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**MULTILINGUALISM AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION:
CASE STUDY ON THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION**

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ACRONYMS

ACHR	Advisory Committee on Health Research
AFRO	Regional Office for Africa
AMRO/PAHO	Regional Office for the Americas/Pan American Health Organization
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe (UN)
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN)
EMRO	Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN)
EURO	Regional Office for Europe
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HIV/AIDS	human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMO	International Maritime Organization
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
MDSC	Multi-Disease Surveillance Centre
NGO	nongovernmental organization
SARS	severe acute respiratory syndrome
SEARO	Regional Office for South-East Asia
UN	United Nations Organization
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WER	Weekly Epidemiological Record
WHO	World Health Organization
WPRO	Regional Office for the Western Pacific
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society
WTO	World Tourism Organization

SUMMARY: OBJECTIVE, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OBJECTIVE. To evaluate the extent to which the practice of multilingualism within WHO enables the different target audiences to access the information made available to them.

General policy issues (chapter I)

A. The World Health Organization (WHO) believes that information on health is essential in order to save lives and ensure good health. Accordingly, access to information is a priority and in its resolution WHA50.32 (1997), the World Health Assembly stressed the importance, for the development of a global health policy, of ensuring the widest possible access by all Member States to the information and documentation of the Organization. WHO also recognizes that in order to reach its different target audiences and achieve the desired impact, the information it disseminates must satisfy clearly defined needs and be available in different languages and through different media. Despite these general policy orientations and partly because resources fall far short of needs, in terms of access to information WHO has fallen behind to an extent that jeopardizes its mission to provide information and share knowledge for the benefit of the largest possible audience.

B. Given the budgetary constraints which WHO has to face, and within the framework of results-based budgeting, it is the responsibility of Member States and of the governing bodies better to define their expectations and primary objectives in terms of access to information so as to enhance its impact on the different target audiences.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The World Health Assembly could :

- a) **Better define the expectations of Member States with regard to the implementation of resolution WHA50.32 (1997) on respect for equality among the official languages, by being more selective about the information products to which the Secretariat should give priority, taking into account both existing provisions relating to multilingualism and budgetary constraints;**
- b) **Invite the Director-General to submit to the Fifty-eighth World Health Assembly a draft medium- and long-term plan of action setting out measurable indicators linked to predetermined objectives and concerning the Organization as a whole ;**
- c) **Decide to establish, as part of such a plan, a special fund for the purpose of gradually translating into the official languages those information products deemed to have priority.**

C. In its resolution WHA50.32 (1997), the World Health Assembly in particular regretted that «the various official languages and the working languages of the Secretariat are used unequally within WHO» and in that regard requested the Director-General «to ensure the strict application of the rules of the Organization which establish linguistic practice, both as regards the Organization's relations with Member States and as regards the use of languages within the Secretariat ». However, there is no formal document setting out the linguistic practice applicable within the Secretariat and the Administration would prefer to maintain the status quo. In the interests of transparency and of greater accountability, the applicable linguistic practice needs to be clarified without calling into question the respective responsibilities of the governing bodies or of the Secretariat.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Executive Board and the World Health Assembly might care to re-examine the scope of resolution WHA50.32 (1997) in order better to define their expectations regarding the strict application of rules setting out linguistic practice applicable within the Secretariat, given that, contrary to the practice of several other organizations within the United Nations system, there is no formal document that defines the working languages of the Secretariat of WHO.

Management issues (chapter II)

D. The WHO Secretariat readily acknowledges that division of responsibility and inadequate coordination and communication among the various departments responsible for information management partly account for the failure of the information products made available to satisfy in full the needs of those for whom they are intended and thus always to reach their target audience. Decisive measures need to be taken to remedy this situation in order to achieve the desired efficacy and efficiency.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Director-General should review, in close consultation with the Directors of the regional offices, the information production and dissemination processes and mechanisms with a view to :

- a) Ensuring greater respect for the multilingual approach to the content of information products and remedying the lack of coordination and communication among the various departments of the Secretariat responsible for overall information management, by carrying out, if appropriate, the required structural adjustments on the basis of the relevant recommendations made by the internal audit of publications policies and procedures carried out in 1999;
- b) Reporting to the Executive Board and to the World Health Assembly within the framework of the Plan of Action proposed in recommendation 1 b) above.

E. As is the case of a growing number of other organizations within the United Nations system, WHO increasingly uses the Internet to recruit staff and strongly encourages applicants to submit on-line applications by stressing all the benefits deriving from this method. The relevant information, as well as many vacancy announcements and other more general information on policy for human resources management is currently available only in English; this does not favour equal access by potential candidates to the information in question.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Director-General should issue a standing instruction to the departments responsible for human resources management and Internet sites to ensure that:

- a) On-line or paper vacancy announcements are issued simultaneously in at least two of the Organization's official languages;
- b) The basic information currently available in English under the heading « Employment » on the Organization's home page should gradually be translated into the other official languages covered by the web site and reproduced on the sites of the regional offices by means of hyperlinks.

