13 January 2013

INTERNATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY AGENCY
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Report of the Director-General on Multilingualism

1. The Assembly in its first session requested the Director-General to "submit to the Assembly, no later than at its third session, options with concrete measures, including cost implications, aiming at a progressive integration of official UN languages to advance the work of the Agency, based on a reasonable and cost-effective use of the resources of the organisation" (A/1/DC/9 of 16 August 2011).

2. The Assembly stressed "the value of multilingualism in its governance processes and in its outreach, and the inclusiveness and participation that this approach promotes". The Assembly also recognized the need to balance the benefits of multilingualism with the impact that the adoption of a multilingual regime and its cost may have on the Agency's capacities for other projects and programming. It underlined "the necessity to develop IRENA's institutional, programmatic, and operational capacity in order to ensure the effective implementation of its objectives and activities, as stipulated in the Statute", and stressed "the need for the smooth, cost-effective, gradual and efficient implementation of multilingualism in IRENA" (A/1/DC/9).

3. Pursuant to this Decision, the Director-General conducted a detailed review of the use of languages in comparable organizations with the view to identifying best practices and experiences that could be used to progress the integration of official languages of the United Nations (UN) into the work of the Agency. The Director-General also monitored patterns of language usage in governing body meetings, and reviewed key dimensions for the introduction of multilingualism in the Agency's documentation and programmatic activities.

4. The present report provides a brief overview of multilingualism across a range of international organizations. It identifies options for implementation, including the cost associated with each of the options.

I. International Organizations and multilingualism

5. There is no single language regime that dominates in international organizations today. The choice of official languages in any organization depends on the nature of the organization, its membership, and other criteria deemed relevant by the members of the organization in question.

6. The number of official languages in international organizations varies widely, from 23 in the European Union, seven in WIPO, six in the UN and many other UN-system organizations, two in, among others, the OECD, to only a single official language in UPU (until 1994) and ASEAN. The application of the respective language regimes also varies widely, with many organizations adopting pragmatic and flexible approaches, while maintaining a commitment to the principle of multilingualism.

7. Many international organizations adjust the scope of their language requirements to ensure that the fundamental purposes of their work are served in the most cost-effective manner possible. Such measures include reduction of in-house translation and interpretation capacities and, in some instances, complete outsourcing of language services, as well as the introduction of policies that help manage the workload (e.g. restricting the number of pages of official documents). Informal arrangements are sometimes made in meetings, such as at the UN, where members opt for not using interpretation, and using only one language after certain hours for the sake of pragmatism and cost-effectiveness. The practical, flexible, and selective approach that many international organizations are adapting, while adhering to the principle of multilingualism, appears to be a prevailing model for the provision of language services.

II. IRENA - Current Situation

8. To date, interpretation at Assembly and Council meetings has been provided in four of the official languages of the UN, namely Arabic, English, French, and Spanish, and has been funded by the UAE government bid resources. This contribution has been recognized by the Assembly, which in its first session expressed gratitude for "the commitment of the host country to provide fixed conference funding for uses determined by the Agency, including interpretation services in all applicable UN languages for the Assembly and policy-making meetings in the host country."

9. Over the past couple of years, the pattern of IRENA's governing body meetings has been consistent and predictable. As stipulated in the Statute, the IRENA Assembly meets once per year and, to date, annual sessions have lasted two days each. The IRENA Council meets twice per year. The Council meetings normally

last for two days and are preceded by two days of meetings of subsidiary organs. Interpretation is provided in four languages (Arabic, English, French, and Spanish) at the meetings of the Assembly, Council, and other high-level events held concurrently, such as the Ministerial Roundtables. No interpretation is provided for the meeting of subsidiary organs.

10. Interpretation has also been offered at consultative meetings with high-level participation, such as the IRENA Africa High-Level Forum held on 8-9 July 2011 in Abu Dhabi, and the Renewables and Islands high-level meeting on 6-7 September 2012 in Malta. The number of languages interpreted at IRENA high-level meetings has so far not exceeded four. In some instances, countries that wished to have interpretation in additional languages brought their own interpreters, and IRENA provided limited logistical support such as interpreters' booths and IT support.

