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DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION: ENVIRONMENT

Progress made towards sustainable and environmentally sound development

Addendum

Report submitted by the International Labour Organization

* A/44/150.

ILO CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

1. The ILO Governing Body has given increasing attention to matters relating to environment and development since its session in February-March 1988 when it was first informed of the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development entitled: Our Common Future and the Environmental Perspective to the Year 2000 and Beyond. At its 242nd Session, the Governing Body examined a paper submitted by the Director-General which had a twofold purpose. First, it provided a review of the ILO's past and present activities related to environmentally sound and sustainable development with a view to receiving comments and guidance from the Governing Body on future priorities and activities in this field. Secondly, after being revised to take into account the Governing Body's comments, this paper is now being submitted as the official ILO response to the requests contained in General Assembly resolutions 42/186 (Environmental Perspective to the Year 2000 and Beyond) and 42/187 (report of the World Commission on Environment and Development) which ask the Governing body of the ILO (like the governing bodies of other organisations) to report to the General Assembly at its 44th Session, through the Economic and Social Council, on progress made in the ILO towards environmentally sound and sustainable development. This paper is also being made available to the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme at its 15th Session in May 1989.

The ILO and environmentally sound and sustainable development

2. Before reviewing ILO activities, it may be useful to define how the Office has interpreted the concept of environmentally sound and sustainable development. The Environmental Perspective to the Year 2000 and Beyond was prepared by UNEP and adopted by the UNEP Governing Council and the General Assembly in 1987. It was adopted as a "broad framework to guide national action and international co-operation on policies and programmes aimed at achieving environmentally sound and sustainable development, and specifically as a guide to the preparation of further system-wide medium-term environment programmes and the medium-term programmes of the organisations and bodies of the United Nations system". Resolution 42/186 also provides a review of the "perceptions shared by governments of the nature of environmental problems, and their inter-relations with other international problems, and of the efforts to deal with them". The Environmental Perspective reflects many of the concerns contained in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED).

3. The report of the WCED entitled Our Common Future, and also known as the Brundtland Report after the Commission's Chairman, Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland, now Prime Minister of Norway, sets forth the fundamental idea that economic and social development should be based on the concept of "sustainable development", that is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The Commission's report defines a number of concepts or perspectives in connection with the process of sustainable development: time, i.e. present and future generations; needs, especially meeting the basic needs of the world's poor; the limitations of technology and social organisation; equity, within and between countries; integrated approaches to policies and actions; natural

resource management; anticipation and prevention as well as rehabilitation. The challenge facing the ILO and others is to implement this concept of sustainable development in its day-to-day activities.

4. Taking into account the all-embracing nature of the concept, the Director-General noted in his remarks at the Oslo Conference on Sustainable Development in July 1988 that "every ILO activity - and no doubt this is true of all our UN agencies and entities - is directed, in principle, to the achievement of sustainable development". The Director-General requested an interdepartmental review of the Brundtland Report and its implications for the ILO. The results of that review underlined how closely the ILO's activities, programmes and objectives are already interlinked with the concept of sustainable development. There are three areas of particular priority and concern for the ILO: the working environment, environmental training and the relationships between environment and employment, poverty and development.

The working environment

5. The working environment, which received relatively limited emphasis within the Brundtland Report and the Environmental Perspective, receives very high priority within the ILO. The ILO has a constitutional mandate to assist countries in improving their working environment and since 1919 has devoted a significant proportion of its efforts in that direction, especially through its standard-setting activities.

6. The high priority to be given to these issues was recently reiterated at the Seventh ILO African Regional Conference held in Harare in 1988 when it adopted a resolution concerning the protection of the working and general environment in the African region. It calls upon all member States and in particular those from that region and the Director-General to take various actions concerning a number of critical issues related to the working and general environment, including hazardous wastes. The extensive programmes carried out by the ILO in the field of occupational safety and health and conditions of work and life make a major contribution to environmentally sound and sustainable development. The Working Environment (Air Pollution, Noise and Vibration) Convention (No. 148), and Recommendation (No. 156), 1977, as well as the Safety and Health in Construction Convention (No. 167) and Recommendation (No. 175), adopted in June 1988, are examples of the ILO's contribution through international standards. A first discussion of safety in the use of chemicals at work, with a view to the adoption of an instrument or instruments, will take place at the International Labour Conference in June 1989.

