



INTERNATIONAL MEDIA RELEASE

31 July 2010

BOOK LAUNCH: New study finds African copyright environments are not promoting access to learning materials

National copyright environments in Africa do not maximise access to educational materials for the countries' learners, and changes need to be made to the countries' legal regimes in order to improve access.

These are the findings from research in eight countries carried out by the African Copyright and Access to Knowledge (ACA2K) project.

A book describing the ACA2K research findings in all the study countries, entitled ***Access to Knowledge in Africa: The Role of Copyright*** and published by UCT Press, has just been launched today at the Cape Town Book Fair.

The book, published under a Creative Commons licence, is also available online on the ACA2K website at www.aca2k.org.

The ACA2K project has since 2008 been probing the relationship between copyright and access to learning materials in Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda

All eight country studies found that the national copyright environments need to be reformed in order to improve legal access to learning materials for educational and research purposes. Much of the learning materials access in the study countries is at present realised through illegal photocopying of entire books or large portions of books, a practice which flourishes in the absence of strong enforcement of the law.

The findings of the research raise the concern that if and when enforcement is tightened, learning materials access, and thus education access, will be undermined in these countries, where learners are generally not able to afford to purchase materials. Copyright laws in African countries need to be reformed in order to open up more legally-permitted channels of access for educational purposes.

The project is supported by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and South Africa's Shuttleworth Foundation, and managed by the Wits University LINK Centre in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The project has found that in the eight other study countries, most policy emphasis is placed on copyright-holder interests, with insufficient efforts being made to develop or

implement copyright exceptions and limitations that allow permission-free use of materials for learning purposes. The tradition of copyright law is based on a balance between the economic needs of rights-holders and the access needs of users. Creators of works are supposed to be rewarded, but a degree of permission-free user access is needed to support follow-on creativity, innovation and education.

All the ACA2K Country Reports are available under “Research Outputs” on the ACA2K website.

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