

Assemblies of the Member States of WIPO

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REPORT ON THE ACCESSIBLE BOOKS CONSORTIUM

Information document prepared by the Secretariat

1. During the 17th Session of the Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights (“the SCCR”) held in November 2008, the SCCR stressed the importance of dealing, without delay and with appropriate deliberation, with the needs of persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled (“the print disabled”). Two courses of action were envisaged by the SCCR. The first was discussions on how to enhance access to copyright protected works. This culminated in the adoption by Member States of the *Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons who are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled* (“the Marrakesh VIP Treaty”) in June 2013.
2. The second course of action was intended to be practical in nature and involved the establishment of a Stakeholders’ Platform (“the Platform”). The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Secretariat invited major stakeholders representing the interests of copyright-holders (“rights-holders”), libraries and the print disabled to take part in the Platform with the aim of increasing, at a practical level, the number of copyright protected works in accessible formats such as braille, audio and large print. The Platform met on nine separate occasions, and presented Interim Reports to the SCCR¹ to provide updates of its work.

¹ Interim Reports were submitted to the 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 24th and 26th and 27th Sessions of the SCCR (documents SCCR/18/4, SCCR/19/10, SCCR/20/6, SCCR/21/10, SCCR/24/2, SCCR/26/5, SCCR/26/7, SCCR/27/4 respectively).

A. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ACCESSIBLE BOOKS CONSORTIUM

3. The Marrakesh VIP Treaty sets out the legal framework to facilitate the cross border exchange of books in accessible formats, but practical initiatives are also needed to realize the objectives set forth in the treaty. Once the Marrakesh VIP Treaty comes into force², government agencies, rights-holders, libraries and organizations representing or serving the print disabled will require technical assistance at the operational level in the production, distribution and cross border transfer of works in accessible formats.

4. Further to the desire expressed by the Platform to continue its mandate at its meetings held in November 2012, November 2013 and February 2014, the Platform recommended to the SCCR in May 2014 to move to a more permanent operational structure (see document SCCR/27/4). The SCCR, at its 27th Session, took note of the recommendation by the Platform for the evolution of its initiatives into a permanent, multi-stakeholder entity to be named the Accessible Books Consortium (ABC).

5. The ABC was launched on June 30, 2014, in front of the Member States of the SCCR, which coincided with the celebration of the first anniversary of the adoption of the Marrakesh VIP Treaty and the presentation by the Government of India of the first instrument of ratification to the Treaty. The objective of the ABC is to increase the number of books worldwide in accessible formats and to make them available to people who are print disabled.

6. The ABC acts as a complement to the Marrakesh VIP Treaty and comprises an alliance of WIPO, organizations that represent the print disabled, libraries and rights-holders and includes the following organizations:

- The World Blind Union;
- The DAISY Consortium;
- The International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment;
- The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions;
- Perkins;
- Sightsavers;
- The International Publishers Association;
- The International Federation of Reproduction Rights Organizations; and
- The International Authors Forum.

² The Marrakesh VIP Treaty will come into force after the ratification of 20 Member States (see article 18, VIP/DC/8 Rev).

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE ACCESSIBLE BOOKS CONSORTIUM

7. The ABC is pleased to report on its three main activities: the ABC International Book Exchange Service; Capacity Building; and Accessible Publishing.

ABC INTERNATIONAL BOOK EXCHANGE SERVICE

8. Currently 14 participating libraries have contributed their catalogues of searchable titles to ABC's International Book Exchange Service (i.e., known as the TIGAR Service)³. The ABC Book Exchange now has 290,000 titles in accessible formats in over 55 languages that can be searched by participating libraries and requested for downloading. Accessible books from this service were loaned *via* participating libraries to individual end users 30,000 times as of May 31, 2015.

9. It should be noted that the ABC Book Exchange is a library-to-library service, allowing for participating libraries to build their collections by downloading for free books that have already been produced in accessible formats by other participating libraries. Participating libraries have downloaded over 3,000 books as of May 31, 2015, resulting in savings of an estimated six million United States dollars (using an estimated production cost of 2,000 United States dollars for a book that is narrated by a human).

