



Governing Body

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Policy Development Section
Social Dialogue Segment

POL

FIFTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Global dialogue forums: Lessons learned

Overview

Summary

This paper provides an overview of lessons learned in relation to the holding of global dialogue forums (GDFs). It comprises an overview of the different formats of international meetings being used under the Sectoral Activities Programme, outlines challenges encountered and makes proposals for improvement that aim to foster constituent involvement, improve efficiency and enhance the impact of these meetings.

Policy implications

None.

Legal implications

If adopted, the proposals set out in paragraphs 12 to 23 would delegate the decision regarding a GDF's composition to the Officers of the Governing Body as well as establishing rules for the designation of Chairpersons and procedures for the adoption of points of consensus in GDFs.

Financial implications

None.

Decision required

Paragraph 26.

Follow-up action required

In order to implement the proposed changes in paragraphs 12 to 23 the Office would need to make internal arrangements supporting them.

Author unit

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References to other Governing Body documents and ILO instruments

GB.288/13, GB.289/STM/2, GB.298/STM/1, GB.298/PV, GB.295/STM/3/3, GB.295/13(Rev.).

Characteristics of global dialogue forums and other meetings

1. In order to strengthen the sectoral aspects of the ILO's work, the Governing Body adopted a new approach to sectoral work ¹ in 2007, based on a recommendation by the Committee on Sectoral and Technical Meetings and Related Issues (STM Committee).
2. The changes made were aimed, inter alia, at improving the relevance and responsiveness of the Sectoral Activities Programme. ² An important part of the reform package was the creation of a new format for meetings, the global dialogue forums (GDFs). ³ These were meant to complement the two existing standard formats for international meetings under the Sectoral Activities Programme, namely, meetings of experts and sectoral meetings.
3. Discussions on the formats of the existing types of meeting had been held by the Governing Body prior to this decision. In particular, the practice for meetings of experts had been discussed by the Governing Body in 2004 ⁴ and 2006 ⁵ with a view to possibly standardizing the format further.
4. Although the three types of meeting share common elements, they differ considerably in their objectives, outputs, composition and duration.

Table. The three standard formats of international meetings under the Sectoral Activities Programme ⁶

	Meetings of experts	Sectoral meetings	Global dialogue forums
Objective	Detailed technical guidance	In-depth policy guidance on sectoral issues	Policy guidance on a specific sectoral issue (typically of pressing nature or emerging)
Outputs (in addition to a report of the discussions)	Codes of practice or guidelines	Conclusions (including follow-up suggestions) and resolutions ^a	Points of consensus ^b
Inputs	Draft code of practice or guidelines	Report and suggested points for discussion	Issues paper and suggested points for discussion
Discussion format (in addition to group meetings)	Plenary sittings in which the draft document is examined and amended by the meeting paragraph by paragraph	Plenary sittings dealing with one point for discussion per sitting	Plenary sittings or panel discussions structured in accordance with the points for discussion

¹ GB.298/STM/1.

² Another important feature was the introduction of tripartite sector-specific advisory bodies as proposed in GB.298/STM/1, paras 48–50.

³ GB.298/STM/1, paras 38–39. The holding of the first GDF was also endorsed at that session (see GB.298/PV, para. 256(a)).

⁴ GB.288/13; GB.289/STM/2.

⁵ GB.295/STM/3/3 and GB.295/13(Rev.), paras 50–63.

⁶ The numbers in the table reflect the typical practice of the last ten years.

