

**« Screens Without Frontiers »**

**SWF**

Project to establish a database of television programs for use of the public  
television channels of developing countries.

UNESCO / URTI

URTI

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## Introduction

Launched by UNESCO and established by the International Radio and Television University (URTI) the project consist of creating a database of programmes for the use of the public television channels of developing countries (162 countries of which 49 belong to the category of less developed countries).

These television have a number of points in common :

- limited or non-existent budgetary autonomy,
- weak budgets,
- weak human and technical structures,
- difficulty accessing the international audio-visual market both in terms of independent program grids in a public service framework,
- difficulty facing the growing competition from programmes broadcast via satellite by major groups from the developed countries.

The first purpose of this project is to help and assist less developed countries. We can notice right now what will be the huge benefices of this project when it will be achieved. As a matter of fact, many public television services in the economically least developed countries are seeking productions suitable for programming and offering satisfactory terms, which would allow them to spend more time on local production, and at the same time, to make it better known.

The expectation of many countries to be included in an international base which they have neither the capability nor the opportunity to create.

Some special criteria has been announced in accordance with UNESCO's politic concerning the audio-visual programs which will be into the database : quality of subjects, impact of programs, decency, education, formation, culture, human right, social participation etc...

It goes without saying that any kind of programme in opposition to moral or cultural identity is absolutely forbidden.

Several decisions have been taken by the Executive Board of UNESCO and through the General Assembly of URTI.

After a thorough prospecting and discussion, the project is about to be finalised. At this stage of the project SWF, it seems necessary to establish a sort of summary including the decisions from the Executive Board of Unesco, the two feasibility studies and the different meetings.

### **I/Background and purpose**

- 1- What is the matter ?
- 2- What are the objectives ?
- 3- Recurrent questions

### **II/Institutional framework**

- 1- A contract between UNESCO and URTI
- 2- Main decisions

## **I/ Background and purpose**

### 1- What is the matter ?

The project “Screens Without Frontiers” (SWF) was presented in 1996 by the Hungarian delegation to UNESCO and the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). Its purpose was, as decided by the Executive Board of UNESCO, at its 149th session (May 1996) “*to prepare, as suggested by the Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), a project aimed at establishing a film bank and database for the use of the public television channels of developing countries*” (149 EX/Decision 7.1.2).

This project, submitted by the International Radio and Television University (URTI) in the framework of IPDC is in fact part and parcel of a larger project launched by UNESCO and aimed at establishing a film bank and database for the use of the public television channels of developing countries “*Screens Without Frontiers*”.

In collaboration with UNESCO, URTI prepared a preliminary study and a feasibility study of the project “SWF”. A professional meeting in March 1998 at UNESCO headquarter provided an opportunity to consult almost all the international bodies and sensitive them to the project. A mailing was sent out to 230 televisions production companies and from an initial file of donors. Most of the delegates underscored the necessity to ensure an active participation of the developing countries and of all the regions, so that this project does not become “a one-way street”. In this connection, they emphasised and endogenous capacities for audio-visual production in developing countries should be strengthened and further appropriate training provided. “SWF” should favour creativity, not consumerism.

The feasibility studies and consultations with representative international and regional professional organisations confirmed among other things :

- a general interest of the nature of the project,
- the existence of appropriate programme sources,
- the wish of many countries to be included in an international base,
- the scarcity (or even total lack) of database concerning the public service in general or designed for programmers in particular.

Who are the professional organisations ?

- international institutions ( like ATEI based in Madrid or CIRTEF in Bruxelles) that covered different countries in the world ;
- regional institutions (like URTNA, ASBU or CIRCOM) that covered part of the world (Africa, Europe, Arab States) ;
- national institutions (public television channels).

2- What are the objectives ?

