INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE

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297th Session

Governing Body

Geneva, November 2006

Programme, Financial and Administrative Committee

PFA

FOURTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Report of the Information and Communications Technology Subcommittee

1. The Information and Communications Technology Subcommittee (ICTS) met on 7 November 2006. The Executive Director for Management and Administration, representing the Director-General, opened the second session of the ICTS and announced that, with the agreement of the Subcommittee, Mr. S. Thom from Australia would be the new Chairperson of the ICTS, replacing Mr. M. Sawers.

2. The other Subcommittee Officers were: Mr. A. Finlay (Employer member), Vice-Chairperson, and Mr. S. Nakajima (Worker member), Vice-Chairperson.

3. The Chairperson took over the chair and confirmed that he would act as the Reporter of the Subcommittee. Owing to the fact that the ICTS report had to be submitted to the Programme, Financial and Administrative Committee (PFAC) on 9 November 2006, the Chairperson requested the Subcommittee to authorize him to adopt the report on its behalf.

Information Technology Strategy (2007-09)

4. The Chief of the Information Technology and Communications Bureau (ITCOM) introduced the Information Technology (IT) Strategy paper. [1] He noted that the 2007-09 Strategy differed from previous strategies in that it would be aligned with the Office's move towards results-based management, the formulation of other key strategies around human resources (HR) and knowledge sharing, and increased emphasis on governance through forums such as the Information Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC) and the ICTS.

5. He noted several underlying principles of the Strategy, including the use of measurable outcomes, adherence to standards and involvement in knowledge-sharing with other United Nations agencies. Of particular note was the fact that the IT Strategy no longer existed in isolation but was a component of the broader strategy of the Office.

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[1] GB.297/PFA/ICTS/1.

6. The Chief of ITCOM gave an overview of each of the major strategy elements in the paper: programme execution services, infrastructure and governance.

7. The Worker Vice-Chairperson noted the importance of user involvement and consultation in the Integrated Resource Information System (IRIS) field roll-out and requirements definition for the Electronic Document Management System (EDMS). He also emphasized the importance of confidentiality and security, meeting the user needs by providing user-friendly tools, and of adequate connectivity between headquarters and field offices. He further noted that some staff in field offices had no access to the Strategic Management Module, and that created difficulty in participating in the 2008-09 office-wide planning and budgeting exercise.

8. The Worker members requested a further breakdown of costs for IRIS, EDMS and connectivity for future meetings.

9. The Employer Vice-Chairperson thanked the Office for its informative presentation and noted that the Employers would have preferred to see that information in the paper discussed by the Subcommittee. He recommended highlighting outsourcing costs which would exceed an agreed threshold in future ICTS meetings. He stressed the importance of client satisfaction surveys as a means of monitoring progress over time.

10. The Employers inquired as to what HR information was available in IRIS and how easily that information could be accessed. They asked if theft of equipment was an issue at the ILO.

11. The Employer members requested additional information for the March 2007 Governing Body session concerning the field roll-out, including the overall schedule and budget and recommended having a meeting prior to the March 2007 PFAC.

12. The representative of the Government of Australia requested further clarification on the linkages between the IT Strategy and the strategic objectives of the Office and other strategies. He further requested information on how IRIS integrated with the IT Strategy, and on the benefits of IRIS to the Office in the upcoming biennium. More generally, he requested a clear assessment of the overall benefits of implementing that Strategy. He also asked what regular budget inputs were expected for the Strategy, matched against anticipated outcomes.

13. The Chief of ITCOM responded to questions raised by Subcommittee members. He reiterated the importance of user involvement and ease of use for EDMS users. In response to the question on difficulties experienced by field offices during the budget exercise, he confirmed that there might have been intermittent local problems in terms of connecting to the Internet, but that there were no reported blockages of access. He noted that a great deal of staffing information already existed within IRIS, and that additional elements such as competencies and skills were being considered. He informed the Subcommittee that all costs associated with the implementation of the Strategy were currently funded. He noted that additional efforts to link IT outcomes to core strategic objectives would be considered.

14. He further stated that the full IT Strategy document would include costing information in relation to the implementation of the strategy initiatives.

15. The Executive Director stated that the total expenditure for IT was approximately 6 per cent of the total expenditure of the Office, which was in line with the 7-9 per cent benchmarks from other government sectors.

16. In response to the question on the use of HR staffing information in IRIS, she pointed out that IRIS was already the source of staffing reports provided to the Governing Body.

17. Regarding the proposal to hold a meeting in March, the Executive Director noted that it was a matter for discussion with the Officers of the PFAC, bearing in mind that the March PFAC meeting would be lengthy because of the programme and budget discussions.

18. The Employer Vice-Chairperson inquired as to whether it was possible to use IRIS for managing skills and competencies.

19. An ITCOM representative responded that the existing IRIS software provided for that and that it could be implemented in the 2008-09 biennium.

20. The representative of the Government of Peru was reassured by the statement regarding budgeting, which would imply that no special or extraordinary expenditures were anticipated. Regarding the possibility of further meetings of the group, she supported the idea of additional meetings as they provided governments, Workers and Employers with an opportunity to hear directly from the secretariat about progress in a very important area.