7. In addition to standard-setting activities, various other activities are being carried out during the present biennium with the overall objective of promoting and supporting efforts at the international, regional and national levels to reduce occupational accidents and diseases and to improve the working environment. The work programme of the Occupational Safety and Health Branch within the Working Conditions and Environment Department has been developed with a view to achieving this long-term objective. These programme elements include: (a) the preparation of draft codes of practice on (i) safety and health in construction, (ii) safety and health in surface mining operations, and (iii) the prevention of major hazards; (b) a meeting of experts on safety in the use of mineral and synthetic fibres; (c) a study on the provision of occupational health services at the national level for small-scale enterprises, agricultural workers and the informal sector; (d) an inventory of occupational safety and health activities of employers' associations and trade unions; (e) a training manual on the use of chemicals at work; and (f) dissemination of information through the ILO's International

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Occupational Safety and Health Information Centre (CIS) and the International Occupational Safety and Health Hazard Alert System.

8. In carrying out its activities concerning the working environment, the ILO collaborates actively with other international organisations, including other UN agencies, as well as non-governmental organisations. For example, action is being taken jointly with the International Social Security Association (ISSA) for the hosting of the 12th World Congress on Occupational Safety and Health in 1990. Inter-agency co-operation with the UNEP/WHO/ILO International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS)¹ and the IAEA continues to be strengthened for the protection of workers exposed to chemicals and radiation, respectively. The Seventh International Pneumoconiosis Conference held in August 1987 provided a forum for exchange of information on lung diseases, engineering and medical measures of protection of workers from dust diseases and other health hazards.

9. In addition to activities under the regular budget, the Office is carrying out a wide range of operational activities aimed at improving the working environment. These activities are part of the ILO's International Programme for the Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment, known as PIACT, which was established in 1976. Furthermore, extra-budgetary resources are available from the UNDP and other multi-bilateral donors for technical co-operation activities. Many of the technical co-operation projects are aimed at assisting governments in the formulation and implementation of national policies on occupational safety and health, in particular by improving the technical competence of occupational safety and health inspection services and strengthening national safety and health institutions. Some 20 projects of this kind are operational in developing countries. An important new subject is the establishment and operation of major hazard control systems in several countries in Asia. Projects on safety and health in mining are also operational in some countries. Another significant feature of several projects is the provision of advice and training to employers' and workers' representatives. An Asian regional project on occupational safety and health and workers' welfare in construction is also operational.

10. The Conditions of Work and Welfare Facilities Branch is carrying out many activities related to working time, work organisation, work content and technologies which are directly related to the working environment. In addition, work-related welfare facilities and services often also have an important influence upon the working environment; for example, inadequate housing, sanitation and transport facilities can affect the worker's health and safety on the job.

11. In a world of rapidly changing technologies and products, including new chemical substances and growing concern about hazardous wastes, issues related to the working environment have become increasingly complex and more closely linked to the general environment. As a result, the past distinction between the working environment and the general environment has become less clear. Lasting solutions to the problems of the working environment can be found only in the broader context of the improvement of the general environment. Similarly, the problems of the general environment cannot be satisfactorily tackled unless the problems of the working environment are effectively solved. For example, monitoring and assessing permissible levels of exposure of workers to chemicals at the workplace may also need to take

¹ See GB.241/IO/5/4 entitled Renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding on the International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS).

into account levels of exposure to other chemicals encountered by those workers outside the working environment. Recent industrial accidents, unfortunately, also have provided dramatic examples of the linkages between the working environment and the general environment. These linkages may require the ILO to co-ordinate its activities concerning the working environment more closely with the work of others dealing with the general environment.

12. The ILO's past activities concerning the working environment have given priority to industrial and other organised sectors of the economy. In future, increasing priority will need to be given to the working environment of workers in commercial establishments such as shops and offices (e.g. indoor air pollution), as well as workers in rural areas and the informal sector of developing countries. It should also be noted that, recognising the rapid increase in the world's population, millions of new jobs - and new working environments - will need to be created and the ILO's challenge will be to ensure that these jobs are safe, environmentally sound and sustainable.

Environmental training

13. The ILO has undertaken environmental training activities in the framework of its traditional vocational training, management development, workers' education and employers' organisations training programmes as well as at the International Centre for Advanced Technical and Vocational Training in Turin and the International Institute for Labour Studies.¹ Although to date these activities have been limited, there appears to be considerable scope for expanding them within all types of national and regional training programmes supported by the ILO.

14. A useful example of the kind of special contribution the ILO can make to environmental training may be seen in the series of information and training activities launched by the Bureau for Employers' Activities. These activities are designed to make employers aware of the principles and practices of environmentally sound management and have been carried out in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This programme, which has been carried out in close collaboration with UNEP, now also provides for special national training seminars to strengthen the capacity of employers' organisations to implement their own national environmental training programmes.

