ICT NETWORK
Sixth Session
PAHO, Washington, DC, 25-26 April 2006

Discussion Summary and Conclusions

I. Opening of the Meeting

1. The ICT Network opened the meeting by paying tribute to the former chair of the Network, Mr. Roger Jones, who led the network for several years and under whose leadership saw the development of the UN System ICT Strategic Framework that guides the work of the Network.

2. The Network welcomed the WFP as the chair of the Network, who expressed a strong desire to build on the Framework and identify two or three specific actions that can deliver ICT value to the UN system.

3. The Network also welcomed the address by a director of PAHO, Ms. Diane Arnold, and expressed its thanks to PAHO for agreeing to host the ICT Network meeting and welcomed new ICT network participants from UNDP, IFAD and WMO.

II. Adoption of the Agenda

4. The ICT Network adopted the agenda and requested that a “way forward” topic be added to the end of the agenda to discuss next steps.

III. ICT and UN Reform

5. The UN Secretary General’s report, “Investing in the United Nations: for a stronger organization worldwide” (A/60/692), presents recommendations that “enable the organization to make better use of its managerial and human resources”, including many investments in ICT. While not specifically targeted at the UN system, these ICT improvements will, nonetheless, have a significant potential effect on ICT operations beyond the UN secretariat. The UN Director of ICT briefed the ICT Network on the nature of these proposals and noted that they included a new ICT leader at a more senior level, recognized the importance of information management as a discipline within the UN and proposed the replacement of several key enterprise systems. These proposals are currently the subject of discussion within the appropriate committees of the UN General Assembly.
6. The ICT Network also received a briefing from the CEB Secretariat Director regarding the work of the High Level panel on system-wide coherence, whose focus is on improving country-level delivery of services by UN organizations.

IV. ICT Strategy: Development of Business Cases

(a) Working Group 1: ICT Services Sourcing Strategy

7. The Working Group on a UN system ICT Service Sourcing Strategy was established to investigate the potential for the out-sourcing and off-shoring of ICT and related support services. The presentation by the Working Group chair (FAO) noted the recent emphasis given to this area by the UN Secretary General in the reform of the United Nations (Ref: A/60/692), but reaffirmed that the activities of the working group will remain limited to ICT service models. The presentation informed the network that a draft terms of reference for the group would be completed and circulated to working group members shortly, and would build on the interest of UN system organizations to gain efficiencies from a common sourcing strategy. The presentation noted the goal of the working group is to establish a business case for a common multi-sourcing framework for ICT services, which would be based on the experiences of organization, including lessons learnt from attempts to offshore or outsource, either to ICC or private services, as well as bring in views from external consultants. The output from the study will include case studies with economic impact, so that different agencies can see what happened elsewhere, and best practice guidelines to determine what services offer the best opportunities if organizations are exploring at off-shoring. The intent is to provide agencies with a guide to the issues associated with multi-sourcing within the UN environment. Next steps after the ToR is approved include the development of a detailed and costed work plan, as the effort will require resources.

8. During the discussion, organizations noted the difficult nature of this topic, since sourcing ICT services is a large and complex issue. It was also noted that some organizations, including IOM, WFP and IAEA, among others, are already engaged in multi-sourcing activities for the procurement of ICT related services, although at different stages. Therefore, it was suggested that a compendium of sourcing arrangements currently in use throughout the system be included in the work plan, and that the ICT Network web site could be used as the platform for recording these. The discussion also recognized the interest of ICC to pursue this matter at the request of the ICC Management Committee, however it was stressed that these efforts should proceed in a coordinated fashion to avoid duplication. It was noted that the focus of the ICT Network would remain the generation of policy at the UN system level, while ICC generally provides implementation. The Network approved the Terms of Reference for this Working Group and suggested the ICT website provide a platform for furthering the sharing of related experiences by UN system organizations.

9. The ICT Network thanked FAO for the presentation and the work that had been performed to date, looked forward to further progress on this topic, and requested
the working group to coordinate with ICC, while also calling upon the ICC director to work closely with the working group in order to avoid any duplication. In addition, the ICT Network requested the working group to include as soon as possible the collection of existing multi-source arrangements currently in use by organizations of the system, and to post this information on the ICT Network website.

