



International
Labour
Organization

► The World Employment Programme (WEP): Past, Present and Future

Background Paper for the 50th anniversary
of the launch of the WEP

A large, stylized graphic of the number '50' in white, set against a background of blue and white triangles. The triangles are arranged in a pattern that suggests a globe or a map, with the number '50' prominently displayed in the center. A small red triangle is visible in the top right corner.

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► Executive summary

This paper has been produced as background for an event to mark the 50th Anniversary of the launching of the World Employment Programme in 1969. It maps out the origins of the WEP in the 1960s, the key events of its heydays in the 1970s, and the challenges it faced in the 1980s. The paper was mainly prepared by Michele Sollai, with contributions from Michael Hopkins and Gerry Rodgers.

The origins of the World Employment Programme lie in the dynamics of international development in the 1960s. With decolonization came new priorities and perspectives. The UN system responded with the First Development Decade in 1961, the creation of the UN Development Programme in 1965, the UN Conference on Trade and Development and other actions. But there was widespread disillusionment about the results of the First Development Decade, centred on the growth of GDP, but which failed to bring broad socio-economic benefits.

The launching of the World Employment Programme in 1969 by Director-General David Morse, and its endorsement by the International Labour Conference, was the main ILO response to the strongly felt need for a new development paradigm. There had been increasing emphasis on employment in the ILO's work in the 1960s, including the adoption of the Employment Policy Convention, No. 122, of 1964. Now the ILO proposed the creation of 'fuller' and 'productive' employment as the way to combine economic growth with widespread social progress. This vision made the WEP, in a very short time, one of the leading players of international development in the 1970s.

The WEP was initially conceived as a global strategy to be implemented mainly through regional employment programmes. The regional focus of the WEP translated into the constitution of 3 programmes in the following years: the Regional Employment Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean (PREALC); the Asian Regional Team for Employment Promotion (ARTEP) and the Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa (JASPA). However, a review by two external consultants in 1969, Walter Galenson, Head of the Industrial Relations Department at Cornell University and Hans Singer, the renowned

development economist who had recently joined the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, proposed that decision-making and research activities be mainly concentrated at the Headquarters, while there should be a country-by-country operational approach, involving inter-agency, comprehensive employment missions as the principal means of assistance to national governments, with support from regional teams. This was broadly the framework adopted by the programme in the first half of the 1970s.

Initially, the WEP was seen as a cross-office programme coordinated by what was then the Human Resources Department. But this arrangement proved to be unsustainable, and a dedicated Department was established in 1970-71. Morse gave responsibility for the WEP to Deputy-Director Abbas Ammar, who launched the initial activities, including the first comprehensive employment missions. He established the Employment Planning and Promotion Department (EPPD) and made the key appointment of Louis Emmerij – from January 1971 as Chief of Research and from early 1973 as Head of the EPPD – who led the programme in its early years.

The first three comprehensive employment missions to Colombia (1970), Ceylon (1971) and Kenya (1972) were the driving force for the take-off of the World Employment Programme in the early 1970s. The crucial contribution of the missions to the World Employment Programme was a coherent, ground-breaking approach that made employment the crux to understand and engage with the question of development.

The 1970 mission to Colombia was the first big 'pioneer project' of the World Employment Programme. The Director of the IDS Dudley Seers was chosen as the leader of the mission. The appointment of Seers, combined with Singer's continued engagement, strengthened the ties between the IDS and the WEP and initiated a synergic relationship that soon became a central feature of the Programme. This mission was an inter-agency undertaking with the ILO as the principal coordinator. The main feature of the report was the framing of an 'integrated' approach to employment, based on the consideration that an effective employment policy would need to include a broad range of reforms involving

the whole structure of the society and economy of Colombia, including agrarian reform and income redistribution.

The second mission to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) was also headed by Dudley Seers. Its report again argued the need for a wide-ranging policy shift on social and economic issues linked to the rise of unemployment in the country. It highlighted the mismatch between the opportunities offered by the labour market – mostly seasonal manual work in the fields – and the job expectations of its new entrants, mainly young, educated school leavers, and made a number of policy recommendations to reduce this mismatch.

The third mission, to Kenya, was co-led by Hans Singer and Richard Jolly, continuing the IDS-WEP partnership. It was supported by Dharam Ghai, Director of the IDS in Nairobi and future head of WEP Research. Its report had an immediate impact, even greater perhaps than the Colombia and Ceylon reports. The report became a ‘bestseller of the ILO’ and a major reference for academic and non-academic activities. This was mainly thanks to the development of the key concepts of the ‘informal sector’ and ‘redistribution from growth’ and their integration into a package of policy proposals.

These missions were not without controversy, for the WEP had to deal with mounting protests by ILO constituents because of the missions’ alleged neglect of their interests and contribution. It was also felt by some that the missions’ proposals on employment were too extensive and provocative to find actual application in government policies. Nevertheless, the missions led to a shift in mainstream development thinking, and to the blossoming of WEP research activities in the early 1970s.

The growing popularity of the comprehensive missions and the effective lobbying of Ammar and Emmerij made it possible to gather a substantial amount of external funding – mainly from UN agencies and Northern European governments – to finance research activities. The WEP soon became the catalyst for a prolific network of researchers that had a big impact on development thinking in the 1970s and well into the 1980s. Several major research programmes were started: on technology and employment, which worked extensively on technological choice and its employment impact; on population

and employment, which developed a series of simulation models for policy evaluation; on urbanization and employment, which examined the links between formal and informal labour markets; on income distribution and employment, which examined the potential of income redistribution as a means to tackle unemployment; on education and employment, following the findings of the Ceylon mission report; and on rural employment, which examined poverty, landlessness and agrarian structure. These programmes were largely staffed by young and highly motivated researchers, who had a great deal of freedom to develop ideas and publish results. There were many books and journal articles, and large numbers of working papers.

The basic-needs strategy launched at the World Employment Conference in 1976 represented the culmination of the first phase of WEP research and a watershed in its overall development. The idea to convene a 'World Conference on Employment and the International Division of Labour' originated in the WEP Research Branch in 1974, and was endorsed by the new Director-General, Francis Blanchard. The Chief of the Research Branch, Dharam Ghai, was the main organiser of the WEC under Louis Emmerij's overall direction. The report to the conference was titled 'Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One-World Problem', and addressed the object of meeting the basic needs of the poorest through employment, growth and redistribution. Although subject to criticism from some participants in the Conference, the new approach was widely supported and led to the adoption of a 'Declaration of Principles and Programme of Action'.

There followed a period of enthusiasm for the basic needs approach to development in international agencies and some countries. But it rapidly became a polarising issue, for there was opposition in both North and South. In addition, there were financial strains due to the temporary US withdrawal from the ILO in 1977, a financial crisis in UNDP, and reduced extra-budgetary funding as a consequence of the global economic recession.

In the face of these challenging external conditions, the WEP framed a 'second phase' in the latter part of the 1970s that aimed to take stock of the first 'pioneering' years and apply research results to operational activities. Research still continued to have a central role within the WEP, including expanded efforts on rural employment, women's work and

poverty eradication. But the more radical and progressive strand of WEP research, protected in the earlier years, was now more exposed to criticism and pressure from the ILO's constituents, which curbed its breadth and freedom. External funding for research also declined. On the other hand, there was an increased emphasis on labour-intensive public works and other short-term employment programmes.

Large-scale comprehensive employment missions were largely phased out in this period. And while the WEC's 'Declaration of Principles and Programme of Action' formally remained the guiding policy framework of the WEP, the focus on basic needs was in fact slowly set aside; the main exception was some important basic needs missions in Africa. Meanwhile, the regional teams, especially in Asia and Latin America, became an increasingly important part of the programme, with the development of autonomous research activities, and notable contributions to debates on trade and employment, on the informal sector and the social consequences of neoliberal policies.

In the 1980s, the debt crisis, economic recession and structural adjustment, combined with an ideological shift towards deregulation and privatisation, represented a formidable challenge to the WEP's core assumptions and priorities. In 1982 an internal review of the WEP suggested a reorientation of activities away from the basic needs approach, and the identification of some new priorities. This included a shift towards more – and more short-term – operational activities, an attempt to address the problem of rising unemployment in industrialised countries, and research into gender inequality, the employment effects of labour market flexibility and access to labour markets by 'vulnerable groups' (women, youth, older workers). Work on income distribution came to an end, work on technology and employment planning was restructured, and work on the informal sector expanded, especially in PREALC. But in the end, this did not amount to a new 'comprehensive' approach. The activities of the Employment and Development Department started being referred to less and less as part of a common World Employment Programme.

In addition to the disconnect among WEP projects, the goal of greater complementarity between Headquarters and regional employment teams was hardly realised. In fact, the

regional teams were not, or only marginally, involved in the re-orientation of WEP research priorities.

Starting in the mid-1980s, the inclusion of employment targets in structural adjustment policies became a core theme of the World Employment Programme. This gave rise in 1987 to a 'High-Level Meeting on Employment and Structural Adjustment', and a cross-office programme of research on the subject. Although this did not provide a common denominator for WEP as a whole, it did open up new possibilities to influence international development thinking and challenge the economic premises of the Washington Consensus, for instance through the inclusion of WEP objectives in the 4th UN International Development Strategy for the 1990s.

But the potential re-emergence of the World Employment Programme in the international arena was undermined by new ILO priorities and internal reform. In the early 1990s, a new ILO structure dismantled the essential components of the WEP, namely its research programmes and the regional employment teams. The latter two were merged into new 'multi-disciplinary teams' intended to facilitate the provision of advice and technical services to employers, workers and national governments, but without the knowledge-based approach of the WEP. Work on employment continued but took different forms.

The World Employment Programme was a unique undertaking in the ILO's history, and there are some important lessons from this experience, which can provide pointers for the future.

The first is the importance of research, knowledge and innovation. This provided legitimacy in a wider intellectual community, as well as bringing new ideas and approaches to policy formulation and implementation. It rested on partnership – the role of IDS, Sussex was critical in the early years – and the programme drew on a widening network of top-level academics and policy analysts. But over time this became more difficult, for it is not easy to maintain an open process of critical research in an organization built on a delicate balance between diverse interests.

The second is historical specificity. WEP was built on, and formed part of, an expanding agenda of international development in the 1960s and 1970s, which provided orientation for its work, and made it possible to raise substantial external funding. WEP's success reflected its central contribution to this emerging development agenda. Today the nearest analogue would be the growing concern with environmental and climate issues. Then in the 1980s, conditions changed, and the WEP was faced with declining external funding and a neoliberal onslaught which it was unable to resist.

The third is the connection to the rest of the ILO. The WEP was largely self-contained, and this was initially a strength because the WEP could build an autonomous approach. But ultimately it made consolidation within the ILO's work much more difficult and generated opposition among some sections of the ILO's constituency. In addition, labour ministries did not manage the economic policies needed for employment creation, and employers and workers did not give the same priority to informal work and poverty. This was certainly a factor in WEP's ultimate demise.

The fourth was the relationship between headquarters and the field. Initially, the WEP was dominated by a vision built at headquarters, despite its focus on development. Later this was reversed, as regional teams built analytical competence and strong regional networks when the capabilities were declining in Geneva. But the synergy between HQ and field was weak. Stronger connections would have provided many advantages and improved the sustainability of the programme.

