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COUNCIL

Hundred and Thirty-first Session
Rome, 20 – 25 November 2006
Policies of UN System Organizations Towards the Use of Open Source Software in the Secretariats (JIU/REP/2005/3)

1.   This JIU Report is accompanied by the comments of the Director-General and of the United Nations System's Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

2.   Given the subject matter, it is drawn to the attention of the Finance Committee.

JIU REPORT 2005/3

"POLICIES OF UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM ORGANIZATIONS TOWARDS THE USE OF OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE (OSS) IN THE SECRETARIATS"

Comments of the Director-General of FAO

General Comments

FAO fully shares in the CEB (i.e. system-wide) comments prepared on this report (in attached document A/60/665/Add.1) on which the following comments from its own perspective are largely based.

The bulk of the report consists of a historical review of developments concerning open source software and a survey of policies and practices in several countries, and much less comprehensively across the UN system. The report seeks to explore the value of open source software in relation to universal access to information and the ability of organizations to share information. However, the conclusions suffer from mixing of issues which are unconnected to OSS *per se*, such as the use of open standards and inter-operability. In a nutshell, the report does not address in a convincing manner the problems surrounding the use of open source software, which would have warranted in-depth analysis to make the recommendations fully valid.

However, as far as FAO's own extensive use of OSS, this is well reflected in paragraph 104 of the report.

Comments on recommendations

Addressee of Recommendation: Executive Head   ☐

                                          Legislative Body   ☐

                                          Other (specify): *General Assembly*   ☒

Recommendation 1 (*quote from JIU Report*)**:**

In line with its resolution 57/295 and in order to guarantee universal access to information and to foster knowledge-sharing, the General Assembly should affirm that the following principles should guide the adoption of a software policy by United Nations system organizations:

1. *Principle 1: All Member States and other stakeholders should have the right to access public information made available in electronic format by the organizations and no one should be obliged to acquire a particular type of software in order to exercise such a right;*

2. *Principle 2: Organizations should seek to foster the interoperability of their diverse ICT systems by requiring the use of open standards and open file formats irrespective*

of their choice of software. They should also ensure that the encoding of data guarantees the permanence of electronic public records and is not tied to a particular software provider.

Is the recommendation of potential relevance to FAO?   Yes ☒   No ☐

Decision and/or Proposed Action: Endorsed ☐

Endorsed as modified ☒

Rejected ☐

Explanation and/or Proposed Action: As observed in the above general comments (and in the CEB comments), while these principles are worth considering, they are not directly tied to the intended focus of the report on OSS.

Include recommendation and action in annual monitoring report: Yes ☐   No ☒

Addressee of Recommendation: Executive Head ☒

Legislative Body ☐

Other (specify): *UN Secretary-General* ☒

Recommendation 2 (*quote from JIU Report*)**:**

For the implementation of the above principles, the Secretary-General, as Chairman of CEB, should take stock of the experiences of Member States and undertake the necessary consultations within CEB in order to establish a system-wide United Nations Interoperability Framework (UNIF) and report accordingly to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. The proposed UNIF should take into account a number of elements including the following:

   (a) *UNIF should be based on open standards and open file formats to foster a unified approach to data encoding and sharing for the benefit of all stakeholders;*

   (b) *Any new information system, software application and/or related upgrades or replacements should comply with UNIF except in such justifiable instances approved by the respective Chief Information Officer (CIO) or ICT manager of each organization;*

   (c) *Customized or bespoke software should be owned by the organizations and be made available as appropriate to other system organizations and public administrations of Member States or licensed as OSS;*

(d) *Organizations should seek to avoid lock-in to proprietary ICT products or services and in that regard, they should level the playing field as a matter of policy by giving equal consideration to all appropriate solutions available on the market including OSS solutions, as long as such products and services comply with the requirements under UNIF and it being understood that the final choice is made on the basis of value for money.*

Is the recommendation of potential relevance to FAO?   Yes [x]   No [ ]

Decision and/or Proposed Action: Endorsed [ ]

          Endorsed as modified [ ]

          Rejected [x]

Explanation and/or Proposed Action: As stressed in the CEB comments, there are many difficulties with this complex recommendation, and in any event, it is not directly related to the purpose of the report.

