

**Administrative Committee
on Coordination**ACC/1995/9
24 July 1995

ENGLISH ONLY

REPORT OF THE INFORMATION SYSTEMS COORDINATION COMMITTEE
ON ITS THIRD SESSION

(Geneva, 19-21 April 1995)

INTRODUCTION

1. The Information Systems Coordination Committee (ISCC) held its third session at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 19 to 21 April 1995. The agenda for the session is reproduced in annex I to the present report and the list of participants in annex II.

I. MATTERS FOR ENDORSEMENT OR APPROVAL BY THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON COORDINATION (ACC) OR THE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATIVE QUESTIONS (FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY QUESTIONS (CCAQ(FB)))

2. ISCC recommends:

(a) That the final report of the Task Force on Strategic Planning (annex III) be forwarded to ACC through the Organizational Committee (OC) in 1995 (paras. 16-17);

(b) That the five former products of the Advisory Committee for the Coordination of Information Systems (ACCIS) should not be continued in their previous form. These are: Register of Development Activities of the United Nations System (RDA); Directory of United Nations Databases and Information Services (DUNDIS); UNS/SABIR, the bibliographic CD-ROM; Books in Print of the United Nations System (UNBIP); and the UN-EARTH microcomputer package (paras. 28-34);

(c) That a revised budget for 1996-1997 (annex IV), totalling US\$ 1,233,100 (and representing negative real growth), be forwarded to CCAQ(FB) (paras. 41-45);

(d) That, as recommended at the Committee's first session, all organizations not yet connected to the Internet arrange connections as quickly as possible (para. 49).

II. SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TAKEN AND DECISIONS ADOPTED BY ISCC

3. ISCC decided:

(a) That the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) would assume the role of lead agency for the Task Force on Document Management Technology (TF/DOM) (para. 15);

(b) That the Committee would review the output of TF/DOM for the biennium 1994-1995 by electronic correspondence, all members seeing all comments before giving final approval (paras. 8-12);

(c) That the "executive statement" of TF/DOM, once approved electronically later in 1995, would be forwarded to ACC/OC (para. 13);

(d) That the final report of the Task Force on Inter-library Cooperation, Standards and Management (TF/LIB) for the biennium 1994-1995 would be considered at the Committee's fourth session, in 1996 (para. 19);

(e) That the brochure from the Task Force to Review the Information System Security Guidelines for United Nations Organizations (TF/SEC) would be disseminated electronically to all organizations in English, the ISCC secretariat coordinating translations into other languages. Each organization would then distribute it to staff using computers, after undertaking specific editing needed (para. 21);

(f) That the Task Force on Information Access and Dissemination in the United Nations System (TF/IAD) would schedule an early meeting to consider a refocusing of its work programme on the basis of the Committee's comments (para. 27);

(g) That the Task Force on Information Management Standards (TF/IMS) would be led by UNDP, with the participation of the Secretariat of the United Nations, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU) (para. 50);

(h) That the five former ACCIS products should not be continued in their previous form (paras. 28-34);

(i) That organizations would be encouraged to supply data on development activities directly to the International Network for Development Information Exchange (INDIX), without ISCC funding (para. 31);

(j) That the new Secretary, John D. Northcut (ICAO), would report for duty on 29 May 1995 (para. 6);

(k) That the post of Administrative Assistant/Senior Secretary (GS.6) would be advertised to all United Nations organizations and other ISCC organizations in the Geneva area (para. 7).

III. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

4. Opening the session, the Chairman pointed out that the order of the agenda would be adjusted because some documentation had arrived late. He noted that a number of items needed close attention; in particular, members should bear in mind that ACC now expected all subordinate committees to have clear goals and targets in their work programmes.

1. Follow-up to the report of ISCC on its second session

5. The Acting Secretary recalled that at the previous session additional task forces had been suggested for inclusion in forthcoming work programmes. While that did not seem appropriate under the Committee's terms of reference, a single Task Force on Information Management Standards (TF/IMS) had been proposed to address areas within the terms of reference that related to standards.

2. Personnel issues

6. It was announced that ACC/OC had approved the appointment of John D. Northcut (ICAO) as Secretary, ISCC. The Committee confirmed that Mr. Northcut would be expected to report for duty on 29 May 1995. The Chairman paid tribute to the other outstanding candidates nominated.

