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Strengthening the field: key considerations from the Staff Union

The value of the ILO comes not only from its role as a standard setting organization, but also from its ability to provide technical services to its member states and constituents all around the globe. Implementing policy reforms, promoting ratification of ILO Conventions and ensuring the realization of the fundamental principles and rights at work requires a strong ILO presence in the field, close to constituents.

Accordingly, the Staff Union welcomes and supports the inclusion in the Governing Body Paper 'The ILO in a changing multilateral environment: Towards better effectiveness and efficiency' (GB.355/INS/7) of a proposal to **reinforce the technical capacity in the regions**, which responds to the calls from both field based colleagues and constituents to ensure that staffing in the field is fit for the delivery of ILO's mandate and priorities. This process however must happen in a strategic and evidence-based way which responds to the *actual* needs of constituents and field offices, recognizing the expertise already based in the field, and through proper consultation. It also must not come at the expense of the important functions on global policy at HQ.

To ensure that any reinforcement of technical capacity in the regions is responsive and effective, the Staff Union recommends:

- Engaging in **meaningful consultation** and dialogue with existing field-based technical specialists as well as chief technical advisors of development cooperation projects, who are well placed to input on the needs and gaps in current models. Field-based specialists, both regular budget and development cooperation, have a broad-based view of the demands and priorities across the sub-region/region and thus are well placed to help identify holistic measures to strengthen technical support to the constituents. Staff, not only management, are best placed to inform the needs of the regions.
- Conducting a comprehensive assessment of existing ILO technical expertise among **all staff** in HQ and the field, given the inherent costs and disruptions of relocations. Such an assessment should include regular budget professional staff **as well as** field-based staff, including regular budget technical specialist and national officers as well as international and national experts on **development cooperation** projects. Expertise

may very well be found in the field already, and from staff of diverse categories. Relocating technical specialists from HQ is not the only option.

- Ensuring any technical specialists deployed to the field are not tasked with continuing both a global role and supporting at the country/regional level, but rather are **focused on supporting local constituent needs**. Requiring colleagues to take on a dual role may very well result in hollowing out global technical teams and weakening the quality of service delivery to constituents.
- Protecting the roles of technical specialists to ensure deeper technical presence, not only an expanded DWT. Past cases have shown that in some instances when technical specialists have been posted to country offices, they have also been tasked with being involved in office management functions, at the detriment of focussing on the provision of services to constituents. The roles and responsibilities of technical specialists in country offices should be properly reviewed to **formalize the separation of managerial/administrative and technical duties**.
- Ensuring consideration is taken for **strengthening also capacity in coordination and support functions**, not only technical advice and support. Functions such as administration, resource mobilization, UN coordination and partnership development and communications must be proportionately enhanced as well. Increasing technical capacity without adequate support functions will impact the effectiveness of delivery to constituents.
- Ensuring that enhancing the technical capacity of the field **does not come at the expense of global policy leadership**. The robust and influential technical work at the global level, including through multilateral engagement with international organisations, remains critical for guiding the work carried out by DWT/CO field-based specialists.

Overall the Staff Union supports the proposal for strengthening technical capacity in the regions, but emphasizes the need for a comprehensive process of **consultation and strategic decision making** based not only on short-term cost saving measures, **but on the needs of constituents and expertise of field-based colleagues**.

We **still** believe in **social dialogue**

