

What ILO can Do for Bangladesh

A national workshop on the connections between international labour standards and technical co-operation was organised at Dhaka on 12 February, by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Manpower. The intention was to study and talk about how international labour standards could help endeavours to enhance the socio-economic development, and how labour standards are promoted by technical co-operation programmes and projects. Before the workshop actually took place, there were a series of discussions with the ILO experts and staff at present providing technical co-operation services in Bangladesh.

Speaking to Dr Leonardo Leonardi from Italy, Mr Groman David from France and Dr Shinichi Ago from Japan, it was learnt that ILO was an outgrowth of social thinking in the 19th century. It was also gathered that the structure of the ILO is composed of a yearly general conference elaborating ILO standards of a governing body and of a secretariat called the International Labour Office. The particularity of the ILO was that it was tripartite in character: the workers, employers and the governments participated in decision making in the various organs of the organisation. They stressed that the main purpose of the ILO was to improve the conditions of life and work by building up a comprehensive code of law and practice.

One understood at the party that each convention was a legal instrument regulating some aspect of labour administration, social welfare or human rights. Ratification involved a double obligation for a member state.

It was both a commitment to apply the provisions of the convention, and a pointer to the willingness to accept an amount of international supervision. Both conventions and recommendations contain standards and present a model and incentive for national legislation and utilisation in various countries.

The experts pointed out that although the ILO cannot

dictate terms to the member countries, it can and does examine the manner in which various countries carry out their obligations under ratified conventions. They also pointed out to the two listening journalists that there was a committee of experts for the application of conventions and recommendations, consisting of outstanding jurists, whose work it was to present their findings in an independent way.

There was also a more general review that was made at the ILO conference by a tripartite

by Fayza Haq

tions, out of which Bangladesh had voluntarily ratified 31 and freely implemented them, while 179 complementary recommendations supplemented the former with technical guidelines. They stressed that a considerable programme of technical co-operation in various fields was being provided by the ILO, in cooperation with the government agencies, employers and workers' organisations.

Dr Leonardo Leonardi said that one of the objects of the

generally provided community support.

He continued that the ILO had a training centre in Turin. Two to three fellowships every year were given for each member country. ILO has been supporting Institutes in Bangladesh which were, for example, engaged in productivity improvement. He added that there were training courses for subjects such as computers, and vocational training organised in Geneva and nominees from countries like Bangladesh attended these courses every year.

however many problems should be sorted out by the people of the country themselves. We have, in all, four offices in the Subcontinent and ten in Asia. At the moment, the Bangkok office is headed by Assistant Director-General Mr T Nakamura. We were primarily here to provide information.

Dr Leonardi, discussing the modus operandi of the ILO, explained that there were about 150 member states represented by tripartite delegations, consisting of the government, employers and workers. He said, "Each delegation comprises four delegates, two of them being from the government, one from the side of the employers and one from the workers".

He added, "The spirit is to help the country and not to judge. Dr Leonardi has been working for the ILO for 35 years and has visited a great number of countries, apart from the Subcontinent and the Far East, in connection with his work. Mr Groman said that he too travelled a lot. He has 24 years experience with the ILO. Dr Ago was a professor of International Law before he joined the ILO and has been working for it for 10 years.

Giving their impression of Bangladesh Dr Leonardi said that he liked Dhaka very much and felt more secure in the streets of Dhaka at night than he did in many other cities. "The country is one with great culture, philosophy and art. I have great admiration for Rabindranath Tagore, and I regret I cannot read him in Bangla," he said.

Mr Groman said, "In Geneva I have come across a lot of Bangladeshis. Unfortunately media coverage of Bangladesh is not always positive. But I personally find a tremendous amount of optimism. There is much poverty in the country but this alone should not be projected".

As for Dr Ago, he said "I feel that democracy is really functioning in Bangladesh. Apart from that, I cannot judge Bangladesh by seeing Dhaka for a few fleeting hours. One cannot assess Japan by being in Tokyo alone. We've simply been shuttling between hotels".

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Dr. Ago, Mr Groman and Dr Leonardi at Sheraton lobby.

title committee for the application of the conventions and recommendations that are obtained after public discussion, and on the basis of the report of the committee of experts. Since '64 there had been more than 1,850 changes to bring national law in conformity with ratified conventions, as a response to the observations of the ILO.

Since World War II, the experts explained, the ILO's technical cooperation has increased rapidly, in close cooperation with the United Nations bodies such as the UNDP and the UNFPA. They elaborated that there were at present 172 international labour conven-

discussions "in to provide information. In the first place the country determines its own aim. This is although", he stressed "that ILO, over 70 years had set international labour standards and helped with technical cooperation."

Mr David Groman mentioned about the Bangladesh Maritime Training Institute which was supported by ILO programmes. He pointed out that the ILO had been supporting the country for many years and helped also in developing the Hotel and Catering Institute. Mr Groman continued that ILO helped in vocational training, management, rehabilitation projects and

90% of the ILO technical co-operation funds come from outside the organisation itself. He said UNDP provided half of it while the World Bank provided 40% of it. The rest 10% per cent which is provided by ILO comes to \$20 million a year. The main beneficiaries, he said were the workers, employers' organisations and the department of labour in each country.

He added, "We are happy with the participation of Bangladesh and there are nationals of your country on the staff of the organisation. We listen carefully to what you have to tell us and try to assist you,

They No Longer Grind Their Lives Away

by Ruth Massey

broken down when they got there.

