

“Written comments by Mthunzi Mdwaba on behalf of the Employers’ group**GB.340/PFA/7: High-level evaluations of strategies and Decent Work Country Programmes****Part I. The ILO’s strategy and actions for promoting sustainable enterprises 2014–19**

The Employers’ Group underscores the significant importance to the programme of work carried out by the Enterprise Department and that EBMOs and their members have been direct beneficiaries of various activities conducted by the Office, as well as tools such as SCORE, SIYB, and Get Ahead. Many businesses and business owners have received support from the Office to make improvements to their workplaces.

However, the work of the Office needs to go beyond the deployment of these “*legacy*” products. In parallel, the Office must enhance its efforts to work with constituents so that the overall operating business environment is conducive to the private sector’s development. A substantial shift is required in the Office’s strategic orientation towards building constituents’ capacity to influence the development of productive and enabling policies for business and their growth. The COVID-19 crisis is accentuating this need.

The Programme Implementation Report for 2018-19 shows strong signs of misalignment to where Office efforts are critically needed. The results achieved for indicator 4.1 is alarmingly below the originally set target (11 results achieved out of 24 targets). In connection, the Group welcomes the recommendation 2 which highlights the need to establish a more effective mechanism between the Enterprises Department and ACT/EMP. The Bureau plays a critical role in channelling the priorities, needs and concerns of EBMOs to technical departments and thus, consultation and collaboration is essential so that programmes and tools developed for constituents are indeed relevant and fit-for-purpose.

We question the “**relevance**” of the Office work on Sustainable Enterprises – the evaluation reveals that the Office is primarily focused on promoting products and tools to individual enterprises and not simultaneously supporting constituents shape a conducive business environment. Additionally, the HLE also notes that the Office is offering enterprise/entrepreneurship products and tools that increasingly do not match the needs of businesses. We request that the Office make a transformative shift to address this issue.

On improving the “**coherence**” of the Office’s activities and the associated recommendation 1, the evaluators rightfully highlight the need to better demonstrate policy approaches, the need to co-design interventions, and embed resilience into enterprise programmes. However, any new framework should undergo consultation with constituents and not be determined by this evaluation alone or by the Office. For example, the evaluation notes that the framework should “*integrate the ILO’s work into global supply chains and define strategic goals in this area*”. The ILO’s approach to GSCs needs to be re-discussed in the March GB (2021) and it is not for this evaluation or the suggested framework to define strategic goals on GSCs. The group also request that the strategic framework address “*support to enterprises to create and maintain decent work*” must be done “*with and through constituents*” and not “*directly*” with enterprises.

On “**effectiveness**”, a more explicit illustration would be necessary on programmes/tools deployed by the Enterprises Department to measure the impact being made (e.g. productivity improvement at enterprise level). Furthermore, even if programmes like SCORE continue to expand, the impact they have in relation to the number of companies in a country or region is insignificant. Supporting governments evaluate the business environment and designing public

policies make improvements will have a much greater impact.

On “**efficiency**”, the we underscore the absolute imbalance in the programme’s expenditure – only 9 per cent was spent on improving the enabling environment (key finding 16). We request the Office to rethink the appropriateness of the budget distribution considering previous guidance from the GB to more adequately allocate resources for policy-specific work on the enabling business environment. In addition, we reiterate the need to put an end to the lack of available data that tracks resource allocation. It is alarming that the Office is not in a position to calculate the investment made to individual programmes and the return/benefits to participating enterprises/workers.

The assessment made on “**impact and sustainability**” highlights that the Enterprises department needs to make considerable improvements to the overall approach taken to support constituents. The Office can no longer afford to discount the importance of measuring longer-term impacts of interventions made nor can support be provided without building local capacity of constituents.

In connection to the **Office response** made to recommendation 8, we note that the ILO Innovation Strategy is presented for the first time in this paper. The GB has not reviewed or adopted any Innovation Strategy so we would like to understand how the Office moved ahead with implementing the non-adopted Strategy and establishing Facilities for various policy areas.

Part II. The ILO’s research and knowledge management strategies and approaches 2010–19

Despite the magnitude of research and knowledge disseminated by the Office, the Employers’ Group has continuously voiced the need for the Office to (1) consult, engage and tap into the knowledge and experiences of constituents when conducting research, (2) develop research that adequately and sufficiently reflects the priorities and perspectives of all three constituents and (3) ensure the independence and integrity of research and knowledge generated by the ILO.

This HLE identifies and reveals a number of institutional and structural problems that have reduced the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of the ILO’s research and knowledge management strategies and approaches (RS&KM). Notably, the evaluation finds that (1) the RS&KM agenda is largely set by individual units/field offices and donors, not by constituents, (2) the lack of internal coherence regarding the understanding, structure and governance of RS&KM as well as the absence of workplans /dissemination plans hinder an effective Office-wide approach to RS&KM, (3) the Office’s compartmentalized work organization and culture leads to less than effective and efficient results, (4) there is no overarching coordination and insufficient prioritization and operationalization of knowledge management, (5) and there is less uptake of the ILO’s RS&KM from employers’ constituents. The overall scoring of 3 (“somewhat unsatisfactory”) adds urgency to concerted efforts demanded by the Office to fill the gap and ensure that the ILO is indeed the global centre of excellence for research and knowledge about the world of work that informs policy dialogue.

