



Annual Report for May 2008 to May 2009

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**Annual Report of the Executive Director
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During its fifth year, the activities of the Geneva Social Observatory (GSO) have focused on the implementation of the outcome of a multistakeholder dialogue on diabetes and social responsibility. Phase One of this project was completed with a major publication of the preliminary roundtable series and presentations of the report in connection with the World Health Assembly in May 2007 and the International Labour Conference in June 2007. Phase Two of the project involved the development and validation of a Workplace Strategy for Diabetes and Wellness, starting with a two-day workshop in March 2008 and culminating with a special GSO Forum on 25 September 2008. The GSO has now entered into a new implementation phase to introduce the Workplace Strategy in specific countries and to launch pilot projects in specific workplace settings. This is a significant broadening in the focus of the GSO.

Meanwhile, the GSO Management Committee has been looking at the long-term benefit of the core mission of the GSO in facilitating a neutral space for multi-stakeholder dialogue on contentious social issues. A particular niche filled by the GSO is in the linkage of health and workplace issues. With the understanding that the current global financial and economic crisis is calling for new ideas, the Committee has identified some general areas for further consideration. These will benefit from the outreach to the “Friends of the GSO” at the annual General Assembly session and other opportunities for multi-stakeholder roundtable sessions among the key Geneva-based players.

Finally, this report provides updates on changes in the GSO leadership and new office arrangements. Also, at the annual General Assembly of the GSO in May 2008, a quarterly GSO Activity Report and an updated GSO website were featured. Further refinements to enhance information flow have been made to the GSO website, as noted in this report. The report concludes with confirmation of the acceptance of the GSO as an NGO observer with consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council and separately as an NGO with access to the WTO building.

The GSO Project on *Diabetes and Social Responsibility*

The GSO has prepared a **Workplace Strategy on Diabetes and Wellness** through extensive multi-stakeholder consultations culminating in a validation forum on 25 September 2008. The wide-ranging consultations have included experts from the International Labour Organization, the World Health Organization, NGOs representing health professionals and patients' groups, trade unions, private companies, diplomatic missions, and academics. The **GSO Workplace Strategy** provides a carefully crafted template for concerned parties to use as the basis for specific workplace interventions. In the course of the two-year consultation process, the GSO also gathered comprehensive data on diabetes and workplace initiatives to support the GSO Strategy.

At the September Forum, participants heard presentations on existing wellness programmes at BT in the UK and at Nestlé as well as presentations on the challenges of implementing the strategy in India, Mauritius and Swaziland. Working groups then finalized the details and suggested regional adaptations for Africa and Asia of the draft strategy. At the end of the Forum, the **GSO Workplace Strategy** was adopted by participants, focusing on the following four main components:

- The world of work is an ideal place to **disseminate information** and to improve general knowledge about the diabetes epidemic and what can be done about it.
- There are steps that can be taken to **mobilize for action**, to develop better data and risk assessments through the working environment.
- The strategy identifies the range of interventions to **manage the monitoring and treatment** of the diabetic condition.
- The strategy concludes with a menu of options that can and should be taken to **maintain a healthy work environment** and to promote wellness in order to prevent and mitigate the onset of the diabetic condition among people in the world of work.

Forum participants have received a final report of the Forum and the final **GSO Workplace Strategy on Diabetes and Wellness**. They have been encouraged to disseminate and adapt the Strategy through their respective organizations.

Immediately following the Forum, the GSO was asked to consider how it might implement the Strategy by adapting it to specific pilot projects. Funding has been provided for workshops and/or seminars to pursue this objective in Poland, Russia and Turkey. These will be carried out in June (Poland and Turkey) and September (Russia), with the following approach:

Phase I: Formulation. The GSO project team is reviewing and adapting the **GSO Workplace Strategy** to regional and national, or sector-specific circumstances, and is initiating the networking and laying the ground work for dissemination and implementation.