15. Despite the specific environmental training activities already carried out by the ILO, the Office has not so far had a formal strategy on environmental training. Therefore, the Director-General has requested an interdepartmental working group to prepare such a strategy in the near future. It is particularly examining the specific role that the ILO might play in this field. Several issues appear to be especially important. For example, higher priority should be given to developing training programmes directed at anticipatory and preventive activities than to those dealing with rehabilitation and alleviation; special efforts are needed to develop a training programme for workers' organisations comparable to that devised for employers' organisations; and the ILO should develop special support activities to ensure that environmental specialists at the national and regional levels who are carrying out training activities are fully aware of general training issues and problems which might also be relevant in

¹ For more detailed information on these training activities, see GB.238/IO/4/8 concerning Follow-up to UNEP's World Industry Conference on Environmental Management (1984).

environmental training; in other words, environmental trainers should be helped to avoid making the same mistakes that occurred in the development and implementation of other training programmes. In addition, the ILO should devote more effort to integrating appropriate environmental issues within training activities related to other ILO programmes, e.g. co-operatives, rural development, labour-intensive public works projects, employment and technology projects, and activities related to occupational safety and health and conditions of work and life. Furthermore, the ILO, particularly in light of its tripartite structure, has an opportunity to play an active role in raising general environmental awareness.

16. The ILO will also need to collaborate more closely with other bodies working in the area of environmental training. The Office has already established direct technical contacts with UNEP, UNESCO, OECD, the Commission of the European Communities and others. It could make a particularly useful contribution to the UNESCO/UNEP International Environmental Education Programme as regards vocational and employers' and workers' training. In developing its strategy for environmental training, special attention will be given to ensuring that the ILO will play a unique and complementary role in this important field.

Environment and employment, poverty and development

17. The Brundtland Report and the Environmental Perspective correctly emphasise that poverty is a major cause and effect of global environmental problems. As stated in the Commission's report: "A world in which poverty is endemic will always be prone to ecological and other crises". Activities aimed at alleviating poverty, creating employment and generating income activities are central to the ILO's technical co-operation programmes and advisory services. The ILO's policies, programmes and projects in these areas will need to be reinforced by integrating environmental and sustainable development considerations more effectively into them. The ILO has so far carried out many projects, especially in the context of its labour-intensive public works programmes, which have aimed at the rehabilitation or protection of the environment, for example wasteland development and land-reclamation projects, including irrigation and forestry-related activities. The dire prospects for rural employment suggest that new approaches will be required. The conclusions concerning rural employment promotion adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 1988 provide useful insights which complement the World Commission's Report.

18. The International Labour Conference in June 1989 is expected to complete its discussions concerning the partial revision of the Convention (No. 107) concerning the protection and integration of indigenous and other tribal and semi-tribal populations in independent countries, adopted in 1957 together with a Recommendation (No. 104) on the same subject. Recognising the emphasis given in the World Commission's Report to these populations and other vulnerable groups, the ILO has a unique opportunity, within its area of competence and in collaboration with others, to promote and support national action to help indigenous populations achieve environmentally sound and sustainable development.

19. The Director-General has drawn attention to the fact that very often rural and urban areas requiring environmental protection and rehabilitation in both North and South are also facing severe unemployment and poverty. This suggests that the ILO should respond in a more integrated fashion to both problems. The ILO should assist governments to ensure both that their environmental policies more effectively reflect employment requirements and

opportunities and that their employment policies more effectively reflect environmental considerations. The Government of Norway has recently approved a special project concerning ILO action to support sustainable development, under which the Office will be able to carry out initial research on the inter-relationships between environment and employment. These activities will be supplemented by a special item in the Programme and Budget proposals for 1990-91.

Meeting of Experts

20. The Governing Body at its 242nd Session in March 1989, decided to convene, particularly in response to the resolution on employment policy and environmental protection adopted at the Fourth ILO European Regional Conference in September 1987, a Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Employment and Training Implications of Environmental Policies in Europe (Geneva, 29 November-5 December 1989).

New areas of concern and action

21. The interdepartmental review of the Brundtland Report drew attention to a number of related activities which the ILO will need to undertake to integrate environmental and sustainable development considerations within its major technical programmes. Some of the most important factors mentioned in the Brundtland Report calling for reinforcement include the following:

- (a) the design, implementation and evaluation of ILO programmes and projects should reflect a longer-term perspective;
- (b) considering that the inequitable sharing of the social, economic and environmental costs and benefits of development cannot lead to sustainable development but only to continued poverty, injustice and division, equity should be one of the important criteria in the design, implementation and evaluation of ILO projects;
- (c) the ILO should give special support to environmental activities providing an opportunity for tripartite collaboration and also should encourage others to take advantage of a tripartite approach in their activities;
- (d) the ILO should continue to strengthen the linkages between its technical co-operation activities and international labour standards so as to assist developing countries to implement ratified Conventions, especially those concerned with the working environment;
- (e) the ILO should give higher priority to the use of project "teams" which draw together expertise from more than one ILO technical unit, so as to ensure that projects reflect a more co-ordinated and integrated approach to sustainable development;
- (f) recognising the important environmental implications of many ILO projects, the Office should establish a practical environmental impact review process, based on experience gained through the special environmental review activities proposed for the period 1989-91, so as to ensure that relevant projects and programmes adequately take into account environmental considerations;

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- (g) the Office should develop internal staff training and advisory support activities in order to assist ILO staff at headquarters and in the field to integrate environmental and sustainable development considerations more effectively in their traditional activities.

