
II. INTRODUCTION BY THE DIRECTOR

This Report covers the work done by Cinterfor/ILO in the two years since the 37th Technical Committee Meeting, which was held in October 2005 in the Dominican Republic. For most of that period Cinterfor/ILO was headed by Pedro Daniel Weinberg, who became Director in April 1995 and went into retirement on 1 December 2006.

In December 2006 the Director General of the ILO considered that since a new head of Cinterfor/ILO was to be appointed, it would be opportune to reflect in depth about Cinterfor's future prospects at a time when vocational training has again become important in the region and in the world. The region of the Americas is moving towards putting into practice the Decent Work Agenda for the Hemisphere that was adopted at the 16th ILO Regional Meeting in Brasilia. In Latin America and the Caribbean, and indeed in the whole world, there is a new determination to give priority to vocational training, to invest in people's abilities and competencies, and to generate knowledge to help meet the new challenges in the world of work.

So as to prepare for this new cycle, the Director General decided to entrust me with the responsibility of heading Cinterfor/ILO's work and preparing a strategic plan. The fruit of this effort is reflected in the "Proposed Strategic Plan for the Future Action of Cinterfor/ILO", which gives a brief analysis of the current situation of vocational training and education for work institutions in the region, the challenges they face, and the possible contributions Cinterfor/ILO could make.

The proposed strategic plan is the outcome of a wide-ranging process of verbal and written consultations with Cinterfor/ILO member institutions, representatives from ILO tripartite constituents, the various ILO offices and departments and the staff at the Centre itself involved in putting the Decent Work Agenda for the Hemisphere into practice. In this introduction to the Report of Activities, I only wish to point out that the consultation process made it very clear that three critically important conditions have been verified for the Centre's work to continue to be effective.

The first condition is that the subject of vocational training and employability continues to be a priority concern in public policies in Latin America and the Caribbean. There is a growing conviction that the lasting and inclusive economic and social development of the countries in the region depends to a large extent on considerable investment in the abilities of the workforce, and this includes male and female entrepreneurs, the self-

employed and paid workers. Investment of this kind is the basis for productive systems that are sustainable and competitive, and for success in the fight to eradicate poverty.

The second condition is that institutions that are active in the field of training and employability are very interested in continuing to share their experiences and learn about good practices, tools and methodologies that can feed the development of innovative national policies and programmes. In spite of the fact that the Cinterfor/ILO network has intensified its efforts to foster horizontal cooperation, or rather because of this, the demand and the offer of information and assistance is still growing steadily, so much so that perhaps it is outrunning the Centre's effective capability to respond effectively.

The third condition is that Cinterfor/ILO's work enjoys great recognition and credibility among its member institutions. There is general agreement on the need to maintain a mechanism to drive and facilitate the processes of information sharing, reciprocal learning, and the systematization and critical analysis of information and knowledge. The member institutions have also made it clear that they trust Cinterfor/ILO to continue to carry out this task in the region, and in fact they are asking the Centre to become more involved and participate more to support the processes of technical and institutional strengthening and international cooperation with other institutions.

The consultation process for the formulation of the strategic plan also yielded greater insight into the complex institutional reality of vocational training in the Americas. The countries in this region have made and are making different institutional and programme responses to a challenge they all face, which is how to integrate their education and labour systems so as to respond not only to the demands of the productive context but also to the aspirations of the active population to have a job and decent work, to social and economic inclusion for the poorest and most vulnerable groups, and to the need to anticipate what vocational profiles society will demand in the long term. This great diversity of institutional and programme approaches might seem surprising bearing in mind the process of information sharing that has been going on for more than forty years through Cinterfor/ILO; it is due to the fact that, in spite of the development of inter-American cooperation, there are still great socio-economic, cultural and political differences between the countries in the region.

