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REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL INFORMATION FOR ALL PROGRAMME STRATEGIC PLAN (2008-2013)

SUMMARY

This document provides a review of the implementation of the Strategic Plan proposed by the Council of the Intergovernmental Information for All Programme (IFAP) and endorsed by the Executive Board at its 180th session.

Financial and activity implications: no impact on IFAP's activities in the 36 C/5 document but may influence the Programme's future orientations.

Action expected of the Executive Board: proposed decision in paragraph 28.

Background

1. The Information for All Programme (IFAP) was established in 2000 to provide a framework for international cooperation and partnerships in “building an information society for all”. An Intergovernmental Council comprising 26 Member States was elected to guide the Programme in its planning and implementation.
2. The IFAP Strategic Plan (2008–2013) was the outcome of a preparation process led by the IFAP Council that involved extensive consultation with stakeholders and partners. This document was submitted to the 180th session of the Executive Board for consideration and endorsement (180 EX/Decision 15).
3. At its 20th session, the IFAP Bureau, in line with the guidance received from the Council at its 7th session, elaborated the modalities for conducting this review of IFAP. The IFAP Secretariat, in consultation with UNESCO’s Internal Oversight Services (IOS), was requested to prepare a survey questionnaire. The Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, by his letter of 4 October 2012, requested Member States to complete and return the questionnaire by 15 December 2012 (Annex I containing the questionnaire is available on the IFAP website). A reminder was sent to Permanent Delegations of Member States on 29 November 2012 and to National Commissions for UNESCO on 30 November 2012.
4. All contributions received by the Secretariat were duly taken into account and the review findings are submitted to the Executive Board for its consideration.
5. As at 31 January 2013, the Secretariat had received 52 replies from the following Member States: Algeria, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Colombia, Côte d’Ivoire, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Finland, Germany, Greece, Grenada, Hungary, Iceland, Iran, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Madagascar, Mexico, Moldova, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Turkey and Ukraine.
6. Acknowledging receipt of the Assistant Director-General’s communication, five Member States (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) declined to complete the questionnaire and provided instead a joint statement in which, while underscoring the importance attached to the IFAP priority areas, they echoed the opinion that the Programme’s activities represented a duplication of both the ongoing work of the CI Sector and of the WSIS Action Lines entrusted to UNESCO. In their view, IFAP’s results are of limited impact and a hindrance to gaining international support for this aspect of UNESCO’s work. Consequently, they indicated that the prospects of reviving IFAP activities seem difficult and that therefore IFAP should be phased out by the end of the 36 C/5. Identical views were also expressed by Canada and Belgium. However, it was considered that aspects such as the expert networks and observatory should be preserved and integrated into the Regular Programme of the CI Sector.
7. Paraguay also did not fill in the questionnaire but indicated that following a period of dormancy it was in the process of resuming IFAP activities.
8. Annex II containing the list of IFAP’s major activities undertaken during the 2008–2013 period and of the key IFAP resources is available on the IFAP website.

Thematic areas covered by the Questionnaire

Mandate

9. Member States reaffirmed, in their overwhelming majority, the importance and relevance of all the IFAP priority areas to UNESCO’s global efforts to build knowledge societies and expressed a clear desire to see UNESCO strengthening its work in the IFAP programme priority areas.

10. While a number of Member States emphasized the inter-disciplinarity, synergy and mutually reinforcing nature of the programme priorities (Algeria, Belarus, China, Israel, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Nigeria, Poland, Slovakia and Tanzania) others identified some priorities as more relevant to their immediate national needs (Information Access – Algeria, Ecuador, Sudan; Information Literacy – Sudan and Turkey). On the other hand, two Member States questioned the relevance of various programme priorities and expressed a desire for their elimination (Hungary – information ethics; Belgium – information for development).

11. While acknowledging that agencies such as UNDP and ITU do conduct activities in areas addressed by IFAP such as information access, several Member States were of the view that the breadth of IFAP's mandate could be an advantage. The complementarity between IFAP and WSIS was noted by several Member States (Austria, Bahrain, Bulgaria and Tanzania) as well as the work of non-United Nations organizations such as the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) (Tanzania).

