

Improving employment and manpower information in developing countries

Results and lessons of an ILO technical co-operation programme

Lothar RICHTER *

Introduction

Disenchantment with manpower planning as an instrument for forecasting and meeting labour requirements grew rapidly among developing countries – particularly in Asia – in the 1970s. This prompted the ILO, in the second half of the decade, to conduct an evaluation of the technical co-operation projects on manpower planning which it had carried out in Asian countries up to that time. The results of that assessment were examined at a workshop of experts held in Tokyo in 1977.¹ The meeting adopted a number of conclusions and recommendations which were later largely echoed by similar evaluations carried out in English- and French-speaking African countries, the Arab region and the Caribbean.²

The first conclusion was that “single figure” forecasts had proved to be widely off the mark and were thus unsuitable for longer-term educational and vocational training planning. Projection work made sense only when it limited itself to scenario-building, i.e. varying the assumptions about the behaviour of the different parameters which entered the manpower equation and thus providing policy-makers and planners with indications of “what would happen if” and what alternative policies might be appropriate.

The second conclusion was that conventional manpower planning work, concentrating on long-term projections at the macro level, should be largely replaced by regular reporting on and analysis of the functioning of different labour markets (sectoral, occupational and regional/local) and the capturing

* Former Chief of the Employment and Manpower Planning Branch, International Labour Office.

¹ ILO: *Manpower assessment and planning projects in Asia: Situation, problems and outlook* (Geneva, 1978).

² idem: *Manpower assessment and planning projects in the Arab region: Current issues and perspectives* (Geneva, 1979); ILO/JASPA (Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa): *Comparative study of manpower planning exercises in nine English-speaking sub-Saharan African countries* (Addis Ababa, 1985); idem: *Manpower, employment and human resource planning in French-speaking Africa south of the Sahara* (Addis Ababa, 1985).

of signals about emerging and persisting imbalances in manpower supply and demand.

The third main conclusion was that a cardinal problem of manpower planning remained the almost complete absence of continuous, reliable and useful manpower information from the vast informal sector, both in rural and in urban areas. High priority should therefore be given to extending manpower assessment and planning operations into this sector.

All the evaluations contained recommendations to the effect that the ILO should build up a longer-term programme of technical co-operation to help developing countries adjust their own programmes and activities in the light of these findings. They also stressed that priority should be given to upgrading the manpower and employment information base in order to serve a wide variety of decision-making purposes in the broad fields of manpower and employment policy formulation, planning, plan implementation and monitoring. The new programme was launched by the ILO at the end of the 1970s.³

In this article we shall (i) give a brief account of the major phases of this programme and the areas it covers, (ii) review the progress made in improving manpower and employment information in developing countries over the past decade and the main lessons learned; (iii) outline the major aspects and areas of manpower and employment information that call for more integrated action; and (iv) identify some of the main outstanding tasks. These various aspects were thoroughly discussed by an inter-regional seminar on the upgrading of labour market information systems in developing countries held in Copenhagen in 1986,⁴ which was entrusted with drawing lessons from five preceding regional seminars organised for English-speaking African countries (Nairobi, 1983), for Asia (Bangkok, 1984), for Latin America (Santiago de Chile, 1985), for the Caribbean (Antigua, 1985) and for French-speaking African countries (Abidjan, 1986).

1. Major phases of the ILO programme

The first phase of the programme – which was initiated in Asia and later extended to other regions – consisted in holding subregional and regional workshops to allow participating countries to take stock of the current situation and the main problems encountered in their labour market information activities, to exchange experiences and to formulate plans of national action as well as identify international assistance needed to support such action.⁵

³ ILO: *Strengthening manpower and employment information for decision-making* (Geneva, 1981).

⁴ L. Richter: *Upgrading labour market information in developing countries: Problems, progress and prospects* (Geneva, ILO, 1989).

⁵ ILO: *Labour market information in Asia: Present issues and tasks for the future* (Geneva, 1979).

