

Annual Report of the Executive Director May 2006 to May 2007

During its third year, the activities of the Geneva Social Observatory (GSO) have included the implementation of multistakeholder dialogue on corporate social responsibility and trade, diabetes and social responsibility, and the post-Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA) environment. In addition, the multistakeholder dialogue on HIV/AIDS and social responsibility, which was the subject of the first GSO roundtable series in 2005, remains an important priority for the GSO. The continued publication of the monthly *GSO News* and the further development of the GSO website are other significant GSO initiatives. Some highlights relating to these activities are described in this report. The report concludes with some comments on human resources and steps being taken to achieve Swiss status as a not-for-profit organization.

WTO NGO Forum on Corporate Social Responsibility and the Doha Round: Are there Win-Win Opportunities for the Private Sector and Developing Countries?

In 2004, the GSO started its work on specific projects with a focus on corporate social responsibility and trade. With modest funding from the European Union and the Norwegian Government, the GSO organized a panel discussion on the subject at the first WTO NGO Forum in May 2004. The views and recommendations shared by the diverse representatives of business from both developed and developing countries, NGOs, trade unions and governments were featured in the initial reporting of the GSO and its participation in other international forums throughout 2004 and 2005.

In 2006 the Geneva Social Observatory and the Quaker United Nations Office were pleased to host a roundtable on “Corporate Social Responsibility and the Doha Round: Are There Win-Win Opportunities for the Private Sector and Developing Countries?” at the WTO Public Forum in Geneva on 25 September 2006. We recognized the growing importance of CSR globally and note how it was being channeled through such endeavors as the public/private partnerships for achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals or the voluntary initiatives of the UN Global Compact. Following the theme of the Forum, “What WTO for the XXIst Century?” we raised the following questions:

- Are the trading interests of multinational enterprises and developing country governments diametrically opposed or is it possible to discern a positive relationship leading to economic growth and development?
- In looking for a win-win scenario, what are the circumstances that need to be met for a positive relationship to be achieved?

The roundtable helped to promote dialogue on the interaction between private sector interests in the liberalization of trade and developing country interests in economic growth and development. The objectives of the dialogue were to facilitate a better understanding of the particular needs of developing countries for sustainable growth, as well as an enhanced awareness of the value of a development perspective in the private sector. The roundtable brought representatives from multinationals and trade associations together with trade negotiators from developing and least developed countries to debate these issues. A summary of the dialogue, with recommendations for further action in this area, has been disseminated by the GSO and has been featured in GSO News reports.

The GSO Roundtable Series on *Diabetes and Social Responsibility*

The GSO convened a multi-stakeholder dialogue on “Diabetes and Social Responsibility” through a series of roundtables (1) to highlight the importance of addressing the global epidemic of diabetes (and related chronic diseases) within the workforce, (2) to identify the changing roles and responsibilities of human resources managers, occupational safety and health experts, health care professionals, labor relations specialists and other stakeholders in the workplace, and (3) to develop policy recommendations for global and national action as well as public/private partnerships. Phase 1 of the roundtable series was concluded on Monday 15 January 2007.

Faced with a dramatic increase in diabetes around the world, especially among people in the prime of their working lives, roundtable participants acknowledged the gravity of the pandemic and developed an action plan and global policy recommendations. Most urgently, the group proposed the establishment of a skeleton protocol for individual companies to adopt. The protocol is envisioned to include company strategies for prevention of diabetes, especially through the promotion of physical activity and healthier diets, and policies on screening for diabetes. Other parts of the protocol should address non-discrimination and the accommodation of people living with diabetes, as well as the basic ingredients for an early intervention-and-treatment programme. The group also recognizes that the development of such a protocol requires a preliminary compilation of evidence on the economic impact of diabetes in the workplace.

The Geneva Social Observatory is being called upon by the Planning Committee for this series to integrate the action plan and policy recommendations into a report for presentation to health and labour relations professionals during the World Health Assembly and the International Labour Conference in May and June. The publication will complete Phase 1 of this project with its focus on the world of work and set the stage for a continuation into Phase 2 in which the focus on the world of work will be broadened to encompass the relationship of the workplace to families and communities.

Other recommendations from Phase 1 propose new and innovative partnerships for working with health professionals, patient groups and the food and beverage industries. Noting the prevalence of the epidemic in developing countries, where clinical treatment options are limited, roundtable participants have also urged the creation of global/local partnerships to empower community-based approaches to prevention and treatment.

