



SIXTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Improvements in standards-related activities of the ILO: Technical assistance and promotion**Introduction**

1. The LILS Committee of the Governing Body has discussed improvements in standards-related activities of the ILO regularly since March 2000. A paper on standards-related technical assistance and promotional activities¹ was submitted to the Committee in November 2002. The present paper is prepared on the basis of the statements and the observations made by the constituents in the LILS Committee as well as during various informal consultations and discussions. It intends to summarize indications for the further development of ILO standards-related technical assistance and promotional activities.

Overall perspective

2. Technical assistance and promotional activities aim to improve awareness and knowledge, develop national capacities, and mobilize the national tripartite constituents. It would seem that the clear preference of the constituents is to focus on the better use of the existing means and tools and their further development in the desired directions rather than develop proposals for alternative products. The standards-related technical assistance and promotional activities of the ILO are extensive and widespread. Factors that can enhance the quality, relevance and impact of this assistance include better choice of the content of assistance, better design of activities and improved knowledge-base and implementation. This paper outlines a set of considerations which are relevant for reinvigorating standards-related technical assistance.

(a) National implementation

3. The ultimate objective of each activity should be to improve the application of labour standards at the national level, as well as to facilitate the process of building national

¹ GB.285/LILS/5.

capacity to do so. International standards are universal, but standards-related technical assistance and promotional activities are country-specific in the sense that the same projects and activities usually cannot just be duplicated from one country to another. This means that the objectives of the activity, and the means by which it is carried out, should be determined in the real world situation in the country concerned and in consultation with all the constituents, taking into account the national priorities and the national administrative and institutional frameworks.

(b) Follow-up to the LILS Working Party

4. Promotional activities should also include a follow-up to the conclusions of the LILS Working Party on Policy regarding the Revision of Standards which concluded its work in March 2002. Over a period of eight years it led to the identification of the up-to-date Conventions for which the ratification should be promoted, the Conventions which need to be revised, as well as the other Conventions which should be denounced as their ratification would be replaced with the ratification of a more up-to-date Convention. The Working Party also clarified the situation with Recommendations. A dialogue with member States on the actions proposed by the Working Party can benefit from the country profiles being prepared listing such actions for each country.

(c) Promotional campaigns

5. There have been various promotional campaigns such as those relating to the ratification of the fundamental Conventions, the campaign for ratification of the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144), and the programmes on occupational safety and health and migrant workers likely to result from the “integrated approach” discussions by the International Labour Conference on those subjects. The campaigns undertaken so far have proved to be successful, although there obviously are limits to the number and scope of campaigns that could take place simultaneously. One possible approach would be to draw up a list of some 20 “leading Conventions” on different major subjects, which could be promoted to form a blueprint for decent work. This list of Conventions and their accompanying Recommendations could be the subject of specific assistance and targeted promotional campaigns. External resources might also be mobilized to ensure that such assistance is readily available.
6. However, in view of the conclusions of the abovementioned LILS Working Party, the Conventions identified as up to date for which ratification has to be promoted add up to 71, and there are a total number of 73 up-to-date Recommendations. Initial consultations have favoured expanding technical assistance and promotional activities to the entire list while respecting the priorities set out for each biennium in the ILO programme and budget, as well as the needs and requirements of the national constituents. Instead of speaking of mere ratification campaigns, these could be promotional campaigns in the broad sense of the word.

(d) Consolidation of practical materials

7. Another important aspect of the implementation of standards is how to translate them into concrete action. Toolkits – such as guidelines, manuals or the list of issues and possible measures which would result in the implementation of the standards – are valuable instruments to assist the ILO constituents in this regard. Gender, tripartism, child labour and forced labour are some of the examples of the areas in which the Office has already developed intensive implementation toolkits, and a great deal of material is available on

how to promote and implement selected standards. By developing and providing additional practical and results-oriented toolkits on how to implement standards, the ILO can provide improved promotional and cooperation-based interaction with the member States. This could be done separately for each thematic area in a gradual manner and as opportunities arise. Subject to donor interest in financing such activities, it would be possible to undertake Office-wide projects to collect, compile and further develop the resources and materials that can serve such a purpose in further thematic areas.

(e) Thematic databases

8. It is difficult at the moment to find readily available and user-friendly information as regards the overall state of standards. This refers both to the content and global coverage of the up-to-date standards, as well as country-specific snapshots of the state of ratifications and implementation in each of the thematic areas. In preparation for the integrated approach general discussions, the Office is progressively collecting concise baseline national information in each thematic area dealt with, wherever possible for all member States. Such information can be complemented by a summary of the most recent reports received, including the reports sent under articles 19 and 22 of the ILO Constitution (both on Conventions and Recommendations, and under the Declaration follow-up) and the reports sent for the preparation of standard-setting and general discussions at the Conference. Those reports contain a rich volume of information on the state of labour conditions in various countries, which is unique and unparalleled globally, but not often processed and used by the Office beyond the immediate purposes for which it was requested. Such databases would not be a compilation of supervisory comments, as they already exist in ILOLEX. Rather, the intention would be to provide a simple set of information in each thematic area for all member States. This information could also be used by the ILO for the identification and planning of technical assistance and promotional activities.
9. A first attempt to integrate existing information and to complement it in a specific thematic area has recently been completed for occupational safety and health in the course of preparations and follow-up to its general discussion under the integrated approach at the International Labour Conference (91st Session) in 2003. That information is currently being transformed into a database and will be electronically available in three languages before the end of 2003. Depending on the availability of funds a more rapid pace for setting up such databases could be feasible through article 19 General Surveys for groups of instruments. Otherwise simpler formats of country information will need to be maintained for internal purposes anyway, for instance for the field specialists to organize their work better. The main challenge is, of course, to maintain and update the databases once established.

