

Operational Activities of the ILO in the Field of Population

FOLLOWING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, advances in medicine and public health technology resulted in sharp declines in the death rates in developing countries while birth rates continued at a high level, causing what has come to be known as the "population explosion". The need to give urgent attention to this phenomenon became generally recognised during the 1960s as a high priority for concerted action by the world community. In 1969 the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) was established, reflecting an international commitment to effective action.

The ILO, of course, was no stranger to population questions. Indeed, many of its fields of competence are precisely those affected by population characteristics and trends—employment, migration, human resources development and social security, for example; so that from its inception the Organisation, in planning and implementing its programmes and projects in these fields, had long been accustomed to examining and weighing population variables, mostly accepting them, however, in the passive sense as "given" rather than as modifiable "policy" factors.

Consequently, when more direct involvement became necessary the ILO found itself well placed to make a useful, if modest, contribution to the common endeavour within its own sphere of influence, its tripartite structure and established programmes in certain sectors providing a firm foundation upon which population projects could be built and implemented.

As a first step towards active participation in the efforts of the United Nations family to assist developing countries with their population problems, the International Labour Conference at its 51st Session in 1967 unanimously adopted a resolution expressing its deep concern at the influence of rapid population growth in the developing countries on the employment, training and welfare of workers. As a follow-up to this, at its 173rd Session in November 1968 the Governing Body laid down practical

lines of action which included: the promotion of information and educational activities in the field of population and family planning through workers' education, labour welfare and co-operative and rural institutions' programmes; research on the demographic aspects of social policy; and action to stimulate the participation of social security and medical services in the promotion of family planning.

ILO action in the population field is accordingly being developed within the above framework, mainly with the financial support of the UNFPA. The approach has from the outset been governed by the following basic principles: action to moderate fertility, including family planning programmes, is not meant to be a substitute for but an accelerator of developmental efforts; it is for each nation to formulate its own population policy and it is recognised that for some countries a larger population may be the desired goal; there should be recognition of the individual's right to decide on the number and spacing of children in accordance with the Proclamation of Teheran of 1968¹; ILO action should form an integrated part of the efforts of the entire United Nations system to assist member States in tackling their population problems. Finally, ILO programmes should assist in furthering and consolidating the fundamental social purposes of the ILO.

Population problems are complex and raise sensitive issues, varying in nature and severity from country to country. The ILO takes full account of this, its activities in the field of population, as in many other fields, being designed to respond to the needs and wishes of its constituents and planned and implemented with their close collaboration.

Educational programmes have been launched with a view to cultivating among the ILO's constituents, i.e. trade union and management circles and public authorities responsible for employment and labour policies, an awareness and understanding of population problems and of their relevance to general national development as well as to such specific labour objectives as improving living standards through increased employment, better working conditions and, especially, the enhancement of workers' welfare.² In this way it is hoped to create a favourable climate for rational debate on population questions and policies where they still remain controversial and to help strengthen commitment to policies in countries where they have already been adopted.

In countries which have population policies or have embarked upon or support national family planning programmes, the ILO further pro-

¹ In this Proclamation the International Conference on Human Rights proclaimed that: "The protection of the family and of the child remains the concern of the international community. Parents have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and the spacing of their children" (para. 16).

² The ILO has a major research and action programme concerning the relation between population and employment under the World Employment Programme which is described separately in this issue of the *International Labour Review*.

vides stimulus and support for the involvement of work-related institutions and social services in the formulation and implementation of policy and programme measures.

A particularly important aspect of ILO activities has been the promotion of an intensive, integrated population/family welfare planning programme for workers in the modern or "organised" sector. This programme calls for an enlarged concept of labour welfare, placing the provision of population education and family welfare services alongside fuller employment, social security and occupational health and welfare services as essential items of workers' well-being. To ensure its success this approach requires a favourable combination of factors, including a firm national commitment to population policy; a sizeable organised sector with adequately developed institutions and services; and a good industrial relations climate. Potentially, the organised sector can make quite a significant contribution to population policy in these circumstances, as the goals of each coincide.

In initiating field activities the first objective has been to encourage trade unions and labour education bodies to promote workers' family welfare. Action has been under way in Asia for over three years and began to be extended to other regions in 1972. Regional advisers are or soon will be in post in all developing regions. A large number of regional, national and sub-national seminars and workshops have already been organised; selected activities are being jointly carried out with regional labour education bodies and international trade union secretariats. Efforts especially directed at young workers have just begun with the appointment of an inter-regional adviser. Production of educational, including audio-visual, materials is progressing. Under the impetus of these activities there is an increasing tendency for trade unions to include population elements in their educational programmes.

A second goal is to stimulate and support similar action by co-operatives and related popular institutions. Many governments are now according high priority to the development of co-operatives as an important tool of economic and social development. The concept of responsible parenthood fits in well with the co-operatives' principles of joint action and self-help and co-operative members constitute a leadership group able to act as a pace-setter and therefore produce a multiplier effect on the rest of the community. This category of operations began only in the second half of 1973 in Africa, but early expansion into other regions is planned.

