INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE

Governing Body

Programme, Financial and Administrative Committee

GB.303/PFA/5
303rd Session

Geneva, November 2008

PFA

FIFTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Report of the Information and Communications Technology Subcommittee

1. The Information and Communications Technology Subcommittee (ICTS) met on 10 November 2008. Ms P. O'Donovan, Executive Director of the Management and Administration Sector (MAS), opened the fifth session of the ICTS.

2. Subcommittee officers were nominated and ratified as follows: Mr M. Mowla (Bangladesh) as Chairperson, Mr S. Nakajima as Worker Vice-Chairperson and Mr A. Moore as Employer Vice-Chairperson.

3. The Chairperson announced that the two papers before the Subcommittee were being submitted for information and invited Mr N. Habra, Chief of the Information Technology and Communications Bureau (ITCOM), to present the first paper.

Information Technology Strategy (2007–09): Annual Report

4. The Chief of ITCOM introduced the paper [1] and highlighted updates on Strategy initiatives, which included the increased use of Plone for collaborative working throughout the Office, the eRegistry prototype currently being tested in ITCOM, email integration with the Electronic Document Management System (EDMS), and Information Technology (IT) staffing comparisons with reported industry-wide averages.

5. The Chief of ITCOM explained that, until IRIS was available Office-wide, it would be difficult to compute a detailed breakdown of decentralized IT spending. He also noted that a costing template, developed by the World Bank and adopted by the entire UN system, would be used to benchmark and compare IT efficiency across all agencies.

6. The Chief of ITCOM closed his presentation by stating that an IT Strategy for 2010–15 would be presented at the November 2009 session.

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[1] GB.303/PFA/ICTS/1.

7. The Employer Vice-Chairperson asked for clarification on the "external" Plone users mentioned in paragraph 3 of the report. He further requested information on savings realized through the implementation of videoconferencing over the Internet.

8. The Employer Vice-Chairperson raised concerns about delays in EDMS projects due to the scarcity of expert consultants. He also relayed feedback that users had been blocked from access to IRIS following the Oracle upgrade.

9. The Employer Vice-Chairperson noted that the client satisfaction survey for 2008 indicated a 70 per cent positive response, but the report did not provide reasons as to why the remaining 30 per cent were not satisfied. He also requested to know if savings had been realized through the use of the Oracle User Productivity Kit (UPK), a tool for Web-based education and training.

10. The Worker Vice-Chairperson stated that the report did not reflect what was requested in the November 2007 session, specifically noting that in paragraph 31 the budget numbers provided were not detailed for each of the 12 Strategy initiatives, making it difficult to assess current and future spending.

11. The Worker Vice-Chairperson asked about the cost implications of routing all Office-wide email through the headquarters infrastructure. He requested that the staffing information provided in paragraph 25 of the report be broken down by gender.

12. The Worker Vice-Chairperson wanted to know if training materials mentioned in paragraph 30 of the report were published in several languages and if the UPK was being utilized for IT initiatives other than IRIS. He also requested detailed costs and savings for the 12 Strategy initiatives in the next ICTS report and asked whether EDMS would be implemented in field offices.

13. The Worker Vice-Chairperson requested the Office to provide the detailed financial documents covering savings and costs for the 12 initiatives directly to the PFA at the following session of the Governing Body in March 2009 with findings of the three past personnel surveys.

14. The representative of the Government of Nigeria, speaking on behalf of the Africa group, commended the Office for taking steps to reduce costs by using collaboration tools, such as Plone and Skype, and welcomed the fact that offices in Africa were benefiting from improvements in connectivity. He also noted the successful upgrade of IRIS, including a new travel module, and the work toward compliance with International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS).

15. The representative of the Government of Nigeria requested clarification on the overlapping roles of ITCOM and the recently formed Information Technology Application Advisory Board (ITAAB). He also expressed concern that current IT governance targets were low.

16. The representative of the Government of Australia commended progress made in collaborative working and EDMS, but raised concerns that the Strategy needed to better position outcomes in terms of objectives and goals. He recommended that future reporting should include targets, baselines, timelines and costs to better assess progress.

17. The Chairperson, representing the Government of Bangladesh, commented on progress made with Plone, the Internal Governance Documents System (IGDS), eRegistry, IT governance and IRIS, and encouraged the Office to review support holistically and in the context of a coordinated IT support structure in order to be cost efficient and to achieve

consistency in service delivery. He voiced concerns about the delay in EDMS development.

18. The Chief of ITCOM responded to the questions raised by the Subcommittee members. He indicated that external Plone users were accessing Plone to collaborate on joint projects at no additional cost to the ILO. He also clarified that external users were mainly collaborators on specific knowledge-sharing projects, as well as staff of other UN agencies and partners.