F. Notwithstanding the commendable efforts made in recent years to improve the user-friendliness and multilingual content of the WHO internet sites, much remains to be done in

order better to reflect the importance attached by the Organization to access to information on health issues and the need to give priority to reaching the target audiences most directly concerned.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Director-General should, after having heard the views of the different departments concerned, both at Headquarters and in the regional offices:

- a) Update the evaluation of current processes and practices in respect of on-line publishing with a view to determining the most appropriate ways and means of improving access to information and the multilingual content of the Organization's web sites, and report thereon to the governing bodies within the framework of the Plan of Action referred to in recommendation 1 b);**
- b) Draw up uniform rules, in the form of an administrative circular, setting out general instructions for on-line publishing, duly taking into account the potential for linkage between the sites maintained at Headquarters and those of the regional offices, and between WHO sites and those of other bodies.**

INTRODUCTION

1. In 2002, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) published a report on the implementation of multilingualism in the United Nations system¹. Given the general nature of that report, it was considered appropriate to conduct more focused case studies on a number of organizations, including WHO, the focus of which is the link between multilingualism and access to information.
2. In this report, JIU pointed out in particular that beyond the usual delineation between North and South or industrialized and developing nations, the dividing line between info-rich and info-poor depended on the language or languages used for communication, as language itself had become the "open sesame" without which no access to the riches of the Information Age was possible. It also referred to the statement approved in 1997 by the executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system, which laid the foundations of the right to universal access to information.
3. By its very nature, information is intended for one or several audiences and in this context, this case study has taken into consideration the possibilities for access to information offered by WHO to its different target audiences: Member States, serving or prospective staff members and lastly civil society as a whole, which includes public and private health-sector professionals, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the general public.
4. In addition to interviews with staff at Headquarters and with the representatives of Member States, the evaluation comprised a review of official documents and of publications by the Organization's different web sites: the main site maintained at Headquarters² and those maintained by the Regional Office for Africa (AFRO)³, the Regional Office for the Americas/Pan American Health Organization (AMRO/PAHO)⁴, the Regional Office for South East Asia (SEARO)⁵, the Regional Office for Europe (EURO)⁶, the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO)⁷ and the Regional Office for the Western Pacific (WPRO)⁸. On the basis of these different information sources and of the languages in which their contents are available, the study set out to determine whether the possibilities offered allowed the Organization's different target audiences to access the information made available to them, and in particular information on major public health issues such as human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), malaria and other communicable diseases.
5. The inspector would like to express his thanks to the representatives of the Member States and officials of the WHO Secretariat whom he interviewed and whose contributions helped in the preparation of this report.

¹ JIU/REP/2002/11

² <http://www.who.int>

³ <http://www.afro.who.int>

⁴ <http://www.paho.org>

⁵ <http://www.whosea.org>

⁶ <http://www.euro.who.int/>

⁷ <http://www.emro.who.int>

⁸ <http://www.wpro.who.int>

I. GENERAL POLICY ISSUES

A. Multilingualism and access to information

a) Reminder of the rules governing language use at WHO

6. World Health Assembly resolution WHA31.13 (1978) is the basic text governing the use of languages at WHO. It designates Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Spanish, and Russian as both the official and the working languages of the Executive Board and of the Health Assembly. The rules of procedure of the Regional Committees of the different Regional Offices have also determined the linguistic practice applicable to each of them; these provisions are summarized in annex I (b) of the JIU report JIU/REP/2002/11. This shows that Portuguese is one of the official languages of AMRO/PAHO and both an official and a working language of AFRO, and that German is one of the official languages of EURO, even though neither Portuguese nor German is included among either the official or the working languages of the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board.

7. These provisions have been completed by resolutions WHA50.32 (1997) and WHA51.30 (1998) which in particular requested the Director-General to ensure application of the principle that the documents related to the Executive Board and the Health Assembly are distributed simultaneously in the different working languages, to take the necessary steps to ensure that the essential technical information of the Organization is disseminated in as many of the official languages as is required, and to dispatch and make available on the Internet the governing body documents for forthcoming sessions not less than 30 days before the date fixed for the opening of the session.

b) Access to information is a priority for WHO

8. The provision of reliable information on human health is part and parcel of WHO's mandate as defined by its Constitution, and more specifically its Article 2, which assigns to the Organization, *inter alia*, the following functions: « to provide information, counsel and assistance in the field of health »⁹ and to « assist in developing an informed public opinion among all peoples on matters of health »¹⁰. The Member States themselves wish to be able to access the Organization's information sources. Resolution WHA50.32 (1997) referred to above, also stressed « the importance, for the development of a global health policy, of ensuring the widest possible access by all Member States to the information and documentation of the Organization »¹¹, and requested the Director-General « to take the necessary steps to ensure that the essential technical information of the Organization, whether in written, audiovisual or digital form, is disseminated in as many of the official languages as is required to meet the needs and priorities of the regions and countries and to give all the Member States the widest possible access to it. »¹².