	Meetings of experts	Sectoral meetings	Global dialogue forums
Typical composition	8–8–8	10–10 plus all interested governments	6–6 plus all interested governments ^c
Typical duration	5–8 days	5 days ^d	2 days
Applicable rules	No specific set of rules ^e	Standing Orders for sectoral meetings ^f	No specific set of rules
Common criticism	Too many night sittings; too short for a comprehensive, in-depth discussion of wide technical areas ^g	Too formal and long, sometimes making it impossible for high-level industry players and senior government representatives to take part	Too short to adopt meaningful conclusions or points of consensus; unclear procedures

^a The original duration of a sectoral meeting envisaged at the time of adoption of the Standing Orders of the Governing Body was considerably greater. For this reason, some elements of the Standing Orders (such as the creation of a working party on resolutions) have not been consistently applied in the last five years. ^b The original proposal had not specified that GDFs would necessarily adopt conclusions or points of consensus. In practice, however, only one of the seven GDFs held since 2008 did not adopt such a document. ^c Education and research grouping meetings have a formula of 5–5–5 plus all interested governments, whereby five governments from developing and emerging economy countries are invited at the expense of the Office, given that in almost all countries, governments are the major employers in the sector. ^d See footnote a. ^e In accordance with the discussion at the STM Committee of the Governing Body in March 2006 (see GB.295/13(Rev.), para. 58). ^f Adopted by the Governing Body on 16 November 1995 at its 264th Session. ^g To discuss and adopt the code of practice on safety and health in agriculture, two meetings of experts were necessary.

5. The three types of meetings thus provide the Sectoral Activities Programme with a comprehensive range of diversified tools that are intended to address the different needs of constituents in relation to international social dialogue.

Lessons learned

6. The first GDFs in 2008 and 2009 were well attended and received very positive feedback. Probably for this reason, the advisory bodies proposed to hold six GDFs and only one sectoral meeting in the Sectoral Activities Programme for 2010–11.
7. The GDFs held in 2010 and early 2011 did, however, differ considerably from earlier GDFs, in that they were characterized by considerably larger inputs (reports/issues papers comprising over 90 pages on average, rather than the average of nine pages for the four meetings held from 2008 to early 2010), by larger sets of points for discussion (an average of six points instead of four), and points of consensus of an average of five pages, a significant departure from the earlier average of two and a half pages.
8. These changes had been made in an attempt to allow these GDFs to deal comprehensively with all aspects deemed important by the advisory bodies which had proposed them. This increase in the substance to be covered by two-day GDFs, however, left participants wondering whether these GDFs were not de facto sectoral meetings presented as GDFs.
9. The tight schedules and comprehensiveness of the draft points of consensus prepared by the Office on the basis of discussions in the GDF plenary sittings were particularly criticized. Their adoption proved to be difficult since, in line with the standard timetable for GDFs (annexed), the drafts were presented to the group meetings only in the afternoon of the second day, with the adoption foreseen directly thereafter in plenary. Other concerns included the perception that governments were not fully able to participate in these meetings, that costs were escalating, and that their outputs sometimes lacked substance.

Proposed changes

10. Following consultations through the advisory bodies, for the first GDF held this year (February 2011), the Office introduced, as a trial measure, changes to the format of the points for consensus and started to develop internal rules with the aim of avoiding an overburdening of the originally short and focused GDF format. These changes took account of the fact that the original format had been introduced with the aim of lightening rules that had had negative effects on the quality of the composition of and discussion in traditional tripartite sectoral meetings.
11. These changes addressed some concerns, but it became apparent that a more thorough reform was needed. In the light of these lessons learned and guidance provided in the STM Committee in March 2011, the following proposals are made by the Office for debate and adoption by the Governing Body.

Improvements at the programming stage

12. Given that the three types of meeting mentioned above have different characteristics, the Office will in future brief advisory bodies on the strengths and limitations of the different formats, in order to facilitate the selection of the most appropriate type of meeting, and to ensure that GDFs are not chosen to address issues that are not adequately focused to be discussed in this short time frame. The Office will therefore ask advisory bodies, when the proposals are discussed, to determine the purpose of a GDF. Advisory bodies will be asked to ensure that the purpose of every GDF is sufficiently focused, bearing in mind that they are short meetings on topical and well-defined subjects of importance to the sector in question, not a general review of trends and issues, and that not more than three points for discussion (plus recommendations for follow-up activities) can be discussed in a single GDF.⁷
13. Whereas all but one meeting⁸ have adopted points of consensus or conclusions,⁹ it was originally foreseen that not all GDFs would adopt a final output other than the report of the discussions. It is therefore proposed that, in order to avoid confusion and resulting problems, already during the discussion in the advisory bodies, a proposal be made as to whether the GDF should adopt points of consensus or conclusions.
14. The Office would propose that a maximum of two meetings (GDFs or any other sectoral meetings) be held in each semester, given the limitations of budget and staffing in the Programme and Budget for 2012–13.
15. Finally, it is proposed that the decision concerning the composition of each GDF should no longer be taken by the Governing Body, as is the case for Regional Meetings, but instead delegated, for this and future sessions, to its Officers in order to further reduce the number

