



THIRD ITEM ON THE AGENDA

The functioning of decision-making bodies

(b) The Governing Body

Introduction

1. Possible improvements in the functioning of the Governing Body were discussed in November 2003. This was followed by consultations in January-February 2004 with representatives of the Government, Employers' and Workers' groups. This document summarizes areas of joint understanding and further work on the topic.

Basic parameters

2. There is a general consensus that the Governing Body should fully exercise its role as the highest decision-making body of the Organization between sessions of the International Labour Conference. To this effect, it must be in a position to deal with all strategic objectives and assure governance over all activities of the International Labour Office. It must give considered and well-prepared policy guidance, as appropriate through focused policy discussions. Due attention has to be paid to tripartism, through improved interaction between the representatives of the Employers', Workers' and governmental groups.
3. The main feature of the current structure of the Governing Body is appropriate: meetings of the committees, followed by the plenary sessions, at which, normally, matters discussed in the committees and submitted for decision would not be reopened. The importance of the work of committees as an integral part of the Governing Body sessions should be underlined.
4. Time management should be improved. All meetings should start on time, statements should not be repetitive, and congratulatory statements should be limited. Obituaries should be treated respectfully but avoiding excessive length. Information and communication technology should be used efficiently wherever possible, the volume of documentation should be further reduced, and documents should be clear and to the point, with executive summaries for any lengthy document. Documents submitted for information only, without a point for decision, should be relevant for the purpose of the Governing Body exercising its oversight role.

Further improvements

5. A number of specific proposals have been identified for improved efficiency and time management of the Governing Body. They are listed in paragraphs 6-9 regarding further improvements to the plenary; paragraphs 10-15 regarding the Governing Body committees; paragraphs 16-17 regarding the consolidation of Governing Body rules; and paragraphs 18-19 regarding interaction between the groups. Proposals for action or further discussion on them are included.
6. *The selection of items for the agenda of forthcoming Conferences.* The treatment of this item in the plenary of the Governing Body tends to be time-consuming without allowing for proper consideration. It might be possible for all groups to have a preliminary discussion, so that their positions would be expressed initially to the Governing Body. Before a possible second discussion and decisions, representatives and coordinators for the groups could discuss with one another with a view to reaching agreement. As a rule, this would concern the discussions in the March sessions of the Governing Body when the actual decisions on the agenda are normally taken.
7. *Policy discussions at the Governing Body.* It is desirable to enhance the policy-making role of the Governing Body through specific policy discussions. Such discussions should be well prepared and should lead to decisions on further action. Items for policy discussions could be identified and prepared by the committees. In the case of cross-cutting issues, the plenary of the Governing Body could have an initial discussion, and, in any case, it should formally decide on an item and the manner of its preparation. The Governing Body work programme would set aside time, for instance half a day, for the identified policy discussions.
8. *Discussion on committee reports in the plenary.* At present, the Governing Body does not normally discuss again items which are covered by the reports of its committees. The Governing Body could specifically agree to consolidate these rules and publish them in a suitable manner (see paragraphs 16-17 below).
9. *Information papers.* An extensive discussion on items submitted for information only should take place only upon request by a group or a certain number of members of the Governing Body, and in principle such a discussion should be held at a later session of the Governing Body.

Issues related to the committees and their meetings

10. *Committee agendas.* The agendas for each committee should be realistic, and there should be agreement on the kind of documents to be prepared. All committees should have a procedure for agreeing on their agenda for the following session, although later adjustments to the agenda may be possible in light of events and subject to agreement by the Officers of the Governing Body.
11. *Covering all strategic objectives.* Exercising effective oversight means that the Governing Body plenary and its committees have to be able to discuss issues related to all four strategic objectives. This raises specific questions as to the objectives of employment, social protection and social dialogue. Regarding the latter, the mandate of the current Committee on Sectoral and Technical Meetings and Related Issues could be expanded to cover issues dealt with by the InFocus Programme on Social Dialogue, Labour Law and Labour Administration.

12. As regards social protection, the alternatives are either to arrange the meetings of the Committee on Employment and Social Policy clearly in advance with separate agendas for employment and social protection questions, together with a decision on timing of the sessions to cover each of them. The other alternative is to set up a new social protection committee. If the latter alternative is considered, its cost and other implications for the Governing Body should be clarified. Such implications also cover the feasibility of Governing Body members and delegations to cover effectively the committee discussions.
13. *Simultaneous meetings.* There is agreement that there should be no other committee meetings parallel to any part of the Programme, Financial and Administrative Committee. Other committees can meet in parallel, but efforts should be made to ensure that the order of the committee agendas makes it possible for individual members of the Governing Body and small delegations to participate fully in major committee debates.
14. *Other committees.* The Subcommittee on Multinational Enterprises has already last November recommended to the Governing Body that it consider how to achieve a better balance between representatives of home and host countries of multinational enterprises in the Subcommittee on Multinational Enterprises. Further consultation may be required to give effect to this recommendation. Discussions on the work of the Committee on Technical Cooperation have also taken place.
15. *Issues related to IPEC.* Currently, the Steering Committee, which is tripartite and, on the government side composed of donor and recipient countries, meets in November. This meeting is not formally part of the Governing Body session. An oral report is made to the Committee on Technical Cooperation at the same session and a written report to the same Committee in March. The oral report to the Committee on Technical Cooperation in November seems to be superfluous.

Consolidation of Governing Body rules

16. The composition, structures and procedures of the Governing Body are at present not contained in a single text. Some are long-standing practices or understandings not specifically included in any legal text (regional distribution of seats in the Government group, extent to which committee reports may be discussed by the Governing Body, role of the Officers of the Governing Body, etc.), but rather spread across a number of documents or decisions of either the Conference or the Governing Body. Others are contained in the Standing Orders of the Governing Body, or in specific sets of rules (such as the Rules governing representations under article 24 of the ILO Constitution or the Rules of procedure of the Committee on Freedom of Association). In addition, some of these legal texts are not comprehensive and, in certain cases, procedures are determined by analogy (for instance the procedure relating to Governing Body committees, as express provision is only made in relation to the Programme, Finance and Administrative Committee).
17. While the need has been expressed to bring together into a single text the different rules and practices, the question arises as to whether this should be done by simply publishing in the same brochure all existing texts, rules and practices, or rather, more systematically, by codifying established practices into the Standing Orders of the Governing Body. If need be, a comprehensive version of the Standing Orders could be preceded by an explanatory note (similar to those adopted regarding the Rules for regional meetings or sectoral meetings) reflecting ideas or understandings that can hardly be codified into a text of a legal nature.

Increased interaction between the groups

18. *Government group meetings.* The Government group, including the regional groups, has expressed the desire for a more effective participation in the work of the Governing Body. Recently, the Government group decided to hold a meeting in advance to the work of the committees, i.e. the Monday of the week in which the Governing Body committees would be working, as well as its usual meeting the following week.
19. Communication between the Government group and the Employers' and Workers' groups can be enhanced through meetings involving the representatives of both non-governmental groups and the Officers of the Government group and the regional coordinators. As appropriate, the Officers of the Governing Body could also be involved in such meetings, which would be serviced by the Office.

Point for decision

20. *The Governing Body may wish to take note, and endorse, the practice and proposals enumerated in this document. It may wish to come back to the question of how to deal with the strategic objectives relating to employment, social protection and social dialogue at a later session.*

Geneva, 20 February 2004.

Point for decision: Paragraph 20.