Concerning, first of all, the long-term objectives, we can mention three main objectives :

- Put in place a database and programme bank for the benefit of public television of developing countries to enable them to source quality programmes.
- The development of the database, over two years, following the on-line mounting of the pilot model. This second objective was reached when the pilot model was accepted, the database is now being created.
- The creation of an operational structure making it possible to put in place the programme bank.

Concerning the immediate objectives, they are a way to achieve the long-term objectives :

- To establish the list of programme sources on the basis of criteria by URTI.
- To inventory existing catalogues, giving details of their characteristics.
- To identify donors willing to make available a selection of their programmes to public televisions of developing countries free of charge or under preferential conditions.
- To define the legal operating conditions with suppliers and users, and draw up a standard contract between programme suppliers and the owner of the database.
- To select documentary software suited to the objectives and financial constraints related to access to the Internet.
- To establish and mount on-line, in French and in English, 500 notices constituting the sample of the future database.

Most of those objectives have already been achieved or are in a good way.

### 3- Recurrent questions

#### - Financial needs

It is evident that the project must be achieved with few funds in order to respect Unesco politic. After a lot of consultations with many professional the conclusion of the two feasibility studies is that the project is feasible. At this stage, some professional institutions already made concrete proposals, and hundreds or thousands of programmes were offered as a contribution to the project. This does not mean that a database and film bank can be easily created, but it shows that there is an interest, a will and a need. For this, the project needs funds.

It is in this framework that URTI is presenting this request for financial assistance to the IPDC, in order to prepare a pilot model of the programme database for the benefit of public television of developing countries. This model has been accepted by the bureau of IPDC and an amount of 67.000 \$ is now available.

Having examined document 154 EX/14, the Executive Board (May 1998) invited the Director-General (154 EX/Decision 3.6.1) to identify extrabudgetary funding sources with a view to finding the necessary contributions to ensure the launching of the first phase of the project. Establishment of the database combining existing and appropriate sources, and establishment of a partnership and a network among the organisations concerned.

The Executive Board also appealed to Member States to give full support to this project both through financial and commodity contributions and through national, regional and international initiatives and encouraged public and private foundations and patrons to display their solidarity by supporting the project financially.

Following that decision, a letter was sent to the Presidents of the National Commissions for UNESCO of donor countries seeking their co-operation in identifying potential partners, public or private institutions, which might be willing to make a financial contribution to the '*Screens without Frontiers*' project.

Another letter was sent to all representative professional organisations involved to inform them about the relevant decision of the Executive Board and to solicit their comments and proposals

in the light of that decision. The replies received confirm '*a general consensus on the need to establish a very well-organised and managed data base*' and reiterate the readiness of the professional NGO to collaborate, provided that the funds are available.

Even with IPDC assistance we will need additional funds. No financial assistance has been sought from sources other than the IPDC, however assistance in the form of programs contribution has been sought from 230 television production companies.

- Enforce copyright

The necessity of respecting copyright, neighbouring rights and intellectual property rights has been clearly maintained in the feasibility study. It seems obvious that the establishment of a such project implies vigilance concerning the respect of integrity of the works. The wish of the author will therefore be respected by strict use of international and european rights.

In order to do our best to enforce the intellectual propriety, some principles have to be respected:

- The necessary complexity but the overriding duty to respect copyright, neighbouring rights and intellectual property.
- The effort needed from some potential providers to technically "internationalise" their documents, and waive their rights as appropriate.
- The project necessarily pertains to the public service notion of the media and their cultural role. Consequently, those overseeing the project must ensure that, so far as possible, the project activities are co-ordinated with other programmes with similar purposes, in particular those relating to copyright law training, audio-visual translation, the computerisation of public services in recipient countries, and so on, which programmes could also be promoted by means of the database.
- The donors themselves should, in respect of all or part of what they make available, select the countries authorised to receive and broadcast the films, rather than such selection being on the basis of a set list.

Professional relationships in this field are so diverse and complex that nothing can be done without the assistance and close co-operation of existing interregional and national organisations.

