



General Assembly

A/59/....

Original: English

Fifty-ninth session

Agenda item 44

Information and communication technologies for development

**Information and communication technologies for development:  
Progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 57/295**

Report of the Secretary-General

*Summary*

The present report presents the activities undertaken to develop a comprehensive information and communication technologies strategy for the United Nations system. The twin foci of all activities related to devising a comprehensive and coherent response to the broad issue of harnessing the potential of ICT for promoting development are (a) the coherence of the policy advice that organizations of the United Nations system provide to countries in setting comprehensive, forward-looking strategies to harness ICT for economic and social progress; and (b) the unprecedented opportunities that ICT offers for system-wide knowledge management and knowledge creation. The strategy will be pursued as an essential component if the overall effort to enhance cost effectiveness, strengthen system-wide knowledge management and enhance the capacity to support countries in using ICTs for the achievement of the MDG.

Contents	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction.....	1 - 18	1
Annex 1 – United Nations ICT Charter.....	1 - 2	8
Annex 2 – Strategy initiatives .....	1	11

## **Introduction**

1. The present report presents the activities undertaken pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/295 on “Information and communication technologies for development”, which requested the Secretary-General, as Chairman of the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB), to collaborate closely with the organizations of the United Nations system and the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force to develop a comprehensive information and communication technologies strategy for the United Nations system.

2. The resolution affirmed the need to use information and communication technologies as a strategic tool to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the development programmes and technical cooperation activities of the United Nations system. It also emphasized the need for cooperation and synergy between programmes and activities of the United Nations system and the crucial role that information and communication technologies can play in facilitating such coordination. The resolution identified several priority elements of this task.

3. As presented in the progress report to the General Assembly at its Fifty-eighth session<sup>1</sup>, implementation of this resolution has been actively pursued, in a collaborative and coordinated manner, by all relevant actors under the overall guidance of the CEB and its two main subsidiary bodies, the High-level Committee on Managements (HLCM) and the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP). As requested by General Assembly resolution 57/295, the ICT Task Force

provided a significant contribution to this process. The progress report noted that the implementation of the resolution remained under active consideration within the framework of the CEB and that the outcome would be reported to the General Assembly at its Fifty-ninth session.

4. The twin foci of all activities related to the implementation of the resolution and to devising a comprehensive and coherent response to the broad issue of harnessing the potential of ICT for promoting development were (a) the coherence of the policy advice that organizations of the United Nations system provide to countries in setting comprehensive, forward-looking strategies to harness ICT for economic and social progress; and (b) the unprecedented opportunities that ICT offers for system-wide knowledge management and knowledge creation.

5. Most, if not all of the organizations of the system are active in providing policy advice on the formulation and implementation of national e-strategies, regulatory reform, institutional development and on programmes and projects to improve connectivity, capacity and local content development. They also provide technical assistance and support for ICT applications in education, health, e-government, e-commerce and others.

6. However, these efforts and related policy advice need to be more effectively integrated into the broader development agenda. Promising initiatives and best practices need to be scaled up and their sustainability enhanced. The system's capacity to forge meaningful, multi-stakeholder partnerships in this area remains limited by several factors arising from traditional modes of operation, donor policies and procedures, cultural barriers between the public, private

---

<sup>1</sup> A/58/568

and civil society stakeholders and the reluctance of partners, in the circumstances, to commit the resources required to make a difference. In this context, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) “brand” provided a solid foundation for moving towards a more cohesive approach to development and poverty eradication. The linking of ICT with the MDG agenda serves as an organizing principle for more coherent policy advice and programme support in the area of ICT for development.

7. For the system to develop greater coherence in ICT policy advice and programme support within the broader framework of its MDG agenda, it must, first and foremost, be able to create, manage and share information and knowledge across the system more efficiently and effectively than is the case at present. Knowledge, information and data are the system’s principal assets and a main source of its comparative advantage. However, at present, these assets remain dispersed throughout the system and often disconnected from each other. Despite progress made recently, information sharing within the system still takes place primarily along organizational and, in some instances, sectoral programme lines. This contributes to duplication and weakens impact. There is an urgent need to create a seamless knowledge-based system to better capture, manage and disseminate data, information and other relevant business assets across the United Nations organizations and its constituencies.