(b) **Working Group 2: ICT Development Network**

10. At the fifth ICT Network in September 2005, UNICEF, representing the Interagency Telecommunications Advisory Group (ITA), presented a proposal for a shared UN system global communications infrastructure, which aims to establish the value and feasibility, and make recommendations for, a UN system-wide interconnected network architecture that meets current and projected data and voice communication requirements for UN system headquarters and field locations. The ICT Network requested ITAG to strengthen the proposal by including a more detailed description of the business-related problems being addressed, the options available, the implications of non-action, the expected benefits from the investment, and the range of projected costs involved, should the preferred option be introduced. UNICEF presented ITAG’s revised proposal for the development of a detailed business case, and the ICT Network was informed that an RFI had been completed and was being circulated to prospective vendors. The revised proposal and RFI provides for a more focused study, intended to more fully comprehend the requirements for interconnecting UN system agencies. The deliverables for the study include a baseline of the current environment by documenting the network infrastructures of participating agencies, defining the operational and business requirements of the interconnected network and identifying future global interconnectivity requirements. The presentation noted that the revised proposal now focuses more completely on preparing a business case for implementing such a network.

11. During the discussion, organizations noted that while an RFI will identify potential vendors to complete the study, before proceeding to the RFP stage, funds would need to be committed by interested organizations. It was noted in the discussion that HLCM already approved funding for ICT Network business cases at its ninth session, and the CEB Secretariat affirmed that standard cost sharing formula would be applied to the allocation of required funds.

12. The network expressed their gratitude to UNICEF for their continued commitment towards the realization of the development network and approved the plan of action based on the revised proposal and RFI.

(c) **Working Group 3: Common Applications Solutions**

13. The objectives of the working group on common applications solutions are to identify software applications with the greatest potential for sharing, and develop protocols for implementing a sharing arrangement between agencies. The working group chair (UNRWA) updated the group on the progress made on the development
of terms of reference for the group, which included alternative approaches for furthering investigations in this area, focusing on common functionality, business requirements, processes, data-exchange standards, technical platforms and their integration and portfolio management. The presentation indicated that the way forwarded included the development of an inventory of applications currently in use across agencies, with the objective of identifying those can be easily be shared. Following this, the working group would proceed with developing a protocol for how to share the application, including the issues surrounding management of shared applications. The presentation highlighted several other issues in this topic, including whether applications can be copied or if one agency can provide the service to another.

14. During the discussion, it was noted that the origins of this working group came from the interest by many organizations to share e-mail and payroll applications. These specific applications have been pursued within other contexts (ICC for e-mail and the ERP Working Group in the case of Payroll), however the working group could pursue other possibilities, including broadening the scope to include the sharing of business practices and processes. Organizations noted that this working group should move ahead with creating the procedures for maintaining an inventory of applications developed by organizations.

15. The ICT Network thanked UNRWA for its effort on this working group, and noted that other organizations needed to join with UNRWA before it could proceed. It asked UNRWA to continue to refine a Terms of Reference, reflecting those areas of greatest interest to the Network. It also identified the ICT website as a means for sharing information about common applications. The Working Group will update the Network on progress made at its next session.

(d) Working Group 4: Knowledge Sharing

16. Improved knowledge sharing across the entire UN system has been identified as a high priority by both high-level committees of the CEB, with the High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) giving particular attention to this subject. At its session in July 2005, HLCP requested the formation of a task force to develop a system-wide knowledge-sharing strategy, and that such a strategy should include an overview of the best knowledge-sharing practices in use across the system. In addition, HLCP requested that the strategy developed must address the requirements of both the HLCM and HLCP and be geared to enhancing the system’s capacities to advance the objectives of the Millennium Declaration, particularly its development goals.

