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Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# Executive Board

Hundred and eightieth session

# 180 EX/6

## Parts I and II Add.

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### REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REFORM PROCESS

#### PARTS I AND II

#### STAFF POLICY – DECENTRALIZATION

#### ADDENDUM

##### SUMMARY

In conformity with Item 2805.7 of the UNESCO Administrative Manual, the UNESCO Staff Union (STU) submits its observations on this report by the Director-General.

1. The UNESCO Staff Union (STU), mindful of the need to promote and protect the interests of the staff – UNESCO's primary resource for the implementation of the Programme – has thoroughly examined document 180 EX/6 Parts I and II.
2. STU submits the following comments and suggestions to the Executive Board so as to transmit its own observations, along with the points of view of UNESCO staff, on different aspects of the Organization's human resources and decentralization policies – of which both ought to function hand in hand, thus ensuring optimal reforms of the Organization.
3. Document 180 EX/6 Parts I and II presents a positive picture of human resources management within the Organization. STU does not deny the fact that reform over the past eight years has occurred. However, the fact remains, as noted in document 34 C/28 Add. that **a gap persists between intended reforms of human resources policies and the delegation of authority for the actual implementation of these policies** including also the perception by staff on how policies affect conditions of service.
4. Despite the fact that, on paper the human resources policy framework is being presented as advancing smoothly, attaining expected results and reaching the right indicators, **practice shows**

**a rather different picture.** The fact is that the application of many of the new HRM policies has been quite problematic from the beginning, fragmented and lacking coherence. In our opinion a major factor contributing to the problematic implementation of the Organization's human resources policies is the delegation of authority to sectors/services/bureaux. Equally, HRM (through different reviews), the Office of the Director-General, the Deputy Director-General, the Director-General himself, as well as the ACPP and the External Auditor have all admitted to such shortcomings and that something must be done to correct them. Our concern, therefore, is how best to ensure that actual practice clearly reflects any stated policy and that such a policy be applied in a fair, equitable, organized and focused manner.

5. It must be clearly stated from the outset that **UNESCO's staff is not against the concept of adapting and improving human resources policies** in order to reflect the ongoing changes and new realities of the United Nations system and of UNESCO in particular.

6. Furthermore, STU considers that such changes could and should be beneficial to the Organization in order to ensure the optimal delivery of the Programme while assuring the continued professional development of staff in the short and longer terms. However, in order for these policies to be beneficial and in the interests of the Organization and its staff and, indeed, to have a positive impact on the Organization's mandate, the various human resources policies must not only be clearly structured but, more importantly, implemented in accordance with a number of clearly defined, uniform and fair modalities and principles.

7. STU is of the view that such a clearly defined, uniform, and fair implementation of the various aspects of human resources reforms and decentralization has not been the case. Whether one considers any or many of the issues presented in Part I of document 180 EX/6, such as performance assessment, merit-based promotion, career development initiatives, to name just a few, or many others such as rotation, recruitment, etc., one of **the main obstacles to good implementation has been the excessive delegation of authority, power and control of all these human resources elements to the different sectors/services/bureaux, with little or no supervised oversight from HRM or any other centralized personnel management system.**

8. The delegation of human resources functions to sectors/services/bureaux is, simply put from a purely logical point of view, counterproductive and inefficient. The main mandate, function and experience of programme sectors or central services are either thematic and/or administrative/political. Their senior managers and staff are not supposed to be and should not be personnel/human resources experts. Their main function at UNESCO is programme implementation or administrative management. The assumption that placing a greater degree of authority and responsibility into their hands will improve the human resources at UNESCO, needs to be seriously re-examined.

9. Experience shows that the devolution of staff responsibilities from HRM to senior and middle managers has not been accompanied by the reallocation of the financial and staff means required to absorb the additional workload, nor has it been supported by professional training on HR issues. There is little evidence that the new table of delegation of authority, originally geared to securing staff commitment in promoting an integrative culture of management, has succeeded in catalysing such changes. Many senior managers, who now spend 50% of their working time dealing with staff matters, resent the situation and often do not feel equipped to adequately deal with many of the issues.

10. As a result of this lack of human resources expertise, combined with lack of time, devotion or even motivation, most human resources decisions taken are therefore not in line with stated or approved policies either by not fully complying with them or, often, fully in breach of them. **Human resources decisions, be they related to merit promotion, recruitment or the hiring of consultants are discretionary and vary from manager to manager, engendering arbitrary, discriminatory situations** whereby UNESCO staff is treated differently. In the staff's opinion this remains the biggest obstacle to a successful implementation of human resources and staff policies.

