International Labour Office

100 years of Public Works in the ILO

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International Labour Office • Geneva

First published 2021

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International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2021.

ISBN 9789220356067 (print)

ISBN 9789220356074 (web PDF)

Photo credits
Cover: Block-paving on a EIIP Project in Mauritania, (Credit: ILO)

Produced by the Publications Production Unit (PRODOC) of the ILO.
Graphic and typographic design, printing, electronic publishing and distribution.
The ILO endeavours to use paper sourced from forests managed
in an environmentally sustainable and socially responsible manner.

Code: CMD-REP

▶ Foreword

"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose".[1] This phrase, coined by Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr in 1849, comes to mind as we reflect back on the state of the World of Work a century after the founding of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Despite the enormous technological achievements, improvements in the conditions of work and standard of living of billions of people, and the enormous wealth that has been generated over that time, many of the same challenges that the ILO faced when it was founded in 1919 are still with us today. Unemployment and underemployment remain key societal challenges with more than six out of 10 workers operating in the informal economy,[2] the environment continues to degrade and the annual investment gap for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is estimated at a staggering US$ 2–4 trillion per annum.[3] And now, with the announcement of the Global Accelerator initiative for Jobs & Social Protection by the UN Secretary General in October 2021, which prioritises the provision of social protection and creation of decent jobs in the context of post Covid-19 recovery, the key role public works programmes is once again recognized as , just as during previous periods of global economic disruption.

Since 1919, the ILO has advocated that social justice for all is a critical requirement in addressing these challenges. This goal has been pursued through a wide range of employment policies, strategies and interventions, some of which aim to address short-term goals such as ensuring livelihoods in post-disaster and post-conflict contexts. Others take a long-term perspective and aim to build the labour market institutions and social security systems required to achieve the goal of decent work for all.

Employment-intensive public works programmes are as crucial a means for achieving full employment as they are an important instrument for ensuring that "no one is left behind". They enable the vulnerable or marginalized to be brought into the labour market. At the same time, these labour-based programmes have important economic, social and environmental impacts.

1 The more things change, the more they stay the same.

2 https://ilo.org/global/topics/employment-promotion/informal-economy/lang--en/index.htm

3 https://www.sustainablegoals.org.uk/filling-the-finance-gap/

They create and maintain the very assets that can increase productivity and strengthen resilience.

The role and objectives they aim to achieve change with time and contexts. They are critical counter-cyclical measures during recessions and depressions when jobs are being shed. They are necessary for reconstruction to recover from disasters or conflicts and they are also important when economies are only growing slowly and few formal jobs are being created. The scale of these programmes may shrink during good times, yet the infrastructure and jobs they provide are still needed in specific areas or among particular communities.

For these reasons, public works programmes (PWPs) were included in the ILO's International Labour Standards since their inception in 1919, including the very first ILO Recommendation.[4] Over the years, emphasis on these programmes has varied in line with the changing global employment context. At the same time, the ILO has acquired an impressive body of experience and knowledge of the use of PWPs that has enabled it to promote and support programme design that fits specific geographic and economic contexts. This is the story that unfolds during the narration of this book. It is an important work for all who are concerned with pursuing the goal of full employment, where indeed no one should be left behind. I believe it will also be of relevance to those who are interested in the efficient and effective use of PWPs, as well as those who have been, or remain critical of them.

In the current global context, many are advocating for decent work, the use of large stimulus programmes, the enhancement of the humanitarian-peace-development nexus, sustainable infrastructure investments, employment guarantees and new green deals. This account of ILO public works relates how the Organization has advocated, coordinated and supported the use of public works to support these different policy objectives through the implementation of employment-intensive programmes over its first century. Each chapter captures events and activities over a decade and positions the role of PWPs within the global events and thinking of the time, from the role of PWPs between the First and Second World wars, decolonization and the start of the development decade (chapters 1–5), to the emergence of the

4 Unemployment Recommendation, 1919 (No. 1) http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R001

ILO's Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) in the 1980s, which to this day promotes and supports PWPs in ILO member countries.

This book highlights the reasons that governments around the world continue to use these programmes, while also clearly laying out the design and implementation challenges that are inherent in them – those of achieving and balancing their economic and social objectives. This balancing act has often been at the root of many of the criticisms of the programmes voiced by the ILO and its constituents: that they provide short-term work, pay low wages and do not meet decent work standards.

The work of the ILO and EIIP demonstrates how these criticisms can be addressed to ensure that these programmes achieve their multiple objectives yet remain true to the values and principles of the ILO. The EIIP has worked with a large number of development partners to advance an employment-intensive approach to PWPs that has now been mainstreamed by many of them.

The book shows the considerable efforts and achievements of the ILO and how it has contributed to the thinking, design and implementation of PWPs over the years including influencing conventions, recommendations, research, advocacy, the implementation of numerous programmes and projects, technical advice and development cooperation providing, and enhancing the role of public works within the wider development discourse.

It is a story of the ILO, and of its global efforts to contribute to decent work for all through PWPs.

Sangheon Lee

Director

Employment Policy Department, ILO

Geneva, October 2021

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... conditions of labour exist involving such injustice, hardship and privation to large numbers of people as to produce unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world are imperilled; and an improvement of those conditions is urgently required.

▶The Mandate of the ILO, as set out in Part XIII of the 1919 Versailles Peace Treaty

Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously. It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the Government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of war.

▶US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Inaugural address, March 4, 1933.

One still hears statements here and there to the effect that we cannot afford (in terms of money) this measure or that, but the great majority of people now realise that what we really cannot afford (in terms of welfare) are mass unemployment and a low standard of living. Moreover, there is no economic reason whatever why we should, and we therefore have a sound basis on which to build for the future.

▶Duncan Christie Tait. ILO specialist on employment and migration, who promoted the role of the ILO in facilitating world economic cooperation, 1944.

▶ Acknowledgements

This book came into being through the collective efforts of many including past and present ILO staff as well as external collaborators.

The authors would like to express the gratitude to Dorothea Hoehtker (ILO) who provided invaluable inputs and guidance on the earlier chapters and Anna Biondi (ILO) and Asfaw Kidanu (ILO) who provided detailed inputs and comments on the entire manuscript. The research support provided by Anna Overbeck and Julia Palkonyay was also essential.

Important contributions and inputs on the later chapters as well as photographic materials were received from former ILO staff: John Clifton, Christine Cornwell, Geoff Edmonds, Mukesh Gupta, Htun Hlaing, Erik Lyby, Jean Majeres, Steve Miller, Kwaku Osei-Bonsu, Thuy Phan, Peter Richards, Mike Shone, Jane Tournee, Eric de Vries and Helmut Watzlawick; as well as current ILO staff: Maria-Teresa Gutierrez, Bjorn Johannessen, Julien Varlin, Dampu Ndenzako and Claude Yao Kouame.

In addition, Robert McCutcheon, Tommaso Milani and Kirit Vaidya provided valuable inputs.

▶ Abbreviations

ASIST	Advisory Support, Information Services and Training
EIIP	Employment-Intensive Investment Programme
EIWP	Employment-Intensive Works Programme
EMP/INFRA	Employment and Infrastructure Branch
EMP/TEC	Employment and Technology Branch
EmpIA	Employment Impact Assessment
DfID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom), now Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)
FINNIDA	Finnish International Development Agency
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRAP	Integrated Rural Accessibility Planning
GJP	Global Jobs Pact (2009)
KfW	KfW Bank (German Development Bank)
KTC	Kisii Training Centre
LRB	local-resource based
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (India)
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NIEO	New International Economic Order
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development

PEP	Public Employment Programme
PWP	Public Works Programme
RARP	Rural Access Roads Programme
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Corporation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SPF	Social Protection Floor
SPWP	Special Public Works Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WEP	World Employment Programme
WFP	World Food Programme
WSSD	World Summit for Social Development (1995)

▶ Glossary

Active labour market policies – government interventions that help the unemployed to find work, including public employment services (for example, job centres), skills training schemes (including technical and vocational training) and employment subsidies.

Cash for work – donor or state-funded public works programmes that provide cash in return for work in order to provide income for the unemployed.

Countercyclical demand stimulus – increased government expenditure during periods of economic slowdown or recession which aims to stimulate demand and thereby promote macroeconomic stabilization.

Countercyclical employment stimulus – increased government expenditure during periods of economic slowdown or recession to promote employment.

Employment guarantee scheme (EGS) – state-sponsored programmes that guarantee employment for all those who seek it.

Employment-Intensive – a mode of asset creation in which the share of total cost allocated to labour (rather than material inputs) is high, and which may entail the use of local resources and appropriate technologies to increase the labour content of production. This term is sometimes used as a synonym for the term "labour-based".

Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) – ILO's programme to promote employment creation through public investment which was initiated in the 1970s. EIIP is used for the sake of brevity in this report to apply to PWP activities and labour-intensive programming from the 1980s onwards.

Food for assets – donor- or state-funded public works programmes that provide food in return for the creation of community assets in order to provide income for the unemployed.

Food for work – donor- or state-funded public works programmes which provide food in return for work in order to provide income for the unemployed.

Frictional unemployment – unemployment that occurs in the economy when people move from one job to another and which can be addressed by ALMP (see above).

Green Works - Green Works refer to the employment intensive development, restoration and maintenance of public infrastructure, community assets, natural areas and landscapes to contribute to environmental goals such as adaptation to climate change and natural disasters, environmental rehabilitation, ecosystem restoration and nature conservation.

Income generation or job-creation programmes – state (or donor)-funded public works programmes which create employment in order to provide support for the unemployed. Their principal objective is employment rather than the efficient use of labour and as a result asset quality and productivity may be compromised.

Labour-based, labour-intensive – a mode of asset creation which makes the optimal use of labour as the predominant resource in production, while also maintaining cost-effectiveness and quality, providing a pro-employment alternative to conventional equipment-based technologies.

Labour-based construction methods – technologies which involve the use of a mix of labour and capital equipment in the construction of infrastructure, with a preference for labour where technically and economically feasible while maintaining established quality standards, and using equipment only for activities not suited to labour-based methods for reasons of quality or cost.

Labour (or employment) optimization – a mode of asset production based on the use of labour-based approaches that take into account efficiency, cost-effectiveness and quality. The term is used to distinguish the optimal use of labour from labour maximization, which may be economically and/or technically inefficient.

Make-work programmes – initiatives designed to ensure that beneficiaries contribute their labour in return for social assistance, with little concern for the quality or cost-effectiveness of outputs.

Public Employment Programme (PEP) – state(or donor)-funded programmes that have as their primary purpose the creation of employment through the production or maintenance of assets or services that contribute to the public good, but are outside the normal public service and complement rather than displace existing delivery mechanisms. PEPs are different from other forms of public expenditure inasmuch as employment creation is their primary purpose.

Public Investment Programme (PIP) – public investments in different types of infrastructure (including the environment, climate change adaptation and mitigation, local communities, social services, and skills development) funded by domestic, international or donor sources, which may include employment creation components for selected activities.

Public Works Programme (PWP) – state-(or donor) funded programmes that have as their primary purpose the creation of employment, often with the objective of providing income security for the unemployed or underemployed. These programmes generally entail the production or maintenance of assets or services that contribute to the public good and complement existing state delivery mechanisms. The term has evolved considerably over the last century and, in this publication, it is used to inclusively to refer to both programmes with social protection income security objectives and also those with more general employment creation objectives. The term is used to include both Public Employment Programmes (PEPs) and Public Investment Programmes (PIPs) inasmuch as they are also intended to stimulate employment.

Relief works – donor (or state)-funded employment programmes that provide welfare payments in return for work in times of labour market dislocation. In these programmes, the productive value of the work is not a priority and the wage is often deliberately set below the market rate.

Social protection – a set of interventions which prevent or alleviate poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout the lifecycle, providing income security through transfers and in-kind benefits for children, the working-age poor (unemployed or underemployed) and the elderly and disabled, which take the form of social assistance (including

public works programmes), contributory social insurance and labour market policies.

Social Protection Floor (SPF) – nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees which ensure that, over the life cycle, all those in need have access to essential health care and basic income security. PWPs are identified as one instrument to provide income security for the working age poor as part of a SPF.

Underemployment – for the purposes of this publication, the term is used to describe labour underutilisation, where workers are not able to secure employment for the number of hours they desire.

1

Municipal Market of Sidi Bouzid, where the 2011 Jasmine Revolution started in Tunisia, which was reconstructed as part of an EII 2015. (Credit: ILO)

1. Introduction

The Constitution of the ILO identifies employment as a key element of social justice and fundamental to maintaining stability and peace. It places the prevention of unemployment at the core of the Organization's mandate. For this reason, Public Works Programmes (PWPs) have been promoted by the ILO since its first Recommendation in 1919.

This book chronicles the breadth and depth of ILO's engagement in this arena over the last century. It describes the journey, the ideas and the innovations that have emerged in a shifting global economic, social and political context. PWPs continue to be widely used and supported by the ILO an it is hoped that lessons that have been handed down will be useful in informing future policy-making and programme design. This record charts the ILO's initial vision as a promoter and coordinator of international public works programming, and its adoption of public works as a key policy instrument for countercyclical demand stimulus in the early years of the Organization. It elaborates the current focus on the promotion of pro-employment public investment in a broader sense, as championed by the ILO's Employment-intensive Investment Programme (EIIP).

Public works programmes have been used as a response to inadequate labour demand for many centuries. Indeed, the adoption of policies obliging public institutions to provide employment for those impoverished by their inability to find work is documented in Europe as far back as the 16th century.[1] The unique characteristics of public works as a policy instrument which has the potential to simultaneously create employment on a large scale, reducing poverty and stimulating demand, while also creating assets and services that respond to societal needs, has led to their being adopted around the globe. They have had a variety of forms in diverse contexts and have been used for recovery from war, and as responses to decolonization, financial crises, natural disasters as well economic recessions, in both rich and poor countries, and in rural and urban settings.

The term "public works" has evolved considerably over the 100 years under review. Here we use the term Public Works Programme to include the wide range of labour-based employment creation initiatives in which the ILO has been engaged which include: internationally coordinated mass employment programmes developed in response to economic recessions; labour-intensive programmes designed to promote economic growth in contexts

of post-colonial investment capital scarcity; post-war and post-disaster reconstruction initiatives; rural access road programmes; humanitarian Cash for Work and Food for Work (CFW/FFW) operations; and Employment Guarantee Schemes (EGSs). What these initiatives all have in common is that they deploy public resources to either stimulate job creation or directly create jobs.

ILO has consistently supported the use of PWPs in times of widespread economic depression or crisis, notably during the 1920s and 1930s, and again following the 1997 and 2009 crises, as countercyclical demand stimulus mechanisms, taking on macroeconomic as well as social objectives. It has also supported national and sub-national programmes with more modest and localized employment objectives.

These interventions have had a variety of objectives in addition to those of employment creation, including asset creation, peace building and stabilization, inclusive growth, humanitarian support, enterprise development, skills development and social protection provision. Programme design and focus has shifted over time and these different contexts, and the vision underlying them has also shifted in line with broader global geopolitical and ideological fluctuations. Nevertheless, the concept of state-sponsored employment creation has been consistently supported by the ILO in line with its mandate to prevent unemployment. As a result, the use of PWP has been promoted in multiple ILO Conventions and Recommendations across the decades,[2] including the first Recommendation in 1919.[3]

The ILO is the lead UN agency mandated to address labour market problems, carrying out analyses of global labour market issues and supporting the development of national employment policies, and the design and coordination of employment promotion strategies. In 1964, the ILO adopted the Employment Policy Convention, (No. 122), and associated Employment Policy Recommendation, (No. 122), which place full employment at the centre of policy-making and identify. They include the use of PWPs as an instrument for achieving employment objectives. Since then, the Organization has led the technical debate and advocacy around the efficient design and implementation of labour-intensive programming in order to simultaneously reduce unemployment and stimulate growth. This work has been headed by the Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) since the 1970s. More recently, the Organization has also promoted the role of the PWP as a component of national social protection systems in line with Member States' mandates to provide a Social Protection Floor (SPF) in accordance with ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202).[4] Also, it has

led work to adapt programming in response to the emerging demands of climate change and environmental degradation.

The variety of ways in which the ILO has attempted to fulfil its employment promotion mandate and change its approach and vision in response to shifts in the broader global geopolitical and ideological context, are explored chronologically in the chapters of this book.

It starts with the ILO's engagement in the promotion of public works programmes immediately after the First World War, in line with the grand founding vision of the ILO. It moves onto the Organization's aspiration to take a role as the coordinating body for international countercyclical employment creation on a mass scale in the 1930s; a vision which the Organization continued to promote, with limited success, until the end of the Second World War. During the decade following the Second World War, the ILO focused on improving the design of public works, but its role in post-war reconstruction was more limited than it had anticipated, and the post-war economic boom in Europe and the United States of America meant that the "prevention of unemployment" became a less urgent component of the ILO's mandate.

By the late 1950s, the ILO had begun to develop a unique role as the provider of technical assistance to Member States on the design of interventions to create employment and stimulate economic development by promoting labour-intensive technologies. This work was particularly relevant in developing countries experiencing capital shortages in the immediate post-colonial period and coincided with the first UN Decade of Development (launched in 1961). During this time, and with the adoption of the Convention and Recommendation on employment policy, the ILO also focused on promoting public works as a way of addressing the challenge of economic growth which generated insufficient employment, experienced by many developing countries during this period.

In the 1970s, the introduction of the ILO's World Employment Programme (WEP) stimulated further work on the development of technical approaches to maximize the employment intensity of infrastructure investment, and their active promotion. ILO's policy advocacy around these issues intensified in the 1980s with the promotion of "pro-employment" approaches across the construction industry, the development of a global network of expertise on labour-intensive construction approaches, and capacity building with private and public sector partners. During the first decades of the new millennium, the ILO consolidated its expertise in this area and promoted the integration of employment creation programming into a range of development

sectors, including social protection, environmental rehabilitation and rural development.

This diverse but connected portfolio of PWP interventions, adopted over the last century, is highly relevant in the current global context, characterized by persistent mass under- and un-employment and poverty, and the social and political instability that it engenders. Recently, this situation was exacerbated by the negative global economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite downward trends in global unemployment and working poverty rates in the new millennium, employment was adversely affected by the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, and it was not until late 2019 that employment returned to levels experienced prior to the crisis, leaving an estimated 172 million people unemployed globally, even prior to the global pandemic.[5] In low-income countries, much of the employment growth of recent decades has been informal and without significant impacts on poverty reduction. The prevalence of working poverty[6] means that more than one quarter of workers in low- and middle-income countries were estimated to live in extreme or moderate poverty in 2019.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated this situation significantly, increasing the number of people living in extreme poverty by over 100 million during 2020 alone, and reversing decades of development gains.[7] The current context, in which unemployment and underemployment remain critical barriers to poverty reduction and economic, social and political stability, makes an exploration of the ILO's experience in employment creation through PWPs all the more relevant, particularly given the global impact of the pandemic.

The vision and ambition of the ILO's approach to direct employment creation has fluctuated over time, reflecting changes in the external geopolitical and ideological context and the shifting fortunes and influence of the ILO as an institution within the international system. But the Organization's promotion of PWPs as a means of addressing individual poverty as well as the broader challenges of social stability, economic growth and development, caused or exacerbated by high levels of unemployment and underemployment, has remained a consistent thread throughout the century. It is this thread that is mapped in the following chapters.

Endnotes

1 E.M. Leonard, 1900, *The Early History of English Poor Relief* (Cambridge: University Press).

2 ILO, International Labour Standards comprise Conventions and are legal instruments drawn up by the ILO's constituents (governments, employers and workers representatives) and set out basic principles and rights at work. Conventions (or Protocols) are legally binding international treaties that may be ratified by Member States. Recommendations serve as non-binding guidelines. In many cases, a Convention lays down the basic principles to be implemented by ratifying countries, while a related Recommendation supplements the Convention by providing more detailed guidelines on how it could be applied. Recommendations can also be autonomous, for example, not linked to a Convention.

3 See also Public Works Recommendations of 1937 (No. 50), (No. 51), 1944 (No. 73) and 1964 (No. 122). As will be chronicled, some recommendations have superseded each other, reflecting the evolution of the ILO's position and engagement with these programmes.

4 ILO, 2012a, Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202).

5 ILO, 2019a, *World Employment and Social Outlook Trends,* ILO.

6 The working poor refers to employed people living in households in which per capita income is below the poverty line. See: ILO, 2019b, "The Working Poor or How a Job is No Guarantee of Decent Living Conditions", ILO STAT *Spotlight on Work Statistics*, No. 6. April.

7 Christoph Lakner et al., 2020, The Importance of Tackling Inequality for Global Poverty, German Development Institute.

Group photo of ILO officials at the first International Labour Conference in Washington D.C. in 1919 (Credit: ILO)

2

2. Public works programmes prior to 1919, the foundation of the ILO and the 1920s

Long before the ILO first articulated its grand ambitions around employment creation, public works programmes had played a role in centuries of European welfare interventions. There is a long tradition in Europe of government provision of employment for the poor in the form of "relief work" to provide temporary support at times of extreme need.[1] This kind of provision was extended during periods of structural economic transition, and PWPs were adopted as a response to the labour market dislocation caused by the industrial revolution in the United Kingdom. Often, relief work was provided when the provision of a "dole" or payment without a work requirement was not socially or politically acceptable. It typically entailed deliberately low paid and unattractive work intended to deter all but the most needy from claiming support, in line with the principle of "less eligibility". Such work was often provided in workhouses in which the poor were obliged to reside in return for support. Under these schemes, it was common for an arbitrary work contribution to be required as a condition for relief, with little concern for the quality of the work or assets created, rather than employing participants in productive work.

By the mid-19th century, such schemes were a key component of social policy across Europe. Towards the end of the century the idea of large-scale "countercyclical" public investment began to emerge as a policy response to economic recession, an intervention which not only offered support to the unemployed but also had the potential to stimulate demand and to create national assets. An early experiment with these ideas was the French *Freycinet* Plan of the late 1870s in which public spending on the construction of railways, canals and ports was accelerated to address the recession affecting rural France.[2]

Given this long tradition, it was inevitable that such public works measures should be part of the emerging policy discourse in Europe in response to the social and economic dislocation resulting from the First World War, at a time when there was an urgent need for relief, employment and also public investment in reconstruction. As a result, public works programmes played a key role in the agenda of the ILO from the outset. The Organization was established with the mandate to address the objectives set out in Part XIII of the 1919 Versailles Peace Treaty, which highlighted not only the urgent need to address conditions of labour, but also the critical importance of the "prevention of unemployment", to ensure social justice and ongoing stability and universal peace (box 1).

▶ Box 1.The Mandate of the ILO, as set out in Part XIII of the 1919 Versailles Peace Treaty

The Commission on International Labour Legislation which met during the Paris Peace Conference and was responsible for the drafting of the ILO Constitution which was later embedded in the Treaty of Versailles,1919 (Credit: ILO).

Whereas the League of Nations has for its object the establishment of universal peace, and such a peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice; and whereas conditions of labour exist involving such injustice, hardship and privation to large numbers of people as to produce unrest so great that the peace

and harmony of the world are imperilled; and an improvement of those conditions is urgently required: as, for example, by the regulation of the hours of work, including the establishment of a maximum working day and week, the regulation of the labour supply, the prevention of unemployment, the provision of an adequate living wage, the protection of the worker against sickness, disease and injury arising out of his employment, the protection of children, young persons and women, provision for old age and injury, protection of the interests of workers when employed in countries other than their own, recognition of the principle of freedom of association, the organisation of vocational and technical education and other measures; Whereas also the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own counties, The High Contracting parties, moved by sentiments of justice and humanity as well as by the desire to secure the permanent peace of the world, agree to the following. A permanent organisation is hereby established for the promotion of the objects set forth in the Preamble.

Source: ILO 1923[3].

Hence, in its early years, the Organization was not only occupied with the establishment of the first labour standards, but also with the promotion of interventions to alleviate mass unemployment directly, in line with its mandate. Accordingly, the second agenda item of the first meeting of the International Labour Conference held in late 1919 in Washington, DC, was the question of preventing or responding to unemployment.[4] The outcome of this inaugural Conference was the adoption of the ILO's first Recommendation – Unemployment Recommendation, 1919 (No.1) – which included an article on the advance planning of public works.

Large-scale works programmes were identified by ILO as a preferable alternative to what was perceived as the economically unsustainable practice of providing cash relief, which offered funds to the poor without a work requirement, and were widely implemented in the post-war period to address unemployment.

By 1921, the 1919 recommendation for the implementation of public works was already being taken forward by many member governments, with works underway or planned in Austria, Germany, Italy and many others, as an alternative to the payment of relief. The International Labour Conference of that year noted that "In most countries the remedy most generally applied, apart from the simple but ruinous palliative of distributing relief, and the one which is the most generally demanded by trade unions is the systematic organisation on a large scale of works of public utility by the public authorities."[5]

However, ILO's perspective on Recommendation No. 1 at this time went beyond the promotion of public works as an alternative to relief. It also included the strategic rescheduling of public investment to finance large-scale employment where and when required to compensate for falls in market demand. The recommendation promoted the strategic use of public funds as a tool for employment stabilization, and proposed that "... each Member of the International Labour Organisation co-ordinate the execution of all work undertaken under public authority with a view to reserving such work as far as practicable for periods of unemployment and for districts most affected by it."[6]

This was the first formal articulation by the ILO of the principle of state intervention to promote countercyclical public works programming. It invited Member States to phase the financing of public investment on infrastructure by withholding or bringing forward financing so as to schedule implementation during periods of economic downturn, and then focus investment in areas particularly affected by recession. This strategy was further developed in the following decades and popularized following the publication of John Maynard Keynes' *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* in 1936, which promoted the critical role of fiscal policy and state intervention to stimulate employment during economic downturns.[7]

While the main policy focus was on the creation of employment with investments in the construction of assets, there was also concern about the quality of assets produced. To this end, the ILO promoted the adoption of "productive" public works that would create assets with the potential to contribute to national economic development. The Organization saw this as an alternative to the dominant form of "make work" programmes,

which paid little attention to the quality of the work completed or the potential of the assets created to contribute to economic development.

The ILO also argued that states had a duty to help the unemployed, and that they should do this by providing "employment on full wage on works which, though possibly not immediately necessary, may increase the national capital in the future, rather than to pay them relief and leave them idle". The requirement for the payment of a full wage illustrates that the ILO's conception differed in an important way from many previous public employment initiatives in that it considered PWP employment to be equal, rather than inferior, to other employment. This was in line with the ILO's preoccupation at this time with the working conditions of all workers and that the remuneration offered to those employed in a PWP needed to be the same as that offered to those working in similar market-based activities.

This innovative vision for public works programmes set out in Recommendation No. 1 in 1919 was developed at successive meetings of the International Labour Conference, which proposed PWPs as an alternative to relief, the provision of the market wage, the promotion of productive, rather than "make work" employment, and the strategic deployment of state investment to stabilize employment, thus forming the kernel of the Organization's work on public works throughout the following century.