7. The Acting Secretary reported that a General Service post for the ISCC secretariat was in the process of reclassification and that a vacancy notice would be circulated in Geneva. Members endorsed the view that recruitment should be open to all organizations of the United Nations system and other ISCC organizations in the Geneva area.

3. Report of the Task Force on Document Management Technology (TF/DOM)

8. The Chairperson of TF/DOM started his presentation by explaining that the original plan had been to complete the work of the Task Force for the current biennium and present it to ISCC in autumn 1995. Plans were now being adjusted, as the Committee would not meet again until spring 1996.

9. The first part of the work programme of TF/DOM for the biennium had been completed in autumn 1994. It consisted of a workshop and identification of key outputs for both the current and the next bienniums.

10. Since ISCC's second session, in October 1994, two subgroups had been formed - one on concepts and another on functional requirements. The "concepts" subgroup was developing a brochure for a wide segment of United Nations management on key issues and related technology in the Task Force's field. It was explained by IMF that the "functional requirements" subgroup would develop a model that was broadly applicable to ISCC member organizations and would be based, in part, on the experience already acquired by some organizations.

11. The Chairperson outlined the terms of reference for a consultant, shortly to be engaged, in view of the need for a comprehensive, but targeted survey. Members were encouraged to identify any and all "stakeholders" within organizations who should be asked to provide input for the exercise.

12. It is planned to hold a Task Force meeting in summer 1995, with the firm goal of completing on time the outputs identified for 1994-1995.

13. The Chairperson pointed out that those outputs needed to be approved before the end of 1995 so that the "executive statement" could be forwarded to ACC (through OC) early in 1996.

14. ISCC members drew attention to the need: (a) for librarians and documentalists to be borne in mind by the Task Force; (b) for industry expertise to be used when appropriate; (c) for an ongoing electronic clearing-house; (d) for material drawn from case-studies undertaken by the organizations and their practical experiences to be used where possible; and (e) for a focus on the most critical documents necessary to manage the various organizations, perhaps split into categories such as substantive, legal and financial.

15. UNDP kindly agreed to assume the lead agency role for TF/DOM in the weeks following the session.

4. Report of the Task Force on Strategic Planning (TF/SP)

16. The draft final report was presented. The Committee agreed that:

(a) While organizations should have a general policy for information management, it made sense to start with an emphasis on management of information technology;

(b) Recommendation 1 of the report should be rewritten and the wording in recommendations 4 and 6 strengthened.

17. A group of ISCC members redrafted relevant parts of the report. The final amended report is attached to this document as annex III. It will be referred to ACC for high-level attention through OC in 1995.

5. Report of the Task Force on Inter-library Cooperation, Standards and Management (TF/LIB)

18. The Chairperson of TF/LIB presented a status report. All three of the Task Force's activities for the current biennium were under way and were expected to be completed on time and within budget. TF/LIB would consider the results of those projects at its second meeting later in 1995, to be held at the Dag Hammarskjöld Library in New York.

19. ISCC accepted the interim report of the Task Force, and looked forward to reviewing a final report for 1994-1995 at its fourth session.

6. Report of the Task Force to Review Information System Security Guidelines for United Nations Organizations (TF/SEC)

20. ISCC reviewed the content of TF/SEC's brochure entitled "Securing information on personal computers and work stations in the United Nations system". It was informed that the brochure was intended for all computer users, including staff in small field offices. The brochure was based on a lengthier document entitled "Information security: Recommended practices for United Nations organizations", which had been written for administrators.

21. In order to avoid duplication of translation effort, ISCC decided that the brochure should be distributed to organizations electronically; they would be asked to provide feedback on distribution and translation into other languages. The Committee recommended that information technology managers make the brochure available to appropriate staff, on the understanding that it could be adapted to reflect the culture of individual organizations.

7. Report of the Task Force on Information Access and Dissemination in the United Nations System (TF/IAD)

22. The representative of the Chairperson reported that TF/IAD had continued its two projects as defined at ISCC's second session. One area of work focused on the information directory service (the "X.500 initiative") while the second focused on the actual access and dissemination effort (the "United Nations Web initiative").