The fifth, and perhaps the most important, is leadership. The role of Louis Emmerij was fundamental in driving the WEP forward in the first half of the 1970s and he was preceded and supported by Abbas Ammar and of course David Morse. WEP was led from the front, and he and others provided important leadership in the early years of the WEP, notably Dharam Ghai and the heads of many research programmes and teams.

The WEP was a child of its time. In a period when conventional models were being overturned, conservative values challenged and hierarchy respected in the breach, the ILO succeeded in surfing the wave and creating something new. Of course, the

employment problem persists today, but its character changes as new needs surface and old ones remain. Clearly, there is still a need for a World Employment Programme.

► Introduction

This paper has been produced as background for an event to mark the 50th Anniversary of the launching of the WEP in 1969. The paper maps out the origins of the WEP in the 1960s, the key events of its heydays in the 1970s, and the challenges it faced in the 1980s. The paper has been mainly prepared by Michele Sollai with contributions and overall guidance from Michael Hopkins and Gerry Rodgers.¹ The authors take responsibility for the content but are aware that many issues may not have received the treatment they deserve. So this is a draft for improvement and comments and criticisms are welcome.

It so happens that this 50th Anniversary of the WEP coincides with the Centenary of the International Labour Organization (ILO) itself. The ILO sees its anniversaries as occasions for innovation and forward-looking thinking, rather than just celebrations of past achievements², and this paper is written in that spirit.

From this perspective, it is possible to draw a line of continuity between the ‘Future of Work’ Centenary Initiative and the World Employment Programme, itself launched in 1969 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Organisation. The World Employment Programme (WEP) was indeed framed and presented as the global strategy of the ILO to understand and respond to the socio-economic challenges of the 1970s. In this sense, the WEP stands as a forerunner of the current ILO strategy to address the future(s) of work and society. Therefore, looking back at the unfolding of the World Employment Programme will hopefully provide some useful insights for current ILO programmes as well as work on employment elsewhere. The report of the one-day meeting on June 4 of former WEP staff and current ILO staff working on employment issues, that will celebrate the WEP and honour its key Director, Louis Emmerij, will, it is anticipated, provide some of these insights.

¹ Sollai is a doctoral student at the Graduate Institute, Geneva. Hopkins and Rodgers are former ILO staff, who worked in WEP in the 1970s and 1980s.

² See the Report of the Global Commission on the Future of Work, *Work for a Brighter Future*, ILO, Geneva, 2019; https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_662410/lang--en/index.htm

This paper provides a general overview of the history of the World Employment Programme, from its preparation and launching in 1969 to its waning and eventual demise in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It first looks at the 'gestation' of the Programme, following the ILO Regional Conferences' call for a 'world plan for employment and human resources' in the late 1960s. Secondly, the paper addresses the 'pioneering' years of the WEP that led to the iconic World Employment Conference in 1976. Since these years were arguably the most vivid period in the history of the WEP, the paper focuses in particular on this phase by examining the key 'comprehensive employment missions' of the early 1970s and the exceptional development of research activities at the ILO Headquarters at that time. Subsequently, the paper dwells on the third phase of the WEP, during which the Programme attempted to consolidate its status and outreach while dealing with growing financial and political issues within and outside the ILO at the turn of the 1980s. Finally, the paper outlines the evolution of the WEP in the course of the 1980s, a decade characterised by notoriously unfavourable conditions for international development. During this decade, the WEP made significant contributions to research and technical co-operation, especially at the regional level, but could not maintain the influence on global economic and social policy that it had had in the 1970s.

As the paper suggests, in the early 1990s a revival of international efforts to advance the social and human aspects of development seemed to create room for the renewed relevance of WEP research and action within the UN system. However, the ILO underwent instead a process of reform that eventually led to the dismantlement of the structure of the WEP and the de facto marginalisation of the WEP's knowledge-based development strategy.

Some recent historical works have mentioned or focused on specific issues connected to the WEP³, but there has not been yet an attempt to treat the Programme as an

³ See RODGERS, Gerry, LEE, Eddy, SWEPTON, Lee, VAN DAELE, Jasmien, *The ILO and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-1989*, International Labour Organization, Geneva, 2009, Chapter 5: Employment and poverty reduction; MAUL, Daniel, *Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940-1970*, Palgrave Macmillan, International Labour Organization, Basingstoke-Geneva, 2012, pp. 250-256; BERNARDS, Nick, *The Global Governance of Precarity. Primitive Accumulation and the*

autonomous historical subject. By tracing a first, broad overview of the history of the WEP the present paper, it is hoped, may provide a starting point for more detailed research alongside its primary objective of serving as a background document for the Conference celebrating the 50 years of the Programme.

Politics of Irregular Work, Routledge, New York, 2018, Chapter 4: Irregular work in the postcolonial social order: the World Employment Programme discovers the 'informal'; BENANAV, Aaron, The origins of informality: the ILO at the limit of the concept of unemployment, in 'Journal of Global History', v. 14, n. 1, 2019, pp. 107-125. See also the series of volumes documenting the intellectual history of the UN, summarized in EMMERIJ, Louis, JOLLY, Richard, WEISS, Thomas G., Ahead of the Curve? UN Ideas and Global Challenges, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2001.

► I. Shaping the WEP, Reshaping the ILO (1966-1969)

To understand the origins of the World Employment Programme, it is first necessary to look at the changing dynamics of international development in the 1960s and the parallel evolution of the ILO within that context. The launching of the First Development Decade in 1961 ushered in a makeover of the UN system as a key catalyst of development ideas and projects, a shift that was best symbolised by the setting up of the UN Development Programme in 1965. Alongside this, new actors started coming to the scene of international development and helped make it more diverse and inclusive than in the past. From the mid-1960s, Northern European governments, new funding bodies (e.g. the Swedish International Development Agency, SIDA, 1965) and academic institutions (e.g. the UK Institute of Development Studies, IDS, 1966) progressively started playing an incentive role in concert with UN agencies. For their part, long-standing actors in development such as the US government and the World Bank also expanded and ramified their operations with the setting up of the US Agency for International Development (USAID, 1961) and the International Development Agency (IDA, 1960).

An important reason for the growth of interest in international development in the 1960s lies in the acceleration of the process of decolonisation at the beginning of the decade. Decolonisation meant greater representation and leverage of developing countries in the international arena. Especially at the UN, this brought a progressive amplification of perspectives and debates on international development. The creation of the UN Conference on Trade and Development in 1964, and the parallel establishment of the Group of 77, should be mainly seen in this light. More and more diverse development actors soon led to greater room for critiques, once the outcomes of the First Development Decade started to become clear in the mid-1960s. The initial enthusiasm increasingly gave place to a widespread sense of disillusionment about the promises of development as they had appeared at the beginning of the decade. The main problem was that the key strategy of the First Development Decade, economic growth conceived in terms of high rates of growth of the GNP, while being 'accomplished' in a considerable number of developing countries by the end of the 1960s, had shown little or no signs of

the broad socio-economic benefits it was expected to automatically bring. On the contrary, the exclusive focus on GNP growth was now thought to have led to new contradictions and mounting problems in the societies of developing countries. There were, as now, increasing calls for alternative development strategies to tackle socio-economic emergencies looming over developing countries such as overpopulation, food insecurity, and persistent poverty.

The launching of the World Employment Programme in 1969 has to be essentially interpreted as the ILO response to the strongly felt need for a new development paradigm. In the words of the “father”⁴ of the Programme, ILO Director-General David Morse, the WEP called first and foremost for the “dethronement of the GNP”⁵ as the exclusive measure and goal of development. For true, comprehensive development to be achieved, the WEP proposed instead to place ‘employment’ as its central object of concern. Accordingly, the creation of ‘fuller’ and ‘productive’ employment⁶ was presented as the way to combine economic growth with widespread social progress. This paradigm shift soon found a very warm reception among ILO constituents as well as within and beyond the UN, to the extent that it made the WEP, in a very short time, one of the leading players of international development in the 1970s. With the WEP, the ILO effectively “caught the tide of affairs”⁷ and perhaps more than it initially envisaged, came to act in an unprecedented manner as a true development agency.

The open, receptive international environment of the late 1960s undoubtedly was a key factor for the emergence of the World Employment Programme. Moreover, the WEP also reflected the gradual shift in the priorities and means of action of the ILO during the ‘Morse Years’ (1948-1970). The setting up and running of the Technical Assistance

⁴ A. Ammar to Morse, 13/12/1972, ILO Archives, WEP 159-3-227-3-1 Jacket 2 (WEP JASPA Missions reports).

⁵ D. Morse, ‘The Dimensions of the Employment Problem in Developing Countries’, Keynote Speech at the Cambridge Conference on Development, 13/09/1970 – 24/09/1970, ILO Archives, RL 25-8-22-1, Jacket 2 (Relations, UK University of Sussex IDS).

⁶ See Report of the Director-General, The World Employment Programme, International Labour Conference, 53rd Session, Geneva, 1969, p. 7 and p. 56.

⁷ JOLLY, Richard, Singer, Hans, SEERS, Dudley, ‘The Pilot Missions under the WEP’, ILO, Strategies for employment promotion. An Evaluation of Four Inter-Agency Employment Missions, 1973, p. 39.

Program (TAP) established the ILO firmly within the field of development assistance to newly independent countries⁸. In the 1950s and well into the 1960s, ILO activities remained geared towards formal wage labour and human resources development in the industrial sector. But the problems of unemployment in its different manifestations already started to be discussed in 1961, when an ILO meeting of experts – among whom the prominent economists K. N. Raj and Roberto de Oliveira Campos – stressed the importance of including broad employment objectives in development policies⁹. Following the meeting, Morse dwelt on the issue in his report to the ILC in 1961¹⁰. This eventually led to the formulation and adoption of the influential Employment Policy Convention (C122) and Recommendation (R122) in 1964¹¹. By the mid-1960s, the question of employment and development had therefore become a central point of debate within the ILO machinery.

The turning point came in 1966 on the occasion of the 8th Regional Conference of American States Members of the ILO in Ottawa, with the adoption of two Resolutions together labelled ‘Ottawa Plan for Human Resources Development’, followed by similar Resolutions in Asia and Africa¹². These official declarations allowed the Office to gather the political capital necessary to present and pass a Resolution at the 1967 ILC calling for the preparation of a world programme on employment¹³. Given the general policy of decentralisation of the ILO in the mid-1960s¹⁴, the WEP was initially framed as a global strategy to be implemented mainly through regional employment programs. The first detailed account of the WEP called for the Office to carry out, in a concerted inter-departmental effort, a ‘research’ phase on employment, revolving around four main

⁸ MAUL, op. cit., Ch. 4: “Principled Development: The Beginnings of the Technical Assistance Programme (TAP)”.

⁹ See RODGERS, Gerry, LEE, Eddy, SWEPSTON, Lee, VAN DAELE, Jasmien, *The ILO and the Quest for Social Justice*, op. cit., p. 184. For more information, see ILO, *Employment Objectives in Economic Development: Report of a Meeting of Experts*, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1961.

¹⁰ Report of the Director-General, Labour Relations, Present Problems and Future Prospects, International Labour Conference, 45th Session, Geneva, 1961.

¹¹ Records of Proceedings, International Labour Conference, 48th Session, Geneva, 1964, Appendix XI, pp. 772-787.

¹² ILO, ‘Official Bulletin’, v. L, n.1, 1967, pp. 73-77.

¹³ Records of Proceedings, International Labour Conference, 51st Session, Geneva, 1967, Resolution concerning International Co-operation for Economic and Social Development, p. 788.