10. Pending the entry into force of the Marrakesh VIP Treaty, the biggest challenge in relation to the ABC Book Exchange has been obtaining the permission from the rights-holder to transfer an accessible book across borders, once a participating library has made a request for a title. Over 10,000 accessible books in the ABC Book Exchange already have the rights given by the rights-holder for the cross border exchange of the work, but the vast majority of the titles do not. This means, therefore, that there is a delay between the time of the request for a title, and the delivery of the accessible book to the participating library. This issue, however, should disappear once the Marrakesh VIP Treaty is widely implemented.

CAPACITY BUILDING

11. ABC's capacity building activities center on providing training in developing and least developed countries (LDCs) in the production and distribution of books in accessible formats. Thanks to a donation received from the Government of Australia, the ABC has implemented capacity building projects in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Additionally, funding has been received from the Republic of Korea for capacity building activities in India. These four capacity building programs were completed by June 2015. ABC partnered with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in each country and the managers at each of these NGOs were all blind persons with experience in advocating on behalf of the print disabled.

³ The 14 participating libraries are as follows: *Association pour le Bien des Aveugles et malvoyants* (Switzerland), *Association Valentin Haüy* (France), Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Danish National Library for Persons with Print Disabilities, Dedicon (Netherlands), Dorina Nowill Foundation for the Blind (Brazil), National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (United States), Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind, Norwegian Library of Talking Books and Braille, South African Library for the Blind, Swedish Library of Talking Books and Braille, the Swiss Library for the Blind, Visually Impaired and Print Disabled, VisAbility (Australia) and Vision Australia.

The following was accomplished during the course of the year:

- (a) 1,588 educational books in accessible formats were produced in national languages, benefitting over 23,500 students who are print disabled in these four countries;
- (b) seminars were organized in the latest accessible book production techniques and were offered to NGOs, government agencies and commercial publishers in each country. The ABC also arranged for ongoing technical assistance in producing works in accessible formats to be given to its local partners;
- (c) reading devices were purchased, which were then loaned to students after they had been trained by the local partner on how to use this assistive technology; and
- (d) training was provided by WIPO to the local partner in the use of the ABC International Book Exchange Service.

ACCESSIBLE PUBLISHING

12. The ABC encourages collaboration between print disabled organizations and rights-holders, on the understanding that this is a key factor in increasing the global number of works in accessible formats. In particular, the ABC promotes the production of “born accessible” works, that is, books that are usable from the start by both sighted persons and the print disabled. Towards this end, the Accessible Books Consortium established the *ABC Charter for Accessible Publishing*, which contains eight principles that publishers are requested to implement. By signing the Charter, publishers affirm their commitment to making their e-books and other digital publications accessible to the print disabled. To date, the Charter has been signed by 12 publishers, including Elsevier, Bloomsbury and HarperCollins, as well as five publishers’ associations.

13. To encourage accessible publishing, the ABC also launched the *ABC International Excellence Award for Accessible Publishing*, which was presented for the first time at the London Book Fair on April 14, 2015. Cambridge University Press and Bangladesh’s Young Power in Social Action were the inaugural joint winners. Both organizations were recognized for providing outstanding leadership and achievements in the advancement of the accessibility of commercial e-books or other digital publications to persons with print disabilities.

C. FUTURE ACTIVITIES IN THE 2016/2017 BIENNIUM

ABC INTERNATIONAL BOOK EXCHANGE SERVICE

14. Work is underway to develop a global user-friendly consumer application, so that a print disabled library patron will be able to search directly in the ABC International Book Exchange Service for titles that s/he may wish to read. The ABC also aims to increase the number of accessible titles in languages that are widely spoken and of relevance to the print disabled in developing countries and LDCs.

CAPACITY BUILDING

15. It is proposed to continue ABC's capacity building activities in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, and to expand capacity building into three additional countries in the next biennium. Attaining this objective will be dependent upon continued funding by donors and identifying local partners who are interested in implementing the ABC mandate. The long-term goal is eventually to create centres of accessible publishing excellence, which could be consulted by regional NGOs, government agencies, libraries, authors and commercial publishers when needed.

ACCESSIBLE PUBLISHING

16. The ABC intends to establish an online hub of accessible publishing information, including revised best practice guidelines for accessible publishing. It is envisaged that through this online hub a Starter Kit of training materials in accessible book production techniques will be made available, as will a manual on how to publish accessible e-books for self-published authors.

