Editorial

Each year on 26 April, we observe World Intellectual Property Day, founded by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in 2000. WIPO, created in 1967 as a specialised agency of the United Nations, plays a crucial role in promoting and safeguarding intellectual property (IP) worldwide. Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, WIPO facilitates global cooperation among its 193 member states and international organisations to enhance IP protection and regulation.

This year, a significant milestone was achieved at the Diplomatic Conference held in Geneva from 13 to 24 May 2024, with the adoption of the WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources, and Associated Traditional Knowledge. Over 150 countries agreed on this Treaty, which addresses the complex issues at the intersection of the patent system and genetic resources, including traditional knowledge linked to them.

The April-June 2024 issue of *Science Diplomacy* highlights this groundbreaking Treaty, which was developed over more than two decades. The Treaty requires patent applicants, such as foreign entrepreneurs or international companies, to disclose the sources of their products, especially those derived from indigenous or local knowledge. Genetic resources, found in medicinal plants, agricultural crops and animal breeds, are increasingly used in various industries such as cosmetics, seeds, medicines, biotechnology, and food supplements.

The Treaty consists of 22 articles covering objectives, definitions, disclosure requirements, governance, and implementation principles, providing a comprehensive framework for managing IP related to genetic resources and traditional knowledge.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ARTICLES	
Article 1	outlines the Treaty's primary objectives of enhancing the effectiveness of the patent system and preventing erroneous patents
Article 2	defines key terms used throughout the Treaty
Article 3	requires patent applicants to disclose the country of origin of genetic resources or the source of traditional knowledge associated with them
Article 4	ensures the Treaty's obligations do not apply retroactively
Article 5	describes sanctions and remedies for failures in disclosure
Article 6	encourages the creation of accessible information systems for genetic resources and traditional knowledge
Article 7	ensures compatibility with other international IP agreements
Article 8	commits to periodic review of the Treaty's scope, content and rules
Article 9	establishes general principles for implementing the Treaty

Article 10	describes governance through an assembly of representatives from contracting parties
Articles 11-13	cover administrative functions of the International Bureau, eligibility to become a party to Treaty, and procedures for ratification and accession
Articles 14-16	detail mechanisms for Treaty revision, amendments and the signature process
Article 17	specifies the Treaty's effective date, three months after 15 eligible parties deposit their instruments of ratification or accession
Articles 18-21	address topics including becoming a party, denunciation, reservations, and languages used in the Treaty

The Treaty marks a global commitment to balancing IP rights with biodiversity conservation and protecting traditional knowledge held by indigenous peoples and local communities. It includes provisions for periodic reviews and amendments to address emerging technologies and broaden the scope of disclosure requirements, reflecting ongoing advancements and challenges in IP law and biodiversity conservation.

The Treaty is unique for its focus on genetic resources and traditional knowledge, transparency, ethical considerations, promotion of international cooperation, and adaptability to future challenges. It represents a significant step towards ensuring that IP rights contribute to sustainable development and equitable benefit-sharing among all stakeholders, including indigenous peoples and local communities, non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental organisations, and industry representatives.

The WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources, and Associated Traditional Knowledge marks a pivotal moment in global IP governance. It emphasises collaboration, transparency, and respect for traditional knowledge, exemplifying science diplomacy by promoting international cooperation, aligning policies, establishing ethical frameworks, engaging in diplomatic negotiations, and contributing to global governance in the realms of IP and biodiversity conservation.

We do hope readers find this special issue informative & insightful.

Monika Jaggi