

## **SOCIAL DIALOGUE SECTOR**

### **Overview of knowledge sharing initiatives within SECTOR**

#### *Knowledge sharing with ILO constituents and the public*

Given the need to be on top of the developments in their respective sectors, sectoral specialists have always been in touch with sectoral social partners, as well as interested governments. In some sectors, such as mining for example, ILO actively shares knowledge by taking part in groups of experts on specific issues of interest, such as the small-scale and artisanal mining community network CASM or the Intergovernmental Forum on Metals and Mining and Sustainable Development.

#### *SECTOR website*

In order to ensure a close link with those interested in ILO's sectoral work, SECTOR established its One-Stop-Window website in 2002. Each specialist provides an overview of the important issues in their respective sector(s) and related ILO research, reports or instruments. The site also includes links on specific information relevant for each sector. In response to requests to further improve the website, the new strategy/orientation of the Sectoral Activities Branch includes a re-design of the website and a clear plan of work that focuses on constant updates to ensure that timely information is made available.

#### *Knowledge sharing initiatives in the context of specific items of work*

Knowledge sharing initiatives have also been created for specific sectoral activities. The Action Programme on Education for example held three Policy Dialogue Forums forums in specific geographic and linguistic sub-regions, that allowed participating countries to share the results of national research assessments and ILO inputs as well as to share information on causes, innovations and "what works or does not work" to improve the status of teaching, reduce shortages and helped participating countries to understand how challenges and obstacles could be overcome through different policies, legislative and other measures in countries with similar socio-economic/cultural traditions and education systems.

In addition, sectoral meetings (such as the May 2006 Meeting of Experts on OSH in coalmines) have also sometimes made use of electronic forums to allow participants to access up-to-date information (provided by the Office) and share their views.

### *Office-wide knowledge sharing on sectoral matters*

The following suggestions were made to the GB in March 2007 on how the Sectoral Activities Programme could rework its office-wide cooperation efforts:

#### **Strengthening collaboration and cooperation on sectoral issues**

In order to further its knowledge base, it is suggested that collaboration on sectoral issues within the Organization be further encouraged. In order to foster synergies, it is also proposed that sectoral knowledge be more widely disseminated and a coordinated approach in relation to sectoral research and work be adopted.

For years, the Sectoral Activities Branch has collected information on developments in economic sectors, distilling what is relevant to the ILO's work. It has served as a clearing house for the exchange of information on sectoral problems and solutions. Cooperation with many units has been fruitful over the years, but on an informal and uncoordinated basis.

In order to strengthen cooperation between units, consideration might be given to the establishment of a focal point or other mechanisms within all sectors to facilitate the flow of information to and from the Sectoral Activities Branch. A similar approach has been successfully applied within the Office in relation to gender issues and for work in the regions. In future, field specialists in Social Dialogue 5 will be more directly involved in the implementation of sectoral activities as well as in providing information on countries' priorities and needs and thus contribute to creating stronger links between the international, regional and national levels.

In order to deepen the constituent-driven nature of the Programme, this approach would also be extended to reach outside the Office. The approach pursued by the Sectoral Activities Branch to better inform sectoral constituents – the idea behind creating the “one stop-window” sectoral web site – could, for instance, be complemented in due course by a regular report that sums up new developments in the sectors, the Programme's progress and results of sectoral research.

#### **Strengthening the Office-wide knowledge base on sectoral issues**

While the Sectoral Activities Branch is the main unit carrying out research on sectoral matters, other parts of the Organization also sometimes examine specific sectors in relation to aspects of their work. In order to avoid duplication of effort and provide added value to constituents, the Sectoral Activities Branch will suggest the formation of a research network on sectoral issues to provide a more complete picture of all relevant work. Governments as well as employers' and workers' organizations are also major sources of

information and analysis on sectoral developments and issues. Information thus collected could be presented in a regular report as well as on the web site.

This emphasis on sectoral research should be complemented by further efforts to gather sectoral statistics, in close collaboration with the Bureau of Statistics. In some sectors, gaps exist in relation to fundamental data such as sectoral employment statistics as well as reliable data on the impacts of global trends on sectoral employment, employment protection and security, and other aspects of decent work. Given the importance of this data for the orientation of ILO's sectoral approach and the fact that governments, employers, workers and their organizations all look to the ILO as a centre of information and expertise on the economic sectors of most concern to them, more attention could be given to systematic data gathering.

The suggestions contained in this paper (GB.298/STM/1) were well received and will be further pursued by the Office in the context of the re-orientation of the Sectoral Activities Programme.

#### *Branch-wide knowledge sharing*

At this time, another central element of the new orientation of the Sectoral Activities Programme is being put into practice. The GB's decision to group sectors was central to the discussions at a branch-wide retreat on how the new orientation could best be implemented.

The retreat concluded that teamwork could be strengthened by building teams for individual or closely related groupings of sectors. The newly created teams would share information and encourage specialists to work together in relation to issues that were relevant to their sectors. At this time, a draft on the responsibilities of all colleagues has been circulated; based on the input received, it will soon be finalised and implemented.

