

# SOCIAL DIALOG

## TO EXPAND DEMOCRATIC CULTURE IN BRAZIL



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## PRESENTATION

This document presents the initial perspective of institutions that are working on the promotion of social dialog to strengthen democracy in Brazil.

Society is currently experiencing tremendous changes in markets, companies, governments, civil society and people's attitudes. Economic crises, or insufficient economic growth, are often exclusionary or unsustainable, and weaken confidence in democracy. Studies of climatic changes and the current global economic crises confirm and indicate the need for a new more sustainable standard of production and consumption. The realization of social dialog involving the principal social actors can be an important route towards finding joint solutions to these challenges. New and old dilemmas are simultaneously challenging the agenda of organizations. One of them is how to improve democratic governance to make it capable of incorporating the expectations of society in the country's development. We need a democracy that is simultaneously capable of expanding the participation of society in general, along with a systematic dialog with citizens and with social groups that want to improve their living conditions and rights, or who want a sustainable standard of development and consumption.

In Brazil, democracy has advanced in recent years, but it is still necessary to consolidate a democratic culture among governments, companies and society. We are striving for a democratic and plural culture where the promotion and institutionalization of social dialog among the various actors creates a favorable environment so that the various interests are treated in a balanced manner. When there is dialog, conflicts and disputes over interests are not eliminated, but can be approached using democratic standards. By guaranteeing participation, cooperation and negotiation among different actors, the realization of social dialog is a way to guarantee governability and the expansion of democracy. It is a fusion of quantity and quality. To the degree in which social dialog takes place, "windows" are opened that allow unexpected issues to be addressed, creating new agendas of opportunities. Social dialog allows having goals for cooperation and or the convergence of objectives, even among antagonistic actors. This mechanism, depending on how it is implemented, can help to resolve common problems, resulting in concrete gains for the social groups involved: communities, citizens, companies, governments, society, and in the final instance, strengthen democracy.

For the socioeconomic changes to be long lasting and promote sustainability, they must be legitimate. The process of social dialog can contribute to a greater legitimacy and quality of public policies, administration of company business and principally to greater participation of civil society in the direction of the country.

*Social Dialog  
Working Group*



*“In countries with social dialog we find various modalities of dialog, as a function of the actors involved in the process, whether it is bipartisan (when there are only companies and workers) or tripartisan (when there is also government participation). The character of the social dialog is always the result of concrete social struggles and for this reason is also constantly changing. Therefore, there is no single meaning of social dialog. Social dialog can mean the right to establish representations of workers and of unions at a company, a dialog between bosses and factory commissions, between unions and States etc. It can mean a dialog about a concrete problem at a company or about a country’s future development model. In sum, there are many possible channels for social dialog on different levels”.*

*Jochen Steinhilber  
- FES representative in Brazil*

## CREATION OF THE WORKING GROUP

Considering the importance of supporting social dialog as an effective means to strengthen democratic culture in Brazilian society while making it a tool that promotes changes in the management of public policies or of companies, various organizations have taken the initiative to create a Working Group (WG). The goal is to invest energy and resources to create a culture that supports social dialog and democracy. The consolidation of a democratic culture would bring dividends for all the segments involved, especially for those who want to leave a democratic legacy for coming generations.

## UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL DIALOG

The Working Group began with the supposition that there are various legitimate understandings about the meaning of what is social dialog. Is dialog negotiation or cooperation? Is it possible for dialog to coexist with conflict and tension? Is social dialog “tension in process”? Another important issue to emphasize is that, to the degree to which dialog advances, conflicts tend to decrease, although the various interests of the parties involved do not disappear. This is a long term view, in which the parties should be heard in order to formulate consensus. But, regardless of the different understandings, the WG believes that what is most important, at this time, is to contribute to formulating and supporting the essential conditions or premises that can help the realization of social dialog.

## THE WORKING GROUP’S CONCEPT OF SOCIAL DIALOG

Social dialog is the process in which legitimately recognized social, economic and political actors, or social groups come together institutionally to share ideas, cooperate, seek convergence of objectives or negotiate issues of common interest.

Despite frequent tension and various conflicts that often permeate the dialog, it can result in the alignment of proposals, in the exchange of information and in new agendas of unplanned possibilities or can lead to shared agreements or projects, strengthening democratic governance and the sustainability of the institutions involved.