9. The implementation of the objectives of the Millennium Declaration, adopted by the Millennium Summit held in New York in September 2000 includes, in respect of several of its elements, consideration for better sharing of knowledge, *inter alia* through access for all to the benefits of the new information and communication technologies. The 111th session of the Executive Board examined a report by the Secretariat¹³ describing health-related goals, targets and performance indicators within the framework of the overall Millennium Development Goals, and in particular Goal 4 (reduce child mortality), Goal 5 (improve

⁹ WHO Constitution, Article 2, (q).

¹⁰ Ibid, Article 2, (r).

¹¹ WHA50.32 (1997), fourth preambular paragraph

¹² Ibid, operative paragraph.3.

¹³ EB111/3.

maternal health) and Goal 6 (combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases).

10. The proceedings of the Organizing Committee of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), due to be held in December 2003 at Geneva and then in Tunis in 2005, have also stressed the importance of multilingualism as one of the factors facilitating access to information. The Draft Declaration of Principles¹⁴ proposes key principles which should govern an information society for all. They include, in particular, access to information and knowledge, in respect of which the document states that « the sharing and strengthening of global knowledge for development can be enhanced by removing barriers to equitable access to information for economic, social, political, health, cultural, educational, and scientific activities and by facilitating access to public domain information.»¹⁵

11. WHO rightly believes that information on health is vital in order to save lives and ensure good health. From the strategic orientations by area of activity contained in the proposed WHO Programme Budget 2004-2005,¹⁶ it is apparent that in order to attain the desired results, the Organization will have to pay greater attention to the implications for education, information and communication of the different sectoral objectives for which the Secretariat has been made responsible.

c) Inequality of access to information

12. In spite of the legislative decisions and strategic orientations described above, it has to be admitted that the language or languages in which information is provided do not guarantee equal right of access for all WHO's target audiences to the information made available to them by the Organization through the different media. Where the Member States for example, are concerned, while it is true that the official documents intended for meetings of the governing bodies are as a rule available in the languages and within the deadlines required, English considerably overshadows other languages as a means of access to the « essential technical information » referred to in resolution WHA50.32. In this respect, the situation of the Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa deserves special mention; even though communicable diseases constitute the main burden of disease in the Africa Region, scant information is available in Portuguese on the different media offering information products, whether at Headquarters or at AFRO.

13. Although access to information for the benefit of the largest possible audience should indeed continue to be one of the primary strategic objectives of WHO, it is undeniable, as was pointed out in the JIU report JIU/REP/2002/11, that the prospect of all the information being available all the time and in all languages is an illusion because of the considerable resources that would be required. However, it would be equally unrealistic to expect any significant improvements by relying solely on the capacity of the Secretariat to continue « to do more with less », thereby concealing the need for additional resources to ensure better access to information.

14. In these circumstances, and short of accepting the status quo, it would be necessary to create conditions capable of facilitating the effective implementation of the decisions of the governing bodies while fostering greater accountability on the part of the Secretariat. It would thus be appropriate to request the Director-General to submit for approval to the Executive Board and the World Health Assembly a genuine plan to ensure access to information with a medium-and a long-term outlook. In order to establish such a plan, Member States would need more precisely and selectively to define their own expectations regarding the provision of information in the different languages, as has been done by FAO. The selection process could be undertaken on the basis of the principal strategic orientations

¹⁴ Document WSIS/PC-3/DT/1(Rev.2B).

¹⁵ Ibid, para.20.

¹⁶ PB/2004-2005

adopted by the Programme Budget 2004-2005, while taking into account the specific regional contexts, and the results should be measurable and verifiable. **[Recommendation 1]**

B. Status of the working languages of the Secretariat

15. Annex II of the report on the implementation of multilingualism in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2002/11) provides an overview of the working languages of the different secretariats, based on the information provided by them. It shows more particularly that several organizations have statutorily fixed the linguistic practice applicable within their secretariat. This is the case of the United Nations (UN), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). In this respect, WHO is the only one of the five major organizations in the United Nations system (the others being the UN, ILO, FAO and UNESCO) not to have fixed in a formal text the linguistic practice applicable to the Secretariat.

16. The Secretariat favours maintaining the status quo, on the grounds that it has a decentralized structure; the use of languages at Headquarters and in the regional offices testifies to this. Moreover, the Administration considers that the working language of staff members should not be fixed by a resolution adopted by the governing bodies, as this would be a form of micromanagement which would undermine the efficacy required of the Secretariat. In its view, the official languages are very widely used throughout the Secretariat and the current flexibility makes it possible to maintain closer links with local cultural diversity.

