



COUNCIL

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Strategic policy framework for multilingualism

Executive summary

Multilingualism is a defining characteristic of FAO as an international, intergovernmental agency. It is firmly rooted in FAO's Basic Texts as Rule XLVIII of the General Rules of the Organization establishes that "Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish are the languages of the Organization". All six languages enjoy equal status within FAO and as such, they provide an effective tool for the Organization to engage and interact with Members, partners and recipients of its goods and services.

Multilingualism implies the mainstreaming of the use of all six FAO languages as appropriate in the delivery of the Organization's mandate and is thus more than a linguistic factor. It enables the participation of Members in the governance of the Organization in an efficient, effective and transparent manner; it promotes unity in diversity, recognising the importance to communicate to the peoples of the world in their own languages for effective delivery of the Organization's mandate; and it is pervasive in the composition and workings of the Secretariat.

As a specialised and knowledge-based organisation, FAO provides a wide range of multilingual products and services from headquarters to decentralised levels. This strategic policy framework aims to serve at the corporate level and provide a holistic and practical approach to meet the demand for improved performance and optimised resource mobilisation on multilingualism in the Organization.

It outlines the role of the Corporate Coordinator for Multilingualism; presents the landscape of FAO's multilingual products and services; covering translation, interpretation, publications and communication and other products; the use of non-FAO languages and finally the multilingual skills of FAO staff.

Suggested action by the Council

The Council is invited to endorse the strategic policy framework for multilingualism, as outlined in this document.

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

Rakesh Muthoo
Director
Governing Bodies Servicing Division (CSG)
Tel: +39 06570 55987
Email: CSG-Director@fao.org

I. Introduction

1. Multilingualism is a defining characteristic of FAO as an international, intergovernmental agency. It is firmly rooted in FAO's Basic Texts, as Rule XLVIII of the General Rules of the Organization establishes that "Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish are the languages of the Organization".¹ All six languages enjoy equal status within FAO and as such, they provide an effective tool for the Organization to engage and interact with Members, partners and recipients of its goods and services.
2. Multilingualism implies the mainstreaming of the use of all six FAO languages, as appropriate, in the delivery of the Organization's mandate and is thus more than a linguistic factor. It enables the participation of Members in the governance of the Organization in an efficient, effective and transparent manner; it promotes unity in diversity, recognising the importance to communicate to the peoples of the world in their own languages for effective delivery of the Organization's mandate; and it is pervasive in the composition and workings of the Secretariat.
3. Since the 2020-2021 biennium, there has been increased demand for, and commitment to, multilingualism at FAO as one of the key areas for gaining efficiency and modernisation in the Organization's enabling environment.² Building on such momentum, this strategic policy framework for multilingualism is developed to identify the corporate approach for further promoting multilingualism across FAO.

II. Objective

4. This strategic policy framework aims to serve at the corporate level and provide a holistic and practical approach to meet the demand for improved performance and optimised resource mobilisation on multilingualism in the Organization, in order to enhance the use of all FAO languages in a balanced, coherent, efficient and effective manner to facilitate the governance and branding of the Organization, as well as the delivery and communication of its programmes of work in support of the implementation of FAO's Strategic Framework.

III. Corporate Coordinator for Multilingualism

5. The Corporate Coordinator for Multilingualism is responsible for the implementation of this strategic policy framework, supporting organisational units at headquarters and in decentralised locations in gearing up their multilingual activities, delivery of language services for Governing Bodies and Statutory Bodies, monitoring progress in implementation of mandates relating to multilingualism across the Organization, and participation in efforts for the enhancement of multilingualism within the United Nations system.
6. The continual enhancement of multilingualism is intrinsically a shared corporate responsibility across FAO, as is the associated delivery of language products and services. The Corporate Coordinator thus facilitates the active participation and close collaboration of all stakeholders and organisational units in this enterprise, not least to meet the ever increasing demand as outlined in the Programme Implementation Report 2020-21.³
7. At FAO, the originators of multilingual products permeate organisational units responsible for its strategic, policy, technical, scientific, data, operational, communication and human resources' activities at headquarters and at decentralised level, whereas the language expertise capacity is housed in dedicated groups for translation, interpretation and terminology in the Governing Bodies Servicing Division (CSG).

