

Programme of the International Labour Office – A view of On-going implementation and Implications for Research

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the Construction Action Programme, that is an initiative in progress of the International Labour Office. Such a programme is important as it provides a platform of social dialogue at the national level to discuss problems and to propose solutions related to labour in the construction industry, leading to the implementation of concrete activities. The process of social dialogue involves the main national representatives of workers, employers and government agencies with a stake in construction. Considering that so far the Construction Action Programme is known only within limited circles, the paper contributes to the understanding of construction in developing countries by disseminating information about it. It provides a comprehensive view of the programme, ranging from its planning phase up to the present stage of implementation. At the same time, the paper also presents a research agenda derived from the experience of the programme, and concludes with inferences on possible synergies between research and development assistance in construction in developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the on-going Construction Action Programme (CAP) of the International Labour Office (ILO). The CAP implements operational activities related to labour in construction, planned and decided through a process of social dialogue. It also explores synergies with different departments of the ILO, whose respective mandates focus on particular labour issues.

Considering that by and large each construction-related initiative of the ILO has been specific to a given theme, the CAP brings an important contribution. It is a cross-cutting platform to implement activities in different themes of labour in construction – bearing in mind the benefits of exploring synergies and complementarity among such themes. In addition, it is important to note that so far the ILO has preponderantly promoted social dialogue – cutting across the different themes of construction – at the international level. Therefore, another significant added value of the CAP is to bring such type of dialogue to the national level.

The paper has a distinctive perspective vis-à-vis those which resulted from an academic investigation. It is a presentation of an operational programme and its findings come from the direct experience of the author in technical assistance. Yet, the paper also includes considerations about a research agenda related to the CAP experience, which may be of interest to the academic community. In parallel, the information on the operational activities of the CAP may be significant to the readers with an interest in development aid.

While papers about operational programmes are many times written after the termination of such programmes, or at least on an advanced stage, in order to provide a comprehensive view (Burton, 1999; Harpham et al., 2001; UN-Habitat, 2001, 2003; Werna et al., 1998, 1999; Werna, 2000), there is a value in making a presentation about the CAP at its current developing stage. Firstly, there is already a group of findings – although preliminary – and the sooner they are disseminated and hopefully feed into research, the sooner the CAP – and specially its beneficiaries – would gain from feedback. At the same time, the CAP is intended to be a process of decision-making (embedded in social dialogue), to be owned and taken forward by the stakeholders in each pilot country. There is no specific cut-off date for an actual termination

country – and especially under such circumstances, en-route

The paper starts by explaining the genesis and the key features of the CAP. Next, it presents the ongoing implementation of the programme with details about each pilot country. The following section focuses on important issues on construction related to the CAP, and the implications for a research agenda. The paper concludes with broad considerations about research and operational programmes, drawing on the CAP experience.

GENESIS AND KEY FEATURES OF THE CONSTRUCTION ACTION PROGRAMME

A number of departments of the ILO deal with specific issues related to labour in construction, such as employment creation, occupational safety and health, workers' rights, etc. The Sectoral Activities Department,¹ in its turn, facilitates the exchange of information between the ILO's tripartite constituents on labour concerning particular economic sectors – including construction – complemented by research on topical sectoral issues and technical assistance to help solve labour problems. The principal activity of this department has been the holding of international meetings that provide a forum for discussion on current issues in the sector concerned. In 2003 the department decided to establish a set of action programmes aimed at supporting the implementation of the recommendations of meetings in selected sectors, including construction. This has generated the CAP.

A key preliminary event for the CAP was the ILO Tripartite Meeting, The Construction Industry in the Twenty-First Century: Its Image, Employment Prospects and Skill Requirements, held in Geneva during 10–14 December 2001 (ILO, 2001). This meeting noted that the construction industry makes a major contribution to the economy of all countries, providing significant opportunities for employment worldwide and contributing to the alleviation of poverty. The Meeting also discussed problems that need to be addressed if the full potential of the industry is to be realised. Three major problems were highlighted in the conclusions to the Meeting (ILO, 2001, 2004):

1. Employment practices

In a number of countries, changes in employment practices in recent years, in particular the trend to labour subcontracting, have created serious problems. This is particularly so in developing countries where labour subcontracting and casual forms of employment predominate, with negative impacts on occupational safety and health (OSH), on training, and on the ability of workers and employers to organise.

