



ELEVENTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Report of the Information and Communications Technology Subcommittee

1. The Information and Communications Technology Subcommittee (ICTS) met on 10 November 2009. Mr M. Mowla (Bangladesh) chaired the meeting. Mr A. Moore (Employer member) and Mr S. Nakajima (Worker member) were the Vice-Chairpersons.
2. The Chairperson announced the following agenda items for discussion: Information Technology Strategy 2010–15, second progress report on the Integrated Resource Information System (IRIS) in the regions, and other questions. The agenda was approved.
3. The Chairperson invited Mr N. Habra, Chief of the Information Technology and Communications Bureau (ITCOM), to present the first agenda item.

Information Technology Strategy 2010–15

4. The Chief of ITCOM introduced the paper ¹ and provided an overview of key elements of the Strategy.
5. The Chief of ITCOM emphasized the approach to defining the Information Technology (IT) Strategy within the Strategic Policy Framework (SPF) 2010–15, taking into account linkages with other Office-wide strategies in determining outcomes, indicators, targets and risks. He noted that extensive consultation had taken place with management at headquarters and in the regions and with Subcommittee members in preparing the paper.
6. The Chief of ITCOM gave an overview of the three outcomes of the Strategy, stressing the need for IT to become a driver of change, an Office-wide approach to IT for improved governance, and the development of a culture of service excellence to ensure a more effective use of resources.
7. The Chairperson highlighted the point for decision in paragraph 34, with a request by the Office to add the following wording: “taking into account the views expressed during its

¹ GB.306/PFA/ICTS/1.

discussion”. The Chairperson invited the members of the Subcommittee to comment on the paper.

8. The Employer Vice-Chairperson raised concerns that overall IT expenditures throughout the Office did not fall under the control of ITCOM. He expressed the view that central control of IT expenditures was the responsibility of management and that that should be addressed quickly.
9. The representative of the Government of Nigeria, speaking on behalf of the Africa group, shared the concerns of the Employers’ group. He added that he would like to see more clarity in the links between outcomes and costs. He noted the importance of the Strategy in terms of governance, support and management in the context of the SPF and supported key themes in the Strategy, such as teamwork, collaboration and IT-facilitated change.
10. The representative of the Government of Brazil thanked the Office for the paper and encouraged the continuation of consultations with the Subcommittee during the implementation of the Strategy.
11. The Worker Vice-Chairperson requested additional clarity on costs related to activities in the IT Strategy. He asked for an explanation of the rationale used in determining the phased roll-out of IRIS to the field, the status of the donor dashboard, specific technology initiatives to be implemented, and wondered how the reorganization in ITCOM would impact staff. He also requested further details on the proposed IT investment study.
12. The representative of the Government of Australia, speaking on behalf of the group of industrialized market economy countries (IMEC), commended the Office for addressing concerns highlighted in the previous IT Strategy. He underscored the need to clarify how outcomes were to be achieved and linked to other strategies. He also noted that indicators were not properly aligned to outcomes and suggested a number of improvements. He asked for detailed information on IT expenditures to be provided to the Subcommittee and wondered how the reduction in the carbon footprint could be achieved.
13. The representative of the Government of Bangladesh noted that some objectives from the previous IT Strategy had not been realized. He highlighted some of the key lessons learned outlined in the appendix and their application to the current Strategy. He felt that an increased involvement of the Subcommittee would be needed to ensure that it retained an effective role in oversight and guidance.
14. The Chairperson noted the number of questions and proposed that IRIS-related questions be addressed under agenda item 2.
15. The Chief of ITCOM replied to the questions raised by the Subcommittee. In reply to the question as to central control of IT expenditures, he provided a historical perspective on the evolution of IT decentralization in the ILO, noting that other UN organizations and private sector firms also faced challenges in recentralizing. He indicated that there were Office-wide standards for desktops, PCs, networks and applications such as email. He pointed out that ITCOM participated in the selection of IT staff in the regions. He stated that ITCOM was able to account for all its own costs and that the Office was progressing with regard to identifying IT costs across the Organization. He noted that a demonstration of the dashboard had been given to donors recently and that it would soon be fully deployed. He stated that work was already under way to participate in initiatives with other UN organizations, such as Intranet sharing with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

