

2-23-2023

The Patent Law Clinic at NYLS Helps a Nonprofit's Efforts to Change Lives in Central Africa

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Recommended Citation

Falati, Shahrokh, "The Patent Law Clinic at NYLS Helps a Nonprofit's Efforts to Change Lives in Central Africa" (2023). *NYLS Community News*. 22.

https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/community_news/22

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WE ARE NEW YORK'S LAW SCHOOL



The Patent Law Clinic at NYLS Helps a Nonprofit's Efforts to Change Lives in Central Africa

Professor Seve Falati '08 • Published February 23, 2023



From left to right: Paige Piazza '23, Hassan Elsebai '24, Evania Fotopoulos '24, Waresa Islam '24, Kiera Latham '23, Professor Seve Falati '08, Nikhil Vasthare '24, Hanjun Liu '23, Jacob Ehrlich '24, Courtney Schenck '24

The Patent Law Clinic (PLC) at New York Law School recently assisted one of their nonprofit organization clients to obtain a U.S. patent for their critical product—one that will change lives in Central Africa.

Terra Firma Rainwater Collective is a nonprofit organization located in Carbondale, Colorado whose mission is to facilitate harvesting rainwater in Central Africa for domestic use. They seek to address a growing water crisis with an innovative solution.

The United Nations predicts that Africa's population will double by 2050, with most of that growth being around rapidly growing cities like Brazzaville, Republic of Congo and Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. These two capital cities are home to over 17 million people and are located directly across the Congo River from one another. In recent years, with the growing urban population, the lack of usable water supply to many of these growing communities has become a major concern.

The majority of homes in parts of Central Africa, including areas near Kinshasa and Brazzaville, do not have running water. In these regions, fresh water for homes is generally purchased and delivered multiple times a week—as such, water is a precious commodity.

The Terra Firma Rainwater Collective leadership team explained to law students in NYLS's PLC that they wanted to challenge this issue of homes in Central Africa having limited access to clean water. Rainwater is a valuable resource, they told us, and has a free delivery to every home when it rains. But they needed to come up with a system to enable harvesting of the rainwater from the roofs

of homes. Their solution: a cleverly designed and easy-to-attach gutter for the common corrugated metal roofs that are so popular in the region. This new technology aims to provide every resident the benefit of collecting, storing, and using the vast amounts of rain that falls in the areas around Kinshasa and Brazzaville.

PLC students **John Lopez '23, Taylor Lapore '22, Jacob Ehrlich '24, and Kiera Latham '23** worked with the two inventors of this technology and assisted them to secure their first U.S. patent.

Initially, the client's application was rejected, and the client had little hope. But the PLC student associates stepped up and reviewed technical documents, conducted legal research, interviewed the inventors, and were able to amend claims and draft a detailed response to the rejections and refute the positions taken by the examiner at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

When the PLC was ultimately successful in overcoming the rejections, the patent was issued and the leaders of the organization were ecstatic. They even sent our clinic jars of local honey from the Rocky Mountains as a gesture of gratitude.

"Working on the gutter system invention in the Patent Law Clinic was eye-opening," Lopez says. "We faced major rejections and worked with Professor Falati to advance prosecution of the application. I learned so much about client case management and patent law practice."

As the faculty director of the Patent Law Clinic, I am deeply proud of our students' work with the engineers and hydrologists who developed this highly impactful technology.

PATENT LAW CLINIC AT NEW YORK LAW SCHOOL

The Patent Law Clinic, directed by **Professor Shahrokh (Seve) Falati '08**, is a year-long clinic, providing 2L and 3L students an opportunity to work with entrepreneurs and practice patent law before the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). Students work with an experienced patent attorney to consult with clients, conduct prior art searches, draft patentability of inventions reports, determine patent application strategy, submit applications, respond to patent examiners, and provide related client counseling associated with patent applications and their prosecution.