



FIFTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

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

1. For the last three years the Governing Body or its LILS Committee have dealt with an item on the review and improvement of standards-related activities of the ILO at the March and November sessions. In March 2002, the Governing Body requested a paper on standards-related technical assistance and promotional activities. The present paper is intended to open a discussion on this topic, seeking further guidance from the Committee.
2. It has become clear that supervisory work should increasingly be followed up with technical assistance. This follow-up requires the commitment of all parties to find solutions to problems raised by the supervisory bodies. Promotional activities and assistance should be based on the engagement of all parties through close and results-oriented cooperation. This paper does not suggest any new supervisory mechanisms and procedures, or modifications to those that exist, but rather highlights assistance as a means of solving problems of standards application.
3. Improvements in standards-related assistance and promotional activities fall within the context of change in the external environment and the internal arrangements within the Office. Since the end of the cold war, the need for international labour standards has grown apace with the increased need for rules-based trade competition and fair practices in the globalized economy. It has become increasingly apparent that in order to be sustainable, development has to be based on rights. Standards-related technical assistance and promotional activities bring ILO standards into the development process and integrate them with the efforts of governments and the social partners, by means such as awareness raising, capacity building and sharing of knowledge.
4. The decent work approach is a development tool that should link the standards agenda with employment, social protection and social dialogue. The success of the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work has underlined the potential of assistance and promotional activities. As the ratification campaign for the fundamental Conventions approaches universality, attention increasingly needs to be focused on the steps that follow ratification.

5. The Office is increasingly asked to help ratifying countries to improve the way they implement standards, and this demand is growing beyond the scope of the available resources. For many years, the supervisory system has been good at identifying the problems of standards application. The question now is how to improve the abilities of the Office and the constituents to remove the problems that stand in the way of giving full effect to the standards.
6. Technical assistance, promotional activities and normative action are mutually reinforcing. Technical cooperation activities are carried out by different headquarters units, by staff in the field and by MDTs. The standards components in technical activities should be ensured by all sides, and sufficient assistance should be provided to improve the implementation of standards at the country level. Strategic programming, recently introduced in the ILO, can help. If technical activities are to reflect an appropriate standards content, standards-related indicators and targets can be developed under relevant operational objectives. Other ways to ensure the same goal are joint programming, and a requirement to incorporate standards in the planning and implementation of programmes at the national level.
7. All measures should rely on a dialogue with the tripartite constituents, leading to an emphasis on increased tripartite participation at the national level for any country-specific assistance. Such assistance would of course need to be agreed with the government concerned and with the social partners.
8. The overall objective is to ensure the greatest ILO impact through better implementation of international labour standards and improved working and living conditions. The Bureaux for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) and for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) can also assist this process by ensuring that activities reflect the priorities of workers' and employers' organizations in the country concerned. Cooperation between the workers' and employers' specialists and the standards specialists within the MDTs, should be reinforced wherever necessary.
9. Promotional activities and enhanced technical cooperation should also take into account the decisions by the Governing Body based on the recommendations of the LILS Working Party on Policy regarding Revision of Standards (1995-2002). These decisions include promotion of up-to-date Conventions, and invitations to ratify more recent Conventions and to denounce at the same time older corresponding Conventions.¹

¹ As part of the follow-up to these decisions the Office is setting up a database (to be launched in March 2003) – accessible through the Internet – that will include country profiles, i.e. information on the specific measures each member State is invited to take pursuant to decisions by the Governing Body. A follow-up to the decisions to revise certain instruments is carried out in the context of developing proposals – including proposals for general discussions based on the integrated approach – for the agenda of the Conference. In the context of enhancing the dissemination of information on standards policy the Office is preparing a guide on international labour standards presenting the decisions taken by the Governing Body based on the work of the Working Party and summaries of up-to-date Conventions and Recommendations. Promotion of and follow-up to these decisions is also to be ensured through targeted technical assistance and/or by incorporating this aspect in larger projects for technical assistance.

- 10.** The ideas raised in this paper do not constitute an exhaustive list, nor are they presented as answers. The notion of stronger links between standards and technical cooperation is not new. It is centred on the conviction that the ILO's role is to improve the implementation of labour standards. What counts is the impact of those standards, and different means of action should complement each other for that purpose. The LILS Committee is invited to elaborate on how this objective can be served by an increased use of technical assistance, cooperation, dialogue, engagement and promotional activities.

Geneva, 4 November 2002.