Phase II: Dissemination. The GSO project team is working with local institutes or consultants to convene one or more **Workshops or Seminars** to present the **GSO Workplace Strategy** through a region-specific or sector-specific Strategy paper. Participants are being invited from relevant government offices, institutions, associations, organizations and management of selected enterprises, to review the specific Strategy and identify steps toward implementation. Specific workplace settings will be identified for piloting the Strategy. This phase will culminate in the preparation of a final implementation plan.

Phase III: Implementation. The GSO project team will work with representatives from relevant administrative organizations and specific workplace settings to apply the implementation plan in the specific workplace settings. The team will assist in establishing and operating **On-site Programmes** or other workplace-related initiatives as identified by Workshop participants. Implementation will also include guidance on impact assessment and sustainability of each initiative.

Management Committee Reflections

At the 2008 General Assembly, members urged the GSO Management Committee to consider the longer-term benefit of the important place of the GSO in facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue in Geneva. A particular niche filled by the GSO is in the linkage of health and workplace issues. With the understanding that the current global financial and economic crisis is calling for new ideas, the Committee has identified some general areas for further consideration.

First, there has been a strong commitment from the beginning of the GSO to supporting multi-stakeholder dialogue on CSR issues generally, and on the nexus of trade and labour. Although the exploration of options for funding of projects in this area over the past year did not bear fruit, the Committee continues to monitor how the relationship between the two, especially in terms of employment and trade, is evolving.

Second, Committee members continue to note the strength of the GSO in linking health and workplace issues, as it has with HIV/AIDS in the workplace and diabetes in the workplace. New issues that may merit this linkage include the impact of mental health or stress on the workplace or the impact of violence, pre-conflict and post-conflict settings on sustainable development or job creation. Perhaps a particular focus needs to be directed to the role of small and medium enterprises in post-conflict situations.

Climate change received considerable attention, too. The impact of climate change on jobs, the value of green jobs, the impact of climate change on health or on migration or within unstable societies – that is, the linkages between climate change and human security, were discussed at several Committee meetings. Another line of thinking dealt with the linkages between climate change and access to water or food security. Other ideas pertained to the financial crisis and the challenges facing the financial sector.

These evolving ideas will benefit from the outreach to the “Friends of the GSO” at the annual General Assembly session and other opportunities for multi-stakeholder roundtable sessions among the key Geneva-based players

GSO Website and Quarterly Activity Reports:

The GSO is a neutral forum for information-sharing, dialogue and action on global social issues. Hence the GSO is dedicated to balanced reporting and research on targeted social issues and provides a quarterly report on GSO activities. This quarterly report is sent out to the “Friends of the GSO” who are all encouraged to support the GSO and participate in its activities. In addition, the report is put on the GSO website, along with all of the reports of GSO projects and events and related project materials. The GSO website may be found at www.gsogeneva.ch. Preparations are underway to add a blog on Geneva-based news of interest to the website.

Changes at GSO

The Geneva Social Observatory has been fortunate to have a wide array of supporters who have contributed their time and resources 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.

In addition, members of the GSO Management Committee have been actively involved in specific endeavours for the GSO – mobilizing funding for specific projects and contributing their substantive expertise to specific events. Others have offered their expertise on budgeting, auditing, or otherwise managing the GSO accounts.

We note with appreciation the conclusion of the three-year term of Martin Watson as President of the Association and have accepted his decision not to seek a second term, due to his having moved to Brussels. Martin will continue as a member of the Management Committee, and we thank him for his continued support. We look forward to the election of a new President at this Assembly.

We are pleased to report that the GSO is benefiting from the move of the offices of HRI to 220 Route de Ferney. The new facilities feature a large conference room, and the move makes it possible to convene major GSO events on site.

Finally, the application of the GSO for consultative status as an observer for the UN Economic and Social Council was approved in July 2008. Approval means that the GSO has access to UN meetings in Geneva and elsewhere. The GSO has also benefited from the use of NGO badges to access the WTO.