

PRESS RELEASE

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Nigeria: National Conference on Geographical Indications

On 17 and 18 February 2022, the Intellectual Property Rights and Innovation Project in Africa (AfrIPI), in partnership with the Africa International Trade and Commerce Research (AITCR) and the IP First Group, hosted The National Conference on Creating Legal and Institutional Frameworks for Geographical Indications. The conference was in Nigeria at the Hilton-Transcorp in Abuja.

This conference was a groundbreaking event, paving the way for national legislation on geographical indications (GIs). Why is this so necessary?

A geographical indication (GI) is a distinctive sign used to identify a product whose quality, reputation or other such characteristics relate to its geographical origin. Some globally renowned GIs are *Champagne* (France), *Feta Cheese* (Greece), *Thai Silk*, *Penja Pepper* (Cameroon). You are only entitled to use a geographical indication if your product actually comes from the protected region. So, for example, if you produce sparkling wine in Germany, you are not allowed to call it champagne.

Nigeria currently has a wide variety of unique products including *Sokoto goats skin*, *Ijebu garri*, *skin hide of Kano*, *Kilishi of Northern Nigeria*, *Yaji* (dry pepper), *Nsukka Yellow pepper*, *Aso Oke*, *Awori mat*, *Fura*, and many more. However, none of them have benefitted from any comprehensive registration that would bring added value from international recognition and commercialisation. With this gap in protection, anyone anywhere could use one of these denominations on their products.

Hence, the tremendous significance of this National Conference which aimed to support the implementation of an appropriate legal framework to create and **protect geographical indications in Nigeria**, creating business opportunities and new markets for Nigerian products.

'Nigeria has great potential to develop and add value to its many quality products through geographical indications. I am convinced that this is the best tool to promote Nigeria's agri-food sector and diversify exports to both the EU and elsewhere in Africa,' said **John Clarke, Director for International Affairs at the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission**.

How did the conference come about? First, in 2021, AfrIPI delivered a high-level public sector capacity building workshop on GIs. That led to setting up a Nigerian Technical Working Group on GIs. It was made up of representatives from various institutions such as the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Justice, the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, the Nigerian Export Promotion Council and the Nigeria Bar Association. This group had 7 months to draft a *sui generis* law on GIs, starting from August 2021.

The Conference:

- examined the key items of the draft law
- discussed a roadmap for adopting the law in the Nigerian system
- discussed the importance of GIs for the Nigerian economy in general as well as in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), for example, a presentation called '**Protecting Nsukka Yellow Pepper: Rationale and Way Forward**' highlighted how important it is to have such a name of a typical product registered and protected by law.

As well as presentations and discussions, there was an exhibition of Nigerian potential geographical indications.

'This conference has attracted key people who will help sensitise the importance of geographical indications in Nigeria. Indeed, pending issues that need to be addressed were raised through extensive presentations and panel discussions. We trust that local businesses will be empowered as it showcased that GIs are an excellent instrument for local development,' stated **Ignacio de Medrano Caballero, Manager of International Cooperation at EUIPO**.

'As AfrIPI, we have made great strides towards facilitating the roadmap for GIs in Nigeria. From the first encounter with the Technical Working group last year till now, it has been an eye-opening journey. Subsequently, we are happy to have this opportunity to present the outcomes of this process, and we hope it will influence greater awareness of GIs in Nigeria,' added **Dennis Scheirs, Project Leader, AfrIPI**.

Background information

AfrIPI (www.afripi.org) is an international cooperation project funded and directed by the European Union, co-founded and implemented by the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO). It has an initial duration of 5 years, starting from February 2020. The overall objective of AfrIPI is to facilitate intra-African trade and African and European investment. It specifically aims to create, protect, utilise, administer, and enforce intellectual property rights across Africa, in line with international and European best practices, and support the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Africa International Trade & Commerce Research (AITCR) is an international trade consultancy firm for the African market that works on four key areas: Trade, Research, Policy and Invest-in-Africa related projects. AITCR is a knowledge-based organisation that delivers forward-thinking, innovative research with relevant data that support evidence-based decision



making, covering various sectors. Over the years, AITCR has worked on several projects, including advocacy work on geographical indications in Nigeria.

IP First Group supports the creation of an environment where innovation and creativity can flourish, which is a critical imperative for the economic development of the countries of Africa. The organisation also supports the establishment of an intellectual property framework that guarantees the recognition of and respect for the rights of innovators, inventors and content creators.

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