CONCLUSIONS OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES NETWORK
Geneva, 22-23 May 2002

1.   The ICT Network held its first session at the United Nations Office Geneva on 22 and 23 May 2002. The list of participants is contained in annex 1. The agenda of the session (CEB/2002/ICT/R.1) focused on six requests from the High Level Committee on Management (CEB/2002/3), specifically (I) developing a compendium of good ICT practice; (II) disseminating details of best practice in respect of work being undertaken across UN system organizations leading to more secure and robust information services; (III) exploring the feasibility of an inter-agency search engine; (IV) improving information sharing among staff of UN system organizations; (V) expanding of appropriate joint purchasing through framework agreements and volume discounts; (VI) enabling additional thematic discussions among ICT experts. The network also discussed the value and expansion of the inter-agency software inventory, and were briefed on other developments in the ICT context.

2.   All documents related to the session and presentations thereto can be viewed on the ICT discussion forum web site[1].

3.   The agenda was adopted by the Committee.

I.   <u>Compendium of Good ICT Practice</u>
(CEB/2002/ICT/2)

4.   In the context of the request by HLCM to develop a compendium of good ICT practice, the network reviewed proposals put forward to advance this initiative.

5.   The network foresaw the compendium as:
- A living knowledge sharing tool which would provide senior management with concise up to date analyses of practices (not necessarily only good ones) and lessons learned across organizations;
- Facilitating alignment of ICT with business needs within and among organizations of the systems and lead to strategic management decisions, *inter alia*, by identifying possible synergies to develop joint projects and leveraging purchasing power.

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[1] http://ict.unsystem.org A user identification/password is required for some parts of this site.

6.   Not withstanding the creation of informal groups addressing broader thematic topics under which some of the areas requested by HLCM might in the long run be subsumed, the following framework is proposed for the four initial areas requested by HLCM:

a) Guidelines for inter-agency consultation:
   Issues to be considered under this rubric initially:
   - ERPs (Enterprise Resource Planning systems)
   - EDMS/CMS (Electronic Document Management Systems/Content Management Systems)
   - Circulation of contents of RFI/RFPs (Request for Information/Request for Proposals) – or at least templates

   Lead agency: UNICEF, UNFPA
   Deliverables: Lessons learned from implementation across system/ways to avoid pitfalls

b) Guidelines for good practice on key hardware, software and networking issues:
   Issues to be considered under this rubric initially:
   - The value and applicability of standards for technology management, e.g. ITIL[2]
   - Network security
   - IT Project Management

   Lead agency: UNICEF
   Deliverables: Quick guides so senior management knows the issues and what to look for when moving towards good practices in these areas, based on practical examples for people and organizations with similar issues and constraints

c) Guidelines for the development, in conjunction with HLCP, of key performance indicators (kpi's) and systems to track such kpi's:
   Issues to be considered under this rubric initially:
   - Development of Management/Administration kpi's
   - Development of Programme kpi's

   Lead agency: WHO, plus IAEA, WMO, UNOG
   Deliverables: Development of a project plan and proposal of a pilot to HLCM investigating whether successful practices can be ported across the system

d) Methods for identifying and justifying the risks, rewards and costs of ICT infrastructure development and business innovations:
   Issues to be considered under this rubric initially:
   - Methodologies for identifying and presenting budget requirements for ICT (fixed and developmental/new investments) on the basis of business needs
   - Common methodologies for demonstrating "return on investment" in the financial/budgetary context of the UN system.

   Lead agency: UN
   Deliverables: good practices in various organizations

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[2] "IT Infrastructure Library" of standards for best practice IT service management, developed originally by the UK government.

7.   Through electronic communication it is expected that the network should have deliverables under each of the above headings ready for the HLCM fourth session in September 2002, if not earlier.

II.   <u>Information Security</u>
(CEB/2002/ICT/3)

8.   In the course of an active inter-change on policies and practices on information security across the UN system, it became evident that although organizations security needs fall into different categories (some having extremely confidential and sensitive data banks) there were important issues common to all organizations which had to be addressed with all urgency.

9.   The concerns focused on four areas: policies, processes, people and technology. From the technological standpoint the following issues were identified:

- ensuring the continuity of services

- minimizing risk of intentional or unintentional corruption of systems

- ensuring appropriate access to information

- ensuring reliable infrastructure to provide quality services.

10.   Key threads in the discussion were also:

- the need to ensure the maximum exchange of information on all these areas

- the value of defining the functions of an information security officer

- the need to involve a number of players from other management areas, including senior management.

11.   Thus future work in this area would need to be coordinated with senior managers in terms of policies both for security and for business continuity – for example human resources managers and learning specialists (in terms of recruiting highly skilled staff, upholding policies, extending awareness and training), offices of inspectors general, legal counsels and external auditors in terms of the development of good practices.