17. Where recruitment is concerned, and as has already been described in detail in chapter II of the report JIU/REP/2002/11, the languages of which knowledge is required or desirable, are assumed to be those in which applicants will have to work. In the case of WHO, the table provided in annex III gives a fair idea of the language requirements set out in vacancy announcements at Headquarters and in three regional offices (AFRO, AMRO/PAHO and EURO). It clearly shows that the languages of which a command is required or is an advantage may vary depending upon the duty station. In this respect, the practice at WHO is no different from that of other organizations in the United Nations system, including those that have fixed in a formal text the linguistic practice applicable within their secretariat. If we take as an example the United Nations, in resolution 2 (I) of 1 February 1946, the General Assembly designated English and French as the working languages of the Secretariat. Later, subsequent resolutions have added to these two languages Spanish, for the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, (ECLAC), Russian, for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and Arabic for the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). This example clearly shows that it is possible to fix rules on the basis of needs deriving from the decentralized structure of the Secretariat.

18. However substantiated the arguments put forward by the Secretariat in favour of maintaining the status quo, it is worth recalling that in resolution WHA50.32 (1997) referred to above, the World Health Assembly stressed « the need for compliance with the resolutions and rules which establish linguistic practice in the various organs and bodies of the World Health Organization and in the Secretariat. »¹⁷. The same resolution also regretted that « the various official languages and the working languages of the Secretariat are used unequally within WHO »¹⁸ and requested the Director-General «to ensure the strict application of the rules of the Organization which establish linguistic practice, both as regards the Organization's relations with Member States and as regards the use of languages within the

¹⁷ WHA50.32, third preambular para.

¹⁸ Ibid, sixth preambular para.

Secretariat.»¹⁹

19. The current situation, in which there are no rules and therefore no formal obligations regarding the use of the languages designated as the working languages of the Secretariat, hardly seems to favour either the implementation of resolution WHA50.32 (1997) or the accountability that should derive from it. Moreover, maintaining the status quo might well encourage the persistence of a house culture which, where the provision of information is concerned, apparently believes that it has attained the desired objectives once the original English has become available, or even takes the view that priority need be given only to the dissemination of the English version of information that could have been produced in another language, given the target audience. For example, the Multi-disease Surveillance Centre (MDSC) at Ouagadougou, in Burkina Faso, has published in English,²⁰ on the main WHO web site, information bulletins on a meningitis outbreak affecting ten countries, eight of which, including the host country, are French speaking.

20. Even though any decision formally to designate the languages considered to be the working languages of the Secretariat would be the responsibility of the Director-General and of the directors of the regional offices, the governing bodies of WHO and its Member States should at the very least help to clarify their own expectations as regards the implementation of resolution WHA50.32 (1997). Such a clarification would also provide support for the efforts already made by the Secretariat itself to encourage a multilingual environment within WHO.

[Recommendation 2]

¹⁹ Ibid, operative paragraph 1.

²⁰ See, http://www.who.int/csr/disease/meningococcal/en/MCSbulletin_W23.pdf

II. MANAGEMENT ISSUES

A. Lack of internal coordination and communication.

21. At its Fifty-second session, the Director-General informed the World Health Assembly that a cross-cluster review of the publications policies and practices would be completed in June 1999, and that it would address, « among other issues, that of different language versions of publications and other forms of health information, within the broader context of information needs of different target audiences and appropriate ways of meeting these needs. »²¹ Although it concerned the various departments at Headquarters, the review was undertaken in consultation with the regional offices. The review's conclusions and recommendations have not been directly brought to the attention of the governing bodies. However, some of the conclusions, which the JIU evaluation confirms, were taken up in the presentation of the Proposed Programme Budget 2004-2005, as is shown in boxes 1 and 2 below.

22. The review carried out in 1999 shows, on the one hand, that the conditions required for the information disseminated to achieve greater impact are not always present, and on the other that responsibility for overall information and communication policy within the Secretariat is fragmented.

a) The conditions required to achieve greater impact are not always present

Box No. 1

« Reliable information is one of the most important products of WHO; Member States and partners count on the Organization's authoritative advice. ... Advances in technology provide unprecedented opportunities for WHO to respond to the health-information needs of different audiences, in a form and with content that are relevant locally. WHO's long experience in providing health information has shown that the information it delivers must meet specifically identified needs if it is to have an impact, and that use of different languages, formats and means of dissemination is required in order to reach target audiences ».

(Source : PB/2004-2005, Proposed Programme Budget 2004-2005, chapter on « Health information management and dissemination », section « issues and challenges », para.2.)

23. First of all, WHO should be commended for the efforts made in recent years to reach out to a broader audience, whether by means of publications, radio broadcasts or Internet sites which have been developed and are maintained both at Headquarters and in all the regional offices. For the first time, a landmark publication, *The World Health Report 2002*, was the subject of summaries in the six official languages which were posted on the main WHO web site. This new approach would certainly be beneficial if it were extended, on a case-by-case basis, to other publications.