2. OSH

Construction is widely recognised as one of the three most hazardous sectors of the economy in which to work. Thousands die each year from construction accidents. Many more suffer and die from occupational diseases. The numbers are not known because records are not kept and compensation is seldom paid. Casual employment and subcontracting are complicating factors in this situation. Yet, the causes of accidents in the construction industry are fairly obvious and almost all are easily preventable.

3. Training

Informal methods of acquiring skills in the construction industry may need to be supplemented from time to time by more formal training (for example, when new technologies are introduced or when higher quality output is required). Cooperation is needed to share the costs of training between workers, employers and governments. The shift towards subcontracting and casual employment has made cooperation more difficult in both the funding and the delivery of training.

¹ Information about the Sectoral Activities Department has been extracted from ILO's website. For more information:
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector>

low "quality" of jobs in the construction industry. A further issue

4. Employment creation

It is widely recognised that the construction industry around the world generates much needed employment. However, there is evidence that the employment generating potential of construction investment is not yet fully realised in some countries and areas of work. In developing countries, more jobs could be created if the barriers to using labour-based methods were removed and the local industry encouraged to develop. Employment friendly investment policies, combined with decent working conditions, could make a major contribution to poverty reduction.

The broad strategy adopted for the CAP has been to try to find solutions to the aforementioned problems through a process of tripartite social dialogue. The focus of dialogue is at the national level. A Tripartite Planning Meeting was convened in Geneva on 3–5 November 2003 to discuss the activities to be included in the CAP. The meeting proposed three inter-related objectives: (a) to create an enabling environment for the sustainable development of the local construction industry; (b) to improve the conditions of work in the industry; and (c) to expand opportunities for productive employment. Following the 2003 Meeting proposed four areas of activity. They correspond to the four problem areas identified in the 2001 Meeting (noted above), which are elaborated in Box 1.

The decision on specific activities to be implemented, within the four areas of the CAP, should take place at the national level, involving the government, and representatives of workers and employers. Social dialogue and tripartism are fundamental for the ILO in general and the CAP in particular, this reason are elaborated in Box 2. Also, the process of social dialogue in each country may as well involve other stakeholders, in addition to government, workers and employers – a process termed "tripartism plus." The process in each country is distinctive from the others. As the ILO puts it (ILO, n.d.):

Social dialogue takes into account each country's cultural, historical, economic and political context. There is no "one size fits all" model of social dialogue that can be readily exported from one country to another. Social dialogue differs greatly from country to country, though the overriding principles of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. Adapting social dialogue to the national situation is key to ensuring local ownership of the process. There is a rich diversity in institutional arrangements, legal frameworks, and traditions and practices of social dialogue throughout the world...

The concrete activities to be implemented are also specific to each country – while related to the broad CAP framework, presented before.

During the 2003 Meeting, five countries were selected to pilot the CAP, all in the developing world: Brazil, Egypt, India, Ghana and Tanzania. The on-going experiences of the CAP in such countries, as well as explorations elsewhere, are presented in the next section.

ON-GOING IMPLEMENTATION

Representatives from the five pilot countries took part in the planning meeting of the CAP in November 2003. The ILO in the field were also contacted before the start of the activities at the country level. The implementation of the CAP started in early 2004, and entails four phases, described below:

1. Social dialogue start-up

This is the initial stage, during which the partner organisations in each country and the ILO

² Dr Jill Wells.

gain to discuss the course of action. The process entails mainly stakeholder meetings. The partner organisations should include not only the traditional tripartite members – the ministry of labour and representatives of workers and employers – but also other organisations with an important stake in construction, such as for example the respective ministries of housing and/or urban development, construction, local government, etc. The foundations for a CAP National Steering Committee are laid at this stage.

