Interim Committee on Government Procurement

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT

Possible Issues for Examination Identified as a Result
of Consultations with Delegations

Communication from the Chairman

This paper reproduces the list of possible issues for examination identified as a result of consultations with delegations that was submitted by the Chairman to the Interim Committee on Government Procurement at its meeting of 4 April 1995. This list was drawn up by the Chairman as agreed by the Interim Committee at its meeting of 15 November 1994.

GENERAL

1.   The replies given by delegations (reproduced in document GPA/IC/W/7 plus ten Addenda) to the questionnaire (GPA/IC/W/4/Rev.1) basically address two distinct categories of use of information technology: one category addressing the access to procurement opportunities contained on databases and one category addressing the carrying out of a significant part of the procurement process through electronic means, going beyond the dissemination of opportunities. Do delegations find it desirable to structure the discussion on the use of information technology along those two separate categories of use?

FOLLOW UP TO QUESTIONNAIRE

2.   In relation to each category of use of information technology, a follow up to the replies given by delegations to the questionnaire may be desirable. Delegations are therefore invited to submit supplementary questions (or supplementary information) to the secretariat for circulation to the Members of the Interim Committee, before the date of the next meeting so as to allow for a fruitful discussion at that meeting.

ACCESS TO PROCUREMENT OPPORTUNITIES

3.   Compatibility of databases. To what extent do the existing and planned databases of signatories have in common with each other information they contain and the structure within which it is organized and what are the implications of this for the compatibilities of different systems?

4.   What common guidelines regarding format are required in order to assist foreign, as well as domestic, suppliers retrieve information, encourage them to compete, and ensure that they can quickly and painlessly find the tenders relevant to their line of business?

5.   How should access be set up and who should pay for it? Will suppliers have to subscribe to each system, or will it be set up on the Internet, free for anyone who has an Internet account?

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6.   Data swaps among Parties. Where databases are being developed or exist, should a possibility exist or be developed to swap data among Parties? Do delegations consider data swaps economically viable? What obstacles currently exist, such as licensing restrictions etc.?

7.   If so, would it be desirable to find ways and means to facilitate those swaps? It would appear that this would to some extent depend on the existence of a minimum amount of common, structured, information and the possibility to establish correspondences between classification systems used by signatories in their respective databases (any given object of procurement, e.g. a pen, should be identified by all signatories in a recognizable way in their databases).

ELECTRONIC PROCUREMENT

8.   At the last meeting, the question was raised whether, to the extent information technology had been, or was being brought into use in procurement systems, appropriate use would be made of the international standards to ensure that data interchange be carried out in a structured standardized manner, allowing for international use. The question was also raised whether, in the event that this was not the case, delegations could make a commitment to use these standards in future, with a precise time-table.

9.   In the event VAN's are being used and to the extent that international access to them is desirable, how can ways and means be defined to ensure such international access?

CONCERNING BOTH CATEGORIES

10.   Compatibility of the provisions of the Agreement with the use of information technology in government procurement.   To what extent are the provisions of the Agreement sufficiently flexible to allow for the use of information technology in government procurement? Should governments be allowed to require firms to tender exclusively by electronic means? If so, for what types and/or values of contracts?