While the recommendations aim to address some of the institutional and structural deficits to delivering constituents-oriented RS&KM, the we express caution with some of the suggested approaches, including:

- **Recommendation 2:** The DDG-P Office is well-positioned to conduct the necessary coordination required with all relevant departments and units, including the Bureaux and field Offices, with its existing financial and human resources. Creating layered committees is likely to result in even greater silos within the Office. What is needed is strong leadership that harnesses a constituents’ oriented, transparent and inclusive RS&KM culture.

- **Recommendation 4:** Before implementing this recommendation, we request for a thorough review on the effectiveness and impact of the Global Technical Teams (GTT).
- **Recommendation 5:** While technological improvements may facilitate better collaboration, it does not replace the need to tackle the greatest institutional impediment that has been highlighted by this evaluation: “culture”. To address the compartmentalized RS&KM design and lack of coordination and consultation, the Office must invest in developing a knowledge sharing culture that recognizes and awards inter-disciplinary and collective efforts. In this regard, the Office response to promoting an enhanced knowledge management culture (in connection to Recommendation 3) not aiming at creating incentives to improve knowledge sharing and team collaboration unfortunately shows that there is no understanding on how to generate a collaborative, sharing culture from management.
- **Recommendation 7:** What is further needed is for the entire Office to integrate employers-specific needs, priorities, challenges into appropriate RS&KM responses and processes.

On several occasions, the evaluation highlights the “*good practice*” of the ILO’s RS&KM which includes the work produced during COVID-19. Firstly, the ILO’s response to COVID-19 does not fall within the evaluation period. Secondly, the relevance, impact and effectiveness of COVID-19 specific RS&KM would need to be determined by constituents and done so in a comprehensive way (e.g. by conducting a separate evaluation that examines the policy tools and knowledge products, and country-level support offered by the Office). The Group would like to inquire how precisely the Office meaningfully consulted constituents on COVID-19 RS&KM. Additionally, navigating the COVID-19 portal for information is a near impossible task. For instance, identifying relevant data for enterprises or employers’ organizations should be straight-forward if one goes into the section on “thematic analysis and practical advice”. However, the sub-section on “enterprise resources” takes viewers to the Enterprise Department’s web page, not to all resources that may be relevant for enterprises (e.g. ACT/EMP tools on COVID-19 produced for employers and enterprises).

Part III. Independent high-level evaluation of the ILO’s Decent Work Programme in the Andean countries of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 2016–19

On relevance, the evaluation highlights that “*constituents did not feel a sense of ownership of the ILO programming frameworks, mostly because they were not created in a participatory manner*”. This is a recurring challenge that has been identified in other DWCP evaluations, hence the Employers’ Group emphasize the imperative to ensuring that ILO programming is done in consultation with constituents. While the policy priorities identified in the Panama Declaration (2018) as well as previous regional Declarations underscore the need to create policies to promote an enabling environment for the creation and development of enterprises, more needs to be done to ensure that ILO programmes and projects support this policy area.

In a context that is not always conducive to constructive social dialogue (as noted in Par 94), social partners should have a more active participation in the process of designing the activity plans for the region. To this extent, the Group expresses the absolute necessity for policy departments and field offices to consult ACT/EMP from the design stage of programmes/projects so the Bureau can serve as a bridge and convey the priorities/challenges of employers’ constituents.

The Office should provide guidance to constituents on how it is making efforts to align the DWCPs with UNSDCFs and national development plans. The Group stresses that DWCPs should be designed

differently, in a more agile manner, allowing for today's pressing priorities, such as rebuilding the productive apparatus and re-generating employment, to be taken into account.

Furthermore, we underline that project offices are not an end in themselves (Par 120). Once project offices are created, they tend to search for new resources to continue working beyond the project's life. These projects are often not geared towards responding to the priorities of the constituents to achieve higher levels of development and economic and social well-being, but rather to satisfying donor priorities. The Office needs drastically transform its modus operandi so that projects are not donor driven but constituents driven and therefore greater synergies between projects and the Office's broader work can be generated.

We acknowledge the substantial support provided to ensure continuity to a work plan for FEDECAMARAS and enable Venezuelan employers to have an institutional reference. However, while Par 122 notes the achievement of the ILO's work in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the support offered to FEDECAMARAS by ACT/EMP should have been better documented in the evaluation.

In relations to recommendation 7, strengthening social protection systems and active employment policies must be prioritized. To do so however requires resources that can only be available if there is a vibrant, profitable, and sustainable business sector. These aspects should be comprehensively considered as the ILO continues to provide assistance.

Overall, the Group re-emphasize the need for future ILO work to apply greater emphasis on the enabling environment for sustainable enterprises as well as the necessity for social partners to be engaged from the onset of programme/project developments to enhance the delivery, implementation and impact of set objectives.

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