24. In spite of the progress made since 1997, there is still a long way to go in order to achieve the results referred to in paragraph 3 of resolution WHA50.32. In comparison with other organizations, and given that it considers information on health to be essential in order to save lives and ensure good health, WHO has fallen behind to an extent that jeopardizes the fulfilment both of the missions set forth in its Constitution and of its strategic objective of health for all.

25. Whether it be issues assigned priority such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tobacco control, or general information on travellers' health, too many information products are still accessible only in English, or at the very best in French and to a lesser extent Spanish. Despite the

²¹ A52/31, para.6.

unprecedented opportunities which technological progress ought to have offered WHO in order better to respond to the needs of its different target audiences, the multilingual content of the various web sites maintained both at Headquarters and in the regional offices is far from reflecting the impact of that technology, as may be seen from the table in annex 1. In its report JIU/REP/2002/11, JIU drew particular attention²² to the fact that the bulk of the information on epidemic outbreaks is available only in English.²³

b) Fragmentation of responsibility for information management

Box No.2

« None the less, there remains room for improvement. Information products do not always reach target audiences, nor do they always meet needs in terms of content or form. Even within WHO information is often fragmented, with cases of both duplication and gaps. Improved communication and coordination within WHO will help to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Processes and systems for planning, producing and disseminating information need streamlining and regular evaluation and refinement. New technology needs to be exploited in order to provide people with relevant information and to reduce the information gap. This can be done only by working with partners, taking advantage of their experience in applying new technology, and reaching all parts of the world, including the least developed areas ».

(Source : PB/2004-2005, Proposed Programme Budget 2004-2005, chapter on « Health information management and dissemination », section « issues and challenges », para.3.)

26. As may be seen from the presentation given in the Proposed Programme Budget 2004-2005, several departments or units at WHO Headquarters and in the regional offices are responsible for producing, processing and/or disseminating the different information products that the Organization provides, using different formats and media. There seem to be neither common rules nor coordination mechanisms whose remit covers the Organization as a whole in order to ensure some degree of harmonization among information management policies as regards both content and the languages used to disseminate it.

27. It is true that there is a department responsible for « Health Information Management and Dissemination » and WHO is the only organization apart from the United Nations to have appointed a Special Coordinator responsible for promoting multilingualism. However, neither of these is anywhere near to having either a mandate or the level of authority that would enable them to provide the necessary coordination either between the different units at Headquarters or between Headquarters and the regional offices. The vision of « ONE WHO » and the « Policy and budget for one WHO » approach which marked the preparation and adoption of the Programme Budget 2004-2005 should also lead to the adoption of a common approach to information and communication management, notwithstanding the diversity of those involved. For example, a recent report by the Secretary-General of the United Nations has confirmed that multilingual web development at the United Nations has been « facilitated by the new, more centralized and integrated internet service of the Department of Public Information »²⁴.

28. Many of the conclusions and recommendations set out in the internal review carried out in 1999 are still relevant, but the reforms proposed are long in being implemented. With the arrival of a new administration at Headquarters, the Director-General should report to the Executive Board, within the framework of the plan of action recommended in paragraph 14 above, on the corrective measures taken or planned to make good the deficiencies described.

[Recommendation 3]

²² JIU/REP/2002/11, para.139.

²³ <http://www.who.int/csr/don>

²⁴ A/58/363, para. 26.

B. Human resources management and access to information

29. Valuable information on job or internship opportunities is available on-line²⁵ as is described in detail in annex II. Like other organizations, WHO strongly encourages applicants to submit on-line applications, which have many advantages. The information in question is solely in English and concerns in particular strategic orientations in human resources management, the different types of contract offered to staff recruited by the Organization, conditions of service, the possibilities and conditions of unpaid internships at WHO Headquarters or in those regional offices that accept interns, the Young Professionals programmes, etc.

30. Clearly, lack of a command of English is a severe handicap for potential candidates and for all those interested in human resources management at WHO and who would like to access the information available on-line. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that identical information on employment opportunities at FAO is available in full in English²⁶, Chinese²⁷, Spanish²⁸ and French²⁹.

31. Depending on the languages required by the post description, it is important to offer an equal opportunity to each applicant who satisfies the job criteria, as was underscored in the report JIU/REP/2002/11. In the same spirit, access to basic information on conditions of employment and career opportunities at WHO should not be restricted to a single language group and the example of FAO should be taken as an illustration of good practice, [Recommendation 4]

C Web site management and partnership building

32. Annex I provides some indications regarding the different web sites maintained at Headquarters and at the regional offices, together with a reminder of the official and working languages of the governing bodies. The main site was reorganized in 2001 and the home page is accessible in English, Spanish and French, although in the case of the latter two, many links send users back to the English text. The AMRO/PAHO site, which is accessible in English and Spanish, is by far the site whose content is virtually the same in both languages.

a) Room for improvement

33. The layout of some sites does not always fairly reflect the efforts made by the secretariats, as some documents actually exist in several languages, contrary to what might be deduced from the presence, or absence of those languages on the home page. While under the heading « epidemic outbreaks », the site in English mentioned a confirmed case of yellow fever³⁰ and cases of poliomyelitis³¹ affecting several countries in West Africa, including French-speaking ones, the link to the French site indicated, under the same heading, that the corresponding pages were not available in French. However, the information on those two outbreaks was available elsewhere, under the heading containing the Weekly Epidemiological Record (WER)³² which is published bilingually every Friday in English and in French.