21. The Worker Vice-Chairperson also voiced support for a meeting in March.

Integrated Resource Information System

22. The Executive Director presented the paper [2] on IRIS submitted to the Subcommittee as an update of previous documents. She emphasized that key lessons learned during IRIS implementation would be taken into consideration during the field office roll-out. She acknowledged that the implementation at headquarters had not been easy and that some of the issues, in particular the capacity to manage change and the impact on day-to-day work, had been underestimated. Although some problems still existed, she confirmed that IRIS was fully operational at headquarters; moreover, the Strategic Management Module was now available and functioning in all field offices and had been used for the preparation of the Programme and Budget for 2008-09.

23. She informed the Subcommittee that some additional functions were being rolled out on a pilot basis to three external offices. Budapest had been given read-only access to IRIS technical cooperation (TC) functionality; Bangkok would use the personnel action module from January to February 2007; and Jakarta would receive IRIS functionality to manage a specific TC project. The requirements of the donor government necessitated the use of IRIS to provide the necessary level of management and reporting.

24. In general, members of the Subcommittee expressed their appreciation of the paper in terms of its clarity and frankness.

25. The Worker Vice-Chairperson requested a time line for IRIS field roll-out and a breakdown of the IRIS budget, including for training. He noted that the adoption of the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) would require 60 months of staff training to be funded from staff development. He was concerned that that could impact IRIS and other training.

26. The Worker members inquired as to whether an evaluation of the efficiency of IRIS had been undertaken and whether there was a staff member responsible for monitoring IRIS

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[2] GB.297/PFA/ICTS/2.

efficiency. They further commented that the paper should reflect in-house ILO terminology and avoid the use of the term "business".

27. The Employer Vice-Chairperson thanked the Office for the quality and objectivity of the paper, especially on lessons learned, and acknowledged the usefulness of pilot sites for IRIS field roll-out. He appreciated the paper, and its discussion in the Subcommittee would be good preparation for the March session of the Governing Body.

28. The Worker members noted the importance of such a document for future IT projects. Referring to the cautious statements towards the end of the paper, they expressed the hope that there should not be too long a pause prior to field roll-out.

29. The representative of the Government of Nigeria raised the issue of using external experts as opposed to building in-house capacity. She also expressed concerns that outsourcing might lead to job losses.

30. The representative of the Government of Australia requested clarification on the cost of IRIS implementation and the benefits that IRIS had delivered to date, including the extent to which IRIS had streamlined and rationalized existing business processes. Additionally, he asked for a detailed plan of field roll-out activities, including time lines, cost implications and support, for example, the logistics of having a 24-hour help desk. He also requested information on the ongoing cost of IRIS, including for upgrades.

31. The representative of the Government of Peru reiterated the need for continuous updated information on the progress of IRIS.

32. The Executive Director stated that reports for future sessions would provide detailed information on field roll-out. She underscored the fact that IRIS as a specific project had come to a close at the end of 2005, and that the IRIS application and its functionalities had been fully integrated into the regular budget and into the programme of work of ITCOM, the Human Resources Development Department (HRD) and the Programming and Change Management Department (PROGRAM). Guided by the lessons learned at headquarters, the field roll-out was being actively conducted in close cooperation with the external offices, and there was no intention to pause or halt the deployment. She confirmed that the ILO policy was not to outsource existing functions, but to consider outsourcing where there was no in-house capacity or expertise.

Electronic Document Management System

33. The Chief of ITCOM briefly introduced the paper [3] on EDMS. He noted that the Stellent software implementing EDMS was being used for the new ILO web site, which was expected to be launched by the end of 2006. He reported that significant progress had been achieved on the application being developed to publish ILO circulars. Work was also under way in other subprojects, specifically the integration of IRIS and email into EDMS.

34. He emphasized that lessons learned from IRIS implementation, such as early user involvement, change management and training, would be applied to EDMS implementation. He noted that the lack of Stellent expertise in the Office had led to an initial reliance on external consultants; however, knowledge transfer was a key term of reference for all consulting contracts.

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[3] GB.297/PFA/ICTS/3.

35. The Worker Vice-Chairperson noted that during the March informal session an update was given on EDMS but wished to have information on the current status of the subprojects and costs. He felt that EDMS would have a great impact on staff. He noted that connectivity and access were difficult in some countries, and that that might affect access to the system. He emphasized the importance of confidentiality and security.

36. The Employer Vice-Chairperson restated the importance of knowing the goals, outcomes and costs of EDMS. He also felt that EDMS would have a greater impact on the Office than IRIS. He stressed the importance of status updates on implementation and roll-out.

37. The representative of the Government of Australia wanted clarification on whether funding for all the subprojects listed in the paper was included in the US$500,000 allocation.

38. The Chief of ITCOM confirmed the importance of confidentiality and security, which raised a number of issues concerning policies, procedures and guidelines. He agreed with the Employers' comments that EDMS would have an even greater impact on the Office than IRIS. In response to the question on the budget, he confirmed that all subprojects were covered by the small remaining balance of the IT Systems Fund and the US$500,000 allocation in the budget for 2006-07.

39. The Chairperson noted the request to hold a meeting during the March 2007 Governing Body session, and would further discuss that with the Officers. He then closed the second session of the ICTS.

Geneva, 8 November 2006.