



FIRST ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Review of the Sectoral Activities Programme**Contents**

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Background

1. Following the development of the ILO's four strategic objectives and the subsequent reorganization of the Office, the Sectoral Activities Department was restructured and became part of the Social Dialogue Sector. This sector, under Strategic Objective No. 4 – strengthening tripartism and social dialogue – has the operational objectives of promoting social dialogue; strengthening the institutions of social dialogue; and strengthening the parties to social dialogue. Importantly, in addition to being an objective, social dialogue is a means of achieving the other three strategic objectives. The Social Dialogue Sector also includes the Bureaux for Employers' and Workers' Activities; the Government and Labour Law and Administration Department; and the InFocus Programme on Strengthening Social Dialogue.¹
2. In the Social Dialogue Sector, the Sectoral Activities Programme will play a key role in achieving the targets for each of the sector's operational objectives, through effective meetings and targeted follow-up action that will strengthen tripartism and social dialogue. Moreover, by carrying out a range of sector-specific activities on other issues, the Programme will contribute to the achievement of the other three strategic objectives and address the two cross-cutting issues of gender and development. Some changes might be necessary for the programme to meet its goals fully and effectively.
3. The Programme and Budget proposals for 2000-01 foresaw the preparation of a paper reviewing the Sectoral Activities Programme, "bearing in mind the operational objectives under Strategic Objective No. 4 and the need to provide more efficient servicing and focusing of sectoral activities and other sectoral meetings in the context of the ILO's strategic objectives".²

Introduction

4. The purpose of this paper is threefold. First, to inform the Committee of current sectoral activities in the light of the review of the programme carried out in 1995,³ which came into effect in 1996. In two biennia some 22 sectoral meetings were held and sector-specific activities, including follow-up on these meetings, were undertaken.⁴ Secondly, the paper examines to what extent the objectives of the 1995 review have been met and whether they are still relevant. Finally, it is intended to seek the views of the Committee on the conclusions drawn by the Office and its suggestions for any changes to the programme to meet the current and future expectations and needs of the ILO's sectoral constituents in line with the strategic objectives, without entering into another time-consuming review.

¹ GB.276/PFA/9, pp. 43-49.

² *ibid.*, para. 113(d).

³ GB.262/STM/1.

⁴ For follow-up on sectoral meetings held in 1996-97 and 1998-99, see GB.271/STM/1 and GB.277/STM/2. Other sectoral activities are covered by the annual reports of the Office for 1997-99.

5. A strong and relevant Sectoral Activities Programme will enable the ILO to maintain and build on its comparative advantage as the best forum for social dialogue at the sectoral level and as the best means to strengthen it, its institutions and the social partners.

Sectoral activities: Treating all ILO issues, one sector at a time

6. There are many reasons why sectoral activities have received special attention since the inception of the ILO. Examples are:
 - ILO constituents are engaged in different sectors and there are often unique problems and solutions to certain sectors or industrial branches of the economy;
 - collective bargaining often takes place at sectoral level;
 - about 30 per cent of all international labour standards deal with specific sectors (over 20 per cent cover the maritime sector alone).
7. Over the years the Sectoral Activities Programme has been dominated by the holding of regular sectoral meetings that provide a forum for the discussion of pertinent, sector-specific issues between those directly involved; an exchange of views; and the adoption of conclusions for appropriate action at the national and international levels. Such meetings bring the ILO closer to the real world of work in different sectors; they also provide the Office with early warning of new social and labour developments and the opportunity to advocate its approach to various issues. For the maritime sector special types of meetings are organized, often in collaboration with IMO and WHO. Occasionally the programme includes expert meetings which adopt codes of practice and/or guidelines. There is periodic collaboration with other agencies in organizing meetings in specific areas or in promoting various types of standards.
8. The other part of sectoral activities is the undertaking, at the national, regional and international levels, of sector-specific activities that have been identified as relevant in the context of a particular meeting or as part of ongoing activities and programmes. The latter is particularly the case in the maritime sector. Proposals for follow-up activity are directed to the Office, to governments and to the social partners. As described below, follow-up undertaken by the Office has often been affected by resource constraints.