# OBJECTIVES

## GENERAL OBJECTIVE

The Social Dialog Working Group brings together different institutions to systematize, reflect upon and formulate contents and conduct activities, aimed at the promotion of social dialog as an essential element for the consolidation of a democratic, plural and just society.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

The Working Group plans to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. Get to know and accompany various existing experiences, systematizing and identifying the principal advances and difficulties, in order to develop guidelines that contribute to consolidating new experiences for social dialog.
2. Formulate and disseminate contents for the communication media and events related to the issue, helping to bring together entities interested in social dialog.
3. Conduct specific activities, meetings or seminars to deepen understanding of the issue and analyze Brazilian and international experiences that can guide the development of social dialog in Brazil.



*2<sup>nd</sup> National Food Security Conference  
- CONSEA - March 2004*



*“We understand social dialog as a process that should offer an expansion of social participation and a deepening of democracy. Social dialog is also a space for learning, for the transformation of a society’s political culture. Although there are many different experiences of social dialog and it takes place at different levels, we can identify common qualities among them. Both in the context of negotiations between capital and labor as well as in the effectuation of public policies, social dialog requires permanent, continued and collective action that intentionally contributes to the institutionalization of spaces for social participation. We believe that interaction through dialog should be permeated by relations of cooperation and trust, because social dialog takes on meaning if there is effective listening by the subjects involved and a collective construction of the conditions for dialog. The preparation for dialog, the systematization of its practices and the transparency in its promotion are requirements for its realization. To act in the field of the constitution and expansion of rights and for the promotion of social justice, Abong has invested in social dialog as a mechanism for expansion of public space, sharing of power and strengthening of social struggles”.*

*Luana Vilutis  
–Abong Representative*



*“Social dialog represents the integration into the work environment of one of the most important rights of citizenship, allowing workers and employers to have greater commitment to the objectives of a company, to reach common decisions about results to achieve. Social dialog represents an opportunity to gain commitments that involve the motivations of each of the parties concerning opportunities for development of people, organizations and society”.*

*Lais Abramo  
– Director of ILO Brasil*



## CONDITIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL DIALOGUE

The Working Group identified premises that should guide the practice of Social Dialog in Brazil. They are:

### THE SOCIAL ACTORS INVOLVED

It is important that the experiences with social dialog consider the tremendous diversity of Brazilian society and of the groups that represent it. Thus, along with the State, workers and business, the social actors who are principal protagonists in a capitalist society, it is important that space be guaranteed for the manifestations and positions of groups such as consumers, universities and research institutes, non-governmental organizations working for the defense of rights and the media. In this way, these groups can perform an important role in the promotion of this form of dialog.

Although diversity is an essential element for the success of the process, it is also essential that the legitimacy of the space for dialog and of the participants be considered. Thus, the observation or not of factors such as the pertinence of the issues raised, the interests of the entities in the discussions proposed and the technical ability and political representativeness of the entities can result in success or failure of the process.

No less important is the need to consider the possibility that social actors, organizations or entities that are not directly involved could have a role as facilitators and supporters of the process. Thus, support from research and education facilities and from the media, for example, can contribute with information about decision making and to the social promotion of the issues raised in the space of Social Dialog.

Promoters of social dialog must also consider any imbalance in the relation of forces present, for example, due to factors such as economic power, political power, capacity for mobilization and others.

The State plays a special role in this process, given that this social actor expresses the result of the dispute of interests found in society at a given time. In this way, the State has in social dialog an instrument to involve the principal social and economic agents in discussions about public administration.

The importance of the State as a social actor mentioned above does not necessarily imply its participation in the various spaces of social dialog. There are even situations in which the other social actors may not desire State intervention, typical for example in certain situations related capital and labor relations.

## COMMITMENT, OPENING TO DIVERSITY AND TRUST IN THE PRACTICE OF SOCIAL DIALOG

It is important that each one of the social actors that are participants in the process be committed to dialog, and work towards reaching agreements and understandings with the others. Respect for the differences among the organizations expands the possibility for reading the reality of their problems, contributing to the efforts to meet established goals. In this sense, it is essential that the representatives involved in the dialog be aware of the highly complex situations that are normally involved in the practice of social dialog, where actors have differing world views, strong expectations and contradictory interests.

It is also important that this complexity be seen as something enriching. Each actor contributes and recognizes in the other an interlocutor who, even with different views and interests, sees the reality and the action to transform it in a distinct manner. In this sense, social dialog is a learning process that involves taking a position about a problem, hearing what the other has to say, reflecting on the distinct views and evaluating possibilities for results that are of interest to the social actors.

Finally, it is important that the actors recognize in social dialog a tool to achieve weightier results, or which in the future could generate more sustainable policies.

## SOCIAL DIALOG AS PROCESS

Social Dialog is a space of continuous construction, even among the parties. Given that this mode of dialog is not well-known in our society, the activities planned to make it occur should be carefully planned, with previous organization of the actors involved in the dialog by means of encounters, internal dialogs and meetings. In addition to the content to be discussed, the rules of the process and the participation of the actors involved should be defined.