Include recommendation and action in annual monitoring report: Yes [ ]   No [x]

Addressee of Recommendation: Executive Head [x]

          Legislative Body [ ]

          Other (specify): [ ]

Recommendation 3 (*quote from JIU Report*)**:**

Based on the outcome of the United Nations General Assembly's consideration of the system-wide ICT strategy, executive heads of other organizations should submit the strategy in due course to their respective governing bodies, along with implications for aligning existing ICT strategies with the new system-wide strategy and for implementing UNIF as suggested above.

Is the recommendation of potential relevance to FAO?   Yes [x]   No [ ]

Decision and/or Proposed Action: Endorsed [ ]

          Endorsed as modified [x]

          Rejected [ ]

Explanation and/or Proposed Action: While ICT related strategies and programmes are duly considered by Governing Bodies in their review of more general programme planning documentation, the recommendation is again unrelated to the purpose of the report. Moreover, the portion of the recommendation dealing with UNIF is not accepted, as under the preceding recommendation.

Include recommendation and action in annual monitoring report: Yes ☐   No ☒

Addressee of Recommendation: Executive Head ☐

Legislative Body ☐

Other (specify): *UN Secretary-General* ☒

Recommendation 4 (*quote from JIU Report*)**:**

The Secretary-General as Chairman of CEB should take the necessary measures to establish a data repository of mature OSS solutions used by United Nations system organizations and which could be accessed by the organizations and by public entities of Member States and other interested parties.

Is the recommendation of potential relevance to FAO?   Yes ☒   No ☐

Decision and/or Proposed Action: Endorsed ☐

Endorsed as modified ☒

Rejected ☐

Explanation and/or Proposed Action: While this recommendation is directed primarily at the UN, there is no problem of principle with establishing global repositories of information, but this should be preceded by a suitable cost-benefit analysis, which is not contained in the report.

Include recommendation and action in annual monitoring report: Yes ☐   No ☒

Addressee of Recommendation: Executive Head   [x]

                                                    Legislative Body   [ ]

                                                    Other (specify): *UN Secretary-   [x]
                                                    General*

Recommendation 5 (*quote from JIU Report*)**:**

As a follow-up to the CEB review of key initiatives mentioned in the ICT Charter,

   (a) *The Secretary-General as Chairman of CEB should include in an addendum to his report on the ICT strategy requested by the General Assembly for the sixtieth session relevant indications concerning the level of priority, savings potential, risk, effectiveness and organizational interest for implementing the proposed OSS initiative;*

   (b) *Executive heads should assess the total cost of ownership (TCO) of their current platforms and they should implement processes measuring the total economic impact of their information technology (IT) investments including their use of OSS and CSS as well as the implications for Member States. The results of their findings should be reported to their respective governing bodies in the framework of their programme budget performance review.*

Is the recommendation of potential relevance to FAO?   Yes [x]   No [ ]

Decision and/or Proposed Action: Endorsed   [ ]

                                                    Endorsed as modified   [ ]

                                                    Rejected   [x]

Explanation and/or Proposed Action: The reasons are well explained in the CEB comments (paragraphs 20 to 23).

Include recommendation and action in annual monitoring report: Yes [ ]   No [x]

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Addressee of Recommendation: Executive Head   [ ]

                                                    Legislative Body   [ ]

                                                    Other (specify): *General Assembly*   [x]

Recommendation 6 (*quote from JIU Report*)**:**

On the basis of past attempts at system-wide coordination on ICT matters, the General Assembly should:

    (a) *Decide that the establishment of any new CEB mechanism on ICT coordination would be considered only after the CEB members have:*

        i. *Agreed on the mandate, mode of financing, powers and expected outputs of such a body in relation to the proposed UNIF referred to above in recommendation 2; and*

        ii. *Provided reasonable assurance that agreed recommendations will be followed up and their implementation duly reported to governing bodies;*

    (b) *Request the Secretary-General as chairman of CEB to give full consideration to all possibilities of using existing mechanisms such as the United Nations Staff College, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the International Computing Centre (ICC) and the United Nations University (UNU) for relevant aspects of the implementation of any new initiative, including OSS.*

Is the recommendation of potential relevance to FAO?   Yes ☒   No ☐

Decision and/or Proposed Action: Endorsed   ☐

    Endorsed as modified   ☐

    Rejected   ☒

Explanation and/or Proposed Action: Again, the reasons are well described in the CEB comments (paragraph 24).

Include recommendation and action in annual monitoring report: Yes ☐   No ☒