16. The Chief of ITCOM stated that the terms of reference were being drafted for the IT investments study, and that the study would be completed in the next biennium. He pointed out that the reorganization of ITCOM would make it less technology-centric and more focused on efficient use of resources in alignment with the strategic objectives of the Office.
17. The Executive Director of the Management and Administration Sector (MAS) noted that the Strategy proposed to address more precisely IT costs throughout the Office and acknowledged that there was room for improvement in that regard. She noted that a number of initiatives had already been implemented to control IT expenditure within the Office, including the establishment of the Information Technology Applications Advisory Board (ITAAB) to monitor, evaluate, and ensure quality and control of IT investments which exceeded US\$20,000. She stated that although IT budgets and staff had been decentralized in the field, guidelines and reporting structures had been put in place to govern IT initiatives. She highlighted the importance of controlling costs and making efficient use of IT funds in the upcoming biennium within existing budget constraints. She emphasized that the IT study to be carried out in the next biennium would be independent and objective; it would help identify the investments that would be needed, but it would be for the Governing Body to decide on any funding that might be required in the future.
18. The Director of the Bureau of Programming and Management (PROGRAM) thanked the Employer Vice-Chairperson for his comments on the importance of centralizing IT throughout the Office. He stated that when there were clearly identifiable IT expenditures, whether staff or non-staff, it was relatively simple to centralize those functions in ITCOM; a number of activities were currently in progress in that regard. He further stated that there was a significant amount of non-staff IT expenditures outside ITCOM; there had been attempts to centralize those resources, but that had turned out to be complicated. He added that there was a large number of decentralized IT support staff who were performing IT functions on a part-time basis, and those would be difficult to centralize. He recognized the difficulty of attaching budgets to the outcome strategies, and informed the Subcommittee that a system was being introduced to implement outcome-based work planning, which would require units to link expenditures with specific outcomes. He noted that it was the first time a results-based exercise had been utilized in the IT Strategy and acknowledged that further improvements were needed.
19. The Chairperson put forward the point for decision in paragraph 34 with the amended text proposed by the Office. He confirmed that the Strategy would be adapted and implemented in line with the comments and suggestions for improvements made by the Subcommittee.
20. The Employer Vice-Chairperson expressed support for the paper and the point for decision with the amended text.
21. The Worker Vice-Chairperson also expressed support for the point for decision, requesting that it be possible to revisit the Strategy.
22. ***The Subcommittee proposes to the Programme, Financial and Administrative Committee that it recommend that the Governing Body endorse the Information Technology Strategy 2010–15, taking into account the views expressed during its discussion.***

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

23. The Section Head of the IRIS Functional Team introduced the paper ² by providing a high-level overview of its contents.
24. The Employer Vice-Chairperson noted that the roll-out was likely to be time-consuming and costly, and said that he would like to see a more precise calendar of the implementation so that it could be discussed at the informal meeting in March 2010.
25. The Worker Vice-Chairperson noted that the timeline was longer than originally expected, and that progress was hindered by connectivity issues which, while understandable, should have been foreseen earlier. He also noted that the pre-pilot in Jakarta had demonstrated the importance of IRIS for the donors to obtain a degree of financial clarity. He was concerned that that would set a precedent in that future projects might not be funded because of the lack of availability of IRIS. He welcomed the additional indications of costs provided by the Office, and expressed concern that if the regions did not have a reserve of funds for connectivity, it might further delay the roll-out.
26. The representative of the Government of Nigeria, speaking on behalf of the Africa group, voiced disappointment that implementation in the Africa region would come last and would not be completed before 2013. He stated that Africa should not be placed in the last position for implementation of IRIS and urged the ILO to collaborate with the UN system present in the region for early implementation.
27. The representative of the Government of Australia, speaking on behalf of the IMEC group, expressed appreciation of the schedule and costing information, and acknowledged that, although the roll-out had been delayed, that approach appeared prudent. The IMEC group requested further information about the lessons learned during the two pilots and asked if an evaluation could be presented in the March 2010 session of the Governing Body. The IMEC group supported collaboration with other UN organizations regarding shared connectivity and noted that it was important to learn from the experience of other organizations.
28. The representative of the Government of Brazil congratulated the Office on the completion of phase 1 in the Budapest Office. She suggested that the Office should hold more frequent conferences to allow field staff to validate processes and procedures.
29. The Section Head of the IRIS Functional Team, responding to the IMEC request for evaluations of the IRIS pilots, stated that a report on lessons learned had been presented to an earlier session of the Subcommittee and that a formal evaluation of the pilots was not envisaged by the Office at that stage.
30. The Director of PROGRAM clarified that the schedule for the IRIS roll-out had been decided in collaboration with the regional directors, based on their evaluation of their state of readiness. In response to the question from the Worker Vice-Chairperson, he indicated that there were no reserves for connectivity but that the costs for the next biennium were estimated at \$600,000; when divided by the number of regions involved, that was something that they should be able to fund.

² GB.306/PFA/ICTS/2.

31. The Chief of ITCOM stated that wherever possible in the field offices, the ILO made use of existing UN connectivity. That was the case for the Office in Addis Ababa, and was being considered in the “One UN” project located in the United Republic of Tanzania.
32. The Chairperson concluded the agenda item by mentioning that the Subcommittee took note of the document related to that item.

Other questions

33. The representative of the Government of Australia, speaking on behalf of the IMEC group, made a statement on the future role of the Subcommittee.
34. The Executive Director for MAS confirmed that the Office would continue with informal briefing sessions. She also proposed that the question of the Subcommittee’s role be addressed in the Working Party on the Functioning of the Governing Body and the International Labour Conference, rather than in the Subcommittee.

Geneva, 11 November 2009.

Point for decision: Paragraph 22.