23. The X.500 initiative had continued during the previous six months, but more slowly than planned. The project was still in phase 1 of the six phases - the initial implementation pilot phase. Only the World Bank and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had been active during that phase. The information directory had been populated with staff information for in-house use by the World Bank. The technical infrastructure was still being put in place at IAEA.

24. The work with respect to the United Nations Web initiative, Gopher, and Internet E-mail activities had not been as well defined as the first project and had not made substantive progress, although many organizations were continuing to implement Internet services. The Task Force had recently established an electronic discussion group moderated by ITU and run by the International Computing Centre (ICC) for United Nations Internet providers and the rest of ISCC.

25. ISCC expressed concern about the work programme of TF/IAD and the lack of involvement of organizations other than IAEA and the World Bank; a fuller report on progress would be desirable. Further questions were raised concerning the World Wide Web (WWW) initiative, since other services could provide a greater capability for simpler and easier world-wide coverage; the absence of documentation; the lack of progress in matching available tools to actual requirements and in identifying a range of access points to information.

26. After examining various alternatives, the Committee emphasized that firm goals and targets were needed, with a tracking of progress. If progress was not possible, a report should be prepared on why targets could not be achieved.

27. Continuing concern was expressed that the technical solutions under examination were too limited in scope. ISCC decided to direct TF/IAD to meet soon after the new Secretary of ISCC had reported for duty with a view to refocusing efforts on objectives and outputs, including the identification of key milestones. The objectives, activities and outputs should relate to the terms of reference of ISCC and the spirit of the report of the ACC Senior Level Task Force on Access to United Nations System Information. In addition, information would need to be made available to a wider ISCC audience to keep ISCC members aware of events in that crucial area.

8. Evaluation of five former ACCIS products

28. The draft report of the Evaluation Team for the Review of ACCIS Products was presented to ISCC. It was explained that questionnaires had been sent to mailing lists of organizations/individuals and to information centres/libraries provided by the former ACCIS secretariat to determine: (a) the usefulness of those products; (b) the ability and willingness to pay for the products and the acceptable price range; and (c) the preferred method for receiving the products. An analysis of the questionnaire returns showed that in general there was a relatively low rate of return and little willingness to pay for the products. It was judged that there was not sufficient demand to continue to produce the products by the same process as used by ACCIS in the past while expecting to distribute them on a cost-recovery basis, as required by the Team's terms of reference. The Evaluation Team therefore considered other possibilities for the contents of these ACCIS products and made recommendations to ISCC.

29. The meeting discussed the draft report and the recommendations contained therein. ISCC's conclusions on each of the recommendations are given below.

30. Register of Development Activities of the United Nations System (RDA): The Evaluation Team had considered that the low interest in RDA and in paying for it indicated that there was no basis for continuing it as a printed publication. However, the contents of RDA were available in computer-readable form, in particular as part of a CD-ROM produced by the International Network for Development Information Exchange (INDIX). INDIX had contacted United Nations organizations that had provided their data to ACCIS and asked them to forward the data for inclusion in its CD-ROM. Furthermore, INDIX had offered to ISCC to collect the data from the United Nations organizations, contribute added value information, and include them in its CD-ROM for a fee.

31. ISCC agreed that RDA should not be published as before and decided to encourage INDIX to collect the United Nations organizations' data, though without additional enhancement and without financial support from ISCC.

32. Directory of United Nations Databases and Information Services (DUNDIS) and UNS/SABIR (bibliographic CD-ROM): The meeting considered that, given the lack of interest and willingness to pay for these two products, they should not

continue to be published as before. However, as the information contained in those databases was considered to be valuable, the Committee recommended that the Task Forces on Information Access and Dissemination (TF/IAD) and on Inter-library Cooperation, Standards and Management (TF/LIB) investigate ways of providing access to equivalent reference information as a part of their work.

33. Books in Print of the United Nations System (UNBIP): The lack of interest and willingness to pay for UNBIP led the meeting to decide that it should not be continued as before. Given the existence of Books in Print (BIP) produced commercially, it was decided that the publisher of BIP should be approached to determine if the UNBIP could be taken over and incorporated into BIP without cost to ISCC or the United Nations organizations.

34. UN-EARTH: The Evaluation Team had found that this software was developed internally by ACCIS, and therefore not maintainable now. Given the lack of interest in it as a software product, ISCC decided that it should not continue to be produced. However, as the contents of UN-EARTH were available from the United Nations organizations, it was suggested that they could be included in the databases being considered by TF/IAD.