This diversity is also a source of wealth and a challenge for renewed action by Cinterfor/ILO. When the Centre was established in 1964, its member institutions were young or newly born and hence in great need of assistance, but they were relatively homogenous. Today the Centre coordinates and facilitates a network of full grown institutions that are at different levels as regards abilities, scope and solidity, and many of them are national, subregional or regional leaders. This means that Cinterfor/ILO has to not only continually demonstrate its added value through practical, methodological and technological excellence, but also increasingly take advantage of the competencies and

experiences accumulated in the national institutions so as to foster horizontal cooperation. This added value also consists in promoting information sharing about experiences between the American region and other regions, a role which is very much within the vocation of the ILO as a global agency.

This Report gives an account of what has been achieved in the last two years in line with the mandate and guidance the Centre received at the 37th Technical Committee Meeting in 2005. The activities are presented from the triple perspective of thematic priorities, geographic coverage and action instruments. As always, this Report also covers the Centre's human and financial resources and its effort to channel its activities within the framework of the ILO global agenda for decent work and to make important alliances with other international cooperation agencies.

One of the most significant points in the new proposal for a strategic plan is the suggestion that Cinterfor/ILO's activity should be reoriented to a results-based management approach, as the ILO itself has been doing in recent years. Therefore perhaps it would be useful to try to briefly summarise, albeit in a not very rigorous way, what can be seen as Cinterfor/ILO's main achievements up to now.

Today in Latin America and the Caribbean there is a genuine regional community of learning about vocational training. This community is not fully sustainable and it needs outside support and development. However, it is extraordinary how managers and professionals in institutions in countries with different political and institutional orientations can show such openness and willingness to communicate, share information and assist each other in ways that transcend all ideological, linguistic, cultural and geographical barriers.

This learning community has been imbued with many of the ILO's values and principles and it is committed to helping in the fight against poverty, inequality and social exclusion by fostering decent and productive employment, gender equity and social dialogue.

New approaches have been tried, critically analyzed and adapted, and also tools geared to strengthening the capability and impact of national education and work systems to support economic and social policies in the member countries.

There is now general acceptance of the idea that it is necessary to go ahead with the construction of supra-national standardization and skills certification frameworks as a contribution that training and employment policies can make to regional integration processes.

Many people in the region - managers, professionals, public officials, entrepreneurs, union leaders, academics, researchers and students – have had access to and been able to take advantage of a vast amount of information, studies and critical documentation about many aspects of training for work, and this has helped them to develop and feed their vocational and institutional projects.

It goes without saying that Cinterfor/ILO cannot take all the credit for these achievements, but it is doubtful whether the same results would have been obtained without an institution like the Centre to work patiently on the collective production of knowledge. The current situation is the starting point for a new effort in imagination and action to promote the development of vocational training policies and institutions.

In conclusion, I should like to thank the ILO Director General and Regional Director for the Americas for giving me this extraordinary opportunity to play a leading role in such an important process. I would also like to thank the managers of the Cinterfor/ILO member institutions for their support, friendship, frankness and guidance in the process of formulating the Centre's new strategies, and our ILO colleagues, who have actively cooperated to help build a successful future for the Centre.

I would also like to extend my very warmest thanks to my predecessor and friend, Pedro Daniel Weinberg. He worked in the service of the ILO, Cinterfor/ILO and the whole vocational training community in the Americas from 1974, when he first came to the ILO, until 2006. In that time he was head of two technical cooperation projects, in Montevideo and in Mexico, he was an independent consultant for the Buenos Aires Office and for Cinterfor/ILO, and he went on to become Director of this Centre, a position he held for more than ten years. Pedro Daniel always showed great vision and leadership, he made important contributions to developing vocational training in the Americas and he led Cinterfor/ILO to a consolidated position in training in the region. All his colleagues at the Centre will remember him for his professional competence and his human warmth, his work ethic, his dedication and loyalty to the cause of training and to the ideals of Cinterfor/ILO and the ILO, and for his generous friendship.

I would like to give special thanks to all the Cinterfor/ILO staff for their constant support and cooperation, their generosity and their devotion to their work. I must also thank Elisa de León who took early retirement in November 2005 after thirty years in different services at the Centre. In her last position she made an outstanding contribution to the development of the Cinterfor/ILO web site.

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