Box 1. The Four Themes of the Construction Action Programme(CAP)

1. Formalizing the informal

To address the problem of labour subcontracting and casual employment, action is proposed on two fronts:

- (a) The regulation and licensing of contractors. This could involve:
 - i. a tripartite initiative to develop a licensing system and register of sub-contractors
 - ii. identification of ways in which governments can create an environment that encourages formalisation, for example through tax incentives, training, advice on OSH, upgrading technology, etc
 - iii. raising awareness of the risks of engaging unregistered contractors.
- (b) The registration of workers. This could involve:
 - i. a national tripartite review of forms of employment in the industry
 - ii. raising awareness among informal workers of the laws and regulations concerning registration and workers' rights
 - iii. identification and dissemination of good practice on how to register workers and provide them with training, social security and welfare protection
 - iv. facilitating the establishment of labour exchange
 - v. paying particular attention to disseminating information on ways of promoting women workers' access to training, education and childcare facilities.

2. Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)

National tripartite structures are proposed to review the situation and develop a two-year national action plan to prevent work-related accidents and ill-health. The tripartite structures will also follow-up on the action plans. The means for implementation could include the following:

- a. the establishment of workplace safety committees
- b. training of company safety officers, workers representatives, trainers and inspectors
- c. promotion of the systems approach within companies (ILO's management systems approach and Convention 167, Safety and Health in Construction)
- d. campaigns on the prevention of specific hazards including HIV/AIDS.

In support of the above, best practices (such as health and safety representation for construction workers, tool box meetings and the inclusion of health and safety requirements in contracts) will be documented and disseminated.

3. Training for work in construction

There are several aspects to training for work in construction:

- a. Vocational training and certification
 - i. tripartite national structures should analyse needs and demands for training and developing a national action plan
 - ii. assessment will be made of the existing provision and agreement reached on improvements to training delivery and systems of accreditation and certification
 - iii. advocacy may be needed on the training needs of the industry to government, training providers and financiers.
- b. Basic training
 - i. illiterate and semi-literate construction workers, including women, need access to basic training
 - ii. incentives that can be offered by government and social partners to extend training to these groups will be identified and disseminated, together with ways of addressing health and safety issues in all training.
- c. Enterprise development
 - i. Construction industry development councils and the social partners will develop training for small and medium



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Tripartite participation will be encouraged in the development of strategies for construction and infrastructure planning that optimise employment, promote construction industry development and avoid "stop and go" practices (through the use of Poverty Reduction Strategies, Public-Private Partnerships, national budgets)

Source: ILO (2004)

Box 2. Social Dialogue and Tripartism

ILO's objective of promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain
dom, equality, security and human dignity.

Social dialogue is defined by the ILO to include all types of negotiation, consultation or simply exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers, on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy. It can exist as a tripartite process, with the government as an official party to the dialogue, or it may consist of bipartite relations only between labour and management (or trade unions and employers' organisations), with or without indirect government involvement. Concertation can be informal or institutionalised, and often it is a combination of the two. It can take place at the national, regional or at enterprise level. It can be inter-professional, sectoral or a combination of all of these.

The main goal of social dialogue itself is to promote consensus building and democratic involvement among the main stakeholders in the world of work. Successful social dialogue structures and processes have the potential to resolve important economic and social issues, encourage good governance, advance social and industrial peace and stability, and boost economic progress.

Tripartite cooperation is defined as referring "to all dealings between the government, and workers' and employers' organisations concerning the formulation and implementation of economic and social policy" (See *Conclusions concerning tripartite consultation at the national level on economic and social policy*, International Labour Conference, 1996). Tripartism is reflected in the structure of the ILO itself: both the International Labour Conference and the Governing Body are composed of equal numbers of government, workers' and employers' representatives. Tripartism at the national level is enshrined in a number of ILO Conventions and Recommendations. The Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144) specifically requires effective consultation between government, employers' and workers' representatives at each stage of ILO standards-related activities. A number of other conventions – for example, those regarding minimum wage fixing, private employment agencies and the worst forms of child labour – foresee consultation between government, workers' and employers' organisations in their implementation.