¹ Basic Texts, 2017 Edition, Rule XLVIII. <http://www.fao.org/3/mp046e/mp046e.pdf>

² C 2021/3, Medium Term Plan 2022-25 and Programme of Work and Budget 2022-23, paragraph 113, f). <http://www.fao.org/3/ne576en/ne576en.pdf>

³ C 2023/8 Annex 7: FAO Language Policy and Multilingualism. <https://www.fao.org/3/ni922en/ni922en.pdf>

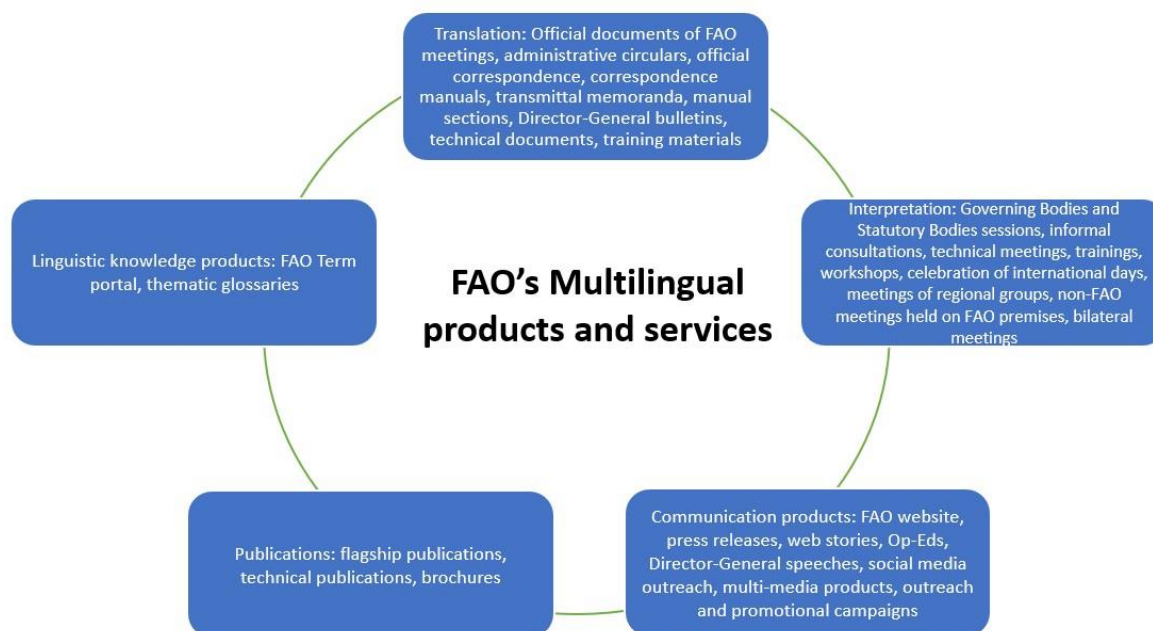
8. The Corporate Coordinator for Multilingualism thus supports the required planning, monitoring and delivery of language products and services covering the spectrum of collaborators from upstream originators to downstream in-house language expertise; and leads the definition and updating of relevant processes and workflows, including the associated submission deadlines and other requirements, as well as underlying technological enhancements.

9. In addition, the Corporate Coordinator is responsible for organising the inputs of reporting to Members on the Organization's delivery of multilingual products and services, in particular through the biennial Programme Implementation Report in the form of a dedicated annex within this keystone reporting document; as well as articulation of the quadrennial review of the strategic policy framework for multilingualism based on the guidance of Members through the relevant Governing Bodies.

IV. Landscape of FAO's Multilingual Products and Services

10. As a specialised and knowledge-based organisation, FAO provides a wide range of multilingual products and services from headquarters to decentralised levels to a broad range of audience for various purposes. Figure 1 below presents the landscape of FAO's multilingual products and services, which are categorised into five groups: translation, interpretation, publications, communication products and linguistic knowledge products.

Figure 1: Landscape of FAO's Multilingual Products and Services



11. As indicated in this figure, these five groups of products and services are available to FAO Members, partners, researchers and academic communities, civil society, private sector, personnel and the general public, to serve various purposes, such as governance, outreach and advocacy and training and knowledge sharing.

