

Summary report on the  
Consultation on the  
Global Arabic Programme

WHO-EM/GAP/001/E

Cairo, Egypt  
10 January 2016



World Health  
Organization

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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## **1. Introduction**

The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean held a consultation meeting on the Global Arabic Programme (GAP) on 10 January 2016, Cairo, Egypt. The consultation aimed at reviewing the current objectives and situation of GAP, including challenges and lessons learnt in the past three decades; determining the role of WHO in providing health information in Arabic, translation of medical and health sciences, and collaboration with partners to promote provision of and access to health information in Arabic; discussing the role of WHO and other institutions and partners to promote publishing and teaching of health sciences in Arabic and making recommendations on the way forward.

The consultation was attended by professors from medical schools, international and regional representatives of medical and health science institutions, and consultants (institutions interested in translation and authorship of health sciences, Arabic academies, translation institutes, senior officials of languages/publishing at WHO headquarters, and Department Directors, Regional Advisors and relevant officials from the Regional Office.

In his opening speech, Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, welcomed participants and said that the consultation would focus on intersections between health and Arabic, specifically the role of WHO, and the Regional Office in particular, in providing health information in Arabic to Member States and Arabic speakers. He indicated that GAP no longer had sufficient resources to realize the intended objectives defined at the time of its establishment. As a result, the programme focused on translating WHO's most important publications and information products, in line with the Organization's strategic objectives and in response to Member State's

needs. He raised for debate two major issues. The first issue concerned further steps to be taken by WHO in the area of publishing health information in Arabic, not merely satisfying the Organization's strategic needs and priorities. The second issue related to the Unified Medical Dictionary (UMD) and how to review and update it.

Several presentations were given during the consultation covering the following topics:

- historical overview of GAP;
- results of the questionnaire sent to ministries of health about GAP;
- current objectives of GAP, its achievements and experiences;
- importance of teaching health sciences in the mother tongue;
- provision of health information in Arabic, translation of medical and health sciences and prospects of cooperation in the future;
- promotion of arabic publishing.

## **2. Summary of discussions**

Participants stated that the arabization of health sciences was a sovereign issue in which governments should play an effective role. Many meetings and conferences on arabization have been held, however, Arab States have not yet adopted a unified position regarding this issue. Some organizations interested in arabization have made significant progress, but they faced major challenges, including weak political will and lack of follow-up mechanisms. Participants indicated that although some universities did not endorse arabization of health sciences, they would like to make use of translated materials in the area of health and medicine. Some countries' experiences were

shared where arabization was a political decision without taking any technical arrangements or follow-up measures.

Participants indicated that in the absence of a clear strategy on arabization in the Arab world, the Regional Office should focus on translating WHO important publications, in collaboration with WHO headquarters and develop a strategic plan for translation into Arabic, in light of Member States' needs, WHO strategic priorities and available financial resources.

They suggested that the issue of medical learning should be dealt with in light of resolution "EM/RC62/R.4 Medical education: a framework for action", which was endorsed by the 62nd Regional Committee, and called for holding a high-level meeting between ministers of health and higher education to achieve the highest level of coordination and cooperation necessary for the effective implementation of the regional framework for medical education.

Participants indicated that health and medical information is updated every day, whereas translation into Arabic fell short of keeping pace with such continuous change. It was proposed that in order to overcome this problem, needs and priorities in the area of health information should be identified. It was also proposed to establish a regional fund in support of scientific translation. Participants concluded that the arabization of health sciences required institutionalization of partnerships in this field. For example, partnerships could be established with medical schools so that professors were able to translate important publications not available in Arabic and priority health topics would be proposed for translation to students in translation institutes.

Concerning the question of Arabic publishing, participants discussed whether the Regional Office should translate non-WHO publications. They stressed that due to lack of resources the Regional Office should focus its resources on translating WHO key publications, in collaboration with WHO headquarters.

Participants tackled machine-assisted translation and its potential to improve productivity. Some participants believed that CAT tools were not effective in medical translation, whereas others referred to some effective software.

Participants then discussed the United Medical Dictionary which they believe is a very important resource that should be further developed and updated. They proposed adopting practical approaches in revising the dictionary, for example, taking into consideration comments received on the dictionary. A plan may be developed to solicit as much feedback as possible from users of the dictionary through a questionnaire on the acceptability of its terms. Some participants said that the Unified Medical Dictionary was inefficient in some aspects and should be reviewed and updated to be as comprehensive as possible. All participants agreed that a committee should be set up for this purpose.



### **3. Recommendations**

#### *To WHO*

1. Support GAP to deliver its activities and focus its resources on translating WHO key publications, in collaboration with WHO headquarters and develop a strategic plan for Arabic translation based on the needs of Member States and WHO priorities with due consideration to any current criteria of translating WHO publications into its official languages.
2. Conduct a comprehensive study on the Region's needs in health information, especially in the area of health outreach and identify priority areas in translating publications into Arabic in light of the study's findings.
3. Further support and develop the Unified Medical Dictionary through establishing an expert committee to review it, define the content to be updated and create a comprehensive plan for its development and enhanced use.
4. GAP should support arabization efforts and pursue dialogue with bodies participating in the consultation meeting and other entities interested in translation and arabization.
5. Define the role of WHO in supporting efforts of arabizing medical and health sciences.



World Health Organization  
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P.O. Box 7608, Nasr City 11371  
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[www.emro.who.int](http://www.emro.who.int)