Source: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/themes/sd.htm>

2. Plan of action

The process of social dialogue in each country focuses on the formulation and finally approval of a Plan of Action containing the concrete activities to be implemented. This entails a number of meetings involving all the partners to discuss ideas to be included in the Plan, as well as bilateral in-depth consultations to obtain details of proposals from individual partners. The CAP National Steering Committee should be formalised at this stage (or during the previous one). This phase concludes with another meeting of the partners – now the National Steering Committee – to approve the Plan of Action and to agree on the next steps.

3. Concrete activities

This is the phase in which the activities of the Plan of Action are implemented. The CAP has seed money to fund a number of priority activities, to give an initial push for the implementation. The remaining activities should be funded by the national partners, other ILO departments and/or donors. Therefore, resource mobilisation is also an important part of the CAP.

4. Sustainability

Ideally the CAP should not stop when the initial Plan of Action is completed. Social dialogue is a process, and it usually takes considerable time and effort to set its structure in place. When such structure is finally ready in a given country, it should be used for a long time, to compensate the investment. During the process of implementation of the Plan of Action, further needs and requests for action are likely to be unveiled, thus generating further activities, and so on. The way to secure the sustainability of the CAP is still an issue, and such point will be resumed in the next section of the paper.

At the beginning of the CAP it was difficult to foresee the length of each phase in each country. As noted before, the way social dialogue develops depends very much on local circumstances. In addition, the timeframe for the implementation of the concrete activities depends on the size of the Plan of Action in each country as well as on the speed of resource mobilization and the implementation capacity of the

of the CAP is country-specific. A summary of the status of the CAP is complemented by remarks about other countries.

In Tanzania, the National Steering Committee is operational since mid-2004. The Committee identified the set of problems to be addressed all related specifically to one of the four themes of the CAP – namely, OSH. The focus on OSH is due to the fact that there are still crucial problems in such a field. There is a need to strengthen legislation as well as to train stakeholders to enforce it. The Committee decides to concentrate efforts on this problematic field rather than to spread resources thinly.

The formulation of the Plan of Action was completed in early 2005. The Plan includes a set of training activities for stakeholders based in Dar Es Salaam. Their implementation started in early 2005 and is due to be completed by August 2005. The International Federation of Building and Wood Workers (IFBWW) provided training for one of the activities. The remaining activities have been funded with CAP seed money. Discussions are presently being held about ways to replicate the Plan of Action in other towns in Tanzania and/or in other countries in the region.

In Ghana, the ILO has an on-going umbrella initiative, the Decent Work Pilot Programme (DWPP). The CAP has linked up to the DWPP in order to integrate ILO initiatives in the same country, to maximise the CAP's limited resources by exploring synergies with the larger programme, and to utilise the existing DWPP tripartite National Steering Committee as an agreed decision-making body consistent with the ILO's Governing Body decision on action programme steering, thereby saving time and resources to begin preparatory work.

The Plan of Action in this country has concentrated on another specific theme of the CAP – employment creation. Ghana is undergoing a process of decentralisation, whose central thrust is to improve service delivery at district level through the transfer of responsibility for administering projects. The CAP Plan of Action has focused on increasing the potential of employment generation on infrastructure through better tendering and contracting procedures, more inclusive of labour-based firms, notably by building the capacity of: (a) local authorities (on contract management); (b) workers and the district's sub-committees on productive and gainful employment (to monitor compliance); and (c) contractors (on the implementation). A set of capacity-building workshops has been implemented in the pilot districts of the DWPP. The workshops have enabled the different stakeholders (local authorities, workers and employers) to understand how they can respectively promote labour-based techniques in infrastructure provision.

A way to scale-up such activities to the other districts in the country is now on the move. The aforementioned training workshops in the pilot districts were implemented via Ghana's Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS). The ILGS is now pro-actively offering the training package to the other districts in the country.

