Information and Communications Technology Subcommittee

PFA/ICTS

FOR INFORMATION

FIRST ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Information Technology Strategy (2007-09)

Introduction

1. At the First Session (November 2005) of the Information and Communications Technology Subcommittee (ICTS), it was agreed that the Office would present its Information Technology (IT) Strategy on a regular basis since it provides the underlying foundation for all IT activities and projects in the ILO. During the 295th Session (March 2006) of the Governing Body, an informal information session of the ICTS was held during which a presentation was made on the IT Strategy for 2001-06. Previous strategy exercises undertaken by the Office covered the periods of 1992-96 and 1997-2000. [1]

2. The current IT Strategy (2001-06) recommended several projects and initiatives, many of which have been completed, most notably:

- ERP (enterprise resource planning) system operational at headquarters;

- acquisition of an electronic document management system;

- upgrade of the headquarters infrastructure network, servers and Internet connectivity;

- IT support enhanced through remote access tools at headquarters and in field offices; and

- IT security function strengthened and formalized.

3. As with previous strategy exercises, consultation with the users is an essential first step, which leads to the formulation of a relevant IT Strategy that truly addresses the needs of the Organization. In the preparation of the new strategy, consultation meetings were held with relevant staff in all sectors and regions; the issues and concerns raised were analysed and addressed.

4. This paper presents an executive summary of the next IT Strategy (2007-09), which has been developed within the ILO's overall framework of results-based management (RBM).

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[1] GB.270/PFA/8.

It is essential that the IT Strategy is aligned with the substantive work of the Office and provides for achieving targeted outcomes through accurate and timely delivery of IT infrastructure, technology and services.

Executive summary

5. The strategy sets down how IT will be used and developed to enable the Organization to execute its mandate. It is focused on improving documentation, governance, compliance and standardization of IT processes so as to better align IT with the strategic objectives of the Office.

6. Within the above overall context, the strategy commits to the delivery of the following IT-related outcomes over the period 2007-09:

   ■ all staff are kept aware of IT tools, technology and services available to assist them in performing their work;

   ■ all staff have access to e-mail and are able to communicate, around the clock, across the globe;

   ■ all ILO email is free of unwanted spam, within the limits of existing filtering technology, and is fully secure;

   ■ all essential services required to maintain business continuity are available in the event of a disaster;

   ■ all staff are able to remotely access essential services and perform work outside the Office;

   ■ all ILO circulars and other official documents, regardless of format, are available and fully searchable in an electronic medium;

   ■ key information is available to staff and ILO constituents via the Web;

   ■ performance is improved for all critical transaction-based systems;

   ■ collaboration throughout the Office is improved through new technologies;

   ■ core business applications are enhanced to improve efficiency;

   ■ manual processes and procedures are minimized through automation; and

   ■ costs are contained.

7. Fundamental to the IT Strategy is the development of an IT infrastructure which will facilitate the ILO becoming a "knowledge organization". Capitalizing on work already done and further utilizing the vast potential of the Internet, Intranet and electronic delivery systems, the strategy envisages improved access to, and sharing of, information and knowledge for ILO staff, constituents, researchers, other organizations and the public.

8. The application of standards and accepted best practices will remain a guiding principle for all software and hardware acquisitions, software development, ongoing operations and support. A formal, auditable governance framework for all IT processes will be a key component of the strategy based on established standards such as Control Objectives for

Information and related Technology (COBIT) and Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL).

9. The ILO will continue as an active participant in the ICT network, which coordinates the exchange of information across the United Nations system. There is a wealth of valuable knowledge and experience to be shared among many organizations with similar IT infrastructures, applications, processes and challenges, as well as opportunities for greater efficiencies through shared development and collaboration.

10. The strategy elements have been grouped into three major areas: (i) programme execution services; (ii) infrastructure; and (iii) governance, support and training.

I. Programme execution services

11. Work in this area aims to ensure that the Organization has the required systems, applications and tools to effectively execute its programme objectives.

12. Implementation of the Integrated Resource Information System (IRIS), the Oracle-based enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, has been completed in headquarters and is fully operational. The next steps will be to deploy some key components of the system to ILO field offices, implement organizational change through improved processes, enhance functionality and integrate with the electronic document management system (EDMS).