12.   The goal in the next phase would be to provide HLCM with guidance as the steps required in order to deal on a system-wide and multi-disciplinary basis with all aspects of this issue.   To this end the network decided to establish in the first stage a discussion among a small number of information security experts in UN system organizations, led by UNCC and including at least WIPO, WTO, and UNICEF, which would:

- delineate all the different issues and stakeholders;

- propose a template for an information security policy on which individual organizations could build;

- compile an index of security policies and related instruments, including to the extent possible those developed outside the UN system.

13.   On the basis of the finding from this discussion, HLCM would be advised on the best ways of moving forward.

III.   Inter-Agency Search Engine
(CEB/2002/ICT/7)

14.   The network noted the long history of this topic, with recommendations for 'one-stop shopping' going back over a decade, leading to the present mandate both from the General Assembly and from HLCM (see CEB/2002/ICT/7).

15.   The network confirmed that although a "UN system portal" (which following the broadest definition would provide personalization, a general entry point, and collaboration features) might be a long-term goal, such a service would be a large-scale project involving significant financing and standardization of content properties in order to provide the added value to the users. It was therefore more appropriate to start, as a first step, by looking at the feasibility of providing a search facility that would search the web sites of all UN system organizations.

16.   Many participants remarked that even such a limited project would need to be formulated and managed well, and involve all the stakeholders – from information providers and technology groups to information resource managers. Expectations should not be set too high, since this first step would not reach all data around the system, much of which was not directly on web pages but stored in repositories.

17.   Nevertheless, the participants noted that the discussion was timely, since many organizations were actively investigating the licensing of new search engines (e.g. UN investigating Google and other vendors), and it should be possible to leverage these investigations and negotiations with vendors by acting together.

18.   The network therefore recommended that:

- The UN system organizations agree to adopt as a goal the provision of a common search facility for public use for retrieving information from all web sites and associated dynamic information repositories throughout the UN system, including working towards consistent taxonomies and processes that will help enable system-wide content management techniques;

- A project team be created to develop a feasibility study and recommendation for implementation of a common search facility for public web pages of UN system organizations in the first instance; Such a project team would need representatives of the web technology managers, information resource managers, and ICT management areas. The network recommended that UN (both ITSD and DPI), UNESCO, UNFPA, and the World Bank be invited to participate in this team; the study to be presented to the HLCM at its autumn meeting 2002.

- The United Nations be requested to contact the Google Organization, with a view to investigating system-wide solutions (and financing of these solutions) based on the Google search engine.

IV. Information Sharing among UN system staff (Extranet)
(CEB/2002/ICT/4)

19.   The network confirmed the potential value of sharing selected information with selected audiences through secure technologies – indeed several organizations have successful extranets in place with their governing bodies or with organizational partners.

20.   The network then discussed the previous pilot project ("StaffNet"). The group thanked the UN for its continuing support as lead agency. The network agreed that lessons learned include:

- The need to identify the target audience(s). This was considered a critical first step to identifying the information needs that can be addressed through an extranet; the challenge is to add value for each user group;

- The importance of constructing and approving a solid business case, including cost/benefits – the business need drives the technology selection;

- The need to establish joint requirements for "content management" (i.e. agreements on taxonomies, formats, and metadata) of the information objects to be shared; The network noted that this could increase the costs of such projects, as well as the benefits.

- The need to develop technologies and associated processes to keep information up-to-date – otherwise the applications and information quickly become unused;

- The value of selecting technologies that are easily maintainable and scalable for potentially large numbers of users, and that provide appropriate security and work over the diverse world-wide networks;

- The importance of building project teams that include not only technology experts but also information owners and information resource managers.

21.   The network therefore recommended that:

- Where needs for access to information are identified, organizations proceed on a case-by-case basis to establish multi-lateral purpose-specific extranets, for example greater access to UN information among UN Funds and Programmes, or access by specific groups of organizations/staff to specific information objects (e.g. HIV/AIDS information).

22.   Concerning information that could be shared usefully among all staff through a system-wide Extranet, the network confirmed the value of sharing in the first instance both basic contact information for staff (i.e. "white pages" containing email addresses and telephone numbers) and information on senior contacts (i.e. "yellow pages").

23.   Concerning the prototype white pages application "Staffnet", which had been commissioned by the former Information Systems Coordination Committee, the network agreed that the current implementation has two technical difficulties: the technical implementation of access security is not sufficient to prevent abuse, and the manner in which the data was to be updated was cumbersome and labour intensive.

24.   The network also noted that the CEB Secretariat had developed an application for a system-wide on-line Directory of Senior Officials (yellow pages), which would be finalized this summer and would require an Extranet environment for secure distribution.

25.   The network noted the work done by the United Nations, as the lead agency for system-wide Extranet activities, towards ensuring that white pages and yellow pages information about staff can be distributed in a secure manner to all UN system staff, and suggested that this work should continue, addressing and resolving the weaknesses of the current "Staffnet" application.

26.   With regard to other possible categories of applications that could usefully be placed on such an Extranet, it was recalled that a 1998 feasibility study had identified, in addition to directories, the three broad areas of databases, documents, and discussion groups. In this connection, and in view of the time lapsed, the network requested the CEB Secretariat to update the list of applications under these categories, where business cases may be developed for consideration of the network before eventual consideration by the HLCM.