In Brazil, the Plan of Action has a broad scope, including activities in the four themes of the CAP. It is also important to note that the ILO Brazil Office already had a number of activities related to construction when the CAP started. Therefore, in addition to proposing new activities, the Plan of Action plays the important role of integrating the existing actions (and the new ones).

In June 2005, the National Steering Committee was formally constituted, and the Plan of Action approved. The first activity currently under implementation relates to a housing project coordinated by national partners, which has an employment creation component via community contracting. At the time of writing this paper, the second activity was being prepared. It entails the CAP support to set up construction cooperatives in a housing project of the World Bank's Cities Alliance programme. Also, the integration of on-going activities is already in progress. The Plan of Action in Brazil includes more activities than the respective Plans of Tanzania and Ghana. Therefore, it is necessary to mobilize more resources to complement the CAP seed funding. This issue is currently also being addressed, and there is considerable

isations.

In Egypt, the National Steering Committee is also in place, and the Plan of Action completed and approved. The Plan includes activities related to three CAP themes: training, the informal sector and OSH. At the time of writing, the implementation of a first set of activities was being prepared, to be implemented in August 2005. It entails workshops for trainers on improvement of skills and on safety and health. Similarly to Brazil, the Plan of Action for Egypt includes a large number of activities. The British Council has a programme related to training in construction and a partnership with the CAP is currently being discussed. Further development organisations are also being approached regarding partnerships and contributions.

In India, a number of meetings with the national partners has taken place. A paper on labour in construction with proposals to address current needs has been produced and discussed in a meeting with the CAP partners. This has laid the foundations for the Plan of Action. In addition, forms of cooperation with development organisations, with an interest in construction, have already been identified. While the other pilot countries may seem to be more advanced than India in regards to the CAP implementation, it is important to bear in mind that the process in each country is unique, as already emphasised in this paper. India has a much larger number of stakeholders, which requires a more complex and lengthier process of social dialogue. It is also important to note that the prospects for donor funding in India seem greater than elsewhere.

Above is a summary of the situation in each pilot country. As shown in the previous section and in Box 1, the CAP framework is broad. Therefore, the national stakeholders in each country chose specific activities within such framework, which are pertinent to the country, after having carried out a needs assessment.

In addition to the pilot countries, there are also prospects for implementation of the CAP elsewhere, such as for example Algeria, Bahrain, Barbados and Uganda. There is in principle possibility for replication in many other countries as well. In parallel, a scheme to establish a CAP network and to promote inter-country cooperation is currently in the drawing board. It is still too early to know whether the CAP will be sustainable in each pilot country and replicable elsewhere (and where specifically). This depends on many political and funding circumstances, among others, that are difficult to predict at the moment. At any rate, there are also technical challenges, which, if addressed, would facilitate the sustainability and replication of the CAP. This has implications for a research agenda, an issue discussed in the next section.

CONSIDERATIONS ON IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

The first part of this section focuses on the key aspect of the CAP decision-making process, social dialogue. The second part concentrates on issues related to the activities included in the respective Plans of Action.

Social Dialogue

Four key issues that have come out of the CAP experience will be analysed, namely: (a) social dialogue at the national level, (b) at the municipal level, (c) the use of information and communication technology, and (d) the prospects for implementation of the CAP elsewhere, such inclusion of the informal sector.

As noted before, traditionally the ILO has paid preponderant attention to the international level in what regards social dialogue in construction. In such a context, the CAP brings an important contribution by focusing on the national level. However, the scaling-up of the CAP experience faces challenges. Only a few countries have a multistakeholder platform for social dialogue in construction, particularly with a cross-

important to devise ways to make such programs sustainable, without inputs from the ILO. While the CAP practical experience has gathered some knowledge on constraints to sustainability, methodical research on this issue could bring an important value-added. It is also important to carry out research on existing best practices – ideally in the construction itself and/or in other sectors, whose experience could be adapted to construction.