¹⁴ MAUL, op. cit., p. 256.

activities: a) manpower projections; b) enquiries into the application of the ILO Employment Policy Recommendation of 1964; c) studies of specific regional problems of employment policy and training; d) target setting for employment creation and skill formation at the sub-regional level. The WEP would then pass to an 'implementation' phase, meaning that regional field teams would start technical assistance and advisory services to the governments of developing countries based on the findings of research previously undertaken¹⁵.

Given the great importance of regional action attributed in this first plan, the setting up of regional employment teams in the field was naturally given a top priority. In each region, a small nucleus of staff was formed - in Santiago de Chile, Bangkok, Addis Ababa and Dakar - already in 1968. The regional focus of the WEP would eventually translate into the constitution of 3 programmes in the following years: the Regional Employment Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean (PREALC); the Asian Regional Team for Employment Promotion (ARTEP) and later the Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa (JASPA). However, it became progressively clear that the establishment of the World Employment Programme, both at the regional level and Headquarters, was encountering more problems and delays than initially thought. Once the first plan of the World Employment Programme started to be presented to the public, the 'regional approach' was put under severe critical scrutiny by international agencies and ILO constituents. The proposed focus of action and in particular sub-regional target setting came under fire at the Tokyo and Rio ILO Regional Conferences in 1968¹⁶.

Director-General Morse was acutely aware of the troubles getting the Programme off the ground, and while absolutely convinced of its conception, soon realised the need for a change of action¹⁷. He decided to commission a review of the plan for the World Employment Programme to two external consultants: Walter Galenson, Head of the Industrial Relations Department at Cornell and Hans Singer, the renowned development

¹⁵ See Zoetewij to Zelenka, 15/09/1967, ILO Archives, Morse Papers, Z 11-5-7 Jacket 1 (World Employment Programme. General, 1967-1969).

¹⁶ Wynne-Roberts, Notes on the World Employment Programme of the ILO, 15/11/1968, Id.

¹⁷ Morse to Ammar (Confidential), 11/11/1968, ILO Archives, WEP 3 Jacket 1 (WEP Planning).

economist who at the time had just concluded his long-term career at the UN and joined the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex¹⁸. The recommendations advanced by the two consultants in 1969 called for a far-reaching departure from the initial strategy and can be summarised as follows: a) against the 'regionalisation' of the WEP, Singer and Galenson proposed a country-by-country operational approach, involving the organisation of inter-agency, comprehensive employment missions as the principal means of assistance to national governments; b) while still accepting the importance of regional employment teams, the two consultants essentially de-prioritised their role within the WEP. Decision-making and research activities would be mainly concentrated at the Headquarters, while the regional teams would basically serve to provide operational support to comprehensive employment missions and carry out follow-up support to national governments based on the missions' findings; c) the two consultants also called for a more pragmatic and policy-oriented approach to employment problems. Singer in particular opposed the formulation of manpower projections and employment targets as ineffective means to bring about actual employment¹⁹. The proposals had a tremendous impact on the development of the Programme. As stated by Zoetewij, one of the main drafters of the initial WEP plan, Singer and Galenson's review of the WEP "enabled us to make the transition from a purely indicative plan with ILO action confined to the purely manpower field to a programme which embodies something much more akin to direct action in the creation of employment. They took us still further away from looking at the programme largely in terms of 'ILO competence'"²⁰.

The re-framing of the scheme of the WEP was probably a critical factor behind the success of the official launching of the Programme at the International Labour Conference in 1969. Morse's General Report included some of the key themes that made for the innovative character of the WEP: the consideration of *all* forms of unemployment

¹⁸ Wynne-Roberts to Singer, 16/12/1968, Id.

¹⁹ See H. Singer, First Thoughts – Objective of the World Employment programme, 20/01/1969, Id; Galenson, Memorandum – WEP, 4/02/1969, ILO Archives, Morse Papers, Z 11-5-7 Jacket 1 (World Employment Programme. General, 1967-1969).

²⁰ 'The Development of the World Employment Programme', 24/02/1969, WEP 3 Jacket 1 (WEP Planning).

as equally important problems of development; the crucial importance of agrarian reform for creating rural employment and social progress; the emphasis on labour-intensive technologies; and the importance of 'adjusting' education to employment opportunities in developing countries²¹.

²¹ Report of the Director-General, The World Employment Programme.

► II. The ‘Prime Years’ of the WEP: The ILO Offensive on Development (1969-1976)

The wide resonance of the WEP following its launching at the 1969 ILC made the question of implementation even more urgent. In theory, the WEP was framed as a global approach involving the concerted re-orientation of a number of ILO activities. Accordingly, the initial setup envisaged the Human Resources Department as the leading component of a ‘WEP Co-ordination Committee’ including the Heads of all Departments dealing in one way or another with the issue of employment²². As it soon turned out, this arrangement proved to be unsustainable even on the short run, so that the WEP remained in a state of administrative uncertainty until a dedicated Department started running in 1971. In parallel to this, the new shift towards centralisation risked being a serious blow for the regional employment teams. Having been suddenly deprived of their original purpose and without clear guidance from the Headquarters, the teams had a hard time attracting resources and finding a definite structure in the first years of the WEP. Apart from the initial perplexity of their newly-appointed leaders²³, the early change of priorities created structural problems of co-ordination both among the regional teams and between them and the HQ.

Against this backdrop, Morse’s decision to give the leadership of the WEP to Deputy-Director Abbas Ammar was a crucial factor for directing the Programme on the right track. Especially after the early resignation of the DG in 1970, Ammar became the main spokesperson of the Programme within and outside the ILO. He assured continuity in management and co-ordination that allowed the WEP to come through its difficult infancy unscathed and eventually empowered²⁴. In accordance with Singer and

²² ILO Circular – Morse, 7/05/1969, ILO Archives, Morse Papers, Z 11-5-7 Jacket 2 (World Employment Programme. General, May 1969-1970).

²³ P.C. Mathew, ‘ARTEP, Its evolution and progress. Suggested solutions to some of the Problems in implementing its Project. General summary of its Conclusions and Recommendations and Review and Evaluation’, 9/04/1971, ILO Archives, Jenks Papers, Z 11-5-9 Jacket 2 (Asian Manpower Plan, 1971-72).

²⁴ Ammar’s great contribution to the WEP stands out also in light of his personal reservations about the Programme. See Ammar to Jenks, 29/07/1971, ILO Archives, Jenks Papers, Z 11-5-7 Jacket 3 (World Employment Programme (General), 1970-73): “You will recall that this Programme was launched with considerable misgivings on my part. When the Ottawa plan for Latin America was worked out, I expressed my doubts, indicating my view that we were plunging into a large-scale enterprise without serious thinking

Galenson's advice, Ammar soon recognised the need to recruit highly qualified, young people to make innovative research one of the main driving forces of the Programme. Even after the WEP found a stable organisational structure with the constitution of the Employment Planning and Promotion Department (EPPD) and new leadership with the appointment of Louis Emmerij – from January 1971 as Chief of Research and from early 1973 as Head of the EPPD – Ammar continued to play an important role as interlocutor between the Programme and the ILO apparatus. The influence of Abbas Ammar can be also seen in the preparation and launching of the “star instrument”²⁵ of the WEP, the comprehensive employment missions.

It is fair to say that the carrying out of the comprehensive employment missions to Colombia (1970), Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) (1971), Kenya (1972) and the publication of the respective mission reports were the driving force for the take-off of the World Employment Programme in the early 1970s. After the launching of the Programme in the summer of 1969, its leaders were at great pains to find organisational and conceptual unity for the Programme. Four years later, the WEP had by all accounts acquired a distinctive, extremely innovative operational and intellectual identity. Considered as a whole, the crucial contribution of the missions to the World Employment Programme was precisely a coherent, ground-breaking approach that made employment the crux to understand and engage with the question of development. By fully embracing and promoting this approach, the WEP soon turned the ILO into a ‘pioneering’ agency of international development. This in turn allowed the WEP to acquire the popularity and financial means necessary to develop a far-reaching research programme²⁶.

As the first big ‘pioneer project’ of the World Employment Programme, the mission to Colombia in 1970 laid the foundations for the character and setup of the following missions. After an initial attempt to involve Arthur Lewis, the Director of the IDS Dudley

and solid preparation and stating my strong reservations concerning the whole idea of the team approach and procedure. [...]”

²⁵ P.C. Mathew, ‘ARTEP, Its evolution and progress’, Jenks Papers, Z 11-5-9.

²⁶ RODGERS, Gerry, LEE, Eddy, SWEPSTON, Lee, VAN DAELE, Jasmien, *The ILO and the Quest for Social Justice*, op. cit., pp. 187-191.

Seers was chosen as the leader of the mission²⁷. The appointment of Seers, combined with Singer's strong influence, strengthened the ties between the IDS and the WEP and initiated a synergic relationship that soon became a central feature of the Programme²⁸. During its preparatory phase in 1969, it was agreed to form the mission as an inter-agency undertaking with the ILO as the principal coordinator. Although Seers later pointed out that the wide composition and size of the mission proved to be an impediment rather than an advantage²⁹, the inter-agency framework remained a trademark of the comprehensive employment missions in the following years. Altogether the team comprised 27 members, in representation of various organisations within and outside the UN system³⁰. The mission took place in early 1970 and the final draft of its conclusions was submitted "in record time" to Colombian President Lleras Restrepo in the following April³¹. The main feature of the report was the framing of an 'integrated' approach to employment, based on the consideration that an effective employment policy would need to include a broad range of reforms involving the whole structure of the society and economy of Colombia. Great emphasis was placed on the rural sector as a potential key resource for employment creation. The report called for a far-reaching process of agrarian reform and land redistribution aimed at tackling the immobilism of big landowners and empowering small farming³². The report further called for the implementation of a progressive income distribution policy, as it underscored how poverty and inequality in income were not only an effect but also a cause of unemployment. A new set of redistributive measures – from the town to the country, and from the rich to the poor – was therefore envisaged to steer demand towards goods and services produced within the country and through more labour-intensive technologies³³. The report also pointed to the current asymmetrical framework

²⁷ Ammar to Morse, 26/09/1969, ILO Archives, Z 1-1-131 Jacket 2 (Correspondence with Mr. Abbas Ammar, 1966-1970).

²⁸ From IDS, also Richard Jolly and Emanuel de Kadt also took part in the mission.

²⁹ Seers to Morse, 19/02/1970, ILO Archives, Z 11-5-8-1 (Pioneer Project. Colombia, Dr. Ammar's mission, 1969-1970).

³⁰ See *Towards full employment. A programme for Colombia*, prepared by an inter-agency team organised by the International Labour Office, ILO, Geneva, 1970, pp. 4-5.

³¹ Méndez to Seers, 17/04/1970, ILO Archives, WEP 86-3-14-3-1 Jacket 1 (WEP Colombia Progress Reports).

³² *Towards Full Employment*, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-137.

³³ SEERS, Dudley, *New Approaches Suggested by the Colombia Employment Programme*, in 'International Labour Review', 1970, p. 385.

of international trade as a substantial reason for structural unemployment in Colombia and promoted a reform of the country's trade policy towards import substitution and promotion of manufacturing exports.