National level and international cooperation

12. All IFAP programme priorities were considered important for building national knowledge society efforts, with several Member States placing emphasis on information access and information literacy. Some Member States expressed interest in having their national experts involved in developing international cooperation in the IFAP priorities. The majority of Member States indicated that they had the ability to develop and implement national programmes in the IFAP priority areas. Nevertheless, many saw an important role for UNESCO in supporting awareness building and standard setting in specific priority areas, for example information ethics, that were not yet addressed in their respective national policy agendas (Algeria, Bahrain, China, Grenada, Latvia, Oman, Philippines, Poland, Slovakia Spain and Tajikistan); facilitating and coordinating regional collaboration (Bulgaria, China, Nigeria, Poland, Russian Federation, and Saudi Arabia); and in mobilizing financial and technical resources (El Salvador and Tanzania). In their view, IFAP should work closely with other regional intergovernmental bodies to develop synergies and impact.

13. Member States generally reported adequate levels of collaboration and support received from field offices in the undertaking of national IFAP activities. About one-third of Member States reported active cooperation with UNESCO field offices both in terms of ongoing in-country cooperation and national activities as well as in facilitating participation in international and regional IFAP events. Several Member States (Austria, Belarus, China, Colombia, Grenada, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, The Philippines, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Tanzania) also cited such cooperation. About one-fifth of the respondents did not know whether any such cooperation existed and a similar number indicated they had not received support from field offices; reasons given for the lack of assistance included the absence of a field office or programme specialist (Canada, Bahrain, Ecuador, Germany and Poland).

National IFAP Committees

14. Just under half of the Member States reported having a National IFAP Committee; however several Member States without an established committee (Austria, China, Ecuador, El Salvador, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Madagascar, Oman, Portugal, Saudi Arabia and Ukraine) confirmed the presence of formal national structures or mechanisms for undertaking IFAP-related activities. Where no IFAP Committee or formal structure exists, UNESCO National Commissions appear to play a de facto role in leading and coordinating the Programme's work.

15. Where IFAP structures do exist, it was reported that they were involved in undertaking activities such as the preparation of publications and newsletters, developing and implementing projects and contributing to their national information society policies. The modalities used by IFAP structures to support national policy work included organizing or attending capacity-building events, conducting research, involvement in policy consultations and participation in conferences.

Content of IFAP

16. Many Member States expressed support for IFAP's work in the area of multilingualism. A majority of the respondents were of the opinion that IFAP should provide national-level policy support as well as project initiatives at the national, regional and international level. Several Member States (Latvia, Oman, The Philippines and Poland) were more cautious, advocating that given the resource limitations faced by IFAP, it should rather direct its attention to policy-oriented initiatives as well as seek to cooperate with ongoing projects through the provision of technical advice. The Czech Republic indicated its willingness to work with IFAP to support the replication in other countries of the successful experiences gained from projects it had carried out in Kenya.

17. Practically all Member States are aware of the IFAP website and IFAP strategic Plan (2008–2013). However, the survey showed a much lower level of awareness of resources such as the Information Society Observatory established at the request of Member States, as well as of numerous documents and resources readily available for download on the front page of the IFAP website. Other documents proposed by IFAP and subsequently adopted by UNESCO's General Conference at its 35th and 36th sessions and included in the 36 C/5 as part of the Organization's work also appear to be not fully known.

Funding

18. During the period 2008–2013, some US \$776,000 in Regular Programme funding has been provided for IFAP statutory meetings and activities. Furthermore, extrabudgetary contributions of some \$100,000 were made to the IFAP Special Account by the Government of China and approximately \$230,000 were used from the remaining contribution made by the Government of Spain prior to the period covered by this report. The Government of the Russian Federation also reported it had provided direct financial support of some \$400,000 to a number of major conferences and initiatives organized in Eastern Europe.

19. In general, Member States were of the view that the Regular Programme ought to be the primary source of funding for IFAP, with both extrabudgetary and direct funding of designated projects being used to support its activities. However, China wished to see more funding channels created and Nigeria felt that Member States of the Council should play a larger role in fund mobilization. The Russian Federation, while recognizing the role of Member States, highlighted the need for greater inputs from UNESCO through the Regular Programme and the mobilizing of additional extrabudgetary resources.