8. Knowledge management (KM) should not be seen purely as a technology-driven process but rather as a policy imperative, facilitated by technology to better manage and put to use the system’s intellectual and business assets. KM decisions should be based on who (people), what (knowledge) and why (business objectives); leaving the how (technology) to be derived from the

first three dimensions. In this perspective, the basic aim is to leverage wealth of information currently available within the United Nations system to maximize impact and results. Critical sets of data, information and business assets should be identified, captured and effectively disseminated within and outside the United Nations system.

9. In outlining the steps to be taken in moving towards enhanced system-wide coordination in the ICT area, the progress report stressed the need for the relevant players to collaborate on the elaboration of an action plan, which outlines the building blocks for a system-wide framework of ICT and includes milestones, benchmarks, resources required and, most importantly, responsibilities and accountabilities for results.

10. In implementation of this approach, the ICT Network (ICT Directors of the entities of the United Nations system), in close collaboration with the ICT Task Force, has developed a proposal on a United Nations system ICT strategy. This process was launched at a brainstorming meeting in July 2003,<sup>2</sup> in which IT managers, programme and management officials of the United Nations System, members of the ICT Task Force and experts identified broad parameters of such strategy and defined concerted approaches to its development.

11. While recognizing the institutional, governance and programmatic constraints on a collective United Nations strategy and the need by each organization to align its ICT investments with its own programmes, the Network has concluded that major opportunities exist for improved use of the funds invested in ICT. The main theme of the strategy developed by the Network is that increased harmony and cooperation among United Nations organizations in ICT

matters will lead to improvements in efficiency and effectiveness and an improved return on ICT investments. The strategy asserts that these improvements are not restricted to the use of technology in support of administrative and operational activities but that mainstreaming ICT in the development agenda and contributing towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) can also contribute significantly to the achievement of these improvements.

12. The strategy presents a vision on how to harness the power of the United Nations system, acting in harmony in ICT matters, and sets out approaches to concert efforts, enhance standardization and harmonize investments to avoid duplication and achieve system-wide savings, thereby improving the effectiveness and efficiency of services to Member States and Governing Bodies.

13. The two high-level committees of CEB, HLCP and HLCM, reviewed the United Nations ICT strategy document at their Fall 2004 sessions. HLCP welcomed the main thrust of the strategy. HLCM, to whom the ICT Network reports, endorsed, in general, the strategy and agreed that future work should focus on measures to address the governance and organizational constraints on the development of the business cases and on proposals for a prioritized and coordinated implementation plan. The Committee also requested that the business case for the strategy be further developed, including resource implications, to enable HLCM to decide on the next steps for implementing a United Nations system-wide ICT strategy.

14. The proposed strategy aims at harnessing the ICT investments by the United Nations system for the benefits of its stakeholders and the community at large. It recommends

---

<sup>2</sup> See paragraphs 18-20 of A/58/568

harmonization of efforts and standardization, in order to avoid duplication and thus achieve significant system-wide savings.

15. An integral part of the strategy is a United Nations ICT Charter (see Annex 1) which defines the principles and framework for the United Nations System coordination and collaboration in this strategic area. To promote implementation of these principles, the Strategy outlines a set of 15 initiatives in ICT for Development, ICT Governance, Information Security, practical applications and capacity-building (see Annex 2).

16. At its recent meeting, CEB endorsed the recommendations that HLCP, in close consultation with HLSOC, should undertake a work programme for mainstreaming and integrating ICT into the broader MDG agenda, including through the development of system-wide approaches and guidelines for use by country representatives and by the Resident Coordinator system; and, working closely with HLCM and its ICT Network, to focus on developing a clear vision of a United Nations system-wide knowledge management system, its optimum functionality and a phased programme for its implementation.