*“Working with social dialog from the perspective of negotiation is a practice we undertake at SOI in accompanying workers networks at multinational companies. Nevertheless, as an institution dedicated to study and research of labor conditions, we understand that social dialog is also a process for developing consensual solutions to conflicts of interest. Thus, either as an explicit negotiation or as a process, it is necessary to establish distinct methodologies so that the objective is achieved. If, the techniques and methodologies for negotiations are quite well known and diffused, the process of dialog that seeks to construct a solution among parties (which may well be traditional negotiations) still deserves greater study and increased exchange of experiences among institutions willing to create new paths. The current awareness of the inter-relation of the economic, social and environmental dimensions presents a challenge to labor-capital relations that can be better orchestrated through social dialog. For SOI, participating and contributing to the Social Dialog WG is also a way of consolidating its work about the agenda of Decent Labor, in conjunction with the union movement. Social dialog is one of the four pillars of Decent Labor, and is now that which is the most discussed yet most unknown: it is understood that it is not limited to collective bargaining but this is often the only factor remembered. To go beyond this restricted understanding to broaden the bases of dialog, without losing identity, can also be a strategy for the union movement.”*

*Amarildo Dudu Bolito*

*– Institutional Supervisor of the Observatório Social*

*Ana Yara Paulino*

*– Researcher of the Observatório Social*

*Regina Queiroz*

*– Responsible for the project Responsabilidade Social Empresarial*



*“Our institution is involved with the organization of the Working Group because we believe that the realization of social dialogs contributes considerably to the democratization of social and economic relations. The realization of social dialogs provokes and induces greater cooperation between the participating organizations. Effective dialog helps establish a balance of powers. When the process of dialog achieves a level of institutionalization and the actors are respected as representatives of the segments involved, positive changes tend to be produced for the parties over a greater period of time. More democratic processes are certainly always slower, but they are always better because in some way, the different expectations of the actors involved, to a large degree, are considered. This gives greater quality and stability to the decision making process and the changes. In Brazil, for various reasons, we know that the issue has still not been properly considered. It is essentially an investment in the future”.*

*Odilon Luís Faccio  
– Director of the Instituto Primeiro Plano*



Moreover, equal access to information for all the participants in the process and the use of mechanisms that facilitate communication, such as information technology networks, are essential elements that must be carefully observed by the promoters of social dialog.

It should also be emphasized that efforts to make progress in more general issues can positively influence the joint treatment of other issues not necessarily associated to the initial questions. Thus, the contact between the actors can generate the beginning of new commitments and joint initiatives to address new issues that, directly or indirectly, arise from the initial meeting of the actors. This establishes a process of permanent dialog that aims at the institutionalization of spaces for social participation. In this sense, social dialog can also be seen as a special type of learning where the participants improve their capacity to intervene daily in the social issues that concern them.

It is important that the spaces for social dialog remain open to the participation of new representations that for any reason, opted to not participate at the beginning of the process or who were later identified by the group as important entities in the work.

The complexity of the work with the social actors requires that the activities that involve social dialog be the object of constant reflection by those responsible for the implementation of the work. In this sense, there is a need to refine the methodological steps that can improve the social dialog process. This may require involving institutional support to the initiative; outside technical support for the process of dialog; support for reflection and efforts to identify converging positions among the participants; and a systematization of the work of the actors. In particular, there is a need for more detailed examination of how the discussion of social problems takes place and how this moment can be important for social mobilization.

## PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY THE GROUP

The identification of the problems should be made carefully, so that the actors concentrate on those that are most important to the reality that is being discussed. It is important that the promoters of the social dialog work with the problems as challenges presented by reality to the participants of the process, something that requires an intervention to achieve a desired situation. This will be essential in the later moments

of identification of the objectives of the group in relation to the problem and the actions to be implemented.

## THE OBJECTIVES PROPOSED TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM

Once the problem is identified, special care must be given to identification of the objectives proposed for its solution. It is essential that the activity moves in the direction of definite, achievable and measurable objectives. Special attention must be given to governability of the group in relation to what was established as an objective. It is also important to avoid overly ambitious goals, because they can cause impediments to the establishment of consensus positions or frustration if they are not achieved by the group. For this reason it is important that a balance is always sought between social demands, expectations of the groups and public responses to the demands. Concerning the identification of actions to achieve the proposed objectives, it is important that the attributions and responsibilities of the participants in the group are clearly established and that they can be accompanied by everyone. Compliance with what is agreed is essential to consolidate trust among the participants and to progressively create a culture of social dialog. Once the results of the work are systematized, it is important that transparency is guaranteed for the information generated, so that everyone has access to the results and can accompany the work of the others in the following steps.