The publication of the report was welcomed by the Colombian government and had a very good public reception. Within the WEP, Seers' work was highly praised in light of the "flying start" that the report had given to the programme of comprehensive employment missions³⁴, and he was chosen to head the comprehensive employment mission to Ceylon, which started taking shape in the summer of 1970. The mission was again sponsored by and made up of representatives of several international and Asian regional agencies, in addition to the nucleus of IDS and WEP people, among whom the future head of the EPPD Louis Emmerij. The mission started operations in the Spring of 1971, and while it was severely hampered by the almost simultaneous breaking out of the JVP insurrection, it was eventually able to carry out its work and publish its findings in the WEP report 'Matching Employment Opportunities and Expectations: A Programme of Action for Ceylon'.



The WEP mission to Ceylon, 1971. At the head of the table, Dudley Seers. On the right, among others, Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij, Felix Paukert and R. Srivastava. On the left, among others, Peter Richards, John Sykes, Michael Lipton and Godfrey Gunatileke. Photo taken in the Taprobane Hotel, Colombo. March 1971; courtesy of Peter Richards.

³⁴ Ammar to Galenson, 8/05/1970, ILO Archives, WEP 2 Jacket 2 (WEP Research Programme). See also Galenson to Seers, 15/04/1970, WEP 86-3-14-3-1 Jacket 1 (WEP Colombia Progress Reports).

The report confirmed the need for a wide-ranging policy shift on a vast range of social and economic issues linked to the rise of unemployment in the country. Moreover, the surveys conducted during fieldwork highlighted the problem of 'structural' unemployment related to levels and patterns of education. As the title of the report indicates, one of the main reasons for unemployment in Ceylon was the mismatch between the opportunities offered by the labour market – mostly seasonal manual work in the fields – and the job expectations of its new entrants, mainly young, educated school leavers³⁵ - an issue that still resonates today. As it was found that this group would rather stay un- or underemployed while waiting for highly paid white-collar jobs than take available posts, the report advanced a series of measures to adjust the Ceylonese education system to the current configuration of the labour market. The report particularly emphasised the concept of 'recurrent education', a long-range combination of formal and in-work education that would allow to "change attitudes and aspirations and bring them into closer harmony with the opportunities offered by the environment"³⁶.

By the time the Ceylon report was published in 1971, the popularity of the comprehensive employment missions was rapidly growing and attracting proposals and invitations from many governments. After Latin America and Asia, it was agreed that the next mission should be to an African country. The case of Kenya seemed to fit well with the stated criterion of choosing countries in which "despite some success in GNP growth, employment problems are pressing, and are recognised as such by their authorities"³⁷. Moreover, Kenyatta's government was very willing to cooperate with the ILO and showed great awareness of rising unemployment in the country³⁸. Pursuing the IDS-WEP partnership, Hans Singer and Richard Jolly agreed to take the leadership of the mission,

³⁵ SEERS, Dudley, *New Light on Structural Unemployment: Lessons of a Mission to Ceylon*, in 'International Labour Review', v. 105, n. 2, 1972, p. 101.

³⁶ Matching Employment Opportunities and Expectations: A Programme of Action for Ceylon, report of an Inter-agency Team organised by the ILO, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1971, p. 141.

³⁷ Galenson, Proposals for Pilot Country Studies on Employment Creation, 10/07/1969, WEP 2 Jacket 1 (WEP Research Programme).

³⁸ Report on Professor Philip's Mission to East Africa, 10/10/1970 – 25/10/1970, WEP 159-3-159-1 (WEP JASPA - East Africa, preparatory project work 1969-1971).

with Louis Emmerij as the main ILO representative³⁹. The overall team was made up of an even larger number of representatives of international and regional agencies from a broad range of disciplines. Moreover, in contrast with the first two missions, Singer and Jolly managed to secure the collaboration of local Kenyan expertise – among whom Dharam Ghai, Director of the IDS in Nairobi and future head of WEP Research – in the preparation and carrying out of the mission⁴⁰. The mission arrived in Nairobi in March 1972 and was officially concluded the following May. Its final report, titled ‘Employment, incomes and equality. A strategy for increasing productive employment in Kenya’⁴¹, was published in the summer of 1972. The report had immediate impact and publicity, even greater perhaps than the previous Colombia and Ceylon reports. Despite its great length, the report became a ‘bestseller of the ILO’ and a major reference for academic and non-academic activities. This was mainly thanks to the development of the key concepts of the ‘informal sector’ and ‘redistribution from growth’. While the ‘informal sector’ had been until then regarded as a “reversion to primitive conditions, a denial of modernization and progress”⁴², the report re-evaluated it in a positive sense and proposed to develop it as part of a pragmatic, sustainable approach to employment creation. The strategy of redistribution from growth basically consisted in: 1) the stabilization of the incomes of the wealthier sections of the country; 2) the reallocation of investment from large-scale modernization to schemes aimed at raising the incomes of the poorest sections of the population above specific ‘poverty lines’⁴³. Taken together, the findings of the report advocated a strong departure from the still conventional framework of the UN Second Development Decade and advanced a clear and coherent alternative to GNP growth-oriented economic development⁴⁴. Thanks to a grant from

³⁹ Singer to Emmerij, 22/11/1971, Id.

⁴⁰ Notes on visit to Kenya, Addis Ababa, Nairobi & Rome (FAO), by Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij, and S.B.L. Nigam, 15/12/1971 – 22/12/1971, WEP 159-3-227-3 Jacket 2 (WEP JASPA Kenya Team Experts).

⁴¹ ILO, *Employment, incomes and equality. A strategy for increasing productive employment in Kenya*. Report of an Inter-agency team financed by the United Nations Development Programme and Organised by the International Labour Office, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1972.

⁴² SINGER, Hans, JOLLY Richard, *Unemployment in an African Setting. Lessons of the Employment Strategy Mission to Kenya*, in ‘International Labour Review’, v. 107, n. 2, 1973, p. 107.

⁴³ ILO, *Strategies for employment promotion. An Evaluation of Four Inter-Agency Employment Missions*, 1973, p. 27.

⁴⁴ Id., p. 38.

SIDA, the report was widely distributed in Kenya and its recommendations immediately followed up by governmental meetings to discuss implementation⁴⁵.

One year later, Director-General Wilfred Jenks convened a meeting with the major participants and agencies involved in the comprehensive missions, to take stock of the experience and formulate guidelines for future undertakings. During the meeting, it was generally agreed that the reports of these three missions presented a 'new style of development', described by Jenks as "development with a human face"⁴⁶. The meeting was also the occasion to discuss some critical points that had emerged during the work of the missions. In the first place, the WEP had to deal with mounting protests by ILO constituents because of the missions' alleged neglect of their interests and contribution. Since the publication of the Colombia report, the workers' representatives strongly opposed the report's questioning of trade unions' entitlements and social legislation on formal wage labour as factors hampering the inclusion of the mass unemployed into the labour market⁴⁷. The controversy that this aroused in the Financial Committee of the Governing Body came close to putting the whole WEP at risk⁴⁸, and it was agreed that from then onwards the systematic involvement of the ILO tripartite framework would constitute a central part of the missions' work. In the second place, the meeting was the occasion to reflect upon the impact of the missions' proposals on employment, which many feared were too extensive and provocative to find actual application in governments' policies⁴⁹. Seers, Singer and Jolly emphasised instead the incisive manner in which the new insights of the missions were already changing the approach of national and international decision-makers and influencing a broad shift in mainstream development thinking⁵⁰. In fact, the impact of the Colombia, Sri Lanka and Kenya reports was a decisive factor for the blossoming of WEP research activities in the early 1970s.

⁴⁵ Strom to Emmerij, 30/01/1973, WEP 159-3-227-3-1 Jacket 2 (WEP JASPA Missions reports).

⁴⁶ ILO, *Strategies for employment promotion. An Evaluation of Four Inter-Agency Employment Missions*, 1973, p. 7.

⁴⁷ See 'Role of Employers' and Workers' Organisations', 1971, ILO Archives, WEP 4-3 (Workers' organisations).

⁴⁸ ILO Governing Body, Third Report of the Financial and Administrative Committee, Geneva, 2-5/03/1971.

⁴⁹ Saunders to Blanchard, 20/07/1972, 'ILO Employment Mission Draft Report', WEP 159-3-227-3-1 Jacket 1 (WEP JASPA Missions reports).

⁵⁰ Emmerij to Weaver, 5/04/1973, WEP 1 Jacket 1 (general 1968-1988).

The regional teams in Africa, Asia and Latin America made only secondary contributions to these missions – mainly preparatory work and staff support – and subsequent major missions to the Philippines (1974) and Sudan (1975). While they developed a variety of local activities, including country studies, data banks and technical cooperation projects,⁵¹ the regional teams clearly played second fiddle to the core of the WEP in Geneva. They would only become a leading component of the WEP later on after the dynamic at Headquarters started to fade.

The research plan of the WEP started to take shape in 1969, but the financial crisis of the ILO in 1970 due to the 50% cut in the US budget contribution risked seriously compromising the development of the research programme. However, the growing popularity of the comprehensive missions and the effective lobbying of Ammar and Emmerij made it possible to gather a substantial amount of external funding – mainly from UN agencies and Northern European governments – to finance the inception of research activities. As stated by Ammar, this “constituted for the ILO an unprecedented breakthrough in securing outside resources for headquarters-based research”⁵². This exceptional situation in fact gave the WEP greater room for broadening its scope beyond ILO conventional focuses and systematically involving high-profile external collaborators in its research activities. In this way, the WEP was soon able to become the catalyst of a broad and prolific network of researchers that had a big impact on development thinking in the course of the 1970s and well into the 1980s⁵³. In 1971, thanks to a grant from SIDA, the new Head of Research Emmerij organised a meeting with the Directors of major Research Institutes in order to exchange information on employment issues and discuss the potential role of the WEP in the current international framework of research⁵⁴. The discussions at the meeting eventually led to the identification of the main areas that characterised WEP research in the following years⁵⁵.

⁵¹ See for example ILO, PREALC: 25 Years. Santiago de Chile, 1993.

⁵² Ammar to Weaver, 26/09/1973, WEP 3 Jacket 3

⁵³ Emmerij, Adaptation of the Structure of EPPD, 23/08/1973, WEP Research Programme Jacket 4 – WEP.

⁵⁴ ‘Meeting of directors of research institutes on research topics related to the WEP’, WEP 2-1001 Jacket 1 (WEP meeting of directors of research institutes 13 December 1971).

⁵⁵ ILO, Scope, approach and content of research-oriented activities of the World Employment Programme, Geneva, 1972, p. 4.

The research programme on technology and employment was one of the first to be established and remained a high priority throughout the history of the WEP⁵⁶. Starting in the early 1970s, activities revolved around three main issues: a) the question of technological choice for developing countries and the relative impact of different technologies on employment rates, b) the identification of new or existing labour-intensive technologies that could stimulate employment creation; c) the study of policies making 'appropriate' technologies feasible and in the long run convenient for national governments and private business. The programme soon developed a broad range of sectoral and country-specific studies, covering in particular agriculture and construction works⁵⁷. As part of this programme Amartya Sen published in 1975 his influential study 'Employment, technology and development'⁵⁸.

Another large programme of research was that on population and employment, aimed at "influencing population and economic policy, especially in developing countries, in such a way that the effects of population changes on employment and income distribution – and of employment and income distribution policy on population – are taken more adequately into account"⁵⁹. A great part of the efforts of this programme in the early 1970s concentrated on the development of the Bachue family of economic-demographic models, which attempted to simulate the structure and evolution of the economies of developing countries and the impact of various policy measures⁶⁰ and the link between population, employment and economic development. The programme also investigated the determinants of labour force participation levels and the socio-economic factors affecting fertility levels.