The 1995 evaluation: Promises and practice

9. During a comprehensive evaluation of the Sectoral Activities Programme in 1995, the importance of the programme and of the Sectoral Activities Department in carrying it out were affirmed by each group in the Committee and in the Governing Body. The sectors were redefined by the Committee and the parameters for sectoral meetings were revised. The Committee stressed that, in order to meet its obligations, including preparing reports for meetings, acting as a focal point between the Office and its sectoral constituents and carrying out follow-up activity, the department needed to have sufficient staff with the required sectoral expertise.⁵

⁵ GB.262/STM/1, para. 7.

10. Currently, regular attention is paid to 22 sectors in 12 meetings per biennium and consequential follow-up activities. Under these arrangements, each of the 22 sectors that were agreed in 1995 – some of which encompass several subsectors – has a meeting every four years.
11. The 22 sectors selected for continued attention still largely reflect the distribution of employment, the world of work, the industrial classification system and the structure of the international trade secretariats; thus they remain relevant. There is also scope for other sectors, such as information technology and software development, that do not fit easily into the list, or for new subsectors, such as ship-breaking, or cross-sectoral industries, such as toy-making, to be treated on an ad hoc basis.
12. The 1995 evaluation promised:
 - smaller, more frequent meetings (an average of 20 participants from each group, ranging from 15 to 30, with a meeting for each sector every four years);
 - shorter meetings (five working days), a single report on a topic decided by the Committee, panel or round-table sittings in which invited speakers and/or delegates presented papers and discussed relevant topics in a less formal way;
 - a single Governing Body representative to chair the meeting (from each group in rotation);
 - the adoption of conclusions and resolutions (except where otherwise decided);
 - effectively, a limit on the number and length of resolutions that can be discussed.
13. Provision for symposia with no specific output and for meetings of experts for the preparation of guidelines or codes of practice was also made. All these reforms were put in place in 1996 with the objective of making sectoral meetings more dynamic.
14. The evaluation also promised increased follow-up activity (using cash savings arising from shorter, smaller meetings), more flexibility in the type of meeting and output, national tripartite delegations for the larger meetings, and using the two “spare” meeting slots to treat urgent issues out of sequence or to deal with additional sectors on an ad hoc basis.
15. The increased resources for follow-up activity did not materialize because successive budgets were cut to deal with the financial difficulties faced by the Organization, and recruitment was also delayed. However, apart from reducing the number of meetings from 12 to 10 in 1996-97, the meetings programme continued as planned. Meetings therefore accounted for an increasing proportion of the department’s resources – about half in 2000-01, and more in previous biennia. The partition of the costs of meetings across different budgets means that there has been little to gain from forgoing a meeting in favour of some other sectoral activity. The savings that would accrue to the Sectoral Activities Department would be mostly for specialists’ work-months, which could be used for other sector-specific activities, such as technical advisory services, information collection, analysis and dissemination, or research. Cash savings, however, do not accrue to the department for use in other activities not related to meetings (see below).
16. The Committee’s call for greater variety of types of sectoral meetings has been implemented to a limited extent. Apart from three symposia, two meetings of experts and two meetings with conclusions but not resolutions, there has been little flexibility in the number, type of meeting or output from the 34 meetings over a six-year period (1996-2001). In fact, the last two symposia were traditional meetings in all but name,

adopting conclusions focusing on ILO action. In three biennia there will have been only one meeting with national tripartite delegations.

17. No additional sectors have been selected for an ad hoc meeting, no sector has had an extra meeting out of turn, and no urgent meetings have been scheduled at shorter notice. Strict rotation has been observed in filling the programme each biennium. All meetings have been held in Geneva, generally on topics agreed at the previous meeting for the sector concerned several years earlier. The final selection of topics by the Committee is made half-way through the biennium before the first new meeting is held (i.e. about one year before the first meeting to be held and three years before the last). Proposals for multi-sectoral meetings have not been supported, with the possible exception of the meeting on municipal services in 2001. One result has been that meetings for several of the 22 sectors have dealt with much the same subject-matter (e.g. globalization, see table below).