9. Review of ISCC work programme for the remainder of 1994-1995

35. The budget for all Task Force activities in 1994-1995 was reviewed. Expenditures were planned for use of the entire budget. The Evaluation Team's expenditure in 1994-1995 was expected to be less than the amount allocated, and those relatively small funds would be reallocated later in 1995.

36. On the basis of printed copies of ICC overhead slides, the Director of ICC briefed ISCC on:

- (a) Provision of the Internet server with "firewall" facilities;
- (b) Security of the environment;
- (c) Commercial products used;
- (d) Establishment of the United Nations "home page" and "list server" facilities;
- (e) Forthcoming provision for bulletin boards and electronic conferencing within "trusted networks";
- (f) Review of future services including operational matters, information access by subject-matter, technical support services such as installation diskette, connectivity etc., and design of the "home page".

37. The budget for ICC services to ISCC in 1994 had been \$150,000, consisting of \$80,000 for temporary assistance, \$50,000 for computer hardware and \$20,000 for computer software. The budget for ICC services in 1995 was \$180,000,

including \$160,000 (equivalent of one professional and one general service staff member) for temporary assistance and \$20,000 for maintenance and software.

38. Members of ISCC noted that although individual information services on the ISCC server at ICC had been planned there was still an uncoordinated approach to the standardization of information presentation through the server. That required attention when the staffing of the ISCC secretariat was complete.

39. After a discussion on various charge-back issues, it was resolved to continue the ISCC 1995 budget for the equivalent of two posts for temporary assistance at ICC, focusing on: (a) quality control of information services; (b) maximizing usage of the server by the ISCC secretariat to support the work programme; and (c) continuing to provide an infrastructure that allowed organizations to make their own databases available for public access.

40. Items that required continuing attention included: the definition of bulletin boards for ISCC use, defining and managing user access rights; managing the update of information; providing E-mail communications; user support; and definition of newsgroups.

10. Proposed work programme and budget for the biennium 1996-1997

41. The meeting was informed of CCAQ's review of the 1996-1997 proposed budget that had been submitted at the beginning of 1995. As there had not been time for formal approval of the 1996-1997 budget by ISCC, CCAQ had not considered it in detail, but had commented upon the overall proposed resources. CCAQ had recalled that budget levels should reflect zero growth and preferably negative growth. It had therefore requested ISCC to present proposals for 1996-1997 at those required levels.

42. Based on CCAQ's comments, the 1996-1997 budget was recast to reflect such growth constraints by reducing the task force budget allocations to zero growth wherever necessary. That resulted in negative growth with a net decrease of \$6,600 from 1994-1995 levels. The meeting agreed with those reductions and then considered other possible budgetary reallocations within the limits fixed. After lengthy discussion of the level of ICC services for 1996-1997, which was set at \$192,000, the meeting agreed that more funds were needed in the current biennium to provide the following desired facilities:

Multilingual "home page"

Electronic conferencing software

Reference services

43. It was noted that a provision of \$90,000 for data services had been provided under the ISCC secretariat provisions, and that the Secretary had discretion to use some or all of that provision for new ISCC services. The allocation for ICC services would be reassessed at the stage of proposals for the 1998-1999 budget cycle.

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44. Regarding the work of the task forces, it was decided that the Secretary of ISCC should participate whenever possible in all task force meetings, including a limited number outside the Geneva area.

45. The revised budget, at less than zero growth, was agreed on the basis of revised tables at a total of US\$ 1,233,100 for the 1996-1997 biennium. The proposals would be forwarded to the Budget Office of the United Nations Office at Geneva and to CCAQ(FB) for its August 1995 meeting in New York. The budget tables, modified to reflect ISCC's decisions, are provided in annex IV.

11. Strategic plan for future ISCC initiatives

46. The Committee noted that ACC/OC and CCAQ would require justification of ISCC's working methods, in particular the use of task forces, the time-limits set and the means of ensuring that concrete goals and targets were met. The Secretary of ISCC should propose and coordinate plans that gave meaning to the terms of reference and provided synergies and cost-effective approaches.