12. Furthermore, different users also hold different priorities for multilingual products and services, which must be taken into due account in order to optimise the use of limited resources, both financial and human, to meet the growing demand across the spectrum. For example, some may have high requirements on the accuracy and quality of language products, while others may prioritise time sensitivity in delivery of the same, whereas others focus on a reliable and quality source of knowledge and expertise such as FAO's terminology databases that build on continuous refinement and updating.

As a result, in the sections below, the Organization intends to establish its approach to each group of multilingual products and services based on the intended audience and purposes.

V. Translation

13. Given the significant amount and complexity of FAO's translation products, the Organization duly considers the factors raised in Section IV and identifies the approach for differentiating mandatory and non-mandatory internal translation to ensure all products are delivered to meet the demand for quality and timeliness, while optimising the use of limited resources.

14. Priority is given to translation assignments that are of importance to the governance of the Organization, and those with high reputational significance. Therefore, it is mandatory for translation of these products to be carried out directly by FAO's staff translators, revisers and senior revisers of the Language Service in CSG, who are recognised as linguistic experts on FAO subjects. In turn, they work with the support of qualified external translators to ensure the consistent application of terminology and correct referencing and the production of clear and coherent translated texts within established deadlines, in accordance with the highest possible quality standards and established FAO style requirements.

15. Specifically, official documents for all Governing Bodies and Statutory Bodies, Ministerial level meetings and other main FAO meetings are translated by CSG to ensure that language versions meet requisite FAO standards. Flagship publications, including the State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA), the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA), the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI), the State of the World's Forests (SOFO) and the State of Agricultural Commodity Markets (SOCO) are also assigned to CSG for translation. Additionally, translations of important training materials are undertaken by CSG, in order to maximise their outreach impacts and educational value. Translation by CSG is also required for certain official non-session documents: administrative circulars; vacancy announcements; official correspondence; correspondence manuals; Director-General's letters, transmittal memoranda, manual sections and Director-General's bulletins.

16. Since August 2020, CSG has also been tasked with translating the Organization's communication products such as press releases, web stories, Op-Eds, the Director-General's speeches, social media outreach materials, multi-media products, and other urgent documents, often in a short timeframe and in order to ensure immediate and effective communication of FAO's messages and maximise impact on their target audience.

17. Regarding such products for mandatory translation by CSG, robust internal procedures to ensure timely and quality delivery are necessary and include strict submission deadlines for originating units, such as those promulgated by the dedicated Director-General's Bulletin,⁴ as well as word count ceilings and formatting requirements. Concomitantly, CSG is responsible for mobilising adequate translator, reviser and supporting staff capacity, according to the demand received, while working closely with the originators to ensure timely and quality delivery of translation products.

18. During sessions of Governing Bodies and Statutory Bodies, CSG ensures translation services according to a predefined schedule agreed with the related secretariat. In addition, CSG undertakes the mobilisation of a critical mass of translators and support staff to meet unforeseen and dynamic in-session translation requirements, which entail delivery within tight deadlines and during late evening or early morning shifts. As part of the strategy, in particular for session and other urgent translation work, CSG continues to reach out to, and train, external translators based in various, strategic time zones.

19. In the case of non-mandatory internal translation, organisational units, including Decentralised Offices, may outsource the translation of documents not listed above to freelance external translators listed on the Organization's Corporate Sub-Roster of External Translators (also managed by CSG) and thus assume the responsibility for coordination to ensure due delivery.

⁴ DGB 2021/06 – Timely preparation of documents for Governing Bodies

20. The complexity and increasing demand for translation services calls for sustainable and balanced use of resources; both human and financial. While recognising the central role of translators, revisers, support staff and senior revisers in the process, it is important and necessary to equip them with modern technologies to enhance efficiency and cost-effectiveness.
21. For this purpose, the Organization is modernising the Information Technology Systems in support of the translation workflow to replace the legacy fragmented and obsolete systems, and to maximise the efficiency and monitoring capabilities, while exploring modern technologies to integrate operational functions of translation services. In particular, the Organization will enhance the Governing Bodies and other document lifecycle production workflow, from authoring to translation and dissemination, and seek integration of modern and Artificial Intelligence technologies.
22. Furthermore, the Organization will continually review and identify appropriate levels of translation resource input required to keep pace with the growing workload and imbue resilience and adaptability for future trends by ensuring appropriate levels of in-house language knowledge and expertise.