Co-ordination within the United Nations system

22. Within the UN system, special attention is being given to the critical need to improve co-ordination of environmental and sustainable development activities. The ILO has been actively supporting and participating in these efforts and the Governing Body has been kept closely informed of progress. For example, at the 241st Session (November 1988), the International Organisations Committee discussed the Oslo Conference on Sustainable Development and the work of the inter-agency group called the Designated Officials for Environmental Matters (DOEM).

23. The ILO has also been actively involved in the development of the System-Wide Medium-Term Environment Programme (SWMTEP), which is an ongoing process to facilitate improved planning and co-ordination within the UN system. The recently approved SWMTEP for the period 1990-95 contains over 50 specific references to possible action by the ILO, alone and in collaboration with others, concerning many different environmental issues, e.g. working environment, rural development, housing, environmental training, industrial activities.

24. The ILO will continue to make every practicable effort to enhance the effectiveness of the co-ordination process within the UN system.

The ILO and the environment: Prospects for the future

25. Increasing interest and concern has been expressed by several ILO Industrial Committees and other meetings regarding the environment in 1988. For example, the Tenth Session of the Chemical Industries Committee adopted a resolution concerning the control and avoidance of toxic wastes; the 12th Session of the Metal Trades Committee adopted a resolution concerning the contribution of the metal trades to the improvement of the environment and also proposed as one of its possible future agenda items "the contribution of the metal trades to the improvement of the environment and to the achievement of sustainable economic growth"; and the Committee on Conditions of Work in the Fishing Industry adopted a resolution on protection of the livelihood of fishermen, which refers in part to the importance of the protection of the marine environment and sound fish stock management. These examples provide an indication of the attention which environmental issues are receiving at the various meetings convened by the ILO. The reports prepared by the Office for such meetings are also giving increasing attention to the linkages between environmental problems and critical labour and social issues.

26. During the next biennium, there are a number of other issues which may require special attention by the ILO. One of the most important future environmental challenges may be that of "climatic change". Although the greatest attention is being devoted to the development of scientific and technical data and analyses of this phenomenon, there may be significant linkages between the possible effects of climatic change - or of policies and activities developed to delay or respond to climatic change - upon employment and social conditions. As a result, the ILO will need to monitor this issue closely in future. In addition, a large number of regional and international

conferences are presently being scheduled between now and 1992. The ILO will need to carefully monitor the development of these conferences with a view to assessing at an early stage what contribution, if any, it should make within its very specific and limited areas of competence.

27. The ILO Programme and Budget proposals for 1990-91 have established environmental concerns and technological change as one of four priority themes for 1990-91. During the next biennium the ILO will concentrate its activities relating to this theme in the fields of employment promotion, training and the working environment, fields in which it has a clear mandate and unquestioned competence. When preparing those proposals, the Director-General expressed the conviction that the key test of whether the ILO would make progress towards environmentally sound and sustainable development would not be demonstrated only by the number of special items included in the draft proposals readily identifiable as "environmental projects" but rather, as stressed in the Brundtland Report, by the extent to which these considerations were more effectively integrated within all relevant ILO activities. In order to implement this integration strategy, a special unit concerning these issues has been established within the Office of the Assistant Director-General for Interdepartmental Programmes. In addition to providing staff resources to promote and support co-ordination and the development of specific efforts by technical departments to reflect these considerations more effectively in the implementation of their programmes, a limited amount of special additional resources have been provided to support those efforts. At the same time, RBTC resources will also be available to further support this integration strategy.

28. In addition to efforts under the regular budget, however, the Office will be seeking additional resources from multi-bilateral donors, as well as other funding sources. Already in 1988, the Government of Norway has approved a special project to support the ILO's special efforts towards sustainable development in advance of the Programme and Budget proposals for 1990-91. Priority will be given to the development of environmental components to be added to traditional ILO technical co-operation activities and the development of new activities in which the ILO may provide a unique comparative advantage.

29. The interdepartmental review of the Brundtland Report identified many other activities which the ILO might pursue in future to support environmentally sound and sustainable development. Nevertheless, recognising the important impact that the ILO's traditional activities have on the achievement of the ILO's fundamental objectives - which are themselves in direct support of sustainable development - the above-mentioned priorities and issues are considered the most important during the period of the Medium-Term Plan, 1990-95.
