

Supplement to Report VI “The role of the ILO in technical cooperation”

Technical cooperation: A strategic perspective Note by the Director-General

The Conference will undertake a major review of the ILO's technical cooperation programme at its current session. It has a report devoted to this subject, and technical cooperation is also discussed, *inter alia*, in my own Report to the Conference this year. This Note complements those reports and should be read in conjunction with them and with the Programme and Budget proposals for 2000-01. Its purpose is to respond to requests made at the last session of the Governing Body and to highlight my views on some of the major issues involved so as to help guide the discussion.

In what follows, I provide my views on the future orientation of technical cooperation in the ILO; outline some of the action already taken, or planned for the near future; and suggest some issues on which it would be desirable to have guidance from the Conference.

1. Future orientation of ILO technical cooperation policy

(a) A renewed commitment

The ILO will renew its commitment to technical cooperation as a major means of action to achieve its mission. It is an essential means of realizing the objectives of the ILO which I have presented to this Conference. Technical cooperation, including both advisory services and operational activities, will therefore be a major instrument of the ILO to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The role of ILO technical cooperation is to help create the enabling environment, at the national and the international levels, for the realization of the values and principles of the Organization in terms of development, institutional capability, legislative framework and socio-economic policy.

It will seek to do so by promoting the four strategic objectives of the ILO: the promotion of rights at work; employment; social protection; and social dialogue. Such a commitment implies a greater focus for the ILO's technical cooperation

activities and a closer integration — in both programme and organizational terms — with the work of the ILO as a whole.

These activities have to be carried out within the new and changing framework of an emerging global economy and rapidly evolving national needs. As I indicate in my Report to the Conference, the ILO must assist in the adaptation of national economies and national institutions to global change, as well as the adaptation of global change to human needs. The ILO will be called upon to help its constituents in what will be a long period of adjustment to these emerging realities, in addition to addressing the persistent problems of poverty, unemployment and insecurity of individuals, families and communities. The ILO must organize itself for this purpose.

(b) Responding to constituents' needs

In recent years the ILO has laid the foundation for a participative, flexible and responsive policy of technical cooperation, drawing upon the experience of decentralization and regional programmes of the 1970s and 1980s. However, to achieve its full potential the Active Partnership Policy needs to be reviewed and placed in the strategic context of the programme and organizational change initiated by the Governing Body in March this year. It must be sensitive, above all, to regional diversity and the specificity of national needs. There can be no single global model for universal application. Country objectives must capture the changing concerns of the ILO's constituents; implementation modalities must draw on national institutional capacities; and programmes must be conceived to reflect constituents' needs through a process of systematic consultations at the regional and subregional levels. The first exercises of this kind have been launched in preparation for the forthcoming Regional Meetings.

The quality and impact of ILO technical cooperation are central to the constituents' concerns. It must be focused to serve the strategic objectives of ILO constituents as a whole, and to maximize impact. It must be realistic in terms of the institutional competencies of the ILO and available resources. Technical cooperation policy must address improvements in the content of substantive programmes, as well as improvements in the management of the process itself. It must examine organizational systems as well as seek procedural improvements. Technical cooperation must, in short, be seen as an integrated part of the ILO's activities as a whole, serving not merely to deliver "products" downstream but contributing to the upstream design of those products and to ILO policies in general.

(c) Partnerships for technical cooperation

I believe the whole of the multilateral system should better integrate its technical cooperation activities. I have the intention of making the ILO a full team player in developing substantive and operational partnerships in this field. Partnerships are essential to upgrade services and mobilize resources; to leverage impact; to develop knowledge networks; and to ensure participation by the social partners and the development of national institutions. The core partnership is between the Office and its primary constituents: governments, workers and employers.

This is the basis of a series of external alliances: with the donor community and development banks; with the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions; and with national, regional and international bodies for research, knowledge, and economic and social cooperation. A special effort will be made to enhance partnerships with the organizations that are concerned with regional and subregional integration and cooperation.

At the country level, the ILO will be active in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework to ensure that its constituents' priorities are effectively pursued, while optimizing the potential capacities of the United Nations system as a whole. All these partnerships must be built on a realistic perception of both the common objectives and the specific interests of the partners concerned, so that the ILO can project the values and concerns of its own constituents more effectively in a wider arena. The follow-up to the major United Nations conferences of the 1990s will be an important setting for these activities.

