Afterword

As you explore these last pages, one hopes that your experience with this book has not only informed your understanding of Africa's access to knowledge challenges, but that it has also triggered your curiosity to learn more and question.

Nearly three years ago, the ACA2K project, a network of scholars and stakeholders from Africa and elsewhere, embarked on a journey to understand how the copyright environment is affecting access to learning materials in Africa. This book is a contribution to this field of investigation and to the body of knowledge. Perhaps the greatest contribution of the ACA2K network has been its testing of hypotheses using innovative research methodologies – in an effort to probe the complex, positive and negative elements of the African copyright environment. There are very few studies championed by Africans, out of Africa, in this area of work. ACA2K has thus pushed the bar a bit higher and other scholars will benefit from this empirical work.

If, after reviewing the evidence presented, you disagree with the interpretation and opinions expressed in this book, then here is an opportunity to contribute, debate and take this work further. This book, taken on its own, can tell only part of the story. For those of us who work in development, our final aim is not to produce books, briefs and papers. Our aim is to see change and to influence policymaking in our respective countries so that we can benefit from better policies that can drive social and economic development and support poverty reduction.

Coming from that perspective, the research methods used by the ACA2K network aimed to probe the intersection between copyright laws, policies and practice in the identified study countries. The network also designed a multifaceted strategy of policy engagement at the national, regional and international levels in order to raise awareness of the challenges Africa faces when it comes to accessing learning materials.

The network's research findings address how the copyright environment could be enhanced to support improved higher education delivery. These findings clearly indicate that African countries do not necessarily need stronger copyright laws. As a matter of fact and in many cases, African copyright laws provide greater protection than international instruments do. Rather, what is needed is a set of flexible policies from government and other copyright stakeholders, as suggested in this book, which can reduce the gap between law and practice and ensure that learners access the education materials they need.

It is rather disturbing to see a polarisation within the international intellectual property (IP) debate and the emergence of strong forces actively lobbying for a focus on further enforcement and extension of IP protection. One would have hoped to see

a debate focusing on the promotion of innovative approaches that could strike the correct balance between the access needs of users on the one hand and the interests of rights-holders on the other. We hope that the balanced approach expressed and stressed throughout the pages of this book will help all those who seek evidence-based arguments in their efforts to inform debates taking place through the WIPO development agenda process and in other international and local IP policy forums.

Education is the cornerstone of Africa's development. Higher education in particular has been marginalised for a long time and it is only recently that policymakers in Africa have embarked on a revitalisation process. Programmes are being implemented to reduce skills shortages and to ensure that higher education institutions play their necessary role in supporting the development of a skilled work force and training researchers and scientists who can enable African creativity and innovation. The focus of ACA2K on access questions from a higher education perspective is an important contribution to the debate on the role of educational institutions in Africa. Policymakers want to see research in higher education institutions that addresses the development needs of the continent. They argue for more research that can inform community development rather than serving an elite of actors who consult specific publications. One cannot help but question whether current IP regimes are best suited to these developmental objectives.

When it comes to knowledge production and dissemination, Africa is marginalised. Until very recently, African scholars suffered from complete isolation. They faced enormous challenges in accessing cheap and reliable Internet bandwidth in a context where the Internet is becoming an important tool for knowledge production, and for knowledge dissemination, research collaboration and teaching in general. On average, an African university used to pay 100 times more for bandwidth than a university in North America or Europe. But this situation is changing, as investment in bandwidth infrastructure on the continent is slowly enabling cheaper connectivity. African universities are increasingly collaborating with their counterparts in the North, and promoting the emergence of national research and education networks dedicated to supporting research and education.

The digital era is thus changing the nature of the debate in Africa from a focus on access to a focus on broader fundamental policy choices and mechanisms that can nurture collaboration, networking, creativity and innovation. In this new environment, how can the IP regime support the creativity and innovation that will address Africa's development challenges? Are the current IP metrics best suited to understanding African bottom-of-the-pyramid creativity and innovation?

As indicated in the last chapter of this book, new models for supporting knowledge production and dissemination need to be explored. In this digital era, the IP regime is challenged and more research is needed to inform possible models that can promote what a networked society has to offer. These new models should

be tested in various sectors, from publishing to music to scholarly communication among others, so that we can come to understand their effectiveness in different settings and conditions. These are some of the areas that the ACA2K network could explore in the future. These issues bring forward important policy questions and fundamental choices that could affect all those who wish to be effective participants in a networked society. Forward-thinking, new, innovative research methods are needed for these challenging lines of enquiry. The ACA2K network has demonstrated its ability to integrate complex concepts and methods to produce solid, evidence-based policy recommendations. Thus, it is clear that constant engagement with policymakers is also fundamental to future processes of enquiry in this area. These are the possible avenues for taking this work further.

We hope that you will also find your own way to contribute to this new, fascinating line of enquiry that questions the intersection between law, practice, creativity and innovation for better developmental outcomes in Africa.

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