(f) Follow-up to supervisory comments

10. Technical assistance and promotional activities should take into account ILO standards – particularly ratified Conventions – and naturally the comments, observations, recommendations and conclusions of various ILO supervisory bodies. The ILO has developed mechanisms that are good at identifying the shortcomings and the problems in the implementation of standards, but has a more limited success in translating this information into concrete improvements on the ground. The different supervisory bodies regularly encourage governments to have recourse to the Office's assistance to resolve problems. Many governments do so in various ways. Technical assistance should follow up the supervisory work of the ILO in a more systematic fashion and complement it by well-designed activities and advisory services aimed at removing those problems. This

assistance can be provided either by the specialists in the subregional structures or from headquarters, involving whatever technical sectors may be necessary to achieve the desired results.

11. The fact that the Office responds to such requests for assistance, and the close link between supervision and assistance, distinguishes the ILO from other international supervisory systems. Direct contact missions are also used when a more practical and on-the-ground identification of ways to overcome the implementation problems need to be explored.

(g) Country-specific projects

12. Larger capacity-building, training, and development-oriented technical cooperation projects can also be envisaged to respond to standards-related needs identified through supervision. The Office could undertake a concentrated country-specific attempt to resolve as many of the standards-related problems raised by the supervisory bodies regarding that country as possible. In such cases, the government and the social partners concerned should commit themselves to working with the Office to analyse and correct all the problems raised within their ability. A limited number of countries can be selected each biennium based on the nature and content of the comments from the supervisory bodies and the potential for achieving results. This should be done through detailed discussion with the representatives of the governments concerned and their social partners.
13. The basic idea is that an analysis of the Conventions ratified and of the outstanding comments of the Committee of Experts and other supervisory bodies should provide a picture of the development problems being encountered. Analysing and addressing the underlying causes of these problems should in itself form a good development agenda. It should respond to the concerns of virtually all the different ILO priorities and hence to the Decent Work Agenda. A slightly different version of this proposal was already approved by the Governing Body in a general discussion on improvements in the standards-related activities.² However, no member State has so far volunteered for this purpose, although it has to be noted that the Office has not really pursued the issue actively. The Office could therefore approach member States that might be willing and suitable for the first experiment with this approach in the hope that the results achieved would encourage other countries to become involved.

(h) Integration of standards in country programmes

14. The ILO is moving towards a country programming approach to improve the integration of its assistance into a coherent whole in line with country priorities and characteristics. Rather than being a shopping list of desired activities, such country programmes would need to relate to and reinforce the ILO programme and budget. Similarly they could be presented to potential donors. Integrating standards-related activities in the country programming process would also make it possible to improve the links between standards and issues such as poverty reduction and the social dimensions of globalization. Apart from increased policy coherence, this would better relate ILO responses with the development needs of the member States.
15. The decent work programming paradigm takes account of standards and rights. In the discussions that were held last year in the LILS Committee, as well as during past informal

² GB.282/8/2.

consultations, participants have taken it as given that all ILO country programmes included standards-related components aimed at the improvement of the impact of standards. A more systematic involvement of standards specialists in the field in the development of ILO country programmes and activities can produce field-driven initiatives and programmes which could further integrate the promotion of standards into the regional objectives. Country programmes are an ideal vehicle to integrate the promotion of standards into the overall ILO effort.

(i) Tripartite involvement

16. Standards-related technical assistance and promotional activities need to be discussed with the social partners as well as the governments in the countries concerned, and should equally reflect both their wishes and priorities, and the mandate of the Organization. Tripartite decisions of the ILO Conferences and the Governing Body as well as the involvement of ACT/EMP and ACTRAV as the focal points for employers' and workers' relations and their field specialists would also be essential. National tripartite ILO committees in line with the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144) can be useful in this regard.

Summary of discussions

17. Rather than designating one specific activity or product, or choosing among them, the approaches mentioned above seem to be mutually supporting tools and activities. Standards-related technical assistance and promotion would need to combine all these elements in a way clearly adapted to the national context. They would need to take into account supervisory comments and the information made available in country profiles on the actions proposed by the LILS Working Party. Assistance should not be confined to States that have ratified the Conventions concerned, but rather should include all countries. It should not only address legal aspects but also include technical and practical aspects. It should go beyond ratifications and aim at the ultimate goal of implementation of standards. Information compiled in the thematic databases can also be important in planning activities. The action has to take place at the national level and the priorities for each country would need to be discussed and set by the tripartite constituents in that country. Any of the up-to-date Conventions could be the subject of technical assistance according to those priorities.
18. This paper has provided a summary of available tools and of what could be done. The impact would be optimal when all these elements can be combined in a more systematic approach. They would need to be taken into account in the context of country-level activities in general and the decent work country programmes in particular, as well as in the preparation of the programme and budget and in the joint programming exercises of headquarters and the field structures. Regular use of these tools by the specialists in the field and support from headquarter units are the basis for such a systematic approach.
19. *The Committee is invited to take note that these elements should be taken into account in programmes which aim at improving the provision of standards-related technical assistance and promotional activities.*

Geneva, 2 October 2003.

Point for decision: Paragraph 19.