C 2017/3 - Medium Term Plan 2018-21 and Programme of Work and Budget 2018-19

Information Note no. 3 – April 2017

Language Services at FAO

I.   Introduction

1.   In considering the proposed Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) 2018-19, the Finance Committee at its 166th Session (27-31 March 2017) requested the Secretariat to prepare for consideration by the Council an "*information note on proposed outsourcing of conference services, elaborating in particular on the reduction of language posts, expected savings as a result of outsourcing, transitional arrangements, measures to ensure quality of language services and products*".[1] This information note responds to the request.

2.   Multilingualism is a fundamental principle for FAO. It is key to the full participation of Members in the work of the Organization, ensuring transparency and effectiveness of its governance. The Conference, Council and Protocol Affairs Division (CPA) currently provides conference services to meetings of FAO governing bodies, in particular language services (official correspondence, interpretation, translation and terminology), as well as printing and distribution of governing body documents. In the PWB 2018-19 there is a net reduction of 36 PWB posts[2] in CPA (paragraphs 98-100 and Annex 9), of which:

    a)   Twelve non-language posts relate to printing and distribution of documents, where the Printing and Distribution Group is downsized and transferred to the Office for Corporate Communications, which will manage a new printing contract with an outside company;

    b)   One non-language post providing IT services is transferred to the Information Technology Division in line with corporate policy;

    c)   Eleven posts in non-language areas of CPA (Conference and Council Secretariat, Meeting Services, Correspondence and Protocol)

    d)   Twelve language services posts in the Meeting Programming and Documentation Service (CPAM), which has the responsibility for *FAO's language services*: Translation, Interpretation and Terminology and Language support.

3.   This note elaborates on the streamlining of *FAO languages services* (translation, interpretation and terminology and language support), as well as *FAO's business model for language services*, which aim to safeguard parity of language and multilingualism and ensure high quality language services.

II.   Streamlining of FAO Language Services

4.   For the biennium 2018-19, FAO will continue improving the quality and timely availability of its language products while pursuing efficiency savings in language services. The PWB 2018-19 proposes that "*…concerning language services, including official correspondence, interpretation, translation and terminology, a higher volume of work will be outsourced, taking advantage of rapidly evolving language service technology and capacity worldwide. This will allow the Conference, Council and Protocol Affairs Division (CPA) to reduce support staff and concentrate on the timeliness and quality of language service products delivered to Members and the secretariat, with a net reduction of 23 posts.*"[3]

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[1] CL 156/4 para 20 f)

[2] "PWB posts" are defined as established posts included in the PWB post counts as shown in document C 2017/3 Annex 9. In addition, there are 6 "non-PWB posts" established in the translation, interpretation and language support groups funded from the assessed contributions, as shown in Part III of this note; these posts are not included in the PWB post counts C 2017/3 Annex 9.

[3] C 2017/3 para. 100

5.   The Meeting Programming and Documentation Service (CPAM) has the responsibility for FAO's language services: translation, interpretation, terminology and language support. The business model adopted for FAO language services (see *Part III*) will help achieve efficiency savings and allow the abolition of 12 (6 P, 6 GS) PWB posts that are currently vacant. As a result of this exercise CPAM staffing will be reduced from the current 49 PWB posts (27 P and 22 GS) to 37 PWB posts (21 P and 16 GS), as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 – Number of PWB posts in Language Services (CPAM)

	2016-17			2018-19		
	P	**GS**	**Tot**	**P**	**GS**	**Total**
Translation Groups	17	14	31	14	10	24
Interpretation Group	5	2	7	3	2	5
Terminology and Language Support Group	5	6	11	4	4	8
Totals	**27**	**22**	**49**	**21**	**16**	**37**

6.   It should be noted that of the six professional language services posts to be abolished, only four were directly assigned to translation and interpretation work. The other two posts were providing support to the language function. They can be abolished due to the efficiency gains made possible by enhanced reliance on advanced technology, as described in this note.