⁵⁶ SINGER, Hans, Research of the World Employment Programme: Future priorities and selective assessment, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1992, p. 85.

⁵⁷ ILO, World Employment Programme. A Progress Report on its Research-oriented Activities, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1973, pp. 67-86.

⁵⁸ SEN, Amartya, Employment, technology and development: a study prepared for the International Labour Office within the framework of the World Employment Programme, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975.

⁵⁹ ILO, World Employment Programme. A Progress Report on its Research-oriented Activities, p. 31.

⁶⁰ BLANDY, Richard, WERY, René, 'Population and Employment Growth: Bachue-1', in *International Labour Review*, v. 107, n. 5, 1973.

The Urbanisation and Employment programme focused particularly on the relationship between the rapid growth of developing countries' urban labour force and the diminishing opportunities for 'productive employment' in urban environments. The purpose of the programme was in the first place to develop an integrated and comprehensive analysis of urban unemployment accounting for the shortcomings of the dual-sector model. Research in this field led to innovative publications demonstrating the links between the 'formal' urban labour markets, the 'informal' sector and the surrounding rural labour markets⁶¹, including a series of city studies, starting with Calcutta.

Moreover, the question of income distribution and employment became in the early 1970s a crucial concern for development thinking. The WEP played an important role by setting up a broad programme of research on various issues connected to the topic. A major influence on research activities in this field was naturally played by the Colombia and Kenya reports, which underlined the great potential of income redistribution as a means to tackle unemployment. Following an early article by Felix Paukert on the relationship between income inequality and development, the Income Distribution and Employment research programme focused particularly on the study of unemployment and income inequalities in and between rural and urban sectors, the geographical distribution of incomes, and the policy instruments to generate income redistribution and higher employment rates⁶².

The findings of the Ceylon report proved to be a decisive inspiration for the development of the Education and Employment research programme. Work under this programme focused mostly on the adjustment of the education system to labour market conditions⁶³. Outcomes included a major study by Mark Blaug on 'Education and the Employment Problem in Developing Countries'.

⁶¹ See for instance LUBELL, Harold, Urban development and employment: the prospects for Calcutta, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1974.

⁶² ILO, World Employment Programme. A Progress Report on its Research-oriented Activities, p. 88.

⁶³ Id., p. 41.

The analysis of rural employment also occupied a central place in the early activities of the WEP, especially since a rural employment research programme was created in 1975 following the recommendation of the ILO Advisory Committee on Rural Employment⁶⁴. Initial work in collaboration with the FAO concentrated on the repercussions of the Green Revolution on employment⁶⁵ and a first major study, *Poverty and Landlessness in rural Asia*, was published in 1977. In the mid-1970s, the focus gradually shifted towards the analysis of agrarian structure and inequality in rural areas.

From a general viewpoint, the basic-needs strategy launched at the World Employment Conference in 1976 represented the culmination of the first phase of WEP research and a watershed in its overall development. While the concept of basic needs was already being developed at the time outside the ILO⁶⁶, its adoption as the centrepiece of the World Employment Conference (WEC) came about because background research for the conference⁶⁷ highlighted the need to focus the WEC on a clear objective, that of meeting the basic needs of the poorest through employment, as well as through growth and redistribution. It also drew on the experience of the comprehensive country missions and the findings of individual WEP research programmes.

The idea to convene a 'World Conference on Employment and International Division of Labour' originated in the WEP Research Branch in 1974⁶⁸, and was endorsed by the new Director-General, Francis Blanchard. Together with Emmerij, the Chief of the Research Branch, Dharam Ghai, was the main organiser of the WEC. Under their responsibility and

⁶⁴ ILO, *Poverty and Landlessness in rural Asia*, International Labour Organisation, Geneva, 1977.

⁶⁵ ILO Archives, WEP 2-15 (FAO-ILO Pakistan, rural employment project, employment implications of green revolution 1970-1974).

⁶⁶ The term had been firstly used in the 1940s by the renowned psychologist Abraham Maslow. The concept of basic needs was then introduced in the development debate by the Argentinian Bariloche Foundation following the insights of Donella and Dennis Meadows' influential report 'The Limits to Growth' (1972). At the ILO, basic needs was first introduced and developed by Michael Hopkins. The basic premise was that employment was not an end in itself but a means to tackle poverty and achieve basic needs. The 1975 Dag Hammarskjöld Report 'What Now? Another Development', submitted in 1975 to the UN General Assembly further contributed to the elaboration and spread of the concept in international development.

⁶⁷ See Michael Hopkins: 'Alternative Patterns of Development – A First Approach', Paper produced in the Population and Employment Project as a contribution to the WEC, 8/07/1975.

⁶⁸ Ghai to Emmerij, World Conference on Employment and International Division of Labour, 13/09/1974, WEP 2 Jacket 6 (WEP Research Programme).

leadership and with the extensive contribution of WEP researchers⁶⁹, a first draft of the Report to the Conference was prepared in 1975, which was discussed extensively within and outside the ILO and received very positive feedback⁷⁰. The final report, titled 'Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One-World Problem', was eventually presented at the WEC in June 1976⁷¹. On that occasion, four working groups were set up to examine the major aspects of the basic needs strategy and the expected changes in policy-making that this strategy would entail. During these meetings, as well as during the plenary conference and beforehand in private gatherings⁷², some important criticisms emerged from a part of the ILO constituency. Employers' representatives and especially the US delegation lamented the likely politicisation of the Conference due to the inclusion of measures to re-orient international trade and the operations of multinational enterprises in the 'package' of the basic-needs strategy⁷³. However, the new approach was generally endorsed with enthusiasm at the Conference and eventually led to the adoption of a 'Declaration of Principles and Programme of Action' containing the fundamental thrusts of the basic-needs strategy. As stated by Richard Jolly, the World Employment Conference officially represented the "enthronement of basic needs"⁷⁴.

⁶⁹ See Michael Hopkins, *Ibid.*, 1975.

⁷⁰ Second Meeting of the Advisory Panel, 25/08/1975 – 26/08/1975, WEC Advisory Group Jacket 2 - WEP 1001-102.

⁷¹ *Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One-World Problem. The international 'basic-needs' strategy against chronic poverty*, Report of the ILO Director-General, Praeger Publishers, New York-London, 1977.

⁷² See for example 'US Department of Labor, Summary of 17/12/1975 meeting with Emmerij', WEP 1001-02 (WEC Preparatory work)

⁷³ SHAW, John D., *World Food Security. A History since 1945*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke-London, 2007, p. 224.

⁷⁴ JOLLY, Richard, *The World Employment Conference: The Enthronement of Basic Needs*, in 'Development Policy Review', v. A9, issue 2, 1976, pp. 31-44.

► III. The WEP after Basic Needs: Between Consolidation and Normalisation (1976-1981)

The World Employment Conference ushered in an immediate period of enthusiasm and widespread endorsement for the basic needs approach to development. Together with most UN agencies, the World Bank also adopted the basic needs strategy as part of its policy framework, thanks to the advice of the Bank's Chief Economist Hollis Chenery and the work of his team comprising Mahbub ul Haq and Paul Streeten⁷⁵. In a way, this represented a natural step forward in the evolution of the Bank's approach to development under the leadership of Robert McNamara, who as early as in 1973 singled out 'absolute poverty' as the primary target of development policy⁷⁶. Against this promising backdrop, the US notice of withdrawal from the ILO in 1977 considerably hindered WEP's basic-needs-centred programme for the following years. This decision was primarily motivated by the long-standing protests of the US over the supposed politicisation of the ILO constituency orchestrated by communist member States and the compliance of the Office to Third-Worldist stances⁷⁷ – the latter claimed to be particularly evident at the World Employment Conference⁷⁸. Thus, after a short time since its official launching, the basic needs strategy was more and more becoming a polarising issue, as the G-77 also strongly criticized the growing adoption of the basic needs vulgate by donor countries and agencies, which they saw as a means to leave aside international re-distribution of income from development debates⁷⁹. In addition to the financial strain brought by the US withdrawal, the ILO had to almost simultaneously cope with the financial crisis of UNDP, which until then had been funding a considerable share of WEP operational activities⁸⁰. Moreover, WEP research saw its extra-budgetary funding from

⁷⁵ EMMERIJ, Louis, JOLLY, Richard, WEISS, Thomas G., *Ahead of the Curve? UN Ideas and Global Challenges*, op. cit, p. 74.

⁷⁶ McNAMARA, Robert, *Address to the board of Governors*, Nairobi, 24/09/1973.

⁷⁷ IMBER, Mark F., *The USA, ILO, UNESCO and IAEA: Politicization and Withdrawal in the Specialized Agencies*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1989, Chapter 4: The Case of the International Labour Organisation.

⁷⁸ GALENSON, Walter, *The International Labor Organization. An American View*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1981, p. 182.

⁷⁹ Follow-up of the World Employment Conference: Basic Needs, Report VII, International Labour Conference, 65th Session, 1979, p. 11.

⁸⁰ ILO, *Programme and Budget for 1976-77: b) Programme Implementation*, Geneva, 2-3/1978, [GB 205/PFA/1/19], p. 1.

Northern European countries start to shrink as the effects of the global economic recession spread in industrialised economies in the late 1970s.

In the face of these challenging external conditions, the WEP framed a 'second phase' of its evolution that aimed to take stock of the first 'pioneering' years and consolidate its achievements within a stabilised structure and programme of work⁸¹. This shift was symbolised first and foremost by the appointment of Antoinette Béguin at the head of the World Employment Programme after Emmerij's resignation in 1976. Béguin was among the group of ILO managers that transitioned from the Human Resources Department to the WEP in the early days of its constitution. It can be inferred that Béguin's new leadership was expected to assure the continuity in management necessary for the 'consolidation' – or 'normalisation' – of the WEP within the ILO framework. In parallel, the WEP followed a process of adjustment and stabilisation of its structure. While the Employment and Development Department (the administrative unit responsible for the WEP) reached its maximum size during these years, the practice of networking and sub-contracting WEP activities to external collaborators was – also given the contraction of extra-budgetary funding – progressively reduced⁸².

In general, the WEP in these years started a gradual policy shift from a 'pioneering' phase of research to one in which previous findings were expected to "pay off" and be translated into increased and more systematic operational activities on employment promotion⁸³. Research activities in this period still continued to have a central role within the WEP, especially on rural employment which was given more and more emphasis owing to increasing international attention to poverty eradication in rural areas⁸⁴. Considerable research was carried out on agrarian systems and rural development,

⁸¹ ILO, Director-General's Programme and Budget Proposals for 1978-79, Geneva, 12/1976, [GB 202/PFA/13/1], p. 74.

⁸² Global Evaluation of WEP Research, Future orientations and organisation of the WEP research programme, 2nd Draft, 20/08/1976, WEP 2-1003 Jacket 1 (WEP global evaluation of WEP research programme, meeting 1976).

⁸³ ILO, World Employment Programme: Research in Retrospect and Prospect, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1976, p. 13.

⁸⁴ WEP 10-02 Jacket 1 (WEP rural employment programme, Inter-agency cooperation 1976-1980).

mostly geared towards Asian countries⁸⁵. Moreover, research on technology and employment continued in this period and showed a gradual shift of focus from the surveying of various 'appropriate' technologies to the study of the actual policies that would serve for their large-scale adoption⁸⁶. Likewise, the WEP project on population and employment expanded and refined the systemic approach to demographic questions in development planning, with publications based on the Bachue economic-demographic models, and research projects on child labour, migration and women's employment, along with the development of new technical cooperation activities⁸⁷.

