

Workshop Title: Languages Other than English

Presenter: James McNulty, International Monetary Fund

During our workshop, we looked at lessons learned by the IMF on using languages other than English. The workshop concluded that:

- it is advisable for multilingual sites to start small
- they require close collaboration between content providers, developers and translation experts,
- usability testing and qualitative feedback are key

The discussion agreed that websites represented at Web4Dev contain content that could be very valuable to those users if translated into more languages. It's clear that while English is the lingua franca of the web, a large fraction of users do not speak English – and that includes visitors to our sites.

It was clear that more translated content can contribute to several MDGs, but as this was a lesson-learning case study about a specific multilingual site moving into its first phase, there is no concrete proposal for the conference. However, the workshop offered a few thoughts to add to points already made during Web4Dev about content in local languages.

First, multi-lingual content does not need to be perfect to be able to make a big difference to users - and this is reflected by the growth of web-based translation tools.

Second, it was suggested that to cover more languages, and to be more flexible, our organizations should consider the idea of being more proactive about releasing and channeling content through auto-translation tools on our users behalf - although accepting the risk of error that this brings may require a change in the way we think about content.

Third, it was suggested that small amounts of our key content that could be of particular interest and value to our most disenfranchised audiences could be identified or written from scratch by local authors, translated into their languages, and made available in the most accessible format for those audiences.