Recent and forthcoming meeting topics	Number of sectors concerned
Globalization; structural adjustment; privatisation	11
Employment; training; working conditions; industrial relations	13
Occupational safety and health	4
Social and labour issues in general	5

The sectoral cycle: Identify an issue, research, dialogue, conclusions, follow-up ...

18. For most sectors, the inputs to meetings (research, data collection, examples and analysis contained in a comprehensive report on an agreed topic, also with regard to broader ILO issues and objectives) and the follow-up activity that arises from them (research, technical cooperation, technical advisory services, information dissemination, workshops, etc.) form the cycle of sectoral activity. This cycle comprises: defining, researching and analysing an issue; discussing it in a global forum; proposing and undertaking appropriate action at the national and international levels; and undertaking further research on new issues, leading to another report and the next meeting.
19. The cycle is logical and is consistent with the knowledge, service and advocacy approach of the ILO. Knowledge is accumulated, analysed and disseminated in a report and discussed at a meeting; a sector's service needs are determined, agreed and prioritized through social dialogue in conclusions and resolutions, then provided for in a range of follow-up activities, including technical cooperation, advisory services, information exchange and social dialogue. The advocacy of ILO values and objectives, including their sectoral dimensions, takes place throughout the process and is an important part of the Sectoral Activities Programme.

Selection of topics

20. The utility of examining broad labour issues along strict sectoral lines, while still considerable, may have diminished. It has certainly become more complex to stay on a single sectoral track in recent times. Topics for recent and forthcoming meetings show that several major labour and social issues are important for a number of sectors.
21. Although the same topics have been selected for a number of sectors, there has hitherto been no serious attempt to address them in cross-sectoral meetings, despite the trend in manufacturing and related services in particular, where sectoral lines have become blurred

as automation has increased, job demarcations have disappeared and evermore jobs have become white collar (even in manufacturing). Moreover, when whole processes are outsourced workers may suddenly be counted as service-sector rather than manufacturing workers, even if they do the same job in the same premises. A similar result is reflected in the reduced distinction between traditional public and private services. In addition, the rise of informal or non-traditional work has not been widely reflected in sectoral meetings. A recent exception was the meeting on small-scale mining, and the importance of the informal sector was recognized in the conclusions of a symposium on transport and a meeting on commerce.

22. When considering cross-sectoral meetings, however, care needs to be taken not to overly dilute the sectoral approach. Other ILO programmes address certain issues globally, and it is for the Sectoral Activities Programme to ensure that the sectoral dimension is retained. Topics that are valid and important for two or more sectors, but still sector-specific, need to be identified. It might also be appropriate to consider a cross-sectoral issue in advance of a new labour standard being developed, or to have a synthesis report prepared following the individual consideration of similar issues for different sectors, possibly followed by a representative tripartite meeting to draw cross-sectoral conclusions.

Links to the strategic objectives

23. Topics for the 12 sectoral meetings in 2000-01, which encompass a broad range of subjects, were agreed in 1998 before the introduction of the four strategic and two cross-cutting objectives by the Director-General. However, the Committee subsequently agreed that each topic was in line with one or more of the objectives, and the Office undertook to ensure close links between the objectives and the specific sectoral issues in a way that is relevant to the sector and the topic when preparing each report.⁶ Panel sittings are also being oriented towards one or more of the strategic and cross-cutting objectives. Follow-up action will also be targeted at the strategic objectives, with social dialogue the linking element.
24. Importantly, the inclusion of the Sectoral Activities Programme in the Social Dialogue Sector, with its three operational objectives of promoting social dialogue, strengthening the institutions of social dialogue and strengthening the parties to social dialogue, provides a powerful means, through meetings and follow-up, of contributing to achieving these operational objectives in a practical targeted way. Also, the fact that strengthening social dialogue and tripartism is also a means to achieving the other three strategic objectives provides additional impetus for closer sector-based interaction throughout the ILO – at headquarters and in the field. For example, it would be important to use the Sectoral Activities Programme for the promotion of international labour standards in general, in view of the direct relationship with constituents at the sectoral level. Similarly, the ILO's action on employment as a strategic objective could also be assessed at the sectoral level, thereby complementing other approaches.

Resource constraints: The limits to growth

25. The resources available within the Sectoral Activities Programme are for staff and for such non-staff costs as travel, external collaboration and regular budget technical cooperation.