Overall, however, the reproduction of the out-of-the-box kind of research that characterised the WEP in its first years was progressively – albeit not entirely – undermined. One reason for this was certainly the loss of the powerful leadership of Emmerij. The more radical and progressive strand of WEP research, protected in the earlier years, was now more exposed to criticism and pressure from the ILO's constituents, which curbed its breadth and academic freedom. As a case in point, the WEP research programme on multinational enterprises and employment was greatly influenced – and toned down – by the constitution and follow-up procedures of the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning multinational enterprises and social policy, adopted by the ILO Governing Body in 1977⁸⁸. Another important reason for the gradual downturn of WEP research was also that – as usually happens in situations of mounting financial restraint – research work ended up with a smaller share of budget resources not only in absolute terms but also in proportion to funds for technical assistance⁸⁹. In fact, after the mid-1970s the formulation and promotion of 'emergency

⁸⁵ See GHAI, Dharam, KHAN, Azizur R., RADWAN, Samir, *Agrarian Systems and Rural Development: A study prepared by the ILO within the framework of the WEP*, ILO, Geneva, 1979.

⁸⁶ International Labour Office, *World Employment Programme: Research in Retrospect and Prospect*, ILO, Geneva, 1979.

⁸⁷ RODGERS, Gerry, HOPKINS, Michael, WERY, René, *Population, employment and inequality. BACHUE-Philippines. An application of economic-demographic modelling to development planning*, Saxon House-ILO, Westmead, 1978. ANKER, Richard, FAROOQ, Ghazi M., *Population and socio-economic development. The new perspective*, in *International Labour Review*, v. 117, n. 2, 1978, pp. 151-153.

⁸⁸ See Governing Body of the ILO, Committee to consider reports on the effects given to the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning multinational enterprises and social policy, Geneva, 22-26/09/1980. GB/MNE/1980/D.1.

⁸⁹ ILO, Director-General's Programme and Budget Proposals for 1980-81, Geneva, 12/1978, [GB 209/PFA/7/1], p. 9.

employment schemes' in the form of labour-intensive public works programmes (later called Special Public Works Programmes, SPWPs) started to become a central part of WEP Headquarters' activities. As evidence of the changing priorities in international development, external funding to the WEP and inter-agency collaborations progressively shifted towards financing these more traditional programmes during this period and even more so during the 1980s⁹⁰.

In parallel to the rise of SPWPs, large-scale comprehensive employment missions were almost entirely phased out of the range of activities of the World Employment Programme. Due to lack of resources and partly because of a deliberate policy shift⁹¹, the 1977-1981 quinquennium saw practically no WEP undertaking comparable in scope to the comprehensive missions of the early 1970s. Notable exceptions were the Basic needs mission to Portugal in 1977⁹² led by Willy Van Rijckeghem and including Antoinette Beguin, Dudley Seers and Michael Hopkins; and the UNDP-financed mission to Egypt in 1981 led by the Danish economist Bent Hansen and the WEP rural employment expert Samir Radwan. Revealingly, the mission report, titled 'Employment opportunities and equity in a changing economy: Egypt in the 1980s. A labour market approach', reflected the return to a rigorous analysis of employment problems and the de facto marginalisation of the basic-needs perspective⁹³. While the WEP's 'Declaration of Principles and Programme of Action' formally remained the guiding policy framework of the WEP⁹⁴, the focus on basic needs was in fact slowly set aside within the ILO.

Following the World Employment Conference, the study and monitoring of basic needs performance at the country level was primarily entrusted to WEP regional employment teams. Although governments' requests for advice on basic needs planning turned out

⁹⁰ See for example ILO-UNDP, Joint Meeting for Support of Special Public Works Programmes, report on the Meeting, Geneva, 8-9/05/1979.

⁹¹ Global Evaluation of WEP Research, Future orientations and organisation of the WEP research programme, 2nd Draft, 20/08/1976, p. 13.

⁹² *Employment and Basic Needs in Portugal*, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1979.

⁹³ HANSEN, Bent, RADWAN, Samir, *Employment opportunities and equity in a changing economy: Egypt in the 1980s. A labour market approach*, report of an inter-agency team financed by the UNDP and organised by the ILO, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1982.

⁹⁴ ILO, Director-General's Programme and Budget Proposals for 1980-81, Geneva, 12/1978, [GB 209/PFA/7/1], p. 60/1.

to be considerably fewer than expected⁹⁵, during this period the regional employment teams managed to get through the difficulties of the first years and find a somewhat stable organisation and programme of work. On the whole, this happened somewhat autonomously from WEP general coordination efforts and resulted in an increasing disconnect between the regional teams and the Headquarters. The Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa (JASPA) started preliminary work in 1973 but became fully operational only in 1977. Despite persistent financial difficulties and changes of staff, JASPA under the leadership of Shyam Nigam developed a broad range of country-specific studies and advisory services geared towards basic needs⁹⁶. In particular, two important 'basic needs missions' were organised by JASPA at the turn of the 1980s. Dudley Seers led a first JASPA mission to Nigeria in 1980, which resulted in the influential report 'First Things First. Meeting the Basic Needs of the People of Nigeria'⁹⁷. In 1981, JASPA appointed Paul Streeten as Head of a second mission to Tanzania that produced the report 'Basic Needs in Danger. A Basic Needs Oriented Development Strategy for Tanzania'⁹⁸.

Formally launched in 1971, the Asian Regional Team for Employment Promotion (ARTEP) engaged in a variety of ad hoc, country-based activities which lacked overall coordination and supervision⁹⁹. It was only in 1978 – in the wake of the appointment of the renowned Indian economist K. N. Raj as Director of ARTEP¹⁰⁰ – that a full and coherent programme was set up. Unlike JASPA, which focused mostly on basic needs activities, the core of ARTEP's work concentrated on surveys and advisory services on rural employment promotion¹⁰¹. This was all the more so after Azizur R. Khan – formerly head of the research unit of the WEP Rural employment branch – took over the post of Director from

⁹⁵ Programme and Budget for 1978-79: c) Programme Implementation in 1978, Geneva, 5-6/1979, [GB 210/PFA/1/1], p. 2.

⁹⁶ JASPA, Activities up to 1980, International Labour Organisation, Addis Ababa, 03/1981.

⁹⁷ *First Things First. Meeting the Basic Needs of the People of Nigeria*. Report to the Government of Nigeria by a JASPA Basic Needs Mission, ILO-JASPA, Addis Ababa, 1981.

⁹⁸ *Basic Needs in Danger. A Basic Needs Oriented Development Strategy for Tanzania*. Report to the Government of Tanzania by a JASPA Basic Needs Mission, ILO-JASPA, Addis Ababa, 1982.

⁹⁹ The Asian Employment Programme, *Programme of Work 1981-1985*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ See RODGERS, Gerry, *India, the ILO and the Quest for Social Justice since 1919*, in 'Economic & Political Weekly', v. XLVI n. 10, 05/03/2011, p. 49.

¹⁰¹ See for example *Employment Expansion in Asian Agriculture. A comparative analysis of South Asian Countries*, ARTEP-ILO, Bangkok, 1980.

1979 to 1983. In this period, ARTEP also carried out extensive research on trade and industrial development, of which the main findings were summarised in the 1981 collective volume 'Export-led industrialisation & development'¹⁰².

Finally, the Regional Employment Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean (PREALC) reached maturity and unity of purpose earlier than the African and Asian Teams, thanks to constant UNDP funding and the continuity in leadership of its Director Victor Tokman (1973-1989; 1991-1993). PREALC developed a broad, high-quality programme of research in close connection with academic centres in the region¹⁰³ and substantially independent from WEP research at the Headquarters¹⁰⁴. Given the growing relevance of the matter in Latin American countries, PREALC particularly focused on the study of the potential for the development of the informal sector¹⁰⁵. From the mid-1970s, an important part of PREALC activities started to concentrate on the detrimental employment effects of rising neo-liberal policies in Latin America. This focus was expanded in the following years when the region became the laboratory for strict deflationary measures and structural adjustment policies during the 1980s debt crisis¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰² LEE, Eddy (ed.), *Export-led industrialisation & development*, Asian Employment Programme, International Labour Organisation, Geneva, 1981.

¹⁰³ *PREALC: 25 years*, International Labour Organisation, Geneva, 1993, p. 38.

¹⁰⁴ It is perhaps worth noting that the Headquarters themselves did not consider PREALC studies as part of the WEP research programme but framed it under the category of 'operations'. See Edgren to Tokman, 19/07/1976, WEP 2-1003 Jacket 1 (WEP global evaluation of WEP research programme, meeting 1976).

¹⁰⁵ See for example PREALC, *Sector Informal: funcionamiento y políticas*, Oficina Internacional del Trabajo, Santiago-Chile, 1980.

¹⁰⁶ *PREALC: 25 years*, p. 39.

► IV. Paradigm Lost: The WEP in Search of New Alternatives (1982-1993)

The outbreak of the debt crisis in developing countries at the beginning of the 1980s and the ensuing rise of structural adjustment procedures led by the IMF and the World Bank was a hard blow for international development. With some notable exceptions, such as the annual UNDP Human Development Report, which started in 1990, the UN system proved to be incapable of formulating viable alternative strategies after the main ideas of the 1970s Development Decade were undermined by the global recession and the rise of neo-liberal doctrines, later epitomised in the Washington Consensus. The ILO, too, did not manage to find a way to stand out from the general strategical impasse. The widespread pressure on developing countries to implement austerity measures and debt reduction policies severely reduced the WEP's room for manoeuvre, which essentially relied on governments' active participation and investment in their national economy. Most importantly, the predominance of neoclassical economic models and the general shift towards deregulation and privatisation represented a formidable challenge to the WEP's core assumptions and socio-economic priorities¹⁰⁷. In the course of the 1980s, the WEP constantly attempted to re-think its structure and priorities in order to find new means to grasp and tackle the changing realities of national and global economies. While in this process some valuable and influential works were produced, on the whole, the WEP was not able to formulate a comprehensive response to the developments of the new decade and regain the political clout it had acquired in the early 1970s.

The global economic recession of the 1980s, in parallel with the changing political balance within the ILO structure, accelerated the neutralisation of the original concept of basic needs and its relegation from the core of the WEP strategy. Albeit in some quarters the basic needs approach was still deemed a useful quantitative instrument to identify and assess poverty, few within the WEP would or could keep it as the global

¹⁰⁷ RODGERS, Gerry, LEE, Eddy, SWEPSTON, Lee, VAN DAELE, Jasmien, *The ILO and the Quest for Social Justice*, pp. 195-198.

framework for their activities¹⁰⁸. Faced with this situation, early in 1982 the WEP started a major internal review aimed at analysing the experience since the WEC and setting down possible proposals for the future. Recording the widening of the range of activities following the adoption of the basic needs approach in 1976, the reviewers noted how this process was in fact weakening WEP internal coherence and synergy among its different branches¹⁰⁹. In order to counteract this tendency, the review sanctioned a “re-orientation towards the old home base”¹¹⁰ and highlighted some unexplored issues within the employment field on which the WEP should concentrate in the future. The policy proposals that emerged during the internal review of the WEP were mainly based on the findings of 4 Task Forces each covering a WEP major area of concern¹¹¹. Overall, the reports of the Task Forces called for the continuation of the structural reorganisation of the Programme that had been initiated in the previous years. The shift towards more – and more short-term – operational activities was deemed advisable in order to stay abreast of governments’ requests and changing international patterns of technical assistance. Viewed as an effective means to ensure the impact of the WEP at the local level, the Special Public Works Programme was again expected to continue as one of the principal elements of the WEP future strategy. The reports particularly emphasised the value of SPWPs in rural areas as effective frameworks to promote grassroots participation in carrying out employment schemes, a feature that became increasingly important within the WEP in the 1980s. Furthermore, the WEP was encouraged to continue its process of decentralisation. However, as clearly emerged during a meeting of the Chiefs of the Regional teams in 1982, the process of coordination with WEP Headquarters this time would work differently from that in the early 1970s when regional

¹⁰⁸ Summary Record of the Meeting of Chiefs of Regional Employment Teams, Addis Ababa, 11-13/03/1981, WEP 12-100 Jacket 1 (WEP meetings of Chiefs of the regional teams 1982-1988). A partial exception was JASPA, which in the 1980s continued to receive requests from governments and carry out work based on basic needs. See Nigam to Richter, 8/10/1982, Id.