11. IRENA also has organized numerous workshops, meetings, side events and other events, in connection with its programmatic activities. Interpretation was provided only in a very limited number of these meetings. Furthermore, official documents and IRENA publications have been issued in English only, with the exception of the IRENA Statute, which has been officially translated into five UN languages (Arabic, English, French, Russian, Spanish) and German (the language of the State Depository of the Statute).

III. Options for progressive integration of multilingualism

12. Consistent with the Assembly Decision on Multilingualism made at its first session, consideration of which languages regime to adopt should be approached pragmatically, with the paramount aim of ensuring the effectiveness of the organization in achieving its goals, through a higher level of inclusiveness, participation, and communication. The language regime should also be affordable in light of the Agency's size and resources.

Interpretation services

13. For the purpose of this report, the following meetings are being considered in the context of interpretation services:

   a.   Governing body meetings (Assembly and Council);

   b.   Meetings of subsidiary organs

    c. High-level consultative meetings; and

    d. Meetings and workshops on programmatic matters involving technical experts.[1]

14. The practice so far has been to provide interpretation for Arabic, English, French, and Spanish at Assembly and Council meetings, financed from the UAE government bid, which provides for UN language interpretation service in these meetings. The current practice reflects the UN languages currently well-represented among the membership. The choice for the coming year could be to continue the current practice of conducting IRENA governing body meetings in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish. Any request for interpretation in other languages could be facilitated by IRENA, but provided and financed by the country/ies seeking such services.

15. As the meetings of the subsidiary organs are intended to promote working-level exchanges, the use of interpretation may not be ideal because it may limit the action-oriented nature of these meetings. The Rules of Procedure for subsidiary organs state that subsidiary organs "shall conduct their business employing working methods that are efficient and results-oriented […] avoiding unnecessary formalities and delays" (A/2/8, Rule 26). It would therefore seem practical to continue the current practice where interpretation is not provided for these meetings.

16. Interpretation for other meetings than governing body meetings would be decided on a case-by-case basis, in keeping with the current practice. As regards workshops and other programme implementation related meetings, interpretation would also be provided on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the need to ensure wide participation, in an efficient and cost effective manner.

Translation Services

17. For translation services, any combination of document types or content, including web and audio-visual content, could be covered:

    a. All sessional documents for governing body meetings;

    b. Selected documents for governing body meetings (i.e. major policy documents such as the Annual Report of the Director-General, the Work Programme and Budget, the Medium-term Strategy documents of the Agency, and the reports of the Assembly and two Council meetings);

    c. All programmatic publications;

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[1] For the costs associated with each of these meeting types for 2011, refer to the Annex.

    d.   Major policy-related publications, such as the proposed annual institutional publication, or other major renewable energy policy reports;

    e.   Materials produced for workshops and other Agency activities and events;

    f.   IRENA website; and

    g.   Website-related applications such as the Global Atlas, or the IRENA Renewable Energy Learning Partnership (IRELP).

18. Unlike for interpretation services, IRENA has had no provision for translation of documents to date. This is in part due to the fact that translation of documents is not only costly, but also complex to manage in terms of time, human resources and quality required. At the outset, to allow for inclusive discussions at governing body meetings, provision could be considered to translate the abovementioned major sessional documents into Arabic, French, and Spanish. The Rules of Procedure of the Assembly and the Council require the Secretariat to provide sessional documents to all Members at least 30 days in advance of the meeting of the Assembly or Council (Rules 8 and 19). In order to ensure efficient and effective use of the Agency's limited resources and sufficient time for implementation of the programmatic activities, this provision would continue to apply to the English version of the documents. Any required translation would be provided as soon as practicable, striving to leave Members with no less than ten days to review the translated documents prior to the meeting.

19. Providing translation for publications, workshops, events, and some public information materials would have a positive impact on the Agency's programmatic activities, which are at the heart of IRENA's mission, objectives, and outreach to the general public. The decision on translation of publications, public information, and programmatic materials should be approached pragmatically, with the paramount aim of ensuring the effectiveness of the Agency in achieving its goals. This might at times require including languages other than the six official languages of the UN, having regard to the target audience, to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

20. An effective and economical option could be to produce major outputs in English, with executive summaries in the UN languages currently used in the Agency, unless there is a high demand for the full text to be translated. The executive summaries could also be translated into other languages, according to the target audience. The resources required to provide these services could be reviewed during the preparatory process for each new Work Programme and Budget and included under the respective project or activity to which they relate. A more informed decision can be taken only in the light of IRENA's experience over the next few years; therefore the issue should be kept under review.

