IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTH PARLIAMENT OF THE FOURTH REPUBLIC OF GHANA

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE ON THE REPORT OF THE AUDITOR-GENERAL

ON THE

AUDIT OF THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEM OF MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, REGIONAL COOPERATION AND NEPAD

Thursday 8th July 2010

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The above IT Audit Report was laid in the House on Wednesday 2nd March, 2010 in accordance with article 184 of the 1992 Constitution and the Standing Orders of the House.

This audit report was referred to the Public Accounts Committee in accordance with Standing Order 165 for examination and report.

To consider this report, the Committee met with the Deputy Minister for Communications, Hon. Gideon Quarcoo, the Chief Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lawrence R. A. Satuh, the Acting Chief Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the technical team from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Cooperation NEPAD and the Ghana Audit Service and report as follows:

2.0 REFERENCES

The Committee referred to the following relevant documents:-

1. The 1992 Constitution

2. The Standing Orders of the House

3. National ICT Policy

4. Financial Administration Act

5. Financial Administration Regulation

6. Audit Service Act,2000

3.0 REASON FOR THE AUDIT

Section 11 (1) and (3) of the Audit Service Act, 2000, Act 584 requires that the Auditor-General review computerized financial and accounting systems and approve the form in which these are kept.

Section 16 of the Audit Service Act also states that the Auditor –General may carry out in the public interest such special audits or reviews as he considers necessary.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) vision is to ensure effective co-ordination between the Ministry and its overseas Missions on one hand; and between the Ministry and other stakeholders promote Ghana's interests abroad.

In furtherance of this vision, MFA has acquired a number of computers and setup an Information Technology (IT) unit.

In line with his mandate, the Auditor-General undertook an IT audit to:

- review and appraise the controls and procedures operated by management to ensure that information is reliable and the continued integrity of the business critical systems is safeguarded;

- assess the effectiveness of the overall management control over the IT functions of the organisation; and

- provide a report highlighting any weaknesses and make recommendation for corrective action.

4.0 SUMMARY OF AUDIT FINDINGS

The audit revealed that there was the **absence of an IT Policy & Strategy** approved by management. This defect could lead to the acquisition or development of systems which would be incompatible with business needs of the institution or not conform to corporate objectives

There was also **lack of proper controls over user access.** Users were able to access any site on the internet and also download unauthorised software. This could lead to unauthorised and inappropriate access gained to the application or client data. This poses risk to confidentiality, integrity and availability of data

There were **poor environmental controls.** This would reduce the life span of the assets thereby increasing maintenance cost. There were no fire hydrants in place to check fire outbreak.

The Ministry did not have a **Business Case and/or Functional Specification** to support the development of the e-consul and e-administration systems which were in progress at the time of the audit.

The Ministry did not have a **formal IT department** and an **IT assets register** to record the IT assets of the Ministry. The Ministry was operating computers which were using unlicensed software.

There was no **Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Plan** which would ensure that the Ministry could continue to operate in the event of a disaster or failure of the IT systems.

No formal procedures were in place for managing changes to the components of the IT infrastructure.

5.0   NATIONAL ICT POLICY

The Committee invited the Ministry of Communications to speak to members on the **National ICT Policy.** The Deputy Minister for Communications, **Hon. Gideon Quarcoo, Deputy Minister** and his technical team represented the Ministry.

The Deputy Minister intimated to the Committee that there is a National Information Communication Technology Policy under which the various MDAs have developed their IT statements. The Policy was based on 14 pillars which covered every aspect of government activities in the country.

The Pillars are:-

- Accelerated Human Resource Development

- Promoting ICTs in Education- The Development and Exploitation of ICTs in Education and Governance

- Facilitating the Development of the Private Sector

- Developing an Export-Oriented ICT Products and Services Industry

- Modernization of Agriculture and the Development of an Agro-Business Industry

- Developing a Globally Competitive Value-Added Services Sector--- A Regional Business Service and ICT Hub

- Deployment and Spread of ICTs in the Community

- Promotion of National Health

- Rapid ICT and Enabling Physical Infrastructure Development

- Research and Development (R&D), Scientific and Industrial Research Capacity Development

- Legal, Regulatory, and Institutional Framework Provisions

- Promoting Local and Foreign Direct Investment Provisions

- Promoting Local and Foreign Direct Investment Drive in ICTs

- Facilitating National Security and Law order.

- Facilitating Government Administration and Service Delivery- Promoting Electronic Government

The Ghana Information and Communications Technology Directorate (GICTeD) is the operational wing of the Ministry of Communications. Its function is to coordinate with all MDAs to develop their Enterprise architectures. It is also to bring focus on the cross-organizational implementation and coordination of ICT strategies.

