



Governing Body

317th Session, Geneva, 6–28 March 2013

GB.317/INS/9

Institutional Section

INS

Date: 20 March 2013

Original: English

NINTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

The International Institute for Labour Studies

Report of the 55th Session of the Board

1. The Board of the International Institute for Labour Studies held its 55th Session on 20 March 2013. The main agenda item focused on a review of the ILO research activities in the context of the reform launched by the Director-General and on the Institute's role in that respect. The ILO Director-General chaired the meeting.
2. The Director-General recalled the discussions at the previous Board meeting as well as those during the Programme, Financial and Administrative Segment of the ILO's Governing Body, which had underscored the paramount role of strong research capacity for the future success of the Organization. While noting that much good work had been done, he highlighted the need to strengthen research capacity, consolidate efforts and overcome dispersion in order to make the Organization a "centre of excellence" on matters related to the world of work and to gear it to the delivery of quality services. The Institute would play an important role in meeting those objectives.
3. The work of the reform task team on research, statistics and publications was nearing completion, but no conclusions had yet been drawn. The Board meeting was an opportunity to reflect on future options. In view of the consensus needed for any consolidation of the Office's analytical capacity, he shared with the Board three alternatives which he considered to be the main avenues for moving forward.
4. They were: (i) concentrating and expanding capacity for research within the Institute; (ii) moving the Institute's research capacity into a new research department within the Office; and (iii) maintaining the Institute in its current form and creating a research department that would work side by side with the Institute. To a large extent, the third option reflected the existing situation and was likely to entail less radical change. However, it left open the question of determining respective roles and was inconsistent with the objective of building a critical mass for research.
5. The Employer Vice-Chairperson referred to the letter sent to the Director-General concerning research, statistics and publications at the ILO. He indicated that any decisions in that area should be guided primarily by the purpose of research activities. His group

considered that the overarching goal was to support ILO policies and activities through solid, evidence-based analysis. That would require critical mass. He was therefore in favour of the creation of a single body that would embrace key research and statistical functions.

6. Secondly, in terms of the nature of the research needed, an appropriate balance had to be found between analysis that would help to address the most pressing policy preoccupations and analysis of a longer term character. The ILO was increasingly called upon to participate in the global debate and that required solid analytical capacity if the most critical “day-to-day” preoccupations were to be addressed. The goal there should be to enhance the capacity to shed light on interactions between trends in the world of work and macroeconomic settings. That said, seeing those activities in a longer term context was also helpful. Indeed, it was important to promote independent thinking and forward-looking ideas. The experience of the last few years, marked by the financial and economic crisis, had put the ILO at the forefront of macroeconomic policy-making.
7. Finally, he drew attention to the resource constraints under which the Organization had to operate. Fragmentation was to be avoided, as it would reduce cost-efficiency. That was a further argument in favour of a single research body where the Institute played a leading role. The ILO was currently sharing the highest level of policy setting with other international organizations. Substantive, impartial research should help the ILO to put forward original ideas; that was very important in view of the lingering financial crisis.
8. The Worker Vice-Chairperson thanked the Director-General for his presentation regarding the future of research at the ILO. The ILO needed to be a centre of excellence in research and policy advice. She was pleased to hear that the Director-General shared the same view. In future, the ILO had to become more of a knowledge institution providing sound indicators of decent work and conducting quality research and policy analysis, of the kind supplied so successfully by the Institute in the *World of Work Report*. Indeed, the ILO had been very well served by the Institute and, if it were given increased resources, the benefits for the ILO at large would increase significantly. The Institute had not been afraid to present analysis that was topical, original, accurate and challenging. As the President of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) had said at a session of the Governing Body, “the Institute should be given the even more ambitious mandate of providing the ILO with a socially and environmentally sustainable development paradigm that is consistent with the values and objectives of the Organization”.
9. Raising the issue of the Institute’s unique structure, she said that its semi-autonomous status had served the ILO well. In the past few years the Institute had increasingly concentrated on day-to-day issues and policy advice and had focused less on more fundamental research of a longer term nature. When research activities were reorganized, the ILO might want to strengthen the role of the Institute as the purveyor of all prevailing wisdom at the ILO. That would be an enormous challenge. When moving forward, it would be important to adopt a more inter-disciplinary approach drawing upon sociology and legal research – rather than solely relying on economic methodologies, as had been the case over the past few years. The Institute was a natural place for collaboration with universities and other research centres and she encouraged further outreach activities in that regard.
10. As for the three options put forward by the Director-General, the Workers’ group saw merit in an approach where the general research agenda would be coordinated by the Institute, but where certain research activities would be carried out in the newly created departments, while other research activities would be performed by the Institute. Putting research in one place might “ghettoize” it within one department and would thus deprive others of much needed analytical capabilities. In the new structure, the Institute would play

a key role in delivering research in all the core activities with regard to the ILO. It should focus on longer term issues, while maintaining links to other departments. She also recommended a boosting of outreach activities for the *World of Work Report*.

