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STATUS UPDATE ON THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW OF BIREME AND INCAP*

Report on the Institutional Review of the Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information (BIREME)

Introduction

1. This purpose of this document is to report to the Executive Committee of PAHO on the institutional review of the Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information (hereinafter BIREME or the Center), with the object of developing a new institutional framework for the governance, management, and financing of the Center.
2. BIREME is PAHO's specialized Pan American center for technical cooperation in health information and communication sciences. Established in São Paulo, Brazil in 1967, its operations are geared to the development of national and regional capacity and infrastructure for management, dissemination, and access to scientific information, knowledge and evidence, keeping abreast of international state-of-the-art methodologies and health technologies. PAHO technical cooperation through BIREME makes a significant contribution to the democratization of quality information in health, which is key to health development and social inclusion in the Region of the Americas.
3. The formulation of a new institutional framework for BIREME stems from the recommendations of PAHO's Governing Bodies on the review and strengthening of all Pan American centers of the Organization, as well as the consultations and agreements between PAHO and the Government of Brazil.

* This document is the second part of document CE142/INF/12 "Status Update on the Institutional Review of BIREME and INCAP"

History of the Current Institutional, Legal, Management and Financing Framework of BIREME

4. Since its creation in 1967, BIREME has operated under the legal framework of a Maintenance Agreement that is renewed every four or five years. The current Agreement remains in effect until 30 December 2009.

5. That Agreement was signed by PAHO and the Government of Brazil, through the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the State Secretariat of Health of São Paulo, and the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP), whose campus is home to BIREME's physical headquarters. The Agreement stipulates the respective responsibilities and regular financial contributions of each party. PAHO is responsible for the management of BIREME and provides the international staff and regular resources for its operation approved in the PAHO budget by the Governing Bodies of the Organization. The international staff selected and financed by PAHO include the Director of BIREME and three additional staff members. The Ministry of Health and the State Secretariat of Health of São Paulo contribute regular financial resources for BIREME's maintenance. Until a short time ago, the Ministry of Education funded the annual subscriptions to hard copies of the scientific journals and in the past six years, has gradually funded online access to the journals. The Federal University of São Paulo contributes national staff, physical facilities, and the scientific journal collection.

6. The contributions detailed in BIREME'S Maintenance Agreement are supplemented with financial resources from projects, agreements, grants, and the sale of information products and services.

7. BIREME has an average annual budget of US\$ 6 million. Regular contributions under the Maintenance Agreement represent 31% of the Center's budget, including the 10.4% contribution of PAHO for international staff and technical cooperation and the 21% contribution of Brazil, which includes the national staff and infrastructure of the UNIFESP (9%) and the financial resources from the State Secretariat of Health of São Paulo (1%) and the Ministry of Health (11%). The Ministry of Education's contribution, represented by the provision of online access to health science journals, is not included in BIREME's annual budget.

8. It should be noted that 70% of BIREME'S total budget comes from extrabudgetary resources--that is, from projects, agreements, grants, and the sale of information products and services. These resources are critical to the sustainable management of BIREME, especially since US\$ 3.6 million (65%) are allocated to staff wages. Thus, management of BIREME's cash flow depends, on the one hand, on the timely disbursement of the regular resources provided for in the Maintenance Agreement (at mid- year or in the second semester) and, on the other, on BIREME's capacity to mobilize extrabudgetary

resources. It is therefore important to give BIREME a budget with a better balance between regular and extrabudgetary resources.

9. Notwithstanding the remarkable increase in the technical cooperation that BIREME provides to the Region of the Americas and the current status of the extrabudgetary resources that it generates, the institutional framework for its management and operation has not been substantially modified in its 41 years of existence. This means that BIREME's current institutional framework and Maintenance Agreement do not adequately meet its management, operational and financing needs.