A third objective is to involve employer and management circles in population questions, particularly with respect to the promotion of family welfare planning for their own workforce, which may in some cases be extended to the neighbouring community as a whole. There are already a number of outstanding success stories of management-inspired family planning programmes in industry which provide information, advice and

facilities through occupational health and welfare services. ILO activities are designed to give maximum impetus to the expansion of such programmes. Efforts to promote employers' orientation in population matters began on a significant scale in Asia only in the second half of 1972, and in 1973 a start was made in Africa, the Middle East and the Caribbean area; this has mainly taken the form of employers' seminars for debate and action on population questions. Developmental work is making good progress and is paving the way for technical assistance.

A fourth area being stressed by the ILO is social security, where social security schemes already providing health care to the protected sections of the population have, or are expected shortly to have, available to them advice and assistance in introducing family planning and related services within the scope of the benefits provided, where this is consistent with national policy. Social security has longer-term effects on population dynamics since income security in old age etc. tends to foster more favourable attitudes towards planning for a smaller and better-spaced family. Maternity benefits and family allowances are considered by some to have a quicker and more direct influence on family formation patterns. Within the context of plans for longer-term research¹ on this subject, some studies have already been completed by the ILO on the relationships between family benefits and population policy and it is hoped to publish the results in the near future. In view of the practical framework that social security provides and the increasing interest shown in this line of activity by social security institutions in Latin America and a few countries in other regions, prospects for programme expansion on sound lines are reasonably good.

Experience has confirmed that a number of activities falling within the individual programme areas specified above become much more effective if they are planned and carried out within a coherent framework. The various components can then provide mutual support and reduce to a minimum programming inconsistencies and resource waste. This evolution is reflected in the growth of joint labour-management or tripartite meetings and other activities in co-operation with national agencies, a process already advanced in Asia. Governments tend increasingly to prefer multi-sectoral country projects in the ILO's programme areas since these provide fully integrated contributions of the ILO and its constituents to national programmes.

In developing ILO population activities the various forms of technical assistance customarily employed by the Organisation are being fully utilised, including: (a) regional advisers (who undertake promotional, advisory and training activities); (b) seminars, workshops, courses and

¹ The eventual outcome of this research should assist policy-makers to reconcile the accepted need for such basic social security protection with the urgent requirements of certain countries to limit rapid population growth.

study tours (for policy discussion by leadership groups drawn from ILO constituents and for task-oriented instruction for professionals such as workers' and co-operative educators, occupational health and welfare staff, and government labour welfare personnel); (c) production and diffusion of educational and training materials and audio-visual aids; and (d) technical co-operation (to assist in planning and implementing country projects).

There is a special feature of the ILO's population activities to which particular attention should be drawn. A large number of national seminars, courses, etc., are being held for ILO constituents, singly or jointly, with the participation of national population, development planning and other appropriate agencies. These meetings are usually sponsored by the national agencies concerned, with ILO encouragement and technical and financial support. In a number of cases, such national seminars have set the stage for concrete action by interested parties.

Apart from the above activities of the ILO, a novel feature has been the introduction of a population component in the leadership training courses of the International Institute for Labour Studies. In addition, the Institute in November 1973 held an International Course on Labour and Population in collaboration with the ILO for persons from developing countries, selected on a tripartite basis, who have already achieved a significant level of responsibility in dealing with policy issues in the labour field, together with participants from national institutes of labour studies. The course was concerned with the inter-relationship between development, labour and population policies.

While the UNFPA finances most of the ILO's population activities, it should be borne in mind that a substantial contribution is also being made by the regular budget under the statistical programme, covering compilation and publication of basic and periodic statistics on the labour force, employment and unemployment in the *Year book of labour statistics* and the quarterly *Bulletin of Labour Statistics*; development of methodology and promotion of standards in these fields of statistics; and related analytical studies. Special mention should also be made of the work on labour force projections. Detailed estimates and projections of the labour force by sex and age group have been issued for the world by major areas and regions and by individual countries for the years 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1985.¹ Revised projections extending to the year 2000, in the light of the data now becoming available from the 1970 round of population censuses, are envisaged.

As the ILO's population activities are adapted to the specific needs and situations of the various regions, they differ in their stages of

¹ These projections were published in five trilingual volumes under the title *Labour force projections, 1965-1985*, first edition, (Geneva, 1971). A sixth volume (*Methodological supplement*) was issued in 1973.

development, emphasis and approach. A brief account is given below of the programme highlights and distinctive features for each region.

(1) *Asia*. Most Asian governments have adopted population policies and launched national family planning programmes; in some of these countries, pioneering experience had already been gained in organised sector family planning programmes even before ILO action in this field gathered momentum. There appears to be a near-consensus among ILO constituents in Asia that population problems are acute and have an adverse impact on the constituents' own objectives; that the subject should be regarded as a matter for consultation and co-operation rather than conflict and contention; and that constituents should endeavour to contribute to national programmes. It will therefore be readily understood that ILO action in the population field is most advanced in the Asian region.

