

Intellectual Property for the Twenty-First-Century Economy

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Joseph E. Stiglitz

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Developing countries are increasingly pushing back against the intellectual property regime foisted on them by the advanced economies over the last 30 years. They are right to do so, because what matters is not only the production of knowledge, but also that it is used in ways that put the health and wellbeing of people ahead of corporate profits.

NEW YORK – When the South African government attempted to amend its laws in 1997 to avail itself of affordable generic medicines for the treatment of HIV/AIDS, the full legal might of the global pharmaceutical industry bore down on the country, delaying implementation and exacting a human cost. South Africa eventually won its case, but the government learned its lesson: it did not try again to put its citizens' health and wellbeing into its own hands by challenging the conventional global intellectual property (IP) regime.

Until now. The South African cabinet is preparing to finalize an IP policy that promises to expand access to medicines substantially. South Africa will now undoubtedly face all manner of bilateral and multilateral pressure from wealthy countries. But the government is right, and other developing and emerging economies should follow in its footsteps.

Over the last two decades, there has been serious pushback from the developing world against the current IP regime. In large part, this is because wealthy countries have sought to impose a one-size-fits-all model on the world, by influencing the rulemaking process at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and forcing their will via trade agreements.

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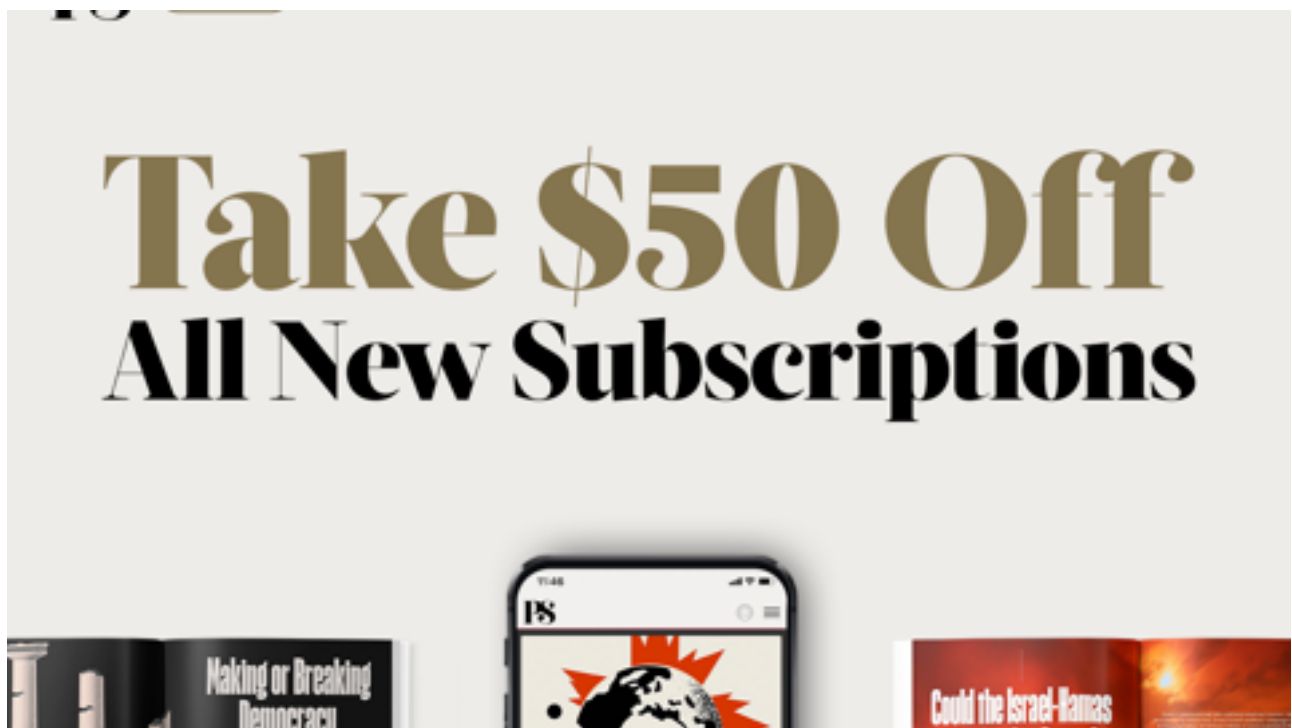
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