IRENA website and web-based applications

21. Translation of web-based materials becomes costly because there is no limit to potential content. In addition, users expect translation of web content to be instantaneous, whereas quality translation can be labour-intensive and slow. The provision of multilingual web content at the current stage of IRENA would be extremely difficult, both in terms of cost and capacity to maintain the site's relevance. During this still nascent stage of the Agency's development, it may be more prudent to continue to improve the content, and delay the introduction of other languages. This would not prevent the Agency from publishing on its website the sessional documents and other documents and publications already translated into other languages. The same would apply to website-related applications, such as Global Atlas or IRELP. This issue could be revisited in a few years in light of experience gained.

IV. Provision of language services

Possible ways of managing language services

22. The options for delivering interpretation and translation services range across a wide spectrum: from all services being delivered by dedicated in-house staff at one extreme, to full outsourcing at the other. In deciding on the optimum mix of service delivery, the main considerations are:

   a. The calendar of meetings (how many meetings, when they take place, and how many overlap with one another);

   b. The volume and timing of publication and documentation requirements, including required date of distribution of written material for consideration prior to certain meetings or sessions (usually 30 days prior for governing body meetings); and

   c. The nature of the publications and documents to be processed (their technicality, complexity, degree of sensitivity, or confidentiality, which might increase the resources required for effective translation).

23. Given the level of meeting activity and the volume of documentation and publications in IRENA since its inception, and because of the built-in fluctuations in some of the Agency's meeting and translation requirements, it would not be cost-effective at the present time to hire and maintain permanent language staff. Outsourcing therefore appears to be the best option for IRENA at the moment, but the overhead costs entailed and the recognized disadvantages of outsourcing should be taken into account. In the medium term, depending on the language

regime adopted by IRENA, the advantages of having dedicated staff to handle the planning and management of interpretation and translation would need to be considered.

The range of costs for language services

24. The International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP), is a network of managers of international organizations employing conference and language services providers, mainly translators and interpreters, whose membership includes the United Nations, other organizations of the UN system, and other intergovernmental organizations. IAMLADP has recognized that there is a worldwide shortage of qualified language specialists for conference translation and interpretation. A new agreement negotiated between the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) of the UN system and the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) in 2012 provides for a "World Rate" of USD 616 per day for interpreters. As a point of comparison, the average rate for experienced interpreters hired for some of the previous meetings of the Agency is USD 635, exclusive of travel, daily subsistence allowance (DSA), and other related costs. If these items were to be included, the cost per interpreter per day would increase substantially to around USD 3,000.[2]

25. According to a 2012 report by the IAMLADP Task Force on Contracting for Language Services (IAMLADP/2012/R.8), the average rate paid for contractual translation by the organizations responding to its questionnaire was USD 204 per 1,000 words. The UN, for its part, pays USD 230 per 1,000 words, based on the word count of the original, for translation by independent contractors working off-site. The latter rate has been used to calculate the approximate cost of various Agency documents; this information is attached in the Annex. This rate does not include the cost of revisions to the translation, which would further increase the total cost.

26. The calculation of actual costs can be complex because demand for translation fluctuates and is therefore intrinsically unpredictable, unless strict rules about the length of documents and their submission dates are in place. Furthermore, while it is relatively easy to identify the direct costs (salaries, fees paid to contractors, travel, and subsistence expenses), apportioned indirect costs may be overlooked (office space, administrative overhead, quality control, etc.) even though they should factor into cost calculations. The major factor influencing cost is the availability or supply of qualified interpreters and translators.

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[2] For more information, please see the Annex.