V.   Expansion of Joint Purchasing

27.   For this discussion, the network had the benefit of the presence of the chairperson (for the period 2001-2002) of the Inter-Agency Procurement Working Group (IAPWG), Mr. Giorgio Fraternale. The wide-ranging discussion highlighted the complexities and linkages in this area, in particular the responsibilities of procurement departments and those of the ICT managers, and the overarching responsibilities for due diligence and adherence to current financial regulations and policies.

28.   The network identified instances of conflicting policy objectives and procedures that to the extent possible need to be rationalized, for example the concept of value for money could outweigh a lowest-cost approach.

29.   In the area of umbrella contracts, the network noted that IAPWG is striving to develop more inter-agency cooperation in the development of such contracts, and welcomed information on recent developments in respect of umbrella contracts signed with Oracle and MetaGroup. The input of ICT managers in the development of future umbrella contracts in the ICT area was deemed to be essential, especially in relation to ongoing service and compatibility.

30.   To this end, the network:

- Welcomed the expansion of exchanges of background information on contracts (RfIs, RfPs, etc.) jointly with the IAPWG through access to the IAPWG web site;

- Noted that all aspects of this matter should be placed on the agenda of HLCM, not least because of its cross-cutting nature, in order to ensure appropriate policy guidance;

- Recommended that organizations review their procedures for enabling staff, where appropriate, to make purchases on-line;

- Looks forward to the continuing liaison with IAPWG and the inclusion of ICT procurement matters on the agenda of future meetings.

VI.   Additional Thematic Discussions
(CEB/2002/ICT/6)

31.   During this discussion, the network identified several focused opportunities for capitalizing on investments in ICT through improving knowledge sharing among ICT experts in the UN system. The areas identified include content management and web development (including taxonomies and metadata), ERP developments, data sharing formats, information security, emerging technologies, automation of conference services tasks, design and architecture of knowledge sharing and its technologies, electronic document management services.

32.   The network noted that there may be several ways to move forward in these areas. In many cases the needs of organizations are driving the appropriate people to connect with each other already. In other cases it may be beneficial to facilitate such discussions in order to obtain results faster.   The network agreed that the discussion topics identified in the Compendium and Information Security agenda items should be addressed quickly.

33.   To these ends the network:

- Requested the CEB Secretariat to compile a matrix of expert discussion forums already existing and proposed in management areas;

- Agreed to discuss priorities, outputs, and support requirements based on the above matrix, identifying areas for HLCM's approval where such knowledge sharing activities would be most desirable.

VII.   Inter-Agency Software Inventory
(CEB/2002/ICT/5)

34.   The network confirmed the value of sharing high-level information on software installed and planned throughout the system, but cautioned that such information needs to be kept up-to-date in order to retain its value – which can involve not only updating the recorded information, but also adding / eliminating functional categories as needs and interests change over time.

35.   The network welcomed the presentation by the UN, and the generous offer to share the software and documentation for the UN's new ICT inventory system. Many organizations already have asset management tools that record very detailed information for their organizations. Any new tool would have to bring added value to the system in order to justify the additional work required to maintain the data. The network remains interested in being briefed on the lessons learned from the UN inventory system, and would welcome a further information session once the system has been in production within the UN.

36.   For the purposes of HLCM and general information of ICT managers, the network was of the view that the existing high level inventory was adequate. It therefore recommended that:

- The CEB Secretariat ensure that the present high-level inventory information be updated twice annually;

- The present high-level inventory be expanded by a small number of additional fields, such as numbers of users, and appropriate new functional categories;

- That both the high-level inventory data and its summary be available online, and the summary be distributed to the broad network groups in the HLCM and HLCP context;

- The network update information on existing and planned search engines throughout the UN system, via a simple email to the CEB Secretariat.

VII. Briefings

Secretary-General's ICT Task Force

37.   The network appreciated the briefing by the representative of the Secretary-General's ICT Task Force on the possibilities of joint interaction, and expressed its hope that the liaison would continue and be strengthened. Two areas of possible joint interest were identified, namely the possibility to leverage the resources of the members of the ICT Task Force to aid inter-agency ICT infrastructure projects, and the awareness training for UN system staff, senior management and members of Missions.

Pay and Benefits Reform

38.   The network appreciated the early warning provided by the Secretary of HLCM on developments in the reform of pay and benefits that will affect potentially all human resource systems. A handout was distributed outlining the main features.

39.   During the discussion, participants identified several issues associated with ICT staff, including compensation for 24/7 support requirements, recruitment and retention of specialized staff, and the possibility of non-management career tracks for specialists. It was stressed that these issues would need to be worked on with HR colleagues and supported by appropriate statistics.

VIII. Other Items

40.   The network noted their appreciation for Ms. Charles stewardship of the meeting, and thanked her for the leadership she provided towards the successful outcome of this first meeting of the ICT network following the decision of CEB in regard to inter-agency cooperation in the area of information and communication technology.

ANNEX 1

List of Participants

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Meeting Secretary : Jerry Barton

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