This new model of public works in which the assets created were of economic significance, and which differed profoundly from the more punitive and previously dominant "relief works" model, was trialled in Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the United Kingdom in response to the challenges of post-war economic and labour market disruption. However, the majority of governments implementing large-scale programmes in the aftermath of the war adopted more conventional approaches to public employment. The inadequacy of their efforts was identified as an issue of concern by the ILO which highlighted the need to promote the new approach at successive meetings of the International Labour Conference. At the 8th Session of the ILC in 1926 a resolution was adopted which requested the ILO to:

> increase to the utmost its efforts to secure wider adoption of the measures proposed in the Recommendations and Conventions on unemployment adopted at previous sessions of the Conference, [relating to] the organisation of public works so as to counteract the fluctuations

> of private business [...and] to seek the advice of the Joint Committee [on Economic Crises] on the financial obstacles to the putting into operation by public authorities of the Recommendation referred to above concerning the organisation of public works.[8]

As this resolution indicates, alongside the continuing push for the expansion of countercyclical public works programmes to respond to employment fluctuations, countries were looking to the ILO to provide innovative solutions to the fiscal challenges that implementation entailed. However, as the economic boom of the 1920s progressed in the United States and Europe, the strategic importance of state interventions to promote employment, stimulate demand and ensure geopolitical stability temporarily receded. Interest in PWP implementation waned accordingly as unemployment moved down the domestic policy agenda.

Endnotes

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3 ILO, 1923, *Official Bulletin*, Vol I. April 1919–August 1920.

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5 ILO, 1921, *Report of the Director*, International Labour Conference, 3rd Session, Geneva, 1921.

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7 John Maynard Keynes, 1936, *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, Cambridge: Palgrave Macmillan.

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Opening of the 23rd International Labour Conference in Geneva, June 1937 (Credit: Jullien)

3

3. The rise of countercyclical employment promotion in the 1930s and ILO's transnational ambitions

The Wall Street Crash of October 1929 dramatically changed the global economic landscape. Addressing unemployment became, once again, an urgent issue during the worldwide economic downturn which followed the crash. The Great Depression had a particularly severe impact on fragile economies in Europe that were still recovering from the effects of the First World War. The resulting decade of mass unemployment, and attendant breakdown in social and political stability, confirmed the critical link between employment and peace that was highlighted in the ILO's founding mandate. The Organization pressed for urgent and concerted international action to address unemployment. The primary mechanism it put forward was an expanded version of countercyclical public investment in PWPs, this time with an explicit link to the associated macroeconomic benefits of such an investment:

> The unprecedented rise in unemployment overwhelmed the capacity of the then known mechanisms of coping with unemployment, namely unemployment insurance and local level public works. There was clearly a dire need for additional instruments of policy to counteract the widespread social distress that had been generated by the economic collapse. The ILO responded well to this challenge. Its earlier work on national and international monetary policies, as well as its work that was in the vanguard of thinking on

> counter-cyclical macroeconomic policies, now stood the Organization in good stead in the face of the Great Depression. The ILO was in the forefront of the advocacy of a coordinated international effort to bring about a reflation of the global economy.[1]

The ILO, together with the Economic and Financial Organisation of the League of Nations, set up a Joint Committee on Economic Crises, which commissioned a study into the problem. The result was *Unemployment and Public Works*, published by the ILO in 1931. It set out an agenda of international action to overcome the Great Depression, focusing on the need for a coordinated international programme of public works to stimulate demand in the global economy. In the same year, the ILO Governing Body established an Unemployment Committee, with the explicit goal of promoting public works as an instrument to mitigate economic depression. The Committee drew attention to the need for international collaboration on public works programming in order to enhance their impact, identifying, "the possibility of Governments coming to an agreement through the appropriate organs of the League of Nations with a view to joint execution of extensive public works of an international character."[2]

This marked the beginning of the adoption of PWP into the emerging transnational policy discourse and the exploration of an expanded role for the ILO in terms of their financing and coordination. The Committee started to investigate options for international financing to facilitate large-scale interventions, recognizing that the rescheduling of existing national resources was not an adequate financing strategy for the scale of national provision required. It also requested an urgent investigation into the institutional and policy implications of: "securing the permanent international co-operation necessary to facilitate the execution of any works which may be recognised as favourable to the economic development of Europe and to promote for this purpose a policy of long-term credits which may inspire the confidence indispensable to lenders and secure favourable condition to borrowers."[3]

The Committee was also concerned to ensure the quality of programmes funded through this mechanism and proposed that the Council of the League of Nations draw on ILO's technical expertise to review government proposals in terms of "(a) their economic necessity and their co-ordination with other schemes from a national and European point of view; (b) their chances of profits and productivity at an early date". To this end, a technical

body was established, the Committee of Enquiry on Public Works and National Technical Equipment,[4] comprising engineers and technical experts and three representatives of the ILO. The Committee of Enquiry invited all League members, together with Turkey and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), to submit detailed plans of public works which they hoped to implement but were unable to finance domestically. Proposals were received from 20 governments between 1931 and 1933 for a combined total of 550 million person-days of employment at an estimated total cost total of five billion Swiss francs (approximately US$83 million).[5]

As the impact of the Great Depression worsened, the ILO was also working on several other fronts to promote PWPs. The need for global macroeconomic management and reflationary fiscal policies was highlighted in a series of papers in the *International Labour Review*[6] in 1930 and 1931, policies that were actively promoted by Director-General Albert Thomas. In 1932, the International Labour Conference adopted a resolution formally calling for public works to be a core component of the macroeconomic package required to respond to the challenge of the depression, along with expansionary monetary and trade policies.[7] Public investment to promote employment was also a key agenda item at the 17th Session of the International Labour Conference in 1933, which discussed in detail "the organisation and co-ordination of national and international public works, with a view to combating unemployment and regularising the volume of employment".[8] The Conference reiterated its support for countercyclical investment in public works to combat unemployment and poverty, and highlighted the urgency of securing international funding and coordination for these interventions. As well as stressing "the necessity of the immediate organisation of large-scale works in order to palliate the effects of the present depression", the 1933 Conference also argued for the development of a permanent policy and institutional structure to support the use of public works as an instrument for ongoing employment stabilization.

By 1933, having reviewed the PWP proposals received from member countries, the Committee of Enquiry was ready to put forward a number for funding. Proposals from Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia, which collectively made provision for 150–200 million person-days of employment at a cost of two billion Swiss francs (approximately US$33 million) were presented for consideration to the international London Monetary and Economic Conference. Convened in London in 1933, the Conference's objective was to identify international solutions to the global economic crisis.[9] The proposals were part of what the ILO described as "an extensive plan of public works calculated to provide a rapid remedy for the present depression"[10] and the rationale for intervention was presented as one of sound economic policy:

> The restoration to circulation of the capital now lying idle [...] by the adoption of a public works policy, including the following lines of action: (a) To set on foot immediately large-scale public works, giving an assured economic yield, particularly in those countries where funds are at present remaining unused; (b) To secure collaboration between creditor countries and countries lacking capital, many of whom are debtors, in order to undertake in these latter countries large works likely to augment the national income and thereby to increase their capacity to meet external debts;[11]

This ambitious proposal was driven by a concern articulated at the 1933 International Labour Conference that interventions to date had been of limited impact due to their fragmentation and poor organization:

> during the present depression such action as has been taken, both nationally and internationally, to spare large numbers of workers the distress of unemployment, and communities the waste that this unemployment entails, has been vitiated by lack of preliminary organisation and agreement.[12]

At the London Conference, the ILO also suggested that, as a prerequisite for the financing of any definite proposal, "it would first be necessary to bring into existence the international machinery for the purpose." To this end, they put forward a plan for the creation of a permanent international commission under the auspices of the League that would have an advisory and co-ordinating function. The body would ensure the development and implementation of an effective policy of advance planning on an international scale, and would co-ordinate domestically financed public works as well as inform international investments in public works. It would facilitate information exchange, the exercise of supervision and the provision of programme quality guarantees, with the aim of acquiring in time "sufficient

authority to take active international measures" itself. In the first instance, this approach was intended to enable internationally financed works to be implemented immediately, as required, based on the advance preparation of a list of approved works. These would take into account "their technical value, their national and international economic utility and the guarantees they offer to those who lend capital".[13]

The London Conference did not provide funding for the national proposals, but it did endorse the ILO's approach, and set up a sub-committee to deal with the question of public works, which was mandated to examine the economic and social aspects of public works employment as well as financing. Noting the interest of the Conference in the approach, and the urgent need to improve the scale and quality of public works programming, the Council of the League of Nations took the initiative forward in collaboration with the ILO. In 1934, the League and the ILO commissioned an international study into existing activities in the sector to inform the development of an appropriate institutional architecture to support the expansion of programming. The ILO was concerned that many programmes still retained the characteristics of *ad hoc* relief, rather than being integrated into the broader economic policy they were proposing:

> Though some light has been thrown on public works policy during the present crisis, our knowledge of the subject is still quite inadequate. In most countries it is impossible to obtain information as to the extent of public expenditure on productive works, because it is entirely uncoordinated and not directed by any central authority. The bulk of public works schemes hitherto put into operation have been little more than relief works, as little attempt has been made anywhere to use them as an integral part of a general economic policy. There is therefore a strong case for undertaking an international survey of the whole question, for collating the important experiments which have been initiated during the past year and for deducing some general lessons from them for future guidance.[14]

The study was to explore options for "the organisation and co-ordination of national and international public works with a view to combating unemployment and regularising the volume of employment"[15] and determining "the best method of ensuring the application of a systematic and co-ordinated policy of national public works and of providing for the co-ordination of these policies internationally" and was to extend beyond Europe, in line with the increasingly internationalist vision of the ILO under the leadership of Director-General Harold Butler. The Unemployment Committee was mandated to explore major nationally financed public

works programmes, underway or under consideration, to enable a comparative analysis of international experience in terms of public works implementation and impacts. The goal was to collate "the fullest possible technical, economic, financial and social information concerning all international works". To this end, a questionnaire was sent to all member governments in March 1934 requesting reports on the public works measures taken or proposed in their countries. It included a request for information on programmes implemented, policy and programme design and implementation details, financing and coordination modalities, recruitment processes and conditions of employment, and labour market impacts, which prefigured the key questions that were to occupy the ILO's engagement in the area of PWPs in the coming decades.

The report was intended to be independent of ongoing processes and discussions resulting from the Monetary and Economic Conference on the financing of public works through international funding. It was instead intended to inform programme design and implementation modalities and outcomes, so that future discussion within the international community could benefit from national experiences. The Fourteenth Session of the League of Nations in 1933 argued that such a study "would be particularly useful in order to enable Governments to judge of the possibility and desirability of pursuing, in present circumstances, a policy of carrying out programmes of public works on parallel lines. In the present period of distress, this question cannot fail to be of particular interest to public opinion and Governments in most countries."[16]

The findings of this research were reported in the ILO's *Public Works Policy*, published in 1935. The *Policy* was the first international comparative study of PWP and explored fundamental questions on the financing options for large-scale public investment, the administration and management requirements for effective programming, and issues relating to programme design. It provided information on wage rates, targeting, the seasonality and cyclicality of employment provision, and conditions of employment. The Policy found that it was widely accepted that PWPs had a demand stimulus function and the ability to stabilize labour demand, but that implementation modalities were far from agreed. The Policy stated that "Public works distribute fresh purchasing power to a considerable number of workers, thus increasing the general demand for commodities and contributing to the re-absorption of the unemployed by private industrial undertakings." The conclusion was that "It would seem to be agreed in most countries that an energetic and far-sighted public works policy may help to stabilise the demand for labour over a given period and

to counteract economic fluctuations to a very appreciable extent, but the measures for applying such a policy are still a subject of controversy."[17]

The *Policy* included detailed descriptions and analyses of public works programmes from more than 20 countries, including: Argentina, Belgium, Chile, The Republic of China,[18] Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany,[19] Hungary, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. It examined the diversity of programming options adopted, exploring issues of cost and impact including: the cost per person-day of employment created; the cost of the production of a unit of infrastructure; and the employment impact of infrastructure investment, setting the agenda for the following 80 years of research and debate in the ILO. Detailed issues of programme design were also set out, as well as management and financing of information relating to the countercyclical scheduling of works, and national and international financing.

The *Policy* reported extensive engagement in demand stimulus programming in response to the global depression, with countercyclical infrastructure spending perceived as a necessary and appropriate response to mass unemployment across the political spectrum. It included analyses of the mass public works components of the celebrated "US New Deal"[20] of 1933, along with interventions implemented under its precursor, the 1932 Emergency Relief and Construction Act, as well as the similar large-scale, but less well known, programmes implemented widely across north Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. It documented the programmes implemented by fascist regimes of the period that prioritized employment, including Germany and Italy. It also reported on mass PWPs in the Republic of China which employed an estimated one million workers on the construction of tens of thousands of kilometres of roads, dykes, railways and other infrastructure. Many of these workers were paid with wheat purchased with loans from the United States covering an estimated wage value of $20 million.[21]

The *Policy* documented how public authorities in dozens of countries had drawn up and implemented systematic plans of public works to overcome the depression while simultaneously improving the national infrastructure base. However, it also revealed considerable heterogeneity in programme design and outcomes, and very different ideas of how public works interventions should be conceptualized. Many programmes had failed, with governments reporting their disappointment at the lack of results, which they attributed to design and implementation shortcomings, the adoption of inappropriate types of work, and financing difficulties.

As well as identifying and discussing the variety of design and implementation options, conditions of employment, and financing options reported by contributing governments, the *Policy* also identified a set of technical design dilemmas and challenges, which are summarized in box 2. These issues have been at the heart of ILO research and technical assistance since that time and remain topical and pertinent to PWP discussions today.

▶ Box 2. Key PWP design questions identified by ILO in 1935

- The relative merits of direct labour hire by the state or the use of private contractors
- Whether general contractors or small scale contractors should be prioritised
- The terms and conditions of PWP employment in relation to regular wage employment with reference to labour legislation and regulation
- The desirability of providing a minimum wage in line with industry norms or a relief payment
- Trade- offs between higher wage rates and extending employment scale
- Whether machinery use should be restricted to maximise employment, or only considered where this is consistent with 'sound economy and public advantage '
- Whether employment targeting should give preference to particular groups, such as those with greatest need, family responsibilities or the long term unemployed

- How labour should be recruited and the benefits of using labour exchanges
- The desirability of higher cost 'productive relief' in preference to 'direct relief' (cash transfer provision)
- The cost benefit of providing public employment through large scale programming and subsidised employment rather than small scale localised initiatives
- The appropriate budget share between administration and wages
- The risk that programmes may not always provide additional employment but may instead incentivise the rebranding of existing employment creation interventions
- The desirability of implementing country wide programmes to avoid labour migration
- The potential for linking public works employment to vocational education
- Diverse public and private financing options, including funding PWP from welfare reserves such as the National Savings Fund.


INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE

STUDIES AND REPORTS

PUBLIC WORKS POLICY

GENEVA

1935

Cover of the 1935 Public Works Policy (Credit :ILO)

Source: ILO 1935.[22]

Overall, the *Policy* concluded that scale and adequate financing were key to success in programmes implemented up to 1933:

> Some of these [public works] plans have not yet passed the stage of preliminary discussion or even of technical preparation; others were not on a wide enough scale to produce the results expected; yet others are still held up by financial obstacles. In a few countries which have adopted a bold comprehensive policy, however, positive results have already been achieved by a policy of public works conceived on a sufficiently large scale and financed in the most appropriate manner. [23]

It identified the need for good programme design, large-scale programming, adequate financing and national coordination. It also raised the need for international coordination and adoption of an extensive plan of international public works, coordinated by an International Commission on Public Works, a position the ILO and relevant League of Nations bodies had been promoting since 1931. The reasons for putting forward this proposal were twofold. Firstly, there was a concern that the implementation of unilateral programmes of works that were "sufficiently vast to give a real impetus to economic activity in general" might cause economic destabilization and adversely affect the economies of other countries, or have an overall monetary impact, which might reduce the overall benefits. The *Policy* argued that "These disadvantages could be got over if the chief countries concerned would agree as to the date and volume of the work in question so that the consequent changes in the average level of prices would be parallel and simultaneous. International co-ordination in public works is therefore necessary." Secondly, it was argued that international coordination was desirable not only in respect of PWPs implemented with international capital, but also for the potential development and implementation of "international" public works which extended beyond national boundaries, signalling an ambitious new vision for large-scale programming. The Policy proposed that an international overview of schemes was essential as "The international body in question would also be responsible for the continuous systematic co-ordination of all public works plans financed on an international basis so as to influence the flow of international investment in public works to the best advantage of the economic system as a whole."

In order to achieve effective international coordination, it was proposed that governments should give the Commission advance notice of proposed national PWP activity. This would then be incorporated into a common plan of action with coordinated implementation to ensure optimal results and effectively synchronizing international public works activity. The *Policy* noted

that this was in line with the discussion at the Unemployment Committee in 1931 on "the possibility of Governments coming to an agreement through the appropriate organs of the League of Nations with a view to joint execution of extensive public works of an international character."

This international vision of public works programming is expressed throughout the *Policy* which concludes by reiterating the case for a single central authority, and the profound employment and economic impacts the creation of such an institution would engender:

> The most striking conclusion from the facts as they appear above, from their fragmentary character—or, one might almost say, their incoherence—would seem to be that in the national, and still more in the international, field there is a great lack of centralised co-ordination and advance planning. The result is that the various works undertaken, no matter how carefully carried out by the administrative departments responsible, remain isolated efforts instead of being parts of an ordered whole. Only the existence of a single central authority, which is by no means incompatible with extensive decentralisation in matters of detail, can lead to national public works being so planned as to constitute a governor for the economic machine.
>
> If public works were thus co-ordinated, they would provide so much employment that the mere existence of the plan to put the work in hand immediately would, it is thought, have a very favourable psychological influence on the market, even before it actually came into force.[24]

The publication of Keynes' *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* in 1936 provided a theoretical endorsement of the countercyclical investment approach that underlay the adoption of public works as a response to economic depression. It also endorsed the argument that borrowing or deficit-financed demand stimulus programming would have a multiplier effect, which would extend into the wider economy beyond the direct wage beneficiaries themselves, reinforcing the vision set out in the *Policy*. The *Policy* was also consistent with the aspirations of the "World Government" movement which at this time saw progressive activists campaigning to develop a new international system in order to defuse the rising threat of a second global conflict. [25]

The response to the *Policy* was positive. The 1937 International Labour Conference adopted two recommendations to support its implementation, namely, the Public Works (International Co-operation) Recommendation, 1937 (No. 50) relating to the international planning of public works, and the Public Works (National Planning) Recommendation, 1937 (No. 51) which related to countercyclical investment programming at the national level.[26] The Conference recommended that Member States should submit detailed information about their public works policies and programmes to the ILO each year in order to facilitate advance planning and so that international experience, and potentially also international financial support, could inform national action.[27]

An International Public Works Committee was established to create a format and plan for the submission of this information. The first session of the Committee was held in 1938, with the participation of representatives from 25 countries and a template for the supply of information (the "Uniform Plan") was communicated to members. Member States at the 1939 International Labour Conference were confident that the Committee would "be in a position to make an important contribution to the coordination of the policies of the Member nations in the common struggle against the causes of unemployment", having received indications from 22 nations that they were planning to adhere to the Public Works (International Co-operation) Recommendation, 1937 (No.50).[28]

Hence, by the end of the 1930s, the ILO had successfully promoted the concept of internationally coordinated public investment to finance employment stimulus interventions. Detailed proposals had been put forward to establish an institutional mechanism for the promotion of employment through large-scale countercyclical interventions and a uniform planning approach had been initiated to share information with the newly created Committee.

This flurry of activity in the early and mid-1930s represented the high point in ILO's influence in the debate on large-scale countercyclical public employment programming, both nationally and internationally. As the decade wore on, the internationalist and transnational vision underlying both the proposed International Public Works Committee and the idea of creating international financing modalities for national programmes, was increasingly out of step with the changing political context, characterized by growing nationalism and protectionism in response to the continuing economic depression. Support for the League of Nations, and the concept

of World Government more generally, was also faltering. The League recognized the urgent need for international cooperation to forestall the social and economic challenges driving international tensions and increasing militarism during this time. However, the appetite for such collaboration among Member States was declining, and with it support for the ILO's grand vision relating to the implementation of large-scale, internationally financed and coordinated PWPs.

Endnotes

1 Gerry Rodgers et al., 2009. *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919–2009* (ILO).

2 ILO, 1931, cited in ILO, 1935, "Public Works Policy", *Studies and Reports Series C (Employment and Unemployment)*, No. 19, page 1.

3 ILO,1931, cited in ILO, 1935, *Studies and Reports Series C*, No. 19, p. 149.

4 The committee was established under the auspices of the Communications and Transit Organisation of the League of Nations.

5 Exchange rate for 1933 of CHF 60:$1, see: Mathias Zurlinden, 2003, "Gold Standard, Deflation and Depression: The Swiss Economy during the Great Depression Research", *Swiss National Bank Quarterly Bulletin*, No. 2.

6 *The International Labour Review* (ILR) is a peer-reviewed multidisciplinary journal of labour and employment studies, established by the ILO in 1921.

7 Gerry Rodgers et al., 2009.

8 ILO,1933, Resolution concerning Public Works, Records of proceedings, 17th Session of the ILC, Geneva, 8–30 June 1933.

9 The London Monetary and Economic Conference was a meeting held in June/July 1933 with the objective of agreeing measures to address the effects of the Great Depression and reviving the global economy. It was attended by representatives of 66 countries.

10 ILO, 1935, *Studies and Reports Series C*, No. 19, p. 2.

11 ILO, 1935, *Studies and Reports Series C*, No. 19, p. 3.

12 ILO, 1935, *Studies and Reports Series C*, No. 19.

13 ILO, 1935, *Studies and Reports Series C*, No. 19, p. 159.

14 ILO, 1934, Report of the Director, International Labour Conference, 18th Session, Geneva.

15 ILO, 1933.

16 ILO, 1935, *Studies and Reports Series C*, No. 19.

17 ILO, 1935, *Studies and Reports Series C*, No. 19, p. 5.

18 The Republic of China (ROC) (1912–1949) preceded the People's Republic of China, which came into being in 1949.

19 Germany subsequently withdrew from the ILO in 1935, re-joining in 1951.

20 The "New Deal" was introduced by the US Roosevelt administration in response to the great depression in the 1930s.

21 ILO, 1935, *Studies and Reports Series C*, No. 19.

22 ILO, 1935, *Studies and Reports Series C*, No. 19, p. 123. Interestingly, given the ongoing debate around this question the Policy noted: "It would be contrary to the principles of a systematic public works policy, which reserves work as far as possible for periods of depression so as to make good the loss of purchasing power resulting from the decline of business in general, to accentuate the fall in wages by employing workers on public works at lower rates than those customarily paid. This rule, however, has not always been followed."

23 ILO, 1935, *Studies and Reports Series C*, No. 19, p. 6.

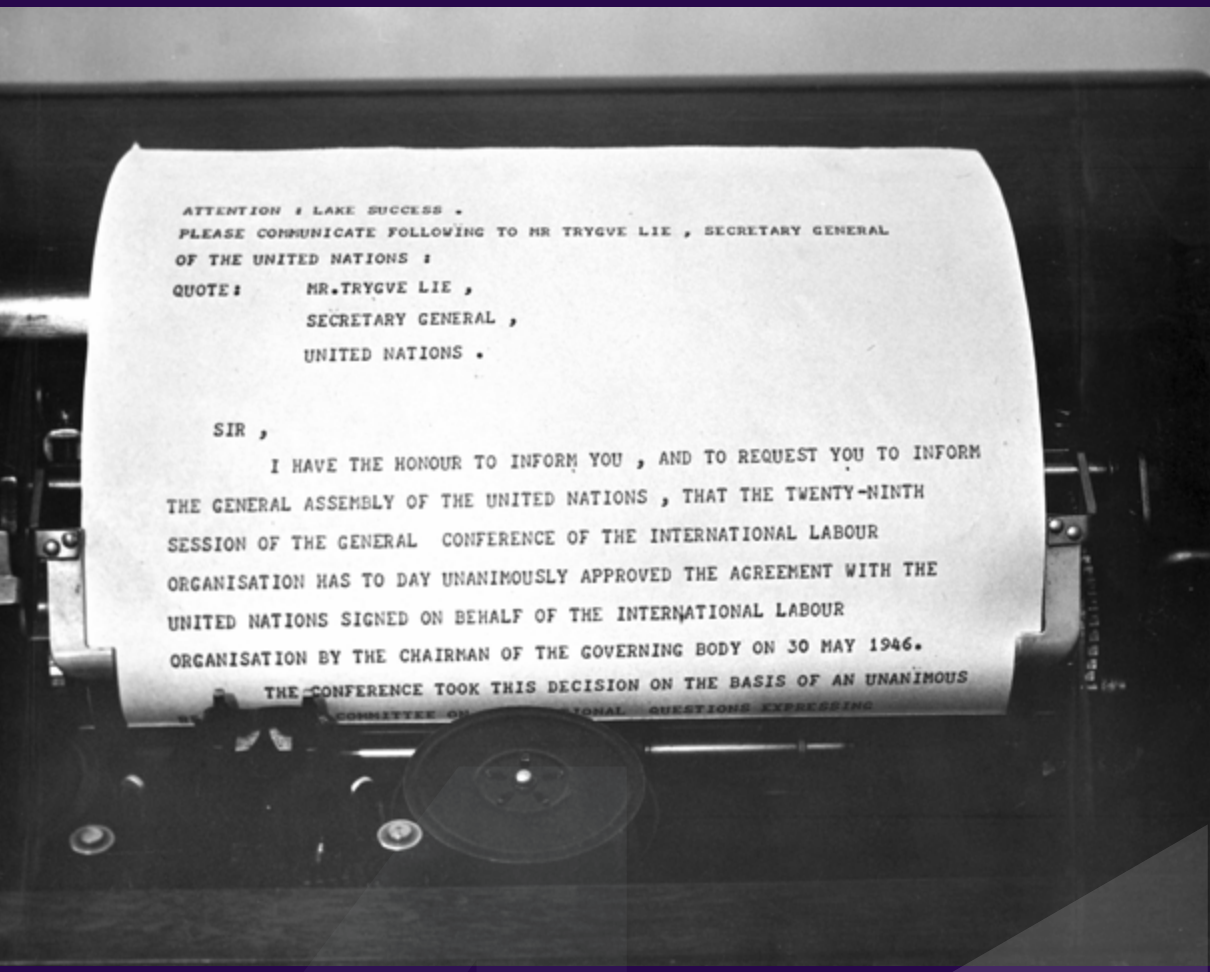
24 ILO, 1935, *Studies and Reports Series C*, No. 19, p. 71.

25 Megan Threlkeld, 2018, "Chaos, War, or a New World Order? A Radical Plan for Peace and World Government in the 1930s", *Peace & Change*, 43, 473–497.

26 Recommendation Nos. 50 and 51 were both withdrawn by the 90th Session of the International Labour Conference in 2002 as part of a process of removing older recommendations that were no longer considered relevant, having been superseded by new instruments, notably the Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122), and the related Employment Policy Recommendation 1964 (No. 122) as well as the Employment Policy (Supplementary Provisions) Recommendation, 1984 (No. 169). This is indicative of the changing perception on the ILO's transnational coordination role and the emphasis given to strengthening national interventions.