The work done by these workshops (presentation and discussion of national reports) provided a basis for the preparation by the ILO of a practical manual, the second phase of the programme.⁶ The manual was designed primarily as a reference source for assisting high-level decision-making on the nature and scope of a national labour market information programme. Thus it sets out the general principles and criteria on which such a programme should be based and describes in detail the various steps and stages to be followed in gradually building up a comprehensive national employment and manpower information system.

The third phase of the programme was to convert the policy-oriented manual into a specific training guide.⁷ The need for such a guide became apparent when ILO experts responsible for manpower planning and related technical co-operation projects had tried to make use of the manual in organising training for national staff in matters of labour market information, especially staff working at regional and local levels. Naturally, this category of staff was more concerned with questions of "how" than of "what" or "why". The guide was conceived as a framework to be filled in by each developing country with its own practical examples, experiences and priorities so as to reflect national conditions and requirements. (The guide is currently being revised with a view to bringing out a second edition that will take into account both the strong and the weak points revealed by practical applications of the first version. In addition, a guide was prepared specifically for French-speaking African countries.⁸)

The fourth phase was the initiation of a large experimental project to test the validity of the "key informants" approach as a complementary source of employment and manpower information, especially for the informal sector and rural areas. The idea of making use of selected key informants was first mooted by the Tokyo workshop in 1977 as a possible source of information to make good the data deficit that existed in rural areas.⁹ Concern about this gap grew in the late 1970s with the important shifts taking place in socio-economic development policy: from economic growth *per se* to the attainment of fuller employment, the achievement of greater income equality and the satisfaction of basic needs. The main target

⁶ ILO: *Guidelines for the development of employment and manpower information programmes in developing countries: A practical manual* (Geneva, 1979).

⁷ *idem*: *Employment and manpower information in developing countries: A training guide* (Geneva, 1982).

⁸ *idem*: *Information sur l'emploi et la main-d'œuvre dans les pays africains d'expression française* (Geneva, 1989).

⁹ It was based on recognition of the fact that in every country there are many persons in both urban and rural areas – businessmen, farmers, officials, teachers, village elders, etc. – who, because of their occupations, responsibilities and interests, possess a wide knowledge of manpower and employment patterns and trends in and around their place of residence; hence it would be logical to collect the information such people can provide on a comprehensive, systematic and regular basis and piece it together into a meaningful mosaic. For a discussion of this approach see L. Richter: "Manpower and employment information through key informants", in *International Labour Review*, 1982/4.

groups of these policies were in the informal and rural sectors and yet it was precisely here that employment and manpower information needed for planning and monitoring the policies was largely absent. The experimental project eventually covered some ten developing countries, mostly in Asia. The main lessons and insights gained from it were reviewed by an evaluation seminar held in Bangkok in 1981,¹⁰ whose conclusions underscored "the feasibility of the key informants system, the potential usefulness of the information obtained and the willingness to co-operate shown by the key informants".¹¹ In the light of the results of the test project and the seminar discussions, the ILO prepared a special manual to guide the decision-making processes involved in the design, organisation and operation of a key informants scheme.¹² The question whether or not the key informants approach should be made use of on a wider scale than has so far been the case is still being debated and a general verdict is outside the scope of this article.¹³ What really matters now is that any developing country considering the use of the approach – or elements of it – has a full account of available experience in the two documents prepared as the fourth phase of the ILO programme.

As the above activities gathered momentum, it was only natural that a increasing number of developing countries should want to compare more closely and regularly their own situation and progress in labour market information activities with those of other countries within their region. Accordingly, numerous requests were addressed to the ILO to arrange for the pooling of employment and manpower information at the international level so that country experiences could be easily exchanged. In response to those requests, and as the fifth phase in the programme, ways and means were explored of establishing an International Pool of Labour Market Information.¹⁴

It should be noted at once that rather slow progress was made in building up the Pool, despite extensive technical assistance rendered to various countries, especially in Asia and English-speaking Africa. The initial enthusiasm shown soon gave way to irregular national contributions and slackening participation. A number of constraints were encountered that could not be fully overcome. For one thing, the additional outlays required in money and staff, at both the national and the international level, could not be sustained. Secondly, many developing countries were unable to ensure the

¹⁰ ILO: *Labour market information through key informants* (Geneva, 1982).