7.   It is estimated that as a result of the proposed changes, overall savings in the areas of translation, interpretation, terminology and language support services will amount to USD 2.6 million of which USD 1.06 million in CPA budget and USD 1.56 million in corporate/pool funding as per breakdown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Savings due to abolition of PWB posts in CPAM

Savings	**CPA budget**	**Pool funding**[4]	**Total**
Translation Groups	384 792	1 090 000	1 474 792
Interpretation Group	0	470 000	470 000
Terminology and Language Support Group	679 704	0	679 704
Total	**1 064 496**	**1 560 000**	**2 624 496**

III.   FAO Business Model for Language Services

8.   The FAO business model for language services aims to safeguard parity of language and multilingualism and ensure high quality services in translation, interpretation and terminology.

Translation

9.   CPAM is responsible for the translation of: i) meeting documents for Governing Bodies, Statutory Bodies, and meetings at ministerial level; ii) flagship publications such as SOFIA, SOFO, SOFI, SOFA, SOCO; and iii) official correspondence and specific administrative documents (administrative circulars, vacancy announcements etc.) A recent analysis of the division of labour in the translation groups showed that approximately 70 percent of the work is devoted to translation and revision and 30 percent on language support services (12 percent to finalizing documents, 12 percent

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[4] FC135/15 Languages Services and Funding Options, paragraph 7: *the majority of Regular Programme funds related to language services are not earmarked in FAO's budget for these services. They are instead mainly part of a fully fungible allotment provided to divisions to flexibly select the most effective means to deliver organizational results. The budgetary allocations of meetings, documents and publications are thus largely spread across the FAO divisions and organizational results that anticipate requiring the use of such services to deliver their programmes on the basis of their programme of work/meeting planning. Divisions are free, with some limitations, to utilize the internal language services or to contract external providers directly.*

to language support and 6 percent to workflow management). This work stream covers documents translated internally and externally. The total number of words translated has been stable over the last few years (with a slightly different pattern in periods of high and very low demand).

10.   Approximately 60 percent of translation work is outsourced to certified translators. This business model guarantees the flexibility needed to ensure that commitments are strictly matched to the demand. The first and foremost criterion for retaining external translators is the quality of their work. For this reason, CPA ensures that all divisions pay the same fee to external translators, which helps preventing that they be selected mostly on the basis of costs, with the resulting risk that it could compromise quality.

11.   The five Translation Groups in CPAM (Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish) are structured to provide high quality services and fast turnaround when needed, notably for in-session reports of meetings held at any location. Each Translation Group translates between 900 and 1 400 documents per year, totalling between 2.2 and 3.4 million words for each language. Thanks to the advanced scheduling of all Governing Body sessions in the PWB (see *Web Annex 12*), CPA is able to plan and ensure availability of resources for servicing these sessions.

12.   Under the adjusted business model for language services proposed for 2018-19, all translation groups will have the same structure (with slight adjustments for Arabic and Chinese) with three professional posts (1 P5, 1 P4 and 1 P3) and two General Service posts (G5 and G4). The French Group will have two additional posts (1 P3, 1 G4), to deal with a historically higher workload. No professional post is foreseen for the English Group, due to the limited demand for translation into English.

13.   Given that a large part of translation work is already outsourced and that the posts to be abolished are all vacant, this adjusted business model can be implemented immediately and smoothly without requiring transitional arrangements. The distribution of posts is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 – Budgeted posts in Translation Groups

	2016-17			2018-19		
Group	**P**	**GS**	**Total**	**P**	**GS**	**Tot**
Arabic	4	2	6	3	1	4
Chinese	3	4	7	3	3	6
English	1	2	3		1	1
French	4	3	7	4	3	7
Russian	1		1	1		1
Spanish	4	3	7	3	2	5
PWB Post Total	**17**	**14**	**31**	**14**	**10**	**24**
*Russian (ex-TF)**	*2*	*2*	*4*	*2*	*2*	*4*

Russian translation group includes budgeted non-PWB posts previously funded from Trust Fund.