17. The chair of the working group on knowledge sharing (FAO) reported that, given the need to avoid duplication of effort, the working group on knowledge sharing would become the HLCP task force, and that a draft terms of reference had been presented to the HLCP at its meeting in February 2006. The presentation noted that because of the greater involvement of the HLCP, the nature of the initiative has broadened beyond the ICT perspective of knowledge sharing and has cast ICT as a
catalyst in the exploration of how organizations can work together in many different contexts, including at the country level and to enhance the system’s capacities to advance the objectives of the Millennium Declaration. In addition, the task force would explore how organizations have, and can, overcome any cultural and policy barriers that inhibit cross-organizational knowledge sharing activities. Taking into account work already completed in this area, including activities at the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), the UN Office of Internal Oversight and others, the task force will focus on an assessment of the existing inter-agency knowledge sharing landscape, develop a strategy to improve this cross-agency knowledge sharing and propose a road-map for implementation.

18. During the discussion, the ICT Network emphasized the importance of this initiative as well as the need to ensure clarity regarding many of the details of the work of the task force. Specifically, the ICT Network stressed the need to avoid duplication of effort by working closely with other inter-agency bodies involved in knowledge sharing activities, as noted in the ToR and the presentation. In addition, the Network agreed that to achieve significant results in this area would ultimately require a considerable commitment on the part of senior management from across the system, and that this should be clearly noted in the task force ToR and the resulting strategy.

19. The Network members thanked FAO for their presentation and asked to remain informed on progress made towards a definitive Terms of Reference.

(e) Working Group 5: ERP Systems and Payroll

20. Most UN organizations have implemented or are currently implementing enterprise resource planning (ERP) applications, usually at significant financial cost and disruption to their business processes. Organizations have found that, when carefully implemented, the benefits of these applications outweigh the costs and disruptions. Given the extensive expense of implementing these applications, organizations of the UN system have discovered the value of sharing experiences and identifying cross-agency opportunities to achieve efficiencies in their implementation and operation. In this light the ICT network created the working group in ERP systems and payroll.

21. UN Secretariat updated the Network on the evaluation of alternatives for replacing its legacy ERP platform, IMIS. Drawing on successful implementations within the UN system, on each of the main vendor platforms, the Secretariat has chosen to independently identify its own solution on the basis of minimum customization and maximum inter-operability. Rather than select a platform on the basis of existing processes, this new approach gives greater emphasis to the harmonization of business processes with industry best practices, providing a basis for longer-term integration with other system organizations and thereby leveraging the capacity of the system as a customer. Similarly, it was recognized that the UN approach brings leverage to the position of other organizations as they canvas support internally for no customizations. This venture is been undertaken independently, on the basis of
proposed management reforms within the Secretariat and the scheduled introduction of a common accounting standard, IPSAS in 2010.

22. The discussion within the Network focused on the specifics of the UN selection process. It was clear to all members that this development will have a significant impact on the approach of the Working Group. The Network requested the working group, as it creates its draft terms of reference, to address three components. First, the conceptual issues of ERP selection and implementation. Second, the operational issues related to running the ERPs. The third component is payroll, and how to move forward with identifying opportunities for sharing payroll and HR solutions.

(f) Working Group 6: ICT Governance and Best Practice

23. Successful ICT governance helps to ensure that ICT projects fully align with the goals of organizations. UN agencies practice ICT governance to varying degrees; some organizations have detailed and transparent processes in place, while others follow only the most rudimentary practices, or none at all. As chair of this initiative, WFP presented conclusions reached by the Working Group on ICT governance and best practice. The presentation noted that, with a goal of defining and documenting the elements of an effective governance model, the activities of the working group included a discussion of the varying governance models in use across the system, and the development of a general definition of ICT governance, along with a description of the key elements of an effective governance framework, the drivers for implementing a governance model (including both internal, such as the Geneva Group) and external), and the next steps for further work in this area. It was also noted in the presentation that since the purpose of the working group was to identify the key elements that make an effective governance structure, the group would not define a specific model that organizations should follow. The chair explained that the working group, in its discussions, acknowledged the wealth of knowledge available in the industry on this issue, with the most notable being COBIT, published by the IT Governance Institute, and that replication would achieve little. The working group, furthermore, decided to incorporate the work of the Centre of Information Systems Research of the MIT Sloan School of Management, which introduces a matrix of key ICT decision categories that organizations face, along with a list of five ways organizations can make these decisions. The working group felt that this matrix would prove useful to UN organizations when assessing their individual ICT governance practices. Of the obstacles that organizations may face when attempting to implement a governance structure, lack of senior management support was reported as the most significant. The working group chair concluded by reporting that follow-up work would request that organization assess their own governance structures for ICT decision-making, and put into place practices that embodied the elements identified by the working group.