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 33.

¹² W. Mason and L. Richter: *Reporting by key informants on labour markets: An operational manual* (Geneva, ILO, 1985).

¹³ For a discussion of this issue see L. Richter: *Alternative sources of employment and manpower information: The case of the key informants approach*, Paper presented at the EUR (Erasmus University Rotterdam)/ILO Workshop on Employment Processes and Economic Change, Rotterdam, 30-31 January 1989 (Geneva, 1989).

¹⁴ ILO: *Guidelines: Pool of labour market information reporting* (Geneva, 1983).

regular, timely and complete flow of labour market information needed to give the Pool a substantive basis. And, thirdly, much of the information supplied was not suitable for storing in the Pool or for analytical purposes. It was this experience that led the programme to redirect its efforts from the acquisition of data stocks to the promotion of information flows.

The sixth phase, a series of activities to encourage and upgrade manpower analysis and planning in the energy sector, testifies to the flexibility of the programme in responding quickly to new needs and priorities. These activities were launched at a time when the two "oil shocks" had led an increasing number of non-oil-producing developing countries to embark on comprehensive programmes to save energy and develop new energy resources. Initially, both national and international efforts were directed at solving the serious technical and financial problems the crisis posed. Very soon, however, manpower and skill constraints made themselves felt as equally important, if not more critical, bottlenecks – a recognition of which resulted in 1982 in giving the programme this new component. It began with a comprehensive pilot project in the Philippines to test alternative means of promptly assessing the manpower requirements and priorities of the national energy development programme.¹⁵ This was followed by the preparation of a number of analytical studies for seminars and workshops on major energy development issues organised by various international organisations, in particular the World Bank and the UNDP.

As a result of these various activities, another practical manual¹⁶ was prepared to provide a systematic framework for action, setting out the various stages to be followed in analysing current and prospective manpower issues and using the findings for energy manpower planning. The manual was written with the needs of both manpower specialists and energy planners and policy-makers in mind.

The holding of the inter-regional seminar in Copenhagen in 1986 was the seventh and most recent phase of the programme. As mentioned earlier, this seminar provided an opportunity to carry out an overall review of the progress made and the problems encountered by the programme and to look at outstanding tasks and new needs that might arise.

2. Impact of the programme and main lessons learned

It can be inferred from many documents, meetings and discussions relating to labour market information activities in recent years that *in toto* the diverse efforts made by the programme, in close association with the

¹⁵ See P. Duiker: *Manpower implications of accelerated energy resource development in developing countries*, Paper presented at the United Nations Technical Energy Group of the ACC Task Force on Long-term Development Objectives, New York, 7-9 September 1983 (Geneva, ILO, 1983).

¹⁶ ILO: *Major stages and steps in energy manpower analysis: A practical framework* (Geneva, 1986).

developing countries concerned, have had a number of catalytic and positive effects. For instance, awareness of the significance of adequate labour market information as an indispensable basis for the decision-making of many labour market "actors" has substantially increased. So has the basic knowledge of what is involved in and required for the gradual building up of a comprehensive national employment and manpower information programme. Improved labour market information capacity is clear from the higher standard of national labour market reporting and of the many papers prepared by the developing countries for ILO-sponsored seminars and workshops and from the larger attendance at these meetings of higher-level government staff and representatives of other bodies including employers' and workers' organisations. On the other hand, systematic co-operation between the main producers and users of employment and manpower information is making only rather sporadic progress.