14.   The improved business model outlined in the PWB 2018-19 also includes further cost reductions to be achieved in language support services through increased reliance on modern technologies (see *Annex*) and recruitment of human resources able to multitask between translation, interpretation and terminology work.

Interpretation

15.   FAO holds on average 250 sessions of Governing and Statutory Bodies per biennium, in addition to 600 smaller events requiring interpretation. In 2014-15, 21 percent of these meetings were held in five or six FAO languages, 8 percent in four languages and 18 percent in three languages[5].

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[5] C 2017/8 - Programme Implementation Report 2014-15, Annex 1.

16.   Interpretation in FAO already relies largely on outsourcing (in 2016, 94 percent of interpretation work was delivered by freelance certified interpreters).[6] In order to optimize the use of resources in a context of fluctuating demand, an effort has been made in recent years to recruit multitasking language staff (translators/interpreters), which allows for increased availability and better use of resources.

17.   The proposed structure of the Interpretation Group in the PWB 2018-19 (reflected in Table 4 below) includes one P-5 post responsible for managing the Group, as well as the delicate planning of required interpretation work months in advance and to ensure that interpreters are identified and recruited in time for all main sessions and also to respond to unplanned requests for interpretation. This function is supported by two GS staff. In addition, two professional staff interpreter posts will remain on board (English and French) as an analysis of the pattern of meetings in terms of interpretation days revealed that for Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish, the maximum rate of utilization of FAO staff interpreters varied between 45 and 55 percent only, while it reached between 75 and 85 percent for English and French.

Table 4 – Budgeted posts in the Interpretation Group

Group	2016-17			2018-19		
	P	GS	Total	P	GS	Total
Management	1	2	3	1	2	3
Chinese	1		1			
English	1		1	1		1
French	1		1	1		1
Spanish	1		1			
PWB Post Total	**5**	**2**	**7**	**3**	**2**	**5**
Russian (ex-TF)*	*1*		*1*			

Russian interpretation group includes a budgeted non-PWB post previously funded from Trust Fund.

Terminology and Language Support

18.   The Language Support Group compiles official FAO terminology, maintains databases and provides assistance to staff and non-staff translators and interpreters. The Group is also responsible for terminology management, which includes identifying areas requiring terminology development, extracting terminology from existing documents and literature and creating terminology records and definitions. Linguistic validation is achieved through collaboration with language professionals working with FAO and other international organizations. The Language Support Group provides departments and secretariats with quality-assurance services for: i) reliable validation of new terminology generated by corporate activities; ii) linguistic contributions to the corporate terminology database; and iii) consistency in the corpus of documents generated by FAO.

19.   The expanded use of Computer Assisted Translation (CAT) tools (see *Annex*) will reduce the need for support activities such as references. Reference work facilitates the translation process with thorough research into each document to verify if any part of it may have existed, in any form, in a previously translated document. This work helps to ensure consistency of language and saves translation time. With newly-available technology, translated documents are now more quickly inserted in customized translation memories, allaying the need to reference all documents. This repository of translated documents also makes it easier for external translators to familiarize themselves with FAO terminology.

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[6] When recruiting freelance interpreters, FAO applies the condition of employment provided in the agreement concluded by the UN Common System and the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), under the aegis of the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). All UN System organizations as well as conference interpreters are bound by this agreement. The application of this agreement ensures that freelance interpreters meet established standards of competence and qualifications. The fact that rates are negotiated in advance and applicable across the UN system also avoids bidding contests between organizations that could lead to cost increases.

20.   In addition, considerable efforts have been made in recent years to improve the terminology platform in terms of architecture and content. In the current biennium, the content of the *Term Portal* and *FAOTERM* terminology database was enhanced for all languages.