GICTeD is also responsible for implementing the E – Government network infrastructure project which was being funded by a US$30 million Chinese loan facility approved by Parliament in November 2008.

The project is earmarked to connect all the various MDAs onto the national network. The infrastructure will also allow all the various MDAs to readily achieve compliance with existing regulations and directives.

He said GICTeD has developed policy guidelines and standards on information security and this would be enforced in all the MDAs.

The Ministry of Communications is also in the process of developing a Scheme of Service for IT personnel in the public service. This scheme is to enable MDAs attract and retain IT professionals in their organizations to help implement the organization's IT strategies.

The Deputy Minister for Communications informed the Committee that the Ministry was also in the process of setting up a Data Center that would serve as a backup facility to ensure business continuity, minimize business risk, and maximize return on investment and opportunities. It would also have a network operating center that would monitor the network efficiency and effectiveness of all the MDAs information systems.

He informed the Committee that GICTeD would also facilitate a disaster recovery and business continuity plan for the MDAs.

He said GICTeD would ensure that interoperability standards are adhered to and implemented by all MDAs to ensure that business objectives of organizations are met.

He said in order to facilitate the requisite enabling environment, work on the data protection bill was being prepared for Cabinet for transmission to Parliament for approval.

6.0   OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) confirmed the findings of the Auditor-General and said the Ministry was taking steps to implement them until the unfortunate fire incident.

He explained that in view of the need to achieve its vision and enhance its operations, MFA undertook to computerize its systems. The computerization was to link all the missions abroad onto a common platform.

As a result of this, assistance was sought from the Korean Government to provide the Ministry with a number of computers for its computerization.

He said with the unavailablity of a systems manager, the Ministry faced a number of challenges in the areas of software acquisition, maintenance, among others.

Per the audit recommendations, MFA was in the process of recruiting a systems manager and implement the recommendations when the fire outbreak occurred.

He said that the Ministry had learnt a lot of lessons and is currently collaborating with the Ministry of Communications to develop its ICT. Unfortunately, the Ministry is temporarily being housed in the Presidential Palace (Golden Jubilee House) and therefore cannot set up its own ICT. He however assured the Committee that when the Ministry moves into its own location, its ICT would be set up with the assistance of the Ministry of Communications, in line with the National ICT Policy and the Auditor-General's recommendations.

The technical team from the Ministry of Communications informed the Committee that prior to the fire outbreak, the Ministry was collaborating with the MFA to implement its ICT programme.

The Deputy Minister of Communications said that his Ministry was setting up a backup system for the Public Sector Institutions to assist them in record keeping. He urged all MDAs to consult with the Ministry before embarking on program involving ICT to avoid situations such as what happened to MFA.

Recommendations

The Committee was not happy about the fact that the MFA did not act on the audit recommendations urgently.

The Committee was of the view that if the recommendations had been taken seriously and acted upon with dispatch, the extent of loss with regards to the fire outbreak could have been minimized.

Issues raised in the Report as at December, 2009 included

1. absence of physical security policy document,

2. unrestricted access to the room where the servers were located,

3. absence of an asset register to record the total number of computers and other IT facilities in the Ministry,

4. poor state of the Ministry's fire hydrant,

5. no backup facility, among others.

6. No ICT department

The Committee was also not happy that the Ministry did not involve the Ministry of Communications at the initial stages when it was drawing up its ICT program.

The Committee regrets the unfortunate fire incident at the Ministry but is of the view that if the Auditor-General's recommendations were implemented on time, the loss would have been reduced.

The Committee therefore recommends to MDAs that the Ministry of Communications must approve all ICT programs before they are implemented. The Committee urges the Ministry of Communications to evaluate from time to time the ICT programs of the MDAs.

The Committee further recommends that the Auditor-General should perform an assessment of all ICT programs at the various MDAs to ensure that they have

been approved by the Ministry of Communications and report to the Committee.

7.0   CONCLUSION

Information Technology has become a key factor in every nation's development with regards to the flow of information and as such every effort must be made to ensure that it is properly implemented.

The Committee urges all MDAs implementing their ICT policies to do so in consultation with and assistance from the Ministry of Communications.

The Committee recommends to the House to adopt this Report on the Audit Report of the Auditor General on the Audit of the Information Technology Systems of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Cooperation and NEPAD

Respectfully submitted.

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CHAIRMAN PUBLIC ACCOUNT COMMITTEE

MR. ASANTE AMOAKO-ATTA
CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Thursday 8th July 2010