13. The management of information in a centralized system is a fundamental requirement for knowledge sharing. Deployment of the EDMS system in headquarters and in the field will be a priority during the strategy period. The introduction of such a system throughout an organization as large as the ILO is a major United Nations undertaking. In addition to the investment in hardware and software, it requires scanning and formatting of historical information and, most importantly, changes in work practices and processes. The implementation has been broken down into a number of subprojects, each one managed by a lead department, with the overall governance provided through a steering committee of the major stakeholders. As the Office learned through the IRIS experience, success in a major organization-wide project can only be achieved through sound project management, dedicated resources, support from the business units and active involvement of the users.

14. Tools for collaborative working will be updated and enhanced. Now that email has been thoroughly integrated into the work culture of the Office, attention will be given to new tools such as Web-based forums, community of practice software, online meetings, Internet telephony and desktop videoconferencing.

II. Infrastructure

15. The IT infrastructure will continue to be improved, respecting existing standards, on an ongoing basis to meet the performance, information access and application needs both internally within the Office and externally for constituents, other organizations and the public. Systems will be updated through a cautious approach to the adoption of new technologies.

16. The Linux operating system will remain the standard platform for server computers providing enterprise-wide services. On the desktop, there is still no viable alternative for Microsoft Windows and Office; however, developments in Open Source Software will be monitored and tested on an ongoing basis, as potential alternatives to proprietary software.

17. The connectivity requirements between headquarters and the regions will be reviewed and potential solutions evaluated continuously to enable the Office to take advantage of developments in technology and localized improvements in telecommunications infrastructure.

18. The demand for remote and mobile access to ILO computer systems is growing as technologies improve. Equipment and policies will be upgraded to support this need.

19. The outsourcing of both the IRIS infrastructure and IRIS development have, to date, met the targeted objectives of cost efficiency and effectiveness. As is the case throughout the United Nations system, such partnering options will continue to be considered and compared against the in-house provision of services. However, the strategy envisages the retention of vital mission-critical functions and expertise within the ILO.

20. The recent increase in dedicated resources to IT security will ensure that the Office has a sound, viable and updated security policy which applies consistently throughout the Office and across all systems. Security mechanisms must be continually monitored, reviewed and strengthened to guard against attacks and risks originating from the Internet. External threats are becoming increasingly sophisticated and dangerous; for example, in March 2004, 26 per cent of all email into headquarters (366,729 items) was deemed to be spam and was successfully blocked; in March 2006, of the 3,244,942 items of headquarters incoming email, 87 per cent were blocked as spam.

21. Overall, the staffing of IT posts remains a challenge when the ILO must compete for high-level expertise and skills with private enterprises or heavily funded international organizations. Moreover, a smaller percentage of IT university degrees are being awarded to women as compared to men, leading to an unsatisfactory gender balance in this area. However, there is a clear awareness on the part of ILO management that more effort and creativity must be applied to improve the situation.

III. Governance, support and training

22. IT governance has been strengthened during the previous strategy period. The ICTS is now in place to assist the PFA in the governance of ICT policies in the Office. Internally, the Information Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC) meets on a regular basis to advise on the strategic direction of IT, review major IT investments, establish standards and monitor compliance with standards.

23. Support, which was significantly improved during the previous strategy period, will continue to be enhanced, guided by user feedback and client satisfaction surveys. The current practices of decentralizing IT support and application development throughout the Office will be reviewed and modified, if needed, so as to ensure a more consistent, responsive, efficient and cost-effective support structure that adheres to the centrally established standards.

24. A recurring theme during the user consultation phase of the strategy was the lack of an effective information dissemination mechanism throughout the Office. Although information about new ILO initiatives is regularly published on the Intranet, many officials do not actively seek that information by visiting the Intranet regularly. Non-intrusive methods that engage staff, such as customized information portals tailored to the preferences and working styles of individual users, will be explored as potential delivery platforms of information. Intrusive user broadcasts have proven to be ineffective in disseminating a lot of information and must be reserved for emergencies and extraordinary announcements.

25. Staff learning and development is one of the main components of the Human Resources Strategy (2006-09). Since IT has become an essential workplace tool, the Information Technology and Communications Bureau (ITCOM) and the Human Resources Department will continue to work together to develop appropriate IT learning programmes, including more use of the Web to deliver training both at headquarters and in field offices.

Resources

26. Regular budget resources in 2006-07 for ITCOM amount to US$21,578,636, plus an additional allocation of US$670,000 under the category of information and communication technology (ICT) investments. Successful implementation of the IT Strategy will be dependent upon the continued allocation of resources to support IT development and maintenance requirements in the programme and budget.

Geneva, 25 September 2006.

Submitted for information.