21.   It is to be noted that due to specific requirements of Arabic, Chinese and Russian terminology (e.g. different alphabet) there are three specific Terminology Officers posts for these languages. Their roles encompass the identification of emerging new terminology in these languages and the liaison with the Senior Revisers (P-5) in the corresponding Translation Groups. They also provide assistance to the interpreters by preparing specialized technical glossaries in advance of technical meetings.

22.   Given the fundamental importance of this terminology database, the coordination staff will continue to ensure coverage of terminology needs in English, French and Spanish while staff capacity fully dedicated to Arabic, Chinese and Russian languages will be maintained. The proposed staffing in the Language Support Group in 2018-19 is as follows:

Table 5 - Budgeted posts in the Language Support Group

Group	2016-17			2018-19		
	P	GS	Total	P	GS	Total
Coordination and reference	3	6	9	2	4	6
Arabic	1		1	1		1
Chinese	1		1	1		1
PWB Post Total	**5**	**6**	**11**	**4**	**4**	**8**
*Russian (ex-TF)**	*1*		*1*	*1*		*1*

Russian Language Support group includes a budgeted non-PWB post previously funded from Trust Fund.

23.   In conclusion, building on years of experience with a continuous attention to quality improvement and innovation in a fast changing technological context, the proposed transformation of FAO language services will safeguard parity of language and multilingualism and ensure high quality language services.

Language Services in a changing environment -

Examples of innovations being used in FAO

CAT Tools

24.   Over recent years, the deployment of Computer Assisted Translation (CAT) tools at FAO has contributed greatly to the quality and timeliness of reference and pre-translation work. CPA has steadfastly encouraged language staff and freelancers to use this modern technology and is banking on the expanded use of these tools in the future. In cooperation with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), all internal translators have access to a customized engine for automatic translation, with encouraging results so far. Experience shows that further enhancement can be beneficial in the coming years, notably with the amelioration of "machine translation". The profession has quickly adapted to CAT tools and is decidedly moving towards their greater integration in work processes as they continue to improve.

XML - Extensible Mark-up Language

25.   Further cost-efficient streamlining will be achieved with the introduction of the XML standard for production of documents, replacing the use of simple templates in a standard word processor. XML allows information to be identified in a more accurate, flexible, and adaptable way. It is extensible, allowing tagging of the content of the document to support specific requirements (e.g. for parliamentary documents or Governing Body documents). With this technology, documents will no longer be just plain undifferentiated text, but a collection of semantically relevant components that can be individually indexed, versioned, tracked, distributed, and made machine-readable. Adoption of an XML standard will also ensure sustainability and continual improvement. XML will be used from the initial drafting of documents to enable authors to provide better quality text for revision and translation, with no changes in their methods of work.

26.   With XML, costs will go down as a result of the reduced time needed for authoring governing body documents in the template format and for the pre- and post-processing activities now required before and after translation. Currently, the text of any document to be translated has to be extracted from the template (pre-processing) and re-formatted in the meeting template (post-processing) before publication. These two activities will no longer be needed on an XML-based structured document which will generate savings in time and money.

27.   FAO is at the forefront of a UN pilot project initiated in 2015 to explore new modalities for the production of documents, using an XML semantic standard called *Akoma Ntoso*, which was defined by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA) as part of a project supporting African parliaments in their legislative process. Since 2016, FAO and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) of the UN are co-leading a working group established by the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) of the UN Chief Executive Board for Coordination (CEB), with the ultimate objective of adopting *Akoma Ntoso* as the unique UN wide standard for documents. Indeed, at its recently concluded meeting (Budapest, 30-31 March 2017), the HLCM decided to propose the adoption of *Akoma Ntoso* standards to the CEB.

28.   With this new standard, the production of documents will be progressively streamlined by reducing the time needed for finalizing documents. This will achieve efficiency savings and provide language staff with additional time to focus on the quality of translation.