If the mill was operating, they would then spend hours queuing for their turn, which often meant making the return journey next day. The lucky ones travelled by ox-or donkey-drawn cart, but most car-

came from the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), which agreed to provide a \$250,000 loan to help the Nhamoinencharo group as well as two other co-operatives in Wedza province — Nyenyedzi (shining star) and Simbamukaka (inexhaustible

user leaving these tasks to someone else until the machine broke down.

"We started million on 7 November 1990," says Mrs Mugaba, "charging Z \$1 (30 US cents) for each bucket of corn milled — half the price charged at a commercial mill. Now that word has spread, we get an average of 50 customers a day."

Millet, sorghum and wheat are milled at the same price. In November and December the co-operative averaged \$330 a month. Once the harvest is in the granaries, each co-operative will be able to make up to \$700 a month.

It was raining by the time

In many parts of Africa women still spend long hours grinding maize between two stones to produce just small amounts of flour. Grinding mills are few and often far away. One group of women in rural Zimbabwe had to walk miles to the nearest one and then queued till it was too late to walk home the same night. Now all that has changed for them. Gemini News Service reports how it happened.

ried their heavy loads in sacks or buckets on their heads.

Margaret Magaba, chairperson of the Nhamoinencharo group, said: "We usually ended up doing what we had always done, grinding the maize between two stones. That meant spending two or three hours to produce just a small amount of flour. Now it takes three minutes to grind two full sacks."

After Dzimbura's first visit and interviews with the group in 1989, ENDA helped them but land from the local district council. Using their savings from the sale of vegetables grown on family plots, they hired a builder to construct the milling shed. Funding to purchase the grinding mill

energy) — to buy mills and set up revolving loan funds, which the groups manage themselves.

Meanwhile, village community workers distributed training manuals and conducted workshops in starting a new business. Classes were held in financial management, budgeting, and record-keeping as well as agricultural production and food processing technologies.

Like most rural women, they had never borrowed money from banks or financial institutions and the thought frightened them, so a lot of time was spent educating the group about credit and encouraging them to take it. Much attention was given to training

user leaving these tasks to someone else until the machine broke down.

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With ENDA's help, the women started what was to become a successful milling business, converting maize into flour with a machine-operated grinding mill. Now, after only six months, they were earning \$300 a month.

Said Dzimbura: "The women overcame every obstacle to start their own business from resistance on the part of husbands to their own fear of borrowing money and the banks' reluctance to lend it to them."

Matze is the staple food in Zimbabwe. As elsewhere in Africa, it is the women who plant and weed the crop. During the harvesting season, the sounds of threshing, winnowing and pounding float across the fields. Now a new sound has been added to these more traditional ones — the roar of the grinding mill.

Although commercial grinding mills existed in the region before the arrival of this one in Nhamoinencharo, they were few and far between. To reach the nearest, women had to walk four hours — often to find it



Members of the cooperative meet to discuss about the new grinding mill.

Helping the jobless find work

by Regine Pachner

UNEMPLOYMENT creates problems — for the person out of work and for the community as a whole. For the jobless, exclusion from the working world means isolation, social demotion, waning self-confidence. For the community, unemployment brings huge hidden costs and a labour market in which a widening gulf exists between the kind of jobs on offer and the pool of available qualified labour.

In addition, dole queues foster social and political discontent. Over the last eight years, the city-state of Hamburg in the Federal Republic of Germany has been trying to ease the unemployment situation by means of a special employment policy programme. Originally a local project, it has now been adopted by other states in the north of the Federal Republic and seems likely, in the long run, to be launched as a joint northern initiative partly financed from the European social fund.

Unemployment in Hamburg stands at 12 per cent of the working population. 38 per cent of the jobless have been unemployed for more than a year, 27 per cent for more than two years and 41 per cent are ineligible for unemployment benefit or unemployment assistance.

The fact that 53 per cent of those out of work have not completed any form of vocational training brings the problem sharply into focus: qualifications are needed.

For this reason, Hamburg turned the tables in 1982 with the launch of an integrated employment and vocational qualification programme. The labour market was decentralized and regionalized. Job creation schemes were set up and

programme has been occupied over the last two years by ZEBRA, an initiative devoted to the vocational reintegration of the unemployed. Mainly set up to help the long-term unemployed, it runs four parallel operations. The first is for 18 to 25-year-olds, offering individual counselling and educational planning followed by part-time work in social services, industry, construction or administration and a two-year course leading to basic or secondary school qualifications.

The second operation embraces industrial and commercial courses, in which foundations are laid for retraining in the field of environmental technology, while the third focuses on information and communication technologies, enabling candidates to obtain qualifications required by employers in the service sector and administration.

Because ZEBRA also offers its charges a socio-psychological back-up service, it runs courses for trainers, foremen and pedagogical personnel, grooming candidates simultaneously for posts within the ZEBRA organization itself. The programmes offer work and training on a weekly rotating basis or in longer block arrangements and run for between two and five years.

All qualifications acquired by participants are officially recognized. Subsequent cooperation between public sponsors and the business community generally results in candidates being taken onto payrolls as regular employees. Although recent federal legislation has hit ZEBRA's budget, it has in one year enable the city-state of Hamburg to reduce its jobless total by 8 per cent. (IN Press)

A special place within the fold in the last seven years. The foundation "Berufliche Bildung — Arbeitslosennetzwerk" provides vocational training for special categories of the unemployed and the "Gesellschaft für Ökologie und Technologie" (Society for Ecology and Technology) offers model jobs designed to meet new requirements resulting from structural shifts in employment.

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