The second issue, social dialogue at the municipal level, is important due to the global trend on decentralisation. In several countries, many aspects of the interface between the government and the construction industry have been devolved to the municipalities. Therefore, the outcomes of social dialogue at the national level – while still important – are limited, particularly in regard to public policies, where governmental decision-making is in (or is in the process of being transferred to) the hands of local authorities.

However, municipal social dialogue faces constraints. Workers and employers are normally represented by national level organisations, and sometimes also by regional/provincial ones. Such organisations seldom exist at the municipal level – perhaps with the exception of a number of largest cities. Therefore, it is important to understand how social dialogue in construction can meaningfully take place at the municipal level. The ILO has already devoted some attention to this matter. For example, analysing local alternatives to social dialogue which could counterbalance the lack of the organisations, which exist only nationally or provincially. One of such proposed alternatives is the use of public-private partnerships as a platform (ILO, 2005). However, knowledge on municipal social dialogue is still incipient, and in-depth research is necessary.

The third issue relates to the possible use of information and communications technology (ICT) as a tool for social dialogue. It interfaces with the two aforementioned issues, as ICT could be useful both at the national and municipal levels. It is here assumed that communication among stakeholders may be quicker and more effective with the use of means, such as e-discussion lists, virtual forums, video conferences, etc. Many stakeholders are short of time to attend (several) face-to-face meetings – and a process of social dialogue normally requires a substantial amount of time in meetings. Also, in the case of dialogue at the national level, there is the added time for people to travel within the country to meet, plus the cost of doing so. While ICT may still not be widely available in a number of countries, its presence is continuously increasing.

Research would be helpful to answer the question of whether (and how), or not, representatives of diverse organisations can reach a satisfactory level of dialogue and decision through the use of ICT (alone or in parallel with some face-to-face meetings).

The fourth issue that has come out from the CAP experience relates to the constraints to involve the informal sector workers in social dialogue. A sizeable share – and often the majority – of the construction labour force is in the informal sector, particularly (although not only) in developing countries. Such workers, by definition, are not members of unions. But the unions, and their federations, are the representatives of the workers vis-à-vis the ILO/CAP. The unions and federations have done efforts to "formalise the informal workers," to bring them on board. But the results have still been limited. The informal sector is not only large, but also continues to grow in several countries. Therefore, research is needed on possible ways to overcome constraints to formalise/unionise informal workers. At the same time, it is also important to investigate options for inclusive social dialogue when/if informal workers do not join unions. This would entail research not only on forms of organisation of the informal workers, but also on how unions could accept the informal sector as an (outside) partner. Similarly to the case of social dialogue at the national level, research on best practices would also bring an important contribution.

Issues Related to the Implementation of Operational Activities

...n of the CAP, as well as its concrete execution, have come across many important issues. Rather than presenting a "shopping list" derived from the CAP experience so far, this paper has chosen an alternative path. The International Council for Research and Innovation in Building and Construction (CIB) has a new Task Group, *People in Construction*, which has a focus on labour issues. The Coordinator of the Task Force,² who formulated a proposal for its initial research agenda, was the Construction Specialist at the Sectoral Activities Department of the ILO for four years up to early 2004, and was involved in the initial stages of the CAP. She was also a Consultant to the implementation of the CAP in Tanzania, and has been kept informed – as well as provided valuable comments – about the activities in the other countries. It is also worth noting that a partnership between the ILO and the Task Group is presently being discussed. While the research agenda of the Task Group is not specific to the CAP, it is indeed pertinent to such a programme. Therefore, it will be introduced here.

The Task Group was launched in June 2005 during a CIB Conference in Helsinki. While the research agenda is open for changes through possible contributions from the members of the Task Group, at the time of writing this paper, the agenda included the following broad headings: (a) labour process in construction, (b) employment relationships, (c) construction labour market, and (d) construction employment and poverty reduction. In addition to such broad areas of research, the agenda also includes more specific issues, namely: (a) OSH, (b) appropriate technologies and employment generation, (c) women in construction, and (d) organisation and industrial relations. All the broad areas as well as the specific issues are detailed in Box 3. The agenda, while still embryonic, already shows connections with the thematic areas of the CAP, as evidenced in Box 3. Such connections are presented in Table 1. Future developments of the agenda by the Task Group members may define further connections. In sum, the CAP supports this research agenda.

