



Geneva Social Observatory Activity Report

Fourth Quarter
December 2009

Mission

The Geneva Social Observatory (GSO) was established in Geneva, Switzerland in 2004 as a non-profit association. The aim of the GSO is to provide a neutral setting for dialogue on pressing social issues, such as HIV/AIDS and social responsibility, diabetes and social responsibility, and corporate social responsibility and trade. In order to have substantive discussions on these issues, the GSO believes that multiple points of view should be consulted, which is why representatives from the private sector, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, academia, governments and international intergovernmental organizations are invited to take part in the GSO meetings and events.

Activity Report

This activity report is developed on a quarterly basis for the Friends of the GSO, who support the Observatory through donations, sponsorship of specific projects, in-kind support, and/or participation in GSO events.

Dear Friends of the GSO,

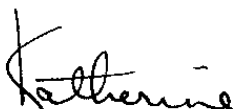
This has been a relatively quiet quarter for the GSO, with planning underway for our next steps in implementing the GSO Workplace Strategy on Diabetes and Wellness in Poland, Russia and Turkey. We have had great introductory workshops in Poland (2 June) and Russia (15 September) and an in-depth seminar in Turkey (20 to 21 June). The networking with occupational health and diabetes experts in these countries has been truly inspiring, and we look forward to building on these networks to support further outreach to specific workplace settings in 2010. Final reports have been translated into the national language of each country and are available on our website at www.gsogeneva.ch. We hope to produce country-specific strategies and organize pilot projects in each country, and we are expecting to add an introductory programme in Serbia early next year, too. Again our thanks to Merck/MSD for their unrestricted grant in 2009 and to the EU and the ILO for their support as well.

As for new directions for the GSO, the GSO Management Committee instructed us to explore further the learning points from the diabetes project and to apply them to project development in the future. Continued interest was expressed by Committee members in a broadened look at disability issues in the workplace, building on the experience in the diabetes project, and also in the counterfeiting issue, for which we held an initial brainstorming session this quarter.

We have continued to benefit from the excellent contributions of our volunteer interns - Alison Curtis from Ohio State University and Deenah Shutzer from Boston University were with us this quarter. They monitored and reported on meetings at the WTO, UNCTAD, ILO and WIPO.

We will keep you posted on new developments. In the meantime we encourage you to continue to support the GSO as we build our current projects and initiate new and more initiatives in coming years. For more information on how to contribute, please visit the "Support GSO" page on our website at www.gsgogeneva.ch or write to me at contact@gsogeneva.ch.

Thank you,



Katherine Hagen
Executive Director, Geneva Social Observatory

The Brainstorming Exercise on Counterfeiting

With support from GSO President Deborah Vorhies, we held a brainstorming lunch with Management Committee members on 25 September to discuss how counterfeiting has developed as an issue sparking controversy among a number of developing country governments and NGOs. We benefited in particular from the expertise of David Vivas-Engui, who described the history of the controversy, emanating from counterfeits as equivalent to trademark violations but now broadened to include patent violations and also fraudulent drugs that deviate from the certified ingredients that they claim to deliver. Merging of the issues has resulted from attempts to merge the enforcement agenda with IP violations. The local generic industries have also conflicted with multinationals over the matter of international standards.

The most pressing issue that might be developed by the GSO is how to separate out the problem of fraudulent drugs from the rest of the controversies. We might look to facilitating a neutral setting for educating stakeholders – governments, health professionals, retailers, patients' groups, the general public – without promoting confrontation. The group agreed to explore this for a Geneva roundtable series but with outreach possibilities to specific country settings. For discussion, the Committee is looking at the following draft for project development:

Preliminary Project Development on Combating the Dangers of Fraudulent Drugs

Nature of the problem

Among the most important problems facing the attainment of the goal of health for all, is the growing production and marketing of fraudulent drugs. Fraudulent drugs are being especially made available in developing countries where poverty and health illiteracy often combine to make consumers vulnerable to drugs that – while cheaper than the real versions – are nevertheless substandard and often have few if any pharmacologically active ingredients relevant to the conditions they are prescribed or sold for. Where these drugs are used there is a high risk of treatment failure and/or drug-resistance. In part the problem lies with poor national quality control systems and the fact that many countries simply do not have the infrastructures required to ensure that these products are not put on the market.

Aim

The aim of this initiative is to work toward improving the awareness of national health authorities and the public about the dangers of fraudulent drugs and to work with them in creating awareness campaigns on this issue.

Methodology

GSO proposes to work with a number of small developing countries and partners to:

- compile data and publish a report on the scope and impact of the problem;
- organize a series of meetings with national health authorities to review the report;
- organize a series of meetings with international quality control authorities;
- organize a series of meetings with consumer protection groups on strategies;
- prepare a series of public information documents and pre-test them in countries;
- report to the WHO and its World Health Assembly on progress and impact.

Timeplan

GSO proposes to undertake this project over a three year period with progress reports made available at the end of each calendar year.

The GSO Management Committee is meeting again on 19 February 2010 to discuss this draft and developing a proposal. More information about this and other GSO projects can be found on the GSO website, www.gsogeneva.ch. To participate, or to contribute either financially and/or in-kind, please write to contact@gsogeneva.ch or call the GSO secretariat at +41 22 734 9601.



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