17. CEB also welcomed and endorsed the United Nations system ICT strategy and asked that the strategy should be pursued as an essential component of the overall effort to enhance cost effectiveness, strengthen system-wide knowledge management and enhance the capacity to support countries in using ICTs for the achievement of the MDGs. HLCM and its ICT Network should work closely with HLCP to continue to develop the business cases for the strategy, its resource implications and measures to address constraints in its implementation.

18. CEB members recognize the significance of the information society agenda as a main tenet of the inter-agency work-programme, the need to make greater use of new information and communication technologies in the working methods of the United Nations and its institutions, as well as the importance of these technologies and knowledge-sharing as main elements of development policies and as vital tools in achieving the MDGs.



**Annex 1****United Nations Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Charter**

1. The United Nations ICT Charter provides a framework for maximizing the value of ICT investments through a systemic approach to the management of technological and organizational change. It recognizes that this will require a strengthening of governance and leadership arrangements, including the provision of an institutional mechanism, both to drive the reforms and to assess the results achieved and to apply the lessons learned.

2. The United Nations ICT Charter states that the United Nations system recognizes the need:

- for greater coordination and synergy between programmes and activities of the United Nations system and the pivotal role of ICT in facilitating such coordination;
- to integrate ICT into the broader strategic management process as an agent of organizational transformation and change;
- to integrate ICT in development project and programme formulation, to achieve clarity and coordination in the use of technology in United Nations development programmes and avoid repetitive investment in the field;
- for the United Nations system organizations to work to a set of agreed best practice guidelines in ICT matters, based on industry standards, and that minimum standards should

be established and adhered to for information governance, including disaster recovery and business continuity;

- for the United Nations system to establish common standards and guidelines for the development of business cases for ICT investment proposals and for ICT project costing;
- to exploit opportunities in the sourcing and management of ICT services and infrastructure to achieve efficiency savings, contribute to capacity building in developing countries and make a direct contribution to the MDGs and to the wider development agenda;
- to exploit opportunities to maximize the return on investments made in ENTERPRISE Resource Planning (ERP) solutions by developing best practice procedures for common United Nations processes and seeking streamlining and effectiveness savings across common administrative processes;
- to promote opportunities for sharing computer applications across agencies in areas where United Nations system requirements are common, or close to common;
- to further exploit opportunities to mitigate software costs through increased usage of appropriate open source software;
- to adopt a systematic approach, across Agencies, to gather, distill, organize, retrieve and present development information for dissemination internally within the United Nations

family and externally to partner agencies and other stakeholders;

- to extend common United Nations procurement actions to obtain improved economy in the United Nations system purchasing for “common” IS/ICT products;
- for a major programme of ICT training for United Nations managers to be made available through the United Nations Staff College to support the introduction and sustain the ongoing benefits of the United Nations ICT strategy;
- for an unprecedented degree of cooperation amongst Agencies on ICT matters to achieve these objectives; and
- for a high level governance structure which would promote change and champion the delivery of the Strategy.

## Annex 2

### **Strategy initiatives**

1. The Charter will be underpinned by a strategy comprising 15 strategy initiatives. Each is supported by an outline business case, identifying the opportunity, elaborating the target position, describing the advantages and constraints and proposing an action plan. These initiatives are grouped under five categories:

#### *ICT in development*

- ICT integration in development programmes
- UN ICT services sourcing strategy
- ICT development network

#### *ICT governance*

- ICT governance and best practice
- Business case preparation and costing

#### *Information security*

- Information security, disaster recovery and business continuity
- United Nations-wide public key infrastructure

*Putting it into practice – working together*

- ERP systems
- Common application solutions
- Open-source software
- Knowledge-sharing
- Web management and content
- United Nations system directory
- ICT asset procurement and disposal

*Sustaining the initiative*

- Training and development, sustaining innovation and creating a “knowledge-based” United Nations

\* The present report has been delayed so that it takes into account the CEB meeting that was held on 29 October 2004.