19. The Chief of ITCOM explained that the routing of email from the regions through the headquarters infrastructure did not incur any additional costs. He indicated that the scarcity of EDMS expertise had been resolved and that the project was now progressing well.

20. The Chief of ITCOM confirmed that user access to IRIS during the first week after the upgrade had been unstable but was quickly resolved. He further clarified the client satisfaction survey results, noting that 70 per cent were satisfied, 9 per cent were dissatisfied, and the remaining 21 per cent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. He noted the comment to include IT staffing metrics by gender. He stated that the two currently deployed EDMS applications, the ILO web site and the IGDS, were accessible in the field.

21. The Chief of ITCOM explained that, of the 38 targeted IT governance processes, some were currently above satisfactory levels, but the goal to achieve acceptable levels for all processes was difficult, time consuming and resource intensive. He clarified the role of ITAAB as an Office-wide advisory board. Its primary role was to reduce costs and eliminate duplication of effort where requirements had already been met with existing applications.

22. The Worker Vice-Chairperson also asked the Office to provide a list of external Plone users.

23. The Chief of ITCOM responded that the list of external users could be made available to the members of the Subcommittee.

Progress report on the Integrated Resource Information System (IRIS) in the regions

24. Mr S. Kershner, the Section Head of the IRIS Functional Team, introduced the second paper. [2] He indicated that the Jakarta pre-pilot was a year old and that lessons learned through it were being applied to the Budapest implementation effort, which was on schedule. It had led to the development of an operational model where criteria such as office capacity and connectivity were considered, and a flexible region by region roll-out plan would be developed.

25. The Employer Vice-Chairperson requested clarification regarding the timeline for the IRIS field roll-out and asked for a table listing specific offices and implementation dates. He further indicated that the ILO field structure review should be taken into consideration in the IRIS roll-out and requested information regarding budgetary impact for headquarters and field offices. In light of the considerable costs to the Organization, he also questioned the ongoing need for the Subcommittee.

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[2] GB.303/PFA/ICTS/2.

26. The Worker Vice-Chairperson voiced concern that the paper lacked details regarding field roll-out timelines and that internal capacity might hamper the intended 2010–11 completion date. He noted that the operational model was new and might create imbalances between headquarters and field offices in terms of the advantages of implementing IRIS over using FISEXT, the legacy system. He indicated that all offices in the regions should be able to implement IRIS and requested more information regarding which offices would be categorized under which type of solution.

27. The Worker Vice-Chairperson noted that the field roll-out would need to consider the field structure review and UN reform effort. He questioned the increase in training budget requirements for the biennium and requested more details. He indicated that the Workers would reserve their decision on the need for the ICTS Subcommittee.

28. The representative of the Government of Australia indicated that the costs provided were helpful and that the roll-out approach was prudent considering the risks. He stressed that, rather than simply monitoring milestones, a detailed schedule of locations and timelines would help identify blockages. He asked why the cost/benefit analysis eliminated implementing a global service centre in favour of rolling out Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) when some agencies had undertaken both activities.

29. The representative of the Government of Nigeria, speaking on behalf of the Africa group, noted with satisfaction the progress that had occurred with regard to the pilot and pre-pilot. He indicated that the strategy for deployment was good and that collaboration with other UN agencies should be established to leverage connectivity options.

30. The Section Head of the IRIS Functional Team clarified that the field roll-out was scheduled for completion in 2011, with a formal plan of offices and dates to be prepared by mid-2009, when the results of the Budapest pilot would be known. He added that the field structure review and UN reform were being taken into account, although they were still evolving, which resulted in the need for significant flexibility. He also confirmed that the field roll-out would be funded from existing resources, which was challenging and necessitated a phased approach. He indicated that the operational model was a means to consider the feasibility of how distinct field offices might perform IRIS functions. The global service centre, he added, was not intended to be perceived as an alternative to the roll-out. Whilst that would have changed the training requirements, it would not have eliminated the need for field office capacity development and training.

31. The representative of the Human Resources Development Department clarified that, in the 2006–07 biennium, expenditure had mainly been incurred through the training of headquarters and Jakarta staff. In the current biennium, funds had been earmarked for the training of headquarters staff with regard to the upgrade, and to prepare field colleagues for the roll-out. A significant portion of the allocated training funds would be used for travel and the translation of training material. The sum of approximately US$2 million had been earmarked for that purpose in the 2008–09 biennium and a similar amount was considered sufficient for the following biennium.

32. The Executive Director of MAS stated that the creation of the Subcommittee had been a decision of the Governing Body, mainly in response to issues concerning IRIS. She noted that the 2008 Declaration called for a review of governance, including the functioning of the Governing Body; the future role of the Subcommittee should be reviewed in that context.

33. The Chairperson thanked the participants and closed the fifth session of the ICTS.

Geneva, 11 November 2008.