10. The need for a new institutional framework for BIREME has been the object of ongoing discussions between PAHO and the Government of Brazil in recent years. In fact, in the last renewal of the Maintenance Agreement in 2004, the signatories agreed on the need for changes and included a Clause in the Agreement specifically stating that BIREME and the signatories to the Agreement should promote modification and development of the institutional structure and maintenance arrangement of BIREME, in line with national and international interests.

11. At the 138th Session of the Executive Committee, PAHO underscored the importance of BIREME's technical cooperation to the Region and noted the need for strengthening the institutional framework of the Center to afford it more sustainable legal, administrative, and financing conditions.

12. In August 2007 PAHO, WHO, and the Government of Brazil signed the Technical Cooperation Strategy for PAHO and Federative Republic of Brazil, 2008-2012, reaffirming the need to amend the Maintenance Agreement "in order to strengthen and expand BIREME's capacity at the global, regional, and local level as international cooperation center specializing in health information and communication sciences."

Toward a New Institutional Framework for BIREME

13. In light of the above, PAHO, in consultation with the Government of Brazil through the Ministry of Health, is proposing a new institutional framework for BIREME, established through three legal instruments. The first would be the BIREME Regulations, which would maintain its institutional status as a specialized Pan American center of PAHO, and define its objectives, functions, membership, and legal framework for management, operations, and financing. The second would be a new Headquarters Agreement between PAHO and the Government of Brazil for BIREME operations, with a definition of the commitments and responsibilities of the parties and the rights, privileges, and immunities of the Center in that country. The third would be a specific agreement between PAHO and the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP) on BIREME's physical facilities on the University campus, updating the existing

commitments related to the assignment of national staff, physical facilities, and the journal collection. UNIFESP would also support the management of BIREME through its foundations, which operate in the country under Brazilian law.

14. The new BIREME Regulations propose that "Member States of BIREME" be defined as all the Member States of PAHO. That is, the Regulations would formally recognize the entire membership of PAHO as Members of BIREME. With a view to strengthening BIREME's international technical cooperation to other regions of the World Health Organization (WHO), they also propose to allow other WHO Member States (that not members of PAHO) to participate by creating a new membership category called "Participating Members of BIREME." Furthermore, the new BIREME Regulations would allow any international organization with an interest or specific expertise in information and communication sciences to participate by designating it a "Participating Organization of BIREME." It should be noted that under the new Regulations, every Participating Member or Participating Organization admitted to BIREME would have to make financial contributions. The Membership of PAHO's Member States would entail no additional cost to them.

15. The Regulations would also create a new institutional framework for BIREME, consisting of three bodies. The first would be an Advisory Committee, whose function would be to make recommendations to the Director of PASB on the programmatic functions, work plan, and financing of the Center. The new Advisory Committee would be comprised of PAHO and the Government of Brazil as permanent members, plus five representatives of the Member States of BIREME; that is, five PAHO Member States selected on a rotating basis by the Directing Council of PAHO. The second body would be the Scientific Council, whose function would be assist in the development of the BIREME's programmatic functions; it would be comprised of scientific information specialists selected by the BIREME Advisory Committee. The third body would be the Secretariat of BIREME, whose function would be the technical execution of BIREME's work program under the direction of an international Director appointed by PAHO and answerable to it.

16. The proposed institutional framework will provide BIREME with a new governance structure and a stable, balanced source of financing that includes the regular resources approved by the Governing Bodies of PAHO, the contribution of the Government of Brazil, the quota contributions of the Member States of WHO and/or Participating Organizations, and the income generated by projects, agreements, grants, and the sale of BIREME services.

17. The new institutional framework of BIREME will be formalized in consultation with the Government of Brazil and should be submitted for the consideration and approval of the 48th Directing Council, which will meet from 29 September to 3 October 2008. Implementation of BIREME's new institutional framework should take place in 2009.

Action by the Executive Committee

18. The Executive Committee is requested to take note of the information presented on the progress made to date in the institutional review of the Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information.

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