VI. Interpretation

23. FAO provides quality simultaneous interpretation in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish, as well as other languages on request, in order to facilitate the conduct of meetings of its Governing Bodies and Statutory Bodies sessions, other formal and informal meetings of its Members, as well as high level and important events.
24. Since 2019, there has been a sharp increase in the demand for interpretation at FAO events, with a 100 percent increase in interpretation services at FAO. Greater engagement by Members and new opportunities for participants from all over the world to meet in hybrid or virtual settings have made FAO meetings and conferences more inclusive and far-reaching, in line with the spirit of enhanced transparency and accessibility imbued in the Organization over the past three years. Interpretation plays an important role in ensuring smooth and comprehensive communication in this new meeting environment.
25. The Interpretation Group in CSG ensures the quality delivery of interpretation at FAO, with a small team of dedicated expertise which plans, coordinates and contracts the services of freelance interpreters based in Rome and elsewhere on a rolling basis for the large number of scheduled and ad hoc FAO meetings.
26. In this regard, CSG uses a yearly planning horizon for the recruitment of freelance interpreters for meetings in the FAO Sessions Plan, with dates published well in advance, while also ensuring the timely contracting of interpreters for the increasingly large number of ad hoc and short-notice meetings, such as informal meetings, briefings and consultations with and by Members, and unscheduled or re-scheduled meetings of Governing Bodies and Statutory Bodies.
27. In order to meet the challenges of increased and unscheduled demand for interpretation services, the Organization continues to streamline recruitment processes and workflows, including by the digitalisation of underlying technological tools linking the dynamic meetings calendar with a recruitment platform for freelance interpreters. Furthermore, efforts to expand the pool of Rome-based freelance interpreters for the large number of meetings at headquarters, in collaboration with the other Rome-based Agencies, is of significant importance in this regard.
28. Consistent with the impetus for enhanced inclusiveness and transparency of meetings of Governing Bodies and Statutory Bodies, the compendium of languages for which simultaneous interpretation is provided will continue to be reviewed, in order to improve the balance and inclusiveness of interpretation.
29. With the advent of the new normal of hybrid physical-virtual meetings, the use of Interpretation Hubs based at headquarters will be consolidated. In addition, the delivery of sound quality, essential for smooth interpretation, will be improved, including by upgrading and

modernisation through capital investment of relevant infrastructure and audio equipment in the main meeting rooms at headquarters, namely the Plenary Hall and the Green and Red Rooms.

30. In addition, the latest developments in interpretation technology will be closely followed, including research currently undertaken in the area of Computer-Assisted Interpretation (CAI), which could become relevant for FAO as results reach an advanced stage of maturity.

31. In order to meet increasing demand and ensure quality control in interpretation services at FAO, adequate and appropriate levels of dedicated interpretation staff capacity in the Organization will be reviewed and monitored.

VII. Communication Products

32. The Organization is committed to multilingualism and the use of all six FAO languages in its corporate communications, with a view to maximising the Organization's reach to its audiences with the latest information on its strategies and programmes, work in priority areas, outcomes and expertise. Multilingualism is also important to ensure inclusive access to the knowledge products and services which FAO offers. The Office of Communications (OCC) continues to provide guidance through the web policy and day-to-day support for the corporate website (www.fao.org) and other communication products to ensure accuracy, coherence and consistency in FAO's corporate messaging.

33. The website's corporate sections are available in the six FAO languages, while the project- and event-related web sections may be released according to the target audiences' language imperative. Language coverage is extended to non-FAO languages when appropriate or required for the target audience. In this regard, Decentralised Offices contribute to the production of multilingual information other than the six FAO languages when required by local target audiences. Multilingualism is incorporated from the very beginning for planning and maintenance of all website sections and the Content Owners (COs).

