

## Preface

WHO, in collaboration with the WTO has been working on the implications on health services of the on-going GATS negotiations. The February 2000 launch of WTO negotiations to further liberalize trade in services under GATS has highlighted the need for better information on the risks and benefits of trade liberalization in specific sectors. Each session of the GATS Council has a standing agenda item on "assessment of services trade", to encourage sharing of new data and information on trends in services trade and the impact of implementing countries' GATS commitments.

Despite there being hardly any listing of requests for commitments in the area of cross-border trade in health services, WHO decided to analyse and place before countries the risks and opportunities that technology (eHealth) and transactions in mode 1 entail. Though there is very little empirical evidence and data readily available, it was felt that there was a need to work towards a WHO policy in the area as well as a need to assist the health ministries of Member States in their consultations with the trade departments to deal with the GATS negotiations. A working paper on eHealth was thus as also a framework and questionnaire to be used for research at country level.

It was felt that national country reports are required to assess the ground situation in various countries and highlight the potential and barriers to such cross-border trade in Mode 1 of health services. The assessment of the situation in the target countries was proposed to be carried out via a common framework that would, on the one hand address the principal issues that are prerequisite to such trade taking place, and on the other serve as guidelines to identify the gaps in the prevailing situation that the stakeholders must consider addressing.

The Health e-readiness and policy analysis comprises a set of criteria that help outline the preparedness of each country in the area of eHealth as well as assist in carrying out a survey of the existing environment for preparing a country status report in the area of cross-border trade in health services for Mode 1 of GATS. The criteria are:

- Policy and strategy framework
- Infrastructure
- Legal and regulatory framework
- Human resource framework
- EHealth Business environment
- Present Status of eHealth and Cross-Border Trade

In order to carry forward this initiative the Strategy Unit at WHO Geneva, in collaboration with the South East Asia Region WHO Office, New Delhi, established an Expert Group in India to produce an India Country Study for this area. This group,

established in the WHO India Country Office and comprising of representatives from the Indian Health Ministry, Indian Information Technology Department, Medical professionals and the WHO Geneva International Consultant on eHealth, commissioned Apollo Health Street Ltd (AHSL) as the National Consultants to assist in carrying out the study.

The objective of the project was to obtain:

1. Recommendations and the finding through the country report which would then be placed before an international consultation organised by WHO HQ Geneva.
2. A suggestive action plan that would set the road map for releasing the potential of cross border trade in health services.
3. Recommendations for the stance India should consider taking at the ongoing GATS negotiations at the WTO, with respect to trade in health services.

The research mandate involved the following activities:

- Carry out country level research based interviews and questionnaires as developed in the framework analysis and as advised by the Expert Group set up for this purpose.
- The suggestive list of stakeholders to be involved for the study were: Government, Policy/ Strategy makers and regulators (central & State), Healthcare providers using telemedicine ISPs and E-Health Portals, Health Information Experts, and Consumers
- Prepare a report incorporating the finding of the research.
- The National Consultant in preparation of the country report would also carry out a SWOT analysis and prepare an action plan that would set the road map for realising that potential.
- Based on the findings the report should make recommendations for guiding the negotiations and recommend a country position for India in the GATS negotiations
- The consultant will also prepare a list of the important stakeholders and experts in the area of Telemedicine and e-health so that a network of such experts could be established for on-going consultations in the area.

- The consultant shall also prepare a list of major Indian website in the area of healthcare and indicate the source of data or information regarding transactions, if any on the websites.
- The consultant shall work under the overall guidance of the Expert Group and the International Consultant appointed by DGO, WHO, Geneva.

*(This final report as approved by the Expert Group, has been edited by A. Didar Singh, International Consultant, WHO, Geneva.)*

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