34. In some of the cases mentioned above, the original English texts are relatively short, and are more akin to press releases. Taking into account the linguistic requirements on recruitment and the facilities also provided by WHO to help its staff learn the official

²⁵ <http://www.who.int/employment/en/index.html>

²⁶ <http://www.fao.org/VA/Employ.htm>,

²⁷ http://www.fao.org/VA/employ_zh.htm,

²⁸ <http://www.fao.org/VA/empleo.htm>

²⁹ <http://www.fao.org/VA/emploi.htm>

³⁰ http://www.who.int/csr/don/2003_10_10/en/

³¹ http://www.who.int/csr/don/2003_10_09/en/

³² <http://www.who.int/wer/2003/en/wer7842.pdf>

languages, there is reason to hope that the services responsible for designing the pages will gradually be able themselves to make other languages available, without the need to resort to the translation section.

35. Some documents are impossible to find on the main web site, even though they should be available there and also exist in electronic format. The basic documents of WHO have been published in the six official languages and the forty-third edition was published in 2001. This publication contains in particular the Constitution, the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly and of the Executive Board, the Financial Regulations and the Staff Regulations, together with other basic texts. The publication indicates that the electronic version is available on the Organization's web site, although at the time of this study this was not the case. The home page contained a link to the Constitution³³ under the heading « Governance », but it was disabled.

b) Coordination and partnerships

36. In spite of the efforts made in recent years, and where very important health topics are concerned, the multilingual content of web sites is not always equal to the issue at stake, as the information is available only in English. Any impact the information might have on target audiences who do not understand English remains to be shown. Closer coordination and cooperation between the administrators of the different sites, together with wider use of new technologies and the development of partnerships might help to offset the shortage of resources.

37. Where interdepartmental coordination in particular is concerned, WHO is one of the agencies with the largest budget for training programmes, and it also attaches high priority to training for health staff. While the home page provides no information whatsoever on this topic, the SEARO web site has a large and very detailed file on fellowships³⁴ which includes the electronic version of a booklet on the WHO fellowships programme, published by Headquarters. The AMRO/PAHO web site also contains two excellent sections devoted respectively to fellowship programmes,³⁵ which refers to the programmes of the other regional offices, and to the training programme for health managers³⁶. For want of a site developed in-house, the other regional sites and the main WHO site could have provided links to those cited as examples above.

38. The new document management tools make it possible to digitalize and file documents that exist in hard copy. Given that most of the information intended for dissemination and produced in-house is produced in electronic format by its authors before being printed on paper if required, it should be possible to disseminate any such document on the web sites in every language in which it is already available. This accounts for the importance of closer coordination between authors and web site administrators.

39. Moreover, use of automatic translation and/or computer-assisted translation software should continue to be encouraged. In this respect, AMRO/PAHO possesses the broadest experience in the field, and a presentation of its automatic English/Spanish/Portuguese translation software may be found on its web site³⁷. According to the information on this site, the SPANAM (Spanish/English) and ENGSPAN (English/Spanish) software have apparently made it possible to produce high quality translations with a 30 to 50% gain in productivity. For its part, the translation unit at Headquarters has developed computer-assisted translation tools which may be accessed through an Extranet and which are available to the regional

³³ <http://www.who.int/governance/en/>

³⁴ <http://w3.who.sea.org/ets/index.htm>.

³⁵ <http://www.paho.org/English/HSP/HSR/fellowships.htm>.

³⁶ <http://www.paho.org/English/DPM/SHD/HR/pfsiabout.htm>.

³⁷ http://www.paho.org/English/AM/GSP/TR/Machine_Trans.htm

offices and external translators.

40. As WHO is rightly seen as the centre of excellence on health matters within the United Nations system, the public first of all turns to the information made available by this Organization before turning to other sources if necessary. However, to judge from the main WHO web site,³⁸ the management of information on severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) leaves much to be desired in terms of multilingual content, considering the high media profile of the epidemic. The web sites of the International Civil Aviation Authority (ICAO) and of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) have established links to the WHO site, with the same shortcomings as regards multilingual access. However, detailed information on SARS was available in Chinese on the WPRO web site and in other official and unofficial language on the sites of the ministries of health of some Member States. The WHO sites could have established links to such sites, provided the information on them was reliable.

