



statement

Extension of TRIPS implementation deadline for LDCs

IFPMA congratulates WTO members for their commitment to reach an agreement on extending the TRIPS waiver for LDCs. This now allows more focus on how LDCs may benefit from eventual TRIPS implementation and on how to address the real barriers which prevent patients in these countries from receiving the medicines they need.

IFPMA supports the efforts of governments and civil society to increase access to medicines and vaccines in LDCs and other low and middle income countries. IFPMA members are involved in over 300 health partnerships¹ in low and middle income countries, with thousands of on-the-ground operators in the field. Many of these programs facilitate access to medicines and vaccines through preferential pricing, licensing or donations. They also strengthen health systems by addressing issues of infrastructure, capacity building and awareness raising.

The majority of essential medicines are not protected by patents and therefore intellectual property plays no role in limiting access to them. Yet, availability of these products in many developing countries is often insufficient. For other medicines, intellectual property may be one of many factors to be taken into account in policies to expand access. Variables that might impact on a patient's potential access to a given medicine include the distribution system within a community or country, the quality of the healthcare system itself, general infrastructure, access to insurance, and government policies on import tariffs and taxes. Access to medicines is a collective responsibility requiring collective action by public and private actors.

Any sustainable approach to addressing access to medicines must take into account not only the short-term goal of improving access to existing medicines, but also the equally critical goal of fostering innovation to meet the evolving needs of patients globally. Sound intellectual property rights are proven and powerful tools for fostering innovation, transfer of technology, capacity building and economic development. These incentives help bring new medicines into existence and encourage diffusion of these medicines to the patients that need them. LDCs thus stand to benefit from the implementation of the TRIPS Agreement especially as they transition to knowledge-based economies. Nevertheless, TRIPS implementation can pose practical challenges in these countries, which ought to be considered. The extension agreed today by the TRIPS Council takes into account the specific socio-economic challenges faced by these countries.

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¹ For a more information on these partnerships, see <http://partnerships.ifpma.org>

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