An exceptionally successful example of what can be achieved was the ILO/ECAFE Asian Symposium on Labour and Population Policies (Kuala Lumpur, July-August 1972), which drew up guidelines for harmonising labour policy measures with those of population policy and for an intensive programme of family planning and related measures in the organised sector.

The population advisers in various ILO programme areas attached to the Regional Office in Bangkok have been constituted into a Labour and Population Team, thus ensuring provision of services to countries in a speedy, flexible and integrated manner. Members of the Team have assisted in designing action programmes and country projects in the ILO's fields of competence, and one such project in Sri Lanka is already operational.

The ICFTU Asian Trade Union College has played a prominent part in workers' education programmes, including the holding of two pioneering courses for rural workers in India, the purpose of which was to introduce the concept of family welfare in a manner which would illustrate its relevance to the whole spectrum of the workers' daily lives.

(2) *Africa*. As density is generally low in this region not many countries regard rapid population growth as a serious impediment to development and only a few governments have adopted population policies or national family planning programmes, although a number support efforts by private agencies on health and welfare grounds. In several countries of central Africa, sub-fertility is a problem. The subject of population remains particularly sensitive in the French-speaking countries of Africa.

The ILO's main efforts in this region are directed towards creating awareness and understanding of the population question and its implications and inducing a climate in which the matter may receive consideration. The family welfare aspects are those to which the ILO gives special

emphasis in this region, and activities in this field are often welcomed. For example, the ILO-sponsored regional seminar for labour leaders (Nairobi, 1971) and the employers' seminar (Accra, 1973) for English-speaking African countries both showed that workers' and employers' organisations are generally favourable to the idea of family welfare planning, and indicated that international assistance would be helpful.

Various national seminars have been held in English-speaking African countries. These activities will be expanded by the Labour and Population Team which is now being constituted.

(3) *Latin America and the Caribbean.* In Latin America most governments initiating family planning programmes have approached the matter primarily as a health measure and have acted largely through mother and child health programmes. The main emphasis in this region, so far, has consequently been upon family welfare through assistance to social security institutions. Workers' population education activities will begin in 1974.

In the English-speaking Caribbean area, the emphasis has been upon workers' population education. A regional adviser is in post, seminars and workshops have been held, and a film made entitled *It can be done*.

(4) *The Mediterranean and the Middle East.* Here again the accent has been mainly on workers' population education. A recent noteworthy multi-sectoral event was the Turkish National Symposium on Population and Family Planning in the Organised Sector (Ankara, November 1973).

The ILO is collaborating with other members of the United Nations system as well as with outside bodies in activities organised for World Population Year (WPY), 1974 having been thus designated by the United Nations General Assembly¹ for the purpose of heightening universal awareness of population trends and problems by means of diverse activities which will culminate in the United Nations World Population Conference to be held in Bucharest from 19 to 30 August 1974.

It may be pointed out that almost all the ILO's UNFPA-financed activities can be said to contribute directly or indirectly to the objectives of WPY. However, the Organisation has in hand two specific enterprises (apart from this special issue of the *Review*) to mark the occasion—

(1) A special "population and employment" issue of the *Bulletin of Labour Statistics*, to appear in August. Various charts and graphs included therein will also be reproduced in colour for display at the World Population Conference.

(2) The inclusion of a population element in appropriate public information programmes designed to increase the impact of population-

¹ General Assembly resolution 2683 (XXV).

related field activities and to highlight the relationship between population and employment. The material produced is both printed and audio-visual and includes a cartoon film.

Arrangements for ILO collaboration in the preparation of the World Population Conference have been made. The Conference will be "devoted to consideration of basic demographic problems, their relationship with economic and social development, and population policies and action programmes needed to promote human welfare and development".¹

The ILO will contribute a background paper entitled "The world and regional labour force prospects to the year 2000 and beyond".

The main agenda item of the Conference is a draft World Population Plan of Action (WPPA).² The ILO is collaborating in expert and inter-governmental meetings concerned in drawing up this document and has furnished the United Nations Secretariat with materials, including relevant ILO standards, for use in preparing the Plan, which is being drafted in harmony with other international development strategies, especially the United Nations International Development Strategy for the Second Development Decade and the ILO's World Employment Programme. The WPPA is expected to represent the consensus of the international community and to provide, inter alia, a framework of major principles for international co-operation, particularly within the United Nations system.

As the ILO's activities in the population field have been operational for only two years, it is too early to attempt a meaningful analysis of their impact and effectiveness. However, it may safely be said that positive results are already apparent, even if only on a small scale. With the expansion of current endeavours and the introduction of others, a constructive contribution to the fundamental social purposes of the Organisation is being made which can only be enhanced as increasing integration of population activities with the main ILO programmes takes place.

¹ ECOSOC resolution 1484 (XLVIII), 3 April 1970.

² ECOSOC resolution 1672 B (LII) 2 June 1972.