Pursuant to one of the major conclusions of the 1977 Tokyo workshop and subsequent regional seminars elsewhere, the programme has made a special effort to assist developing countries in improving their labour market signalling capacity and extending its range to all economic sectors, groups of occupations and regions, areas or localities. This effort seems to have fallen on very fertile ground. Improving labour market signalling has been a major item on the agenda of many international and national seminars dealing with employment and manpower issues.¹⁷ At the same time, the plea made by the Tokyo workshop to phase out mechanistic forecasting in favour of more analytical work has met with a wide international response.¹⁸ Nevertheless, a considerable number of developing countries still seem to be sold on the application of traditional manpower planning approaches, although range projections and scenario-building to look at policy options are apparently gaining ground.¹⁹

Hence the first years were devoted primarily to programme-building and technical co-operation activities at the international, regional and subregional levels in order to ensure the widest possible impact of the programme. There was, however, a tendency to impart knowledge and training preferentially to the higher echelons of staff engaged in labour market information activities. To correct this, the programme has

¹⁷ See for example L. Richter: *Labour market signalling in Asia: Potential, problems and prospects*, and W. Mason: *Some priority areas for improving labour market signalling in Asia*, Papers presented at the Seminar on Labour Market Signalling sponsored by the German Foundation for International Development, Berlin (West), 14-25 July 1980 (Berlin (West), 1980); and L. Richter: *Labour market signalling: A tool for training needs assessment in developing countries*, Paper presented at the Meeting of Experts on Methods of Training Needs Assessment, Turin, 26 September-1 October 1983 (Geneva, ILO, 1983).

¹⁸ G. Psacharopoulos et al.: *Manpower issues in educational investment: A consideration of planning processes and techniques*, World Bank Staff Working Papers No. 624 (Washington, DC, 1983).

¹⁹ M. Hopkins et al.: *Aspects of labour market analysis and employment planning: MACBETH: A model for forecasting population, education, manpower, employment, underemployment and unemployment*; WEP working paper (Geneva, ILO, 1986).

endeavoured more recently to place the training of middle-level technical personnel in the foreground. Such personnel, who are mainly engaged in collecting, analysing and disseminating labour market information at regional and local levels, are the key to any labour market information programme. However, their knowledge and skills generally fall short of what an active local labour market information network requires. This shortcoming has become even more critical as a result of recent trends to assign the responsibility for planning and plan implementation to these levels and of the need to identify clearly the target groups of basic needs and anti-poverty programmes. The manuals and guides prepared under the programme have helped to highlight the importance of middle-level staff training and have served in several instances for the preparation of national training guides adapted to local conditions and requirements.

A number of technical co-operation projects concerning manpower planning and labour market information undertaken with resources other than those made directly available to the programme have also benefited in various ways from the latter's activities. The international experts responsible for these projects have generally kept in close touch with the programme. Conversely, many of these projects have also contributed substantially to the further development of the programme by providing feedback on the practical usefulness of the various programme components. This has helped to keep programme activities focused on areas of greatest need.

Whatever progress has been made during the past decade in improving labour market information in developing countries has been more rapid at the national, aggregate level than at the local, disaggregated level. This is clear from the greatly improved coverage and depth of analysis of the manpower and employment situation and trends in national annual reports. Not all problems have been solved at this level, however. The lack of integration and adequate use of employment and manpower information systems in the overall process of development planning, plan implementation and monitoring continues to be a stumbling block, while the lack of co-ordination between the main producers and users of manpower and employment information has proved to be at the root of the widely observed phenomenon that many potential sources of labour market information are simply unused, underused or not readily accessible. Although attention was called to the need to make the fullest possible use of existing information sources before considering the development of new ones, skill shortages have barred the way to quick improvements. There has also been a lack of co-ordination between labour market research and practical labour market reporting, which in many developing countries continue to operate completely apart from each other. Despite the programme's many attempts to rectify this situation, unwillingness on both sides to collaborate or to acknowledge each other's role and importance in a national employment and manpower information system has frequently made this difficult.