27 ILO, 1939, *Report of the Director*, International Labour Conference, 25th Session, Geneva.

28 ILO, 1939.



Pledge of cooperation of the ILO sent to United Nations, 1946 (Credit: ILO)

4

4. The Second World War and its immediate aftermath

Finally, by the late 1930s, the stage was set for the realization of an ambitious plan of coordinated international public works programming to address the economic and social challenges of the decade. However, approval for the implementation of the ILO's recommendations came too late for it to contribute to the resolution of the processes of economic and political destabilization that were leading to global conflict. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 severely disrupted all ILO activities, including work on public works programming. In 1940, the ILO temporarily moved its office from Switzerland to Canada for the duration of the war (returning eventually in 1947). The International Public Works Committee never came into effective operation, and the Uniform Plan was not taken forward.

However, although these initiatives were suspended, the idea of implementing large-scale public investment policies with the objective of promoting social and economic outcomes remained part of the ILO vision. During the war, the ILO worked on the development of the social policies which would be required for post-war social and economic reconstruction. The international coordination of public works policies remained on the agenda and was discussed at the 1941 International Labour Conference held in New York, which identified a key role for PWP in post-war reconstruction and employment policy in a resolution on post-war emergency and reconstruction measures.[1]

The following year, the ILO's Emergency Committee adopted a second resolution affirming the post-war relevance of planned public investment, and the importance of international policy coordination and financing. Reflecting the ambitions of the pre-war *Policy* and the Uniform Plan, the Committee maintained momentum on PWP by commissioning preparatory research into the "international collaboration required for the financing and carrying out of these programmes", the construction of a list of "public works having an international bearing" and the

conditions required for their implementation, together with a review of the financial implications of such an international public works policy.[2]

The resolution stimulated planning for post-war PWP implementation in Member States. The Government of the Republic of China instructed its agencies to draw up proposals for PWPs to be implemented at the point of post-war demobilization, with the aim of attracting advance support in the forms of external financial and technical assistance. At the same time, committees were set up in India to develop public works to assist in the economic transition to peace. In South Africa, a Social and Economic Planning Council was appointed which recommended the preparation of a long-term programme of public works to be implemented by line ministries and local authorities. The Council made a number of stipulations on the conduct of the programmes in order to address the anticipated post-war re-employment challenge of finding work for almost a quarter of a million workers. It requested that they should: start quickly; make the greatest possible use of local raw materials; select diversified projects so as to use diversified skills; be widely dispersed geographically; and include projects of the highest social and economic utility.

This continued interest in public works programmes was linked to a recognition of the critical importance of employment in the post-war period, a concern articulated in a paper "The Transition from War to Peace Economy: Analysis of an International Report" published in the *International Labour Review* in 1943. The paper argued that "the only real solution for unemployment is employment, and it is now widely recognized that one of the main objectives of economic policy is to assure that, in so far as possible, no man or woman able and willing to work should be unable to obtain employment for periods of time longer than is needed to transfer from one occupation to another or, when necessary, to acquire a new skill."[3]

At this time, the ILO presented the prospect of mass unemployment as morally unacceptable, as well as economically and politically unsustainable, in a post-war context. This moral dimension to employment creation was set out by Duncan Christie Tait, an ILO employment specialist who was prominent in promoting ILO's role in facilitating world economic cooperation during the 1940s, in his article "Social aspects of a public investment policy" published in the *International Labour Review* in 1944, which argued that:

> One still hears statements here and there to the effect that we cannot afford (in terms of money) this measure or that, but the great majority of people now realise that what we really cannot afford (in terms of welfare) are mass unemployment and a low standard of living. Moreover, there is no economic reason whatever why we should, and we therefore have a sound basis on which to build for the future [...] The assurance of full employment for all who are willing and able to work will undoubtedly be the most important social and economic problem after the war in all countries which have suffered from the scourge of unemployment.[4]

Tait explicitly linked employment with welfare, social policy and development, presenting PWPs as key policy instruments for promoting employment and raising the standard of living in both developed and developing countries. At this time, the concept of direct state intervention through economic policy to ensure adequate employment levels was again gaining traction globally, and remained a key component of the vision of the ILO and that of adherents of the "full employment movement" internationally,[5] with the economist Kalecki writing in 1942 that "A solid majority of economists is now of the opinion that, even in a capitalist system, full employment may be secured by a Government spending programme".[6]

Anticipating profound changes in the post-war global order the ILO comprehensively rearticulated its 1919 mandate, in the form of the *Declaration of Philadelphia*, which was adopted at the 26th Session of the International Labour Conference in 1944. The Declaration set out the key principles that should inform the work of the ILO and attempted to define its role in the new post-war order of economic cooperation. Two aspects of the Declaration were of particular significance in shaping the ILO's future PWP orientation: the foregrounding of social policy and welfare; and an increased focus on international engagement. The Declaration highlighted the ILO's responsibility to promote international economic and financial policy measures to support social policy and welfare priorities, and the promotion of social security and employment, with the third part of the Declaration identifying full employment as one of its 10 social policy objectives. It also extended the ILO's remit to include the social and economic advancement of less-developed regions and dependent territories, paving the way for the expansion of the ILO's international PWP work in the following decades.[7]

The 26th Session of the International Labour Conference also adopted the Employment (Transition from War to Peace) Recommendation, 1944 (No. 71), which provided guidance to Member States on how to change war industry to post-war productive manufacturing, and skill the returning labour force accordingly,[8] and the Public Works (National Planning) Recommendation, 1944 (No. 73), which also complemented the Public Works (National Planning) Recommendation, 1937 (No. 51) and was formulated to be specifically applicable to the transition from war to peace. This encouraged public authorities in each Member State to "prepare a long-term development programme which can be accelerated or slowed down in accordance with the employment situation in different parts of the country." and proposed that "Special attention should be paid to the importance of timing the execution of the works and the ordering of supplies, so as to limit the demand for labour at a time when there is already full employment and to increase it at a time when there is unemployment."[9]

Recommendation No. 71 also called for coordination with local authorities in the planning and designing of projects in order to create employment opportunities for large numbers of demobilized soldiers. It reinforced the focus on reconstruction and employment rather than relief, in line with a continuing critique of many PWPs implemented in the previous decade, which were perceived by the ILO as "disguised relief"[10] and insufficiently concerned with the quality of the output. Such an approach was not readily compatible with the task of international post-war reconstruction.

The International Public Works Committee was renamed the International Development Works (IDW) Committee and tasked with revising the Uniform Plan, as the scope of the 1938 plan was not considered adequate for the post-war context. Its remit was, therefore, revised away from a detailed programming description, in favour of a broader overview of national policies with information on the total volume of planned and actual public investment, in order to provide an overview of the wider international labour market picture.[11] As post-war planning accelerated with employment promotion centre stage, the ILO reiterated the need for the international coordination of national employment and public investment policy to avoid potentially negative

spill-over effects from the unilateral adoption of large-scale national interventions:

> [The] objective is international coordination of policies in the timing of public investment, goal being to know the policy which is being pursued in each country and to have some information on the total volume of public investment made and planned, the purpose of the international coordination of national plans for which the committee was set up, was to ensure that countries are marching in step in their public investment policies and will thus avoid the pressure that might otherwise be exercised by a deflationary policy in one country on the policies of other countries.[12]

The Declaration identified unemployment as a significant challenge in all developed countries, a particular concern of Tait, who noted that "in some of which it undermined the whole social fabric of the State".[13] He recognized that PWPs had a key role to play in the process of national economic development of relevance to both developed and developing countries, noting that "The under-developed countries, in particular, will have a vast programme before them in developing their resources. The possibilities, therefore, are almost unlimited."[14]

Hence, in 1944, there was renewed optimism in the ILO the vision of internationally coordinated and financed PWPs on a mass scale, as a means of promoting international socio-economic reconstruction and stabilization, which included for the first time the recognition that they were an instrument for economic progress in under-developed countries. This optimism was grounded in the understanding that PWPs would only be able to contribute to these goals effectively if appropriately sequenced and financed, and accompanied by appropriate monetary, trade and training policies.[15]

The Organization was confident that the correct policies had been identified and the time was now ripe for their implementation; the countercyclical public investment approach, consistently promoted by the ILO since 1919, was now widely accepted internationally. The ILO, as the lead agency for the design and coordination of global policy on public works, was also poised to realize them, as noted by Tait, "For those of us who studied this question closely before the war, the most striking feature of the present situation is the steady development of the ideas of that time and, above all, their wide acceptance as a basis of policy."[16]

The International Development Works Committee set to work on the issue of international policy coordination, assessing progress against Recommendations No. 51 and No. 73 on the national planning of PWPs. However, uncertainty regarding the ILO's future role in relation to the newly formed United Nations, created in 1945. This, together with the changing institutional and geopolitical context, and growing doubts over the future appetite for international policy coordination, meant that many proposals were deferred at the committee's inaugural meeting.

The Committee did, however, commission a study to consider how welfare and working conditions considerations should be incorporated into public works.[17] It also reviewed the findings of an ILO study *Public Investment and Full Employment*,[18] which analysed the interwar experience of countercyclical public investment. The study highlighted challenges in the application of the approach in many countries during this period and also identified terminological and definitional issues in the sphere of PWPs. It noted the risk of tensions and confusion between the design and objectives of welfare-oriented programmes on the one hand, and those designed primarily for public investment on the other, and noted that this tension between welfare and investment objectives risked discrediting the concept of PWPs. This was the first articulation of an issue that is yet to be satisfactorily resolved in many PWPs to this day and remains a significant challenge in international PWP programming.

However, the identification of these design challenges did not detract from the ILO's overall support for PWPs as a critical policy instrument, and its continued promotion of public investment as "an indispensable element in the maintenance of full employment, especially in highly industrialised countries".[19]

By the time the war came to an end in 1945, the international institutional space within which the ILO operated was changing significantly. The ILO managed this transition by successfully brokering a continued institutional identity for itself, becoming the first specialized agency of the UN in 1946. However, the mandate of the newly formed UN included the promotion of "higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development" as set out in Article 55 of its Charter,[20] which meant that the ILO as a specialized agency no longer played the lead role in terms of employment policy in industrialized or developing countries.[21] Moreover, it was not given the mandate it had anticipated for the coordination of post-war reconstruction, which dealt a significant blow to its long-nurtured

aspirations. In this context of uncertainty due to ongoing negotiations between ILO and UN on the ILO's future institutional identity, the formation of the Economic and Social Council of the UN, and the appointment of a new UN Economic and Employment Commission, the ILO suspended all work on the Uniform Plan, including statistical data collection and analysis, the collection of information on infrastructure destruction from war-affected countries, and the preparation of lists of proposed works.

The mandate for post-war reconstruction to which the ILO had aspired was initially passed to the UN Reconstruction Agency, and although the 30th Session of the International Labour Conference in 1947 adopted a resolution to contribute to the reconstruction activities under the Marshall Plan financed by the United States however, the mandate was ultimately transferred to the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC)[22] established in 1948 expressly for the purpose of overseeing its implementation. The role of coordinating the financing of the reconstruction activity was given to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), later known as the World Bank.[23] After a period of tension with the IBRD concerning which agency would have responsibility for the preparation of lists of reconstruction works to be undertaken in cooperation with other countries and international agencies, the ILO withdrew from the process and did not in the end play a significant role in the Marshall Plan or post-war reconstruction.[24]

The ILO did, however, continue to promote the adoption of economic policies which prioritized employment, and the "full employment movement" remained central to UN economic policy prescriptions during the late 1940s. Internationally, the tide was turning once again against the concept of world government and transnational policy coordination, and a new world order was emerging which was increasingly dominated by the Bretton Woods Institutions and United States policy interests. In this context, the ILO's long-term preoccupation with the pursuit of full employment through internationally coordinated mass employment programmes was increasingly out of step with the ideological orientation of the Western Block in the context of the emerging Cold War.

A series of regional ILO conferences took place in Asia, Central America and the Middle East in the years immediately following the war, at which international economic cooperation and ILO programmes which advocated "new and bold measures in the field of monetary policy,

credit, international trade and public works".[25] were still on the agenda. However, the ILO's grand vision of the creation of internationally coordinated national public investment programmes to promote full employment was overtaken by significant post-war global political and institutional changes. This marked a turning point for the engagement of the ILO in the discourse around mass scale public employment programmes. The era of championing international interventionist engagement and countercyclical investment to promote employment, which had characterized ILO's engagement over the 30 years since its inception, was at an end.

Endnotes

1 ILO, 1941, *The ILO and Reconstruction. Report by the Acting Director of the International Labour Office to the Conference of the International Labour Organisation*, New York, October 1941 (Montreal).

2 ILO, 1941.

3 E.J. Riches and L.B. Jack, 1943, "The Transition from War to Peace Economy: Analysis of an International Report", *International Labour Review*, 48, 1–22.

4 Duncan Christie Tait, 1944, "The social aspects of a public investment policy", *International Labour Review*, 49, 1–18.

5 Notable adherents include the progressive British politician William Beveridge who outlined his vision for post-war employment in his 1944 book, *Full Employment in a Free Society* (London: Rouledge).

6 M. Kalecki, 1943, "Political aspects of full employment", *The Political Quarterly*, 14, 322–330.

7 ILO, 1944a, *Declaration concerning the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organisation*, adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 26th Session, Philadelphia, 10 May 1944 (Montreal).

8 ILO, 1944b, Employment (Transition from War to Peace) Recommendation, 1944 (No. 71).

9 ILO, 1944c, Public Works (National Planning) Recommendation, 1944 (No. 73).

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11 ILO, 1944d, *Minutes of the 92nd Session of the Governing Body*.

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16 Tait, 1944.

17 Duncan Christie Tait, 1946. "Development works and full employment", *International Labour Review*, 54, 309–20.

18 Benjamin Higgins, 1946, "Public investment and full employment", *Studies and Reports*, New Series No. 3.

19 Duncan Christie Tait, 1946.

20 UN, 1945, *Charter of the United Nations; Chapter IX, Article 55 – International Economic and Social Co-operation*.

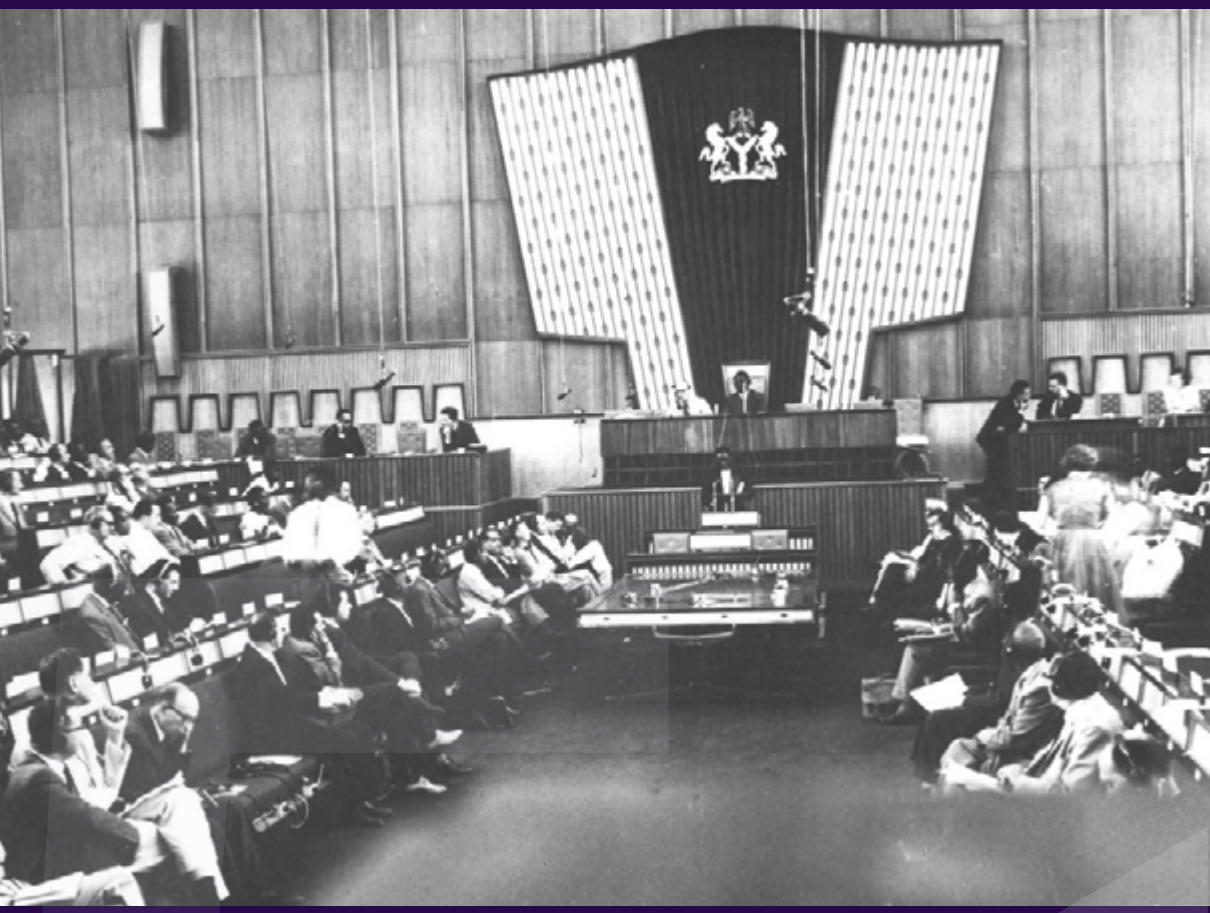
21 Gerry Rodgers et al. 2009, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice,* 1919–2009 (ILO).

22 The OEEC was later renamed the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

23 The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), collectively known as the Bretton Woods institutions, were established by the allied nations in 1944 to create rules, institutions and procedures to regulate the post-war international monetary system.

24 Antony Alcock, 1971, *History of the International Labour Organization* (London: Macmillan).

25 R. Islam, 1958, *International Economic Cooperation and the United Nations* (Groningen: Wolters).



With many new members and starting to decentralize its operations, the first ILO African Regional Conference was held in Lagos Nigeria in 1960 (Credit: ILO)

5

5. Finding a new role in employment promotion

In the absence of major roles in either post-war economic reconstruction or the coordination of investment for full employment, the ILO had to reconsider its role within the new international institutional architecture. The post-war context differed starkly from the political, institutional and economic landscape within which the Organization had previously operated and its discourse on international support for large-scale public works programmes had flourished. The late 1940s and 1950s saw significant changes in the international institutional architecture, international politics, and labour market situation, with resurgent economic growth meaning that unemployment was no longer the policy priority it had been previously. Elevated labour demand resulting from post-war reconstruction and the post-war economic boom meant that levels of unemployment remained low throughout the late 1940s and 1950s in many industrialized countries. In this new context, the ILO had to redefine itself and its mission, a challenge summarized by David Morse, who took over as Director-General of the ILO in 1948, thus "My task was to rebuild an organisation which had run down during the Second World War. It had survived, which was a feat, but it had not yet found a firm footing in the post-war world."[1]

At the same time as the ILO was seeking to redefine its role, the emerging Cold War and East-West tensions, driven by antagonism between the two superpowers, diminished the global appetite for internationalism. The United States, in particular, was reluctant to cede control of national sovereignty or international hegemony, resulting in competition between the Atlantic Alliance, led by the United States, and the newly formed UN.

In this context small-scale, localized PWPs became popular in Member States in providing employment for particular segments of the labour force, in underdeveloped regions, and in response to seasonal fluctuations in labour demand. In the early 1950s, Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and

Switzerland reported directing public investment in this way to promote localized labour absorption.[2] but countries were reluctant to adopt the full employment standards promoted by the ILO during this time.[3] This was in part due to the reduced appetite for transnational governance, noted above, and was also informed by the concern that in contexts of relatively high employment, the adoption of programmes to further promote employment could be inflationary, reflecting the prioritization of economic rather than employment objectives. This represented the end of an era for the ILO in relation to PWPs and fuelled a broader shift in its institutional orientation in favour of technical assistance and an extension of activities related to development cooperation.

From the late 1940s, the ILO had started to extend its activities beyond standard setting and policy design, to include significant technical cooperation and the provision of technical support to Member States, in line with its new mandate as a specialized technical agency of the United Nations. This coincided with the process of decolonization, and the accession of a significant number of newly independent developing countries to ILO's list of Member States, with new needs and expectations. In response to this new demand, the ILO established a network of regional and field offices during the 1950s to support decentralized programmes, working through the new Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA) initiative. Initially, EPTA's focus was on vocational training but it was soon extended to include technical assistance on productivity enhancement. EPTA's work on productivity included research into the contribution of labour-intensive production techniques to promote productivity in contexts where capital and foreign exchange were scarce. Demand for the ILO's technical assistance and inputs through advisory missions accelerated significantly during the late 1950s, in part due to a growing interest in the relative merits of capital- versus labour-intensive growth strategies. By 1956, the ILO was providing technical assistance under the EPTA to 40 countries. The primary concern of the assistance provided was raising labour and capital productivity in the small modern sectors of developing economies. [4]

During this decade, the UN defined its key development priorities as addressing disease, starvation and literacy. This limited resources for the ILO activities, as labour was not perceived to be central to the development project, which was emerging as the UN's main focus. Consequently, by the late 1950s, in an increasingly crowded international space which now included multiple UN agencies and the Bretton Woods

institutions, the ILO's role in relation to public employment was limited to the provision of technical assistance.

Despite the narrowing of the ILO's focus and the fact that mass public employment programming was not widespread during this period, it remained part of the institutional discourse. Critical reflection on the conceptualization and design of public works programming continued as illustrated in an article published in the *International Labour Review* in 1956:

> full employment is now generally accepted by governments as a national objective, and much thought has been devoted to means of achieving it and of ensuring its continuance. Among the measures that could be taken to maintain full employment when depression threatens, one of the most widely accepted is the adoption of a compensatory public works policy [...] whereby alternative employment may be provided when there is a fall in privately financed construction work. [5]

The article summarized a number of issues which were being discussed within the Organization at this time and were based on the ILO's PWP experience over the previous decades. These were to inform the World Employment Programme some 13 years later (see chapter 6) and framed much future PWP research within the ILO. He set out concerns regarding the technical quality and efficiency of PWPs, reiterating issues noted during the 1930s and 1940s, and The article identified the technical factors which could potentially affect performance in terms of construction resource requirements: labour; materials; equipment; management; and planning and administrative requirements. It also highlighted the feasibility of expanding the notion of public employment beyond construction, to include public maintenance, land development, public service and public production, prefiguring the agenda taken forward some 50 years later in the work of the EIIP. The article noted the need to monitor and quantify the employment created through public investment approaches, again foreshadowing the work of the EIIP on Employment Impact Assessment (EmpIA) several decades later, arguing that "when a compensatory public construction policy is accepted as a major instrument for achieving full employment the problems of resource utilisation must be taken into account in the appraisal of the employment-creating capacity of such a policy."[6]

The article set out a series of seminal questions relating to the design of public employment programming, which effectively set the agenda for

work on PWPs over the following half century. These included, for example, questions such as: what should constitute "public assets" liable for construction in a PWP; the extent of governments' willingness to finance construction; the role of the private sector; the impact of the supply of labour, materials, and entrepreneurial skills; the capacity of national planning and administration institutions; and the efficiency of the approach in improving employment outcomes for the poor. It also emphasized the critical importance of interventions being economically, technically and politically feasible, as well as enjoying local ownership:

> in comparison with other compensatory spending and tax policies, to what extent is it economically desirable to create new jobs through public construction? The politically possible may not at the same time be technically possible, and what is technically possible may be impossible politically. Furthermore, a programme that may be both politically and technically possible may not be economically desirable. But it is certain that no compensatory public construction programme can be carried out unless it is technically practicable.[7]

This approach linked the ILO into the global public investment debate, which emerged in the 1960s and early 1970s, and, in particular, the question of potential trade-offs between, on the one hand, employment intensification in infrastructure development and, on the other, the conventional concept of growth, as discussed in the theory of planned economic development.[8] The emphasis on technical feasibility as a prerequisite for the implementation of PWPs was to inform the technical orientation of much of ILO's subsequent PWP work. This gave an impetus to research into the "Choice of Technology" which compares capital and labour-intensive approaches to infrastructure creation. By 1958, these issues were being explored in the *International Labour Review* and applied to developing economies, with the challenge defined as how to make the best use of scarce capital to expand growth, while also selecting production methods that would simultaneously enhance employment creation and address the issue of surplus labour and growing populations in developing economies. This approach is explained in the *Review* excerpt below:

> The choice of production methods has therefore become a matter of public concern and has indeed formed an integral

> part of development planning. Obviously as a matter of public policy the question of the choice of methods—whether capital-intensive or labour- intensive—is closely related to the relative emphasis given to the various criteria and the scope for compromise, to other measures devised to create employment, to the availability of capital resources and measures to augment them, and to the particular kinds of industries to be developed. Whether and to what extent the two objectives—a rapid expansion in both output and employment—can be simultaneously achieved will depend, inter alia, on the methods of production used in the industries scheduled for development. [9]

These issues were explored at the 8th Session of the Asian Advisory Committee meeting held in New Delhi in 1957 which formally recognized this potential tension between: (i) promoting economic growth by making the best use of scarce capital; and (ii) creating employment for the existing surplus labour, and the challenge inherent in attempting to promote output and employment simultaneously.[10] The Committee also recognized that attempting to target both outcomes in a single programme could be problematic unless the challenge was explicitly addressed at the design stage. It was argued that "The methods which meet one criterion may not be suitable for others" and "If a method could be found that would at the same time maximise employment, output and the rate of growth, it would be preferable to all other methods".[11] In order to explore the issue empirically the ILO carried out an initial study of manual earthmoving techniques in India for the Working Party on Earth Moving Operations, convened by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in 1959.

However, by the early 1960s, the context for ILO's work was changing once again as the UN turned its focus to the question of international development. In 1961, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 1710 (XVI) declaring the 1960s the United Nations Development Decade. The Resolution noted that despite the technical assistance in the 1950s, the gap in per capita incomes between the advanced and developing countries had increased, and the rate of economic and social progress in the latter was still far from adequate. It therefore called for measures to attain a minimum annual growth rate of 5 per cent in developing countries by the end of the decade.[12]

At the same time, the ongoing process of decolonization resulted in the accession of additional countries , with rising ILO membership from only 55 countries in 1947 to 115 by 1965 and 121 by the end of the decade. The

Organization grew commensurately with staff numbers rising fivefold and an annual budget which increased from $4 million at the start of the 1950s to $60 million by the end of the 1960s.[13]

The role of the ILO's tripartite members (governments, and workers' and employers' organizations) also started to change at the national level, with the mandate of the ministries of labour shifting towards norms and standards in many countries. As a consequence, ministries of labour would often be less involved in PWPs, which were increasingly the domain of infrastructure-oriented ministries with whom the ILO had fewer links.

The international institutional context was also changing with the emergence of new agencies including the World Food Programme (WFP), which was created in 1961 following the 1960 Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Conference. The WFP was later to collaborate closely with the ILO and EIIP, bringing with it increasing resources for financing PWPs.[14]

By the early 1960s, these geopolitical and institutional changes again led to a shift in the ILO's orientation on public works. At this point, the debate shifted from a primarily technical one around the choice of technologies, to a broader exploration of policy issues relating to the dual challenges of poverty and employment. Developing country governments increasingly looked to the ILO for support in addressing urgent economic and social development challenges. This gave the Organization the opportunity to bring together the various strands of technical research and development thinking which had been ongoing since the 1950s and link them to a resurgent policy debate on employment.

