The purpose of IAPB Briefing Papers is to inform IAPB members and others about important and emerging issues affecting VISION 2020: The Right to Sight.

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Abstract:
This paper provides guidance to IAPB Members, and their development partners, on the potential advantage of engaging with local United Nations personnel in national advocacy efforts to promote VISION 2020: The Right to Sight.

The Heads of country offices of several United Nations Agencies may be useful interlocutors in the context of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight national advocacy strategies. The local Head of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Office and the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are probably most relevant to our work. However, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the UN International Labour Organisation (ILO) are also both very active in promoting policies which serve to support those with disabilities. This note explains the functions of the in-country offices of these UN bodies, and suggests issues which might be discussed in contacts with them.

World Health Organisation
WHO has offices in 145 countries (list appended). In country, WHO staff perform three roles. First, they monitor health developments in the country of accreditation, and provide a channel of communication between governments, WHO Regional Offices, and WHO Headquarters. Second, WHO personnel provide strategic advice to governments, and other stakeholders on the development of health priorities and services. And, third, WHO experts may be present to give technical assistance in a particular field, or assist the government address a specific challenge. Generally, the nature of WHO’s relationship with individual countries is set out in 5 year WHO Country Cooperation Strategies (CCS),
copies of which can be downloaded from the WHO website: http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/listofccs/en/index.html.

In May 2009, the World Health Assembly, an annual meeting of WHO Member States, adopted Resolution A62/1 on the prevention of avoidable blindness and visual impairment. The resolution “URGES Member States to implement the Action Plan for the prevention of avoidable blindness and visual impairment” and “REQUESTS the Director General to provide support to Member States in implementing the proposed actions in the plan”. However, the Action Plan also requests “international partners” to play a full part in promoting its implementation. The Resolution text, and its associated Action Plan, is also available from the WHO website http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA62-REC1/WHA62_REC1-en.pdf.

In discussions with WHO personnel, you might wish to enquire what action has been taken locally to assist your host government to fulfil the 5 objectives of the Plan which are to:

- Strengthen advocacy to increase Member States’ political, financial and technical commitment to eliminate avoidable blindness and visual impairment.
- Develop and strengthen national policies, plans and programmes for eye care.
- Increase and expand research for the prevention of blindness and visual impairment.
- Improve coordination between partnerships and stakeholders at national and international levels.
- Monitor progress in elimination of avoidable blindness and visual impairment.

You might also ask WHO staff how you can further assist them, and other stakeholders, in promoting the fulfillment of the Plan’s objectives through joint activities. An excellent time to engage with local WHO staff is when they are in the process of consulting on drawing up a new Country Cooperation Strategy (i.e. generally during the last year of the life of the extant Strategy – each Strategy specifies the time frame of its operation).

**United Nations Development Programme**

UNDP is present in 166 countries (list appended). UNDP serves as the UN’s development network. It seeks to build institutional and human resource capacity through the provision of technical assistance and financial support. Its main areas of focus are:

- Democratic governance.
- Poverty reduction.
- Crisis prevention and recovery.
- Environment and energy.
- HIV/AIDS.
In its work to support the achievement of the MDGs, UNDP places emphasis on the empowerment of women, and recognises that people with disabilities may be disproportionately excluded from the benefits of development.

In some countries, UNDP provides a coordinating mechanism for the international donor community active in the country, and helps governments elaborate their own National Poverty Reduction Development Strategies. Thus, while UNDP may not necessarily be directly involved in the health sector (apart from HIV/AIDS), it will be an influential player in debates about a country’s development priorities, and policies. Details of UNDP activities in individual countries can be found on the UNDP website.

In discussion with UNDP staff you might wish to establish the extent to which the needs of people with disabilities are factored into national development strategies. You might also wish to offer to work with UNDP to raise awareness of the needs of disabled people in general, and those who are blind, or visually impaired, in particular.

**United Nations Children’s Fund**

UNICEF is represented in 190 countries. Their website provides details of country programmes and contact addresses. It regards itself as the leading advocate for children’s rights and places heavy emphasis on the right of social inclusion for those with disabilities. It is particularly active in the health and education sectors. In the health field, it supports immunisation, Nutrient supplementation, and health education programmes: all directly relevant to national efforts to prevent avoidable blindness and visual impairment amongst the young. UNICEF has a strong track record in working with NGOs and other stakeholders. While UNICEF is unlikely to be a direct source of funding for programmes specifically aimed at reducing avoidable blindness, its involvement at the community level may provide useful channels for communicating key messages.

**International Labour Organisation**

The ILO has an impressive record of championing the rights of those with disabilities. It has Regional and country offices in almost 60 locations (see their website). Its core programme “Decent work for all” seeks to promote fair employment practices and opportunities. It also provides advice on the development and implementation of social protection programmes. In some regions, there are specific strategies for promoting the needs of disabled persons (e.g. Ability Asia Pacific). Such strategies are based on the principles of:

- Equal opportunity;
- Equal treatment
Mainstreaming vocational rehabilitation services into national employment programmes.

Obviously, ILO’s work does not focus on medical interventions to prevent avoidable blindness or visual impairment, but local ILO offices may be a useful ally in advocacy efforts premised on a rights based approach to the challenge of achieving inclusion of the needs of those with disabilities in national development strategies, and, for example, in efforts to reduce injuries through improvements in health and safety in the workplace. Like the other UN bodies mentioned above, they are an important source of influence on host governments.

Feedback

Please do tell us if you found this Briefing Paper useful. And if, in the course of your advocacy work, you do engage with these UN organisations, IAPB would be most interested to receive any feedback you can offer.