

Dietrich Schüller

## The Information for All-Programme (IFAP) of UNESCO

To avoid misunderstandings from the start: IFAP is **not** a Programme **separate** from, or **above** the regular Programme and Budget of UNESCO;

- IFAP covers one of the key issues of civilisation, namely **information and its organisation**, in an emerging digital world. These issues have high trans-sectoral (transversal) significance for the entire programme of UNESCO, such as the priority areas: promoting information literacy; information ethics, and information preservation.
- Therefore, these issues have been highlighted as a "Programme" (=IFAP).
- In order to ensure the a well informed advice from Member States beyond General Conferences, an Intergovernmental Council has been established which is formed by specialists of 26 Member States. It Bureau meets twice a year.
- The Council and its Bureau advises the Director General and the Secretariat on issues covered by the mission of IFAP. The appropriate actions are taken within the regular programme and financed by the regular budget. This does not exclude endeavours to raise extra budgetary funds by special actions of IFAP.
- Because specialised NGOs play an important role in the implementation of relevant actions, they are closely included into the decision making process of Council and Bureau<sup>1</sup>.

The Information for All-Programme was established in 2001. Located in the *Sector for Communication and Information*, it followed the General Programme of Information (PGI) and the International Informatics Programme (IIP), which in several of their activities were overlapping. IFAP is directed by an Intergovernmental Council consisting of 26 member states, elected at the biennial General Conferences by all member states for a term of 4 years. These four year periods are interlacing at the time for half of the membership, in order to ensure continuity in the conduct of business. Due to budgetary considerations, the Council has been kept relatively small. Therefore, member states are encouraged to send experts as their representatives. The Council meets every two years. The Bureau, elected at these meetings, forms the executive of the Council and consists of a President, three Vice-presidents, three Members and the Rapporteur. The composition of the Bureaux, like that of the Council itself, is intended to represent electoral groups evenly.

One of the central concerns of UNESCO is the disparity between developed and developing countries. Despite all endeavours to counteract this disparity, modern ICTs are specifically sensitive to respective economic situations. This has led to a digital divide, which is not peculiar to "northern" vs. "southern" countries only, but also to specific groups like women, youth and the elderly, and disabled persons everywhere around the world.

The Information for All Programme seeks in particular to:

- promote international reflection and debate on the ethical, legal and societal challenges of the information society;
- promote and widen access to information in the public domain through the organization, digitisation and preservation of information;

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<sup>1</sup> IFAP Agenda, April 2007

- support training, continuing education and lifelong learning in the fields of communication, information and informatics;
- support the production of local content and foster the availability of indigenous knowledge through basic literacy and ICT literacy training;
- promote the use of international standards and best practices in communication, information and informatics in UNESCO's fields of competence; and
- promote information and knowledge networking at local, national, regional and international levels <sup>2</sup>.

In streamlining its effectiveness, IFAP is concentrating on three priority areas:

1. Promoting information literacy for all people;
2. Strengthening awareness about the importance of preservation of information of all kinds;
3. Promoting a better understanding of the ethical, legal and societal implications of ICTs.

A specific feature of IFAP is the mentioned close cooperation with NGOs. IFLA, ICA and CCAA<sup>3</sup> representatives take part actively in the deliberations of the Council and Bureau, thus ensuring an optimal alignment between the "legislative" and the practitioners.

One of the foremost tasks of Council and Bureau is to consult the Director General and the secretariat in the preparation of the Medium Term Strategies and the Biennial Programmes and Budgets. Beyond these regular consultations, IFAP representatives, generally the President and/ or Bureau members, are closely involved in UNESCO's actions such as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and its follow up. IFAP also promotes smaller events like the World Day for Audiovisual Archives (27 October), but also meetings and conferences in the fields of its competence.

In order to support knowledge and awareness of key areas in its mandate, so-called *Thematic Days* are arranged at IFAP Bureau Meetings. These events convene Bureau members and experts, and specifically include members of the Secretariat. Some of the recent topics were *Measurement for Knowledge Societies*, *Infoethics*, *Information Literacy and Information Preservation*.

The last topic, naturally, is of specific interest in the context of *Memory of the World*. The outcomes of this Thematic Debate held in April 2007 were *Key Messages for Governments and the Industry*<sup>4</sup>, and the promotion of FOSS (Free and Open Software)<sup>5</sup>.

The work of IFAP is not confined to the direct cooperation between the Council and the Bureau with UNESCO headquarters. Important bodies are the IFAP National Committees, which have already been established in 57 member states. Their task is to act as a link between respective national experts, bringing their inputs to the Council, while likewise disseminating UNESCO's initiatives to the experts of member states for efficient implementation.

IFAP has been evaluated in 2006, which unveiled several basic misunderstandings on the part of the evaluators which, unfortunately, were not adequately explained in the course of the process. The major mistake was probably triggered by the word "Programme" in its title,

<sup>2</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=21291&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=21291&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>3</sup> IFLA: International Federation of Library Association and Institutions; ICA: International Council on Archives; CCAA: Coordination Council of the Audiovisual Archives Associations

<sup>4</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/24447/11776910681Key\\_Messages\\_for\\_Governments\\_and\\_Industry.pdf/Key%2BMessages%2Bfor%2BGovernments%2Band%2BIndustry.pdf](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/24447/11776910681Key_Messages_for_Governments_and_Industry.pdf/Key%2BMessages%2Bfor%2BGovernments%2Band%2BIndustry.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/25323/11890995031INF\\_5\\_Open\\_source\\_-\\_proprietary\\_software.doc/INF%2B5%2BOpen%2Bsource%2B-%2Bproprietary%2Bsoftware.doc](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/25323/11890995031INF_5_Open_source_-_proprietary_software.doc/INF%2B5%2BOpen%2Bsource%2B-%2Bproprietary%2Bsoftware.doc)

which suggested that IFAP is a Programme separate from, or above the regular Budget and Programme. It was specifically criticised that IFAP has no specific budget of its own. A clarification has, therefore, been made in *IFAP Agenda April 2007*, which is quoted as the initial statement of this paper.

IFAP Evaluation was discussed at the 34th General Conference. The majority of member states underlined the importance of IFAP and its mandate, and insisted that it must be maintained. At the same time, however, restructuring was recommended by establishing a *strategy plan*. Supporters argued vis-à-vis some critical voices that the existence of an Intergovernmental Council strengthens democratic cooperation of member states in a field of central significance for the work of UNESCO. Otherwise, input of member states would be restricted to General Conferences, which, in view of the importance of the matter, was considered insufficient.