One of the first explicit articulations of this reorientation was the ILO report published in 1961 entitled *Employment objectives in economic development*, which argued that economic development alone was not sufficient to increase employment, and that employment needed to be targeted directly as an additional objective of development policies, an issue that was to be fully explored in the WEP at the end of the decade. A key proposition of the report was that there was "scope for raising employment at a given level of investment through changing the composition of output and the techniques of production."[15] The report was discussed at the International Labour Conference in 1961 which

identified unemployment as a significant constraint in the development process and highlighted the need to address this challenge directly:

> to large masses of people, having any job at all is now a great privilege, and finding work one of their principal aspirations. Broadly speaking... the prospects are that this situation will grow considerably worse in the years to come. [...] while the provision of jobs is certainly one of the best social services that many governments could render to their citizens, it is remarkable how little emphasis is commonly placed on employment objectives in programmes or economic development. To a large extent this is due to the fact that the economic consequences of trying to provide many new jobs quickly are more complicated than might have been expected.[16]

The International Labour Conference reiterated the need for full employment, passing a resolution for the adoption of full, productive and freely chosen employment as a core government objective. The question of "manpower issues in economic development" was identified as a key concern, and the ILO returned with dynamism to its previous theme of highlighting the need to create additional employment opportunities in countries where there was surplus labour.[17] This time, however, the emphasis was on developing countries and included a highly technical focus while also drawing on the lessons of the previous 50 years of institutional experience.

The Conference also resulted in the production of an Agenda for Action which argued that surplus labour could be harnessed to build infrastructure and hasten the rate of economic development as a complement to the regular activities of public works departments. It highlighted the need for infrastructure investment in Africa and the urgency of ensuring that this investment took place, in order to meet economic growth targets. Given the lack of capital available, it was proposed that African countries should mobilize unemployed and underemployed labour to supplement what could be achieved by regular public works departments, characterizing surplus labour as a resource which could be deployed to achieve development outcomes. PWPs were an attractive option in this context as they addressed the simultaneous need for physical infrastructure creation and mobilization of the unemployed in contexts where improved productivity could promote significant returns on the limited capital available. Hence, they were once

again promoted by the ILO as a tool to stimulate economic development as well as employment.

In order to take this work forward, the ILO began providing practical assistance to national and local authorities including: the provision of technical assistance and training; the development of technical and operational manuals; advice on the organization of labour, output standards, worker wellbeing; and the dissemination of international experience of labour-intensive production. A Preparatory Technical Conference was commissioned by the International Labour Conference in 1961, and a series of technical studies were planned to explore the conditions and methods of operation required to improve productivity in PWPs in order to develop an empirical basis for its work and develop appropriate technical assistance inputs. Key areas covered by these studies, included:

- advice as to what methods, tools, transport equipment, etc., are best suited to specific conditions, and on the use of mechanised equipment in connection with manual methods;
- advice on the forms of organisation best suited to the various conditions, including, possibly, practical assistance in the formation of co-operative types of organisation for manual workers;
- the compilation and dissemination of output standards embracing as wide a variety of conditions of terrain and climate as possible and covering the use of various types of tools and equipment;
- information on questions of housing, nutrition and health, sanitation and allied matters relating to the well-being of the workers;
- collection and dissemination of information on relevant experience in all parts of the world and in all conditions, and on economic aspects of labour-intensive methods of operation;
- the development of training programmes and assistance in putting them into effect, including technical assistance in the development and training of senior managers, engineers, foremen, local headmen, instructors and workers, and also the holding of seminars and technical meetings.

- the preparation and publication of manuals, simple instruction books and pamphlets, films, and other aids to instruction; and
- the preparation of programmes to make use of aid from the World Food Programme.[18]

The initial studies examined key design and implementation challenges and identified the need for good management and supervision as key prerequisites for effective PWP implementation. In 1963, an ILO mission to India examined the opportunities for promoting labour-intensive methods in the delivery of public infrastructure. In the same year, an ILO Technical Meeting on Productivity and Employment in Public Works in African Countries was held in Lagos, Nigeria, to explore potential opportunities for delivering employment-intensive infrastructure to address the lack of infrastructure and capital in Africa. The meeting considered the conditions under which labour-intensive production methods could compete with capital-intensive methods, and the advantages of labour-intensive approaches in contexts of surplus labour and limited capital. It critically appraised the ILO's historical PWP experience, drawing on specially commissioned case studies from India, Nigeria, Tanganyika[19] and Tunisia and identified a series of fundamental policy and programme design questions associated with the challenge of expanding PWP activity in response to topical development challenges. It also noted the need for significant labour productivity improvements if the approach was to be economically attractive and adopted widely.

The meeting resulted in the publication of a seminal article in the *International Labour Review* entitled "Economic development, employment and public works in African countries" that captured the critical issues relating to programming, and set the agenda for subsequent discussions. The paper articulated the dual purpose of PWPs in Africa, namely, their simultaneous contribution to economic development and to the provision of employment and incomes. It identified the need for productivity improvements to make the approach economically viable.

In 1964, Convention No. 122 and associated Recommendation No. 122 on Employment Policy were adopted based of the work by the Preparatory Technical Conference. The Recommendation included detailed provisions relating to the promotion of public works and labour-intensive methods of production and advocacy for the increased use of labour-intensive methods of production. and was intended to provide a framework for integrating future ILO work on PWPs into employment policies and related measures. [20],[21] The Convention and Recommendation contained many of

the ideas that had been so prominent in the 1930s. They highlighted the need for "active manpower and employment policy as a part of over-all economic and social policy".[22] This was a key moment, as it provided both a mandate and a legal framework for the ILO to engage in the promotion of labour-intensive approaches as a contribution to the coordinated promotion of employment, and to provide associated technical support to Member States, despite this opportunity to extend its work linking employment creation and macroeconomic objectives. However, internal discussions continued around the desirability of promoting economic growth through the use of labour-intensive production methods, particularly in capital-constrained developing countries. Thus, the ILO's focus throughout the decade remained primarily on the more limited areas of human resources planning, vocational training and choice of technology analysis inputs, rather than on the integration of PWPs with broader development strategies. [23]

By the late 1960s, however unemployment was becoming an increasingly serious problem across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as population growth outstripped employment growth, particularly in contexts of growing rural-urban migration. The need to address this urgent challenge was highlighted in a series of ILO initiatives, most notably the 1966 *Ottawa Plan for Human Resources Development for the Americas Region,* and *Asian Manpower Plan,* and *the 1968 Jobs and Skills Programmes for Africa Plan*, which identified the need for the ILO to explore options for accelerated employment creation. These regional plans resulted in the creation of regional manpower advisory teams, and the execution of regional labour reviews with associated technical assistance to build "manpower" programmes entailing human resource development in collaboration with other UN agencies, and job creation.[24] Inadequate employment growth in developing countries was identified as a key factor underlying the failure of the UN Development Decade to meet its objectives, as set out in Director-General Morse's address to the 1967 International Labour Conference:

> Employment is still expanding at a very slow rate, much slower in most developing countries than the rate of populating increase... and this represents an extremely dangerous situation for our member states and for the worlds at large – economically dangerous socially dangerous and politically dangerous [...] politically because the frustration and the great discontent among the growing ranks of the unemployed and among youth are potentially the most explosive force in the world in which we live today.... [25]

The implication of this analysis was that the approaches adopted during the UN Development Decade were inadequate and that an alternative approach was required from the international community. To this end, Morse proposed a new approach that would provide coordinated support for economic and social development on the part of the UN, the specialized agencies and Member States. The 1967 International Labour Conference adopted a resolution on international cooperation for economic and social development.[26] Two years later, the ILO launched the World Employment Programme, which proposed a coordinated global programme to address underemployment and unemployment. In this way, after an almost 30-year hiatus, the ILO once again took centre stage highlighting unemployment as a global challenge and identifying a key role for itself leading a coordinated international response. [27]

The WEP was a response to the global labour market challenges of the period. It provided an alternative approach to the development policies that had brought growth to newly independent countries without significant employment creation or poverty reduction. In this changed world, unemployment was of major concern once again, and the ILO put forward a response in which the development of labour-intensive approaches was central.

Endnotes

1 See "David A. Morse", ww.ilo.org.

2 ILO, 1956, "Employment and Unemployment: Government Policies Since 1950", *International Labour Review*, 70, 1–22.

3 This requirement was later set out in Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122), which required ratifying States to declare and pursue an active policy designed to promote full, productive and freely chosen employment, with the aim of ensuring work was available for all who sought it.

4 Gerry Rodgers et al., 2009, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice*, 1919 (ILO).

5 E.J Howenstine, 1956, "Compensatory Public Work Programmes and Full Employment: A Study of the Mobility of Resources in the Construction Industry", *International Labour Review*, 73, 107–34.

6 Howestine, 1956.

7 Howestine, 1956.

8 Amartya Kumarj Sen, 1960, "Choice of Techniques. An Aspect of the Theory of Planned Economic Development", *The Economic Journal*, 78, 909–10.

9 See for example: ILO, 1958, "Production Techniques and Employment Creation in Underdeveloped Economies", *International Labour Review*, 78, No. 2S, 121–50.

10 ILO, 1957, "ILO Productivity Missions to Underdeveloped Countries", I*nternational Labour Review* 76, No. 1, 139–66

11 ILO, 1957.

12 UN General Assembly, 1961, "United Nations Development Decade. A Programme for International Economic Co-operation, 1710 (XVI)", *Resolutions Adopted on the Reports of the Second Committee*, 1084th Plenary Meeting, 19 December (New York, NY).

13 Antony Alcock, 1971, *History of the International Labour Organization* (London: Macmillan).

14 This included the initiation of Public Law 480 (the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act) in the United States in 1954, under which surplus grain production was provided to developing countries as food aid and was often used to pay workers in PWPs implemented by the newly formed WFP.

15 ILO, 1961a, "Employment Objectives in Economic Development, Report of a Meeting of Experts", *Studies and Reports*, New Series No. 62.

16 ILO, 1961b, The Role of the ILO in the Promotion of Economic Expansion and Social Progress in Developing Countries, ILC, XLV.

17 Alcock, 1971.

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WEP Mission to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1971 (Credit: Peter Richards)

6

6. The WEP and its legacy

The 1969 World Employment Programme (WEP) was the ILO's contribution to the UN's second development decade. It marked the beginning of a new development paradigm for the ILO which involved direct engagement with poverty reduction and overall development policy. The WEP articulated the centrality of employment and the need for employment-oriented development and "the creation of 'fuller' and 'productive' employment as the way to combine economic growth with widespread social progress".[1] This vision "made the WEP, in a very short time, one of the leading players of international development in the 1970s".[2] In this way, the WEP set the agenda for the development of PWP programming in the subsequent decades, recognizing that unemployment and underemployment were not only major causes of poverty and but also serious obstacles to development:

> In developing countries, unemployment had reached enormous proportions, and even when economic development had been judged to be successful by such criteria as increase in gross national product, it had failed to resolve the problem of creating productive employment for the increasing labour force. The World Employment Programme represented a first attempt at world-wide planning in the field of human resources development and employment policy.[3]

The WEP represented a reassertion of the ILO's global mandate and aspirations and ILO Director-General Morse described its aim, "to halt and indeed reverse the trend towards ever-growing masses of peasants and slum dwellers who have no part in development".[4] Originally conceived as a global strategy to be implemented mainly through regional employment programmes, the WEP had an impact which extended significantly beyond these programmes. It provided a new impetus to the ILO's engagement with development, identifying employment as the key driver of sustained individual and national development in low-income countries. The WEP recognized both the commonalities and differences in the employment challenges experienced in developing and industrialized countries, and advocated for financial and technical assistance from the industrialized nations to support national programming in developing countries. Under the framework of the WEP, a series of "employment missions" were carried

out to developing countries to explore the nature of the employment challenges and potential policy responses.

Increasing the employment intensity of the development process was central to realizing the social and economic objectives of the WEP. This idea was highlighted in the findings of the WEP employment missions to Colombia (1970), Sri Lanka (1971) and Kenya (1972), which came to define the main topics addressed in the WEP's successive research and advisory work priorities: employment and income policy; pro-employment planning; technology and employment; informal economy; rural underemployment; and public works. This work resulted in an extensive research programme on employment-oriented strategies, including labour intensification. [5]

The mission reports called for growth with redistribution and promoted the idea that employment should be created through the adoption of radical full employment strategies, including the use of labour-intensive approaches for construction and infrastructure development. This involved the use of unemployed low-skilled labour for public infrastructure delivery, and a fundamental shift in the ratio of capital and labour used in the construction and maintenance of public assets. The aim was to increase the number of workers used to produce an infrastructure asset instead of using the resources to invest on equipment, whenever technically and economically feasible. The underlying idea was to reduce the capital intensity of large-scale industrialization in order to absorb the growing labour force that was increasingly moving away from agriculture, while simultaneously compensating for the lack of capital available to developing countries. This ambitious vision was based on the recognition that under conditions of conventional labour intensity, the industrialization processes would not generate sufficient employment to absorb the growing labour force. Given the scale of anticipated investment in infrastructure development in the countries visited by the missions, the construction industry was selected as a sector where this approach could be tested and demonstrated.

The ILO had once again found a role in relation to an emerging global challenge, which involved a multi-stranded response, based on the promotion of an innovative new approach to increasing employment, which was the origin of what was to become the ILO's Employment-Intensive Investment Programme and the adoption of this new approach meant that "the ILO was able to enter the second half century

of its existence with a new and challenging role in the international community".[6]

The trajectory of PWP employment-intensive activity was also influenced by developments in the broader development discourse of the time, and the ILO led a radical rethinking of the role of labour in construction and development during the 1970s. The Organization was increasingly oriented towards the needs of developing countries at this time and engaged in the new development discourse, informed by ideas of the New International Economic Order (NIEO),[7,8] and the Basic Needs approach adopted by the wider international development community following its presentation at the 1976 ILO World Employment Conference.[9]

The NIEO emerged in the early 1970s, a period when leaders in both industrialized and newly independent southern countries were radically rethinking geopolitical relations between the North and South. It was "the most widely discussed transnational governance reform initiative of the 1970s"[10] with the objective of transforming "the governance of the global economy to redirect more of the benefits of transnational integration toward the developing nations — thus completing the geopolitical process of decolonization and creating a democratic global order of truly sovereign states".[11]

At the same time, the related, and ultimately more influential Basic Needs discourse also emerged, largely as an outcome of discussions between the ILO, World Bank and other UN organizations, which took place in preparation for the 1976 World Employment Conference. The central idea was that development strategy should not only focus on macroeconomic outcomes, such as economic growth and fiscal stability, but also on enabling individuals to meet their basic needs as its primary objective. In order to achieve this, it was argued, it was necessary to address both economic growth and income distribution, with employment as a critical enabling factor. The challenge of addressing these dual goals of growth and distribution was presented at the 1976 World Employment Conference, which put forward a development agenda "designed to fulfil the basic needs of the entire population over the next 25 years, in terms of food, shelter, education and health, by a combination of economic growth and income distribution".[12]

Similar ideas were being articulated among various development actors at this time,[13] and the Basic Needs approach was rapidly adopted by the development community, including the World Bank, so that "by the middle of the 1970s it looked as though a more appropriate development strategy had been designed that effectively combined economic growth, productive employment creation, and basic needs. At the core of the strategy was a shift to a pattern of economic growth that is more employment-intensive, more equitable, and more effective in the battle against poverty."[14]

The new Director-General, Francis Blanchard, appointed in 1973, promoted this approach and reinforced the ILO's orientation towards a "social progress through economic development agenda".[15] As part of its contribution to resetting the relationship between North and South, in line with the WEP agenda, the ILO started to explore ways of generating employment in developing countries which would contribute to both economic development and the delivery of basic needs.

The WEP had a significant impact on the way that PWPs were conceptualized and managed within the ILO, and led to the creation of two teams working on different aspects of PWPs. The first, the Emergency Employment Branch, better known as EMP/URG, worked on Special Public Works Programmes (SPWPs), creating short-term demonstration projects to illustrate the application of labour-intensive approaches in creating employment and income rapidly, while providing basic community infrastructure with a social focus (box 3).

▶Box 3. Special Public Works Programmes (SPWP)

SPWP manuals providing guidance on soil conservation and establishing related tree nurseries (Credit: ILO)

The Emergency Employment Branch worked on the development of SPWPs from 1973 onwards. SPWPs differed from national PWPs inasmuch as they were time-bound, financed through external funding which was additional to the national budget and supplemented national plans for job or infrastructure creation. They assisted governments in providing employment urgently for specific priority sectors of the labour force through the construction of productive assets that were additional to those included in development plans. These programmes were intended to simultaneously promote employment and develop the rural sector through the construction and/or maintenance of productive social infrastructures and were designed to bring direct benefits to those employed in the projects. They made intensive use of locally available and mainly unskilled labour, and local technologies and products.

SPWPs were used to demonstrate the appropriateness of labour-intensive methods for the creation of infrastructure which could serve to boost agricultural production, protect the environment, improve communications or provide basic community facilities. They were pilots and intended to provide models for replication on a larger scale.

They also had a social objective, as they were designed to offer a rapid response to the challenges of high levels of un- and underemployment and low-living standards faced by many new member countries, whose economies were characterized by a limited wage labour and a large rural sector. In this context, the programmes were required to create jobs and income rapidly while also introducing appropriate technologies

for the construction of both productive infrastructure – which included rural access roads, irrigation canals, minor dams, terracing, watershed and environment protection, and afforestation – and also social infrastructure, including schools, health centres, water supply and drainage. In this way, SPWPs were used to showcase the potential for labour-intensive approaches to create employment, directly improve rural production and access to basic goods and services and provide income. These programmes also included training for the workforce, local technicians and officials of decentralized administrations, and the promotion of local participatory organizations, and aimed to transform infrastructure production. They became known as "major programmes of minor works", with their range of objectives, including addressing socioeconomic needs, exemplifying a basic needs approach to development.

Between 1975 and 1983, a range of bi- and multi-lateral donors, including the Swiss Agency for Development and Corporation (SDC), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the UK Department for International Development (DfiD) and the World Bank, provided $65 million to support these programmes, mostly in the form of grants and funds for technical cooperation. These grants were used to develop a range of techniques for different types of SPWPs and prepare for the implementation of national labour-intensive investment programmes by undertaking surveys, feasibility studies and training workshops. Over time, SPWP grew to include a range of environmental activities such as afforestation, reforestation and soil conservation which are now referred to as Green Works. Over time, SPWP grew to include a range of environmental activities such as afforestation, reforestation and soil conservation which are now referred to as Green Works.

By 1982, SPWPs were being implemented in 22 countries. Governments executed SPWPs with the technical support of ILO experts and personnel from UN and bilateral donors who formed technical cooperation project teams, to which national staff were attached as counterparts. ILO's input to SPWPs was mainly through the provision of technical advice, training of national staff and supporting the establishment of project monitoring systems.

Initially, the SPWP was criticized on technical grounds due to its focus on social objectives and employment creation at the expense of technical quality and efficiency but, over time, this was addressed and the SPWP team developed technical expertise in the design, organization, monitoring and evaluation of SPWPs across sectors as well as the formulation of policy.

Sources: Gaude et al. 1984;[16] ILO 1984;[17] Mayer 1989;[18] Ghai 2009[19]

The second team working on PWP, was the Employment and Technology Branch (EMP/TEC), led the Construction Technology Programme and worked on the promotion of labour-intensive, or what was to become became known as employment-intensive, technology.

These two teams were formed in response to concerns raised internally within the ILO during the 1950s and 1960s, relating to the perceived failure of PWPs to fully achieve their anticipated technical, economic and social policy objectives. Some critics had noted that, whilst employment had been created, it had not always resulted in the creation of durable physical assets. These two branches provided a way for the Organization to take forward work on all three key objectives, employment creation, development and basic needs.

The initial challenge for EMP/TEC was to provide evidence supporting the argument that labour-intensive road-building techniques offered a viable employment-oriented construction technology, based on the practical application of labour-intensive technologies which in terms of cost and quality of outputs were equivalent to capital-intensive technologies.

The concept of employment intensity was of interest beyond the ILO at this time, with the World Bank establishing the Labour and Capital Substitution in Civil Construction research programme in 1971, with financial support from a consortium of nine bilateral donors. The results of the study were published in the report entitled *Labour based construction programmes: A practical guide for planning and management.*[20] In the foreword to the guide, the World Bank's Vice President of Operations Policy argued that labour-based programming had a key role:

> Our experience suggests that labour based construction programmes - like programmes involving the most advance technology - cannot alone solve the grave problems of the developing countries. In the many countries where labour is abundant and capital is scarce, however, labour based programmes are an indispensable part of long term strategies for rural development.[21]

Subsequent research undertaken jointly by the World Bank and ILO in the 1970s led to the development of a theoretical basis for the adoption of labour-intensive methods. It set out methodologies for labour-intensive road construction and explored the relative cost and quality of roads produced in this way to ascertain that they were not only economically efficient and technically sound, but also generated productive employment.

This theoretical basis was established through a series of seminal studies carried out during the 1970s exploring the extent to which employment could be generated by substituting labour for capital in hitherto equipment-intensive investments in a number of countries including India, Iran, Kenya, Mexico, the Philippines and Thailand. It became clear from the findings of the studies that even in higher wage countries such as Thailand, labour-based methods could be competitive and a viable economic choice for simple rural infrastructure projects.

During this period, the ILO established a close working relationship with the World Bank and other UN agencies on PWPs. It supported the use of PWPs as one component of the development process to promote full employment, economic growth and income distribution. ILO technical cooperation programmes expanded significantly across Africa, Asia and Latin America, focusing on a combination of vocational training, enterprise development, and small- and medium-sized enterprise support as well as PWPs, building on the WEP's emphasis on the use of local technology and labour-intensive, rather than the conventional capital-intensive, methods for the construction and maintenance of public assets.

As the popularity of the more radical aspects of the NIEO diminished in the broader international development discourse, the ILO focused increasingly on the critical, but arguably less ambitious, project of promoting labour-intensive approaches in specific areas of construction, notably rural access roads, and on generating evidence on the viability of this approach. The WEP employment mission to Kenya in 1972 led to a breakthrough in the form of the Rural Access Roads Programme (RARP), the first large-scale programme resulting from the series of technical studies. The RARP entailed the construction of 14,000 km of unclassified rural roads throughout the country using labour-intensive methods. As the ILO's first major labour-intensive rural road programme, it garnered considerable donor interest and support. The systems and procedures developed under the RARP were subsequently integrated into the work programme of the government ministry responsible for rural roads (box 4). The RARP and the associated training centre was instrumental in the expansion of labour-based methods in Africa and beyond.

▶Box 4. The Kenya Rural Access Road Programme (RARP)

Line of people applying for jobs on the Rural Access Roads Programme, Kenya (Credit: ILO)

In Kenya, as in many developing countries in the 1960s and 1970s, the desire to enhance rural connectivity to foster trade and rural economic growth following decolonization resulted in a road-building boom. The Government of Kenya made significant investments in expanding its existing infrastructure networks in line with its policy emphasis on rural development, where 80 per cent of the population lived at the time, in an attempt to alleviate rural poverty. In 1970, an Act of Parliament entrusted the Ministry of Works with the construction and maintenance of roads. In compliance with this policy, the Ministry initiated two major programmes in 1974: the Gravelling, Bridging and Culverting Programme (GBC) to upgrade some selected classified secondary and minor roads to gravel standard; and the Rural Access Roads Programme (RARP) to improve unclassified roads by adopting labour-based methods.

The Rural Access Roads Programme was unique in that it represented the first attempt in Africa to implement labour-based method efficiently to scale. RARP constructed 14,000 km of all-weather farm-to-market access roads in 23 districts with high agricultural potential and became an exemplar of the possibility of constructing low-cost, good-quality roads using labour-based techniques. The RARP was also important in

that it created a national operational model for the global initiatives foreseen under the WEP. The Ministry was pleased with the success of the programme, which limited scarce foreign exchange use and also created employment and income-earning opportunities in rural areas. At its peak, the programme provided employment for 12,000 people and in 1978 the lengthsman system for routine road maintenance was introduced which provided employment for 5,000 workers, each of whom was allocated responsibility for routine maintenance activities on a 1–2.5 km section of road, on the basis of 12 days work per month.

Sources: de Veen 1980;[22] Beusch and de Veen 1991.[23]

The techniques and work organization methods developed under the programme are still in use today for the implementation of donor- and government-funded rural road programmes and have been adopted and used in many countries in the region and elsewhere.

As part of the programme, a training centre was established with ILO support in 1978 in the Kenyan town of Kisii to train local supervisory staff for the RARP, and later local contractors, in the application of labour-intensive methods (box 5). The Kisii Training Centre (KTC) highlighted the importance of national personnel having an understanding of and competence in the use of labour-intensive approaches in order to achieve sustainable programme outcomes.

▶Box 5. The Kisii Training Centre - Kenya

KTC practical training on the setting out of tasks for each worker, Kenya. (Credit: ILO)

The Kisii Training Centre (KTC) – originally known as the Rural Access Roads Training School – was established in 1978 under the Kenya Institute of Highways and Building Technology (KIBT) that was part of the Ministry of Works. Funded by the SDC and provided with technical support from the ILO, the objective of the KTC was to train all cadres of supervisory staff for the Rural Access Roads Programme (RARP).

The KTC, originally a small Kenyan road construction foreman school, was to become the African regional training centre for labour-based methods, an internationally recognized training centre for labour-intensive road construction in Africa. The ILO provided support to the KTC through the EIIP, including the development of a curriculum and training materials, provision of teaching aids, resource mobilization through market linkages, the establishment of monitoring and quality control systems, and the promotion of its services globally, for both public and private sector training.

The KTC has trained several hundred Kenyan engineers and technicians from sectoral and district technical departments and contractors in the use and management of labour-based road works and over 450 engineers and technicians from over 18 different countries

including Bangladesh, Botswana, Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Laos, Namibia, Nepal, South Africa, Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. The Centre continues to run both national and international courses including tailor-made in-country courses for engineers and managers in labour-based road technology. Two courses established by the KTC – "International course for engineers and managers of labour-based construction and maintenance" and "International course for supervisors of labour-based road contract works" – were instrumental in promoting and institutionalizing labour-based technology in construction in Africa.

Source: Kidanu 2020 (personal communication).

The RARP provided the opportunity to test academic and theoretical issues explored in earlier studies and supplied the answers to technical questions. The programme created thousands of kilometres of rural access roads setting the standard for ILO's promotion of the construction of large-scale rural access roads using labour-intensive techniques to produce roads equal or superior in terms of cost and quality to those using conventional capital-intensive methods.

The programme's focus on training and the creation of a cadre of engineers with the skills required to design, implement and manage large-scale labour-intensive road construction was to become a key characteristic of programming in the coming decades. Adequate technical skills and appropriate technology were recognized as key prerequisites for programme success (box 6).

▶Box 6. The Legacy of the RARP in Kenya – the Minor Roads Programme, the Roads Maintenance Initiative and the Roads 2000 Maintenance Strategy

Sealing of a road using labour intensive methods under the Roads 2000 programme in Kenya (Credit: ILO)

The Kenya Rural Access Road Programme was so successful, both in terms of its own objectives and the national political enthusiasm it engendered, that the use of labour-based methods was extended to the Kenyan classified road network in 1985, resulting in the creation of the Minor Roads Programme (MRP). To meet the training needs of the MRP, a more permanent training centre was built, the origin of the present day Kisii Training Centre, where all labour-based roads training in Kenya has since been carried out. The positive results of the RARP and MRP contributed to the decision to adopt labour-based approaches across the entire road network of Kenya through the Roads 2000 Maintenance Strategy under the Roads Maintenance Initiative (RMI) policy framework.

