

# **Promoting Access to Reading Materials for the Visually Impaired People (VIPs) in selected African countries**

(Draft)

## **1. Brief Project Description**

Access to the resources of the information society by visually impaired people (VIPs) is an important issue in all countries and economies. In developing and least-developed countries it is a challenge beyond imagination. The share of VIPs of the total population is high, due to various diseases, political instabilities and equivalent, and available resources are scarce.

For Governments, there is strong moral and political commitments take action to attain equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities, including VIPs, based on the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Person with Disabilities, adopted by the United Nations in 1993.

Technology has opened up new opportunities for VIPs to access works and these opportunities touch a range of intellectual property related issues. The project addresses a range of legal, commercial, cultural and economic exploitation issues of intellectual property in relation to visually impaired people:

- Finding an enabling legal regime to address accessibility
- Fostering accessibility of commercial products and services, including enabling technology
- It is question of cultural and knowledge based works, protected by IPRs
- Accessibility and affordability of reading materials for VIPs is at stake.

The scope covers all possible solutions to enhance accessibility. Apart from a number of technology issues, training and information are important, as VIP accessible materials will only be of benefit if the target group is aware of the products and serviced and can effectively use them.

The World Blind Union (WBU) and a coalition of rightsholder organisations under the leadership of the International Federation of Reproduction Rights Organisations (IFRRO) as initial project partners have decided to test a Pilot Program, for which they are seeking funding. The program is based on an analysis of the needs of the participating countries.

The Pilot is intended to run in two African countries during two years. The results of the programs can be replicated and developed further to serve the purposes of other African countries, as well as those on other continents.

## **2. Initial Project Partners**

The initial partners are the World Blind Union (WBU) and a coalition of rightsholder organisations, under the leadership of the International Federation of Reproduction Rights Organisations (IFRRO).

Representatives of VIPs and rightsholders discuss various options to enhance accessibility at WIPO. The development dimension plays an important role in these deliberations. WIPO's participation in the process is important.

## **3. Intended Beneficiaries and Target Countries**

The beneficiaries are visually impaired people (VIPs) in the target countries.

The intended target countries are Mali for Francophone Africa and Nigeria for English-speaking Africa. These two African countries have sufficient infrastructure in place to carry on the project with their international partners. Local participation is a prerequisite for the success of the project; both from the side of government authorities, representatives of VIPs and rightsholders.

It is essential to run the project in two countries that are sufficiently different in language and size as well as infrastructure to ensure broad experiences.

#### **4. Expected Project Outcomes**

In summary, the expected outcomes of the project are:

##### Policy issues

- Broad Government attention to equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities and adherence to relevant UN rules
- Establishment of national strategies on access to information, in particular for VIPs
- Higher literacy rate among VIPs
- Enabling tax regimes for the production and distribution of VIP accessible formats

##### Availability of materials

- Increase in the number of titles, both national and foreign, in VIP accessible formats
- Promotion of accessible material in formats that are most relevant for the country
- Greater variation in distribution outlets to cover various regions of the country

##### VIP Organisations

- Improved coverage of VIP organizations to reach all VIPs
- Secure control of recipients of materials, in particular in digital form

##### Infrastructure Issues

- Increase in VIP accessible educational materials in both special schools and mainstream inclusive schools, covering all levels from primary schools to universities
- Increase in VIP accessible materials in public libraries
- Improved accessibility to personal computers and internet connectivity, both with VIP facilities

##### Intellectual property Rights

- Exploration of suitable legal framework with broad participation of stakeholders
- The role of trusted intermediaries for the delivery of VIP accessible material

The point of departure in the target countries will be studied with the help of a questionnaire (enclosed). This makes measurement after the project period possible.

#### **5. Intended Implementation Details**

A multi-partner action plan is needed to address all issues and implement the plan in the target countries.

On the international level, the following organisations are partners:

- WBU
- IFRRO in collaboration with other rightsholder organisations
- WIPO (subject to further discussion)

On national level, broad participation from different stakeholders is a necessity, with good coordination within the country. Bodies representing the following are essential:

- Relevant Ministries (for disability matters, education, culture, ICT)
- National intellectual property office
- National VIP organisations or their representatives
- National library service authority
- National book development authority
- Representatives of universities
- National library association
- National members of IPA, IFRRO and writers' organisations.

An International Reference Group (with the above representatives) and a National Steering Committee (with the above representatives) will be the governing bodies of the project in Mali and Nigeria respectively. The International Reference Group will ensure cross-fertilization between the two countries and replication of good practices.

## **6. Cost Estimates**

A detailed implementation plan will be drafted in collaboration with the international and local partners, and with participation of the funding partner(s), when available. Sufficient funding should be ensured to make real progress possible and the test various solutions to accessibility.

Funding falls into two parts:

- Costs related to running of the project both locally and internationally
- Funding of material and/or technology.

A cost estimate for running of the project during two years is on the level of one million euro. The budget will be developed later.

Funding materials and/or technology is a separate issue. There will be different options for funding, a kind of shopping list, for example for computers with screen readers,/screen-readers alone, devices for the use of VIPs and materials. This list is under development.

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## **Access to Reading Material for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VIPs) in selected LDCs**

### Short Presentation

#### **1. Background**

The Committee on Development and IP (CDIP) at WIPO requested the Secretariat to make a proposal concerning a possible WIPO Donor Conference. The matter was in principle approved in December 2008 as part of the program and budget for the year 2009. Instead of using the name "Donor Conference", the proposal now goes under the name "Conference on mobilizing resources for development".

The objective of the proposed conference is "to mobilize additional resources to WIPO through donor funding, by encouraging the establishment of trust funds or other voluntary funds within WIPO specifically for LDCs, while continuing to accord high priority to finance activities in Africa, to promote, inter alia, the legal, commercial, cultural and economic exploitation of intellectual property in the countries".

#### **2. Stakeholder Platform to address the Accessibility of Reading Materials for VIPs**

The action points of the January 19, 2009 meeting list a number of elements in a possible solution to accessibility, and one of them is the "development dimension (3.c.iv.)". Within this framework, a joint proposal to address accessibility to reading materials by VIPs in selected LDCs was briefly discussed. Supported by both parties, it was agreed that the proposal would be further developed by Chris Friend (WBU) and Tarja Koskinen-Olsson (IFRRO).

#### **3. Joint Proposal – List of Issues**

A joint proposal for funding is primarily targeted towards the forthcoming conference, but can also be used in searching extra funds outside the conference, if need be.

According to the framework submitted by WIPO, high priority is to finance activities to promote, inter alia, the legal, commercial, cultural and economic exploitation of intellectual property. To address accessibility of reading materials for VIPs includes all these aspects:

- Legal: finding an enabling legal regime to address accessibility;
- Commercial: fostering accessibility of commercial products and services in LDCs, including enabling technology;
- Cultural: print materials are cultural and knowledge based works, protected by copyright;
- Economic: Accessibility and affordability of print materials for VIPs is at stake.

The joint proposal targets at African countries. Two countries have been proposed by WBU as suitable target countries: Mali as a Francophone country and Nigeria as an English-speaking country. The preparatory team is now working a questionnaire that these countries would fill in to find out the point of departure and to form the basis for developing the project. A draft questionnaire is annexed.

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