As a knowledge, service and advocacy organization, the ILO must develop linkages with the actors that share our values and objectives — among them, parliamentarians, universities and knowledge centres, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, and global information and communication networks.

2. Plan of action

Several steps have been taken, or are planned in the immediate future, to carry out a strategic orientation of the ILO's technical cooperation policy.

(a) Improving focus and impact

The four strategic objectives, and more particularly the eight related InFocus programmes approved by the Governing Body, will provide the points of departure and the rationale for all ILO technical cooperation. The evolving requirements of ILO constituents will need to be matched with institutional competencies and resource constraints in terms of the strategic objectives themselves. The broad policy guidelines for operational activities will be provided by the general legislative mandate of the Organization.

I have already initiated the process of identifying the technical cooperation components of the InFocus programmes. Each of the current global programmes will be reviewed and integrated, as appropriate, with the InFocus programmes, while retaining their project identity where necessary. Extensive consultations will be undertaken at the national level to ensure that country objectives reflect the specificity of the constituents' demands, and are realistic in terms of organizational objectives, capabilities and the resources available. Greater focus will also imply that operational objectives will include activities necessary to promote the concepts and notions underlying the programmes in order to help mobilize public opinion, external support and consciousness-raising and help expand ownership of the results and outcomes.

(b) A new programming framework

The strategic objectives provide the basis for a common programming framework which links regular budget programmes with those financed through extra-budgetary resources. My Programme and Budget proposals for 2000-01 reflect this intention to move towards an integrated programming structure. Such an integrated programming approach will promote operational and policy synergies. It will help resource mobilization by giving the development partners a much clearer indication of the contribution they could make towards the overall ILO technical cooperation programme. It will also facilitate the identification of regular budget commitments to technical cooperation programmes.

(c) Consolidating and developing technical excellence

The knowledge base of an institution is the foundation of sound and reliable advice. We must ensure the highest technical quality in our technical cooperation projects. I have initiated a process of identification of our strengths and limitations in this field on the basis of the opinion — in the first instance — of our managers at headquarters. Later this year, I will consult field managers. It is my intention to implement policies that will stimulate and enhance the excellence and modernization of our capacities. I believe it is essential to understand that, in our efforts to access decreasing international resources, we operate in a highly competitive environment. This demands a strengthening of the knowledge capacity of the ILO in terms of research and statistics, and of its capacity for economic analysis. Ultimately, quality in substance and process is the basic requirement for recipient and donor satisfaction.

(d) Management of technical cooperation

The success of technical cooperation depends on sound management, a coordinated approach, and an effective support machinery for delivery. I have already started the process towards more efficient management and greater transparency and accountability through the establishment of a Senior Management Team organized on the basis of the four strategic objectives. Upgrading the management capacity of the Organization as a whole, including the capacity for technical cooperation, is the key to ensuring clarity of institutional objectives and to securing necessary support services for the ILO structures in the regions.

(e) Better resource mobilization

I intend to stress resource mobilization to reverse the quantitative decline of technical cooperation. The strategic approach described above will provide a more transparent map of activities and targets for the donor community.

I also intend to develop a more substantive relationship with the international development community, including the development cooperation ministers or agencies and the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD. This will involve not only more systematic contacts with technical specialists in the donor community but also more systematic dialogue with ministries of labour, trade unions and employers' organizations so as to involve them more directly in resource mobilization and in ensuring support at the political level. Reference has been made to the importance of intensifying relationships with the United Nations

system and the Bretton Woods institutions. New initiatives will be undertaken with the private sector, with foundations and with other non-traditional partners, within the framework of our agreed values and principles.

Extra-budgetary contributions are by definition voluntary. They normally respond and are accountable to general policy priorities and preferences established by parliaments in the regular budget appropriation process. As a result, it is normal that donors may wish to specify the areas of ILO activities to which their funds should be assigned in our dialogue with them. At the same time, recipients of technical cooperation programmes wish to exercise ownership of projects carried out with them. It is a function of the Office to integrate donor-driven and demand-driven specificities into a coherent whole to the satisfaction of all, by promoting dialogue between all the parties concerned, and through programme design and innovation.