47. In addition, the Secretary of ISCC would require input from ISCC members on possible future work programmes. Among items identified were:

Global Wide Area Network (WAN) encompassing all United Nations locations

Compatible E-mail systems

Electronic data transfer mechanisms when more than two organizations are involved

Critical management systems requiring coordination to achieve economies of scale

Information management

Status of Internet connectivity and infrastructure

Video conferencing

Mandatory standards for codes and telecommunications

48. It was strongly felt that projects requiring large funding by ISCC must be avoided. Interest groups and/or working groups with electronic facilities could be organized at minimal cost in preference to a larger number of task forces with expanded budgets.

49. Of immediate strategic importance, and given the fact that the Internet would serve as the current electronic access mechanism of choice, ISCC resolved to urge all United Nations organizations not as yet connected (to the Internet) to become connected as quickly as possible.

50. Since the revised 1996-1997 budget would include a Task Force on Information Management Standards (TF/IMS), it was decided that UNDP would be the lead agency, with participants from ITU, WHO, UNHCR, the United Nations and UPU.

12. 1995 session of the Economic and Social Council

51. Members were reminded that the United Nations was preparing a working paper for the forthcoming session of the Economic and Social Council on information access by States to on-line databases. Appreciation was expressed for the input received from the various organizations.

52. The United Nations will endeavour to circulate an advance copy of the paper to all ISCC members.

13. Date of next meeting

53. The fourth session of ISCC will be held in Geneva (tentatively in April 1996) to coincide with the timing of the ICC meeting. Efforts will be made to have electronic equipment (including an Internet client) available, so that the meeting will need to be held at one of the organizations having such facilities, such as UNHCR or ITU.

54. At that meeting, since a budget will have to be prepared prior to December 1996 for the 1998-1999 biennium, one agenda item will focus on a preliminary indication of priorities for that biennium. Draft and final budgets, will be prepared, possibly using a working group, and approved by electronic means. It was also agreed to consider at the next meeting which longer-term plans should be forwarded to OC and how frequently.

14. Other business

55. The representative of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) raised the question of security during electronic transmissions. Certain Governments requested that no data storage should occur in any public domain at any time. To provide for such levels of security was extraordinarily expensive. The member asked whether ISCC should prepare further recommendations, evaluations, suggestions and cost estimates (beyond the level of work done for TP/SEC) in order to provide organizations with options to satisfy Member States' concerns.

56. During the discussion, it was pointed out that various products were emerging that would satisfy such concerns. There were discrete groups of organizations that had strict security requirements while other organizations needed very low security levels to provide a high degree of transparency.

57. The issues raised in paragraphs 53 and 56 were deferred for possible consideration by a future task force.

58. Under remaining other business, it was agreed that:

(a) Periodic progress reports (to all ISCC members) on task force activities would be made through the electronic clearing-house;

(b) Electronic facilities would be used to widen access (to sub-focal points) to information on ISCC activities;

(c) The Secretary of ISCC would periodically request all organizations to (re-)confirm the names of ISCC focal points.

59. It was again emphasized that ISCC would be fully expected to provide medium- and longer-term strategic views to ACC.

60. ITU made a presentation on the Geneva International Organizations' Metropolitan Area Network (IOG/MAN) project.

Annex I

AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Approval of the agenda.
3. Follow-up to the report of ISCC on its second session.
4. Personnel issues:
 - (a) Schedule for the new Secretary of ISCC to take up the position.
 - (b) Recruitment of a GS level-6 staff member.
5. Evaluation Team for the Review of ACCIS Products.
6. Reports of ISCC task forces:
 - (a) Task Force on Document Management Technology (TF/DOM);
 - (b) Task Force on Inter-library Cooperation, Standards and Management (TF/LIB);
 - (c) Task Force on Information Access and Dissemination in the United Nations System (TF/IAD);
 - (d) Task Force to Review the Information System Security Guidelines for United Nations Organizations (TF/SEC);
 - (e) Task Force on Strategic Planning (TF/SP).
7. Review of ISCC work programme for the remainder of 1994-1995.
8. Proposed work programme and budget for the biennium 1996-1997.
9. Strategic plan for future ISCC initiatives.
10. Relationship between ISCC and ICC.
11. Economic and Social Council session, summer 1995, and follow-up to Council resolution 1994/46 on the need to harmonize and improve United Nations information systems for optimal utilization and accessibility by all States.
12. ACC matters.
13. Date of next meeting.
14. Other business.

