



SEVENTEENTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

International Institute for Labour Studies

Report of the 42nd Session of the Board

1. The Board of the International Institute for Labour Studies held its 42nd Session on 8 November 2000, chaired by the Director-General of the ILO. It had before it the report of the Director;¹ and a document concerning the acceptance of contributions and gifts for the Institute.²
2. The Director-General stated that decent work represented a unified strategic objective, which required all units of the ILO to work in an increasingly convergent and integrated way. The activities of the Institute had to be seen within the context of the ILO as a whole. While maintaining the autonomy and flexibility of action of the Institute, it was necessary to promote the growing functional interdependence between the Institute and the ILO, emphasized by the Director in his report.
3. The task of the Institute was to work together with the ILO to create the conceptual basis for decent work. It was equally important to translate this concept into operational reality as quickly as possible. For this reason he had set up a pilot programme to support the field structure and make decent work operational at the country level. To ensure a close interface between the Institute's research and the operations of the pilot programme, he had asked Mr. Sengenberger, the coordinator of the pilot programme, to be based in the Institute.
4. As the Institute was the place to explore new horizons, the Director-General wished to share some thoughts for the future. The question was often asked: What does decent work really mean? The answer had to be sought in the causal integrity between its four constituent elements. Decent work was a holistic notion: not the sum of the four sectoral strategic objectives, but rather the interaction between them. This concept needed to be further deepened.

¹ INS.B.XLII/1.

² INS.B.XLII/2.

5. Secondly, decent work had to be seen not only through the eyes of policy-makers but also through the eyes of people. Unless there was an understanding of workers in terms of their human concerns, it would not be possible to have effective policies. Workers as heads of families were responsible for the nurturing of future generations, and these issues affected families. They were also a central component of the economy, not merely in terms of production, but also in terms of consumption.
6. Finally, it was important to see decent work from an employers' perspective, in terms of an enabling environment for the investments which created work, and of the skills that enabled enterprises to develop. Decent work demanded economic sustainability.
7. All this required research and a capacity to provide policy advice. The primary function of the Institute was to create and develop such knowledge, and it was essential for the Institute to have the space and autonomy to do so. It was equally essential to draw on the full tripartite potential of the ILO, and he invited governments, workers and employers to put their best minds at the disposal of this thinking process. The Institute was the only place in the ILO where the tripartite partners could have free-ranging discussions to develop a common structure of thinking.

Report of the Director

8. Introducing his report, the Director said that the Institute's current task was to create the conceptual and analytical foundations necessary to assist the ILO in operationalizing decent work. This was an entirely new programme for the Institute, and for the ILO. Furthermore, little work had been done in this area by the external academic community. Consequently, much preliminary ground-breaking work had to be carried out, and the report provided an analytical description of these activities.
9. *What the Institute had done* in the year under review could be summarized as follows. First, it had begun a comprehensive survey of the relevant literature. Secondly, a research programme had been set up with two elements. An analytical framework was created to identify the causal interactions between the four strategic objectives of decent work and explore their relationship with economic performance. The second element was research on how policies for decent work could best be implemented. Traditionally, instruments for implementation were state policies, legislative action and collective bargaining. Could there be a better mix of these traditional policies in specific national situations? Could new potentialities for implementation be identified, drawing on the resources of civil society and of markets? Research methodologies had also been identified to explore each of these components of the research programme. Finally, work had begun on the development of new statistical indicators of decent work, with particular reference to rights at work.
10. As regards the *lessons learned* in the course of the year, the Director said that the preliminary findings of research had shown the growing importance of the State in creating an enabling environment for economic growth, as well as in creating appropriate incentives for implementation and regulation. Research had also shown that emerging forms of social organization, working in conjunction with the markets (such as microcredit and self-employed groups) presented new opportunities to achieve decent work.
11. Several lessons had been learnt regarding future implementation of the Institute's programme. As the Director-General had pointed out, it was impossible for the new programme to develop without close interaction with the ILO, in particular with the various sectors, the International Policy Group, and the new pilot programme. In future the Institute's programme would increasingly contribute to – and draw on – the work of all these units.