## THE RESULTS OF THE PROCESS

An essential factor for assuring that an experience with social dialog is a reference for others is the effective implementation of the actions proposed by the group. For this reason, it is very important that the entities involved in the process strive to transform the results of the work into effective actions. If not, there is a risk that the participants have a negative perspective of the results, and this becomes a negative example for similar processes.

Finally, it is important that the actions proposed include initiatives that seek to insure the expansion and dissemination of dialog, in such a way that the experience be seen as part of a process that does not terminate there, but that continues and that has as one of its on-going re-

INSTITUTO  
**ETHOS**



*“We understand dialog to have another objective that is not only negotiation. We think of dialog to change the view of society, because we cannot make gains without measuring the impacts, if not, everything stays the same. We understand dialog as a space for learning. A space for opening where the actors are willing to make a new analysis. If we act as if it is only a space for settling differences, the actors will come with pre-established proposals not open to change and this makes advances difficult. We think of dialog with the purpose of legitimization and of building confidence between the parties involved. We understand that dialog can serve as a space for learning, which offers changes in the market standard, and allows new forms of social relations. It can help reach the following objectives: a) social control – social dialog helps society exercise social control through regulations and laws; b) return for all – competition and conflicts do not bring good results because there is an imbalance between the parties; c) cooperation – dialog must be a space for cooperation”.*

*Paulo Itacarambi  
– Executive Director of the Instituto Ethos*



*“Oxfam International invests in the processes and mechanisms that assist in the combat of inequality and poverty. Social dialog is one of them, to the degree in which it can contribute to strengthen active citizens and effective States.*

*We understand that there are various formats for social dialog that range from the preparatory process of a negotiation between workers and employers, to round table discussions about certain issues that interest workers, business, government and non-governmental organizations, to policy councils that are spaces for deliberation where qualified citizens have a chance to freely express their opinions and influence the preparation, implementation and monitoring of public policies. The quality of the dialog depends on the balance of forces among the actors involved. In this sense, we understand that some minimum requirements should be observed so that a social dialog can effectively be called dialog, such as: broad participation of the parties involved; autonomy for the participants; clear rules and norms of operation that are known and respected by all the participants; achievable and measurable objectives; attributions and responsibilities of the participants clearly established and transparency in actions”.*

*Nathalie Beghin  
- Advocacy Adviser for Oxfam International  
in Brazil*

sults increased social participation in the definition of the direction of society.

## EXPERIENCES

There is a wide range of experiences with social dialog that involve differing objectives and forms of participation of the actors which may involve: governments and companies; companies and unions; governments, companies and civil society; or companies and unions. These experiences have been the initiatives of governments, companies or the fruit of social conquests. Social dialog is a tool that favors participatory and negotiated democracy. It is a space for discussion where citizens have the opportunity to freely express their opinions and to influence the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of public policies. It is a space for learning and of negotiation, which can bring beneficial results to the actors involved.

In the first phase of work, the WG identified 4 different types of dialog, and has been systematizing and analyzing these experiences:



*Social Dialog meeting between company and labor unions from BASF/South America - Santiago, Chile/May 2008*

a – Social participation in the implementation and monitoring of public policies: the experience of the National Council of Food and Nutritional Security — CONSEA and the forums for social participation of the PluriAnnual Plan – PPA 2004-2007 (multipartisan): Oxfam International and ABONG

b - Social dialog among private companies and workers (bipartisan), on national and international levels (BASF and BAYER): Instituto Observatório Social and Fundação Friederich Ebert.

c – Preparation of participative diagnoses about problems in the labor market (tripartisan): DIEESE.

d – Sustainable Connections – an experience that seeks to commit companies to not purchase products (soybeans, wood, etc.) that use slave labor in the production chain: Instituto Ethos.



*“ We understand social dialog as a space where social actors are heard and recognized as representatives of the diversity of interests and world views found in society. The actors involved have different interests and world views, which creates difficulty, but does not, in most cases, restrict dialog. To the contrary, these differences make the process richer. The presumption is that these differences be respected and preserved, for this reason our work emphasizes a search for points of convergence, and not necessarily of consensus. Although the most common model of social dialog is tripartisan, we believe in the need for other agents who can contribute to the debate by being involved in the dialog, and increasing even more the wealth of the process”.*

*Crystiane Leandro Peres  
– DIEESE Representative*



*Sustainable Connections Seminar  
São Paulo / December 2008*





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