Annex II

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Annex III

REPORT OF THE ISCC TASK FORCE ON STRATEGIC PLANNING

1. The organizations of the United Nations common system have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in information technology (IT) a/ and, in the process, have become irreversibly dependent on it to achieve their goals. Prime examples of this dependency can be found in economic analysis and statistical work, in the multilingual support of conference services, in the management of large quantities of statutory information, and in the support of most administrative processes. This huge investment in both the physical and organizational infrastructure, coupled with the extremely rapid pace of development of new technology, now, more than ever before, presents a challenge for the orderly management of change.

2. Because a strategic plan is an essential prerequisite to enable organizations to maximize the benefits of their past, current and future investments, the Information Systems Co-ordination Committee (ISCC), at its first session in 1994, established a Task Force on Strategic Planning, with a mandate to provide "medium- and long-term strategic views to ACC on information systems, technology and services," presenting a statement of proposed priorities and their implications across the United Nations system.

3. In developing an information management structure, the first step is for each agency to assess its institutional needs, including policy issues that affect organizational productivity and efficiency. An important requirement is to develop plans for the information technology infrastructure.

4. The Task Force concluded that any strategic plan for information systems, technology and services must relate to an organization's overall strategic plan and should include, as a minimum:

(a) A definition of medium- or longer-term objectives related to investment and operational matters;

(b) Identification of the benefits to be gained from adoption of the plan, e.g. a quantified statement of productivity gains;

(c) A plan outlining the recommended steps, time-frame and resources required to achieve these objectives.

The appendix contains examples of the outlines of the strategic plans of three United Nations entities. It is suggested that, as a next step, ISCC establish a standard model for the presentation of individual agency plans.

a/ In the context of this report, information technology has been defined to include computing, networking and telecommunications.

Need for a strategic plan

5. The Task Force also identified the need for the definition and implementation of a common minimum information architecture and infrastructure, which will:

(a) Address the needs of inter-agency information flows and standard management practices;

(b) Meet the requirement to provide easier access to public information about the United Nations system;

(c) Enable organizations to be more responsive to the needs of their constituents in an integrated manner.

The challenge

6. In addition, the Task Force recognized that there are opportunities for the United Nations system as a whole, through better coordination, to benefit by avoiding the duplication of work in such activities as systems design and development, procurement and exploration of new technologies and tools.

7. Among the many challenges facing the managements of agencies of the common system, perhaps one of the greatest is how to deliver their work programmes while coping with the reality of limited resources, both human and financial. To meet this challenge, it is appropriate to plan how to reorganize for work in the electronic information age.

8. Information technology today is characterized by the unusually rapid pace of innovation. New technologies and products offer opportunities to change/improve the way knowledge-based work is conducted, but, at the same time, rapid change presents management with several interrelated, critical requirements:

(a) The need to understand, through a strategic planning process, which aspects of technological innovation create opportunities to advance organizational goals and how those advances can be achieved;

(b) The need to help adapt to new, technologically-based approaches to work through enhanced training of management, technicians and end- users;

(c) The need for ongoing management commitment, including provision of the required resources for investment in infrastructure;

(d) The need to manage technological change, including the creation of adequate accountability and control mechanisms.

9. Furthermore, managers are now demanding timely and comprehensive information necessary to their day-to-day activities to support the decision-making process. This requires the development of more sophisticated

and flexible information systems, which, in turn, places greater demands on the information technology infrastructure.

10. Finally, because the organizations of the United Nations system function on a global basis, the provision of reliable world-wide data and voice communications are essential to efficient operations.

11. Technological change is inevitable; its management requires the planning and control of the ways in which new facilities are introduced and, equally important, previous systems are phased out. Management of change also encompasses organizational implications in terms of structure, staffing and ensuring that the benefits related to innovation are gained within an optimal time. Organizations not adapting to change will lag behind to such a degree that subsequent change may become more complex and more costly.

12. Another consequence of failure to adapt to change is that the skills of the staff will become outdated, preventing them from fulfilling their potential both for themselves and for their employing organizations.

13. In the United Nations system, information technology managers need to have a knowledge of what is occurring within the rest of the system in order to avoid duplication, to adopt best practices and to share the development of new systems and facilities, so that benefits can be optimized.

