



## Emerging Researchers and Postgraduates Symposium 2026 Call for Papers

### Africa's IP and Innovation Future: Norm-Setting, Regional Integration, and New Research Frontiers

#### Introduction:

The African Union has recently adopted the annexes to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Intellectual Property Protocol, signalling a key turning point in the continental aspirations for harmonised intellectual property (IP) norms across the continent. Regional IP organisations are simultaneously reviewing and modernising their legal frameworks to support innovation, industrialisation, and further the goal of improved intra-African trade. Various national IP laws are also evolving in response to both regional and global legal changes and pressured by the fast-paced digital changes and growing markets, the persistent challenges around traditional knowledge (TK) and biodiversity governance.

The momentum offers a unique opening for African scholars, policymakers, innovators, creators, and communities to shape an IP and innovation architecture that reflects the continent's priorities, histories, cultures, and developmental aspirations. With this background in mind, the South African Research Chair: Intellectual Property, Innovation and Development (The Chair) will host the **Second Edition of the IP Law Emerging Researchers and Postgraduates Symposium** under the theme *Africa's IP and Innovation Future: Norm-Setting, Regional Integration, and New Research Frontiers*.

The Symposium aims to centre the voices of early career and postgraduate scholars in Africa, whose perspectives are vital in imagining an inclusive and context responsive African IP and innovation future. It will provide a platform for emerging scholars to explore and critically discuss the future of IP law, policy and practice in Africa. The Symposium will take place from 7 to 11 September 2026 at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, where participants will have the opportunity to develop their research. Papers that demonstrate academic rigour and make a meaningful contribution to the field will be considered for publication with a reputable academic publisher.

#### Symposium Theme:

The Symposium will be organised around six cross-cutting themes, each reflecting a priority area in contemporary African IP debates. The Chair invites emerging and early career researchers and postgraduates to submit papers under the following themes:

1. **Africa's Emerging IP Architecture**

Continental norm setting, regional harmonisation, institutional design, and geopolitical dynamics

Possible topics include:



- The AfCFTA Protocol on IP Rights: institutional design, implementation, and negotiation priorities
- Harmonisation vs national autonomy in IP law
- ARIPO/OAPI reform trajectories and regional cooperation challenges
- Comparative analysis with ASEAN, Mercosur, or other regional frameworks
- Africa's role in global IP norm setting (WIPO, WTO)
- Digitalisation of IP administration and the role of Regulatory Technology (RegTech) in examination, opposition, and enforcement
- Cross-border digital licensing frameworks under continental market integration
- The prospects for a continental IP organisation

## 2. **IP, Development, and Equity in a Continental Market**

The role of IP in supporting inclusive growth, industrialisation, technology transfer, SMEs, and youth innovation ecosystems

Possible topics include:

- IP and industrial policy goals in Africa
- Technology transfer, local manufacturing, and innovation capacity building
- Startups, SMEs, and youth entrepreneurship in Africa's IP landscape
- IP and gender equity
- Competition law and IP in Africa
- IP financing and innovation ecosystems

## 3. **Protecting Africa's Cultural and Biological Resources**

Traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, biodiversity, geographical indications, benefit sharing, and cross border custodianship

Possible topics include:

- TK and TCE governance models: national, regional and customary systems
- Transboundary custodianship of TK/TCEs
- Geographical indications for food, crafts, and cultural products (including emerging cross border GIs)
- Equitable access and benefit sharing models
- Bioprospecting and the politics of biodiversity governance
- The protection and digital circulation of folklore
- AI-assisted TK and TCE databases, digital cataloguing, and ethics
- Data sovereignty and ethical governance in digitisation of TK/TCEs

## 4. **Digital Transformation and the Future of IP Enforcement**

AI, data, digital markets, platform governance, online enforcement, streaming economies, and creative remuneration



Possible topics include:

- Digital piracy, online enforcement, and cross border regulatory challenges
- AI generated content and authorship in African contexts
- AI and emerging technologies in Africa's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems
- The role of platforms – streaming, social media, marketplaces – in shaping IP ecosystems
- Creative economy challenges in new digital environments (including metaverse governance)
- Data governance, data rights, and their intersection with IP
- Collective management organisations (CMOs) in the digital age
- AI-driven tools for IP enforcement and rights management

#### 5. **Climate Change, Innovation, and IP:**

Climate-responsive technologies, adaptation pathways, sustainability transitions, and the evolving role of IP systems

Possible topics include:

- Patent landscapes for green technologies in Africa (renewable energy, water purification, climate-smart agriculture)
- Patents, licensing, and access in digital agriculture and precision farming technologies
- IP options for climate mitigation and adaptation
- IP financing mechanisms for climate innovation
- Comparative legal analyses of green patent policies
- Climate-resilient crops: plant variety protection (PVP) and farmers' rights

#### 6. **Fintech, Digital Markets and Intellectual Property Governance in Africa**

The intersection of fintech innovation and IP governance in Africa's digital economy

Possible topics include:

- Software patentability standards across African jurisdictions
- Trade secrets and algorithmic protection in fintech
- IP and regulatory sandboxes in African fintech hubs
- Cross-border digital finance under the AfCFTA
- Data governance, ownership and IP intersections
- Platform dominance, competition law and IP in digital payments
- IP strategy for African fintech start-ups
- Open banking frameworks and proprietary systems
- Digital sovereignty and Africa's financial data ecosystems



### **Submission procedure and instructions:**

We invite African scholars to send their abstracts to [sarchi-ip@uct.ac.za](mailto:sarchi-ip@uct.ac.za) by Thursday 16 April 2026. Abstracts must clearly identify the theme under which they fall and should not exceed 350 words. The results will be announced by the last week of May. Authors whose abstracts have been accepted will be required to prepare and submit their draft papers by Friday 7 August 2026. Only participants who submit draft papers will be eligible to attend the Symposium. Participation will take place strictly on-site. The Chair will contribute to the costs (travel and accommodation) of 8 postgraduate students whose draft papers have been received. Those who would wish to be considered for sponsorship must indicate at the time of submitting their abstract.

### **Target Audience:**

The Symposium is intended for African emerging researchers, early career scholars, postgraduates and academic scholars specialising in IP law in Africa. The Symposium aims to examine the evolving continental and regional IP governance frameworks, highlight research that connects IP to development, innovation, and equity, and critically engage with the role of IP in emerging technologies and climate-change responses.

### **Enquiries**

Please submit enquiries to [sarchi-ip@uct.ac.za](mailto:sarchi-ip@uct.ac.za).

### **TIMELINES:**

- Call for papers announced – Monday 16 March 2026
- Deadline for submission of abstracts – Thursday 16 April 2026
- Results announced – Last week of May
- Submission of draft papers – Friday 7 August 2026
- Symposium dates – Monday 7 September – Friday 11 September 2026
- Submission of final papers – 30 October 2026