These less successful promotional efforts of the programme have nevertheless made it possible to pinpoint some of the hard-core problems. All indicate the need for greater convergence between the generation of information at the macro and micro levels, between long-term and short-term forecasting, between the research (causative) and the reporting (descriptive) components of national labour market information programmes, and between quantitative and qualitative information generation.

3. The need for convergence in labour market information programmes

The first convergence needed is in the generation of employment and manpower information at the macro and micro levels. Macro data underpin policy-making and planning primarily at the national level. Micro information serves essentially operational and quasi-daily decision-making purposes at project, enterprise and local levels and as a feedback on policy impact to the central authorities. The question is not whether one is more important than the other since each has significance for different groups of decision-makers. The recent shifts of manpower and employment policy towards employment promotion, a more equal distribution of incomes, poverty eradication and structural adjustment, together with the focus on specific target groups and areas, have made it imperative to give much more attention than hitherto to labour market information activities at disaggregated levels: different economic sectors and subsectors, occupations and regions, areas and localities. It is at these levels that manpower and employment policies have to be translated into concrete action and to be effectively monitored.

A second, related convergence is needed in the functions of labour market information activities: equal attention should be given to assessing future manpower and employment trends (forecasting and projecting) and to signalling developments and turning-points in the current situation (regular analysis and reporting). Some manpower and employment policy decisions, such as those affecting the generation of occupational skills involving long gestation periods or the construction of facilities for education and vocational training programmes, have to be based on information with longer time horizons. In these and similar cases (as for teaching and health service staff, where occupational demand is related to demographic or social factors) some preview or projection is justified. What is important here is that projections should be regularly updated. This can be done through an effective system of labour market signalling – indispensable for all those who have to make decisions frequently and promptly. For example, such quick decisions are needed in dealing with large-scale layoffs in certain industries and occupations and the employment repercussions of natural calamities.

A third convergence is needed between manpower and employment research and regular labour market reporting. The latter is mainly, but not exclusively, the responsibility of the public employment service, while the former is largely in the hands of universities and similar institutions or special manpower or labour research institutes. Both research and reporting are vital elements of a strong and versatile labour market information system meeting a wide range of user needs. Without research, employment and manpower information is likely to lack depth and perspective as well as explanatory power. On the other hand, employment research without regular labour market reporting is likely to be out of touch with the short-term processes in the different sectoral, occupational and local labour markets. It will thus miss crucial turning-points and ignore the need for immediate remedial measures. Therefore, reporting and research functions should be interdependent and not carried out in isolation or, worse, in total disregard and misunderstanding of each other's role, as is still often the case today.

A fourth convergence that needs to be brought about is between quantitative and qualitative manpower and employment information. It is widely accepted that, to be meaningful, many labour market data need to be interpreted and supplemented by qualitative information such as perceptions, attitudes and motivations relating to labour market behaviour. Orders or ranges of magnitude and directions of change might throw a bridge between these two types of data. Moreover, the defective state of labour market data generation in many developing countries and the lack of resources for remedying this situation soon render it necessary to make full use of cost-effective qualitative information to supplement the weak statistical base.

Keeping these needed convergences in mind might help to bring into sharper focus the main aspects of the ILO programme that have proved to pose major challenges and that have defied quick solutions. They can be said to constitute the hard-core problems that must be tackled with realism and determination if more lasting improvements are to be achieved than the programme has so far been able to bring about. We look at a few of these problems below.

4. Some outstanding tasks

Experience with the programme has shown that effective producer-user collaboration is essential for solving the various problems that beset the development of adequate labour market information capacity in the Third World. Without such close co-ordination, there is little hope that national labour market information programmes will yield satisfactory returns on the resources invested in them.

No one is more aware of this than the developing countries themselves. In fact, many of them have established advisory, interministerial, tripartite or

similar committees, task forces or councils explicitly or implicitly responsible for the co-ordination of information in the field of manpower and employment planning. However, many of these bodies have turned out to be too weak or their action too sporadic to achieve important and lasting results.

