



International
Labour
Office

Social Dialogue

> Finding a common voice



SOCIAL DIALOGUE SECTOR

What is Social Dialogue?

Social dialogue is defined by the International Labour Office to include all types of negotiation, consultation or simply exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers, on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy.

Social dialogue is the ILO's best mechanism in promoting better living and working conditions as well as social justice. It is an instrument, a tool of good governance in various areas and its relevance is not just related to the process of globalization but in general to any effort to make the economy more performing and more competitive and to make society in general more stable and more equitable.



What are the enabling conditions for Social Dialogue?

SOCIAL DIALOGUE	Strong, independent representative workers' and employers' organisations with the technical capacity and access to the relevant information to participate in social dialogue.
	Political will and commitment to engage in good faith in social dialogue on the part of all the parties.
	Respect for the fundamental rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining (as enshrined in ILO conventions n.87 and n.98).
	Appropriate institutional support.
	The representatives of the social partners should be recognized as equal partners by each other.



What are the different forms of Social Dialogue?

Social dialogue takes many different forms. It can exist as a tripartite process, with the government as an official party to the dialogue or it may consist of bipartite relations only between labour and management (or trade unions and employers' organizations), with or without indirect government involvement. Concerted search for a consensus can be informal or institutionalized, and often it is a combination of the two. It can take place at the national, regional or local level. It can be inter-sectoral, sectoral or at enterprise level.

Social dialogue institutions are often defined by their composition. They can be bipartite or tripartite. The tripartite actors are the representatives of governments, employers' and workers' organizations.

The most usual activities of Social Dialogue

>> NEGOTIATION

Negotiation is not only an integral – and one of the most widespread – forms of social dialogue. Parties can engage in collective bargaining at the enterprise, sectoral, regional, national and even multinational level.

>> CONSULTATION

It requires an engagement by the parties through an exchange of views which in turn can lead to more in-depth dialogue. The parties participating in tripartite or bipartite bodies can engage in negotiations and the conclusion of formal agreements. Some of them are only consultative and information bodies, others are empowered to reach agreements that are binding on the parties (e.g. Governments, workers and employers).

>> INFORMATION-SHARING

This is one of the most basic and indispensable elements for effective social dialogue. In itself, it implies no real discussion or action on the issues but it is nevertheless an essential part of those processes by which dialogue and decisions take place.



Does Social Dialogue differ from country to country?

Social dialogue based on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining takes into account each country's cultural, historical, economic and political context. There is no "one size fits all" model of social dialogue that can be readily exported from one country to another. Adapting social dialogue to the national situation is key to ensuring local ownership of the process. There is a rich diversity in institutional arrangements, legal frameworks and traditions and practices of social dialogue throughout the world.

What is the role of ILO in Social Dialogue and Tripartism?

The Declaration of Philadelphia encapsulates the ILO's commitment to participation with the statement that "the war against want requires to be carried on with unrelenting vigour within each nation, and by continuous and concerted international effort in which the representatives of workers and employers, enjoying equal status with those of governments, join with them in free discussion and democratic decision with a view to promotion of the common welfare".

Several international labour standards and resolutions of the International Labour Conference (ILC) refer to tripartism and social dialogue in connection with ILO technical cooperation activities.

These instruments not only provide for tripartism in technical cooperation programmes and projects as an objective in itself, but also as a management tool. They also call for the participation of the population concerned in the formulation and implementation of measures of social progress.

Tripartism and social dialogue are integral components of the Decent Work Agenda of the ILO and essential channels for achieving it. The Resolution concerning tripartism and social dialogue, adopted by the 90th Session of the International Labour Conference in 2002, invited the governments of member States to ensure that the necessary preconditions exist for social dialogue, including respect for the fundamental principles and the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, a sound industrial relations environment, respect for the role of social partners, achieving employment goals and improving social protection.

What is the role of social partners in strengthening Social Dialogue?

>> WORKERS

Workers and their organizations play a vital role in social dialogue. Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining are the two fundamental principles and rights at work, and are essential to the democratic process. Social dialogue is a valuable means of protecting and promoting the interests of workers by extending democracy and human dignity to the workplace. It is also a well-tested instrument for managing social and economic change while maintaining consensus and stability in society. Through social dialogue and collective bargaining, workers and their organizations improve their working conditions and wages, and, in many instances, have successfully expanded the scope of collective bargaining to include questions of workers protection such as safety and health at the workplace and social security schemes, workers' education and training, and even the participation of workers in the management of enterprises.

Trade union organizations at local, national, regional and international levels are the major means by which workers participate in social dialogue and as such serve as indispensable instruments for working people to improve their quality of life and to promote equitable and sustainable development of the society as a whole.

