lack of human resource development system, guideline to execute this and intellectual property training opportunities for the employees has resulted in the dissatisfaction of the professionals working in office. Trainings in many instances are often taken as incentives for employees in many organizations. This situation is believed to have contributed to the high turnover of professionals. Failure to retain experienced workers ultimately leads to recruiting new workers. This still poses a problem to the office as it takes time to bring the newly employed workers onboard.
- Truly speaking, the professionals in the office are not as such capable of addressing intellectual property issues that require

special intellectual property knowledge. These special intellectual property issues may fall on legal and commercialization/trademarking and licensing affairs. But it should be kept in mind that there are only very few resourceful professionals that can somehow handle the above tasks.

- The office has widened the dimension of intellectual property rights to be protected, promoted and commercialized. Two notable examples can be cited. These are the Protection and Development of Community Rights/Traditional knowledge and Technology transfer. The points in discussion are truly vast areas which have not earlier been part of the office's mandate to handle. Presently these sectors have enjoyed a global attention at WIPO, international organizations and many countries as key IP development tools. It is a pity for the office that it has no professionals who specialized in these fields.
- It could be agreed that intellectual property in the country is somehow a new concept. What it is, how it can be protected and exploited should be further promoted to the general public and specific target groups. Piracy and infringement problems in the country are crucial. Lack of the required knowledge by the right holders, stakeholders and the general public is believed to be the main reason for the piracy and infringement problems being faced nationwide. Intellectual property education and awareness creation in its entirety is the responsibility of the office. Professionals with indepth knowledge are highly needed for a meaningful intellectual property education and awareness creation.

7. Recommended Strategies For Effective Capacity Building Programs.

In an effort to create and maintain an enabling intellectual property capacity building program the following initiatives are to be pursued

- Strengthening strategic global intellectual property alliances with academic institutions.
- Establishing strong relationships with focal universities that offer intellectual property education worldwide will fetch good training opportunities to the office. Some universities are already identified for this purpose. Turin, Lund, unisa and African university have been in the forefront in offering intellectual property (MA) degree program.
- Establishing ties with relevant international organizations and national IP offices that can facilitate and contribute significantly to the realization of IP capacity building programs to be in place herein after in the office WIPO takes the lead by assisting national intellectual property offices capacity building programs at all levels be it through short or long term trainings.
- Maximize possible involvements in any regional and global initiatives with respect to intellectual property education.

Free scholarships can be secured if the office keeps eyes on new global initiatives or programs on intellectual property education. This can successfully be implemented by establishing a well functioning

internal system that facilitates better links with in and between domestic and external intellectual property organizations

- Promoting a mission to national universities and other academic institutions to include curriculums for intellectual property at degree level. This initiative requires advising the government on trends and emerging issues relating to capacity building in the field. The government can support the effort if it is convinced about the importance of integrating intellectual property into national development priorities as a development tool.
- Overall leadership and advice is required for coordination of technical inputs, participatory process approach and training design. The development of partnership arrangements with training providers and other aspects of implementation require the involvement of relevant government institution. This can be more efficiently made practical when the office discharges its leadership responsibility in time based trends.
- Facilitating access to international exposure on intellectual property issues fora.

Working diligently to actively play a role in the international IP fora opens opportunities for the recognition of the office by involving parties. This consequently, promotes not only the office's attachment worldwide also raise international exposure for participants, hence adding knowledge on the part of the participants.