⁶ GB.274/13.

The level of resources has declined for several biennia, and a fixed budget has meant that focusing more on one sector detracts from the attention given to others. More significantly, expenditure (staff and cash) on the preparation of reports for meetings affects the amount available for follow-up action. Other, indirect, expenditure (such as editing, translation, printing, interpretation) associated with meetings is not in the programme's budget. One item that does appear, however, is the cost of travel and DSA for employer and worker participants in meetings.⁷ In 2000-01 this amounts to about US\$140,000 for a meeting of average size. However, savings resulting for example from non-participation are not transferable to other uses; rather they are consolidated for use Office-wide.

26. If all the resources for meetings were fully managed by the Sectoral Activities Programme, the potential budget for non-meeting activities could be increased by using unspent residual resources for a meeting, or the resources freed by not having a meeting.
27. If merely the resources allocated for employers' and workers' participation in meetings were accessible and within the programme's control, the budget envelope could be enlarged. Choices could then be made of the type of meeting to be held and where, and even whether to hold a formal tripartite meeting at all. For example, national workshops are extremely focused and cost-effective, and have proved a successful precursor to the development and undertaking of specific activities with solid national input. The same could apply to regional and subregional meetings, particularly with the involvement of ILO area offices. Forgoing a single traditional meeting in Geneva could make it possible to conduct significant additional national or regional activities for the sector concerned or for a group of sectors, thereby getting even closer to constituents, focusing on specific regional and national issues and involving the field offices directly in sectoral activities. In order for these options to be developed and implemented, the Committee would need to recommend to the Governing Body changes to the way in which the budget of the Sectoral Activities Programme was structured.
28. As regards staff resources, the 18 posts for specialists in the Sectoral Activities Department are numerically close to the 22 sectors. However, as there are important differences and needs in different sectors, the six specialists who each cover two sectors must currently prepare a report for a meeting in every biennium. The restructured department also has four team leaders with additional responsibilities that take up a varying but significant proportion of their time. So while, arithmetically, each sector would seem to be adequately covered, this has not always been the case, and follow-up activities have suffered. Under the new departmental structure, however, different ways of preparing for meetings, such as using a team of people from inside and outside the department, will be considered in order to minimize these constraints and capitalize more on specific skills and expertise.
29. Many of the follow-up activities could also take place under the umbrella of one or other of the InFocus programmes (IFP), adding value to both activities without losing sectoral identity. This would provide a sectoral dimension to the work of the IFPs and the achievement of the objectives, and bring sectoral activities more into the mainstream of ILO work. Resources for follow-up from within the Sectoral Activities Programme could be leveraged by contributions in cash or kind from an IFP or one of the four sectors. The same could apply to meetings. An IFP such as that concerning follow-up on the *Declaration*, for example, could sponsor additional participants or observers at a relevant sectoral meeting as part of its work. IFP-related follow-up at the national level would then have a head start.

⁷ GB.276/PFA/9, table 12, p. 43.

30. This could also be the case for collaboration outside the ILO. The department is continually involved in bringing sectoral social and labour concerns to the attention of other agencies, employers' organizations, trade unions, NGOs, etc., and ensuring that they are included in any sectoral programmes these groups undertake. Cash and in-kind contributions from the ILO to such programmes could be considerably leveraged and ILO involvement would help efforts to meet ILO objectives and increase the ILO's influence. The Director-General has encouraged the Office to seek extra-budgetary funding for its activities, and such initiatives could trigger such funds. Individual donors are also being approached regarding the provision of additional funds for specific project proposals arising from sectoral meetings.

Sectoral meetings: Why? What? Where?