⁷ See the timetable in the appendix.

⁸ The Global Dialogue Forum on Decent Work in Local Government Procurement for Infrastructure Provision (17–18 February 2009).

⁹ The Global Dialogue Forum on the Impact of the Financial Crisis on Finance Sector Workers (24–25 February 2009) had adopted conclusions.

of submissions to the Governing Body and associated timing problems in the event that changes to the composition are needed.¹⁰

Standard format for inputs

16. In the interest of cost savings and greater focus, the inputs into each GDF should be standardized. Issue papers should: be limited to no more than 20 pages in English, French and Spanish; contain the proposed points for discussion; and outline the most important elements of the issue, focusing on recent developments and providing facts and figures. In order to ensure wider ownership, and in particular the involvement of labour ministries and line ministries with a sectoral focus, the Office proposes that issue papers should be based on concise questionnaires devised through consultations in the advisory bodies and sent out to workers' and employers' organizations as well as governments, in addition to research undertaken by sectoral specialists.¹¹

Standard format for outputs

17. It is proposed that "points of consensus" will not be longer than three pages, and will contain a section for "points of consensus", a section for "points on which consensus was not reached", and a section on suggested follow-up activities, grouped in accordance with the points for discussion.

More assistance to participants

18. Government representatives, in particular, have criticized the lack of clear rules. For this reason, the Office proposes to establish a new and more in-depth briefing on the standing practice and rules of GDFs, as outlined herein, and to present this briefing to all groups at the beginning of the first day, and make these materials available online to assist delegates in their preparations for each GDF.

Developing draft points of consensus

19. In order to improve the drafting process, it is suggested that, at the end of each sitting, the Office (or the Chairperson) should make a short oral summary of the main points raised in the discussion and possible points of consensus. In order to inform the secretariat and correct any misunderstandings, the participants should be given the opportunity to react to this short oral summary before the session is closed, thus providing the Office with feedback that would then be reflected in the draft points of consensus.

Discussion of draft points of consensus

20. The adoption of the points of consensus has often been difficult because of the limited time for discussion in plenary. It has thus become established practice to remove from the draft any paragraphs that could not easily be amended to win the support of all three groups.

¹⁰ It is proposed that this delegation be a standing one until revoked, and not one to be made at the beginning of each Governing Body session or each three-year period.

¹¹ To increase response rates and in order to ensure wide participation, the use of IT-based services will be considered.

This has led to the adoption of points of consensus which, particularly in one case, were considered to be substantively very weak.

21. The standardized format for points of consensus proposed here, which was tried out in the Global Dialogue Forum on Safety in the Supply Chain in Relation to Packing of Containers (February 2011), would, however, allow for the adoption of points of consensus to be structured as follows:
 - In the group meetings scheduled just before the final plenary sitting of the GDF, the groups would have the opportunity to look at the draft points of consensus prepared by the Office in English, French and Spanish.
 - In the subsequent plenary sitting, the Chairperson would ask the GDF to adopt the draft points consensually and paragraph by paragraph.¹²
 - Should a paragraph not find consensus, the Chairperson would allow for amendments to be suggested from the floor. Should these amendments not find consensus, the amendment would fall and the text, as originally drafted, would remain without prejudice to the following principles.
 - Should a point identified as “point of consensus” be strongly opposed by one of the participants, the Chairperson would suggest that it be moved to the section “points on which consensus was not reached”. A final decision on placement would be taken by the Chairperson, in consultation with the Vice-Chairpersons.
 - Only in cases where the GDF would agree by consensus that a certain section of text be removed entirely, would the passage in question be deleted.
22. The previous practice consisting of deletion from the draft points of consensus of all those passages which could not easily be amended to the satisfaction of all three groups, would thus no longer be applied.

