WHO publications policy: report on implementation

Report by the Secretariat

1.   In May 2008, the Executive Board at its 123rd session noted the report of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee,[1] which had observed that the full report on the implementation of the WHO publications policy, scheduled to be submitted to the Board at the 129th session, would indicate whether the objectives were being achieved. The Committee had asked for further information on the proposed categorization of WHO information products and guidance on approval at the different stages of the publishing process, and requested that users in developing countries be given free access to the proposed electronic library of WHO's information products and to other health-related databases.[2] Board members welcomed the proposals on quality, cost–effectiveness and accessibility, but expressed concerns about the approval process and the emphasis on electronic dissemination as the preferred means for dissemination. They requested further information on the role and membership of the proposed policy coordination group and the link between the policy and the action plan on multilingualism.[3] Members stressed the need to ensure that WHO's information products were made available in official and local languages, as well as in print when the intended target audience did not have reliable access to the Internet.

2.   This report describes the steps that have been taken to implement the policy, as at February 2011, and responds to the Board's requests and concerns.

PRINCIPAL STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PUBLICATIONS POLICY

Publishing Policy Coordination Group

3.   The Group, which reports to the Director-General, consists of members from each headquarters cluster and each regional office. It is responsible for overseeing implementation of the publications policy, with the following terms of reference:

- to advise on the mission, core values, budgeting and financing of WHO's publishing activities, the development of content to fill identified gaps in publishing, the detailed

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[1] See document EB123/2008/REC/1, summary record of the first meeting, section 6, and summary record of the second meeting, section 1.

[2] Document EB123/3.

[3] See documents EB121/6 and EB121/6 Corr.1.

categorization of information products, and the harmonization and standardization of publishing procedures and adoption of standardized publishing technologies across the Organization

- to propose mechanisms for ensuring that WHO's published materials are made available and accessible in the Organization's official languages, as well as in local languages, and requirements for the different categories of information products, in consultation with the Guidelines Review Committee

- to develop a strategy to set priorities for translation of information products, in consultation with Member States

- to provide guidance on WHO's dissemination practices, publishing training for WHO staff members, and the choice of tools and their application to monitor access to and use of WHO's information products.

4.   The Group has met 12 times since its establishment in June 2008 (nine videoconferences and three in-house meetings in Geneva). The outcomes include preparation of a draft policy on contractual arrangements for funding the development of information products and guidance documents on acknowledgement of contributions to information products and publishing in external journals. The Group has also considered other matters, including how to evaluate the impact of WHO's information products, multilingualism, open access, publishing training, revision of the WHO Manual and *WHO style guide*, and use of the WHO logo on information products.

Clear mechanisms for approval

5.   Planned information products were electronically catalogued with a data-collection tool in headquarters and five regional offices between February 2008 and June 2009. The tool was subsequently expanded into a larger application for approving planned products across the Organization. As a result, a master list of approved planned products has been created and is available on the headquarters Intranet for consultation by all WHO staff. The application, which aims to streamline the approval process for different products and reduce publishing costs through the elimination of potential duplicates, is intended to be used for all information products planned within the Organization, regardless of whether they are to be published by WHO or an external publisher, and whether they are to be printed or made available in other formats. As at February 2011, the application has been activated in headquarters and four regional offices, and discussions are under way to activate it in the remaining regional offices. It is currently being developed further so as to accommodate the approval requirements for different categories of products (see below) and the related publishing policies at the planning and content development stages. The approval requirements at the production stage will be integrated later.

6.   A study was initiated in 2010, to determine the number of contributions[1] published in the scientific press by staff in headquarters (including partnerships and WHO offices administered by headquarters) during the 2008–2009 biennium. A total of 1485 such contributions were identified, of which 143 were published in WHO journals and 1342 in external journals. The results of the study will be used as a basis for developing a strategy on external publications, which will form part of the overall strategy on publishing.

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[1] Includes articles, letters and commentaries.

Categorization of products

7.   Specifying categories of information products and clearly classifying such products according to those categories are the means of ensuring that drafts are processed in the most appropriate way, whether they are advocacy materials such as fact sheets, scientific or technical materials such as guidelines, or external publications such as journal articles. This approach promotes consistency (by ensuring that all publications with similar content or audiences are processed in the same way), simplifies decision-making (by defining dissemination formats for each category), enhances the approval process (by clarifying the major elements that must be assured for each category) and promotes cost savings (by discouraging unnecessarily elaborate formats, excessive print runs and untargeted mailings). All offices have some kind of categorization system, but work is being undertaken (see paragraph 5) to harmonize the different systems.

8.   One major area where improvements have been made is the process for developing guidelines. The *WHO handbook for guideline development* provides a set of detailed instructions for guideline development and clarification about when a product should be categorized as a guideline. The handbook is updated every year. Between January 2008 and December 2010, 275 new guidelines were submitted to the Guidelines Review Committee, of which 45 were rejected.

Cost–effectiveness in production and dissemination

9.   A new typesetting technology has been applied to the production of the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* in all six official languages. The software has been customized for further applications. Specific templates can be defined for each category of information product, and all file types required can be generated for printing and electronic dissemination (including applications for mobile telephones and accessible versions for people with visual impairments) and for archiving. Monographs produced with this software include *Women and health: today's evidence, tomorrow's agenda* and *The world health report – health systems financing: the path to universal coverage*. For the latter, the production costs per page (excluding translation and printing) were 35% lower than for *The world health report 2008: primary health care – now more than ever*. For the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, the full costs of the software are expected to be recovered by October 2011.