Already before these more formal structures for information sharing, a number of specialists have been making use of the shared drive infrastructure provided by ITCOM. In particular maritime sectoral specialists constantly use these shared drives to ensure that all colleagues have access to all relevant information. This practice has also been extensively and successfully used during sectoral meetings and the International Labour Conference, in particular in the preparation of amendment proposals and reports.

27 June 2007

## **Decent work in a global economy: some elements for a sectoral research strategy**

### **Background**

Article 10 of the ILO Constitution states that the functions of the Office include “the collection and distribution of information on all subjects relating to the international adjustment of conditions of industrial life and labour.” Research on developments in different areas related to the Organization’s mandate on industry and employment is needed to accomplish this constitutional obligation and to ensure the continuation of the Office’s role as an authority and a centre of reference in the world of work. Much of this work also aims at refining and reinforcing the relevance of the ILO’s advisory services to constituents in member States and at the international level. In the context of rampant globalization and the ILO’s Decent work agenda announced in 1999, there is a continuing need for the ILO to be able to deliver to its constituents policy recommendations based on solid research into the determinants of employment, the impact of labour standards, the conditions under which workers’ rights or enterprise growth can best be achieved, the sources of vulnerability and exclusion, and the ways to promote effective social dialogue.

In October 2005<sup>2</sup>, the Director-General announced a policy for the Office which recognizes that top-quality publications can only be built on good research. This requires the development of a research strategy for the Office as a whole; development of policies and mechanisms to ensure quality research standards; and policies to strengthen institutional capacity to deliver technically sound, empirically based policy research in both headquarters and the regions, including collaboration with external networks.

### **The context of a sectoral research strategy**

Sectoral activities have received special attention since the ILO’s inception based on the recognition that: (i) the Organization’s constituents are engaged in different sectors and that there are frequently problems, issues, and solutions unique to certain sectors or industrial branches of the economy; (ii) social dialogue and collective dialogue often takes place at the sectoral level; and (iii) many international labour standards are sector-specific.

Research within the Sectoral Activities Programme has hitherto been largely, but not solely, driven by the need to prepare comprehensive reports on agreed priority social and labour topics, as a basis for discussions at sectoral meetings. Such meetings usually review developments in the concerned sectors and generate recommendations for follow-up by the ILO and its

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<sup>1</sup> These suggestions were prepared by John Sendanyoye for the branch-wide retreat in May 2007

<sup>2</sup> ILO Circular No.612, 11 October 2005

sectoral constituents (in the form of conclusions and/or resolutions related to research, technical cooperation, advisory services, information dissemination, workshops, etc). Research has also been undertaken to expand the ILO knowledge base on topical issues in various sectors. Over recent years, there is a growing recognition that, despite the largely intangible benefits of comprehensive sectoral reports for meetings, their cost is considerable, and absorbs resources that might otherwise be available for follow-up. More and more sectoral information can also now be readily accessed online meaning that more constituents can obtain material formerly only available to them from ILO reports. Such information proliferation also increases the sectoral specialists' task, as more careful selection and verification of inputs for the preparation of reports is required if analysis is to be complete, limits on length respected, balance ensured and value added by the Office to the information used.

### **Issues, goals and some elements of a sectoral research strategy**

In view of the foregoing, the following issues, aims and elements need to be taken into account in developing a sectoral research strategy:

- Make the preparation of sectoral reports and other publications for meetings, action programmes, and other activities more cost-effective
- Enhance intra-ILO research synergies to take advantage of wide-ranging expertise available elsewhere within the ILO, at headquarters and in the field, on various aspects of the Organization's mandate to ensure better relevance and impact of sectoral research output to the Decent work agenda
- Develop systematic partnerships with social partners, academic institutions and other international agencies on sectoral research programmes
- Prepare an inventory of sector-specific research within and outside the ILO with a view to making SECTOR a real "one-stop research repository" where social and labour information on all economic sectors and industry branches and sub-branches of main ILO interest, including studies carried out both within and outside the ILO might be accessed or information on them obtained
- Ensure flexibility in sectoral research choices to take better account of globalization's impact on the emergence and obsolescence of industries
- Develop effective processes to initiate and strengthen timely consultations internally within the ILO and with governments, employers and workers on the selection of research topics and mechanisms to ensure collaboration on research implementation
- Ensure that resources for sectoral research are commensurate with identified research needs
- Assess the research capacity within SECTOR and develop a training programme to enhance any identified gaps
- Identify research sources available within the ILO, including INFORM resources, and train sectoral specialists on the optimum utilization of those resources

- Institute standards and procedures to ensure sectoral research of satisfactory quality, including mechanisms for peer review
- Establish mechanisms for collaboration among sectoral specialists on research as and when certain developments might cut across different sectors and industry branches (e.g. on the globalization of labour markets in services).