(f) Reviewing the field structure

I am aware of current problems arising from the lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities between headquarters and the field, and within the field itself. I intend to look into this problem as a matter of urgency. The aim will be to provide a more efficient and a more accessible presence and service structure of the ILO in the field, which is able to respond flexibly and rapidly to constituents' needs, drawing upon the resources of the Organization as a whole. In addition to technical policy guidelines, headquarters should be able to provide the field structure with information on international comparative experience of various social policy measures, together with assessments of the economic and fiscal implications of social initiatives. We must combine an appropriate level of decentralization — thereby bringing decision-making closer to our clients — with overall strategic coherence in order to project a clear ILO identity worldwide.

(g) Improved monitoring and evaluation

Indicators of performance are essential for the ILO, its constituents and its development partners. Wherever possible, identifiable targets should have clear performance indicators. The existing assessment system provides a self-evaluation mechanism. Thematic evaluations take place annually and are discussed in the Governing Body. Traditional projects have built-in evaluation mechanisms but little impact analysis. There is need to improve mechanisms to assess programmes and their impact at the regional or national level. As part of the overall evaluation system to be established within the ILO, I propose introducing methods of systematic evaluation of technical cooperation with recipient countries and development partners.

(h) Better delivery of technical cooperation.

Concern has been voiced in recent months about the ILO's delivery rate of technical cooperation. This is an important issue, as the delivery rate is often an indicator of efficiency and effectiveness in the interaction between the ILO and its donor and recipient counterparts. I have initiated a series of measures both to define the extent of the problem and to deal with it. To begin with, relevant information

and data are being analysed to identify the reasons for slippage. In future, data will also be presented in a more meaningful way to bring greater accuracy and transparency to the execution of technical cooperation. An Office-wide “delivery-control mechanism” is being built up and will be put in place later this year. This mechanism will serve as both a control and an early-warning system, as well as promoting better communication between headquarters and the field structure.

(i) Rapid response capacity

I have referred in my Report to the Conference to the need for the ILO to respond rapidly to emerging problems or opportunities, whether these arise from economic crises, natural calamity, conflict or social change. This will require the ability to monitor developments, plan the responses, mobilize existing ILO expertise, and coordinate external partnerships and resources. Steps will be taken to develop such a capacity within the ILO. Dealing with such crises will often require a system-wide United Nations response within which the ILO will contribute its own areas of competence as part of a wider partnership.

3. Issues for discussion

Since I view technical cooperation as an essential means of realizing the strategic vision of the ILO, I welcome the opportunity to have the guidance of the Conference on technical cooperation at the outset of my mandate as Director-General.

Together with comments on paragraphs 1 and 2 of this Note, ideas and suggestions would be particularly useful in the following areas.

(a) Enhancing the relevance of the ILO’s technical cooperation

- The form and nature of technical cooperation that will be required in the future. New outputs and products in the area of socio-economic policies.
- Emerging social requirements of regional integration and cooperation.
- Ways of integrating both economic and social efficiency through ILO technical cooperation.
- Principal areas of assistance in the implementation of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

(b) Improving the quality, visibility and impact of ILO technical cooperation

- Monitoring systems to ensure better quality and delivery.
- Methods of evaluation of efficiency, relevance and impact.
- Communications strategies to increase the visibility of ILO activities and to promote wider partnerships.

(c) Strengthening partnerships

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- Improving the process of dialogue and consultations with constituents.
 - Strengthening and extending partnerships for resource mobilization.
 - Increasing collaboration with national and regional institutions in the design and implementation of ILO technical cooperation.

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It will be clear from the foregoing that this Conference review marks the beginning of a new stage of ILO technical cooperation policy. A primary goal has been proposed for the ILO as a whole: to enhance the opportunities for decent work for all. Technical cooperation policy is being reoriented in line with the four strategic objectives to achieve this goal. In coming months a series of steps will be taken, ranging from improved programming to organizational reform. Reports on their outcome will be submitted regularly to the Governing Body. Our action will undoubtedly require adjustment and fine-tuning as the process evolves. At this stage, I look forward to the proposals and advice of the Conference in guiding this strategic orientation, which can be further developed and discussed in the Governing Body. I am convinced that, with your support, the ILO can develop a technical cooperation policy which can serve to meet the specificity and variety of national and regional needs, while being firmly embedded in our basic principles and values.