



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

PROGRAMME, BUDGET AND ADMINISTRATION

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Progress report on information technology, knowledge management and the Global Management System

1. This report provides information on the way in which WHO's Secretariat intends to develop its work strategies relating to information technology and knowledge management, and on implementation of the Global Management System.

A. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

2. WHO's programme on information and communications technologies provides high-quality, responsive and cost-effective services and innovative and appropriate solutions that contribute to achieving the goal of health for all. It underpins not only the provision of relevant, timely and accurate information to countries so that they may improve health outcomes, but also the streamlining of organizational processes. Work is geared to empowering individuals who work to improve the health of all people; acting as a catalyst for new and innovative services to Member States; increasing the productivity of teams and individuals; and facilitating the sharing of knowledge and new ways of working within WHO.

3. In the past, the area of information and communications technologies was managed more or less independently at regional and global levels, with the risk of duplicating efforts and not making the best use of skills available throughout the Organization. In 2001, therefore, the Director-General established the Information Technology Fund, opening the way for a global approach to the planning and implementation of corporate systems and services.

4. A global WHO strategy for information and communication technologies is being drawn up on the basis of consultations with regional and country offices, and it will take account of priorities, concerns and lessons learnt throughout the Organization, and the particular challenges of providing support to the Global Management System. It will link up with related strategies such as those being drafted for knowledge management and eHealth, and with the strategy of the United Nations system in this area. Opportunities offered by the information and communications technologies industry will be considered.

5. The strategy will be geared to:

- building capacity of WHO staff in their use and management of information and communications technologies, and using this knowledge and expertise to contribute to building capacity in Member States;

- managing costs, by making maximum use of knowledge of WHO staff and by outsourcing services which could be provided more cost-effectively elsewhere;
- improving services by adopting best-practice methodologies, using common products and standards, and providing a common support structure throughout the Organization.

6. Aside from the strategy other activities include:

- contributing to development of the Global Management System by applying knowledge of existing systems and technology and project management skills and technical expertise. At the same time, measures are being taken throughout the Organization to ensure that the necessary technology infrastructure and services are in place to provide appropriate technical and end-user support;
- connecting all WHO country offices to the WHO Global Private Network by the end of 2005; when complete, the Network will provide secure, managed data, telephony and video facilities to all WHO staff;
- streamlining the process for granting access to staff to WHO corporate information systems, which will also enable technical programmes to identify individuals working in partner organizations, to whom privileged access to some WHO information is to be granted;
- building capacity to provide technical support to a range of functions relating to staff security in the field, and to the Strategic Health Operation Centre at headquarters, particularly in emergencies such as the earthquakes and tsunamis of December 2004.

7. Challenges to be tackled include providing support to the Global Management System while maintaining existing administrative support systems; improving the level of services to increasingly mobile end-users, often in difficult-to-service, and sometimes unsafe, locations; meeting increasing demands for systems that support WHO's core health-information needs; and adopting new technology platforms and approaches to meet the needs of the Organization in a more cost-effective manner.

B. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

8. WHO aims to promote global health equity through better management and sharing of knowledge. Its goal is to bridge the gap between what is known and what is done (the "know-do" gap), particularly in lower-middle income countries by creating an environment that encourages the creation, sharing and effective application of knowledge to improve health outcomes. Although effective knowledge management is essential in all regions and countries, special attention will be given to those countries that have the largest "know-do" gaps and face significant challenges to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

9. At headquarters, activities related to knowledge management include WHO's library and information networks for knowledge; publications and journals, inter alia, the *Bulletin* and *The world health report*; WHO's corporate web site; development of tools and methods to improve collaboration and learning; and eHealth, which involves making the best use of information and communications technologies in order to improve health.

10. A comprehensive strategy for management and sharing of knowledge will be completed in May 2005 after a process of consultation throughout WHO and with external organizations acknowledged as having strong knowledge-management programmes, experts in the field, donors and technical bodies.

11. The strategy focuses on four main areas: improving access to health information; maximizing the impact of health research through translation of knowledge into policy and action; fostering the sharing and reapplication of experiential knowledge; and making optimal use of eHealth to strengthen health systems and improve health. These areas will be backed up by efforts to drive change through agenda-setting and advocacy in the global health community; build capacity, both within and outside WHO; and conduct research to evaluate which approaches are most effective.

12. In order to implement the strategy, working relationships between the three levels of the Organization have been strengthened, a global approach to knowledge management has been developed, and a plan of action has been drawn up. New initiatives under way include framing of a publishing policy and process; launch of WHO's multilingual web site and a Portuguese language information-technology platform for health systems; monitoring of the global observatory for eHealth in countries; expansion of the global health library; introduction of knowledge platforms such as electronic health records to support "3 by 5" work in Africa; fostering the sharing of knowledge through communities of practice, such as networks of WHO collaborating centres; and a series of new publications.

13. A challenge for an effective knowledge management and sharing programme is to make possible the translation of knowledge into policy and action at all levels, shifting from the traditional role of information dissemination to one that is more strategic and supportive, and to build adequate capability within and outside the Organization in new relevant skills and competencies.

C. GLOBAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

14. Efficient and effective management of WHO's activities is required in order to accomplish the expected results set out in the Proposed programme budget. Work is under way to renew managerial principles and policies and to provide clear guidelines within which the Organization can operate optimally; to strengthen and simplify results-based management; and to determine methods of working that will strengthen programme delivery in support of countries. Emphasis is laid on simplifying and harmonizing WHO's work around the world. A key feature is the further decentralization of responsibility and authority, enabling approved programmes to be implemented at the level required, while ensuring adequate controls and full accountability.

15. This shift in ways of working will require staff training in the new managerial and administrative procedures and use of the new computerized management information system. Training will be tailored to the role and responsibility of any given staff member.

16. The selection of commercial software for the management information system was made after consultation with technical and administrative staff at all levels in regional offices and at headquarters in order to ensure that it best met WHO's requirements and would make possible an integrated approach to programme management and implementation. It is being examined for any shortcomings in its ability to meet WHO's future management and administration requirements, with a view to adopting the best practices inherent in the software.

17. The selection of a firm to assist WHO in deploying the software is reaching its conclusion. Only firms with recent experience in implementing such projects in other organizations of the United Nations have been considered in order to take advantage of lessons learnt. WHO has also benefited from contact with other organizations that have been through a similar exercise.

18. It is expected that introduction of the new system will lead to:

- elimination of risk of failure of corporate information systems
- better management, through the availability of timely and accurate global data to facilitate decision-making;
- efficiencies that will save time and money, for example by:
 - reducing the clerical and administrative workload of technical programme managers by two hours per week by end 2008, equivalent to a 5% increase in productive time for health technical work
 - enabling WHO to earn several hundred thousand United States dollars a year, through a significant reduction in the low-interest bearing cash held by the Organization
 - reducing by several months the interval between identification of a staffing need and recruitment of a suitably qualified person
 - eliminating the clerical work required to produce statutory reports, saving the equivalent of several full-time person-years in each biennium.

19. Prerequisites for the project to be successful include:

- adequate and affordable communication facilities to ensure that WHO country offices can use the supporting management information system
- adaptation of offices to the revised distribution of roles and responsibilities across the Organization
- an initial investment to ensure continuity of operations, since the existing systems cannot be discontinued until the new ones are functioning satisfactorily
- harmonization of practices in order to reduce extraordinary administrative and reporting requirements and accept standard reports, including with respect to extrabudgetary resources.

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