11. A representative of the Government of France said that it was very important to establish the ILO's reputation as an internationally recognized centre for research and knowledge. It was vital to have a reputable flagship publication like the *World of Work Report* which enhanced the visibility of the ILO. He agreed with the Director-General that the ILO's research was currently fragmented, uncoordinated and lacking in critical mass and that the situation entailed a risk in terms of the quality control of its various publications. In the Organization's new structure, the Institute could pave the way to a centre of excellence because of both the nature of its mandate and its excellent performance – especially given its small size. With respect to the Director-General's options, he thought that the final decision should depend on: (i) whether the critical mass could be achieved relatively quickly; and (ii) whether the new structure could ensure high-quality scientific work. For those reasons, the status quo would probably not be the best scenario.
12. A representative of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran welcomed the reform process that was currently taking place at the ILO. To survive in a world replete with quality research centres, the ILO had to restructure its research and knowledge strategy. The leadership of the new research structure should remain within the Institute, given its excellent performance and recognized products. Meanwhile, the new realignment should focus on extending partnerships with other institutes and organizations.
13. A representative of the Government of Panama agreed with the Director-General that the ILO should be the centre of excellence for research concerning the world of work. To that end, the Institute's autonomy and independence should be preserved, as it provided reputable research on key matters related to the world of work. It would be advisable for the Director-General to strengthen the Institute by giving it critical mass and to allocate a budget that allowed it to fulfil its role and provide the ILO with the influence it needed at the international level.
14. A representative of the Government of Argentina emphasized that the Institute had been able to offer a better understanding of which policy solutions would improve economic growth while maintaining social equity through its *World of Work Report* and the research series entitled *Studies on growth with equity*. The Institute had played a valuable role in providing analysis and research on the challenges posed by the global crisis and its impact on the world of work. The intellectual inputs of the Institute's Director into research and policy debate in the region were much appreciated. The Institute must continue to develop its analytical capacity while also focusing on longer term issues. It should not lose its independence and free-thinking spirit.
15. A representative of the Government of Zambia welcomed the debate and agreed that there was a need to have strong capacity and freer thinking in terms of research. As for the three options, it would be useful to have research capacities in both the Institute and the secretariat.
16. A representative of the Government of Pakistan highlighted the role that the Institute had played in providing research into issues related to the labour market, particularly through the *International Labour Review*. Among the three options laid out by the Director-General, the third option seemed most attractive if it was necessary to maintain research capacity in departments along with expanded research capacity at the Institute.
17. The Director of the Institute thanked the Board members for their comments regarding the feasibility and practicality of the three options set out by the Director-General. As many

members had said, there was a need for the ILO to become a centre of excellence and solid, evidence-based analysis was crucial in that regard. The current fragmented nature of research would make it difficult to move in that direction. Critical mass was of the essence if the high expectations associated with a centre of excellence were to be met. The achievement of critical mass would also facilitate the diversification of research methodologies and fields of study, as well as the extension of outreach activities and an external network. Those were activities that would clearly benefit from pooling research resources that were of a cross-cutting nature. Concerning the nature of research, he favoured an approach where activities would address some of the most critical policy preoccupations while at the same time contributing to a rigorous longer term agenda.

18. The Worker Vice-Chairperson said that it was necessary to bear in mind long-term issues in future research activities. In all the scenarios and options for reorganizing research, close coordination was essential in order to ensure complementarity between the analysis of current trends and the longer term research agenda.
19. The Employer Vice-Chairperson highlighted the importance of coordinating research within the Organization. Publications like the *World of Work Report* provided a baseline of research into the situation throughout the world which the Organization needed for its day-to-day activities. Secondly, it was crucial to underpin the programmes of the ILO with sound research and analysis. For example, the Global Jobs Pact would have benefited from such high-quality background data. Thirdly, it was necessary to draw up a clear research agenda for the long term. It was important that the ILO balanced those three needs and for someone to be accountable. Close coordination and strong leadership were essential in that respect.
20. The Director of the Turin Centre said that, while the Institute and the Training Centre had very different mandates, there were clear complementarities between the two that could be further developed. The Centre could play an important role in extending the outreach of the Institute's publications and research. The Centre offered the Institute an opportunity to publicize its tools, methodologies and knowledge among participants in its training courses. The Centre had recently launched a doctoral programme which might help to boost research into labour market issues of relevance to the ILO. There was room for more collaboration between the Centre and the Institute.
21. The Director-General thanked the Board members for the extremely fruitful discussion. While a focus on change could be taken to mean that the status quo had failed, that did not apply in the case of the Institute, as members had pointed out, it had done a great deal of excellent work under its Director's leadership. Secondly, he welcomed the favourable reactions to the proposal to make the ILO a centre of excellence for research into world of work issues. A strong research capacity required the resources and staff that would permit credible engagement in policy debates at the highest level of the international policy-setting environment. Thirdly, it was essential to underpin policy with long-term thinking that looked beyond the immediate horizon.
22. It would be wise to consolidate capacity. Irrespective of how the new research entity was organized or where it would be placed, it would have to relate very directly to different parts of the Office. Quite understandably a debate was under way as to how much research capacity should be maintained within policy departments and how much should be centralized. Furthermore, he welcomed members' comments on enhancing the outreach to other institutes and developing a more multidisciplinary approach to research.
23. Lastly, the Director-General said that the issue of the Institute's autonomy and independence required further reflection. Autonomy in terms of thinking and research was important but it was different from autonomy vis-à-vis the ILO and its governing

structures. Regulations governing the Institute were not very clear in that regard. Finally, he thanked the Director of the Institute and his colleagues and encouraged Board members to continue to engage with the Office on the critical issue of how best to organize the ILO's research and analytical capacity.