34. Social media use has soared over the past decade globally. To meet this opportunity, the Organization will strengthen its presence on social media platforms with multilingual information to maximise engagement with target audiences across different cultural backgrounds.

35. Multilingualism is integral for FAO's global campaigns, including International Days, Years and UN Decades, to engage its global and multi-sectoral audience. FAO communicates in up to 50 languages for major campaigns, which are directed towards a broad range of audiences with different expectations and needs, ranging from the general public, private sector, farmers, youth and academia, to existing and potential donors.

36. Furthermore, the Organization is committed to producing more communication packages and toolkits in all FAO languages and where applicable, non-FAO languages, to reach the end-users of FAO's products and ultimate beneficiaries of its projects and programmes.

VIII. Publications

37. The Organization publishes a wide range of publications and is committed to meeting the highest standards of quality in its publishing activity, and thus the production of publications in all FAO languages is a fundamental requirement.

38. Editorial publishing guidelines available in all six languages are essential to translators, copy-editors and proofreaders working on FAO publications, as they provide guidance and rules on clarity, style, consistency and terminology use in order to ensure language quality and technical accuracy for all content published.

39. New functionality has been available in the internal Publishing Workflow System (PWS) for planning and quality control since 2021, to emphasise the importance of high-quality language versions of publications, both in terms of translations and of copyediting. Technical units and

Decentralised Offices undertaking the production of high-quality publications are committed to producing language versions consistent with established FAO standards, especially when translations are contracted externally.

40. In addition, the FAO Publications Board is responsible for defining which publications should be available in all FAO languages (such as flagship and high-profile publications), in order to maximise the impact of FAO publications on target audiences, as well as to ensure cost efficiency and the best use of resources.

IX. Linguistic knowledge products

41. The FAO Term Portal is a key multilingual asset for the Organization. Translators, interpreters, editors, technical experts and other users from FAO and from all over the world refer to it. It provides a search window for terminology in all of FAO's domains (agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, forestry, gender, nutrition, etc.). It also hosts the FAO structure, various thematic collections as well as the database of official Names of Countries and Territories (NOCS). Currently, it counts more than 100 000 entries in all FAO languages as well as in Italian and Latin.

42. The Terminology Team in CSG is responsible for the maintenance and improvements to the FAO Term Portal and the NOCS databases, including consulting authoritative sources, concept owners as well as technical and linguistic experts, both in FAO and around the world. In this regard, successful partnerships continue to contribute to the improvement of the data contained in the terminology databases.

X. Use of non-FAO Languages in local contexts

43. The extensive geographic coverage of FAO's programmes and projects as well as communication campaigns means that the Organization works in numerous local contexts where non-FAO languages are predominantly used. In such cases, products and services need to be provided in local languages in order to meet the practical needs for efficient communication with partners and recipients, effective delivery of work and maximised impacts of programme implementation.

44. As a result, products and services using non-FAO languages can also be provided with the support of voluntary extra-budgetary resources and according to agreed financial arrangements with resource partners. In this regard, quality control by CSG of recruitment of local and other translators and interpreters for non-FAO languages is enabled to support the implementation of relevant programmes and projects with tailored language versions.

XI. Multilingual Skills of FAO Staff

45. FAO has always valued the multilingual skills of its staff members and will continue its efforts to develop a team of staff across all cultural backgrounds with strong linguistic skills. Focus will be given to language skills at recruitment stage and the provision of language training opportunities as well as related incentives. Staff members will be encouraged to develop continuously their linguistic skills and use the FAO language they deem fit to fulfil their mandates and improve communication, so that multilingualism is also reflected in the daily work of staff as a distinct feature of FAO.

XII. Conclusion

46. Multilingualism is a basic attribute of FAO, and the strategic policy framework for multilingualism provides holistic and practical impetus for its definition and realisation in the Organization's delivery against its mandate. Based on this framework, the integrity and enhancement of the plethora of language goods and products within FAO is ensured as a synergetic corporate

commitment, supported by quality and qualified in-house language expertise, and facilitated by the Corporate Coordinator for Multilingualism. Above all, the strategic policy framework offers Members a dedicated vehicle to drive the determination, assess the delivery, and update dynamically the direction of multilingualism at FAO.