24. Discussion by the Network centered on the importance of this subject to achieving ICT goals in many areas, and which has gained particular relevance in light of the recent request by the General Assembly to review all governance mechanisms across the UN system. During the discussion, members of the network expressed a
desire for the working group to develop a common model that can be utilized by organizations that currently do not have without existing structures. While also conveying concern that ICT decision-making will continue to be regarded by senior management as ICT issues, the network strongly supported the idea that any model presented should include training material directed at senior management to explain the value of effective ICT governance structures and processes.

25. The ICT Network thanked WFP for the clear and concise presentation, as well as the members of the working group for their efforts. It suggested that the working group on business case development would benefit from merging with this working group. It was also agreed that, given the importance of this topic to the HLCM, the working group should quickly continue its work by taking further stock of common practices and standards in use throughout the system, and, combined with recommendations from member states, prepare a presentation to the HLCM at its next meeting.

(g) Working Group 7: Business Case Development

26. The working group chair (WFP) reported that, as with the working group on governance, it directed its efforts at focusing on the key elements of an effective business case tool, rather than specify a specific tool that organizations should use. Topics covered in the discussion included the need for training in the use of business case analysis tools, of both ICT and business unit staff members, the linkages that exist in some organizations between business case development and the biannual budget preparation processes, the value that organizations can expect to gain by using these tools and the value of sharing existing tools across organizations.

27. During the discussion by the ICT Network on this topic, organizations expressed the challenges they face when trying to implement these business case tools, mostly due to lack of clarity regarding the value of these activities to the organization. Since many organizations have decentralized their ICT budgets, departments frequently have the authority to proceed with ICT-related projects without the need for a clear business justification, especially in the absence of a well-formed governance process. It was, therefore, pointed out during the discussion the importance of presenting a business case tool as adding value to the organization, rather than as an obstacle to achieving organizational objectives. In addition, the Network discussed how utilizing a good business case tool can bring objectivity to the difficult decisions that must be made when trying to balance available resources against organizational requirements, and therefore provides a clear link to ICT governance.

28. The ICT Network thanked the working group and its chair for their efforts and noted that ICT business case development and ICT governance are closely linked, and these two working groups should consider merging. It was also suggested that, when completing its work of describing the elements of a quality business case, the working group should also clarify many of the terms used when discussing this subject, as they are frequently a source of confusion. Examples include the terms
“Return on Investment”, “Cost-Benefit Analysis”, and “Project Charter”, among others. In addition, the Network requested that, given the synergy between governance and business case development, this working group consider merging with the working on ICT governance and best practice.

(h) Working Group 8: ICT Training

29. Successful implementation of the ICT strategy depends on many factors, one being middle and senior level managers who understand the value of technology, and how to apply it appropriately to improve operations. These managers are frequently called upon to develop and implement improvements in their areas of responsibility, many of which involve information systems. In many cases, these individuals lack the skills and tools necessary to effectively integrate information technology into their operational areas, a gap most effectively addressed through an ICT training program directed at senior management. The ICT Network created the working group on ICT training to address this issue. The chair of this working group (UNCTAD), presenting the group’s activities, noted that the issue extends beyond the capacity of senior business managers to understand the value that ICT can provide to business operations, but also for ICT managers to fully comprehend the needs of operational departments, and proposed two training programmes directed at each constituency. The working group presented a suggested curriculum for a business manager training programme, and noted that a similar programme for ICT directors was under development.

30. The chair also reported on the efforts of the working group to identify partners for delivering these training modules, including the UN Staff College, UNICC and several independent consultants and educational institutions. The difficulty in this stage was the desire to avoid formal training activities and instead present this material in smaller, more informal doses. The chair reported that the Staff College declined due to limited resources and tight focus, that UNICC was already engaged in a similar activity, about which it would report at the management committee meeting and that the independent entities contacted expressed interest in the project. The chair concluded his remarks by noting that the working group was very small, and could benefit from increased participation by additional organizations.