¹⁰⁹ “The concern is that WEP, faced with constant if not declining real resources, may be spreading itself too thin and losing its focus. The question then naturally arises whether WEP risks dissipating its relevance and in the process a good deal of the intellectual force and missionary zeal that certainly characterized its early years”, ‘Summary Note on the Internal Review of the WEP, 1982’, Id.

¹¹⁰ Edgren (ARTEP), ‘Some views on the Agenda Points’, for meeting of Regional Employment Team Chiefs, Geneva, 13/05/1988, WEP 12-100 Jacket 2 (WEP meetings of Chiefs of the regional teams, 1988-1992).

¹¹¹ The 4 Task Forces focused respectively on a) Employment aspects of international Phenomena; b) National strategies; c) Labour processes; d) Local level development. See ‘Summary Note on the Internal Review of the WEP, 1982’, WEP 12-100 Jacket 1.

teams were essentially framed as the ‘implementation’ arm of WEP. In recognition of their growing role as active proponents of new ideas and perspectives in their respective regions, the regional employment teams would now co-operate on an equal footing with Headquarters, including in the formulation and planning of the World Employment Programme as a whole¹¹².

In parallel to this structural evolution, the reports of the Task Forces singled out some important issues until then overlooked in the WEP and that were seen emerging as central areas of concern for employment policy. One concerned the exclusive focus on employment problems of developing countries, which cast legitimate doubts over the meaning of the word ‘World’ in the World Employment Programme¹¹³. The launching in 1976 of basic needs as a “One-World problem”¹¹⁴ was meant to endow the WEP with a truly global strategy, but its early success was not followed up. In the context of mounting unemployment in industrialised countries, the WEP was now required to make determined efforts to develop a programme of action in this field in concert with European regional agencies¹¹⁵. Noting that unemployment in Western Europe was a particularly acute issue among younger generations, the Task Forces suggested the creation of a WEP section specifically targeting employment problems for youth groups. Among other ‘gaps’ in the WEP, the question of women workers was brought up as a key area of focus for future WEP activities, specifically in light of the potential role of women in rural production. Although work on this issue had started in the late 1970s, the reports called for the intensification of research on gender equality in rural development, focusing particularly on women’s access and title to land¹¹⁶.

¹¹² G.Thirion, Note for discussion, Draft Annotated Agenda for the Second Meeting of Chiefs of Regional Teams, 20/09/1982, Id.

¹¹³ ‘World Employment Programme. A Note on the Name’, Z 11-5-7 Jacket 1 (World Employment Programme. General, 1967-April 1969).

¹¹⁴ *Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One-World Problem. The international ‘basic-needs’ strategy against chronic poverty*, Prepared by the ILO International Labour Office, Praeger Publishers, New York-London, 1977.

¹¹⁵ ‘Summary Note on the Internal Review of the WEP, 1982’, WEP 12-100 Jacket 1, p. 14.

¹¹⁶ Id., p. 15.

Following this official 'internal review', the WEP, under the new direction of Jack Martin, underwent some changes and established new research priorities. As a clear demonstration of the departure from the early thrust of the Programme, the 'Income Distribution and Employment' Programme was closed in 1981¹¹⁷ - though with hindsight that looks premature today. On the contrary, the newly created 'Labour Market and Employment Planning' Programme gradually became a pivotal part of WEP, encompassing increasingly prominent issues such as the employment effects of labour market flexibility and the access to labour markets of 'vulnerable groups' (women, youth, older workers)¹¹⁸. Moreover, following the 'Vienna Programme of Action' adopted at the 1979 UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development', the WEP further expanded the study of appropriate technologies for developing countries aimed at generating higher levels of employment. In the new context of the 1980s, the WEP particularly focused on the scope and application of the concept of 'technology blending', defined as "the constructive integration of newly emerging technologies with traditional economic activities"¹¹⁹. Similarly, work on the informal sector was expanded in light of the widespread informalization of economic activity as a consequence of the global recession. Interest in the informal sector revived and the concept started to be widely applied (notably in the work of PREALC), though HQ research in this field became to a large extent directed at delimiting the scope of the concept and finding appropriate fields of application¹²⁰.

While the WEP considerably modified the scope and extent of its activities in response to the deep global recession of the decade, it was in the end not able to formulate a new 'comprehensive' approach. New branches were created and new programmes were launched, but with little unity of purpose. A clear sign of this was that the activities of the

¹¹⁷ ILO, World Employment Programme: Ninth Progress Report on Income Distribution and Employment, Geneva, International Labour Office, 1981, p. 4.

¹¹⁸ ILO, Director-General's Programme and Budget Proposals for 1988-89, Geneva, 12/1986 [GB 235/PFA/5/1].

¹¹⁹ ILO, *Facing the Technological Challenge. A Review of ILO activities on technology since the UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development*, ILO, Geneva, 1985.

¹²⁰ As noted by Singer, «Paradoxically, in one sense, the WEP is now fighting the very 'romanticisation' of the informal sector for which it was sometimes criticised in earlier research». See SINGER, Hans, Research of the World Employment Programme: Future priorities and selective assessment, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1992, p. 6. For an historiographical overview of the concept, see BENANAV, Aaron, *The origins of informality: the ILO at the limit of the concept of unemployment*, in 'Journal of Global History', v. 14, n. 1, 2019, p. 120.

Employment and Development Department started being referred to less and less as part of a common World Employment Programme. In fact, the very wording 'World Employment Programme' gradually dropped out of sight in the course of the 1980s. Compared to the wide notoriety 10 years before, it is quite telling that in 1984 the need was felt to produce a booklet titled 'The WEP: What it is, what it does'¹²¹.

In addition to the disconnect among WEP projects, the goal of greater complementarity between Headquarters and regional employment teams was hardly realised. In fact, the regional teams were not or very marginally involved in the re-orientation of WEP research priorities occurring at the time: for example, the programmes on target groups as well as on technology were apparently considered a "monopoly" of Headquarters¹²². Even Special Public Works Programmes, which at least theoretically should have implied co-operation at the local level, turned out to be an exclusive Headquarters' concern¹²³. At the same time, regional teams further developed their work programmes in substantial independence from Geneva¹²⁴. JASPA continued its basic needs-centred surveys and technical advisory services to assist governments in integrating basic needs targets in economic planning. JASPA also started to organise training programmes and regional employment workshops for national planning officials¹²⁵ (as did ARTEP and PREALC). ARTEP maintained and further developed its focus on agrarian systems and changes in the agrarian structure, mainly in the form of country-based technical missions and reports¹²⁶, but also looked at the impact on employment of growing international trade. PREALC expanded work on the adverse employment conditions provoked by the indiscriminate restrictive measures imposed on Latin American economies following the debt crisis. In this field, PREALC had a trailblazing role within and beyond the WEP in so far as it was among the first to attempt a systematic analysis of the destructive social consequences of structural adjustment. In particular, PREALC research led to the

¹²¹ The World Employment Programme: What it is, what it does, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1984.

¹²² Summary Record of the Third Meeting of the Chiefs of the Regional Teams, Santiago, 5-7/11/1984, WEP 12-100 Jacket 1 (WEP meetings of Chiefs of the regional teams 1982-1988).

¹²³ Summary Record of the IV Meeting of Chiefs of Regional Teams, Geneva, 21-24/04/1987, Id.

¹²⁴ In 1980, a new Southern African Team for Employment promotion was created. The team was financed by SIDA and stationed in Lusaka.

¹²⁵ See for example ILO, *JASPA work programme 1986*, JASPA, Addis Ababa, 1985, pp. 10-18.

¹²⁶ Summary Record of the Third Meeting of the Chiefs of the Regional Teams, Santiago, 5-7/11/1984.

development of the influential concept of social debt, which as Hans Singer put it, highlighted “a third dimension to the traditional categories of external debt and internal debt, namely the debt owed by society to the victims of the debt and adjustment crisis”¹²⁷.

Starting in the mid-1980s, the inclusion of employment targets in structural adjustment policies became one of the core themes of the World Employment Programme. Following developing countries’ growing requests for technical assistance on the matter, the ILC adopted at its 70th Session in 1984 a Resolution calling for the establishment within the ILO of systematic action to tackle rising unemployment and underemployment as a consequence of stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes¹²⁸. The follow-up activities to the Resolution eventually led to the convening in 1987 of a ‘High-Level Meeting on Employment and Structural Adjustment’. The meeting, comprising a large group of representatives from the ILO tripartite constituency and from international agencies, further emphasised the call for a far-reaching re-orientation of ILO activities on the issue¹²⁹. The conclusions of the meeting found application in the launching in 1989 of an ‘Inter-Departmental Task Force on Structural Adjustment, Employment and Training’¹³⁰. Given the expertise accumulated in the previous years with the World Employment Programme, the Employment and Development Department was designated to lead the Project¹³¹.

Despite this progressive convergence between the World Employment Programme and the problems connected to structural adjustment, some within the WEP raised doubts about making structural adjustment the unifying theme for “bringing WEP’s forces

¹²⁷ SINGER, Hans, *Research of the World Employment Programme: Future priorities and selective assessment*, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1992, p. 83. See PREALC, *Adjustment and social debt: A structural approach*, International Labour Organisation, 1987.

¹²⁸ International Labour Conference, 70th Session, Geneva, 1984, *Record of Proceedings*, ‘Resolution concerning Employment Policy’, p. XXXVIII.

¹²⁹ International Labour Organisation, *High-Level Meeting on Employment and Structural Adjustment, Report of the Meeting*, Geneva, 23-25/11/1987.

¹³⁰ RODGERS, Gerry, LEE, Eddy, SWEPSTON, Lee, VAN DAELE, Jasmien, *The ILO and the Quest for Social Justice*, pp. 197-198.

¹³¹ Rolph van der Hoeven (EMPLOI), *Office space for the Inter-Departmental Project on Structural Adjustment*, 19/06/1991, WEP 1-4-010 Jacket 1 (WEP Interdepartmental project on structural adjustment, general correspondence 1990-1991).

together”¹³². According to the new Director of ARTEP Gus Edgren, the path undertaken since the beginning of the decade was clearly making the ‘unorganised parts of the labour market’ the common denominator of action of the WEP. However, Edgren accepted that it was still necessary to reserve a central place for the disrupting effects of structural adjustment on labour markets in order to “keep [the WEP with] one foot in the formal sector”¹³³. This was all the more necessary especially since, as Edgren pointed out, a focus on unorganised labour would have never been backed by ILO constituents:

“Organised workers and employers as well as Labour Ministry officials are not going to support, let alone participate in, a programme dealing with unorganised workers and self-employed, unless this programme promises eventually to bring the unorganised into the fold of their own power base. Such reactions to the new signals are already heard from ILO constituents, and it would be suicidal for [WEP] programme managers to ignore them”¹³⁴.