FUNDRAISING

17. The ABC has been operational for over one year, and with the accomplishments to date of the ABC and its activities, the International Bureau will seek to ensure its continued future success, which includes securing an effective funding base – eventually moving away from dependence on the WIPO Regular Budget – to support a gradual scaling-up of its activities and geographical coverage. The International Bureau will therefore embark prudently on the development of a strategy for the solicitation of extra-budgetary financial contributions, with the ultimate objective of long-term financial sustainability for the ABC and its mission to make more accessible books available.

18. As evidenced by ABC's progress, it has quickly become a critical component in the overall commitment of the Organization and its Member States to making a difference in the lives of persons with print disabilities. This commitment was most acutely reflected in the historic adoption by Member States of the Marrakesh VIP Treaty in June 2013, the objectives and practical implementation of which can be realized through innovative multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the ABC.

19. A challenge that emerges in ABC's efforts to continue providing its specialized and state of the art support to these objectives, however, including the technical assistance required at the operational level in the production and distribution of works in accessible formats by government agencies, rights-holders, libraries and organizations representing or serving the print disabled, is the question of longer-term sustainable financing. Consequently, the International Bureau intends to develop and pursue a comprehensive fundraising strategy to include the solicitation of extra-budgetary funding for ABC activities.

20. In a world of competing resources, and a recognition that participation of a broad range of stakeholders is crucial to the implementation of solutions to global challenges and the achievement of common goals, many Specialized Agencies of the United Nations and other international organizations have long engaged broad-based fundraising strategies to mobilize extra-budgetary financial contributions from Member States and the private sector in support of their missions. Organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the World Food Program (WFP), to name a few, receive significant extra-budgetary resources for their programs, whether through voluntary contributions from Member States, direct private contributions, corporate giving programs or individual donations/crowd-sourcing, among others. Several of these

agencies also have partner organizations in the form of local tax-exempt public charities and non-profit organizations with which they have entered into cooperation agreements and through which fund-raising in the countries in which such charities are established is facilitated by the tax-deductibility of the contribution for the donor. UNICEF, for example, has a unique structure through which it raises funds from the private sector: a network of 36 UNICEF National Committees, established as independent local NGOs around the world that work to advocate on behalf of UNICEF's mission and promote children's rights. Collectively, the UNICEF National Committees raise approximately one-third of UNICEF's annual income.⁴

21. Drawing from the experience of these and other Specialized Agencies, the International Bureau will proceed cautiously, gradually, and transparently in the development of such a strategy, seeking to leverage a range of possible fundraising efforts, sources, and partners appropriate to the objectives of ABC. Options that the International Bureau will seek to explore will include voluntary contributions from Member States, from the private sector, including philanthropic organizations and individuals, and partnership with non-profit entities. Regarding the latter, the International Bureau will also explore possibilities such as the establishment of one or more dedicated public charities/NGOs to support ABC's mission, subject to the laws and regulations of the countries in which such entities may be created, in order to attract donations that would benefit from the status of tax deductions. Whether in partnership with non-profit entities newly established or with those already working to support initiatives for the print disabled, the International Bureau will seek to expand its fundraising base in countries in which prospects for charitable giving to the Organization's initiatives in support of accessibility for the print disabled may be realized. With respect to the management of such contributions, they are and will continue to be subject to the WIPO Financial Regulations and Rules and applicable oversight, auditing, and reporting mechanisms.

22. The ABC is an exciting and innovative multi-stakeholder entity that seeks to bring lasting change to those affected by the global book famine. Its efforts to share the latest, up-to-date technical knowledge about how to produce accessible books, to support the goal of "born accessible" publishing, and to expand an international database and book exchange of accessible books will require sustained financial and in-kind support to ensure the long-term success of ABC as the premier multi-stakeholder platform dedicated to increasing the global number of works in accessible formats. In embarking on its strategy for long-term financial sustainability, the International Bureau will continue to ensure regular reporting to Member States on the development and implementation of this strategy and subsequent fundraising efforts.

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⁴ See http://www.unicef.org/about/structure/index_natcoms.html.