31. Meetings have remained the core of the Sectoral Activities Programme – the constant factor when other means of action have been curtailed – even though they are meant to be the means to other sector-specific activity rather than an end in themselves. Consequently, they have absorbed a major proportion of staff and other resources and the department has been labelled as a meetings department rather than being recognized as one involved in all the ILO's means of action. Meetings however continue to be important, particularly to the social partners. This has been stated in the Committee, and it is clear from the responses to the evaluation questionnaires for each meeting. Thus consideration needs to be given to the proportion of resources devoted to meetings and to the issue of whether meetings might be structured differently to enhance their effectiveness.
32. The opportunities that the ILO provides to discuss topical sectoral issues, exchange views and experience, develop and agree on ideas for national and international action and reinforce or make new networks are highly regarded. Indeed, the ILO is widely seen as the preferred forum for sector-specific social dialogue, and this has been achieved primarily through sectoral meetings. If it were to lose this position, meetings – and the ILO – would quickly lose their relevance, opportunities for follow-up would be diminished and the impact of the programme reduced. The serious question then arises of whether such benefits should continue to be achieved through a regular series of meetings or how they might otherwise be realized.
33. Nevertheless, consideration also needs to be given to how meetings might be further improved. The conclusions of two recent sectoral meetings have called, *inter alia*, for the establishment of a small standing tripartite strategy forum to “oversee the ILO's activity in the sector concerned”, or to “discuss global developments in a sector and their implications for employment, working conditions and labour relations”. The Joint Maritime Commission has been cited as an example of a successful vehicle for international social dialogue. The concept of such sectoral consultative groups was also raised by the Workers' group during the 1995 evaluation, but it was not generally supported. However, where sectoral employers' organizations that address labour and social issues exist (e.g. in the chemicals and shipping sectors), there has been successful sectoral social dialogue in and around ILO meetings.
34. If such groups were set up, what would they do that would not be done by the Committee or by traditional sectoral meetings? How would such groups interact with the Committee? Could such groups be multisectoral? Would they discuss sectoral issues (as is done in meetings now) and recommend courses of action (follow-up) at the international, regional or national levels? Would they take the place of Geneva-based meetings and lead to a more regional approach, or would they merely add another layer? How would they be funded? To what extent would their cost curtail other activities?

35. Since expenditure on traditional meetings has meant that less is available for other activities, there should perhaps be a sharper focus on different ways to stimulate practical activities with a measurable impact that would be equally or more attractive to sectoral constituents than meetings in Geneva. In other words, a choice has to be offered. Examples that would lead to continuous rather than sporadic social dialogue in structured meetings in Geneva include discussion groups on the Internet, video conferences, electronic and paper newsletters, as well as national and regional meetings.
36. A virtual conference, for example, could focus on any of the following: a meeting's principal theme, including the Office's report and related papers; panel themes; other sectoral issues; or follow-up activities. The forthcoming Joint Meeting on Lifelong Learning in the Twenty-first Century: The Changing Roles of Educational Personnel in April and the Tripartite Meeting on the Social and Labour Impact of Globalization in the Manufacture of Transport Equipment in May 2000 offer the first opportunities to organize an electronic forum. Draft points for discussion could be reviewed and agreed by a small group prior to a meeting and considered regionally before the meeting; a tripartite focus group could be identified during a meeting to monitor and coordinate follow-up activity by constituents and by the Office.
37. Questions that need to be considered include the purpose and objectives of a virtual conference in relation to a meeting's expected outcomes, its costs and benefits, its organization and its timing – before, during and after a meeting. The cost of virtual conferences could be financed from savings from previous meetings, or from resources for panels or follow-up.

Participation in sectoral meetings

38. Despite the expectation following the 1995 changes that larger meetings would normally have national tripartite delegations, this has not been the case. In fact, since 1996-97, governments in the Committee have not raised the issue when the choice of national delegations or group-selected participants has been made. However, having national delegations can provide more opportunity for pre-meeting discussions and post-meeting stimuli for national follow-up activities, particularly if undertaken under the umbrella of the competent ILO field office.
39. To alert governments to forthcoming sectoral meetings and to ascertain the extent of their interest in participating, the Office invites all member States to identify, in order of priority, which of the 12 meetings in the coming biennium they are interested in attending. When proposals to invite governments are made to the Committee, these wishes are taken into account together with the other established criteria for participation.
40. In 1996-98 government participation in 21 sectoral meetings was about 80 per cent of those invited, ranging from 65 to 95 per cent. For 12 meetings in 1999, however, it fell to 65 per cent (ranging from 50 to 78 per cent). In the sole meeting with national tripartite delegations, government participation was average (80 per cent). The proportion of government delegates coming from missions in Geneva was about 23 per cent in 1996-99.
41. On several occasions, when governments realized that a tripartite sectoral meeting did not necessarily mean that there would be three participants from their country, they declined to participate. Other governments cited budgetary problems or insufficient information about a meeting and its coverage in time to identify a suitable person. In this respect the Office now includes in its letter of invitation more information on the topics to be discussed. Some governments have withdrawn too late for a substitute from the reserve list to be invited; others have accepted but not attended.