Exploratory dialogue on Promoting fair trade and labour standards in the post-MFA environment

In cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and with funding from FES, a meeting was convened on Tuesday, 27 February 2007 in the Press Room, World Meteorological Organization, Geneva, Switzerland for an exploratory dialogue. The objectives of this exploratory dialogue were to:

- Identify what policies and practices in the issues described below will benefit most from multi-stakeholder dialogue as well as to identify others
- Enable the conveners and participants to sharpen their perspectives on these issues and stakeholder involvement
- Prepare a GSO/FES report on the issues highlighting the diversity of perspectives and the possible range of policies and practices
- Define specific issues for further dialogue on promoting fairer trade and employment in the post-MFA environment
- Build collaborative working partnerships between stakeholders for on-going collaboration in a future programme

The participants were encouraged to reflect on the policies and practices relating to the three discussion areas - trade measures to improve market access for vulnerable countries, technical assistance to improve competitiveness and for adjustment purposes, and the role of labour standards in improving productivity and consumer demand. As these issue areas were addressed, the participants were able to sharpen their perspectives and understand better the nature of stakeholder involvement in each issue area. While the entire exploratory dialogue was off-the-record, allowing participants to speak freely and without attribution, a general summary of the discussion has been prepared to highlight the diversity of perspectives and the range of policies and practices. Through a concluding brainstorming session at the end of the programme, specific issues were defined for further dialogue on promoting fairer trade and employment in the post-MFA environment. The summary and recommendations have been published by FES and are available on the FES and GSO websites.

The dialogue has helped to promote the building of collaborative working partnerships between stakeholders for on-going collaboration. Thus, this exploratory dialogue served as a prelude for a longer-term programme of dialogue on constructive solutions for sustainable economic and social development in a post-MFA environment. A follow-up GSO proposal is currently being prepared.

Further Reflections on *HIV/AIDS and Social Responsibility*

HIV/AIDS and Social Responsibility was the subject of the first GSO roundtable series, completed in 2005. The umbrella action plan and related methodology for outreach to the informal economy in Africa were featured in GSO presentations organized by the ILO and the World Bank at the 2005 Abuja conference of ICASA. Subsequently, GSO also shared its action plan and methodology at a workshop on working with the informal economy during the International AIDS Conference in Toronto, Canada in August 2006. This remains an area of interest for the GSO, although the focus has shifted to implementation of the action plan and methodology in specific countries and with specific partners. Such implementation is more appropriately handed off to other entities, but it may be necessary for the GSO to reinvigorate the effort.

Ongoing Programmes: *GSO News*

The *GSO News* provides insights into the dynamics of social issues as they affect and are affected by the key players on the Geneva scene. In addition, the monthly journal aspects of the *GSO News* are supplemented by occasional in-depth commentaries on topical issues. An abbreviated version of the *GSO News*, called the *GSO News Digest* is available free to anyone who would like to receive it. The full version of the *GSO News*, including the in-depth commentaries, is offered on a subscription basis. The subscription fees are modest.

The GSO is a neutral forum for information-sharing, dialogue and action on global social issues. Hence the *GSO News* is dedicated to balanced reporting and research on targeted social issues. In addition to occasional in-depth reports, the monthly *GSO News* features news on developments at WHO, WTO, ILO and many other Geneva-based organizations, as well as other selected developments on global social issues. This is a subscription service for ten issues a year, prepared on a monthly basis with the exception of August and January. It offers detailed news articles on ten to twelve events of interest, leadership changes in the major organizations, and a listing of forthcoming events. This is sent out to subscribers electronically. A separate *GSO News Digest* with a short sentence on each covered event is sent out electronically to a larger list of non-subscribers with an invitation to subscribe. Back issues of *GSO News* are eventually posted on the GSO website.

Ongoing programmes: *GSO Website*

At the request of several participants during the first and second phases of the GSO program on HIV/AIDS and Social Responsibility, the GSO was able to introduce its own website. The GSO website was launched on 15 March 2006. The website has made it possible to place all of the reports of GSO projects and events and related project materials. It is also where all issues of *GSO News* are catalogued and made available to the public. The GSO website may be found at www.gsogeneva.ch.

The overall aim of developing the GSO website is to promote the work and mission of the GSO. As the GSO and our projects have grown, so has the need to develop the content and capabilities of the GSO website.

Human Resources of GSO

The Geneva Social Observatory has been fortunate to have a wide array of supporters who have contributed their time to GSO programmes. The most substantial contribution of time has come from HRI, and efforts have been made to cover the costs incurred by HRI, at least in terms of specific project outputs. Basic outreach and programme support of the newsletter and website have not been adequately funded, and the burden has rested on HRI for these services. A core funding proposal has been prepared and will soon be used to solicit new sources of funding for these basic outreach services.

In addition, members of the GSO Management Committee have been actively involved in specific endeavours for the GSO – mobilizing funding for the roundtable series on Diabetes and Social Responsibility or facilitating joint ventures like the WTO panel with QUNO or the post-MFA exploratory dialogue with Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Others have offered their expertise on budgeting, auditing, or preparing articles for *GSO News*.

Turnover in the Committee has included the resignation of Stuart Robinson and the departure of Bernice Lee to new opportunities in London. This is also the first full year of the services of Martin Watson as President, and he has pitched in most generously to develop the organization with both project and budgeting support as well as leadership of the Committee.

Statutory Changes

The GSO has initiated the process for establishing its status as a not-for-profit organization in Switzerland. Amendments were approved for compliance with Swiss law in November 2006, and further amendments have been proposed for approval in May 2007. The GSO is grateful to John Iglehart, attorney at law in Geneva, for continuing so ably to guide the organization through these necessary steps for establishing its legal status as a not-for-profit organization.