41. Partnerships could offer a means of broadening access to information through better interaction with other information sources or users. The voluminous report of the Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR) on Genomics and World Health is accessible in full from the WHO site only in English³⁹ with only summaries being available in Spanish and French. Despite this, ACHR itself states in the introduction that the report is intended for the 191 Member States of WHO and that it is intended to show « the likely impact of genomics on global health, with a particular focus on the implications for the developing countries.⁴⁰» In view of the importance of such a publication for the developing countries, priority should be given to translating it into all the official languages, or even into non-official languages; this could be done either by the Organization, or through various forms of partnership. Moreover, this translation has been requested by some members of the Executive Board.

42. Where the public at large is concerned, so excellent and useful a publication for travellers as *Health for travellers* is also accessible only in English on the WHO web site. Its availability in several languages ought to be of interest not only to organizations in the United Nations system such as ICAO, IMO and the World Tourism Organization (WTO), but also to actors in civil society such as the major pharmaceutical firms or the travel industry.

c) Harmonization of rules

43. The vision of « ONE WHO » ought to generate some degree of harmonization in the management of the different web sites, regardless of which unit is responsible for developing and updating them. Common rules should be laid down and could include, for example, the following elements :

- A statement on the home page explaining that WHO advocates multilingualism and that some of the information under certain headings is available in several languages ;
- The languages in which information on the member countries is available should include the official language of WHO used in each of the countries concerned ;
- When there is an epidemic outbreak in a particular region or country, the relevant information should also be available in the official WHO language used to send documents from the Organization to the country, and a hyperlink should be provided on the site of the regional office concerned ;
- As is the case of the AMRO/PAHO site, the sites of the other regional offices should

³⁸ <http://www.who.int/csr/sars/en/index.html>

³⁹ http://www3.who.int/whosis/genomics/genomics_report.cfm?path=whosis,genomics&language=english

⁴⁰ Ibid., para.1 of the introduction.

all include a heading entitled « Governance » providing access to the basic documents and to those official documents of the regional committees which already exist in electronic format in the various working languages.

44. The uniform standards applicable to the different WHO web sites could be determined by general guidelines applicable to on-line publishing, which would be drawn up in close consultation with all interested parties and set out in an administrative circular from the Director-General. [**Recommendation 5**]

Annex I : Languages used by the governing bodies and on the WHO Internet sites

Official languages	Working languages	Site URL	Language used on home page Observations
World Health Assembly and Executive Board			
(E, Ar., C, S, F, R)	(E, Ar., C, S, F, R)	Main WHO site http://www.who.int	E S F Many links in S and F refer back to the English text.
		http://www.who.int/entity/en/	E S F Apart from the headings, which have been translated, all the items refer back to the English text.
		http://www.who.int/dg/lee/en/	E S F
		http://www.who.int/governance/en/	E S F Official documents in the six official languages
		http://www.who.int/employment/en/..	E Under the heading « e-Recruitment », applicants are strongly encouraged to submit on-line applications.
	Regional offices		
AFRO (E S F P)	(E F P)	http://www.afro.who.int	E F - Most of the links are in English, including the publication « Basic indicators 2002. Health situation in the WHO African Region “ - No link to the governing bodies
AMRO/PAHO (E S F P)	Not specified	http://www.paho.org	E, S -Link to the governing bodies and documents in the four official languages
EMRO (E, Ar., F)	E, Ar., F	http://www.emro.who.int	E No link to the governing bodies / “Public information on Biological and Chemical Threats” not available in F
EURO (E, Ger., F, R)	Not specified	http://www.euro.who.int	(E, Ger., F , R) Link to the governing bodies
SEARO (E)	(E)	http://www.whosea.org	E Link to the governing bodies
WPRO E, C, F	E, F	http://www.wpro.who.int	E No link to the governing bodies Information on SARS in E and C

E: English // Ger. : German // Ar.: Arabic // C: Chinese // S: Spanish// F: French // P: Portuguese // R: Russian

Annex II: Access to information on human resources management from the WHO site

(<http://www.who.int/employment/en/index.html>)

Menu titles in English	Comments
Employment	The title has been translated into French (<i>Travailler pour l'OMS.</i>) but not into Spanish. The different sub-headings are only in English.
Strategic directions	Under the heading « Who are we & what do we do? », information is provided on the four strategic directions) of WHO and on the organization's core functions.
Recruitment	Under the heading « What are we looking for », basic information is given on the ideal profile of applicants for employment and on the principle governing recruitment policy; these include proficiency in one of the official languages of the Organization (English, Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, French and Russian) together with a working knowledge of a second language, additional languages being an asset.
Employment Profiles	Under the heading « <i>Who are our staff</i> », information is provided on professional and general service staff, as well as on the « <i>Associate Professional Officers</i> » programmes, funded by certain Member States and the <i>Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie</i> .
Types of Contracts	Under the heading « <i>Type of contracts</i> », it is possible to find guidance on the different types of contracts offered to staff recruited by the Organization. Readers are informed that the conditions of employment and staff policy are set out in the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules, a copy of which is provided to staff on appointment. [As the Staff Rules are available in French, a summary could have been provided, as in English]
Vacancies	List of vacancies for fixed-term posts : Although the titles have been translated into French, the other information is in English. In most cases, proficiency in English or French is required, together with a working knowledge of the other language. In rare cases, proficiency in English and in French is required. For certain posts in the regional offices, knowledge of Portuguese (AFRO), of Spanish or of Russian (EURO) is occasionally required along with English or French.
Internships Opportunities	This heading covers information on the possibilities for and conditions applicable to unpaid internships at WHO Headquarters or in those regional offices that accept trainees.
Apply	This heading provides an explanation of how to apply for a vacancy. Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply on-line, and attention is drawn to the numerous benefits of applying on-line. Applicants unable to submit an on-line application may submit their application by filling out a personal history form, which is available on-line in English and in French and which may be downloaded [assuming the candidate understands English well enough to understand the relevant instructions] [ICAO offers a form in three languages which uses virtually identical terminology].