Cost estimates

27. The experience of the last two years has shown that the total number of governing body meetings provided with interpretation each year is three (6 days total). Assuming four languages may be required at these meetings, a team of nine certified and experienced interpreters for the four languages (three interpreters for Arabic, two for each of the other three languages), for two days of meetings costs USD 54,000.[3]

28. In 2012, IRENA hosted 18 workshops, meetings, and other events, not including side events organized in connection with other meetings. Based on an examination of the range of nationalities in attendance and their ability to work in the English language, and assuming interpretation of two UN languages other than English, the potential cost of interpretation for a one day meeting could be USD 18,000. Because of the complexity of the matter, and the short experience of the Agency, it cannot be determined to what extent the experience so far represents the future pattern of IRENA activities, nor can any estimate of possible translation or interpretation workload involved in such events be made without further detailed information about the languages used by participants and the services required for each event.

29. Assuming that the major policy documents of governing body meetings were to be translated, the costs for the three UN languages other than English, calculated at the UN contractual rate, would have been approximately USD 45,000.[4] This figure reflects only the fees paid directly to contractors, and does not take into account overhead costs related to handling the outsourcing of this work.

30. In 2012, IRENA's publishing programme included approximately 70 publications. The cost of translating a publication of 200 pages into the three UN languages other than English would be approximately USD 59,000, in addition to the cost of printing.[5] For planning and budgeting purposes, it will be essential in the future to have accurate estimates of the total number of pages of planned publications, to set a firm submission date for each one, and to indicate whether a publication is to be translated and, if so, into which languages. Such a forecast would allow for rational workload planning, which would help to contain costs.

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[3] This figure is inclusive of travel, accommodation costs, daily subsistence allowance (DSA), terminal expenses, and administrative fees. An overview is provided in the Annex.
[4] *Id.*
[5] *Id.*

The range of options for the apportionment of the cost of language services among the Agency's membership

31. In order to facilitate consideration of how the cost of language services should be apportioned among the membership, this report outlines three options:

    a. Expenditure on language services is regarded as a *general expense of the Agency* and hence is apportioned among the membership at large according to the regular method for calculating mandatory contributions (scale of contributions). This is the model in place in the UN and most of its specialized agencies.

    b. A *user-pay system* in which the costs for each language are apportioned among the Members using that language. The arrangement for funding at the German Translation Section at UN Headquarters represents the model of this system, inasmuch as the costs of the Section are defrayed from voluntary contributions from the German-speaking member states which wish to receive these services (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein). Various other organizations afford member states the possibility of receiving upon request specific language services that are not normally provided on condition that they bear the costs involved.

    c. A *hybrid arrangement combining elements from (a) and (b),* apportioning some expenditure for language services (considered essential or core services) among the full membership and charging individual members, or groups of members, for other services, deemed "non-core" by the Members.

V. Recommended options for discussion by Members in selecting IRENA's language regime

32. In light of the observations highlighted above, Members of IRENA may wish to consider the following:

    a. Interpretation services for Assembly and Council meetings would be provided for UN languages currently well-represented among the Agency's membership, and, as required, for high-level consultative meetings, financed from the UAE government bid, and subject to availability of resources.

    b. For consideration at the fourth session of the Assembly, the Secretariat may be mandated to include in the proposed Work Programme and Budget, for consideration by Members, as part of the core budget, and subject to availability of resources, the costs and administrative requirements associated with the following:

    i.   Translation of the major sessional documents for the Assembly and Council meetings from English into the UN languages that are currently well-represented among the Agency's membership, namely Arabic, French, and Spanish;

    ii.   Interpretation and translation requirements in connection with programmatic activities based on real need and relative benefit, and bearing in mind the associated costs. Provision of language services other than English would be decided on a case-by-case basis as part of the planning of each programmatic activity;

    iii.   Translation of major publication(s) that would be made available in one or more languages other than English for reasons related to outreach and potential benefit for target audiences, or translation of executive summaries of these publications from English, as required, subject to the availability of resources; and

    iv.   A preliminary assessment of the demand for, the feasibility of, and the costs associated with providing certain basic web-related applications (such as in the site interface) in additional languages.