The concentration of WEP efforts on structural adjustment seemed to open up new opportunities, especially in the last years of the 1980s, when new international development thinking finally started to systematically challenge the economic premises of the Washington Consensus. The work of Amartya Sen and Mahbub ul Haq leading to the UNDP Human Development approach, combined with UNICEF’s ‘Adjustment with a Human Face’ and the Brundtland Report, which introduced the concept of ‘sustainable development’, together reflected a changing view of structural adjustment as a long-term undertaking that would need to include social progress in order to be fully achievable and sustainable. WEP officials soon realised that this changing environment was potentially creating new space for the WEP to re-assert the relevance of its employment-centred approach and retake a proactive role in international

¹³² Edgren (ARTEP), ‘Some views on the Agenda Points’, for meeting of Regional Employment Team Chiefs, Geneva, 13/05/1988, WEP 12-100 Jacket 2 (WEP meetings of Chiefs of the regional teams, 1988-1992), p. 2.

¹³³ Id., p. 3.

¹³⁴ Id., p. 2.

development¹³⁵. The report to the 1989 ILC 'Recovery and Employment' by the outgoing DG Francis Blanchard clearly testified to the willingness of the ILO to put employment creation at the forefront of current debates on human development and structural adjustment¹³⁶, and the ILO put considerable effort into the inclusion of WEP objectives in the 4th UN International Development Strategy for the 1990s¹³⁷. Thanks to effective lobbying at the Prepcom for the International Development Strategy and a friendly relationship with the Chairman Gamani Corea, employment eventually figured as an important aspect of the final document of the Committee¹³⁸.

In reality, the 4th UN International Development Strategy had very little resonance and application in the following years, but the inclusion of employment targets within its framework seemed to prefigure the potential re-emergence of the World Employment Programme in the international arena. However, a general policy shift inside the ILO introduced by the new Director-General Michel Hansenne in fact undermined WEP plans to that effect. Following the end of the Cold War in 1989-1990, Hansenne redirected ILO activities towards assisting Eastern European countries in the transition to democracy and a liberalised market economy. As it soon became clear, this new focus reserved little space for employment problems per se and put much more emphasis on long-standing ILO issues such as freedom of association and international labour standards. Quite naturally, WEP officials were not enthusiastic and lamented the awkward confinement to

¹³⁵ "The objectives of achieving growth, human development and social consensus coincide with much of the mandate of the ILO and perforce can make an ILO position in the process of policy formulation and execution much more apparent and obvious than in the past when the ILO's role was often of sounding the alarm bell (do not destroy employment, do not destroy public sector decline of social services, do not destroy social security schemes, do not destroy training institutions, etc.)", Inter-Departmental Project on Structural Adjustment, 'Proposals for implementation of the various components of the project', ILO, Geneva, 09/1991, WEP 1-4-010 Jacket 1 (WEP Interdepartmental project on structural adjustment, general correspondence 1990-1991). Arguably the basic needs work of the ILO paved the way for the Human Development Report, led by Mahbub ul Haq who had taken basic needs to the World Bank. Some ILO basic needs researchers were also involved in the early stages of the UNDP Human Development Global Report and National Human Development strategies.

¹³⁶ *Recovery and Employment*, Report of the Director-General (Part I), International Labour Conference, 76th Session, 1989, ILO, Geneva, 1989.

¹³⁷ Note by the ILO for the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole for the Preparation of the International Development Strategy for the 4th UN Development Decade, 'An Employment-oriented strategy for the 1990s', 01/1990, WEP 1-4-03 Jacket 1 (WEP Departmental activities, preparation of an international development strategy for the 4th UN Development Decade, 1989-1990).

¹³⁸ Freedman, report on mission to New York, 18-27/10/1990, Id.

democratisation of the employment question in the 1992 DG Report to the ILC¹³⁹. Alongside these shifting priorities, Hansenne ushered in a substantial makeover of the ILO structure which ended up dismantling the essential components of the WEP, namely its research structure and the regional employment teams. In the first place, the re-organisation of activities at the Headquarters parcelled out the Employment and Development Division, which until then had formed the administrative and organisational core of the World Employment Programme¹⁴⁰. Moreover, there was a radical re-shaping of the whole field structure of the ILO. WEP regional employment teams were merged into new 'multi-disciplinary teams' expected to facilitate the provision of advice and technical services to employers, workers and national governments. As a critique of this new format, Gerard Thirion, the WEP official responsible for coordination with the regional employment teams, could not but point out that:

*"... the experience of the Regional Teams shows that advisory services and policy advice must be based on substantive investigative work and studies, if they are to have any impact. [...] This experience demonstrates that no governments, research institutions, workers' and employers' organisations will pay any attention to a regional centre which is 'delivering' ready-made solutions on employment policies and programmes. Whether it sounds presumptuous or not, the Regional Teams have to be 'centres of excellence'. Without a minimum of excellence, they would not have been recognised, as they now are, as reliable advisers on employment issues by their various partners in the regions"*¹⁴¹.

Like the regional employment teams described by Thirion, the whole World Employment Programme had been a great 'centre of excellence' of international development thinking. While investment in research declined after its peak in the mid-1970s, the basic

¹³⁹ Eddy Lee to Lonnroth, 'Director-General's Report for the ILC 1992', 12/11/1991, WEP 1-4-010 Jacket 1 (WEP Interdepartmental project on structural adjustment, general correspondence 1990-1991).

¹⁴⁰ ILO, Director-General's Programme and Budget Proposals for 1994-95, Geneva, 12/1992 [GB 255/PFA/3/1], p. 63.

¹⁴¹ Thirion, 'About Regional Teams', 18/03/1992, WEP 12-100 Jacket 2 (WEP meetings of Chiefs of the regional teams, 1988-1992).

idea was sustained into the 1980s. But the structural reforms of the early 1990s coupled with the reversion to the ILO's traditional agenda sanctioned the WEP's formal and definitive demise.

► V. Conclusion

The end of the World Employment Programme did not, of course, bring an end to the ILO's work on employment, but this subsequently took different forms, and was more closely linked with other ILO work, notably within the new Multi-Disciplinary Teams at the regional level. A series of World Employment Reports was started in the 1990s. The ILO contributed substantially to the UN Global Summit on Social Development in 1995, within which employment creation was one of the primary means for social progress. A series of ILO-led country studies of employment strategy was one of the follow-up actions after the Summit. Then in 1999, employment was made one of the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda. The integration of employment within this agenda increased the focus on the quality of employment, in addition to the quantity. The ILO's work on employment did not recover the prominence it had attained at the peak of the World Employment Programme, but the effort on employment issues was sustained within the wider frame of the decent work agenda in the last two decades.

That is a story that would require another paper. Here we just point to a few features of the World Employment Programme that merit reflection in future work. The first is the importance of research, knowledge and innovation. While much of the ILO's work can be said to be knowledge-based, the scale of the investment in research in the World Employment Programme makes it stand out. It provided legitimacy in a wider intellectual community, as well as bringing new ideas and approaches to policy formulation and implementation. It rested on partnership – the role of IDS, Sussex was critical in the early years - and the programme drew on a widening network of top-level academics and policy analysts. The process was sustained by a large group of young researchers who were encouraged to follow their noses, in the belief that this was the way to generate substantive advances. But it ultimately proved difficult to maintain an open process of critical research in an organization built on a delicate balance between the interests of diverse governments, employers and workers.

The second is its historical specificity. WEP was built on and formed part of, an expanding agenda of international development in the 1960s and 1970s. New problems were being

addressed, and new solutions sought. These innovations both provided an orientation for its work and made it possible to raise external funding, which was essential because working only with regular budget resources would have both limited the scale and constrained the range of the work which it carried out. These circumstances have not recurred since, or at least not in the same way, though one could imagine a comparable scenario today around the environmental agenda. Then in the 1980s, conditions changed, and the WEP was faced with declining external funding and a neoliberal onslaught which it was unable to resist.

The third is the connection, or rather lack of connection, to the rest of the ILO; readers may have noticed that little is said about this above, because WEP was to a large extent self-contained. This was initially a strength, since it allowed the WEP to build its approach unconstrained by the need to compromise with other parts of the ILO agenda. In the end, it was a weakness, because it made consolidation within the ILO's work much more difficult, and generated opposition among some sections of the ILO's constituency. It was this which certainly lay behind Michel Hansenne's policy in the early 1990s of creating integrated policy teams within which employment was only one part; but one cannot help feeling that he threw out the baby with the bathwater. It is important to realise that this question of connections within the ILO is not only about territory, but also a question of theoretical framework and academic discipline. WEP was the stronghold of economists and other social scientists; dialogue with the lawyers was always complicated. Different disciplines generate different perceptions of the problem and come to different solutions.

An important related point was that the WEP's agenda encompassed many issues that fell outside the priorities of the ILO's constituents. Employment policy required action in economic and financial fields which went well beyond the competence of the Ministries of Labour which provide the bulk of government representatives. Both employers and workers were (and are) mainly concerned with the formal sector, while a great deal of WEP work aimed to raise incomes and productivity among informal workers. This lack of congruence with the agenda of the tripartite constituency weakened the political support

for the WEP's work within the organization, and played a significant role in its ultimate demise.

The fourth was the complicated relationship between headquarters and the field. Initially seen as a regional operation close to the policy actors in developing countries, in practice in the 1970s the WEP was dominated by a vision built at headquarters, not least because it was only at HQ that there was the critical mass of work that was needed. But in the 1980s this was at least in part reversed, as the decline in research capability in Geneva was not replicated in the regional teams, which built analytical capability and strong regional networks, which gave them credibility among regional policy-makers. However, in both the 70s and the 80s there was only limited synergy between HQ and field. If today's global communications had been available then, the story might have been different.

The fifth, and perhaps most important, is leadership. The role of Louis Emmerij was fundamental in driving the WEP forward in the first half of the 1970s and he was preceded and supported by Abbas Ammar. And of course, the WEP would not have existed without David Morse's leadership in the 1960s. Many others played a key role in the early years of the WEP, notably Dharam Ghai and the heads of particular research programmes and teams, too many to single out here, and subsequently Emmerij's successors at the head of the WEP. The role of Victor Tokman in building up and sustaining PREALC in the long term was particularly noteworthy in Latin America.

The WEP was mainly built around a development agenda; its work on employment in industrialized countries never had the same impact, in part because it was a much smaller player in industrialized country research. In the 1970s, only a few larger developing countries had a substantial research establishment, so the WEP brought considerable value-added, and policymakers listened. But of course, ultimately the larger players of the North have disproportionate clout in international organizations. To acquire their support, the ILO needed (and needs) to offer viable routes to more and better employment in the North as well. Efforts to address this in the 1980s never had the resources that would have been needed.

In the end, the WEP was a child of its time. In a period when conventional models were being overturned, conservative values challenged and hierarchy respected in the breach, the ILO succeeded in surfing the wave and creating something new. Of course, the employment problem persists today, but its character changes as new needs surface and old ones remain. Clearly, there is still a need for a World Employment Programme.

► Annex: Chronology of main events of the WEP