Recommendations

14. The Task Force considered the background against which new technology must be introduced and weighed the challenges outlined above, bearing in mind the irreversible dependence on information technology that now prevails. Among a number of recommendations considered, six were identified as being of sufficient strategic importance to warrant the attention of ACC, as they are necessary to provide for increased efficiency within each organization while enabling the agencies of the common system to operate in a cooperative and coordinated manner.

RECOMMENDATION 1: RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR A HIGH-LEVEL DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY RESPONSIBLE FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN EACH AGENCY

15. In addition to the reporting and organizational structure, the role and responsibilities of the IT authority need to be defined. It is appropriate for the authority to report to the executive head in a small agency or to the appropriate directorate - such as that responsible for administration in a large agency. Options that could be considered for the information technology structure are:

(a) To establish a high-level authority that is independent of the technical operational responsibility for electronic services;

(b) To combine the role of the authority with that of the line manager responsible for the provision of both information technology infrastructure and the information required by management at various levels;

/...

(c) To integrate the role of the authority into a high-level strategic organizational planning unit.

16. Among the responsibilities of the IT authority are:

(a) To ensure that strategic plans express a vision of how information technology can best support the goals of the organization;

(b) To review solutions and proposed information technology investment and benefits;

(c) To endorse change and to secure organizational commitment for the introduction of new systems, practices and procedures, highlighting areas that need to be given special attention;

(d) To monitor the development, implementation and evaluation of policies and plans relating to information technology.

17. The IT authority must secure leadership by example from senior management in each organization in order to obtain maximum value from the use of information technology, particularly in regard to applications that require a critical mass of users to become truly effective. (To cite one example, managers can show leadership by actively using electronic mail, which in most cases is more economical than other means of communication.)

RECOMMENDATION 2: ESTABLISH AN INTEGRATED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF VOICE, OTHER ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS AND COMPUTING

18. There should be an integrated organizational unit for managing the operations of all aspects of information technologies and services, including telecommunications and computing. This has become necessary because of the convergence and interdependence of these technologies. Computing systems depend heavily on telecommunications, while today's telecommunication systems are computer-based. It is further recommended that infrastructure management should remain a centralized function, while the application of technology may be decentralized.

RECOMMENDATION 3: ENHANCE TRAINING AND OPERATIONAL SUPPORT FOR INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

19. In order to minimize resistance to changing technology and to promote the effective management and the use of technology tools and systems, training is vital for three types of personnel:

(a) Managers, to promote executive awareness of the benefits and implications of fast-changing technology, e.g., with respect to working methods, organizational change, and dissemination policy;

(b) Information technology staff, to ensure that each organization is able to operate and to support systems and services, and that individual staff

members can make an effective contribution in a changing information technology environment;

(c) End-users, to ensure that the benefits of productivity and efficiency are achieved.

20. Training needs should be clearly identified and the management of training programmes should be assigned to a unit equipped to respond to training needs related to technological innovation.

RECOMMENDATION 4: CONTINUOUSLY ENHANCE THE INFORMATION SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE

21. In order to permit forward planning, a minimum predictable level of investment, expressed as a "predictable percentage" of an agency's administrative budget, should ideally be identified for the purchase and upgrading of information technology facilities. Such investment should be separate from applications development activities, training and recurrent operating costs. This concept must first be endorsed by the senior management of organizations and then incorporated into their programme budgets.

RECOMMENDATION 5: PROMOTE INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

22. Particular attention should be given to facilitating the easy access to, and transfer between agencies and individual offices of, data needed in the collaborative execution of their programmes. In addition, ISCC, in accordance with its terms of reference, should further develop its role as a clearing-house and/or central dissemination point for information concerning strategy papers, job descriptions, and developments in the pipeline in the field of information technology. This dissemination, as well as an inter-agency discussion forum on these subjects, should be effected in electronic form wherever possible. There is also a need for closer coordination between ISCC and other inter-agency bodies, such as the Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP), when items related to information technology are considered. [Note that ISCC will not undertake operational responsibility for the dissemination mechanism, which would be managed by the International Computing Centre (ICC) or some other entity.]

23. It must be borne in mind that the results of the implementation of this recommendation should form part of the solution for "easy, economical, uncomplicated and unhindered access for Member States" referred to in various resolutions of the Economic and Social Council, which Member States fully expect to be achieved.