10.   Since defining production-file templates is complex, substantial savings can be made only if large numbers of pages are produced with the same template. A template has already been prepared for the WHO Technical Report Series. Several regional offices are monitoring developments in headquarters and some have started to implement this technology.

11.   Headquarters and regional offices extensively use their web sites to make publications available to the public. Full-text editions are generally made accessible online without charge, but it is often difficult for readers to find the information they are looking for unless they know the relevant titles. As part of the action plan on multilingualism, whose rapid implementation the Health Assembly requested in resolution WHA61.12, an electronic library – the "global institutional repository for information sharing (IRIS)" – has been established in headquarters and all regional offices. This "e-library" will eventually contain the definitive collection of WHO's information products in official and non-official languages, which will be fully searchable by keyword and accessible to users free of charge through a single web interface in all official languages. It is expected that the e-library will reduce further the need for large print runs.

12.   Use of print-on-demand technology is growing and is helping to reduce expenditure, in particular on storage. Initial print runs are being reduced in headquarters and the regional offices for Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Pacific, and subsequent print needs are being met through print-on-demand services. More than 250 WHO books that were out of print are now available through such services. Given the low cost of printing in India, the Regional Office for South-East Asia has assisted other parts of the Organization with conventional printing needs.

13.   WHO's free dissemination of printed products is generally declining as the cost of printing and mailing increases, although the mandatory dissemination to WHO regional and country offices, health ministries and depository libraries continues. The free dissemination of printed copies of several serial publications has been reduced following a recent exercise in which readers in countries with reliable access to the Internet were invited to use the electronic version, although copies are still sent on demand to readers with limited or no such access. The free dissemination of printed copies of non-serial publications and the WHO Technical Report Series may vary, depending on the print runs, and is often limited to the mandatory recipients. CD-ROMs also continue to be used as a low-cost alternative to print for reaching audiences with limited or no access to the Internet, although problems have been encountered when customs officials have considered them as goods and therefore imposed import duties, payment of which has often been refused by the recipients. At the same time, new Internet channels for book dissemination and sale are being increasingly exploited. One such site features more than 650 WHO information products in full text and attracted almost one million unique book visits and more than 12.5 million page views in 2009. WHO distributes more than 700 e-books though different commercial channels, reaching libraries in public and private organizations and individuals across the world. An increasing number of these e-books are available in formats that can be accessed and used on different mobile devices and personal computer technologies, including tablets, smart phones and e-reader devices.

14.   Other ways of reaching new audiences are being exploited. In line with the action plan on multilingualism, 430 contractual agreements were concluded during the biennium 2008–2009 with various partners for the translation of WHO publications, into 57 languages. New licensing arrangements have been concluded with several major publishers of scientific journals in order to facilitate the publication of articles by WHO staff members while ensuring that copyright is maintained by the Organization. An online form was introduced in headquarters in mid-2009 to facilitate the processing of requests to reproduce WHO materials in external books and articles; more than 3300 requests were processed in this way between July 2009 and December 2010. Guidance on "clear print" has also been introduced in headquarters and the Regional Office for Europe in order to improve the accessibility of WHO's printed information products for all audiences, including those with visual impairments, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.[1]

Enhanced support for publishing

15.   Since September 2008, the headquarters Intranet site has included a detailed guide to WHO's publishing policies and procedures. The guidance takes users from the stage of planning a publication, through content development, production, marketing and dissemination, to archiving and evaluation. Advice is given on the various issues that need to be considered, including attribution of authorship and acknowledgements, copyright, editorial style, electronic file formats and use of the WHO logo.

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[1] *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.* New York, United Nations, 2008 (http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=12&pid=150, accessed 7 February 2011).

The information relating to publishing policies will be incorporated into the revised WHO Manual. The regional offices also have publishing-related information on their Intranet sites, including guidance on the publishing process and templates for approval and production of information products.

16. In an effort to improve consistency in the information products issued by the Organization, an interregional working group has been established to prepare the second edition of the *WHO style guide*, for use by all WHO offices.

17. Staff training on publishing continues and has been supported by the Headquarters Learning Committee. Regular briefings on house style and outsourcing work to freelance editors and the workshop on improving text-revision skills continue, and the training on copyright has been expanded to include guidance on publishing at WHO. Several new courses have been introduced, including workshops on improving accessibility to printed materials, writing and publishing research articles, the new application for approving planned information products, and an overview of the publishing process at WHO. In 2008–2009, 47 such sessions were organized in headquarters, with 682 participants; in 2010, 69 sessions were organized, with 748 participants. Training videos on improving accessibility to printed materials have been made, a distance-learning course in proof-checking is under development, and other courses are planned, including briefings on publishing through external publishers and editorial style (after the second edition of the *WHO style guide* has been published) and workshops on the different phases of the publishing process, which will include advice on possible ways to reduce costs. In addition, generic versions of two established courses have been prepared for use by regional offices, and a "training of trainers" session has been organized in headquarters. Publishing training courses also continue to be organized in regional offices and at country level.

18. Workshops and lunchtime seminars on the development of guidelines have been organized in headquarters since 2008, covering topics such as conducting systematic reviews, assessing the quality of evidence, formulating recommendations, using the GRADE (Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation) methodology,[1] and implementing and adapting guidelines for end-users. Further workshops are planned for 2011 across the Organization. In addition, weekly clinics are held for guideline developers in headquarters and a web-based, e-learning course is being developed for guideline developers across the Organization.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

19. The Executive Board is invited to note the report.

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[1] http://www.gradeworkinggroup.org/.