It is worth elaborating here at least one aspect of employment creation – i.e. labour-based techniques. Such techniques have been promoted by the ILO widely, preponderantly in construction, and have also been used in the CAP. The use of labour-based techniques certainly creates more employment than capital intensive ones. However, there is a strong counter-argument that economic growth is based on capital-intensive techniques, with the consequent increase in productivity, and generates employment in the long-run. Labour-based techniques may generate employment in the short-run, but this is short lived.

There is indeed a rationale for using labour-based techniques whenever capital is more costly than labour. But in such cases the private sector is likely to naturally opt for using such techniques. Therefore, there may be no need to promote them.

Are there places where labour-based techniques are more cost-efficient but the government contractors and the private companies simply do not know it, so that promotions necessary? In parallel, under which circumstances is employment creation in the short-run so crucial to justify the promotion of labour-based techniques even when they are not cost-effective? These are important questions, among others.

discussions amongst the members of the Task Group and will clearly depend on individual interests and priorities. It could include research falling under any of the following broad headings:

1. Labour process in construction

A fundamental issue for research (particularly in the developing countries, where there are huge gaps in knowledge) is the role of labour in the production process: What tasks are undertaken by labour, how is the work organised, who are the actors involved and how do they relate to each other? Anthropological type studies of the working lives of builders are particularly valuable, both in themselves and for the insights they might give into ways of improving safety, welfare or productivity.

2. Employment relationships

The whole body of law that is designed to offer some protection to the workforce is based around the concept of a relationship between a worker and his/her employer. But it is not always clear who is the employer. In the construction industry 'triangular employment relationships' (with three parties involved) are becoming more common as labour is increasingly 'outsourced.' At the same time, there has been a great expansion in the number of construction workers who are 'self-employed,' some in reality and some only masquerading as such. Workers in the 'informal' or domestic sector are frequently employed by householders, others by the 'community.' A sound understanding of employment relationships in the various subsectors of the construction industry is needed before attempting to design policies to ensure the health, safety, welfare and security of the construction workforce.

3. Construction labour market

Construction labour is not homogeneous but differentiated by trade, skill level, sex, etc. In many countries, particularly developing countries, labour markets are also fragmented by nationality, tribe, caste, race or sex. An adequate supply of labour at the right time and place, and of an appropriate type and level of skill is required for the smooth functioning of the industry. It is therefore important to understand how the construction labour market operates, how buyers and sellers of labour make contact with each other, as well as the factors that affect the supply of labour of different categories (including secondary issues influencing training and migration). Research into these issues is an essential prerequisite to labour market interventions to correct deficiencies in supply or expand demand in order to create employment.

4. Construction employment and poverty reduction

It is frequently argued that the construction industry can contribute to poverty reduction through the offer of income and/or employment to those with little education or skill and few alternatives. But jobs in construction in any one location are generally temporary. Research is needed into the long term impact of temporary employment opportunities upon poor households and communities in the rural areas of developing countries, where poverty is most acute and construction programmes often promoted as a solution. The linkage between migration for employment in construction (rural-urban and international) and poverty alleviation at the household and community level is a further area requiring investigation. Here again, ethnographic studies would be of particular interest and value.

In addition to the broad areas of research outlined above, there are other more specific issues of interest and concern to construction researchers, practitioners, policy makers and activists, including international agencies such as ILO, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and trade unions. Research focused around these issues would also gain enormously from a labour perspective:

a. OSH

Construction work is estimated to be the third most dangerous occupation after mining and agriculture. Only a few developed countries have accurate statistics on the number of deaths and the incidences of ill-health from exposure to hazards at work in construction. In developing countries standards are simply appalling and nobody knows how many are dying. It is now widely recognised that the behaviour of all stakeholders in the construction industry will have to change and all will have to work together to achieve this change, if we are to secure significant and sustainable improvements. Studies are needed to ascertain the knowledge, attitudes and expectations of workers, supervisors and managers; and the kind of incentives that might be able to bring about the required momentum.