11. For these reasons, STU strongly pleads in favour of reinforcing centralized human resources functions with a view to effectively building capacity in human resources managers to support both staff development and programme delivery. The new consultant policy is a case in point. Designed to simplify and render transparent the use of temporary assistance to implement programme activities, practice already shows a radically different application across services. The exponential bureaucratization of the procedure does not seem to serve as a valid control mechanism and some form of centralized authority seems fundamental to avoid a similar situation we find ourselves today where there are over 100 cases of long-term temporary assistance – contracts with more than five years of overall duration.

12. STU would also like to draw attention to **the need for a just, impartial and effective mechanism for internal justice**. Current mechanisms are complex and institutionally biased in favour of the Administration. The Administration can call upon its own legal advisers to defend its case whereas colleagues are left to fend for themselves, without recourse to appropriate legal council. For internal justice to be served, confidence in the fairness and efficiency of the mechanisms in place must be achieved. An examination of the current mechanisms could be undertaken with a view to ensuring dialogue that favours amenable resolution of conflict and, when necessary, that cases are not prolonged arbitrarily, that mediation is effective, and that just resolution involves “consequence management”. Just as responsibilities for the implementation of the Programme lay with managers, consequences of their managerial decisions ought also to hold the same level of responsibility which binds managers and the Administration to fully assume the consequences of the decisions they take. Within this context, the role and clout of the whistle-blowing mechanism envisaged remains to be seen.

13. Also related to the fundamental value given to the managerial competences of staff is the thrust of the corporate training plan for 2008, whereas in past years – although with a reduced budget – the learning focus is on mastering new software and management tools rather than on the acquisition of knowledge. **A balancing act seems to be required at this point in time, and more attention is to be given to a learning programme that allows staff to develop their specialized knowledge and remain competitive in their respective fields.**

14. STU also strongly calls for refining the human resources policies monitoring and reporting mechanism to go beyond the factual presentation of figures and percentages (e.g. of staff having completed performance reports) and start looking into the qualitative impact of the policies, in an effort to understand their effects and improve their implementation (e.g. why PERFOWEB reports are not used in the recruitment process as a qualifying element for candidates or that reporting on the gender action plan should be more than providing men and women ratios and the indicators on the increase of women in PABs).

15. As concerns new human resources policy areas, our objective as staff representatives is to ensure that policies seriously address staff concerns and issues. This is the case of the ongoing revision of the 2003 rotation policy. We are aware that staff has different needs and aspirations, but as the consultation we have undertaken in the last weeks shows, a large segment of the international staff is interested in rotating positions. It is then crucial that the new policy is crafted in such a way so that it takes both organizational needs and staff concerns into consideration. As recent experience in other United Nations specialized agencies, STU is persuaded that a more open and participatory approach to policy development is essential to make the rotation policy work.

16. Finally, the issue of the Organization’s budget cannot be ignored. Throughout the past decade reductions in UNESCO’s spending power have forced the Organization to streamline its functions. Today staff is faced with the difficult challenges of doing more with less, thus leading to conditions of work that are frustrating at the least and untenable in the long term. Such budgetary reductions could eventually lead to the risk of arbitrary abolition of posts and/or to the downgrading of certain occupied posts which has an extremely negative effect on staff morale and nurtures perceptions of fear. While STU does not deny that difficult decisions must be allowed to be made,

such decisions cannot be left to sector ADGs alone as has happened in the past in both the Education and Culture Sectors. Staffing decisions need to be taken in a systemic manner, taking into consideration both organizational needs and staff skills and potential for development. Again, in our opinion a reinforced centralized human resources department is best suited to such decisions.

17. In conclusion, STU is firmly convinced that unless there is a correction to these basic dysfunctions in the actual application of what we consider, once again, to be on paper basically positive staff policies, this will continue to hinder the effective implementation of UNESCO's mandate. STU would therefore call on Member States to clearly express to the management team of the Organization their desire to not only ensure that staff policy creation and implementation be done in a more harmonized, centralized, and therefore better controlled manner, but also that HRM or any other centralized staff management entities that may be created be given the adequate resources and authority to effectively implement staff policies. **STU is of the conviction that human resources policies that consider organizational needs and staff competence will inspire engagement of staff – the most important resource at UNESCO's disposal – for the efficient and effective implementation of the Programme.**