RECOMMENDATION 6: REVIEW INDIVIDUAL AGENCY STRATEGIES AND IDENTIFY COMMON REQUIREMENTS

24. As concluded in paragraph 4 above, agencies should present information technology strategies in a format that includes the following common elements:

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(a) A definition of medium- or longer-term objectives related to investment and operational matters;

(b) Identification of the benefits to be gained from adoption of the plan, e.g. a quantified statement of productivity gains;

(c) A plan outlining the recommended steps, time-frame and resources required to achieve these objectives.

The strategies should be reviewed and updated at least every two years and disseminated for information through the mechanism described in paragraph 22 above. Disseminating this information can lead to very substantial benefits, notably by avoiding duplication in the development of new applications and assessment of IT products.

Implications for the United Nations system

25. In an area as important as information technology, a coordinated and consistent approach, which both provides for cost-effective solutions and is responsive to newly identified requirements, should be taken throughout the United Nations common system. While each agency is responsible for implementing its own technological infrastructure and making information available on-line to Member States, changes that occur in one agency often have an impact on the whole system. There should continue to be a shared sense of the enhanced level of information technology that is appropriate to all agencies.

Appendix

THREE OUTLINES OF STRATEGIC PLANS

1. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations:
standard outline for a strategic plan

[This includes the table of contents from FAO's Medium-Term
Computerization Plan 1993/95 as a possible starting-point]

Executive Summary

1. Introduction
 - 1.1 Description of Planning Process
 - 1.2 Scope of Technologies and Applications Covered by Plan
 - 1.3 Period and Implementation of Plan
2. [Strategy for] Applications Supporting Technical and Economic Programmes
3. [Strategy for] Applications Supporting Management, Administration and Operations
4. [Strategy for] The Desktop and Network Applications and Services
5. [Strategy for] Infrastructure
6. [Strategy for] Managing the Technology [and Technological Change]
 - 6.1 Planning
 - 6.2 Policy and Coordination
 - 6.3 Centralized and De-Centralized Support Resources
 - 6.4 Training
7. Cost and Benefits
 - 7.1 Investment in Infrastructure
 - 7.2 [Investment in Applications]
 - 7.3 Investment in Centralized Support Resources
 - 7.4 Investment in De-Centralized Support Resources
 - 7.5 Investment in Training

Annex A - Documents Consulted

Annex B - FAO Technical Architecture

Annex C - [FAO Information Architecture]

Annex D - Summary of Deployment and Support Objectives 1993/95

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2. United Nations Development Programme: Format for a two-year strategic plan for information management

1. Target functions and organizational units

Scope and dimensions of proposed re-engineering
Integration or replacement of existing information systems
Risk assessment

2. Anticipated impact on agency

Training requirements
Staffing changes
Critical path and time-frame

3. Anticipated impact on inter-agency information flow

Need for inter-agency consultation/agreement
Savings/loss in case of success/failure

4. Proposed technology solution

Customization of commercial product
Agency specific system development
Expected life cycle of proposed technology
Risk assessment of proposed technology

5. Estimated costs and payback/benefits

Infrastructure and development costs
Recurrent maintenance/operating costs
Opportunity costs
Anticipated savings/replacement costs
Tangible and intangible benefits

3. United Nations International Computing Centre: Proposed contents of an information strategy report

1. Alignment of current information systems with the organizations' vision, mission and objectives

Misalignment analysis
Gap analysis
IS&T does not meet requirements

Alignment of current Information Systems with the Organizations'

Technical architecture
Information architecture
Infrastructure and systems
Data and information flows

2. Assumptions about the Organizations' environment for the next 3-5 years

Business process re-engineering
Re-organization
Impact of IS&T on the effectiveness of the organization
Budgets and resources devoted to IS&T

3. Priorities: Which misalignments/gaps/infrastructure and architecture projects will give the greatest benefits

In financial terms
In meeting the Vision, Mission, Objectives of the organization

4. Strategic options

Fit the technical and information architecture vs. "island" solution
Buy and customize vs. make
In house vs. outsourced

5. Tactical plan

Priorities to be incorporated into the current or next operating plan:

- Operational matters (e.g. disaster recovery, availability management)
- Investment matters (e.g. new systems, facilities, infrastructure)
- Training matters

Quick fixes

Frequency of revision of strategy report