By the late 1980s and 1990s, it was becoming evident that the Government of Kenya was unable to ensure adequate road maintenance, and the emphasis of the ILO's support shifted from construction to maintenance. The RMI was introduced, under which constraints to road maintenance were identified and support was

provided to extend the labour-based experience to maintain higher class feeder roads as well as some paved roads.

The Roads 2000 Maintenance Strategy was born out of this initiative in the early 1990s with the vision of implementing the strategy throughout Kenya by the year 2000. The strategy aimed to implement a new approach which entailed rapidly bringing roads to a maintainable standard and placing them under effective maintenance with the use of local resources. The target was to bring the majority of the then 63,000 km of classified roads to a maintainable standard by the year 2000. This was to be achieved through a combination of spot improvements and guaranteed periodic maintenance to ensure the progressive rehabilitation of the entire road network. A pilot project in the then South Nyanza and Kericho Districts demonstrated the applicability of the approach and the Government consequently adopted the concept for full national implementation in 1994. The KTC became the main training provider for the Roads 2000 programme.

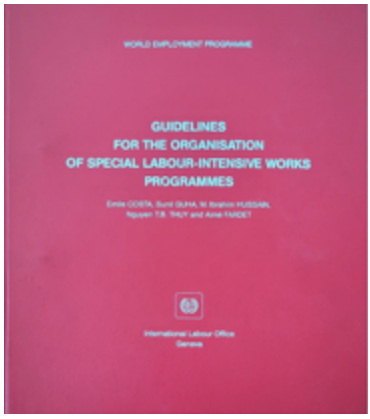
Source: Republic of Kenya, Ministry of Roads 2011.[24]

The success of the RARP also led to the implementation of similar programmes in Africa with ILO support, including Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. Similar labour-intensive rural road construction programmes were also developed in Asia and South America. These programmes introduced complete work procedures for the road infrastructure, which were distinct from conventional road building techniques. The labour-based method emphasized the achievement of technical and functional requirements while prioritizing the use of local resources including labour, materials, skills and domestic contractors. Work carried out under the RARP served as the laboratory for further development of the technology and approach, which was documented in a number of research and working papers.

The ILO continued to promote and disseminate experience from these programmes with partners in different countries throughout the 1970s. It also supported further research and experimentation with labour-intensive infrastructure to ascertain the technical, economic and social feasibility of labour-intensive road construction techniques in different contexts and, critically, to identify the "institutional and policy requirements for the successful implementation of such techniques".[25]

These included studies in Iran, (present day the Islamic Republic of Iran).[26], the Philippines[27] and Thailand.[28] This research resulted in the publication of two seminal documents in 1977; the *Guidelines for the organization of special labour-intensive works programmes*[29] (box 7) and the *Manual on the planning of labour-intensive road construction*,[30] which together provided both a theoretical and a practical guide to the adoption of labour-intensive approaches and were to become the key reference documents for employment-intensive construction in the ILO from the 1970s onwards.

▶Box 7. Guidelines for the organization of SPWP, 1977



Cover photo of the Guidelines, 1982 version (Credit: ILO)

The Guidelines for the organization of SPWP were published in 1977 and became a seminal document for the ILO implementation of PWPs. The guidelines examine each aspect of programme design and implementation in turn, explaining the problems to be resolved and suggesting solutions, both in theory and as evidenced in practice. They set out an implementation model which is intended to be applied flexibly. The purpose of the guidelines is to offer those responsible for labour-intensive programmes simple methods of management and evaluation along with subjects for reflection, in order to support the development of large-scale programmes for the use of unemployed labour appropriate to their own country context.

Source: Costa et al. 1977.[31]

The guidelines and manual were followed by further research and projects and the study *Men or machines*,[32,33] was particularly important as it brought institutional, social and political economy questions into the PWP debate for the first time. In this publication the author, Lal articulated

four key questions which have been at the core of the discourse on labour-intensive employment creation ever since:

1. Is it feasible to find technically efficient labour-intensive techniques for road construction?
2. Is the adoption of such techniques socially desirable?
3. If it is desirable, what is the ideal system of fiscal and administrative devices to ensure that private contractors use the socially optimal technique?
4. What are the factors affecting the large-scale implementation of efficient labour–intensive techniques?

Lal argued that concerns with technical efficiency and the technical feasibility of substituting labour for capital "must ultimately be an engineering problem" and stressed the importance of adopting "non inferior" labour-intensive techniques. This publication contributed to an ongoing debate on the theory of planned economic development[34] and the relationship between employment and growth, which focused not only on how to promote employment creation but also on how to maximize current employment without undermining future employment and growth prospects. This involved looking at employment within the wider institutional and economic context, as discussed in Sen's 1975 book *Employment, technology and development*,[35] which was also produced within the WEP framework. In this way, during the 1970s, while part of the ILO's ongoing PWP engagement was highly technical, the work of Lal and Sen brought the PWP debate more deeply into broader policy debates relating to political economy and development economics.

In parallel with ILO's work, the World Bank was also carrying out technical research into various aspects of labour intensification in civil construction and agriculture, which complemented the series of ILO studies. World Bank research resulted in the production of a series of 18 technical studies between 1975 and 1978 on the topic of the substitution of labour and equipment in civil construction which covered a wide variety of types of work, including excavation, loading and road surfacing. It also examined issues such as the impact of workers' health and nutrition on productivity norms, and the implications for programme design.[36]

Together the World Bank and ILO studies led to the conclusion that the appropriateness of labour-intensive approaches needed to be considered

on a case-by-case basis, and subject to detailed techno-economic analyses rather than a blanket endorsement or critique.[37]The ILO took up the challenge of identifying the contexts in which labour substitution was potentially a viable and desirable option, and matching contexts with appropriate technical approaches. From 1976 onwards, EMP/TEC provided significant technical assistance and, over time, the labour-intensive construction and maintenance methods it promoted became an established and accepted option for the implementation of rural infrastructure construction and maintenance, as well as other infrastructure works including irrigation projects and urban slum upgrading.

The 1976 World Employment Conference marked the high point of the WEP research programme. Political enthusiasm for the Basic Needs approach waned in subsequent years, the large-scale employment missions were phased out and the WEP research agenda was drastically cut, particularly the more radical elements of the WEP programme.[38]

However, by the end of the 1970s, the ILO's research and advocacy had established that labour-intensive construction methods were grounded in a sound theoretical basis and able to achieve outcomes that were comparable with those achieved using conventional capital-intensive approaches. The feasibility of context-specific and technically-sound labour-intensive construction programmes was also firmly established. Despite this achievement and the significant empirical body of work produced by the ILO, labour-intensive approaches still had many detractors, and the ILO recommendations were received with varying degrees of enthusiasm among professionals in many countries, ranging from open hostility to warm acceptance. Many engineers were still not prepared to substitute the conventional equipment-based technologies that they had learned in university with what they perceived as outdated approaches that would result in substandard works.

Endnotes

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King of Nepal Birendra Bir BikramShah and the ILO Chief Technical Advisor Mike Shone at the inauguration of the Bhorletar Irrigation Project in Nepal, 1985 (Credit: Unknown)

7

7. The coming of age of EIIP concepts

The 1980s witnessed rapid changes in the ideological and institutional context. As noted by Sollai in his history of the WEP "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."[1]

The general consensus on the broad lines of the interventionist social, labour and economic policy positions which the ILO had promoted since its inception broke down as free-market ideas gained traction globally. ILO-supported pro-employment interventions became increasingly perceived as sources of market distortion that could impede rather than enhance economic growth. The interventionist macroeconomic policies historically promoted by the ILO were antithetical to the emerging increasingly neoliberal world order. Under World Bank-sponsored Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), many of the gains made in previous decades were rolled back, resulting in a "lost decade for development".[2] In line with the increasingly dominant free market thinking of the time, the ILO faced significant resistance to continued public works programming from the international financial institutions, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). But even with these changes, it continued to promote policies to overcome poverty and underdevelopment in line with the Basic Needs approach through public employment and labour intensification. Despite the challenging policy environment, work on PWPs and the promotion of labour-intensive approaches, mainly in the form of individual projects, continued to flourish during the 1980s. The ILO's portfolio expanded in many developing countries in response to a high demand for technical assistance and policy advice in applying the technical approaches and guidelines developed in the 1970s under the WEP.

In 1987, the two ILO teams working on PWPs, EMP/URG and EMP/TEC, were merged into a new unit called the Employment and Infrastructure Branch (EMP/INFRA), which subsequently became Employment and Investment Branch (EMP/INVEST). Despite initial friction regarding differences in policy, and whether the primary focus of the work should

be on employment creation or infrastructure development, this merger was an operational success. EMP/TEC benefited from a greater emphasis on the social issues related to PWPs whilst EMP/URG accepted the more stringent technical requirements needed to ensure that labour-based methods fulfilled technical and economic objectives.

The merger of the two units resulted in the integration of the socially and developmentally oriented activities of SPWPs into EMP/TEC's more technically oriented programming. This created the multiple-function approach to PWPs which, despite challenges relating to the inherent tensions between the different functions, was to characterize the Organization's engagement in the sector from that time on. The resulting PWP model informed what was to become the global PWP blueprint and was particularly influential in terms of the design of initiatives such as the World Bank-supported Social Fund approach, designed as a response to the adverse impacts of Structural Adjustment.[3]

One benefit of the combined programme and the associated broadening of the PWP concept and objectives was that related issues of local-level planning, poverty eradication, local communities' access needs, the capacity of local government, and the priority given to ensuring that maintenance systems were all simultaneously integrated into PWP programming, potentially contributing to the sustained impact of funds invested into infrastructure.

EMP/INVEST's work now extended across different ILO regional and country offices as well as many external partners. This work was positioned as a global ILO programme and was named the Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP),[4] reflecting the focus on applying employment-intensive approaches to public investments. EIIP is used for the sake of brevity in this report to apply to PWP activities and labour-intensive programming from the 1980s onwards. The EIIP continues as an important vehicle to promote full and productive employment and decent work, with the main objective of influencing the design and realization of public investments to optimize employment outcomes, in particular for the poor.

In addition to rural road programmes, such as the national District Roads Improvement and Maintenance Programme in Botswana, the EIIP also supported PWPs that involved the creation and maintenance of other types of infrastructure, in order to increase job creation. Through SPWPs, local communities were engaged in projects focusing on water supply

and irrigation, erosion control, forestry, and the construction of social infrastructure, such as schools and clinics,[5] and including, for example, a large programme supporting small-scale irrigation works in Nepal in the 1980s.

Another important stream of the EIIP's work related to capacity building. Experience gained from the Kisii Training Centre in Kenya led to the establishment of national training centres on labour-based construction in many other African countries (box 8).[6]

▶Box 8. National training centres

Centre de Formation HIMO in Antisrabé, Madagascar, which was established as an independent training center in 1997 (Credit: Unknown)

The EIIP supported the development of national labour-based training institutes to build the capacity of public and private sector operators in labour-intensive construction by providing training materials, ready-made modules for training and supporting curriculum development. The curriculum accommodated the linkage of formal training to programme implementation, with programmes including human resources investment as a core component in order to produce the skilled technicians required for effective programme management and implementation.

Following the establishment of the Kisii centre in Kenya in 1978, national labour-based training institutions were established in the 1980s and many went on to be government or self-financed, nationally owned and organized, creating a regional platform for South-South learning on labour-based practices, with the ILO continuing to provide technical advice and assistance on request. Many are now internationally recognized, and they continue to train engineers, supervisors and managers from all over the region. Several of these centres also collaborated in areas such as curriculum development and sharing training expertise, further development of labour-based technology and the introduction of effective systems and procedures for routine road maintenance.

From the 1980s onwards, the EIIP provided technical assistance for the creation of the following national labour-based training institutes across Africa:

Botswana – Roads Training School and Field Training Unit Molepolole
Cameroon – Akonolinga Center for construction and EIIP works
Ethiopia – Ginchi Training Centre
Ghana – Koforidua Training Centre
Lesotho – Teyateyaneng Training Centre
Madagascar – Centre de Formation HIMO, Antisrabé
Malawi – Roads Training Centre
Mozambique – Beira Corridor Training Centre
United Republic of Tanzania – The Appropriate Technology Training Institute
Uganda – Mt. Elgon Labour-Based Training Centre
Zambia –Roads Training Centre

Source: ILO 2015.[6]

The EIIP also promoted academic engagement with universities in developing countries and worked with 14 universities in Africa and 12 in Asia to promote labour-intensive construction methods in their respective countries. It provided support towards incorporating this approach into their curricula at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In addition to institutional capacity building and the development of joint research initiatives, the EIIP provided support in the development of relevant under- and postgraduate

course materials. It also supported the development of a master's Programme on Transport and Road Engineering for Development in collaboration with the International Institute for Infrastructural Hydraulic and Environmental Engineering (IHE)[7] and the University of Delft, the Netherlands.

During the same period (between 1980s and early 1990s), the ILO commissioned further studies into the choice of alternative technologies with the aim of further enhancing the productivity and effectiveness of projects and employment creation across a range of activities. The result of these studies informed the planning, implementation and monitoring of Local Economic Development (LED) programmes in a number of sub-sectors.[8] They also informed the application of choice of technology analysis, previously used exclusively in road construction, to a range of LED activities where there was potential to increase employment.

The EIIP also extended its collaboration with UN agencies. It worked with the World Food Programme (WFP) in Mozambique in the 1980s to support the recovery from its civil war. Part of this collaboration was the development of operational procedures for its food and cash for work programming which had an important influence on future WFP operations by strengthening the emphasis and quality of assets and conditions of work. The EIIP also collaborated with UNDP on PWPs for crisis response, and the World Bank on the technical modalities of the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes, focusing particularly on employment creation and private sector development. For example, the two institutions worked together on SAP-support programmes in Ghana in 1986/87, exploring ways to maximize employment creation in Bank-financed infrastructure projects and provide training for small-scale private sector contractors. However, differences between the World Bank's vision for operationalizing SAPs and the EIIP's vision and working practice emerged as the adverse employment implications of the approach became evident. As a result the close technical collaboration on PWPs which had endured since the early 1970s was weakened. However, the EIIP did continue to provide technical assistance to World Bank-funded infrastructure programmes, and the two continued to collaborate on the Road Maintenance Initiative in Africa as part of the sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Programme (SATP).

▶Box 9. Mozambique: Post-conflict Employment-Intensive Works Programmes (EIWPs), 1980s

Gravel Quarry Chicumbane, Xavi-Xai, Gaza Province, Mozambique, in 1988 (Credit: M. Gupta)

Mozambique was beset by a civil war between 1977 and 1992 resulting in the death of an estimated one million Mozambicans. Another 1.7 million took refuge in neighbouring states, and several million more were internally displaced. By the mid-1980s, Mozambique had to commit itself to a structural adjustment programme, which exacted harsh economic reforms, retrenching about 100,000 workers and eroding real wages over a decade. The EIIP supported the various phases of the Government's Feeder Roads Programme (FRP), and coordinated efforts by various bilateral and multilateral donors, and NGOs, in the development of job opportunities providing incomes and food security.

Employment-intensive works programmes (EIWPs) were designed to use local resources in job creation and to reintegrate former combatants into society by way of employment. The most successful EIWP in Mozambique in the 1980s and 1990s was the FRP which built, re-constructed and maintained essential roads during and after the war, including roads damaged by 16 years of war.[9] The

FRP, operating initially in a war zone and in a highly constrained economic environment, faced challenges in terms of both funding and the institutional structure of the Government of Mozambique. There were significant concerns that lack of maintenance was adversely affecting sustainability and that a number of the rehabilitated feeder roads were serving as heavily trafficked main roads.

Beyond providing access to social and economic services, the FPR project concentrated on providing employment opportunities to the rural poor in particularly vulnerable areas, which included "deslocados" or persons internally displaced by the raging conflict. Strong collaboration with the WFP ensured the provision of necessary food aid. The innovative programme combining part payment in cash and part payment with WFP food rations combined with adequate interventions on technical organization and capacity building was the basis for new WFP Cash for Work operational procedures. On occasions, non-food items such as cement, roofing sheets, clothes, shoes and other non-perishables were distributed to the project work force so that they could rebuild their homes or shelters.

The EIWPs in Mozambique in the 1980s suffered from excessive centralization, procedural challenges and inefficient state-owned enterprises as well as from bias in favour of equipment-intensive methods, typical of the centrally planned economies at the time. The FRP and the ILO support team were nevertheless able to rehabilitate thousands of kilometres of roads during a most challenging period in Mozambique's history. The initial FRP project was institutionalized in a nation-wide FRP that provided employment to thousands of Mozambicans including women, deslocados and former combatants following the signature of the Peace Agreement of 1992.

Sources: Authors; de Vletter 2001.[10]

By the end of the 1980s, the Basic Needs agenda and associated development discourse were being swept away by a new and essentially neoliberal development project, linked to the growing dominance of the Washington consensus and Bretton Woods institutions. Thus, the role and influence of the ILO in relation to PWP conceptualization and implementation, as in many other areas of long-term institutional policy engagement, was significantly reduced.

Endnotes

1 Michele Sollai, 2019, *World Employment Programme: Past, present and future. Background Paper for the 50th Anniversary of the launch of the WEP. Executive summary*, (ILO).

2 See for example: Giovanni Cornia et al., eds., 1987. *Adjustment with a Human Face. Volume 1: Protecting the Vulnerable and Promoting Growth* (Oxford: University Press).

3 Philippe Garnier, Marc van Imschoot, 2003. Social Funds: *Lessons for a New Future* (ILO).

4 EMP/INFRA had three units: (i) Infrastructure Programmes and Engineering; (ii) Special Rural Works (SRW); and (iii) Socioeconomic studies and training (SET). Although known by various names over the intervening decades, these three units formed what became known as EMP/INVEST (internally) and led to the programme known as the EIIP to the outside world.

5 One consequence of this expansion of activity was the ILO becoming a member of the Steering Committee of the International Tropical Forestry Action Program (TFAP) set up by UNDP, major bilateral agencies and international "green" nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

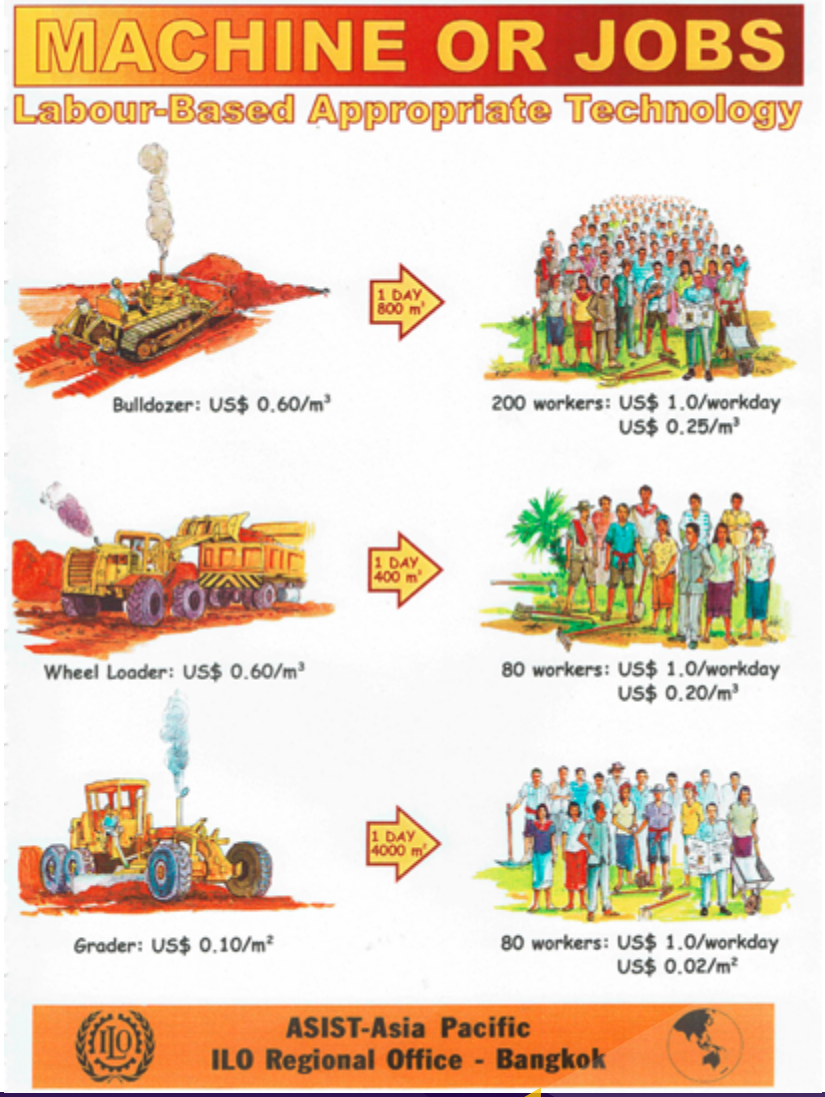
6 ILO, 2015, *Agreement of Cooperation Among 13 Labour-Based Training Institutions in Africa Made Under the Auspices of the International Labour Organization*, Addis Ababa, 18th November

7 At the time, IHE Delft was one of several international institutes in the Netherlands for which the Dutch government provided bursaries to staff and officials from developing countries to pursue graduate studies. IHE Delft now operates under the auspices of UNESCO and focuses on water and hydraulic engineering related education and the transport course is no longer offered.

8 These included agriculture, animal husbandry, food and drink processing, construction, building and infrastructure, related infrastructure, energy generation, recycling, sanitation and environment related activities, business and entrepreneurship related activities, vocational and technical skills, tool making and handicrafts.

9 Fion de Vletter, 2001, From Destruction to Reconstruction – *The Mozambique Experience (1981–1997): Using Employment Intensive Technology, Recovery and Reconstruction Department* (ILO).

10 De Vletter. 2001.



Promotional poster showing the costs and employment creation advantages of using a labour based approach (Credit: ASIST Asia Pacific)

8. PWPs in the period of neoliberalism and ILO reorientation

The context for public works programming underwent significant changes in the late 1980s and 1990s, as the result of major global geopolitical changes and the fundamental shifts this engendered in the orientation of the ILO itself. Externally, geopolitical shifts redefined the challenges that were of concern to the ILO:

> the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism, the questioning of development models and of aid to third world countries, the doubts expressed on full employment in industrialized countries, and the emergence of a new wave of globalization, forced the Organization and its secretariat to review their methods of work and the instruments used to carry it out. [1]

These changes challenged the ILO's fundamental identity in relation to market interventions. One key dimension of the ideological change was a shift from the primary responsibility for addressing unemployment from the state to the unemployed themselves which was associated with a decreasing sense of solidarity and willingness for society to accept unemployment as a collective problem. As a result, unemployment was increasingly presented at a policy level as a supply side problem, rather than a structural demand problem. In this new paradigm, where unemployment was characterized as the fault of individuals who were not sufficiently skilled or entrepreneurial to succeed in the job market, the rationale for state intervention was significantly weakened. Where state intervention did take place, it was primarily through Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) and, in this context, the space for the deployment of PWPs offering direct employment creation by the state was severely curtailed.

The ILO responded to this external pressure by shifting its strategy and focus. During Michel Hansenne's tenure as Director-General from 1989 to 1999, the Organization refocused on its normative and standard setting mandate and social dialogue in the established economy. It moved away

from the more radical engagement on income distribution, employment creation and tackling inequality, which had been priorities under the Basic Needs agenda. Work on international economic and trade issues was deprioritized, as was engagement on poverty, marking a significant discontinuity with the previous orientation. One consequence of this was that resources shifted away from field-based technical assistance and operational programmes. As a result, ILO's programme-level interventions in support of Member States were significantly scaled back, although some degree of engagement was maintained on work linking employment to the impact of globalization.

The ILO carried out an institutional reorganization at this time to match its changing agenda, establishing Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs). This was also in part a response to the new demands from Member States in Eastern Europe which were abandoning state socialism, which had a significant impact on many countries in other regions. The MDTs comprised different specialists in ILO's main spheres of competence. They replaced WEP regional employment teams and integrated regional training and labour administration centres. While this was intended to enhance the Organization's coherence and impact, it resulted in the "fragmentation and consequent weakening of its capacity in the field" in relation to employment[2] and represented a significant challenge for the continued provision of technical assistance and support on PWP programming.

These external and internal changes also had an impact on the operations of the EIIP more broadly. The previously close relationship with key UN agencies underwent major changes, with the collaboration with the United Nation Development Programme continuing at a reduced level. It moved away from large-scale ILO programme implementation using significant bilateral funding mediated through the UNDP, to limited programme preparation inputs and the provision of *ad hoc* technical services, leaving the UNDP to deliver PWPs without significant inputs from ILO.

Similarly, the close collaboration ILO had developed with WFP over many years, under which the EIIP provided support through a formalized cooperation agreement, with WFP providing food aid to ILO-implemented PWP operations was also scaled down. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), with its history of private sector contracting, started to take on a stronger role in UN project implementation, directly competing with the EIIP in some countries. Only the collaboration with the UN Capital Development Fund increased during this period, focusing

on local-level capacity building for the planning and management of district operations.

Overall, the UN specialized agency financing was also reduced during this period, which resulted in a significant challenge in terms of both collaboration and financing for the EIIP. Many donors also decided to channel more of their technical assistance funding through private service providers instead of the UN. Changes in international donor policies meant that several bilateral donors including DfID, NORAD, the SDC, SIDA, and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) reduced the financing of rural infrastructure works and channelled funds to alternative development priorities including private sector development and local economic development.

Relations with the World Bank also shifted again in the late 1980s, but in this case with increased collaboration on several fronts. There was increased technical collaboration with the World Bank transport sector due to its growing interest in funding rural road works, which opened new possibilities for the ILO at national level. The ILO and World Bank also collaborated closely on the Road Management Initiative (RMI) and the Rural Travel and Transport Programme (RTTP), two components of the Africa Transport Policy Program (ATPP), originally the sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Programme (SSATP). The EIIP contributed its extensive experience in the promotion and use of small-scale contractors trained in labour-based methods. Following the initial successful contractor development programme in Ghana, other countries followed, for example, Ethiopia, Kenya, and the United Republic of Tanzania. However, by the late 1990s, the ATPP focus again shifted to management and financing rather than technology and labour-based capacity promotion, reflecting the divergence in the interests and policies of the ILO and the World Bank.

Despite these developments, demand for EIIP inputs from ILO Member States remained strong, particularly in relation to support for rural infrastructure development. Moreover, continued project-specific financing from bilateral donors compensated for reduced ILO and UN resource flows which enabled the programme to innovate and create new modalities and institutions for programme delivery. The result was stronger collaboration directly with developing countries, supported through bilateral financing arrangements.