12. The second lesson was the growing importance of tripartite involvement in the Institute's research programme. This had always been a distinguishing feature of the Institute's work. Accordingly, it was planned to organize a small workshop to discuss the research programmes of the Institute with tripartite participants and academics, in the first half of 2001.
13. Effective implementation also required an interface between the Institute and the external academic community. In 1999 reference had been made to an academic consultative council. Thinking on this had evolved in the light of the research programme itself. It had become apparent that very different types of expertise were demanded by the programme, covering the fields of sociology, law and economics. This range of expertise, combined with the need for cost-effectiveness, pointed to a panel of experts who could be drawn upon, as needed, by the programme.
14. There was also potential for new cooperation with the Turin Centre. The outcomes of the Institute's research and the field experiences of the pilot programme could provide input for future training activities at the Centre on decent work.
15. Mr. Barde (Employer member) reiterated the Employers' firm commitment to the continuing vitality and autonomy of the Institute. The Institute was essential for the ILO: to provide a synthesis of thinking, and to explore future trends.
16. As regards the informal sector, while it was the task of the ILO to establish fundamental standards valid for all, these standards would have a greater chance of being implemented if they allowed for a margin of flexibility and differentiation to take into account the economic and developmental possibilities of each country.
17. It was necessary to conceive of decent work in qualitative as well as quantitative terms. Individuals functioned within an environment, the primary element of which was the family. The notion of family had varying connotations depending on differences in cultures and national traditions. However, it was important to go beyond the notion of social protection to the notion of the family in order to address the problems of marginalization and exclusion.
18. Finally, it was important to clarify the meaning of the term "civil society": this was not a homogeneous entity, and all those covered by the term were not necessarily representative of it.
19. Ms. O'Donovan (Worker member) expressed appreciation for the effort made by the Institute to align its work more closely with that of the ILO as a whole. The Institute had also clearly worked hard to reposition its programme around the strategic objective of decent work. The Workers warmly welcomed these developments. They also welcomed the research programme to implement decent work, as theoretical work had to be accompanied by practical action at the national level. For that reason they also welcomed the new pilot programme to operationalize decent work. They requested an indication of the timetable of the expected outcomes of the research programme as a whole.
20. Referring to comments by Mr. Barde regarding the informal sector, the Workers' group also had very serious concerns about the evolution of that sector. In many countries – both developed and developing – new employment opportunities were mainly arising in this sector, while existing regulatory structures became less and less relevant. It was therefore important to focus on the informal sector.
21. As regards civil society, the Institute should not confine itself to the role of so-called civil society organizations, but should examine the role of the institutional social partners who

had experience with empowerment and employment policies and who had already registered important successes in their relations with the informal sector.

22. The Institute's project on "Labour in the 21st Century" was a very interesting exercise, and its outcomes should be widely disseminated. It would be useful to know the results of the Internet conferences held in French and Spanish. It was noted that ACTRAV would now take responsibility for this project, but it was hoped that the Institute would share with ACTRAV the lessons learned from this exercise so that it could be effectively pursued in future.
23. As regards educational activities, there had been a very good series of events and several new initiatives to develop techniques and outreach. She wondered whether the Institute had considered the potential of distance learning for its internship courses, and whether there had been collaboration between the Institute and the research units of the Bretton Woods institutions.
24. The Chairperson invited Mr. Sengenberger to describe the new pilot programme to operationalize decent work at the country level.
25. Mr. Sengenberger said that a task force had been located in the Institute to coordinate the activities of the programme. The pilot programme would require the support of the Institute in relation to concepts and statistical indicators. In turn, the Institute would be enriched by information and data on policy experience from the field. The pilot programme would be an intersectoral effort involving the field offices, the MDTs, and ILO sectors at headquarters, assisted by an advisory group comprising ILO Executive Directors, the Regional Directors and the Institute. Three countries had already been selected for this programme – the Philippines, Panama and Denmark – for which the full consent of Governments and of the Workers' and Employers' groups had been received. Efforts were being made to identify a fourth, low-income country, as it was in such countries that the informal economy was most significant. The programme would emphasize ways of bringing decent work to the informal sector.
26. As a first step, the task force would work with constituents to identify priority concerns and formulate an action plan. The implementation phase would probably extend over several years. The lessons learned in the pilot countries would be used to inform other countries that wished to embark on a decent work programme.
27. The representative of the Government of South Africa thanked the Institute for choosing the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town to host the Fourth ILO Social Policy Lectures endowed by the ILO's Nobel Peace Prize. The lectures would go a long way in encouraging dialogue between the academic community, business, labour and government. It was unfortunate that financial constraints limited the scope of the Institute's educational programme. Several African countries had never benefited from the internship programme, and it was important to address the growing demand. With regard to outreach activities, it would be useful to have study tours for parliamentarians, as they played an important role in the ratification of ILO instruments. Welcoming the progress made in updating the Institute's website, she emphasized that outreach efforts had to go beyond the Internet, as many communities did not have the technology to access it.
28. The representative of the Government of Saudi Arabia recalled that the Arab countries had not adequately benefited from the work of the Institute. There was insufficient knowledge in the Arab countries of the Institute's work, and vice versa. He invited the Institute to consider ways of deepening exchanges and cooperation with the Arab research community. He thanked Mr. Servais, the Institute's research coordinator, for efforts in this

regard. The Institute could usefully organize activities for the Arab world with the support of both the ILO Regional Office in Beirut and the Regional Office for Africa.