31. The discussion raised several issues, one being the difficulty of changing the perception of ICT as a strategic enabler, and not simply a utility service. In addition, members of the group expressed the difficulty of explaining the issue of enterprise computing to individuals who think they fully understand ICT since they are familiar with desktop applications. Furthermore, members of the network indicated that the ICT strategic planning exercise was the perfect opportunity for ICT to engage with the senior leadership on issues that propel ICT beyond the utility function, and the ICT leadership was encouraged to take advantage of these kinds of opportunities to create a learning experience for their business colleagues.

32. The ICT Network expressed appreciation for the ICT Training Working Group and looked forward to further progress reports at the next meeting.
V. Special Interest Groups: ICT Knowledge Sharing

33. Special interest groups provide an effective mechanism for knowledge sharing throughout a technical community like ICT. Within the ICT Network, several of these groups exist, with others in a less formal arrangement. The ICT Network considered presentations regarding the special interest group on SAP, a presentation on the relationship between the ICT Network and the Oracle users group, CABIO, a presentation on the ICT activities of the UN Development Group (UNDG), and a presentation on the current state of the ICT Network web site.

(a) SAP-SIG

34. The SAP special interest group brings together agencies currently using or interested in using, the enterprise resource planning (ERP) software SAP. The representative of the SAP-SIG chair (UNICEF) recalled that the group was formed in 2004 and is comprised of both UN and non-UN public-sector organizations. The presentation noted that the main topic of discussion at the last meeting was an update by participating organizations on the status of their SAP implementations, a demonstration of the UNICEF HR project, and discussions on hosting and sharing of payroll solutions as well as licensing. On this last item, the representative noted the possibility of one license agreement across the system, but to accomplish this would require a full-time procurement resource to analyze the various contracts. The presentation indicated that any decision the UN may make regarding ERP solutions could have an effect on the license environment. Working closely with the World Bank, with its wide range of SAP products, also presents an opportunity to identify beneficial licensing terms. The final point of the presentation was that the e-place location for SAP-SIG documents remained with UNAIDS, and the SAP-SIG, together with the CEB Secretariat, might consider either linking or migrating these documents to the new ICT web site.

35. The Network thanked UNICEF for the presentation and called for a closer examination by the SAP-SIG and the CEB Secretariat regarding a closer electronic linkage of working documents, either through document migration or linking.

(b) Oracle users group - CABIO

36. Oracle, together with PeopleSoft, form the other large ERP application in use throughout the UN system. While no UN ICT special interest group for Oracle exists, the Customer Advisory Board of International Organizations (CABIO) brings together international public sector organizations that use these software products. One member who attended the last meeting (UNHCR) provided an update to the Network on the activities of the CABIO. The presentation emphasized the mixed (UN and non-UN) nature of the CABIO, although noting that all members represent public sector organizations. At the last CABIO meeting, the some of the key issues discussion included Oracle’s future plans, like product fusion of Oracle and PeopleSoft, and the role of CABIO vis-à-vis the ICT Network. The presentation
indicated that CABIO functions differently from the ICT Network, in that CABIO is a place where the larger community of public sector organizations seek to influence Oracle product development, mostly based on identifying common requirements of member organizations. The presentation noted that in this regard, Oracle as a corporation was more likely to respond to the collective requirements of 30 organizations, than individually.

37. Much of the discussion within the Network centered on the relationship between CABIO and the Network. Both groups provide an arena where the collective voice of the Oracle-using community can be heard, with the ICT network focusing on inter-agency policy and support issues and the CABIO engaging collectively with the vendor on common issues and to understand, and perhaps influence, the vendor’s product direction.

38. The Network thanked UNHCR and the other CABIO participants from the UN for their input into the discussion, agreed that the vehicle is useful to the network, and looked forward to further updates at future meetings.