- 42.** Arguments concerning national delegations need to take into account the importance of obtaining the best possible delegates from each group and an appropriate gender mix at each meeting (over the past four years the proportion of women participants and observers has ranged from 7.5 to 75 per cent, with an average of 17 per cent). The benefits of wider representation of countries through group-selected participants need to be compared with the degree of national cohesion and the possibility of generating greater impetus for national follow-up that could result from having national delegations, regardless of how the employer and worker participants are selected.
- 43.** Since, according to questionnaire responses, tripartite meetings are welcomed and produce a more balanced and credible output, the means to ensure adequate and active participation throughout should be examined. There are several options for increasing government participation in sectoral meetings. They include:
- obtaining the agreement of the Employers’ and Workers’ groups that the delegates they nominate will come from the countries selected by the Committee to be invited;
 - advising the governments of the countries from which the Employers’ and/or Workers’ groups have nominated participants and inviting them to send a participant or observer;
 - inviting specific governments in the normal way and extending a blanket invitation to members (and possibly deputy members) of the Governing Body, or to all member States, to attend as observers (member States can attend sectoral meetings, but they are not explicitly invited);
 - inviting all members (and possibly deputy members) of the Governing Body to participate. Any votes would be weighted;
 - paying part or all of the costs of some government participants based on criteria to be agreed. This concept is one that would have to be examined in a broader context, not merely for sectoral meetings;
 - the possibility of having additional participants attend, “sponsored” by an InFocus programme, was mentioned above.
- 44.** It is for the Employers’ and Workers’ groups to nominate or influence the nomination of delegates who will be active in advancing their cause concerning the topics being discussed and to ensure that the issue of gender balance is addressed.
- 45.** Notwithstanding their increasing role and influence in and around the world of work, NGOs retain (officially) only very limited opportunity to participate in sectoral meetings, including in the less formal panel sittings. There has even been a reluctance in the Committee for the Office to include NGOs in the information-gathering process leading to reports. In practice, however, NGOs have made greater inputs into some meetings than would normally be the case. This pragmatic approach has never distorted the balance of meetings, nor has it detracted from the input of constituents; in some cases it has thrown new light on an issue. Enabling relevant NGOs to put forward their point of view, especially in panel sittings, could provide extra food for thought for those directly involved in a sector. Dialogue would foster a better understanding of each group’s views. In view of their influence it would seem prudent to continue to have a flexible and pragmatic approach to NGO participation and to strengthen relations with them whenever appropriate.

Sectoral meetings: Inputs and outcomes

Reports: Benefits and costs

46. When, during the 1995 evaluation, a single report for each meeting was proposed, the intention was to produce, each four years (except for symposia and meetings of experts), a comprehensive report that examined the sector concerned over about a five-year period, highlighting developments and focusing on the topic selected for discussion at the meeting. The trend of having rather broad topics has meant that most ILO issues have been addressed and analysed and topical examples provided in a single report.
47. Thus the reports as currently produced have two functions – first, as a discussion document that focuses on the suggested points for discussion that were developed from the report and which lead to the conclusions; secondly, they are a reference work on the sector that is useful to a broader audience – outside the meeting – of those involved directly or indirectly in the sector. Indeed, taken over a period of years, the reports for each sector provide a unique social and labour history. More recently, their publication on the Internet has stimulated considerable dialogue and demand for them and for other sectoral material, and has led to further exchanges of views.
48. Despite the largely intangible benefits of comprehensive sectoral reports for meetings, the cost of producing such reports is considerable, both in terms of the time of those concerned and, increasingly, in money spent on consultants to provide specialized input (which absorbs the resources available for follow-up). Moreover, the amount of sectoral information now readily available on line means that more constituents now have access to material which was formerly not available to them other than in an ILO report. This proliferation of information also makes the author's task harder, as more careful selection and verification are required if analysis is to be complete, limits on length respected, balance ensured and value added by the Office to the information that is used.
49. Cost leads to the question of balancing the provision of appropriate input to meetings and satisfying the need for analyses of sectoral social and labour issues against other sectoral activities. Although a short report might lead to small savings in staff resources and in external collaboration, such savings will not necessarily be proportional to the effort involved. The preparation of a short analytical issues paper, for example, would require much of the underlying research to be carried out. On the other hand, limiting the input to a meeting to points for discussion would result in significant savings in staff time.