20. The majority of Members States expressed dissatisfaction with IFAP's level of funding and almost half of respondents considered that the IFAP Secretariat did not have sufficient resources to implement IFAP's activities. Furthermore, some Member States indicated that the available resources were insufficient to support the global programme of work envisaged (El Salvador, Madagascar, Latvia).

21. The lack of funding at the national level was highlighted as a hindrance both to undertaking national activities and attracting experts to the national IFAP structures. Two respondents mentioned that persons involved often participated and organized these activities at their own cost and based on their own interest and motivation (Israel, Kyrgyzstan).

22. Of the respondents, five Member States (China, Ecuador, Nigeria, Oman and the Russian Federation) indicated a willingness to consider contributing financially to the Programme. Reasons given by Member States for not contributing included *inter alia* the economic crisis, the absence of a National IFAP Committee, competing priorities, etc.

Evaluation of IFAP

23. 71% of respondent Member States positively evaluated the IFAP Programme and its results for UNESCO. Furthermore, 67% of Member States wish to see IFAP's priorities continue to be covered in an integrated way within one Intergovernmental Programme and 83% of Member States expressed the opinion that the existing priority action lines should be maintained. Some Member States are convinced that IFAP's priorities should continue to be addressed through a single Intergovernmental Programme so as to reinforce their interdependencies and continue to contribute to UNESCO's Regular Programme as emphasized by Bulgaria, China, Ecuador, Israel and Poland. Two Member States (Sudan and Turkey) considered that specific national or regional needs should drive the content of IFAP's activities.

24. Member States identified IFAP's ability to generate interregional synergies and international interdisciplinary cooperation as one of its strengths and also pointed to its networks of experts and the IFAP Observatory as another asset. However, Member States also expressed the opinion that IFAP's inability to widely and effectively communicate its achievements was a major shortcoming which was constraining its ability to attract funding.

25. The participation of national experts in IFAP events was viewed favourably and respondents indicated satisfaction in the subsequent impact that this had on national initiatives undertaken in the various priority areas.

26. Nearly half (46%) of the Member States considered that IFAP has achieved the goals of the Strategic Plan (2008-2013) while 14% of Member States did not share this view. About one-quarter (27%) indicated that they did not have sufficient information to make that assessment, while the remaining Member States did not respond to this question.

27. Member States also underscored a desire to have UNESCO's governing bodies consider and address how the financial situation and effectiveness of this intergovernmental programme could be further improved. In this regard, a number of concrete proposals were made by several Member States, such as increasing visibility and awareness about IFAP, providing greater support to national needs by strengthening capacity of national experts and of national IFAP structures, enhancing engagement and outreach to stakeholders particularly youth groups and civil society bodies who are directly concerned by the IFAP priorities but remain outside the intergovernmental setting.

Action expected of the Executive Board

28. The Executive Board may wish to adopt the following decision:

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling 180 EX/Decision 15,
2. Having examined the report of the Director-General on the review of the implementation of the Strategic Plan for IFAP for the period 2008-2013 contained in document 191 EX/41,
3. Expresses appreciation to the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Council for the Information for All Programme and to the members of the IFAP Council who have contributed to the preparation of this review,
4. Takes note with satisfaction of the fact that 52 Member States have provided their substantive inputs to the review process,
5. Confirms its commitment to the global goal of universal access to information and knowledge for all,

6. Takes note of the opinions expressed by Member States and the findings of the review process,
7. Invites the Director-General to transmit to the General Conference at its 37th session this report, together with the Executive Board's observations made during the debate on this item and any observations or comments that the Director-General may wish to make.



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ADDENDUM

SUMMARY

This document is an addendum to document 191 EX/41. It contains the links to the annexes of the document.

Annex IA – Circular letter:

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/ifap/ifap_strategic_plan_letter.pdf

Annex IB – Questionnaire:

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/ifap/ifap_survey_questionnaire_oct2012.pdf

Annex IIA – Key IFAP Resources:

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/ifap/annex2a_key_ifap_resources.pdf

Annex IIB – Major IFAP Activities:

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/ifap/annex2b_information_ifap_review_ex191.pdf