(c) United Nations Development Group

39. The UNDG is one of four executive committees established by the UN Secretary General and brings together UN agencies working in development. In addition to working groups addressing country-level coordination in administrative matters as HR, finance, and procurement, they also have an ICT working group led by UNDP. The ICT Network member from UNDP provided an update on the activities of this working group, which has recently been focusing on the ICT aspects of implementing a joint office, a project, which seeks to provide one administrative facility for all organizations operating in a country. The first implementation of this concept has recently concluded in Cape Verde. The presentation focused on some of the lessons learned from the Cape Verde implementation of the joint office, including the length of time, one year, required from planning to implementation, mostly due to the complexity of resolving business issues across agencies. One key ICT objective was the implementation of one ICT infrastructure in the country office, including the adoption of one ERP application. The presentation noted that it was too early to determine if the approach resulted in significant cost savings, although initial results point to savings in ICT head count. Future plans include implementing this approach in an additional forty (40) country offices, although given the time to implement the first one it was unclear how long the additional offices would take. Finally, it was noted that harmonization on basic ICT functions, like desktop, networking, telecoms, was simple and straightforward, but when it came to using business models and ERPs and systems, it became more complicated.

40. The Network discussion focused on the process used by the UNDG to implement the joint office project. It was observed that the UNDG explicitly decided to implement an “ad-hoc” solution, whereby the system put into place in a country would be based on the key agency present in that particular country. UNDP was the largest organization with a presence in Cape Verde, while the next country to adopt
the joint office will be Guyana, where UNICEF is the prime agency. The network noted that there remain questions on how to integrate the business processes implemented in the joint office with those at the headquarters for agencies participating. The Network expressed concern about 40 ad hoc ERP and ICT infrastructure implementations on the basis of a predominant agency and questioned why UNDG does not explore common solutions supported by regional centers.

41. The discussion concluded by noting that the Network should take a proactive approach when looking for ways to address inter-agency challenges similar to that of the joint office. In particular, it was noted that all of the UNDG member organizations are represented in the ICT network, and therefore could exert some influence over the UNDG ICT working group activities to achieve efficiencies and harmonization.

VI. Contingency Planning

42. The recent development of avian influenza (AI) preparedness guidelines by organizations or the UN system has prompted renewed reflection on the ability of ICT operations to continue in the event of a global emergency of this nature. The Network received a briefing on the AI issue by the member from WHO, who reported that much information already exists on UN organization intranets. The key issue is that a high level of uncertainty exists around when a pandemic of this nature might strike, and its level of intensity. The ICT issues include the need to continue operations, especially communications capabilities, in an extreme case that might include border closures, a particularly difficult problem in the case of Geneva where many staff members reside in France.

43. The ICT Network thanked WHO for its presentation, and decided that the issue of contingency planning and preparedness went beyond the specific case of AI. Therefore, the network decided to create a working group that could present a proposal regarding inter-agency harmonization of contingency planning activities at the next ICT Network meeting.

VII. Other Matters

(a) Update on ICT projects

44. The Network decided to defer discussion of these items to the next meeting in the interest of time.

(b) Update on follow-up to the World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS)

45. The CEB Secretariat reported that the final phase of the WSIS took place in Tunis, in November 2005. Among other actions, the outcome of the Summit requested the UN Secretary General, as chairman of the CEB, to create an inter-agency
collaboration mechanism to support the WSIS outcome implementation and follow-up activities. This group, known as the UN Group on the information Society (UNGIS) was approved by the CEB at its most recent meeting. The UNGIS has not formed as yet, and is expected to act as a focal point for the 11 action lines described by the Geneva and Tunis outcome documents.

46. The Network thanked the CEB secretariat for the update, and asked for further updates on this important issue.

(c) Way Forward

47. The ICT network discussed the issue of funding for ICT projects, and for moving forward on the existing priority initiatives. The Network discussed and agreed that each initiative should delineate a business case, including costs and clear deliverables, which could be presented to the HLCM for action and funding.

48. The ICT Network agreed to retain the practice of holding its meeting during the same week and in the same location as the ICC management committee meeting. The Network thanked PAHO for its hospitality prior to closing the meeting.
Annex 1  
List of Participants

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<th>Organization</th>
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