Some situations will have to be examined :

- **Relations between the database and the provider of programmes** : the provider must ensure that he owns the rights which allow the distribution.
- **Relations between the database and the broadcaster** : explain the juridical disposition concerning the way and the system of broadcasting with each broadcaster .
- **Relations between the database and the right-beneficiary** : in this situation, the common control of rights is necessary.

## **II/ Institutional framework**

### **1- A contract between UNESCO and URTI**

The SWF is the outcome of a collaboration between UNESCO and URTI.

URTI is an NGO that has operational relation with UNESCO. It is a legally incorporated French association with an international purpose. It brings together 33 radio and of television companies from 23 countries. Established in 1949, URTI's aimed is to promote culture, knowledge and know-how through the exchange of radio and television programs among its members.

Politically, only a strong impetus from an organisation such as UNESCO ensure sufficient mobilisation. In any case, the initiative will need to be supported by national authorities and relayed by other institutions of international co-ordination.

Financially, such a project can be envisaged only if it has a budget which ensures that joint expenses and local cost are shared.

Some advantages have a lot of impact on the project :

- the credibility of the organisation ;
- the possibility of drawing on its Regional Office and ensuring consistency with its other aid programmes (IPDC) in the field of communication ;
- the experience gained from the provision of technical assistance to URTI.

## 2- Main decisions

After the 149<sup>th</sup> session of the executive board, it has been decided that URTI had to proceed with a preliminary feasibility study which was examined at the 151<sup>st</sup> session.

In view of the results of that initial study, the Executive Board, at its 151<sup>st</sup> session (151 EX/Decision 3.4.1) in May 1997, invited the Director-General to :

- Specify the objectives and modalities for establishing such a bank and its database ;
- Continue contacts with all possible partners ;
- Study the advisability of organising a meeting with interested countries and bodies ;
- Draw up detailed financial estimates and a financing plan.

The Board took the decision to finalise the preliminary study which was a good start for the very new project.

The definitive feasibility study was submitted to Unesco in March 1998 and favourably examined. A broad-based consultation was held. The opinions of over 130 major private production companies and 90 public or private television channels and specialised programme collections were sought. A questionnaire was sent to all 40 public television channels of the least developed countries on the conditions under which programmes (and information on programmes) from abroad were used. Following this consultation with professional organisations, including a meeting with representative regional audio-visual organisations<sup>1</sup>, as well as contacts with Permanent Delegations of UNESCO's Member States, a comprehensive document (154 EX/14) was prepared and submitted to the Executive Board.

The Executive Board of UNESCO, at its 155<sup>th</sup> session (November 1998) :

- Reiterated its appeal to Member States to give full support to the project '*Screens Without Frontiers*' both through financial and commodity contributions and through national, regional and international initiatives ;

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<sup>1</sup> Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU), Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA), Canal France International (CFI), Association Européenne de Télévisions Régionales (CIRCOM), International Council of French-Speaking Radio and Television (CIRTEF), European Broadcasting Union (EBU), Federal Service of Russia for Television and Radio Broadcasting (FSTR), International Radio and Television University (URTI), Japan Media Communication Center (JAMCO), Union of National Radio and Television Organizations of Africa (URTNA), Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU) and Ibero-American Television Organization (OTI).

- Supported with gratitude the initiative of the Hungarian television company 'Alfa TV', which has already provided significant financial means and premises for setting up and accommodating the data bank.

It invited the Director-General :

- to continue identifying extrabudgetary funding sources to ensure the launching of the first phase of the project ;
- to initiate, once the required funding has been secured, the first phase of the project through professional organisations (such as the European Broadcasting Union and the International Radio and Television University, which have expressed interest in becoming operators), ensuring that representative professional bodies from all the regions are fully involved ;
- to keep it informed of the progress of the project on a yearly basis ;
- to make an evaluation after the initial two-year phase has been completed.