b. A second specific issue revolves around the various barriers to the use of more "appropriate technology" in construction projects in developing countries, with the implications for "employment generation". While building construction in developing countries is extremely labour intensive, often with little or no use of machinery, the civil engineering field projects tend to be large, contractors international and techniques highly mechanised. Research on this issue to date has mostly focused on procurement processes and other technical issues. Yet anecdotal evidence suggests that the most significant barriers lie in the attitudes and behaviour of the people involved at various stages in the construction supply chain, from procurement to design to implementation.

c. Women in construction

In many countries efforts are on-going to encourage more women to enter the construction industry, as professionals

crafts people or labourers (which is a much more difficult challenge). The ; it is generally because of failure to attract sufficient young men into the e for the impact that female employment has on poverty alleviation. The constraints to women's entry and survival in construction have received some attention by researchers but there is room for further research that might provide insights into how these constraints could be addressed in different contexts. In other parts of the world (mostly in Asia) where women are already working in large numbers in construction, the critical issue is not how to attract women to the industry, but how to promote equal opportunities for women to acquire skills and for those skills to be recognised so that they can progress up the job hierarchy and gain equal status with the men. The challenge here again is how to bring about changes in behaviour, which is certainly the realm of the social scientist.

d. *Organisation and industrial relations*

In developed countries trade union membership and influence has declined in recent years. In many developing countries, on the other hand, trade unions have never been well established and have been considerably weakened by privatisation and casualisation of labour. Yet alternative, more informal forms of association and organisation may well exist and need to be investigated. This is an area that has been little researched.

Source: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/themes/sd.htm>

Table 1. Relationship between the Research Agenda of the CIB Task Group, *People in Construction*, and the CAP Thematic Areas

| Task Group Research Agenda | CAP Thematic Areas |
|---|------------------------------------|
| Labour process | Safety |
| Employment relationships | Health and safety, informal sector |
| Construction labour market | Training |
| Construction employment and poverty reduction | Employment generation |
| Occupational safety and health | Health and safety |
| Employment generation | Employment generation |
| Women in construction | Employment generation, training |
| Organisation and industrial relations | Informal sector |

There is indeed a sizeable literature on capital-versus labour-based techniques (Gilbert, 1982; McCutcheon, 1979; Standish, 2003; Tajgman and de Veen, 1998; Werna, 1996), but it is beyond the scope of this paper review it. The point emphasised here is that the debate is still open, and that it would benefit from further research.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented an on-going programme of the ILO, which is distinctive as it brings social dialogue in construction to the national level, at the same time implements activities in different themes of labour in this particular industry, also exploring synergies. Considering that so far the CAP is known only in restricted realms, the paper has aimed to contribute to the understanding on construction in developing countries by disseminating information on such a programme. At the same time, it has made considerations for research.

Research and operational programmes of development assistance. This provides the basis for the design of successful programmes. Former studies during implementation provide valuable insights to correct possible en-route difficulties – bearing in mind that some difficulties are likely to happen no matter how well designed a programme is. In addition, research about the outcome of implementation feeds into future programmes – helping such programmes to learn from the past. At the same time, the operational programmes provide fresh material about concrete interventions, which is valuable for research about developing countries.

While this paper has concentrated on research related to the implementation of the CAP, it is also important to note that a previous round of research already provided a crucial contribution to the planning of such ILO programme. It was noted in the beginning of the paper that the CAP agenda is based on recommendations from an ILO meeting which took place in 2001. The document (ILO, 2001) which provided the basis to such a meeting – and to the recommendations – is the outcome of a number of studies carried out by several researchers in different parts of the world, and put together by the Construction Specialist of the Sectoral Activities Department of the ILO. Therefore, while research already has a linkage with the previous stage of the CAP, a new round associated with the present stage of the programme is welcome. The CAP findings may provide useful material for research, which in its turn would contribute to the implementation activities yet to come, as well as to future programmes inspired by the CAP.

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