This EIIP approach was, however, at odds with the internal reorientation initiated by the ILO leadership, which entailed moving away from

project-based interventions in favour of upstream employment policy engagement and the promotion of labour standards. The EIIP team perceived direct support to governments in the planning and implementation of PWPs as a means to promote and demonstrate policy options as well as to strengthen the implementation capacity of local institutions. However, it was not universally accepted within the ILO at this time that the Organization should continue to be directly involved in the type of project-level technical cooperation that had previously characterized EIIP activity. This tension regarding the objectives and role of the Organization was illustrated by a comment from the Director-General during a visit to an EIIP project site, who remarked "the ILO should not be in the business of building bridges".[3]

In line with the changed organizational priorities, the EIIP was moved into the Development and Technical Cooperation Department (DEVCOTEC) in 1994 with a reduced budget and resources commensurate with a focus on policy and the scaling back of project-level activity. Although some resources were decentralized and country-level project activities continued, this reorganization resulted in a significant reduction of operational programming and the ILO's longstanding promotion of labour-intensive approaches for infrastructure development. Core staff and operational programme budgets fell significantly, with EIIP technical assistance expenditure falling by more than 50 per cent between 1991 and 1998,[4] as the programme shifted from financing project implementation to more knowledge-based technical assistance. The increased focus on knowledge building and management led to the establishment of the extensive *Construction Technology Papers* series which consists of 177 papers. These were further complemented by the *Rural Accessibility Technical Papers* and the *Socio-Economic Technical Papers*.[5]

The EIIP responded to this challenge by establishing Advisory Support, Information Services and Training (ASIST), which effectively functioned as bilaterally financed regional EIIP teams. This was a significant innovation which enabled overall staffing levels and engagement on employment promotion to be maintained during this period. The first ASIST team was established in Africa and was followed by ASIST in the Asia-Pacific. The creation of ASIST teams enabled the EIIP to continue to provide technical assistance and ongoing project-based engagement in support of member countries directly from the regions. The ASIST programme of the 1990s had a strong knowledge development and dissemination objective. The resulting wide range of publications included technical briefs, bulletins, an extensive library of technical training manuals, tools and guides,[6] as well as Regional Seminars for Labour-Based Practitioners that continue today (box 10 and 11).

▶ Box 13. The Advisory Support, Information Services and Training (ASIST) Programme

Poster promoting and the EIIP approach to Development Engineering (Credit: ASIST and Waterkeyn)

The EIIP Advisory Support, Information Services and Training (ASIST) was a sub-regional technical assistance programme funded primarily by bilateral donors, the Danish International Development Cooperation Agency (DANIDA), DfID, the Dutch Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS), the Finnish International Development Agency (FINNIDA), NORAD, SIDA and the SDC. The programme also received short-term project funding from other countries as well as the World Bank, the UNDP and other UN agencies.

There were two regional ASIST programmes, one in Africa, initially working in 15 east and southern African countries, and later one in the Asia-Pacific region. ASIST Africa started in Nairobi in 1990 and grew rapidly to include some 16 technical staff at its peak. Half of the office moved to Harare in line with ILO's decentralization policy in 1994. The work of ASIST Africa continued until 2005. ASIST Asia-Pacific was set up in Bangkok in 1998. With five technical staff, it was smaller than the African programme. However, the existence of large-scale labour-based operations in the Asia region and the availability of domestic and international funding from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, significantly increased the outreach and impact of the programme.

The objective of ASIST was to improve the efficiency of labour-based technology development programmes, primarily rural road and transport programmes. ASIST's activities included research and development, the provision of information, training, and advisory inputs on policies and technologies. Research and development programmes into labour-based technology and rural transport addressed a diversity of issues. These included: engineering standards in construction; gender-based rural accessibility, and transport access and service delivery in urban settlements. The ASIST research programme collaborated with the University Network in Africa established by EIIP.

The results of this work were disseminated through a range of media, including national and international training courses, guidelines, the ASISTDOC online database, TV programmes and a regional series. Between 1993 and 2006, 20 issues of the ASIST Bulletin were published, covering a variety of thematic topics. A *Technical Brief* was also published to spread knowledge about labour-based technology and management.

Despite formal recognition of the significant achievements of the EIIP and the ASIST programmes, the latter programme was closed in the late 2000s. This was partially caused by the ILO's centralization of bilateral donor relations which made it more difficult for programmes like ASIST to raise funds directly from donors. The ILO continued to provide ASIST services by funding four regional EIIP technical specialists in Africa (based in Addis Ababa, Dakar, Pretoria and Yaoundé) and two in Asia and the Pacific, based in Bangkok and New Delhi.

Sources: Authors; Ladbury and Howe, 2004.[7]

▶ Box 11. Regional seminars on labour-intensive construction

Participants at the 17th Regional Seminar for Labour-based Practitioners held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2017 (Credit: ILO)

The Regional Seminars for Labour-based Practitioners, initiated in 1990, are a series of meetings convened by the EIIP with the objective of periodically bringing together significant numbers of practitioners with others involved in infrastructure development from the African region and beyond. The discussions focus on developments, and shared experiences and ideas on the application of employment-intensive approaches in the delivery of local infrastructure. Over the last thirty years they have contributed to knowledge sharing on labour-intensive construction and promoted South-South exchange between ILO practitioners.

The first regional seminar held in Mbeya, the United Republic of Tanzania, in 1990, was chaired, organized and financed by the EIIP but, since 1996, they have been organized by host governments. As an international platform for South-South learning on labour-based work practices, they are nationally owned, organized, and self-financed. Furthermore, since 2007, these meetings have also included ministerial participation.

The 18th Regional Seminar took place in Tunis, Tunisia, in 2019, on the theme Towards Sustainable and Inclusive Local Development: Local Resource-based (LRB) Approaches and Decent Job Creation. It was attended by 400 participants and included a two-day ministerial session with representatives from 13 African countries, who called for the formulation of employment-intensive investment strategies that support local capacity-building initiatives, build vocational training capacity, and improve monitoring and evaluation systems.

Source: ILO 2019.[8]

The privatization of service provision promoted during in the 1980s resulted in the increased use of private contractors in infrastructure delivery in developing countries. However, in many developing countries, particularly in rural areas, few private enterprises were able to construct and maintain infrastructure to the required standards using labour-intensive methods. ASIST responded to this challenge by initiating and supporting small contractor development programmes in a number of countries, starting in Ghana (box 12) and subsequently in Mozambique, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, among others. This involved the provision of training and mentorship to small locally based contractors and then engaging them in labour-based road construction works. As part of this work, ASIST produced EIIP's first operational guidelines on contractor development. These guidelines were widely promoted through a joint publication with the World Bank and Economic Commission for Africa[9] and resulted in the 1999 EIIP *Guidelines for Capacity Building for Contracting in the Construction Sector*. These guidelines, which became widely known as the "green guide" because of the colour of the publication, captured ILO and partner experience and expertise on contractor development. The green guide enabled the EIIP to respond to increasing demands to facilitate the use of small-scale contractors in the implementation of labour-based infrastructure works

▶ Box 12. Ghana Feeder Road and labour-intensive public works programmes

Compaction of a gravel road using a pedestrian roller in Ghana (Credit: Htun Hlaing)

Since independence in 1957, Ghana has promoted rural development efforts, prioritizing the development of feeder roads. During the period of Structural Adjustment, in the 1980s, when the promotion of employment and income opportunities were high on the agenda, the Department of Feeder Roads (DFR) sought to enhance their capacity to plan and manage labour-based feeder road works and introduce private sector small-scale contractors in the delivery of the works. At the same time, the Ghana Irrigation Development Agency was concerned to improve water management for agricultural development, flood control and improved water supply and sanitation. The Ghana Feeder Roads Programme (FRP) was developed as a response to these concerns and started in 1987. It was the first ILO labour-based contractor development programme. The FRP set standards for labour-based contracting in road rehabilitation and maintenance and produced capacity-building material. It also led to the establishment of a training centre based in Koforidua which is still central to the development and application of employment creation programmes in Ghana. The programme continued for 10 years, with support from the World Bank, the African Development Bank and a range of bilateral and multilateral donors. By 1995, 93 contractors had been trained in the effective implementation of road works and more than 1,500 km of rural roads had been rehabilitated.

An associated Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW) programme started in 1988. It developed training material for contractors involved in building small earth dams and dugouts. This training material, funded by the UNDP and the Government of Germany, aimed to promote employment in improved water management interventions for agriculture and sanitation as well as flood control.

From 1992 onwards, the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi collaborated with the DFR and the ILO on a series of studies and research work on technology options, quality assessments of roads built and the performance of labour-based contractors. Labour-based construction technology was incorporated into the engineering curriculum at the University which also served as coordinator of the 15 countries of the African Universities Network that aimed to do the same.

This first labour-based contractor training programme for feeder roads and the public works projects in Ghana were successful in optimizing the use of labour, contractors and other local resources; promoting employment within rural and community development; and strengthening rural accessibility and transportation to markets. It also contributed to improved water management through the development of durable dams and irrigation systems and linked these with initiatives to improve agricultural production and diversification, such as aquaculture via fish ponds.

The success of the Ghana contractor development programme was subsequently repeated across Africa and beyond. The involvement of civil engineering researchers and students at postgraduate level through the university network gave further credibility to the use of labour-based methods in construction in the region.

Sources: Authors; ILO 2012b;[10] 2019.[11]

Through the persistent efforts of the EIIP and the ASIST programme, labour-based technology was widely recognized as a viable technology for rural road construction and maintenance by the late 1990s. However, the work on rural roads was only one part of the activity carried out by the EIIP, which continued to provide technical support to public work-related activities in many other sub-sectors, including accessibility planning, technical support

to local governments and small contractor training, reflecting the broader development mandate of the team.

Another important area of EIIP work in Africa, was the development of a work programme in Francophone Africa. This took the form of support for a number of national programmes, including the operation of the West African PWP initiative, AGETIPE (box 13). It also included the *Kita Forest* project in Mali, which was implemented with financial support from the Norwegian Government following the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992. This project put some of the sustainable development recommendations set out in the Brundtland Report into practice.[12] It used a community contracting approach to protect depleted forest reserves along the Dakar–Timbuktu railway line, preventing further desertification and incorporating sustainable forestry management into the national code of practice.

▶Box 13. AGETIPE: Executing Agency for Works of Public Interest for Employment

Magatte Wade, Director of AfricaTIP, greeting the Minister of Labour or Burkina Faso at an ILO meeting in Dakar, Senegal in 1998, with Steve Miller (Specialist) and Jean Majeres (Head of the EIIP) looking on (Credit: Unknow)

The programme originally known as *Agence d'Exécution des Travaux d'Intérêt Public* of AGETIP, did not initially include an employment objective until it was incorporated as a key component following collaboration with the ILO.

The first *Agence d'Exécution des Travaux d'Intérêt Public pour l'Emploi* (AGETIPE) or Executing Agency for Works of Public Interest for Employment, was created in Senegal in response to an economic crisis in 1989. It was supported by international donors including the World Bank and German Development Bank (KfW). The programme created small-scale infrastructure (roads, water supply, sanitation, and social infrastructure) in parallel to providing other services such as small contractor development, microenterprise credit, nutrition and literacy programmes.

Other programmes based on the AGETIPE model were subsequently established in 18 countries in Central and West Africa to support shifts in infrastructure delivery as part of the structural adjustment and privatization drive at the time. With its expansion across the African region, AFRICATIP was an umbrella organization for the AGETIPEs.

The ILO provided technical support for the development and implementation of AGETIPE programmes across the continent. Nationally, AGETIPE works closely with municipalities by providing co-financing for municipal infrastructure. Municipal agencies submit proposals and contract out agreed works and projects for employment.

AGETIP has had an important impact on employment and income generation through public investment in infrastructure, as well as on capacity-building in the small- and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in the construction sector.

Sources: Authors; Bentall et al. 1999;[13] Majeres and Yao Kouame, 2020 (personal communication).

The main aim of EIIP engagements, both in rural and urban settings, was to enable local governments and communities to construct and maintain local productive infrastructure, in order to create employment and income opportunities, sustainable infrastructure and support local economic development. The development of a wider range of rural infrastructure, including water supply and irrigation systems, erosion control, forestry and social infrastructure requires significant community and local government participation. In order to promote this engagement, the EIIP developed the Integrated Rural Accessibility Planning (IRAP) methodology, which ensures gender balanced community participation is integrated into decision-making

on transport planning and the location of services. IRAP-related research and development projects were implemented by the EIIP in Cambodia (box 14), Malawi, the Philippines and the United Republic of Tanzania. With donor support, the ILO also established an autonomous International Forum for Rural Transport and Development (IFRTD) to further develop and promote improved accessibility and integrated transport planning for poor communities in rural areas. The IFRTD is still in existence today and has 1,800 members from 83 countries (see box 14).[14]

▶Box 14. Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) - Cambodia

EIIP workers at Angor Wat, Cambodia (Credit: Nick Rain)

The EIIP engagement in PWPs in Cambodia started in 1992, following the 1991 Peace Agreement, in response to the destruction of infrastructure during the Khmer Rouge period and the need to reintegrate refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and demobilized combatants. The EIIP adopted a labour-based appropriate technology approach, known as the Labour-Based Appropriate Technology programme (LBAT), which differed slightly from the African PWP model due to the different availability of local resources in the Cambodian context. The EIIP introduced a LBAT programme to rehabilitate Cambodia's secondary and tertiary roads and irrigation canals, following a request from UNHCR, which identified the critical need for roads for food

distribution, resettlement, the reintegration of former combatants, and the restoration of irrigated land for food production. Through this programme, the ILO made a significant contribution to the peace process, as the main provider of road access into rural areas and water for irrigation where refugees and IDPs were resettled. In anticipation of the work commencing in 1992, the ILO started recruiting and training LBAT supervisors from the refugee camps along the Thai border.

Essential rural infrastructure, particularly rural roads and irrigation schemes were carried out across six provinces and concentrated in the four north western provinces (Siem Riep, Banteay Meanchey, Battambang and Pursat) which had the highest concentration of demobilized combatants, returnees from Thai refugee camps and IDPs. All these projects required mine-clearing operations before works commenced. By the end of 1994, the project had constructed or rehabilitated 220 km of secondary roads and employed 6,000 people per workday, of whom 60 per cent were women and 40 per cent were returnees, IDPs and former combatants. The project also rehabilitated 56 km of secondary and tertiary canals of Bovel and Barai irrigation systems covering 12,000 hectares. In addition, the programme provided training to more than 150 road and irrigation engineers, trained and engaged 10 small contractors working on rehabilitation/maintenance agreements, and provided literacy training to 1,000 people. Subsequently, more engineers and contractors were trained under an Asian Development Bank (ADB) project which replicated the ILO programme and training materials from 1997 onwards in other districts.

The Appropriate Technology component of LBAT entailed extensive research into the use of local materials such as bamboo to reinforce roads and for canal covers, the use of cement to stabilize road subgrades, stone block paving and a range of geotech and bio-engineering works to stabilize infrastructure works. Extensive tree planting for environmental protection and shade was an important feature of all the works undertaken.

The ILO continued its work in Cambodia through the 1990s, carrying out road construction and maintenance, irrigation canal rehabilitation, and rural infrastructure construction, rehabilitation and maintenance. The EIIP participated in the clearing and restoration of what is now the Angkor Wat UNESCO World Heritage site in Siem Reap. This

engagement in the restoration of Angkor Wat was unique inasmuch as the ILO team worked in partnership with UNESCO, who provided specialist archaeological advice on the restoration. The programme engaged 1,000 workers, many of whom remain employed today by the Government as part of the *Authority for the Protection of the Site and management of the Region of Angkor* (APSARA).

The EIIP continued to provide technical support to the Government in the implementation of rural infrastructure programmes during the 2000s. From 2009 to 2012, the EIIP also provided support on policy issues related to rural development and, in particular, infrastructure. Whilst much of the work assisted the Ministry of Rural Development, the ILO also supported the development of certain elements of the Government's proposals to improve the livelihoods of the rural population more widely. Local development planning adopted ILO's IRAP methods which were enhanced by using the Geographic Information System and other modern planning techniques.

ASIST-Asia Pacific developed a Public Works Programme as part of the Cambodian Government's Social Protection Strategy. This was coordinated by the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development in collaboration with the ADB, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (AusAID), the German Development Bank (KfW) and the Ministry for Rural Development. Support was also provided to the WFP to assess the viability of moving from Food for Work to Cash for Work in their rural roads programme, including the preparation of a manual to implement the change, although unrelated issues eventually limited WFP's ability to do so.

Between 2007 and 2013, ASIST-AP was a full partner with the Government and the donor community in the implementation of the national Social Safety Net programme. In addition to designing the public works programme the EIIP, through ASIST-AP, provided a broad range of support to the overall development of the rural areas which extended beyond its usual role in supporting infrastructure creation and employment, and included education and health services, and community support with an overall social security focus.

Sources: Authors; Srivastava 1994;[15] Hoye 2001;[16] Wenk 2002.[17]

An important distinction between the work of the other agencies and the PWP which the ILO was implementing or supporting during this period, was the extent to which labour standards were mainstreamed in implementation. This became of particular interest with the increased involvement of private contractors in rural works and required the development of labour conditions that complied with international labour standards yet were suitable for this context. Specialists in Harare and the ASIST team collaborated in addressing this issue.

Studies were carried out in selected countries including Namibia and Zambia, and projects including the rural road works in Ovamboland, Namibia, were used to develop the guidelines for mainstreaming fair labour conditions in rural infrastructure works. These guidelines were presented at the Second Regional Seminar for Labour-Based Practitioners in Mohales Hoek, Lesotho, in 1992. This gave impetus to the development of more comprehensive guidance to national partners on international labour standards and labour conditions resulting in the *Employment – Intensive Infrastructure Programmes: Labour Policies and Practices* published in 1998, and better known as the "blue guide", which was to become the seminal document on labour conditions in PWPs.[18]

At this time, the EIIP also sought to institutionalize government adoption of employment-intensive investments and small contractor development by proposing the creation of Labour-based Investment Policy Units (LIPUs) in ministries with responsibility for public investment programmes. It was planned for these units to have steering committees with representatives from technical line ministries, planning and labour departments, and civil society, in order to promote collaboration. The aim was to ensure that infrastructure investment met both economic and social objectives and was compliant with basic labour standards in line with the recommendations of the green and blue guides. The goal of these units was to create national capacity on policy options and technology choices for employment-based investment. They were also tasked with preparing studies to inform advisers and decision-makers on labour-based approaches and on proposals to increase the share of public investment in infrastructure and construction allocated to labour-based programmes. Two of these policy units were established in Cambodia and Uganda. The initiative was not implemented more widely due in part to a lack of resources within the EIIP, but perhaps more critically, due to global processes which were at this time driving the opening of public markets to international competitive bidding, led by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and European Union-Africa,

Caribbean and Pacific (EU-ACP). This meant that EIIP recommendations for a large-scale transformation of government spending in favour of labour-intensive approaches were increasingly at odds with the policy preferences of more powerful international organizations.

By the end the century under the EIIP, the ILO's engagement on PWPs had extended to include issues that went significantly beyond technical assistance for labour-intensive works. They encompassed a wide range of associated development issues including: gender; environmental rehabilitation; employment conditions; occupational safety and health; community contracting; sustainable asset management; decentralization; contractor development; contracts management; and environmental safeguards. These complementary programming areas are elaborated in box 15.

The EIIP was initially developed to support research into labour-intensive technology. It had incrementally extended its support into these complementary areas in order to improve PWP performance and the adoption of employment-intensive methods. In so doing, it had become a significant actor in a range of development policy and programming areas. Also, during the 1990s, it had maintained a significant and expanding portfolio of PWP activity, which incorporated ongoing support to country-level programming with an extensive programme of technical assistance and guidance, innovative country-level programming and policy engagement.

▶Box 15. Complementary programming areas under the EIIP, 1990s

Construction of urban drainage works as part of the Hanna Nassif Community Upgrading Project in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, late 1990s (Credit: Unknown)

Road maintenance

An emphasis on road maintenance was adopted as the inadequate maintenance of rural roads was found to be a pervasive problem which resulted in rapid deterioration, financial inefficiencies and the risk that access gains achieved through programme implementation would not be sustained. Road maintenance also created opportunities for inherently labour-intensive activity.

Decentralization and local government capacity

Local government capacity was identified as a key determinant of the successful implementation of labour-based rural road programmes. Training programmes on core technical, financial and managerial issues were developed, building on the success of the programme at the Kisii Training Centre in Kenya. Support was also given to institutions to manage the decentralization process taking place in many countries at this time.

Rural access and transport planning

The promotion of Integrated Rural Accessibility Planning (IRAP) – a planning system based on household transport needs – was identified as a means to address the limited access to health, education, markets and other basic services by rural populations following the publication of *Roads are Not Enough* in 1993. IRAP project work was undertaken in a number of countries and training modules were developed and integrated into regional planning at university level. Although recognized as critical, rural transport was perceived to be outside the remit of the EMP/INFRA and so, in 1995, EMP/INFRA worked with donors to create an independent international body focused on rural transport issues in developing countries, the International Forum for Rural Transport and Development (IFRTD).

Small contractor development

The move away from government ("force account") implementation of infrastructure works to private sector implementation during the 1980s resulted in the initiation of a programme to support the development of small contractors. This programme was used to inform the production of the 1999 EIIP *Guidelines for Capacity Building for Contracting in the Construction Sector*, or the "green guide", which contributed to rethinking the role of the state in relation to private contractors and workers, and the development of small- and medium-sized private sector actors specialized in employment-intensive construction. An updated version of the green guide was published in 2019.

Promoting good labour practices

EIIP engagement in improving conditions of work was first formalized in the Guide for Special Public Works Programmes from 1977. In the 1990s, as its engagement with small-scale contractors increased, the EIIP became increasingly concerned to ensure that contracts met labour standards and developed the 1998 EIIP *Guide on Good Labour Policies and Practices in Employment-intensive Programmes.* This publication, known as the "blue guide" deals with issues relating to recruitment, wage setting, remuneration, wage protection, attendance, labour regulations, motivation and discipline.

Sources: Authors; Taigman and de Veen 1998;[19] ILO 2019;[20] Edmonds 2019 (personal communication).

Two key events took place during this decade which eventually created space for increased engagement in PWPs in the next decade. These were the 1995 UN World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) and the initiation of the ILO's *World Employment Report*. The World Summit highlighted the challenges of poverty, unemployment and social integration, and the adverse impacts of the policies of structural adjustment, including economic stagnation and growing poverty. In response to these challenges, the outcome document endorsed the goal of full, productive and freely chosen employment, reflecting the language of ILO Convention No. 122 of 30 years earlier. It highlighted the critical role of employment in addressing poverty,[21] opening once again the international space for a more interventionist approach to employment promotion among the international agencies and giving the ILO the mandate to support work on the realization of this international commitment.

The *World Employment Report* reinforced this resurgent global concern with employment, creating an empirically based narrative which documented the failure of growth to deliver adequate employment, and the chronic and structural nature of the challenge this represented.

Endnotes

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2 Gerry Rodgers et al., 2009, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919–2009* (ILO).

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4 Terje Tessem, "EIIP Global Team Notes" (unpublished).

5 The *Construction Technology Papers* published between 1992 and 2008 were a diverse set of publications which included the proceedings from the regional seminars as well as a wide range of topics related to employment-intensive construction methods and approaches of which only a selection is available online. The *Rural Accessibility Technical Papers* published between 1999 and 2006 focused on rural accessibility and experiences with the use of IRAP, while the *Socio-Economic Technical Papers* (1998–2007) focused on the socio-economic impacts of using EIIP approaches.

6 Most of this material is available online on the ASISTDOC Database which was developed as part of the programme. ASIST – Bibliographic Database, accessed 7 July 2021.

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20 ILO, 2019, *Developing the construction industry for employment-intensive infrastructure investments.*

21 Rodgers et al., 2009.

Construction of contour ditches to reduce erosion and runoff in Gonaives, Haiti as part of rehabilitation works after hurricane Jeanne, 2005 (Credit: ILO)

9

9. EIIP in the new millennium

While the UN World Summit for Social Development did not immediately or directly stimulate increased ILO investment in EIIP and the PWP, it did lead to the promulgation of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda in 1999. Juan Somavia, who had chaired the WSSD and became Director-General of the ILO in 1998, was instrumental in the introduction of the Decent Work Agenda which argued that "the primary purpose of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity".[1] Adoption of the Decent Work Agenda brought inequality back to the forefront of the ILO's mission, positioning employment creation once again as a key strategic objective, alongside rights at work, social protection and social dialogue. The Decent Work Agenda provided an updated articulation of the historical ILO concern with employment creation, and the EIIP positioned employment-intensive investment as a key mechanism to achieve this. It was endorsed by the follow up to the WSSD, (Social Summit +5) in 2000, which "called on the ILO to develop a coherent and coordinated international strategy on employment",[2] echoing the aspirations of the ILO some 70 years previously.

For the EIIP, the adoption of the Decent Work Agenda represented a major opportunity to mainstream its extensive work on good labour practices and fair conditions of work, as captured in the blue guide[3] and also increasingly recognized by other UN agencies.

The increased global focus on employment creation increased EIIP's profile within the ILO. The Programme had also been increasingly involved in post-disaster and post-conflict situations in the 1990s and engaged in work on inter-agency coordination of post-disaster and conflict response and management.[4] During this time, the EIIP had worked in close collaboration with the ILO Programme on Crisis Response. This resulted in two important EIIP programmes in development and disaster contexts in Indonesia and Haiti (box 16).

▶Box 16. EIIP Disaster Response activities – Indonesia and Haiti, 2004

Schoolchildren in Aceh, Indonesia, crossing a pedestrian bridge built as part of the Aceh Nias project after the 2004 earthquake and tsunami (Credit: ILO)

The EIIP was at the forefront of the UN's early recovery and reconstruction efforts agencies in response to the massive earthquake off the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia and subsequent tsunami in December 2004.[5] The EIIP was mandated by the World Bank to manage 25 per cent of the joint funds made available for the reconstruction work, with responsibility for work with regional and district authorities and capacity building. The major activities undertaken as part of this intervention included: the planning and implementation of infrastructure works including housing, water and sanitation, and access roads; and using small-scale and community-based contractors to respond across the different areas of Indonesia hit by the earthquake and the tsunami. The project was implemented from 2006–2012 of and included a major, demand-driven, capacity-building component, focusing on active community involvement and the inclusion of women. With a vision of longer term sustainability, the project extended the capacity of district governments and small contractors to adopt and undertake employment-intensive road works.

In Aceh, in addition to the jobs created directly in the PWPs, the project also developed tools and capacity for planning, budgeting, and programming for road infrastructure investment at district level, providing a road management information system with related Geographic Information System (GIS) tools, a five-year road master plan, and community-based road routine maintenance guidelines.

Around the same time in 2004 hurricane Jeanne made landfall in Haiti and caused enormous damage. In its aftermath, ILO, UNDP, and WFP worked closely with the Government of Haiti to develop a job creation programme in Gonaives, a town severely impacted by the hurricane. This programme focused on restoring the watershed to reduce erosion and increase its resilience to future storms, and promoting local employment, local capacity building and social organization, as well as preserving the livelihoods of future generations by restoring a natural resource base through employment-intensive approaches to maximize income for the local population. It also supported the establishment of local associations which were part of the implementation and could continue such work after completion of the project. The project demonstrated the relevance of community contracting for environmental protection and the prevention of further deterioration of water catchments through local-level schemes. The impacts of the intervention have lasted up until today, with many of the local associations established under the project still in existence. It demonstrated how an emergency response project with a longer term vision, can have long-term impacts by investing in local capacity.

