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FOLLOW-UP TO DECISIONS AND RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD AND THE GENERAL CONFERENCE AT THEIR PREVIOUS SESSIONS

PART II

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

ADDENDUM 2

COMMENTS BY THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

SUMMARY

Pursuant to Item 9.2.7 of the UNESCO Human Resources Manual, the International Staff Association of UNESCO (ISAU) submits its comments on human resources issues (document 206 EX/5.II.F).



Doc. 20190315

F. UNESCO's strategic transformation
(Follow-up to 205 EX/Decision 5.III.D)

1. The progress report on the strategic transformation does not provide any essentially new information. However, two key questions arise from the report:

- On reading document 206 EX/5.II.F and the report on UNESCO's communications contained in document 206 EX/5.II.F.INF, it does not appear that there has been close interaction between the strategic transformation team and the authors of the report. The impression is rather that of working in parallel, the strategic transformation team apparently being satisfied with simply noting that a review has been conducted and recommendations submitted, which, however, do not reflect the concerns of the work on the overall strategic transformation of the Organization.
- It is regrettable that the work of the external panel of experts does not focus on one or two major cross-cutting themes decided upon jointly by the Director-General and Member States. This would have had the merit of reviving the impetus expressed in the global flagship reports through which UNESCO has positioned itself in the past, guiding the global agenda in its fields of competence.

2. The report contained in document 206 EX/5.II.F.INF on UNESCO's communications strategy provides a diagnosis with which it is easy to agree. However, the proposed solutions do not appear to resolve the problems identified. The idea of a new directorate with a team of some 50 staff is not at all in line with UNESCO's current budgetary constraints. Furthermore, the precautions taken by the authors of the report do not dispel doubts over the risks of duplication that are bound to appear at the Directorate-General level between the Director of the Office of the Director-General (CAB) and the Director of Communications.

3. We also cannot fail to question the absence in this report of specific reflection on the goals and targets of the communications strategy for an organization such as UNESCO. Indeed, the report does not say to whom the Organization must communicate in particular, and proposes, through the creation of a Directorate of Communications and Engagement (DCE), a communications strategy that is ultimately somewhat too generalized to meet the real needs of the Organization.

4. While it is important to raise awareness about UNESCO in general, it is also necessary to highlight, better than the report does, that as an intergovernmental organization, UNESCO must communicate with the Member States and institutions concerned by its action, particularly at the national level. Communication to the Member States is essential, because it is upon them that the budget and the programme depend. Communication must also be aimed at other international and regional agencies.

5. Furthermore, the Organization must communicate with communities of specialists and experts in its fields of competence. Finally, and in order to take into account the Constitution, it should also be recalled that UNESCO has an advocacy role to play among the public, in particular by using what the authors of the Constitution in 1945 called the mass media, which now includes the Internet and social media. These few remarks on UNESCO's targets are mainly intended to put into perspective the principle of communication, which is that it should focus on specific actions and topics. In this regard, the proposed strategy seems to focus communications on UNESCO as a global entity rather than on the Organization's specific actions, which are linked to the programmes and thus to the action of the sectors.

6. In this respect, it is often noted that UNESCO communicates on a large number of subjects – and this is a reality that the communication strategy must take into account – rather than seeking to simplify it, as the authors of the report venture to do by proposing that the new Directorate focus on communicating mainly on four to six cross-cutting themes.

7. The idea of focusing on a few themes is at odds with the fact that the Programme as adopted by the Member States covers a far greater number of themes and topics, which respond to their priorities.

8. It is clear to ISAU, therefore, on the basis of the diagnosis given by the report, that a properly staffed central Directorate of Communications integrated into the Office of the Director-General will probably not be able to respond to the fundamental problem, which is rather a deficit in the programme sectors. A quick review of practices shows that the sectors actually communicate a lot with a number of their targets but on an ad hoc basis and rarely with appropriate resources and expertise. It is at this level that communication must be rationalized with a view to upgrading. While communication does indeed need to be reformed at the central level, and even at Headquarters itself, the fact remains that there is also a need to consider reforming the sectors towards more effective and efficient communication that is more in touch with the target audiences of the programmes. It is in the sectors that the teams should be strengthened, and a clearly defined sectoral strategy should be developed jointly with the relevant central services, primarily the Directorate of Communications.

9. In conclusion, while a comprehensive strategy is needed for the better positioning of UNESCO, for such a strategy to be effective and efficient, it cannot be designed without being anchored in the programme sectors.