Designation of the Chairperson

23. Given that GDFs were a new format, outside chairpersons had been designated by the Office, in line with the standing practice for meetings of experts. Whereas this practice is helpful in the context of meetings of experts, where selecting a Government expert as chairperson automatically results in that expert being unable to participate fully in the discussions, it does not seem to be adapted to the realities of GDFs, in which Government participation is not restricted and all interested governments can participate. For this reason, the Office proposes that in line with article 57 of the Standing Orders of the International Labour Conference and long-standing practice at the Conference, as well as

¹² Decisions would be taken on the basis of consensus, as defined in paragraph 24 of the Compendium of Rules of the Governing Body: “... The term “consensus” refers to an established practice under which every effort is made to reach without vote an agreement that is generally accepted. Those dissenting from the general trend are prepared simply to make their position or reservations known and placed on the record. Consensus is characterized by the absence of any objection presented by a Governing Body member as an impediment to the adoption of the decision in question. It is for the Chairperson, in agreement with the Vice-Chairpersons, to note the existence of a consensus”.

the Governing Body¹³ a chairperson should be designated from one of the three groups, typically the Government group.

Other matters

24. These proposals are made taking into account the budget levels approved in the Programme and Budget for 2012–13. Other proposals with financial implications, such as the suggestion to increase the typical duration of all GDFs from two to two and a half days, have not been reflected. Although an increase in duration might allow for more radical changes, including the creation of a tripartite drafting group (similar to that in sectoral meetings) that would work in the evening of the second day to draft conclusions to be presented the following morning, such changes were not proposed since, owing to financial considerations, they would require that the standard number of participants for each GDF (six workers, six employers, plus all interested governments) be reduced to five workers, five employers, plus all interested governments to cover the additional costs, and would possibly require interpretation to be restricted to English, French and Spanish.

Conclusions

25. The above proposals are made with a view to improving the functioning of GDFs and would, if approved by the Governing Body at this session, be implemented in time for the two GDFs to be held in 2012 (on Conditions of Personnel in Early Childhood Education, to be held in February 2012,¹⁴ and on Future Needs for Skills and Training in the Oil and Gas Industry, December 2012).
26. *The Governing Body may wish to endorse the proposals for improvements to the GDF format made in paragraphs 12 to 23.*

Geneva, 6 September 2011

Point for decision: Paragraph 26

¹³ As reflected in article 4.2.2 of the Standing Orders of the Governing Body.

¹⁴ With the exception of the new format for the issues paper owing to timing limitations.

Appendix

Global dialogue forums

Standard timetable

[...]day, [...] [...]	[...]day, [...] [...]
08.30–09.00 Registration 09.00–10.00 Consultations (G, E, W) ¹ 10.00–13.00 Opening plenary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Opening statements – Adoption of draft timetable – [First point for discussion] 	08.30–09.30 Consultations (G, E, W) 09.30–12.00 Plenary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – [Third point for discussion] – [Follow-up]
14.30–15.30 Consultations (G, E, W) 15.30–18.30 Plenary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – [First point for discussion (cont.)] – [Second point for discussion] 18.45–19.45 <i>Reception</i>	15.30²–17.00 Consultations (G, E, W) 17.00–18.30 Plenary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Adoption of points of consensus – Closing

Key: G = Governments; E = Employers; W = Workers

¹ The Government group meeting will be opened by the Office, which will hold an in-depth presentation of the rules and practices of GDFs. This presentation will also be made available to the Worker and Employer groups, upon request.

² At this point, the draft points of consensus will be distributed in the three meeting rooms in English, French and Spanish.