33. For the sixth session of the Assembly in 2016, the Secretariat would include the following in its progress review to the Assembly in accordance with decision A/1/DC/9:

    i.   An assessment of the implementation of translation and interpretation in the Agency's activities, including challenges faced;

    ii.   The result of its contacts with other intergovernmental and UN organizations regarding the possibility of forming a consortium or a joint language service, affording IRENA access to a pool of pre-screened language professionals who can provide high quality services; and

    iii.   The results of its contacts with the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP), with the aim of learning about best practices and obtaining additional specific information that may be useful in the IRENA context.

**Summary of Options for Translation and Interpretation Services
with Estimated Costs**

Translation Costs[1]

Category of document	Length (words) [2]	Four languages AEFS[3]	Six languages ACEFRS[4] (UN model)	Each additional language
All documents for governing body meetings (sessional documents) per session	50,000 words[5]	79,000	132,000	11,500
Major sessional documents[6]	65,000 words	45,000	75,000	15,000
Publications	1.1 million words[7]	759,000	1,265,000	253,200
Major publications	85,000 words[8]	59,000	98,000	19,550

* All amounts are in US dollar and rounded to the nearest 1,000.

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[1] Costing assumes translation by independent contractors working off-site at United Nations rates of USD 0.23 per word per language, based on the word count of the original.
[2] Word count based on 425 words per page.
[3] Arabic, English, French, and Spanish.
[4] Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish.
[5] Assuming an average of 10 documents of 5,000 words, over and above the major sessional documents.
[6] Annual report of the Director-General, Work Programme and Budget, Medium-term Strategy, and summary reports of the Assembly and of two Council meetings.
[7] Estimate for 70 publications, 2,500 pages per year.
[8] For a publication of 200 pages.

Interpretation Costs[9]

Category of meeting	Session Duration [10]	Two languages	Four languages (AEFS)	Six languages (ACEFRS) (UN model)	Each additional language[11]
Governing body meetings[12]	8 days	n/a[13]	216,000	336,000	48,000 – 72,000
Consultative meetings involving Member states	4 days	48,000	108,000	168,000	24,000 – 36,000
Workshops and other events	1 day	12,000	27,000	42,000	6,000 – 9,000

* All amounts are in US dollar.

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[9] Cost calculations are based on an average cost of USD 3,000 per interpreter per day. The average is formed from the cost of interpreters per day contracted for previous Assembly, Ministerial Roundtable and Council meetings. The cost includes expenses for travel and accommodation, daily subsistence allowance (DSA), terminal expenses, and contracting agency fees.

[10] One day includes 2 sessions of 3 hours, a total of 6 hours per day. Additional interpreters are needed, if the length of meetings per day exceeds 6 hours.

[11] For each additional language 2 interpreters are needed; 3 interpreters are needed for Arabic and Chinese.

[12] Including parallel Ministerial Roundtables.

[13] Not applicable, since the Council and Assembly proceedings have been conducted in four languages.

Full Multilingualism based on the United Nations Model

A full multilingual regime using the six UN official languages, with interpretation provided to all governing body meetings, consultative meetings, seminars, workshops and other events on an as-needed basis (assuming 13 such one-day events per year), and translation of all sessional documents and publications into all official languages, would cost approximately USD 2.5 million[14] per year:

Sessional documents	132,000
Publications	1,265,000
Governing bodies	336,000
Consultative meetings	168,000
Workshops, seminars, etc.	546,000
Total	2,447,000

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[14] Eliminating translation and/or interpretation services for any category of document or meeting would, obviously, reduce overall costs.

Explanatory notes to tables:

1. The figures include costs for travel and accommodation, daily subsistence allowance (DSA), terminal expenses, and contracting agency fees. Not included are overhead costs, which can be substantial, for evaluation of proposals, recruitment, quality control, payroll, project management, and other human resources activities. Interpretation equipment rental costs are also not included here.

2. Interpreter teams composed according to AIIC standards must have two interpreters per language booth, with the exception of Arabic and Chinese, which require 3 interpreters. The standard team for a four-language (AEFS) meeting will have 9 interpreters; a six-language meeting (ACEFRS) requires 14 interpreters. For each additional language, 2 (or 3) interpreters will be needed, according to the language(s) involved.

3. Number of words per page was derived from a random sampling of sessional documents and publications and is only approximate. For future planning and budgeting purposes, a standard measure based on a complete word count for all IRENA documents and publications could be developed.