Reports: More or less?

50. During a recent sectoral meeting it was said that the information contained in the report was interesting but it was not necessarily useful. While this might reflect a shortcoming in a particular report, it is worth considering whether omitting or limiting the background information and analysis would detract from the process of dialogue, addressing specific issues and developing conclusions. Of course, a meeting could decide that a comprehensive analytical sectoral study was required. The topic could be identified during the meeting and the task included in the Office's programme of follow-up activity. There would be immediate benefits from this approach – from the process of social dialogue and from meeting people directly involved in the sector concerned – that would make an important initial contribution to such work. Some preparatory work would also have been undertaken in order to prepare an issues paper and points for discussion. The timely delivery of the results could be ensured by having the meeting set a deadline for the publication of the study a few months after it had ended. As an experiment, the Office

proposes to have a short issues paper for at least one meeting in the current biennium (Moving to Sustainable Development through the Modernization of Agriculture and Employment in a Globalized Economy). The paper will comprise a brief overview of recent developments in the sector, including statistics, an analysis of the topic and points for discussion. It will be for the meeting to determine the next steps.

51. The utility of combining the report for a meeting with the note on the proceedings of the meeting could be considered. There would be benefits for the reader in having a single publication covering the input and output of a meeting. However, restricting the distribution of a comprehensive report, or delaying its publication until after the meeting, would mean that much of the data would be even more out of date than is already often the case. Moreover, the public impact of the report and benefits from public pre-meeting discussion could be lost. Occasionally, considerable publicity for the Office, the meeting and the sector has been generated by a timely, topical report.
52. Some of these disadvantages are overcome through publication on the Internet, but for many people there is still no substitute for the printed page, especially in developing countries. On the other hand, an issues paper or simply points for discussion could be distributed to participants and interested parties before a meeting (and put on the Internet), then combined with the note on the proceedings in a single publication afterwards. This latter approach, where appropriate, would provide a seamless presentation of the issues and outcomes.
53. A mix of full reports, issues papers and points for discussion would provide additional flexibility in preparing for meetings and undertaking follow-up, particularly for specialists who manage two sectors.

Panel discussions: Adding value?

54. A major innovation of the 1995 evaluation was the introduction of panel sittings during meetings at which invited speakers – from the meeting, the Office and outside the ILO – have an opportunity to speak on a relevant topic and stimulate a discussion, but without seeking to reach conclusions or a consensus. The three panel sittings are generally well-received. Attendance is high from within the meeting, although less so from within the Office, and discussions are lively. Their timing, however, can mean that key persons in the meeting are otherwise engaged in negotiating resolutions or conclusions during these sittings. Moreover, lengthy group meetings can shorten the amount of time available for panel sittings with interpretation. The practice of limiting statements by NGOs and others in the plenary sittings has also been extended to the panel sittings.
55. Finding topics and speakers is time-consuming, but can pay off when short, interesting presentations on relevant topics expand the meeting's horizons and lead to a free exchange of views between participants and observers. The relatively small resources available to pay invited speakers has sometimes limited the choice of speaker.

Conclusions and resolutions: A good basis for follow-up?

56. Specific conclusions and resolutions can be a precursor to concrete follow-up at the national, regional or international levels by the social partners and by the ILO. The process of social dialogue, subsequent negotiation and consensus often leads to much of many conclusions and resolutions being general in nature, making it difficult to identify specific courses of action. Where they do specify what should be done, in order of priority, where,

by whom and when, both the Office and national constituents are in a better position to react.