N.B : although WHO has a large budget for training fellowships, only the Regional Office for the Americas has a relevant link on its site (<http://www.paho.org/English/HSP/HSR/fellowships.htm>); the link may be consulted in both English and Spanish.

Annex III. Language requirements set out in WHO on-line vacancy announcements
(on 27 November 2003))

Vacancy announcement	Language requirements	Observations
Headquarters (http://www.who.int/employment/vacancies/en/). Announcements posted only in English		
Communications officer / level P-3 Vacancy announcement number : HQ/03/SDE/TA228 Duty station : GENEVA (Switzerland)	Command of English and good working knowledge of French. Knowledge of other United Nations languages an asset.	Temporary appointment
Receptionist–Clerk / level G Vacancy announcement number : HQ/03/GMG/TA237 Duty station : GENEVA (Switzerland)	Proficiency in English or French and good working knowledge of the other language. Additional language skills would be a valuable asset.	Temporary appointment
Technical officer / level P-3 Vacancy announcement number : HQ/03/EIP/TA232 Duty station : GENEVA (Switzerland)	Excellent knowledge of English ; knowledge of Spanish and of French would be an asset.	Temporary appointment
Technical resources coordinator / P-5 Vacancy announcement number : HQ/03/EIP/TA238 Duty station : GENEVA (Switzerland)	Good knowledge of both English and French.	Temporary appointment
AFRO (http://www.who.int/employment/vacancies/en/) . Announcements posted only in English		
Administrative officer / level P-2 Vacancy announcement number : AFRO/03/FT468 Duty station : MAPUTO (Mozambique)	Excellent knowledge of English or of French and good working knowledge of the other language. Knowledge of Portuguese would be an asset.	Fixed-term appointment
Director / level D-1 Vacancy announcement number : AFRO/03/FT473 Duty station : BRAZZAVILLE (Congo)	Good knowledge of French and of English.	Fixed-term appointment
Physician (Regional Advisor on research policy coordination) / level P-5 Vacancy announcement number : AFRO/03/FT437 Duty station : BRAZZAVILLE (Congo)	Excellent knowledge of English or of French and good working knowledge of the other language. A working knowledge of Portuguese would be an asset.	Fixed-term appointment
AMRO/PAHO (http://pahoapl.paho.org/pahoexternalenglish/ASEPage_JobListMenu.asp) Announcements posted in English and in Spanish		
Office services supervisor / PO3 Vacancy announcement number : 03-027 Duty station : WASHINGTON, D.C. (United States of America)	Very good knowledge of English or of Spanish and good working knowledge of the other language.	Post of unlimited duration
Chief of unit, Essential drugs, vaccines and health technology /level PO5 Vacancy announcement number : 03-028 Duty station : WASHINGTON, D.C. (United States of America)	Very good knowledge of English and of Spanish, a working knowledge of French or of Portuguese would be an asset.	Post of unlimited duration
Health services advisor /level PO4 Vacancy announcement number : 03-029 Duty station : SANTO-DOMINGO (Dominican Republic)	Languages : Very good knowledge of Spanish and working knowledge of English.	Post of unlimited duration
Financial officer / level PO2 Vacancy announcement number : 03-030 Duty station : WASHINGTON, D.C.	Languages :Very good knowledge of English or of Spanish.	Post of limited duration
EURO (http://www.who.int/employment/vacancies/en/) Announcements posted only in English		
A.I. Network administrator / level P-3 Vacancy announcement number : EURO/03/TA226 Duty station : COPENHAGEN (Denmark)	Excellent knowledge of English and working knowledge of German, French or Russian. Knowledge of Danish would be an asset, as most contacts will be with Danish firms.	Temporary appointment

Divisional secretary /unassigned post, DTR / level G-4 Vacancy announcement number : EURO/03/TA224 Duty station : COPENHAGEN (Denmark)	Very good knowledge of one of the languages for recruitment at the duty station. Elementary reading and oral interaction skills in another working language.	Temporary appointment
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