Obviously, there is no magic formula for guaranteeing the effectiveness of any particular co-ordination mechanism although the programme has provided a few pointers that are worth bearing in mind. For the preparation of the national reports to the five regional seminars mentioned earlier, the organisers suggested that tripartite committees be formed with each member being given a specific task and each committee being provided with a detailed plan of work to be completed by a specified date. The size of the committees was kept quite small. In the light of this experience, it would seem sensible that a co-ordinating body should start off with a small number of members and then perhaps expand its composition gradually in response to clearly defined needs, possibly by co-opting members temporarily to deal with specific tasks. Tripartite committees composed of representatives of ministries of labour and employers' and workers' organisations or of ministries of planning, ministries of labour and statistical services might constitute basic building blocks.

The first task of such committees should be to work out an annual routine. Meetings at which decisions are to be taken should be well prepared by a strong secretariat, which should also monitor their follow-up. Whatever ministry or government agency is made responsible for such co-ordination should assume the task in a collegial rather than an authoritarian spirit. In other words, co-ordination must take "the form of constructive partnership rather than following directives".²⁰

A second important problem that has defied quick solution is the lack of properly trained staff. The need to improve the skills of the various staff categories concerned with the generation, analysis and dissemination of employment and manpower information has been increasingly recognised by many developing countries. However, the actual efforts deployed in organising and holding training programmes have fallen somewhat short of needs, although there are a few exceptions.²¹ Apart from the shortage of funds, two major conditions have rarely been met: the availability of qualified trainers and the existence of suitable training material.

As we have seen, the training manuals and guides prepared under the ILO programme do provide a basic framework for the preparation and

²⁰ C. Dougherty: "Manpower development planning from three points of view: Country, technical assistance agency, and lending agency", in Psacharopoulos et al., op. cit.

²¹ A special effort to train some 200-300 officials concerned with the generation and analysis of labour market information in French-speaking countries was made under a series of national training seminars supported by an ILO/DANIDA technical co-operation project. See J.-B. Célestin: "Manpower planning and labour market information in French-speaking Africa", in *International Labour Review*, 1983/4.

organisation of national training efforts. In order to be effective, however, they need to be adapted to specific national requirements and conditions, something which so far has been done by only a very few developing countries.

Improved skills are also indispensable for making fuller use of existing information, especially through more comparisons and cross-references and even a more thorough analysis of statistical/tabular presentations. The tendency to publish labour market information as a collection of tables with little or no accompanying analysis is still largely the rule rather than the exception. Although the need for more and better analytical work seems to have been widely accepted, many questions still remain to be settled in practice.²²

Consideration should not be given to generating new manpower and employment information until it has been clearly established that available data sources are insufficient to meet the needs. Moreover, other factors need to be taken into account. Cost-effectiveness is one of them. Others relate to the repercussions which the introduction of new or changed methods of data collection and definition might have on the comparability of data, both at the national and at the international level. More attention needs to be devoted to these questions in the future than has been the case in the past.

At the same time evaluations should be made from time to time to identify data that are not really worth collecting or that have outlived their usefulness. It has been rightly said that it is much easier to demand more information than it is to abstain from doing so.²³ Indeed, we cannot cite a single example of a well-reasoned and determined effort to weed out unnecessary and less useful data. It might prove to be very cost-effective to make such an effort in future work to improve national labour market information capability.

On the other hand, demands for the generation of new information, especially data on the informal sector, will no doubt continue to increase. As mentioned earlier, much thought and effort have been given under the ILO programme to upgrading manpower and employment information in the informal sector. However, noteworthy improvements have been slow to appear. This can be explained only partly by the inadequacy of conventional labour market information sources and the lack of funds. Fuzziness in defining what the informal sector covers and special problems of data collection here are other reasons for information deficiencies. It has been said that "the attempt to describe the sector in some general sense is

²² R. Hollister: "Manpower planning viewed as an analysis process for manpower and employment policy formation and monitoring", in *Report on the Seminar: New orientations of manpower planning and analysis and their relevance to Indonesia*, Seminar sponsored by the Government of Indonesia, the UNDP and the ILO, 1-4 July 1986, Jakarta (Jakarta, 1986).