Sources: Authors; ILO 2005.[6]

From 2001 to 2007, the EIIP carried out similar types of post-disaster interventions that extended beyond the immediate emergency to create capacity and build sustainable and locally owned assets in Nicaragua in the aftermath of hurricane Mitch, and from 2005 to 2008 in Guatemala following hurricane Stan. The EIIP was also active in post-conflict contexts, including Timor-Leste, where a short-term EIIP employment programme became a conduit for the emergency food aid distribution soon after independence in 2002. The EIIP support to the country has since gone through many stages and has become the single largest technical assistance project that the ILO has ever implemented, contributing to nation building through the promotion of participatory planning and strategy development, capacity building and training with both public and private sectors (box 17).

▶Box 17. Nation building through constructing roads and strengthening local institutions - Timor Leste

Construction of a concrete road in Timor Leste (Credit: ILO)

Timor Leste was left devastated by guerrilla warfare following a period of over two decades of Indonesian occupation (1975–1999) before achieving independence in 2002. In 2006, civil unrest in the capital city resulted in looting, and the burning of houses, shops, government offices and the camps in which a large number of internally displaced persons had settled. The government initially responded by distributing rice to affected households but, based on some initial assessments of introducing EIIP approaches, the ILO proposed using Cash for Work projects as an alternative method of support. The CFW activities evolved over time into sustainable labour-based rural road works. In this way what had started as a series of EIIP technical cooperation projects to generate emergency employment, became the 2006 Work for the Nation Project to promote nation-building by providing employment to IDPs and other vulnerable members of society, particularly unemployed youth. A successor Work for Peace project was developed in 2007,

in recognition of the continued importance of promoting stability through work while tensions remained high.

With 50 per cent of the population of the country under 20-years old, the promotion of youth employment was identified as a priority for continued stability, peace and development. In response, the EIIP also supported the development, and implementation of the Government's Youth Employment Programme in 2008, which included a youth targeted employment-intensive public works component. The EIIP also linked employment to investments through the TIM Works project (Investment Budget Execution Support for Rural Infrastructure Development and Employment Generation). With non-oil GDP stagnating in the mid-2000s, the EIIP strategy was to increase sustainable employment in the infrastructure sector. The project which ran until January 2010, supported an employment-intensive approach in road sector investment and illustrated the potential to create significant additional jobs through an employment-intensive approach. Subsequently, two additional major EIIP rural road development programmes started in Timor Leste – the Enhancing Rural Access (ERA) project funded by the EU, and the Roads for Development (R4D) project funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Following their initial success, both programmes were renewed for a second phase until 2021.

While starting as Cash for Work and emergency reconstruction projects, the ILO projects in Timor-Leste developed sustainable employment models by mainstreaming and capacity building employment-intensive approaches for rural road planning, construction, improvement and maintenance into government departments and institutions. These projects also supported communities and construction businesses by collaborating with a range of agencies, including the Secretary of State for Professional Training and Employment, Community Training Centres, sectoral ministries as well as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Sources: Authors; ASIST Asia-Pacific Team 2004;[7] ILO 2019.[8]

Similar EIIP projects, of varying scales, were implemented in a number of countries facing natural disasters and conflicts. These include Madagascar where rural roads and peri-urban development programmes, and the ongoing Education for All school-building programme were implemented, the latter in collaboration with UNICEF. Other countries where the EIIP implemented sizable crisis related interventions during this period include Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique and Somalia.

The range of contexts in which these programmes were implemented illustrates the scale of dissemination of the employment intensive PWP model across the globe in the last 20 years. However, EIIP interventions during this period were not limited to crisis response. The Programme also engaged closely with the World Bank on employment promotion and the mainstreaming of public employment within social funds, shaping the approach adopted in these interventions internationally. This included large-scale ILO assistance to the Egypt Social Fund for Development in the early 2000s, drawing on core areas of EIIP institutional expertise relating to innovative pro-employment technologies, capacity building and local economic development.

At this time, the EIIP faced increasing demands for support from countries that were adopting PWPs as a response to the growing problem of widespread under- and un-employment, and the realization that, as currently configured, economic growth would not provide adequate employment to absorb the growing labour force. The EIIP provided technical inputs and facilitated peer learning among two seminal large-scale pro-employment PWPs being developed by member governments during this period in South Africa and India. These programmes were reminiscent in their vision, of the large-scale nationally driven and implemented employment programmes designed to address systemic labour market failures that had been initiated in the 1920s and 1930s.

The EIIP had been supporting South Africa since the advent of democracy in 1994. The ILO supported the National Economic Forum[9] processes that explored potential solutions to the triple challenge of unemployment, inequality and poverty, which predominantly affected historically disadvantaged groups. The ILO was also involved in the promotion of labour-based programmes, the development of associated technical and managerial capacity, and in supporting social safeguarding in programme implementation. This included the development and adoption by the social partners of the *Code of Good Practice for Employment and Conditions of Work in Special Public Works Programmes*.[10] The ILO, with financing from DfiD,

also supported the implementation of the *Gundo Lashu*[11] programme, a labour-based contractor development programme in the Limpopo province. The programme demonstrated the viability of such an approach in South Africa and contributed directly to the development of a large-scale national public works programme, the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), launched in 2004 as a key component of the government's national poverty reduction and growth strategy. It is now in its fourth five-year phase with a target of creating five million job opportunities over the 2019–2024 period.

The EIIP also had a long history of engagement with the Government of India on PWPs, having provided inputs as early as 1981 on various aspects of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme including the development of methodologies for participatory planning and selection of employment intensive environmental works. It also provided technical assistance during the development of the unprecedented mass national employment programme, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), developing guidelines for State-level implementation of MGNREGA schemes focusing on participatory planning of water conservation and harvesting, and flood control and protection works, using employment-intensive work methods. The MGNREGA was initiated in 2005 and continues to be the largest employment guarantee programme in the world, providing employment to an average of 55 million workers each year on the basis of a legislated commitment to the right to work.

During the first decade of the new millennium, the EIIP continued to document its accumulated labour-based programming experience in order to provide resources in response to the growing interest in PWPs among Member States and donor agencies, and its expanding engagement in institutional support and national capacity building. The ASIST programmes in Africa and the Asia Pacific produced guidelines that drew on their extensive database of literature on employment-intensive works for the planning, financing, design, construction and maintenance of rural roads. These included: *Building Local Government Capacity for Rural Infrastructure Works* in 2003;[12] *Rural Road Maintenance: Sustaining the Benefits of Improved Access* in 2007;[13] and *Building Rural Roads* in 2008.[14] EIIP knowledge and literature was also disseminated through the World Road Association (PIARC),[15] and played a leading role in the Technical Committee on Accessibility and Mobility in Rural Areas.

Furthermore, the EIIP significantly developed its urban programming activity, adapting its approaches to accommodate urban works, including low-income urban settlements, and implementing projects to provide not

only access but also other services including water supply, sanitation and waste management in unplanned settlements. This led to the development of urban community contracting and procurement approaches by ASIST Africa, which were subsequently captured in new guidelines and international training courses, notably *Sustainable community-managed and labour-based upgrading of urban low-income settlements*[16] *and Community contracts in urban infrastructure works. Practical lesson from experience*.[17]

In order to quantify the additional employment impact of the labour-intensive approaches it promoted, the EIIP carried out a number of comparative studies of labour-based and equipment-based technology between 1995 and 2003, including studies in Cambodia, Lesotho, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe.[18] The studies provided data and insights into the employment and economic impacts of labour-based approaches in the construction sector and how they enhance local community livelihoods. They also identified the need to develop better tools to quantify the impacts of labour-based public investment programmes on employment and economic development. Neither the ILO's technical departments nor the Employment Department, which was dealing with national employment policy development, were working on this issue. At the same time, the first macroeconomic model (MADHIMO) to simulate such policy options was developed for Madagascar.[19]

In 2007, the EIIP initiated a work programme on Employment Impact Assessment (EmpIA) to address this critical monitoring gap. It attempted to capture and quantify the direct, indirect and induced employment effects of public investment in infrastructure and related sectors. Also, it was an opportune moment to engage in this area of work because it coincided with the 2008 financial crisis that made the need for this kind of evidence all the more critical to inform national policy choices. Subsequently, the EIIP carried out analytical work on fiscal stimulus packages in Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mozambique and the United States. They aimed to estimate and quantify the employment impact of anticipated infrastructure interventions to help advocate for the use of large infrastructure investments as a tool for countercyclical employment creation and macroeconomic stabilization.

The ILO focus on employment generation as a means to social justice and development which had been reinvigorated by the Decent Work Agenda was further endorsed in the ILO *Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization* of 2008.[20] The Declaration called for the promotion of decent work through a coordinated approach entailing four strategic objectives: employment, social protection, social dialogue, and fundamental principles and rights at work.

However, only a couple of months later, in September 2008, Lehman Brothers, one of the largest investment banks in the world, failed amidst an economic downturn. The resulting financial crisis spread rapidly to the rest of the world and led to the most serious recession since the Second World War and a global economic crisis. Consequently, the ILO had to reappraise the Declaration in relation to the changed economic environment and its impact on jobs and the world of work more generally. After a broad consultation process to gauge the impact of the global crisis, the ILO convened a summit on the global jobs crisis.

The need for a new organizational orientation was discussed at the 2009 ILO Global Jobs Summit which resulted in the adoption of the Global Jobs Pact (GJP) which highlighted the need to promote the Decent Work Agenda in response to the global economic downturn.[21] The GJP was designed to guide national and international policies to stimulate economic recovery, generate jobs and provide protection to working people and their families. These ideas were reminiscent of those put forward by the ILO in the 1930s in response to the great depression in terms of the need for direct state intervention to promote employment.

In line with the objective of "accelerating employment creation, jobs recovery and sustaining enterprises" the GJP called for national responses to the crisis, and proposed that governments should implement "public employment guarantee schemes for temporary employment, emergency public works programmes and other direct job creation schemes which are well targeted, and include the informal economy".[22]

The GJP also proposed that, in line with the goal of "building social protection systems and protecting people", the PWP should be adopted to play a role in developing social protection provision: "Countries should give consideration, as appropriate, to the following: [...] building adequate social protection for all, drawing on a basic social protection floor including: access to health care, income security for the elderly and persons with disabilities, child benefits and income security combined with public employment guarantee schemes for the unemployed and working poor."[23]

Hence with the GJP, ILO policy on PWP came full circle, with the recommendation that large-scale national public works should be implemented nationally as a core policy response to a global economic downturn. The GJP also introduced a critical new dimension to the ILO's position on the PWP, formally recommending that PWPs should play a role in the expansion of social protection provision.

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20 ILO, 2008, "ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization" adopted at the International Labour Conference at its 97th Session, Geneva, 10 June 2008.

21 ILO, 2009, "Recovering from the Crisis: A Global Jobs Pact" adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 98th Session, Geneva, 19 June 2009.

22 ILO, 2009.

23 ILO, 2009.

Shirley Alinsunurin was among the farmers trained and hired to apply the Sloping Agricultural Land Technology (SALT) as part of an EIIP project to support the recovery from typhoon Bopha in the Philippines, 2013 (Credit: M. Crozet)

10

10. The PWP as the ILO response to global issues in the 2010s: Crisis recovery, social protection, and the global environmental priorities

The global financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath had profound implications for the global development discourse, the UN, the ILO and ultimately also the EIIP. The impact of the crisis on employment was severe and long lasting, affecting the entire global economy and the scale of the crisis highlighted the need for a coordinated global response. The G20 stepped up to take on the lead role and, having supplied a response plan to the crisis through the Global Jobs Pact, outlined in chapter 9, the ILO was co-opted into the G20 process to develop responses to the global employment crisis. The ILO was associated with the Employment Working Group and the Development Working Group, mandated to address the international dimensions of the growing unemployment challenge. The development of the GJP meant that the ILO was well positioned to respond to the financial crisis and share, once again, its long-established experience in large-scale PWP implementation, using infrastructure investment to create employment and stimulate demand,

Despite the shift in previous decades away from government intervention, the main coordinated response agreed by the G20 was to implement large-scale stimulus packages, including large infrastructure investments.

In terms of the absolute size of the investments, the United States led the way, with a $800 billion stimulus package, (over 5 per cent of GDP) and half of G20 countries invested over 4 per cent of GDP[1] indicating a return to more interventionist government economic policies as an instrument for crisis response.

As well as being supported by the G20, the GJP was also endorsed by the IMF at the ILO/IMF joint conference on The Challenges of Growth, Employment and Social Cohesion in 2010. This also resulted in the World Bank establishing the Rapid Social Response Fund (RSF),[2] which went on to finance many public works-based social protection interventions. In this way, the GJP helped to revive interest in PWPs, both as countercyclical demand stimulus interventions to revive growth, and as programmes to provide targeted employment to quell social and political unrest, particularly among youth.

These new developments provided a strong impetus for the ILO to extend its EmpIA work on the employment impact of investment in infrastructure and other public investments. Both national governments and their partners were eager to better understand the employment effects of the various stimulus packages initiated after the financial crisis, and the ILO carried out work on the employment impacts of stimulus packages and infrastructure investments in Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mozambique, South Africa and the United States. In addition, new partners collaborated in the endeavour, including the European Investment Bank (EIB) who undertook a joint study with the ILO in 2014. The study appraised the employment impact of selected investments in order to develop practical recommendations for improving the employment impact of future EIB infrastructure projects, in terms of both the quantity and quality of jobs created. The study focused on transport, energy and environmental infrastructure development in four Mediterranean partner countries, namely Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. Similar EmpIA assessments were carried out for the World Bank on their projects in Jordan and Lebanon. Similarly, the EU requested and financed capacity building for sectoral EmpIA with national institutions and EU delegations in Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Rwanda, Guatemala and Honduras as part of the Strengthen project.[3]

Prior to the crisis, the EIIP had already been developing a series of new working papers and capacity-building material to meet the growing interest in the use of PWPs for creating employment, extending their use in non-infrastructure sectors and updating policy and thinking in

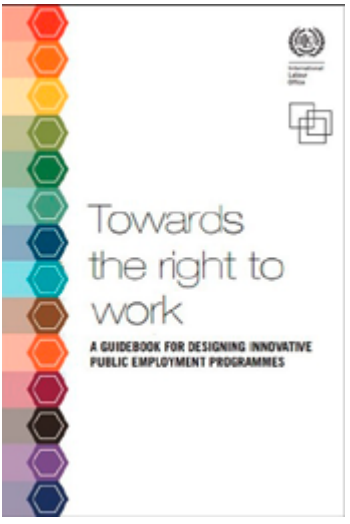
response to the changing challenges of the 21st century. In 2009, the ILO participated in a Conference at the Levy Economics Institute in the United States on employment guarantee policies, building on the experience of large-scale programmes such as the MGNREGA in India, the EPWP in South Africa and the *Jefes y Jefas de Hogar* programme in Argentina. The conference articulated how this new generation of programmes could be used in response to the global crisis and also as instruments for achieving full employment more widely, in line with the arguments put forward in Convention No. 122.

Building on these discussions, the ILO introduced the term Public Employment Programmes (PEPs) to refer to government-financed programmes which had employment creation as its primary purpose, an activity which was becoming increasingly topical in the wake of the crisis. The term was adopted to differentiate these activities from public investment programmes in which asset creation was the primary objective. It was also introduced to emphasize the focus on employment creation across other sectors, extending beyond infrastructure with which the term PWP was generally associated. This extended conceptualization was further developed in two publications which were produced in the wake of the financial crisis: *Towards the right to work: Innovations in public employment programmes*[4] and a new training guide *Towards the right to work: A guidebook for designing innovative public employment programmes*.[5] These publications captured recent global experiences with PEPs, including from Ethiopia, India and South Africa. They built on four decades of EIIP research and experience, drawing out lessons for the post-crisis environment, exploring their contribution and role in social protection and presenting PWP in the context of a right to work. The guide provided comprehensive technical advice to policy-makers and planners in government and development agencies on multiple aspects of PEP design and implementation, outlining the potential for labour absorption beyond the infrastructure sector (box 18). It has been used as the basis of an annual ILO international training course and technical assistance to PEP design and enhancement in Egypt, Greece, India, Lebanon, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania and Viet Nam.

▶Box 18. Towards the right to work: A guidebook for designing innovative public employment programmes

Participants of a training course based on the Guidebook held in Cape Town, South Africa. (Credit: Unknown)

The Towards the right to work guidebook was published by the EIIP in 2012. It contains a series of 15 "guidance notes" summarizing EIIP's experience and learning across a range of issues, gained over the last four decades of operations. It forms the core of an international course, developed with support from the ILO's International Training Centre in Turin (ITC-ILO), for policy-makers, social actors, planners, officials and development agency staff designing innovative public employment programmes.



These guidance notes cover the following:

1	Analysing unemployment and underemployment
2	The spectrum of public employment programmes (PEPs)
3	Creating fiscal space for PEPs
4	Cost structures and funding flows in PEPs
5	Setting the appropriate wage rate in PEPs
6	Targeting strategies and mechanisms in PEPs
6.1	Introducing youth employment into PEPs
6.2	Ensuring gender equity in PEPs
7.1	PEPs and Labour-intensive infrastructure works
7.2	PEPs and the Social sector: Tackling social Challenges
7.3	PEPs and urban works
7.4	PEPs and green jobs through green works
8	Social partners and social processes in PEPs
9	Public employment programmes and decent work
10	Innovation in tackling the risks of corruption in PEPs
11	Design of institutional frameworks for PEPs
12	Training and capacity development in PEPs
13	Graduation and exits from PEPs
14	Designing monitoring and evaluation systems in PEPs
14.1	Innovations in payment systems: Efficiency, accountability and financial inclusion
15	Impact of PEPs

Source: ILO 2012c.[6]

Another line of work over this period was to strengthen research and improve guidance on to make EIIP activities more gender responsive. While such efforts were already part of EIIP's work the *Illustrated guidelines for gender-responsive employment intensive investment programmes*[7] consolidated learning and evidence from 43 projects in 27 countries to highlight how the EIIP project cycle has entry points where gender equality can be promoted. Such entry points included: ensuring that women can participate in, and meaningfully contribute to the planning and implementation of rural infrastructure; engaging women in planning processes; and ensuring that they can also benefit from the employment offered. Enabling women to take up employment also requires specific measures depending on local customs and culture. Measures such as

equal pay for work of equal value, child care, setting quotas, making works available close to home, flexible working hours and options for part-time work were all found to enhance women's participation and are considered in EIIP project design.

10.1 The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In 2015, the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its accompanying 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goals represented an important shift, in that they recognize the interconnected nature of the world at the start of the 21st century and are a call for action to all developed and developing countries. The Agenda also explicitly recognizes that the 17 goals are interdependent and integrated and cannot be achieved in isolation, paving the way for policies that are able to integrate and combine, economic, social and environmental objectives such as PWPs.

SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 1 which includes the expansion of social protection are central to the ILO. PWPs can have an important role in contributing to them and, in particular, target 8.5: "By 2030 achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all men and women, including young people and persons with disabilities and equal pay for work of equal value, as well as target 1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable."

At the same time, the assets and services PWPs provide will also contribute to many of the other SDGs related to clean water, infrastructure, sustainable cities and communities, climate action and life on land.[8]

In the decade following the financial crisis, the EIIP's PWP work coalesced around four major areas: crisis response, recovery and reconstruction; the provision of ongoing technical assistance for the planning, implementation and monitoring of employment intensive programmes; the adaptation to climate change; and the extension of social protection. Two of these areas, crisis response and technical assistance, were an established part of the ILO's PWP work. But climate change and social protection, were new to the EIIP, reflecting developments in the geopolitical and environmental context. The EIIP's focus once again expanded to include the explicit

welfare and income security concerns, which had driven early programme development.[9]

10.2 Crisis response including focusing on refugees

In 2016, the UN convened the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit in response to what the UN described as "the highest level of human suffering since the Second World War"[10] with the objective of fundamentally reforming the humanitarian aid industry in recognition of the "mounting complexity of crisis response and the intertwining between humanitarian needs, development and conflict prevention".[11] The purpose of the summit was to generate commitments from UN Member States, the UN and international organizations, development banks, local and international NGOs, and the private sector to reduce suffering and deliver better for people caught in humanitarian crises. The result was an action agenda, the Agenda for Humanity[12] and an agreement known as the Grand Bargain Initiative between the major humanitarian donors and aid providers to ensure more resources were delivered into the hands of people in need.

The Agenda for Humanity included recommendations to improve the humanitarian development nexus, all of which were core to the approach the EIIP had developed over previous decades in its crisis response programming. These included: reinforcing rather than replacing national and local systems; being inclusive in decision-making; investing in local capacities; putting people at the centre; and building community resilience.

This new international context and orientation increased the demand for EIIP engagement in humanitarian and crisis response work, extending the use of the EIIP approaches in emergency reconstruction as well as work with refugees and host communities, in these contexts. These activities informed and were, in turn, also reinforced through the ILO Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205).

EIIP support to the planning and implementation of PWPs in the post-financial crisis period was particularly important in the Middle East (Jordan and Lebanon) and North Africa (Egypt and Tunisia), where it played a role in the recovery in the region following the social and economic

disruptions resulting from the Arab Spring. This included the construction of a market place in Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia where the Jasmine Revolution had started sparked by lack of opportunities for local vendors to sell their goods and produce.[13] The EIIP programme in Tunisia went on to provide capacity building for the decentralization of investment and development planning in 90 newly established communes. This included the promotion of local decision-making on investments and building community and private sector capacity for the implementation of an extensive range of infrastructure and service delivery programmes.[14]

Support to Egypt took a somewhat different form as the government already had significant PWP experience from the establishment of the Social Fund for Development in 1991 which had implemented such programmes since then and was already collaborating with the EIIP on developing responses to the financial crisis (box 19).

After the January 2011 revolution, additional interventions to promote employment were introduced including a further economic stimulus package. The Ministry of Planning approached the ILO to conduct an employment impact assessment of its national Urgent Plan to activate the Egyptian economy in 2013–2014. The ILO also supported the World Bank in the development of a large-scale PWP called the Emergency Labour Intensive Investment Project and financed with a $200 million loan. The project provided employment for the poor through labour-intensive works implemented at governorate and community level to create and maintain local social and economic assets. The ILO also provided a customized training package for the implementers of the Social Fund for Development, based on the newly developed PEP materials and supported the expansion of the project into social and environmental-related activities.

▶Box 19. Emergency employment: EIIP work with refugees in the Middle East, 2010s

Workers building storm water drains in the town of Mazboud in the Chouf district in the Mount Lebanon area, under the Employment Intensive Infrastructure Programme in Lebanon (EIIP) (Credit: ILO)

In 2013, the ILO launched a programme to support Syrian refugees and host communities in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The aim of the programme was to support governments in creating immediate job opportunities for both Syrian refugees and members of their host communities, while also improving local infrastructure and the environment. These interventions were aligned with the UN Regional Refugee Response and Resilience Plan (3RP) for Syria and were supported by the EIIP in Jordan and Lebanon.

As part of this response, EIIP started activities in Jordan, with funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), through the German Development Bank (KfW). The programme focused on improving livelihoods by providing Cash for Work opportunities for thousands of vulnerable Jordanian citizens as well as Syrian refugees. Jordanian and Syrian women and men contributed to the improvement of local infrastructure focusing on the maintenance and cleaning of roads and highways, and municipal buildings and facilities.

The project has played a critical role in facilitating access to decent short-term job opportunities and helped enhance overall employability. Implemented in close collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works and Housing and the Ministry of Local Administration, and previously with the Ministry of Agriculture, the project has ensured that the beneficiaries include 50 per cent Jordanians and 50 per cent Syrians, with 20 per cent being women and 3 per cent persons with disabilities.

In Lebanon, the EIIP strategy was introduced in 2016 with the development of a project to create short- to medium-term employment opportunities for Lebanese host community members and Syrian refugees through infrastructure works. EIIP Lebanon is also funded by the Government of Germany through the KfW and the first Financing Agreement was signed in December 2016. The project is in its third phase of implementation, which will last until June 2021. The ILO is currently negotiating a fourth phase.

Project implementation started in January 2017 in the most vulnerable municipalities hosting the most deprived Lebanese and refugees, covering all governorates of the country. Labour-intensive infrastructure interventions include the rehabilitation of agricultural roads, construction of markets and irrigation networks, and the maintenance and spot improvement of secondary roads. The infrastructure measures are complemented by trainings on employment-intensive methods for contractors and capacity building for public institutions and communities, which include the principles of Decent Work and Gender Mainstreaming. Institutional support includes the development of operational guidelines and working with the Ministry of Labour to promote the development of simplified work permit procedures for Syrian refugees allowing them to legally and formally take up employment.

Sources: Authors; EIIP website.[15]

10.3 Technical assistance

Alongside the expansion of crisis response activities, the EIIP has continued to support the implementation of major infrastructure investment programmes, drawing on the range of PWP expertise that the ILO has development over time. Building on its relationship with the World Bank, the EIIP began supporting India's Prime Minister's Rural Road Programme (PMGSY) in 2013, the world's largest rural road programme. The EIIP provided organizational and managerial capacity building to monitor financing incentives from federal to state level. It also supported the introduction of a new rural road maintenance system using labour-intensive approaches. This included the provision of capacity building through the development of training modules for contractors and field engineers, and the promotion of community contracting maintenance approaches.

In 2015, the ILO also contributed training material for MGNREGA's innovative "barefoot technicians", a new cadre of field supervisory staff introduced to promote the quality and sustainability of PWP infrastructure. Similarly, between 2014 and 2019, EIIP provided technical assistance to the national Strengthening the National Rural Transport Programme (SNRTP) in Nepal. Its objective was to create employment while also improving rural access. Besides upgrading and maintaining the existing rural road system through regular maintenance, the Programme also employed a predominantly female workforce, and promoted occupational health and safety.

10.4 Social protection

Public works programmes have been used as a form of social protection to provide support to those unable to find work for centuries, as outlined in chapter 1. Many of the programmes supported by the ILO since the 1920s have been developed with welfare objectives. In 2012, PWPs were included as one of the instruments identified to provide income security for people of working age in ILO Recommendation No. 202, which was then adopted by the UN system under the Social Protection Floors (SPF) initiative.

The SPF involved a global coalition of UN agencies, international NGOs, development banks, bilateral organizations and other development partners which backed the extension of social protection provision beyond the small minority of people in developing countries who were covered by either contributory programmes, or the limited national social assistance programmes.

The SPF promoted the progressive realization of nationally defined social protection systems to alleviate poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion, through the development of national systems that provided income security for children, the working age poor, the elderly and the disabled .[16]

It was proposed that SPFs would use a combination of instruments including social assistance, contributory social insurance and public works programmes to provide income security for poor people of working age. In order to contribute to the SPF, social protection instruments were required to provide support that was regular, reliable, and available as required. This highlighted the challenge of accommodating both social protection and employment/growth objectives within a single PWP, stimulating an international dialogue around the implications for PWP design which the ILO took a key role in facilitating.[17]

The SPF resulted in increased collaboration between the key international agencies involved in PWP activity, including members of the Social Protection Inter-Agency Board (SPIAC-B).[18] The EIIP took a lead role in bringing together the key international actors working on PWPs at this time into a "community of practice" to explore how PWPs could contribute to the SPF and promote agency collaboration.