57. Participants need to build on the stimulus of these texts to generate action at home. The nomination of contact persons during a meeting to coordinate follow-up activities could provide added impetus, as could the inclusion of relevant follow-up activities in the work of the InFocus programmes. ILO field offices could act as both the forum for the outcome of meetings to be discussed and more widely distributed at the national and regional levels, and as the focal point for generating follow-up action and disseminating the results. The contact persons could also work with national counterparts and the Office to trigger proposals and secure the funding to undertake them.

Towards greater relevance, impact and flexibility of sectoral activities

58. This paper has set out to trace the recent experience of the Sectoral Activities Programme and identify areas where changes could be introduced to ensure that the needs and expectations of the ILO's sectoral constituents and the objectives of the Organization can be met in an efficient and flexible manner. The Office believes that the following suggestions would lead to improvements in the Sectoral Activities Programme in terms of relevance, timeliness, impact, flexibility and integration with other ILO programmes.

Resources for sectoral activities

- The Sectoral Activities Programme should place more emphasis on appropriate follow-up and other substantive activities, and resources should be allocated for these purposes.
- The Sectoral Activities Programme should manage the disbursement of the funds earmarked for travel to meetings and for DSA allowances on the basis of 12 meetings each biennium. This would provide greater scope for determining where and what sort of meetings should be held, or what other activities should be conducted.
- Managing the other costs relating to meetings, particularly translation and interpretation, would provide even greater flexibility.

Sectoral meetings

- A more flexible approach to sectoral meetings should be introduced:
 - For example, the Office, after appropriate consultations, could propose to the Committee, in November 2000, a mix of regular meetings, symposia, meetings of experts, regional and national meetings, both single and multi-sectoral, of different size and duration for the 2002-03 biennium that fitted within the financial envelope of 12 traditional meetings for that biennium.
 - Subjects for meetings to be held in the second year of the biennium could be determined later in 2001 in order to ensure maximum topical relevance.

- Electronic sectoral meetings could be held prior to, parallel with, or following a sectoral meeting, depending on its purpose.
- If sectoral consultative groups were to be established, the resources for them would have to be taken from elsewhere in the programme. If they were self-financing, or took place in a virtual format, their budgetary impact would be small. Their role vis-à-vis meetings and the Committee would have to be determined.

Participation in meetings

- The governments invited to participate in each meeting could continue to be selected by the Governing Body on the basis of the established criteria, the level of interest they have shown in the programme of sectoral meetings, and their past attendance record.
- Employer and worker participants could continue to be invited by the groups but, by agreement, could come from the same countries invited to send government participants.
- Additional member States could be invited to participate in sectoral meetings, such as members of the Governing Body, either as observers or as delegates; in the latter case weighted voting would be needed.
- Where appropriate, additional participants could be invited to attend under the umbrella of an InFocus programme, either as delegates or observers.
- The participation of women delegates should be actively encouraged.

Reports for meetings

- The Office should adopt a flexible approach to the reports prepared for each meeting, depending on the topic and the opinions of the social partners concerned.
 - Where issues papers are prepared, their publication in final hard copy form could be combined with that of the note on the proceedings. In any case there could be a closer link between the report and the note.
 - Pre-meeting consultations should be held on the points for discussion – to agree the draft where these were the sole input to a meeting and then discuss them – including under the umbrella of ILO field offices.
- The publication of reports and other material on the Internet as soon as they are available should continue.

Panel sittings

- Panel sittings could be extended by having shorter group meetings, or by providing additional interpretation if resources could be found. Less formal panels, in a single language, could take place at lunch time or in the evening, if required. Additional resources for panellists would enable more guest speakers or high-profile speakers to be invited. Video conferences could be one way of expanding participation.

Follow-up activities

- A small coordinating group should be identified at each meeting to stimulate and monitor follow-up activities by the Office and by the social partners.
- Follow-up activities should be more closely linked with the work of the relevant InFocus programmes and of the ILO field offices.

59. *The Committee on Sectoral and Technical Meetings and Related Issues is invited to consider the issues raised in the paper, to consider and review the proposals in paragraph 58 and endorse changes to be introduced to improve the operation and delivery of the Sectoral Activities Programme.*

Geneva, 14 February 2000.

Point for decision: Paragraph 59.