

The impact of digital technology and international regulations in the protection and dissemination of indigenous knowledge in Africa: the case of the South Africa Music Archive Project (SAMAP)

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Researchers generally agree that the documentation of indigenous knowledge has become an important tool to ensure the survival and self-sustainability of indigenous communities and cultures and to support claims of original ownership. Using modern information and communication technologies, indigenous communities can digitize significant aspects of their cultures including languages, ceremonies, dances, songs, stories and artworks to mention but a few. However, although digitisation is ideal for sharing, exchanging, researching and preserving indigenous cultures, it also creates ample opportunities for illicit access to and misuse of traditional knowledge. It is essential, therefore, that indigenous knowledge owners be able to define and control the rights and access to their resources, in order to uphold traditional laws, prevent the misuse of indigenous heritage in culturally inappropriate ways and receive proper compensation for their cultural and intellectual property. This paper explores the growing concern within Africa regarding the implications of preserving and accessing indigenous knowledge over networked environments and the benefits, or lack thereof, of this kind of access within the framework of intellectual property rights. The specific focus of this concern is on SAMAP whose brief is to digitise South African indigenous music genres in the post-apartheid era for purposes of research, teaching and learning.