The ILO, through the EIIP, also worked in the 2010s to improve donor and UN coordination around PWP design and implementation as part of social protection systems by supporting the SPIAC-B Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessments (ISPA) initiative (box 20). Under ISPA, the ILO worked to promote inter-agency collaboration and harmonize programming. It also worked to mitigate institutional and ideological tensions in PWP programming approaches that had emerged in previous decades between the main agencies active in the sector.[19]

This work to promote joint programming to increase effectiveness, institutional efficiencies around PWP implementation echoes the brokering role the ILO attempted to play in relation to PWP activity in the 1930s, and the goals of the Uniform Plan.

The explicit inclusion of extended social protection provision and the SPF approach in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 further highlighted the social protection role of PWPs. SDG 1.3 called for all countries to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems for all, in order to attain the SDG 1 target, "end poverty in all its forms everywhere".[22] This further increased the demand for the ILO's PWP technical inputs in

programme design and also promoted collaboration between the EIIP and the ILO's Social Protection Department (SOCPRO).

▶Box 20. Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessments (ISPA) Social Protection Public Works Tool

Beneficiary of the Productive Safety Net Programme in Tanzania trained on improved rice growing practices in Zanzibar, of the improvements identified as part of the ISP assessment and included in the ILO technical support to the programme, 2019 (Credit: Barnabas Jachi)

From 2013, the EIIP played a key role in developing, trialling and promoting an instrument to develop a unified set of definitions, assessment methods, implementation arrangements and indicators to support the design and appraisal of PWPs as part of social protection systems. The resulting ISPA Social Protection Public Works Programmes tool was intended to generate consistent information on the design and potential impact of PWPs in terms of their contribution to social protection in a given country, which can be used for national analysis and cross-country comparison.

The tool is one of a wider set of instruments that were developed to support harmonized inter-agency appraisal and design of social protection provision and, thereby, to improve social protection performance. It is part of a multilateral initiative that builds on existing work by the ILO, World Bank and other UN and development actors supporting PWP activity.

Sources: Authors; ISPA 2021.[21]

10.5 Responding to climate change and increasing environmental concerns

The increasingly evident consequences of environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change have elevated environmental concerns within the global development agenda since the Rio conference in 1992, but it was the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change that brought them centre stage highlighting the need for enormous investments in climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. This had important implications for the future of public works programming and provided a framework for increased demand for "green" PWP activity as a tool for the creation of climate resilient infrastructure and the restoration of ecosystems.

In response, the EIIP reviewed its activities in selected key areas relating to climate change adaptation and the promotion of environmental sustainability including reforestation, water management and flood protection, and combating desertification. This period also saw a significant increase in the recognition of global environmental concerns and their incorporation into ILO PWP activity.

In collaboration with the Regional Office for Asia, the EIIP produced the publication *Local investments for climate change adaptation. Green jobs through green works in 2011*.[20] It describes how infrastructure development will play a major part in climate change adaptation and highlights the need for additional investments in infrastructure to help affected communities to mitigate its impacts. The publication underscores the need for rural infrastructure to be built to higher standards using improved designs to better withstand the local impacts of climate change. It identifies strategies to create decent employment through investment programmes that have direct environmental benefits or respond to specific climate change risks or hazards and refers to these as "Green Works".

In 2011, the EIIP published T*owards an ILO approach to climate change adaptation*,[21] which explores the implications of climate change for the world of work and the role of the ILO in supporting adaptation through the Decent Work Agenda, including public works programming. This publication identifies the need for further development of employment

and social protection measures that support Member States in "climate proofing" the world of work.

The EIIP also engaged under the framework of the Fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2018 where the Declaration on Investing in Biodiversity for People and Planet[22] was adopted and the importance of strengthening "ecosystem-based approaches to achieve climate change mitigation and adaptation and disaster risk-reduction, and to combat land degradation, while simultaneously contributing to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity;" was reiterated. To further support this line of work the EIIP also contributed to the development of the *Voluntary Guidelines for the Design and Effective Implementation of Ecosystem-Based Approaches to Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction*[23] which were adopted at the 14th meeting of the COP and includes PWPs as an instrument for implementing ecosystem-based approaches.

This new area of work within the ILO is in line with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which provided the framework for increased demand for "green" PWP activity as a tool for the creation of infrastructure and the restoration of ecosystems. It also aligned the ILO's work with the related objective of addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation through PWPs as part of the Shock Responsive Social Protection (SRSP) discourse which also emerged at this time.[24]

In the first decade of the millennium, the development agenda evolved significantly, and ILO's work on PWPs shifted accordingly, sharpening its focus on social protection, climate change and humanitarian responses. It provided both technical assistance and guidelines to support Member States in their endeavours, increased inter-agency collaboration and attempted to promote harmonized programming in the sector. The SPF, the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement all served to place employment creation through public investment centre stage, thereby highlighting the role of PWPs globally. Each of these international initiatives explicitly or implicitly identified future potential roles for PWPs, in terms of employment creation, macroeconomic and social stabilization, and as a contributor to social protection, rendering PWP programming perhaps more relevant and popular now than it has been for many decades.

Endnotes

1 ILO/IILS, 2011, "A review of global fiscal stimulus", European Commission-International Institute for Labour Studies EC-IILS, *Joint Discussion Paper Series*, No. 5.

2 The Rapid Social Response (RSR) Programme, launched in 2009, supports the world's poorest by building effective and adaptive social protection systems to respond to urgent social needs for sustainable livelihoods and jobs and includes many public works-based social safety net programmes. The RSR is supported by a Multi-Donor Trust Fund Partnership between Australia, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the World Bank. RSR Phase 1 (2009–2012) assisted low-income countries address urgent social needs stemming from the food, fuel, and financial crises. The ILO supported the design of the RSR.

3 ILO, 2014, "Strengthening the Impact on Employment of Sector and Trade Policies (STRENGTHEN)".

4 Maikel Lieuw-Kie-Song et al., 2010, "Towards the Right to Work: Innovations in Public Employment Programmes (IPEP)", ILO Employment Working Paper No. 69.

5 ILO, 2012c, *Towards the Right to Work: A Guidebook for Designing Innovative Public Employment Programmes*.

6 ILO, 2012c.

7 ILO, 2016, *Illustrated Guidelines for Gender-responsive Employment intensive Investment Programmes*.

8 UN, 2015, "The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

9 ILO, 2021, "International Labour Standards on Social Policy".

10 OECD, 2016, OECD at the World Humanitarian Summit, Istanbul, 23–24 May.

11 OECD, 2016.

12 UN, 2019? "Agenda for Humanity" (archived).

13 The Jasmine Revolution or Tunisian Revolution was an intensive 28-day campaign of civil resistance. It included a series of street demonstrations which took place in Tunisia and led to the ousting of long-time president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011. It was sparked off by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi on the Sidi Bouzid market. It eventually led to a thorough democratization of the country, and to free and democratic elections and inspired what was to become the Arab Spring.

14 This included: access roads and streets; irrigation; water supply and sanitation; public baths (hammam); water management and river training; land development and environmental protection; building and paving materials; communal buildings and market places; cultural heritage and monuments; and local economic development initiatives and tourism services.

15 ILO, 2021 "Employment intensive investment in countries".

16 ILO, 2021. "Social Protection Floor."

17 For an analysis of the challenges of using PWP for social protection provision, see: Anna McCord, 2012, *Public works and social protection in Southern Africa: Do public works work for the poor?* (New York, NY: UN University Press).

18 The Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board is a light, lean and agile inter-agency coordination mechanism – composed of representatives of international organizations and bilateral institutions – to enhance global coordination and advocacy on social protection issues and to coordinate international cooperation in country demand-driven actions. It is co-chaired by the ILO and the World Bank. See: ILO, "Social Protection Inter-agency Cooperation Board".

19 For an overview of the institutional and ideological challenges relating to social protection provision and competition between the Bretton Woods and UN agencies, see: Anna McCord, 2013, *The Public Pursuit of Secure Welfare: Background Paper on International Development Institutions, Social Protection and Developing Countries".*

20 ILO, 2011, "Local Investments for Climate Change Adaptation: Green Jobs Through Green Works".

21 Marek Harsdorff et al., 2011, "Towards an ILO Approach to Climate Change Adaptation", ILO Employment Working Paper No. 104.

22 UNEP, 2018, *Sharm el-Sheikh Declaration Investing in Biodiversity for People and Planet*, 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, 17–19 November 2018.

23 UNEP, 2018, *Voluntary Guidelines for the Design and Effective Implementation of Ecosystem-Based Approaches to Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction*, Convention on Biological Diversity Subsidiary Body on Scientific Technical and Technological Advice, Twenty-second Meeting, Montreal, Canada, 2–7 July.

24 Clare O'Brien et al., 2018, *Shock-responsive Social Protection Systems: Synthesis Report*, Oxford Policy Management Research Reports and Studies.

Working on a water reservoir to serve the town of Hamanna to the east of Beirut in Lebanon, under the Employment Intensive Infrastructure Programme in Lebanon (Credit: ILO)

11

11. Into the ILO's second century

Changes in the global context and the policy developments outlined in the previous chapter led the ILO to redefine its goals and strategy relating to PWPs. These were set out in the EIIP programme document *Creating jobs through public investment*, which defined the EIIP scope of activities thus:

> EIIP supports ILO member States in the design, formulation, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes aiming to address unemployment and underemployment through public investment, typically in infrastructure development. EIIP reinforces and builds institutional and operational capacity to provide productive and decent work that has an economic, environmental and social impact.[1]

It also identified six key thematic areas relating to the ILO's current PWP-related work: Employment Impact Assessments; Public Employment Programmes; Public and Private Sector Development; Green Works; Community and Local Resource-based Approaches; and Emergency Employment (figure 2). Work on these six thematic areas, summarized in Box 21, is carried out through four means of action, namely, policy advice, capacity development, implementation support and knowledge development.

▶Box 21. Current EIIP areas of work

Brochures on the key thematic areas of ILO's current PWP-related work (Credit: ILO)

Employment impact assessments (EmpIAs)
The employment potential and impact of public policies and investments are not always well understood by policy-makers and practitioners. EIIP has been addressing this knowledge gap by undertaking EmpIAs to quantify the employment potential and impacts of public investment programmes in the infrastructure sector, particularly in sub-sectors where labour-based construction methods are technically feasible and cost-effective. An EmpIA can be ex-ante, where it is used as a prognostic tool to evaluate the employment effects of completed projects. This work has evolved in recent years, and EIIP is working with researchers and specialists across the ILO who are collaborating with Development Finance Institutions on strengthening methodologies, to develop, modify and apply tools and economic models to conduct these macro-level assessments.

Public employment programmes (PEPs)
The EIIP will continue to advocate for the use of PEPs as a policy instrument to respond to unemployment and income insecurity among the working age poor. This includes the promotion of employment guarantee schemes and large-scale PEPs. It will also continue to document good practices and conduct research to strengthen the evidence base to support this advocacy as well as to enable better design and implementation of these programmes. It will also carry on supporting national governments by providing not only technical support for improved design, advice on measures to improve

targeting, quality and productivity, but also assistance in the monitoring and assessment of such programmes.

Public and private sector development
A competent local construction industry is essential for sustainable infrastructure provision, and this requires a well-functioning public sector (client) and private sector (contractors). EIIP provides training and support to the private sector, particularly small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) enabling them to build and strengthen management and technical capacities and provide sustainable infrastructure using local resource-based (LRB) approaches. Similar training and support is extended to the public sector, in particular, to local governments to improve their capacity to plan and procure such work. SMEs can implement an important share of infrastructure works (housing, roads, water and sanitation, and health and education facilities), and are essential engines for local job creation. It is, therefore, important that they are equipped to function effectively in what can be a challenging business environment.

Green works
This work refers to environmental and ecosystem restoration as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation through forestry, irrigation, soil and water conservation and flood protection. EIIP assists and guides the identification, design and implementation of interventions in support of climate change adaptation and mitigation. This involves reducing risks and vulnerabilities, while seeking out opportunities and building the affected communities' capacities to cope with the effects. EIIP's focus on climate change adaptation includes five subsectors: irrigation, soil and water conservation, flood control, rural transport and forestry. It elaborates on the LRB approach and demonstrates how green jobs can be created through green works, using a LRB approach to climate change adaptation.

Community and local resource-based approaches
The focus here is on improving access to infrastructure and services at local level. EIIP's local resource-based approaches build on the employment-intensive approach by emphasizing the use of local knowledge, materials, institutions and enterprise in addition to local labour. This is achieved using a twofold approach: (i) by optimizing and combining the use of local resources in the development, implementation, operation and maintenance of community works through local-level planning; and (ii) by increasing

participation and promoting the use of local labour, materials and technologies in project implementation.

Emergency employment
EIIP supports governments to generate job opportunities in response to demands arising from conflicts and natural disasters. Its work in these contexts is intended to supply immediate relief through income, the repair of assets, and the restoration of services. Thus, it also helps to restore activities in other sectors, such as agriculture, transport and trade. The initial short-term emergency employment then transitions into a more integrated medium- to long-term term approach to recover from and be better prepared for future crises.

Sources: ILO 2018; EIIP website.[2]

The ILO's work in support of PWPs originates from the creation of the Organization in 1919. While the global prominence of PWPs as well as their profile within the ILO have waxed and waned over the intervening years, they have remained part of the ILO's recommended policy instruments and programme toolbox. The ILO has incorporated and referenced PWPs in many of its international labour standards. It has assisted numerous Member States to combat unemployment by providing decades of technical assistance to build national capacity across a range of practical areas relating to the conceptualization, design and implementation of employment-intensive investment programmes.

The ILO's celebration of 100 years since its foundation was a milestone that initiated Organization-wide reflection on its future role. Of particular interest were the dialogues and reflections on the Future of Work, particularly, the future role and nature of the social contract.[3] These discussions informed the *Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work* which recommitted the ILO to the pursuit of full employment and declared that the Organization should, inter alia, direct its efforts to "developing effective policies aimed at generating full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work opportunities for all". These discussions show notable similarities with those that took place when the ILO was first established. While the world has changed significantly in the intervening years, from the perspective of the world of work, the essential challenge – insufficient decent employment to secure social justice and peace – is still as important today as it was in 1919.

The declaration mentions the role of the state as an employer, which combined with the lessons of the past 100 years bear witness to the fact that PWPs will continue to play an important role as long as the pursuit of full employment remains on the agenda of the ILO. While there are many uncertainties about what the future of work will look like, it can reasonably be predicted that it will entail various episodes of labour market disruption. While these may be more or less severe in different contexts, transitions into new forms of work are unlikely to be seamless and the existing challenges of unemployment and underemployment, inequality and informality, working poverty and precariousness are likely to persist in the foreseeable future. PWPs will, therefore, continue to have an important role in responding to these challenges, but will have to do so as part of a wider package of well-coordinated social, employment and economic policies.

Another important question is the extent to which the macroeconomic causes of the chronic lack of decent work will be more widely acknowledged, and whether the inadequacy of focusing on supply side responses in the context of mass and growing informality, recurring crises and instability, and persistent unemployment and underemployment will be recognized. After all, the analysis that an adequate response to these challenges also required a strong demand-side response first inspired the promotion of PWPs within the ILO in 1919.

In this context, the idea that the provision of employment by the state is part of the social contract may find increased traction in different parts of the world, and this will have important implications for the ILO's future role in PWPs. These questions were further explored in a paper commissioned by the EIIP entitled *Employment matters too much to society to leave to markets alone.* The paper foresees a potentially transformational role for PWPs to strengthen the social contract while also addressing a range of social and developmental challenges.[4]

PWPs also remain highly relevant as an instrument by which to advance the increasingly critical global development agenda, in particular the Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The realization of the SDGs will require massive investments in quality and sustainable infrastructure, in line with the development of updated principles and standards, for instance in the G20 and the Environment Management Group of the UN. EIIP has contributed to the development of guides such as the *Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure* and the G20 *Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment* thus

integrating its approaches for enhancing the employment outcomes of infrastructure development.

The SDGs also call for full employment, decent work and social protection floors, which by definition implies an urgent need for large-scale assistance for the working poor. PWPs are a means by which this can be achieved.

Similarly, The Paris Agreement highlights the need for urgent investments in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Here again, PWPs potentially have a major role in both these areas, as already envisaged in "Green New Deals"[5] emerging in different countries which all call for a combination of green investments and massive job creation.

As such, PWPs remain as an important policy instrument today as they were in 1919, a period when the world was experiencing similar challenges of unemployment, nationalism, protectionism, inequality, and associated political and social instability but with the added challenges of climate change and environmental degradation. Whether adopted, as rural and urban investment programmes, temporary demand stimulus responses to social and economic disruption, localized responses to livelihoods disruption, or as a component of social protection provision in a context profoundly affected by climate change, the experiences of the ILO over the last century will remain highly relevant for ensuring that these PWPs are designed and implemented to achieve their objectives.

While there will always be debates on whether we can afford to use PWPs to address these challenges, it is worth recalling Tait's words of 1944:

> One still hears statements here and there to the effect that we cannot afford (in terms of money) this measure or that, but the great majority of people now realise that what we really cannot afford (in terms of welfare) are mass unemployment and a low standard of living. Moreover, there is no economic reason whatever why we should, and we therefore have a sound basis on which to build for the future. [6]

In this context, there is a role for ILO to continue providing standards, guidance, analysis and technical assistance to counter the ongoing threat of mass unemployment and underemployment and their adverse consequences for global poverty and instability. If the Organization can continue to adapt and innovate as it has done over the years, its work on PWPs will continue to make a contribution to lasting peace and social justice.

Endnotes

1 ILO, 2018, "Employment Intensive Investment Programme. Creating jobs through public investment", Geneva.

2 ILO, "Employment intensive investments".

3 ILO, 2019c, ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 108th Session, Geneva, 10–21 June 2019.

4 Kate Philips et al., 2020, "Employment Matters Too Much to Society to Leave to Markets Alone", in The Value of Work and Its Rules between Innovation and Tradition: 'Labour Is Not a Commodity' Today, eds. Anthony Forsyth, Emanuele Dagnino and Margherita Roiatti (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing).

5 The combination of financial, economic and climate crises experienced since 2008 have led to the articulation and promotion of what are often referred to as "Green New Deals" in many countries. They generally tend to call for a combination of massive public investment in renewable energy and climate change adaptation to respond to the climate crisis as well additional investment in employment creation and social protection, reminiscent of the "New Deal" introduced by the Roosevelt administration in response to the great depression in the 1930s. The EU adopted the European Green Deal in 2019 with the aim of making the EU climate neutral by 2050.

6 Duncan Christie Tait, 1944, "The social aspects of a public investment policy", International Labour Review, 49, 1–18.

▶ Afterword

As the International Labour Organization (ILO) was approaching its centenary, the Office adopted a range of initiatives to celebrate this milestone and to reflect on its history. This book is one of those initiatives and is the contribution of the ILO's Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP), the current custodian of public works programmes in the ILO.

While the EIIP has existed as an ILO programme for approximately 50 years, the promotion of public works to address unemployment has been part of the ILO's policy arsenal for much longer and we decided to investigate and document how the ILO has promoted and supported public works during its long history.

As we embarked on this venture, we have been able to document the importance of public works for employment promotion since the very first ILO Recommendation in 1919 and how central it was to the Organization's policy debates between the two world wars.

This rich history, documented in the Organization's extensive archives, ensured that this idea which started off hesitantly as a "potential paper" has now developed into a book. We hope it will be of value to all those with an interest in the ILO and in the history of the use of public works as a means to create job opportunities, reduce poverty and unemployment, and contribute to reducing existing inequalities.

Over the last century, public works have been used to respond to a range of social, economic and political crises. In the process, they have evolved to the point that they respond to high levels of poverty, informality and underemployment in developing countries and the crises that have characterized the end of the 20th and early 21st century. These include not only the sudden onset of natural disasters and protracted conflicts, job losses due to financial crises, increasing numbers of refugees and displaced populations in search of livelihoods but also the impact of land degradation, environmental deterioration and climate change on productivity, incomes and employment.

This book illustrates how public works have been used to respond to these changing demands and we hope will provide inspiration and insights into

how they can be used as a tool in response to the major challenges of our time.

Whilst finalizing this publication, the COVID-19 outbreak began and, since then, it has plunged the world into the most severe economic and social crisis since the Second World War. It has increased un- and underemployment and has pushed many millions of people into poverty, rolling back many development gains and further exacerbating inequalities, affecting yet again the most vulnerable groups. Many governments have relied on fiscal stimulus interventions including public works and extended social protection to provide jobs and income support, particularly for those falling below the poverty line. And time will tell whether it will intimate a longer-term shift away from the neoliberalism that has dominated social, economic and employment policy over recent decades towards recognition of the macroeconomic causes of poverty, the role of the state in stimulating demand to achieve full employment.

The ILO quickly readjusted some of its employment-intensive investment programmes to build much needed assets and ensure that water, sanitation and safety equipment were provided. Certain programmes, however, could not safely work on these labour-based schemes because of the need for people to socially distance.

Nevertheless, in this context, the ILO, with its institutional expertise in the design and use of employment-intensive investment approaches for the planning, implementation and maintenance of infrastructure and environmental works will continue to have a key role to play in the global arena.

The publication of this book was not immune to the pandemic and it was suspended for most of 2020 while the authors were deployed on more urgent, but not unrelated work. Ironically, although the delay meant it was too late to be part of the ILO's centenary celebrations, its current timing could not have been more appropriate as the world and the Organization grapple with how to respond to a new period of increased unemployment. Evidence from the past has shown that public works continue to have a strong role to play in responding to the threats to social, economic and political stability of the present.

▶ Annex 1. Provisions and articles in Recommendation No. 122 relevant to public works promotion

25. Besides promoting modern industrial development, Members should, subject to technical requirements, explore the possibility of expanding employment by--

(a) producing, or promoting the production of, more goods and services requiring much labour;

(b) promoting more labour-intensive techniques, in circumstances where these will make for more efficient utilisation of available resources.

From Annex to the recommendation:

PROMOTION OF RURAL EMPLOYMENT

(2) Major objectives should be to create incentives and social conditions favourable to fuller utilisation of local manpower in rural development, and to improve productivity and quality of output. Means appropriate to local conditions should be determined, where possible, by adequate research and the instigation of multi-purpose pilot projects.

Measures designed to stabilise employment may further include:

(c) increased, or reduced, expenditure on public works or other public investment of a fundamental nature, for example roads, railways, harbours, schools, training centres and hospitals; Members should plan during periods of high employment to have a number of useful but postponable public works projects ready to be put into operation in times of recession;

Measures to even out seasonal fluctuations in employment may include:

(c) planning to counteract seasonal unemployment or underemployment; special attention should be given to the co-ordination of the activities of the different public authorities and private enterprises concerned with building and construction operations, so as to ensure continuity of activity to meet the employment needs of workers.

9.

(1) Measures to expand employment by the encouragement of labour-intensive products and techniques may include:

(a) the promotion of labour-intensive methods of production by means of :

(i) work study to increase the efficiency of modern labour-intensive operations;

(ii) research and dissemination of information about labour-intensive techniques, particularly in public works and construction;

(b) tax concessions and preferential treatment in regard to import or other quotas to undertakings concerned;

(c) full exploration of the technical, economic and organisational possibilities of labour-intensive construction works, such as multi-purpose river valley development projects and the building of railways and highways.

(2) In determining whether a particular product or technique is labour-intensive, attention should be given to the proportions in which capital and labour are employed not merely in the final processes, but in all stages of production, including that of materials, power and other requirements; attention should be given also to the proportions in which increased availability of a product will generate increased demand for labour and capital respectively.

11. Means appropriate to local conditions for the fuller utilisation of local manpower in rural development may include :

(a) local capital-construction projects, particularly projects conducive to a quick increase in agricultural production, such as small and medium irrigation and drainage works, the construction of storage facilities and feeder roads and the development of local transport;

(b) land development and settlement;

(c) more labour-intensive methods of cultivation, expansion of animal husbandry and the diversification of agricultural production;

(d) the development of other productive activities, such as forestry and fishing;

(e) the promotion of rural social services such as education, housing and health services;

(f) the development of viable small-scale industries and handicrafts in rural areas, such as local processing of agricultural products and manufacture of simple consumers' and producers' goods needed in the area.

Source: ILO. 1964. Employment Policy Recommendation, 1964 (No. 122). NORMALEX database, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312267, accessed 15 July 2021.

▶ Annex 2. Economic development, employment and public works in African countries

The ILO's perspective on labour intensive approaches to infrastructure creation during this period was summarized in a 1965 article in the *International Labour Review*[1] which explored the most effective ways of raising the productivity of labour-intensive works. It set out the need for simultaneous improvements in all aspects of manual operations including "the organisation of the work unit; tools; methods of using tools; the ratio of productive work to ancillary work; incentives; food; supporting services, e.g., temporary housing, medical facilities, amenities, arrangements for essential provisions and for tool and appliance maintenance." The article also reflected on the stark policy dilemmas inherent in PWPs, particularly between optimizing cost and optimizing labour-intensity: "The criterion for the choice of technology in public works differs according to the purpose or objective of public works policy. For development objectives the methods to be used need to be as cheap as possible, whereas for employment objectives they need to be as labour-intensive as possible."

The article also recognized the economic validity of arguments in favour of choosing the cheapest techniques in public works but acknowledged that choosing to minimize costs could mean leaving many people without work. It argued that while there were additional costs associated with adopting labour-intensive methods (including the high cost of organizing labour, the time cost of manual production, and the cost of the provision of services and amenities for workers), a PWP approach might still be desirable, even if it came at a higher price. Thus, it suggested that it may be appropriate to pay a premium for labour-intensive production given the real, and typically unquantified, economic and social costs of unemployment:

> A decision by the government of a country with surplus labour to choose labour-intensive methods in public works so long as the money costs exceed the money Costs of more capital-intensive methods by not more than a certain percentage could be supported by respectable arguments, but the choice of the particular percentage would be a matter of judgment.
>
> Economists who find this argument convincing, as most do, believe that in countries with 'surplus' labour it will be advantageous to choose methods

> of production, in public works as in other sectors of the economy, that use more labour and less capital than the methods that are cheapest in terms of money. How much allowance should be made for the under-pricing of capital and the overpricing (from the point of view of real costs) of labour is another question, and one on which the data required for making a scientifically acceptable calculation are scarcely ever available.

Key technical issues addressed in the paper included the desirability of performance standards or norms (for example, earthmoving operations) derived from work-study analyses. It called, as a matter of urgency, for the development of a complete range of standards on all types of earthmoving operations, covering not only incentives but also planning and costing. Concerns regarding the PWP wage and how to regulate against contractors exploiting workers in cases where they were not directly employed by the state were also raised, with case studies highlighting the low wages disbursed to workers. It noted that while the use of contractors relieved government departments of the necessity to engage directly in recruitment, labour administration and supervision, this "put workers at the mercy of the contractors and might force them to accept wages which were unreasonably low" in areas of significant underemployment and unemployment and argued for the protection of workers through stipulated minimum wage rates in publicly controlled contracts.

There is a striking resonance with the issues identified in this 1965 article and the ongoing dilemmas with which the ILO, and other agencies, were to grapple over the successive half century.

Endnotes

1 ILO, 1965, "Economic Development, Employment and Public Works in African Countries", *International Labour Review*, 91, No. 1, 14–46.

ISBN: 978-9220356067

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