²³ R. Chambers: "Rapid rural appraisal: Rationale and repertoire", in *Public Administration and Development* (Chichester), 1981, Vol. 1, pp. 95-106.

essentially mistaken and fruitless".²⁴ Greater attention should perhaps be paid to more regular reporting on the manpower and employment situation and trends in the informal sector instead of the one-off survey which has so far been the usual means of gathering data on this sector.

Any decision whether to make do with existing data sources or to resort to new ones must take into account the general increase in the potential volume of manpower and employment information and the increasingly sophisticated techniques being used to analyse it, as well as greater demands for quicker processing, publication and dissemination. Because of these pressures the introduction of electronic data processing for labour market information will most likely continue to be regarded as a high priority in many developing countries.²⁵

In most cases cost and skill considerations and the lack of sufficient "computerable mass", as regards both quantity and quality of data, will counsel a selective, step-by-step installation of computer capacity. Recent advances, however, have made microcomputer technology much more accessible in terms of cost and skills required and this will probably facilitate the entry of electronic data processing into labour market information activities in developing countries. The greatest benefits are likely to accrue to manpower projections of the scenario-building type, the construction of manpower accounting models and the speed of labour market reporting. But here again, training of the personnel involved must be given priority.

5. Main conclusions and outlook

This overview of the objectives, activities and results of the ILO programme for upgrading employment and manpower information in developing countries has shown that a great deal of the spadework for underpinning national action in this field has been completed. There now exists a large body of technical documents, especially in the form of guides and manuals, which can be of considerable help to developing countries in their efforts to improve their labour market information systems. Therefore, the activities so far pursued by the ILO programme no longer need to be continued on the same scale.

However, it has also been shown that certain key problems have stubbornly resisted efforts to overcome them and that new issues have emerged. Much still needs to be done to strengthen collaboration between

²⁴ M. Bienefeld and M. Godfrey: *The informal sector*, Paper presented at the International Seminar on World Structural Change and Its Impact on ASEAN's Employment and Manpower, Bangkok, 1985 (Bangkok, Human Resources Institute, Thammasat University, 1985), p. 189.

²⁵ ILO: *Labour administration: Computerisation of labour market information*, Proceedings of the ILO/ARPLA (Asian and Pacific Regional Centre for Labour Administration) Inter-country Symposium on Labour Market Information Functions of Labour Administration, Indonesia, 1986 (Bangkok, 1987).

producers and users of employment and manpower information, to expand staff training especially at middle technical levels and to exploit more fully existing information sources. Efforts to upgrade the employment and manpower information base in the informal sector should be pursued and electronic data processing introduced on a selective basis to begin with. The inter-regional seminar in Copenhagen pointed out that these were priority concerns for developing countries in the years ahead and that future technical co-operation should concentrate on supporting national efforts to deal with them.

Perhaps one of the most useful ways of doing this would be to send out short-term, high-level consultants to advise on programme design, to help bring together users and producers of employment and manpower information and to assist in organising training programmes. They would be primarily concerned with enabling developing countries to build up their own capacity to generate labour market information suitable for their needs rather than having such work done by international experts. This would also have the advantage of not entailing large expenditures from tight national and international budgets.

Although modest in scope, such an orientation of future technical co-operation work in this field would lend continuity to an activity that clearly lies within the ILO's mandate, and would help all those who require relevant, timely and reliable employment and manpower information for a variety of decision-making purposes.

On the other hand, it is well to remember that even the theoretically best possible employment and manpower information system is "silent" until it is put to use. Its effectiveness depends largely on the full commitment of each country to policies aimed at promoting the development and utilisation of its human resources. Ultimately, that commitment is the main driving force for endeavouring to improve employment and manpower information.