



CONCEPT PAPER

A textbook, diagnostic equipment, instructional materials program and regional educational fund to strengthen health sciences education in the WHO African Region

1. Introduction

The Expanded Textbook and Instructional Materials Program (PALTEX) was created in 1966 with the purpose of improving the quality of health sciences' education and its practice in Latin America. For more than 40 years, PALTEX, a joint technical cooperation program of the Pan American Health and Education Foundation (PAHEF) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), has provided nearly six million books and educational tools to students and health professionals (physicians, nurses, dentists, nutritionists, etc.) at 550 institutions in 20 Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Over the last 3 years, there has been a common interest between PAHO/AMRO, WHO/AFRO and WHO/HQ to establish a formal dialogue aimed at exploring the feasibility of establishing a similar initiative in the African Region. This is in recognition of the extreme need for these teaching and learning materials in most of the African health training institutions.

This technical cooperation is in line with strategic objective number 13 in the PAHO/AMRO Strategic Plan 2008-2012 to ensure an available, responsive and productive health workforce to improve health outcomes. Also, it is in line with WHO's strategic plan expected result, OWER 10.9, that supports the building of capabilities, with a focus on countries with critical health workforce shortages, to improve the production, distribution, skill mix and retention of their health workforce. This fund could be an important pillar of the implementation of the Strategy of Scaling up of Health workers according to WHA and AFRO Regional Committee resolutions on that item. In this context it would be likely that a resolution on PALTEX could be developed depending on the feasibility study results.

WHO has also signed a contract with EC for 2009-11 for strengthening health workforce development and tackling the critical shortage of health workers. The planned activities under this contract also include conducting a feasibility study for establishment of a fund to facilitate access of health profession students to textbooks, diagnostic equipment and educational resources. As part of this study, it is envisaged to explore the feasibility of transferring an approach of PALTEX which is in place in the Americas for nearly 40 years.

This paper contains a proposal for the development and implementation of a joint initiative for: A textbook and instructional materials program to strengthen health sciences education in the African Region to be carried out by the Human Resources for Health (HRH) technical units of PAHO/AMRO, WHO/AFRO and WHO/HQ. Concurrently, to conduct a feasibility study for a regional education fund from which this initiative will be contextualized for sustainability purposes.

2. Background

PALTEX is a program that acquires, produces, and sells quality textbooks and instructional materials at affordable prices, representing an incentive for students and health workers to use them.

A broad range of instructional materials, emphasizing public health and primary health care, is currently available through the program in Spanish, Portuguese, English and French.

During more than 40 years of operation, PALTEX has been extremely successful and has contributed to the education of millions of health professionals. The Ministers of Health of the 20 participating Member States continue to renew the Program as part of PAHO/AMRO's technical mission. PAHO/AMRO Representatives report that PALTEX continues to meet an important need, and that it is well recognized and well received in their country's training institutions. Furthermore, new institutions continue to be drawn into the Program, current students seek out the Program, and former students remember that they were helped by the Program.

Based on this experience, a similar and custom-made initiative could be developed for low-income countries in Africa, ensuring access for students, teachers and professionals to essential educational and reference materials (e.g. textbooks, learning materials, diagnostic equipment, computers, models/dummies for strengthening skills labs/clinical demonstration rooms etc.) with the aim of strengthening both education and practice.

3. Objective

The overall objective of this initiative of technical cooperation among PAHO/AMRO, WHO/AFRO and WHO/HQ is to assess the feasibility of establishing a textbook and instructional materials program to strengthening health sciences education in the African Region based on the experience of the PALTEX program in the American Region.

If deemed feasible, it is proposed that the cooperation continues in order to design and implement a program to acquire, produce and distribute quality textbooks, diagnostic equipment and instructional materials at affordable prices for students, educators and health professionals in low-income countries of Africa. Concurrently, to conduct a feasibility study for a regional education fund from which this initiative will be contextualized for sustainability purposes.

4. General strategy

Phase 1: Working group

Establish a joint working group, including members from PAHO/AMRO, WHO/AFRO and WHO/HQ to facilitate the implementation of the project. The group will include:

- Technical advisors from WHO/HQ: Mario Dal Poz, Gulin Gedik, and Rebecca Bailey
- Technical advisors from PAHO/AMRO: Silvina Malvárez, Eduardo Castro and Thomé Nicocelli
- Technical advisors from WHO/AFRO: Margaret Phiri, Jennifer Nyoni, Djona Avocksouma

Phase 2: Planning meeting

Conduct a workshop in Washington, DC on June 28 - 30, 2010 with members of the above-mentioned working group and an external expert. The workshop will be aimed at presenting PALTEX to WHO/HQ and WHO/AFRO, discussing the education situation in the African Region, agreeing on the lines of work, collaboration and concept paper, and defining the next steps.

Phase 3: Feasibility study

After the workshop, WHO/HQ and WHO/AFRO, with technical support from PAHO/AMRO, will conduct a feasibility study for the initiative in the African Region. The study will be done by an external expert, with technical support from the working group.

Phase 4: Develop a strategic plan for the creation and launch of the program

Based on the results of the feasibility study mentioned above, the joint working group will design a strategic plan of action for the creation and launch of the program in the WHO African Region.

5. Next Steps (in the short term)

5.1 – Meeting of the working group on June 28-30, 2010 in Washington, DC

5.2 - Regular conference calls to finalize the feasibility study plan and tools

Organize monthly conference calls to track progress and discuss challenges. The meetings will include WHO/HQ, WHO/AFRO and PAHO/AMRO working group which will monitor the progress of the project.

5.3 – Design the feasibility study: by an external consultant (to be discussed).