29. Mr. Patel (Worker member) found the Institute's research programme an exciting one. The proposal to examine causal relationships between the four strategic objectives was a dynamic way of elaborating the concept of decent work. He suggested three additional considerations to be taken into account when developing this research. First, it had to be situated within the broader context of economic policy, including fiscal, monetary, industrial and trade policy. Secondly, it had to explore the potential of new information technologies to increase the quality and level of employment. Finally, it would be useful to consider the global institutional arrangements (such as free trade agreements) most conducive for the outcome of decent work.
30. Mr. Anand (Employer member) agreed that in evaluating decent work in any particular country due regard should be paid to the level of development and the need for flexibility, so as not to hamper the chances of future progress. It was also necessary to look more to the social and human aspects of a country rather than its form of government, the democratic form being the ultimate goal. Referring to the comments made regarding the family, he noted that there were a variety of perspectives. There was, for example, the Japanese model and the concept of a corporate family. There were also other models, and it was important to give the concept a modern dimension and scope.
31. When addressing the role of NGOs, it was important not to weaken the institutional social partners – employers and workers – who provided the distinctive profile of the ILO. One way of proceeding was to review the exclusive focus on industrial relations that had influenced the scope of representative organizations in the past. With respect to the pilot programme, it was desirable to focus on smaller countries where policies were likely to have a more immediate effect. He also emphasized the importance of choosing countries in diverse geographical and cultural settings.
32. Mr. Barde said that it was necessary to be realistic about the informal sector. It was not possible to deal with the problems of the sector through norms and standards. They had to be addressed through minute and painstaking work at the micro level. Furthermore, before one talked about decent work, it was necessary to have work itself. There had to be a differentiated approach, taking into account the demographic factor, which continually influenced the economic and social environment.
33. Mr. Patel drew the attention of the Board to the outcome of the discussion on the informal sector held at the last session of the International Labour Conference and the interesting consensus that had emerged. The relationship between the quantity and quality of work was dynamic rather than sequential. Decent work embraced both within the growth path.
34. Mr. Sibanda (Worker member) emphasized the importance of the informal sector in the context of structural adjustment programmes in Africa. He emphasized the importance of including African countries in the pilot programme, as many of them were examples of informal economies.
35. Replying to the debate, the Chairperson thanked the members of the Board for their support and for their useful comments and suggestions. Mr. Patel had suggested that the research programme should take some additional considerations into account. The dimensions of economic policy and information technology might usefully be addressed within the context of specific country exercises in the pilot programme. As regards global institutional arrangements, the Institute would collaborate with the ILO's International Policy Group, which was in touch with the research units of the Bretton Woods institutions.

36. Regarding the informal sector, the Chairperson observed that the Institute was not addressing the problem of the informal sector as such. The Institute's primary concern was how decent work policies could best be implemented; the issue of the informal sector was approached from that angle.
37. As regards civil society, the research agenda would focus on how the institutional traditional partners themselves could draw on the resources of other actors in pursuit of their common objectives. This involved identifying partnerships forged by trade unions and employers' organizations with such actors at the community level, and exploring their future potential for achieving decent work.
38. Referring to the statement by the representative of the Government of Saudi Arabia, the Chairperson stated that discussions had already begun with the Regional Director for Arab States to respond to these concerns.
39. The Chairperson then invited Mr. Servais to respond to the questions raised regarding the project on organized labour; the educational and outreach programme; and the timetable for the programme as a whole.
40. Regarding the time frame for the Institute's research activities, Mr. Servais stated that the indicators mentioned in the report would be completed by the second quarter of 2001. By then, it was also planned to complete the literature surveys on the components of the research programme. There would be a meeting in the first half of 2001 to discuss the research programme and research methodologies, following which individual case studies would be taken up.
41. Regarding the interactive network on organized labour, Mr. Servais noted that the English language component was successful, with about 800 participants. A number of French speakers participated in the English language component, but there were difficulties in finding adequate numbers to launch a separate exercise. The Spanish language component had begun later with a significant, but smaller, number of participants. He noted that there would be a meeting in April with practitioners, organized in conjunction with ACTRAV, to draw lessons from the interactive conference as a whole.
42. Regarding the number of participants for the internship courses, Mr. Servais noted that the number of Government participants for the English programme had been raised from six to eight. Regarding the demand for the regional courses, consultations would be undertaken with the ILO regions to work out the necessary financial arrangements.
43. Responding to questions regarding the pilot programme, Mr. Sengenberger said that Africa would certainly be included in the programme. Consultations were under way and awaited the consent of all the involved parties. He recalled that a parallel exercise was being undertaken by the ILO with the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme, where two of the 16 countries were African (Mali and the United Republic of Tanzania). As regards the choice of countries for the pilot programme, the criteria included size, regional representation, and representation of countries at different levels of development. He expressed his full agreement with Mr. Patel's comments on situating the decent work programme within the wider context of economic and social policy. Macroeconomic policy concerns would be central to the pilot programme.
44. The Board took note of the report of the Director.

Acceptance of contributions and gifts

45. The Board of the Institute recommends that the Governing Body accept with thanks the contributions from the employers' confederations of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

Geneva, 13 November 2000.

Point for decision: Paragraph 45.