>> EMPLOYERS

Because they express the needs of enterprises in a way that no other agency or even individuals amongst their own membership could, employers' organizations play an important role in helping society to set the conditions necessary to achieve employment and living standards objectives. Employers' organizations help to enhance enterprise success by influencing the environment in which they do business, and by providing services that improve their individual performance. By providing enterprises with information, advice and training, employer's organizations contribute to their operational efficiency. As partners in tripartism and social dialogue, employers' organizations have a major contribution to make in building the relationships and understanding that must underpin the Decent Work Agenda.



>> GOVERNMENTS

Labour administration has two principal roles to play in social dialogue, whether tripartite or bipartite, namely those:

▪ *Of Promoters*

Under ILO international labour standards, labour administrations are made responsible for promoting consultation with the social partners and for taking appropriate measures to ensure that such consultation is regular and effective.

They suggest the **creation of specific procedures...within the national context...at the initiative of the government... so as to ensure and foster participation by the social partners.**

▪ *And of Protagonists*

Labour administration furnishes instruments to encourage dialogue between the social partners. It plays a variety of roles, including the one of employer in the public sector.

Labour administration must take part in tripartism as a partner, in order to encourage exchanges, carry forward the discussion and even to find support for its policies and actions. The content of social dialogue is clearly not restricted merely to "issues related to ILO activities", but include all matters connected with the areas of activity of labour administration at the national level, among others: "securing the social peace as a fundamental guarantee for boosting productivity in the world of work and furthering economic and social development...". Labour administration actions with regard to consultation at the national level should specifically entail creating consultation bodies attached to ministerial structures, as well as establishing permanent secretariats to ensure sustainability and efficient functioning.

How does ILO encourage its constituents to strengthen Social Dialogue?



By dealing with various labour problems and being present in the most accurate and crucial issues.

The relevance of social dialogue is increasingly recognized as the international community searches for appropriate responses to the challenges of globalization. With its time honoured tradition and competence in this area, the ILO is well placed to play a leading role in fostering the dialogue, partnerships and participatory approaches to decision making. It helps its constituents by:

- Promoting International labour standards concerning social dialogue.
- Promoting gender equality in each of its programmes and activities.
- Creating social dialogue indicators developed as part of the overall decent work indicators.
- Contributing to modernize labour legislation, strengthening labour ministries.
- By establishing a plan of action to operationalize the Resolution concerning social dialogue and tripartism adopted at the 90th Session of the International Labour Conference.
- By organizing tripartite and bi-partite meetings in several technical areas.

The Social Dialogue Sector

“Strengthen tripartism and social dialogue...”

>> INFOCUS PROGRAMME ON SOCIAL DIALOGUE, LABOUR LAW AND LABOUR ADMINISTRATION ▪ IFP/DIALOGUE

The IFP/DIALOGUE Unit aims to promote the benefits of social dialogue across the economic agenda in fighting poverty, strengthening the institutions of social dialogue, reinforcing the tripartite constituents' action to social dialogue and assisting member States in revising national legislation in accordance with international and comparative labour law.

>> BUREAU FOR WORKERS' ACTIVITIES ▪ ACTRAV

The mandate of the Bureau for Workers' Activities is to strengthen representative, independent and democratic trade unions in all countries, to enable them to play their role effectively in protecting workers' rights and interests and in providing effective services to their members at national and international levels, and to promote the ratification and implementation of ILO Conventions.

>> BUREAU FOR EMPLOYERS' ACTIVITIES ▪ ACT/EMP

The ILO's Bureau for Employers' Activities maintains close contacts with employers' organizations in all the member States of the ILO, and provides support to them in all their relations with the ILO. Its tasks are to make the resources of the ILO available to employers' organisations, and to keep the ILO constantly aware of their views, concerns and priorities. It promotes international cooperation amongst employers' organisations, and runs a programme of technical cooperation around the world which aims to strengthen representative, independent employer's organisations offering services to enhance business competitiveness.

>> SECTORAL ACTIVITIES DEPARTMENT ▪ SECTOR

- In recognition of the fact that many labour issues also have a specific sectoral character, the ILO developed a Sectoral Activities Programme as early as the 1940s. This Department aims to improve the capacity of sectoral constituents to deal equitably and effectively with labour issues in the sectors concerned. The Sectoral Activities Department promote through social dialogue an international tripartite consensus on sectoral concerns, promote harmonization of all ILO activities of a sectoral character and provide technical advice, practical assistance and concrete support to ILO constituents.
- 22 economic sectors are covered which are mentioned in the web site of the Sectoral Activities Department. <http://www.ilo.org/sector>

Who deals with Social Dialogue issues in the ILO?

Where I can find information on Social Dialogue in the ILO?



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